

World War II

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Dennis James Fensome

Dennis Charles James Fensome was the only child of Edward Christian Fensome and his first wife Charlotte Margaret Ringwood. He was born at Tidworth on 29/12/1923 while his father was still a serving officer in the Royal Field Artillery and before he transferred to the Highland Light Infantry. Dennis and his mother followed his father on his various postings, one of which was to Malta in 1929 where they stayed for two years. They returned to the UK on the P and O vessel *SS Barrabool* arriving in London, via Plymouth, on 20/12/1931 with their intended residence being the H L I Barracks at Dover.

It is uncertain when Edward was demobbed but by 1939 he and Charlotte were living at Coombe Place, Offham where he was a caretaker and groom. Dennis had already joined the navy in Portsmouth and was not with them. Some time between 1939 and 1942 the Fensomes moved to Hurst. Meanwhile Dennis had trained as a signaller, numbered P/JX 166815, and was listed at the shore establishment *President III*. She was a naval accounting base dealing with all those personnel working on defensively armed merchant vessels. He was in fact on board the *MV Waimarama* who, in a twist of fate, formed part of a 14 vessel convoy called *Operation Pedestal* intended to relieve Malta. There were several RN personnel on board. This particular convoy was the most heavily attacked convoy during the whole war. The presence of a signaller onboard was necessary but he was of course a very vulnerable member of the crew. On 12/08/1942 the convoy came under prolonged attack all day and at some point during the day Dennis was injured, with his death recorded the following day. There is no record of his burial so it is likely that he was buried at sea. The *Waimarama* was sunk by dive bombers just a fortnight later.

Dennis is remembered by name on the Portsmouth Naval Memorial on panel 66 column 2 as well as on both local war memorials. On the church memorial Dennis is spelt with a single 'n' however all records show him spelt 'Dennis'.



MV Waimarama

Noel Thomas Gander

Noel was the son of Thomas Gander and his wife Rowena Gander, nee Mason. He was born on 12/12/1920 in Hurst and baptised on 27/02/1921. His father died in 1938 and his mother remained living at the family home of Ridgewood in Cuckfield Road. Noel joined the family building firm as an apprentice and is listed still living at home on the 1939 register.

Noel joined the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve and was numbered 1250546. This number falls within a series that were issued in May 1940 to men who enlisted in Uxbridge. By 1942 he was a sergeant in 78 squadron. They had moved to RAF Croft, near North Allerton, in October 1941 and were part of Group 4 Bomber Command. They flew Armstrong Whitworth Whitley V planes but were in the process of changing over to Halifax bombers, with the conversion completed by 16/03/1942.

During March the squadron flew only 2 operations. Both were to Boulogne. The flight on 10th was partially successful. On the 13/03/1942 Noel took off on the last Whitworth Whitley operational flight. He was the sergeant observer in aircraft numbered Z9389. The flight of 4 aircraft took off at 10% moon and reached Boulogne but encountered heavy flak. One aircraft failed to locate the target, one could not identify any ground features but was able to put out four searchlights, the third aircraft failed to return to base and Noel's flight arrived back just after midnight. They had difficulty landing. On this fifth attempt the pilot approached too fast and overshot the runway hitting the boundary fence and a number of trees. The aircraft caught fire and of the five members of the crew only one survived. Noel was found dead in the wreckage.

He is buried in the South Avenue cemetery in plot G 66 in a CWGC privately registered grave. He is listed on both local war memorials and also remembered at the International Bomber Command Centre (IBCC) at Lincoln in phase 2 panel 168.



Percy Gander

Percy was born in Hurst on 31/10/1915, and baptised here on 26/12/1915, the son of Horace and Helen Gander nee Ballard. He married Annie Middlemas, known as Ann, in 1938, and a son Dennis was born in the second quarter of 1939 and a daughter Julia in the second quarter of 1941. In 1939 Percy, Annie and Dennis were living at 41 Kemps with Percy working as refuse collector. His parents were living in Western Road but his father died in January 1942.

Percy joined the 2nd Battalion, the Queen's Royal West Surrey Regiment as a private on 13/06/1940 and was numbered 6097139. The 2nd Battalion were already serving in the Middle East and following his initial training Percy was sent to join them. It is not known when he arrived but almost certainly before the action at Sidi Barani. The 2nd battalion were part of Operation Compass, the first big attack of the Western Desert Campaign. The town was taken and the battalion had moved on to Bardia by the start of 1941. Here they were employed guarding and evacuating prisoners and in salvage operations. On 11th February they sailed for Alexandria. Further actions took place until they reached Tobruk on 22/09/1941 where they were chiefly involved in night patrols. They had a brief period of respite until they returned to the front on 07/11/1941. A major attack was launched on 20th but did not go according to plan. On 26th A and D Companies were moving up towards the main attack when they were shelled while still in their transport. A Company continued while D company were held in reserve. A Company lost 35 men and were held in reserve on 28th when B, C and D Companies advanced. Percy was killed on 29/11/1941.

He was initially buried in Cyrenica in an area where it was not possible to maintain his grave in the correct manner. He was exhumed and re-interred in the Knightsbridge War Cemetery at Acroma, Libya in plot 8.G.22 on 19/06/1945. His headstone reads "Life goes on, but happy memories stay. Always lovingly remembered Ann, Julia and Dennis."

