

Rising brook writers

WARtime memories collected in 2007 – published in 2008



Project supported by grant aid from



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SPECIAL THANKS TO:

Jane Wells: SBC CultureGen
 Nick Corder: Workshop Leader
 SCC's YOUR LIBRARY Team at Rising Brook Branch Library
 All the Senior Citizen/Over 50s organisations which took part.

PUBLISHED BY:

Rising Brook Writers

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First Edition

ISBN 978-0-9557086-0-2

www.myspace.com/risingbrookwriters

www.risingbrookwriters.btik.com

RCN: 1117227

RBW is a voluntary charitable trust.

Community Workshops taking part in this recording of a slice of social history were:

Hall close Monday club, stafford

Colwich community room, colwich

Age concern: Shakespeare Road CENTRE,
 highfields, Stafford

OULTON GOOD COMPANIONS, OULTON, STONE

Retired NHS Workers fellowship , WESTON ROAD, STAFFORD

Sandon PARISH ROOM Workshop, SANDON

Rising brook library workshop

STAFFORD REMEMBERS:

This themed anthology is a collection of personal reminiscence of life in the 1940s/50s as told by local people to our research team. Senior citizens are a valuable resource, which should be greatly treasured, as their collective memory reveals a fascinating slice of social history in vivid detail.

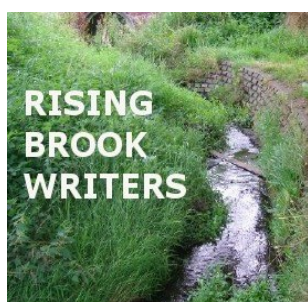
Rising Brook Writers are, in the main, not seasoned authors, but rather mature students who enjoy creative writing for the pleasure of self-expression. Stafford Remembers, a community outreach workshop project, was led by the author, Nick Corder, writer in residence for Stoke on Trent Library Services. Stafford Remembers is the third publication by RBW.

RBW was sponsored by grant/in kind aid from Awards For All, Stafford Borough Council, The Co-operative Bank, and SCC's Your Library in 2007-08. Rising Brook Writers was formed in 2005 at Rising Brook Branch Library, Stafford.

Our first book, Tales From The Gaiety, a Music Hall anthology, received sponsorship and/or assistance from Age Concern, SCC YOUR Library, Stafford Borough Council and CultureGen. The second anthology, Tales Of The Supernatural, was published in 2007.

RBW are members of Stafford District Arts Council and Stafford District Voluntary Services.

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Sharing Our Memories

Winifred Davis - Monday Club

I had children during the war. One was born in 1942 and the other just when the war was finishing. We also had an evacuee called Doris, a quiet, well-behaved child, who came to stay with us. She came from Margate or somewhere on the South Coast. My neighbour also took in an evacuee and when I had my first child, Doris moved in next door.

There was an air-raid shelter shared by the two gardens. My husband and our neighbour dug it out and built it properly, with a place for you to sleep. It's still there, but you can't get to it now through my garden. We didn't really have to go in it very often - the siren would go off and we'd take a flask of tea and hide away in there, but it only ever happened about three times.

At the same time, the Air Force and the Navy were coming round looking for spare rooms in which to billet their personnel, so if we hadn't had an evacuee, we'd have probably had a serviceman. The lady next door to me went to Scotland whilst the war was on and they let their house out to the Services.

My husband was a voluntary fireman, but when all the bombing happened in Birmingham and Coventry, he had to join the fire service. Later, he was sent to Dartington in Devon to help building the ships up for the Americans with the preparations for D-Day, although we didn't realise it was D-Day at the time, of course. He managed to get various things off the Americans, such as sweets and even a set of curtains which I made into blackout blinds.

I was standing in the kitchen, looking out of the window, where there are a lot of trees when they dropped the bomb on English Electric. The bomber shot out of the trees and made me jump, although I could only see the back end of it. English Electric wasn't far away and they were involved in making materials for the war. The bomb didn't go off on landing and the bomb squad had to detonate it under a controlled explosion. I heard it explode as I was going into town on the bus.

Lillian Hengerty - Monday Club

When the war started I was 24. My husband, Bob, failed his medical because he had a bad heart and he worked on the grinding wheel at Universal. I was heavily pregnant, so my daughter Shirley was a real war-baby. She was born at the end of the month that war broke out

and the midwife had to deliver her during the blackout.

I was making 'con rods' (rods that connect the piston to the crank, or crankshaft, of an engine) for Alvis Motors. Alvis rented some big garages opposite the Lotus factory in Stafford, but Lotus wanted them back later, so we were moved out to work in Mill Street in Stone.

Alvis's headquarters were in Coventry. I remember hearing that Coventry had been raided on the radio. Many Alvis workers had to leave the area because they'd been bombed out of their houses. The company needed to billet them elsewhere.

I had a Mrs. Madeley and her daughter Evelyn who came to live with me. I was given a sort of rent-book and an allowance of ten shillings a week.

Audrey Partington - Monday Club

During the war, I lived in a place called Shaw, near Manchester. I worked in a mill office. I got fifteen shillings in my first pay packet and I must have given it to my mother, who would then have given me a couple of shillings back. We called this "odd money". I used to spend whatever cash I had on sweets and the pictures. There were two cinemas in Shaw, so we used to go to the pictures twice a week, when the programme changed.

During the 1940 Manchester Blitz, we were in Church and whilst the soloist was singing "Silent Night", the siren sounded and we had to go down into the crypt for safety. Before the blitz was over, I had to walk home and, unbelievably, it didn't worry me at all.

They were probably trying to bomb the armaments factory near Shaw and, of course in Manchester, the big target was the docks. I think they must have mistaken one of the big mill buildings for the armaments factory, because they ended up bombing one of the mills.

My father sometimes used to say "I think we'll go down the shelter". He always seemed to know when there was going to be a raid on. Earlier, I'd had to do some night-watching myself, but nothing ever happened.

In 1943, I married a boy that I met at the Church. Robert worked in the office of a textiles company and was unfit to serve, so he used to act as an ARP warden. He worked in a mill called "The Rome Mill" and one of the bombs had knocked the "R" off the big sign that ran down the length of the chimney, so for years it always said "ome Mill".

Lilian Jones - Monday Club

I was busy during the War. I already had one child before the War started, one at the start and two more during it.

Rationing was dreadful and feeding a large family was difficult. We used to put condensed milk in our tea, because I couldn't drink it unless it was sweet. Powdered milk was dreadful and you ended up being sick of Spam. Now and again we had an egg each and we used to give ours to the children, because there was never enough to eat

My husband, George, was a nurse, but he was called up for the Medical Corps. Originally he was supposed to be posted to Wall in Devon, but he didn't have to go in the end and they stationed him in the Midlands, covering Coventry and Birmingham, looking after bomb victims. Every time a siren went off, he was there.

We lived in Coronation Road when they were building 16 MU, which then became a potential target for German raids.

One day, I'd got the baby in a pram in the garden and an aeroplane came thundering over the back-gardens, strafing everything in sight. It didn't drop a bomb, just fired its machine-guns. Then the Ak-Ak started up and it soared off back to Germany.

When I went out to inspect the garden later, there were bullet-holes in the fence.

Elisabeth Morrison - Monday Club

I was born in Stafford, as was my mother. Her father was a warden officer at Stafford Prison.

I was 14 when war broke out. We lived in Pitt Street and I was the only Roman Catholic child in the street. I wasn't allowed to play with the Protestants and vice versa, so I was one on my own.

I decided that they had more fun at their school, so one day I just went to their school instead of mine and sat on a long bench at the back. No-one knew I was there until the Priest found out and he came to the house to tell my Dad, who threatened me with a good hiding if I ever did it again.

When I was a bit older, we all used to go dancing at the Borough Hall. It was here that I met the man who was to become my husband, Bill, although everyone else knew him as Jock. He was stationed at 16MU. I went out with him for a while and then he was sent off to Burma and I thought "oh, well I probably won't see him again", but I went up to Scotland to visit his mother because she'd written to me.

When he came on leave, he came to our house first before he went up to Scotland to see his mother.

