

# Researching Ronald Palmer



## **The story of a Llangwm airman**

Some years ago a letter arrived at the Western Telegraph from an RAF researcher Andy Ingham asking for help in tracing relatives of the late Ronald Palmer of Llangwm. Andy hoped to obtain a photograph of Flt Sgt Palmer to appear in a book he was compiling about the squadron. Ron Palmer served in RAF 127 Squadron during WW2.

An editor at the local newspaper forwarded it to journalist John Evans of the Pembroke Dock Heritage Centre and also of the Pembrokeshire Aviation Group.

John and Andy exchanged emails with the details they knew.

Andy wrote:

*\* On the 6th April 1945 one of the pilots of 127 Squadron, a Sergeant Ronald Palmer was tragically killed in a flying accident in Holland. He was 22 years old.*

*\* Ronald Palmer came from Llangwm Pembrokeshire.*

*\* He is buried in the Bergen-op-Zoom War Cemetery in Holland.*

*Thanks for your help.*

*Andy Ingham*

John replied:

*I am a Pembrokeshire Aviation Group member and researcher. I do not have much on Ronald Palmer but his loss was referred to in another local paper, the West Wales Guardian. A report stated that Sgt Pilot Palmer, RAF, of Chapel Row, Llangwm, lost his life in air operations. Aged 22 he joined the RAF in 1942 and carried out training in South Africa.*

*After obtaining his Wings he served in Italy and in January 45 'transferred to this country to carry out operations on the Western Front'.*

*That's all that I noted in the local press but will check further when I am next in the local Record Office which has the newspaper's files. There may be other references locally.*

*I am not sure if the Telegraph has used your appeal. I hope so and I hope also that it has brought contacts with the family. Let me know whatever as I have contacts at Llangwm which I will gladly follow up on.*

*Many years ago I went to Bergen-op-Zoom cemetery but was then unaware that a local lad was buried there. I suspect there are other Pembrokeshire servicemen there as well as it is a large cemetery.*

*Interestingly, there is no reference to Ronald in the third volume of Fighter Command Losses by Norman Franks (Midland Counties Publications).*

*Good luck with your researches. If I can help further please come back to me.*

*Best wishes,*

*John Evans*

Andy Ingham was grateful for the reply and sent the following:

*Thanks for the information John.*

*It is more than I had.*

*I can explain why the loss of Ronald Palmer is not listed in FCL by Franks. His aircraft (Spitfire XVI s/n RR212 coded 9N Z) stalled on take off and crashed. The aircraft did not catch fire but Palmer was killed on impact.*

*He was about to undertake an aircraft familiarization flight (Sector Recce) as he had just joined 127 Squadron at B.79. Woensdrecht. This was not considered to be an operational loss hence no entry in FCL.*

*The investigation into the accident concluded that the it was due to 'lack of Familiarity with type'.*

*(Palmer would have been familiar with the Mk IX Spitfire which was fitted with Auto Prop Control. The Mk XVI although almost identical did not have Auto Prop Control which led to the engine stalling on take off.)*

*I am very keen to locate a family member as I would like a photo of Palmer for a book I am writing.*

*Thanks for your help.*

*Andy*

## **The search for a photograph**

John Evans was quick to get in touch with Llangwm Local History Society. He told us about Andy Ingham's request and asked for our help in locating family members and a photograph of Ronald Palmer.

We had the hard facts - and there was no denying that these were very hard facts to countenance - we had only to fill in the detail and the story from within Ron Palmer's home village of Llangwm.

It turned out to be not as easy as we thought. From all the branches of the Palmer family we could not seem to contact the one to which our pilot Ron Palmer belonged. The late Gloria Thomas (nee Palmer) once told us that the Palmer dynasty started with a John Palmer of Pembroke who married a lady from Burton (maybe the then Burton parish area of Llangwm)(c1715) and had seven sons. Our search therefore spread far and wide.

Progress was made when Richard Palmer told us of a display of photographs of three Llangwm men connected to the Rugby Club who died in the Second World War. These hang in the committee room of the club.

So a photograph was found, if a little inaccessible for the moment. It was of course out of season, with the rugby club only open on certain occasions. Accordingly correspondence was set up with Michael John, then chairman of the rugby club, for permission to take down the photograph of Ronald Palmer and scan it for Andy Ingham.

An ideal opportunity arose when the club's AGM was held one evening and we were able to take the photograph out for scanning - and promptly return it within the week.



