

VE Day Memories—Christine Hogh (Smith) Class of 1958

Written for junior school children

The day arrived and the whole country was rejoicing that Victory in Europe had been achieved.

However, in our home, which at that point was in Lancashire living with my grandfather, there was frustration too as my father was in India with the RAF and the war against Japan continued.

My mother, younger sister and I were living in a little town, not far from Blackburn in Lancashire, called Great Harwood. We had moved from Shirley, Croydon in the middle of the Battle of Britain in 1940 when I was a few months old to join my grandfather. He was managing a factory making OXO cubes having been sent there by the parent company Fray Bentos from their offices in London. My father, working on the Stock Exchange, gave up his job when he decided Croydon was too dangerous with The Battle of Britain raging nearby and joined a factory in Blackburn as a 'progress chaser'. This factory was working 24 hour days to produce what was needed for the war effort so both men were doing jobs that were totally alien to them but that's what you do in a crisis.

Great Harwood was essentially a cotton mill town but the OXO factory was a popular place of employment as it was cleaner and much, much quieter than the cotton mills. I visited both frequently as a small child. My grandfather would take me to the OXO factory to give my mother a break when she had my next sister a year after we moved up north. I was his first grandchild and so he liked to show me off and his secretary would let me use the hole punch to make confetti for my dolls' imaginary weddings. The first word I learned to write was OXO after tracing my finger in the fat white letters that are still part of their logo.

He would then take me to meet Mrs Mills, our cleaning lady who worked a shift in the mill before she came on to us to do the 'rough' as my mother put it. The rough included whitening the front door step - a matter of great social pride among those hard-working ladies of Lancashire - and scrubbing floors, this after working hard spinning cotton onto big spools for many hours and lip-reading conversations with her friends above the incessant clatter of the machinery, but she never complained and her rosy face was always smiling. We adored her.

I went to school in September 1943 at three and a half. As many mothers were working in the mills to replace the men away in the forces, full time nursery provision had been set up with a lovely teacher called Mrs Forsyth and an assistant I think. Although I made a fuss on the first day and screamed and stamped my feet, I was secretly intrigued about school, although annoyed that my two-year-old sister was going home.

I soon decided that school was much more interesting than being at home although they really hadn't much idea of what to do with nursery age children so we had a slightly watered down infant curriculum (I am by training an infants' teacher!). The only real difference was the slower pace, the hot cocoa at morning break heated on the stove in the corner and the 'rest' after lunch when little camp beds, a blanket and a pillow were put out and we were supposed to sleep. Many pillow fights ensued!

The war ticked on and dad, having been called up in 1942 joined the RAF like his younger brother. He did his basic training in Wales and came home once on embarkation leave in 1943 before he disappeared to India for three long years. He wrote to me every week and sent me funny drawings of him repairing aircraft or flying in them. It was a great incentive for me to learn to read and write and in March 1945 he wrote an aerogram, which I still have, commenting on what a good letter I wrote now - I was just under five. Great credit to St Bartholomew's C of E Primary School's teaching.

On the day the war was declared to be over in Europe we all listened to the Prime Minister on the radio, or the wireless as we called it then, and many patriotic tunes were played, especially relating to the armed services. My mother made my sister and me stand to attention and salute when the RAF march was played. She then handed me the paper and asked me to read out some of the front page. I still have it, carefully kept after she died, and I was quite proud to note that it was the Daily Telegraph - quite difficult reading for a five-year-old.

Later that day there was the excitement of going to a street party, not in our road which was a fairly main one but in a quiet street between two rows of terraced houses with tables laid out all down the middle.

There were sandwiches, jelly, cake and squash to eat and it looked just like the L S Lowry painting called VE Day. When I first saw that picture it looked so like my vision of my street party that I thought Lowry must have been there but I think that scene was replicated all over the country and certainly all over Lancashire where there are many such streets.

It was May and the evening light was still quite bright as we walked down the hill. Earlier, I had asked my grandfather whether we would be up until midnight and he said that we would. I was waiting with bated breath to see the fairies at the bottom of the garden, which he had assured me only appeared when the clock struck 12, but I kept that thought to myself.

On the way I spotted a big bonfire, blazing away, with a figure on top just catching fire so I said to my mother, 'What's that?'

'Oh! That's Hitler,' she replied casually.

Now, I knew Hitler was a bad man but burning him on a bonfire in Great Harwood seemed rather cruel so I fell silent and must have looked upset when she realised that I had taken her statement literally.

'It's just like Guy Fawkes,' she added hastily, and then remembered that since the beginning of the war, before I was born, there had been no fireworks or bonfires on November 5th or, indeed, any other night. When all had been explained to my satisfaction I was able to calm down and enjoy the celebrations. The food was quite simple but enjoyable and we played games that children still love today like Pass the Parcel. Everyone was so happy that life could begin to return to normal, though I think few realised how tough that would be and how long it would take. My father didn't arrive back from India until April 1946.

However, that day, when we arrived home to 51 Park Lane, I asked my grandfather if it was midnight and he said it was (but I have no idea if this was true). I demanded to be taken down the garden to see the fairies. Needless to say, there were none and I think that was when I began to realise that adults don't always tell the truth but they are quite good at fairy tales!



WWII Memories Ann Hatherill (Carter) Class of 1955

Written for junior school children

Hello, my name is Ann Hatherill, but before I married my name was Ann Carter. My parents who died in the 1990s were William Arthur Carter and Elsie Carter.

Before my mother married she was living in Lincoln, where she was born, with her father. Her mother had died of tuberculosis. My mother was a junior school teacher in Lincoln. Before 1944 married ladies were not allowed to teach so she knew that she would have to stop teaching when she married my father. My father was a qualified engineer. He had met my mother when he went to Lincoln for part of his training. Afterwards he returned to Brixton in South London where he lived with his parents. His father was a 'motor cab driver', which we now call a taxi driver. Their three storeyed terrace house was the only one in their road without a live-in maid. After qualifying my father was employed for a while, but then he lost his job in 'the depression' as was common in the early 1930s. The depression was a time when many companies had little or no work so they had to shut their factories and offices and make their employees redundant. He was out of work for a long time and in those days no one received money when they had no job. My mother sent him money out of her wages.

Eventually they married in 1934 when he had found work. My grandfather sold the house in Lincoln and came to live with them in their new house in Norbury which is part of Croydon. He paid towards the house and gave my mother some money each week which helped pay the mortgage and buy food.

I was born in May 1937 and was their only child. My mother was then 39 years old, my father was 30 and my grandad nearly 80. When I was very small it became more and more obvious that a war was likely in Europe and that England would become involved. This must have been a great worry for my parents with a young child and my grandfather whose sight was beginning to deteriorate. He had cataracts in his eyes which were not operated on in those days.

