

“Yes, we remember it well!”

A Lighthorne anthology of reminiscences of the 1940s



Lighthorne Village School circa 1939

Foreword

It is hoped that you will, depending upon your age, either share a little nostalgia from things which others remembered and you had forgotten; if you're not yet sixty-something, discover just what it was that made your Pensioner neighbours into the kindly/irascible old souls they have become or, if you are very young, learn what it was like to have been your age in the 1940s.

A brief explanation of the background to this slim volume may be helpful. During Lighthorne's "Sixty Years On" week-end celebration to mark the anniversary of the end of the Second World War, it was noticed that a local school had asked its pupils to interview their grandparents and older neighbours about living in England in the Forties.

Perhaps, it was suggested, a collection of such Memories could be gathered together and published for the benefit of subsequent generations' curiosity. A general request was made for contributions – not only from people who were resident in Lighthorne at the time (although three of the contributors do appear in the cover photograph) but from all the present inhabitants regardless of where they lived in those distant days.

No "rules" were laid down. That's why some entries cover the whole decade while others limit themselves to the War years only. The anecdotes flowed in. Some related to a single incident while others ranged more widely through the authors' childhoods. Nor was a specific format suggested – that's why some contain continuous paragraphs and others have neatly-placed titles and headings in the text. Any attempt to "standardise" the writing would, it was felt, have detracted from the variety of individual narrative styles.

The anthologist's hardest task is usually in making a selection from the available material. Not so with this compilation. Every offering was welcomed and published in full. As a result there is some repetition - for which no apology seems needed. In fact, different reports of the same event or phenomenon only add to the authenticity of the whole – for example, quite why the males seemed to think that parachutes were for use when jumping out of planes and the females had other ideas will probably fascinate sociologists studying gender-stereotyping for years to come.

Although many of the contributors regard the typewriter as a new-fangled gadget, - "It'll never replace copper-plate handwriting" - they have been sufficiently open-minded to agree that the Internet has its uses and a copy of this small archive will be made available on the Lighthorne History Society's page on the Lighthorne Village Website www.lighthorneonline.com

Many of us missed the opportunity to ask our parents and grandparents for details of *their* early lives and have regretted the oversight. You didn't even have to ask for the details of ours.

Here they are. We hope you find them interesting.

Lighthorne – May 2008

Barbara Townsend (nee Adams)

Lighthorne in World War II

At the outbreak of the War my older sister and I attended the village school. We had to take our gas-masks, in a cardboard box hung from a shoulder-strap. They covered the whole face and were horrible to wear – but essential. Every morning, after assembly, we had to practise putting them on to make sure we could use them quickly in an emergency. The number of children at the school was greatly increased by an influx of families evacuated to Lighthorne from Coventry. These evacuees brought their own teacher with them, Miss Clutterbuck. She was very strict and did a lot of shouting which made the children very tearful. I remember one little girl called Violet Whitlock who cried every day because she was missing her Mum and Dad.

I remember the air-raid warnings going off when the Germans were bombing Coventry. It was a horrible sound, very loud which echoed around the village and we children hurried home and were put into cupboards until the “All-clear” went off. I don't recall being particularly frightened because I was too young to realise what was going on; but it must have been a very worrying time for my parents and their neighbours.

The Black-out. During the War, the whole village had to be kept dark at night-time – not a chink of light was allowed. Key-holes were stuffed with newspaper and black material covered all the windows in case the enemy saw the village from their aircraft and dropped a bomb on it. There was an Air-raid Warden (Special Constable) called Charlie Blizzard who patrolled at night and knocked on the door if any light was showing. My father also served in the local defence force, The “Home Guard”, along with many others in every town and village in England, to protect us in the event of the expected Invasion.

One dark evening a German parachutist came down in the field behind our house. I think he must have been taken prisoner. But his “silk” parachute was retrieved by the ladies of the village and used to make petticoats and underwear as clothing was in very short supply. And not only clothing; food was also rationed and books of coupons were issued to every family. I think we had one egg on Sunday to be shared between two people.

After the war, we had two German Prisoners-of-War working at Church Hill Farm and one Italian who worked at Hill Farm (off Chesterton Road). They were transported in from various hostels in the area. If I remember rightly, the three that I have mentioned eventually moved in permanently to the farms where they stayed for a very long time and were treated as part of the family. Heinz and Zep lived at Church Hill Farm and Clem moved in with the Branson family at Hill Farm. They were very friendly and appeared to love the children of the village. They, themselves, were very young.

We had a terrible tragedy one Saturday morning when, on a very hot day, several young boys from the village decided to go swimming in the fish-pond belonging to Church Hill Farm. One of the boys, Patrick, got into difficulties and Heinz dived into the pool and brought the boy out. In spite of trying very hard to resuscitate him, he was not successful and the lad died. My brother, Tony, was one of the lads in the swimming party and recalls the event vividly. He remembers Heinz running down the bank from the farm, undoing his boots and throwing off his clothes as he ran. He dived in and came up for air several times before finally locating Patrick and pulling him out. The village, as you can imagine, was in shock. He was a local boy who lived in what is now Greystones on The Bank. In recognition of Heinz's bravery, the village arranged a collection and presented him with a leather wallet. Later, there was an inquest held in The Antelope which the dead boy's companions had to attend.

Betty Bywater (nee White)

I was 9 years of age and at school in Lighthorne at the start of World War II. I used to live at the cottage known as "Pleasant View" (on The Bank). Our teacher at what was known as Lighthorne Church of England School was Miss Carpenter and both she and her sister lived at The School House (in Old School Lane).

During the winter months we would all have a cup of cocoa which was made on the big, black stove positioned in the centre of the room which was also used to heat the school.

Among the memories that I have of those years was having to carry a gas mask with us at all times and of "Ration Books". These books contained coupons for the amount of food we were allowed to buy each week. In addition, we also had clothing coupons.

There was a small shop in the village which was started at "Smithy Cottage" during the mid-forties. Miss Mountford managed the Post Office along the Back Lane (now The Old Post Office – Post Office Lane) where she sold various items such as vinegar, soap, etc. and she also ran a small library.

Mostly people came round in vans selling goods. There was the Harbury Co-op van; the butcher's van from Wellesbourne; Mr Jones from Warwick who sold oil, paraffin, etc.; a van selling fruit and vegetables and a clothier from Gaydon called Mr White.

During the early 1940s I went to school in Leamington and had to catch the bus on the Banbury Road as none of the buses came down into the village.

The first soldiers I recall seeing had come to Moreton Hall (that's where May Hunt, later Hackleton, met Cyril). Later on, American soldiers were stationed there. The first airmen I recall at Gaydon airfield came from Canada. They flew Wellington bombers. I remember them departing in the evenings and returning the next morning. The village people were allowed to go to the E.N.S.A. Concerts and the cinema at Gaydon Camp.

In the village itself there were lots of activities in The Malt House, such as flower shows, dances and concerts. The Lewis's who lived along Back Lane provided the music for the dances.

When I left school at the age of 14, I worked at Ashorne Hill which I believe was something to do with the steel industry at that time. When I was 17 I joined the Women's Land Army and was stationed at various hostels around Warwickshire.

During the night of the big air-raid over Coventry we could see the city burning from the fields beyond the school. The scale of the fires lighted up the whole area. There were a few incendiary and other bombs dropped over Lobbington (the then gated Moreton Morrell Lane) as a result of a plane being hit. Enemy planes were easily recognisable by the drone of their engines.

After the raid on Coventry my mother's family, 16 in total, came to live with us as their homes had been lost. Evacuees also came from Coventry and stayed with various families in the village. They attended the village school and had brought their own teacher with them.

There was an artillery gun positioned behind Keeper's Cottage (opposite the Sports Field). While I was at school we always had a maypole on the village green and a May Queen was chosen along with her attendants.

There were some Prisoners-of-War including an Italian named Clem at Hill Farm with Mr and Mrs Branston. After the war he stayed in England and now lives at Whitnash, I think. There were also two Germans at Church Hill Farm and another at Buckmaster's in Moreton Morrell.

My father belonged to a smallholders' club which allowed him to keep chickens and a pig. We used to fetch our water from the Broad Well. My brothers and I used to have yokes which carried two buckets at a time. We filled the copper with these; a job which had to be done twice a week. The first copper-full was used for the washing and the second one for our baths. Full buckets were kept in the water-pantry for general use.

There was a Home Guard unit in the village manned by farmers, market-gardeners and other men exempted from military service.

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Caroline Haynes

Memories of the Forties

I was born in early January 1942 - so apart from odd flashes of visual recollections such as the room I slept in while being looked after by the wife of my mother's GP when my younger sister was born in October 1944; and a possible earlier memory at the age of about eighteen months, typically of a pet cat leaping over my head and across my playpen, only to land awkwardly on a table, pulling the cloth and contents onto the floor – my first real memories commence in the Summer of 1946.

My mother, sister and I moved into a rented cottage in the then small and comparatively isolated village of Pebworth on the edge of the Cotswolds. My father, being in the Royal Navy, was seldom at home. I know I revelled in the pretty garden full of cottage flowers, and the peppery scent of phlox always takes me back to that time. Also there were trees in the garden which provided a feast of red and green early-Autumn apples which was a wonderful treat.

