Memories of Wartime East Meon

By Residents Then and Now

The following accounts are the results of interviews conducted by Johnny Culley in the early part of 1995. The individuals were chosen because not only were they all East Meon residents at the time of being interviews, but they also called East Meon their home during World War II. Some people who fell into this category chose not to be involved and some, unfortunately, were never approached as the project ran out of time. Each individual that was included was interviewed on one or more occasions and their accounts pieced together from the notes taken. The accounts were then taken back to the interviewees for their consideration and, if the authors felt uneasy with details of the accounts, alterations were made as deemed fit. The subsequent versions were again shown to the interviewees to check that all was now satisfactory. In May 1995, at the East Meon Country Fair, the accounts were displayed, along with personal artefacts and the photographs, as part of an exhibition marking the 50th anniversary of V-E Day. Johnny Culley would like to thank all of the individuals for admitting such an intrusion and for giving such honest and fascinating insights.

The photos of contributors are taken from pictures taken at the V-E and V-J Day celebrations in East Meon

Arthur Newbury

Arthur Newbury was born in 1928 at Ladysmith, Coombe; his mother's father was a carter for the Blackmans. Arthur was the youngest of six boys, though he believes his mother had three girls who all died. During the wary, the family lived at Kilbourne house in Chapel Street. His father, Harry, was a shoemaker and his mother, Louisa, assisted with the laying out and bringing into the world of villagers at opposite ends of their lives. Arthur married Sheila Nevile in 1961 and today lives in Glenthorne Meadow.

We had cadet force and a Home Guard , and, of course, the fire service. They had a little round sort of fire station and I can remember Jesse Box, old Teddy Butler and various names.

I remember when they started the Home Guard. They used to call it the Defence Volunteers and they had a company, it was mostly all those that were doing farm work and jobs that were exempted form service – even the vicar was in the Home Guard! The Collyers, Frank ran the Home Guard and the son, Sid, he ran the Cadets. The son went on to be in the Rifle Brigade stationed in Winchester, was it? They were actually the start of the forces in East Meon. Four of my brothers were in the Home Guard and Charlie was in the RAF. In those days it wasn't 303's, it was catapults and pitchforks and whatever they could get their hands on to defend themselves. They eventually did have rifles and it really smartened the thing up.

I was a runner – Company Cadet messenger boy. We'd just do training; the Home Guard used to go out and guard tunnels – the Meon Valley Railway – one at Privett and another on the A272 to Winchester, and of course the viaduct at West Meon.

The army used to organise stunts – we would sort of defend and they would attach! Before the stunts started, we used to parade outside where the Spar shop is now. And what did the army do – I expect they thought "Let's show these bloody country wallies up!" – they used to come through in a 15 cwt truck throwing a couple of crackers out! I remember saying, "That's it, sir, we're dead!"

They used to have an annual concert; they put on quite a show. My brother Lofty, he was a sergeant, he used to write monologues about several of the officers and the privates and perform then on stage.

They used to have sixpenny hop dances at the village with a band - the Cossacks Dance Band. There used to be a George Blackman on the drums and a Bill Blackman on the accordion – both brothers. And one came from Chawton, I think, and he was the piano player. Rosie Collyer was a fantastic singer and she used to sing with the band.

We had cinema shows and all in the old village hall and we used to see the news. You couldn't get in the Petersfield picture house, the Savoy, on a Saturday morning unless you took a bundle of newspapers. We used to save rags, silver milk tops, lots of things.

I used to work in the shop opposite the Izaak Walton. That was called Parson's Stores. I was just an ordinary shop assistant – school-leaving age was fourteen, wasn't it? I think I got twelve and six a week. We had yellowy ration books. The ration books consisted of points: sweet coupons and points for tinned beans, tinned fruit and stuff, two ounces of butter, four ounces of margarine, I'm not so sure about sugar – two pounds of sugar a month or a week. Cooking fat and biscuits were on points as well.

They'd cut the points out – the points were monthly. Some of them used to tick it up and settle ad the end of the week. If we had some biscuits or tomatoes and they thought they'd get some, they'd pay up straight away!

One of my jobs was to cut half a pound of butter into four two-ounce blocks. It was nearly impossible to do, especially the salted butter – you had to be dead accurate. If it didn't turn the scales, you could be liable. Sometimes I had to get a little butter to spread it on top to turn the scale! We used to grind coffee in those days. I used to have to wind the bloody handle, that was another of my jobs. You had to be very careful if someone got half a point of tomatoes and someone else didn't! I can remember Mrs Parsons coming out and apologising to one lady!

I worked there until the old man called me in the office. "You've had a birthday, Arthur," he said, but instead of giving me a rise, he said I ad more to pay on my card! I jacked it in and went up to Leydene Gardens (Mercury by then). I saw the King – King George VI – the Queen Mother's husband. I can remember leaving the gardens to watch for the King. Everything was smartened up – get the toothpaste out and paint eh white posts! We stood by the sentry box and the sentry present arms to the King. The King saw us – there were several gardeners about – but he didn't say "Hello, Arthur!"

Then I worked for the War Agriculture Pest Department. It wasn't the best of jobs but it was more money - £1.18s 6d a week. It was all to do with the war – keeping the pests down so that we could produce more food for the country. You had to trap rabbits, wire rabbits and ferret rabbits. You'd gas if you had to if they were in a hedgerow of something. You could get money for them. I used to have about seven or eight rabbit meals a month. Mum would make a rabbit stew, rabbit tart, rabbit something else! Even the cat would go out and bring a rabbit home for dinner in those days!

Every house used to build their own air raid shelter. They used to dig a big deep hole with bedspreads and galvanised iron over the top with a couple of struts to hold it up. Luckily enough, we didn't have any really heavy bombings! Our air raid shelter used to be up the garden on the right hand side and the toilet next door.

We had the evacuees out from Portsmouth. We had a complete family at one time – the Wards family. Super people. He used to run the snooker club down in Portsmouth. There was mother and father and sometimes the two daughters. They came out of Portsmouth to get away from the bombings. They used to say "Its' murder down there!" They went back occasionally, they had their work down there, their way of life took them back. They had a room upstairs and a room downstairs. I think they used to pay Mum something. We used to blacken out windows with really old dark blankets and knobs of blue. Dad used to mix it up and pint it on the glass – I don't think they still sell it.

One night there was an air raid and we all had to go into the shelter, the Wards and all, and we all got into the shelter and Mrs Ward, quite a large lady, couldn't make the passageway into the air raid shelter because the steps weren't wide

enough. She had to stand where she bloody got! I think we tried to get her in further, and we apologised but we hadn't built it with her in mind!

You were far enough to be safe. It was exciting but frightening. It was quite a pretty sight from this angle: searchlights over the hill going all over the place, tracers (bullets with a flashlight with them), when they fired them big shells you'd see a burst of smoke in the sky and they'd drop parachutes with a flare to light up the target. It must have been hair-raising for them.

After the war we went down to Portsmouth. It looked three parts of a town – big holes where cellars had been, heaps of rubble, every street more or less.

We knew what it was like the night we had the little raid on East Meon. They must have mistook East Meon for Mercury. We went up Temple Lane, that's where the Newbury family went. You've seen how deep it was – you couldn't find a better air raid shelter. They dropped a bomb about fifty yards from the road in the vineyard. Another bomb was dropped just behind those five cottages in Frogmore and the other was dropped on the cricket field. It was a straight line – three bombs. You just saw these big flashes. Every time a bomb exploded, the sky would light up. Goodness knows how many bombs there were. Mum would say, "Tuck your little face into the bank, ducky." You were dead scared!

The very next day, there were unexploded time bombs all over the place. There was one at Drayton Mill where the Aburrows, the wheelwrights of East Meon, lived. I remember this dear old lady – she was bedridden – had to be evacuated and my father had to carry her upstairs because she stayed with us for several nights. Up on the old Winchester Hill we'd go up and find the incendiary bombs; there were some that didn't go off it they'd gone into the soft grass or bushes. If you saw a crater you daren't go near them because it might be an unexploded bomb.

We used to listen to the news and sort of had a feeling it was coming on the day. But it's a bit like everything else, it's a bit surprising. Churchill gave a speech that particular day. I can remember the big tea party. Dad must have been around somewhere; anything like that, Harry Newbury was there!

I can remember old Reg Files coming back from the war on the old-fashioned bus and everybody waiting for him. He was terribly thin - he'd been through a lot. I worked with him for ten years and he never mentioned anything to me.

Charlie Dowlen

Charles Dowlen was the third of seven children. He was born in Henfield, Sussex, in 1913 at a house called 'Cannons'. When people asked him where he was born he used to say that he wasn't born, he was fired! His father and uncle were born there before him. The family moved to Elsted, Sussex and then to South Farm, East MEon in 1921. His father, Arthur, had been in the army in World War I and was head cowman at South Farm. Charlie married his cousin, Bessie Catherine Dowlen, whom he had known all his life. He says he was too shy before that!

I was born in 1913; that made me 26 at the beginning of the war. I was sitting at home with the wireless. I can remember Chamberlain saying that talks with the Germans had fallen through and war had been declared. Bit of a shock really, wasn't it. After all, we went through that war years before.

I was a cowman up at Atkinson's, South Farm. I was up there all the time, 31 years all together. We were all a family together. None of the family were married - we were all living at home at the time, five brothers and a sister. I was second eldest. I had three brothers working on the farm, one on a separate farm – my sister was crippled.

Actually, we were asked to join the Home Guard quite early, four of us in the Home Guard. We were told our own job was more important for food value really than being in the services. I was an ordinary private. We had our firing range up at Ockham Bottom. Duties used to start about seven about twice, three times a week. We used to go out on manoeuvres round the village. When we were guarding, we used to start around ten o'clock through to four in the morning.

I can remember being on duty one night. I heard a clatter so I halted him. No answer. So I halted him again. Still no answer. So I said "Halt, or I fire!" "It's all right, it's Berry with the tea!" "So I said "Pass, Berry and hot tea!".

Our captain was Captain Collyer – he was a veteran from World War One – a very nice man. He was the sort of chap who made you feel at home. I can remember once when we went up to Ockham Bottom to do some rifle practice. We used to take four or five rounds for the target and I was so high with my shots the captain said, "Very good shot – you've just shot a sailor up at Mercury!"

