

Bombs incidents in Sussex towns

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BURGESS HILL

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BURGESS HILL

Bombs But No Casualties

BURGESS HILL experienced a number of high explosive bombs in the residential area, but fortunately not one person was injured and there was no widespread damage to property. Fourteen high explosive and about 200 incendiary bombs fell in the area. The Police Station in Upper Church Road and adjoining property was hit on one occasion. There were 1,056 alert signals in the town, the longest lasting for nearly 14 hours.

Mythical Aerodrome

It was a curious fact that the majority of the bombs fell in the Franklands Hotel area, and this gave credence to the story that the Nazis, for some reason, were under the impression—a mistaken one—that an aerodrome had been built there. It was freely stated at one time that "Lord Haw-Haw" had announced on the German radio broadcast in English, that "Burgess Hill aerodrome" had been bombed, but this never got beyond the story point, for no one ever came forward and definitely said they had heard the broadcast.

One of the Home Guard posts was at Franklands bridge, quite near to the hotel, and members of the Home Guard occasionally found themselves in for an exciting time. Of their number the one who seemed to enjoy the experience most was a man approaching 70!

Machine-gunning

The first really disagreeable experience the townspeople had was on Sunday morning, August 18th, 1940, when a German plane flew in quite low and machine-gunned people in Church Road and Leylands Road.

Two months later—October 14th—an unexploded bomb fell in Capt. Wormald's

garden in Mill Road, and people in the immediate neighbourhood were evacuated to the homes of friends for a few days until the bomb was neutralised.

Police Station Hit

The most exciting night was probably the one two days afterwards, when four high explosives and an oil bomb fell in the district. One bomb damaged the back of the Police Station, and also the side and back of Mr. Kelham's premises adjoining. A second bomb exploded in Park Road about 30 ft. from a house, and the gas and water mains were damaged. A third bomb fell in a garden in Crescent Road, and a fourth on a farm near Burgess Hill railway station. The oil bomb landed in a field off Freaks Lane, and caused no damage. The rescue squads performed a fine job of work, and first aid repairs to houses were completed the same evening. The night was one of heavy rain.

Tribute to A.R.P.

On October 20th, 1940, two high explosive bombs fell at "Blenheims," Keymer Road, and there was some damage to property. Commodore C. T. Wilson, who lives there with his wife and family, wrote a highly appreciative letter to the A.R.P. authorities for the way they had dealt with the incident.

Flying Bombs

When the flying bomb menace came along in June, 1944, not one of these missiles fell in the district, although many passed over, and some fell in the vicinity.

On July 12th, 1944, a young Polish pilot met his death at Burgess Hill, his plane crashing on to Greelands Fields, Keymer Road.

CRAWLEY: 1 – two pages, text and photos

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CRAWLEY

Flying Bomb Lands Intact

FOR its size, the little town of Crawley, just over the border in West Sussex, has a big bill to present for damage by enemy action from the outbreak of war until VE-Day. The total casualties sustained were 78, of which nine were fatal. Forty-four high explosive bombs fell in the parish, three doodle-bugs (one of which fell intact and did not explode), seven oil bombs, which caused four fires, and 2,000 incendiaries, which caused eight serious fires. Two doodle-bugs which fell just outside the parish caused extensive damage in the parish.

Seven Killed

More than 1,200 premises and dwelling houses were seriously damaged, and 24 entirely destroyed.

The most serious incident was on July 10th, 1944, when a flying bomb fell at the junction of Oak Road and West Street, killing seven people and seriously injuring 44. Much damage was done to surround-

ing property, and 15 houses were entirely destroyed.

On February 4th, 1943, two bombs fell on West Green Church of England school at 8.30 a.m. No one was injured, though the school cleaner was at the time on the premises. At the same time one bomb fell on the Westminster Bank and four on the Post Office, while bombs fell also in Station Road, resulting in the death of two people.

“Something Hissing”

On July 10th, 1944, the unexploded flying bomb caused the evacuation of the residents in Malthouse Road in the middle of the night. Concerning this incident, the Report Centre received a message from Malthouse Road that “something was falling from the air, and it was hissing.” Half-an-hour later a second report said that the “something had fallen in the road and it was still hissing.” Subsequent investigation revealed that the hissing was caused by the compressed air escaping through wires in the flying-bomb’s structure.



