

*This is a first-hand account by
David Alfred Holman
of four brave young men who risked their own lives to save
the crew of a Beverley Aircraft that had crashed close to
Thorney Island
on the evening of Thursday 17th May 1962*





Beverley 132
the actual plane that crashed

Introduction:

I have read many accounts of the air crash over the years, most of which I have photocopied, one report even had the Beverley crashing into the deeps! I have taken time to check with the various people, some of which were stationed at Thorney Island at the time. I have never been asked for my version of what happened. For that reason alone I have decided to note down my own recollections of what I remember of the night in question. There are still a couple of problems which have not been solved and having spoken to one of the survivors I was surprised that an official enquiry decision had been reached before the survivors account was declared.

His version is still classified so cannot be reproduced, only touched upon.

Thursday 17th May 1962:

It was about nine thirty at night when my sister Carol came into the front room and said she had heard an explosion and there was a huge fire down at Thorney. I told my sister to stay in the house, and on this particular evening my Mum, Dad and both of my brothers were all out, we were living at Number 5 *Marsh Bungalows*, Prinsted at the time. I quickly pulled on a couple of jumpers and ran down to the shore.

Straight away, I knew there had been a plane crash. I grabbed a rowing boat that was pulled up on the shore, luckily it still had the oars in the boat, (normal thing, in those days). A chap from Chidham, Frank, said he would come with me. Frank, whom I had never met, lived at Drift Lane, Chidham and as he was only wearing a shirt I gave him one of my jumpers to put on. Just then Robert Marsh and Alan Parr arrived. We rowed them out and transferred them to Robert's Dad's fishing boat, after which we rowed down to Thorney. Quite a high tide at the time luckily.

When we arrived at the crash scene, which took about thirty minutes, the wreckage was about three hundred yards from the shore, in line with the East-West runway (where a lot of crashes seem to happen), the whole area was ablaze with burning wreckage and debris everywhere. On the sea bed, the remains of the Beverley was alight with burning wreckage floating around everywhere. It was quite an eerie sight as the fire was burning fiercely below the water and so it did not seem natural, to me anyway.

The whole of the area under water was ablaze and you could see the mud, the reeds and everything all under water burning fiercely. We rowed over the wreckage and burning debris then heard a cry for help. We located where the voice had come from and found an airman struggling in the water. We pulled him into the dinghy. He had been in the water for over half an hour by now. We called out to Robert and Alan who said that they had found another two Airmen. We transferred our chap to Robert's boat and he said he would take them ashore. By this time, there were quite a few people on the Thorney shore, but as yet, nobody seemed to have got afloat.

The Airmen told us that there was a crew of five. We continued to row around the wreckage but couldn't find anybody else. As the tide had turned, I decided that the best bet was to row across to Cobnor as that is where most of the flotsam seems to land. We rowed around for a while then went up to Chidham and then Nutbourne. Still nothing, so we went back to the wreckage but couldn't find anybody.

On this particular night, for some reason or another the rescue helicopter at Thorney was not available. It had been called to another area for cover, so I was told.

I have recently spoken to an Airman who was on duty that night. He explained that Thorney had only one helicopter and it was called away for cover elsewhere. Also that Thorney did not have any water rescue service for anything that may happen. Surprising really, as Thorney is completely surrounded by water, well at least on three sides. He was very worried the crash had occurred, apart from the loss of two of his comrades he had been working on one of the engines only a day or two previous and felt he may have been in some way responsible. As it turned out at the inquiry, it was another engine that had failed.

We arrived back at Prinstd sometime after two thirty am. We had been out for a little over four hours. I took Frank back to our house, Mum and Dad made us both have a bath to warm up as we were so cold, after this Frank walked home to Chidham!

One of the Airman was found under the wreckage at a later date and a couple of weeks later, another was washed up on shore at Cobnor.

The cause of the crash was because one of the engines had fallen off and dropped off in the garden of a house in Bosham missing the house by about fifty feet. The engines apparently were under-powered and needed a lot of maintenance. The track record of these engines was not good and there had always been problems.

Eventually the Beverley was taken out of service because of this ongoing problem.

A couple of weeks passed when I received a letter from the C/O at Thorney, thanking us for our efforts. A little while later I received another letter saying that three of us were being invited to a parade at Thorney for a presentation to be made by the Air Chief Marshall. I rang the C/O and asked why the presentation was for three people as there were four of us involved. I told him to forget it and said I wouldn't go. He then got in touch, said he was acting on orders and suggested I met up with him.

He said to report to the guardroom and I would be escorted to his office. I explained my reason's for refusing. He explained how the military works and orders are orders.

He then went on to say that in World War Two when he returned from a bombing mission he was awarded a DFC or something and that his crew didn't. I said I wasn't in the military. After a pause, he said he would invite Frank and his parents to a private meeting and would present him with a gift the same as we were to receive. He wouldn't be able to do it until a couple of weeks after our do. He guaranteed to do this, at which point I accepted the invitation.

About a week before the parade a chap in the RAF who was lodging at *Sea Winds*, called out what a rotten !x !x I was. I asked him what was up. "What's up", he said, "we have been on parade most of the week cos of you". We laughed about that, and he explained what was going to happen.

Come the day guests etc were met at the guardroom and taken to the main hanger. The Air Chief Marshall stepped of the aircraft then made his way to the hanger where the presentation took place. We were presented with a letter from the Air Ministry and a silver cigarette box with the RAF crest engraved on it. After which there were various interviews with the T.V. radio and local press, also meeting up with one of the survivors. We were then taken to the officer's mess for a buffet and chat with all concerned.

I had asked for a day off work but was told I was only allowed half a day. Things seemed a little different in those days. Anyway I had to leave about one o clock to get to work for the two – six afternoon.

A few years later I received a letter from one of the survivors. Unfortunately I was unable to meet. We exchanged letters and many phone calls.

He was surprised with Board of Enquiry's decision as it was dated before he wrote his report of the events. During his time with the RAF he had about three narrow escapes.

