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# CAERWENT HISTORIC TRUST

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**OPEN AFTERNOON:**

***Detecting the Past***  
***Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2.00 - 4.00pm***  
***Westgate Barns Caerwent***

The pastime of metal detecting has enriched our knowledge by covering the whole time span over a very wide area, and can give an appreciation of the smaller things that were part of everyday life over the centuries. Members of Gwent Metal Detecting Club will put some of their finds on show and there will be a short talk starting at about 2.30pm. All are welcome, and especially any residents of Caerwent and surrounding areas who have themselves practised metal detecting.

**LEST WE FORGET:**

## **BILL CROSBIE**

**Pilot Officer 175935 William Francis Crosbie.**  
**150 Squadron RAF. Died 14 May 1944**

Bill's parents came to Caerwent with McAlpines in 1939. McAlpines were the main contractor for building the Dinham factory, they still have a depot just beyond the railway bridge at Crick. Samuel Crosbie was a supervisor of the Irish navvies, called 'Greenmen' because they were all issued with green overalls. The Greenmen lived on the Welfare Centre site in wooden huts which had formerly provided accommodation at a holiday camp and the Crosbies lived in a hut on the side nearer Crick.

Annie Crosbie was in charge of the canteen for the Greenmen, who numbered 3,500 at their peak. She was effectively their 'Matron'. Mrs Crosbie, a devout Catholic, was very small in stature, but a very strong personality. The Greenmen could be very unruly, especially at weekends. Only three people could control them: PC Boddy, who was huge, PC Rasmussen, who was big, and the diminutive Mrs Crosbie. If the policemen could see the Greenmen out of the pubs, down the village hill and beyond the Vicarage, they became her problem, and she could 'sort them out'!

Bill, tall and good looking, was rear gunner in a Wellington bomber. This aircraft was designed by Barnes-Wallace and made of a metallic framework covered by canvas. Considering it first flew prior to WW2 it was still flying in a front line role until the end of the war. The Wellington at this time was normally crewed by 5 airmen - a pilot, who was also the captain (or "skipper"), a navigator to plot the course of the aircraft; a wireless operator; a bomb aimer whose job it was to accurately place the bombs on the selected target as well as help with the navigation and piloting. In an emergency, the bomb aimer would also operate the front guns; and in the rear turret was William Crosbie armed with four .303 cal machine guns whose main job was to take on fighters and give the pilot commands for evasive manoeuvres. When an attacker was spotted his instructions would take precedence over any other commands on the intercom and the pilot would take the aircraft through moves designed to throw off the enemy.

It is believed that the crew trained in Scotland to undertake special missions, possibly associated with the 'Dambusters' project but more likely to develop skills as a Pathfinder. The Pathfinders were squadrons made up of highly experienced crews who flew ahead of the main bomber force to drop marker flares or bombs on their given target to enable those

following to hit the target with greater accuracy. By 1944 150 Squadron was based in Amendola, Italy and at this time the RAF was providing support to the Allies as they drove northward. The nature of targets meant that 150 Squadron became night precision bombers taking on bridges, roads, railways and other targets requiring a high degree of skill in night navigation, bomb aiming and target identification.

Bill was promoted from Warrant Officer in April 1944 (the exalted rank being in recognition of the hazards faced by aircrew, not his role) and six weeks later his plane set off to destroy the Avisio viaduct, just north of Lake Garda. Bill's plane was the leader of a group of eight whose job was to drop flares on the target. Due to bad weather, the mission was aborted and Bill's was the one plane that failed to return. It may well have crashed in the mountains rather than fallen prey to enemy action.

Bill was buried at Padua, Italy alongside his crew. His parents did not move on with McAlpines and remained in the area. Bill had one brother and one sister. A niece and nephew still live locally and the family name continues in 'Crosbie Homes', a firm which recently built some houses in Lawrence Crescent

GJ & JN 2008

*The Caerwent Community Remembrance Service will start at 10.45am  
on Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> November at the War Memorial in the centre of Caerwent*

### **Photo - Visit to Factory and Welfare Centre of 7<sup>th</sup> September**



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## **CÆR WENT · HISTORIC · TRVST**

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