

# Moordown Halifax Memorial

## 'Fire In The Air' Reports...

The official documents relating to the loss of JP137 do not make any mention of the aircraft being on fire in the air, *before* the crash.

The only 'official' comment about any fire in the air discovered so far was made by **Sgt. Childs**, a police officer who gave evidence at the inquest of civilian victim, Dorothea Bennett.

At her inquest on 24th March 1944 he described how he was in Wycliffe Rd when he heard the aircraft '*making a loud noise as though it was in trouble*'. He then '**saw a flash in the direction of Moordown, and a few seconds later saw a plane go straight down in flames.**' Sgt. Childs had seen the fire onboard, *before* the aircraft had crashed.

Over the years, a number of other local people have come forward who had also seen the aircraft on fire in the air that night, but none of those observations had been officially recorded at the time.

With the confirmation of an engine fire in the air, so soon after take off, we could then be almost certain that Sgt. Evans had no chance of saving his stricken aircraft, despite his best endeavours....

A 'Bournemouth Echo' request in October 2011 for anyone who could recall seeing the aircraft on fire in the air that night produced several replies ...from a variety of Winton and Moordown locations....suggesting that the aircraft had most definitely been on fire before the crash.

I had the chance to meet and speak with **Evelyn King**, from Ashton Rd, who had seen the aircraft on fire from her home in Portland Rd, Winton, where she had lived as a child. She clearly remembered seeing flames as the aircraft passed near to their home.

**John Hartley** wrote to describe what his wife **Jean** (née Ball) had seen that night. John wrote:

*'My wife was just 11 years old, and was in bed at home in Delhi Rd when she was woken by the noise of the plane, and saw it on fire as it disappeared over the roofs of the bungalows opposite her house'*

**Mick Brewer** emailed:

*'In 1944 as a 13 year old my family lived at 40 Abbott Rd, Winton. This runs north/south, my parents bedroom faced east. On the night in question my father came into my bedroom waking me to tell me an aircraft was crashing. He had seen it from his window flying west and on fire! Looking north west from my window we could see the fire and hear the munitions exploding.*

*I hope this helps to confirm the aircraft was definitely on fire before crashing'*

**Ray Shepard** also emailed to say:

*'My parents lived at 1033a Wimborne Rd, which was the upstairs flat in the building next to the crash site. That fateful night of the 21st March they were staying with other family members at Coronation Ave. **In the night my mother was awoken by the noise of the plane in trouble and could see the bright light of the engine on fire**, and heard the plane crash. In the morning, she told the other family members what she heard, but as they heard nothing they did not believe her.*

*At that time there was a small war production factory in the corner of Wimborne Rd and Hillcrest Rd, where my mother's sister worked. She set off for work, and was soon back to tell everyone that my mother was correct.*

*The family all went to see the incident but were not allowed too near, even though her property was burnt out, and the only thing the firemen managed to save was my cot, which was in a bad way. With the shock of it everyone thought my mother would lose the baby she was carrying - which was me - but all was OK and I was born in April 1944.*

*Once the flats were repaired, my parents moved into 1033 Wimborne Rd, which was the downstairs flat. The previous occupants - a Mr. and Mrs Sprakett - survived, but they no longer wished to live there and moved....'*

**Pete Swain** wrote from his home in Parkstone:

*'In 1944 I was living in Queen Mary Ave as an evacuee, with my brother Ken. **I remember watching the plane come down, which was on fire**. If I remember. a boy named John Chislett lived in one of the cottages who I was at school with. Hope this helps with your enquiries'..*

I spoke to Pete Swain on the telephone, and mentioned to him that there had been some suggestion that it may have been exhaust 'plumes' from the aircraft engines that people had seen, rather than an actual engine fire?

Pete - who had been a technically minded youngster, and went on to become a mechanical engineer himself - was absolutely positive that it was an engine fire he had seen, and not any 'exhaust plume'.

So, a selection of independent observations, all describing seeing an engine fire in the air.

Despite any actual 'official' record of an airborne engine fire, I think we can be pretty certain that there had been one.....and that fire had essentially sealed the fate of JP137.