



COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES & OTHERS AT KESTON PARISH CHURCH

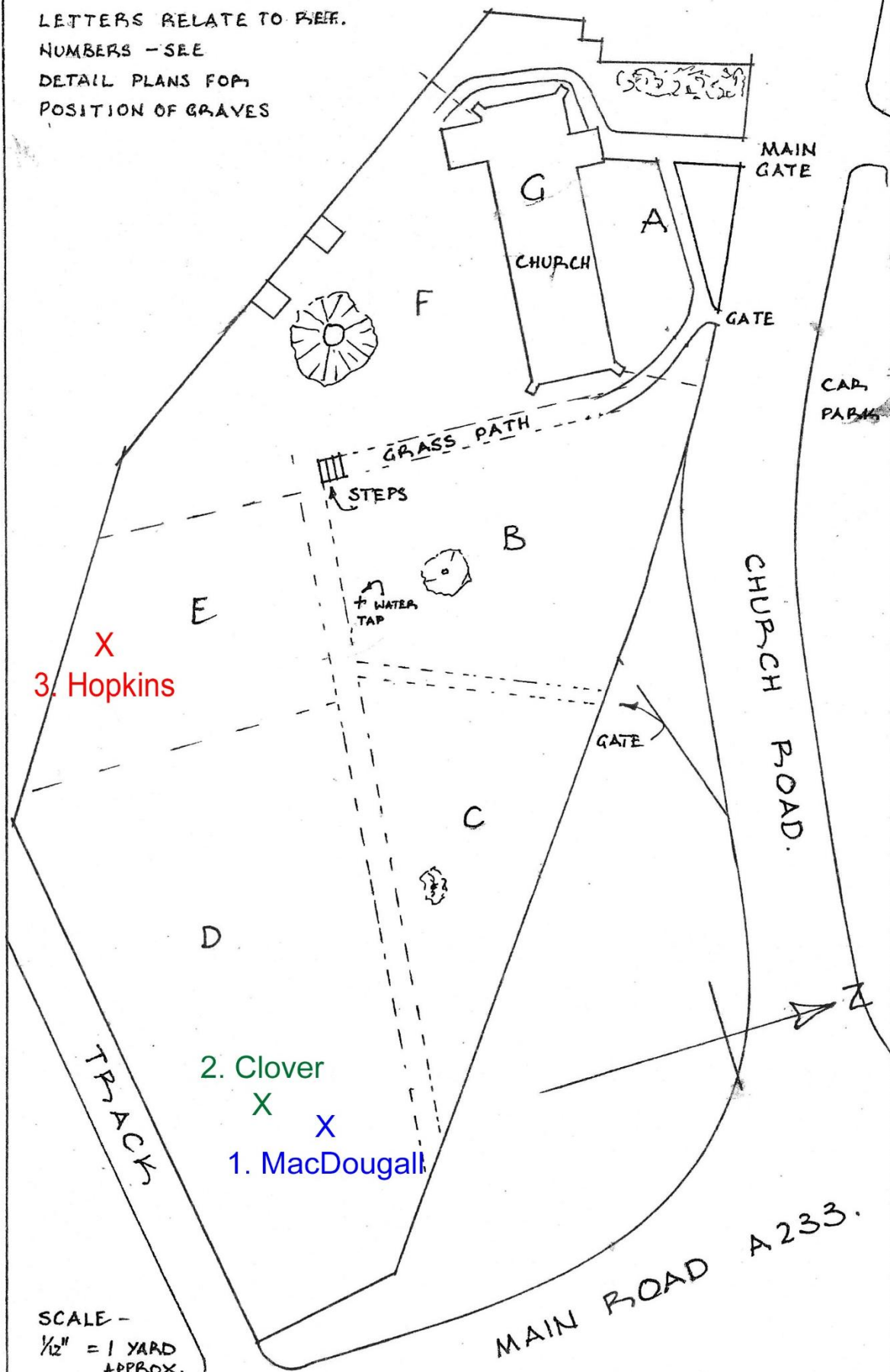
Details of the three Commonwealth War graves and other graves of those that served in the military, with maps



kestonparishchurch.org.uk

KESTON PARISH CHURCH - SITE PLAN.

