

SERGEANT PILOT FREDERICK JOHN HOWARTH

Service Number: 754182

Enlisted: Royal Airforce Volunteer Reserve

Born: 12th January 1920

Died: Killed in a flying accident 3rd September 1940, Aged 20

Memorials: St Catherine's Churchyard, Burbage Row 9 Grave 13

St Catherine's Church War Memorial.

St Catherine's Church, bronze plaque south side chancel wall.

Burbage War Memorial



Frederick Howarth was born on Strutt Road, Burbage on 12th January 1920, the son of Harry and Alice Howarth of Lychgate Lane, Burbage.



Former home of Harry and Alice Howarth,
Lychgate Lane, Burbage

Frederick was educated at the Burbage Church of England School starting in 1924 followed by Grove Road School.

At the age of fourteen, he moved on to the Hinckley Technical College and then Nuneaton Mining School where he studied electrics. Having left college, he worked for Matkins Electricians then Messer's Parsons and Sherwin and Co, the Ironmongers on Station Road, Hinckley.

In his spare time, Frederick was very active in the Scout Movement and spent a good deal of his time with the fourth Hinckley's St Marys Troop.

One of the most promising Rugby footballers in the district he played wing forward for Hinckley in the 1937-38 seasons.

In his late teens, he joined the RAFVR and was taught to fly Tiger Moths at Desford Airfield. When war was declared on 3rd September 1939, Fred immediately joined up and was sent to No. 1 Training Wing at Cambridge University until October 1939.

On the 18th December 1939, he was posted to No.7 Elementary Flying Training School at Desford. By May 1940, he was training to fly Harvard's.



Harvard MK II

Having quickly made themselves familiar with one of the thirty-three Hawker Hurricanes at the station and local geography, new pilots were expected to adapt quickly to a series of tasks set by their instructors, these included what to do when vectored onto enemy aircraft and also how to deal with the situation of finding themselves under fire from the enemy. This involved arduous sorties flown as a pair, with the instructor and trainee fighter pilot taking it in turns to act as quarry and hunter.

During his second term of advanced flying, he moved to Royal Air Force Station, Sutton Bridge near Kings Lynn to train to fly and fight effectively in a modern fighter aircraft as part of a squadron. This included honing their skills on both offensive and defensive tactics.

A pilots training course had originally been spread over forty hours, but this had been halved to twenty in order to prop up the losses that the squadrons had suffered over the summer of 1940. There were a growing number of trainees without the equivalent increase in instructors. Consequently, those who mastered the basics of air fighting were sent out in pairs to practice amongst themselves. It was during just such a sortie that Frederick Howarth met with disaster.

On 3 September 1940, a year to the day since Britain had entered the war, Frederick was flying Hurricane L1654 when he collided in the air with Hurricane L1833 piloted by Sgt. Karel Stibor (Czech) during an affiliation exercise between flights. Both pilots were killed and the aircraft completely wrecked.

Eyewitness accounts exist of the crash. Henry Allen, a land worker saw the two aircraft jockeying for a position of advantage over one another and much "stunting" was seen to take place to effect this end. One aircraft pulled up into a loop and during the final stages of this manoeuvre the collision occurred. The actual incident happened at around 600-700 feet and upon breaking apart both aircraft dived straight into the ground.

Alan Kew then aged ten, was tying up his shoelace before going to school when he heard the aircraft's engines followed by the collision and subsequent impact with the ground.

He ran outside, but there was little to see except some smoke drifting away from the crash sites. Alan now owns the land where Stibor's plane fell. Fredrick Howarth's plane fell in the orchard of Bank Farm amongst the fruit bushes and plum trees.

Fortunately, both pilots' bodies were recovered. Sgt. Stibor was buried at Sutton Bridge Church near the airfield and Frederick Howarth was brought back to Burbage and laid to rest in St Catherine's Churchyard.



St Catherine's Churchyard



Plaque St Catherine's Church

TUESDAY, THE THIRD, SEPTEMBER

The schoolboy stooped to tie his shoe
His ear picked up the sound
Of stunting fighter aeroplanes
A mile above the ground.

Before his hand was on the latch
His breath caught in his throat
A bang, then screaming engines,
The final dying note.