One Sunday morning, I should have been on duty and I went out ferreting and what happened but the Home Guard came round the corner of the place where I was ferreting! The Captain said that the next time we had Sunday duty we wouldn't go out ferreting!

I remember we went out for a march one day and some of them didn't know their left from their right and they shouted left turn and some of them turned right!

One night was had quite a few small bombs. There was three bombs dropped up the hill in Mercury. I got so that I never took much notice. You could hear it quite plain from Portsmouth and you could see searchlights and all.

Later on, we had a few of the old doodle-bugs. You always thought they were going to drop near you but they went on for miles. You would hear a pop-pop-pop-pop-pop-popping noise and then they'd cut out and they travelled on for such a distance and then they'd drop. They used to cut out suddenly.

A very good pal of mine – Freddy Phillips – was the son of one of the chaps that used to work at the farm. He was in the air force and he was lost on a flight. He was very young – in his early twenties I think, when he was killed. When he came home, we used to go for a drink in what's now the Izaak Walton. I can remember when his father told me he'd died. I just sat down and cried.

We had Canadians were stationed at Langrish House. Mainly, they were nice chaps. Some, if they had a drop of beer, were quite quarrelsome – I used to keep well clear!

On the farm, you were allowed certain privileges. You were allowed steak and kidney pie once a week – it had hair off the cattle itself and all in it sometimes – and you were allowed about two ounces of butter extra. Other than that, we didn't really get anything extra. Actually, we really didn't miss anything at all – we weren't starved. In actual fact, we were lucky on the farm. I can't see why we got extra.

I know when they were preparing for V-E Day. We were stationed down at West Meon guarding each end of the tunnel because I understand there was a meeting of ministers in a railway carriage at Droxford station. You could read between the lines. They were wrangling for a long time and I think, Hitler being the man he was, it had to come. He was a very determined man. They were giving an inkling that it would come for several days.

There was quite a celebration in the village – I think we all felt pretty happy; I had one or two pals that were in the army. We had a few pints in the pub and I remember walking up the river, blind drunk! I think they had a firework display up in the vineyard. It settled down to normal life quite quickly. Actually, I think East Meon was very lucky, except, of course, those few people that died.

Frances Childs

Frances was born in Warnford in 1922, the second eldest of the four children born to Samual and Rosina Symes. When she was 9, the family moved to Pond Cottage, East Meon. Frances married James Childs in 1942. She moved with her family to Lythe House and then to Frogmore. Just after the war, she and Jim moved to Hill Hampton Farm where he was cowman for 23 years.

It sounds so silly now. A friend and meself (Elsie Brewer) wanted to go and see her husband in Southampton. So we got the train to Portsmouth and then on to Southampton. We got there about ten to eleven. We were walking down and at eleven o'clock Churchill gave out that war had broken out. So we turned round and came back without seeing him- we thought that the bombs were going to start coming down!

I got married in 1942 when I was 20. I'd known him since I was 16 – Frederick really but nobody knew him only as Jim. He was called up so he went in the navy, in '40 I should imagine. He went to Collingwood, then he came home and we got married in the registry office in Petersfield – we know he was going abroad. The registry office was where Burley & Geach is now. It was late afternoon. My mum and his mum were witnesses. We just bussed in and back. Then we went to the New Inn and had a drink, the four of us. He didn't have any leave – that was a weekend – so he went straight back and then he got posted abroad. I didn't see him for three years or so. He was in Algiers, North Africa and all over. He was a stoker in the navy. At least once a fortnight I had a letter – he was a good writer, he liked writing. Sometimes they were a bit delayed. It annoys me when people say their husband's going away for six weeks and I think three years! Then, there was a war on and you couldn't do anything about it. You just wondered from day to day.

Everything was rationed – butter, cheese and milk. You had to get the coupons from Petersfield, I think. Mum was a good manager; she made up things, she was a pretty good cook. With a family you put it all together and made it go further. We had to mind things from week to week, careful how you got through the rations. You couldn't be rash. Of course, living on the farm, we had rabbits. We were always alright.

There were Canadians stationed here – and New Zealanders. They were all quite nice and friendly. There seemed a lot, but then a regiment does, doesn't it?

We would hear the siren at Petersfield and Dad used to make us go under the trees because it was doodle-bugs, wasn't it? We didn't take much notice during the day, but ignored them while we were outside.

We'd get up at half-past four because we had to get the cows up at five. Me and Dad did the milking. We had our own ones that we knew and milked – we had to milk them by hand, no machines. We had to put the milk churns out on the stand and we had to label them: how many gallons there were in the churns and the name of the farm. The lorry from Southeastern Farms, Petersfield would come about 7.15 to pick up the churns. Then we'd go in for breakfast. After breakfast, we used to go and pick the dung up and scrub the cow pens down and all the milk coolers and then get the horse and cart and take it down to the field. By the time we'd done that, it was dinner time. We'd go out and feed the calves and get the cows back in and milk them again for the milk to be stored overnight. We'd go out at eight o'clock, in the winter, and shake the litter up – otherwise, the cows would stay out.

Sometimes we'd go down to Portsmouth just to have a look. We used to walk to Buriton Crossroads and catch the bus to North End and be back in time to do the milking. We had identity cards. We had to carry them with us wherever we went – just in case you got hit I supposed.

I can't remember VE Day though we was all looking forward to it. We were living at Frogmore – Jim never did come to Lythe House.

He was invalided out in the end and he had to go to Scotland in hospital. Jim was home so the war was over for me. Jim got a job as a cowman for Stanley Jones at Hill Hampton Farm and we moved up there – there wasn't really room for us all in that little cottage in Frogmore!

Les Phillips

Les 'Ginger' Phillips was born in Alfriston, Sussex in 1928, the fourth of the five children of Frederick and Ida Phillips. After a spell in Bedhampton, the family moved to Ropley where Les finished his schooling. In 1942, six months later, the family moved to East Meon where Les's father took a job as cowman at South Farm. Les also got a job there at fourteen and worked there for the next 52 years. In the meantime, he married Edna Ayling and had three daughters.

My father was working for a fellow, Bridges the name was, over Ropley. A new fellow took over and he didn't like it. He saw an advert in the paper for South Farm and he took it.

It was Atkinson brothers when I started, George and Joe Atkinson. He [George] was a straight sort of bloke – if you'd done everything right, you'd get a bit of credit and if you'd done wrong you'd get a rocket. I'd never had a j ob. He came to me and asked if I'd like to do a job or two. I supposed I'd been with my father – I'd done a bit of tractor work, a bit of relief milking as well when I was a nipper. The first job I ever done, we had to go potato-picking and they didn't have a spinner or an elevator then, you just split the baulk with a horse and baulker, so the potatoes cam out either side of you, but you had to do a lot of fishing around for them. You'd get a wage but it wasn't very much!

Five or six horses they had when I started up there and three tractors – an International W Ford, and International 10-20 (that never had tyres on, they had spiked on that – if you wanted to take it on the road, you had a band you'd put on) and the third one was a David Brown. The International W Ford, five forward gears that had on it, which was unheard of in those days – at that time, if you had anything more than three in a car, it was remarkable! They had two carters they did a lot of the farm work then; you'd use them for hay and straw and hoeing the sugar beet and mangolds. They never done no ploughing; tractors was doing that when I got there. The work is so much easier now than it was when I started. Today they got all the modern things that we wouldn't have even dreamt of in those days.

They used to have the village hall opposite the Spar shot. We used to have a dance down there nearly every Saturday night – that was a marvellous place. There was people in the village that formed a little band, Cossacks they were called. They were marvellous entertainment – piano accordion, drums and piano. Anybody you went to in the village and ask about them you wouldn't get a bad word from anybody, they were brilliant. Yu could get the bus into Petersfield and go to the cinema – the buses used to be crowded in those days. They wouldn't be as far ahead as Pompey but the big films used to come there.

I used to go to Fratton Park to see Pompey not too often. Bus to Petersfield, then go down by train –that was before the days of the working class owning cars. Pompey was in the first division in those days, but the league wasn't going. They won the cup in '39 – 40, they beat Wolves 4-1 in the final and they certainly weren't expected to do either, they were real underdogs. With the services around, what they done – this happened general, not just at Pompey – they used to get guest stars from other clubs and they used to get quite a lot of top named down there. I think a lot of those footballers were in the services, weren't they? The most classiest name that I can remember playing there was Stan Morison, used to play for Blackpool, but they had others beside them.

I thought he [Hitler] was mad. Obviously he'd been preparing for that for a long time and he seemed funny; no-one knew that he was doing it. You'd see bits of him – they used to have a newsflash at the cinema to keep you up together, Belsen and that, though I can't honestly remember whether I saw them before or after the war. I don't know the people that were doing it could really do it. Pretty terrible, all of that.

When we was down at Bedhampton, a German plane nosedived down into the ground and quite a few village people ran down the road. We heard the noise – it was obvious they were in difficulties. When we got there, the German pilot and gunner just got out of the plane and gave themselves up. There wasn't no trouble or nothing; I think perhaps they might have been glad.

My two older brothers were in the RAF. They didn't talk about it – not to me. Very near the end of it, somebody higher up, they sent a message up to my mother – I suppose it was a thing you thought could happen any time. He [Fred] got all the way home and he only crashed then – that's probably what upset more than anything. He was going out with a girl, that time, in the WAAF and she came over and saw us to tell us how it happened; she was at the same station – she saw it happen. I suppose it was a period of time then that sort of thing was happening on quite a scale, all over the country.

He was a good brother to me. It was him that used to take me down to Fratton Park if ever I wanted to go and he was a damned good footballer. In fact, he won a cup-winner's medal when he played for a team at Pompey in the final at Fratton Park – outside right he played. Certainly the best footballer in the family.

In those days it was all sort of delayed, nothing instant. I know we heard old Churchill on the radio. Glad that is was all over.

Ivy Robinson

When the war started, Ivy Symes was ten years old and lived at Pond Cottage near Lower Farm with her mother, father, two sisters and a brother. She was the youngest of the four children. For two years her father managed the farm at Lythe House and the family lived there. Then, towards the end of the war, they moved to No 4 New Cottages at Frogmore. Ivy met and married Harry Robinson in 1946. Today she lives with her husband in Glenthorne Meadow.

