

World War Two: Bomb Site Discovery Trail**Introduction**

Luton was a target for Nazi bombers owing to the many factories in the town producing military equipment and components.

Estimated Walking time without stops: 35 minutes

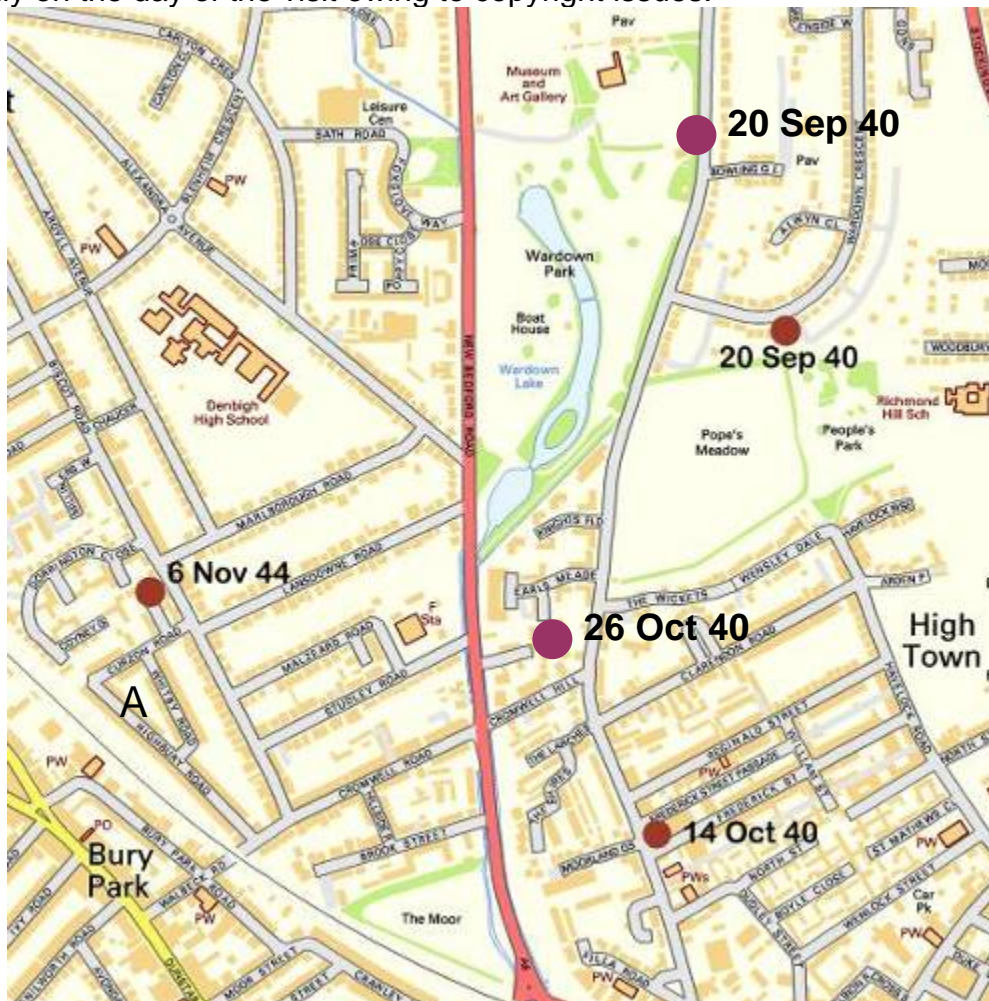
Distance to walk: 2.67 km, 1.66 miles (or 3.5 km, 2.1 miles)

Estimated time to complete trail: 1 hour 10 minutes (or 1 hour 30 minutes)

Over the course of WWII Luton endured 900 air raid warnings, and 24 actual raids in which, 107 people were killed and over 500 injured. The damage to the town and its buildings was significant.

This trail will take you to the locations of three separate bomb sites, and using contemporary sources and photographs the children will establish the extent of the damage caused and reflect on the impact of the raid.

The trail instructions are downloadable from our website, the photo pack will be provided for use only on the day of the visit owing to copyright issues.



Map showing date and location of bomb sites.

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Location 1: The Museum building

00:05 mins

Wardown House was completed in 1877 as a private house by a wealthy Victorian solicitor called Frank Chapman Scargill. At the time it was on the outskirts of the town and its grounds were all of what its now the public park. It had all the features of a house of this kind, the area that is now the parks compound was the kitchen garden and the service wing, stables and coach houses are now used as offices and the cricket pavilion.

Location 2: East Lodge, Wardown Park

00:10 mins

Leave the Museum and walk down toward the lake, the play area and the exit on to the Old Bedford Road.

On your left at the edge of the lawn, just south of the bowls ground, you can see two long mounds under the trees. Underneath these mounds are the public air raid shelters used by local residents and visitors to the park. Similar mounds can be seen on the New Bedford Road side of the park, although all are now sealed and the entrances buried.

Can you imagine what it would be like to be huddled in the dark narrow shelters with lots of other people, listening to the rumble of aircraft and the boom of bombs? People used to sing songs in the shelters to keep their morale up, and to stop themselves being frightened.

At 4:42 PM on Friday September 20th 1940, in the grass area to the west of East Lodge, a single bomb, out of a stick of 6 from one aircraft, exploded forming a small crater. The crater has been filled in since, and there is no evidence remaining above ground that a bomb ever landed here. Other bombs landed in a line heading towards Pope's Meadow, one struck 13 Wardown Crescent **see location 3**.

Walk out onto the Old Bedford road and cross to the eastern, far side of the road. Walk about 150 metres (164 yards) and then turn left into Wardown Crescent. Number 13 is on the left hand side of the road about 100 metres (109 yards) up the hill.

