

Sydney Hastings Dowse – RAF Pilot and Great Escape Survivor

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Sydney Hastings Dowse was a highly regarded RAF pilot in the early period of the second world war, specialising in photographic reconnaissance. After being shot down over France in 1941 and captured by the Germans, he achieved particular renown from the daring escapes he and others made as prisoners of war, including the 'Great Escape' from the Stalag Luft III prison camp. Nearly two decades after the war he came to live in Effingham, in Leewood Way, where he remained for at least five years.

Introduction

Sydney Hastings Dowse was born in Hammersmith, London in 1918, the second of four children born to Irish parents William and Patricia. In his teenage years he became a flying enthusiast and in 1937 at age 18 he joined the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. When the second world war began two years later it was inevitable that he would enter the RAF in which he rapidly became a Pilot Officer. His active service in the RAF was soon brought to a close when having been shot down with his aircraft he was taken prisoner of war in 1941. There followed for him a remarkable succession of imprisonments, escapes and re-imprisonments that he was lucky to survive, although he was not freed until the war ended. He is of particular interest to Effingham Local History Group on account of his having lived in Effingham for a few years during the 1960s.

Family background

Sydney's parents were William Robert Dowse and Patricia Emmeline (née) Frankenberg.

William Robert

William Robert had been born in the Donnybrook district of south Dublin. His birth registration [Dublin South 2 509, 1891 (Q4)] gives his date of birth as 23 November 1891. He was born at 12 Havelock Square West, the home of his parents Robert and Anne Elizabeth (née Kirke); Robert's occupation was recorded as builder's foreman. He was one of two children born to Robert and Anne; the other was his older sister Jane Margretta. Robert had been born on 19 June 1851 to parents William and Jane (née Bell) and baptised on 17 July 1851 at St Peter's, Dublin. He had married Anne on 23 April 1889 at Inver, Donegal in the Registrar's Building there 'according to the usages of the Methodist Church'. Their marriage certificate describes him as a builder's foreman residing at 11 Beechwood Road in Ranelagh, Dublin and she as residing at Drumconner, Inver.

Jane Margretta was born on 20 January 1890 at her parents' home 9 London Bridge Road in Donnybrook, south Dublin.

The 1901 Census finds the family living in Mount Pleasant Avenue in the Rathmines and Rathgar East district of Dublin. Robert was occupied as a builder's assistant. He, his wife and the two children were all recorded as being of the Methodist religion.

The 1911 Census finds them living at 15, Booterstown Avenue in the Blackrock No. 1 district of Dublin and Robert now occupied as a builder's manager; living with them were their domestic servant and a boarder. Jane Margretta (recorded as 'Margaret') aged 21 was an undergraduate at Trinity College Dublin whilst William Robert aged 19 was working as telephonist.

We know very little of Jane Margretta's subsequent life. She evidently graduated at Trinity College with a Bachelor of Arts degree in June 1913 [*The Evening Herald* (Dublin), 26 June 1913]. She died aged 83 on 10 February 1974 at Gascoigne House (a home for the elderly) in Camden Row, Dublin. Her death certificate gives her profession as 'MA' (Master of Arts) and the cause of death as 'cerebral thrombosis (R. hemiplegia)'. She was buried in Dublin's Deans Grave Cemetery [Plot: South-West/J1/88]. Probate was granted in England, her estate valued at £346, she being named as 'Jane Margretta Dowse' whose place of residence had previously been Drumconner, Inver in County Donegal.

The 1911 Census is our last 'sighting' of Robert. He evidently died at some point during the next fifteen years. Anne died aged 70 on 28 February 1926 at Chestnut Lodge in Booterstown Avenue, Rathdown, Dublin. Her death certificate describes her as 'widow of builder's clerk' and gives the cause of death as liver cancer for about 6 months.

Aged about 21, William Robert joined the General Post Office service as an unestablished skilled workman in July 1912 [*British Postal Service Appointment Books 1737-1969*, British Postal Museum and Archive, POST 58 No 108]; by April 1914 he had become a skilled workman class II.

His employment with the GPO must have been interrupted by the First World War, as *The London Gazette* listed him (by his full name) in its issue of 29 January 1915 as among those to be made temporary Second Lieutenants in the Royal Engineers.

He married in 1916 to Patricia Emmeline.

Patricia Emmeline

Patricia Emmeline had been born in the Coolock district of North Dublin. Her birth registration [Dublin North, Group ID 9374310] gives her date of birth as 17 March 1892. She was born at 1 Victoria Terrace, the home of her parents Rudolph and Jane (née McEvoy); Rudolph's occupation was recorded as Quartermaster Sergeant in the Royal Engineers regiment.

Patricia Emmeline was the third of six (known) children born to Rudolph and Jane. The two born before her, in Malta, were

Gerald Baptist Frankenberg	born in 1888, precise date uncertain
Reginald Hastings Frankenberg	born 7 December 1890 (in Sliema)

and the three born after her were

Rhoda Janetta Frankenberg	born 22 October 1897, in Bermuda
Ronald Evelyn Frankenberg	born 1899, precise date uncertain, in Bermuda
Maurice Gordon Frankenberg	born 29 March 1905, in Dublin

The diversity of their birthplaces is owed to the movements of their father in the course of his military service in the Royal Engineers. His service details are held at The National Archives in the file British Army Service Records: WO97/4877/067/001 which in 2002 was extensively transcribed, interpreted and narrated by Lt Col Edward De Santis [<https://www.reubique.com/14060.htm>].

Rudolph was born in Manchester on 29 January 1859 to parents Adolphus Frankenberg and his wife Christiana (née Hodgson) and baptised at the Cathedral there on 23 February 1859. In the baptism record the occupation of Adolphus is given as 'Traveller' but on the birth certificate [GRO Ref: Manchester 8d 177, 1859 (Q1)] it is given as 'Riding Master'. There are genealogical complications regarding Christiana's origins and the certificate of her marriage to Adolphus which are too far unresolved to justify articulating here.

Rudolph grew up in Hulme, Manchester and enlisted there in the Army in January 1877, to serve eight years with the Colours and four on the Reserve. After training at Chatham he embarked from there to Cyprus in 1878 with the Royal Engineers, returning to England in May 1880. Various postings and promotions followed during his career in the Supernumerary Staff, with Regimental Number 14060. While in Malta in 1887, he married on 30 June to Jane, a widow who had previously married in County Westmeath, Ireland on 19 April 1881 to William Parker, then serving as a Sergeant in the Royal Artillery at the barracks in Athlone. We do not know when William died.

As noted above Maurice, the last child of Rudolph and Jane was born in 1905 when Rudolph was aged 45 and nearing the end of his military life. After just over 30 years of service Rudolph was discharged from the Army at Dublin on 24 January 1907, his pension date set at 17 January. It is not clear whether Rudolph and Jane were still together at this time; in the 'Proceedings on Discharge' section of his service file where it requests the 'Intended place of Residence' the entry states 'Woolwich (full address will be notified later)'.

Rudolph and Jane were certainly not together on the night of the 1911 Census. He was in the household of his married sister Beatrice Thompson, whose husband John was an engineer pattern maker; they were living at 12 Alexander Grove in Salford. Meanwhile Jane was living in South Dublin at 10 Leinster Road, Rathmines and Rathgar with her five youngest children – in June 1906 the oldest, Gerald, had enlisted as a Sapper with the Royal Engineers. It is known that by 1915, and probably some years before, they had separated, as a newspaper stated in an account of Rudolph's 'downfall' [*The South Western Star*, 17 September 1915]. This short article reported that Rudolph, an 'incurable inebriate' of no fixed abode, had been charged with wandering the streets of Earlsfield and had been previously arrested for trouble-making in Melody Road, Wandsworth where Jane had been living. He had recently had a spell in prison. He was discharged with a warning to be more careful.

He was in trouble with the law again five months later, having been summoned in front of the Croydon County magistrates by Jane for threatening her with grievous bodily harm. Although she was legally separated from him he had turned up at her home, now in Birdhurst Road, Mitcham, and made threats to her there on two successive evenings. Their separation had come about through his brutal treatment of her.

The details of his threats were set out in a rather longer article [*The Croydon Times*, 9 February 1916]. On this occasion it was intended to bind him over to keep the peace in the sum of £20, but as he could find no such surety he was instead 'removed in custody'.

Some years later Rudolph was prosecuted by Lambeth's Board of Guardians for repeatedly obtaining relief, to which he was not entitled, by way of admitting himself into the Lambeth workhouse, having already spent two terms similarly in the Southwark workhouse [*Gloucestershire Echo*, 30 December 1920]. He was sentenced to 14 days' hard labour and warned that a repeat offence would make him liable to 3 months' imprisonment.

The 1921 Census finds Rudolph at age 63 among a very large number of others in a lodging house at 92 Westminster Bridge Road, a street running south-east behind Waterloo station. His occupation was entered as pensioner. Meanwhile Jane was living at 104 Sinclair Road, Hammersmith. The only others in her household were her daughter Rhoda Janetta (an actress) and the latter's American husband Sydney Herbert Chapin (a general agent, whose age was twice hers), both described as visitors.

Five years later, on 28 April 1926, Rudolph – described as of no fixed abode – died at Lambeth Hospital from stomach cancer [GRO Ref: Lambeth 1d 215, 1926 (Q2)]. He was buried in Lambeth two days later.

Although we do not know precisely when Jane had secured her judicial separation from Rudolph it is clear from the newspaper article mentioned earlier that she did so no later than 1915 and therefore when her daughter Patricia Emmeline was aged no more than 23. As Rudolph and Jane were apparently already living apart in 1911 their separation may well have preceded that, in which case their matrimonial turmoil would have occurred while Patricia was still a teenager. It seems quite likely that all of the children suffered to some extent from witnessing Rudolph's abusive treatment of their mother.

Patricia would not have been directly impacted by her father's behaviour in the 1920s. In 1916 she married William Robert Dowse [GRO Ref: Camberwell 1d 1831, 1916 (Q2)] who as we have seen, was by then serving in the Royal Engineers. Shortly after the War she would move with him to Malaya.

Early married years of William Robert and Patricia Emmeline

Their first child was Gerald Robert Dowse born on 28 April 1917. His birth certificate [GRO Ref: Hammersmith 1a 314, 1917 (Q2)] states that he was born at 104 Sinclair Road, Hammersmith, the home of Patricia's mother Jane. William's occupation was given as Lieutenant in the Royal Engineers and Jane was the informant.

Their second child was Sydney Hastings Dowse born at the same address on 21 November 1918. His birth certificate [GRO Ref: Hammersmith 1a 302, 1918 (Q4)] gives William's occupation as Lieutenant in the Royal Engineers, serving as a telegraph engineer.

There seem to be no records of William being awarded military medals which perhaps implies that he did not serve in any theatre of war abroad. No Army service or pension record has been found for him.

Immediately after the War William took up employment as a telegraph engineer with the British Malay Government. While there, he and Patricia produced two more children, Ronald Gordon McGregor Dowse (born about 1921) and Patricia Mary Dowse (born 8 March 1923). These two were born in the city of Seremban in Negeri Sembilan, one of the four British Protectorates making up the entity known as the Federated Malay States established by the British government in 1895 [from the family's records]. Patricia Mary was later to go back to Malaya, and as described below spent several years of World War II there.

In 1923 the family returned to England, sailing on the newly-built *SS Sarpedon* (Blue Funnel Line), having embarked at Port Swettenham, Malaya's principal port located in Selangor, another of the Federated States. Accompanying William, Patricia and the four children was their female nursemaid, or 'amah', Chuan Ah Flo (?or Ho) aged 33. In the ship's manifest [The National Archives, BT26 Piece 744, No 91] William was described as an engineer with proposed address 'c/o Crown Agents, London'. The children's ages were entered as 6, 4, 1½ and 5 months. The ship arrived at London on 11 September. The purpose of their journey may have been to acquaint Patricia's mother Jane with her two latest grandchildren and/or to fulfil some aspect of William's work.

This trip was to have a tragic outcome for the family, namely the death of their third child Ronald. His death certificate [GRO Ref: Paddington 1a 15, 1924 (Q1)] states that he died age '2' on 6 February 1924 at 23 Randolph Crescent (in the Little Venice area of Maida Vale). The cause of death, ascertained without *post mortem*, was certified as '(1) pneumonia – double croupous 14 days (2) cardiac failure' and the informant was William, of the same address, described as 'telegraph engineer (Malay Government)'. Family records assert that the underlying cause was the accidental scalding of Ronald in a bath prepared by the family's amah Chuan Ah Flo. The two older boys Gerald (aged nearly 7) and Sydney (aged 5) would surely have felt keenly both this loss of their baby brother and the grief of their parents.

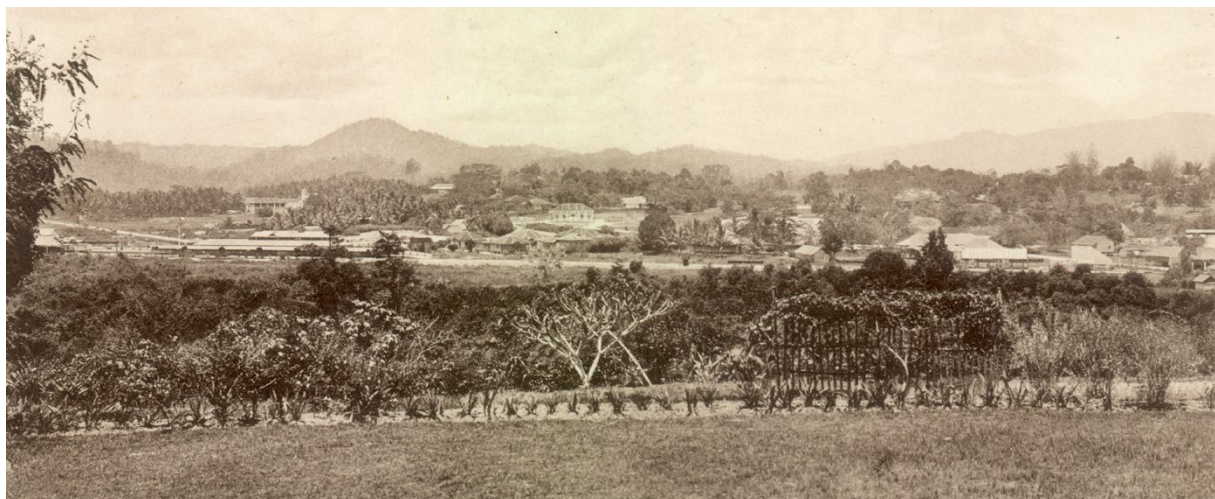


Figure 1 Seramban (seen here in 1910), where Sydney was taken to live by his parents in his infancy.

Soon after Robert's death William returned to Malaya via the *SS Patroclus* (another new ship from the Blue Funnel Line), embarking at Birkenhead and departing on 16 March 1924. It appears that he travelled without the rest of the family, who are not listed on the manifest even though the wives and children of other male passengers are. Described as an engineer, his last address in the UK was recorded as 'c/o Crown Agents, 4 Millbank, London SW1' and his destination as the Federated Malay States.

Six months later Patricia likewise returned to Malaya, departing on 11 October 1924 from Merseyside on *SS Hector*, a new ship of the Ocean Steamship Company. Accompanying her was just her daughter Patricia Mary (recorded on the manifest as 'Moya', an Irish familiar form of 'Mary'); they were scheduled to disembark at Singapore. Their last address in the UK was recorded, curiously, as 3, 'Litchfield' [sic – Lichfield] Road in Alrewas, a village in Staffordshire. We do not yet understand the significance of Alrewas to Patricia. There does not seem to be any family connection to explain it. It is not impossible that William had been sent to the Alrewas area tasked with work on the telephone services there. In his book *An Alrewas Miscellany* [publ Hailwood Enterprises, July 2012] the author Roger Hailwood states that 'Up to 1923 there were no telephones on Alrewas ... When the telephones came to Alrewas in 1923 ...' However, it does not seem likely that the Malay Government would have despatched one of their engineers to work in rural Staffordshire, unless some very special kind of expertise were required that William happened to possess.

