

COURAGEOUS

CROYDON

A CROYDON ADVERTISER PUBLICATION





THIS photo was received in London in August, 1944, via a neutral country, of a flying bomb being prepared for launch ("Planet News.").



SCENE of devastation after a flying bomb fell in Shirley at 2.20 pm on July 26, 1944.

It destroyed St John's C of E School, damaged many monuments in the churchyard, took part of the roof off the church and severely damaged many houses, including the two school cottages.

But the few children in the school who had gone to the shelter were unhurt, as were the two occupants of the school cottages who were in a shelter about ten yards from where the bomb fell. They were said to have "emerged hysterical and covered with dust."

The loss of the school involved numerous complications for the church and took ten years to resolve. The church itself was restored in 1947.

For a while after the bomb fell only part of the church could be used because cracked plaster kept falling.

Eventually the problem was solved by shooting down the hanging fragments, using more than 300 cartridges from a 410 gun.

The church, which replaced the chapel, was consecrated in 1856.

A casualty rate of less than one death per flying bomb did not represent a serious threat to Britain.

More importantly, the diversion of German resources to such a weapon seriously affected other German arms. They would more sensibly have built fighters to combat the immense Allied air supremacy.

Londoners, remembering the capital's ordeal in the summer of 1944, should note also the

suffering of the Belgians.

The offensive against London ceased with the capture of the Pas de Calais, but the Germans retained sites in Holland which — with London beyond their range — they attacked Belgian cities, in particular Antwerp.

Nearly 9,000 flying bombs as well as 1,600 V2s were launched against the great seaport, causing 4,000 deaths.

COURAGEOUS CROYDON



Sounds like old worn out motor bikes



David Bundle

THE FIRST night of flying bombs in Croydon made a lasting impression on 14 year old David Bundle when he lived with his parents in Grange Road, South Croydon.

"I shall never forget that night," Mr Bundle, now 54, said at his home in Arkwright Road, Sanderstead.

"The doodlebugs were completely unknown and very noisy. They sounded just like a load of old, worn out motor bikes.

"We did not get much sleep that night because it sounded like we were being invaded by a fleet of aeroplanes. It was not until the next morning we were told they were a new secret weapon."

He was lucky enough to escape ever being bombed either at home or at Whitgift Middle School, which was on the site of the Whitgift Centre in Croydon.

But there were a couple of near misses. Early one morning a doodlebug glided over their rooftop and fell in Brighton Road, opposite the Windsor Castle.

The blast shattered windows in their home and ripped the door off their air raid shelter. The family were unhurt but several people who had been in a newsagent's shop were killed.

Another time he was at school when a doodlebug hit the nearby Grubb's printers. Glass showered into the classroom from the blast but no one was even cut, although the print works in Poplar Walk were destroyed.

"I really do not know how we managed to get any education at all," said Mr Bundle. "We seemed to be inside the school air raid shelter half the time. We thought it was great fun.

"My brother, Harry, was 17 at the time and he had to sit the equivalent of his 'A' levels inside the shelter.

"However, at that age it did not really bother us. To most of us it was just a great adventure."

The little shopping centre just vanished

IT seemed like any other Tuesday for the Bentley family of Blenheim Park Road, South Croydon, as they prepared for work.

They heard the doodlebug but thought it, like many others, was going straight over.

But 17 year old Jean who had been watching tanks on the Purley Oaks railway line, saw it appear to be heading straight for the family home.

"I doubt whether I would be here today if Jean hadn't been watching the tanks," said her elder sister, Kathleen.

"It suddenly altered course and dived for our house, so it appeared to Jean. She let out a most dreadful scream which brought my father, who was shaving with a cut-throat razor, to the top of the stairs, and my mother away from the kitchen window.

"The first thing I knew was the explosion. I was flung down the stairs.

"The whole house seemed to break into pieces and everything was covered with dust. Jean had been blown into the French windows and was cut and covered with glass. She couldn't remember anything about it because of the fear," said Kathleen — now Mrs Herbert of Hurst View Road, South Croydon.

"We found out that the bomb had landed on the corner of Kingsdown Avenue and

Brighton Road (where the tyre shop now is) which used to be Wilson's confectionery shop. The whole family were killed. The buildings were badly damaged and the gas mains fractured, so fires kept breaking out in the area.

Kathleen's parents, Charlie and Molly went to help. He donned his Home Guard uniform to stop people looting. Her mother helped pull people free from the wrecked buildings.

