

WORLE HISTORY SOCIETY

# Wartime Worle 1939 to 1945

---

The goings on in the village of Worle in  
World War 2

**Raye Green**  
**December, 2015**

A study of the home front in the village of Worle, Somerset, during World War 2, with pictures, cuttings and memories of the people of Worle.

Published by Honey Pot Press  
[www.honey-pot-press.co.uk](http://www.honey-pot-press.co.uk)

## 1. Introduction

I missed the war. Right through childhood I listened to my adults, and I had a lot of them, reminiscing about 'the war', by which they meant World War 2. I had the good fortune of being born in the first year of peace, a fact that I imparted to people regularly, as if I had planned it all. I normally added that my Dad had also been born in the first year of peace, and I left it to others to work out, if they cared, that I had arrived in 1946 and my Dad in 1919.

In point of fact I rather resented having missed it all. My mother and grandparents succeeded in making the whole experience sound like a romantic idyll. Community spirit, the fun of making the food go round, the blackout, good old Winnie, make do and mend – rose coloured specs, in fact. My father, on the other hand, and my uncle, rarely mentioned it. They had both been in the front line and looked up to the sky with exasperation. The home front propaganda, the Hollywood versions of events, the hero worship of Churchill, all irritants to them both.

People spoke, with apparent affection, about a time that I didn't share with them, and I frankly considered them thoughtless to make me feel so left out. This might be one reason for my eagerness to research and write an account of Worle in the Second World War.

My family did not move to Worle until 1949, so there is no collective memory to rely on this time. In comparison, the 1953 book was easy. I remembered it, had lived it and knew at least a little of what I was talking about. This is different. In Worle, for the duration of WWII, my family did not exist. They were still in the Welsh valley where they were all born, and Worle managed quite well without them.

So this book is based entirely on what other people have told me via newspaper reports, photographs, log books, minutes, registers and endless conversations. These chats have sometimes been with folk who were at the centre of life in the village and sometimes with people whose families have passed on memories. It is, in the literal sense a history book which has to rely on research, and mainly the written or printed word. It cannot hope to be a complete, or a final account in any way. Doubtless others will add to or alter what is to be found in these pages. If you have contemporary evidence which adds to our understanding of the time, record it, write it up. Don't allow it to be lost.

## 2. Setting the Scene

We are going back to a time when Britain had had its confidence shaken by the abdication of Edward VIII. George VI and Queen Elizabeth with their daughters the princesses Elizabeth and Margaret, collectively the 'new' Royal Family had been warmly adopted by the nation, but my parents' and grandparents' generations could have done without another war. The cream of a generation of young men had been lost in the Great War and it takes longer than 20 years to recover from that kind of devastation.

I had assumed, before I started the research, that early in 1939 people were largely unaware of the possibility of war, or at least not too concerned. After all, it was only twenty years since the armistice was signed which was supposed to mark the conclusion of the war to end all wars. They would, I thought, have assumed that the 'powers that be' would have more sense than to go down that route again, and against the same foe. Surely they could not have been expecting it. Not true. Talk of war, beneath the surface, was everywhere.

Let's start by having a look at the map of the village in 1938. There are some drawbacks in this approach. The Ordnance Survey were a few years behind the building programme, so the houses on the north side of Hill Road East do not appear on it, neither does the Church Hall, which plays a large part in village life before and during the war. The map is small, I know, but may help conjure up a picture as we go along. An alphabetical list of street names follows.

Annandale Avenue; Bristol Road; Bristol Road [Old]; Castle Road; Church Road; Coronation Road; Ebdon Road; Greenwood Road; Hampden Road; Hawthorn Hill; High Street; Hill Road; Hill Road East; Kewstoke Road; Lawrence Road; Lyefield Road; Madam Avenue; Mayfield Avenue; Mendip Avenue; Pine Hill; Ranscombe; Spring Hill; Station Road; The Rows; The Scaurs; The Square. In these 25 streets, according to the street directory and electoral roll, lived 720 men and 868 women, 1,588 voters in all. The under 21s probably equalled this figure, as in previous decades for almost 100 years, so about 3,000 souls inhabited the village. This volume is for them.

The housing in Worle was not dense, as it is now, but much more scattered and interspersed with fields and orchards. Only in reasonably small patches were houses clustered closely. Coronation Road was noticeably built up, and along the High Street neighbours were in nodding distance of each other. Greenwood Road looks positively cosy which, of course, it was. The 'old' village snuggled around Manchester Square at the top of the Scaurs and led along Kewstoke Road to Castle Road and then to the new council properties. Spring Hill had avoided development and still had a stream and a little bridge at the bottom, but even there, the new school building was rising from the soil. The Weston, Clevedon and Portishead Light Railway chugged merrily through Worle, crossing Station Road on its way to Wick St. Lawrence and thence gently northwards

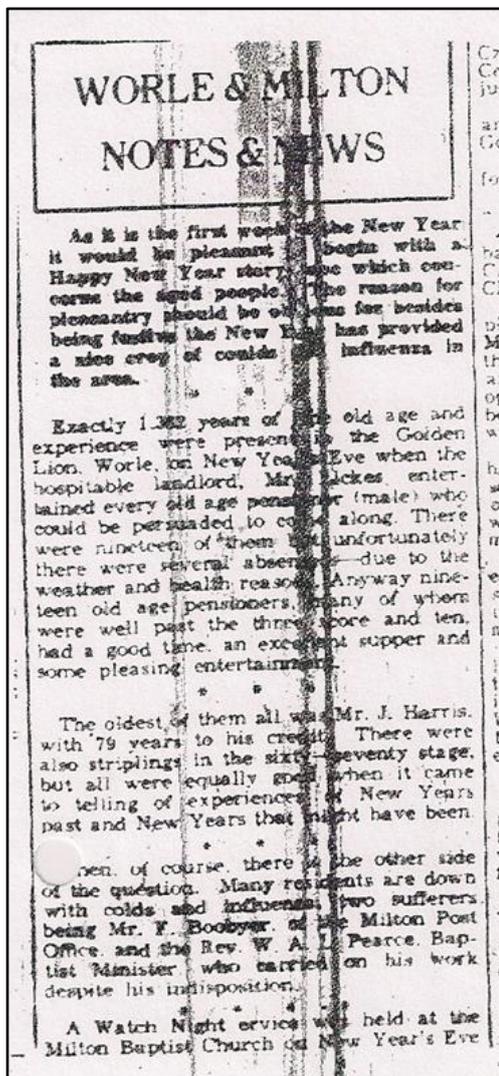


One of the luxuries of researching these years is the fact that Worle news was covered by two local papers. Before the war, both papers appeared on Saturdays, so were in direct competition. The Mercury we are still familiar with, but in 1939 it was a more austere publication, scorning the rather common idea of having photographs all over the place. The Gazette, on the other hand, had a much more modern look, illustrating wherever possible and using shorter stories with designated columns for different areas. This is a joy for a local history nut, since it is much easier to find information. It makes you wonder why the Gazette went out of business in 1952 and the Mercury ploughed on. It seems to me that the answer lies in the content and information given in the rival papers. There is no doubt that the devil is in the detail. The Mercury provides considerably more information, rather like a modern 'broadsheet', whilst the Gazette has a lighter feel, as do 'redtops' these days.

However, for the moment, I am going straight to the Gazette and the delightful column headed 'Worle and Milton Notes and News'. This appeared faithfully each week and gave the village all the news, in brief. The drawback is that we get the news from the viewpoint of one individual: the journalist responsible for Worle.

### 3. Happy New Year: January 1939

On December 31<sup>st</sup> 1938 we very sensibly head directly to the pub – the Golden Lion, that is. Mr Lickes, the hospitable landlord, had put on an evening of food and entertainment for the old men of Worle on New Year's Eve. All male, old age pensioners were welcomed to an excellent supper and the chance to reminisce about New Years Past. The women, I suppose stayed at home, knitting or something. Nineteen of the old fellows turned up, with Mr. J. Harris the acknowledged senior member at 79. Apparently, colds and influenza had struck down a fair number of folk, so perhaps some of the chaps remained at home with their wives. This would be the last time that the New Year would be welcomed without a heavy heart until 1946 arrived on the scene. The report, below, is taken from the Gazette dated 7<sup>th</sup> January, 1939 and gives some idea of the difficulties of transcribing some of the details. My attempt at this task is attached, to assist the reader to make some sort of judgement as to accuracy!



As it is the first week of the new year it would be pleasant to begin with a Happy New Year story which concerns the aged people. The reason for pleasantries should be obvious, for besides being festive, the New Year has provided a nice crop of 'colds' and influenza in the area.

Exactly 1,352 years of ripe old age and experience were present in the Golden Lion, Worle on New Year's Eve when the hospitable landlord, Mr Lickes entertained every old age pensioner [male] who could be persuaded to come along. There were 19 of them but unfortunately there were several absentees due to the weather and health reasons. Anyway 19 old age pensioners, many of whom were well past the three score and ten, had a good time, an excellent supper and some pleasing entertainment.

The oldest of them all was Mr. J. Harris, with 79 years to his credit. There were also striplings in the 60 – 70 stage, but all were equally good when it came to telling of experiences of New Years past and New Years that might have been.

Then, of course there is the other side of the question. Many residents are down with colds and influenza, 2 sufferers being Mr. F. Boobyer of the Milton Post Office and the Rev. W.A.L. Pearce, Baptist minister who carried on his work despite his indisposition.

A Watch Night Service was held at the Milton Baptist Church on New Year's Eve

St. Martin's Church was in the habit of putting on an annual parish social, which that year took place on Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> of January in the Church Hall. It was quite a drawn out affair, starting with games and competitions [unspecified!!] and followed by a thrilling whist drive in which Mrs. Raines won a box of chocolates. The people with real stamina then enjoyed dancing from 10.00 p.m. until midnight.

And that was not all. Rev. Frederick May had been vicar of Worle since 1926 and regularly put on a gift and prize giving for the children of the parish. In January 1939, 150 children attended, bribed by the clever rouse of providing a cinematograph show. I am assured that Rev. May was a Welsh man, and sounded it. I can hear him encouraging the children. "There's a good boy you've been this year. You shall have a prize and then, you won't believe it, but you can watch a film. Yes, a film".

Rev. May's welshness was not universally popular, finding disfavour with some of the elite of Worle, including Mrs. Bisdee who inhabited Sunnyside house in Church Road. I don't suppose the vicar minded her attitude: the Welsh are used to teasing, and smile when people are a bit funny. The vicar had had some difficulty raising the funds for the children's treat that year. The weather leading up to Christmas was seasonal to say the least and the choir's usual tramp around the village singing carols was a shadow of its normal self. Luckily donations made up the deficit, so the 'social' was a roaring success.

The picture below is not precisely dated, but is from the 1930s. I wonder how many of the parishioners, seated in the Junior School playground on this wet day, were present at the social gathering.



Rev. Frederick May is circled in blue; Eli George, the verger, in orange. The fourteen women seated at the front all seem to wearing the same hat. One of these women is

probably Mrs. May, the vicar's wife, but I do not know which one. One or two have fur wraps and all have straps on their shoes. Quite a fashionable bunch.

A glance at the Mercury tells us that the Methodist Chapel was also busy providing entertainment for the New Year in the form of a Guest Evening. The members of the congregations from the Milton Churches were invited to Lawrence Road for tea and games, organized by Miss Lily Fry of Tower View, the Scaurs. The Sunday School Junior and Intermediate departments had enjoyed their treat on the previous Wednesday.

The young people, mostly girls, of the Methodist Church were involved in a Christian Endeavour group. In 1938 they were all dressed up for a play to celebrate the Sunday School Anniversary when a picture was taken, featuring eleven of them.



Maiden names are provided, with married names given in brackets:

Standing: Enid Davis

Betty Fry [Thomas]

Lily Durston [Blizzard]

Olive Urch [Goodwin]

Ivy Hood [Payne]

Seated: Joyce Wells

Joan Peacock [Coronation Rd]

Joyce Edwards

Dolly Hutchings

Gwyneth Gay [Chapel Cottage]

On a family level, a private party also took place at 'Hillcrest', Church Road at the home of Mrs Williams. It was a surprise celebration, organised by the family and descendants of Mrs Anna Louisa Brooks, to mark her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. Life had not always been easy for Anna Brooks. They moved to Worle in 1911, and some years later her husband had

died as a result of an accident and she had lost her leg in the same incident. Mr. and Mrs. Brooks had nine children, five of whom survived to see their mother's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. It is good to know that she was able to enjoy her birthday with the 18 loved ones who attended.

It is just as well that the village celebrated the festive season with some vigour, since the Gazette, published on January 7<sup>th</sup> also told some subdued tales.

Firstly, there was a report of a death. Charles Arthur Kent<sup>1</sup> had been vicar of Worle from 1896 until 1902 – almost 40 years before. He had moved to Melford-on-Sea and just before Christmas had collapsed and died suddenly on a bus ride to New Milton. He was only 74 when he died, and had been a young married man when he was at St. Martin's.

Also during the same month the Mercury reported the 'Tragic End of Locally Connected Vicar'. This was most interesting, since it told of the death of Rev. Charles Richard Vallance Cook, aged 40, who was vicar of St. Just in Cornwall. Charles was the son of the late Rev. Vallance Cook and Mrs. Cook of Weston. He must have been born in 1899, and was the brother of Rev. Eric Vallance Cook, who became vicar of St. Martin's Church, Worle in 1949. Charles had achieved his pilot's wings at the age of 17 and was brought down twice during Worle War I. His severe injuries, it was thought, contributed to his untimely death.

---

<sup>1</sup> See 'A Glimpse of Edwardian Worle' pp 42 - 44

#### 4. The Spectre of War and Evacuation

It is at this point that the local papers reveal the level of war awareness that actually existed so early in 1939. I had erroneously supposed that most people maintained an uninformed, innocent attitude to Hitler and his doings. Of course, the crisis of the previous September referred to later by the wife of the local Member of Parliament, had been widely reported. Chamberlain's visit to Hitler, and his piece of paper which led him and Britain to expect peace, were widely known about, but not trusted nationally or locally. Preparations were afoot, just in case the worst happened.

The reports of deaths in the village were sad, but nowhere near as portentous as the interesting heading 'Weston a Reception Area'. It seems the town, along with the rest of Britain, had been 'zoned'. The possibility of an evacuee problem was already being planned for and Weston was deemed safe enough to take children from more dangerous areas. The report contained some controversial arguments. It suggested that *'care was being taken to respect different social levels!'* It further explained as follows:

*'This is not snobbishness, it is plain common sense. Most parents with children of their own would not welcome forced association with children from different environments in life. Young people assimilate unhappy habits very easily and if social reality was not assured many houses would refuse to participate.'*

This seems like a remarkable comment and makes us realise how far society and political correctness has moved in 70 years. Despite the reassurances that no one would have to take an unacceptable child, there were few responses to this first request for evacuee volunteers. Officialdom soon demanded a response. Local authorities were asked to visit every household to find out how many spare rooms there were. Evidently, the notion of a spare bedroom tax had not been entertained at this point. Weston Council asked, via the Mercury, for volunteers to assist in conducting the necessary survey in the town. The national result claimed that 4,800,000 rooms were available in safe areas, including Weston, including Worle.

The proposed payment system for households receiving evacuees was published that week. I'll try to make it understandable!

For taking in one child of school age householders received 10/6d a week [52p].

If you were generous enough to take in more than one school child, you received 8/6p [42p] for each child.

Now it gets more complicated. Children under school age had to be accompanied by an adult who would be responsible for their care. In these cases only lodgings were provided, not food, so the householder received 5/- [25p] a week for the adult and 3/- [15p] for each child.

I supposed, from this information, that the kitchen facilities, such as they were, had to be shared between the householder and the lodgers. In fact, Annie Vaughan in

Greenwood Road had to tolerate a second cooker being installed in her already tiny kitchen for the use of the evacuee family.

I think it might be useful to have some idea of the value of money in 1939. A little research has led me to the following figures which might help. The average weekly wage for a working man was £3/9/- [or £3.45p in today's money], a woman received, on average £1/12/- a week [£1.60p] and newly enlisted servicemen were paid 2/- [10p] a day. That last figure sounds criminally little, even taking into consideration the free bed and board. In contrast, whiskey<sup>2</sup> was 13/6d a bottle, or roughly 67p. Life was not easy, and rationing hadn't started yet!

The next indication of planning in high places came on January 28<sup>th</sup> with the heading, **'ARP Report At Last'**. There was an Air Raid Precaution committee for Weston and Axbridge which came into being in 1924. The bombing in World War I had made the Government recognise the need for advance planning. Only London was deemed to be in obvious danger from enemy bombs, but never-the-less precautions were necessary. Mr Shearmur was our local ARP chief and he gave out the news at a meeting.

The fifty-four local ARP Wardens were to receive special First Aid training to enable them to deal with the injured. These would be run by qualified lecturers with first aid certificates. Somehow this doesn't sound too comforting.

Local first aid posts were also named:

- Knightstone Baths for both sexes
- St. Jude's Church Hall for men only
- Old Methodist School and Church Room, Milton, for women
- Isolation hospital, Drove Road for both sexes.

None for Worle, I note. I have visions of the men struggling to reach St Jude's Hall whilst their wives headed for Milton Methodist. Both were on the hill and quite a climb if you needed first aid!

Ian Orr-Ewing had been the constituency MP for three years at this time. The picture on the right was taken in the late 1930s. Mrs Helen Orr-Ewing was doing her bit to help him along. Wearing a rather stylish hat at a rakish angle, she presided over a meeting of the Weston Women Conservatives at the Town Hall. In her address Helen Orr-Ewing said,

*'Since last year we have passed through really terrible times and a period of grave anxiety and crisis and we cannot be sufficiently thankful that during those terrible days last September we had a really strong Government in power, led by such a magnificent Prime Minister as Mr. Neville Chamberlain.'*



<sup>2</sup> Interesting to note that the price of whiskey at the time was very easy to find, whereas the price of milk was obscure, to say the least.

There was generous applause at this point. Of course, it was an audience of supporters, but I suspect that no one would have found it easy to believe that the 'Peace in our Time' sound bite would haunt Chamberlain so.

So, there was plenty of talk about the possibility of war in every part of society. All this depressing news appeared in nearly every household in Worle. It must have been a time of deep uncertainty, tinged with hope. The danger, some people thought, had passed –just. Sadly, not everyone felt safer after Chamberlain's announcement. A middle aged man who lived in Fairfield House in the High Street was plagued by concerns about the international situation and was found dead with his worried head in the gas oven. The poor chap was only 48. He was found by his daily help. Gas was also the culprit in the death of a 57 year old local lady, who was certain that her health was failing. Her husband and son had to break into the family home in an attempt to save her, but were too late. *'My nerves are all to pieces'*, read a note that she left behind.

Were these sad losses signs of the times, were they in any way connected with the conditions in Europe? We shall never know, of course. We only know that those who were smug about it all, and convinced that another war was not possible, were quite, quite wrong.

## 5. Local Matters

The local council had some every-day issues to deal with. The state of Worle Recreation Ground was a matter of considerable annoyance to the parents of the village, whose children were returning home even more muddy than usual. The matter was discussed at a council meeting. It seems that two local farmers, including Alf Tripp had been granted permission to graze their cattle on the recreation field. The state of the ground need not be described, I think. There was some disagreement between councillors over what should be done. Milton and Worle Ward had three councillors, all of whom lived in the village. Councillor Charles William Newsome Martin, known as Bill, lived in Kewstoke Road and was a Labour man. He agreed with the aggrieved parents, and said so in an article in the Gazette. Councillor Albert Michael Butt Criddle, who lived at 'Southville', in Church Road, near the top of Coronation Road, and Councillor Arthur James Heybyrne [Spring Hill] did not voice an opinion in the press. The report does not say what was actually done about grazing rights or the mucky field, but the trouble rumbled on, as we shall see.

Worle Old Boys Football club mentioned the state of the field in their match report that week: 'anything but conducive to good football...' was the verdict. However, WOBs were still playing football for the moment. Kelly, Cornet, White, White, Bray, Sandford, Williams, Smith, Pemberthy, Pemberthy, Gill all turned out that Saturday, just like Trumpton Fire Brigade. One of the Pemberthy boys donated this picture of the team from 1934 to 35 season, the closest we have to a pre-war image of the 'Brillcreem<sup>3</sup>' boys of Worle.



---

<sup>3</sup> It seems that this was the customary spelling of the nation's favourite hair cream.

Perhaps the state of the recreation ground or the prospect of war was too much for him, but Mr. Holley resigned as secretary of the Milton and Worle Ward committee, citing health troubles. Mr Muxworthy stepped into the breach and successfully persuaded the Borough Surveyor to consider the state of the footpaths in Worle. Only 'consider', you'll notice. Nothing was actually done. I'll bet that became a minor issue rather suddenly when things kicked off. The editorial comment in the Gazette praises the concept of the Ward Committee thus:

*'A committee of this description is particularly useful to a suburb like Worle and Milton. Geographically situated as the ward is, it is always possible for the inhabitants to think they are rather removed from the centre of affairs. This kind of thing is not conducive to good citizenship and therefore the Ward Committee serves a useful purpose in keeping interest alive. Worle and Milton are important parts of the town of WsM and the committee is instrumental in making this fact better known.'*

So Worle was thought of as a suburb in some quarters even before the war. Who would have thought it? Some news items underline the suburban approach that was creeping in. Road widening was beginning in Church Road. The area to be dealt with was between the bottom of Hawthorn Hill and the bottom of Pine Hill. 'Surplus banking' was removed around the bottom of Hawthorn Hill in preparation for the work to commence.

This picture shows the results of the work. It is taken from the bottom of Pine Hill, facing west and reminds us just how narrow Church Road became at this point.



As part of the same 'improvements' Pine Hill was also to get an overland telephone line. I really don't know whether this was to service a public telephone box, or the houses.

There are some interesting social comments to be gleaned from the Gazette articles that cold, influenza-ridden January. It seems that animal welfare was already an issue in 1939. There was, of course a local hunt, Weston Harriers, which often met at The Newtons but that January they mustered at Woodspring Priory. Right into the early 1960s hunting remained an acceptable activity in the locality. There was, however, an opposing view about the treatment of animals and on 21<sup>st</sup> January 1939 the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection held a meeting which was reported adjacent to the picture of the hunt. It opened with these words: *'There can be no Peace on Earth or Goodwill in the human kingdom until men cease to prey upon and exploit the defenceless creatures of the sub-human kingdoms...'* This made good use of the fear of war and bloodshed which permeated all other activities and tells us a great deal about the arguments over the treatment of animals, even then.

One of God's creatures managed to get its name in the Mercury as a result of a successful charm offensive. Described as the 'Cheerful Duck' this enterprising bird had moved into a fertile plot of land in Church Road. Mr. Criddle's small holding was the duck's choice and he certainly did not want to share his new home with any other ducks, so he fought off potential flat mates with some energy and became quite a local favourite, waddling around and quacking to passers by in a sociable manner.

The prospect of war, however, was the major concern and as usual when feelings are running high, rumours abounded. There was talk of military development in the district surrounding Weston and Worle which, according to the local newspapers had, 'reached ridiculous proportions'. The Mercury suggested that *'residents will be well advised to disregard fantastic stories now going the rounds. Suggestions which have this week been made concerning areas near Worle, are, to say the least, laughable'*.

I do wonder what military development was being discussed. Was it to do with the airfield, or the R.A.F. Camp or the Ministry of Defence land at Middle Hope? Were the 'ridiculous proportions' ever attained? Someone may remember, I hope.

In general, the people of Worle were a healthy bunch. Many were involved in occupations which demanded a level of fitness not matched in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Farming and Market Gardening were the main sources of employment for the men, and their wives had few modern conveniences to ease their household chores. And, of course, everyone walked and cycled much more. There were hardly any cars. The Mercury actually remarked on the longevity of the villagers and this is backed up by considerable evidence of people who raced around engaged in 'leisure activities' which were physically as demanding as their work. Mercury readers vied to hold the record for the oldest living inhabitant. A 94 year old woman claimed the title and one 84 year old woman was said to be still doing a full day's work. It is, therefore, interesting to note that the Worle correspondent for the Gazette devoted an amazing number of column inches to discussions of colds and influenza and other minor health matters. No detail or statistics are used, merely repeated statements such as:

"...the weather we have been experiencing of late has brought out a fine crop of colds and influenza in the ward and not a few people are confined to bed..."

The gardens heralded spring early that year, despite some high winds. There were reports of daisies in the lawns as early as February and the crocuses bloomed in time to be remarked upon in the February 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the local papers.

The Church Hall was pressed into service again by the Servers and Choir Boys of St. Martin's Church, to hold a social. Have you noticed that we no longer have 'socials'? They have quite disappeared, and I really don't know what has replaced them. This particular social was held to raise money for the Churchyard Extension Fund [notice the health connection]. Attendance was good and the usual range of activities was available: games, competitions, whist and finally dancing to Don Mario and his band. Further investigation, mainly using maps of the area, has revealed that this extension to St. Martin's Churchyard was to be the area to the right of the footpath, looking up towards the Church from the Kissing Gate. Many new graves were being dug by Eli George in this new area when I was a child. Nowadays it is opposite the car park and the Worle History Society research team allocated the letter 'J' to this section when recording the graves in 2013.

By early 1939 the British Broadcasting Corporation was responsible for Radio Stations across the country, as well as a very small television service. It is likely that many families in Worle had radio receivers, which had valves and therefore took ages to 'warm up'. Transistors arrived much later and speeded things up considerably. The Home Service was introduced in September 1939 after the start of the war. Cinema was still a hugely popular source of entertainment and 'The Wizard of Oz' introduced the nation to Judy Garland and 'Over the Rainbow'. Other popular tunes of the time were Glenn Miller's 'Little Brown Jug' and, surprisingly, Louis Armstrong's 'Jeepers, Creepers'. Did the Church Hall ring to the sound of Don Mario and his Novelty Band playing any of these tunes? I wonder.

The Church Hall was used for almost all the social activity in Worle, as well as serious meetings. In February that year there is mention in the papers of a range of bookings to keep the hall busy. Not content with the Choir Boys' social and dance, Worle Old Boys football club also held a dance; confirmation classes started with Rev. May in charge and whist drives were a regular feature.

During the previous year the 'First Worle' Brownie Pack had been started. It was the brain child of Miss Nora Jefferies, who lived then, as now, in Pine Hill. The Brownies met weekly in the Church Hall during the early part of 1939, paying a shilling a week to hire the space for an hour and a half in the early evening. Nora was the pack's Brown Owl, and is still addressed as such by many of her flock. She was always indefatigable, organising activities for her girls as well as doing her full time teaching job. It became obvious to Nora that some of her Brownies were growing up and needed to move on to a Guide Company. This is when she persuaded Miss Jackson Barstow to set up the First Worle Guide Company, which began in January 1939. Guides and Brownies would never have existed in Worle without the Jefferies sisters, Nora, Freda and Gwen and their circle of friends.



This rather blurry picture was taken of the new Girl Guides outside the equally new school building in Spring Hill. Taken in 1939, it precedes the opening of the school itself.

Besides these various sociable pastimes, books and reading were an important part of many lives, but Worle had no

library and the Gazette was running a low-key campaign to have a branch library located in Worle. Week after week the matter was raised in the Worle and Milton Notes and News column. The journalist responsible was obviously an enthusiastic reader and had a persistent turn of mind. How upset he would have been if he had known that our branch library would not open for another 30 years.

## 6. Talk and Preparations

So, life plodded along, but more serious issues raised their heads and talk of war was never far away. Ian Orr-Ewing, the local Member of Parliament, accepted an appointment in the Government's Defence Department. I am impressed to learn that he visited the New Inn [Woodspring these days] in the High Street to address guests at a supper. Defence of the realm was on his mind and he made an urgent plea for more National Service Volunteers. His stern warning was that:

*".....if another war broke out, towns and villages in England would be in the same position as French boroughs a few hundred yards from the front line in 1914-18.*

He also made a very interesting remark, which bears repeating,

*"I have always felt", he said, "that I would look with horror on the day, which I hope will never come, when England is governed entirely by clever men. We want England to be governed by men who understand the spirit of England".*

*"Nothing could be more important in the world, than the defence of England, at the present time."*

It has been a while since our representative in Westminster has addressed a group of local people in their local pub. Good for Orr-Ewing, and he a Scotsman. It must be mentioned, I think, that the Gazette columnist for Worle attended the meeting and took the opportunity to ask Orr-Ewing a question. Affairs of state and defence were not on **his** mind. He asked about the library, or rather the lack of it.

Weston A.R.P. wardens seem to have made some progress in their defence preparations. By the middle of February the town was promised 60,000 gas masks, which were to be stored in Wadham Street. None were kept in Worle. Great. The A.R.P. had made a slow start and been greatly criticised, but were now on the move. Among other things, it was stated at their meeting that spring, that,

*"They were not expecting a crisis or a war and they hoped there would neither, but in the course of time Air Raid Precautions would become part of the training of every fit man and woman."*

A fortnight later a new A.R.P. Chief Warden was appointed. Major J. L. Kenny was a retired army officer and a prominent member of the British Legion. There is no mention in either paper of what fate befell Mr. Sheamur, the previous Chief Warden. Anyway, Major Kenny announced that gas masks were to be distributed within a week and that tools for the assembly of the masks had arrived. ARP wardens were being trained to assemble them. This is remarkable. I naively assumed that gas masks arrived all made up and ready for action. Still, at least they made it out of Wadham Street. However, they did not reach Worle until the very end of August – only a whisker before war was declared.

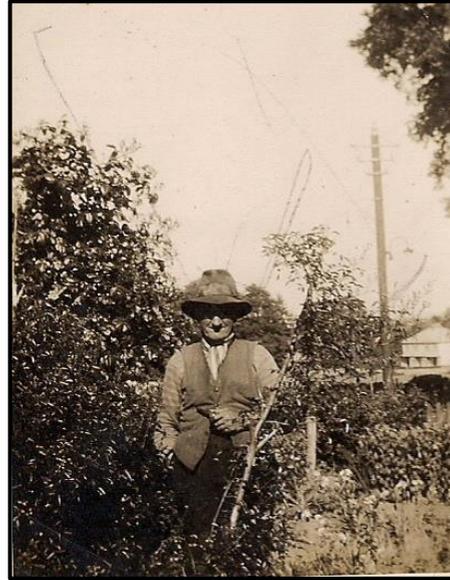
Major Kenny also disclosed that the County Council had decided Weston needed only one First Aid Post, and there we were thinking that four such facilities would be inadequate. In response to this worrying news, it was pointed out to the Council that the town expected an influx of evacuees if war should be declared, and that our close proximity to Cardiff and Bristol docks and to aircraft factories would add to the danger from bombing.

**“You will hear some strange noises on Tuesday”**, announced the Gazette on March 4<sup>th</sup>, **“resembling the wailing of lost souls in Hell”**. This wonderful prose, of a type we never enjoy in our local papers now, actually referred to the testing of the A.R.P alarm systems. These systems had been installed mostly in local Laundries! Moorland Laundry in Weston had one; Westman’s Laundry in Burnham-on-Sea was also thus blessed, as was Imperial Laundry in Worle. Why laundries? I have no idea. Presumably the height of the chimneys was significant. On the other hand, I wickedly imagine that the systems were driven by steam. Anyway, observers were posted indoors and out of doors at suitable distances to check the efficacy of the noise. Reports will doubtless follow.

There is no doubt that Worle was aware of the horrors unfolding in Europe at this time, since the national newspapers must have been full of it. Almost everyone read a newspaper in 1939 and hardly a soul could have missed the disappearance of Czechoslovakia from the map at the hands of the Nazis. Bohemia and Moravia were also occupied and Lithuania looked as if it was next on the list. In fact, although war had not actually been declared, World War 2 was already raging on the continent, so no wonder Britain [so often referred to as England by politicians in 1939] was preparing. Memories of the shock waves in 1914 were still all too clear. In retrospect, it is easy to recognise the importance of March 28<sup>th</sup>, when Hitler denounced Germany’s non-aggression pact with Poland. Only three days later Britain and France promised to support Poland if there was any attack on Polish independence.

## 7. The Annual Flower Show and other matters

The most optimistic forward planning in the village surrounded the Horticultural Society and Worle Flower Show. The annual general meeting of the 'Horti' was held, according to the Gazette, at Worle School [it doesn't say which one!] late in March. The main point of discussion was the Flower Show, which was scheduled to take place on August 7<sup>th</sup>, closer to the wire than any of the members realised. Ignorance is bliss, so the officers of the club were voted for and appointed as follows: Mr. Stephen Jones, President; Mr. H. B. Price, Treasurer; R. E. Mawson and J. Black, Secretaries.



A new silver cup was presented to the society by Mr. Moody, who represented the Weston-super-Mare Hospital League. It was designed for the '**cottagers**' of Worle, exclusively, to compete for. Entries were to consist of a group of



four vegetables. This, I think, is interesting. It sounds delightfully parochial and makes sure that the silverware stays in the village. The vegetable bit is none too clear. Should it be 4 different veggies, like, for instance, a carrot, an onion, a runner bean and a pea-pod, or was it intended to be 4 carrots, etc?? And then there is the dodgy question of what constituted a cottager? Could gardeners who lived in bungalows enter, or those who inhabited council properties, and what about flats with a bit of garden? There was, I fear, all sorts of potential for confusion. What fun.

The Gazette was at pains to emphasise the importance of Worle Horticultural Society, and after discussing the success of the 1938 show, it speculated on the growing annual support for the event. The paper reported the well-kept gardens and allotments, at their spring best due to friendly rivalry between neighbours.

April is always said to be a treacherous month. The papers published on the first of the month reported the deaths of Harry Garland, and his brother-in-law, James Fisher as well as Walter Eber Huish. Harry Garland<sup>4</sup> of Colebridge House was the people's warden at St. Martin's Church and an enthusiastic rose grower. He worked for many years as a farrier and was known and liked by all. His death shook the village and special mentions were made by Rev. May in services and in the Parish Magazine. The family of Harry and James must have had a dreadfully sad week. Walter Huish had lived in Quarry House, Newton's Lane, and appropriately had been a quarryman. He was 54 and left four daughters and one son. What a week.

Easter week seems to have been calm and much as usual. Communion Services were held at the Church and the Chapel; there was a Gala Dance at the Church Hall on Easter Monday and a Worle Old Boys football match against St. Paul's, Berking, on the rec. This away team were staying at Brean in caravans.

Bank Holiday Mondays are often a bit of a let down. This one saw a mishap in Station Road at the level crossing. The Weston, Clevedon and Portishead Light Railway was plying its trade gently, as usual. At the same time two cars, both driven by Birmingham folk were approaching the crossing. In the first car Robert Richardson saw the lights change to danger and he braked at once. Miss Nora Harding, following in her Vauxhall, was not quick enough to follow suit and ran into the back of Mr. Richardson's Austin 7. The train was completely unaffected by events, but poor Miss Harding swerved and landed up in the ditch, together with her mother and sister, who were passengers. Never mind, no one was injured, though St. John Ambulance was called, just in case. As a matter of interest the very next day, the Finance Committee of the Borough Council discussed Ministry of Transport traffic lights for Worle which would cost £537/8/1d. It seems very expensive.

St. John Ambulance, Worle Division, is reputed to have met at Mr. and Mrs. Bisdee's stable block, next to Springfield House, in Church Road. This was convenient for Dr. W. J. Petty, M.B.,B.S., M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., who lived practically next door at 'Craigside', and was the Divisional Surgeon and Superintendent for St. John. 'Old' Dr. Petty was ably assisted by Walter Williams, who was Ambulance Officer for the Worle Division.

