

## Patrick Devlin



### **BECKETT GC, JOHN ARCHIBALD (1906-1946)| Sergeant, Royal Air Force**

John Archibald Beckett was born on 14 March 1906 in Lurgan. He was the son of Samuel Nicholl Beckett and Elizabeth Swanton Beckett. Tragically the couple lost two other sons. William was killed in action with the Merchant Navy in 1941 and Samuel, a Warrant Officer in the RAF, was killed in action on 11th April 1943.

John was educated at St. Enoch's Public Elementary School, Belfast. He first worked as a fitter for Coombe Barbour (Textiles) and Harland & Wolff (Shipyard). He enlisted in July 1935 probably in Belfast. His first job in the RAF was as a rigging mate. He became a rigger and then a fitter. He served in Canada for two years from 26th March 1942 - 29th March 1944. His next recorded posting is to the Middle East on 21st Feb 1946 based at Hetropolis. He was not employed as a driver - he was simply driving the vehicle at the time - he is listed as a fitter, a member of the ground-crew.

Citation: *16th December 1947*

*The KING has been graciously pleased to approve the posthumous award of the GEORGE CROSS to: 521319 Sergeant John Archibald Beckett, Royal Air Force, Royal Air Force Station, Ein Shemer, Air Headquarters, Levant*

*On the night of 28th March, 1947, during refueling operations on a Lancaster aircraft of No. 38 Squadron, a violent fire broke out suddenly in the pumping compartment of the refueling vehicle of which Sergeant Beckett was the driver. The flames enveloped Sergeant Beckett and set alight the front of the Lancaster's fuselage. Another airman beat out the flames on Sergeant Beckett but not before the latter had sustained very severe burns on the hands and face. At this moment, there was grave danger that the main tank of the refueling vehicle, containing over two thousand gallons of fuel, would explode, in which case it is practically certain that most, if not all, of the twenty or more aircraft in the park would have been destroyed. In spite of his serious injuries and the pain he was suffering, Sergeant Beckett got into the driver's seat of the blazing vehicle and drove it a distance of about four hundred yards to a point outside the aircraft park, where it could*

## HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE

*do no further damage. After this he collapsed and was taken in the ambulance to the Station Sick Quarters dangerously ill. He died on 12th April, 1947.*

*The fires in the Lancaster aircraft and in the vehicle were eventually brought under control, and extinguished with no further damage to persons or property. There is no doubt that, by his prompt and gallant action, Sergeant Beckett saved a number of valuable aircraft from almost certain destruction and his comrades, who were working in the vicinity, from risk of serious injury.*

Beckett's George Cross was sold at auction by Christie's on the 20th November 1985.