As was feared England became involved in the troubles in Europe after German soldiers advanced into Poland. For England the war started in September 1939 when I was two years old.

Expecting that London would immediately be bombed my parents decided that my mother, grandad and I should go and stay away from Croydon for a while. We went to live with a lady in her house in Reigate as her lodgers. She was, I think, a friend of one of my mother's distant relatives. Years later my mother told me how unhappy she was there having to share a house with someone she didn't know. It must have been very hard trying to keep me quiet and occupied. She was also worried about my father and how he was managing on his own. As no bombing started for several months we returned to Croydon. My father changed his job about the time that the war started. Being an engineer he was not expected to volunteer for the Royal Navy, Royal Air Force or Army, nor was he 'called up'. When more soldiers, sailors or airmen were needed, men and women not doing essential work were expected to join when called for. 'Conscientious Objectors' were people who refused. They were allocated jobs in places like hospitals. My father became an instructor at the Government Training Centre in Croydon, next to Croydon Airport which was an important civil airport - before the days of Gatwick and Heathrow. My father trained men and women to use workshop machinery for making things for use in the war. The men and women had been, for instance, shop assistants, race horse jockeys or musicians and had never used machinery like lathes and milling machines before. Other instructors taught people skills like blacksmithing or how to make things from sheet metal. When the men and women were skilled enough their best skills were matched with vacancies in the small factories that occupied many small buildings. I remember going to Brixton with my father to visit a friend of his who had one of these small factories in some lock up garages. It was crammed with people and machines and the air was blue with vapourised oil as the machines were being pushed so hard to make things fast.

At the top of the road where I lived there was a joinery works which, before the war, made doors and window frames. During the war they made parts for wooden gliders which were used to take men silently behind the German lines in France on nights with no moonlight.

Soon after the war started 'blackout' was introduced. As most bombing would happen at night no street lighting was allowed and houses had to have no lights showing at all. This was done so that the bombers

could not easily decide exactly where they were. Air raid wardens came round after dark to check that people were not showing any lights.

Railway lines were obviously fairly visible with the minimum of light from the sky. The steam engines which pulled most of the trains had special heavy sheets joining the engine and tender to cut out light from the fire.

My father nailed the special thick black cloth we were given over many of our windows or it was nailed over frames which could be removed. We had a small air raid shelter built outside our back door at the start of the war, however it was very damp in there and very cold so we didn't use it for long.

My parents often laughed about the evening at the start of the war when one of our neighbours, Mr Large, said that he had just come home. At the top of the road in the pitch dark he had just walked into an elephant! Apparently a circus had just been on one of the London commons and was having to move its animals away which they had chosen to do after dark.

Soon after the war started everyone was issued with an identity number - mine was DMTA 312/3. We were given a card with our number and personal details on it. We were supposed to always carry our number. This was so that, if we were killed or badly injured in the bombing, people could easily find out who we were. My father had metal discs made with our numbers on them. My parents' ones were on the ring of house keys which they always carried when out of the house.

Not long after we returned from Reigate the 'blitz' started. This was continuous night time bombing of London - every night but especially bad on dark nights when the moon wasn't out. Then the bombers could come in unseen but they had to come in lower when near their targets. They first dropped incendiary bombs which produced fires to light up places on the ground. They could then drop their bombs before returning to Germany. Around London there were many aerodromes from which our fighter planes flew. They were small aircraft such as spitfires which could go fast and manoeuvre easily. They chased the incoming German bombers and shot down as many as possible. The bombers were also found using searchlights. They were very powerful lights which pointed upwards and could be moved to point in different directions. When their light showed up a bomber then large guns on the ground would try to shoot the plane down. Many bombers did not reach their target but those that did caused great devastation and loss of life in London and the surrounding areas. Other cities with key industries, docks etc. were bombed too.

Soon after the start of the Blitz my mother, grandad and I were away again, this time to a tiny cottage called Hillcrest in Eagle, a very small village about 6 miles south west of Lincoln. It was owned by an old lady who was a relative of one of my mother's friends in Lincoln. We went to Eagle by public transport - train to Lincoln and then a bus. During the war all trains were packed with soldiers moving from place to place. My father came with us to Eagle to help us carry our belongings and then he had to return to Croydon.

My parents were very unusual in owning a car, but only people like doctors were allowed to buy petrol - they were allocated petrol coupons - so my father could not use the car during the war.

Few people had phones - we didn't have one until the 1950s - so when my father returned to Croydon from Eagle my mother would have waited for the postman to bring news of his safe return.

The cottage was tiny but we were all much happier there than in Reigate. There was no running water but the pump was not far away in the farmyard next door. The privvy (toilet) was outside, needing a candle to get there after dark. There was a kitchen range which needed lighting every morning before we could have hot water. It was also used for cooking hot food. Bath time was in a tin bath on the rag rug in front of the fire.

Ordinary washing and washing up was in a bowl on the kitchen table. Strangely it did have electricity but it was very expensive and could only be used for lighting and listening to the radio. The radio was the vital link to know what was going on in London, however the news was often not quite correct as the Government did not want the Germans to know how successful or otherwise their bombing had been.

We were all happy there although my mother was no doubt worrying about my father and forever watching for the postman. I made friends with local children and joined in with picnics and play. We were very near many airfields from where our bombers flew in and out in the morning and evening when

they were bombing Germany. Sometimes they practised for raids when they would 'hedgehop'. They came so low that we could see the crew. We felt that we could have touched them if we had stood up and held our hands up.

My father came up every two months or so. The people in the village would give him eggs from their hens or a rabbit that they had shot for him to take back. The village knew when he was there because of all the washing on the line.

Back in Croydon my father lived in the kitchen with its permanently blacked out windows. He slept in a deckchair in the kitchen and did not undress at night. Then, when the air raid siren went during the night, he could quickly go into our air raid shelter until the 'All Clear' went. The air raid siren made a moaning noise which went up and down in pitch at the start of the raid. At the finish it made a note of constant pitch. My father had stuck a map of Europe on to the kitchen wall. As the Germans advanced across Europe towards England he marked their new positions. The map stayed on the wall until the end of the war. Most homes had one of these maps.

One night, after we had been at Hillcrest for about 18 months, my mother woke me up and told me to get up quickly and go downstairs and get dressed. Out of the window I saw a red glow in the distance but coming towards us. My mother knew that it was an aeroplane on fire. It had been hit by a German plane which had been chasing it. I remember standing in front of the cold range getting dressed as fast as I could while my mother helped my grandad get up and dress. Suddenly there was a noise like a very strong wind followed by rattling and crackling noises. We made our way out of the cottage and realised that many tiles had come off the cottage roof and flames and heat were coming from the farmyard next door. When we went towards the lane the village policeman shouted out that we must go away from the village as fast as possible. The rest of the village, apart from the lady next door, was on the other side of the farmyard. It was winter, a moonlit night with snow and ice on the ground. We and the lady from next door, Mrs Hackney, hurried as best we could, my grandad finding it very hard as his sight was by now very poor. Eventually we were picked up by an RAF bus and taken somewhere where we were given breakfast.