Life has to move on, as they say, and the much missed Harry Garland's shoes still needed to be filled. The Vestry and Parochial Church Council met and appointed the new Church Warden – Alfred Tripp of Nutwell Farm, High Street. His father had been Church Warden at St. Martin's and the family had had connections with the Church for 200 years. Alfred Tripp had already been Church Councillor and a sidesman. He, and other people with official Church duties would be in for a difficult few years.

Good news was received by three pupils from the Church of England School. Free places at Weston County [Grammar] School were awarded to Barbara Smale of Ranscombe Avenue, John Edwards, The Laurels, High Street and Gordon Porter, The

---

<sup>4</sup> See 'A Glimpse of Edwardian Worle' p 92

Parade, High Street. This news reached the Mercury, together with the following comment on local schooling:

*'School restarted after the Easter holidays on Tuesday for what, at one time, was thought would be the last term in the present buildings. It is said to be doubtful, however, whether the new school at Spring Hill will be finished by September, and thus the "old order" may continue a little longer.'*

The clocks were put forward for British Summer Time, [except for the war memorial time piece, which stoically stuck to GMT], swans nested on the pond by the Great Western Railway line on Worle Moor, the new pavements were completed in Church Road, the football club played their games, Brownies met at the Church Hall and you could be forgiven for supposing that all was as normal, but it wasn't.

## 8. In Case of War

Major Kenny, newly appointed to his post as Chief Air Raid Warden, called a meeting at the Town Hall to be attended by all ARPs. He told them that the town had been split up into 7 sections, each of which would have its own head warden. He produced a map showing the sectors, sadly I cannot lay my hands on a copy. He also said that there were now enough gas masks for everyone, but he did not know if there were sufficient of each size. The wardens were therefore asked to set up fitting depots at schools and Church Halls and to act as fitters. Volunteers were told to contact Major Kenny at 47 Farm Road, or to go to the Area Organiser, ARP Office, Central Chambers.

Exactly one week later the Worle Wardens met at Parker's Assembly Rooms in Hill Road and appointed G. D. Waite to be Emergency Chief ARP Warden for Worle. Mr. Waite lived in the School House in Hill Road. He wasted no time. The village was divided into 5 sectors which included a chunk west of the junction with Milton Road and with only 17 wardens available to him to look after his area he made an immediate appeal for more volunteers. A total of at least 30 was needed. As it was, only 3 wardens were allocated to a post designed for 5 or 6.

Details of the Worle sectors and allocated wardens were published in the Mercury as follows:

W1: Locking Road; Baytree Road to Bristol Road Junction; Westbrook Road; Seabrook Road, Woodcliffe Road. Wardens: Messrs P. H. Corsbie, W. Wright, H. Walters and Mrs Webb.

W2: Windsor Road, Spring Hill, Ranscombe Avenue, Pine Hill, Church Road, Coronation Road. Wardens: Rev. F. May, Mrs A. C. May, Mr. W. Handcock.

W3: Bristol Road from junction to Station Road, Annandale Avenue, Mayfield Road, High Street to the Scaurs, Greenwood Road, Station Road. Wardens: Messrs S. Godfrey, S. Jones, G. R. Parker.

W4: Hawthorn Hill, Church Road from Coronation Road to the Scaurs, Hill Road, Lawrence Road, The Scaurs, Kewstoke Road, Castle Road. Wardens: Messrs E. Fry, C. W. Newsome Martin, G. D. Waite.

W5: Bristol Road, Station Road to boundary, Loop Road, Ebdon Road, Madam Lane, High Street from the Scaurs to Bristol Road. Wardens: Messrs D Brewer, F. Muxworthy, G. D. Redman and Miss J. Merrick.

Comments in the Worle and Milton column of the Gazette suggests that these people, including three women, would be responsible for the provision of air raid shelters for the 2000 people in the ward as well as emergency action. However, nothing stays the same and there are suggestions that the boundaries and the warden allocations changed with the passing months. Incidentally, does anyone know which little bit of Worle was 'Loop Road'?

The behaviour of Nazi Germany was certainly not comforting. On 28 April 1939 Hitler denounced the Non-Aggression Pact concluded with Poland in 1934 and at the same time abandoned the Anglo-German naval agreement of 1935. Hitler then sought to negotiate a Pact of Steel with Mussolini, which was supposed to provide relief from Germany being 'surrounded' by Great Britain, France and Poland. Undoubtedly these actions propelled the Berlin-Rome [Hitler-Mussolini] axis towards war with the rest of Europe.

It is impossible to know how these events affected the people of Worle. The local papers stick rigidly to reporting preparations for war in the area and do not comment on international matters, probably feeling that people received enough information from the national press and the BBC. Normally, it is the best informed people who suffer most in such times, and I suppose this was the case then. Certainly a matter of 'ignorance is bliss'. The people who were the most willing volunteers seem to be those in what was described as 'the professions'. The clergy and local teachers were quick off the mark and others followed swiftly. By the 29<sup>th</sup> April, the number of ARP Wardens in Worle had risen to 23, but this time not named in the papers.

The beach lawns in Weston were awash with people on Monday 24<sup>th</sup> April for the National Service recruitment rally. The Gazette reported the rally using the emotive headline '*Did you join up on Monday Night? Too Old? What about National Service?*' The men must have been aware of the pressure, especially when the opening paragraphs asked, '*Have you joined one of the local Territorial units during the week?*' The rally began with a march past of the Territorial units, led by two detachments of trainees from R.A.F. Locking. The main section of the parade included the 4<sup>th</sup> Somerset Light Infantry, 295<sup>th</sup> Company Royal Engineers, and Somerset Yeomanry. The mayor addressed the crowd on the Beach Lawns, urging the young men to join the Territorials, which would help to ward off conscription. '*Let us not shirk!*', he concluded.

It was emphasised that no Territorial was expected to serve abroad in time of peace, and a list of advantages was presented;

- A satisfactory rate of pay in return for services, plus a proficiency grant
- Uniform, and expenses incurred in travelling to drill halls for training
- A fortnight's holiday under canvas with pay and expenses found
- Social amenities
- Tutorship in horse-riding, motor driving, markmanship, etc. according to the unit
- The knowledge that you are doing your bit.

Two days later the government made up the minds of any waiverers. The Military Training Act was passed and men aged 20 and 21 were required to undertake six months military training. Was there ever such an April?

There was no May Bank Holiday in 1939: not until 1978 did Great Britain have this luxury. However, May 1<sup>st</sup> was conveniently on a Monday and it poured with rain all

day. Still, the rush to prepare for war seems to have slowed down with the arrival of the hawthorn blossom and the local papers reflect this. Sporting activities and enjoyment were widely reported and nostalgia was in the air.

The Mercury reporter for Worle interviewed F. H. Phippen, Devonia House, High Street and uncovered information about the Weston to Worle Turnpike Road and its finances in 1881. It is fascinating, so I have made a pamphlet<sup>5</sup> for interested parties. We are so lucky that people looked back and recorded their findings.

Rev F. May wrote a glowing tribute to the departed Harry Garland, which was published in the Church Magazine. It recalled Mr Garland's service as a Church Warden, but also talked of his kindness and generosity.



Harry Garland with his wife [right], an unknown lady, [left] and his famous roses.

Spring is also heralded by the arrival, in the High Street, of a barrel organ which serenaded the village on Tuesdays. It had been a feature of the summer of 1938, and there was considerable relief to note that it had acquired some new tunes. This sounds like the precursor of 'musak', which is so annoying and of the juke boxes which were yet to accost our ears. Could the barrel organ man be bribed into five minutes silence, I wonder? The arrival of Spring also affected the spring in the war memorial clock which again started to play up, stopping at 5.35 and refusing to budge. Oh well, it was still on G.M.T, anyway, so it was always an hour out!

Worle Old Boys had a busy time trying to complete the season's fixtures. Saturday saw them travelling to Pilton, where it snowed, and Worle lost 3 – 1; on Monday they beat Winscombe, but were soaked by torrential rain; Wednesday took the poor things to Wells where they drew 4 goals each; on Friday they gave up the outside activities and

---

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 1

enjoyed a dance at the Church Hall, leaving the games to Worle Cricket Club and the Homing Pigeon Society! ....But only for a day. On Saturday they took on Shepton Mallet, an old adversary and ended the season by thrashing them 8 goals to 1. Hurrah. The football club was beginning to enjoy considerable local fame and appreciation, mainly because of the skill of one or two star players. Ken Lane and D. Price both lived in Coronation Road and had the experience that May of travelling to Denmark on tour with the Young Men's Christian Association football team, something they certainly could not have done by the Autumn.

As the football season closed, Cricket took over, with most of the same youngish men involved. The change over was marked by a cricket match between Worle Old Boys and Worle Cricket Club, which the cricketers won, fortunately. The cricket club minutes for this time are a joy and all recorded in two books, kept safe by Johnnie Tucker and loaned to me for a while. Thirty three gentlemen, including the vicar, in the chair, attended the Annual General Meeting in November 1938 in the Long Room at the New Inn. They are all named in the minutes with an initial and surname. At the end of this venerable list it says 'and Ladies'. How sweet.

It is useful, at this point, to record the names of W.C.C. officials. Club President was Rev. Frederick May: the vicar of St. Martin's traditionally took this post and chaired meetings. G. W. Edwards was honorary secretary and W. Ballam was returned as treasurer. The captain of the first XI was J. Hancock and vice captain was J. Cromer. It was a thriving club with a decent bank balance and a record of winning matches, which encouraged the members to reach for greater things. The war, when it came, put paid to that aspiration and when the club held its next A.G.M. in November 1939, only 15 were able to attend. But for the time being, there were three teams, including a Junior team and the club had a busy season ahead of them.

There were other sources of entertainment, too. A small boy, presumably left unattended as children were in those days, got himself stuck in a sewage pipe in Coronation Road. Now, it must be made clear that this was a new, unused sewage pipe which was awaiting installation, so it could have been worse. The local children had been crawling happily through the pipes for days, when one little chap became stuck and had to be dragged out backwards. Sadly, I do not know who this was, or whether it affected him for life.

The congregation at the Methodist chapel were busy. There is a report of a 'social' held by 'Christian Endeavour', which seems to have been run locally by Lily Fry and was part of an international group for young people which is still active in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and was started in Maine, USA in 1881. No details of the 'social' are available, but harmless fun and refreshments [no alcohol] were usually the backbone of such gatherings. The C.E., as it was called locally, also arranged a ramble on Worlebury, which around 20 youngsters joined, followed by supper in the Schoolroom.

Some activities around Worle were not so 'merrie'. War preparation had to be faced. It is true, I think, that May was quieter in this regard, but reminders reared their heads from time to time. The international situation was volatile. Spain, following a

devastating civil war, announced that it was leaving the League of Nations, which further weakened an already wobbly association, and the world was watching Europe with hearts in mouths. Activity was the best way to deal with the uncertainty. At least it was possible to feel that something was being done.

The A.R.P. Wardens seem to have led the way. Twenty eight of them held a meeting in Mr. Parker's rooms in Hill Road and made plans for a practice blackout in South Ward on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup>, which all ARP personnel attended. But that was chicken feed: the big happening that month was a practice bombing of Yatton. Sadly, there is no information about how this was managed, but it must have involved some frightening moments and tells us a great deal about the mind set of the time. This is confirmed by the following extract from a piece in the Gazette, reporting a meeting held at the Town Hall. J. L Kenny had this to say:

*"You may ask yourself why we are making this tremendous effort. I think it is partly because, while we are talking politics, other people are talking war. War is not entirely a question of fighting battles. I want to bring home to you that we are at war. When the bombs begin to fall and the guns go off it is the climax of your war and it is no good trying to be ready then."*

This speech was too long to reproduce here, but one line stood out, I think:

*"Each of you should ask yourself this question now: Am I going to be a defender or the defended?"*

This must have set folk thinking and it was certainly too much for Mary Diamond of Tintern Villas, who lost her concentration and slipped on a banana skin in Alfred Street. She dislocated her shoulder. No, really, it is true, it was in the paper.

By the end of the month, Germany and Italy had signed their 'Pact of Steel', a pact of friendship and alliance between Hitler and Mussolini which retrospectively looks like the drawing up of battle lines.

Whitsun was approaching, and the West of England enjoyed wonderful sunny weather for Whit Sunday and Monday. It was a very English weekend, with a village cricket match and the children re-living the Worle Schools Sports that had been held on the recreation ground on the previous Wednesday. There was no carnival, I notice. I wonder why not. Never mind, Worle Old Boys put on a comic football match in aid of St. John Ambulance and then took their wives to the Bristol Hippodrome to see a show. All of them went – except for poor old Tom Pemberthy, who was injured during the game and St John Ambulance had to be called out to tend to him. It probably cost more to get Tom fixed up than the club were able to denote from the proceeds. Nice.

The children were entertained by a 'Buffalo Bill' circus coach which toured the village – not quite so English, but it suited the unusual weather. The children at the Church of England School in Hill Road were engaged in a project monitoring the weather and they recorded a record 83° in the shade on June 5<sup>th</sup>. The next day the thermometer read 87°. Spring had burst out all over.

Children in the Methodist Schoolroom presented a series of short plays; the Methodist 'Bright Hour' for ladies of a certain age, set off to Downside Abbey for an outing; the guides and brownies held a bring and buy sale at 'Sunnyside' and raised over £10, but much the best was the arrival of 20 piglets at Laurel Farm in Station Road. The children gave up on Buffalo Bill and concentrated on the pigs, or joined the Sunday School outing to Weymouth.

The journalist for the Gazette excelled himself by writing on the topic of a lupin –yes, just the one. It lived in the garden of 'Glenview' in the High Street and had one blue bloom. Not exciting you may think, but all the rest of its blooms were pink. I do agree. It's not a classic anecdote.

Spring is never any good without a wedding and on this occasion Miss Lydia Kate Osbourne of Ebdon Road obliged by marrying her beau, Donald Owen at St. Martin's Church. She had a clutch of attendants who wore a range of gowns from old gold in colour to pale pink and all carried cornflowers. Reminds me of a lupin I heard of somewhere.

The subject of weddings brings us to Don Mario's Novelty Band. At present there is no information about the nature of this group, except that John Woolmington was the drummer. John and the band appeared at the dance in aid of local charities in the Church Hall on June 16<sup>th</sup>, and the very next day John was back at the Church Hall for his wedding reception, following his marriage to Dorothy Venning.

Not everything in the garden was lovely. The village said its goodbyes to Alexander Fuszard of Hill Road, who died at the age of 51, and to Annie [Mona] Williams of 'The Lodge' in the High Street. At the annual meeting of the Village Club silent tributes were paid to Harry Garland and E.P. Jones, both members for many years.

Poor old Fred Bartlett, who had been good since February, lost his sense of proportion again and was arrested for shouting in Ebdon Road. Why always in Ebdon Road, I wonder?

June drew to a close and international matters re-surfaced. Things had been going on all the time. The S.S. St. Louis had crossed the Atlantic carrying Jewish refugees to Havana in Cuba, where they hoped to find asylum. They were turned away and sailed on to the U.S.A. where, again, they were denied entry, despite their papers being in perfect order, and despite the large Jewish communities who were contributing so much to the prosperity of America. Eventually the Belgians, British, French and Dutch all offered the 937 passengers asylum. You find out who your friends are. The following people from the St. Louis were among those who settled in Britain. They deserve a mention, I think:

*Nathan Haber, born 1890 in Dora (Austria-Hungary);  
Emma Hoffman, born in 1897 in Priesen, Germany;  
Cilly (or Zilly) Hofmann;  
Friedrich Marcus, born in 1889, Altona, Germany;*

*Else Schott, born 1903 in Krefeld, Germany. May have settled in Birmingham with Schott and/or Blumenthal relatives there;*  
*Helene Turkowicz, born 1891, Rozwadow, Austria-Hungary. The family had a shoe and handbag shop in London. Husband Joel, daughter Edith;*  
*Chawa Weiser, born 1883 in Nowosielitza, Austria-Hungary. Husband Ignaz.*

I hope they were happy here.

In Weston a huge parade of National Service Units was held on the Beach Lawns. People from Worle marched with the Territorials, First Aid Corps, Nursing Corps and the ARP Wardens. 6 RAF bombers flew over in formation to salute the volunteers.

## 9. Summertime, and the living is easy?

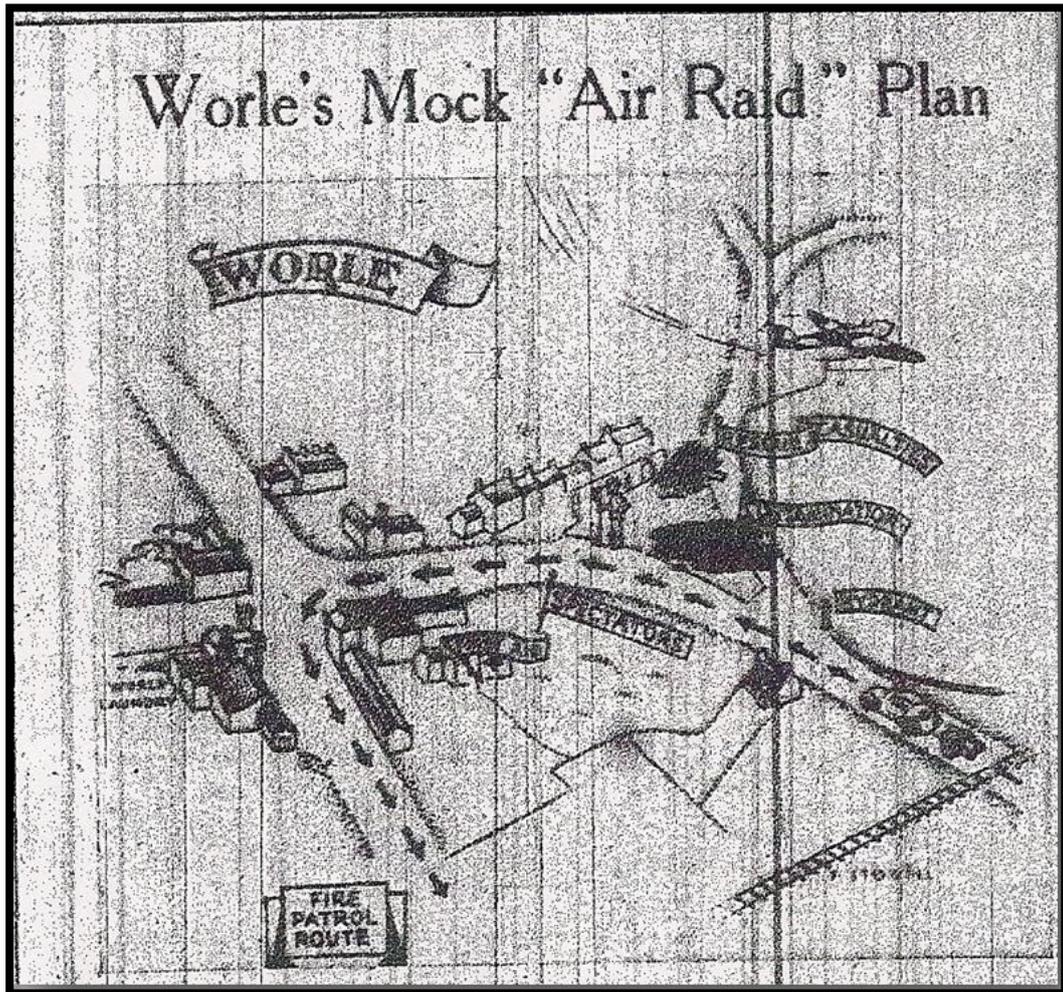
Well easier some years than others. In Worle, haymaking was in full swing and the village concentrated on horticulture and agriculture when it was possible. Councillor Criddle organised a day out to the Royal Agricultural Society Centenary Show at Windsor Great Park, which set the tone. A week later the Flower Show meeting finalised the arrangements for the big day on August Bank Holiday Monday, but the fear of war was demanding a great deal of attention.

The council were discussing public air raid shelters, which were normally supposed to be underground. Not so easy in Weston and Worle. The carboniferous limestone of the hill is not keen on being dug out, and has to be blasted, which is not an accurate science. So the council considered using lower ground, but the water table rendered that proposal too dangerous, so it was resignedly agreed that underground shelters were not possible. There is no actual alternative proposal, however, at least there is nothing in the papers to suggest what they intended to do. The only clue is the Air Raid precautions for schools which were printed in St. Martin's Parish Magazine.

It is interesting to speculate on how the children felt. Evacuation was a new word to most of them, and although the children of Worle would not have to leave home and be billeted on strangers, they would have to tolerate children from city environments coming to stay. Volunteers were still needed for the evacuation scheme, which in the Weston area had to prepare to take 8,800 youngsters, together with their teachers or parents. Before the event, I dare say the whole thing sounded like potential fun, but would the reality be the same. Noses would be put out of joint.

The international news was worse than ever for the Jewish population on the continent, as the papers and the BBC told the nation that the Nazis had closed down the last remaining Jewish business in Germany. Hitler was making it less and less possible for the rest of the world to negotiate, and as war crept nearer the preparations at home gathered pace. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of July a 'big blackout' was planned across four counties. It would begin at midnight and end at 4.00 in the morning to allow the RAF to carry out manoeuvres. In the event low cloud hampered the manoeuvres, but the blackout went ahead. The new school in Spring Hill, which would become Worle Senior School, was almost finished. It was water-tight and some rooms were complete, so the ARP meetings were often held there. A senior warden had to be appointed for the Worle Sector and there had been a rumour that there would be changes to the sectors and warden arrangements. The ARPs were issued with chrome signs announcing 'Air Raid Warden' to hang on their garden gates [assuming they had one] so that they could be easily found, and a large scale ARP exercise was to happen in Worle on July 28<sup>th</sup>. This was to include a mock air raid. It is impossible to imagine how they managed this. Where did the planes come from and how many were there and what exactly did they do? I don't know, but I have found a plan which was used at the time, which I hope you can follow. It was drawn by F. Stowell.

The arrows, which indicate the Fire Patrol Route, follow the High Street from east to west, past the Ebdon Road junction and then turn left at the New Inn into Station Road. Positions are marked for casualties, co-ordinator, hydrant [the old parish pump], and bizarrely, spectators. I can't help thinking they might have achieved greater realism if everyone not directly involved had hidden under the stairs. Perhaps the spectators were expected to assess the success of the thing. I must say I find it amazing that this actually happened in the village. The reality of war is becoming clearer.



Clinging to normal life was becoming a greater and greater challenge, but they really, really tried. The three children who had passed the written examination for the Grammar School also negotiated the interview stage successfully and were congratulated in the Mercury. Mrs Hunt, who lived in The Rows, claimed to be the oldest inhabitant in Worle and the cricket team beat the team from Webbington 42 runs to 29. Not a magnificent score on either side.

The rag and bone man had plied his trade around the streets with his pony and trap for decades. He had succeeded by dint of bribery. Local children had looked forward to the clop of hooves, since it meant that in exchange for unwanted bits and pieces they would receive balloons or other toys from the crafty trader. Suddenly it looked as if

the rubbish he was given would be much more valuable, and he was instructed by the local magistrates that he could no longer reward the youngsters if he wanted to keep his licence. What a shame.

One wonderful relief from all the gloom was the wireless. The radio programming had been rather dull and the BBC had received moans and groans from a disillusioned public who were sick of organ recitals and public information announcements, but the BEEB was forgiven when 'It's that Man Again' hit the airwaves on 12<sup>th</sup> July 1939. The phrase was coined from the common habit of referring to Hitler and his doings with the same words and was soon shortened to ITMA. It's launch preceded the introduction of the Home Service, but it was to become the star in the crown of the new radio channel from September 1939 and right through the 1940s. If ever a laugh was needed, it was then and the BBC became the nation's favourite again. Tommy Handley's quick fire, topical jokes were an instant hit and attracted entire families to listen when ever it was broadcast.

In the village, a travelling fare arrived early in July and parked on the land near the New Inn. There were roundabouts, swings and sideshows to entertain everyone for a few days, when it moved on to extract cash from someone else.

Things were just rather odd. The schools were open in the evenings until 10 o'clock so that people could have their gas masks fitted; the Brownies were not welcomed at the Church Hall because it had been requisitioned for war matters, so they had to meet on the hill when it was fine. Courting couples started rushing to the altar at an alarming rate.

I have been struck by the unusual letters that have gone down in history, like the personal one from Mahatma Gandhi to Adolf Hitler requesting the prevention of war and, in contrast, the epistle from Albert Einstein to President Roosevelt about developing the atomic bomb using uranium. This second letter led to the creation of the Manhattan Project and ultimately the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. What a shame the success rate of those mail shots could not have been reversed.

I am also shocked and amazed that on Friday 4<sup>th</sup> August, Neville Chamberlain dismissed Parliament until October 3<sup>rd</sup>. Yes, really. He was clearly deranged.

How did people cope? Especially those who truly understood what was happening? The Churches were well attended by those who drew comfort from believing in a loving God, or wanted to ask the Almighty to take sides. Others threw themselves into activity of any kind, rather than sit and think. Consequently, the Flower Show was a roaring success, socially and financially. On Monday 7<sup>th</sup> August at 2.00 p.m. the much maligned Recreation Ground was full to capacity with people who were determined to enjoy themselves for as long as they were able. But walk along the High Street, and you would have been confronted by a map in the Post Office window showing all the Air Raid Precaution information, as well as a model head, fitted with a gas mask.

The Cricket Club did their best, playing their matches as usual, holding meetings in the mornings at C. W. Edwards' home and organising the dance planned for September 6<sup>th</sup> in the Winter Gardens. Poor things.

Then a 'normal disaster' struck, with the death of Ellen Day, who was 83 and lived in The Rows. She had worked at the laundry until 6 weeks before her death.

It was time for action, so on 20<sup>th</sup> August, 1939 the youngsters donned their uniforms, polished their badges and Scouts, Guides and Brownies gathered in Mendip Avenue to take part in the first ever Church Parade.

E ighty young people marched out into the High Street, past the War Memorial and up



to St. Martin's for a special Church Service. On the way they passed Westonia Cottage on the left, where a young family called Jones had moved in. Valerie Jones was two years old. I wonder if she and her parents and brother came out to watch the parade.

Further along on the other side the marchers were probably unaware of the pomegranate tree in the garden of Prospect Cottage. And so to Coronation Road and along Church Road to join Rev. May for the service. The village was delighted to have the distraction and took an interest. The youngsters look proud and optimistic and were kept under marvellous control by Nora Jefferies.



These pictures are real treasures, provided by Nora Jefferies, to whom I am very grateful. They allow us to be there with them all, flying the flags and banging the drum, loving our place in the world and determined to protect it. The sign on Skid's wall, on the far left of the picture on page 56 starts 'Help Win the War'. They had 13 more days.



That evening the High Street flooded in torrential rain and you couldn't even get a pint at the Lamb. The pub and the cottages in Lawrence Road were full of mud on the ground floor.

Four days later Chamberlain recalled Parliament and a War Powers Act was passed. His Majesty King George VI's Government ordered the Royal Navy to be put on a war footing. All leave was cancelled. Naval and coastal defence reserves were called up, especially radar and anti-aircraft units. The last British and French private citizens in Germany were ordered home by their respective governments. Things were looking grim. Things **were** grim.

Worle Old Boys did what they always did in a crisis – they organised a charity dance in the Church Hall and planned another for the following week. Ken Lane, who was an extremely good footballer for the local club, was offered a contract with Bristol City for the next season, but the fates had different ideas. On the 29<sup>th</sup>, the children were due to return to school for the new academic year. At least they thought they were.

## 10. War

The first of September, a Friday, proved to be pivotal. After much manoeuvring and desperate diplomacy, not to say threats, it was suddenly all too late. Germany opened hostilities on Poland without even declaring war. Britain's position was clear. We had undertaken, together with France, to support Poland if any attack was made upon its independence.

The countries of Europe drew up their battle, or non-combatant, lines. Norway, Sweden, Finland and Switzerland declared themselves neutral in any conflict. Spain and Ireland followed suit on the Saturday.

Locally there was organized mayhem. On Friday, five trains full of 4,000 evacuees arrived in Weston and had to be found homes. Saturday brought a further 3,200. Whole schools from London arrived together with their teachers, but this was no day trip. The local newspapers reported their arrival at length, describing faces wreathed in smiles being greeted by friendly, welcoming locals. In fact, of course, there was apprehension and confusion on both sides. These poor little Londoners had rarely, if ever, visited a rural area before, and the life experiences of the locals did not include traffic congestion and smog. A great deal of bridge building was going to be required. London accents on the lips of children, who referred to the men of the house as 'mister' and to the ladies of the house as 'missus', were going to take some getting used to.

Rations depots, designed to help local people to feed such huge numbers, were set up around the town, on a ward by ward basis. The depot for Worle was actually at Milton Park Road in the Infants' School. Hardly a home in the village was unaffected. If you didn't actually take in evacuees, you doubled up with other members of your own family to make room elsewhere. Mr. S. H. Jones was in charge of all this in Milton and Worle and I bet it tested his stamina and patience.

Appeals were made for drivers to deliver children to their 'billets' and for blankets for all the extra beds required. Mr. Waite, our Chief ARP chappie for Milton and Worle, set about distributing gas masks for everyone. He must have been worried. Luckily, the evacuees brought their own.

So there we were: children by the thousands and teachers and mothers by the hundreds all in the town, many of them in the village. Even without a war to worry about this would have been interesting and it was going to be the women who bore the burden, that was certain.

The men, in fairness, worked their socks off to deal with the influx. Worle Old Boys even cancelled their matches and the much anticipated Charity Dance. The Cricket Club gave up on their End of Season dance at the Winter Gardens, which was too full of people to be used for dancing.

Sylvia Culliford, Station House, nipped up to St. Martin's amongst the chaos and married Eric Cormick: the last peace time wedding for six years. Blanche Weaver, nee Wyatt was buried in the dear old churchyard and wished eternal peace by family and friends.

And that was that. There was no avoiding it. It was Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 1939 and no one would ever forget it. At 11.15 a.m. B.S.T. the voice of Neville Chamberlain told the nation what it already knew, that Germany had not responded to the call for withdrawal from Poland and that, consequently....."*this country is at war with Germany*".

Immediately all men between 18 years and 41 years of age became liable for conscription. All the village's lovely young chaps – the cricketers, the footballers, the members of Christian Endeavour, the Choir, Don Mario's Band – everyone. They wouldn't all go at once, of course, but it still doesn't bear thinking about.

Even the sounds of the village would change. There would be no bells rung in celebration or to mark a passing, but only if the enemy invaded. The collection in St. Martin's Church that day was presented to the bell ringers in appreciation. In some parts of the country Air Raid Sirens were sounded almost at the same moment that war was declared. There was no air raid, but it brought the horror of it all home to people. In Worle, there was trouble telling the difference between an Air Raid Siren and the whistle on the Weston, Clevedon and Portishead Light Railway. So, it was necessary to dive for cover if a train went past.

By the time the enormity of it all sank in, it was announced on the wireless that France, New Zealand and Australia had also declared war on Germany. I find myself thinking 'you find out who your friends are' an awful lot as I write this.

There is nothing in the local press about other happenings on this terrible day. No mention of the sinking of the 'Athenia', a passenger ship sailing to Canada, with the loss of 112 lives. There had been 1,400 people on board when the German U-boat attacked. Britain, on the other hand, did not attack anybody or anything as far as I can ascertain. We dropped 6 million propaganda leaflets on the no doubt astounded Germans. The paper weighed 13 tons, and it was estimated that it provided sufficient toilet paper to keep the people of Germany squeaky clean for 5 years.

Monday 4<sup>th</sup> September came. We were, for the first full day, a country at war, a town at war, a village at war. Nepal joined the allies, and were a blessing. My father, who had a hell of a war, said he would rather have one Gurkha than 10 of any other nationality by his side. Amazingly, 4000 more evacuees arrived on Weston Station, but many of these were destined for Long Ashton. They still had to get there, of course.

On Tuesday, the U.S.A. declared itself neutral in the war, and I feel unable to make a comment which would be suitable for these pages.

Wednesday was a better day. South Africa declared war on Germany and Nora Jefferies decided to do something. So she took the Brownies up the hill for a meeting

to keep them busy. Only 8 Brownies attended – the rest were already busy enough at home, helping with the evacuees. Nora's notes in her wonderful log book, written the same day, read as follows:

*'The outbreak of war naturally made a difference to the pack, for Tawny, being a mobile VAD was now unable to attend meetings regularly. Our first meeting after the declaration of war was held on Sept 8<sup>th</sup> on the hill. Mrs. Crease kindly offered to help if necessary. We met on the hill because owing to new school arrangements arising from the evacuation scheme we were no longer to be allowed the use of the hall at the infants' school. Only 8 Brownies were present at this meeting for the evacuees were as yet hardly settled down in their new homes so the Brownies were needed at home to help. Fathers and brothers were being called up and Brown Owl encouraged the Brownies to keep cheerful at home when the grown ups had so much to occupy their minds and worry them. This would be a little bit of war work that the Brownies could do.'*

*'War or no war, the pack must go on, and so the new sixers were nominated that night and having achieved Golden Bar were presented with their stripes the following week when we met at Mrs. Bisdee's.....It was at this meeting that we welcomed our first two evacuee Brownies both from London. Iris Kellehen and Iris Beasley.'*

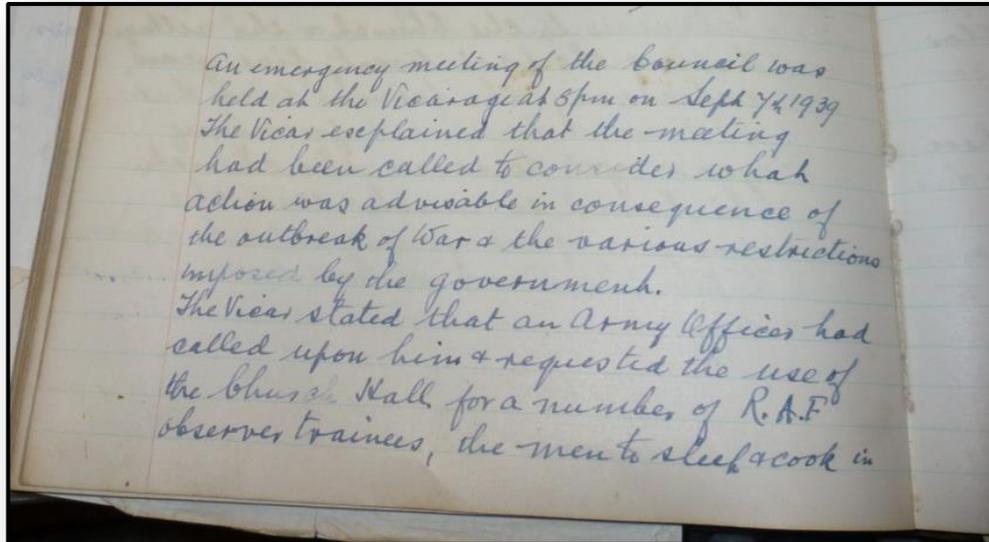
I think I am beginning to understand the nature of heroism. It takes many forms. Sometimes it is about pure, physical courage of the sort that results in a Victoria Cross or a George Cross, sometimes it is about focussing on the moment and doing what needs to be done, like supporting and caring for other people, distributing gas masks and keeping the children occupied and contented.

