

LEIGH IN THE WAR 1939-45

Leigh and District Historical Society Occasional Paper No. 2

Foreword

The Leigh and District Historical Society has been concerned for some time that there has been no record of the impact of the Second World War on the village and people of Leigh. Many years have elapsed and the memories of these events, though still clear in many peoples' minds, are inevitably beginning to fade. We have been aware that time was running out.

We have therefore been fortunate that Morgen Witzel, a Canadian researcher who has lived in the village for several years, has offered to pull together all the available information. There are many people still in the village who lived here during the war and a number of them, together with others who had moved away but were tracked down through the local media or by word of mouth, were interviewed by Morgen. We are most grateful to them for sharing their memories. Their information has been supplemented by material from the village ARP log, which was kept meticulously right through the war and had been retained by the parish council in their safe; this proved to be a fascinating document. Local newspaper archives, particularly the Tonbridge Free Press, and official documents kept at the Public Record Office in Kew provided further information, and more valuable insight into the period was gained from the diaries of Sir Eric Macfadyen who lived at Meopham Bank and owned land in the parish of Leigh. Information from all of these sources is included in this book and has been consolidated onto a map of the parish which is reproduced inside the back cover.

The Society is indebted to a number of people who have contributed to this publication. As well as those who were interviewed or contributed information, Chris Rowley, John Knock, Mary Dyson, Janet Donald, and Belinda Forster helped locate people to be interviewed and suggested lines of inquiry. Harry Lucas, chairman of the parish council, lent the ARP log, and Maurice Martin lent copies of photographs of the Messerschmidt crash at Old Kennards. Monty Cairns and Heather Maugham cooperated in producing the front cover, James Cook and Lawrence Biddle proofread the manuscript, and Sarah Harris drew the map showing where the bombs fell, aeroplanes crashed, and other events which occurred in the area. Finally, we are grateful to the Macfadyen family for permission to quote from Sir Eric's diaries.

We hope that you will find this record interesting and informative. Its preparation has certainly given us much pleasure and satisfaction; we are very aware, however, that we have not yet unearthed all there is to know and the Society would be delighted to hear from anyone who has additional information to offer.

Monty Cairns, Chairman, Leigh and District Historical Society, September 1993

Introduction

This is not an official history. It is rather an impressionistic account of how the events of World War II appealed to the people of the parish of Leigh in Kent. The aims of the project were to show how Leigh residents saw the war and were affected by it and, secondarily to describe events in Leigh in a fitting context within the larger history of the war.

The original aim was to restrict the coverage to the civil parish of Leigh. It soon became clear, however, that this boundary could not be rigidly adhered to. Things which happened outside the parish did affect Leigh. Some areas outside the parish, particularly in the east towards Hildenborough, were still considered to be part of Leigh. Some of the western parts of the parish, on the other hand, especially Charcott and the airfield, looked more towards Chiddingstone Causeway. Generally speaking we have only reported on events which happened within the boundaries of the civil parish, but we have described events outside this boundary if they were witnessed from Leigh or affected Leigh residents.

We have chosen to allow people who spoke to us to remain anonymous, and only persons who wrote or appear in diaries, official records, or other written accounts are named. A full list of all those who took part in the project appears at the end of the book.

In 1939 Leigh was a mainly agricultural village with a population of a few hundred people. During the nineteenth century there had developed an oddly assorted trio of local industries, gunpowder, cricket balls, and bricks and tiles. By 1939 the gunpowder and brick and tile industries had ceased, but the cricket ball factory in Chiddingstone Causeway was flourishing and employed a number of Leigh men. Some residents worked in London and commuted from Hildenborough, but most were employed in Tonbridge, in the village, on local farms, or in the aforementioned cricket ball factory. Much of the civil parish was also part of the estate belonging to Hall Place, home of the Morley family since 1870 and residence of the 2nd Lord Hollenden.

Although the Tonbridge-Redhill railway had run through the parish since 1846, Leigh had not been deemed important enough to have its own halt until 1917. The original builders of the railway had located a station at Chiddingstone Causeway, just outside Leigh parish; this station was called Penshurst, even though it was some way from the Penshurst boundary.

During the First World War an airfield was established in the open fields south of Charcott right against the west boundary of the Parish. Again the name Penshurst was considered to be more up-market than either Leigh or Chiddingstone Causeway. Penshurst airfield had a busy period in the 1920s and '30s, but was closed in 1936 following a crash at an air show. In 1938 the airfield became a polo ground.

3 September, 1939

The outbreak of war with Germany was announced at 11am by Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. The Leigh Air Raid Protection (ARP) logbook records the occasion:

ARP log book, Leigh, September 3rd, 1939. 1100, war with Germany. 1120, approximately, air raid warning,

Leigh siren sounded. False alarm. 1140, all clear

Some people heard the news as they were preparing to leave for church. "I remember I was getting ready for church," one Leigh woman recalls, "and I heard the prime minister say we were at war. I remember thinking there wouldn't be much time for church. And then a little later the sirens went." Another missed the broadcast and it was not until she was in church that she heard the news. "The vergger came in and went up to the vicar, Mr Sealey, and whispered in his ear. The vicar then turned to us and said that war had been declared. Then there was an air raid warning, and then Mr Sealey said we had all better go home. I remember walking across the green and thinking everything looked very calm."

Reactions to the news and the subsequent alarm varied. A man working at the fire station first became aware that war had been declared when the sirens went. "We were sandbagging the fire station at the time. When the sirens went we were sent back inside the fire station. We just dropped everything and off we went." A couple living on the high street went in the other direction: "We heard the announcement indoors and rushed outside to look up at the sky." Even more unconcerned was a young woman who was sitting on her back doorstep when the sirens went, but did not realise it was an authentic alarm. "I thought it was just a test, to make sure they were working."

People who lived in more remote parts of the parish heard the news in different ways. Expecting the broadcast, the village school in Weald set up a radio rigged to loudspeakers, and one family living in the northern part of the parish went up to listen. "We were all tip on the Green by the School in the Weald, and they were broadcasting up there. The School had set up a radio and we were all up there listening. After the broadcast we simply went home; my husband was in the Air Ministry and he was on call, so we went home and waited."

Still others were caught outside the village. The then assistant Scout Master recalls:

"The day war broke out, the Scouts were in camp at Studland, Dorset. Hubert Russell and Daisy Walton were in charge. Herbie gave me the train tickets to bring all the scouts back to Leigh, and £5 to get food to eat on the train journey. We arrived back in Leigh to find all the houses putting up blackout curtains."

The outbreak of the war came as no surprise, and people in the village can remember preparations for war as far back as the Munich crisis. The ARP service had been set up in Leigh in May 1938, with Mr Wilson-Walker of Old Kennards as head warden and Mr Phipps the baker as assistant head. When Mr Phipps moved out of the district a year later the vicar, the Reverend Mr Sealey took over as assistant head warden; when Mr Wilson-Walker also left the district in May 1940, Mr Sealey became head warden, and Mr Foy of Great Barnetts Farm became assistant head warden. There were 13 wardens serving at the start of the war, and more were added as the war progressed, notably Mr Gibbons the school master.

Mr Sealey who came to the parish as a bachelor, was also married in early 1940, to a "rather glamorous singer" who could sometimes be heard on the BBC. Mr Sealey seems to have been liked by most people and is described as a "very learned man". We owe Mr Sealey a great deal, for when he became head warden he took over the ARP logbook, making it into a record of events in the parish over the next five years. It is thanks to the logbook that we are able to fix the dates and times of many events in Leigh.

Charcott's ARP organisation was linked to Chiddingstone Causeway and the Charcott baker, Mr Grayland, was the Causeway head warden. Mr Grayland is remembered by many people in Leigh; he and his son delivered bread to a number of the outlying farms, while the Leigh baker seems to have concentrated more on the village.

Another body which was already established in 1939 and was activated immediately on the outbreak of war was the special constables. Leigh had a village constable, PC George Cornelius, who stayed with the village throughout the war. In addition, twenty-two special constables were enrolled under Head Special Constable Donald Whitehead, the butcher, and Sergeant G H Parrett, the newsagent. The Specials also organised the Leigh Pig Club, collecting food scraps to feed pigs; their slogan was, "Give your scraps to save your bacon."

Other organisations were prepared as well. The Leigh Fire Brigade was fully prepared and had already taken part in some war exercises; the fire station, which was located in the building on the corner between Kiln Lane and Lower Green', was manned by shifts of volunteer fire fighters while other volunteers, usually wives or sisters of the firemen, manned the telephones and prepared to respond to emergencies. The Brigade consisted of 16 men, led by Hubert Russell, Bernard Pankhurst, and W G Hanson, the latter being a former professional fireman from London, together with a single horse-drawn engine.

Fire-watching shifts were also organised with two and sometimes three watchers on duty at a time, and virtually everyone in the parish including Lord and Lady Hollenden did one fire-watching shift per week. In theory no one was supposed to do more than one shift, but in practice many people did two; one woman who worked in London remembers doing one night in London and one night in Leigh virtually every week throughout the war. Fire-watching was not universally popular, particularly with farmers who in some seasons got little enough sleep as it was. Others suffered as well; later in the war a Tonbridge school-master was caught stealing fishing tackle from a shop. His defence in court, which was accepted, was that his nerves had been ruined by too much fire-watching.

The WRVS had been preparing for war for some time, and the village hall had been made ready to receive bombed out evacuees from London. One member of the WRVS remembers learning to drive an ambulance in 1939, wearing a helmet and goggles to protect her from flying glass. The Leigh Nursing Association had established a first aid post to provide medical treatment for the evacuees, many of whom were expected to arrive suffering from shock or gas.

With the benefit of hindsight, it might seem that these precautions were overly dramatic. Apart from a few false alarms in the first week of the war, caused in part by faults in the new British radar warning system, all was quiet. This calm, however, was quite contrary to general expectation. It had been assumed for some time by the civil and military authorities that, immediately upon the outbreak of war, Germany would launch large scale bombing raids on London and other major cities. A prophetic novel, "What Happened to the Corbetts" by Neville Shute, had painted a grim picture of British cities under the bombing with widespread destruction, interruptions of food and water supplies, and outbreaks of disease.

This picture was not discounted by the authorities. Conservative estimates were for 100,000 casualties in London alone in the first two weeks of the war, and several million refugees, many of them injured, were

expected to descend on the outlying rural districts.

There was also the possibility that local towns and villages might be bombed. People were urged to build air raid shelters, or at least find places in their houses such as cellars or under stairs where they would be relatively safe in event of structural collapse. Windows were heavily taped to prevent them from being blown inwards by bomb blast. Households were instructed to keep stirrup pumps and buckets of sand handy in order to quench incendiary bombs. The Tonbridge Free Press devoted a considerable amount of space to air raid precautions, including an exact description of how an air raid warning would sound:

Many people have asked what exactly the warning for an air raid would be. The first indication of an air raid would be a high pitched wailing noise going up and down. This would be followed in all probability by the blowing of police whistles. If any gas bombs have been dropped, the wardens will warn people with hand rattles. The all-clear for gas will be given by the ringing of hand bells. The general all clear meaning that the raiders have passed, would be given by the sirens, a high steady note without oscillations.

Some people, it appears, are never happy This letter appeared in the Free Press the following week:

Mr Alec Rodgers, chairman of the vocational guidance department of the National Institute of Industrial Psychology points out that the sound emitted by the air raid warning siren is virtually identical with that of an omnibus or heavy lorry starting from rest. Many who live within earshot of main roads, he suggests, are likely to wonder from time to time whether the noise they had just heard came from the road or from a siren. "Is it not too late to suggest that a change should be made in the warning device?" he asks.

In practice the alarm was not nearly so alarming and some people found they could sleep through it without difficulty

Some people who did not hear the air raid siren early Monday morning (the second day of the war) were awakened by the all clear siren. In one home the master of the house jumped out of bed and immediately went and woke up all the others, thinking it was the alarm signal he had heard. The family sat up shivering in their night attire, and it was not until the milkman arrived that they found out their mistake.

Originally Leigh did not have its own siren, relying instead on the Tonbridge siren. Quite a number of people in the north and west of the parish, however, could not hear the Tonbridge siren at all, particularly if there was a strong wind blowing, and it was decided to mount a siren in Leigh over the fire station. There then developed a wrangle over precedence and whether or not Leigh's siren was subordinate to the Tonbridge siren; if the warning was given, could Leigh sound its siren before Tonbridge? In the end, once the raids did start in earnest, all concerned acted with greatest common sense and the Leigh siren sounded whenever it was deemed appropriate.

It was also expected that German spies and saboteurs would be parachuted into the country and that a

German invasion of Britain would probably rely on mass parachute landings. There was an immediate increase in security. A woman who was a small girl in Leigh during the war remembers that she was instructed never to tell anyone the name of the village:

"I remember a rather silly incident when some of us were out walking and a car pulled up and a man asked us the name of the village. So we said we didn't know Then he said, are you off to school, and we said yes. And he said, well, what's the name of the school? And we said we didn't know It had really been drummed into us."

Even more embarrassed was the Assistant Scout Master:

"I was asked to report to Gaza Barracks where there was a platoon or company of soldiers stationed one night in three or four, to be on duty to guide the soldiers to any local point where it was thought paratroops might have landed. This did not last very long, but I remember I felt a complete prat being in a Rover's uniform."

At this point it was the Special Constables who nominally had the job of catching and capturing enemy agents, and some of the specials seemed quite keen on their role.

One evening Special Constables Lewis Brooker and Alfred Houghton thought they were onto something big. As usual, they showed themselves in the village and strolled down Powder Mill Lane. Approaching Great Barnetts, a circular light was showing halfway up a large shrub near the entrance. Their nerves tingling, they advanced with care. Then came dismay; they discovered Mrs Cecil's son halfway up the shrub, operating a large telescope centered on the moon or stars. All they could do was point out the error of his ways; he wasn't big enough to threaten.

The Arrival of the Evacuees

One of the first measures undertaken by the civil authorities was the evacuation of hundreds of thousands of children from London. Many of the children were sent to the north of England and some even went overseas. The majority however were sent into the counties nearest London. The evacuation process began even before the formal outbreak of war, and proceeded relatively smoothly. According to the Free Press, the population of Tonbridge Rural District swelled from 19,000 to 40,000 in a week, with a corresponding increase in the population of Sevenoaks Rural District. Leigh received more than 200 children from a Catholic school in London, who had come by train from London to Tonbridge and were then taken by bus to Leigh. They arrived in the village on the morning of the first day of the war, shortly after the all clear had been sounded. Their arrival is described by a Leigh village schoolteacher:

"I remember it was Sunday the first Sunday of the war, and we got a call telling us to expect evacuees from London. The children came from St. Vincent's School, Westminster; it was a Catholic school. They came on the Sunday morning, and the staff had to go out and receive them. There must have been two to three hundred, all girls or infants. I don't know where we put them all. We shared classrooms at the School with them, working on half days. One week we went in the morning and they went in the afternoon, the next week it was the other way about. Village people received the children and were very kind. They were all Catholics, and

all the staff were Catholics, 2 or 3 nuns and a priest.

The headmistress of the St Vincent's infants was Sister Cecilia. Father Hathaway was the priest. The rest of the staff were Catholics. I remember one, a Miss O'Brien, an Irish lady She was a character. They used to assemble in our school for a cup of tea in the morning, and she used to criticize the rest of the staff, and then put her hands together and say, "May God forgive me."

The evacuees had come by train as far as Tonbridge, where they were put on buses and despatched to Leigh. Some people remember seeing the buses pulling up on the Green as they were coming out of church.