## **The search for a relative**

Word was getting around about our research - and soon we were hearing about one and another who knew someone in Ronald's family - but were not directly related. Even John Evans made a connection: *“Earlier this week I was talking to a friend of my mother's who went to Taskers. I mentioned Ronnie Palmer and she said 'I knew him'. He was a year older than her. Small world.”*

It rather belatedly occurred to us to contact our local archivist Nikki Bosworth, who is always ready and willing to help with village history enquiries. Nikki soon came up with the following information:

*“Ronald Palmer lived at number 5 Chapel Row with his parents Trevor and Lena Palmer. He was born at 1.10 a.m. on 2 December 1922 at 97 Portfield, Haverfordwest, the home of Trevor and Lena at that time. He appears to have been their first child – I don't know if he had siblings.*

*Trevor Palmer was the son of William and Maggie Palmer of Main Street, Llangwm, and was aged 3 years on the 1901 census. William Palmer was a driller at HM Dockyard – and both William and Maggie were born in Llangwm.*

You can always trust an archivist to be thorough - even the time and place of Ron Palmer's birth is mentioned. There is also a footnote, about a touching presentation that was made to Ron Palmer's father Trevor as a lasting memento on the death of his son, by his friends and fellow villagers in the Llangwm Institute:

*In Llangwm cemetery, in the far right-hand row looking up the cemetery from the gates, there is an urn inscribed “A token of respect and sympathy of Trevor Palmer from Llangwm Institute”. It is not dated.*

Nikki soon sent further information:

*I've had the chance to look at the newspapers. There is a report in the Western Telegraph of 12 April 1945 and a longer report in the West Wales Guardian of 13*

*April 1945 – with a photo of Ronnie Palmer. He was an only child, educated at Haverfordwest Grammar School, worked as a clerk in Milford for a couple of years before joining RAF. Posted to South Africa to train as a fighter pilot and returned to Europe at Xmas 1944.*

## **Progress**

We had a breakthrough with our research when Donald Rees happened to mention at that AGM in the rugby club that we might glean further information about the family from Mr Vivian Jones, who lives at Silverstream, Freystrop. He may even be related, someone said.

## **A family archive**

When I called at Vivian Jones's home in Silverstream, Freystrop, he produced a box of mementoes and proceeded to unpack an amazing assortment of photographs and information relating to the Second World War. It turns out that Ron Palmer was Vivian's first cousin - Viv's father (John Jones) and Ron's mother Lena were brother and sister.

It was most fortunate that my roundabout research had led me there and was yielding such good results. Thank goodness for people like Vivian Jones who had valued the past, and treasured it. (Sadly Viv Jones has since passed away.)

Viv had various pieces of information kept about his cousin Ron, including a newspaper cutting from 2005 (*see next page*) entitled "*Through Child's Eyes*" in which a relative of his wrote about his thoughts and reminiscences of VE Day for the local newspaper.

This news cutting looks likely to be from the Western Telegraph. "*Through Child's Eyes*"... VE Day Anniversary Special... in which William Rees (68) then living in the Midlands remembers the VE Day children's party in the Market Hall and Bonfire at Tan Bank, looking forward to his father coming home from the War. He says that he didn't realise then, at eight years old, that loss prevented many people from rejoicing with the same enthusiasm. His great aunt and uncle, Lena and Trevor Palmer, of Llangwm, lost their only son just thirty days before the surrender. He goes on to

mention that Ronnie, a former Grammar School pupil, excelled at sports, particularly rugby and cricket, and that he has a hazy memory of him as a smart and impressive young airman who called on his cousin - his (William Rees's) mother Doreen - earlier in the War.

..VE Day anniversary special.. VE Day anniversary

## Through child's eyes

**TO AN eight-year-old boy, VE Day celebrations in Haverfordwest meant parties, food and the possibility that his father would soon be home.**

William Rees, now a 68-year-old, living in the Midlands, looks back at the day from a more sober perspective.

"Surprisingly, I remember that time very well. I knew my father Bertie Rees could soon be home from the war.

The Market Hall was full of children enjoying traditional party fayre for the first time in years. There was even blancmange, which was quite unknown to many of the younger children.

I also attended a celebration bonfire, possibly on Tan Bank in Prendergast. It was a huge cubic structure, with effigies of Hitler and other Nazi leaders perched precariously in the middle.

"Being eight-years-old, I was unaware that loss prevented many people from rejoicing with the same enthusiasm - my great aunt and uncle, Lena and Trevor Palmer, of Llangwm, lost their only son just thirty days before the surrender.

Ronnie Palmer (pictured) was a former Grammar School pupil who had excelled at sports - particularly rugby and cricket.

I have a rather hazy memory of him as a smart and impressive young airman who called on his cousin Doreen - my mother - earlier in the war.

Ronnie was a 22-year-old pilot stationed in Holland with the 127 Squadron, Tactical Air Force.

At 1400 hours on Friday, April 6th, 1945, he climbed



into the cockpit of his Mark XVI Spitfire.

After a good take-off, the aircraft was seen to dive, level out, then disappear from sight.

At 1403 hours it exploded and a cloud of black smoke rose from where it was last seen.

Ronnie is buried in a War Graves Commission Cemetery in Bergen-Op-Zoom in Holland.

He would have been 83-years-old this year."

Viv Jones promised to search out more relevant information for me, he would give me a ring when I could pick it up. Even if it was more than Andy Ingham required, it was shaping up into a comprehensive record of this Llangwm airman for the local history society. Much more followed...

There were photographs of the Squadron, the first of these most likely taken during preliminary training in the UK. Seaside resorts were locations frequently taken over by the RAF, with former hotels as accommodation. From the photo caption ITW represents Initial Training Wing - the palm trees suggest Torquay.



