

# WARTIME

## The First and Second World Wars including the role of RAF Benson

### *Tape 2 -*

WWI – Father and uncle went to fight. Father went to Russia.

WWII - Evacuees – Arthur Walklin had evacuees. Rationing – 2 oz cheese, a quarter of butter and 2 oz tea.

Joined up September 1939 and only just having had his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, he joined the Oxon & Bucks Light Infantry. ***Straight*** into active service? Well, on the first day he got 4 miles up the road from here to Nettlebed and spent the night sleeping in the village hall! Posted around the U.K and nearly torpedoed by a u-boat as he went to Northern Ireland. Then in action in Greece, Crete and Italy. He became a stretcher bearer. Often while still under attack, he made his way to rescue and treat injured comrades. The army heard of his musical talent and he was appointed Bugler. This was his moment of musical regret as it meant getting up extra early for “reveille”. After the war, he left the army and worked at RAF Benson then Wilders of Wallingford. Whilst in the army he learnt to drive and never took a test yet when he left the army, that was acceptable enough to obtain a driving licence and he later taught members of the family to drive.

### *Tape 3 -*

WWII - Evacuees – mother had one from East London 7 yrs old. A terror who swung the cat around by it's tail. Evacuees sent to the school. [From St Saviours, Paddington, but a short stay as Ewelme was considered unsafe]

POW's in Ewelme – mostly Italians and some Germans. Worked on the land – kept at Huntercombe, [formerly the site of a Borstal, now a Category C Prison], Nettlebed and Woodcote.

Village and family members went to fight – father requisitioned to work on Mulberry Harbours at Portsmouth, mother went into munitions factory in Wallingford.

### *Tape 6 -*

POW's in Ewelme – her children made friends with POW's from RAF Benson. They marched through the village to go to church. Rector Jenkins would ask ‘our German friends’ for suggestions for hymns. They made wooden toys for village children.

Her mother had evacuees from London. A few still keep in touch with her.

Rationing – with a family of 6 she kept 3 ration books at Greenways Stores and 3 at Bennetts.

WAAFs taken out when war started. Then even civilians had to wear uniforms to work there. Planes took off over Ewelme – Fairey Battles always crashing. One crashed on the allotments in 1940. Night raids in 1940, incendiary bombs dropped in field across the brook and on the camp. Daylight raids on camp and then the enemy strafed the workers in the watercress beds. Probably after PRU in Cottesmore Lane. Two daylight raids. Buzz bombs landed in Swyncombe Woods. Harry Shepherd, a postman, was delivering to Mays Farm when a buzz bomb landed in a field near him. They could watch the glow in the sky from London burning in the blitz.

### *Tape 7 -*

Father planted the Common with potatoes during the war – the schoolchildren helped to pick them, afterwards it was planted with corn. Then the village paid £1 a head towards the trees that were planted on the Common but they died due to lack of water.

### *Tape 8 -*

Had a London evacuee for a while. Mr Cutler from the Bakery baked biscuits and Tom Orpwood a local landowner and farmer supplied the villages. She remembers Germans called Weinert who kept kennels at the bottom of Rabbits Hill and bred little fluffy white dogs. (Her dog Toby got under the wire one day and mated some of the bitches, came home exhausted and slept for days! But her family had to pay for the bitches to be pregnancy tested which cost a lot of money). These are the Germans who set up the kennels at Cholsey that John Smith remembered. The man was a POW but stayed on and married a woman called Lil. Cynthia reckons the German POWs were billeted at Turners Court. She didn't get a wooden toy made by the Germans for the choir children's Xmas presents. She reckoned only those of more meagre means had them.

### *Tape 9 -*

The shrine opposite High House isn't a war memorial but a shrine to those who served in the war.

Mrs Burkitt who lived where the Styles now live (Loreto) put her evacuees in the chicken house. They gave them a nice room but they didn't stay. Mrs Bowles at The Old Mill House was the evacuation officer.

The Lamb Inn, so tragically demolished in the early days of the war by the RAF to make room for a runway they hardly ever used.

Her father said that the site of RAF Benson was unsuitable due to the marshy nature of the ground which was proved to be true when the runways were extended. Their house was requisitioned in 1940 and they were given the choice, as her brother was missing in Norway and her father was in Belfast (serving officers were not forced to have their houses taken over). However, they decided to do so and it became the photo reconnaissance unit. They locked all their belongings in the drawing room and an upstairs room but they were broken into on a guest night. The gates were also harmed and for all this and the William's (Cottesbrook) house they received £1500 in compensation. RAF Benson has devalued the properties.

### *Tape 10 -*

A Lancaster crashed behind Edgar Winfield's cottage, the crew baled out. The cottage was not on the OS maps of the area so was not purchased when the airfield was built. A sneak raider came in one Thursday pm. Percy Tuckwell saw it. A string of bombs hit the bunker here the WRAF usually took shelter, lucky they did not hear the siren so did not go to the shelter. A Wellington bomber crashed and blew out a window at the Shepherds Hut. Her husband flew in Fairey Battles, the rest of the crews of these aircraft went by train from Wallingford. She went to the station to sing them off.

Only remembers girls as evacuees. Mrs Warner and Mrs King had some and the Hollies who lived in the White House. Cindy Olly was an evacuee in the White House.

### *Tape 11 -*

WWI - Men took their own horses - Mr Orpwood took his own [Nancy].

WWII - Employed POW's on the farm. Nearest camp was Whitehouse. The overseer lived at Ewelme a Mr Robinson who lived at Days Cottage. The camp housed about 40 Italians. The Germans were housed nearer Reading. The Polish resettlement camp was at Nettlebed. Camp 020 was an interment camp where political people were held. This was at Huntercombe. His mother took in evacuees at Crowmarsh.

There were air raid shelters in the village that people used but he never did. Incendiaries were dropped on Roke. A Lancaster bomber crashed outside Crowmarsh. Land Army girls came from Oxford and Watlington and most married local people. The different Regiments stationed in the area often fought at dances so had military police stationed at Benson. After the war [was this WWII] the farmers were given the option of buying the gun horses at £10 per horse. Good buy, but the only snag was that they could be repossessed if needed for war. He bought several.

### *Tape 12 -*

At Saffron Close they had a POW to help with the garden – paid 1/- per hour. He also landscaped John Burbidge's garden and Brownings under the guidance of Fred Greenway.

### *Tape 13 -*

Sweet Rationing – the farm would go to collect swill from Chalgrove a USAF base, and they would give the children sweets called Buzzbars (chocolate biscuit bar).

### *Tape 16 -*

Evacuees – her parents had a Mancunian husband, wife and 2 children as well as their own children in a 3 bedroomed house by Kings Pool. All fitted in.

Rationing – her uncle in the almshouses gave her his sweet ration when she took his meals.

