Radley History Club
RHC

World War Two memories

Short accounts of the wartime experiences of individual Radley residents and memories of life on the home front in the village

Compiled by Christine Wootton

Published on the Club website in 2020 to mark the 75th Anniversary of the end of World War Two

Party to celebrate VJ Day in August 1946

Victory over Japan Day (VJ Day) was on 8 August 1945. It's likely the party shown in the photograph above was held in Lower Radley in a field next to the railway line opposite the old village hall. Club member Rita Ford remembers a party held there with the little ones in fancy dress, including Winston Churchill and wife, a soldier and a Spitfire. The photograph fits this description. It's possible the party was one of a series held after 1945 until well into the 1950s to celebrate VE Day and similar events, and so the date of 1946 handwritten on the photograph may indeed be correct.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

These accounts prepared by Club member and past chairman, Christine Wootton, have two main sources:

- recordings from Radley History Club's extensive oral history collection
- material acquired by Christine during research on other topics.

Below Christine explains how the project came about.

> *Some years ago Radley resident, Bill Small, gave a talk at the Radley Retirement Group about his time as a prisoner of war. He was captured in May 1940 at Dunkirk and the 80th anniversary reminded me that I had a transcript of his talk. I felt that it would be good to share his experiences with the wider community and this set me off thinking that it would be useful to record, in an easily accessible form, the wartime experiences of more Radley people.*

As of December 2020 there are over 20 accounts. The first accounts were published on the Club website in April 2020 to mark the 75th Anniversary of VE Day on 8/9 May 2020 with more added in subsequent months. All the accounts are available separately on the Club website.

This compilation brings together common themes by presenting the accounts in one document under the following categories:

- Military service
- Life in Radley
- Radley Home Guard
- Life in Oxford
- Life in London
- Life elsewhere in England
- Life in Germany
- Escape from Germany

A summary (in italics) is given at the start of each account.

Radley History Club's oral history recordings

Much of the information collected by Christine for this project comes from two oral history collections compiled by Radley History Club:

- 'Radley Remembered' – a series of interviews with people with memories of Radley up to and including the 1953 Coronation
- 'A Tale to Tell' – interviews with people who live or have lived in Radley with interesting tales about their lives

More information about the recordings in these series is given on the Club's website.

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MILITARY SERVICE

A list of the known World War Two service men and women from Radley compiled by Christine Wootton, with contributions from Joyce Huddleston, is available in the Club archives (D.384).

The accounts in this section are arranged in more or less chronological order, starting with those of two men taken prisoner by the Germans in May 1940.

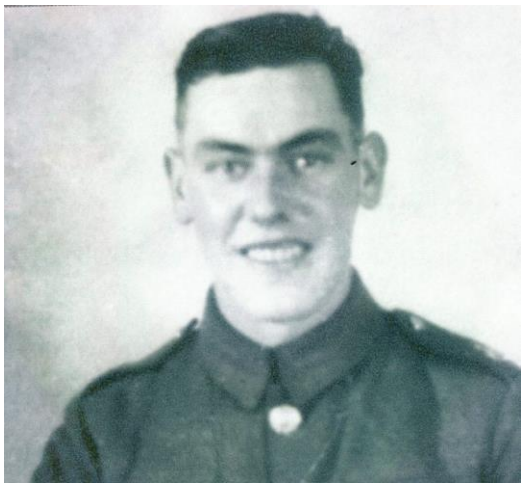
1. Bill Small: Captured during the retreat to Dunkirk

Bill Small, a private in the 4th Battalion Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry (a Territorial unit), served in France as part of the British Expeditionary Force. He was captured by the Germans in May 1940 during the retreat to Dunkirk and spent the rest of the war as a POW.

Albert William (Bill) Small was born on 28 June 1919 at South Stoke in what was then Berkshire. He married May Phyllis Elizabeth Dandridge in the same village on 5 April 1947. She was born on 11 May 1926 and died in 1997. In 1960 Bill and his wife were living at 3 West Lockinge Farm, near Wantage (also then in Berkshire). Following his first wife's death, Bill married Stella Blanche Dorman in 1997 in Abingdon district. Stella, who was born on 10 August 1921, died in 2006 and Bill died in 2007. They had supported each other when their former spouses had been ill and, following their marriage, lived together at Bigwood, one of the mobile home parks in Radley.

Bill joined the 4th Battalion of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry (4th Battalion Ox and Bucks) as a private and his army number was 5384376. When he was taken prisoner of war, his POW number was 14836. On the POW lists for 1943-1945 he was listed as being in Camp 344.

Bill was a very popular member of the Radley Retirement Group. He was their first aid officer and enjoyed going on group holidays. Anyone who went on one of these holidays with him will remember the hilarious costumes he dressed up in for a fancy dress evening. He was asked to talk to the Group about his experiences during the war. Below is his account.



Bill in uniform, 1938

“At home in the 1930s life was hard. I went to work on Saturdays, aged nine, from 8am to 3pm earning 8d – giving 6d to my mother and keeping 2d for myself.

After leaving school aged nineteen, I wanted to do something different with my life so I joined the Territorial Army, the 4th Battalion Oxon and Bucks Light Infantry – and from there my journey began.

We went to the camp at Lavant near Chichester for 14 days training. What a wet time it was! We had to sleep in tents, ten men in each, lying on grass. After basic training I returned to farm work for a while until, in September ’39, a call came over the radio to report to Goring-on-Thames. We had to sleep in the village hall on very hard floorboards. A week later we were formed up to make a battalion of 48 divisions including Berkshire and Gloucestershire regiments and went to Woolton, near Newbury. Training went on all the time – I was a sniper then – but men from the 14-18 was said to get out of that so I became a stretcher bearer (first aid). We did a lot of manoeuvres on Snelsmore Common, near Newbury.

We left Newbury in January 1940 from East Woodhay station on a steam train to catch a boat from Southampton to Le Havre, France. On the Channel crossing we were chased by enemy submarines, which made it a four and a half hour crossing! A very cold and rough crossing too!

We landed at Le Havre early in the morning with the ground covered in snow and ice. We marched for about ten miles to temporary billets. We then went by steam train to Attichy for a short stay before continuing by train at the end of January to Roost-Warendin near Douai. We had to share baths, 12 men one after the other in a metal footbath. We had to undress and with a towel around us run across the snow to the bath, about 20 yards away surrounded by hessian. Very cold! After a few weeks we went to Arras for a weekly bath at the miners’ pits – much better.

Early 1940 was spent training for trench warfare and building the Gort Line, which was a continuation of the Maginot line, from Luxemburg to the north coast of France. This was a line of anti-tank trenches and pill boxes 200 yards between.

Germany invaded on 10 May 1940 through Luxembourg, a neutral country, running around the back of the Maginot and Gort lines of defence, overrunning all in their paths – blitzkrieg as they called it. We were at Waterloo in Belgium, and after a day’s fighting and many strafing sorties, we had to pull back to the Charleroi Canal. After another stand then we moved to Ath in Belgium. As we retreated through the town, four abreast in lorries, we were bombed and strafed by many Stukas. I was in the third lorry from the level crossing when a lorry carrying ammunition was hit and went up in the air about six feet. I jumped out of the left hand side of the lorry and it was strafed on the right. One chap I spoke to was wounded – his war was over; seven men were killed on his side of the lorry.

We moved onto the Albert Canal to form a new line of defence. The canal was red with blood from the Germans trying to cross over. They gave up after half a day.

We went on to form a line of defence at Enghein on 17/18 May, then marched at night for 26 miles to a wood by the River Escaut on 19 May.

At one stage I had to go to the town to fetch bread for everyone after being given the password for the day. Near to the town the bridge was being guarded by our boys and a sentry jumped out with a bayonet at my throat. Halt – password? I had forgotten it. I froze. About eight men

were around me with fixed bayonets and I had to be taken to an officer to be OK'd. I heard them click the bolt on their gun and I swore at them not to shoot! A very close shave. I was able eventually to go and fetch bread for the troops.

Another time a shell landed outside our café HQ wounding the guard and bending the runners off the shutters well out of shape. The chap sitting opposite me had the belt taken off his back – another close shave.

We retreated to Bois and got heavily shelled day and night for 36 hours continuously. We were going to blow up the bridge in Bois and I remember thinking I had time to go to the toilet first – a board with a hole in the top – but when the bridge went up so did I, through space!

As I have already mentioned the Charleroi Canal was our line of defence and I had to go to HQ with a message. Someone had to take the ammunition to the front line so I was asked to go. We had a Bren gun carrier (small tank) and put boxes of ammo on top of the tank and off we went about 300 yards across open ground to the front line with bullets flying everywhere. When we got to the front line I had to crawl along the top to push the boxes of ammo off into the trenches where our boys were dug in. Coming back was worse but I am still here.

We moved to Cassel on the hill, being continuously bombed and strafed day and night for four days. Cut off from the main army we had to fight our war listening to BBC Radio, which was four days behind the real news. At Cassel I had to go down into 'no man's land' between us and the German line to collect the wounded. We were fired on as we crawled down and back with bullets moving the soil around our tin helmets.

One time on arriving at the Regiment Aid Post (hospital), a shell landed outside in the square as we were entering the doorway. It blew us down the corridor to the operating table. On returning to Cassel recently I saw the building. It's now a doctor's surgery but still has the shrapnel marks around the door. We also sheltered in a cellar of a house, which took a direct hit. We had to force open the cellar door to get out finding the rest of the house was gone.

At 10 o'clock one night we had orders to fight our way out of Cassel and make for Dunkirk. On the way down at a place called Watou [a village in Belgium near the French border], German tanks came over the brow of the hill. We dived into a ditch and the tanks went right over the top of us. No-one was hurt. A little while later we had to make a stand at Wormhout, 12 miles south-east of Dunkirk.

Throughout the Second World War there was no shortage of senseless killings, but little did we realise we would encounter the SS Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler, some of Hitler's favourite troops.

The British troops put up a brave resistance against heavy odds. We claimed batches of their casualties including their commanding officer Schutzuk. Many SS troops were stoked up after the fierce battle but, when word got out that their commanding officer had been wounded, things got out of hand.

Some of our soldiers who had been wounded were shot dead. About 20 of our men had been lined up and shot. A hundred were double marched over fields to a barn; those who fell were beaten or bayoneted. The SS troops then threw hand grenades into the barn. Twenty survived as they were under the dead. The troops rounded up what was left, about 30 men, myself included. We were lined up in the field with a machine gun put in front of us. Many things went through my mind about how to dive left or right or fake death but, at what seemed like the last

moment, a German officer came down the road shouting. The machine gun was removed and the German army took over. I then had to help pick up the wounded and rejoin the main German column for marching to a POW camp.

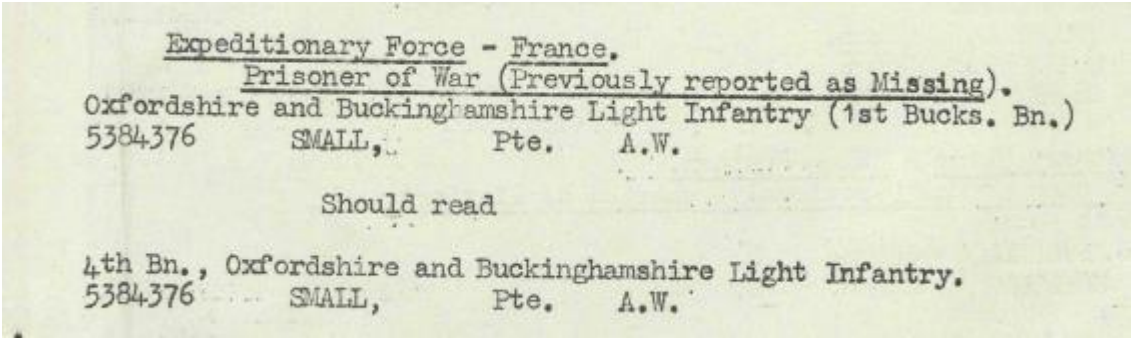
Our last week of fighting we had had very little food and, after being taken prisoner, we had to march 15-20 miles a day in the heat for three weeks to Germany scrounging what we could to survive.

On arriving in Germany they asked for people who did farm work and could ride a horse, so I volunteered to go. So they took us back to the French coast to pick up three horses each to ride back into Germany. On the way back a lot of chaps who could not ride well lost their horses, so I had to round them up and return them as we went along. Sometimes it meant riding about half a mile from the column but it was impossible to escape. There were Germans everywhere. After about ten days riding we arrived back in Germany with bow legs and a B…. sore behind. Then on to Stalag VIII-B Lamsdorf.

Our camp was at Lamsdorf. We had two small rotten potatoes and a slice of bread each day, nothing else. Christmas 1940 we left peelings on the cookhouse floor and we were told it was 'too much waste'. We were given prunes and had potato peelings with prunes.

This carried on for a long time until Red Cross parcels began to arrive – our lifesaver. One parcel was shared between ten men. This consisted of a small bar of chocolate, quarter of a pound of tea, a small packet of plain biscuits, a small tin of ham, raisins and a few other items. After two years things got better still – one parcel per man per week. The raisins in the parcels were soaked to make wine at Christmas. This went on until 'jerry' found it and confiscated it for themselves. We had to hide our mixture but we had other cans for them, which we pee'd into – it looked the same. They never took it again.

We had to shower and delouse every six weeks and our clothes were taken away to be steamed. They came back with metal tags on them, which burned your body when they were thrown at you. It was cold but you did the best you could. I had a Stalag number like everyone else. 14836 was mine. This was hung around your neck, your head was shaved and a photograph taken. Of course our war did not end there. We could be bombed by the RAF at night and the Yanks in the day.



Expeditionary Force - France.
Prisoner of War (Previously reported as Missing).
Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry (1st Bucks. Bn.)
5384376 SMALL, Pte. A.W.

Should read

4th Bn., Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry.
5384376 SMALL, Pte. A.W.

Typewritten record confirming Bill was a Prisoner of War

The French POWs joined us at Poznań. One French officer wished to learn English so I got him to say "I am a B….. fool" so every time he went up to anyone he would salute and say "I am a B…… fool". Everybody laughed and told him "very good, very good". All went well until

an English-speaking Frenchman arrived and told him what he was saying. That was the end – he would not speak to me again.

I moved around several camps – XXIA, XXB, Poznań [Stalag XXI-D], etc. My last camp was Stalag VIII-B Lamsdorf. It was five years after capture when the war went the other way.

One night the Russian army overran our camp and the Germans fled, but in the morning when the Russians withdrew and our guards came back we had just an hour to leave. We left in batches of a hundred men and had to march through the Erzgebirge mountains. We had to dig into the snow for warmth at night, minus 40 degrees with wolves for company. We eventually reached Prague in Czechoslovakia and then made for Nuremburg in Bavaria. We were shelled as we were entering British-held territory. A lone British tank arrived – at last we were free. We were told to make our way down to where the Yanks were about three miles away. Some of our chaps were killed after five years as a POW as the Yanks didn't recognise them.

From Nuremburg we were taken about 50 at a time in lorries to catch a Dakota at Augsberg to Lyon in France. Then we were put into a Lancaster bomber in the empty bomb bays with no time to think about what was going on. Next stop an aerodrome in southern England. We stayed overnight then had passes to Paddington, then Goring. Home at last! Two days from being freed to being at home.

After six weeks' leave I had to report back to Aylesbury for a few weeks, then down to Fleet near Aldershot. I was transferred to the Royal Army Medical Corps, then to Checkendon near Wallingford to look after a camp of Polish soldiers as a medical orderly.

I then went to the Churchill Hospital, Oxford, to take over from the Americans. It was one of their hospitals and had been built named after Sir Winston.

Then it was 'demob' time and I went to Taunton in Somerset. I had nightmares for about six months over all that had happened during the previous five months. I still have the odd one even now, 56 years later. After being demobbed I was given a job at the Royal Berkshire Hospital in Reading as a medical orderly. I had a job to get there, so being one minute late they stopped me an hour's pay. I finished right away. I went back to farm work because by then I had met a girl who lived on the farm, who I later married. Later on I joined the St John's Ambulance, having an ambulance parked outside on 24-hour call. It also had to treat minor injuries, cuts, etc. I passed more certificates in home nursing so I had a badge on the door in the village of West Lockinge, doing nursing at night to relieve the doctor's surgery."

Notes on the above account

The German army had launched its invasion of the Low Countries on 10 May 1940, ending what had been called the phoney war. The British Expeditionary Force had been sent over in readiness and had spent time building pillboxes and other defences. Unfortunately the Germans invaded through the poorly defended Ardennes Forest, having defeated the Dutch and invaded Belgium. The 4th Battalion of the Oxon and Bucks Light Infantry tried to defend the River Scheldt, but were pushed back into France and found themselves in the Dunkirk area. The evacuation of British troops from Dunkirk started on 26 May. The 4th Ox and Bucks took part in the defence of Cassel until 29 May but were eventually encircled by German Forces near Watou and forced to surrender. Most of the soldiers were held as prisoners of war for the next five years.

Interviewed in November 2002

2. Charles Lockett: RAF pilot taken prisoner during the Battle of France

Charles Lockett joined the RAF in 1931, becoming a squadron leader in 1938. In September 1939, he led No. 226 (Bomber) Squadron to France. Charles was shot down and captured in May 1940 during a raid on Reims. He was a prisoner at several camps, ending the war at Colditz. Christine's research about Charles started when the Club was given a letter written by him to his wife from Colditz.

Charles Edward Stuart Lockett was born in the village of Childer Thornton on the Wirral in Cheshire in 1910. His parents were Robert Kerr Lockett and Ellen Hilda Fielden. Charles had a brother, Peter born in 1920. Later his father remarried, and he and his second wife had a daughter, Jeanetta, born in 1932.

The Lockett family had prospered in Liverpool in the early 1800s. The family firm of William and John Lockett was registered in 1833 and almost immediately formed a business association with the Martell family in France, which was unbroken for a century. They were shipowners and wine merchants, trading across the Atlantic in both directions. Charles' mother's family originated from Todmorden in Lancashire/Yorkshire. Joshua Fielden, born in 1748, was the man who started a long line of famous Fielden names. He was the founder of the Todmorden cotton spinning industry and died a Tory Quaker in 1811. One of his five sons was John Fielden MP who was a prominent reformer and sympathised with the Chartist movement. By 1832 the Fielden brothers had one of the largest textile companies in Britain. They were caring employers and had 684 power looms. John Fielden MP brought about the Factory Act of 1847 which established a ten-hour working day for all women and children.

Ellen Fielden's father was Edward Brocklehurst Fielden. His middle name reflects the fact that his mother was Ellen Brocklehurst from Macclesfield, Cheshire. The Brocklehursts made their money in silk manufacturing. Ellen's mother was Mary Ellen Knowles, the daughter of a wealthy Wigan colliery proprietor. Ellen was born at Bury Knowle House, Headington, Oxford. Her father, who was a civil engineer with the Thames Conservancy, bought the house in 1885 and extended it to accommodate his wife, four children and their many servants. In 1894 the family moved to Shropshire, first renting Longford Hall and then in 1895 buying Condover Hall.

Charles Lockett was educated at The Leas School, Hoylake, Cheshire and Aston Clinton School, Buckinghamshire. When he left school he spent three years in an aero engine factory, before joining the RAF in September 1931. Charles married Eve Mason on 17 May 1933 at the parish church in Sanderstead in Surrey; by 1935 we have evidence from Kelly's Directory for that year that the couple were living at Neat Home Farm in Radley. His occupation on the marriage certificate was given as 'Pilot Officer'. No profession is given against Eve's name. Both were residing in Sanderstead at the time. Her father was Robert Mason, a professor; his father's profession was given as 'solicitor'. The witnesses were W. Mason and F Prier(?). Eve's family originated from Swaffham in Norfolk. Her brother was in the RAF with Charles and this is probably how they were introduced to one another.

Charles Lockett

Charles lived at Neat Home Farm in Lower Radley from about 1935 to about 1947 except for the time he was a POW. His wife lived there during that time. She was a member of Radley Women's Institute and employed local women to help with the upkeep of the house.

Charles' career in the RAF progressed from Pilot Officer to a Flight Commander with No. 15 Squadron. Then in December 1938, as a Squadron Leader, Charles became Officer Commanding No. 226 (Bomber) Squadron, at either Harwell or Upper Heyford. On 2 September 1939, the day before the declaration of war, his squadron landed at Rheims, France, as part of No. 72 Wing of the Advanced Air Striking Force.

During the German invasion of Belgium and France, the squadron fought hard, bombing motor transport columns and other tactical targets in an attempt to delay the enemy's advance. There were large losses of aircraft at this time as the Fairey Battle planes, which they flew, were vulnerable to attack from certain angles. On 14 May 1940, the date Charles was captured, only 28 of the 63 Fairey Battles that took off made it back. He was shot down during a raid on Reims/Champagne, while flying a Fairey Battle P2267 plane, and then taken prisoner. The squadron withdrew to England in mid-June 1940, without him and many of his colleagues.

Charles was in several prisoner-of-war camps. One of the first camps he was in was the Dulag Luft (*Durchgangslager der Luftwaffe*) at Oberursel near Frankfurt. Almost all RAF personnel were interrogated here before being sent on to other camps. He tried to escape from the camps and, on one occasion, he managed to hide away on a ship going to neutral Sweden but was found and returned to the Germans. Probably as a result of this he was transferred to Colditz. He was in Colditz at the end of the war; he told a local resident that he would like to have seen the glider, which the prisoners had secretly made, fly but he was released before that happened.

After his release at the end of the war in 1945, Charles held various posts in the RAF before becoming, in 1955, an Air Attaché in Paris with the rank of Air Commodore. When he retired from the RAF, on 10 May 1959 aged 49, Charles and his wife Eve, went to live in Jersey. People, who knew Charles in Jersey, remember him as a tall, thin, bald-headed man who wore spectacles. He became a member of the Royal Jersey Golf Club and a friend who played with him says he had a wonderful sense of humour. The friend used to laugh his way round the course. He and Eve were living in, by all accounts, a lovely house in Jersey in Regent Road.

Charles started a new career when he arrived in Jersey; he and a friend called Graham Miller set up the Graham Miller Co (CI) Ltd in the mid-1960s and traded as international loss adjusters. (His brother Peter had shares in it.) Charles had several directorships and became an underwriting member of Lloyds in 1960. He led a busy life in Jersey and was respected by all who knew him.

