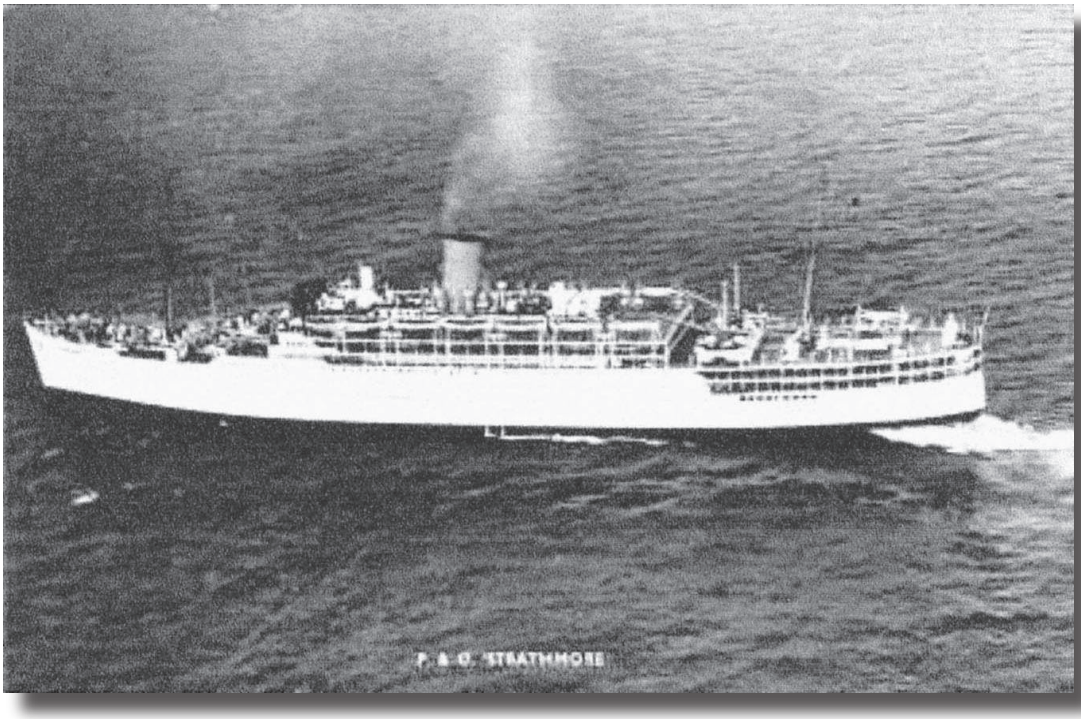
memories of the war

No photograph available

Mrs. Diana Wharton
Bartlands,
Shrawley.

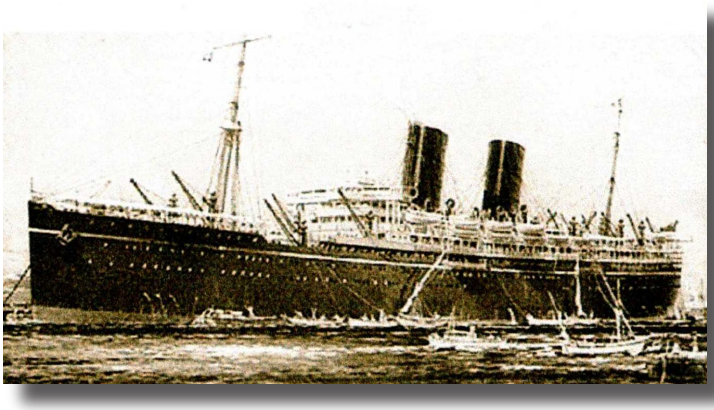
"Quit India"

May 1940 saw me in Southampton ready to embark on the S.S. Strathmore together with many other mothers and children. The powers that be had decided that all non combatant 'mouths' should be shipped out to parents and husbands in South Africa, India and ultimately Australia.
There was a certain amount of tension for the S.S. Rawalpindi had recently been sunk with a similar complement on its way to America. Five hundred women and children were lost.
In the Bay of Biscay there was news of Dunkirk.
Everywhere there was the deepest depression and increased tension. Next stop the Canaries, berthing next to a German ship! Twenty four hours later we sailed. There was mounting tension, for now we were pin-pointed and without protection. Life-boat drill was constant, life-jackets had to be carried at all times. together with a small suitcase containing warm clothing and war rations. We followed a constantly zig-zagging course, with many a lifeboat stand-by as enemy submarines were sighted.
We eventually arrived safely at Cape Town and then made for Mombasa. Italy had entered the war and we were to pick. up three hundred Indian refugees. As we docked, we saw them. Pitiful creatures, lying on the dockside with all their possessions in tiny bundles. Unfortunately, they created an enormous health hazard; meningitis, measles, chickenpox, malaria and skin problems came aboard with them and most were suffering from malnutrition. Matters were so bad that when the ship docked at Bombay, all passengers were put ashore while it was fumigated.
For me, it was nearly journey's end. Two days and two nights on the train to Calcutta and thence a relatively easy war, with minimal rationing and only the odd air raid. Famine and political unrest were the worst hazards. "Quit India" was the slogan.
The most heart-rending part of the war was coping with returned prisoners-of-war from Japanese camps. Their suffering was appalling and some of these apparitions were unrecognisable as human beings. Many are now dead, but the remaining few carry an indelible scar. They should not be forgotten, for they paid a terrible price.



S.S. Strathmore was built in 1935 by Vickers Armstrongs of Barrow as a Passenger Liner with a gross registered tonnage of 23,428 tons and launched by The Queen Mother.
She was built mainly for the Australian route but her first voyages were to India. At the outbreak of war she was requisitioned for use as a troopship. In March 1941 she was part of one of the largest convoys to the Middle East, comprising 23 troopships and when they called at Table Bay harbour it was the largest ever to visit that port.
She survived the war and spent until 1948 repatriating troops around the world. After another refit she stayed in service 1963 when she was sold to a Greek ship owner.

S.S. Rawalpindi was built in 1925 as a Passenger Liner for the London/Bombay mail service and was owned by The Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company.
In 1939 it was requisitioned by The Admiralty for service as an armed Merchant Cruiser. It was converted at The Royal Albert Dock, London and had the aft funnel removed with eight 6 inch and two 3 inch guns fitted.
In November 1939 she encountered two German battlecruisers off Iceland and after an intense bombardment was set on fire and sank at 2000 hrs GMT with a large loss of life.



Joan Colwill
Dodingtree,
Little Witley.

LOCAL ACTIVITIES DURING THE FIRST THREE YEARS OF THE WAR 1939-1942

My father was the air raid warden for the district as by this time we had a phone. When an air raid alert was on he was notified by phone. I at this time was a VAD. having certificates for first aid, home nursing and 20 hours training in hospital. Whenever there was an alert, I got on my bike and went to Great Witley where I had a car ride to the Elms at Abberley. This was then the home of Sir Richard and Lady Brooks and we spent the nights on duty in the large lounge, and if lucky had a mattress on the floor. Our job was to man the horsebox that had been turned into a makeshift ambulance and could have been called out to anywhere needed. Fortunately we were not called upon and so all our training was never tested.

At about the same time the R.A.F built and manned a dummy airfield on Starbank and Twitlane. This, if ignited, would have looked like Birmingham on fire. They commandeered the phone which was in the kitchen and it was manned by two airmen day and night. We lent them camp beds and I got quite used to waking them up with a cold sponge before I could cook the breakfast. Imagine always having someone watching your every movement. They burnt all our coal and it was quite a time before the M.O.D. came up with some more. Our phone was cut off for a short time as they had not paid their half of the bill. Eventually an air raid shelter was built for them nearer the site and a hard road was made. All we had was a makeshift shelter in a very damp cellar. Fortunately the dummy airfield was not needed.

