

In Memory of

Sergeant

# James Arthur Gerald Browne

404849, Royal Australian Air Force who died on 31 January 1943 Age 25

Son of Francis Atkins Browne and Olive Eglantine Shuckburgh Browne, of Roma, Queensland, Australia;  
husband of Marjorie Sylvia Browne, of Southgate, Middlesex, England.

Remembered with Honour

Scampton (St. John the Baptist) Churchyard

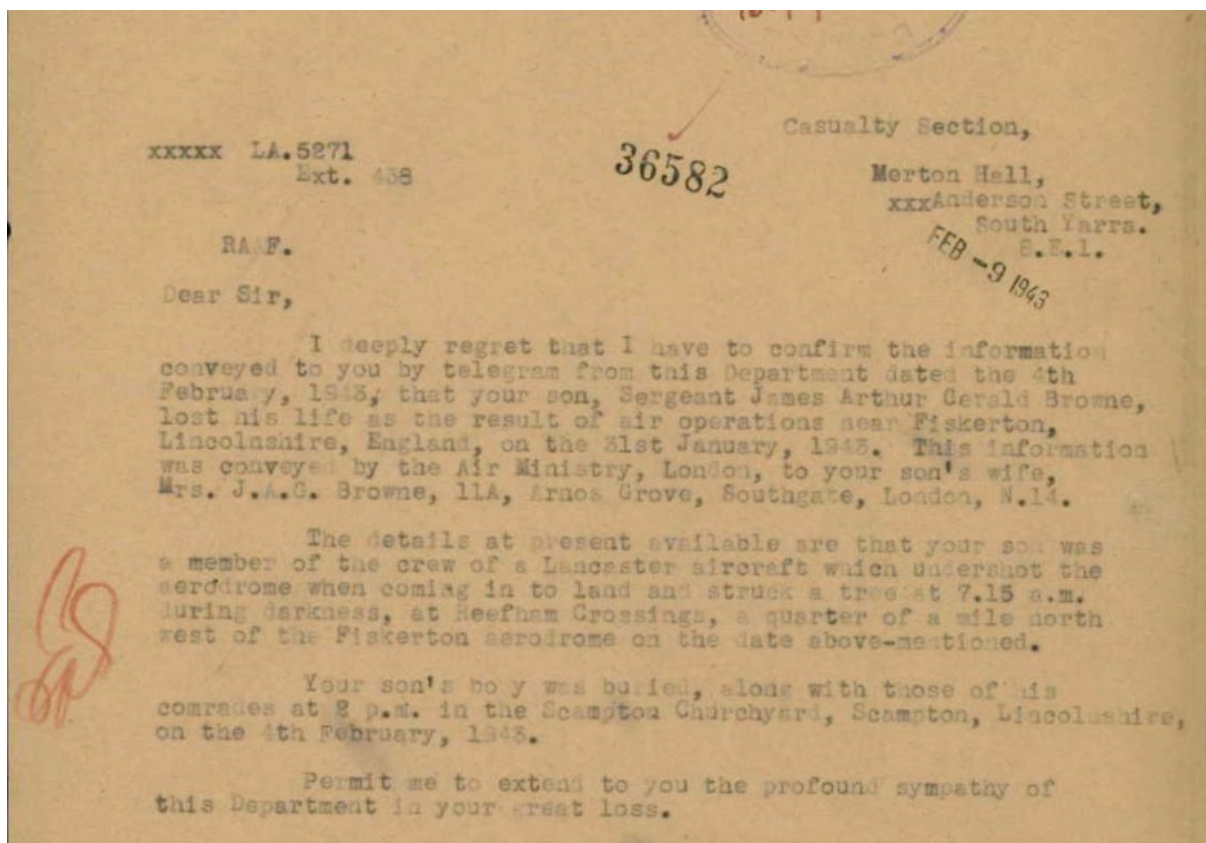


Commemorated in perpetuity by  
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

404849 Sergeant James Arthur Gerald BROWNE, RAAF was killed when Lancaster ED428, crashed at Reepham level crossing, Lincolnshire, at 0715hrs on 31<sup>st</sup> January 1943

The aircraft, callsign 'E-Easy' of 49 Squadron, had taken off at 0226 that morning from RAF FISKERTON on a mission to Hamburg. A letter to Sgt Browne's father tells how, after successfully completing the mission, the aircraft undershot the runway of Fiskerton aerodrome while coming in to land, struck a tree and crashed at Reepham Crossings, ¼ mile north west of the aerodrome ( and 2 miles east north east of Lincoln).

