

(Thanks are due to Bruce Crawford, for bringing this shelter to our attention in August 2020)

# An Unusual Air Raid Shelter in Rosemary Hill Road

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During WW2, air raid shelters abounded, obviously where there was the likelihood of bombs dropping. With the threat of war, Anderson Shelters were the first to appear. As a general rule, these were somewhat flimsy affairs, being made of corrugated iron and erected in back gardens. They were often sunk slightly into the ground with a thick turf covering, giving some protection from falling masonry, etc, but were small, had very little comfort and were susceptible to flooding.

In time, bearing in mind that people living in built up areas had no back gardens, Morrison Shelters were provided for use inside people's homes. Made of heavy steel, they doubled up as a table with four mesh sides, one of which opened up for a small family to crawl underneath, thus giving similar protection to the Anderson Shelters but without most of the drawbacks.

But, there was another much stronger type of shelter to be had, built by Stanton Ironworks Co Ltd near Nottingham (see [www.andersonshelters.org.uk/concrete\\_etc.html](http://www.andersonshelters.org.uk/concrete_etc.html)). This *Stanton Shelter* was made of precast concrete arched-shaped units (each one in two parts), bolted together. For concealment purposes in the garden, as with the Anderson, they were covered with a layer of earth and turf, but these were buried much deeper. Many appear to have been used for military purposes, being much larger in construction and most unlikely to be found in residential areas.

Surprisingly, there is a shelter still to be found in the garden of a house in Rosemary Hill Road, near to the Walsall Road junction, which is thought to be a *Stanton Shelter*. The following photographs, taken in August 2020, show a strong degree of similarity.



1. Brick Wall supporting a shallow mound of earth covering the top of the shelter. Trees and shrubs have virtually disguised the mound.

*(Photo courtesy of Bruce Crawford)*





2. A view of the entrance showing the top step. A covered hinged door, no longer there, would have kept it waterproof.

*(Authors' photo)*



3. This shows the deep flight of steps down, nine in all.

*(Authors' photo)*



4. Underground floor level. There is presently flooding about 12 inches deep. A main door seems to be missing. The entrance to the shelter is to the left and its wooden door is open. The round steel item appears to be some sort of lid with a handle on the reverse side.

*(Photo courtesy of Bruce Crawford)*





5. View of right hand side of shelter, showing its wooden door and electricity cables, which were connected to the house at the other end of the garden.

*(Authors' photo)*



6. The shelter, reckoned to be 10 x 8 x 8 feet high, showing a 'Mansard' shaped roof. This construction seems to differ slightly from the usual *Stanton Shelter* inasmuch as there appears to be five concrete sections bolted together. One could imagine two narrow beds might fit in, or two long benches providing seating for, say, 5 persons each side.

