



BOMBS OVER SHERFIELD

Stories from Childhood of WWII

Breach Lane Chapel, Sherfield on Loddon

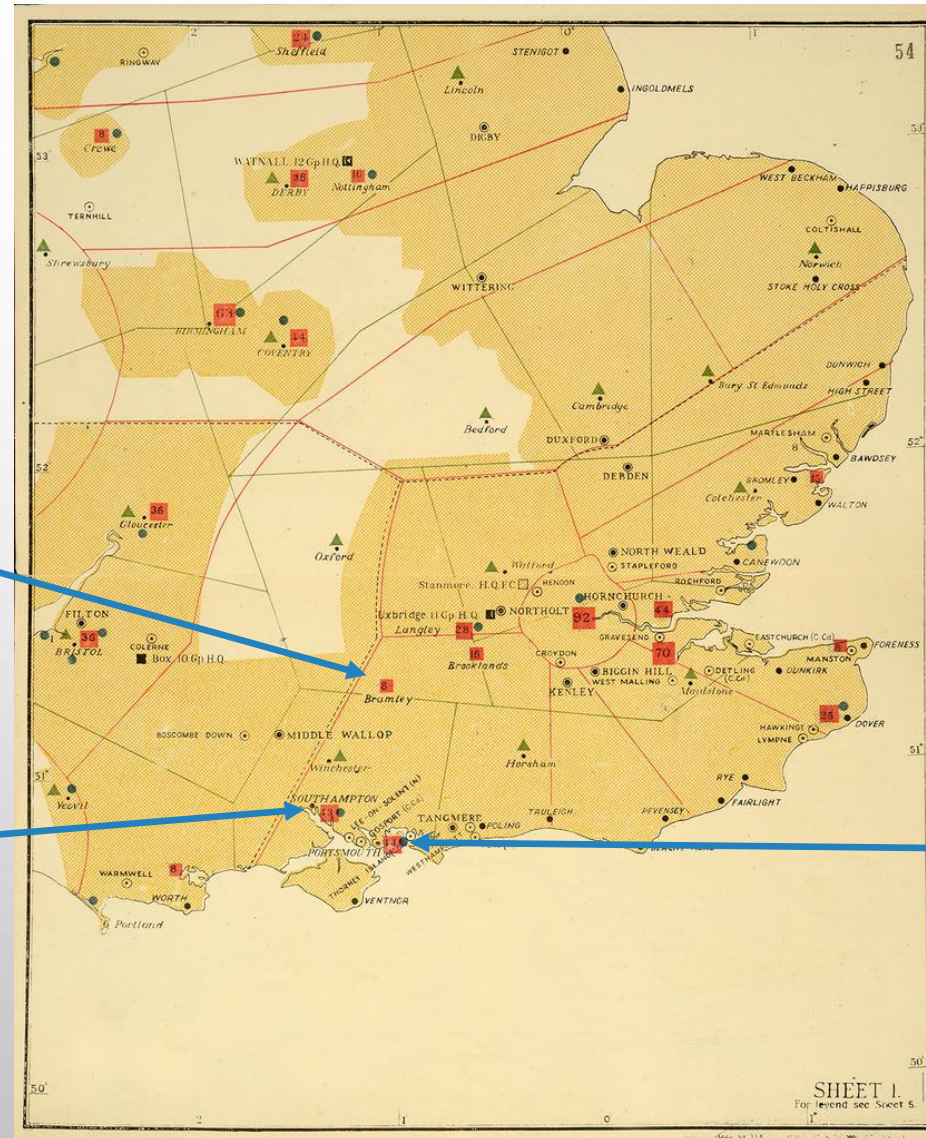
1st May 2025

Key Hampshire locations within RAF Defence System 1940

Bramley
Ordnance Depot

Supermarine
Spitfire Factory
Southampton

RN Dockyard
Portsmouth



Bramley Ordnance Depot



Substantial player in the military infrastructure and armaments supply chain – **a key target**

Major Prize to be taken by the enemy

Air raids a significant threat to Bramley and Sherfield

What was life like for residents, especially children?

Sherfield in the 1930s

A small agricultural village

No Goddards Close, Bow Drive, Bow Grove, Northfield Road or more modern developments.
No Bypass.

As well as sport on the Common,
– between The White Hart and Longbridge Mill - Ladies Hockey and Cricket Pitches and a Pavilion.
- Northfield good for 'kickabouts' by local lads.

No mains services

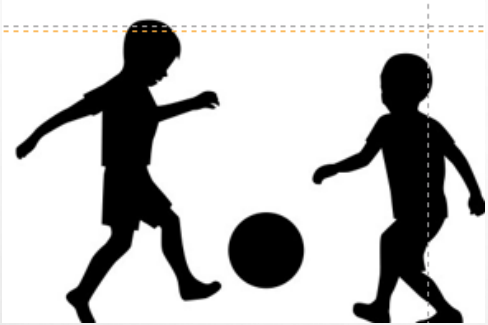


Basic Agriculture

No Combine Harvesters - A Sail Binder cut and tied **Sheaves**; Eight sheaves made a **Stook**; Thatch bonnets protected the grain; after threshing (using Traction engine driven Thresher), straw used for thatching.

Considerable dependence on Horse power.
Cows were milked by hand.

Young People and their Stories of the War

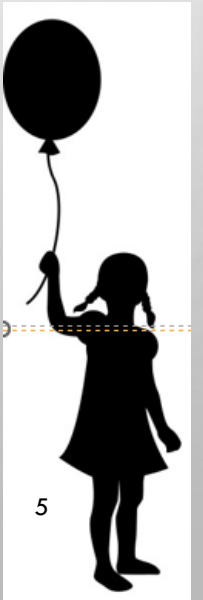


Ray Crossman b1933



Don Rickwood b1931 & Ursula Cork b1931

Joan Howland b1932



Just a selection of stories tonight. For even more see later.

