

Story behind road names reveals tale of heroism

By HUW BORLAND

UNBEKNOWN to many people, certain street names in Durrington tell a 57-year-old tale of heroism and self-sacrifice.

Squadron Drive, Fulbeck Avenue, Thompson Close, Bourne Close, Rees Close, Moore Close, Callon Close, Essenhigh Drive and Varey Road bear the names from a World War Two bombing mission that ended in tragedy.

On December 17, 1944, a Lancaster bomber crew set off for Munich, from RAF Fulbeck, Lincolnshire, loaded with incendiary bombs.

The crew, from the 49th Squadron, found they could not fly the bomber above 1,000ft and called for help.

The base told them to ditch the bombs in the sea at 5,000ft, otherwise the explosion would blow the aircraft's tail off.

Struggling to stay airborne, the crew found themselves above Worthing.

They crashed on the beach, just 100 yards south-east of Worthing Pier. The plane exploded.

Flying Officer Edward Essenhigh, 24, pilot, Sergeant Harry Varey, flight engineer, Sgt Len Bourne, 28, navigator, Flying Sgt Fred Rees, 22, wireless operator, Sgt James Moore, 39, air gunner, FO Andrew Thompson, bomb aimer, and Sgt Gordon Callon, 20, air gunner, probably died instantly.

Sgt Callon's was the only body recovered from the wreckage and was buried at Littlehampton.

Tom Gatfield, of the 49th Squadron Association, said: "The sacrifice of this crew, in avoiding Worthing, no doubt considerably reduced their chances of landing safely in shallow water.

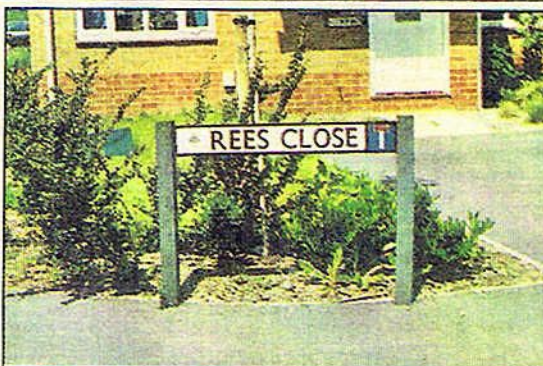
"They lost their lives and, although many sea-front shops and houses had some damage, no one in Worthing was killed and only three people were slightly injured."

Cliff Harrison, from Worthing Borough Council, said: "The development in West Durrington was built in 1997.

"There were proposals from developers for naming the roads. Members of the council decided they did not like them and asked the officers to make a report on some options.

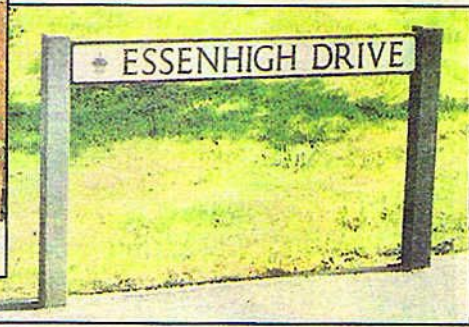
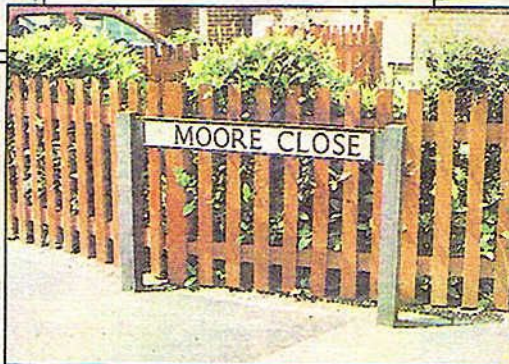
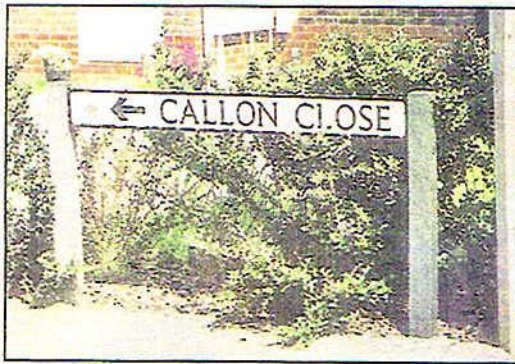
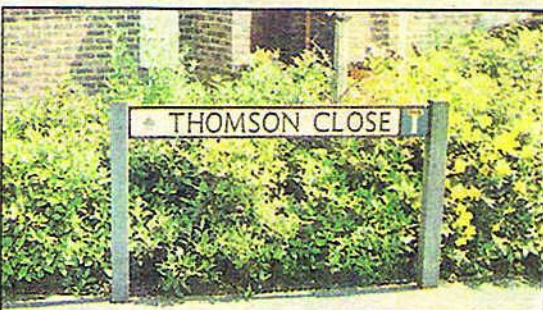
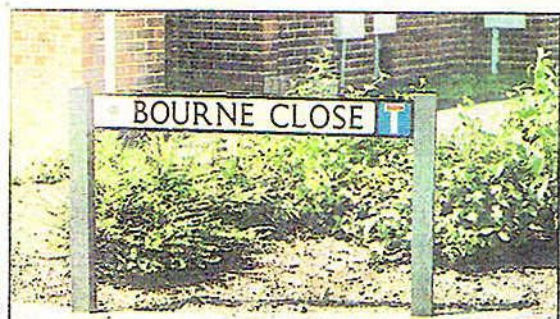
"One option was the crew of the Lancaster, suggested by then mayor, Peter Green. That was accepted by the environmental services committee.

"We have had letters from relatives since then, thanking us for the recognition."



■ HEROIC CREW: Lancaster bomber crew (back row) Fred Rees, Andrew Thompson, Gordon Callon, James Moore, (front) Len Bourne and Harry Varey. The pilot, Edward Essenhigh, is not in the picture.

Streets marking ultimate sacrifice of crew



■ SIGNS OF RESPECT: The Durrington road signs are a tribute to the heroic air crew