"D" Flight, No. 2 Squadron, No. 5 I.T.W. Oct 1942.

The photographer's mark is Bayley's Studios, Plymouth, Torquay & Newquay.

49 in the photo.

*(More photographs follow)*



Two photos of RAF 127 Squadron taken while at a training base in Egypt 1944 at 71 Operational Training Unit Ismalia.

*(Andy Ingham was able to give exact location details as he already had the photographs from his cousin Emrys Williams who is seated in the middle of the second row back, top photograph.)*



For the History Society Viv Jones provided a copy of a Cricket XI team photograph in which his cousin Ronald Palmer is second from the left in the front row. (*Photograph shown below.*)



Also a photograph of the Llangwm Ladies Choir in which Lena Palmer, Ronald's mother, is in the third row down, far right. (Choir is 32 strong, plus conductor and accompanist.) (*Photograph shown below.*)



*Next, a sobering set of photographs - photos of the funeral of victims of war  
were frequently given to the family.*





*The graves were initially marked with crosses; over the next 20 years or so the Commonwealth War Graves Commission replaced them all with the familiar white headstones we see today.*

*Ronald Palmer's headstone is shown on a subsequent page.*

In expressing his gratitude to John Evans and all concerned for the outstanding photograph archive which were scanned and sent to him, Andy Ingham mentioned an exciting development in his research...

*"I have commissioned some art work of aircraft profiles flown by 127 Squadron. One I have is the Aircraft that Sgt Palmer was killed in, Spitfire XVI RR212. Can you provide me with a postal address and I will forward a couple of prints to you? (One will be for Viv Jones for all his help.)"*

After a few days John Evans appeared at our house laden with two prints of the Spitfire, a beautiful technical illustration.



RR212 was built by Vickers Armstrong at Castle Bromwich and was delivered to 8 Maintenance Unit on 18 October 1944. It was taken on strength by 127 Squadron on 23 November 1944. The first time it was used operationally was on 15 December 1944 when it was flown by the Norwegian Wing Co. Rolf A Berg on a mission to escort Mitchell bombers to Zwolle, Holland. On the 31 December 1944 RR212 was damaged, Cat C while being flown by the Canadian, Flying Officer N McCallum on a Bomber Escort mission. It was repaired on site by 420 RSU. The aircraft became the favourite of Pilot Officer EAW 'Ted' Smith and he flew it on many missions. RR212 was damaged beyond repair Cat. E on the 6 April 1945 when it crashed on take off. The pilot, Sergeant Ronald Palmer was undertaking a Sector Recce and was killed. Sergeant Palmer came from Pembrokeshire, Wales and is buried at Bergan-op-Zoom War Cemetery, Holland.



**SUPERMARINE SPITFIRE LF XVI**

**127 SQUADRON RAF**

**RR212 9N Z**

*The text from the print above is reproduced in larger type on the following page.*

*Text as it appears on the Spitfire print*

SUPERMARINE SPITFIRE LF XVI  
127 SQUADRON RAF  
RR212 9N Z

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John kept one print for the Pembroke Dock Heritage Centre/Pembrokeshire Aviation Society and I delivered one to Viv Jones, who immediately selected from his box of mementoes a small photograph of Ron Palmer, not 2" square, and fixed it firmly in the lower left hand corner of the frame – “to remember Ron whenever I look at the Spitfire print on the wall in the front hall there,” he said.

We were all grateful to Andy Ingham – not only for his fine gifts of the Spitfire prints, but also for his enquiry, without which Llangwm History Society might never have discovered Viv Jones and his much cherished collection of wartime photographs.

Ronald Palmer was not forgotten in military circles either. Over in Pembroke Dock Heritage Centre they had been planning a display in order to commemorate D-Day, June 6<sup>th</sup> 2024, 80 years on from the heroic and horrific landings on the Normandy beaches which went on to win the war and restore our freedom.

The Pembrokeshire Model Club works closely with the Pembroke Dock Heritage Centre, and they had built a model Spitfire, the very version which Ron Palmer had last flown. As a tribute, John Evans suggested that they paint it in exactly the same colours as Ron's plane. And so they did. Here is the result.



*PDHC and the Model Club customised the Spitfire model to faithfully represent the last Spitfire that Ronald Palmer flew.*



Last but not least....John Evans, who was central to this research story, just happens to have a son living in the Netherlands, not too far from the cemetery at Bergen-op-Zoom.

The next time he made a family visit to the area, he made sure he arranged a trip to the cemetery there.

John sought out the grave of Ronald Palmer, no 13.B.3, and paid his respects there. He laid a few flowers beneath the headstone, in remembrance and gratitude for his wartime service, from his people of Pembrokeshire.



*The inscription reads:*  
1651825 SERGEANT R. PALMER  
PILOT, ROYAL AIR FORCE  
6TH APRIL 1945 AGE 22

“AT THE GOING DOWN OF THE SUN  
AND IN THE MORNING  
WE WILL REMEMBER HIM.“  
MAM AND DAD



*The military cemetery at Bergen-op-Zoom,  
Ronald Palmer's final resting place.*