When the Post Office at Crawley was put out of action on February 4th, 1943, a temporary office was set up in the street

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CUCKFIELD

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CUCKFIELD RURAL DISTRICT

A Village Tragedy

THE first flying bomb which fell in England crashed at Mizbrooks Farm, near Cuckfield, in the early hours of June 13th, 1944, exactly a week after D-Day. No damage was done to the farm. The wardens dealing with the incident recognised the type of missile from a description issued to Civil Defence services some time previously under the heading of "possible new enemy weapons." Experts from the Air Ministry, the War Office and the Home Office were soon on the scene.

Twenty-three flying bombs ended their flight in the rural district. A total of 618 high explosive bombs fell in the area, with 25 oil bombs and something like 10,000 incendiaries. There were 191 unexploded missiles in the district.

The Casualties

Of the civilian population 10 were killed outright by enemy action, three died in hospital, a number were severely injured, and there were many minor casualties. Fifteen houses were totally destroyed, and about 716 were damaged, but the majority of these have now been repaired.

There was a surprising number of alerts—1,896—but this was accounted for by the fact that at one time the district was divided into three warning areas. Throughout the war the alerts were received both from Brighton and Horsham, and for a time from London South.

Tragedy at Ardingly

The most tragic incident of the war for the district occurred during the night of October 3rd, 1940, when two cottages at

Ardingly were hit by a bomb and five old age pensioners were killed. They were Isabella and Thomas Lovejoy, and George, John and Harriett Ann Stevens. The aged victims were buried in one grave in the churchyard extension.