Occasionally I call in at the Methodist Church coffee shop in Emsworth and chat to some of the senior members in the centre. One chap in particular was a pilot stationed at Thorney who used to fly Beverley's among other planes. We spent a long time chatting about Thorney and I am still finding out more about Thorney.

When I told him about the Beverley and the survivors he said of one of them, “Oh! You mean Dolly”. I gave him his phone number and address and they made contact after some forty years. It also turned out that one of survivors used to be a flight navigator for my Uncle George who was a Flight Lieutenant based at Thorney after moving from a rented property “*Long Acres*” in Prinsted.

George also flew Beverley’s many times at night. When night flying he would come down quite low over our bungalow and the T.V. would go haywire. My father would be sitting there and used to say “Goodnight George”.

The aircraft would use Southbourne Church spire as a marker as it is more or less in line with the main North-South runway.



Nigel Duncan MCLEOD

Rank Sergeant

Service Number 3505080 Royal Air Force,
Station RAF Abingdon

Date of Birth 04 August 1935, Age 26

Date of Death 17 May 1962 Grave Number F.2



Edward Thomas HOLLINS

Rank Flt Lt

Service Number 2508796 Royal Air Force
Station RAF Abingdon

Date of Birth 23 December 1932 Age 29

Date of Death 17 May 1962 Grave Number F.3

Cemetery at
St Nicholas' Church
West Thorney
West Sussex PO10 8DS

MOD controlled access.
Identity required at
security gate onto island.

Parish Office
c/o St John the Evangelist
Main Road, Southbourne PO10 8LB

17th May 1962 a Beverley XL132 crashed off Thorney Island.

After an engine fire - and the subsequent loss
of that engine - the Beverley failed to make the runway, for an emergency landing,
and crash landed in Thorney Channel.

None of the crew had time to don their lifejackets and in their attempts to get ashore, sadly Sgt.
McLeod and Flt. Lt. E.T.Hollins were drowned.

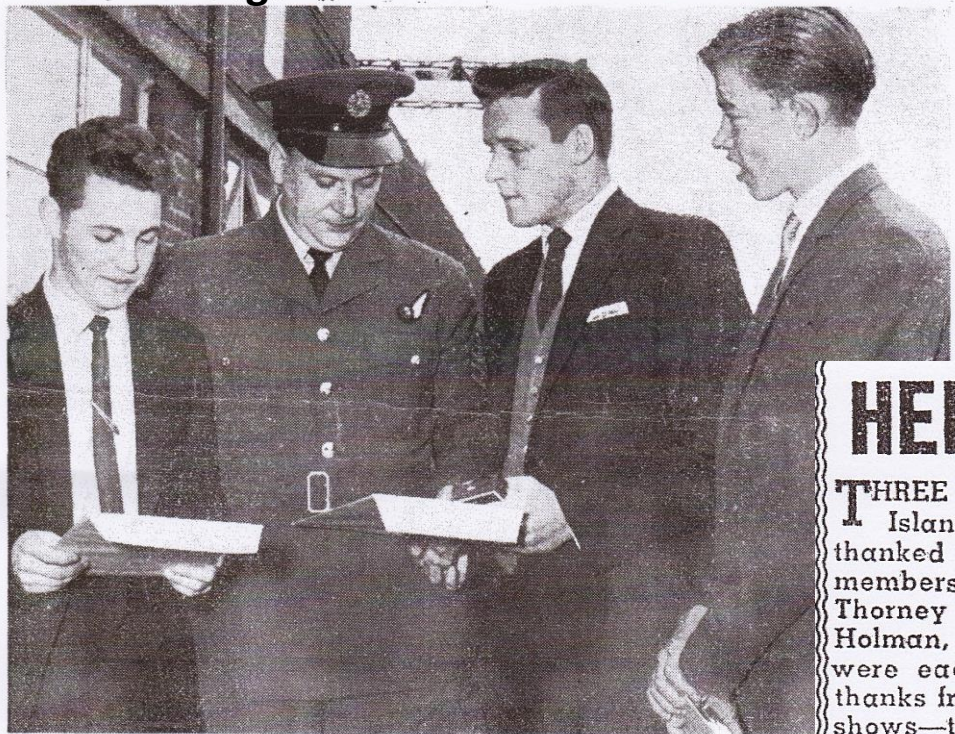
The aircraft had taken off from the airbase at Thorney Island to carry out local night circuits and landings, but at 21.24 whilst on the downwind leg abeam of the airfield, No.3 engine failed and the crew reported "We have an engine fire".

Thirty seconds later a "MAYDAY" distress call was transmitted, and at 21.25 the crew reported "No.3 engine running away and we are filled with smoke". Permission was given for an immediate emergency landing, but at 21.26 another aircraft in the vicinity reported that the aircraft on fire "has pranged in the drink".

Several witnesses on the ground reported seeing the Beverley on fire, and also a large burning object falling from it - this was No.3 engine, which detached and landed in someone's garden.

The engine landed in the garden of Bosham Manor House, about 50yds from the Church.

(Information taken from the KSH History Forum)



HEROES ARE HONOURED

THREE Emsworth youths were guests of honour at the Thorney Island R.A.F. station yesterday when they were officially thanked and commended for their assistance in rescuing three members of the crew from a plane which crashed into the sea at Thorney Island earlier this year. They were 22-year-old David Holman, Robert Marsh, aged 17, and Allan Parr, also 17. They were each presented with a silver cigarette box and a letter of thanks from the Air Council, and after the ceremony—as the picture shows—they met Sgt. Signaller William McGuire, one of the men they pulled from the sea.



Evening News and Southern Daily Star
No. 20,415 (85th Year) 3½d.



SPORTING MAIL AND MORNING NEWS EDITION
Three men escape, one dead, one missing

THORNEY CRASH

**ENGINE
FALLS
NEAR
HOUSE**



Three of the crew were rescued unhurt, one was killed, and another man reported missing when a Beverley transport aircraft crashed in flames at Thorney Island last night.



