



remembrance ni

World War 2 Life stories

Church bell ringer awarded DSM for his part in naval action

Petty Officer Norman Matson was a keen bellringer and was a member of St. Thomas's Bell-Ringers Society on Belfast's Lisburn Road.

On the morning of Sunday, 15th November 1940, across the United Kingdom a "firing peal" of bells was rung in honour of the first offensive victory by the Allied forces. Norman who was home on leave at the time, was given the honour of the Society by being assigned the biggest bell, the tenor.

In 1940 Norman was serving on board *HMS Carnarvon Castle*. Built by Harland and Wolff, the *Carnarvon...*





Bellringers of St Thomas' Church, Belfast who took part in the Victory Peel. Norman Matson is to the extreme right. Photo - Larne Times, 19/11/1942.

...*Castle* was a passenger ship operated by the Union-Castle Mail line. Requisitioned by the Admiralty in September 1939 while in Cape Town, she was converted into an armed merchant cruiser and commissioned in October 1939.

On the 5th December 1940, while off the coast of Brazil, she encountered the German auxiliary cruiser *Thor*. In a five-hour running battle with her the *Carnarvon Castle* suffered



heavy damage, sustaining 27 hits causing 4 dead and 27 wounded.

For his part in the action Norman was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal.

Carnarvon Castle put into Montevideo for repairs. She was repaired with steel plate reportedly salvaged from the German cruiser *Admiral Graf Spee*.

Norman Leslie Matson was born in Belfast on the 17th November 1903. He was the son of Charles Matson, a constable in the RIC, and his wife Jean Matson (nee McIlwrath). The family then living in Ulsterville Gardens moved to Madrid Street where they are recorded in the 1911 census. Norman's father, now a sergeant, later attained the rank of Head Constable.

**The
Matson
family
grave in
Bangor
cemetery**



After school Norman joined the Belfast and County Down Railway working for 14 years in the office of the general manager.

On the outbreak of the Second World War, Norman joined the Merchant Navy and later volunteered for the Royal Navy.

Norman died in 1950. The family notice in the Belfast Newsletter of 02/09/1950 reads -

MATSON – September 1, 1950, at Hospital (as result of war services, patiently borne), Petty Officer Norman Leslie Matson, D.S.M., loved son of Jeannie and the late Charles Matson. Funeral from his residence, 24, Camden Street, on Monday, at 2-30 p.m., to Bangor New Cemetery. Very deeply regretted. Thy will be done.

RAF WW2 veteran enabled The Ports to do the double

Jim Kerr was educated at the Model Primary School, Enniskillen and at Portora Royal. His first job was as an accounts clerk with the local firm of T.P. Topping.

When war broke out, Jim and six of his friends didn't follow the deep-rooted Fermanagh tradition of joining the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers or the Royal Inniskilling Dragoon Guards – they plumped instead for the RAF, where he served from 1940 until he was demobbed in 1947.

After training in England, Jim was posted to the Middle East and Africa. The ship convoy taking him to his posting in North Africa with the Germans in command of the Mediterranean, and an ever-present threat of U-boats, had to sail round South Africa to the Suez Canal.

As a leading aircraftman, he was stationed in Alexandria and Egypt, and they were involved in various battles, until the war ended.

His service continued back home in Aldergrove and dismantling the flying boats back in Killadeas, Fermanagh. He ended his RAF service in France.

Jim had sad memories of the war, losing many friends in action, and he vividly remembered the day when he witnessed an RAF transport plane crash at Lydda Airport, with the loss of 150 souls.

After the war, Jim Kerr (right) took up employment as a clerical officer in the Fermanagh County Surveyor's Office in Enniskillen.



With his typically caring attitude, he involved himself in voluntary welfare work in the area, with ex-service personnel. Then, in 1951, he married Cork-born Olive Kingston, a fashion buyer in George Wilson and Son of Enniskillen - they met on a blind date.

Jim's other passions in Fermanagh were football and the Loyal Orders. He was an official with Enniskillen Corinthians FC and they created history by winning the Junior Cup, beating Clooney Rovers, Londonderry, at Shamrock Park, where he was to make his mark later in life.

The Kerrs moved to County Armagh in the late 1960s. He initially worked with Armagh County Council and then with the Roads Division of Craigavon Development Commission, with the advent of the new city project. They set up home in Killicomaine Park. With the re-organisation of local councils in 1973, Jim transferred to the DoE Roads Division at Marlborough House and retired in April 1985.

Along with his father, he had followed a strong Orange-Black-Masonic tradition in Enniskillen and he continued this

in Portadown. He joined ex-Service Lodges LOL 608 (Orange) and RBP 326 (Black), which had in their ranks a significant number - around 50 - of WW2 veterans in the 1960s. He served at officer level in lodge and district. He was a Trustee of Carleton Street Orange Hall. He was secretary for 25 years of the committee of the County Grand Lodge of Armagh, from 1983-2008 and then held the post of honorary assistant secretary.

After serving the Masons in Enniskillen, he transferred to Portadown in 1968, where he was a Past Master and Past Secretary of 231 from 1981-2007, as well as being in Portadown Preceptory Lodge and Armagh Provincial Grand Lodge.

