

HAILSHAM'S BOUNCING BOMB

By Richard Goldsmith

When the Society's Committee meetings have finished, it is inevitable that one or two of those present start to tell stories about an event that they remember from the past. After our meeting last September, Ernie Pitcher and Frank Stenhouse started a "friendly argument" about the bomb that bounced across Hailsham Town in February 1943.

We were talking about the poor state of repair of the old Cinema in George Street, and Ernie said that it was never the same after the bomb dropped. It had apparently suffered some blast damage but Frank thought that Ernie meant that the bomb had fallen on the building. "It fell on the Post Office.., left its fins in the yard and made a dirty great trench... and damaged the sorting office as well as the telephone exchange". Ernie agreed, but went on to say that the bomb then bounced all the way over the top of Cortlandt and George Street, and finally landed in Vicarage Road where the house called St Mary's is now.

Apparently a German bomber flew in low over the recreation ground and dropped one bomb in the garden of Clifton House in Western Road, "..It blew up the greenhouse..." said Ernie, then it released the bomb that dropped on the Post Office."I kept the fins in the store for years afterwards, but goodness knows what happened to them... we could have put them in the Heritage Centre!"



After it bounced across the town, the bomb exploded on some wooden huts that were used for the National Fire Service, and destroyed them. "If you look at the churchyard wall, you can still see where it was repaired afterwards, and the explosion blew all the windows out of the church and pretty nearly out of every shop in the town - certainly all those down the High Street". Frank recalled at this point that the Home Guard were called out "...to prevent looting from the shops... something unheard of in Hailsham!"

Fortunately, casualties were light, "...but young Dave Saunders was cut by a piece of flying glass...he was posted as a war casualty!!..." Mr. Saunders was able to confirm later, that before he was called up, as a young man of 17, he worked for Mr. Faulkner, the solicitor in North Street. He happened to be standing outside what is now the Posy Bowl flower shop, then Edwards's tailors' shop, when the window shattered. "I was treated for a cut on the back of my head by Doctor Stansfeld along with one or two other people with minor injuries, and the following day to my surprise, my name appeared on the official war casualty notice board outside Cortlandt!"

The bomb finished up in the garden of the original house called St Mary's, a 16th century property which was demolished in 1937. This stood on the corner of the High Street and Vicarage Road where the Television Rental shop and the Estate Agents are today. Apart from the NFS wooden huts and the post office, damage to other buildings was mainly superficial - broken windows, fallen ceilings, plaster and the like. But life had to go on at the sorting office and before the debris was cleared away, Frank and his colleagues ensured that the mail bags destined for London had a fair amount of plaster and brick dust mixed in with the letters "...just to show them that us country folk also had our share of the bombs!"

Ernie also thought that one of the ladies, who operated the telephone exchange, was commended for staying at her post, but Frank couldn't confirm this. Perhaps one of our readers can recall the incident and may be able to add some detail