



Hero city airman survived against all the odds

Capital connection helped ensure POW's survival

DAVID MCLEAN

A FAMILY is paying tribute this week to a heroic Second World War airman who was aided in his miraculous survival 75 years ago by an astonishing Edinburgh connection.

Flight Sergeant John Hughes was one of just three of his crew to survive when their Lancaster bomber was shot down after a mission to the German

city of Harburg in March 1945. The young RAF navigator escaped by parachute, landing near the town of Basdahl. John sustained serious injuries and was sent to the hospital at Sandbostel POW camp.

Around ten weeks later, on April 29, 1945, the camp was liberated by the British and Hughes was saved along with thousands of others.

The badly-wounded Edinburgh airman was able to return home to his eventual wife with whom he would share the joy of welcoming six children into the world.

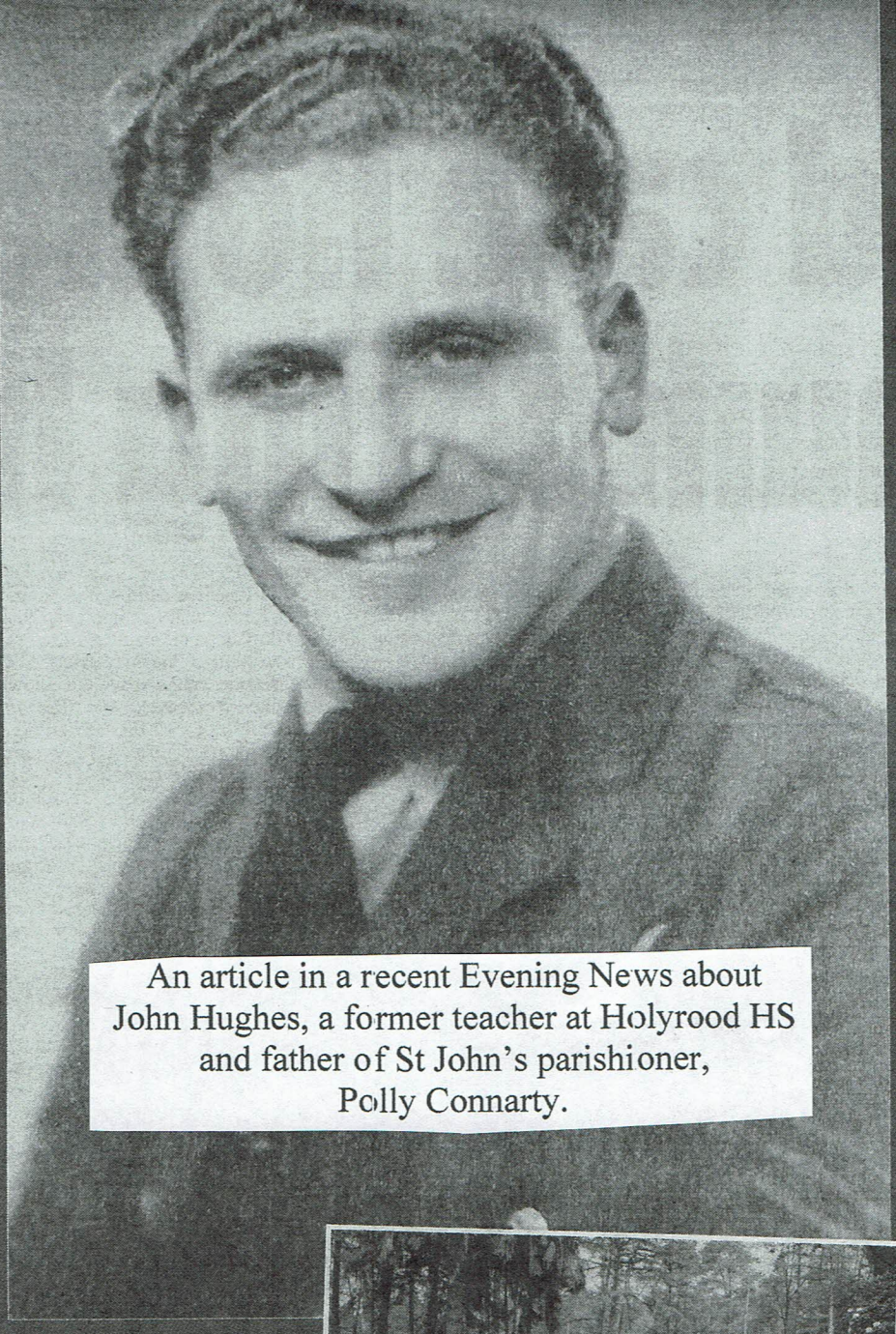
Capital-based writer Clare

Cavanagh, one of Hughes's sixteen grandchildren, said she is immensely proud of her granddad's tale of wartime survival.

"The story of my granddad's recovery is very precious to my family," Clare, 35, explained.

"He died when I was five, but my only memories from that age are of him. He was my favourite person."

Flight Sergeant Hughes' recovery was exceptional. Having suffered a broken pelvis and a fractured spine due to his near-death ordeal in the skies above Basdahl, he would, among other athletic pursuits, go on to become heavyweight



An article in a recent Evening News about John Hughes, a former teacher at Holyrood HS and father of St John's parishioner, Polly Connarty.



champion of Uganda after he and his wife moved to the East African nation to teach children in 1955.

But if not for a staggering quirk of fate, John's story could have ended years earlier in Nazi Germany.

After John's narrow escape from his stricken bomber, a farmer took him to the local constabulary in Basdahl.

During interrogation that police officer, Herr Klinow, discovered he shared a personal link with the captured British airman.

It transpired that Klinow had been a prisoner-of-war himself 30 years earlier in the First World War and had been held

incredible coincidence ensure his father's safety.

"The policeman could have left him in the field, handed him over to the authorities or shot him," John told the Evening News.

On Wednesday the family had hoped to attend a commemorative service in Germany to mark the 75th anniversary of Sandbostel's liberation. However, the coronavirus lockdown saw the plans scrapped.

John Hughes says young people today should look for inspiration from his father's generation and their ability to cope through hardship.

He added: "If my father was here today, he'd say 'just s

