Warrant Officer Pilot

LOUIS CLIFFORD ASHFORD

566345 Royal Air Force

Died

8 May 1942

Aged 26

Buried at Weston-super-Mare Cemetery

Section Y, Grave 231



The Ashfords were not, despite appearances, a typical Blackdown Hills family. Jack Ashford, father of Louis (he seems to have been Louis to the family, and Cliff to others) had been adopted by the Gill family of Churchstanton.

Named Noel Ashford (a Christmas Day baby) he was the illegitimate son of Jane Ashford, a domestic servant of Dunkeswell – no father is named on his birth certificate. He was born in the Honiton Workhouse in 1889, and lived with the Gill family at Newton Cottage in Red Lane, Churchstanton. It was not a good start to life; very likely his mother had no option but to give him up. The head of the Gill household was James, a blacksmith; by the time Noel appeared most of the family were grown up. By 1901 he'd become 'John Noel', and by 1911 Jack, which was how everyone knew him.

What was his connection with the Gill family? Curiously, on Clifford's 1916 birth certificate (registered by his mother) his name is given as 'Jack Gill Ashford'. Could one of the sons have been his father? Impossible to tell.

Jack had dreadful bad luck. Geoffrey Berry remembers his grandfather telling him that '[Jack] had met with an accident as a teenager on Corfe Hill when a cart ran backwards and his legs were crushed by the wheel going over them'. Added to this he had an accident in which he lost an eye. Given such problems the Ashfords were not well off, but '[Jack] worked on the Chard roads, and dug graves and looked after the Churchyard at Otterford. Also chimed the bells.'

He married in 1913; his wife Dorothy was working as a kitchenmaid at Otterhead (a house of 26 rooms – quite a contrast to the 4 rooms in which Jack was living at Flood Cottage, Churchstanton at the same time!) for East India Merchant William Black. She was born in 1891 in London, but – and again, a surprise – her adoptive parents were actors, Whitmore and Violet Ledger; in 1911 they were lodging with the rest of their theatre company in Barnsley.

The Ashfords had four children, two boys and two girls (Winifred Emily and Dorothy Joyce). Louis was born on February 7 1916; the family then were living in Moor Lane, Churchinford. Geoffrey Berry

found a cutting (probably from the Somerset County Gazette) telling of another misfortune: 'Another sadness for the Ashford family, dated October 1921.

"Otterford. Child's Sudden Death. Great sympathy is felt throughout the parish with Mr and Mrs J Ashford of Birchwood whose little son, aged three and a half years, died after an illness of about 24 hours. It is supposed that the child [Arthur] had eaten some poisonous hedge berries. The funeral took place at Otterford on Thursday 27th inst."

By this time the Ashfords were probably living at Staple Hill Cottage (or Tar Cottage, so called because the walls were tarred to keep out the wet), on the main road at the end of Hornsey Lane. The cottage, now a ruin, is still there.

Louis went to school at Huish's Grammar School in Taunton, to which he must have won a scholarship; in 1932 he came out 37th nationally in the limited competition for aircraft apprentices entering the RAF. It must have felt like the way out to a new life for him.



Western Morning News December 21 1932

On January 10th 1933 Louis arrived, as part of the 27th entry (he's on the 27th's Roll of Honour), to start his training at RAF Halton, Buckinghamshire.

'Following the end of WW1, Trenchard's vision of a permanent RAF was published in a now famous memorandum which was endorsed by Winston Churchill, the Secretary of State for Air, in December 1919. An RAF Apprentice Scheme based at Halton, was a key thrust in the paper. Trenchard believed that the only way to recruit high quality mechanics for the ever-more technical Service was to train them internally. At the heart of his vision was the recruitment of well educated boys between the ages of 15 and 16 who, because of their resourcefulness and intelligence, could rapidly absorb the necessary technical training , and thereby complete their apprenticeship in 3 years, instead of the standard 5 years in civilian life.' RAF History of Halton