Ray Crossman b1933



Ray (9), Shirley (2), Ron (5) & Rob (7) in 1942



2, West View, Bramley Road

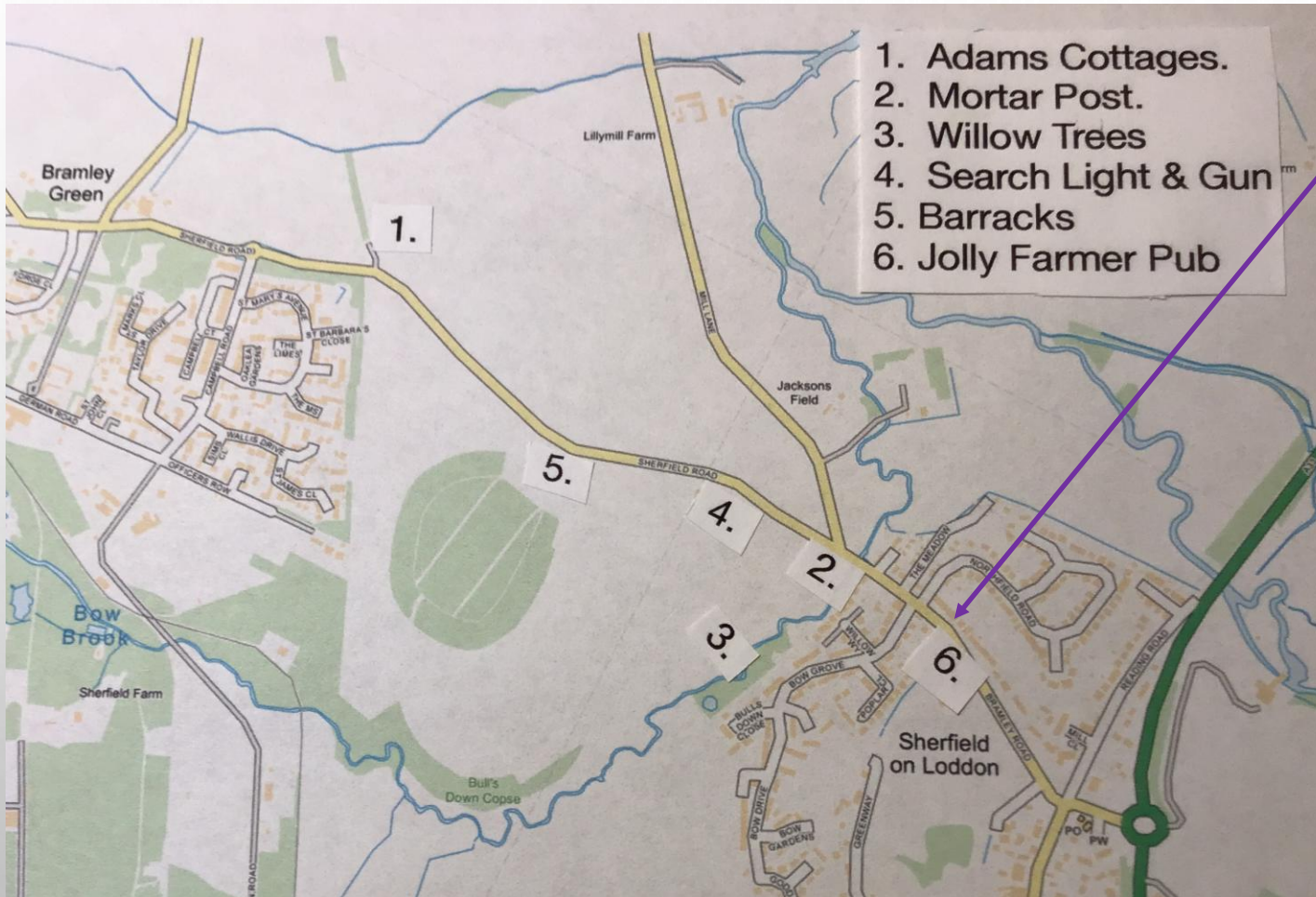
Father: Sidney b1909
Civilian, but experienced Soldier
Called up Immediately.

Mother: Iris b1914



Local Family:
Grannie Claridge
(Adams Cottage, between Sherfield and Bramley)
Aunt Lena Warrilow and two cousins
(Jubilee Cottage, Greenway)

Well Defended



West View, within the Explosive Range of Bramley Camp

Windows & Doors protected by Wooden Boxes
3' wide, filled with soil.



A Morrison shelter took up most of the kitchen.

No Home Comforts



Very small kitchen: Belfast sink; hand pump for water; kitchen range with a small fire box and an oven on the side; Lino on the floor. Morrison shelter!



No mains electricity, gas or drainage. You dug a hole and buried it!



The front room and bedrooms always freezing cold. We slept in one double bed. Mum put house bricks in the oven, covered them, then put them in the bed.



Mum spent a lot of the time at the window listening for bombers.

British Expeditionary Force 1939

Sid Crossman had been a regular in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, 1928 - 1935: one of the first to be called back to the Army.

A member of the British Expeditionary Force, sent to France.



Sid Crossman (middle)

British and French troops were evacuated in Operation Dynamo (*Dunkirk*) (26th May – 4th June 1940) to England, after the capitulation of the Belgian army.

Bramley Station - Late 1939

I was only six, but clearly remember the soldiers going off to France.

My dad was one of them!

Soldiers were lying on Bramley Common by the Pigeons pub waiting for the trains

Women crying and very upset.



Don Rickwood b1931 & Ursula Cork b1931



Sherfield School, 1939.

Mother: Catherine b1901
(the farm dairymaid)
Brother: Alastair b1933
No local family



1943



Father: Arthur b1893
Farm Bailiff,
Sherfield Court Estate,
Reserved Occupation



Court Farm House Sherfield Green

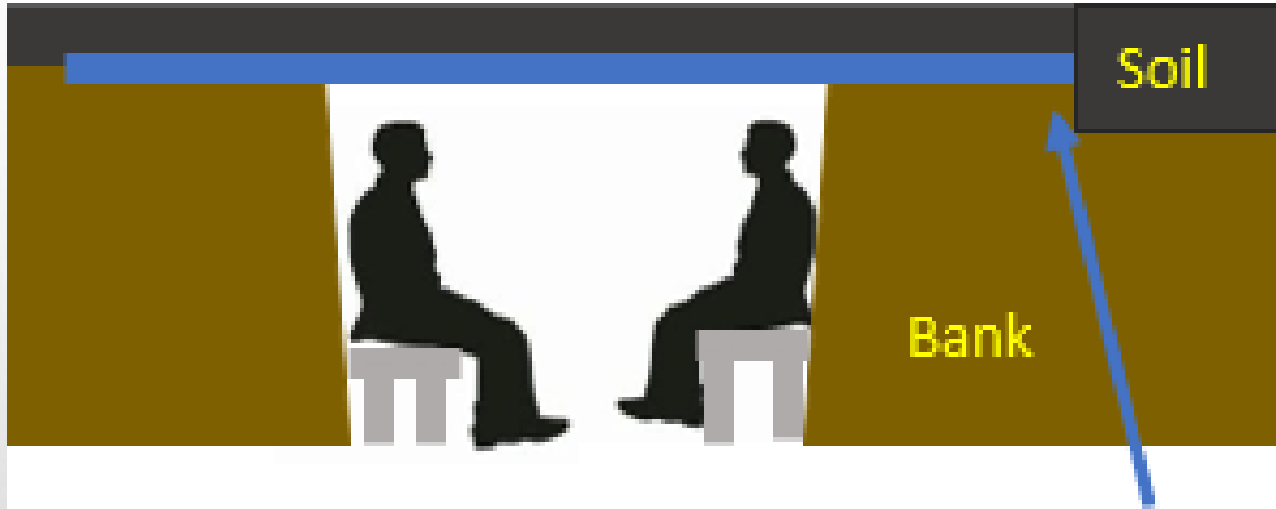


Ursula's home
1, South View
Cottages

Parents: George &
Agnes
Brother: Jeffrey,
b1934
Sister: Angela,
b1944

No Home Comforts and no Air Raid Shelter

Facilities very basic but farm generator provided electricity for some lighting



Iron bars & corrugated iron sheets

The 3" Bofors gun behind Court Farm was up a track, 100 metres further on from the front of the old cottage at Goddards Farm. The site covered about an acre.



The Shelter was for the four of us and Ted, Phyl and Margaret Onions from Lilac Cottage (now Little Bowlings).

