

## World War II

### Ewelme News, Apr-May 2019

The year 2019 marked the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of the Second World War. The Archive holds more information from this conflict, especially on the Photographic Reconnaissance Unit (Spitfires and Mosquitoes) based at RAF Benson. Some villagers were employed by the RAF and Ewelme properties housed various sections; Fyfield Manor was the HQ, Cottesmore Mansion billeted personnel and huts in the orchard next door was for developing the photographs to be sent on to Danesfield House at Medmenham for interpretation.

Whereas twenty Ewelme men lost their lives in the First World War, five were killed in the Second. One was Charles Walklin who joined the Royal Air Force as a Sergeant pilot. He flew Bristol Beaufighters in Egypt with 108 Squadron. In November 1942, after bailing out, and he had to walk back across the desert to his Squadron and was awarded the Late Arrivals Club certificate (a copy in the Archive). He was killed in 1943 aged 20 and is remembered on the Alamein Memorial. Another was Sub Lieutenant Grenville Hampden of The Old Mansion in Cottesmore Lane who joined the Fleet Air Arm in 1938 aged 18. In 1940 he was serving on the aircraft carrier HMS Furious carrying out aircraft ferry missions to support British troops in the Norway campaign. Grenville Hampden went missing on the 13<sup>th</sup> April 1940 and is named on the Lee on Solent Memorial.

Villagers pulled together to 'do their bit' for the war effort by raising funds, taking in evacuees or billeting RAF families, running the British Restaurant and joining the Home Guard. Schoolchildren joined in. The boys dug for victory on the school allotment. Erica [Knowles] Allen remembers as a 9 yr old knitting for the Merchant Navy. A scarf required "*casting on 89 stitches in garter [plain] stitch, slip the first and knit into the back of the last stitch, when it was as long as yourself you could cast off. If you were a good knitter, you made balaclavas, fingerless mittens, gloves and socks in grey, maroon or navy blue wool!*" The children also saved to buy 6d Red Cross strips, contributions for Red Cross parcels for prisoners of war. (Erica remembers some returnees visited the Sunday School to thank the children for their donations).

An RAF Spitfire cost £9,000 to build and the Spitfire Fund Campaign was zealously embraced by Lady Laelia Somervell of The Old Rectory, and Mrs Nowell-Smith of Hill House. These ladies organised events in their gardens for 'Wings for Victory Week' - Erica remembers dancing in fancy dress on the lawn with other schoolgirls to a Glen Miller style band. The schoolmaster's son Bob Quixley remembers these events included 'Bowling for a Pig', children's novelty races, side shows and stalls. He also exhibited his scale model aeroplanes made out of scrap timber.

Lady Somervell's husband, Sir Donald, was a man of many parts. Later Lord Somervell of Harrow, he died in 1960 and his gravestone records he was '*MP for Crewe 1931-1943. Solicitor General. Attorney General. Home Secretary. War Cabinet of Winston Churchill and a Corporal in the Home Guard Ewelme*'. Nearby is the grave of James A Thomson who died in 2001. In the Battle of Britain, as 'One of the Few', he flew Hurricanes with 302 (Polish) Squadron, (one of four Polish Squadrons in this Battle). On the 29<sup>th</sup> October, two days before the Battle officially ended, Flt/Lt Thomson collided with Flt/Lt Czerny during a routine patrol over Brooklands. Thomson bailed out, sustaining slight injuries and was subsequently posted to operational Hurricane squadrons the Far East. He retired from the RAF in 1957.

There is an Archive memoir published in a local newspaper from Herbie Winfield (died 2007) relating his experiences of fighting the Japanese in Burma in a letter home to his parents. Raymond Baxter OBE, (the famous TV broadcaster), joined the RAF at age 18 in 1940, and was a Spitfire pilot, serving with 65, 93 and 602 Squadrons until 1946. At his funeral at St Mary's in 2006, two Seafire's,

(the Naval variant of the Spitfire), saluted the cortege leaving the church with two low passes overhead. His ashes are buried against the southern retaining wall. The daring operation carried out on the night of December 31<sup>st</sup> 1943 by Maj-Gen Logan Scott-Bowden of Prospect Farm (died 2014) is widely publicised. Then a Captain in the Royal Engineers, he and an NCO Sapper swam ashore from a motor torpedo boat to reconnoiter 'Gold Beach' in Normandy. In the darkness, they successfully took samples of the underlying beach materials with earth augers, before swimming, heavily laden, back to the boat. The analysed samples established the bearing capacity of 'Gold Beach' for heavy landing vehicles, information vital in the planning of the D Day landings six months later. Not all men were combatants - Aubrey Gilbey (died 2016) was called up in 1944 as a Bevin Boy, working in a Barnsley coalmine.

The Archive reveals that whether their role was large or small, Ewelme villagers 'did their bit' to contribute to the victory in 1945.

*Ewelme Village Archive*