

# Harry PATIS

ARP Rescue Party  
Died on 6 April 1944, aged 63

Harry was the only person to be killed by enemy action in Wells during the war. He was born in London, and was an accomplished musician, and played double bass in many London Orchestras. Harry moved to Wells in 1922 and played for the Wells musical societies, which was how he met his future wife. During the Second World War he joined the Wells ARP and died from wounds caused by a German bomb exploding near to the wooden chalet where he lived.



Wells ARP Rescue Party  
The date is unknown so perhaps Harry is on the photo  
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Harry was born in London on 13 July 1880. The story of his pre-war life was given in the *Wells Journal* of 14 April 1944:

A native of London, he was a brilliant musician, and for several years played in many London orchestras. During the last war he was with a military band, playing the clarinet. Soon after the last war [1922] he came to this district to live with his nephew, Mr. J. H. Boothaway, and assisted him in his business at the Bekynton Cafe. An excellent double bass player he soon became associated with the various musical societies of the district and his services were in great demand for the various operatic and musical societies in this part of the county.

In 1934, Harry married Emily Sophia Wilkins BA, the elder daughter of Mr W. F. Wilkins, of 'Elim', 5, Elm Close. Sofia, as she preferred to be called, played the viola and appeared in a lot of the local music events, and played alongside Harry both before and after they married. Sophia had moved to Wells from Kent to work as a teacher before the Great War. In 1932, she was teaching at Oakleigh School.

Harry and Sophia lived in a wooden chalet off Tynning Lane. Now called Tynings Lane, it runs between Lower and Upper Milton, and the chalet was on the north side of the road a couple of fields before the lane meets the Old Bristol Road. Pat Robinson remembers:

Harry lived in Tynings Lane, in a wooden chalet hidden by trees, on an unmade lane up between Upper and Lower Milton so familiar to me. But as children we never met them. The Patis Chalet fell into disrepair but their garden plants remained for a long time.

During the war, Harry joined the ARP and became a member of the First Aid Team which was later merged into the ARP Rescue Service. His sister, Alice Kate Patis, came to Wells to escape the bombing in London and stayed on afterwards, dying here in 1956.

The following details of Harry's death are taken from Paul Fry's book A Short History of the Order of St John and in particular the City of Wells Division (Wells, 1996):

What was termed a "Baby Blitz" on Weston-super-Mare and Bristol took place during March [1944]. Wells was on the flight path of the enemy aircraft, and it was during the night of 27/28th March [that] an enemy aircraft, fleeing from defending Beaufighter night-fighters jettisoned its load of high explosive bombs over the Mendips. Several fell in the area of Tynning Lane, Upper Milton, causing injury to a man living in a converted caravan tucked away in a wood under the Mendips.

At 0030 hrs a call out of the Wells Ambulance was made from the Rescue Post to respond to the incident. The St. John ambulance was dispatched at 0035 hrs and was away until 0220 hrs.

The Report of the A.R.P. District Officer [G.E. Mitchell] noted:

"Divisional Superintendent Fry took charge of the ambulance and quickly arrived at the scene, he was accompanied by Mrs Collins, who was driving, and Messrs Vowles, Grist and Baker.

One casualty (Mr H. Patis aged 63, himself a member of the A.R.P. first aid party,) was found lying on the floor of the living room with a compound fracture and severe lacerated wounds of the left leg. He received admirable first aid and was quickly removed to hospital. ..."

The unfortunate Mr Patis, died of blood poisoning some days later [on 6 April] in the Wells Cottage Hospital ... His home under the Mendips was regarded as one of the safest places in the area.

Jeff Allen's father always said that Harry was lying on a bed when rocks thrown up by the explosion of a bomb came through the roof of the chalet and hit his leg. The 'Jack Blandiver' column in the *Wells Journal* of 24 February 1956 stated that Harry was preparing to report to the ARP post when he was injured.

Harry's funeral took place on 10 April 1944 and was well attended by friends and colleagues, and by many local government and civil defence dignitaries. It was reported in the *Wells Journal* of 14 April 1944 that:

The first part of the funeral service was held at St. Cuthbert's Church. ... Members of the Wells First Aid and Rescue Party, acted as bearers, and his cap, belt and pouch rested on the coffin. Members of the First Aid, Rescue and Decontamination Parties, Ambulance Drivers, Wardens Service, N.F.S., Special Constabulary, Red Cross Nurses, and St. John Ambulance Brigade men and women were present. ... The interment took place at Wells Cemetery and after the committal, the members of the various services filed past the grave and saluted.

Harry is buried in Wells Cemetery in Section H, Row N, Grave 6; sadly it is unmarked. Harry is also remembered on the rolls of honour at Wells Town Hall and Wells Cemetery. He is also listed in the seven volumes of "The Civilian War Dead in the United Kingdom" which are kept just outside the entrance to St George's Chapel in Westminster Abbey.

Harry's wife remarried at the registry office in Wells on 18 February 1947 to Rev. Percy W. Jones.

We would like to thank Pat Robinson, Pauline Pickford and Jeffery Allen for their help in writing this article.