We didn't use it very often.

The bombs were not a worry unless you got a direct hit. It was the shrapnel from the shells falling from that gun up the back that made you take cover.



Anti-aircraft shrapnel

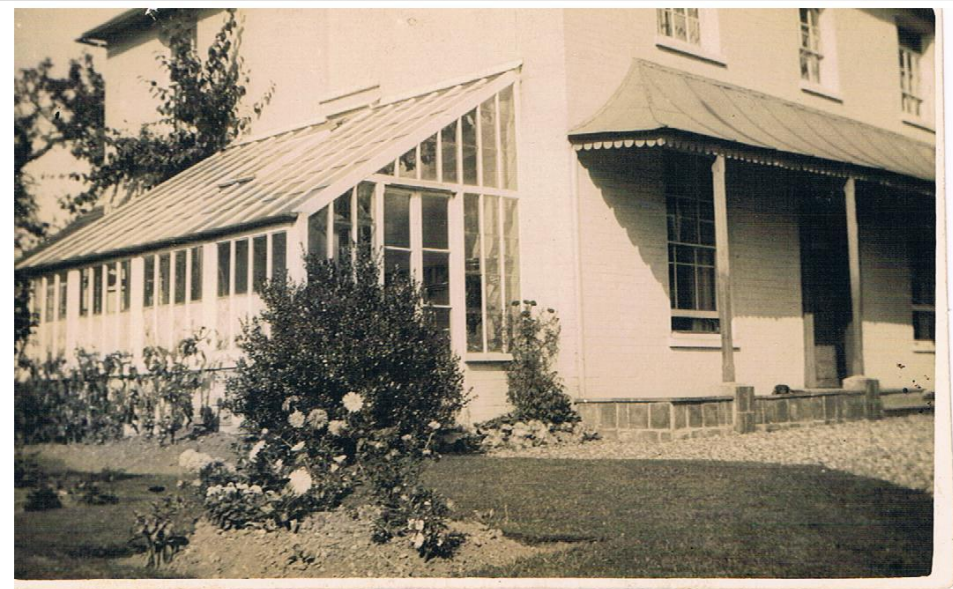
Don

Camouflage



The house was camouflaged green and brown.

The glasshouse roof reflected on moonlit nights.



During the day, with much shouting, “**are you READY**”, one in each bedroom would pull the sheet up to let the sunlight on to the grapes, and lower it again at night.”

Bramley Camp - the Threat & the Reality Don's map

- The Germans knew about the Camp: that it had a river, but not exactly where it was.
- Bow Brook (green line): covered with camouflage nets; trees and rushes.
- Sheds camouflaged green and brown.
- Difficult to see them from Court Farm.
- Surrounded by big guns
- Decoys on Wild Moor: Loddon & Lyde



- The Moors cleared: to make more land productive; and, because of the rivers, which were widened and mock buildings, the Germans would think that was Bramley Camp.
- This decoy was successful: many incendiary bombs dropped on the Moors, but not on the Camp. Don

Monk Sherborne Decoy: Controlled fires lit during an air raid simulating a large bomb strike

What happened to the Incendiaries?

- Years later I ploughed up many incendiary ends on the Moors.
- One cold winter's day I picked up one or two.
- Coming off the Moors at lunch time I found the builder Dan Musson and his merry men working on Wildmoor farmhouse, all sitting round a fire in an oil drum.
- I had this corroded piece of aluminium in my hand and I said "*do you know what that is*".
- They passed it round. No one knew what it was.
- Just as I was saying "*it's an incendiary bomb*", the last man threw it in the oil drum!





It gave a little hiss and a weak blue flame
came up, nothing dangerous!

The Moral of this Tale

Beware of Bombs & Beware of Builders!

Joan Howland b1932



Joan with father c1940
Civilian, Territorial Army,
Called up before War

Father: Wilfred b1902
Mother: Doris b1906
Sister: Ann b1944

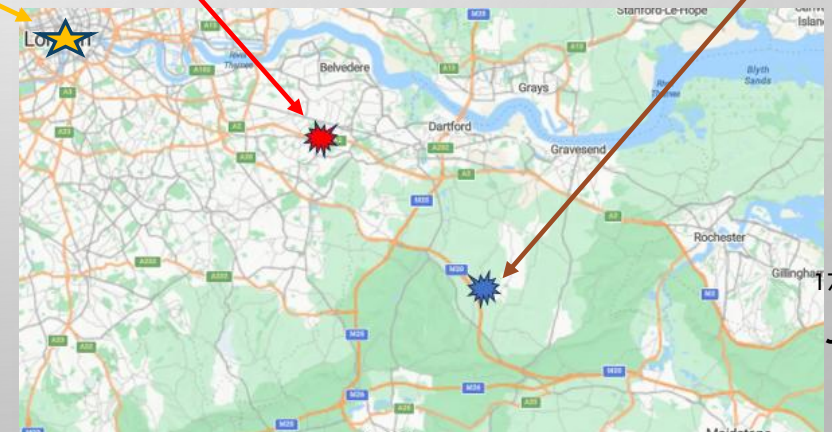


Chelsea



All Mod Cons
and an Air
Raid Shelter!

With the threat of war, had moved from
Chelsea, where Joan was born, to North
Kent/London borders to be nearer maternal
grandparents in rural Kent



Joan

3rd September 1939



It was a warm sunny day when we heard the announcement on the wireless - we were at war with Germany.



It was so so quiet for a Sunday; no one mowing their lawn; no one talking over a garden fence; but then the Air Raid Siren sounded, the first of many many times.

I didn't understand but knew it was very serious as the grown-ups were looking unhappy and sad.

[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/OPKMYKGX7TQ?T=43](https://youtu.be/OPKMYKGX7TQ?t=43)

The Air Raid

The Air Raid shelter was on my father's lovely lawn. We had candles for lighting and slept on bunks.

One night, not long after the beginning of the war, a large bomb landed at the end of the street but didn't explode. The Air Raid Warden told us to get out as quickly as we could.

It was very scary and noisy with searchlights moving backwards and forwards and guns firing in the nearby park at the German planes.



What Next?

We were taken to the village hall where we sat all night on hard benches.

The very kind WVS ladies gave us tea (very strong in thick white cups) and biscuits (like square dog biscuits) which I couldn't bear to eat.

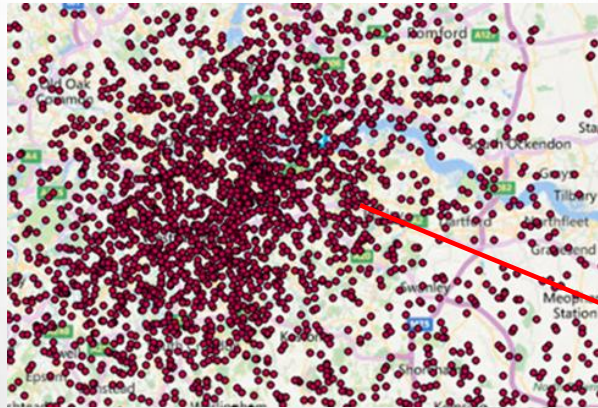
I kept crying. I had left my precious teddy behind. He had button eyes and didn't have much fur, but I loved him!

