

This two year project has been funded by the National Heritage Lottery Fund.

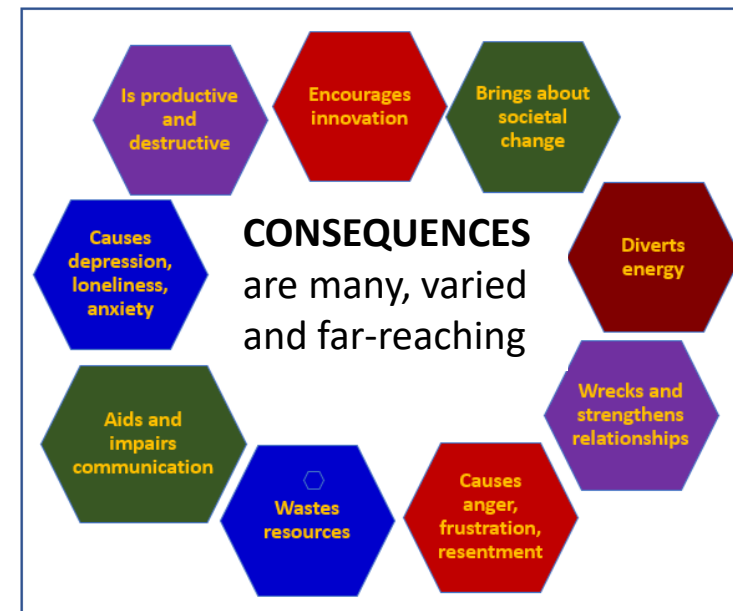
Its original aim was to coincide with the 75th celebration of the end of World War 2 and to record and share personal recollections of that era.

It was hoped that this, in turn, would encourage wider discussion and reminiscences amongst families and groups, not just on war, but also on other conflicts and their consequences – good as well as bad – on our individual journey through life.

Such recalled and shared memories not only forge links and create bonds between generations and beyond, but also help the generations to come understand why we have done what we have done. And in that way it can be added to and remain a living record.



Events of 2020 – 2021 made it impossible to venture into people's home and visit groups and we were given permission by the Fund to widen our scope to include COVID, Brexit, Black Lives Matter and other conflicts in current living memory in a dedicated Gallery at Swaffham Heritage and as an e-archive available and to add to online, and free to all. If you would like to add your story please contact Swaffham Heritage by letter, email, phone or just pop in.



In exploring the past we help guide the present which shapes our future.

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Part 1: A Collage of life in Swaffham in the World War II era

This is a collection of newsprint, images, video and audio collected by Swaffham Heritage (Museum) over several years. Some of the video and audio clips are taken from an oral memory project dating from around 2010 -2012 and some from the Heritage Lottery project from 2019-2021. It is a snapshot of life in Swaffham and a few of the neighbouring villages during World War II.

The Shire Hall air raid siren, Campingland shelter and shelters elsewhere



As a young teenager Reg Stibbons (correct name) worked in the harvest fields. A favourite pastime was playing cricket in the middle of London Street. He became a carpenter and was called up in 1942 with the Royal Norfolk Regiment. After the war he became a civil engineer at North Pickenham airfield.



Toni was a radio operator in Portsmouth but later moved to Swaffham and was an eager supporter of many activities and organisations in the town. Here she describes getting into an air raid shelter in her war service.

Hoddy Savage – for 20 years Swaffham's Town Crier

After the 1st World War Hoddy became the town crier.

He always wore a braided coat with breeches, buckled shoes, a tricorn hat and carried his bell and staff. It is said that an announcement he made in Sporle was heard in Dunham – over 3 miles away.



Rod was a school boy at “Nod’s College” on Campingland. He was later to become a booking clerk at Swaffham Railway Station and made the railway his career.



George was born in Tottenham in 1935 and lived there during the war except for two years when he was an evacuee in Devon. He remembers sheltering from air raids at school and the shelter in his garden.



Janet, who was 10 at the end of the war, lived in a North London suburb. Her abiding memory of May 1945 is not having to go to the shelter.

Dorothy remembers that her family never used their Anderson shelter because it used to flood. Her mother later used it to store pickles and jam.

Gas masks

Because the memories of gas poisoning in World War I still affected many men who had been blinded or suffered breathing difficulties the government decided to issue gas masks for all civilians as early as 1938.

Air raid wardens would use old football rattles if gas were detected or suspected. People were advised to seal their house windows, and telephone kiosks were painted in a red paint which would turn green on exposure to gas.

Some private firms also manufactured gas masks for dogs.

However, gas was never used against civilians in the UK during the second world war.



Barbara Clarke was a young girl living in Swaffham during the war. Here are her memories of having to have her gas mask tested.



Mickey Mouse gas mask

Diane remembers that she had to take her Mickey Mouse gas mask to school with her every day. She says that you couldn't breathe properly and that they smelt. They were a bit frightening. Fortunately, they never had to use them

Research shows that Barbara's experience was quite normal in schools around the country. Sometimes children were asked to take off their masks for a few minutes.

"A van was brought to the school and filled with tear gas and we walked through it. Then ... we had to take our masks off"
"There was a van in the yard and we were made to go in wearing our gas masks and then, when inside, were asked to take them off for a few seconds. The van was full of tear gas and we all came out coughing and spluttering. I suppose they were trying to make us see the importance of having gas masks near us at all times, but we didn't appreciate the lesson."

(Moshenska, G, "Government gas vans..." 2010)

A resident remembers that the children had frequent practice sessions on the use of their gas masks and were supplied with one at school so that they did not have to carry one with them.

They also had drills to see how quickly they could get into the shelters.



Kindertransport and the Cockley Cley Guides

| NAME. | Date of Birth. | | Measles | | Class or Standard. | German | Measles | Whooping Cough | Scarlet Fever | Diphtheria | Chicken Pox | Mumps | Other |
|-------------------------------|----------------|---------------|--------------|----|--------------------|--------|---------|----------------|---------------|------------|-------------|-------|-------|
| | Month | Year | M. | O. | | | | | | | | | |
| Wurmanowicz Sylvia | 7 | 28 | M | | | | | | | | yes | | |
| Boym Gerda | 2 | 28 | M | | | | yes | | | | | yes | |
| Heller Gretel | 4 | 26 | M | | | | | | | | yes | | |
| Horowitz Abby | 9 | 26 | M | | | yes | | | | | | yes | |
| Kohn Lilly | 7 | 29 | M | | | | | | | | yes | yes | |
| Foster Freda | 9 | 27 | | 0 | | | yes | | yes | | | | |
| Livy Lotti | 4 | 26 | | 0 | | | | | | | | | |
| Schischka Lilli | 3 | 27 | M | | | | yes | yes | | yes | | | |
| Thomas Ivy | 5 | 29 | | 0 | | | | | | | | | |
| Wasserman Ruth | 5 | 26 | M | | | | | | | | yes | | |
| Wastell Joyce | 12 | 29 | | 0 | | | | | | | | | |
| Wastell Leonard | 4 | 23 | | 0 | | | | | | | | | |
| Hertzberg Thea | 9 | 30 | | | | yes | yes | yes | | | yes | | |
| Thomas Irene | 5 | 33 | | 0 | | | | | | | | | |
| Windover John | 5 | 35 | | 0 | | | | | | | | | |
| Rose Joyce | 1 | 32 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Coots Peter | 11 | 34 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Coots John | 4 | 33 | | | | | | | | | | | |

The measles vaccination register of 1941 which includes the children



Outside Cockley Cley Hall



Outside the schoolroom – now the 20 Churchwardsens pub.



