

ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY PRESS – 10 April 1943

SOUTH COAST AIR RAIDS.

DAMAGE AND CASUALTIES IN MARKET TOWN.

An old borough and market town near the South Coast, which had fortunately hitherto escaped serious attention from enemy raiders, suffered badly in a low-level attack by a formation of eight fighter-bombers - M.E. 109's - soon after daybreak on Wednesday. The enemy planes came in from the sea skimming the cliffs and opened up with their cannon as they approached the town, still flying very low. Swinging round in a half circle each dropped a bomb and then raced away for the coast. They were attacked by ground defences, both as they approached the town and as they left it, and at least one was hit. When over the Channel they were engaged by our fighters and one was shot down by a Typhoon. It is thought that at least two others were so badly damaged that they would not have reached the French coast.

The bombs were well scattered over the town, hence the damage both to business and private property was extensive, and unfortunately there were casualties, including a number killed. The attack did not last more than a minute. Fortunately at the early hour in the morning the workers had not arrived at some of the business premises which were either demolished or damaged, otherwise the casualty list would have been far greater.

A bomb, which fell in a timber yard [*Morey's (2020 Jewson's) Trafalgar Road*] and killed three men, bounced at least 300 yards after first hitting the ground [*east of Medina Avenue ?*]. It passed through the roof of the residence of Mrs. J. H. Flux [*9 Avondale Road*], while she was in bed in the room immediately below, bringing down debris on her bed, but she escaped injury. It then struck the ground in the garden of a Baptist minister's house next door [*7 Avondale Road*], ploughed up the soil for about three yards, passed through a concrete wall between the gardens, and ricocheted over two roads [*Mount Pleasant Road & St John's Road*] and several houses before exploding in the timber yard. The men killed here were Messrs. E. H. Tulley, F. C. Burt, and W. O'Donnell.

Another bomb hit a garage [*Southern Vectis, 109 Pyle Street*], passed out through the open doors, and is believed to have travelled another 150 yards before it completely demolished and set fire to a large grocer's and provision merchant's [*?*] shop and store. The N.F.S. soon had the fire under control.

Most of the casualties occurred when terraces of houses in Clarence-road and Chapel-street were hit. In Clarence-road four houses were demolished and five occupants killed, including Mrs. Dudley, wife of a munition worker who had just left for his work, and her six-year-old daughter Valerie, and Mr. and Mrs. Mundell and their grandson Master H. Ablitt. Mr. Mundell's body was not recovered until the afternoon. Mr. D. Abraham was seriously injured here, but his wife and daughter were rescued from the ruins with minor injuries. In Chapel-street five houses were wrecked and there were more fatal casualties, including two widowed sisters, Mrs. Flux and Mrs. Buckler, living together, and a young airman, A. C. Carlton and his wife, who were spending a short holiday with Mrs. Carlton's father (Mr. Mitchell), who was so badly injured that he died in hospital. In one of the shattered houses here a man of 85 (Mr. H. Porter) was rescued almost uninjured. He had been saved by a piano, which took the weight of the falling debris.

A bomb passed through the roof of a cinema [*Medina (2020 Slug & Lettuce)*] in the High-street, badly damaging the building, and then exploded in a big draper's shop next door, completely demolishing it and an electric light company's offices, and badly damaging the Guildhall and the offices of a county newspaper. There were no casualties here, but several wonderful escapes. A party of firewatchers were just about to leave the cinema after having been on duty all night, but they

escaped with slight injuries although the bomb passed through the building just above the room in which they were assembled. Mrs. Salter, who occupied a flat over the Electric Light Company's office, had a miraculous escape. She was in bed when the whole building collapsed, yet when the rescue party arrived they were amazed to see her crawling out from a heap of debris. She had escaped with cuts and bruises, not sufficiently serious to necessitate hospital treatment. After receiving attention at a first-aid station she was able to go to friends. Almost equally remarkable was the escape of Mrs. E. Blee, wife of the caretaker of the newspaper offices. She was in bed in a top floor room and jumped out when she heard the noise of the cannon fire, with the intention of going downstairs, but before she could do so a steel showcard printing machine, weighing about 1cwt. crashed through the roof on to the bed with such force that it knocked a hole in the floor boards under the bed.

Ald. and Mrs. Whitcher, whose residence is next door to the wrecked grocery store [*Whitchers at 31, Jordan & Stanley Grocers 32&33 St. James Street (2020 corner of South Street and Upper St. James Street)*], also had a lucky escape. The bedroom in which they had been sleeping until the previous night was badly damaged by blast. Fortunately they were using another room - a change made in the course of spring cleaning.

Other premises badly damaged by bombs or blast included a mill, a pork butcher's shop and a garage, and among the many other buildings less seriously damaged were the Parish and St. John's Churches, where windows were blown out.