On a down-to-earth note, I notice that the opportunity to make a quid or two did not escape the population. Louches of Weston were already advertising 'fancy gas mask cases' at 3/6d each, which was quite legitimate, of course. I suppose they were the wartime equivalent of the designer handbag, which leads me to ask myself whether Kathleen Culliford was tempted to buy one- a gas mask case, that is. She was following her sister to the altar a week ago and now she was heading up the aisle herself. Donald Disney of No. 1 Council Houses, Kewstoke Road was the lucky groom and the party went back to his home for the reception. The Cullifords must have been reeling with the rush of it all.

It was a tough time for the newspapers. If they reported war matters, people moaned and if they didn't, people moaned more. The Gazette went with the flow and published the A to Z of Air Raid Precautions as well as describing the evacuation in great detail. I could go through all 26 items, but I'll just mention one which caught my eye. In the case of an emergency, the bath should be filled with water. All well and good if you were lucky enough to possess a bath!

On Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> September, the vicar called an emergency parish meeting at the Vicarage. The minutes, below, do not tell us who attended, but they met at 7.00 p.m. The Church Hall was needed for the war effort. It was to accommodate R.A.F. Observer

Trainees, who would eat and sleep there for the princely sum of 2d per man per night. No time limit was mentioned, so presumably it was 'for the duration', which soon became the usual expression.



## 11. An evacuee's memories

Reg Barr came to Worle in September 1939 from Ladbroke Road, near Notting Hill, now W10. He was seven and a half years old and a pupil at Lancaster Road School. Reg was the youngest of five children. His two sisters were considerably older than he was, and stayed in London, where they had jobs, but Reg's two older brothers came with him and the three little boys were all billeted together, with the Huish family in Lawrence Road.

The whole of Lancaster Road School was evacuated to Worle on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1939, teachers as well as pupils. Reg recalls Miss Bell, the headmistress, who was billeted with Freddie May and his wife at the vicarage, so I expect she was chilly. The vicarage was notoriously cold and didn't have hot water on tap until 1953.



It is my impression, gleaned largely from the Mercury and Gazette reports and editorials, that the people of Weston and Worle thought that the evacuated children had come from a deprived background, and would benefit hugely from a stint in the West Country. There may be a grain of truth in this, as we shall see, but Lancaster Road School was in what

became a fashionable and wildly expensive area of West London, adjacent to the A4. Portobello Road was close by and 60 years later Hugh Grant and his film crew would arrive to exploit the fame of the Notting Hill carnival. The picture shows the celebrations in Ladbroke Grove when George VI was crowned. So it wasn't all dingy back streets and poor food.



But, it was no bad thing that the children were swiftly removed, since Ladbroke Grove received its fair share of bombing. The picture of the street [from Notting Hill History Timeline] shows the results of one night's efforts by the Luftwaffe.

Reg and his brothers were well looked after by Mrs. Huish, but the poor lady already had two boys of her own and taking on more was too much for her, so Reg moved to Kewstoke Road, to the

Broadbears' home, and there he stayed for the duration of the conflict. Whereas the Huish family had attended the Methodist Church in Lawrence Road, the Broadbears were Church of England, and worshipped at St. Martin's, so Reg went to Church with them. The Broadbear's daughter was a piano teacher, and gave Reg lessons. He proved to be musical and soon Mr. S. Gibbins, organist at the Church, took over his

tuition. Reg became a server and a choir boy and eventually, as an adult, the church organist. He also played the organ at R.A.F. Locking and remembers playing at the apprentices' Passing Out services in front of a congregation of 500 or more.

When the war ended, Reg stayed in Worle. His parents had moved to Melksham and he saw a lot of them and of his sisters. Celia, his second sister, is still alive. Both Celia and his older sister visited him regularly and had him to stay with them. Celia's husband was from Corsham and it was from him that Reg learned the skill of wood turning.

It is so pleasing that Reg's experiences of the sudden move worked out so well, but he admits that it was a massive upheaval, and just about the most formative event of his life. But Reg still lives here and has contributed greatly to village life. My sincere thanks to him for talking to me.

## **12. Blackout, Air Raid Precautions and associated matters**

The blackout suddenly became an immediate issue. There were many ways of blacking out the light, from proper blinds made for the purpose to sticking black paper over the glass. Opening a door to enter or exit would show light to potential enemy aircraft, so it was best to stay indoors after dusk. As a result the Church and the Chapel moved their evening services forward, first of all to 6.00 p.m. and then earlier and earlier as Autumn approached until they began at 3.00 in the afternoon. The Churches seem to have been busy, not only were the congregations bigger, but weddings were solemnised quickly, in case the men were called up. The 'cloth' also had to deal with an unfortunate rash of funerals.

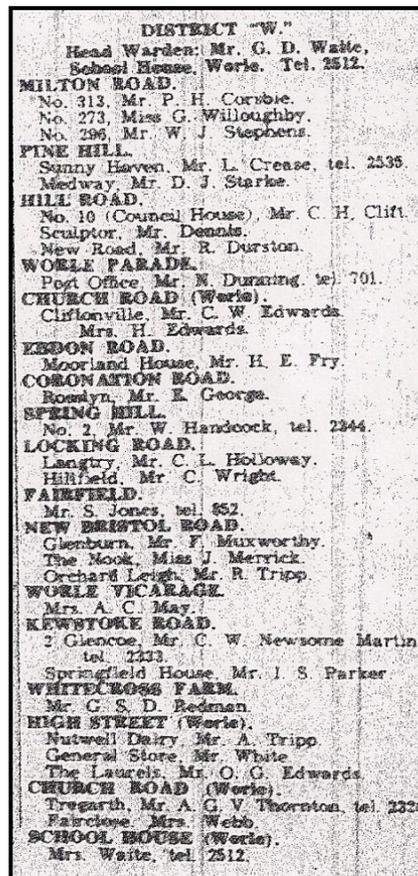
John Porter died at Westwick Green farm. I don't entirely blame him, he was 87 and I expect he had had enough of wars. Blanche Weaver, nee Wyatt who had been buried on September 2<sup>nd</sup> was joined a week later by her sister, Mabel Leaker. What a sad time it must have been for the Wyatts. Hill Road lost Edith White who was 66 years old and Lawrence Road said goodbye to Lucy Milliner. Rev. A. M. Mumford, formerly of Pine Hill also succumbed. It must have seemed never ending.

Finally, on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> of September the schools re-opened. It had taken some organising. The evacuated schools and local schools had separate timetables, each with their familiar teachers, so the school buildings were being used for much longer hours to fit it all in. This caused even more blackout troubles, which became worse with the passing weeks. The business of getting around in the dark, or choosing to stay indoors was a bit of a trial. Wilfred Parsons was knocked off his bike in the blackout and broke his pelvis. This caused the ARP wardens to pontificate constantly about the stupidity of the civilian! Until, that is, an ARP warden had to be admonished for 'showing a light'. The papers reported at the end of September that there had been 8000 blackout offenders in the town during the month.

The papers loved it. “Jay walkers with lights are doomed”, declared the Gazette. Offenders became known as the “Light Brigade” and ironically, ARP Wardens were “Little Hitlers”. The scripts for ‘Dad’s Army’ were being written all over the country. The ARP wardens for ‘W’ district, which we must assume stood for Worle, were listed in the Mercury. Five of the wardens were really Milton people, but the rest were ours. Nevertheless, it is all too easy to get into a tangle with the house names. What or where, for instance is the Hill Road entry for *Sculptor*? Enquiries have informed me that a sculptor, named G. O. Dennis, did indeed live in Hill Road. This interesting person was affectionately known as Geronimo. His works of art, which I pondered about, turn out to be grave stones for the most part, and can be seen in the Churchyard.

The wardens had a busy couple of months attending meetings and being trained for all eventualities. Of the 31 wardens, 26 were men and 5 were women. It would be interesting to know how the 5 females fared at the gatherings in the New Inn to learn about incendiary bombs and high explosives. Eli George was the man in charge of the safety of Coronation Road. Maybe he took his spade in case a grave needed to be dug in a hurry.

When the training sessions ran out of topics the ARPs set off around their sectors to check up on the state of the gas masks, and those who had not had a fitting were to be given a thorough ticking off. This turned out to be 90% of the population of Worle, according to the Mercury. Most people had never had their masks fitted, and those who had made some adjustment to the straps had made a less than accurate stab at it. They would all have died in a gas attack – or so the paper claimed. The wardens had the bit between their teeth and set out again to collect names and addresses of children under 4 years of age, for whom special masks were to be provided.



Right through this period, generally known as the ‘phoney war’ but referred to by Churchill as the ‘twilight war’, the wardens met every week to keep up to scratch. By the beginning of December an ARP post is mentioned in the press. It was situated at the Church of England School in Hill Road, a sensible choice as the Chief Warden for the area lived in the School House. An appeal was made for furniture and utensils for the wardens to use. A check of the Civil Defence records tell us that there were actually two Wardens’ posts, the above mentioned one at the school serving W 18 section and the second one at the New Inn, serving W19.



The ARP Wardens for W. 18 and 19 sections are pictured above, gathering at the New Inn in early 1940. Photo courtesy of Stan Terrell. Some are still unnamed, but time may provide more answers.

There was also the matter of the sirens to consider, and regular testing was carried out on Tuesdays, fortnightly. The piece in the newspaper is too good to miss. I have, therefore, reproduced it in full, and laughed the whole while.

***'Weston to be 'Warned' on Tuesday'***

*Should the following notification happen to escape the attention of readers, they will, on Tuesday morning, at eleven o'clock, experience a big fright, for the local A.R.P. sirens will open up at full blast and cause an impression that for some inscrutable reason the nasty Nazis are about to attack this peaceful zone.*

*The explanation of the matter is that not only in Weston, but throughout the county, the sirens will be tested, and that on the second Tuesday in each month, at the same hour, the test process will be repeated. We are requested by the Chief Constable of Somerset, Mr. J. E. Ryall, to explain that the tests will be made in the following manner:-*

*Electric sirens will commence with the sounding of a steady note [the 'Raiders Passed' signal] for 30 seconds. This will be followed immediately by the 'Action' warning signal [a fluctuating or warbling note] being sounded for 25 seconds. These tests will conclude with the sounding of a steady note for a period of one minute.*

*Steam or compressed air sirens will be tested merely by the emission of a short blast. If a warning of impending air raid is received on a day on which tests*

have been held or are to be held, the 'Action' warning signal will be reinforced by the free use of whistles by police and air-raid wardens.

I have repeated this aloud to many intelligent people, all of whom have laughed and none of whom have been able to repeat the information accurately. How I love England and the English [and the Welsh, of course]. Those instructions are the best I have ever come across and should re-printed freely across the nation for our edification and to cheer us up.

### 13. Big Brother or Common Sense?

Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> September saw an announcement in the local and national press that Identity Cards and Ration Books were to be issued to all citizens. This was a natural follow-on to the National Registration Act which had been passed by a very efficient government only 2 days after the outbreak of war.

Levels of disruption in the country were massive and the 1931 census was rendered useless, so it was announced that Friday 29<sup>th</sup> September would be National Registration Day. The nation was told that apart from the unprecedented movement in the population resulting from evacuation and mobilization, there was a need for the control and planning of manpower to make the wartime economy efficient. Rationing was bound to take place and full information was necessary if you wanted to eat.

So, there we were. Worle, together with the rest of the nation had a miserable Friday filling out the form – never a popular pastime. 65,000 people delivered the forms which HAD to be completed on the day, because the 65,000 'enumerators' returned on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> September and Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> October to visit every household in the land. Information was checked and each resident was issued with an Identity Card. And they say the Germans are good organizers.

E.D. Letter Code		DATE OF NATIONAL REGISTRATION DAY		Postal address		FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY	
Schedule Number				Name of householder or other person responsible for making the return		1.	
				Description of premises, establishment, etc., if other than a private dwelling		2.	
						3.	
						4.	
						5.	
						6.	
						7.	
						Initials	
						Date	
						FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY	
						1.	
						2.	
						3.	
						4.	
						5.	
						6.	
						7.	
						8.	
						9.	
						10.	
I declare that this schedule is correctly filled up to the best of my knowledge and belief, and that the persons included spent the night of National Registration Day in this household or establishment, or have been otherwise properly included according to the above instructions.				Signature (Head of Household, Manager of Establishment, or other person responsible for making the return)		Enumerators' Initials	

Information gathered for each person was their name, sex, date of birth, marital condition, occupation and whether or not you were a member of the armed forces or reserves. Forty six million cards were issued. The identity card had 2 pages and at the top of each page the 'enumerator' entered the person's name and their identity card number.

Of course, people do not always tell the truth, and it was later realised that many nervous mothers had not entered their sons on the forms, hoping that they would therefore escape conscription. I have a vision of the Mothers' Union, eyeing each other up, wondering if all the upright, self-righteous members had told the whole truth about their households. The culprits soon realised that if they concealed their precious sons they would not get a ration book or identity card. Difficult.

#### **14. Not as 'Phoney' as you may think.**

Gradually, during that Autumn and Winter, people realised that things were pretty quiet, considering there was 'a war on'. The initial fear of air raids began to fade a little as the weeks passed.

Allowance had not been made, however, for U-boats, and some people paid the ultimate price as a result. Scapa Flow was a protected anchorage in the Orkneys and naturally enough considered a safe haven for the fleet. The British Battleship 'Royal Oak' was at anchor there and it seems that the crew were able to prepare in a reasonably relaxed fashion for trouble ahead. It came sooner than anyone imagined when a torpedo from U47 struck the battleship at one o'clock in the morning on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> October. One of the sailors on board said,

'The ship leapt out of the water and all the lights went out.'

Men climbed out of their hammocks and made for the upper decks. The ship turned over, quite suddenly, and the men and boys, who were supposed to be safe, found themselves in the freezing water. There was screaming. Bodies floated on the surface. Men were dying in the cold. Some were hauled up out of the water to rescue boats. The name of Petty Officer Arthur Simmonds, 22 years old, whose father was born in Ebdon Road, appeared on the official list of those who were missing. Worle felt its first personal grief of the war. On the day when Petty Officer Simmonds disappeared, the Golden Chain flowered on Worle Moor, at least a month later than was usual.

#### **15. Remembrance**

With the nation at war with Germany again and the memories of the Great War still clear in the mind, the preparations for Remembrance Day were reported in the papers. In particular, the collections achieved from the sale of poppies were described as 'magnificent'. Each area was reported under a sub-heading, but Worle was included with the Weston figures. St. Martin's, it has to be said, only collected £1/15/9d which was pretty paltry compared with other parishes. Kewstoke, for example, contributed £5/11/6d.

The eleventh day of the eleventh month fell on a Saturday in 1939, and no service was held at Worle War Memorial, which I must say, I found surprising. Instead, a large, white wooden cross was placed in the top section of the Churchyard, near the

memorial cross, west of the Church. The wooden cross was an open structure which was laid on the grass and into which people were invited to place their wreaths and poppies dedicated to the fallen. Remembrance Services were held on the following day, being a Sunday, but were not reported in the newspapers. The War Memorial clock stuck again, at 12.20 this time. I expect it was sulking at the lack of attention.

## **16. Everyday news**

I am sure that the weddings that took place that Autumn were not everyday events to those involved, but at least they were normal. The Methodist Chapel was the venue for the nuptials of Wilfred Davies and Marjorie Collard, who took the brave step of having Audrey Milliner play the organ for them. There was orange blossom, of course, and lavender clad bridesmaids with Michaelmas daisies and pink chrysanthemums. In contrast, Gladys Fletcher and Jack Hobbs sneaked off to Bristol and were wed quietly.

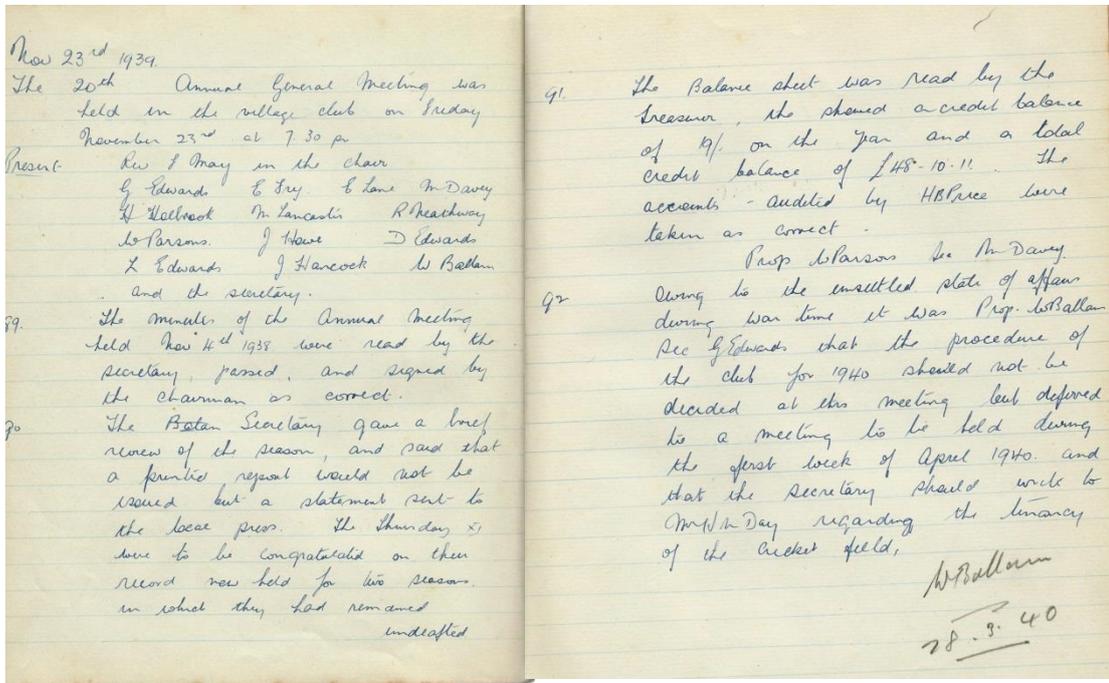
By the time the clocks had been put back an hour on 18<sup>th</sup> November little had happened locally. The Sale of Work at the vicarage was financially successful; the new swings on the rec proved very popular with the children; Worle Scouts completed their paper collections; whist drives at the village club became a regular feature again. Oh, and Al Capone was released from Alcatraz. The darker nights and the blackout encouraged people to star gaze and also to ask whether there would be a full moon for planned events.

There was considerable sadness at the news that Albert Lane had died. Albert lived at Church View, Coronation Road, and had been ill for a year, but he was only 51, so people were still shocked at his passing. He, together with Harry Garland, had been the village blacksmiths. Now both of these men had died within months of each other. Many strands of village life were bound to miss him – he was a keen agriculturalist and worked hard for St. Martin's Church and the Parochial Council, not to mention ringing the Church bells.

Some of the popular activities were suffering the effects of the war. The Homing Pigeon Society normally met at the Golden Lion to make plans. This was only natural, considering that Mr. Lickes, the licensee, was also President of the society. The AGM that marked the end of the homing season was expected to announce the suspension of activities for the duration of the conflict.

Emily Curry's estate was sold off by auction at the New Inn. There were two dwellings, 1 and 2 Fernlea in Lawrence Road, as well as the shop, outbuildings, gardens and orchard. The whole caboodle was purchased for £650 by Mr. R. Jones.

And then there was the Cricket Club to consider. Their 20<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting saw 15 stalwarts gathering at the Village Club at 7.30 on November 23<sup>rd</sup>. But they felt unable to make any meaningful decisions. It was impossible to know if an eleven could be mustered for the 1940 season so, rather deflatedly, they agreed to meet again in April in the hope that matters might have been resolved.



The pages above are scanned from the original minutes book, given to Worle History Society by Johnnie Tucker, who later in the history of the Cricket Club, became the secretary.

So, life as usual? Not really. Just in case the world hadn't had enough fighting the Soviet Union attacked Finland on November 30<sup>th</sup> and the Winter War began. The dispute was over the Karelian Isthmus, which is strategically placed at the end of the Baltic Sea, and it only lasted for 105 days. The world assumed that Russia would win easily. But the weather turned nasty and the Finns were blessed with 'sisu', Finnish for strength of will, determination and perseverance, a word which entered other languages across Europe. Between November 30<sup>th</sup> and March 13<sup>th</sup>, the USSR lost an average of 10,000 soldiers a day, whilst the Finns lost 250 a day. Russia, by sheer force of numbers, eventually broke through the Mannerheim Line, but the Finns are reputed to have remarked that their lakes were full of dead Russians. Perhaps there was a lesson here for Great Britain and for everyone on the home front. The lesson that we needed to hang on to our sisu, come what may.

## 17. The season of Good Will Approaches

The news that had the greatest effect on the largest number of people that Advent concerned the evacuees. It was announced that they were to stay in Worle for Christmas, not return to their families. Not only were the school age children upset, but the mothers and babies who had been evacuated were pretty cross, and the people who had taken them in, and had been looking forward to a few days 'en famille' were downcast. Committees were immediately formed to sort the situation out. Matters such as entertainment and presents had to be resolved and the Gazette took the opportunity to point out the chance that was afforded to people to pitch in and do some voluntary work.

Providing for the Christmas needs of evacuated children was not the only problem for host households. The schools started to send the evacuees home from classes half an hour earlier than usual, so that they didn't get lost in the blackout. It seems to me that the little monkeys were pulling the wool over the eyes of gullible locals. I don't believe for one moment that there was any difficulty for them to find their way around our little village, as it certainly was in 1939. But they got away with it and hard pressed housewives had an extra 30 minutes of babysitting to get through each day. Lovely. Still, the schools did not break up for the Christmas holiday until 22<sup>nd</sup> December and in the meantime everyone could look forward to Sunday 10<sup>th</sup>, when parents were arriving by train from London to visit the young ones. Rather than expecting the host families to accommodate the influx of adults, tea and presents were laid on in the schoolroom at Milton Baptist Church. Two little girls, aged about 7 years, who were staying with a Worle family, are reported to have walked to Weston alone to meet their mother from the train. Poor little mites. What was the host family thinking of? And who were they?

The new school in Spring Hill was again in the news, with the appointment of a Headmaster. L. W. Bisgrove was the man for the job it was decided and he did, indeed, become a stalwart of education in the area. A short time later an advertisement was placed in the local press for a caretaker. Staffing the new school was to be a challenge, since so many men were on active service.

Worle's two little schools that were operational that winter were packed to capacity with the pupils from the parishes and the evacuees. Whilst the papers tried to be kind about the influx there are signs that there were some difficulties. Children sometimes arrived in the village 'none too clean and impetigo, rickets and fleas became common place in school'.

The demands on the whole population were great. Men between 35 years and 50 years of age were urged to join the Home Defence Battalions. These were branches of the Territorial Army attached to regular regiments, like the Somerset Light Infantry. By this time hardly a soul was exempt from war work. Reverend May asked for names of Worle men serving with the regular forces and those being called up. The combination

of Christmas and the dangers of war drew more young couples to the altar. Edward Williams and Evelyn Wells married early in December. William Lee and Doris Banwell headed for St. Martin's to tie the knot on the 9<sup>th</sup> and Henry House popped down to St. Saviours to marry Joyce Davies. All six of them must have had an odd mixture of joy and fear in their hearts.

The blackout still created some very odd anomalies. George Cousins, who lived at The Rows, tried in vain to argue that he thought he was doing the right thing when he was fined for having NO REAR LIGHT on his bicycle. There really is no justice and whoever said 'the law is an ass' may have had a point.

Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> December wasn't a good day. Firstly, there was an air raid siren test. The siren on the Imperial Laundry started its weird variety of wails and despite the advance warnings, considerable panic ensued in the streets.

Then the news broke that HMS Duchess had sunk following a collision with the battleship, HMS Barham. The Duchess was one of several smaller ships escorting the Barham in inshore waters off the Mull of Kintyre. 124 of her crew died. It is easy to assume that ordinary people remained cosily at home but actually incidents such as this tragedy added greatly to the fear and sadness. Modern communications meant that news of such events reached the ears of the population much faster than in previous conflicts.

Christmas arrived to a cold spell and icy roads. John Vincent, out on his bicycle on Christmas morning, hit a slippery patch on Puxton Railway Bridge and fractured his ankle, so that put an end to his celebrations. Other folk streamed into the Churches that day and the children received their gifts, of which Cowboy and Indian outfits were the most popular. War games in the woods ensued. Oh well!

In an attempt to raise the tone a concert was given in the Church Hall on the 27<sup>th</sup> by the evacuees from Lancaster Road School. The young Londoners were joined by the 'Nigger Minstrel Troupe'. '*Jeepers, Creepers*', as Louis Armstrong would no doubt have said.

## 18. 1940

It would be good to start this description of the New Year on a cheerful note, but whereas 1939 was greeted with gatherings and celebrations lasting several days, 1940 was, understandably, a much more subdued affair. However, there was a party, held at the Methodist Church by the Christian Endeavour Branch on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, and the dear old Church Hall [actually it was in its infancy in 1940] was pressed into service on the first Thursday of the year to entertain 300 children, both locals and evacuees, who were well fed and played the usual party games.

## 19. Hail and Farewell

Some families were fortunate and were able to welcome home sons, fathers and brothers from the Armed Services. Rev May welcomed home service men on leave in January's parish magazine: L. B. George was home from the RAF. He was a sidesman and parochial church councillor. P Hatherall, another church councillor returned for a rest, as did Reginald Wilmot, W. Street and Hewlett Burgess. Fred Gillett was also home, but far from getting a rest, Fred was getting married!

Sadly, also during the first week of the year, a local household received a telegram telling them the terrible news of the death of their son. Mr. and Mrs. John Loud had lived in Worle for decades. Mrs Loud, nee Barrett, was born in the village and following her marriage to John Loud, the couple settled in Worle, where most of their children were born. Their son, Herbert William Loud went to school in Worle and as a youngster worked for H. N. Day on Nut Tree farm and played football for the village football club. Long before the start of World War 2 he enlisted for the regular army in the Horse Artillery and was posted to India, where he stayed for seven of his twelve years service. When war was declared, H. W. Loud had enjoyed nearly two years of civilian life, but was immediately called up and sent to France. His parents had not seen Herbert for some years when they learned of his death. The telegram simply said that he had died in France on December 28<sup>th</sup>. He left a widow and two children, Michael [3] and Maureen [2]. The Mercury carried a full report of this loss in its January 6<sup>th</sup> issue.

Civilian losses still had to be dealt with, of course. The New Inn was normally a very busy, lively public house. It hosted the activities of several of the best darts teams in the area and was Worle Cricket Club's tavern of choice. The landlady who welcomed everyone with equal hospitality was Maud Whitford. Maud was 60 years old and had been what the Mercury describes as 'acutely ill' for some months. Her death that January was mourned by many villagers. Maud was born Maud Porter and was a member of the well known Porter family who were fishmongers and greengrocers. One of her daughters was Mrs Lickes, whose husband ran the Golden Lion Hotel and another daughter, Mrs Hembury held a similar position at Basonbridge Inn. Herbert and Audrey, her other children, still lived at home. Maud's funeral took place on 6<sup>th</sup> January and was reported in the Mercury and the Gazette.

## 20. What the Papers Said

The village seems to have been subdued and the news from the rest of world was not likely to encourage a cheerful mood. The 'Winter War' was still in full flow and, surprisingly, the Finnish forces had some victories to celebrate against their mighty Soviet foe. Several skirmishes resulted in Russian tanks being destroyed, but the cost to such a small nation as Finland was great.

Closer to home, the British Minister of War, Hore-Belisha, was dismissed from his office. Hore-Belisha's relations with Neville Chamberlain and, indeed, with Ramsey MacDonald were strained. There were differences of opinion between the Liberal, Jewish Belisha and other powerful M.P.s and the result was his sacking in January 1940. The newspapers reported that his Jewishness was considered to be a difficulty.

Such changes at a crucial time were unsettling but the introduction of rationing had a much greater effect on day to day life. Butter, bacon and sugar were much loved commodities eaten daily with relish. Faced with the problem of each person being allowed only 4 ounces of butter [or lard], 4 ounces of bacon and 12 ounces of sugar each week, housewives and shopkeepers alike had to be well organised, imaginative and irrationally optimistic. At least Christmas was out of the way, always a relief to the female of the species.

Worle Old Boys struggled on in the face of an increasing scarcity of young men. The chaps of Worle had valiantly signed on early in the war, or been called up to serve and there were fewer and fewer around to be picked for a game at the weekend. Even those who were still around were working long hours to cover for those on active service, or were ARP wardens, or helping to occupy the evacuees. In consequence the team was often short of players on Saturdays and was forced to face the opposition with 10 men or fewer. The match between WOBs and Locking early in January resulted in Worle losing by 2 goals to 7. Disaster, and much sorrow in the Old Kings Head that evening. The report in the Gazette ran to eleven column inches, which was ironic.

## 21. Practice at the Lion

January 17<sup>th</sup> was a Wednesday, and was the day chosen by Worle ARP for a practice exercise to keep the men and women up to scratch, and to try out their newly acquired first aid and emergency skills. The exercise was to centre on the Golden Lion public house at the corner of Hill Road and the High Street. The yard outside the Inn was used as a treatment area for the 'injured'. At 3 p.m. the 'casualties' were stretched out on a series of boards and labels were tied to them. The



labels described the nature of their injuries and the wardens rushed about bandaging like mad things. Then the auxiliary ambulances - probably under the auspices of Walter Williams, Ambulance Officer for Worle St. John Ambulance - arrived and 'patients' were transferred to the vehicles. Where they went after that is a mystery. It seems quite likely that this whole procedure was regarded as an interesting diversion, especially for the children. The highlight was a less than spectacular 'rescue' of an unnamed female from the top floor of the building where she was supposedly marooned. The rescue squad, in the form of more ARP wardens arrived, complete with ladder, and unceremoniously brought her down. The Golden Lion seems to be mentioned in an increasing number of newspaper reports at this time, as a place where people gathered and where the landlord was hospitable to any individual or organisation connected with war duties.

Lest the rest of the village should feel neglected, the Decontamination Squad joined in with an exercise at the bottom of Pine Hill, where they faked an 'affected area'. The section of the road was roped off and the squad appeared, wearing gas-protective clothing and respirators. They doused the area with sand, from the beach, no doubt. I am interested to note that the Mayor turned out to witness the whole procedure. Laudable, particularly as it was a freezing cold day.

Worle was obviously hopeful that a few dozen bandages, a ladder and a supply of sand would answer anything the Nazis could throw at us, especially if we dressed up as Cyber men. It has become my ambition to organise a re-enactment of this memorable day.

Lights were an issue that January. The early onset of darkness doubtless added to the trouble and confusion caused by the blackout. Frank Syms was fined for riding round with no screen on his bike's front light, thereby attracting Germans like moths, whilst Maurice Brewer of Wisteria Farm and Alfred Hunt were both fined for 'failing to show a rear light'. I think the only way to deal with the situation was to allow for the inevitable fines in the weekly budget. One also wonders whether the weekly 'Bright Hour' meeting at the Methodist Chapel needed to be renamed the 'Not so Bright Hour' to reflect the situation.

## 22. Mayhem on the Continent.

As January wore on there were reports of the happenings in Finland, where the Russians were driven back on the ground, and retaliated furiously with heavy air bombardment. Two weeks later Russia launched an attack on the Karelian Isthmus. This disputed little area seems an unpleasant place, freezing in Winter and swampy in Summer. The kind of place that a rich man would give to an unpleasant relation for Christmas. But thousands were dying for it. Perhaps the map, showing us just how close, geographically at least, Helsinki and Leningrad/St. Petersburg are, helps us to understand. The arrows show the Russian forces pressing northwards into Finland..



I suspect that the people of Worle, cultivating their friendly plots of land, organising their evacuees, working out how to feed their families and how to repel a possible invasion, thought they had quite enough to contend with, but the pictures of the Winter War in Finland provide food for thought.

Great Britain certainly had its own troubles. U-boats were thought to be the scourge of the seas, threatening not just military vessels, but also supply ships making voyages to and from the British Isles. These merchant ships were the nation's life blood and the government decided that they needed to be protected. Accordingly, it was announced that Merchant ships in the North Sea would be armed. This was all the excuse Germany needed and on 15<sup>th</sup> February, Hitler announced that armed merchant ships would be classed as warships and treated as such. The curtailment of merchant navy

activities contributed in no small way to the need for rationing. Every town and village and household in the country was affected in this way by the German submarines. On Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> January the HMS Exmouth, a destroyer with a crew of 135, was lost with all souls to a U-Boat attack. If you had asked anyone in Worle how many submarines Germany had in service at that time I strongly suspect that the answers would have been very wide of the mark. In fact the Third Reich had just 14 of the dreaded vessels. If the British people had known that, perhaps they would have been less intimidated, or perhaps careless. Good job they didn't know.

### **23. Meanwhile, at home.....bells and birds**

The village seems to have been busy, busy, busy that February. As we know, the Church Bells were silenced as soon as war was declared. Mufflers were fitted, but the ringers continued their activities. On Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> February, the bell ringers at St. Martin's rang a silent, complex Quarter Peel for the first time. The band was conducted by George Prescott, who was also 5<sup>th</sup> ringer, the rest being Jack Hack, Leslie Crooke, Jack Weaden, Wilf Blake and George Cousins. A quarter peel is one thing, but this one was rung in three methods – which obviously impressed the journalist at the Gazette.. The 1,260 changes included 120 Stedman, 480 Plain Bob and 680 Grandaire. Thursday evenings at St. Martin's have always meant the bells, but this was a wonderful, new achievement. I spoke to a couple of ringers yesterday, to check my facts and learned that quarter peels are regularly rung these days, both at St. Martin's, Worle and St. Lawrence's, Wick. Even full peels are not unusual.

#### **The Fanciers of Worle**

Worle Homing Pigeon Society perked up unexpectedly. Mr. Lickes, landlord of the Golden Lion, was President of this esteemed group, and so the club converged on the Lion for all its meetings. At the gathering on February 2<sup>nd</sup> there was general gloom because of the fear that pigeon races would not be allowed to continue in wartime. By the 10<sup>th</sup>, however, the club received word that they had permission to fly their birds as usual. Pigeon racing did not start until well after Easter, as a rule, but plans were made for weekly forays, and training commenced at once.

Pigeons had been used as messengers throughout the First World War as a small, but key part of communications. By 1918 over 100,000 birds had been employed in war work. In 1940 birds were again seen as useful carriers or homing birds.

Eric Moore, who was a young teenage boy at the outset of war, shared his memories with me. His older brother was a keen pigeon fancier, but was called up in 1941 and left his birds in 14 year old Eric's care. By that time birds were already being commandeered for the war effort. A chap who lived in Locking Road, was responsible for obtaining birds locally for the armed forces. Only young birds were acceptable and Worle Homing Society supplied a goodly number, which probably explains why the club

was allowed to continue flying. Eric remembers that a fair number of birds resisted the re-training process inflicted by the armed forces, and returned to their home loft in the village. When this happened the owners had to take the birds to the police station to be checked for messages. As far as we know, no local birds were awarded the Dickin Medal for their efforts, but there are rumours that several went ashore on D-Day, under the coats of soldiers, to provide a link with home during the communications blackout. The Official History of 'Special Section, Royal Signals', published in 1945 and passed to me by Brian Austin, stated that *'the pigeon fanciers of Worle were one of the best suppliers of pigeons for Special Operations'*.