Their arrival meant a great deal of work for people in Leigh, particularly for the voluntary services. The school sharing arrangement, described above, does not seem to have lasted long, and ultimately the evacuees set up their own school in the village hall which had originally been intended as a first aid post. With a staff of six (a priest, two nuns, and three lay teachers), they were well-equipped to carry on their schooling on their own. The WVS provided school lunches, which were also served in the village hall, and the Leigh nursing service provided some necessary medical care. "Their parents used to come and visit," recalls one WVS worker; and the teacher quoted above says that at first at weekends "we were inundated with all the uncles and aunts and all the rest." Beyond that, the burden of looking after the evacuee children was assumed by local people.

The local children had decidedly mixed reactions. In their eyes the St Vincent's children were a little alien. "I remember going up to the village hall sometimes," one woman remembers, "to collect their dinner money and that sort of thing, and waiting outside listening while they went through their rosaries. But they were nice people. I remember Miss O'Brien, she sent me a bible when I was confirmed. And Father Hathaway the priest was a very nice man as well."

"It was very mixed, really" recalls a man who was a pupil at the village school. "Some of the evacuees got on very well. There was one lad in particular who got on very well with everyone and everyone got on very well with him. But some of the others, I suppose because they were a bit different... Well, we weren't very kind to them, to be truthful. We chased them, and that sort of thing. I'm afraid we might have made their lives a bit of a misery; I hate to say, that, but I think that might be true. But I wouldn't be truthful if I said they blended in easily." Another women, however, thought that the refugee children mixed in very well and remembers as a small girl playing games with them on the Green.

The teacher quoted earlier also had reservations about some of the children. "Leigh children were village children, but St. Vincent's were a very cosmopolitan lot, from around Victoria Station, real little cockneys, you had to watch them with both eyes, if you know what I mean." Many of the children, however, got on very well with the families on whom they were billeted, and some lasting friendships were formed with some evacuees returning to visit their "families" long after the war. One girl was actually adopted by a Leigh family and came to live in the village until she grew up. The teachers were also remembered fondly; as well as Father Hathaway and the nuns who were billeted in a house on Greenview Avenue, and the colourful Miss O'Brien, there were Mrs Joiner the infants' teacher and Miss Linthorne, both of whom were billeted at Leigh Park Farm.

One thing which the evacuees did allow, however, was for country people to indulge in one of their favourite

pastimes; making fun of city people. The Free Press ran a series of evacuee jokes, one of which goes like this:

A small London boy was sitting in a farm house kitchen where he was evacuated. The farmer was busy plucking a chicken for the next day's dinner. Suddenly the little boy said seriously, 'Do you have to undress that chicken every night?'

In fact many of the evacuee children were desperately lonely and homesick. The St Vincent's children were perhaps fortunate in being evacuated as a group, but in some other districts even families were split up and children found themselves among total strangers. The imposition of strict sweet rationing, which occurred early in the war, must have seemed like the unkindest cut of all. By October the police were picking up dozens of runaways, some as young as six, walking the roads or the railway line from as far away as Tunbridge Wells without food or money. Others, regrettably, turned to vandalism. By November, with not a shot fired or a bomb fallen in mainland England, the authorities began to give up. The parents, uncles and aunts stopped visiting, and more and more evacuee children began packing up and returning to London. The police stopped trying to prevent them. By early 1940 only a few evacuees remained, although some of these stayed on through the entire war.

The "Phoney War"

One can feel a certain amount of sympathy for the editors of the Tonbridge Free Press who, like the rest of the nation, had geared up in September 1939 to play their part in the war effort and then found that there did not seem to be much to do. A regular column called "What Happened in the Last War" was developed, and became popular because nothing seemed to be happening in the present one. Various local worthies provided advice on how to cope with the stresses and strains of wartime. The Tonbridge librarian contributed a series entitled "Read for Learning and Read for Fun" in which he suggested, perhaps surprisingly, that the best books to read in wartime were spy thrillers and detective stories. Their sheer escapism, he suggested, would calm nerves and help people to relax.

His advice does not seem to have been widely taken. By November it was reported that the most borrowed book in the library, and the bestseller in local bookshops, was Adolph Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. The editors announced with satisfaction that at least the author was unlikely to see a penny of his royalties.

Life carried on very much as before. Rationing was introduced within days of the declaration of war, with sugar petrol and other fuels being the first and most affected; butter was also heavily rationed, and by mid-winter most staple commodities were on the list. Petrol rationing was so severe that many people with cars simply garaged them for the duration of the war, jacking them up and removing their wheels. Hall Place was also affected by fuel rationing; its large conservatory, where exotic fruits such as oranges and bananas were grown under glass, had to be closed down for lack of fuel and was demolished.

Many people are hard pressed to remember a single event of note between the outbreak of war and Dunkirk in May, 1940. Even at the time there was a certain air of tedium. Sir Eric Macfadyen of Meopham Bank wrote in his diary on 7 January, 1940:

I never expected to see a war in which I had so little to do myself. It certainly impinges on my routine little enough. The railway carriage is too dark to read the evening paper going home; that, I think, has been my worst hardship so far. I have bought a tractor for the farm and am ploughing up pastures at the behest of a Community Committee. On the bench, we fine the middle-aged for neglecting to draw their bedroom curtains instead of the young for exceeding the speed limit. I can't at the moment think of any other difference the war has made to me.

The blackout was undoubtedly one of the most unpopular features of the phoney war. Houses had to be blacked out completely and not a chink of light was allowed to escape from behind the curtains. Those cars which were still running had to have their reflectors blacked out and their headlights masked so that only a tiny beam could escape. Regulations were frequently violated and the newspapers carried lists of people summoned for blackout violations. Leigh residents were summoned for violations on two occasions, both of which were described in the Free Press.

After telling two special constables that their duties were "nothing but a farce" and they could "go to the devil", a Leigh resident refused to extinguish two lights showing - one from outside and one from inside - his house and said, "I'll put that light out when I think I will, and when I go inside I'll put the other light out, but not before."

Special Constable David Fuller said that at 8pm on September 25th he was patrolling the village when he saw a light shining from the Gate house. A light had been switched on illuminating the porch, and the front door had been left open with more light streaming out.

The defendant, who had been head special constable in Leigh during the previous war wrote to the court denying the incident and stating that he absolutely had not got time to attend. He was fined £2 plus 17 shillings costs.

"I am tired of the — blackout," was alleged to have been said to a special constable by a woman who was summoned for showing a light at 16 Lealands Avenue, Leigh. It was stated that two windows were showing entirely naked lights, and that the defendant left a hall light on when she answered the Special Constable's knock. In the course of the conversation, she said that she was leaving the district, and the Special constable could report her if he wanted to. As he was leaving she flashed a torch after him, told him to go away and think it over, be more courteous, and not to worry people over such trivial matters. She was fined £1, with 7 shillings 6 pence costs."

There were also endless rounds of exercises and tests, ranging from continuing attempts to get the Leigh air raid siren to be audible in all parts of the parish, to a massive air raid simulation exercise in February 1940 at Chatham in which the Leigh Fire Brigade participated along with fire brigades from all over north Kent and east London. One feature of these exercises was the press ganging of local bystanders, who were used as mock casualties to test the ambulance services. This incident was reported to have happened in Chiddingstone Causeway:

During a blackout rehearsal a "casualty" was labeled "arterial bleeding" and directed to wait on a seat in a

country district until picked up by a stretcher party At the end of three hours, very bored and rather chilly. he left the following note pinned to his seat: "Bled to death. Gone home."

The Phoney War did not bypass Leigh completely One of the most noticeable effects was the disappearance of many of the younger men of the parish on military service, which threw still more of the burden of running parish services on organizations like the WVS. The call-ups were not extensive at first, but slowly over the winter more and more men disappeared into the ranks of the armed forces. One Charcott man nearly became the first soldier from Leigh to see action when his unit was ordered to Finland, but the orders were canceled at the last minute and the unit went to France instead.

A few people also remember noticing more activity on the railway. One woman who was often on night duty at the fire station remembers that there was "usually a train, like a very heavy goods train, going through most nights about 2 am." These were almost certainly regular troop trains. Through the winter of 1939-40 the line was in fairly steady use moving troops down to Dover for embarkation for France and the Middle East. One of these night trains in January 1940 carried 250 horses en route to the Middle East via the Dover-Dunkirk ferry and the yeomanry officer in charge of the horses recalls looking out in the middle of the night at the sleeping village covered in snow. After the war this same officer moved to Leigh, where he still lives.

The landscape also began to change. Britain had to be able to grow as much of its own food as possible to reduce dependence on food imports, and county agricultural committees were set up with the aim of increasing food production. The Kent Agricultural Committee earmarked large sections of pasture land for ploughing and cropping.

This has already been mentioned at Meopham Bank, and it is interesting to note that the records of Hall Place show that a total of 150 acres at Home Farm and 80 acres at Price's Farm were converted from pasture to arable in the winter of 1939-1940. One field which might have been ploughed up, the old airfield at Penshurst, was not; instead, early in 1940, a small party of air force personnel quietly re-occupied the airfield and began clearing obstructions from the field itself. The intent at this point was to use the field as an emergency landing ground for damaged RAF aircraft unable to return to their own bases.

One more event during the Phoney War needs to be recorded. Despite the departure of men to the armed forces, the Leigh Cricket Club remained active, and in the spring of 1940 the Club succeeded in getting permission for Sunday cricket. As there was a clause in the original lease forbidding Sunday games on the Green, application was made to Lord Hollenden, the lessor, to have the lease changed. Lord Hollenden stated that he had no objection to the proposal, providing the majority of the householders living within view of the Green also gave their approval. In mid-April the Club conducted a ballot of those householders, who voted by a margin of 19-4 in favour of Sunday cricket.

Dunkirk and the Home Guard

In May 1940 the phoney war came to an abrupt end. German armies rolled into the Low Countries and France and men from Leigh were involved in the fighting. The BBC and the national newspapers provided some

details on the fighting, and in his diary Sir Eric Macfadden noted the retreat of the allied armies and foresaw disaster. For most people in Leigh, however, it was not until Dunkirk that the full scale of what had happened was revealed.

We are used today to the blow-by-blow accounts of wars such as the Falklands conflict and the Gulf War, and it may seem strange that people were somehow less curious about events in 1940. In fact, some Leigh residents were only too happy not to know what was going on. "It was for our own good," one woman says emphatically "We didn't want to know. After all, if the Germans had come, we'd have been a lot better off not knowing where the army were and what they were doing. And to be honest, we didn't need to know, either." This woman lived in Charcott, not far from Penshurst airfield, and she was aware that in early 1940 a party of soldiers moved onto the airfield and began clearing it for use and putting up Nissen huts, but she did not know the airfield's intended use and had no intention of trying to find out.

In general, people knew a great deal more about the events and personalities of the time than modern historians give them credit for. Later "revelations" about the drinking habits of the new Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, were no surprise. "We knew he was an old soak," one woman says happily "but we trusted him." Others agree. "Chamberlain didn't seem to be doing a lot for us," another woman says, "and we were rather glad to hear Churchill was in." If anything, the fall of France brought a sense of relief the waiting was over, and everyone believed in the new leader. Not at least people knew what they were up against.

With Dunkirk, the railway running through Leigh became a line of major importance. The week of the Dunkirk evacuations saw Southern Railway's busiest week ever. More than 250,000 men were brought into Dover and Folkestone and were ferried up the single train line from the Channel ports to Tonbridge and beyond. One man who describes himself as "a child train spotter" remembers being "bemused by the tremendous number of trains, on the line after Dunkirk."

A woman living on Greenview Avenue not far from the station remembers that one of her neighbours was the Leigh station master. Another neighbor, a soldier on one of the evacuee trains, threw out his kitbag as the train steamed slowly through the Leigh station. "One of the other chaps said to him, 'What did you do that for?' He replied, 'Oh, that's all right, George (the station master) will take it home for me.' And George did." At Penshurst men threw letters out of the window which the station staff collected and posted. For some men's families these letters were the first news they received after Dunkirk.

Leigh station itself was not used during the evacuation, but the Leigh WVS and other volunteers went to Tonbridge to hand out tea and food to the soldiers packed onto the trains. It is worth recording that the Tonbridge station master received the OBE for his efforts in keeping the trains running, and he may have done more than any other individual to ensure that the evacuation was a success.

Dunkirk affected Leigh in other ways as well. The first Leigh man to die in World War Two was Lieutenant-Colonel Eric Fraser of The Limes², who was wounded in France and died at sea on the way back from Dunkirk. His brother, Dr Beaumont Fraser, was the Hildenborough GP and later gave a very large sum to the Spitfire Fund in his memory.

Another Leigh man was taken prisoner at Dunkirk; his wife and young son lived in Southampton until they were bombed out later in the year. The son, now a Leigh resident, recalls that he and his mother then came to live with his grandfather in Leigh, and he grew up in the village. He has no memories of his father until the latter's return from captivity five years later.

Suddenly it seemed that Leigh was in the front line. Even before Dunkirk, Home Secretary Anthony Eden had called for the formation of Local Defence Volunteers to resist a German invasion; it was Churchill, in July who gave the LDVs their more popular name, the Home Guard. General Sir Edmund Ironside, appointed Commander in Chief Home Forces in the aftermath of Dunkirk and, as the Free Press always reminds us, an Old Tonbridgian, seems to have pinned much of his hopes on the Home Guard. In his diaries he painted a vivid picture of the southeast of England turned into a fortress, with local volunteers waiting on rooftops to throw Molotov cocktails down onto columns of German tanks. Courage, he declared, was essential; no defence would stand if the men behind it ran away. But the Home Guard, he was certain, would stand firm.

It was a fine sentiment, but one that would not have been shared by Sir Eric Macfadyen, who had fought in the Boer War and who was now asked to raise a platoon of Local Defence Volunteers in Leigh and Hildenborough. His armament against German tank columns? 'Public spirited sportsmen are lending shot and guns, and I have already been supplied with 150 rounds of Number 6 and Number 7 shot from Tonbridge.'

At the same time as this thin red line was being formed the first static defences were going in, the pillboxes and gun emplacements which can still be seen by the river. Within Leigh parish there were 15 small pillboxes and two fortified gun emplacements on the north bank of the Medway between the Powder Mills and Well Place. The defile at the top of Paul's Hill and the arch under the railway embankment were deemed ideal places to ambush advancing German columns; there were three more pillboxes here, one on the south slope of the hill and two throttling the road just where it comes over the crest by Paul's Hill, and an anti-tank barrier by the railway arch. Finally there were three small pillboxes built around the perimeter of the airfield, two just north of Chiddingstone Causeway and one not far from Compasses.

These defences were part of a complex system of defences known as the Ironside Line, designed by General Ironside to stop the advancing German forces from reaching London. The Medway and Eden valleys were much more boggy then than now and posed a real obstacle to tanks, and it was thought that fixed defenses manned by either Home Guards or the army could halt the German any German advance. A local man who served in the Royal Artillery describes how a battery of four heavy guns was to be stationed on the Leigh village green, firing in support of troops defending the Ironside Line; the tower of St. Mary's was to be used as an observation post. Had the invasion ever taken place, there would probably not now be much left of Leigh village, or the local Home Guard. Captured German documents show that they had planned the ridge north of Weald to be their own stop line while they prepared for their assault on London, and as such Leigh was an objective which would have been taken at all costs.

Later in the summer this plan was abandoned, but from Leigh's point of view an equally alarming one was substituted. General Brooke, the new commander of Home Forces, adopted a policy of planning nodal points, where local defence forces would hold out until relieved by British tanks, and Edenbridge was designated as one of these points. The local Home Guard company and several companies were detached from the

Sevenoaks battalion and formed into a new Edenbridge battalion. Their task was to hold Edenbridge for three days against the German army and air force. Again, this ambitious aim contrasts sharply with Sir Eric Macfadyen's appraisal of his troops in July 1940:

They are good chaps, and keen, but there is no overhead organization as yet. I assume our responsibilities to be limited to watching the skies at night and reporting any parachutists seen landing. We have four Ross rifles for the men actually posted, and one of my chief concerns is that they shall not be discharged at any RAF pilots making a forced descent.

