

BRADWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER No.33 November 2023

Upcoming events

This month sees the last of our meetings in the Methodist Hall for this year. In the talk I will focus on the history of one particular house: Oswald House on the Hills. Speculation on how it came to be built in 1907 will be followed by a review of some of the people who have lived there. The date for the meeting will be Tuesday 21st November at 8 pm.

Robert Wallace Warhurst

In our continuing biographical sketches of personnel serving in two world wars we are very grateful to Janis Ibbotson who has collected together information about her cousin Bob Warhurst.

Janis's brother Geoff Nunns typed this account for her:

George (Ezra) Warhurst. and Mary Wallace were married in 1908 in the Zion Methodist Chapel at Staveley. George was said to be deeply religious and always observed the sabbath wearing his tail coat. George and Mary had three sons Jim, John and Bob. Bob, the youngest son, was born in January 1923 at Ash House Farm, Abney. The sons' upbringing was a religious one. For many years Sunday Services were held in the kitchen of Ash Farm House until a green corrugated hut was provided in the centre of Abney (where the stone community building now stands). It was here that Vera Nunns (née Dobson) played the small bellows organ during services. Bob was confirmed into the Church on 25th April 1937 in Hathersage.

Bob's eldest brother Jim attended Hucklow Primary School and then Tideswell Grammar School before joining the army and serving in India. It was said of Jim 'he wasn't for farming'. Not so middle brother John who left school at 14 for farming, later taking over the running of Ash House Farm. It would appear that Bob was also attracted to the farm and Geoff Nunns' last memory of him was a figure riding bareback on the farm horse in the first field of Ash House Farm as you approach from the glider club at Great Hucklow. The field was edged by pine trees, possibly Scots pines.



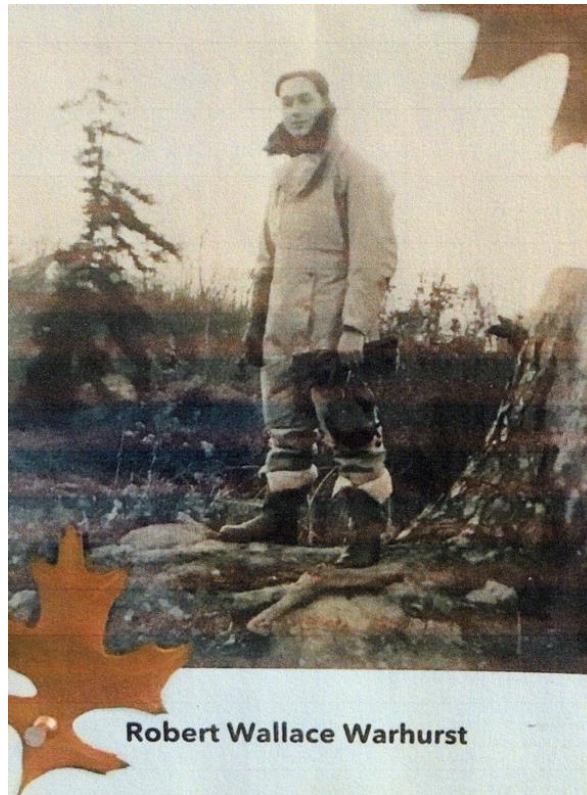
Aged just 18 years Bob enlisted in the RAF in July 1941 and trained as a Wireless Operator/Air gunner. Bob had served just 2 short years before being shot down and dying in a Whitley V Bomber of Squadron 10 over the Bay of Biscay. Geoff Nunns obtained the facts surrounding Bob's death from Volume 7 of the Bomber Command list of losses during WWII. It reads:

(Robert) was the wireless operator onboard a Whitley V bomber 'L' (LA814) that was shot down by a U-boat in the Bay of Biscay on 20th June 1943, while on anti-submarine patrol. They had taken off from St Eval (Cornwall) at 11.45 hours and set a course that would take them to the Bay of Biscay. Here they came upon a U-boat, and in the engagement that ensued, the Whitley was shot down in flames. All onboard are commemorated on the Runnymede Memorial (besides the Thames). They were able to send a brief wireless transmission at 16.40 h GXBF 2829. (*This final transmission would have been keyed by Bob.*)

