



Investigating a Mystery

In Holy Cross Churchyard is a war grave, authorised by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, of Acting Sqn Ldr Frederic Bright Harvey, RAFVR, who died on 21 October 1942. Although most war graves are in military cemeteries, many are in churchyards, typically close to the place of death. But why is there one in Sarratt? Believing that the criterion for a war grave was that the deceased must have been killed as a result of enemy action, I checked the Roll of Honour board in the church but Harvey's name was absent. So perhaps he was not local; but if so, why was he buried here? Was he killed locally? Did he have local family? Curiosity aroused, I decided to investigate further.

Frederic was born and educated in Rochester, Kent, became a journalist with a national newspaper, married in 1911, lived in south London, and in 1918 fought in France. In the late 1920s there was a divorce, and after moving into a London flat he met Kathleen Woods, who lived with her parents in Rickmansworth, but probably worked in London. In 1930 he took lodgings in Rickmansworth and they married in 1931, settling in Wheatsheaf Cottages, then from 1934 in Gable End, Deadmans Ash Lane.

With the onset of WW2, Frederic left the newspaper world and entered the RAFVR, perhaps needed for his long journalistic experience, which might have included photographic skills, for the Roll of Honour at his old school states that he was 'in charge of an Air Ministry Photographic Unit'. He and Kathleen moved in 1940 to live in the Gate Inn, Chorleywood (where perhaps she had a live-in job), and in June 1941 he took up a post as Acting Sqn Ldr in Whitehall, one that he held until he died. Was he killed? No. His death certificate revealed that he died in the Gate Inn from food poisoning after eating mushrooms (which he had gathered locally and had been cooked by Kathleen).

I asked the CWGC and the RAF why he was granted a military grave, and the latter replied that, 'responsibility for graves includes all personnel who died whilst serving as a member of HM Forces between September 1939 and 1947. This includes personnel who did not die as a result of enemy action'.

So this explains the war grave, but why is his name not on the Roll of Honour in Holy Cross? With eight years' residence in Sarratt, he was undoubtedly 'local' but perhaps the British Legion (of which he had been a member following his service in WW1) restricted its