Charles Lockett died at 11.35 am on 26 August 1966, while piloting his plane on a day's visit from Jersey to Alderney. His two passengers, Dr Bill James and his wife Lady Ursula James, died with him. Detailed accounts of the accident were published in the Jersey Evening Post on 26 August and 27 August 1966. No one seems to know how the accident happened, but the post-mortems recorded death by drowning for all three. Charles was buried in Swettenham, near Congleton, in Cheshire.

The sports car that Charles drove round Radley

Copy of the log book of Charles Lockett's car

For more about Charles and his brother Peter's wartime story and their imprisonment as POWs see Radley History Club's book, From Radley to Colditz and Sagan.

3. Peter Hairs: An RAF instructor's tale

The timeline of the wartime career of Peter Hairs as an RAF pilot and then instructor takes you on a tour of airfields all over Great Britain. It also illustrates the myriad of RAF training establishments and their acronyms.

Peter Raymond Hairs was born in 1915 in Thornton Heath, Surrey. He married Eileen Hill in 1939. For many years they lived in Lower Radley opposite the old village hall.

Peter joined the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve (RAFVR) in January 1938 as an Airman UT Pilot (Pilot under training) and carried out his early flying training at No. 19 Elementary & Reserve Flight Training School (E&RFTS) at Gatwick.

Peter was called up when World War Two began. In October 1939 he was sent to No. 6 Flying Training School (FTS) at Little Rissington in Gloucestershire to complete his training, after which he was commissioned as a Pilot Officer.

Peter Hairs

On 28 December 1939 Peter was posted to No. 11 Group Pool at St Athan in south Wales, where he started to fly Hurricanes. He then joined No. 501 Squadron of the RAFVR at RAF Tangmere in Sussex on 25 January 1940.

The squadron flew to France on 10 May and on 14 May Peter damaged a German Dornier Do 17 bomber and had a share in destroying another on 15 May.

He claimed a Messerschmitt Me109 destroyed on 5 September.

On 13 October 1940 he was posted to No. 15 Service Flying Training School (SFTS) at Kidlington in Oxfordshire as a flying instructor.

Peter went to No. 2 Central Flying School at RAF Cranwell in Lincolnshire for an instructor's course on 23 February 1941 after which he moved to No. 11 FTS at RAF Shawbury in Shropshire on 14 April to instruct.

For a short period in May 1941 he was at No. 10 EFTS at Weston-Super-Mare before being posted to Canada on 13 June as an assistant Chief Flying Instructor (CFI). His wife Eileen went with him.

In mid-December 1943 Peter returned to the UK and joined No. 276 Air Sea Rescue (ASR) Squadron at RAF Harrowbeer in Devon. He was posted away on 5 May 1944 to No. 19 Operational Training Unit (OTU) at RAF Kinloss in north-east Scotland as Officer-in-Command Bomber Defence Training Flight.

His final posting was to India on 18 July 1945 on administrative duties. He was released from the RAF on 30 October 1945 as a flight lieutenant.

Peter received a Mention in Despatches (gazetted 14 June 1945) and was made an MBE (gazetted 1 January 1946).

In later life Peter was a bank manager and a magistrate. He died, aged 99, in 2014.

4. Ted Holst: Some mother's son (a sailor's tale)

This article is reproduced from the Souvenir Programme for Radley's celebrations in May 1995 marking the 50th Anniversary of VE Day. Frederick Rasmus (Ted) Holst was born in 1915 in Sunderland. Ted and his wife Ida came to live in Ferny Close, Radley, following some years working abroad – Ted is thought to have been a ship's pilot in one of the Gulf states.

"It was 1941 and a lovely August Monday in Canada Dock, Liverpool. I was gangway duty officer on the auxiliary aircraft carrier, *HMS Audacity*, awaiting orders for convoy duty with 36 Escort Group, commanded by Commander Walker, RN.

We had done all our practice and training, our aircraft were ready, we'd had our leave. About 14:00 hours a young seaman, designated HO (hostilities only) came up the gangway, hours overdue from leave. His excuse was that there was no train running from his home town, Sunderland, to Liverpool. Asked to repeat his excuse and to think carefully about his answer he again said that there was no train running on a Sunday afternoon. 'First Lieutenant's Report for overstaying your leave', he was told. 'But sir', was the protest. 'Unfortunately for you it is that you lied about the train. As I live in Sunderland, I caught the train that you said was not running'.

Days and weeks went by. On 21 December 1941, the battle that had begun a few days previously and was a running fight came for us to a calamitous conclusion. The Audacity was torpedoed and was sinking fast. I was on the flight deck, by the bridge sponson [a projection on the side of a boat, ship or seaplane], awaiting the final order, 'Every man to himself' when the young seaman from Sunderland appeared beside me. 'What are you doing here?', I asked. 'You heard the order to abandon ship'. 'I can't swim sir', he replied.

He was wearing his Royal Navy regulation life belt, already inflated. I took him by the arm and faced him towards the blackness, and told him to start running as fast as he could without stopping. He did just that and disappeared over the edge of the flight deck into the darkness. I never saw him again."

Note: HMS Audacity, escorting Convoy HG-76 from Gibraltar to the UK, sank west of Cape Finisterre off Portugal in 70 minutes. A total of 73 of her crew were killed. Survivors were picked up by the corvettes, *Convolvulus*, *Marigold* and *Pentstemon*.

More about HMS Audacity

For other accounts of people's military service see:

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24 Reg White: Memories of working in London and the Navy

Tip: To return to this point hold down ALT and the left arrow on your keyboard.

5. John Nicholson: From the Normandy beaches to Germany

As a soldier in the British Army, John Nicholson had a fascinating war career from the Normandy beaches right through to Germany and the end of the war as an infantry signaller. His story takes us from fierce fighting in the Falaise Gap, the Netherlands, the Battle of the Bulge to the northern coast of Germany.

Frederick John Nicholson was born in London c.1925. Not long before D-Day in 1944 when John was 19, he was called up to join the army and had to report to Canterbury from where he was sent to join the Royal Leicestershire Regiment. After battle school training as an infantryman, he was given embarkation leave. He was then sent to Market Rasen in Lincolnshire. From then on, his feet barely touched the ground. His kit was reorganised to equip him for battle – his battledress along with his haversack and light, etc. – and then he was given 50 rounds of ammunition and a bandolier. He travelled down to the south coast and was off to Normandy. He had thought he was going to the Far East as he had had malaria jabs and all sorts of things. He thinks this might have been a spoof to disguise where they really were going, but he didn't really mind as there was a bit of bravado about it.

John landed in Normandy on 6 July 1944 a month after D-Day. The beaches were more organised by then. There were paths leading to tents where groups collected together. The paths had names such as Knightsbridge on them.

When John landed in the late afternoon, the men were then told to lie down under a hedge and get some sleep. The next morning he had very peculiarly tasting porridge for breakfast and realised it had salt in it, which it the way that Scottish people like it. After eating he was marched off to the tailors where he was told to take off his battledress and the Leicestershire badge, and it was replaced with the uniform of the 51st Highland Division of the 2nd Battalion of the Seaforth Highlanders. He realised he was unexpectedly in a Scottish regiment. He thought it might have had something to do with his name, which is fairly common in Scotland.

After a few days in Normandy when some of the mates he'd been training with were killed, John came down to earth and realised what it was all about. Part of the time the men were making jokes and trying to forget about things. They didn't want to dwell on what was happening, but when someone had to write to a family or mate of someone who had been killed, it was very difficult and terribly hard. It was so necessary to have a sense of humour. There were some humorous incidents. On one occasion John, as an infantry signalman, was laying a telephone cable near Arnhem when his mate, George, began to giggle. John didn't know why until he turned around and found a billy goat taking an interest in his back. Many animals were left behind when people made their escape from the town when the Battle of Arnhem started. He thinks George would have stepped in if the two-horned goat had actually tried to butt him. After trampling through mud it was a relief to have a laugh. After the war whenever George went on holiday, he would find a postcard to send to John that featured a goat.

Soon afterwards John first made contact with the enemy. The Germans were entrenched in a small village just outside Caen called Tilly-la-campagne and were under attack. The village was being held by the SS Panzer Division 'Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler'. RAF planes supported the army by coming down at tree top level and giving the Germans all they had. It meant that many Germans were taken prisoners of war. John found them to be very arrogant. One of them wanted to assert himself with the Regimental Sergeant Major but found he had picked

the wrong man when his opponent, who had been a boxing champion, soon made him hit the deck. Discovering how to get these arrogant soldiers down to size was a quick learning experience. It wasn't long afterwards that these really hardened Nazi prisoners of war were shipped off and the British were dealing with very different people. One of them was Italian and looked as if he would rather make them a cup of coffee than fight. The British weren't used to foreigners in those days, except for the Americans, and had to quickly learn to distinguish the different nationalities.

As an infantry signaller John had a 'walkie talkie' on his back and he could hear all that was going on. For example, he would hear 'B company over there and another company here'. He could tell his comrades how the war was going.

A couple of weeks went by before they came face-to-face with the enemy at a place called Falaise – the famous Falaise Gap. The Germans were trapped there at what was a significant time in the war. When the heavy stuff started John and his comrades were hurrying along and saw an enormous tank, probably taken out by the RAF, at the side of the road with an 88 mm field gun on the turret. It was a Royal Tiger – the British had nothing like it. How it had been knocked out John didn't stop to find out but it had a track missing and was on its side. John and his mates came under fire. The idea was that the men should hit the deck and get down when under fire. However, John learnt things from those who had done it before that they hadn't taught you at the training camps. He learnt that when you hit the deck, you crawl and don't stay there. As a signaller he had a sizeable tin box on his back with valves in and it could get disabled very quickly when it was hit. It was a speedy learning experience.

Not long after the early days in Normandy the army moved towards the River Seine. Crossing the river meant relieving Le Havre, Rouen and Paris. They turned north from the River Seine to get to Le Havre. The RAF did a good job softening up the defences, most of which were pointing out to sea. One large bomb fell on a bank and the Germans who were there helped themselves to quite a bit of money. John said that when they took prisoners they had to remove things that would help them to escape. They often found that the Germans had this money from the bank. It was returned by the British sometimes not so willingly, but it would have been no use to the British as it couldn't be exchanged for sterling.

One of the worst parts of the war for John was being at the northern end of the Siegfried Line [a system of pillboxes and strongpoints along the western frontier of Germany] where the Germans were hiding in the trees. There were snipers in trees and, when John and his mates came under fire from higher positions, they were very vulnerable. There was nowhere to hide and it was very frightening. In general, John believed, soldiers always think it is going to happen to someone else not to them. On three occasions between Normandy and the end of the war, his rifle company came down to 35 or 40 out of 100 men. Many of the soldiers lost their lives. Until they moved out of the forest it was the worst and most dangerous bit. It was a good feeling when they finally moved out of there.

John carried a heavy load. Some kit for additional sleeping would be on three-ton lorries. He would have to carry a weapon, and stuff to keep it clean, plus sufficient ammunition; some people carried a grenade but he didn't. They also needed basic equipment to feed themselves. The radio he carried had a battery, which would keep going for about 8 hours. This weighed a few pounds. The spare battery, plus bits and pieces, was carried by someone else. It probably weighed 50+ pounds in total. John was often with front line men at a maximum of 15–20 yards from the enemy. He had to be with the company commander and, if the

commander went forward on reconnaissance, the signaller did too but at other times they were behind the front-line troops. If he got a message for ‘Sunray’ [the radio callsign given to any commander], he had to give it to his commander.

Very often the men slept out in the open. They would dig a slit trench and there would be two to three men in it, with one sleeping at a time while the others were on duty. It was tough on the third man if the commander ordered them to move before he had completed his allocated sleep time! Food was brought on a lorry or truck but, if it couldn’t get near enough, it would be brought on a Bren gun carrier to about 100 yards behind the line. Eight men at a time would go for the meal. Breakfast was always before dawn. If sandwiches arrived with breakfast the men knew they wouldn’t be having anything in the middle of the day. The evening meal was after sunset. Very often when the men thought they were going to get some rest and relaxation something would come up and it was cancelled.

John was not actually involved in the Battle of Arnhem (17–26 September 1944) in the Netherlands where the plan was for the British 1st Airborne Division to be dropped near the town to meet up with the Guards’ Armoured Division driving up from Brussels. John had to get through to a group that had landed at Eindhoven and were pushing through to Nijmegen. They got stuck. John felt that the airborne drop was a little bit too soon. The people organising this attack should have given the troops on the ground an opportunity to get a bit closer and then they could have linked up with the airborne men and shortened the war. The gap was too much. It could have worked completely and they would have had a gateway into northern Germany but it went wrong. They had been making good progress and it was all well-meant. Just the timing was wrong.

There were terrible winter conditions during the campaign in the Ardennes – also known as the Battle of the Bulge. It was bitterly, bitterly cold and, although the men had been putting dubbin on their boots for some time, the snow clung to them and penetrated, so the men had wet feet. They also found they couldn’t hide in a white background. By this time the Germans had had to pull back from Russia and so had white-painted weaponry to spare as their two fronts, one of which was in Poland, were getting closer together. The Allied Forces were trying to get to the town of La Roche. To the credit of the British ‘base chaps’ the men got a hot meal once a day; John and his mates were very proud of ‘base wallers’. The men were pulled out of the line a few days before Christmas to celebrate Christmas with Christmas pudding from a tin. One or two people had problems with frostbite but not like they had in the First World War. John’s father, who’d been a sergeant in the Essex Regiment, told John things about his army service in the First World War but that had been a very different war.

The Allies did not think the Germans had it in them to fight the Battle of the Bulge. It was their last throw of the dice and their last fling. The Germans had some good troops there and they put up a good resistance; then they turned and ran leaving their weapons but no ammunition, as it had probably run out. It appeared as though they were falling apart. There were one or two heavy skirmishes but no pitched battle. That came a bit later with a very heavily defended position.

After the Ardennes John and his comrades moved into Holland. The people there had suffered and starved. On one occasion, a little boy came running up to John, who gave him a sandwich from his mess tin. The boy thought it so valuable that he went running in to his house. Obviously he wanted to tell his family. Being occupied had been so hard for these people. The secret police were so frightening to the ordinary people. Britain hadn’t experienced anything

like it. A Jewish man with his unit explained to John what his family had to go through in Germany and it wasn't good.

John finished up in Germany near Bremen. He was on leave in England when the war peace was declared and remembered the great celebrations. He returned to Cuxhaven, a navy port where submarines had been. It was a different world. There were very hardened Nazis there walking with their heads drooping. The Germans were very worried in case the Russians got to them and were pleased when the British arrived. People in Frankfurt were pleased to see the Americans, especially when they brought goodies in their canteen and socialised well with the locals. A few weeks later the fraternisation ban began and they had to ignore them. The Germans said good morning but the Allied Forces could say nothing back. A lot of pretty girls would smile at the troops and they would smile back – a sign that the fraternisation law wasn't working; it was repealed within a year or so.

An officer called Captain Scobie and John had become friendly while making their way to Germany and looked after each other. The Captain's father was General Scobie, the commander in the Balkans. [Lieutenant-General Sir Ronald Scobie was a career soldier who commanded the British Forces in Greece.] One day Captain Scobie called John into his office to tell him that there was a family problem at home; John knew he was about to be told his parents had separated. The captain thought the best thing for John to do was get on to an instructor's course for signallers at Catterick in Yorkshire. So an application was made to the War Office for him to get him posted to Catterick. Some months after the war had finished, he did this course at Catterick! Then Private Nicholson became Sergeant Nicholson and he became a sergeant instructor at Catterick where he finished his army career. His friend the Captain told him that it was a straight train ride from Catterick to London where his family was. Captain Scobie had been compassionate in enabling the change for John.

John was classified as 'walking wounded' twice. He received a 'very small piece' of shrapnel in his left arm, but it was considered better to leave it there as it was not giving him any bother. John felt it good advice and it always amused him and his wife when the alarm went off when he went through airport security.

John was asked if he felt there were any good points about the war. He replied that he had grown up in the East End of London where Jewish people outnumbered others and known so many of them. He felt he had done a good thing in rescuing if only a few Jewish people from the slave labour camps where many of his friends' relatives were. He was reminded of the story of Anne Frank, which was for real and a bad, bad period in history.

There was a great sense of camaraderie in the army and he made some good friends. Whatever they had they shared and looked out for each other. One of them was Jimmy Quarrel who lived in Trinity Gardens, Canning Town, in London. He was a bit of a controversial man who emigrated to Australia after the war. The mates had fun with his surname.

Another close friend was Jimmy Shand. Unfortunately he died in the very last action they were in. He was one of the four men who worked together.

George Backhouse was a good friend too. He had died a few years before the interview took place. George was a Yorkshire man with a good sense of humour who could write very descriptive letters. He was the one who was with John when the billy goat nearly butted him. George, who worked for Rowntrees, had an allowance which enabled him when sweets were rationed to send some to John on a couple of occasions.

After being demobbed, John who was interested in sport, but didn't want to play football anymore, started to play badminton and tennis. In 1954 at a tennis club dance, his future wife Joyce Haynes asked him to dance. He hadn't seen her at the club before as she had been involved in car accident and was only then ready to get back to tennis. Joyce was an excellent tennis player and they began to play mixed doubles together. They had a holiday in Paris in the summer and by the end of the year they were married and began life together in London where they both lived. They found a flat in Merton Park just outside Wimbledon; while there they saved like mad and bought a house in Malden just a little way away. The first of four children was born in Malden in 1959. They later moved out of London to Goring as they had spotted some nice houses there and wanted cleaner country air for their children. When trying to find the right secondary schools for their children, they moved in 1969 to north Abingdon as it was central to the area John covered in his job.

Husband, dad, grandad and great-grandad, John died peacefully in 2017 aged 92. A service of thanksgiving was held at Christ Church, Abingdon.

Interviewed by Tony Rogerson on 4 October 2012. Also present at the interview was Tony Gillman, a Club member and friend of John's, who had suggested the Club should interview John about his wartime experiences.

6. David Buckle: My time in the Royal Marines

'A quiet war' is how David Buckle described his time in the Royal Marines from 1943 to 1945. He served first in a combined operations group in charge of landing craft and then as part of a special brigade that was sent to northern Germany at the end of the war.

By the end of 1942 when he was 18, David started to think about joining up to serve in World War Two despite being in a reserved occupation as he was working on a farm in Radley at the time. When he went to the recruiting office in George Street in Oxford, he was told he could either work down the mines as a 'Bevan Boy' or go in the Royal Marines. Not liking the idea of working down a coal mine he volunteered for the Marines, for which he had to pass a sight and hearing test.

In January 1943 he received a letter to report to the Royal Marines barracks at Eastney in Portsmouth on 12 February 1943. This turned out to be a turning point in his life. David had been brought up in a children's home and hadn't had an easy time, but it had made him independent and he felt this new occupation was a new adventure. Going down to Portsmouth was a real eye opener of what war was about. The peace and quiet of Radley had well and truly been left behind.

On his first night in Portsmouth the Germans bombed the city and David was in the thick of it. These were violent air raids and, with bombs going off everywhere, the place was shaking. He sat in an air raid shelter and felt terrified. As well as having his eyes opened to the realities of war, he was amazed at the reaction of some of the men in the barracks. There were men crying at night because they were missing their mothers who had done everything for them and they couldn't cope with looking after themselves. David's upbringing in the children's home meant he knew the hard way how to survive, with activities such as washing his own socks. Some of the men resented the fact that David was so independent and was enjoying himself.

The sergeant in charge of them was a nice man but a tough guy. He said that they were going to be properly trained so they would not disgrace the Marines. Part of the discipline was that if anyone in the squad misbehaved they had to run round the barracks. One day the sergeant said to David that he couldn't understand why he was never bothered about any of the discipline and David informed the sergeant that his former guardian could teach him a thing or two about discipline. The Marines trained him and stretched him. Life was changing for him.

After 14 weeks' initial training in Portsmouth, David was posted to combined operations and was sent to a camp in Barmouth in north-west Wales for training in navigation, seamanship, Morse code and semaphore and gunnery. In the course of gunnery training hundreds of men assembled in a huge cinema. The instructor said that they had to fire the gun a little in front of the aircraft so that by the time the bullet got there the plane would be there too. In his posh voice he said it was rather like throwing a stone at a cat running across a lawn. At that a Cockney lad piped up and said: 'What's a bloody lawn sir?'.

After six weeks' training David knew a bit about navigation and seamanship, but not much about the other two subjects. He returned to Portsmouth and was then sent to various places including Brightlingsea, near Southend, ending up at the naval base at Invergordon on the Cromarty Firth in north-east Scotland. Here there were two flotillas of small landing craft made out of seven-ply wood. When the men went across from Invergordon to Cromarty at the mouth of the Firth, they saw big Sunderland aircraft landing on the water having been on Atlantic patrols.

David had a good time in Scotland but not all was pleasant there. One day very senior army and naval personnel arrived for a special exercise with tanks designed to be amphibious. They were to be despatched from landing craft, first going underwater and then coming to the surface before landing on the beach. The idea was that, once on land, the driver would press a button and a small explosion would get rid of all the water and rubbish, and then the tank would be fit for use on the land. A senior naval officer who had a lot to say for himself was on David's boat. The first tank went off the landing craft and immediately went down and never came up to surface. There was a long pause. All sorts of messages were going back and forth, and the officer ordered the exercise to carry on. Altogether nine tanks went off the landing craft and nine went to the bottom. They were fully loaded tanks with a full crew. It was unimaginatively awful and there was sorrow in the camp for days afterwards.

Eventually David completed his training, which included a rehearsal for D-Day with warships firing shells over the men as they went onto the beach. The firing did not stop until they reached the beach. It was *very* noisy.

The men were then told they were going to Portsmouth. All their landing craft were hoisted up onto cargo boats that had been converted to have 24 landing craft on either side. They travelled round the top of the Scottish coast and down the Irish Sea and back along the south coast. There was one U-boat scare but that is all. David found himself on *HMS Vernon*, a submarine base opposite Gosport, which was the Royal Navy's main submarine base. There were motor torpedo boats (MTBs) there as well. While there David met and had a chat with a Radley resident called Wilson who lived in a bungalow opposite the Bowyer Arms and who was in the MTB fleet.

David's work until D-Day was to deliver sailing orders to all the warships in the harbour and the Solent. He found he could go anywhere in Portsmouth harbour purely by compass night

or day as he had learnt enough navigation skills to do it. He thought it was great fun. This work carried on for a while and during that time there was no leave and any talk in pubs about anything they had seen was banned. The men were aware that all this was leading up to something. There were troops arriving and landing craft were assembling on the Solent. There were hundreds of barrage balloons above them.

David's job on D-Day was not to land in France but to deliver sailing orders to every landing craft detailing when they had to set off. His group also took troops out to the landing craft. Many of these troops were American, and he and others were surprised to see that black and white soldiers were segregated onto different boats.