Apart from the Golden Lion pigeons and the bells, there was considerable action elsewhere. The Village Club in Mendip Avenue was flourishing. As the Church Hall was used regularly for matters associated with the war effort, several activities removed to the Club where the interior decor is described in the paper as 'cheerful'. Perhaps the brightness made up for the lack of alcohol, because Whist Drives were held weekly and were well attended by the women, whilst the men favoured Billiards – a growing game in Worle. The premier billiards team won the Weston League Championship in 1938 and 1939 and looked set to make it three in a row.

The managers of the new senior school were announced and were, I suppose, predictable. The clergy were to play a major role, whether or not they had any knowledge of educating the young. Rev. May, Vicar of Worle, headed the list, followed by Rev. Knight from Kewstoke, Rev. Lutley from Hewish, Rev. J. J. Edwards, Wick St. Lawrence and County Councillor Harden. Children from all four of the parishes represented were to attend the school, so the choice of managers was even handed, at least. The school buildings themselves were described at the first managers' meeting as 'palatial', and the whole prospect was given an entire page of the then enormous Mercury. The managers expressed their *'confidence in Mr. Bisgrove's ability'*, which must have been a comfort to him, and then spoilt it, by adding that *'in the present circumstances, we will not expect too much.'*

'The present circumstances' referred to above were hotting up, as we would say nowadays. Firstly, Britain and France, acting in unison again you notice, decided to intervene in Norway to cut off the iron ore trade in anticipation of an expected German occupation and ostensibly to open up a route to beleaguered Finland. Less than a week later the USSR attacked the Mannerheim Line [see map on page 55] which was actually a series of forts along Finland's border. Neville Chamberlain's government called for volunteers to fight in Finland. This seems unreasonable now with Britain under such threat itself, but hundreds answered the call, and became known as 'Group Sisu' to reflect their determination and endurance. This was never tested, however, as the Winter War was resolved before the volunteers could reach the trouble spots. The list of volunteers does not give details of their origins, so we have no way of knowing whether anyone stepped forward from Worle. The end of Winter itself and of the Winter War was in sight.

Lest we forget about the Germans in all this, they were planning to invade France via the Ardennes Forest, as well as organising, in advance, for the invasion of Denmark and Norway. Scandinavia was having a hard time already. Finland was forced to concede the Karelian Isthmus and the shores of Lake Ladoga to the USSR on March 12<sup>th</sup>. The French government, led by Edouard Daladier, resigned because of Daladier's failure to assist Finland. Paul Reynaud took over.

Hitler and Mussolini met at Brenner Pass on the Austrian border and Benito Mussolini agreed with Hitler that Italy would enter the war 'at an opportune moment'. How much, if any, of this was known to the allies? Goodness knows, but Britain and France made a formal agreement that neither country would seek a separate peace with Germany. Considering Easter was on the horizon, the world was in an unholy mess.

On the home front, Holy week was a strange mixture of weddings, first aid classes for adults in the schools and road widening in Kewstoke Road. There were also a couple of nasty accidents. Mrs. Lancaster fell and damaged her arm, but much worse, Oliver Payne fell on to a girder in the quarry and sustained internal injuries which needed surgery.

The usual round of winter illnesses was still hanging around, and the papers found the space to mention that Rev. May [vicar], Mr. Waite [head ARP warden and schoolmaster], H.N. Day [farmer] and old Mrs Urch were all suffering from influenza.

## 24. G. D. Waite's interesting departure!

Mr Granville Waite, in particular, had a lot on his mind that February. On top of his normal activities, he was organizing a messenger boy service to support the ARP wardens. Boys between 15 and 19 years of age were needed and, when Mr. Waite felt sprightly again, he set about recruiting them. Local boys who were not of an active disposition found G.D. Waite's determined enthusiasm something of a trial. Accordingly, news of this new plot to involve young men in the war effort caused some youngsters to go to considerable lengths to avoid the gentleman until he had achieved his required numbers. The avoidance techniques included the boycotting of sporting activities for a week or so. Mr Waite could be relied upon to turn up at matches, so the youngsters were suddenly less obvious on the recreation ground. The realisation that anti-gas training was to be given to messengers created much more interest, however, and several volunteers suddenly emerged, hoping for the 1940s equivalent of high visibility jackets, no doubt.



Mr. Waite must also have known that an announcement would shortly be made to the effect that he was leaving the village. He had accepted a new post as head teacher of Wrington School and was therefore moving from Worle's school house and the job in the Church school in Hill Road. This was not public knowledge until 24<sup>th</sup> February, when the Gazette mis-reported the details of the story and had to publish a full apology the following week. They had to admit that Mr. Waite was not head teacher of the Worle School [Mr Mawson was]; Mr Waite was not from Gloucestershire [he was from Wales] and he was not leaving because Mr. Bisgrove got the headship at the new school.... that's that settled then.

In fact, G. D. Waite fulfilled many crucial roles in village life and would leave some cavernous holes. He was brought up in South Wales and did his teacher training at Caerleon Training College, where he specialised in Music, Geography and Physical Education. An asset to Worle School, he took all games and fitness classes, played the piano and put on concerts. He belonged to the Red Triangle players and acted and produced for them. Other activities included volunteer work for the YMCA. His public spirited nature also led to him setting up, with Mr. Mawson, Worle Old Boys Football Club, which still exists today. He was treasurer and a player for Worle Cricket Club and played with local tennis clubs. There is no doubt that Wrington gained a wonderful new head teacher in Mr. Waite, and Worle was impoverished by his move.

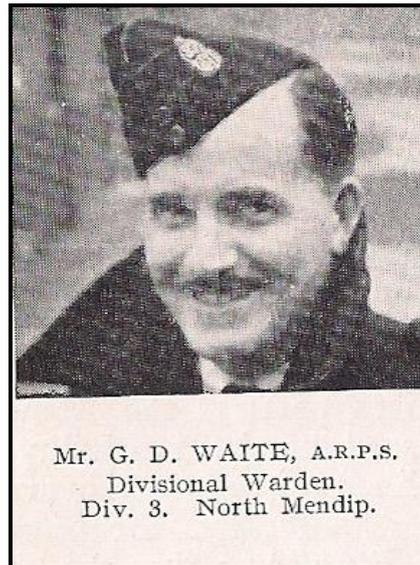
At his last ARP meeting in Worle, baby helmets and Mickey mouse gas masks were issued, and it was announced that C. W. Newsome-Martin would take over as head

warden. The wardens had collected for a gift, and Mr. and Mrs. Waite received a 'handsome oak tea table and fire-screen combined, bearing a plaque, suitably inscribed'. This sounds like the sort of gift every home should have. In fact the table converted to a fire screen when not laid for tea. Major Kenny, Chief Warden for Weston-super-Mare, made the presentation and praised the couple roundly.

Worle Church of England School also said farewell with a gift – this time an attaché writing case, presented by Mr. Mawson, whose speech referred to Mr. Waite's ten years invaluable service. The Mercury reported the Easter changes thus:

*'Mr. and Mrs. Waite moved to Wrington on Thursday, the same day that Mr. L. W. Bisgrove, who has been Headmaster there up to the present, came to Worle, where he is to take charge of the new senior school. All this week the Church of England School has been the scene of a vast 'packing up'. On April 2<sup>nd</sup>, all children over the age of 11 will be transferred to the new building in Spring Hill, and their books, etc, have had to be prepared for removal. In future, the C of E School will be solely a junior establishment. One standard from the present Infants' building is to be raised to junior status.*

Later in 1940 G.D. Waite was appointed Divisional Warden of Division No.3, Rural Area [North Mendip]. The history of Civil Defence in the area states that he built up a very fine service of wardens, and was well served by the Group and Head Wardens of his Division. He not only did excellent work as a Divisional Warden, but also served Civil Defence well as a Bomb Reconnaissance Officer in which capacity he helped lay out the grounds at Hutton and to arrange training and demonstrations for the various services. He also worked as a commentator, using a microphone with great effect, especially in exercises on Incident Control. His running commentaries are said to have infused life into the exercises, adding vigour and interest for Civil Defence personnel and onlookers.



## 25. The new Senior School



On the Friday designated for public viewing of the new school, Spring Hill was busier than it had ever been up to that day. Entertainment had been at something of a premium in Worle since the outbreak of war and nobody was going to miss a chance to carry out a thorough inspection of the Senior School. Between five and six hundred people went around the building. The low, single storey structure with glass sided classrooms and draughty corridors open to the elements received mixed reviews, but at least it was an outing and something different to gossip about.

Mr. Bisgrove, in peacetime, would have expected to have more men on the staff but, as it was, the war was employing most of the males of the species and Mr Bisgrove “carried on with a lot of women” according to village chit chat. There were literally no other men working at the school until Mr. Finney and Mr. Stephens turned up. The mix of local children was complicated, too, and was described thus: the yeoman stock of Worle families; rural children from the village schools; youngsters from three new council estates in Milton and finally, pupils from Weston, whose ambitious parents wanted their offspring to have the benefit of the new premises. And then, there were the evacuees.



On April 2<sup>nd</sup>, the first day of lessons, one hundred and thirty-three local children started at the school, under the care of Mr. Bisgrove and the staff, together with seventy-two London children, the latter having their own head teacher and allocated rooms. I

wonder whether chaos and bloodshed ensued? They would never have admitted it, anyway.

On Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> May, only six weeks after the school had opened, the international situation began to affect the running of the school on a daily basis. A message was broadcast to the nation, I presume via the BBC, as follows: *'Owing to the National Emergency and conditions on the Continent'* schools were instructed to re-open after only one day of the Whitsun holiday. Every single member of staff responded to the plea and only 22 pupils failed to turn up at the correct time, and therefore missed the air raid rehearsal held on the first morning back. The new school had responded magnificently, but there was more disruption to face all too soon, which we shall return to.

## 26. C. W. Newsome Martin, Councillor and Head ARP Warden for Worle

Bill Newsome Martin was selected to replace G. D. Waite as Worle's head ARP warden. He was an interesting and very popular choice. I think it is fair to say that Bill was an unusual individual in terms of the local population. Of course, he had been a Warden from the start, so he understood the way things worked, but he was certainly not a replica of G. D. Waite.

For a start Newsome Martin was a self confessed socialist and a paid up member of the Labour Party, in which capacity he represented Milton and Worle Ward on the Borough Council. This was a minor miracle which probably reflected his personal popularity more than local politics. Worle was 'true blue' for the most part. Conservative Party meetings at the Lamb Inn were well attended. But Bill got the local vote and was vocal in his approach to village matters, council matters, party matters, national matters. You get the picture.

I notice that in February, 1940, Newsome Martin had been in the papers under the headline: *Weston Council Rules by Brute Force, says a member*'. The National Union of General and Municipal Workers held a branch meeting in the town, and one of the major speakers was Bill Newsome Martin. He told the meeting that the question of wages had come before the relevant committee of the council earlier in the week. The council's decision not to increase the wages of its employees, clearly upset him. He described the decision as 'entirely contrary to the spirit of English justice' This gives us an idea of his likely approach to his new responsibilities.

Another great interest of Newsome Martin was the well being of local youths and their useful occupation. The newly introduced Messenger Service, designed to support the ARP wardens and later the Home Guard, was, therefore, dear to his heart. This service involved 15 to 19 year old young men – just the age group that Bill felt needed something constructive to do, and it flourished under his leadership. He had always employed an 'open house policy' at 2 Glencoe Villas, Kewstoke Road, where he lived, and this now paid dividends.

Newsome Martin's social conscience was well understood in the village, but I doubt that many people were aware of his love of poetry, especially that of Gerrard Manley



Hopkins, whose poem 'The Windhover' he often quoted. It is not an easy poem to get to grips with and that combined with it's religious theme tells us a great deal about Bill Newsome Martin's character.

*'The Windhover': To Christ Our Lord*

*I caught this morning morning's minion, kingdom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn  
Falcon, in his riding  
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding  
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing  
In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing,  
As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding  
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding  
Stirred for a bird, - the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!*

*Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here  
Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion  
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!  
No wonder of it: sheer plod makes plough down sillion  
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,  
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.*

Bill often, in later years, enjoyed his favourite tippie, barley wine, in the company of my uncle, Wyn Charles, and he became a good friend of my father, Mervyn Jones, who was also a socialist at heart.

## 27. The real suspension of Peace

So Worle shuffled and re-shuffled in an attempt to prepare itself for what seemed to be building to a crisis in Western Europe, and the village hoped it had done what it could to protect its citizens and occupy its children. In Westminster, Neville Chamberlain declared that Hitler had 'missed the 'bus', by which he meant that the optimum moment for invasion or air attack had passed. At the same time the North Sea was a maelstrom of aggression, courage and fear as Germany approached the Norwegian coast. The invasion of Norway and Denmark came on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> of April and Denmark surrendered on the same day. The Germans also suffered a huge loss, when the cruiser 'Blucher' was torpedoed and capsized in Oslofjord, and the one thousand men on board died.

Whilst the people of Worle defiantly formed a new Tennis Club and successfully tested the Air Raid Siren at last, Vidkun Quisling formed a 'National Government' in Norway and a new word came into general use in England. Everyone accused of being a 'quisling' knew what it implied.

The Faroe Islands, which were Danish, of course, were occupied by British troops in an effort to keep the Germans out of territory which would threaten our northern isles. They remained under British protection until 1945.

Then, to cap it all, Italy invaded Albania.

The Gazette had had enough, and published reports and comments from papers around the world on the subject of Hitler and his allies. Quotations from Chile, Egypt, Switzerland, Belgium and Uruguay ranged from '*France and England have in their hands the destiny of Western civilization*' to plain '*Rule Britannia*'. Himmler was not about to let the grass grow under his goose-stepping feet, and ordered the establishment of Auschwitz concentration camp. The rate at which one horror after another was unfolding is breath taking.

Finally, at the very end of April, King Haakon of Norway and his entire government fled to Great Britain. They would not have been able to get to any other safe haven with any certainty. The U.S.A. was still not showing its hand.

Meanwhile, Worle did some furious digging in an attempt to be self supporting. Every spare bit of land was cultivated with varying levels of success. Well blessed with professional market gardeners, the village had been rather inclined to rely on their efforts to keep folk well fed, but now the Gazette stated that: '*the clerks and all who have a little plot, can be seen in the evenings with just a spade – digging, weeding, planting.*'

The local papers valiantly continued to bring out their weekly editions, albeit, shorter than usual. The normal happenings of day to day life continued to be reported.

Fussell's Rubber Co. Ltd. played a big part in the life of the village, providing stable employment for men and women, as well as a Sports Club, which included a cricket team. Quite apart from the strains of running the business at such a difficult time, H. J. Fussell carried on his activities in the community. High on the list amongst these was the Worle Old Age Pensioners' Christmas Gift Scheme, of which H. J. was described in the Mercury as the 'genial chief'. The scheme had been running for some years, as a look at the local papers for successive years confirms, and in the run up to Christmas 1939, H.J. set about organizing it as usual. Collectors that year included W. Fletcher, L. Lippiatt, C. B. Champion, J. Bond, M. Venning, W. Lippiatt, T. Timbury, R. Rogers, R. Jones and H. J. Fussell, all of whom earned their living at Fussell's factory and offices. The best way to describe what this entailed is to use H. J.'s own words, as reproduced in the Mercury.

***"Mr. H. J. Fussell writes as follows:***

*'May I, through the medium of your columns, express on behalf of the Committee of the Worle Old Age Pensioners' Christmas Gift Scheme, my sincere thanks for the grand co-operation of all concerned in making this year's collection a greater success than ever?*

*'The black-out made the work of the collectors very tedious, and the many wartime calls upon people's generosity caused anxiety as to the success of the scheme this year, but the generous support of everybody showed that the British spirit can never be daunted.'*

*'The total collected was £25/6/-d, the whole of which was distributed to sixty-two old-age pensioners of Worle, in the form of groceries and coal. Where the circumstances required it, actual cash was given. Generally speaking, each case received goods to the value of 4/- or 5/- and coal to the value of 4/8d [i.e. 2 cwts]'".*

You have to hand it to that generation, they certainly pulled their weight. Sadly, the scheme was put on hold for the rest of the war, but H. J. still raised cash for the needy himself and donated what he could each Christmas to the most deserving cases amongst the elderly of Worle.

Other local people who are worthy of note at this time are Mrs. H. M. Tripp and Miss E. D. Elliot, who were both mistresses at the Church School and were leaving their posts. Whether the fall in numbers, following the opening of the Senior School was to blame for this change or whether retirement was calling, is not known, but they were presented with an attaché case and a wireless table respectively. Mrs Tripp remained in the village and well into the 1950s returned to the school to provide cover when a teacher was away. At the same school, on Friday evening of 12<sup>th</sup> April, the ARP lectures started again in the area reserved for the warden's post. The very fact that they found room for an ARP post suggests that numbers of pupils might have diminished.

Some local deaths were reported in the papers in more depth than usual. Firstly, Percy John Taylor had died on the 14<sup>th</sup> April. He was 67 years old and lived at 'Sunholme', Annandale Avenue. His death was certainly not expected, as he was working until the previous evening at the premises of 'Taylor and Church', the grocery firm, where he was senior partner. His brother had been post master at Banwell and his son, Albert Taylor, was proprietor of 'Taylor's Transport' in Worle High Street.

On the same day as Percy Taylor's unexpected demise, Ernest Henry Phillips died. Ernest was very much a Worle man, having been born in Lawrence Road in 1869. He stayed in Worle all his life, working on the land and living for the last 5 years in Castle Road. Ernest's daughter, Mrs. R. A. Penberthy lived in Hill Road, but sadly, his only son was killed in the First World War. Mr. Phillips had lived alone since the death of his wife several years previously.

In what turned out to be a sad month on the home front, John Earley of Prospect House died on Friday 12<sup>th</sup> April. He was a Christian Scientist and his funeral service was conducted in two sections, the first at his home in Christian Scientist tradition and the second in the Churchyard at St. Martins.

## 28. Boys will be Boys

The naughtiness of evacuated children was often a topic covered in the local press, and food rationing led to unusual temptations. The headline read, 'Evacuees raid Worle Fowl-Houses' and the subjects of the thieves' attention were eggs. A. W. Rice, a market gardener of Apple Tree Cottage, Ebdon Road, was the victim of this crime. He



reported that on March 16<sup>th</sup> a sitting of five eggs and two china eggs were found to be missing from his fowl house. The hen house was

situated in a disused quarry which I remember was reached from a lane off the east side of Kewstoke Road. At 11 am. Mr Rice caught three boys at the top of the quarry, and one boy in the hen house! For those of you who are desperately trying to place the old quarry, an aerial photo is supplied to help out. This was taken six years after the egg incident. The neat row of houses to the left of the picture is Castle Road and the disused quarry is the feature shaped like a cauliflower.

The four errant lads came up before Mr. J. W. Bevan, Chairman of the Juvenile Court. Detective Constable Crocker gave evidence to the effect that the boys admitted that

most of the eggs had been smashed or thrown in the pond. Mr. Crocker visited the home of the local boy and was given back several eggs which the lad had taken home. Three of the boys had good reports from teachers and were given two years probation. The fourth boy was described by his head master as 'one of those boys just sent to try us in this world'. He was sent to a remand home for 28 days while the bench had a think about what to do about him. Perhaps this harsh treatment for five eggs helped to make Britain great. Who knows.

The Mercury balanced the egg thing with a report about the success of local boys in the scholarship examinations. 'Boy Scholars have swept the board' said the report. The little school on the hill must have been jubilant when Lionel Savery, John Tucker, Hildred Bambridge, Walter Hartree and Alan Durston all passed. Wonderful name, Hildred. I have checked, and it seems to be correct.

Another local lad, slightly more mature, married Betty May Davis of Ebdon Farm. He was Leslie George Edwards of Cypress Farm, so two farming families joined up, which was not uncommon. Puts me in mind of '*I've got a brand new combined harvester.....*' and so on. Anyway, Les Edwards was secretary of Wick Harvest Home, Captain of Wick Bellringers and he played for Worle Cricket Club. A thoroughly good egg, if you'll excuse the pun.

Older gentlemen were very busy, of course, with a variety of war work from ARP duties to Dig for Victory, but they made time for some relaxation. Among their favoured activities was billiards. Several local public houses sported a table, as did the Village Club in Mendip Avenue [not yet known as the Century Club]. Worle A team won the team Billiards League Championship for the third year running. There were, apparently, ten teams in the league, including two teams from Worle. The individual championship was played at the village club between E. Chaplin and R. Davis on 22<sup>nd</sup> April, but there is no report of the winner. Oh well.

The Weston, Clevedon and Portishead Light Railway was only just surviving. The dear old trains were still chugging back and forth, and still blowing their whistles – an act that continued to confuse the locals, who feared it might be a genuine air raid warning. The Mercury carried a detailed report, forecasting its imminent demise and providing an account of its 40 year history with anecdotes from its admirers. The line had only a month of active service left, and when the end came, it was described as 'peaceful'. There was no cheering, but the line was dotted with people taking photographs of the final train, and the stations were thronged with locals who turned out to witness its passing.

## 29. Hurrah, hurrah, the first of May.....

The first of May in 1940 saw the ladies of the Bright Hour setting off to Lyme Regis, Seaton, Beer and Sidmouth for a trip. Surely somebody took a camera. If so, please can we have a photograph? This outing is a nice reminder that people still enjoyed the spring in their inimitable, English, even Somerset, way.

Worle Cricket Club had their first practice match of the season at the recreation ground. The chaps had to be at their best for this occasion, as the first eleven for the coming games was chosen from their numbers. W.C.C. had held a general meeting at the Village Club at the end of March and decided to run only one team for the coming summer, and to arrange what fixtures they could on Thursday evenings and Saturday afternoons. The meeting had been attended by W. Ballam [in the chair], J. Hancock, G. Edwards, L. Edwards, D. Edwards, M Lancaster, R. Neathway, K. Lane, R. Langdale, Kingsmill, Gooding and 'the secretary. Frustratingly, the secretary is never named, and obviously did not know the initials of Kingsmill and Gooding.

This group discussed a variety of topics, all of a planning nature, of which the subject of where to play was top of the list. Since the early 1920s the club had used the field which belonged to H. N. Day, and was approached from a path which ran along the side of Nut Tree Farm. There was even a small pavilion on the field, which the club had built for the princely sum of £24 in 1924. There were often mutterings about the state of the pitch and the rental and now there was the possibility of using the recreation ground, which the council had promised to prepare for cricket.

The possibility of a move to the recreation ground had been a matter of debate for some years, and in fact continued to be discussed, ad nauseum, throughout the war and beyond. Cricket pitches and the state of the wicket are of great concern to those who participate in the sport, although there is some suggestion that members of Worle's cricketing elite were often keen to turn out in their whites on Saturdays and Thursdays, but not so eager to do their bit to help maintain the wicket.

Another drawback of the situation was that H. N. Day attended the W.C.C. meetings at the New Inn, thereby making it difficult for others to voice their feelings about his field and the rental charged for its use.

As the aerial photograph on the next page shows, the 2 pitches were not far distant from each other, and although this was taken in 1946, it is evident that the surface of the rec. is nothing like Lords! In 1940, the Cricket Club decided to offer H. N. Day a maximum of £5 for the tenancy of his field until the recreation ground was ready for play.



H.N.Day's field is marked by the top box, with the little pavilion shown as a white dot on the extreme left of the box.

The Recreation Ground is outlined at the foot of the aerial photograph, with Fussell's factory and Sprakes Terrace on the left of the box.

Other sporting happenings in the village included the Flying club's first race of the season which set off from Ripon, with successes for F. Wells and H. Diamond. Meanwhile, the Darts League's end of season supper took place, probably at the New Inn, and the triumphant Billiards team celebrated their latest victory at the Village Club. Worle Old Boys reached the end of the season in reasonable shape, considering the number of men who had been called up.

### 30. Churchill's War Cabinet

The local papers, published on May 4<sup>th</sup>, informed the readership that something called the 'Parashooters' was started in Worle. It gave youths and older men who were not eligible for the Forces a chance to 'do their bit'. This was, no doubt, a response to the German invasion of Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg – a terrifying development which brought the war on the continent right to our doorstep. This horror was compounded by the announcement from Neville Chamberlain that he was stepping aside from the premiership. Many people sighed with relief and hope when Winston Churchill became Great Britain's political leader. His war cabinet was kept as small as possible, probably because of the experiences, still fresh in the memory, of the indecision of Lloyd George's much larger war cabinet 20 years previously. Thus, the major players were: Winston Churchill, Prime Minister & Minister of Defence, Neville Chamberlain, Lord President of the Council, Clement Attlee, Lord Privy Seal, Lord Halifax, Foreign Secretary and Arthur Greenwood who was Minister without Portfolio. This last post sounds frighteningly like a human version of a miscellaneous file.

Anthony Eden was given the Foreign Office and promptly made a speech requesting that men between the ages of 17 and 65 should sign up for the Local Defence Volunteers. There had been awareness that men were joining informal groups all over the country in an effort to provide some defence against the feared invasion. The government was concerned that such groups would become little more than vigilantes and hoped that a nation wide organisation would be much easier to control. So it was that the men of the LDV met for the first time in Worle. The papers give no details of this, but one man, J. A. Nevill Fitt, who joined on the first evening, later wrote an autobiography, called 'The Bob Man', and mentioned the inaugural meeting, though provided no information about the venue or exact numbers of men who volunteered.

The escalation in the war led to a further burst of evacuation, especially from London. Families who were already pushed for space were required to breathe in again and make room for another one or two. In total a further 2,000 beds were needed in the town, but there is no record of how many of these were in Worle.

Prayers became the order of the times, and Whitsun Sunday attracted large congregations to St. Martin's and to the Methodist Chapel. The King's proclamation, signed on May 11<sup>th</sup>, had cancelled the Whit Monday holiday, so instead of the usual funfair on the recreation ground with stalls and games, everyone trooped back to work. Churchill used that Monday to give his famous 'Blood, Toil and Sweat' speech to a subdued House of Commons.

News of bombing on the near continent speeded up the evacuation of children from the Home Counties and many arrived in time for Worle Junior School sports day, when Walter Hartree – I assume from Ranscombe Nurseries – was presented with the coveted trophy, as captain of the winning house, Grenville.

### 31. Dunkirk and Worle

The 25<sup>th</sup> of May marked the start of a week which no one who lived through it would forget. Worle suffered some local and personal tragedies, of which the most affecting to the whole village, was the last train to Portishead on the lovely Light Railway, which chugged its sad way through sorrowful, worried folk who had moaned about the railway, and loved it, for so long. The sight must have seemed symptomatic of the times.

Worle, and Kewstoke Road in particular was, bereaved, having lost Mrs. W. Knight, who was known locally as the Village Nurse and James William Spinner of Manchester House. Mr Spinner had manned the general store in Manchester Square for 50 years. He died suddenly, in the shop, whilst talking to his son-in-law, Mr. Gunning. Dr. Petty attended the scene but was unable to resuscitate him.

Other people were also suffering. Mr. Coombes of Laundry House, superintendent of the Methodist Sunday School, was reportedly diagnosed with a painful bout of shingles and Maureen Connor had to appear at Petty Sessions for the infamously confusing 'riding a bike without lights' despite the blackout. The Mercury and Gazette failed to lift the spirits that weekend. They tried, by reporting Worle Cricket Club's win over Nailsea by 103 runs to 53. Even Mr. Durston's prize bird, winning the pigeon race from Tamworth out of 107 entrants, did not spark the usual celebration in Golden Lion.

The whole of Britain knew that our forces had been cornered on the coast of France by the German advance. Until that weekend, no one had really heard of Dunkirk, but it was destined never to be forgotten. Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> was a National Day of Prayer and the Churches were packed with believers and doubters alike, whilst more than 300,000 Allied Troops waited on a foreign beach, watching the skies and the horizon. So many of them were boys, not men. They must have been terrified. They must have thought their lives were about to end. No one on the home front knew if their loved ones were in imminent danger, but the knowledge that the British Expeditionary Forces were trapped was enough to unnerve the most stable of mothers.

Mrs Davies, a widow, who lived at 4 The Parade, High Street, Worle doubtless lay awake night after night, in common with many other women across the Nation, wondering where her son, Ronald, was and whether he was safe. The newspapers were full of worrying speculation.

The Mercury published hints and instructions, should the dreaded invasion



actually occur. ARP Provision for Air Raids were listed, telling people the whereabouts of refuges for those caught out in an air raid. The list did not include any refuge in Worle. The nearest was St. Jude's Church in Milton! Another column gave instructions, 'If Germans Drop from the Sky'. The essence of the plan was that the nearest police station and the nearest military head quarters should be informed at once, and everyone was expected to co-operate with the newly formed Volunteer Defence Force.

Young Glyn Boobyer feared for the safety of his young brother, Phillip. National newspapers were dramatising events. There were reports that German soldiers in Belgium had been seen to throw small children into the air and catch them on their bayonets. Not good news.

\*\*\*\*\*

Leopold III of the Belgians surrendered on May 28<sup>th</sup> and was taken prisoner. German forces were 20 miles from our shores, just across the water that we call 'The English Channel' and the French call 'La Mange'. Sir Ian Orr-Ewing, MP for Weston super Mare sent a letter to a friend, expressing his feelings about The Belgian King's action. The letter is emotive and illuminating, and I reproduce it here:

*'At first sight the action of Leopold of Belgium in ordering his troops to surrender to the Germans, whilst he was King and Commander-in-Chief of his army, makes those of us who fought on Belgian soil in the last war almost regret our own efforts and the loss of our friends and relations.*

*'But then, as now, our battle was not for one people, certainly not for the king of any people other than our own. We fought then and we fight now for all that freedom means, against all that brutal bestial might can mean.*

*'Ours is not the duty to judge Leopold of Belgium, we must leave that to his people, however much we may feel that by the means of betrayal he adopted he must ever carry on his conscience, so long as he evades the final meeting with his maker, responsibility for the death of many of England's finest manhood.*

*'Our job is to ensure that those who carry on the fight for us and with us are not betrayed by one instant's slackening in our own effort to supply everything we can to enable them to win through to victory.*

*'Overwhelming strength of arms at sea, on land and in the air; unshakeable determination on the part of every man and woman to devote our whole life to securing our own land and the homes of fighting men, not only against attack by arms, but against attack by the weapons of fear, of wavering or of doubt.*

*'The British Expeditionary Forces, the Air Force, and the navy have shown us what real courage is. We cannot let them down even for one minute in the day. Let's get on with the job.'*

By June 4<sup>th</sup> 338,000 troops had been rescued from the beaches. The BBC 'On this Day' entry reads as follows:

*The Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, has described the "miracle of deliverance" from Dunkirk and warned of an impending invasion.*

*His moving speech to Parliament came on the day the last allied soldier arrived home from France at the end of a 10-day operation to bring back hundreds of thousands of retreating allied troops trapped by the German Army.*

*Many French troops remained to hold the perimeter and were captured.*

*Major-General Harold Alexander inspected the shores of Dunkirk from a motorboat this morning to make sure no-one was left behind before boarding the last ship back to Britain.*

*The beach and sea were in chaos. There were bodies floating in the water and we were under constant attack from machine-gun fire, bombing, explosions sending shrapnel in every direction.*

\*\*\*\*\*

Ronald Davies, whose poor mother, in her flat in The Parade, must have been reduced to a grease spot by this time, wrote to his fiancée, Miss Frances Jones, telling her of his exciting adventures at Dunkirk. He writes as follows:

*'I was chased and nearly captured three times, but I managed to 'win' a push-bike and ride 40 kilos to Dunkirk. There, I waded out to a boat and started for home.*

*'After 2 hours we were bombed, and I was lifted gently into the air and deposited in the sea. I was in full kit and I had to undress in the water. The ship I was in carried on, leaving another chap and myself clinging to a plank.*

*'We were machine-gunned, but my luck still held and I was picked up by a naval sloop about 2 hours later. We went back to Dunkirk, where we were bombed again, and I eventually arrived at Dover with only a pair of pants.*

*'A sailor gave me a pair of "ducks" to come ashore.'*

\*\*\*

I feel sure that there are many more tales of survival, joyous repatriation and even heroism which went unreported, but are well known within family circles. We must be thankful for all of them, whether or not we know. Dunkirk was both the nadir and the zenith of World War 2 for the allies. That June could so easily have marked the end of Britain's efforts to maintain her freedom, but it was turned into a story of hope and aspiration, thank goodness.

## 32. Twenty Days in June 1940

The rest of June 1940 was a muddle of 'normal' life at home in Worle, sandwiched between news of all kinds from the continent and beyond. In an attempt to give you an idea of what I mean, here is a short extract from our Diary of 1940. Most snippets of information are taken from the local newspapers.

Monday 10 <sup>th</sup>	Norway surrendered to Germany. Italy declared war on Britain and France.
Tuesday 11 <sup>th</sup>	Rev. May worked all day trying to find billets for expected evacuees Pte Albert Loud arrived home for 48 hours leave at 'Tenerife' Kewstoke Road. B.E.F. in France.
Wednesday 12 <sup>th</sup>	Mother's Union meeting at Church Hall
Thursday 13 <sup>th</sup>	Worle Schools closed today and tomorrow to cope with 350 new evacuees
Friday 14 <sup>th</sup>	German army entered Paris Worle Local Defence Volunteers' meeting. Few details, just that a good number turned up.
Saturday 15 <sup>th</sup>	Methodist Chapel packed for anniversary of Sunday School. Pigeon Race results from Ripon. Durham Race details. H.W. Crook & Son, Lawrence Road, is the place to take scrap metal for government collection scheme. Injured Soldiers appeal for bedroom slippers, books and games. Picture of wedding of Harry Jones and Olive Hornett at St. Martin's.
Sunday 16 <sup>th</sup>	F. H. Phippen's death reported in Mercury. History and obit. Local market gardener injured when horse was frightened by a cat
Monday 17 <sup>th</sup>	Funeral held on this day of Edith Portlock, [56] Spring Hill. Related to Phillips' family of Church Road.
Tuesday 18 <sup>th</sup>	Soviets invaded the Baltic States. National Saving Scheme meeting in Methodist Schoolroom, Lawrence Road.
Wednesday 19 <sup>th</sup>	
Thursday 20 <sup>th</sup>	
Friday 21 <sup>st</sup>	Funeral of Mrs. S. A. Chamberlain, Prospect Cottage, High St. aged 76
Saturday 22 <sup>nd</sup>	The <b>French</b> surrendered at Compiègne. Sir Geoffrey Peto, ARP Commissioner for the South West, made a speech: Churchill has told us that the Battle of Britain has begun. 100 planes on East Coast. ARP services in front line. Home Secretary ordered removal of Road Direction Signs.

	350 evacuees arrived from Willisden. All billeted successfully, but school places difficult.
	Noreen Esme Denmead, Castle Road, married George Albert Bishop of Devonshire Road.
	Worle 'Parashots' report. A. M. Wilmot was section leader and W.G. Moore was deputy.
Sunday 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Hitler toured Paris
Monday 24 <sup>th</sup>	
Tuesday 25 <sup>th</sup>	Inaugural meeting of National Savings Group address by L. C. Lane
Wednesday 26 <sup>th</sup>	Charles Ball, Lawrence Rd, married Annie Blackmore in Bude Methodist ramble to Wick St. Lawrence. Greta Mary Rice, daughter of Mr and Mrs Samuel Rice of 'Holly Bank' Kewstoke Road married Thomas Robinson [RAF] from Manchester
Thursday 27 <sup>th</sup>	
Friday 28 <sup>th</sup>	
Saturday 29 <sup>th</sup>	Worle Youth who Wed in Haste, Stole for Wife'. Sylvester William Raines, 19 years old, of High Street, was charged with stealing a wallet on 22 <sup>nd</sup> June from Alan Maggs. £14/10/-. Bench were sympathetic. Given 2 years' probation and help finding a job. Hay making in full swing. Crops were exceptionally good. Girl Guides, Boy Scouts and Brownies held Church Parade and had new flag blessed in service at St. Martins. Canvassers needed for new National Savings Group. Worle Cricket Club struggled to find opponents. Praise in paper for Mrs Dawson, who intended to take over the running of her husband's garage to free him for war work. Mr Dawson had been disqualified from driving earlier in the year. 12 new lambs at Springfield – very late. <b>Mrs W. Jones [nee Cook] of Glen View, High Street welcomed her husband home. He was lifted off from Brest after several narrow escapes.<sup>6</sup></b>
Sunday 30 <sup>th</sup>	Last race of season for Homing Society Germany occupation of Channel Islands started.