Lord and Lady Roberts



Brief extract from a film made by Lili Tauber after the war

Kindertransport was an organised campaign which transported Jewish children from Germany, Austria and Poland to safer countries.

Lady Judith (known as Gladys to the girls) and her husband Lord Peter Roberts of Cockley Cley offered a home to 25 girls, although only 15 lived at the hall. Lady Roberts’ grandson Sir Samuel Roberts recalls that he was later told of the “utmost reverence with which those poor girls came to see the new baby” - which was Sir Robert in October 1940.

He writes “ 15 teenagers, their matron and cook, a mother-in-law, my 19 year old pregnant mummy, plus all the normal staff – grannie was catering for 115 meals a day and that in war-time.”

Other children, including some evacuated from Hackney, were given homes in other cottages in the village.

“The few local children went to a school in Swaffham, three miles away, and did not mix much with the evacuees. The village school, which had been modiefied into a pub, was re-opened for evacuee children from Hackney and the Kindertransport children. Two teachers were drafted in from London—Miss Gadsby and Miss Payne.”

“Miss Gadsby had been a former Guide, she suggested starting a Guide company in Cockley Cley. ‘Those of us from Germany had never heard of such a thing,’ said Gretel Heller. ‘We thought this all sounded like a good idea. But we couldn't afford any uniform.’ Each girl was issued with a hat, a maroon scarf and a Guide belt and badge, donated by Lady Roberts. ‘The best part was learning Morse code and being able to signal secret messages to each other. We did a lot of stalking in the woods.”

Amongst their tasks was weeding the sugar-beet fields for pocket money or sweet treats.

Prisoners of War in the area

Little is known about the life and work of prisoners of war held at Cockley Cley, except that they came from Germany and Italy and worked on local farms

One of the German PoWs was Max Mueller – a graphic artist who later married a local girl and settled in the town. These paintings of a PoW and of a refugee family were both painted by him.



One resident remembers how they would make toys out of wire for local children in their spare time.

The PoWs did not go home immediately after the war ended, but were allowed more freedom.

Permission was given for them to enter restaurants, shops, cinemas and public transport within a radius of five miles from their camp, Swaffham being the centre for some five hundred from Cockley Cley.

Swaffham Baptist church was very involved in including the PoWs and in 1948, shortly before repatriation, held special services at the church with the pastor from the camp and also public concerts. (Thetford and Watton Times, 19 June and 14 July 1947)

By 1948 Ukrainians took the place of German prisoners of war at the camp at Cockley Cley. They were employed mainly on agricultural work in the district, and had the same status and privileges as the Germans.

(Thetford and Watton Times, 19 June and 14 February 1948)

A group of Ukrainians left their farming community in the Ukraine to avoid conscription in the Russian Army. They worked their way across Eastern Europe living off the land or serving in whichever army was occupying the territory at the time. Often their only food was vermin.

Eventually they arrived in Italy where they served in the Italian army and were taken prisoners by the British. They were shipped to Scotland where they were set to apple picking.

Knowing of the need for agricultural workers in Norfolk Lady Fermoy arranged for them to be transferred to Norfolk where they were first installed in North Pickenham P.o.W camp and then lodgings were found in Swaffham to work in Corbatch canning factory.

After the war they were unable to return to the Ukraine which was then under Russian control and settled in Swaffham, neighbouring villages and elsewhere.



We have no memories of past evacuees to Swaffham but visitors to Swaffham Heritage whose parents or grandparents were evacuated to Swaffham consistently mention their fond memories of living in Swaffham.

Evacuees come to Swaffham

Within days of the beginning of the war a train load of mothers and children arrived from London but went back a fortnight later because there had been no bombing raids. Most of the evacuees however appear to have arrived in October 1940.



Diane describes having an evacuee lady stay with the family

From the beginning it did not go well.

138 mothers and children arrived and the WVS organised their dispersal to homes. Empty houses had been requisitioned where possible .

However, there had been much dissatisfaction in the town as to the fairness of billet distribution, so much so that within a week many evacuees had returned to London. The deputy billeting officer resigned and an inquiry promised. By November there were 519 evacuees in the town and residents complained that they had made a water supply unusable and that parents had no control over their children. Many evacuees complained that they were clearly not wanted.

A later November report records 1155 evacuees, amongst them 451 unaccompanied children. Evacuees continued to arrive during 1941 but how many returned to London we are not told. Although many were treated well there was still some resentment, mostly occasioned it seems, by a perceived notion that some residents were supposed to wait hand and foot on some visiting families.

By this time coal and food shortages were becoming a crisis and the notion of a communal feeding station or a British Restaurant was mooted and then declined. A rest room for evacuees had been opened at the Vicarage which was very much appreciated.

By June 1941 newspaper reports record that there was a poor response for evacuee billets in the town and that the Rural Council would rather have evacuees from other places than London. "Many of the London evacuees had gone home and it seemed to be a colossal waste of time, labour and transport."

Information from newspaper scrapbooks on Swaffham between 1940 and 1941 by Mr Tuttle.

Later years saw fewer evacuees arriving in Swaffham which by then was billeting many serving military or associated occupations.

Mr. Edwards (sanitation inspector and billeting officer) said that, out of an original total of 1,129, there were 595 evacuees remaining in the rural district on January 8. "Every week we have them dribbling back here," he said. "We have had a number of letters from people asking if their children can be re-billeted."

Lynn Advertiser - Friday 26 January 1940

"Two pregnant evacuees from London came to stay, one with a toddler. They spent most of their time doing very little and, after 2 weeks, returned to London."

Diane remembers that the evacuee children were quite nice, but the boys could be a bit rough in the playground. "It must have been a bit hard for them because they had to leave their parents behind"

A great argument developed in Sporle in early 1941 when it was found that the person in charge of billeting and with a large house had not taken any evacuees.

Swaffham was one of many Norfolk centres where troops were stationed

Soldiers were housed in billets (residents were paid 6d a night) and camps in and around the town. Field kitchens were set up in the market place.

Stella remembers the many soldiers stationed at Manor farm in Nissen huts. She met her future husband there. He was on night duty and would ask her to get him some fish and chips which he would eat out of his tin helmet.

A camp was built on what is now Couhé Close. The Convent Meadow on Sporle Road served as an ablution and sanitary area for troops occupying the old Drill Hall in the White Lion.

The West Yorks occupied the barns and other buildings at Petyguards and the new Drill Hall, and the Queen's own Scottish Borderers were based at Cockley Cley Hall.

The golf course was used as a tank training ground, although still open to members, and a gas training station was built near the rifle range in Cley Road. Some officers stayed at The George.

"In the summer of 1940 my father (headmaster at Hamond's Grammar School from 1949-64) got back from Dunkirk and was officer in charge of a small section of the RASC, with an address in Spinners Lane. I presume it was at the Farmhouse/Strattons that they were billeted."

In Beachamwell Ruth remembers that officers were billeted in the Rectory and Hall, and a marquee on the lawn became the officers mess. The soldiers trained in the church ruins. Convoys of troops and tanks were continually passing, due to the many bases in the area. Ruth cooked eggs and fried bread for many of the passing men, who were tired and hungry coming from the coast.



Judy, who lived at Manor Farm, recalls the living accommodation for the army.



Jack remembers that the army took over Surridge's sheds at the bottom of the bottom of Ash Close to store wood and coal for the troops.(Surridge made cricket bats).

The French Canadians moved into the Drill Hall.

Coronation Grove was a field. The army built Nissen huts there and the troops moved in.

Wrights Garage became an ARP post, as did Holland farm on Westacre road.

