

Stonehouse History Group

Journal



Issue 1

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Front cover sketch "*Home Guard*" ©Darrell Webb. With thanks to Tom Round-Smith for use of the original photograph of Stonehouse Home Guard members, Annis and Jones, practising their gun skills on The Park.

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Why not become a member of our group?

We aim to promote interest in the local history of Stonehouse.

We research and store information about all aspects of the town's history
and have a large collection of photographs old and new.

We make this available to the public via our website and through our regular meetings.

We provide a programme of talks and events on a wide range of historical topics.

We hold meetings on the second Wednesday of each month,
at 7:30pm.

Everyone welcome – come along and join us.

Stonehouse History Group Journal
Issue 1, May 2012

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STONEHOUSE ROLL OF HONOUR



1939

WORLD WAR

1945

In memory of those who were Killed in Action
or Died on Active Service whilst serving their
King and Country.

Bodenham. V. H.
Gardiner. F. E.
Hall. I. T. H.
Harris. S. J.
Jones. C. J.
Jones. E. A.
Long. G.
Mellor. L.
Rigsby. G. H.
Simmill. R. J.
Short. G. B.
Smith. C. A. R.
Stopford. G. W.
Taylor. W. J.
Thomas. D. R.
Webb. D. J.
Young. G.

L.A.C.
P/O
A.C.2.
L.A.C.
Flt / Sgt. Pilot.
Sergeant.
Sapper.
Trooper.
Corporal.
Trooper.
A.B.
Sergeant Pilot.
Flight Sergeant.
Driver.
Trooper.
Corporal.
Stoker Ist Class.

R.A.F.
Royal Navy.
R.A.F.
R.A.F.
R.A.F. V.R.
R.A.F.
R.E.
43^{R.D.} RECCE
R.M.
43^{R.D.} RECCE
Royal Navy.
R.A.F. V.R.
R.A.F.
R.A.S.C.
R.G. Hussars.
R.A.C.
Royal Navy.

Stonehouse History Group Journal

Issue 1

Welcome to this new enterprise in the community life of Stonehouse

Stonehouse History Group began in May 2008 with the following aims:

- to promote interest in the local history of Stonehouse in all its aspects and through all periods of history;
- to hold talks and training courses devoted to this aim and to visit places of historic interest;
- to encourage members to work on research projects on local history;
- to cooperate with other societies and bodies having similar interests;
- to try to ensure that any material related to the history of Stonehouse is collected and preserved and made available for future use.

We have been undertaking research on a variety of topics and have presented some of our work at meetings. However we are keen to disseminate the information further, and to preserve it for the future, and a journal seemed an ideal way to do this. Our long-term aim is to produce a History of Stonehouse and the articles in this and subsequent journals will help us work towards compiling this.

The theme of our first issue is

The Impact of World War Two on Stonehouse

In 2009 our group commemorated the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of World War Two by holding a special meeting based on people's memories of the war in Stonehouse. We collected together a large number of photographs, diaries, letters and artefacts from local people and these were displayed for an audience of 55 members and guests at Park Junior School on Wednesday 9th September 2009. Highlights of the evening were talks by members who had experienced different aspects of life during the war.

This interesting event started us off on a more in-depth look at the history of wartime Stonehouse and we interviewed several more residents and added to our research. We were delighted when The Gloucestershire Local History Committee made "The Impact of World War Two" the topic of their History Afternoon in October 2011 as we were able to use much of our research to create an exhibition which we displayed at the event - and in various venues across Stonehouse. We were able to visit the Gloucestershire Archives and discovered the Parish Council's "War Book" which gave much interesting detail about the organisation of war-related measures in Stonehouse.

We are indebted to local residents who have allowed us to record their memories of wartime Stonehouse and have lent us original photographs to copy for our collection. Particular thanks go to Sylvia Bliss, Peggy Deuten, Erwin Gerlach, John Peters, Les Pugh, Tom Round-Smith, Betty Sargeant, Margaret Taylor and Frank Woodyard for their contributions to this issue.

We hope you enjoy our first issue.

The Editorial Team

May 2012

Helping to defend our country

by Jim Dickson

Summer 1940 was a time of great peril for our country – faced by German armies only 25 miles away on the other side of the English Channel. These armies had occupied Denmark and conquered Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium and France in only 11 weeks - and the British Army had escaped destruction or capture at Dunkirk only “by the skin of its teeth”.

Although more than a third of a million men were evacuated from Dunkirk by 4th June 1940, the material losses by our Army were enormous e.g. of some 445 tanks shipped to France, only 22 were brought back to England (Thompson, 2008, p.300). Until its equipment could be replaced, the British Army therefore faced the prospect of fighting an invading German Army mainly with rifles and light machine guns.

The following describes ways in which our town helped stiffen the defences of our country at that perilous time.

Home Guard

On 14th May 1940 the Government appealed for male volunteers between the ages of 17 and 65 to help repel the anticipated invasion. Within 24 hours a quarter of a million men had volunteered and, by the end of June, this had increased to 1.5 million. These men joined the “Local Defence Volunteers” (renamed the Home Guard, HG, in July 1940)



Back row: ?, Hobbs, Les Pugh, Tom Round-Smith, ?, Cyril Cooper?, Ernest Dwyer, ?, “Jock”, Arnold Annis.

Middle row: ?, Stan Brooks?, Bernard Tudge, Derek Moore, Geoffrey Round-Smith, ?, ?, Charlie Carter, Ralph Simmons, Eric Gosling, Clark

Front row: Jones, Fred Scobell, Harry Pearce, SM Charlie Williams, Lt Richard Thomas, Major Carmichael, Lt Frank Moore, Lt Bert Gardiner, Cyril Baker, Walter Morgan

A platoon was formed in Stonehouse (see photo above taken in 1941) and another based at Wycliffe College - where the Meteorological Office of the Air Ministry was located throughout the Second World War. The latter unit was made up entirely of Air Ministry employees. In addition the two shadow factories (Sperry Gyroscope at Bond’s Mill and Hoffmann Manufacturing on Oldends Lane) each had their own HG platoon. Senior officers at Sperry’s were in charge of both factory platoons. See the table for details.

The German Army had used parachute troops very effectively in a number of attacks e.g. in Belgium and in Crete. If enemy troops had landed in this neighbourhood the alarm was to be sounded by the ringing of bells at Wycliffe Chapel, St Cyr’s Church and the Council Schools.

The roles of the Stonehouse and Air Ministry platoons were to engage the enemy wherever they were located - while some members manned road blocks, provided guides & runners, etc (War Book, 1939-45, pp 9, 10, 22, 23 and 27). If the enemy drove back these units then all members of the Home Guard were to fall back into the "Keep". This was the area occupied by the Air Ministry and enclosed by Bath Road, Regent Street and lower Bristol Road (essentially the area now occupied by Wycliffe College). The Keep was to be held at all costs, the intent being to deprive the enemy of the use of the two main roads.

When the signal "action stations" was activated, road blocks were to be manned at the following locations:

1. near the bridge where the Stonehouse to Nailsworth branch railway line ran under Bristol Road (opposite the entrance to Boakes Drive);
2. at the bottom of Regent Street;
3. at the bottom of Pearcroft Road, at its junction with Bath Road;
4. at the railway bridge over Gloucester Road.



Home Guards on railway bridge over Gloucester Road

In addition, an observation post (OP) was to be set up on the south-west side of Doverow Hill. Those manning it were to communicate with Company HQ at Stanley Mill. Other OPs were to be set up and maintained. Given its elevated location on the roof of Springfield (house on Bath Road, owned by Wycliffe, which no longer exists; see photo in "Wycliffe at War"), the Royal Observer Corps post was expected to provide useful additional information.

Stonehouse Home Guard platoon in training



Rifle training at brickworks



Hand grenade training in quarry



Attacking Sperry factory



Practising gun skills on The Park

Personal stories

During the war, Sergeant Major Charlie Williams (front row, 4th from left in photo of platoon) had been invalided out of the Grenadier Guards as a result of rheumatic fever. He joined Stonehouse HG and proved a godsend to young men like Derek Moore (middle row, 4th from left) because of his military training and experience. Derek had joined the HG when he was almost 16 - like many he lied about his age but “nobody seemed to care”. As a result of the experience gained from Charlie, he felt much better prepared for life in the Army when he was called up (Moore, 2009). By the middle of the war such benefits to youngsters of Home Guard training had become recognised at national level.

Derek described the Sperry and Stonehouse platoons as competitors. On Sunday mornings the latter would conduct mock attacks against Sperry’s factory at Bond’s Mill. Les Pugh (back row, 3rd from left in photo of platoon) tells of such an attack (Pugh, 2008, p.64). Les and Cyril Baker (front row, 2nd from right) attempted to penetrate the well-guarded factory by wading through a culvert carrying the river Frome under the railway embankment - only to find that Sperry’s HG had the culvert under surveillance. Les and Cyril abandoned the attempt and - as Les put it - “I returned home like a drowned rat”!

Ernest Dwyer (back row, 4th from right) lived at 13 Avenue Terrace. Members of the Stonehouse platoon carried out another exercise – which included wading waist-high along the river Frome with rifles carried above their heads. Ernest came down with pneumonia and died on 3rd September 1942, aged 29 and having been married only 16 months (White, 2009). He was buried at St Cyr’s.



Back row: Tony Sheldrake, Taff Button(?), Bert Leach, Frank Lee, Geoff Frost, Ron Davis, Frank Twisleton, George Wadley, John Johnson, George Porter, ?, H Shill, D Parker

Middle Row: Frank Woodyard, Ivor Thomas, Frank Miller ('Dusty'), ?, Terry Attlee, regular soldier instructor, Captain instructor, Lt Fred Davey, regular soldier instructor, Jack Prail, Bob Cole, ?, Ted Hance, P Hughes, Jimmy Tween

Front row: Vic Hoyle, ?, Powell, ?, R Siggs(?), ?

Frank Woodyard (*middle row, 1st left, in above photo of Hoffmann HG platoon*) remembered the firearms training at the brickworks and hand grenade training at a quarry near Dursley. By the last few years of the war, Hoffmann’s platoon also had 4 anti-aircraft (AA) guns which fired 20 mm bullets. These guns were mounted on wheels which folded down to form a platform. They also had twin Browning machine guns with a built-in seat. Frank remembered training with these weapons at Portishead—where they fired at targets towed by aircraft flying above the River Severn. On one occasion after they had been firing at the towed target, the captain of a ship which had been sailing on the river complained about bullets falling on the deck of his ship!

Was there any possibility that the Home Guard would have been successful in a fight against an invading army or an attack by parachute troops? In the opinion of former members of the Stonehouse and Hoffmann platoons, they would have been “cut to pieces” if they had come up against battle-hardened units of the German Army in 1940 – not least because they were virtually unarmed since most of the British Army’s weapons had been lost at Dunkirk.

8th Battalion (Dursley), The Gloucestershire Regiment

Battalion Headquarters: Dursley Court
 Company Headquarters: Stanley Mill

Battalion Commander: Lt Col J Campbell, VC, DSO
 E Company Commanders: Major S G Annis
 Major Carmichael?

Platoon, Company	Officers	Headquarters	Strength**	Responsibilities
51, E Company	Lt Frank Moore Lt Bert Gardiner Lt Richard Thomas	Electrical shop attached to stone house at junction of Great Western Road* with Bath Road	3 officers & 46 other ranks	Fire watching at Stanley Mill, some of which was used as a store by the Royal Navy. Defence of Stonehouse together with No. 55 Platoon.
55, E Company	Lt W H Hogg	Air Ministry, located at Wycliffe College	2 officers & 26 other ranks (Air Ministry employees)	Defence of Stonehouse together with No. 51 Platoon but particular responsibility for defence of the "Keep" (see main text).
H(?) Company	(?)	Sperry Gyroscope's factory at Bond's Mill	5 officers & 100 other ranks (Sperry employees)	Defence of Sperry's factory and maintaining order. At night, all members of Sperry's HG living within 2 miles of the factory to report for duty on hearing explosions in this neighbourhood.
H Company	Lt Fred Davy	Hoffmann's factory off Oldends Lane	1 officer & 30 other ranks (Hoffmann employees)	Defence of Hoffmann's factory and maintaining order. At night, all members of Hoffmann's HG living within 2 miles of the factory to report for duty on hearing explosions in this neighbourhood.