### *Tape 18 -*

WWI – Jack Orpwood was killed by a sniper in 1914/18 war. His name is on the Menin Gate. He served with the Oxon, Bucks & Berks Company. Tom Orpwood was in the cavalry. He had a horse called Nancy which he took to France. They were issued with bundles of hay and one bundle was issued from H W Orpwood of Ewelme! What a co-incidence. When they returned he let her go [from Watlington Station] and she walked back to her stable on her own. Buried in the orchard off Chaucer Court under a plum tree. He has a photo of Tom on her.

WWII - Evacuees – His father was a sergeant in the Specials and an Allocation Officer, they had the evacuees no-one else wanted. They went to the Reading Room and Tom Orpwood, Mrs Strickland and Mrs Bowles divided them up. He remembers some going to bed and one night they checked on them and they were under the bed. They said they always slept under the bed as their parents slept in the bed. June and Julie, Walklin's friends were in the White House stables – they still visit the village.

Fairey Battles always crashing. One at back of Levers Farm. We carried the crewman out and later found he had a broken back. A Wellington crashed one Sunday morning. At North Farm a Fairey Battle crashed. They couldn't find the crewman until a pool of blood was seen on the road and he was hanging from a tree, he had been blown out. A Wellington belly landed behind Levers Farm, another at the Pightles. One fellow lay dead on the road. The WAAF's shelter was bombed but because the alarm went off late they were not in it or all would have been killed.

Land Army girls worked on the farm. Arthur Walklin's wife was one. One crew worked for the Orpwood's and lived at Larkstoke near Ipsden – a hostel there. Another land army hostel at Goring. Aubrey Gilbey's wife and Mrs Les Foster were LA.

The WAAFs were billeted at the White House during the war. The Old Mansion at Cottesmore Lane was the PRU and the drains are supposed to be lined with silver from the developing process.

Home Guard – His father was a sergeant in the Special Police. Ben Allsop in charge of the Home Guard, he lived at Troy. He was in it and started as a messenger for the ARP. He said he was 16 but he was actually 14. Met twice a week, one evening and Sunday mornings. LDC – look, duck, vanish = Local Defence Volunteers. He guarded Dorchester Bridge from the nearest pub, now a house. He became a corporal at 16. Guarded aerodromes (or attacked them) with Steve Cook and Arthur Walklin, had a Lewis gun and then a Sten. gun when he was a corporal.

### *Tape 19 -*

WWI – Can remember being at her grandmother's house the day her father returned from the war and she didn't know him.

WWII - Fairey Battles had frequent accidents. Two Shuttleworth brothers killed at Benson. Had Mosquitoes and Blenheims. The Duke of Hamilton was killed here (in a Mosquito 1944).

Orpwood's very generous during war and made sure workers had enough rations. Hated dried eggs. Grew their own and pickled eggs in isinglass.

### ***Tape 22 -***

WWI – German prisoners mended roads and were very kind to children. She remembers not being able to believe they had killed. They worked on the roads near Fifield so probably lived nearby.

WWII - She wanted to join the WRENS but wasn't allowed to because she had a Nursing Certificate so she had to run a day nursery for children for women who worked making armaments at Vickers in Hertfordshire. This was quite hard work.

Her mother had an evacuee called Joan who came from the East End. She was 'lousy' so it was cleared up but had returned by the next time she came to visit. The children at the nursery used to get re-infected after they had been home at weekends. This was probably due to lack of cleanliness. She kept in touch with Joan for quite a long time.

The family managed with the rationing quite well. Her father being a gardener used to be able to grow food for them. He also had a glasshouse so he could produce food early, they even had grapes on occasion. The food was given free which helped with the food bills so they were luckier than most.

### ***Tape 23 -***

WWI – His father went into the Royal Flying Corps.

WWII - Evacuees – some have kept in touch with us and do to this day. Come from Essex to visit almost every year. They stayed at The White House and then the garages and sheds were improved there for accommodation for them.

We still have our clothing coupons. Not much deprivation in the village, most people kept chickens and had a garden.

### ***Tape 24 -***

World War I - his father was in the Royal Horse Artillery - only 5ft 1ins and his height saved him from being killed by snipers in France. Used to ride the lead horse on a mobile gun, if the horses foundered in a shell hole remembers the officers saying 'Save the horses.' The men trapped underneath could be replaced, horses could not.

WWII - They had an underground bunker - remembers the fun of digging it out. His mother would put the two younger children in a tea chest wrapped up.

Remembers being alarmed when listening to the wireless they heard Lord Haw Haw broadcast that the Germans would be bombing RAF Benson and they also knew the church had two elevens (XI) on the clock face and not 11 and 12 in Roman numerals (this is a fact). Very anxious that the enemy knew such detail - but they seemed to be misled by the Swyncombe decoy and never did bomb RAF Benson badly.

Does not remember having to quit school for an air raid, they seemed to come mostly at night.

POWs in Ewelme - remembers the Italians - his brother worked in the cook house as a young lad. The Italians wore a uniform with a bit of black and a white patch. Farmers used them to work on the land. About 150 of them. Molly Monday lived at Huntinglands and was walking to the Red Lion at Britwell when she was accosted by an Italian POW. She grabbed a stake and laid him out for his effrontery.

Evacuees - they liked them but they came from London and were very different. No sooner had they come to the school than the children were afflicted with an outbreak of fleas!

World War II - Air raids - The only bombs that ever landed on Benson fell right behind where his sister now lives - he thinks it was a J88 that dropped 5 or 7 bombs. They were safe in their home made underground shelter. German planes bombed Swyncombe Woods because they were decoyed by the cutting out of roads and plane shapes. The planes came over the hill and thought RAF Benson was there.

Food - villagers were pretty much self-sufficient. He was taught to have a months supply in the larder. Large larders kept stocked. His mother always had 30-40 gallons of homemade wine on the go.

### **Tape 28 -**

He observed that although things might have been rationed after the war, they as a family frequently had to make do anyway, rationing made no difference.

### **Tape 30**

By the School House there was a small orchard there adjacent to the woodwork shop that was a coach house once, where a small coach was kept. During the war it was used as a dwelling by some evacuee families from London who stayed there practically the whole of the War. Mr Quixley looked out of his window one morning and saw strangers camping on the Common with a lorry and a car. He asked the Trustees if they could be accommodated in the workshop and as a bedroom they used a room which was the Nurses 'surgery' - Nurse Heaney which was adjacent to the ground floor rooms of the schoolhouse, abutting to the almshouses. There is a window which looks on to the headmasters garden. Families were Kelly and Briaris?

