

Milton Malsor & Collingtree WI



Memories of WW2 & VE Day 75 Years On
- Family Stories from Some of Our Members



May 2020

As talk of muted VE Day celebrations began to filter into my radar, I wondered what we, as Milton Malsor and Collingtree WI could do. We couldn't have a party or a get together, owing to the Coronavirus pandemic, so I thought about sharing our memories in the form of stories and photos put into a booklet. This could then be added to our website and held in our WI archives.

This document is the result - interesting and insightful stories from members and friends. In some cases, these are the memories of people themselves, while others are based on accounts handed down from their parents and grandparents.

Thank you very much to those who took part. I hope readers find the stories and old photographs as interesting as I did.

Paula Neal



Pattie Kutas

I was 14 and at boarding school when the news came through. There was much cheering and excitement but when three of us went back to our dorm the fourth girl was sitting on her bed with her head down. She said 'I expect Mummy will be sad tonight'. Her father had been killed. That moment has been with me all these years and I never forget the sorrow that can lie behind the rejoicing.



Olwen Winfield

Olwen's husband Brian was 10 years old on VE Day so that is a day he won't forget.

Parties went on in the streets around where they lived afterwards. Brian's friend remembers a bonfire being lit in their street. It was an unmade road which made it ideal for the bonfire. The family had lived there for about 70 years. Brian and his friend had gone to look at a bus that had been decorated up for the events and so missed the lighting of the bonfire. It was fuelled by old film reels which had been given by the local cinema where Brian's mother worked as a projectionist. His grandfather was also the doorman there.

Brian had been sent to Nottingham as an evacuee for about 12 months. As they didn't live very close to industrial areas and no severe bombing, his mother wanted him at home.

They were both 5 when war started and found out afterwards that they had gone to the same school.

Olwen's father was a bus driver who was called up with the remissionary forces to drive lorries in France. During his time in France he was injured and ended up in hospital and then sent home to England. He was never sent abroad again. His unit was

sent to Dunkirk, in 1941 without him and had he gone, he would have been a POW for the rest of the war.

Olwen went to stay on an egg farm between Southport and Preston and her grandparents moved into their house. Olwen told me that if she had a penny for every egg that she collected and washed, she would be a rich woman! She remembers that the eggs were stamped with the lion symbol when they were received by the Milk Marketing Board. They returned to Birmingham as the war ended.

Brian's father was stationed in Ireland, Italy and North Africa, fighting at the battle of Monte Cassino. He visited Pisa and his initials are apparently somewhere on the Tower!

Many soldiers didn't return home immediately after the War was ended and had rest periods in Europe to fatten them up so they didn't look so ill. Olwen's uncle spent his rest time on the island of Capri.



Jill Eckford

On VE Day, Jill's mother, Dolly Harmer took her two daughters, Jill aged 8 or 9 and Jacky aged 6 or 7 to Buckingham Palace. They travelled from their home in the London suburb of Arnos Grove on the Piccadilly Line.

Jill's only recollection of that day was that she wanted to have a coca cola. She knew that money was tight so she never asked for any!

Bob Kingston (Shirley's husband)

A clear memory as a 13 year old in Milton. The Fair people, who had spent the war on the Greyhound field borrowed Sargeant's horse and cart to collect all the old tyres from the Gayton tip and they all sat round a bonfire (he's not sure where they got the wood from) and had a sing song.

Tom Newberry played the accordion and Reg Digby played his cornet.

That must have been a very smelly bonfire!
[Editor]

Sheila Charlton

Diary entries for Sheila's mum.

May 7th - "News all very good. V Day tomorrow."

May 8th - "V DAY, on holiday all day. Wet until after 3pm. Churchill speaks. Go to Church at night. Listen to King. George and Edith for supper. Slades here. Bonfire. Write no. 23 to John."

On the 9th she starts with "V.1 Day." Sheila wondered what this meant until she heard someone reading a diary on the radio and calling the 7th 'V minus 1'.