We returned to the cottage and were told that when the aeroplane came down the two land mines it was carrying had exploded, the explosion being heard in Lincoln 6 miles away. My parents decided that if we were going to be killed, then we might as well be killed at home, so we returned home to Croydon.

Soon after we returned home my grandad became ill. He needed an operation which he did not want to have so he gradually became weaker and finally died. My parents would have been sad, but must often have wondered how they would cope with him during the ceaseless air raids.

Our house in Croydon was the end one of a group of houses. Next to us was Norbury Hall, a very large house in extensive grounds including a lake. The family who lived in it had agreed to the cellars of the house being strengthened and made into a large air raid shelter for the 100 or so people in the road.

When we returned home we had to go into that shelter every night. I remember being half asleep and my feet being put into wellies and my coat being put on. We stumbled our way up the road in the darkness (remember no street lights) past a huge cedar tree in the grounds. If we had slightly lost our way its branches used to hit our faces. We went down some stone steps and into the cellar where there were dim lights. There were rows of deckchairs for people and children to sleep in and cots for babies. I always took my second hand teddy bear that someone had given me. I don't remember having any other toys.

The Air Raid Warden ticked our names as we came in. He was not pleased if people did not turn up on time. Night time was often noisy because of the air raids taking place outside. One morning we came out to find that the four houses opposite the main gates had been demolished by a bomb during the night, but at least the occupants were safe even if they now had no home and possessions. Everyone helped their neighbours and we knew everyone's name in the road.

My father had put smaller screws to hold our front door lock on and had put a pillow behind the door. If there had been a close air raid while we were out we came home to find the front door open and probably a window or two broken. One bomb fell in the grounds of the house behind us, so that night part of the ceiling fell down in my bedroom and also in my parent's bedroom but we did not sleep there so it did not matter. My father always kept a set of ladders and a strong rope upstairs. They were in case we needed

to escape from the house through an upstairs window.

In 1942 I was 5 years old so had to start school. I went to the local one, about 10 minutes walk away - everyone used to walk to school. The headmaster found out that my mother had been a teacher before she was married so he asked her to go there as a supply teacher. Some of the staff had volunteered for the services so he was short of teachers. We sat in desks which held two pupils, all facing the front, with the desks in rows. There were between 40 and 50 children in a class. If a teacher was away their class was split and the classes above and below had to have 3 children to a desk - the seats were long planks of wood. There were no chairs in schools for children. The classrooms were all next to each other in a long row, the toilets were outside across the playground, but there was a covered walkway to get to them. It was still very cold out there in the winter. The school had air raid shelters built in the playground just in case there was a daytime air raid. In 1942 there weren't but later on we could be in the shelter all day. Day to day life in the war was very different from today. In the 1940s there was no television, no computers, no calculators, no biros, no felt pens, no central heating in homes and of course no cars in use other than by people like doctors. There were no antibiotics which made childhood illnesses long and painful. Food was rationed from January 1940, no one had a freezer and few people had a fridge. No one ate crisps, chips or cakes because there weren't any in the shops. Potatoes and bread were the staple food. Now, and before the war, a lot of our food is imported. During the war ships were always under attack and so their cargoes had to be essential goods such as fuel for aeroplanes, ships, tanks etc. So no one saw a banana or an orange during the war. Many of the dairy cattle in England had been slaughtered due to lack of food for them so milk was scarce - at worst 1/2 pint per adult per week. Young children were given an allowance of milk. The USA sent tins of dried milk and dried egg to help out. Both were mixed with water but the result wasn't very nice. My mother sometimes made cakes with the dried egg. The butter, margarine and fat allowance allowed us to have a little spread on our bread but we usually just had bread and jam. People didn't have instant coffee then. The tea allowance was small but better than nothing. The one egg per person per week was usually boiled in our house. The cheese ration was a minute piece per week but people who did manual work got extra. We all had a tiny meat ration supplemented by an occasional piece of corned beef or spam which was imported from the USA. I also remember eating whalemeat once. There was a tiny sweets ration, no chocolate, just a small handful of 'dolly mixture' type sweets or boiled sweets. No one ever left food on their plate as everyone was hungry and ate all they were given. Most dinners were almost all potatoes, in fact vegetables and potatoes were added to lots of foods. Strangely British people were healthier at the end of the war than at the beginning and children were much healthier, especially the condition of their teeth due to the shortage of sweets and sugar.

Every road where I lived had its 'pig bins' - we had one outside our house. Potato peelings and other food scraps were put in by householders. They were collected up and given to pigs which were reared locally. Land such as golf courses was made into allotments so that people could have a strip of ground and grow vegetables on it. Some people kept chickens for eggs and meat and were given an allowance of grain for feed. In some areas groups of people kept pigs which were then slaughtered for food.

Many things were in short supply. A clean piece of paper was a luxury. Envelopes were slit open so that people could write on the back. In school our writing books were small and made from poor quality paper. Our pencils always had our names on them and there was trouble if they were lost. Pencils for use in public places were attached by string to something solid or they would have been stolen. There was a great shortage of crockery and cutlery so in cafes the sugar spoons were chained to the cafe counters. Nothing was made of plastic then. There were a few toys and children's books in the shops. What I had, had been passed on second-hand. Clothes were rationed and in very short supply so there was the phrase 'make do and mend.' A lot of mums made their children clothes out of any material they could find. People listened to the radio a lot. The broadcasts contained encouraging words and songs such as 'Run Rabbit Run' and 'We'll Meet Again.' At intervals Prime Minister Winston Churchill talked to the people to encourage them to keep going.

After the heavy bombing of 1940 and 1941 there was a period of almost unbelievable quiet. No bombs were dropped on Croydon in 1942 and few in 1943. The last conventional bomb fell on Croydon on April 19th 1944.

During the time of quiet the Germans had advanced across Europe, taking control of Holland, Belgium and France. Near the French coast the Germans began to construct launching sites for the dreaded flying bombs, doodle bugs or buzz bombs which were to cause such destruction in England. They were directed at London but many fell short in Croydon, which was the borough hardest hit by them. The flying bombs were pilotless with engines mounted at the rear. They were launched up a sloping platform with sufficient fuel to reach their target. Each carried 4/5 ton of explosive. They made a noise like a motor bike and could be heard and seen coming. When the primitive rocket motor cut out it continued for a short while and then started to dive. As it fell faster it made a whistling noise. They were sinister things which terrified everyone. Unlike bombers these came at any time of the day or night. The first fell on June 12th 1944. A total of 141 fell on Croydon between June and August. 54,000 (3 out of every 4 houses) received damage, 1400 being demolished or beyond repair.