Location 3: 13 Wardown Crescent

00:20 mins

One bomb struck the back of number 13 Wardown Crescent. The house has been repaired since, and there is little evidence that there ever was a bomb blast here.

Roofs and windows of surrounding houses were lightly damaged as the full force of the blast was taken by the back of number 13. A large crater was gouged into the back garden on number 13, roughly where the pond used to be. Three members of the family were in the house at the time, all escaped with no injuries or fatalities.



Location 4: Lye Trading Estate

00:25 mins

Now retrace your steps back to the Old Bedford Road and follow it road south towards the town centre keeping the grassy hill of Pope's Meadow on your left hand side.

The new housing development of Pope's Court and Knight's field on the western side of the Old Bedford Road, lie on the site of the Lye Trading Estate.

At 2:35 AM on Saturday 26th October 1940, during an incendiary (fire) bomb raid. A fire bomb ignited a silk warehouse on the Lye Estate, causing £1,000 worth of damage. The fires from this raid were swiftly extinguished by fire wardens.

Location 5: Frederick Street, Junction with Old Bedford Road

00:35 mins

Keep following the Old Bedford Road south, and after roughly half a mile, you will arrive at the junction with Frederick Street on the east (left) side of the road.

On Monday 14th October 1940 the siren sounded just before noon as a rogue aircraft had been reported in the area.

At about 12 noon a lone aircraft was seen circling above the town, shortly afterwards at 12:15 PM a single large bomb detonated on a small area of high town, located between the Old Bedford Road and the junctions of Frederick Street and Mussons Path, in which 13 people were killed and 35 injured.

The bomb blast was concentrated on two neighbouring hat factories, W. O. Scales & Co. and Gregory's. Most of the deaths were the women and girls employed at these factories,.

The blast was enough to throw a heavy blocking machine over the neighbouring roofs into a nearby garden. Blocking machines typically weighed over half a ton (500 kg)

Dewing machines were also blasted considerable distances, and ribbons and hats were blown up and ended up caught in trees as far away as Lansdowne Road on the other side of New Bedford Road.

Roofs and windows of nearby buildings such as 'The Mount' and North Street Methodist Church were also badly damaged.

Think how much effort it takes to lift up something heavy like a bag of shopping.

Now think about how difficult and heavy it would be to lift up something like a car.

Now imagine how much effort it would take to 'throw' this car a hundred metres!

Only now can you begin to see how powerful bombs are, and it is only a push of air, like a powerful wind, that is throwing the car. The air is shoved so hard by the chemical explosion of the bomb blast, that it is moving fast enough and has enough power to throw heavy objects.



Location 6: Mussons Path, Junction with Old Bedford Road

00:40 mins

A further 200 yards (100 metres) south of Frederick Street is Mussons Path.

The exact location where the bomb fell lies directly underneath the Jehovah's Witnesses Hall.

Where the OAP home complex 'Nursery Cottages' now stands, opposite Mussons Path, used to be Old Bedford Road School. Hundreds of children had been hurried to the shelters where they were unharmed, although the school building was damaged by the blast.

Tommy Walker was the youngest person to be caught in the raid, he was 14 and worked in the factory. He was trapped in the rubble and it took two and half hours to dig him out.

Can you imagine what it would feel like to be trapped under all the rubble for hours?

Location 7: Old Bedford Road

00:50 mins

In September 1940 Luton's main bus depot in Park Street was bombed, damaging 46 buses, leaving only 19 working buses to service the whole of Luton.

In a great irony, the undamaged buses were moved to a new base in a hat warehouse in Frederick Street. The raid of 14th October damaged this new depot and yet more buses were destroyed! After this Luton's buses were dispersed under the trees in Wardown Park.

Why might bombing a bus depot have been so inconvenient?

A time before cars, people need them to get to work in the factories making weapons and ammunition.

Why would the buses have been safer under the trees in the park?

Shaded, dispersed, not all lumped together so it takes many more bombs to destroy a number of buses instead of just one to destroy many.



Location 8: Junction of Biscot and Lansdowne Road (Optional)

1:15 mins

This location is across the busy A6 and, unless your tour is significantly longer than one hour or you are using this trail as part of an in-school loan, it is not recommended that you visit this location, it has merely been provided as further local interest.

Retrace your stops north up the Old Bedford Road until you reach Cromwell Hill. Turn left onto Crowell Hill and follow it down to The A6 New Bedford Road. Cross the A6 and follow Cromwell Road for quarter of a mile until you reach Biscott Road. Turn right into Biscott Road and follow it for quarter of a mile until you meet the junction with Lansdowne Road.

At 9:50 AM on Monday November 6th 1944, a single V2 rocket detonated in the Commer Car Factory canteen block in Biscot Road, killing 19 people, injuring 196 and damaging 1,524 houses. As common with all V2 rockets, there was no air-raid warning since the radar technology of the day was unable to detect these rockets as they followed a ballistic trajectory via space, and were travelling faster than the speed of sound at impact.

The explosion caused a crater 30 ft wide and 12 ft deep. Numbers 77 – 83 & 58 – 68 Biscot Road were destroyed, and houses up to 1.5 miles away were damaged. Brick dust from the pulverised houses drifted and settled in Wardown Park. If the rocket had landed 5 minutes later, the canteen would have been filled with people taking their 10 AM break.

As common with all V2 explosions, all reporting of the explosion was censored and the rumour started that it was the result of a works gas explosion and not a rocket. Only after the war was the truth released.

V2 rockets were a development of the V1 Doodle-bug. They travelled at up to 3000 mph, contained 2000 lbs of explosive and had a range of 150 miles. V2s were first used against the UK in September 1944.

A descendant of the V2, the Saturn V (five) rocket, carried humanity onto the surface of the moon since both rockets were designed and inspired by the German scientist Werner Von Braun.