* Great Western Road is now named Burdett Road

** The strength of each platoon would not have been constant throughout the war e.g. on reaching their 18th birthday, young men became liable for service in the Armed Forces unless they were in a "reserved occupation" or were physically unsuitable

Pillboxes

In early June 1940 General Ironside, Commander in Chief (C-in-C) Home Forces, set about defending the coast and preparing defence lines inland. His aim was to assist the British Army in resisting the expected German invasion in the south east. If, however, the invasion were to be successful, the inland defences were designed to limit the type of warfare that the Germans had employed to such potent effect in France – which had relied heavily on mobile tanks and troops supported by dive bombers.

“Stop Line Green” (also known as “Bristol Outer Defences”) was one of a number of defensive lines set up between June and August 1940. Its purpose was to protect Bristol and Avonmouth from inland attack if the Germans had succeeded in invading in the south east (Green, 1999, pp.3-4). It was a continuous anti-tank defensive position, some 90 miles long, extending from Highbridge (south of Weston-super-Mare) on the Bristol Channel to Upper Framilode. It exploited rivers, canals and railway cuttings, supplemented by ditches. Around 370 pillboxes were planned or built and more than 250 road blocks.

General Alanbrooke replaced Ironside as C-in-C Home Forces in July. Stop Line Green was partially completed when the order was received from Brooke to cease construction. Nevertheless, it appears that a lot of partially started works were completed (Strickland, 2007, p.8).

Between Stroud and Upper Framilode, the Stroudwater Canal and River Frome formed natural defences. They were supplemented by 16 “pillboxes” built - in frantic haste - between Stonehouse Ocean and Upper Framilode. A total of some 28,000 of these structures were built in the UK between June and October 1940 (Osborne, 2004, p.7).

The special pillbox, complete with its wartime camouflage and soldiers on the roof, was taken during the visit by Queen Mary, the then Queen Mother, in April 1941.



The pillbox that is familiar to most Stonehouse people is the 2-storey “special” (known locally as “The Gatehouse”) which guarded the bridge over the canal at Bond’s Mill. This unique structure was associated with the two strategically important “shadow factories”: Sperry Gyroscope at Bond’s Mill (to its immediate south) and Hoffmann’s bearing factory (on Oldends Lane, some 300 metres to the north). It has a concrete base, reinforced concrete lower section, and brick upper floor with a circular brick enclosure and machine gun emplacement on the roof. It is clear that one of its intended roles was as a platform for an anti-aircraft gun. (Anderson, 1984, p.20). The probable reason for its unusual height was to enable gunners on the roof to fire over the roofs of adjacent buildings at Bond’s Mill (which are built on lower ground). The structure has been much altered over the years, particularly with the insertion of modern windows. However, a number of the original small embrasures can still be seen. After the Second World War, funds were available to the Company of Proprietors of the Stroudwater Navigation to demolish this pillbox - but they “never got around to doing it” (Hall, 2012). It is therefore welcome news that, since February 2012, The Gatehouse has been Listed by English Heritage as a Building of Special Architectural or Historic Interest, Grade II. Of the other 15 pillboxes in this area, 6 have been demolished.

The Gatehouse was backed-up by a pillbox on the meadows by the river Frome — some 300 metres to the south (see *adjacent photo*) - perhaps an indicator of the importance of guarding the canal crossing at this location. This pillbox is a Type 24 “shell-proof” and is the most common infantry pillbox in the south of England (Foot, 2007, p.28 and 91). This type has reinforced concrete walls some 3 feet 6 inches thick (greater than 1 metre) and a reinforced concrete roof 16 inches thick (more than 41 cm). Each contained an internal anti-ricochet protective wall and was to be manned by up to 8 men. Most of the pillboxes in this area had a grassed-over roof which seems to have been the main method of disguising them from an enemy.



There was another Type 24 pillbox at the Ocean, on the north bank of the canal by the railway embankment. It had been demolished by 1964 (Strickland, 2007, p.23). It was probably demolished when the space under the bridge carrying the main railway line was filled in, following discovery of cracking in its southern abutment (Hall, 2012).

Would these defences have stopped the Germans?

The fighting in Belgium and in France in May 1940 showed that German troops could overcome pillboxes by firing at their embrasures with tanks and field guns (Foot, 2007, pp 59-60). It seems most unlikely that such aggressive attacking by battle-hardened troops could have been resisted effectively by Stop Line Green's defences since most of the British Army's tanks and guns had been abandoned in France.

What saved Britain from invasion?

Although the British Army had suffered a great defeat in France, by October 1940 the German air fleets had failed to defeat the RAF, and the Royal Navy still controlled the English Channel. By the following spring, when the weather would again have been suitable for a cross-Channel invasion, Hitler's attention had turned to his greatest folly – invading Russia in June 1941.

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Sperry's Home Guard at Bond's Mill



*Members of Sperry's Home Guard training at Stonehouse brickworks.
Frank Taylor from the Woolpack Inn is pictured front centre.*

Acknowledgements

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The images of Stonehouse Home Guard platoon and of the special pillbox at Bond's Mill are from the large archive of photographer Edwin Peckham of Stroud. ©Copyright Peckhams Photos, www.stroudphotos.co.uk.

The images of Stonehouse Home Guard platoon in training and on guard are from the personal collection of ©Tom Round-Smith.

Stonehouse Post Office sends Land Army girls to Devon

by David Flagg

My Mother, Muriel Flagg (née Malpass), who lived in Leonard Stanley, worked at Stonehouse Post Office from 20th April 1942 to 11th May 1945. During the Second World War she found it very upsetting when telegrams were received by the Post Office informing the next of kin that a son or husband was missing or killed in action.



In the field with potato baskets. Mum far left, Sandy in middle.

Since a large portion of our food had to be imported, the sinking of food supply ships by German U-boats meant that additional home grown food was required. To help the war effort, Stonehouse Post Office sent Mum and her work colleague, Sandy, to the Devonshire Volunteer Agricultural Camp at Dreamland Cafe, Okehampton, where they were employed planting potatoes.

So Mum and Sandy, although employed by Stonehouse Post Office, became part of the Land Army working in Devon.

In May 1945 Mum left the Post Office and went to work at Mullins the Drapers.

Mum in headscarf at the back of the potato riddler, Sandy to the left of her.



Evening entertainment at Dreamland Café. Note the blackouts on the windows. Mum is left at the back of the piano, Sandy to the right of her.

Life in the Women's Land Army

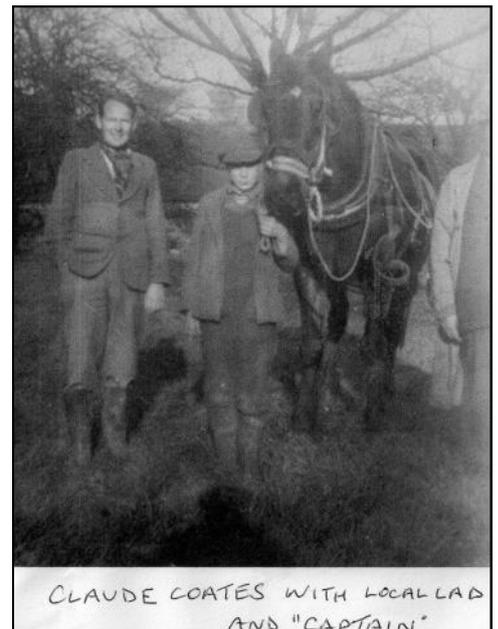
The Women's Land Army was formed in 1939 as a wartime measure to help food production in this country, and to reduce the imports from abroad in the light of the dangers to our shipping from enemy action. At its peak in 1943 over 80,000 women from all backgrounds, the big cities as well as the countryside, were 'land girls'. Initially, Land Girls earned £1.85 for a minimum of 50 hours work a week. In 1944, wages were increased by £1 to £2.85. This was still less than the minimum wage of £3 per week for a male agricultural worker. However, as the wages were paid by the farmer, rather than directly by the state, it was difficult to ensure that everyone was paid properly. Although the work was hard, conditions were often bad and the pay was low, many women enjoyed the experience, and formed lifelong friendships with fellow Land Girls (see sources of information). The Land Army was disbanded in 1950.

Stonehouse resident, **Sylvia Bliss**, wrote about her time as a "Land Girl"

Everyone aged 18 or over had to register for some sort of war work and as I didn't wish to join the services or any other type of work, I chose the Women's Land Army.

I spent the summer of 1943 working on a farm at Moreton Valence with another land army girl. Later I was sent to Horsemarling Farm in Standish, a farm run by Mr Coates and his son Claude. It was not a very big farm, with about twelve cows but no other animals, except a pig which was kept for the family's use. We had a horse for all transport, not being in possession of a tractor. Claude was in charge of "Captain" (the horse) and looked after his needs.

I was lucky enough to only live about 2 miles away so was able to live at home and cycled home to lunch as well. My day began when, after arriving at the farm, I would go to collect the cows from whichever field they had been in overnight and bring them into the milking shed. As there was no electricity in the yard, "Hurricane" lamps were hung up in the shed for light on dark mornings, and milking was done by hand. Claude and I would pick up our milking stools and begin. As our buckets filled, the milk was poured into the churn outside the shed, which was then taken across to the dairy and poured up into a large container. The milk ran over the cooler into fresh churns. These were then taken on a trolley down to the farm gate, to await the arrival of the lorry which would transport it, with the churns from neighbouring farms, to Cadbury's factory at Frampton-on-Severn. The cleaned and empty churns were returned to the gate to be taken back in.



*Sylvia with fellow Land Girl,
Jean Wilkins*



Sylvia with a calf



Sylvia after a day's hay-making

The cows were then released from the shed and I would take them back to whichever field they had to graze in that day. The dairy had to be washed and the utensils scrubbed and cleaned, also the cow shed had to be swept and hosed down and then we would go in for breakfast. We used sawdust on the floor of the cowshed which meant a periodical trip to the sawmills at Ryeford with the horse and cart to fill up. I always enjoyed this, harnessing up "Captain" and trundling through Stonehouse. There was little or no traffic in those days!

When the shed was dry and clean, the mangers were refilled with hay and minced root vegetables ready for the cows to come in for the next milking time which was usually about 3pm. I would fetch the cows in, and the procedure would begin again. The milk was kept in the cold dairy overnight.

There was always plenty of work to be done on the farm and although the dairy was my main job, I helped with other jobs as they came along. When the fruit fell in the orchard it had to be picked up and loaded on the cart and, once again, Captain was harnessed up and taken to Oxlynch where there was a farmer who had a cider press. When the cider was ready to be collected, I would ride the horse back up to this farm and bring the barrel back on the cart.

I had the misfortune at one stage to fall down in the cowshed and fracture my wrist. That put me out of action for a week or two but luckily there were a number of friends who helped out while I was away.

Hay making time came around in June and July and we prayed for nice weather to dry the cut hay which was left out in the field. It would then be gathered up and, with the help of some of the local young people, loaded onto the cart. We used pitch forks – there were no bales then. The hay was made into hayricks and left until the winter, when it was used for the cows' feed. Hedges often needed trimming and docks and nettles cut down and the farm to be kept generally tidy.

I worked at the farm until late 1945 when I contracted cowpox and had to leave. It is interesting to note that this was the disease which alerted Edward Jenner to the observation that, of all the population being struck down with smallpox, dairymaids remained immune from it. After investigation, he realised that the cowpox virus could be used for vaccination against smallpox, which helped to save thousands of lives across the world.

At the end of the war, the Women's Land Army was disbanded. I was sorry to leave the Land Army but I enjoyed it and learned a lot.



