

Buckinghamshire in World War Two

Bombs over Buckinghamshire

Bombs and crashed aircraft

The fires of the London blitz could be seen as far away as Waddesdon, but happily Buckinghamshire escaped relatively unscathed. A comparison of the figures of people who died in the Blitz makes this clear:

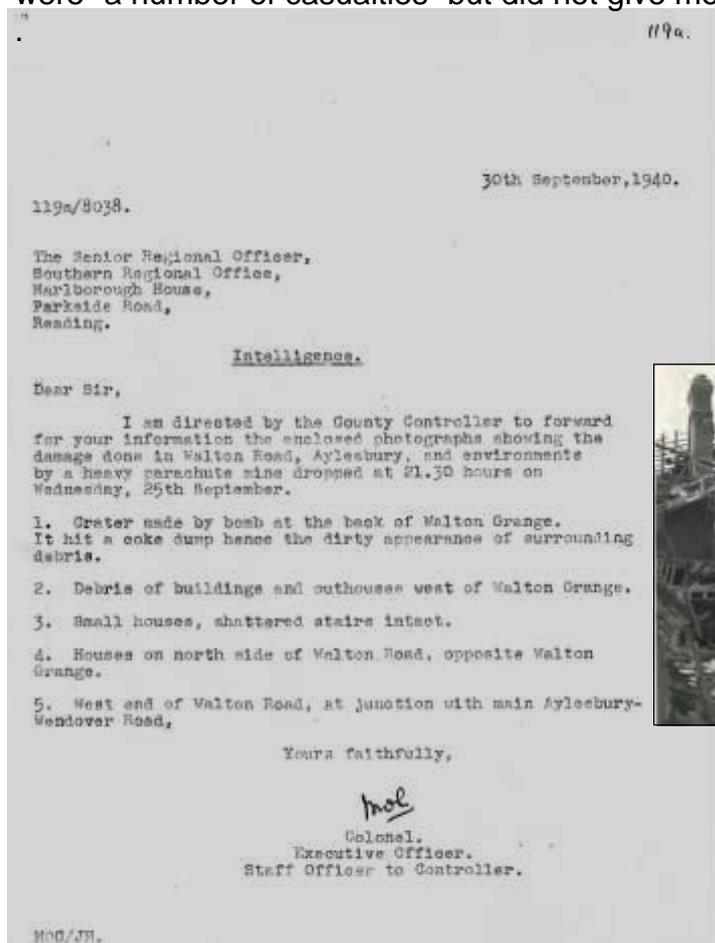
People killed during the period of the Blitz, 26 June – 31 December 1940:

London 23000
Buckinghamshire 33

Nonetheless, around 1700 high explosive bombs and 4200 incendiaries were dropped within the county in this period, chiefly in the south and east, and 200 houses were destroyed or seriously damaged. After 1940 the number of incidents diminished but bombs continued to be dropped from time to time in various parts of the county and, beginning in June 1944, 27 V1 flying bombs landed in Bucks.

Bomb in Aylesbury

A land mine was dropped on the night of 25th September 1940 and landed in Walton Street, Aylesbury, causing considerable damage. The initial report stated that there were "a number of casualties" but did not give more details.



A letter about the bomb damage was sent to the regional officer by Colonel M O Clarke, the ARP chief officer for the county. It shows that the land mine fell on a coal store at the back of Walton Grange and not Walton Pond as is commonly believed. (ref AR 59/90/2/2)



Photograph of the damage
(ref D/HWV 131)

Other Incidents

Not all bombs dropped exploded immediately. The following report records a lucky escape by people in Great Missenden High Street.

(from report 27/9/40 from AR 59/90 2/2)

Report of A.R.P. Officer on Air Raid Activity
For the period 17th September to 27th September,
1940.

