

THE BOMBING OF WOKING

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A number of bombs that fell on the Pyrford Court estate were recorded, including the one that damaged Roundbridge Farm on the 26th September 1940, whilst on the 1st October, Lady Place Farm at Pyrford was also damaged, although thankfully nobody was seriously injured.

Everyone has heard of the Blitz on London, but what about this area, what evidence is there of bombs falling on Woking? We were obviously not one of the historic towns listed in the Baedeker Guide that was used by the Luftwaffe to target places such as Bath, Coventry or Exeter, but the junction of the main railway lines to Portsmouth and Southampton was a target, and most local people have heard of the attack on Brooklands – undoubtedly the worst local loss of life during the whole of the Second World War.

Apart from the Vickers attack, little it seems has been written of local bombings, which is why a book published in 2009 by the Send & Ripley History Society is such a wonderful read. Called 'Memories of War' it details the recollections of numerous local people who actually saw the bombs fall and the dog-fights that took place up and down the Wey Valley.

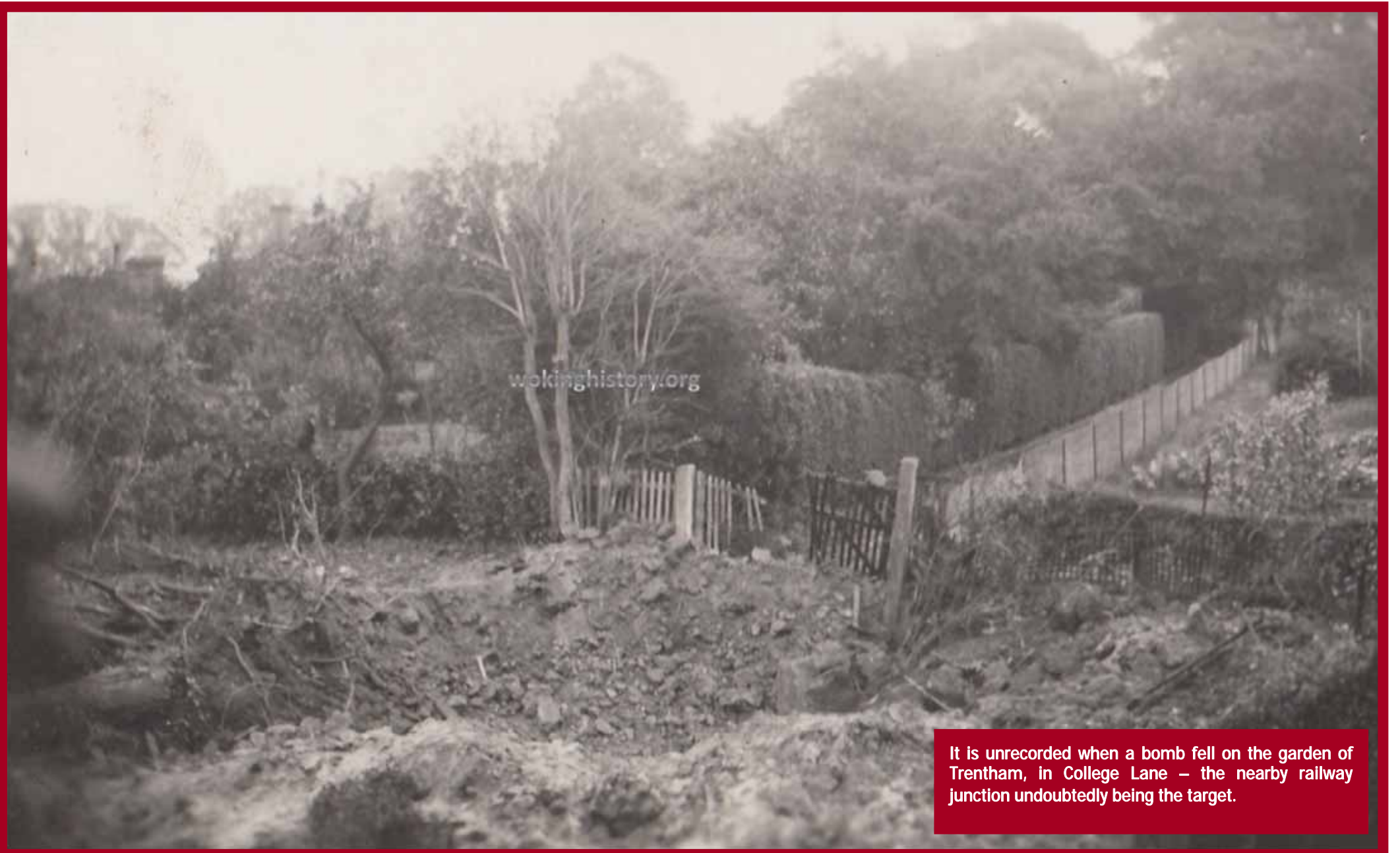
The raid on the 4th September 1940 at Brooklands is touched upon, but it is remarkable just how many more bombs fell at that time in and around the two villages – surely not a main target for the Luftwaffe bombers. The book (and the accompanying map) records that a bomb fell close to Send Church on the 20th September 1940, with a couple of others falling the following day near Newark Priory, but unless the Germans were targeting our local landmarks in some pre-

Baedeker style campaign, one can only assume that most of the bombs dropped in the Wey Valley were strays.

