

RECOLLECTIONS OF THE WAR YEARS

A COMPENDIUM OF EXPERIENCES OF THOSE OLD ENOUGH TO REMEMBER.

This year marks the 60th Anniversary of the end of the 2nd World War. Those of us who are 70 and over retain vivid memories of those dark days in 1940 when, as small, uncomprehending children, we experienced the horrors of the outbreak of war. The blitz, gas masks, ration books, the blackout, evacuees, the drawn curtains in the house nearby signifying the loss of a father or son, all come back to haunt us in those unguarded hours.

We remember listening to ITMA on the wireless with Tommy Handley, and revelling in the characters of Mrs Mopp, Colonel Chinstrap and the sinister German spy, Fumph who always came to a sticky end in every episode. There was always the reassurance of "Children's Hour" with the soothing voice of Derek McCullough saying "goodnight children everywhere." There was "Double British Summer Time" when the clocks moved forward 2 hours during the summer months, and the sight of convoys of military vehicles encamped along the roadside as "D" day approached.

As we grew older we understood in more detail the significance of the "D" Day landings and experienced the pleasure and relief when VE day was declared on 8th May 1945. Over the next few paragraphs we relate the stories of 5 parishioners whose memories span the war years – they are unpublished personal recollections so perhaps they will add just a little to our understanding of those difficult times.

Memories of the war in Lincolnshire John Benson

In 1940 I was 11 years old when in the early hours of Saturday morning 28th September I awoke to the sound of a terrific crash, followed by machine gun bullets going off. We had an army officer billeted on us but he had been called for duty that night at nearby Lincoln barracks because Hitler's invasion was expected imminently. My first thoughts were that the Germans HAD landed and were coming down Yarborough Crescent but were being held up by men in the trenches which had been dug at the corner of Burton Road. My parents came into the front bedroom which I shared with my younger brother - they thought that the house had been hit. They drew the blackout curtains and we saw that a Hampden bomber had crashed into St Matthias church opposite our house.



There was a terrific blaze and machine gun bullets were popping off in the fire. My father rang the fire brigade and I went downstairs to the back room (to be out of the way of the machine gun bullets), had a cup of tea and then fell asleep again.

The next morning I went to school as usual (we went to school on Saturday mornings in those days) and was somewhat surprised to find that the sound of the crash had awoken most of Lincoln. I went home at lunchtime to find that the area had been cordoned off and that the local residents had been told to go to air raid shelters.

Apparently the Hampden had returned from a raid on U-boat bases at Lorient in France with a bomb still on board - and it was still there in the wreckage! Fortunately it was soon dealt with. Later that day I found remnants of ammunition belts - still with live ammunition - at the bottom of our hedge, but to my intense disappointment the RAF came and took them away.

The south side of St Matthias church, including the vestry, was destroyed, but it was patched up with corrugated iron until the damage was repaired after the war. It continued to be used every week by the soldiers at the barracks for their Sunday morning church parades.

The Hampden was from 83 Squadron, based at nearby RAF Scampton. It had flown home on one engine and had probably still got quite a large amount of high-octane fuel on board. The crew of four had baled out, but the pilot - Pilot Officer Dudley Snook (20) probably left it too late. His parachute failed to open and he landed less than 100 yards away from the crash. He is buried in the churchyard at Scampton. The air gunner later became a pilot and he survived the war.

On Tuesday 22nd July 1941, a Hampden very nearly crashed into Lincoln Cathedral. Returning from operations, it crashed into the boarding house of the Girls' High School on Greestone Stairs, only a hundred yards away from the cathedral. A member of staff of the High School was killed, together with all the crew.

Five days later, on a sunny Sunday evening, the pilots of two Spitfires were doing aerobatics and mock attacks on each other over Lincoln. I watched them with a friend and we were horrified when one of them crashed into the other, slicing off the tail section. That plane immediately went into a spin and crashed in the centre of Lincoln - opposite the LNER railway station - killing four people. The other kept going and circled until it too lost height and crashed into a house near the racecourse. Both pilots baled out safely.

