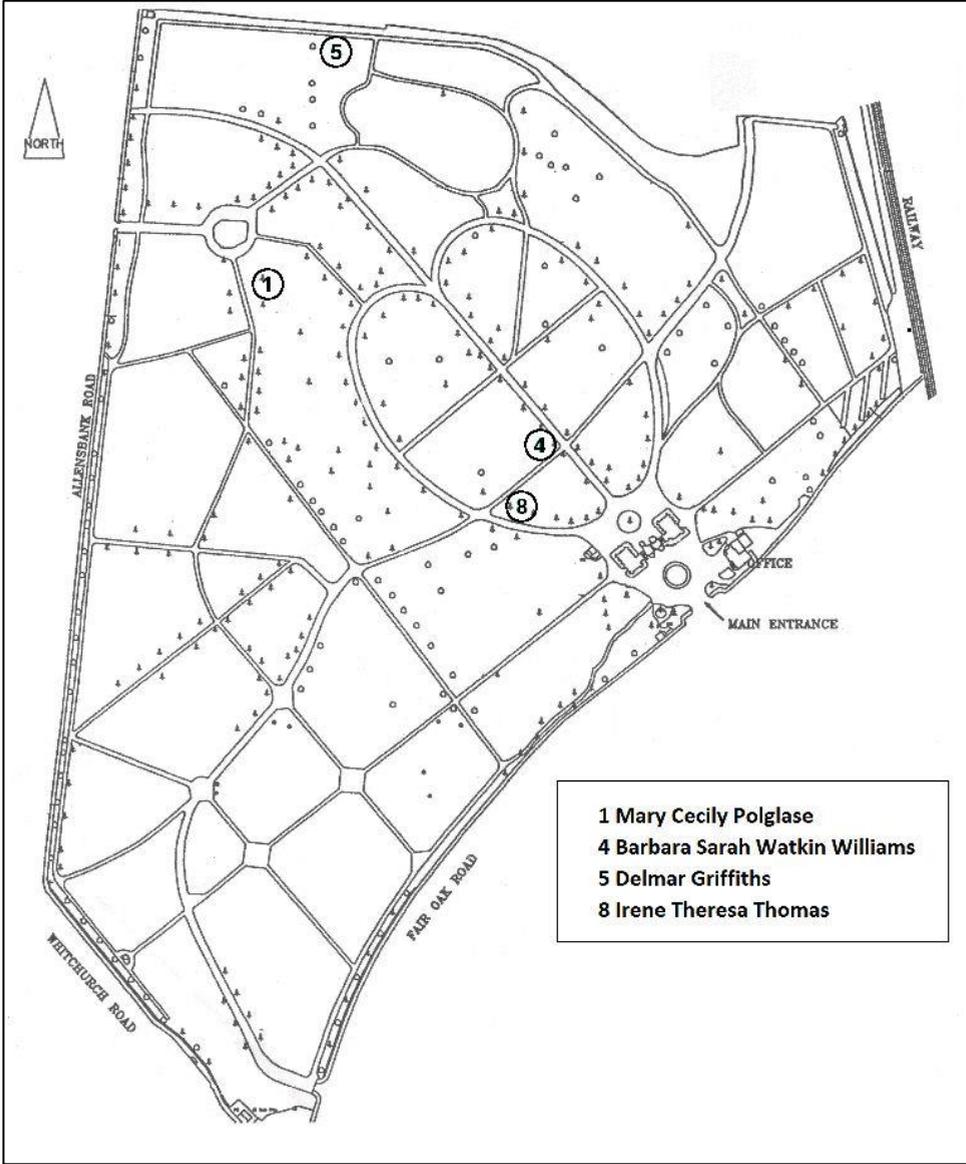
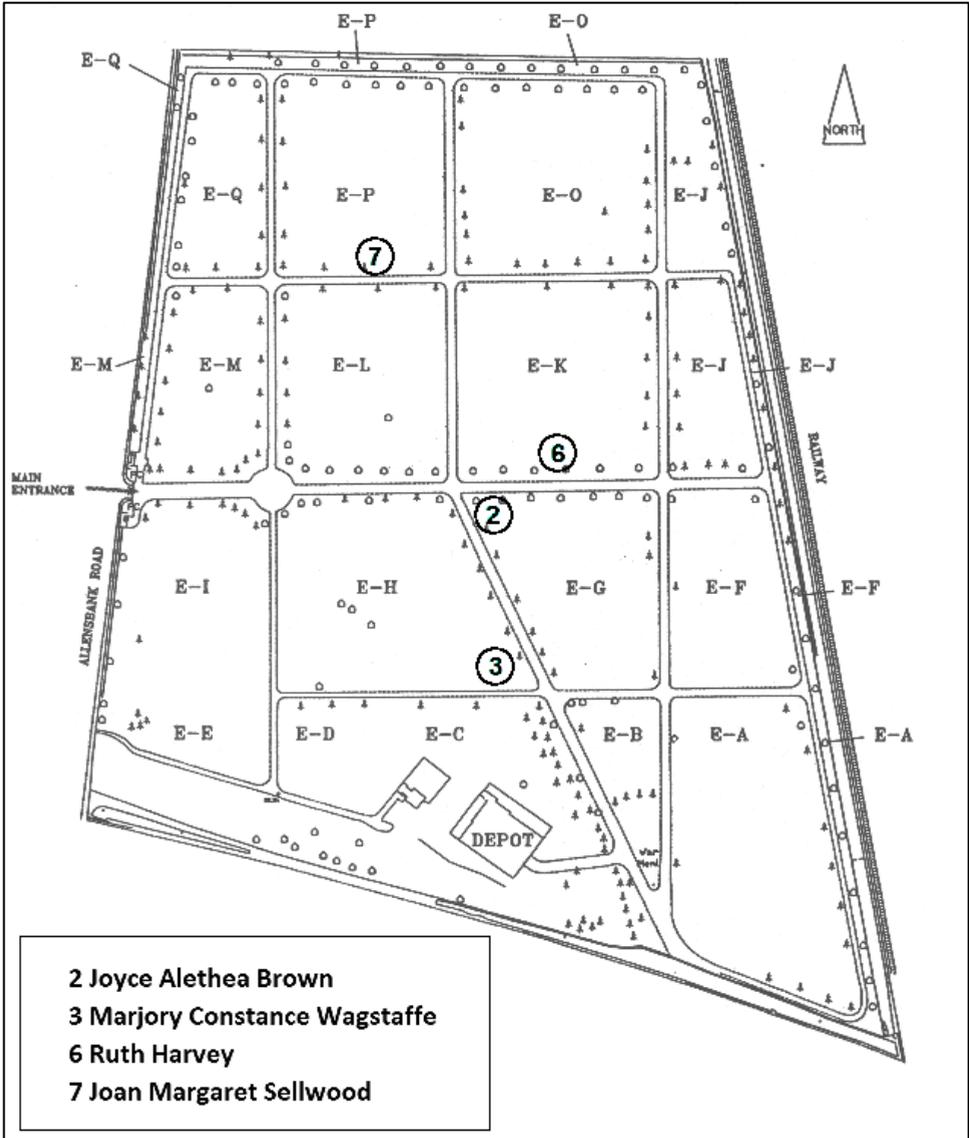