Sir Eric also remembers one afternoon, at the height of the Battle of Britain, when a military vehicle arrived with a consignment of cap badges for the platoon. "I am delighted to have the cap badges," he recorded dryly "although I would rather have caps; also boots, also overcoats, and not least, rifles."

"They really were a Dad's Army" recalls a man from Leigh. "Their trousers were outside of their puttees, and their caps..." Words apparently fail to describe their caps. A Charcott woman whose husband was a Southern Railway employee at Peshurst station recalls that all the railway staff were conscripted into the railway Home Guard, and used to go out on patrols sometimes as far as Lower Street. "What they would have done if they had found anything, I don't know," she says, and echoes the last man quoted: "Dad's Army is so true!"

The Home Guard did eventually get rifles and uniforms; by October 1941 they had full sets of battledress, bayonets, and enough American P17 rifles to equip half the men, although there were still ammunition shortages³. They became what one member calls "a regular little army; two hours on and two hours off", with a headquarters in the old iron room behind the village school. They also acquired a rather lethal jerrybuilt weapon called a Northover projector, which fired phosphorous bombs at advancing tanks. Perhaps fortunately it was never used in action, and in the end the only casualties it caused were among local livestock. A local man whose father owned a farm recalls:

"My father lost two cows. The Home Guard had a gun of some kind, a little wheeled thing that shot some kind of phosphorous bombs. They put it behind a bicycle and pulled it along. They used to take it along down towards the river, where there are some high banks, and have target practice there. Two of my father's cows came along and ate the grass there, and because there was phosphorous on the grass they died. There was a hearing about it, and my father got his compensation."

Meanwhile, Britain prepared itself anew for the long-delayed bombardment and for the very real possibility of invasion. There were calls in the local newspapers for more men to join the armed forces, and for blood donors. From Leigh's point of view, the war was about to begin in earnest.

The Battle of Britain

Within a few weeks of Dunkirk, German aircraft were raiding convoys in the English Channel and off the south coast of Kent and Sussex. It was another two months, however, before Leigh heard, rather than saw its first German aircraft. The ARP logbook entry for 3 August, 1940, describes the first appearance of enemy aircraft

over Leigh:

12.57 pm Bombs heard dropping apparently southerly direction. 1 am Sirens heard Edenbridge and district. Searchlights active and numbers of planes heard passing over. 2.34 am. All clear.

The long-awaited aerial attack was about to begin. On 13 August and again on 15 August the Luftwaffe attacked England in overwhelming strength, striking at radar stations and airfields. The battle for the airfields in particular put Leigh in the front line. Two of the RAF's most important airfields, the fighter sector stations of Biggin Hill and Kenley were less than 15 miles northwest of Leigh, while the smaller fighter station of West Malling was only a few miles to the east. Again the railway played a significant role. Between the wars, civil airliners flying from London to Paris used the railway as a landmark; part of the importance of Penshurst airfield lay in the fact that the field was close to this route and easy to find in the event of bad weather. Now, German bomber groups based in France found that they too could fly straight up the line of the railway from Ashford and then turn over Tonbridge and Leigh to make for the target of their choice. On 15 August, the ARP log records the first heavy fighting in the Leigh district.

Thursday August 15, 1940. 2 warnings from Tonbridge, 1135-1225 and 1510-1645. Last over about 4.45. About 6.50 many planes over Leigh, and sound of bombing and machine gun fire. All clear sounded about 7.35 pm

Shortly before the evening raid began, Sir Eric Macfadyen and his Home Guard platoon marched along from the village to Penshurst airfield, to undergo a short course in the use of the Bren gun. Sir Eric wrote in his diary the next day:

Sirens were sounding as we went along, and just after seven, within a few minutes of our arriving, enemy planes at 10 to 15 thousand feet came westwards along the valley. Fighters were roaring after them, and vertical columns of smoke already marked crashes over by Ightham and near Mereworth Woods.

Suddenly I was conscious of a plane, a Heinkel bomber I learned later, hurtling down on us out of the Western sky. He came at an angle of about 45 degrees over my left shoulder and directed straight at our little group. He seemed to have no object in life but to ram us. We jumped into the gun trench we were standing by. The young corporal who had been demonstrating how to dismantle the Bren was furiously assembling the wretched thing, shouting for a magazine. The poor boy I daresay had dreamed for months of just this chance to bring down a Jerry. He had the gun together in under 30 seconds, but before a charged magazine could be got, the chance had gone.

Meanwhile. just before reaching us, the bomber had flattened out not more than 100 feet up, if that. Then we saw that hidden behind it had been a chasing Spitfire. In a flash the two were past us, flying level now whipping by on either side of our trench. They barely cleared the trees that surround a house a hundred yards of and were out of sight.

Quite a thrill after a routine day in the City.

The German aircraft which so frustrated Sir Eric's Bren gun instructor was almost certainly not a Heinkel, and was quite probably an Me-110 flown by Captain Walter Rubensdorffer, one of the Luftwaffe's top pilots and leader of a specialist unit called Experimental Group 210. Group 210 had, as part of the evening raid, attacked Biggin Hill, but had got lost in the evening haze and bombed parts of Croydon instead, causing the first British civilian casualties of the war

The Group was then attacked by two British fighter squadrons and chased at low level back across Kent and Sussex. One German pilot, Lieutenant Ortner, was shot down and baled out over Ightham; it was probably his "column of smoke" that Sir Eric and his men saw. Captain Rubensdorffer himself had been attacked as he pulled out from his bombing run over Croydon and pursued south and east, coming over Crockham Hill so low that several people thought that he was about to hit the hill, and by the time he passed over Leigh his plane was already badly damaged; eventually on fire, he crashed into a pig farm at Rotherfield and was killed.

The upshot of this attack was that Prime Minister Churchill authorized more British bombing attacks on German cities. Eventually the bombers reached Berlin and it was then that Hitler, furious, ordered the Luftwaffe to switch from bombing British airfields and begin the Blitz on London.

For the moment, however, the airfield attacks continued relentlessly with waves of bombers passing over Leigh almost every day. The ARP logbook for 18 August reports very heavy fighting.

Waves of enemy bombers passed overhead at about 1320 going towards London. Heavy AA and machine gunfire, and fighter attacks. Distant bombing. A British pilot parachuted down and landed near the ballworks, Chiddingstone Causeway, and one was reported to have landed in Penshurst Park, but the LDV found no traces. British plane down between the Weald and Sevenoaks Ridge. Tracer bullets set fire to hedge outside Nurse's cottage, Powder Mills Road. Pieces of wing fabric found in Mr Foy's garden and field. Wardens searched the parish after the raid. Raid over about 1350 as far as Leigh concerned. Another warning in force from about 5.45 to 6.50 pm but nothing seen worth noting from Leigh.

Most of the fighting on this day happened just after 1 pm, when several hundred German bombers flew up the line of the Tonbridge-Ashford railway and then on towards Biggin Hill. Several dozen planes were shot down in half an hour. Of the British planes seen to crash from Leigh, Flight Lieutenant Gaunce of 615 Squadron baled out over Weald unhurt, while Flight Lieutenant Russell of 32 Squadron baled out over Chiddingstone Causeway seriously wounded; he had to apply a tourniquet to his own leg as he came down by parachute, and was taken to Edenbridge hospital

By the end of August, Mr Sealey the head warden was noting in his logbook that "people are keeping out of the streets, and more people are taking cover indoors than formerly" as the battle intensified. It appears, however, that the decision to take cover was very much one of personal taste.

Some found it hard at first to remember there was danger. "I remember once being outside and looking up and saying, 'Oh, look, there's something shiny coming down'. My brother said to me, 'Lay down, you twerp, that's a

bomb!” The bombs landed not far from Charcott. But it wasn't the bombs that were the major problem, it was the shells. They fired so many of them, and those that didn't hit anything just kept on coming down. We used to go out hop-picking and I remember many times lying in ditches while the shells came down.”

Children were usually instructed to come indoors as soon as the warning was sounded or the fighting started overhead. One woman who was a pupil at the village school recalled, “We were never allowed to watch the raids. When the alarm sounded we went straight in the dugouts and that was that. We had a trench in the garden and we had to jump down in that. We had a shelter at the school, but I never even went in it; when the raids started, I'd run straight around the Green and home.”

Some adults, on the other hand, went outside to watch the tremendous spectacle being played out overhead. Another woman remembers going out often to watch the planes going overhead. “I remember being with my brother, on our way to Bough Beech, when the Germans came over, a whole lot of them chased by fighters. We stopped and just sat and watched the dogfights.”

“We used to see clouds and clouds of planes coming over,” says a man living then at Killicks Bank. “It was nothing to see 50 or 100 planes come over, bombers and fighters. In the hop gardens you could hear the empty shells falling, and I remember working in the woods and hearing the empty shell cases flying all around. Or you'd be chopping a pole and there'd be a lump of shrapnel, and the axe would have a great lump out of it, which you'd have to grind and grind.”

And a man from Leigh remembers: “Courting was very difficult during the daylight raids. I can remember having to move around the trees down by the river very rapidly as the German planes came diving over.”

So far, apart from shrapnel and cartridge cases and some odd bits of debris, nothing had actually fallen inside the parish. The first bomb finally fell in the parish during the night of the 28th, about a quarter of a mile west of the Keepers Cottage. The flash was seen by a special constable from the Blue Anchor, who strolled across the field and extinguished a small fire which had begun to spread around the bomb crater. Damage was nil, and most people in the parish were not even aware that a bomb had fallen.

As August drew to an end, the period of the Battle known as the airfield Blitz reached its height. On the evening of 31 August there was another major battle overhead as 54 and 85 Squadrons pitted 12 Hurricanes against about 120 German aircraft. The ARP log book tells of fighting seen and heard at great height, and of a plane crashing in flames near Underriver; this was Sergeant Gibbons of 54 Squadron, who parachuted to safety on Shipbourne Road. In the same fight, Squadron Leader Peter Townsend of 85 Squadron was shot down and wounded, parachuting down near Tunbridge Wells; Squadron Leader Townsend of course became better known after the war as equerry to King George VI and sometime companion to Princess Margaret.

The weather held fair for more than a week, ideal for the attacking Germans, and there was heavy fighting overhead almost every day. There were four air raid warnings on 1 September; three planes were seen shot down, and machine gun bullets and cannon shells struck the church and parts of the high street. By now there were an increasing number of German raids being launched by night as well as by day and the ARP logbook for Wednesday 4 September, records both day and night raids.

0907-0955, warning in force. Planes heard passing west at great height. 1252-1426, warning. 12 enemy two-engined bombers seen to southwest. Later engaged by fighters and a series of fights took place. Plane brought down in nose dive to southwest, apparently beyond Hartfield. Later parachute seen. 3 enemy landed Penshurst but were dead before landing. 2110-2248, warning. Many single planes in district. Many flares dropped, two passed easterly nearby. Parachutes later found near Home Farm. During raid saw bombs fall in searchlight beams. Same plane gunned a searchlight to southeast, and missed.

The searchlight was located in a field south of Powder Mill Lane, and was apparently part of a battery which stretched into Hildenborough. Several Leigh residents remember the incident of the bombs falling near the searchlight, and one man who was outside actually saw the bombs fall into a nearby field. No damage was done, and some people believe the bombs were jettisoned by a damaged bomber and landed in the field by chance, but others are convinced the bomber was deliberately attacking the searchlight. The logbook tends to support this view. A woman who lived at Moorden recalls the incident of the dead parachutists:

“I was hop-picking at the time in the hop garden behind Moorden and Chiddingstone Causeway. A German plane was shot down and a German pilot landed in the next field. They left his body there for two or three days, as they couldn't decide which parish he was in. Eventually he was buried in Leigh churchyard.”

The last statement is puzzling as the only German airman known to have been buried in Leigh churchyard was the one killed at Kennards; this incident will be described later. It is possible that the two incidents have been somehow confused. The area behind Moorden, which is near the boundary of all three parishes, does tend to get overlooked in the official records, and we do not know for certain what happened to any of the bodies.

The Beginning of the Blitz

On 6 September, the Germans changed tactics. Hitler had ordered retaliation for RAF raids on Berlin, and now the Luftwaffe struck hard at London for the first time. The RAF changed its tactics too. The fighters based at Biggin Hill and Kenley went down to meet the Germans off the coast. The second line of defence, composed of squadrons based at Northolt and at Essex fighter stations such as Hornchurch and Stapleford, met the Germans over the North Downs and over the Thames Estuary. From the 6th onward there is a dramatic increase in the number of planes shot down over Leigh, with three seen going down on the 6th and eight on the 7th. A British plane was also shot down, and the incident is recorded in the ARP logbook.

Saturday September 7, 1940. 1125-1220, warning. Quiet here. 1630-1855, very big raid on London, four waves of attack, over 100 bombers counted in three of them. 7 enemy planes down in district, and a Spitfire, of which the pilot gallantly avoided part of the village and lost his life. Plane came down near Enfield. Fire brigade out to incendiary bomb in Hildenborough. Roar of attackers very heavy. Last hour reasonably quiet. During night very heavy attack on London docks and southeast of England.

The German losses included an Me-109 at Seal and a Ju-88 bomber at Tonbridge. One of the intercepting RAF squadrons was 602 Squadron, which attacked a very large German force over Biggin Hill. Flying Officer Coverley became separated from the rest of the squadron and was attacked by German fighters. Diving over

the North Downs, his plane was set on fire. Apparently realising that if he abandoned his Spitfire it would be left heading straight for Leigh, he stayed with the aircraft until it was safely over the village and then baled out badly burned. The plane crashed between Ensfield and Haysden; the pilot was still alive when rescued but died before reaching Pembury Hospital.

Wednesday 11 September, 1940 is one of the red letter days in Leigh wartime history The ARP logbook gives the official account of what happened.

1510-1650, warning. Large enemy forces attacked London. Met by heavy fighting and barrage. Planes seen coming down and 1 parachute. One German plane attacked by 3 Spitfires passed behind church and low down and crossed over Upper Kennards and landed in Old Barn large field. Heavy bursts of machine gunfire as he passed church. 5 on board, 3 wounded. Plane not smashed up. Wardens, police and military on spot. Many planes reported down in district.

Two German bomber groups, 1 and 76, escorted by several hundred fighters, launched a raid on the London docks in the mid-afternoon. They got through and dropped their bombs, but as they were turning south, the bombers were pounced on by at least three squadrons of British fighters. The squadron diary of 1 RCAF Squadron tells how the interception was made.

12 Hurricanes of Number 1 Canadian Squadron left Northolt 1542 hours. The squadron led by Squadron Leader McNab in sections in line astern sighted a formation of about 20 Heinkel-111s northwest of Gatwick at 1615 hours. The enemy was about 300 feet below and proceeding south, and the attack was opened from the beam and moving to astern, breaking up the formation on the original attack, after which the combat developed into individual dogfights.

One Canadian pilot, Flying Officer Yuille, attacked a lone Heinkel-111 piloted by Corporal Steineck of Bomber Group 1. According to his own after-action report, Yuille made a number of attacks on the Heinkel and seems to have worried it like a terrier with a rat, pursuing the bomber down and blazing away at it as it lost altitude. He was joined by two other Hurricanes, one of which was flown by Sergeant Scott of 222 Squadron. Scott charged headlong into the attack, completely oblivious of any other British fighters nearby; Yuille complained later of getting shoved out of the way by Scott while he lined up to make his own attack. In this fashion they pursued the hapless bomber down over Leigh, low over the church and virtually grazing the roof of Upper Kennards, until it made a crash landing behind Old Barn. Corporal Steineck managed to put the plane down more or less intact, sliding between two rows of poles which had been put up to prevent glider landings, and finally the Heinkel came to a stop, riddled with bullet holes and with three of the live crew injured.