In 1927 Patricia returned from Malaya to England, again accompanied by just her daughter Patricia Mary, now aged 4. She sailed from Penang on the *SS Mahua*, arriving in London on 18 November 1927. Her intended address after arriving was recorded in the ship's manifest as Alrewas. This Staffordshire association had therefore lasted for at least three years.

In 1929 William was admitted as an Associate of the Institution of Electrical Engineers [*Lists of Corporate and Non-Corporate Members*, publ IEE, London, 1930]; the latter source describes him as 'Senior Engineer, P & T Dept, Kuala Lumpur, Federated Malay States'. It seems that in the 1930s at least some of the family resided in Lancing, West Sussex. The Electoral Register for Lancing in 1929-30 records Patricia (but not William) as residing there at The Cliff, Brighton Road, but this must have been only transitory. In 1932 Patricia and William sailed together back to England on the mail ship *RMS Carthage* (Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company) from Penang, arriving at London on 15 April. The ship's manifest described William as an engineer and their intended address in the UK as Douglas House, South Lancing. At the start of World War II the 1939 National Register listed Patricia as still residing in Lancing, now at a house called 'Drumconner', clearly named in memory of the family's roots in County Donegal. She was aged 47 and married. William is not listed. He was presumably still working in Malaya. Aged 50 and working for the 'Colonial Postal Service' he was captured there when Singapore surrendered to the Japanese in February 1942 and held there in the notorious Changi prisoner of war camp until Singapore was liberated in 1945 [<https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-RCMS-00103-00012-00022/59>].

In the Lancing electoral register for 1946-47 Patricia is recorded as still at 'Drumconner', with her son Gerald. William died in Sussex in 1967 and Patricia died in Perthshire in 1978.

Sydney's life before the War

We currently know rather little about this. Perhaps the greatest unknown is whether Sydney and his older brother Gerald, after being brought to England from Malaya in 1923, then remained permanently in England throughout the rest of their childhood and early teenage years (perhaps at boarding school or living with a relative) or were instead spending that period largely in Malaya whilst making occasional visits to England with one or both of their parents. The known sailings of William and Patricia between these places suggest that they had undertaken other sailings of which no evidence has yet been found by us in the principal sources detailing immigration and emigration.

Sydney and Gerald may have been boarding at a prep school in England up to this time. However this may be, it was at Christmas 1932 that Sydney was admitted to the prestigious public school Hurstpierpoint College in Sussex, about ten miles north-east of Lancing. Gerald had already been admitted there in the summer of 1932. The College's archivist has confirmed to us that Sydney's time at the College spanned 1932-36 and it seems that the same was true of Gerald. Both boys were assigned to the *Fleur de Lys* House. Their activities and progress can be charted through the hundreds of mentions made of them in the College's magazine *The Hurst Johnian*, which has been continuously produced since 1858 and is accessible in digitised form from the Hurst Johnian Archives at <https://www.thehurstjohnian.org>. Most of the references to them (and to the other pupils) are concerned with sporting achievements.



Figure 2 Hurstpierpoint College, pre-War.

Sydney was active in most of the principal sports undertaken there, including rugby, cricket, hockey, squash, tennis, athletics, running, shooting and boxing, and was highly proficient in many of them. The magazine gives detailed accounts of his performances in the various matches and tournaments. He obtained swimming colours in 1933 and 1934; 1st XV rugby colours in 1933; 1st XI hockey colours in 1935; 2nd XI cricket colours in 1935; 1st XI cricket colours in 1936; running colours in 1936. He was the College's all-round junior sports champion – '*Junior Victor Ludorum*' – in 1934 and the senior champion – '*Senior Victor Ludorum*' – in 1936. He was at his peak in his final year, 1936: School Prefect, Captain of House, Captain of Rugby, Captain of Boxing, Captain of Running, Vice-Captain of Hockey, winner of the Clayton Challenge Cup and of the Steeple Challenge Cup and winner of a half-mile race (in 2 minutes and 29 seconds). Besides sports, he took part in the College's annual Shakespeare play in 1933, won the Lowe English Prize in 1934 and sang for *Fleur de Lys* in the House Music Competition in 1936. He also undertook training in the College's Officer Training Corps, obtaining his passing-out (graduation) Certificate 'A' in 1935, being ranked as Drum-Major in that same year, then Sergeant followed by Company Sergeant Major in 1936.

In 1937, having left Hurstpierpoint, he joined the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. This had been established the year before with the intention of bolstering the capability of the RAF in the event of war. He learned to fly during his time in the RAVR and completed his flying training with the RAF after his call-up in September 1939, gaining a commission in 1940.

His prowess in rugby had led to him being taken on by the Harlequins, one of the country's top amateur rugby clubs. This was noted in the Press in April 1938 when he played in a seven-a-side tournament for the Worthing Rugby Club [*The Herald* (Worthing), 22 April 1938]:

'The Worthing Club, which had an exceptionally good Eastertide, will have the services of a Harlequin player in their seven. He is Dowse, a full-back, who played for the Harlequins "A" against Worthing earlier in the season, and who has been assisting the club over the holiday period.'

In 1939 he again played for Worthing in their seven-a-side tournament [*Worthing Gazette*, 5 April 1939:]

'The Worthing Rugby Club's Seven-aside [sic] Tournament on Saturday week looks like being an even greater attraction than in former years ... The Harlequins will also be represented, though not as Harlequins, for Dowse the Harlequin player, who lives at Lancing and has played for Worthing in the past, is bringing down a team of fellow-Clubmen, who will probably adopt some weird name of their own for the occasion.'

Sydney's War

Researching Sydney's wartime experiences is difficult owing to the sparsity of public sources on military matters in this period. This section draws in places upon a small set of online narratives. These are here indented in quotes with their sources cited; in some cases their wording has been changed slightly to aid continuity. The internet addresses of these sources are listed in this article's Bibliography.

Shoreham-on-Sea: Flying Training 1937 to 1939

As noted earlier, Sydney was educated at Hurstpierpoint College, Hassocks in Sussex, where – according to its files – membership of the (army) Officer Training Corps was compulsory; in this he enjoyed drill, the summer camps at Tidworth and the Tactical Exercises. He joined the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve in July 1937, learning to fly on weekends at No. 16 Elementary and Reserve Flying Training School (ERFTS). This was based on the Shoreham-on-Sea airfield and operated as a civilian-run flying school from its establishment on 3 July 1937. Operated by Martin School of Air Navigation, the school provided initial flight training for aspiring pilots. In 1937 it received a contract to train pilots for the Royal Air Force, initially using the de Havilland Tiger Moth bi-plane but later supplemented by the Hawker Hart and Hawker Hind.



Figure 3 Terminal building at Shoreham-on-Sea, late 1930s; at left – a De Havilland DH.89 Dragon Rapide.

Sydney's instructor was Johnnie Love, who taught him on the Tiger Moth, involving dual flying skills, aerobatics and emergency landings. He flew solo in early spring 1939. He was a natural pilot and excelled at map reading on cross-country flights, which benefitted him in his later service as a photographic reconnaissance pilot. On 3 June 1939 he was awarded his Royal Aero Club Aviator's Certificate No. 18579. He completed pilot training at Shoreham-on-Sea in August 1939. With the start of the Second World War imminent, the training school moved away from Shoreham in August 1939 until its disbandment on 3 September 1939, preceding the War.



Figure 4 Example of a De Havilland DH.82 Tiger Moth.



Figure 5 Example of a Hawker Hart, being flown by RAF 33 Squadron.

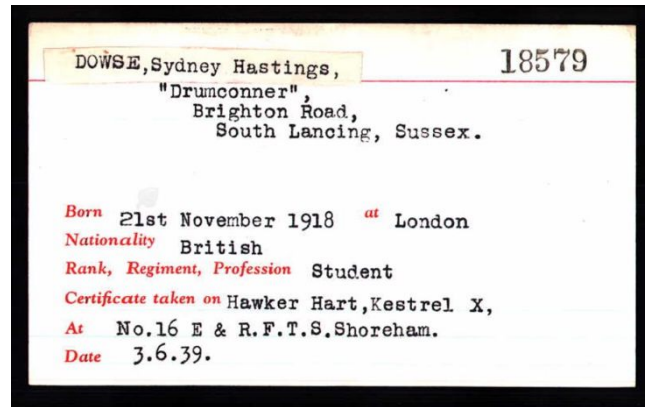


Figure 6 Sydney's Royal Aero Club Aviator's Certificate.

The storm clouds gather: Royal Air Force commission : 1939 to 1940

When war broke out in September 1939, Sydney, by then aged 20, was called to regular service and went on to advanced training on the more powerful Hawker Hart, undertaking formation flying as well as simulated and live firing exercises on the Aldershot ranges. He completed pilot training at Shoreham-on-Sea in August 1939.

He received his commission as a pilot officer on 21 October 1940, with seniority from 9 August 1940 [from his RAF Personnel Service Record, Form 543], this fact being published in *The London Gazette*.

Serving with RAF Coastal Command in Scotland: 42 Squadron: 1940

No. 42 Squadron had been created on 14 December 1936 by expanding 'B' flight of No. 22 Squadron. By 1939 it was based at RAF Bircham Newton, Norfolk. Initially it was equipped with Vickers Vildebeest bi-planes (light bombers) but was re-equipped with the new twin-engine Bristol Beauforts in January 1940. Sydney was assigned to this new Squadron which was operating under RAF Coastal Command, and on 16 September 1939 he was posted to RNAS Donibristle 2.7 miles east of Rosyth, Fife on the Firth of Forth. He was not on bombing runs, but seconded to the Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm on photographic reconnaissance along the Norwegian coast, flying Fairey Swordfish biplanes from the aircraft carrier *HMS Furious*. From here he also took part in an unsuccessful search for the German ships *Gneisenau* and the cruiser *Koln* north of the Shetlands, after reports of their passage into the Atlantic intending attacks on shipping.



Figure 7 Fairey Swordfish carrying a torpedo at the Shoreham Airshow on 22 August 2015.

In October 1939 he was posted to RAF Gosport on the Solent in Hampshire, a joint RAF Coastal Command and Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm airfield. He carried out further training in general reconnaissance and anti-submarine patrols. By November he had completed his advanced training and in January 1940 was moved with the Squadron to RAF Silloth in Cumbria. He undertook further operational training here as well as flying Avro Anson general reconnaissance aircraft on maritime and anti-submarine patrols over the North Sea, remaining with 42 Squadron at RAF Silloth until February 1940, when he was posted to 608 Squadron at RAF Thornaby-on-Tees, North Yorkshire.



Figure 8 Avro Anson Mk.I of RAF 321 (Dutch) Squadron; Imperial War Museum Image IWM (C 2117).

Anti-submarine patrols and convoy protection: 608 Squadron: 1940

'608 Squadron was formed at Thornaby-on-Tees, North Yorkshire on 17 March 1930 as a day bomber squadron within the Auxiliary Air Force. Its initial equipment was the Avro 504N and Westland Wapiti. These were replaced by Hawker Demon fighters in January 1937, when the squadron's role was changed to that of a fighter squadron. Its name was changed to 608 (North Riding) Squadron in May 1937.

On 20 March 1939, shortly before the war broke out, the squadron's role was changed yet again, now into that of a general reconnaissance unit flying under RAF Coastal Command, and was re-equipped for that role with Avro Ansons.' [Wikipedia]

Sydney, having completed more operational training, joined the squadron and flew these aircraft on anti-submarine and convoy escort missions. He remained with this squadron at RAF Thornaby until September 1940.

Eager for more action and bored with flying Ansons on submarine patrols, Sydney requested transfer to the reconnaissance force, focusing on observing the movement of German capital ships (the largest ships such as battle ships and battle cruisers).

After converting to the Supermarine Spitfire, on 20 October, he was discharged from regular squadron service and was transferred to a temporary commission in the RAF's Photo Reconnaissance service.

In 1940 this service was still relatively unknown in the RAF and remained secret to the wider country lest Nazi Germany should become aware of its operations over occupied Europe.

The Admiralty's concerns over the Kriegsmarine (Nazi 'War Navy')

'One of the main motivators to improve Photo Reconnaissance was German work on two new battleships. The *Bismarck* and the *Tirpitz* would be the largest battleships in the world. As such, they would be a huge threat to Britain's maritime supply lines.' [War History Online]

British surveillance of these two battleships was a massive, relentless intelligence and military effort. It combined aerial reconnaissance, codebreaking, human intelligence (underground Resistance networks), and surface naval shadowing to monitor the vessels, which were seen as primary threats to the Atlantic and Russian convoys and national security.

The RAF Photographic Reconnaissance (PR) units were also tasked with aerial reconnaissance of the Kriegsmarine battle cruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* docked in the French Atlantic port of Brest.

'Admiral Godfrey, the head of naval intelligence, encouraged the use of PR in finding these ships. It led to the swift identification of the *Tirpitz*. It also showed how important the right tools could be, as a Spitfire with extra fuel tanks could obtain photos that other planes could not. Additionally, it demonstrated how important context and interpretation were. Clues to the *Tirpitz*'s imminent departure were not understood because there were no photos of its dock from earlier dates.' [War History Online]



Figure 9 Supermarine Spitfires F.Mk.I of 65 Squadron in May 1940; Imperial War Museum Image IWM (HU 1664).

The development of Photographic Reconnaissance

PR was revitalized by the work of two men – Frederick Winterbotham and Sidney Cotton. Winterbotham, a First World War PR pioneer, was now the senior air officer in the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS). Finding the British uninterested in PR, he worked with the French in early 1939. They arranged PR flights piloted by Cotton, an Australian flyer, over Germany. The results revealed what could be achieved and got the British interested.

Huge improvements had to be made if PR was to be effective. PR pilots and photograph interpreters and analysts were recruited and trained.' [War History Online]

Sidney Cotton was an Australian inventor, photographer and aviation and photography pioneer, responsible for developing and promoting an early colour film process, and largely responsible for the development of photographic reconnaissance before and during WW2. In April 1939, Cotton was recruited by Fred Winterbotham of MI6 to take clandestine aerial photographs of the German military buildup. Cotton's mission was using flights for the Aeronautical Research and Sales Corporation as a cover for espionage with the only difference being that his paymasters were MI6 instead of the Deuxième Bureau. Cotton was provided with a new Lockheed 12-A Electra aircraft by MI6.



Figure 10 Sydney Hastings Dowse with a Spitfire at an unknown airfield, perhaps early 1941.

Photograph interpreters formed an elite body of specialists who analysed aerial reconnaissance photographs to extract critical intelligence for military planning and operations, using a diverse skill set and equipment such as stereoscopes to create 3D images.