Three young civilians had the rare distinction of a parade in their honour at R.A.F. Thorney Island on Friday.

It was to show the gratitude of the Air Council for the gallant help they gave when they went to the rescue of the occupants of a crashed plane on the night of May 17.

"The parade was actually

more of an ordeal than the rescue," 17-year-old Allan Parr said later.

He and his colleagues each received a Letter of Appreciation and a silver cigarette box from the C.-in-C., Transport Command, Air Chief Marshal Sir Edmund Hudleston.

The parade was told how the three men—Mr. Allan Parr, of

Church Road, Southbourne; Mr. Robert Marsh (17), of Shawn Cottage, Prinsted; and Mr. David Holman (22), of Marsh Bungalows, Prinsted, put out in a boat after the crash.

They rescued three members of the crew of the Beverley aircraft, disregarding dangers from the burning wreckage and

oil, and the risk of petrol exploding.

At the ceremony to send them all by the hand was of the survivors, Sergt. Will McGuire, and his wife.

"They arrived just in nick of time," said the sergeant.

The picture shows the three heroes being congratulated by the Air Chief Marshal (right).



Three civilians were honoured by the R.A.F. at Thorney Island on Friday. They were Alan Parr (17), Church-rd., Southbourne, David Holman (22), Marsh Bungalow, Prinsted, and Robert Marsh (17), Shawn Cottage, Prinsted, who put out in a boat in a dark night in May when a Transport Command Beverley crashed in Chichester Harbour. They picked up three members of the crew. The other two died. Each received a silver cigarette box and a letter of appreciation from the C-in-C. Transport Command, Air Chief Marshal Sir Edmund Hudleston. In the picture with them is Sgt. William McGuire, one of the men they rescued.

THREE HEROES CRASH RESCUE

Three-hour search

From knowledge gained as a Southbourne Sea Scout, 22-year-old Mr. David Holman knew the channels of Chichester Harbour and was quickly on the scene when the R.A.F. Beverley transport aircraft crashed off Thorney Island on Thursday night.

He was near his home at Marsh Bungalows, Prinsted, when he saw the aircraft crash in flames and with a passer-by he commandeered a rowing boat to make for the wreck.

Meanwhile the blazing aircraft had been seen passing over Southbourne by two local youths.

Allan Parr, a 17-year-old apprentice fitter, of 6, Church Road, Southbourne, and Robert Marsh (17), of The Firs, Prinsted, ran from the centre of the village to the water's edge at Prinsted.

They were just in time to join Mr. Holman in his dinghy and he rowed out to Robert's father's 25-foot former naval cutter, moored in the Harbour.

"When we were near the wreckage, we could see two of the crew in the sea. They had stripped off and were swimming towards the lights of Thorney," Robert told the Evening News.

"We got them aboard and then saw that Mr. Holman had saved a third man. We drew alongside and took him aboard too.

"We put all three men in the cabin, turned on the heater and gave them some of our clothes.

"We cruised about a bit looking for the other members of the crew and when a R.A.F. dinghy arrived, we made for Thorney Island and landed the men at the sailing club.

"We could not search any more because we were running out of petrol," he said.

"We did not think about the danger," said Allan Parr. "Two of the petrol tanks blew up as we were approaching the wreckage, and there was burning oil and wreckage on the water. I suppose it was a risk, but we did not think about it."

David's mother told the Evening News today that her son spent three-and-a-half hours rowing around, looking for the other members of the crew.

"HANDS BLISTERED"

"It was after two o'clock when he came in. His hands were all blistered. He only had his shirt and trousers on. He had given his pullover to one of the airmen.

"Both he and the man who was with him were soaked to the skin. I made them both have a hot bath and David lent the other man some clothes.

"We do not know who he was. All we know is that his name is Frank and he promised to return the clothes.

"They were all very modest about what they had done, but I am very proud of them," she said.



ALAN PARR



ROBERT MARSH

R.A.F. go on parade for rescuers

Three young civilians had the rare distinction of a parade in their honour at R.A.F. Thorney Island today.

It was to show the gratitude of the Air Council for the gallant help they gave when they went to the rescue of the occupants of a crashed plane on the night of May 17.

"The parade was actually more of an ordeal than the rescue," 17-year-old Allan Parr told the Evening News later.

He and his colleagues each received a Letter of Appreciation and a silver cigarette box from the C-in-C. Transport Command, Air Chief Marshal Sir Edmund Huddleston.

DISREGARDING DANGER

The parade was told how the three men—Allan Parr, of Church Road, Southbourne, Robert Marsh (17), of Shawn Cottage, Prinsted, and David Holman (22), of Marsh Bungalows, Prinsted, put out in a boat after the crash.

They rescued three members of the crew of the Beverley aircraft, disregarding dangers from the burning wreckage and oil, and the risk of petrol tanks exploding.

At the ceremony to shake them all by the hand was one of the survivors, Sergt. William McGuire, and his wife.

"They arrived just in the nick of time," said the sergeant.

From Group Captain J. J. McKay.

MAY I express, through the columns of your paper, my grateful thanks for and appreciation of the spontaneous and most valuable assistance given by local residents when an aircraft from Thorney Island crashed in Thorney Creek last week.

Three members of the crew were rescued by the prompt actions and initiative of three young men, and others laboured throughout the night helping in the search for further survivors.

The actions of these young men earn more than our thanks for they show that, despite the criticism of the youth of today, there are still those, as there always have been, who will rise to the occasion in an emergency and act promptly of their own accord. This is the true spirit of our country which some people would have us believe is now lost in our young folk.

May I also thank all those others with whom my officers and men have come in contact during their search for vital clues necessary to determine the cause of the accident, for their understanding, helpfulness, and kindness.

I need hardly add that the Police and Fire Services were first class.