The Royal Marines' boats were again loaded onto cargo boats and they set forth, stopping halfway in the English Channel. The men wondered why they were waiting, but then realised they were in the assembly area and that, if there had to be a mass evacuation, they were there to bring the men out. As they weren't needed, they went back to Portsmouth and David was spared going all the way to France.

As a corporal David was entitled to be the coxswain of a boat. Now he was made a sergeant and, with this promotion, was moved to a special brigade within his flotilla and waited be told what his next destination would be. At that time he was the youngest sergeant in the Royal Marines.

From Portsmouth, David's group was sent by train to a specially built hutted camp, Windrush Camp, between Burford and Northleach on the Oxfordshire–Gloucestershire border. On the table in one of the huts were huge maps of Lübeck, Kiel and Flensburg. David discovered that they were being trained for a special brigade to be sent to Germany. The war was coming to an end by the time they finally sailed from Tilbury to Ostend, and then on to an old cavalry camp in Belgium where their beds were palliasses which they filled with the straw they found in a heap. The brigade stayed here for a few days before being put on lorries and taken to Brussels airport to fly to the Lüneberg Heath military airfield near Hamburg. The brigade got on Dakota aircraft that had come in from Germany bringing in prisoners of war (POWs) who had been released. At the airfield were thousands and thousands of British ex POWs just wandering around. Nothing seemed to be organised but the ex POWs didn't mind as they were on their way home.

On their way the Marines' lorries passed through Hamburg. The city was an unforgettable and awful sight following the allied bombing. There were vast heaps of rubble four or five storeys high with dead animals lying around, but fortunately no dead humans. People came out of the rubble waving white flags made of sheets or handkerchiefs.

David was in charge of one of the squads. Its first stop was Lübeck. Here, in an additional task, their job was to take command of a building that had been the SS headquarters for northern Germany and Schleswig-Holstein and clear it out. The men managed to get inside the first doors, but then found big steel shutters and it was impossible to go any further. There were huge steel doors everywhere. They were then told to retreat to a mile away and, after they'd heard a loud explosion, they could go back and get on with their job. Two hours later there was a huge explosion. The whole place had been blown up and was destroyed. Unfortunately, this included records and documents that might have been useful later as evidence in war crime trials.

With now nothing more they could do in Lübeck, the squad headed off to Kiel. They were very tired when they arrived after an awful night-time journey. They came to a large block of flats and an officer went inside. Soon afterwards old people and children were brought out, and the squad went in the building and into the warm beds. Unfortunately, it is the kind of the thing victorious soldiers did as well as looting the premises. The men had a rest and then moved on to their next job, which was to capture the U-boat pens in Kiel harbour and any German warships that had come in to surrender. On these ships, they had to take charge of the ships' flags and the papers and revolvers belonging to their captains. David and two other men did this after commandeering some small boats. On one occasion they were going down below deck when they encountered a German carrying a couple of trays of eggs. He had also been drinking schnapps. The officer told him to go on deck but he didn't do it. The officer repeated the order in German and still the man didn't obey, so the officer said he was not messing with these people and shot him. David brought one of the revolvers home with him but Beryl, his wife, handed it over to the police. He kept the ship's flag.

The squad's next activity was to go down to the U-boat pens. They stood on top to begin with and found that the concrete roofs had a depth of between 16 and 20 feet. There were marks almost like pinpricks on top where bombs had landed but had made no difference. There were no big U-boats in the pens, only a production line of men making two-men boats; they were taken into captivity.

While looking out to sea the squad spotted a German liner at anchor in the harbour so they went to investigate. It turned out to be a brothel ship for German officers. The German officers were taken into captivity and the women who were filthy dirty were thrown overboard. Boats picked them up and took them ashore.

A lot of German soldiers were arriving ashore from Denmark where they had been part of the occupation army. They were ordered to throw their weapons into a pile and were taken off into captivity elsewhere. Many of the German soldiers began betraying the members of the SS and Gestapo by pointing them out. The SS men had pulled their insignia off their collars but that was futile because the outline could still be still beneath. All the SS men were put into what was a diesel pumping station and locked up there – very unpleasant for them as it was mid-May and very hot. One sergeant got a sack which he filled it up with chains and made one SS man run up and down a railway line because he was being awkward. Some of the SS men were beaten up. David and his mates protested but they had come quite recently to war and were told that they hadn't seen Belsen and witnessed what these Germans are capable of. Those who had seen the atrocities took a very different view. One SS officer was very arrogant and tried to boss the British soldiers around; he was put against the wall and a Bren gun of 90 bullets emptied into him.

The squad stayed in Kiel for a few more days tidying up before going on to Flensburg. Their task was to take into captivity some members of the German high command, though David was not involved with this.

David's unit spent VE Day in Kiel. The next question was what would happen now the European war was over. David and his mates sailed through the Kiel Canal back to England on a captured German cargo boat. Before they left, their company commander decided that he was going to have his bit of booty as well. he took home a Mercedes car loaded at the front of ship and a sailing boat at the back. He told the lads to take what they wanted as they wouldn't have any problems with customs. On arrival in England, the group went straight onto

a train to Chatham and had no problem with the customs officers. Lined up at Chatham a Customs and Excise man checked them by walking up and down the ranks but didn't ask any questions. That is how David was able to bring back the ship's flag, the revolver and a trinket for Beryl.

David was demobbed at the barracks in Portsmouth in July 1945. That was the end of his war. He had an early demob as his detachment was now surplus to requirements; they were all 'hostilities only' conscripts and so were not meant to stay in the army after the war. The Royal Marines no longer wanted them. David left the next day and went back to Radley.

David felt that, after being badly treated as a young boy, the Marines gave him a sense of direction and purpose and took away the anger he had before. He felt he could do some useful things in the future. He went in as a boy and came out as a man.

Coming back from Germany across the North Sea the company commander had said that he didn't want the men sitting on deck doing nothing, so they must be prepared for civilian life. One lecturer said the important thing to do when they were back in civvies was to join a union and get themselves organised. He told them that they must not let the management do to them what they'd done to the workers in the 20s and 30s. This advice shaped David's future.

After the war David as a shop steward with the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) at the car body plant in Cowley, Oxford, campaigned to replace the disliked piecework with a guaranteed wage. He was appointed TGWU Oxford district secretary in 1964 and fought many battles to improve the working conditions of the men at Cowley. He had to contend, he said, with the bad senior management as well as the Trotskyist element that had infiltrated the union.

During his long life, David served on many committees, including local councils, and was always in favour of anything that would improve people's lives.

Interviewed by Eric Blanks on 4 July 2005

David Buckle and his wife Beryl pictured in July 2003

Read a short obituary of David Buckle MBE

For David's account of his time in Radley before the Marines see:

8 David Buckle: My life in the early years of the war

Tip: To return to this point hold down ALT and the left arrow on your keyboard.

LIFE IN RADLEY

7. Beryl Buckle: Memories of life in Radley during the war

When war was declared Beryl Buckle (née Stimpson) from Lower Radley was a pupil at Radley Primary School. Her account has lots of detail about her family (including her father's tragic death working on the railway), evacuees and rationing, life in Radley in general, her work in a local bakery and her wedding to David in 1944.

Her family

When war was declared Beryl's family lived in Lower Radley and Beryl was a pupil at Radley Primary School. At the time it didn't seem of great importance to her, but she remembers her mother being very upset. Beryl's father, Fred Stimpson, had served in the trenches during the First World War and it must have reminded her mother of that. He had not enlisted for a second time as he was a railway worker and railway work was vital war work.

Beryl pictured in 2003

At the start of the war lot of people in Radley, including her father, built air raid shelters. He dug a large pit, lined it with corrugated tin, put a roof on it and covered it with earth. It made a wonderful den for the children to play in.

Beryl's father was killed during the war under very unfortunate circumstances. He was a foreman checker for the Great Western Railway at Abingdon Station. Because so many men had been called up to serve in the war, women were employed to do jobs men normally would have done. One day he saw two women using a large crane to load tree trunks onto trucks. They were finding it hard work as the crane was operated manually by a heavy winch handle. Fred offered to help them because he didn't like to see young girls struggling. As he was turning the handle the safety catch failed and the handle spun round lifting him off his feet. He died three days later in the Warren Hospital in Abingdon of internal injuries.

The railway company stated that it was his own fault as he should have been supervising the girls doing the work, not doing it himself. Unofficially Beryl's mother, Evelyn, was told that someone from the GWR sent to investigate the accident secretly replaced the safety catch with another one and declared the crane to be safe. So Evelyn wasn't eligible for compensation; she was entitled only to workmen's compensation from his union and nothing could be claimed from the employer. Evelyn had to go to Oxford to claim it and the judge's words upset her greatly: 'You are going to be awarded £300 in compensation', he told her, 'but you will not receive it all at once because people like you are likely to squander it all immediately and then live off the state'. She was allowed to have £1 per week and two shillings and six pence per week for Beryl until she started work. Beryl was 14 at the time and started work soon afterwards. Beryl's mother was a very proud person and had never asked for anything from the state. She was told she had to go to work and suggested that she should work on Abingdon Station. She just could not bring herself to do this and so went as a cook in Radley College's tuckshop. She also took in an occasional lodger, which meant that Beryl had to sleep in the same room as her mother. Beryl had first met her husband to be, David, on the

day of her dad's funeral. She had wandered up to the railway bridge away from the wake and it was there that she met him.

Most people made home-made wine and on one occasion a visitor tried her mother's dandelion wine and had rather too much. She had to be taken home in a wheelbarrow.

Evacuees

Many people took in evacuees. Beryl and her mother couldn't take anyone in as they didn't have room as they only had two bedrooms. Her aunt and uncle who lived nearby took in three little brothers, the elderly couple across the road took in one evacuee, and Beryl's friend Jean James' parents a little further down the road took in a girl.

By this time Beryl's grandparents had died and her two uncles who had lived with them were called up, so their cottage was left empty and it was requisitioned for evacuees. They had two different families living there. No inventory was taken when they moved in so the evacuees just took over what was there. When the uncles came home on leave, they had to move in with Beryl's mother. This was quite a problem but they managed.

Work

When Beryl was old enough, she worked in an ironmongers (Bottrell's) in Abingdon, though she found it rather boring as most of the other staff were old men: all the young men were away fighting. So after about two years she got a job at the Oxonian Bakery in Thrupp Lane. Beryl really enjoyed this job as there was a very nice atmosphere there and she was the 'jam tart queen'. Everything was rationed but the staff worked with what the Bakery could have.

Marriage

Beryl stayed working at the bakery for about four years and was still working there when she married David. They had to wait until he was home on leave from the Royal Marines before they could marry, so it took place on a very cold day on 30 December 1944 in Radley Church. Beryl had three bridesmaids – Jean Merry as she became, Beryl's little cousin Ann Villebois, and her cousin Kitty Jeacock. She was fortunate in that she had a real wedding cake instead of the cardboard artificial one that many people had due to the rationing. Because Beryl worked at the bakery, the people there made her a wedding cake with real icing on it. People in the village gave her coupons for some of the ingredients. The reception was in the old village hall.

Rationing

Beryl felt that her family coped with rationing. They were allowed one or two eggs a week but living in the village there was always fresh produce. Men kept pigs and often slaughtered them unofficially. They also enjoyed fishing in the river. When her uncles came home on leave, they brought their ration books and that helped. Apart from luxuries, people were self-sufficient with most growing their own fruit and vegetables. There was a very small choice of sweets available from the local shop.

Radley in general

Radley was not affected by the war to a great extent. In Sugworth Lane there were 'ack-ack' guns and searchlights. Culham across the river had a naval air station and Abingdon had an RAF station, so there were lots of people going around in uniforms. Many of the Americans who came often called in to the Bowyer Arms for a drink.

Miss Cross, the headmistress of Radley School, organised a girls' club which Beryl joined and there was a boy's club organised by the vicar. The two clubs and anyone else who was interested took part in events such as concerts and dances put on to raise money for the war effort.

One day when Beryl was about 16 when she returned to work in the afternoon having cycled home for lunch, she was met by hordes and hordes of people coming the other way down towards the river in the opposite direction to her. It meant she had to walk instead of ride as she could hardly move for all these people. All these people had come to see an unofficial Oxford v Cambridge Boat Race finishing at Radley College Boathouse (the war meant the Boat Race couldn't be held in London). It was reckoned that about 7,000 people descended on Radley that day.

Mr and Mrs Edwards ran the Bowyer Arms during the war years. The pub and the village hall were the hearts of the village. People made their own fun in those days. Children could play in the road as there was little traffic.

There were often floods in Lower Radley and the Bint family from the boathouse sometimes had to go by boat into the village for provisions. One day she was amazed to see swans swimming in her garden but they never had floods in the house. It was difficult to see the line between the ditch and the road when flooded, so it was quite adventurous walking into the main part of the village. Quite often the families put a plank over the ditch and then walked in the field. There was some skating and sliding when it froze.

The river provided a source of amusement and the children used to go there via Common Lane. They climbed trees and made dens in the fields. The radio was used for information and entertainment. These were battery radios and it was Beryl's job to take the accumulator to be recharged at the bungalow opposite the Bowyer Arms. They listened to the radio when it was too cold to go out.

Interviewed by Mary Blanks on 20 October 2003

See the next account for husband David's early life in Radley.

8. David Buckle: My life in the early years of the war

David Buckle's account of his part of his life includes his time in Ramsgate where he witnessed the soldiers returning from Dunkirk and life in Radley living at Bigwood Camp, and working on various local farms before he joined the Royal Marines in 1943.

This account draws heavily on David's autobiography, 'Hostilities Only', published in 1999.

David spent his early years in a private orphanage, which moved to Ramsgate in 1938. At the age of 13½ his guardian found him work, which included being an errand boy for the local ironmonger, which he enjoyed as it meant spending time in the fresh sea air.

It was now 1939 and he became aware that the storm clouds of war were gathering. On 3 September, David and other children from the orphanage gathered together with their guardian and listened in silence as Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain spoke. The United Kingdom was at war with Germany.

Although Ramsgate changed at the start of the war, with no street lights, no visitors and food shortages, it had very little impact on David until the summer of 1940. It was then that he saw boats going out from Ramsgate for the evacuation of Dunkirk. Every kind of boat left, both large and small, until the harbour was virtually deserted. David wrote in his book.

> "By the time the first boats returned the sea front was a hive of activity. The WVS was brewing up tea and there were huge trays of mugs and tables full of bread rolls waiting. Soon the harbour was busy once again, as the soldiers and their rescuers came ashore and were wrapped in blankets and given cups of tea. Some army staff had appeared and were taking down numbers and names and trying to establish some sort of organisation. I watched as exhausted soldiers and civilians alike slumped down wherever there was space to rest. Much later on I realised that what happened next made an indelible impression on me. I could see that the sea just outside the harbour was still thronged with little boats bobbing on the waves, waiting their turn to come in, but suddenly an order was given and the men stopped coming ashore. In the area of the fish market, at one side of the harbour wall, a space was cleared, and long trestle tables were set up and covered in white cloths. Proper chairs were produced from somewhere, places were laid with cutlery and glasses, and I believe even some military silverware appeared on the tables. Then from two or three boats some senior officers came ashore and were served a full lunch. No mugs and blankets for their journey; they had obviously commandeered the most comfortable boats for their journey and now they were being entertained in the most incongruously civilised manner. Meanwhile the rest of us civilian volunteers and soldiers alike waited around for the half an hour while they ate. Then they left, the tables were cleared and the disembarkation continued. The other ranks who had been left shivering in their open boats outside the harbour wall were allowed to come ashore. This display of the army's regard for seniority impressed me most by its callous disregard for the welfare of the ordinary fighting man." [*Hostilities Only: An Autobiography*, by David Buckle, 1999, pp. 32-33]

David continued to live at the orphanage, watching the Battle of Britain from the flat roof of the house. Eventually his guardian decided that it was not a safe town for her charges and so he was told that he would be going to Bigwood Camp at Radley in Berkshire, a privately run camp and from there he would work on the land. As his guardian saw him off on the train, she told him what his real name was and this helped him many, many years later to find out about his biological family.

Someone in a small car picked David up at Radley Station and he was taken to Bigwood Camp. This consisted of about 30 wooden huts in Radley Large Wood. About 60 boys were living there. Each hut housed six boys sleeping in bunk beds and there were separate huts for the toilets, washing, cooking and eating. The only housework they were expected to do was to keep their own hut tidy. The beds were comfortable and the food was good. Although rationing was in force everywhere, in Radley there was not a great shortage of food as there was a fairly plentiful supply of vegetables, chickens and rabbits. Pigs were also kept unofficially and the meat was shared around amongst the farm workers.

The boys at the camp were supposed to be a pool of labour for the local farms and they were picked up each day and taken to local farms around Radley. The idea was that they would work for a farmer for six to eight weeks, and if found to be satisfactory they would be taken on formally.

David's first work was at Wick Farm with Stephen Dockar Drysdale. After serving his six weeks probation he was taken on as a farm labourer and moved into the family home. Every day he got up at 5.30 am and went down to the cowshed to help the cowman with the milking (by hand at first but later some machinery was installed). After helping the cowman to clean out the milking shed, David went to the farmhouse for breakfast after which he would travel with the farmer to deliver the milk to Abingdon. After that David would help out with other farm workers on the land, hedging and ditching, etc. David enjoyed this work – he loved being in the open air and learnt a lot about the environment.

Following a difference of opinion about washing up the dishes, David was asked to leave. Fortunately, he was quickly offered a job in Blewbury but it only lasted a month as he was missing his girlfriend Beryl back in Radley. They later married. See 6 for details of their wedding.

David then started work in Radley working for Mr Greening, milking cows and doing farm work for him in Sunningwell. All this time the war was grinding on. Rationing was increasing, first clothes, then soap and petrol. The USA had joined the war and every other man appeared to be in uniform. David had joined the Home Guard but he did not feel this was a very useful contribution. He and others spent nights standing on a railway bridge over the River Thames armed only with broomsticks which would have been of no use at all if the Germans had landed.

After becoming tired of being shouted at by Mr Greening, David decided when he was 18 to join the Royal Marines (see 6 David Buckle: My time in the Royal Marines).

Bigwood Camp, Radley, in 1941: David is standing alone on the left as Sir Ralph Glynn, MP for Abingdon, addresses the boys.

The photograph is taken from David's autobiography, *Hostilities Only*.

9. Nancy Homewood: Wartime memories at Peach Croft Farm

Nancy Homewood grew up at Peach Croft Farm in Radley where her father, Charles Taylor, was the tenant. Nancy's husband John Homewood took over the tenancy after her father retired. These are her memories of life there in World War Two.

Nancy Homewood in 2005

As the 1930s drew to a close, we children felt the apprehension of our elders. A shelter, with an earth roof over a tin frame, was dug in the garden. We practised wearing our gas masks, as we sat inside on wooden benches, but did not ever have to take refuge in it. We were taken outside during the London Blitz on two successive nights and, looking eastwards towards Nuneham House, saw the sky red from the terrible fires. Another indelible memory happened – again on two successive nights – when Coventry was bombed. We looked up and could clearly see and hear the formations of German planes flying directly over the house, heading for Coventry.

In the early summer of 1942, we were taken to see what was happening in the newly constructed Dutch barn in the farmyard. We were told that we were not to talk to anyone about what we saw. In the barn were 20 or more wooden crates about 3 feet by 3 feet by 3 feet. Some had been opened and the contents assembled on the floor – red metal plates, gears, chains, canvas, rollers and a huge collection of assorted nuts and bolts. Teddy Ballard of Abingdon Agricultural Engineers, one or two of his staff, my father and brother, a tractor driver and Sidney Alexander, who had joined the farm as a lad of 14 and remained with us all his working life, were there. This excited and enthusiastic team armed only with an instruction manual and their own experience were about to assemble the very first combine harvester in the county and I believe the first in the country. It had been secretly shipped from America from the International Harvest Company, on a convoy, to aid and increase Britain's food production. More were to follow, but when the constructed 'flat pack' pulled by a tractor drove around the big front field alongside Whites Lane and Radley Road, the verges were crowded with many folk looking to see this amazing machine that could cut the corn, thresh it, store it in a hopper and leave a neat row of straw behind. On the first circuit of each field, there was a row of stalks and ears of corn compressed by the tractor and the combine (the cutter bar was to the right-hand side of the machine). This left enough for the traditional gleaners to gather corn for their own poultry.

For more about farming life in Radley during the war, see the Radley History Club book, Radley Farms and Families 1600-2011.

10. David Shaw: Memories of WW2 in Radley

David Shaw was a young boy living with his parents in Lower Radley near the railway line during the war. His varied memories include a plane crash-landing in a nearby field, bombers flying overhead en route to Germany, Italian prisoners of war, and some of the interesting people who lived in the caravans by their house.

- During the war David's mother, Hilda Shaw [known as Sue], worked for the No. 1 Civil Repair Unit (CRU) which had been set up at the Cowley works of Morris Motors in

Oxford in September 1939 to repair damaged aircraft. It was staffed by civilians under the management of the Air Ministry. The factory itself was disguised so that, from the sky, it looked like a village; it had two chimneys that were disguised as straight roads and cardboard cut-out cars on the roads. The CRU's administrative department was at one of the Oxford colleges and David's mother worked there as a secretary to one of its bosses. She cycled to work and was often very weary when she returned. However, she was extremely dedicated to the work and at the end of the war she was presented with an electric clock for her contribution to the war effort. Many aircraft crash-landed and the CRU repaired them where possible. One aircraft, which David thought was a Wellington bomber, crash-landed in the field just over the bridge in Lower Radley. He felt that the landing was done very well as the plane was intact and the pilot just managed to avoid the big elm trees.