Mother asked the Air Raid Warden if she could go back home to collect our dog which had been shut in for three days and she collected teddy.

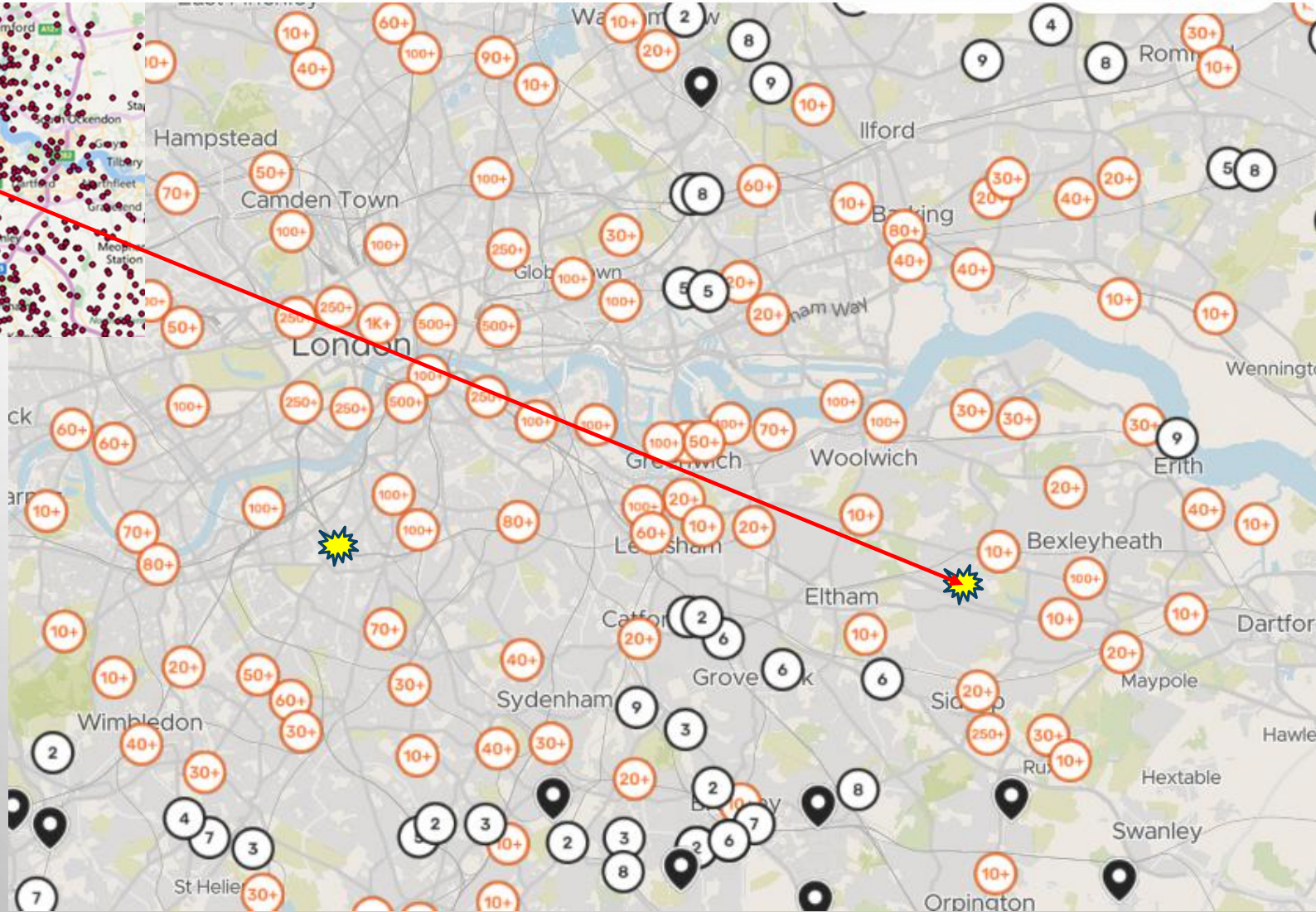
Next day we went to live with my grandparents in Kent.



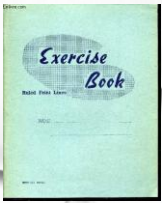
London – the Reality



V1 Rockets
Doodlebugs
Buzz Bombs



Extent of bombs dropped on London WW2



At School

I loved living with my grandparents but had a two mile walk there and back to school.

Our exercise books were old. When we finished them, we had to turn them upside down and write between the lines.



When the air raid siren sounded, we went into a brick-built shelter and sat on wooden forms. Lessons continued – spelling each others' names, animals and flowers.

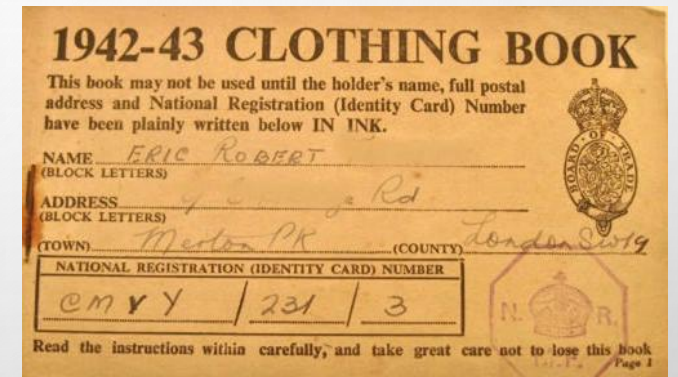
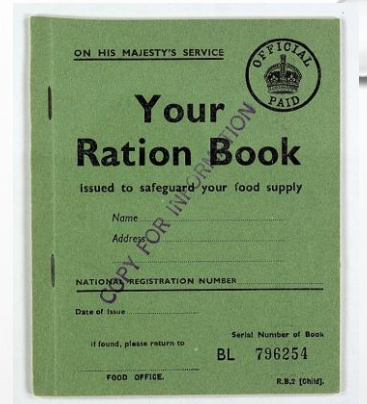
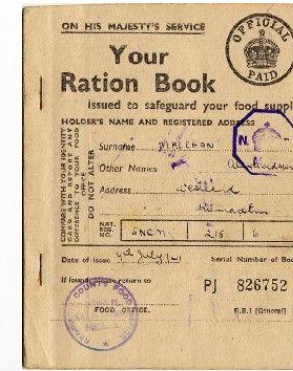


There were evacuee children from London. They were living with strangers and some were home sick. But they soon settled down and we became friends.

The Village General Store

The door 'pinged' when it opened. The shop had a nice comfy smell.