Then the incredibly hard Winter of 1946/7 was upon us. I don't remember feeling especially cold myself, but I do recall the water in a vase of flowers freezing overnight. My mother had enrolled me in a little dame school in the village of Weston-sub-Edge. She had an Austin big 7 which she was allowed to keep in a barn in the farmyard exactly across the lane from our cottage. Every night the radiator had to be drained and a little brass heater was hung under the bonnet. The car tyres were fitted with chains. On school days my mother would wrap us both up very warmly and drive us along the steep lanes which seemed to be mere tunnels in the snow. I clearly remember seeing white owls sitting on the top of the hedgerows, seemingly falling off backwards and flying away as the car chugged past them. I've always thought of them as snowy owls, although an expert bird-watcher friend assures me that there is no record of snowy owls reaching that area during 1947.

Later that Spring we left Pebworth and moved down south to Hampshire to be nearer to Portsmouth because of my father. To begin with we lived in a 1st floor flat with a large window looking out over the port, and my excited parents made sure I watched as HMS Vanguard hove into view, telling me that the King and Queen and two Princesses were home again after their visit to South Africa.

Finally, back to the weather! I remember at least part of that Summer being exceedingly hot and the whole family turning beetroot red after spending days on the pebbly beach somewhere near Alvestoke where we lived for a few months in another rented cottage.

Davinia Chambers

A Country Childhood in the 1940s

I was born on January 3rd 1940 and I can assure you this was a dreadful winter as the ambulance couldn't get to Barford from Warwick due to the heavy snow drifts so, with the help of the village nurse and a neighbour, I was born at home.

Country life was quite different then; we had no running water and the communal pump outside our house supplied 14 cottages – so at any time we could hear the pump being pushed. Washing Day was Monday and come Hell, high water and Hitler, mummy was up early filling the copper and lighting it to do the weekly wash. The Coventry raid took place in November 1940 but, as mummy was up anyway, she set off to fill the copper; to open the wash-house door you had to put your finger in a hole and lift the latch and, while she was doing this, she noticed that in an opening in the trees over the wall a face appeared – followed by a body which slipped into the yard. Since there had been reports of parachutists landing from the crashing planes, my mother decided this was IT.

Here came the enemy. While keeping an eye on the man, who was by now approaching ever closer, she gripped her washing-stick and, as he came up to the wash-house, raised it and bashed it down on his head. She called out to a friend who held him down with her wash-board around his neck. Mummy ran down the road to alert the Home Guard who had been busy all night; her main concern at this point was whether she had enough clothing coupons left for a new dress, since she would be bound to be invited to the Palace to meet the King. The Home Guard troop came running down the lane and found her “prisoner” still out cold. They turned him over and their leader, Mr Workman, said, “What have you done? This man and his team from Coventry are here to help us.” ... the outcome of this was that my mother never went to the Palace but, by way of reward, she and Mrs Cheshire were invited every year to the Home Guard annual supper.

1941 passed us having evacuees billeted on us. One of whom my mother couldn't wait to get rid of. We had our own chickens but were only allowed to keep our ration allowance – the rest were collected on Friday mornings by the egg-marketing man in his red van who would count the eggs, then pay my mother so much per dozen. But if you had brown eggs you got three-farthings more per dozen and this evacuee thought we should empty the tea-pot over the eggs so that more of them were brown. I think this lady only stayed with us about 5 weeks. Some people in the village put up relatives who were evacuees – among them, a very young Billie Whitelaw came to Barford.

In August of '42 I had my own special playmate arrive; my mother's eldest brother was with the Chindits in Burma and his wife sadly died in childbirth together with the new baby. My mother had to go to Hounslow (this was where they lived) and fetch home my cousin, close up the house and everything. As far as I was concerned this was great! I had a pal to help feed the chickens and pull up the dandelions for the rabbit and help with other chores. As I was older, I had to put the Brasso on the door-knocker and he polished it off. I always seemed to have horrid stains on my fingers. Another of my mother's brothers was in the RAF stationed in India from where he used to send home a tea chest containing about 7lb of tea. The post lady would walk up the village with her bike telling folk there was fresh tea going to our house. Then, during the afternoon, friends would call round to see my mother – and also take home some tea which had been duly weighed out. Then, one day, when the tea chest had arrived and mother's friends came round in the afternoon, there, on the piano draped with a white parachute were two ebony elephants.

We were so posh, having silk blouses and shirts.

Later that year we had two Czech soldiers billeted on us whose unit had taken up residence in two large country houses in the village. One of them had been a builder and the other a commercial artist.

That Christmas we had some rather different Christmas decorations – the artist had painted on the back of huge margarine boxes. On one was a picture of a large pudding on a plate; one of a stable which was taller than us and, lastly, a holly leaf with the words “Merry Xmas” - for years after I thought “Xmas” was the Czech spelling for Christmas. Nearly every house hosted one or two of these lads and we were sad when they went.

The postmaster used to bring letters in yellow envelopes, telegrams, and when we received one mum would rush around making up more beds as someone was coming home on leave and Michael and I were sent to meet them off the 'bus. On one occasion we went to Portsmouth to meet an uncle off the boat but there was barbed wire all over the beach and so we couldn't paddle. On our train-journey home, Michael and I were suddenly thrown to the floor and covered by a greatcoat – people were screaming because a plane was machine-gunning the train. We pulled into a tunnel and waited. After a while the plane went away, people cheered and we climbed back onto our seats and a Nun sitting opposite told us the Germans had been after a letter addressed to the King. She told us what good children we had been. We felt we were so very important!

The lady next door had four girls who were evacuees. They were older than us and they always seemed to know when a convoy would be coming through the village and would run to beg for sweets; we weren't old enough to go and I was never too happy about this! Some afternoons Mummy and a band of ladies – they might have been the W.I. - would be called into the village hall to make piles of sandwiches and cakes and dish them out to lorry loads of soldiers on the move.

Wellesbourne airfield was operational and we used to count the planes out as they went over in the evening and count them back when they returned home in the morning. We also had a cocoa tin in which we kept shrapnel and what we thought were bits of planes. One afternoon we went to Wellesbourne aerodrome where we bought postage stamps which the airmen stuck onto a bomb and chalked alongside the names of Hitler and other high-ranking Germans.

We always had to listen to the 6 o'clock News on the Home Service and we learnt the names of the newscasters; Frank Phillips, Alvar Liddell and the man who read important items, John Snagge – when he spoke, we always had to be quiet. Sometimes we listened to such a funny man; his name was Lord Haw-Haw. He used to interrupt the programmes by saying “Germany Calling” and telling us which of our ships had been sunk; how many of our men were under attack, etc. My mother used to shake her fist at him – but we still listened.

At the top of the Barford Road which joins the Banbury Road, in Lord Warwick's estate, there was a prisoner-of-war camp where Italians and Germans were held. At Christmas, children in the village did very well from the gifts they sent us. I had a table-tennis bat painted green with yellow grains of corn which had some model chickens on, attached to strings which passed through the bat – when you pulled the strings the chickens would peck away at the corn. Michael had a cotton-reel dachshund dog painted brown that rolled along. One morning, when we were going to school, the children were standing waiting to cross the road when the Home Guard were spotted coming up the street with three men in front of them with their hands up. Germans had been caught! We just waited and watched and the amazing thing was they didn't look so very different from our dads. I was shocked because, until then, I had always thought that every German had a black moustache and a funny fringe-type haircut. Mummy used to say on moonlit nights “He'll be over tonight” and I thought she meant Hitler.

Towards the end of the War, servicemen were encouraged to bring home Commonwealth servicemen of equal rank and my uncle (the tea and elephant one) brought home two Jamaican airmen. When we went to meet them off the bus I couldn't take my eyes off them. One had a gold tooth so I decided he must be a Prince. They were great fun – there was a village dance that week-end and these men certainly knew

how to “jitterbug” - a dance-craze somewhere between Charleston and Jive – so there were plenty of girls hanging around our house that evening. The following morning when Michael and I took up their tea, I was astonished to see that they were still the same colour and the black hadn't rubbed off on the sheets. Amazing!!

V.E. (Victory in Europe) Day dawned with one of the villagers running up and down the street blowing a bugle. There was a street party for which Mr. Smith, the baker, made red, white and blue cakes and the children had races and games – brilliant fun!! We went to Southampton again and the wire was still on the beach. But we sat and watched the big liners coming in with big red crosses painted on their sides. Mummy said they were bringing the troops home.

V.J. (Victory over Japan) Day arrived in August and we had another party – this time in the “rec.” (recreation ground). Then, gradually, men were coming back to the village from all over the world.

In 1946 a new battleship, H.M.S.Vanguard, was launched and my friend's brother was on board. It took the King and Queen and the two princesses to South Africa and we saw newspaper pictures of the fun they had with Neptune in the “Crossing the Line” ceremony.