The army used the Baptist Church building to store mattresses for the troops.

A field kitchen for the soldiers was set up in the market place and the Assembly Rooms became a NAAFI and meeting place for American airmen stationed at North Pickenham.

Mike recalls



Food supplies



Eileen and Irene on their milk round for Howes at Copperhall Farm, about 1942



Stella tells the story of a lady who lived on Queen Street.

As a young girl during the war Stella was a milkmaid at Manor Farm.

Work started very early as the cows had to be brought from the fields to the farm.

The men would milk the cows and the dairy maids would take the milk into the dairy and cool it. From there it would go into churns and Stella would either work on the milk round or clean the dairy afterwards.

The milk round was done with a pony and cart except in the winter when sometimes they had to use the farm carthorse and a tumbler. Sometimes the snow was so deep - up to waist high nearly - and they had to walk.

Later on they used bottles but in the early days people would leave jugs outside their houses and the milkmaids would have to measure it out.

Barbara remembers: There was no real market on Saturday mornings. On one stall - if you took your own newspaper wrapping you could buy 1d worth of delicious chips cooked in beef dripping.

She also remembers saving up her sweet ration so that she could have a good supply for Christmas.

“No food was wasted. Butter was supplemented by taking the cream from the top of the milk and putting it in a Kilner jar. When it was nearly full they would screw down the top and shake the contents until the whey separated.”

Gwyneth worked in Hannants grocers. She recalls that the shops had pooled delivery services to the outlying villages to save petrol.

“When we went with the Co-op we used to collect industrial pies made in their bakery for the farmworkers as extra rations.

Food was very short and off ration foods were eagerly sought after and at every house they were asked if there was anything off the ration.

Winters were very hard with snow and icy roads. Sometimes we could not get the van down tracks across fields to farm cottages. This meant they had to carry the groceries over the field paths. “Looking back I wonder how we all managed but we did and the comradeship enjoyed then is what is rationed today.”

Dorothy obtained a post in the Food Office in White Hart Lane, dealing with permits of ration books and the issue of cod liver oil and orange juice to those qualified to receive it.

Grace remembers: “Rationing wasn’t too bad really because people used to grow all their own vegetables. We had cows and chickens and our own eggs and double rations of cheese and meat. We could exchange some vouchers to people who would give us sugar in return. We would milk our cows by hand and then had to deliver the milk by pony and cart with the churn.



Billy Read's delivery van on Whitecross Road in 1935



On the corner of Ash Close. Sometime in the 1940s.

Wages and Prices

Many local pubs only opened 2 or 3 days a week because of a shortage of beer and most of the goods listed above were on ration and scarce.

The average wage for a coal miner working on the pit face was £2.10s (£2.50) a week

A male Factory worker in 1941 making tubing for Aircraft would earn £2.3s (£2.15p) for a 48 hour week.

A male 14 year old working in a leather factory could earn 14/- (70p) for a six-day working week

A male RAF volunteer in 1944 got £3. 10s. a week (£3.50)

A young woman working with the Women's Land Army would earn £1.2s 6d (£1.12p)

Diane's father serving abroad could send home £1 10sh a fortnight to maintain the family.

Average cost for food for a family of 4 for one week £1.4.0 (£1.20)

Average cost for a family of 4 for coal for one week 4/- (20p)

Average cost for a family of 4 for Gas and Electricity for one week 2/- (10p)

Tin of Beans would cost 7d (3p)

1lb Pork Sausages 1/3 (6p)

A Kit Kat cost 2d (1p)

Toilet rolls 2/3 (11p)

Daily News Paper 1d (2d on a sunday)

Dozen large eggs 1/6 (7.5p)

A pint of milk cost 2d a pint (1p)

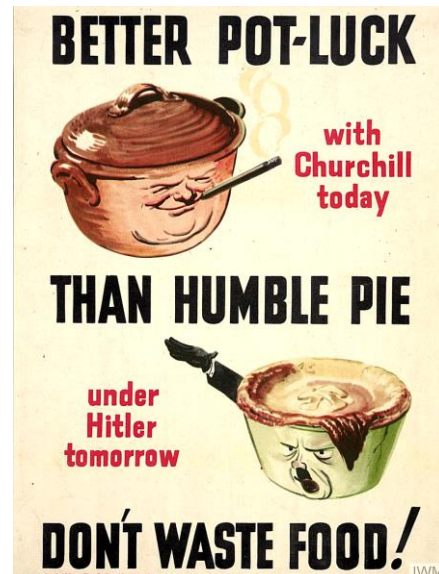
A Mars Bar would cost you sixpence (2.5p)

Lipstick 6/6 (32.5p)

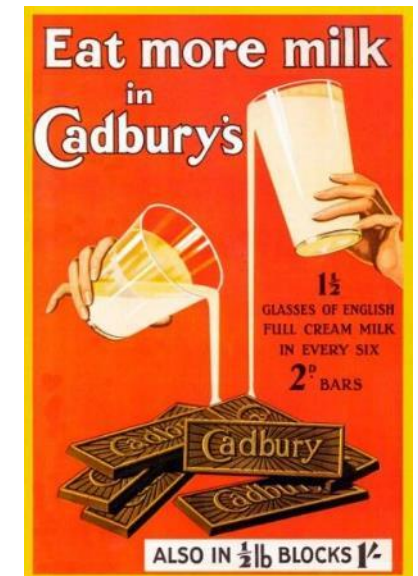
A 1lb Jar of Strawberry Jam cost 11d (4.5p)

A loaf of bread would cost about 4d a loaf (2p) although most people made their own bread, especially those on a low income with children.

A typical war time 3 bedroom semi detached house would cost approximately £350



Diane describes going to the local shop and how her grandfather had an allotment



The Town Band and other entertainment

When the town band began is unknown, but by the 1930s it was large and successful. We only know that at some time their practice rooms were either the Cornhall or The King's Arms.

During World War II the instruments were stored at Manor Farm. Judy remembers



SWAFFHAM TOWN BAND 1944 BANDMASTER
MR J. W. NORMAN.



Town band 1939

There was never a lack of entertainment. There were regular dances at the Drill Hall to which the young soldiers billeted all over the area readily came. Stella remembers that sometimes the Polish soldiers stationed at Watton would send trucks (passion wagons) to the market place in Swaffham and take the girls to Watton for a dance and bring them back. Similarly treucks would bring th soldiers into Swaffham.

Peter remembers one of the very many whistdrives.

"The Conservative Club in London Street held whist drives every week and the winner might be lucky enough to take home a rabbit (most likely poached!).

One time particularly remembered was my mother finally winning, or rather tying with another woman for, first prize.

So they drew cards to determine the winner.

Guess what – my mother drew an ace – only to hear that it was 'aces low'. My mother was so upset and angry because she had not won our dinner for the next several days."

In warship week over 1941 and 42 the Urban and District Councils raised over £60,000 to buy HMS Romeo, a trawler minesweeper.



war weapons week 1941

The Government and charities were constantly looking for funding. Whist drives, darts matches, concert parties - for many different good causes - were held as well as various "weeks" throughout the years which brought in a considerable amount of money.