We got married at the Registry Office in Perth in 1946 when he was still in the RAF. When she heard about it, one of the Nuns took hold of both my hands and looked me in the eyes and said "You are not married in the eyes of the Lord". We had two daughters and they got to make their own minds up about religion!

Joan Chalklin - Monday Club

The woman at the Labour Exchange could have let me go to a better paid job that I had lined up at an armaments factory, but I ended up being interviewed to work for REME (Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers). The officer who interviewed me must have assumed that I wanted a job in the office, because all my previous work had been office-based, but I said that if I was going to work there, I wanted to be in the factory. I wanted to do war work, I was fed up with being in an office. I ended up working for REME for about two years.

So, towards the end of the war I found myself in bib and braces on the factory floor. My job was to water-proof tanks. Obviously, with hindsight, we were working towards the invasion, although I have to confess that being only 18 at the time, I was entirely naive and I never worked out entirely what we were doing.

I worked on two types of tanks - the British Churchill Tank and the American Sherman Tank. We had to make a canvas construction held in place by inflatable struts at intervals around the tanks. The canvas rose up with the struts and created sides around the tank, so that it almost had its own little built-in boat.

These tanks were secret, but other tanks didn't have to be kept under wraps, so we used to have to take them out on test drives all along country roads and if it was a nice day, we'd sit up on the turret. Since then, I've seen film of D-day on television and I don't think that the water-proofing was that successful and I understand that a lot of them just sank.

After the war, I went back to office work, at the Ordnance Depot next door. In the end, I'm quite glad I did go to work for REME, because it was a great experience, even if we weren't very well paid.

Anne Longthorne - Monday Club

We lived in Leeds during the war. My husband tried to enlist, but he was told that his eye-sight was too poor. He had a driving licence for just about every kind of vehicle on the road, so they said that he might be useful come the invasion. He went into what would have been a reserve occupation, building Halifax Bombers. He was disappointed,

because at school he'd been in the Officer Training Corps, but they just wouldn't have him.

All during the war, he used to do jobs for all kinds of people and always took payment in goods - usually food or clothing. This meant that we were well looked-after by the standards of the time. At the beginning of the war, my two children, Hedley and Alexandra were very small, so we needed all the help we could get.

Later, when the children were a bit older, I got a part-time job inspecting parachutes. I'd go to the factory and check the knots and the seams of a sample of the parachutes they made. I was given a list of what I had to do and could fit the work in around the children's school-times.

One night, they bombed the street where we lived. The siren went off whilst the children were in bed. I carried them down to the air-raid shelter and put Alexandra in the cot in there and Hedley on the mattress. The aeroplane circled round the church at the top of the street and then came down the road and dropped its bombs. It did it five times. Whilst all this was going on, I played the gramophone that we had out there, so they didn't hear anything.

Gwen Creek - Monday Club

I was in the ATS and was posted all over the country, including York, Anglesey, Devizes, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Hyde Park, Buckhurst Hill and ended up in Bridlington

We worked on the Ak-Ak guns as a height-finder. There were three of us working on a big, long instrument and we all had to read off measurements and call them out to someone, who then did all the calculations. I had to focus on the aeroplanes.

Whilst we were in Plymouth in 1942, we did a lot of firing, because they were bombing the docks. We were at Seaton Barracks and divided into different sections. One half of our battery was based at Home Park, Plymouth Argyle's Football Ground. We shot some planes down, but you don't know if it's your gun or another gun that has done the damage.

I don't think we even earned as much as 10 shillings a week and the only time I ever managed to save any money was after I got married.

I met my husband when he was in the Royal Artillery. We married when he was on embarkation leave, when he was posted abroad and fought in Italy at the Battle of Monte Casino. One day I got a telegram to say that he was missing presumed dead. Of course, it was terrible, but then I got a letter - he'd been captured and was a Prisoner of War.

I used to get short letters from him at the prison camp, where he was held near Munich and I sent him parcels, but the Germans used to split the parcels up and stick things into the tins, which often made the contents inedible.

After the war, when he was released, he was given a fortnight's leave and then sent straight back to Germany. From when we got married until he came back from being a PoW, I hardly saw anything of him.

Ellen Gifford - Monday Club

I was eighteen. I was working on munitions and you had to assemble the components from a little tray. We were making shells and bullets and other small explosive devices. One day, as I put my hand into the tray, one of the devices I was working on went off.

It was a mess. The foreman took me to a nurse and then the First Aid Station, but it was obviously too bad for them to do anything about it, so they called for the ambulance and I was taken to North Staffs Infirmary.

My father was working the night shift in the same factory and when he arrived at work, they told him what had happened. Of course he was shocked. They rushed him over to the hospital. I didn't get home till about midnight and when my mother saw my hand, she fainted.

To begin with, they just bandaged my hand up and, after a couple of weeks, they decided that they would have to amputate the tips of a finger and part of my thumb. I was off work for a year and when I went back I didn't work on munitions. They gave me a different job in the print room.

I never had a penny in compensation.

John Martin - Monday Club

I left school at fourteen and went straight into farming. I was paid £12/10 shillings (£12.50) for the whole year, although my bed-and-board was all found. I had to get up at 6.00 every morning and take out the pigs, horses and cows and muck them out. Then you went in the house for your breakfast. It was always a cooked breakfast to see you through a long morning. I used to be really pleased if one of my eggs had two yolks in it.

You'd work from about 7 o'clock in the morning through till around 3.30 in the afternoon, when the farmer's wife would send out a bottle of tea and maybe some egg and bacon sandwiches. Milking, of

course, was done by hand. And at hay-making time, you'd be working till ten at night, cutting the hay.

It was nearly all horse-work in those days. You used to harness up the horses according to the job you had to do. For deep ploughing, or if the roads were badly rutted, or it was especially muddy, you might have to use two pairs of horses. It was rare to see a tractor in those days.

I'd only be about 15 when the war started and I worked on several different farms around Goole. One of the farms I worked at was hit by incendiary bombs. Hull was a common target, but sometimes they used to offload their bombs anywhere. Luckily, the day they bombed Goole, I was away at Pontefract Races, so I never got to see what happened.

Later on, we began to get prisoners-of-war working on the farms. There were Italians and Germans and the Italians used to sing bits of opera whilst they were working around the farm.

Lillian Turner - Monday Club

I come from Malvern in Worcestershire. Out there, we didn't see too much of the war itself, although we had one or two bombs.

At the start of the war, I worked as a domestic for a solicitor. I must have been about nineteen. There were two of us servants, but I lived in and had to do very long hours, the evening meal went on till 10 o'clock. We shared the household jobs and I was cooking, although I'd never cooked before, I grew to love it. In early 1940 to get married and because they wanted someone to live in, I left.

My husband was always looking to make money. He ran taxis, so he always had a petrol ration. He started a garage early on in the war and a snack-bar for me to run. That was hard work, especially with all the rationing. We never got a meat ration for the snack-bar. I used to make the most awful cottage pies with pork luncheon meat - it was entirely tasteless.

I would make jellies from squash and the Americans used to swallow them in one go. How the Americans managed to drink the coffee, I'll never know. It was chicory essence and disgusting. They were very good, and used to bring food from the cook-house and packets of lard and so on, which was a little bit naughty. I lived in constant fear of the Ministry of Food who never wore uniforms when they inspected.

Geoffrey Lyons - RBW Library Workshop
Stafford: Sound-bites from the local papers

1951 - Festival of Britain year started with a blizzard. The Call-Up for national service was brought forward to Feb and May. Bagnalls were recruiting boys as indentured apprentices for production of a new engine. Men's two piece suits cost £6.00 at Weaver to Wearers. The sod cutting ceremony for the new St Patrick's Church took place. There were vacancies in the shoe trade; both Lotus and the Gainsborough Works were taking on. Korean War: Stafford's first casualty died. RAF Stafford began a waste paper campaign for 'valuable salvage'.