1947 began with terrible snowstorms and, like many villages, we were cut off. There was no school as the teacher couldn't get through from Wellesbourne. Nor could Mr.Hinson, the coal-man so we had to go out each day looking for wood, twigs – anything that would burn so that we could dry the washing in front of the fire. There was even ice on the *inside* of the windows. Eventually we were dug out by Royal Engineers from Long Marston with big snow-ploughs. One of the men stationed there was Cliff Chambers – who later became my husband. It's a small world!!

In November of that year Princess Elizabeth married and we went to Warwick New Cinema to see a film of the event. Burgess & Colbourne (now House of Fraser) had a replica of the wedding cake with ever so many tiers, all iced. I think they charged sixpence for adults and threepence for children to look at it and, when we had filed past, the grown-ups had a cup of tea and the children had orange juice with a slice of “the royal cake”. I realise now that it wasn't the real thing.

1948 was a fantastic year for us girls. Christian Dior had created the “New Look” and we all cut out pictures of the dresses and tried to dress like the models in them. That Summer, London hosted the Olympic Games and the name of the Czech runner Emil Zatopek was on all our lips – we convinced ourselves that he must have been stationed in Barford! My farmer uncle actually went to see the Games – the only person from Barford to do so. My cousin had gone back to London as his Daddy had re-married – so I lost my playmate. But not for long. All my mother's brothers had married by now and there was room in the house for her to start another scheme. In those days, boys left school at the age of 14 and those in orphanages had to leave those as well. So mother invited them in. Some for a couple of weeks and one stayed for 8 years. She not only housed them but had to help them find work – either in farming or in service as an under-footman or similar job.

Towards the end of the forties, village life resumed. One lady ran an Outing Club to which people paid a weekly amount for a summer trip in 7 or 8 charabancs to the sea-side at Llandudno, Skegness and Weston-super-Mare. In winter mum and her friends went to Coventry Hippodrome to hear Donald Peers singing “In a shady nook by a babbling brook.” We usually used Grasby's coaches for these trips. And then, of course, there was the Panto where Cinderella's coach was pulled by Mrs.Grasby's Shetland ponies. Her family seemed to have cornered the transport market.

In April 1949, just as we were getting used to peacetime, HMS Amethyst was involved in what became known as The Yangtse Incident, memorable to most children for the part played by Able Seacat Simon. Sadly this skirmish was a fore-runner to the Korean War and the Forties finished, as they had begun, with fighting filling the headlines. Nevertheless, my country childhood was something to remember.

Doreen Humphriss

Although I was only three years old at the start of the war, I was very aware that something was going on. I remember everyone fitting blackout material to the windows and, during a night time raid on Coventry, our neighbours helped my parents to carry me and my brothers to a place of safety. Walking home from school one day along a country road we saw enemy planes approaching and we dived under the hedge. We were so frightened. ‘Search lights’ criss-crossed the night sky trying to locate the enemy planes which could be heard droning above. ‘Barrage balloons’ were placed all around the outskirts of Coventry to deter enemy planes coming too low over the city.

We remember being asked to take a jam jar to school to receive a measure of a substance similar to drinking chocolate powder, which Canadians shipped over for British children during the war. Also locust beans and liquorice root could be bought as a substitute for sweets which were in short supply.

We also remember seeing the night sky lit up over Coventry by the explosions and fires during the raids.

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Mrs. M. G. Northover

Bath, Somerset – 1940

In November 1940 I was a civil servant at The Admiralty in Whitehall, London. The Admiralty removed many of their activities to the delightful spa town of Bath and my department was one of them. I was billeted on arrival with a very pleasant family with whom I still keep in touch. One of my friends was billeted next door.

Our first Winter was one of extreme cold. Ice and snow turned Bath into a fairyland visually, but as our billets were in a lower part of Bath and our office was at the requisitioned Royal School, which was an uphill walk of some length on icy roads; it was extremely hazardous. My landlord's suggestion that we covered our footwear with pairs of his thick, woolly socks worked beautifully, even if we did look odder than usual.

The return journey, downhill all the way, we solved for ourselves – most illegally but successfully. We commandeered two large “In” and “Out” trays from the office, from which we constructed a serviceable toboggan which conveyed us hilariously but safely down the hill. Unforgettable!

Heather Hinman

Home

Life was pretty frugal although, not knowing better, I did not notice. My first experience of sharing a fruit called a banana with my brother was not a success. Once we had worked out that it had to be peeled, we were still unimpressed with the bland, squashy interior. And butter. What was the big deal? I was used to margarine and perfectly content with it; as I was with powdered egg rather than those things in shells.

Some luxuries, however, will always remain special, e.g. tasting my first custard-cream biscuit. Also looking forward to the two Canadian soldiers, sons of my Canadian aunty's friends, arriving at our house with chocolate and chewing-gum. I rather think the main attractions for them were my two teenage sisters who, of course, looked forward to the occasional pair of silk stockings.

School

Most people surely remember their first day at school – I do. What I remember most was the roaring fire glowing behind a large fire-guard in the school hall.

We used slates and chalk to practise writing as materials such as paper were in short supply. We even had to hand back our well-earned end of year prizes for general use of the school.

One morning, Miss Winstanley, our rather formidable teacher, came into class and asked what special news we had heard. Every child's hand shot up and with one voice told her, "Hitler's dead, Miss."

May Day and Commonwealth Day were important dates in our school calendar. May Day was a delight as it meant we girls were allowed to wear our best frocks and ribbons and skip to our hearts' content around the Maypole. Commonwealth Day seemed a more sombre day judging by a photograph I have of me and my class of 6-year-olds taken in 1946.

The Blitz

The sound of a siren still makes my hair stand on end. It was pretty scary hearing the buzz-bombs or doodlebugs overhead and my father standing in the doorway of our shelter in the garden proclaiming, "We'll all be killed".

Most of the time, however, hearing the siren engendered a feeling of dangerous excitement; especially when it meant being turfed out of bed in the middle of the night, wrapped in a blanket and taken down the garden to our Anderson shelter or, if there was not enough time, sitting in a cupboard in the living-room with the dining-table pushed up against it for extra safety.

V.E.Celebrations

One night I remember being taken from my bed and dressed in warm clothes; but instead of the shelter, we were taken to our local park where we were treated to a wonderful firework display. To a five-year-old this was very confusing; as suddenly there was no black-out and no-one had their gas-masks with them. What I didn't know was that Victory in Europe had been declared. Our lady butcher organised a party for all the children of their customers – what a treat!

Post-War Freeze

1947 was the Winter of the big freeze and most of our pipes froze. We could put up with taking buckets of water to flush the lavatory; but waking up in the early hours with our bedroom walls streaming with

water from the burst pipes once the thaw set in was no fun. However, going out into the snow was great fun at the age of 7. The only downside was the dreaded chilblains which most people suffered then. With just one fire to warm the whole house, coming in from the cold and roasting by the fire played havoc with one's circulation – hence so many chilblains.

Post-War Fun

My first holiday was in 1949 and we went to Warner's Holiday camp, one of the first to be opened after the war. It was pretty basic, i.e. we were accommodated in ex-army camp huts. We did, however, have a swimming-pool.

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Maggie Woodhouse

In 1943/4 we moved from Nottingham to Warwick. My father had two jobs, one day and one part of the night. One night when the bombs were raining down, our neighbours took my mother and me to the front garden where we could see the River Trent alight with the warehouses and factories on fire. I was very upset when we moved because we had to live with my grandmother. It meant leaving my friends, my dolls-house, swing, sledge etc. Our home was let into two flats and before we left; we had the basement reinforced to form our air raid shelter

One time my parents made home-made wine, and a little was spilt and the dog drank it! The dog then had to go round the furniture to get to his basket! Another time, a bomb fell close to home, Mum was scared, threw the dog down the cellar steps, carrying me she tripped on the last stair!

Having arrived in Warwick, there was a hurry to get me to school. I had been in a convent school, sometimes boarding from Monday to Friday. I boarded because Mum was told to get a job to help with war work. I didn't like the school in Warwick. Children had to wear wrist bands with their name on and also I had to memorise my National Insurance and National Health Number, presumably in case I got lost.

Without a sledge, I used a tin tray on the Common in Warwick. The weather in memory seemed much colder than now with more snow. Summers too seemed warmer and never-ending. Dad was an engineer; he could not go to war because he was lame, but quite often he repaired farm vehicles to keep things going when materials were scarce. Payment was 'in kind' - meat, cheese, eggs, etc. Sugar was a problem; then Mum stopped using it. As soon as we could travel, we visited my grandfather in London. On a tube platform, I asked what the machines were for. I was told you could buy chocolate from them before the war—perhaps again when rationing stops?

The biggest disappointment was the first ice-cream I had, it tasted foul! Where a queue formed, you joined it; not always knowing what you waited for. Parachute silk made wonderful undies. Eggs were kept in isinglass. Iron railings were taken down for the war effort.

“DIG FOR VICTORY” and “MR CHAD IS WATCHING” were some slogans.

Irene Proudman

I hold the status of being a pre-war baby. My younger brother, having once been photographed sitting upright with the soles of his new shoes clearly showing the wartime 'utility mark', thereafter proudly referred to himself as a 'utility baby'.