THE SIGNAL IS
"HELP SWEEP THE SEAS"

March 21st - 28th
SWAFFHAM U.D.
OBJECTIVE £40,000
Cost of the Hull of a Tender Minesweeper

SWAFFHAM & DISTRICT WARSHIP WEEK

HELP FLOAT H.M.S. ROMEO

Opening Demonstration
SATURDAY, MARCH 21st
MILITARY DISPLAY AND BAND
OPENING AT DRILL HALL at 1 O'CLOCK

MILITARY BAND
LADY FERRET
BAND, 10.00-1.00 P.M. CONCERT, Public Room.
1.00-2.00 P.M. CONCERT at Royal Cinema.
2.00-3.00 P.M. CONCERT at Royal Cinema.
3.00-4.00 P.M. CONCERT at Royal Cinema.
4.00-5.00 P.M. CONCERT at Royal Cinema.
5.00-6.00 P.M. CONCERT at Royal Cinema.
6.00-7.00 P.M. CONCERT at Royal Cinema.
7.00-8.00 P.M. CONCERT at Royal Cinema.
8.00-9.00 P.M. CONCERT at Royal Cinema.
9.00-10.00 P.M. CONCERT at Royal Cinema.
10.00-11.00 P.M. CONCERT at Royal Cinema.
11.00-12.00 P.M. CONCERT at Royal Cinema.

OFFICIAL PROGRAMME

Monday, 20th - 8 P.M. AUCTION.
MARTY PLACE. (If not in House, Proceeding of Goods raised from 11 o'clock onwards in the Public Room.)

Tuesday, 21st - 8 P.M. AUCTION.
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Sunday, 26th - 8 P.M. AUCTION.
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LEND EVERY PENNY YOU CAN

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OUR MINESWEEPER — H.M.S. ROMEO — £40,000

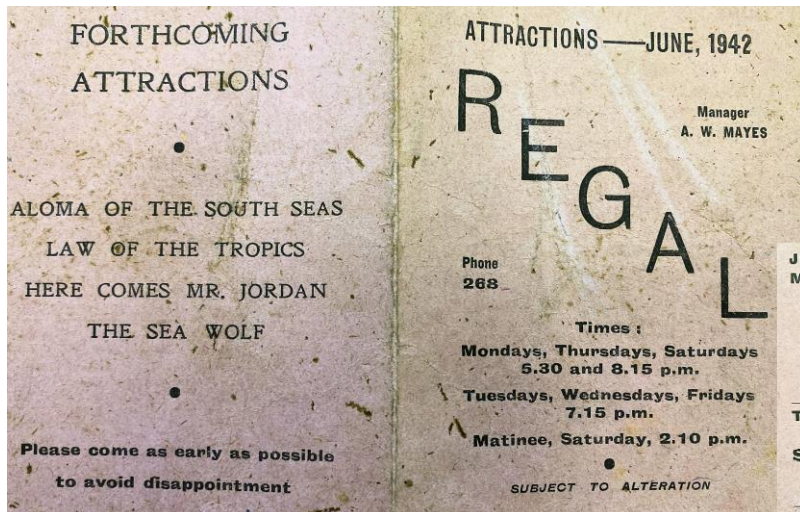
The Cinema

There had been a permanent cinema building in Swaffham since the early 20th century but its prime began after its refurbishment in 1937. During the war it was immensely popular. The films were often American or British “morale boosters” and the double seats at the back were very popular with courting couples.

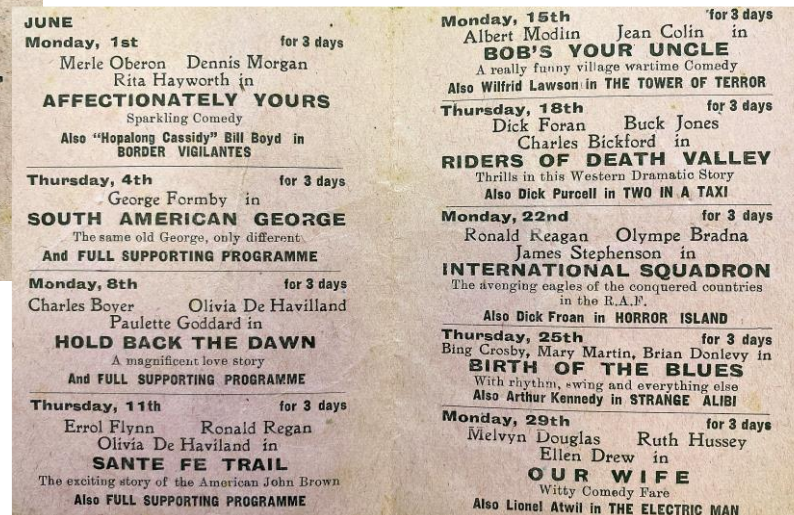
Other businesses also profited from the popularity of the cinema. The landlord of The Norfolk Hero (now The Station) charged for putting cycles in his shed. The trouble was that if you went early to get a good seat, you had to wait for 50 bikes on top of yours to be removed at the end of the film.

A bus service (styled “chicken crates” after the wooden slatted seats) brought customers in from the villages but if the film was popular it was often full, so out had to come the cycle.

The Police daybooks for the Sporle and North Pickenham show a constant report of stolen bicycles – most of which could be found in North Pickenham as the airmen “borrowed” them to ride from Swaffham back to camp.



Swaffham Heritage: Stibbon Collection



The cinema shortly before demolition in 1995. After the cinema closed in 1964 it became a confectionary factory and a factory for the catering trade.

Plane crashes



Rod remembers a USAAF plane crash

Jack remembers that there were at least four plane crashes in Swaffham.

One near Swaffham Raceway.

One at Carol House. See newspaper report

One at the Splashes.

One on Lynn Road near what is now the caravan site.

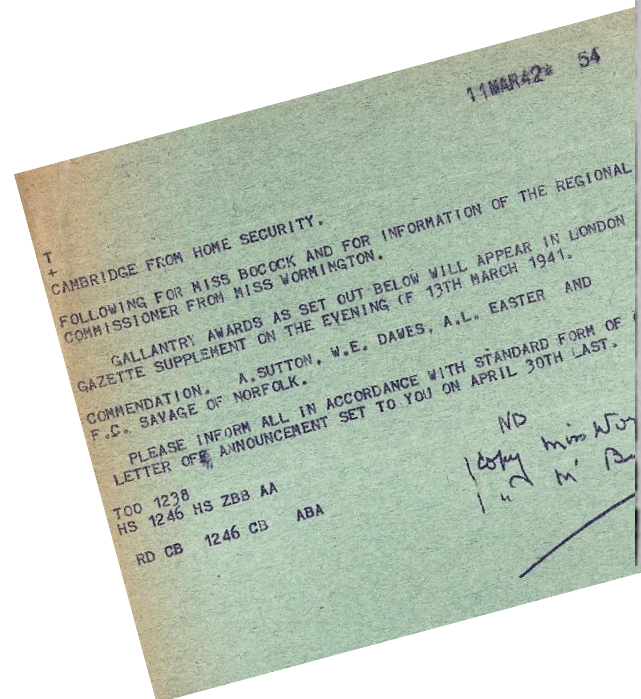
Ash Close was machine-gunned.



Herbert recalls a plane crash on Weasenham Farm land near the Splashes
Does anyone know where the tree was planted so that we can honour the pilot?

On 2nd tour to Pelygards to the scene of an aeroplane crash, and remained at the place accompanied by P. B. 169 Bankham until relieved by a party of U.S.A. airmen from Shipdam.

