

In Memory of  
Corporal

# Thomas Alexander Keating

348825, 49 Sqdn., Royal Air Force who died on 23 November 1939 Age 46

Son of Thomas and Nancy Keating; husband of Catherine May Keating, of Winchester.

Remembered with Honour  
Scampton (St. John the Baptist) Churchyard



Commemorated in perpetuity by  
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Corporal Thomas Alexander KEATING was killed when Hampden aircraft L4034 of 49 Squadron, stationed at RAF Scampton, crashed into a hangar at RAF Waddington at about midday on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1939.

There were six occupants of the aircraft:

[16257](#) Squadron Leader Percy McGregor WATT (Age 33)

[348825](#) Corporal Thomas Alexander KEATING (age 46)

[552191](#) AC1 Stanley TAYLOR

[351857](#) AC2 Frank Leslie TALBOT (Age 18)

[535916](#) AC1 Leslie McGARVIE (Age 26)

[620024](#) AC2 Walter Gerald KELLY

All were killed.

The 49 Squadron Form 540 records that:

“Squadron Leader WATT was practicing Z.Z. approaches at WADDINGTON, the four Aircraftsmen Wireless Operators being under instruction to Corporal Keating.

Visibility at WADDINGTON was about fifty yards and the aircraft, having approached in the normal way, flew across the aerodrome at a very low level without shutting off, and struck a hangar on the far side of the landing ground. TAYLOR, TALBOT and KEELY were killed outright, the remainder of the occupants dying within a few hours.”

Unfortunately, tragic as these deaths were, they were not the only casualties. Working in the hangar struck by L4034 were :

[565893](#) Corporal Archibald McDonald HENDERSON (Age 24) and [619132](#) LAC George Thomas LANDING (Age 30) who were both killed,

and Corporal A COOKE and AC2 M BRISTOW, who were both injured.

The Hampden aircraft was not without its vices, it had a tendency to swing while taking off and an occasional reluctance to ‘unstick’ on take-off. It was also liable to yaw during circuits and on a climbing turn at low speed, if the wing dropped, a yawing dive could occur. If this happened at low altitude there could be insufficient time and height for recovery. This may have been the cause of the crash of L4034.

Corporal Thomas Alexander KEATING was a career airman having transferred to the RFC from the cavalry in the First World War. Squadron Leader Peter Tunstall, later imprisoned in the infamous Colditz POW camp, remembered Keating from his time on 49 Squadron in his book ‘The last Escaper’; “Our two future VC’s were not the only great men at Scampton. In my estimation another of them was Aircraftsman Keating. To our young eyes, Keating was an old man. He had iron-grey hair

and a row of First World War medal ribbons.... Keating also played rugby for the Station and died young at heart."

Tunstall described Keating as "the father of 49 Squadron" .

He recalled "when an airman came up, saluted smartly and said "Excuse me sir, but AC Keating would like to have a word with you" you knew you were in for a quiet fatherly dressing-down that would really hit home.

"Now that's not the way to go on, sir, is it now?"

"No, Keating"

"I mean we'll never really get on in the service if we do silly things like that, will we, sir?"

"Yes, Keating-I mean, no, Keating"

"Very well then, we'll have to pull our socks up, won't we, sir?"

And so it was with the pilot officer looking sorrowfully at his shoes in the august presence of the old Wop/AG"

Thomas Alexander KEATING rests in Scampton (St John the Baptist) Churchyard together with two of the young airmen he was training on that fateful day, a father figure to the end.