

Unguided missile—1943

The extraordinary story of one bomb

With thanks to Lucy Buncombe (nee Borham) and the present owners of Wymering House, Sally and Denis Moul, for their help in putting this story together



A Focke Wulf FW190 fighter/ bomber

At about 10 pm on Saturday 15 May 1943 seven Focke Wulf FW190 fighter bombers approached Southwold. By the time they'd left they had killed 10 people and injured 21, leaving a trail of destruction across the town in the worst night of bombing the town experienced in the war.

One of the high-explosive bombs they released exploded on Bartholomew Green blowing out all the Victorian Stained Glass windows of the church and flattening many of the gravestones. More significantly, it completely destroyed Hollyhock Square (now replaced by Hope Cottages) where many of the worst casualties were.



Damage to the churchyard



Like many of the raids on Southwold it was really intended for Lowestoft. The bombers had come in over the N Sea but encountered barrage balloons at Lowestoft. So instead of dropping their bombs there, they carried on inland, making a wide sweep south and heading back towards the coast from the SW dropping their payload just before going home.



Part of Hollyhock Square before and after the bomb

That night at a few minutes to 10, the ARP warden came banging on the doors in the High Street, shouting for everyone to evacuate. Amazingly he had somehow got wind of the impending attack

and the direction in which it was headed.

One of the doors he banged on was that of Wymering House, the home and practice of Dr John Borham, his wife, Edith, and their baby daughter, Lucy, who was sound asleep in her nursery directly above the front door.

On hearing the warning, Edith instantly grabbed Lucy from her cot and ran out of the house heading north out of the town centre. They had only got as far as Anchor Villa a hundred or so yards away, when the attack started. Lucy believes she can just remember her mother throwing herself on top of her as the bombs fell.

There is a bizarre twist to this story. The high-explosive bomb that wreaked death and destruction just south of the Church actually touched ground on the Common not far from St Barnabas. It hit the ground a glancing blow without detonating then took off again towards the High Street



Arrow shows approximately where the bomb touched ground, asterisk where it finally exploded.

narrowly missing the corner of the Roman Catholic church.

It passed over the back garden of Wymering House and through a top-floor window, just nicking the sill and displacing some bricks as it went. The window opened on to a landing along whose full length the bomb travelled, destroying a rather finely carved balustrade as it went. At the end of the landing was a door which the bomb burst through into a storage room, directly above Lucy's nursery, where Edith kept her jars of home-made preserves. At the far end of the room the bomb exited the house via a front window, taking with it a large quantity of plum jam which

ended up in the middle of the High Street.

The bomb must have been still on an upward trajectory because it passed over the top of Sutherland House opposite without touching it before dropping down to Bartholomew Green where it finally exploded. It's an extraordinary sequence of hundred-to-one lucky chances, followed by a tragedy.

Seven people died in Hollyhock Square and many more were injured. Dr Borham himself rushed to the site of the explosion to give first aid to the casualties.



The top landing via which the bomb travelled on its way to the door of the storage room at the end. The bannisters are modern replacements.



Rear garden of Wymering House. Asterisk shows the point of entry of the bomb. The damage to the sill and the area of repointed brick-work are still just visible in the close-up below.



Front of Wymering House. The yellow asterisk marks Lucy's nursery, the red one the window where the bomb exited.

The contemporary photographs are reproduced from Barrett Jenkins' books, 'A Visit to Southwold' and 'Reminiscences of Southwold during the Two World Wars' courtesy of the author's daughter, Ann Thornton.