1952 - Former Mayor, Alderman Owen received an OBE. Good progress was made on the Infirmary extension. Greater Stafford 20 year plan; 6,430 extra homes. The Royal Brine Baths increased its charges: Adult Swim up to 9d, Child 4d, Visitor 3d, Towel Hire 2d, Soap 1d and a café was opened. Stafford's farewell parade to the old King took place in February headed by the High Sheriff and the Mayor. In mid June it was announced that Stafford was still a boom town for jobs

Edith Holland - RBW Library Workshop

'THE WAR EFFORT' was the mantra.

It was echoed on every possible occasion from scraping on and off the national standard margarine, to how much wool we could buy for knitting comforts for the troops.

My husband was posted to RAF Hednesford in 1943. He found lodgings for us with kind people who prudently kept pigs. This meant there was always home-made lard for toast and cooking, faggots, liver and scratchings all without ration books.

Once when Jack had a seven day leave, we went off by rail from Cannock to Corwen along with our tandem heading for North Wales, hoping to get bed and breakfast along the way. Our first stop was Porth Madog and found us searching for food off ration. Eventually, we sat on the stony beach of Criccieth hacking at a small Hovis loaf, while trying to spread fish-paste with a penknife, followed by two small apples each. What a laugh that adventure has always been, but, we were glad to return to our friends and the pigs.

Steph Spiers - RBW Library Workshop:

Stafford, early 1950s: "There was a butcher's shop on Bull Hill near the Elephant and Castle, (where the traffic island is now on Gaolgate) every week I used to queue, holding my mother's hand, for half a pound of pork dripping. The dripping was kept in metal bowls in the window and was weighed out onto greaseproof paper with a wooden spoon. The dark brown jelly was the best part, spread thickly onto doorstep slices of bread, toasted on an open fire and sprinkled with salt. Heaven on a plate."

"Italian prisoners of war used to work on lots of the farms around Stafford. German prisoners also worked on local farms. They wore grey uniforms with coloured patches on their jackets."

Highfields

"Land army girls did forestry as well. It was dangerous work. A girl I knew almost cut her arm off with a band saw when she was working cutting timber." Oulton

Edith Holland - RBW Library Workshop

Knitting for a serviceman was an on-going job, done with love and a sense of helping 'THE WAR EFFORT'.

Wool was on coupons of course; so when we had coupons and the wool shop had some stock in, we were able to make scarves, balaclavas, mittens and socks. However, my scarf for a sailor ended up in eight or nine different shades of navy-blue as the yarn was bought one ounce at a time. The shop keeper had no option but to impose her own rationing system.

The scarf had a long and useful life even so, firstly round the neck of that sailor - later my husband - then for the children in winter, ending as a dog's bed long after war-time.

There was one way of knitting without using coupons, that was with oiled wool; available sometimes for making sea-boot socks for men on arctic convoy duties. It was difficult to use being course and smelling of sheep; it made our fingers sore. The strangest thing I knitted was a pair of mittens in rug wool. They were bright orange and as thick as a rug to wear. But, waiting for a bus at 6.30am on a winter morning, who cared about the look of them, at least I didn't have frost-bite!

Barbara Sherriff - Colwich

I worked as an office junior at GEC at Witton in Birmingham, starting there when I was just 14. It was here that I met my husband, Eric, who was in a reserved occupation, making armature windings for electric motors, which were vital for the war effort.

A lot of war-time weddings were very much make-do-and-mend, but somehow or other, we didn't do too badly and had a big family wedding.

The ceremony was at a Church at Erdington (Birmingham). In those days, we didn't have any children under five years old there, just in case they were unruly.

I was married during the War and the material for the dress had to be bought using coupons that we got from all sorts of people. They all clubbed together to help buy the material and my Mother made the dress.

One of my uncles arranged a dance band for the reception. I still remember them playing "Charlie is my darling".

Peter Pinckney - Colwich

We lived close to the docks in Southampton. Anything they dropped that missed the docks hit us, so my parents and relatives never waited for sirens before we got into the shelter.

Somehow, they always seemed to know when there was going to be a raid, so we'd pile into the shelter with big bottles of water, food, blankets and pillows. There were another two shelters at the top of the road. One was partly underneath a shop and one was in a small square.

One night, the shop was bombed and the entrance to the shelter caved in. My mother pushed me out through the hole shouting "Get out! Get out!" Outside, the sky, the houses, the street and the ground were all bright red from the fires. I wasn't at all scared, I thought it was brilliant, so my mother half-dragged, half-lifted me to safety. She'd been paid that day and during all this she dropped her wage packet. Everyone went looking for it.

I stopped outside my school and watched its roof burning. My Uncle Bill, who was a decorated Naval hero from the Great War and now too old to serve, heard a lady screaming from the top of a building. He vaulted over the railings to save her and put his hand on top of the one of the spikes on the fence and it went straight through his hand.

I used to collect the casings from the incendiary bombs and bits

of shrapnel, which us boys used to swap amongst ourselves.

It got so dangerous, that the whole of our extended family decided to move to Bournemouth. Until we got our own places, we all went to live in a 3-bedroomed house, where the landlady already had a husband and two sons. We all slept on the floors. It seemed a great adventure to me. My grandfather stayed behind, though. He worked on the docks as a crane operator and it was so far down for him out of his cab, that he used to stay up there during the raids. He was lying in bed one night and the roof was blown off his house and he found himself lying there, looking up at the sky.

When we all got home from Bournemouth, we found that our house had been looted.

Jennie Eagle - Colwich

My mother made me leave school at 14. I went to work at the Kodak Factory in Birmingham. I paid all my wages over to her and she then allowed me to keep enough for my bus fares to and from work.

I loved to go dancing and would go to the local hop. I loved all the dances - the foxtrot, the waltz and the rumba, although I don't remember when the jive came in.

If you were lucky, your date would pay for you to go in. If I was unlucky, I'd have to walk all the way home, having used my bus fare to get into the dance.

On one occasion, I managed to double-book myself for a date. I'd arranged to meet one lad at the dance-hall, but forgot that another was coming to the house to collect me. When he got to our house, I wasn't there and when my Mother found out what I had done, she was furious and gave me a real ear-full.

Norman Shrehorn - Colwich

I was a lad of 14 when I started work on the 14th August 1939. The week before I started work, my Dad took the family for a holiday in Glasgow. He was a railwayman, so he got free tickets.

I got a job at Dormans, where they made diesel engines. There was plenty of work at the time and they offered me two jobs - one in the foundry and one in the erecting shop. I took one look at the foundry and with all the dust and heat, it was like walking into the gates of hell, so I took the job in the erecting shop.

You used to start at 8.00 and finish at 5.00 and then when you were older, you did overtime to get the money in. I started work as an errand boy, which I did for about 12-18 months, until I managed to

convince a gang leader that I was a good lad to have as an apprentice. One of my jobs was to go round the site at dusk, shutting the enormous steel shutters on the windows for the black-out.

If I remember rightly, when I started, my weekly wage was 10/6d (52 ½ pence), which my Mother took, giving me back sixpence a week pocket money, which I'd spend at the pictures. On a Monday night the Sandonia was like a madhouse. All the Monday film-goers were regulars and knew each other - there was shouting and throwing stuff. People seemed to know each other more than. None of us had got much, but we didn't have a yobbish attitude

I also used to buy cigarettes and started smoking when I was 14, because everyone else did and you were pretending to be grown up. You could buy 3 cigarettes out of a machine for about a penny. When my Dad caught me, he gave me the belt.

I was never a great dancer, but at around this time I used to go roller-skating. Up on the Common there were clubs that the salt factories ran and one of them had a roller-skating rink.

Some of the lads soon discovered a bit of a racket for pulling in some extra pocket money. Some of the workmen were commandeered to do fire-watching duty at Dormans at the weekend, which they didn't particularly like doing. The lads organised a little syndicate where we did it for them, charging about 2/- to 2/6d. It was great for us - we just sat in the huts playing darts and drinking tea.

After the war had started, working at Dormans automatically meant that your service in the Armed Forces could be deferred. In 1941, I became a bound apprentice, which I did for seven years. As soon as I finished my apprenticeship at the age of 21, I joined the Army. I had missed the War, but ended up in Palestine.

