

THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Bridget Talbot & Kiplin Hall

Bridget Talbot had two major concerns during the Second World War. One was her tireless battle to ensure the safety of men serving with the Merchant Navy and the Royal Navy. She wrote to newspapers stressing that conditions for seamen must be improved and raised questions in Parliament.

Her major achievement was the invention of a waterproof torch to be fitted to lifejackets, which gave men lost overboard a better chance of rescue. Miss Talbot used her political and social connections to badger Parliament to provide torches for all Merchant Navy, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force personnel, which saved many lives.

Dear Miss Talbot,
While serving in H.M.M.L.180 in the Channel in 1943, I was in an engagement with German E boats in which a Norwegian destroyer was blown up. We picked up the survivors, over 100 and believe me we would never have seen them except for the little red lights.
Yours sincerely,
Edward Burdon

Kiplin Hall's survival was Miss Talbot's other great concern. From late 1939, it was used by the Army. In June 1940, this included men of the 1st Battalion The East Lancashire Regiment who had been rescued from the beaches of Dunkirk. Bridget's account of this is very moving:

After Dunkirk a regiment was given a rendezvous at the house; all day and all night straggling and exhausted men arrived. The owner did everything that was possible in the way of collecting food, blankets and cushions and by three the next afternoon every floor was covered with men sleeping as if dead. It was a sight never to be forgotten with the hot sun streaming in at the windows on to the pictures, old furniture, the walls of books and the floor a silent carpet of prostrate khaki figures. With the help of a little gardening, bathing in the river and sleeping these Dunkirk men gradually recovered from their weariness and mended their shattered nerves.

In autumn 1942, Kiplin was requisitioned by the Royal Air Force as No. 224 Maintenance Unit, to supply bombs and ammunition to the local airfields, particularly the Bomber Command airfields at Middleton St. George and Croft.

The Hall was turned into flats for the officers, with the men living in outbuildings and newly-built accommodation huts. The NAAFI canteen opened in part of the old stable block in December.

The unit became active in November 1942 and the Operations Record Book records:

- 3/11 First consignment of Explosives received at Scorton (L.N.E.R.) Station.
- 23/11 First issue of explosives despatched from Unit.

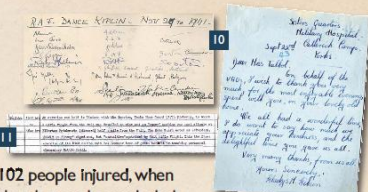
The bombs were stored in dumps in the woods around the Hall. The largest were the 4000-pound 'cookie' bombs. From summer 1943, incendiaries were also stored at Kiplin. One RAF officer stationed here said the cellars below the Hall were used to store ammunition. Not surprisingly, Miss Talbot insisted that it should be removed!

There was also time for rest and fun. The unit football team was formed in January 1943 and on the 31st played RAF Catterick Officers' Mess XI, winning 1-0. There were dances in the Hall and no doubt spirits rose when the local VAD nurses visited. In March 1943, an exercise was held with the Scorton Home Guard. Despite the serious report in the Ops. Book, it still sounds like an episode of Dad's Army!

On 4 February 1944, there was a terrible explosion at Catterick Bridge railway station on the Richmond branch line, at its junction with the Catterick Military Railway. 6 civilians and 6 service men were killed and 102 people injured, when trucks full of incendiaries and hand grenades exploded. The nearby Railway Hotel stood on the steep empty plot at the north-west corner of the crossroads of the Great North Road and the B6271, where the Brompton-on-Swale traffic lights are now. The hotel was destroyed, along with 7 houses, a café and the goods yard offices.

During 1944, the number of bombing raids on Germany and France increased enormously and the unit's turnover of explosives doubled to ensure that bombs could be delivered to Middleton St. George and Croft. In August, 13,096 tons of explosives were handled between the railway station, Kiplin and the airfields. The total number of personnel at Kiplin that month was 208.

In late November 1944, No. 224 M.U. moved from Kiplin to Scorton airfield and operated from there until 1947. Despite many repairs being carried out by the RAF, Bridget maintained that considerable damage was done to the Hall during the war. She campaigned for years to get compensation, including sending petitions to Downing Street, but with little success. The house became almost derelict, although the flats were occupied until the 1980s.



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- IMAGES**
- 1-4 Miss Talbot's life-saving torch is well documented in Kiplin's archives.
 - 5 Miss Talbot's support of Merchant Navy personnel extended to their children.
 - 6 Bridget found time to support the Dig for Victory campaign. She is beside the second nurse from the right.
 - 7 24 men of the 1st Battalion The East Lancashire Regiment signed Miss Talbot's scrapbook after being rescued from Dunkirk.
 - 8 Miss Talbot wrote to the Government and to the newspapers about the wartime treatment of Kiplin Hall.
 - 9 Bomb dumps in the woods around Kiplin. Those on the left are 5000-pound bombs and on the right 4000-pound 'cookie' bombs. (Courtesy of Kenne & Clarkson)
 - 10 Bridget loved organising dances for those involved in the war effort. Women in the Voluntary Aid Detachment worked as nursing assistants.
 - 11 From No. 224 M.U. Kiplin Operations Record Book, 26 March 1944.
 - 12 Photographs show the terrible damage caused to the Railway Hotel. (Courtesy of The Northern Echo)
 - 13 Report from 224 MU Kiplin Hall Operations Book, 4 February 1944.
 - 14 Increased bombing in Europe meant extra personnel and a heavier workload at Kiplin.
 - 15-17 Miss Talbot was adamant that a lot of damage was done to the Hall despite her actions, but P.L.E. Galloway's letter indicates that RAF personnel were actually carrying out repair work. (Images 15, 17 courtesy of North Yorkshire County Record Office) (Images 11, 13, 14 courtesy of the National Archives)