The mixture of news is amazing. By the end of June, France, our closest ally in terms of distance and the first to come to our aid on 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 1939, had been forced into surrender and Churchill had announced that the Battle of Britain had begun. Paris was full of Germans, Norway had given up, Russia had invaded the Baltic States, evacuees were still pouring in to Worle, all the Road Signs had to be removed and finally, Germany had occupied the Channel Islands, which were supposed to be ours! The

---

<sup>6</sup> I find the report of Mrs. W. Jones's husband's return particularly uplifting! It would make a good line for a Carry On film.

surrender of the French nation, coupled with the German's arrival in the Channel Islands, sparked concern at governmental level about what would become of the French Fleet. So, to prevent it falling into German hands and being used against the allies, British Naval units either sank or seized the ships in the Algerian ports of Oran and Mers-el-Kebir. The French Government, based temporarily in Vichy, from which it took its name in this strange period, immediately broke off diplomatic relations with Great Britain. Disaster.

However, the local papers were still reporting pigeon race results, Mothers' Union meetings, marriages, rambles to Wick, hay making, cricket and the late lambs at Springfield. If Hitler got his hands on the Mercury and the Gazette, he must have despaired.

### **33. In fair July, the Summer starts to fade and die.....**

Ann Hunt, who lived at 5, The Rows was 96 years old, and very probably the oldest resident in Worle at the time. The report does not give her maiden name, but does tell us that her husband, an agricultural worker, had been dead for many years. Mrs Hunt had lived in the parish all her life and had resided at the Almshouses in The Scaurs until they were demolished in about 1934, when all the tenants were moved to The Rows. Sadly, she took to her grave many stories of life in 19<sup>th</sup> century Worle. Her funeral took place at the Churchyard on July 5<sup>th</sup>.

The Parish Magazine was delivered on the first Saturday in July and contained an eulogy from the vicar for Mr. F. H. Phippen. Rev. May had already spoken of Mr. Phippen's illness and his contribution to the work of St. Martin's Church at the Parish meeting in June. Now, following Mr. Phippen's death, Rev May wrote of his 50 years service to the choir and of his life-long loyalty to the Church. Mr Phippen was a philanthropist, and it was he who gave the land for the Village Club, later known as the Century Club, to be built in Mendip Avenue.

There were, I'm afraid, some unsightly signs of war activities in Worle, not least of which was the ever-growing scrap metal dump in Lawrence Road. People gave of their scrap metal and indeed of their still needed metal objects with amazing generosity, believing that every bit of it was needed for the war effort. Mostly, people thought it would be used to manufacture weapons or planes. In fact, much of it was of no use for such specialised use and was literally scrapped. In the meantime, however, it created an eyesore in Lawrence Road.

P.C. Hansford who, incidentally, lived in the Police House in Lawrence Road, did not have to look at the mess for much longer, having been promoted to Acting Sergeant in the Criminal Investigation Department. I assume that this meant removing from his home, so that Worle's new P.C. could move in. Local people chatted about these matters, and the good start that had been made to the National Savings Scheme, and the sad, if predictable, news that the Flower Show was not going to happen that year.

### 34. The Eve of Disaster

On Tuesday evening, the 9<sup>th</sup> of July, Worle Old Boys Football Club held its annual meeting at the Junior School. W. Fletcher was in the chair and Dr. W. J. Petty was voted President. Fred Williams, Dot Wilcox's father, became vice-chairman that evening. The club had over £80 in its account, a great deal of money at the time, as the reports in both local papers intimate. I dare say the vicar, who was feeling the pinch over the Churchyard fund arrears, was deeply envious. The club had an incredible reputation for fair play by 21<sup>st</sup> century standards. Not one player had been cautioned by a referee in the entire season. I hope chaps went home with a song in their hearts. It would not last long.

The Luftwaffe launched the Battle of Britain the next day.

The day was showery, the sort of gentle rain we are most used to during an English summer. Into our green and pleasant land flew a solitary German plane. It dropped four high explosive bombs on King's Dock, Swansea. Twelve people are reported to have died in the attack; another 26 were injured. We do not know the route taken by the young German pilot that day, but it was probably best to fly up the Bristol Channel – certainly he was less likely to be spotted than he would be over land. However he got to the Gower Peninsula, his arrival sent shock waves across the South West. It was much too close for comfort. The Germans were apparently concentrating on shipping and dockyards. Axis Planes were detected over the English Channel and Hurricanes were up, doing their stuff already.

In Worle, there was much digging, not to plant vegetables this time, but to provide shelter. The papers gave the population instructions on how to deal with incendiary bombs and praised Worle people for their household air raid precautions.

Five twelve-year-old girls decided to put on a concert in a back garden in New Bristol Road. They made costumes, learnt lines and invited friends and neighbours to attend. Christine Davis, Margaret Jones and Iris Raines all contributed, as did two girls who had been evacuated to Worle, whose names, sadly, I do not know<sup>7</sup>. Between them they raised 18/7d, which was handed over to the Red Cross to help with the war.

Churchill took over the air waves for a while on 14<sup>th</sup> July. It was Bastille Day, of course, and he took the opportunity to speak about France, its people and its leaders. He included one paragraph, which I reproduce here, which tells us so much about the spirit of that time:

---

<sup>7</sup> Eileen Billing contacted me with the following information: *'We believe one of the girls to be Elizabeth Conway (Cowan), a Jewish girl evacuated to the home of Tom and Aida Raines, 11 Hill Road, Worle, parents of Iris Raines, mentioned in the paragraph. Elizabeth remained in contact with Mr and Mrs Raines, as she always called them for the rest of their lives, and continued to visit them from her home in London on an annual basis until their deaths. Tom and Ada were my husband's grandparents'*

*“And now it has come to us to stand alone in the breach, and face the worst that the tyrant's might and enmity can do. Bearing ourselves humbly before God, but conscious that we serve an unfolding purpose, we are ready to defend our native land against the invasion by which it is threatened. We are fighting by ourselves alone; but we are not fighting for ourselves alone. Here in this strong City of Refuge which enshrines the title-deeds of human progress and is of deep consequence to Christian civilisation; here, girt about by the seas and oceans where the Navy reigns; shielded from above by the prowess and devotion of our airmen—we await undismayed the impending assault. Perhaps it will come tonight. Perhaps it will come next week. Perhaps it will never come. We must show ourselves equally capable of meeting a sudden violent shock or what is perhaps a harder test—a prolonged vigil. But be the ordeal sharp or long, or both, we shall seek no terms, we shall tolerate no parley; we may show mercy—we shall ask for none.”*

### **35. Active Service at Home and Away**

Churchill's eloquence seems to have stirred the Nation, including Dr. Rolland Chaput, who, in a loud speaker van, took up the tale in Mendip Avenue, outside the Infants' School. An audience gathered in the early evening, to listen to his thoughts on 'You and the War'. Many people found that his message was unavoidable, since the loud speaker was a powerful affair and his voice could be clearly heard at some distance. Dr. Chaput was on the staff of the Ministry of Information, so we may presume that his words were of an official nature. Flo Philips did not manage to attend the event. She worked at Marks and Spencer, and this was the day on which the firm's oven exploded, injuring Flo's right arm and temporarily affecting her eyes.

In an attempt to comfort the flock, the Bishop of Bath and Wells, Francis Underhill, visited the Parish on 18<sup>th</sup> July to preach at a service of intercession at St. Martin's. Just for a moment, it seemed that this may have succeeded, when, the next morning, Adolf Hitler made an address to the Reichstag. Although this was essentially a victory speech, and masterly, it must be admitted, Hitler failed to strike the right note with the British Government, when he 'appealed for reason'. The following journalistic comment sums up the situation.

*‘Yet the expected victory was incomplete. The British, who had been beaten in both France and Norway, remained obstinately defiant and were not seeking peace terms as expected. At the conclusion of his speech Hitler made a rather weak ‘appeal to reason’ from the British. Some had expected something more substantial that might appeal to those in Britain who were interested in peace. It was easy for the Churchill administration to dismiss Hitler's “offer” out of hand.’*

The minds of most of the village must have been taken over by war matters. It was not just that the international situation was dire, it was not just that invasion might be imminent, it was the thought of the youngsters who were abroad, goodness knew

where, and the danger that they were enduring. The Gazette ran a regular column that featured men and occasional woman who were away on active service.

- E.A. Williams, 23 Hill Road, was away with the Somerset Light Infantry.
- E. Bartlett, 21 Mayfield Avenue, was a Driver, somewhere.
- H. Roger Holbrook, RAF, had worked at Moody's stores and played billiards and cricket.
- Lance Corporal Day, Somerset Light Infantry, 7 Kewstoke Road, served in both World Wars.
- Private R. W. Fury, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Wiltshire Regiment, 5 Spring Terrace, was wounded and taken prisoner in Germany, but managed to send a field card home.
- Rex H. Clayton, Hawthorn Hill, was with the British Expeditionary Force in the Corps of Military Police, and was reported missing as from May 24<sup>th</sup>.

The list is far too long to attempt, of course, but in one sense everyone who was on active service was missing and all anyone could do was to plough on – 'keep the home fires burning' as someone once said!

Many families had several sons, brothers and so on to worry about, and to be intensely proud of. One such family was the Bishops. I recently met Elsie Bishop [now Pemberthy], who lived at number 6 Kewstoke Road [please note that the street has been re-numbered since]. Elsie was one of 6 children of whom she is the only one still living. She very kindly loaned me a much treasured photograph of her father and his 2 sons, all in uniform.



Elsie is not sure of the date of the photograph, but it shows her brother, Alfred, on the left, who was in the Army Medical Corps. Samuel, Elsie's father, is in the middle. He was a member of the Home Guard, as you can see, but had served in the Royal Artillery

in World War 1, working with the horses. Finally, on the right, is Norman. Like so many youngsters he went into the Army Service Corps straight from the Home Guard, and in fact went off wearing his H.G. Uniform. Elsie was the youngest, but remembers her brothers going off to war.

Air Raid Drills were carried out regularly in all the village schools. The children, including Elsie, often wore their Mickey Mouse gas masks in class, which was probably fun for a while. St. John Ambulance started nightly duties and agreed to patrol whenever the air raid sirens had been sounded. Meanwhile, the newly dug holes, intended to provide shelter, predictably filled with water and the ARP wardens were expected to come up with a solution. Huge sand castles started to appear everywhere. This was because W. Huish and Sons rounded up anyone who possessed a lorry and delivered quantities of sand all over the place to use in firefighting. The piles were situated at Castle Road, Coronation Road, Lawrence Road, New Bristol Road, Golden Lion, Hawthorn Hill, Hill Road, Kewstoke Road, New Inn, Pine Hill, Preanes Green, The Rows and The Scaurs. This certainly helped the children to pass the time during the school holidays and provided something to fill the holes!! Not what Huish and Sons had in mind?

Nora Jefferies' Brownies and Guides had been without a regular home for meetings,



more or less since the onset of war. The Church Hall was no longer available, since the RAF had men billeted there, and so an application was made for permission to use a room in the new Senior School. The Weston Board of School Managers granted the required access, so presumably the meetings started to convene there at once. This would have given them time to organize themselves for the Church Parade Service on Sunday August 11<sup>th</sup>, pictured above, with the Infants' School and the Village Club in the

background. Altogether, the girls had a very busy weekend, as they were also involved in a repeat of production entitled 'The Adventures of Violet and Rose', a fairy play produced in aid of the Red Cross which took place in the garden of Sunnyside House. At the same time, the Guides and Brownies paraded in antique dresses to raise funds for the Soldiers' Sailors' and Airmen's Wives and Families Association.

### 36. St John Ambulance, Health and First Aid

Weston's General Hospital in the Boulevard was certainly doing its best to look after the people of Worle that August. Mrs. H. J Fussell was seriously ill and being cared for at the hospital, together with Mrs. Ball from Lawrence Road, Mr. F. Smith who lived in the High Street and Mr. Clift of Hill Road, who worked at Fussell's. I dare say the village was pleased to hear that their 'quietly capable' ARP Wardens had been successful in their First Aid Studies and had all been awarded the certificates as proof of their efficacy.

In times of emergency people in trouble and, indeed, the medical profession, relied heavily upon the men of St. John Ambulance. In 1877, the Order of St John set up St John Ambulance. People from all classes were trained in first aid so they could help workers involved in the frequent accidents from the new machinery used since the industrial revolution. - It soon became a uniformed brigade providing first aid and an ambulance service at public events. By 1940, the chaps of the Worle Division met in the mews block at Sunnyside House.



We have no date for this photo of the St. John Ambulance men, but Ian Vaughan is 4<sup>th</sup> from the left in the back row.

St John Ambulance was called upon one Saturday lunch time when George Payne, of

Woodland, Preatnes Green had a rather unusual spill. George was a life long resident of Worle and a popular farmer. That Saturday he was driving his horse and cart along Milton Road towards Weston when the horse slipped and fell near Ashcombe Park. George was thrown and landed heavily in the road on his head. This was not his first accident. I cannot be certain whether he was very poor at driving his cart, or whether he and his horse both enjoyed a tipples and a topple, but he had fallen from his cart

only a few months previously and almost been run over by the wheel. On another occasion, he tumbled into a deep rhyne and was lucky to get away with a thorough soaking. I should mention that George was 80 years old and I cannot help admiring his spirit, and determination to carry on as he always had.

At the opposite end of the scale, age-wise, I should mention Clive Wall, an eight year old boy who resided at Homeleigh, Spring Hill. Poor little chap was out on his push bike one Sunday, when he hit a hole in the road and was, next minute, lying on the tarmac. His anxious mother had him transported to the hospital to have his bruised eye and lacerated leg inspected.

You may recall that Mr. Phippen's death was reported in early July [page 113]. His position as manager of Worle Infants' School was taken on by Mr. A. G. V. Thornton, generally known as Victor. It may well be that few folk will recall him, as he had only been living in Worle for 2 years. Vic Thornton was 68 and an active member of the community. As well as being a school manager, he was an ARP Warden and worked hard for the Methodist Church. In addition, he was Honorary Secretary of the Weston-super-Mare Society for Lancashire and Yorkshire Folk. He was full of energy and quite a sportsman, so it came as a great shock when Vic was taken ill rather suddenly and two weeks later, died at his home, 'Tregarth', Church Road, Worle.

The Infants' School had now lost two managers in a few weeks, so Mr. F. R. Vincent of 'Rheims', Greenwood Road, must have accepted the invitation to fill the void on the board with some trepidation.

As a brief footnote for those who think that only modern warfare involves the dangers of landmines, I feel that I should mention the fate of the poor old cow, which was grazing at Middle Hope, as usual, enjoying the August weather, when she was blown to smithereens by such a device. Can you believe it? There was no comment from the Ministry of Defence, of course. But then, she wasn't their cow. She belonged to Collum Farm.

### **37. The Village Club**

In 1940 the Village Club was not yet called the Century Club, but apart from the fact that it did not serve alcohol, it was much as it is today. The papers published on 17<sup>th</sup> August, 1940, tell us that 40 years after the club was opened, it was finally mortgage free. The annual general meeting was held on the previous Tuesday and chaired, as usual, by Rev. May, who was Club President. So many club members were away on active service that the numbers at the meeting were small, but one empty chair was particularly poignant – that of F. H. Phippen. A letter of sympathy and appreciation was penned to Mrs. Phippen. Mr Moody, the club's secretary, suggested that a photograph of the late treasurer should be enlarged and hung in the club, together with pictures of other benefactors.

The new treasurer, Mr. H. B. Price, read out the accounts, which were passed, and which were soon enhanced when H. Wagner, Secretary of the Sports Club, presented a cheque for £8 together with a group photo of the darts team. If anyone knows where this photo has landed up, please let us know. Richard, the club's present caretaker, is searching as I write. I am also interested to note that Mr. and Mrs. C. Knight managed the club very efficiently on a day to day basis. I spoke to their niece, June Knight, about the couple, whom she knew as Uncle Cliff and Auntie Alice. They lived on the premises at the club, probably upstairs in the flat, and June says that Alice might have been efficient but she had a sharp way with her. Charlie Knight, who was the brother of June's Grandfather, lived with them.

The club contributed to the general well being of the village by arranging regular evening and day time entertainment. The Whist Drives, held every week, were very popular and raised money for good causes, and the darts team belonged to a small local league and enabled the men of the area to mingle for pleasure, rather than only for wartime activities.

### **38. September, and the bombing begins in Worle**

It was almost exactly one year after the outbreak of war that disaster came to Worle on an unexpected and horrifying scale. Men had already been lost on active service, of course, and there had been scares when the air raid siren went off, but Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> September brought tragedy. This time there was no siren, just a quiet night in late summer, shattered by a high explosive bomb which fell on Westonia Cottage, opposite the Golden Lion. The cottage was the home of a young family – Mr. and Mrs. David Gweirydd Jones, their son, Melville and their three year old daughter, Valerie. The family were all in one room, downstairs when the bomb fell. Mrs Jones was nursing her daughter. The Mercury, on 7<sup>th</sup> September, reported thus:

*“During Tuesday night enemy raiders flew over a South West village and dropped several bombs. One of these fell directly on a picturesque old-world cottage, killing a man and his wife and their little daughter. Their ten-years'-old son and the family pet, a spaniel dog, in the same room, had miraculous escapes. After the explosion, whilst wardens and other A.R.P. workers were searching for the bodies, the dog ran wailing pitifully amidst the ruins, searching for his dead master and mistress and baby playmate.*

*By a strange freak, shops and other property within a few yards of the pile of stones which marked the site of the cottage, sustained no damage whatever, not even a pane of glass being broken. In a downstairs bedroom of a house adjoining the cottage was a bedridden old lady of 87 years who, with other members of the family, had to be evacuated in the early hours of the morning. The dead man, after a long period of unemployment, had just obtained work. He was the well known tenor soloist of a local glee party and a member of the village Church choir, in which his son also sang.*

*When the bomb fell, the father, mother and two children were all in a downstairs room and the mother was found with her baby clasped in her arms. Two high explosive bombs fell in an adjoining road and badly damaged three houses, but there were no personal injuries. A number of incendiary bombs fell on a main road near by and caused trifling damage: others fell harmlessly in a field."*

The Gazette, also published on September 7<sup>th</sup>, reported the fatal bombing, too, and it is only right to include that version of the incident. The headline read: FIRST BOMBS FALL IN SOUTH-WEST SEASIDE TOWN. THREE MEMBERS OF ONE FAMILY KILLED. Many Homes have to be Evacuated.

*"A Man and his wife and their daughter, aged four were killed on Tuesday night when raiding German aircraft scored a direct hit with a high explosive bomb on the house in a south-west town. A son, aged twelve, who was in the same room as his parents lies in the hospital. – A spaniel survives.*

*They were Mrs and Mrs. G. Jones, their daughter, Valerie, and their son, Melville. Two entire streets in the same town had to be evacuated to the local school when unexploded bombs were discovered.*

*The house on which the bomb fell was irreparably damaged, but houses adjoining both left and right were left intact except for plaster falling from the ceilings caused by vibration. Not a window was shattered, though a bomb dropping in the same area some time ago, but a considerable distance away, broke windows.*

*Mr. J. G. Lickes, the landlord of a public house across the road from where the bomb fell told a Gazette reporter who visited the scene of the damage, that he was sitting in the back kitchen of his home with his wife and children. They heard an explosion but were unaware that it was so near.*

*'I sat there for five minutes,' said Mr. Lickes, 'when someone came and said 'Come out – there's a house down here'.*

*Not a window in the public house was broken.*

*In a room adjoining the bombed house, in the house next door, an old lady of 90 years was sheltering. She is Mrs. A. Urch who was resting on the bed when the bomb dropped. Her two sons, Mr. N. F. and Mr. A. E. Urch were in the same room.*

*'It was a marvellous escape', said Mr., A. E. Urch to a Gazette reporter. 'My mother did not faint, but she moved to relatives. I think the safest place is downstairs.'*

*Apart from damaged ceilings and walls the house is intact and no windows are broken.*

*All night long on the debris, however, sat the spaniel dog, who would not move. He resisted all attempts to get him to come away and it was not until morning that he suffered himself to be led.'*

Mr. Jones, the father of the young family, was universally known as Gwyn. He came from a large, close family, most of whom attended the triple funeral at St. Martins the following Saturday. Gwyn's brother, Hayden Jones was amongst the mourners. Many people will remember Hayden. He ran the paper shop on the south side of the High Street in later years. Gwyn's wife was a member of the Gillett family. For the Joneses and the Gilletts it would have been so hard to come to terms with the loss of this well loved couple and their little Valerie.

The full choral service was appropriate for the young Welshman, who sang whenever possible. The choice of 'Abide with Me' must have brought so many tears to sad eyes. Young Melville's world was, of course, temporarily shattered by this loss. I am glad to be able to say that Frank Gosden has tracked Melville down. He is well and lives in the Midlands.

The Golden Lion was once again near the epicentre of the incident, and the Lickes family must have wondered when they would receive a direct hit. Several local people have described the moment of the blast to me. Although the papers describe it as night time, it was, in fact, the evening. At the moment that the bomb hit Westonia Cottage, a man emerged from the Golden Lion, quite by coincidence. The blast sent up clouds of dust and debris and this left a clean outline of the man on the pale, outside wall of the pub. He was shocked, of course, but completely unhurt. Other eye-witnesses have told me that a mattress was blown out of the cottage and was lying on the pavement on the opposite side of the High Street, outside the Lion.



The pictures above was taken late in the year by a photographer from the Gazette newspaper and shows the sad remains of Westonia Cottage. Behind the ruins is the

cottage where old Mrs. Urch resided and to the far right there is a glimpse of Fairfield House in the High Street. The Golden Lion is out of the shot to the right.



The bombsite in Greenwood Road, above, was also taken by the Gazette photographer.

There were other bombs that fell on Worle, but the dates are oddly contradictory. The incendiaries, which were mentioned in the Mercury, fell in Greenwood Road, hitting two houses immediately behind the bakery. Jenny Vaughan's family often talked of that night. They remembered it clearly, as the entire population of Greenwood Road was evacuated to the Church Hall for their safety. Apart from the tragedy of the Jones family, the bombing had broken a gas main, which was the main reason for the evacuation.

Jenny's father, Ian Vaughan, had to cross the fields over the back to feed the chickens in his own garden whilst Greenwood Road was evacuated. Mr and Mrs Vaughan, and their daughters Shirley and Maureen [Jen was not yet born] spent the first night in the Church Hall and the next day moved to a farm in Station Rd. Jen doesn't know how long the evacuation lasted, but supposes it was until the gas main was mended. This evacuation was ironic, as you will see. They were not to know that later that night, or maybe early the following morning, bombs would fall all around their safe haven in the Church Hall. One unexploded bomb – or possibly a land mine dropped by parachute – was embedded in the garden at the back of 3 Hill Road East. No one can recall whether the bomb was dealt with in a controlled explosion, or whether it was de-fused, but the house was undamaged. Just as well, since Jenny Vaughan and her husband, Frank Gosden, moved into this house with their 2 children thirty years later and still live there today. It is the home of Worle History Society's committee meetings.

The Snook family lived next-door-but-one to the Church Hall in one of a pair of semi-detached houses, which had not long been built, and Peter, the youngest son of the house [and one of our stalwart members] remembers one night all too clearly. Well you would, if you were a small boy and lucky enough to have a bomb fall in your front garden. There is some discussion about the date of this momentous happening, some say it was in September 1940, but 4<sup>th</sup> January 1941 is the generally accepted Black Saturday.

The bomb blast lifted the house up from its foundations and dropped it again, slightly out of position. It looked perfectly OK, but was actually extremely dangerous. Both of the semis were condemned almost at once and Peter's family were moved into a house at 83 Upper Bristol Road, for the duration. That bomb is also remembered by Ronald Jones. Ron lived in one of the council houses towards the top of Hill Road, below the Church. His garden backed on to Peter Snook's. When the bomb fell, Ron and his mother dived head first for the Morrison shelter, which also served as their dining table.

The photograph that follows was taken in the summer of 1941, but I include it here because it shows Worle Brownies beginning the clear up of the sitse in Greenwood Road. The girl with the bandaged knee is Maureen Vaughan; the woman standing at the back is Betty Smout from Castle Road, who was Tawny Owl.



Another little girl, much the same age as Maureen Vaughan, was June Knight – now Beacham. She was eight years old when the war began and lived at 17 Hill Road in a newish bungalow. She had joined Nora's Brownies but says that the memories of the

meetings are vague. However, she does remember how her family dealt with the air raids and the bombing, which was so close to her home. June's mother seems to have been a calm, stoic soul who reacted to raids by sitting on the edge of the bed, knitting whilst the children were safely stacked away in the Morrison shelter, which was in the back bedroom. Dinky, the family dog also took to the shelter, lying along one end across the heads of the youngsters. Before the Morrison shelter was delivered, they used to sit in the hallway, by the front door – not at all safe, but they got away with it.

The photograph shows June's brother, Roy, holding Dinky, on the left. The boy standing was Victor Brewster, an evacuee. His mother, the lady in the hat, holding the baby, was on a visit to her son.



This aerial, taken in 1946, shows Greenwood Road the bomb sites and relevant buildings.

1. Golden Lion
2. Church Hall
3. Site of Jones' family home, [Westonia Cottage]
4. Bomb Site in Greenwood Road
5. Site of Snook family home, Hill Road East.
- 6 & 7 Sites of unexploded bombs

Just think how all those people from Greenwood Road and Hill Road must have felt. Firstly, Westonia Cottage, then evacuation and all the rest of the bombs, falling all around that tiny area of the village. Unbelievable, but true.

### 39. Stiff Upper Lip

On the day of the Jones family funeral, the Germans began the bombing of London, which has become known as the Blitz. The parents and children who had been evacuated to Worle must have had mixed feelings – relief at being somewhere ‘safer’ and horror at the thought of loved ones exposed to such danger.

Mr and Mrs G. F. W. Clayton of Wilmslow, Hawthorn Hill had been dreadfully anxious about their youngest son, Rex, since the end of May, when he was reported missing. Amazingly, a postcard arrived on the same day as the bombing. It was an official postcard, printed in German, but it carried Rex’s signature and the address of the P.O.W. camp where he was being held. Such relief was felt, to know that he had been captured by the enemy. The family had heard reports that Rex was spotted on the beach at Dunkirk, but had heard nothing since. Rex was well known in the area as a particularly talented Rugby three-quarter and a previous captain of the Weston Rugby Team. His older brother, Harold, also played for the team and both young men also played for Somerset.

There was good news from the antipodes, too. William J. Rogers was the eldest son of the late James Rogers and of Mrs. Curry of ‘Lawson Villa’, Coronation Road. He contacted his mother to tell her that he had been appointed a Member of the Legislative Council of New Zealand. The background to this story is complicated, so I shall rely on the Mercury report, and hope that it is accurate.

*‘Mr. William J. Rogers was born in New Zealand, where his late father, a native of this district, was engaged in work for one of the Railway Companies for some years. He was brought to Worle by his parents when only a few months old and received his education at the local School, but returned to New Zealand at the age of 18. His father continued to reside in this parish until his death, while his mother, now the wife of Mr. Sam Curry, has been in Worle over fifty years. She was born in New Zealand, her grandparents having been among the first colonists of the islands.’*

First prize for exploiting Hitler and all his works goes to the Boy Scouts. They somehow gained possession of the tailfin of a German bomb, and, on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> September, carted it around the village, collecting donations for the Worle Spitfire fund. We must acknowledge, I think, that this beats ‘bob a job’ week.

The photograph shows an unexploded bomb being recovered from Frank Chaplin's market garden. This was found and recovered in 1940 or 41, so perhaps it accounts for the tailfin. Rumour has it that the aircraft which dropped the bomb was attracted by a chimney fire.



#### 40. Worle's Home Guard

By September 1940, the Home Guard, across the country and in Worle, were becoming more organized. Originally formed on 14<sup>th</sup> May as the Local Defence Volunteers by Sir Anthony Eden, it was renamed the Home Guard by Winston Churchill on 23<sup>rd</sup> August. Men between the ages of 17 and 65 were expected to come forward to join. Not only did they have Non-Commissioned Officers, but also they were in possession of uniforms and even some, very limited, weaponry.

The membership, naturally, fluctuated, but was drawn from four main categories. Firstly, there were the men who were too old to be called up for active service, but often these were the most useful, since many of them had experience of serving in Worle War 1. Then there were the youngsters who were waiting for their call up, some of whom lied about their age in order to join the Home Guard. The third group were men engaged in a reserved occupation, like farming and market gardening and the fourth was a number of chaps who were exempted for medical reasons.

Amongst this last group was Jack Crocker Raines. Jack worked for Gunnings Stores, delivering groceries. He was 33 years old, so he would normally have been on active service, probably overseas, but Jack was still in Worle. Members of his family have suggested that this may have been due to poor health, but I am not certain of this. The newspaper reports say that he had just passed a medical for the army, and expected to be called to the colours some time in late October.

Jack was a married man and lived with his wife, Gladys Ruby Raines, in one of the old cottages, now demolished, at the top of the lane behind Gunnings Store. His home was only yards from the shop where he worked. A stroll through Manchester Square, past the Round House and down Lawrence Road, would have taken him to the cottage where he was born, and grew up.

The Home Guard met regularly at The Newtons, on the borders of Kewstoke, but also used other local venues for practicing various skills. The Observatory was one such place.

On the evening of Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> September, 1940 Jack Raines, Harold S[h]ingleton and Frank Meakin were on duty at the Observatory Picket Post. They were all carrying weapons, so the Home Guard must have been equipped sooner than I had imagined. The three young men were obviously inexperienced in weaponry and also had to deal with operating in darkness for much of their tour of duty.



The local papers say that, when one of the men opened the door to go out, the lights in the tower were extinguished to comply with blackout regulations. Harold Singleton shouted that he could not see what he was doing with his gun and simultaneously a shot was heard. Poor Jack Raines was shot in the groin. Here reports differ, but the Mercury of 28<sup>th</sup> September, page 4 column 6 says that an ambulance was called and Jack was rushed to hospital. The ambulance was manned by Mr. Bowering, father of Dr. Roddie Bowering, who still practices in the village. Dr. Bowering's father used to tell him about this sad event. He said that it was evident, at once, that Jack's femoral artery had been severed.

At 1.30 a.m. Jack's Section Commander, W. J. Moore, called at the cottage and told Ruby that Jack had been shot.

One of these cottages, at the top of Lawrence Road, was the birth place of Jack Raines



Ruby went straight to Weston Hospital, where Jack died later that night. A full report of the inquest appears in the Gazette, dated 28<sup>th</sup> September, 1940. A verdict of accidental death was brought in and the Jury gave their fees to Jack's widow.

The funeral took place with full military honours on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> September at St. Martin's Church. 60 Officers, N.C.O.s and men of Weston Home Guard formed up outside the cottage and walked behind the cortege, out into Church Road, where they turned left and slow marched to the Church. Eight colleagues from the Home Guard carried the coffin to the grave. They were H.C. Raines, H. F. Ackland, J. L. Griffiths, W. J. Kingsbury, G. L. Lanham, W.G. Parsons, R. Palmer and H. J. Hutchings. The Union Flag covered the coffin and The Last Post and Reveille were sounded on the bugle.



So, another Worle boy was laid to rest in the peace and quiet of the old Churchyard, where the Jones family had so recently been interred.

On the following Sunday the village gathered at the Church again, for a special service, attended by Jack's family and the Home Guard. The report in the Mercury of 5<sup>th</sup> October, gives Jack's address as 'Manchester Cottages'. The report of Jack's death also says that another family member had been killed in an air raid only a short time before. Was this a reference to the tragedy at Westonia Cottage? Perhaps.

I only hope that poor young S[h]ingleton, who was only 19 years old, was able to get some comfort and sympathy from the Church, the village and his Home Guard colleagues, and forgiveness from the family of Jack Crocker Raines.

## 41. Autumn Term

The Senior School was well prepared for air raids. Most of the windows had been covered with wire netting, the remainder had been treated with sellotape and large concrete anti-blast screens had been erected outside the main doors. The children whether they were local or evacuees, were all well into a new school year by this time, and it seems that the opening of the new senior school had taken some pressure off and helped to deal with the overcrowding.

However, the school buildings were being used for a wide variety of activities, mainly as a result of wartime demands. The Brownies and Guides had been making good use of a room at the Senior School every Saturday for some time, but this was causing some difficulties. The papers reported on October 12<sup>th</sup>, that the girls were making a mess and not clearing it up. Consequently the cleaners and caretakers were unhappy – never a good situation in a school! The caretaker was at the end of his tether, trying to deal with local children and the evacuated school, not to mention the Guides on Saturdays. He had had enough and threatened to resign. This came to a head at a Weston Schools Meeting, where Alderman C. Harden introduced the subject to the assembled dignitaries. Rev. May observed that the Brownies and Guides had no where else to go, except maybe the Infants' School, but a decision was made that the caretakers had to be able to keep the new school in good order for the children, so Nora Jefferies and her colleagues, found themselves homeless again.

In all honesty, the schools were being used for far longer hours than usual to accommodate both schools, and the spate of air raid warnings, especially at night, had led to a decision to start lessons at 10.00 a.m. instead of 9, to allow the children to get some sleep. Of course, this was seen as a chance to turn up even later, so it was decided to go back to a nine o'clock start. This was probably a useful lesson in not taking advantage of a situation.

The welfare state was but a twinkle in the eye of Labour politicians in 1940, but the welfare of the nation's children at this time of rationing was a priority. Accordingly, there was an issue of subsidised milk for every school child. Each child was able to buy a third of a pint bottle of milk for a ha'penny, but about a third of the children at the senior school were taking up the offer! Apparently the parents did not see the need to fork out every day, as they had plenty of milk at home. A decision was made to nag the children about it at morning assembly. It was thought to be necessary to keep a rural emphasis in the local schools. Dairy farming was being encouraged by the introduction of instruction in dairywork in the school. There are no details as to the nature of these classes. I wonder if they made cheese.

There is no doubt that the people of Worle were relatively well fed, largely because the private gardens and market gardens, as well as the farms, produced excellent meat, vegetables and fruit, as testified by the produce that appeared in the Church to celebrate Harvest Festival. William Day, of Spring Hill, had a surplus as usual. He had

always sold his extra vegetables from his lorry, and did so that Autumn, but this time he was taken to court and fined for doing so, much to his consternation. As a result, local growers decided to instigate a barter system to by-pass this silly law, which would have resulted in produce being thrown away. Good for them.

There was an unexpected cold spell in mid-October and children and teachers alike suffered bouts of tonsillitis and colds. Miss Russell was off sick, so her class had to double up for a few days. Fortunately it was almost half term, so the schools had a rest and the women who had taken in evacuees had to take up the slack.