We used to have a ration book – there were six of us. My ma used to go and get her little bit of marg and one egg each a week. The farm workers or heavy workers got an extra bit of cheese. When I worked on the farm, I used to get extra clothing coupons. Most people had their own pigsty – Mercury had their own pig farm! The old rabbits used to come in handy for food. Ninepence they'd cost to buy, four-pence for a skin – the fur trade used them for gloves. Mr Daughtrey, the rag and bone man, used to come out from Petersfield and my mum used to say, to and take the rabbit skins out to him. I used to hate that but he gave us some money for them.

Dad was a cowman and May, Frances and jack all worked on the farm. I left school at 14 and worked on Jones' farm. Mum used to help too; she'd go mangold-pulling, stone-picking and dung-spreading. Me and Gwen [Box] one day, we went hop-picking. My mum had this [identity disc] made in Petersfield because we'd helped to pick a few hops. She bought one for me and one for Gwen. I was sixteen when I lost this name-tag – I can remember the boy I was talking to when I lost it! I remember it was between the top stile and the middle stile by the school. Ron Norris found it with that thing [metal detector]. He took it home and he cleaned it and he said to May to look what he'd found and that she wouldn't believe it – she was as pleased as punch! It must be eleven years that I've had this ….. all those years!

We didn't have birthdays really. My birthday would come and go. People didn't have money for that sort of thing. I can't remember getting anything for my birthday.

We had a nice old village hall where Park Vista is now. It was a lovely old village hall. We had dances mostly with music from our East Meon men – George Blackman, Annie Blackman's husband and another man from Petersfield, three accordions. It was good for us kids.

I used to do National Savings. May used to give me some money for that. I used to take sixpence to the teacher every Monday and she gave us a stamp and we would put it into a book. When we had five shillings we used to put it all in the post office.

We used to have some evacuees into the village, going to our school with us. One stayed down Cross Keys – her name was Zena. We had the girls' toilet, a sort of long tunnel, made into an air raid shelter at the school. The boys used to chase the girls and I hated going into it. I can't remember going in for a proper air raid, just the practices. When you heard the air raid siren going in Petersfield my dad used to get us up and take us away from the house, down the lane a bit, and lie us down under the trees! I think it was silly, looking back. You could hear the shrapnel coming down. Instead of our Jack getting up, he'd stay in bed and he's still alive. I remember one day we got across the field and had left the candle on. So someone had to go back to blow it out!

I remember seeing barrage balloons over towards Pompey. We had a bomb dropped at Golden Road between the blacksmith and Frogmore and one on Park Hill. There was a searchlight at the bottom of Mercury Hill. I remember me and Gwen went up there one night and saw those lads and her mum came looking for us and told us off.

We had a fire hut at the bottom of Glenthorne, run by the NFS. The Home Guard used to meet there too. My brother Jack was in the Home Guard – just because you worked on the farm all day they didn't let you off. Everyone had identity cards. You had to show them on demand. You'd get into trouble if you didn't have one but it weren't very often they were wanted. We had a few Canadians come in – a few stopped at the Court House. They used to go in the pubs!

That night [VE Day] Frances and I went in the New Inn [now the Izaak Walton]. I wasn't allowed really to go in the pub – I was too young. We had a good old drink and celebration. We was all outside on the bridge and there was a lot of us there.

We thought things would start getting better. It took its time. Yu could put your lights on and there was no more getting up in the middle of the night. One of two extra things started coming in but by the time things got back, the cost went up and you couldn't afford anything, but it made a difference. Normal life crept up on you gradually it came back slowly.

That was a forgotten war that [the continuing war in the Far East]. Once it started to settle down, we forgot about the other war.

Ivy Cook

Ivy Paice was born on 19th October 1913. She grew up in warnford and West Meon before moving to Parsonage Cottage, Oxenbourne when she married Jack Cook in July 1940. Jack was working at Leydene Gardens when Ivy first met him but worked at Berry's Farm throughout the war.

He couldn't go in the army, he wasn't fit enough – I don't know what they call it, A3 wasn't it? But he was in the Home Guard. They used to go out on night duty, didn't they? They used to guard the viaduct and tunnels at West Meon. I had a brother-in-law in the fire service too.

We had a cellar in our house where we used to go down, not very often – we used to hide under the table or in a cupboard if it was not too bad. You know there was something on if the siren went. If it was very bad, if you could hear them overhead, we'd go down in the cellar. We have been out to watch them over Portsmouth – you could hear the bangs and the planes roaring. I can remember one very, very bad night when they hit Coventry at night-time. You knew something was up, you heard the planes. We didn't know where they were going but there were so many planes and air fighters went up and everything. The next day, Coventry had been hit and the cathedral had been destroyed. I can remember when there was a bomb dropped at Stroud and there was a landmine at Leydene – for years I had some of the cord off that landmine!

We had a boy in April-May 1941. The font was sandbagged. My son had to be christened in just a tin bowl which I've always felt a bit grieved over – he don't grieve! I never went to Portsmouth – I wouldn't take a child and I wouldn't leave my baby. When he began to toddle, he wasn't allowed to go out much unless Mum was with him! You had gas masks. We had instructions with them. We had special ones for the babies that fitted over the pram but we never had to use them. You always had it by you - it had to become second nature. You had clothes coupons. I'd got all my baby stuff before the worst of the war had come. I had the pram, I had everything. I was very lucky. I ordered all my stuff from Landports drapes store and it arrived in the daytime but in the night Landports was bombed! When it got that he was taking solids, he was getting his food rations same as everybody else.

We were luck 'cause we had a good garden, we grew everything, fruit and all. In those times, men liked gardening – times I suppose. Being a farmworker, Jack had extra rations, cheese and butter. You didn't starve but you wasn't overfed. Sugar, tea, everything was rationed. There was a black market, but I never had nothing off it – goodness knows where that came from. We did strike lucky with the rabbits – only a single-barrelled gun but he was a good shot. We used to get a delivery once a week from International Stores, Petersfield. If we wanted little

bits and pieces we used to cycle to Petersfield or come down to East Meon and we'd come down to church – you either cycled or walked, hoping the Jerries weren't overhead.

I often wondered what was happening to my brother because he was in Germany. We wrote as often as he could and said as much as he could. Some might be censored – they were darkened and then "censored" put over it. We couldn't read it – might have been possible for someone that was clever! As a matter of fact, he married a German girl who rescued him at her own risk. I lost my own dad through the first war. I had a horrible feeling about the Germans but when I met her, my attitude changed.

I remember we saw the gliders go over to France in preparation for D-Day. On the Portsmouth road, the troops were going through.

You more or less k now it was beginning to calm down a bit. It was on the wireless I think I heard it [V-E Day announcement]. I really thought that I should have my brother and other lads I know home. I expect we had a glass. We used to make our home-made wine from the berries off the trees. It was nice to hear the church bells ring which I am very fond of. In those days the comradeship was wonderful, I will say that. If anybody was in trouble, you knew that somebody would help you out. I don't think that it's gone in East Meon.

Jean Samways

Jean Smith was born in Rogate in 1936, the only child of Albert Smith and Alice Etherington. She came to Bridge Cottage in Frogmore when she was fourteen months old or so. The cottage itself belonged to her grandfather before her parents. It used never to have a name until, at one point with so many Smiths in the village, Jean's parents decided a name would help the post arrive.

We used to go to Petersfield on the bus for clothing and things like that – I think it was ninepenny return in those days. We used to go to the pictures on a Saturday morning: one and six wasn't it? That was the Children's Morning. I think it was about nine till twelve – I know because we used to catch the twelve o'clock bus back. My mum lost her handbag in Petersfield once . They'd pinched her handbag with all the ration books. We had to go into some place in Petersfield and she had to swear that they'd really lost it – it all had to be legally done. She had to fill in these forms to get the temporary ones through.

In the ration time my mother was quite good – she was that type – at organising that kind of thing. You used to be allowed so much of certain things. You worked it out; my grandmother was here, then my mum and dad and I.

You could see all the searchlights up at Mercury, moving round for the aircraft coming up off the sea. It was awful – all those thick black curtains. My mother – she was shaking so much it shook me to sleep. Of course, my father was deaf, being a prisoner-of-war in Germany in the first war, he didn't hear it. He'd been through quite a lot. He'd been only about eighteen. They only had bread and water. He met Mr Atkinson out there. No letter got through to the Atkinsons but my grandmother had one through saying that he'd met Mr Atkinson and they were safe.

When the doodlebugs came out, we had to clear out the houses. I always remember seeing the doodlebugs coming over – balls of fire. They made a terrific noise. You could see this big ball of fire coming towards the house. We were lucky, they went over the top! We had to get up the lane, there were banks there. I always remember 'Frogmore people' up the lane. There was an old chap and my mum used to go and knock him up. I remember once, everybody went up and there was only us left in Frogmore. Mum said "I don't think that was very fair!" I remember we took stools for my grandmother to sit on! At that age, you don't remember how serious it is. If I slept, they'd try to leave me. My parents tried to keep me calm about it. She said afterwards, "I tried hard not to unnerve you too much." When I asked, "Oh Mum, what's that?" she'd say "Oh that's only a doodlebug." My mother was like that!

I can remember Mr Chambers, who lived in the old school house, moved down into the village opposite the Spar and my mother and me helped him move. We were moving the furniture across the field and all these planes went over. "Duck down quick!" Mum shouted and everyone went flat down, face down on the ground!

One night, there was one up the paddock, the one at the vineyard, and one at the cricket field. My father passed them all down the West Meon road on his way to work. He said "You'll be all right!" but later he said he shouldn't have gone. I suppose he had not so much fear, being in the first war. The police came and told us, "Everybody out and down the village this time!" My father was at work and my mother was worried to death because he wouldn't know where to go. I always remember my grandmother saying, "I'm making a cup of tea first, whatever happens, before I go," and my mother saying, "I'm taking Bert some socks!" My father always said they'd made a mistake dropping them there. They never went off; they had to dismantle them.

We had evacuees from London and that. We didn't put any up but I was still friendly with them. Mrs Hatfield used to live in the thatched cottage across the road. She died a couple of months ago. Her family visit us and we visit them – some of them live in Portsmouth now. We had some more people, the Masons and the Stigends, evacuated from Portsmouth over the road – they were relieved to get out of the city. We used to go to Portsmouth on the train occasionally. You could see all the housed boarded up. My grandparents and my mothers' relations lived won there; they never talked about it much.

