Robert William SMITH (1921 – 1943)





W.O. / Air Gunner, 1380261

Robert William SMITH

RAF

1657 Heavy Conversion Unit

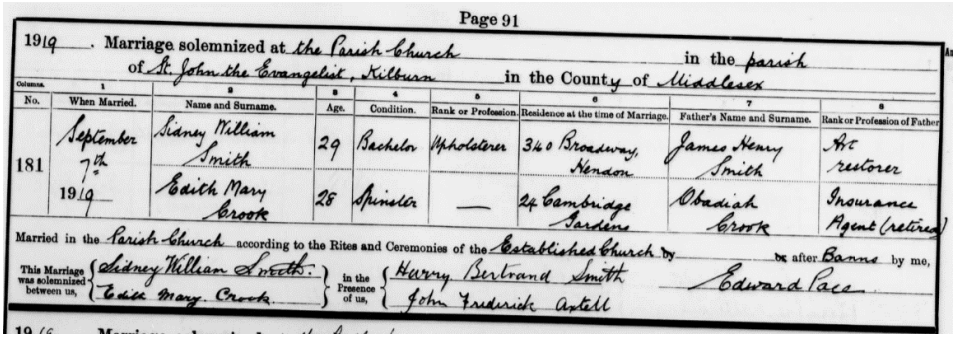
10th February 1943

Age 22



Robert William Smith (known as Bob) was born at Borehamwood on 31st July 1920 the son of upholsterer and art restorer, Sidney William Smith and his wife, Edith Mary, formerly Crook. His father enlisted in September 1914 and served during WW1 with the Kings Royal Rifle Corps. He was wounded (gun shot to left arm) and earned the Military Medal for bravery.

Bob's parents married on 7th September 1919 in Kilburn.



Page 91

1919. Marriage solemnized at the Parish Church in the parish of St. John the Evangelist, Kilburn in the County of Middlesex

Columns. No.	1 When Married.	2 Name and Surname.	3 Age.	4 Condition.	5 Rank or Profession.	6 Residence at the time of Marriage.	7 Father's Name and Surname.	8 Rank or Profession of Father.
181	September 7th 1919	Sidney William Smith	29	Bachelor	Upholsterer	340 Broadway, Hendon	James Henry Smith	Art restorer
		Edith Mary Crook	28	Spinster	—	24 Cambridge Gardens	Obadiah Crook	Insurance Agent (retired)

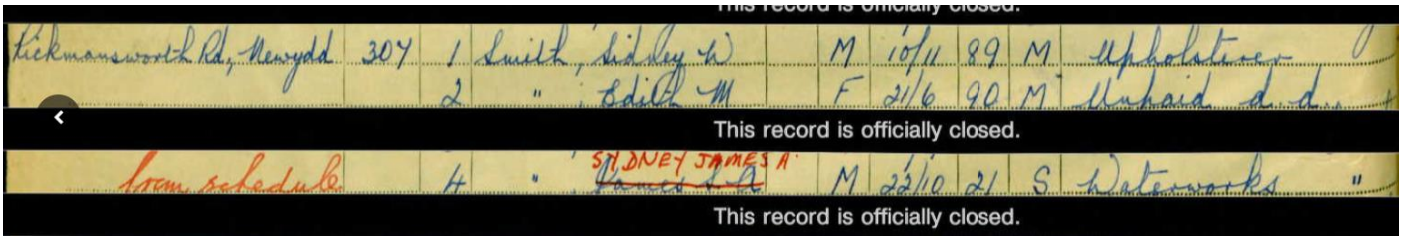
Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church by ~~Banns~~ after Banns by me, Edward Pace

This Marriage was solemnized between us, Sidney William Smith. Edith Mary Crook. in the Presence of us, Harry Bertrand Smith, John Frederick Axtell

The family had moved to Amersham by 1921 when another son, Sidney James Allan was born on 22 October.

On 8th June 1923 a sister, Doreen Winifred made the family complete. Her birth was registered in Croydon.

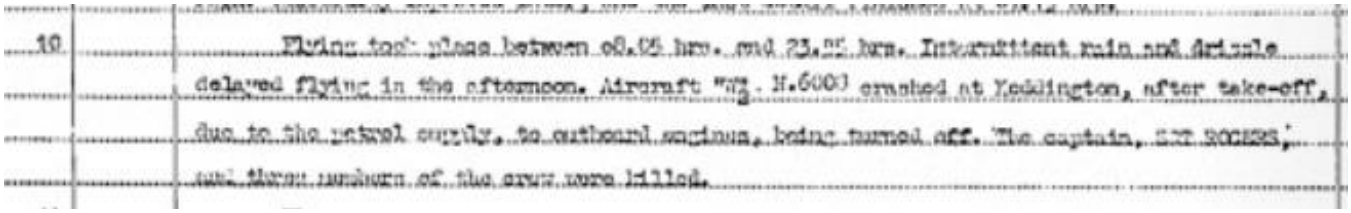
The 1939 Register shows that the family were living in Rickmansworth Road in Amersham. The two redated records are, no doubt, Bob and his sister Doreen. Brother, Sidney James Allan Smith's record is open and he was employed at the Waterworks.