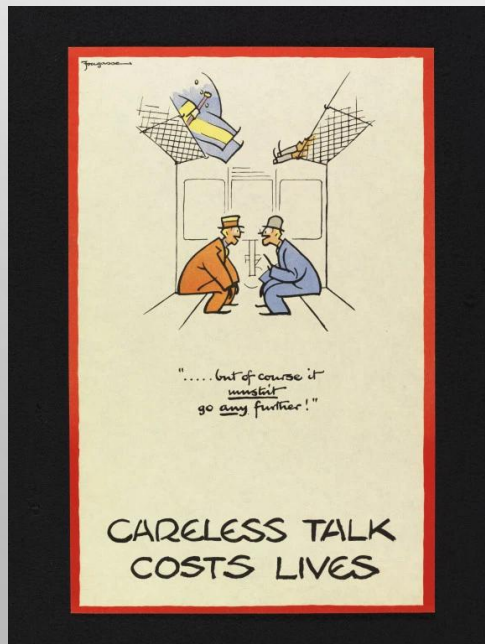
On the right, the Post Office, with posters: "Dangerous talk costs lives"; Colorado Beetle; "Always remember to have your identity card and gas mask"; "Buy savings stamps". On the left, Groceries, with much kept in sacks and measured out in metal scoops. In the middle, Hardware and lots more.



Everyone had a ration book for food and sweets – green for children.

Fruit was very scarce but there were plenty of vegetables grown by our farmers and on allotments. We never had bananas.

Joan



Back Home

After quite a while, we returned home. Every one behaved normally, going to the shelters only when the siren went off. School was as normal. Brownies and Guides resumed.

We went to Saturday morning pictures, 6d to see Cartoons, Comedies, and Cowboys & Indians.



My sister was born in July 1944.

Mother was given an enormous gas mask for her.

New born babies were kept in a large white linen cupboard in which there were little cots, four to a shelf.



What did Small Boys do?

Smoke Bombs & Thunder Flashes

Bramley Camp Trained soldiers as ammunition inspectors and in bomb disposal

Always on manoeuvres

One group would go towards Bramley, the other to Sherfield and attack on Hilly Dilly

Blank 303s, smoke bombs, thunder flashes

Throw anything left over into hedges and ditches

We collected what was left

Kept it in our gang hut.



The Gang

The Gang Hut, a Barn at Lilly Mill Farm

Equipped with table tennis, darts, board games...

The Gang : Ron Butler the farmer's son. Ray Crossman, Eric Percy, Don Rickwood, Brian & John Wright (Scout Master's sons), Bernard Therrien, Roy Bulpitt, Jim Strong, Maurice Sycklemoore, John Barraclough, Russell & Roland Brown, Reggie Woods, Nigel Dewey, John Dodd

We would let off a few smoke bombs and thunder flashes on Hilly Dilly

Then run and hide, in case PC Heal came.

He lived up the road and knew all of us.

Favourite place for swimming in the river – Lilly Mill!



Plenty of Sport

A lot of time in the summer spent playing football and cricket on the Common. The rest of the Common was rough, with gorse bushes and small trees.

Most summers the kids would set light to it.

One year my cousin Desmond Warrilow was trapped and badly burnt.



In the winter we went to the Village Hall to play table tennis, billiards, snooker and darts.

Potato Picking

We could take time off from school for potato picking for local farmers, but only so many times.



One of the farmers, Mr Gamble from Hartley, would pick us up with an old black car. The girls went in the car and, usually, just the boys in the covered trailer behind.

As it was covered with a tarpaulin you had to sit on the floor: so you had to pick a spot that the pigs and calves had missed when they had been taken to market.

Don 1941: I had just finished a day for Mr Garret at Moulshay Farm, and had walked over the fields to a gate near where there are now houses at the Plantation. On my right leg is my lunch box, and the light-coloured box on top of that is for the gas mask which went everywhere with you.





The Boy Scouts



In summer 1944 the we camped at the Roundabouts. We didn't get much sleep.

We could hear the dance band. Every third tune they would play *Paper Moon*.

Around midnight we saw this flame travelling across the sky, going in the direction of London: a Flying Bomb.

At three-o'clock, six of Bowden's shire horse's (Lance Levy Farm) went by with their heavy hoofs clumping and snorting at the tents.

The Scout Troop pulled a big trailer to Broadford Bridge in Stratfield Saye for a weekend away, led by the Scout Master, Mr Frank Wright.

Every year a troop from Acton, including some very senior scouts, would come to Sherfield. We would sit round a camp fire and sing songs. One was unforgettable.

*Have you ever thought as the hearse goes by,
That some day you are going to die,
The worms crawl in and the worms crawl out,
They go in thin and come out fat, Ooooh!*



But Girls had Special Charms: *Got any Gum, Chum?*

The Butcher's shop (now *The Shop*) was owned by Mrs Rutter. She sat in the little office in the back corner. When you got your meat, you paid through the office window.

With her was Eleanor Friend. She was around eighteen.

If Ursula and her friends saw an American convoy coming, they would dash into the shop and say "*Eleanor, there is a convoy coming*".

They would get her outside the shop to be sure to getting some gum. No need to call out "*Got any gum, chum*".

The Americans were very generous throwing out sweets and gum.





Bombers, Bombs & Dog Fights

Bombers by the Hundred

1938 - I heard a different engine noise coming up over the Butcher's shop. It was from an auto-gyro and it flew right over head.

That was the first time I had seen anything like it, not knowing that in a year or two we would see hundreds of bombers going over head, around four to six in the afternoon on their way to Germany.

They had left their bases in East Anglia, to fly down over the South Coast, around over France and up into Germany, drop their bombs and fly straight back to base in Lincolnshire or Suffolk.



The Battle of Britain

Sometimes we saw a parachute floating down a long way away.



We could look out towards London and see a red glow. It would get higher and wider: the fires from the air raids in London starting up.



I can recall the Battle of Britain (1940) and watching the planes in the sky.

We often saw Spitfires fighting in the blue sky – silver dots weaving about; you could hear the drone of their engines.

The Dog Kennels – Bombed!

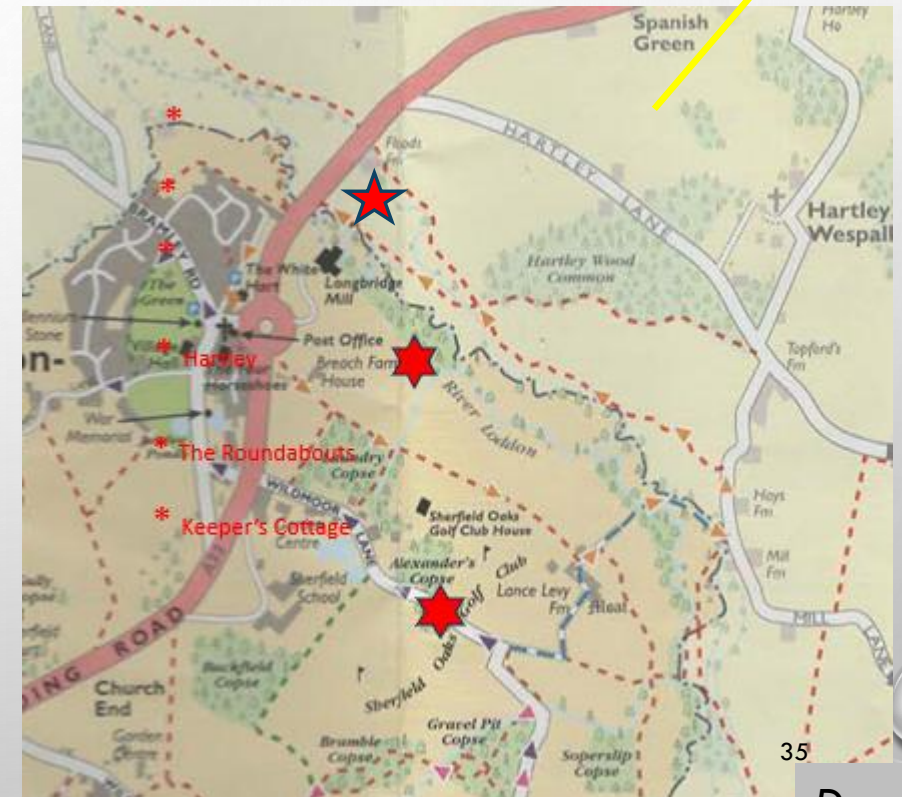
Six stick bombs, intended for Chamberlain's House in Heckfield, fell in Sherfield and Hartley (1940).