Several people remember seeing the bomber go over, including a man who was part of a party picking hops in a field near Meopham Bank. "We saw it coming in," he recalls, "and we knew it was going to crash. We ran straight across the fields to get to it." The duty Home Guard had also seen the plane come in and had run along the railway line, but were ultimately beaten to the scene by some soldiers who had come along the road from the Hildenborough direction, arriving in time to receive the surrender of Corporal Steineck who had walked across the fields towards Meopham Bank.

Most of the village seems to have gone out to see the plane, and by the time Sir Eric Macfadyen arrived home from London his farm appeared to have suffered an invasion. "I arrived home yesterday to find an enemy bomber," he wrote in his diary "a Heinkel-111, dividing barley corn meadow from the Old Barn big field. It had been driven down by four Spitfires, and had taken the ground in the big field... Of the crew of five, three were slightly hurt. ...This happened about 3.45 pm. By six o'clock when I got home, several hundred sightseers had collected. A man was at the gate into the road with a hat, collecting for the Spitfire Fund."

A woman who remembers being taken to see the wreck as a small girl recalls that after it was removed from Sir Eric's field it was kept, minus its wings, on show for some time in the car park of the Half Moon pub in Hildenborough. She also remembers vividly seeing a blue and white badge on the side of the aircraft, which she was astonished to learn after the war was the insignia of BMW.

In the excitement which surrounded the crash of the Old Barn Heinkel, it seems a second plane may have crashed in the parish without many people noticing. That afternoon, Sergeant White of 72 Squadron attacked what he believed to be Dornier bomber over Sevenoaks.

I climbed to 18,000 feet and saw a single Do-17 flying south with 2 Me-109s flying close behind it and above. I flew underneath the Me-109s and fired a long burst from astern. I broke away and then saw white smoke coming from the port engine, and the wheels came down and the machine fell into a vertical dive south of Sevenoaks.

No Dorniers were lost by the Luftwaffe at that time, but an Me-110, a plane similar in appearance, was in the area, and this is probably the plane said by two people to have crashed east of Fletchers Green sometime during the Battle of Britain. The wreck location has never been determined precisely and RAF records are vague.

Despite many eyewitnesses and a wealth of official records it is difficult, sometimes impossible, to establish exactly what happened when. Eyewitnesses, not surprisingly do not recall exact dates fifty years after the fact. The written records of the time are often equally unclear, and the pilots in the air were usually too intent on their enemy to be paying much attention to where they were. The Canadians of 1 RCAF Squadron tend to refer in their reports of actions over Surrey and West Kent to where they were in relation to Gatwick Airport, presumably the only landmark any of them recognised.

What we lack in precise detail, however, is more than compensated for by colourful descriptions. Sometime during this phase of the battle an Me-109 was shot down and crashed somewhere south of Penshurst station, and the pilot was taken prisoner by a railway Home Guard from the station; his wife recalls the incident.

"When the plane came over it was alight, and it dropped up behind Penshurst station, in the hop garden behind the station. My husband and the others had guns, because there were guns at the station. They went out because they'd seen this thing come down and they saw the pilot come out. My husband grabbed his gun and went to the pilot. He [the pilot] said, "Visky Visky!" My husband said, "You don't get no blooming whiskey!" Then he said to me afterwards, "You know if he'd had a gun, I wouldn't have known what to do." They held the

pilot at the station until some of the military came down from the aerodrome and took him.”

As the fighting overhead intensified, more bombs began to fall as German bombers, damaged by the fighters or anti-aircraft fire, shed their loads in an effort to get back to France. Shortly after midnight on September 13 two bombs exploded in Meopham Wood, shattering most of the windows on the south side of Meopham Bank; awoken by the blast, Sir Eric Macfadyen thought at first that the house itself had been hit. In the afternoon a stick of five high explosive bombs fell in the parish, the first landing on the far side of the Medway and the rest falling in a line up and across Little Barnetts farm. A man who was living at the farm as a boy remembers the incident clearly because of the date: Friday the 13th.

“One bomb exploded near the farm outside, and the blast somehow came around the back of the house and blew the back door off its hinges. Another one didn’t go off. We went out and looked at it, and there was just this hole going down. It was just outside the bull pen, and the old bull was looking over the fence and down into the hole too. My father had to lead him out. We could look after him, but there was nothing we could do for the chickens; they had to take their chances.

We were evacuated that night. There was a gun emplacement along the road, with some soldiers, about six of them. They had a gun, a little 6 pounder, facing down towards Six Arches Bridge. Well, I’d got quite friendly with them by then, and I went and stayed the night with them. It was fun, they had bread and jam and all sorts of things to eat.

The bomb went off about five in the evening. I don’t think any of the chickens were killed.”

By now the battle was reaching its climax. Here is the ARP logbook entry for 15 September, 1940:

1145-1315, warning. Service interrupted. Enemy formations heard. 3 planes seen crashing, at least two hostile and one down at Hildenborough, to which fire brigade called. 1400-1548, warning. Enemy planes seen crashing in different directions. Barrage balloon adrift and shot down to northwest. Large formations of our fighters seen. 1914-1947, warning. Service interrupted. Distant dogfights seen but result unknown, to northeast. 2000, warning in force. Much activity towards London, heavy damage.

With hindsight we now know that the raids of 15 September were not the largest of the battle and the initial RAF victory claims were too high⁴. But the afternoon raid, which was fought in clear skies and consisted of a single massive raid on a single target, did make a great impression on those watching from the ground. One woman from Leigh remembers that day ‘like it was yesterday’. “We could see all the planes above the ridge to the north, and you could see them turning and diving and their wings glinting in the sun. There were so many planes. They came over in a great swathe, the German ones, and you could hear their engines beating. You could always tell the German planes from ours, by the engines. Most of the fighting was over to the north and east, so you could stand outside and watch. It was far enough away to be safe, but close enough to see.”

“I remember we all ran out of the back of the bakery,” recalls another, “and we could see them all across the sky towards the ridge above Sevenoaks, swarms of them.” Another woman remembers seeing “great swathes of bombers” flying over, and her husband recalls that they were flying in perfect formation. Overhead, the

British pilots were fighting desperately to keep the bombers away from London, even at the end of the day turning to ramming the enemy once they had run out of ammunition: the ARP phrase “enemy planes seen crashing in different directions” conveys a sense of events happening faster than Mr Sealey could write them down. There was also an ugly note which escaped the watchers on the ground; the pilot of the British plane which went down near Hildenborough, Sergeant Pidd, was machine gunned while coming down in his parachute and killed.

After the 15th there were a few days of bad weather which cooled down the daylight blitz for a few days, but the lull was short. On the 20th two German bombers were shot down nearby one crashing at Sevenoaks and one at Vexour Farm, Penshurst. A Hurricane, attacking the bombers, was also shot down, and Sergeant Innes, the pilot, baled out safely and came down at Philpotts, his plane crashing not far away

Both the 27th and the 30th were bad days with major daylight raids on London. On the 27th yet another German bomber was shot down at Chested Farm, between Chiddingstone and Chiddingstone Causeway. On the morning of the 30th there was heavy fighting overhead as two British squadrons, 229 and 1 RCAF, were attacked by more than 50 Messerschmidts. The RAF got the worst of the encounter; one British pilot was killed when his plane went into the ground at Riverhill, and another one came down safely at Brownings Farm, Chiddingstone Causeway just across the parish boundary

In the afternoon of the 30th, another major raid was launched on London. Escorting the raiders was Fighter Group 51, and flying in the Group's 6th squadron was an experienced Me-109 pilot, Corporal Kurt Hubel. Again, some details are vague; it is not clear exactly when and where the raiders were intercepted by 46 and 92 Squadrons, but the ARP log book records exactly how one part of the fight ended.

Enemy bombers in two formations with large escort of fighters seen high up, passing to northwest. Fights seen. A Messerschmidt 109 brought down in flames and crashed by the haystack in the old farm yard by Old Kennards. Machine and pilot partly burned. Haystack on fire and fire brigade out. Pilot's cap and overalls found in Hall Place park. Pilot dug out, and buried in churchyard the following day.

According to two eyewitnesses, Hubel flew in low from the west, pursued by single British fighter. The British pilot seems to have fired only a single burst with his machine guns, at which Hubel's Messerschmidt tilted over and dived towards the ground at a steep angle. Possibly Hubel had some control over the aircraft, for it leveled out slightly before it hit the ground, clearing the church tower and striking the roof of Kennards at an oblique angle, causing some damage to the roof and chimney. The plane then hit the ground in Old Kennards yard, catching fire and setting fire as well to a nearby haystack.

The noise of the crash was heard all over the village. “We heard a tremendous bang,” said one woman. Her husband, a special constable immediately left for the scene. Not a well man (he had been turned down from the army on medical grounds), in his haste to get to the crash and do his duty he leaped over a fence and injured himself ending up in Pembury Hospital for some time. “That was the end of my career as a special constable,” he recalls wryly

A crowd quickly collected, and among the first on the scene were two young men from London who were on a camping holiday staying in the fields further down Powder Mill Lane. One had a camera and took several photos of the scene after the crash. The photos show only a cloud of smoke from the burning haystack being watched by a number of spectators; the photographer was unable to get close to the scene as the Home Guard and Leigh Fire Service were by then in attendance, but the photos⁵ do show how close the plane came to hitting Old Kennards barn. As related above, Hubel's badly burned body was removed from the wreck and buried in the churchyard on 1 October, where it remained throughout the war; several local people used to put fresh flowers on the grave, which was low down near the south wall of the churchyard. After the war the body was repatriated to Germany.

There are two mysteries surrounding the death of Corporal Hubel. The first concerns the reported discovery of his cap and overalls in the Park. Hubel, trapped in his Messerschmidt, is unlikely to have flung these items out as he came down, and the machine was already burning fiercely by the time the first people arrived on the scene, preventing anyone from getting into the wreck. Hubel was certainly wearing all his equipment when his body was removed from the plane after the fire was extinguished; one man distinctly remembers seeing the Iron Cross around his throat. But if the cap and overalls did not belong to Hubel, whose were they?

The second mystery concerns the question of who killed him. None of the RAF squadrons in the area reported shooting down an Me-109 anywhere near Leigh, although another was brought down at Golden Green near Tonbridge. There was a rumor that an RAF pilot drove down to the village from Biggin Hill that evening, and that this was the pilot who had shot down the Messerschmidt, but no Biggin Hill squadrons were in action in the area and this officer is most likely to have been a member of the Crash Investigation Unit come to record the circumstances of the crash. The only remaining possibility is that the man who shot down Corporal Hubel was himself killed before he could return to base and file a report, and there is one candidate for this role:

Pilot Officer John Crossman of 46 Squadron, flying out of Stapleford in Essex, who was shot down and killed near Forest Row just five minutes after Corporal Hubel crashed at Old Kennards.

We can guess, therefore, at what may have happened. Hubel's unit was engaged by British fighters as it crossed the North Downs, and several planes on both sides were shot down. Hubel was attacked by Crossman's Spitfire, and dived away to try and escape but was pursued and shot down over Leigh. Crossman was attacked in turn, possibly by Hubel's squadron mates, and tried to escape to the south but was unsuccessful and was killed at Forest Row⁶.

September 30th saw the last of the major daylight raids, although large German formations of fighters and fighter bombers did continue to come over, usually on harassing raids, and there were still days when there was intense air activity overhead. One more aircraft was shot down in the parish on 27 October, in circumstances which are worth relating. A Charcott resident, by then in the army recalls coming home on leave and hearing rumours of "a German fighter which made a wheels-up landing on the airfield, and the British pilot then came in and landed behind him." Unfortunately there seemed to be no eyewitnesses to this strange story and it was not until a search was made of pilots' records held at the Public Record Office that the following was discovered:

I was Yellow 4 on 28/10/40 in 74 Squadron when we met about 15 Me-109s. The enemy aircraft which I attacked was diving into the clouds and then I followed him. Enemy aircraft saw me and attempted to turn onto my tail. I managed to turn inside him and put a burst into his engine. causing it to stop. I fired two 3 second bursts at 150 yards plus range. Enemy aircraft force landed on Penshurst aerodrome. As I did not know my position and I was short of petrol, I landed on the same aerodrome.

signed, Peter Chesters, Pilot Officer

The story is also reported in a history of 74 Squadron, Tiger Squadron, by Ira Jones, who spoke to Pilot Officer Chesters after the incident and confirmed that he had indeed landed on the same airfield as the man he had shot down, possibly the only time this happened during the entire war. The book also relates that Chesters was killed the following year; coming back from a raid over France where he had shot down his third Messerschmidt, he did a victory roll low over Manston airfield, stalled, and crashed into the ground.

The Night Raids

The major weight of the German operations now switched to night bombing, and Leigh was placed in greater peril than ever. Bombers on their way to London were caught in searchlights, damaged by anti-aircraft fire, or simply became lost in clouds, at which point they jettisoned their bombs over open countryside and turned for home. But of course that "open countryside" was full of villages and farms, and Leigh parish lay directly between London and the German bomber bases in North France.

The residents of Wickhurst and Coppings Farms received a shock on the night of 4 October when at various points in the night several German bombers shed their loads overhead. About 20 bombs fell around the two farms, one only 60 yards from Coppings Farm. No damage was done.

On the night of the 15th a stick of 10 bombs fell in a south to north direction, beginning on the south side of the Medway and walking north right into the village. The tenth bomb of the stick landed on the gasworks on Lower Green, demolishing an old storehouse. Prior to this time the gasworks had been kept full as a backup in event of an interruption of supply from Tonbridge, and it is possible that the works were damaged and the gasholder punctured by shrapnel as no gas was kept at the site afterwards. Fortunately the holders did not ignite; apart from the shed there was no other damage in the village and the ARP log book records with some astonishment that not even a window was broken.

The only casualties from the bombing were livestock. A stick of bombs which fell in the fields west of Ramhurst on 20 October injured a cow, and another stick which dropped around Little Barnetts created a crater which flooded; a horse later fell into the crater and drowned. At about half past seven on the evening of the 20th, the most serious incident to date occurred when a stick of bombs fell across the southern side of the village.

1933. Stick of bombs dropped, whistle heard. 5 HE and 2 oil bombs. 1, in Rookery Wood. slight damage to roof and 1 window broken in Old Park Cottage. Crater 25 feet by 15 feet. 2, HE and oil bomb in Rookery Field. No damage. 3, HE at the top of the road to Killbank Arch, to right of Greenview Avenue. This and No.4 damaged 27 houses in Greenview Avenue, very slight damage to tiles and a few windows. Bits of earth also damaged

homes at the Waterworks, a chimney hit and tiles smashed. Hole in roof of Scout Hut. Bits of demolished oak tree hurled up to 250 yards. 4, in field south of Lelands Avenue, almost in hedge. 5, oil drum near gate inside field belonging to Mr East, near Cranifords. This was put out by East, the Crawfords, and others. 6. HE, to south of Hollowtrees in fields beyond garden. Damage: hole in the roof of the bungalow over lounge, another over front door and bedroom. Four panes of glass broken and 2 cracked in lounge. Very dark night, and wardens had great difficulty getting about and obtaining information.

Very relieved the wardens must have been, after groping through the blackout with a raid in progress overhead, to find that damage had been so slight; the only fatalities were a pheasant, killed and partially plucked in Rookery Wood by No. 1, and a rabbit who probably suffered a fatal heart attack after No. 7. Virtually every house in Greenview Avenue had been slightly damaged, and it needs little imagination to see what would have happened had either No. 3 or No. 4 fallen any nearer the houses. A woman on Greenview Avenue remembers No. 3 digging out an entire oak tree and recalls the noise; "I must say I thought the entire house was coming down, but it turned out it had only raised a few tiles." A man living on Lealands remembers clearly the fall of No. 4, which was just at the bottom of his neighbour's garden. Even more fortunate, however, were the occupants of the bungalow narrowly missed by No. 6.

