

LOWDHAM PARISH COUNCIL

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Service for RAF Newton trio killed in explosion at base in 1940

Three RAF airmen have been remembered 80 years after they died in an explosion at their base

Frederick Stewart, Walter Blom and William Franklin were among seven killed when an aircraft bomb detonated at RAF Newton on 27 July 1940

Their graves are at St Peter's Churchyard, East Bridgford, where the service was held on Monday evening – 27 July 2020

Organiser Phil Rudman said: "With VE Day celebrations limited, it felt fitting to mark their anniversary"

He described it as "a beautiful and respectful event" attended by about 30 people

"Three wreaths were laid for them. Their families said they were touched and appreciative," he added

"The village has been fantastic at remembering fallen servicemen every year"

Mr Rudman added: "I spotted the distinctive war grave headstones during a walk and I wondered about their stories

"A small group decided to research them and see if we could track down any relatives"

Records showed a flare started a fire on a parked bomber and while a team tackled the flames, the munitions exploded, killing those nearby

They found Flt Lt Walter Blom, 23, from Australia, was a decorated pilot, who had been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross in battles during the Nazi invasion of France just weeks earlier. Sgt William Franklin, 28, grew up in Radlett, Hertfordshire, and had just been awarded the British Empire Medal while Aircraftman First Class Fred Stewart, aged 22, came from Cookstown, Northern Ireland

Mr Rudman said: "I managed to find the great niece of Walter Blom who came from Tasmania. She lives in Hobart

"She asked her family, found some old photos which had been archived on a memory stick in a 'forgotten drawer'. She and her family have also been quite touched that we are organising the event today

Descendants of AC Stewart will also be sent a record of the service but no family for Sgt Franklin has yet been traced

A Commonwealth War Graves Commission plaque will be attached to the entrance to the churchyard, along with an information board displayed in the porch

Newton Parish was represented by the Chair of Parish Council, Mrs Penny Higgs, who laid the RAF Wreath (the middle one in the picture).

A commonwealth War Graves Plaque has now been placed on the wall of St Peters. She said the service was very moving.

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