

# Compton Chamberlayne

## Roll of Honour



*Lest we Forget* World War II



FLIGHT LIEUTENANT

**M.T.G. HENRY. DFC.**

PILOT

ROYAL AIR FORCE

13<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY, 1941 AGE 28

*IN VERY LOVING MEMORY*

## Michael Thomas Gibson HENRY

Michael Thomas Gibson HENRY was the only son of Thomas Gibson HENRY and Edith Margaret HENRY (nee Castle). Michael's birth was registered in the September Quarter of 1912 in the district of Birkenhead, Cheshire.

(The 1911 Census records Michael's father – Thomas Gibson Henry as a 40 year old, single, solicitor, visiting Septimus Castle, aged 55, a solicitor, widowed & his 3 adult children – one of whom was Edith Margaret Castle, aged 26, Thomas Henry's future wife. The address recorded was Park Lodge, Bidstow, Birkenhead & had 6 servants.

Thomas Gibson HENRY married Edith M Castle in the June Quarter of 1911 at Birkenhead, Cheshire. 2 years after the birth of their only son, Thomas Gibson & Edith Margaret HENRY had a daughter – Elizabeth G HENRY, whose birth was registered in the September Quarter of 1914.)

Michael Thomas Gibson HENRY attended the Sedbergh School in Cumbria, as part of Sedgwick House, from 1926 until 1930.

Michael's younger sister, Elizabeth G Henry married Frederick S Wakeham, in the district of Wirral, in the March quarter of 1937.

Michael Thomas Gibson HENRY was granted a short service commission as Acting Pilot Officer with the Royal Air Force, on probation, on 5<sup>th</sup> July, 1937. (*Source: London Gazette 20<sup>th</sup> July, 1937*)

M.T.G. HENRY was posted to No. 7 Flying Training School, Peterborough, July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1937. (*Source: The Times(London, England) newspaper 10<sup>th</sup> August, 1937*)

M.T.G. HENRY was appointed as Acting Pilot Officer to No. 10 (Bomber) Squadron at Dishforth, North Yorkshire. (*Source: The Times (London, England) newspaper 7<sup>th</sup> March, 1938*)

No 10 Squadron was reformed as a night bomber unit in 1928. In 1937 the unit moved from RAF Boscombe Down to RAF Dishforth. At the beginning of the World War 2 they were the first unit equipped with the Armstrong Whitworth Whitley aircraft & these were in use between March 1937 and December 1941.

A Forthcoming Marriage Notice was placed in The Times on Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> March, 1938 –  
*Mr M.T.G. HENRY AND MISS E.M. WARD*

*The engagement is announced between Michael Thomas Gibson, only son of Mr and Mrs T.G. Henry, of Home Croft, Cortington, Wilts, late of Heswall, Cheshire, and Elizabeth Marion (Betty), younger daughter of Mr and Mrs F.W.R. Ward, formerly of Yokohama, Japan, and now of Pennings, Guildford.*

Michael Thomas Gibson HENRY, Acting Pilot Officer on probation, was confirmed in his appointment and graded as a Pilot Officer on the 10<sup>th</sup> May, 1938. (Source: London Gazette 24<sup>th</sup> May, 1938)

A marriage was registered for Michael T G HENRY & Elizabeth M Ward, in the September quarter of 1939, in the district of Thirsk. (Thirsk spans the boundaries of North Riding of Yorkshire & North Yorkshire).

On the night of 12/13<sup>th</sup> April, 1940 the crew of aircraft – Whitley K9023 were tasked with a reconnaissance flight to observe shipping in the coastal regions of Kettegat and Skaggerak, Norway. The Whitley K9023 took off from R.A.F. Dishforth in North Yorkshire at 18.45 hrs and bombed a supply ship, but on their return the aircraft flew over a “flak” ship (a ship heavily armed with anti-aircraft weapons, used to protect other vessels from air attack) which fired at the Whitley and scored hits. The pilot was able to return safely to R.A.F. Dishforth and land at 03.30 hrs without further incident.