In March 1945 - only a few weeks before the VE Day - the Germans carried out large-scale intruder operations. Cruising around, waiting for Lancaster bombers returning from operations, were Luftwaffe Junkers Ju188A-1 aircraft, each carrying a crew of four. One of them shot down a Lancaster near Langworth and then made off towards Welton. Flying low, it attacked a car on the Welton-Hackthorn road, spitting cannon fire and machine gun bullets. But it came too low and crashed into the car, flinging it across two fields. The driver was the only member of the Observer Corps to be killed on duty in the war. He was the father of two boys from my school. The Germans were buried in Scampton churchyard. Many years later, a farmer ploughing his fields found a German identity tag and it was thought at first that it must have belonged to one of the aircrew who had perished. But this was a NEW name.

Checks were made and it was found to belong to a member of the squadron's ground crew, who had been reported as "absent without leave". He had evidently "hitched" a lift in the JU 188, probably for a bit of excitement.

So one of the gravestones of the Luftwaffe crew now has TWO names on it.

MEMORIES OF THE 1939-45 WAR – John Copeland

Although only at the tender age of eleven at the end of the 1939-45 War, living with my parents in the Essex town of Colchester, there are two vivid childhood memories that I have of the conflict.



The first recollection is of being machine-gunned by a Messerschmitt fighter. With my mother, who was pushing my sister in a pram, I was walking into the town, a short distance from our house. Suddenly, there was the

most tremendous noise overhead, and coming towards us, seemingly only a hundred or so feet above the ground, was a Messerschmitt fighter, its machine-guns blazing a trail of bullets along the street. Luckily, my mother, having heard the plane, pushed me and my sister into a stone gateway, and we were unhurt, though obviously extremely frightened by what could have been a deadly encounter with the Luftwaffe.

A more pleasant memory is of the Air Raid Warden for our street – a twenty-stone Bert Slack, much partial to a drop or two of the hard stuff, who would come waddling down to our house whenever the siren sounded. On hearing a plane overhead, usually when drinking my father's remaining whisky, he would say to my mother, Edna, whom he always called Ed: "Don't you worry, Ed. It's one of ours". Then, when there was an enormous explosion nearby, indicating quite decisively that it had not been one of our boys, Bert would say in consoling terms to my mother, reviving his confidence with some more whisky:

"Don't you worry, Ed. Our boys will get the little bugger".

Colchester fortunately escaped serious bomb damage, except for an incendiary raid, which had the town lit up, clearly visible from my bedroom window. At night when in bed I would hear the drone of the German bombers high overhead on their way to bomb London. It was a noise that always frightened me, forcing me to hide under the bedclothes, and even today whenever I hear the increasingly rare sound of a piston-engined aircraft, my mind goes back to those frightening bombers, all those long years ago.

NAVY DAYS - by Guy Walkinton

During 1944 I was serving aboard an American-built Lease Lend Fleet minesweeper HMS Steadfast. In those days it was the very latest in the class, and was able to sweep at 12.5 knots. We had to deal with several types of mines which the Germans had sown in the English Channel – firstly, the contact mine which was secured to the seabed by a cable, and which we would sweep with a serrated cable, thereby releasing the mine to the surface, so allowing us to dispose of it with machine-gun fire (Oerlikon). Secondly, the magnetic mine, which was laid on the seabed. We would dispose of these mines by towing an electrically charged cable, which sent out an impulse, thereby exploding the mine.

Thirdly, there were acoustic mines, which were removed by bow hammers that hit a diaphragm at regular intervals, thereby activating the mine. This particular mine was a menace as ships' engines would set it off, causing an immense explosion.

For a time we would sail out of Plymouth, and I well remember seeing the city centre as just a heap of rubble as a result of the "Baedeker Raids" of 1940, as they were called. A fair number of vessels were engaged in the Atlantic U-boat war; in fact, I remember standing on the Hoe and watching one of the Bird-class Sloops setting out to do battle. As she passed us, her public address system blared out "A Hunting We Will Go". We all cheered and waved, but in today's climate the skipper would probably be "banned" from the bridge and condemned to 28 days' stoppage of gin!



One day we were ordered out to clear the mines from around the Eddystone lighthouse, 14 miles south of Plymouth. I sailed past the lighthouse in 1998, and was pleased to see that we had done such a good job!