At 01.15 on the same night a report was received from the Missenden Report Centre that two high explosive bombs had been dropped at Great Missenden. A tenant of a row of cottages at the rear of Messrs. Wright's premises in Missenden High Street, hearing the two high explosive bombs, went out to see if his rabbits and ferrets were alright. It appears that in the darkness he stumbled and on investigation found that there was a hole in his garden with which he was not familiar. He immediately reported this and suspicion was immediately aroused that an unexploded bomb had fallen within about 6 feet of the cottage. Orders were given to evacuate the cottages and at 03.21 the bomb exploded – only a few minutes after the evacuation of the cottages had been completed. The explosion more or less completely wrecked one end cottage but little damage was done to the other two cottages. The bomb caused a crater about 30 feet in diameter and 18 feet deep. Debris which fell following the explosion caused damage to roofs in the vicinity, otherwise the effect was more or less harmless, with the exception that the Missenden siren was put out of action, but this was reported to Mr. Hammond at Beaconsfield and the siren was in working order by about 9 o'clock the same morning. The other two bombs mentioned previously were of the instantaneous type, one of which fell in the allotments, about 20 yards North of the railway embankment, and the other fell in a field at the rear of the school at the bottom of Frith Hill, Great Missenden. The bomb which fell North of the railway caused damage to the electric power cables, and telephone wires and roofs of houses in Whitefields Lane were, in some cases, rather badly damaged. A bay window in one of these houses was also badly damaged. Glass of other windows was, of course, shattered. Splinters from the bomb which fell at the rear of the school injured a horse and the animal had to be destroyed. The blast from this bomb also caused a considerable amount of damage to glass of windows in the Missenden High Street. The prompt action taken by the Wardens in particular and other persons undoubtedly saved casualties.

There were casualties too arising out of allied forces incidents, particularly towards the end of the war when both the American air force and the RAF were launching offensives from Britain. Figures from the Bucks Civil Defence Committee revealed that between 23 Feb and 3 June 1944 only 6 enemy bombs landed in Bucks but 72 allied bombs were dropped in accidents and 26 allied aircraft crashed within the county.

The following report gives details of a plane crash at Westcott near Waddesdon in 1944. On this occasion the aircrew managed to escape.

(Westcott Bomb incident, 1944 from AR 59/90/2/5)

06.00	To Region	Situation Report. Lancaster bomber crashed, causing few casualties and blast damage. N.F.S. and C.D. services in attendance. Incident well in hand. 1 R.A.F. Officer killed, 2 civilians slightly injured, Bicester Road blocked.
07.20	From Area 4	13 people homeless and 4 more will probably have to be evacuated. Can be accommodated locally.
08.03	From Police	Details of crash. Crew of 7 escaped uninjured, plane caught fire and bombs exploded killing Flt.Lt. Bulmer of Westcott standing on the road 150 yds away, where he stopped a jeep driven by a U.S. soldier, also slightly injured. Property damaged. 13 persons homeless. Armaments Officer, Westcott, making reconnaissance for U.X.Bs.

Air Raid Precautions

Local schemes of defence were set up by county and district councils. The ARP as they were known concentrated on preparing and training the general public, air raid warning sirens, anti-gas measures, air raid shelters and first aid posts. They enforced the blackout and worked closely with the auxiliary fire service. ARP wardens were among the first on the scene when the bombs fell and had to report details of the damage to the control headquarters in Aylesbury so that the WVS and Rescue parties could be mobilised and the District Valuer briefed to go and evaluate the damage.



Rescue Party. Individual villages had their own Rescue parties which would be called upon to help clear debris and help look for survivors at a bomb site. When a flying bomb hit and demolished a house in Chestnut Lane, Chesham Bois in July 1944, rescue parties came from Amersham, Great Missenden and Chesham to help clear the



Sandbags were used to help soften the blast and minimise damage. This photograph shows sandbags outside the Fire Station at High Wycombe (pHigh Wycombe 491)

Gas

A major fear at the outbreak of war was of gas attacks. Everyone, even babies, was issued with a gas mask and demonstrations of how to use them were given in schools and elsewhere.

