

## **KEGWORTH AIRCRAFT DISASTER**

On the 8<sup>th</sup> January, 1989 at 8.25 p.m. a Boeing 737-400, owned and operated by British Midland, crashed on to the westerly embankment of the M1 at Kegworth. There were 8 crew members on board, 117 passengers and 1 baby making a total of 126. Of those, 47 were killed, 5 had minor injuries and 74 were seriously injured.

The aircraft had been engaged on a double shuttle between London Heathrow and Belfast. It landed at Heathrow at 6.45 p.m. after completing the first shuttle flight and took off again for Belfast at 7.52 p.m. At 8.05 p.m. the flight crew experienced moderate to severe vibration, a burning smell and smoke. The commander immediately took control of the aircraft, disengaging both the auto-pilot and the automatic throttle. The two pilots then diagnosed the symptoms of vibration and smoke and all instruments were indicating a problem in the right engine and 20 seconds after the onset of the vibration, the commander instructed the first officer to throttle back the right engine. This stopped the vibration and smoke. The engine was shut down. An emergency message was transmitted and the commander stated that he was going to carry out an emergency landing at East Midlands Airport. The right engine had not been at fault; the problem was with the left hand engine. Now having one shut down engine and one faulty engine the pilots fought to keep the aircraft flying in order that it could be landed at the East Midlands Airport. However, this was not possible and the 'plane crashed some 900 metres short of the runway, on the westerly embankment of the M1 motorway. One set of wheels had fallen off but had landed in the central reservation of the motorway and the aircraft had broken off telegraph poles and trees in the field of Molehill Farm on the eastern side of the motorway. No vehicles on the motorway were hit and no-one travelling on the M1 was injured on this busy Sunday evening.

Residents from Kegworth rushed to the scene and dozens of people helped to rescue and comfort the injured passengers. Many residents accompanied the injured to hospital and stayed with them until their own relatives arrived. Friendships were forged on that cold January night and no-one in Kegworth will ever forget the 8<sup>th</sup> January, 1989. The emergency services were soon on the scene, police, fire and ambulances, helicopters overhead, soldiers, Salvation Army; hundreds of people and a rescue operation which swung into action and was wholly successful. The M1 motorway was closed for a week whilst investigations were undertaken with the 'plane on the ground and until arrangements could be made for it to be removed by lorry.

Kegworth Parish Council erected a Memorial in Kegworth Cemetery to "those who died, those who were injured and those who took part in the rescue operation". Soon after the disaster the M1 was widened from three to four lanes and the Parish Council arranged for the soil, on which the aircraft came to rest, to be removed from the M1 embankment and placed in Kegworth Cemetery. This soil forms the base for the memorial garden. On top of this is a large stone upon which is engraved the names of all those who died.

Lesley Pendleton.  
County Councillor, District Councillor and Parish Clerk.