We then moved down to the Solent to participate in the Normandy landings. Several channels had to be kept mine-free, so we were involved with the British channel from Nab Tower (Portsmouth) to the Juno light vessel which was anchored off Le Hamel. It was a never ending job as the Germans put down more magnetic mines during the hours of darkness.

We would be sweeping during the daylight hours, and at night go to a designated trot line off the beaches. The anchor positions were numbered, and it was alleged that the staff officers drew numbers out of the hat so that those with the lowest numbers were nearest to the enemy! A trot line was established so that they could act as guard ships during the night for the vessels that were closer inshore.

One of the night-time hassles was the human torpedoes and the divers who were liable to attach limpet mines to our hulls. I can remember seeing the Monitor class (shallow draught) cruisers supporting the army as they landed and also the rocket-firing landing craft. There was an immense amount of noise!

These days we tend to decry the Americans, but I shall always be grateful to them for the tremendous firepower support that they gave us on our right, which must have taken off a lot of the pressure on our landing beaches. Sadly, they managed to drop a bomb on one of our sister ships, killing four sailors. Such is war. Eventually we had a disagreement with a magnetic mine, but managed to limp back to Portsmouth. There were no serious casualties, but when the encounter happened, the skipper signalled the flotilla leader: "Stand by to pick up survivors", but thankfully we did not need any help! Looking back it was quite an experience, but thankfully nothing like that will ever happen again. I will be around with the poppies at the end of October and will look forward to your support!

MEMORIES OF THE 1939-45 WAR

by George Oglanby

War is declared - I remember war being declared and hearing Chamberlain's voice on our wireless and the gravity that seemed to settle on everything - it seemed like a Sunday morning. All the families in the Avenue came out to their front gates and talked to the neighbours - it made a big impression on one eight year old boy. The family Austin 7 was put on blocks in the garage and my father bought a triumph 3-speed bike to travel to work.

The Evacuee

Then an evacuee arrived - he had come down by train with others from London to Wokingham a distance of just 30 miles. He lived in Clapham and had his name and address written on a label on his jacket. His



name was Arthur - he had no change of clothes but carried his gas mask. My mother was appalled by his condition and insisted he must have a bath - he was very dirty, smelly and his cloths were ragged. I remember my mother filling the bath and trying to get Arthur into it. He was terrified and I heard him screaming "No, No!"

My mother set about getting some other clothes for him and eventually he went to school. This was too much for him as he had had little schooling and could not cope. I don't know what the mechanism was but after a few months he returned to London and the Blitz. I hope he survived.

The Dunkirk Evacuation I remember the evacuation from Dunkirk. Trains would pass slowly through Wokingham carrying the rescued soldiers who were in a shocking state, tired out, dirty and unshaven - many did not speak English. My mother gathered what supplies she could find and with others, climbed the embankment (still there today on the Guilford reading Line) and offered the food and drink to the exhausted men through the carriage windows. I thought "we are losing the war" and felt terribly despondent.

The Home Guard - My father joined the Home Guard, originally called "The Local Defence Volunteers". He had an arm band, no uniform and paraded with his own shotgun. Later he was issued with a .303 rifle and ammunition which were kept in the hall at home. He was a reasonable shot and he was given a piece of equipment called a "Cup Discharger" which was about the size of a beer mug and was fixed to the muzzle of the rifle to fire grenades. He explained that you took the pin out of the grenade, placed it in the cup, and then loaded the rifle with an explosive charge, take aim and fire. A hazardous operation with a live grenade and I am thankful he never had to use it for real!

The Blitz - My brother and I slept under the table during the blitz - German bombers would circle overhead and drop their bombs anywhere rather than risk the searchlights and flak over London.



One night my father returned to the house from his spell on duty, and woke us, saying "come and have a look, London's burning". Climbing a low hill by the house we looked out towards London and saw an enormous red glow on the horizon with searchlights crisscrossing the night sky, the air was filled with the sound of aircraft and the noise of anti-aircraft guns - an extraordinary memory.

Memories of the 1939-1945 war - Gordon Hickmore

We lived at 124 Monmouth Road in Dorchester, a long road which ran parallel to the Southern Railway Line linking London to Weymouth.

