

Burton in the War Years.

The outbreak of war in 1939 saw the writer as a 5 year old, living in one of the Granary flats in the Hall Yard. Strangely, memories of that time are quite clear, certainly clearer than they are of 2004.



A platoon of soldiers was billeted in the village; the Wilson household was instructed to provide lodging for one sergeant and two privates — Edgar, Charles and Reg all hailing from the Sheffield area. They were allocated the attic on the second floor of the flat, the roof slates clearly visible with no insulation whatever.

From time to time a searchlight battery encamped to the village and took up positions in the park opposite Monk Bretton and also at the top of the hill, on the opposite side of the road to the Bede Houses. The platoon of soldiers sported a football team with the pitch (complete with goalposts) situated in the lower part of the Park not too far from Dunster lodge — a particularly wet area of the Park in those days.

The stables below the granary flats were 'taken over' by the Ministry of Food and were regularly stocked and de-stocked, then re-stocked again with numerous cardboard cartons containing tinned food believed to be corned beef. In the early days it is recalled that the entrance door was guarded by the soldiers although this 'precaution' did not last long.

In the early days of the war, Burton boasted its own police constable — PC George Till (the writer's God Father) who lived next door in the second granary flat in the Hall Yard. PC Till's only mode of transport was his bicycle. His No. 2 was Special Constable Fred Denton who lived at Denton's Cottage — then named Rose Cottage on the hillside.

The residents of the village were allocated Air Raid shelters. Residents in the Hall Yard and the local area were instructed to proceed to the cellars of the Hall on hearing the sirens. Those residents in the middle of the village had a purpose made shelter constructed in the field behind the Hillside cottages (now forming part of the gardens of The Water House).

Residents at the top of the village were allocated a newly constructed shelter in the gardens of Debonnaire Cottage. Siren suits were the order of the day but the writer can only recall being taken to the cellars on one occasion — thereafter no one seemed to bother.

The soldiers were 'moved out' after some 18 months or so and their place at our granary flat was taken by two Land Army girls who were billeted with us for some two years. They spent their time working in the Hall gardens or on the Estate Farm in Carlton.

During the latter stages of the war prisoners of war were billeted in North Carlton and a number travelled to Burton each day to work in the Hall Yard, the saw mill and the stables (still using horses in those days) which have now been converted to Nos. 1, 2 and 3 Hall Yard residences. As I recall, some spoke very good English and one was quite adept at wood carving producing, for the writer, a most realistic wooden rifle.

One strange result of the billeting of the soldiers was the construction of a decontamination unit, adjacent to the Hall and situated at a point where the entrance to the Georgian House is at present. This was a single storey building with four shower cubicles and the words prominently displayed at the front of the building DECONTAMINATION UNIT. The reasoning behind the need for this escaped me and still does.

The Park area to the South of the Hall adjoining the city boundary was taken over as a training area for the army personnel at the Sobraon barracks. The sound of gunfire and explosions was pretty continuous throughout the war and it was a strictly prohibited area. The same area had been used during the first world war to trial the first tanks made by the Rustons factory in Lincoln.

Mike Wilson