He is listed on both local war memorials.



*Badge of the Queens Royal West Surrey Regiment
as depicted on a CWGC gravestone*

Frederick Arthur Percy Head

Frederick's birth was registered in the Steyning district in the first quarter of 1915. At that time the Steyning district included large parts of Hove. When the 1939 register was compiled on 29th September Frederick was living at Howard Lodge with his brother Richard. Somewhat unusually they are both listed with their service titles as most servicemen were not included in the register. Frederick's date of birth was given as 05/02/1915 and his rank as aircraftsman 2nd class 2546, then attached to the RAF depot, RT wing, No.1 at Uxbridge. His number was issued in September 1939 so he had only just signed up. Also living at the same address was confectioner Audrey Cox whom Frederick married in the Brighton district in the last quarter of 1939.

Frederick was initially reported missing in the Birmingham post of 17/08/1940 and the CWGC list him as killed on 01/08/1940. They also list him then as 902546 sergeant of 236 squadron, Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, but do not record Audrey as his wife. Probate on Frederick's estate was not granted until 1962 by which time Audrey had remarried. It gives an address in Leighton Buzzard for Frederick at his death and says he "died on war service on or since 01/08/1940 through war operations at some place unknown."

236 squadron of the RAF was formed as a fighter squadron in 1939 and equipped with Blenheim fighters. In February 1940 they were transferred to Coastal Command before returning to Fighter Command in April. Following the completion of his training Frederick joined the squadron on 27th March. The squadron was returned to Coastal Command in May flying defensive sorties from RAF Filton and then in July transferred again, this time to Thorney Island, and subsequently to RAF St Eval in Cornwall, mainly carrying out defensive anti-shipping sorties over the Channel and Irish Sea.

On 11th July he was part of the crew of Blenheim L6818 when it was badly damaged by return fire from a Heinkel He111 over Start Point. They managed to return safely to St Eval. On 1st August he set out in Blenheim IV R2774 on a bomber-escort operation but failed to return to base. Archive reports state that there was low cloud over Cherbourg making visibility poor. Having identified their target two Blenheims strafed the Luftwaffe airfield and anti-aircraft batteries at Querqueville, flying at below 100 feet. There was heavy defensive ground fire. Oblt. Dullberg of III/JG27 managed to take off to intercept the aircraft and claimed to have hit both Blenheims. Pilot Officer B M McDonough 42137 as well as Frederick, numbered 902546 and operating as an air gunner, were both killed, as were the crew of the other Blenheim. Due to the weather conditions there are no details of where they crashed and they are listed as having no known grave.

Frederick is listed on panel 15 of the Air Forces Memorial at Cooper's Hill, Runnymede as well as on both local memorials. His brother Richard survived the war.



Badge of 236 Squadron RAF.

Edward Frank Hill

Edward was born in Bromley on 09/11/1909 to Harold Babbington-Hill and his wife Ethel Babbington-Hill, nee Dixon. He was educated at King's school, Canterbury starting in the Junior school in 1921. Harold was an underwriter and Edward followed his father into the same profession being listed on the 1939 register as a Lloyds underwriter and then living in London. He had married Gladys Duckett Oliver in Kensington in 1931 and they had at least one child, Ann, who was born in Kensington on 26/07/1931. Edward and Gladys both appeared on the voting register for 1939 at 92 Philbeach Gardens, in London, but only Edward was listed there on the 1939 register. There is circumstantial evidence from the register to suggest that Gladys may have been a member of the ATS numbered W/3064. Their daughter Ann was with her grandfather, then living at Innisfree near South Avenue.

Edward had joined the OTC at school where he served as a Lance Corporal, and on leaving school joined the TA. He was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant into the 19th Battalion, the London Regiment in November 1928, later transferring into the Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment. In August 1936 he joined the 7th Battalion where he was in command of D Company. The 1939 register notes that he was a captain in the Territorial Force.

At the outbreak of war Edward was mobilised as a captain in the 7th Battalion and numbered 40759. From October 1939 the 7th Battalion had become part of the 36th Infantry Brigade. They left Southampton on 21/04/1940 arriving at Le Havre before moving to Le Manoir near Rouen where they worked on a railway siding. On 09/05/1940 they moved to Fleury where they were expecting to have a fortnight's section and platoon training. With the German invasion of France on the 14th the 7th Battalion were ordered to Clery-sur-Somme where they were to defend a crossing over the Canal du Nord. They arrived on 18th and came under immediate aerial attack being forced to withdraw to a point NW of Albert. On 20th they re-assembled in the centre of town but were overrun by a large German force, with D Company taking the brunt of the attack. Casualties were very high and Edward was killed early in the day. The remaining men were ordered to split into small groups and aim for Doullens about 15 miles away. Only 70 men managed to escape and eventually return to the UK. Edward was originally posted as missing but he was eventually identified among the dead and buried at the Albert Communal Cemetery Extension in Plot 1 Row R grave 7. His date of death is given as 20/05/1940.

He is remembered on both local memorials, the Army roll of honour, the roll of honour of King's School Canterbury and the Lloyds of London Memorial.



