

Sergeant Pilot Fredrick John Howarth  
745182

Royal Airforce Volunteer Reserve  
Killed in a flying accident Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup>  
September 1940  
Age 20  
St Catherine's Churchyard Burbage  
Row 9 Grave 13  
Son of Harry and Alice Howarth of  
Lychgate Road Burbage  
Burbage War Memorial  
St Catherine's Church War Memorial.  
Bronze plaque south side chancel wall.



Fredrick Howarth was born on Strutt Road, Burbage on 12<sup>th</sup> January 1920.  
Fredrick was educated at the Burbage Church of England School starting in  
1924 followed by Grove Road School.



Former home of Harry and Alice Howarth, Lychgate Lane

At the age of fourteen, he moved on to the Hinckley Technical College and then Nuneaton Mining School where he studied electrics.

Having left college he worked for Matkins Electricians then Messer's Parsons and Sherwin and Co, the Ironmongers on Station Road, Hinckley.

In his spare time, Fredrick was very active in the Scout Movement and spent a good deal of his time with the fourth Hinckley's St Marys Troop.

One of the most promising Rugby footballers in the district he played wing forward for Hinckley in the 1937-38 seasons.

In his late teens, he joined the RAFVR and was taught to fly Tiger Moths at Desford airfield. When war was declared on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939, Fred immediately joined up and was sent to No 1 Training Wing at Cambridge University until October 1939.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> December 1939, he was posted to No 7 Elementary Flying Training School at Desford. By May 1940 he was training to fly Harvards. During his second term of advanced flying he moved to Royal Air Force Station Sutton Bridge near Kings Lynn to train to fly and fight effectively in a modern fighter aircraft as part of a squadron. These included honing their skills on both offensive and defensive tactics.

Having quickly made themselves familiar with one of the thirty three Hawker Hurricanes at the station and local geography, new pilots were expected to adapt quickly to a series of tasks set by their instructors these included what to do when vectored onto enemy aircraft and also how to deal with the situation of finding themselves under fire from the enemy. This involved arduous sorties flown as a pair, with the instructor and trainee fighter pilot taking it in turns to act as quarry and hunter.

During August and September of 1940, the height of the Battle for Britain was being fought in the air and the pilots were fighting to survive not only the aerial onslaught but also fatigue, engine failure and human error. If the enemy did not get them in the air, there was always a chance they would be bombed out or shot up on his own airfield.

A pilots training course had originally spread over forty hours but this had been halved to twenty in order to prop up the losses that the squadrons had suffered over the summer of 1940. There were a growing number of trainees without the equivalent increase in instructors. Consequently, those who mastered the basics of air fighting were sent out in pairs to practice amongst themselves. It was during just such a sortie that Fredrick Howarth met with disaster.

On 3 September 1940, a year to the day since Britain had entered the war Fredrick was flying Hurricane L1654 when he collided in the air with Hurricane L1833 piloted by Sgt. K Stibor (Czech) during an affiliation exercise between flights. Both pilots were killed and the aircraft completely wrecked.

Eyewitness accounts exist of the crash.

Henry Allen, a land worker saw the two aircraft jockeying for a position of advantage over one another and much "stunting" was seen to take place to effect this end. One aircraft pulled up into a loop and during the final stages of this manoeuvre the collision occurred. The actual incident happened at around 600-700 feet and upon breaking apart both aircraft dived straight into the ground.

Alan Kew then age ten was tying up his shoelace before going to school when he heard the aircrafts engines followed by the collision and subsequent impact with the ground. He ran outside but there was little to see except some smoke drifting away from the crash sites. Alan now owns the land where Stibors plane fell. Fredrick Howarth's plane fell in the orchard of Bank Farm amongst the fruit bushes and plumb trees.

Fortunately, both pilots' bodies were recovered. Sgt. Stibors was buried at Sutton Bridge Church near the airfield and Fredrick Howarth was brought back to Burbage and laid to rest in St Catherine's Churchyard.

TUESDAY, THE THIRD, SEPTEMBER

The schoolboy stooped to tie his shoe  
His ear picked up the sound  
Of stunting fighter aeroplanes  
A mile above the ground.

Before his hand was on the latch  
His breath caught in his throat  
A bang, then screaming engines,  
The final dying note.

Two more bangs as the aircraft hit  
The boy was through the door  
Just stupefying silence  
No more the Merlin's roar.

The time was o-eight-twenty-eight,  
September third the date,  
The year was Nineteen Forty,  
Two men had met their fate.

The boy to school went on his way,  
One lace was still untied  
Passed wreckage in the plum orchard  
Where now a man had died.

