Sir Frederick Banting - winner of a Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1923. 'His death in 1941 and its connection with Kidderminster'

Bob Millward June 2016

Frederick Banting



Frederick Banting was born on 14th November 1891 on the family farm in Ontario.

He failed his first year Divinity degree course at the University of Toronto and switched to Medicine. He graduated a year early in 1916 because of an urgent need of doctors to serve in the 1st World War. Initially he served in hospitals in England but was sent to France in 1918 as a battalion medical officer. There he was wounded and was awarded the Military Cross.

In 1920 he went into General Practice and also worked as a demonstrator at the University of Western Ontario. In October that year he was required to lecture students on the pancreas, a subject about which he knew little. He was conscientious and spent much time reading up on the subject. One article in a medical Journal took his attention and caused him to contemplate an idea for isolating an internal secretion from the pancreas that he thought might produce a treatment for diabetes.

He took this idea to Professor John Macleod at Toronto University and began research on the topic under Macleod's direction in May 1921. Charles Best was assigned to work with Banting to supplement the latter's limited laboratory



James Collip

experience. After some initial setbacks the pair were eventually successful in keeping a diabetic alive dog with injections of pancreatic extract. At the end of 1921 MacLeod brought in biochemist James Collip to add impetus to the development of process for purification of the extract suitable for human trials



Frederick Banting and Charles Best on the roof of the University of Toronto's Medical Building in 1922. From the F. G. Banting Papers. Courtesy Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

The discovery of **insulin** was announced on 3 May 1922. It proved immediately to be a spectacularly effective life saving therapy (not cure) for diabetic patients and quickly moved into commercial production.

The importance of the discovery cannot be overstated. Until this time the treatments available for Type 1 diabetes were mostly ineffective and a positive diagnosis of the condition was essentially a death sentence. Dietary control to near starvation levels could sometimes prolong life for a year or two, but often proved the main cause of death.

The Nobel prize committee in Sweden swiftly recognised the work and awarded the 1923 prize for Medicine jointly between Banting and Macleod. Banting, the youngest man ever to receive the Nobel Prize for Medicine, gave half his money to his co-worker Best and Macleod did the same to Collip.

Honours for Banting were to follow: a lifetime annuity by the Canadian Government, a Chair of Medicine at the University of Toronto, a Knighthood in 1934 and Fellowships of the Royal Society of London and the Royal Society of Canada.

The Banting family have long believed that **Jennie Victoria Jorden** was the seed which later germinated as Sir Frederick Banting's idea of using insulin to treat diabetic patients. Fred never talked about her as it hurt too much but when he was growing up at Banting farm she had been Fred's tomboy friend who lived on a neighbouring farm. She became diabetic and died as Fred looked on and this clearly made a lasting impression.

Later in the 1920s Banting moved into other areas of medical research, notably cancer, but was never again to attain the same level of personal research achievement that his work on insulin had brought. Nevertheless, during the 1930s he became a pre-eminent figure in Canada's medical research activities and when war in Europe loomed took a deep interest in aviation medicine and problems of chemical and bacterial warfare. In the early days of the war he became Major Banting in the Army medical Corp and was in charge of research connected with air fighting. He was the prime contact for liaising with British scientists and in February 1941 set out on yet another trip to Britain.



Gander airport Autumn 1941

The flight proved fatal. He arranged a lift on a Lockheed Hudson Mark III bomber T-9449 being ferried to the UK,. After leaving Gander the plane developed engine trouble and crashed in an isolated spot near a lake at Trinity Bay in Newfoundland. Only the pilot survived. Banting was 49 years of age.



Scene of the crash showing the Hudson bomber

Travelling in the plane with Banting were: pilot Joseph Mackey, navigator William Bird and radio operator William Snailham. Banting survived the initial crash but died of his injuries shortly after. He was found away from the plane attempting to bandage a damaged toe and apparently died of exposure. Bird and Snailham died on impact.

A more detailed description of the events associated with the crash, as recalled some 34 years later, is given in an appendix below - pages 11 and 12.

