

Flying Officer Edward James McCabe

“On 24th July 1945, when just four years old, I witnessed the crash of a Mustang III just 200 yards away from my garden in Hull, Yorkshire, England.”

The volunteers at the King Township Archives receive many intriguing requests for information, but few are as moving and as compelling as the one we received from 73-year-old Ivor Rogers in January of this year. As we read more of Mr. Rogers' email, our interest grew:

Mr. Rogers continued: “Recent researches show that this single-engine fighter had suffered a catastrophic mechanical failure. The pilot was Flying Officer Edward James McCabe, service no. J/43858 of 441 Squadron, Royal Canadian Air Force, and son of Joseph and Mary Meagher McCabe, then of King Township Ontario...It is very likely that I owe my life to the pilot's courage in just missing my house.” Mr. Rogers believes that he may be the “sole living witness of this tragedy” and he wished to make contact with any living relatives of this brave young pilot. Mr. Rogers discovered that the McCabe family had attended the Sacred Heart church in King City, and he hoped that we would continue the search on his behalf: “any help that your Society can offer in this regard would be incredibly welcome.”

Our first step was to contact Reverend Michael Martell, the parish priest of Sacred Heart Parish. Rev. Martell knew that the McCabe family had helped to establish the original Roman Catholic Sacred Heart community on Jane Street during the Great Depression of the 1930s, but not even the oldest parishioners knew where the family had gone. We found a McCabe in King City, but she was from a different branch of the family. We thought we had found the right McCabes in Colgan and then near Brockville, but we soon realized that they were not direct descendants either. Sharon Bentley of the King Township Library, and Kathleen Fry of the King Township Museum, talked and wrote to their many contacts but to no avail. Discouraged, and almost ready to admit defeat, one day we entered “Flying Officer Edward James McCabe” into the Search field of the Library's online Ancestry.ca link. Suddenly, to our surprise and delight, the picture of a smiling young man in a dapper suit jacket appeared on our screen, along with his family tree and the email address of Bill Harper, who had posted the photograph and the information. This was a picture of our elusive Edward James McCabe and we had found his family at last.

Bill Harper, the son of Edward's older sister Caroline, was in the midst of creating his family tree on Ancestry.ca. His mother had talked very little about her youngest brother, who had died so tragically near the end of the war, although she named Bill's brother after him. Bill's mother and all of her siblings had passed away, his cousins were scattered far and wide, and Bill thought that he had posted all he would ever know about his long lost uncle.

The Archives volunteers took great pleasure in connecting Ivor Rogers and Bill Harper: the magic of the internet allowed us to bridge time and to link interesting people, far

away places, and fascinating stories. Ivor Rogers intends to visit Edward's grave in Harrogate, Yorkshire "in order to pay my utmost respects." Bill plans to share Edward's story on the Canadian War Museum website. The bravery and sacrifice of King Township's young Flying Officer Edward James McCabe has not been forgotten – his story has touched and connected all of us.

Louise Di Iorio, KTHS Archives
April 2014



Harrogate (Stonefall) Cemetery

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission is responsible for the commemoration of almost 1,700,000 members of the Commonwealth forces who gave their lives in the two world wars. The graves and memorials of these men and women, who came from all parts of the Commonwealth and who were of many faiths and of none, are found around the globe in some 150 countries.

During the two world wars the United Kingdom became an island fortress and a base for equipping and training troops and launching land, sea and air operations. The thousands who were lost in these operations and have no known grave are commemorated on memorials across the country. Many more — nearly 170,000 who died of wounds received on active service, of sickness or disease, or in training accidents — are buried in cemeteries and churchyards throughout the United Kingdom.

In Yorkshire, numerous airfields were established during the Second World War as bases for the bomber offensive against targets in Germany and occupied Europe, most notably at Harrogate, Linton-on-Ouse, Tockwith, Rufforth, Marston Moor and Allerton Park.

Only a few First World War casualties had been buried in various sections of Harrogate (Stonefall) Cemetery but, as the Second World War intensified, the plot of land originally set aside by the local authorities for service war burials proved insufficient and in July 1943 burials began in the two acre plot known as the Air Forces Section.

These two plots contain nearly all the cemetery's 1,000 Second World War burials. Many of these casualties died in the military wing of Harrogate General Hospital and most were airmen, two-thirds of whom served with the Royal Canadian Air Force which had a strong presence in the area.

The Cross of Sacrifice was unveiled in July 1951 by the High Commissioner for Canada and dedicated by the Chaplain-in-Chief of the Royal Air Force.







FLYING OFFICER
E. J. MCCABE
PILOT
ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE
24TH JULY 1945 AGE 21