*(Authors' photo)*



7. Shelter showing the flooding after the rain in August 2020.

*(Authors' photo)*





8. View of left hand side of shelter, showing 'Mansard ' shaped roof. The rear wall does not appear to be a door.

*(Authors' photo)*



9. The shelter showing electricity cables, assumed to be for internal lighting.

*(Authors' photo)*



10. The steep steps leading to the exit.

*(Authors' photo)*



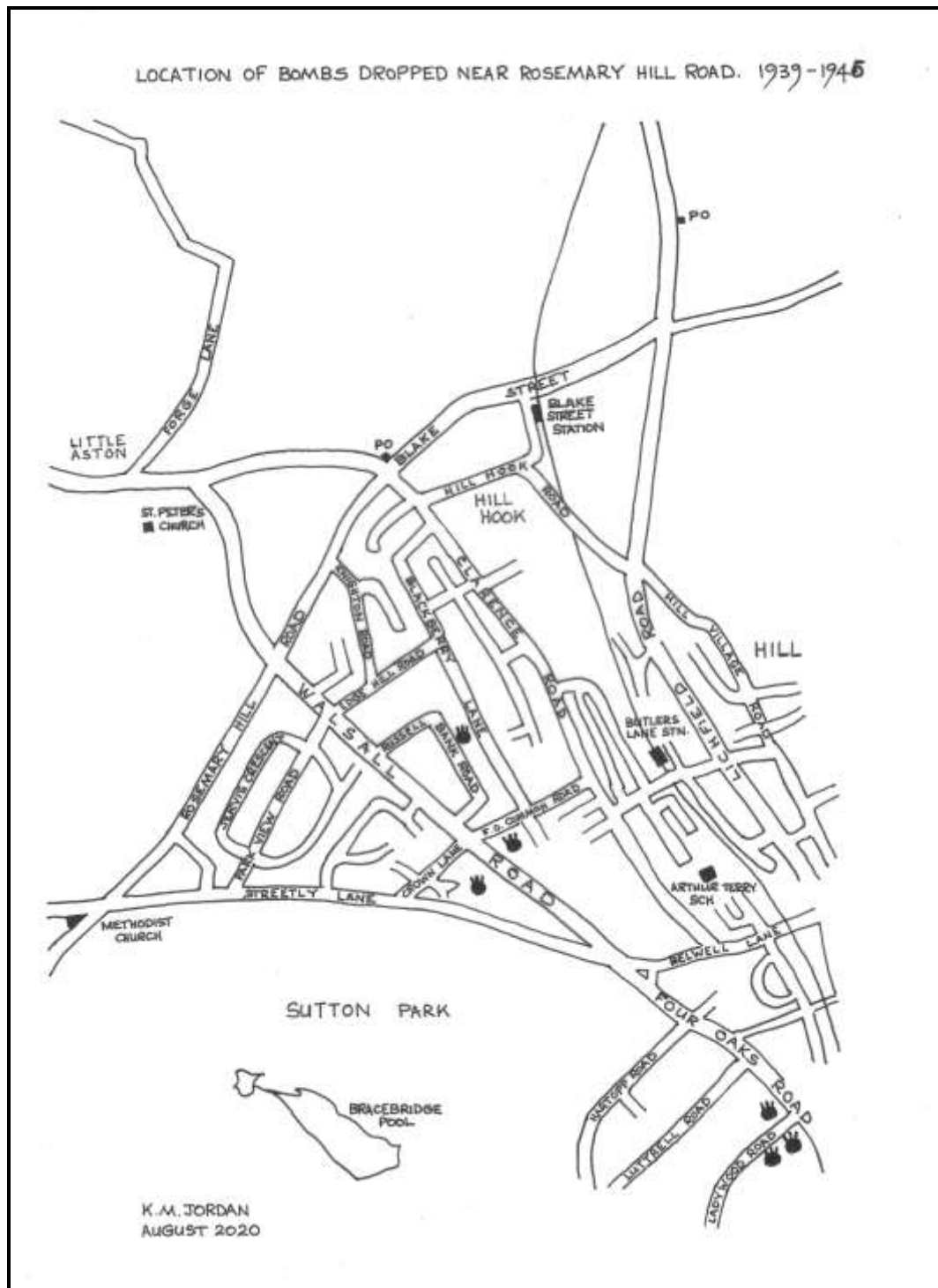
It is a puzzle to think why such a robust shelter was installed in this area. Certainly, during WW2, bombs were being dropped in the Little Aston Area, as well as the rest of Sutton Coldfield, but the numbers were very small.

This rather indistinct map (formerly in Drawer 13 of Sutton Coldfield Local Studies Library and Numbered 28) shows the sites of bombs dropped in Sutton Coldfield, 1939-1945.



*(Authors' photo)*

This is an enlarged view of the area in question, drawn by Keith Jordan:



It can be seen that at least six bombs were dropped in the vicinity, leading one to wonder why? Perhaps the German Luftwaffe were aiming for the railway line between Birmingham and Lichfield which ran nearby, or perhaps their bombs were just jettisoned as surplus to requirements before the aircraft

returned home after targetting something nearby, perhaps the Barrage Balloon Centre at Whitehouse Common. It is unlikely we shall ever know the reason.

However, the owner of the air raid shelter does recall conversations with several old British bomber command crews over the years, whose opinion was that night navigation and bomb aiming in the early years of the war were fairly inaccurate arts rather than sciences. There were no ground based aids or radio aids to navigate by, only ground features which the black out rendered quite obscure. In addition forecasting upper winds was a bit of guess work as well so if the winds were out by even 20 degrees or a few knots that could make a big difference over the flight from Germany. Add in a bit of cloud that hadn't been forecast or smoke from the bombs and incendiaries that had already been dropped, the tail end charlies would have had a tough time getting a bomb in the right place.

What we do know is that, had a property been destroyed or damaged during a bombing raid, the householders in Sutton Coldfield were aware of what to do next. They had all been sent instructions from the Borough Council in the form of a small booklet.

To find out what these were, you will need to look at another item, entitled 'After the Raid', in the Serendipity section of this website!

Janet and Keith Jordan  
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