

School coaches crash in snowstorm

TWO DIE, 16 HURT



TWO BOYS from Wood Green school, Witney, died, and 14 other pupils were hurt, when their school bus crashed in a snowstorm on Tuesday night.

Their bus collided with another school bus — with no passengers — on a bend on the Bampton to Brize Norton road, near Bampton.

The boys, both aged 14, were Gary Gerhardt, of 20 New Road, Bampton, and Gary John Hawkins, of 5 Furlong Road, Clanfield.

Most of the offside of the school special, carrying 46 pupils, was ripped off.

Full story and more pictures: Centre pages

Bus prefect Susan got it organised

TWO 15-year-old schoolgirls — one of them a bus prefect — ignored their own cuts and bruises and helped calm the younger children after the crash. They were praised by the police for what they did.

A police spokesman said the girls, Susan Taylor, of 1 Oathurst Estate, Bampton, and Margaret Gascoigne, of 21 New Road, Bampton, had been "outstanding" and very grown-up about what they did.

One rescuer said that Susan, who was bus prefect on the school coach "showed more guts than I have ever seen before in a teenager."

'Shouting'

The two girls helped get the screaming and shouting younger children from the wreckage, made sure they did not wander away, stopped a passing motorist and told him to call for the doctor.

"After the accident everyone was shouting and screaming. The children were all shocked so Margaret and I thought someone had to do something. I ran in front of the first car that came along

'More guts than I have ever seen in a teenager'

and told the driver to get a doctor," said Susan.

Meanwhile, Margaret kept the shocked children together. "They were all complaining they were cold and wanted to go home. They started wandering off, but I knew we had to keep in a group so that a list of names could be taken," said Margaret.

Later when the children calmed down, she led them the mile to Bampton police station.

Susan stayed behind with an injured girl, Rosalind Till, of Bampton, who said she would not go anywhere without Susan.

"The policeman took us to Witney Health Centre and I

waited with Rosalind, as she had to have an X-ray."

Both girls, in the same form at Wood Green School, Witney, said they did not think they had done anything special to be heroines.

"I just did my job as bus prefect," said Susan.

"We realised someone had to keep the children in order.

Third death in snow

In another accident on Tuesday, Stuart John McGinlay, 55, of The Nurses' Home, Bradwell Grove Hospital, Burford, was killed when his Vauxhall Viva was in collision with a lorry at Signett Hill, near Burford.

The crash happened at 1.30, also in heavy snow.

The car was being driven towards Lechlade and the lorry, driven by Mr Ronald Edward Haward, of 54 East Street, Banbury, was travelling in the opposite direction.

Service at school

BEFORE lessons began at Wood Green School yesterday, the headmaster, Mr H. W. Pooley, conducted a short service for the whole school. There were special prayers for the two dead boys and for the parents of the injured in their anxiety.

One of the dead boys, Gary Gerhardt, was an early morning newspaper delivery boy for Mrs E. M. M. Papworth, of Bridge Street, Bampton.

"He was a jolly good boy, and very good at getting up in the mornings. He started his round at 6.30 each day."

IT WAS 4.20 p.m. In another minute or so the 46 pupils being taken home to Clanfield and Bampton from Wood Green School, Witney, would have been home. Their school bus had only another half-mile to

go.

Then as many of them were peering through the misty windows at the heavy snowstorm outside, their school special — a Hughes coach — cornered badly.

It lurched. The coach rocked crazily. As the children clung frantically to their seats, the off side was ripped away.

They had collided with another bus coming from the opposite direction — an empty City of Oxford Motor Services coach, travelling towards Brize Norton.

With their coach reduced to a twisted mass of metal and shattered glass, some of the children got on to the treacherous roadway, and stood about, dazed and shocked.

Others remained in their wrecked seats — too stunned to move.

Three Bampton doctors were among the first to arrive, an RAF ambulance crew also turned up from Brize Norton. They found two of the children had died, 14 were injured, and both drivers seriously hurt.

Bampton firemen had to release the drivers from their cabs.

One of the rescue team, Leading Fireman Raymon Green, found his daughter, Esther, aged 15, was on the coach.

She had cuts on her head and he went with her to hospital.

Walked

Many of the children who escaped serious injury walked to their homes at Bampton, or to the surgery.

From there, some were later taken by ambulance to hospital.

The children's headmaster, Mr H. W. Pooley, and other members of the staff, arranged roll calls to check who was on the bus. Later some of them helped Thames Valley Police at Witney identify the two dead boys.

One pupil who had a lucky escape from serious injury was 15-year-old Pearl Paintin, of 5 Fox Close, Bampton, daughter of Mr and Mrs R. Paintin.

Cut

Pearl said: "I remember the coach going round the bend and it went over the other side of the road.

"I was sitting on the gangway seat and my friend Rosalind Till, of Bampton, was sitting next to the window. My face was cut. I don't remember much after that and I walked home."

Her twin brother, Paul, had stayed away from school, or he, too, would have been on the coach.