How did the local children adapt to the incomers, ie evacuees? They had great fun and would send them to Pouparts Stores to get a packet of 'hurdle' seeds - Ewelme children were always quite 'smart'. In Wartime 1939-45 the common was ploughed and cropped by Mr Chamberlain of Crowmarsh - continued in production of wheat, potatoes etc for many years after end of the war in 1945.

### **Tape 32 Bob Quixley 2 (interviewed by George Cannon)**

GC - City school populations diminished because of evacuation. What can you remember about Ewelme school and the RAF station, were there married personnel on the station?

*Yes, but I am not sure the families lived very much on the station. We had billeted onto us any country houses had spare bedrooms were requisitioned service or displaced people. My people had families from Jersey, Mrs Towers and another lady related were with us in 1939/1940 period. When they left we had RAF personnel, Mrs Cameron and her sister Mrs Doris Light and 2 children John and Richard, and another member of the family joined. I think there was a Vic Leighton and his wife Joan. He worked in the photographic labs at the Old Mansion.*

*Evacuees - There were quite a lot of London boys at the beginning there was a teacher with them called Mr Beale. In the photo of the Ewelme and London boys breaking new ground on the hill above Cow Common Mr Beale and my father is there.*

[Initially evacuees came in 1939 from St Saviours, Paddington, but did not stay long as Ewelme was considered unsafe].

GC - Was there any feeling between the locals and the evacuees, or where they generally helpful.

*Well I think there was a fair amount of teasing. The Londoners tried to impose their way of life on the village and the village boys stuck up for themselves. Sent them to the shop to buy a packet of hurdle seed or something like that - two ways of life not exactly the same. After a wave of bombing in London we had the Briaris and Kelly families who lived in the annexe of the school house. Also other youngsters came and it did change village life. Eric and Carole Knowles lived at the Old Lamb hotel billeted on Mrs Miners. Eric still visits each year. Eileen Mencarene lived most of the war here. The Masters House was occupied by W/O Brookes and his wife they had 3 children, Norma, Pat and Ian.*

*I have photographs of the church cloisters and school taken by Mr Brookes.*

*Home Guard - When they first came into being called LDV - Local Defence Volunteers uniform consisted of khaki armband with LDV and then civilian clothes. My father when he returned at the end of August 1939 (all school masters ordered back to their schools as it was obvious there would be War) - to return and organise things. He at first volunteered to become a policeman - auxiliary as did Tom Orpwood my godfather. When LDV formed my father transferred himself from Police into LDV to utilise his army experience. Run by Capt Allsop who lived at Goulds Grove, his Sergeant was Dore Winfield and he was a bugler and a good rifle shot as was my father. Worked hard - go out at night and stand duty and man lookout posts in case of bombing, and eventually built a structure up Days Lane as a look out post on the corner at the top. Four timber uprights and*

*timber cross pieces for flooring and a little roof. Was covered in hessian sacking and they plastered with cement sand and lime plaster which set hard for protective sheath. Manned this in watches of 4 hrs or whatever. They would be out all night fire watching etc. Then went to do their normal work the following day. Which amazed me as they were oldish men at the time.*

*Later on my father made friends with a farmer called John Frost who farmed near Oakley Wood - my father felt he ought to do something else for war effort and walked up to help with farm labouring work. I remember going and helping with wheat or hay harvest and remember two daughters - Katherine and Josephine.*

GC - Land Girls - We had a man named Robinson who became an almsmen was in charge of a group of these girls and some are now living here - most may have died. When did they get the LDC uniforms was there a big show of excitement?

*I remember what it was like initially, not proper battledress but a denim battledress. Khaki but not the same colour as the final one. This must have been late 1940 period. Almost overall material of denim worn over top of normal clothing. Arthur Walklin was in Home Guard one of youngest members, I think Brian Orpwood was too.*

GC RAF must have had great effect on village life - any outstanding experiences you recall?  
*Changes began to come about before War, the fact it was being built had an affect on the village and one or two people got employment there so that was in a sense a change of style of village life. Children came to increase school numbers. My chief recall was of the change of life in sense that there were all these aeroplanes flying around. Fairy Battles bombers spent a lot of time training and some crashed on approach.*

GC There is a feeling in village at the moment about aircraft noise, was there any outcry about advent of aeroplanes and Fairy Battles at the time?

*I never thought of it - I don't remember people talking about it, people accepted it no particular resentment.*

GC Fairy Battles - accidents, do any come to mind?

*I do recall in summer of 1940 a fatal crash on the rising ground just up from the Shepherds Hut. Several bungalow buildings were demolished and quite a large farmhouse building called Eyres Farm which stood over road from Shepherds Hut. By 1940 things were beginning to change. Battles on their way out and we got squadrons of Spitfires here. Initially we were not aware of photo reconnaissance, it took a while to filter through. Other aeroplanes here was an Avro Anson an Air speed Oxford used for transport purposes. Later 2 Lancaster's. Arrival of Mosquitoes quite a thing, to begin with no-one knew what they were but eventually schoolboys found out and the news went around they were called De Havilland Mosquitoes. Distinctive noise from 2 Merlin engines were unmistakable. Very fast. Earliest ones painted under pale duck egg blue and upper camouflaged in usual green/grey tones. Earliest ones were green/brown until they changed them. Later they painted PRU blue both Mosquitoes and Spitfires.*

GC From the civilian point of view - we have heard talk of the British Restaurant - was that in Ewelme or Benson.

*Don't remember one in Ewelme, certainly one in Henley could have been one in Benson, another in Town Hall in Oxford.*

*There was a feeling of foreboding all the time, people didn't like being at war, of course there were men who lost their lives and men who became prisoners of war which caused anguish. Remember Bobby Scaldwell had been reported missing and caused gloom. Mrs Scaldwell worried he was killed in retreat from Dunkirk. Remember one afternoon being at the school and Mrs Scaldwell came to clean it and we were in the garden. Mrs Scaldwell appeared flushed and excited, news had come he was a prisoner of war but safe. Mrs Scaldwell told my father she had met Tom Orpwood in the street and had greeted her and she said "Sir, he kissed me on both cheeks!" A big thrill for her. Typical of him, he was a caring man.*

*We were short of food and clothing particularly, this idea of make do and mend was in vogue, it must have been terribly laborious for the women, because in those days women worked in the home without benefits of modern technology. Might have been one or two Hoovers, Electrolux, or Goblin cleaners in the village, but not many, most people used dust pan and brush and a broom.*

*Diet altered a little yes. Most people possibly benefited from the rationing - everyone was entitled to bacon, butter - some of the poorer families would have had those things more regularly in their diet than otherwise would have been the case. I remember pre war days some boys would talk about having bread and dripping for lunch. Never a shortage of vegetables and we were encouraged to dig for victory and grow more vegetables. Some kept a pig and chickens, ducks, geese or whatever. Harry Keene on Green Lane kept a pig and slaughtered it. Always came up to give my father a present of pork as his reward for looking after Keene children in school. Business of village life, kind of repayment between families and people in kind, not money.*

