



BILL BRAY – A LOCAL HERO

Many people may remember watching a TV Sunday night documentary in 2003 by Ray Mears 'Real Heroes of Telemark' but be unaware that **L/Corporal Frederick William Bray (k/a Bill)** who is remembered on the 1939-1945 Honours Board in St John's Church was one of the Royal Engineers of the 1st British Airborne Division killed in November 1942, when two gliders in which they were travelling, towed by Halifax bombers, crashed near the Norwegian coast due to appalling weather conditions. There were no survivors.

Norway at that time was under German occupation and the mission of the Engineers had been to destroy the Vermork hydro-electric power station at Rjukan in the Telemark region where heavy water was being produced for German atomic bomb research. Norwegian saboteurs eventually destroyed the heavy water plant in February 1943.

Bill Bray, who was 29 years old, was well known locally and a keen Scout. Before joining the army he had worked for my father, Gordon Jenner, as a lorry driver. He lived in Stanhope Cottages, Racecourse Road until his marriage to Lily when their home was in Edenbridge. Their son, Dennis, was born two months after Bill was killed.

Bill is buried in Norway at Stavanger and several years ago with Lily, I visited his grave. Dennis too has visited his father's grave and in August 2003, accompanied by a Norwegian guide, he followed the route taken by the Norwegian saboteurs to the Vermork power station (now a museum) and to the spot where the ferry with the train taking the last of the heavy water to Germany, had been blown up.