WW2 Servicewomen In Cathays Cemetery



Friends of Cathays Cemetery





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Introduction

There are over 750 Commonwealth War Graves from both world wars in Cathays Cemetery and of these, 8 are of women. One was in the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS), the rest were in the Women's Auxiliary Air Service (WAAFS).

Conscription of unmarried women between the ages of 20 and 30 began in December 1941. Women could choose between the auxiliary services or factory work.

Most WRENS were employed in office- based roles, but some were deployed near the coast to intercept German Naval signals, and some worked with the code breakers at Bletchley Park.

Anyone who has watched the iconic British war films 633 Squadron or the Battle of Britain will be familiar with the WAAFS at the plotting table or making cups of tea, but the WAAFS did so much more. They packed parachutes, worked with codes, and analysed reconnaissance photographs, as well as working on aircraft maintenance and with barrage balloons.

On 29th September 1939 a census, (the 1939 Register) was taken of the British population to gather information for use in issuing ration books and identity cards, and in organizing labour and conscription. This register has proved invaluable in discovering the stories of the women in this booklet.

1 Mary Cecily Polglase (1912-1942)

PLOT D 550

Mary Cecily Polglase was born in Cardiff on 13th May 1912 to Samuel and Teresa Polglase. The family were Cornish, the surname Polglase was widespread in Cornwall but usually spelt with a Z not an S.



