

These seven young men together with nearly 1,000 others who died while serving with 207 Squadron RAF are commemorated on a Roll of Honour which along with the Squadron Standard is on display in Leicester Cathedral. The Squadron which had been based at Bottesford from Nov 1941 to Sept 1942, before moving to Langar, was 'adopted' by the City of Leicester during the war, and its Standard laid up in the Cathedral when 207 Squadron was disbanded in June 1984 after 60 years service (9).

A further memorial to men of 467 Squadron (RAAF) is displayed locally to the seven crew of Lancaster LM311 who died on 13 July 1943. They had brought their badly damaged aircraft home after a raid on Turin, but it broke up on its final approach to the airfield and crashed and burned out in a field south of Moor Lane off Normanton Road. On 12 July 1998 a group of relatives and officials met at the site to plant a eucalyptus tree in memory of the men who died. Mrs Mildred Greenwood, widow of Sergeant Jack Greenwood the Flight Engineer and his sister and brother were among the colleagues and relatives who attended the service. (10) On 15 Aug 1999 a plaque was placed by the tree, following a service at St Mary's Church Bottesford, at which a Roll of Honour containing 241 names from the 467 Squadron (RAAF) was dedicated in the presence of representatives from both the Australian and Canadian High Commissions. (11) There is a seventh headstone

in St Swithun's churchyard in memory of Private George Simpson who died in 1919 following active service in the Great War in France.

- (1) Notes George Hamblett's collection.
- (2) Notes by G Cork.
- (3) "On the Wings of the Morning RAF Bottesford 1941-1945" Vincent Holyoak ISBN 952673908
- (4) Ibid
- (5) G. Cork
- (6) Vincent Holyoak
- (7) Additional note G Hamblett, Australian
- (8) G Cork and G Hamblett
- (9) G Hamblett
- (10) Newark Advertiser 28 July 1998
- (11) Grantham Journal 20 Aug 1999

This information is taken from George Hamblett's pamphlet (April 2000) on the War Graves he tended at St Swithun's for 30 years, on behalf of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, and it is repeated here 'as a tribute to those who gave all in the defence of freedom, and with a prayer that one day God's Kingdom and the Sermon on the Mount will be a reality for all people.'

The care of these War Graves has now passed to John Winter who can be contacted on 01400 281773.



**“LEST WE FORGET”**



**St Swithun's Church,  
Long Bennington**



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## St. Swithun's Church



**“WE WILL REMEMBER THEM”**



A key role in the country's victory in World War II played out on Long Bennington's doorstep as from November 1941 until the end of 1943, the village reverberated almost nightly to the roar of aircraft engines as the bomber squadrons took off from Bottesford (Normanton) and Balderton airfields to combine with other aircraft to attack targets across Europe. The regular contribution from Bottesford was 12 aircraft per night, and from Balderton 20 aircraft per night.

The village's Inns and its Village Hall, provided valuable relaxation for the crews during their brief periods of leisure and also for the many men and women who helped repair and maintain the aircraft and the airfields. Dances and entertainment shows were held almost every night of the week in the Village Hall - but for a small number the village provided their last resting place. The six war graves in the Churchyard are a lasting memorial to the many airmen who lost their lives while taking part in operations from the local airfields, a memorial now supplemented by the dedication of pews and wall plaques inside St Swithun's Church.

On Battle of Britain Sunday 22 Sept 1991, two pews on the south aisle were dedicated to these airmen by the Vicar Rev Ron Amis and plaques bearing the Squadron Crests were placed on the south aisle wall. Kneelers for these pews, provided by members of the congregation, were embroidered with the names of the airmen.

**The six graves mark the resting places of:**  
**Flight Sergeant Russell Avey, Royal Canadian Air Force.** Pilot from Norwich, Ontario.  
**Flight Sergeant Alvin John Broemeling, Royal Canadian Air Force.** Air Gunner from Provost, Alberta.  
**Sergeant Grey Doyle Cumberbatch, Royal Air Force.** Bomb Aimer from St Michael, Barbados.  
**Flight Sergeant Frederick William Dyde, Royal Air Force.** Rear Gunner from Broadway, Worcestershire.  
**Flight Sergeant Rene Roger Landry, Royal Canadian Air Force.** Air Gunner from Norman, Ontario.  
**Sergeant Benjamin Pratt, Royal Air Force.** Air Gunner from Foots Cray, Kent.

Only two of the six were stationed at Bottesford at the time of their deaths, Sergeant Pratt and Flight Sergeant Broemling, both serving with 467 Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force

(RAAF), although Flight Sergeant Dyde had served at Bottesford before 207 Squadron Royal Air Force (RAF) was transferred to Langar.