- David's parents housed some refugees temporarily until they went off to families in the village. Once one of the Radley College boys came down the hill by the railway on his bicycle and knocked over one of the refugee children.
- When it was not easy either physically or financially to go on holiday during the war, David and his mother used an old gypsy caravan to have a holiday in Radley. Mr Beck from a farmhouse in Lower Radley lent them a horse which pulled the caravan down towards the river and the two of them would enjoy being away from their house and swimming in the river as far as the island. They spent at least two summers there.
- David remembers counting bombers going east to Germany and counted over a hundred on one occasion.
- Towards the end of the war there was a hut at the side of the railway on the right just before the bridge going into Lower Radley where there were Italian prisoners of war. They worked on the farms and made straw baskets.
- In the middle of the war David's father had a Jewish man working for him. He was from Slovakia and was an excellent worker. The sawmill that Mr Shaw owned did very well during the time he was there.
- At the end of the war there were several caravans on the area around their house. There were some interesting people living in the caravans, amongst them a Major Wilson, who David thought was an illustrator for the *News Chronicle* newspaper.
- A family called Jordan was living in one of the caravans at the back of the Shaw's house at the end of the war. As well as owning the caravan, the family owned an American V8 car that was the envy of those who lived near them. One day Mr Jordan was shooting into the air with a rifle and shouting at the top of his voice. David's father went to see what it was all about and discovered he was celebrating the end of the war. Mr Jordan went to the pub and ordered champagne and started giving drinks to people who were on the trains when they stopped at the station. He was a great character who had come from Australia. In his caravan there were pictures of him hunting crocodiles.
- There was an early summer party in the field opposite David's house just over the bridge in Lower Radley when the war in Europe ended. Trestle tables were set up just opposite the village hall [then in Lower Radley near David's house] and food was

prepared in that building. David's father gave £10 towards the cost of the food. Fortunately, it didn't rain so they didn't need to use the village hall for the main activities. The village was small enough at that time for everyone to go to the party.

Interviewed by Ann Blake on 18 February 2005

David Shaw pictured at his house in Lower Radley in February 2005

11. Brian Talboys: Memories of growing up in Radley during the war

Brian Talboys was nine in 1939 and spent the war years living in Radley. His memories cover what life was like in the village, evacuees in Radley, soldiers travelling back from Dunkirk, the Home Guard and Upper Thames Patrol, the armed forces stationed nearby, and the changes after the war.

Brian was born in March 1930 in Tilehurst and came to Radley in 1934. He lived at 89 Foxborough Road. When the family arrived in Radley the road was called Station Road and Brian's mother was very upset when the name was changed just before the war. The Council wanted the houses to have numbers as well as, or instead of, names.

Brian left school at the age of 14 in 1944 and helped on Mr Taylor's farm at Peachcroft for a year before starting an apprenticeship to train as a motor mechanic with Mr Gowring at his garage in Ock Street, Abingdon. It was not possible during the war for him to have a fully indentured apprenticeship because he would have had to go to a technical college. As Radley was then in Berkshire this would have meant him going to Newbury and he had no transport.

Living in Radley during wartime

- Brian remembers wartime Radley as a very sleepy little village where everyone knew each other, where you could walk through the meadows and swim in the shallows of the River Thames near Sandford.

- He remembers the night in the blackout that he was kicking a ball against the old stable block at the Bowyer Arms and managed to hit the head of someone passing by on a bicycle. Unfortunately, the cyclist was the village policeman. He was reprimanded by the policeman as well as by his parents.
- The war brought people in Radley together. Brian spoke of the division between those who lived in Lower and Upper Radley but they united as one during the war. There was a big drive to help the war effort mainly led by Mrs Hutchins who lived at East House, one of the large semi-detached houses on Foxborough Road opposite what is now Stonhouse Crescent. With the help of ladies such as Mrs Allen, Mrs Saunders, Mrs Jeacock, Mrs Hadland and his mother she organised many money-raising activities from her music room. People collected such things as aluminium. Competitions were organised and the prizes would be savings certificates, which was the government's way of raising money. People were encouraged to buy savings stamps towards a savings certificate.
- Brain's memory of Mrs Saunders is of her shouting across the village calling her daughter Peggy ('our Peg') in the evening. Radley was so quiet that sound travelled a long distance.

Evacuees in Radley

- One of Brian's most vivid memories of the war was seeing crowds of evacuees on Radley Station. They had come by train and it seemed to Brian that all the children had with them were little brown bags with their face masks. Ladies on the station were trying to find homes for the evacuees. Many were waiting for the train to take them on to Abingdon. The arrival of the evacuees meant that Brian could only go to school in the morning as the evacuees had lessons in the afternoon. Brian's family took in some children even though their bungalow was already full with his cousins and aunts from London. When the evacuees returned to their own homes Brian's mother was forced to accommodate RAF officers. It seemed that they were only there for a couple of weeks and never came back. It was only when their relatives came to collect their belongings did Brian realised that the reason they hadn't come back was because they were either missing or had been killed.
- When the doodlebugs started attacking London, Brian's relatives came back to stay with his family. In 1943 his mother and Mrs Jeacock put on a party for his cousin's fifth birthday. It was held in the village hall and about 80 children attended.
- Mr Edwards was the publican at the Bowyer Arms in 1943 when his daughter married a Canadian service man. The ladies of the village got together and helped to organise the wedding arrangements. Brian's mother made the buttonholes, using carrot tops and carnations wrapped in silver foil from cigarette packets. Someone made a cake for them and everyone came together to make it a special occasion.

Soldiers travelling back from Dunkirk

- Brian remembers the Sunday he stood on the station bridge when trains were going through carrying soldiers returning from Dunkirk. He said that it was eerily quiet as the trains were going very slowly. Many of the men were bandaged and all he could see of one man was the cigarette he was smoking. Some of the men were in a terrible state. They were en route to Oxford where some of the colleges and examination halls had been converted into temporary hospitals.

The Home Guard and Upper Thames Patrol

- Brian remembers the Home Guard members. He recalled that, near the kissing gate at the start of the footpath through Radley College just past the main entrance on the road to Kennington, there was a slit trench and a big piece of tree trunk with another piece of tree trunk on top of it. Attached was an old cartwheel that was supposed to be wheeled across to stop any tanks. He often saw the Home Guard with their rifles.
- The Upper Thames Patrol, who had commandeered boats on the Thames, were taking a break and having a cup of tea one day when Brian and his friends untied the boat from its moorings.

The armed forces

- There was a big artillery camp at the top of Sugworth Lane and the men from there used to come with their band to dances held in the village hall. To have a live band was very good.
- Some bombs dropped on the Wildmoor estate on Wootton Road in Abingdon and a land mine dropped at Clifton Hampden. Harwell airfield, where there were Fairey Battle aircraft before it became a glider training air station, was attacked.
- Mr Shirley, who lived in Foxborough Road, was one of the first prisoners of war. He was in the Territorial Army and so was one of the first to be mobilised.
- The three Allen boys (Les, Stan and Teddy), who lived next door to Brian, fought during the war. Stan was killed near the end of the war and never saw one of his daughters. One of the Smewin family died.
- Brian saw hundreds of planes flying over Radley. Sometimes it was Mustangs practising shooting at trains, but at other times it would be the squadrons circling round to gain height before going towards Europe. His mother often used to say ‘What poor devil is going to get it tonight?’.
- Many soldiers from the USA arrived on Radley Station just before D-Day. They were throwing candies, chewing gum and money to the children watching them. Brian didn’t go to school that day!
- Just before the Battle of Arnhem a large plane landed in one of Mr Frearson’s fields just past the big chestnut tree at the start of Lower Radley. It was soft ground, so no-one was injured.
- Brian saw lots of gliders going across, also lots of training aircraft from RAF Harwell.
- There were a lot of fights in Abingdon between the tough USA troops and the British. On one occasion a reserve policeman stood on a metal seat by the County Hall and shouted ‘Now, now my lads, calm it down’. Brian didn’t say if it had any effect.

The end of the war

- Radley changed after the war. Many men came back having seen many different places and so started moving away from Radley. There were quite a lot of poor people in Radley at the time and many of their children had never seen the sea. People started travelling and realising there were opportunities to improve their lives further afield.

Interviewed by Tony Rogerson on 29 October 2003

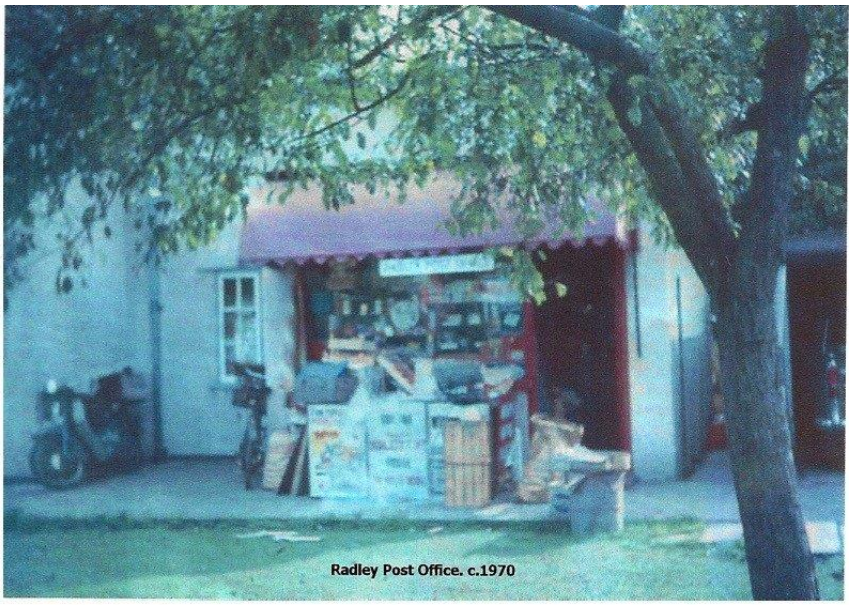
12. Gladys Williams: Using Radley Station in wartime

This article is reproduced from the Souvenir Programme for Radley's celebrations in May 1995 marking the 50th Anniversary of VE Day. Gladys Williams tells how she and her WRAF friends used Radley Station to travel to and from their duties at RAF Abingdon.

I first remember Radley Station in early 1942, when I was posted to serve at RAF Abingdon. In those days there was a waiting room with a cheerful fire. The train from Paddington used to stop at Radley and we then caught the Bunk to Abingdon and walked to the camp. When we had a 48-hour leave pass, a group of us would meet at Paddington, catch the last train at midnight to Radley which arrived in the early hours of the morning. By this time the Bunk had stopped running, so we walked through Radley to Albert Park in Abingdon. There we sat under Prince Albert's statue to eat our sandwiches and then walk to the camp, sometimes to find an 'apple pie bed' waiting for us.

We were never molested or mugged while walking those 3-4 miles. Oh, happy days, wonderful companionship.

Twenty-five years later, my husband (ex RAF) and I and our two daughters moved into Radley post office and I spent 25 happy years in the village.



Radley Post Office, c.1970 in Church Road when Gladys and her husband were there

13. Evacuees in Radley

Radley played its part in taking in evacuees, among them children from a London primary school and several schools at various times at Radley College. Many of the evacuees based in the village lived at Bigwood Camp in Radley Large Wood.

During September 1939, over 1.5 million children, mothers and babies, elderly and disabled people were evacuated from the major cities into safer zones. However, many returned during

the ‘phoney’ war only to return later. As described below, Radley played its own part in taking in evacuees.

Evacuees at Radley Church of England Primary School and other preparations

Two days after Great Britain and France declared war on Germany, Miss Cross, the recently appointed head teacher, was informed by Shire Hall at Reading (Radley was in Berkshire at that time) that the school should be closed as it would be needed that day for evacuated children and that all staff were to be present. Presumably this was so that the evacuees could assemble there and be allocated homes to go to. No evacuees arrived; there were none in the village at that time and so Miss Cross reopened the school.

The school holiday in May 1940 was extended because a large evacuation was expected from London and, on 7 June, 34 evacuees arrived by train from Upper Hornsey Road School, in Holloway and made the village hall their schoolroom. The older boys from the village school took stock down to the village hall. There was a generous ratio of staff to children at the evacuee school and Miss Cross tried to negotiate being able to employ some of them in return for taking some of the infant pupils. There was some cooperation. In December 1941 children at the evacuee school joined the village school children for school dinners. Trestle tables were used for this in one of the classrooms. The school was overcrowded and these tables were also used as classroom desks.

The evacuee school closed at the end of April 1942 and most of the evacuee children appeared to return home. Any children who were left, attended the village school. It was hoped that one class could occupy an annex room at the vicarage but Eastbourne College, which had been evacuated to Radley College (see below), was using it. The infant class eventually moved there in October 1945.

Damien C was born in 1940 in Radley. His mother and brother Carl were evacuated and lived in New Road. His mother arrived six months pregnant in June 1940 and Carl was enrolled at the village school; he was probably one of the infant children Miss Cross took in. Damien’s mother often spoke to him about the Blitz and recalled that she was a witness to one dramatic event in Paddington. His father at the time was helping to build runways on airfields in the area. The family left in May 1941.

When the county scholarship exam was taken in March 1941, the remainder of the school had to go out on a nature walk or sit in the church to leave space for the 11+ children who were taking the examination. In 1945 children not taking the examination went to Bigwood Camp, where the evacuated units were until 24 July 1945 when the camp was no longer needed. The equipment and supplies were transferred from Bigwood to the school. The camp is now Bigwood Mobile Home Park off Sugworth Lane in the north of Radley.

The village school took in four new children in May 1941. Three of them had come as evacuees from Walthamstow and had been to nursery school there. The other was from a family who had left London as their father had a job at Didcot. The school also admitted Donald and David Betteridge who had come to stay with the Pontings until they returned to New Marston in Oxford in July.

During the war, Radley School was earmarked as a suitable reception centre for Oxford citizens in case the city should suffer a severe air raid. Miss Cross agreed that blankets and food could be stored in the school provided they were in a box or chest. She informed the

officials who were dealing with the situation that the school key was kept in her house, but should she be away, they had better break the lock of the infants' door. In March 1941 the equipment for the rest centre arrived and caused more congestion for storage space.

This was even more noticeable when further stock was delivered in May and again in August. A hanging cupboard and 40 chairs for the rest centre were sent. Eventually Mr Greening agreed to store the equipment at the farm across the road. It was decided that the cycle shed could be used for extra toilets and the Public Assistance Department would supply hessian and Elsan closets in the event of heavy bombing on Oxford. The school was given two sand bags, which, together with the three they had made, meant they had a grand total of five for the school and house. The rest centre requisites were removed in February 1945.

More about the evacuees in the village

Members of Radley WI entertained the village children, the evacuee children from the school and their teachers to tea and games at Wick Hall after school in July 1940. The children, numbering 77 in all, sat down on the grass and had tea, and afterwards the grown-ups had theirs. One of the evacuees gave a vote of thanks to the WI for giving them a happy time.

There is evidence that some of the adult evacuees integrated themselves into the Radley community when they were present at a public meeting in the village to arrange a committee for the Radley War Distressed Fund.

Many of the evacuees appeared to be living at Bigwood Camp. The WI had set up a canteen there. It was reported in January 1941 that the WI committee had decided to close the evacuee's canteen on Sundays, as there was insufficient support. However, it did decide to hold a dance at Bigwood Camp in aid of the District Nursing Association, which would be entertainment for those living there.

A family of refugees from London was living in the attic flat at Lower Farm during part of the war. The accommodation was very basic with water and toilet facilities outside. On one occasion a bombing raid was taking place over RAF Abingdon and the siren went. The family dashed downstairs from their flat and frantically asked the Frearson family where the air raid shelter was. The refugees were astonished that the Frearsons did not have a shelter and that they could calmly continue eating their meal while the air raid was taking place. This was the difference between living in an isolated farming community and living in inner London.

Francis Levetus and his wife, Ellen Enid Jean, the daughter of William Dockar-Drysdale, came to Wick Hall at the start of the war to escape the Blitz. Their two daughters were born in Abingdon. In an interview made as part of Radley History Club's 'Radley Remembered' oral history series, Josephine, the eldest, talked of her idyllic childhood at Wick during the war. She remembers her grandfather, William, as being rather a gloomy person, but her grandmother was the most delightful, charming person it was possible to know.

Evacuees at Radley College

About the time war broke out, the Warden of Radley College allowed children and expectant mothers from East London to occupy one of the dormitories. He had found them to be homeless and had escorted them to this temporary accommodation. Perhaps the evacuees had been sent to Radley College instead of the village school. In his book, *The History of Radley College 1847–1947*, A.K. Boyd does not say what happened to these people and it has not been possible to find any evidence so far as to where they went.

In September 1939 there were 399 boys on roll at Radley College and this was expanded when 100 came from Colet Court Preparatory School (a preparatory school for St Paul's School in Richmond), and 30 from Davies Laing and Dick's (DLD) 'cramming establishment' in Holland Park in London. Colet Court occupied the Pavilion, the Music School, one of the shop's tea rooms, several private houses and Radley Vicarage. DLD occupied the Warden's house. The visitors played games in the morning and had lessons in the afternoon while Radley followed the usual routine.

Both groups of evacuees had left by the time the College term started in January 1940. Following the departure of the visiting schools, however, Radley College was worried that it might be taken over as a military establishment. It was saved from this by the arrival of Eastbourne College in June 1940; two-thirds of their school arrived with its junior school taking temporary refuge in Nuneham Courtenay. The College was then accommodating about 600 pupils and was very squashed. Extra accommodation at Wick Hall, the Vicarage and Park End Farm was used. Eastbourne College did not return home until after the summer holiday of 1945.

In Radley College's Chapel Cloister there is a plaque commemorating the sympathy and easy friendship between Eastbourne College and Radley College during World War Two. In 2002 it was decided that Eastbourne College should have a similar plaque and a short ceremony was held attended by the headmasters of the two schools, Charles Bush and Angus McPhail. The inscription reads 'In memory of those who made it possible to survive the Second World War by taking us to Radley College and, when peace returned, bringing us safely home, under the leadership of the Headmaster Francis John Nugee MA'. In celebration of the occasion, the Radley versus Eastbourne cricket match was revived.

Sources

- Radley Remembered tales recorded by Radley History Club
- *The History of Radley College 1847–1947,* A.K. Boyd, 1948

14. Radley Primary School in wartime

During the war staff and pupils of Radley Church of England Primary School held gas mask and air raid practices, and took part in fund-raising for the war effort. Obtaining fuel to heat the Victorian classrooms during the winter was a continuing problem.

On 3 September 1939, Great Britain and France declared war on Germany. Soon afterwards Miss Cross, who had recently been appointed as headteacher of Radley Church of England Primary School, had a gas mask practice with the children. Although some parents had said the children disliked wearing them, they all put them on except for one child who only agreed after some persuasion. The holding of practices seems to have lapsed somewhat during the 'phoney' war, but the school children again had to carry gas masks in May 1940 following the invasion by the Germans of Holland and Belgium, and attacks on French territory. The children had to learn how to put on each other's masks. During the occasional gas mask drills, the children in the infants' class had to wear their masks for a quarter of an hour then rest for 30 minutes. Miss Cross ordered boxes for the gas masks and made it known to the authorities the mica eyepieces were broken in many of them. She was still waiting for replacements many months later.

At this time the school had two classrooms – one was built in 1872 adjoining the School House (where the headteacher lived) and the other in 1892. A porch was added in 1905. At the beginning of 1940 it was very cold and there were problems with very cold classrooms and frozen pipes as fuel was not easy to come by. For the first time since war was declared a ton of coke was delivered for the stove for which Miss Cross was most grateful. The need to conserve coal, used on the open fires, was highlighted when she had both classes in one room as she was worried that the open fire burned two buckets of coal each day.

The school had wire netting fitted to the inside of the windows and the church became the air raid shelter. Later a first aid box and a stirrup pump were delivered. The children were taught how to use the stirrup pump and approach a fire.

In June 1940 the school held some air raid practices. The staff could take the children in from play to the church with gas masks, books and dinners, etc. in 2½ minutes. Every child had its own place in church and had instructions as to what to do in case of bombs dropping in the neighbourhood. The children practised going under the pews. There were several air raid alerts and the school went into the church each time. However, Miss Cross preferred to send the children home if she could as the church was cold and damp. Some bombs dropped near Abingdon, but none seem to have been dropped on Radley. Miss Cross commented in the school logbook that on 27 June there had been no air raid the night before, which meant the children didn't feel tired the next day.

The children and staff at the school helped to raise money for the war effort and people disadvantaged as a result of the war. Six shillings were raised in 1940 and, at about the same time, the children brought in pennies and raised the same amount for Finnish children.

In July 1941 the boys, during their spare time, cut thistles in the meadow next to the playground and put them into ricks. Their usual playing field was very dry and the grass was dying, whereas the rest of the field was covered with long grass and thistles. The boys worked for Mr Greening at Church Farm, who was very short of staff, in return for the use of the field during playtime and lessons. In May 1942, during the last quarter of an hour of the school day, the boys raked up straw that had blown all over the place in the high winds. The playground was where the tarmacked area between the old school and the newer building is now. The children also played on the field where the new cemetery is.

An expansion of the school meals service locally meant that, in December 1941, about 72 of the children started to have school dinners. This number included the evacuee children (see 13 Evacuees in Radley for more about these children). School dinners, which were provided by the local authority and were not part of the food rationing system, were free for the low-income families; others paid 4–5 old pence per meal to cover the cost of ingredients.

In May 1942, the drill lesson was interrupted by aeroplanes flying overhead. The log books do not say whose they were.

In May 1943 a 'Wings for Victory' week was held. A concert and dance took place in the village and nearly every child went to it, which meant the children were quarrelsome and very tired the next day. Consequently half an hour of rest had to be given in the afternoon. Warrant Officer Fairman of the RAF came to the school and spoke to the children on 'Wings for Victory'. He told the children about bombers and answered their questions. Thirty of the older children went with Miss Cross to an exhibition and films in Abingdon about the subject.

The end of 1943 saw Miss Cross going to a conference on fuel economy and the children giving a concert in aid of the Waifs and Strays Society. ‘Salute the Soldier’ week took place in June 1944.

Mr Buston of the Ministry of Supply came one afternoon in July 1944 to talk to the juniors about the need for a greater drive on the National Book Recovery Campaign. On the morning of 25 July, a van from Abingdon Rural District Council came to collect books for the ‘Books for Forces’ drive. About a thousand books had been collected by the school. George Steptoe’s reward for collecting 250 books was to become a ‘Field Marshal’; Geoffrey Hellman was a ‘General’. The books were needed for prisoners of war, armed forces personnel in camps, and for selling if rare or if not in good enough condition to be recycled to recover the paper.

By September 1944 the boys were collecting wood for the school fires from Mr Shaw’s sawmill in Lower Radley during the dinner hour. But by January 1945 he wasn’t able to let them have any more. Fortunately the bursar at Radley College had two large piles of wood which needed clearing in a hurry. The children managed to do it in two lunch hours and one afternoon!

A further task imposed in 1944 by the authorities on Miss Cross as head teacher was to identify which children were growing at more than the normal rate and thus qualified for extra clothing coupons (practically everything that could be bought was rationed by this time). She did this by measuring the children’s feet to find out if they were long enough to qualify. Seven girls were eligible. This happened again the following year. In the years just after the war, chocolate powder was distributed to the children to take home about twice a year.