"What was our little shopping centre wasn't any more, and there was a great cloud of black smoke rising from one of the shop sites where the gas mains had been penetrated and a fire started.

"About six shops and the flats above them were gone and dozens of houses partially destroyed. Ones like ours with roof, walls, windows and doors damaged, must have been in their hundreds.

"When the fire started it looked hopeless for people buried underneath. However, tunnels were made by hand through the rubble and several people were brought out alive.

"They dug all morning and afternoon bringing out the bodies. There were eight dead altogether — five of these were casual acquaintances of ours."

Kathleen, then 19, stayed at home trying to clear up the debris from their home. Jean ran down to the air raid warden's depot at the top of

the chalk pit to get first-aid help to the wounded.

"I was more than happy to stay behind," said Kathleen. "I picked the glass out of the cheese and butter because although you would get extra ration coupons to cover what was damaged, if you could salvage it, it would mean you would have a bit extra."

A letter about the bomb was printed in a New Zealand paper after she sent it to her cousin who lived there.

She described writing the letter in a cold, windy lounge because all the windows were blown out by the bomb. Although they had tried to patch up the holes, they had not had much success.

Mrs Herbert said she used to wait and see how near the bombs seemed before diving for cover.

"Or else you would be diving for cover all the time. But when the engine cut out you would hear dead silence and then the whoosh as it came through the air.

"It was worse in the City, where I used to work in a life assurance office. There was nowhere to hide. People with desks, mainly the men, would climb under them, but because I didn't have a desk, I would just hide in the corner by some filing cupboards.

In fact, Kathleen ironically logged the first flying bombs to come over Britain — when she worked in the basement of the



Mrs Herbert, then Miss Kathleen Bentley, on the steps of her family home on Blenheim Park Road, South Croydon, before the bomb. The blast blew the steps away.

Town Hall as a voluntary Civil Defence worker recording all objects flying overhead which were not regular planes.

"We didn't know what they were at first. We called them unidentified flying objects," she said.

Heroes of the bombardment

JUNE 13, 1944 . . . just after 4 am . . . signalled the start of Hitler's last ditch attempt to beat Britain to Her knees with his 'Vengeance Weapons'.

Although the attacks came as a surprise to the public, civil defence workers had been on the look-out for "Hitler's secret weapon" for some time, hence the code name.

That first bomb landed near Gravesend, and it was not until two nights later that Croydon had its first experience of the weapon that was variously known as the buzz bomb and the dingbat before public opinion settled for "doodlebug." But in the following two months they were to become all too familiar with the new horror.

Early in the evening of June 15 a bomb flew across Croydon at a height of about 2,000 feet, travelling via Riddlesdown and the Red Deer to Norbury, where it passed out of the borough.

Later that night the first bomb fell on the borough, at the junction of Avenue Road and Warminster Road. Three other bombs fell in Croydon that night, killing several peo-

ple and injuring many others.

In the first week of the campaign 30 people were killed in Croydon and 164 received hospital treatment.

Croydon lay in the direct line of flight from the launching sites in the Pas de Calais to Central London — the narrow strip of Southern England that came to be known as "Doodlebug Alley."

Within that "alley" the bombs would come to earth at whatever point they ran out of fuel, and people in the line of flight would listen to the sound of their engines with some trepidation lest they should cut out when overhead.

By the end of August this had happened 141 times over Croydon, which was hit by more bombs than any other London borough.

During that time 215 people were killed and 1,996 injured, 705 of them seriously. For such an intense bombardment such casualties might be considered relatively light; experts attributed this to the fact that experience during the blitz in 1940 to 1941 had made people "shelter conscious."

In particular, many lives were saved by the steel-framed and steel topped Morrison shelters which people had in their dining rooms and kitchens, often doubling as tables. These provided a close refuge

on those occasions when the engines of the bombs were heard to cut out overhead.

But although the lethal effect of the doodlebugs seems to have been less than that of high explosive bombs dropped from aircraft, their range of blast seems to have been wider. They were effective within a radius of about 400 yards, and many of the injuries were caused by flying glass.

During the onslaught 1,032 houses were destroyed in the borough and another 56,968 damaged. This odd statistic — more than the total number of houses in the town — is explained, by the fact that many houses sustained further damage after being repaired.

Destruction on such a massive scale created the most serious problem faced by the borough: thousands of homeless people needing food and shelter.

