

A fateful night, 31st March 1944

Following the publication on our website of the article about the Halifax piano manufacturers [The Pohlmann family updated.pdf](#) we were sent a lot of information about the downing of a Halifax bomber over Germany on 31st March 1944. Scott Gordon, the nephew of the navigator, Robert (Bob) White, had spotted a connection with the Halifax Pohlmann family. In amongst the extensive list of items in Scott's private collection were some letters. One was from Ethel Pohlmann, another from her daughter and son-in-law. There was also an image of a young war time bride surrounded by five young men in uniform. She was the daughter of Henry Edward and Ethel Pohlmann. Time to investigate more!

Back tracking a little.

Ethel Pohlmann née Pollard had married Henry Edward Pohlmann during WW1 as the *Halifax Daily Guardian* announced on 4th January 1917.

MARRIAGES

POHLMANN – POLLARD – Jan 2nd, at Wrangthorn Church, by the Rev. H. J. Tomkins, Henry Edward, Sec-Lieut. Duke of Wellington's West Riding Regiment, the eldest son of Fred Pohlmann, Oakleigh, Hipperholme (Pohlmann and Son) to Ethel only daughter of Mr. W. Pollard, Hyde Park, Leeds.

Whilst serving with the Duke of Wellington's West Riding Regiment Henry Edward Pohlmann was wounded. Then at the end of 1917 he was attached as an 'Observer' to two Royal Flying Corps squadrons. His younger brother, 2nd Lieutenant Reginald Peel Pohlmann was flying with one of them, the 25th, when he was shot down over Germany in February 1918.

Thankfully, Henry Edward Pohlmann survived and returned to live in a house named Merville on St. Giles Road, Lightcliffe. He worked for the family firm in Halifax manufacturing and selling pianos and then later radios and televisions. Henry and Ethel had two children, a son Reginald Pollard Pohlmann and a daughter Margaret Elizabeth Pohlmann. Their son was born on 23rd February 1918 just days after his uncle was reported missing and so no doubt named after him. Margaret was born on 7th November 1921.

This Pohlmann family were still living at Merville, St. Giles Road, Lightcliffe in July 1936 when Reginald Pollard Pohlmann, an accountant's clerk, travelled abroad with his uncle Arnold Pohlmann, a salesman in the family piano manufacturing business. Arnold Pohlmann's address was given as Oakleigh, Hipperholme and so he must have still been living there with his parents, Fred and Sarah Pohlmann.

By the time the 1939 register was taken Henry, Ethel, Reginald and Margaret Pohlmann had moved to 138, Skircoat Moor Road, Halifax and Arnold Pohlmann was living with them. At the time the son, Reginald, was a clerk to a chartered accountant and their daughter Margaret was a 'Post Office Telephonist'. Sometime before August 1940 Reginald enlisted with the R.A.F. following in the footsteps of his father and his deceased 19-year-old uncle who he was named after. Margaret was also involved in the war effort, her name appearing on military lists from 1940 as a 'telephonist' in London.

On 14th September 1942 the *Halifax Evening Courier* had this report

CLEVELEYS WEDDING

Sergt. Reginald Pollard Pohlmann, R.A.F., only son of Mr. and Mrs. H. E. Pohlmann, 138, The Green, Savile Park, Halifax was married on Saturday at St. Andrew's Church, Cleveleys, to Miss Mary Owen, elder daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Owen, 26 St. George's-avenue, Cleveleys, and of Timperley, Cheshire. The bridegroom, who is an old boy of Hipperholme Grammar School, was articled to Mr. Edgar Sproat, chartered accountant, but after passing his final A.C.A. examination in July 1940, joined the R.A.F. He has served in Iceland. The bride is attached to the A.T.S., and her colleagues assembled in uniform at the church to form a guard of honour. Miss Margaret Owen (sister of the bride) and Miss Margaret E. Pohlmann (sister of the bridegroom) were the bridesmaids. L.A.A. Basil Tuck, R.A.F., a colleague of the bridegroom acted as best man. After a reception at the Regal Hotel, Cleveleys, Mr. and Mrs. Pohlmann left for the honeymoon in the Lake District.