During the holiday the schools re-grouped, so to speak. The coal bunkers were stocked to the hilt ready for Winter. This supply would keep the iron stoves in each classroom as well fed as the children they warmed. Teachers kept the stoves topped up with coal and the area was protected by fireguards. Presumably the cleaners and caretakers had a thoroughly good time making hay while the buildings were empty. Meanwhile, the children were kept busy collecting fallen leaves for manure, though I have no idea where they put their greenery. I dare say it went on a compost heap somewhere.

Peter Snook has happy memories of the bee hives which produced masses of honey, and of collecting rose hips. These little treasures were stored in cardboard boxes in the classrooms and were collected weekly by a van which took them away to make rose hip syrup for the babies. The hips were also used for a less altruistic purpose. The boys would remove the pips and put them carefully down the backs of unsuspecting girls, who itched madly for days afterwards.

Every child hoped to get his or her hands on a blue card. These were issued to children who could establish some family connection with farming and horticulture. During the Summer and Autumn terms, especially, children could present their blue card to the teacher and would be given permission to take a half day off to help with farm work. The only proviso was that this should only occur once or twice a week, and the card had to be signed by the farmer or market gardener. Some of the local farmers couldn't write, so a cross was accepted!! You can guess the rest.

The gas board installed a pedestal gas-detector board in the Senior School garden. I have no idea what this would have looked like and no amount of asking around has answered the question. I do know that it warranted a mention in the Mercury, and reproduced here:

*'The pedestal gas detector board in the School garden is in use almost every day now! Oh No! Not for the purpose for which it was intended, but as the comfortable, sunbathing platform of a ginger cat.'*

The November meeting of the Worle School Managers was interesting. It was noted that Rev. Lutley, [Hewish, St. Pauls] and Rev. Edwards of Wick St. Lawrence, had not attended a single meeting, so they were asked to resign and were to be replaced. Wow. The same meeting discussed the constant flooding at the bottom of Spring Hill.

This was predicted by the entire village when the Rhyne was piped, but the authorities ignored the warnings. Consequently there was often six inches of water in the school drive and children and staff alike had to wear Wellingtons [boots, not planes] or ride bikes to school. Excellent. Actually much of the High Street was affected by flooding – the Lamb Inn, the New Inn and the bottom of Lawrence Road all suffered.

On a happier note, I am pleased to report that the Church Hall gave provisional permission for the Guides and Brownies to meet on the premises again – but only on the condition that this time they cleared up properly.

## 42. Cycle of Life

The ups and downs and round-about of life went on. The tail fin from the German bomber found a temporary resting place in the window of Mr. Urch's Barber shop, next door to the sad sight of the remains of Westonia cottage. The idea was to raise further cash for the Spitfire Fund.

George Fry, who was secretary of the Sunday School at the Methodist Church, was called up, but the report gives no further details. In the post-war years I knew George Fry well – a gentle soul with the ability to spray his listeners with spittle whenever he spoke. George was not a confident man and often stammered nervously. I did not realize, as a child, that he had been involved in the fighting. Now I wonder if he had always had a nervous disposition, or whether a carefree fellow had come back a different man.

A young Dunkirk survivor from Liverpool, by the name of Patrick Jude got himself into trouble. He admitted to being a deserter since his return to Blighty, and was caught stealing a bicycle belonging to David Norris of Kewstoke Road. David was a member of Worle's Home Guard, and used his bike to get to meetings and tours of duty. Mr. Jude was sentenced to seven days hard labour, which seems like a practical punishment.

There were two infant deaths in the village, both reported in the papers. Rex Douglas Wilcox was only four months old when he died. He was the grandson of the Neathways at the Bakery in the High Street, and brother of Jean, Margaret and Kath. Rex's father was away fighting, I believe. I do hope he was given leave to grieve with the family. The other child lost to the village was Frederick Oliver Penberthy, whose family lived in Spring Terrace. Freddie was five – and for once I am lost for words. His funeral was reported in the Mercury on 19<sup>th</sup> October.

Active Service was also taking its toll. The terrace of villas on the south side of the High Street between the junctions with Greenwood Road and Mendip Avenue were mostly residential at this time, and inhabited by families. The houses had three storeys, so there were four bedrooms, a bathroom and a second toilet outside. One of the bedrooms was an attic room approached by its own staircase. The houses were built in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and were named rather pretentiously: Sandringham, Windsor,

Cumberland, and Balmoral. This picture of 'Cumberland', now 128 High Street, was taken towards the end of World War 1. The girl in the photograph is Frances Griffin, who later married Fred Boobyer. The house is flanked on the right by 'Windsor' and by 'Balmoral' on the left.



William Thomas Powell was a twenty-seven year old married father of two, who resided, in peace time, in the house named Cumberland. In civilian life William had worked as a waiter in two well known Weston Hotels, first at the Imperial and then at the Royal. He was reported killed on active service in London with the Army Military Auxiliary Pioneer Corps. The name was changed to Pioneer Corps in 1940. The Corps handled all kinds and types of stores and ammunition, built camps, airfields and fortifications, cleared rubble and demolished roadblocks, built roads, railways and bridges, loaded and unloaded ships, trains and planes, constructed aircraft pens against enemy bombing and a host of other jobs. William Powell had been a busy young man. He was due for leave to visit his wife and two children the day after his death. His older child was only two years old. By 1949, when my family moved into 'Windsor', young Mrs. Powell and her children had moved and 'Cumberland' was the home of Mrs. Wilmot and her family.

Fortunately there are always some weddings to brighten the scene and in 1940 young people were eager to use the term 'there's a war on' to persuade their parents into agreement. The first reported celebration of nuptials that Autumn was on Hallowe'en, which is an interesting day to choose. It was a real village wedding when Violet May Vincent of Elm Mews, High Street married William Ayshford Holley of Glentworth, High Street. Violet had two bridesmaids, her friend -Hilda Whitchurch- and William's niece, Eileen Holley. Eileen later married David Noch and they both, together with Phil Holley, Eileen's brother, now belong to Worle History Society. The wedding ceremony was held in the Methodist Church and was followed by a reception in the Schoolroom. No photographs remain, except for the one published in the Gazette. The quality is poor, but it gives us a glimpse. The child in the bottom right corner is Eileen Noch, who remembers very well that her hat had a floppy brim which she was conscious of for the entire day.



The approach of Christmas sent other couples to the altar. Bill Williams, a regular player for Worle Old Boys football club married Annie Barnett, a Cardiff girl, who wore her WAAF uniform for the ceremony. Her military colleagues tuned out in force to provide a guard of honour outside St. Martins Church. Boxing Day brought with it a rush of nuptials, well, two weddings. Wilhelmina Florence Henderson from Hill Road and Ronald Woolcombe tied the knot at St. Martins - and dashed off quickly to vacate the Church for Alfred James White and his bride Kathleen Daisy Newton.

News from the courts of justice had been mixed that month. Walter Vowles was accused of encouraging the rat infestation by neglecting to remove a hayrick, and was taken to court by Mr. Caine who wanted £20 for the loss of peas and potatoes. The claim was turned down by the County Court. Hilda Prewett was fined ten shillings for showing a light. Betty Fry, Tower View, had a fine of five shillings for having a red light on the front of her bike instead of the back! And then, Albert Diamond was fined a measly ten shillings for breaking the speed limit in Locking Road. He received no endorsement because he was a lorry driver. I ask you, where was the justice in that?

### **43. Our Neighbours 'in town'.**

A book about Worle is difficult to write honestly, without some recognition of the suffering of Weston and its people. Many Worle people worked in the town and almost everyone shopped there and enjoyed the entertainment provided for locals and holiday makers. The newly completed Winter Gardens, the three cinemas the Knightstone, Playhouse and Tivoli theatres, the public houses, hotels and restaurants were all patronised by the people of Worle.

In the Autumn and Winter of 1940, Weston was undergoing its own blitz. So many air raids occurred that it is only possible to mention the worst of it. September was the start of the attacks, and not only in Worle Banwell, Hutton and Mark were all hit, and there was a near miss at Knightstone Causeway. Warnings were going off several times a day. 29<sup>th</sup> September was hardly ever quiet, with 29 air raid warnings in 24 hours. October began more 'peacefully', but on the 14<sup>th</sup> at 9.20 in the evening the siren sounded for the third time that day and a stick of 12 bombs were dropped across the town doing considerable damage, not least in Ashcombe Park, where the reservoir was damaged as well as several homes.

Every day that Winter, the air raid warnings were heard and bombs and incendiaries were dropped all around the area. 9<sup>th</sup> December was the only quiet day in months, but they began again on the 10<sup>th</sup>. By the end of 1940 the air raid sirens had been heard around the town 387 times.

### **Keeping things in proportion**

Still all these local happenings were as nothing compared with the goings-on elsewhere. The local papers were becoming careful with their reporting, for fear of giving away information to the enemy, but I'm sure that the near destruction of Coventry on 15<sup>th</sup> November was to the forefront of people's minds. There were signs of sympathy and concern for safety in Worle. The inhabitants of Coronation Road were making every effort to minimize potential damage by plastering their windows with sticky tape and anything else that looked helpful.

Anyone who had no evacuees 'living in' tried to do their bit by issuing invitations to hard pressed neighbours to spend a sociable evening in their homes. I wonder if it was usual to provide supper in these days of rationing? There was, naturally, a committee for Evacuation Welfare. The village always had a committee to sort out problems, or create new ones! This one met on 2<sup>nd</sup> December and was chaired by Mr. Finney. Details of plans for Christmas festivities were agreed, but first they had to do some fund raising, so an Evacuee Flag Day was announced for 14<sup>th</sup> December, a Saturday. There are no details of how much cash this brought in, but there was an evacuee party at the Church Hall on the last day of this frightening year. Who would have believed that it would be remembered as our 'finest hour'?

**1941**

#### 44. New Year Celebrations .....

had always been 'homespun' in Worle, if you'll excuse the Americanism, but in 1941 there was little time for fun. The Methodist's party was the usual mix of games, competitions and food, but, of course, no alcohol. The Anglican effort was held at the Church Hall and was for 250 local Sunday School children from local churches. Evacuee children had had their own 'do' the previous day. There are no photographs, but the fact that clothes rationing began on the first of January may have had an effect. It was only sensible to buy useful, functional items – frivolity was out. However, there was feasting and a film show for the children. Rev. May and his good lady had come up trumps again.

The films on offer at the party were almost certainly black and white cine versions of silent movies with someone on the piano providing the exciting sound track. Laurel and Hardy shifting the piano over the rope bridge was still around at such gatherings in the late 1950s I seem to recall. Anyone lucky enough to go to the cinema in 1941 might have been treated to '*How Green was my Valley*', which won the Best Picture Oscar, or to '*Citizen Kane*', which launched the career of Orson Wells into a new realm.

Dancing was more popular than ever and influenced increasingly by Hollywood and all things American. Glen Miller could be heard everywhere that year, with *Chattanooga Choo Choo* and *String of Pearls* being special favourites among the young and energetic. My own parents were still singing 'their songs' when I was growing up with '*I don't Want to Set the World on Fire*' and '*You made me Love You*' at the top of the list. The Church Hall was witness to all these pleasures that winter, as well as giving shelter in time of need.

Christmas stockings had been inevitably rather empty compared usual, but I dare say some people received a copy of Agatha Christie's '*Evil Under the Sun*' to help while away the hours in the blackout and the Children could be seen around the village, in the daylight hours, on their Christmas roller skates. The best place to skate was the War Memorial forecourt, where the concrete was smooth and less likely to tip one over. These novel gifts were particularly popular that year since they were deemed useful as well as fun. Youngsters who were acting as messengers for the ARP wardens or the Home Guard were much faster on their new wheels, and proud of themselves. One boy in Coronation Road was overheard saying that his new skates were given to him in the hope that his boots would not wear out so quickly.

One other celebration that festive season was a white wedding – less often seen in those days of austerity. St Martin's Church was the venue for marriage of Alfred James White, who lived in Kewstoke Road, and his bride Kathleen Newman from Bridgwater. Not only did the bride wear white satin, but she was attended by four maids who were arrayed in mauve, pale green, peach and pale blue. The Mercury carried a report of the 'do'.

## So much for relaxation.....

We are used, now, to fireworks on New Year's Eve. At the dawning of 1941, the village had to tolerate flares that were seen overhead but there were no air raid warnings or bombing that night. Sadly, the quiet didn't last and on 3<sup>rd</sup> January, a Friday, there were reports of 1 kg incendiary bombs dropping in the locality. This was only the start. On the night of the 4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> of January Weston experienced its first major blitz. The air raid reports supplied by The Civil Defence do not mention Worle, but people living in the village say that this was the night when a bomb fell in Hill Road East and made the Snook family temporarily homeless. The map on page 129 will illustrate this for you.

No one got any sleep that night. The planes came along the shore at Sand Bay, over the hill and southward into town. Many buildings in Weston were destroyed or damaged, the worst of the bombing affecting the area around St. Paul's Church, which was burnt almost to the ground. It's Church Hall in Whitecross Road and many surrounding homes were also flattened.

There was nothing said about any of this in the local papers in the following weeks – security, no doubt, but ironically the Mercury had chosen the 4<sup>th</sup> of January to publish a piece about the air raids of September 1940, referring to the deaths in the Jones family and to bombs falling over farm land. Deaths and injuries were minimized by the paper under headlines such as: *'Very Few Killed, Damage Slight, Many Remarkable Escapes'* and *'Answer to Rumour Mongers'*. Anyone who exaggerated the damage or was even realistic about it was considered a know-all.

So it was that anyone reading the papers that January would have believed that there had been no bombing since the previous September. The Snook family, whose home was deemed unfit for human habitation, knew better. One day Peter will find the photograph of the house, taken soon after the bomb fell in the garden – one day he'll find it!! In the meantime it is interesting to know that, shortly before the bomb fell, Peter's brother, David, and his father, Jack, were standing by the front gate with Charlie Loud, chatting. Whether or not there had been a siren, I do not know. The three chaps finished their conversation. Jack and David went indoors, whilst Charlie Loud wandered along to the Sperrings' house and popped in there. Minutes later the bomb fell in the front garden, right by the garden gate. Peter, his mother and his sister, Doris, were in the front room by the fire, and he remembers that the impact was such that the fire, in its entirety, shot straight up the chimney –woooooof. The large, showy vase on the end of the mantelpiece fell off and landed on Doris' head. I won't repeat Peter's comment about this.

## 45. Schools Meeting: safety, finance and food

Two days later a business meeting was held for the school managers to discuss a whole lot of issues. Miss E. Jackson Barstow of The Lodge was chairman of the managers as well as an Alderman on the Borough Council. There was a long agenda.

Security was first, of course. Several schools were operating with no resident caretaker and no head teacher on the premises at night, so it was decided that keys should be deposited with someone nearby and with the nearest ARP warden. Air raids and especially incendiary bombs were a great concern, so duplicate keys were cut to ease the situation.

Many local teachers were women at this time, rather an innovation resulting from the war, but there were still a few men, often too old to be called up, or exempt from the services for health reasons. Until this time these chaps were not serving in the Home Guard, but now the need was such that they it was agreed that they should be eligible for service provided their removal from the staff in the event of an emergency did not seriously interfere with school duties.

Mr. Haybyrne, a stalwart of the local school managers, had visited the new senior school in Spring Hill and was keen to report his findings. Ten of the classrooms, he said, were not protected from bomb blasts [one thinks about the Snook's fire!] so the children had to be marched to other rooms during 'alerts', which delighted the youngsters, but upset the lessons. The managers decided that wire netting and cellophane should be used to protect the windows so that lessons could go on until the last possible moment. Spoil Sports.

This caused a rather satisfying row, which gives clues to the priorities of the managers. Alderman C. Harden said that if Worle School had wiring and cellophane, all the schools would want some!! And where would it end? Quite. Mr Heybyrne replied, sniffily, that money should not be considered when the safety of children was at stake. Mr. W. M. Brown, J. P., took a middle of the road approach. He agreed with Mr. Heybyrne, but added that they did not want to spend money needlessly. After much wrangling they agreed that Rev. May and Mr. Heybyrne should talk to the headmaster about it and act accordingly. In these days of health and safety it is remarkable that there was any discussion about some cellophane and wire netting. Seems like pretty minimal precautions to me.

There was one worrying and sad item for discussion. Teachers had pointed out to Mr. Heybyrne that several evacuee children were insufficiently clad and often had no footwear. The red tape involved in getting the London City Council to address the matter was long winded. First, the parents had to be contacted and asked for funds. If there was no reply the L.C.C. had to be written to for help and meanwhile the poor little kids were suffering. Mr. Holway, one of the teachers, had stumped up £6 himself for boots and clothing. Fortunately, Willesden Corporation had agreed to refund this

amount. Some children had not heard from parents for six months. No one knew what had happened to them – it was usual for the authorities to reply if the family had been bombed out. It could only be assumed that the parents were not interested or not able to help.

At least the children were about to be better fed. Hot meals at lunch time had not been available thus far, but now it was planned to introduce the idea at Worle School, which, being new, had a kitchen. A cook was to be appointed at the princely sum of a shilling an hour. Her duties would be the provision of hot meals for those who cared to pay thru'pence each for them. This would cover the cost of the food, but not the labour and expense of cooking and washing up.

The cook's proposed pay caused another argument over money, which went like this:

Mr. C. Coles: It seems to be taking an advantage of the cook – only paying a shilling an hour.

The Chairman: We should not want a cook from the Savoy.

Mr. Coles: No, but we want a cook who can cook one. [laughter]

The Chairman: A charwoman does not get any more. The cook would have about five hours work a day.

Mr. Coles: I should hardly compare a charwoman with a cook.

In the end, they agreed to appoint a cook, but no resolution of the pay is reported.

The younger children were suffering. Miss Simcox, who had been head of the Infants' school since 1938, made an entry in her school log to the effect that there were 30 cases of whooping cough and 21 of measles amongst the little ones. The county medical officer decided to close the school until February 9<sup>th</sup>. The same entry tells us that the religious education at the school was admirable, despite war time difficulties. Miss Simcox was formidable.

\*\*\*\*\*

## 46. Winter Woes

Troubles, they say, never come alone, and that was certainly true that winter. The Borough Council, open to criticism then as it is now, made an attempt to sort out the mess at the bottom of Spring Hill. The building of the new school had necessitated changes to the drainage system. Oddly, the new pipes to funnel the water from the natural spring stopped at the bottom of the hill and a short ditch was left open to the heavens. The ditch was no longer any use and was protected only by a dwarf wall. It was distinctly dangerous in the blackout, and the road constantly flooded. Why they didn't keep the stream and the little bridge heaven only knows.

Harry Hancock, who lived at 12 Manchester Cottages, was finding life tough. He had fractured several fingers whilst demolishing a wall and was unable to work for several weeks. Just along Kewstoke Road, next door to Moody's Stores, considerable sadness

greeted the news that Mary Diamond had died. She had lived in the village for years and her two sons worked locally as market gardeners on Glen Nurseries. The land is now occupied by Friar Avenue and Wayland Road.

Two other brothers in business locally were the Mundens, Henry and Charles, who were well known coal merchants with premises at St. Georges. I have no idea how they got along normally, but in 1941 they had a huge row, which ended up in a court case and reports in the papers. It seems that Henry accused Charles of helping himself to petrol and not paying for it. Henry's housekeeper gave evidence to the court that the petrol had been supplied between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of February 1940, so the difference of opinion had been going on for a whole year! Charlie claimed that he had paid for the fuel. The sum of money involved was £3.4s 6d. Petrol was just under 5 shillings a gallon in 1940, so we are talking about a dispute over 13 gallons. His Honour Judge Myddelton-Wilshire was somewhat amazed by the tenacity of the complainant and advised the brothers to shake hands and split the difference, which they did. Petrol was precious stuff in the war.

#### **47. Disney Family at War**

A family who had things on their minds that winter was the Disney family from Kewstoke Road. The Mercury speculated that they might hold the record for the highest number of serving members of the Armed Forces. A short piece published on 18<sup>th</sup> January, 1941 suggested that 4 or 5 sons were away at the front and that other, younger ones, were about to depart.

Florence and Charles Disney had 14 children. The photograph of the family shows Florence with the first nine of these. It was taken either late in 1914 or early in 1915, during the First World War, when the family lived in Greenwood Road. The family probably moved to Kewstoke Road in the 1930s, when the large, well planned council houses were built.

I expect Florence assumed that her boys were safe from active service, but she was wrong. She hadn't allowed for a second world war. A trawl through the admissions registers of Worle Infants' School provided some additional information, and helped to sort out the children in the picture, which is shown on the next page. Sadly, the names of the babies on Florence's knee – Ronald and Donald, appear on the World War 2 plaque in the War Memorial as casualties of the conflict. Every one of Florence's children attended school in Mendip Avenue, apart from Mickey, who does not appear in the admissions registers. It seems likely that Lou Disney, the eldest, later lived at 7 Hill Road and had at least four sons of his own: William, John, Anthony and Douglas. Dennis and Roker are still alive as I write.



1. Louis, [Lewis], born 9<sup>th</sup> August, 1905;
2. Edna, born 30<sup>th</sup> August, 1906.
3. John Kenneth [Jack], born 8<sup>th</sup> January, 1908.
4. Harold, and 5. Stanley – twins born 25<sup>th</sup> April, 1909.
6. Albert Edward, and 7. Cecil Wilfred – twins born 24<sup>th</sup> January, 1911.
8. Ronald Raynor and 9. Donald Raymond – twins born 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1914.

Children born to Florence and Charles after the photograph was taken were as follows:

10. Mickey, no details found
11. Souvla Douglas, born 9<sup>th</sup> October, 1917
12. Dennis, born 14<sup>th</sup> November, 1920.
13. Norman, born 20<sup>th</sup> March, 1922.
14. Roderick Charles [Rocker], born 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 1929

## 48. On the Front Line

That miserable January, it must be supposed that some of our Worle boys were serving in North Africa, where the Australian 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> divisions, with British support, were struggling to capture Tobruk. This poor, beleaguered port was kicked about from allies to axis for several years in the early 1940s. In early 1941 it was under Italian rule, but fell to the allied onslaught. The Libyans and Italians called for help and Rommel's North Africa Campaign began. The Allied forces pressed on, however, and entered Benghazi. And there they stuck.

Then, as now, Libya, and Tripoli in particular, was in the news. Rommel had his eye on this key strategic port and finally marched and rolled into the town on 12<sup>th</sup> February. At this point the Germans and British had not clashed in the desert, but that changed on 24<sup>th</sup> of the month. The allies were driven back towards Egypt and Tobruk was left cut off and isolated. The whole of Europe and North Africa was in a tremendous mess. German troops invaded Bulgaria early in March and 4 days later British forces entered Ethiopia in an attempt to oust the Italians and return Emperor Haile Selassi to his native land.

## 49. In the Local Press

The Weston papers, meanwhile, concentrated on parochial matters. Children were obviously a huge concern to all throughout the war and a great deal of attention was paid to school issues. The pressures of accommodating evacuee children were beginning to ease, mainly due to familiarity. Many schools had integrated the children by this time, rather than running separate timetables for evacuated schools, which helped the situation.

Milk was still being made available for children, though they still had to pay – no welfare state as yet. The C of E Junior School had a very good record with 170 small bottles of the white stuff being bought each day by the children – almost one each, but not quite. Some of the farmers' children still took their own – good for them. At the new Senior School, the hot dinner scheme was most successful and the County Education Authority was patting itself on the back. Seventy-five children were having school dinners each day, which was a great relief to families who were hard pressed to cope with the extra stress of feeding their own offspring and the evacuees. The Infants' School and the Junior School were planning to follow suit – not so easy without the modern kitchen facilities available in Spring Hill. All this nourishment must have helped the concentration of the pupils. Around 30 local children aged 10 or 11 took their scholarship examinations on Monday 10<sup>th</sup> March. The evacuees sat their examination on Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup>. The little hall at the Junior school was normally used for these occasions. It was actually made up from two classrooms with the partition removed and was still not spacious, so maybe that was the reason for two sittings. The whole country sat the same paper, so I do wonder if the evacuee children were given

special papers. The Mercury generally published the names of successful pupils, and this year was no exception. The village learned on Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> May that Michael Gillett, Tony Pitt, Arthur Copeland, Brian Elliot, Molly Edwards and Loveday Davey were all off to the Grammar School in Broadoak Road every day – probably on the No. 40 ‘bus.

## 50. A Child’s eye view

Glyn Boobyer was nine years old when war broke out and was most interested in the whole business. He had been born at ‘St. Leonards’ in Worle High Street, now number 200 and occupied by Bloxham and Barlow’s Estate Agents. The family had lived in various houses in the village: ‘Cumberland’, also in the High Street, had been the home of his mother’s family; Somerset House in Kewstoke Road was the old family home of his grandparents, Bessie and her husband Sam Boobyer, who earned a crust as a coffin maker and builder. The Boobyers were strong Baptists.

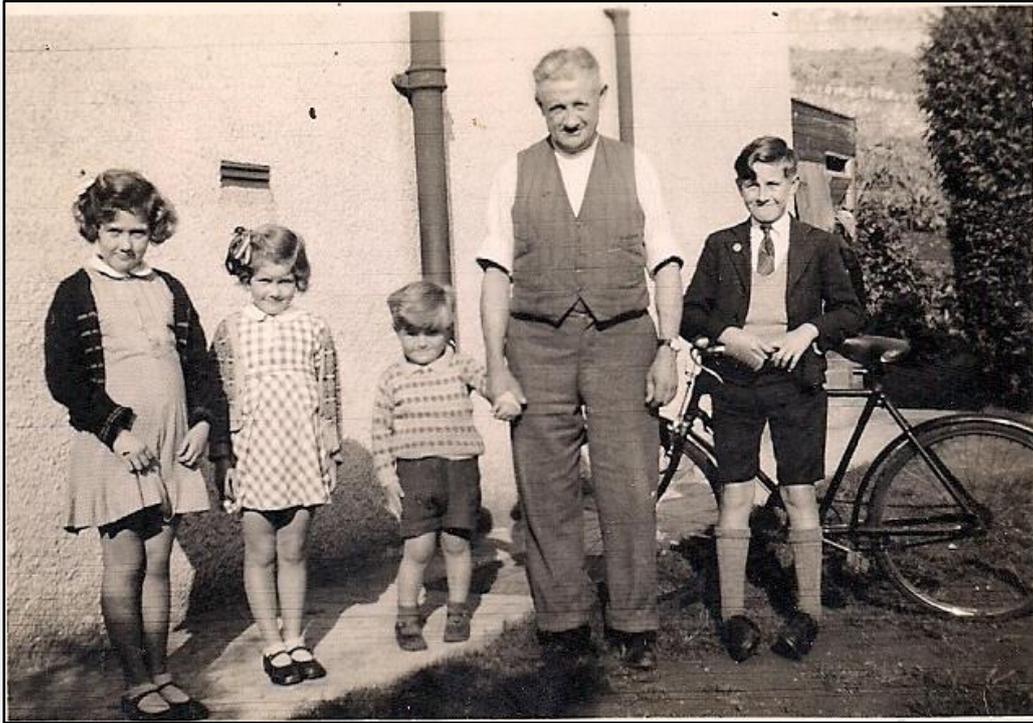
Glyn’s parents, Fred and Frances, had eight children, three boys and five girls, of whom Glyn was number five. By the 1930s, Glyn’s father, Fred was running Worlebury

Garage in Milton Hill, which he had built, incidentally, in 1926 against the side of the stable/cider barn on land owned by the Southcotes.



Glyn admits that he enjoyed the whole war experience at first. The News Chronicle published a world map with the British Empire coloured pink and sets of flags. This was put on the bedroom wall and enabled young Glyn to follow events with interest. He attended the old primary school on

Worlebury and remembers running home to Myrtle House, in Milton Hill, during an air raid with leaflets, which told Churchill to surrender, raining down from the German planes. With great foresight, Glyn gathered up a handful to keep. Years later he learned that his brother, Ken had sold them.



The family photograph shows Fred Boobyer holding the hand of his young son, Philip. Glyn is on the right and the two girls are friends, not sisters. Glyn thinks the picture was taken in 1941.

The first serious air raid is clear in the family memory, since there was direct hit on Milton Methodist Church, which was right opposite the family garage business. This was obviously rather terrifying, so much so, that Glyn's sister Joice, who was about 18 years old said, 'Shouldn't we give in?' When the call up came, Joice and another sister, Rita, were needed for war work. Joice went to the Beaufighter factory at Oldmixon where she was employed doing the wiring in the cockpits, and Rita went to an underground factory at Corsham to help manufacture shells. The third sister, Jean, was an ARP warden. Ken, the oldest child, also went off, but he travelled further afield, first to Yeovilton Fleet Air Arm and thence to Africa and India. What an upheaval in the course of family life.

Fred, the father of the clan, joined the Home Guard. His beat was between the Golf Club and the Observatory, and one night an incident, which seems too far fetched for an episode of Dad's Army, began with a phone call. The Bryant family in Worlebury Hill Road were desperate. A Ghost was trying to break into their house.

Fred set off with fixed bayonet, a la` Corporal Jones. He left instructions that in case of trouble, Glyn should look after the family and push Germans off any ladders put up at the windows! Fred did not return until 7.00 a.m., by which time the family wanted an explanation.

Cygnets House, the 'hospital' at Kewstoke was being used for burns cases, though this was not widely known. One of the patients, bandaged all over, was trying to get back to Cygnets House, and needed help. He was banging as hard as he was able on the doors and windows of the Bryants' house. When Fred arrived on the scene, he found the poor man, unconscious in the garden. It took the rest of the night to get help and have him taken back to his sanctuary. No one ever found out why he was wandering on the hill.

## 51. Crime and Misdemeanours.

There was one massive scandal to report that Spring, which was certainly talked about endlessly as a distraction from the war. Cyril Vivian White gave his address as Central Stores, High Street, Worle. I suppose he lived in the domestic quarters upstairs. Did he run the shop? Maybe, but I don't know. The Mercury reported that he had previously been a schoolmaster at Wells and that he had been 'bound over' for three years for offences on 4 schoolboys aged between 11 and 14. Amazingly, there were only six lines about this story in the Mercury.

In contrast, the theft of jewellery perpetrated by a local widow with 5 children was given ten column inches. She had stolen 2 rings and a brooch worth £27 from her employer's home, where she worked in a domestic capacity. The contrast in the two approaches to these cases by the editorial staff at the Mercury gives us cause to question the priorities of the day and to be thankful for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

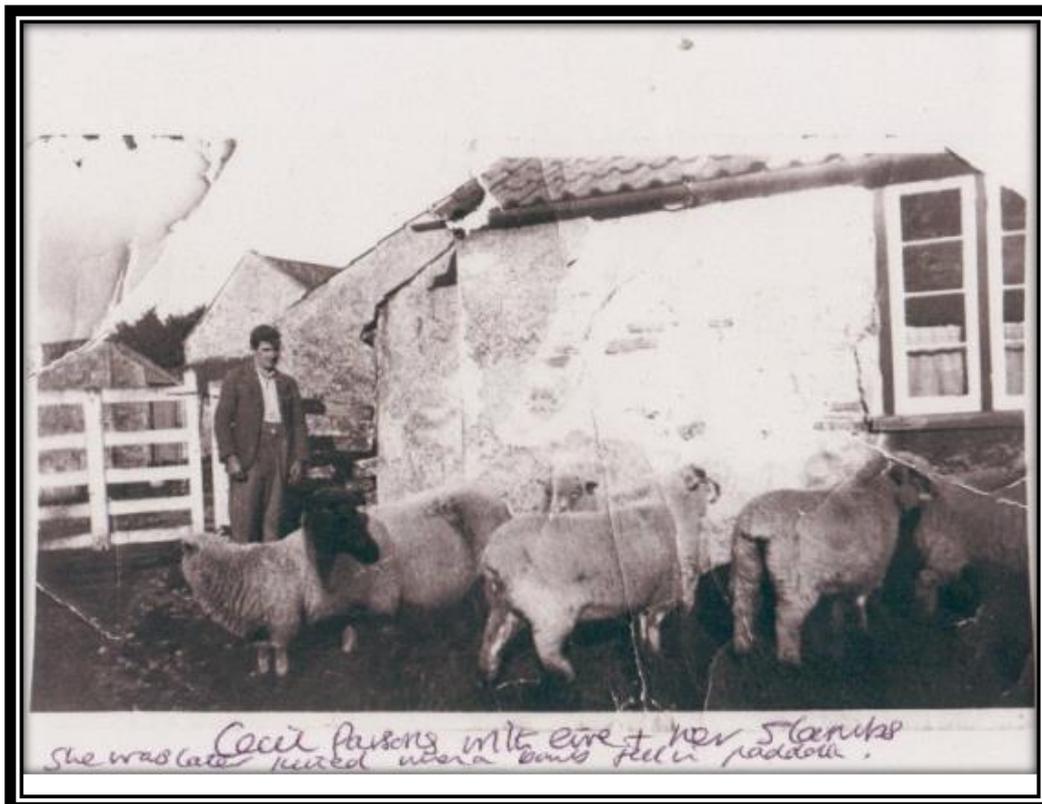
Of course, there was great interest in the seventh appearance in court of Fred Bartlett, for whom Friday evenings were a battle with the bottle. He was reportedly picked up from the road inebriated and taken in a hired car to the police station by a chap described in the Mercury as 'War Reserve Hunt'. The court was used to Fred. His previous conviction was in April 1940 for using bad language. This time his drunkenness was rewarded with a fine of ten shillings and costs of seven shillings and six pence. I expect that cut into his drinking money for several weeks. These days, if we believe the media, half the village would have been in the dock with him.

Motorists have never had an easy time with the law and we have much evidence of this in wartime Britain. One example was reported in the local press at the end of April. John Summers, who lived at The Lee, High Street, Worle found himself in the dock at Weston-super-Mare Police Court pleading 'Not Guilty' to a charge of failing to immobilise his car. Police Sergeant Whitter gave evidence that a rotor arm from a motor car was taken into the Station by S.C. Workman. The same night, Mr. Summers arrived at the Station to recover the item, which he claimed was his property. He was promptly charged with the offence. Poor Mr Summers pleaded that he had taken out the ignition key, which meant no one could drive the car. The court actually studied the wording of the regulation and decided that at night, part of the mechanism had to be removed in order to comply. In the daytime it was acceptable to remove the ignition key and lock the doors! Mr. Summers was fined £1.

## 52. Spectacle to behold in the skies.

April arrived, bringing with it the Easter Holidays and celebrations. The Schools had almost three weeks holiday, returning to the classroom on 22<sup>nd</sup> of the month. All the schools had been busy with War Weapons Week with the idea of contributing as much as possible to the Spitfire Fund. By April 3<sup>rd</sup> £5,000 had been raised in the town. People were encouraged in their efforts to raise money by the continual German bombing in the South West.

That Thursday evening there was an unexpected spectacle in the skies over Worle. A Nazi night raider was brought to earth by anti aircraft fire. Onlookers, including Sam Cox of Worle Home Guard, saw a dull red light in the sky, which turned out to be a German plane on fire. The Gazette reported that the Heinkel 111 'dived to its doom' over Hewish. John Palmer, a cabinet maker was credited with the capture of two Nazis, whose parachutes had saved them. They were hiding under a hedge when Mr. Palmer stuck his thumbs in their ribs and said 'Hands up'. They were taken by surprise and handed over their guns. Proper Dad's Army stuff.