When at school we spent hours in the air raid shelter, often not getting any lunch until the middle of the afternoon. We continued our lessons there and when there was a lot of noise from outside we would sing 'Ten green bottles hanging on the wall' to try and distract us and drown the noise.

One afternoon the siren went as a doodle bug was coming towards us. My parents and I went across our road and into the Morrison shelter in the house opposite. They were indoors and were like a very thick steel kitchen table with a wire cage around the legs. The old lady in the house had a chair in the cupboard under the stairs as she couldn't bend down to get into the shelter. We got in with the lady's daughter, pulled the wire cage shut and put our heads down on our knees shutting our eyes. We heard the engine stop and waited. After a silence the whistle started getting louder then there was a sort of muffled bang. We opened our eyes. The room was full of dust and the lady's French windows had disappeared. The houses behind hers had disappeared but we were all alive and lucky to be so. Others had not been so lucky.

After raids like that everyone did their best to help each other and clear up their houses - more windows broken which had to be boarded up and more sweeping up of broken glass. Every house had a heap of glass and rubble outside. I remember being forbidden to put my hands down the sides of chairs by the cushions as the broken glass got everywhere.

My mother and I went off again to Lincolnshire because of the danger of remaining in Croydon. This time we went to stay with relatives in Sleaford, not near any aerodromes. We had not had a bath for weeks at home as no one dared get into a bath when flying bombs could arrive at any time. In Lincolnshire we enjoyed a good soak. I remember my mother trying to get me clean. I went to school in Sleaford which I hated. The teacher was a lady called Miss Buck who terrified me and of course I didn't know any of the children. She had a cane and was very strict.

Luckily for me the British troops in Europe captured the French coast so the flying bombs stopped coming to Croydon and we returned home. For a short time the Germans launched them from Holland but they did not get to Croydon. Soon however the Germans begun to be overrun and surrendered. The war in Europe was over at last on May 7th 1945. The people were jubilant but very tired after their constant battering and deprivation. Prime Minister Winston Churchill stood on the balcony of Buckingham Palace with the King and Queen. The people in most of the roads in Croydon piled up broken wood and lit bonfires. This was not popular as it damaged the road surface. Bells which had been silent all through the war could be peeled and the BBC broadcast its first weather forecast since September 1939.

Looking back now, aged 67, I am amazed at the bravery and courage shown throughout those six years - a long time. But things would have been very different for us all now if everyone then had given up hope.



WWII Memories - Ruth Meadows-Smith (Benbow) Class of 1951

Written for and given as a talk to the U3A

Why are we sitting in the dark on this crowded train? Mummy and my brother John 2 1/2 years older than me and I am 6 1/2 years old. We got up early this morning and left our home in Addiscombe near Croydon, mummy and daddy carrying suitcases and all of us with boxes and carrier bags over our shoulders. We caught a train to London Bridge and then a bus to King's Cross. I felt sick on the bus, I hate buses. We had already had our summer holiday at grandma and grandpa Hayes house at Reston and had a really good time. Daddy brought tickets for us and managed to get seats for us on the train going to Louth and then he said 'goodbye' and kissed us and looked sad and went home. We had arrived at King's Cross at 9:30 in the morning, and the train left at 11:20. We only got a little way when it stopped in this tunnel, the lights went out, and we sat with the boxes on our knees. The box had a red cover and inside was this thing called a gas mask. We practised putting it on – I didn't like the smell, sort of robbery, and your face got hot inside. There was a strange wailing up and down sound and everyone on the train said it was a siren. There had been an announcement by an important man called Mr Chamberlain that we were at war with Germany. I don't know what that means but it isn't going to be a holiday and I don't think I like the Germans. Suddenly there was a continuous wailing sound and everyone said that is the "all clear" – Does that mean the war is over? On the train continues on its journey to Louth. We went to grandma and grandpas but Mummy returned home to Addiscombe. I learned later that my dad been on a No. 18 bus on his way home from King's Cross when the siren went and everyone has heard off the bus in city Road and put in the basement of a tenement house. The man was nailing wooden boards over his downstairs windows, so when my dad went home he nailed wooden boards over our windows in Addiscombe.

On the next Sunday auntie Connie, my mother's cousin took John to another cousin, uncle Sydney and auntie Nell, who lived at Melton Mowbray. He was called an evacuee and he was very cross as he didn't want to be evacuated and I heard he was very naughty. The first day he went to the local grammar school he went up to one of the boys and punched him in the face! His name was Bob Hyslop and his parents had a farm in a village some miles away and over the years John used to go to stay with him and loved farming. Bob was my brother's best man at his wedding, and told this story at John's funeral.

I was evacuated with my grandparents until July 1940, when everyone thought the east coast was going to be invaded and I remember army vehicles passing my grandparents' home the whole of one day, going towards Grimsby, and I was taken to Melton Mowbray.

My father was a precision engineer, and did not get called up as he worked at Creeds in Croydon, who invented the Teleprinter amongst other devices essential for communication in the war. He had to mend any broken machines and worked very long hours, 64 1/2 for £9 (old money) a week and later was in the bomb disposal squad at Creeds, then working 8 am - 8 pm - 10 pm and called out to diffuse bombs which had not exploded. He was down a crater defusing a bomb when the sides came on top of him; his back was injured and he had to be hospitalised and had episodes of back pain for the rest of his life, and had to always wear a corset. Later in the war he suffered from duodenal ulcers and had to go into hospital due to internal bleeding. On one occasion he was in hospital in Louth and the man in the next bed, 'local' asked him where he came from, and my father replied 'London'. The man said, 'oh, I have a friend who lives in London, his name is Robert Smith do you know him?'