Jessie Thomas - Colwich

The day war was declared I was playing in the garden of my Aunt Gladys and Uncle Jim in Barkers Butts Lane in Coventry. I had had some kind of nervous problem - at the time they called it St Vitus's Dance - and my mother was having problems after giving birth to my little brother. They thought it was going to be good for me, because Aunty Gladys was childless and would be happy to look after me.

The day before the Coventry bombing, I persuaded my Aunt to go shopping in Coventry so I could buy a present for my mother. We went up to the fifth floor of Woolworths in Coventry and bought a plaster dog.

My Aunt and Uncle lived in an end maisonette. There was a

flight of concrete stairs adjoining the maisonette with a cupboard underneath, which we used as a shelter. My Aunt had planned everything - she had a little cooker in there, flasks already made up - and we had to take cover in there during the Coventry blitz.

Uncle Jim was a voluntary fireman and we just didn't see him for two days. Now I'm older, I realise how awful it must have been for her, not knowing what had happened to him.

When it was all-clear, my Aunt wanted to know if the local Co-op was still standing. I honestly can't remember if it was or not, because there was so much devastation. There were people still lying on the pavement covered in sheets, waiting to be removed. The Cathedral had gone, as had Corporation Street shops. In a very short time, there were tin shacks in Corporation Street housing temporary shops.

My father had seen the bombings from our home in Warley, part of Smethwick, but he couldn't get through for several days. As soon as the Coventry Road was open again, he came and took me back home. I hadn't been at school for about 12 months because I'd been ill.

Fortunately, when I did eventually get back to school, I managed to stay in the A-stream. I was going to stay until I was fifteen - it was the first year you could stay on beyond 14. I was doing book-keeping and short-hand, training up for secretarial work, but I never got to finish it, as my dad lost his job and my Mother made me leave school to get a job.

My first job was at a coal merchant's. I used to have to blag it. I only had six months' shorthand, but fortunately I could write quite quickly, so when the boss dictated letters, I was able to do little bits of short-hand and fill in the rest with rapid long-hand. I was on 22/6d a week, but it went up to £1/5s. Eventually, I went to be a telephonist with the GPO and then I was on a massive £3 per week.

John McCormick - Colwich

We lived near Milford Haven during the War. There was an armament depot, where my Dad worked. They made mines, sinkers and depth charges. On the other side of the estuary was the Naval dockyard Pembroke Dock, so the area was a bit of a target for German raids.

There was a barrage balloon and Mother used to make bread puddings for the RAF lads who were stationed there and I would run up the field with it to give it to them.

We had a small-holding in a tiny village of around a dozen houses. Mother used to look after our few cows, pigs and chickens. It was my job to take a hand-truck and go door-to-door, collecting the peelings to feed the pigs. When one was slaughtered, everyone was

repaid by having a slice of the pig.

I didn't notice if we went short during the war, as mother used to make cheese and butter. We also had apple trees in the garden. There was a chap in the village who used to have some kind of job with the fish-buyers. So, we used to barter our stuff for fish.

I was just five years old in the first year of the war and started school in the December of the first year of the war. My first teacher was a Miss Folland, then you had Mr Maynard. Gordon Parry, who taught some of the older children, went on to become an MP, but is dead now.

I was a good lad at school. I remember reciting the times tables, but I also seem to remember that a lot of our time was spent practising putting the gas-mask on, filing in a crocodile into the air-raid shelter, which looked like a flat-roofed brick bungalow. The back wall was built of loose bricks built into sand. There was a lever you could pull if you were trapped, so that the sand fell away and you could push out the bricks.

Joyce Taylor - Colwich

I'd just had a new baby brother when the war started. I was about seven years old when things began to hit home, as I was the one who had to do all the queuing. You had to queue for everything, everywhere. I queued at the green-grocer's, the butcher's, the baker's - wherever. By the time I'd gone out to run a few errands, having got the various coupons off my Mum, I was shattered.

My Dad had a big map of the world on the wall. He followed each army's progress by moving different coloured pins. So when the news came on, he hushed everyone so that he could keep it up-to-date.

Our shelter was essentially a coal chute in the cellar. The concrete block outside it had a huge "S" painted on it, which meant that we had a stirrup pump, should anyone need it.

My husband, Gordon - whom I met much later - came from the Radford area of Coventry. They had a Morrison shelter and during the terrible air-raid that flattened Coventry, they all dived under the table. His mother was down at the local fish and chip shop, where she worked. His father was an air-raid warden and the church at Radford was blown to smithereens, killing many of the people, including children, who were in church at the time.

When the air-raid was over, the explosions had blown out all the doors, and blown in all the windows. He gazed out through what had been the doorway and the row of houses opposite had been flattened.

But far worse than this, he could now see right the way to where the sweet shop had stood. It had been demolished and from his child's eye view, this was far more upsetting to him than any the loss of the houses and people.

Dorothy Ives - Colwich

I was working at English Electric on the day the German aeroplanes dropped the bombs there. It was the 9th October 1940. I was working in the clerical department, so I sheltered under my desk. I admit I felt both frightened and excited - one moment I was sitting at my desk and the next I was hiding under it, which is what we were told to do.

After the first bomb went off, everything was covered in dust and plaster. We all picked ourselves up and went back to work, but we were told that a second bomb had landed, but had failed to go off. There was no time to get into the shelters, so when the Army came to blow it up, we had to brace ourselves against the wall and hope for the best.

My husband-to-be was in what was later called the REME (Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers) and had been in the Army from the first day of the War. He was stationed on the South Coast, maintaining search-lights. Later he dealt with people who had been bombed out in Eastbourne, but was back home on leave in Stafford when the bombs dropped on English Electric. He said he thought he had left all the bombing behind him in the south. My future mother-in-law actually saw the bombs as they fell out of the belly of the plane.

Steph Spiers – RBW Library Workshop

Stafford 1950s: Everyone had a Co-op Divvy number. Every time mum bought groceries at the Co-op she would recite her Divvy number. This meant a copper or two would be recorded on a ticket and the 'Membership Dividend' could be claimed back. A bit like reward points today. I can still remember her number: 14624. Woe betide me if I forgot to say it to the lady at the Co-op when I was sent on an errand to the shops.

Mary Fitzpatrick - Shakespeare Road Workshop

My husband, James, and I worked for the Admiralty during the war. I did some filing and James was involved in ship building. All through the war, we lived in Bath in a Georgian townhouse that had been converted into flats.

They used to bomb Bristol, because of the docks, but on this

night they seemed to have made their minds up to bomb Bath. I don't know if the Abbey was the target, but it got scarred a bit and some of the windows were blown in.

I was heavily pregnant at the time. During air-raids, we used to have to go down into the cellar, which served as an underground shelter.

They dropped incendiary bombs and we could smell smoke coming in from the house next door, so we had to get out of the shelter as well. We ran out and were sitting out in the open fields. We heard the whistling of another bomb and my husband turned to me and said "This is for us." Luckily, it dropped just a few yards away from us. It didn't hit us, but big lumps of earth flew out of the ground and where the bombs fell in the next field, there were lots of cows killed.

We had to stay two nights in a communal hall, then friends from the Admiralty took us in for a while before we managed to find a flat. We always kept a suitcase packed ready for an emergency like this, but apart from that, we lost everything.

Pamela Mellett - Shakespeare Road Workshop

The day before war started, we were evacuated from Brixton in South London to Patcham, near Brighton. There were four of us children - Phyllis, who was about 14 at the time, I was 11 and the two boys Roy and Dennis were 9 and 7.

We were at Santley Street School in South London and the whole school was evacuated, although we were considered to be in a safer area than people in the East End, where they had the docks. As we filed round in a crocodile to get onto the bus that would take us away, I was all excited, thinking we were all going on a holiday. We had gas masks and luggage labels on our coats. I looked up and all the mothers, looking out of the walkways of the blocks of flats and it didn't occur to me that they would all have been feeling terrible about it, wondering if they'd ever see us again.

We were lodged in two pairs of two children, Dennis and I were lodged in one house and Phyllis and Roy were three doors down. The woman we stayed with had two children of her own and her husband was away in the army.

The family was all right, but there was one incident that sticks in my mind. I came home from school one day. I was hungry, so I did what I would have done at home and went into the pantry and helped myself to a handful of currants. The war had only just started, so things weren't rationed at that stage. When the woman found out what I'd done, she was fuming. "May God drop a bomb on you!" she

said.