To help repair the damage 1,500 workers were brought in from other parts of the country and accommodated in schools, halls and temporary huts. One of the saddest incidents in the whole campaign occurred when 11 of these workers, from Scotland and Ireland, were killed when a bomb hit huts in Aurelia Road, West Croydon, only a few hours after they arrived.

People from other parts of

the country — and the world — rallied to Croydon's support in her hour of trial.

American citizens provided funds for a fleet of 16 mobile kitchens which were based at Woodside. These were staffed by relays of WVS workers and members of the Society of Friends who came to Croydon from other parts of the country.

And families from Penzance to Tyneside opened their doors to the floods of evacuees who left Croydon during that tortured summer.

By the end of August almost 34,000 people had been sent to safer areas, mainly mothers and children, expectant mothers, aged and infirm people. The Mayor, Alderman A. Lester Boddington, wrote letters of thanks to the chief citizens of 36 towns which had received Croydon evacuees.

The man responsible for coordinating the entire civil defence effort was town clerk Ernest Taberner, who had already received the OBE in 1942 in recognition of his services.

In the New Year Honours of 1945 the OBE went to Cyril Walker, the borough valuer — it had been his responsibility to find homes and billets for the bombed out families.

Continued overleaf

One individual who was in the thick of the worst incidents night after night was Dr Horatio Sparling, Divisional surgeon of the St John Ambulance Brigade. At many incidents he crawled through debris to administer morphia to trapped casualties in spite of imminent danger from collapsing walls.

At one incident in Livingstone Road, Thornton Heath, he was held by his heels over a cavity while he gave injections and treated the injuries of people trapped below him. He was awarded the MBE.

Also honoured was P-insp William Holloway, who rescued many trapped people, without thought of personal danger. He received the British Empire Medal for his courage and devotion to duty at an incident in Winchelsey Rise, South Croydon, in June. As typical of many such incidents, it is worth recalling in detail.

Two women and two young children were trapped in a concrete shelter under a demolished house. The roof of the shelter had lifted and was wedged in a dangerous position.

With the help of other police officers Insp Holloway cleared away sufficient debris to allow him to squeeze between the concrete roof and walls of the

shelter and reach the trapped people, and from this dangerous position he rescued one woman and the youngest child, a baby only a few weeks old.

While he was clearing out more debris from inside the shelter, a fire broke out. Then the concrete roof slipped further into an even more precarious position. But Insp Holloway stayed with the remaining woman and child until he managed to get them clear.

Unfortunately the elder child died, but both women and the baby recovered.

One thought which sustained the battle weary Croydonians at the height of the bombing was the knowledge that across the channel Allied forces were advancing towards the Pas de Calais where the bombs were launched. The last bomb to reach Croydon before the launching sites were overrun landed on August 16. But unfortunately that was not quite the last flying bomb to hit the town.

Three months later, on the night of November 14, a solitary bomb scored a direct hit on Eskdale House in Castlemaine Avenue, killing the occupants Hugh and Helen Crosfield and a visitor staying with them.

Mrs Crosfield was a Croydon JP and she and her

husband had been the founders of the first nursery school to be established in Croydon, in Canterbury Road.

This bomb is believed to have been one of a number launched from planes which the Germans used to carry the bombs as far as the coast after they had lost their launching sites. Another such bomb was responsible for the biggest single tragedy in the whole campaign, when an hotel in Purley was wrecked.

Incidents in the old Croydon borough are well documented, but information about bombs which landed in the old Coulsdon and Purley Urban district is scanty, although it is known that 54 bombs landed in the district.

But what happened in Dale Road, Purley, on October 31 is clear enough. A bomb scored a direct hit on the St Marie Hotel (See facing page). Thirteen people were killed instantly, another four died in hospital, and 31 people were injured.

The bomb struck at daybreak. The hotel was wrecked, and many of the 29 guests were trapped under the wreckage. An Alsatian dog specially trained to scent out victims helped the rescue workers digging in the wreckage, and by mid-day it was known that 13 people had

died in the blast.

Among these were Mrs Sheila Lang with her sister and baby daughter Beryl, aged two. Her second child, Ronnie, escaped with a broken leg. The hotel's proprietor and his wife, Mr and Mrs H. Warner, were among the injured, and Mrs Warner died in hospital next day.

A contemporary account describes the scene of wreckage:

"The devastation was such as is all too familiar from a direct hit from a flying bomb, and strewn amongst the rubble were the remains of clothing, furniture, suitcases and a grand piano.