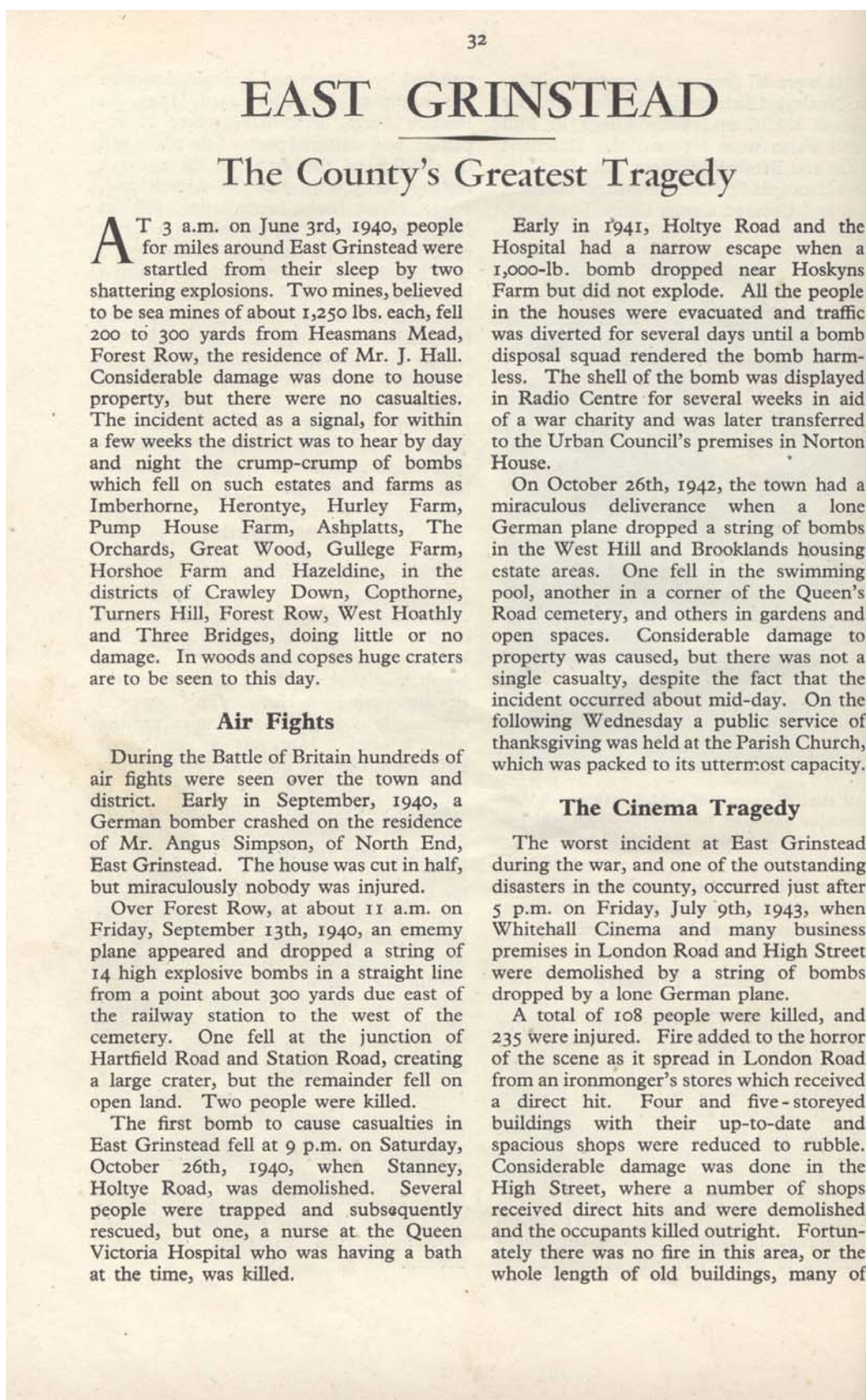
Hurstpierpoint Fatality

On the afternoon of February 10th, 1943, a number of small bombs fell in the Hurstpierpoint area, and little Heather Lamb, daughter of Pastor Lamb, was killed. The pastor himself received injuries. A number of houses were damaged. Mr. E. J. Vigar (chairman of the Rural District Council and Sub-Controller), in the company of Mr. O. F. Brown, the A.R.P. Officer, had only just left Pastor Lamb's house when the tragedy occurred. Mr. Vigar, whose record of service during the war was a magnificent one, carried on a long time in ill-health, and when he was taken seriously ill he insisted upon meetings of the Council's Emergency Committee, of which he was chairman, being held in his bedroom. Ultimately he was taken to hospital, where he died at the end of 1943.

Bomber on Mansion

On March 12th, 1943, about a month after Hurstpierpoint was bombed, a British bomber fell on the residence of the then High Sheriff of Sussex, Col. G. H. Loder, High Beeches, Handcross. Fire broke out in the mansion and considerable damage was done, and three maids—Bertha Edwards, Grace Stratton and Ethel Williams—were killed. The Colonel's aged mother was among other occupants of the house, but was rescued from the building.

EAST GRINSTEAD: 1 – three pages, text and photos



EAST GRINSTEAD

The County's Greatest Tragedy

AT 3 a.m. on June 3rd, 1940, people for miles around East Grinstead were startled from their sleep by two shattering explosions. Two mines, believed to be sea mines of about 1,250 lbs. each, fell 200 to 300 yards from Heasmans Mead, Forest Row, the residence of Mr. J. Hall. Considerable damage was done to house property, but there were no casualties. The incident acted as a signal, for within a few weeks the district was to hear by day and night the crump-crump of bombs which fell on such estates and farms as Imberhorne, Herontye, Hurley Farm, Pump House Farm, Ashplatts, The Orchards, Great Wood, Gullege Farm, Horshoe Farm and Hazeldine, in the districts of Crawley Down, Copthorne, Turners Hill, Forest Row, West Hoathly and Three Bridges, doing little or no damage. In woods and copses huge craters are to be seen to this day.

Air Fights

During the Battle of Britain hundreds of air fights were seen over the town and district. Early in September, 1940, a German bomber crashed on the residence of Mr. Angus Simpson, of North End, East Grinstead. The house was cut in half, but miraculously nobody was injured.

Over Forest Row, at about 11 a.m. on Friday, September 13th, 1940, an enemy plane appeared and dropped a string of 14 high explosive bombs in a straight line from a point about 300 yards due east of the railway station to the west of the cemetery. One fell at the junction of Hartfield Road and Station Road, creating a large crater, but the remainder fell on open land. Two people were killed.

The first bomb to cause casualties in East Grinstead fell at 9 p.m. on Saturday, October 26th, 1940, when Stanney, Holtye Road, was demolished. Several people were trapped and subsequently rescued, but one, a nurse at the Queen Victoria Hospital who was having a bath at the time, was killed.

