



■ Michael Maltin with the ball fired through his roof by the Ermin Street Guard. Photo: Paul Nicholls

Stone me, there's a hole in my roof!

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AS a former airline pilot, Michael Maltin is used to keeping an eye out for airborne hazards.

by Jo Barber

But nothing could prepare Mr Maltin for an attack on his house near Stroud at the weekend - when his property came under siege by the Romans!

Mr Maltin, who lives at Woodchester, luckily saw the funny side of things when a wooden ball fired from a replica siege engine smashed through his roof.

Woodchester village, famous for its Roman mosaic the Orpheus Pavement, which is buried under the churchyard, was playing host to Roman battle re-enactors the Ermine Street Guard on Saturday and Sunday when the military missile went astray.

Mr Maltin's home overlooks the village field where the Guard were demonstrating their fire power and

giving displays of soldiery as part of the villagers' Roman celebration.

As well as demonstrating Roman swords, armour and shields, the guard thrilled the audiences by firing both the wooden onager and a timber ballista during their performances.

And Mr Maltin was among the enthralled onlookers who earlier in the day had enjoyed the high-quality exhibitions and demonstrations by the Guard.

But he was back at his house in North Woodchester when the enemy struck on Sunday afternoon, while his wife was sitting on the front terrace enjoying the sunny afternoon weather.

Wind

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The onager ball, which weighed about a pound and measured about six inches in diameter, plummeted from the skies and shattered several roof tiles, landing with a thud in the attic of the Maltins' home of 27 years.

Centurion in charge of the legion Chris Haines said: "The ball was going well away from the house when it caught a gust of wind and took off some tiles."

Mr Maltin, a retired airline pilot and widely known locally for his skills as a clock restorer, took the incident in good spirit.

"The Guard were brilliant," said Mr Maltin. "I am arranging the repair privately – it is certainly not the sort of damage you could put on an insurance claim form very easily!"

Mr Maltin's wife Christine, who was sitting on her patio at the time, said the missile did make a crash when it landed on the roof.

"I think it was rather a shame that it happened when they put on such a superb display, but we do not want to make too much of it.

"I think they are embarrassed about it happening."

● On guard for Roman celebration – Page 16



■ Left: The Ermin Street Guard Roman re-enactment society with their reproduction ancient rock-throwing machine, the onager.

Photo: National Museum of Wales photographic dept.