Sylvia with Shirley Dicker in the Co-op supermarket, November 2011

Source of Information

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Peggy Deuten, Girl Guide

by Vicki Walker and Shirley Dicker

On 18th March 2011 we interviewed Peggy (née Axford) about her childhood in Stonehouse during the 1930s and 1940s.

Peggy was born in 1928. She originally lived in Cam but moved to Chapel Row in Stonehouse at the age of three. A few months later the family moved into a council house at Woodcock Lane. The site where Maidenhill School is now was allotments. Her granddad was a policeman in London but he got an illness which left him crippled. He moved to Cam before Peggy was born and then they lived in the last cottage on Gloucester Road (just before where Arrowsmith Drive is now). They moved to King's Road when the houses were new in the 1930s.

She went to Stonehouse County School. Older teachers were Miss Hibbertson who taught history and Miss Gleed who had been there since Peggy's dad was at the school. She was in Mr Herbert's class for a year. Headmasters while she was there were Mr Parkin and Mr Wright. She remembers the evacuees coming from Birmingham in 1939. The school doubled in size in one day!



Peggy (tall girl in centre) playing at dressing up with her friends in fields near Woodcock Lane

Peggy left school at 14 to go to the County Typewriting Office in Rowcroft, Stroud, where she learned shorthand and typing and book keeping, taught by Miss Lewis. She did two terms there and then got a job as a secretary at Arthur's Press in Woodchester. She went there on a bicycle or, if the weather was bad, she walked to the LMS station at Midland Road and caught the train to Woodchester – the Dudbridge Donkey. She also remembers the railcar which had three halts between Stonehouse and Stroud. She worked there for eight years until she got married in 1949.



In 1949 she lived in a rented cottage at Woodchester but moved into Severn Road when it was built new in the early 1950s. Her parents still lived in Woodcock Lane and later moved into Park Road. In the 1960s Peggy's husband and her father built two houses at Cotswold Green where she still lives in 2011. They paid £300 for their share of the road. The council won't take over the road unless the residents get it made up. Some of the road was already built in the 1940s. Some of the top row at Cotswold Green was built in the 1940s on land sold off by Captain Sibly of the Wycliffe College family.

She remembers the Co-op being next to the Congregational Church (burned down in 1967) in the High Street. You went to the counter and a man came in a khaki overall and went to the shelves for you to get your order. Other shops were Miss Horsham's in the High Street, selling china, and Moore's sweets and tobacco shop (where Lloyd's Bank is now). Moore's also had a lending library which you paid for – maybe 3d a week. Peggy's grandmother used to borrow books from there. At the top of Regent Street on the corners were Bradley's and Mullins' with Chandler's Stores on the corner of Aldergate Street. She didn't go out of Stonehouse much, maybe to Gloucester on the railcar with her two aunts to buy underwear and blouses. Her aunts made suits and coats at Holloways which was situated in Brick Row at the top of Stroud. They used to buy textiles at a shop in Rowcroft in Stroud. She can remember the fireworks and fetes held at Standish Hospital by the League of Friends. The three Leagues of Friends from Stroud, Standish and Cashes Green hospitals together were called Trius.

She remembers the Ship Inn - opposite the junction of Regent Street with Bristol Road, the Brewer's Arms in Gloucester Road, the Royal Arms - opposite Wycliffe College Chapel, and the Crown and Anchor in the centre of Stonehouse (now a doctors' surgery) – all pubs which have now gone.

Girl Guides during the Second World War

Peggy has been in the Girl Guide movement since she was a Brownie aged 7, then a Guide and is still in the Trefoil Guild.

"I was a Brownie when the war broke out. There should have been a flying up ceremony but because of the war everything went haywire. It didn't close down but I missed the flying up, I just went up to Guides when I was 11. In the summer of 1940 one of Captain Sibly's daughters, Mary, who was at university, got the Guides going again. When she went back to university we were left without a captain. I was company leader. Another one of the Siblys, Mildred, who used to ride around Stonehouse on a very big upright bicycle - a very tall lady with a full skirt hanging over the side of the bicycle - lived at Wycliffe College. She and her friend Miss Elcombe kept the Guides going from a distance. I was running it but I was answerable to them."

The Guides used to meet in the Wycliffe Chapel Hall, but in 1939 there was a fire and it burned down and they lost all the equipment. After that the Guides met in the Subscription Rooms in Regent Street. The Subscription Rooms had a manager and a caretaker and were kept going by public subscription. It was more expensive than the Chapel and the Guides found it hard to afford on their 2d per child per week. They had a benefactor in Mr Northcote whose daughter went to Guides and Mr Northcote paid the rent for them. The Northcotes lived at the top of Queen's Road next to the Sturm family. June Sturm was in the Guides as well. In the summer the Guides sometimes met at the Wycliffe College swimming pool which was free — so they saved on the rent. At 17 Peggy became a lieutenant, at 18 a captain. She took Guides to camp during the 1950s at Hodgecombe farm in Uley. They would go for weekends or, in school holidays, for the week — with the parents coming for a day to make sure everything was going well. The District Guide Commissioner was Miss Sibly. Divisional Guide Commissioner was Mrs Rawlings who lived in the big house at Little Sodbury. Miss Hartfree, the County Camp Advisor, lived in a cottage in the grounds. The Guides used to camp there as well. Peggy was a captain for quite a few years until 1964, and then joined the Trefoil Guild, of which she is still a member.

Peggy bought a Brownie box camera at Stonehouse chemist for 15 shillings to take photographs of Girl Guide outings and camps.



Peggy (right) with Pamela Vale outside her home in Woodcock Close in 1945.



Peggy Deuten with Shirley Dicker at her home in March 2011.

Guide camps at Uley in the 1940s



Girl Guides being taken to camp in Peggy's Great-Uncle Percy Harmer's coal lorry.

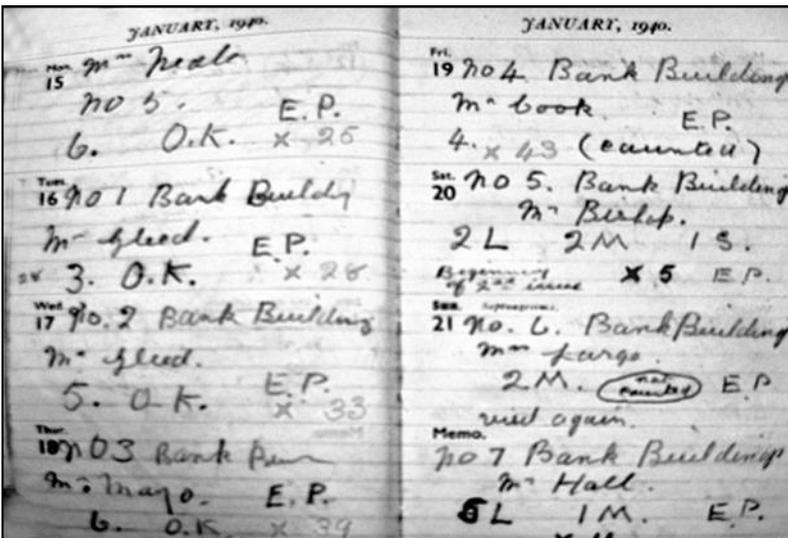
ARP Wardens

by Shirley Dicker and Vicki Walker

When war was declared on September 3rd 1939, Air Raid Precautions (ARP) had been in the process of formation for over four years. The Government was preparing measures for safeguarding the population against attack by hostile aircraft. Regulations were brought out in 1938 which detailed arrangements for all aspects of dealing with enemy attack, including air raid warnings, first aid, clearing debris and repairing buildings, anti-gas training and fire services. One of the services prescribed was the organisation of local volunteer Air Raid Wardens.



Stroud "Area Eight" of the Civil Defence Services was formed in June 1938 and included Stonehouse and Nailsworth. A list of Head Wardens was published with Captain E. L. Smart and Captain B. D. Parkin being in charge in Stonehouse. Anti-gas courses were held in 1939 and Wardens were issued with equipment such as helmets, respirators, whistles, torches, gas rattles, handbells and first aid outfits. They were instructed on how to report air raid damage with a complicated system of Preliminary Messages, Express Messages, M.1 Messages and Supplementary Messages. One Warden was so exasperated by the different forms that he sent this message to Control - "Casualties buried under messages". Wardens were also asked to make a census of all motor vehicles in the area. Stonehouse Wardens alone listed 98 cars and lorries.



Two pages from a Stonehouse ARP Warden's diary. The Warden notes the number of respirators (gas masks) that he has given to each house in Bank Buildings, Regent Street.

On the outbreak of war, the Government ordered the issue of respirators to the general public. Wardens took responsibility for handing these out and instructing people on the fitting of them.

Whenever there was a job to be done, and it was not clear who could do it, it was always given to the Wardens. By 1941 they were responsible for organising the Fire Watchers in their area and initially organised the Fire Guard in 1942. They made sure there were air raid shelters set up for people, either an Anderson shelter or somewhere else safe for people to go. One of their main jobs was to patrol the streets to check that no light was visible. If they saw a light, the call "Put that light out!" or "Cover that window!" would be heard. They had to look out for air raids or alien planes while patrolling the streets. They also had to assess any bomb damage and report to the emergency services.

The Stonehouse Wardens Service consisted of approximately 60 male and female members (see group photo on next page). Stonehouse Parish was divided into the following 6 posts:

- Council Yard, Gloucester Road
- Hill View Cottage, Upper High Street
- Oldends
- Stonehouse Court
- Haywardsend House
- "Moir", High Street

Each post was supplied with a first aid outfit and anti-gas ointment. When an alert was sounded, each post was to be manned and the fire service and housewives' service to be called to support the Wardens and to act as steadying forces.

Each factory had its own ARP Wardens. They had to make sure they knew where all the shelters were and show people where to go and what to do if an air raid were to happen. They showed them the route to take to get to the shelter if it was night. The wardens made sure they took their respirators and rattles (to give the order if a gas attack happened) and, in cold weather, also made sure they took their coats.



Back row: Peter Hayward, ?, Roy Northcote, ?, ?, ?, ?, ?, ?, ?, ?, ?, ?

Middle row: Bramwell Parker, ?, ?, ?, SJ Vinson, Walter Price, (Poulton?),
Ernie Owen, ?, ?, ?, (Ted White?), ?, (Jim Vaile?)

Front row: Gardner Young, Mrs Christine Parker, Miss L Johnson,
Molly Wheeler, ?, ?, ?, Captain B.D. Parkin, Geoffrey Young, ?, Mrs Hayward, Mrs Richards, Mrs Farran,
Miss L Ritchie, ?

On March 16th 1942, Captain B. D. Parkin of Stonehouse became the Head Warden for "Area Eight". He remained in post until the end of the war and Captain Symonds, Co-ordinating Officer to the Defence Committee, gave him special mention in his book (Symonds p.93):

"STONEHOUSE IN THE FRONT LINE"

WHAT IS OUR DEFENCE?

AN ADDRESS on the above subject
will be given by

Capt. P. R. SYMONDS
Co-ordinating Officer for Civil Defence

AT THE

Subscription Rooms, Stonehouse,

ON

MONDAY, DECEMBER 1st, 1941
at 7.30 p.m.

Chairman: Capt. B. D. PARKIN

Members of all Defence Services will
be present to give information and answer
your questions.

COME AND LEARN YOUR DUTY!

Collins, Printer, Stroud.

"Captain B.D. Parkin, JP, the Head Warden of Stonehouse (G.1) but who will be remembered by the service generally, first as Deputy Chief warden to Mr Beale and then, during the past three years, as Chief Warden. No man did more to bring the service to a high standard of efficiency and to hold it together during a difficult period of enemy inaction. He will be remembered for his clear and well thought-out Orders and his many eloquent and elucidating addresses to Head Wardens."