After the crash it was suggested that perhaps sabotage was the reason for the crash. Whether or not this was the case has been argued over for many years. Bob Banting is sure that sabotage was involved and he says:

"If I went to court now I could prove that Hudson Mk III was downed due to sand in the oil. I have a video interview captured in 1991 of two of the hunters, Dalton and Walter. They are standing right beside the remains of the plane. The audio confirms the story as do the official findings. The rest of the proof goes this way. Mackey returned to Musgrave Harbour and went out to the plane by helicopter, where it rested on 7 mile water lake, which has been renamed Banting Lake. He presented the hunters with bush knives. The local paper was there. The Gander Beacon recorded that Mackey confirmed, in his speech, that it was sand in the oil that caused the trouble."

However, official confirmation that the crash was a result of an act of sabotage has never been published.

The Pilot: Captain Joseph Creighton Mackey - born c1910



Mackey was an American from Kansas City who had earlier been a stunt pilot with the Mackey Flying Service from 1934 to 1938. In 1940 he had helped set up 'Bombers for Britain' and delivered the first aircraft over the North Atlantic. He was appointed a Captain in the Canadian Pacific Railway Air Service with a remuneration of \$500 for each Atlantic trip undertaken with a guaranteed opportunity of two trips per month. The return journey was to be by air or sea as required by the Company.

As an experienced able pilot Mackey was probably considered a 'safe pair of hands' to convey Banting as a passenger and, indeed, he did everything in his power to save those on board. There are many, and sometimes conflicting, accounts as to what exactly happened but the following seems to be the more or less generally accepted version.

As part of a flight of five Hudsons that took off from Gander on the evening of Friday 20th February 1941, Mackey was forced to turn round after just 50 miles when one engine failed. The second engine failed soon after and Mackey was forced to crash land the aircraft in darkness having ordered the others to bale out. Mackey was knocked out and when he recovered consciousness he found that none had baled out, that Bird and Snailham had been killed on impact and Banting had suffered severe injuries.

Next day he set out to seek help but soon found that travelling in the deep snow was not possible. When he returned he found that Banting had died of his injuries or exposure. It was not until Monday morning (February 23rd) that the rigorous air search located the aircraft and a rescue party of hunters primed to investigate. The hunters found the crash, took Mackey to Musgrave Harbour and returned later to retrieve the bodies which were laid out in the Orange Lodge there.



Mackey continued with ferrying duties to Africa, Russia and India. On release from service in 1946 he established 'Mackey Air Transport' which became Mackey Airlines in 1953 and which subsequently merged with Eastern Air Lines in 1967. In 1968 he started Mackey International Inc. and carried 2,480 passengers in the first year. The business expanded and in 1976 the airline carried 177,330 passengers with no passenger injuries.

Joe Mackey in the late 1970s The scar of his head wound sustained in the air crash of 1941 can be seen clearly.

What was the Connection of all this with Kidderminster?

In December 2002 Bob Banting, of Oakville, Ontario, contacted the Kidderminster & District Archaeological and Historical Society via their website. He explained about Frederick Banting and the air crash in 1941 and asked if anything was known about the navigator William Bird who, according to a newspaper report at the time of the crash was: "of Kidderminster".

With my brother Phill we were able to establish some of the details of William Bird's life prior to his death, starting with information about his military career obtained from the <u>Air Historical</u> Branch of the RAF.

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The stroy was supplemented by details supplied by the <u>RAF Personnel Management Agency</u> who volunteered that "the next-of-kin of Pilot Officer William Bird was his wife Gertrude Ann Bird" and that she was living in Cheltenham at the time of his death. They were also able to provide Gazetted details for him viz.

Date and Place of Birth: 18 November 1915, St George, Kidderminster, Worcestershire

Enlisted into the Royal Air Force with service number 751596	8 Jun 1939
Discharged on Appointment to a Commission	1 Jun 1940
Granted a Commission as Pilot Officer on probation in the	
General Duties branch of the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve	
for the duration of hostilities	2 Jun 1940
Previously Missing now Killed on Active Service	21 Feb 1941
	Discharged on Appointment to a Commission Granted a Commission as Pilot Officer on probation in the General Duties branch of the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve for the duration of hostilities

Additional data about his background came from Jimmy James, via the excellent Cheltenham website: http://www.remembering.org.uk, Graham Sacker's book 'Held in Honour – Cheltenham and the Second World War', several reports in the Gloucestershire Echo (26 & 27 February & 5 March 1941), and a notice in the 'The London Gazette' (September 1941) about William Bird's will.

