

Zeppelins over Leyton

By Alan Miles ([email](#)) – August 2013

The Zeppelins were the first craft to bomb Leyton. These great balloons were about 650 feet in length and they attacked on moonless nights. It was one of the early German use, of terror weapons which was supposed to frighten Londoners into submission.

In the now out-of-print book, "The History of Leyton and Leytonstone", W H Weston writes **"On the 17th August in 1915 a German airship passed cross-wise over Leyton, from the neighbourhood of The Bakers Arms to the Wanstead Flats"**.

It seems that these awesome large, silent bombers did much damage to Leyton and Leytonstone. Apparently, a Zeppelin followed the course of the Leyton Midland Railway. Bombs fell around Leyton Midland Railway, and the Zeppelin continued bombing on the Wanstead Flats. Sadly in this raid, 500 houses were damaged and others completely destroyed, yet only 8 people were killed and 40 injured.

On September 25th, 1916 the area around The Bakers Arms received a severe bombing and about 800 houses were damaged. Although the casualties were far less than the previous raids of August 1915.

On September 2nd, 1916 the darkness of the unlighted streets of Leyton were lightened up by a huge glare. It was a Zeppelin fully ablaze causing a great red glow in the sky and the Zeppelin split in two. One half fell to the ground and the other half floated off. It was Lieutenant Robinson VC who shot the craft down using incendiary bullets from his "SE5". The half that flew away landed in Cuffley, Herts.

Barrage balloons, searchlights and fighter aircraft plus anti-aircraft guns gradually put pay to the Zeppelins.

Air raids by the German aircraft began; these were usually Gotha Bombers and flew many more raids on London. On a hot sunny morning on July 7th, 1917 a large fleet of aeroplanes flew in from the East, they flew in a 'v' formation, the leader's wings clearly marked. At first people believed that these were British aircraft, so they kept calm and were not afraid. But then anti-aircraft guns began to open up, and so ridding that belief. They flew over Leyton heading for London to release their lethal bombs.

All around the anti-aircraft guns opened fire and small puffs of white smoke exploded just below the enemy, and other shells exploded in the sky above. The planes turned eastwards, heading towards East and West Ham. The intensity of these attacks came in September and October when intermittent raids were carried out by German aircraft. The attacks were becoming more and more frequent, but so did the anti aircraft fire.

The growing increase of guns bought a new menace for the people who lived in Leyton, it appears that people were still walking round the streets looking at the action, and therefore many were hit by falling bullets, shrapnel, and bits of damaged aircraft. They finally found the best thing to do was to take cover in air raid shelters, and received if necessary some medical help. There they waited eagerly for the blowing of the "all-clear" bugles.

Weston writes **“The last attack in our neighbourhood took place in Whitsuntide on May 19th 1918 and many Leytonians saw one of the German planes falling in a mass of red flames”**.

I read once that some Gotha Bombers bombed Walthamstow, and that a bomb landed behind The Rose and Crown Pub.

Weston writes **“from the 31st May 1915 -19th May 1918 time again hostile aircraft passed over or in proximity to the town. A list with which I have been supplied gives a total of 60 air raids directed to London. Of these 10 took place in 1915, 12 in 1916, 25 in 1917 and 13 in 1918, and in the majority of cases the hostile aircraft passed over our neighbourhood”**.

I found by reading this piece of history that London was more badly bombed than has ever been mentioned, was it all kept quiet?

The History of Leyton and Leytonstone by W H Weston

Published by A Wheaton & Co. Ltd, Paternoster Press 1921,