*Badge of the Royal West Kent Regiment
as depicted on a CWGC gravestone*

Robert Alwyn Howell

Robert was born in Eastbourne on 05/09/1905, the youngest son of George Walter Howell and Lilian Amy Stephanie Howell nee Bindon. In 1911 the family were living in Eastbourne where George was the manager of a house furnishers. Robert, who had the nickname 'Bobby', went to school at Eastbourne College and was a good runner, winning steeplechase events while still at school. He was also a keen amateur golfer and a member of the Willingdon golf club. He took part in the National Amateur Championships in 1938 reaching the third round.

Robert's father had died in 1932 and Robert became the company director, moving to Hailsham. He married Mary Eva Parry at Chailey in 1936 and they were listed in Hailsham on the 1939 register. Robert was additionally noted on the register as being a leading fireman in the Eastbourne auxiliary Fire Service. Robert and Eva subsequently moved to St George's Cottages in Hurst and had three children. Robert also had an interest in sailing and was almost certainly a member of the RNV(S)R which had been formed in 1936 for 'gentlemen with an interest in yachting or similar pursuits'.

At the outbreak of war the navy were looking for a site to train officers of the RNVR and requisitioned the newly constructed King Alfred leisure centre naming it *HMS King Alfred*. Between then and mid 1940 over 1700 men were trained leaving as Temporary Sub Lieutenants. Robert was appointed to *HMS Skirmisher*, the RN base at Milford Haven as a T/S.Lt. He joined *HMS Derby County*, an anti submarine warfare trawler in June 1941. In October he was appointed a Temporary Lieutenant and transferred to *HMS Vervian*, a flower class corvette, becoming the commander from mid 1943. Her main role was as escort for merchant shipping convoys across the Atlantic. In 1943 she had picked up many of the survivors from *SS Wade Hampton* which had been torpedoed while part of a convoy to Murmansk. On 20/02/1945, while acting as escort for homeward bound convoy HX-337 travelling from New York to Liverpool, she was torpedoed on the starboard side by U-boat U-1276 at 1149 hours, and sank in around 20 minutes about 25 miles SE of Dungarvan. The commander, three officers and 56 crew were lost. The U-boat was sunk by depth charges dropped from *HMS Amethyst* which was part of the same convoy. *HMS Vervian* is a designated vessel under the protection of Military Remains Act.

Robert is remembered on the Portsmouth Naval memorial on panel 90 column 2, and on an inscribed tablet in Willingdon church as well as both local war memorials.



Edward John Hurley

Edward was born in Wimbledon on 11/07/1920, the fifth child of George Joseph Hurley and his wife Lilian Amelia Hurley nee Collins. George and Lilian had married in 1906. In 1939 Lilian was living at Gordon House, Hurst with several of their children, however husband George was not there. He appears to have been living at Brinsworth House, the home for retired music hall artists in Twickenham. Lilian died in 1944 in the Worthing district.

The 1939 register was taken on 29th September but Edward was not listed at home, meaning he had probably already joined the Royal Navy. He was numbered C/SSX 21958. This style of numbering indicates that he had signed on for a short service of 7 years, with the possibility of a further 5 years in the reserves. The 'C' indicated that he originally signed on at Chatham, the 'SS' that he was a seaman and the 'X' that he joined after the pay reviews in the early 1930s. Due to the 100 year rule his papers are only available to family members to view. From other sources we know that by 1941 he was rated as an AB. To achieve this rating he needed to serve for at least a year meaning he had joined the navy before May 1940.

We know that he was serving on *HMS Kelly* in the Mediterranean on 23/05/1941 when she was sunk, but it is unclear when he joined her. *HMS Kelly* was a K class destroyer built at Hebburn on the Tyne, launched in 1938 with a crew of 218. Her captain was Lord Louis Mountbatten and she was the leader of the 5th Destroyer Flotilla. Several books have been written about the service of the *Kelly* and the film "In Which We Serve" is said to be loosely based on her. It is also said that she had much publicity before her loss but few successes. In March 1941 she was employed in mine laying near Brest when she was nominated for transfer to the Mediterranean arriving at Gibraltar on 24/04/1941. She was initially deployed on escort duty to Egypt, but was detached from the convoy to take part in the bombardment of Benghazi. On 21/05/1941 she left Malta to assist in the defence of Crete. To quote from her 'details of war service' for 23/05/1941, when she was positioned south of Gavos, Crete, "... came under heavy and sustained air attack by German aircraft during which ship was hit and sank within 2 minutes." Edward was killed and his body was not recovered for burial. In all 128 men perished, about half the crew.

There is a memorial to all the fallen from *HMS Kelly* at Hebburn, although no crew names from the sinking are given. Edward is also listed on the Chatham Memorial on panel 43 column 1 in addition to being named on both local war memorials.



HMS Kelly

Francis Derek Jago

Francis was the son of Sidney Herbert Jago and his wife Mary Margaret Jago nee Courtice. Francis was born in Hurst on 05/10/1914. His father was a hairdresser and ran a business in the High Street. They lived at 8 Church Terrace. The family had moved to the village around 1906. Francis was a member of the 1st Hurst scout troop. His mother died in 1938.