The first in the ditch beside the gamekeeper's dog kennels, next to Keeper's Cottage. It plastered mud up the kennel wall. The blast went backwards and blew all the small trees over and all the leaves off for a way back.

Another fell in the Roundabouts, behind a fisherman's hut. Another killed a cow in Hartley.

Everyone in the village went to have a look at the crater.

The village policeman told them that it was *"best if they went home"*.



Air Raids

When they bombed Coventry (1940), German bombers were going over very high up. All the search lights were scanning the sky. If they locked on to one, every gun around Bramley Camp would open up.

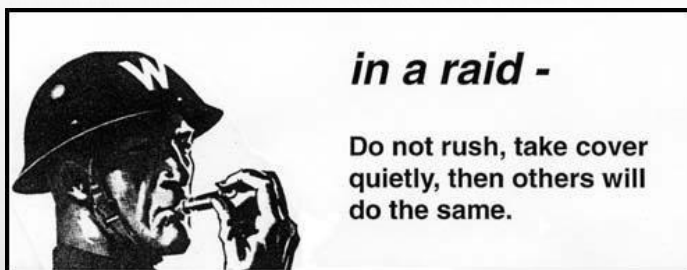


When the People's Pantry in Reading was bombed (1943), I heard the bombs going off in that direction. Then the air raid siren in Bramley Camp, and I could hear shouting out the back: getting the gun ready up at Goddard's Farm.

Forty-one lives were lost.

Civil Defence

As **Air Raid Wardens**, my Father and Ted spent much of their time outside. Mostly, they alerted householders to chinks of light from windows which should have been blacked-out.



The Home Guard trained on the Common. Ted Lyons, was Captain Mainwaring!

The Observer Corps post in Turgis undertook visual detection, identification, tracking and reporting of aircraft. Harold Lailey was involved.



Don & Ray

For Goodness Sake – Listen for the Siren

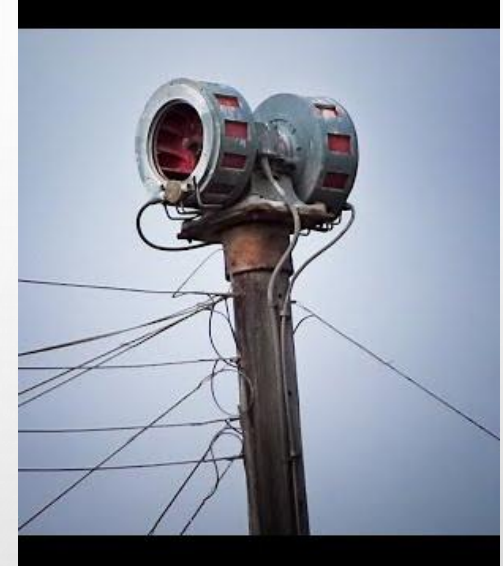


I was walking across the Common from my Aunt's near the Globe not realising that the siren had gone.

There was a dog-fight going on above me. One of the Germans came down and machine gunned along the Reading Road.

Mr Ham who lived at Hams Corner got off his bike and lay in the ditch.

Mother was on the front lawn yelling at me because I hadn't heard the siren.





D-Day Approaches

A Busy Road

I could look down into the village and see what was going along the main road.

There were long convoys: tanks, trucks, half-track gun carriers, tank carriers, and air craft carriers, long artic trailers with the body of the aircraft on and the wings placed one on each side



Later, lots of American convoys with American type trucks and all the things they needed.

Ursula lived close to the road. One of her memories is of the convoys coming back from Dunkirk, then later, troops and trucks making their way to D Day, and listening to them at night.

The Tank Carrier

A large tank carrier with a Churchill tank pulled up on the gravel in front of the White Hart.

At play-time we got as close as we could for a look, without crossing Bramley Road. They were doing something to the tyre on the carrier. It either burst or the ring blew off.

A soldier was blown up against the White Hart wall and I think he was killed, maybe very badly injured.



Gliders



The Americans flew Dakotas that pulled gliders. From the Common we used to see them circling over Aldermaston way. At times they would practice over Sherfield.

The gliders were very big and they made the Dakotas work hard at times.

Once we saw one pulling two gliders at once. It came very close to a tall elm tree at the top of Winton Cottage garden.

One Morning on the Common – May 1944



Covered with lorries, tanks and guns.
Bren-Gun carriers were new to me.



Excuse me sir: *“Why are there three white stripes on the vehicles; never seen them before?”*

Soldier: *“So we know friend from foe.”*

They disappeared as fast as they arrived;
by D Day, they had gone.

Erected a big Radio Mast – hit an electricity cable – big flash -
several soldiers knocked to ground - no one killed but
some badly burnt hands.

D-Day - 6th June 1944

Constant stream of lorries from the Camp:

Full of ammunition

Bombers going over

Gliders towed by planes

All with three white stripes

Lots of German bombers, V1 (Doodle Bugs) and, later, V2 Rockets flying towards London

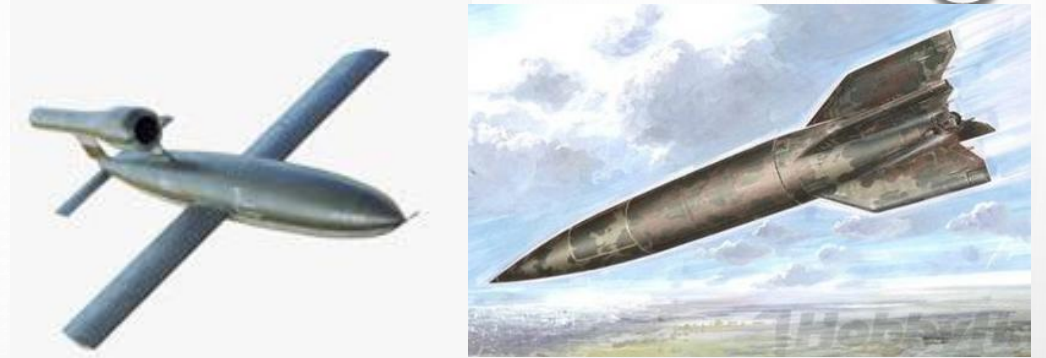


You could always tell a German plane – a different engine noise

Flying Bombs

In June 1944 the V1 Flying bombs started, day and night, with fire propelling them at the back and very noisy.

We prayed that the fire would not cut out and the rocket drop on us. One day this happened but the rocket went a little further, dropping on a row of houses. It was a Saturday lunch time when most people were at home.