He joined No 2 Wing at Halton as an Aircraft Apprentice and completed his three year training in January 1936, emerging as Aircraftsman First Class. He was posted to 16 (AC) Squadron in that month, and then in March sent overseas to 6 (B) Squadron in the Middle East. Stationed at Ismailia on the Suez Canal and at Ramleh in Palestine, the Squadron was part of the force dealing with the developing problem of tensions between Jews and Arabs. In May 1937 Louis was promoted to Leading Aircraftsman; he returned to England in September 1938 to 1 RAF Depot (NE) Uxbridge, and thence in October to No 26 (T) Group:

'No. 26 (T) Group has charge of the twenty-three Elementary and Reserve Flying Training Schools which are run by civilian companies for the elementary (formerly *ab initio*) training of short-service officers and airmen pilots before they go on to the R.A.F. Flying Training Schools of No. 23 (T) Group.' *FlightGlobal/Archive May 24 1938*

Evidently at this point he was moving on from air mechanic to pilot, specifically a ferry pilot, flying planes from factory to Squadron or where ever was required.

By January 1939 he was back at Uxbridge, and later in the month joined 5 Flight Training School; he was promoted to Corporal in April. After spending a short time at 9 Air Training School in July and August, he returned to 5 Flight Training School and then on to No 2 Ferry Pool in September, having been promoted to Sergeant. After a period at 4 Ferry Pool he moved on to 39 Maintenance Unit, Colerne. At Colerne they handled Hurricanes and Spitfires, ferrying them out to North Africa, the Middle East and Far East.

Late in 1940 Louis married Kathleen - Kay - Mooney in Weston-super-Mare. In April 1941 he was promoted to Temporary Flight Sergeant, and in October to Temporary Warrant Officer Pilot, the last rank before being commissioned. 'Temporary' was a wartime convention. He moved around between 10 Maintenance Unit at Hullavington, 33 Maintenance Unit at Lyneham and 39 Maintenance Unit at Colerne.

It must have seemed to Louis at this stage of his life that, despite the War, things were going his way: married, doing a job he no doubt loved and heading towards a commission. He was living at Trimnels Farm, Colerne, with his wife there too one assumes. But it was Wartime, and things could very quickly go awry, as, sadly, they did for him. On Friday May 8 1942 he was ferrying Spitfire VB W3607 from 39 MU Colerne to the Unit's Satellite Landing Ground at Starveal Farm, Woodstock, Oxfordshire. It seems he lost control on approaching to land, and crashed, dying instantaneously of multiple injuries and burns.

An inquest was held in Woodstock, and we have a full transcript. His Colerne Squadron Leader, H Vernon L'Amy, giving evidence at the inquest, said that 'The weather conditions were not ideal, and you do get bumps there over the trees on the approach, and this might make the machine stall. The landing ground is small and the speed has to be slower on this account. There is a very small factor of safety in approaching the small landing grounds.'

Louis was given a full military funeral at Weston-super-Mare, his wife's home town; there's a detailed account in the Somerset County Gazette. His death notice, evidently inserted by his parents, refers to him as a Test Pilot; although his family still believe this to be the case, there is no other evidence to substantiate it. As far as we understand from the records, he was a Ferry Pilot. He is buried in the Commonwealth War Graves section of Weston-super-Mare Cemetery.

His wife Kay remarried in 1949, in Weston, to Stanley Baker. His mother Dorothy died in 1957, after both she and Jack had gone to live with their daughter Joyce in Norton Fitzwarren, leaving Staple Hill/Tar Cottage abandoned.

(My thanks to Bill Chorley, RAF researcher, for guiding my steps in investigating Louis Ashford's RAF career. Many thanks too to Louis' nieces Val and Nina for sharing photos and family memories.)

A Satellite Landing Ground is typically an airfield with one or two grass runways which is designed throughout to be "hidden" from the sky by using woods and other natural features to hide the presence of aircraft and associated buildings. The landing grounds were mainly used by RAF maintenance units which used the areas to disperse aircraft to reduce the likelihood of attacks from the air. – *Wikipedia entry for location of Satellite Landing Grounds*.



Mural at Starveal Farm – working on a Spitfire. From WW2 Airfields of Oxfordshire

Louis Ashford's grave, Weston super Mare

No. 2 Satellite Landing Ground, Starveal Farm,Woodstock: 51.51'.18" North 001.20'.42" West. Opened on 14 June 1941.