January 1945 was cold and snowy. The thaw set in at the end of the month but the dinner vans could not get through, as the roads were impassable. Where possible, children were sent home for lunch. Those whose parents were out at work had hot cocoa, toast, bread and jam in school. One day only 20 out of 84 children were present, so Miss Gower taught them all while Miss Middleton and Miss Cross got on with the stocktaking. The school had to close for one day because the playground was too muddy, stopping the children from crossing it to reach the ‘offices’, or toilets as we now call them.

During the afternoon of 7 May 1945, news came through that the German wireless had announced the complete surrender of all German forces on land, sea and air. Miss Cross told the children to listen to the wireless that night and, if 8 May was declared ‘Victory in Europe’ Day – which it was – then there would be a holiday for two days.

Views of the two sides of the Victorian school building, November 2019

The School House is seen at the far end. Miss Cross was the last headteacher to live there.

For a history of the school from its beginnings in Victorian times to the present day, see The History of Radley C E Primary School, published by Radley History Club.

15. Radley Women's Institute in wartime

While meetings continued as normally as possible, members of Radley WI joined in national campaigns to make jam and to grow onions and other crops. Much time was spent on fund-raising, supporting prisoners-of war and putting on social events for members of the armed forces stationed locally.

Meetings

The Women's Institute (WI) nationally played an important role in World War Two in placing evacuees with families and taking in evacuees to their homes. They worked hard to help the evacuees settle into the community.

The war affected not only the actual meetings of Radley WI but also the way members lived their lives. Seven days after the war started the monthly meeting on 7 September 1939 had to be cancelled because of the national emergency. The following month, however, it was possible for the president to give an interesting talk on what could be done in the trying times they were about to experience.

In December 1940 Mrs Dussek's suggestion of a Nativity Play was decided against as it was considered inadvisable to undertake anything that would bring children out at night or assemble them in one place in considerable numbers. After some discussion it was decided that a carol party should be formed, open to all enthusiasts, to sing carols in aid of the Warren Hospital on Radley Road in Abingdon. [The Warren Hospital had replaced the old cottage hospital on Bath Street in Abingdon. Formerly a large private house, it had 26 beds when it opened in 1930. It became part of the NHS in 1948. It later became a maternity hospital and, from 1969 to 1977, a geriatric unit.]

In May 1941, the Group Committee made up of representatives from about six local WIs decided that, given the conditions at that time, a river expedition would take members too far from their homes. Instead it was agreed to hold a group meeting in the Abbey grounds in Abingdon on 17 June at 3.30 pm, with members taking their own tea and each participating WI arranging a game or sport.

In view of the alerts, blackout and transport difficulties it was proposed in November 1941 that the monthly meeting should be held at 2.30 pm in the winter months instead of in the evening. This proposal provoked a storm of rather confusing discussion and it was finally decided – on Mrs Saunders' suggestion – that the meetings should be held on alternate evenings and afternoons. Mrs Dockar-Drysdale, Mrs Hellard and Mrs Wrinch offered rooms in which the meetings might be held that would be more comfortable and warmer than the village hall. It was also decided that the full fee of £2 10s should be paid to the Village Hall Committee whether the hall was used or not.

In April 1942 it was resolved that either Mrs Wrinch or Mrs Procter should attend the annual meeting in London on 18 June organised by the National Federation of WIs, although the view expressed by Inkpen WI that the General Meeting should not take place on such a large scale

in wartime was warmly supported by members. The following month the meeting was cancelled.

Meetings continued as normally as possible and, on 1 July 1943, Lady Willert (probably the wife of Arthur Willert, British journalist and diplomat) spoke at the monthly meeting. She gave an amusing and interesting talk on various aspects of American social life. She spoke about the high standard of living, the beautiful ready-made clothes and the multifarious labour-saving devices that helped the American housewife. This must have been very different from what Radley WI members were experiencing and it made one woman comment that 'women over there never do any work'. Interestingly Lady Willert's talk had to be approved by the Ministry of Information.

Although the village hall was the venue for the meetings it was not the best of buildings. On one occasion Mrs Hellard proposed that the WI should make representations to the appropriate authorities about the lamentable state of the outside of the hall. It was eventually decided that this was not a matter in which the WI as such could take action. However, those members who had husbands among the trustees were 'urged to make their lives a misery until something was done to remove the danger of the roof collapsing on them'.

In December 1943 Mr A.A. Thomson gave a very amusing and delightful talk on 'Laughter in Battledress'. The ladies almost forgot the cold in listening to his store of anecdotes from 'the man in the street'. The social half-hour started with 'Sir Roger de Coverley' – the accompaniment provided by members' hands and feet would, they hoped, 'be successful in averting pneumonia'. The hall was eventually patched up, but it was to be many years before a new village hall was built.

Some of the WI members were invited to join in with others in singing at Didcot in December 1945. Mrs Shaw said a few words at the meeting about their experience. It was generally agreed that it had been most praiseworthy and noble of the seven singers to go in thick fog especially as it entailed waiting on Didcot station for 2½ hours for the return journey – Didcot not being one of the 'brighter station resorts'.

Jam and Jerusalem

The WI has always been renowned for jam-making and the war made it imperative. The WI in general made an enormous amount of jam during the World War Two using surplus fruit from gardens, allotments and hedgerows. In order to do this, groups obtained extra sugar supplies from the Ministry of Food. In April 1940 names were taken at the Radley WI meeting of those wanting an allowance for jam making and, in June, names were taken of those wanting preserving bottles. Preserving centres were being set up. In 1941 Mrs Dockar-Drysdale, Mrs Hellard, Mrs Hutchins and Mrs Wrinch agreed to attend any meetings and demonstrations to be held in connection with them. In spite of a bad fruit year, 198 lbs of jam were made in 1941. On 25 June 1942 Mrs Wrinch reported that 44 lbs of gooseberry jam had been made at the preservation centre.

After the German invasion of northern European countries in 1940 supplies of fruit and vegetables from there were halted. It meant that onions from France were no longer available. It was not easy to grow them commercially in Britain at that time, so people were encouraged to grow their own. It seems that a target was set for each village and, in response to the appeal to grow more onions, it was decided that if each member of Radley WI contributed a few pounds the two hundredweight minimum could be reached. Oxfordshire WIs harvested 13

tons in 1942. The National Federation also distributed tomato seeds and seed potatoes to its members at a preferential rate.

In 1941 Radley WI was able to secure an allotment of 10 poles for an annual rent of 3s 6d and a man was found to dig it. The allotment was divided up between Mrs Harding, Mrs Hellard, Mrs Gardner, Mrs McKellar, Mrs Saunders, Mrs Wilkins and Mrs Wrinch.

The WI ran a produce stall in Abingdon for which they needed a permit. They received one in December 1941 but eggs, jam and fats had been deleted from the original permit.

A letter of thanks was received for the 3 lbs of honey for submarine crews sent by Radley WI in November 1942.

An appeal for nettles and medicinal herbs was received in June 1943. It prompted a lively discussion and eventually it was decided that some members should go to Wick Hall to start on Mrs Dockar-Drysdale's nettles, which were reported to be plentiful.

Lantern lectures on the storage of vegetables could be applied for from Reading. There was some discussion on whether to apply for these and it was suggested that they should have an open meeting and invite their husbands. However, it was felt to be beyond the power of the most enthusiastic members to bring their husbands and so the whole subject was eventually left to those members attending the Kennington meeting to discover if Kennington WI was proposing to have such a lecture or if it would join with Radley.

Towards the end of the war, the national WI monthly newsletter urged mothers of the under-fives to take advantage of the cod liver oil and fruit juice offered by the Ministry of Health. Mrs Yeo, the Voluntary County Organiser, spoke of the urgent need for all householders to continue to produce the maximum possible from their gardens.

Fund-raising

A considerable amount of time during the war was taken up by Radley WI with fund-raising. It started in December 1939 with a dance that raised money for the district nurses and the Red Cross Association, although it appears that the latter's share was kept to buy materials for the WI's own use in connection with that charity.

In 1940 members decided to give £2 towards a national scheme for a WI ambulance. A vote was taken in September of that year to decide whether the proceeds from the jumble sale following the meeting would be put towards a Spitfire Fund or a fund for the Radley Distressed. After a discussion, it was agreed that a fund started for the immediate relief of anyone local who might need it in the event of air raids was the best choice. A committee, open to the public and led by the vicar, was set up for 'Radley War Distressed'.

A social was organised for 19 February 1942 and the vicar was asked to take the door and secure the local RAF dance band. However, the estimate for the band proved excessive and so it was decided to hold the dance from 9 pm until midnight instead of 9 pm to 1 am, as the hour after midnight meant extra charges.

A proposal was put before the meeting on 16 July 1942 that Radley WI might meet the appeal for hospitality to Women's Services by organising a social evening for them. An emergency meeting was held at Mrs Paton's house to discuss a social for the WAAF girls. It was decided to entertain the guests from 7.30 to 10 pm with progressive games followed by dancing and community singing. It was agreed to buy bread and cakes from WI funds, with members

providing tea, milk, jam, butter, margarine and tomatoes. Prizes were promised by Mrs Wrinch (jam), Mrs Talboys (toilet soap), Mrs Paton (toilet soap), Mrs Hellard (cake), Miss Greening (book) and Mrs Drysdale (fruit). Cigarettes (to be handed round) were to be provided by members and not given as prizes. The WAAFs arrived at 7.30 pm. Twenty had been invited but only 15 could come owing to duties. The Flight Sergeant in a vote of thanks said that she had enjoyed the party very much as had all the girls and that 'they would never falter until victory was won'.

In December 1942 members welcomed among the guests a party of RAF personnel from Nuneham Courtenay. This would be from Nuneham House, which was requisitioned during the war by the RAF. The evening was most enjoyably spent in games, competitions and dancing. Mr Furness of the RAF nobly bore the brunt of the piano-playing.

The profit from a dance in January was £10 8s 6d and it was decided that this should be given to the Warren Hospital as a contribution towards the new X-ray apparatus.

At the beginning of 1943 the Berkshire Federation – of which Radley was a member in those days – appealed for occupational parcels to be sent to wounded prisoners-of-war (POWs). It was decided that, because of the expense and the large number of members needed to provide occupational parcels that others outside the WI should be asked for their help. The first occupational parcel for a POW contained rug wool slippers. As a result of the work of the sub-committee for 'occupational parcels for prisoners-of-war', parcels had been sent off containing directions for, and samples of, tea cosies, fire screens and bags all done in tapestry work, and also those for dishcloths, gloves and belts for the less skilled prisoners to make. The balance in hand in December 1945 of the Occupational Parcels Fund was handed to the Radley Welcome Home Fund.

In October 1943 the treasurer explained that there was a large sum of money in the prisoners-of-war fund. It was therefore decided that local people who were prisoners-of-war and who had been left out of the last distribution of money to the local forces, should be sent an equivalent sum at once from the fund. It was also decided that the people to benefit from the Forces Fund would be men and women who had joined up from Radley and those who have no home except in Radley. Mrs Saunders reported she had received many letters of thanks from members of the Forces and put them on the table at one of the meetings for members to read. The committee suggested that members should each 'adopt' one of their guests for the Christmas party evening, that is, the soldiers billeted in Sugworth Lane.

At Easter 1944 an appeal was made for members to spare eggs for the Warren Hospital so that each patient could have one. It was found that more eggs were donated than had been the case in pre-war days. The custom of giving eggs to the hospital continued for several years after the war and Christine Wootton remembers them being collected when she first joined Radley WI in 1964. Members also undertook mending for the Warren Hospital during the war.

Mrs Gardner reported that she had sent off another parcel in July 1944 to the Merchant Navy Comfort Fund containing socks, scarves, gloves, mittens and sweaters.

There was rationing of practically every commodity during the war and afterwards. In 1945 Mrs Dockar-Drysdale asked members to remember the bombed-out people of Lewisham by giving gifts of household goods. That year Mrs Levetus gave a talk on dressmaking, particularly on 'make do' as she felt this was more useful that 'mending' of which she thought members would be sick of. She provided some good tips on how to make over old clothes so

that they could be worn again and showed members some children's garments made from old clothes or couponless material.

As the war drew to a close, the local organiser of the Mid-European Relief Fund asked the president if members would volunteer to knit babies' vests. There was no difficulty in getting offers.

Mrs Rhodes spoke about the plans for post-war relief in Europe. There was a crying need for help of all kinds and she ended with an appeal for English men and women to bear cheerfully with restrictions in food and clothing in order that the destitute of the continent could be helped.

Note: Radley WI celebrated its 95th anniversary in 2020.

THE HOME GUARD IN RADLEY

The combined Junior Training Corps of Army Cadets from Radley College and Eastbourne College (the latter had been evacuated from the south coast) worked with the 1st (Abingdon) Battalion of the Berkshire Home Guard and the Upper Thames Patrol during the war.

16. Tony Money: The GHQ Line and Radley College's contribution to the Home Guard

Tony Money served as the Radley College archivist for over 40 years. As archivist, his interests included the World War Two defence line known as the GHQ Line, which ran south of Abingdon, and the duties of Radley pupils and staff as part of the Berkshire Home Guard and the Upper Thames Patrol.

Tony served in The Buffs (Royal East Kent Regiment) from 1940 to 1946 where he was a lieutenant (service number 180048). He was mentioned in despatches and was awarded the Military Cross in 1943 in Tunisia. After being a pupil at Radley College before the war, Tony became a don [master] there in 1958 and stayed until his death. He helped with the Officer Training Corps (OTC) at Radley where he was designated a Major.

Although born in Surrey, Tony grew up in Golders Green in London. He came to Radley College as a pupil from 1934 to 1938. Tony's father had been at Radley as a boy and it was only natural to his family that Tony would follow in his father's footsteps. After two years at Oxford University he was called up and went into army.

Tony was away from Radley College for the course of the war and for a few years following when he taught in various British schools and one in Germany. He came to Radley as a master in 1958 and taught mainly Latin and English. He retired from teaching in the late 1980s or early 1990s but stayed at Radley where he continued to be the College Archivist until he was over 80. He also served as Honorary Secretary (1963-1988) and President (1994-1998) of the Radleian Society, and a fund-raiser for the College. [Note: The Radleian Society aims to connect and develop the Radley College community, which includes Old Radleians, Radley parents and staff.]

One of his great interests as an archivist was the GHQ [General Headquarters] Line built south of Abingdon in 1940 when France fell and after Dunkirk when there was a real risk that Germany would invade Britain. It was hoped that it would contain an expected German invasion. [Note: Because the British army had had to leave most of its equipment behind on the retreat to Dunkirk, defensive lines were built across Britain in the hope of containing the Germans and delaying their advance. The GHQ Line was Britain's last line of defence, but fortunately it was never needed.]

Britain's main defences weren't along the coast as it would have been impossible to completely stop the Germans there. There were defences, but the most important were on the defence line south of London and along the River Thames. Radley was behind the GHQ Line and so was not directly involved in it; Didcot was outside the Line. The main purpose of the GHQ Line was to guard London and the Midlands' armament factories, etc. It was hoped that the River Thames would be a formidable barrier because, if the Germans had crossed it, they would have reached the flat land north of Oxford and been able to make speedy progress to Birmingham and Coventry, then England's industrial heartland.

Tony had never heard of this defence line before he met Leslie Smith of Kennington. Leslie had been going around the countryside tracing the line, which went from south of the Thames down past Chelmsford along the North Downs before crossing the Thames and going as far as the Bristol Channel. It was built by an enormous number of civilians and, during the war, it was top secret. People building a fortification in one place did not know that others were doing the same further along. The line followed high ground and rivers. There was a fortification line of trenches where there was no river, behind which were pillboxes. Leslie Smith went with a friend on a bike looking for the pillboxes; they discovered 24 or 25 in this area. The pillboxes were very solid; they were made of concrete and were ready for troops to occupy if there was an invasion. They are camouflaged in hedges and Tony felt that they should be preserved as historical monuments.

As the river goes in a loop around Oxford it was not thought advisable to use that part of the river, so an eight-mile trench was dug from Abingdon to Appleton. This trench started just south of Abingdon, then went through Marcham, Frilford Heath and Fyfield, before joining the Thames at Newbridge. The trenches have now all been filled in, but up to a few years before Radley History Club interviewed Tony in 2008, people could see where they had been.

Although RAF Abingdon was bombed at least twice, no bombs fell on Radley and it seemed that Oxford was being spared from bombing.

Pupils and staff from Radley College and the evacuated Eastbourne College formed a combined cadet corps and were part of the Berkshire Home Guard based in Abingdon. They did duty in Radley Park, patrolling and stopping cars on the roads to make sure no German paratroopers had landed on what would have been an ideal landing ground. Some also belonged to the Upper Thames Patrol, which guarded bridges and important crossing points on the river between Lechlade and Teddington. A picture taken by the Germans during the war shows that one of their targets was Appleford Railway Bridge between Didcot and Oxford (railways were vulnerable as they moved troops, munitions and industrial materials). The boys and adults would patrol at night along the towpath from Sandford Lock to Black Bridge, the bridge over the railway south of Radley. One of the boys wrote in the College newspaper, *The Radleian*, that he didn't know what he was doing most of the time, as there was tremendous security. No-one seemed to know the whole story. [See also the next account.]

Radley College Band marching through Abingdon at the head of the 1st Berkshire (Abingdon) Battalion Home Guard (www.pictureoxon.org.uk, POX0033592)

Many Radley College pupils were called up at the end of their school days and many became officers. They were used to living in Spartan conditions at school and so life wasn't much different for them during the war. A total of 220 former pupils died during the war; many had gone into the RAF and died in the Battle of Britain. One ex-pupil, the Earl of Suffolk and Berkshire who was a civilian doing civil defence work received a George Cross, the highest honour for civilians. He was killed doing bomb disposal work in 1940, having previously successfully defused 40 bombs.

Tony Money finally retired in 2007. He died on 17 January 2008 aged 88. Over 250 people attended the Thanksgiving Service for him at Radley College in May 2008.

Interviewed by Tony Rogerson on 19 May 2003

Supplementary information from pages 9–21 of the 2008 issue of The Old Radleian

17. Wartime memories from Radley College: Experiences with the Home Guard

This article is reproduced from the Souvenir Programme for Radley's celebrations in May 1995 marking the 50th Anniversary of VE Day. *The article was an excerpt from the book, '*The Story of the First Berkshire (Abingdon) Battalion Home Guard by Ourselves'*, first published in 1945 [it's still available in paperback]. The author of the article is unknown but was probably one of the masters from Eastbourne College. It is probably not a coincidence that its headmaster, John Nugee, had been Sub-Warden at Radley College before his appointment in Easter 1938.*

On 28 June [1940] we [Eastbourne College] were evacuated to Radley. That summer we had two patrols each night in the College grounds. Duty came round every third or fourth night for officers and every seventh night for other ranks. The headquarters was the cricket pavilion and we had sentry groups on observation as far as a mile away, connected by field telephone. Orders were not to load except in an emergency. While I was at the furthest post, I heard a shot and at once hurried to investigate. I discovered that one boy of independent mind had decided that, if these times were not an emergency nothing ever would be, so he loaded and discharged his rifle at the Warden's house, thereby bringing a committee of enquiry from the neighbourhood.

Another night I returned from visiting rounds to receive a message that a sentry had heard from the Warden that German parachutists had landed at Sandford Lock. It seemed very odd but one could hardly mistake one's own headmaster so the picket was roused, sentry groups doubled and a recce patrol started. The atmosphere was tense – we did not expect half-trained and half-alarmed boys to last long against the Hun paratroopers. I investigated and traced the message to an observation post who had accepted this bogus message from someone who said he was the Warden. The observation post received a raspberry and the rest retired to bed.

Two nights later, long before we had any uniform, my second in command received an urgent message that 'an armed band was at Chestnut Avenue'. Reserves were summoned and a strong patrol hurried off into the darkness, expecting to meet a sticky end. An astonished observation post eventually protested that all they had said over the telephone to a sleepy orderly was that they wanted their arm bands.

There were other great times – Sunday morning exercises spent in signal boxes, up gantries and under culverts until a worried station master urged that our troops should be protected from their more immediate dangers; cold nights spent on the Mansion roof spotting bomb flashes across two counties, and lastly those night patrols in Radley Park.

LIFE IN OXFORD

18. Margaret Higgs and Iris Lancaster: Growing up in wartime Oxford

Margaret Higgs and Iris Lancaster were brought up in Oxford where their fathers were employed at Oxford colleges. They both remembered Neville Chamberlain's famous radio broadcast on the day war was declared.

Margaret Ann Higgs (née Simpson) was born in 1936 in Luther Street, just south of Speedwell Street in Oxford and was brought up there. Her father was a college servant at New College, Oxford. He had been a driver in World War One and was sent to Gallipoli where he drove ammunition trucks from trench to trench. While having some rest in Egypt, he met T.E. Lawrence [Lawrence of Arabia] who asked him to be his driver. Unfortunately, the army would not release him so he had to go back to Gallipoli. Between the two world wars he drove cars for William Morris both to different parts of the country and to the continent. He was delivering a car in Germany when World War Two started. The people to whom he was delivering the car helped him to escape back to England.

Margaret remembers Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain speaking at the start of World War Two. She started at South Oxford School at the age of three and remembers having to go out on to the playground and down into a shelter. A gas mask had to be worn and she found sitting with this on very claustrophobic. Her first gas mask was a Mickey Mouse mask, but this was followed by an awful black one. She also remembers going to Albion Place, off Speedwell Street, to the Ministry of Food office to get ration books. Her father was the only one who had butter; the rest of the family had margarine. If they wanted jam, then they had to have it without butter or margarine. After waking up the students at New College, her father would return home for his breakfast and his children used to stand around him hoping for a little taste of butter.

Margaret remembered seeing tanks and lorries parked all the way down St Aldates as they waited to go to France for the D-Day landing. Towards the end of the war she remembered seeing planes going across Oxford towing gliders for Arnhem. The sky was black with them and they took ages to go past.

The war years were carefree days for Margaret and her friends. They often played outdoors and were out all day long at times. They had the freedom to go all over Oxford. A popular place was Hinksey Lakes where they would swim and eat picnics, and be there all day. She remembered walking up to Cumnor passing on way the German prisoner of war camp at Harcourt Hill, North Hinksey. This later became an Italian prisoner of war camp. There was virtually no traffic and no danger for children in those days.

Margaret became a teacher and married Rex Higgs in 1961. They had two sons. She died in October 2019, her husband having predeceased her.

Iris Isabel Mary Lancaster (née Burt) was born in Oxford in1926. She was brought up in Hayfield Road, north Oxford, a continuation of Walton Street. Her father was a college porter.