Shortly afterwards, the V2 silent rockets appeared.

One day high up one shattered. Pieces of metal were falling everywhere. We had to rush to the shelters.

A Night at the Cinema – 22nd June 1944

Bramley Camp had a small cinema

Sometimes the guard would let us in.

At other times they would say “? off”.

Walking home one night we saw a plane trying to get back to Aldermaston, but on fire.

The crew bailed out and it crashed in Silchester.

Some boys got on their bikes to find it, but my mother wouldn't let me at that time of night.



Next Morning

Charlie Hale and I cycled over

It was an American Liberator Bomber

Wreckage everywhere. One engine had gone straight through a barn.

We picked up some cannon lying about and other pieces of the plane and brought them home.

Charlie trod on a glove and picked it up.

There was a hand inside.

An American Military Police Officer came over and said it was the pilot's, who had been shot over Germany.



Repairing Lives



We saw terrible injuries when we walked round the village and Basingstoke.

Park Prewett Hospital, Basingstoke

*Prepared for injured soldiers returning from the landings.
1,400 mental patients moved to various hospitals in Surrey.*

Two plastic surgeons, cousins, from New Zealand, gained great fame:

Major Sir Harold Gillies (1882-1960) - Army

*(Rooksdown House)- the pioneer of plastic surgery –
Rooksdown Club*

Professor Sir Archibald McIndoe (1900-1960) – RAF

(East Grinstead) - the innovator – Guinea Pig Club etc

Sir Alexander Fleming also worked at Rooksdown –
probably the first place ever to use penicillin routinely!

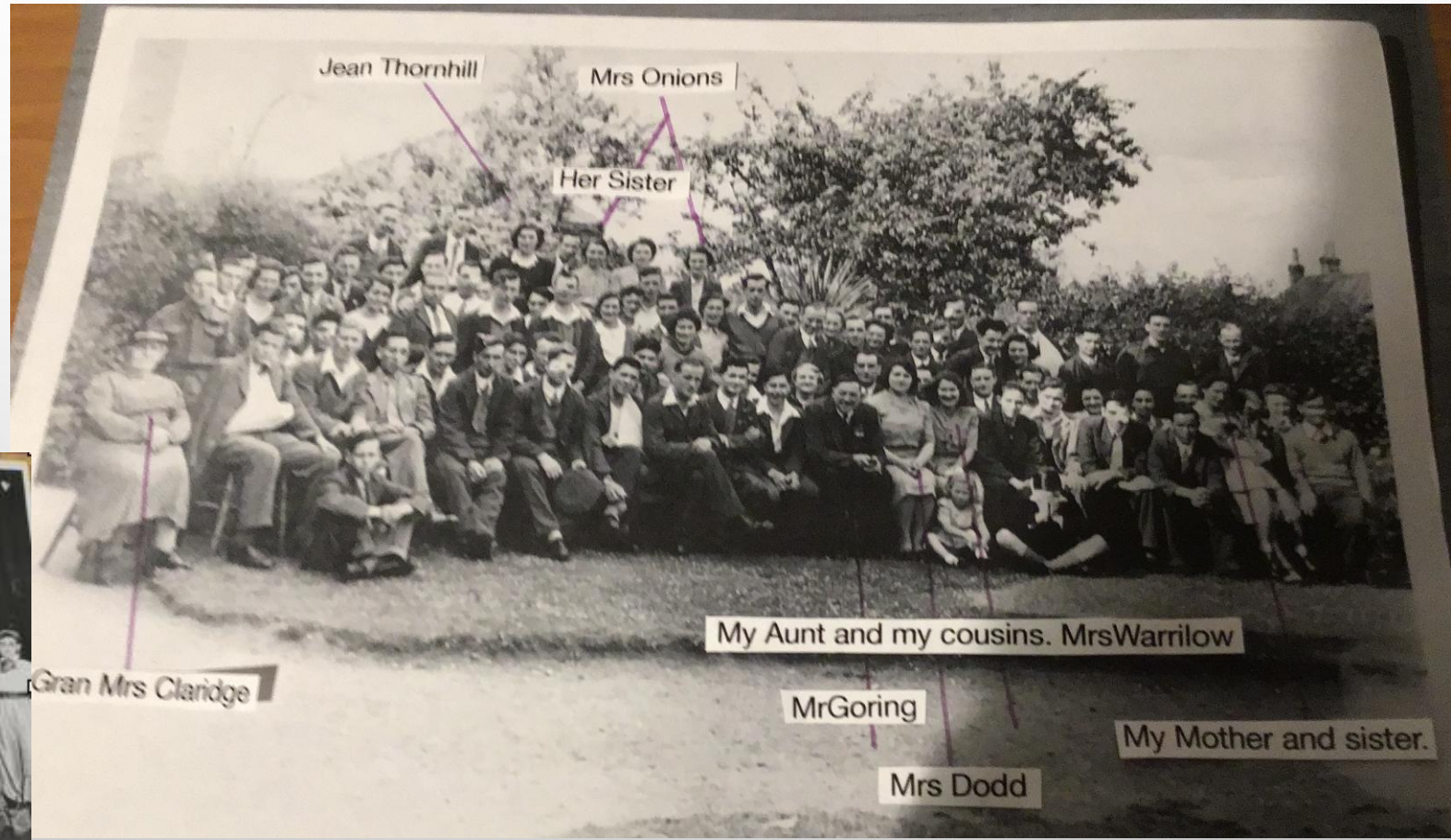




Buckfield House and Sanquillo Manor

now Sherfield School and Loddon School
Convalescent Homes for injured service men.

Villagers arranged
concerts and parties,
especially Mrs Dodd and
Mrs Barraclough



Wounded soldiers outside the village hall



Victory

VE Day

On 8th May 1945 peace was declared.