In this photograph Lola Richards of Chesham Bois tries on her gas mask
[Photograph by permission of owner]

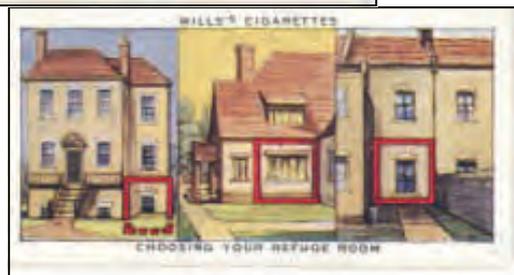
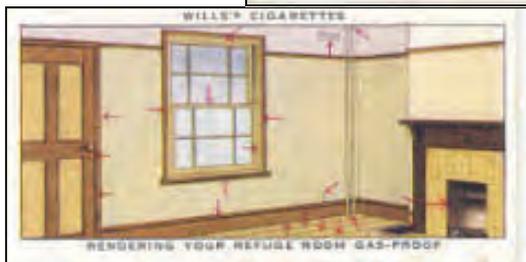
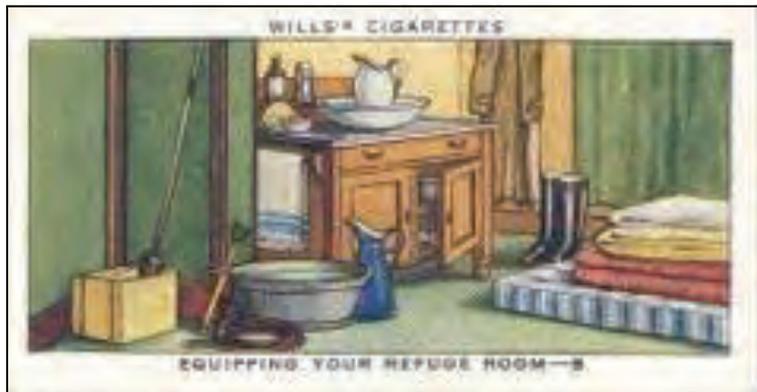


Air Raid shelters.

The provision of public air raid shelters in Bucks was very variable and at the decision of the individual district councils. Thus Amersham Rural District Council decided there was no call for public air raid shelters since there was no congestion of population in the area and it was not until October 1940 that their first public shelter to accommodate 50 people was built in Sycamore Road. Even then it was intended for shoppers caught in an air raid rather than an overnight shelter. By contrast Chesham UDC had three public Air Raid shelters planned in July 1940 (before the Blitz) and Slough UDC had no less than 8 in Slough itself able to accommodate over 800 people between them. It seems clear that people were expected to make their own arrangements for protection in the event of an air raid. From the outbreak of war people were encouraged to set aside a room or even build a refuge room in their house. In more populated areas or areas at greater risk of being bombed the district councils were empowered to provide building materials at little or no cost and to give advice about building domestic shelters. The building of Anderson shelters in a garden was encouraged and later the Morrison shelter – neatly converting a table into a shelter indoors – was widely advertised. A handbook “Your Home as an Air Raid Shelter” was available from the Post Office.



This document shows the provision and cost of public air raid shelters in and around Wolverton. [ref AR 177/81 no.261]



Cigarette cards describing refuge rooms and suggesting how they should be prepared (D113/45)

The WVS

Although the Rescue parties and Ambulance parties did the vital work of rescuing injured people and clearing bomb sites to make them safe, the very practical role of supplying blankets and clothes, food and hot drinks, usually fell to the Women's Voluntary Service. Led by Lady Courtown, the County Organiser for Bucks, these ladies could be called out at any time day or night and would man mobile canteens or get the use of a nearby hall to help both the homeless or traumatised victims and also provide much needed refreshment for the toiling rescue workers.