From the Stonehouse War Book, a written record of Invasion Committee documents, which is held at Gloucestershire Archives, and of which Stonehouse History Group has a copy, we can see that there were very detailed plans for coping with invasion and many local residents volunteered to "do their bit" for the war effort. One example was 18 year old Mostyn Pryce who had recently left Wycliffe College and was working at a bank in Gloucester while awaiting call-up papers. He wrote in his diary of his experiences in Civil Defence.

Extracts from Stonehouse resident Mostyn Pryce's diary May 1941.

Pryce on City Control.

From "Home Guard" to "Civil Defence"

"Under the compulsory firewatchers scheme, M.R. Pryce was required to serve one night a week on guard over the business premises of Lloyds Bank Ltd, the National Provincial Bank Ltd and the West Gloucester Power Co Meter House; also the Guildhall. Pressing ever upward, however, Mr Pryce determined to seek higher office and at once volunteered to become a telephone operator on the City Control Staff. On being accepted, he became a fully fledged Civil Defence Worker, complete with armband."

Lightning Gas Course at Gloucester ARP School. Nine Weeks Course in One Day!

"Hardly had the "Associate Examination" (bank exam) had time to be digested, when a communication was received of an impending gas examination, with a view to gaining qualifications as an Air Raid Warden. For this purpose, a course in Anti-gas training, normally taking nine weeks, was attended for one day only – Sunday 4th May 1941.

"The journey to Gloucester had to be made on a pedal-cycle, starting at 9.00am. The instruction, which was held in a classroom in Sir Thomas Rich's School, lasted from 10.30 to 12.30 and from 2.30 to 4.30. Six printed sheets of information were brought away for detailed study. The exam is to be held on Friday 9th May 1941."



Mostyn Pryce wearing his newly-acquired ARP badge

Sources of information

Air-raid Warden's diary held at Gloucestershire Archives, ref D8229/1

Pryce, Mostyn, *Diary*. May 1941

Symonds, P.R. *"Area Eight" in the war against Hitlerism, being an account of the Civil Defence Services and A.R.P. in Stroud and Nailsworth*. Stroud (Urban and Rural) and Nailsworth (Urban) Defence Committee, 1945. Copy in SHG Collection.

War Book: *World War 2 Stonehouse Invasion Committee Documents 1939 – 1945*. Gloucestershire Archives, ref P316a PC 50/1. Copy in SHG Collection.

Fire Precautions

by Shirley Dicker

At the end of 1940, as a result of the blitz on London, the Government put out an appeal for fire watchers. In the Stroud area 1,903 persons volunteered. The Air Raid Precautions Warden (Captain B.D. Parkin in Stonehouse) was given the role of organising fire watching duties.

By 1941 an order was issued to ensure that all business premises had adequate fire prevention arrangements. All British males were required to do 48 hours a month of fire watching unless exempt. Another order was issued requiring local authorities to make arrangements for local fire watching. If there were insufficient volunteers, there was provision for compulsory enrolment. In December 1941 all Stonehouse men between 18 and 60 were required to enrol. In 1942 women also had to sign up.

Mrs E. Pryke's memories of fire watching

In 1940 Mrs Pryke had moved to a house in Queen's Road, Stonehouse, with her parents, after her husband had joined HM Forces. She remembered fire watching in the 1940s:

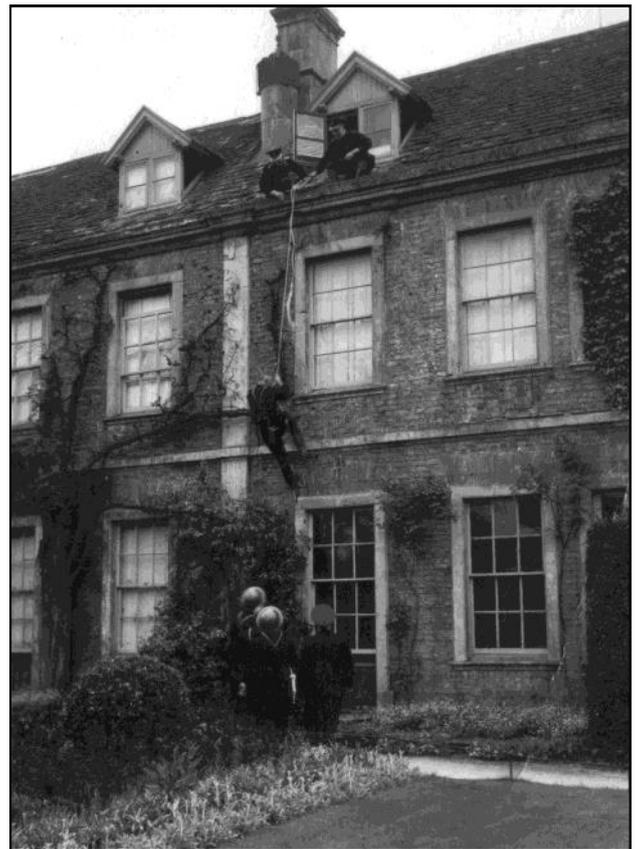
"I went to work for the Air Ministry who had taken over Wycliffe College. For some time we were in the main buildings, and then they built four or five wooden huts on the grounds and my section was transferred there. Once every two or three weeks it fell to my lot - with three or four others - to do 'fire watching'. This involved patrolling the grounds every few hours during the night to see if there were any signs of incendiary bombs, or aircraft likely to drop any, in spite of the fact that we had never had a raid at Stonehouse. It was a weird experience, to say the least, with cows and sheep in the grounds and rats and mice running around indoors.

"Once there was a very bad air-raid at Bath which sounded much nearer. This seemed to worry the Stonehouse village folk and those such as the Women's Voluntary Service, etc, came round from house to house inquiring how many people we could take in if there was a blitz on Stonehouse - or if we would be willing to use some rooms as hospital wards in case there were many people injured. Fortunately this never happened."

The Fire Guard was formed in 1941 and head and senior Fire Guard leaders were appointed to train the members of their teams. Two teams of volunteers were recruited, one in Stroud and one in Stonehouse, who underwent considerable training by National Fire Service (NFS) personnel in addition to their normal Fire Guard duties.

The outcome of this training was the formation of two demonstration teams who toured the area, over a period of two months, demonstrating the duties of Fire Guards from the "fall of bombs" to the extinguishing of fires. The Stonehouse team (*photo on next page*) included a young woman, Molly Chew. These demonstrations culminated in an inter-team competition between Stroud and Stonehouse which was judged by the NFS. Stonehouse won and was awarded the George Pearce Cup.

Peggy Deuten's father, Percy Axford, was in the Auxiliary Fire Service before the war. Peggy remembers a big fire at the cinema in Laburnum Walk in September 1936 and, because the fire fighters were still only in training, they had to stand and watch it burn down. The cinema was just before the Recreation Ground, next to where the retirement flats are now. The Auxiliary Fire Service took part in fire fighting and prevention at the beginning of the war and, later, became part of the NFS.



Stonehouse Fire Guard practising at Haywardsfield House, Wycliffe College

STONEHOUSE FIREGUARD DEMONSTRATION TEAM

Winners of the "George Pearce" Cup, August, 1944.



H. S. HACK, P. NEALE, R. LORD, P. AXFORD,
(Asst. Fireguard Officer) (Leading Fireman)

W. EBBORN, J. RESTALL, R. DAVIES,
(Party Leader) (Party Leader)

E. BIRKS, M. CHEW,
(Party Leader) (Party Leader)

S. LAPPER, R. BROWN, M. PARKER, J. H. GOVIER,
(Area Captain)

C. WHITE, G. HARROLD, T. SULLIVAN,
(Party Leader) (Party Leader)

R. REMES, J. VINSON
(Sector Captain)

Sources of Information

War Book, 1939 – 1945 *World War 2 Stonehouse Invasion Committee Documents*. Can be viewed at Gloucestershire Archives [ref P316a PC 50/1]. Copy in SHG Collection.

Pryke, E. *Two Visitors' Views of Stonehouse*. Stonehouse review towards a town. Stonehouse Town Council, September 1990, p.19-20. Copy in SHG Collection.

SHG Oral History interviews – Mrs Peggy Deuten, 2011

Symonds, P.R. *"Area Eight" in the war against Hitlerism, being an account of the Civil Defence Services and A.R.P. in Stroud and Nailsworth*. Stroud (Urban and Rural) and Nailsworth (Urban) Defence Committee, 1945. Copy in SHG Collection.

Thacker, Joy. *Survival and revival: Stroud during the war and recovery years*. Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1995. Copy in SHG Collection.

Stonehouse British Restaurant

by Shirley Dicker

During the war the Government decided to build restaurants to help feed the nation and help people supplement their rations. Stonehouse had the first British Restaurant to be established in the Stroud district - situated in the heart of the village, just off Laburnum Walk in the corner of the Recreation Ground at the rear of the Co-op Supermarket. The building was a wooden hut, 120 ft (37 metres) long and 18 ft (5.5 metres) wide. It had seating for 150 people. The wood for the tables came from bombed premises at Painswick and they were made by Mr A Price of Ebley. The food was cooked at Dudbridge, brought to Stonehouse in containers, kept hot by hot plates and served to the public - who took their food to the tables on trays. The restaurant had its own cooking equipment in case of emergencies.

The restaurant was officially opened on Monday 24th August 1942. Sixty councillors and officials attended on Tuesday 25th August when the restaurant opened to the public. 130 people were served lunch and all seemed satisfied.

The first meal served was soup, roast beef and vegetables, apple tart, and a cup of coffee or tea.

The Tariff

	Old pence	New pence*
Soup	3d	1.25p
Meat and Veg	8d	3.33p
Sweet	4d	1.67p
Cheese and biscuits	3d	1.25p
Coffee white	3d	1.25p
Coffee black	2d	0.83p
Tea	1d	0.42p

*introduced in 1971

See the article "Life in the Women's Land Army" (p14) for rates of pay for women during the war.

Beatrice and Frank Woodyard remembered that food coupons were not required when you ate in the British Restaurant. Frank normally ate in the work's canteen at the Hoffmann factory where, again, food coupons were not required. As Beatrice commented, eating at the British Restaurant was a useful boost to your rations (which were anything but generous during the war). She also commented that the restaurant was a cheap place to eat.

The restaurant was open each day from 12 noon until 2pm - except Sundays. It was expected that between 400 and 450 meals would be served each day. The cost of the building had to be repaid in 5 years, and the contents of the building to be repaid in 2 years; the restaurant had to be self-sufficient so that it did not put a burden on the general rate payers. Sadly the restaurant closed in May 1945 because of the lack of support it received over the years.

Sources of Information

A full report of the opening of the Stonehouse British Restaurant was published in the Gloucester County Advertiser on Friday 28th August 1942. It can be viewed at Stroud Library.

Woodyard, Beatrice & Frank, personal communication on 20th April 2012.

STROUD R.D.C.'s FIRST BRITISH RESTAURANT



The new British Restaurant at Stonehouse, the first to be established in the Stroud R.D.C. area, is proving very popular. Above is a queue lined up for dinner on Tuesday. On the left are assistants serving the meals, which are cooked at Dudbridge and brought to the restaurant by van. Below are members of the staff with the honorary manager, Mr. H. Bennett, and a family party at dinner. On the left are some of the customers.



© The Citizen

The lady at the front of the queue in the top photo is Dinah Joyce, née Hyams, mother of David R Joyce. Dinah died in January 1986.

Evacuees at Stonehouse Council School

by Vicki Walker

Headmaster, Mr Charles Wright, returned from his summer holiday in August 1939 to receive the news that 76 evacuees from St Barnabas School in Birmingham were to arrive within the next few days.

Mr Newnham, Headmaster of St Barnabas School, reported that:

"We arrived at Stroud where we were placed on a bus and taken to Stonehouse. The children were given milk and biscuits and then had billets found for them and were taken to their new homes by cars. All arrangements worked very smoothly and well."



Children arrived in Stonehouse on September 1st 1939 and were entertained by their teachers and foster parents by rambling through the local fields and woods until they could be registered at school.

