

## **Bombing in West Bromwich in World War Two**

### **David Brown**

The previous generation had experienced Zeppelin raids on the Black Country in the First World War and preparations for this war had begun in earnest from 1938. Film newsreels at the district's eleven cinemas had shown bombing abroad in places like Spain. These pictures and the distribution of gas masks, the digging of Anderson bomb shelters in gardens and barrage balloons flying over Dartmouth Park gave townsfolk some idea of what was to come. Yet when it did come from the skies it must have been an awful experience.

The first actual air-raid warning sounded on Tuesday 25th June 1940 lasting from 11.35pm to 12.20am. It proved harmless.

In total the Commonwealth War Graves Commission list 58 of the town's civilians being killed by air-raids. The majority were killed by bombs hitting the town centre in the third week of November, 1940, during Tuesday the 19th and Thursday the 21st. Other notable raids were earlier on the 10th November, 1940 hitting Tantony, and then April 1941 hitting Walsall Road. Then odd 'stray aircraft' caused alarms but little damage.

It was the 166th air-raid warning from 7pm to 11.45pm on Sunday 10th November 1940 that saw everything suddenly become very real for folk. In Tantony five bombs were dropped severely damaging houses and the Great War memorial there. Craters 10 metres across and 5 metres deep were left by those that missed.

Mrs Everley and her two sons Maurice and Trevor reported hearing a terrific shriek before everything went black and the house fell about them. Mrs Everley was trapped in her dining room but able to call to her two sons trapped near the hallway. Trevor partially covered by debris had one hand free to wave to rescuers searching by torchlight. Eventually all were dug out and taken to hospital.

Nearby the Kendrick family were just about to go their shelter when an oil bomb fell yards from their door. The house shook violently breaking all the windows, thankfully the family were not hurt but oil was found splattered inside and outside of the house. Oil bombs were a nasty dustbin sized bomb packed with oil and inflammable material that on impact spat out flames and splinters for several metres. The Kendrick family had had lucky escape. Thankfully no lives were lost in the Tantony raid; however the memorial to the First World War there was damaged. It can just be seen in the photograph of Shaftesbury Street and Law Street. Subsequently it was put in West Bromwich Cemetery.

Worse was to come and events of the third week of November 1940 are etched on the memories of elderly townsfolk still alive today. That week was generally dreadful for England with almost 5000 killed or injured. In the West Midlands alone 228 lost their lives to German raids.



*A black and white photograph showing bomb damage following an air raid at Tantany Estate, West Bromwich 10th November 1940. Photographer: Sidney Darby; from Sandwell Archives.*

On the 19th November the Germans launched a nine-hour attack on the Midlands with wave after wave of bombers. In West Bromwich bombs hit, Richard Street South, Lombard Street, Constance Avenue, Florence Road, Paradise Street, the District Hospital in Edward Street, the Corporation Gas Showrooms next to the Central Library, Oak Road and the Corporation Bus Garage and the Palace Cinema in the High Street.

Sometime around 7pm German planes first dropped thermite incendiary bombs that would set the town alight to guide in the next wave of bombers carrying high explosive bombs. German targets may well have been the railway sidings, surrounding factories and the large gas-holder at Swan Village.

Incendiaries soon set alight the Peacocks store in Paradise Street, Bromford Lane and Victoria Street. Some crashed through the roof of the Palace Cinema, High Street, during a film, the audience were quickly evacuated, some taking shelter in the nearby basement of Burton's Tailors. Air-raid wardens and fire watchers with handcarts of sandbags, stirrup pumps and buckets of water attempted to put out the flames but had an impossible job.

Now with parts of the town well ablaze the following wave of bombers had a rough indication as to where to drop their high explosive bombs. Sadly their inaccuracy meant that intended industrial targets were missed and ordinary townsfolk in their homes took the brunt.

A line of bombs were dropped along Lombard Street causing devastation and heavy casualties. At 19 Lombard Street a Mrs. Winifred Taylor was visiting her friend, Harriet Botterill; the house received a direct hit and was flattened. The two ladies were presumed to have been killed but 65 hours later Winifred Taylor was dug out alive but badly injured, sadly her friend was found dead. At 17 Lombard Street Mrs. Maud Ford was dug out alive after 16 hours, tragically her fireman husband Joseph and 20 month old daughter Carol perished. It was alleged by some at the time that the position of the father's body seemed to indicate he had been trying to shield his daughter.