It is not known when Bob joined the RAF but in February, 1943 he was undergoing some training with the 1657 Heavy Conversion Unit based at RAF Stradishall.

With the introduction of the new heavy bombers, the 4-engined Short Stirling, Avro Lancaster and Handley Page Halifax, into service, the Royal Air Force introduced Heavy Conversion Units. The role of the Heavy Conversion Units was to qualify crews trained on medium bombers to operate the heavy bombers prior to assignment to an Operational Training Unit where they would gain further experience before final posting to the operational squadrons. This HCU training was generally a three – four week course.

Almost immediately after taking off from RAF Stradishall at 0939 hrs on 10th February, Stirling N6008, suffered the total loss of two engines due to a fuel supply failure. The aircraft continued to fly in a south-westerly direction with its undercarriage still locked down. Unable to climb, the Stirling struck high tension cables before hitting some buildings at 8 Kings Hill in Kedington. It crashed through village allotments bringing power lines down before settling in a field beyond killing four of the crew and injuring two.


10 Flying took place between 08.05 hrs. and 23.[illegible] hrs. Intermittent rain and drizzle delayed flying in the afternoon. Aircraft "Z" N.6008 crashed at Keddington, after take-off, due to the petrol supply to outboard engines being turned off. The captain, Sgt ROGERS, and three members of the crew were killed.

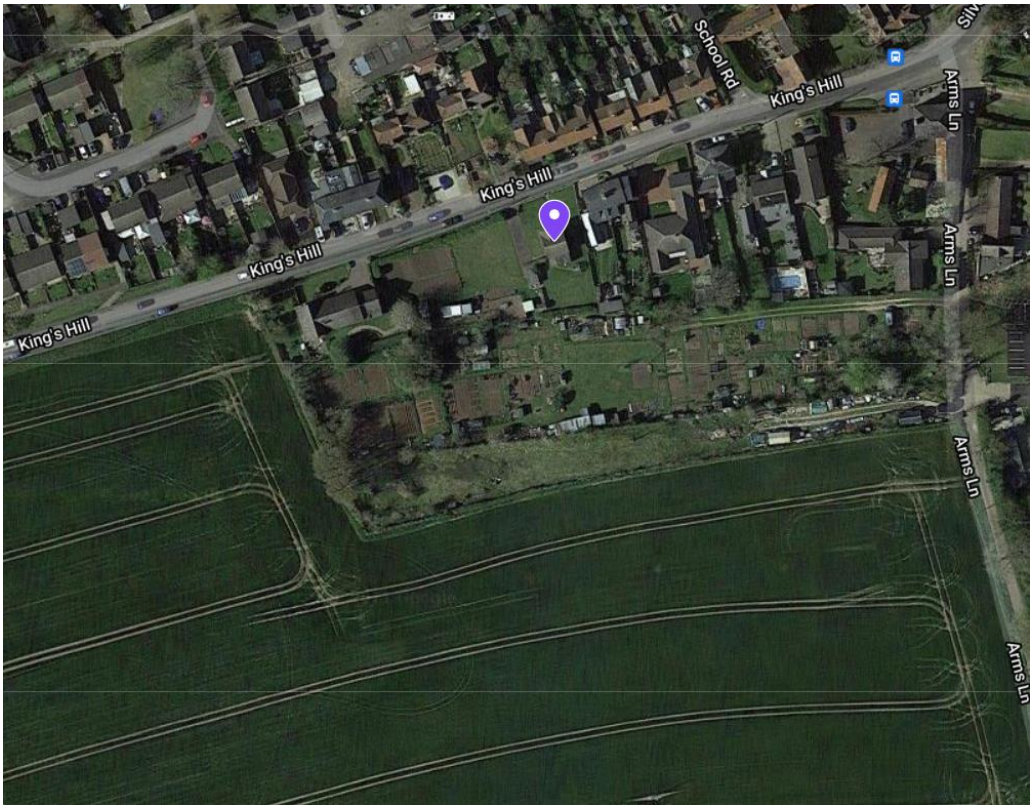
Extract from Operations Record Book

Those killed along with Bob were pilot, Sgt Sidney Clifford Rogers, navigator, Patrick Samuel O'Carroll (RNZAF) and flight engineer, Sgt Trevor Pierce. The crew members who survived were Sgt Hector Howells and Sgt B S Smith.

