

Village Echoes

During the Second World War, Goudhurst was no stranger to bombs being unloaded by the Luftwaffe on their way home from raids on London. Mostly these fell in the more rural areas, but on the night of the 16th November 1940 two heavy calibre bombs fell near the centre of the village, causing considerable damage to buildings but, fortunately, no immediate loss of life. One landed in the field next to Cloth Edge in Church Road and the other in the vicarage garden where it also uprooted an 80ft high elm tree.

The Goudhurst Air Raid Precaution records provide details of the event. The bombs were identified as parachute mines, i.e. blast bombs designed to cause maximum damage over a large area. The parachutes were later found and collected by the local police and military. Those houses nearest the blast (Cloth Edge, Maypole, Queen Anne's and the New Vicarage) were immediately rendered uninhabitable; most of the stained glass windows in St Mary's Church were blown out and all the buildings in the High Street suffered damage, especially to their roofs and windows. Even the Methodist Chapel in North Road had broken windows, and Pattenden in Bedgebury Road reported a collapsed ceiling while there were other reports of broken windows here and there within a mile of the village.

Members of the local ARP, soldiers stationed in the village and the local Red Cross detachment were quick into action to help clear the debris from the church, the streets and looking after the injured. In all, only three people were actually injured - Mrs C Page, Miss Price and the housekeeper at Queen Anne's - who suffered minor injuries and were quickly taken to the local first aid post by the Red Cross Ambulance. This was despite the fact that the ambulance station had been demolished in the blast, the unit's older ambulance wrecked, and the one they used was also damaged. Mrs Page, who lived at Mill House Cottages in Church Road, was also among those rendered homeless, along with Mr C Skinner and Mr Dantree. Mill House cottages (pictured) were eventually demolished and were never rebuilt. Other villagers were mostly treated for shock apart from, that is, Mrs Alice Southon, who had struck her head while scrambling out of bed and sadly died two days later as a result.

Although the press was not allowed to name the village, they could report eye-witness accounts – thus we learn that Len Prickett, who lived at 6 Churchyard Cottages (now Weavers Cottages) had got out of bed to investigate the noise of the bomb dropping only to have the door he was holding also wrenched off its hinges when the second bomb went off. He stated that *"hot air hit me in the face as though I was close to a furnace; mud fell as thick as flakes in a snow storm"*. Mr Skinner reported that he was blown out of bed and covered in broken tiles, glass and plaster.

Writing in the December 1940 parish magazine the Vicar commended the villagers on their resilience and echoed their thoughts that *"it might have been so much worse"*.

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