By 1911 Samuel and Teresa had a son, John Stephen, and were living in Kimberley Road, Pen-y-Lan. Ten years later the 1921 census shows the family living in the seaside town of Porthcawl. In the 1939 Register, taken just before the outbreak of the War, the family were still living in Porthcawl and both children joined the services; John in the paymaster section of the Royal Naval Reserve, and Mary Cecely as a Flight Officer in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force.



Inscription on Polglase memorial

Mary Cecely was stationed with Fighter Command at Portreath in Cornwall. She was killed in a bombing raid while a patient at the Royal Cornwall Infirmary on 6th August 1942. People were aware that 'tip and run' raids, designed to undermine public morale, had been carried out throughout south west England but most, including the citizens of Truro, thought of them as merely a nuisance. Just after 7.30 pm on 6th August 2 enemy

aircraft were spotted by the Truro Royal Observer Corps, coming towards the city at very low altitude. The initial objective was probably Truro railway station and sidings, with the Penzance to London mail train standing at the station. One aircraft attacked the station with cannon and machine gunfire, killing a postman and injuring several women. The pilot may have misjudged his bomb release as his 500 kilogramme bomb missed the station but scored a direct hit on the Cornwall Royal Infirmary demolishing the West wing. Ten people, including Mary Cecily, died, buried under tons of rubble. In all 14 people were killed, 65 injured and over 100 houses damaged in a raid that lasted under 10 minutes.

Mary Cecely is buried in the Catholic section of Cathays cemetery in grave D550 where she was later to be joined by her parents.

2 Joyce Alethea Brown (1918-1941)

PLOT EG 1775

Joyce Alatheia Brown was born in Cardiff on 28th October 1918, just two weeks before the end of the First World War. Her grandparents, Hugh Brown and his wife Alethea (after whom Joyce Alethea was named) were born in Devon, but by 1911 were living in Cardiff at 19 Penywain Rd. Hugh gives his occupation as a joiner and his son Ivor Archie is a corn merchants clerk. In January 1917 Ivor married Nettie Marilla Naish in Devonport. By the 1921 census the family was living at 119 Donald St, Roath.

By the start of the Second World War Ivor, Nettie and Joyce had moved again and were living at 22 Heathwood Rd. Joyce was working as a shop assistant but joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force , becoming an Assistant Section Officer on 20th October 1941.

Less than a week after signing up Joyce became dangerously ill and on 26th October was admitted to Markfield Hospital, a sanatorium and isolation hospital in Leicestershire where she died of cerebro spinal meningitis on 28th October; her 23rd birthday.



Joyce is buried in Plot EG 1775

Ivor and Nettie had one other child, Cecil Henry Brown, born on 26th June 1920. In 1939 Cecil is living in London, at 2 Jelfs Cottages SW2. He appears to be a lodger there and gives his occupation as Furniture Remover (Heavy Worker). He joined the Royal Air Force Volunteer

Reserve, a force which was formed in 1936 to provide a reserve of air crew in the event of war. He served in various squadrons flying various aircraft. He was awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross (these are awarded for conspicuous gallantry in the face of the enemy) and in March 1945 was awarded a Bar to his DFC, in reality a second DFC.

After D Day he was with 403 squadron, operating from France and flying Spitfires when the squadron got involved with a flight of ME 109s led by the German ace Walter Nowotny. Cecil Henry said he knew he was facing Nowotny as he was flying the only FockeWulf 190 in a flight of Messerschmitts. The result of this encounter was the downing of 6 German planes and the loss of one Spitfire.

After the end of the war Cecil Henry stayed on in the RAF in Europe as part of the allied forces of occupation. On 23rd September 1946 he was the navigator on a de Havilland Mosquito piloted by Allan Percival Mountain DFC and bar, flying from RAF Lubeck in Northern Germany, when the plane got into difficulties and crashed into trees near Fassberg, both were killed.