The other 'plane fell over there,  
Where still thin smoke did waft,  
Into the cloudless azure vault  
Above the broken craft.

Hurricanes, an old man said,  
From Sutton Bridge for sure,  
Just practising their deadly trade,  
Eager to join the War.

He ran to school, no thought of play  
A sadder, older boy,  
His dreams to be a pilot,  
Abandoned like a toy.

The lad has grown to farm the land,  
Where once the wreckage lay,  
And since has told us of the sight  
That met his gaze that day.

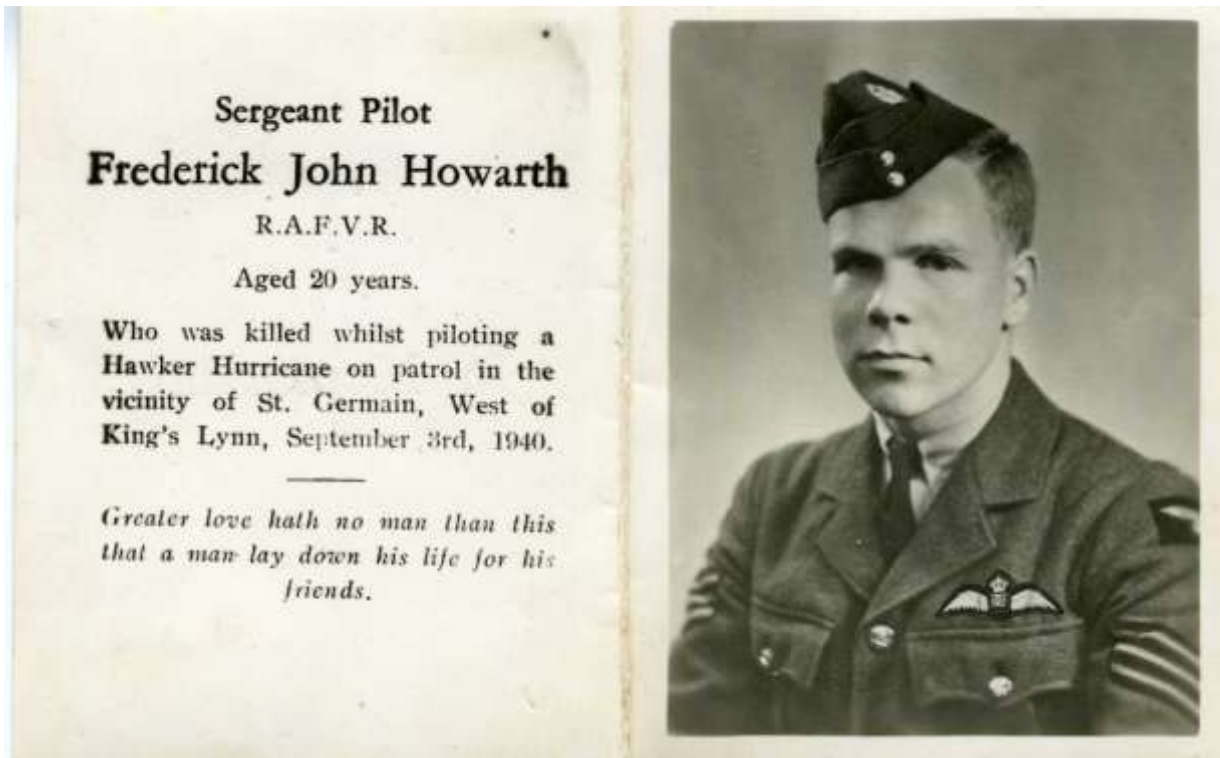
The years have passed, the memories fade,  
But always he'll remember,  
The day he bent to tie his shoe,  
Tuesday, the third, September.



Hawker Hurricane I (L1833)  
Flown by Sgt. Stibor on the fateful day



Grave of Sargent Stibor



Plaque St Catherine's Church

Denis, Fredrick's younger brother became a pilot with 158 Squadron, survived the war, and lived for many years on Flamville Road, Burbage.

After the war, the family placed a bronze plaque next to John Lords on the wall above the choir stalls where he had sat as a chorister, on the south side of the chancel.

In September 1985, the members of The Fenland Aircraft Preservation Society undertook a project named The Saddlebow Hurricanes to recover the remains of the Howarth's and Stibors aircraft. The wreckage of Howarth's aircraft was discovered some 11 feet down in the former orchard now a stubble field. The seat control column and head armour were recovered first then eventually the Rolls Royce Merlin engine.



After painstaking restoration, the Engine and some artefacts went on display at the Fenland Aviation Museum Wisbech.



St Catherine's Churchyard