

Zeppelins over Trentham

Zeppelin raids had taken place at points across the country from 1915, but it was believed that the Midlands were too far inland to be reached by airships.

On 31st January 1916, the area was taken by surprise as a number of airships reached the Midlands. One was seen over Walsall at 20.10 and another attacked Burton at 20.30. Lighting restrictions were not in force at the time, so the local area, including the steelworks at Etruria, were lit up. A zeppelin approached from the south and was seen over Trentham. Frederick Todd, the Land Agent for the Trentham Estate, reported that: *"At least two zeppelins, who were evidently making their way to Crewe, dropped seven bombs at Sideway Colliery without much damage - they missed their objectives which were the Power House, the by-products plant, and the pit-head installation."* They made craters, but caused no injuries or loss of life.

Following this raid, precautions were taken, with blackouts and restrictions on lighting. In 1915 Trentham Church reported spending £3 on insurance against zeppelin attack and damage.

On Monday 27th November 1916, a clear, dry night, the German Navy Airship LZ 61 [Tactical number L21], in the company of nine other Zeppelins, crossed the Yorkshire coast. It initially attacked Leeds but was repelled by anti-aircraft fire. Commanded by Oberleutnant Kurt Frankenberg, the LZ61 was on its 10th raid of England, and had also carried out 17 reconnaissance missions. At 22.45 a warning was received locally. Black out and air raid precautions were taken. Doctors and Red Cross Nurses, the Police and Fire Brigade were put on standby. Just before 01.00, the single zeppelin was spotted.

The LZ61 dropped one bomb on Kildgrove, three at Goldenhill and three at Tunstall, where damage was sustained by some houses and a church. The Commander headed towards Chesterton and dropped 16 high explosives and seven incendiary bombs, but caused little damage and no casualties. A local account from the time reported...*"From the window I could see distant flashes – over in the direction of Chesterton - and every sound was following by a grinding and rending detonation. So the infernal artillery continued to half past one, when the Zeppelin, obviously coming closer to my point of vantage, dropped a bomb that shook every brick and window in the house. Yet the explosion was half a mile away. That was the last I saw of the raider. I counted 21 explosions."*

Bombs were next dropped on the collieries between Fenton and Trentham, but again no damage or injury was caused. It was last seen over Blurton Farm at 1.35am before it left North Staffordshire and steered towards Great Yarmouth, heading for home. In total, 21 bombs exploded across the district, while many more unexploded 'duds' were found the next day, including at Blurton Waste Farm, Fenton Hall Farm, and close to Stafford Coal and Iron works in Fenton.

As dawn broke on Tuesday morning the 28th November the LZ61 was intercepted by three RNAS pilots: Flight-Lieutenant Egbert Cadbury; Flight Sub-Lieutenant Edward Laston Pulling; and Flight Sub-Lieutenant Gerard William Reginald Fane flying B.E. 2C aircraft. After exchanging fire with the three aircraft the LZ61 burst into flames and crashed into the sea about eight miles (13 km) east of Lowestoft.

Oberleutnant Frankenberg and the 16 other members of the craft did not survive. Flight-Lieutenant Egbert Cadbury recorded in his diary *"...Having seen the Zeppelin circle down to the sea in a blazing mass – a most horrible sight – I went back to Yarmouth. I could not say I felt very elated or pleased at this; somehow I was overawed at the spectacle of this Zeppelin and all the people aboard going down into the sea."*



Flight-Lieutenant Egbert Cadbury

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THE STAFFORDSHIRE SENTINEL.

THE ZEPPELIN RAIDS.

North Staffordshire's Two Visitations.

Hitherto Unpublished Details

Though the official communiques of Zeppelin raids were never more specific in their mention of localities than North Midlands and Staffordshire, everybody in this northern part of the county knows that we had two visitations in 1916. The military necessities of the time forbade the publication of details which would lead to the identification of particular towns and districts, but there is no longer any reason why those details should not be disclosed.

The first raid was on the night of January 31st, 1916, and the second during the night of November 27th-28th of the same year. On the first occasion the district escaped without damage or casualty, though six bombs at least were dropped. On the second occasion 21 bombs were dropped and exploded, to say nothing of seven or eight "duds," but the damage was comparatively small, and only one person was injured. Considering the quantity of high explosives bestowed upon us and the alarming character of the succession of crashes, the results achieved by the enemy were extraordinarily disproportionate, and, in fact, negligible from the military point of view. Nevertheless, the district had fortunate and remarkable escapes on both occasions.

