

Time lines

Strange dustbin goes missing

JANUARY 1982: A hotelier was on the hunt for a strange item after it disappeared overnight.

A rabbit-shaped dustbin disappeared from outside the Post House Hotel in Brentwood, leaving its matching mate all alone.

Deputy manager Gordon Slatford said: "I didn't know whether or not to inform the police or the RSPCA."

"I hope whoever took him hurries up and brings him back and his mate looks absolutely devastated."

The three foot high bin was estimated to cost £100.

Costly big freeze

JANUARY 1982: Essex was left counting the cost of clearing snow and ice in the middle of a freezing winter.

Essex County Council put the bill at £3 million, while Brentwood Borough Council reported the big freeze would cost them £100,000 to deal with.

By the middle of January, the councils had used more than half of their salt supplies, and were already estimating that pothole repairs and other key works would not be finished to schedule.

Family's bad breaks

JANUARY 1982: A Brentwood family suffered a series of unlucky breaks after a winter skiing holiday.

While in Austria, Peter Rayner fell and injured his leg on the slopes, and was left facing a cartilage operation.

Then, days later, his wife Alice had an accident and tore ligaments in her right leg.

The family returned home with son Jamie, 12, who left on a ski trip with the Brentwood School. But soon after, he tore the ligaments in his left leg in a similar accident.

Mrs Rayner said: "People all thought it was a big joke."

"The problem is that when we're all moving around at home we tend to fall over each other's crutches."



DRAMATIC ESCAPE: RAF airman Denys recalls the day his Vampire Pilot grateful to his wife's lucky locks for plane crash survival

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A NORTH Weald RAF pilot was never far from his beloved wife Barbara as he bailed out at 11,000 feet, his blazing jet crashing to the ground below.

Sgt Pilot Denys Mobberley's Vampire disintegrated after it was hit by another jet, falling to earth in pieces, narrowly missing All Saints parish church in Purleigh, near Maldon.

But it was a lock of his wife's hair, sewn into his uniform, that kept the former squadron leader safe, on this and another death-defying occasion during his 25-year career with the Royal Air Force, which started in 1943.

Eyewitness Mrs NS Hawkins, from Purleigh, saw "smoke and sparks coming from the Vampire, then it broke up and the pilot floated down on his parachute."

Blood

Under the headline 'She saw hand of providence reach out and save a life', the Essex Chronicle reported that children had been singing carols in the church on the afternoon of Sunday, December 30, 1951.

Villagers Mr and Mrs Leslie Jarvis raced in their car to where the pilot had dropped close to his Vampire, with its smouldering debris spread across 500 yards.

Mrs Jarvis said: "The pilot was extremely brave. He stepped out of the harness grinning, with blood running down his face from a cut on the forehead."

Widower Mr Mobberley, who celebrates his 86th birthday next



EYEWITNESS: Mrs NS Hawkins, who saw the Vampire break up

month, told the Gazette this week: "I had been taking part in a wing formation exercise involving Squadrons 604, 601 and 72, comprising 18 Vampires led by Squadron Leader Kingaby, a Battle of Britain ace."

"When we had completed our high-level exercises we started our descent towards base, with a reasonable space between each of the squadrons."

"However, my number two con-

tinued to close up on me and the leading edge of his wing collided with my tail booms.

"Everything in the cockpit was vibrating and breaking up, and it was not possible to focus on anything - all I could think of was my wife, Barbara."

"I knew that I had to escape - this was before ejection seats - fortunately the cockpit canopy was still intact so I quickly checked that my parachute and dinghy were correctly secured but disconnected my radio plug and oxygen tube."

"I then put one hand on the harness release and the other on the canopy eject lever. I bent fully forward, knocking my forehead on the gun sight, and operated the harness and canopy releases."

Falling

As the formation was travelling at 350mph at about 11,000 feet, he felt the full blast of the airflow; his oxygen mask flattened hard against his face before breaking away.

"I remember the wind blowing my mouth open and inflating my cheeks like a balloon."

"At this stage I must have temporarily lost consciousness and the next thing I remember was being clear of the aircraft and falling towards the earth."

"I was not very high so I pulled the parachute ripcord handle."

He said: "To my great relief, the chute opened immediately and luckily, being over open country, I landed softly on a freshly ploughed field."

"One of the other pilots had seen my parachute open and flew



PROUD PILOT: Denys Mobberley with a similar Vampire jet aircraft to

down to see where I had landed. I was able to indicate to him that I was safe and uninjured.

