

### **THE MORANT FAMILY**

In June, 1941 “Elnathan”, Northam Road, Hedge End, the home of Phillip and Winifred Morant and their children Florence (21), Sidney (15), Reginald (12), twins Elsie and Norman (9) and Leonard (8) took a direct hit from enemy bombing and all said members of the family were killed. Also lost on that day, were an evacuee Gladys Martin (23) and a sailor home on leave William Moore (21). Two other children Sheila Morant, a cousin aged just 6 and Kenneth Martin aged 2 were rescued alive from the debris and taken to Cold East Emergency Hospital. Sadly, Kenneth died the same day. Sheila Morant survived and recalls that she had been visiting the house during preparations for the marriage of Florence to William Moore - she was to be their bridesmaid. Sheila was told that her life was saved by her Aunt Winifred, when she threw herself across her body during the blast.

Joyce Chambers (nee Whitlock) recalls her father, George Whitlock, being a member of the Rescue Team on the Winchester Council ARP. He and Mr. Bert Hallett, Mr. Sid Abraham, Mr. Tom Trump (from Winchester) recovered the family from the ruins. Bert Hallett was also the village grave digger and he was joined by George Whitlock in preparing the family plot. Gordon Whitlock, Joyce’s brother played with the Morant children.

Those lost in this tragedy were interred together and laid to rest in Grave ‘D’ of Albert Road Cemetery.

This story was uncovered when the Town Council sought the consent of the family to commemorate a newly planted copse after the Morant family. The original site of their home “Elnathan” overlooked the new copse. The trees were planted in 1996 with the help of a Woodland Grant from the Forestry Authority based at Alice Holt in Surrey. Seventy people stepped forward to brave driving rain and complete a two-day challenge organised by the Itchen Hamble Countryside Project to plant 1,500 trees and shrubs. Volunteers included West End and Hedge End Scouts, Hampshire Conservation Volunteers, Itchen Hamble Conservation Volunteers and 21 recruits from HMS Sultan, Havant.

Native shrubs were planted in the southern hedge in the hope that plants, insects and animals living in the surrounding hedges would colonise the woodland as it matured. The original plan allowed for a small amount of open areas to form woodland glades to give increased habitat diversity. The Copse consists of 20% Oak, 30% Ash, 10% Wild Cherry, Hazel, Hawthorn, Blackthorn, Dog Rose, Guelder Rose, Goat Willow, Alder, Buckthorn, Crab Apple and Field Maple.

A Commemorative Ceremony was held on 15<sup>th</sup> December, 2001 and a Memorial Stone was put in place.

Hedge End Town Council hoped that from what must have been a tremendous tragedy 60 years prior, a commemoration and a woodland that will flourish for years to come would be a befitting tribute to those who were lost and by which we could ensure that they will be remembered and become part of Hedge End's history.

In 2003, the Town Council gave special dispensation for the interment of the late Raymond Stanley George Morant, who had passed away at the age of 80 years. He was thought to be the only surviving member of the immediate family, when aged just 19 years he had returned from the War to find that his home had been demolished and had to find his Grandmother to inform him that his entire family had been killed by enemy action. However, in 2017 the story of the Morant family continued when attention was drawn to the evacuee and her son, who were also victims of the tragedy in 1941. The Town Council were approached by the nephew of Gladys, Raymond Barnes, who was happy to share family history that had been given him by Gladys' elder sister Peggy.

Gladys lived in Olive Road, Southampton. She was evacuated with her son to Hedge End due to heavy bombing in the area. Members of the American army were billeted in Aldermoor School just a short distance away and Olive Road was also close to Southampton Docks (just two miles away) and was an obvious target. Gladys' sister, Peggy, was 10 years her senior and she remembers meeting Gladys' sweetheart "Ted" Morant. Peggy also said that she would often visit the Morant family home and her memory of them was a positive one and that they were a lovely family. Gladys was also known to have been a member of the Salvation Army. Her family were never officially informed of her death, but learnt through a neighbour who knew the details. They finally read an account in the Echo, although for security reasons, the report was quite vague. It is not known whether Gladys' family were able to attend the funeral. It was said to have a profound affect upon Gladys' father, George Martin, and emotionally he was said not to have come to terms with the tragedy.

The Town Council were not aware of a son within the family named "Ted" or Edward, however, following further research were able to ascertain that he was the first born to Winifred and Philip Morant on 17<sup>th</sup> March, 1919 and was named after his father, but used his second Christian name and was known as "Ted". Ted Morant is known to have married in 1971, and died in 1986. What happened to Ted between 1941 and 1971 is not known.