"We had an oil bomb that fell and flamed, and an HE bomb eight yards from the house. It made a large crater and blew three holes in the roof. They said later it was a five hundred pounder. It was probably because we lived in a bungalow that there was so little damage. It happened just around seven in the evening; the people who lived at Old Kennards came across and helped us clear up our house, and then asked us in for supper."

The low-lying bungalow missed most of the blast, which went up and over the house, where a larger house might have been more seriously damaged. The same phenomenon occurred at Fletcher's Green, where a parachute land mine came down in the field adjoining a small bungalow along the Weald Road. Once again the blast swept up and over the house, not harming the occupant and only slightly damaging the house.

Bombs continued to fall, sometimes singly and sometimes in sticks; virtually every night would see more bombs and every morning would bring its crop of craters. Most fell harmlessly in fields or woods and were reported only for the record. Some came closer. Early in the morning of 6 November a stick of ten bombs dropped from southeast to northwest across Penshurst Woods, the tenth falling 40 yards southeast of Lightfoots Cottages; again, there was no serious damage. That night four bombs fell around the Powder Mills, one landing near the footpath; some damage was done to the works but there were no casualties.

Charcott had a narrow escape when a stick of bombs fell right across the village. The first landed on the airfield and knocked out both the electricity and water mains; the second hit the Forge, knocking down one end, the third and fourth landed in the orchard, and the fifth went down the well of the house in the orchard. "You could hear the bombs scream as they fell if they were further away," one woman remembers. "If they were close, you didn't hear them. That night there was no scream at all, just bang—bang—bang—hang—bang." Once again, no one was hurt.

On 13 November Leigh had to deal for the first time with large numbers of thermite incendiaries. Most people had been trained in how to deal with these and no serious damage was done, but there was a close call for the

church.

Wednesday November 13, 1940. Warning continued until nearly dawn. 0525, bombs dropped in the Causeway district. The same plane dropped 25 incendiary bombs, many near West Lodge, others in Hall Place gardens and park, 2 on the road near the garden gates, 1 in Healey's garden, 1 in Brown's garden, 1 in Fleur-de-Lys yard. and 1 on the roof of the church. This penetrated the roof and fell on the stonework of the southeast chancel arch, by the Gower window, and did no further damage except splintering the bottom board of the wooden ceilings. Fire brigade attended and had to remove some tiles, cut 6 battens to remove debris of the bomb, which was almost extinct. Head warden removed certain things from the church and cleared pews under the chancel arch. Incident cleared up by 0610.

A man living in the Old Lodge who was then a boy had as his bedroom a room fairly high up in the Lodge. He remembers hearing the thump as an incendiary hit the roof above him, before sliding off into the roadway outside and beginning to burn. The heat was so fierce, he recalls, that the device melted a sizeable hole in the tarmac of the road. A woman living at the Limes remembers that it seemed at first as if the whole village was alight, with the glow of incendiaries coming from the entire length of the High Street.

The closest call of all, however, came just a week after the incident of the incendiaries.

Wednesday November 20, 1940. At about 2355 a stick of HE bombs dropped, 10 in all, 50 kilograms, 9 unexploded. 1, 2, and 3 fell from river in northwesterly direction; field flooded, not found until Monday 25th. 4 in adjoining field south of railway, in flood. Crater 25 feet by 5 feet. 5, unexploded, about halfway up south side of railway embankment. 6, unexploded, by fence on north side of embankment, 50 feet from down track. 7 and 8, unexploded, in Williams' field south of Lealands avenue, latter about ten yards from the gardens. 9 in Greenview Avenue near junction with Lealands Avenue, unexploded; hole about 4 feet by 3 feet. 10, on the Green, 10 yards from the road near the Chestnuts, unexploded.

No. 9 was discovered by Mr Geratt the railway porter who wheeled his cycle into the hole. Head warden and police at once notified, and after inspecting hole, all houses in Greenview and Lealands avenues were evacuated, people proceeding to the Village Institute, where WVS provided tea, biscuits and warmth and put some children to bed in the first -aid post. About 0400 Number 10 was discovered, and all houses on the south side of the Green between Oak Tree Cottages and the School House inclusive were evacuated. Over 175 persons were concerned. Several went to friends or private houses; breakfast was provided at the Institute for 160 persons.

During the morning the District Controller, Captain Wilson, inspected holes 4-10 and later all persons in Lealands Avenue and the top end of Greenview Avenue were allowed to return by a circuitous route.

"We were sleeping under a bed in the front room when the bombs fell," one Greenview Avenue resident recalls. She was then a child, living with her parents near the junction with Lealands. "They [the wardens] knocked on the door and told us we had to get out. We went out and went up to the village hall. I can recall people putting us to bed there. The next day we were allowed back to get blankets and things, and then we went and stayed with a friend for a few days until the bombs were made safe."

Another woman who lived with her mother near the top of Greenview Avenue remembers: "We were woken up in the early hours and told to go down to the village hall. I remember my mother and I walking down the middle of the road and seeing this hole and I said to my mother 'My word, that was a large bit of shrapnel to make that hole.' And I was actually looking at an unexploded bomb."

Fortunately Greenview Avenue at that time was not paved; one resident described it as a "mud track" which, given the heavy rains in the early winter of 1940, was probably accurate. The rains would have further softened the soil, providing less resistance to impact detonation bombs which simply buried themselves in the mud rather than going off. We can, however, sympathize with the army bomb disposal squads faced with the task of digging out the bombs and making them safe; and with the railway porter who, on a dark night, rode his bicycle into a crater containing an unexploded bomb.

During the last few months of 1940 bombs were falling into the parish at least once a week and sometimes more often. Some people were strict about taking shelter every time the alert sounded. One family remembers having an Anderson shelter, described as "a kind of iron double bed" into which the whole family including the cat crawled each night, but they lived in a bungalow and could count on little protection if the roof came in. Anderson shelters were corrugated steel structures which were set up over trenches dug in gardens and then covered over with turf. Later in the war the Morrison shelter was introduced; this was a kind of reinforced metal table which was kept indoors so that one or two people could take shelter quickly

Others made do with solid cellars or cupboards under staircases. The bakery in Charcott had a cellar with a well, which had to be pumped out regularly to keep the cellar dry; at night, one woman remembers "virtually everybody in Charcott would bring along a palliasse and sleep in our cellar" At Killicks Bank the family dug a cave in the bank of a backwater of the Medway at the beginning of the blitz. When, later in the winter, this became unpleasantly damp they moved into one of the pillboxes nearby. "We slept there every night when the bombers came over, until we got brave and went back home again."

One woman remembers shelters as a way of life. "We slept under stairs or in cupboards, and then halfway through the night we would have to get up and go out to the shelter; My mother used to leave us in a cupboard when she went out to stand watch. I can remember thinking at the end of the war, finally, we can have a night's sleep in our own beds." But for others, going to a shelter was a rarity; a man who lived on a farm east of the village cannot recall ever going to a shelter, and slept in his own bed upstairs most nights. Still others used shelters occasionally, gradually giving up on them as the war went on.

For those with strong nerves, night during the blitz could be an awesome spectacle. Sir Eric Macfadyen recorded these impressions after a night on duty with the Home Guard.

...the spectacular sight is the play of the searchlights. One hears the alternating beat of the twin engines overhead, 15,000 feet up. Beams of light from all around the skyline stab upwards and blunt themselves against cloud or intersect with each other in a clear sky. I have counted up to 50, some near some far and faint. Sometimes, though rarely, a plane is caught in a beam, held and for some way followed across the sky by the accusing finger. Last night I saw a plane firing tracer bullets down our searchlight beam but without extinguishing it. At some time on most nights a barrage of gunfire can be heard from the Medway direction,

and the night is dark, shell-bursts flash in groups around some invisible target over the guns.

Another man recalls going up on the church tower at night with his grandfather, who was fire-watching, and seeing the searchlights and the glow of fires. "It was quite illuminating at times," he says now.

The safety of children was a continual worry, especially at the village school. One of the teachers recalls, "They had all got gas masks, and nice job it was looking after the gas masks. We hadn't any proper shelters much of the time; the children used to have to get down under the tables. Everything in the school was rather primitive. We had one fireplace, and in the cold the children used to have to sit with their coats on." Some children were very careful to take precautions; there was the case of the girl quoted earlier who used to run home from the School to her parents' shelter just off the Green whenever a daylight alert sounded, and one man says that as a small boy he found the raids quite frightening. At the other end of the scale there is the case of a small girl who used to shout to her grandfather, "Come on, Grandpa, here comes another one!" and dash outside when the bombers came over. Yet another woman who was a child at the time says now "As a child, it really was quite exciting. Our parents must have been terrified."

It was not the planes but what fell from them that worried parents. Some bits of debris were harmless; later in the war, small shiny strips of metal-backed paper began to appear on the ground during the night. At first the air raid wardens duly collected samples and sent them off for analysis, supposing them to be something dropped by enemy aircraft; later they became too common to be bothered with and several local children used to collect them for souvenirs. Only after the war did anyone learn that these bits of paper were in fact dropped by British aircraft, to confuse German radar stations in France.

One man remembers picking up something rather more valuable; after America's entry into the war, American bomber crews flying low over the local villages used to throw bars of dark chocolate out the window. With sweet rationing in force, these goodies were certainly far more appreciated by those on the ground than anything dropped by those same bombers on the far side of the English Channel.

Other objects could be more dangerous, and there was considerable worry about children picking up live ammunition or grenades. Posters warning against handling objects from crashed planes or which fell from the skies were put up in various places, and children were also told by their teachers and parents not to handle unfamiliar objects; they were to inform the police or the ARP and leave the things alone. Debris from damaged planes fell nearly as regularly as the bombs. Sir Eric Macfadyen's diary records one incident when a German plane was hit overhead during the night and showered the area liberally with chunks of fuselage. One of the German aircrew baled out as well, and was given a bed for the night at a cottage in Hildenborough before being conducted to the police station the next morning.

The November and December raids were devastating for London, and from Leigh it was frequently possible to see the orange glow of burning reflected in the sky; the modern reflection from the sodium lights along the motorways between Leigh and London is often eerily reminiscent of the blitz. Sir Eric Macfadyen, who had his office badly damaged in the late December blitz and then totally destroyed in one of the big raids of April 1941, writes frequently in his diary of the difficulties of struggling to and from London, and a woman coming back with her husband from leave remembers it taking half a day to get from Paddington around to south London where

a train could be caught to Hildenborough. Another woman who commuted to the West End remembers it taking her three hours to get to work. "You stayed on the train until you came to the end of the rails," she recalls, "and then you got off and got a bus and took it to a place where you could catch another train." On one morning she had to take six different trains or buses.

The raid of 29 December flattened large areas of London, including the City premises of Lord Hollenden's company, I & R Morley. Lambeth Palace was bombed during the same raid, and there was extensive damage to the palace and chapels. The Archbishop of Canterbury, who had been contemplating retirement in any case, chose this moment to hand over to his successor. One of his staff, Mr Walter Wells, decided that he too would retire, preferably to the country where he and his wife would run a pub. The Bat and Ball in Leigh was then vacant, the elderly landlord having died shortly before, and the pub was offered to Mr Wells. He and his wife went briefly to live in Canterbury to wait while the pub was made ready; three days before they were due to move to Leigh they were bombed again in Canterbury, and literally lost everything they owned. They arrived in Leigh with nothing beyond the clothes they stood up in.

They were fortunate in that their son-in-law had just been posted overseas and their daughter and grandchildren were planning to move in with them; they arrived with the contents of their flat. Their new neighbors rallied around as well, providing furnishings of all sorts, and Mr Wells' daughter recalls that drapes arrived from Hall Place while a kitchen table appeared from Penshurst Place. It was an odd but warm welcome to Leigh.

By the spring of 1941, the London Blitz was dragging to an end: the Germans were already diverting resources to the East, preparing for the invasion of Russia. Three very large raids were made in April and May of 1941 and the Leigh ARP log book records the passage of the bombers overhead.

Wednesday April 16, 1941. 5 warnings during daylight. all quiet here. At 2115, night warning. Very heavy attack on London. where there is great damage. Continual stream of bombers passing near and over Leigh between 2140 and 2315, after which not so heavy here. Many flares seen. heavy AA fire heard, and several bombs heard. but none nearer than Four Elms.

Saturday April 19, 1941. Night warning Another very heavy attack on London. Planes started passing over and near Leigh about 2100. Several bombs heard in neighborhood. Some fell in Brook Street Farm fields. others destroyed The Grenadier pub in Hildenborough. A large number of incendiaries seen on the slopes of Riverhill. Large numbers of planes passed over but traffic slackened after 2240. Revived about 0200.

Saturday May 10, 1941. 5 day warnings. 2252 - morning, another heavy raid on London developed and a constant stream of raiders passed over and near Leigh during the warning. No local incident, but one enemy bomber seen in flames, which crashed near Withyham. Damage done to Westminster Abbey. Houses of Parliament, and British Museum. London papers were not delivered until about 12-1230.

The Hall Place Fire

On 28 November 1940, while the raids were still at their height and while bomb disposal teams were still working to make safe the unexploded bombs in Greenview Avenue, a disaster quite unconnected with the war struck Hall Place. A man who worked for the Hollenden Estate was on the scene and describes vividly what happened.

The chimney of the housekeeper's room at Hall Place had been giving trouble, but local firemen had been unable to find anything seriously wrong. Just before eight o'clock we heard the Leigh fire engine tear by, bell clanging, and, to my astonishment, I heard it slow down at the bend of the road, sixty yards away, and turn in at the back of Hall Place.

On went my tin hat and, with torch at the ready, I hurried to the mansion. Our brigade was right at it, trying to locate the fire which had broken out in one of the second floor bedrooms. Lord Hollenden was strolling around, calmly smoking a cigarette and trying to size up the situation. Then a cry was raised. One of the gardeners who had been having a bath was trapped up in the tower and unable to find his way through the smoke up or down the 167-step spiral staircase. After what seemed an age, an extension ladder was produced and he was rescued through one of the tiny windows in the tower. He proved to be little the worse for his trying experience, and was rescued still clutching his sponge and bath towel.

Owing to their lack of hose and engine power, the Leigh brigade had used a fountain pond full of goldfish in the garden for their water supply and, at a critical moment, this ran out. It was then realised that a district call must be circulated and water be drawn from the thirteen acre lake in the grounds. Unfortunately, while this rearrangement was taking place the fire increased its hold. Eight engines were in action, but despite the fact that the fire was attacked from inside and outside, it spread and spread.

Lord Hollenden immediately organised a force to cart away part of his library, which he particularly prized, and the rest of us - employees, local police, villagers, and sightseers - set to work with a will to carry furniture out onto the back lawn. Jim Hansell and I were carrying a valuable grandfather clock when it cracked in half (I am delighted to say that this particular clock was repaired). A man standing on top of a pair of steps was cutting down the paintings in the dining room and handing them to a relay of helpers. I shouted up to him, "Yank the-things off!" I turned around. Lord Hollenden was standing beside me! I wished I could have fallen through the floor.

By this time the fire was spreading, but fortunately burned off the roof thereby letting out the heat, and thus saving the main fabric. Further, a raid had developed by now and there was a continual hum of enemy aircraft. As they passed to and fro we looked anxiously aloft, wondering why some bomb aimer did not take a pot-shot at this well-defined target. It was only later we learned an RAF machine was up aloft, circling to ward off any inquisitive planes.

When it was impossible to rescue any more household goods, arrangements were made to cover them with tarpaulins against the frost, which was now so intense that the firemen were having great difficulty in handling their frozen hoses. About two o'clock in the morning the raid ceased, and by four o'clock the fire was, broadly speaking, out. I found most of the firemen had congregated in the mansion kitchen trying to get something hot to drink, but it was a hopeless task - there was a two inch layer of water on the floor Exploring the premises we

found smouldering wood, broken furniture, and ruined carpets, and above all, water everywhere. It was a sorry sight.