Another bomb landed to the left of the Central Library wrecking the Corporation Gas Showrooms and its records. Mrs. Lucy Williams (96) recounted that her mother had just bought a new gas cooker on instalments and the loss of the records meant she did not have to pay for it!

A further bomb totally smashed the laundry of the District Hospital in Edward Street and damaged parts of the hospital itself. The town's Medical Officer, Dr. Walton, and hospital matron were blown in opposite directions whilst standing in a corridor. Dr. Walton reported, 'the corridor caving in front of me', nevertheless they both picked themselves up and got on with supervising the evacuation of 90 patients to Hallam Hospital. Both received the George Medal for their bravery.

Bill Markland of Jervoise Street told our researchers that aged 14 he was diagnosed with pleurisy and was admitted to West Bromwich District Hospital on the 19th November the very day of the heavy raid. Admitted at lunchtime he was not to spend the night there. With the bombs coming down and the hospital hit he recalls it was decided to evacuate. He recalled being very thankful as a furniture warehouse across the railway line from the hospital was hit and a metal girder from it was blasted through the air crashing through the roof of the very ward he was in. Evacuated to Hallam Hospital he was put in the veranda outside the main ward on a mattress beneath another patient's bed. With the anti-aircraft guns at Stone Cross and Hill Top Golf Course blazing defiance at the bombers shrapnel from their high explosive shells rained down on the glass roof of the ward he was in. It must have been terrifying for a young boy of 14.

Further bombs came down killing eight members of the Care family at 2A Richard Street South and six members of the Harris family at 108 Oak Road. Civil Defence and rescue services worked tirelessly and a temporary mortuary was set up in Pitt Street in an old soap factory.

Iris Witton reported to us that then aged six she attended Lodge Estate School, next to her at school sat Jean Downing. Iris recalled the tragic events of Richard Street South very vividly. She remembered the shattering noise of huge blasts and when the all-clear siren sounded her family emerged from their shelter to a terrible smell of gas from shattered mains. The area had been devastated, particularly Richard Street South where her school pal Jean Downing lived,

Despite all the chaos of the bombing raid life went on and Iris attended school the very next day. Jean Downing did not, her chair remained empty. Jean's family had

been caught sheltering in a cellar which flooded... eleven water-mains were fractured by bombs that week. Jean and her older brother John aged 12 were trapped for 21 hours with John holding her head above the water. Sadly Jean did not survive. John did and received a gold medal for his heroism. Along with other local heroes he was presented to the Duke of Kent who visited to the town the following month to offer his support and encouragement.

Sadly the Germans had not finished with the town and sirens marked their return two days later on Thursday 21st November 1940. Once again the sky echoed to the 'brumm...brumm...brumm' of the German bombers. Olive Cooksey, of Witton Lane, recounted to us 'that you knew it was the Germans as according to her husband their engines were not synchronised and had an intermittent sound'. Mrs. Lucy Williams (96) said that the family's pet dog, Candy, got to recognise the sound and barked a warning beforehand, then dashed down to the shelter with the rest of the family.

Just as two days before thermite incendiaries were dropped setting alight targets for the following bombers to drop high-explosives. Lyng Methodist Church, thankfully empty, was completely wrecked by a direct hit, houses, shops; the Post Office and the Turks Head Pub were badly damaged. Casualties were not as numerous as two days before because townsfolk had gone quickly to the shelters when the alarm sounded. The tragic lessons of Tuesday had been learned.

The next month there came a more welcome visitor to the town, HRH Duke of Kent, paid an unannounced visit on Friday 27th December 1940. He met the Mayor and civic dignitaries, Civil Defence workers, and the bereaved, including Police Inspector Evans who lost his wife Violet, their two young children and a niece when their Jesson Street shelter took a direct hit. The Duke then toured the bomb damaged parts of the town, news quickly of his visit quickly spread and people congregated to see him, the party stopped at the District Hospital and he spoke to those involved with the evacuation. Next he went to Richard Street South where relatives of those killed waited to speak to him. Here the Duke spoke to 12 year old John Downing who had been trapped with his sister in a cellar for 21 hours and tried vainly to save her.

Hallam Hospital was visited later, amongst staff and patients the Duke spoke to Maud Ford who had been buried 16 hours alongside her dead husband and baby, also the badly injured Winifred Taylor buried for 65 hours in Lombard Street before rescue. No doubt his visit gave comfort to those so tragically affected during that terrible week of November 1940.