"That's a rather wicked thing to say," I replied.

"That's rather a wicked thing to do," she said. It was before rationing and I think it was a bit much for a handful of currants!

After that, we then moved and lived with a woman who lived above a flat. I had begun sleep walking again, which I hadn't done for years. Apparently, I was looking for my brother's gas mask.

They then reckoned that the South Coast was too dangerous as they feared an invasion, so they moved us inland to Hambledon, near Guildford. My mother came to stay with us there. She had made friends with a young teacher who decided that he would bring his wife and baby out of London so as to be safer. The very day they moved away from London, a bomb jettisoned its load on the way back out to the coast and the couple was killed, although the baby was found alive on top of the rubble.

My mother just cried and cried.

Rita McQuiggan - Shakespeare Road Workshop

I was born in Southern Ireland and came across to England with my Mum and sisters in the 1950s to find work. My Mum had re-married - to an Englishman - and there was more work in England.

I was only 14 when I got here and had already left school. I worked as a hampress at Hallidays in Birmingham, where we made various parts for cars. My job involved cutting out metal into different shapes, including making washers. There were only one or two my age at the factory, most of them were older.

We worked from 8.00 in the morning till about 6.00 in the evening. It wasn't particularly hard work, but the machinery was noisy. It was too loud for music, unlike GEC, where I later worked. We were well-treated. Hallidays was only a small factory and there was no staff canteen. We used to take our sandwiches - perhaps cheese or bananas, meat was still on the ration - and go and sit by the river to eat them during the lunch break.

My first wage was £2/10s and I got to keep about half of it. I occasionally went dancing, but was keener on the funfairs or the pictures. I was a big fan of James Dean and Mario Lanza in those days.

Evelyn Williams - Shakespeare Road Workshop

In 1941, I joined up and became a WAAF. I was 18 at the time and initially I worked as a telephonist. We had big switchboards in those days with cords linking to both inside and outside the camp. You then

had to plug these in to make the various connections. Then I became a telegraphist. You used to type the message and then transmit the message to someone elsewhere in the country, a fore-runner of the telex and email.

I started out in London at Regent's Park, where I did my training, but had around 5 or 6 different postings, including Pocklington in Yorkshire, and Devon. On one occasion, in Yorkshire, a German bomber followed the British bombers back to the airfield and dropped its bombs, but the worst air-raid I encountered was actually when I went home on leave. One night, the bombers jettisoned all their remaining incendiary bombs over where they lived in Uckfield in Sussex. We went to a shelter at the end of the garden until the all-clear.

Social life was whatever was available on camp. We were always stationed out in the country, separated from local village life, so it was mainly limited to dances at the NAAFI - waltzes, the foxtrot or the quickstep were particular favourites. In Devon, the Americans came to camp and brought with them all the big band music, such as Glen Miller, and a dance that was new to us, the jitterbug.

There was some friction between the nationalities. When I was stationed on the outskirts of Exeter, there was a group of Polish troops here and some of our lads didn't get along with them. It all blew up into a massive scrap one night and they had to evacuate the streets because they became so violent and we had to wait for them to send a vehicle from the camp to fetch all of us WAAFs back to safety. It all settled down after that, and everyone became very friendly.

Clive Hewitt - RBW Library Workshop

When the NEW Queen Came to Visit

Captain Webber, the Officer Commanding 'A' squadron of the local Army Cadet Force, must have known somebody, as the unit was asked to provide a Guard of Honour for the Queen's visit. New kit issued! Drill, endless inspections, spit shone boots, brasses polished, and webbing Blancoed to perfection.

On THE DAY, we paraded two hours before Queen Time. More inspections and, carefully not scuffing those boots, marched off to the county building and up to the imposing flight of stairs where we were to stand.

Cheering from outside said that the royal car had arrived and Her Majesty swept into the building and up the stairs without a glance at us, closely followed by the local hierarchy. After the banquet it was back to the stairs, we now waited facing inwards. Hoping and dreading

that the Queen would speak to us. Eventually the procession swept down the stairs without a pause and out of sight, leaving a gaggle of people littering the stairs holding conversations. After a quick dismissal we were off home, thankful that all had gone as well as it had.

Joan Morris - NHS

I was only one year old when the War started, so my memories are mainly from towards the end of it. My very first recollections are of everywhere being very dark with the black-out curtains and that there were very few cars around.

We lived in Stafford, up near the Castle. There were fewer houses then and we were lucky because we had a back garden and lived next door to a farm, so I think we fared better than some other people. My father used to work at the Gas Works and he helped out on the farm at weekends and other times. He often used to help milk the cows before going off to work. I suspect we got a bit extra food and I can remember watching my mother skinning rabbits for a rabbit pie. Mind you, we were a large family. I had seven brothers and seven sisters - the eldest two were conscripted towards the end of the war.

You hardly ever got any chocolate or sweets. There wasn't a lot of sugar about and we had saccharine in the house instead. A treat would be a little bar of chocolate at Christmas.

When I was five, I went to school at St Paul's in Stafford and had to walk each way. I had a gas-mask, which you had to practice trying on. Then when I was 6, I went to Derby to stay with my granny. I guess it must have been VE-Day, because there was a huge bonfire. I had to go to bed in the afternoon for a sleep so I could stay up late to watch it. Of course, I'd never seen a bonfire before - not at night - they weren't allowed with the blackout.

Then, on what must have been VJ-Day, there was a street party. Everybody had to get up to do a little turn. I went up on stage and sang "The White Cliffs of Dover".

Ann Valentini - NHS

We lived in a house at the town end of the Wolverhampton Road in Stafford. One of my earliest memories is of some officers coming to the door. They were knocking on the doors of all the houses in the road and if you had a spare room, then someone had to be billeted with you. The Americans had arrived, and a tall young man of nineteen, whose first name was Wesley, but whose surname I've now

forgotten, came to live in what had been my brother's room.

Wesley didn't eat with us. The Americans had taken over the Technical College and if you peered through the ground floor windows, you could see them buying such rare items as eggs. Wesley brought us loads of stuff - especially tinned fruit and sweets - food you simply couldn't get hold of. When the American Jeeps drove by us in the street, the soldiers would throw sweets and chewing-gum to us. My sister, who was 10 years older than me liked the Americans not for the sweets, but because they were so good at dancing compared to the English boys.

My brother was away in the Merchant Navy. He'd joined straight from the Grammar School at the age of seventeen and was working on boats that sailed to South America and India. I remember one time when he was due home on leave, so I sat out on the step waiting for him to arrive. He came striding down the road in his uniform, over his shoulder was slung a massive bunch of bananas. I was one of the few kids who ever saw a banana during the war, let alone ate one.

Not far from the house was a field where my father kept pigs and often there would be a huge side of bacon hanging in the pantry. There was always plenty of bacon and pork, and my grandfather, who lived off the Wolverhampton Road as well, had a big garden. Here he grew all kinds of vegetables - carrots, potatoes, onions, broad beans and green beans.

There were apple trees in the garden, and he grew rhubarb too. Whenever I saw the posters saying "Dig for Victory", I always thought that was exactly what we were doing.

Roz Taylor - NHS

I was five at the Coronation. At the time, I lived with my parents and grandparents in a terraced house with a huge back garden. My grandfather was disabled, so what would have been the front room, just kept for best, was his bedroom. Our house was quite posh. We even had a bathroom with hot and cold water that my Dad, who was a handyman, put in and an inside toilet. Most of the people in our road didn't have these luxuries. When I went to school, we had to pass the public baths and I remember asking my mother why people came here to have a bath as it seemed so strange to me.

Just after the War, my grandfather was taken ill. The Doctor said he needed brandy, but as it was on the ration, the only way you could get it was by buying a pint of beer, then you could buy a tot of brandy. My father and his brother were sent on a pub-crawl. They drank the beer and poured the brandy into a bottle to take home. By the time

they had enough brandy for my grandfather, they were both feeling quite ill and vowed never to get drunk again. To my knowledge, they never did.