Two more bangs as the aircraft hit
The boy was through the door
Just stupifying silence
No more the Merlin's roar.

The time was o-eight-twenty-eight,
September third the date,
The year was Nineteen Forty,
Two men had met their fate.

The boy to school went on his way,
One lace was still untied
Passed wreckage in the plum orchard
Where now a man had died.

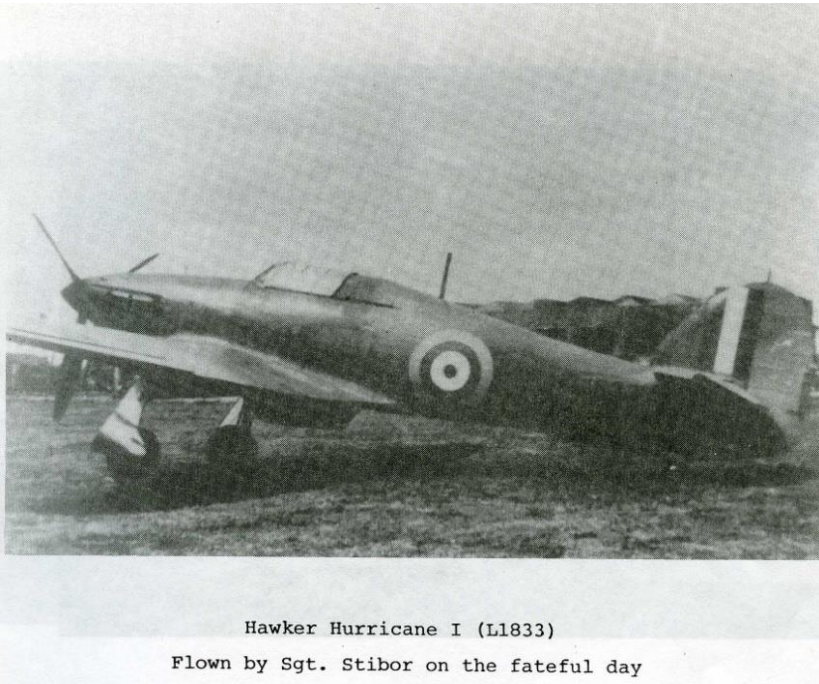
The other 'plane fell over there,
Where still thin smoke did waft,
Into the cloudless azure vault
Above the broken craft.

Hurricanes, an old man said,
From Sutton Bridge for sure,
Just practising their deadly trade,
Eager to join the War.

He ran to school, no thought of play
A sadder, older boy,
His dreams to be a pilot,
Abandoned like a toy.

The lad has grown to farm the land,
Where once the wreckage lay,
And since has told us of the sight
That met his gaze that day.

The years have passed, the memories fade,
But always he'll remember,
The day he bent to tie his shoe,
Tuesday, the third, September.



Hawker Hurricane I (L1833)
Flown by Sgt. Stibor on the fateful day



Grave of Sargeant Karel Stibor

Sergeant Pilot
Frederick John Howarth
R.A.F.V.R.
Aged 20 years.
Who was killed whilst piloting a
Hawker Hurricane on patrol in the
vicinity of St. Germain, West of
King's Lynn, September 3rd, 1940.

*Greater love hath no man than this
that a man lay down his life for his
friends.*

After the war, the family placed a bronze plaque next to John Lords on the wall above the choir stalls where he had sat as a chorister, on the south side of the chancel.

In September 1985, the members of The Fenland Aircraft Preservation Society undertook a project named The Saddlebow Hurricanes to recover the remains of the Howarth's and Stibor's aircraft. The wreckage of Howarth's aircraft was discovered some 11 feet down in the former orchard now a stubble field. The seat control column and head armour were recovered first then eventually the Rolls Royce Merlin engine.

After painstaking restoration, the Engine and some artefacts went on display at the Fenland Aviation Museum Wisbech.

The Fenland Aviation Museum closed in 2023 and a new exhibition hall was being built at the City of Norwich Aviation Museum to accommodate most of the exhibits.

Denis, Fredrick's younger brother became a pilot with 158 Squadron, survived the war, and lived for many years on Flamville Road, Burbage



Denis. Howarth