Classes moved to Church Hall

On September 11th 1939 Mr Wright admitted 130 new children, including 78 evacuees from Birmingham and 52 others from various places including "unofficial" evacuees. The school roll jumped from around 184 in July 1939 to 314 in September. There were not enough rooms in the old school building (built 1832 with later additions) and so Mr Wright got permission to rent the nearby St Cyr's Church Hall. Extra teachers from Birmingham were sent to help with the classes of 40 children or more.

Miss D Smith (infant teacher from St Barnabas) found the conditions unsatisfactory.

"Children are over in the Church Hall – a pleasant room but the building has been greatly neglected – very dusty and dirty.

"Apparently no caretaker can be found in the village willing to take over the work of cleaning here (fee 8 shillings per week). School caretaker Mr Gale is a cripple and unable to do much. Has had a woman to help clean Church Hall. She has proved a bad worker – now the school caretaker is without this extra help. I have asked him to see if my room cannot be kept free of dust and dirt. I shall let the children dust and do little jobs."

The Church Hall was also very cold and Mr Wright reports on 10th January 1940.

“Head Teacher went to Stroud to purchase 2 oil stoves to supplement heating of Church Hall. Dr Prout approved on behalf of the managers.”

In addition the hall was used as a dining hall. Lessons ceased early in the morning so that it could be prepared for serving 200 meals and throughout the afternoon there was constant interruption because of washing up.

Swift return home of evacuees

Many of the children evacuated to Stonehouse went home after a few weeks. However they were replaced by others from different schools and children of the essential war workers at the shadow factories, Hoffmann's and Sperry's. Maisonettes were speedily erected in the fields at the edge of town and the population doubled over the next 10 years.

The difficult times for the school in 1940 were reported by Rev Robert Nott when examining children on their Religious Knowledge.

“In reporting on my visit a year ago I spoke of the changes in staff and arrangements that had interfered with the working of the school. During the year past such interference has been even greater. There has been a constant coming and going of evacuated children and teachers, so that some classes have had four or five teachers in the year. In spite of this there were signs of careful Bible teaching. The passages for Repetition were well known, and on the whole I should give a favourable report. Some of the children showed no response, they had only been a short time in the school.

“While there was a group of boys in the senior class, recently come, who were keen to show their knowledge. I was particularly struck by the reverence and beauty of the opening prayers both by Infants and older scholars.”

The children's education was also interrupted by air raid warnings when they were sent to shelters. They participated in the War Weapons Week July 19th–26th 1941, the total amount raised being £385.18.

No sympathy for War Workers

Families where both parents were working found it difficult to care for their children. In 1941 Mr Wright records:

“Oct 7th 1941

Sent a letter of application from a parent asking that a boy of 4 could be admitted to this school to the Official Correspondent. Reason given that mother is on war work and that the parents could get no one to mind child.

“Dec 8th 1941

Received letter from Official Correspondent. Refusing permission for child to be admitted and stating that the managers were not prepared to admit children under 5.”

Summer Special Holiday period

However by 1942 the teachers were trying to help.

“August 4th – 28th 1942

The school was open for the whole month. 4 teachers came in on duty for the 1st three weeks and three teachers for the last week. The attendance averaged 47.3 in the mornings and 43.1 in the afternoons. The school was open to all who cared to attend and the children of women on war work were only a small minority of those who attended.”



Evacuees lack clothes and boots

The teachers from Birmingham took responsibility for ensuring that their charges had proper clothing and boots. Mr Newnham writes on 13th September 1939:

"Mrs Newnham and I visited some homes of the children to discover what clothes and boots etc were lacking. Paid a visit to District organiser of clothing.

"Many children have been fitted out by the kindness of the Stonehouse foster parents. Others have received parcels from their parents.

"Boots and boys' clothing will be most in demand."

The Birmingham Education Department were also sending donations for the children's welfare with which the teachers bought items such as socks and handkerchiefs for the children.

"Clothing is being sent from the Women's Voluntary Service for Civil Defence.

"Boots are to be distributed shortly by the Birmingham Mail Christmas Tree Fund or the Police Aided Association."

Miss Smith was very concerned about the children's clothes.

"July 28th 1940

I have filled in forms for boots and clothing for all poor cases and am going to see Mrs Farren who runs the Women's British Legion. These women hold sewing meetings and I may be able to obtain some clothing from them.

"July 29th

Mrs Farren said she had some clothes and I was to call for them at the British Legion next day.

"July 30th

I went to the British Legion and received some clothes. These were all boys' clothes and I think they will fit some of the worst cases i.e. Ernest Glaze, Stanley Horton, Ernest Weaver and Dennis Weaver."

She also took the children out during the holidays:

"Sept 13th 1940

We broke up today for a fortnight's holiday.

"Sept 18th

I met the B'ham children and took them for a ramble to Randwick Woods. On the way back we called at a farm for milk which the farmer kindly supplied free of charge.

"Sept 25th

We went for a ramble to Frocester Hill. Children brought their tea and we arrived back about 7pm. Snaps of the children were taken.

"December 21st

We broke up today for the Xmas holidays. I have arranged to meet the Birmingham children during the holidays at school for recreational activities, rambles if weather is fit etc.

"January 3rd 1941

We gave the children an Xmas party in the Church Hall. Mrs Parker helped. Some of the village people contributed towards the party and the children had a very good time. I had visited Dennis Weaver (a child who could not settle in any of his billets and had been moved to Butterow) and arranged for him to be sent to Stonehouse for the party."



No more evacuees

In 1941 there were so many war workers needing accommodation that the Chief Billeting Officer sent this letter.

“March 4th

Received a reply from Mr J. B. Powell Chief Billeting Officer for Stroud in which he states no more children can be billeted in the Stonehouse area, as it is now entirely reserved for the billeting of War Workers.”

Even though many of the evacuees eventually returned home the school roll remained around 290 because of the influx of war workers.

After the war the school buildings were refurbished and added to in the form of HORSAs huts. In 1951 it was decided to form a separate Secondary School taking in children from the surrounding villages. There was then a school roll of 691. In 1957 the new Stonehouse County Secondary School was opened and the old school became Stonehouse County Primary School.



Sources of information

Stonehouse Council School Log Book 1939 – 1945.

St Barnabas School, Birmingham Log Book 1939 – 1941. Photographs from this Log Book.

Both books available at Gloucestershire Archives Ref S316/1.

Wycliffe at War

by Darrell Webb

Talking freely about the weather, especially the forecast, was not allowed during the 1939-1945 World War; such information was top secret and forecasts were banned from newspapers and the radio. This demonstrates the importance of weather observations to countries involved in World War 2. Weather forecasts were especially important for naval operations. Weather in the United Kingdom is observed by the Meteorological Office - or the Met Office as it is known today - and was established in 1854 as a small department within the Board of Trade to provide a service for mariners. Then in 1919 the Met Office became part of the Air Ministry. The weather was observed from the top of Adastral House (where the Air Ministry was based) giving rise to the phrase "The weather on the Air Ministry roof". The Met Office's headquarters was established in Dunstable by the time of World War 2 and remained there until 1960 when it moved to Bracknell in Berkshire. In 2003 it moved again – to a purpose-built £80 million structure in Exeter, Devon, where it still resides.

Gloucestershire has been associated with the study of weather for many years. There have been important contributors such as apothecary, Thomas Hughes, who contributed daily temperatures between 1771 and 1813 and also Dr Edward "Ted" Wilson, from Cheltenham, principal scientist on Captain Scott's ill-fated 1912 expedition who made South Pole weather observations. However, the county's position in national meteorological history was settled during the Second World War with the secret evacuation of the Met Office to Wycliffe College, Stonehouse. In circumstances perhaps evocative of the film Enigma, the supply and calibration of meteorological instruments, climatological record-keeping and the Navy's mapping of sea currents and ice extent occurred in Wycliffe's hall, house and science block from November 1939 until August 1945. However it does not seem to have been a happy time for Wycliffe.

The preliminary steps to the highly secret, compulsory requisition of the school's premises were described in the school magazine, the Wycliffe Star, during winter 1945-46, and were afterwards reported in the Stroud News on April 19th 1946. On Boxing Day 1938 the headmaster, W A Sibly, received a letter marked "very secret" from Sir Patrick Duff, Principal Secretary of the Ministry of Works, informing him that Wycliffe was one of a number of large buildings outside London earmarked for national purposes in the event of war. He was asked to "very kindly" allow a representative of the Ministry to survey the premises during the then-current Christmas holidays, in order to minimize publicity. The situation was described by a later headmaster, S G H Loosley (Loosley, 1982, pp. 103-5):

"It was a very unseasonable letter and W.A.S. was shocked by its contents for he had been slow to accept the probability of war..... Shadow factories for key industries were being built in safe areas. At Stonehouse the Sperry Gyroscope Company occupied Bonds Mill and a large factory for Hoffmann the ball and roller bearing company was erected to the west of the LMS railway station. This seemed to confirm that Wycliffe was in a place of safety. Nevertheless in Stonehouse the tempo of preparations for war increased. Courses were started for air raid wardens, Reade (one of the masters) was instructing the Wycliffe volunteers. An Observer Corps unit was formed with its HQ on Springfield roof with Captain T M Sibly in command. Seeing all these preparations it must have been hard for the Headmaster to keep his secret".



Royal Observer Corps, KI 24 - the men who watched the skies from an observation point at Wycliffe College. Captain T M Sibly is in the centre.



The flat roof on Springfield House was ideal for the Observer Corps' headquarters.



Captain T.M. Sibly on the roof of Springfield, watching out for aircraft, by sight and sound

“The headmaster and the Chairman of the Governors set about looking for alternative accommodation, but without success. As the threat of war increased, the Ministry of Works suggested an approach to St David’s College, Lampeter in Wales. Accommodation was insufficient for the whole of the Junior and Senior Schools, so it was agreed that only boys aged 11 and over would go there and the younger boys to form a Preparatory School which would occupy The Grove and Windrush Houses in Ryeford”.

During 1939 the School moved out, and the Climatological, Marine and Instrument Branches and also the Library and Stores of the Meteorological Office headquarters in Dunstable were moved to the requisitioned school buildings at Stonehouse. The Stroud News article recorded that, during the move, 167 telephones were installed as well as a hanging light for each worker, and ample stocks of coke and coal for heating.

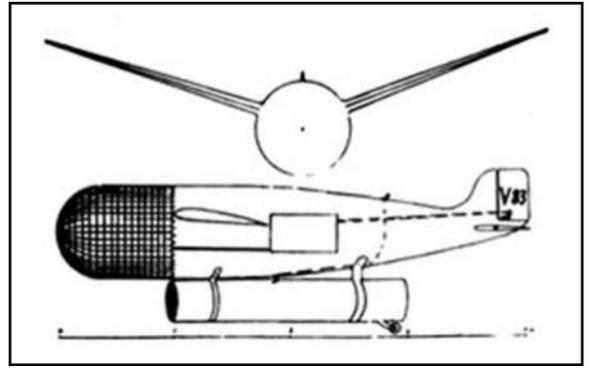
Before the outbreak of the 1939-45 war Britain’s weather services got much of its meteorological information routinely from Europe. In 1940, that supply was cut off. So obtaining vital weather data became yet another job for the decoders at Bletchley Park. They decoded and translated the intercepted German weather radio transmissions. R. P. W. Lewis of the Meteorological Office wrote that, after a year or so, they were so efficient and fast, that surface and upper-air charts for the whole of Axis-occupied Europe could be drawn up, which were nearly as good as if there were no war on at all. Much of this information would have been transmitted to the departments at Wycliffe.

The German weather codes were not produced by Enigma machines but they were complicated enough to make deciphering them an arduous task. Breaking these codes also helped to win the vital Atlantic battle against the U-boats because the German naval cipher carried weather reports that had originally been coded by Enigma. This made it possible to track back the work which helped in cracking the Enigma machine operations.