- Pilot – F/Lt Richard Bickford RAF (37462) – Uninjured
- Second Pilot – S/Ldr Desmond Patrick Hanafin RAF (33087) – Uninjured
- Observer – F/O Michael Thomas Gibson HENRY RAF (39876) – Uninjured (Trained Pilot)
- Wireless Operator/ Air Gunner LAC Arthur Millington - Uninjured
- Wireless Operator/ Air Gunner LAC G L “Larry” Donnelly - Uninjured

On the night of 17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> May, 1940, the crew of Whitley P4967 were tasked with operations to Bremen, Germany to bomb storage facilities. They left R.A.F Dishforth at 20.58 hrs and bombed the target just after midnight but sustained heavy flak damage. The aircraft was hit and the port wing was damaged, a large amount of fabric was ripped from the upper surface of the wing and port aileron. The aircraft sustained some fuselage damage and with difficulty in keeping control, the pilot returned the aircraft safely to R.A.F Dishforth, where they landed at 03.35 hrs. The damage was later assessed & repaired.

- Pilot – F/Lt Richard Bickford DFC RAF (37462)
- Air Observer - F/O Michael Thomas Gibson HENRY RAF (39876) of Compton Chamberlayne, Wiltshire
- Navigator – Sgt Arthur Knapper RAF (580777)
- Wireless Operator/ Air Gunner – Sgt John Fletcher
- Rear Gunner – LAC G L “Larry” Donnelly

On the 30<sup>th</sup> July, 1940, Flying Officer Michael Thomas Gibson HENRY was awarded the R.A.F. Distinguished Flying Cross. The award was announced in the London Gazette stating – *The King has been graciously pleased to approve the following awards.* (Source: London Gazette 30<sup>th</sup> July, 1940). The Times newspaper announced the awards the following day with – *Gallantry And Devotion To Duty – The King has approved the following awards for gallantry and devotion to duty in the execution of air operations.* (Source: The Times 31<sup>st</sup> July, 1940)

The Distinguished Flying Cross is a Military decoration awarded to personnel of the United Kingdom's Royal Air Force for "an act or acts of valour, courage or devotion to duty whilst flying in active operations against the enemy." Recipients of the Distinguished Flying Cross are entitled to use the letters "DFC".



*The Distinguished Flying Cross*

On the night of 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> August, 1940 the crew of Whitley P4953 sustained slight flak damage on Operations to Wismar, Germany on the coast of the Baltic Sea. The pilot was able to return safely to R.A.F Leeming, North Yorkshire and land without further damage.

- Pilot – F/O Michael Thomas Gibson HENRY RAF (39876) (Parents of Compton Chamberlayne, Wiltshire)
- Second Pilot – F/O Peter Wellwood Fortune Landale RAFVR (70379) of Dumfries, Scotland
- Observer – Sgt J Shaw
- Wireless Operator/ Air Gunner – Sgt G L “Larry” Donnelly RAF
- Air Gunner – Sgt George Frederick Dove RAF (621162)



*Whitley P4953*

On the night of 11<sup>th</sup> /12<sup>th</sup> August, 1940, the crew of Whitley P4953 and seven other No 10 Squadron Whitleys & eight No 51 Squadron aircraft undertook Operations to Gelsenkirchen to drop incendiary bombs, known as “razzles”. This type of incendiary bomb was made of pills of phosphorous covered in gauze and placed between pieces of celluloid. While in the aircraft they were carried in containers topped up with water. When released down the flare chute, they had a habit of lodging themselves in the tail plane of the Whitley and in the rudder hinges of the aircraft but did not catch fire immediately as they were wet. The aircraft landed safely at R.A.F Leeming but when the incendiary bombs dried out – they ignited. In the case of Whitley P4953, the damage sustained at RAF Leeming was repaired. At least four No 10 Squadron aircraft on this raid were hit by flak & of the eight aircraft being used, six sustained damage by the incendiaries catching fire on landing. The probable crew of Whitley P4953 are:

- Pilot – F/O Michael Thomas Gibson HENRY RAF (39876) (of Compton Chamberlayne, Wiltshire)
- Second Pilot – F/O Peter Wellwood Fortune Landale RAFVR (70379) of Dumfries, Scotland
- Observer – Sgt J Shaw
- Wireless Operator/ Air Gunner – Sgt G L “Larry” Donnelly RAF
- Air Gunner – Sgt George Frederick Dove RAF (621162)

Flying Officer Michael Thomas Gibson HENRY, D.F.C. (39876) was promoted to the rank of Flight Lieutenant on the 10<sup>th</sup> December, 1940. (*Source: London Gazette 14<sup>th</sup> January, 1941*)

