John Noble Wright





Rank: - AC2 (Air Gunner)

Number: - 908737

Regiment: - Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve 98 Squadron

Died: - 17th Jun 1940 aged 26 years

Cemetery: - Commemorated on the Runnymede Memorial Panel 27

Batley News, 29 Jun 1940; 6 Jul 1940

Family Details:

John Noble Wright (known as Jack) was born on 29 August 1913 the eldest son of George Henry and Blanch Ida Noble Wright nee Asquith. Leslie was born in 1923 followed by Phyllis Noble 1928 and David Noble in 1933.

Service Details:

John Noble Wright was Batley's first R.A.F. casualty of the 1939-45 War. No. 98 Squadron, flying Fairey Battles, was a training unit and in April 1940 moved to Nantes, France, where it continued to receive crews for operational training.

In June 1940 the squadron was recalled to U.K. because of the imminent collapse of France. Many of the squadron personnel, including Jack Wright, were lost when the 16,700-ton troopship HMT Lancastria, a former Cunard liner, was bombed and sunk while at anchor in the River Loire two miles off St Nazaire. The attack was carried out by German aircraft from the Kampfgeschwader Group 30, which specialised in anti-shipping operations.

An estimated 4,000 servicemen, about half those aboard, drowned in the disaster which happened in raid-afternoon just as loading was complete.

Because of the magnitude of the disaster, which was the worst loss of life at sea of the whole war, Prime Minister Winston Churchill ordered that news of it should be withheld and it was six weeks later before an official announcement was made. The exact scale of the disaster will never be known as nominal rolls went down with the ship.

A Batley survivor of the Lancastria tragedy was Thornton Hallas, now of Soothill, who had been stationed at an RAOC ammunition supply depot in Brittany. In the week before the disaster, as troops and airmen passed through the depot on their way to St Nazaire, Thornton met Jack Wright, who was an old friend from Staincliffe. Jack promised that when he got home, he would to let Thornton's family know that he was well. He was never to deliver the message. In February 1942, Thornton was taken prisoner at the fall of Singapore and spent three and a half years in captivity. Liberated in Vietnam, he was Batley's first Far East prisoner-of-war to arrive back home in October 1945.

Jack Wright was the eldest of the four children of Mr and Mrs George Wright, of Yard 1, Halifax Road, Staincliffe (near Chapel Fold). The picture of him was provided by his sister, Mrs Phyllis McKechan, who now (1992) lives at 1/7 New Orleans Crescent, Maroubra 2035, New South Wales, Australia.

She writes: *"When the war started and Hitler was taking over Europe, Jack was working in the shipyards in the Isle of Wight and saw all the refugees coming into England. He said to my mother, 'Any man who saw their plight was not a man if he did not join up and try to stop it.' So, he joined the Royal Air Force."*

Jack was awarded the Air Crew Europe Star, the 1939-45 Star and the 1939-1945 War Medal.

He is remembered with Honour on the Batley War Memorial and the Royal Air Forces Association Club, Batley



Researched by
Bill Berry (1992)