*Wings for Victory Week, putting money into National Savings for the War, Dig for Victory and similar things. One event held in gardens of Old Rectory of Sir Donald and Lady Somervell - thinks it Wings for Victory. Bowling for a Pig, races for children ie 3 legged and sack races or egg and spoon - great fun. And exhibitions, shows and side-shows, stalls. I was asked to put on an exhibition of model planes. My first hobby had been plane spotting then I made models on scale 1:72 and you could buy kits of bakelite pieces, the Hurricane was available, but these became unavailable. I made my own out of scrap timber. They were hideously crude to begin with but eventually I developed shaping skills. There were aero-modelling books to occupy youngsters. I made several hundred eventually and I put on an exhibition at the event. The landlord of the London Road Inn asked my father if I would make some models to hang on the pub walls. I was flattered and made a collection of suitable models. English and American and German models in the set. Chiefly English and American aircraft. Bill Parker [had succeeded Captain Stevenson] was the landlord at the time and he gave my father a cheque for the work and he was acutely embarrassed for the cheque was for £10 for the 50 models - he couldn't believe this would make money. £10 was a lot of money in those days. I realise whereas it was regarded as a waste of time to be interested in model aeroplanes or data, I realised later I was training my memory and organising my mind and this spilled over into my academic work.*

*Story of Flying Fortresses - In the summer months and at weekends I would go and stand on the road quite close to Cottesmore Farm and watch the planes flying in. Sometimes you would spot a new aeroplane you hadn't seen before. I was there one afternoon, must have been 1943 I was watching the planes until eventually a big plane appeared and I realised it was a Flying Fortress.\* I was excited, this was the first time I had seen one. Then it became evident a large number were coming in, and I realised there were signs of damage, bullet holes in the fuselage, an engine on fire, some on 3 engines or even 2. I began to get a bit anxious. I had no-one to share it with I stood alone watching it all happening. Must have been going on for perhaps 3/4 to an hour it stretched out across the afternoon in my memory. The last to arrive had 2 engines on fire and one feathered, flying on 1 engine. I was upset by the whole thing obvious a lot of damage had been done. I went home and told my parents and their reaction was 'Keep quiet about it, careless talk costs lives.' I never heard it mentioned by anyone at all - not a word about it. In recent years I began to wonder if I had dreamt it all, had a nightmare. Earlier this year I made contact with Wg Cdr Bill Newby a retired RAF officer who lives in Cornwall and we had a chat about his experiences at Benson. He came in 1942 as navigator on Mosquitoes. I mentioned this to him - No you didn't it actually happened. The Americans were stationed north in the Midlands and used to congregate over Oxford for their daylight raids. Form up into big formations over us. The station to which they should have returned was fog bound and they were diverted here. It had long runways that could take big bombers and could be diverted here.*

*\*? Only one incident of a Fortress flying in from the Station Record book on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1943 due to lack of fuel and visibility over the proposed bombing zone. The Armament Officer dealt with the bombs on board.*

GC That obviously left a big imprint on your mind. You mentioned the slogan Careless talk Costs Lives. There was a cartoonist of the time who produced slogans. Can you remember others?  
*Bob - 'Be like Dad - keep Mum'. 'Walls have ears'. I remember the Fugace drawings, he went on even after the war. Economy of line. There were other events here, again near the Lamb Inn and the blacksmiths shop. One day I was standing waiting for something to happen. Slightly overcast day, broken cloud, high cloud above with the odd patch of blue. I heard a peculiar noise I couldn't identify. The noise suddenly shut off and there in a gap I saw a Heinkel 111 - my immediately reaction was that they were flying in an enemy aircraft. The RAF had a circus, they captured aircraft put them into RAF insignia and flew them round to give the members of the RAF Regiment etc experience in seeing them for recognition purposes. That was my first response and then I looked again and I could then see the black crosses under the wings. Within moments there were 4 explosions near the hangars, the engines sprang into life and it flew off south eastwards. Again, I never heard a single mention of it from anyone.*

*I think the struggle after the war was a much more pernicious thing than wartime. We put up with wartime deprivation without too much complaint but post-war years became dreary, rationing went on for years, food and clothes, everything in short supply. I still have the habit now, during the war you couldn't throw anything away so every orange box was taken to pieces and every nail straightened out and put in a jam jar and kept. All pieces of wood put away and used to make other things. The post-war years were not easy for a lot of people. We all thought we would have a better land to live in but the truth was it didn't get better for quite a long time. There was a dance to celebrate VE Day, held in the lower classroom at the school. I got home for that.*

*Bobby Strickland was captured at Dunkirk. His mother, worked at the school as a cleaner and dinner lady. One day she arrived and excitedly said to my father that she had encountered Tom Orpwood on the way to the school. The news that her son Bobby was alive in a German POW camp had come through. Mr Orpwood was so glad for her that he kissed her on BOTH cheeks.*

### **Tape 33 - interview with George Cannon**

GC I asked him about land army girls.

*I have a few photos, Arthur Walklins wife was a land army girl and Hazel Tuckwell, Reg Tuckwells wife.*

GC What connection did Chris Robinson have with the land army.

*He was in charge of them and the POW that worked on the farm. If you wanted half a dozen POWs to pick potatoes or sugar beet you got onto Chris Robinson and he would send them out next day. If you wanted 2 or 3 girls for threshing he was in charge.*

GC He married one didn't he?

*Yes, there used to be a land army hostel at Ipsden and a POW camp there.*

GC So the camp wasn't on the station.

*No. They did afterwards have some on camp.*

GC Were they all Italian or mixed nationalities.

*No - there were Germans at Ipsden. We played them at football. There used to be in the old rifle range a photo of the two teams but it got spoiled by the damp.*

GC Can you recall any individuals from the POWs. I am asking because some years ago a German came looking for Harry Keene and I thought of Harry Keene the almsman. I said I would get him, when I introduced him the German said that's not him the one I knew had one arm. So do you know anything about that one arm business.

*That was Harry Keene's father - lived in old Council houses and he used to be a batman on the camp and they had POWs on camp. Perhaps they worked on camp together.*

GC The German had brought his son to show him where he had such happy memories.