The Germans had not finished though; once more in 1941 the industrial areas around West Bromwich attracted the attention of the Luftwaffe. In a raid on Bescot marshalling yards in April 1941 two high explosive bombs hit Walsall Road blowing 100 metres of watermain out of the ground and damaging nearby houses. Matthew Bates of South Staffs Water says his late mother who was then 11 years old was asleep in the far house (see picture from SSW) when a lump of concrete fell through the ceiling and landed on the pillow next to her. The two nearer houses were so badly damaged that they had to be demolished.

Mr. Peter Charlton remembered being in their garden shelter in Bustleholme Avenue and hearing machine gunfire. After the 'all clear' the family emerged to find that the greenhouse on the flat roof of number 10 had been shot to pieces. He can also remember one night there being so much shrapnel dropping from anti-aircraft guns at Stone Cross and Bustleholme Woods that they could not get out of the front door.

Thankfully after 1943 no more targeted raids on the area took place although odd 'stray' aircraft must have caused alarm.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission has given us permission to print the roll of the townsfolk who died in West Bromwich. In so doing we honour them and reflect on their untimely deaths, every short description speaks volumes of the tragedy that befell each person.

### **Deaths caused by air-raids in World War Two in West Bromwich.**

Publication allowed here by kind permission of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

ALCOCK, Eliza, age 70; of 23 Lombard Street. Wife of Thomas Alcock. Injured 19 November 1940 at 23 Lombard Street; died 20 November 1940, at Hallam Hospital.

ALCOCK, Thomas, age 74; of 23 Lombard Street. Husband of Eliza Alcock. Injured 19 November 1940, at 23 Lombard Street; died the same day at Hallam Hospital.

BOTTERILL, Harriet Louisa, age 69; of 19 Lombard Street. Widow of Isaac Botterill. 19 November 1940, at 19 Lombard Street.

BROOKES, Vera Mary, age 5; of 17 Lombard Street. Daughter of Alfred Brookes. 19 November at 17 Lombard Street.

CARE, Eric, age 9; of 2A Richard Street South. Son of Thomas William and Matilda Care. 19 November, at 2A Richard Street South.

CARE, Harry, age 5; of 2A Richard Street South. Son of Thomas William and Matilda Care. 19 November, at 2A Richard Street South.

CARE, Jill, age 2; of 2A Richard Street South. Daughter of Thomas William and Matilda Care. 19 November, at 2A Richard Street South.

CARE, Matilda, age 40; of 2A Richard Street South. Wife of Thomas William Care. 19 November, at 2A Richard Street South.

CARE, Roy, age 13; of 2A Richard Street South. Son of Thomas William and Matilda Care. 19 November at 2A Richard Street South.

CARE, Thomas William, age 44; of 2A Richard Street South. Husband of Matilda Care. 19 November, at 2A Richard Street South.

CARE, Vera, age 11; of 2A Richard Street South. Daughter of Thomas William and Matilda Care. 19 November 1940, at 2A Richard Street South.

CLARE, Edith Gertrude, age 27; of 8 Burlington Avenue, Burlington Road. Daughter of William T, and Helen Freer; wife of William A. Clare. Injured 19 November, at 8 Burlington Avenue; died 20 November 1940 at Hallam Hospital.

CLARKE, Thomas Edward, age 69; of 112 Oak Road. Husband of Fanny Clarke. 19 November 1940, at 112 Oak Road.

COOK, Elsie, age 22; of 108 Oak Road, Daughter of Mary Ann Harris (formerly Cook), and of the late J.T.Cook. 19 November 1940, at 108 Oak Road.

COOK, Ivy Blanche, age 22; of 106 Oak Road. Daughter of Frederick Betterige, of Holly Croft Road, Handsworth; wife of John Thomas Cook. 19 November 1940, at 106 Oak Road.

COOK, John Frederick, age 13 months; of 106 Oak Road. Son of John Thomas and Ivy Blanche Cook. 19 November 1940, at 106 Oak Road.

COOK, John Thomas, age 26; of 106 Oak Road. Son of Mary Ann Harris (formerly Cook), and the late J.T.Cook; husband of Ivy Blanche Cook. 19 November 1940, at 106 Oak Road.

COOK, Valerie, aged 15 months; of 108 Oak Road. Daughter of Elsie Cook. 19 November 1940, at 108 Oak Road.

DOWNING, Eliza, age 48; of 104 Oak Road. Wife of William Downing. 19 November 1940, at 104 Oak Road.

DOWNING, Jean, age 6; of 104 Oak Road. Daughter of William and Eliza Downing. 19 November 1940, at 104 Oak Road.

