



THE DAY THE EARTH MOVED

At 8.25am on Sunday 19 November 1944 a V-2 rocket blasted into the air from a remote site in Holland. The target was London. Five minutes later it blew up on Hazlehurst Road. The devastating explosion killed 34 men, women and children. Now, 70 years on, the community has come together to honour the people who died and campaign for a memorial to be erected in their names. In the last of our series marking the two World Wars and their impact on our *Village*, writer **January Carmalt** talks to some of the families who returned to the same spot to remember their loved ones

London is a city brimming with history – it surrounds us in our architecture, buildings, streets and memorials.

Everywhere we turn in this remarkable town there is something to recall our fascinating but all too often tragic past.

Beyond the traditional hallmarks and monuments steeped in reverence and esteem, a casual stroll throughout the Village may prove equally enlightening if we look hard enough. Scattered across south London deep-level air-raid shelters from WWII still stand around Clapham Common and Stockwell – conspicuous cement cylinders standing as architectural time capsules.

Tree-lined streets pock-marked with less than sympathetic 1960s bricks and



PHOTOGRAPH © Imperial War Museum

A German V-2 rocket at the moment of launch during Allied tests in Germany, 10 October 1945



mortar sandwiched between period homes are often less elegant reminders of our war-torn past and, in some instances, the unmarked graves of the forgotten few.

And what of those forgotten fallen? This year the country marked the centenary of the start of WW1 and over four million gathered from far and wide around a stunning Tower of London to glimpse the humbling and heart-stopping sea of poppies – a breathtaking thanksgiving to the soldiers who gave their lives in the Great War.

Coupled with this epic display, it seems only fitting during this time of

Roads, destroying 50 properties and taking the lives of 34 people, ranging in age from as old as 92, to as young as six months. Today a car park and collection of flats now stand on the very spot which so many years ago suffered such loss and devastation. There is no plaque, no marker, nothing whatsoever to commemorate the loss of lives.

In a bid to honour the innocent men, women and children who died on that inauspiciously fateful morning, Summerstown resident, historian and local activist Geoff Simmons, alongside the Reverend Dr Roger Ryan of St Mary's Church, organized this special service

Through meticulous research and tireless campaigning Simmons managed to reach many of the victims' relatives who subsequently journeyed from far beyond London to descend upon Hazelhurst Road and regale the congregation with remarkable tales, both of death and survival. "It was thrilling to see so many people come from all over to attend the ceremony. We spent a lot of time tracing family members but there are still others we would like to reach."

For Lynda Cazeaux (née Biggs) of Berkshire the day was particularly poignant. A former longtime resident of Bertal Road in Summerstown, three of

where he fell ill and was taken prisoner by the enemy in 1942.

Still missing a year later and presumed dead by his family, Douglas' possessions had been returned to his home in Summerstown. But he managed to escape through Italy and arrived back in London to a miraculous homecoming in September 1944. Having beaten the odds on the battlefield, such joy was short lived through this tragic twist of fate and bad timing.

their home. Thankfully, Annie and the rest of her family escaped the war unscathed.

It was a special service where alongside regular hymns and bible readings, family members also came forward to read personal accounts of what occurred 70 years ago. With a considered and inspired flourish of nostalgia,

Reverend Ryan concluded his sermon with the 1944 chart-topping tune *I'll Be Seeing You* performed by Bing Crosby, a much loved anthem during the war

lost on 19 November 1944 does not end here. Geoff Simmons and Reverend Dr Roger Ryan, along with others, continue to work towards properly honouring the victims with an official memorial plaque. If you would like to learn more and see how you may help, please contact Simmons on rgbsimmons182@gmail.com. Reverend Ryan at stmarys@summerstown.org.uk or visit summerstown182.wordpress.com



Douglas Kitts was captured by German troops in North Africa – but escaped through Italy. He was given a hero's welcome when he returned home to Hazlehurst Road. Five weeks later he was dead – a victim of the blast

remembrance that there was a rather more intimate memorial, right here in our own Village when the residents of Summerstown gathered on 16 November at St Mary's Church on Wimbledon Road to honour and reflect upon their own fallen. For it was 70 years ago, at 8:30am, Sunday 19 November when with no word or warning a V-2 bomb fell swift and silent on the residents of Hazelhurst and Foss

where family members, friends and the rest of the community could pay tribute to the dead.

Simmons' efforts have been nothing short of a selfless labour of love. To see the families, hear their stories and witness as they swap tales of courage and heartache in mutual commiseration, there is little doubt such an undertaking was well worth the tremendous effort.

her family were killed in the blast. Her father's cousin, Douglas Kitts, had only just returned home from fighting abroad and was staying with cousins Nellie Biggs and Charlie Kitts at 36 Hazelhurst Road when the bomb dropped. All three perished. Having fought with the Royal Corps of Signals throughout Europe and Africa, Kitts was evacuated at Dunkirk and subsequently stationed in North Africa

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A car park and flats stand on the site.
There is no plaque, no marker to
remember the loss of 34 souls

Reading her family's letters, what strikes Lynda still today is the incredible fortitude of the community and its generation, who despite such grief and sorrow were able to carry on with grace and dignity, and get done what was necessary in the aftermath of the disaster.

But mingled with the stories of tragedy and despair are others of fortuitous foresight. Janet Surtees (née Turner) is the granddaughter of one lucky survivor who with eerie intuition felt disaster would one day strike her road.

For over 20 years Annie Turner and her family lived at 3 Hazelhurst Road, but unable to shake the ominous foreboding, in 1940 the family moved to nearby Khama Road and witnessed the horrible affair from

played often for those serving overseas. Afterwards, the congregation made the short walk to the site itself. There, the Rt Hon Sadiq Khan MP read the official Wandsworth Council incident report from November 1944 and Lynda Cazeaux, with Sylvia Cutting, read aloud each of the victims' names. Students from Burntwood Academy then gently broke a minute's silence with a touching cover of Sting's *Fields of Gold* via guitar ensemble. Ending our memorial, Maureen Giles (granddaughter of Minnie Matilda Ware, No. 28) and Caroline Foster (relative of Christopher Kitts, No. 36) scattered petals across the paved site where a crater once marked the epicentre of the bombing. But the campaign to remember those

Deadly Facts

- On 3 October 1942 German rocket scientist Wernher von Braun's brainchild the V-2 missile first took to the air
- The 12-ton rocket, capable of carrying a one-ton warhead, was extraordinarily deadly. And because it travelled faster than sound those underneath never saw or heard what killed them
- The V-2 was virtually impossible to intercept. Upon launching it rose six miles vertically and then proceeded on an arced course, cutting off its own fuel according to the range desired. The missile then tipped and fell on its target at a speed of almost 4,000 miles per hour
- The V-2 hit with such force that its casing would burrow several feet into the ground before exploding
- The V-2 was capable of flying 200 miles and the launch pads were portable, making them impossible to detect before firing
- Over 1,100 V-2's were launched against England, killing more than 2,700 people