Whatever the dangers and deprivations of the war years, I enjoyed a happy and secure childhood. I was allowed considerable freedom to go out to play with friends, make dens on bombed sites and organise concerts.

An Evacuee

Before the war actually started my parents decided to send me to live with my mother's elder sister, Irene and her husband, who lived in Kirkham near Blackpool. It was considered to be safer than my home town of Grimsby on the east coast. Uncle Cecil was a master at the Boys Grammar School in Kirkham, whilst my aunt was at home looking after their three children. My youngest cousin Elizabeth, was only six months older than me.

I can't really remember this time but know that my aunt was in complete contrast to my quietly-spoken, gentle mother and it was a bewildering, if short-lived, experience for me; I only stayed nine months.

I can see now that it must have been painful for my parents and a huge responsibility for my aunt and I am really sad that on subsequent visits to Kirkham with my grandmother, I was always a little afraid of Aunty Irene.

The Blitz

Grimsby was badly damaged during the war. It took many bombs meant for the docks at Hull across the Humber estuary in Yorkshire. Armaments were shipped from there for use in Europe, so it was a prime target. Unused ordnance was frequently dropped on us as the German bombers made their way home over the North Sea.

My father's business was situated at a cross-roads close to the docks. One night the fish and chip shop diagonally opposite took a hit and caught fire. (You could see incendiary bombs covered with sand bags and dustbin lids on paths and roads and gardens the night after a raid). On this occasion, the whole building was destroyed.

I remember the event clearly. As usual, when an air-raid siren sounded my brother and I were wrapped in blankets and carried downstairs into the shelter. My grandmother was carrying me and as she opened the back door, I took in the blazing scene, decided it was high drama and screamed loudly, only to be told by her 'not to be so daft'! Needless to say I 'shut up' immediately.

My mother kept telling me not to pick things up in the street and years later I read an article explaining that 'booby trap' bombs had been dropped in our area. They were concealed in pens, small toys and even sweets. The Mayors of Grimsby and Cleethorpes had agreed not to publicise this, though of course warnings had been given locally.

Our Air Raid Shelters

Behind our shop and house there was only a small yard, so we had a brick building with a concrete roof for a shelter. It was always a disturbing experience, being woken in the middle of the night when the siren sounded.

From the comfort of my warm bed I was carried out into the darkness where the night sky was criss-crossed with searchlights and the moon and stars shone brightly in the blacked-out town. Sometimes I would hear the planes; thuds of bombs and see the lights of blazing buildings.

There always seemed to be a rush of cold air on my face as I was hurried across the yard and into the dubious safety of the shelter. It had a musty smell. I just lay on one of the bunk beds, aware of the tension of the grown-ups and longing for the 'all clear' to sound.

I know we had the recommended biscuit tin, complete with candles, matches, torch, first aid kit and one additional item - a bottle of brandy. Our shelter was broken into quite regularly!

My grandparents lived in the neighbouring town of Cleethorpes. I stayed with them regularly throughout my childhood. They had a Morrison Shelter, which was a large metal table-like structure with wire mesh sides. It was put up in the downstairs, middle room of their Victorian terrace house. It was fitted with a large mattress and bedding so they slept inside with me in the middle. After a raid they would knock on their neighbour's wall with a walking stick to let them know they were safe.

The News

Sleeping in the room next to my grandparents sitting room I often heard the wireless and the 'pips' which heralded the nine o'clock news. I listened to reports of troop movements, battles in the air and at sea; of defeat, victories and government advice.

I once asked my grandma, "What will they talk about when the war is over?" I remember her reply, "They'll tell you where the King and Queen are going and what they are doing. They will tell you things such as what the Queen is wearing and what colour her dress is". I was amazed!

The Bomb

Across the road from my grandparents, behind a row of detached houses, is the Sydney Sussex Recreation Ground. My brother and I spent hours there. One night it took a direct hit and there was a huge explosion. Most of the glass in the front room bay window was shattered. No-one was injured though my grandfather, who was an ARP warden (Air Raid Patrol warden) said that if it had been his night on duty, he might not have been so lucky. The replacement glass was misty and full of ripples; you couldn't buy clear glass at the time and it was a considerable wait before the proper glass could be put in.

The Soldiers' Billet

The house on one side of my grandparents' had been requisitioned by the army. Several soldiers were billeted there and as there were no carpets you could hear the men walking about and clumping up and down the stairs in their big boots. I used to make up concerts in the back garden, singing and dancing, quite unaware that I had an amused audience the other side of a large privet hedge.

Clothes

Throughout the 1940s, I had very few new clothes but appreciated those that were passed down to me by my cousins, especially the siren suits which were like boiler suits with short sleeves, short trousers and zip fronts—I loved them - they were particularly good for climbing trees.

Apart from school uniforms, I did have a few special dresses and always a new summer dress for the Sunday School Anniversary each year.

I once had two pairs of ‘party shoes’; one silver brocade and the other gold. I kept asking if I could wear them and was always told they were ‘for best’. When a special occasion arrived neither pair would fit me! I was sent cream, shantung silk blouses from my cousins, the uniform of Lytham St. Anne’s Girls Grammar School!

I usually wore boys' shoes that could be passed on to my brother. My mother made me coats, hats and dresses from her old clothes. I remember she cut up one of her evening dresses, white net covered in embroidered flowers, and created a formal long dress for my first Grammar School party - a dance at Grimsby Town Hall. I wore a royal blue, velvet cape and my friend and I went by taxi so we felt very special.

My teacher, Miss Phyllis Gaine, who always referred to her pupils as ‘people’ taught us all the dances: the Military Two-Step, Valeta, Gay Gordons, Waltz and Barn Dance.

Before the great evening, we girls had a dance card filled with names of boys we would be dancing with. I remember telling Byron Evans, a very short boy, to ‘buzz off’ when he stood by my desk to book a dance with me.

Food

We ate very well. In Grimsby, we had the most wonderful assortment of large, juicy, fresh fish - and it wasn’t on ration. The fishermen came straight off the docks with large straw carrier bags (bass) and into my father's shop to give him dover sole, halibut, turbot, skate, plaice and haddock. Cod was for the cat! We had rabbit, sausages and pork products from friends’ pigs; chops, offal and occasionally a roast; all of which were served with plenty of fresh vegetables.

Each Christmas we received a food parcel from my grandmother’s sister in Canada. This always contained a tin of sausage meat for stuffing the turkey, tinned fruit and cheese. We were very grateful.

Occasionally a consignment of Wall's ice-cream arrived at a local shop and we would join the queue, hoping they wouldn’t run out before we got inside. We were rewarded with a pale blue and cream, paper-wrapped block. How delicious we thought it was.

My cousins and I would walk several miles through the fields to a cottage where the old lady sold home-made ice-cream, served in glass tumblers.

My Uncle Cecil kept hens; I remember the smell of the bran-mash cooking in the old copper. He also had a huge greenhouse filled with tomatoes which made the tastiest sandwiches, especially when eaten out of doors.

Apart from rationed sweets, shops would sell children small apples (giz the core!) or a handful of pea pods, parched peas in Lancashire, liquorice root and sherbet; all for a few pennies. My grandfather distributed broken bits of Victory V lozenges and tiny liquorice bits called Imps.

We scrumped fruit from gardens and orchards usually under-ripe and sour-tasting and collected berries from the hedgerows and begged chewing gum from the American soldiers and airmen (“Got any gum, chum?”)

Schools

When I was five and a half years old my mother took me to the local school, Macauley Street, which was about half a mile from our house. It was an impressive 1930s bungalow-style building, rectangular with a verandah around a central garden. This seemed a magical place, set out with grass and flowers and, in the centre, a pond with narrow water channels leading off in which were goldfish. Imagine my delight. How I enjoyed it when we were allowed to take books outside to read or sit in the garden for a story.

I was only taken on my first day, thereafter I walked to and from school with other children, carried my gas mask and returned home at dinner time. I remember playing ‘Fairy Footsteps’ and ‘What’s the time, Mr Wolf?’

Although I carried my gas mask with me, I always knew that I would never be able to wear it in an emergency. It smelt of rubber and felt stuffy. My baby brother had a Mickey Mouse design and I was very envious.

At school we were taken into an air raid shelter when the siren went. It had benches along each side of its long walls. We were made to sing songs, the most boring of which was “Here we go round the mulberry bush”. I’ve always hated repetitive songs.

After a few months it was decided that I should go to the Corporation Grammar School, a foundation for the children of the Freemen of Grimsby from the age of five years. Together with my friend Tilly, I began the curious half-day attendance. Apparently, the Fire Service had commandeered the original building near the Town Hall, so classes were organised in the central Methodist church.

Three classes were held in the mornings and three in the afternoons so we changed sessions alternate weeks.

The uniform was quaint; a navy gym-slip with red sash, white blouse and red tie and a navy pork-pie hat with a badge. I wore stockings attached to suspenders of my liberty bodice. My teacher Miss McCloud, who wore her hair in a tight bun was firm but very kind. It was very formal but by six and a half, I knew all the main rivers, lakes and mountains in the British Isles though I can’t remember them now.