Cecil Henry Brown is buried in a Commonwealth War Grave in Hanover war cemetery, Allan Percival Mountain is buried next to him

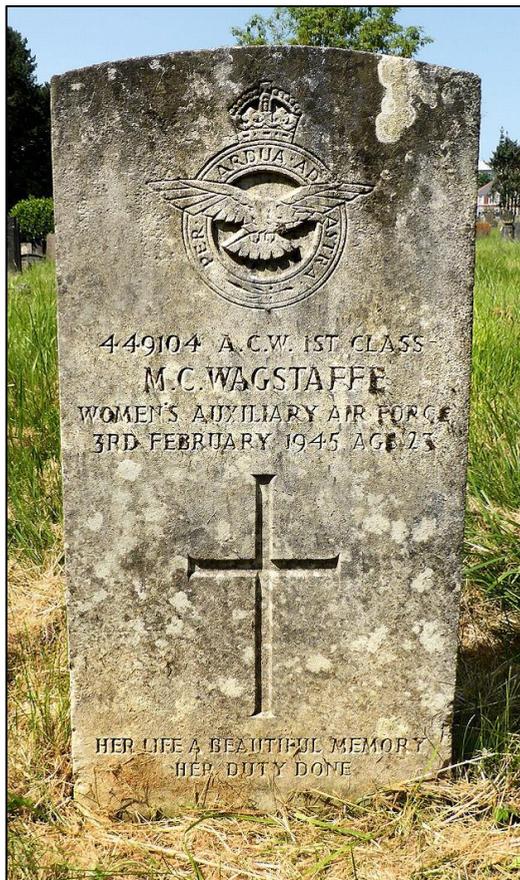
3 Marjory Constance Wagstaffe (1921-1945)

PLOT EH 383

Marjory Constance Wagstaffe was born in Cardiff on 1st July 1921. Her father William, an oxyacetylene cutter on the Taff Vale Railway, had married Gladys Mabel Blick in 1913, and Marjory was the 3rd of 4 children.

In 1939 the family were living at 40 Herbert St., Butetown, and while Gladys ran the home, William and the 4 children were all working. William was a riveter at a wagon works, and the youngest child, Harry, worked

alongside him as a rivet warmer. Rivets had to be heated before use so that they became malleable and formed a firm joint when cooled. This sounds a dangerous occupation for a fifteen year old. Kenneth, the eldest, was a steelworker, while Marjory and her older sister Marion were machinists at a munitions factory. As is well documented munitions work could be dangerous too, and not just because of the explosives used in munitions. In 1944 a stray shell from an anti-aircraft gun hit the munitions factory in Llanishen, killing 12 people and injuring many more. Marjory joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force as an Aircraft woman First Class. Tragically she died on 3rd February when she fell down a stairwell in the Courtlands Hostel in Surrey.



Marjory is buried in Plot EH383

4 Barbara Sarah Watkin Williams (1922-1940)

PLOT O 1107

Barbara was born in Cardiff in July 1922 to Thomas Baker Williams, an auctioneer's clerk and his wife Annie Maud. In October 1935 Barbara was a bridesmaid when her older sister Annie Elizabeth married the well known boxer Jack Petersen in Marshfield parish church. By the outbreak of war in 1939 Barbara and her parents were living at 18 Ninian Rd Cardiff.

Barbara joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force in 1939 and was stationed at RAF Digby in Lincolnshire, which in May and June 1940 was home to No 222 squadron of Spitfires on a rest and recuperation break from the Battle of Britain. RAF Digby was the oldest RAF station, opened in March 1918 in the last year of the First World War. Frank Whittle the inventor of the jet engine, and Douglas Bader were stationed here, and it is where Guy Gibson learned to fly.

On the night of 19/20th of June 1940 Barbara was travelling in a car with Pilot Officer Alan Blanchard Lawton when they were involved in a head on collision with a car driven by Pilot Officer Kenneth Andre Cockerell in the blackout near RAF Digby. The previous morning Cockerell had returned from a successful bombing raid on Hamburg. All three tragically died.

Barbara is remembered on the war memorial within St Matins church, Albany Road. Her friends at RAF Digby bought a flower urn which is still in use on her grave, it is inscribed:

To Barbara

In loving memory from the Girls of C. Control

Digby 1939-40



Memorial plaque on Williams grave

Barbara is buried in Plot O 1107

Barbara was the niece of one of our famous boxers, Jack Peterson, and their graves are next to each other, in the corner of Section O, at the low point on the main drive. Barbara had joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force in 1939, at the age of 16. By the following year she was an Aircraftwoman 1st Class, serving at RAF Digby, in Lincolnshire. In the chaos of a bombing raid on the airfield on 20 June 1940, she was hit by a truck and died, at the tender age of 17. A Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone has been erected in the family plot. A more recent stone plaque, which is easier to read and was commissioned by a sibling of Barbara, records her details and those of her mother, Annie Maud, and father, Tom Baker (before you ask "who" ... don't!), who are buried with her.