It was ten months before even a part of Hall Place could be made habitable once more, and the house was not restored to its present condition until after the war. Lord Hollenden was prime warden of a city livery company and had brought its archives down to Hall Place for safe-keeping: the papers were rescued with some difficulty, drenched with water, and ended up drying out in Sir Eric Macfadyen's oast house at Meopham Bank. The Hollendens themselves moved into Old Kennards until the repairs to Hall Place were completed.

Earlier in November, Lord Hollenden had begun making arrangements for "rest weeks" whereby employees of the firm could spend a week at Hall Place and have a respite from the blitz: the scheme lasted just three weeks before the fire brought it to an end. Twenty employees on rest weeks were staying at Hall Place and in the immediate aftermath of the fire accommodation had to be found for them. Mrs Twitchell, the WVS officer responsible for billeting evacuees, first learned of the fire when she received a telephone call from Lady Hollenden asking her to find billets for the twenty employees. As it was late at night, Mrs Twitchell asked Lady Hollenden the reason for the urgency. She received the laconic response, "Well, my house is burning down."

Far from offering shelter to employees, the Hollendens themselves became evacuees. living at Upper Kennards until the repairs to Hall Place were completed. Their London house in Connaught Place had already been destroyed by the blitz and I & R Morley's premises were to be destroyed just a month later, while the Hollendens' holiday home in Devon was requisitioned and turned into a barracks for Canadian troops.

This was by far the worst fire in the parish during the war, but it was not the only one. Late in 1943 Southdown House and the butcher's shop both caught fire when a spark caught in the thatch, and both buildings were burned out. Due to a shortage of materials repairs were not completed until January 1944, but Mr Whitehead carried on with his trade without memorable interruption.

The Hall Place fire was reported at length in the Tonbridge Free Press and there were several photos showing the extent of the damage; because the fire was not due to war damage it could be reported freely. The Free Press, stymied in its ability to report real news because of censorship, seems to have decided that the salient feature of the war was the impact Old Tonbridgians and Old Juddlians were having upon it.

Decorations and promotions awarded to old boys of both schools were reported lavishly and the appointment of Air Chief Marshal Sholto Douglas to the thankless post of commanding officer of RAF Fighter Command at the height of the Blitz was reported with the headline: OLD TONBRIDGIAN TO SOLVE NIGHT BOMBER PROBLEM.

The Lull

Between May 1941 and January 1944 Leigh was seldom troubled by enemy aerial activity. The nights were still full of the sound of heavy bombers going over, but these were more often than not RAF and later US Army Air Force bombers going out to strike targets in France and Germany. Sometimes these planes came back

damaged, and it was then that the airfield began to come into its own. Several Charcott residents remember the four-engined American Flying Fortress which came in and landed with its wheels up, touching down at the north end of the strip and sliding all the way down to the main road, ending up not far from Appleby's. "We thought it might have been able to land with its wheels down," one man said, "but probably if it had it would have just kept on rolling. You could see the scratches in the pavement where it went across the road until sometime after the war when the road was repaved." Ground crews came in and repaired the bomber and eventually taking advantage of a light load and a favourable wind, the big plane was flown out once more, to the wonder of two boys who were watching from the southeast corner of the airfield near the Compasses. It remains the largest aircraft ever to have flown out of Penshurst airfield.

Sometimes planes came back too badly damaged to land, and the crews simply waited until they were certain they were over friendly territory and then bailed out. In March 1944 an American Flying Fortress, badly damaged, flew over Penshurst airfield and the crew bailed out, with the plane crashing north of Tonbridge. Eight of the nine crew landed safely, but the pilot's parachute failed to open and he was killed. The RAF and army units stationed at the airfield played host to the crew for three days until they were eventually taken back to their squadron. In July the crew of another damaged Fortress bailed out between Home Farm and Meopham Bank; this time all landed safely.

It is possible that the plane which crashed near Ensfield Bridge in March 1942 was also trying to make for Penshurst. The plane, a Blackburn Botha transport aircraft, crashed for unknown reasons. A man then living at Killicks Bank was the first one on the scene: "By the time I got there the men were burning upside down in the plane. You couldn't do a thing about it. I could see them inside, burning, both dead."

By this stage in the war Penshurst was more than just an emergency landing ground. In June 1942 a new RAF squadron, 653 Squadron was formed at Old Sarum in Wiltshire. 653 was an Air Observation Post Squadron, with a mix of army and RAF personnel. The pilots were RAF, the planes were small Taylorcraft Austers, and each plane carried an army artillery officer; their function was to fly low over enemy positions and direct the fire of friendly artillery. It was decided that the Squadron should be based at Penshurst, and in September 1942 the first Austers flew in and landed at the field.

Despite the fact that it was based at Penshurst for nearly two years, 653 Squadron did not play much of a role in the parish. Its pilots and planes were frequently off on exercises: because AOP squadrons were still a fairly new idea, there was a great deal of testing and practicing at army firing ranges at Lydd, Headcorn, Alfriston and Salisbury Plain. Sometimes the entire unit, ground staff and aircrew alike, would move out for a week or more of sustained exercises. The work often involved low flying in very bad weather, and not long after the squadron's arrival at Penshurst one of its pilots struck a barrage balloon cable in Surrey and was killed.

On a lighter note, the opening of the airfield had its uses for one local family, the Foys of Great Barnett's Farm. Their son Peter, an RAF pilot would occasionally fly in his plane to land at Penshurst when he was coming home on short leaves. A woman living just along the road from Great Barnett's remembers, "He would fly low over the house first, and I remember my grandmother would look up and say, 'Oh, there's Peter' His parents would drive up to the airfield to collect him and bring him home."

At the airfield, the ground crews erected their own buildings, primarily hangars and maintenance sheds; one of these was still standing, badly decayed, at the southern perimeter of the airfield until 1991, when it blew down in a storm. A large house on the southern edge of the airfield, probably Knotley Hall, was taken over as the officers' quarters and mess; 664 Squadron, which arrived later in the war, noted that they were allowed to play football in a nearby field, but that the house's tennis courts were off limits.

People in Charcott remember seeing vehicles with soldiers and airmen passing to and from, but it was difficult to distinguish troops attached to airfield from others stationed in or moving through the area. Military traffic on local roads was frequent. Convoys moved through the village, particularly along the main east - west road, the B2027. Some convoys used to halt for a few minutes in Leigh, next to the Green, while the soldiers stretched their legs; some local children worked out that if they went up to the soldiers and said, "My daddy's a soldier," they might get sweets, or threepence.

There were a number of army units based in the area from as early as 1940. In the aftermath of Dunkirk there were very few military units which were fully equipped and able to face the German army, and most of these were units which had just arrived from overseas. 1st New Zealand Division and 1st Canadian Division were moved quickly into position south of London, with the former based around Rochester and the latter in East Surrey, The Seaforth Highlanders of Canada spent part of the war in and around Edenbridge, and some of the battalion got to know Leigh and the surrounding district; in 1943, the Free Press reported on a rugby match between the battalion and Tonbridge. Canadian soldiers were regular visitors to the Bat and Ball pub in Leigh.

The London Scottish were also based in the area, and it may have been a battalion from this division which was stationed for a while at Gaza Barracks, with some of its officers quartered at The Priory. A man living near Hall Place remembers on some mornings seeing Bren carriers and hearing bagpipe music in the park; whether these were the London Scottish or the Canadian Seaforths, it is impossible to tell.

The searchlights along Powder Mill Lane became a regular feature of the village, and these were soon supplemented by anti-aircraft artillery pieces from the 59th Heavy Regiment, RA. Yet more colonials were introduced onto the scene, for the 59th were recruited in Newfoundland (at that point still a British territory). Later in the war there were barrage balloons along the road from the airfield to Leigh Park Farm, and light mobile anti-aircraft guns which came into the parish, set up for a while, and then left again. There was also the light gun crew mentioned earlier stationed at one of the Ironside Line emplacements near Little Barnetts.

Not all of the military personnel seen in Leigh were on the allied side. There were several prisoner of war camps in the area, particularly an Italian camp at Somerhill and a German camp further east of Tonbridge. Men from both camps did labouring work in the parish. The Italians in particular were well-liked. One woman recalls seeing them in the local shops. "They put up the pre-fabs on Green Lane, and they used to come into the newsagents and buy their cigarettes. One of the Germans made me a brooch out of perspex. The Italians used to make rope slippers, and I remember one of them making me a pair of those too." She recalls that some of them were very young: one of the Germans was only eighteen or nineteen. She also recalls that the Italians used to be let out without a guard. This may be a reference to the period after September 1943, when Mussolini was overthrown and Italy came over to the allied side: unable to get home for some time, the Italians stayed on at Somerhill and did building work or worked on local farms.

Another woman who spoke a little German used to talk sometimes to German POW crews working near the railway embankment: they were friendly, and delighted to meet someone who spoke their language. Several people remember the two German soldiers who were later quartered at Home Farm and worked there; they had a reputation as good workers, and were sometimes seen in the local pubs. One was a "genuinely nice man" and was well-liked by almost everyone, but there were suspicions that the other held strong Nazi views. At least one of the German POW's in nearby camps did not go home at the end of the war, and some people remember him living and working in Tunbridge Wells for some years thereafter.

One of the lasting impressions of the war in Leigh is the extent to which everyone worked. By this point very many men were overseas, and did not get back until late in 1945 or 1946. Quite a number were in the Mediterranean, with either the army or the navy; word came back in 1941 of a local seaman who was on board Lord Mountbatten's destroyer HMS Kelly when it was sunk off Crete, and survived but lost a leg. At home, everyone had at least two roles. A Charcott man, coming home on leave from the army, found that his entire family had been mobilized; his father was an air raid warden, his sister was a land girl, and his brother was in the Home Guard.

The land girls were a particularly valuable institution, replacing lost labour on the farms. Several local girls were employed as land girls on farms around the district. Part of the Hall Place lawns had been ploughed up and turned into a vegetable garden and two Leigh land girls, Bertha Hitchcock and Peggy Wood, were employed in the garden. A Charcott woman who became a land girl "went into cows," and worked in the dairies on several local farms, continuing to work after she was married and only stopping when her first child was born.

Another woman remembers her land girl providing a service above and beyond the call of duty, "We had a couple of land girls, and the one that stayed longest, a North country girl who a boyfriend who was one of the soldiers at Gaza Barracks. She used to bring things home which her boyfriend had given her, things which came from the officers' mess. I remember once there was a whole joint of lamb with just a little bit missing. It was absolutely unheard of for a family to have something like that."

Things like joints of lamb were missed as rationing continued, but by and large Leigh continued to eat fairly well. At least part of this was due to the efforts of the Leigh Village Produce Association, formed in 1941 to help increase the production of food in the village⁷. There was plenty of land for gardens⁷ and for poultry, "We were very lucky living in the country," says the woman quoted above, "because we had hens and a garden. We never ran short of things. The children were always well fed." Another woman confirms that no one ever went without. "Rationing was probably good for me, because it cured me of my fads and fancies. I learned to eat what I was given. But nobody ever felt really hungry,"

A woman who was a child during the war recalls never having butter, but goes on, "We used to have the van come around once a week, just like the fish and chip van does now, and we could get our own dinner from that. We took our own plate and pudding plate and got our food, and it was very good. I don't know if it was the WVS or who it was that did it; it might have been something like British Restaurants. We used to enjoy that. Then there was an old lady in Garden Cottages who used to make meat pies. We used to go and get those once a week, and that was another day we didn't need to use rations. I suppose there wasn't a lot of meat in

them, but they were good.”

“It was a pretty compact, well looked after little village,” says another. “We had a dairy, and a bakery which helped. I remember sweets were rationed, which as a child I could not understand.” A man remembers, “We used to have one Rowntree’s fruit gum a day, I remember Mr Parrett who had the shop where Johnstons are now getting a great carton of Rolos and giving it my mother, saying, “You’ve got three kids. You have this, I don’t need it.” An older woman remembers not being able to get bananas: “Bananas were reserved for the elderly, for the over-70s. I remember my mother turned 70 during the war, and I said to her, ‘Now you can register to eat bananas.’ She said no, she was not going to register to buy bananas and let people know she was over 70!”

The fact that there was no shortage of food was confirmed by people who worked in the shops or the pubs in Leigh. Mr Coates the grocer is remembered by nearly everyone, both for the quality of the goods in his shop and for the fact that he delivered nearly everywhere in the parish; tribute was also paid to his wife Margaret and his staff who kept the shop running smoothly even when he was ill. There was also Mr Whitehead the butcher, “a big, good-hearted man,” who never went to market; “he used to just stand outside his shop as the farmers went past and say, I’ll have that one, and that one, and that one.”

“Everybody got their fair share,” says one man. “The average was about a shilling’s worth of meat each, a week. We had a good butcher in Leigh, and you never told him what you wanted, you just relied on him to give you the best.” The butcher also sold venison, culled from the Hall Place herd and sold at low cost and off the ration; another local family kept geese, and there was frequently a goose available for Christmas. Those who kept poultry could give up their egg ration in exchange for meal to feed chickens or ducks, which in fact meant more eggs.

Leigh’s experience of the rationing systems was that it worked extremely smoothly. One shopkeeper explains that individuals were given points for various groceries and other which were on ration, and these points were surrendered upon purchase of the rationed goods. When stocks ran low the shopkeeper sent off to the wholesalers, who delivered as usual. “Things went so smoothly you hardly knew there was a war on.” The woman whose parents kept the Bat and Ball remembers that when the pub ran low on things such as cheese, she simply went up to Sevenoaks, filled out the requisite forms, and got some more. A baker’s son recalls:

“Our flour came from a firm in Dartford, in hundredweight and a quarter bags. They used to pick up the order at the beginning of the week and deliver at the end. Rationing did cause us some problems. There was always enough flour for the baking, but late in the war they had to put things in it. They used to take potatoes and mash them up and put them in the flour. My father and brother delivered quite a distance around; they had a horse and cart, and two push bikes with baskets on the side which were used for delivering. They delivered as far as Leigh and Bough Beech.”

Recreation also continued. Cinemas nationwide had closed during the first week of the war, but quickly reopened again, and for young people especially the cinema was very popular; there were at this point five cinemas in Tonbridge, within easy walking distance, and several people recall walking into town to go to the cinema especially on summer evenings. Most sports continued without much interruption; cricket in particular

carried on, albeit with a much changed team. With so many of the regular team away in the armed forces, schoolboys and servicemen from local camps (including, apparently, one man from the searchlight battery on Powder Mills Lane) were drafted in and play went on. One local man who continued to play remembers only one occasion when a match was interrupted by an air-raid alert. The club secretary even wangled additional ration coupons for club teas, on the grounds that the club was playing against local military sides.

The biggest loss was probably petrol. Most people walked or cycled everywhere; younger people used to walk into Tonbridge to the cinema and those who had to get to Hildenborough to commute to London took cycles. The children of a family living on Philpotts Lane used to cycle to school in Leigh, as did the teacher who lived at Fletcher's Green. "At one point I couldn't cycle past Coppings because there were barrage balloons on the road, which used to go up whenever there was a raid. I couldn't get down the road at all, and I had to cycle around Lower Street way to get to the village. Because this was an interception area we used to get a lot of air-traffic over, and I always used to bicycle to school with my tin hat on."

There were also difficulties with roads. There was at that time a small bridge on the road towards Ensfield just south of the railway arch, spanning a ditch. Early in the war a British light tank drove over this bridge and caved it in, and the bridge remained unusable until the end of the war. In February 1943 Ensfield Bridge caved in for unknown reasons, possibly due to damage caused by flooding. The army, who needed to use the road, quickly put up a temporary bridge which remained in place until the bridge was rebuilt after the war.

One of the biggest problems caused by the petrol shortage was occasional interruptions in deliveries. The Bat and Ball solved their problems in a simple if unorthodox way; many of the pub's clients were local soldiers, and whenever they were on exercise in the area of Watlington, where the brewery was located, the publican telephoned the brewery and asked him to give the delivery to the army to bring up. The arrangement worked well.