My grandfather also had a small television set, so our house was the setting for a party on Coronation Day. We had loads of people there - neighbours, aunts and uncles - in fact most of the people in our road. A lot of the grown-ups stayed out in the garden, but it was raining and we kids had to stay indoors.

Some food must still have been on the ration, but I remember we had cold meat, sandwiches and salads. I drank squash and there may have been some lemonade. I still remember them trying to get me to eat tomatoes, which I didn't like at all. "If you don't eat a tomato, you can't have jelly and ice cream." So I just went without jelly and ice cream as well. I still don't like tomatoes.

I still don't like tomatoes.

The Day 'the Ingo' was bombed

According to an eye witness whose reminiscences are reported in the BBC WW11 archive. The story goes that sometime in 1940 Stafford experienced its one and only daytime air raid. The ENGLISH ELECTRIC (local nick name 'The Ingo') armament factory on Lichfield Road was the target. Four bombs were dropped and the factory roof was strafed by machine gun fire. Warning sirens wailing were the first signs to the 10,000 employees that something was very wrong. A few seconds later hooters and klaxons went off simultaneously followed in quick succession by two shuddering bangs as bombs hit the buildings and seconds later by an ear splitting din as two bombs exploded outside. As sirens wailed people ran for the shelters. After several seconds, there was a loud series of rat-tat-tat, rat-tat-tat machine gun fire on the factory's glass roof. The German twin engine bomber then sped away loosing its last two bombs as it went. There were no casualties apart from bumps and bruises and a twisted ankle.

During wartime bombing or strafing raids were not reported in the press for morale and security reasons which meant rumours of what actually happened abounded.

The account states that on the top of the Ingo's office block was a plane spotter turret watching for incoming planes. Spotters on duty were used to following twin-engined RAF Oxford training planes on their approach to Stafford. These friendlies then wheeled around at a

height of a few thousand feet. However, on this occasion a similar looking plane to an Oxford appeared out of the clouds, circled, dropped lower, then made a bee-line for the 'Ingo'.

The Luftwaffe plane dropped four bombs.

The first was a few hundred pounder which went through the army-tank assembly shop roof. It then dropped into the Research Dept's High Voltage Laboratory. It spun round and round on the floor and skirted the enormous high voltage generator used for simulating lightning strokes. It did not go off. The second was an 'oil bomb'; so called because they resembled an oil drum. It landed on the concrete roof of the High Voltage Lab. It burned out harmlessly merely staining the ceiling underneath.

The remaining bombs were 50 pounders. They landed between the factory and the railway line. They both exploded and did the most damage to the building — the gravel they threw up sounded like machine gun fire as it shattered windows along the factory wall.

The above is a précis of an account of the incident given by eye-witness Mr John Weaver (WW2 People's War archive) reproduced here under the BBC website's terms and conditions for educational, not-for-profit use. www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/stories/94/a4464894.shtml WW2 People's War is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar

CRESWELL REMEMBERS A HERO

4th July 2007 American Independence Day

The Union flag and the Stars and Stripes hung together side by side as a fitting memorial to a selfless hero from New Jersey, who sacrificed himself to save others, was unveiled in a tribute of gratitude to an heroic American pilot who died exactly 63 years ago when his 'crate' crashed into a field at Creswell Home Farm.

The WW11 'Ace' of the USAAF 356 Fighter Group 361st Fighter Squadron, who between 1943-44 had flown over 60 missions and shot down at least five enemy aircraft, being honoured by local people was Captain John Pershing Perrin, whose plane had caught fire over Stafford skies. When his stricken fighter was hurtling towards Creswell instead of saving himself by bailing out, 25 year old Capt Perrin (holder of the Distinguished Flying Cross) tried to carry out an emergency landing to avoid hitting a school. The Mustang P-51 single seater aircraft was being flown from Warton in Lancashire to Steeple Morden, Cambridgeshire when a faulty pump primer caused explosive gasses to leak into the cockpit causing such a loss of power that the plane fell out of the sky.

Robert Selby: Chair Sandon Royal British Legion

Sandon 30th April 1945: Lancaster XKB879

A week before the war ended in May 1945 a four engine Lancaster Bomber took off from Middleton St Georges (now Tee-side airport) on a training flight. Of the seven crew members six were Canadian and the youngest was sixteen.

The aircraft got into trouble: its airframe was faulty. It crashed, killing all the crew in a field on the edge of Sandon. A local doctor was called but none could be saved. The doctor salvaged a small part of the bomber as a souvenir which ended up forgotten in an outhouse.

However, the current owner of that doctor's house found the item and researched it. This culminated in a talk about the crash to Sandon Royal British Legion members, who then decided to erect a memorial. Using the internet they tracked down five next of kin, fifty years on.

28th August 1999: A memorial stone was erected near the crash site on the A50 - about 300 people attended, including the Canadian Air Attaché, local dignitaries and four British Legion standard bearers. Traffic was stopped while the vicar dedicated the memorial, the names of the crew were read out and wreathes laid. A Spitfire and the Lancaster from the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight made three circuits of the site. Thereafter the crowd slowly dispersed.

We shall remember them.

Margaret Millington - Sandon

Although there were eventually five of us children, I was one of just three when war broke out. I don't remember much about the start of the War, because I was too young, but I do remember the later years

In September 1943, we got our first tractor on the farm. Up until then, all the work on the farm had been done with horses. Any farmer wanting a tractor had to make a case to the War Agricultural Committee and, once they'd agreed you were eligible, your name went into a hat.

There were definite advantages to living on a farm. We didn't live in fear of being bombed, although we had to take our gas-masks to school and if you forgot yours, you had to walk the one and-a-half miles home to go and fetch it. Food was rationed, but we had eggs, potatoes and milk. Twice a year in the Autumn and in February, we killed a pig, which was then distributed around the family. When

others killed their pigs, they reciprocated, so there was always plenty of bacon and ham. My Aunt Lil used to help make sausages and black pudding, Father salted the bacon and hams.

Animal foodstuffs were rationed as well. You got coupons according to how much you had produced in the previous quarter. You'd put in your order for corn and hand the relevant coupon over to the salesman. The corn would then arrive by rail and be brought up to the farm by the local railway lorry. To eke out what you could feed the animals, my father grew a small acreage of what he called "dredge corn". This was a mixture of oats, barley and beans, that was sewn as a mixture and when it had grown, was put through a roller before being fed to the cattle.

There were no combine harvesters then and everything went through a binder, so the stooks of corn were left out in the fields to dry before being brought under cover. We hired a threshing-machine that was driven by a single-cylinder diesel engine tractor. At harvest time, the neighbours came to help and you'd go over to help them as well.

We were allowed extra human rations at harvest time - the "harvest ration", which included cheese and a barrel of cider. My parents were tee-total, so the cider was given to the men, although I remember sneaking a drink.

One of our neighbours was a bit of a rogue. You weren't allowed to sell potatoes directly off the farm and he was caught doing exactly that. He was summoned to appear at the Magistrate's Court and sent a 10/- postal order to cover his travel to the court. The War ended soon after and his summons was cancelled, but he got to keep the 10 shillings, which would have been half a week's wages for a farm labourer.

Gladys Massey - Sandon

On the day war was declared my sister was being christened. The ceremony was being conducted by a missionary, Reverend William Mellor, who had come home for his holidays in Stoke. There was a sudden kerfuffle and voices were raised, which was unusual in church. Of course, he had to leave the country immediately if he was to get back to his ministry and people had come to warn him. I was simply too young to realise what was going on, but the irony is that my sister was being baptised Janet Irene, and "Irene" means "peace".

We used to go to a non-conformist church in Stoke in what was then Cross Street, but re-named Epworth Street when they amalgamated the Six Towns and wanted to eliminate duplicate street names. We went into the Church, a typical 2-tier non-conformist

chapel, for the first part of the service, then on to Sunday School where we sang songs and were read Bible stories. The church was also used as a drop-in centre for men in the armed forces. The church rooms were in the basement and they used to come in for tea and a bun.

We lived near the Drill Hall in Shelton and, as we often had soldiers billeted with us, we could eke out the rations. My mother preserved what food she could - salting beans and bottling plums and raspberries and whatever she could lay her hands on. We were all issued with a gas-mask.