5 Delmar Griffiths (1922-1946)

PLOT A 1845

Delmar Griffiths and her twin sister Blanche were born in 32 Meteor St. Adamsdown on 8th January 1922, to William John Griffiths and his wife Maria Margaret. In the 1939 Register the family are living at 7 Colum Rd.

Delmar was a Leading Aircraftwoman in the Woman's Auxiliary Air Force. She died on 10th May 1946 at 15 Eliot Grove, Guiseley, Yorkshire of chronic inflammation of the right kidney after being medically discharged from the WAAF.



Delmar is buried in Plot A 1845

6 Ruth Harvey (1922-1944)

PLOT EK 226

Ruth Harvey nee Watling was born in Chelsea in 1922.

In July 1944 she married Albert Harvey in Cardiff. At this time Ruth was in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force, stationed at RAF Llandow in the Vale of Glamorgan. The RAF base at Llandow opened in 1940, initially as a grass strip airfield with a small number of wooden buildings. In late 1941 the concrete runways were completed. During World War 2 the main RAF unit based at Llandow was Number 38 maintenance unit.

Ruth was a fabric worker attached to Number 3 Aircraft Preparation Unit at Llandow. On 17th December 1944 she was admitted to the RAF hospital in St Athan, she died on 22nd December from tubercular meningitis.

She is buried in Plot EK 226.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission allowed the family of the casualty to choose a short personal inscription for the grave stone, Ruth's family chose MIZPAH, which is a Hebrew word meaning watchtower; usually translated as *May God Watch Over You*. Mizpah became a popular word on jewelry in the mid-Victorian period, it then fell out of fashion but regained popularity during World War 1.

7 Joan Margaret Sellwood (1919-1945)

PLOT EP 106

Joan Margaret Sellwood was born in Cardiff in 1919 to Isaac and Elizabeth Sellwood. Isaac had been born in Wootton Bassett and served in the Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry in the 1st World War. The 1921

census shows the family living at 44 Pen-y-peel Rd., Isaac is now a plasterer. He died in April 1935. By the time of the 1939 Register his widow Elizabeth was still living in Pen-y-peel Rd with her children; Wilfred, a solicitor's clerk, and Joan, a shorthand typist.

Joan joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force as a Leading Aircraft Woman. She died of tuberculosis in the North Wales Sanatorium on 17th March 1945.

Joan is buried in plot EP 106.

8 Irene Theresa Thomas (1903-1944)

PLOT O 1303

Although not technically a servicewoman but certainly related to the important role of ammunitions worker during the Second World War is the story of Irene Thomas.

On 27th March 1944, German bombers were over Cardiff and anti-aircraft gunners, including members of the Home Guard went into action. At the height of the barrage, gravity brought one of their shells down on the Royal Ordnance Factory, in Llanishen, piercing the roof of a workshop and exploded amongst the machinery. There was a crash and a flash and pieces of machinery were hurled in all directions. A number of workers, mainly 'girls', were hit by flying debris. The factory's first-aid and emergency arrangements were put into prompt operation and a casualty clearing station was established. The more seriously injured were rushed to hospital, but eight were killed following morning. Later three more died of their injuries. Eight of those killed were women.

A father had been employed in the factory for some time, but in a department some distance from where the shell fell. His young daughter

had only recently started working in the machine shop where the shell exploded. Just before the shell hit the factory, the father went to the shop to allay any fears she might have had. He had just spoken to her when the shell crashed amongst the workers, killing him almost instantaneously. It is believed that the daughter was also amongst the dead.



Memorial on Roderick family grave

One of those killed was Irene Theresa Thomas, born in Cardiff in 1903, the daughter of Stanley and Caroline Roderick of Homerie, Ty-Fry Road, Rumney. She had married John Thomas in 1928 and they were living at 8 Bronllwyn Road, Pentyrch, at the time of her death. But she is buried close to the internal corner of Section O on the south side of the "heart", with her parents. Her father, Thomas Stanley Roderick died in 1960 and her mother, Caroline Sarah, in 1976.



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