*If you remember I mentioned him as bringing pork to my father.*



*He had a brother Jack who worked for Depper Smith who had the Kings Pool cress beds. Unless he was rabbiting on the common.*

- GC We have been asking about the wartime. Were any of your family in home guard?  
*Yes, Herbert had joined up - Fane was in it until he joined up and I joined up. I rose to the rank of Corporal at age 16.*
- GC Rapid promotion. Dore Winfield was the sergeant?  
*Yes. And Frank Sherfield the keeper from Swyncombe he was a sergeant.*
- GC When you see Dads Army on TV you must laugh.  
*Some ways, but it was the Home Guard yes.*
- GC Apart from meeting as the Home Guard was there a form of camaraderie amongst you, did you meet up in other ways?  
*Oh yes in the Rifle Range we used to have dinner at Christmas as it was the British Restaurant. They cooked on a big coal grate. I used to have to come and light the fire ready for the ladies to cook.*
- GC Coming back to the evacuees. There's a couple of ladies the two who lived in the stables [at the White House] and said how helpful your family was to them do you recall them?  
*There were evacuees all over, they did come down here everyone came into the Reading Room here and when it had quietened down they all went home. When the bombing started again they turned up in lorry loads. It was to find somewhere to put them quick. I think the Walklins helped do the old stables up because Mr Horsley lived there then and that's where he kept his horses. Mrs Burkitt at the bottom end turned her garden shed into a room for some.*
- GC They come back almost every year to see the Walklins they usually make a tour of the village taking pictures, some are in the exhibition now. They have fond memories of your family.  
*Father was a Parish Councillor, Special Constable, Evacuee Officer, jack of all trades.*
- GC I understand that sometimes the selection of evacuees was a bit like a cattle market and people were here and someone said I will have those two, or this one. Was it like that?  
*Yes, it was and I remember we had one young lad and he was billeted somewhere a bit of a handful and the woman said he'll kill me if I don't get rid of him, so we had him at home until we found somewhere else. He went missing and I found him on the common with a handful of twigs and he said he had gone to get Mrs Orpwood some firewood. He was plastered from head to foot in mud where the water runs down the common. But after a bit they decided this area wasn't safe so they moved on.*
- GC Because of the proximity of the airfield I suppose.  
*Yes, because we had one or two aircraft land where they shouldn't have done.*
- GC Yes, he was telling us earlier about the Flying Fortresses.  
*Yes, a load came in one night, [Liberators?] couldn't get to their own camp, and being Americans they couldn't wait for one to clear the runway before the next came in, so they came in one behind the other and they were sending red lights up to go round again, but they didn't take any notice, came down 3 or 4 on the runway at once. Fairy Battles were the unsafe ones. One crashed at the back of the farm and we went up to get the fellows out. It didn't catch fire really, but the pilots said he was at 4,000 ft according to his altimeter. He took the top out of the fir tree by Saffron Close and then went up through Miss Maxwell's garden and finished up at the back of the barn.*
- GC I hope he got it fixed by the next flight.  
*There was another one out in the fields he got out but the plane was burnt out. Just out the back of Hampdens Way. Then a Wellington came down a little further round towards the common one Sunday afternoon but he just belly flopped and he got out and stood and laughed at it.*

GC So they were a bit close for comfort some of them. I think you told us before about the one up near Swyncombe - it finished up in a barn or something. Someone told me about that.

*BO There used to be some in the barn over where the Dew Pond is up Harcourt Hill, I think a Spitfire was stored in there. I don't know what happened to him.*

*I do remember a barn somewhere over the Wallingford side of the river about going from Wallingford to Didcot, a barn there where a couple of chums from the Grammar School we happened to look into the barn and there were 3 Tiger Moths all hoisted up by their tails so they were stored there for safe keeping.*

GC I actually did my flying training outside Windsor - Winkfield. Did you have much contact with the Americans at all.

*They were about here because we used to go to Benson Dance and there were always a lot from Berinsfield and Chalgrove and they did do exercises at the back of Swyncombe woods on the downs.*

*The American unit at Chalgrove was their version of the photographic reconnaissance. Bill Newby finished up as a Wing Commander was interviewed for his commission at Fifield Manor was apparently the HQ of the 5 units of the PRU the whole group - including the Medmenham Place where they did the developing and printing.*

*They used to develop down at Cottesmore.*

*Thats right the old Manor - Moira Hampden as was. That house had been in the hands of the family, I think Moira is a direct descendent of John Hampden. But Bill Newby said he went for his interview at Fifield Manor and flew in Mosquitoes. He said there were 2 Mosquito and 3 Spitfire squadrons operational from Benson at that time. Got a lot of interesting stories to tell which we hope to get hold of in due course. The other thing I remember during the war were these night-time exercises that took place around here. I would wake up maybe at .2.0 am and hear the sound of tramping feet - apparently RAF Regiment exercises and they would be marching at night.*

*I think that was more aircrews, they used to take them out about 20 miles and they would have to get back to camp without being caught.*

*What I am thinking of is a marching unit because they used to sing as they marched along. We have to join up, we have to join the blooming air force.. Almost an eerie experience.*

GC Certainly clean songs anyway.

*There were others but I couldn't always hear the words.*

*I do remember being wakened at night by a curious sort of quiet warning noise, like a rushing wind noise with a roar built in. My bedroom was blacked out and I became aware of this growing light. I went to look (southwards from a room at the end of the school house nearest the school) I looked up and realised it was a Lancaster on fire. One sheet of flame, glowing and flaming and the roaring noise was the wind passing through skeleton of the plane. It went towards Wittenham Clumps. No-one ever mentioned it.*

*The only Lancaster I knew that crashed was up at Rumbolds. I think there was a write up about it. One night they were flying Fairy Battles round and Jerry came round and flew with them and dropped bombs at the back of the Manor down towards the airfield.*

GC He mentioned the Heinkels, did you get a great deal of bombing around here attacking the airfield.

*We got shot up one time out harvesting towards Huntinglands. One went round and there were spurts of dirt going up and I don't know if that dropped a bomb and hit an air raid shelter on what's Spitfire Square, because the WAAF's were in those houses and it should have been their shelter. But they forgot the siren so nobody was hurt.*

*That could have been the same Heinkel 111 I told you about earlier.*

*I think there was another one hit the side of the hangars - they had been asking if any bombs hadn't gone off - I wouldn't like to say if there are any out there.*

GC I suppose they have been there all these years and sunk lower and lower.  
*Of course we had the jets in at Benson, ferry squadron with Sabre jets, they were noisy. A lot of people now complain about the noise of Bulldogs and helicopters.*

GC I'm glad you said that because I asked Bob earlier what impact the RAF coming had on the village, people complaining about these noisy aeroplanes. Bob said they it was accepted.  
*There was a war on so you put up with it. But the Fairy Battles crashed left right and centre, not any houses they crashed on, it was around about. The noise that goes on now is nothing that used to be.*

### ***Tape 34 -***

My father was a reservist in the RAF and was called up at the very beginning of the war. We lived in Liverpool and as the crowd of aeroplanes fly quite near the docks. My father wanted my brother and myself nearer him and away from the bombing. We had already experienced some. My brother and I were machine sprayed running for shelter with our friends to a new building site that had been abandoned because of the war already so we were happy with the thought of a good night's sleep. So there we were two children orphaned at the age of three and five and attached to a new stepmother suddenly transported to Ewelme.