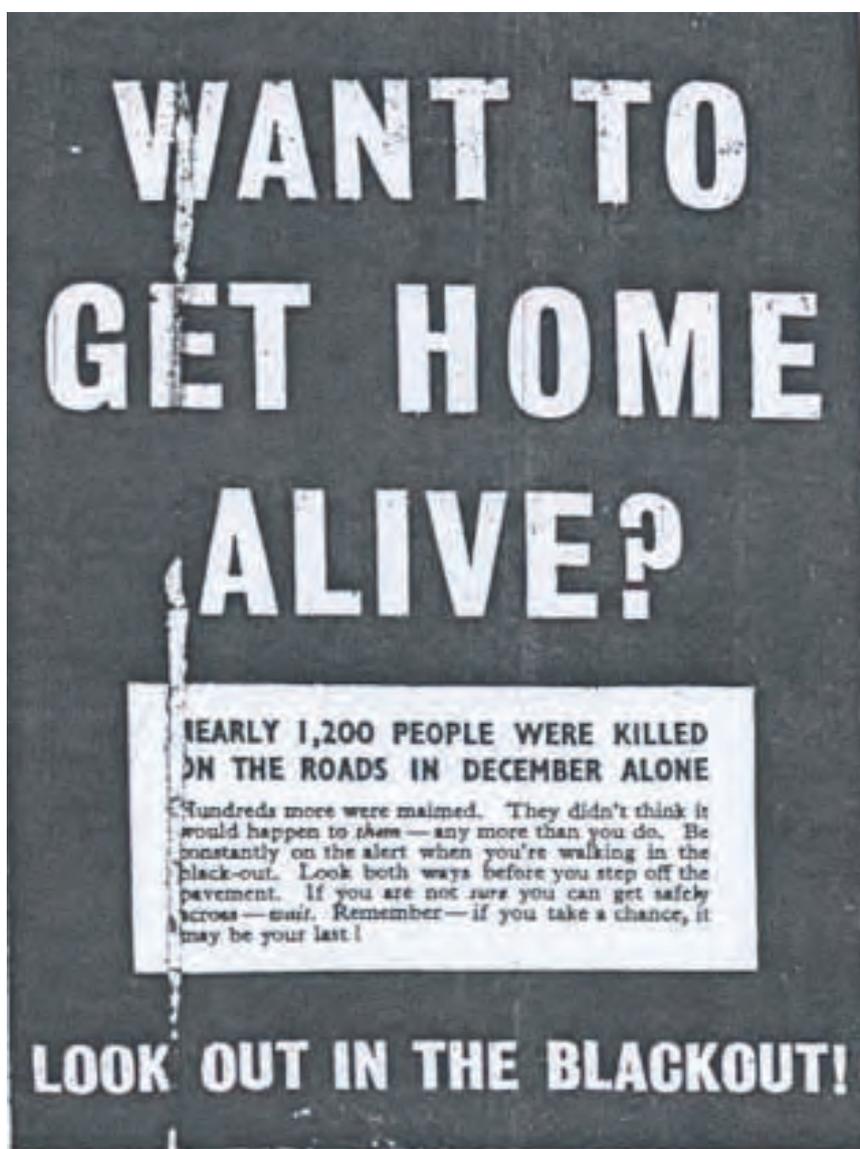
A typical mobile canteen; this is a picture of one used in London (D/X 814/8/1)



A WVS field kitchen preparing meals at Long Crendon, 1941. This one was being used for the Home Guard. (phLong Crendon254)

The Blackout

Warnings and reminders about the blackout were put in local newspapers. This one is taken from the Bucks Herald.



During the early part of the war much of the business of the local courts was taken up with blackout offences. These are frequently recorded in the newspaper and show how seriously the blackout regulations were taken. This offence was recorded in the *Bucks Herald* 27 September 1940

Bucks Herald 27 September 1940

CANDLE IN BEDROOM

Percy George, 9, Hill Way, Amersham, was fined £1, the Magistrates saying they had taken into consideration his circumstances.

P.C. Dennis said light was showing from an unobscured candle in a side room at the defendant's house at 11.15pm. Thin curtain material was at the window, but there was a strip six inches wide which was completely unscreened. "I did not think it would show as the candle is not strong" was the defendant's explanation.

What happened when a bomb fell?

On Sunday 4th July 1944 a V1 bomb landed on the house Red Leys in Chestnut Lane, Chesham Bois. Red Leys was the home of Sir Arthur Scott, a distinguished veteran of the Boer War and World War 1. A detailed report of the incident and the action that was taken to rescue people can be found at the end of this section. This is the official report by the District Engineer reveals just how many different people were involved in clearing just this one site and the extent of the damage that a single bomb caused.

Note the different people involved in clearing the site and how long it took: they were not finished until 7pm.