The Bat and Ball at this point was renowned for its cooking; the landlord's wife had been a well-known London cook before the war; and people used to walk from Tonbridge for Bat and Ball teas. The local soldiers and airmen were possibly more appreciative of the beer than the food. "The balloon crews used to say, oh, look, a balloon has gone down just near the Bat. We'd better rush a lorry over to make sure everything is all right."

The Bat's landlords also helped to organise social events for the troops, and there were dances either up at the airfield or in the Leigh village hall; the landlord's daughter and several other women remember going to the dances. The troops usually organised a fund; the RAF squadrons at Penshurst, for example, would vote mess funds to help cover costs of dances, while locals usually made up the difference. "There was a local man named Frank Barkaway who used to just say to me, 'What do you need?' Once I said we were short of money to pay the band. He got out his chequebook and wrote out a cheque there and then. The band cost £6 10s." A local farmer, Harry White of Price's Farm, sometimes provided a brace of pheasants as prizes or for a raffle. When the officers' wives or families came down to stay Mr and Mrs Coates simply declared open house and put them up for as long as necessary,

Once, the landlord's daughter recalls, some of the soldiers came in with a book of travel warrants, which needed to be counter-signed in order for the men to get to London. They had presumably been unable to get

the warrants signed by the appropriate authorities, but it seemed that any signature would do and she signed the warrants happily, "I don't think their sergeant's eyesight was very good," she says now.

In the middle of 1944 the local soldiers were warned that they would be moving very soon, and all their money was taken away, "We used to get a few of them around the back of the pub, asking for five Woodbines. They'd tell my father they didn't know if they would ever get a chance to pay him back, but he gave them the cigarettes anyway, Then one night they were each given a ten-shilling note, and they all got in a lorry and came down to the pub. I still remember their captain, walking in the door and calling '150 beers, please, keeper!'

They stayed for most of the evening, but then suddenly a motor-cycle appeared. Not a word was said, but they all disappeared. just like that. We got up at 2 o'clock and waved them off. We knew we'd never see most of them again."

1944

In January 1944 there was a brief renewal of the Blitz. In January there were two big bombs near the Blue Anchor, and then another stick of bombs which dropped right across the village. Once again, none of the bombs exploded.

Saturday 22 January 1944. About 0500 a plane going towards London dropped eight bombs, none of which detonated. 1, in the woods southwest of Keepers House. 2, in the park near the public footpath. 3, in the bottom corner of the new part of the church yard. 4, at the foot of the cattle shed behind the slaughterhouse. Chestnuts was evacuated, their second experience. 5, in the field near School Garden. 6, in the field near the sewage farm. 7, near Ensfield Farm. 8, between farm and cottages.

About 0515, a large number of incendiaries were dropped in three districts, 1, in field near Keepers Cottage and home Coverts. 2, in woods around the chapel and adjoining fields. 3, between Price's Farm and the park. Altogether some hundreds of bombs. Several did not ignite.

Incidents also near Charcott, Weald, Bailey's Hill and Shipbourne. Owing to high wind, very few people even outside were aware of the first incident.

Most people did not discover what had happened until morning, when they awoke to find army bomb disposal teams going through the village once again; one man remembers seeing the bomb hauled out from the crater near the slaughterhouse. These raids barely interfered with the village. By now most people knew that preparations were in hand for an invasion of Europe. At Penshurst the schedule of training and exercises intensified, as it presumably did among the army units in the area. D-Day, on 6 June 1944, found 653 Squadron collecting maps and organizing its movements to Normandy, and on 28 June the pilots flew to a hastily prepared strip at Rucqueville, where they became the first allied air unit to fly from liberated France. Early in July one of the pilots, Captain Wilkinson, and his observer were killed when they flew too low over their target and were hit by an incoming British artillery shell.

653 were succeeded at Penshurst almost immediately by 661 Squadron which flew into the field on 29 June.

The personnel of 661 assumed that they too would be moving on to Normandy at once, and did not have much time to get to know the local communities; they spent most of their time on flying and spotting practice and lost a pilot killed in an accident on 20 July. On 28 July the Squadron diary has this entry:

28 July Code word Cornelius. alerting squadron to six hours notice received. Squadron dance held in village hall. Leigh. the sum of £28 pounds being voted by the PSI to defray expenses.

On 30 July the 661 Squadron moved to France, where it did valuable work spotting for the gunners of First Canadian Army during the Battle of Falaise.

However the people of Leigh and the rest of southern England were by no means as interested in events in Normandy as they might have been. Hitler had long been expecting an invasion of Europe by the Allies, and had already prepared his retaliation.

The Doodlebugs

Of all the weapons of World War II, the V1 flying bombs were at once the most ridiculous looking, the most efficient, and some of the most terrifying. The V1 was, very simply, a pilotless plane propelled by a rocket motor and controlled by a pre-set gyroscopic mechanism; when it reached the target area the motor stopped and the bomb dived to the ground. Volkswagen, the main contractor, produced them at about £400 each, and they delivered half a ton of explosive to a concentrated point.

The V1s had been in production since 1943, and the allied air forces had spent much time trying to knock out stockpiles and launch sites, to no avail. All over northern France, launch sites had been set up under the direction of a Luftwaffe unit, Flakregiment 155(W). On the morning of 6 June, 1944, as the D-day landings got underway, the unit's commander received the codeword authorising him to begin the bombardment of London. By 12 June, V1s (RAF pilots were the first to call them doodlebugs, and the name quickly caught on) were falling in Britain. Leigh and Charcott were awakened in the night by an unusual sound.

"We saw this thing coming over making all this noise and with its tail alight. I said to my husband, 'Look at that! We haven't heard anybody shoot anything down, have we?' We thought it was a plane coming down in flames. But it went right on over us, and that really was quite frightening, because it wasn't doing what it should do."

"It sounded to me like a motorcvcle backfiring," said another woman. "It was after half-ten and we had all gone to bed, when suddenly we heard this terrible noise. We all got up and looked out, and there it came, from across behind the Bat and Ball, going north." Up at the airfield it was also believed that the machine was a plane in distress, and flares were fired in order to guide the supposed aircraft in to land.

The ARP logbook also noted the incident, the first of many to come.

Thursday June 15, 1944. First flying bombs passed over Leigh. Sounded, from indoors, like a big plane coming in to land. First two passed over warden's post very nearly; others wide of village to south and north. First

flying bomb at 2335, second at 2340. Machine gun fire from searchlight station at second. Very heavy barrage from London estuary.

Three forms of defence were quickly evolved, all of which affected Leigh. First, in a matter of days, a huge belt of barrage balloons was established, from east Surrey around to the Thames estuary, and this belt began quite literally at the northern edge of parish. at the road which runs from Charcott towards Leigh Park Farm and on to Weald. More balloons were flown from fields north of Charcott towards Weald, and up over the ridge to Sevenoaks. The balloons were dangerous, to friendly fighters who had to avoid crashing into them, and to their crews; several WAAFs were killed east of Sevenoaks when a V1 snagged their balloon, slid down the cable, and exploded.

There were also anti-aircraft guns, and a major gun belt wrapped around London also covered the Leigh area; by the autumn of 1944 there were about 2,000 guns of all sizes between Reading and Rochester; The heavy guns of the 59th Regiment along Powder Mill Lane were joined by light mobile Bofors. One Charcott woman remembers, "The army had a lot of these little light guns, which they would drive around and set up and fire in different places. They never told you when they were coming of course, they'd just be there. They used to set up in the road outside my kitchen window, and sometimes the first thing I'd know of them was when they opened fire at a doodlebug."

The final defense was fighters. Only late model Spitfires and the new Tempests were fast enough to cope with the V1s, and squadrons of these were stationed forward near the Kent coast, patrolling in the air in hopes of intercepting the doodlebugs before they reached land. If the interception failed there would often be a high-speed low-level chase across Kent with the fighters trying desperately to stop them before they reached London. The ARP logbook for 22 June records:

Fairly busy with living bombs until 0830. At 1542 windows rattled. 1839. one passed over, and a little earlier one was brought down east of Quarry Hill, Tonbridge. 1845, flying bomb passed over chased by two Tempest fighters. It was apparently hit but not heard to crash.

A local man who was a boy at the time remembers being on the Green, playing with friends, when the bomb and the fighters came over.

"We were on the Green one night, my two cousins from Tunbridge Wells and me, and we were playing with the cricket club roller. The sun was still shining. We heard the V1 and looked around to see where it was coming from. Then we saw it, coming right down Greenview Avenue, parallel with it, and heading out to the north. Then we heard the scream of engines from the planes coming out and down in a dive. The doodlebug was still going along, and all of a sudden there was merry hell being let loose as the cannon started firing. In those days there was a row of poplar trees up on the hill by the church between the gate and the road. The cannon shells [from the planes] took the tops of the trees off. I hid behind the roller; my two cousins crawled all the way up to their granddad up the road."

Someone else remembers on another occasion, while walking down the road from Killicks Bank to Leigh, a Spitfire catch up with a V1 and tip it over with its wing; the bomb went down somewhere further north.

The aim of the defences was to stop the bombs from falling on London and to shoot them down over open country; but "open country", as the chairman of the Kent Civil Defense Committee later said with feeling, was where the people of Kent lived. Kent took more flying bomb hits than London, and in a postwar ranking of numbers of flying bomb hits per rural district, Sevenoaks came third and Tonbridge fifth. By late June the scale of the bombardment had increased enormously and dozens of flying bombs were passing or coming down every day, Here is the ARP logbook entry for 23 June:

Friday. June 23. 1944. 0156, 7 flying bombs passed, 2 up eastwards, 2 across about by Bid Bridge, 3 to south of Leigh Halt. 0217, 1 on Bid Bridge track. 0234, southeast track. 0242, eastward track. 0249, southward track. 0259, eastward. 0313. nearly overhead, much higher, in clouds. 0313, eastwards: 0324, distant explosion. 0333, eastwards; 0342, distant explosion. 0359, eastwards. 0402, south of Leigh. 0408, south track. 0430, flying bomb shot down by fighter, crashed south of railway in Hawkes Wood. 0432, eastwards. 0437, near Leigh. 0456, south track. 0510, Bid Bridge track. 0535, Bid Bridge track. 0600, all clear.

0700-0800, 7 or 8 more on different tracks. Several down. Quiet until 1500. then 3 on north track 2 on south track. 1600, far north track. 1628, flying bomb down to southeast. 1643, 1652, south track. 1707, south track. 1709, north track, shot down in open near Sevenoaks Weald. 1721, far north track. 1727, south track, others to north, some crashed. 1756, far north track. Several others during evening. 2240, flying bomb shot down and crashed in Tonbridge in the garden of the Red House. Flying bomb was damaged by a fighter, and another tipped it over so as to keep it from a more populated part of Tonbridge. Damage to Tonbridge School and in High Street, East Street, and Bordenyke.

The wardens had spotted the fact that the bombs followed set tracks, due to the fact that they were launched from fixed sites in France towards the centre of London. Leigh lay directly between three or four launchers and London; by working out the number of bombs on each track, one can see which launchers were most active. There were also short lulls, while the troops operating the launchers brought up fresh bombs and did maintenance work, followed by bursts of activity with bombs coming every few minutes.

Some Leigh residents were relatively stoic about the doodlebugs, others were less so. "We saw lots of doodlebugs," one man remembers, but does not recall them as being any more worrying than the bombers had been. Not so the family dog. "We had a dog, and sometimes when I was out working with my father the dog would suddenly run for home. My father would say, 'We'll see a doodlebug along soon,' and there always would be one. The dog could hear them long before we could."

At the Bat and Ball, remembers a woman who lived there, the flying bombs looked as though they were coming straight in through the back window when they passed over. A woman living at the Limes could see them out of her bedroom window at night and see the flames coming out of their tails as they flew low over the village. Another woman's young daughter used to stand outside listening for the approach of the flying bombs. When she heard one, she'd shout "Doodlebug, mummy! Doodlebug!" and run inside and jump under the Morrison shelter until it had passed over.

The flames coming out of the back of the rocket motor gave the doodlebugs an uncanny look, but it was the noise, the deep, backfiring roar of their engines, that affected peoples' nerves most. One man says that

recalling the noise of the doodlebugs still makes him feel uncomfortable. And one woman says that she, like tens of thousands of others, prayed, when she heard a doodlebug, "that it would keep on going." Bad as the noise was, it still provided an illusion of safety: if it stopped, on the other hand, listeners had between five and twenty seconds to take cover before the explosion.

As in the Battle of Britain, it was not only the bombs which were a danger. The shells fired by the AA guns and planes had to come down somewhere, and matters were made worse by the fact that the guns of the new fighters fired explosive cannon shells rather than lead bullets. A Leigh man had a narrow escape when, while he was cycling along Powder Mill Lane delivering milk, a cannon shell fell from the air and struck his bicycle. He later told the Free Press that he was going down the road when he heard a snapping noise as if he had run over something. "I looked around but couldn't see anything at first. Then I noticed the cannon shell, wedged base first, between my lamp bracket and the milk delivery box. The shell, of course, was hardly visible above the box and was not easily noticed." The man was told that, had the shell struck the bicycle nose first, it would certainly have exploded.

Worse was to come. On Friday June 30, an anti-aircraft shell crashed to earth and exploded in the road outside the School House, shattering 20 panes of glass and some wooden frames in the School House and more glass in the School itself. Mr Gibbons the schoolmaster, standing some six feet from the explosion, was by some miracle untouched.

So far Leigh had been fortunate: other parishes had had people killed and injured, but in Leigh no one had yet been harmed. Three days after Mr Gibbons' lucky escape, however, the inevitable happened. The subsequent inquest into the incident, coupled with eyewitness accounts, makes it fairly clear what occurred. A local boy, Jimmy Longhurst, had found an unexploded cannon shell, probably a 20mm round from an RAF aircraft cannon. Where he found the shell is unknown, and probably immaterial. According to the inquest report he first took the shell home and showed it to his father, who told him sharply to get rid of it at once. This he did not do. The temptation, as another former pupil recalls, was to bring things to the School and show the other kids, 'See what I've found'."

At this point the School lunches were being provided from Edenbridge, and Mr Gibbons the master used to go out every morning around 11 am to use the private phone in his house and ring Edenbridge to order the lunches. On the morning of 3 July Mr Gibbons went out as usual, and Jimmy Longhurst produced the cannon shell from his pocket to show his friends. He dropped it, and it exploded. Not far away a girl, Joan Chandler, was standing with her back to Jimmy Longhurst, talking to a friend. The friend recalls:

"I was talking to her; I didn't even know he was playing with the thing. There was this tremendous flash. I had cordite all over me, but I was unhurt; she [Joan] took all the blast in her back. I was stunned, and I couldn't talk. My mother was in the post office at the time, and she heard the children screaming."

The blast was heard all over the eastern side of the village, and some thought at first that the School had been hit by a bomb. A local deliveryman, passing by in the road outside, was the first to reach the door of the School; he was closely followed by PC Cornelius. According to the account of one of the schoolteachers, confirmed by the ARP logbook and the subsequent inquiry, Joan Chandler was killed instantly, by shock;

Jimmy Longhurst lived for few minutes but died of shrapnel wounds, dying according to one account in the arms of PC Cornelius. One of the teachers remembers that Mr Gibbons' desk and all the wall behind it was peppered with shrapnel; had he been there he would certainly have been killed as well.

There were no other casualties, though a number of children were badly shocked and frightened. Many still remember the incident with sorrow as does the teacher mentioned above, who found the memories of the explosion so disturbing she ultimately left the School. 'There had to be an inquiry and the school was closed for two or three days. I was very fond of those children, but I never settled after that. I stayed on for a year after the war and then I left in 1946.'

