

SIRENS FOR AIR RAID WARNINGS

The method of sounding the warning by Siren took some time to get into working order, and, even now at the end of the war there are some areas which are not satisfactory. The arrangements which had to be made were : -

- (a) Where to place the sirens. This could only be found out after a number of trials.
- (b) How to arrange the manning of the siren.
- (c) Whether hand sirens could be used.

At first 2 Gent Sirens were procured, one to be in Christchurch and one in Highcliffe. The cost of fixing them being £50.6. 3d.

After consultation with the Police Inspector, the A.R.P.O. & Chief Warden on whom this ditty devolved fixed on (a) The roof of Highcliffe Hotel and (b) Fairmile House.

Three hand sirens were bought, and, were put at Liveys Garage, The Grove, the Town Hall and Ayonmouth Hotel. There was also a steam siren at the Gas Works by Waterloo Bridge. Practice in working the hand sirens was given to those who were supposed to do it.

The first test was held on 11th May, 1939. The two sirens at Highcliffe Hotel and Fairmile House made sufficient sound, but parts of the area did not hear anything. A curious complaint from one citizen was as follows:- "When I have the windows shut and the wireless is turned on, I cannot hear the siren". What exactly he expected is not clear.

What actually did come out, as regards Highcliffe was this. The siren sounded well over the village, but became lost among the trees. Thus it could not be heard at Highcliffe Vicarage, nor in Friars Cliff, but it could be heard near Saulflands (well beyond the vicarage). Then a person visited Highcliffe with a mobile siren on a car. But this was not approved by Region.

A proposal to work the siren on Fairmile House by Remote Control did not get further than discussion. The manning had proved a great difficulty, since, if the sirens were to be of any real use there should be someone on duty day and night to sound them when required. Two siren wardens were enlisted by the A.R.P. Officer, but this was brought to an end, and the manning was to be taken over by the Fire Brigade who had 2 men on each night at Highcliffe. They had a watch room in one of the wooden rooms attached to the Hotel and they were connected by telephone with A. R. P. Headquarters. The siren

controls were in a small back-room in the hotel building itself, about 3 paces from the watch room. Except for large numbers of rats it was not too uncomfortable. Then the Siren Controls were put into the watch room.

At Fairmile House, where the siren warden went, the duty was carried out by wardens, who stayed in the Porters Lodge at the Entrance to the Institution, the Controls being in the Lodge. A suggestion that the police should man the siren was turned down by the Inspector. This siren became loosened in some way and had to be refixed.

Then came an order that the Fire Brigade were to be relieved of siren duty by 22.00. hours on Sunday, 22nd November at Highcliffe. The wardens had to take over, and a roster of duty was drawn up. By arrangement with Mrs. Castellani, wardens on duty had use of the office in the Hotel.

In the case of Fairmile House, as this place came under Bournemouth, A.R.P. Bournemouth were asked if they could take over this duty. A proposition was finally put that:

- (a) Volunteers doing 12 hours duty should get hot soup and sandwiches from the canteen at 20.00.
- (b) That the siren at Highcliffe Hotel should be moved to the Fire Station in Lyminster Road. This was finally done, and the siren remained in this position until the end of the war.

For the present, the one at Fairmile remained, duties being formed from the wardens organisation. In accordance to the objection raised by the Master to Ladies being on duty in the porters Lodge of the Institution, this was discontinued, and men only took the duty. The warden on duty was taken there by car and brought away in the morning, petrol being allowed for this purpose.

To try and get over the difficulty of manning, the Borough Engineer investigated how remote control of the sirens from some central point like the Town Hall could be carried out as proposed in H.S.C 23/1940. Tests were carried out at this period on the first Monday in each month, and it was finally decided that the siren at Fairmile House, should be moved to the Town Hall, which was taken in hand on 27/3/40. A hand siren was given to Major Anderson, O.C. Christchurch Barracks to be operated from there. In the course of the tests, the hand siren at Mundeford (Avonmouth Hotel) failed to operate. Then Mr. Livey who worked, the one in the Grove, strained himself in doing it, the working of the hand sirens being a very considerable effort. This left a big area in Jumpers where the warning, with the wind from the north, could not be heard. Finally it was decided to have another Gent siren on a site in Canberra

road, and after a slight set-back due to the Remote Control not working, this siren was in working order. Arrangements were made for the periodical tests by the Poole & Bournemouth Electricity Coy., and this continued throughout the war.

The hand sirens were finally given up and kept in reserve and the warning was worked from sirens at Canberra Road, Town Hall, Gas Works, and Highcliffe under A.R.P. Headquarters, Christchurch, and a further one under the War office at the A.D.E.E. (later S.R.D.E.), Somerford.

There were some pockets, depending on Variations of the wind, where the warning could not be heard on occasions, but it was felt these could not be covered. The sirens at Southbourne and New Milton helped to make warning generally heard, the latter was a particularly loud one and has several times been the cause of manning posts in Christchurch, when there was no warning in the Borough.

There was a suggestion put forward in 1942 for the sirens in all the three Boroughs of Poole, Bournemouth and Christchurch to be controlled from Bournemouth, but this was turned down on the ground of expense and except for a minor alteration in the position of the Control Switch of the Highcliffe siren, no further alterations were made throughout the war.