

# After 60 years, families visit aircrew's graves

By JULIAN ISHERWOOD  
IN GAMTOFTE, DENMARK

A GROUP of British families finally found the last resting place of their wartime relatives yesterday, attending a moving ceremony to honour the crew of a Lancaster bomber 60 years to the day after the aircraft plummeted into a Danish church.

"This has been truly wonderful, a fitting tribute to the crew and our loved ones. We had no idea what had happened to them," said Joanne Morris, grand-niece of Air Gunner Sgt Arthur George Wright, who was in Denmark with her cousin Sean Cowan.

It was early on May 16 1944, that a Lancaster from 576 Squadron in Elsham Wolds, Lincolnshire, was attacked and critically damaged by a German fighter.

The bomber began disintegrating as it approached the Danish coast, eventually crashing into the small village of Gamtofte, setting the presbytery, church and surrounding buildings alight.

"We were to have been married a month later. He died two operations short of his 60 missions," said Eileen Kingston, fiancée of the Lancaster's 22-year-old pilot, Flt Lt Ernest Presland. "Our honeymoon was all set. We were just waiting for him to finish his operational duty."

It was after an appeal through *The Daily Telegraph* that families of the eight airmen who died in the crash found out what had happened and where their loved ones were buried. The Gamtofte church had been trying to contact relatives in order to mark the occasion.

"It has been a truly warm experience, meeting the families of the other crewmembers," said Doris Hendrick, the former wife of Flt Sgt Benjamin Hudson. Mrs



Doris Hendrick at the service for the airmen yesterday

Hendrick remarried in 1947, unaware of the exact fate of her first husband.

In the early morning Danish sunshine in the local cemetery in Assens, a small impromptu service was held for the airmen whose loved ones had travelled from Britain.

At another ceremony later, the families gathered in the picturesque, rebuilt Gamtofte Church, outside which a commemorative stone and part of a propeller mark the day when the Lancaster made its final flight.

"By remembering that night, when the blood of one Canadian and seven young British aviators were sacrificed on the ground outside, we are honouring their memory and also putting their fates into historical context," Pastor Keld Schelander told a packed church.