Francis joined the RAF Volunteer Reserve as a pilot in January 1937 and was numbered 742695. He trained at various Officer Training units and had become a sergeant by 1939 as his rank and number was recorded on the 1939 register during a visit home in September. He was posted to 150 squadron on 19/12/1940. 150 squadron had been re-equipped with Vickers Wellingtons in October 1940 while based at RAF Newton. They moved to RAF Snaith in July 1941. On 08/04/1942 he transferred to 149 squadron based at RAF Lakenheath. 149 squadron was part of Bomber Command and flew Stirling aircraft. During 1942 they were involved in the training of air crew to fly the Stirling, as well as undertaking operational flights. Operations Books for April list several sessions of training which may well have included familiarisation for Francis. He was the forward air gunner on all the following listed flights and on each occasion he was in a differently numbered aircraft. The Stirling had a crew of seven. Two night flights are listed for Francis on successive days towards the end of April. On 23rd/24th he was part of an attack of 9 aircraft detailed to attack the Heinkel factory at Rostock, which was successful. The following night 3 aircraft were detailed to attack the docks at Dunkirk. One returned to base with engine trouble but two successfully dropped their bombs and returned safely. On 2nd/3rd May he was one of 3 aircraft detailed to lay mines in the Baltic off Langerland. This was again successful..

On 05/05/1942 Francis, flying in a Short Stirling 1 marked OJ-R and numbered N6124, formed part of a coordinated 121 aircraft operation on Stuttgart. 8 aircraft were supplied by 149 squadron. They took off at about 22.30 in 77% moon. At around 0400 hrs they exchanged fire with Lt Gustav Knoch, who claimed the hit. He was also hit by fire from Francis as the forward gunner and subsequently crashed and was killed. Francis' plane crashed near Agnicourt and the entire crew was killed. Following the crash all the bodies were taken to Laon (St Just) Cemetery for burial and most were buried in a communal grave numbered 16 - 20. At the time Laon was a German night fighter base so it is thought that the Luftwaffe carried out the burials.

Francis is remembered on both local war memorials and also at the IBCC at Lincoln in phase 2 panel 188.



Badge of 149 squadron RAF



Badge of 150 squadron RAF

Francis was awarded the 1939-45 Star, the Air Crew Europe Star and the War Medal. These were sent to his sister Phyllis who is well remembered within the village for running the 'Bargain Shop'. Following her death in Lewes in 2000, aged 93, Francis' medals were sold as a group in 2014 and realised £260.

John Michael Kilner (Killner)

John Michael Killner, but known as Michael, was the only son of John Killner and his wife Norah Heather Grietje Killner, nee Neumark aka Delange. He was born in Bristol in 1924. At that stage period his parents were both actors. While John snr probably had more roles, his wife Norah was the daughter of Herman Delange, an actor of some distinction, particularly during the late 1890s. Both Norah and her sister Phyllis appeared many times on the London stage in the 1920s. The Killners had a house in Hampstead from the early 1930s and were sufficiently successful to be able to send their son to Kimbolton school. He became captain of the school and excelled at sport being captain of the school 1st X1, having been coached by England cricketer Jack Hobbs. He then attended Caius College Cambridge joining their Officer Cadet Training Unit. After leaving university Michael worked for Barclays Bank in Haywards Heath for a year while waiting for his call-up papers. He had also been a member of 172 (Mid Sussex) squadron ATC receiving his original training with D flight.

The date of Michael's call-up is uncertain but is likely to have been in late 1943. He was sent to Canada as part of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan where he earned his wings as a navigator and bomb aimer and was commissioned as a pilot officer in the RAFVR numbered 163546. He received further training on the American B25 Mitchell bombers at No.13 OTU based at RAF Bicester, or more accurately Finmere airfield, as part of the preparations for Operation Overlord. Along with 17 other men from 13 OTU he joined 180 squadron at Dunsfold on 29/08/1944. The OBS records that this was a mixed group of pilots, navigators, air gunners and wireless operators from the UK, Canada and Australia. Michael's first operation was 3 days later to attack the marshalling yards at Givest. He flew a further 7 missions before having a week's leave at home. On his return there were 7 flights, including 2 on the same day to Arnheim, before his final flight on 06/10/1944.

Meanwhile his father was a stalwart lieutenant in the local Home Guard having moved to Hurst to become the licensee of the New Inn sometime around 1931. He was the founder of Hurstpierpoint Players and had begun directing their next production of 'Outward Bound' when Michael was killed.

The official report of Michael's death from the Dunsfold Airfield History Society records shows that twelve Mitchell bombers took off from Dunsfold at 1000 hours on 06/10/1944 intending to attack a fuel dump at Amersfoort in Holland. As the aircraft climbed away from the airfield two of them collided in low cloud, with flight number FW264 crashing at Blacknest Farm, Chiddingfold Road, Dunsfold. Three of its payload of eight 500lb bombs detonated on impact, the aircraft was burnt out and all the crew were killed. The other aircraft managed to return to the aerodrome safely.

Michael is buried in the South Avenue Cemetery in plot H199 and is remembered on his school Roll of Honour and both local war Memorials, where his surname is spelt incorrectly. Possibly as a result of John's death his father gave up the licence of the New Inn a month later and returned to Hampstead and a life on the stage.