The first Handley Page Halifax aircraft (L7244) took to the air on 25<sup>th</sup> October, 1939 from the R.A.F airfield at Bicester. It was to be almost a year before the second prototype – L7245 made its first flight in August, 1940. Two months later, on 11<sup>th</sup> October, 1940 the first production example – L9485 designated the Halifax Mk 1 made its flight. Within five weeks 35 Bomber Squadron began receiving its first Halifax aircraft at R.A.F Leeming in November, 1940. The Halifax had a crew of seven, with a length of 71ft (21M), a wingspan of 104 ft (31M) & a top speed of 309 mph. On 5<sup>th</sup> December, 1940, No 35 Squadron moved to R.A.F Linton-on-Ouse, North Yorkshire.



*Halifax L9485- the first production Halifax & sister to L9487*

On 13<sup>th</sup> January, 1941, the crew of Halifax L9487, the third Halifax in production, were given the task of a measured climb and fuel consumption test at 12,000 feet on the newly arrived, brand new aircraft. The crew were all operationally experienced and qualified to carry out the test. They were to carry out the test at 12,000ft at which they were to cruise at that height for an hour and measure the fuel consumption. The Halifax L9487 took off from R.A.F Linton-on-Ouse at 11.20 hrs and climbed away. About half an hour later, the aircraft was seen near Dishforth at around 3,000 ft with the port undercarriage down and a trail of vapour behind the port side of the aircraft. One of the port engines was also seen to be not working. The vapour ignited (probably as a result of being ignited by an engine exhaust flame) and a large fire was seen on the port side of the aircraft. The aircraft then entered a steep dive before crashing from 2,500ft near Baldersby St James, between Thirsk and Dishforth at 11.53 hrs. All the airmen were sadly killed instantly. The fire was thought to have burnt away the aircraft's tail control surfaces, making the Halifax L9487 uncontrollable. The crew were found to have been wearing their parachutes and all were probably preparing to bail out when the aircraft entered the spiralling dive and as a result they were unable to eject.

- Pilot – F/Lt Michael Thomas Gibson HENRY DFC RAF (39876) (aged 28 of Compton Chamberlayne, Wiltshire. Buried Roeclyffe Churchyard, Boroughbridge, Yorkshire)
- Second Pilot – P/O Leslie Joseph McDonald RAFVR (79513) (aged 23 of Karori, Wellington, New Zealand. Buried Dishforth Cemetery, Yorkshire)
- Observer – Sgt John Napier Hall RAFVR (743002) (Buried St Michael's Cemetery, Stoke, Warwickshire)
- Wireless Operator/ Air Gunner – Sgt Anthony Charles Henry Reid Russell RAF (904441) (aged 22 of Wandsworth, London. Buried Dishforth Cemetery, Yorkshire)
- Wireless Operator/ Air Gunner – Sgt William Charles Browne "Laddie" Jesse RAF DFM (633777) (aged 22 of Dublin, Irish Republic. Buried Dishforth Cemetery, Yorkshire)
- Flight Engineer – Sgt Francis Leslie Plowman RAF (567918) (aged 21 of Doncaster, Yorkshire. Buried Dishforth Cemetery, Yorkshire)

This was the first fatal Halifax accident & the cause of the fire was blamed on the failure of ground crew at R.A.F Linton-on-Ouse to secure the fuel –filler cap back on one of the port fuel tanks after it had been refuelled. The vapour seen behind the port wing would almost certainly have been fuel, which, by the time it ignited had soaked into the tail section of the aircraft. Also of note is that the port outer engine had been suffering trouble since its delivery. It suffered a coolant leak on 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 1940 which resulted in a new radiator being fitted and then the same engine showed low oil pressure. It was run-up on the 24<sup>th</sup> December, 1940 and a new oil relief valve had to be fitted. Following the crash, all the engines were removed & taken away for inspection. This engine was found to have suffered an oil shortage in the air, prior to the crash, part of the crankshaft had broken causing the failure of the engine. Further investigation of other Halifaxes' found that this was a design problem with early Halifaxes'. When full of fuel and in a tail-down position, the oil pumps on the outer engines were above the oil level. This oil system was later changed to stop the problem reoccurring.

