During the Second World War the Essex Police Headquarters in Springfield presented a natural bombing target for German aircraft. On two occasions the Luftwaffe dropped bombs on, or in close vicinity to, the site.

Monday 19th August 1940

The day saw Chelmsford suffer its first civilian casualties of the war. Shortly before 1.45 p.m. a Heinkel He 111, apparently on an armed reconnaissance mission, appeared without warning above the town. Once over Springfield it released around 23 small sized high explosive bombs (H.E.s) and one or two incendiaries. The bombs were probably intended for the Essex Police Headquarters which stood at the northwestern end of Gainsborough Crescent. However, they fell wide of their probable target and dropped in a line across Kingston Crescent and neighbouring Gainsborough Crescent. In the process they demolished two houses, left two others so badly damaged that they would require demolition and another twenty less seriously damaged. Far more importantly, they left three people dead and six others injured, some seriously.

In Kingston Crescent the first four houses on the left from Sandford Road were damaged, with number 3 'Gendros' demolished and a slight fire caused. Its occupiers, the High Street dentist Herbert East and his wife Audrey, were badly injured and were to spend months recuperating in hospital. Both were to recover and reach good ages; Herbert lived to be 87 whilst Audrey died in 1992, when aged 100. The semi-detached neighbouring house, number 1 ‘Manville’, occupied by Ernest Windus, was damaged beyond repair.

In Gainsborough Crescent numbers 20 and 22, a pair of semi-detached police houses on its north-eastern side, were worst affected. One bomb struck number 20 and completely flattened the property. Its occupier Police Sergeant Albert Oakley had been in the kitchen preparing to go on duty at headquarters when the aircraft was heard overhead, while the rest of his family were sat around the lunch table in the front room of the house. According to one report Sergeant Oakley went to the back door to look out for the aircraft, and as he did so a bomb from the aircraft passed over his head and dropped behind him in the middle of the house. Sergeant Oakley was flung into the garden by the explosion and escaped serious injury. The occupants of the front room were not so fortunate, Sergeant Oakley’s wife, sister and daughter were buried under tons of debris, though remarkably his niece and his son, Gordon, who were also in the room escaped practically unscathed and were able to clamber out of the devastated house.

Rescue parties rushed to the scene and frantically began to clear away the debris to get to the three buried victims. The first to be recovered was Oakley’s 47-year-old sister, Alice Louise Oakley, of Brentwood who had been staying for a few days. She was rescued still alive but died soon afterwards at the Chelmsford and Essex Hospital. Eventually the other two casualties were recovered, both dead. They were Mr. Oakley’s 40-year-old wife, Ivy Beatrice Oakley, and their ten-year-old daughter Gwendoline Marjorie Oakley. All three were subsequently buried in Brentwood on 24th August 1940.
At 12 Gainsborough Crescent a woman who was sheltering under the stairs lost her leg when she was hit by an unexploded bomb that penetrated the house. Nearby a man was reported to have been blown downstairs by the force of one explosion, but he escaped unhurt. At another house, a woman was holding a cup when the blast shattered it in her hand.

The road surface in Gainsborough Crescent was cratered by bombs and the gas, water, sewage and electricity utilities disrupted. Several small fires were reported but they were all quickly extinguished. The presence of some eight or nine unexploded bombs led to the evacuation of the neighbourhood while Number 46 Bomb Disposal Squad dealt with them over the next five days.

The fire brigade, police and rescue services were quickly on the scene and were praised for the speed and effectiveness of their rescue work. One sour note, as far as the authorities were concerned, was the large number of sightseers who hampered some of the rescue work.

Saturday 16th November 1940

In the early evening, following an air raid siren, a number of German aircraft appeared in the night sky above Chelmsford. Around 7.15 p.m. one of the enemy raiders was captured by the local searchlights and targeted by intense anti-aircraft fire. As the pilot took violent evasive action to escape, it is believed that his

eyewitness account: When our house was destroyed

"It was lunchtime on a clear summer’s day and I was at home sat around the table in our front (dining) room with my sister, mother, aunt and cousin, having just finished our meal. Then we heard a droning noise which I’d come to recognise as a German aeroplane - as a typical eleven year-old I’d become fairly expert at distinguishing our aircraft from the Germans by studying aircraft silhouettes and so on.

I rushed over to the bay window at the front of the house to see outside and as I looked up I could see a German aircraft coming from the direction of police headquarters. I shouted a warning to the family, something like ‘It’s one of theirs!’! That is the last thing I can remember until I came round, actually under the table - how I got blown backwards from the window towards the bomb there is no telling! I never heard the sound of the bomb dropping, or even the house falling down. You can’t really say that I was trapped, because I was able to pull away various bits and pieces of debris and crawl out to daylight.

There I found that our house had been totally destroyed and was reduced to a pile of rubble. Remarkably Constable Shephard’s house next door was still intact, and apparently a newspaper reported that it didn’t even have a broken pane of glass. The fireplace which backed onto his house was still there and I saw my cousin standing right beside it with her hands over her face. I got hold of her and we scrambled across the rubble to the road. Fortunately neither of us was injured - I didn’t even have a cut even after clambering out over all the bricks and rubble.