Charles Walter King D.S.M and Bar

Charles was the son of Cornelius George King who is remembered in the WW1 sections of both war memorials. Theirs is the only family within the village where father and son both made the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

Charles was born on 21/11/1914 at Hurstpierpoint and baptised on 21/11/1914 the third son of Cornelius and Matilda King nee Hemsley. His father died in 1923 but the family remained in Hurst. Charles married Freda May Hellier at Hurst on 20/9/1939. Their wedding had to be put off for 3 weeks as Charles was called back to the destroyer *HMS Antelope* as she embarked on a two week deployment of anti submarine escort duties in the Channel and SW approaches. Their honeymoon would also have been short as when the 1939 register was taken on 29th September Charles was already back on board and Freda was listed still living at home with her parents. He was able to come back to Hurst on leave, probably in November 1940 when *HMS Antelope* was in dock for repairs, as their only child, Valerie, was born in mid 1941.

Charles naval papers are not available to view but from other sources we know that he joined the navy in Portsmouth in 1931 and was numbered P/JX135731. The 'P' denoted that he enlisted at Portsmouth, the 'J' that he was a seaman on a 12 year contract and the 'X' that he enlisted after the pay reviews in the early 1930s. At his marriage he was already a Leading Signaller and he eventually rose to become a Petty Officer telegraphist. The role of the telegraphist was to send and receive coded signals, decode them where possible or pass them up the line. At the early stages of the war Charles was on *HMS Antelope*, particularly looking for submarine radio traffic. On 05/02/1940 while on escort duties in the Atlantic *HMS Antelope* became the first destroyer to sink a submerged submarine. A short while later Charles was responsible for the detection of two enemy submarines within the space of half an hour. Both were sunk. For these actions he was awarded the DSM. Later the same year, probably in November when again on Atlantic convoy duty, further detection work on his part resulted in the destruction of further submarines for which he was awarded the bar to the medal. These were both presented to him by the King at Buckingham Palace in early March 1941. From April *HMS Antelope* joined the home fleet on convoy duty in the NW approaches. In September they formed part of the escort for the first Russian convoy PQ1. *HMS Antelope* was a particularly busy and successful vessel and was nominated for a refit from November 1941.

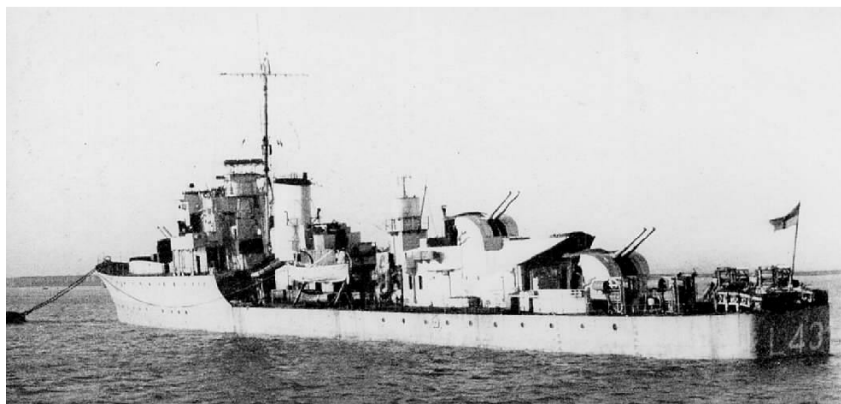
It is likely that it was at this stage that Charles transferred to *HMS Hurworth*. It is also likely that this was where he became a PO. *HMS Hurworth* was a newly completed escort destroyer of the Hunt class and spent most of her working life in the Mediterranean, although her initial deployment after working up to operational service at Scapa Flow was on defence duties in Freetown, South Africa. In January 1942 she travelled via the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea to join the Mediterranean fleet for close escort duties on the Malta relief convoys. These continued throughout 1941 and 1942 interspersed with offering support for other actions taking place. On 22/10/1943 while attempting to assist a Greek destroyer which had hit a mine south of Leros she also hit a mine and split in two. The forward section sank in three minutes and the back in about a quarter of an hour. 113 of the crew of 198 were killed, but the casualty list was not published until 1945.

At the Greek Naval Base in Salamis there is a memorial plaque to *HMS Hurworth*. George is listed on the Portsmouth Naval memorial on panel 73 column 2 and also on both local war memorials.

Freda survived him by nearly 70 years, dying in Hassocks in 2020



HMS Antelope



HMS Hurworth

Raymond Geoffrey Kingsland

Ray, as he was known, was born at Hailsham on 18/01/1919 and baptised at Hurstmonceux on 16/02/1919, the sixth child of James Perkins Kingsland and his wife Rhoda Emily Kingsland nee Eade. James had been a career soldier with the Royal Artillery serving for fifteen years in India and then re-enlisting for service during WW1. James died in 1934 and some time before 1939 Ray's mother moved to 4 Cuckfield Road.

Following his father's death in 1934 Ray signed on with the Royal Artillery and was numbered 838357. His army papers are not freely available, so we cannot say how or where he served. He transferred to the RAF on 06/10/1941 joining 77 squadron and was re-numbered 658993. This number falls within a block of numbers issued after 1939 to men transferring to the RAF from the army. Possibly reflecting his previous army career Ray was promoted quickly to sergeant and became an air bomber.