Iris was 13 when World War Two broke out. On that Sunday morning the family sat round the radio and heard Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain telling them that the country was at war with Germany. She remembers air raid shelters being built but her family sat under a table under the stairs if there was an air raid siren. No-one seemed to panic. One bomb fell in a field

in Ferry Hinksey Road, off Botley Road. It was thought that it was a German plane unloading its bombs because the crew couldn't drop them elsewhere.

Her father's family in London were far worse off than they were. Two of Iris's treasured possessions were a brown teapot and glass vase, which were found under the stairs when a relative's house was flattened. The family fortunately were safe.

The blackout did not make much difference to their lives as they did not go out after sunset as everything was so dark. They just accepted the situation they were in.

Iris married Peter Lancaster in 1949 and had a daughter. Iris died in February 2015, her husband having pre-deceased her.

Tony Rogerson interviewed Margaret and Iris on 4 December 2013.

19. Denis and Jenny Standen: Memories of wartime Oxford

Denis and Jenny Standen were both brought up in Oxford. During air raids Denis remembers sheltering in the basement of Corpus Christi College where his father was a 'scout', watching one of the unofficial wartime boat races between Oxford and Cambridge, and cycling out to Radley where he saw soldiers waiting for D-Day. Jenny, who lived in Headington, remembers mail being dropped from a plane for the American-occupied Churchill Hospital.

Denis was born in 1934 at Corpus Christi College where his father was a college servant or 'scout' as the occupation is called in Oxford. The family had a college house in Magpie Lane adjacent to Oriel, Merton and University Colleges and near the back entrance to Christ Church. Most of Denis' early life was spent in this area.

The first visit to an air raid shelter that Denis remembers was in 1941. The Luftwaffe was making raids on Coventry and finding their way there by following the River Thames to Oxford, and then the railway line from there to Coventry and Birmingham. On one occasion he was ready for bed at about seven o'clock in the evening when he saw German aeroplanes flying overhead wing tip to wing tip. He was quickly ushered out in pyjamas and dressing gown and taken to rooms below the College. While there he sat on the knee of a gentleman who told him a story. This man had a strange accent and Denis asked him why this was. The gentleman told him that it was because he was a Russian Jew. Denis was rather dismayed about this, but the man told him that there are good and bad in every country. He later found out that he was sitting on the knee of Isaiah Berlin (1909-1997, a famous philosopher and historian of ideas whose family had emigrated to England in 1920).

Denis was a soprano chorister in his early days and practised at Manchester College, which was used during the war as a shadow Admiralty Office. The younger choristers got up to all sorts of pranks. While the choirmaster was busy playing the organ, the boys could go on their hands and knees under the benches and find a spiral staircase that took them to a roof which had a fortified parapet and walkways. They could go all over the roof of Manchester College, which was almost linked with Wadham College so the boys could go from one to the other.

Oxford wasn't systematically bombed unlike Coventry and Denis remembers thinking what on earth they would do when there was peace, as there wouldn't be any news.

The Oxford and Cambridge boat race was held on the River Thames in some of the war years. These were unofficial boat races but nevertheless were important for the universities. One race took place between Sandford and Oxford. Denis got the bus to Sugworth Crescent at the northern end of Radley and walked down Sandford Lane to watch the crews set off. [Note: There was an unofficial boat race at Henley in 1940 and another between Sandford and Oxford in 1943. Also in 1943 there was a race from Black Bridge (Nuneham railway bridge) to the island by Radley College boathouse. It is estimated that 7,000–10,000 people watched the latter race from the riverbank.]

When one of the students left the college, Denis' father was given an old bicycle which he gave to his son. Denis was delighted to have it and did it up. One day in the later years of the war, Denis went on a bike ride from Oxford. He cycled from Redbridge to the Tandem pub in Kennington on a raised footpath because of the floods. He got to Radley eventually. After Sugworth Crescent, he was on new ground as he had never been there before. There were no mileposts, as they had been taken down during the war in case of enemy paratroopers. He got to the corner by Radley Church and tossed a coin to see whether he should go left or straight on. He turned left, past a string of houses towards the pub and came across an army encampment full of tents and soldiers waiting to go to France for the D-Day landings. Everything was painted with black and white stripes. They were in a sort of gap between the houses and he ventured in. There was a lovely smell of bread and cakes, which were being baked by the Army Logistics Corps. There seemed to be a lot of foreign troops, probably Poles and one of them asked what he was doing there. They didn't like the idea that Denis was snooping around, but they gave him a penny bun and told to go on his own way. He thinks they were near to where Stonhouse Crescent is now.

Denis and Jenny Standen pictured in 2006

Jenny, who was born in 1940, lived in Headington, Oxford. Her bedroom faced towards Southfields Golf Course and Cowley. There was nothing between their house and the beginnings of Cowley. She remembers that, after the armistice in May 1945, she looked out of her window and thought there were a lot of stars out that night. Her mother nearly cried because it was the first time her daughter had seen streetlights, which had been turned off during the war.

The Churchill Hospital across the valley from where Jenny's family lived was used by the US Army during the war. Its mail was delivered by aeroplane and one day Jenny remembers running into her house in great excitement saying that a bomber had flown at tree top height over the valley and dropped the mail bags for the hospital. A lot of American equipment was left behind after the war and her father noticed this when he went in for an operation.

Interviewed by Tony Rogerson on 18 July 2006

LIFE IN LONDON

A common theme of these accounts is the bombing endured by the city's residents during the war and 'near misses' from injury or death.

20. Joy Alexander: Close encounter with a V1 flying bomb

The 50th anniversary of VE Day on 8 May 1995 saw a variety of events in Radley organised by the Commemoration Committee. The Souvenir Programme included a series of short articles about people's memories of the war. One of these articles was from Joy Alexander, the founder and first chairman of Radley History Club.

I was a WREN busy being trained as a radio mechanic – by the elite of the services. Out of a class of thirty there were six of us who joined the Wrens and stuck together during our war service and after, but that is another tale.

This little highlight begins in London during the buzz bomb [V1 flying bombs] attacks. We were stationed at Hampstead and were bussed to Walthamstow for our training. So, we were bombed by day and night. All the other girls had no experience of air raids and bombs as they came from strange places like Glasgow, the countryside round Bolton, Cheshire and strange rural bits of England that I, as a Thames valley, near London, girl, knew nothing of. I had, all through the war been bombed, machine gunned, had shrapnel dropping from the sky and mundane other happenings and was used to ducking under tables, stairs and anything else handy.

But, back to the tale of the striped winceyette 'jarmers'! The siren went again with the high-pitched wail – waaara – waaara – waaara. Mainly it was little men standing on a platform with a tin hat on, turning the handle like starting up a car, when cars had starting handles.

"Oh bother, not again. Shall we go to the shelter?"

"No I'm nice and warm here and if we hear the puttt-puttt-puttt getting nearer we can dive for cover when the engine cuts out."

Unfortunately this wasn't a puttt-puttt-puttt but a stray bomber, which had followed the Thames in from somewhere, got lost, and came in under barrage balloons – they were grey silk and located in the sky like big friendly piggies.

On the bomber came, suddenly there was a whishh-crump-crump-crump as it let go its load. This was followed by crash, bang and screams – at which point I sat up in my bottom bunk space shouting, "Everybody out". I moved, nobody else did. The glass came in, in long thin slivers like knives; the building shook, dust rose, and all was followed by a dreadful silence apart from a little body clad in striped winceyette pyjamas sliding gracefully face down on to the highly polished linoleum floor and yells and screams from the next street.

Silence, then, "Oh dear, that was near", came from the room behind me as I picked myself off the floor running lightly over broken glass like some Indian religious gent.

Sufficient to say not a foot not a head chopped off from my friends. A quick sweep of the broom and we all went back to bed. The next street was wiped out.

21. Brian and Valerie Mott: Coping with the bombing

Brian Mott came from the Windsor/Egham area, about 20 miles west of central London. He remembers V1 flying bombs and the family's Morrison shelter, and his mother working as a postman. Valerie lived at Balham in south London but spent the war with family in south Wales while her father was away serving in the RAF.

Brian, who was born in 1932, lived on the edge of Windsor Park, a few miles from the town of Windsor. He went to Egham Grammar School and spent most of the war years there.

At the start of the war Brian's father was not called up immediately as he was a builder and was constructing gun emplacements, etc. along the River Thames. In 1941, however, he was called up into the Army. Brian's mother was very hard-working, and she got a job as the local postman to supplement the family's income. She got on her bike incredibly early in the morning to collect the mail and was then out delivering it. Brian had an older sister and younger brother, so he felt he was the man of the house and made breakfast for his siblings and got them ready for school.

Egham was about 20 miles out of central London, but the school spent a lot of time in the basement air raid shelters. The Grammar School shared its buildings with a bombed-out school from central London. The two schools alternated, having either morning or afternoon sessions.

Brian remembers playing cricket one afternoon in Windsor when a doodlebug (a V1 flying bomb) passed overhead. The boys all lay down on the cricket field and the doodlebug came down about a mile and half away. On another occasion while waiting to go in a swimming pool near Staines a doodlebug came over and landed near an Army establishment. They felt the shock waves from it. [Note: Thousands of doodlebugs were launched by the Germans to bomb London starting in June 1944. A doodlebug kept flying until it ran out of fuel when it fell to the ground and exploded.]

At the beginning of the war, Brian's father put sandbags around the walls of their ground floor bathroom to form a makeshift shelter. Later a Morrison shelter was delivered and this consisted of a hard steel table with substantial legs and a steel top. The table was put in the sitting-cum-dining room and the family slept under it.

There were a few stray bombs in their area. One blew some tiles off their roof as it dropped in a nearby cemetery and blew up some graves. As a child Brain felt that people adapted to the situation as part of their lives. It was quite stressful, but they got used it.

Valerie was born in Balham in south London in 1936. When the war started her father went into the RAF, and she and her mother went to stay with her father's aunt in a little village near Swansea in South Wales. Both her parents were Welsh. When the bombing had calmed down, they went to Swansea to live with her grandmother. The whole family went into the 'coal hole' (a cellar where coal was stored) when the air raids started. Swansea was flattened during the war because of its docks, but no bombs fell near Valerie's family. She returned to London when she was 10 and her father had left the RAF.

Interviewed by Tony Rogerson on 24 February 2006

Brian and Valerie Mott pictured in 2006

22. Doug Rawlinson: An unhappy evacuee and service in the Far East

Doug Rawlinson was a school boy in London when war broke out. He was evacuated twice, both unhappy experiences. He served in the Navy from 1944 to 1947. After training at Skegness, he sailed on two ships – one to Australia and one to Japan. While in Japan he visited Miyajima and Hiroshima.

Douglas Rawlinson, known as Doug, was born in Fulham in 1927 not far from Craven Cottage, Fulham's football ground, and the river Thames. His home was typical ordinary working class accommodation in those days. There were no cars, deliveries were by horse and cart, and trams ran along the road at the top of the street.

At the age of 11 Doug won a scholarship to Latymer Upper School in Hammersmith, but war interrupted his education. On 1 September 1939 he was evacuated. The schoolchildren were taken by train to Old Windsor station and dispersed among the occupants of various villages around Slough. Doug was billeted with two different families, but both proved to be unhappy experiences. At one of the houses the family were abusive about his parents; he had to go to bed with a candle, as he was not allowed an electric light. He was very pleased to return home in 1940. His school had been relocated to the Slough area and were using a previously condemned school building. With so many boys returning home and travelling to Slough each day, the school also returned to London.

The start of the London Blitz meant Doug was evacuated again. He was billeted in two different homes and enjoyed neither of them. He felt quite traumatised by it all, so when he was 14 his father took him out of that school – a move Doug regretted for the rest of his life. His parents then moved to Brighton as his father's work was relocated there and so Doug went with them.

Doug volunteered for the Royal Navy in 1944 at the age of 17. In order to join the navy it was necessary for him to have connections with someone in that service. He had a brother who had been in the navy for three years and an uncle who had served for 20 years plus. He joined with the rank of a boy as he wasn't quite 17½. His pay was 10 shillings per fortnight. When he reached the age of 17½ he became a probationary supply assistant and had to report to the old Butlin's holiday camp at Skegness, then known as HMS *Royal Arthur*. [The Admiralty requisitioned the camp on 22 September 1939. It was used as a central reception area for new naval recruits, which closed in 1946.] There was a motto on the entrance gate, which caused some amusement: 'Our aim is all for your enjoyment'. There were about 5,000 matelots (sailors) in the camp but there was a shortage of uniforms, so the men had to wear their pullovers back to front to hide the fact that they didn't have any shirts.

Doug Rawlinson pictured in 2006

It turned out to be a bitterly cold winter. There was a tubular heater in the flimsy huts they lived in, which was on for about 2 hours per day. At night they left their daytime clothes on and put their pyjamas over the top for warmth.

One day Doug was summoned to the divisional officer because his brother, Leading Signalman John Edwin Rawlinson, who had returned from abroad after 2½ years wanted Doug to be his best man at his wedding and was requesting compassionate leave for him. Doug knew nothing of this but the divisional officer was suspicious that Doug had put him up to it. Permission was refused. Sadly Doug never saw his brother again as he was killed on HMS *Goodall* off the north Russian ports on 29 April 1945; a U-boat fired a torpedo at the frigate, causing its ammunition magazine to blow up. The captain was killed with 111 other members of the crew; there were 44 survivors. This was the last ship to be sunk before the end of the European war – it was just eight days before VE Day.

Doug was stationed at Skegness for 2–3 months then went to Malvern for his seaman's training, then back to Skegness to do his training for the supply branch. The common name for sailors in the supply branch was 'Jack Dusty', which came from the fact that they often had to carry bags of flour.

After qualifying Doug was sent to the Royal Navy Barracks at Portsmouth and was there for several months. He went home most evenings to Brighton catching the train back at 4.30 each morning to return for 7 o'clock. It cost him two shillings for a working man's return ticket.

In December 1945 Doug sailed on HMS *Victorious*, an aircraft carrier, to Sydney. It took her a month and Doug remembers it was 12,208 miles via the Suez Canal. He spent Christmas on the Red Sea. The ship took on fresh provisions in Sydney, which meant that the sailors could have some time ashore. The Australians were very hospitable and Doug visited the homes of some of them. He was able to have meals with his hosts, stay overnight, and go on sightseeing tours with them. Their homes were nothing pretentious as they were usually made of corrugated iron. The father in one of these families had been a sailor and Doug used to stay there quite a lot. After the war Doug seriously thought of emigrating and this family would have sponsored him, but he got married instead. The sailors, while in Sydney, were stationed at HMS *Golden Hind* on what used to part of the racecourse.

Doug's next ship was the HMS *Newfoundland*. It went via New Guinea to Japan where they dropped anchor at Kure on the Japanese inland sea. His next vessel was the depot ship, HMS *Mull of Kintyre*, which had been built in Canada for work in the Pacific. Doug was very impressed by it. Everything on board was better than on British ships. Kure was part of an industrial area in Japan and it was very badly damaged during the war. It was a port and most of the ships in the harbour had been scuttled or damaged. All the Japanese ships that were moored alongside had had their superstructure removed.

Doug's crew were there to create a naval base after the Americans had left. Sometimes they were moored alongside the harbour but sometimes outside. Once they had to moor away from the dockside because a typhoon was expected, but it never materialised. The sailors were not allowed to eat or drink anything onshore and if they did go ashore they had to return before it was dark. They had Japanese men on board to do the heavy work and doing such things as cleaning the decks, etc. Also they had a contingent of Chinese on board for training but the Japanese, who disliked them, beat them up on shore.

While in Japan Doug was allowed to go on a Japanese tugboat to Miyajima, one of the holiest places for followers of the Shinto religion. Here there were temples and a beautiful sea arch. The Sun shone through the arch to the elaborate temple at a certain time of the day. Doug was able to watch the Japanese at prayer. He thought the name of one of the temples translated as the 'temple of a thousand mattresses'. Inside it, there were lots of large wooden bats rather like table tennis bats. Doug kept one and thinks it was probably a prayer bat.

On one occasion he went to Hiroshima, which was about 10 miles away. This was on what was considered to be a bullet train; even then as it went very fast. Doug didn't pay as he stood beside the driver. Hiroshima station was by the side of a river; he crossed the river by a bridge and was confronted by lots and lots of wooden stalls where the Japanese were selling souvenirs relating to the atomic bomb damage. He bought quite a few postcards showing damage to the city. There were no restrictions on walking about and he doesn't know if there was any radioactivity even though it was only about six months after the bomb had dropped. He wandered around streets that had been cleared with rubble piled up at the side. As far as the eye could see there was devastation. Most of the buildings had been flattened. The building with the dome, which is still standing as a memorial, was there. Little Japanese children came running up to him and gave him a Chinese figure and some fused glass that had been fused by the bomb. Doug had witnessed the severe damage caused in London by the Blitz and so knew what devastation was like.

When he was out in Japan he thought he could be demobbed at an earlier date in Australia. Then he found he would still have to serve his full time and so he came back to Britain.

Doug left Japan in September 1946 and came back on board the HMS *Mull of Kintyre* via Hong Kong, Singapore, Colombo (in what was then Ceylon) and the Suez Canal. He was then based at Gare Loch on the River Clyde where the ship was involved with midget submarine trials. Sailing along the west coast of Scotland he saw lots of ships being mothballed.

While on leave for Christmas Doug got a telegram saying he had to report back to the ship on Boxing Day. He travelled overnight on a train and when he got there he was told to report back to Portsmouth for demobilisation! He never got the full records of his naval career because they were lost. He only got a précis of when he joined and when he was demobbed. His

gratuity was enough to enable him to buy a bicycle. In early 1947 he left the Navy and returned to Brighton. He married June on 23 December 1950.

Interviewed by Eric Blanks on 23 February 2006

23. Joy and Eric Riley: Rationing and close encounters with V2 rockets

During the war Eric and Joy Riley were children living in north London in Tottenham and Wood Green respectively. Both remember the bombing and both were nearly killed, in separate incidents, by a V2 rocket. They also remember rationing, particularly sweet rationing!

Eric and Joy Riley pictured in 2006

Joy was born in 1933 in Wood Green in north London (in what is now the London Borough of Haringey). When World War Two threatened, the family thought that it would be safer for Joy and her mother and brother to go to live in Watford with her mother's sister. Joy's father would stay at home in London because of his work. One day Joy was sitting carving bits off a lump of salt (salt was bought in fairly large cuboid lumps at that time) and suddenly became aware that her mother and aunt were crying. They'd been trying their best not to show that the outbreak of war was upsetting them as they wanted to protect their children.

As time went by air raids started and Joy remembers formations of bombers going out from a local airfield. The children counted them as they went out and were rather sad when not as many came back.

Joy and her family didn't stay long with her aunt as there was some friction between the adults. She did manage one term at the local school but, as she had to follow a different curriculum, she didn't do so well in the end of term examination.

Some way into war sweet rationing started and Joy was horrified to find there were no sweets. However, after rationing came in, they were allowed ¼ lb per person per week. Joy's job was to go on a Sunday morning to buy four different lots of sweets, put them on to the table and share them out between the four family members. There was a mixture of toffees, boiled

sweets and jellied sweets. Joy put the sweets into four dishes and each person was allowed roughly a couple of sweets per day.

Joy's mother did the cooking and shopping, but the family never felt deprived. Her mother used to put butter or margarine on to a slice of bread then scrape almost all of it off for the next slice. There was a pig bin (a large dustbin) at the corner of most streets and it was where people put scraps of food and peelings in ready to be collected regularly to feed pigs.

At the age of ten, Joy's mother asked her to go and pay the electricity bill at the electricity showroom. She took her brother who was three years old. As she reached the end of her road, instead of turning right as she usually did, she turned left as she could see her cousin there and wanted to ask him whether he'd like to go with them. He declined, so Joy and her brother kept on walking along the street and then took a bus. The fare was about one old penny for her and free for her brother. When the bus got to the top of Lordship Lane (one of the main roads through Wood Green) and turned into Redvers Road, there was an enormous bang near the Congregational Church. Joy was standing on the deck of the bus and saw the church windows go in and out twice before they fell on the pavement. A V2 rocket had fallen a couple of hundred yards away. The two children got off the bus and paid the electricity bill. Joy knew that the way they normally used to get to the shop would be blocked so they walked the long way home. Her mother was frantic with worry, as she didn't know they had gone a different way there. Her cousin had saved their lives because, if they hadn't seen him, they would have just been passing the place where the rocket dropped. V2 rockets came down without any warning whereas the doodlebugs were like an aeroplane and could be heard until their engine stopped and they dropped out of the sky.

War became part of everyone's lives. One of the biggest changes Joy noticed as a child was her schooling. On some occasions the school closed completely, especially towards the end when doodlebugs and V2 rockets were dropping on London. But because Joy was in the top class and preparing for the 11+ examination she had to stay in school.

The blackout was difficult to cope with, as everywhere was so dark, especially in winter. People could carry a torch if they kept their fingers over the end of it. Nevertheless, her parents were quite happy to let her go on her own to Brownies and Guides in the dark. They never had any thought of taking her.

There were air raid warnings practically every night. There were not too many bombs where Joy lived but the family still had to go into a shelter. There was no tube station or public shelter near them, so they had an Anderson shelter in the back garden. A large hole was dug, which was covered with a corrugated iron roof with earth on top. Unfortunately it tended to flood. Joy's mother suffered from claustrophobia and sat with her head outside, which defeated the object of being in the shelter. Because of this they managed to get a Morrison shelter. This was a large metal table, which they put inside the front room. They slept under that for a long time. Her cousin was staying with them, as he had been bombed out, so the whole family were under the table in this shelter. Joy's father by this time was in the Army.

Eventually the war ended and a street party was held to celebrate. All the tables and chairs were brought out because there was no traffic – petrol rationing meant there just weren't any cars on the roads. Children could roller skate in the road and ride bikes quite safely. Everyone did their best for their children at the street party. Someone got a piano on to the street; there were decorations everywhere and dancing went on to midnight and beyond.

Eric was born in 1931 in the area that now forms the London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. The family later moved out to Tottenham in north London (also now part of the London Borough of Haringey) because his father worked on the Underground and, at that time the Piccadilly Line was being extended northwards to Cockfosters. Eric was evacuated two days before war was declared but, because he suffered from asthma, foster parents were not keen to have him and, after being with three sets, he returned home in 1940 just in time for the Blitz and the Battle of Britain. He was very keen to go home and eventually he was able to persuade his parents to let him.

