



Zeppelin raid on Valley 50 years ago this week. Rossendale Free Press Sept 1966

Bombs from a marauding German Zeppelin gave Valley folk their first taste of air raids just 50 years ago this week.

It was shortly before midnight on 25 September 1916 that the beat of its engines was first heard. Within a few minutes it was clearly visible against a starlit sky, flying in a north east to south west direction.

Apparently it became almost stationary for a time and then resumed its course. A few seconds afterwards the first bomb was dropped and, within five to eight minutes, unloaded another 12 to 15 missiles.

Wakened

The bombs were clearly visible as they fell and the resultant explosions wakened sleeping residents. Within a short space of time many hundreds of people were out in the darkened streets, some lingering there or on their doorsteps for an hour or more.

It was 2.45 am before conditions were officially declared as back to normal.

The raid is recalled in an extract from a diary of the late Mr J H Whipp, a native of Lumb and for many years under-manager of Grime Bridge Colliery.

Forwarded to us by M J Jones of Ash Bank Road, Werrington, Stoke-on-Trent, it reads: "Zepps came to Lumb. Flew over Co Factory five past 12. Fire bomb dropped near Field Top Farm. No damage. Next on to Rawtenstall dropping several bombs, blowing windows out but no lives lost. Ewood Bridge station blown up and rows of houses. Great damage done and also at Bolton and Bury and between 30 and 40 lives lost".

Just how accurate Mr Whipp's details were is difficult to determine as newspaper reports of the raid were necessarily vague in view of wartime censorship.

Futile

A "Free Press" comment was that a tour of the area afterwards showed how little the raid had been. Within a radius of about three miles some 10 to 12 bombs, some incendiary and some explosive, had been dropped and, in every case, they had fallen in soft earth.

Two were near farms, one near a house in its own grounds, and others on similarly open ground. Three at least failed to explode. Those which did explode made deep craters in fields five or six yards across and 10 to 12 feet deep.

One bomb fell 30 to 40 yards from the end of a row of cottages blowing out practically every window in the row, both upstairs and down.

Some doors were blown off and one window frame was torn out and hurled on to adjoining grassland. A bomb splinter went right through a 10in telegraph pole. What happened at Haslingden is recalled in the "Helmshore Historian" which states nine bombs were dropped on open land between Stonefold and Ewood Bridge. Five exploded, many windows were broken and there was slight damage to the railway line at Irwell Vale.

During the raid a woman appeared at the doorway of the Bridge End Hotel in a white apron and was immediately pushed back by onlookers, who feared the whiteness would be seen by the Zeppelin crew.

After the raid a farmer and his family were discovered sleeping in the middle of a field at Cockham. They considered it safer in the open and had dragged mattresses and bedding from home.

After passing over Helmshore the Zeppelin bombed Holcome where property was damaged and Bolton, where 19 were killed.

Press reports of the time speak of a hamlet of about 100 people subjected to incendiary attack. One such bomb crashed through a bedroom in which two little girls were sleeping. The girls, who escaped injury, were rescued from their blazing room by their father and the house was severely damaged.

At Holcombe

At a hillside village, presumably Holcombe, windows and doors of a row of cottages were blown in at the front and those at the back blown outwards.

In the same district one bomb fell at the rear of a mineral water works. Broken glass, bottles and corks littered the area, two lorries were smashed, windows broken and a joist from the works stood bolt upright in an adjacent field.

The church clock was badly damaged and the school was also damaged. The village post office had a lucky escape after a bomb fell nearby.