LETTERS RELATE TO REF.
NUMBERS - SEE
DETAIL PLANS FOR
POSITION OF GRAVES



SCALE -
 $\frac{1}{12}'' = 1 \text{ YARD}$
APPROX.

Commonwealth War Graves at Keston Parish Church

1. Second Lieutenant Baldwin Childerhose MacDougall

RAF 141st Squadron

Died 22nd September 1918 age 19

Baldwin Childerhose MacDougall was born on the 10th of October 1898 in Beech Ridge, Quebec, Canada, the son of John and Frances (née Childerhose) MacDougall of Port Elgin, Ontario. The 1901 Census for Canada records that Baldwin had two brothers: Kenneth and John Lorne MacDougall and three sisters: Christina, Florence and Helen MacDougall.

On the 5th of June 1916 Baldwin, aged just 17 years and 8 months, joined the 7th Reserve Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force as Private 346. On the 15th of December 1916, leaving his family home at 177, Alfred Street, Kingston, Ontario Baldwin embarked at Halifax, Nova Scotia, on the *R.M.S. Olympic* bound for Liverpool, arriving on the 28th of December 1916. Baldwin was stationed at Seaford, East Sussex and was now serving with the Canadian Army Dental Corps.

On the 19th of September 1917, Baldwin transferred to the Royal Flying Corps and on the 4th of January 1918 he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant with 141 Squadron of the Royal Flying Corps, later to become the Royal Air Force on the 1st of April 1918. On the 22nd of September 1918, Baldwin was killed in an aero accident at Biggin Hill.

Churchyard map location D165



2. Flying Officer Brian Robert Clover

Grave 319

RAF Service No. 50694

Died 16th December 1943 age 31

Brian Robert Clover was born in December 1912 in Tendring, Essex, the son of George Clover and Ethel Harriet Clover (née Closs). Brian (known as Bertie to his family) had two brothers George William and Charles Samuel Clover.

In 1940 Brian married Mildred Joan Agate in Blean, near Canterbury, Kent. The *Supplement to The London Gazette* dated the 9th of March 1943 records that Brian, serving as a Warrant Officer 50694 with the Royal Air Force was to receive a Commission and be promoted to Flying Officer.

Brian had joined the RAF's Technical Branch on the 14th of January and was attached to the 75 (Signals) Wing. The 75 (Signals) Wing of the RAF was formed on the 1st of July 1940 at Biggin Hill and it was tasked with operating the electronic air defence network across Britain. It was a part of Number 60 Signals Group responsible for the operation, maintenance and calibration of the Chain Home Radar Stations. The Headquarters of the 75 (Signals) Wing was based at Heathfield House, Heathfield Road, Keston, and Brian was billeted at 18, Hayes Gardens, Hayes, Kent a short distance away.

Brian died on the 16th of December 1943 in Farnborough Hospital, Locksbottom, Kent. The circumstances of his death are unknown.

Inscription on gravestone:

So he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side

Churchyard map location D149



3. Sergeant Michael John Hopkins

Unit 16 Operational Training Unit RAF Volunteer Reserve

RAF 4280952 Service No. 1280952 RAF Pilot

Died 15th May 1941 age 19

Michael John Hopkins was born on the 15th of January 1922 the son of Captain Thomas Hollis Hopkins (a Chartered Civil Engineer who saw service during the Great War) and Elsie Marguerite Hopkins (née Adams) of Bradfield, Leafy Grove, Keston. Michael was educated at Bromley County School for Boys (now the Ravensbourne School, Hayes Lane, Bromley, Kent) and Wycliffe College, Stonehouse, Gloucestershire. On leaving College he joined the staff of Barclays Bank, Bromley as a Clerk. Having joined the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve in May 1940, Michael qualified for his pilots' wings ten months later, on the 31st of March 1941 with the 16th Operational Training Unit based at R.A.F. Upper Heyford, Oxfordshire. While training for night bombing operations, on the 15th of May 1941, Michael was flying a twin-engine Handley Page Hampden medium bomber Serial Number P1350. During training, and whilst preparing to land, the aircraft lost power in one engine, causing it to enter an unrecoverable spin and crash in a field west of Fritwell village, a short distance north-west of Upper Heyford; there were no survivors. Michael was killed with four other servicemen aboard. He was buried in Keston Parish Churchyard on the 20th of May 1941. *World War Two medal entitlement: 1939-45 Star and the War Medal 1939-1945.*

