

CHORLEY & DISTRICT IN WORLD WAR TWO



LOCAL AIR RAIDS

By Stuart A. Clewlow, FRHistS

ADLINGTON

On October 4th, 1940, H.E. (High Explosive) bombs fell on land off Bolton Road, between Babylon Lane and Ashfield Road. It demolished the old Smithy that stood by the Elephant & Castle Pub on Bolton Road.



Above and below: Then and Now (Nov. 2006)
The old Smithy circa. 1900, and St. Joseph`s Church. (S.A. Clewlow)



Adlington received attention again on October 19th, 1940 when two bombs damaged four houses in Church Street, one being the surgery of Dr. Jack. He and his family took shelter in the cellar and following the explosion, they became trapped there. Although uninjured they were very shaken by the incident. The building later had to be demolished, and was replaced with what was Adlington Police Station. More bad luck followed for the Doctor. After his surgery was damaged and later demolished, he set up in an empty shop near the White Bear Pub. However, when an unexploded bomb from a later raid was detonated by bomb disposal experts in November 1940, the blast destroyed his temporary establishment.



Above: Adlington Police Station, site of the Doctors, 2006. (S.A. Clewlow)

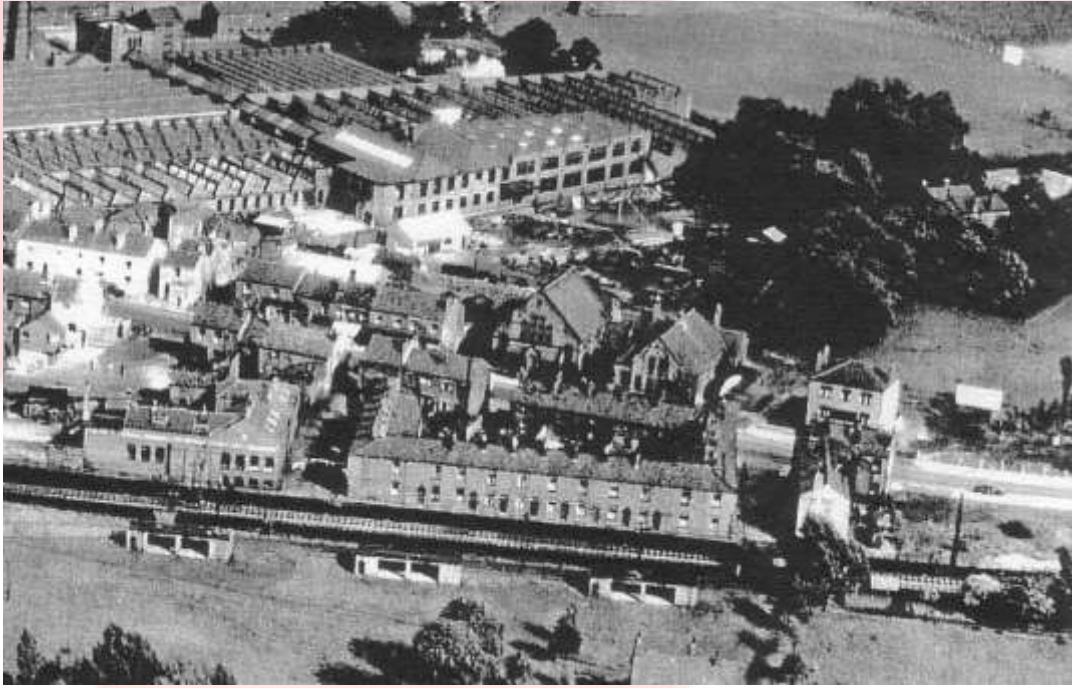
During the October raids, a bomb blast also severely damaged Market Street Methodist Church. It was not possible to repair the damage until after the war and the Church only re-opened on April 17th, 1948. (At the time of writing this the two adjoining Church buildings had become converted for business/retail purposes.) After the raid, subsequent marriages and funeral services took place in the Methodist Sunday School building next door. During this attack, Mr and Mrs Holt, who lived in a house near the Church, lost everything. They then moved into No.29 Westhoughton Road, Adlington.



