

The club's tragic air crash

Friday, August 9th 1968

EIGHT of our young ladies lost their lives in the crash. They were bound for Innsbruck Airport for a walking holiday in the Austrian Tyrol when the plane mystifyingly crashed onto a German autobahn.



Maureen McLindon (aged 20)

This is the first time these details have appeared for 39 years because it is so poignant for some members (myself included).

Eye witnesses said the crippled plane with engines spluttering, was actually trying to land, but crashed. All 48 people on board were killed. That very busy autobahn miraculously had just one car heading straight for the crashed plane. The driver escaped with a broken windscreen.

Peter McLindon not only lost his sister Maureen (20), a nurse at Broadgreen Hospital, but also a cousin from Essex, Mary Fletcher (a member of our club). Mary was a very close cousin friend of Maureen, Peter and her Liverpool cousins, who she visited often.

Waited at Innsbruck for girlfriend and sister

It was also a double blow to Mike Humphreys, a club member, who was waiting at Innsbruck Airport with another young member, Paul Anderson.

They had been touring around Germany on a motorbike. Mike was eagerly expecting to meet up with his girlfriend, Barbara O'Keefe (25), a popular gym teacher at Blessed Ambrose Barlow secondary school, West Derby. She was also on our committee. Mike was also waiting for his sister, Valerie Humphreys (22), a teacher at St Hugh's primary school. There were two other teachers, namely Jean Baxter (24), a well-liked teacher at Our Lady of the Assumption school, Gateacre, and Mary Byron (25) a devoted teacher at Blessed Edmund Arrowsmith secondary school, Whiston. The final two were: Irene Rawlinson (23), a civil servant from Wavertree, and Monica Hanna (pictured) a shorthand typist for an engineering firm, worshipping at St Monica's, Bootle.



Monica Hanna (aged 25)

At that time, I had been in the club for only two years, but realised that seven of those girls had actually shared my 1956 olive green Morris Minor. I often dropped Mary Byron home on a Thursday club night (from Prescott) and taken the other six on car rambles, etc. There were many other young single men in the club doing likewise, and we remembered the happy times spent with those girls, playing tennis at our own club at Lance Lane, etc.

The night before, many of us waved goodbye to them at Lime Street on the Thursday midnight train to Heathrow. Many had just been dancing at our crowded weekly club night. Barbara O'Keefe was wearing a new lime green trouser suit that she had made. I can still vividly remember it all.

Ironically, two of them, Valerie Humphreys and Monica Hanna were last-minute replacements for two other girls who couldn't travel. The coach actually turned up for the Sunday ramble, and startlingly, some members didn't realise that it was our girls that had perished two days before, in spite of it being front page news in all the papers. The coach was hastily cancelled. Later there was a memorial Mass at the Cathedral, and then, well life must go on, and the club gradually picked up again with more new members joining, weekends away and skiing holidays (flying to Austria!).



Barbara O'Keefe (aged 25)

They died in the prime of life. God bless them all - R.I.P. *Dave News*

ARCHIVES: Your Editor hasn't got a superhuman memory of the air crash. In fact, the archive material came from rather fragile copies of the Liverpool Daily Post and Echo, The Daily Mail, The Sunday Times, The Catholic Pictorial and The Universe.

If anyone would like a photocopy of one or more of the relevant sections of any of the above newspapers then please contact me personally - 01744 632211

TRIBUTES: Bishop Harris (president in 1968) said the sad loss of the young catholic rambles was a great shock. "Last year we celebrated the Association's 40th birthday when over 200 members at the dinner dance recalled many happy occasions over the years. Now this is the club's saddest moment. May they all rest in peace."

Fred Norbury, a founder member and a trustee, also gave his condolences, as did Bernard Manley, club chairman.

CATHOLIC RAMBLERS SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER

The club's tragic air crash

Friday, August 9th 1968

IN 1968, seven of our young lady members who were flying out to Innsbruck Airport for a walking holiday in the Austrian Tyrol were tragically killed when their plane crashed onto a German autobahn.

The plane (with both wing tips missing) tried to land but crashed and burst into flames. All 48 people on board perished.

It was a miracle that only one car was on that autobahn – normally a very busy one. The Volkswagen driver escaped with just a broken windscreen and a dent after hitting the central reservation. He ran for his life across the blazing autobahn.

This is the first time for 39 years that these details have been given in our newsletter, mainly because it would have been too upsetting for some current members, especially to Peter McLindon who not only lost his 20-year-old sister Maureen (a trainee nurse at Broadgreen Hospital) but also one of his cousins. Hilda Laycock also lost one of her best friends, 25-years-old Monica Hanna (pictured right). She was a shorthand typist, from St Monica's, Bootle.

It is also quite disturbing to me as I had then been a club member for two years, and three of the young ladies who lost their lives in the crash had been on the committee alongside me. I had given everyone of these seven girls a lift in my 1956 Morris Minor, taking them home on a Thursday night from the club or giving them lifts on car rambles or club weekends away.

One of them was Barbara O'Keefe, a 25-year-old gym teacher at Blessed Ambrose Barlow School, West Derby (pictured here). She was due to meet up with her friend, Mike Humphreys (also a club member) at Innsbruck. He was on a motorbike trip with another member, Paul Anderson, riding pillion.