William Bird - a Biographical Summary

Born 18th November 1915 in Kidderminster he was Baptised at St George's Church, Kidderminster, on 30th June 1916 to William & Florence of 30 Golden Fleece (corner of East St and Offmore Rd). His father William was deceased and his occupation given as 'Gardener'.

He moved to the Cheltenham area when about 9 years of age. He was the only son of Mrs Florence Bird who, at the time of his death lived at, Gretton (~5 miles NE of Cheltenham). This would explain why he does not appear on the Kidderminster War memorial.

He married Gertrude Ann Haslum of Cheltenham in February 1939 and moved to Berkshire where he lived at "Riviera", Whatmore Lane, Winnersh, near Wokingham. He had earlier been working for the Liverpool and Victoria Friendly Society in Cheltenham and it seems likely that his move to Wokingham was work related. He appears in



the Liverpool Victoria WW2 War memorial book now housed in their Head Office in Bournemouth.

Bignell Charles E	Merchant Navy
Birchenall John Wardley	RAF
Bird Montague Cecil	RCS
Bird William	RAF
Blay George Thomas	RA
Boddington Robert Anthony DFC & Bar	RAF
Boulter Arthur	RA
Bowditch Roland	Royal Scots Fusiliers
Bradshaw Bertram	RA

William enlisted in the RAF Voluntary Reserve on 8th June 1939, Service number: 751596 and was called up at the beginning of the war. On 2nd June 1940 he was granted a Commission as Pilot Officer on probation in the General Duties Branch of the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve for the duration of hostilities with a new service number: 79749.

Before the fatal flight home Bird had been with the RAF in Montreal since November 1940 and had written to his wife saying that he expected to be returning to England "in a way in that he would very much enjoy".

After the crash a card in his wallet gave the address: Pilot Officer William Bird, Harlequin, Thomas Avenue, East Radcliffe, Nottinghamshire, presumably his address near to where he was stationed prior to being sent to Canada. In his pockets were a 'Speedway' stopwatch, a 'Competitor' wrist watch and a cheque: Midland Bank Ltd., Wokingham.

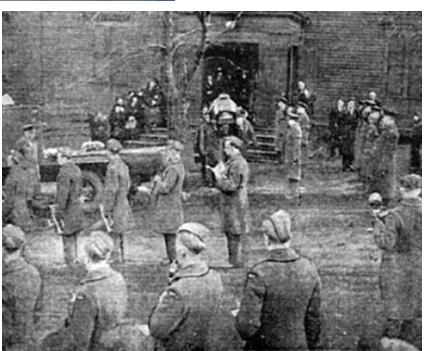
At the time of his death William's wife was living at 7 Evesham Road, Cheltenham, with her parents Mr & Mrs Frederick Haslum; their son Robert was just over 1 year old. A memorial service was held at Cheltenham Parish Church on Tuesday 4th March simultaneously with that held for Banting at St. Martin's-in-the-Fields.

William Bird appears on the War Memorial to be found in the Promenade, Cheltenham but not on any memorial in Kidderminster.



A report of his Burial service appeared in the Canadian press: "March 3rd 1941. He was laid to rest with full Military Honors and the City stayed the flow of traffic to make way for the Royal Canadian Air Force lorry which carried his body. There were no kinfolk present as he was lowered into the grave after a service at St. Paul's, the oldest Protestant Church in Canada. But a native of his home country stood with the Air Force escort and firing party. He had never met Bird but felt he should attend."





"An Air Force band escorted the lorry through the streets while hundreds of civilians watched. The cap of an R.A.F. officer was placed atop the Union Jack draped over the coffin. The firing party poured three volleys into the sky at the grave while the band rendered 'Abide With Me'. Two Air Force buglers rippled the March Air with the 'Last Post'."

His grave is number 198 in Section E of the Halifax (Fort Massey) Cemetery, Nova Scotia.

