

ST JOHN'S, REDHILL AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The following are extracts from the diary of Rev WAR Ball, then Vicar of St John's, and from the Surrey Mirror.

1944

Sunday February 6th

The Reigate W.J.A.C. and the cadets attached to the Queen's Royal Regt., Reigate Section attended our Youth Service at 3.45pm at their own request.

From the Surrey Mirror

FEBRUARY 25TH – VERGERESS FOR 24 YEARS: FUNERAL SERVICE AT ST JOHN'S – MISS BRIGDEN KNOWN AS "BESSIE".

From the Diary of Rev Ball

Sunday April 23rd St George's Day

The Rev T. Reid, Congregational Church, Redhill (minister) preached in St John's at 11am and the vicar visited the Redhill Congregational Church and conducted the whole service and preached at 11am. The Archbishops appointed this day as a "Day of Prayer".

Sunday May 21st

Being Empire Youth Sunday, The Redhill ATC and WJAC attended Mattins. The vicar preached the sermon.

Tuesday June 6th – later known as "D Day"

We invaded France near Cherbourg and Havre. In spite of short notice about 200 were present at an 8pm service of Intercession – and about a dozen at 12 noon.

Monday June 19th

At 2am a pilotless bomb dropped near the corner of Earlsbrook and St John's Roads. 10 people were killed and 17 were wounded and sent to East Surrey Hospital. About 40 houses were blasted out or had to be demolished later. Mr and Mrs Clarke and Mr and Mrs H Kent (prominent church workers) were among the many rendered homeless.

Those who were killed were:

- Sydney Harold Bish, aged 56, of 100 Earlsbrook Road
- Violet Bish, aged 54, of 100 Earlsbrook Road
- Sydney Harold Bish, aged 23, of 100 Earlsbrook Road
- Veronica Bish, aged 21, of 100 Earlsbrook Road
- Edward John Bath, aged 73, of 98 Earlsbrook Road
- Margaret Mary Demming, aged 50 of 98 Earlsbrook Road
- Christine May Tickner, aged 28, of 96 Earlsbrook Road
- Ronald Louis Tickner, Aged 5, of 96 Earlsbrook Road
- Clare Phillips, aged 8 months, of 96 Earlsbrook Road
- Winifred Moore, aged 51, of 94 Earlsbrook Road

And on June 27th Mary Ann Bath, aged 85, of 98 Earlsbrook Road, died in hospital.

From the Surrey Mirror

TEN PEOPLE KILLED BY PILOTLESS PLANE

HOUSES DAMAGED IN WEEKEND RAIDS

Ten people, including a baby, were killed and a number were injured in the early hours of Monday morning when a "pilotless plane" fell in Southern England. The plane, which is believed to have been hit by anti-aircraft fire, dropped at the back of houses in two roads which join. It demolished houses in both roads, damaged others, and other damage from blast splintered wood from doors and window frames and other debris.

Many of the victims were buried under their shattered homes and rescue parties and the Civil Defence workers generally, worked heroically to get the victims out and to render first aid to the injured. The police did particularly good work and were on long hours at a stretch. Mobile canteens catered to their needs as they toiled through out the day and also provided welcome refreshment in the early morning to the many homeless people whom the authorities had to deal with.

A lady was seriously injured and was very ill in hospital at the time of writing. (*This lady died from the shock – making 11 killed*). Others received injuries in various degrees sufficient to necessitate their removal to hospital. Other people received minor injuries such as cuts from broken glass, tile splinters, etc and received treatment at First Aid Posts.

Several people in damaged houses described to a reporter the eerie moments of suspense preceding the explosion saying that they heard the "pilotless plane" approaching and waited anxiously for it to pass over. Suddenly there was the sound of a gun firing and as the noise of it died away the listeners realised that they could no longer hear the throb of the plane's propulsion unit. "I wondered what had happened ", said one man, "and then I heard it swishing down. Just as I braced myself against an inside wall, there was a thud and almost simultaneously, a terrific explosion. Glass, ceiling plaster, dust, pictures and all sorts of things showered down on me and outside I could hear the crash of walls coming down and I knew that some other place had got the direct hit and not ours."

Not very far away buildings were damaged by another flying bomb in the small hours of Saturday. The machine was also thought to have been hit by gunfire and its drop ended in a tree where the blast of the explosion blew the tree top off the trunk.

This incident was, fortunately, unattended by injury beyond slight cuts caused by glass but three people had narrow escapes.

From the Diary of Rev Ball – 1944

The children's services at Hooley and Meadvale and the Sunday Schools had to be cancelled from June 25th onwards owing to the frequent alerts. The Earlswood Asylum service was also cancelled at this time, indefinitely.

July 2nd

Pilotless bomb incidents continue. Over 100 were present at the 8am celebration. At 10.45am an "alert" was sounded but a good congregation were present at 11am. The "all clear" was not sounded till after the late celebration.

July 18th

The children of our schools were evacuated on this day and went to South Wales. Owing to this our church choir lost most of the boys. Honor Oak School, Dalmain Road School and others evacuated to this area all had to leave.

July 21st

A very bad day owing to the many "pilotless bombs" flying and dropping in the area. One dropped in Reigate killing 3 people, another after hitting a balloon cable and being deflected, dropped in the Earlswood Asylum grounds. No loss of life but the blast damaged many windows and doors in the Asylum.

From the Surrey Mirror

July 23rd

AT THE CROSSROADS

The announcement by the Rev W.A.R. Ball on Sunday of his impending removal to his old diocese in Kent, was received with genuine expressions of regret by the members of the congregation.

October 1944

NEW VICAR OF ST JOHN'S REDHILL

The Rev John Bertram Phillips, at present Vicar of the Church of the Good Shepherd, Lee in the Diocese of Southwark, is to be vicar of St John's Redhill in succession to the Rev W.A.R. Ball who leaves at the end of this month to become Vicar of Faversham in Kent.