MEMORIES OF V.E. DAY MAY 1945.

When the news of victory was broadcast, I was stationed in Chatham Dockyard being a Motor Transport Driver in the Wrens. We were all given 48 hours leave and a friend, Eileen and I, took a train to London.

On arrival we found the capital very crowded with thousands of forces and civilians. I remember trying to find food and drink in Soho and then set off for Buckingham Palace, making our way slowly through Leicester Square then on to Trafalgar Square, through Admiralty Arch and then starting the long and difficult walk up the Mall. The crowds were frightening, one slip and you would have been trampled. We then did what everyone else was doing and linked arms with an already long chain of people which stretched across the road. In this way we followed other chains in front of us, singing all the way. This was a much safer way to travel. On reaching Buckingham Palace found a birds eye view of the balcony from Queen Victoria's statue, where we stayed for hours and were lucky enough to see the Royal Family and Winston Churchill appear on the balcony several times. By this time we were hungry and thirsty and we thought the most likely place to obtain anything would be a railway station, so eventually got to Charing Cross and did get a cup of tea and a bun, after a long wait. By this time night was coming so, like hundreds of others, found a place on the floor where we spent the night. We eventually found our way back to Chatham very tired and weary.

What a wonderful experience it was.

Helen Mills
Prospect Cottage,
Shrawley.

V.E. DAY 8th MAY 1945.

The news that the war was over came though when I was working at Pool House, Astley, with Robin Tomkinson, looking after her herd of Jersey Cows. I had been in the Land Army all through the war and the work had included looking after about 500 pigs at Severn Bank, a large herd of milking cows at Himbleton, then moving to Astley.

At Pool House it was milking by hand seven days a week, with no week-ends or days off. Just a few hours Saturdays or Sundays to cycle home and see the family. Work continued as usual after the news, but I was delighted to think that I could soon give up cows and Land Army work and return home to do some of the things that I had planned before the war.

Sheila Mills

Astley

The Hospital in which I worked was now allocated convoys of wounded soldiers. Why did they always seem to arrive late at night or week-ends. The Office Staff had to be on duty and ask each man his name, age, rank, regiment and next of kin. (This was easy with the British but French and Poles were tricky). Then the Doctors and Nurses would take over to assess the damage. After a time the wounded were moved on, either to specialist hospitals, convalescent homes or back to their units and I had to arrange their transfer and make sure their records went with them. I also gave out their rations of free cigarettes and chocolate.

Sheila Corbett

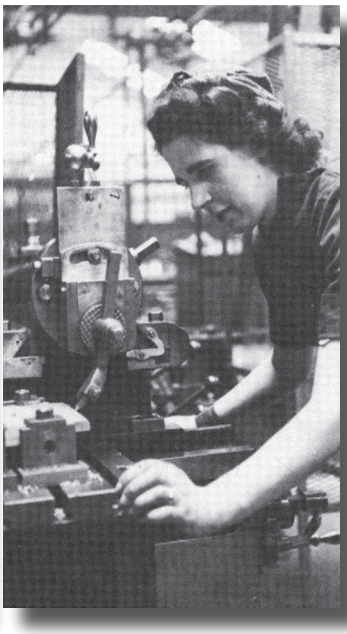
The Post Office,
Shrawley.

My most vivid memory of the war was from November 1940. I was then aged ten and living in Kidderminster. Our air raid shelter was dug into the top of a hill at the back of our house. When the air raid warning sounded we had to climb up the hill to go down into the shelter which was fitted out with bunk beds. As children we really didn't see much danger we just hated having to leave our warm beds if we were called out during the night. To this day the smell of sandstone recalls the memory of the shelter. The German bombers used to pass over us on the nights when the bombing of the Black Country was at its worst. The particular night in question, my father called us all out to look at the sky in the distance. It was just a huge glow of orange and red. The grown ups were all discussing where it might be. When we listened to the radio the next morning we knew. It was the night of November 14th 1940 the night that Coventry was destroyed.

Margery Austin

The Post Office,
Shrawley.

In January 1945 I "celebrated" my 21st birthday.
I was working at Wolston, near Coventry, where I had been sent on war work. I was making gas seals for 25 pounder guns and living in a hostel. There was snow on the ground and it was bitterly cold. We were working the night shift from 8.00pm. to 7.00am. and had not booked a meal in the canteen. We decided that it would be good to have a fish and chip supper. Two of the girls 'volunteered' to walk the mile to fetch these and the rest of us waited in anticipation. They returned empty handed, having been told that they only served "regulars" and we did not come into that category. "There is a "War on you know" was the reply they got when they protested.
So much for our celebration!!



Claire Moore

Hazelhurst Cottage,
Shrawley

V.E. is much more vague, as is V.J. The evening of V.E. I sat on a front door step with a friend with a bottle between us, which 1'm sure we must have emptied and saw not a soul. Even the Land Girl who lodged with us didn't come back before I returned to my digs. V.J. was different. A bonfire on Barrow Hill at Martley. We got home just in time to change and get to work for 7.00 a.m. Stock and then hops. Every time we sheltered from the rain that day we'd be asleep. Luckily the Black Country folk were with us to wake us up. Also at this time, in 1945, several members of the family got back to England and there was a party and playing cards, Mother ended the evening as Banker, winning enough money to buy a Hoover which I still have today.

Mr. C Russell

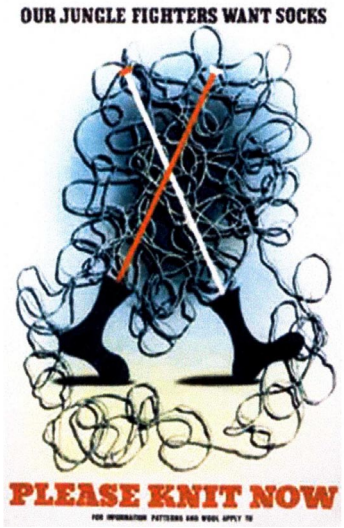
Vine Cottage,
Shrawley

Mr. Russell had joined the Territorials in Scotland in 1938 and so was called up straight-away. He saw action during October 1939 as a member of the Anti-Aircraft Artillery at Rosyth Dockyard.

They were at the Forth Bridge when one of the soldiers spotted an aeroplane which he took to be a Spitfire. He said as much, adding 'but I've never seen one with black crosses on the wings'. His companions realised it was a German Heinkel, very similar in shape to a Spitfire, one of six which were attacking the cruisers in the dockyard. They started firing and brought one of them down; two others were brought down later by Spitfires and the other three made it back to Germany. It appears this was in the nature of a reconnaissance exercise for nothing happened for months afterwards.

His Battery was moved to Oswestry where they trained the new recruits. He has a vivid memory of their inability to make a neat parcel with brown paper and string of their civvy clothes which were then sent home. Many of them were unable to read or write but were taught by the Army Education Corps.

The Battery then set sail from Invergordon to the Shetlands on the 'St. Magnus'. They were to defend Sumburgh Airfield as they were so near to occupied Norway. It was here that he was roped in by the local W.I. to give a talk when they found out he had been an art student in Paris. He had no slides and they provided him with a blackboard and coloured chalks. "And we want no ladies without their clothes on, please Mr. Russell". During the talk the main lights were dimmed in the Hall, and he noticed many flashing lights around the room. The ladies were improving the shining hour by knitting! Vision of 'les tricoteuses' knitting as they watched the guillotine in action flashed into his mind.