J. J. McKay.
Commanding Officer,
Royal Air Force,
Thorney Island

More memories of ill-fated Beverley

More information about the crash of the RAF Blackburn Beverley in 1962 has been sent to Down Memory Lane by Ken Rimell, who writes:

I now own the RAF Rapid Crash Rescue Land Rover that attended the crash that night. It also transported the pilot the following morning to view the engine in the Bosham garden.

The crash happened some distance from the shoreline, my vehicle's lights tried in vain to illuminate the area somewhere around 1am in the morning while rescue attempts were made.

Out of interest I did some research into the incident some years ago.

The pilot was a Flt Lt Grey and they were on a night training flight when one of the Bristol Centaurus engines caught fire over the Witterings. The Centaurus as fitted to the Beverley had a noted problem of overheating and catching fire; as I understand the engine had been found to be initially under-powered by the RAF and uprated by the manufacturers and as a consequence was to suffer this problem throughout its service.

I traced the pilot who had by now retired from the RAF and was living in Devon where he had taken holy orders to become a vicar. He had also survived another Beverley incident in Aden a year earlier and he assured me his survival had nothing to do with his move to the 'cloth'.

The engine that fell out of the aircraft came down in the grounds of Bosham Manor where a small pond now marks its landing spot. Had it fallen a few yards further it would have hit the building.

The owner, I'm told, was made aware of their near miss when local Bosham fireman John Strange knocked on the door to tell the surprised occupants what had happened.

While in the RAF I flew back from Aden to Thorney Island in a Beverley, thankfully arriving safely. It seems my angel wings were working.

Years later memories
are recalled in the local press

Crash remembered

THANK you Ken Emery for restoring my lack of confidence in my memory (Down Memory Lane, May 24). Not long ago I had related to a friend my experience on the occasion of an aero engine falling from a plane into the grounds of Bosham Manor.

I was on front desk duty at Chichester Police Station at the time of the incident – an era when the front hall was open to the public and manned 24/7 by a police constable.

It was not long before Fleet Street learned of the incident (not from police sources) and the antiquated telephone switchboard was jammed by the enquiring press corps. There were only three outside lines and this was pre-mobile phones and person radios. Contact with personnel at the scene was therefore hampered and the press was told that their enquiries were inhibiting lines of communication.

As my friend has a long association with Bosham and, to my surprise, had no knowledge of the incident, I made enquiries of the County Archivist and, after a search, was advised they had no such record but suggested I get in touch with Tugmure Aviation Museum. Again, they had no awareness of such an occurrence.

Hence my doubting the clear memory of events outlined. So thank you for the Down Memory Lane article – apparently age hasn't yet taken its toll, at least not so far as my memory is concerned!

Tony Hiscocks
Gordon Avenue, Chichester



I remember the night a burning Beverley lost an engine over Bosham Manor

A dramatic incident in the sky around Chichester 50 years ago is vividly recalled by **Ken Emery** of Chichester, who writes:

At the time I was eight years old and living at 93 Sherborne Road with my parents and younger brother. My bedroom window faced west, towards Portsmouth.

Late one evening I was woken by the sound of loud aircraft engines and got out of bed to look out of the window.

The aircraft was burning fiercely and as it descended into the western sky, a large part broke away and spiralled to the ground. The aircraft continued to lose height until it disappeared behind the trees in Newlands Lane. I went back to bed wondering what on earth I had witnessed and heard no more about the incident.

I had always been interested in aviation from an early age due to my father, who learnt to fly Tiger Moths at Portsmouth Airport and also built model aircraft which he flew on the Goodwood estate. As I grew up and became more interested in local aviation history, I decided to research exactly what it was I saw on that fateful night.

At the time RAF Thorney Island was home to 242 OCU (Operational Conversion Unit) whose job it was to train pilots to fly heavy transport aircraft. On the night of May 17, 1962 a Blackburn Beverley XL32, code letter Z-Zebra, took off at 10.30pm on a routine training flight.

As it passed over West Wittering, the number three

(starboard inner) engine caught fire due to the bolts shearing on one of its 18 cylinders. The pilots, Flt Lt Ron Wright and Flt Lt John Gray, realised their only option was to try to make it back to Thorney Island, where the emergency crews were alerted.

As the aircraft passed over Bosham, the burning engine over-spun, seized up and tore itself out of the airframe and fell, with the starboard undercarriage, into the grounds of Bosham Manor House. The occupants of the house were not aware what the noise was until the fire brigade called to douse the still burning engine.

The rest of the flaming machine carried on with the remaining engines on full power and bits of burning aircraft dropping into fields and on to rooftops.

Despite the valiant efforts of the crew to avert disaster, the aircraft finally crashed into the 'Great Deep' channel at the northern side of the aerodrome. The five crew members managed to escape but unfortunately two of them drowned before they could be rescued by local boat-owners.

After this incident, night flying was banned by Beverley, pictured, and Argos aircraft until the arrival, in 1967, of the more reliable Lockheed Hercules and Andovers.

I have recently built a model of this Beverley as a reminder of what I witnessed all those years ago, and wonder if any other readers have any memories of the night the Beverley fell.

Looking back on a tragic aircraft crash

More details of the aftermath of the Beverley aircraft crash have been sent to Down Memory Lane by Ray Carter of Chichester, who writes:

Having read the original article with interest, I have been spurred on, by that ambassador for the Royal Air Force, Ken Rimmel, to add a little more to the story.

The Rapid Crash Rescue Land Rover, now owned by Ken, had been disposed of by the RAF and had been acquired by Chichester High School Combined Cadet Force where it was used in practical training alongside an aircraft engine. When Ken learnt it was to be disposed of by the school, he set himself the task of acquiring it for the RAF Fire Museum Collection at Shoreham.

I was at the time contingent commander of the high school's CCF. My father had been the station fire officer at RAF Thorney Island until 1962. Following his death, my mother and I resolved to purchase the vehicle and donate it in memory of my father's service to Ken and the museum. I remember proudly seeing the vehicle after it had been restored and returned to a roadworthy condition.