Local man, George Smith, aged 20, of 25 Haverhill Road, Kedington, a Stockman and member of the Home Guards, rushed to try to reach the crew but was electrocuted and also lost his life.



Photo credit: Aircrew Remembered; photo on left courtesy of Keith Howells and family



The satellite photo on the left shows the location of 8, Kings Hill with the allotments to the rear.

The fields in the bottom of the satellite photo stretch from Kedington to Calford Green and it would have been here that the aircraft came to rest.

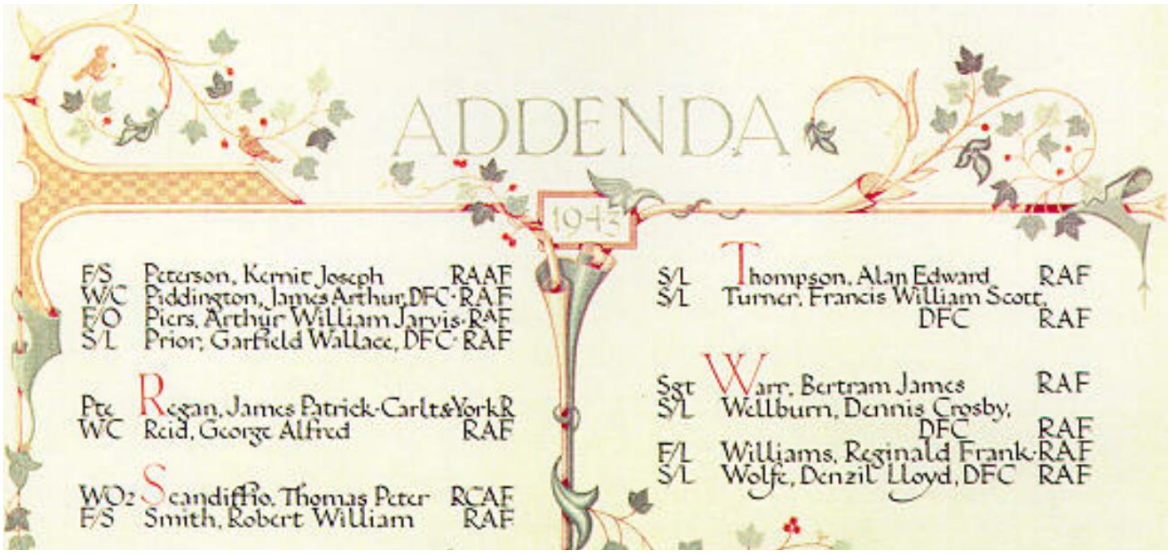
Robert William Smith (Bob) was buried at Haverhill cemetery, Suffolk, England, grave 246, section U.

Sgt George Trevor Pierce was buried in Llandudno Head Cemetery, in his home town.
P/O Sidney Clifford Rogers was also buried in Haverhill Cemetery. His parents lived in Sussex.
The Navigator, Sgt Patrick Samuel O'Carroll, of the Royal New Zealand Air Force was also buried in Haverhill Cemetery.

The crew who survived were Sgt Hector Howells and Sgt B S Smith (full name not known).

Bob's father, Sidney Smith, died in 1959 in Amersham. His brother Jim (Sidney James Allan) lived in Beaconsfield until his passing in 2003. His sister Doreen, emigrated to Canada in 1947 after marrying Frank Lewis Jones. His mother Edith joined her daughter in 1971 and passed in Vancouver in 1972. Doreen passed in Victoria in 2018.

Bob is also remembered in Canada where his name appears on page 607 of the Second World War Book of Remembrance.



We are grateful to Mike Jones, of Vancouver, for providing family information and the photograph of his uncle, Robert William Smith.

Local Kedington man, Kevin Betts, who has a keen interest in military history, is responsible for a fundraising effort to provide a memorial to commemorate the men who were killed in five aircraft crashes within the Parish during WW2. George Smith the off duty home guardsman who rushed to try and help those in Bob's aircraft is included.

The bronze memorial, being created by sculptor Sean Hedges-Quinn, will be placed in Kedington Community Centre. The names will be on a separate vellum scroll.

The crew who survived, Sgt Hector Howells and Sgt B S Smith (full name not known) are also remembered.



Photo: The memorial – a work in progress photo courtesy of Sean Hedges-Quinn.

Stockman and home guardsman George Smith who was electrocuted trying to reach the crew lies in an unmarked grave and the Kedington Air Memorial Group would like to give him a headstone.

The artwork, which is currently in mould form, reveals an angel on a plane's propellers, with the five doomed aircraft in the sky and features flowers and plants from the states and nations of the aircrew, including survivors, with an oak leaf for George Smith.