"Lock-up garages adjoining the hotel were destroyed, and the cars inside crushed by the falling masonry, but a surface shelter was still standing. "All through the night the Civil Defence worked by the glare of high powered lamps as it was feared there might be more victims buried beneath the debris, and they would not be satisfied until it had all been turned over."

THIS map shows the parts of Croydon hit by flying bombs. In a special edition of the "Advertiser" in October, 1944, a report says:

Flying bomb damage has been considerable along the railway from East Croydon to Victoria, and a journey by train on that route has been, as a result, a depressing experience.

Norbury Avenue has had many houses wrecked on both sides of the road, and the debris makes a grim picture from the carriage win-

far away, the combined result of the two explosions was terrific, and among the buildings practically destroyed was Cranmer Hall, a small mission church.

The worst week of the flying bomb raids was the third, during which 27 fell. This was an increase of three on the preceding

Road), South Norwood; Brigstock Road, Thornton Heath; Bishop's Walk, Shirley; Bredon Road, Addiscombe; Bramley Hill; Biggin Hill, Upper Norwood; Brighton Road, South Croydon; Beckenham golf course, Woodside.

Croham Road, junction of Campden Road, South Croydon; Coombe Farm; Colvin Road and Whitehall Road, Thornton Heath; Chipstead Avenue, Thornton Heath; Chepstow Road; Camden Gardens and County Road, Thornton Heath; Canterbury Road, West Croydon; Croham Valley Road, South Croydon; Court Drive; Central Hill (Convent), Upper Norwood; Curzon Road; Coombe Road (corner of Edridge Road).

Davidson Road; Denmark Road, South Norwood; Duppas Hill Recreation Ground; Duppas Hill Terrace.

Elmwood Road, West Croydon; Estcourt Road, Woodside.

Factory Lane, West

week. During the first week of the attack 22 dropped in the borough. The totals for the succeeding six weeks were respectively 10, 9, 12, 19, 11, 7.

Roads or buildings hit by the flying bombs include the following:

Addington Palace golf course; Acacia Road; Ash Road, Shirley; Auckland Road, Upper Norwood; Addiscombe Road (junction of Mapledale Avenue).

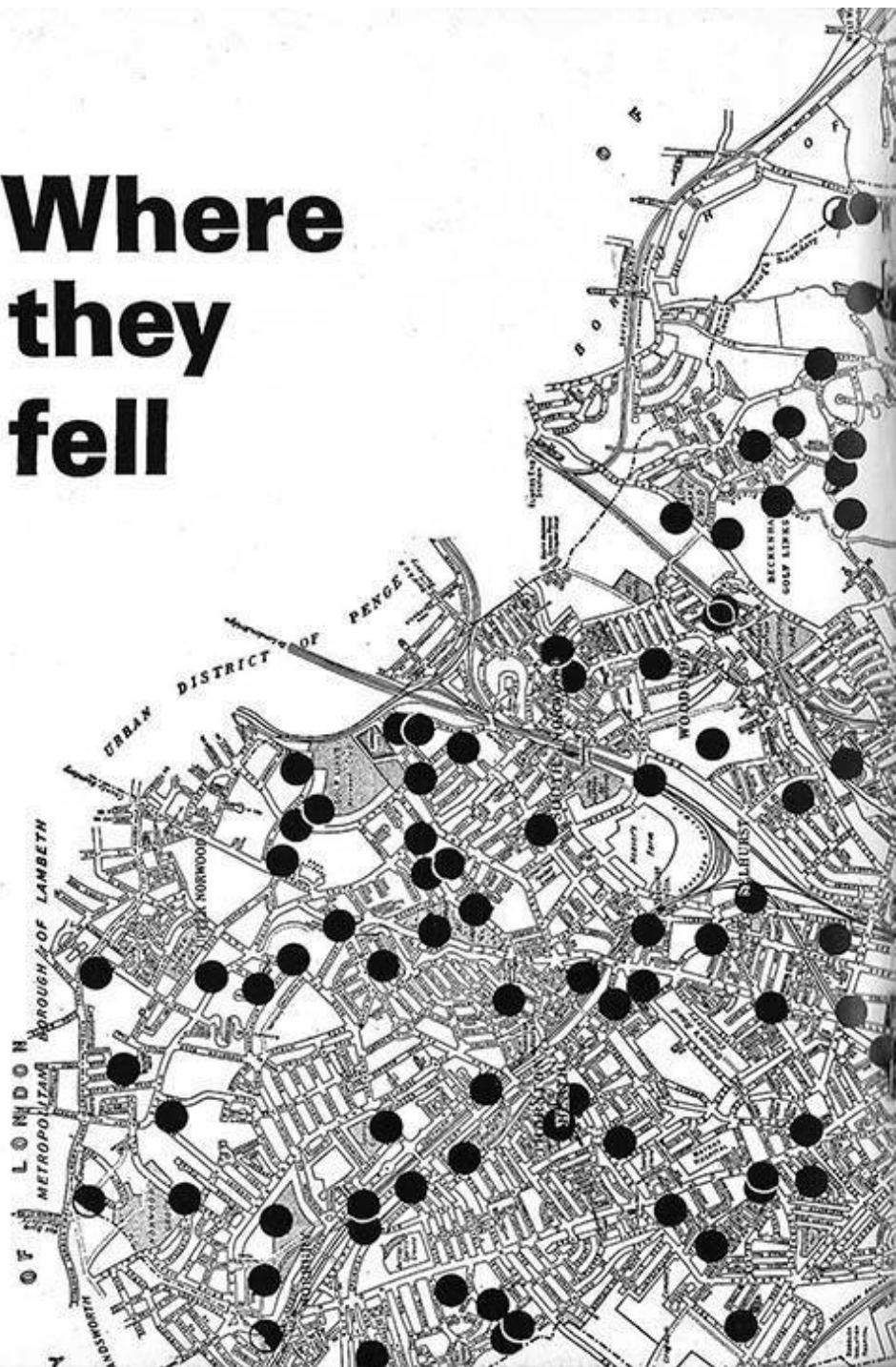
Bethlem Hospital, Monks Orchard; Brownlow Road, East Croydon; Beckford Road (corner of Tennis-