During his next posting at Falmouth he applied for and was accepted into the Intelligence Corps as he spoke Italian and French. He joined the Security Branch and his job was to interrogate suspected spies in England and abroad. The Corps sailed to Egypt the long way round Africa, for the Mediterranean was not safe.

At Helwan, south of Cairo, he was excused duties in order to paint a mural of Egyptian life on the wall of the officers mess. It was just finished when they decided to pull the building down and build a new one. Mr. Russell managed to get his wall plus mural integrated into the new building.

After the Battle of Anzio the Allied Specialist Force (S-Force) moved to Italy. It was composed of about 30 men of various nationalities who were expert e1ectricians, telephonists etc so that Rome could be kept going when it was liberated. They were all given the addresses of targets whom they had to arrest when they reached Rome.

They liberated Rome the day after the Normandy landings. He remembers it was dawn as they moved in, wondering whether the Germans were going to fire on them. Slowly they became aware of clapping coming from the windows above them and flowers began to be thrown into the streets. As the sun came up more and more people came out, until they were surrounded by cheering, excited crowds.

A young girl, aged about fifteen, was carrying a box containing a rabbit. When he asked what was in the box she showed him and insisted he should have it. He kept the rabbit on the balcony of his billet and when he left he gave it to their cook Teresa. When he went back three years later she still had the rabbit which had produced young which she and her family ate.

More intelligence work followed - arresting Fascists and people who had collaborated with the Germans, then he travelled to Austria by motor bike where more Nazis were captured, hiding in ski huts. They were put in the local jail after signing documents stating what part they had played in the war.

For Mr. Russell's demob party at the Hotel Bayer, a friend organised these Germans and Austrian Nazis in making paper chains to decorate the room. They provided coloured paper, paste made from flour and water and round-ended scissors so that they could not inflict any damage on themselves!!

War Time Postings

Rosyth
I
Oswestry
I
Shetlands
I
Falmouth
I
Egypt
I
Italy
I
Austria

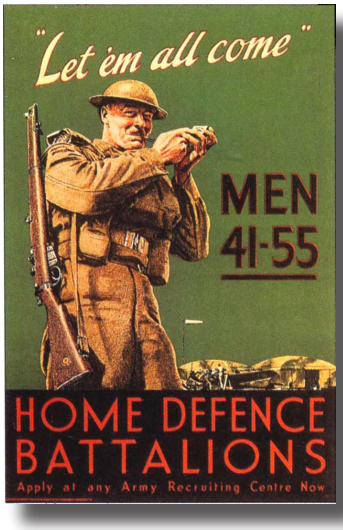
Mr. Wallace Wilcox and Mrs. Elsie Westwood

Nicholls Farm,
Shrawley.

Farming and Farmstock were subject to rationing. The Department of Agriculture issued feed coupons which were enough to last for one month's supply of food for each animal. Calves were allowed glucose to put in their feed.

Wallace was with a calving cow on the night that the bomb dropped opposite the Lenchford. He had feeding stuff sacks tacked up at the windows as blackout. He was worried that somehow he was showing a light which the Germans had seen, but there was nothing he could do about it.

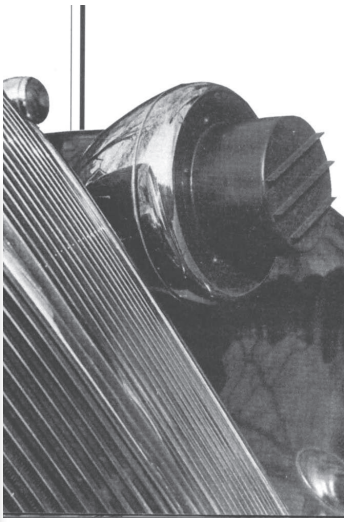
He nearly lost his life on Home Guard duty at Abberley through 'friendly action'. He and Harry Halford were patrolling round the base of the Clock Tower, while Neville Colebatch. and another man were on duty up at the top. Suddenly, a beer bottle whistled down between them and smashed on the ground.



The two up above had dropped it in fun, hoping that the two on the ground might mistake it for a bomb. The air was blue for sometime afterwards.

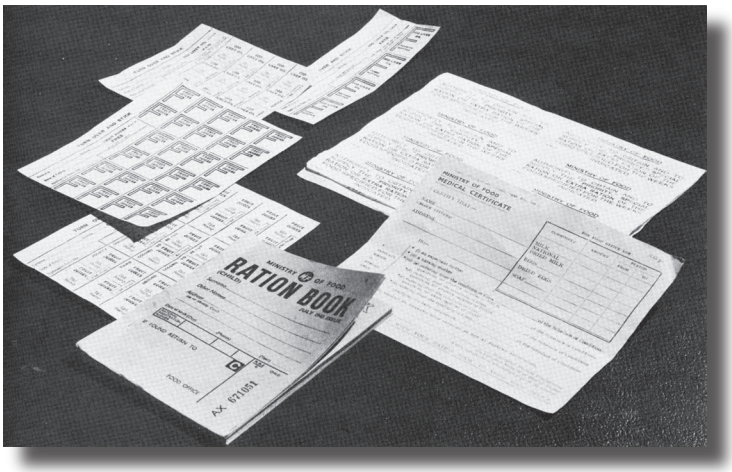
Many men, old and young, were either Special Constables, Air Raid Wardens or belonged to the Home Guard. They patrolled from Glazenbridge to the Lenchford and were on duty for about six hours at a time from dusk until midnight and midnight to dawn. The policeman would cycle along the road every so often to check that they were carrying out their duties properly.

If people went to Abberley by car, they were allowed a gallon of petrol per journey. The uniform was a hard helmet, an overcoat and a forage-cap with the appropriate badge. Bicycle lamps had a hood fitted over the top half so that no light would shine upward.



Nicholls Farm was the distribution base for meat pies brought out by the W.V.S. every Friday morning. People could buy as many pies as there were ration books in the family.

Mrs. Westwood remembers going to see Gladys Verity married at Shrawley Church on the afternoon of 3rd September. They would never forget their wedding anniversary!



Mr. & Mrs. Oakey

Holders Cottage,
Shrawley.

Mrs. Oakey remembers September 3rd. 1939 very well, for it was the first time she had visited Holders Cottage for the day. She and Mr. Oakey were married in April 1940 and lived for the first six months with his parents before moving to The Lodge at The Wood House.

All their furniture was utility quality and their precious coupons had to be used to buy curtain material etc., but The Lodge was a comfortable home from home for many of the airmen and soldiers in the village, whom Mr. Oakey, in his hospitable fashion, would invite in to have a drink. The fact that the girls from The Woodhouse also found their way there at the same time was no coincidence, and Freda Carden, in particular, had reason to be grateful, for she married one of the airmen.

They watched the village searchlights picking out the German bombers on their way to Coventry, but the only siren Mrs. Oakey heard was when she was in hospital at Worcester in January 1940.

Mr. Oakey remembered the mother and two children who were evacuated from London, and lived in a flat at The Wood House. She left after a short while because she couldn't stand the loneliness. 'They were a dirty lot' he said scathingly.

