Probus talk 6 March 2025

The Blairskaith Junkers

Alastair Fleming/Linda McIntosh

Alastair Fleming gave a highly detailed and well researched talk about the shooting down of a Junkers 88 bomber during a raid on the Clyde during World War II. The plane crashed on a hill near Lennoxtown, only avoiding the town itself after a last minute turn. Two of the crew parachuted out and were captured; the other two stayed in the aircraft to turn it away from the town. They attempted to parachute out but were killed. The bodies of the observer, Hauptmann Gerd Hansmann, who was in charge of the plane, and his pilot were found and buried in the local cemetery.

Alastair was inspired to investigate the story after finding some items on the crash site. He had brought along and displayed some of the items and documents relating to the event. **The story is given in his presentation** that also follows up what happened afterwards.

Linda McIntosh's grandfather was one of the discoverers of the crash victims and told a moving personal story of her family's involvement with Gerd Hansmann's widow.

Linda McIntosh talked about the aftermath of the Junkers crash at South Braes, Lennoxtown, on the night of 6/7th May 1941.

Linda's grandfather, Jack Maxwell, was on Home Guard duty on the night of the crash and a member of the search party. He found one of the two bodies of the German aircrew.

It was believed that the Junkers pilot, Werner Coenen, deliberately turned the falling plane away from the town centre to the remote hillside, thus preserving the safety of local people. This action earned Coenen and Gerd Hansmann the lasting respect of local people.

In 1954 Hansmann's widow, Gisela, visited his grave in Campsie High Kirk, Lennoxtown. She liked the location and decided to leave Gerd to rest in peace. The body of Werner Coenen had been relocated to the German Military Graveyard at Cannock, near Birmingham. Gisela continued to visit Gerd's grave in Lennoxtown periodically.

On the annual anniversary of the crash the people of Lennoxtown place flowers on Hansmann's grave as a mark of their continuing respect. Linda's mother, Jack Maxwell's daughter, had grown up with the crash story, and had participated in the annual flower laying at his grave.

Jack Maxwell died in 1999. Among his effects were the parachute clip and medal belonging to Hansmann. Linda and her mother made contact with his widow and met on her final visit to Lennoxtown, subsequent to which Gisela and Linda's mother became pen pals. Some time later Linda and her mother visited Gisela, and her daughter Gabriele, in Germany. They were given Hans' parachute clip (previously returned with his medal to Gisela) and a photograph of him to keep as tokens of their friendship and respect. Gisela died in 2014.

This was a moving and personal story arising from such tragic events.