A circumstantial report prepared on behalf of Wing Commander SLEE, Commanding 49 Squadron, stated that, from questioning Sgt PHILLIPS, the sole survivor, it would appear that the wrong QFE (air pressure at ground level) was set on the aircraft altimeter. This would cause the altimeter to indicate that the aircraft was at a greater height than it actually was.



James Arthur Gerald BROWNE was born on 31/12/17 at Brisbane, Queensland to Francis Atkins BROWNE and Olive Eglantine Shuckburgh BROWNE

After primary schooling he attended first Roma State School and then The Southport School, a fee paying school which he represented at cricket, football and rifle shooting. Also whilst there, he attained the rank of Corporal in the school Cadet Corps.

After leaving school, Gerald worked as a Jackeroo overseer grazier in conjunction with father and uncle at Beaconsfield, Roma, Queensland

On 03/01/40 James applied for aircrew duties with the RAAF already having flown 16<sup>1/2</sup> hrs dual and 4<sup>1/2</sup> hrs solo in civil aircraft after training with Royal Queensland Aero Club and Rona Aero Club. In his application, James disclosed that he had, in 1938 also applied to both be a cadet in the RAAF and for Civil Air Reserve.

It wasn't until 4<sup>th</sup> June 1940 that Gerald was enrolled into the Reserve of the RAAF at the Recruiting Centre at TOOWOOMBA and he then had to endure another 6 frustrating months before he was enlisted at No 3 Recruiting Centre on 06/12/40 as an Aircraftman 2<sup>nd</sup> Class (AC2). The 6<sup>th</sup> being a Friday he didn't report to No. 2 Initial Training School, Lindfield until Sunday 8<sup>th</sup>. Gerald was mustered as a Wireless Operator Air Gunner (WOAG).

His initial training over, Gerald was posted to No2 Embarkation Depot on 4<sup>th</sup> January 1941, on the same day being promoted to Leading Aircraftman (LAC)

A week later, while Gerald was at No2 Embarkation Depot, Llewellyn Grey, who was subsequently to be killed in the same incident as Gerald, arrived there. It is not known if the two men met at Bradfield Park but they both embarked from Australia on 23/01/41 and their postings and dates are identical throughout their Canadian Training and until they arrive at 14 OTU at Cottesmore together.

On 16<sup>th</sup> February 1941 Gerald was posted to No.3 Radio School Winnipeg, graduating with his Wireless Operator's Badge on 5<sup>th</sup> July before moving on to No. 3 Bombing and Gunnery School on 6<sup>th</sup> July 1941

On 05/08/1941, the graduation day from No.3 B&GS, Llewellyn was awarded the Air Gunner's Badge and promoted to the rank of Sergeant. The next day he was posted to No.1 'Y' Depot Halifax to await transport to the UK. Llewellyn embarked for the UK on 20th August, not arriving until 8th September when he was posted to the strength of No.3 Personnel Reception Centre, Bournemouth. On 29th September he was posted to No.1 Signals School to continue his Wireless Operator training and on 9th December 1941 he was posted to 14 Operational Training Unit (14 OTU) at RAF Cottesmore where the various trades undertook joint training in order to form future crews for operational units.

The contents of a letter he sent while posted to 14 OTU were published in The Western Star newspaper of dated 17<sup>th</sup> July 1942

## WITH THE R.A.F. IN ENGLAND

### LETTER FROM SERGEANT GERALD BROWNE

Writing to friends in Roma, under date April 4, Sergt. Gerald Browne, son of Mr. Frank Browne, Beaconsfield, says: The cake looked so small that I didn't like to cut it—used to take it out and admire it. We finally did, and it tasted as good as it looked.

In recent months I have seen Bill Lloyd in London, Jim McGoldrick, Harold Sparks (who is on this station), Ina Duc, who also dropped in one day, and Jack Cullen, who is on this station, and in my flight. You probably know that Bob Ryder and Jim Courtney are missing—bad luck.