From then onwards my brother and I enjoyed life so much that we never tired of talking and remembering that time in our lives. So it was in August 1940 that my brother and I arrived at the Lamb Inn into the care of Grampy and Granny Dymond. There were others there too. Eileen Mencarini and her cousin Roy Dickenson Arthur a little boy and his mother and Auntie Doll Eileen's mother. Granny Dymond had Kathleen, Majorie and Joyce her own daughters. When we arrived Kathleen had just left school and had a job in Wallingford at Pettits a department store. Joyce had already left home. She later, was in the ATS with the then Princess Elizabeth.

We used to save Red Cross strips 6d each and send them via the Red Cross to prisoners of war. One or two of them when they returned used to come to Sunday School to visit us. I suppose they were repatriated because of ill health. When it was 'Wings for Victory' week we had a big 'happening' as you might say, in I think it was Noel-Smiths garden or Sir Donald Somervell. I am not sure and I remember dancing. Norma Brooks, Betty Billings and myself and I think Esme Hall was the other girl. We had to dance barefoot - that made us light footed. In school we made comforts for the troops. It must have been the Merchant Navy. Eighty nine stitches garter 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. Grey, maroon or navy blue. The soldiers who visited us at Sunday school were ex prisoners of war sent home on health grounds or exchanges. Norma Brooks, Betty Billing, Esme Hall and myself did the dance at the Garden Party. We went to Mrs Noel Smiths for rehearsals. Esme lived with Miss Walker she passed a scholarship and returned to Sheffield. We did tableaux and I dressed as a nurse, Dutch girl, Betty was Wings for Victory person we had a Squander Bug. We had an American band in the garden Glen Miller style. Bob showed a display of his aeroplanes. It was a big garden fete. Shows were put on in the Reading room. Mr Greenway and his wife organised those.

As the war progressed the aerodrome became busier and Spitfires doing the victory roll took the chimneys off the Lamb Inn with great regularity so the Air Ministry decided to pull it down and re-house Mrs Dymond and her brood of children. [Actually to extend the runway in 1942].

We moved up the village to Saffron Close which we shared the house with other Air force families. [The house was eventually requisitioned from Miss Maxwell]. Two airmen came up to the house each day to pump up water from the well and once again I experienced bathroom, flush toilet and a huge garden for us children to run wild in. I don't ever remember it raining!

Squadron Leader Hussey was the camp Dr. Hussey and used to give talks in the reading room about being a Medical student [actually a Met Officer] with Shackleton's expedition to the Antarctic 1914-1917. I got my love of geography from those talks and ended up teaching Geography and Maths in our local Comprehensive School. All my friends know about my love of the Antarctic and one girl belonging to my Embroiderers' Guild did a 3D embroidery of Frank Hurley's famous photograph of the Endurance ice bound in the Weddel Sea in 1915 as a gift to me after my three years as Chairman of the local branch of the Embroiderers' Guild.

### *Tape 35 -*

Lived at the Lamb until 1942 when it was demolished.

One of the planes flew over and they were all well camouflaged on the camp and turned back and came down lower. They machine gunned all the down the brook. Mr Howerd said 'I dived myself under the cress'. They were after the PRU but they never found it.

Digging for Victory - remembers Mr Quixley taking them to the allotments to dig - "1-2-3-4 move along". Was on the land owned by Mr Orpwood, now the allotments. Also had land between the school and the Nurses Cottage. They wondered where the stored beetroot and carrots went to - presumably to the almsmen.

We could go onto the airfield as kids where they were carrying fuel and bombs to dispersal (behind the Lamb) but after the war they decided to stop it - it was a security risk! But we could go onto the airfield as kids carrying bombs on the little trailers to the planes. They used to let us sit in the parked planes.

Must have been 1940. Aeroplanes landed on the grass and then of course there were Fairey Battle's and Anson's, and the Lamb is built into the perimeter of the aerodrome. There were 3 strands of barbed wire that formed the fences and over that fence was a little bay for Fairey Battle's and Anson's. When the planes came back they would land and would come back on the perimeter runway. The aircrew would get out and the ground crew would climb in one of the seats. Myself, Wallace and Roy Dickinson brought the plane to its final resting place. When they had Fairey Battle's they had a number of Polish pilots. You could see them coming in over the Lamb's garden. They were a bit erratic and they used to clip the elm trees and crash the planes. Wallace can see his grandmother now and hear the engines revving and they would clip the trees. I can see Granny Dymond rushing to the dresser trying to clutch the plates before the planes hit the ground. All the jams on the shelf used to come to the edge. When the Fairey Battles were trying to land with the Polish pilots Granny Dymond would hear their engines revving and fading as they tried to negotiate the trees etc. She would rush to the dresser and try to push the plates and jars back before they fell off.

Eventually they were replaced by Spitfires which were faster aeroplanes so the RAF decreed all the trees had to be reduced to a height of 6ft. All the hedgerows and trees were down to 6ft. At the Lamb they had a great big shield of elms. Along came a gang of Canadian lumberjacks and they chopped them all down in a morning. They stood on the trunk and walked along swinging their axes and with one movement they could lop off a branch.

The extended runway reached the road and it was concreted (not just grass). The Lamb Inn stood out like a sore thumb from the 6ft trees and hedgerows. We were moved out and into Saffron Close.

The Manor (where the PRU was) had a yew [Cedar of Lebanon] tree which is still there but the RAF said we will stick a light on the top. If they had film to be developed they would buzz the tree and house and a man would come out with a van and follow the Spitfire up the runway, collect the cameras and while the aeroplane went to dispersal take the film which would go back to the PRU to be developed. If they came back at night the red light was switched on.

One night a Mosquito came back from a mission in the dark and it couldn't give a recognition signal on the radio so they asked another aerodrome to send a fighter and they shot it down. A Wellington crashed near Fyfield, we used to get the perspex to make ornaments at the Lamb.

We had an air raid one night, I remember I was brought down from the bedroom and slept on a board which was underneath the dart board whilst the Irish men played darts above me.

Remembers when Peter Miners was born in 1940 there was danger of an air raid, we brought all the children under the table and the new born baby was laid on the top. Mrs Dickenson brought her children in too, but nothing happened, the bombs didn't arrive.