'Specialist on-board equipment was needed. In order to carry out PR flights without being detected, pilots needed to fly quickly and at high altitude, which meant using the latest planes and improved lenses. Finding such equipment became easier once the RAF had taken overall control of the PR operation. In a change from the separate intelligence gathering of Britain's military arms, the RAF carried out PR not only for itself but also for the Army and the Navy. Coordination, men and resources all contributed to the further improvement of PR operations.' [*War History Online*]

'B' Flight No 1 PR Unit (PRU): 1941

'On 24 September 1939, the RAF formally took over the 'Heston Flight', a civilian PR unit headed by Sidney Cotton based at Heston Aerodrome [near Hounslow, west London]. The unit had previously been contracted by MI6 to perform clandestine PR over Europe, using civilian-registered Lockheed 12A aircraft. The Flight was re-designated several times, firstly on 1 November 1939 as No 2 Camouflage Unit, then on 17 January 1940 as the Photographic Development Unit, then on 18 June 1940 as the Photographic Reconnaissance Unit (PRU), and finally on 14 November 1940, as No 1 PRU.' [*Military Wiki Fandom*]

'B' Flight, based at RAF Heston and later at St Eval near Padstow in Cornwall, operated unarmed, high-altitude Spitfires for crucial, top-secret intelligence gathering during the war. It was famous for using pink-camouflaged Spitfires for dawn/dusk sorties, acquiring intelligence for missions such as detecting Germany's V-1 bomb facilities.

- Key operations: 'B' Flight was part of the unit formed in 1940, focusing on low and high-altitude, long-range reconnaissance.
- Iconic aircraft: the Spitfire PR Marks I, III, IV & VII (specifically X4497) were the key aircraft used by 'B' Flight for reconnaissance, often piloted by officers like Sydney.
- Mission: it was crucial for photographing German naval movements, including the *Tirpitz*, and played a significant role in Allied intelligence.
- Legacy: the unit was known for high risk, with 1 PRU suffering heavy losses. It eventually evolved into the specialised PR squadrons Nos 540, 541, 542, 543 and 544 in October 1942.

'B' Flight was involved in reconnaissance training and operational flights from other airfields such as Thornaby, and Turnhouse (Edinburgh).

Sydney joins 'B' Flight: 1941

In early 1941 Sydney volunteered to join 'B' Flight at RAF Benson in Oxfordshire, flying Supermarine Spitfire Mk III Type(s) A/B/C/E.



Figure 11 A Type F.8 Mark II (20-inch lens) aerial camera being loaded into the vertical position in a Supermarine Spitfire PR Mark IV at RAF Benson; Imperial War Museum Image IWM (CH 10847).

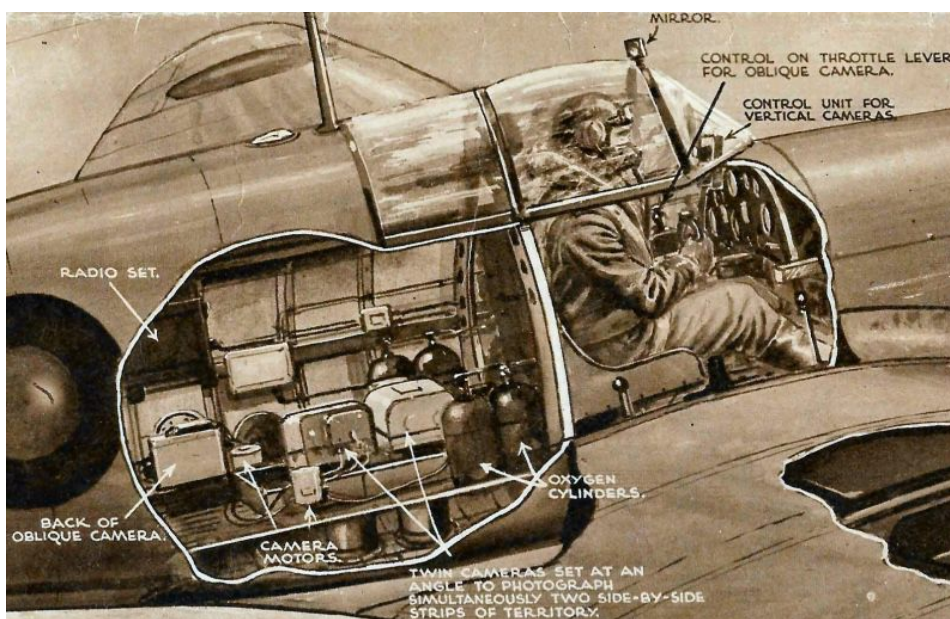


Figure 12 Sketch showing camera placements in a PRU Spitfire; *The Illustrated London News*, 11 March 1944.



Figure 13 An air reconnaissance camera type F24, weight 8kg; the predominant kind used by the RAF during WW2; © The Board of Trustees of the Science Museum.



Figure 14 Low-level oblique photographic-reconnaissance aerial image of the German heavy cruiser *Admiral Hipper* in dry dock at Brest, France, 1941. Obtained on a 'dicing' sortie by a Supermarine Spitfire PR Mark IG of No. 1 PRU Detachment flying from St Eval; Imperial War Museum Image IWM (C 2576).



Figure 15 Reconnaissance Spitfire at St Eval in early 1941.

From 26 January to 15 April 1941 Sydney was based at RAF Wick in Caithness and flew PRU missions mainly to Norway.



Figure 16 A Supermarine Spitfire Mk.III; Sydney was recorded as flying this particular aircraft (X4492) on 14 March 1941 and also as flying it from RAF Wick on a PRU sortie to Norway.

From 19 April to 2 August he was posted /transferred to RAF Mount Farm in Oxfordshire and flew PRU missions to Belgium, France and Germany.

From 5 August to 20 August he was posted /transferred to RAF Harrowbeer in Devon and RAF St Eval, flying PRU missions to the French Atlantic coast, going down to the Spanish border. He was photographing airfields and HQs, overflying Spain, Gibraltar, Portugal and Switzerland.

His tally of completed PRU missions between March and August 1941 totalled 40, as follows:

- RAF Wick – 4
- RAF Mount Farm – 29
- RAF St Eval - 7

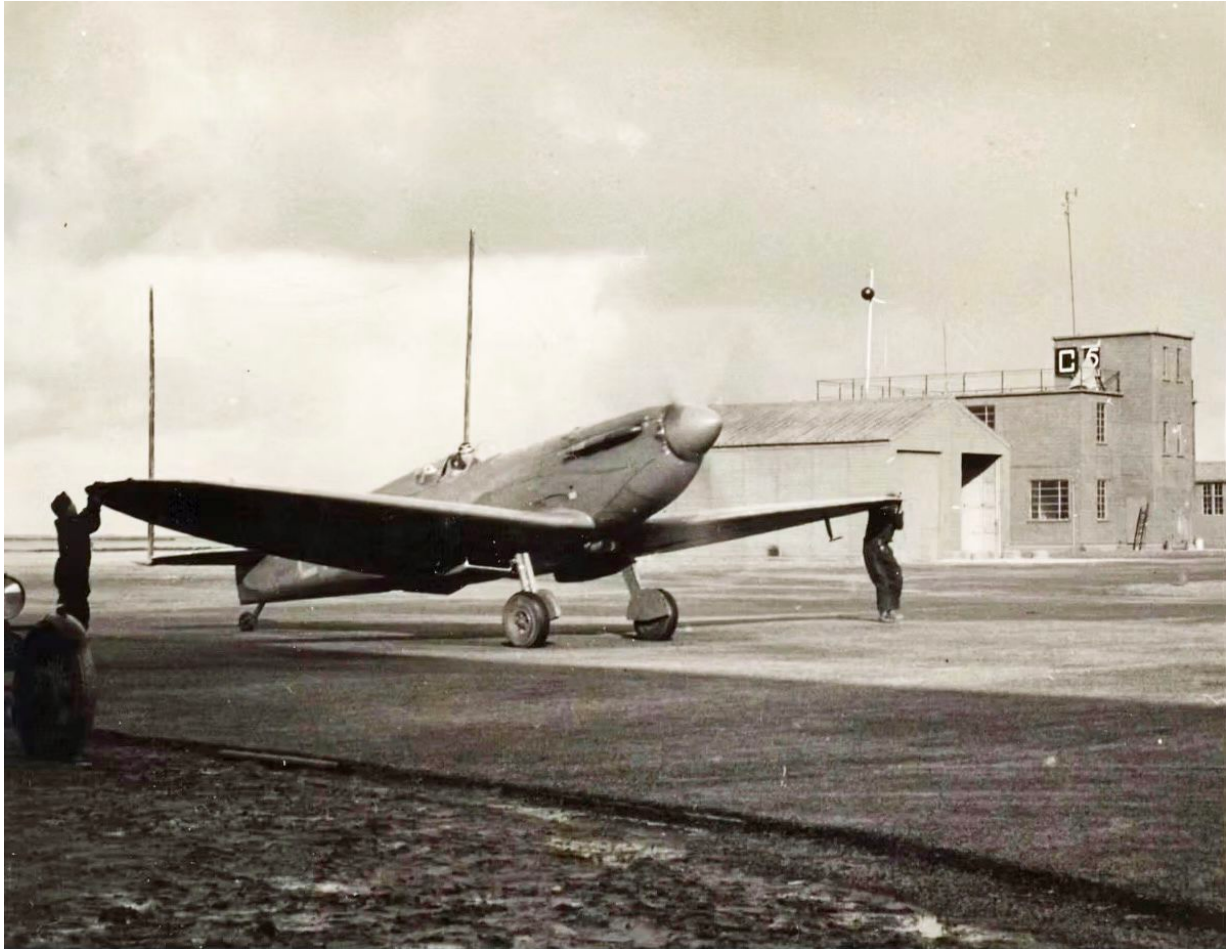


Figure 17 A view of RAF Wick on 29 January 1942 showing Spitfire PR.IV AA810 taxiing-in, Robert Tomlinson at the controls; it is the only known photograph of this aircraft which holds special significance in the history of the Spitfire's role in WW2.

The aircraft AA810 seen in Figure 17 logged more operational hours than any Spitfire of its type and was also the first one to be lost over Norway during the war. It went into service on 17 October 1941 and in the months that followed it was flown by several pilots, including Alastair 'Sandy' Gunn. Most of those pilots did not survive the war. Gunn was flying it, on a reconnaissance flight seeking the *Tirpitz*, when it was shot down near Trondheim. He bailed out, was captured and made a prisoner-of-war. He landed up in the Stalag Luft III camp in which Sydney was also incarcerated and was the 68th man to escape during the 'Great Escape' (narrated presently in this article). He was recaptured and later executed by the direct order of Hitler.

The remains of the aircraft were recovered in 2018 and a major project was initiated to restore it to flying condition by the company Spitfire AA810 Restoration Ltd, the target date for completion being 2027. It will be dedicated to the memory of all the RAF PRU pilots who risked their lives, including Sydney. Details of the project can be read at

<https://www.spitfireaa810.co.uk/the-machine>

and

<https://vintageaviationnews.com/restorations/rare-reconnaissance-spitfire-pr-iv-aa810-on-display-at-the-royal-automobile-club.html>.



Figure 18 Ft Lt Alastair ("Sandy") Gunn leaning on the tail of Spitfire R7056 in November 1941.

Sydney shot down while serving in 'B' Flight: 1941

On 20 August 1941 he took off from RAF St Eval in a Supermarine Spitfire Mk III PR Type C (serial number X4497), equipped for long-range missions with additional fuel tanks and a modified camera, from RAF St Eval on a mission over Brest to photograph the Kriegsmarine battle cruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*. He flew below 18,000 feet, the cloud base, in order to obtain clearer photographs.

13/6/41 F/a. Downe - Run 97 0735. Group B
DE 978
H/o. St. Downe took off on a corkie from
which he has not returned.
St. Downe R/r.

Figure 19 Record of Sydney's departure in Spitfire X4497 at 7.35am on 20 August 1941 in his squadron's operations record book, the note in the right-most column stating 'F/O S.H. Dowse took-off on a sortie from which he has not returned'.

While flying over Lanvéoc (Finistère, Brittany) he was bounced and attacked from behind by two Messerschmitt Bf 109F ('Friedrich') fighter aircraft of the Luftwaffe's Jagdgeschwader 2 (fighter wing 2) (JG 2) 'Richthofen' wing based at the Brest-Guipavas airfield in France. Their 7.62 mm machine gunfire hit his Spitfire, damaging its Rolls Royce Merlin engine and wounding him in the leg. The engine stopped and he decided to bail out. He turned the aircraft on its back, released the canopy and his harness and fell out, pulling his parachute's ripcord. He landed in the sea about a mile from land and, although he was wounded, he managed to swim ashore. He initially evaded capture, clambering over the rocks and hoping nobody had seen him and that he could make contact with the French Resistance. In Pentrez near Telgruc he was seen by some French girls who gathered around him, attracting the attention of the German Coast Guard. The girls were shooed away and he was arrested, the German soldiers uttering the immortal words 'The War is over for you'. He was taken to Wehrmacht HQ in Brest where a doctor tried to remove the bullet from his leg. From there he was taken into central Germany.

His Spitfire had crashed into the sea in flames near Fort Lanveoc. Its wreckage, including its camera, was later recovered by the Germans.

66
Geheim *K-TP*
Geheime Kommandosache

Berichtsstelle <i>Waldemar 2</i> X <i>087</i> Bericht Nr.		Kommando Flughafenbereich Brest Eing. 20. AUG 1941 <i>Boleski</i>
Angenommen Aufgenommen Datum: 20/8. 1941 von: <i>1955</i> Uhr von: <i>X 42 V 14</i> durch: <i>M.</i>	Befehl: 19 Datum: 19 um: Uhr an: Nr. durch: Nr. Stelle:	
Bemerkung: -- G E H E I M -- Q E M --		
Berichtstext ++- S S D - LLSB NR 0417 20/8. 1235 DSZ = AN WALDEMAR 2 NACHR. = IM LAUFE DES VORMITTAGS WURDE 1 SPITFIRE UEBER LANVEOC DURCH EIGENE JAEGER ABGESCHOSSEN. MASCHINE BEI FORT LANVEOC BRENNEND ABGESTUERZT, BIS AUF EISENTEILE VOLLSTAENDIG VERBRANNT. KAMERA GEBORGEN. PILOT MIT FALLSCHIRM ABGESPRUNGEN. BEI PENTREZ IN DER NAEHE VON TELGRUC VON DER KUESTENWACHE 3 FESTGENOMMEN. UEBERFUEHRUNG DESSELBEN NACH BREST- SUEDE VERANLASST. = KOMMANDANT DER SEE UND LANDFLUGHAEFEN BREST - LANVEOC- POULMIC BR. B. NR. 648/41 GEH .++++		
Nicht zu übermitteln: Unterschrift des Aufgebers Berichtsbefehl des Aufgebers		

Ein 5003 Drei Drucke, Berlin NW 61

Figure 20 Sydney's capture confirmed by the German Commander of the Brest-Lanvéoc-Poulmic air base.



Figure 21 The wreckage of Sydney's aircraft on a lorry following its recovery by the Wehrmacht from the sea off Brest.

In captivity as a prisoner-of-war: early escape attempts

Flight Lieutenant Dowse was captured by the Germans at Brest in August, 1941, after he had abandoned his aircraft which had been set on fire by enemy fighters. Throughout his captivity, this officer persistently tried to escape but never succeeded in reaching England. In December, 1941, he escaped from hospital at Stadroda to which he had been taken after capture for treatment for an injured leg. Three days later, he was caught by a frontier guard at the German-Dutch border. Flight Lieutenant Dowse later escaped from a camp at Bad Sulza by mingling with a fatigue party. After travelling by train to Werwitz, he continued on foot, through deep snow towards the German-Belgian border where he was eventually captured, suffering from extreme exhaustion. After some days in hospital, Flight Lieutenant Dowse was imprisoned at Oflag VI-B.' [*Third Supplement to The London Gazette*, 13 August 1946]

Oflag VI-B (a prisoner of war camp for officers at Warburg) was a desolate place, west of the Weser on a plateau three miles from Warburg station, housing 2,500 officers. When Sydney arrived, the inmates were still clearing it of rats and fleas as well as planning a variety of escapes.