"There was a country road alongside the field and, after a few minutes, during which I gathered together my parachute and dinghy pack, a local couple arrived in their car."

"Mrs Jarvis offered me her handkerchief and asked me if I would like to wipe my face. I asked if it was muddy, to which she

replied that it was covered in blood; I had cut my forehead on the gun sight."

"She then asked me if I would like a cigarette. I said that I didn't smoke, to which she replied, 'Aren't you going to start?'"

"They took me to their home, from where I called the RAF station, and gratefully accepted the offer of a cup of tea and biscuits, before an ambulance arrived outside and took me the Chelmsford

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jet disintegrated in mid-air after it was hit by a colleague's aircraft



the one that he was forced to bail out of. This picture was taken in Germany where he was based in 1950

and Essex Hospital, Chelmsford, for a check-up.

"My two wing men, Sid Hyams and Peter Blake, quickly drove down to Woodford Green, where I lived, to tell my wife, Barbara, that I would be a bit late getting home that evening.

"When the full story came out, Barbara thought that I had a miraculous escape, but I assured her that she had been there to look after me the whole time.

"You see, ever since I was awarded my 'wings' I had always sewn a lock of Barbara's hair under the pilot's flying badge of my 'battle dress'; the uniform I wore under my flying overalls."

Fuel leak

Mr Mobberley escaped death a second time.

In 1964, he safely landed a Victor tanker aircraft after experiencing a massive fuel leak that

flooded the cockpit. Again, he had one of Barbara's lucky locks sewn under his wings.

He was awarded the Air Force Cross in 1965.

He left the RAF three years later with the rank of squadron leader.

He then worked for the Civil Aviation Authority at Stansted until 1991 as a senior flight examiner before retiring to Suffolk.



AFTERMATH: Bystanders check the wreckage of the Vampire aircraft

Fellow flyer in such a state that he didn't lower landing gear

FLEET Street reporters raced to RAF North Weald when news broke of the collision and "negotiated" their way into the Flying Wing Adjutant's office.

"One enterprising reporter took my photograph from the operations board and slipped it in his pocket before anyone had landed," recalled Mr Mobberley. "The next day, the front page of the Daily Herald carried my photograph, with a graphic description of the accident."

They claimed that after Sgt Pilot Mobberley had parachuted safely he phoned the North Weald asking, "Who hit me?" and adding, "I'll sort him out when I get back."

Mr Mobberley told the Gazette that, when Pilot Officer Norman saw his Vampire break up, he was convinced that his actions had led to a death.

PO Norman was in such a state that he crash-landed his Vampire on the grass at the side of the runway at North Weald without lowering the landing gear.

Mr Mobberley said: "When the rescue services arrived at the



FRONT PAGE NEWS: Former RAF pilot Denys Mobberley

aircraft, he had passed out and was unconscious in the cockpit.

"He was immediately taken to sick quarters where he remained unconscious for some time.

"I eventually arrived back at North Weald and went down to sick quarters, by which time he was recovering."

"PO Norman was taken aback to see me standing there fit and well."

Time lines

To Paddington by train in 40 minutes

JANUARY 1992: A revolutionary rail scheme was launched early in the year – Crossrail.

The plans, to link Shenfield with Heathrow and Reading among others, were first touted in 1992 by British Rail.

It claimed passengers would be able to travel from Brentwood to Paddington in 40 minutes.

Essex husky racer

JANUARY 1992: A Brentwood man was making waves in the world of husky racing, despite mild conditions.

John Beckwith, 59, of Rowan Green, was entering his second season as a husky rally challenger, preparing to travel to Scotland to enter the first season.

His chief dog was Ruby Roo, pictured, who led a team of three or four dogs at 25mph in the races.



Hotting up in library

JANUARY 1992: Book lovers using Brentwood library were left hot under the collar when the building's ventilation system needed desperate repair work.

A total of £90,000 was suggested as the cost of repairing the cooling system, which also affected newly-built libraries in Basildon and Harlow.

Conservative councillor Mrs Kathleen Pauley said: "Brentwood is a brand new library.

"I am absolutely amazed it was not seen to in the original designs."

Cough jab advised

JANUARY 1982: Children in Brentwood were being encouraged to get vaccinated against whooping cough, as the disease claimed victims across the country.

Brentwood's community physician, Dr Tony Kirkland, joined up with a government campaign to publicise the jab, after thousands of children became infected.



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