

Sergeant Richard John Bebbington, Royal Air Force,
of Botvyle Farm, All Stretton

died 3 September 1942 over France, aged 24.

Richard (Dick) Bebbington was born on 20th January 1918 in Conover- his name at registration was John Richard but he seems to have reversed this once he was an adult. Dick was the fourth of five children of John Bebbington, a farmer, and Ellen nee Gardiner who were married in Rushbury in 1912. John was born in Edstaston, near Wem, and his father farmed there at the quaintly named Pepper Street Farm and in Eaton under Heywood. Ellen's widowed mother ran the Lutwyche Arms in Wall under Heywood in 1911 so the couple presumably met over the bar.

Ellen had been born in Yorkshire but her mother was from Church Stretton and her father James, who was born in Wistanstow, was a publican who had also run pubs in Shrewsbury.

By the time of the 1921 census the family were living at Little Lyth farm, near Bayston Hill. Richard attended Adams Grammar School in Wem. Soon after 1921 it appears John took on a tenancy for a farm in Sleaf, near Wem, but had to leave when the aerodrome was built. After leaving school Dick worked for the Public Assistance Department for Shropshire County Council.

By November 1937, when Dick's father John died aged 59, the family were living in Manor Farm, Botvyle, All Stretton. They remained there in 1939, with Dick's brothers William and Robert and his sister Winifred, all helping out on the farm.



Temporary grave marker in Gennes-Ivergny and Dick Bebbington in uniform

Following the outbreak of the war, Dick was called up and joined the Volunteer Reserve 15th Squadron of the Royal Air Force, his service number was 655832. Dick qualified as a pilot and served throughout the war. In 1942 he was based at Borne in Cambridgeshire and was flying Stirling bombers. His plane was shot down over the village of Gennes-Ivergny in the Pas-de-Calais region of Northern France returning from a raid on Karlsruhe in Germany on 3 September 1942.

The crew were originally reported missing but all seven were confirmed dead four months after the crash. Dick's mother received a touching letter from the Mayor of Gennes-Ivergny telling her how they had found the wrecked plane and buried the crew in the local cemetery. The seven, six from the RAF and one from the Canadian Royal Air Force were buried in four graves.



Dick Bebbington's gravestone with Observer Sergeant Coop

In 1954 formal headstones were erected by the Imperial War Graves Commission. The inscription on Dick's gravestone reads :

655832 Sergeant
R J Bebbington
Pilot
Royal Air Force
3rd September 1942 Aged 24
To them,
He gave the aid that's sure
The only courage to endure.

Dick Bebbington is remembered on a memorial at Adams Grammar School, Wem, on the County's Roll of Honour in St Chad's Church, Shrewsbury and also on Church Stretton's own war memorial.

Dick's mother Ellen died in 1958 in Leebotwood. His brother Robert continued farming at Botvyle with his family and, after retirement, remained there until his death in 1991. The family are still resident at the farm.