'At Warburg, he participated in the excavation of an escape tunnel, which was completed on 18 April 1942. He and 34 others (including the legless air ace, Douglas Bader and Sydney's later escaping partner Stanislaw Krol), prepared to escape. However, as the tunnel broke surface, it became clear that it was slightly too short, and the exit hole had emerged directly in the patrol path of a German sentry. Six RAF officers managed to escape, but, due to the proximity of the sentry, none of the others, including Sydney, was able to do so.' [*Military Wiki Fandom*]

He was mentioned in dispatches on 11 June 1942 and promoted to Flight Lieutenant on 21 October 1942, with seniority from 9 August 1942.

'He joined in the construction of other tunnels at Warburg. On 30 August 1942 an attempt – which became famous as the 'Warburg Wire Job', using articulated ladders to scale the wire – led to the escape of 28 prisoners from this camp, although only three of these managed to make it home.' [*The Times*, 11 April 2008]

However, Sydney was not directly involved in this attempt.

Imprisonment in Stalag Luft III: 1942 to 1944

In May 1942, Sydney was transferred to Stalag Luft III at Sagan in Silesia; it housed officers of the Allied air forces and other RAF officers.

The camp stood in a pine forest clearing with huts on stilts to prevent tunnelling. When Dowse arrived, it held 900 Allied airmen and was seriously overcrowded. His jovial and easy-going manner soon won him friends, and he was popular with the more relaxed of the German guards.' [*The Times*, 11 April 2008]

'His next escape attempt occurred on 30 November 1942 when he and Flight Lieutenant Stanislaw 'Danny' Krol cut through the wire into the camp's central compound and crawled across that compound using blankets as camouflage. They were in the process of cutting the perimeter wire to get out when they were arrested and sentenced to 14 days' solitary confinement.

Sydney, who spoke some German, befriended a German Corporal Hesse who worked alongside him in the camp's censor office. From this contact, he was able to gain useful information and documents which aided the camp escape organisation. He was able to 'borrow' a genuine gate pass which was copied by the POWs' forgery department, and this copy was used on the delousing break mass escape in June 1943.

Through this same contact, Dowse was able to gain information about the German secret rocket establishment at Peenemünde [on the Baltic Sea island of Usedom]. This information was passed on to British Intelligence via secret codes written into POWs' letters home.

Dowse also learnt that the Gestapo had liquidation plans for [his fellow prisoner and key escape planner] Roger Bushell if he were caught escaping again. Dowse warned Bushell, who chose to ignore the warning.' [*Military Wiki Fandom*]



Figure 22 Compound at the Stalag Luft III camp; Imperial War Museum Image IWM (HU 21013).

The camp was established to hold air force personnel. Its guards, numbering about 800, were drawn from the Luftwaffe. It was divided into distinct compounds, that on the northern side being opened on 29 March 1943 for British airmen.

Besides the raising of the huts on stilts to deter escape attempts, the site had been deliberately chosen for its sandy soil which made tunnels highly unstable. The Germans also buried microphones around the camp to detect sounds of tunnelling.

Around the perimeter were watch towers and high barbed wire fences as a further deterrent. The camp had been designed to be assuredly escape proof, but its designers has not reckoned sufficiently with the ingenuity and tenacity of prisoners like Sydney, Gunn and many others, as events would demonstrate.



Figure 23 One of the watch towers at the Stalag Luft III camp.



Figure 24 RAF inmates of Hut 122 at Stalag Luft III; Sandy Gunn is the left-most of the pair standing at the rear in the doorway, whilst seated below him with face downwards is Arnošt ('Wally') Valenta – like Sandy, Wally was one of the fifty 'Great Escapers' murdered by the Gestapo in 1944.



Figure 25 Sandy Gunn (at right) in the North Compound preparing fresh straw for bunk mattresses and pillows.

The Great Escape 1944

During his time in the North Compound at Stalag Luft III, Dowse became involved with the construction of the three tunnels intended for a mass escape, masterminded by Roger Bushell, Harry Day and Canadian Wally Floody, who was instrumental in the tunnel's design and construction. One tunnel, codenamed 'Harry' which Dowse had helped build, was completed in early 1944.

On 24 March 1944, he took part in The Great Escape through tunnel 'Harry', escaping with Stanislaw 'Danny' Krol. Dowse had drawn escape number 21 and was disguised as a Danish foreign worker, equipped with the appropriate (forged) documents and clothing provided by his 'contact'. [Wikipedia]

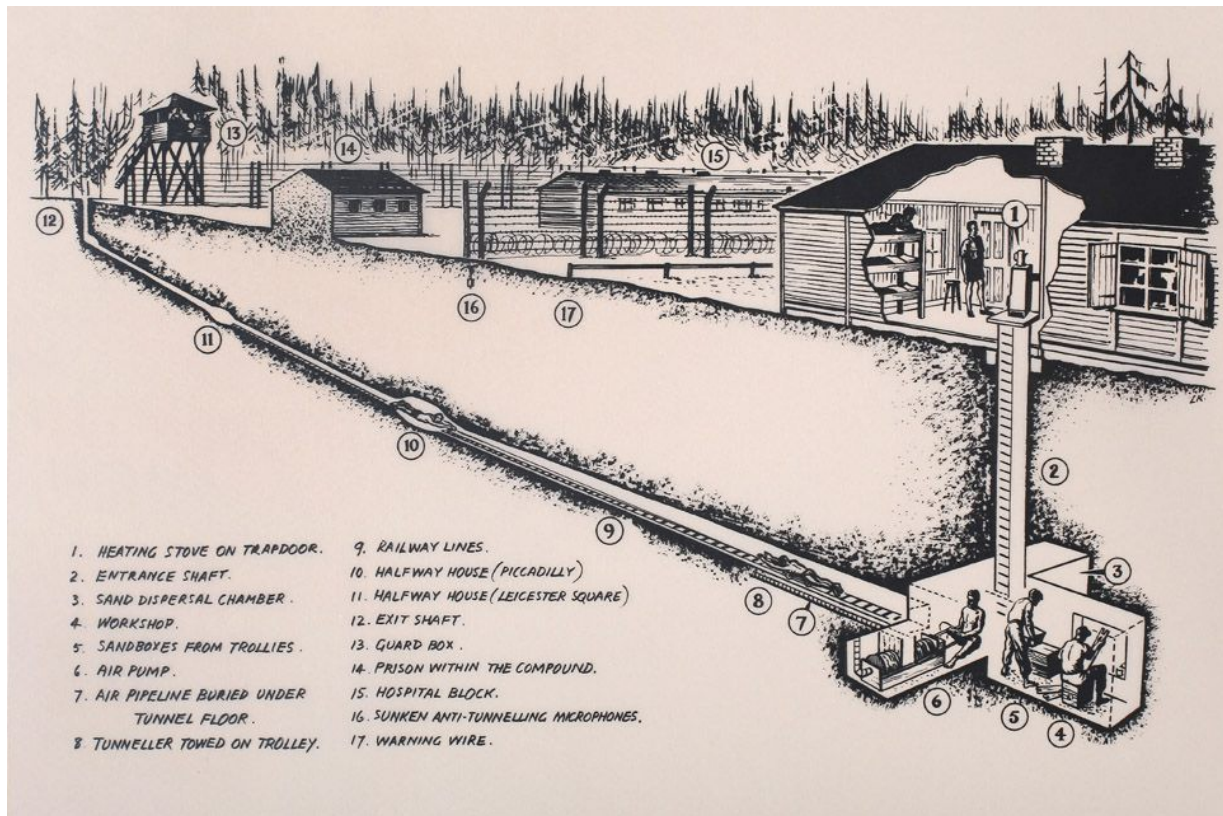


Figure 26 Sketch showing the details of tunnel 'Harry' in relation to the compound and Hut 104.

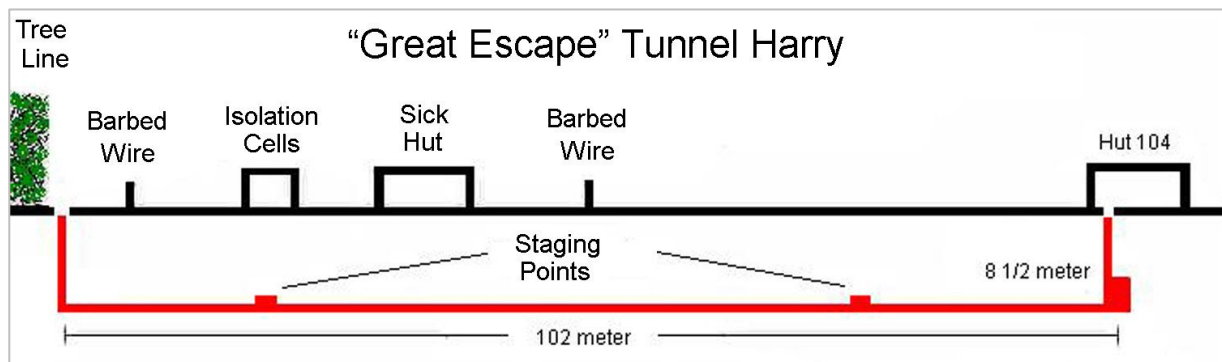


Figure 27 Sketch showing the depth and length of tunnel 'Harry'.

'The escape was delayed because the exit hatch took longer to dislodge than expected. Then it was discovered that the exit was some 25ft short of the edge of the forest which they had relied on to provide cover from the sentries' watchtower. Despite these setbacks, the escape got under way at 10.30pm and shortly after 2.30am 80 men had gone through the tunnel. Four of these were supervising the exit and dispersal procedure when a prowler sentry outside the wire stumbled across the exit hole and fired a warning shot to alert the guards.

Stanislaw 'Danny' Krol had gone through the tunnel ahead of Dowse and miraculously the two met in the woods beyond the wire. Their plan had been to catch a train to Berlin then Stettin (now Szczecin [in Poland]), but the delays in the tunnel meant they had missed the first one. Not wishing to hang about Sagan station waiting for another, they decided to follow the line of the railway eastwards and walk the 80 miles to Poland.

They made remarkably good progress and were within a few miles of the Polish border on April 6 when a farmer discovered them in his barn, where they were taking a rest before crossing under cover of darkness. Disbelieving their cover story of being Polish workers, the farmer called a party of Hitler Youth and Volksturm [local militia].

Dowse was sent to Sachsenhausen concentration camp [near Frankfurt]. Stanislaw 'Danny' Krol was among the 50 recaptured officers to be executed.' [*The Times*, 11 April 2008]

German retaliation: Sachsenhausen concentration camp 1944 to 1945

'At Sachsenhausen, Dowse found himself with three fellow survivors of the 'Great Escape': (Harry Day, Johnnie Dodge and Bertram James). They were placed in Sonderlager A (Special Camp A) within the main camp. Here were housed a handful of other 'political' prisoners, including [Special Operations Executive] SOE agent Peter Churchill, two Russian generals, various other Russians, Poles, Italians and four British soldiers of Irish origin. Later, they were joined by British Commando Lieutenant-Colonel (Mad) Jack Churchill who had been taken prisoner on the Dalmatian island of Brac.' [*Wikipedia*]

'Unlike in Sagan, where the guards were vigilant for signs of escape, the Sonderlager prisoners were left to their own devices.' [*The Times*, 11 April 2008]

'Dowse and James almost immediately began another tunnel, which was kept secret from all non-British personnel. The 120ft-long tunnel ran from a corner of their prison barrack room under the nearby fence to an empty compound beyond. Their tools were a table knife with a serrated edge and two spoons. The earth dug out was dispersed in the foundations of the barrack block. This was completed and used on the night of 23 September 1944, when Dowse, James, Day, Dodge and Jack Churchill escaped.

Dowse paired up with Harry Day and they travelled by train into Berlin. However, they were recaptured the next day when hiding in a bombed-out house in the Berlin suburb of Mahlsdorf.' [*Wikipedia*]

'The four former Stalag Luft III inmates and Churchill crawled through the tunnel and scaled the outer wall of Sachsenhausen on September 23, 1944, but all were recaptured by early October and returned to Sachsenhausen and placed in separate cells in the punishment block. After further questioning, during which Dowse informed his interrogators that he had posted a letter to the International Red Cross during his few days of freedom, the five men were returned to the camp cell block.' [*The Times*, 11 April 2008]

'All the escapers who had been re-captured had been spared execution mainly thanks to Day's efforts under interrogation.' [*Wikipedia*]

Sydney then spent a period at Sachsenhausen in solitary confinement – accounts vary, but the duration of this seems to have been 4-5 months, from late December 1944 into the early months of 1945. He, together with a couple of other 'Great Escapers', were then grouped with more than 130 other individuals of several nationalities and varied backgrounds and moved to Dachau concentration camp near Munich. Under the direct orders of Hitler this group of 'prominent' prisoners (*Prominenten*) were to be used as pawns by the Nazi regime in the course of negotiation if they were to arrive at the point of losing the war. They were moved on yet again, overseen by SS personnel, and landed up at Niederdorf in the South Tyrol. By this time German command structures were disintegrating as the leadership of the regime entered its death throes in Berlin. Nazi officers, amidst increasing lapses into disorder, internal conflicts and drunkenness, became uncertain of their duties and authority. It was discovered that one of them guarding the group at Niederdorf was carrying a document ordering that 28 of the group, including Sydney and his two colleagues, were to be executed. Fortuitously, German Wehrmacht troops then intervened. After a tense and perilous standoff, the SS guards laid down their weapons and departed. Some of the *Prominenten* managed to disperse. On 1 May, Sydney and others set out towards the nearby American 5th Army, reaching them two days later. On 4 May the Americans went to rescue the remaining hostages and in the

face of this the Wehrmacht in turn dropped their weapons and surrendered; the *Prominenten* were officially liberated.

Useful details about Sydney's early flying career are contained in his summary Service Record (Form 543) held in The National Archives. Some segments of this two-page record are shown in the Appendix.

After the war – Malaya and the first marriage

With the war in Europe ended Sydney was repatriated to England. In January 1946 he was released from the RAF, ranked as Flight Lieutenant. He was 27.

A month later, on 11 February, Sydney's sister Patricia ('Paddy') Mary married in London at St George's, Hanover Square to David Anderson Borrie of the Colonial Administrative Service. Her parental home was still 'Drumconner' in Lancing. A quite long account of the wedding was published on 15 February in *The Herald* (Worthing), noting Patricia's interesting wartime career. She had been serving in the Observer Corps in Malaya, escaping from there only two days before Japan had invaded. On return to England she had then served as a Leading Torpedo operator with the Wrens (Women's Royal Naval Service). Her husband David had served as a pilot with the RAF Volunteer Reserve when the war began but subsequently worked, as did Patricia, in the Observer Corps in Malaya. Like Patricia's father William Robert, David was captured when Singapore surrendered to the Japanese and was interned until the war's end in the Changi prison camp. The newspaper's report of Patricia's wedding does not mention the presence there of any of her siblings, but it seems highly probable that Sydney would have attended it. She was given away at the wedding by her father.



Figure 28 Wedding of Sydney's sister Patricia; 11 February 1946.

The Electoral Registers for London in 1946 show Sydney living in London NW1 at 56 Warren Court, a large block of apartments adjoining Warren Street underground station on the Euston Road, borough of Camden. One other person was listed with him there, a widow Mary Ann Cook, who would soon become his first wife. In 1958 she told a court that she and Sydney had first met in April 1946.

