LAWRENCE BARR, Leading Aircraftman, 641413 RAF, 03-Dec-1944

Back in 2012, I was unable to find any military casualty named Lawrence Barr. The Common Wealth War Graves Commission listed two individuals called Laurence Barr. However, neither had an obvious connection to Brompton-on-Swale that I could see. Subsequently in 2020, it was mentioned on the Brompton-on-Swale Facebook page that Lawrence had a sister called Rita.

I then searched online records for a family with the Barr name who had two children called Lawrence and Rita. Eventually I found them. The Father was Joseph Raby Barr and their Mother, Emily (nee Place), so it seems that somewhere there has been a change of spelling in the CWGC records.

Lawrence's parents, Joseph (born 1886) and Emily (born 1889) were married in 1911 in Middleton Tyas and had 10 children as far as I can tell (Alice Rebecca born 1911, Lawrence 1912, William 1914, Emily 1916, Peter & Richard 1921, Robert R 1922, Ada 1923, Vera 1925, Rita 1929 and John 1931).

Lawrence's Father, Joseph Raby Barr also found time to serve in WW1 - joining up in 1916, he was in the 7th Battalion Yorkshire Infantry (Private 28752) and then transferred to the 1/9th Battalion Durham Light Infantry (Private 7234). When joining up he gave his address as Morris Grange, Middleton Tyas. He seems to have been captured on 5th November 1916 as his battalion took part in attacks on the Butte de Walencourt (2), being repatriated on 13th June 1919.

The Barr family, or at least Joseph, Emily and son Peter and daughters Emily and Rita were living in Brompton-on-Swale in 1939 (according to the 1939 register).

Lawrence married Margaret Marr in 1941 in Montrose Scotland. I am guessing he was probably serving at RAF Montrose when he met Margaret. I could not help but also notice that a Laura Margaret Barr was born in Montrose in 1942, but I cannot confirm this child is Margaret and Lawrence's daughter.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission gives the usual brief details for Lawrence's death ..
"*Leading Aircraftsman, Laurence Barr, 641413, Royal Air Force, Son of Joseph Raby Barr and Emily Barr; husband of Margaret Barr, of Montrose, Angus. Died 03-Dec-1944*"

Some further research reveals what I believe happened. Lawrence was located at an airfield that the RAF had taken over called Deurne Airfield near Antwerp, Belgium which was designated "Advanced Landing Ground B70". These were temporary advanced airfields used for combat support. From October 1944, Antwerp was the target for a large number of V-weapon attacks as it was a major port being used by the Allies. Over 1,700 people were killed and 4,500 injured in greater Antwerp. Thousands of buildings were damaged or destroyed as the city was struck by 590 direct hits.

The largest loss of life in a single attack came on 16 December 1944, when the roof of the crowded cinema Rex was struck, leaving 567 dead and 291 injured.

At 12:14pm on December 3rd 1944, V2 Battery 836/3 of "Gruppe Sud" commanded by Waffen-SS General Kammler, fired the 2nd of 9 rockets it would fire that day towards Antwerp from a location near the town of Hachenburg 20 miles NorthEast of Koblenz. Approximately 5 minutes and 200 miles later that V2 smashed into the ground at supersonic speed at Deurne Airfield killing Corporal Sydney Clark (1221739) from Port Talbot and Leading Aircraftman Lawrence Barr. They were both 32.

Lawrence Barr is buried in **SCHOONSELHOF CEMETERY**, Belgium. Grave Reference I.B.29 alongside Sydney Clark (I.B.28)

Sources:

(1) Warlencourt https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Attacks_on_the_Butte_de_Warlencourt
(2) CWGC https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/casualty-details/2254873
https://www.cwgc.org/visit-us/find-cemeteries-memorials/cemetery-details/2024000
(3) V2 Rockets
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/V-2_rocket
http://www.v2rocket.com/start/deployment/timeline.html