I went to Cauldon Road School, which also doubled as a civil defence depot - there was storage for Wellington boots, sou'westers, shovels and so forth. I had a Mickey Mouse gas-mask, which they issued to very young children, and I was the only one still wearing it when we went into the Juniors as my face was too small for the next size up. Oh, the indignity!

Susan Jerrett - Sandon

In the early part of the War, I drove a mobile canteen. I'd only just learned to drive and I was at the helm of a small lorry. There was no power steering then, the sites we visited were often muddy and the roads narrow. In the dark, you had to drive by the tiny pin-pricks of light left after covering up the headlights and most of the side-lights. At least you didn't have to crank the engine to get it started, as you did on some lorries.

Where we lived, just outside Wrexham, there were search-light emplacements and gun-sites dotted all around and the people stationed there needed cups of tea and whatever food and sweets we could muster. Although, as I was out all day, the tea must have been pretty stewed by the end of it. We also made a kind of cake called a "Wet Nellie". It consisted of bread soaked in water, sprinkled with whatever sugar we could get hold of, and dried fruit. This was mixed together and baked in the oven, before being cut into small squares that we sold at a penny or two a go.

There was a step up into the lorry and my Mother insisted that I wore trousers in order to maintain decorum whilst amongst the soldiers. This was all very well, but trousers for women were hard to come by.

There was also a stable in one of the villages that was used as a canteen. The local village hall, which for some reason was known as "The Cocoa Rooms", was at the centre of life. The library visited here on a regular basis and they showed films here as well.

My Father organised what he called "blood-letting" sessions with the St John Ambulance or the Red Cross in attendance, where they would tour the village halls of the area collecting donations of blood. My mother ran the WRVS sewing-bee, making endless pyjamas and operating gowns in the attic of the local vicarage.

The war seemed a long way off. My brother was away in the Durham Light Infantry and never got to serve overseas, and we were in the middle of the country. My Father had a shoot and a rod on the River Dee. We were also self-sufficient in most things, with the exception of milk. We used to get lots of people coming to stay in the hope of a good feed.

In those days, we still had staff in the house. We employed two maids, a house parlour maid, a cook and a gardener who lived in a cottage in the grounds.

Kathleen Sargent - Sandon

My home was in Buxton in Derbyshire, but during the war I was training to be a children's nurse at Pendlebury Hospital in Manchester. Getting back from a home visit wasn't always easy. On many occasions, there were air-raids, so the train waited in a tunnel for what seemed like an eternity. By the time I got into Manchester, there would be no trams running, so I'd have to walk all the way from London Road Station to Pendlebury - about seven miles through Trafford Park and Salford - in the dark. On the way, I'd pass air-raid wardens and rubble. It's not a walk I'd care to do today.

The Luftwaffe seemed to use the chimney of the hospital as a marker for turning round and going back home. This meant that if they had any bombs left that they hadn't dropped on Manchester targets, they dropped them in our area. The windows of the hospital were blown out on a regular basis. They managed to hit a nearby draper's shop once and all the hats were blown across the surrounding area and into the trees. The land-mines they dropped reduced everything to rubble, and on one night a bomb actually blew me into the shelter.

As soon as you heard the siren, you went through a drill. First of all, you had to don your siren suit - a pair of navy dungarees that you could pull on over what you were wearing as there was never time to dress properly. Then you checked that you had your ID card, some money and a gas-mask with you and reported to one of the wards, where you were responsible for the evacuation of five particular patients.

On one occasion, another nurse and I caught infectious jaundice and we had to stay in the sick-bay. It had barred windows, so you

couldn't even get out. When there was an air-raid, all we could do was hide under the stairs.

Olga Higgs - Sandon

My parents ran a sweet shop in Sandbach during the war. My mother was in charge of the shop and my father worked in the offices at Radway Green, the armaments factory near Alsager. The shop was where the front room of a house would normally be, and we lived behind it and upstairs.

The shop stocked the kinds of sweets that were aimed at adults, rather than children. We had all the famous brands - Rowntrees, Pascall, Barker and Dobson, Cadbury's - and big jars of sweets, such as barley sugar, caramels, humbugs, liquorice and, of course, we had Parma Violets. We also sold cigarettes and tobacco. I remember we had Craven A, Players, Senior Service, Kensitas and Woodbines, as well as some oval-shaped cigarettes called Passing Cloud, that were considered a bit more up-market.

I don't think I got any more sweets because I lived in a sweet shop. Sweets were tightly rationed and you had to be able to take the coupons the customers gave you to the wholesaler. You couldn't be generous with your weighing-out either, because you could only re-stock according to the coupons you'd taken.

During air-raids, we sometimes went into the cellar - we had no shelter. One night, there was huge excitement. We were going to bed, when there was an almighty crash. The walls shook and pictures bounced and we all shouted "What's that?"

It was a bomb that had fallen in a field at Wheelock, just a mile or two away. The bomb fell near the Nag's Head. I don't think anyone was hurt, but it left an enormous crater. For days afterwards, all the children were scrabbling looking for bits of shrapnel as souvenirs.

Margaret Woodward - Oulton

The very day war broke out, I was standing with my mother just by the kitchen door when we heard Mr Chamberlain's announcement on the wireless. Although we were a large family, there were just the two of us that day. My mother was terribly upset, because my father had served in the Great War. My father never used to talk about the War - nobody did - although he sometimes used to try out bits of the French he'd learnt. I was only fourteen and I didn't really understand - it was just something that was happening. I knew everyone was terribly upset.

Although I'd passed the 11-plus, I didn't go to the Grammar School. The remaining place went to a wealthy only child. In the end, I left school at fourteen and went to work in a local factory for 12 months, working as a trainee painter and decorator of pottery. I enjoyed it, but I really didn't want to be there and I was determined to make up for missing out on the Grammar School place and get an education.

First of all, I went to night school and learnt soft furnishings and sewing, then I joined the Air Training Corps and thought I'd like to go into the Air Force when I was old enough, but in the meantime, I decided that I'd prefer to work in an office. When I was sixteen, I got a job in the offices at Teddy Toy, who had moved up from Dagenham. They originally made soft toys, but branched out into hammocks, heavy-duty protective clothes, anklets and things like that for soldiers and sailors. They also made small arms on a hush-hush basis. I got a job there as a clerk and switchboard operator. There were 136 lines on that switch-board, with different knobs and wires to connect the incoming lines with the different extensions. It was a pretty complex job - now I can't even use a mobile phone!

When I was about 17 or 18, I was called up and directed to work at the armaments factory at Swynnerton, but I refused to go. I'd seen all the people who worked there and their skin was yellow and didn't like the thought of it. So I went to Belstuffs, who were famous for their tents, haversacks, tarpaulins and waterproofs.

I was only there for a couple of months, before I realised what I really wanted to do with my life. I'd made up my mind to follow my older sister's footsteps and become a nurse. She was a matron by then. I got a place to start nurse training at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in 1944, but that meant waiting a year, so I went to the Royal Hospital in Wolverhampton and from there I started my long career. I became a nurse, a midwife, a health visitor, nursing officer and eventually the acting deputy director of nursing services.

In the end, leaving school at 14 didn't harm me all that much and certainly made me more determined to succeed in my chosen profession.

Mary Leese (née Poole) - Oulton

I was nineteen when the war broke out and, although it seems horrid to say so, I was excited. There was something different happening. I came from a large family and was very innocent, so it was a revelation when I went into the forces.

I joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service, the ATS. My first job

was as a plotter on an RAF station. We used to get reports from the gunnery site relayed through the headphones we wore and then have to plot positions on a huge map of the Birmingham-Coventry area. There were three tables with huge maps laid out of England and the local area. We moved the blocks labelled with the height of aircraft around with long sticks. The officers from the Air Force and the Army stood on a dais above us where they got an overview of what was happening.

We were based in Honiley in Warwickshire, but were moved on when the threat of air-raids receded. So I retrained as a kinetheodolite operator, which was far more interesting, because you did so many different jobs - you could be a film developer or you could act as a target-finder for the Bofurs guns, for instance.