William Snailham



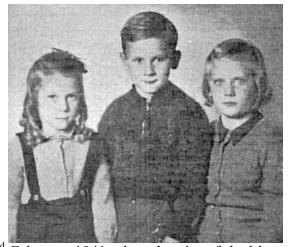
Bob Banting's initial query and follow up material had given us some information about Frederick Banting, William Bird and Joseph Mackey but little about William Snailham except that he was "a Canadian" ... "of Bedford, Nova Scotia".

Initially, members of the Kidderminster Historical Society, and others, we were able to establish a number of details about William Bird but nothing about his time in Kidderminster apart from that he had been born in the Parish of St George. Hoping to rectify that situation we sent a query in to the Kidderminster Shuttle hoping that someone would be able to offer information. The Shuttle staff were very helpful and even contacted Bob Banting in Canada to obtain supplementary facts but all to no avail.

We did, however, receive an unexpected phone call from Mrs Betty Tyler of Franche, Kidderminster. She announced: "I don't know William Bird but the Radio Officer William Snailham was my Uncle Bill"! "I have some details about him. Are you interested?" Were we just! A quick visit

revealed that Betty had a wealth of information about his family background in the UK and Canada and about the air crash in Nova Scotia. She generously allowed us to borrow and copy this absorbing collection. Only a summary can be included here.

William was born in his father's farm near Bamber Bridge, close to Preston, Lancashire, in about 1904. Aged 17 he moved to Canada to work as a radio operator on board Canadian Pacific Railway passenger ships. When WW2 began his duties diversified. Just before Christmas 1939 he visited his mother in Bamber having crossed the Atlantic in an oil tanker, and again at Christmas 1940 after ferrying an American built aircraft for the RAF. He had settled in Canada and his three children were being looked after by his sister-in-law (Mrs Andrew Wilson) since the death of his Canadian wife Viola (nee Adams) about six years previously. This photograph of the



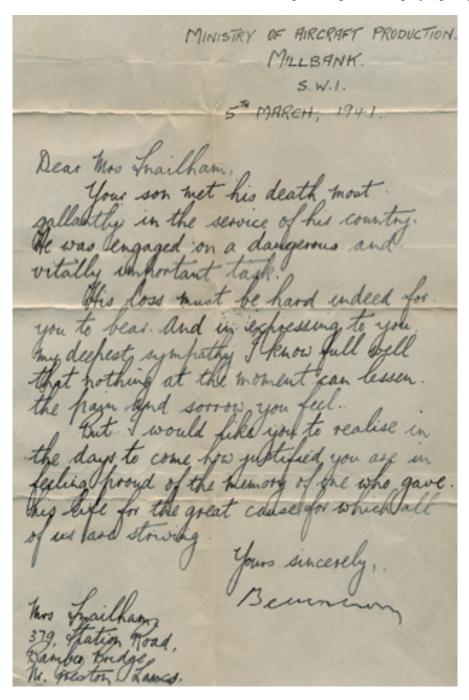
children appeared in a Canadian newspaper dated 23rd February 1941 when the aircraft had been reported missing and not yet discovered. Left to right: Viola, six, William, nine, and Gloria, 10.

William Snailham was the radio operator on the fatal Lockheed Hudson flight that should have been a straightforward ferry delivery of a vitally needed airplane to the UK. Snailham's mother received a telegram from the Canadian Pacific Railway Air Service on the 26th February informing her of her son's death and offering to arrange a military funeral in Newfoundland to be attended by colleagues and official representatives. A second telegram arrived on the next day to say that Mrs Annie Wilson (Snailham's sister-in-law) was urging a burial at Halifax, Nova Scotia alongside his wife. They would comply if Mrs Snailham had no objection. And that is what in fact happened.

This news travelled fast because a detailed account of his career and involvement in the flight was published in the Lancashire Daily Post on the 26th February 1941. This was the same day that

William's mother received the telegram; and it included a summary of that first telegram amongst much else!

Amongst the other material provided by Betty was a slightly later evocative photograph of his children and copies of their birth certificates. There was also: a list of items found in his locker (appendix 3), a group photograph of 21 men taken at Gander including himself and Mackey, but not Bird, a photograph of five 'parked' Lockheed Hudson airplanes presumably awaiting to be ferried to the UK (appendix 2). The real 'gem' in the collection was a hand written letter from Lord Beaverbrook to Williams' mother, dated 5th March 1941 expressing his "deep sympathy".