To return it to my year at my grandparents. My grandpa was the 7th son and last of 11 children, and he was called Septimus. His parents lived at South Reston Hall where he was born and his forebears had lived there for 200 years. he married my grandma, Alice Marwood, in 1902 who was also one of 11 children, and they had one child, my mother. They had been farmers until the depression in the 1930s when my grandfather, like so many others, was made bankrupt because he farmed on the Lincolnshire Wolds, mixed farming but mainly sheep and the prices were so low when he had paid all his debts and sold his lovely farmhouse – The Grange – at Authorpe, there was nothing left and they had to go into rented accommodation. He became the Louth Rural Council rate collector for 14 years, and so I called thousands of miles on his Rover – the car company – cycle, which he bought a 10 guineas in 1899. The bicycle is now in the Rover museum. He stopped riding it in 1959 aged 85 and bought a new one! The old one was called a road racer, there was no free wheel or breaks, you stopped by peddling backwards. I remember him getting on the saddle over the back wheel and I have a photo of him riding it. You may not think this is relevant to my experience during the war but to me it is. It is the background to the year I spent in the village. People knew everyone for years and for miles around. The boy Peter who lived next door to my grandparents, and was 4 1/2 years younger than me, I still know and he still lives just round the bend in the road where he was born in 1937. I still visit him and he is now the oldest person to have been born in the village. It is a way of life which has gone. We had no mains water – my grandfather pumped water in the kitchen for 20 minutes every day from a concrete tank outside, which filled from a 'bore', into a tank in the 'false' roof. The lady in the cottage opposite had a pump in the front garden which used to squeak as she lifted the handle up and down to raise the bucket of water. There was no electricity, it arrived in 1956, so paraffin lamps had to be trimmed and let every evening. An accumulator for the wireless was exchanged every 2 weeks by van, so they could listen to the news. most people had outside toilets which were wooden planks with one or two holes and a bucket underneath which had to be emptied, probably on a compost heap. Horses and wagons, very few cars and I don't remember tractors... Steam engines for harvesting. Milk was brought to the door by the local farmer's daughter in a milk churn, and ladles into a jug – grandma grumbling if the cows had eaten wild garlic and tainted the milk. Vegetables were grown in the garden, fruit made into jam or bottles for the winter. Pigs fry, sausages and meat brought round in a basket when a pig had been killed and eggs bought from the nearest person with chickens. When I had measles auntie Lizzie brought round beef tea which she had made it was very nice. This was village life which children evacuated from London experienced for the first time. Sam had good times and some very bad depending on who they were billeted with. I of course was very fortunate.

9 September

John had gone to Melton Mulberry and I had to go to school. The village school was a mile away at the other end of the village. Children were brought to school by bus from several other villages, farmer's sons and daughters, and the children of their workers. The first few days I was taken to school by grandma and grandpa. It was very different from my old school, Woodside Infants, where there were a lot of children the same age in one classroom and we had a chair and desk each, my best friends were Wendy and Colin Humphreys, and our teacher was quite young with black curly hair and her name was Miss Haddock – well it was a fish anyway – and we had a playground with a field in the summer to play in. South Reston School was a small building built in 1858 – I have a photo of it before it was sold in 1993 and is now a private house as so many village schools now are. there were only two rooms, a small one for the children

that could not read and a big one for those that kid. I was put in the big room and all the boys and girls seemed much bigger than me and the biggest boys and girls sat at the front of room and so I was at the back. We had benches to sit on and a long table to write on either slates or paper and pencil. I sat next to Betty Hutton who came from another village; she was very kind to me. Names were on the register and by my name was written evacuee with Mr and Mrs S Hay. There was one other boy evacuee, bigger than me, and he wore glasses. The teacher was Miss Mathews who looked very old and had grey hair and if the boys are naughty she had a cane or ruler which she used on their hands but not very often. She didn't have far to come, but she rode a bicycle with a basket on the front and sat up very straight. We used to say our tables all together, copy carefully joined up writing with loops and work on our own. I thought I had to keep up with the big ones, so learnt a great deal at that school. On Wednesday afternoon Parson Shaw who lived at the rectory came, he was quite fat and wore small glasses and had quite a squeaky voice. I don't remember what he taught us but it must've been Bible stories. We had an hour for lunch and play. I didn't stay to lunch and there was no way I was using the toilets in the playground, sitting on a wooden plank with the boys looking through the door. So I ran a mile through the village – past the village shop, Past the church, Miss Matthews house, the Methodist chapel, the park belonging to South Reston Hall which had a moat around the kitchen garden and Parson Shaw's Rectory, the cricket field which was full of sheep as all the young men were away in the forces, Mr Bond's farm, Charlie Woodrow with his big scythe cutting the grass around ditches and catching rats – he got 6d for 10 rat tails - and on past Mr and Mrs Whites bungalow, past Park View auntie Lizzie and Alice's house, to Mr and Mrs Archer's farm yard where grandpa would wait to see me across the road to the Wagon and Horses pub. We didn't go near the pub and I often wondered what awful things happened that when people drink beer, as our family didn't as we went to the Methodist chapel. Nearly home, past Mr Walker's market garden where we bought tomatoes in the summer, past Peter's house, to our chalet bungalow and my lunch. Eat up quickly, then go to the flushing toilet! And run all the way back to school.

Wednesday was market day in Louth, 7 miles away. Grandpa would ride his bike and grandma would get the bus, which didn't run very often, and on holidays I would go with her. I wanted to go but I was and still am a very bad traveller by bus or car so grandma would tell me stories to keep my mind off the journey. In Louth as well as stopping in the International Stores and the market we met all sorts of people including my grandma's seven sisters. 3 were married to farmers, 2 lived with their brother on his farm, And two came from Grimsby. I listened to all the news and gossip being exchanged and we had fish and chips for lunch.

Saturday was play day and a bath in the tub in front of the fire when it was cold, or the range in the kitchen would heat the oven for all the cooking and the damper would be moved so the fire would heat the water tank, which grandpa had filled up with his pumping in the morning. The small bathroom upstairs was heated with a black paraffin heater, but it was always cold. So we were all clean for Sunday with our Sunday best clothes on to go to chapel. If there were flowers in the garden, especially roses, grandpa would put one in the lapel of his suit jacket. We would walk single file to chapel as the path was very narrow, grass verge to the road and grass on the other side to the ditch which was usually full of water. Lots of people went to chapel and the service was usually taken by men who were farmworkers During the week, occasionally women, or sometimes a minister. My mother was a local preacher when they lived at the Grange farm and used to cycle miles to preach. I like the singing but got a bit bored with

the sermons, my grandpa used to go out of our pew near the back and sit in the front as he was a bit deaf and every now and then he would call out 'praise the Lord' so I suppose he liked what the preacher was saying. We didn't cook on Sundays, but heated up what had been cooked on Saturday on a small paraffin stove. Then I had to write a letter home to my parents. We only read the Bible on Sundays, and so grandma would take me out for a walk and tell me stories about when she has a girl, such as "it was very cold and a pig had had piglets and her mother was still in bed nice and warm so her father took the piglets up and put them in bed with her to keep them warm!" Also about the soldiers who came home from the Boer War and had lost their legs and used to sit on the pavements in Louth begging for money. We used to sing songs from the First World War, "it's a long way to Tipperary", "farewell Piccadilly" etc. I learnt all the names of the birds and flowers along the road sides and lanes and usually visited friends or relations for cups of tea along the way. I was given tea for the first time during the war so never had sugar in it.

