

When the war ended:

When the message of the liberation reached Drejø, teacher Køster spontaneously took the school children down to the airman's grave. On the way down there the Reverend Blum was notified, and together they made a short commemorative speech expressing their gratitude to the fallen airman.



Later teacher Køster said: "We went down to the man who was the only person we "knew" who had been part of the fight for Denmark's freedom."



A tradition was created:

In the years to come it became a fixed tradition that every year on 5 May the school children went in procession to the airman's grave with the school flag and flowers, accompanied by many inhabitants of Drejø.

When Drejø school closed in 1991, the then vicar, Jens Th. Hansen, who has later retired, decided to continue the tradition as long as the islanders were interested. Although it is now without the school flag, the islanders still bring flowers to the grave. And the present vicar, the Reverend Hanne Thordsen, wants to keep up that tradition.

In Memory of
Sergeant DAVID HOWELLS

1102739, 103 Sqdn., Royal Air Force Volunteer
Reserve
who died age 29
on 16 May 1944

Son of David and Mary Ellen Howells, of Clydach
Vale, Glamorgan.

Remembered with honour
DREJO CEMETERY



Commemorated in perpetuity by
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

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The airman's grave on Drejø

26 June 1944



5 May 1991 The last year with Drejø School and the flag.

*In brilliant garb of spring like now you stood.
As this flower will fade
so you faded very fast at the hands of the enemy
in fight for liberty for us.
Thank you for accepting death for us.*

Jens Hansen and Mrs. Hansen 5 May 1945

What happened on 16 May 1944:

During a mine-laying operation on 16 May 1944 the "Lancaster" LL 963 was shot down and crashed into the sea approximately 1 km south of Avernakø Hoved. All seven occupants of the plane died. Three disappeared in the sea, while four airmen were found and buried on Avernakø, in Åstrup, in Fåborg, and on Drejø, respectively.

The story of David Howells' burial:

On 25 June 1944 the dead body of David Howells was washed ashore near Drejø Wood. The following day an inquest was conducted by parish executive officer Rasmus Henningsen, police inspector Strømvig from Svendborg, and a German army surgeon, who had arrived on the island together with two German soldiers. Apparently after the inquest had been conducted, police inspector Strømvig called Mogens Blum, the vicar, and asked him if he would carry out the burial of the English airman in Drejø churchyard. The vicar said he would gladly do that, but only if he could wear his vestments, after which the German army surgeon took over the receiver. He told the vicar that this was OK, but that only the men who were necessary to officiate at the funeral were allowed to be present at the burial. To the question whether the vicar might bring his parish clerk, the German answered in the affirmative. In mid-afternoon on 26 June 1944 Erling Køster, sole teacher and parish clerk, was teaching the youngest classes at school when the lesson was interrupted by a young girl who delivered the message from the Reverend Mogens Blum that the parish clerk was to appear immediately wearing his church vestments. Speculating about what religious ceremony was ahead at such a short notice, Køster dismissed the school children and hurried to the meeting place agreed upon, the carpenter's house, where the vicar waited in his vestments.

Shortly afterwards a cart arrived from the wood driven by the parish executive officer. On the cart lay the dead body of an English airman who had drowned and whose name was at first not known, followed by the Danish police inspector and the Germans.

The churchwarden had also been notified and had selected a burial spot in the churchyard and had furthermore called the bell ringer and two men who dug the grave. Køster, the teacher, procured a coffin from the carpenter's. The two German soldiers searched the dead body in order to find an identification mark, but there wasn't any. They found a ring, however, in which the letters "DH" were engraved. After a bunch of flowers had quickly been provided and put on the airman's breast, the coffin was taken to the grave where ten men were present at the burial.

The Reverend Mogens Blum tells about this:

"The German military surgeon was a noble-minded and friendly man. His behaviour did much to make me feel that the burial of the English airman, which was carried out according to the normal practise of the Danish church, has become a good memory for me." Extract from Anders Bjørnvad "Faldne Allierede flyvere"

A memorial was erected:

After the war The Commonwealth War Commission put the official RAF iron cross on David Howells' grave. The iron cross is now kept in the church tower. After the liberation there was a collection on Drejø for a stone to be placed on the grave. At a memorial ceremony the stone was unveiled by farmer Carl Julius Pedersen, who together with the Reverend Mogens Blum made the commemorative speech. It is said that Carl Julius got so nervous when it was his turn that he quite forgot what to say - but the Reverend Blum saved

the situation. Teacher Erling Køster took part in the memorial ceremony together with all the school children and many inhabitants of Drejø. The children had written songs from "Danmark frit" (=Denmark free) 1945 on common paper from their note books, among others "En lærke letted' og tusind fulgte" (=A lark ascended and a thousand followed) by Mads Nielsen. These texts were distributed and sung at the grave.

The inscription on the stone runs as follows:



Here rests English airman Sergeant in R.A.F. Howells 1102739 fallen in the battle for freedom, buried 26.6 1944

If I were to fly away on the wings of the dawn, and settle down on the other side of the sea, even there your hand would guide me, your right hand would grab hold of me.

Erected in gratitude.
(Old Testament, Psalms, Chapter 139, 9-10)