Bob Banting in Canada was 'over the moon' when sent this information about William Snailham because the group involved with commemorating Banting: his work heritage and finally his sad accidental death, had very little about Snailham. Betty's generosity was subsequently extended to donating the original collection of documents to Bob Banting and his group and the Frederick Banting Museum.

General Observations

Musgrave harbour. The nearest settlement to where the Hudson bomber crashed killing Banting, Bird and Snailham is Musgrave Harbour and there today is a Memorial Interpretation Centre which contains many artefacts relating to Dr Frederick Banting's work and his death in the air crash. Also on the site in the Banting Memorial Park is a full size replica of a Hudson Bomber aircraft.

The goggles shown on the right belonged to Mackey and are on display in the Banting Interpretation Centre in Musgrave Harbour along with other wreckage from the 1941 crash.

The Banting Homestead. Banting was born on an 100-acre farm near the small town of Alliston North of Toronto. The last person to live and work the farm in Alliston was Fred's nephew: Edward Banting. He was a proud relative. In his front parlour he had many mementos of uncle Fred's life, including some of Fred's landscapes (he was also a noteworthy artist). Edward was visited





frequently by diabetics from all over the world. They came to see where Fred was born, to experience the ambiance, to breathe the country air, and to walk in the same paths and fields where Fred grew up and learned the values of hard work, and concern for humanity.



The restored Banting Homestead in 2013

welcomed these visitors and took great pride in showing them his treasured mementos. He determined that others like them, and future generations too, should be able to continue visiting uncle Fred's birthplace, even after his own death. He bequeathed the farm to the Ontario Historical Society (OHS) who had shown interest in his plans. After Edward's death in 1999 the house decayed for several years before the determined to sell the property for housing development in 2006. There were

objections to such action and eventually Alliston Town served a notice of "designation" as an historic site under the Ontario Heritage Act and won their case. The whole property was subsequently purchased in 2008 by the Town of New Tecumseth and is jointly administered by the town, who manage Capital projects, and the Sir Frederick Banting Legacy Foundation who look after operational matters.

The above house is not the one in which Sir Frederick Banting was born. That was demolished in 1927 and replaced with the present structure now used by the Legacy Foundation. However, David Harrison, a Canadian artist who specializes in painting Heritage Homes and Structures, has depicted the original homestead that Fred Banting would have known. His painting was commissioned in 1996 by the Banting family, and the Novo Nordisk diabetes company, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the discovery of the now widely used man-made Isophane Insulin. Harrison states that the picture portrays 'the young Banting with his collie welcoming home his father from a trip to town'.



Appendix 1

The following account was written in 1976 by the brother of Harold Hicks, one of the rabbit hunters who rescued Joe Mackey from the site of the crash. Coming from an eye witness at the time it is probably a fairly accurate account of events as that occurred. It is perhaps unfortunate that the writer incorrectly remembered Joe Mackey's first name as 'Jim' and also got the year wrong – it should read 1941. [Courtesy Bob Banting]

Although hardworking, flamboyant and boisterous, the particular teller of this true story is shy about having his name revealed. For those that know him, his identity is no secret. For those who don't we hope you will enjoy a good true story.'

The account

"In 1942 Great Britain was at war Germany and the U.S. hadn't entered the war at that time. The U.S. was making bombers and supplying Great Britain, they were bringing the bombers down to the border and putting them across on wheels to the Canadian border. And the ferry command would pick them up and bring them down to Gander, Newfoundland."

"The Hudson Bomber was the plane used extensively during the war. We could sit down In Musgrave Harbour in the night anytime after 6:00 p.m., and sometimes before, and from then until midnight, there would be nothing but a roar of air craft."

"On one night in February 1942, we heard one plane which made a weird noise. About 10 to 15 minutes, after that we heard what we thought was the same sound coming back, on approximately the same course. We thought there must have been something wrong with the plane, and that's all we thought of it."

"The next day was a stormy day. but the following day it was a little better and there were a few planes maneuvering around. Nobody paid much attention to them. But the following day, a Sunday, was a beautiful day and wherever you looked in the sky, you'd see a plane making circles, diving, etc. We figured there was something wrong."