The Parsons family of Icelton Farm, Wick St. Lawrence, had suffered a loss as a result of the bombing on 9<sup>th</sup> April. Earlier that spring one of the ewes had excelled herself by giving birth to five lambs. The picture shows Cecil Parsons, another member of Worle Home Guard, admiring the ewe and her offspring. The mother, of course, is the one with the mature black face. She was not rewarded for her efforts. The Germans got her one night whilst bombing along the coast. Robert Parsons tells me that it was a

bomb which had fallen in the paddock. The lambs, almost fully grown by that time, all survived, so the hand rearing had been worthwhile.

### **53. Pine Hill suffering**

The people of Pine Hill were receiving unpalatable news on a regular basis that Spring. Firstly, there were two bereavements. Mr. C. Popham's had lived for several years in the road. His funeral was conducted at the Churchyard on Friday 25<sup>th</sup> April.

On the same day news reached Mrs. Williams of 'Braeside', Pine Hill that her husband, Rev. H. L. O. Williams had died when his ship was sunk by enemy action. Rev. Williams was a Methodist minister and had worked for long periods as Headmaster of a school in Sierra Leone. He and his wife had a young daughter, Peggy.

All this sadness was followed by the shocking news that John Richard Lewis, a 34 year old, of 'Stepstone', Pine Hill had been arrested in Yorkshire on a charge of fraud. The police had been after him for a while, but had finally traced him to Leeds, where he was hiding out. Specifically, he was accused of defrauding Matthew Burrin of London S.W.20 of a surety in the sum of £8.10s. Mr Lewis had been most inventive in his attempt to obtain money by false pretences. He duped 34 bird fanciers to the tune of about £200. The birds in question were not pigeons, as I assumed they would be, but budgerigars. Lewis advertised the birds for sale in a periodical named 'Cage Bird', was inundated with potential buyers, took the cash and set off to travel the country with a lady friend on the proceeds. The eight pairs of pedigree birds and hundred-weights of bird seed never materialised. The birds were fictitious.

Still on the subject of birds, the Homing Society arranged their first flight of the season on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> May with a race for old birds. I understand that the term 'old birds' had no connotations and did not insult the elderly ladies of the community. I am also interested to report that the fanciers – invariably men - were permitted to enter a limit of three old birds each. No comment.

## 54. Diaries of an ARP Warden and a Housewife

The ARP Wardens had become weary with the lack of comforts at their post HQ and decided to raise money by putting on a concert at the Church Hall on 8<sup>th</sup> May. There is no detail about the nature of the programme, but I have a vision of Cllr Newsome Martin giving a rendition of 'Chattanooga Choo Choo'.

One of Worle's ARP wardens kept a diary, which I have been lucky enough to be given access to. Reading it gives us some insight into the contribution they made to the war effort and to the security of the village population. The following entries are all from May 1941. It certainly suggests that a few 'home comforts' were in order.

- Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup>     **ARP Diary:** 'Clocks on. Duty ARP 2200 – 0700 Sirens 2155 – 0410. AA shell fell at Preanes Green - Phew'
- Sunday 4<sup>th</sup>**     **ARP Diary:** 'Saw Crease to be satisfied re AA shell. Sirens 2350 get up fearing raid - sleep in shelter'
- Monday 5<sup>th</sup>     **ARP Diary:** 'Balloons up in Weston (16 ?) Sirens 2330 – Light Patrol – to bed in shelter'
- Wednes 7<sup>th</sup>     **ARP Diary:** 'Sirens 2330 – 0450 (saw planes come down in flames)'  
**Housewife's Diary:** 'Awakened at 4.30am shelling right overhead at enemy plane. Plane seen in flames. Planes brought down in night raid (7<sup>th</sup> / 8<sup>th</sup>) - one in Hewish – I heard it – 2 others near Congresbury – 3 Germans loose.
- Thursday 8<sup>th</sup>     **ARP Wardens'** concert at Church Hall to raise funds for 'Home Comforts' at their post HQ.  
**ARP Dairy:** 'Duty 2200. Hess flew plane to Scarborough'
- Sunday 11<sup>th</sup>     **ARP Diary:** 'Dusk siren – Sirens 2350 – 0445'.  
**ARP Diary:** 'Hess reported in E England - Hess reported 'lost'
- Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup>    **ARP Diary:** 'Excited – Bismarck sunk'
- Wednes 28<sup>th</sup>    **ARP Diary:** '2 alerts in night – few planes and gunfire'.

The Luftwaffe was active right through that Spring, but the heavy raid on 10<sup>th</sup> May proved to mark the end of the Blitz on Britain, though spasmodic, lighter raids continued. Early in June a bomb fell on the sea front and shattered a good deal of glass, but did little structural damage. Some people were treated for shock, but no injuries were sustained.

## 55. Tragedies

There were some happenings that are best forgotten that summer. Several people with local connections were in all sorts of trouble. One young man, whose family had suffered one disastrous loss already, was accused of attempting to murder his 21 year old wife; another elderly Worle man felt unable to put up with the symptoms of Parkinson's disease any longer, and took his own life. The poor Jones family, who had lost 3 family members in the bombing were further bereaved by the loss of Mrs. Margaret Jones, mother of Gwyn Jones and grandmother of little Valerie. Sometimes only silent reflection is adequate.

## 56. Some things never change!

Traffic incidents were a well established fact of life by the 1940s and the local police actually made time, amid the mayhem, to set traps for unsuspecting, furious road users.

The cross roads formed by High Street, Spring Hill and Annandale Avenue became a favoured spot for the Constabulary to lurk in wait for erring drivers. Nothing daunted by the plane being shot down locally during the night time hours, P.C. Beatty set himself up on this corner on the morning of 8<sup>th</sup> May and stopped motorists. As a result Petty Sessions in June heard five cases of driving without a licence – a remarkable number, which makes us realise that our parents' and grandparents' generations were not as law abiding as we were given to believe.

Minor accidents also occurred. The first was at the 'bus terminus outside the New Inn. Details are scant, but it is fair to say that in the bump between the No. 40 green 'bus and Mrs Minnie Bunker [Manchester Cottage], the 'bus was triumphant. Minnie's left leg was the injured party.

Cyclists and motorists were at logger heads, too and this mini-war was epitomised by the collision between Joseph Corner and 'a car' in the High Street. I assume that the driver of the car was not good enough to stop, since no one could identify him, but Joe was treated at the General Hospital for lacerations to his forehead, on which he landed. Joe was the 'Cornerstone' of the Methodist Sunday School and was welcomed back by the pupils and other teachers a few days later.

Seventeen year old Walter Knight managed to stand in exactly the wrong place one day in early July. A stone fell from the local Quarry right on his head, and he was rushed off to hospital with deep lacerations. Did Walter work at the quarry, I wonder, or was he wandering where he ought not to have been?

Reg Palmer lived in Greenwood Road, and worked as a butcher's rounds man by day. Any spare time was taken up with his Home Guard duties, but his activities were put on hold for a while after his van collided with a lorry in Milton Road and Reg received severe cuts to his arm.

It is always said that farming is a dangerous occupation, and even experienced men like Ellis Chaplin had accidents. At the end of August, right in the midst of harvesting, Ellis's horse bolted. Unfortunately, it was pulling the reaping machine at the time. Ellis was thrown to the ground and the reaping machine ran over him. The very painful result was a compound fracture of the leg. Goodness knows who completed the harvest?

The question needs to be asked, were they just careless? And did the Germans really need to go to the trouble of bombing? Maybe they should have waited patiently for the population of the village to win the war for them.

## 57. Midsummer happenings

In the days of the blackout, midsummer's day must have been greeted with more than the usual joy. The government, beset with complaints about the difficulties suffered after sunset, had decreed on 4<sup>th</sup> April, 1941, that the country would abandon Greenwich Mean Time for the duration of the war and spend the entire year on British Summer Time. Additionally, the months from the beginning of May until the end of August would be Double Summer Time. That midsummer weekend in June, Worle must have taken on an almost Scandinavian atmosphere, with the light, low in the sky over Weston Bay not finally fading until well after eleven in the evening. The more romantic souls walked out to Sand Point or the end of Worlebury Hill to watch the sunset.

A Mercury reporter, fascinated by these long, light, summer evenings, wrote an article headed: *Worle, Midsummer Night's Dream*, which described the superstitions which abounded in the village in earlier times. Ghosts knocking on the Church Door and Will o' the Wisps seem to have featured largely in the local imagination.

Whilst these gentle occurrences coloured life on the home front, things were very different elsewhere. Hitler had long been considering the matter of whether and when to invade Russia.

Information about the proposed invasion, code named 'Barbarossa' was conveyed to Stalin by various sources. Richard Sorge, an agent working for the 'Red Orchestra' in Japan, obtained information about the proposed invasion as early as December, 1940. Winston Churchill sent a personal message to Stalin in April, 1941, explaining how German troop movements suggested that they were about to attack the Soviet Union. However, Stalin was still suspicious of the British and thought that Churchill was trying to trick him into declaring war on Germany.

When the 'Red Orchestra' prediction that Germany would invade in May, 1941, did not take place, Stalin became even more convinced of his theory, especially as Germany had invaded Yugoslavia in April. Adolf Hitler had expected the Yugoslavs to surrender immediately but because of stubborn resistance, Hitler had to postpone Operation 'Barbarossa' for a few weeks.

Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> June, still Barbarossa had not started. Stalin, fearing revolution, turned his attention to the Baltic States. 15,000 Latvians and 40,000 Lithuanians were rounded up and sent to Siberia

On 21st June, 1941, whilst Worle basked in the evening light, a German sergeant deserted to the Soviet forces. He informed them that the German Army would attack at dawn the following morning. Stalin was reluctant to believe the soldier's story and it was not until the German attack took place that he finally accepted that his attempts to avoid war with Germany, until 1942, had failed.

The German forces, made up of three million men and 3,400 tanks, advanced in three groups. The north group headed for Leningrad, the centre group for Moscow and the southern forces into the Ukraine. Within six days, the German Army had captured Minsk. General Demitry Pavlov, the man responsible for defending Minsk, and two of his senior generals were recalled to Moscow and were shot for incompetence.

The Soviet people, who were terrified of both Stalin and Hitler, had no option but to fight to the death. World War 2 had reached a new level of horror.

\*\*\*\*\*

## 58. Worle's People: Living with War

War had been with the World, the country and our village for two years. Life on the Home Front was much the same as usual – and entirely different.

People continued to read the Mercury, where births, marriages, deaths, petty misdemeanours, serious crimes, Church Services, billiard matches, pigeon races, Bright Hour meetings, savings groups and dances at the Church Hall were regularly reported. All that was normal, though much less varied than in peacetime, and done on a shoe string. It was the extra activities that made the difference.

Homes were still without their men folk, yet over-crowded with evacuees, some of whom struggled to settle in a small village after life in London. Providing food on the ever changing rations was a constant headache, despite the vast amounts of food grown in small garden plots as well as by the professional growers and farmers. Although some farmers and market gardeners were 'reserved occupation', many of their experienced labourers were called up and had to be replaced with inexperienced youth, elderly retired men or land girls.

Local shops, ironically, were manned almost entirely by women, who had to deal with organising the rationing and dealing with unhappy customers as well as the normal duties.

Local firms, like Fussell's Rubber Co. Ltd., had to completely reorganise. The workforce constantly changed as men were called up and were replaced, or not. The normal production line concentrating on heels and soles for civilian shoes, suddenly had to adapt to providing vast quantities of boots for the armed forces, without any new equipment becoming available.

The three local schools had all sorts of trouble keeping going. The Infants' School, next door to the Village Club in Mendip Avenue, had an entirely female staff, which was usual. Miss Simcox managed it with a rod of iron, but it wasn't easy. Staff came and went much more often than in peacetime and the school relied heavily on girls who were at training college and who visited the schools for several weeks to practice their skills on the village's children. There was milk available in the mornings – at a cost of 1d a small bottle – but the lack of kitchen facilities meant that children either went home for lunch or took whatever their mothers could find to fill their little boxes.

The Elementary school on the hill became a Junior School in 1940, following the opening of the Senior School, but with the evacuee situation and the decision to 'send up' the top class from the infants' school, it was still hard pressed. Mr Mawson worked hard to deal with as many children as ever, but without Mrs. Tripp or Miss Elliot, who had left earlier in the year.

The Senior School we have already visited, but it must be mentioned that the staff of all three schools dealt daily with changes that came out of the blue, or even fell from the skies. Some children thrived on the excitement, but others were nervous wrecks and not easy to deal with.

People still tried to keep their homes tidy and well cared for and the women used their sewing and knitting skills to the full, unpicking garments and remaking them in the evenings, as long as it was light. Their efforts were often sent off to the forces or to other countries which needed everyday items even more than we did. Younger women were expected to be involved in war work and several Worle girls were employed at the Beaufighter factory on Oldmixon, helping to build planes.

Day upon day, the wireless and national press reported cities and towns devastated by enemy bombing. The problems in France and North Africa, the Baltic and Scandinavia went on and on. America had still not succumbed to Churchill's entreaties and the ever present threat of invasion hung over everything. ITMA did its best to keep everyone cheerful, and Chattanooga Choo Choo was guaranteed to get toes tapping – if there was enough energy left over.

All this, you see, was without the voluntary war work which almost everyone had to do.

- Worle had at least 60 men in the Home Guard at this time, and
- 30 ARP Wardens [men and women].
- Worle Savings Club, according to the Mercury, gathered enough cash in 1941 to buy a Spitfire, searchlight projector, a Bren Gun and carrier, a barrage balloon, a heavy ambulance, a nest of machine guns, a light ambulance, ten rows of armour-piercing bombs and thousands of rounds of ammunition.
- St John Ambulance was three times as busy as in peacetime and had to deal with very different cases.
- Working parties were set up to make 'comforts' for the Forces.
- The schools still closed for a week so that pupils could help with potato lifting. Gas mask fitting sessions were held regularly at local schools in the evenings.
- The Red Cross group raised £60. 16s 10d in their first month.
- Brownies and Guides raised funds for safety equipment for the Ministry of Supply and they even cleared bomb sites with their bare hands.

Right through that Autumn and Winter they kept going. It is quite impossible to mention everyone by name so we have compiled a separate Home Guard book and are working on the ARP Wardens. Hopefully, others will follow.

- The Soviet Union abandoned Poland and the Baltic States and retreated to the 'Stalin Line' on the former border with Poland.
- The Germans pierced the Stalin Line and took Smolensk.
- Britain and the USA froze Japan's assets.

- The Siege of Leningrad began.
- The Germans captured Kiev.
- The RAF bombed Nuremberg.
- Ark Royal was sunk by a U Boat.
- Britain declared war on Finland, Hungary and Romania, all of whom had refused to withdraw from war with the USSR.
- The Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour.
- Finally, the Americans came into the war.

By 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1941, Britain had dispatched 53 merchant ships to Russia to supply 100,000 tons of general stores, 750 tanks, 800 fighter planes and 1,400 vehicles.

Everyone had worked their fingers to the bone. Everyone was exhausted. Most of the world was at war with someone. Luckily, no one knew that there were three and half more years to go.

Dear old Mr. Criddle, local councillor and Methodist, finished off the year with a flourish. He won 'best bull in show' at 'Man O' Mendip' and took his gold trophy up to bed with him for each one of the 365 days it was in his possession.

**Part Two**  
**1942 to 1945**  
**In Pursuit of Peace**

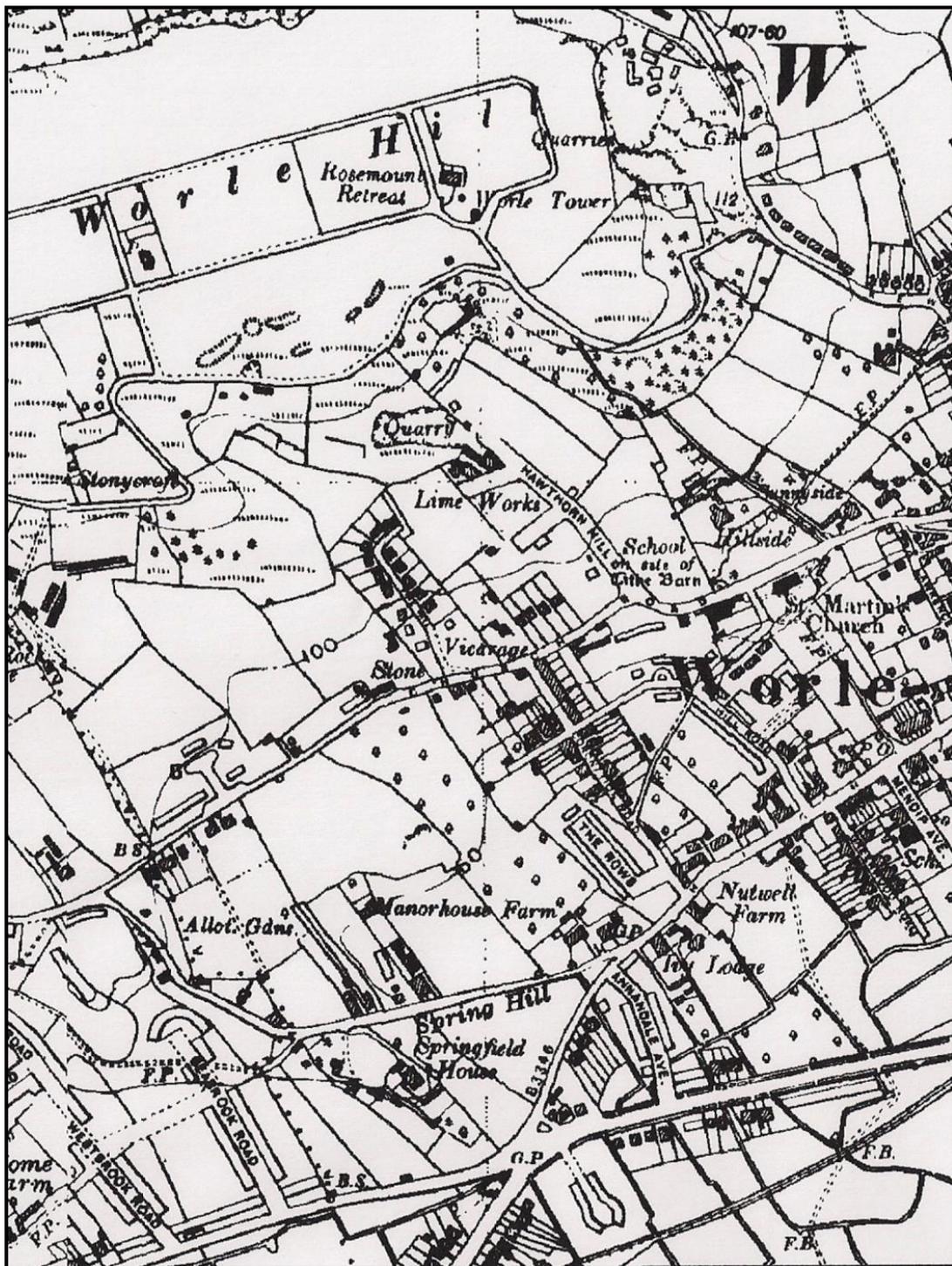
**59. In January 1942** the war had been affecting the lives of everyone, including the people of Worle, for three long years.

During most of 1940 and 1941 Britain had felt that she faced the Axis countries alone, following the collapse of many of our neighbours in northern Europe. How far this is true is questionable, of course. Many countries which were part of the British Empire stood staunchly by our side sending troops to assist the 'Mother Country', and the Americans, despite their efforts to avoid direct involvement in the war, had contributed, albeit reluctantly, in other ways. At the end of 1941 the situation changed when, on December 7<sup>th</sup>, Japan attacked Pearl Harbour and declared war on Britain and on the United States. With shock waves still travelling round the globe, four days later Germany and Italy declared war on the US. Britain was no longer alone, Churchill and Roosevelt were partners.

On Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> January 1942, the United States and 25 other nations signed a united declaration against the Axis countries. All major countries of the world were facing the most destructive war in history.

More than 50 countries were involved in the war, and the whole world felt its effects. Men fought in almost every part of the world, on every continent except Antarctica. Chief battlegrounds included Asia, Europe, North Africa, the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, and the Mediterranean Sea.

So much for the broader picture. Let us look at the situation in Worle.



The west half of Worle Village: Ordnance Survey 1938



The east half of Worle: Ordnance Survey 1938

By the beginning of 1942 almost everyone in Worle was working flat out for the war effort, with only one thing in mind: peace. Old and young; male and female; villagers and evacuees; armed forces and civilians; left and right; church, chapel and doubters—everyone did his or her bit.

For three years the village, along with the rest of the country, had been either preparing for war or living with the consequences of war. The people had organised themselves into Home Guard units, Air Raid Precaution units, savings groups, volunteer messengers, St. John Ambulance personnel, Red Cross groups, an endless list of support groups for coping with the situation.

All this was taking place in a new and strange environment, where buildings and people had been wilfully attacked by the enemy planes which throbbed menacingly overhead day after day, night after night. Add to that the lack of ordinary comforts caused by rationing and the addition of thousands of evacuees to the normal population and the loss of all the fit, young men in the community and it is easy to see how tough life must have been. The young women were also needed for the war effort, in munitions factories or to help fit out aircraft or to work the soil. Nobody was immune. The elderly gave advice based on all too recent past experience, or they helped to look after the children and kept the home fires burning.



The aerial photograph above was taken as part of the MOD survey in 1946. It shows the area of Worle which suffered most from the bombing in 1940 and 41. The sites of the pictures on the previous page are numbered 3 and 4. The red line follows the High Street and the green is Greenwood Road.

## 60. Reverend Frederick May at work

1942 began, in the village of Worle, in the traditional way, despite the war. The annual parish party was held in the Church Hall and was attended by 170 children. This fact, combined with the celebration of nuptials at St. Martin's Church, has led me to begin by considering the Reverend Frederick May, vicar of Worle. Mr May and his good wife had resided in Worle and served the people of the parish since 1926, already a period of 14 years, so the couple must have been very familiar to the congregation and to the rest of the inhabitants.

The parish party was on Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> January in the afternoon. Tea was provided by a band of ladies headed by Mrs May. Whilst the children were eating, Mr May was preparing his favourite way of keeping the children quiet – a cinematograph entertainment. There is a general feeling that Laurel and Hardy were regular features of Mr May's shows. The children were rewarded before the show with prizes for attendance and good behaviour at Sunday school.

Friday was a quieter day, but on Saturday Mr May officiated at the wedding of Kenneth James Fuszard of 22 Hill Road, whose bride was Miss Phyllis Clarke from Wells.

So far the New Year seems to have been reasonably cheerful, if busy, but on the 4<sup>th</sup> of January the village learned of the death of one of its prominent citizens, Edward Bisdee, and Freddie May's services were needed to comfort the bereaved and there were still many other duties to be fulfilled.

St Martin's business and parish affairs were run by the Parochial Church Council, which held its annual meeting in the Church Hall on 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 1942, a week later than originally planned. Rev. May was central to the proceedings, of course. Firstly, he gave a summary of the previous year, describing it as 'uneventful', an odd description of such a momentous year, until we remember that this was simply a business meeting, concerned with finances and so on. Rev. May was well prepared. The finances were sound, apparently, but as usual the heating of the Church was a problem. One of the pipes had 'given out' and the repair was delayed for want of a permit. Nothing was simple, it seems.

The Sunday School was limping on, but not flourishing. This is surprising considering the large numbers of children in the area and the assumption that people turn to their faith in times of trouble. I would have thought that stretched mothers would happily pack the children off for an hour on a Sunday, but maybe there was a lack of volunteers to teach them their scripture.

There was one worrying report. The vibration from the bombing had led to the supporting pillar of the pulpit cracking and the pulpit steps pulling away.



Two wooden stays had been installed to prevent it moving forward and work was urgently needed to make the repair permanent. The crack is still visible today, as figure 6 shows.

Many parishes had suffered as a result of their churches being bombed and these were being assisted by contributions from 296 out of 500 churches which between them sent £1,789 to parishes in trouble in the year up to January 1942.

Early in the year it was becoming obvious that Mr. S. Gibbins, the church organist, was becoming restive. He was fed up with the old fashioned nature of the organ, which needed a 'blower' to operate it. He couldn't help noticing that Shipham Church had an electric blower, and even in those straightened times, he was envious. When Shipham Church asked him to become their organist he was sorely tempted, and wrote to the vicar to that effect. 'Lead us not into temptation', comes to mind. Organists come at a premium – they are rare birds, so Rev. May promised to increase Mr. Gibbins's salary by £10 [presumably this was annually]. He also contacted Messrs Osmond and Loof of Taunton to discuss the supply and installation of an electric blower. It was likely to cost about £45, so a special collection was planned for Whit Sunday. Amazing what a bit of emotional blackmail can achieve.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **61. Edward Herbert Bisdee and his family**

The Bisdee family had always been staunch supporters of the Church, and indeed, of all activities which enhanced life in the village. Mr Edward Herbert Bisdee of 'Sunnyside', Church Road had a serious fall from his step ladder on December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1941. He had, at the age of 82, been pruning the grapevine in the conservatory and the fall left him with a fractured hip. By the New Year pneumonia had set in and on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> January, he had 'gone to his reward'.

Of course, there had to be an inquest – carried out by Mr M. Pulliblack, the Coroner for North Somerset. It was held on the Tuesday in the Court Room at Weston Town Hall with all the solemnity needed to deal with the demise of a prominent citizen. Once that formality was over Mr Bisdee's widow and daughter set about arranging the funeral, which was to take place at St. Martin's Church on Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> January. Edward Bisdee had been a Warden at the Church, so had inevitably spent a great deal of time in the company of the vicar. However, rumour has it that Mr and Mrs Bisdee only tolerated the Rev. May, disapproving of his Welshness and unbending attitude to worship. Mrs Bisdee dealt with her moral dilemma by asking Rev. May to conduct the funeral service, but to be assisted by Rev. E. J. R. Lutley, vicar of Hewish, who was a particular friend. We do not know how Freddie May reacted to this state of affairs, but we do know that the great and the good attended in force. Dr. W. J. Petty [now referred to as 'old' Dr Petty] was there, as were Messrs. A. M. B. Criddle; B. Griffin; S. Twitt; N. C. Moody; H. B. Price; W. H. Tripp; A. S. Tripp; Stephen Jones; G. Williams and

Miss Lee-Pemberton. Many of those mentioned in the papers were big wheels in the Church, so I expect the vicar was gratified, despite himself.

In fact, Rev May concluded the annual parish meeting in February with a tribute to Mr. Bisdee. *'We have suffered the loss of a loyal churchman by the death of Mr. Bisdee who served the Church Parish loyally. He was an ardent Churchman, helpful in the past, generous in his support of church work.'* The members stood in silence as a tribute.

Mr. A. C. Matthews was elected to replace Mr. Bisdee, and it was hoped that the legacy left by the deceased warden would pay for the steps between the upper and lower churchyards to be repaired. It's an ill wind, as they say. Freddie May must have been weighing up the pros and cons of the loss of a warden whose family had been sniffily disapproving of him.

The Bisdee family had always practiced the old tradition of 'noblesse oblige'. They had opened their garden to the Girl Guides and Brownies for meetings, supported all sorts of local fund raising efforts and they allowed the ARP wardens and St. John Ambulance to meet in their coach house. Following the death of Mr. Bisdee, the family continued to involve themselves in the community efforts to keep things ticking over. However, the family home, Sunnyside House, was sold and in April they held a farewell games party in the garden for the Brownies. Mrs. Bisdee and her family were planning to move into Weston, although, after the move, they made occasional visits to Worle and continued to contribute to village life.

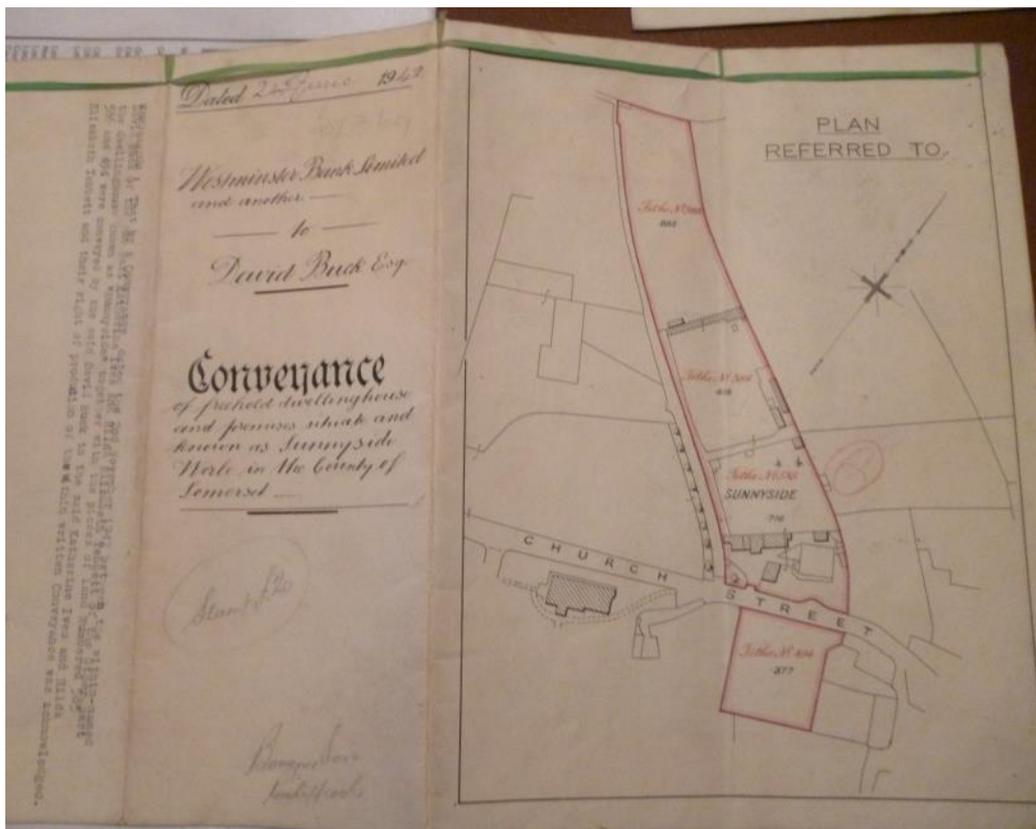


Above: The civil defence men in front of the coach house at Sunnyside, sitting on the car



Above: The women, attired in trousers and uniform and looking very modern

Fig 9: The conveyance of sale in 1942, with plan showing the extent of the garden



## 62. A.R.P. Joyce Eileen Merrick and her brother, Harold.

One of the five or six women who volunteered as an ARP warden was Joyce Merrick. She was in her early 20s when she first joined.



Picture above shows Joyce Merrick in the front row, second from the right, sitting between Mr. Waite and Mrs. May.



Working in uniform [fig. 12, left] was nothing unusual in Joyce's family: her father, Frederick, was a retired policeman. Her mother, Catherine Petherone, came from Warmley, near Bristol. During World War 2, Mr and Mrs Fred Merrick lived at The Nook, New Bristol Road with their daughter.

Their son, Harold was a Leading Steward in the Royal Navy serving in the Mediterranean. He saw action at the invasion of Norway and the Battle of Narvik. Later he joined the crew of HMS Naiad. On 11<sup>th</sup> March 1942 she was under strong enemy air attack for almost a day before she sank. Harold Merrick was lookout for offensive aircraft. When the Naiad went down he had the gruelling experience of clinging to a raft all night, in company with many other seamen. 82 men died.

Harold Merrick did not get home for his sister's wedding but returned on leave in June – just in time for the Weston Blitz.

Whilst home, Harold was interviewed by a Mercury reporter on the day that the fall of Tobruk was announced. He recalled that he had spent several weeks in the Libyan port in 1941, based on shore. He was captured when out on patrol and imprisoned by the

Italians for ten days, but escaped and spent two days on the run in the desert before he was able to rejoin the garison. Harold was also in Malta for a spell and he took part in Battle of Cape Matapan and in the withdrawals from Greece and Crete.

Picture below, shows Joyce Merrick at her wedding to Reginald Coombes on 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 1942. The bridesmaid is Miss Doris Quick; Cyril Parker is the Best Man.

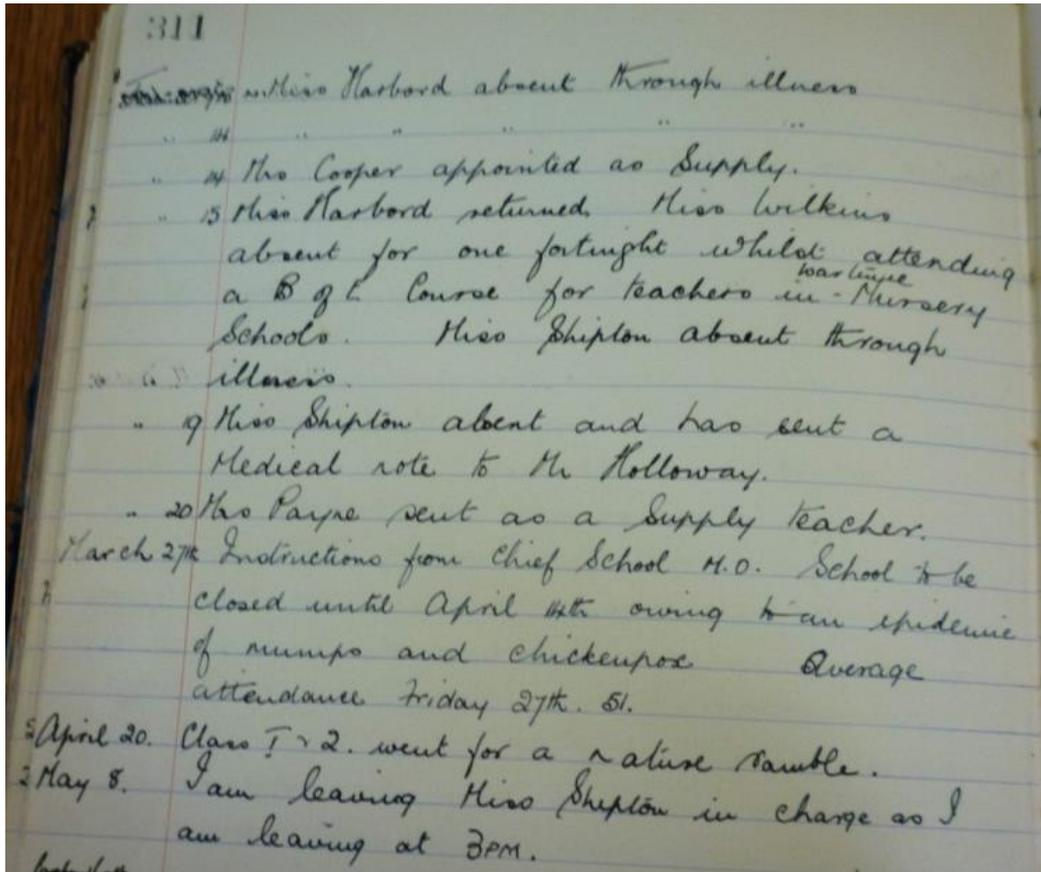


Joyce's marriage to Reg was a long and happy one. They had two children, Brian and Pauline. Last summer, her nephew, Alan, contacted me and told me about his Auntie Joyce. Joyce had had health problems which kept her at home with her parents, an undefined difficulty with one leg made life harder for her. Alan has no descendants himself and said that there were no other family members who could remember Joyce. Her parents, Frederick and Catherine are buried in Worle Churchyard behind the grave of Jack Crocker Raines.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **63. Miss Simcox, head teacher of Worle Infant's School**

The three schools which were operational in Worle in the January of 1942 were all due to return to teaching as usual on Monday 5<sup>th</sup>. It was to be a difficult Spring Term. The Local Education Authority employed three other teachers to assist Miss Simcox at the Infants' School in Mendip Avenue. The school log records that Mrs Morris, one of the three, had resigned recently because of illness, but that no replacement had been sent to teach her class. I suspect that the children who were without a teacher were spread about the other classes. The other two permanent members of staff at the time were Miss Shipton and Miss Harbord. Miss Harbord was still teaching at the school in 1950 when I started my school life there, and I think she must have been very young in 1942.