The next thing I knew there were people shouting - a crowd of policemen had come out of headquarters and rushed down the road to start searching the debris for survivors. They took charge and one of them got hold of my cousin and I and took us a few doors down the road. I think to number 8, where someone invited us in and gave us comfort. My dad who had been in the kitchen getting ready to go on duty, had survived the bomb, and he stayed at our house to help with the rescue efforts.

A short while later there was an enormous panic when they discovered that some of the string of bombs had landed in

Kingston Crescent, but had not gone off. That meant that we had to evacuate the area so they brought a police car down from headquarters and I was put in it and taken off to relatives of my father in Brentwood. My cousin was taken back to her family up Ipswich way. Of course I had nothing, no clothes nothing at all, so after a couple of days I was taken out shopping in Brentwood. While we were out another German bomber came over. As I watched it dropped bombs which I thought had fallen on where I was now living, but fortunately it turned out to be the next street.

It was at Brentwood that my dad told me that my mother, sister and aunt had all been killed. My mother and sister had been sitting nearest to the door to the hallway and were both dead when they were dug out. Apparently my aunt had left the dining room to go to the kitchen to warn dad when the bomb exploded near the hall. She stopped all the shrapnel in her back which presumably saved dad. She was rescued alive and as she was being carried out on a stretcher she asked someone to wish my aunt, Gert Trotterdell, a happy birthday. Although she was still conscious at that stage she died later in hospital.

My father had previously been stationed at Retendon and through that he was able to get hold of fruit that my sister and I used to weigh up and sell from our house, making a bit of pocket money for ourselves. We used to keep the money in a bakerite bowl on the mantel piece and I remember seeing that intact when I got out from under the table. However, once the site was cleared afterwards the money and bowl went missing - that has always gripped me.

After the bombing I went back a few times to Gainsborough Crescent to see the house after it was cleared and I watched the house being rebuilt, but I never lived there again. I followed my father into the police and since retiring I frequently visit headquarters to attend functions, parking in Gainsborough Crescent. Then I often stop outside my old house and reflect on the bombing."

Gordon Oakley, January 1997
Eyewitness accounts: Bombs across Essex Police Headquarters.

“At that time I lived at 40 Gainsborough Crescent, a house on a corner just behind the police headquarters. It was evening and dark. I was at home when a lone raider appeared overhead and jettisoned a stick of bombs as it flew off towards the coast. At the time I didn’t know the extent of the damage but afterwards I saw that the first bomb had come down on the edge of the lawn and drive at the front of the police headquarters buildings. Another three or four others had gone off on the police sports ground to its rear, leaving large holes. The first bomb landed practically at the feet of two police officers who had been standing up against a sandbagged enclosure at the entrance to the building. They were both killed and the sandbagging wrecked. There was a damn great big hole in the drive and lawn, and all the headquarters buildings suffered superficial damage.”

Les Manning, December 1994

“The first bombing incident I can remember once I’d become a warden was one weekend in November 1940 when my brother-in-law came down to visit us from Hanwell. He was also a warden so that particular evening he offered to come out with me on my round during an air raid alert. As we were out in Springfield Park Road a German bomber suddenly appeared overhead and dropped a stick of about sixteen small bombs.

As soon as we heard them whistle we dived to the ground for cover. I remember my brother-in-law frantically searching his pockets for a rubber he carried with him - you were supposed to put it between your teeth so that even if you were knocked out by the blast or whatever you’d still be able to breathe! The bombs fell outside our sector, across the Police Headquarters, where two policemen were killed, and into the fields nearby. It was a shock to my brother-in-law who had never heard so many bombs go off so quickly after one another. ‘Blimey!’ he said, ‘We don’t have ‘em drop like that in London!’ After the plane went we got up off the ground and continued our round.”

Jack Palmer, June 1994

Nearby dozens of houses in the adjacent residential areas also suffered from the explosion.

Another high explosive device from the stick landed on the lawn of the Chief Constable’s garden opposite to the room where Captain Peel and his wife were reported to have been eating dinner. Fortunately they escaped serious injury, though their house was badly damaged.

At least half a dozen more bombs fell across the police sports ground and bowling green. Surprisingly one of the devices, which landed close to the footpath across the sports ground and about 100 yards from Sandford Road, failed to detonate. It was to remain dormant for almost a year until it exploded on Sunday morning almost a year later (28th September 1941).

Monday 19th August 1940.
Properties damaged as a result of the bombing which occurred shortly before 1:45 p.m.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Damaged properties with occupiers’ names in more serious cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kingston Crescent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nos. 13-57</td>
<td>Including: 1 (Ernest Wincus) beyond repair, 3 (Herbert East) demolished.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gainsborough Crescent</td>
<td>NE side: nos. 8-12, 16-18, 20-22.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SW side: nos. 11, 15, 17, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Including: 20 (Albert Oakley) demolished &amp; 3 fatalities, 22 (Leon Shepherd) main structure badly damaged and to be demolished.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>22 including 2 demolished and 2 damaged beyond repair. Street lamp number 360 in Gainsborough Crescent was also damaged and its repair was to cost £45/-.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aircraft released a stick of bombs that fell across Springfield, in a line from police headquarters to fields adjoining Chelmer Road. Tragically their detonation resulted in the deaths of two police officers and damage to over fifty properties.