**Flight Sergeant Broemling** was the unfortunate victim of a missing helmet, when on the night of 16/17 Jan 1943, he was rear gunner on a Lancaster operating from Bottesford on a Berlin raid. A few days earlier he had discovered that his flying helmet, which incorporated an oxygen mask, was missing from the locker room and he was issued with a replacement. Soon after take-off on the fatal flight he reported that the replacement helmet was unbearably tight and was instructed by his captain to use the spare helmet carried on the aircraft. This was unfortunately fitted with an obsolete oxygen mask which didn't have the inspiratory valve which had been fitted to later models to prevent freezing. By the time the plane commenced its bombing run at a height of 19,000 ft in temperatures around minus 50 degrees centigrade, Broemling's mask had frozen up. The aircraft pilot and captain concentrated on his bombing run, but immediately the bomb load had been released he dived steeply to 8,000 ft, the level below which oxygen masks were not required, although they were still over Berlin. The crew did what they could for the now unconscious rear-gunner. The plane was subsequently hit twice by enemy fire, but managed to limp home and land safely at Bottesford; however Flight Sergeant Broemling was found to have been dead for several hours. (4)



**Flight Sergeants Avey and Landry and Sergeant Cumberbatch** were members of a crew of seven of a Lancaster bomber based at Waltham (Grimsby). All seven were killed on 5 March 1943 when their aircraft returning from a mine-laying operation attempted to land at Langar airfield, in the Vale of Belvoir, but overshot the runway and crashed and burned out in a field near Plungar. The aircraft had been forced to divert to Langar due to weather conditions at its home base. The other four members of the crew are buried elsewhere. (The next of kin were allowed to choose between a local military funeral or having the body transported home) (5).



**Sergeant Pratt** was the rear gunner in a Lancaster of 467 Squadron RAAF, based at Bottesford. On the night of 2nd/3rd Aug 1943 an aircraft piloted by Pilot Officer David Symonds was taking part in the fourth of a series of concentrated raids on Hamburg. Over the previous three nights nearly 800 aircraft had been deployed and over 2,000 tons of bombs dropped, but on this fourth raid, owing to poor weather conditions, the mission was less successful. Thunderstorms and severe icing prevented the Pathfinder crews from marking the target area adequately; however, as the 467 Squadron crew turned for home, having successfully bombed their primary target, their radar warning signalled the approach of an enemy aircraft. The attacking plane, a Junkers 88



night fighter, was driven off by fire from the upper gun turret, but during the attack Sergeant Pratt was killed by a single bullet entering the rear turret. The aircraft landed safely at Bottesford where it was discovered that the starboard rudder and outer engine had also been damaged in the attack. Pilot Officer Symonds recorded that after the funeral at St Swithun's he found Sergeant Pratt's mother waiting to speak to him. Not knowing what to expect he was relieved when she said "Mike always said 'Don't worry Mum, Skip will always bring me home'; thank you for bringing him home to England." (6) The account of Sergeant Pratt's death is contained in the operations record book of 467 Squadron as an additional note; it had at some time been removed from the record book and inadvertently put between the pages of another book. Earlier histories of the Squadron, in the absence of this information, had assumed that he had been a member of the crew on an aircraft which had crashed at Audlem, Cheshire, while on a training exercise as this was the only aircraft from 467 Squadron lost on that date. (7)



**Flight Sergeant Frederick William Dyde** was born in 1915 at Limington, Warwickshire, but his family moved to Saintbury Hill Farm near Broadway, Worcestershire, in 1926. He joined the RAF in 1935/36 and for the first year of the war had been employed on the barrage balloon defences of London, transferring to aircrew in 1941. His 16 operational missions, some of which were flown from Bottesford before 207 Squadron moved to Langar, included the first bombing attack on Italy.

On the night of 2 October 1943 Dyde was the rear gunner in a Lancaster of 207 Squadron RAF based at Langar, which was one of 11 Lancaster bombers of No 5 Group RAF Bomber Command assigned to take part in a night attack on Munich. As the first of these aircraft, with Dyde on board, prepared for its take off run it was noticed by a ground controller that the aircraft's pitot head cover had not been removed, and so a flare was fired to alert the crew to abort the take-off. (The pitot head is an open vertical tube protruding from the wing and is calibrated so that the airflow passing over it gives a measure of an aircraft's airspeed; it is normally covered when the aircraft is on the ground to prevent insects and debris lodging inside it.) The engines of the aircraft were heard to reduce power, but power was then reapplied in a bid to get airborne when the pilot realised that he could not stop in the length of runway available. Heavily laden with a full bomb and fuel load, the plane staggered into the air, but at 50ft it stalled and dived into the ground, exploding on impact. All seven aircrew were killed; their names are listed below (8).

**Pilot: Flight Officer Archibald F Bremner** aged 24 from Glasgow;  
**Flight Engineer: Sergeant Robert M Appleton** Age 23 from Darlington;  
**Navigator: Flight Sergeant Roland R Woodhouse** Age 20 from Oldham;  
**Bomb Aimer: Flight Sergeant Arthur D Archer**, Age 23 from Chingford;  
**Wireless Operator: Sergeant John H V Gorsley** age 24 from Oldham; **Air Gunners: Sergeant Arthur E Smith** Age 19 from Liverpool and **Flight Sergeant Frederick W Dyde** age 28 from Broadway, Worcs.