The winter of 1939/40 was bitterly cold and I will hand knitted clothes - vests, jumpers, dresses, long socks, scarves and pixie hoods and gloves. The east wind blew from the North Sea and it snowed and snowed, South Reston was cut off for two weeks. Mr Dennis next door Doug us out. Eventually, workmen it came through from Louth and snow was piled in three steps in each side of the road, and if I walked on the bottom step I was taller than my grandma. I had chilblains which I had never had before and when my feet got hot in front of the fire they itched and were painful. I had wintergreen ointment which I rubbed on them, and I can still imagine the smell. I was warm in bed as I slept on a fat featherbed which had a hot water bottle put in and I was allowed to say my prayers in bed at night when it was cold.

While I was very happy with my life at my grandparents in the country, things were not so good for my parents according to my father's diaries. My father was working very long hours and my mother had joined the Red Cross working in Croydon General Hospital. John wanted to go home and so he was being very naughty and they had to move him from Uncle Sidney's to the local butcher, a Mr and Mrs Sutton after Christmas 1939 which we all spent at Reston. The standard allowance for keeping an evacuee was 10/6 (55p) a week plus payment for new clothes. John had a navy suit for school £1.10, his shoes 2/3 (23p) and £5.50 for a term at the Grammar School. Mother and John visited us at Reston and my dad visited for a few days. They went back to Addiscombe and John stayed for 10 days and then was sent back to school at Melton, and Mrs Sutton said she could not keep him after July. So far there had been no bombing in London, all the activity has been on the continent and I didn't understand what grownups were talking about. We had been issued with identity cards and Mr Walker had brought our round. We had to memorise the number and I still know mine TNUQ343, the last number was the number in the household; grandpa 1, grandma 2 and I was 3. We now started getting air raids at night and we used to wrap up under the space under the stairs where a stuffed red fox lived and he had to be moved. I thought it was fun as I was told more stories by grandma. She had been governess to the Lord Mayor of Sheffield's children, Rita and a boy Jonas, in the 1890s. He was German and owned a steel works in Sheffield, and grandma had travelled to Germany with them and I have a letter she wrote to my grandpa from Cologne before they were married. I know she was still exchanging Christmas cards with Rita in the 1940s. The reason we were having air raids was because there were many aerodromes on the flat land of the East Coast and we were very near to Manby. My Uncle Will Househam had a farm we used to visit opposite the aerodrome.

Another strange happening was my grandma brought a lot of narrow white tape and a pot of black ink and was writing Ruth Renbow lots of times on the tape and then stitching name tapes in my clothes. Also I was taken to the photo shop and had lots of photos taken and the pictures were put on a large sheet and a small album – called polyphotos. Everything was changing. Grandma's nephew Ronnie had been sent away to the mines because he had bad eyesight and couldn't be a soldier, my big cousin Raymond was a soldier in command of a lot of soldiers and because he was very tall he had carried some of his men in the sea and put them on boats to get them away from France and the Germans and back to England and then he was poorly. I had watched army trucks go past my grandparents' house all day and then they had packed up all my clothes and I was taken to Melton to Uncle Sid and Auntie Nell and grandma had got into trouble because she hadn't taken me to the doctors to have a medical certificate. Grandma went home without me and I cried. My cousins took me out for a walk to try to cheer me up and then I got into trouble. I was told much later my mother's cousin in California, who had an orange grove, had said he would have John and me over there until the end of the war, but because I hadn't got a medical certificate we had lost our place on the boat which was taking English children to America. That boat as well as 2 others was torpedoed by the Germans, and hundreds of children drowned, so my grandma always said she had saved my life!

There is a note in my father's diary 19 July 1940, wages £11.4.5, at 3/8 an hour. On 26 July, I go back to Addiscombe with John and a few days later men come to build a shelter in our garden at the very end of the sideway between our house and Mr and Mrs Moss. It has very thick walls and a concrete roof – not very big inside and smells damp and not very nice. Daddy had 4 days summer holiday, and a soldier Uncle Arthur Strawson came to stay and we went to Keston Ponds and Hampton Court, without mummy as she was poorly in bed, and the doctor came. The very best memory – I had a new bicycle for a present, and I learnt later that it cost £2.15. I remember on a hot day I rode to my friend Colin, who I hadn't seen for over a year. In the front garden there was a tent so I looked inside and there was Colin with nothing on, and he shouted at me so I ran, got my bike and pedalled home as fast as I could, and never saw him again!

14 August

Grandpa's sister Lizzie and her husband Mr Strawson visit and go back to Lincolnshire with their soldier son, Arthur.

15 August

Mother is better and takes me and John to London Zoo and that evening after we get home there is an air raid and bombs hit Croydon aerodrome and the Acc and Tab Engineering firm, and 174 people are killed. My dad finished the air raid shelter with a thick wooden door and 6 bunks to lie on. Sirens went every day or evening, but not more bombs until

26 August

No warning, bombs all over Croydon with much damage. The day before, a Sunday, there were a lot of fires in London.

29 August

Air raid, no warning, bombs dropped on Beckenham soon after midnight. John and I should have gone back to Melton but unable to get away. We were sleeping in the shelter and often there were air battles going on. Daddy was working nights and had to get under work benches when they heard the bombs whistling down.

5 September

John should have started school at Melton but we cannot travel, and John won't stay in the shelter but puts on a tin hat and goes out when the raids are on. Daddy was in the Bomb Disposal Unit and there were 47 bombs causing fires in the roofs on our road, and a crate of 250 firebombs were dropped opposite Teevan Road in Addiscombe Road which daddy had to deal with. Spitfires go after the German bombers and sometimes we see them come down.

10 September

Mother takes John and me to Melton; she doesn't stay but goes home and gets back very late. People in London go into the underground stations if there are raids on. Mother had to do this on several occasions. In my dad's diary, there are raids every day and night, much damage and deaths. He has 1 day off in 8. Several times the bombs were dropped before the siren went off. This goes on all through October and November, including:

14 November

Bombing of Coventry for 13 hours, over 1000 casualties and 200 deaths.

Christmas Day

Addiscombe Methodist Church entertained 13 POWs in the church hall and in the evening at home. I am not sure where they came from. I know there was a POW camp at Shirley Hills, and they were there until at least 2 years after the war.