What has this got to do with memories of the ill-fated Beverley?

I was a teenager and pupil at the Chi Hi at the time of the crash. I remember getting up and being surprised to see a half-drunk glass of beer by my father's chair. My father loved a drink in the evening, a habit no doubt acquired from a lifetime's membership of Service messes.

I knew something out of the ordinary had occurred, it was not father's style not to finish his drink or clear up before going to bed. Mother soon provided the answers, a phone call from the duty watch reporting an incident by the Deeps had sent my father, AMFO Nick Carter, to the crash site, to lead the fire section's rescue efforts.

When he arrived at the scene of the crash, all efforts were concentrated on finding the crew members who were in the water. It was a very dark night, the tide had turned, members of the crew could be heard calling out in the dark.

Sadly two members of the crew were lost that night.

After a change of uniform, my father reported to the station commanding officer that morning, who, in the traditions of the Royal Air Force, made it clear to all assembled that the priority for the station CO was the recovery of the bodies of his aircrew. The station fire section, used to working the mudflats and channels around Thorney, were able to recover the missing aircrew after a few days.

My father went on to serve in RAF Germany and RAF Lyneham and Kemble before retiring in 1976 after 47 years in the RAF and Air Ministry Fire Service.

He helped save Beverley's crew

The story about a Beverley aircraft which crashed in Bosham 50 years ago jogged the memory of **David Holman** of Southbourne, who told Down Memory Lane:

I lived at Prinsted at the time and was one of the three civilians who went out to rescue the airmen when the Beverley crashed.

Afterwards there was an RAF parade in our honour at Thorney Island where we were presented with a letter from the Air Ministry and a silver cigarette box, both of which I still have.

I have photos of the engine which broke loose, in someone's garden in Bosham, just about 20 yards from his conservatory, as well as a photo of the wreckage taken when the tide was out.

One of the survivors contacted me a few years ago.

the end of the line for Beverleys?

The Down Memory Lane article by Ken Emery (Observer, May 24) regarding the crash of the Blackburn Beverley off Thorney Island on May 17, 1962 was of great interest to **Derek Newton**, who writes:

Three days following this earlier crash, on May 20, I was one of more than 50 passengers on one of two Beverleys returning to RAF Abingdon from Denmark. Part-way through the flight the plane I was on made an unscheduled landing on a small grass civil airfield at Groningen in Holland, apparently for an 'engine check'.

After about two hours the plane took off again to continue the homeward journey across the North Sea but after a short time smoke and flames were seen by all to be coming from the port inner engine.

The plane returned to Holland, making a very swift descent to a full emergency landing into Schiphol airport, Amsterdam, attended by crash tenders, fire engines and ambulances where we all exited at great speed through a carpet of foam.

We spent the night in local hotels and were ferried home by another plane the next day. I understand that a repair team came out later with a replacement engine to get the plane back to base.

The only detail of the plane I have is from a very poor newspaper photo from that time which shows the tail number 288.

My memory is that these two incidents were, for practical purposes, the end of the line for the Beverleys in the UK, at least for trooping, although I believe they continued for a number of years overseas.

It may be a coincidence but I never remember flying in one again although I do remember using the Argosy and the Hercules.

Thankyou for saving my life – 3

John Gray had managed to escape from his blazing plane, but after half an hour in the cold waters of Chichester Harbour, he entrusted his wife to God's care and, exhausted, waited to die.

The fact that he's here to tell the tale 38 years later is entirely due to the heroic efforts of four Southbourne lads.

On Monday night he met one of them for the first time. With Alan Parr, he relived the events of May 17 1962.

Alan, who now lives at Cosham, was with Bob Marsh, now resident in Australia, outside Southbourne youth club on the night of the crash.

"I just looked up and saw the plane on fire", Alan recalled. "We rushed down to the shore about a mile away. We saw this ball of flames in the harbour. It was just instinct that we went out there and did what we did."

With David Holman, who still lives in Southbourne, and a youth called Frank, they took out a rowing boat and a fishing smock and brought in three airmen, including Mr Gray. Two others died in the crash.

Mr Holman, who was unable to make the meeting with Mr Gray for family reasons, denied any heroism.

"We just did it. Had all the fuel gone up, the risk was quite considerable. There was all this fuel and spreading wreckage. I was a bit stupid really."

Mr Holman has now spoken to Mr Gray and hopes they can meet up at a later date.

Mr Gray, who lives in Devon, said he was moved to track down the youths who saved his life partly



How the Observer's sister newspaper, The News at Portsmouth, reported the story

By Phil Hewitt

because he is now writing his life story.

He said he has reflections of the fact that he hadn't sought out his survivors before, but he was out of the country for a long time after the crash.

"It just never entered my head that it would be possible to find them," he said.

In the event, it provided remarkably straightforward. He took a visit to Thorney Island from where he was flying at the time. He asked around in the neighbourhood, and a few phone calls later he had tracked them down.

Mr Gray trusted on a pilot with the RAF on piston powered aircraft and Vampire jet aircraft, gaining his wings in March 1946.

In February 1960 he joined No 85 Course on Beverley at RAF Thorney Island. In the May of that year, as a late stand-in for a colleague, he embarked on the final session of night flying training.

In Beverley No 132, No 2 engine suffered massive mechanical failure resulting in an immediate and uncontrollable fire. In less than two minutes the engine burned itself off the wing and fell - one and a quarter tons of white-hot metal - into the garden of The Manor House at Bosham.

The aircraft was now without hydraulic control and crashed into Chichester Harbour in 16 feet of becoming tidal sea water, just over half a mile from the runway on Thorney Island and about one mile south of the village of Prinsted.

All five crew members got out of

the aircraft which continued to blaze furiously on the surface of the water. But the RAF rescue dinghy crew were unable to start the boat's motor. So great were one of the rescuers' efforts at pull-starting it that he ripped the flesh off three fingers and was hospitalised for weeks.