Spitfire VB W3607 had served previously with 41 Squadron, a fighter squadron which was equipped with Spitfire VBs between August 1941 and March 1943, by which time it was re-equipping with Spitfire XIIs. W3607 was produced at Chattis Hill, and had a Merlin engine.



ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS

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1911 CENSUS DOROTHY LEDGER

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1901 CENSUS DOROTHY LEDGER

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WESTERN MORNING NEWS DEC 21 1932



With Best Wishes for Christmas and Throughout the Coming Year ick all . No. 6 (Bomber) Squadroi Royal Air Force Ramleh, Pale Akkerst



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OFFICIAL SENSITIVE PERSONAL



Transcribed details from the Record of Service for Warrant Officer Pilot Louis Clifford ASHFORD [566345]

Surname:	ASHFORD
Forenames:	Louis Clifford
Service Number:	566345
Rank:	Warrant Officer
Date of Birth:	07 February 1916
Place of Birth:	Chard, Somerset
Date of Enlistment:	10 January 1933
Killed in Action:	08 May 1942
Promotions:	See attached
Movements:	See attached
Honours and Awards:	General Service Medal w/c "Palestine"

OFFICIAL SENSITIVE PERSONAL

OFFICIAL SENSITIVE PERSONAL



Warrant Officer Pilot Louis Clifford ASHFORD [566345]

Movements

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OFFICIAL SENSITIVE PERSONAL



Warrant Officer Pilot Louis Clifford ASHFORD [566345]

Promotions, Reclassifications, Reversions

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1. 1. 7	LAC	
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OFFICIAL SENSITIVE PERSONAL

Oxfordshire) TO WIT

DEPOSITIONS of Witnesses touching the Death of LOUIS CLIFFORD ASHFORD

severally taken on Oath, and acknowledged, on the behalf of our Sovereign Lord the King, at the Dwelling House of Fublic Assistance Institution

in the Parish of Woodstock - - - - - - - in the County of Oxford, on Monday - - - - - the Eighteenth - - - day of May - - - - - one thousand nine hundred and forty two before me Harold Lambourn Franklin - - - - - - - - - -His Majesty's Coroner for the Central - - - - District of the said County, on an Inquisition then and there taken on view of the Body of the said LOUIS CLIFFORD - - - ASHFORD - - - - - - then lying dead as follows (to wit)

A. Thur I eslie COLLINS

I am a Squadron Leader in the R.A.F. and Senior Medical Officer at the R.A.F.Station at Kidlington.

On the afternoon of 8th May last the body of deceased was brought to my Station and I examined the body, which was the same one which the Coroner viewed at my Station on the 10th May last, according to information given to me.

The deceased was 26 years of age and he was a I was informed deceased died on crashing ab Starvall Farm that afferroon. The cause of death was multiple ingivies and burns, and death would be instantancous. arthur tealie bellins s/L.

rylenry Reel ERNEST, PERKS

I am an Aircraftsman in the Royal Air Force stationed at Colerne, Wilts, to which Station deceased belonged.

On Friday the 8th May 1942 I was on duty at that Aerodrome, and at approximately 2-50 p.m. I strapped deceased into a Spitfire Aircraft No. W.3607 which then taxied across the aerodrome to take off from the runway. To other ferran could have got into the machine

EAP Perks

Herbert DIXON

I am a Corporal in the Royal Air Force stationed at Starvall, Wootton, Oxon.

At approximately \not{A} - $i \not{f}_{\mu}$ on 8th May last I was about to cross the aerodrome to Headquarters when I noticed a Spitfire Aircraft doing a left hand circuit prior to landing. I stopped to watch it and waited for it to land before crossing the aerodrome. The aircraft was completing its left hand circuit banking to the left and approaching from the South West at a very four — altitude and travelling very slowly.