Eric remembers the aerial bombardment of the Blitz, which came during the night. Doodlebugs were pilotless so they came at any time and were difficult to defend against. It was the same with the V2 rockets. Towards the end of the war he saw hundreds and hundreds of our planes coming back from bombing raids. The Germans cunningly sent doodlebugs amongst our planes, making it even more difficult to shoot the doodlebugs down as we might have shot our own planes. Some bombs fell within a quarter of a mile of him and he recollects the red glow in the sky when the London docks were on fire.

Eric was at Tottenham Grammar School (since demolished) in March 1945 when, during the lunch hour, a V2 rocket dropped on the opposite corner of the building to where he was. Had it not been the lunchtime he and many others would have been killed. However, about four boys were killed and one severely injured, losing an arm by shrapnel or falling masonry. The V2 landed opposite the cloakrooms, the administrative department and a biology laboratory. The boys heard the very loud bang and just sat there looking at each other until a prefect came to the door and told them to go out into the playground. Window frames and door frames were all over the place. Luckily their classroom was all right. Eric's mother appeared on scene and was relieved to find he was safe and they went home. The crater made by the V2 was shallow as the bomb was designed to do more damage on the surface. It was more powerful than the V1, which was much more of a terror weapon as you could hear it coming and when it cut out you knew someone was 'going to get it'. People waited for the bang when it cut out. Between incidents Eric said that they forgot about it all and got on with schoolwork.

Shortages were difficult. Eric felt he and other children didn't really miss anything because that was what they were used to, being so young. He remembers having two daylight sightings of doodlebugs. When he was at White Hart Lane near his school and the home of Tottenham Hotspur Football Club, he saw one clearly going towards his home, so everyone ran quickly to see if their homes were all right. Another time he was going to the shops on a small errand and saw a doodlebug very, very clearly.

There was a tremendous thunderstorm on the day the war ended and Eric saw lightning strike a telegraph pole just at the end of his road. This brought the wires down with a loud noise, so the end of the war for Eric was quite noisy. He said that they were all disappointed that austerity lasted so long. Resources had been exhausted and goods were just not available. Britain didn't have the capacity immediately to pick up. Sweet rationing went on until the 1950s. When his family moved into a flat in Bedford in 1957, Eric remembers that coal was still rationed.

Interviewed by Tony Rogerson on 13 March 2006

24. Reg White: Memories of working in London and the Navy

When war broke out Reg White was 17 and living in London. His account provides an insight into what it was like working as an electrical engineer in a factory making instruments for the Navy and then his experiences in 1945 in the Navy on a fleet repair ship supporting the British Pacific Fleet.

Reginald S. White, commonly known as Reg, was born in 1922 in the St Pancras district of London. He left school in 1936 at the age of 14 – the normal leaving age at that time. On the 1939 Register of civilians in England and Wales taken on 29 September 1939, Reg appears with his father, a hairdresser, born in 1883 and his mother Alice born in 1886. Also on the register are Reg's sister Doris and brother Albert, both of whom were hairdressing assistants. Reg was described as an electrician's mate. The family was living at 78 Weedington Road, St Pancras.

To begin with Reg had some short-term jobs, which were mainly in engineering and this made him decide that he would like to become an electrical engineer. His father had a hairdressing business but, unlike his siblings, he wasn't interested in that occupation. Eventually, at the age of 16 Reg began full-time work with St Pancras Borough Council as an improver in the electrical department. Here he refurbished domestic appliances for the local council. As part of the job it was mandatory to do two nights a week at night school. Reg realised that he hadn't paid as much attention as he should have done at school so he decided to go to night school for four nights a week studying maths, English, technical drawing and practical work. He continued at night school until the war started. For some reason the Council decided to shut down the electrical department and he was out of a job, so he started working as an 'on call' electrician repairing electrical equipment used by a shoe repair chain. This job didn't last long as being on call interfered with his love of cycling and camping. It was, however, about the time that World War Two started and from 1939 when he was aged 17 the Government directed his life for several years.

Reg received a directive from the Ministry of Labour to start work at Electroflo Meters at Park Royal in London. He was in the maintenance section of the factory, which made instrumentation equipment for the military and occupied a five-storey building. As his evening classes had stopped he started a correspondence course. It was also necessary for Reg to join either the auxiliary fire service (AFS) or the Local Defence Volunteers (LDV); he opted to join the former. When the war started, German planes came in very low indeed and people would dive into underground shelters such as underground stations. Reg tried it for one night. He didn't find it a very hygienic or clean place and so decided to stay above ground during an air raid, which he found to be quite an experience. A kind friend then offered to take him to his house after work where he could stay overnight. The two of them usually played snooker during an air raid and managed to survive.

After the retreat from Dunkirk in 1940, there was a rapid change in working life at the factory. Reg could now get overtime pay if he worked weekends. The entire workforce decided they would work on when air raids started, as the country was desperate for armaments. There was no pressure to do this but they all volunteered, as they wanted to keep the factory working. There would be a volunteer spotter on the roof to spot bombs falling nearby and Reg felt that he should take his turn in doing this. Their building was the tallest in the Park Royal industrial area and being on the roof would be an experience he would never forget. He was very concerned for his own safety as there would be aeroplanes coming over, anti-aircraft guns

going off and shrapnel flying around, and he was amongst it. There was a big red stop button, which he could use if necessary and this would stop the whole factory, shutting it down and the workers would then take shelter. This carried a great responsibility having to decide between work output or the safety of his fellow workers. He survived it and was pleased he had done it, but it changed his outlook on life.

Park Royal was about five miles cycling distance from his home and Reg was working five days a week, and sometimes 24 hours per day. He used to manage to go home on Saturday lunchtime before the raids started and freshen up, and then go back on Sunday before the raids started again.

Lack of sleep began to take its toll on him. One night he went down to an air raid shelter with a first aid kit and put his steel helmet and gas mask down beside him on a seat, then promptly went into a deep sleep. That was the night they were a target. The Germans dropped an incendiary bomb on Park Royal greyhound stadium. The wooden forms quickly caught fire. This was what the Germans wanted as it would light up their target area. The caretaker, volunteers and members of the ATS tried to put out the fire but it took all night. Everyone there thought Reg was helping, but it was a volunteer who was answering to the same name. At a roll call the next morning Reg was not there and his mates wondered what had happened to him. They discovered that they had the wrong Reg fighting the fire and then that the Reg they thought was there was in fact fast asleep. The managing director understood and was sympathetic as Reg was absolutely worn out.

In 1945 Reg was called up into the Navy and reported to Chatham Barracks. By that time the European war had finished and there was an immediate call-up to go to the Far East. The intake at the barracks was therefore enormous and it became overcrowded. One day to relieve the pressure Reg's group had to get out of Chatham Barracks and it was organised so that they would march out to the sound of a marine band. They went as far as a pub, where they sat down for some refreshments and then marched back into the Barracks again.

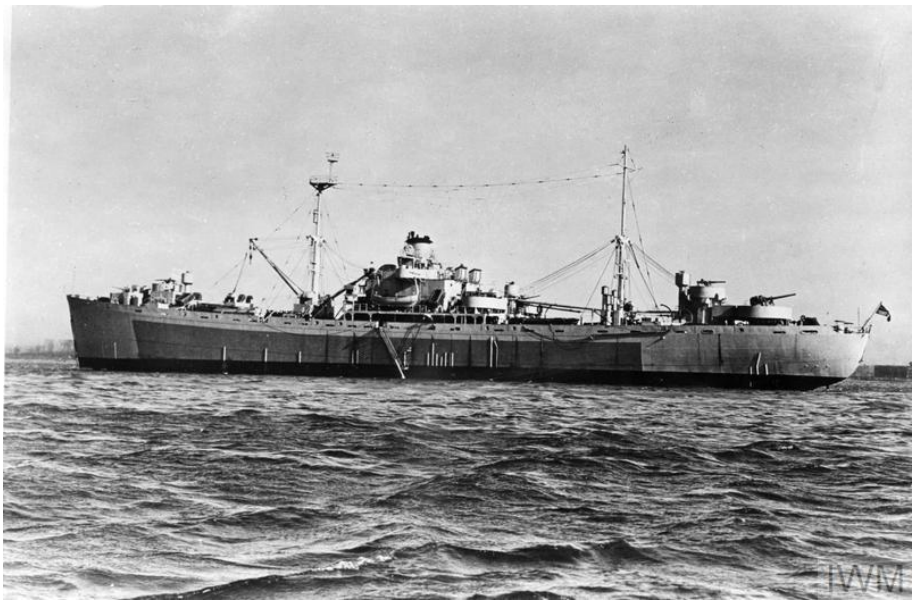
The sailors had minimal practical ship training. For shooting they had to load a revolver in darkness and shoot a silhouette from the hip. For fire-fighting they had to go into a room about the size of a tank and, once inside, the door would close behind them. There was a tray on fire with some crude dirty oil in it; they would be given a quick lecture on what to do, given a hand pump and some water and if they came out of the door on the other side of the room they had passed. For swimming they had to be able to swim the length of the swimming baths. The competent swimmers were allowed in at the shallow end. Non-swimmers were pushed in at the deep end. Someone was there with a long pole in case they sank. Reg, who couldn't swim, jumped into the deep end and doggy paddled a few strokes before getting out at the side. He passed!

Following the fast-tracked naval training they were given a series of technical interviews. Civilian engineers tested them and because Reg had a good background in maintenance he passed easily and was given a nice set of tools.

Following some shore leave he went on board *HMS Assistance,* which had been built in the USA and had been ordered to the Far East to join the British Pacific Fleet as a fleet repair ship. The Fleet included battleships that had been kept in the UK to fight against Germany but were now proceeding to the Far East as Japan was still fighting. *HMS Assistance* was part of the Fleet Train – a floating supply unit composed of auxiliary vessels such as oilers, repair

ships, ammunition ships, provision and store ships that accompanied a fighting fleet to sea on operations and enabled it to remain operational for long periods without having to return to port. It sailed for Australia soon after reaching the UK and arrived at Manus in Papua New Guinea, the assembly point for the British Pacific Fleet, on 10 September 1945 and remained there until 15 November before departing for Singapore where she was to operate as a harbour repair ship.

Reg was told that the ship would be an easy target for the Japanese and the crew was pleased when they arrived in New Guinea, A total of 400 ships would eventually make up the Fleet, so the maintenance men knew they would be very busy. The Japanese did attack but they were lucky and came to no harm.



HMS ASSISTANCE, BRITISH AUXILIARY FLEET REPAIR SHIP. MAY 1945, AT SEA. (A 29283)
Copyright: © IWM. Original Source: http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205160539

Reg was in New Guinea when the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan and the war with Japan ended. Now that the war had ended the Navy no longer needed technical people and so Reg and his colleagues went back home. He felt one good thing about the journey home was that men could be demobbed at any port the ship called at. *HMS Assistance* returned to the UK in late April/early May 1946, was decommissioned and then sailed back to the USA.

A memorable experience for Reg on the return voyage from New Guinea was when the ship's crew put on a Christmas Day party in Singapore for about 70 Dutch and Chinese children, many of whom were orphans and looked after by a charity. He was nearly in tears at seeing their little faces because they didn't know what to expect but the ship's crew had all the facilities to make a nice party for them. Santa Claus, a cinema, a shop and ice cream were available as it was an American ship. The children didn't know what ice cream was but soon found they liked it. Someone made a short film of the party which ended up in Imperial War Museum in London. Reg has a copy of it.

Reg was keen to get home as he was married by this time. Coming back to the UK, where so much damage had been done by German bombs, meant a new post war life for him and his wife. Reg had married when he was on leave from Chatham just before he went to the Far

East. His wife, Olive, worked at the same place as him before the war and he often chatted to her when they met, usually in the stores' office. One day she stopped at his workbench and so he sat on the bench to talk to her. What he had forgotten was that there was a very hot soldering iron on the bench and he sat on it. She laughed and he wasn't very happy about it all. When he had cooled down he went to apologise to her for what he had said and they ended up making a date to meet each other. They eventually married earlier than they intended as he was being posted abroad.

In 1946 Reg was demobbed with a full set of tools, something which was quite usual. He was still under the direction of the Ministry of Works and was sent to maintain a defunct American air base at Cheddington in Buckinghamshire. He said it was a plum job as they had a completely workable aerodrome to themselves. Unfortunately, it meant a lot of travelling from Leighton Buzzard and so he went back to the company he worked for before the war. He eventually became their chief electrical engineer.

Reg fully retired in 1987 and moved to Radley to be near his daughter and grandchildren. He became a well-known person in Radley as a result of the most interesting cartoons he contributed to *Radley News* and Radley History Club's book, Radley People and the Railway. Reg died aged 98 in 2020.

Interviewed by Tony Gillman on 31 January 2017

LIFE ELSEWHERE IN ENGLAND

25. Jean Deller: Childhood in Essex with visits to Radley

This article is reproduced from the Souvenir Programme for Radley's celebrations in May 1995 marking the 50th Anniversary of VE Day. *Jean came to Radley as an adult to help look after her mother, who'd had a stroke. Her parents were then living in a cottage in Lower Radley. After her parents died, she lived in north Abingdon but retained her connection with Radley until the end of her life.*

When war broke out, I was living in Stanford-le-Hope in Essex. A friend and I were playing in the garden when the siren suddenly boomed out. We were terrified. My friend ran home and I ran into the house shouting 'Daddy'. The house was empty so you can imagine how I felt. I sat on the stairs sobbing when suddenly my father came running in. He had been next door talking about what was going to happen.

I was just five years old. We slept in a shelter in the garden where I felt safe. I was evacuated for just a year in 1940 to Surrey, then went home to Essex. Occasionally we would visit my great aunt in Radley. That meant a train ride to London and then a train from Paddington to Radley.

Memories

- Of the houses that had been bombed in the road where I lived.
- Seeing large offices, a hospital and a church in ruins. The hospital beds were hanging out of the sides of the floors.
- Cakes and pancakes made from dried eggs.
- Helping my mother cut up marrow into small squares, adding pineapple essence, sugar and water to make a bowl of pineapple.
- Standing in the garden watching the doodlebugs go over. If the engine stopped, we lay flat on the ground.
- Sadness in our family as my second cousin in Radley was killed during the war. We all loved him and he is remembered on the war memorial in Radley.
- Happiness in school when the siren went – into the shelter to read comics and books.
- Fear was with me but we were taught to put on a brave face.
- Happiness when I was ten and the war was over. I hope it never happens again.

Radley during the war years was to me a quiet oasis. I loved visiting. There didn't seem to be any fear. My aunts carried on as usual but Aunty Florrie who lived at 110 Lower Radley had an evacuee called Edwin. He was 13, I was 7 and I thought he was wonderful. He stayed until the end of the war and came back regularly.

VE day

I was woken up by my mother coming into the room and telling me the war was over in Europe. How happy we were. Flags were put out on the houses. Everybody was happy except that our neighbour was still a prisoner of war in Japan. We would not be happy until that part of the world was at peace.

Note*:* Jean's second cousin, Leslie Ambridge Smith, was a sergeant in the Royal Artillery. He was killed on 28 November 1941 aged 36 at Tobruk during the North Africa campaign. His

mother Mary and Jean's grandmother Lucy were daughters of Charles Ambridge, the first stationmaster at Radley Station.

26. Dot Hewlett: A wartime childhood in Lancashire

Dot Hewlett grew up in Southport on the Lancashire coast near Liverpool where her father, a civil servant, was a member of the Auxiliary Fire Service. She remembers air raids and camping with the Guides.

Dorothy (Dot) Hewlett was born in 1931 in Todmorden in west Yorkshire [the historic boundary between Yorkshire and Lancashire runs through the town]. Her father worked in the cotton industry as a textile design teacher but, when the depression of 1932 affected the industry, he made the decision to move to Southport on the coast in Lancashire where he bought a dairy. Dot already had three aunts living in Southport, so it seemed a sensible move. Both her grandfathers, who had been 'tatters' [overseers in the cotton industry] moved to Southport when they retired.

Dot's father kept the dairy until the war broke out when legislation meant that milk deliveries became zoned. As his previous customers in the hospitality business had been affected by a drop in demand at the start of the war and petrol was rationed for delivering further afield, the business was no longer viable and so he changed occupation. He went into the Civil Service and joined the National Assistance Board (NAB) whose headquarters had been evacuated to Southport. He used his motor bike to visit elderly people to see whether they qualified for any benefits. When the war was over his department moved back to London and the NAB helped Dot's family to buy a house in Surrey.

Dot's mother worked in the shop that was attached to the dairy, which also sold fish and greengroceries. When rationing started, she stopped selling rationed goods and after a while decided to close the shop completely. She had taught shorthand before the war and so found work as a secretary to the principal of a further education college. Two aunts who had boarding houses in Southport didn't want to take in evacuees so they, with their young children, went to live with Dot's family. The shop premises came in useful, as the aunts were able to store their furniture there.

The first memory of the war that Dot had was the day before war broke out. She was pushing the little boy from next door in his pram to the school railings where she saw many evacuee children standing there. They had come from Bootle, a deprived area of Liverpool, and brought with them nits, head lice and scabies, etc.

One day at school the children were timed running back to their own home and then back to school. If they could run quickly enough, they were allowed to shelter at home during an air raid; if not, they had to use the school shelter – which they enjoyed playing in. But school wasn't disrupted very much as the raids were mostly at night. If the siren went off during the night, Dot's mother would push her under the table but if didn't take long to realise that the raids were mainly further away from their house and so they just slept through them. The only time they did have any bombs was when German planes had been chased out of Manchester towards the sea and dropped their bombs randomly before returning to Germany. One bomb blew out the windows of houses in the road near where one was dropped, while another just missed a munitions factory nearby which no-one had realised was there.

There were a lot of sirens every time Liverpool and Manchester got a raid. Dot's father had joined the Auxiliary Fire Service (AFS) and was a volunteer station officer. Every time there was a siren her father, as station officer, had to go to the fire station. The firemen were all volunteers. On occasions he had to go to Liverpool or Manchester as back-up. He told Dot that once it was so cold the water coming out of the hoses was freezing and the men were slipping and sliding all over the place. Dot remembers him wearing his uniform helmet and tunic, with a big axe on his belt.

She also remembers going to the cinema quite often during the war and she very much enjoyed being a Girl Guide [an interest that continues to this day]. She said that they had to camouflage all the Guides' tents so that, when they pitched them, they would be not seen from the air. However, they had a bright yellow one whose colour they couldn't bear to change so that had to be camouflaged under the trees. On another occasion during a visit to the Lake District, the Guides heard that the atom bomb had been dropped in Japan and that was the end of the war.

Interviewed by Tony Rogerson on 13 February 2006

27. Ida Holst: Wartime food and clothing

This article is reproduced from the Souvenir Programme for Radley's celebrations in May 1995 marking the 50th Anniversary of VE Day. Ida and her husband Ted were both born and grew up in north-east England; they married in Sunderland in 1945. They came to live in Radley after some years working abroad. Ida was very involved in several village organisations. A few years after Ted's death in 1999, she decided to go and live nearer her daughter. She still kept in contact with friends in Radley and liked to hear about what was happening in the village.

Keeping pigs

Some people kept pigs and fed them on collected kitchen swill. A licence was needed, but some people unofficially kept more than one. Permission was needed to slaughter an animal. The story goes that a farmer slaughtered two pigs. News arrived that an inspector was on his way. The carcase of one pig was hidden quickly. After the inspection the farmer's wife asked if everything was in order. "Yes madam", replied the inspector, "but unfortunately your pig had two left sides".

Eating out

Towards the end of the war dried bananas arrived on the scene. They were revolting looking brown strips which swelled up in water.

Ted and I were having lunch in a hotel in the north-east. There was one other couple in the room at the time. On the menu were rice pudding and bananas and custard. I warned Ted not to ask for bananas but we heard the other couple ordering them. We sat in silence for their comments. Suddenly Ralph Reeder of Gang Show fame yelled out "What the b——hell is this?" as he looked at a dish of yellow custard with two long brown blobs in it. We nearly fell off our seats with laughing.

Wartime clothing

As the war progressed we used whatever came to hand. A prize was to obtain a white sack in which Canadian wheat was delivered. These sacks were of thick white material, which was great for tea towels, aprons, etc. Never mind the printed lettering which eventually bleached out.

Army blankets were made into coats and dressing gowns.

Ladies' skirts were allowed three knife pleats. Coats no longer than 39.5 inches counted as children's wear and so needed fewer coupons.

The backs of men's shirts were made into aprons, tiny blouses, hankies and other things.

Hair was rolled around a stocking or a shoe lace. Legs were painted with liquid make-up and a black line added down the back of the leg. Aristoc stockings were very scarce and cost almost 8% of a week's wage.

28. Christine Wootton: My wartime story

Christine Wootton herself was born just before the war started and has memories of events from that time including visits from her uncle who was in the Royal Canadian Air Force, food parcels from her grandmother in Canada, her father building an air raid shelter in the garden, and not being allowed to stay up past her bedtime on VE Day!

Transcribing the memories of people who had experienced World War Two made me realise that I too was alive at that time, living with my family in Cheshire. I was born a year before the war started but had begun to attend full-time school before the war was over and so was old enough to remember some of the events of that time. In school, paper was in short supply so we were allowed one sheet of Izal toilet paper if we needed to go to the outdoor toilets across the school yard. To practise writing and maths we had small slates and chalk with a thick wad of felt for erasing the work.

At the beginning of the war before my memories started, my parents had an evacuee family living with them. This was an experience my mother did not enjoy and she was relieved when they were given accommodation nearer to where they came from. I was a toddler and it became too much for her to have others in the house.

One of my earliest memories was of my uncle coming to visit us, often bearing gifts from Canada. He had emigrated to Canada as a baby with his mother in 1920, leaving behind my mother and her sister to be brought up by grandparents. He came over as a member of the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) and surprised us with a visit. I have since discovered what 'painting the town red' means; at the time I didn't understand what it meant in regard to my uncle!

On one occasion he came back from a visit to Canada with a suitcase full of peanut butter. It was delicious on sandwiches with homemade jam especially blackberry jelly which my mother made from the berries we picked in the hedgerows.

My uncle, Flight Lieutenant Arthur Edwards, joined the RCAF in 1940 and began aircrew training in Canada. He later joined an overcrowded transport ship and landed in Liverpool before being transferred in a sealed train to Bournemouth for further training. After being transferred to the Royal Air Force station at East Fortune in Scotland [now home to the National Museum of Flight], he learnt to fly firstly Bristol Blenheim aircraft and then Bristol Beaufighter Mark IIs. Following completion of his training he was transferred to No. 404 Squadron of the RCAF, which was then flying bombers from RAF Chivenor in north Devon to hunt German submarines in the Bay of Biscay. After a time here he was transferred to No. 236 Squadron at RAF North Coates in Lincolnshire where he searched for German convoys bringing Swedish iron ore along the Norwegian coast.