The following morning the boat started first time - too late for the two airmen who died.

In the meantime, the four Southbourne lads had plucked the three survivors out of the water.

Mr Gray vividly recalls swimming away from the wreck, fearing that the fuel on the water would ignite. He struggled to get out of his RAF flying overalls but omitted to untie the legs. They clung to his ankles dragging him down.

Eventually he managed to get those off, but by then was exhausted. He'd been in the cold water for almost half an hour. He prepared himself for death.

"I have had a Christian faith since childhood. I had already committed my wife to God in total faith. I was utterly calm and at peace. I just said to God 'I am ready for You to take me if You want to'."

"I had been very, very frightened, but I was not afraid of drowning. I was ready to die."

And that's when his saviours turned up. He was hoisted into the boat, given a jumper, warmed at a private shore and taken ashore where he can, bedraggled, into the officer's mess.

The officers just looked at him in amazement. They thought they were seeing a ghost. It had seemed inconceivable that anyone could have survived.



Pilot David Gray (right) with one of his rescuers, Alan Parr.

This story was in the West Sussex Observer in 2000
38 years after the crash

From: Sir Maurice Dean, K.C.B., K.C.M.G.

TELEPHONE, TRAFALGAR 8811.



AIR MINISTRY,
WHITEHALL,
LONDON, S.W.1.

28th September, 1962

Sir,

I am commanded by the Air Council to state that they have learned with admiration of the part you played on the night of 17th May, 1962, in rescuing the survivors of a Beverley aircraft which had crashed in Chichester Harbour.

The Air Council wish me to convey to you an expression of their warm gratitude and appreciation of your gallant conduct on that occasion.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

Permanent Under-Secretary of State

D. Holman, Esq.

From : Group Captain J. J. McKay, D.S.O., D.F.C., R.A.F.



ROYAL AIR FORCE
Thorney Island, Emsworth, Hampshire
Telephone: Emsworth 2381, ext. 1

Please address any reply to
THE OFFICER COMMANDING
and quote: TI/C.12/6/17/AIR
Your reference:

22nd May, 1962.

Dear Mr. Hollman,

Although I knew on Thursday night that you together with Robin Marsh and Alan Parr had been responsible for rescuing the three survivors of the aircraft which had crashed, before writing to you I had to wait until the Board of Inquiry informed me of the circumstances under which you effected the rescue.

2. It was a splendid effort on your part and you can be justly proud in the knowledge that but for your prompt actions, loss of life could have been greater. As the Commanding Officer of Royal Air Force Thorney Island I wish to congratulate you and thank you most sincerely not only for rescuing the aircrew members but also for the spirit you displayed in going so quickly to the scene of the crash.

3. I would like to meet you personally some time and I will write again and arrange a meeting. I have sent identical letters to this to Robin Marsh and Alan Parr.

Yours sincerely,

Mr. D. Hollman,
5 Marsh Bungalows,
Prinsted,
Emsworth,
Hants.

From: AIR CHIEF MARSHAL SIR EDMUND HUDLESTON, K.C.B., C.B.E., R.A.F.



HEADQUARTERS,
TRANSPORT COMMAND,
ROYAL AIR FORCE,
UPAVON,
PEWSEY,
WILTSHIRE

Telephone: Upavon 207/208

TC/C.56130/5/A.O.C-in-C.

28th June, 1962.

Dear Mr. Holman,

From the reports that I have received concerning the incident on 17th May, 1962, when a Beverley aircraft crashed into Chichester Harbour, it is clear that your prompt action, cool behaviour and disregard of personal danger, in pulling from the water three survivors of the crash, was a most praiseworthy effort. But for your actions, the loss of life in this accident might well have been greater.

I note that you have received a letter from Group Captain McKay and I hope that you will be able to accept his invitation to visit Royal Air Force, Thorney Island.

I wish to take this opportunity of expressing my personal admiration for your very successful efforts and of adding my thanks to those you have already received.

Yours sincerely
E. C. Hudleston

David Holman Esq.,
5 Marsh Bungalows,
Prinsted,
EMSWORTH,
Hants.

From : Group Captain J. J. McKay, D.S.O., D.F.C., R.A.F.



ROYAL AIR FORCE
Thorney Island, EMSWORTH, Hampshire
Telephone: Emsworth 2381, ext. 1

Please address any reply to
THE OFFICER COMMANDING
and quote: TI/C.505/2/P1
Your reference:

10th September, 1962.

Dear Mr. Holman,

Thank you for your letter of the 7th, and I would be pleased to see you on Wednesday Evening 12th September. As to the time I will be free at any time that is convenient to you. If you would be good enough to phone either the Adjutant or myself during working hours to let us know what time you will be here, I will meet you at the Guardroom.

Yours sincerely,

J. J. McKay

Mr. D. Holman,
Seaward,
5 Marsh Bungalows,
Prinsted,
Emsworth,
Hants.

From : Group Captain J. J. McKay, D.S.O., D.F.C., R.A.F.



ROYAL AIR FORCE
Thorney Island, Emsworth, Hampshire
Telephone: Emsworth 2381, ext. 1

Please address any reply to
THE OFFICER COMMANDING
and quote: TI/C.505/2/P1
Your reference:

21st September, 1962.

Dear Mr. Holman,

Thank you for your letter informing me that you are able to come to the Station on Friday 28th September at 1015 hours.

2. On arrival, you will be met at the Main Gates, that is the gates by the Station Headquarters, and shown where you may leave any cars. You will then be escorted to the place where the Presentation is to be held. Your guests will also be shown to their seats.

3. In order to arrange seating accommodation I will be grateful if you will let me or my Adjutant know, by telephone or letter by midday Thursday, the number of guests you will be bringing.

Yours sincerely,
J.J. McKay

Mr. D. Holman,
Seaward,
5 Marsh Bungalows,
Prinsted,
Emsworth,
Hants.

From: GROUP CAPTAIN J. J. McKay, D.S.O., D.F.C., R.A.F.