The Lamb's garden was like a smallholding – had geese, chickens and pigs. Next to the chicken run was the boundary fence and the barbed wire entanglements and to the other side was an anti-aircraft gun. My grandmother used to say 'take this out to the fellows at the gun'. There was a great pink jug filled with tea. I used to walk and leave it through the long grass which grew through the wire. She would ask me to get the jug and there it was – empty. I never saw the men. I remember the petrol tankers that used to go up the road and through the gates for refuelling. They would stop outside the Lamb or anything that was coming from the PRU, and they used to give us a ride. After the war you weren't allowed to go through the airfield due to security. Yet during the war we children used to go onto the airfield and watch them load bombs and petrol and then crawl through the hedge back into the garden.

I remember Whitleys going up one night with a rack of bombs and my father was in charge of the ground crew overhauling the bombers. When the overhaul was completed the person had to go on a test flight. He dodged it one day and the plane crashed up the road on the allotments. I used to walk up there with 2 watering cans in the summer as I had a little plot there. Then one night there was a Wellington sitting there. When I returned in 1945 or 1946 I took the bus up and there was an Anson stuck in a field of potatoes.

### ***Tape 37 – Wg Cmdr Bill Newby***

**RAF Benson** - Wg Cmdr Bill Newby, who came to RAF Benson as a Mosquito navigator on 544 Squadron in 1943 remembers the American Flying Fortresses (B17's) would formate over Benson *en route* for daylight bombing raids over Germany. The Mosquito's would fly ahead of the heavily laden bombers, photograph the intended targets from height, cruise around Lake Geneva and then photograph the results of the bombing. They flew straight back to Farnborough to unload their 'cans' which were despatched in an Airspeed Oxford and flown to the USAAF bases in the Midlands. The intention was to have the photographs ready for the returning crews to see and thus keep up their morale, as they suffered heavy losses in these raids. At height, the waiting Mosquito crews could see the B17s being decimated by F190s and M109s. Wing Cmdr Newby remembers existing on Horlicks tablets and chocolate for the long flights, but being given a meal of bacon, two eggs, sausage and baked beans before departure and on return. Another 'perk' of the job was that the returning PRU aeroplanes were 'permitted' to do low level passes before landing. This was to relieve the tedium of flying high and level for such long periods. His pilot's favourite 'target' was Didcot Railway Yards followed by The Swan at Streatley and low level along the river, or alternatively, fly low downstream from the Shillingford Bridge Hotel. The only *no-go* area was RAF Harwell, where glider crews were being trained.

The PRU and Ewelme were synonymous. Bill and his colleagues would often go over to the PRU buildings to inspect the photographs they had taken that day. He remembers Sarah Churchill working there once as one of the first phase interpreters. He photographed an airfield with parallel burn marks round the hedgerows which the interpreters decided was caused by the running up of the new German jet fighters Squirt HS126s. Ironically, he was shot down by one in July 1944 and captured by the Germans.

Bill Newby's Flight Commander was Wing Commander The Lord David Douglas-Hamilton, son of the Duke of Hamilton. He was married to the 'Health and Beauty Girl' Prunella Stack (a popular classic 'pin-up' of the 1930's period when fitness was promoted as chic). At a flight briefing on their wedding anniversary, the squadron had arranged for a larger than life-size photograph of 'Miss Stack' to be made up which unrolled, to great hilarity, when her noble husband pulled the map cord. Bill Newby remembers Squadron parties at The White Hart at Nettlebed and their beloved Flight Commander with his bag-pipes leading them along the top of the village school wall being followed at a distance by an anxious local policeman with an open note book and pencil poised. Sadly, Lord David was killed in March 1944 returning from operations when his Mosquito crashed into a hill near Lewknor.

The White Hart became a favourite off-duty haunt of the PRU crews. It was run by a very popular lady publican - 'Clemmie' (Mrs Clemments) who always had bacon and eggs available for aircrew whatever time they dropped in. There are squadron badges and pictures on the walls to this day.

*“I was delighted to be able to explore Ewelme on my ‘cycle; to see the old buildings, the watercress beds; the mediaeval buildings of the old hall and school; Fyfield where I was commissioned and the River Thames where we practised our dinghy drill escapes and learned to sail.”* Despite his dangerous occupation (he was eventually shot down and taken prisoner), he added - *“Those were some of the happiest days of my life...”*

Regarding the early importance of the Station and its vital wartime photo-reconnaissance role Bill Newby wrote - “We were all sworn to so much secrecy that I am sure no-one ever spoke about how much of the success of the Allied War Effort depended on the airborne intelligence gleaned by crews from RAF Benson. ‘Bensonians’ and ‘Ewelmers’ (to coin a phrase) ought to be very proud of this association.”

#### **File 44 -**

Walking or cycling was very precarious because, with no runway, returning aircraft would land into the wind. I have had aircraft land over my head, just in front and just behind – one even hit the road and bounced over the hedge. When they were landing from the Ewelme area we had to watch out just in case they didn’t stop. One Vickers Wellington of 12 OTU did just that and finished up across the road in the next field.

Some of the Imperial Airways aircraft landed at Benson with the outbreak of War and were painted with camouflage. In 1939 we would talk to the ground crews over the hedge. One of the [Fairey Battle] Squadrons was getting ready to fly out to France and a fitter gave me a metal tag and said ‘This is the last time you will see this old kite.’ I still have this metal tag today, 60 years on, I believe the Squadron was wiped out shortly afterwards – I was 13 at the time.

At 14 years of age in 1940 I was delivering milk in the afternoon for Mr and Mrs Pengilly from the Dairy in High Street [Benson] when at the bottom of Littleworth I could see the Fairey Battles going around in an anti-clockwise circuit for what is known as ‘circuits and bumps’, when I spotted an unusual aircraft in the circuit – a Junkers 88 with wheels down as if doing the same as the others. From this location I was unable to see any more, but it wasn't long after the crunch of bombs was heard, fortunately there were no casualties. Not long after this the airfield was enlarged; the road up Beggars Bush Hill was closed and a new one from the Preston Crowmarsh turning up to the Riverside Café (known as Rivers, but now gone) was built, all this enabled the runways to be added.

#### **Interview 46 -**

**War** - For several years after the War the Oxfordshire County Council continued to employ my father in farming. The rare luxury of a Ford Popular Estate van was provided for the necessary mobility. Part of his role involved utilisation of ex-German prisoners of War to assist local farmers. This continued for several years after the War until they were eventually repatriated to Germany. During this time they made friends with some of the local community, including my parents. My brother Charles remembers in particular Carl and Werner, I was too young to remember them before they returned to Germany. I still have one if the many wooden toys which they made for us using a fret saw. A few of the Germans never returned home, they married English girls. Several years later one of these families lived in Hampden Way, Ewelme. I knew their daughters and attended Icknield Secondary School Watlington at the same time. I wrote to Carl to let him know of my father’s death in 1986 and after a long wait learned from his daughter in Hamburg that Carl had also died at about the same time.