Police Journal Sporle and North Pickenham beat 1944



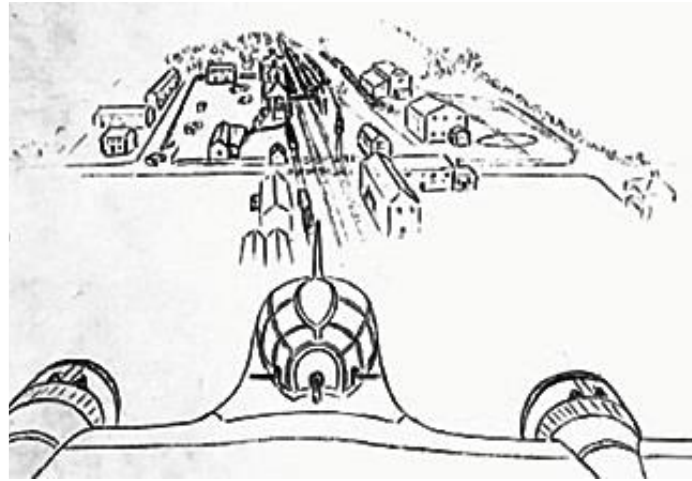
Mr. Frank Charles Savage, 35 King-st., Swaffham, has been officially commended for bravery in rescuing an airman from a blazing aircraft, with three other men, William Edward Daves, farm labourer, Castleacre, Andrew Leonard Easter, agricultural engineer, Colkirk, and Albert Sutton, farm labourer, Great Cressingham. The 'plane burst into flames on crashing and all four men, who were working in the vicinity, ran to help the airmen. When the men reached the 'plane there was a danger of the petrol tanks exploding, but disregarding their own safety they succeeded in reaching an injured airman (the rear gunner) and dragged him clear of the burning wreckage. The men received minor burns. The airman died before reaching hospital. Savage is employed by the Swaffham urban council as sewage works attendant.

Lynn Advertiser - Friday 20 March 1942

Swaffham was bombed during the war.

On Monday 6 January 1941, as men from the Norfolk Regiment were loading equipment on to a train in the railway station goods yard, ten bombs were dropped from a German Dornier plane, killing six soldiers and wounding three. The station master, Mr Coker, was wounded on the shoulder.

Rod remembers that seven bombs exploded: three on the railway embankment, one in the goods yard and three in adjoining fields. Three did not explode. Of these, one landed on the ramp of the platform to Lynn, one on the railway embankment on the Lynn side and one at the rear of the petrol station 10 yards away from the main Lynn road.



One resident had just finished at the railway station unloading salt for Masons on Lynn Road when a plane came in from the Sporle end flying very low along the railway line. "It was misty, I suppose that's why it was so low".

The Royal Observer Corps post was in Bear Lane opposite the station. Three guards with Bren guns had been alerted to the approach and managed to fire a few shots each before their guns jammed. Shots were also fired from the roof of the Drill Hall in Sporle Road, but the plane escaped.

Stella was at home and had to fetch the milk from the farm. On the way back she heard the German plane starting to machine-gun. She jumped into the hedge, frightened for her life, until it was quiet. When she climbed out her milk can was empty.

A dummy airfield was built on land beside Brandon Road on South Pickenham estate, and this suffered several attacks.

Several landmines were laid around Swaffham, at Thorns farm and Palgrave farm, just off the Norwich Road at Petyguards.

Rod recalls the number of bombs dropped on Swaffham.



*Saw an object resembling a small bomb
at Petygards wood. Reported the matter to
Swaffham Police Sen. On 2nd tour gave
attention to the black-out*

Police Journal. Sporle and North Pickenham beat 1944

The Americans arrived at North Pickenham in April 1944 and stayed until July 1945

Jack remembers the Afro-American soldiers.



Brian, who lived as a child in North Pickenham, remembers the American servicemen in the village. There were several camps and a hospital. On Houghton Lane were some old allotments where the Americans used to dump their rubbish. The children would often scavenge for “treasures”.

Two American couples lived in his house together with a Jewish evacuee lady from London. His mother took in washing from the Americans to earn some extra money. There was no running water in the house, just the village pump, and no electricity, just a huge brick copper in the scullery which had to be lit to heat the water.



The Christmas parties for the Swaffham and Pickenham schoolchildren are well remembered by Barbara and Rod.



REUNION: American former members of the 491st Bomb Group and their Norfolk friends meet again at the Blue Lion, North Pickenham.

In 1997 a group of veterans from the USAAF 491st Bomb group revisited North Pickenham. It was a bitter-sweet occasion as they remembered lost colleagues and refound old friends.

Courtesy EDP 5 May 1997



Di Wells, or Tractor Annie as she was known to the troops, was there to greet them. As a 20 year old she lived and worked on her father's farm in the middle of the airfield and became the soldiers' pin-up girl.

“My mother always left the farmhouse door open for them,” she recalled, “and we shared their troubles, especially when their mates were shot down or injured.”

Services



Members of Swaffham A.R.P. Report and Control Centre: Back row (left to right), Miss R. Blowers, Mrs. M. Head, Mr. G. Morris, Mr. E. Goodrum (Messenger), Mr. W. B. Rix, Mr. E. A. Curtis, Mrs. H. Tuttle, Miss M. Manning. Second row, Mrs. W. Salter, Miss I. Cooper, Miss J. Bayes, Mrs. E. Dodds, Mrs. E. Miller, Miss H. Goodrum, Miss N. E. Rix, Mrs. M. E. Coe, Mrs. D. M. Bone, Miss K. Hughes, Mrs. M. Bowman. Front row, Mrs. M. Monk, Mrs. J. Kiernan, Miss D. Mason, Mrs. V. F. Flack (Duty Officer), Mr. P. A. Cooper (Duty Officer), Mr. J. H. Woolton (Local Sub-Controller), Mrs. A. C. Barker (Duty Officer), Mrs. E. Warren, Mrs. I. Stewart, Mr. W. Tuttle.

The ARP (Air Raid Precautions) was established in September 1939 at the Shire Hall. There were also posts at Crown yard, Barrett and Smith's garage, Lydney House Conservative club and Mr O Staines' house. Apart from two caretakers at the rescue depot all work was carried out by volunteers.

Swaffham fire engine ca 1942



The LDV (local defence volunteers), formed in May 1940, was open to men not in military service between the ages of 7 and 65 to join and be trained in their spare time to defend their country. They were promised uniforms and weapons, although at first all they got were armbands and broom handles. Women were not permitted to join. The name was later changed from LDV to become the Home Guard.



During the war the mobile ambulance unit HQ was at Holland House Farm on Westacre Road. The ambulance is possibly a Talbot. Photo dates from about 1939/40. The service was run by ladies trained as nurses and worked in conjunction with the ambulance depot. Later the ambulance depot amalgamated with the Rescue party depot in Theatre Street together with the Decontamination depot.

Fire watching was also carried out on a voluntary basis until 1942 when it was discontinued, and the Auxiliary Fire Service served on a part-time basis.

Bits and Pieces

"Dirty Dick's café later became The Little Chef café on the Downham Market roundabout. There was a flat roof containing a window on which was painted an arrow showing the way to Marham. It was lit up at night when the bombers were returning home from a bombing raid on Germany - not to show the airmen home but to direct the German bombers to the target area."

"... The swarm of rats coming into Swaffham, Night time round the NAAFI (Assembly Rooms) was rather like a movie as they came in from the country. Normally they were round the farms but with farms not producing the same sort of food they came to town. Naturally we had spare food and waste out the back and they found it. We had to have the ratcatcher to come and clear them and he caught so many that he laid them all out in a row on the pavement."

