

Alfred Harris

After the search for Alfie's family began, Eve the niece of Alfie made contact and she advised that she had photos, letters and documents pertaining to his life. Unfortunately, Eve had problems with her computer and could not forward them at the time.

In May of 2019, further genealogical research was undertaken, and a site was found which was administered by a gentleman named Ben Goosens. Ben is based in Holland, and his website details the final hours and subsequent loss of Lancaster PB303 ZN-R and crew on 1 November 1944.

<http://members.home.nl/lancaster.pb303>

Ben was contacted to enquire if he had any further information on Alfie Harris and amazingly he advised the following: 'It is a pleasure for me to read you are very busy researching the history of the Jewish airmen who fought to regain the freedom for so many people. You asked me for more details from Flight Sergeant Alfred Harris. What I have about him, I will share it with you. My mother did adopt several graves from the crew of Lancaster bomber PB303. Also, from the grave of Alfred Harris. On the adoption certificate you can see the last known address from his wife. She was about 1950 (I was 7 years old) a guest from our family and she did go then several times to the cemetery, together with my mum and sometimes I did go with together with them. In one photo you see Mrs Kate Harris and my mum in front of the townhall from Bergen op Zoom. I was told, Mrs Harris had passed away in 1999 and I do not know about if there is still family.'

After the war ended, people from Holland were able to adopt the graves of those men who lost their lives to liberate their country. By this action they were able to express their gratitude for their regained freedom and give some comfort to the bereaved relatives. The adoptions were organised by the Dutch War Graves Committee and the adoptee had to take care of the grave as if it was a member of their own family. They had to put flowers on the grave at remembrance ceremonies and were also able to write to the family. They also had to help to organise for the parents or wives to visit the grave.

Ben Goossen's mother Jane was one of many who adopted graves. The graves were chosen randomly by a committee and Jane Goossen was given the graves of the crew of Lancaster PB303. Jane started to write to the families, but she could not speak English, so she wrote her letters in Dutch and gave them to a neighbour who translated them for her, and she then copied the translated letters herself. Jane's neighbour then translated the letters she received. When Jane's son Ben was 18, he learnt English and was then able to translate the letters. Ben recalls 'I can remember some visits from relatives, but I was only 4 or 5 years of age then, my memory isn't very clear about it. I can remember the visit of the widow of Sgt Harris. She stayed at our home whilst she was in Holland and my mother accompanied her to the cemetery several times'

Ben was advised that Alfie's niece had been contacted and he asked that his contact details were passed to her. Eve was contacted and advised that her uncle's photo was on Bens website, the close connection of Ben's mother and Ben who was tending her uncles grave. Eve was delighted, as was Ben to know about each other and they were put in contact.

Eve has kindly supplied photos, letters and documents relating to Alfie's life.