At about seven years old I took an entrance exam for a small private school, St Martins. I remember having to tackle long multiplication and division sums. I was accepted and sent alone on my first day, six miles across town using three different buses. Walking up the steps of my new school, I burst into tears and was reprimanded by one of the staff who said something to the effect that “big girls don’t cry”.

I loved school, an old mansion, complete with round turret room, conservatory, a gym with ropes, a stage and a back garden with trees that you could climb!

It was here I came under the tutelage of Miss Lucy Mackrell, the widow of a missionary in Borneo and former actress at the Old Vic Theatre in London. She showed me the magic of Shakespeare and fostered my love of poetry.

Our uniform was pale blue and grey. Blue jumpers and grey socks and pleated skirts and a cosy scarf pixie hood to keep out the chill east winds. I really loved this school where there was a strong emphasis on the arts and we were given the freedom to be creative.

In 1948 I started at Wintringham Grammar School.

Leisure

Like most children in the 1940s, I enjoyed a great deal of freedom. I was trusted from about the age of seven to go to parks and playgrounds with friends. There was usually a park keeper to keep an eye on things. I was allowed to ride around town on my bike stopping to play with other children. Occasionally I was 'told off' by adults which was acceptable then, although you didn't tell your parents. You could ask for help from people you didn't know who were usually kind if you needed first aid or direction or to know the time - you didn't get a watch until you were 10 or 11 years old then.

At Cleethorpes, I was made aware of beach safety rules and allowed to go to the 'sands' with my cousins and later on my own.

Some activities were banned. Swimming in the River Freshey (it was full of rubbish) and going to swimming pools; my parents were frightened I might catch polio which was a huge problem at the time.

Fortunately, my parents knew nothing about my craze for walking through storm drains!

I loved books and comics. When I was very young I had Rainbow and Playbox which split words into syllables. Later I had Enid Blyton's Sunny Stories; my mother said there was a lesson to be learnt from every story. Eventually I progressed to the Dandy and Beano and Eagle Comic (I wish I'd kept the first copy, it must be worth a fortune now!)

I have to admit to reading all the Enid Blyton stories and series, all the Just William books and was particularly fond of Noel Streatfield, Malcolm Saville, Lewis Carroll and John Masefield. You could only borrow two books at a time from the Children's Library and I remember one summer holiday when I cycled 3 miles across town to change my books almost every weekday.

At Christmas, my brother was given Rupert and Bobby Bear's Annual whilst I was given the Daily Mail Annual.

My brother and I played with a farm set, Meccano, marbles, cigarette cards, conkers and made puppet shows with a box and cardboard characters. I was never interested in dolls but loved the card figures with paper clothes you could cut out. We enjoyed painting and won several competitions in the Grimsby Evening Telegraph. One prize was a visit to the Ritz Cinema to see, 'The Snows of Kilimanjaro', which I found rather boring.

I enjoyed the Saturday morning cinema club. The manager always came on stage to talk to us and the session began with singing along to the film where a ball bounced onto the words. At the Savoy cinema, our favourite song was 'The Bells of St. Mary's', which we knew by heart. Then, we sang 'God Save the King', cheered for the films and sat down. I listened to the radio; especially 'Children's Hour' at 5 o'clock with Derek McCulloch (Uncle Mac) and Violet Carson. I loved the plays; 'Ballet Shoes', 'The Box of Delights', 'Swallows and Amazons', 'The Adventures of Larry the Lamb', 'The Swish of the Curtain' and 'Nature Walks with Romany and Raq the dog'. After tea it was time for 'Dick Barton - Special Agent' and my parents enjoyed that too.

Jean Hopkins (nee Adams)

My memories of life in the Forties were of great excitement. As a teenager, all I could think of was joining the Women's Land Army. Eventually I put my age as seventeen when I was actually only sixteen. Living in the country, I was used to country life and I was content to accept the conditions of service laid down by the officials who interviewed me.

I was very excited about leaving home for the first time. Life was hard to begin with and I was very homesick but in time this passed and I made many new friends and we still meet at the WLA Reunions.

In 1997 I saw the film "Land Girls" and felt quite strongly that it portrayed a life lived in cushy digs while the reality was that we had had it tough in poorly-equipped hostels. I wrote to the Daily Mail saying so and they published my letter (below) which shows what things were really like.

"I am an ex Land Girl and would like to point out that not all the girls were billeted on farms; indeed, the majority of us lived in hostels. These were very basic. We slept in dormitories of about 20 to 25 girls; each allocated a bunk-bed in a cubicle. The Warden would get us up in the morning and there was a mad scramble for the ablution block where the previous day's clothes were drying. It was very fortunate to locate one's own socks, for example, because unless clothes were marked they used to 'disappear'. Likely as not, one would be left with socks which had holes in. Socks were among the most important items of clothing since 'wellies' were the normal footwear.

After breakfast there was a further rush; this time to the bike shed to grab a decent bicycle. Sometimes I had to double up with someone going my way. Then it was off to work; depending on the season we would be tying raspberry canes or picking sprouts or digging up carrots – often on very cold mornings. When the weather was impossible we were sent to a canning factory or, sometimes, 'rained off'. When that happened we used to thumb lifts into town. I recall an occasion when a few of us hitched a lift on the back of a coal lorry resulting in a liberal coating of coal smuts when we came to dismount.

All the girls had to be in by a certain time. If we didn't have a late pass then we arranged for a window to be left open. I once climbed through to be confronted by the Warden.

Another time we went threshing on a farm where we were given scrumpy cider to drink as tea was in short supply. It was very strong and, not being used to it, most of us fell asleep among the chaff. On Fridays we used to visit the cinema where we were allowed to sit on the floor at the front for sixpence, resulting in stiff necks all round."

I still keep in touch with the friends I made in those happy days and try to attend the Land Army Reunions. At the WLA 50th Anniversary in 1989, I was introduced to HM The Queen Mother, our Patron, making that an unforgettable day. And in 2005 I was invited to join the Parade to mark the 60th Anniversary of the end of World War II – V.J. Day. I will never forget that day either; the crowds that cheered us and the atmosphere will stay with me forever.

John Kane

A Tale of Two Schools

As a young man in the 1950s, I took in my stride all those farcical British films about the happiest days of our lives in which Alistair Sim played the part of an endearingly dotty Prep. School Headmaster and Margaret Rutherford was the Principal of St. Trinian's while the two schools shared the same premises. After all, I had seen it all before.

In September 1940, at the ripe old age of nine, I was looking forward to starting my prep school education at my first all-boys' school. This was Brockhurst School at Church Stretton in Shropshire. Notwithstanding its close proximity to my family home (about eight miles distant), parental visits were not encouraged but that didn't worry me at all. Being thrown together with a group of boys of the same age as myself and in similar circumstances, I quickly became accustomed to the routine and discipline of my new surroundings. For the first time in my life I had masters to teach me and I learnt to play cricket and football. We were in an idyllic situation, cocooned in beautiful, rural isolation, away from all the sights and sounds of the war between Britain and Germany which had been declared in September 1939. We had little knowledge of the invasion of Europe by the German Panzers; we heard nothing of the bombing of British cities. To us boys, living together at a school in the heart of the countryside, there was very little change in our routine and life at school carried on as if there was no war. However, after I had been at Brockhurst for about two years, all that was to change.

It was announced that the school buildings and grounds had been sold to St. Dunstan's and was to be used as a hospital for blind ex-Servicemen who had been wounded in the war; and that the Headmaster was to retire to live in Dawlish in South Devon. The school "business" had been sold to a John Park who was at the time the Geography master. Brockhurst was to leave Church Stretton after the Summer term of 1942 and reassemble under the new headmastership at Broughton Hall, a rambling Tudor manor house near Eccleshall in Staffordshire. Broughton Hall was formerly owned by Sir Jock Delves-Broughton and was reputed to be haunted.

But it was not the ghosts we had to fear. It was the presence of another prep school which had been evacuated from a more hazardous, but undisclosed location and which had already adopted the name "Broughton", whose headmaster was one Kenneth Thompson. The original plan had been to partially merge the two schools. We ate together and shared classes and common-rooms; but not dormitories, whilst keeping separate teams for football and cricket. There was a partial mingling of the "reds" (Brockhurst) and the "greens" (Broughton), a co-existence which was not uneasy until it became obvious that Park and Thompson were like oil and water. Their quarrel surfaced slowly and only became public when we returned from holiday to start the Summer term of '43, to find all Brockhurst's belongings (books, desks, blackboards, football boots and piles of odd pink socks) littering the drive and the Hall's doors barred against us. The mullioned windows of the old house were lined with the jeering faces of the other school.

The Brockhurst boys were ordered to stay with their suitcases in the drive whilst John Park and his assistant masters rallied help from friendly villagers nearby amongst whom, it turned out, Thompson was none too popular. The local shopkeeper, a burly one-time Petty Officer, broke down the front door and, with whoops and cheers led by our headmaster, we stormed the Hall, reoccupying our beds and classrooms and carrying in our furniture.