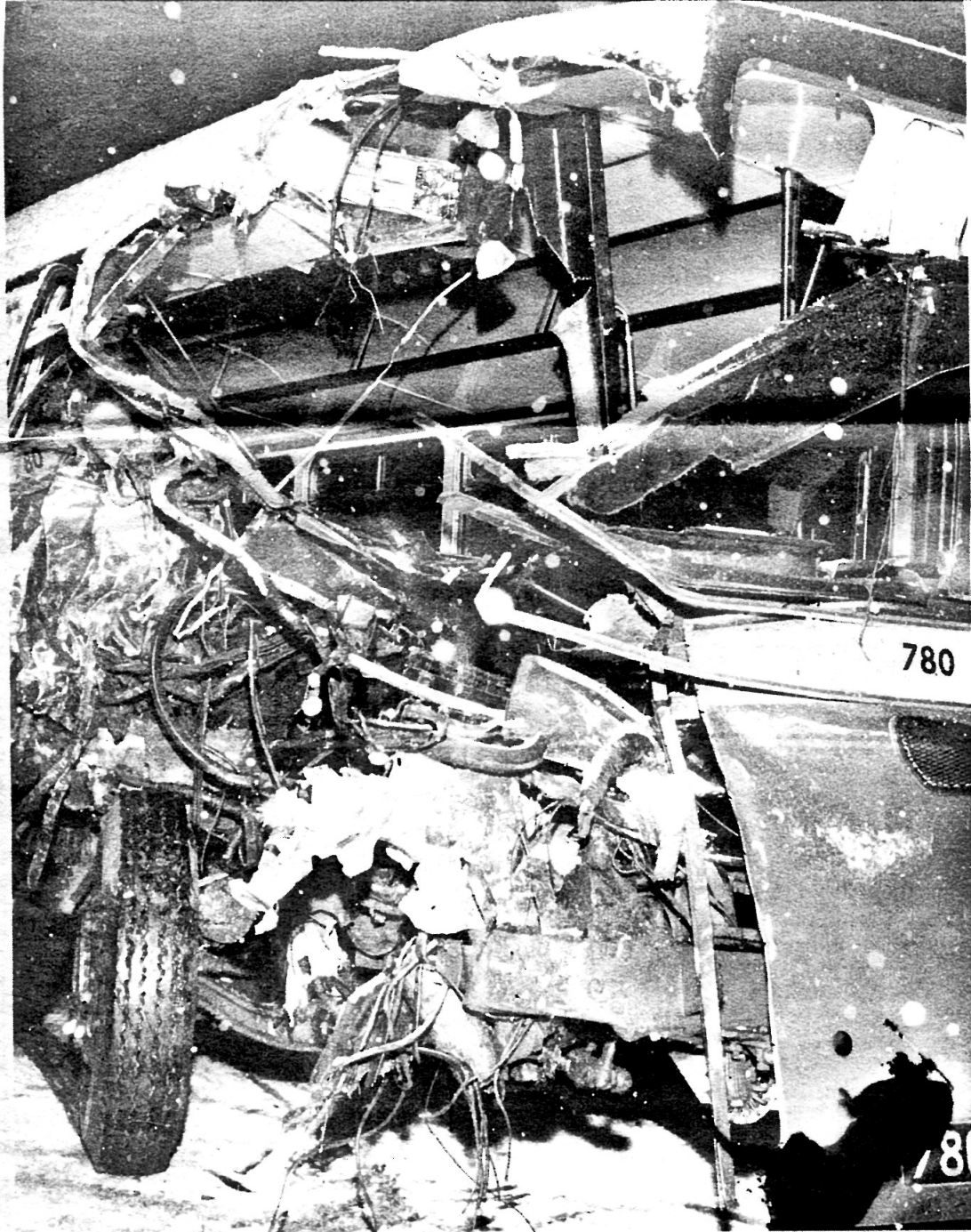
The accident — on Tuesday night — happened when the coach was within half-a-mile of its destination after its six-mile trip from Witney.

The other bus was returning to Witney after having taken children from Henry Box School, Witney, to the Bampton area.

The road was closed for nearly four hours while the wreckage of the coaches was removed.



Pearl Paintin, 15, one of the pupils in the crash, is comforted by her mother, Mrs Ruby Paintin.



The cab of one of the wrecked coaches

Both drivers in casualty list

The injured, who were all taken to Radcliffe Infirmary, are:

COACH DRIVERS:

Mr R. Younger, of 1 Bull Road, Aston; and Mr Kenneth Woodward, of Lechlade.

PUPILS:

Michael Richard, of 1

Friars Court, Clanfield, and from Bampton:

Rosalind Till, of 6 St. Mary's Court.

Ana Williamson, of Church View.

Gordon Walker, of 29 New Road.

Alex White, of 10 Mercury Close.

Susan Abbott, of Bridge House.

Andrew Clark, of 35 New Road.

Robert Kazmer, of Buckland Road.

Janet Harrison, of 20 Bushey Road.

David Taylor, of 26 Mercury Close.

Esther Green, of Buckland Road.

Thomas Cole, of 23 St. Mary's Court.

Barbara Kingman, of The Haven, Buckland Road.

Richard Buckingham, of Church View.



Trees will live in memory of Bampton boys

Two trees which were planted on Friday afternoon at Bampton, will be a memorial to two boys from the town who were victims of the school coach crash in February.

Some of many people who were there are seen watching one being planted by Mr H. W. Pooley, headmaster of Wood Green School, Witney, where the boys were pupils.

The trees, of the tulip variety, were provided by Bampton parish council, and have been placed in the playing fields in New Road.

A plaque on each tree bears the respective names of the boys — Gary Gerhardt, 14, and Alec White, 16. They died following a road accident in which their school coach