Mary Ann had been born in Malta with surname Cesareo in the first decade of the 20th century and had come to live in England at about the age of 16. She had married at Westminster Register Office in 1937 to a

clerk George William Cook. Their marriage certificate [GRO Ref: Westminster 1a 1212, 1937 (Q2)] states her age as 30 and his as 27. It describes him as of independent means and living at 9 St Martin's Court (as was Mary Ann), London WC2. It names his father as William Cook, a company director, and her father as Henry Cesareo, a deceased mechanical engineer.

George had been born in Leigh, Lancashire on 8 December 1909 to parents William (at that time a shop keeper) and his wife Amy. By the time of the 1921 Census William had become joint director of a company C Cook & Co Ltd, dealing in household furniture.

After marrying in 1937 George and Mary Ann settled at 56 Warren Court, being listed there in the Electoral Registers of 1938 and 1939 as well as in the 1939 National Register. In the latter, George's occupation was given as wine store clerk and ambulance organiser (having enrolled at St Pancras) and Mary Ann as a clerk's secretary (presumably his); her birthdate was entered as 4 December 1907 which was more or less consistent with the marriage certificate but may not have been accurate.

George enlisted in the Army in 1939 and served in the Royal Regiment of Artillery with Service Number 224496. Described as a Cadet, he was named in the *Supplement to The London Gazette* of 17 February 1942 as having been made a 2nd Lieutenant with effect from 31 January. He died on active service a few months later, in Tunisia. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission records that he died aged 33 on 24 April 1943 while serving in 231 Battery of the Royal Artillery's 58th Anti-Tank Regiment, and that he is buried or commemorated by memorial 16.F.9. at the Medjez-el-Bab War Cemetery. After his death Mary Ann continued living at 56 Warren Court and, as noted earlier, by 1946 Sydney had also taken up residence there.



Figure 29 Warren Court, Euston Road where Sydney took up residence with Mary Ann in about 1946.

In 1946 Sydney journeyed by sea to Singapore on the *Monarch of Bermuda*, departing from Liverpool on 18 July. The ship's manifest describes him as aged 27 and engaged in Colonial Administration; his last place of residence had been 'Drumconner' in South Lancing. In returning to Malaya, he was of course returning to an area in which his family had been very involved.

Just a month afterwards, on 16 August, he was awarded the Military Cross, announced three days in advance in *The Third Supplement to The London Gazette* published on 13 August. The citation is quite long and detailed, and it is clear that the award had been made for his contributions to helping others escape from imprisonment. The Gazette's announcement is shown in the II.

On the same day that this award was announced in the *Gazette*, Mary Ann Cook embarked at Liverpool on the Bibby Line's ship *Derbyshire* bound for Malta, probably to visit friends or family there. The passenger

manifest prefixes her name with 'Mrs', gives her age as 38 and her last address as 56 Warren Court. She must have returned to Britain before long, because on 6 February 1947 she embarked again, this time at Southampton on the ship *Arundel Castle* bound for Singapore, her age listed as 39 and her last address as 56 Warren Court.

According to Mary Ann's later testimony (in July 1958) to the Penang High Court, Sydney had been writing to her from Singapore saying that he wanted her to come there and marry him. He married her in Singapore in the afternoon of the same day she arrived there in March 1947. He had married a woman at least 11 years older than himself and it would have been doubtful whether she could by then have produced children. He later claimed that his parents had strongly disapproved of the marriage.

On 6 April 1947, or thereabouts, Sydney was appointed to the role of District Officer at Balik Pulau, his predecessor having been transferred from there [*The Straits Budget*, 10 April 1947]. (District Officers played an essential role in the districts to which they were assigned, carrying out both administrative and executive functions in the interface between the Colonial government and the inhabitants.) Balik Pulau, then a small village, is today a suburb of George Town in the Malayan state of Penang, nearly 400 miles north of Singapore. He was presently transferred to Parit in Perak state, south of Penang, before being appointed in 1949 (according to Mary Ann) to the Secretariat in Kuala Lumpur.

He and Mary Ann visited Britain in 1950, sailing on the P&O line's ship *Canton* and arriving at London on 17 April. The passenger list describes him as a civil servant and states their intended address as 20 Gordon Square, WC1. Her age is entered imaginatively as '31' rather than at least 43. They returned nearly six months later, departing from Southampton on 6 October 1950 bound for Singapore on the Dutch ship *Oranje*. They cited their last place of residence as 20 Gordon Square and his occupation as in the Colonial Administrative Service.



Figure 30 The fountain at Balik Pulau town centre; about 1940s/50s.

Back in Malaya, he was posted to Larut, Matang in Perak as Chairman of the Town Board, but scenes arising from their turbulent marriage caused him to be transferred from there, and in 1951 they returned to Penang. Unhappy in her situation, Mary Ann left him on 19 October 1952 and returned to Britain aboard the *Canton*, arriving at London on 27 October; the passenger list gives her age as '37' rather than at least 45 and her intended address as 20 Gordon Square. The 1954 Electoral Register for St Marylebone shows her living at 54 Blandford Street, where she was to continue living for at least the following ten years.

Details of Sydney and Mary Ann during the next few years are known primarily from a series of newspaper articles recounting in excruciating detail their long-drawn-out divorce case in the Penang High Court and the Malayan Federal Court of Appeal, extending from 1958 until 1962. Those articles about the case appearing in *The Straits Times* are freely available online, whilst others in the *Singapore Standard* are not. The divorce proceedings reached the Penang High Court in the summer of 1958, Sydney testifying that he had first asked Mary Ann for a divorce in September 1953. Mary Ann had travelled to Malaya from London to contest his suit. The following summaries are drawn from the accounts in *The Straits Times* of the evidence offered by both sides during the court proceedings.

The Straits Times, 23 July 1958

Sydney's case was made on the basis of her desertion. She contested this, counter-alleging cruelty towards her on his part. He said that she had broken gramophone records over his head on one social occasion, which he had passed off as a joke. He stated that after the transfer to Kuala Lumpur she had been always picking quarrels with him, creating scenes whenever he returned from playing golf or rugby and had been in the habit of throwing things at him. He described a holiday they had taken in Lausanne, Switzerland. Part way through this she had packed her bags and gone back to London; he had persuaded her to return to the holiday, which she did, but after returning to London she had walked out on him again. He denied that in July 1952 he had torn off her dress leaving her nude.

The Straits Times, 24 July 1958

Sydney said that at a party Mary Ann had spotted a small smudge of lipstick on his coat. She had then used her own lipstick to smear his entire coat with it. At another party, at the home of a Dr Yeo Choon Hooi in August 1952, she had had a few drinks before they had driven off homewards. During the journey she had jumped out of the car and lain down in the middle of the road. Another car stopped and its driver, a Mr Moller, tried to assist in getting her up. After some time Mr Moller gave up and returned to his car, whereupon she got up of her own accord and got back into Sydney's car. He denied that he had threatened to crash the car, or that he would drive her out of town and murder her or that he had punched her in the face. He also denied that he was afflicted by obsessive jealousy and suspiciousness, or had a persecution complex or had a wild temper.

The Straits Times, 25 July 1958

Mary Ann claimed that at a Rotary Ball in 1952 Sydney had paid excessive attention to the wife of a Dr Ooi Kee Wan, a former president of the Penang Rotary Club, causing her (Mary Ann) humiliation and distress. Dr Ooi testified that no such behaviour on Sydney's part had taken place, that he had never see Sydney drunk and had never see the facial disfigurements that Mary Ann claimed to have resulted from Sydney beating her. Referring to the incident alleged to have occurred in August 1952, Dr Yeo testified to the same effect and said he had no memory of her being dragged away from the party as she had alleged. Sydney denied that he could be an extremely wild and difficult person to deal with, but counsel produced a letter written by Sydney's brother in 1946 urging him to control his temper.

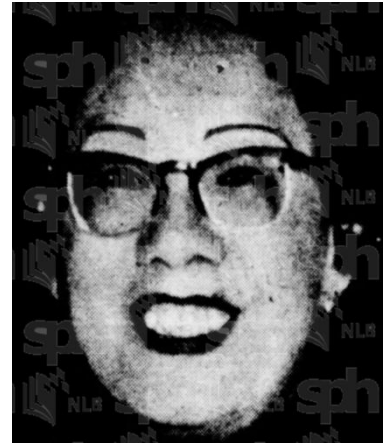


Figure 31 Mrs Ooi Kee Wan.

The Straits Times, 30 July 1958

Mr Moller, the car driver mentioned previously, was examined in detail about the incident of August 1952. He said that Mary Ann, lying in the road, had asserted that Sydney had threatened to murder her. He said that when she had eventually risen from the road on her own accord she had been very calm; he thought she had been 'putting on an act'. A former servant of the Dowses testified that she had seen Mary Ann throw a tin at Sydney but had never seen him throwing anything at Mary Ann, or hitting her. Sydney stated that his parents had tried to break up his friendship with Mary Ann before the marriage. He intended to fly back to them this September.

The Straits Times, 31 July 1958

Mary Ann testified that during their journey aboard the *Canton* in 1950 Sydney had 'gone crazy', hitting and biting her in their cabin. She broke down during this testimony, resulting in a 10-minute adjournment. She alleged that on the day they had married she had invited him to meet some friends she had made during her voyage to Singapore on the *Arundel Castle*. After a nice party with them, Sydney asked her if she had slept with a particular man among those friends. Subsequently, every time they had a row he would accuse her of having slept with that man. She described how after a party in Balik Pulau he had driven their car at 80mph, saying 'I'll show you who is the master'. The car crashed into a pile of stones, ripping off its bonnet and left door; the next day she was diagnosed in hospital with mild concussion. On another social occasion there he had repeatedly accused her of being drunk despite their host denying this was so and telling him not to be so silly. She related that on their return he had beaten her unconscious – she had awoken in a bath of cold water, Sydney trying to press her face into it. She had needed to wear dark glasses afterwards to hide bruising to her eyes. She gave the court her account of the earlier incidents involving Dr Yeo, Dr Ooi, Mr Moller and the Lausanne holiday.

The Straits Times, 1 August 1958

Mary Ann continued her testimony, stating that Sydney was a very jealous man, not liking her to speak to other men and forbidding her to mention the name of her former husband. She had left Sydney because of his violent temper. He had used foul language to her throughout their marriage. After her return to England in 1952 she had written letters to him, telling of her loneliness, hoping for reconciliation until receiving his request for divorce in September 1953. Cross-examined, she said she had not given the names of people in London who had witnessed the beatings because 'they were all friends who did not like to be dragged into a case like this'. She had told Sydney that she would return to him in Malaya if he paid for her

journey and promised to stop beating her, but he had written back to say that he had been 'thrown out' of the Colonial Administrative Service and no longer had a job. After that he had sent her no more money.

The Straits Times, 2 August 1958

She continued testifying, saying she had heard that he was living in a big house and driving a big car. She admitted he had sent her £1,200. She would have settled the divorce case for £4,000 as that was the amount she had spent on him during their marriage. She denied that her aim in contesting his suit was to exact payment from him as the price of not making claims that would lose him his friends. Dowse's counsel stated that all her claims in the court had been falsehoods driven by her desire for money. He said that Dr Yeo had testified that in the incident of August 1952 it was she who had become 'rude and aggressive', whilst Mrs Yeo had testified that Mary Ann could be a very temperamental woman with a jealous disposition, always imagining that Sydney was running around after other women; but she (Mrs Yeo) did not believe that he was flirtatious. The case was now adjourned for other witness evidence to be sought.

The Straits Times, 7 November 1958

Three months had passed. The judge who had been hearing the case, Mr Justice Rigby, had just granted a *decree nisi* to Sydney, to be made absolute three months henceforth. With Sydney's consent, \$4,000 would be paid by him to Mary Ann's solicitors to cover the costs of the proceedings. In his findings the judge stated that whilst he had shown considerable sympathy to Mary Ann it would be 'quite impossible for him' to say that Sydney had been guilty of causing constructive desertion. He would not accept her allegations of assaults 'without corroboration by independent witnesses'. He believed that she had left him in October 1952 'without reasonable cause'. It was also his view that both parties were 'wholly unsuited' to each other.

It thus appeared that in his pursuit of a divorce Sydney was now home and dry with his reputation having been not too badly mauled during the proceedings. But this was not to be. In January 1959 Mary Ann wrote a letter to the Attorney General reporting to him the allegations of an unmarried woman named Tan Phaik Kooi, aged 23. On 22 August 1958 (ie after the conclusion of the court hearings, but before the verdict) Tan had reported to the police in Pulau Tilus that she had been raped on four occasions times by Sydney at his home, the first time in March of that year. She had become pregnant. Mary Ann had known of this during the divorce case hearings but had not disclosed it. Moreover, if Sydney had already committed adultery with this woman prior to those hearings then he had not presented to the High Court all material relevant to Mr Justice Rigby's determination of the case.

In early February 1959, just four days before Sydney's *decree nisi* would have been made absolute, the Attorney General intervened and in early 1960 the case was reopened in the Penang High Court, again in front of Rigby.

The Straits Times, 20 January 1960

The intervention had been triggered by it being brought to the court's attention that in May 1958 Tan Phaik Kooi had been found by a doctor to be pregnant following, as she claimed, a number of occasions when, against her will, she and Sydney had been intimate. Because Sydney had denied being the father she had filed a statement at Pulau Tilus on 22 August. On 7 December 1958 she had given birth to a boy at the Penang Maternity Hospital, naming Sydney as the father. She was seeking damages.

The Straits Times, 22 January 1960

Sydney told the court that he had 'many enemies', with whispering campaigns against him all around the town. He denied being the father and said he had 'never even seen' Miss Tan. He did recall an occasion on 12 August 1958 when Tan and her guardian and another woman 'called at his house one night and made a commotion at the gate'. When they refused to leave he agreed to have her examined by a doctor (as will later appear, it was perhaps not an 'examination' Sydney was wanting from the doctor, but something more destructive). Rigby found it hard to understand why Sydney would have agreed to this if there had been no prior association between him and Tan. Sydney referred to threats having been made to him during the earlier proceedings by Mary Ann, whom he said was a 'vicious and spiteful woman capable of doing such a thing to him' – he was implying that this was all a set-up engineered by her. He had noted the commotion in his diary, with a side note that Tan was a prostitute. He had agreed to her seeing a doctor only in order to avoid publicity. A former servant of Sydney told the court that she lived next door to Tan and that on the night in question she had heard the commotion at Sydney's house. She confirmed Sydney's account of how he had eventually given in to Tan's demand to be examined. She also said that Tan had been 'mixing with

other men'. Sydney's counsel said there were discrepancies in Tan's evidence and asked the court 'what better way was there of scotching this false accusation than to see whether or not she was in fact pregnant?'

The Straits Times, 23 January 1960

Mr Justice Rigby declared that 'he had no doubt' that Sydney had 'deliberately and wilfully' suppressed the fact of his adultery with Tan Phaik Kooi. Having seen Tan and the two women who had accompanied her to Sydney's house, Rigby said that he did not believe that any of them were other than respectable women. He believed that Sydney's conduct, in agreeing for a medical examination, had been consistent with his knowing that he had been the father of her child. Regarding Tan's allegations that the intimacies had been non-consensual, these were not germane to the case in hand.

Rigby acknowledged that during the earlier proceedings in 1958 Sydney must have been much distressed by the 'sensational, unpleasant and vulgar publicity' it had provoked. He branded Mary Ann as 'a thoroughly vindictive woman who, for motives that can be actuated by little else but pure spite, would go to considerable lengths to resist the dissolution of the marriage'. He awarded costs against Sydney and ordered that the rescinding of the *decree nisi* be stayed pending an appeal, notice of which had been given by Sydney's counsel.