Miss Rowley
The Knowle,
Little Witley

I remember Mrs. Mills (Helen's mother) being in charge of billeting out the evacuees. They had two initially but one went to Miss Knight's in the New Inn Lane to be with her friend. The other one, Betty Round, still visits me frequently. Later her Aunt and Uncle from Liverpool came to live with them. The decoy site along Twit Lane (opposite the Dingle Drive) and the shelter which the officers billeted at the Dingle used. I used to turn the collars on the officers' shirts. Most people who could, kept a pig and they were allowed to kill a pig once a year. Then there was a great sharing out of pig-meat and offal among the neighbours.

EXTRACTS FROM THE MINUTE BOOK OF SHRAWLEY PARISH COUNCIL 1939 TO 1945

The old Minute Book for these years does not tell a great deal, but the names of the Councillors are still familiar even 50 years on, Mr.D.H. Thomas was Chairman throughout this period and in April 1939 the following Councillors were elected. Mr. W. Weaver, Mr. H. Bunce, Mr. H. Wood, Mr. R Powick, Mr. J. Pennington and Mr. J. Westwood.

Would you believe the state of the road in New Inn Lane was a problem?

In March 1940 elections were postponed (due to the War). Ridding Bridge needed repair and Astley P.C. was asked to pay half the cost. Shrawley's half amounted to £2. 5. 1.

A letter was received from the District Council regarding ploughing up of Public Highways. For or against - it does not say. The precept was set at £5 and a cheque for £5. 8. 4 was signed being £5 Clerk's Salary: 8/1d Audit and Postage (what would Mr. Micawber say regarding this extravagance).

In 1942 Mr. R Powick died and Mr. G. Walker was co-opted.

In 1943 the Trustees of the Thomas Vernon Charity were named as Mr. H. Bunce, Mr. J. Weswood, Mr. G. Walker, Mr. D. H. Thomas and Mr. E. J. Hodgkinson. I surmise Mr. Hodgkinson was Clerk of the Parish Council.

September 1943 the District Council notified "Housing of the Working Classes Post War Programme" and said 8 houses would be built. Mr. G. P. Mills was co-opted to the Council at this time.

In April 1944 the precept was raised to £7 and a cheque was signed for £5.17.6 (Clerk's Salary still £5 and 17/6d expenses).

In April1945 the Rural District Council was criticised for not consulting the Parish Council on sites for the 8 houses to be built.

The Parish Council was asked to join the Local Association for Parish Councils but refused saying they could see no useful purpose would be served. 50 years on the Parish Council are members and are grateful for all the help it gets from the Association.

The last very important item I read was that the Clerk was asked to find out how many people wished to have electricity and water connected.

The Parish Council only met once a year during this period and I trust I have managed to report the events correctly - not being there at the time. As I have already said the names are still familiar and their addresses are still there for all to see.

Mr J Westwood

Mr D H Thomas, trustee of Thomas Vernon Charity

Mr G Walker

Mr W Weavers

Mr. & Mrs. Fred Harris & Bill Walker,

Royal British Legion.

Fred was in the church choir with Bill on September 3rd. when Mr. Tom Walker let them know that war had been declared. They walked home after the service and saw Mrs. Cuff, an elderly lady who lived in the end house of the Old Crown Cottages when they were still four separate dwel lings. A biplane flew over and she watched it out of sight. 'Well! they never dropped anything, did they?'she said with relief. The fact that it happened to be an English plane hadn't registered!

They soon had evidence of German aircraft, however. Sally remembered the Germans dropping flares to mark the path for their bombers, and some fell very near Stone Hill, where Cis Dorrell lived with her family. Poor Cis suffered badly from asthma, but the speed with which she ran up the lane to warn her father that his haystacks were in danger left a vivid impression on the watchers.

Fred and Bill, in company with Hubert Thompson and several others, were walking near the Lenchford when bombs were dropped in the field opposite the Lenchford and at Holt one Sunday evening. They saw the flash as the hombs left the bomb bays and felt the resulting: impact. When they looked round, Hubert was nowhere to be seen: he had dived for cover in a nearby ditch. Unluckily for him, the ditch was full of hawthorn branches for Fred's father had just that day been hedge cutting! Sally's elder sister had cycled back to work at Holt, where she lived during the week and when her father, Mr. Carden, heard the news of the bomb, he got on his bicycle and set off there and then to see that she had arrived safely.

It was a period of very hard frost, and the bomb didn't make a very large crater as a result. It landed by the Council houses on the Worcester Road on the side nearest Holt. The inrush of air which filled the vacuum left by the explosion, took all the tiles off the roofs on the side nearest Worcester. The local postman, Len Dixon, lived there, and he and the other occupants had to stay in the Village Hall while Bill, his father and uncle replaced the tiles. A large part of the hedge bordering the road completely disappeared, burnt by the bomb.

Many of the men of the village who were not in the forces were either Special Constables, Air Raid Wardens or in the Home Guard. They regularly patrolled the main road through Shrawley, and it was on one such patrol, that Bill's father, George Walker, saw lights flashing into the sky from the Monastery. He had been a signaller in the Great War and recognised that the flashes were in Morse Code.

He fetched Mr. Carden and Mr. Hedges, the Astley policeman, and they caught either two or three Irishmen signalling to the German aircraft overhead. At that time various strange groups lived at the Monastery 'And they were a dirty lot' remarked the postwoman at that time.

Mr. Carden was in charge of the British Legion flag during the war, and he kept it hidden from the Germans in his wardrobe, only bringing it out to show to the favoured few. It had Shrawley written in large letters on it, and German spies had to be kept in the dark as to where they had landed. To this end, all signposts were also taken down.

The airmen from the decoy aerodrome site were billeted around the village, but the Artillery who manned the searchlights and gun emplacement opposite Church Farm, had their own camp. One of their members, 'Sammy', was very good at scrounging (and not to put too fine a point on it, stealing!) anything he could lay his hands on.

A new consignment of galvanised toilet buckets (no flush toilets in those days) disappeared, only one left out of six. 'Sammy' served his time in jail for that episode, and when he came back he had been provided with a complete new kit. By the time he arrived back at Shrawley, having been given a lift from Worcester by Mr. Verity, he was down to a basic pair of trousers, a shirt and some plimsolls. He'd flogged the rest on the way! He often visited the Post Office, then at Pipe House, and one day as Wallace Wilcox and Bert Verity were talking, Sammy offered them half a dozen eggs. 'Got a good haul this morning from Mrs. Verity's hens before they were up.' He didn't realise he was speaking to Mrs. Venty's son! When he was called up he filled in his civilian occupation as 'Burglar'!

Fred's brother, Eddie, was the only prisoner of war in the Far East from the village, and he was presumed dead for four or five years, for nothing was heard from him. Fred remembers Len Dixon bringing a telegram from the Red Cross to say that he was alive, and both his mother and Len crying at the news. He had been at work on the infamous Burma Railway.

Colin Jordan,

Firtree Cottage, Shrawley.

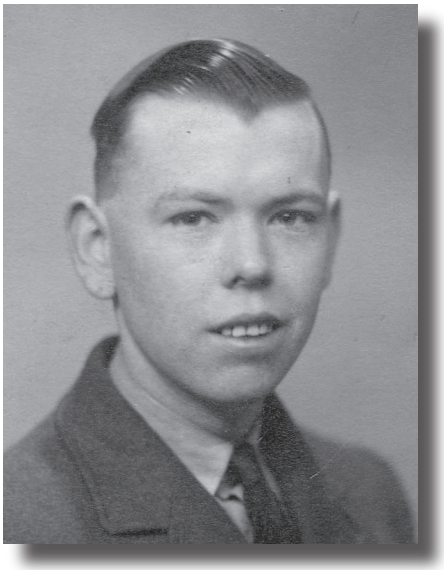
Colin remembers sleeping on beds under the stairs whenever there was a raid on Birmingham or Coventry, for the sound of the explosions could be heard clearly. Dog fights also took place in the lights over Shrawley, between German and British planes, and he used to pick up strips of silver paper dropped by the German Bombers presumably to disrupt signals, either radar or radio.