Early in 1941, Holtye Road and the Hospital had a narrow escape when a 1,000-lb. bomb dropped near Hoskyns Farm but did not explode. All the people in the houses were evacuated and traffic was diverted for several days until a bomb disposal squad rendered the bomb harmless. The shell of the bomb was displayed in Radio Centre for several weeks in aid of a war charity and was later transferred to the Urban Council's premises in Norton House.

On October 26th, 1942, the town had a miraculous deliverance when a lone German plane dropped a string of bombs in the West Hill and Brooklands housing estate areas. One fell in the swimming pool, another in a corner of the Queen's Road cemetery, and others in gardens and open spaces. Considerable damage to property was caused, but there was not a single casualty, despite the fact that the incident occurred about mid-day. On the following Wednesday a public service of thanksgiving was held at the Parish Church, which was packed to its uttermost capacity.

The Cinema Tragedy

The worst incident at East Grinstead during the war, and one of the outstanding disasters in the county, occurred just after 5 p.m. on Friday, July 9th, 1943, when Whitehall Cinema and many business premises in London Road and High Street were demolished by a string of bombs dropped by a lone German plane.

A total of 108 people were killed, and 235 were injured. Fire added to the horror of the scene as it spread in London Road from an ironmonger's stores which received a direct hit. Four and five-storeyed buildings with their up-to-date and spacious shops were reduced to rubble. Considerable damage was done in the High Street, where a number of shops received direct hits and were demolished and the occupants killed outright. Fortunately there was no fire in this area, or the whole length of old buildings, many of

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them half-timbered, might have been burnt to the ground.

In the Whitehall Cinema there was an audience of 184, including a number of school children, and they were trapped when the bomb fell. The usual notice announcing an air raid alert signal had been displayed, so that anybody who wished to leave might do so. Suddenly there was a terrific crash, and, to use the words of a survivor, "the whole building seemed to collapse like a pack of cards, trapping most of the audience." The bomb crashed

through the roof into the front of the auditorium. Many were buried under falling masonry and were killed instantly, and others were pinned down and badly injured. A small number escaped with minor injuries. Efficient Civil Defence workers and soldiers commenced the gigantic task of clearing the rubble and rescuing the trapped and the injured, while the N.F.S. fought the flames. It was the darkest hour the town has ever known.

The Wednesday following was a day of mourning in the town, when the victims



Fire fighting in London Road after the tragic raid on East Grinstead on July 9th, 1943

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HAYWARDS HEATH AND DISTRICT

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Widespread Bombing But No Fatalities

IN the Cuckfield urban district, which comprises Haywards Heath, Cuckfield and Lindfield, 13 high explosive bombs and three groups of incendiary bombs were dropped, and a flying bomb crashed into the cemetery grounds at Haywards Heath, but no-one was killed in the area.

During the whole period of the war one person was seriously injured, and 16 sustained minor injuries. Three houses in the area were destroyed, and serious damage done to 30 others. There was slight damage to 495 houses, and glass was broken in 107 others. The number of alert signals was 682.

Most of the damage occurred towards the end of 1940. The first incident of note was on a Thursday night during September 1940, when a stick of four high explosive bombs fell near the Council houses at Bentswood, Haywards Heath, damaging some of them.

On Saturday evening, September 28th, 1940, a bomb exploded in the back garden of a house on the west side of Haywards Road, Haywards Heath. Damage was caused to nearby houses in that road and

also in Wood Ride and Park Road, and a large number of houses on the opposite side of Haywards Road suffered badly from the blast, while the windows of shops and other buildings in South Road, Ashenground Road and Sussex Road were broken. The bomb was the last of a stick of four which fell across Ashenground Woods.

At Brook Street, Cuckfield, on December 6th, 1940, a bomb exploded in the middle of the road, wrecking two houses. There were a number of casualties, though not serious ones.

There were three incidents in the area on the night of December 21st, 1940. One bomb fell in an open field at Burntwood Farm, Tyler's Green, Haywards Heath. Another dropped in the Haywards Heath recreation ground, near the railway station. A person walking through the ground at the time received a spinal injury, but recovered following hospital treatment. The third fell on an isolated lodge in Hanlye Lane, Cuckfield, and the occupants were trapped underneath. They managed to crawl safely out, and walked to a hospital not far away for treatment before anyone could arrive to assist them.

On July 11th, 1944, a flying bomb crashed in the Haywards Heath cemetery grounds, but no damage was done in the cemetery.



The Brook Street incident, December 6th, 1940