

GOODISON UNDER ATTACK!



Merseyside was badly hit by Second World War air raids, peaking during the May Blitz of 1941.

A few months earlier, on the night of 18 September 1940, several bombs landed in the Everton and Walton area. One hit Gwladys Street, causing serious injury to nearby residents, and damaging the Gwladys Street Stand.

A further bomb dropped in the school yard, badly damaging the exterior wall of the Bullens Road stand, while also perforating the roof. A third bomb hit the outside of the practice ground [to the rear of the Park End Stand], demolishing the surrounding hoarding and blowing out windows in houses on Goodison Avenue and Walton Lane.

Two days later, with Everton due to play Chester in the newly-formed Wartime League North, an emergency board meeting was convened. It resolved to call in Archibald Leitch's company [which had constructed three of Goodison's stands] to give a valuation of 'the complete renewal of damaged properties for submission to the War Damage Claims department within the prescribed 30 Days' - thereby passing costs onto the government.

They envisaged this would cover 'the demolition of a large section of the new stand outer wall in Gwladys Street; destruction of all glass in this stand; damage to every door, canteen, water and electricity pipe and all lead fittings; and the perforated roof in hundreds of places.' The claim also

included damage to the Bullens Road Stand and nearby properties. Club secretary, Theo Kelly, estimated the cost of this extensive damage to be about £1,500.

Due to wartime reporting restrictions, nothing appeared in the local news, but a photograph of the damaged Bullens Road outer wall surfaced two days later [see above], described cryptically as: 'The rear of the stand of a well-known football ground in a north-western town'. Match reports of the Chester fixture made no reference to the state of the stands - concentrating instead on Tommy Lawton's 16-minute hat-trick in a 4-3 victory.

However, this was to be no full-to-capacity attendance as government war-time restrictions prevented the gathering of large crowds. At football grounds, crowds were limited to 8,000 in evacuation areas, and 15,000 elsewhere, although this was gradually relaxed as the government acknowledged the importance of the game as recreation for the working man.

Attendances of around 5,000 at Goodison and Anfield became the wartime norm. No doubt modern health and safety measures would see the ground closed until repairs were completed. Different times indeed!

By Mike Royden
[EFC Heritage Society]