DOWNING, William, age 64; of 104 Oak Road. Husband of Eliza Downing. 19 November 1940, at 104 Oak Road.

EVANS, Joseph Brian, age 12; of 1A Jesson Street. Son of William Alfred Evans and of Violet Alice Evans. 19 November 1940, at 1A Jesson Street.

EVANS, Roger Barry, age 7; of 1A Jesson Street. Son of William Alfred Evans and Violet Alice Evans. 19 November 1940, at 1A Jesson Street.

EVANS, Violet Alice, age 45; of 1A Jesson Street. Wife of William Alfred Evans. 19 November 1940, at 1A Jesson Street.

FORD, Carol Ann, age 20 months; of 21 Lombard Street. Daughter of Maud Ford and Joseph Sidney Ford. 19 November 1940, at 17 Lombard Street.

FORD, Joseph Sidney, age 29; Fireman A.F.S, of 21 Lombard Street. Son of Thomas and Elizabeth Anne Ford, of 235 Basset Road, Friar Park, Wednesbury; husband of Maud Ford. 19 November 1940, at 17 Lombard Street.

GREEN, Joseph Higgins, aged 50. Husband of Eva Green, of 17 Kier Road, Friar Park, Wednesbury. Injured 19 November 1940, at District and General Hospital; died 21 November 1940, at Hallam Hospital.

HANDLEY, Frank, age 41. Son of Lucy Handley. Of 39 Midland Terrace, Great Bridge, Tipton. 19 November 1940, at Richard Street South.

HARRIS, Alfred, aged 9; of 108 Oak Road. Son of Harry and Mary Ann Harris. 19 November 1940, at 108 Oak Road.

HARRIS, Desmond, age 7; of 108 Oak Road. Son of Harry and Mary Ann Harris. 19 November 1940, at 108 Oak Road.

HARRIS, Edna, age 12; of 108 Oak Road. Daughter of Harry and Mary Ann Harris. 19 November 1940, at 108 Oak Road.

HARRIS, Harry, age 40; of 108 Oak Road. Husband of Mary Ann Harris. 19 November 1940, at 108 Oak Road.

HARRIS, Harry, age 13; of 108 Oak Road. Son of Harry and Mary Ann Harris, 19 November 1940, at 108 Oak Road.

HARRIS, Mary Ann, age 50; of 108 Oak Road. Wife of Harry Harris. 19 November 1940, at 108 Oak road.

HAYNES, Chrissie, age 57. Wife of Joseph Haynes, of 70 Overend Street. 21 November 1940, at 35 Trinity Road.

HUNT, Annie, age 29; of 27 Oakwood Street. Daughter of John and Annie Willoughby, of 46 Ruskin Street; wife of Arthur Hunt. 19 November 1940, at 27 Oakwood Street.

JAMES, Eric Hubert, age 4. Son of Harold Hubert and Kitty Evelyn James, of 120 Princess Road, Warley, Oldbury. Injured 30 July 1942, at 120 Princess Road; died 11 August 1942, at Hallam Hospital.

JEFFRIES, Agatha Rose, age 38; of 78 Beeches Road. Daughter of James and Augusta Jane Bedworth, of Eversley, Great Bridge; wife of Arthur Jeffries. 19 November 1940, at 78 Beeches Road.

JEFFRIES, Arthur, age 58; of 78 Beeches Road. Husband of Agatha Rose Jeffries. 19 November 1940, at 78 Beeches Road.

KYLE, Edith Hannah, age 47; of 51 Oak Road. Wife of Robert Kyle. 19 November 1940, at 51 Oak Road.

LAMB, Ernest Albert, aged 18; Home Guard. Son of Alice E. Lamb, of 137 Trinity Road. Injured 19 November 1940, at Parliament Street; died 20 November at 1940, at Hallam Hospital.

PARKER, Clara Ellen, aged 79; of 83 Oak Road. Widow of Joseph Parker. Injured 19 November 1940, at 83 Oak Road; died 26 November 1940, at Hallam Hospital.

PERRY, James, aged 24. Son of Phoebe Perry, of 145 Ebenezer Street. Hill Top, and of Samuel Perry. 19 November 1940, at 145 Ebenezer Street.

PERRY, Samuel, aged 58. Husband of Phoebe Perry, of 145 Ebenezer Street, Hill Top. 19 November 1940, at 145 Ebenezer Street.

PICKERELL, Horace, aged 22. Son of James Henry and Emma Pickerell, of 6 Petersfield Drive, Whiteheath, Oldbury. Injured 5 June 1941, at Tube Products Ltd; died same day at District and General Hospital.