Figure 32 Mary Ann, photographed in London on 22 January 1960 while in Penang Justice Rigby was castigating her.



The Straits Times, 23 February 1960

In February 1960 Sydney appealed to the Federation Court of Appeal against Rigby's decision. The appeal hinged on the question of whether the accusation that Sydney had committed adultery with Tan had been satisfactorily corroborated in the recent hearings. Sydney's counsel pointed out that Tan's allegations had not been made known to the authorities until after those hearings, even though Mary Ann had known about them at the time. He asked whether the report of the commotion on 12 August 1958 amounted to corroboration of Tan's claims.

The Straits Times, 24 February 1960

The Penang Legal Adviser, acting on behalf of the Attorney General, argued that Rigby had acted properly when concluding that Tan's claims had been corroborated. Sydney's counsel said that for Tan's evidence to hold, it had to be shown not only that a crime had been committed but also that the accused had committed it. The mere fact that a girl was pregnant was no corroboration of that. He stated that Sydney's actions in response to the commotion had been entirely understandable.

The Straits Times, 25 February 1960

However, the Federation Chief Justice, Dato Sir James Thomson, presiding over the Appeal hearings with two other judges, thought otherwise, saying that there had been ample corroboration. Referring to Tan's evidence he conceded that 'it was extremely unlikely that the whole of her story was true' and that it was incredible that she would have had a succession of intimacies with Sydney that were all against her will. Thomson stated that the 'crucial question' was Sydney's state of mind when he had remarked, during the commotion (as witnesses had testified), that Tan did not look pregnant. Such a remark, said Thomson, suggested that Sydney had been 'more interested in the question of whether or not Tan was pregnant than anything else'. Moreover, not content with having arranged Tan to see a doctor, Sydney had then gone to that doctor the next day to ascertain the result of the examination. He would surely not have done so if he had never had intercourse with Tan. Thomson concluded that Rigby had been correct to regard these considerations as corroborative and dismissed the appeal with costs against Sydney.

The Straits Times, 12 April 1960

Sydney was not a man to give up easily. In April, on hearing submissions from his counsel and also from the Penang Legal Adviser, the Appeal Court granted Sydney conditional leave to appeal to the Privy Council against the rescission of his *decree nisi* granted in 1958.

The Straits Times, 30 April 1960

It was announced that the appeal would be heard by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council at sittings beginning on 11 January 1961.

The Straits Times, 6 May 1961

Following those sittings the Privy Council's findings were published in early May 1961. The issue was very simple, being a conflict between the testimonies of Sydney and Tan as to whether or not her pregnancy had been the result of their having had sexual relations. The findings rehearsed all the details of the events on 12 August 1958 and the matter of interpreting how Sydney had acted. The Council could find nothing exceptional in the way Mr Justice Rigby had formed his judgment on the evidence in front of him. The appeal was dismissed.

The Straits Times, 23 June 1962

But, as already observed, Sydney was not a man to give up easily. It appears that back in 1958, presumably in order to have disclosed everything material to her contesting Sydney's petition, Mary Ann had submitted 'discretionary statements' to the court admitting that in 1956 and 1957 she had herself committed adultery while in London. Now, in 1962, Sydney sued her for divorce on the grounds of that adultery, her statements now having become acceptable as evidence under the terms of the prevailing Evidence Ordinance. We do not know the details of these proceedings but in June 1962 Mr Justice Hepworth of the High Court granted Sydney a *decree nisi*, to be made absolute three months henceforth, whilst awarding costs against him. He was finally free of Mary Ann.

Curiously, Mary Ann retained her Dowse surname in the years that followed. Electoral Registers list her as residing at 54 Blandford Road in St Marylebone from 1954 until at least 1964. She may also have been the 'Mary Ann Dowse' listed in those registers during 1961-63 at 23 Lisle Street in Soho, at that time the premises of a nightclub. Mary Ann had been involved with such clubs even before she had met Sydney. In her testimony in 1958 she had told the High Court that (before the war) she had worked in the Burlington Club and then, during the war while her husband was away, she had run the Crackers Club in Denman Street. After the war she had managed the White Room Club. Later, during the divorce proceedings with Sydney, she had hoped to acquire enough money to purchase a club premises, but the £1,200 he had sent her had not been sufficient.

Currently we know nothing more about the life she lived in London after returning there from Malaya in 1952. She appears to have died on 22 September 1978 [GRO Ref: Camden 14 1713, 1978 (Q3)] aged '63', a figure consistent with the underestimate of eight or so years that she had typically employed in earlier records citing her age. The Islington Cremation Register states [Reg No 21420] that cremation followed on 19 September. The Probate Register states that she had been residing at 32 Clare Court, Judd Street in London WC1 and that her effects were valued at £42,801, administration being granted on 12 December.

The second marriage

Sydney wasted little time before getting remarried. At the beginning of August 1963 it was announced that he had become engaged to the sister (Florence) Marion of Mr Frank Byers, Chairman of Britain's Liberal Party; they were expecting to marry in London in September [*The Straits Times*, 1 August 1973]. Marion was about the same age as Sydney, having been born in Birkenhead, Cheshire on 30 January 1918 to parents Charles Cecil Byers and his wife Florence May (née Fairclough). The 1939 National Register finds the family living in Lancing, their home almost next to that of Sydney's family. Marion's occupation was entered as 'artist'. It seems highly probable that Sydney had known her long before he married Mary Ann. Marion had first married to John Brook [GRO Ref: Westminster 1a 1318, 1940 (Q1)] and by him produced two children, Caroline S (1945) and John Marcus (1947). By the time she became engaged to Sydney she had evidently divorced, being referred to in *The Straits Times* as 'Miss Marion Byers'.

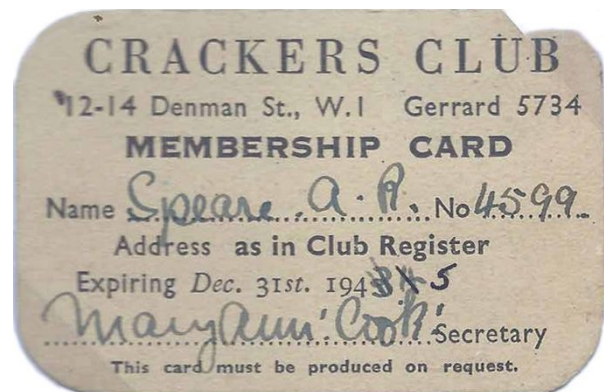


Figure 33 Mary Ann Cook, acting as Secretary to the Crackers Club in the early 1940s; this membership card had belonged to fighter pilot Almus ('Al') Reed Speare, an American serving in the Royal Canadian Air Force.

Sydney and Marion married a little later than September – their marriage was registered in the 4th quarter [GRO Ref: Westminster 5c 639, 1963 (Q4)]. It seems that Sydney had put Malaya behind him for the time being. His life in Malaya had been very different from what it would be during his next few years in England. In 1961 and 1962 he had been President of the Penang Rugby Union and had been regularly lauded in the Press there as a ‘rugby star’.

Sydney Dowse takes up residence in Leewood Way, Effingham

Not long after marrying, Sydney and Marion took up residence in Effingham, Surrey. The then still very new house into which they moved was called The Elms and stood in Leewood Way (this is entirely distinct from the dwelling nearby of the same name on Orestan Lane).

The builder of The Elms and its previous occupant had been property dealer and Effingham stalwart (Wilfred Charles) John Brind (1913-2001) who had first appeared – with his third wife Madeline (née Winterborn) – in Effingham's electoral registers for 1961-62 (the qualifying date was 10 October 1960), as well as a Councillor on Effingham Parish (EPC) and a member of the local board of school managers. Having joined EPC at the local elections of May 1962, his first appearance in the Minutes was for the meeting of 5 June 1962. He also served on the Committee of



Figure 34 Marion Byers.



Figure 35 (Wilfred Charles) John Brind, c1948-49.

Management for Effingham's King George's Field and Hall charity (as it was then named) and in 1963, when he was Chairman of that Committee, he was given a cheque for £52-10s by Barnes and Molly Wallis to start up a fund for building a ‘pavilion’ on the charity's premises, this building becoming subsequently known as the King George V (‘KGV’) Hall [*The Surrey Advertiser and County Times*, 4 May 1963]. From early 1963 Mr Brind had been Chairman of Effingham Residents and Ratepayers Association (ERRA as it was styled then), in the formation of which he had been the prime mover; the intention was to ensure that villagers could share their views and feed these to their elected Councillors.

During his time in Effingham Mr Brind was desirous of developing land lying between Leewood Way and Orestan Lane, land that had long been farmed by the Killick family of West Lane Farm. He may have been the source of a planning application [Ref: GU/R 11426] submitted to Guildford Rural District Council (GRDC) seeking consent to demolish the farmhouse, and some farm buildings, and erect one house – we do not yet know the full details. We do know that consent was granted, on 27 March 1963.

Two earlier planning applications [Refs: GU/R 5441 and GU/R 5743] for residential development on this land had already been refused by GRDC in 1956 while

the Killicks were still resident. Again, we do not yet have further details of these plans but we do know that consent was refused.

Mr Brind resigned from EPC in early 1964, his letter being noted at its meeting of 24 February 1964; at that meeting another resident of Leewood Way, Anthony Cockle (David's father), was unanimously elected as a Councillor in Mr Brind's place. At an ERRA meeting in February 1964 tribute was paid by its incoming new Chairman Mr Kenneth McCrae Hall to Mr Brind who, it was noted, had moved away from

Effingham to take up residence in Cobham Way, East Horsley [*The Surrey Advertiser and County Times*, 1 February 1964]. From this it seems safe to conclude that Sydney and Marion purchased The Elms from the Brinds and moved into it in late 1963 or early 1964. As will be related presently, Mr Brind's property ambitions for Effingham attracted particular public attention after he had moved away and Sydney was one of the many residents who would express their opposition to those ambitions.



Figure 36 Kenneth McCrae Hall and his bride Rowena Joan (née Chalk) at their wedding in 1954.

During the period when Sydney and Marion were living in Effingham they were familiar to the Cockle family living opposite to them. David now relates here his recollections of Leewood Way in its early days and, in particular, his memories of Sydney.

Early days in Leewood Way

We moved to Effingham in the summer of 1957 – my father, mother, myself and my sister Jillian – from Kingston upon Thames where we had lived in the converted upstairs flat of my paternal grandfather's house in Latchmere Road. I was nearly six years old and had just completed my first year of primary school education at Latchmere Road Junior School.

My father Anthony ('Tony') and my mother Donalda ('Donnie') purchased a newly built three-bedroom detached house, No 14, in Leewood Way. My father, a chartered electronics engineer with Solartron Ltd in Cox Lane, Chessington, installed the electrical power system in the new house. My parents gave the house the name Kander after the river which runs through the Swiss village of Kandersteg in the Bernese Oberland, where my parents had gone on their honeymoon.

The Leewood Way estate of detached houses and bungalows was built on the site of Upper Leewood Farm. Construction began in 1955, with the last bungalows completed in early 1958. The developer/builder was W H Gaze & Sons Ltd of Thames Ditton, Surrey. The majority of the houses at the lower, western, end of the estate, were built on piled foundations owing to the local geology. The underlying strata there are the Thanet Sands & Reading Beds (Late Paleocene), overlying the chalk (a boundary known as the K-T boundary); these beds consist of green sandy clay and sand, approximately 59-40 million years old, lying between Home Farm in the south and Leewood Way in the north. The piling contractor was Colets Piling Ltd, their plant workshop and offices located at the corner of The Street and Orestan Lane on the site of the old Village Hall.

In the autumn of 1956, we all visited Leewood Way to see the progress on our new house. The recent Suez crisis had imposed petrol rationing on Britain. With my father requiring his

Rover 12 for work, we had to travel by train from Surbiton to Effingham Junction and then walk the 1½ miles to Leewood Way. In what would become our garden, I had the misfortune to step in a puddle which turned out to be a completed pile bore, which soaked my lower legs from foot to knee. Squelching back to the station and waiting for a train back to Surbiton is a very powerful memory.



Figure 37 Leewood Way in 1965, with No. 14 (the Cockle home) marked; The Elms lay beyond the left-hand edge of this picture.

Opposite (south of) No 14 and across the road there is a bank and a ditch, a hedge of elm and then fields. These fields between Leewood Way and Orestan Lane extending westwards towards East Horsley had long been known as West Lane Farm (or 'Killicks'). The farm was a composite holding, made up of some tenancies and some land owned by the Killicks themselves, on which they grazed their dairy herd. At the eastern end was the farmhouse (since demolished) fronting onto Orestan Lane. At that time West Lane Farm belonged to farmer Ernest Arthur Killick (1891-1970). His father Arthur John (1852-1928) and Arthur's uncle John (1809-1883) had also previously farmed West Lane Farm. On Arthur's death in 1928 Ernest had taken over the additional position of Clerk to Effingham Parish Council (which his father had held since 1894) and held this office until 1946.

Since the 1930s Ernest, by an agreement with Mrs Dolores Pauling of The Lodge, also had a tenancy to graze his dairy cattle on her parkland which, after her death in 1938, became what is now the KGV playing fields.

Ernest began winding down his own dairy herd after the end of the War. He began selling off land and relinquishing tenancies. He last appears on the Electoral register for qualifying date October 1960, after which he moved to Great Bookham.

I and the other young boys who lived on Leewood Way regularly scrumped fruit in Ernest's orchard. He apprehended us on several occasions, threatening either to report us to the village bobby for trespass or to visit our fathers. I don't remember if he ever followed through on his threats.

The Elms

Property developer John Brind (mentioned earlier) personally bought the orchard plot and gained planning permission from Guildford Rural District Council to build a large family house which he named The Elms on part of the site, accessed from Leewood Way. Planning consent for The Elms [Ref: GU/R 8856] was gained on 29 July 1960. Brind and his family lived at The Elms for about three years. By February 1964 they had sold the house to Sydney Hastings Dowse and moved away from Effingham.

Memories of Sydney in Effingham

Sydney moved into the Elms in early 1964. He would be about 46 at that time. Electoral Registers list his new wife Marion there with him. I remember him having a lady there with a significantly tanned complexion; probably this was Marion.

Sydney made an immediate impression in Leewood Way and Effingham. He drove a silver/grey 1960s Bentley S2 saloon. It was known that on several occasions he drove the Bentley up to Gibb's butchers in The Street in his swimming trunks and bare feet and went into their shop so attired.

He and his wife sunbathed in the nude beside the swimming pool in the garden of The Elms. The teenage boys of Leewood Way, including myself, were curious at what had been told by somebody's parent and we went to peer through the hedge surrounding the back garden. Sydney became aware of the voyeurs and threw apples at us, so we scarpered!

Many of the residents of Leewood Way and Effingham were suspicious and very wary of Sydney, having little knowledge of his background. My father was an exception and, being a former WW2 RAF serviceman with an interest in radios, radar and the fate of RAF prisoners of war, struck up a casual friendship with Sydney. My father told Sydney that I was a Cadet Sergeant in No 261 Guildford Air Training Squadron, undergoing Air Experience Flying at RAF White Waltham, Berkshire in de Havilland Chipmunks. My father also told Sydney that I had recently gained my 'C' Class Gliding Licence at RAF Tangmere, Sussex and that I had ambitions to join the RAF, subject to passing the aptitude tests at the Air Crew Training Centre at RAF Biggin Hill, Kent. (I was accepted, subject to school/college examinations, for Officer and Air Crew Training but my pilot training was deferred for 18 months owing to Ministry of Defence budgetary restraints in that period; somewhat crestfallen, I decided to pursue my second career choice – Civil Engineering.)