The most complete example of devastation was at a doctor's residence [*Bradley House (2020 southern end of Church Litten Park)*] in the southern part of the town which received a direct hit. Hardly one brick of the large house remained on another, and unfortunately the doctor and a maid (Miss E. G. Draper) were killed. The doctor [*Dr. Arthur Arbuthnot Straton*] had been in practice in the town for some 25 years. His devotion to his noble calling, his outstanding skill, and unfailing kindness and sympathy had won the affectionate esteem of a very large number of residents in the district who were his grateful patients. He had also done splendid work as one of the consulting staff of the County Hospital. His death is an irreparable loss to the community. His wife was rescued from the ruins with serious injuries. Their only son, an Army officer, has been missing since Dunkirk.

The damage to the Guildhall by blast and flying debris from the wrecked shops on the other side of the street was extensive. Practically every window was broken and the flying glass scarred the furniture and walls in the Court-room. Coping stones on the roof were dislodged, ceilings and plaster brought down, and the four faces of the clock in the tower smashed. Fortunately the valuable pictures in the Council-chamber escaped serious damage.

No words of praise can do adequate justice in commending the magnificent work of the Civil Defence Services and their military helpers who came so readily to their assistance, and of those responsible for the treatment of the injured and the comfort and feeding of the homeless and distressed. A special word of appreciation must be given to the W.V.S. and Church Army, whose vans and other means of providing tea and other refreshments for all in need, workers and sufferers alike, were a bright gleam in a very sad picture. Once more these women voluntary workers showed a wonderful spirit of unselfishness, pluck, and unremitting concern for the unfortunate, and these qualities were also exhibited by the public generally, who were courageous and cheerful in a very trying ordeal. The Mayor, his colleagues on the Town Council, the Town Clerk, Borough Surveyor, other borough officials, police, and all with special duties to perform in such an emergency, carried them out with admirable coolness and splendid efficiency. Repair squads were at work making damaged houses habitable, and other parties of men were busy clearing the streets of broken glass and other debris, in a remarkably short time. In fact the whole of the preliminary arrangements for

meeting such an emergency worked smoothly and well in spite of the fact that in some instances alternative centres of operation had to be found.

Mr. Humphries, of Ryde, the driver of a train approaching the town, showed admirable good sense and presence of mind. Seeing the enemy machines heading towards the town, he pulled up his train in a tunnel until the danger had passed.

On their way back, near a village on the coast, the raiders fired cannon shells at a herd of cows. Five were hit and two were so badly injured that they had to be destroyed.

ABLITT, Harold Frank, Clarence Road, buried Newport Cemetery
ABRAHAM, Donald Edwin, 13 Clarence Road, buried Carisbrooke Cemetery
BURT, Frederick Cecil, Fire Guard Service, injured Morey's Timber yard, buried Carisbrooke Cemetery
BUTLER, Amy, 24 Chapel Street, buried Newport Cemetery
DRAPER, Elizabeth Grace, Bradley Lodge, Medina Avenue, buried St Paul's Cemetery
DUDLEY, Valerie Lilian, 14 Clarence Road, buried Newport Cemetery
DUDLEY, Violet Lily, 14 Clarence Road, buried Newport Cemetery
FLUX, Julia Mary, 24 Chapel Street, buried Newport Cemetery
MITCHELL, Harold, Fire Guard Service, died from injuries received 25 Chapel Street, buried Carisbrooke Cemetery
MUNDELL, Celia Anne, Clarence Road, buried Newport Cemetery
MUNDELL, William Robert, Clarence Road, buried Newport Cemetery
MURPHY, Eleanor Adelaide, 23 Chapel Street, buried Newport Cemetery
PALMER, Eva Mary, 22 Chapel Street, buried Carisbrooke Cemetery
RACKETT, Alfred, died 25 September 1943 from injuries sustained during enemy air raid in April, buried Carisbrooke Cemetery (finally recognised as a victim of enemy action, January 2024)
SHEPARD, Edward Harold Cecil, Fire Guard Service, injured Morey's Timber yard, buried Carisbrooke Cemetery

CARLTON, Nellie, died at 25 Chapel Street, buried Maidstone¹
CARLTON, LAC RAF Norman Douglas, died at 25 Chapel Street, buried Maidstone¹
O'DONNELL, William Thomas, killed Morey's Timber yard, Funeral at Portsmouth¹
STRATON, Dr. Arthur Arbuthnot, remains were cremated¹
TREVETT, Edward James, died from injuries received Terrace Road, buried Porchfield Burial Ground
TULLEY, Ernest Harry, aged 18, died Morey's Timber yard, buried St Olave's church, Gatcombe

¹ Isle of Wight County Press, 17 April 1943, page 7