"At this time my Mum was living in Upton, Wirral with her widowed Mother and much younger brother, a twelve year old schoolboy. She worked as a telephonist at the Exchange in Upton village. Having married in November 1944, she was 2 months pregnant (not feeling that great, according to other entries) with my oldest sister, Wendy, born in December 1945. I never knew her as she died of meningitis in September 1948, a month after my sister Lucy was born. I arrived in 1950, my sister Elizabeth in 1952 and Caroline in 1960.

My Dad (the John referred to, though more usually called, Jack) was with the Royal Army Service Corps and returned (according to the diary) on June 8th.



My Uncle, Mum's brother, also called John is 87 now and, although he has a great memory and I often chat with him about the past, does not have specific memories of VE Day. He was at school with his gas mask, throughout the war, spent many nights in the air raid shelter and wrote letters to various people away, including my Dad (some of which are in a box stored with another sister) - retrieved when we cleared Mum's house. He does remember having a party at school, Park High in Birkenhead, at some point.



Photo: 28th Nov 1944

Paula Neal

I don't have personal memories but I would like to add my bit.

My Mum was still at school when War broke out so had to endure taking a gas mask to school. There was a bomb shelter under the railway arches near the school. Apparently, the boys had to enter from one end and the girls from the other! There were no lights, it was damp and had a very uneven floor. After



a few attempts to get 400 children plus staff into the bomb shelter, after a 15 minute run across the fields, it was decided that it was more dangerous than the possibility of being bombed in the classroom. However, this never happened as there were no daylight raids.

She told of the family having an evacuee, called Margaret who came from the south coast, Worthing I believe. Mum was 16 and Margaret was 12. Despite the difference in ages, they became firm friends, as Mum was an only child. She stayed with them for a while and went to school at alternative times to my Mum. The school was shared due to lack of facilities for so many children. She and Margaret kept in touch for the rest of their lives which I found very moving.

After leaving school she cycled daily to work at David Brown Tractors in Meltham, near Huddersfield where she was a Tracer in the Drawing Office. She traced all drawings for tank gears, aero gears and of course tractors. In 1945 she transferred to WC Holmes in Huddersfield where she met my Dad - after the war.

My dad, was in reserved occupation during the early part of the war as a draughtsman. Having always been interested in aircraft, he made enquiries to see if his deferment form could be 'lost' and this very conveniently happened. He joined the RAF as an engine fitter during the early part of 1941.

His first two years were spent in Stradishall heavy bomber station in Suffolk. He was



then sent to SEAC where he served in a repairs and salvage unit in Bengal and Assam. The main task of the unit was to recover crashed aircraft from mountains, jungle or sea.

He also served for a while with a night fighter squadron and was eventually sent to Ceylon on 'rest'. After a spell on a jungle station he was seconded to the Air Ministry as a draughtsman where he worked for about 12 months on the design of Columbo Airport.

Dad was demobilised in 1946 and returned to Huddersfield to continue his work as a draughtsman.

My Dad was part of a group of 9 friends in Huddersfield who were known as Contact. When war was declared, they pledged to keep 'in contact' during the conflicts and meet up again afterwards. They all survived the war and had a huge reunion to celebrate. The men kept 'in contact' through Huddersfield YMCA and sent messages to be posted on a board there. When any of them were home on leave they would check the board to see if anyone else was home and then meet up. They kept up the friendship as long as their health allowed and had many parties celebrating significant wedding anniversaries etc.

Lucy Phelps

My Grandmother (the one on the right below) was in the Land Army. Her name was Daintry Joan Cope. She was based in the West Midlands near to her family home. Her main duties were milking the cows and looking after the cattle. Every morning she caught the train to deliver the full churns to Kidderminster. When she passed away, Lucy's family had a picnic bench installed in



her honour, in the spot where she used to sit and wait for the train at Arley station.