"On Monday morning about 9.00 or 10:00 a.m., there were two or three planes hovering around, and the Hudson Bomber came from, the south, going north course. She came over Musgrave Harbour, and dropped leaflets On the leaflets was a message – 'air craft crash 10 miles south of you: 1 man alive, in desperate need of help, please render all assistance possible. I will dive over the spot until help arrives"

"The leaflet was signed by Jim Allison, a Texas flyer, who was an employee of the Ferry Command. He was ferrying the Hudson Bomber from Gander to Great Britain. but was retained at Gander for some Technical work on the an craft"

"We immediately took snow shoes, axes, etc. and all the men of the community gathered horses, dogs etc. and went in on woods path. There were about 5 or 6 parties. Also there were four men in rabbit catching; Dalton Abbott, Harold Hicks. Tobias Moulton and Walter Hicks. They were about five miles from the crashed plane when they picked up the same message. They immediately threw away their rabbits and went to the plane and assisted the pilot Jim Mackey. They put him on a slide, and he was pulled by hand ten or twelve miles to Musgrave Harbour and given in charge of the district nurse. They brought him to Musgrave Harbour on Monday night around 10:00 p.m."

"The main parties of men going to look for the plane left Musgrave Harbour, Doting Cove and few surrounding communities that morning. We had no difficulty finding the plane. The wireless operator was in his seat and. I cut him out. The navigating officer apparently was ready to parachute, the rip cord was pulled and broken, and the famous Doctor Banting, the discoverer of insulin, was found a couple of hundred feet away from the plane in a sitting position when I found him, dressed in a khaki uniform, nothing on his head, and he had a wounded foot or toe. His first aid kit was near him, and it appeared he was in the act of bandaging his toe when he died. He died of exposure. He wasn't frozen."

"We held a memorial service here for the people lost in that plane although we didn't know what religion they were. We held an old fashioned United Church service and formed a funeral procession and put them on board the plane. We treated them just the same as if they were residents of our community We couldn't put them in a casket because the plane couldn't take them, but we wrapped them in white linen. The church was blocked to capacity with mourners for the funeral."

"The pilot of that plane, Jim Mackey, and his wife came back here to visit last year. He lives in California and he's Colonel James Mackey now. We had a time for them when they visited here. He got up to speak, wiped his eyes and the big tears started to roll down his cheeks. For about a minute he couldn't utter a word. The three fellows who rescued him were sitting by him. It was a moving scene, and a good many people had tears in their eyes. He was here a whole day, and he flew in by helicopter to his plane."

"The plane, the Fair Child, that came and picked up the boys of Dr. Banting landed at the very doorstep of the first person in Newfoundland that ever insulin was used on. Her name was Mrs Stanley Peddle."

"The first plane that made a crossing from east to west landed in Musgrave Harbour. We have that distinction, too. That plane landed in Musgrave Harbour when she ran short of fuel. She landed. in the bog. We got her out of the bog and pulled her about a half a mile."

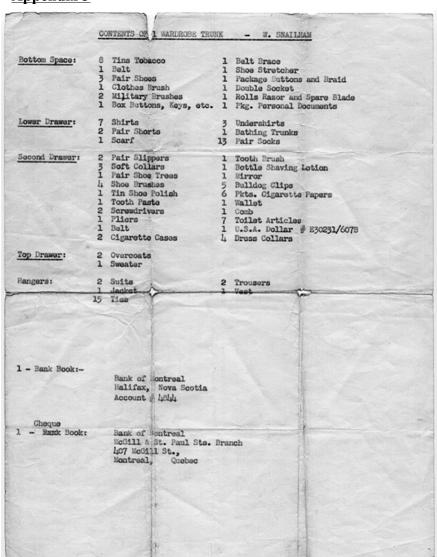
"The pilots on that plane were Harry Richman and Dick Merrill. Captain Eddie Rickenbacker, the Manager of Eastern Airlines, was here too."

Appendix 2



A flight of 5 Lockheed Hudson Mark III bombers parked at Gander airfield. Date unknown but the photograph was amongst the documents held by William Snailham's niece Betty Tyler.

Appendix 3



List of items found in William Snailham's locker after his death.