The winter has left us, and it is spring, and very lovely, too. Though there was lots of snow, fog, rain, etc., the winter didn't seem too bad—not as cold as Canada. With the improved weather, we have been very busy, day and night. I haven't been off the station for six weeks and was very tired, so was pleased to get three days leave which I spent with friends in London. It was swell to get away from the round of aeroplanes, air force beds, and mess cooking for a while.

The one thing I miss most over here is fresh fruit and white bread, we won't see till after the war. I soon got used to little sugar and have eaten horse meat on a few occasions. I don't like the idea, but it is quite edible. We have been having some foul weather for the last week, three days thick fog, and since that a gusty northerly gale, very cold, sometimes cloudy. It is cold at ground level and drops to zero at 10,000 feet. There seems to be little to write about, as we have got used to everything. I could fill pages talking "shop," but don't suppose the censor would enjoy that.

I have seen a fair bit of England and Scotland since coming here. During autumn and winter we did little flying and had several periods of leave, during which I visited Liverpool, Bournemouth, Salisbury, Bath, Bristol, and various parts of Somerset, Glasgow, Ayr, Stirling, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Dundee, Nottingham, Lincoln, Leicester, and of course London. Reads like a Cook's tour. I like Bath and Somerset best, and have been there three times. London is swell place. I was not greatly taken with it at first, but grew to like it more each visit. I can find my way round without trouble, even in the blackout. I visited all historic places early in the period, and still got a kick out of walking down the Strand and Regent Street to Piccadilly Circus, or down Whitehall, or having a drink in the Savoy.

One day some people took us to a sitting of the House of Commons, which I found extremely interesting. The actual House of Commons has, of course, been bombed, and the Commons now sit in the House of Lords. Saw Hore-Belisha and Maxton, and saw and heard Bevin, but Mr. Churchill was not present. However, I got a good view of him and the King of Greece at the England-Scotland football at Wembley.

It wasn't until 22nd May 1942 that Gerald was posted to 49 Squadron, at that time based at RAF Scampton. He does not seem to have arrived as part of a formed crew as the Squadron Form 540 records the posting in of one pilot who is posted out the same day to 49 Conversion Flight and six Wireless Telegraphist/Air Gunners, all Australian. This may have been due to the fact that 49 Squadron were in the middle of converting from the Handley Page Hampden through the infamous Avro Manchester to the Avro Lancaster which had a different crew composition. Gerald did not fly any operational missions in a Manchester aircraft and instead undertook conversion training to operate in the Lancaster. Gerald's comrade Llewellyn GREY re-joined him at 49 Squadron nine days later on 31<sup>st</sup> May.

Sergeant BROWNE was normally part of the crew of Sgt GOULD together with, amongst others, two of the other men who would die in Lancaster ED 428, his long-time comrade, Flight Sergeant GREY and Flying Officer RIDLEY.

On 15th August 1942 the three of them undertook their first operational mission to DUSSELDORF as part of Sgt Gould's crew. On 17<sup>th</sup> August 1942 Gerald's RAAF records show him as being appointed as an Air Bomber but individual crew roles are not shown on the 49 Squadron aircraft/mission records (Form 541) and the Form 540 recording the fatal crash records Gerald as the Wireless Operator.

Further missions followed:

OSNABROOK on 17/08/42

DUISBERG on 06/09/42

FRANKFURT on 08/09/42

BREMEN on 13/09/42

WILHELMSHAVEN on 14/09/42

ESSEN on 17/09/42

Mining Off SWINEMUNDE on 19/09/42

MUNICH on 20/09/42

WISMAR on 23/09/42 when their aircraft was damaged by flak.

WISMAR on 01/10/42 when they returned with a 1000lb bomb hung up!

OSNABROOK on 06/10/42 when they returned early with a port engine and the rear turret u/s.

The Schneider factory at LE CREUSOT in daylight on 17/10/42

MILAN on 24/10/42

On 15/11/42 two of the regular crew, the now Flight Sgt Gould, the pilot, and Sgt Seaman, were posted from the Squadron.