Inscription on gravestone:

And when you go home tell them of us, and say "for your tomorrow we gave our today"

Churchyard map location E76



Other graves

1. Flying Officer Noel Butler Hemsley M.B.E.

Flying Officer Noel Butler Hemsley M.B.E. was born on the 18th of September 1892 in Chorlton, Lancashire, the son of Henry Hemsley and Linda Hemsley (née Butler). Noel was one of seven children his brothers being Howard Desmond, Gordon and Dudley and sisters Anne, Alice and Audrey, who in 1911 all lived with their parents at "Beaumaris" 39 London Road, Bedford.

On the 17th of September 1917 Noel joined the Royal Flying Corps as Private 20883 and was subsequently promoted to Sergeant Major with 43 Squadron. On the 10th of November 1917 Noel was Commissioned as a Second Lieutenant. Further temporary promotions followed on the 1st of May 1918 he was promoted to Temporary Lieutenant and on the 1st of September 1918 to Temporary Captain.

Noel was appointed as a Flying Officer for flying instruction on the 17th of March 1919 and was based at Biggin Hill. Two years later on the 31st of March 1921 Noel was killed in an aero accident while piloting an aircraft at Biggin Hill. His passenger, Edward Fenton Terry, also subsequently died following the crash. The crash was reported in the Evening Standard of the 2nd of April 1921.

Inscription on gravestone:

In honoured and Beloved Memory of Noel Butler Hemsley M.B.E. F/O. R.A.F.

Died on duty 31st March 1921 aged 28 and of Dudley Staunton Hemsley TPT. 18th H.R.S. Fell in France 26th March 1918 aged 21 years

In God's Keeping

At the Going Down of the Sun and in the Morning

We Will Remember Them.

Kerb:

Also of their beloved Mother Linda Hemsley Died 20th March 1936 aged 72 years

Cross and kerb Churchyard map location D163



2. Captain Gordon Wright Anderson

Royal Army Service Corps.

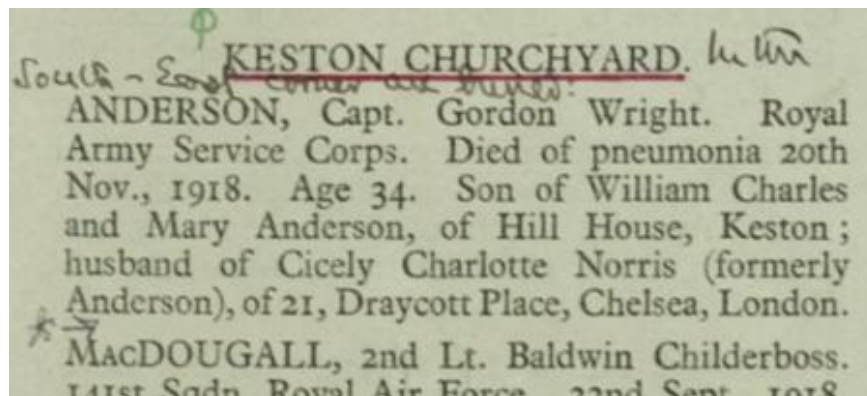
Gordon was born in Bromley in 1885 and died of pneumonia on 20th November 1918 in Marylebone, London. Son of William Charles and Mary Anderson, of Hill House, Keston, (behind The Fox Inn), he married Cicely Charlotte Dodgson in 1916 and they lived at 21, Draycott Place, Chelsea, London. (Cicely was later known as Norris). Living in Chelsea would have been convenient for Gordon who had a desk job at the War Office in Whitehall. It was soon after attending a Victory Celebration dinner that he died from the Spanish flu virus that was to kill more victims than the war itself. He was buried on 23rd November 1918

Inscription on gravestone:

"Faith Shall Vanish into Sight / Hope be Emptied in Delight"

In ever loving memory of Gordon Wright Anderson who passed over November 20th 1918

Cross and kerb Churchyard map location D197



3. Lieutenant Robert Wylie M.C.

Unit 955 Ind. Def. Bty. R.A.