On the point of straightening out from the left hand turn I saw the aircraft do a half roll to the right and fall into an inverted dive at about 60 degrees from the horizontal disappearing behind the trees fringing 2 site. I then saw smoke rising from behind the trees. I shouted to the men working on No. 3 site "She's crashed" ordered them to follow me and ran to the scene. On the way I instructed A.C.Marston to pick up an extinguisher and at that moment I saw the fire tender proceeding at full speed to the crash, so I instructed Marston to drop the extinguisher to enable him to run faster. I, with others rendered all possible assistance.

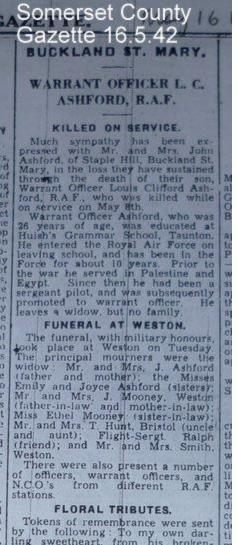
The plane which crashed was "W.3boy and there was only one person in the plane. Which and.

R for PIERCY I am a Flying Officer in the Royal Air Force N Starrall Farm. I did not see this crash, but later I examined the wreckage of Spitfire Aircraft No. W.3607. The crash was due to stalling. The last paragraph of my statement produced needs modification. I cannot say if the flops had been operated or not. I cannot say why the machine shalled. 19 do not think it possible owing to the discoregration of the machine to say why the machine crashed R. Kiency Flo. Henry Demon L'dmy I am a Squadron header at boleme, and officer in charge of flyin g there. by last I authorised a flight by teceased. He was Iflying a Spiffire W. 3607. I produce the maintenance sheet in respect of this machine She machine was in good infulled by deceased. Deceased was a fully qualified order and altworthy and good pilob. I was at Starvall derodrome. Woothon waiting for deceased to come in, and saw his machine crash out of control. I had just landed, and my own engine was running, so I cannot say if his engine was running property or not. The beard the evidence of the last witness, but an afraid I cannot add anything. The weather conditions were not ideal, and you do gib bumps there over the trees on the approach, and this might make the machine stall. The landing ground is small and the speed has is be slower on this become.

There is a very small factor of safety in approaching the small landing growing HV.h any st-

Henry John Thomas blamp I am a thying offices in the R.A. F. at Starvall Farm, Woollon. according to information received deceased was 26 years old. Wid personal papers were handed to me for safe custody and from his PAS. Book his address appears to be Francelo Farm, boleme, Willo. Wattand Officer. He had been in the Zoice about 1 years. An Clamp Jo.

n the one o n the n triew by n i view by n pilot cras pilot cras further say the Royal ta.	And	An Inquisition taken for our Sovereign Lord the King, at
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the said Harold Lambourn Franklin do say:- LIFFORD ASHFORD died at the Farish of Wootton in the Death was that the aircraft of which he was the said LOUIS CLIFFORD ASHFORD died at Wootton afor of which he was the pilot accidentally orashed of soid LOUIS CLIFFORD ASHFORD died at Wootton afor of which he was the pilot accidentally orashed of a which he was the pilot accidentally orashed of 	of	
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<pre>ibourn Franklin do at the time of his Death was a</pre>	And so May 15	do further say that the said IOUIS CLIFFORD ASHFORD died at Wootton aforesaid on the 8th day o 342 when the aircraft of which he was the pilot accidentally crashed out of control
at the time of his Death was a and a Warrant Officer No.566345 in was at Trimnels Farm, Colerne in the County of Wi was at Trimnels Farm, Colerne in the County of Wi at the said Harold Lambourn Franklin al this Eighteenthday of May1942.	and I,	the said Harold Lembourn Franklin do further say that the sa
and a was at Trimnels Farm, f I, the said Harold I al this Eighteenth -	TOUIS (at the time of his Death was a
That his private restance was at frimmers farm, outside in the outpoint of withos. In Withess whereof 1, the said Harold Lambourn Franklin , have hereun subscribed my Hand and Seal this Elepteenth day of May 1942.	Twenty	and a
	that hi J	ls private residence was at Trimnels Farm, Colerne in the County of Wilts. 11 WULLNESS whereof I, the said Harold Lambourn Franklin , have hereu
	subscri	bed my Hand and Seal this Eighteenthday of May 1942.
		A star