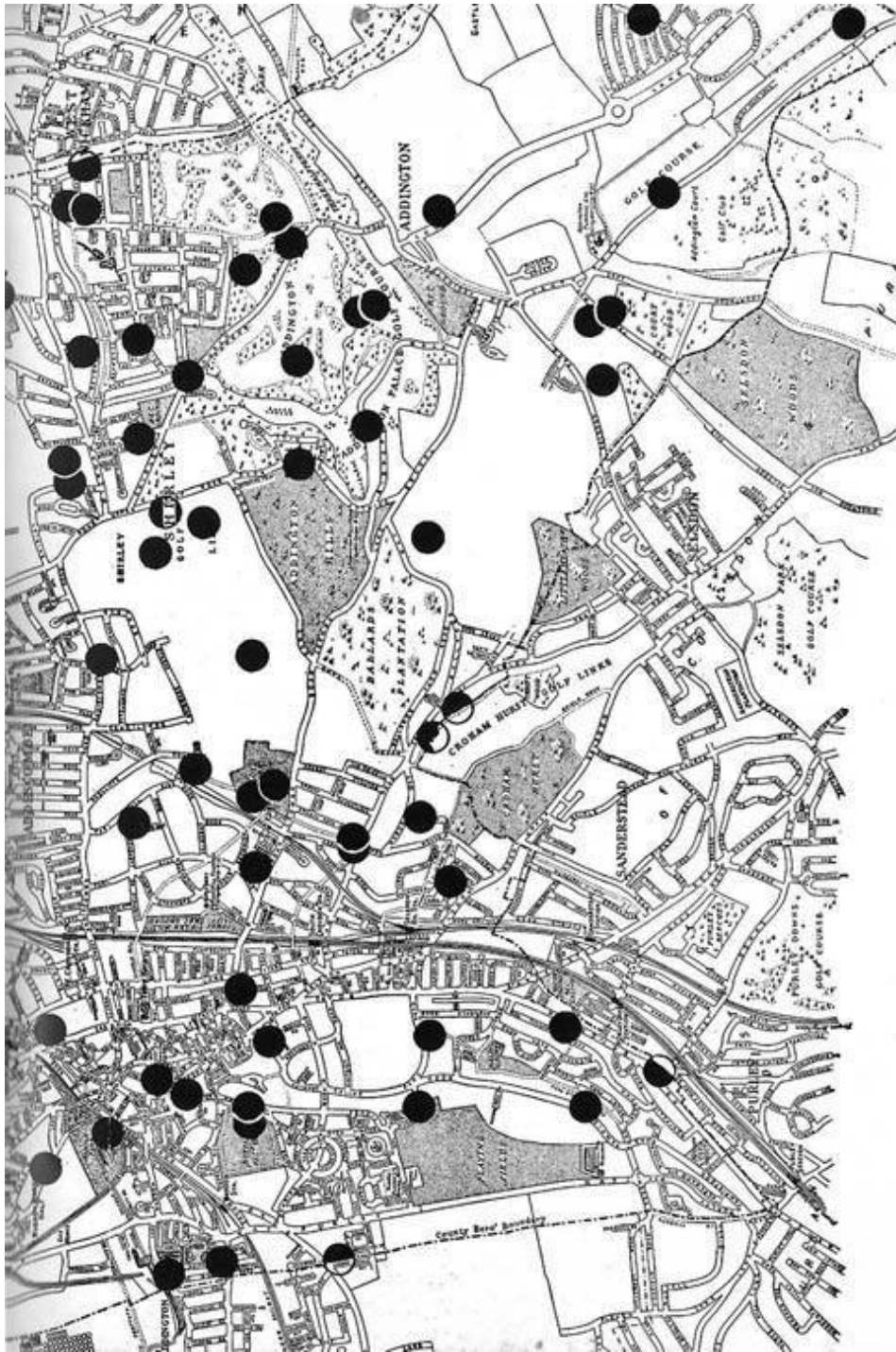
dow, as does the wreckage in Selhurst New Road. Norbury had a particularly bad time, for several of the robots hit the Pollards Hill district, while others landed near Norbury Brook.