He remembers friendly games of foothall taking place in the Park between the airmen and soldiers and any able-bodied civilians. Cigarettes and tobacco were in short supply during the war and he remembers being the only one with any tobacco at the bonfire to celebrate the end of the war, and sharing around what he had for everyone to roll themselves a cigarette. No-one minded the fact that he wasn't really old enough to smoke!

Bill Walker

Rectory Lane,

Shrawley



My uncle, Tom Walker, the Church caretaker had slipped out of the church as the choir proceeded down the aisle on the morning of 3rd September 1939. He had gone back to Church Cottage to listen to a speech on the wireless by Neville Chamberlain. He re-appeared later during the lessons and as he took his seat in the back pew, he looked towards the choir stalls and pulled on his right ear. This was the pre-arranged signal to let us know that war had been declared.

The highlight of the next eighteen months was the re-roofing of the Council Houses at Holt, which had been removed by a stick of bombs from a German aircraft. It was bitterly cold, but we were able to watch the training aircraft from Perdiswell making practice landing and take-offs from the fields opposite. That was when I decided I wanted to be a pilot. Meanwhile, I joined the Home Guard whose headquarters was at Abberley Clock Tower. From here we sallied forth at night patrolling the lanes around the Witley area, making frequent checks that the Hundred House and the Red Lion had not come under any surprise attack! 1 remember being on duty when Coventry was bombed and watching from the top of the Clock Tower with bombs still falling when we went off duty at 5.00 a.m.

I volunteered for the R.A.F. on my 18th birthday in April and after a 2 day written, medical and oral exam in Birmingham in June I was accepted as trainee air-crew. After more selection tests I was accepted to train as a pilot under the Empire Air Training Scheme probably in Canada.

Early in February we were given 24 hours notice to join a troopship in Liverpool. The ship was already filled to capacity, but hastily built plywood accommodation had been built around the deck with three-tier bunks on each side of a narrow passage way, home for the next ten weeks. We left the Mersey in a snow-storm and sailed North to join a large convoy leaving the Clyde. We woke one morning to find ourselves among ships which seemed to stretch from horizon to horizon. The crewmen of the Arundel Castle told us it was probably the largest convoy to sail from Britain at that time. It consisted of a battleship, two cruisers, eleven destroyers and smaller escorts, seventeen troopships and a couple of American Liberty ships which apparently were intended to act as survivor boats.

Our destination was South Africa. We sailed across the Atlantic, down the North American coast, back across the Atlantic to Free Town in Sierra Leone where the convoy split. Most of the escort left with ships carrying troops - the invasion force for taking Madagascar. Back across the Atlantic and down the South American coast, re-crossing and arriving in Cape Town on 27th April. All this to try to avoid enemy submarine action. We were in a holiday camp in Cape Town for a couple of days then entrained North finally arriving at Benoni Flying training School, where my chief instructor was Bobby Locke, the South African golfer.

Ater my first solo flight, I felt ten feet tall. Unfortunately, my flying career was cut short when I blacked out during a course of aerobatics, recovering just in time to make a very bumpy emergency landing. The control tower had spotted the incident and I was sent to Benoni Hospital where it was discovered that I had a duodenal ulcer. I was in hospital for a short while and then transferred to the aerodrome sick-bay for 12 weeks. My future wife, who was a W.A.A.F. who had been a Fitter on the aircraft I used to fly, visited me every day and we became engaged when I was discharged from sick bay.

I passed the full air-crew medical test but as there was a chance my illness could recur again I was declared unfit for flying duties and retrained as an instrument repairer. I was promoted to L.A.C. and posted to Bloemfontein.

Ellen and I married at Benoni and I was there when the war ended. V.E. celebrations took place, especially among the R.A.F. families and personnel. I was posted back to England in July 1945. Ellen followed in Septembcr. I spent the rest of the war based at Pershore in a building maintenance works Flight, working at various aerodromes in the South of England until my discharge in October 1946. Thus ended for me what I must admit was a “cushy” war, as I remember with pride those mates with whom I trained, many of whom later flew to their deaths in bombing raids over Germany.

A typical convoy being attacked by aircraft

Mr. D. Gorton,

Wulstan Farm.

8th May 1945 saw me, at the age of 22, living in a Council owned three bedroom terraced house at 148 Orme Road, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffs, with my wife who was expecting our second child, our two year-old son, in-laws and my wife's sister.

I had passed the examinations to ioin the RAF but became a 'Bevan Boy' and was sent to work at the outset of war to Wulstanton Colliery, where I worked with compressed air engines, pulling the coal out of the mine. My main job was to load the coal into the cages down in the pit, to be pulled up. I worked shifts 6.00 am to 2.00 pm or 10.00 pm to 6.00 am. The 2.00 pm to 10.00 pm shift was a maintenance shift. My wages were approximately £1.00 per week but I supplemented this by cultivating the garden and greenhouse and doing contract hoeing of beet, mangoes and turnips for Mr. Heath at what is now Keele University farm. If we wanted meat, I went out with the gun and my crossbred terrier 'Spot'.

My wife worked at Enderley Mills where all the forces uniforms were made, but at the start of war she went to the Winton Ordinance Factory where she worked in the cordite section, weighing out the correct amounts to load the shells. She was also in the Red Cross and worked on the wards at the City General Hospital.

My wife's mother looked after our son while we were at work, and my father-in-law, being a builder, spent the whole of the war in London, re-building what the German bombers took out. My sister-in-law worked at a food distribution warehouse, and in between all this I was an Air Raid Warden at night, covering the area around Friars Wood School.

When it was announced on the radio, that the War had ended our initial feelings were "Thank God", but very soon our thoughts turned to those we knew were not coming back (I lost my best friend Bob Hollingsworth of the Blackwatch, killed in the raid on Dieppe), and those we were not sure would return.

Everyone wondered how we could celebrate and street parties throughout the country were suggested and neighbours got together to arrange these. The people around were mainly women, children, old people, men who had been invalided out of the war and evacuees

The celebration took place about a month later. Tables and chairs were taken into the street after lunch. We stopped the buses, covered the tables with sheets and everyone who had a flag hung it from their window. We blew balloons up for the children and food consisted of paste sandwiches, jelly and cakes served with Tizer or Corona lemonade. It was not a national holiday but the local newspaper, the 'Sentinel' came and took photographs and we all had a 'sing-song'.

I finished down the mine in 1947. We got our first home when 1 went to work on a farm at Shelton-under-Arley near Stableford. Here I drove my first Ferguson tractor having been on a training course at Burgess's factory to learn how to use the hydraulics.

While food rationing was still in force, I kept us in pork by going round as a pig killer. You had to have a permit to kill a pig, but I killed many in one night using the same permit. The local 'bobby' was kept in pork too!