It was the end of the war. People were rejoicing. Relief – wasn't it? We were all relieved that it was the end of the war, soldiers and that were coming back. Mr Macdonald, he was a prisoner of war. I remember him walking down over the

fields, cheerful coming back. The flags and that were flying when he came back. We had this party. All the children had to take their mugs! We had a mug from the party – I've still got it!

Kath Barrow

Katherine Fielder was born in 1922 in Cork, Ireland. Her father was in the Royal Hampshires and the family came to stay with her paternal grandparents during the troubles, when Kath was only one. After several moves around the region, the family came to East Meon when Kath was about fourteen. By that stage, Kath had two brothers and a sister. Her father worked for George Jones at Lower Farm, Oxenbourne. Kath met George barrow during the war and they married in 1944.

I can remember the day of the war. I was going up to seventeen or eighteen. I was on my bicycle going to mass at St Laurence, the Catholic church near the station in Petersfield. Soon as I got to the station, I knew one or two young people that said did I know the war had started, and a siren went, just as I was going over the station. We were young people and we were a bit bewildered. I hated that siren. I went to the church – I thought about my mum and dad.

I was working at Tilmore for a lovely old lady, Miss Boore, a sort of housemaid. When it started, Portsmouth was very badly knocked about. You could always see the flashing over Portsmouth – you could see the red glow; the sky was alight with bombs. We could see right over towards Butser and East Meon way and I used to hope that East Meon was all right.

One day, we were coming up Ramsdean Hill; I was coming back for a half day with my sister, we had a half-day off together. Over the top of us was this Spitfire and a German plane, ooh they were at it! You knew the German planes from our people, a sort of moaning noise. They didn't have those delightful little planes, just big, heavy planes. We could hear them, going round each other, like two dogs scrapping, they used to call it a dogfight. We got on our bikes at the top and raced home and told our mother and she made us a cup of tea, bless her heart!

When my sister died in 1941, I had to come home and get a daily job. For about a year and a half I lived with my mum. I wanted to go in the Wrens but because my mother lost my sister she wanted me to join the Land Army so I would come home at weekends and be safer. She was broken-hearted, she never got over Margaret's death. Margaret was in hospital for tonsils and was given too much ether. We were living at Giant's Cottage but we moved up to number 4, Coombe road after losing my sister – the old doctor, Dr Clifford, said my mother was too upset after losing my sister to live in that cottage.

I went on my own to Eastleigh. My mother saw me off at East Meon by the church and a lady met me in a brake – you used to get about nine girls in a brake – down at the station in Eastleigh and look me down about two miles to the hostel at Bambridge.

Forty girls, the most wonderful girls from London, Yorkshire, Wales, as far up as Scotland – we even had a model. Two Welsh girls had to be sent back because they had nits – she wouldn't have them! We used to have to be at work at 9

o'clock and we would work till 5 o'clock. But when the two hours went on in 1943 or so, we worked till 7 o'clock. We used to come in all hot and all rushed for the bath! We done ditching, sprout-picking, thrashing, haymaking, stoking, we done anything! We used to cut the mangolds and cover them with the leaves before we left for home. The old boys would come and their sons in the morning – they wouldn't let us lift those heavy things – and feed them to the cows. And hoeing – great big fields with old Mr Gray at Micheldever and Lord Northrbok with Barings Bank. Because we worked so hard he gave us five pounds each! People were always kind to us saying what good work we were doing, always a marvellous welcome!

We heard that there were several Land Army girls killed. We were always told to get down under the hedge quick – you could hear them coming. We were always told to get down under the hedge quick – you could hear them coming. Perhaps if they see us with our brown uniform and shirts, they might think we were soldiers.

We had a ration book but we gave that to the hostel. If I went home on a Saturday the VCO would give me a little chit to get a few rations while I was home. Of course, they didn't have much cheese and we used to have beetroot and put it in sandwiches – now that's something I don't like! And we had egg powder, I used to hate it!

We used to get paid fortnightly from Winchester Castle, I think we had about three pounds a week and you'd get more for overtime. We used to go dancing in the Guild Hall in Winchester. We weren't allowed to drink a lot. We were allowed out till 10 o'clock on Fridays and half past ten on Saturdays, but if we had a picture or a dance to go to, we had till 11o'clock but we had to sign the book when we got in.

Because I'm not a very good sleeper, I had to be the watch out for the doodlebugs – there was a fleet air arm where the airport is now and the railway workshop and also there was a munitions factory. I heard one and saw it flash by the window – one of the girls never pulled her blinds which she should have. You could hear them coming, the most horrible noise. Everyone was told to get out of their beds and lay flat.

When my sister was alive, we cycled over to Privett to see the Messerschmitt. He was all right, taken prisoner of war. But there was a boot on the floor – about the week after, it was. We were ditching one day around Winchester. I used to like that job; I think it's what kept us all so slim! Some Italian soldiers were coming over. They weren't allowed to talk to us but our supervisor was away. They could speak English very well. One of them said to me, "I'd like to take you to Italy in my broom-broom!"

We had a farm in our territory at Worthy Down and we saw Laurence Olivier come out – if you sat in the back of the brake, you could see out. He was in the navy he was an officer. We used to be like young girls and thought, "Oooh, he was marvellous." We queued up to see 'Gone with the Wind' for four hours at Winchester, at the cinema. Of course the girls went to see Clark Gable.

Me and my very dearest friend, Rosina, we went into the pub at Owslebury – we used to have a cider. She met an American. I thought, "Oh dear!" but he turned out to be the most wonderful husband.

In the meanwhile, at the end of 1942, I went for a dance at Twyford, it was what you used to call a hop in those days. George was with another person and he came to speak to me – I was with my friend Lily. We passed a pleasant evening that particular night and we agreed to meet the next night. I went on my bicycle in case he didn't turn up and it was the beer talking! He came on his own and left the other one behind.

We said cheerio and hope to see you again, but I never thought he would, but he wrote some letters – of course they were censored – and we got married in the August, 1944, because George thought he was going to Arnhem. We were married in St Laurence Church. My mother used to work for Lady du Boulay at Oxenbourne House and she thought the world of my mum. My mother always made cakes and she knew this and she asked "Have you got much fruit to make the cake?" She phoned her friend in Australia and she sent sultanas, raisins and currants and different things. I cycled up to Mrs Hascott with George and asked her if she'd make a cake, and she did. It was lovely, just the one tier.

We went for our honeymoon to Bournemouth – George had to get special leave. When we went to the Southern Hay at Bournemouth and came down in the morning, George was in uniform. Breakfast was on the table. There was a little toast-rack with three slices of toast. We dealt with them and George called the waiter over to ask if he could have some more toast. He said, "More toast, Sir, don't you realise there's a war on?" I don't know if he realised George was in uniform or not!

My mother did miss me, but they knew I wasn't too far away. I used to come back every other weekend, but when I got to know George more, he used to go and stay at 'The Dog and Duck', round the corner by the hostel.

My mother had chickens and my father used to belong to the pig club – Mrs Hastie used to be the secretary. It worked very well. We had out own pig – the club would provide the offal for it and when you killed it, you had to give up all your meat rations while you were eating fresh meat – they would put a line through it. My mum cried when it went, though she ate it. She used to worry because you know in the market in Petersfield there was a man who used to stand there with currants and sultanas, with women queued up for miles, and really gloat. She had to queue for bananas too. She was a good woman for making something out of nothing.

Dad was in the Home Guard. Do you know what he guarded? The railway at East Meon; it was a tunnel. We didn't know what he was doing – he never said. The captain of it was Mr Collyer. Pat worked on the farm and on the fire service – Jesse Box was a marvellous leader. On the right hand side, up Glenthorne Meadow, that used to be a fire station. After the war, it was turned into a house.

You know the saddest thing I thought about the war? The road out of Winchester – all down the road were soldiers, vehicles parked along the road, and they'd

wave and shout to us girls. They'd be gone the next morning, all the way over tp France. Those rows of soldiers ready to go over.

You could tell the better news from Winston Churchill – we didn't like him because he wouldn't give us any Land Army moneh! And George used to tell me a lot and I had an uncle that was in the war and he knew. We were told by the warden. We went home for the V-E Day party that weekend. My mum and dad, we went down for a little drink – he wasn't a pub man but he loved cards and darts. I lost my purse, I must have dropped it. It had about six pounds and there was a picture of George in it – I never got it back. It was found on the road to Leydene, all the things taken out. The policeman said, "Not to worry – it's V-E Day!"

It was August when George came back. Terry and myself were waiting for George at the bus stop. But George came by taxi and drove straight by and we said, "That was George drove by!"

Mary and Tony Crockford.

Mary Brown was born in 1932. Her family came to the village when she was about six months old. During the war, however, they moved to number 1, Bell Cottage, opposite the war memorial. Later on, the Browns lived in Temple Lane. Tony Crockford's father, Frederick, was from West Meon whilst his mother, Jessie Blackman, was from the village. The Crockfords already had a daughter when tony was born in Totton, Southampton, in 1933. At the outbreak of the war, the family moved to the village, initially to Coombe Road where Tony's aunt, Dorothy Richards, lived and then to Ivy Terrace. The families were near neighbours after the war when they lived at numbers 3 and 6 temple Lane. Tony and Mary were married in 1955 at All Saints Church by Reverend Garrod.

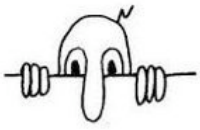
M. When war was declared, I was always petrified Hitler, this horrible man, would come over here.

At the beginning of the war, there was the LDV and there was a little shepherd's hut on top of the hill which was linked down to the village to Collyer's he was Captain Collyer of the Home Guard. The women were put on sort of point duty so they could view the whole village. I can remember my mother being involved. If any enemy planes came and they thought they'd parachuted won, they had to phone down to Collyer's house. I don't think they knew what to do, to start with – it didn't go on for very long!

At the beginning of the war, everybody flooded out of the cities, but they gradually filtered back. It was the families with mum that stayed, and the father stayed in the dockyard, perhaps. Some of them got their own houses, like the Carnes at Coombe and the Coles and Masons at Frogmore – there were always empty houses. The Wards, they stayed all through the war and then went back at the end. Audrey Green stayed here all the time with her aunt. We were all friends together. They were here as long as a lot of the farmworkers- five years is a long time.