NCO'S from different R.A.F. stations **FLORAL TRIBUTES.** Tokens of remembrance were sent by the following: To my own dar-ling sweetheart, from his broken-hearted wife, Kay-" Sweet memor-ies will always be mine". In memory of our dearest boy, from his sorrowing Mum and Dao-" One of the best": In affectionate remem-brance of our darling brother, from Em and Joyce-" Peace perfect peace": To our dearest Clifford, Mummie, Daddie, and Ethel-" Rest in peace ": In affectionate remem-brance, Uncle Tom. Aunt Doll, and Les. With deepest sympathy, from Tom and Claice and the boys. Cyril, Ken, and Allan ; With deepest sym-pathy, Mr. and Mrs. Durman, Fred, and Joan : With our very deepest sympathy, Mr. and Mrs. Harvey and family : In sincere remembrance, from a few of his friends at the Cavendish Hotel ; With very deepest sympathy, Mr. and Mrs. Leech. 18. Southville-road, Weston ; Fondest memories of Cliff, from Harold, Sal, and all at 35. Sandford-road, Weston : With deepest sympathy, from H. Snelgrove and family ; Deepest sympathy, Mas. Collect and Monica and Mr. And Mrs. Bull ; Deepest sympathy, warrant officers and senior N.C.O's, a Maintenance Hu!, R.A.F. ; To a fine pilot and great friend, Squadron Leader Henry L'Amy ; With deepest sympathy, from all personnel of No. - Site, R.A.F. In memory of Ash, from Flight-Sergt, and Mrs. Bain ; Deep-est sympathy, from the commanding officer and officers and airmen, a Maintenance +Hut, R.A.F. ; Sincere sympathy to dear Ash, from R.A.F. Police. m D o p DI 1.6 23 a CE he ap to ea be Sa A M ha sii to Tł w ap I } siz £8 an the We wa COL as lb.

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DYD 669848 CAU	CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a Register of Deaths in the District above mentioned. Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the Seal of the said Office, the 25th	Ille Watten R.Y. Chilford R.Y. Chilford	Columns:- 1 2 No. When and Name and surname where died	REGISTRATION DISTRICT 1942 DEATH in the Sub-district of Chipping Norton	CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF DEATH
CAUTION: THERE ARE OFFENCES RELATING TO FALSIFYING OR ALTERING A CERTIFICATE AND USING OR POSSESSING A FALSE CERTIFICATE *CROWN COPYRIGHT WARNING: A CERTIFICATE IS NOT EVIDENCE OF IDENTITY.	in the certified copy of a Register of Deat 7CE, under the Seal of the said Office, the	Made 97 Trimvels Fam decidents Made 26 Colesne. Wilts. Was de ausents Official de Marca da Marca Juno 12561373 in de ont of co	3 4 5 me Sex Age Occupation	T Chipping Norton	VTRY OF DEATH
E THERE ARE OFFENCES RELATING TO FALSIFYING OR ALTERING A CER AND USING OR POSSESSING A FALSE CERTIFICATE ©CROWN COPYRIGHT WARNING: A CERTIFICATE IS NOT EVIDENCE OF IDENTITY.	ths in the District above mentioned. e 25th	hat of which when put of which he put on ashed no f. H.	6 Cause of death Signa	CHIPPING NORTON in the County of Oxford	
	day of March	Betthicate received Turntieth hom H.L. Franklin Turntieth Grannels Ostadoline May C Cartal Districts C Cartal Districts I Agreat 1111 1984 May 1942 1042	7 8 Signature, description and When residence of informant registered	ford	GIVEN AT THE GENERAL Application Number 5552342-1
See note overleaf	2014	H.A. Hustings Registrat	9 Signature of registrar		GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE Application Number 5552342-1