Reginald Pollard Pohlmann survived the war. For a time, he and his wife lived in Kent at 10, Stuart Avenue, Hayes, Bromley where one daughter was born. Another daughter's birth was registered in North Surrey. At some point they moved to Devon where after an encounter with a pothole (!) this picture appeared with an article in the *Torbay Express and South Devon Echo* on 6th January 1994.



Mary and Reg Pohlmann with Vauxhall Astra after the wheel had been repaired.

Reginald Pollard Pohlmann died on 7th January 2002, his last place of residence was given as Totnes, Devon. Ninety-two-year-old Mary Pohlmann née Owen died on 22nd December 2011 in Hook, Hampshire.

Meanwhile on 20th January 1944 his sister Margaret Elizabeth Pohlmann married Frederick Walter Douglas another R.A.F. man.

FIVE WITH D.F.M. Canadians at a Halifax Wedding

When Flying Officer Frederick Walter Douglas, D.F.M., Keston, Kent, was married at St. Jude's Church, Halifax today to Miss Margaret Pohlmann, only daughter of Mr. and Mrs. H. E. Pohlmann, The Green, Savile Park, Halifax, he had four former colleagues of a Halifax bomber crew, all members of the Royal Canadian Air Force and holders of the D.F.M., as best man and groomsmen.

Flight-Lieutenant J.M. Blisset, D.F.M., was the best man, and Flying Officers R.White, D.F.M., F. R. Zulauf, D.F.M., and R. Shannon, D.F.M., were groomsmen.

Mrs. R.P. Pohlmann, sister-in-law of the bride, was matron of honour, and the bridesmaids were Misses Rosemary E. Fenwick, cousin, and Joyce B. Haigh and Margaret Haigh, both of the W.R.N.S.

The bride was given away by her father. The service was conducted by Captain W. H. A. Berry, C.F., and the Rev. Lewis Foster, Vicar of St. Jude's.



**Notice the writing top right. The line up is thought to be from L - R
Franklin Zulauf, Bob White, Frederick, Margaret, Jack Bissett, Bob Shannon**

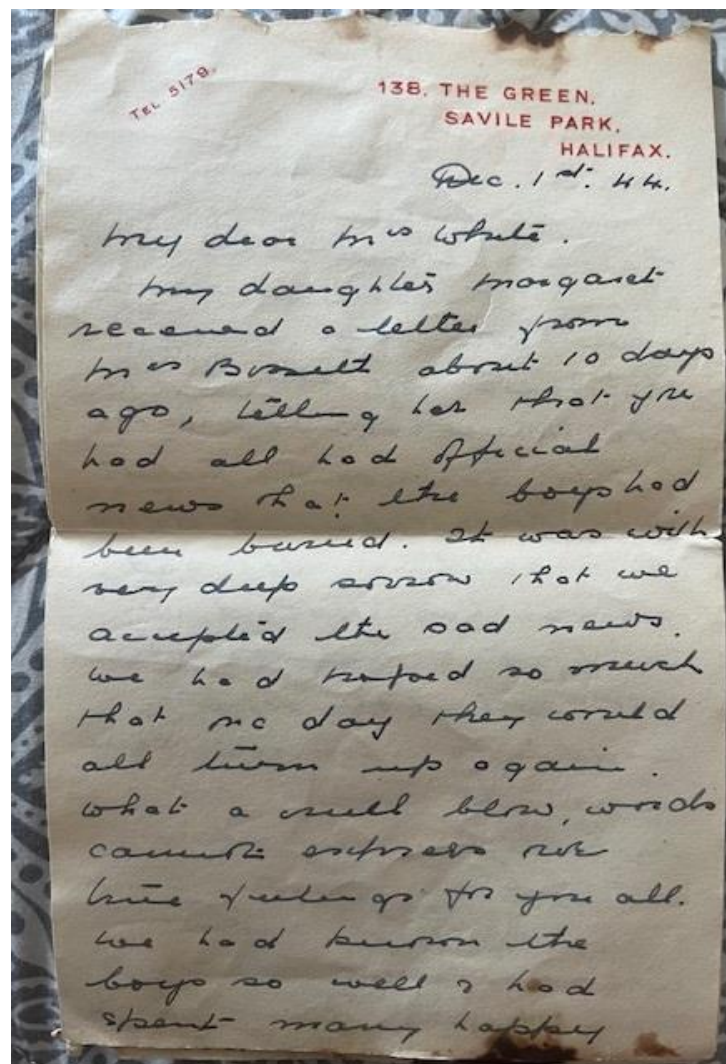
This image comes from Scott Gordon's private collection

As the newspaper report says all five young men, as part of the same Halifax bomber crew, had been awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal. The investiture was at Buckingham Palace, with King George VI presenting them with their medals.



