

# Witnesses recall horror of Lancaster bomber crash

My items about the Wigston Lancaster bomber crash of 1946 brought a big response from readers and I am grateful to Mr Brian Simpson, of Burbage, for sending me his extensive file on the subject.

The bomber was on a routine flight from Faldingworth, Lincolnshire, and it is believed that the plane was hit by lightning in a violent thunderstorm.

In an attempt to avoid the densely populated area of Wigston, the pilot made for an open field behind Long Street School (now All Saints' C of E School).

The Lancaster crashed in flames at about 1.25pm on Monday, February 14, 1946. It missed the school by less than 10 feet and damaged a number of houses in its descent, including The Beeches, in Aylestone Lane.

No one on the ground was killed, but the crew of six Polish servicemen all lost their lives.

I featured a number of eye-witness accounts in previous items. The event undoubtedly made a lasting impression on those who saw it happen. The



**DAMAGE** The house in Wigston which was hit by the plane

Mercury headline described the plane as a "Hurling Mass of Flames" and Myra Downs, who was on the way back to school at the time of the crash, was terrified.

"It was a sight newer to be forgotten and my recollection is really one of horror", she said.

"I could see the plane was heading towards the tower on the top of the Co-operative society building across the road. It did, in fact, hit this and then went

down in the field behind The Beeches. The flames rose high into the sky with thick black smoke.

"By this time I was screaming and crying, my fingernails going into the mortar between the bricks of a house near to the cinema. For me, it was a day I shall never forget and even now I am terrified when there is a thunderstorm."

Margaret Boughton says her most vivid recollection was of

the deafening roar of the plane as it approached out of the storm - then seeing the bomber skimming over the rooftops.

"There was a tremendous explosion followed by an eerie silence. For a long time afterwards the sky was full of small pieces of singed debris drifting down like black snow."

Mrs L Rixon remembers that she had just taken her baby upstairs for a nap. "All at once saw this huge plane coming towards us with flames bursting out of it.

"I grabbed my baby, sure that we were going to be hit. There was a silence then a loud bang."

In 1976-the Mercury reported that while the builders were preparing the site for the building of the new premises for All Saints School, they found many fragments of the Lancaster bomber.

Twenty years later, the then head teacher of the school asked local residents for their memories of that fateful day in 1946. These were collected and the school made a permanent display of them along with reports from the local newspaper and information about the Polish airmen, who are also remembered in a memorial plaque in the school.