Christine's uncle

On one occasion early in 1944 my uncle was leading an aircraft section in a diving attack on a German escort ship when a 20 mm shell hit the aircraft's armoured windscreen leaving it totally opaque, while another hit a propeller blade making it necessary to shut down the starboard engine. His Spitfire escort lost him so it was necessary for him to fly home alone at low level without being able to see forward. He decided during the next hour that if he ever got the aircraft back to base and on the ground in one piece, then nothing that could ever happen after that would be worth worrying about. He landed safely but soon afterwards he was taking off for a training mission when an engine failed and he hit a sea wall at the end of the runway and found himself in hospital for six months. At the end of the war he was repatriated to Canada and I didn't see him again until he came back for a reunion of his squadron some years later.

A picture taken by Christine's uncle of a German convoy in the North Sea he was about to bomb

One of the good aspects of having a grandmother in Canada was that she sent over food parcels during the war and for a time afterwards. I disliked the chocolate she sent, but loved the packets of nuts. Butter was in a sealed tin and there was often a tin of Klim (dried milk) – the name comes from 'milk' spelt backwards. She made her own soap and included this in the parcel. It was a rather special soap as it floated in the bath. The parcel was wrapped in white

cloth and sewn on. On arrival this was carefully unpicked and the material used for tea towels and such like.

Although my father was in a reserved occupation, wartime must have been exhausting for him. He was an air raid warden, had an allotment, helped on his parents' farm and had a full day's work to do. Often at night he would collect vehicles from Manchester to be converted into ambulances at the factory where he was the foreman. He told me he tried to drive on the tramlines as far as he could out of Manchester to get a smoother ride.

With the possibility of being bombed by the Germans, my father and our neighbour built an air raid shelter in the back garden. This was very well built and provided shelter for both families. My mother used to struggle down with me in a crib type gas mask until I was old enough to have a Mickey Mouse mask of my own.

Christine pictured in the family's back garden with the air raid shelter in the background

The area where we lived had quite a lot of industry but fortunately very few bombs dropped anywhere nearby. The German bombers would fly overhead to Manchester and Liverpool, and I can remember seeing search lights, in the distance, over these towns. Crewe was nearby and the railway works had barrage balloons over it. The walls of the building were painted to look like rows of houses and it escaped destruction during the war. The nearby Foden's motor works produced tanks and these used to be tested on a field at the end of the road we lived in. This was always called the ''tank field' until houses were built on it after the war.

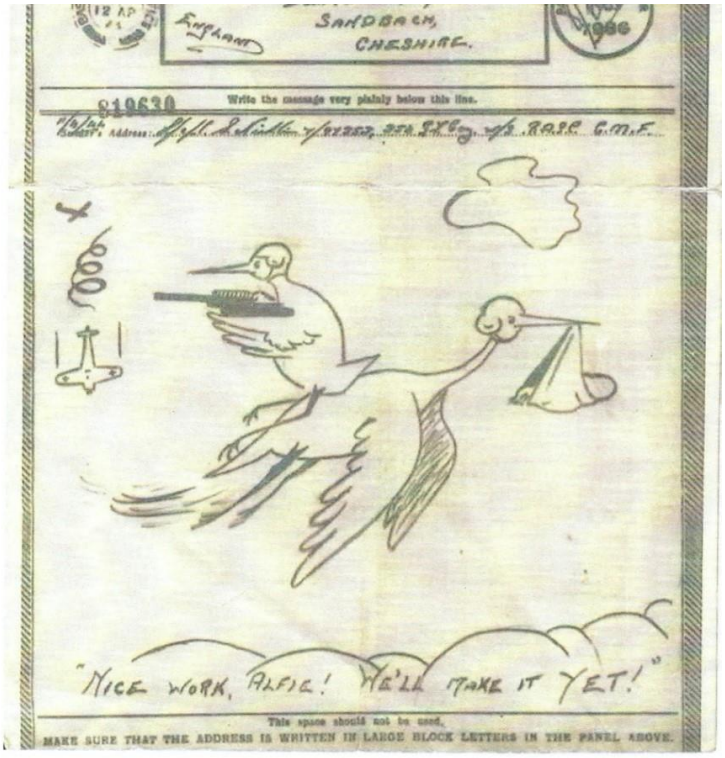
As time went by and the villagers realised that the Germans weren't particularly interested in them, air raid shelters tended to be no longer used. A film now in the National Archives was taken of children at my primary school going into the school's air raid shelters during the war, also lining up books in the playground when there was a book collection in aid of the war effort. The filming took place just before I started school and I was always disappointed I was never allowed to see inside the shelters.

Because my father's parents had a farm we were able to have some extra food from there which helped immensely. Every Christmas my father would put me on the front of his bicycle and go with my mother on her bike to the farm for a Christmas meal. He had made a wooden saddle to fit on the cross bar of his bicycle which I would use until I could ride a bike of my own. One year my uncle had fattened a turkey for Christmas but when it came time to kill it, they couldn't because it had become a family pet.

I think we managed to go on holiday every year as we were able to use a caravan that was parked at Llanddulas in North Wales. My father had made the caravan for his boss and so was able to use it when no-one else needed it. We would travel by train to Abergele, having sent our luggage off in a big trunk in advance. My father only had one week's paid holiday but my mother and I would stay for longer. I remember seeing the large concrete obstacles on the beach to prevent the enemy from landing.

On several occasions my mother took me to Chippenham where her sister and her children lived. My main memory of Bristol station was that it was where I swallowed a plum stone! I also remember the train stopping frequently when air raids were taking place over that city. I used to get bored and tried pressing buttons on the blinds to get the train to move. The trains, like houses, had blackout blinds. One of the highlights of a Christmas visit was a visit to the pantomime in Bath.

The church that my parents went to arranged dances and parties for American servicemen who were billeted nearby and on one occasion I attended. I can remember my father lifting me up and I was asked to pick the most handsome of a line-up of these soldiers. Some of them tried to bribe me with sweets but I resisted. I don't remember who I chose. There were also Italian prisoners of war in the area who I think worked on local farms. Some of them made lovely straw baskets and I really liked the one I was given. In 1944 my brother was born. One of my parents' friends was serving in the army and sent the aerogram pictured below. This friend had been at Dunkirk, but had survived and was still fighting in Europe when he sent the letter. Just before the war he wouldn't get married to his girlfriend as he knew he was going into a dangerous situation; after some time had elapsed his girlfriend married someone else but he unfortunately was killed. After the war the original couple met again, married and lived happily together for many years afterwards.



The aerogramme sent to my parents when my brother was born

My parents heard that the war was about to end in Europe just after I had gone to bed. I heard them talking about it to a neighbour and asked if I could join them as it was a special time, but they didn't agree to my request. This was not the only time I missed out. I very much wanted to hear Winston Churchill speak from the train he was going to spend the night on at a railway siding near to our local station. One of my parents went to hear him but nothing was going to change my bedtime!

For a further account of life elsewhere in England see:

See 8 David Buckle: My life in the early years of the war

Tip: To return to this point hold down ALT and the left arrow on your keyboard.

LIFE IN GERMANY

29. Lorre Stebbings: Life in Germany during the war

Lorre Stebbings was born in Germany and lived there throughout the war. Her family's home was destroyed by bombing and they frequently had to shelter during raids. When the war ended she and her family were often hungry. Lorre married an English soldier after the war and came with him to England.

Annelaure (Lorre) Stebbings was born in Bielefeld, North Rhine-Westphalia, in north-west Germany, on 25 May 1926 and grew up there. As an only child she went to a kindergarten at the age of two because her mother wanted her to be with other children. She started school at the age of six, as was the norm in Germany. Her father was then a chauffeur to a very rich man who owned about six cinemas in the town. This meant that he was abroad in different countries quite often as his boss was involved with the film industry. Her mother didn't work. Lorre went to a Lutheran church Sunday School every week as well as day school.

When Lorre was nine she very nearly died. Like most Germans she lived in a block of flats. An epidemic of diphtheria had spread very quickly because of the close proximity of children living near each other and playing together. The doctors were overrun with cases and, although a doctor had promised to call one afternoon to see Lorre who had a high fever and her throat was swelling, he did not come until the next morning. He rushed her to hospital and gave her an enormous injection. He told her father that without it she had about 20 minutes to live. She thinks that the shock of nearly losing their beloved daughter made her parents decide to have another child and about a year later she had a brother.

Life was very pleasant for Lorre as a child and she was too young to be aware of Hitler. She didn't want to join the Hitler Youth movement as she got older but was pestered to do so. She did eventually but all she did was to sign her name on a piece of paper.

World War Two had begun by the time Lorre finished school at the age of 14. She didn't go to college as only the well-off could afford to do that. So, because it was compulsory, she had to do a year in someone's house before she could get any job. At the start of the war very few women were in full-time work in Germany. Hitler had decreed that their job was to stay at home, and be good housewives and produce as many children as possible. But because of the skills shortage in Germany, a law had been passed in 1937 which meant that women had to do a 'Duty Year'. This meant that they had to work patriotically in a factory or a person's home for a year to help the Nazi's economic revival. In Lorre's case it was helping in a household where there was a large family. She did her year but wasn't happy with the first family she was with. At the end of the year she went to work in what had previously been a suitcase/fine leather factory but was now making armaments. Her work involved putting a stamp on to iron containers for shells. If she had been a big strong girl she would have helped a farmer.

There was rationing and in 1940 the sirens were going off every night because of enemy bombing raids. At that time Lorre's family were living on the edge of the town, but her father's boss had a beautiful flat in town and he encouraged them to move there. Most German houses had a cellar and, when the bombing started, that is where they would go. One afternoon there was severe bombing and Lorre just managed to slide into the cellar. When the raid was finished they left the cellar only to find that their block of flats had completely gone. Her family

was left with nothing apart from a little handbag her mother was carrying. They family were left bewildered and realised that they had to go their separate ways. Lorre's father went to his sister outside the town. Her mother and brother went to another sister of her father and Lorre went to a sister of her mother. This continued for some time, but they remained in contact with each other. The aunt she was staying with dug a trench in the field to go to when the alarm sounded. As they were out in the country there was not so much bombing there, but the city was still being constantly bombed.

The family really wanted to get back together and so when a solicitor friend of her father vacated a flat in the city and offered it to them they moved in. They lived in this flat for a while but were still running almost every night to the cellar. They weren't always bombed but still went to shelter in the cellar when the siren went off. It was very frightening. The family appreciated that the British bomber crews tried to hit set targets. When the Americans entered the war, however, bombing was far more indiscriminate and conditions deteriorated. Sometimes when one raid finished another would begin almost straight away. Lorre's family didn't feel safe in the town so they moved to the outskirts near a mountain inside which was a shelter. They felt they would be safe in there as long as the Americans didn't bomb the shelter's entrances and exits as they had done in Hamburg where hundreds died. They had to run up the mountain when an air raid started. As the raids were coming so often, the family spent every evening as a matter of course in the mountain to avoid having to run up it at the sound of the siren. When the 'all clear' went they would return home.

At the end of 1944 Lorre received a letter telling her to report to a town on the River Ruhr where she would be drafted into an anti-aircraft facility. It upset Lorre to leave her parents again and she cried every day. The US soldiers were moving in from France, and the noise and shooting at night was dreadful. She felt by this time people were wanting the war to end. She was sent on a quick six-week course to train to use Morse Code before being posted with some other girls to where the anti-aircraft guns were so that they could send messages in Morse Code should everything collapse. It was a dangerous place to be and it meant a lot of running to bunkers. They kept being told that the 'Yanks' were coming nearer but that they had to be there with the men underground. She was told to be brave.

The Yanks were moving even closer and early one morning she was told to leave, as the person in charge did not want to be responsible for women being there. Lorre and two girls departed eastwards and went along the autobahn on foot for two days with people giving them occasional lifts. Enemy planes flew low overhead and they had to dive into the embankment about twice a day to avoid them. When she had to leave the autobahn after two days on it, she met an old farmer who felt sorry for her and gave her a lift part of the way to the place where her family had lived near the mountain. It was still there, but her mother and young brother had gone to farms in the country as they had been evacuated. Lorre stayed with a neighbour and was able to get in contact with her father. She walked to the farm to see her mother, who was living in one room with her brother, and joined them there. They cooked in one corner of the room and her brother slept on the floor.

Then the war finished and the US Army came. They thought at first that everyone was a Nazi which wasn't true. Food was in very short supply and Lorre and her family were often hungry. Farmers were still growing food but it didn't go to the shops. Money had depreciated in value and, until the new rate of exchange came in, shops were not opening. Women travelled to the country on a little train each day to the farmers to get work and collect a little food such as a

few eggs or strips of bacon and a bit of flour. Lorre heard that some Yankee soldiers stopped the train in the middle of nowhere and took the food off the women, as they didn't want them going there. She thought it totally wrong as the women had put in a day's hard work for a little bit of food for their families.

The Yanks settled into a big country house before moving south and the area was taken over by the British. Lorre had had private English lessons and this came in handy. Because she spoke English she had various jobs and sometimes worked away from home as an interpreter. The last job was in an office that dealt with army vehicles. Her first husband was the boss and was about to be demobbed. He wanted to marry her and for her to join him in England. She deliberated for some time, but desperation over life in Germany made her decide to go in the hope of a better life.

Lorre got married and lived at first in lodgings at Ely in Cambridgeshire where her husband was a barber. Then a job in Shipston-on-Stour in Warwickshire came up for him which had a flat to go with it, so they moved there. It was not a happy marriage and she was very homesick, but she did have two lovely children. She would have returned to Germany if she could have taken the children and her parents would have welcomed her back. Her husband wouldn't allow them to go and she couldn't make him, as the children had been born in England. She stayed with him as a housekeeper until her children left home. Lorre had another life and happiness for seven years with her second husband until he died in a road crash in about 1984. She missed him terribly. He was a church organist and they loved to go to concerts together, including the Proms in London. They went to Germany for holidays. She lived in Abingdon as a widow for over 30 years. Lorre was a worshipper at Radley Church.

Interviewed by Tony Rogerson on 14 May 2012

ESCAPE FROM GERMANY

30. Wartime experiences of Amatsia Kashti's relatives

Many Radley residents have a story to tell of their family's experiences during World War Two. One is Amatsia Kashti. One set of grandparents were killed by the Nazis, but the other set escaped from Germany with their family including Amatsia's mother, first to Paris and then to Switzerland.

Amatsia's paternal grandfather Ferdinand Bogen (1872-1944) was a travelling salesman in Berlin. On the outbreak of World War One, Ferdinand felt that he had to do his duty to the Kaiser and so volunteered to serve in the German army. The old (aged 42) Jew was promptly kicked out of the recruitment office, but this did not deter him from buying a mule and cart, with which he organised a postal service for Jewish families whose sons served on the Eastern front. For the next four years he was absent from his family, and they suffered poverty and hunger. As a reward for his efforts, Germany killed him 25 years later.

Amatsia's paternal grandparents, Ferdinand and Johanna (1874-1944), and his father's sister Marianne (1911-2010) stayed in Germany after World War One. His aunt, however, managed in 1939 to get a visa to be a nanny in Britain as she was a qualified Montessori kindergarten nurse. She became a teacher and died in London in 2010 aged nearly a hundred. When World War Two broke out, Amatsia's grandparents escaped to Holland and stayed with members of their family. They lived there in semi-hiding until 1944 when, in their seventies and in poor health, they were put together with 50 other Jews in a cattle wagon on a train going to Auschwitz. There is no record of their arrival there and it is likely that they did not survive the journey, which could have lasted up to two weeks.

When their son, Franz (1909-1994), Amatsia's father, finished his law studies in 1932, the Nazis were already in power and anti-Semitic legislation restricted how he practised his profession. He recounted that, when he was sitting one day in court as a junior judge, with cape and all, the senior judge turned to him and said: 'Dear colleague, today I saw them hitting Jews at the entrance to the building and I would advise you to leave through the back door'. From that moment on he couldn't stay to listen to the proceedings and made two decisions. First, he was going to leave from the back door and second, he was going to emigrate to Palestine as soon as possible.

Palestine had been a British territory mandated by the League of Nations since 1929, following the first Arab uprising known by the Jews as 'The Riots'. To emigrate there people were required to produce a certificate proving that they had a profession that was needed in the colony – and a judge in Germany was not one of those professions. So Franz took a two-year apprenticeship in plumbing and obtained his diploma, which enabled him to obtain an immigration certificate. As the certificate he obtained was for a couple, he married a fellow Jew who also wanted to emigrate in Berlin Town Hall so that she could go too. When they arrived in Palestine in 1934 they went to Jaffa Town Hall and got a divorce.

On arrival in Palestine, Franz was one of the founders of a kibbutz in Jezreel Valley (now in northern Israel). However, he soon discovered that he was not destined to be a plumber and so he became an administrator in the kibbutz. His first genuine wife, Hanni (1912-1950), had trained as a nurse in a TB hospital in Holland in order to qualify for entry to Palestine, but while at the hospital she too contracted TB. Before dying she was in a sanatorium in Switzerland.

To be able to visit her, Amatsia's father got work in the Israeli Foreign Office and was sent to Holland. He visited her in Switzerland each month until her death in 1950.

When changing trains in Paris on the way to Switzerland one time Franz stopped off to visit a family living in Paris who had left Switzerland after the war. Here he met the woman who was to become his second wife and Amatsia's mother. Amatsia was born in Paris in 1952, but within a year the family went to Israel to live.

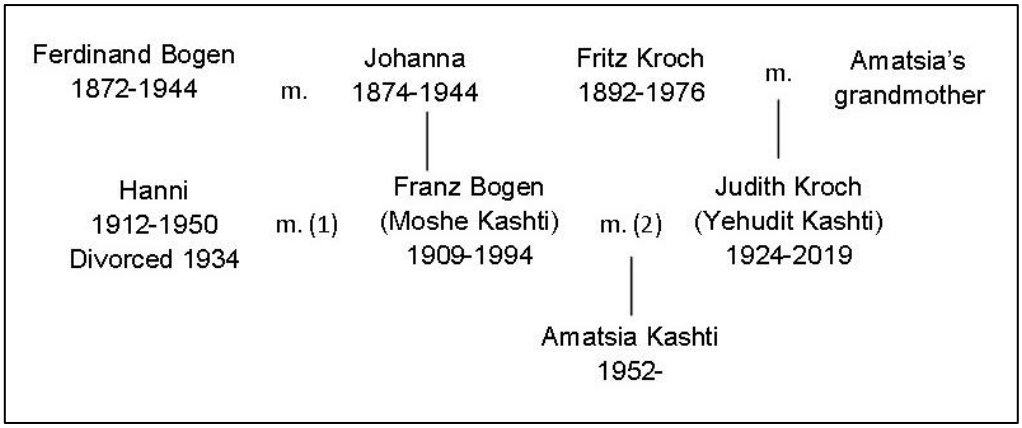
Amatsia's mother Judith (1924-2019) came from a wealthy family in Leipzig who owned a bank and had a property empire. With the rise of the Nazis to power, and even after Kristallnacht (Night of the Broken Glass) in 1938, the family believed that their fortune would shield them from any harm and that the nightmare regime would soon be over. However, when the war broke out they were all incarcerated and only released on condition that they signed over their wealth to the German Reich. They did so and decided to escape individually and then meet up in Paris. The family dispersed to Holland, Belgium, France, Switzerland and Italy, and reunited eventually as planned, on the outskirts of Paris.

In France they thought they would be protected but it was not to be. When the Germans invaded France the family escaped by foot and by horse and cart towards a village in the Free France zone controlled by the Vichy Government. Twenty-five years earlier, Amatsia's maternal grandfather, Fritz Kroch (1892-1976), had become a friend of a French Jew, Felix Goldschmidt (1898-1966). When he saw that France was at risk, Felix bought a small cottage on the outskirts of a small village deep in central France called Mézières-en-Brenne as a possible refuge. There Amatsia's grandparents with his great-grandmother and four children met Felix, his wife and four children and here both families (13 people) stayed for a year and a half.

The entire village knew of the Jewish family and kept it secret. The mayor even managed to save food vouchers to feed them. One night a village policeman cycled over and told them to get ready quickly and escape because at dawn a German truck would be rounding them up and deporting them. That night the family ran to a faraway vineyard of a local friendly farmer and hid in a hut for two weeks before fleeing east to Switzerland. By various means, and with many complications, they made their way there and were put in a refugee camp. At one point on their escape route the notorious Klaus Barbie, who was chief of Gestapo Department IV in Lyon, put some of them in prison. His nickname was the butcher of Lyon. Fortunately, all the family managed to get away.

Once Amatsia's family was in Israel, Franz Bogen became Moshe Kashti (the translation of Bow from German to Hebrew) and worked for the Defence Ministry for the rest of his career until his retirement. Judith (pronounced Yehudit in Hebrew) worked as a medical secretary in a large hospital. When she retired, she bought a computer and wrote down the story of her escape from Germany. She wrote it in German and it was translated to English ('Running for Survival'), Hebrew and French.

After Amatsia's father died, the family added the names of his parents to his memorial gravestone, as they were never buried.



Simplified family tree of Amatsia Kashti

To celebrate his 60th birthday Amatsia decided to retrace the route his mother had taken to Switzerland by walking the route. His son accompanied him for part of the way. His mother was still alive and was able to keep in contact with him by email and reminisce about places Amatsia was calling at on his journey – making it a reflective time for Amatsia.

In 2017 Amatsia and his cousins contributed to the construction of a monument, 'The Fountain of Liberty', in Mézières-en-Brenne's market square to commemorate the village's help in saving his mother's family, and in particular Thérèse and Henri Morissé, the farmer and his wife who hid the family in their vineyard. The Kashti family arranged for the Morissé descendants to receive the medal of Righteous Among Nations from the Yad-Vashem Holocaust museum in Jerusalem, a medal awarded to non-Jews who risked their lives saving Jews. This was done in a formal ceremony attended by French and Israeli officials as well as representatives from Yad Vashem (The World Holocaust Remembrance Center) and 14 members of the family.

De Leipzig a Mézières-en-Brenne: Histoire d'un episode de la vie de deux familles et de leur rencontre improbable [From Leipzig to Mézières-en-Brenne: the story of an episode in the life of two families and their unlikely encounter]

The image was taken from a YouTube video of part of display at the fountain's inauguration in 2017.

Interviewed by Tony Rogerson on 11 April 2013