77 squadron, originally formed in 1937, became part of 4 group Bomber Command at the outbreak of war. They flew Armstrong Whitworth Whitley Mk V aircraft which had a crew of 5 and a limited range, particularly when loaded. From September 1941 to May 1942 they were based at Leeming before a brief spell in Coastal Command being based at Chivenor until October. The squadron then moved to Elvington near York and converted to Handley Page Halifax B II bombers. This required a period of training and the squadron did not become fully operational again until January 1943. The crew size was now 7 men; pilot, flight engineer, navigator, air bomber, 2 air gunners and 2 wireless operators who also operated as air gunners in necessary. 77 squadron were the first squadron to occupy the newly constructed base at RAF Elvington. This was a 'temporary' camp of wooden buildings with Nissen hut accommodation. Between April and June 1943 the squadron records note that they had flown 356 sorties on 29 raids but lost 19 aircraft and 122 crew. One of these was Ray.

In the early morning of 22/06/1943 bombers from a number of squadrons took off for a raid on Krefeld. Elvington supplied 20 aircraft and Ray's aircraft was numbered JB 852 KN-G. The raid was successful but heavy flak was encountered as well as German fighters. It is thought that Ray was on the return flight when they were hit by flak and crashed NNE of Ede on the shooting range killing the entire crew. The crew are buried together in a communal grave at Ede General Cemetery in Row H graves 7 – 11. Three planes from 77 squadron were lost in the same raid.

Ray is remembered on both local war memorials and on the IBCC at Lincoln in phase 2 panel 194.



Badge of 77 squadron RAF

Irene Mary McDonald

Irene has the sad distinction of being the only woman listed on the local war memorials.

She was born on 13/05/1919 in Brackley, Northants, the daughter of John Joseph McDonald and his wife Alice Ellen McDonald nee Stockwell. The family had moved to Hurst by 1921. Known in the family as 'Biddy' she lived in Sayers Common and attended school in Burgess Hill. In 1939 her parents were living in the Lodge at Deane's Isolation Hospital at Goddards Green where her father was an ambulance driver and porter. At the time Irene was working for Dr Cunningham Jones in Grand Avenue, Hassocks, and living in at his house.

Irene was a popular girl and volunteered for the WAAF in August 1941 as an aircraftwoman 2nd class, being numbered 436620. Her number suggests that she was based in either Harrogate or Bridgenorth at the WAAF training centre. The newspaper report of her funeral records that she was returning to her base in the 'North of England' when she was taken ill, which tends to suggest she was training in Harrogate, however the WAAF training school was moving to Bridgenorth around this time. Another confusion is that the 'Allied Airmen Roll of Honour' lists her as attending 10 Technical Training School in Kirkham, Lancs. If this is the case she was receiving training on aircraft maintenance. Sadly WAAF records from WW2 are rarely available so we cannot be absolutely certain where she was based..

What is certain is that Irene came home on her first leave in October 1941 and spent a week at home before catching a train to return to her unit. On the way back she was taken ill with abdominal pains and was taken off the train at Nuneaton where she was admitted to the general hospital there. She died four days later on 03/11/1941. The first her parents knew was a telegram informing them of her death.

Her death was registered in Nuneaton but she was buried in Sayers Common in a privately registered CWGC grave. No grave number is given as hers is the only WW2 CWGC grave in the cemetery. She is remembered on the Sayers Common war memorial as well as on both local war memorials.



WAAF blazer badge

Clifford Albert Rollings

Clifford was born in Hurst in early 1910 and baptised on 27/02/1910, the son of Amos Clifford Rollings and his wife Louisa Frances Rollings nee Ridley. Amos was a house painter and in 1911 the one year old Clifford was listed on the census at 1, Pretoria Villas in Hurst Wickham. He had two older sisters, and later, a brother who was born in 1924.

Clifford joined the Royal Sussex Regiment as private number 6396202. The RSR arrived in France in April 1940 taking part in the Battle of France and the following retreat to Dunkirk. Casualties were high both dead and captured. Clifford was taken prisoner at Dunkirk in June 1940. Originally listed with incorrect initials as 'Missing' he was eventually tracked to Stalag XX-B which was near Malbork, Poland. This was the most northerly of the German POW camps and had previously been used in WW1. Many of the prisoners there were forced to work on local farms, sawmills, factories and in the local goods yard. They were also used to cut ice on the nearby River Nogat. While the work was hard, it did give the opportunity for prisoners to meet the local people, and there are several instances of marriages with local girls. Clifford was numbered POW Number 11314.

In the winter of 1945 the German authorities took the decision to evacuate many of the POW camps in the face of the advancing Soviet army, thus delaying liberation. It is known that the evacuation of prisoners from Stalag XX-B started on 23/01/1945 with their eventual, very circuitous route, covering some 1600 km. This evacuation, on foot, was very arduous. Taking place through the icy winter months and with little or no food or shelter, large numbers of the prisoners died en route. Clifford's date of death is given as 16/04/1945. His parents were told that he had died in hospital in Germany, however the CWGC do not list a grave site for him.

On both the CWGC lists and on his probate a wife, Rubena Rollings, is listed for Clifford. At this stage no record of a marriage has been found. There is circumstantial evidence to suggest that Rubena may have been Irish and following Clifford's death emigrated to Australia in 1947.