Mrs Hastie (*left)* was the best teacher, but in all fairness, the headmistress had everything to do. Mrs Hoyes was the headmistress – she used to come all the way from Odiham. It was a poor education, I was only waiting to leave. I hated it. We still learnt about 1066; it was still the three R's. When the evacuees came we were absolutely bursting – one time we were three in a desk built for two!

T. We had a three-bedroomed house in Ivy Terrace; there was my mother and myself in one room and, in the other, Mr and Mrs Wells from Portsmouth.



Everything was rationed. Everyone used to draw that thing – Chad. Underneath there always used to be, "Wot – no …?" You used to find them everywhere there was a wall. They were one of the earliest stages of graffiti.

M You had 2 ounces of butter and 2 ounces of cheese per person per week. If you were an agricultural or a factory worker you had 12 ounces of cheese. Half a pound of sugar and I think you had 1 egg a week, though most people round here had their own chickens and they wouldn't have egg coupons. And they had their own pigs. If you had one slaughtered, you kept half but you wouldn't get the 2 ounces of bacon. Everything was used, even the chitlings – ugh! Tea, soap was rationed – everything was rationed!

It was a brilliant idea. You had to register with a grocer. You gave him the forms at the beginning of the book which said that you were his customers. You had a page with your soap coupons, a page with your tea coupons, you'd have your sweet coupons and then you'd have your points. You had 24 points a month. You bought broken biscuits because they were less points. A tin of corned beef was 24 points – it would take a whole month's rations! Thins like cakes from Lyon and Hales were under the counter, they were never on display. A good shopkeeper would share them around.

It was surprising the number of people in big families who didn't use all their rations. They would sell their coupons. There was always ways of getting things like material, but it was usually above board.

All the signposts were taken down for invasion reasons so that nobody would know where to go, and the chain round the war memorial for metal. You saved every little piece of paper, every little scrap of paper and your pencil till you had nothing left! It was a joy to get a new book or pencil. Even things like boxes, jam

jars if they had MRF on the bottom, all bottles (every bottle was returnable) – they were all salvaged. We took them all to school: beech nuts (a halfpenny or penny a pound); acorns – I think that went for animal feed; rosehips – the rosehips made syrup. The teachers, they did everything, but the bottles came back to the shop.

They expected you to have a fortnight off to do potato-lifting or hop-picking – any of those sorts of things that were considered to help. That was purely the shortage of manpower, when the harvest had to be lifted and they needed it there and then. You had to be twelve. You used to have a blue card and you'd have it ticked by the farmer. You got paid – I expect it was peanuts, it would only have been coppers.

T. We always used to carry gasmasks in a cardboard box. Most of us used to treat these things as though they were made of glass and there was one evacuee, Wally Gilmour, who had no respect for his gasmask; his was always bashed and dented, ours were always immaculate! The children's gasmasks were rather like a pig's snout; the babies were Mickey Mouse ones! We used to have a gasmask drill every morning. We used to have to sit for a lesson in them. You used to have to put your fingers in the elastic straps and pull the elastic straps over your forehead. It used to steam up if you started breathing heavily. We never used them seriously – there was never gas over here in the second war.

M. For 'Warship Week' I had to recite 'Big Steamers' by Rudyard Kipling. Don't ask me now because I've forgotten. All the village came to watch. That was going to help with the war, as we thought, to build another battleship, as we thought. The Youth Club used to knit for China and they liked red! And also a friend of mine, we did a few things – we made little brooches – and that was for Russia and I had a letter from Mrs Churchill. But that was in a handbag and that got stolen. Children were conscious of things. No-one knew exactly what was happening till after the war, all the atrocities and everything. We only heard what was on the news. I think we were pretty well aware of it, but not the seriousness of it. We had a book week. Where the Baileys live now [Glenthorne House], there used to be people called Coles. When Mr and Mrs Cole died, Cyril sold up a lot. They had this house sale and my father bid for what he thought was a hallstand and, of course, all the books were there as well – they had one room which was a library! We were very pleased when they had this book week and they all went up there!

In 1942 there was an epidemic of scarlet fever. You had to go to an isolation hospital in Petersfield. My sister was in. It was January and it was snowing like mad; it was really thick snow. They told her that they wouldn't be able to take her in unless somebody came in so she was praying that someone else would come in! It just happened to be me, so she came out as I went in! She was in a month, I was in a month. You never saw your parents for that month. Because I had my tenth birthday in the hospital, my mother, she'd borrowed sweet points from my aunts and people, she got me a nice big selection of sweets in a box. I can remember the nurse bought it round and said this was my birthday present, and that was the last I saw of it – it got shared between the ward.

The cricket field had army in it – they were there I think for the D-Day landings. Down at Collyer's field, going down to the village hall, that was full of army, a searchlight up at Atkinson's, there were King's Own Scottish Borderers – they were at Oxenbourne. Then there were the New Zealanders at Langrish. The Canadians requisitioned the Court House and the petrol pumps. They used to park their lorries in a field at Aburrows, behind the almshouses. We used to know all the Canadians. You'd get in one lorry, come up to get petrol, come back and get in the next lorry, so that's how we used to get lifts. They were very good to us children – they would put on film shows for the children of the village. It was all the latest films. Some of the girls from the village married Canadians and New Zealanders. The New Zealanders came first and then they went and the Canadians came. They were part of the village. Some of the French Canadians had dreadful tempers – there used to be a few fights.

T. The Canadian troops used to have on the back of their cigarette packets, the silhouettes of aircraft. It was an aircraft-spotting thing. We used to collect them. We didn't see any planes close enough to identify many.

We used to see the Pathe News if we went to the Court House. It always used to finish off with, "…. [so many] of our aircraft are missing. We were very aware of the bombs. You'd hear the gunfire and the planes and see the searchlights – usually they were sweeping across the sky. Watching the searchlights in the Portsmouth area, you'd see them all converge on a plane. Even from this distance you could see they were onto an aircraft. You could see the puffs of smoke in the sky in amongst the searchlights. Because there was no other lighting, when Portsmouth or Southampton was ablaze, you'd see a big orange glow in the sky. You could always see Portsmouth lit up, watch the bombs, and hear the droning of the Germans coming.

I remember these stray bombs up at Mercury somewhere. They did a dummy airfield at Butser. They had some hooded lights – made it look like an airstrip. That might have drawn some odd bombs to confuse the enemy bombers, a sort of decoy. If one had gone off, it would have finished the village.

I used to live next door to Jack Simpson. We shared an air raid shelter. It was quite an adventure for us – you were under the table or down the garden. You used to brew up, have biscuits, it was quite an adventure, quite a thing for us to get up in the middle of the night and get down to the air raid centre.

M. My bedroom faced south and mother's faced north. I was a light sleeper and she would say, "Now, if you hear the planes, give me a call." Looking back, as a mother, I expect it was more to console me.

T. One enemy aircraft flew very low over the village, heading towards West Meon. It was obviously in trouble, one engine had gone of something. You could see the people in the cockpit with the crosses on the wings. That crashed somewhere like Warnford or West Meon.

When the invasion started, there were loads of planes going over, towing troop-carrying gliders. They had to cut some loose, it was the weather or something. One came down at Coombe and the other at Warnford, where, apparently,

everyone was killed. We went up to see the one at Coombe. There was a couple of soldiers walking round and the local bobby on guard. The tail was stuck right up in the air.

M. I got a piece of Perspex from the glider.

My uncle, my mother's brother, he's the Allen on the war memorial. He was a stoker. He was the first one killed in the village. He was a bachelor uncle – he spoilt us rotten. He was exactly forty – he was due to come out in '38 or '39, he'd done his twenty-five years. My grandmother had seven children and she was widowed. Whatever happened to this sailor boy of hers, she knew: she knew when he squashed his hand and he didn't tell her; she knew when he was coming home if he didn't ring…

He was due home on a Saturday morning. At 2 o'clock in the morning, Tony's mum heard her shout out, "Oh my Jim!" My mother had taken up things, vegetables. But my grandmother said, "Oh you can take that back because Jim won't be coming home. We lost him in the night. It's all right, he'll be washed ashore, because in my dream, his hat was washed to the shore." He was reported missing, then my grandmother was told he'd been killed in action – the telegram didn't come till the next week. His body was washed ashore at Portland; he was killed just off the Isle of Wight. It really knocked her to pieces.

We used to have dances every week She was very Victorian and my Gran always came – she didn't dance – and all the sailors used to come up and say, "Hello Gran, will you look after my hat?" She'd have all these sailors' hats around her! She had a bond with the navy.

I can remember being very, very upset. I burst into tears. I was in Mrs Hastie's class and I can remember her making a lesson of it. Even at that age, you know you've got a great loss. It was here way of getting across to the children that the war was going to affect everybody.

T. My father had been away since 1940, fighting in the desert. His letters would come in quite a batch, not always in chronological order. There'd be great excitement. My mother, she wrote as she spoke, my father always used to say. I used to be more or less forced to write to him! We always had to listen to the radio – I can remember thinking it was a bit boring!

At one point, my father and Fred Gibbs were staffed by a German plane, machine-gun fire, and they dived for cover, into what turned out to be a cactus – he gave me the impression there was not a lot of cover. They thought afterwards that bullets were the lesser of the two evils! Someone in their company drew a cartoon of the incident. My father was put in charge of an Italian prisoner-of-war camp and one of the prisoners painted a picture of my mother from a little photograph. I remember going to the studio called Watson's in Lavant Street, to have our photograph taken to send to my father and I had one taken in my chorister's uniform and he carried it around with him in his wallet. We got give shillings a quarter in the choir. You were ticked off on a register and there were two services every Sunday: matins and evensong. If you missed a service you lost threepence. You very rarely ended up with the full five shillings!

We used to listen to all the news bulletins so we knew it was coming. I was at the cinema in Petersfield and on the screen a message was glashed up during the film, that British and Russian troops had linked up in Berlin, and there was a cheer in the cinema.

We knew he was coming home that day. I hardly remembered him; I was twelve by then. I'd written, "Welcome home Dad" in chalk on the garden shed. I met every bus – there was one every hour – from Petersfield. It got to be about 6-ish. My aunt from Drayton came by and said she had a Union Jack. So my aunt and I cycled to Drayton to get it. I picked up the flag and came back and when I got back, he'd already got back. He'd taken a taxi – it didn't occur to me that he'd be rash enough to get a taxi. My first memory really of my dad was being bear-hugged by this bloke with a bristly chin. He'd been away since 1940 and he came home in 1945. He was a battery sergeant-major by the end of the war.

