

The Bombing of Marlow

The First Attacks

My first article published in *Newsletter* in December last year covered the V1 rocket attack in 1944 at the top of Chalkpit Lane which badly injured Jim Platt. This article covers the earlier period of conventional bombing that took place between September 1940 and March 1941.

The *Bombs Over Bucks* archive at the Bucks Archive Centre in Aylesbury lists six attacks of varying seriousness on the following dates:

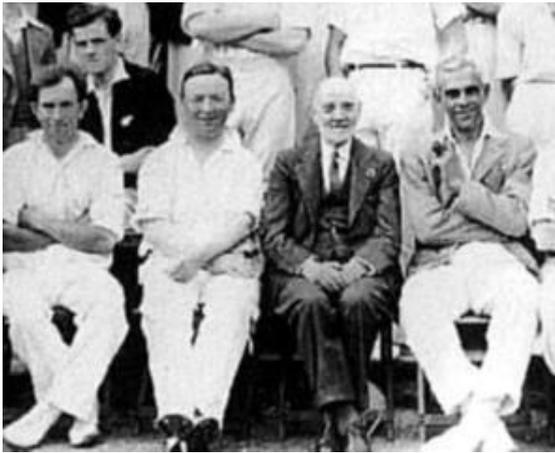
- 1) Monday 30th September 1940
- 2) Overnight 30th September – 1st October 1940
- 3) Weekend 12th – 14th October 1940
- 4) Weekend 26th – 28th October 1940
- 5) Weekend 8th November – 11th November 1940
- 6) Monday 3rd March 1941

These records were made by officials in some cases quite a while after the actual incidents and the dates shown are necessarily a bit vague, especially where the incidents were minor. In addition there must be some doubt as to whether all incidents were recorded at all.

Number (1) was the very serious attack which resulted in Marlow's only death from enemy action in the town during the war. By a cruel fate, this day saw the last major daylight Luftwaffe attacks on London and the Home Counties, as the RAF established their domination during the Battle of Britain. Leo Ryan, known as Paddy, was well known in Marlow and owned an electrical shop in the High Street. He joined the Royal Navy in 1917 at the age of 18 and served on various ships during World War One. By the outbreak of war in 1939, he had married and moved to Marlow. He became a stalwart member of our local cricket team and volunteered for the Home Guard early in the war. Local resident Christine Harding was standing in the back garden of their house in Quoiting Square with her mother at about 5pm on 30th September. They heard the noise of the bombers and then the British fighters, and rushed inside to take cover. She recalls the bombs landing in a line heading south from Terrington Hill through West Street and Pound Lane down to the river. *Country Life* magazine reported that forty JU88 bombers escorted by twenty ME109 fighters were intercepted by six Spitfires at 19,000 feet. The bombers jettisoned their loads both in order to avoid catastrophic explosions if hit by rounds and also to speed their escape.

Paddy was unfortunately caught out in the open during the attack whilst walking with his young son Patrick, who was injured. He is buried in Marlow Cemetery and Ryan's Mount, a residential road built much later near the site of his death, is named in his honour. He is also one of the five civilian names on our war memorial in All Saints Church.

If you want to know more about Paddy Ryan, I recommend the excellent website:
<http://www.chalfontcrew.plus.com/page29.html>



Paddy is seen here, second from left, ready for a cricket match with Boris Karloff in 1936.

Number (2) saw the dropping of bombs overnight which caused extensive damage in West Street and the Henley Road, Thames Place, and the Lovell's Sawmills in the station area. No casualties were recorded. The wardens have written 'Thames Place' but I'm guessing that they meant 'Thames Lawn'. Janet Smith suggests that this raid may in fact have taken place in the afternoon or early evening because her father recalled taking his wife, who was afraid to go out in the blackout, to a matinee showing at the cinema. They had to leave suddenly when the bombs came down, and flakes fell off the cinema ceiling with the vibration. As further evidence that this was indeed the same incident, he mentioned a bomb dropped in the garden of The Sycamores at the bottom of Mill Road, beside the original Thames Lawn mansion.

Number (3) was an attack over a weekend which caused damage to water mains and sewers in the Berwick Road area. There were no casualties.

Number (4) was another weekend attack which caused damage in the Oak Tree Road area. Again with no casualties.

Number (5) recorded an unexploded bomb dropped in woodland up on Marlow Common sometime over the weekend.

Number (6) recorded a bomb dropped in the fields of Blounts Farm which caused no damage.



This may not be the whole story and my colleague Keith Ray in an earlier article queried the line of over 60 bomb craters in fields parallel to the river from Bisham through to beyond the Rugby Club. Keith expressed his hope that these craters resulted from deliberate jettisoning of bomb loads in non-populated areas in order to lighten the weight for their journey home. This may well be the case, but some residents in the Town think that that this was an attempt to attack the important photographic intelligence station at Danesfield. However this theory seems unlikely to me because, if the Germans ever knew about the aerial reconnaissance network of RAF Benson, Danesfield and Hughenden, why weren't these locations targeted throughout the war in a much more concentrated way?

There's also the question of whether this incident, if it happened, was associated with numbers (1) or (2) above or whether it took place on another date in September 1940 unrecorded by the wardens. If unrecorded, was it not listed in order to keep the location of the base secret? Much more to discover, I think.

I am very interested in talking to more local people about their experiences at that time. If you were around or if you know anyone who was around, please get in touch with me by either emailing: tmsheritage@marlowsociety.org.uk or phone: 01628 475475

With thanks to Janet Smith and Michael Eagleton.

Geoff Wood