In fact Bob's was the second Whitley to attack the submarine. The first attack was carried out by Whitley 'J' (EB399) of the same Squadron (10). The Bomber Command account of this earlier attack reads

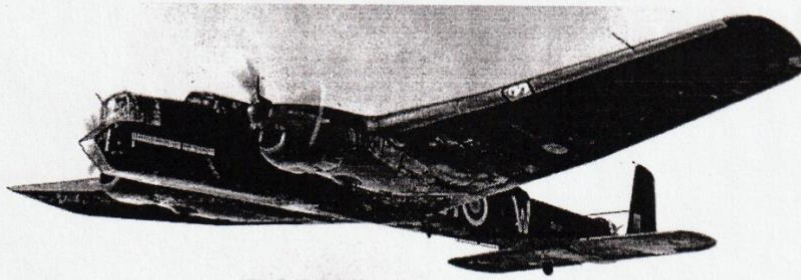
At 16.37 hours, Whitley 'J' (EB399) of 10 Squadron sighted a submarine on a SW (outbound) course. The bomber attacked from the starboard beam of the submarine, releasing a stick of six depth charges from 75 ft. The rear gunner saw the stick undershoot, exploding well short. Another aircraft was now observed approaching and carrying out an attack during which it was observed to crash in flames.

In a separate report we read: although no flak was seen from the submarine, the Whitley (LA814) was seen to be trailing smoke following its attack. It caught fire, crashing into the sea. There were no survivors of the six-man crew. The submarine then dived apparently normally. But there is speculation in the report that the submarine may have been the Italian submarine *Barbarigo* commanded by Umberto de Julio with five other officers and 47 ratings. Perhaps it had been mortally wounded because the *Barbarigo* was reported missing at about that time.



Robert Wallace Warhurst

Geoff Nunns added that 'The Whitley was a slow cumbersome aircraft but it was very unlucky to have been hit by a shell from a U-boat that would have been moving up and down on the waves



Source: Harold A Skaarup Web Page (RAF Photo)

The Armstrong Whitworth AW 38 Whitley was one of three British twin-engined, front line bomber types that were in service with the Royal Air Force (RAF) at the outbreak of the Second World War.



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
RAF Personnel Management Centre
Innsworth Gloucester GL3 1EZ

Telephone Churchdown 712612 (STD 0452) ext 2622

Your reference

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Our reference

DPM(Airmen)/104/1/W/P Man 3d(2)a

Date

19 April 1990

CERTIFIED TRUE STATEMENT OF SERVICE

SERGEANT ROBERT WALLACE WARHURST (1451359)

Date of Enlistment
(Duration of Present Emergency)

8 July 1941

Ranks

Aircraftman Second Class
Leading Aircraftman
Sergeant

8 July 1941
14 February 1943
19 March 1943

Musterings

Aircrafthand/Wireless Operator (Air)
Wireless Operator (Air)
Wireless Operator/Air Gunner

8 July 1941
14 February 1943
19 March 1943

Postings

2 Reception Centre
Reserve
3 Reception Centre
10(S) Recruit Centre
4 Signals School
Station Castletown
3 RAF Regiment School
No 4 Signals School
10 Air Gunners School
24 Operational Training Unit
10 Operational Training Unit
24 Operational Training Unit

8 July 1941
9 July 1941
5 November 1941
7 November 1941
5 March 1943
18 June 1942
18 June 1942
28 October 1942
6 February 1943
24 March 1943
6 June 1943
Undated

Sergeant Warhurst was reported missing, Presumed Killed in Action on 20 June 1943

ff. J. G. G. G.
A GILSON
for Director Personnel
Management (Airmen)
(Royal Air Force)

JMS

According to Geoff Nunns Bob is remembered on the memorial inside Hathersage Church that Geoff recalls as a 'fine piece of beaten copper work'. There is also an inscription alongside his parent's grave in the church yard at Bradwell that read 'Also, Robert Warhurst (SGRAF) beloved youngest son of George and Mary. Died on active service June 20 1943 aged 20.' Unfortunately the inscription is now barely readable. Of course Bob is remembered on the War Memorial in St Barnabas' churchyard and at the Runnymede memorial.