On the same date Sergeant BROWNE, Flight Sergeant GREY, and Flying Officer RIDLEY were posted to 1654 Conversion Unit to form a new crew together with Flight Sergeant COLE as Pilot, Sergeant BRAMLEY as Flight Engineer, Sergeant PHILLIPS as mid upper gunner and Sergeant WOOD as rear gunner.

Whilst posted to 1654 Conversion Unit Gerald got married on 7<sup>th</sup> December 1942 to Marjorie Sylvia BROWNE nee AYRES of 11A Arnos Grove London N14 at Edmonton Register Office. It's not known how or where they met.

It wasn't a long honeymoon and the first mission of Gerald's newly constituted crew was on 21/12/42 to MUNICH and on 16/01/43 the same crew flew a mission to Berlin.

The next night, the 17th January, they again attacked BERLIN but for that mission Flying Officer RIDLEY, the Navigator, was replaced by Flying Officer WATTS.

When ED 428 took off on its final mission Flying Officer RIDLEY was back but flying in Sgt BRAMLEY's place as Flight Engineer in a change that cost his life was Sgt PITTARD. Sergeant Gerald BROWNE, RAAF, was killed on his sixteenth operation, a little over half way through the thirty that normally comprised a first 'tour' of operations with Bomber Command.

His father received the dreaded telegram on 4th February 1943, the day Llewellyn and four of his comrades were laid to rest in Scampton Village Churchyard.

R.A.A.F. Form A.22 (Revised May, 1942). (R.A.F. Form 96 A.). (S.57:A. (Naval)).										MESSAGE FORM				Office Serial No. _____	
Call IN and : Preface OUT										No. of Groups <b>GR</b>		Office Date Stamp P.A. 658 P.A. 659 <i>Enc. 3A</i>			
DELIVERY PERSONAL. (Above this line is for Signals use only.)										TO* <b>MR. F.A. BROWNE, BEACONSFIELD, ROMA, Q'LD.</b>					
FROM* AIR BOARD, MELBOURNE				Originator's Number. P.A. 658		Date. 4/FEB		In Reply to Number and Date.							
DEEPLY REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR SON, SERGEANT JAMES ARTHUR GERALD BROWNE															
HAS LOST HIS LIFE AS RESULT OF															
1943															
AIR OPERATIONS NEAR <b>FISKERTON, Lincs. ENGLAND</b> ON THIRTY-FIRST JANUARY (.)															
THE MINISTER FOR AIR JOINS WITH AIR BOARD IN EXPRESSING PROFOUND SYMPATHY IN YOUR SAD BEREAVEMENT.															
TO: POSTMASTER <b>XX ROMA Q'LD.</b>															
P.A. <b>659 4/FEB</b> REQUEST ADVISE AIR BOARD BY COLLECT TELEGRAM WHEN ACCOMPANYING WAR CASUALTY TELEGRAM ADDRESSED TO <b>MR. F.A. BROWNE, BEACONSFIELD, ROMA.</b>															
HAS BEEN DELIVERED															
FROM: AIR BOARD.															
This message must be sent AS WRITTEN and must NOT be sent by W/T. Signature <i>F.A. Brown F/O</i>			This message must be sent IN CYPHER and may be sent by W/T. Signature <i>XXXXXXXXXXXX</i>			Originator's Instructions.* Degree of Priority.*			TIME of ORIGIN 2130/5 1/2 T.O.P.						
!Originator to insert "NOT" if message is not to go by W/T over any part of the route. (Below this line is for Signals use only.)															
System in.	Time in.	Reader.	Sender.	System out.	Time out.	Reader.	Sender.	System out.	Time out.	Reader.	Sender.	T.H.I.			
*The Signal Department is responsible that these details are transposed to the appropriate portion of the message form and that all possibility of compromising distinguishing signals, etc., by omitting to remove their signification from the address, etc., is avoided. Before delivery of the message these details are to be re-inserted in P/L.															

While it is likely that Gerald's wife received her telegram earlier, it is not known if she was able to attend the funeral. They had been married less than two months.

It was over 6 years later that Gerald's widow felt able to move on, and in May 1949 RAAF Headquarters received a letter from her informing them that she had remarried.