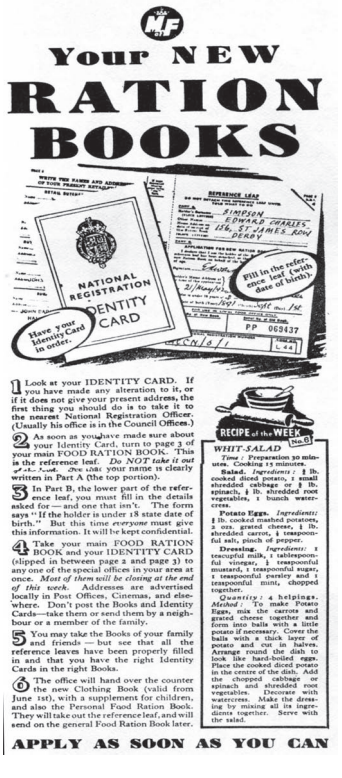
Every house had a shelter dug in the garden. This was lined in tin with grass clods on the roof. We had two benches in it, but in fact never used it. We took the attitude of 'if your number was up' that was it. I refused to go in a shelter when an air raid began while I was in Manchester collecting a lorry load of fruit and veg from the market in 1941. That shelter took a direct hit and all 250 people were killed.

The nearest bombs dropped were two and five miles away. The Germans were trying to find the American camp at Keele, and the doors were left open at the Corona factory after a lorry delivery and they saw the light. You could easily distinguish the drone of the planes, whether friend or foe.

German prisoners of war were used mainly on the farms or for road clearance. The American troops were nice on the whole, as were the Polish exiles, but the French troops who came over for training after Dunkirk and were based at Trentham Gardens, were very coarse.

Rationing applied to food and clothes. There was a good 'black market' and many would sell their coupons for ahout 1/- a sheet. Five coupons meant you could buy a pair of shoes for the children at approximately £2.00.

In wartime, the nation does work together and help each other, it's a shame it takes a national catastrophe for people to respond in that way.



MF

Your NEW RATION BOOKS

NATIONAL REGISTRATION IDENTITY CARD

Have your Identity Card in order.

Fill in the reference leaf (with date of birth).

1 Look at your IDENTITY CARD. If you have made any alteration to it, or if it does not give your present address, the first thing you should do is to take it to the nearest National Registration Officer. (Usually his office is in the Council Offices.)

2 As soon as you have made sure about your Identity Card, turn to page 3 of your main FOOD RATION BOOK. This is the reference leaf. *Do NOT take it out* . . . . . then write your name is clearly written in Part A (the top portion).

3 In Part B, the lower part of the reference leaf, you must fill in the details asked for — and one that isn't. The form says "If the holder is under 18 state date of birth." But this time everyone must give this information. It will be kept confidential.

4 Take your main FOOD RATION BOOK and your IDENTITY CARD (slipped in between page 2 and page 3) to any one of the special offices in your area at once. *Most of them will be closing at the end of this week.* Addresses are advertised locally in Post Offices, Cinemas, and elsewhere. Don't post the Books and Identity Cards—take them or send them by a neighbour or a member of the family.

5 You may take the Books of your family and friends — but see that all the reference leaves have been properly filled in and that you have the right Identity Cards in the right Books.

6 The office will hand over the counter the new Clothing Book (valid from June 1st), with a supplement for children, and also the Personal Food Ration Book. They will take out the reference leaf, and will send on the general Food Ration Book later.

RECIPE of the WEEK No. 6

WHIT-SALAD

Time: Preparation 20 minutes. Cooking 15 minutes.

Salad. Ingredients: ½ lb. cooked diced potato, 1 small shredded cabbage or ½ lb. spinach, ½ lb. shredded root vegetables, 1 bunch watercress.

Potato Eggs. Ingredients: ½ lb. cooked mashed potatoes, 1 oz. grated cheese, 1 lb. shredded carrot, ½ teaspoonful salt, pinch of pepper.

Dressing. Ingredients: 1 tablespoonful milk, 1 tablespoonful vinegar, ½ teaspoonful mustard, 1 teaspoonful sugar, 1 teaspoonful parsley and 1 teaspoonful mint, chopped together.

Quantity: 4 helpings.

Method: To make Potato Eggs, mix the carrots and grated cheese together and form into balls with a little potato if necessary. Cover the balls with a thick layer of potato and cut in halves. Arrange round the dish to look like hard-boiled eggs. Place the cooked diced potato in the centre of the dish. Add the chopped cabbage or spinach and shredded root vegetables. Decorate with watercress. Make the dressing by mixing all its ingredients together. Serve with the salad.

APPLY AS SOON AS YOU CAN

Bert Verity,

Astley.

Mr. Verity volunteered for the R.A.F at Worcester and within a few weeks found himself driving transport lorries through France and Belgium, where he was when Dunkirk was evacuated. His group were ordered to many different places and eventually he was got away several days after the main evacuation and crossed to England on a barge.

He spent the main part of the war transporting supplies through Italy, Austria and Yugoslavia where he met up with of the Russian forces. This mobile column had a sort of freedom, and they were responsible for providing their own meals. They cooked over an old petrol can turned on its side with a hole cut out and their saucepans were catering-sized bean tins with wire handles.

Whenever they stopped, the petrol can was filled with petrol, the bean tin with water and a match was thrown at it so that they could have a brew-up. A handful of tea and a tin of mndensed milk were put in when it was boiling and it was 'Tea up!'. Bully beef was the main standby, but if they could swap any beef for eggs they would make a meal of those. This could only take place in the day because the light from the fire would be seen at night. For eighteen months he only had a roof over his head for three nights. They slept in the lorries on top of whatever they were carrying, except petrol. This might be ammunition, aircraft petrol, D.D.T., the latter being sent by the ton from America, for they had discovered that most of the inhabitants of Naples were lousy, and disease was carried by fleas.

The aircraft fuel was for the American tanks, which, with the petrol inside them, were such deathtraps if they were hit that they were given the nickname 'Ronson' after the cigarette lighter.

As the Germans retreated their landmines became a risk. In general they were planted haphazardly, but the British troops soon learnt not to go through a gap in a hedge to answer a call of nature, but to stay on the side of the road, for there were many mines in such strategic spots.

Often a watch would be spotted lying on thc side of the road. These were booby-trapped so that whoever picked them up would have their hand blown off. Many of the mines were small and only wounded not killed, on the principle that a wounded man was more trouble than a dead one and the Germans were hoping to cause more delay.

The Allies blew up road and railway bridges ahead of the advancing troops, so that the Germans would have to cross by boat and leave much of their equipment behind. Bailey bridges on pontoons were then constructed for the Allied forces. As they crossed the Po, around a hundred thousand troops could be seen sitting on the ground; they were waiting to surrender. On 2nd May, 1945, one and a half million troops surendered in Austria, Italy and Yugoslavia, mainly German, but after V.E. Day, Mr. Verity was among the troops who for many months tried to settle things in Yugoslavia, which was going through much the same turmoil as now. He was near Lake Como when Mussolini, trying to escape North in a German soldier's uniform, was recognised by the Italians. He and his mistress and a few companions were shot and hung upside down on meat hooks in a garage. For a few cigarettes Mr. Verity obtained photographs of the event.

They were travelling North when they heard that war had

ended in Europe. The first thing they looked for was a cigarette, and later as they sat and tried to take the news in, they realised that there was nothing to stop them having a 'Brew-up' now, even though it was midnight. Lights didn't matter any more and they drank their tea to the accompaniment of flares and tracer bullets lighting up the sky in the distance as other people celebrated in their own way.

Left.
Burnt out tanks.

Below left.
The end of Mussolini.

Below right.
Crossing the river Po.

Bottom.
Bert with his truck.

Mrs. Sheila Thomson
The Old Barn
Shrawley.

Mrs. Thomson was in Sussex spending her school holidays with Diana Robertson Hare, daughter of the actor Robertson Hare, when war was declared. Another actor happened to be there also and she remembers the weeping and upset as they reacted in typical theatrical fashion. Shortly afterwards the siren sounded, to everyone's consternation, but nothing happened. It had been a false alarm.