M. We knew the prisoners were coming home. We went to meet them both, all the children and women. Bobby MacDonald got off at the school and came home through the allotments. We were all up there waiting for him but Reg, he had a conflab with the bus conductor and got him to drop him off at the Cross. By the time we'd run round, he'd got indoors. When you think about it, that was the last thing you'd want when you got back – to be hoisted on people's shoulders – you'd rather crawl into the woodwork. Bobby MacDonald looked quite fit, though he'd been a prisoner for five years. Reg looked pretty poorly, he wasn't really in good health at all.

I can remember my aunt with Mrs Vaughan collecting things for a street party. All the things from the old village hall: tables and chairs and crockery. It was only schoolchildren that sat down first, then it filled with mothers. We had dancing in the streets.

For V-J we had a party as well. For night time, they were going to do a big bonfire on Park Hill. They were going to set light to this big tree but they'd had a lot of rain and it never did burn. We just came away. They had all the bales of straw and paraffin but it still wouldn't burn.

Reg Files

Reginald Files was born in Bath on 22nd May, 1914. Reg was one of four brothers. After the First World War, his two older brothers went to explore the opportunities available in America and, for a few years, Reg, with his mother and other brother, Roland, joined them. In the early '20s, however, the three returned to England to look after the sons' grandfather in Flint Cottage, East Meon. Reg has stayed in the village ever since.

I remember where I was when it was declared – up, walking round Temple Lane one Sunday morning. Me and my mate were going into Blackman's father's place – we used to go in every Sunday morning to get some wine. It came on the radio; I heard him broadcasting, old Chamberlain. Everybody just said, "Do this, do that – oh yeah!" But he [Hitler] did – simply because nobody never done anything about it. It wasn't as simple as that; we were pretty run down as regards modern weapons – we'd just started recovering.

We worked for Bob Moss and he was part of Heavy Duty rescue. We joined for the simple reason that he was in it. I had a motorbike – I used to tear off to Fareham. On occasion, we had to go down and stay all night there. We were called out but we never did anything – this was the phoney war. There hadn't been any bombs dropped anywhere. The sirens would go and that was it.

It was coming – the amount of troops that were starting to move about. I was called up in the May of '40. Roland, he wasn't no good for the army – he had a smashed shoulder. The Isle of Wight, that's where I did my training. One particular day we were up on St George's Down, on a little platoon exercise, and we watched them bombing Portsmouth. I went from there up to Royston; we were under canvas. Our RSM was an ex-Grenadier Guard. When he saw us, he said, "Oh my Christ – another load of brownies!" He wasn't very impressed – I don't think anybody was! He licked us into shape a bit.

I wrote to my mother once a fortnight with all the news and she wrote much the same. Money was pretty scarce – I used to get gen bob a week and had to donate so much a week to her. I had a pass after six months at the end of 1940. They came round about when you'd had leave and I said, "I ain't had no leave!" and they said, "You ain't had no leave?" and I was away on the following week. I had ten, twelve or fourteen days. East Meon seemed much the same – a lot of people in khaki. Never altered.

I was in the 5th battalion, the Hampshires. We went down to London – didn't do anything up there at all. About '42, the invasion scare was on and then we were down on ack-ack and guard duty on the coast. There were a lot of troops on the

coast and they had one of those massive great railway guns there. I was at ever so many places along the coast.

Christmas '42, we went to Fleet, prior to embarkation. We didn't know where we were going. When you were young like that, it don't seem to worry you. Nearly all the chaps didn't seem to take much notice. I think a lot of us wanted to get going – there was a lot of that but I think it was different when they got there! From there we went up to Glasgow. We still didn't know where we were going. We embarked on the Leopoldville, a Belgian boat. I was in the mortar platoon, 5th Hants battalion. I think I can remember them telling us we were going to North Africa but you've got to remember – with two or three thousand troops on a board, a lot of tales go round and you've got to remember to take them with a pinch of salt!

I remember there was a French stowaway on there; he wanted to join the Free French. He wasn't supposed to talk to anyone. I was on guard duty and he soke to one of the French or Belgian crew and I got put on a charge. Another time, I was down in the hold – they didn't know if there was anyone else about – a massive hold with rats tearing about all over the place!

We docked at Algiers and got on the Royal Ulsterman and we went as far as Bone on the north coast of Africa. We disembarked there and had a swim in the sea, I think. Then we moved off and took up position; I think it was the Essex regiment we relieved.

They started shelling one morning. It must have been the 14th or 15th of March, '43. They had it worked out, the Germans. It was all covered in fog up on the hill. I forget the number – all the hills were numbered for reference. I think it was Hill 60. You couldn't see the column coming up. The tanks came up over the top of the hill brow. We had eight 25 pounders. They knocked them all to pieces but they clobbered one or two tanks.

Hey really did rain it down on us, terrific the shelling was! As the day proceeded, the fog began to clear and they really began to hammer us as they could get their bearings. There ain't no doubt about it – we were frightened. There's a boy on the war memorial – Alfred Mullard, I used to go to school with him – he was killed just up in front of me. A lot of them got killed. I was up in the mortar pit, loading three inch mortars. We were supposed to have orders, but nobody give any orders. We never fired no bombs – if we'd had somebody there, he would have given us some idea of where to lay on, but he never did. Never had no orders.

We held them off from early morning and it was dark when they started collecting us. Some of us got back but I was right by them. We hadn't been there fourteen or fifteen days and we were captured! It was real chaos: German wounded, English wounded. We had to carry this wounded artilleryman off one of the 25-pounder guns about a mile. We had to put him down and the German officer indicated to leave him. I think he was hurt bad. Never knew what happened to him.

We carried on to an assembly point and marched into Bizerte. We embarked on a boat, laying on the bottom down in the hold for about ten days. We were thirsty and hungry; the Italians made some good bargains – watches and that for tins of bully beef!

We pulled into Naples and transferred by rail to Capua where you could see Vesuvius smoking all day long. It was a POW camp – first one I'd ever been in. We had a parcel a week; used to get Canadian parcels and some from Scotland. Some had tea, sugar, milk powder, tins of pilchards – everybody had a parcel. It was a transit camp; there was every kind of bloke you could think of, even Germans out of the French Foreign Legion and compelled to fight for the French – they didn't stay long.

Then Borgo San Lorenzo, not far from Florence. I wasn't there long before the Iti's packed in. The guards just went one morning. Some notice had been given out that we should all stay in the camp. We scarpered out of the camp. We went up into the mountains. We stayed there with some Italians, Alfredo Misuri, for about three or four months, on the farm, helping them to get their crops and grapes in. Him and his wife were good to us – they knew we were POWs because we had khaki with a red square on your back. It used to look right down on the road and if they'd see a dust cloud coming up, they knew it was Germans and they'd say "Tedeschi!" (German in Italian, I think!) and they'd take you to some cave and notify us when it was all clear. They were going to get us down to Termoli in southern Italy and the priest was involved. We were going to be all dressed in civilian clothes. A car picked us up one day – two of us – and took us down into Florence. They put us up with some Carmelite monks in Florence and we stayed there for a week. One day, a car pulled up and it took us, all in civilian clothes, to this big house outside Florence. Eighteen of us there were eventually there and a lorry was going to come for us on a Friday night and take us down to Termoli. The lorry came all right, only trouble was it was loaded with SS blokes. This was at night and I was in bed. We heard some shouting and you could hear some thumping on the stairs and there was a German – and he was a bloody big bloke – with a luger. We put our hands up. I only had a shirt on and he lifted the shirt with his gun, and I put my hands down. He smacked me across the earhole and across the bed with the gun.

We went downstairs and there was a sergeant who holds a lot of power. He had been somewhere in Sussex to university and he said, "I'm entitled to shoot you all, you're spies – you're all in civilian clothes. With his gun he blew a china doll up as if to say, "You try it!"

We wend to an Italian barracks and the next morning, over the tannoy, came, "We're going to hang out the washing on the Siegfried Line …" A friend of mind said, "Cheeky bastards!" – they were taking the mickey. After two or three days, we were loaded onto trains. They strip-searched us outside, on the barrack square. We had this bucket. It was filled with excrement, overflowing onto the floor. We stopped at one point and then they opened the door, the lot tipped over the platform. The Italian Red Cross nurses gave us a few 'pannis' – little loaves. We weren't too bad then. A bloke had a hacksaw blade on him – how he got that on him, I don't know. He cut a bloody big hole – he never stopped once – in the

carriage but it was going too fast to jump out. They found the hole when we got up to Brenner and pushed us all over to one side and put two boards of wood across the hole. We'd had the bucket in the corner and they took the bucket away. There were eighty of us, so it didn't half stink when we got there!

We went to Stalag 4B, a transit camp with a lot of Russians, and then to Kleinschonell (?), another big camp. There were working commands. We'd march to the station and then travel into Czechoslovakia, 20 to 30 minutes. We'd come backwards and forwards. They were making the fins for jet engines – they had jet engines – and we did more or less building work. A strange thing happened on the platform early one morning – when I say early, I mean early. There was an American and his wife speaking real American, as we arrived for work. He spoke to us, "Won't be long now."

We knew the day we invaded in France from a German civilian. He said, "The Englanders have invaded France but it won't last long …" and put his arms out to show they'd be pushed into the sea. Then he turned to a prisoner and said, "Haben sie eine Zigarette, Kamerad?" The bloke told him where to go, but he didn't understand any English!

One day, walking down from Kleinschonell to the station, there was a big SS bloke, no expression on his face, blank, and a German soldier lying in the gutter. There was a notice that said, "This is what happens to a German deserter," – some of us spoke German. I was amazed, the amount of blood that comes out of a bloke. He deserted off the Russian front, I suppose, and they caught up with him.

When they started really bombing all over Germany, we didn't get any parcels. We relied on those. We got what we used to call stodge: a sort ofl watery soup and a lump of bread once a day. We were so short of food then. If you had a bad tummy, they used to give you charcoal. There were one or two that went into hospital – we didn't hear no more about them; you couldn't afford to be ill. Some of the guards were oldish or civilians towards the end. All the younger chaps were going to the Russian front. When the work was finished, we moved to a camp on the Elbe. We were moving stuff, little short sleepers – they were building into the hillside to make another factory in there.