Telephone: Emsworth 2381
Extension 1

ROYAL AIR FORCE,
THORNEY ISLAND,
EMSWORTH,
HAMPSHIRE

TI/C.12/6/16/AIR

5th September, 1962.

Dear Mr. Holman,

I am writing this to invite you to attend a Presentation Ceremony at Royal Air Force Thorney Island at 1030 hours on Friday 28th September, 1962. At the Ceremony you will be presented with a letter of appreciation from the Air Council in recognition of the part you played in saving the lives of three members of the Royal Air Force when one of our aircraft crashed on the night of 17th May, 1962.

2. An identical letter to this is being sent to Robin Marsh and Alan Parr. If all three of you are able to attend on September 28th, the Presentation will be made by the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Royal Air Force Transport Command, Air Chief Marshal Sir Edmund Hudleston, K.C.B., C.B.E.

3. As arrangements have to be made, I shall appreciate it if you will inform me as soon as possible if you are able to attend. The Ceremony itself will be short and you can expect to be able to leave here by 12 noon. Should your employer require confirmation from me I shall be pleased to supply it.

4. I also extend a very cordial invitation for your parents and any of your relatives and friends to attend and witness the Ceremony.

Yours sincerely,
J.J. McKay

SEVERITY	W. O.	17	5	62	AIRCRAFT TYPE	BEVERLEY	MX.	C1	A/C NUMBER	XL132	CMD.	T	GRP.	UNIT	242-OCU	BASE AIRFIELD	THORNEY ISLAND	ROLE	OCUT
PHASE	FL-L	TYPE OF ACCIDENT	E-OC/S	P. CAUSE	121-8	OTHER AIRCRAFT	-												
CASUALTY					NO. OF A/C	1	DES.	A	CREW										

Whilst on the downwind leg there was a loud explosion followed by fire in No.3 E. It burned furiously & began overspeeding despite feathering & fire drill action. After approx. 45 secs No.3 E fell away from A. Fire persisted in 5th. mainplan. P put out a Mayday call & flew A around base leg, & lined up with r/w at 125 & 400' AGL. There was decreasing effect of the controls in the descent & between 50'-100' no response at all. About 1/2 mi. short of the r/w P ditched A in the shallow creek. All 5 crew (not wearing life jackets (1)), escaped through the port hatch (astrodome). 3 of these were rescued by civilians & the Zodiac launch found the body of the Eng. The body of the Nav. was not found & he is missing presumed drowned also.

Prime Cause :- No 16 cylinder sleeve cracked from fatigue causing the crankcase to be severed & the E controls disrupted, making feathering impossible. Windmilling of the propeller pumped oil into the E which resulted in an intense & uncontrollable fire. This spread causing detachment of No 3 E & severe structural damage.

Remedial :- See File

PILOT ET HOLLINS (W442508796, K), SGT NO. MCLEOD (ENG, 3605080, K)

PURPOSE		CLEARANCE		OCCUPANTS		AUTH.	
431		W		221		1	
PLACE		THORNEY ISLAND (HANE)		LOCAL TIME ZONE		DAY, ETC.	
LAST TAKE-OFF		11		2126 (A)		NIGHT	
FROM-VIA-TO						STAGES	

1P	SERVICE	NAT.	NAME, INITIALS	NUMBER	RANK	AGE	UNIT STATUS	CREW STATUS	INSTR. CAT.	INSTRUM. NAT.	ASSESSMENT
1P			WRIGHT RWJ	3520789	FLT LT.	26	STUDENT-P	CAPT.	NIL	GREEN	STUDENT-PAT
2P			GRAY J.D.N.	5043352	FG OFF.	W	STUDENT-CR	CO-P	W	W	W

1	1P	2P	OTHER CREW	OTHER OCCUPANTS	NON-OCCUPANTS	A/F CAT.	ENGINES CAT.	R.A.F. PROPERTY	OTHER PROPERTY	HOURS AS 1ST P.	1ST. PILOT TOTAL L.S.M.	30.D	2ND. PILOT TOTAL L.S.M.	30.D
THIS A/C	U	U	1-1, 2-K			SS	5555		MINOR	ALL	565	W	W	823
OTHER										NIGHT	53	2	2	W
SPECIAL RECORD	FIRE-ASIA (BRANOP) (K) PPTY NIGHT (X) (2) N.A.F. FORM 4880, 1 NOV 62 JUNE 1963													
	PARAMOUNT REGD. TRADE MARK 631.C. 11841 M (P) TYPE. 315 20 20 411 15 W													

[illegible]