My job was to film what was going on to test the accuracy of height finders. There were two stations and a central post, all calculating distances, which gave you the triangle for height-finding. The film was then developed and evaluated to see if the guns were firing accurately.

The theodolites, ironically enough, were German. I understand that before the war, we'd traded them from Germany for something else.

This was in the day before hand-held calculators. You had to be pretty good at maths - especially trigonometry, and we used slide rules, circular slide the size of a small table and logarithms to calculate everything. There was a computer brought onto the camp in 1944 - from America and it was the size of a living room. All I remember about it was that someone sat there saying "data rough, data smooth" - which was just Double Dutch to me.

We used to think we were rather elite in this section as there were only about 200-300 of us in the whole of the services. To this day I remember my service number: 161344.

Betty Benbow - Oulton

I am a war baby. We lived out in the country on the edge of the Mersey when it was still very rural. The Americans were billeted in the woods there, which are now are part of John Lennon Airport. My father was a farm-worker and also in the Home Guard, so he never went away to the War and was always at home with us.

I was too young to go scrounging sweets off the Americans, but my father used to drive the lorry for the farmer he worked for and he often had trouble just getting in and out, because there were so many American Army vehicles on the road. We were not far from the Rootes

Munitions Factory.

Later, they knocked down the cottages where we lived and used the farm land to build what became the Eastern Avenue end of Speke - a huge housing estate for people who'd lost houses in the bombing of Liverpool.

I remember going into Liverpool on the bus with my mother and seeing The Queen Victoria monument and all around there were huge craters. It didn't register to me as suffering and homelessness; I was too young to realise all this. They were just holes in the ground

I was five when we moved a few miles away to another village and started school there. I think the authorities must have been preparing for peace, because my father was offered a small-holding and so he kept a couple of pigs, chickens and geese. He started with just four acres and eventually added a bit more land. It must have been very hard work. He grew vegetables as well. I certainly remember cabbages and sprouts. You had to wait until you'd had the first snow before you could go out and pick them. I think he supplied shops with them on a small-scale.

There was a retinue from Lancashire County Council who came round every quarter to collect our rent. It was quite a posh affair, there were three cars and various smartly-dressed people and they all had tea and cake.

For me, the war was really something that was happening elsewhere. I seem to have been happy all the time and especially liked thunderstorms, where we'd all be in the house together.

My older brother was eighteen years older and in the Royal Engineers. I was told Norman would be coming home soon. I sat on the side of the road waiting, but he didn't come home until 1948. He was in Palestine helping to set up the Israeli nation.

Georgina Martin - Oulton

I'm originally from Somerset and I met my husband when he was stationed at Portishead, overlooking the Bristol Channel. He was in the Royal Artillery and worked on the guns on the coastal defences, alongside many men who had been in the retreat from Dunkirk.

We met in the parish room in Portishead and it was love at first sight. I had some friends who were in a little dance band that played at the hall and they were grumbling that they couldn't play the piano properly as they needed a piano stool. So as I lived close by, I went home to get it and he came with me to carry it.

I was in the drapery trade at the time, but when I was called up, I went to work in a factory making screws for bomb doors. It was a

Norwegian firm and there were three shifts running 6.00 a.m. till 2.00 p.m., 2 p.m. till 10 p.m. and 10 p.m. till 6 a.m. The early morning shift was the best one to work as you had all the rest of the day to yourself.

I enjoyed the camaraderie of the factory. You felt as though you were doing something useful. I spent my 17th birthday in an air-raid shelter. It was quite a busy area for raids as we weren't that far from Bristol Docks. German planes would come up the Bristol Channel and follow the River Severn up to the Midlands, or simply bomb Bristol and the South Wales coastline. We always had to wait for them to come back down again. The worst incident happened one summer night, they dropped seven bombs on the sea front and in the village -- and my hair literally stood on end. Three or four local men were killed in the raid.

In May-June 1944, there were huge numbers of boats, laden with ammunition, in the docks. Then, one June morning, we went out and they were gone. I was on the night shift the evening before they went and at midnight, all the fitters disappeared from the shop-floor, leaving just the women. We thought they'd all gone out for a smoke, but they'd actually gone up to the radio station, which was manned by the Home Guard, and were standing by.

We didn't know it, but it was D-Day.

Milly Shropshire - Oulton

I worked at Lotus for about a year, but with the war I had to go into munitions at Swynnerton. I left when I was pregnant with my first child, David. After he was born, I got a little part-time job in a grocery shop in Stone. The shop was packed with all sorts of goodies - bacons, cheese and everything like that. Eventually you had to have your coupons to buy food, but working in the shop, you'd think you'd get a little bit more. But the chap who managed the shop was a miserable, tight-fisted sort, so there was no chance of getting anything. I don't even think we got staff discount.

We had been living with my mother in Stone, but then my husband was posted away, so we went to live in Cambridge near the aerodrome, where I had my second child, Vivienne. We rented rooms in a lovely big house. The lady who owned the house was having an affair with someone at Bomber Command, so we used to get all sorts of tickets for concerts and dances.

Stone was home, though. I was born there and had more-or-less always lived here, so after three years, we came back home and in 1947, I got a little council house at the end of York Street. It was

heaven to me. It cost 30 shillings a week (£1.50), which included all the rates, which seemed an absolute fortune to us

We bought utility furniture to go in it and when I'd paid for all of it, I had just £6 left in the bank. We worried if we were actually going to make ends meet, but we always did somehow.

Eileen Chambers - Oulton

I lived in Blurton from about the age of five and had just started Thistley Hough School for Girls, which was the local grammar school, in 1939. I was completely bewildered because I'd moved from a small school into a very large school, so I was rather quiet.

The headmistress, Miss Bamber, was really strict. You had to have all the right uniform, such as gym slippers, blouses, indoor shoes and outdoor shoes. You wore a panama in the summer and a velour hat with the school band in the winter. You couldn't leave your hat off or go to school without your gas-mask, or she'd send you home. In the corridors, the girls used to walk in files. At the time, I thought it seemed awful, but looking back I think it stands you in good stead.

I was keen on languages, so I liked French. I also enjoyed Biology classes and was quite keen on hockey and netball, although I was never good enough for the teams.

I wanted to go into the WRENS, but I wasn't old enough. When I left school after I'd done my School Certificate, I did a secretarial course in Hanley, which I loved. From there, I got my first job in an insurance office in Stoke, then I got a job as a secretary at Wedgwood's in Barlaston. I used to work specifically for the Export Sales Manager and the people I worked with were very friendly. I did enjoy it.

I was on £4/10s a week and everyone thought I was on very good money indeed. I don't remember giving my mother anything. I have to admit I was a bit self-indulgent. On Saturdays, I would go shopping in Hanley. My favourites were the big department stores of Bratt & Dykes and Huntbach's. I didn't sew my own clothes, but I did knit. Throughout the war, I knitted balaclava helmets and socks for soldiers, sailors and airmen.

Clive Hewitt - RBW Library Workshop

VE Day Memories: Parties were for birthdays or Christmas; not something called Vee Eee day and on 'The Bricks', across the way, but, when you're five, you don't understand these things. According to the other kids, all the mums in the street were busy making and baking

things. Eventually The Day arrived!

Out of the boxes in cellars and cupboards came bunting and crepe paper, they were used to decorate the outside of houses. Tables and chairs were lined up on the bricks, out of hiding came the best tablecloths, cutlery, china and all sorts of other fancy things. Food had been rationed for years, but it was amazing what was being splurged on a kid's tea party.

Freshly washed, combed and in clean clothes us kids were allowed to sit down to this feast. We'd never seen so much cake, sandwiches of so many varieties, jelly, blancmange, preserved fruit, eggs, meat etc that was on those tables. Parents carefully controlled their offspring; it wouldn't do to 'have a scene' and spoil the day or have a child being sick in the street.

Adults drank from glasses and laughed a lot, the kids had pop, or tea, and then there were 'the sports': races, ball games, and prizes for everybody. After the kids had been put to bed the adults continued their own party.

**SADLY That's The End Of This Poignant Wander Down
Memory Lane thank you for sharing it with us**

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