Roderick MACKINNON (1917 – 1943)



527591 Sergeant
Roderick MACKINNON

Observer
61 Squadron

Royal Air Force

2nd March 1941 Age 24

(No photograph available)

Roderick MacKinnon was the seventh of ten children. His parents were Lachlan MacKinnon and his wife Annie nee MacKenzie who had married in 1903 in Duirinish, Isle of Skye.

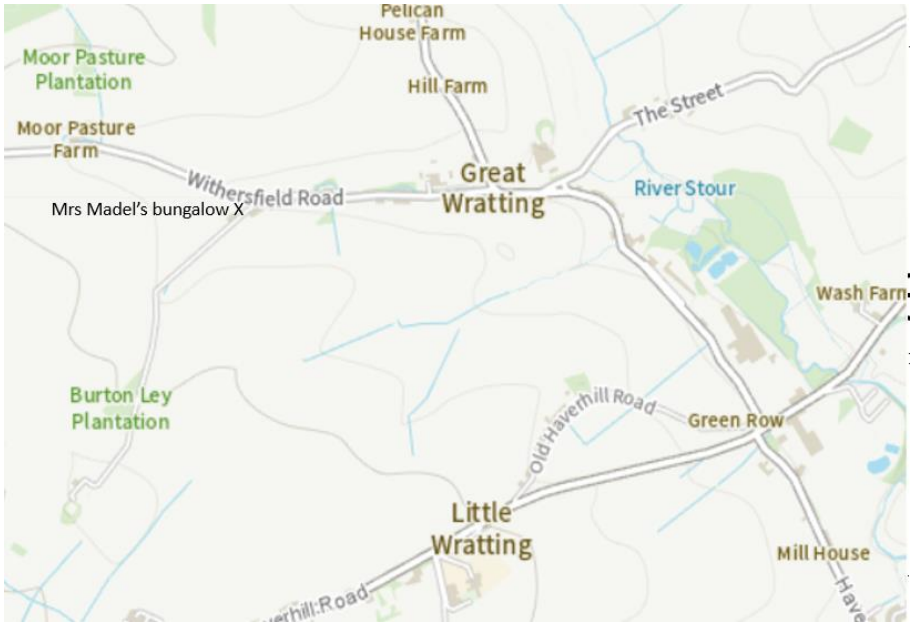
Nothing is known of his early life but after joining the RAF he joined 61 Squadron which was based at RAF Hemswell, Lincolnshire. 61 Squadron was a bomber squadron that was stocked with Handley Page Hampden aircraft at the start of the war.

Hampden P1253 took off from RAF Helmswell at 20:04 hours on 1st March 1941to take part in a raid on Cologne. On board were Pilot Officer Jim Noble, Sergeant R Fletcher, Sergeant F D Healing and Sergeant Roderick MacKinnon who was the Observer.

The raid on Cologne was carried out by aircraft of Bomber Command - Blenheims, Hampdens, Wellingtons and Whitleys. Significant destruction was caused around the port area of Cologne and the attack was a moderate success. However, six aircraft were lost on the raid and a further fourteen crashed in the bad weather they encountered on return. The loss of twenty aircraft out of one hundred and thirty one was a high price to pay for the night's work. Hampden P1253 was one of the

aircraft that crashed on return with the loss of Sgt Healing and Sgt MacKinnon. In May 1944, the pilot Jim Noble wrote to Sgt Jim Fletcher describing the fatal, horrific crash landing.

He described how during the attack on Cologne their aircraft sustained damage from a shell burst which ripped a hole in the fuselage, just behind the rear gunner's seat perforating the petrol tanks. They were unaware of the damage to the fuel tanks. The return journey was uneventful but as they neared the English coast the weather began to deteriorate. They arrived over Hemswell but enemy aircraft were in the vicinity and the damaged Hampden circled base for fifty minutes before being told to divert to RAF Stradishall which was over 100 miles away. They flew at 950 feet on instruments, as forward visibility was poor and they needed to see the ground. When they were some 8 miles north west of Stradishall the port engine failed. Jim Noble tried to switch on the intercom to advise the crew to bale out but as he did the starboard engine also failed and all he could say was "Hold on everybody, I'll try to get it down in one piece." It was 03:20hrs and the crash landing was made in the dark. With both engines out of action and an altimeter that turned out to be incorrectly set, the Hampden hit the ground at 90mph and the tail dropped off as it did so. The rest of the aircraft continued over ploughed fields and through hedges for a quarter of a mile leaving behind it a trail of debris. It came to a standstill in Burton Ley Plantation off Ann Suckling Lane near Great Wratting.



The pilot was catapulted through the perspex windscreen and landed on the starboard wing which had been thrown some fifty feet ahead of the fusilage. This no doubt cushioned his landing somewhat. It was 05.30 when P/O Jim Noble regained consciousness and he was just able to make out the wreckage of the fuselage. In spite of his injuries he went to investigate, first finding Sgt Roderick MacKinnon who had not survived the impact. He then found Sgt Fletcher sitting near the wireless operator's position and the severely injured rear gunner, Sgt Healing. Together Sgt Fletcher and P/O Noble searched the wreckage for the VERY pistol and cartridges in hope that they could attract attention. Unfortunately, they did not find them so at first light, 06.54hrs, the two of them decided to struggle for help despite their injuries. On the way Sgt Fletcher collapsed due to his injuries. Noble continued to crawl to a bungalow at the Great Wratting end of Anne Suckling Lane where he managed to summon help for his crew from the occupant, Mrs Madel. (See x on map) Initially she thought he was a German because the injuries he had sustained to his face made it difficult for him to speak. It was only when she helped him to open the zip on his flying jacket that she saw the RAF wings on his tunic and rushed to summon help. It took an ambulance over an hour to arrive. They found Sgt Fletcher and Sgt Healy and took them and P/O Noble to Newmarket hospital for treatment. Unfortunately, Sgt Healing died en route to the hospital. P/O Noble and Sgt Fletcher survived.

Sgt Roderick MacKinnon who lost his life in the crash aged 24 years of age, was buried at Haverhill cemetery, grave 135, section U.
Sgt Frank Douglas Healing, who died of his injuries aged 22 years of age, was buried in Liverpool (Kirkdale) Cemetery Sec. 7. C. of E. Grave 421.