For the rest of the Summer term the rival schools took up the cudgels with a zest hitherto reserved only for football. Kenneth Thompson was booed at prayers while long afternoons were spent hunting in packs in the park. The rivals rarely came to blows but threatened each other with a series of territorial displays which would have been the envy of a pack of baboons.

Meanwhile, the two headmasters went to law and we waited breathless for the result. The popular Press were having a field-day; the story knocking the battles in the Mediterranean off the front pages. John Park, as a trained barrister, represented himself and refused to call any of his boys as witnesses. Thompson, by contrast had no such scruples and his star witness was a 10-year-old, one Michael Heseltine, whose piping testimony was supposed to have swung the verdict.

Our school was thrown out of Broughton Hall and, at the start of the Autumn term of 1943, we found ourselves sharing Maer hall about four miles away, not with another school but with its wealthy owners, the two Misses Harrison of the Harrison Shipping Line family. They had come, with surprising generosity, to the aid of John Park. After that, life became really rather dull and somewhat boring.

One of my contemporaries at Brockhurst was a boy called Julian Critchley, now the late Sir Julian Critchley MP, who has written a much fuller and wittier account of this episode in his autobiographical memoirs, "A Bag of Boiled Sweets". At the end of the Summer term of 1944, Critchley went on to Shrewsbury School where he renewed his acquaintance with Michael Heseltine, and I went on the Wrekin. We never met again.

* * * * *

David Wright

War

The 'curfew'. I remember struggling as a young child with my bicycle after dark as we had to cover the headlamp. I also remember the local fire engine being repainted in grey. We lived in Ely in Cambridgeshire and were near the American and RAF bases so that we were a target area for the Germans.

Post-War

The re-introduction of food that was not obtainable during the war. My parents told me how wonderful it would be when things from abroad were brought into the Country again. Bananas were often mentioned but I did not like them and when forced to eat them at boarding school to which I had been 'put away' while my parents were job- and house-hunting, I vomited in full public view across the dinner table.

Joy Watkins

Recollections of the Forties

In 1940 my family was living in Catterick Camp where my Father had been stationed for several years. He was posted away on standby for overseas service and the family went to live with my grandmother in Derby. After being peripatetic Service children, to live near aunts and uncles and cousins was a novelty for us. We missed seeing soldiers around but before long there were uniformed A.R.P. Wardens and an Anti-Aircraft battery, manned by A.T.S. Girls, was situated in the local park. There was little activity there in the daytime but at night they were often busy, firing at German bombers that came to bomb Rolls Royce and the Railway workshops. In the mornings after a raid, the children gathered strangely shaped pieces of shrapnel from the surrounding streets. Our house had a cellar, part of which had been reinforced and had benches and bunk-beds built along the walls. Candles, emergency rations and water were kept there and, to begin with, whenever the Air Raid siren sounded, we all decamped into the cellar for the duration of the raid. Often we heard no activity overhead and the cellar was damp and cold and the night seemed so long. After a few weeks, Mother decided that we should wait in the dining room until we heard the planes overhead and the guns going into action. One night as we were dozing in armchairs, camp beds, etc., wrapped in blankets, we woke to a loud screaming noise as a bomb fell. As we rushed to the cellar there was an enormous explosion. The bomb missed us but, on the way to school next day there was a huge crater where a house had stood the day before.

Food rationing was one of the most irksome conditions of wartime. We had to “register” with a certain grocer who took our ration books and was able to order goods according to the number of customers he had and we could only shop there. Mothers became very ingenious at stretching the meagre rations with vegetables. We grew to enjoy corned beef hash and Spam fritter and even dried egg omelette; one week we had three real eggs in the rations! One boiled, one fried and one scrambled!

Clothing coupons were another difficulty. Often we had little to wear but our school uniform. Outgrown woollies were unravelled and the wool re-knitted into new garments. When I left home to begin my nursing training in London in 1948, my mother had a dressing-gown made for me from a velour curtain! Apart from the difficulties shared by everyone, our life in wartime Derby was interesting. Buses, cinemas and museums were new to us and we enjoyed them. It came at a time when we needed to be settled for our education. I passed the Scholarship Exam (as the 11+ was called) and went to Homelands Grammar School. We had to pay fees at the start, but thanks to the 1944 Education Act – introduced to and guided through Parliament by Sir Adam Butler's father, they were abolished for my last 3 years. Discipline was strict and uniform was worn at all times both in and out of school.

The National Health Service came into being in July 1948 and I began my training at University College Hospital in that month. The patients had been evacuated during the war and the hospital was just getting back into action, but conditions were still very much as they had been before the war. The wards were big with beds along each side; the Sister's desk stood beside an open fire in the centre of the ward. Here, the sterilizers also resided. Long, polished tables and benches ran the length of the ward at which the “up” (or mobile) patients took their meals.

At night the junior student nurse sat at the table after “lights-out”, in a dim glow, making cotton-wool balls and gauze dressings to pack the dressing drums which then went off to be sterilized in the autoclaves. The ward sterilizers also had to be cleaned during the night. It was very difficult to do this quietly! The junior nurse also had the job of cooking and serving breakfast for the whole ward of thirty patients. A huge pot of porridge was put on to slow-cook before midnight and bread was “buttered”.

One soon became adept at frying a dozen eggs in the enormous frying-pan. With luck, a convalescent patient would help to push the big three-tiered trolley around the ward.

As student nurses, we lived in the Nurses' Home under the eagle eye of Home Sister who inspected our rooms and our uniform and made sure that we were in by 10.30pm unless on a Late Pass. London was very drab and bomb-scarred and food restrictions meant that restaurants were limited to meals that cost no more than 5 shillings (25p). But we did get tickets to the Theatres free and saw many West End productions from the best seats. Regents Park was a short walk away from the hospital and on one occasion I saw Queen Mary visiting her Rose Garden at the same time as me.

In 1946, Father came home again after serving with the 8th Army all across North Africa and through Italy and into Austria. We had followed his progress on a big wall map of the Mediterranean region; we only knew where to draw our red line from News broadcasts, as his letters were very discreet or censored. Father's return was a shock to all of us. We children had grown up while he had been away for 6 years, and he had been living under trying conditions and we hardly recognised him. After his disembarkation leave he was posted to Yorkshire but, as we three children were all at school in Derby, our parents bought a bigger house and the family and Grandmother stayed there.

Thanks to the 1947 Partition of India Act, I lost my British citizenship! Both my Father and I were born in India and our births were registered by the Army. I managed to reclaim it later!

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David Humphriss

When VE Day was announced, houses were decorated with flags and bunting. Outside lights were switched on and a huge bonfire was made and lit in the field behind Bank Cottages. The RAF station at Gaydon was closed down and the huts were eventually taken over by the District Council as emergency housing. A village cricket team was formed and played in a field behind Foresters Cottage.

The Malthouse was used as the village hall and regular Saturday Night Dances were held there. The local band, The Malteasers played one week and a group from the RAF the next. Mr Bob Seeney was MC and in the local band were: Mr C Lewis, Roy Lewis and Mr Jones.

About 1947, mains services came to Lighthorne - streetlights, water and sewage. The Stratford Blue buses came down to the village to pick up commuters and we no longer had to walk up to the Warwick/Banbury road to catch the bus to Leamington.

Keith Sheppard

Memories of the Second World War

I was born in the London suburb of Ilford in December, 1938. Consequently I find it difficult to distinguish between what I “remember” (not much) and what I was subsequently told about it. I have tried to keep these notes to the former category.

What I do NOT remember is my father - who first “appeared” in my remembered life when I was six years old. Although the family album shows that he was at home for my first 18 months.

I DO remember occasions - I was probably 2 ½ - when I was awakened in the night by the Air-Raid Siren wailing and being carried in haste to the Anderson Shelter (a hole dug in the back garden and covered with corrugated iron and earth) where I must have gone straight back to sleep until the “All Clear” sounded and we returned indoors.

I have some recollection of V1 flying-bombs (Doodle-bugs); one of which destroyed houses in the next road. Later in the War, I was certainly made aware that if you could hear the engine running you were “safe” but if you heard it cut out, you were in danger.

As the bombing increased, my mother took me away from London (as did many other parents with infants too small to be evacuated) to stay with my grandmother in Linton - near Cambridge. Her cottage was homely but primitive - outside bucket-loo, no bathroom, cold water supply only - that sort of thing. With no telephone or newspapers, the accumulator (battery) powered fretwork-fronted radio was the only source of “News” and, although I wasn’t aware of THE WAR (it was the only state of affairs I had known) as anything special, I was often “shushed” when the Home Service News came on.

The village was two miles from the Hadstock US Air-Force base and much “excitement” among us youngsters when one of their planes crashed in a field half a mile away. The “Big boys” (eight or nine-year-olds) brought several souvenirs to school during the following days.

In the late Summer - of 1943 it must have been - I was sent “gleaning” (picking up loose ears of corn that the harvesting machine had dropped) for a neighbour’s chickens and an Italian Prisoner of War who was building the stooks of straw caught a field-mouse and gave it to me with much incomprehensible but obviously friendly accompanying language and gesticulation (he possibly had children of his own of around my age).