(ref AR 59/90)

REPORT ON FLX BOMB INCIDENT – SUNDAY 2ND JULY 1944

CHESTNUT LANE, junction PARKFIELD AVENUE

CHESHAM BOIS

10.54 Fly Bomb explosion.

10.55 “Alert”. (Siren sounds).

I immediately proceeded to Area Control, Chesham, the first report arriving from Amersham Report Centre at -

11.04 which intimated that Fly Bomb had fallen at Chesham Bois P.O. – some casualties – no details. Incident Officer’s Post set up.

11.15 (approx.) – decided to leave Control Centre for site, and was accompanied by Mr. Garrett Pegge.

On arriving at Chesham Bois was directed Chestnut Lane, where I contacted –

INCIDENT OFFICER, (Sgt Biggs) who gave a very concise report of the state of the Incident.

He reported Rescue Personnel on site at the present time, rescuing a trapped casualty – further parties from Missenden and Chesham having been sent for.

He advised me that Sgt. Brown was on the site.

On arriving at the actual scene, I saw the completely collapsed building as a heap of debris, and about 200 people (Wardens, N.F.S., Military, Cadets & Rescue Personnel) working on the perimeter of it.

I could not at first contact Sgt. Brown, but after a quick survey instructed a Rescue Party Leader to take charge of one section of the perimeter where N.F.S. and other personnel were working, apparently without a leader.

MR. LLOYD, who was on the site before me, was in attendance with the Rescue Party Personnel, working for the release of the trapped femal casualty, and near here I was able to contact **SGT. BROWN**.

(Lady Scott, I learned, had been sent to hospital as a conscious casualty prior to my arrival).

I proceeded with reconnaissance, and immediately tried to organise the eager workers into chains, there being about 10 chains of approx. 15 men in a chain.

Picks, shovels, debris baskets, etc., were being called for by various workers, but I insisted on hand picking and chain removal.

Certain personnel were smoking, and I gave orders that there should be no smoking, as I understood there was a possibility of a gas leak.

A GAS COMPANY REPRESENTATIVE arrived and was directed to cut off the gas.

11.50 (approx.). Mr.Lloyd and Rescue Party had exposed the trapped female casualty, so that the doctor could administer morphia, and very soon afterwards the casualty was recovered and despatched to hospital in a very serious condition.

Work was still proceeding on the whole of the debris perimeter and I contacted Sgt. Brown to confirm that there was, in fact, knowledge of other casualties.

There seemed to be some doubt about this, and I called for "Cease Work" and for everybody to remove away from the site so that 'listening' could be carried out at various points, and at the same time SGT. BROWN sent a message to the conscious casualty at the hospital to confirm that there was a further casualty, and if possible the probable location.

SUPT. NEAL did this errand personally, and soon returned, confirming that Lady Scott's husband was in the house, and was able to give approximate location. Mr.Lloyd, with a Rescue Party and a chain of workers for debris removal, proceeded to search in this part of the debris.

In about 7 MINUTES the male casualty was located, trapped in a pancake collapse.

Work on the remainder of the debris perimeter was NOT at this stage being proceeded with.

12.30 It took about 25 minutes to release the casualty, and he was dead.

The work was now halted and it was agreed to call the R.P. personnel aside in order to give them further instructions.

<u>Rescue Personnel present</u> :-	AMERSHAM	19
	MISSENDEN	10
	CHESHAM	<u>13</u>
		<u>42</u>

The Mobile Canteen was in attendance at the site, and arrangements had been made for feeding the workers who were to remain, at the Sycamore Forces Canteen.

12.40 CHESHAM personnel were dismissed, AMERSHAM were sent to 'feed' and GT. MISSENDEN were instructed to remain on site, collecting tools and equipment and removing any visible salvage.

13.05 I left the site.

14.00 On my return, Missenden Party had gone to lunch, and Amersham Rescue personnel were again on site, but contrary to my instructions they were again removing debris, intimating that the possibility of a further casualty had been raised, during the interval.

I contacted Sgt. Brown and Sgt. Biggs (I.C.) and they confirmed that all casualties in the demolished building had been accounted for.

I thereupon stopped work of further debris clearance, divided up the personnel into groups to assist the occupants of the adjoining properties to recover certain urgently required goods and chattels. MISSENDEN PARTY returned and assisted with this work.