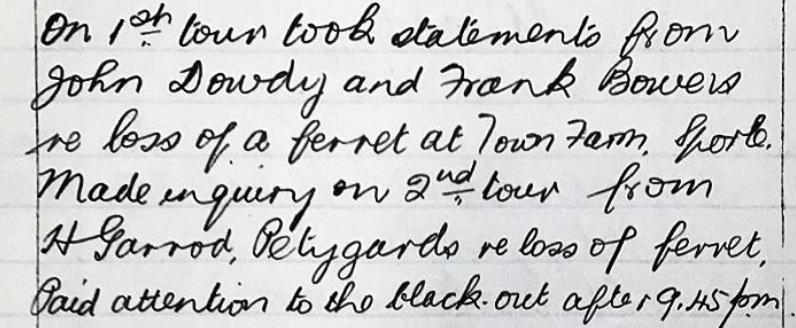
"At weekends we cycled around the area to locations where bombs had fallen and my collection of shrapnel which I carefully marked with the date and place of discovery, extended to a second shoe-box. ... I recall a Wellington crash landing in the railway cutting near the Downham Road turning and going to see it. We were amazed at the skill of the pilot in lodging the wings between the embankment enabling the crew to drop out underneath onto the railway line"

Frederick heard a broadcast by Lord Haw-Haw saying what damage had been done to Marham when, in fact, the attack had been on one of the dummy airfields nearby. He remembers the dummy airfields being lit up after our own aircraft had passed safely, resulting in the Germans bombing heathland and not proper airfields.

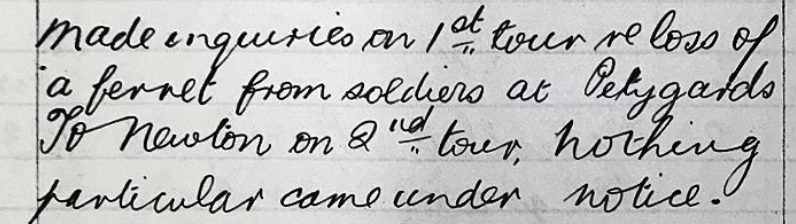
The policeman's lot on the Sporle and North Pickenham beat seems to have been mostly about poaching, bicycles, blackouts, driving or cycling with or without lights, swine fever, dipping sheep and the occasional car crash, plane crash and accidental death. This ferret story ran and ran.

"Lord Haw Haw (William Joyce) often visited Swaffham before the war to see a friend who lived in a flat over Wilson's butcher's shop in Station Street. He taught at Swaffham Grammar School and organised local people to distribute Fascist propaganda outside the cinema etc. ."

"I left school to join the then National Provincial Bank next to Boots. Like Barclays across the road we paid out wages to the various military units. One particular American unit drew its Imprest from us and the Paymaster was always escorted by two "snowballs" (military policemen) who would stand in the doorway of the bank and allow no customers in whilst their transactions were being effected. Their sub-machine guns were fully loaded."



On 1st tour took statements from John Dowdy and Frank Bowers re loss of a ferret at Town Farm, Sporle. Made inquiry on 2nd tour from H Garrod, Petygards re loss of ferret. Paid attention to the black-out after 9.45 pm.



Made inquiries on 1st tour re loss of a ferret from soldiers at Petygards To Newton on 2nd tour, nothing particular came under notice.

Scouts and Guides' war efforts – Waste paper collecting

War Declared. Many senior scouts serving in H. M. Forces.

Owing to Black-Out Cubbing temporarily suspended. It is hoped that Cubs & available Scouts will undertake Waste Paper Collection, at request of Paper Control Board. A meeting is to be held on Thurs., Nov 2nd to discuss scheme. Leaflets have been printed.

Cub notes 1939

During 1940 the Swaffham Cubs collected and sorted about 1 ½ tons of waste paper and by 1943 had collected 14 ½ tons and received £47 18sh 3d.

The Military commandeered their Headquarters and so their possessions were transferred to the Vicarage stables. Meetings had to discontinue but paper collecting carried on.

Due to lack of leadership the cubs were disbanded but paper collecting continued under the leadership of the Guides' leader, Miss Backhouse. The money received went to various causes such as "Comforts for Troops" and the Christmas Parcels Fund for serving Swaffham men and women.

THE PAPER CONTROL BOARD
HAS AUTHORISED
THE COLLECTION of WASTE PAPER
BY
BOY SCOUTS

As the War proceeds, there will be a shortage of wood pulp, and waste paper will be extremely valuable as the most useful substitute

YOUR WASTE PAPER IS WANTED

NEWSPAPERS
PERIODICALS
MAGAZINES
BOOKS

WRAPPING PAPERS
(NOT GREASEPROOFS)
CARDBOARD &
CARTONS etc.

SCOUTS WILL COLLECT if you send word to:-

Mr. A. J. BREWSTER

MARKET PLACE,
SWAFFHAM, NORFOLK.

STACY & SON, LTD., LONDON, W.1.



Barbara remembers going camping with the guides at Southacre

Returning PoWs

SOME OF SWAFFHAM'S LIBERATED PRISONERS-OF-WAR



Twenty-two of Swaffham's returned prisoners-of-war. Back row (left to right): Sgt. H. Stoner, Pte. D. Williams, Pte. H. Hudson, Guardsman P. Head, L/Cpl. C. Cooper, Cpl. E. Thompson, Pte. H. Tufts.

Middle row: Pte. C. Lock, Sgt. R. Stibbon, Gnr. E. Barrett, L/Cpl. B. Holman, Pte. F. E. Panks, Pte. F. Lake, Pte. R. Drew, Sgt. V. Shingfield.

Front row: Pte. W. Bone, Pte. S. Bennington, Bdr. W. Perkins, Capt. F. Hearn, L/Cpl. R. Ward, Sgt. C. Perkins, Gnr. L. Cornwall.

Lynn News & Advertiser photograph.

Unknown date



The last PoW home from Germany
Albert Muffett

Before being sent overseas Albert was a saxophone player in the band of the Royal Norfolk Regiment. In the war he was a stretcher bearer and was captured in Germany crossing the river Elbe.

Can anyone fill in any more details?

Captain Hearn said "liberated men found that at first they were unable to concentrate and were "thick in the head, unable to act upon their own or grasp details."

On prison conditions he said "Many of the parcels sent from home never arrived, but the Red Cross parcels we did get saved us from starvation.

The camps were always heavily guarded and there was no possibility of escape. We spent our time on camp duties, reading and playing cards.

The men refused to grow vegetables as we were told we would only be allowed to retain half the crop."



One of many Swaffham and District Far East Asian Prisoners of War
See the [FEPOW tab](#) on the Swaffham Heritage website

Swaffham Footballers

1031-32 season. Swaffham United Football Club. Winners of Divisions A and B of the Dereham District League; Swaffham Hospital Cup; Wilson Peace Cup and Dereham Benevolent Cup.

Most of these young men who had such a successful year in the 1931-32 season would, within seven or so years, be serving their country at war.

During the war it was the turn of the Home Guard team – with mixed fortune.

**The Home Guard football team
on Saturday played with 10 men
against Swaffham Grammar
School and lost 7-2.**

November 1942

SWAFFHAM
A Home Guard football team
entertained a military team at
Swaffham on Sunday and won
5-2

May 1943

SWAFFHAM UNITED FOOTBALL CLUB
(1931-32)
WINNERS: DEREHAM and DISTRICT LEAGUE DIV. "A" AND "B", SWAFFHAM HOSPITAL CUP,
WILSON PEACE CUP, AND DEREHAM BENEVOLENT CUP



Back Row - G. ALLEN, S. BLOCKWELL, A. ROBINSON, R. HENDRIE, C. GREEN, W. CHAPMAN
CENTRE: A. MANN (SEC.), C. WARD (ASST. SEC.), F. YOUNG, F. WHITE, C. JENNINGS (CHAIRMAN), W. HUBBARD, C. HOBBS,
F. KNOCK (COM.), J. HEAD (TRAINER)
Sitting: A. PRECIOUS, J. TUTTLE, R. ROWE, R. DICKERSON (VICE-CAPT.), G. PAGE, ESQ. (PRESIDENT), L. MANNING (CAPT. RES.),
S. YOUNGS, R. YOUNGS, F. YEMANS.