Interestingly the Stroud News article also stated:

“... From all accounts our science rooms saw strange experiments. Here for example was brought for examination the automatic meteorological transmitting equipment with which the Germans sowed the Atlantic Ocean, so that at a time when it was treason to speak of the weather here in England our foes were receiving daily reports from apparatus which is said to have sunk during the day time and have surfaced at night fall and to have been recharged from time to time by enemy submarines. Some say too that on the flat roof of our science buildings was dismantled the first flying bomb which was brought for examination. Other experiments were carried out in secrecy at Stonehouse, and so the school’s property can at least claim to have served in strange and vital ways, the Allied Cause”.

The episode of the flying bomb, which was also reported by S G H Loosley (Loosley, 1982, pp. 118), may well be connected to British Military Intelligence records of August 1943 by R V Jones, chief British technical intelligence expert (Carpenter, Aug 1943), who reported that:



Photograph and sketch of the remains of the flying bomb made by Lieutenant Commander Hasager Christiansen

“...on 22nd August 1943 an object had crashed in a turnip field on the Danish island of Bornholm in the Baltic Sea, roughly half-way between Germany and Sweden. It was a small pilotless aircraft bearing the number V83, and was found by the Danish Naval Officer in Charge, Lieutenant Commander Hasager Christiansen, he and the police chief, Johannes Hansen, promptly photographed it, made a detailed sketch, and noted that the warhead was a dummy made of concrete.”

It was also reported that the material was eventually shipped back to London.

At first it was not certain what he had found. From his sketch it was about 4 metres long, and it might have been a rather larger version of a glider bomb HS 293 that was being used against allied war ships in the Mediterranean. Indeed it turned out that this particular bomb had been released from a Heinkel 111 bomber, but it was in fact a research model of the flying bomb which England, particularly London, was going to experience in the following few months. British Military intelligence eventually discovered that the V-1 missile was being built at Peenemünde, so Winston Churchill ordered Operation Crossbow, a plan to destroy V-1 production and launch sites. Over the next few months over 36,000 tons of bombs were dropped on these targets.

Was this the very bomb which was shipped off to Wycliffe to be dismantled on the roof of the science building for examination? If you can shed any light on this matter, we would be delighted to hear from you.

By spring 1945 the Wycliffe masters were impatient for a date to return to Stonehouse. However the staff of the Meteorological Office did not move out until late summer - on a special train to London, together with 1100 tons of equipment. Only then were Wycliffe people able to inspect the premises for a return to school.



Air Ministry huts covering the Wycliffe cricket pitch

The Stroud News article reported the comments of Wycliffe's Sister Martin on conditions found in the School's Sanatorium:

"We were not prepared for a swim, but judging by the amount of water (at least four inches deep) we could at least have paddled. Two boiler fireplaces were found to be stacked with un-burnt paper, cardboard and left over clothing, such as scarves, belts, odd gloves and gas masks, etc. A visit to the surgery disclosed two one-time lockers brown with dirt and cigarette burns. The roof was leaking. In the main Entrance Hall postage stamps of various sizes and values were stuck on the ceiling, plus the remains of the VE (not VJ) Day decorations and it was now September! Only two switches were intact out of thirty two the others hung covered in dust and cob webs plus hundreds of drawing pins and ordinary pins all rusty with old age. Brown paper hanging from ventilators and enormous rudely made man-holes in the ceilings added to the desolate scene. Only by their shape could the difference be told between lavatories, bathroom basins and baths and the dirty and broken stone floor".

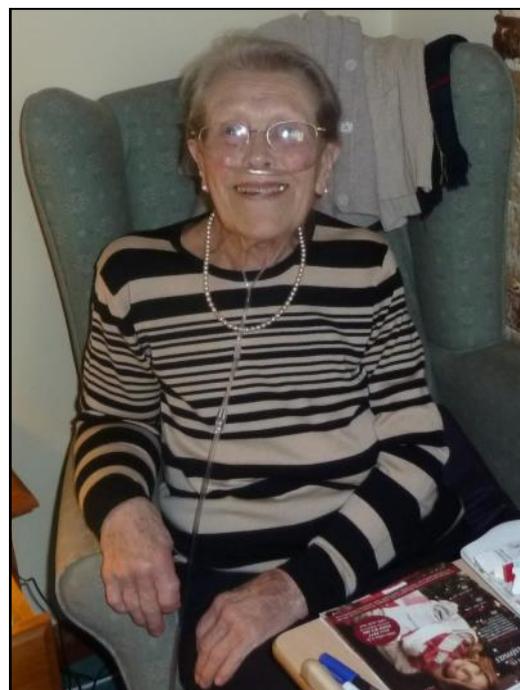
S G H Loosley recorded in his book (Loosley, 1982, pp. 118-9) that the school grounds were left in a sorry state, with sewage drains laid through the playing fields with four large huts erected across the top of the cricket field. In school, Haywardsfield and Springfield houses' walls, ceilings, equipment and fittings had been left severely damaged and dirty. It took a six week effort by masters, their wives, and the boys to clean up, while local craftsmen repaired the damage and two of the Met Office huts were adapted for school use.

On October 18th 1945 school life was able to resume. Wycliffe had perhaps suffered its share of war damage, but had also performed a valuable service for the war effort – but it was left in a bit of a state!

Working at the Air Ministry

Margaret Taylor worked at the Met Office at Wycliffe during this time. Vicki Walker and Shirley Dicker interviewed her on November 24th 2011, and the following is an extract from her memories, beginning in 1939 when she was just 17. Sadly, Margaret died on January 5th 2012.

"It was wartime and you were directed where you had to go. You had to go to the nearest place. In my case, I was born and brought up in Ebley, just along the road. The nearest place where they wanted me to work was the laundry in Ebley. I didn't want to work there because I had better qualifications than that. You had to go before a tribunal to state your case - which I did. I was terrified – my mother came with me! They entirely agreed I had quite good qualifications in secretarial work and also German. They said I could do something different and I went to the Air Ministry - first of all in Stroud where they had taken over the Imperial Hotel by the railway station. I stayed there for a little while and didn't like it very much. I was in the "Effects" Department and one time I had to write to a poor lady whose eighteen year old son had been killed - and to tell her that she owed eight shillings and four pence - to be taken out of her son's wages. For some reason this triggered the feeling that I couldn't go on doing this and so I watched the notice board for something else to turn up within the Air Ministry.



"The next thing that came up that I thought suited me was in the Meteorological Office in Stonehouse. I had a few interviews and they thought I had the right qualifications, so I went there to the Climatology and Research Department. My boss was Dr Goldie who seemed to be terribly old. He had retired but, when the war broke out, he was roped back into the service. He was deputy head of the Meteorological Office. The head of the whole office was Sir Nelson King-Johnson. Everything was highly secret in those days – do you know, as far as I know, I never even saw Sir Nelson and yet he visited a number of times. You never knew because it was all kept under cover.

"There were about half a dozen of us on our wing and I got on quite well with the others. At Stonehouse it was chiefly Climatology and Research. There were different sections such as British Rainfall, British Sunshine, the Marine section and various others which all came under the Meteorological Office. We had a lot of fun. My dog used to come to work with me – it wasn't supposed to!

I lived at Ebley whereas most of the people came from London and were billeted around - but I was lucky enough to be able to live at home. Peter, my dog, used to belt over Doverow Hill and be sitting on the doormat waiting for me when I got to work. Likewise, when I went home, he'd shoot across the hill and be waiting on the doorstep when I got home!

"I was 18 in 1940 when I started work in Stonehouse doing secretarial work. I was learning German when the war broke out which helped me to get the job and it proved to be useful. We used to get reports from experimental stations in Germany. Research was going on into jet propulsion and FIDO (Fog Intensity Dispersal). Sometimes the reports were scrunpled up and I remember one that had obviously been submerged in water and had a heel print on it. They were roughly translated somewhere – I don't know where – and they came to me to be finished off. Then they went to my boss and I used to wonder what those bits of paper could actually tell us. Of course we were working on jet propulsion as well and it was all highly secret. It was all mathematical research.

"We did have some fun though. One lady in the office decided to make us some scones for a treat. Nobody had any butter so she got some black-market margarine from somewhere. If you got it from the black market it was nearly always thoroughly rancid by the time you got it. The scones looked all right but of course they didn't taste very nice. However we all ate our scones politely! You didn't have milk or sugar and tea was very hard to come by - so we had cocoa which wasn't rationed - but you had to have it made with water and no sugar! You had to be very brave to tackle it.

"We had a party at Christmas time. But it was baked beans on toast! To boil a kettle you had to go down a labyrinth of passages and it always seemed to be damp and cold with an icy wind blowing. There was a tiny gas ring at the end of all this and you daren't take your eyes off the kettle or somebody else would pinch it. About once a month they had a canteen there and it used to issue bread and dripping, half a slice cost a halfpenny. Absolutely everybody from the director down had their bread and dripping. It was a lovely flavour but we only got that treat about once a month. I sometimes wonder what it would be like if we had to go back to that now.

"There were bathrooms at Wycliffe and many of the people who were billeted didn't have a bathroom in their house and so they were allowed to have a bath at the College. At that time, houses were mostly cottages and bathrooms were quite a rarity - and a lot had outside toilets. It was a hard life but everybody seemed to be in the same boat."

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Hoffmann's "shadow factory"

by Jim Dickson

Hoffmann Manufacturing Co Ltd

In 1898 Hoffmann was registered as a company by cousins Charles and Geoffrey Barrett. They purchased the patent rights for the manufacture of steel balls from Ernest Hoffmann of the American Machine Co., then bought out Hoffmann's share in 1903 (Anglia Ruskin University website, 2012).

The Barretts built their small factory in Chelmsford in Essex and, in 1898, started the manufacture of steel balls - mainly for bicycles. At that time theirs was the only firm in the UK engaged exclusively in making bearings. In 1901 the Company marketed its first complete bearing, and a year later made steel balls which were accurate to 1/10,000 inch or 2.5 μm (Hoffmann, 1963, p.1) - bringing the firm worldwide fame.

As the motor car and aircraft industries grew, the demand for bearings increased rapidly and Hoffmann expanded to become the largest employer in Chelmsford.

"Shadow factories"

In 1936 the British Government initiated discussions with industrialists which led to the "shadow factory programme". The Government provided capital for new plants on the understanding that, if war started between Britain and Germany, they would be available for munitions production. The scheme continued after the outbreak of war and by 1945 there were 265 shadow factories (Stratton & Trinder, 2000, p.106).

In December 1940 Frank Woodyard moved to the Stonehouse factory from Chelmsford. He noted the marked improvement in working conditions at the new factory e.g. daylight working was the norm since the windows in the roof were north-facing and equipped with sliding steel shutters. In contrast the windows in the Chelmsford factory had to be blacked-out throughout the war.

Hoffmann's shadow factory in Stonehouse

The parent factory was some 30 miles north-east of London. In the late 1930s it was within range of bombers from Germany. So the company built its new shadow factory in Stonehouse to be out of the then-range of the bombers. The choice of location might have been different had the Government anticipated the German Army's rapid conquest and occupation of Belgium, the Netherlands and France in May/June 1940. There is an aerial photograph in Gloucestershire Archives - taken by the Luftwaffe in 1941 - which shows the Hoffmann and Sperry shadow factories (Stonehouse History Group website, 2012, p. 47). So, although the factory did not suffer bombing, its location was known to – and within range of - the enemy.

An important factor in selecting Stonehouse for the new factory was its good rail links with Chelmsford and with important engine and aircraft factories in the Midlands, Bristol and Gloucester.



The former Midland Railway Station can be seen in the background of this official construction photograph - taken on 29th November 1939, some 3 months after the start of the Second World War.

This construction photograph was taken on 10th December 1940 – by which time the Battle of Britain was over.

The new factory was in operation well before its completion. Staff were transferred from the parent factory as required and equipment was re-organised as completion progressed.



This photograph shows the completed factory.

