
Somersham Air Crash

October 5th 1942

Bill Wade - 18 February 2020



On the evening of Monday 5th of October 1942, a Wellington bomber of No 156 squadron took off from RAF Warboys on an operational mission to Germany. Shortly after take off, an uncontrollable fire, thought to be a flare, broke out on board the aircraft, forcing the crew to bale out. Tragically, the blazing aircraft came down on the village of Somersham. With a full load of bombs and fuel onboard, an explosion and tremendous fire resulted. Seven houses were destroyed and eleven villagers, tragically lost their lives.

Heroic

It is clear from contemporary accounts that heroic efforts were made by the fire service, home guard, civil defence and service personnel to rescue those injured in the crash:

Nothing but a few pieces of twisted metal remained of the Aircraft on Tuesday morning. The Crew had baled out and landed safely on the Bluntisham – Old Hurst Road, only the Pilot sustaining a twisted ankle. The blaze, which was visible for miles, was fought by NFS formations from Somersham, St Ives & Huntingdon, who were later relieved by crews from other parts of E Division. A plentiful supply of water was obtained from the hydrants. Column Officer Williams of Ely, told our Reporter that the local Firemen made a splendid job of it and deserved high praise. Members of the Somersham Platoon of the Home Guard set to work, soon after the crash, in lending whatever assistance was needed, and they, together with other Soldiers & airmen, did heroic work throughout the night and next day.

A contemporary eye witness account was also reported in the Hunts Post:

Special Sgt E C Norman,

I was sitting indoors at about 7.15 pm when I heard a plane revving overhead in a rather peculiar way. I went outside and saw 2 Planes flying around, with a sort of halo around them. I took them to be on fire. Shortly afterwards I saw a Plane flying at a great speed in a Southerly direction, in a fairly shallow Power Dive. It came lower & lower and crashed into the houses in West End, which at once went up in a mass of flames. The cottages upon which the plane fell adjoined the White Lion Public House and several of them were Thatched. The aircraft, in crashing, took the Roof off a house in Rectory Lane occupied by Mr & Mrs Len Ruff (who were downstairs at the time and escaped injury), went clean through the Cottages on the White Lion side of the street, and ended up among the Cottages on the opposite side of the road.



There is a plaque in memorial to those who lost their lives on the site in Somersham, the photograph above on the right shows the site today.