My memories of Melton Mowbray are quite different from the year I spent with my grandparents. That was like a holiday. September 1940 to the end of July 1942, I knew I was an evacuee. I was living with Auntie Nell and Uncle Sid, but I had never met them before. They had a daughter Jean at teacher training college, and son Arthur at boarding school, and Norma 18 months younger than me and she was about 6. They lived about 1 mile outside the town of Melton Mowbray and my Great Uncle Arthur, my grandpa's brother 10 years older than my grandpa, lived just around the corner in a bigger house, next door to the grammar school. He looked much older than my grandpa, who had black hair and a little moustache and was friendly and smiley, Uncle Arthur looked old with white hair and a white moustache and always looked severe and I knew I had to be very good. Uncle Sid was always fun but was away all day. He had a car and owned a large shop at Somerby which sold nearly everything and he used to take groceries around to people living in villages all around. My first very vivid memory is being taken by Auntie Nell to Melton to a place like a post office, and Auntie talking to man at the counter and the man pointed to me and said to her 'Is she yours?' Auntie turned round and looked at me in horror and said 'NO'. That was the first time I knew I was on my own and had to look after myself, keep quiet and put up with what ever happened. In retrospect, when we look back at our lives, there are moments which stand out and define our personalities. What was happening at that counter, I was being registered as an evacuee. Taken from my father's diary I understand he sent money to the Evacuation Officer and people who had evacuees collected 10/6 (55p) a week from them, and also food coupons and canvas beds with 2 [insert] of wood each end that crossed in the middle and held the canvas tight. My bed was orange and I don't know if my bedding was given out from the evacuation office or if it was Auntie Nell's. The bed was put up in the bedroom which Norma and Jean slept in – Jean was at college so her bed was empty. The counterpanes and curtains were pretty, white with small pink rosebuds, I had plain covers. Norma had her own wardrobe and there was a piece of elastic stretched inside then door with lots of pretty ribbons

hanging there for her hair. I had rubber bands at the end of my plaits. Aunty took me shopping in Melton as she said I had grown out of my clothes, I would rather have kept the clothes I had – a fitted pale blue coat for Sundays and a kilt which had pale blue in it; the Anderson tartan I believe. What was brought for me was a rough hard wearing sandy coloured thick coat with a hat. I really hated it, especially the hat, and I had to wear them on Sundays and I think it made me dislike Sundays. We went by car to chapel, a big building not like the small friendly chapel at Reston, we were in a pew with a door on it and the hymns were the only good part of Sunday mornings. I don't remember John being there but Sunday lunch we went to Uncle Arthur's. Aunt Kath lived with him and they had a maid, who brought the dinner in, and we sat in silence and I would have liked some more potatoes and gravy, but it was taken back to the kitchen and the pudding served up. Uncle Arthur and Aunt Kath both had a rest after lunch so John and I went into then kitchen and the maid would let us eat some more. I learnt later that it was then custom to leave food from the meal in the dishes and that was left for the maid. My mother often used to do this even though we didn't have a maid, years later.

School

John was at the grammar school and the Council Junior School was too far away to walk on my own and there was no one to take me, so I went with Norma to a school held in a lady's house. She was very nice but all the children were younger than me so I was given work to do on my own. Large pictures were put on then wall and I had to write stories about them. We were read stories about Percy the Pig and I had to write it all in an exercise book from memory and I had a book for sums which I used to take home. I discovered if I was doing sums I didn't get into trouble, so I enjoyed doing sums. I was quite happy playing with Norma but I found her games a bit tedious sometimes. She had a family of dolls behind the large settee and I wasn't into dolls and one day when she was cross because I wouldn't play doctors and nurses, she ran at me with the scissors and cut through my special red dress that grandma had knitted for me, and through my knitted vest, just scratching me. When she saw what she had done she thought she would get into trouble and so I found a needle and thread and tried not very successfully to mend the dress. She did get in to trouble sometimes and my Aunt would spank her with the back of a hairbrush and say to me 'I would do this to you if you were mine'. I never knew what we had done. This makes my Aunt sound cruel. She wasn't, and it can't have been easy having someone else's child for 2 years. I think also she was not always very well.

I sat the exam for the grammar school before I was 9. They had a class 1 year before the senior school. I remember that day. All the children were bigger than me and we went into the playground at lunch time and I had never seen so many children running around. I passed that exam and had to wear the uniform; it was grey and red and they had houses. I was in Belvoir which was red, there was also Cotswold, yellow, and Quorn, blue. I learnt these were the names of the Leicestershire hunts and there was a rhyme they used to shout which started 'Belvoirs best'. I had a friend when I was there called Ann Freckingham and I don't remember much else about it. Everyone was bigger than me – again!

Holidays from September 1940 to June 1941 were spent at Reston, with our parents usually managing to travel from Croydon for a few days. We could not go to the seaside as the beaches and sand dunes were covered in barbed wire. Food was rationed but it was easier for people living in the country, living off the land – their own vegetables, chickens, rabbits, pigeons and pigs fry. Whitsun beginning of June our parents came to Somersby and we had a holiday together.

22 June

The raids in and around London had almost stopped as Germany invaded Russia on 22 June. John left the grammar school at Melton and passed on to Whitgift Middle School in Croydon – now Trinity School at Shirley. I stay in Leicestershire. Mother comes to see me on the 6 November for half term. Friends of ours Rene and Godfrey (I have just been to his 100th birthday) decided to move from Isle of Wight. Rene packs up but cannot find their cat so she decides to leave without it. She left the cat's basket at our house in Addiscombe and took her 2 children to their new home in West Hartlepool on the 17 November. On the 30 November the cat turns up at our house – no one knows how it found its way. So my father put it in its basket with a bottle of milk and a saucer and put a label on the basket asking the Guard to feed it and the basket was taken to Kings Cross. The cat arrived duly fed on 2 December at West Hartlepool. My father is having stomach pains at this time, there was a shortage of milk and so all munitions and war work factories were allocated Halibut Liver Oil at work.

7 December

Japan declares war on America.

26 December

American fleet destroyed at Pearl Harbour.

Jan 1942

Russia attacks Germany.

Japan invades Burma.

12 February

Battle in the Straights of Dover, 2 battle ships slip by.

21 February

Dad visits me at Melton for 2 days – Germans engaged on the continent, no raids.

17 March

Empty trunk sent to Melton for my clothes etc.

1 April

I come home with Norma for Easter.

4 April

Clocks go forward 1 hour – double summer time.

10 April

Aunty Nell and Norma go home.

21 April

A big battle in Libya.

21 June

We lose Tobruk.

24 June 1942

Jean Hay brings me home from Melton Mowbray.

24 July 1942

I am no longer an evacuee. It will be another 3 years before the war with Japan ends with America dropping atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August, and Japan surrendering on 14 August 1945, Germany having surrendered on 8 May after Hitler committed suicide.

