

WALTON PARK WAR MEMORIAL

WALTON PARK, RAGLAN ROAD, SALE. M33 4AG

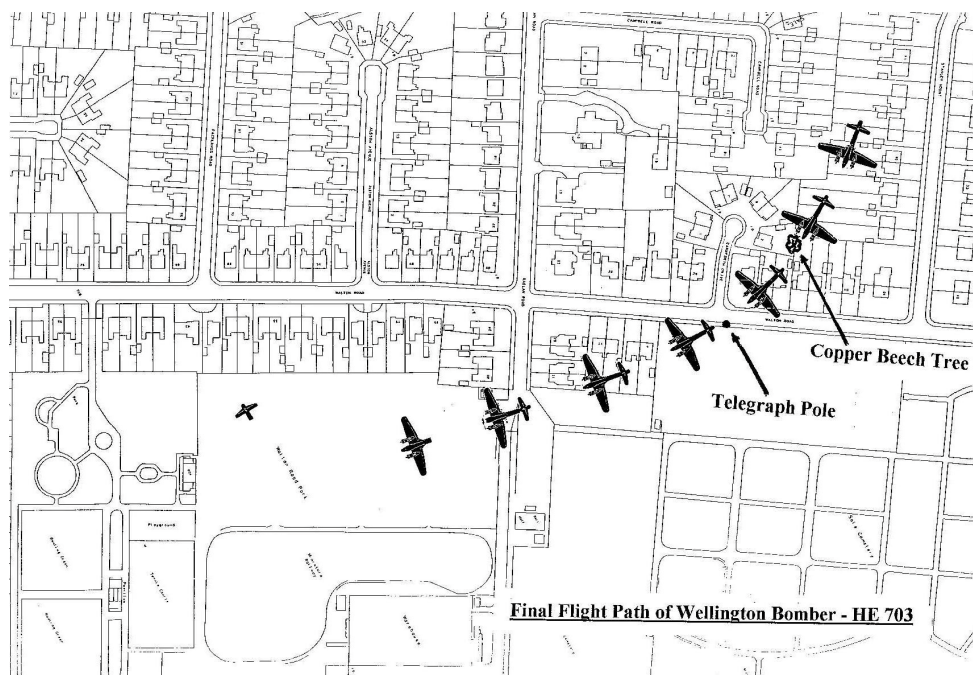
THE INCIDENT

At 23.50 hours on the night of Tuesday 3rd August 1943, a twin engine "Wellington" Mk X, medium range bomber, No. HE 703, with a crew of five Royal Australian Air Force and one Royal Air Force personnel on board, crashed onto what is now the football pitch in Walton Park. In 1943 this area of the park, had been turned over to vegetable allotments, as part of the Nations "Dig for Victory" civilian war effort.



Whilst flying over Manchester their port engine cut out, due to failure of the oil retainer and it had to be shut down. Normally the aircraft would have been able to continue back to base, or just land at another airfield. However, whilst still flying at 13,000 feet (4 kilometres), the starboard engine started to lose power and from that moment on, the aircraft was doomed.

As it circled, it clipped a large Copper Beech tree in the garden of 2 Carnforth Avenue, then cut the telephone wires on Walton Road. Somehow the pilot very skillfully managed to lift the aircraft in its final moments over the top of 5 & 7 Walton Road, clipping just the chimneys and damaging the roof.