Clifford is listed on the Dunkirk memorial on panel 64 and also on both local war memorials.



*Badge of the Royal Sussex Regiment
as depicted on a CWGC gravestone.*

Edward James Stickland

Note that the surname is spelt incorrectly in both war memorials as Strickland. It should read Stickland.

Edward was the son of James Bertram Stickland and his wife Edith Harriett Stickland nee Rookard. James was born in Edmonton but Edith was born and baptised at Hurst. James was a draper and moved for work. James and Edith married in 1922 and their son Edward was born in 1923 in Tonbridge, while their daughter Joan was born in Southampton in 1928. In 1939 the family were living at 33 Preston Street in Brighton. By 1943 they were living in Hassocks.

Edward joined the RAF Volunteer Reserve, numbered 1800355. This number was issued to recruits at Euston in December 1941. Inevitably promotion within the RAF was quite speedy and by 1943 Edward was a sergeant flight engineer. He became part of 462 squadron, who were in turn part of Bomber squadron, Middle East Command.

462 squadron had been formed in September 1942 at RAF Fayid, Egypt from 10, 76 and 227 squadrons. Based in North Africa it was, technically, an RAAF unit but most of the air and ground staff were non-Australian. They flew Halifax B Mark II bombers but since they were the only squadron flying Halifax bombers in the area the lack of experienced replacement air crew and maintenance became an issue and they were non-operational for a period leading up to January 1943. They moved to Terria in Libya on 1st October 1943 with their targets listed as Greece, Crete, Rhodes and other islands in the Dodecanese. Edward and his regular crew of 6 men joined the squadron at Hosc Raui at the end of July 1943. Paperwork for his aircraft is poor and it appears to have been numbered BB 333 with a serial number J.

On the evening of 12-13/10/1943 they took off between 2340 and 2350 as part of a five aircraft operation to bomb Maritza Aerodrome on Rhodes, and with Edward as the flight engineer. After take off they completed a slow circuit but were seen to be losing height and crashed about 2 miles WNW of the aerodrome exploding on impact. The resulting fire meant any investigation of the fault was not possible. A funeral for Edward and his colleagues was held the following day at the Civil Cemetery in Benghazi. He was buried in plot 2 G 12. The area was, and still is, a difficult place to maintain and on 11/09/1944, in an attempt to make the access better, Edward, and a number of other men were exhumed and reburied in the Benghazi War Cemetery. Edward now rests in plot 6 E 14.

Edward is remembered on both local war memorials



Badge of 462 squadron as part of the RAAF

Douglas Percy Stone

Douglas was the only son of Stuart Francis Stone and his wife Hilda Gertrude Stone nee Pankhurst. They married in 1914 and moved to Hurst to live at Box House Farm where Stuart traded as a market gardener. Douglas was born on 13/03/1920 at Hurst. In 1939 Douglas was still living at home and listed as a market gardener's labourer.

Douglas joined up in 1942 and his initial training was with the General Service Corps. He was numbered 14208280 and then transferred to the 2nd/4th Battalion the Hampshire Regiment as a private. He had married Mabel Paige early in 1942 in Henfield, probably prior to his joining up. They had no children.

Douglas army papers are not available so it has been difficult to find reliable information about what he was doing. The regimental diaries for the 2nd/4th Battalion show that operating in two halves, they invaded Sicily as part of Operation Husky in July 1943. A and B companies secured the beach and unloaded supplies moving inland and capturing Mount Scalpello then moving further inland to set up a garrison at Catania. C and D companies invaded Salerno in September 1943 where they met stiff opposition. Armoured half tracks overran D company on 16 September and Douglas is recorded as being killed that day. He was initially buried near where he fell.

In November 1943 a site for a cemetery was chosen and laid out and Douglas was exhumed and reburied on 18/12/1943 in the Salerno War Cemetery in plot III.C.32. He is also remembered on both local war memorials.



*Badge of the Royal Hampshire Regiment
as depicted on a CWGC gravestone*

Edwin Timms

Edwin Timms was the son of Edwin Timms and his wife Edith Mary Timms, nee Alexandre. He was born in 1921 in Lambeth and known as Teddie. He married Pamela Dorothy Smith in Watford in 1941 and they do not appear to have had any children. Pamela was listed on the 1939 register working as a personal secretary in Surrey. Edwin snr died in 1925 in Westminster hospital, Edith later qualified as a midwife in Watford and worked there. She died in 1989 in Watford. Pamela did not remarry after Edwin jnr's death and died in Sanderstead in 1979. At this stage I have been unable to make a connection between Edwin and Hurst. The most obvious connection may be through Pamela working in Hurst or possibly through her brother John who married in Cuckfield. If you can shed any light on the connection we would be pleased to hear from you.

Edwin's army career has also been difficult to research. What follows is a brief outline of the Welch regiment in WW2 and in particular the 1st Battalion since Edwin was in the 1st Battalion when he died. How much applies personally to Edwin is uncertain.

