

# Effects Of Crash At Prestwick

Scene of destruction after the disaster which overwhelmed houses in Hillside Avenue, Prestwick, on Monday morning. These bungalows were almost completely destroyed by the plane striking them and by the fire which followed on the accident. Figures are visible on the right of the picture at work on the blasted walls. (See page 7.)





1st September 1944

# PRESTWICK CRASH

## Twenty-Five Perish When Plane Hits Houses

Twenty-five people were killed, including the crew and passengers of a Trans-Atlantic plane, when it crashed early on Monday morning on houses in Glenburn, Prestwick, creating a scene of havoc, and much alarm over a wide area.

Immediately following the crash tongues of fire shot into the night sky from the burning and damaged plane, and from houses which caught fire almost at once and burned fiercely, and by the light of which rescuers carried on their work.

Civilian victims of the disaster were: —Thomas George Maitland (43), 10 Hawthornvale, Leith; Thomas Kinnear (23), 25 Dunsyre Street, Kirkcaldy (the son of Councillor Thomas Kinnear, of Kirkcaldy); William Kenneth Snowden (24), 155 West End Road, Southall, Middlesex; Robert Alexander Handyside (44), Mayfield, Kelso; and Irene Haswell (5), 6 Hillside Avenue, Prestwick.

Mr Alex Haswell, who was home on leave from the R.E.M.E., and his wife, are in the Ayr County Hospital, as also Mr Andrew Haswell, a brother who resides near the scene of the accident, and who had gone to the rescue. On enquiry at the hospital yesterday it was ascertained that all three were slightly improved.

An official statement issued by the American authorities on the day following the calamity put the casualties in the plane at 20, the number including six of a crew, twelve service men, and one civilian passenger, stated to be a nurse. All were of American nationality.

The accident occurred about 1 a.m. and the plane was heard flying low just before the crash. It would appear to have struck a chimney of a corporation house at 59 Berclands Road, occupied by Mr James Hart, who saw it afterwards through his window strike the garden wall of 60 Berclands Road opposite, occupied by Mr James Anderson, it rose slightly, careered along Hillside Avenue, and finally came to rest after demolishing the houses at Nos. 4 and 6. The effect of the impact was terrific, and in all the circumstances it is surprising that the death roll among the civilian population was not heavier.

### Woman's Ordeal

All four men victims, together with Mr and Mrs Alexander Haswell and little Irene Haswell, stayed with Mrs Agnes Johnston, 6 Hillside Avenue, Mrs Haswell's mother.

Badly shaken by her experience Mrs Johnston said that she and Mr and Mrs Haswell were preparing to retire for the night when the accident occurred. Irene and the four other men were already sleeping.

"I knew nothing was wrong until I heard a tremendous crash in the front of the house," she said. "Immediately the house seemed to collapse on top of us and fire broke out. Soon the house was a mass of flames, and I was pinned down by beams. I tried to kick myself free, but I couldn't do so.

"The flames were licking round me, and I had shut my eyes, fearing that I could not be saved, when the rescuers arrived."

### Rescue Work

It was Mr Andrew Dougan, 103 Glenburn, son of Bailie Dougan, who rendered such valuable aid and was largely instrumental in saving Mrs Johnston and Mrs Haswell. He knew the lie of the interior of the house through having stayed there for a time, and he found Mrs Johnston practically engulfed in debris with Mrs Haswell near her. Mr Haswell was about three yards away and he managed to get his head and shoulders clear. Other willing helpers were soon assisting.

Describing Mr Haswell's predicament, Mr Dougan said the whole chimney seemed to have come down on top of his legs. Rescue squads and A.R.P. officials got a rope and pulled the chimney wreckage off him, and carried him away on a stretcher.

### The Little Girl.

When the crash came and in that brief space before the house came about them, Mrs Johnston called in an agony of suspense, "Save the baby," meaning little Irene, but as she realised afterwards, her son was pinned down and could not get out. When the rescuers reached the child she was still clutching her little doll; she was alive but died on the way to hospital.

"I don't know yet how we all escaped," said Mr Anderson, the roof of whose house was sheared off and the interior went up in flames. In the house with him were his wife, his mother-in-law, Mrs Allan, his two sons, Peter (17) and Allan (12), as well as Mr Harry Smith, an airman from Nova Scotia.

"Mr Smith got out through the attic window, and the rest of us struggled from the house in our night clothes. On getting outside the house I discovered that Mrs Allan was missing. I went back into her bedroom, which is situated on the ground floor, and found that she was pinned in the room by falling debris."

Defying the flames, Mr Anderson pulled aside the burning beams and, lifting his mother-in-law from the bed, carried her to safety.

### "Whole Street on Fire."

The fierceness of the flames that destroyed the four houses was described by Mrs MacGregor, 1 Alford Avenue, whose house is situated near the scene of the tragedy.

"I was in bed when I heard the deep sound of a large plane coming over," she said. "It seemed to be almost at roof-top height. Then almost at once I heard a crash. I jumped from bed, rushed to the window, pulled aside the black-out curtains and looked out. The whole street seemed to be on fire—my eyes were almost blinded by the glare. I was convinced that my own house was ablaze. I rushed to the telephone and dialled the number of the local fire brigade. But there was no reply. The line was dead, having been severed by the crashing plane."

Her husband, Mr Ian MacGregor, ran from the house and, realising that telephone communication with the fire brigade had been interrupted, called for a volunteer with a car or a bicycle to go to the nearest telephone booth. A boy immediately volunteered for the job, and cycled to the booth. The fire brigade arrived within a few minutes.

### Fire Fighting

No praise can be too high for the rescue squads of the C.D. service, the Americans and the miners, whose work was not always unhampered and for a time was hazardous in the extreme. Three of the N.E. fire brigades answered the summons promptly, and under Chief Officer Paterson soon had a plentiful supply of water playing on the burning houses, four of which were burning fiercely. Eight lines of hose were got at work, and within an hour or so the fires had been extinguished. When day dawned over the scene a spectacle of ruin presented itself, and a feeling of tragedy and sorrow was reflected on the faces of all who gathered there. Throughout Tuesday gangs worked to clear the wreckage, and hundreds of sightseers thronged round the scene of the tragedy until the police were obliged to erect a rope barrier at the area to keep the curious at bay.

### Houses Destroyed

The houses destroyed, four in number, are of the bungalow type, and were of an attractive character. No. 2 was occupied by Mr and Mrs Stewart, who escaped in their night clothes by a back window when the plane damaged the house, and No. 4 was unoccupied at the time, Mrs and Miss Stuart having gone to Largs a day or two previously and thus escaped the horror of the scene and probably a worse fate. No. 6, the home of Mrs Johnston in which the lodgers and the little girl met such a tragic end, was completely flattened, while the home of Mr Anderson, already alluded to, at 60 Berclands Road, was gutted. One or two other houses sustained minor damage.

The remains of the four men victims have been taken to their respective homes for burial, and the little girl victim was laid to rest in Prestwick cemetery yesterday afternoon amid many manifestations of regret on the part of the population of Glenburn and district.