15.30 (approx.). The Rescue personnel proceeded to cover with tarpaulins the roofs of damaged properties, and they continued with this work until -

19.00 when I gave them the dismissal, as they were extremely tired, and at this time numerous building contractors were proceeding with the roof covering work.

<u>CASUALTIES:</u>	<u>Total No. 20</u>	
	Dead	3
	Ambulance cases	5
	Sitting Car cases	10
	Walking cases	<u>2</u>
		<u>20</u>

<u>HOUSES:</u>		
	Completely demolished	1
	To be demolished	3
	Damaged (from slight to serious superficial)	300

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

The work of the Rescue Parties was considered efficient, and although the eager workers of the other services did certain excellent work, it was uncontrolled, and it would have been far better to have called for 'Cease Work' at an earlier time in order that a quick re-organisation of the labour could have been made.

From the casualty point of view, the Incident was cleared in a little more than 1½ hours from the time the Fly Bomb fell, and this is considered very satisfactory.

R. E. HARRIS

Area Engineer

Bishops House
BEACONSFIELD
6th July, 1944.

Suggested Lesson Plan: Role Play of the Chesham Bois Flying Bomb incident.

Below is a simple role play adapted from the incident at Chesham Bois in 1944 recorded in the Emergency Planning files and reproduced on the website in "Bombs over Buckinghamshire". The aim is to show how many people could be involved in the clearing up of just one incident and how people came from neighbouring districts to help out. It also makes the point that innocent civilians in leafy Buckinghamshire lost their lives too. A child or group of children could be picked as one of the characters and in turn read out their part in the clear-up following the bomb blast.

(1) SERGEANT BIGGS

My name is Sergeant Biggs and I was one of the first people at the bomb site. When Mr Harris arrived, I told him what had been happening. The Amersham Rescue Party was rescuing a trapped lady and Rescue Parties from Great Missenden and Chesham had been sent for.

(2) AMBULANCE DRIVER

I am the ambulance driver. I arrived quickly and saw about 17 people who were injured. Some were taken to hospital and others were treated on site, as they were not too badly hurt.

Sadly, a child later died in hospital.

(3) MR LLOYD

I am Mr Lloyd and I am the Amersham Rescue Party leader. We arrived at the scene and spent about 35 minutes trying to release a trapped lady. She was taken to the hospital but sadly she later died. Sergeant Brown will carry on...

(After Sergeant Brown)

My rescue party started searching where Lady Scott had said. At last we found the her husband buried in the rubble, but he was already dead.

(4) SERGEANT BROWN

My name is Sergeant Brown and I told people what to do. I told the men to "cease work", so that we could listen for sounds made by people still alive under the rubble. Lady Scott sent a message from the hospital to say that her husband was in the house. Mr Lloyd will carry on...

(5) AMERSHAM RESCUE PARTY

We are the Amersham Rescue Party and there are 19 of us. We helped rescue the trapped lady and later got into long chains to pass the rubble along from man to man.

(6)MR HARRIS

I am the Area Engineer. When I came the house was a pile of rubble and 200 men were hard at work. It was my job to write the official report of the incident. There were 20 people injured, with 3 people dead. The Scott's home was destroyed and 3 other houses had to be knocked down because of the explosion. In all 300 houses were damaged in some way.

(7) GAS COMPANY MAN

I am a gasman. The engineer, Mr Harris, called me out because he was worried that there might be a gas leak. I did as Mr Harris asked, and cut off the gas supply.

(8) CHESHAM RESCUE PARTY

We are the Chesham Rescue Party and there are 13 of us. We wanted to use picks and shovels to move the rubble, but Mr Harris insisted on us removing rubble by hand and using the chains. We worked until lunchtime, when we were sent home.

(9) GREAT MISSENDEN RESCUE PARTY

We are the Great Missenden Rescue Party and there are 10 of us. A couple of us were told off for smoking because of the gas leak. After lunch, we collected tools and equipment. We covered rooves of damaged houses and worked until 7 pm. By then we were very tired.

(10) WVS Ladies

We organised a Mobile Canteen, providing hot drinks and lunch for the workers.