It was a double tragedy for Mike, as his sister, Valerie Humphreys, was also on the plane (a 22-year-old school-teacher at St Hugh's primary school).

After dancing the night away at our crowded weekly club night, many of us said our goodbyes to them at Lime Street on the Thursday midnight train to Heathrow. Barbara O'Keefe was wearing a new lime green trouser suit. I still vividly remember that night.

Ironically, Valerie Humphreys and Monica Hanna were last-minute replacements for two other girls who couldn't travel. The other ladies who perished were Irene Rawlinson (23), a civil servant from Wavertree, Jean Baxter (24), a teacher at Our Lady of the Assumption school, Gateacre, and Mary Byron (from Prescott), a teacher at Blessed Edmund Arrowsmith secondary school, Whiston.

The Sunday ramble was hastily cancelled and on the following Sunday there was a memorial Mass at the Cathedral. After that the club gradually picked up again with new members constantly joining. God bless them all and may they rest in peace.

Dave News



Monica Hanna

How did it crash?

Well, it took a long time to work it out, as the black box was damaged. But the crash investigators finally found out that the plane was on direct course for Innsbruck when it suddenly went into a dive, whether to avoid another plane, or whatever. During the dive the wing tips broke off and the plane tried to land on the autobahn but it plunged into an embankment, then flipped over and exploded.

One wing tip was found in a potato field and the other in a cornfield only about 150 yards apart.

The crash must have happened very quickly, as nobody had time to put on their seat belts.

Double shock

Peter McLindon's cousin was Mary Fletcher, who lived down in Woodford Green, Essex. He and his sister Maureen were very close to her. Both girls tragically died in the crash.



Barbara O'Keefe

The club's tragic air crash. Friday, August 9th 1968

A FEW months ago, I was asked by a Liverpool Echo reporter could I recall any significant incident in the club since its formation in 1927. Well, I told her that outstanding in my memory was the tragic air crash of 1968.

The plane (apparently with both wingtips missing) tried to land but burst into flames on an autobahn in Germany. All 48 people on board were killed, including seven of our young lady members who were flying out to Innsbruck Airport for a walking holiday in the Austrian Tyrol.

It was a miracle that at the time of the crash only one single car was on that autobahn – normally a very busy one. The Volkswagen driver escaped with a broken windscreen after jumping out of the car and running for his life across the blazing autobahn.

This is the first time for 39 years that these details have been given in our newsletter, mainly because it would have been too upsetting for some current members, especially to Peter McLindon who lost his 20-year-old sister Maureen (a trainee nurse at Broadgreen Hospital), and also to Hilda Laycock who lost her best friend, Monica Hanna (a shorthand typist from St Monica's, Bootle).

Sadly, of course, it also disturbs me (even as I type now) as I had been a club member for three years, and three of the young ladies who lost their lives in the crash had been on the committee with me.

One of them was Barbara O'Keefe, a 25-year-old gym teacher at Blessed Ambrose Barlow School, West Derby (pictured here). She was due to meet up with her friend, Mike Humphreys (also a club member) at Innsbruck. He was on a motorbike trip with another member, Paul Anderson, riding pillion. It was a double tragedy for Mike, as his sister, Valerie Humphreys, was also on the plane (a 22-year-old teacher at St Hugh's primary school). Valerie Humphreys and Monica Hanna were sadly, both last-minute replacements.



Barbara O'Keefe

The other three were Jean Baxter and Irene Rawlinson (both from Wavertree), and Mary Byron, a genteel and attractive school teacher from Prescot. Mary was about the same age as myself at the time.

I had given everyone of those seven girls a lift in my first second-hand car, a 1956 Morris Minor, on various car rambles, weekends away or had given them a lift home on a Thursday night from the club.

Many of us said our goodbyes to them at Lime Street on the Thursday midnight train to Heathrow, after attending our weekly club night. Barbara O'Keefe was wearing a new lime green trouser suit. I still remember it as though it were yesterday.

The Sunday ramble was hastily cancelled. There was a memorial Mass at the Cathedral the following Sunday, but after that the club gradually picked up. God bless them and may they all rest in peace.

A full page article mentioning our club's 80th anniversary year and this tragic accident will be appearing in the Echo sometime in the near future. *Note our Dinner Dance is on Saturday, October 27th.*

Dave News

A double shock for Peter McLindon

Another victim was Mary Fletcher, who lived down in Woodford Green, Essex. She was a close cousin of Peter McLindon and his sister Maureen who died in the crash.

How the tragic news gradually unfolded

I was actually driving my car down to our own (then) tennis club at Lance Lane in Wavertree on the Friday afternoon. I finished work early on Fridays at my newspaper job in Warrington, where I used to live.

I heard the news on my car radio but thought that it couldn't be them because it crashed in the afternoon, and they had a morning flight. But when I arrived at the tennis club and saw some of the others, I learnt the tragic truth. Their plane had been delayed due to traffic congestion at the airport and also flooding caused by wet weather.

What was the cause of the crash?

Well, it took a long time to work it out, as the black box was damaged. But the investigators finally found out that they were on direct course for Innsbruck when the plane suddenly went into a dive, whether to avoid another plane, or whatever. During the dive the wing tips broke off and the plane then tried to land on the autobahn. It must have happened suddenly as nobody had time to put on their seat belts. *R.I.P.*