**Bob White's medals including on the left his Distinguished Flying Medal
from Scott Gordon's private collection**

It was on 1st December 1944 that Ethel Pohlmann, the mother of Reginald and Margaret, wrote this letter to a lady in Canada, Robert (Bob) White's mother – an easier to read transcription follows.



138 THE GREEN,
SAVILE PARK,
HALIFAX.

hours in their company.
I shall never forget
that wonderful day we
spent together in London
when the boys were
decorated by the King.
Bob Shannon gave me one
of his admission tickets
into the Palace to watch
the installation. The sad
news has spread in
Halifax & friends who
met the boys at the
wedding & admired them
so much wish to be
included in our very
deepest sympathies to you
& Mr. White. I wish with
all my heart that you
could have been spared

TEL 9179

138. THE GREEN,
SAVILE PARK,
HALIFAX.

This must blow. You
will be sorry to hear
that the Padre who
married truck & Margaret
was killed in France
early in July. So that
very wonderful day last
January 20th is now
over shadowed with much
sadness.

My husband lost his
brother over Germany
in the last war. He was
a flying officer & only
19. Time & time only
softens the blow, but
one never forgets.
With love & kindest thoughts
to Mrs. Polkman &
husband.

Brown.
E. Polkman.
138 The Green.
Savile Park.
Halifax, Yorks
England.
Dec 1st 44.

138, THE GREEN

SAVILE PARK

HALIFAX

Dec. 1ST 44

My dear Mrs White,

My daughter Margaret received a letter from Mrs Bissett about 10 days ago, telling her that you had all had official news that the boys had been buried. It was with very deep sorrow that we accepted the sad news. We had hoped so much that one day they would all turn up again. What a cruel blow, words cannot express our true feelings for you all. We had known the boys so well & had spent many happy hours in their company. I shall never forget that wonderful day we spent together in London when the boys were decorated by the King. Bob Shannon gave me one of his admission tickets into the Palace to watch the investiture. The sad news has spread in Halifax & friends who met the boys at the wedding & admired them so much wish to be included in our very deepest sympathy to you & Mr White. I wish with all my heart that you could have been spared this cruel blow. You will be sorry to hear that the Padre who married Fred & Margaret was killed in France early in July. So that very wonderful day last January 20th is now over shadowed with much sadness.

My husband lost his brother over Germany in the last war; he was a Flying officer & only 19. Time & time only softens the blow, but one never forgets.

With love & kindest thoughts.

Ethel Pohlmann &

husband

Squadron Leader Jack Montgomery Bisset, Flying Officer Robert John White, Flying Officer Franklin Roy Zulauf and Flying Officer Robert Albert Shannon all featured in that wedding photograph. Two months later, on 31st March 1944 they and four other crew members were shot down over Germany.

Another transcribed letter tells you more.

c/o 138 The Green,
Savile Park,
Halifax,
Yorks.
12.12.1944

Dear Mrs & Mr White,

My wife Margaret and I have been very sorry indeed to receive news which seems to be final about Bob and the other boys. Herhahn where the authorities say they are is about 70 miles from Nuremberg, the target they were raiding that night.

I want to express to you how much Bob meant to us all here, both my wife, myself and our whole families, because with frequent visits of all the boys to my home, we all knew them so well.

I don't know whether at home Bob was a humourist, but believe me I do not think we should have been half the crew without him. He could always find the line to make, no matter where or when, which fitted the situation & brought us all away from any worries we may have had.

He was a wonderfully good man at his job too – quite honestly the best on the Squadron and any other crew would have been only too glad to fly by "Whitey's" directions, if they had had the chance.