I have always been intrigued with RAF Benson PRU history. I like the story regarding PRU Spitfire pilot Flt Sgt Bill Johnson. It is unfortunate that a book has not been published giving the full story of the PRU contribution during WW2. I do have a book titled ‘RAF Benson Diary of Wartime Losses’ which has diary entries covering the building of RAF Benson, formation of PRU then PRU squadrons, some of the successful PRU sorties, details of all sorties where pilots were lost or captured and aircraft losses in lost local area, of all aircraft types and RAF units. It also mentions, with photos, the photographic intelligence buildings in the grounds of the Old Mansion, Ewelme. The briefing and interrogation section was initially there but moved to RAF Benson SHQ on 31/10/43 whilst the photographic intelligence section remained at the Old Mansion. Page 76 records “16 April 1943, 541 squadron, sergeant W Johnson in Spitfire IV AA807 on landing back from a sortie tipped the aircraft over on its nose; only slight damage resulted”. Page 81 records “13 June 1943, 541 Squadron, Sgt W Johnson in Spitfire XI BS490 took-off on sortie No. D671 to Dortmund Ems

Canal at 06:00 hours but failed to return. Sergeant W. Johnson, s/n 1295901, of 541 Squadron was captured and became prisoner of war, number 35, at Stalag Luft VI”.

As a young lad I helped out at the farm where you now live in the converted barn. At that time the farm was owned by Mr Philip Chamberlain [Fred Chamberlain Philips father]. His new foreman was ex RAF Spitfire PRU pilot Sqd Ldr George Singlehurst. Apparently, he would never talk about his wartime experiences and seemed content with farming life. He and Mr Chamberlain would drive the two Massey Harris combine harvesters and they could often be found socialising and drinking together at the London Road Inn. He was always friendly to me and sometimes gave me a lift in his car. He would also socialise with Doris Chamberlain who lived in the newly built house which stands almost opposite to where you now live. Page 73 of book includes photo of PRU pilots on Spitfire, George Singlehurst is sitting on the port wing. Unfortunately, two of the other five pilots in photo were killed later in 1943.

The following link shows DSO, DFC & MiD (Mentioned in Despatches) awards to George Singlehurst:  
Air Forces WW2 Details : A/Sqn Ldr George Basil SINGLEHURST (60342), RAFVR [RAFCommands]

The following link gives most names of those who served on the PRU and those who did not survive or were captured. George is shown in the list:  
For Those Who Served | Spitfire AA810  
The PRU attrition rate was very high.

#### **File 58 -**

War came up, I was in the ATC RAF Cadets. Cycled to Wallingford for meetings which were held in the Grammar School.

I was called up in 1944. Went down the mine in Barnsley (Bevin Boy). Went up by train lived in lodgings which they approved of. Worked shifts, either 6 – 1.30 or 2 – 8.30, and night shift 10 – 5.30 am. Helped move half a ton of coal in tubs. Worked in a gallery and moved the tubs up by lifts to the surface where they would be tipped out and come back empty. Had a bath and changed into clean clothes. Took the dirty ones back once a week to be washed, included in the rent. After 2 ½ years the war finished. Used to have to pay your own train fare there and back. Had a week or fortnights holiday a year. Went by train from Wallingford to Cholsey, and to London and London to Barnsley. Went to the pictures or theatre for breaks, went to Blackpool and heard the organ. The Alhambra cinema – could go to the pictures for 3d. I should have stopped there until 1948, but came home when the war in Europe ended and didn't go back. They kept sending for me but I didn't go and left a fortnights wages at the pit. I did a few odd jobs for Tom Orpwood with Brian. I was called up for National Service in the RAF from 1944 – 1947, an armourer looking after the guns, ammunition and bombs on aircraft. It was better than being down the pit.

#### **File 60 -**

The expansion at RAF Benson appeared overnight, one day the Benson Road was 'clear' the next there was a sentry at a gate on it. [At the entrance of Clay Lane now Green Lane]. At Benson Aerodrome the King's Flight was still there and I remember seeing the Flare Path lit up on occasion. The Aerodrome was suddenly expanded and some Polish Pilots were operating from it. We thought they were mad because they used to just miss the roof tops (or so it seemed). One of them did hit a large tree that was owned by a lady who lived adjacent to the blacksmiths which was in the road going towards Benson. [This was probably the Cedar of Lebanon in the grounds of Cottesmore Mansion opposite – the top had to have a light put on it – work done by Herbie Winfield - so the pilots could see it]. The RAF had requested it to be cut down, she had apparently refused I can't remember if it was cut down after the crash. It was however, exciting to see someone coming down on a parachute. I remember the aircraft they were Fairy Battles. I do remember the night time Army exercises with the Bren Gun Carriers going through the village.

#### **63 -**

He had a proper rocking horse made by the German POWs as all the choir children were given toys. He doesn't know where the Germans were billeted – but reckons they couldn't have been far away as they marched to church. Some assisted his father Charles on the PSI gardens (behind Observatory Close near Benson) which he said supplied the camp with vegetables. Charles also worked on the sports field. He

remembers Otto and Willie worked with his dad. One German called Werner stayed on and married a woman called Lil. They lived at 2 Cat Lane Cottages, which belonged to the Orpwood's, the local farmers, so he worked on that farm. Afterwards, they bought kennels outside Cholsey on the road that goes to Blewbury. They are still kennels. John said they called it WernerLil. A Lithuanian also worked for Orpwood's. John said Italians had a camp at Howberry Park (at Crowmarsh now the water research department).

#### 64 -

Being one of the Townsend girls mentioned in Derek Robinson's article in the Ewelme News as having a dolls house from the German prisoners, it was well equipped with hand-made furniture, my little sister had the pull-along nodding ducks. The POWs attended Ewelme Church evening services always sitting in the north side pews. Their favourite hymns were *Now thank we all our God* and *Son of my Soul*. We young girls in the choir took a fancy to one called Fritz!

I can remember was going along to the camp where the POWs in a work shop were making Christmas gifts out of wood for many children me included, they made me a Dolls House with all the furniture but it was without a roof. We were taken there by the Rev Kenneth Jenkins. I remember I had a crush on one of the POWs his name was Siegfried. Also I remember when they came to Church they sat on the left side pews and sang really with strong voices. One hymn was "Sun of my soul thou Saviour dear" which seemed to be a favourite.

#### 71 -

Remembers seeing Lancasters whilst standing at the end of the Old London Road and waving to the pilots. About 1947/48.

He and his friends would go to Rumbolds Pit after the war – then run by Bullingdon Rural Council. The RAF had dumped rubbish from the PRU. They would find drop tanks and use them as 'boats' on the river. Also photograph negatives would be buried with and under ashes (from domestic fires). This could ignite when the oxygen hit it and one of his pals singed his eyebrows and front of his hair.