The Halifax L9487 was built by Handley Page Ltd and first flown from Radlett on 25<sup>th</sup> November, 1940. It was delivered to the R.A.F at 24 MU(Maintenance Unit) the following day and then to 35 Squadron on 4<sup>th</sup> January, 1941. The total flying time of L9487 up to the crash was only four hours. Linton-on-Ouse O.R.B. makes reference to the accident of L9487 – *“aircraft of 35 Squadron took off at 11.20hrs on climb and consumption test. 30 minutes later was seen to be in trouble just north of Dishforth, with smoke coming from the port inner engine. Aircraft lost height and dived into the ground at an acute angle and caught fire. 6 killed.”*

(35 Squadron were the first unit to become operational with the Halifax, when they flew their first operational flight to Le Havre on 10<sup>th</sup> March, 1941. On this raid, they lost the first Halifax in an operational flight when L9489 was shot down by friendly fire by a British night-fighter having misidentified it over Southern England. Four of the crew were sadly killed.)



*The crash site of L9487 was located and some fragments of the aircraft were found by Ken Reast and Dick Barton in 1997*

Flight Lieutenant Michael Thomas Gibson HENRY, D.F.C. (39876) of the Royal Air Force, No 35 Squadron, died on 13<sup>th</sup> January, 1941. His death was registered as Michael T G HENRY, aged 28, in the district of Thirsk, in the March quarter of 1941.

Flight Lieutenant M.T.G. HENRY, DFC was buried at St Mary's (Anglican) Churchyard, Roecliffe, (east of Church), near Boroughbridge, North Yorkshire. His death was acknowledged by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission & as such he has a CWGC headstone.

The CWGC has the following information – Son of Thomas Gibson and Edith Margaret HENRY; husband of Elizabeth Marion HENRY (nee Ward) of Compton Chamberlayne, Wiltshire.



*St Mary's Roecliffe Churchyard (Photo by Richard Roberts – British War Graves)*

Death notices were placed in *The Times* newspaper –

### **ON ACTIVE SERVICE**

*HENRY – In Jan., 1941, killed on active service, FLYING OFFICER MICHAEL THOMAS GIBSON HENRY, D.F.C., beloved husband of Betty (nee Ward), and only son of Mr and Mrs T.G. HENRY, Homecroft, Cortington, Wilts.*

(The Times – Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> January, 1941)

### **FALLEN OFFICERS**

#### **“THE TIMES” LIST OF CASUALTIES**

*We have received news of the death of the following officers in addition to those whose names have been published in the official list:-*

#### **ROYAL AIR FORCE**

*FLYING OFFICER MICHAEL THOMAS GIBSON HENRY, D.F.C., killed on active service, was the only son of Mr and Mrs T.G. HENRY, Homecroft, Cortington, Wilts. He was commissioned as an acting pilot officer on July 5, 1937 and trained at Peterborough. He had served in the Bomber Command since February, 1938, and in July last was awarded the D.F.C. for gallantry and devotion to duty in the execution of air operations. He leaves a widow.*

(The Times – Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 1941)

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### **SEDBERGH SCHOOL ROLL OF HONOUR**

World War 2

**HENRY MTG**, DFC S 1926-1930

Flight Lieutenant (Pilot), RAF, 35 Squadron Bomber Command.

Killed when his Halifax crashed on an air test after taking off from Linton-on-Ouse.

Buried Roecliffe St Mary Churchyard, Yorkshire

13/1/1941 aged 28 years.

\*\* A special thank you to Richard Allenby - [Yorkshire Aircraft website](#) for giving permission to use his information regarding the 4 incidents involving the Whitley K9023, Whitley P4967, Whitley P4953 & the Halifax L9487 and Michael Thomas Gibson HENRY's Headstone.

*\*\*JEANS : HENRY – On Feb. 8, 1944 at Cairo Cathedral, Lieut.Colonel J. G. JEANS, R.A., elder son of Major and Mrs T. K. Jeans, of Broadchalke, Salisbury, to ELIZABETH MARION (BETTY) HENRY, Junior Commander, A.T.S., younger daughter of Mrs S. W. R. Ward, and the late Mr Ward of Summerhayes, Woking, and widow of Flight Lieut. M. T. G. Henry, D.F.C., R.A.F.*

*(The Times (London, England) Monday 14<sup>th</sup> February, 1944)*