He never was content unless we were right "on track" and he did not once get us lost or anything like that.

On one target, the most heavily defended there was in those days, namely Essen–Krupps works, Jack the pilot called to Whitey on the intercom & said "Do you want to come up & see what we are coming into?" Whitey pulled his curtain back & switched off his table light & stepped up front beside Jack & said "Jeeze, I could reach out & get hold of the top of that cone of searchlights!" And then later on over the target he said "Boy this flak is heavy – those boys down in Krupps must be wheeling the guns right off the production lines & firing at us!"

Whitey was a grand chap and along with the other boys I am sure they are in God's good keeping & we will all meet again some day. Please remember he would not have us feel sad, but we do sincerely share your sorrow at this bad time.

It seems hardly possible we are now nearly to Xmas but we are, and instead of sending a card this year, Margaret and I send you our warmest greetings and may time, the great healer, ease your burden of loss.

*Believe us to be
Yours most sincerely,
Doug & Margaret*

The Douglasses had a daughter born 1945 and then a son born 1949, both births being registered in the Bromley district. Years later in 1989 this was also the registration district when Frederick Walter Douglas. Margaret Elizabeth Douglas née Pohlmann died on 1st June 2009 in Sevenoaks. She was cremated in Greenwich , London on 19th January 2009.

Ethel Pohlmann's letter mentions another loss that of the padre, the Rev. Walter Henry Arthur Berry. He was the forces chaplain who took her daughter's Halifax marriage service. *The Bromley & West Lent Mercury* published on 1st September 1944 announced his death.

DIED IN NORMANDY

The Rev. Walter Berry

The death was occurred in Normandy of the Rev. Walter Berry, Chaplain to the Forces, only son of Mr. and the late Mrs. Berry, of Bradbourne, Oakwood, Crofton.

Mr. Berry was an M.A., of Caius College, Cambridge, and before taking Holy Orders was for a number of years engaged in business in the City. His ambition was always the Church and in 1938 he entered King's College, London, where he studied divinity for a year.

His first engagement was a curacy at Bexleyheath. A year and a half later he was appointed Vicar of Horton, Kirby. He left his parish about a year ago to take up the duties of a chaplain, and was only 43 when he met his death.

Chaplain 4th Class The Rev. WALTER HENRY ARTHUR BERRY
Service Number: 291270

Regiment & Unit/Ship Royal Army Chaplains' Department

Date of Death Died 27 July 1944

Age 40 years old

Buried or commemorated at

[RANVILLE WAR CEMETERY](#)

III. C. 15.

France

Country of Service United Kingdom

Awards Mentioned in Despatches

Additional InfoSon of Walter Joseph Berry and of Mary Selena Eleanor Berry (nee Smith); husband of Kathleen Berry, of Keston, Kent. M.A. (Cantab.).

Personal Inscription FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH



Back to the loss of the Halifax bomber

There were announcements in newspapers, obviously including ones in Canada, following the deaths of all the airmen as well as various citations, the one quoted explains more.

Halifax aircraft # LV 898, from # 427 Lion Squadron (Ferte Manus Certas), was shot down by a German night fighter aircraft during a night operation against Nuremberg, Germany on 31st March 1944.

This was the 34th operation for this crew and this was one of 108 Allied aircraft lost this night. There were three # 427 Sqdn, aircraft lost on this date.

Initially the eight crew members were buried near where their Halifax bomber went down.



Image again from Scott Gordon's collection

The images of the CWGC headstones are from www.findagrave.com

They were then moved to the Rheinburg War Cemetery, Germany and given CWGC headstones. Here are the four for the Canadians who attended that Halifax wedding.



Scott Gordon has gathered together a large collection of items connected with his uncle including the uniform Bob White wore at the Douglas – Pohlmann wedding. There are also the letters and telegrams Bob White sent home to his mother in Canada, including one about the wedding and another one about meeting King George VI.



Scott has also visited the crash site in Germany where pieces of the Halifax bomber were found. He even has the flight journal showing the last flight on the Nuremberg mission.



With grateful thanks to Scott Gordon for sharing all this material with us.

D. M. Barker

May 2025