The railway ran right along the river. We used to see truckloads and truckloads of Jews on their way to the gas chambers, going north. They all had striped clothes. They were no trouble to pick Jews out – they had the star and a square on their back – dirty black and white suits. And they were stood up in open cattle-trucks like pit props, a steam engine in front. You saw so many of them. They treated them like animals – they hated them. They'd worn them down so. They knew what was going to happen, I think.

You heard them bombing Dresden and when the Americans came over you could see them – they were so low, you could see the numbers, our boys night-time, Americans day-time. That was the last camp. They seemed very confident for a long, long time till right towards the end. They knew what was coming, but we were still building the factory into the hillside. Three or four days before the end, they marched us out of the camp and then they left you and that was it. They just left you. Me and another, we took off. Some Russian bombers come over and

dropped all these anti-personnel bombs. Then there really was a mess – soldiers, tanks, horses, women, kids …. 'cause they were all fleeing from the Russian front. We met some more Americans and stopped in an old tin shed. A German came along and said, "Alles ist fertig" - it's all over. The Russians relieved us – we were in the Russian zone. It took a few days to get back. I was in a little place called Glasseter (?)

We got on a Dutch lorry and we got to where the Americans were and they de-loused us as we were as lousy as coots! You've no idea the amount of people – there were all the displaced persons, all the POWs. We moved up to an East German aerodrome. So many were lined up at each plane. All these parcels were passed out and we stacked them. Ehen you finished all that, you hopped on the plane for Brussels, then England.

We came in at an aerodrome near Guildford. There was a bit of checking out. I got extra rations, extra milk. I had a train warrant to Petersfield, the ordinary bus – there were a lot more busses in those days! They knew I was coming, telegrams were sent. Bobby MacDonald, he was taken early on, he was in Poland I think and he came home the same day. He got off at the school and came down the fields. I dropped down to nine stone and was pretty thin. I'd broke my teeth when I was out there and a bloke took them away to mend them, then the Russians made a big push and he scarpered! The old lady, it upset her a bit, thinner and no teeth – the bottom ones!

I had a motorbike and I mixed up some petrol and paraffin 'cause petrol was rationed and I rode out up to Duncombe Wood where there were all big trees. I used to shoot up there. It took me a fair time to acclimatize and that. I used to go to the pub and have a drink but I didn't go much anywhere else. Quite a few were curious but there were thousands of POWs everywhere. I got some pay off the Germans – about eighty or ninety pounds, probably twelve months afterwards. Eighteen weeks leave I had, then I went back to Plymouth and I was demobbed there.

Tony Simpson

Dorcas Allen was born in 1910 in Hinton Ampner, the seventh and last child of William Allen, a farm foreman at Cheriton and his wife, Mary. Tony had two brothers and four sisters. Tony has one vivid memory of the First World War: "I can remember a Zeppelin go over at Hinton Ampner …" She married Walter Simpson in 1932 and the couple moved to East Meon in about 1934, during the war they lived at number 3, Ivy Terrace. Walter died in 1956.

Although we knew it was coming, it seemed terribly sad that morning (Declaration of War).

I can remember Bottle Cottage – that was two cottages then. At the end of those two cottages, my garden me their garden and reached the field behind. One night, when the Germans were over, they showered down no end of incendiary bombs and the force of those broke quite a large part of my bedroom ceiling and shattered the windows.

I only had the son and then Josie was born more or less as soon as the war started. It just made extra work and you were worried – you wouldn't let her stay upstairs, I can tell you!

It must have been terrible for the people in towns. We did dig a little shelter in the garden but we didn't feel it was safe when we got in there, so really we just stayed indoors and just hoped for the best. You couldn't feel easy to go to bed – you were worrying. We had the old village hall opened up for emergencies – there was even a little bed or two in case anyone got hurt.

We put very dark curtains, anything to darken the windows. They'd be round on you like a cat on hot bricks. It was lamps and candles – that doesn't give the light electric does, does it? It was a marvellous sight to peep out and see it all; you daren't let a bit of light show! Even in broad daylight I can remember two German planes in an afternoon trying to get to Mercury, but they were driven off by our planes. There was a German plane at Privett. I went up and saw it that day. No end of it was hanging in the trees. I can't say I saw bodies; I expect they were removed before we got there. You felt sorry for whoever it was. Of course, it was a good thing – it stopped them doing more damage but you've still got a feeling of sadness – it was somebody's men, husbands, boys …… we all thought they were dreadful, particularly him – he seemed horrible – but I expect they thought the same of us.

I can remember walking to Buriton one morning, fruit-picking I think – when we thought the war was nearly over. We had babies and children. We got past Lythe Housel and we discovered there was a lot of police. They said. "Go back and keep to the middle of the road!"; there were a lot of incendiary bombs.

You had to be careful with your food because we were all rationed. I don't think you'd see fat people in those days because we didn't have the food – we live in clover now. You just had to be sensible with your coupons. I remember one lot up at South Farm; they had a big family and they always spared mother some sugar because she liked sugar. I like butter really and we were very limited with butter. They wouldn't manage with it today! It brought you close to people – we were all friends together.

I also had an evacuee with me from London. It was a girl = she was a very nice girl. She stayed six months I should say, at least. I don't know what happened when she went back.

There was no water laid on, you'd get it from a standpipe. You'd wash up in a bowl and have a bucket underneath the table in the scullery and when that was full of dirty water, you'd have to carry it out. When there was frosty weather, you always kept enough in your kettle so you could boil it up and unfreeze the standpipe. The only way you could have a bath was indoors in front of the fire in a big, old bath and you'd add hot water for the next person!

Walter worked for Mr Butler over at Coombe, tractor driver – he had various agricultural jobs. At night he helped with the fire service. They'd go off as soon as it got dark and it was almost daylight before they'd return. The most was Southampton, but occasionally Portsmouth. Some nights wouldn't be so bad but you could tell by the searchlights. It was really shocking what you had to pickup, especially when it came to children, he was so fond of children and to see them in the state they were in. But when you think of it, Germany must have had it just as bad. He'd be terribly tired, his eyes terribly bloodshot, and they to try and carry on in the days! Most people that had husbands doing that felt they were coping alone.

My father had died and there wasn't one of us left school. My brother Jim, he'd been such a wonderful son. When he joined the navy, he allowed my mother something every week. He never married, devoted his life to my mother. He'd been in the nave full time and drawn his first week's pension. He just loved children. When he came home, he'd stand on the bridge at Pink's corner and play marbles with the children. He was very well liked in the village.

I went in in the morning and she was crying and she said, "Tony, I've had a dreadful premonition – my poor son Jim was killed. It was so plain." Mr Smith was the postmaster and he came that morning with a telegram saying my brother was missing, presumed killed, and then the second telegram came, nearly a week afterwards. He was killed off the Isle of Wight – it was a German E-boat – yet he was washed up near Plymouth so he must have been in the water some time.

She had the choice of his body being brought home and buried in the church yard of buried there in Portland Bill, right at the top of the very big hill, overlooking the water. She considered this and she thought as he'd spent all his life in the navy – he'd even put his age on to get in – that was the place for him to be buried. My older brother lived over at Ropley. We were going to tell him. That was quite a to-do! IN the end, I went up to Dr Clifford to explain and he said, "Don't worry; if you'd like to wait while I eat my supper, I'll take you over."

As things progressed, you could tell we were going to win. We were all told by Mr Churchill – he announced it, but you could tell it was going to happen. It was on the wireless. Anyone could realise it was going our way, thank Goodness! It was just to say that the war was over. We were all so happy.

We had little whist drives and dances and we raised money for the Welcome Home fund and we handed it over to Dr Clifford and it was to be shared out between those that came back from the war, the men that returned. It wouldn't have been an awful lot.

We all got together, we gave things to make the street parties up, all the little children were invited, naturally. I think they were all presented with a mug. We all bustled to and made a nice tea. The mood was wonderful. It went beautifully. It was a different atmosphere altogether. Mind you, I think all the time East Meon's been a very friendly place; I wouldn't want to move out of the village, but perhaps that's just me.

Both of them, Bobby MacDonald and Reg Files, they were very popular in the village. We never really thought we'd get them back. We went down to meet them at the bus. We said we'd carry them shoulder-high. Bobby MacDonald wasn't treated so bad but Reg definitely was. He came back from that war in a shocking state – it was terrible to see him. No way could you have celebrated because he looked so terrible.

Wilson Atkinson

Wilson Atkinson was born in 1927 at Lower Farm, the son of George and Sarah Atkinson. Wilson was later joined by a sister, Mary. He married Eileen Jackson in 1958 and eventually succeeded his father on the farm. Wilson has two daughters an a son, George, who has in turn taken over from Wilson.

I listened to the old radio. I remember Chamberlain reading it out. I do remember vividly the fact that the Germans had gone into Poland and that if they didn't withdraw, we were going into war.

My father was involved in the First World War – he was a prisoner. He had great admiration for the German people. He thought that in the mines where he was working as a prisoner, the conditions really weren't bad. And they were workers. He never had a bad word for them in that respect. It was certain elements, the Nazis, that were bad. We used to get it in the press every day. WE knew the villains: Hitler, Goebbels, Goering, Rommel, Mussolini, ….. I think Rommel was rather admired; it was Rommel this and Rommel that!

I must have been just into Churchers College; I was a boarder. Every time there was an air raid warning we used to get our sleeping-bags and we had certain areas to go to in the corridors.

The nearest I ever got to a bomb was when we were having a French lesson. One of us said, "Sir, there's a German aircraft out there." The teacher said, "Baker, get on with your work!" German bombers dropped bombs onto the workhouse at Love Lane in Petersfield and killed about six. The garbage went past the windows and blew them in!

We used to buy books for ourselves and discuss what planes were going over and try to identify them. I used to be able to pick out their shapes and identify the planes. In actual fact, it was a Junkers 88 that flew over Petersfield and

dropped the bombs on the workhouse. You could buy little models of aircraft and kits and put the together in balsa wood. Everybody tried to get a little bit of a plane or bomb. Or a parachute – we used to gather them and make a dressing-gown cord! We were going out and getting souvenirs when we could – spent bullets and ammunition. We were going out and getting souvenirs when we could – spent bullets and ammunition.