Above: Market Street, Adlington c.1900.
The large three storey building was the Plough Inn, which is now the site of Adlington South Business Park. (S.A. Clewlow)

The people of Adlington had to pull together and help each other out. Mr. Harry Naylor, MM and his wife for instance, were bombed out of their home. They moved in with his relative Mr. Arthur Harper and his wife in Chapel Street, Adlington, before being able to later buy a new house in Euxton. Mr. Naylor was also a member of the family that owned and ran the Plough Inn, Adlington.

Adlington was again a target for the Luftwaffe on November 29th, 1940, falling victim to a landmine raid; the raid taking place on a frosty Thursday night at around 2330 hours. One landmine, believed to be a 1000lb type, and exploded, fell in a garden near Gerrards Mill (later becoming the site of Fairport) on Market Street. The mill and a row of cottages nearby, next to the Plough Inn, sustained considerable damage. The Plough Inn itself was damaged and lost its outside staircase. The Plough Inn and out buildings were demolished in 1970.



Above: An aerial view of the area of Adlington bombed on 29th November 1940. The former Methodist Church is in the centre. (Crown Copyright)

The second landmine fell much nearer to the Plough Inn but failed to detonate. As a result all the houses within a 200 yard radius had to be evacuated by the Air Raid Wardens and local Police. Many of the evacuees spent the next couple of nights sheltering in Christ Church School (now Adlington Community Centre, below) off Railway Road. The evacuees spent their nights sleeping on straw with refreshments organised by the ladies of the WVS (Women's Voluntary Service).





Above: Site near where one landmine fell. Now a car park, 2008. (S.A. Clewlow)

On the Friday morning a Naval Bomb disposal expert assessed the site of the unexploded landmine and after removing the outer casing using an acidic solution, deemed the mine safe for detonation. After people were evacuated and traffic diverted, the landmine was officially detonated on the Saturday at midday. It is believed that the detonation may have taken place a little earlier than initially planned as the bomb had started ticking.

The explosion following the detonation was reported as more intense than had been expected and although under control, many neighbouring properties sustained damage. It was later thought that although the outer casing of the landmine was removed, there may have been an inner casing. Many people felt it caused more damage than the landmine that exploded in the raid.

Subsequently, the row of cottages by the Plough Inn had to be demolished. In all 86 houses were severely damaged, 124 slightly damaged and 82 had to be evacuated. One of the main problems caused to surrounding houses by the explosion, other than shattered windows, and blown off roof tiles was that doorframes became twisted and doors would not completely shut too. Amazingly, during the raids on Adlington in 1940, no one was killed and injuries were slight.

Fortunately, Adlington was well prepared. The Head Warden of Adlington ARP was Mr. William Arrowsmith. In October 1939, ARP Warden Mr. Leonard Billington, passed the Lancashire Constabulary examination in dealing with high explosives and incendiary bombs.

In addition to the ARP service, Adlington could also boast a Home Guard Section, Ambulance Service and even Fire Brigade. The Home Guard H.Q. was the St. Paul's Church old wooden club room and they used the Church tower as an observation post.



Above: St. Paul's Church, Adlington- November 2006. (S.A. Clewlow)

CROSTON AND BRETHERTON

There was another bombing raid, this time to the north east region of the borough. Three bombs fell in and around Croston. Fortunately, even this rural area was prepared for such attacks. Anderson shelters had been provided and there was an air raid siren installed on top of the Police Station.



Above: The former Police Station at Croston, 2007. The building has now been refurbished and developed into apartments. (S.A. Clewlow)

One of the bombs fell to the rear of Jubilee Mill, Moor Road (now a housing estate). Sadly, the night watchman was killed. One bomb landed near the road through Bretherton and the other bomb fell in a field between the two villages.

CHORLEY

In 1941, nearby Bolton was also bombed. They were not as fortunate as Chorley and suffered over two dozen casualties.

The most serious raid against Chorley was on 19th March 1941. A payload of seven bombs fell on the Brooke Street and Eaves Lane area. A direct hit occurred at the house (No.102 Brooke Street) of Mr John William & Mrs Bessie Worthington and their two daughters. One of the daughters had only a few months prior, married Anti-Aircraft Gunner J. Simmons who was away on active service at the time. All of their wedding presents were lost in the explosion. At the time, a relative, Mary Wilkinson was staying with the family and became trapped in debris when the explosion collapsed the seven year old house.