On the football front, he was treasurer of Portadown Football for many years, significantly during the golden era of Ronnie McFall. The Ports were his pride and joy, lifting around 24 trophies during that time. His 'books' were meticulously kept. He acted with total integrity and was a personal friend of chairman Ted Clarke, whose contributions to those halcyon days was immeasurable.

Being a meticulous man, he kept detailed records – written and photographic – of achievements during his life, especially the 1991-92 season, when the Ports' four trophies included the League and Cup. That 'double' achievement had pride of place in his memoirs – as had the proud album of his distinguished war record.

Jim and Olive were also faithful members of Seagoe Parish, and with his financial skills and experience, he led the counting teams for the freewill offerings at the historic

church where his funeral service was held. His last five years of life were hit by loss of sight.

Jim was born in Kesh, County Fermanagh, the son of James Henry Kerr snr., and Matilda Sarah Kerr, and had three sisters, Irene, Annie and Beatrice. The family later moved to Enniskillen.

Ian Edward Maitland Borley of Armagh amongst first fatalities of RAF in WW2

Flight Sergeant Ian Edward Maitland Borley was born in Rathmines, Dublin and lived in Armagh. He was among the first RAF fatalities in World War Two. He was 30 years old.

Flight Sergeant Borley (365199) was one of the first Royal Air Force fatalities of World War Two. He died while flying with RAF 9 Squadron on 4th September 1939, on one of the war's first raids on Germany, against shipping at Brunsbuettel at the mouth of the Kiel Canal.

Vickers Wellington L4268 took off from RAF Honington, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk at 1605hrs on the second day of the war.

The RAF attack German Shipping

The mission was to attack German battleships Scharnhorst and Gneisenau at the mouth of the Kiel Canal. The target was under low cloud cover. The raid was a failure. Both German ships escaped undamaged.

A Luftwaffe BE109 shot down Vickers Wellington L4268 off the German coast. All five crew members died in the crash as the plane went down in the waters.

Also killed were:

- Observer Flight Sergeant George Miller (580160)
- Wireless Operator / Air Gunner Corporal George William Park (524855)
- Wireless Operator / Air Gunner Leading Aircraftman Harry Dore (531093)
- Air Gunner Aircraftman 2nd Class Robert Henderson (618765)

Newspapers at the time did not list Borley among the Royal Air Force's first losses. The Royal Air Force listed the men as missing presumed dead.

Luftwaffe Claims

The Luftwaffe shot down another Vickers Wellington of RAF 9 Squadron on the same raid. The time for both planes going down was 1815hrs. Feldwebel Alfred Held and Feldwebel Hans Troitzsch claimed the two Wellington Bombers. The Luftwaffe credited Held with their first victory of the war.

With the rest of the Staffel still quite a way behind me, I already had the Englishman in my sights. I fired my first rounds into the aircraft, but the rear gunner gave as good as he got. Time and again we flashed past each other, machine-guns hammering and engines howling. We had strayed far out over the Jade Bight when the Englishman dived to gain more speed and escape my fire. I forced the

Tommy lower and lower and suddenly a long flame shot out from the left side of the bomber. It seemed to be out of control and wallowing about. One final burst was enough. The aircraft dropped its nose and fell. I circled to follow its descent, but already there was just a burning pile of debris in the water which disappeared a few seconds later.

Feldwebel Alfred Held.

We were off the Elbe estuary when I noticed the three Englishmen far below me, very low over the water. When we got nearer I recognised them as twin-engined Wellington bombers. Two immediately made for the low-lying clouds and disappeared. The third was right in front of my guns and I closed in to 100 metres to be certain of hitting him. At 50 metres his port wing broke off and a flame shot from the fuselage. By the time the bomber was engulfed in flames I was only 20 metres behind him. The burning tail broke away and streaked past just above my head. I had to dive to avoid the flames and continued to follow the bomber down. It dropped some 400 metres into the sea where it quickly disappeared, leaving just a slick of oil.

Feldwebel Hans Troitzsch.

Born on 23rd March 1909 in Rathmines, Dublin, he was the son of Frederick W Borley and Annie Borley. His father was a sergeant with the Royal Irish Fusiliers (Princess Victoria's) in The Great War. His mother Annie was from Edinburgh. The family lived in Armagh before the outbreak of the First World War. While Ian Edward Maitland Borley and his twin brother were born in Dublin, their younger sister was born in Co. Armagh in 1911.

Borley married Bessie Jean Marshall of Axbridge near Weston-Super-Mare, Somerset in the summer of 1935.

His name is on Panel 1 of the Runnymede Memorial, Surrey, United Kingdom.

Acknowledgments

East Antrim Times

Eddie Connolly, Bangor Cemetery project

Portadown Times

Wartime NI

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The **remembrance ni** programme is overseen by Very Rev Dr Houston McKelvey OBE, QVRM, TD who served as Chaplain to 102 and 105 Regiments Royal Artillery (TA), as Hon. Chaplain to RNR and as Chaplain to the RBL NI area and the Burma Star Association NI. Dr McKelvey is a Past President of Queen's University Services Club. He may be contacted at houston.mckelvey@btinternet.com

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