It was through these conversations my father had with Sydney that in 1967, when I was about 16, I was invited by him to come to The Elms after school, to see his RAF photographic album. I remember that apart from his photographs of pilot friends and colleagues, there were others showing:

- Sydney in his rugby kit – he played for RAF teams;
- his flight training when he was in the RAFVR – de Havilland Tiger Moths, Hawker Harts and North American Harvards;
- the Fairey Ansons, Fairey Swordfish and Supermarine Spitfires that he flew;
- the RAF bases that he flew from, Benson in Oxfordshire for one – being the home of 1PRU this base was secret, for obvious reasons;
- Sidney Cotton's Lockheed 12 Electra, probably at RAF Benson or RAF Heston.
- unusually, original copies of aerial photographs of locations in France, Germany and Scandinavia, which he undoubtedly took on his photo-recce missions; several of these featured Kriegsmarine battle ships and battle cruisers, including Bismark, Tirpitz, Scharnhorst and Gneisenau – he shouldn't have been able to keep copies of these!

He enjoyed telling me about his reconnaissance missions to France, the Ruhr, Norway and, surprisingly, southern Spain. I cannot recollect if he mentioned his time as a POW in German camps or his taking part in the Great Escape.

Sydney's 'lady friend'/wife brought in a tray of coffee and cakes during our meeting in their sumptuous lounge, which I remember was expensively furnished. Sydney offered me a brandy or a scotch to accompany the 'Cafe keuken'; I politely said "thanks but no thanks" as my parents would have taken a dim view of a sixteen-year-old drinking spirits in the afternoon, but I accepted the offer of a small beer.

Sydney and his lady disappeared from The Elms and from Effingham some time in 1968; I never saw him again.

In 1968 we had a family holiday in Kandersteg, Switzerland. One day in the two-week holiday we travelled to the Swiss Federal Capital, Bern, by train to visit museums and the extensive shops. In the early evening, we returned to the Bern railway station (Bahnhof Bern) to catch our return BLS service to Kandersteg. Waiting outside a café on the concourse for the platform board to display our train, my father suddenly exclaimed "that woman in the fur coat walking across the concourse, isn't that Sydney Dowse's partner?" We all looked and at that same moment she saw us and quickly walked on without acknowledging our presence.

Mr Brind's development proposals

After his move to East Horsley Mr Brind's ambitions for Effingham became more starkly apparent. On 2 December 1963 a company named Orestan Developments Limited (ODL) had been incorporated and registered at Companies House. Its declared objects were to acquire lands and premises and to carry on the business of builders and contractors. Initially it had two subscribers, Susan Mary Lowes and Thelma Platman, each holding one share. Its registration document records that the company's compliance with the Companies Act of 1948 had been declared by a solicitor John David Almond Leaver on behalf of the legal practice Baker, McKenzie & Hightower of Compton House, Aldwych, London WC2. ODL's registered address was 28 Ealing Road, Wembley in Middlesex, being the premises of Clifford & Clifford Ltd (auctioneers, surveyors, house, land and estate agents). Another company, Effingham Developments Limited (EDL), was likewise claiming to be based at that address and also at East Horsley but, curiously, cannot be found in the online records of Companies House. Mr Brind was a director of EDL, this being stated in an article about his involvement in a controversial proposal to develop land in Tadworth [*Surrey Mirror and County Post*, 31 January 1964]. In November 1964 he had offered to the 'education authority' (referring to Surrey County Council's Central Divisional Education Executive) to 'dedicate' 7 acres of land between Orestan Lane and Leewood Way for the use of the Howard of Effingham School and St Lawrence Primary School; as noted earlier, these 7 acres had been farmed since at least the early 19th century by the Killick family of West Lane Farm in Orestan Lane. Land Registry documents indicate that ODL had acquired the title to this land in late December 1963. In respect of a further section of land between Orestan Lane and Leewood Way, Mr Brind was seeking planning permission to build six houses which were supposedly to be let to teachers at a nominal rent. Both ODL and EDL were thus involved in these proposals, ODL as the land owner and EDL acting in partnership with it.



Figure 38 The view east across part of the land that Mr Brind wished in 1964 to 'dedicate' to the schools; The Elms (with its white-edged gable) is at right of centre whilst other houses in Leewood Way opposite The Elms can be seen on the left.

The proposals were viewed with considerable suspicion. Many column inches were given to Mr Brind's statements disputing that he been promoting them for personal gain [*The Surrey Advertiser*, 20 March 1965]. A week later his position was attacked by Mr Hall who only a year previously had taken over the Chairmanship of ERRA from Mr Brind and had at that time praised him for his multiple contributions to the community. He now accused Mr Brind of having not disclosed the full facts about his intentions, suggesting that the proposal to offer the 7 acres for the use of the schools was 'tied up' with another application made by Mr Brind 'to build about 60 houses and a shopping centre in the Effingham area' [*The Surrey Advertiser and County Times*, 27 March 1965]. Mr Brind denied this, saying that his proposals had been made purely 'from the goodness of his heart'. Mr Hall may have had his own reasons for opposing the proposals – he was a resident of Orestan Lane, living with his wife Rowena at the house named Dalehurst.

These proposals appear to have been turned down by GRDC during 1965. ODL then submitted a plan to build 34 detached houses on the afore-mentioned 7 acres, whilst offering an adjoining plot of 11 acres to Surrey County Council for a new school and/or playing fields. GRDC refused this proposal for 34 houses as it was judged to be incompatible with Green Belt policy. ODL subsequently appealed. A public inquiry to hear this appeal was scheduled to take place on 16 February 1966. At a meeting of ERRA in September 1965 the Chairman – now Brian Cassell, who had succeeded Mr Hall – urged residents to attend the inquiry and to submit their views in writing [*The Surrey Advertiser and County Times*, 2 October 1965]. At a further meeting in December ERRA announced that it would contribute £50 towards the estimated £300 required for its legal representation at the inquiry; an appeal for contributions to this 'fighting fund' was to be sent to all residents [*The Surrey Advertiser and County Times*, 4 December 1965].

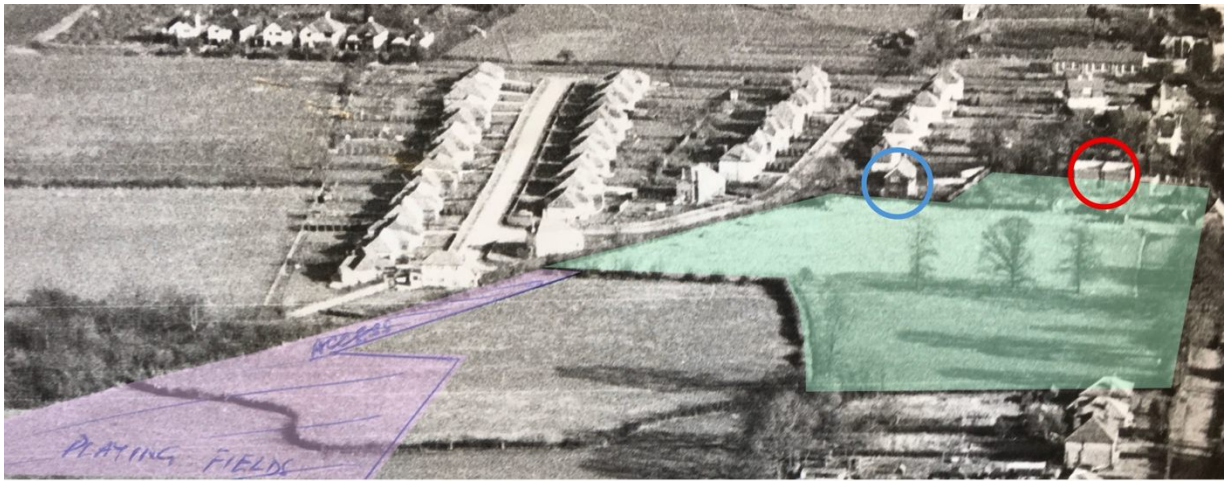


Figure 39 A view east of Leewood Way, dominating the centre of the photograph; Orestan Lane is at far right.

In this aerial photograph taken in 1965 can be seen, in green, the land formerly to be 'dedicated' to the schools (forming most of the reputed '7 acres') but on which Mr Brind now wished to build 34 homes. The area shown in mauve was a small part of the '11 acres' he now offered to SCC for a new school or playing fields, as indicated by the contemporary hand-written label at lower left. The blue circle marks The Elms and the red circle marks an electricity sub-station (which would be replaced by a smaller one in 1968). Figures 37-40 are drawn from a bound file of 11 photographs [SHC Ref: 8423/5] submitted to GRDC in 1965 by Mr Brind's EDL 'in conjunction with' ODL.

The inquiry duly took place, at Millmead House, Guildford. Effingham's opposition to ODL's plan appears to have been spearheaded by EPC which at this time was chaired by Dr Charles Thomas Sutton. However, it was Councillor Antony ("Tony") Donald Page who represented EPC at the inquiry [*The Surrey Advertiser and County Times*, 19 February 1966]. He expressed the view that there had been 'a hint of bribery' in ODL's offer of the 11 acres site alongside its application to build on the 7 acres site, as well as 'a hint of blackmail' in the possibility that if ODL did not get its way then it might inflict something even worse upon Effingham. He said 'Seldom have I heard a case presented with a more cynical contempt for the Green Belt policy'. EPC's Vice-Chairman, Brian Cassell, also spoke. He was EPC's representative on the board of governors for the two local schools and reported that following inspection of the land offered it had been concluded that it was unsuitable for playing fields. A resident John Wright described Effingham as a place not far from London which had preserved the character of a true village; its residents and associations had worked actively to maintain that character.

Sydney was also given the opportunity to speak. The rear of The Elms directly overlooked the 7 acres site. One of the 11 photographs submitted to GRDC is captioned 'View of the Site as seen from the upper window of "The Elms" Leewood Way'; it must surely have been taken by Mr Brind before he sold The Elms to Sydney. The Elms would arguably be more directly affected by the proposal than any other property in Leewood Way. There was some irony in the fact that Mr Brind, who had previously enjoyed his unspoilt rural outlook from the rear of The Elms, was now seeking to alter that outlook against the wishes of the very person to whom he had sold the house and to whom he had no doubt conveyed reassurances as to the stability of its situation.

In Sydney's statement to the inquiry he said:

'... he bought his house because he had definite information that it was in the Green Belt, and that there was no chance whatsoever of any building there. He was told two applications for planning consent [on that site] had been turned down.'

In the end, the Minister of Housing and Local Government rejected ODL's application to build the 34 houses. Brian Cassell's joyful response to the announcement in August was reported at length [*The Surrey Advertiser and County Times*, 20 August 1966]; he likened the battle by ERRA, in particular, as 'rather like the story of David and Goliath'. The inquiry inspector had recommended that the appeal be rejected on the basis that 'there were no special reasons to warrant the overriding of normal Green Belt principles in this case' and that 'this portion of the Green Belt served as a small but definite and valuable break between the main village development and the unfortunate ribbon development to the west'.

Soon afterwards Sydney did experience a little development behind his house when, in 1968, a new electricity sub-station was built directly behind The Elms, surrounded by a fence six feet high.

GRDC had received no objection to this and in any case the work lay within the scope of permitted development [*The Surrey Advertiser*, 6 January 1968].



Figure 40 The view south from the rear of The Elms towards Orestan Lane; directly ahead is the old sub-station whilst at the right can be seen the farmhouse of West Lane Farm.

ODL was not a company to give up easily. After the 1966 failure another plan was submitted for the 7 acres site and that too was refused, on 3 February 1971 [SHC Ref: GU/R/1/71/EFF]. This refusal was subsequently appealed and a public inquiry to hear the appeal was scheduled to take place later that year, on 6 October. However, in September it was reported that ODL had withdrawn its appeal [*The Surrey Advertiser and County Times*, 24 September 1971]. Evidently ODL then sat on the land for about 55 years until such time as the Green Belt principles were relaxed. That relaxation came in December 2024 when the Government set in motion a revised National Planning Policy Framework whereby some land within the Green Belt could be viewed as ‘Grey Belt’ and potentially suitable for development. At the end of December 2024 ODL had current assets of only £34,575 whilst owing £42,090 to its creditors; it must have been putting a low market value on its land holdings. In late 2025 the housing association Aster Homes Ltd, having an option to purchase the 7 acres site from ODL, submitted to Guildford Borough Council an application for permission to build 37 dwellings there. And so the arguments over this site will go through yet another cycle, more than sixty years since the first one. One of ODL's directors today (2026) is the son of the Mr Leaver who had endorsed the company back in 1963.

There is much more that ELHG would wish to learn about the history of Orestan Lane and West Lane Farm and of the various attempts to develop the land there – we intend to research this topic more closely in the future and to write an article about it for this series.

Another significant matter for Sydney during his years in Effingham was concerned with the quest to obtain compensation for those who – like him – had been imprisoned at Sachsenhausen. After the war a campaign had been launched to secure compensation for British victims of Nazi persecution. Its proponents had engaged in a ten-year battle against resistance from the Foreign Office but by the summer of 1964 an agreement had been made between the British Government and the Federal German Government that Germany would provide £1M for the British Government to distribute as it saw fit. Accordingly, by late 1966 about a third of more than 3,000 claimants had been compensated, receiving on average about £1,000 each. The fund was then depleted. However, about a dozen surviving ex-prisoners of Sachsenhausen had been excluded from this scheme, the Foreign Office taking the view that these individuals had not been in ‘Sachsenhausen proper’, that is, in a true concentration camp, but rather in an associated special camp within the complex where they were held (in the view of the Foreign Office) merely as prisoners-of-war.

Sydney had become much exercised by the Government's attitude. His views were reported at length in the autumn of 1965, when he stated [*Daily Express*, 10 October 1965]:

“There is someone sitting in an office somewhere who obviously hasn't much of an idea about what went on during the war. This person obviously thinks that just because we didn't come back from a concentration camp with grievous injuries we don't deserve any compensation’.

By mid-1967 the relevant survivors included six whose whereabouts were then known: Group Capt Harry 'Wings' Melville Arbuthnot Day; Flight Lt Sydney Hastings Dowse; Flying Officer Bertram Arthur 'Jimmy' James; Capt Sigismund Payne Best; Col John 'Mad Jack' Churchill and Capt Peter Morland. The survivors' case had been taken up in Parliament – at the request of Harry Day and Sydney – by Conservative MP Lt-Col Airey Neave who by mid-1967 had spent 18 months locked in argument about the matter with Foreign Secretary George Brown and Prime Minister Harold Wilson. It transpired that the Foreign Office had never interviewed any of the Sachsenhausen survivors and had instead relied, for its view of what their conditions and treatment had been like, only upon what had been written in books authored by Captains Best and Churchill. Neave pointed out that Harry Day, Sydney and others 'had spent long periods in cells, shackled to the floor and sometimes to the ceiling, being fed like animals and in fear of execution in the main compound' [*The Birmingham Post*, 16 June 1967]. An all-party motion signed by 353 MPs was laid in the Commons requesting an independent inquiry, this to be followed by *ex gratia* payments in appropriate cases. As a result, the matter was put before the Ombudsman Sir Edmund Compton whose verdict would then be debated on a free vote. He examined the evidence of just the four individuals who had chosen to lodge their claims: Harry Day, Sydney, Col Jack Churchill and Capt Best.



Figure 41 Group Captain Harry Day.