I remember it was a warm, cloudless summer's day and I (aged 4½) was with my father and neighbours in the front garden looking skywards. I recall seeing tight formations of aircraft flying from the direction of Weymouth and then turning eastwards over the town, following the railway line towards London. Although the aircraft were very high and little more than specs in the sky, you could hear the distinctive throb of the engines as they flew past. My father explained they were German bombers and they were probably following the railway line towards Southampton or London. "Why don't we shoot them down?" I asked, expecting a positive answer. My father shook his head, "Too high" he said sadly, and we went down to the Anson shelter in the garden in response to the wailing sirens.

Such childhood memories are difficult to place and verify, but recently I carried out some research and discovered that on 15th September 1940, the date now recognised as Battle of Britain Day, *Luftflotte 3* carried out diversionary attacks on Portland and then bombed the Supermarine aircraft factory in Southampton where the production line for the Spitfire was based. The aircraft based at airfields in North West France, flew from Cherbourg, coasting in at Weymouth at about 2pm. The formation then continued to Woolston where the factory was located - a distance of only 50 miles or 20 minutes flying time from the target.

On one occasion a young man, a commando, was billeted with us for a few days. He enlivened the street by throwing thunderflashes from the bedroom window, much to the consternation of the neighbours. One day he said farewell to my mother saying he was "going on an op." A few days later a vehicle collected his belongings. It was the time of the Dieppe raid.

With the build up to "D" day, Monmouth Road was lined on both sides with a huge convoy of military vehicles and men of a United States infantry battalion. It was a paradise for small boys who could tap into an inexhaustible supply of chewing gum. We all collected gum rappers and Havana cigar bands which were stuck into an album. Duplicates were traded avidly at school and I seem to remember I had a collection of over 50. One day the convoy moved off and older members of the gang, who had cycled up to the Ridgeway which overlooked Weymouth, reported seeing hundreds of ships in the bay. Our convoy was probably destined for the Utah and Omaha beaches.

Burton in the War Years – Mike Wilson

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. A platoon of soldiers was billeted in the village and the Wilson household were 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. 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 soldiers were ‘moved out’ after some 18 months 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 North Carlton.

From time to time a searchlight battery encamped to the village and took up positions in the park opposite Monk Bretton house and at the top of the hill, on the opposite side of the road to the Bede houses. The stables below the granary flats were ‘taken over’ by the Ministry of Food and were regularly stocked with numerous cardboard cartons containing tinned food, believed to be corned beef. In the early days the entrance door was guarded by the soldiers although this ‘precaution’ did not last long.

The residents of the village were allocated ‘Air Raid shelters’. Residents in the Hall Yard were instructed to proceed to the cellars of the Hall on hearing the sirens. Those in the ‘middle of the village’ had a purpose made shelter constructed in the field behind the Hillside cottages, whilst households on Middle St were allocated a shelter in the gardens of Debonair Cottage.

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 the 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.

The park area to the south of the Hall adjoining the Lincoln boundary was taken over by the Military as a weapons training area for the Army at the Sobraon Barracks. It was a prohibited area and the sound of gunfire and explosions was pretty well continuous throughout the war.



Ludgate Gardens

*THE Judge looked down from his high place
And, with a frown upon his face
Remarked to Council there below him:
“Who is this Hitler? Should I know him?”*

*To mark his Lordship’s little joke,
The Council smiled before he spoke:*

*“Surely, me lud you recollect
That famous scenic architect
Who swept our city slums away
And planted lawns with borders gay,
Where Ludgate Gardens stand today.”*

*“Really!” replied the Judge,
“Well such is Fame!
I didn’t even know
The fellows name.”*

The Sundial



*My poor old sundial had a shock
When first they tampered with the clock;
And never quite forgave the crime
That brought a second Summer Time.*

*It can’t think why we wake at five,
Before the bees have left the hive;
It hates to feel our day is done
Before the twilight has begun.*

*Yet, on my Sundial, I can trace
This message for the human race;
“let others talk of storm and showers
I only count the shining hours.”*

Poems by Richard Arkell “Green Fingers” and
“Green Fingers Again” Published 1942 -1945

Editors note: The clocks were advanced by 2 hours during the summer months March 1940 – 1946 so that office and factory workers could benefit from the lighter evenings. Not popular with farmers who still got up at 5 for milking but were still in the fields at 11pm at harvest time.