Another source of information on attacks between Old Woking and Pyrford comes from

the records of the Pyrford Court Estate – owned by the Guinness Family. On the 26th September 1940 Roundbridge Farm in Old Woking was partially damaged by bombs and from then to November that year the number of attacks on the estate were faithfully recorded. Apparently





It is unrecorded when a bomb fell on the garden of Trentham, in College Lane – the nearby railway junction undoubtedly being the target.

a dozen heavy-explosive bombs fell that night, with three 'oil bombs' on the 28th September and a further five heavy-explosive bombs on the night of the 1st October. On that occasion Lady Place Farm at Pyrford was partially demolished, although thankfully it seems that nobody was badly injured.

On the 11th October the map accompanying the Send & Ripley History Society's book shows a cluster of heavy explosive bombs landing in a line near Ockham Mill, with others falling the following day to the east of Pyrford Church and Lady Place Farm. A couple of days later a couple of isolated bombs fell near Prews Farm off Tannery Lane in Send and at Mays Corner, but there was then a lull for a few days until the 19th October when apparently a solitary oil bomb fell on the Pyrford Court Estate.

Maud Ceeley, who had moved out of London at the beginning of September 1940 to live in the relative safety of Old Woking, recorded in her diary (published in 1993 as *Woking - A Wartime Dairy*) that on the 18th October 'Woking (the district) was at one time considered a "safe area" but I have been told that more bombs have been dropped on this rural district than any other in the country'.

Whether that was true or not I have not been able to verify, but Mrs Ceeley's diary shows that whatever the truth, the rumour was easily believed in the area at that time. On the 21st October a bomb fell to the east of Newark Lane near the Seven Stars Public House with several more at Ockham the following two nights. On the 29th October a line of bombs fell on what is now the Wisley and Pyrford Golf courses and on the 7th November thirty-two high explosive bombs fell on the Pyrford Court Estate – probably the largest number to be dropped in any one raid on the area. Again why so many bombs were dropped here at that time is not known.

On some occasions it was because the Luftwaffe planes heading for targets elsewhere

were under attack (or actually damaged) – and released their bombs early. This appears to have been the case on the 28th November 1940 when four houses on the Hermitage Estate were demolished by five bombs dropped by a plane that one resident reported was seen going over in flames. The houses were occupied by a large number of people (four in one, six in two and nine in the last) although only one fatality occurred – Mr Frank William Zeacle.

Apparently by the end of December 1940, 5,668 high explosive bombs had been dropped on the Surrey Constabulary area in the previous six months.

There were other stray bombs that fell on our area – many of which went unrecorded (or at least their exact locations were not revealed at the time), but thankfully it seems there were relatively few injuries or deaths – although one air-raid on the town in January 1941 did

apparently kill seven people.

There then appears to have been quite a lull in aerial activity over Woking with only sporadic attacks, but in October 1944 the Civil Defence Committee of the council reported that 'up to the 30th September – there had been 1,555 alerts in the District and that as a result of fifty-eight air raids two residents had been killed and fifty-two injured.' They also reported that a total of '434 bombs had fallen in the district resulting in 2,844 properties being damaged and twenty-six being destroyed', with 'twelve large clusters of Incendiary Bombs' falling in the area.

Almost to the end, Woking was still very much at war.

A number of local people recall a bomb falling in Chertsey Road, Woking, demolishing John Bright's shop, a couple of door up the road from Woolworth's.



THE BLITZ ON BROOKWOOD



A number of former Knaphill residents recall bombs falling in the area, including Keith Sadler who in 2014 remembered an incident when 'all of a sudden we heard the whistling sound of a bomb coming down, and then a huge explosion'. He went on to note that 'at lunchtime we kids all ran in the direction where the bomb had crashed and found that it had demolished a house on Bagshot Road, killing all the inhabitants'.

That was possibly on the 22nd November 1940 when a British fighter plane attacked a

German bomber in the Knaphill area. The Luftwaffe bomber promptly released his cargo of bombs, one of which completely demolished a house called Strathyre in Bagshot Road, killing the sole occupant, Mrs Ellen Jane Hone (aged 49). Apparently three other bombs fell nearby with thirteen more falling on Brookwood Cemetery. One worker in the cemetery was slightly injured and a number of graves disturbed by the large craters that were created, but it was actually another incident during the London Blitz that had a more dramatic and long-lasting effect

on the Cemetery.

On the night of Wednesday 16th April 1941 an incendiary bomb fell on the sidings near Waterloo where the London Necropolis Company had their London Terminus. It damaged some of the buildings, the sidings and several carriages that used to run on down the Southern Main Line to the cemetery. With the station and rolling stock in London destroyed, the service – which had been running for almost ninety years – was ended and London's connection with the cemetery virtually cut off overnight.

MORE MEMORIES OF KNAPHILL

As we saw last week a number of air-raid shelters were provided at Knaphill, and houses provided with Anderson shelters in their gardens or Morrison shelters in doors.

One local resident of Knaphill, Derek Cloak, recalled an incident in the village which sent him scurrying under the stairs. 'One day the Mums were chatting and the children were playing in the front garden, when a couple of fighter planes flew low overhead engaged in a "dog fight" and cartridges started falling all around' He thought the Spitfire crashed on Inkerman Barracks 'killing several Canadian soldiers stationed there', with the pilot bailing out and coming down near to Guildford' – but I have not been able to verify his information yet.

He also recalled one Saturday when he and his mates were at the pictures at the Social Club in Brookwood Hospital. They heard a plane in trouble overhead and he and his colleagues ran to see a Mosquito crash near the Lower Guildford Road, killing the crew on board.

Fortunately the local school was never hit, although it was well-protected by sand-bags – as seen in this picture taken at the start of the war.