Edwin is known to have joined the Welch regiment, numbered 193800, and risen to the rank of Lieutenant. Note that 'Welch' is an archaic form of the word Welsh and is the correct spelling for this regiment at this date. The first battalion endured heavy fighting throughout the war, initially in Palestine, and later in Libya. They suffered heavy losses at the 1st battle of El Alamein. On 9th July 1943 they landed in Sicily as part of General Montgomery's British Eighth Army for Operation 'Husky'. Their role was to facilitate the supply of men and equipment across the beaches. They crossed the Messina Straits landing in Italy on 3rd September and again performed the vital role of facilitating supplies of men and equipment. While the eighth army pushed forward the Welch was sent to Egypt on guard duties where they were honoured to supply an escort for Winston Churchill in Cairo. In May 1944 they received much needed reinforcements and by July that year returned to combat duty, landing in Italy. On 6th September they were part of the attack on Croce. This operation lasted six days and the regiment were under constant shell fire from the German position high on the Coriano Ridge. Although the German army was eventually overcome, fighting was fierce and those who fell were often buried close to where they fell.

Edwin died on 09/09/1944. A site for a cemetery, the Coriano Ridge War Cemetery, was selected in April 1945 and those soldiers who had been buried in outlying areas were brought in to the new cemetery. Edwin is buried in plot XX.L.8 and is also remembered on both local war memorials.



*Badge from the Welch Regiment
as depicted on an embroidered tie*

Alfred Joseph Webb

Alfred was the son of Joseph Edward Webb and his wife Florence Julia Webb nee Dunnings. He was born on 01/01/1911 while his parents were living at 38, Gordon Road, Brighton, however he was baptised at Walthamstow on 26/02/1911, his mother's parish. His father Joseph was a blacksmith's striker. Alfred married Dorothy Margaret Bartley, probably at Hurst, at the beginning of 1940. Dorothy was the daughter of Richard Henry Bartley whose name appears among those listed on the WW1 section of the war memorials. Alfred and Dorothy did not have any children.

Alfred joined the 1st Royal Corps of Signals as a signalman numbered 2572927. However, since his army papers are not yet freely available we cannot be certain what he was doing. Many of those that joined the Royal Corps of Signals were ex Post Office engineers and drivers and it is possible that Alfred may have joined the PO in 1932, but this is unconfirmed. It was said of the Corps of Signals that they were always the first in and the last out of a battle. Alfred's actual role is not known but he would have been at the forefront of any fighting as the signallers general role was to intercept messages from the enemy and pass them back down the line as well as dealing with the day to day signalling required of a battalion in war.

Alfred appears on the lists of Missing between 10/05/1940 and 16/06/1940, however he was later reported as killed, with an estimated date of death given as 27/05/1940. He appears to have been buried in the French section of the Lille North Cemetery shortly after his death, possibly in plot 92.4.11. He was re-interred in the Lille Southern Cemetery in plot V. D. 29 on 13/05/1947.

It should be remembered that the Germans had broken through the British line in May 1940, which ultimately led to the enforced evacuation of troops from Dunkirk. The possible confusion in this cemetery also comes from the fact that the French numbering system differs from that used by the CWGC. It is known that the 10th Casualty Clearing Station used the Lille cemetery between 16th and 25th May 1940 and also during the last two weeks of July 1940, but due to the 100 years rule I have been unable to access any records for them. The grave concentration report into Alfred's exhumation makes the distinction that Alfred died rather than was killed in action which would seem to suggest that he may have been admitted to the 10th CCS.

Alfred is remembered on both local war memorials.



Cap badge of the Royal Corps of Signals

Joseph Woolgar

Joseph is another serviceman whose death has been difficult to trace. He was the son of Thomas Richard Woolgar and his wife Matilda Woolgar nee Keyes. Joseph was born in 1902 in Brighton and by 1911 the family were living at 49 Bernard Street, Brighton. He married Lilian Maud Spicer in Brighton in 1930 but they do not appear to have had any children. In 1931 they were both listed on the electoral registers living at 39 High Street, Brighton. In 1939 Lilian was living at Prospect Cottage, Hurst opposite the church.

Joseph joined the RAF Volunteer Reserve, numbered 799787, and was a leading aircraftman. His number occurs in a batch of numbers issued in February 1939 to leading aircraftmen. The role of an LAC was varied, ranging from maintenance to cooking plus some clerical tasks. He appears to have been stationed in the Chichester area as his death was registered in the Chichester district. At the time only Tangmere and Westhampnett (Goodwood) airfields were fully operational and it is now known that Joseph was stationed at Tangmere. 145 squadron were based there from May to July 1940 and again from October 1940 to May 1941. 616 squadron was there from February to May 1941.

Joseph's death has been recorded as 09/04/1941 following an air raid on the station. The Observation Record Book for 616 squadron laconically notes that a 'JU88 dive bombed the station and caused quite a bit of damage.' It then goes on to list the Ops for the day. In fact 5 men were killed and 14 injured when No.8 Barrack Block was almost completely destroyed and No.5 Barrack Block badly damaged by HE bombs. The Watch Office was also out of commission for some time.

It is interesting to note that Douglas Bader arrived at Tangmere on 18th March 1941 and SOE had a training base nearby.

Joseph is buried in The Downs Cemetery in Brighton in section X.D grave 638. Lilian remained living in the village and died here in 1970.



RAFVR lapel badge

The Air Ministry P4 files into casualties and the enemy action on 09/04/1941 at Tangmere are kept at The National Archives but may only be viewed by visiting Kew, and I am grateful to Stewart Hall for additional information from these files.