Mrs. Worthington managed to free herself from the rubble and search for assistance. Nearby Fire Watchers and Wardens rushed to the scene to dig out and rescue Mr. Worthington and Miss Wilkinson. Tragically, Miss Wilkinson later had to have a leg amputated due to burns from an electric fire suffered while trapped in the cellar. Nothing remained to bare evidence that a house once stood there. It was reduced to a pile of bricks, timber and the family possessions. During the attack, the two sisters were away from home at a nearby Cinema and were completely unaware that their house or even neighbourhood had been devastated.

On the other side of the street, the blast from the same bomb damaged the front of a block of six flats and also wrecked two houses and a combined shop-house. The damage was increased to those properties due to another bomb falling directly behind them at the same time. One of the worst hit of these properties (No.97 Brooke Street) was that owned by Mr James Henry & Mrs Beatrice Wigglesworth. Mr. Wigglesworth was knocked down and his leg broken when the fireplace collapsed on him.

No.93 Brooke Street, belonging to Mr Edward and Mrs Amelia Rostron was also badly damaged by this explosion.



Above: Damage on Brooke Street after the raid. (Mr. George Birtill)



Above: The site where No.97 Brooke Street once stood, 2008.
The gable end house is No.93, what was Mr.Rostrons. (S.A. Clewlow)



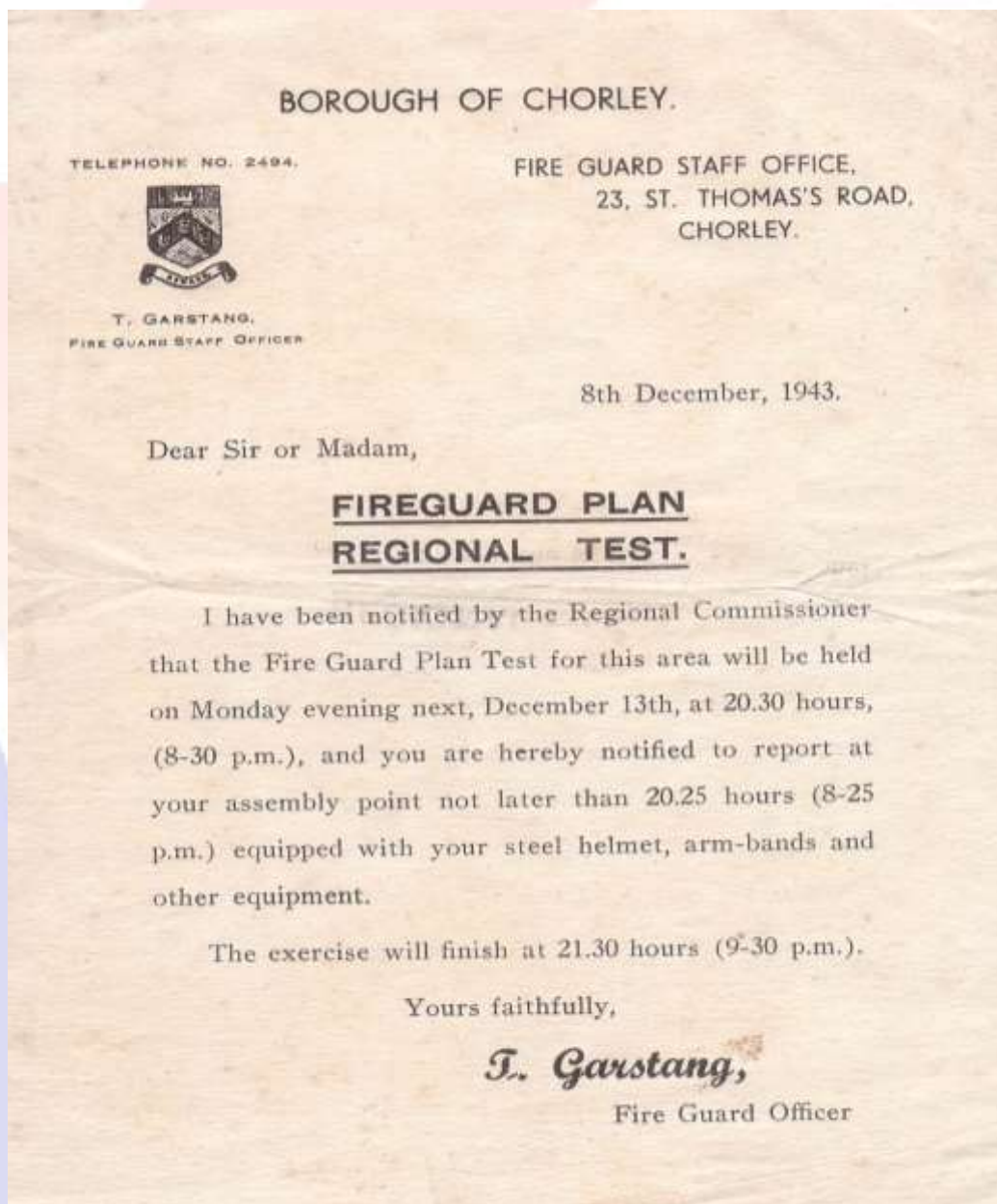
Above: The gable end house is No.106 Brooke Street,2008. To the right is where No.102, the Worthington house used to stand. (S.A. Clewlow)