Note the densely packed machinery. Also that power was transmitted to each machine from overhead shafts via belts. According to former employee, John Wadley, this system was replaced by electric motors by 1960.

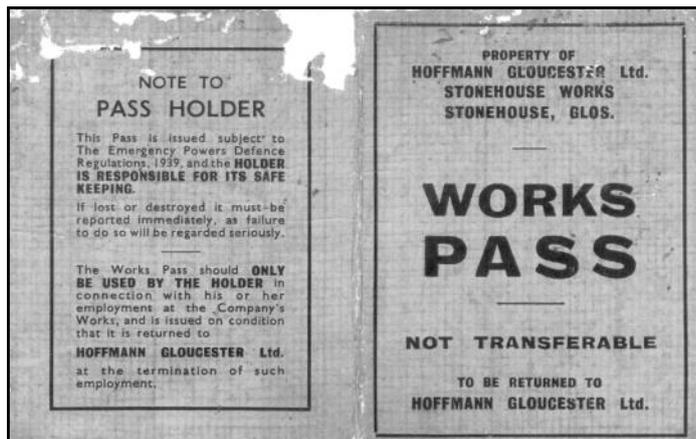


This photograph was taken in April 1941. It shows Queen Mary - the then Queen Mother - with factory staff. Note that this building, now named "Queen Anne's Gate", was formerly Queen Mary's Gate".

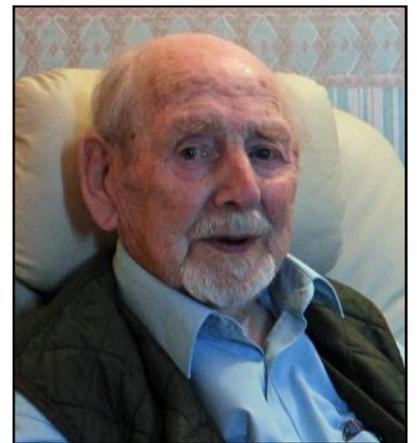
Early in the war, productivity at the parent factory suffered because workers were spending a lot of time in the shelters due to regular air-raid warnings. Some would go home and not return to work that day! This system had been changed by the time the Stonehouse factory was in operation. When an enemy raid was anticipated, spotters went to a lookout post on the roof (War Book, 1939-45, p.26). If approaching hostile aircraft were spotted, red warning lights were flashed in the factory. Only then were workers allowed to take cover. Frank Woodyard, who transferred from the parent factory to the Stonehouse one in December 1940, does not remember ever going to the shelters in Stonehouse.



Frank Woodyard during WWII



Frank's Works Pass dated 10th December 1940



Frank in 2010

What contribution did the factory make to the war effort?

- Hoffmann bearings were used in practically all types of British aircraft in WWII.
- The factory manufactured large numbers of bearings e.g. more than 950 were incorporated in each Lancaster bomber.
- The factory also manufactured large numbers of cores for bullets - 0.303" (7.7 mm) and 20 mm (0.787") - (Hoffmann Manufacturing Co, 1957, p.8). These were sent to munitions factories to be made into bullets.

During WWII the population of Stonehouse almost trebled (from c.2300 in 1931) – largely due to the importation of workers by the Hoffmann and Sperry Gyroscope companies (Spencer, 1942).

The former Hoffmann factory on Oldends Lane is now owned by SKF Aerospace Bearings.

The factory under construction in 1940 – 41



7th May 1940



7th October 1940

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Acknowledgements

The author was given generous assistance by former Hoffmann employees Frank Woodyard, John Wadley and Paul Smith. This included the supply of photographs, documents and memorabilia.

Erwin Gerlach, former German POW

by Vicki Walker and Jim Dickson

On 15th December 2011 we interviewed Erwin about his time as a prisoner of war (POW) in this country, from 1944 until 1947.

Erwin was born in Germany in 1926. He was conscripted into the German Army in 1944 aged 18 and captured in Belgium soon after. He was imprisoned in a “near-concentration camp” in Belgium where his weight went down to only 6 stones and 6 pounds. From there he was sent to a POW Camp in Edinburgh then transferred to a camp in Moreton-in-Marsh. At this camp, guards drove the prisoners to work on farms, canals and rivers in the surrounding area. An Army Captain drove the bus and gave the prisoners their orders. Since Erwin could speak some English he often stayed with the Captain to help interpret the orders - which meant he had less work to do. He remembered cutting back the weeds on the canal banks. The POWs were also taken to Gloucester where they cleared the banks of the River Severn. They were paid one shilling (5p) a day so they were able to buy things. They worked from 9am until about 5pm each day.

Erwin was then moved to a camp in Coleford - in the Forest of Dean – where there were both Italian and German POWs. He worked at a farm at Clearwell. Having trained as a mechanic in the German Army, he also helped out at Higgs and Niblett’s garage in his spare time. There he met and made friends with the Herbert family, who owned a haulage business. They invited him to visit their home and he became good friends with Mr and Mrs Herbert and their two children.

In 1946, after the war had ended, prisoners were given the choice of returning home or staying in England for another year. Erwin chose to stay.

“I stayed here because I didn’t know where anybody was in Germany. No-one got in touch until long after the war. My family didn’t know where I was and I didn’t know where they were. I got married in 1948 and we didn’t get in contact with my family until long after that – after the Red Cross found them. My grandfather had been killed in the war. One of my brothers was a prisoner of war on the Russian front. He died in 1968.”

“I have another brother living in Kropelin in Germany. I have been over there a few times to visit. I find it very different to how it used to be. It’s the same as here, all different nationalities.”

“My wife, Dorothy Joan, came from the Forest of Dean. We met at a dance. We had a dance band in the camp that had played on the radio in Germany. At the end of the war, when people were a bit friendlier, the band played in Coleford Town Hall. When you went to the dance you still had POW written on your back - some people didn’t speak to you but some did. I made some good friends on the farm and I have some photos of the family I stayed with”.

Erwin had photos of himself and his friend Werner, who worked at the same camp, with the Herbert family — including those shown below.



Erwin and his friend Werner with some of the Herbert family



Erwin & Werner in uniform



Erwin at the Herberts’ home

Erwin has a photo of himself on the day he was discharged from the German Army in 1948 - wearing his new suit instead of the uniform of a POW (see below). He kept his discharge papers and his identity card. He gained British citizenship in 1973.



Erwin in his "demob suit"

CERTIFICATE OF DISCHARGE Entlassungsschein		CONTROL FORM D.2 Kontrollblatt D.2
<p>ALL ENTRIES WILL BE MADE IN BLOCK LATIN CAPITALS AND WILL BE MADE IN INK OR TYPE-SCRIPT.</p> <p>PERSONAL PARTICULARS Personalbeschreibung</p> <p>Dieses Blatt muss in folgender weise ausgefüllt werden: 1. In lateinischer Druckschrift und in grossen Buchstaben 2. Mit Tinte oder mit Schreibmaschine.</p>		
SURNAME OF HOLDER Familiennamen des Inhabers	GERLACH	DATE OF BIRTH Geburtsdatum (DAY/MONTH/YEAR)
CHRISTIAN NAMES Vornamen des Inhabers	ERWIN	PLACE OF BIRTH Geburtsort
CIVIL OCCUPATION Beruf oder Beschäftigung	FARM WORK	FAMILY STATUS - SINGLE Familienstand
HOME ADDRESS Strasse Heimatanschrift Ort Kreis Regierungsbezirk/Land		NUMBER OF CHILDREN WHO ARE MINORS Zahl der minderjährigen Kinder
<p>I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF THE PARTICULARS GIVEN ABOVE ARE TRUE. I ALSO CERTIFY THAT I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTOOD THE "INSTRUCTIONS TO PERSONNEL ON DISCHARGE" (CONTROL FORM D.1).</p> <p>Ich erkläre hiermit, nach bestem Wissen und Gewissen, dass die obigen Angaben wahr sind. Ich bestätige ausserdem dass ich die "Anweisung für Soldaten und Angehörige Militär-ähnlicher Organisationen" u.s.w. (Kontrollblatt D.1) gelesen und verstanden habe.</p>		
SIGNATURE OF HOLDER Unterschrift des Inhabers		

Part of Erwin's discharge papers



Erwin on his Wedding Day



Erwin in Dec 2011

After their marriage in 1948, Erwin and his wife lived in Malmesbury, Tetbury, Cirencester and Frocester. Although he had trained as a mechanic in Germany, he continued to work outdoors for the rest of his life. He worked for Mr Dangerfield and then Mr Graham Prout at Frocester Farm for 30 years until he moved to Severn Road, Stonehouse in 1980. Then he was a gardener at Wycliffe College for 11 years until he retired. He has lived at Sherborne Close since his wife died in 1996.

Photos copyright ©Erwin Gerlach

How I came to work for Bletchley Park

by Betty Sargeant

In 1939 I was living in South London. About three months before the outbreak of World War Two I had started work as a Clerical Officer in the Civil Service. We were warned that government departments and ministries would be relocated out of London and that, if war were to be declared, staff should report for duty as a priority. I had helped my two younger sisters, Helen and Kay, in their packing for evacuation and had gone with my mother to see them off on a train to the West Country - a safer place. The news became more sombre and an announcement was expected. My parents and I gathered round the wireless to hear Prime Minister Chamberlain announce that we were at war with Germany. Ian, my then boy friend, was requested to see me safely to Thames House for duty. The false alarm of an impending air raid resulted in our being turned off the bus and being offered shelter in the meat store of a helpful butcher. Eventually we arrived at Lambeth Bridge and I was soon admitted to the office at Thames House. Ian left with a promise to return later to see me home.

We were warned that, for most, the move to Southport in Lancashire would take place shortly. Nine girls and twelve young men were relocated from the department. At Southport we were billeted in bed and breakfast accommodation and worked in hotels taken over for the duration. Friends were made and we enjoyed visits to Blackpool, which was a training area for the RAF. Of the young men relocated with me, eleven were in time released for service with the Royal Air Force, and were killed. The twelfth, who was released into the Army, was the only one to survive the war.

All were concerned with the safety of family members. In spring 1941 I received a letter from my Dad telling me that my sister Helen had returned home "to be with Mum". One evening shortly afterwards, in April 1941, I was at a NAAFI dance when I was astonished to see my friends at the entrance beckoning to me. They told me that I had received a telegram from a neighbour asking me to come home at once. They had packed clothes in a case, had a taxi waiting outside to take me to a station and had made a collection to pay the taxi and the fare to London. With thanks and hugs for my friends, I asked the driver to take me to the nearest station for a train to London. He dropped me in the town centre but it was dark and I was lost. I stopped four soldiers coming towards me and asked for help. They looked after me all the way to London, bought me a large cup of tea and a sandwich at Euston and saw me on to the Underground.

I arrived in the street where our house had been but was utterly shocked to find it as a heap of bricks, broken furniture and clothes. I knew a nearby neighbour and found the front door there intact. I knocked, the lady opened the door and took me into a warm room, brought a cup of sweet tea and told me a landmine had fallen on our house: my father had been sitting on the sofa reading and had been killed. My mother and sister Helen were sheltering under a heavy table. My sister Helen had been dug out but our mother had died. The lady's husband and others had also been killed. We had to wait three weeks for the funerals.

A kind neighbour took me to tell my youngest sister Kay the awful news. Kay decided it would be best for her to stay where she was. When Helen came out of hospital I took her back with me to Southport. She was traumatised and was terrified of the possibility of another similar experience. I explained the problem to the landlady and asked if Helen could sleep downstairs for a while. The landlady was incensed at the suggestion of anyone sleeping on her settee! I found Helen in tears but advised we should wait until all were asleep when we would creep down and sleep for a short time. This worked but, within a few days, the Billeting Officer called to see us. He was very kind and said he would find a more suitable billet. This helped a lot but, to this day, Helen cannot cope with being contained anywhere without an immediate easy exit.



Betty with a friend while training on the Isle of Man, 1943.