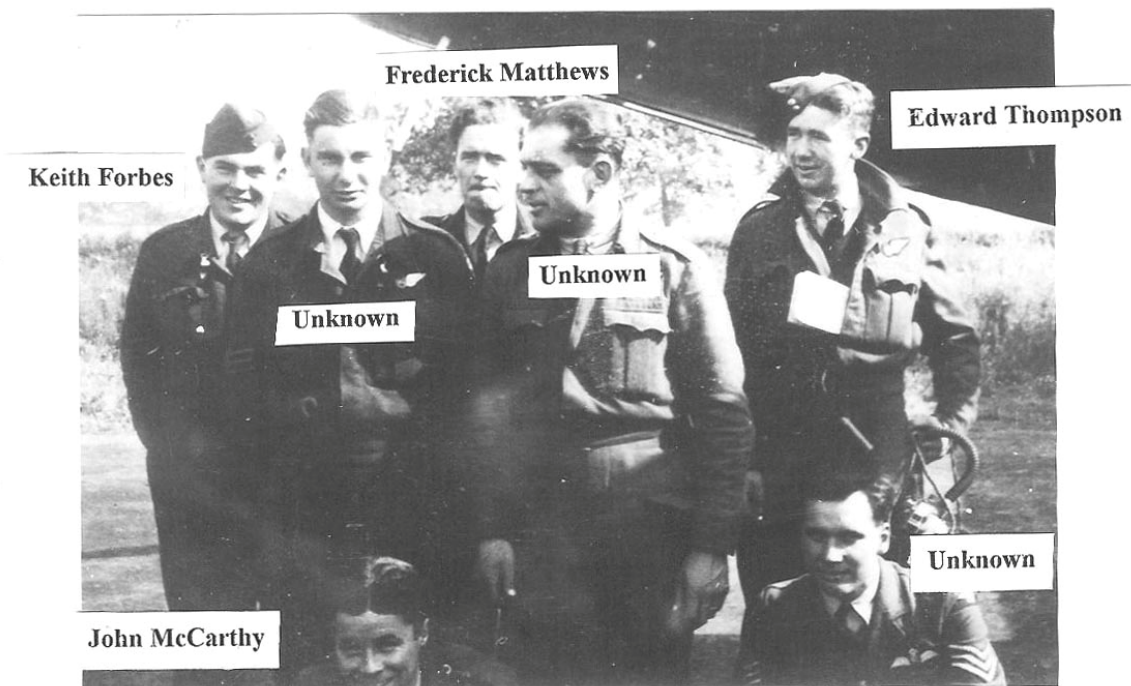
Final Flight-path of HE 703



The Remains of Wellington Bomber HE703 the Day after the Crash

The Crew

The crew of HE 703 came together at Lichfield in June and July 1943, when they were enrolled on 27 O.T.U. training courses. They are all pictured below. John ("Tich") McCarthy (the only R.A.F. member of the crew) can only just be seen bottom left of the main picture.



The two Australian Airmen killed here in Sale



**Flight Sergeant
Frederick James
Matthews (Pilot)**



**Flight Sergeant Claude
("Snow") Thompson
(Bomb Aimer)**

The other crew members



**Flight Sergeant
Edward Sargent Newell
(Observer)**



**Flying Officer Clive
Prosdocimi Luther
(Mid-Upper Gunner)**



**Flight Sergeant Keith
Gavin Forbes
(Wireless Operator)**



**Sergeant John
Emmanuel McCarthy
(Rear Gunner)**

The Wireless Operator – Keith Forbes, the only member of the crew to survive the War, recalled that he felt his ears "pop", which caused him to look at the instrument panel above his head and saw that the aircraft's speed was down to 120 miles per hour (193 kilometres per hour) and that its altitude was down to 1,000 feet (305 metres). From his Wireless operator's position in the aircraft, Keith could not see outside, but knew that they were into a landing procedure. He remembers nothing after that, until he woke up in hospital.

According to Norman Coleman, an eye-witness of the accident who lived at No. 38, Stanley Mount, the aircraft circled once before its final descent. Norman recalled that he had just gone to bed in the back bedroom when he heard the sound of a low flying aircraft go past very close by. He got out of bed and went to the window in time to see it, with its landing lights on, come across his line of vision from right to left clipping the top off a copper beech tree, which until it was felled a some years ago, stood on the boundary fence line between No. 2 Carnforth Drive and No. 16 Walton Road. After clipping the top of this tree, it flew on directly over Nos. 14 and 16 Walton Road, where it then snapped a telegraph pole and telegraph wires as it headed straight for Nos. 5 & 7 Walton Road.