Thankfully there were few flying bombs during the tragic events of the morning of the 3rd, but in the evening they began to come over in large numbers. At twenty minutes to ten a flying bomb coming in on the track just east of the village was attacked by an RAF fighter One wing was shot off the doodlebug and it veered and crashed in the fields between Home Coverts and Lower Street. Pieces of debris were found on the road near Home Farm.

All through July the flying bombs continued to come, sometimes only a few each day, sometimes fifteen or twenty. Large numbers were shot down around the parish, and the ARP logbook records one incident at Riverhill where several people were killed. Late in the month the bombs began to come faster again; twenty were seen on 26 July of which two were shot down and fourteen others were heard to crash. Thirty-three passed over on 27 July of which two were shot down and one was brought down by a barrage balloon; again the majority were heard to crash. The very large percentage of bombs which crashed in north and west Kent was due to a clever ruse by British intelligence. Correctly assessing that the Germans were aiming for central London, they placed large numbers of obituary notices in the London papers from the boroughs of north and west London. The Germans, reading these, assumed that their bombs were traveling too far and shortened the range. Central London was given a respite, but the southeastern boroughs and northwest Kent paid the price.

On 28 July a flying bomb fell in the fields near Coppings Farm, far enough from the farm to avoid causing any damage. On 2 August at 4:15 in the morning, another crashed in a cornfield near Eggpie Lane. This time some damage was done, to Yew Tree Cottage and Pond's Cottage, and several acres of corn were blasted. A woman who lived nearby recalls going out to see the site in the evening. "It was a very shallow crater, but all the field around it looked like it had been swept. Everything was knocked absolutely flat by the blast."

That was one of six bombs to fall in the area that day. On 3 August the warning was given at half past midnight; by midday 54 doodlebugs had been spotted from Leigh, of which 29 had been seen or heard to crash. The ARP logbook notes sombrely, "This has been our worst day so far" The following day there was a great deal of fighter activity, and at 8:25 pm a fighter pursued a flying bomb across the Medway, bring two cannon bursts which ripped the engine unit off the V1. The engine unit fell in the fields north of Killicks Bank. The fuselage and warhead plunged into the Paul's Hill hop garden, very near the village, and exploded with tremendous force. The blast tore a 25 foot crater in the hop garden, and nearly 2 acres of hops were blasted and Paul's Hill house and a nearby cottage were damaged; down in the village windows were smashed in the High street, including a number at the Limes and the big plate glass window in the front of Coates' grocery; one woman remembers coming down and seeing the High Street littered with bits of glass. Had the bomb

fallen a few weeks later the garden might well have been full of encamped hop pickers.

Two days later on 5 August Mr Sealey, doing his sums, noted that in less than a month 925 flying bombs had been heard in the parish, and 362 of these had been heard to crash. And still the bombs continued to come. Their effect on much of the country was far worse than the Blitz had ever been; there were scenes of real panic in London as people fought to get onto trains taking them out of the city.

Locally there was no sense of panic, but the doodlebugs, impersonal and remorseless, made people uneasy in ways the bombers never had. People listened constantly for the noise of the rocket engine, and then waited for the moment when the engine would stop and the bomb would plunge to earth. A local woman who worked in the post office remembers riding her bicycle up the road near Home Farm doing her delivery rounds, and hearing a doodlebug approach, and then came the awful moment when its engine cut out overhead; she leaped off her bicycle and into the ditch, but the bomb glided on for some distance before exploding. Even if the bomb went on over you did not know for certain you were safe; there were stories of bombs veering around 180 degrees in flight.

In mid-August the intensity of the doodlebug blitz began to decline, but just before 1 am on 14 August one fell in Park Field at Price's Farm. Two cows were killed and another had to be destroyed; there was blast damage at Price's Farm, at some of the new houses on Penshurst Road, and at Hall Place.

On Monday, 21 August, came one of the most dramatic doodlebug strikes. A local man was working near Great Barnetts Farm when a V1 approached, cut out, and crashed straight onto the railway line at Six Arches, about 200 yards west of the Medway, "It was one time I wished I'd had a camera," the man recalls. "We didn't see it, but we heard it. I ran straight down and I was the first person on the scene. It had hit the embankment, and the rails of the track were bent up and around [past 90 degrees]. There were bits of it lying all over. The stove pipe affair at the back was embedded in a willow tree south of the railway; it stayed like that for years. I don't know what happened to it; I moved away to Tonbridge, and when I came back it was gone." There was a train on the line at the time, coming up from Tonbridge, but it was able to stop well away from the blast site. Both railway tracks were put out of action, but the ARP logbook records that full service had been resumed by nightfall.

On Tuesday 29 August the RAF were very active, chasing and shooting down a number of flying bombs in the area. One went into the hop garden at Moorden, just inside the Chiddingstone Causeway ARP jurisdiction; another exploded in the air over Hildenborough. There were no casualties. The real significance of 29 August, however, was that on that day Allied forces in France overran the last of the groundbased V1 launching sites. The doodlebugs continued to come, but henceforth they were launched from the air, by bombers flying out of bases in Belgium and Holland. Leigh did not see another flying bomb until the end of September.

During the two months of the V1 blitz, Leigh had seen or heard 1,500 flying bombs, and well over 600 of these had crashed within earshot. More than one-third of all the flying bombs launched from France during this time had passed within sight and sound of Leigh. Not since 1940 had the village been so continually in the line of fire.

In the meantime a still more lethal weapon had made its appearance. Rumours of “rocket bombs” as the V2 rockets were called, had been circulating for some time, and in early September the ARP logbook recorded several distant heavy explosions which the wardens guessed were either long-range guns or rocket bombs. In fact some shells from long-range guns had fallen as far west as Maidstone, but these had been overrun and captured as well. The rocket bombs had arrived, and the V2 blitz had begun.

By October it was clear that rockets were falling in the vicinity, The air-launched V1s had also arrived, and one bomber flew inland as far as East Peckham before launching its flying bomb. The rate of both V1 and V2 attacks was nothing like as frequent as in the doodlebug blitz of the summer, but there was seldom a day without some kind of incident. Quite early on a V2 rocket came down near Ightham in mid-October; on 4 November one fell in Penshurst between the Glebe and Warren farm, digging a crater which was later measured at 40 feet by 20 feet and shattering glass for some distance around. By the middle of the month the ARP logbook was recording half a dozen V2 explosions a day, and Bough Beech, Underriver and Southborough were all hit.

Although there were fewer V2s than flying bombs, their noise and impact were in some ways greater. With approximately a ton of explosive in the warhead, they exploded with a sound which could be heard for miles. Because they arrived at supersonic speeds, however, “the first thing you heard was the bang; then you heard the whistle of the rocket coming in.” One woman says, “There was no waiting for the thing like there was with the doodlebugs. If you actually heard the rocket explode, then you were probably still in one piece.”

The End in Sight

Both V1s and V2s continued to fall at intervals throughout the winter. By now however, the end of the war was in sight. Penshurst airfield was tenanted again, from January 1945, this time by 664 Squadron, a Canadian air observation squadron also flying Austers. 664 spent most of its time practicing flying, playing baseball on the Leigh village green, and socializing to an extent at least equal to its predecessors. The Squadron diary for 23 February records:

Weather cleared from windy to clear day by 1000 hours and flights were able to get some flying time logged. The squadron's first dance was held in the town hall of Chiddingstone Causeway. Girls were obtained from the local Wrens, WAAFs and LTS and the surrounding villages. Prizes were given for different dances. The dance turned out to be a big success, and it is hoped that another may be held in the near future.

Although they seem to have enjoyed their stay in Leigh, 664 were also chafing at the bit. Unlike their hosts, who could not wait for the war to be over, 664 were desperately anxious that the war would end too soon before they had a chance to see any of it. Three days later the Squadron commanding officer wrote in the diary:

And so another month ends. The big question on the tongues of all personnel, from the CO on down, is, “When do we go over?” It would appear that this squadron is a forgotten baby, and if we don't go over soon, the fellow's are going to lose heart.

664 Squadron did get transferred to the Netherlands in March 1945 and flew a number of missions in support of the advancing troops of 1st Canadian Army in Holland and North Germany, without losing a plane or a man.

The war did almost end with a bang, as the Germans kept up the bombardment of England right up until the end of March, 1945. Only then, with allied troops entering Germany and all the launching units either overrun or pushed back out of range, did Leigh begin to breathe more easily and the local defence organizations began to stand down. A final quote from the ARP logbook brings the war to its close.

Tuesday 27 March, 1945. 0500, flying bomb. 3 rockets and 1 flying bomb within sight of Leigh, 2 crashed.

Thursday 29 March, 1945. Just V2s to reach England. but none heard here. Wardens patrol duties as usual, stand-bys.

Monday April 9, 1945. Firing bomb to west about 1000.

Wednesday 2 May, 1945. Stand down of A.R.P

Thursday 3 May, 1945. Messrs Foy and Hurley attended the stand down parade at Sundridge, addressed by Wing Commander Hodsell, the head of the National ARP service. Head warden unable to attend owing to illness.

May 4th to 10th, 1945. Wardens handed in surplus kit. All wardens paid 5 shillings, having "mislaid" their waterproof capes. Wardens keep their steel helmet, respirator and haversack, greatcoat, boots, anklets, battledress, and torch and whistle.

Thursday 8 May, 1945. VE. Day.

Most people remember the day the war began with great clarity; they remember VE day less vividly. Some cannot remember the day the war ended at all, and certainly life went on in some respects much as it had before; rationing was still in force, and the voluntary organizations still had more than enough to do. One woman remembers taking the news quite calmly; "We knew the day before that the war was probably going to end, and it was given out that there would be a general holiday. I spent the day gardening. I took three feet off the privet hedge between the next door house and mine, and it was a very good day's work." A man who was a schoolboy at the time also took advantage of the holiday, to go fishing with his friends.

Others were more direct. Someone recalls vividly seeing Mr Gibbons, schoolmaster, air raid warden and pillar of the community, going out onto the Green and burning his gas mask. And one man said simply, 'I got drunk.'

"In the afternoon there was a party on the Green. Mr Whitehead the butcher went into the grocery and bought up the entire stock of ice cream. They put the freezer on the green, and plugged it in through the back of Coates' store. Then someone came along with a bag of new sixpences. Every child got free ice cream and a new sixpence to mark the occasion. Then we had games, three-legged races and sack races. We had a wonderful day, I remember too that the pub stayed open until about 1 am. Nobody would have dared ask us to close!" A man remembers a dance on the Green that night; "there was a sound system provided by a man from Bough Beech. It wasn't a very good sound system and we could hardly hear anything. But we enjoyed ourselves."

Many of the men were still overseas, either on active service or, in some cases, newly released from prisoner

of war camps. When the war ended," one man recalls, "I was in San Marino, the little city state in Italy We had to move in a hurry, across the mountains to Austria to face the Russians, and we ended up in Klagenfurt. I didn't get home until 1946 when I came home in leave. We rode on the backs of three and one half ton trucks, all the way across Europe."

"Some of us kids were playing on the Green," another man remembers, "and I looked up and there was this soldier coming across from the road. One of the others said, 'Isn't that your dad?' I supposed it was. He'd been taken prisoner when I was two, in 1940, and I hadn't seen him since."

For many, however, the chief memory is of deep relief. After six years of air raid sirens, alerts, and shelters, the sky was finally safe. "I remember the end of the war," said one woman. "I remember thinking, now we can go to bed and sleep. I remember going out for a walk, and thinking, there'll be no more air raids, no nothing. It's over."

A Charcott woman with a young baby also remembers the unaccustomed sensation of peace and safety "The day the war ended, I remember thinking we could go back to bed and stay there through the night. We used to hate nights," she says. "Now I like going out of doors at night and looking at the moon and the stars. But we used to hate the moon, during the war."

Afterword

It was over. From 1939 to June 1944 more than 850 air raid alarms had been sounded in Leigh, and from then until the end of the war there were so many alerts that the ARP logbook stops recording them. More than one hundred and thirty bombs, and possibly as many as 700 incendiaries, had fallen in the parish, along with five V1 flying bombs; nine planes had crashed in the parish, and the pilots of two at least had been killed.

Perhaps the final act connected with the war was one of remembrance, in which the names of those who died on active service were commemorated. Leigh already had a war memorial, commemorating the 31 men of the parish who died in World War One. Now it was decided that the men who had been killed in World War Two would have their own memorial, and a circular letter to all parish residents announced the decision.

"You will know that on the 19th of February 1948 a Parish Meeting was held at the school to discuss plans for a memorial to those who gave their lives in the 1939-45 war. The meeting, which was representative of our village, agreed on a general plan and appointed a Committee to execute it and deal with finances.

We are writing to tell you that it has been decided to add a simple dedicatory inscription to the face of the stone step immediately below the column of the existing War Memorial, with the names of those who gave their lives inscribed on either side of it.

In addition there will be placed on the Green four oak seats of the finest quality and of dignified design. They will be simply and suitably inscribed, and will be carefully set up so as to ensure their permanence. These seats will be made by the British Legion Workshop, Preston Hall, Maidstone.

The cost of this memorial is £120. We ask every adult in our parish to give at least 2 shillings 6 pence to the Leigh War Memorial Fund, for provided everyone does his share the necessary fund will be raised.

In these times we all face many demands upon our purses. But the Committee suggests that the sum it is asking each of you to give is in the worthiest cause of all, and is small in comparison with our gratitude to those who gave their lives for England and for us.

We live today in peace and freedom, and in hope. As a thank offering for this, and to provide a fitting memorial to our men whose debt surely no money can repay, please send or give at least 2 shillings 6 pence to our honorary treasurer who is Lt. Commander G W Style RN, Retired, The Woods, Leigh, and please remember to enclose with your gift a note giving your name and address.

The Committee has thought it advisable to make a qualification for those names which are to be inscribed on the War Memorial. We have decided the fairest and most definite ruling is to include all who were killed in action or died on active service, and who lived in the parish for any period between 3 September 1939 and 14 August 1945.”

The memorial was duly carried out, and the names of the 11 soldiers, sailors and airmen who died in World War II were added to the lower step of the war memorial, where they can be seen today,

Edward Bickersteth

John Curtis

Eric Fraser

Leslie Humphrey

Gilbert Nixon

Arthur Schofield

Leslie Chandler

Tony Flower

Sidney Horan

Charles Nixon

Philip Patching

Notes:

1. This building now houses Leigh Service Garage.
2. Later Chilling House, now Leigh House. Since this was written, the name has returned to Chilling House.
3. Weapons were a problem for much of the war. The only readily available weapons were Canadian Ross rifles, which jammed, and American P-17s which used different ammunition from the standard

British .303. Not until 1942 did enough Lee-Enfields become available to equip every man.

4. The victory claims announced by the BBC after each day's fighting were based on initial claims by the pilots, and were always adjusted sharply downwards a few days later by the RAF's Crash Investigation Unit. These revised figures, however, were not broadcast.
5. The Society is indebted to Mr Maurice Martin for the loan of the photographs, which were given to his father by the photographer.
6. John Crossman, an Australian serving with the RAF, was buried in the churchyard at Chalfont St. Giles, Buckingham shire. His headstone can still be seen there.
7. The Leigh Produce Association is still active today

Contributors to the Leigh and District Historical Society World War II Project

Mr Eric Bachelor	Mr A Grayland	Mr Dennis Stolton
Mr Lawrence Biddle	Mr Alfred Houghton	Mrs Vi Stroud
Mrs Margaret Coates	Mrs Catherine Johnson	Mr Russell Thompsett
Mr Spencer Coates	Mr John Knock	Miss Phyllis Upfield
Miss Winifred Ellis	Mrs Audrey Latter	Mrs S Weller
Mrs Dorothy Fautly	Mr J Latter	Mrs Mo Whall
Mrs Joyce Goad	Mr Harry Lucas	Mrs H Wood
Mr Neville Goad	Mr Cyril Seldon	Mrs Peggy Young