WESTON SUPER MARE WAR GRAVES CEMETRY

	SCHED		th, U.D. or R.D. Chard, Jo SURNAMES	0,	1	BIRTH		S,		
ADDRESS.	No.	Sub. No.	AND	S, P. or	M. or F.	Day.	-	W. or	PERSONAL OCCUPATION.	See INSTRUC
	2	No. 3	OTHER NAMES.	1.	6	7	8	D. 9	10	
Moor Farm	53	1	Saller, Frank L.	-	M	15-Feb	86	M		
			Salter, Hossie a.			28 Se p	493	M	Unpaid domestic duties	
			Salter arthur a. g.	_	M	50,00	21	5	Unpaid domestic duties General farm work assisting father	
				reco	rd is	officially	closed	d.	COND COLOR HAVENUL	
			This	reco	rd is	officially	closed	i.		
			This	reco	rd is	officially	closed	d.		
Greenlands	54	1	Rust Francia &	-	M	30,00	11	M	Form Manager	- nu
<u>v (co., co., co., co., co., co., co., co., </u>		2	Rust Francis J. Rust Phyllis H. B.	-	F	23 Fel	10	M	Unpaid domestic duties	
			This	recor	rd is	officially of	closed	1.	whypered april 100 backer	
1283 50 CR282 POR		11	Rust angela M.V.			1 /	1		Under School age .	The second second
1073						officially of			under venous une.	
Dead man Farm	56	1	Durman, George	-					Dairy farmer	
veay man furm		2	Duran verge		F	10/001	88	M	Il sid dimenti dit	
		2	Durman Mabel E.	-	NI	17 Mal	18	S	Unpaid domestic duties agricultural tractor driver pressing favoring & land alteration	
Pro la Cra, Crast 111	5-7	,	ashford Jack 9	-	M	252	88	n	General farm Cabourer	
Boombe Cige Staple Hill		2	afland Dow H I	,	F	20 NED	a	N	Unpaid domestic duties	
Staple Hill	58	1								
siaple sile		2	mutter George		-	9 sept	96	14	Dairy farmer	A
		2	matter fieldie		-	y jan	96	17	Unpaid domestic duties Sam Carter general farm wo Couman glaced farm work assisting father	*
		3	Muller, Svor 9.	-	14	9 Mich	21	5	Couman, general farm work	
		4	Muder Cafford R.	-	M	22/Mch	22	5	assisting father	,
Halls well	50								Kitchen maid incapacitates	-
stallo Well	59		Spiller Charles E.	-						21 De Jand Fled
		1.	Spiller Olive m.			V3/tug			Unpaid domestic duties	- China and Manus Mar A. Co
Shiers Farm	10	,			1	0 1	1		17	The second second
shiers sarm	00		Board Joseph H.						Farmer	
		2	Board, Edith J. Board, William C.		F	1100	12	["]"	Farm labourer	
Castle View	61	0	Moth Milline		M	1 pan	15	M	Lorry driver for haulage	
Jasae view	61		Notley Starold d.		- F.	LOSTPL	04	14	Contractor.	
		2	Novey cauch m.	-	r die	officially	06	11	Unpaid domestic duties	
FOLAS	1264	1								
		4	Notley, Doreen M.	-	F	28/100	33	5.	General Cabourer, hedget	
School House	63		Knight, Sam		14	y sept	03	14	Under School age General Caboures, hedget A hoad worker Rating Valuation Officer Sepurg food Securities Officer	
unon youse	63		Colman inarles		M	Sopec	00	11	Deputy food seculive officer	
		2	Colman ada D.	-	1	19May	108	141	Head Jeacher	
						officially c				
7.8164	1.	1							1 c min i	
Fair End Cottage	64	1000	Le Samuel	-					Smallholder farmer	
		2		-	F	22 Oct	00	11	Unpaid domestic duties	
		3	Lee Robert	-	M	22 Mct	12	5	Jarm worker - general	
						officially c				
M	1			recor	u is c	officially c	1 1	100	11 p. Horseman .	13
Meanword	65	/	White Hedley	-	M	15 Jun	1.1.	W	Haulier for road work Dairy farmer & general	
M	11	2	while Raymond C.	-	M			5.	farm worker	
Mannings	66		Fogwill, John	-	M	26Dec	82	M	Farmer	

1939 CENSUS, ASHFORD FAMILY