Captain Frank Worrall, a Home Guard Staff Officer, stated that his wife Mary E. Worrall and daughter June, lived at No. 31 Raglan Road. The family was in their dining room when they heard the terrific noise of the aircraft. Frank and his daughter June went to go to the back door to see what was happening, but Mary called them back, which was just as well as the starboard aileron fell off the aircraft, having been damaged by its collision with the roof of Nos. 5 & 7 Walton Road. It landed just outside his back door smashing the window and showering the room with glass.

From this point on the aircraft leaked petrol from the fuel tank in its starboard wing and must have descended very rapidly from then on in, as another eye-witness Charles Sutcliffe Jnr., who was a local Air Raid Warden, and lived at No 15, Walton Road with his wife Gladys, stated that it smashed down the two concrete gate posts (now replaced) that led to the Walton Park Sports Centre, then an Emergency Food Store.

Some of the contemporary newspaper reports state that the aircraft was on fire as it came down, but according to eye-witnesses Messrs. Coleman and Sutcliffe and the vertical note written on the A.R.P. Controller's report, the aircraft only caught fire after it had crashed.

On landing, the front of the aircraft burst into flames, the trail of which led back to No. 31 Raglan Road. Fortunately, the aircraft was not carrying any bombs, which was the main concern of the residents, as they saw this doomed aircraft coming down in their vicinity. However, its machine guns **were** armed and the ammunition was exploding in all directions, so it was not a place for the faint hearted to be.

During the course of the crash, about 10 - 12 feet of the tail fin end of the fuselage broke off and skidded the length of the field ending up at the rear of Nos 35/37 Walton Road as shown on the plan.

The pilot - Flight Sergeant **Frederick James Matthews** and the bomb aimer Flight Sergeant **Claude ("Snow") Thompson** were both killed in this accident and are buried in the Military Section at Blacon Cemetery, Chester.

The Observer (Navigator) – Flight Sergeant **Edward Sargent Newell** was killed taking part in a bombing attack on Frankfurt during the night of the night of the 18th/19th March 1944 and is buried in Durnbach Cemetery, Bad Tolz, Germany.

The mid-upper gunner – Flying Officer **Clive Prosdocimi Luther** died over Holland during the night of the 16th/17th December 1943, whilst taking part in a bombing raid on Berlin. After crossing the northern coast of Holland the "stream" of bombers was intercepted by German night fighter aircraft operating out of the airbase at Bergen and Clive's Lancaster bomber shot down. He is buried in the Stompetoren Churchyard, situated just to the east of Alkmar, Holland

The tail gunner **Sgt. John Emmanuel McCarthy RAFVR** was killed returning from a bombing raid on Stuttgart during the night of the 20th/21st February 1944 At 06.50 hours on their return on the 21st, they had broken low cloud in preparation for landing, when flying through a snowstorm, they crashed into a tree, half a mile South of North Witham, Lincolnshire, eight miles South of Grantham. The entire crew was killed. He was buried in the Templeton Chapel Cemetery South of Narberth in Pembrokeshire, South Wales.

The wireless operator Flight Sergeant **Kevin Gavin Forbes** was the only member of this crew to survive the War, but was so badly injured in the Walton Park crash that he never flew operationally again.

More details about these men can be found in George Cogswell's two websites:

Trafford War Dead	Greater Manchester WW2 Blitz Victims
Records the 4,600 names from the A.B.W. & W.W.1. plus 2,200 names from W.W.2 Also includes photographs of local war memorials	Records the names of 1,350 men, women and children civilians killed by German bombing on what is now Greater Manchester
	
www.traffordwardead.co.uk	www.greatermanchesterblitzvictims.co.uk

The polished granite memorial set into a rough cast granite block



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