My paternal Grandfather was a fireman in the blitz and was based in London. The

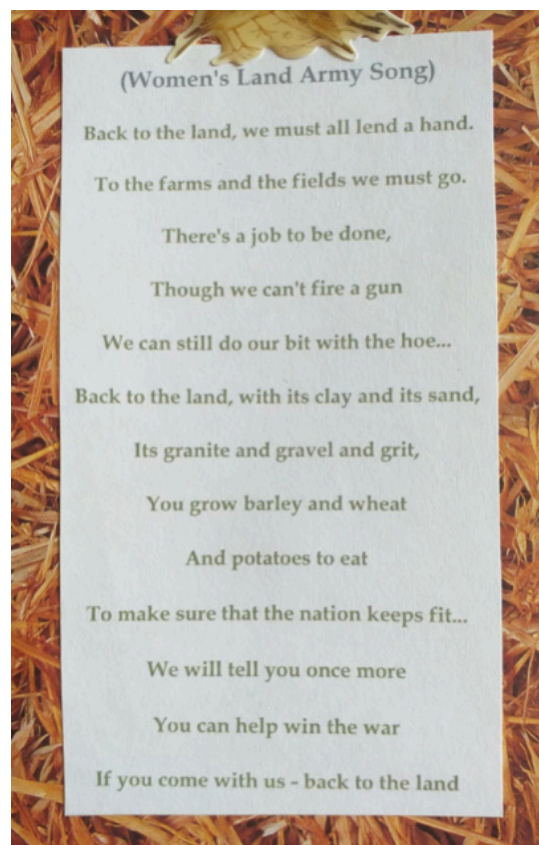


photo below shows my grandfather Ernest Amos on the right, his brother James Amos who was in the air force, and his father sat at the front who fought in the Somme and survived.



My uncle sent me this story about my gran, she was a funny lady and this story was completely her.

During the blackout mother was walking along South Road when the air raid siren went off. Seeing a man on the opposite side of the road with what looked like a stick she thought "there is a poor blind man over there I will take him to an air raid shelter". She hustled him across the road grabbing his arm into the public air raid shelter on the park opposite the Broadway. "You will be safe here" she said. He turned round and replied "Its all right miss I am actually the Air Raid warden"!

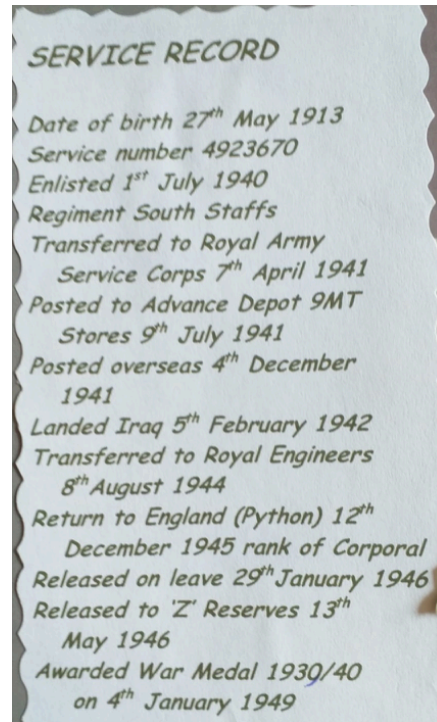
I also have a first hand story about my grandfather Ernest, who was the Fireman in the photo opposite.

When myself and my husband were first married, we rented a property on a country estate, the owner was a lovely elderly woman who's husband was a polish airman who fought in WW2.



My grandfather came to visit one day and was chatting to the owner outside in the garden and their chatter turned to stories of the war. My grandfather was relaying stories of the blitz and how he had rescued a polish airman from his aircraft that had crash landed in a London street, taking out all the bay windows with the aircraft's wings as it went, my granddad laughed and said that the first thing the pilot asked for when he was pulled from the cockpit was a 'cup of tea'. The lady went as white as a sheet and then started to laugh as it turned out that my granddad had rescued her husband. Needless to say, they chatted on for some time and she was thrilled as, even though her husband had passed away 8 years before her and my grandfather's meeting, she was still hearing new stories about him. I was so pleased that I was there to share that moment.