— JANUARY 31st.—1916.

On the occasion of the first raid, January 31st, the district was taken completely by surprise, as, indeed, were the other Midland towns which the Zeppelins raided. Few people had anticipated that the Midlands were within the German airships' radius of action, and fewer still thought they would venture so far inland when there were plenty of targets near the coast; but the enemy, in pursuance of his policy of frightfulness, wished to carry his war on civilians to the furthest point possible, and likewise, if feasible, to disorganise the great industrial centres of the Midlands, which, as he knew, were engaged on war work, directly or indirectly.

No lighting restrictions were then in force, and the whole district, including the iron and steel works, were a blaze of light, hidden but slightly by a ground mist. A number of airships took part in this raid. One reached Walsall at 8.10, and another attacked Burton at 8.30. Soon after that time a Zeppelin came up from the south in the direction of Trentham and the Potteries, and sighting the flares and lights of the Stafford Coal and Iron Co.'s blast furnaces, dropped half a dozen bombs in quick succession. All of them fell on refuse heaps situate between the blast furnaces and the collieries, making great craters, but failing to do the slightest damage.

Thereafter the course of the raider is doubtful. The Zeppelin was believed to have been heard in the neighbourhood of Hanley, over Wolstanton, and as far westward as Madeley, and was said to have dropped a flare out in the open country, but its course was largely speculative. Whether the Zeppelin had discharged her last bombs at the Stafford Coal and Iron Co.'s works, or whether the airship was in search of some particular objective

were miraculous, for the concussion of the explosion was tremendous and widespread. As stated, the outhouses of the four dwellings mentioned were swept away as though they had never existed; the doors of the houses, inside and out, were torn from their framework and splintered; all the windows were shattered; and cupboards and furniture were thrown about and converted into match-wood. There are some fifteen houses in this particular row, and all sustained considerable damage, though the others were not reduced to wreckage like Nos. 2, 4, 6, and 8. Back to back with this row is another row of houses having their frontage to Bond-street; and they suffered considerably, most of the windows being smashed and some having the framework torn out. Masonry hurled into the air fell on to the roofs of houses, heling them over an extensive area; in fact, as many as fifty houses in the neighbourhood suffered at least some damage. The roof of the Roman Catholic Church was damaged by falling fragments, and windows were blown out. At the Royal Albert Pottery also many windows were damaged. After the explosion of the bomb many of the inhabitants went out into the streets, not a few in their night attire, and ready help was given to the people whose homes had thus been wrecked. Next day the Sun-street district of Tunstall presented a devastated aspect, and for days afterwards became a spectacle for curious sightseers.

CHESTERTON DISTRICT.

From Tunstall the Zeppelin made across Bradwell Wood for Chesterton, where burning mine hearths in the neighbourhood of local collieries apparently attracted the raider and gave the enemy the impression of more important targets than mere heaps of ironstone in process of calcining. At any rate, the airship heavily bombed this district and the explosions were alarmingly heavy and numerous. Apart from an old shed which collapsed from concussions and the big craters formed on the mine heaps and in the ground, not a scrap of damage was done. This bombardment, indeed, was particularly futile. One of the last bombs which exploded fell behind Bradwell-lane, Wolstanton, and the explosion was felt with great intensity by the residents of that district.

For some time, the raider obviously circled round an area roughly described by Bradwell Wood, Chesterton, and Wolstanton; and the airship was plainly seen by many residents. Eventually, the Zeppelin turned south-east and was sighted over Blurton Farm, coming from Hartshill, at 1.35 a.m. Whether the airship then left the North Staffordshire area is not certain, but quite probable.

Besides the 21 bombs which exploded—that number having been counted by numerous people—quite an array of "duds" was collected next day. Four or five of these were discovered in the Chesterton district, and two more unexploded bombs were found at no great distance from the works of the Stafford Coal and Iron Co., Ltd., at Sideway. One of these two had fallen just inside Blurton Waste Farm, and the other a little distance away on the Fenton Hall Farm. Both had harmlessly dug themselves in.

RAIDER DOWN IN FLAMES.

When last seen the airship was said to be making only moderate speed, and the fate which befel it is best told in the words of Lord French's communique issued on November 28th. After recounting that several raiders approached the North-East Coast between 10 and 11 o'clock the previous night, one being brought down in flames off the Durham coast, Lord French went on to state:—

"Another airship crossed into the North Midland Counties and descended upon the