The first high explosive bomb blew up on the gravel forecourt of police headquarters almost directly beneath the clock and only a few yards in front of the main building. Although sand bagging around the ground floor absorbed much of the blast two officers on armed guard duty by the main entrance were caught in the open close to the bomb. Constable Alexander Simpson Scott, aged 27, was killed instantly, whilst his colleague, 29 year-old Detective Maurice George ‘Dixie’ Lee was grievously wounded and died shortly afterwards at the Chelmsford and Essex Hospital.

Alex Scott was the son of Mr. & Mrs. Scott of ‘Brasida’, High Road in Chigwell. After an education at Chigwell School he had joined the police in June 1934, before becoming a motor patrol driver at H.Q. a year later. He was a good all round sportsman and very popular with his colleagues. Constable Scott had been married for just 18 months at the time of his death. His wife Myrtle, who was the daughter of the London Road grocer Mr. Bayes, lived at 93 Springfield Park Road. She was to subsequently re-marry and lose a second husband in the war. “Dixie” Lee was the 29 year-old son of Henry and Isabel Lee of Small Shoes in Good Easter. He had joined the Police in November 1933, having spent seven years in the Essex Regiment. He had only recently transferred from Hatfield Heath to the Headquarters to join the C.I.D. to deal with aliens and translation work. His wife Florence lived at 8 Springfield Park Lane.

Blast from the device caused extensive superficial damage to the roof, windows and ceilings throughout headquarters. The protective sandbagging was dislodged and corrugated steel sheets and other debris thrown across the courtyard. An early assessment reported that not a single window at headquarters had survived unscathed. The time of the explosion was eerily recorded by the Headquarters clock which was stopped by the blast at 7.17 pm.
Fortunately this belated incident failed to cause any significant damage or injuries.

A further three H.E.s, fell into a field 400 yards south-east of Dukes Farm and 17 more were reported in the vicinity of the A12 Chelmer Road (Chelmsford by-pass). As a result, eight houses on the road's eastern side closest to Dukes Cottages suffered minor damage from the blast. A crater in the road surface resulted in traffic being reduced to one lane pending its repair. A warden, George Goodenough, from one of the damaged houses was slightly injured and a number of sheep were killed in nearby meadows.

Further aerial incendiaries were dropped at Boreham, 400 yards south of Boreham Hall, and across the River Chelmer in Little Baddow, near the Church and Gibbs Farm. No further damage or injuries were reported.

Saturday 16th November 1940
Properties damaged by the air raid on Essex Police H.Q. around 7.25 p.m.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Damaged properties with occupiers' names in more serious cases.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chelmer Road</td>
<td>Farmleigh, Meads, Clovelly, Marlborough House, Sallaire, The Leas, Wayside, Alvea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gainsborough Crescent</td>
<td>N.E. side nos. 11 13 17 21 23 29 31 37 39 41 43 45 47 49 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. W. side nos. 28 30 32 34 36 46 42.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingston Avenue</td>
<td>Nos. 7 15.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingston Crescent</td>
<td>Nos. 16 22 26 29 31 33.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount Hill Avenue</td>
<td>Fairfield, Bellmans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandford Road</td>
<td>No. 86.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>53 properties.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Alex Scott

"At 24 I married Alex Scott and we were to have eighteen months of wedded bliss. He was an all round sportsman who was loved by all, a policeman based at headquarters where he was a wireless operator on the cars.

The war was on and for a holiday we went to Chigwell to stay with his mother and father. After that we went on to Grays to a pal of Alex’s from the Police Headquarters. When we returned to Chelmsford he had to go on duty. That was the last I saw of him.

That afternoon I went to the pictures to see a film but instead I slept through it. Going home, I felt something was wrong. During the evening a policeman came and told me that Alex had been killed. He took me to my mother who lived nearby.

I went to bed and did not wish to get up. My brother came in and kept worrying me to go down stairs and eventually I did. I had such a caring family, eight brothers and sisters and, of course, I can’t forget my loving parents.

Alex’s mother asked if he could be buried at Chigwell so that is where he lies today.

The next thing was to get me out. My brother-in-law and sister nagged me to go dancing with them and gradually I started to go out again. The only thing to do when you lose someone is to get out again as soon as possible. It helps.

A few months later I joined the W.A.A.F. and left Chelmsford. I was a wireless operator, as I had learned Morse code in the Guides.

I was so pleased when Alex was remembered at the memorial service at the Police Headquarters last year. He was the love of my life and I’ve shed a few tears writing this. I still feel his presence sometimes, watching over me. When I look at his photograph I ask, ‘Why did it have to happen?’.”

Myrtle Scott, January 1994
(a few weeks prior to her death.)

Acknowledgments to:
Andy Begent is a member of the Civilian Support Staff at Essex Police Headquarters.