Another explosion damaged a newly built bungalow. The occupants suffered shock but this could have been a lot worse. It was believed that the bomb fell by the front door into a pile of loose soil and building debris, which absorbed a lot of the force of the explosion.



Above: Damage on Brooke Street. (Mr. George Birtill)

Two bombs landed on allotments where Sacred Heart Infant School now stands, shattering green houses and spoiling crops of tomatoes. Another two fell amongst a group of brick-built surface air raid shelters; hitting two of them and causing one of them to collapse. By good fortune the shelters were empty of residents at the time. They had not been popular amongst residents as due to their positioning and construction they were prone to damp and flooding. Similarly to the Adlington raid, one of the bombs failed to explode. It landed in a builders yard belonging to J.W. Lee & Co. Ltd on Yarrow Road, and had to be attended to later by a Bomb Disposal squad.



Above: Chorley practised drills in case of an enemy raid. (S.A. Clewlow)

People of the area were later commended in the *Chorley Guardian* for the calm and efficient way in which they endured the attack. Neighbours pulled together and sourced food and water in which to aid those who were in shock, injured or forced out of their homes. Amazingly, though there were injuries, no one was killed by the Chorley attack.

In 1941 bombs actually fell on Chorley itself. During one enemy attack, bombs fell in the fields by the side of Chorley Cemetery on Southport Road, and the area on which Woodlands Education centre now stands. Criticism followed as the air raid siren hadn't sounded prior to the attack. It was just fortunate that the bombs did not land anywhere of significance.