No. and rank 144995

Date of death 15.4.1941. An article about him featured in The Keston Magazine, December/January 2023 edition, as below.

The Hero in our Churchyard



It has come to light in an unexpected way that there is a man who was awarded the Military Cross buried in Keston churchyard. (The Military Cross being the third level military decoration awarded to Officers of the British Armed forces in the First and Second World Wars). The grave is on the far side of the church hall but sadly is in a bad state of repair, the cross on the top having fallen off, as so many in the churchyard have. The inscription reads:

In honoured and loving memory of
Lieutenant Robert Wylie MC RA
Killed by enemy action April 1941
"None knew thee but to love thee,
Nor named thee but to praise".

Robert was born in 1886 in Camberley, Surrey. His father was Robert James Wylie and his mother was Isabella. His father served as an Elder at Trinity Bromley United Reformed Church in Frelands Road, Bromley from 1916-1923. The entry in the 1939 England and Wales Register for Robert (junior) records that he lived at 43 Rodway Road, Bromley with his wife, Mary Emilie, and their daughter Kathleen Mary Wylie, (whose married name was to become Zeidler). Robert's occupation is listed as a Retired Bank Official and that he was an Air Raid Precaution (A.R.P.) Warden for the Inns of Court in London. Mary's is listed as "Domestic Duties", (a housewife), and Kathleen was a "Trained Beauty Culturalist" and a Volunteer Ambulance Driver.

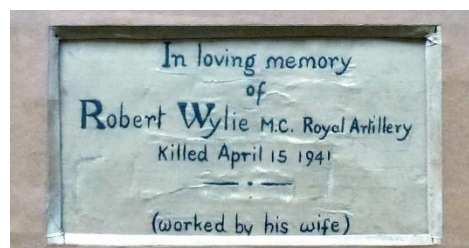
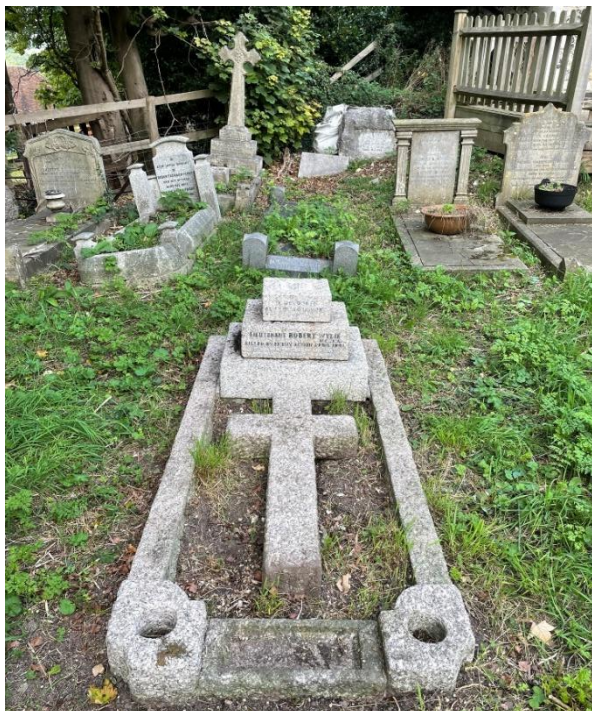
Robert first served in the Army during the Great War, and according to the Supplement to *The London Gazette* dated 14th December 1915, he was Commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Inns of Court Officers Training Corps. Robert's entry in the 1914-1915 Star Medal Roll showed that he first served as a Second Lieutenant with the 6th (City of London) Battalion (Rifles) and that he embarked for France and Flanders on 1st June 1915. At some point he transferred to the Royal Field Artillery and was promoted to Captain. On 11th December 1917 he was promoted to Acting Major as well as being Mentioned in Despatches in *The London Gazette* of 14th December 1917. The Supplement to *The London Gazette* dated 16th December 1918 states:
Award of the Military Cross - Captain Robert Wylie, The London Regiment, *"For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty when in temporary command of a Battalion. Then the situation suddenly became critical he altered his dispositions and organised the defence under heavy shell fire. His rapid decision and quick action added materially to the saving of the position, and made the subsequent successful counter attack possible."*

