

## World news

# Danes seek to honour relatives of war crash RAF crew

By JULIAN ISHERWOOD  
IN COPENHAGEN

A DANISH village largely destroyed by an RAF Lancaster which crashed 60 years ago is appealing for help to locate relatives of the eight crew members who died so that they can receive the thanks of the community.

"We have tried almost everything," said Elisabeth Ege Olsen, organist at the church in Gamtofte.

"We have found one family member, almost by chance, and she was here in 1995 to see her former husband's grave for the first time.

"But we would like to have contact with the rest of the families."

Neither the British Embassy nor the Commonwealth War Graves Commission have been able to help trace family members.

A commemorative stone,

reading "Denmark thanks these sons of England who found their death here on May 16th, 1944" and bearing the names of the eight crewmen, marks the spot where the aircraft crashed.

No one in the village was killed when the British aircraft came down.

Mrs Olsen said: "The eight members of the crew are buried in Assens nearby and the graves are still honoured once a year with flowers in memory of their fight for us all.

"We will be having a memorial service on May 16 which is the 60th anniversary of the event. We would like to find the relatives of these brave airmen."

It was early on May 16, 1944, that a Lancaster from 576 Squadron was attacked and critically damaged by a German night-fighter. The plane began disintegrating as it approached the Danish



The gunner: Flt Sgt Benjamin Hudson and his bride Doris married 10 days before the crash

coast, eventually crashing into the small village in south-central Denmark.

"The plane came down on the presbytery," Mrs Olsen said.

"The church and many of the buildings in the hamlet were also damaged."

Reports at the time show that the presbytery was demolished, the church seriously damaged, two farms burnt to the ground, and most other buildings in the village damaged.

Bomber Command records

show that Lancaster ME576 UL-X2 took off from RAF Elsham Wolds in north Lincolnshire at 10pm on May 15, 1944.

Under Operation Garden- ing, the Lancaster's mission was to lay mines in Denmark's Little Belt seaway.

But the mine-laden Lancaster was caught by German defences and crashed into the village with the loss of all those on board.

German occupying forces immediately buried the eight crew members in the local

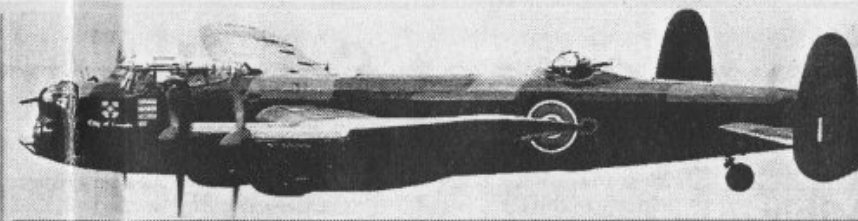
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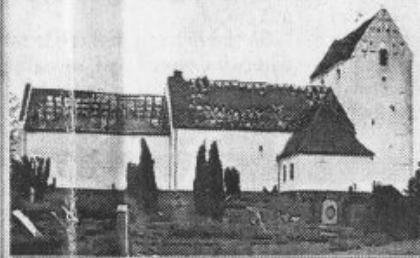
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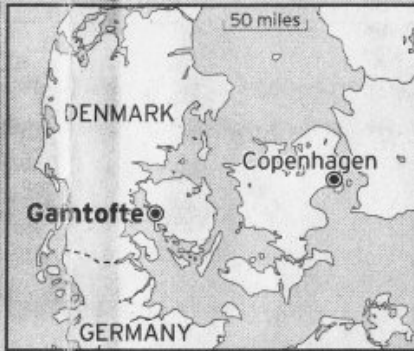
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The RAF Lancaster bomber was shot down by a German night-fighter



The damaged church in Gamtofte



Wreckage from the crashed aircraft



The pilot: Flt Lt Ernest James Presland DFC

Picture: PALLE BRUJUS JENSEN

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cemetery. The commemorative stone bearing the names of the crew was erected in Gamtofte six years later.  
The one family member located by Gamtofte's inhabitants was Doris Hendrick, the former wife of Air Gunner Flight Sergeant Benjamin Hudson.  
Mrs Hendrick remarried in 1947, unaware of the exact fate of her first husband.  
For reasons that remain unclear, it was only in 1994 that an official RAF letter written to her in 1947 explaining

her husband's fate came to light.  
After travelling to Denmark, Mrs Hendrick and Keld Schelander, the vicar of Gamtofte, held an impromptu graveside service in September 1995.  
At the time, Mrs Hendrick was reported as saying: "I will never forget the last words Benjamin said to me, 'If I'm posted as missing, don't think that I'm dead - I'll come back'.  
"Now I feel that he has come back to me."

## The men who failed to return

RAFVR Air Gunner Sgt Arthur George **Wright** DFM, 27, son of Charles Ralph and Edith Wright of Doncaster.  
RCAF Navigator FO Mark Leslie **Abramson**, 30, son of Louis and Dora Abramson of Ottawa, Ontario.  
RAFVR Air Gunner Flt Sgt Robert Edward **Leatham**, 20, son of William and Mona Leatham, Bebington, Cheshire.  
RAFVR Air Bomber Flying Officer Charles **Ashcroft**, 27,

son of John and Alice Ashcroft, Manchester.  
RAFVR Air Gunner Flt Sgt Benjamin Johnson **Hudson**, husband of Doris Hudson, Derbyshire.  
RAFVR Pilot Flt Lt Ernest James **Presland** DFC, 22, son of Ernest and Elizabeth Presland of East Ham, Essex.  
RAFVR Pilot Officer Albert Edward **Slade** (no details).  
RAFVR Flt Engineer Sergeant Alan Wilfred **Knapp** (no details).