PIDDOCK, Hannah Betsy, age 42; of 48 Richard Street South. Wife of John Alfred Piddock. 19 November 1940, at 106 Oak Road.

PIDDOCK, John Alfred, age 46; of 48 Richard Street South. Husband of Hannah Betsy Piddock. 19 November 1940, at 106 Oak Road.

PIDDOCK, Lillian Irene, aged 19; of 49 Richard Street South. Daughter of John Alfred and Hannah Betsy Piddock. 19 November 1940, at 106 Oak Road.

PINCHER, Joseph, aged 51; Firewatcher. Husband of Harriet Pincher, of 26 Lellow Street, Hateley Heath. 14 March 1943, at Hall End Foundry.

POWELL, Thomas, age 76; of 3 Osborne Road. Husband of Harriet Eliza Powell. Injured 19 November 1940 at 3 Osborne Road; died same day at Hallam Hospital.

PRICE, Esther, aged 39; of 1A Jesson Street. Daughter of J.Price. 19 November 1940 at Jesson Street.

RICHARDS, Gladys Maud, aged 19; of 38 Jesson Street. 19 November 1940, at Jesson Street.

RICHARDS, Rose Evelyn, aged 17; of 38 Jesson Street. 19 November 1940, at Jesson Street.

STEVENS, Annie, aged 29; of 79 Oak Road. Wife of Thomas H. Stevens. 19 November 1940, at 106 Oak Road.

STEVENS, Nellie Jean, aged 7; of 79 Oak Road. Daughter of Thomas H. Stevens, and of Annie Stevens. 19 November 1940, at 106 Oak Road.

WAIN, Amy, age 63; of 149 Lyng Lane. Wife of William Wain. 12 August 1940, at 149 Lyng Lane.

WATTON, John age 70. Husband of L.Watton, of 49A Spon Lane. 23 November 1940, at Hallam Hospital



WEEKS, Ellen Claudia, age 78; of 78 Beeches Road. 19 November 1940, at 78 Beeches Road.

### **Local Civil Defence Deaths in World War Two**

Edwards, Richard, Civil Defence Warden/Fire Watcher.

Died West Bromwich on 12th June, 1941, aged 35. Husband of Lillian Edwards of 62 Burrows Street. Injured at Messer's Bates premises, Hospital Street. Died the same day on way to the General Hospital.

Gee, Raymond, Civil Defence Warden/Fire Watcher.

Died West Bromwich on 12th June, 1941, aged 30. Son of Charles William Gee and Caroline Gee. Husband of Lily Gee of 106 Goscote Lodge Crescent. Died at Messer's Bates premises Hospital Street.

Partridge, Ralph Charles, Civil Defence Warden/Fire Watcher.

Died West Bromwich 12th June, 1941, aged 17. Son of Mr & Mrs Charles Partridge of 40 Oak Crescent, Leamore. Injured at Messer's Bates premises Hospital Street. Died same day at the Manor Hospital.

Ford, Joseph Sidney, Civil Defence AFS Fireman.

Died West Bromwich 19th November 1940, aged 29. Son of Thomas and Anne Elizabeth Ford of 235 Bassett Road, Friar Park, Wednesbury. Husband of Maud Ford of 21 Lombard Street, West Bromwich. Died at 17 Lombard Street together with his daughter Carol.

Pincher, Joseph, Civil Defence Warden/Fire Watcher.

Died West Bromwich 14th March, 1943, aged 51. Husband of Harriet Pincher of 26 Lellow Street, Hateley Heath. Died at Hall End Foundry.

Beardsmore, Joseph Thomas, Civil Defence Warden/ Senior Fireguard

Died 10th April 1941, aged 34. Husband of Polly Beardsmore of 54 Oakfield Road. Died at High Park Road. Awarded Posthumous Commendation by H.M. the King for Brave Conduct in Civil Defence.

Cartwright, Bert, Fireman NFS.

Died 28th April 1942, aged 39. Husband of Minnie Cartwright of 17 Farley Street, Great Bridge. Died at Rolfe Street Fire Station, Smethwick.

Coles, Ernest Harry.

Died 10th April, 1941, aged 38.

Hudson, George William, Senior Air-Raid Warden.

Died 10th April, 1941, aged 23. Son of George William Hudson of the Falcon Inn, High Park Road. Died at 1 Thomas Street. Posthumous Commendation for Brave Conduct.