

**TO COMMEMORATE THE PLANTING
OF FIVE BETULA UTILIS variety *JACQUEMONTII*
ON SUNDAY, 10TH APRIL 2011
BY PORTISHEAD IN BLOOM
TOGETHER WITH MARY-ANN ILES, TOM'S DAUGHTER,
THE CHAIRMAN OF PORTISHEAD TOWN COUNCIL
MRS REYNA KNIGHT
AND THE PORTISHEAD BRANCH OF THE BRITISH LEGION**

**TO CELEBRATE THE LIFE AND SERVICE TO HIS COUNTRY OF
TOM BROOM (1914 – 2010)**



SQUADRON LEADER TOMMY BROOM D.F.C**

At the top of Roath Road where it meets Slade Road, there is an area of green open space where Rhondda Villas used to standⁱ. It was here at No. 2 Rhondda Villas that Thomas John Broom was born on 22nd January 1914, a few months before the start of World War 1. Tom's father, John Ashford Broom, served with the Army Medical Corps in France, stationed near Calais. When he returned home, he worked as a draper's assistant in Osmond and Tovey's shop in the High Streetⁱⁱ. He was a senior member of the St John Ambulance Brigade that had been formed in the village. When the First World War finished, Tom went to the Portishead Council School just across the road from Rhondda Villas. This was at that time an elementary school which educated children from infancy until they reached the school-leaving age of fourteen years. Tom was a competent pupil at all times but he improved rapidly under the influence of Mr Churchley who taught Standards V and V1, From 1926 to 1928, Tom came under the supervision of the Headmaster, Mr Barlow who was generally pleased with Tom's progress in attendance, punctuality, conduct and subject learning.

On very cold days when the children were released from their classes for morning playtime, Tom's mother would cross the road from Rhondda Villas to hand him a cup of hot cocoa through the railings. His mother, Louise Gough, was a farmer's daughter who was born at Hallen, just north of Henbury in Bristol. As a young girl she obtained work as a maid "in service" to a bank manager's family. When the family moved to live in the fashionable Woodhill Road area of Portishead, Louise moved with them and that was how she came to meet John Broom and to marry him on 5th January 1911 at St Mary's Church, Henbury.

Tom's family attended St Peter's Church where Tom joined the choir. In the week before Christmas, they went round the village carol-singing as well as out at Woodhill and Woodlands Road where some wealthy Bristol merchants lived. Whatever they collected paid for their annual visit to the pantomime at the Prince's Theatre on Park Row in Bristol.ⁱⁱⁱ

Tom was one of four children; he had an older sister Muriel and younger brothers, Bob and Peter.

When Tom left school, he was signed on at the Stoke Road Motor Garages and Engineering Work which was sited in Stoke Road at the back of Budgens. Over the years the garage has been known as “Coward and White”, “Spreag’s” and “Jenkins and Vickery”. Part of Tom’s job was to move cars from one spot of the garage to the other, as many Portishead streets were too narrow to park in, owners used the garage premises. Within three years of leaving school, Tom obtained a driving licence and as a result could deliver cars to their owners’ homes as far away from the High Street as Nore Road and Woodlands Road. Tom also learnt to use the telephone at the garage which was no mean feat at that time.

Tom had always intended to apply for the R.A.F. as soon as he reached his 18th birthday in 1932. His referees were Mr Coward, the Works Manager and a Chartered Mechanical Engineer at the garage and Dr Charles Wigan, the local general practitioner and Chairman of the Urban District Council. Mr Coward wrote that Tom was “a suitable candidate for engagement in that branch of His Majesty’s forces in which he desires to serve”. Dr Wigan wrote that he had known Tom since birth and would recommend him for any post requiring intelligence, sobriety and courage. Once Tom’s application had been processed, he was ordered to report to London for tests, both mental and physical. He was given a lift on the pillion of Fred Small’s motorbike on 3rd May 1932, to catch the 5.00 am train from Temple Meads to London and so began his career in the Royal Air Force.

Tom became a navigator in Mosquito aircraft and the story of his wartime career can be found in an excellent book called “Squadron Leader Tommy Broom DFC – The Legendary Pathfinder Mosquito Navigator” by his friend Tom Parry Evans, published by Pen & Sword Books Ltd in 2007.

The citation for one of Tom’s Distinguished Flying Crosses reads “Flight Lieutenant Broom DFC was a navigator in a Mosquito aircraft of 128 Squadron detailed to place a 4000 lb. bomb up to the mouth of a railway tunnel in the region of Kaiserslautern on the morning of the 1st of January 1945. This operation required great skill, determination and the utmost precision. By his assistance to his pilot this attack was carried out most successfully. Flight Lieutenant Broom has completed 73 operations against German targets, the

majority of which were heavily defended and including 15 against Berlin. He has, at all times, shown consistent keenness and skill.”

When Tom received a second bar to his Distinguished Flying Cross, the Urban District Council wrote to his parents saying “At a meeting of the Council held last evening, reference was made to the additional award to your son, Squadron Leader T Broom and I was requested by the Council to convey to you the Council’s congratulations on this additional award. From official citation there is no doubt that your son has earned the recognition which has been bestowed upon him and the Council has unanimously resolved to place on official record its appreciation of your son’s service to his country.”

Portishead in Bloom is extremely pleased to be able to recognise and appreciate all that our local “Posset” hero, Tom Broom, did for his country during World War Two by planting five birch trees var. *Jacquemontii* together with hopefully, a seat and plaque on the site of the house in which he was born.

For the past eighteen months, Portishead in Bloom has worked closely with North Somerset Council, Portishead Town Council, the Portishead branch of the British Legion, Tom’s daughter Mary Ann Iles and the residents of Roath Road to complete this very worthwhile project.

10th April 2011

ⁱ The houses, a pair of semi-detached and one detached, were demolished in c.1965 to make way for road improvements when the High Street was going to be pedestrianized. This never happened.

ⁱⁱ The store was built in the early 1870s and has always been a drapers/clothing shop. From 1988 it was known as Worthingtons and is now M & Co.

ⁱⁱⁱ The theatre was destroyed by German bombers in 1940-1941.