Sir Edward's report was published in December 1967 as reported with relish in the Press [*Daily Express*, 22 December 1967]:

'The case of a compensation battle by British soldiers [sic] held in a Nazi concentration camp blew up in the face of Foreign Secretary Mr George Brown yesterday. Devastating disclosures are made in a report by the Ombudsman, Sir Edmund Compton. Nameless mandarins of the Foreign Office are blasted by Sir Edmund for arguing that the 12 Servicemen were not entitled to compensation because they were not held in the main camp. But Mr Brown must bear the ultimate responsibility for the affair, which some MPs believe is as serious as the Whitehall blunder in the notorious Cichel Down case.'

Sir Edmund had concluded that the Foreign Office had followed incorrect procedure in its assessment of the claimants' case, resulting in an injustice to them as well as damaging their reputations. In the ensuing parliamentary debate George Brown disputed the view that his civil servants had blundered in their approach and argued that the whole business had been just one of differing judgments. Nevertheless, Brown grudgingly agreed to pay compensation, from the public purse. There were 11 recipients, including Sydney. However, Sydney was still dissatisfied, as reported in early 1968 [*Express and Star*, 30 January 1968]:

'But even this news has not satisfied Mr Sydney Dowse, one of the claimants and one of the organisers of the Great Escape from Stalag Luft III in 1944 when 50 British RAF men were shot. He thinks the money should come from the Germans and not from public funds. Mr Dowse, who lives in Effingham, Surrey, is still angry for people like widows and orphans [ie for relatives of the ex-prisoners who had since died].'

Returning to Sydney's domestic circumstances, it is perhaps significant that in the Electoral Register for Effingham his wife Marion's last appearance is for the year 1968, whereas Sydney continued to be listed at The Elms up to 1972. This may connect with a remark made about Sydney on the *military-history.fandom.com* website:

'He married three times, for the most part to women of some fortune but was single at the time of his death. (He married Florence Marion Byers, daughter of wealthy businessman and Liberal, C. Charles Byers, then ran off, in 1968, with Wings Day's wife, to his former superior officer's eternal chagrin.) In retirement Dowse divided his time between elegant homes in Chelsea and Monte Carlo.'

Harry 'Wings' Day, one of Dowse's fellow prisoners of war and petitioners in the claim for compensation, had married and divorced several times before finally partnering (or marrying) Margaret ('Margo') (née Holmes) Pollock. Electoral Registers for Knightsbridge list Harry and Margo as residing there at 2 Trevor Square during at least the period 1965-70. Reputedly they also lived at times in Monaco and then Malta. It is not clear whether they ever separated or whether Sydney had indeed 'run off' with her. Harry died in Malta on 2 December 1977. Three years later Sydney (by then aged about 62) and Margo married in London [GRO Ref: Westminster 15 1039, 1980 (Q4)].

Sydney must by then have been divorced from Marion. We know nothing of her subsequent life. Numerous public trees on *Ancestry* claim that she died in 1967, doubtless mis-identifying her as the person named 'Florence M Brook' who died aged 52 in that year [GRO Ref: Barrow-in-Furness 10b 215, 1967 (Q1)]. However, they are all mistaken. French government death registers prove that Marion died, as 'Florence Marion Byers born in the UK on 30 January 1918' on 12 February 2001 in Puiset-le-Marais, Essonne in France [<https://www.data.gouv.fr/datasets/fichier-des-personnes-decede-es>].

Sydney's last years

We do not know precisely when Sydney left Effingham. It appears that he sold The Elms in the early 1970s as the Electoral Register shows it occupied in 1974 by the family of John and Valerie Townsend. We also do not know what had brought Sydney to Effingham in the first place. He is reputed to have had homes in various parts of the globe; perhaps he just wanted a quiet English country retreat as well.

It appears that after Harry Day died in 1977 Margo continued living in the Trevor Square home where Sydney joined her after they married in 1980. The freehold of the property, as well as many others in Trevor Square, was held by the department store Harrods. It was reported in 1983 that Harrods had sold 32 houses in the square to a property company for a 'cut price' £2.5M. Harrods was part of the House of Fraser Group and at an extraordinary meeting of the Group's Board of Directors their Chairman, Professor Roland Smith, was challenged on this matter by Sydney [*Daily Post*, 1 July 1983]. Sydney told the Board that after that sale one of the tenants had been 'offered his freehold at £200,000, more than double [what] the property company had paid. Professor Smith said there was no "sinister" background'.

Another of our unknowns is what became of Margaret (Margo), whose origins remain undetermined. She had first married in 1924 [GRO Ref: St Geo Hanover Square 1a 1076, 1924 (Q4)] to a recently-divorced Army captain Hugo McDowell Pollock. She was not listed with him in the Electoral Registers until 1931, in which year they were living at 9 Hanover Square. During 1933-35 they were at 39 Kensington Place but appear to have moved in 1935 to 7 Middle Street in Knightsbridge. In that year, while living at that address, Margaret went bankrupt, being described as 'a commission agent and dealer in stocks and shares' [*The Edinburgh Gazette*, 8 November 1935, p944]. The Electoral Register for 1937 lists them together at a flat in 71, Sloane Street but the 1938 register shows Hugo living alone at Flat 8 in 1a Queen's Gate, South Kensington. It seems likely that they divorced, as he remarried in 1952, in Durban, South Africa, to Isabel Ann North. As noted earlier, she later partnered or married Harry Day before marrying Sydney.

In 1993 Sydney was remembered by Jimmy James when the latter made his third visit, since his incarceration during the War, to Sachsenhausen. An account of that visit [*The Journal*, 14 May 1993] tells graphically of the horrors inflicted upon that camp's inmates.

In 1994 Sydney and thirteen others who had made the 'Great Escape' from Stalag Luft III met in Sagan (today, Zagan); his recollections were reported as follows [*Daily Express*, 31 March 1994]:

'Sydney Dowse is now 75. He is almost the caricature of the Spitfire pilot: chirpy, dapper and raffish. Dowse was third in the tunnel. His partner was a Pole, Flying Officer Danny Krol ... Dowse says "We were caught a couple of weeks later. We were hiding in a haystack and Russian slave labourers uncovered us. They tried to hide us but we were seen".'

Also in March 1994 a memorial service in tribute to the former inmates of Stalag Luft III was held in London at St Clement Danes, attended by 15 including Sydney who had financed and organised it [*Wales on Sunday*, 13 March 1994].

Sydney seems not to have had been short of money in his retirement years, reputedly driving expensive cars and occupying fine properties in London and Monte Carlo. In 1999 he purchased a Rolls Royce 'Corniche', registration number TLC 138M, which had belonged to the recently deceased tycoon Roland 'Tiny' Rowland of Lonrho fame, to whom it had first been registered on 20 September 1973. Rowland had driven it to his work himself every day. (In 2016 this car was put up for auction at Blenheim Palace where it was expected to reach up to £50,000.) We do not know for how long Sydney kept it.



Figure 42 The Rolls Royce Corniche purchased by Sydney in 1999.

In 2000 Sydney became a director of a plastics manufacturing company named Polyval plc based at Villa Spera, 11 Rue Louis Aureglia in Monte Carlo, and maintained that position until 2002. The company had been incorporated in 1995 and was dissolved in 2010.

In March 2004 Sydney, Jimmy James and three others – the only living survivors who had tunnelled out of Stalag Luft III – attended a reunion to mark the 60th anniversary of their escape. It was held at the Imperial War Museum. One report of the event [*Shropshire Star*, 16 March 2004] referred to Sydney in these terms:

‘He is now 84 and divides his time between London and Monte Carlo.’



Figure 43 Jimmy James (at left) with Sydney at their reunion in 2004.

Another report [*Yorkshire Post*, 17 March 2004] describes the meeting there of Sydney and the actor John Leyton who had played the part of Sydney in the film *The Great Escape*:

‘There was an emotional encounter on the lawns of the Imperial War Museum in South London, when Mr Dowse met John Leyton who played him in the 1963 film of the daring escape. The two exchanged a warm handshake and chatted animatedly about the film which immortalised the escape of Allied aircrew from the camp near Sagan on the night of March 24, 1944. As the two came face to face for the first time since the film's release more than 40 years ago, Mr Leyton, 65, said “It is wonderful to meet you. It is an honour and privilege, what you did was absolutely extraordinary. I had an insight into it but I went home to a nice hotel every night”.’

Sydney died on Thursday 10 April 2008 [GRO Ref: Hampshire (5041C), Entry No 500848239, 2008 (Q2)], leaving only two living survivors of the ‘Great Escape’. At the time of his death he had been living at Woodhall House, a large detached residence in Andover Down, on the London Road leading eastwards out of Andover. He was buried in the churchyard of St Nicholas in Fyfield, to the west of Andover.



Figure 44 The grave of Sydney Hastings Dowse, bearing an RAF emblem.

A few obituaries for him were published in national newspapers [*The Times*, 11 April 2008; *The Telegraph*, 12 April 2008; and *The Independent*, 7 June 2008], that in *The Telegraph* having the most to say about him – but almost entirely about his wartime escapades and only this about his later life:

‘He continued to enjoy the fine things in life – including his Rolls-Royce and fast sports car – into old age, and once remarked: “Once one escapes from [Sachsenhausen], life holds no difficulties.” It is thought that Sydney Dowse married three times, but at the time of his death he was single.’

He had made his Will five years earlier, on 16 November 2003. It states only this:

‘This is the Last Will and Testament of me Sydney Hastings Dowse of 21, Royal Avenue in the County of London made this sixteenth day of November in the year of two thousand and three years.

I hereby revoke all former Wills, Codicils and other Testamentary instruments made by me and declare this to be my last Will. I appoint Penelope Alexandra Vernon of Fyfield Manor, Fyfield, Andover, Hampshire to be my Executor and direct that all my debts and funeral expenses shall be paid as soon as convenient after my death.

I give and bequeath to Lady Penelope Vernon all my money and possessions.’

Royal Avenue contains extremely expensive and desirable town houses in Chelsea; we do not know for how long Sydney had lived there.

Lady Vernon, born in 1940, was the daughter of Air Commodore George Felix Allin Skelton and his wife Karin (née) Rosenius. Her second marriage was to Sir (William) Michael Vernon. Sydney's Will was witnessed by Ingrid Tissot-dit-Sanfin, an ‘Interim Agency Manager’ of 115 Rue de Lausanne, 1202 Geneva in Switzerland and Margot Cecilia (née Skelton) Morriss (born in 1939), being a ‘Personal Assistant’ and elder sister of Lady Penelope, of Loxwood Cottage in Marsh Green, Kent. Probate was duly granted to Lady Penelope on 8 May 2008, still residing at Fyfield Manor. The grant of probate stated that the gross value of his estate had not exceeded £300,000 and its net value had not exceeded £92,000. We do not know the nature of the connection between Sydney and Lady Penelope; it may have arisen from her father's connection with the RAF. We cannot now enquire of her, as she died in January 2026, or of her sister Margot who died in 2014.

Sydney's son

In April 2015 Thiam Siew a former student of the Anglo Chinese School in the city of Klang, Selangor in Malaysia posted an account on his website (<https://acsklang1966to76.wordpress.com/2015/04/26/the-great-escape-by-thiam-siew/>) of the friendship he had formed six years earlier with Alan Dowse, the son whom Sydney had fathered in 1958 by his dalliance with Tan Phaik Kooi. It reads as follows (some slight correction has been made to the English):

‘The Great Escape is a 1963 American World War II epic film based on an escape by British and Commonwealth prisoners of war from a German POW camp during World War II, starring Steve McQueen, James Garner, and Richard Attenborough. All of us in ACS Class 1976 were then 4 years old. This show was one of my favourite films in my ACS secondary school days. I was an innocent young boy seeking the thrill of adventure in the film. Why is this writer so melancholy about the past and a film? Here is my story.

In the year 2009, I became a good friend of Alan Dowse from Penang, aged in his 50s. We met in Subang Jaya, Malaysia and got acquainted with one another pretty well over the years. I must say that meeting Alan Dowse in person was a divinely inspired friendship. He told me that the film was based on his father's story in World War 2. This was a true story of his father, Sydney Hastings Dowse, a fighter pilot shot down in Germany and taken as POW in a German death camp. His father and some 500 prisoners made tunnels beneath the prison walls and escaped in different groups.

Alan Dowse spoke passionately to me about his father who once worked in Penang as a District Officer after WW2. While in Penang, his father met a Chinese girl and had an affair with her. She was pregnant with Alan and the father wanted Alan to be aborted while still in his mother's womb. Somehow miraculously, he survived and was born into this world. His father left the family and went back to live in England. Not much contact thereafter. He was raised by his maternal grandmother in Penang. Life is not a bed of roses for him and his mother. The survival instinct, the “Can Do Attitude”, the courage and determination to live for freedom, was inbuilt in Alan as well. This note is a tribute to an old friend Alan Dowse who passed away in Tanjung Malim in August 2014.’

We do not know whether Sydney ever fully acknowledged paternity in respect of this boy, or whether he provided any financial or other support during the boy's lifetime.

ILLUSTRATIONS

- Figure 1: from *Wikipedia*, public domain; original source – Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies and Leiden University Library/Wikimedia Commons
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- Figure 7: from David Cockle (own photograph)
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- Figure 18: attributed to the Gunn family
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- Figures 20, 21: from <https://www.absa3945.com>
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- Figure 24: attributed to the Gunn family at <https://www.cvgc.org/stories/stories/flight-lieutenant-alastair-donald-mackintosh-gunn/>
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- Figure 44: from Findagrave: Memorial ID 272660826
- Appendix: from The National Archives [Ref: XAA000340418: SH DOWSE (Service Number: 740393)]

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are especially grateful to David's sister Alison Mayell for suggesting that we collaborate on the writing of this article, as previously ELHG had been unaware that her family had known Sydney personally during his period in Effingham. We also express our warm thanks to Mrs Mary-Louise Rowland, Archivist of Hurstpierpoint College, for kindly providing information about Sydney's time there.

APPENDIX

RAF Service Record (Form 543) of Sydney Hastings Downe

D O W S E, Sydney, Hastings. *Pilot* 740393

BIRTH. Date <u>21/11/18</u> Nationality <u>British</u> Place: Town <u>London</u> Parish & County <u>London, Middlesex</u>		RELIGION. C of E.	CIVIL OCCUPATION. <u>Student.</u> Employer _____ Address _____																																																																		
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DISCHARGE. Date <u>28-10-1940</u> Para. <u>652 (14) K.R. adl</u> Cause <u>Appointment to a temporary commission</u> Total Service <u>3</u> years <u>110</u> days. " Qual. Service <u>1</u> " <u>50</u> " Pension Award _____		GOOD CONDUCT BADGES. <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th>Authy.</th> <th>1st, 2nd, 3rd.</th> <th>A. D. R.</th> <th>Date of Effect.</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> </tbody> </table>		Authy.	1st, 2nd, 3rd.	A. D. R.	Date of Effect.																																																														
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Annual Training: 1st year FROM 12-7-37 To 22-7-37 FROM 8-1-38 To 22-1-38		SERVICE DOCUMENTS CHECKED. <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th>Date.</th> <th>Initials.</th> <th>Date.</th> <th>Initials.</th> <th>Date.</th> <th>Initials.</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> </tbody> </table>		Date.	Initials.	Date.	Initials.	Date.	Initials.																																																												
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Form 543.

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The second page of the form has a particular detail of interest in its second line which records his service in September 1939 at RNAS Donibristle, the former Fleet Air Arm base located 2.7 miles east of Rosyth, Fife. This might connect to a later verbal account given by Sydney to the Imperial War Museum about his serving on *HMS Furious*, an aircraft carrier based at Donibristle which had been used for advanced deck landing training.