From the girls' school logbook, Whitecross Road

1939

Oct 5th the dentist examined all the children present. 116, also the 21 evacuees

1940

Oct 17th Closed at noon owing to school being used for inspection of evacuees.

Nov 1st Closed for evacuees

Nov. 25th Received from Ashill School 14 tables & 28 chairs L.C.C. property.

1941

Mar 7th Raid warning at 11 am – lasting until 4.10 pm - very few children at school.

Mar 12th Raid warning on at 9 am Registers marked at 9.30 am.

July 22nd After a critical report on Religious Instruction by the Rev. Hughes, the Head Teacher added a note "Owing to the large classes in the school, due to wartime evacuation, the children were talked to generally on religion & not questioned in detail upon the syllabus of work covered during the year. Thus the examiner's remarks seem to convey a wrong impression."

1942

Feb 20th School closed owing to lack of fuel.

25th November Nurse examined all children present for dirty heads & sore throats

26th November Mrs Easter, a civil defence worker, lectured on poison gases

1943

February 18th School closed, no coal.

May 28th Twenty girls exempted from school in order to pick peas at Carol House Farm.

June 6th pea picking again today.

June 9th Children warned again about touching strange objects, which might be explosives.

June 26th Twenty girls went to Hill Farm, Dunham for fruit picking for one day.

1944

January 12th Temporary cleaner commenced work.

January 27th School closed – no coal.

January 28th School closed – no coal,

January 31 Opened school, 10 cwts. of coal delivered.

Oct 26th An LCC teacher reported here at 9 am, but only to announce that she was returning to London, as she was not satisfied with her billet.

Dec 14th two LCC assistants were to start but both postponed and then cancelled.

1945

Jan 25th LCC assistant starts work today. (Returned to London on 28th March)

May 8th & 9th School closed for Victory in Europe.

Oct 25th and 26th October School closing for VJ holidays.

And a memory from Hamond's – the boys' grammar school (The girls' grammar school was in Dereham)

"Town boys no longer had to return between 6 and 7.30 to do our prep. We also found that trenches had been dug around the perimeter of the school playing field and we all had to provide ourselves with a sack, duly painted with camouflage colours, which we took with us when using the played. We never found out what we should do in the event of an enemy appearing whilst we were being marched to or from the field."

A few other people known in Swaffham for their experiences in wartime

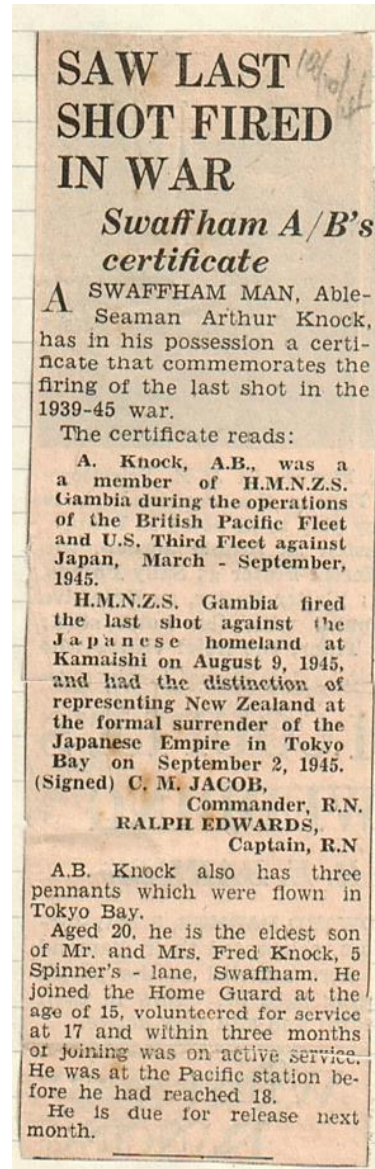


The cyclist Evelyn Helsen/Hamilton amazed the public in 1938 by cycling 10,000 miles in 100 days. During the war she joined the French Resistance and reputedly transported Resistance members across Paris on a tandem. Her bike shop in London became the headquarters of the Resistance military spy network. She was awarded the Cross of Lorraine by the French government for her resistance work. At some time she retired to Swaffham and for many years headed the parade of WWII veterans each Remembrance service.



John talks about Evelyn

Arthur Knock



Unknown newspaper 10/10/1946

Bernard (Dick) Thompson



Dick was born and died in Swaffham. He enlisted in 1938 with the Royal Artillery and spent most of the war fighting and serving under Wingate and Mountbatten in Burma, where he was severely wounded. Post war he worked for Swaffham Motors.

He represents here those men of Swaffham who were awarded the Burma Star - the men who fought through thousands of miles of intractable, malaria-ridden jungle, doggedly always ploughing on. There are several other local soldiers who fought in Burma, but so far Dick is the only one to have surfaced.

We would be grateful to know of any others.

Valentine Barker

A Londoner, Valentine Holland Barker completed his medical studies after service in WWI and became a GP in Swaffham in 1935. In WW2 he served with the Army Medical Corps and ran one of the most luxurious ambulance trains employed on the European front, carrying around 10,000 wounded men.

He would "acquire" cigarettes, drinks, and many other items from ships and depots for his wounded soldiers. He took the train right up to the front line, often straddled by bombs, and back, but he always got through with the injured. It was his proud boast that he never lost a man in his train.



Dr Barker carves the turkey on Christmas Day in the Cottage Hospital – a tradition at the time.

He retired from his Swaffham general practice in 1967 but continued to work with the British Legion which he first joined in 1925.

In 1974 the new scheme of flats in Swaffham, purpose built for ex-servicemen, was named Valentine Barker Court in his honour.

VE Day. Fireworks and Bonfires at Swaffham

Swaffham was awakened on VE-Day by the ringing and firing of the church bells.

In the afternoon team of the Royal Tank Regiment played football against a town team. The soldiers won 6-3. Then the military held a free dance in the Drill Hall. Dancing took place on Market-hill and the Town Band entertained. On the following Sunday a special service and parade took place in the parish church and Marketplace.

The welcome Home Fund was a cash gift to all returning servicemen agreed by a committee formed in April 1945. They felt that a direct gift was better than a permanent marker of the occasion.

(Information from Lynn News April, May 1945)

Colin lived on Cley Road. 8 May 1945 was his seventh birthday and he woke up to the sound of church bells ringing. "Strange" he thought—"most unusual in the middle of the week".. He recalls:



The people milled around all day. There was a sense of rejoicing as people talked to the soldiers who would be coming home; those still away, those who had returned, those still prisoners, those in the Far East, those who were injured or had died. Then, quite spontaneously, in the evening -



Peter's most memorable moment was in the cinema with his mother in May 1945 when the film unexpectedly stopped and a hastily scratched slide replaced it declaring "It's Over!". He can't remember what the film was, only that the whole picture house erupted to shouting, kissing, cheering and hugging.

SWAFFHAM DEFIES VICTORY-DAY RAIN Carnival and fancy dress dance in Drill Hall

Rain had little effect on Swaffham's Victory celebrations; only the bonfire and firework display were postponed. The evening carnival was held in the Drill Hall instead of on the Market Hill.

Swaffham's real celebration took place a year later – in June 1946. There were sports, teas for young and old, a carnival and a dance, bonfire, fireworks costing £25 – and rain.