The mouse made its escape while I was carrying it home.

In 1944, I won a fancy-dress competition at the Village Fair (doing my famous Winston Churchill impersonation - couldn’t understand why I was shouted at for my well-rehearsed V-sign being “the wrong way round”). The loudspeaker played “Mairzydoats & Dozydoats” and “Little Sir Echo” throughout the afternoon.

Although one can’t of course *remember NOT* having things, I do recall that meat was “special” - the occasional rabbit and on one occasion some “mince” shortly after my pet guinea-pigs “went to Heaven”. I didn’t make any connection at the time - now I recall it for the first time in sixty years, I’m not so sure.

Later that year, my mother and I moved to stay with an aunt in Cullompton, near Exeter, and although I have said I didn't see my father until after the War, that's not quite true - he had written to say that he was being sent to Torquay for a "ditching-at-sea" course. So we stood on the Platform at Cullompton station and his was one of the several score of uniformed arms waving furiously as the train sped through.

I remember a bonfire party at Valentine's Park in Ilford on, or shortly after, VE night and that, I am afraid, is the sum total of my authentic first-hand memories of WW2.

To put the thing in context, however, my father served as an Air Raid Warden during the first few months and then volunteered for the RAF. As a Flight Sergeant navigator he flew Wellingtons for a couple of years and was then transferred to Lancasters in 617 Squadron - after the Dam-busters raid when it became the Pathfinder (flare-dropping) Squadron which led the way to many of the mass raids - including Dresden. He never spoke to me of his wartime experiences. My mother worked in a canteen at the US Air Force base for a year or two and I sometimes accompanied her but was forbidden to copy the other children in asking "Got any gum, chum?"

Although none of my immediate family was killed in the War, I did "lose" some relatives - the brothers and/or sisters who my parents, aged 26 in 1936, at the outset of their marriage, had certainly intended for me.

* * * * *

Jean Camm

As I was only in my early teens at the beginning of the 1940s, I don't remember very much about things. I was at Moreton Morrell with my parents. One thing however was that the two big houses, Moreton Hall and Moreton Paddox were taken over by the army, the British, American and Czech troops were stationed at various times here.

After the war we only had buses early morning and evening. When we went to the cinema, we had to cycle into Leamington.

When we moved to Lighthorne, things were beginning to get back to normal. There were more local attractions. I was in the local W.I. drama group, we performed in the then Malthouse next door to The Antelope.

The stone dug out of the quarry just outside Lighthorne was used to help build the runway at RAF Gaydon, now renamed Lighthorne Heath. Many lorries working all hours.

Nelson Watkins

Village Life in the 1940s

Looking back 60+ years, the 1940s for me must have been a relatively privileged time. We lived in a small village in the South Shropshire hills; the house, built in the 17th Century, was divided in two; the other part being occupied by a farming family. The house was large, draughty and without electricity or heating. Coal and logs were used to fire the cooking range and in some of the other rooms, paraffin lamps and candles provided light.

As a 3-year-old in 1940 living in such idyllic surroundings, I had little understanding of the war. For me it was something going on elsewhere and our rural environment seemed to insulate us from the terrible events of war. With a good sized garden, orchard and close proximity to a farm, we were able to avoid the hardships of food rationing and, in general, the war had little impact on daily life. No doubt my parents protected us from the worst news; but we still carried gas-masks when we went to town. Along with other children of our age, we enjoyed the freedom to roam the fields, climb trees, fish for trout with bent-pin hooks, collect birds' eggs and so on. Whilst my mother complained that she never knew where we were, it was made very clear that if the church bells rang out we should get home fast because the Germans were coming! So we didn't venture too far.

School was 4 miles away in Ludlow. Father worked in town so we usually travelled with him in his Austin 10 (Reg.BUJ 442)! School had, I think, five classrooms each heated with a large open fire. Playground life could be tough, particularly in the war years when many children suffered the worst effects of the war. School was not much to my liking, but I eventually passed the 11+ and moved to the Grammar School. The war had ended by this time and we were encouraged to do sports which was much more to my taste. Also I now had a bike on which I could ride to school. The downside was the lunches – in the basement of a Methodist church – at the British restaurant! Turkey twizzlers would have been a real luxury.

The nearby Titterstone and Clee hills had for hundreds of years been the scene of many industries – coal-mining, iron ore, lime, brick-making and the like. In the late 1800s stone-quarrying became a major industry with demand for the stone coming from all over the Country for road-building. It was transported via two steep inclines to a railhead close to our village and thence by steam train to Ludlow – real live Thomas the Tank Engine! With the advent of war, and the need to build more airfields, demand for stone greatly increased. With all this activity on our doorstep and the added fascination that steam trains have for youngsters, we were provided with unending interest and entertainment – much of which would today result in severe punishment.

Farming was the life-blood of the village and with very little mechanisation and shortages of fuel, the main sources of energy were horses and people; the latter being supplemented by German prisoners-of-war from a nearby PoW camp. Haymaking and harvest were always enjoyable times – turning the hay, riding atop a wagon-load, helping to build a hayrick and, best of all, the picnics with farm-made cider! Then would come the harvest and stooking the sheaves of wheat and oats, leaving arms and legs red-raw from scratches. Later in the year would come the threshing machine, often driven by a steam traction-engine, and all those sheaves would be handled yet again.

Winter time on the farm was less fun; pulling sugar-beet and mangolds in frost and snow was harsh.

As war progressed our field edges became disfigured by the appearance of Nissen huts. Then came soldiers and army lorries full of shells and ammunition. As we now know, this was part of the build-up to the D-Day landings and, thankfully, it all disappeared after a few months. This was about as close as we got to the violent side of the war. Nevertheless, we were thankful when it was over and celebrated with flags and parades in Ludlow.

At home we still had no electricity and often the thick rime that formed on our windows on frosty nights would stay for days on end. Cycling to school could also be a very painful experience with frozen hands and ears. The winter of 1947 blocked all our roads for several days and schools were closed. We thought it great fun helping to dig out the snow and bring supplies to the village on our sledge. Milk lorries couldn't get through and, although it kept cold in the churns, a lot of milk had to be thrown away. By this time, I had three sisters and had to participate in household chores. My tasks were: keeping all the paraffin lamps filled and the wicks trimmed; cleaning all the shoes, peeling potatoes and mowing the lawns. I was much happier helping out on the farm, which had the benefit of a few shillings every so often.

As petrol became more readily available, travel by car to visit relatives and occasional trips to the seaside began to widen our horizons. But the poor roads, cold and smelly cars, combined with two or three travel-sick children made long journeys a bit of an ordeal – especially for the parents!

In February 1949 came the big power “Switch-on”. No longer did mother have to get up at the crack of dawn to light fires and get breakfast for the family. A new cooker and washing-machine arrived on Day One. We never did get a television but at least we didn't have to take the wireless accumulators to be charged every three days!

Our church was about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile from the village itself and I don't recall it as the focal point of village life. That may be because I attended less often than my siblings who were in the choir and attended twice on most Sundays. However, decorating the church, particularly at Harvest Festival, was always a big occasion for everyone. Regular attendance and the need to be virtually inactive for more than an hour seemed to be a problem for me; perhaps illustrated by allegations that my initials are carved in the back of one of the pews. I cannot recall doing such a thing; but I will check it out one day.

* * * * *

John Tarver

I was born in Ashorne and I lived next-door-but-one to the School. My earliest memory of the War was going to see some painters decorating the inside of the school. I was chatting to them when the outbreak of War was declared; two of them downed tools and rushed out of the door saying, "We're going to join the Army and fight for our Country".

In 1940, I had to start school in Wellesbourne; cycling there with my gas-mask slung over my shoulder and my sandwiches and books on the handlebars. After being there for a year or so, we all had the chance to go out in the Summer and Autumn pea-picking and potato-lifting on various farms in the area. I remember one day when I was pea-picking in a field alongside the aerodrome. We heard planes, mostly Wellington bombers, taking off and landing all the time but, on this occasion, the noise from a plane taking off seemed different. We looked up and saw one of its engines on fire. It hadn't gone far when it turned and tried to get back to the runway; the flames had got worse and it came crashing down into the river by Hampton Lucy Church. Only the rear-gunner survived.

There were two very active airfields within a few miles of each other at Wellesbourne and Gaydon. Both had Wellingtons and there were a lot of crashes – one at Bromson Hill Farm. I saw another hit a tree on the Wellesbourne Road at Newbold Pacey in a heavy snowstorm – the entire crew were killed. Several planes came down in the woods at the Loxley end of the airfield.

Ashorne Hill was taken over by the War Office and people in the village could get passes from the local shop to go the film shows and ENSA (Every Night Something Awful) Concerts which were held there. It was quite a Top Secret place with high-level meetings; Winston Churchill came there once. They had their own Air Raid Siren so when it went off we knew that enemy aircraft were approaching. In the woods there were anti-aircraft guns which started firing as soon as the planes could be heard overhead. Shrapnel used to rain down, sometimes very noisily on a tin garage we had at the back of the house. We had a bomb fall on Greenlands Cottage but it didn't do much damage as it was only an incendiary – not a high-explosive one.