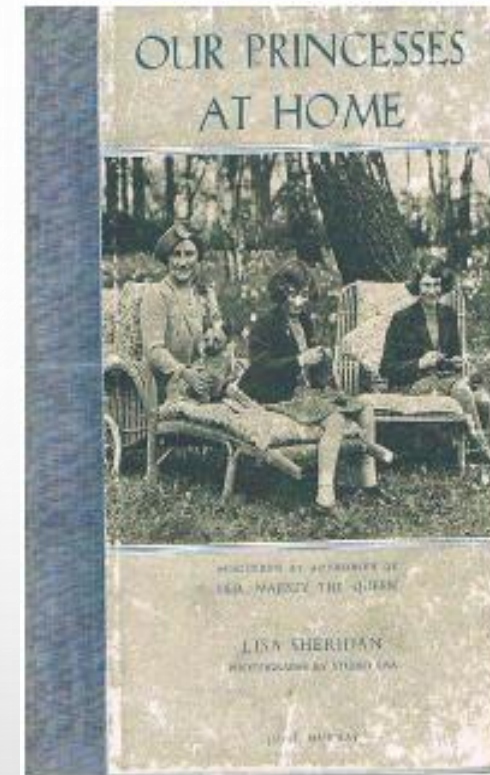
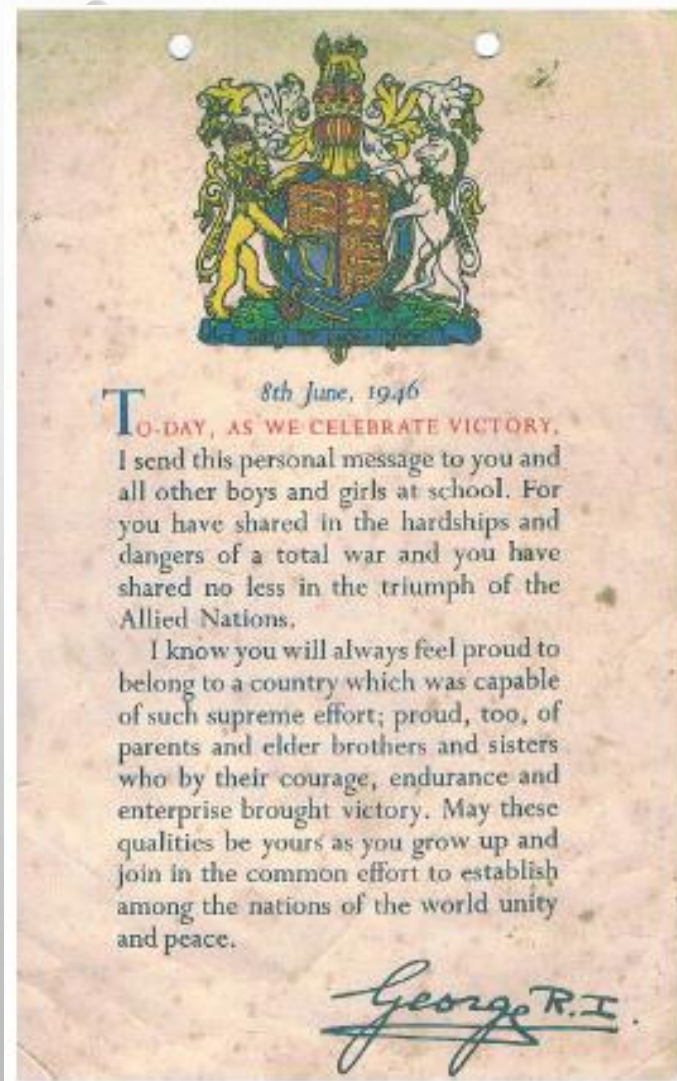
Bonfires: dancing in the streets: street parties for children. Several bonfires were built on the Common, with parties around each of them. Stiff competition to see who could build the biggest.



Joan's father was demobbed before Christmas.

He came in, threw his cap in the air – he was safely home again...

Celebrating Victory



Book presented to Ursula for the best long frock, at the Village Children's Victory Day Party.

All school children received this message from the King.

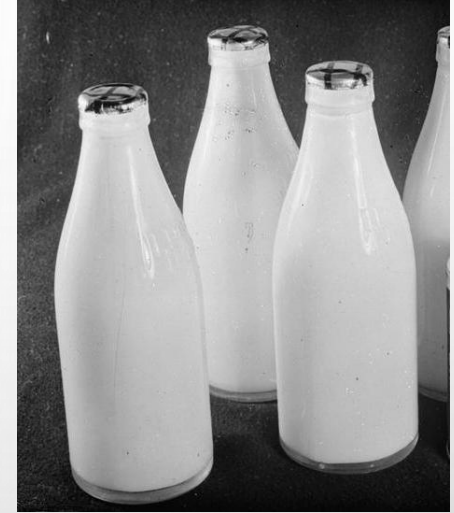
Milk Boys & Milk Men



Don: Sherfield Court Farm had a prize dairy herd. Don's mother was the Dairy Maid. Don & Alistair were involved with processing and bottling milk and caring for the dairy equipment, churning the butter before school and mostly washing up afterwards!

Ray: Aged 12, in the afternoons, Ray worked for John Wright of the Red Lion at Turgis Green (now Jekyll and Hyde), delivering milk, which came from Lilly Mill Farm.

He arranged the bottles for filling, sealed them with waxed cardboard tops, put them in crates and delivered to Sherfield, Church End, Wildmoor, Turgis Green, Bramley and Stratfield Saye - 2½d (=1p) a pint.



Mr Maynard from Carpenters Farm was the other milkman. He had two churns on his bike, a pint ladle and a half pint ladle. He would put the milk into whatever container was offered.

A Boys' Holiday

Troops from the camp used to burn slightly damaged bell tents at Broadford Bridge in Stratfield Saye.

We got one with a small tear; patched it up; and had a week's holiday in Hayling Island.

Nobby Clarke's dad took us down and picked us up.

He had bought the butcher's shop from Mrs Rutter.

She also owned the four pairs of semis in Bramley Road, where we lived, and the Garage next to the shop, which she sold to Lionel Dodd who worked for her.

Otherwise, we never had holidays, just Sunday School outings to Frensham Pond and, on rare occasions, a day trip to Southsea, Bognor, Brighton or the like.



As, for young men and women, well.....

Ray



They Danced their Cares Away

Regular dances in the village hall: very popular with service men stationed nearby: Bramley Camp, Taylor's Lane and Heckfield.

The Sherfield Band played in several villages.



Americans from Aldermaston air base parked their Studebaker and International trucks by the back garage.

If Annie Bright, in The Globe, had some beer, they would sit on the bank outside, drink it and give us the bottles to return and get the money back.

In the 1950s, a Saturday night coach from Ruffles Coaches went round taking people to dances in nearby villages and further afield. It was at one of these that Ray met Jean.



Don & Ray



Ray & Jean
outside
Swallowfield
Church where
they were
married in
1960.

Ray Crossman (b1933)

Married Jean Soper, 1960, Three children.

Always working: A milk-round boy (aged 12)

Labour Co-ordinator at Bramley Camp (16)

Soldier (16)

Set up building firm with Herbie Allen (21)

Acquired The Meadow Caravan Park

Sold out to Herbie (44)

Bought and developed caravan and holiday
parks; Retired.

Sport, Sport, Sport.....

This evening: Ray & Jean and Ron & Jane



Siblings: Ray, Shirley and Ron Crossman

Donald & Ursula Rickwood (b1931)



Don and Ursula Rickwood
Howick, Auckland, New Zealand 2020

Donald Rickwood and Ursula Cork, childhood sweethearts, married 1951, Two children. Ursula brought up the family.

Don - always working: From a childhood in farming to a key member of staff of Sherfield Court Farm, “*the problem solver*”, not least establishing the agricultural contracting business, serving major estates in Hampshire, Berkshire and further afield

Established own landscaping businesses locally and then in Auckland, NZ.

Now retired.

Joan Dillistone (née Howland) (b1932)



Joan Dillistone (née Howland)
1932 - 2013

Married Harold Dillistone, 1954,
Two Children.
Brought up a family -
The most noble of all occupations !



BOMBS OVER SHERFIELD

This presentation will be available on the Internet from
2nd May 2025 at:

www.managementreality.com/Sherfield/Index.html

and <https://tinyurl.com/zn3ye2ej>

There are links to individual presentations devoted to the war-time memories of each of Joan, Don & Ursula and Ray. These contain many more memories than presented this evening, and there is much other information about the village recorded by the Sherfield History Group.