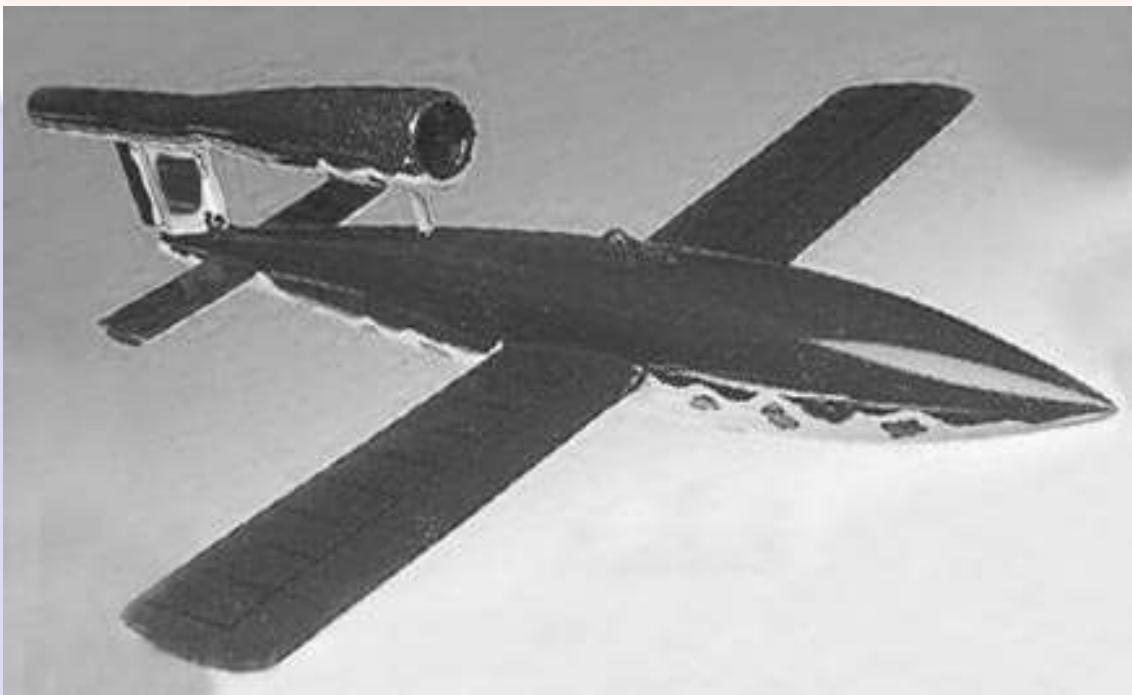


Below: Looking towards the cemetery from the field where the bomb landed, off Southport Road, 2007. (S.A. Clewlow)

BRINDLE

Chorley Borough also fell victim to an attack by Hitler's secret weapon, the Fiesler Fi 103 / V-1 Flying Bomb- the 'Buzz-bomb' or 'Doodlebug'. The Germans had been developing rocket technology and the effort resulted in the V-2 rocket, and V-1 flying bomb. The use of these weapons in 1944 was all part of a last ditch effort by the Germans to destroy major areas of Britain. So desperate was their need to disrupt the supplies to the ever-advancing allies through Europe, that they launched the unguided, destructive rockets at civilian areas, in a misguided belief it was a winning strategy.

As the Germans were pushed back further east across Europe, they needed to develop further methods of being able to carry out attacks directly on to Britain. One such concept was to increase the range of the flying bomb by attaching it to a Piloted Bomber aeroplane, the Heinkel He 111 H-22. When the bomber was within a suitable range of a target, the 'Doodlebug' was released. It would continue, unguided towards a target. Once it ran out of fuel, it would fall to earth, carrying its explosive charges. At this stage of the war, anything was deemed a suitable target.



Above: The 'Doodlebug'. (S.A. Clewlow)

One such raid occurred in the early hours of 24th December 1944. Forty five Heinkel Bombers from Luftwaffe Unit KG53, complete with attached `doodlebugs`, flew towards Manchester. Between Skegness and Mablethorpe, the bombs were released. 31 crossed the eastern English coast, and half of these fell within twenty miles of Manchester. However, Lancashire suffered the brunt of the damage, with eight of the missiles falling within its boundary.

The first missile to fall, did so at 0528 hours and came down and exploded at Brindle, Chorley. The `doodlebug` had made a spiralling turn in its descent and came down onto a hen coop in an area within Gregson Lane, the Railway level crossing, Stonefield Cottages and Hewn Gate Farm. Only traces of straw and feathers of the birds could be found around a 40ft crater. The signal box by the railway crossing didn't escape the force of the blast either. The entire glass frontage was blown in and the occupant was lucky to survive unscathed. It was reported that he had left the building to tend to a call of nature the moment the bomb exploded.



Above: The railway crossing at Brindle, 2007. (S.A. Clewlow)

In all two cottages were wrecked, two farms seriously damaged, and minor damage to 112 houses, 2 mills, 2 pubs, a chapel and a railway signal box. When Stonefield cottages were struck, three adults and a child were fortunate to escape without serious injury. Such was the devastation, Civil Defence Personnel who arrived on the scene to investigate, thought that two bombs had exploded.

Farm worker Joseph Bolton, who was preparing to go to work, and his wife were in one of the cottages when the explosion occurred. The house fell down around them and also trapped their daughter in her bed. After freeing his trapped leg from the debris, Mr. Bolton was able to free his family. They all suffered minor injuries and even their cat Trixie was so scared that she didn't return home until the next day. Next door to them was Mrs A. Hodgson who lived alone. She too became trapped in her house but managed to free herself and also escaped uninjured but shaken up.



Above: Brindle was lucky compared to other areas struck by V-1's that day.