When I was at school, I was in the OTC and AFS. We used to have a little motorised fire tender with hoses, if anything around the school was hit. I remember going down and practising at the fire station, made to crawl on my hands and knees through a shed full of smoke and start the diesel engine. We were kept in readiness. With the OTC, we used to go on manoeuvres on the Heath. We had a rifle range. By the time I left, I was a quartermaster sergeant and the bugler in the band. We were partly trained and a lot of them went off into the war. We didn't know what would happen, you didn't look that far ahead. I might have been in the war in a twelvemonth.

When I moved from preparatory school into the senior school, the senior boys at the top of the school were going into war and some of the poor devils fell by the wayside.

My life really revolved around the farm. We used to be allowed out about once in every three weeks. I just used to cycle out. But that was only for the day – we had to go to the morning service at Sheet. My father was a bit of a taskmaster and he used to give me jobs. I was made to hand-milk, do shepherding, do everything on the farm.

We had one or two fellers worked on the farm, prisoners-of-war. On one or two occasions I was put in charge of Italian prisoners-of-war. There was a camp at Stroud and Upham. Those that wanted to work on the farm were brought out in a lorry. You used to have them cutting bushes on the hillside and potato-picking. They'd have one, if not two, soldiers with them. We got to know quite a few of them and one or two of the fellers stayed on after the way. They integrated quite well.

I can remember troops cleared part of Duncombe Wood. They had charcoal burners – charcoal was used for ammunition. They did the same at Langrish; the Canadians were timer-fellers in their own right.

From the farming angle, the Growmore Club was set up, when farmers used to meet and discuss what they were trying to do by growing more for the effort.

We had a lot of evacuees, right through the war. We had navy personnel, sometimes single officers, sometimes families, an evacuee from Lodon with her daughter, and then we had a school teacher billeted on us out of Portsmouth, Miss Barnes, who used to teach at East Meon School. And after the war, there was a Polish lady and her husband moved in. The house was never your own once the war started.

Many a time we could hear the bombers droning overhead because we were on the flight path. I remember going into the air raid shelter some nights when it got really vicious. Other nights we used to come down and sit under the table.

There was petrol rationing – you couldn't get away far. Headlights were just a little spot. They were blotted out with a disc. Some of them had louvred slits to give a bit more light. You couldn't drive very far unless it was urgent.

We had a searchlight site on the farm. They had living quarters there, two or three Nissen huts, all camouflaged. They had a light anti-aircraft gun. It was a big prism, tremendously powerful; they had a big generator. Their aim was to light up planes so that the anti-aircraft guns, wherever they were situated, would pick it off. What they liked to do was get the planes in a cross and follow it. I saw them pick out quite a few planes and the flash around them – you saw the big puffs of our fire.

You saw quite a few dogfights going on overhead during the day. You'd see them dive down, Spitfires and Hurricanes chasing German planes. They used to come over with aircraft coverage. You'd have two or three bombers with four or five fighters with them

One evening in the summer, we were cutting corn with a binder and stoking when there was a single German aircraft come over, reasonably low, which dropped three high explosives and an oil bomb. We saw the bombs drop. He aimed for the naval establishment but missed. The oil bomb landed in the roadside and caught the hedge alight. The high explosives landed in amongst the sheep; there were one or two of them blown to pieces or injured. The indentations are still on the hillside now where they landed. The road was about six to eight inches deep with chalk. And I can remember when there was a landmine dropped on top of the hill at Chidden Down.

We had experience with the V1 and V2. They were over the top of you, making a noise and then silence as the motor cut out. One night it was a dirty, misty night, standing on top of Hyden Hill with my father and another farmer and just about over the top of us, the engine stopped. You couldn't see it, just heard it; you know what sound travels like in fog. At least we knew it wasn't going to hit us – as a matter of fact, it fell near Warnford. Just towards the end of the war, a Fiefly went into the side of the hill at Hyden – the pilot was killed.

We watched with intensity the success of our troops at Normandy and the Russians coming in as well – sheer weight of numbers, that's what carried them through. The Americans were good to us; if they hadn't have come in, I;m certain we wouldn't have made it. We were always suspicious of the French. You used to follow it in the papers – there were always maps in the papers. We had a paper every day. I've got a faint idea it was the Express. I used to follow quite avidly the direction the things were going; I think we all did really, we were hoping for the best. You saw pictures of it – Belsen and all those places, and Colditz.

The invasion, that was another tremendous saga. You know what was on, basically, before it was announced. Roads were widened, concreted, made into woods to camouflage the military build-up. We knew the invasion was imminent.

Stuff was moving down daily. I can remember very vividly the day of the invasion when Dakotas were pulling shoals and shoals of gliders. I was home then, I think we were on holiday. It was nothing for one or two of the gliders to come down when they were practising for it, either with troops in or else not. I remember going up Hyden Hill. We know the thing had started – those booming planes going over.

We knew that things were going better. It was broadcast on the radio. It was a fight really as to who was going to get to Berlin first. Churchill was marvellous, a great statesman – he growled! I don't know who we could put in his place if there was a war today. Montgomery had a lot of support in the area because he was a fairly local chap. I remember the Pathe News – the celebrations in front of Buckingham Palace, the King and Queen stood on the balcony and the Mall absolutely packed.

Winifred Boyce-Clare

Winifred Mullard was born in Frogmore in 1923, the daughter of Lottie and George Mullard. She had four brothers and a sister, Vera. Her father had been badly wounded in the First World War and was unable to work when he returned. He died when Winnie was fifteen, shortly before the outbreak of World War Two. Winnie and her mother and sister lived at Bell Cottage throughout the war. In 1944, Winnie married Roland Boyce-Clare and moved to Canada.

I heard it on the radio … Chamberlain. We had an idea that there was going to be a war.

I remember the Home Guard by Bell Cottage – they used to have a hut. Everywhere we went, we used to take gas masks, but we never had to wear them. We had to make sure it was dark. We made frames for the windows and put some dark over. The thing I was terrified of most was when we heard the doodlebugs. You could hear the sound of them coming. You thought, that's definitely coming here and then you'd hear nothing, then a bang. We used to be able to see the blazes at a distance. I was very scared. It affected my mother but she wasn't scared. When the siren went off, she said, "When, if I'm going to die …." And she would stop in bed! She didn't seem to be frightened. There used to be Bell Cottage and then a big house and me and my sister used to go down in their cellar.

There was only me and my sister, really, still at home. We coped all right, really. Like sugar – we all gave up sugar in our tea or coffee. We took in evacuees – a woman with two children from Portsmouth; her husband was a PO in the navy. We didn't even know them or anything! She only had one hand and we were surprised how she coped with looking after the two children – one was about ten and the other about thirteen. I should think they stopped about two years. We all mixed in together. Her husband, he came through it all right and he stopped for a little while until they got a place in Portsmouth. I did hear that they started to run a café.

I went to the unemployment and they gave me a job. I was working in the rubber factory in Petersfield. Two weeks I was working days and two weeks nights, doing heels and soles of rubber shoes. I started that when I was about sixteen or seventeen. I loved it there. That's all demolished now, near Osborne Road, I think it was government. I can't remember what I got paid, but it was good for the time, and if we done night work, it was extra money. My mother let me have so much. Vera was in the Land Army at Privett. Where she was working, she lived as well.

I had four brothers. They were called up; George worked for the air force at Swindon, Arthur, he was in the army, Wilf, he was in the army, and Alf, he was in the army. That was my favourite brother, Alf was. I was there when she had the telegraph to say that my brother had been killed in the war. It must have been 1940. When the telegram came, my mother was in Petersfield, doing the shopping. There was my sister and me – we were wondering how to break the news to her. Unfortunately, she suffered from epileptic fits. My sister said we'd have to be careful. My sister, she was a bit hysterical.

They held a service over at the church, just for the family. It was very heart-breaking. He'd got married; when he was killed, his little girl was only about one and a half years old. Arthur came and Wilf. George didn't come – he married the village nurse and moved up to Swindon. They wanted to take me, but my mother wouldn't let them. They adopted a girl, Inge, a Jewish refugee from Germany; she'd lost her parents.

I was seventeen. I'd been out with one or two of the village chaps. There used to be a picture show. Anybody could go. These Canadians were stationed at the Court House. He [Roland] was stood up by the church with another chap/ My sister and I, when we walked by, he said, "Are you going to the picture show?" We said yes and they sat behind us.

They were all French Canadians, only about thirty of them. Most of them spoke good English but they'd all speak French together. In the old village hall, they used to have a dance, Saturday night. I remember the two brothers Blackman – George and Bill – used to play the accordions. Sometimes at the dance, the Canadians might start a fight; if they'd had a bit to drink, some of them were very rough. I think the East Meon people took it as if that was just one of those things. Afterwards, they'd probably get us and shake hands. They were moved to Langrish School, but my husband, we still kept seeing each other.

When I met Roland, I was the happiest girl alive. I was going out with him for two years and he was all right until he started drinking. There was a lot of people didn't like him for the way he treated me. A few hard times with him, but if you loved a person ……. I don't think he would have stopped in England, he wanted to get back. He asked would I be prepared to go back with him. I knew that if he was sent back to Canada, I would have gone with him. I think the happiest time was when he gave me my engagement ring. It wasn't what you would call an expensive ring but it was one I shall always remember. He gavae me that when we were getting on the bus in Petersfield to come back to East Meon. We'd been out for the day. We went and had a drink and then a meal – it was fish and chips, I think.

All these papers had to go back and I had to go to the padre and see that everything was clear, that he wasn't already married, I suppose. The day I was going to get married, I came downstairs and my mother said, "You're making a mistake – he'll never be any good for you." We got married in Petersfield Registry Office – just my mother as a witness and her friend, Mrs Boniface, and then my husband, he had a friend as best man. We got married 3rd January, 1944.

We was married three months and then I fell with my oldest daughter, Yvonne. He went back to Canada before I did – nearly a year without him. My husband, he sent a load of baby clothes. I breast-fed her until she was about ten months or so. We just knew that we had to cope. I think I travelled over in November, December 1944. I had to go to Canadian House to get my passport.

There was everything: plenty of candy, sweets, all different cereals, maple syrup (first I'd ever tasted – I can't stick that, reminds me of dog food). And the sweetcorn over in Canada! It didn't matter what house you went into, there'd be a big pan of it on the range. I'd never tasted it until I went to Canada. You wouldn't have thought there was a war on, it was that different.

I can't remember seeing any celebrations when the war ended. There may have been in Quebec, Montreal – I was out in Ontario, out in the wilds!