The Final photo is of my maternal grandfather Stephen Cope, and his service history.



Chris O'Leary

I was born in 1947 and all I can remember as a young child are that there were lots of bomb sites around the area where we lived from the London Blitz. No one really spoke about the war. All my mum's family survived the bombings and life carried on with holidays in the 1950's and, of course, the Queen's Coronation in 1953. I remember the street party we had then.

Janet Winchester

I was born at the end of the war and do not have any photos to share of the actual day. My father was in a protected trade, so did not join up, instead he stayed home, joined the home guard and repaired local farm machinery to keep things going at home. I remember my mother saying that before the war my dad wanted to start flying lessons and my mum said if he could afford flying lessons, he could afford to get married, he never learned to fly but married my mum instead. My only memories are after VE Day, I remember seeing a gas mask, the type that you put a whole baby in, that was mine, I remember rationing and I remember just up the road from where I lived was a prisoner of war camp, as children we used to go and

talk to the prisoners through the wire fencing, not realising the full implications of what we were doing.

Rowena Flood, a former Milton Malsor resident but not a WI member.

Rowena Flood was 20 when the war ended and was a WAAF in the later years. She was down in the New Forest area and does not have a specific memory of VE Day. She drove vehicles (some enormous) of all kinds and had a life long love of driving, which made giving up when her eye sight deteriorated very hard.

Cynthia Young, a former Milton Malsor resident and WI member.

Cynthia was 23 in 1945, a civil servant at the Head Post Office in Derby and living at home with her Mother. She remembers that they all had to take a turn of fire watching on the roof and there was a camp bed to sleep on. She does not recollect May 8th but on VJ Day (August 15th) when all hostilities ended she and Mother visited her sister Yvonne, in the village of Breadsall with other family members and they celebrated at the Windmill Pub. The women went up first and then returned to the children (one of whom was her nephew Ian, born in February 1945) and the men followed but Cynthia was able to stay throughout the evening so was quite merry by the end!

Kay Drinkwater (not a Milton Malsor resident but Sheila has known her since moving to Northampton in the early 70s)

Kay was 24 and working as a Nanny to a little boy on East Park Parade, overlooking the Racecourse, where lots of foreign soldiers (mainly Polish) were stationed. She remembers watching all their activity and celebrations from the window and believes there was a bonfire in the town centre.



Barbara Brice

Having been a wartime baby I have vague memories of being held by my parents at their bedroom window one night and seeing searchlights scanning the sky and in particular the time when Coventry was badly bombed and I can recall an orange glow in the sky in that direction.

I do remember the Moaning Minnie bomb sirens.

I had been a bridesmaid at the age of 3 and was so excited to be allowed to wear my white satin dress and white buckskin shoes to the VE street party in Briar Hill Walk. Not sure it stayed white!

A large air raid shelter had been built in the road opposite my home. One day the "basher" was coming I was told and there was then crashing and dust as the concrete building was noisily demolished. The lumps of concrete on the ground made for an interesting and alternative assault course for a few days!

My husband was born in Newcastle in 1940. Both our fathers served in the Home Guard, mine in Northampton and Malcolm's in Newcastle. He carried out night time fire watch duties at the Andrews Liver Salt building there. Very important personally as his own carpet shop was on the ground floor of that building. Luckily all remained safe.

One eerie recollection in Malcolm's memory is a large bombed house which had been a dentists: by morning just the old fashioned dentists drill was left swinging in the space where the room had been!

Social Occasions

The following photographs were taken from social occasions organised by the Friends of Milton School, when our children were there. These dances were very popular and very well organised with virtually everyone going in fancy dress, wonderful food, excellent bands and a highly decorated Village Hall.

1985 - NAAFI Dance



1989 - 'Allo Allo' Dance



1995 - 50th Anniversary of VE Day



Forces sweetheart Dame Vera Lynn