Where Stonefield Cottages once stood, there is now an agricultural store and workshop. The signal box has also since been demolished. Due to post-war tipping in the forty foot crater and continuous agricultural work, there is no visible sign of the impact crater of the `doodlebug` .

It was also reported (by the late George Birtill, OBE, JP, who was at the scene of the incident) that the missile must have also contained leaflets. The pieces of German propaganda littered the bomb site and surrounding area. They comprised of alternate versions of the battlefield events whilst in truth the situation in Europe was that Germany was being pushed back on all fronts towards Berlin. Due to their sensitive nature, all of these leaflets were gathered up and confiscated by the authorities.

Although a devastating event, Brindle escaped lightly during the raid. The other V-1`s launched that day against Manchester, led to the deaths of at least 42 people; leaving at least a further 109 people injured and hundreds of buildings damaged.

A field study by members of the Lancashire Aircraft Investigation Team in 2004 was conducted to record the physical impact still evident of the incident. The study revealed that a stream following the uneven contours of the field, which was believed to be the infilled crater, was in fact the remains of a small stone quarry. The actual 'doodlebug' crater was in fact not far from this spot and a survey with metal detectors pinpointed the crash site. Small fragments of aluminium alloy and steel were found lying in natural clay and showed signs of stress from a great force. These were believed to be fragments from the bomb casing. The largest section retrieved was a couple of feet in length and was believed to be made of aluminium. For a time, this particular piece was on display at the now closed RAF Millom Museum in Cumbria.

OTHER INCIDENTS

Part of a precaution initiative for Chorley was an ARP lookout built on the roof of Chorley Town Hall and there was even the elaborate installation of a Civil and Army `fire and lights` decoy site located at Belmont; this was designed in such a way as to distract any enemy activity aimed towards the Royal Ordnance Factory in Euxton which would of course, have been thrown under the cover of darkness if an attack was suspected.



Above: Chief ARP Warden John Gibson, Aspull and Haigh. (S.A. Clewlow)

During the war bombs also fell at: The Bobbin Mill, off Dawbers Lane, Euxton, Denham Hall Farm in Brindle, Welch Whittle Colliery near Coppull and incendiaries fell over Coppull.



Above: The tail fin of one of the incendiaries that fell on Coppull. (S.A. Clewlow)

Incendiaries also fell around Chorley Hospital, Euxton Lane and contrary to popular belief a number of them did fall within the perimeter of ROF Chorley.

For the number of bombs and incendiaries that fell within Chorley & District, the area was fortunate to not incur more damage or casualties. The raids brought the reality of the war close to home but strengthened the resolve of the people and helped to encourage support for the Armed Forces and uniformed services.

Presented by Local Historian and Author
Stuart A. Clewlow, FRHistS

Some of my first public displays of local history and military artefacts was back in 1995 to commemorate the 50th Anniversaries of VE Day and VJ Day. Since then I have been researching and collecting information and artefacts of local importance and sharing it across our Borough, whether that is in schools, community centres, public events and temporary exhibitions, such as the popular Chorley Remembers exhibition at Astley Hall Coach House.

My work has been rewarded with Civic Society Awards, Parish Council Awards and even an invitation to the Queen's Garden Party at Buckingham Palace. All that is extremely humbling but I like to see it as being a measure of just how interested and passionate we all are in our heritage.

A number of events and displays were planned to acknowledge the 75th anniversaries of VE Day and VJ Day in 2020 but these were affected due to the Coronavirus issues. Hopefully this brief publication will help raise awareness of our local involvement during the war and go a small way towards acknowledging the anniversaries.

Feel free to contact me if you can add any information to anything mentioned or if you would like to ask any specific questions about the subject.

My local history books include:

The Bolton to Blackpool Dance Trains
The Chorley & District Spitfire
HMS 'Ursula' - The Chorley & District Submarine
In Memoriam - Military Memorials and Graves (Borough of Chorley)
Euxton CE Primary School- Golden Jubilee
Euxton - Then & Now
Euxton Remembers
"Pals on Parade" (WW1 Brass music CD with Leyland Band)
ROF Chorley: 80th Anniversary

Please join, enjoy and share my Facebook groups:

Euxton Then & Now ROF Chorley (Buckshaw Village)
Chorley & District in World War Two



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