A brief summary of the rest of my war

August 1942

We all go on holiday to Reston. The clocks go back 1 hour to summer time. My father has a very bad back from digging out and defusing German bombs. There are some air raids, but days and nights without them. We grow vegetables in the flower beds and have chickens in the garden so we buy meal which is mixed with boiled vegetable peelings, it doesn't smell very nice. The chickens lay eggs, and we don't get eggs on the ration books. My parents ration books are beige and John's and mine are blue; age 5-16 years. Sometimes we can get oranges. Never any bananas in the war. Different foods are valued with different coupons. I used to go shopping on Saturdays, I remember a large tin of golden syrup was 16 points, and I used to put that on my porridge or cornflakes as the sweet ration was only 2oz a week until several years after the war. A tin of red salmon was 32 points, and my grandma used to buy one, which was a whole month's allowance, for us when we came on holiday.

September 1942

I passed the exam to go to Croydon High School, then in Wellesley Road facing Middle Whitgift playing fields, not the Whitgift Shopping Centre. Again I was put in the year with girls a year older than me, taken from my exam papers, but this was another definitive experience in my life. They were all good at netball in my form – very good – and went through the school together eventually winning the Festival of Britain Netball Trophy, when the winners of the Southern Counties CHS played the north, which they won about 56-20. How did this affect me? Our games mistress in 1942 must have felt sorry for me, smaller and younger than the others and made me Netball Captain which meant I had to give out the balls and write down the teams, so they had to come and help me. They were all very nice, and suddenly I felt I belonged. I wasn't in the first team, but I used to ride on my bike to school early and practise shooting and was always in the 'games group', eventually becoming a physiotherapist!

November 1943

Another incident I remember well occurred in November 1943. My father was on Home Guard Duty at Creeds most nights, sometimes until 1am. On 5 November, bombs dropped on Addiscombe, the Elgin Hotel was hit where Miss Elizabeth Price was living. My father collected her from the wreck – there was blood everywhere – and took her home. She had a lapse of memory on the way, and she stayed the night, I don't know how we first met Miss Price, who was a 'White Russian'; her real name was Maleokov and she knew several foreign diplomats including Monsieur Spark and Monsieur Gendarme, Financial Advisor to the Government of Belgium, who we came to know quite well. I think mother knew her from the Red Cross when Elizabeth was unwell and she used to come to our house for treatment. In my father's diary for 9 November there is an entry; Miss Price is ill at the Dorchester Hotel with Lady Diane. She phones us and wants to know what to do. She is brought to our house and on the 12th goes back to her wrecked room at Elgin Hotel.

December

Miss Price borrows £3 and on the 22 December stays the night I think she has lapses of memory. On 26 December it is recorded that Elie Gendarme, stationed at Selsdon Park Hotel during the war visits us and Miss Price stays the night. Soon after this she was living in a flat in the house next door to us.

During 1943 my father in the Bomb Disposal Unit wrote that there were hundreds of unexploded bombs around Croydon. At one of his lectures the Royal Engineers Officer was demonstrating the instrument

used to listen if the bombs were ticking. He turned the probe to the house across the road and they could hear the people talking.

1944

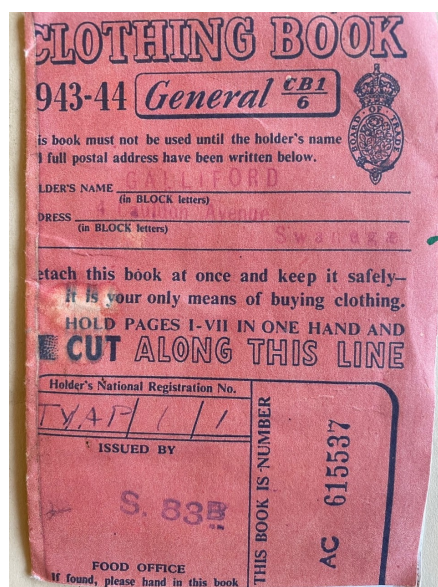
The year of the doodlebugs. My father has no diary for that year – he was ill much of the time in hospital after haemorrhaging from duodenal ulcers. We were in the shelter a lot that summer. In June I was sent to my Uncle and Aunt in Farnborough, Hampshire, and we used to watch the doodlebugs going over, wondering if they would land in Addiscombe. It was the end of the school year and my exam papers were sent to me at their home, I had to do them under strict conditions and send them back. Before I went away, I was cycling over Windmill Bridge on my way to school, I heard a doodlebug, then the engine cut. I kept cycling but a man told me to get off my bike and lie down. When I arrived at school in Wellesley Road the doodlebug had landed in the field opposite, and all the windows in the front of our school had been blown out. Miss Mouncey, head of the Junior School, who always looked so neat and tidy, had her hair all in a mess. They couldn't believe I had cycled to school. I think Croydon had more doodlebugs than any other borough. The V2s were more frightening as there was no warning and they were very powerful. I believe the last one just before the end of the war landed in Orpington and a lady was killed.

April 1945

My sister Mary Alice was born, the beginning of a whole new chapter – a happy one – in my life.

I was 6 when the war started and 12 when it finished. I remember more of the next 6 years, which in some ways were harder with clothes and food still rationed, and in short supply – bread rationing, no potatoes only POM, whale meat, clothes made from my grandma's nice material, shortage of fuel in a freezing cold winter of 1947, Hans a German POW coming to dinner on Sundays and doing the garden during the week; he returned to East Germany in 1947 and sent Christmas cards to my parents until he died. I remember the first ice creams and the first bananas and my best Christmas present – fudge made in a flat tin by my grandma.

The sad outcome for my mother was I never regained my relationship with her, and I hope she never knew. My father had health problems for many years so they had to rebuild their lives by working hard. The happy outcome for me was the school I went to, and meeting my husband at my school dance when I was 17. We were happily married for 54 years with 4 happily married children, 12 grand children and 1 great grandson.



Medal from the King given to children in 1946 in memory of the end of the war

CREEDS of CROYDON BOMB DISPOSAL SQUAD

HAROLD 1943 BENBOW

Ruth's Father



In the years when our Country
was in mortal danger

HAROLD SEYMOUR BENBOW

who served 28 January 1943 - 31 December 1944,

gave generously of his time and
powers to make himself ready
for her defence by force of arms
and with his life if need be.

George R.I.

THE HOME GUARD



Ruth's Mother in Red Cross uniform



I WISH TO MARK, BY THIS PERSONAL MESSAGE,
my appreciation of the service you have rendered to your
Country in 1939.

In the early days of the War you opened your door to strangers
who were in need of shelter, & offered to share your home with
them.

I know that to this unselfish task you have sacrificed much
of your own comfort, & that it could not have been achieved
without the loyal co-operation of all in your household.
By your sympathy you have earned the gratitude of those to
whom you have shown hospitality, & by your readiness to
serve you have helped the State in a work of great value.

Elizabeth R