Next summer she took her School Certificate and all the schools in Guildford had to assemble under one roof for the occasion presumably for better protection. Her parents were in Malaya and she and her sister were due to sail on the P and O boat Narkunda in September. Many of her school friends were sailing for Canada. Unfortunately, their berths were requisitioned, so they stayed at the school. Mrs. Thomson did Art at Guildford but decided that she wanted to join the Land Army. Her father insisted that she did it properly and she attended Studley Agricultural College. One look at the Ayrshires with their huge horns put her off farming and she studied horticulture, with six hours of practical work a day, followed by laboratory work. Food was grown and packed for Covent Garden. When an air-raid was taking place, they slept on the stone floor of the cellars on straw palliasses. Mrs. Thomson remembers how they would go out afterwards to find the bomb craters, which they would stand in. The RAF cadets from Stratford were entertained at dances Glen Miller was a great favourite.

Her first job was at Wisley which had never employed women before. The interview was held in London, and she and another Studley student were taken on, together with two Land Girls and two girls from the Women's Farm and Garden Association, and a student from Reading University who looked after their morals!! Their main work was at the trial grounds testing vegetable seeds sent under Lease Lend from the U.S.A. to find the varieties best suited for growing in our country.

Meanwhile Malaya was falling to the Japanese and her father, who was in the Diplomatic Service, was in Government House, burning papers, and pouring all their whisky supplies down the sink, when the door was kicked open and he was ordered out. The next three and a half years were spent in Changi jail.

Her mother escaped on native buses to Singapore where she worked on censorship, finally leaving her husband behind as the bombing got worse, setting sail on The Empress of Japan, three days before the fall of Singapore with only two suitcases.

Their daughters knew nothing of this and only knew that their mother was safe when the ship docked at Durban. because the Suez Canal had closed. It had been a horrific journey with the Lascars threatening to mutiny regardless of the three thousand women and children on board. Fortunately discipline was restored when they took naval crews on board.

Mrs. Thomson had met her first husband - a New Zealander and they married during his "Survivors Leave". He was in the Fleet Air Arm and his aircraft carrier had been hit by a sea-mine - one of ours and had sunk. Fortunately, he was in the air at the time. When Alistair was born in 1944 she was unable to let her husband know he was a father, for he was flying from the Orkneys trying to sink the Tirpitz in Norway. He took French Leave for the day on the day she left hospital with the baby and flew in to Hendon. Six weeks later she received a telegram to say that he was missing in action presumed dead.

She remembers that year as being horrible - everyone who visited the house seemed not to come back. Mr. Thomson's youngest brother aged 19 was shot by a Greek in Greece where they were supposed to be relieving the Greeks from a Communist take-over. Incidentally Mr. Churchill was also shot at while in Greece though it was kept quiet at the time. His other brother was a P.O.W. in Germany escaping three times.

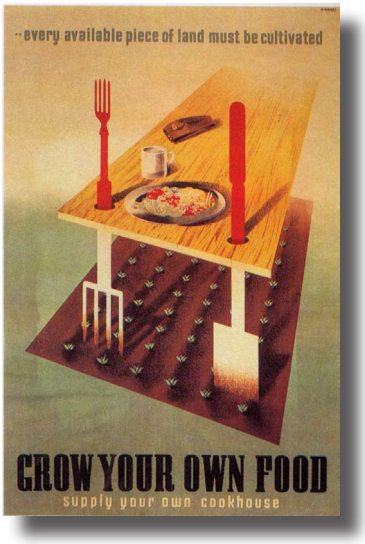
Doodlebugs became a fact of life like a Black Wellington Boot flying through the air. She and her mother would count to ten after it cut off; if it had passed all was well, but if not they dived under the stairs for shelter. Land mines were worse. The whole house shuddered in the blast.

The flares dropped by the Germans would light up the whole area, so that one could see people running for the air-raid shelters. Sadly one afternoon when the Police were holding a Sports Day, a doodle bug fell onto the field. It was like a battle field.

She visited her aunt in Folkestone, for which she needed a permit, as it was a sensitive area, and remembers sitting on the cliffs having a picnic watching German Stukas bombing a convoy sailing up the Channel They had counted the number of ships and suddenly there would be a gap where one or two were missing.

When the war ended she moved to her aunt's in Folkestone where huge camps were set up for campaign veterans waiting to be repatriated to Canada and New Zealand. Her father arrived home by ambulance and he caused her mother many problems. He couldn't understand rationing and would ring up Fortnum and Masons and order food which they would deliver to find no coupons to exchange. He complained about the National Loaf - a mixture of brown and white flour. His dressing gown was in tatters after his ordeal and Mrs. Thomson went with him up to London where the WV.S. issued him with a basic outfit.

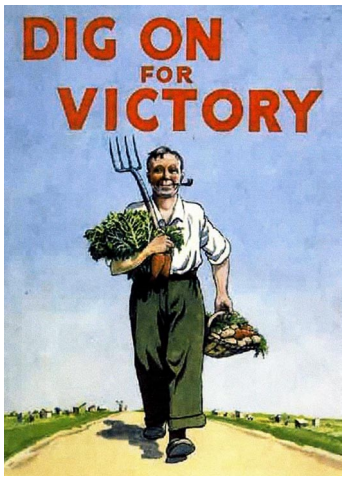
Mr. Thomson was on his way as a submariner to the Far East and was at anchor in Malta when the end of the Japanese war was announced and so they returned to England.



Mrs Powick and Valerie, Old Wynyates, Shrawley.

My father was called up in December 1940, and he joined the Pioneer Corps. He was given extended 'Industrial leave' over Christmas 1941 to do war work, but was recalled in the New Year. He kept his wartime experiences very much to himself, we gathered that he had been working in advance of the front line of troops, laying down smoke screens and erecting communication lines from D-Day onwards.

He came home on leave once after D-Day, for he was asked to accompany a friend of his who was shellshocked and had completely lost his nerve. The friend was subsequently invalided out of the army. My father rarely talked about the war, but did once mention seeing bits of bodies hanging on barbed wire.



Back in Shrawley it was 'Dig for Victory' time. My mother decided it was either let the garden go completely, or dig it herself. This she did, to good effect, keeping us in fresh food all through the war.

Milk was rationed, but we were lucky in being able to buy skimmed milk, which was used for puddings, so we never went short. Local farms supplied the village with milk in those days. The W.V.S. meat pies delivered every Friday to Nicholls Farm were a good stand-by.

Bananas were non-existent and oranges were in short supply. Many times my mother would hear on the grapevine that they were on sale in Kidderminster, and she would go especially to buy some. The grapevine worked equally well one Monday moming, when she heard that Morton's shoeshop in Kidderminster had a new consignment of Clark's sandals. Leaving the washing (an unheard of happening) she caught the bus there and then and successfully bought me a pair. When my father was called up, we went to stay with my aunt in Stourport for a year, during which time a family of evacuees from Bristol lived in our house. When we returned home to live we had a Land Girl billeted on us, who worked for Mrs. Mills at Glazenbridge.

I remember being deadly jealous of the children at Shrawley School during the year I spent at Stourport, for a lorry used to go round the village picking up the airmen to take them to the decoy site every morning, and they would give the children a lift to schooL Oh, my joy when my father came home on leave and I was able to go to Shrawley School again for a time, and more importantly, ride in the lorry!