Robert saw military service again during the Second World War. He was promoted from Second Lieutenant to Lieutenant in the 955 Independent Defence Battery (Searchlight Unit), 12th Defence Regiment, of the Royal Field Artillery on 18th September 1940. This regiment was based at Bridport and sadly Robert was killed during the bombing of Portland on the 15th April 1941, aged just 55. His death was reported in the Army Casualty List 491 on the 18th April 1941. He was awarded the 1939-45 Star and the 1939-45 War Medal. Records show that he left the sum of £34,115 6s 11d to his wife, which is the equivalent of £1,914,178.90 today!

It was through an embroidery that his wife did that this story has come to light. In July 2022 the Rector at Keston was contacted by one of the Elders at Trinity Bromley United Reformed Church as they were closing the building. Whilst clearing 127 years of accumulated files and artefacts they discovered that a framed embroidery that had been hanging on the gallery had an inscription on the back, (see below), to say that it had been done in loving memory of Robert by his wife, Mary Emilie Wylie. They discovered that he was buried in Keston churchyard and wondered if we would like it. It is a framed embroidered pulpit fall, beautifully done, with a gold cross in the centre on a gold and white background. All round it are single flowers in pastel shades, linked by stems and leaves and there is a gold fringe at the bottom. We have gladly accepted and are currently deciding where to place it. It may not be possible for it to go in the church as we would require a faculty. Unfortunately as with many of these historical things, we do not know quite why Robert was buried at Keston, and may never know. What we do know is that we are honoured to have such a hero in our churchyard and are grateful to Hilary Creed, the Elder at the URC for taking the time and trouble to contact us and arrange the handover of the embroidery.

Sally Churchus with a great deal of help from Peter Zieminski

Cross and kerb. Royal Artillery Badge. Churchyard map location F50



4. Flight Lieutenant Derek Benson

Article in The Keston Magazine February/March 2020 edition below:

Flight Lieutenant Derek Benson – not forgotten

From the time, 39 years ago, that we moved to Leaves Green, I had been aware that a flying accident had taken place opposite our home. I was also aware that it had happened on the day after I was born, on 27th March 1949. I knew F/Lt Benson was buried in Keston Parish Churchyard and from time to time I had searched for his grave without success. As this accident and many other aspects of post-war flying at Biggin Hill will be covered in the second volume of my history of the RAF base (Vol 1 'RAF Biggin Hill – The Other Side of the Bump' still available from occasions in Biggin Hill) I researched a little more and asked Pat Geiger if she could ask the Rev. Carol Morrison if she could inspect the burial records and find a location for me for Benson's grave. This she duly did and it became clear that he was buried in plot 147 but, on first inspection, I could find no headstone but, subsequently, found his details on the stone grave surround. It was clear the grave had not been tended for many years and it occurred to me that a couple of the RAF Cadets from the Biggin Hill Squadron (where I am an instructor) might be happy to help clear it as an act of remembrance.

Rev. Carol Morrison was happy for us to go ahead and on Saturday, 9th November, the job was done, recycling some of the white crushed stone which surrounds the flag pole at Biggin Hill – from where F/Lt Benson took off to undertake a Met. Check before some Cadets of the time were allowed to go flying in an Avro Anson. What happened to cause the plane to crash was never really determined and the circumstances of the accident were recorded in detail in the Parish Magazine in 2010 when 'Chalkpit' wrote down his recollection of the tragedy which he saw first hand.

