



## News and events

- **Our next meeting** is on **17 May** when a speaker from Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies will talk about **Treasures of the archives, with a special focus on Wheathampstead.**
- The exhibition **The Forgotten Battle of St Albans** is open at the St Albans Museum and Gallery in Market Place **until 25 June.** The Second Battle of St Albans took place in 1461 and its final stages were fought on Nomansland.

## Doodlebug

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This entry in the St Helen's School logbook, dated 27 June 1944, goes on to describe the damage to the school buildings (broken windows, roof damage, cracks in ceilings and 'bell turret moved'). It is the only contemporary record we have of this major incident in Wheathampstead's war.

Records at HALS list 18 incidents of bomb damage in the Wheathampstead area during the Second World War, 11 in 1940, four in 1941 and three in 1944. Most of these caused no damage and no casualties but the official record states that this bomb 'fairly severely damaged' the farmhouse and that three men and two women were slightly injured.

The late Dennis Toyer, in an interview in 2013, recalled '... a very large bomb crashed in the field over at Bury Farm. And upstairs I've still got some pieces of the metal somewhere which came off of it. And I was dug out of the ruins [of this house], as we might as well say, by the local fire brigade.

... a note from the War Ministry they said 'a small bomb', but it was far from being a small bomb. The shell of it was at least, I would have thought, 10 feet long. Yes, it was some bomb. It blew the shop windows out in the village. I remember

walking over the broken glass windows out in the village. I remember walking over the glass to school treading through that. It was quite a devastation, this whole area. Some of the church windows, which were coloured windows, stained glass, on this side, were put back in plain glass. That was all due to this wartime bomb. About 1944, it was towards the end of the war.'



The first 'doodlebug', the V1 flying bomb, was launched on London on 13 June 1944. More than 9,000 were launched before the last site able to launch the missile at Britain was captured in October of the same year. The V1 was about 27 feet long and weighed over two tons.

Local historian, the late Amy Coburn, also remembered this bomb: 'Towards the end of the war there was a night when a strange plane was heard to 'cut out' followed by an explosion. It was a while before we knew that this was one of these flying bombs – 'Doodlebugs' – that had fallen in a field not far from Amwell. Later we learned that it was one of the first to arrive on our shores.'

Amy continued: '... not many bombs fell in the village itself. Although two did fall in the churchyard of St. Helen's Church. One had the strange effect of sending a quantity of liquid chalk over the churchyard wall into Church Street, spraying the roadway white.' This is probably the incident shown in the HALS records as having occurred on 19 September 1940.