Now and again enemy planes would come very low – hedge-hopping – to avoid being shot at. I remember walking across a field when I heard the sound of engines behind me. It was a German plane. I ran and dived into a ditch full of nettles – an uncomfortable experience!

Ashorne, like other villages, had various events to raise money for the War effort. In 1941 we had Warship Week with dances, whist drives and a concert which raised £115. In 1943 we had Wings for Victory Week; that raised £5250 and, in 1944, we had Salute the Soldier Week which included a large auction which brought in a staggering £8172.

In 1944 I left school and went to work on a farm at Bromson Hall where they had four horses and one tractor to work all the land. Bromson Hill was a hostel for Land Army girls who used to work very hard on the farms – when we were very busy, mainly during harvesting and potato-picking, four or five of them would come to help us out. The corn was cut into sheaves which were then picked up and piled into stooks to dry for two or three weeks after which they were put into ricks ready for threshing.

Being young, we didn't realise the dangers of war because we had some great fun at times.

Pauline Kane

London in Wartime and After

At the tender age of two when war broke out, my early recollections are naturally scant. My father was a schoolmaster in North London, a reserved occupation, and he had no option but to stay put to carry on his teaching profession. My parents were in a dilemma as to whether I should be evacuated to safer pastures with relatives in the country or to stay together as a family come what may. As I was an only child, my protective parents decided that I would remain with them. Blackout blinds were installed at all our windows, our old Jowitt car was put away in the garage and laid up on blocks for the duration of the war, and a Morrison shelter was installed in our dining room to allow us to take refuge when the haunting sounds of the sirens warned us of approaching enemy aircraft.

During the early 1940s enemy aircraft dropped bombs all around us, the roof of our house was severely damaged by bomb-blast and most of our windows were blown out despite being criss-crossed with sticky tape. London burned as the docks were targeted and the sky glowed red. Much has been written about the comradeship which abounded in the Blitz but we were all in it together and we all supported one another. One of the most frightening times was when the V1 flying-bombs – the “doodlebugs” - started. We could hear the drone of the engine as the doodlebug approached, dreading the cut-out of the engine as we knew that the explosion was imminent. We just prayed.

All these memories, thankfully, are in the dimmest past and, in a way, I was fortunate that I was really too young to appreciate the seriousness of the situation.

At the end of hostilities in 1945, a war-shattered England with derelict bomb-sites where buddleia and rose bay willow herb ran riot, was war-weary but unbowed, but the whole Country was in need of a moral uplift. George VI was on the throne and the pomp and circumstance accompanying any royal occasion gave the British people a much-needed boost. The popularity of the Royal Family was at its peak.

A close family friend from Yorkshire had applied for a job at Buckingham Palace on the recommendation of her local parson, and had been accepted. She took up residence in a room overlooking the Palace gardens and my mother and I were invited on many occasions for Sunday tea. We crossed Green Park from the underground station and entered the Palace via a side entrance in Buckingham Palace Road. After signing the visitors' book, we walked along what appeared to us to be miles of subterranean passages before going up in a very antiquated lift to Kathleen's apartment. All this was very exciting for a little girl and enabled me to have a number of memorable experiences. I was able to look out on Garden Parties from Kathleen's window; I had conducted tours of the State Apartments and, best of all, I had the opportunity to stand in the Palace forecourt on the occasion of King George VI & Queen Elizabeth's Silver Wedding on April 26th, 1948.

Some wonderful and very happy memories which I will never forget.

Ethel Crombie

Marriage in the Forties



Getting married in the Forties was full of problems. You had to beg or borrow clothing-coupons to get a dress; undies were easy to make out of old parachutes (if you knew an accommodating airman). The flowers for a bouquet had to be from friends' gardens (hence tulips and forget-me-nots). The wedding cake was a sponge made with powdered eggs and had a cover of white cardboard instead of icing-sugar. I feel sure our breakfast was spam and salad and the wine was cider. The honeymoon had to be decided according to where the bombs might not fall – after all, you didn't want to spend your first night in an air-raid shelter with all your neighbours!

It was, however, a wonderful occasion and the vows taken then lasted over sixty years.



Heather Hinman, her brother and a friend ready for a V.E. Day fancy dress party, May 1945



Davinia Chamber's friends celebrating at a V.J. Day party, August 1945



Jean Hopkins and friends in the Women's Land Army, 1946



Joy Watkins in the Junior Red Cross



John Tarver – a National Serviceman still in uniform in 1949



Mrs Northover – lunchtime skating on the frozen Trafalgar Square fountain, London 1947



Betty Bywater

Caroline Haynes (back row far left) at
Miss Forshaw's school, Summer Term 1949

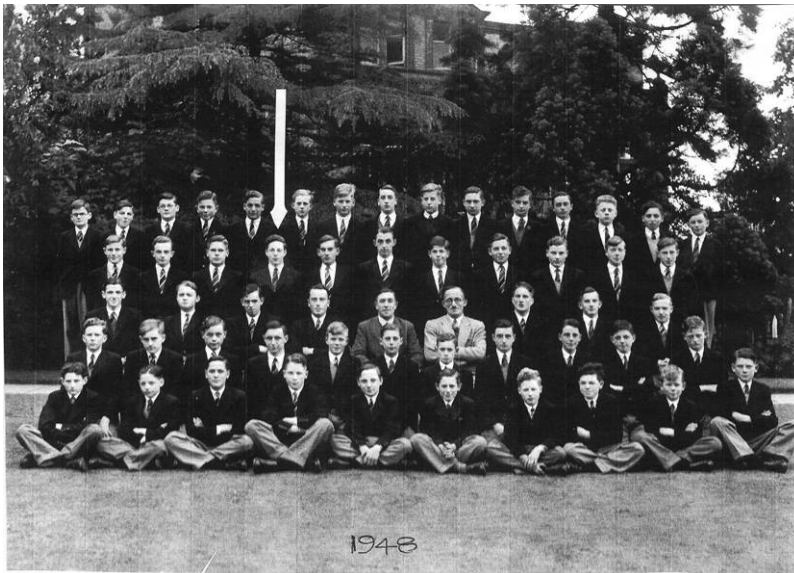


David Wright, aged 8 ½ in 1948
in the garden of his home in
Glamorgan



Irene Proudman, school photo (minus
front teeth), aged 6 years

John Kane – school photo 1948



Nelson Watkins

Barbara (back left) and Jean Adams (back right)
with brothers and sister

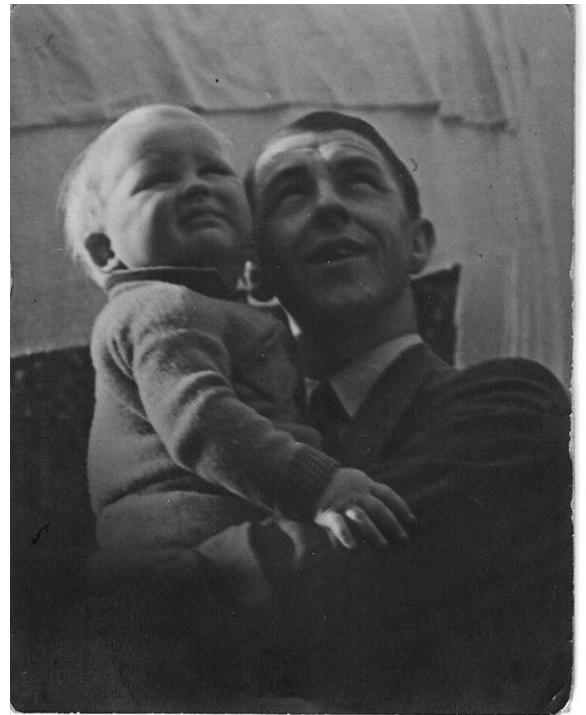


Maggie Woodhouse,
Great Yarmouth, 1949

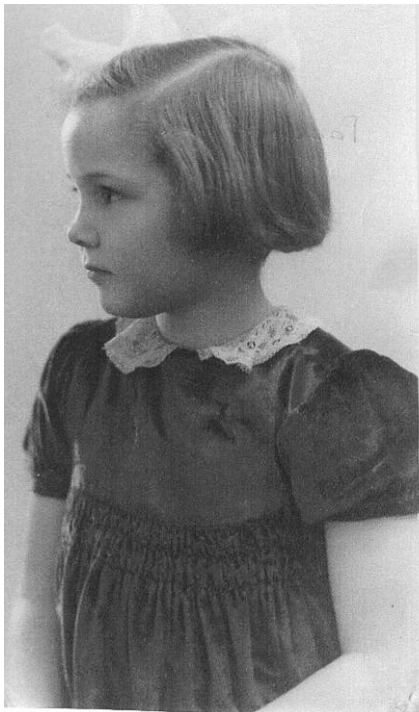




Jean Camm, Croyde, 1947



Keith Sheppard and his father
discuss aerial warfare



Pauline Kane



Sunday school group with Doreen Humphriss in the centre on the back row



Sunday school group with David Humphriss on the back row third from the right