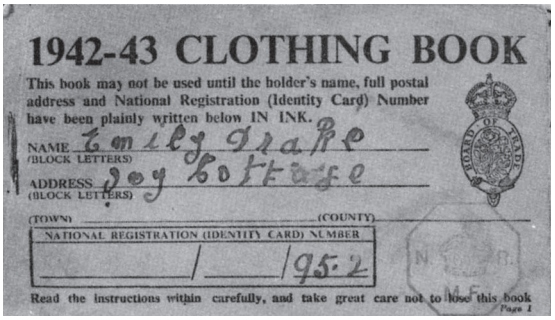
We were given a fortnight off school once we were ten years old, to go potato picking up, and I remember going to Mr. Halford's at Court Farm and earning ten shillings one week. We also gathered rose hips which were made into Rosehip Syrup.

Concentrated orange juice for babies and toddlers, plus cod liver oil, were available from Nurse Powick. Although there was a charge at first, later it became free upon the presentation of coupons.

My memories are obviously not so vivid, as I was only seven when war broke out. I remember hearing the news on the wireless and crying because I thought we would all be killed. Mr. Hodgkinson, the paperman, was delivering the Sunday papers at the time, and I wouldn't go and speak. to him as I usually did,

I remember lying in bed trying to decide if the aeroplanes overhead were German or ours. The Germans were supposed to have a distinct throb, in the engine note. I could never decide which they were. I used to pray every night that God wouldn't let my father lie in a cold, wet ditch somewhere waiting to be shot at, but would keep him safe.

Gas masks were to be carried everywhere, but we soon got blase, as Mr. Thomas stopped checking what the boxes contained, for we either had them empty, or the children who stayed to dinner at school took their food in them. My brother David who was born in February 1940, had a huge gas mask especially for babies. It looked like a large diver's helmet and the baby's body was completely contained inside.


1942-43 CLOTHING BOOK

This book may not be used until the holder's name, full postal address and National Registration (Identity Card) Number have been plainly written below IN INK.

NAME (BLOCK LETTERS) Emily Drake

ADDRESS (BLOCK LETTERS) Joy Cottage

(TOWN) (COUNTY)

NATIONAL REGISTRATION (IDENTITY CARD) NUMBER

/ /95 2

Read the instructions within carefully, and take great care not to lose this book

The war as such didn't impinge much on our every day lives, except for the ritual of listening to the news, on the hour every hour, when you were forbidden to speak. It took me a long time before I voluntarily listened to a news bulletin when I grew up! Uncle George (Walker) had what I think 'Was the only air-raid shelter in Shrawley, and it made a marvellous place to play in, but was never used for its intended purpose, thankfully.

My only real impression of the effect of war was when I visited relations in Quinton and ·saw large silver barrage balloons tethered at the bottom of the garden, and played under the table which was, in effect, a reinforced wire cage to hide under during a raid. I also visited Coventry after the raid and remember the prefabricated shops which had hastily been erected in the flattened ruins where now Godiva rides on high, so that life could have some semblance of normality.

"When I went to the High School we were allowed to wear our own clothes in the summer, because of the coupon allowance, but everyone wore the winter uniform.

I remember only vaguely the celebrations in August when the war finally ended, the most vivid recollection being of someone throwing magnesium onto the bonfire held in the field opposite the Rose and Crown and of the brilliant blue light it gave off as it burnt.

My final war memory is of the party given for Eddie Harris at the Parish Room after his return from being a prisoner of the Japanese and of how yellow he looked. He was evidendy suffering from jaundice. I can still remember the feeling that here was a special human being, a little apart from the rest of us. I was just fourteen and had no idea what he had been through.

Mrs. Verity,
Goodyear Farm,
Shrawley.

The greatest impact on life at Church Farm was the arrival of the Searchlight Unit one evening after dark in 1940. They unloaded their rations etc., which filled the kitchen and commandeered the phone, (which was a rarity in the village). This meant that the middle door between themselves and the Army had to be secured, so that the soldiers could use the front hall and door.

'They hadn't even got their tents fixed up to sleep in, also the weather was very cold and wet, so we helped where we could.'

Later two large wooden huts were erected in the field opposite, and two searchlights and one gun emplacement were installed. The walls were very thick. and made from turf with cinders on the ground inside. A shaft for a water pump was dug opposite the house and a wicket gate was placed in the hedge. The soldiers went once a week. to Park Attwood for a bath.

The generator for the lights was just below the house and I dreaded hearing the cry, 'Take posts!', for we knew that we would be in for a sleepless night with the noise it made as the lights were switched on.

'When the lights were up you could have seen a needle on the backyard, they were so powerful. There was always a guard on the gate to the site with his gun. Many a night I would wake my husband and say the searchlights were up, and he would say, 'Put the sheets over your face and get off to sleep.' But we were still always alright the next morning.

Agricultural workers were allowed extra rations, and Mrs. Verity ordered them once a month to he delivered with her own order. Cheese, tea, margarine and sugar were weighed out very carefully and handed over when the price had heen worked out. There were probably at least ten men and women working on the farm at that time.

During extra busy times, such as the potato harvest, Mr. Verity would fetch Italian prisoners of war from Hampton Lovett to help with the work. An armed guard always travelled with them. Some of them were very nice men and they made little wooden toys for Tony, who was ahout four or five years old.

Margaret had just heen born when Coventry was bombed. Nurse Powick was on her way upstairs with Mrs. Verity senior and they stopped to watch the

glow in the sky. Mrs. Verity had heard the nurse arrive and remembers wondering where they had got to, and what on earth was happening, for the jugs were rattling in the washbasins. She was just going to get up to see, when they came in and said that they had heen watching the bombing.

The stables were used for storage. They were jam packed with rolls of pure linen, parachute silk, rolls of felt, empty ammunition cases, incendiary bombs and phosphorine which burnt well on celebration. bonfires!

Mr E Bradley,
Royal British Legion.

VILLACH AUSTRIA 1945

I received a message one morning 'Report to Battery Office', belt and gaiters, (which meant I would be leaving the barracks), and carry small arms. Suggesting that I would more than likely, be meeting someone with an unfriendly disposition.

On arriving at the office, I found a White scout-car and a small 'PU.' truck drawn up outside with six of the lads in attendance. After waiting about twenty minutes, out came a tall, thin chap in a 'hotchpotch' of a uniform. No cap or rank insignia. He came up to me and introduced himself as being a member of the intelligence corps. and our mission that day was to take into custody a nazi political agent.

He took two lads and got into the scout car, leaving the rest of us to climb into the "PU.".

After we had gone about 5 miles or so, we stopped. He got out and approached a small group of people. Immediately he was transformed into a raving lunatic he screamed, clenched his fists, hurled abuse all around; all this of course, in German. When he rejoined the detail, he explained quite calmly that in order to get information one had to instill fear into anyone who happened to be near. We set off again, in a different direction, and soon came to a flower be-decked house by the side of a lake. We stopped and got down. "the Awful One" beckoned me to join him, and we raced into the house. It was occupied by a young couple with two small children. After making his presence felt in his own obnoxious way, we ran upstairs looking in all the rooms. Finally, we entered a room with a large balcony overlooking the lake. On a settee sun bathing was a youngish woman and "The Dreadful One" went up to her screaming like a madman, but this girl remained calm and unruffled. He bent down and attempted to get her to stand. She did, eventually, but only when she was ready. Finally he gave her a push, and she fell partly on the settee and partly on the floor. She looked up at us both with utter contempt, and he left the room.

I stood to attention and bowed to this brave girl. Why I will never know. To salute her courage, or ease my conscience at being present?

But the day wasn't over yet - not by a long way.