Lynn News 14/06/1946



Rod remembers VE Day



Barbara's thoughts on VE Day

Memories of VE Day and other things in other places.

Eileen in Haringay remembers the music and dancing



Mike in the Isle of Man going to school and learning to knit and that on VE Day his father, who was stationed there left for duty abroad.



Eileen from Haringay remembers the street parties



George from Tottenham remembers school in air raid times



Janet in a North London suburb remembers a special dress



Wendy from West Lynn remembers members of the USAAF from Wendling visiting her school and going to the base.



George was evacuated from Tottenham to a village in Devon. It was totally different!



Colin was evacuated to a small village because he had been bombed out. He remembers VE day and that the school gave him a book which had in it a note from the King.



In his Christmas Day speech in 1939 King George quoted from a 1908 poem by Minnie Haskins.

"I said to the man who stood at the Gate of the Year,
'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.'
And he replied, 'Go out into the darkness, and put your hand into the Hand of God.
That shall be better than light, and safer than a known way.'"

The poem became a watchword throughout the war.



Gwen Page remembers being recruited for Bletchley Park



Howard Clarke remembers being recruited



Ted Gulliver tells the story of keeping PLUTO (pipe line under the ocean) from freezing

Post-war action against nuclear missiles in Swaffham and North Pickenham

The late 1950s saw the beginning of the Cold War and the base at North Pickenham was deemed suitable to house Thor nuclear missiles.

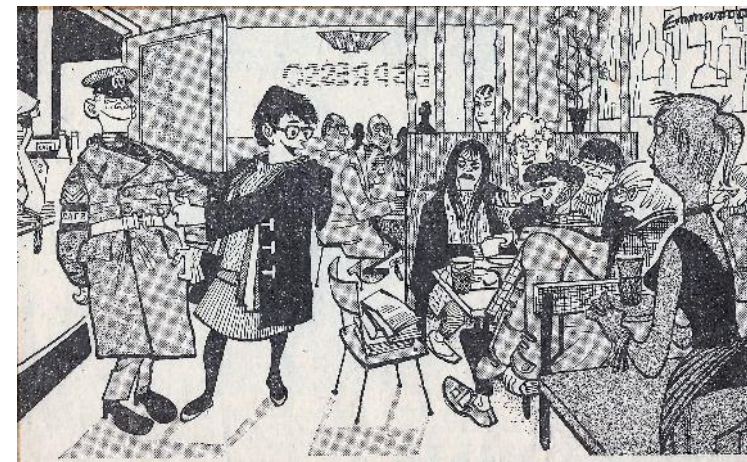
On 6 December 1958 the fledgling CND, then known as Direct Action against Nuclear Missiles launched its very first direct action in a march from Swaffham Marketplace to North Pickenham and broke into the base there, scrambling over barbed wire. Construction workers yelled abuse and flung men and women into a 6 inch mixture of mud and wet concrete. They were trampled on, pushed, kicked, trapped and had hoses turned on them.

Three days before Christmas they returned. Over 90 demonstrators marched from Swaffham to North Pickenham. 45 were arrested. Some were held over Christmas.

The demonstrators, very few of whom were local, were not particularly welcomed in Swaffham. Stallholders pelted them with fruit. Car owners revved their engines so that the speakers could not be heard.



The town clerk received a telephone call from a Moscow journalist asking questions about the demonstration.



“Actually, I’ve been stuck on Fred here ever since he threw me into a concrete mixer at Swaffham”, Dec.1958

Despite the protests the base became operational in 1959 and Thor began to take its place as part of the operational front line of the RAF. The base was stood down in October 1963

A last miscellany of memories.

Edwin – a printer – remembers that during WW2 times were difficult because of the shortage of raw materials.

Labels for the local canning factory were printed on the back of other labels and handbills.

Newspapers sometimes arrived late in the afternoons or not at all, if there had been a heavy raid on London the night before.

Edwin often had to go to Swaffham railway station to collect the newspapers. This was not an easy task because the guard would start throwing the bundles out of the train at Westacre bridge and didn't stop until after the train pulled out of the station. If the parcels burst, there were papers strewn all along the track and many bundles ended up on the embankment at Northwell pool.

Since customers of shops such as the grocers or at fish and chips shops had to supply their own wrapping paper newspapers were essential!

Any unsold papers were sold to the YMCA and the NAAFI and swapped for bars of chocolate.

Pipes were laid down Castleacre Road and by Manor farm by the hedges, connected to tanks which could be set alight in the event of invasion.

There were also pipes set in roads into which lengths of railway line would be inserted vertically to slow down invading troops.

Trenches were dug across fields and around the grammar school field to prevent planes landing.

Wellington bombers made out of plywood were placed on the dummy airfields, together with Nissen huts.

Cynthia remembers that her father was in the Royal Observer Corps. One evening when he was on duty a parachute came down near our house on Castleacre road. He rushed home fearing it was a German, and found a very frightened young English airman sitting on a chair in the hall drinking tea with Sue and I watching from the top of the stairs. For many years after that there was a Brooke Bond tea stamp stuck under the chair he had sat on.

A labourer on a Westacre farm remembers that he wasn't allowed to sign up for the army because he was needed on the farms. Instead, he joined the Home Guard and took a night a week on duty around Tumbler Hill on watch out for anything was happening anywhere around the area. They could often see bombs being dropped in the distance around Peterborough or Norwich.



Nothing is known about the provenance of this photograph. Experts asked have commented that there are no WWII medals present but ages and medal groups suggest Boer War and the clothing and hats say late 20s. This might suggest the foundation of the Swaffham British Legion in June 1928 – but there was only a membership of 50 at the time, including at least one woman. However, most are wearing a lapel badge. Or perhaps it is King George V's Silver Jubilee in 1935 which included a parade? We think the photograph was taken outside the Assembly Rooms. Newspaper reports are silent.

Can anyone help? Can you recognise anyone?

Sources

The interviews

The known interviewees

| | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Barbara Clarke | Peter Mills | Ted Gulliver |
| Reg Stibbons | Herbert Rutland * | Howard Clarke |
| Colin Dickerson | Mr Applegate | Cynthia Dudley * |
| Toni Groom | Brian Potter | Gladys Kendle |
| George Langridge * | Tom Allard | Gwyneth Frost |
| Colin Abbiss * | Mrs Thompson * | Frederick Greef |
| Janet Abbiss * | Mike Scott * | John Webster |
| Sir Samuel Roberts * | Diane Moulton | Wendy Atkinson * |
| Judy Ison | Dorothy Leonard | Gwen Page |
| Jack Knock | Mr P Hey | Eileen Melton * |
| Mike Staines | Mr Austin | Mr Turvey |
| Ruth Rix | Pauline Spoor | Edwin Coe |
| Stella Boardman | Rupert Besley | Mr RE Chilvers |

Swaffham Heritage Archives

Swaffham at War
Living Memories Project 2010-2012
Military Remembrance Trail 2020
Stibbons Collection
Max Mueller Collection
Images Collection
Police Journal; Sporle and North Pickenham Beat
Tuttle newspaper collection 1940-1941
World War II document boxes

British Newspaper Archive

The known interviewers

Trudy Golden *
Rhona Patterson *
Sian Hogarth
Judith Coker *
Mark Taylor
Michael Connors

With grateful thanks to the
museum volunteers for their
help, and to all who have made
this archive possible.

* Denotes those who took part in the 2020 HLF funded Military
Remembrance Trail project before lockdown.

2021



Swaffham Heritage@gmail.com



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