Crash Site Photos

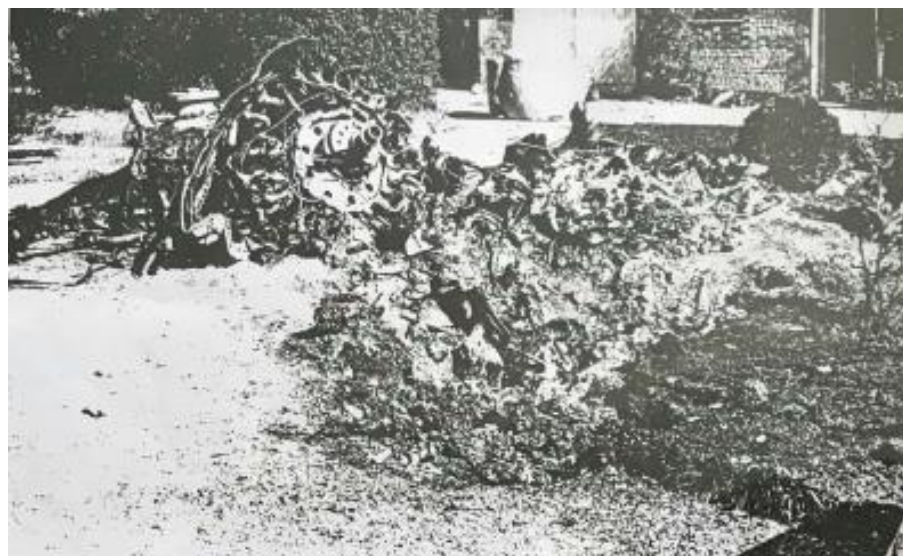




Beverley (XL132) crash, Thorney Island, May 1962



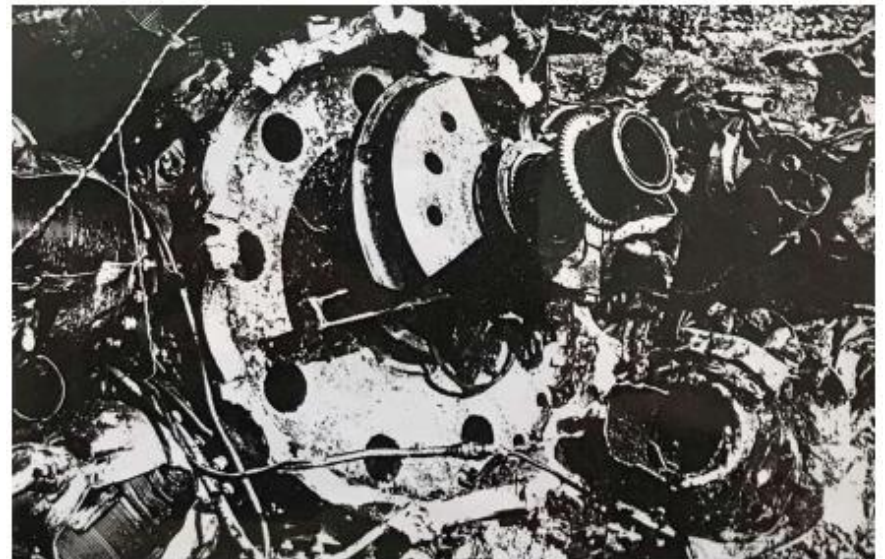
Beverley Wreckage





Wreckage at Bosham

Engine wreckage being recovered from the garden of Bosham Manor House, Old Bosham.



(A Daughter's Request for Help) Beverley crash, Thorney Island, 17.05.62 - Sgt N.D.McLeod

The daughter of the late Sgt. N.D.McLeod has posted in the hope of finding out more about her father's military career before his untimely death in the crash of Blackburn Beverley XL132 off Thorney Island on the night of 17 May 1962. She was only a baby at the time and has no recollection of her father, who was the Flight Engineer aboard the Beverley. After an engine fire - and the subsequent loss of that engine - the Beverley failed to make the runway, for an emergency landing, and crash landed in Thorney Channel. None of the crew had time to don their lifejackets and in their attempts to get ashore, sadly Sgt. McLeod and Flt. Lt. E.T.Hollins were drowned. I'm sure that there are places, people and methods which will help Sgt. McLeod's daughter find out more about her late father. However, regrettably, I don't know where those places or who those people or what those methods are. There may be some on this forum who can either help by providing information or pointing to where that information might be found. I suspect that there are other fora on which, perhaps, requests for this information might yield more. But I don't know which those are. So if those in the know can specify those, I'll happily pass this information on. May I offer my thanks, both personal and vicarious, in hope and anticipation!

(Information taken from Key.Aero/forum/historic/aviation)

I was the Second Pilot in Beverley 132, that crashed that night in May 1962. Like the trainee Captain that night, I too had been a Co-Pilot on 84 Squadron at Khormaksar, prior to this incident. Neither he, nor I had met the "staff Crew Members", namely Flight Engineer, Navigator, and Signaller, before that flight. But my wife and I do go to the Military Graveside at West Thorney about once a year, to visit the graves of the two who died that night. John.

(Khormaksar) was a Royal Air Force station in Aden, Yemen.

(Information taken from the South East History Boards)

	FL129	Beckburn Beverley C1	19.72222
1626	21120	Beckburn Beverley C1	Ex RL117, N 23/84/1957, d/d 30/05/1957, acc 28/08/1965 at No.71 MU Oyster
1632	21131	Beckburn Beverley C1	Ex RL118, N 23/85/1957, d/d 19/06/1957, d
1633	21132	Beckburn Beverley C1	Ex RL118, N 23/85/1957, d/d 19/06/1957, d
1634	21148	Beckburn Beverley C1	N 08/37/1987, d/d 26/07/1915, sold as scrap
1638	21149	Beckburn Beverley C1	N 11/37/1987, d/d 09/08/1915, in 76884, 12 pms, Doncaster Museum

(Information taken from UK Serials.com)

General Characteristics of the Blackburn Beverley

Crew: six (two pilots, flight engineer, navigator, signaller, air quartermaster)

Capacity: 80 troops or 70 paratroopers

Payload: 44,000 lb (20,000 kg) for 200 mi (322 km)

Length: 99 ft 5 in (30.3 m)

Wingspan: 162 ft (49.4 m)

Height: 38 ft 9 in (11.8 m)

Wing area: 2,916 sq ft (270.9 m²)

Empty weight: 79,234 lb (35,950 kg)

Loaded weight: 82,100 lb (37,240 kg)

Max. take-off weight: 135,000 lb (61,235 kg)

Powerplant: 4 × Bristol Centaurus 173 18-cylinder radial engines, 2,850 hp (2,130 kW) each

Maximum speed: 238 mph (208 kn, 383 km/h)

Cruise speed: 173 mph (150 kn, 278 km/h) at 8,000 ft (2,400 m)

Range: 1,300 mi (1130 nmi, 2092 km) with standard 29,000 lb (13,154 kg) payload

Rate of climb: 760 ft/min (3.9 m/s)

Wing loading: 28.2 lb/ft² (137 kg/m²)

Power/mass: 0.138 hp/lb (228 W/kg)

Takeoff roll: 1,340 ft (410 m)

Landing roll: 990 ft (300 m)