Hopefully our clear-up of the grave will last for a few years to come and, perhaps, other Cadets will keep up the tradition – there are a few RAF graves in Keston which could do with the occasional visit.

Thanks to Rev. Carol Morrison and Pat Geiger for trawling through the records to confirm the position of Benson's grave.

Peter Osborne

Inscription on grave:

In Loving Memory of our dear son and brother F/Lt. Derek Alfred Benson killed 27th March 1949

Kerb. Churchyard location D147



Before



Work being carried out by James Kennel from the Biggin Hill Squadron



From April/May 2010 edition of The Keston Magazine:

Sunday Morning Tragedy by Chalkpit (Edward Williams)

It was an overcast day in early Spring 1949 when thoughts once again turned to making a start on preparing the vegetable beds ready for sowing. This was an important part of family life with many food items in short supply following the War. With a quantity of bean poles in need of replacing father and I set off across the field at the bottom of the garden for the nearby wood. As we walked towards the wood we could hear the sound of Merlin engines which, although they could not be seen, was the distinctive sound of Spitfires flying in the clouds above. On reaching the wood father began selecting his hazel sticks, always aware that care was needed to coppice the stumps for future years. With the sticks neatly bundled and balanced on father's shoulder, cushioned on a sugar sack, we set off for home. It was then our attention was drawn to the sound of an aircraft in trouble and within seconds there were several loud bangs followed by silence! It wasn't long before the clanging of bells was heard from all directions as emergency vehicles were heading to the scene. Bad news travels fast and by the time we arrived home neighbours and my older brother had most of the details- where and how the plane had crashed- not altogether accurate but very dramatic! By the time we had made our way to the top of The Green, a large crowd of onlookers had already arrived to view the damage. Among the many men from the Emergency Services were personnel from the nearby RAF Station to clear the wreckage and take it back to the airfield. The extent of the damage left no doubt as to the unfortunate fate of the pilot. The Spitfire on that Sunday morning, 27th March 1949 was piloted by Fl. Lt. Derek Benson, aged 26 of 615 Squadron (Surrey) Auxillary Air Force Biggin Hill. The crash killed both him and Miss Anne Dring Forbes Cockell aged 18 years. A fellow officer described how Benson took off on a weather test, then did a number of fairly steep turns round the airfield; he came across the aerodrome in the Bromley direction, pulled up into cloud to reappear in an almost vertical dive from which he failed to pull out. The plane then ricocheted through the hedge at the bottom of Ivy Cottage, ploughed its way through a small orchard, hit the north wall of Old House Farm, bounced into the air and disintegrated. The Rolls Royce engine struck the south wall of Old House Farm crossed Milking Lane and crashed through the lounge of the cottage opposite, occupied at the time by Miss Cockell, Mrs Leeworthy and her five year old daughter Ann. Mrs Leeworthy escaped through a hole in the wall with Ann, to return with a neighbour to find the body of Miss Cockell.

The fuselage of the aircraft hit the trees bordering The Green in front of The Kings Arms; the pilot's body was flung into the tree while the rest of the plane reduced a car to a heap of metal, the impact sending it through the front door of the Kings Arms injuring two customers. Many on The Green who witnessed the accident and came to the scene were reminded of the war years when plane crashes were only too common in the area.

Flight Lieutenant Benson was buried in Keston churchyard, his coffin borne on a Royal Air Force truck escorted by Airmen. At the graveside a firing party from 615 Squadron fired three volleys and Royal Air Force buglers sounded the last post. Ft. Lt. Benson's death was all the more poignant as he had flown a Spitfire in a Fighter Squadron in the War and had over 1,000 flying hours to his credit.

It is 60 years since the crash and the damage caused to property is now hardly discernible, but what of the families of the victims? Where are they now? What of the little girl who escaped with her mother – let us hope that she had a happy life!

Whole document by Sally Churchus July 2025, with thanks to Peter Zieminski and Peter Osborne

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