



## The Bradford-on-Avon Bomber Crash 1944

On 26th March 1944 a Handley Page Halifax Bomber "V" for Victory of 425 Squadron, Royal Canadian Airforce, crashed in fields near Bradford on Avon. Sadly 6 of the crew of 8 were killed when the plane on a cross country night time training exercise came down near the town 3 men died in the plane. Three bailed out over Dilton Marsh but only two survived the landing. A further two bailed out over Bradford-on-Avon but their parachutes did not save them as the height at which they jumped meant the parachutes were ineffective and did not open fully to cushion the impact. The three men

remaining on board must have managed to steer the aircraft away from the town as eyewitnesses seemed to think the plane was on course to crash over the town.

A memorial was erected at Westbury House, Westbury Gardens, Bradford-on-Avon as shown above. The men who died were:-

### Joseph George Brian Hall

Pilot Officer J/89283 Joseph George Brian Hall. He was aged 22 and was the son of Edward Paterson & Gabrielle Hall. He left a widow, Barbara Sykes Hall of Pleasantville, New York State, United States of America. He is buried in Bath (Haycombe) Cemetery, Somerset, Plot 39, Section H, Row C, Grave 260



### Don Hernando De Soto Grover

Pilot Officer/Navigator J/85140 Don Hernando De Soto Grover. He was 23 and was the son of Maurice B. and Aimee Grover of Kirkland Lake, Ontario, Canada. He is buried in Bath (Haycombe) Cemetery, Somerset, Plot 39, Section H, Row A, Grave 248



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## Roy Stanley Porter

Pilot Officer/Air Bomber J/89470 Roy Stanley Porter. He was 21 and the son of Mrs. W. G. and the late Staff Sergeant Porter of Carleton Avenue, Woodroffe, Ontario, Canada. He is buried in Bath (Haycombe) Cemetery, Somerset, Plot 39, Section H, Row B, Grave 248.



## Harry Newton

Sergeant/Wireless Operator/Air Gunner 1480974 Harry Newton. He was aged 22 and the son of Harry and Ada Newton of Oldham, Lancashire. He is buried in Oldham (Greenacres) Cemetery, Lancashire, Section C, Row 15, Grave 192



## Frank Norman Simpson

Sergeant/Flight Engineer 2208979 Frank Norman Simpson. He was aged 20 and son of Frank & Ethel Simpson of Stretton, Cheshire. He is buried in Stretton (St. Matthew) Churchyard, New part South East of Church.



## Graham Herbert Evans

Sergeant/Air Gunner 1025594 Graham Herbert Evans. He was aged 21 and son of William Jenkins Stanley & Elizabeth Evans of Ystrad Mynach, Glamorganshire. Buried in Ystrad Mynach (Holy Trinity) Churchyard, Glamorganshire Plot F, Grave 290.

## Pilgrimage for Pilot's Relatives

Relatives of a Canadian pilot, killed when his plane crashed in Bradford-on-Avon during the Second World War, paid an emotional visit to the town this week.

Randy and Lynne Grover went to Westbury Gardens to see a memorial plaque to their late uncle, Pilot Officer Don Hernando de Soto Grover, who died at the age of 23, with five other crew members. They were shown to the spot by historian Jonathan Falconer, whose interest in the crash, near Christ Church in 1944, began from stories he heard as a boy.

Mr Grover said: "We were very honoured to know that the Brits paid tribute to them and that Jonathan had been a part of that.

“Growing up, I looked up to my uncle as he flew in a plane. When I was 18, I got my own flying licence and was in the Air Cadets.

“My younger brother, Tom, is a maintenance engineer in the aviation industry and so are his sons. There’s a long family connection with flying.”

Ms Grover said: “We knew nothing of our uncle’s death, except he was killed overseas. I am very impressed with Bradford. I love the architecture and I love all the flower beds.”

The Canadian crew was on a training flight from its base at Tholthorpe, North York-shire, when the plane, a Handley Page Halifax III, was seen flying over Bradford with one of its four engines on fire before it crashed.

Residents, soldiers and the fire service rushed to help.

Mr Falconer, who helped to get the Westbury Gardens plaque put up in 1994, to mark the 50th anniversary of the crash, has also written a book about the Canadian crew.

He said: “Having gone to school in Bradford on Avon at Fitzmaurice Grammar, I always heard stories about a crash during the war.

“This has always intrigued me and, as I have an interest in air force history, it lodged in my subconscious.”

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Lyne & Randy Grover with historian Jonathan Falconer