Several parts of Croydon have had two or more of the missiles almost on the same spot.

In Old Town, for example, there was one which fell in Cranmer Road, followed soon afterwards by another, at Duppas Hill Terrace, not

Where they fell





Croydon; Featherbed Lane, Addington.

Grange Road, Thornton Heath; golf course in Croham Valley Road, South Croydon; Gascoigne Road, New Addington; Gladeside, Shirley; Gibson's Hill, Upper Norwood; Greenside Road, West Croydon.

Hatch Road and Tilecroft Road, Norbury; Holmesdale Road, South Norwood; Harrington Road, South Norwood; Haling Park Road, South Croydon; Hurst Way, South Croydon; Haslemere Road, Thornton Heath.

Heath; North Surrey golf course, Norbury.

Oak Avenue, Shirley; Oakfield Road, West Croydon; Pollards Hill South, Norbury; Pollards Hill East, Norbury; Poplar Walk; Pampisford Road, South Croydon; Parkfields.

Riddlesdown Road; Ross Road, South Norwood; Rycroft Road, Upper Norwood; Ranmore Avenue.

The Glade, Shirley; The Crescent, Selhurst; Thornton Heath Recreation Ground.

Upper Shirley Road. Waddon Way; Warminster Road, South Norwood; Woodmere Gardens, Shirley; Woodmere Avenue; Wright's Road, South Nor-



wood; Winchelsey Rise, Addington; Windmill Road, West Croydon.

Yew Tree Way, Shirley. At a number of these spots two or more flying bombs landed in more or less the same site.

People living in the vicinity of Lloyd Park will look in vain for a spot on the map to commemorate the flying bomb that spread destruction around late one Thursday afternoon, incidentally breaking the plate glass window of the "Advertiser" office.

This particular doodlebug was caught by a Spitfire and shot up, exploding in the air. The pieces crashed down in Lloyd Park, but officially it was not deemed to have fallen in the borough.

Kingsway. Long Lane, Woodside; Lome Gardens; Lancaster Road, South Norwood; Lloyd Park, South Croydon; Lodge Lane, Addington; Layard Road, Thornton Heath. Milton Road and Milton Avenue, West Croydon; Marion Road, Thornton Heath; Moore Road; Mill Lane, Waddon. Norbury Crescent; Nursery Road, Thornton

Sandfield Gardens, Thornton Heath; Saxon Road, South Norwood; Spurgeon Road, Upper Norwood; Spa Hill, Upper Norwood; Spring Park Road; Shirley Avenue; Shirley Park golf course; Shirley Way; South Norwood Hill; Shirley Church Road (junction of South Way), Shirley; St James's Road, West Croydon; Selhurst New Road, Selhurst; Shirley Schools; Selsdon Park Road; Stanley Road, West Croydon; Sylvan Road, Upper Norwood.