This terrible experience made me all the more determined to work directly for the war effort. Those employed full time in the Civil Service were not allowed to volunteer for military service until the age of 21. As soon as I was 21, I gave notice and enlisted at Lancaster on August 21st 1942. I was posted for training in the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS). On completing this, I was posted to Douglas, Isle of Man, for training as a Special Wireless Operator (SWOP). One of our subjects was Electricity and Magnetism - but few of us learned much as the lecturer was a handsome young officer and we all gazed at him in admiration. After some months of good food, warm welcomes and kindness from the people of Douglas, we were tested on our Morse skills. Those up to standard were posted to intercept stations. The duties involved going "on watch" for eight hours, finding and listening to enemy communications sent by Morse and in code. This was followed by an eight-hour rest period and a third period for recreation, further training or other activities as decided for us. I was posted to Beaumanor near Loughborough. This was one of the intercept stations for Bletchley Park, which had been set up outside London for decoding work. Every morning a small van ("tilly") was sent from Beaumanor to Bletchley Park to deliver the previous 24 hours' messages for decoding.

One day in May 1944 I picked up a priority message which I recognised as German. I informed the Officer in charge and was told to continue - which I did. I then noticed that there were more people in the set room and I was informed that I had been given a better aerial and another interceptor had been ordered to shadow me. The shift ended and I thankfully had a good sleep. On reporting for duty the next morning I was ordered to report to the Colonel in charge. I tidied my hair, made sure all was ship shape, went to the Colonel's office and tapped on the door. "Enter" said a voice. I opened the door and saluted. He stood up, said "good morning" and came towards me. He took my hand and congratulated me on the intercept I had found and taken the previous day and said: "If you never do anything for your country in the future, your country has reason to thank you now". My mind instantly returned to my parents, and I felt that perhaps I had done something to help stop the killing. I thanked the Colonel and reported for duty in the set room. The intercept was reported as of merit on Part 1 Orders. After the events of D-Day in June 1944, I hoped that it had helped in the preparations.

Our training had included the ability to recognise Morse signals, to cope with high speeds and interference, and to exercise the highest accuracy in our work. If you have seen the film called "Enigma", you will have viewed Bletchley Park, Beaumanor and a set room very similar to the one which I came to know very well indeed. Bletchley Park is open to visitors. The tour is very interesting but, if you go, please ask about the work of the interceptors, which tends to be over-shadowed by the great work of decoding. The work at Bletchley Park was Churchill's Secret Army. It shortened the war by two years and saved many lives.

I am still able to read Morse, albeit certainly not at the same speed, and I am very interested in the increased public information being released. We had to sign the Official Secrets Act and I was unable to tell my family about my war work until fairly recently. I offered to train my husband and children to read Morse but the proposal was kindly declined!



Betty chatting with fellow SHG member, Stanley Dicker, at the World War Two evening in Sept 2009.

A little boy in war-time

by John Peters

People seem to think that everyone went round in the War with a gas mask. I do not ever remember going anywhere outside the house with a gas mask, though when I first had it I liked wearing it indoors and in the garden, because it was a novelty and had an interesting rubbery smell. The first time I took it out of doors with me was the day we were told to take our Mickey Mouse gas masks to the National School and change them for grown-up types, and the last time was at the end of the war when we were asked to take all our gas masks back to school as they would not be needed any more.

Every individual was issued with a ration book, marked Ministry of Food, coloured buff for adults, blue for children and green for very small children. They included Personal Points for items that many people would not need, such as jelly babies and liquorice allsorts for me and 'a quarter of best chocolates for me' (that was Mammy). There was a separate pinkish coloured book for clothes, called Clothing Coupons. We could buy most things in Tetbury (we were 'registered' for food at Fawkes's Stores) but we had to go into Stroud on the bus from time to time because some things were completely unobtainable in the village.



Mickey Mouse gas mask and carrying case



John during the War

One shopping day has stuck in my mind ever since. I went into Stroud with Mammy while her friend Mrs Davis looked after my baby brother, David. I cannot remember now what we were supposed to be shopping for, but I do remember Mammy bought herself an aloe plant, very spiky, from the hardware and garden shop in Stroud High Street. It flowered ten years later and she kept it for the next forty years.

We went into Park Gardens (there was a ladies' toilet in the far corner) where we sat on a bench and watched an old man mow the grass that was decorated with KEEP OFF THE GRASS signs. Then we went into Bateman's. Now Bateman's is entirely a sports shop, but then it sold toys as well. If I remember right, they still sold toys up to the 1970s. In the shop Mother bought me a wooden jigsaw puzzle that showed RAF planes shooting down a bomber with swastikas. I have no idea why she bought me a jigsaw – but I was pleased.

We had just crossed the road by the four clocks when the air-raid sirens began. That was what we called 'the curly ones' – the air raid siren was a revolving noise-making machine that produced a horrible undulating, up and down sound to warn you to go under cover because a German plane had been spotted in the area. You had to wait where you were until 'the straight ones' sounded; the siren began again but made a continuous noise, officially called 'the All Clear', to tell you that the danger was past.

I said 'We had better go into the air raid shelter.' It was on the forecourt of the Sub Rooms. 'I'm not going in there!' Mammy said. 'Not in a public air raid shelter!' and we huddled in a shop doorway until the straight sirens went.

Much later we heard that a German bomber had been spotted coming along the Nailsworth valley towards Stroud, and the one anti-aircraft gun at Nailsworth had been put on active service – that is, the official gunner had been called away from his work to man the gun. When a plane was very high up the pilot could see the chimney of Stonehouse Brickworks and orient himself by it. It is very likely that the pilot at Nailsworth was actually lost!

When we had finished our shopping we went to wait for the bus by the big lump of coal outside the coalman's shop. The interesting thing for me was that we saw men in dirty overalls and goggles using oxy-acetylene apparatus to cut down the iron railings in front of the houses. That was the only time I saw men cutting down the railings that nearly every house on every town street had then. We knew it was part of the war effort.

I went to sleep on the way home and only woke up when the bus stopped at Avening, as it often did to catch up with the timetable. The driver and conductress always had a break there for a cigarette.



*Stroud Subscription Rooms
with wartime air raid shelter on forecourt.*



*John (left) with fellow SHG members, Betty Sargeant, Les Pugh and Tony Burton,
at the World War Two evening in September 2009.*

Acknowledgements

The image of Stroud Subscription Rooms is from the large archive of photographer Edwin Peckham of Stroud. ©Copyright Peckhams Photos, www.stroudphotos.co.uk.

Photo of "John during the War" copyright ©John Peters

Stonehouse History Group

Annual Report 2011 - 12

The group has continued to flourish, maintaining a steady membership of 46, with 93 names on our contacts list. This year we have had 10 events, with an average attendance of 43, plus 4 outside visits during the summer. We have met on the second Wednesday of every month at 7.30pm in the Town Hall.

The excellent Stonehouse History Group website, www.stonehousehistorygroup.org.uk, has been maintained and developed by Darrell Webb. It gives details about the activities of the group, as well as a wealth of information about the history of Stonehouse. We have received communications from a variety of people with questions about Stonehouse history as well as photographs and information to contribute. The website is well-used with an average of 20 visits per day, from visitors in at least 20 different countries!

We have continued to interview local residents about their memories of Stonehouse. Shirley Dicker, Jim Dickson, and Vicki Walker have interviewed:

Chris Hemming (Woolpack), Barry Reynolds and Wendy Gabb (Spa Inn and Globe Inn), Mary Webb (Brewer's Arms and Globe Inn), Erwin Gerlach (World War 2), Margaret Taylor (World War 2), Tom Round-Smith (World War 2), Terry Jefferies (Young and Wolf Button Factory) and Frank Woodyard (Hoffmann's shadow factory).

Shirley Dicker and Vicki Walker have continued to visit groups to show the presentation of High Street photographs old and new. Talks have been given to Stroud Local History Society, Stonehouse Probus Club, Stroud U3A Oral History Group and Nailsworth Local History Research Group. They have also visited Wycliffe College (Year 10) and Park Junior School to give presentations on the History of Stonehouse.

We worked on the series of walks leaflets with Stonehouse Community Partnership and, in June, did our first guided history walk for Stroud Local History Society. This began at the Crown and Anchor, continued down past the Berryfield to the Canal and Church, through Bridgend and back to the Town Hall for tea and cakes. We are grateful to Colin Wood for opening the church tower for us. We also led a walk down the High Street in September – as part of the High Street Festival - and had a display at the Summer Jolly in July.

We have continued to collect photographs of Stonehouse, many of which have been uploaded to the website. We decided to use some of these to create a set of table mats and coasters for sale. These have sold well making the Group a small profit. We still have some mats in stock and more may be ordered. We also published a 2012 calendar, selling all 100 copies. We intend to produce a new calendar for 2013.

Our main achievement this year was to create a display on World War Two in Stonehouse for the Gloucestershire Rural Community Council's Local History Afternoon on October 1st. The committee used the information and photographs acquired from our research to create 6 display screens. The work we did on this led us to decide to make WW2 the main theme for our first Stonehouse History Group Journal in which this report is published.

We have a healthy bank balance, benefiting from members' generous contributions to monthly fund-raising raffles. This money goes towards paying for the speakers and the hire of the premises.

We are grateful to the Midcounties Co-operative for giving us a grant towards the purchase of a new laptop which we use for our presentations and the storage of photographs.

Committee, May 2011 – April 2012

Chair – John Peters

Vice-Chair – Linda Greenway

Secretary – Vicki Walker

Treasurer – Carole Crisp

Committee – Valerie Blick, David Boaker-Praed, Shirley Dicker, Jim Dickson, Ken Greenway, Darrell Webb, Colin Wood

Stonehouse History Group

Events 2011 – 12 (number attending in brackets)

May 11th 2011

Annual General Meeting (36)

Members' reports: Jim Dickson on Hoffmann's Shadow Factory, Janet Hudson update on Stonehouse research: 'A possible assembly site for Blacklow Hundred', Darrell Webb on the Stonehouse History Group website, Vicki Walker and Shirley Dicker on Pubs of Stonehouse.

June 8th 2011

Tony Burton - Levelling along the canals and rivers (47)

June 25th 2011

Steve Mills - Walk down the canal to Eastington (12)

July 2nd 1.30 pm

GRCC afternoon at Fairford (12)

July 20th 2011

Visit to Frocester Court with Arthur Price. (25)

August 10th 2011

Nailsworth local history walk with Nick Peters. (21)

Sept 14th 2011

Ted Currier - The Aircraft Industry of Gloucestershire (49)

October 12th 2011

Dr Simon Draper – Victoria County History and Writing a Parish History (43)

November 9th 2011

Frank Smith - History of Wycliffe College (46)

December 14th 2011

Alec Hamilton – Friends of Friendless Churches and Christmas social (44)

January 11th 2012

Gwilym Davies - Traditional Carols and Wassails (36)

February 8th 2012

Virginia Adsett - Children's Hour (37)

March 14th 2012

Carolyn Heighway – Anglo-Saxon Gloucestershire (48)

April 11th 2012

Bruce Hall - The Cotswold Canals: a History and the Restoration Project. (48)

Do you have any interesting historical photographs of Stonehouse?

1890 -1990

Shops or pubs
Stonehouse industries
Schools
Streets or houses
Roads, bridges, railways
Fetes, fairs or other activities

We would like to borrow them to scan for our collection.
We can scan them in your home using our laptop or take them away for a few days.
We promise to return them safely.
If you would like to give us your old photos we will store them safely for the future.

May we record your memories?

If you have memories of life in Stonehouse many years ago we would like to talk to you.

At the moment we are researching the pubs, Stonehouse during the Second World War , industries and the development of High Street. If you think you could help with information on any of these topics please phone Vicki Walker on Stonehouse 826 334 or contact us via our website
www.stonehousehistorygroup.org.uk

Would you like to write an article for the next issue of this Journal?

If you would like to write an article please discuss it with any member of the editorial team.
You will find Guidelines for Contributors on our website.

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