The extract from the log book, above, tells us that illness was to be a feature of the school term. On 14<sup>th</sup> of January Miss Harbord was struck down. Her absence was covered by Mrs. Cooper who stepped in as a supply teacher. Every supply teacher of whom I have memories in the infants' and juniors' schools had a favourite class up their sleeves, which they repeated ad infinitum. Eskimos and their lifestyle was one such class. I wonder if Mrs. Cooper regaled the little ones with this fascinating topic.

Anyway, no sooner had Miss Harbord returned when Miss Wilkins [a student teacher] went off on a two week course for teachers in war-time Nursery Schools and Miss Shipton was absent through sickness. It is a wonder that the children could remember the names of their teachers. The next name to learn was that of Mrs. Payne, who was drafted in to help. So much for January, and for the notion that people were more reliable and more likely to stay at their posts regardless in those good ol' days.

By the end of March the whole school was suffering, with only 51% of children attending on the 27<sup>th</sup> of the month. Mumps and chickenpox had carried out a pincer attack and there was nothing for it but to close the school until the dual epidemics blew themselves out.

Miss Simcox, like Rev. May, was regarded in the village as a mixed blessing. It all depended on what you regarded as a good head teacher. She was certainly strict – I

remember all too well. In November of 1942 Miss Grant, His Majesty's Inspector of schools, made a day's visit. Miss Simcox was so satisfied with her report that she entered it in her log, word for word, as follows:

*Inspected 11<sup>th</sup> November, 1942. Report by HMI Mr J. J. Draper. The atmosphere of this Infant's Department is that of a good home.*

*The headmistress who took charge in September 1938 has planned thoughtfully and worked zealously to achieve this. While she herself is responsible for Class I, her leadership throughout is inspiring and energetic. The 3 members of her staff give loyal support, and the effective team work has gained the good will of parents and the children's trust. Good social behaviour is the accepted general practice.*

*The entrants' class of children between the ages of four and five, although housed in an ordinary classroom, serves as a happy introduction into school life. The teacher in charge has received beneficial stimulus from attendance at the Board's Course on Nursery Work held in Bristol last January. The daily programme reflects her sincere desire to ensure the best possible Nursery conditions for the children's all round development.*

*In the other 3 classes the skills of the 3Rs are mastered with commendable thoroughness. A still greater degree of mastery would be achieved if Reading were characterised by a more natural rhythmic fluency and if less prominence were given to the written symbol in Number in the early stages.*

*The children's confidence in speech and habit of careful listening merit special mention. Tuneful, joyous singing is another valuable experience. Practical activities in Handwork and Drawing with pencil and brush afford a rich experience in colour. A noteworthy outcome of the school training is that of the development of self reliance so that tasks undertaken by the children are carried out without undue supervision or help.*

Does anyone have recollections of this 'tuneful, joyous singing' as part of their experience at the school? I'm blown if I do. Perhaps it was staged for the occasion, or maybe I'm suffering from selective memory. In fairness, the young ones seem to have been well looked after and the parents had one less thing to keep them awake at night between bombs.

The school building remains more or less intact in Mendip Avenue and is now used as a Children's Centre. During the war the layout was a simple one with a hall running almost the length of the building from south to north, with four small classrooms, two on the west side and two to the east. Miss Simcox's office and the cloakrooms were at the north end. Some of the original tiles that decorated the walls in the hall and classrooms still cling on, but the much loved conker tree has long since disappeared.

Below: Worle Infant's school before the war, the boy outlined is Dennis Urch, who still lives in Worle, with his wife, Nancy, nee Trego.



#### 64. Olive Goodwin's Memories

Olive Goodwin, nee Urch, was in her early teens when war broke out. It is Olive's younger brother, Dennis, who is indicated in the photo above. Her family lived in Kewstoke Road and were surprisingly close to military activities throughout the war.

'Hillend', the group of cottages next to the stony path up to Worlebury Hill, was adjacent to waste ground at the time and this land was made available for the Army to use. Every evening three army lorries drove to the spot and parked for the night. It was their job to drive the generators for search lights which went up every night. Such happenings brought the war very close and combined with the AkAk guns stationed in the field just down the hill, served to frighten young Olive half to death. Added to this, just down Newtons Road, huts and a camp site for soldiers sprang up.

Olive had been a pupil at Worle Elementary School, next to St. Martin's Church and left school just before the new Senior School opened in 1940. Her first job was at Brown Brothers' bakery in Weston High Street. The premises is now occupied by 'The Works' and had a view across the road to the Winter Gardens pavilion. The staff often went out onto the balcony on the first floor to drink their morning coffee. One sunny morning in 1942 at about 9.30 they were out sipping their drinks when a mass of German planes, in formation, flew straight towards them over the Winter Gardens from the Bristol Channel. Olive was terrified. There had been no siren, no warning of any kind. Just wave after wave of planes. She could see the pilot in the first plane and can still remember his face. They didn't shoot or bomb in Weston. They were on their way to Filton.



The aerial photo above gives us an idea of the proximity of war.

Green arrow - Olive's house

Red arrow – search lights

Red box – the Newtons, where the Home Guard met

Green box - Army huts and camp site

Yellow splodge – exploding bomb

Orange line – Akak guns

White box is Manor Farm, now The Old Manor public house

At work and at home, it was impossible to escape from the horrible realities of wartime Britain. One frosty night Olive was in bed when a bomb exploded at the top of the field just along from her house. The frozen ground sent big clots of clay everywhere. One landed on the Urch's roof and damaged the bedroom ceiling. Olive's father, who worked at the quarry, was out at the time – drinking with pals in the Old King's Head. He returned home to a furious wife and crying children. Oh dear. The same night there was a ring of fire from Collum Farm around to Wick and Worle. The incendiaries were thought to have missed their target.

Olive, bless her, says she suffered from nerves. I have to say I'm not at all surprised. Nerves or no nerves, she still 'did her bit' by helping out the ARP wardens. She did the

night shift, manning the phone at her old school, where the ARP post was situated. She remembers Bob Durston being on night duty with her, and Mrs. May taking food along for them. It was unusual to have a quiet night with no sirens, and people were very confused with the sirens going off all the time. They kept getting up and going to the shelters at the 'all clear' and then going happily to bed when the 'attack' siren sounded.

There was, however, one happy outcome of the situation. Many young chaps were stationed at the army site down in Newtons Road, among them was Cyril Goodwin. Olive and Cyril started courting, and on April 24<sup>th</sup>, 1943, they married at Ebenezer Methodist Chapel in Lawrence Road. Almost 70 years later Olive is still running a stall regularly in the hall where she and Cyril were wed, now known as Worle Community Centre.



Back row from left: Mr. C. Richardson, Cyril Claude Goodwin, Olive Winefrede Urch, Margery Urch

Front row: Ruby Venn, Maureen Venn

## 65. Mary Gould, nee Palmer

Mary grew up in Weston. She was born in 1923 and was constantly ill as a child. At what now seems to be the tender age of 14 she, and all her contemporaries, left school and looked for work.

It was 1937 and the coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth was imminent when Mary secured an interview for a job in Worle as a companion/help. Mary's mother, sister and nephew – aged 4 – all accompanied her to the interview at Beaver Lodge on the corner of Station Road and New Bristol Road. The lady of the house, Mrs Tinknell, had returned from Canada after an accident on the Canadian Pacific Railway had left her paralysed from the waist down. Mary secured the position and stayed with Mrs Tinknell for over 2 years and was treated as one of the family.

Early in 1939 she moved to the Moorland Laundry where the very petite Mary spent much of her time operating a huge iron, pressing the uniforms of the RAF chaps from Locking. Hitler's doings soon changed everything. As soon as war was declared Mary joined the Auxilliary Territorial Service. Three girls applied to join together, but the other two dropped out. Mary had a desire to be trained as a driver, and she knew that her small stature might be an issue, so she teetered off to Taunton for her medical wearing ridiculously high heels. They took her and sent her off to Honiton for 6 weeks training before she was posted to Aldershot. She never did learn to drive – the ATS chose the tall ones for that. The smaller girls, like Mary, were all trained as telephonists and studied plane recognition.

There was no time to settle down anywhere. Mary was sent to a total of 38 different sites, including Newcastle, Gateshead, Washington, and eventually Lowestoft. It was there that she met her husband. It must have been an interesting time. The ATS girls were billeted in a holiday camp in Suffolk, where Mary slept in a windmill. She was still in Suffolk on V.E. Day, but says there were no celebrations. Peace meant that the girls were all split up and, nothing daunted, Mary set off to Glasgow and tested for the Pay Corp.

There were some billets, but Mary and 2 other girls went into digs, which proved to be a mistake. The meals were tiny and there was no packed lunch, so she bought a currant bun every day. Her pay was three pounds six shillings a week and her digs cost one pound, seven shillings and six pence. I can't help thinking she must have been relieved on 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 1946 when she came out of the ATS. Mary went straight down to the Odeon in Weston and started there as an usherette the next day. On 4<sup>th</sup> May she married and set off on a new adventure to Middlesex where the couple lived with her parents-in-law.

Worle was still in her blood, however, and on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1958 the family moved back to Worle, where they started building their future home in Station Road on a plot at the back of Beaver Lodge, where her Worle journey had begun.

## 66. Beryl Green, nee Howells

Beryl was born in 1925. When she was small, her family moved into 'Elm Grove', a house in the High Street, opposite the Recreation Ground and surrounded by fields. Beryl's father was a builder and a few years later he built a detached house in Hill Road on the right hand side if you are looking up the hill. I assume this must be the house on the corner of Hill Road East.

Her memories of school are scanty, but she certainly attended the Infants' School in Mendip Avenue and the Elementary School next to the Church. Mr. Mawson, the headmaster, she remembers as a nice, friendly man; Mr Waite, she says, was OK! Hummm. She left school at 14 and just like Olive Urch, Beryl missed the new Senior School by one year.

Beryl is still very lively and good company. She is certainly no slouch, and must always have had some drive and verve. Her first job after school was at Hewish Post Office tea gardens, where she was treated like a daughter. I am struck by the number of people who make this comment about their first jobs, and I can't help feeling that we could learn from it in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Being treated as a member of the family is bound to encourage loyalty and gives youngsters a greater desire to please.

As soon as she was old enough, Beryl signed on and landed up working at the Beaufighter factory at Oldmixon. Bristol Aeroplane Company had moved into two shadow factories, one at Oldmixon on the western boundary of the Airport, the other at Banwell, a mile away from the boundary but accessible via the main A368 road to Banwell village, which was widened to allow aircraft to be moved along it. Nearby, RAF Locking was established as a radio and radar school. The factories built and repaired thousands of Beaufort and Beaufighter aircraft, and also a small number of Hawker Tempests, and the RAF ran an acceptance facility in a hangar to the north side of the runway.

A few years back Beryl was featured in 'Our Finest Hour', a television series made by Testimony Films, which chronicled the contribution of ordinary people to the war effort. She made some notes of her memories, which I have included below, just as she wrote them.

*I worked in a flight shed adjoining the Weston Airport where Beaufighters were at the last stage before flying.*

*I fixed the Pilot's compass on the left hand side of him and a metal stand, the 4BA bolt. I had to put in the four corners, then underneath the stand had a nut on top of my finger and screw the two together, it was easier doing the one for the gunner. He also had two instruments on a panel above his head.*

*The pilot had a Blind Flying Panel, which was a flat piece of metal about 12 x9 with all his 6 instruments fixed in, it would be facing him after being fixed in, there was an Aloa Air Pipe going from front to back. Some times it got*

*damaged by others putting in their work, usually the radio. I would go along the pipe with a small cone of water soap and a brush to find out where the bubbles were, then replace that part. The Petter Head was at the far end of the wing for getting the air through. I had to put my mouth around this pipe and blow air in or suck air out to test which way round the instruments were going.*

*The 2 torpedoes were underneath each wing. I used to swing my empty compass box walking through the shed singing 'Programme, chocolates, cigarettes', just for fun and they would all laugh.*

*I had to buy all my tools myself and I kept them in an old compass Box and brought them home with me every day.*

*The lady brought the tea trolley around while 'Music while you work' was on.*



This picture of the old Beaufighter factory is courtesy of the Imperial War Museum reference: IWM (ATP 16395D). The helicopter is a Wasp Junior.

The employees at the factory were all given a chance to go up for a flight, but Beryl was under 21 and her mother refused her permission. However, she does remember attending a talk given by Churchill in a hotel in Taunton, opposite Freeman Hardy and Willis. She sneaked up to the great man and tapped him on the shoulder, a memory she still treasures.

As a matter of interest, 3,300 Beaufighters were made at the factory during the war. Ninety-one employees of BAC were killed in a major air raid on the Bristol factory when 350 bombs were dropped in 45 seconds.

When the need for the planes ceased, Beryl went on to work on the prefabs called 'aerohouses', like those at the Maltings. These pre-fabricated homes were intended to last 10 years, but actually provided many families in Worle with homes into the early 1960s

## 67. Methodist People

Worle Methodist Chapel in Lawrence Road shared its minister with two other chapels: Milton Methodist and Hill Road Methodist. At this stage of the war the job was the responsibility of Rev. A. R. Bates. There is a picture of Rev. Bates in the Mercury of 31<sup>st</sup> January, which suggests that he was a young man, probably in his 30s. The photograph accompanies a short report of the annual Leaders and Society meeting of the chapel, over which Mr Bates presided. He was ably abetted by a group of men described in the paper as 'the three Cs'. These were Messrs A. M. B. Criddle, W. Combes and J. Corner, all of whom were re-elected as stewards. Mr Criddle was appointed as Church Secretary. This must have made him a very busy man in addition to his duties as a Borough councillor and demanding job of farming and husbandry.

The finances of the Chapel were rather satisfactory. There was a balance of £12 after £8 had been allocated to the Trust Fund. Debts to the Circuit had also been paid off. The Overseas Missions collection for the year had been double that of the previous twelve months.

Two ladies of the chapel, Mrs Peacey and Mrs Thornton were appointed to act as Poor Stewards for the year, but their precise duties are not referred to.

Chapel members seem to have been engaged in quite a variety of activities. Firstly new members were welcomed in the Church at the Covenant Service, when Mrs J. Rutt, Mrs Edgar Fry and Mr W. Durston all joined the congregation. A New Year social was arranged for the younger people and Christian Endeavour group had a very serious talk from Miss Ruth Michael entitled, 'How far can I go with the crowd?' Sadly, there is no answer to this all important question.

## 68. Len Griffiths: one man's war

John Leonard Griffiths' story came to my attention when I found a report in the Mercury dated 21<sup>st</sup> March, 1942. Len Griffiths had been reported missing and his wife, Ella [formerly Ella Griffin] wrote to the paper, telling them his story. At the time of Len's disappearance his son, Brian, was about six years old. Brian now lives in Montreal and has been good enough to pass information and photographs on to me for inclusion in these pages.

Len grew up in Weston on Sunnyside Road, the son of Tom Griffiths, a Great Western Railway employee. He belonged to St. Paul's Scout Troop for many years and was a keen cyclist. He met his wife, Ella Griffin, at church. They both joined Weston Cycling club, and when Ella's father invited Len to join him in the running of a cycle shop in Worle High Street, Len agreed.

Below: Len Griffiths on the right, with his father-in-law, outside C. Griffin cycles in Worle High Street.



When the Home Guard was formed, Len joined them, but was very soon called up and posted overseas. He and Ella wrote long, detailed letters to one another and upon Len's disappearance, Ella passed one of his letters to the Gazette. The following report and the beautifully written, emotive excerpts were published.

21st March 42

**WORLE SOLDIER REPORTED MISSING IN MALAYA**

**MR. J. L. ("LEN") GRIFFITHS, FORMER HOME GUARD.**

Mrs. Griffiths, of High-street, Worle, has received official intimation from the War Office that her husband, Private John Leonard ("Len") Griffiths, has been reported missing. He was serving in Malaya at the time of the fall of Singapore.

Mr. Griffiths, son of Mr. Tom Griffiths, of Sunnyside-road, a well-known G.W.R. employee, was born in Weston and attended Wallacole-road School. On leaving, he also joined the Gops staff of the G.W.R. Some six years ago he and his wife returned from Bristol, where they had been residing for some time, and Mr. Griffiths joined his father-in-law, Mr. C. Griffin, in the conduct of a cycle shop at Worle.

Years ago, Mr. Griffiths was a prominent member of the St. Paul's Scout Troop, while, with his wife, he belonged to the Weston Cycling Club. He joined the Home Guard in Worle when it was formed and did duty regularly until called up. There is one child, aged nearly seven years.

Readers with men folk in the Far East will be interested in a letter written to his wife by Pte. Len Griffiths of Worle, now reported missing on the eve of the Battle for Malaya.

The letter, written by the flickering light of a candle, gives a vivid picture of our troops under canvas 'neath a tropic moon. Incidentally, the candle was sent to Private Griffiths, with many others by his wife while he was still quartered in this country. His pals laughed at him when the candles arrived, *'but I have the last laugh now'*, he wrote.

Pte. Griffiths was not able to give his whereabouts at the time the letter was written, on New year's Day, but from the description he gives of the country, it seems likely that he was already in Malaya.

He talks of going for a route march along an untarred road inches deep in dust and of being nearly suffocated when the dust was stirred up by passing carts drawn by oxen.

Having been associated with his father-in-law, Mr C. Griffin, in the Cycle Works, High Street, Worle, before he joined up, Pte Griffiths was naturally interest in the wheeled traffic. The cars and lorries were mostly 1918-20 models, he guessed, probably second hand, but there were plenty of bicycles – almost as many as at home – and well-kept by their owners.

*“The women”, he wrote, “do nearly all the work out here. They work as builders’ labourers and carry as much as a hod of mortar in a bowl on their heads.”*

*“They wear iron rings on their heads to help them balance their loads. The actual brick-laying is done by the men.”*

*“Cows are regarded as sacred and they don’t eat the flesh or drink the milk. All our milk and butter is from goats. What beef we get is rather tough as grass is scarce and the animals get a lot of exercise looking for food.”*

*“Money goes a long way. with 35 rupees [1/6] I was able to buy a wristlet watch, a packet of 250 players magnum and a nice pair of English pattern sandals which are much cooler to the feet than slippers.”*

*“We can each have our native servants to clean up and clean our boots for about a rupee a week. I don’t think I shall indulge in a servant as it might make me so blessed swelled-headed when I arrive home and expect the same sort of thing to go on. I am getting used to doing my own washing.”*

*“Of course, we have to be careful where we go and what we say, as some of the natives understand English. It doesn’t do to pass any sort of remarks in front of them as they have strange customs and beliefs which we do not understand, and we may say something quite accidentally which would cause a lot of trouble.”*

*“All the boys had a good Christmas dinner with turkey, two vegetables and Christmas pudding, and different kinds of fruit, with a free issue of ice cream. The officers sent round a couple of issues of cigarettes, so altogether, with some music and impromptu entertainment by some of the lads, I can say we made the best of things.”*

*“I went to 7 o’clock communion and also to the 11 a.m. service. I nearly broke down at the end of Communion, when the Padre was finishing with –‘The peace of God which passeth all understanding keep your hearts and minds .....’ “You know it sort of fills one up in an inexplicable way. No doubt, dear, you had the same feelings”*

Two years later, in June 1944, the Mercury reported that Mrs Griffiths had received a postcard from Len telling her that he was a prisoner of war in Thailand. Of course, she felt vindicated for having expressed her certainty that Len was alive. Sadly, Ella and young Brian never saw Len again, but Brian visited his father's grave in Thailand thanks to the Royal British Legion, who organised a trip. Len's grave is one of 7,000 graves of POWs who worked on the so-called Death Railway, between Siam and Burma.



Above. A view of the Allied War cemetery in Kanchanaburi, Thailand.

Right. Brian with a RBL standard bearer, Laura Ashton in 2005.



The news of Len's death was finally reported in the local newspapers on 20<sup>th</sup> January 1945, when Brian was 10 years old.

*'Great sympathy is felt for the wife, young son and other relatives of Craftsman John Leonard Griffiths, RFME in the news they have just received of his death from illness while a prisoner of war in the hands of the Japanese.'*

*The War Office gives the date of his death as June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1943, and his wife's grief is the more poignant because thirteen months after that date she received a post card from him, written in Thailand stating he was safe and well.'*

## 69. News from Home and Abroad

There is no doubt that war creates some very odd anomalies and I think the regular BBC news bulletins must have had a delicate path to tread. As Spring moved into Summer the news was shocking. The poor little island of Malta suffered from a difficult geographical and political situation at this time. Stuck as it was, and is, of course, east of Tunisia and south of Sicily the island was a very desirable spot for the Allies and Axis alike. Its political allegiance to the allies was a thorn in the flesh of both Germany and Italy. In consequence it had been under constant air attack since June of 1940. The bombing was intensified on April 8<sup>th</sup>, 1942 and such was its severity that the people of Malta were awarded the George Cross for bravery one week later, on the 15<sup>th</sup>. Malta was not the only place suffering: closer to home Bath and Exeter both received air attacks before the end of the month.

Dramas in Worle were slight by comparison, though devastating to an already stretched community. A major fire destroyed Worlebury Golf pavilion during May and there were some sad deaths. Doreen West, who lived in Hawthorn Hill, died in hospital, not unexpectedly. Much more of a shock was the death of Lance Corporal Henry Charles Fox, who died of natural causes whilst on duty with the military police. He was an apparently fit youngster of 24 who had attended Worle School.

The Mercury continued to report lesser matters, like the chap from Greenwood Road prosecuted for urinating in public during the blackout. He gave a false name to the police and was fined £1. I also see that Clarence Atherton of Mill Lane appeared at Petty Sessions for failing to obey a traffic light.

The local papers failed to report the story that follows!

## 70. Mrs May, The Vicar's Wife

The arrival of American troops in the theatre of war was generally greeted with relief, and often with anticipation. Even now, well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we hear our elders reminiscing happily about nylon stockings, chocolate and other luxuries which came to our shores along with the handsome, relaxed troops. It does seem, however, that some disquiet was felt by a small number of people, including Rev. Frederick May's wife.

For the sake of clarity, it is necessary to explain that Rev. May and his first wife had come to take up the incumbency in Worle in 1926. The couple had a daughter, Elsa, and the family moved into the Vicarage in Church Road, looking down Coronation Road. Shortly after they moved in Mrs May, sadly, died, leaving Frederick alone with a daughter to bring up. Within a relatively short time the vicar remarried. I have not

been able to confirm the maiden name of his second wife, but her Christian name was possibly Elizabeth. It is this second wife who features in this tale of woe.

The story broke in the Sunday Pictorial, of all papers, on 6<sup>th</sup> September 1942. How it reached the national press, heaven knows. Someone must have 'blown the gaffe'. In 2016 it is a horrifying tale of ignorance and prejudice. The cutting is reproduced below, but for those who find the print too small, a transcription follows.



**Vicar's Wife Insults Our Allies**

The women of Worle, Weston-super-Mare, are amazed by Mrs. May, wife of their vicar.

She called them together and attempted to lay down a six-point code which would result in the ostracism of American coloured troops if they ever go to the village.

The women of the village have come to the angry conclusion that this code amounts to an insult to the troops of our ally.

These (in her own words) were the rules Mrs. May laid down.

1. If a local woman keeps a shop and a coloured soldier enters, she must serve him but she must do it as quickly as possible and indicate that she does not desire him to come there again.
2. If she is in a cinema and notices a coloured soldier next to her she moves to another seat immediately.
3. If she is walking on the pavement and a coloured soldier is coming towards her, she crosses to the other pavement.
4. If she is in a shop and a coloured soldier enters, she leaves as soon as she has made her purchase, or before that if she is in a queue.
5. White women, of course, must have no social relationship with coloured troops.
6. On no account must coloured troops be invited into the homes of white women.

Mrs May forbade her hearers to mention her 'talk' to the newspapers. But they were so astonished that they told their husbands.

### **Disgusted**

One of the husbands, a local councillor, is preparing a full statement to be sent to the Ministry of Information. He said, 'If the woman is talking like this in the name of the Church, I should be interested to know what her husband's bishop thinks of it'.

Feeling is so high in the district that it is more likely to hurt Mrs. May. A local woman who attended the meeting told the Sunday Pictorial last night: 'I was disgusted, and so were most of the women there. We have no intention of agreeing to her decree.

*Any coloured soldier who reads this may rest assured that there is no colour bar in this country and that he is as welcome as any other Allied soldier. He will find that the vast majority of people here have nothing but repugnance for the narrow-minded, uninformed prejudices expressed by the vicar's wife.*

*There is, and will be, no persecution of coloured people in Britain.*

I have been unable to find any evidence locally for reactions to this frightful revelation. Goodness only knows what Freddie May thought about it. It does seem possible, however, to speculate about which councillor contacted the press. He was, according to the Sunday Pictorial, a married man, which narrows the field.

Enough said, I think.

## 71. An ARP's Diary for the year of our Lord 1942

The first hand reflections of someone intimately involved in the activities of the village during Worle War 2 were passed to me by the daughter of one of Worle's ARP wardens. The family would prefer to keep the identity of the man confidential, which, of course, I shall do, but his contribution, reproduced below, with some comments, helps us to understand the times. The 'post' referred to in the entries is the school in Hill Road and 'light patrol' is probably more easily understood as 'blackout patrol'. The warden always refers to his colleagues by their surnames in the manner of the times. Bill Newsome Martin is always styled 'Martin'. The entries for June 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> – the nights of the Weston Blitz - are particularly poignant.

### 1942

Jan	5	Brilliant moon – no raids
	6	Planes about – but no sirens
	8	Full Light Patrol – no trouble – Planes about late
	10	Light Patrol – Muxworthy did night duty - no sirens
	14	Light Patrol
	24	Duty at Post all night - no raids
	29	Light Patrol - no raids
Feb	15	Churchill on wireless
	21	On duty all night
Mar	1	To bed for an hour after duty
	7	Duty all night
	28	Duty all night at Post – King spoke on wireless
	29	Day of Prayer
Apr	3	Clearing sand bags - sowed peas and potatoes - Sirens 8.45pm
	4	Duty all night with Bob
	5/6	Gardening planting out beans, peas, spinach, cabbage, broccoli, lettuce and radish,
	6/7/8/&10	Work on sand bags.
Apr	18	Duty all night
	25	Sirens 22.45. Visit Post after all clear 0045
	26	Sirens 04.45 Flares dropped near us. To ARP Pictures with Crease, work on sand bags in roof till dark. Sirens 0115 – 0245 (27 <sup>th</sup> )
May	1	ARP meeting evening - no raids
	3	Sirens 0145 – 0230

	6	ARP meeting Weston – waste of time – no raids
	8	Duty Patrol 2200 – 2400
	10	Churchill inspiring on wireless
	22	On duty all night at Post - no raids
Jun	6	Duty 22.30 all night - no raids
	20	On duty all night
	27	Weston heavy blitz - 0100 - 0230. Mr James killed. Scores bombed. Big fires in Weston. We came through but very scared.
	28	On duty all night and survey in morning. Not a pleasant day and thoughts of night to come. Saw Mr Conway in eve. Heavy blitz again 0145 – 0240. Big fires Weston. Stick of bombs across to Worlebury. On Duty all night
	29	No trains from Weston – cycle to Puxton to catch train. I am too tired to worry but dread the night. Weston in a pickle.
	30	Many guns stationed on Hill. Thundery and quiet night.
July	1	Sirens and raiders - 0200 – flares and incendiaries. Raid did not develop.
	15	Bought shelter
	16 / 17 / 18	Work on shelter. (Completed on 18 <sup>th</sup> ) 18 <sup>th</sup> On duty all night – all quiet
	27	Sirens 0615 – 0715 Heavy mist. Full moon at night.
	30	Sirens No activity
Aug	1	On duty all night at Post – all quiet
	4	Sirens 0150 – 0245 (Raid on S Wales)
	13	Light Patrol with Crease – very dark
	15	On duty all night with Bob – all quiet
Sept	5	Sirens 2140 – 2145
	9	Light Patrol with Crease Weather fine – cold night -no raids
	10	Light Patrol – No
	12	Some gardening & Blackout work. Duty all night with Wright.
	24	Light Patrol on way home
	30	Light Patrol with Crease
Oct	1	Light Patrol
	3	Duty all night
	4	Bed for an hour – then work in garden – To Hutton in afternoon to see UXB sight Very interesting by lecture by Martin
	7/8	Light Patrol – very dark
	10	Bought new shoes 37/6d Light Patrol
	14	Light Patrol – Visit Post and return Warden mac
	17	On duty all night – Post rearranged

- 21 Light Patrol on way home  
 24 Took boys to pictures – not on duty – but sirens 2310 –2345.no activity  
 31 On duty all night at Post
- Nov 7 On duty all night  
 10 Churchill good speech and encouraging  
 15 Church bells rang for victory in Egypt – Parade of Civil defence – very good show  
 21 Duty all night at Post
- Dec 2 Light Patrol – much overhead activity  
 5 Duty all night at Post  
 17 To ARP lecture  
 19 On duty all night at Post  
 26 On duty all night with E George  
 31 Attend Gas lecture.

Telephone numbers: WESTON EXCHANGE

Mr Noble	(Not shown)	
ARP Whitehead,	Emergency,	Hapbern, Spring Hill
Mrs Edwards	Church Road	1621
Martin		2333
Crease		2535
ARP Post W 18		2005
Report Centre		2611/2/3
Fire		2751
First Aid		2190

These contemporary diary entries by our anonymous ARP warden certainly bring history to life, and it is interesting to compare them with the memories of an elderly gentleman who was a boy at the time. The boy was Charles Reeves, an eight year old then, who remembers the night of the Weston area blitz all too well. He wrote the following description of the 1942 bombing of Worle in memory of his grandfather, Charles Drury.

I have scoured the newspapers of the time, and read the Civil Defence account of the attacks, but there is no mention of the bombs that fell on Worle on this particular night, so the following account is all the more precious and I must thank Charlie for allowing me to reproduce it here, verbatim.

## **72. Charlie Reeves: Memories of 28<sup>th</sup> June, 1942**

*I would like to recall the time some 70 years ago when my grandfather, Charles Drury saved all our family from a German bomb that destroyed our residence of East Lynch, Ebdon Road, Worle, in the early hours of Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> June 1942. It was my grandfather who had heard the bomber overhead and, as there was no air raid warning, he stressed that we should get up in case it was a bombing raid in our area.*

*I was aged 8 and my brother Graham aged six. We were awoken up from our beds, together with our parents, my grandmother, and an aunt and uncle who were staying with us, we got up quickly and got dressed, little clothing, as it was midsummer and a full moon, we got downstairs and got in the under the stairs cupboard which was renowned to be the safest place in the event of bomb destruction of houses which did not have air raid shelters.*

*My grandfather and uncle had gone out of the house and were some way down the drive way when the bomb exploded on the side of the house, the blast demolished three quarters of the house and left us surviving in the under stairs cupboard, unfortunately my grandfather was killed and my uncle injured by the blast and flying shrapnel, which also killed our horse in the adjoining paddock*

*My father was buried under the kitchen table with a wall on top. Guided by his calling, my mother dug him out. In the mean time my grandmother guided my brother and myself as we clambered over the rubble to escape up into the garden.*

*But the German bomber had dropped three bombs in a line, the first on our house; the second, which did not go off, was in Mr.Cainy's market garden, now Cherrywood Road /Rise; the third exploded in The Square of Worle, just where Lloyds TSB Bank is now built. The plane then came back over, dropping flares and machine gunning us all, the evidence is shown by a bullet hole in the signpost at the Nut Tree pub junction of Ebdon Road to this day, and as survivors, the destruction left us with few clothes and possessions.*

*Further raids in the following nights were in Weston-super-Mare. We ourselves stayed in lodgings at the home of Percy Bartlett and his family at Glendale, Ebdon Road, for three months, then set up home in New Bristol Road where my parents lived for the rest of their lives.*

*Without my grandfather's observation of this invader overhead, we would have all been killed and I would not be telling this story, seventy years on.*

*Charles Reeves, Bleadon  
June 2012*



The signpost at the corner of Ebdon Road, 2010

The ghastly experiences of Charlie's family came in the midst of a whole host of events across the globe, which have only grown in importance with the passage of time.

- On 29<sup>th</sup> May in Los Angeles, California, an already famous chap, Bing Crosby, recorded 'White Christmas' – in California at the end of May.
- A couple of weeks later a young girl who was hiding in a secret annex in the Netherlands was given a diary for her 13<sup>th</sup> birthday. Her name was Anne Frank and her diary is world famous.
- Sebastopol, a Russian port on the Black Sea, was invaded by the Germans in July, following a long siege. 90,000 Russian prisoners had already been taken by the end of June.

Back at home the bombing seemed to have ceased for the time being. The ARP wardens and the Home Guard were still out on regular patrol, but there were some lighter moments to report. The Home Guard held a dance at the Newtons, in the old Long Barn, which was possessed of a sprung floor. I have never found out why it had this luxury or who was responsible for it.

The ARP wardens also had a bit of a do that September. This time it took the shape of a presentation to Newsome Martin, who resigned as Head Warden, a post he had taken over from G. D. Waite in 1940. Mr Martin was appointed Bomb Recognition Officer for the area and was to be replaced by W. R. [Bob] Durston.

To round things off, the whole of Weston joined together for a Civil Defence Ball at the Winter Gardens, attended by Wardens, National Fire Service, Rescue, Medical and First Aid personnel, Fire Guards and the lucky old Women's Voluntary Service. I expect the girls had rather a good time.

## W. R. [Bob] Durston: the new ARP Head Warden



Bob Durston [fig. 27, left] was nearing his 42<sup>nd</sup> birthday, and was married with six children, at the time of his appointment as Head ARP warden in Worle.

Bob fulfilled the criteria for the post in terms of experience and, when his promotion was imminent, he was provided with a telephone at home, which was considered essential for a head warden. In 1940, Weston had a total population of just over 40,000 and, according to the telephone directory of that year, there were only approximately 2,500 subscribers. Bob became one of them and after the war paid for the phone to be transferred to him for private use.

Born in Worle High Street on March 5<sup>th</sup> 1901, Bob spent his early years living in Sprakes Terrace, Station Road with his parents Robert and Lilian [nee Neads], his brother Walter and sisters, Lilian and Elizabeth.

A Worle boy through and through, he married in St. Martin's Church in 1930. His intended was also part of the village. Florence Ivy Thomas lived in Church Cottage, next to the Church. The couple began their married life at No. 4 The Parade and four years later moved to a newly built council house in Hill Road, where they brought up their family.

An enthusiastic sportsman, Bob played football for Worle before Worle Old Boys was formed, and then became one of the many Vice-Presidents of WOB. Cricket was also his game, and he took the bat for Fussells' Cricket Club. Amazingly, he also found time to be a Committee member of Worle Horticultural Society and as Sports Secretary was particularly responsible for the organisation, prizes and so on for the sports events held at the annual Flower Show.

Bob's occupation made him exempt from conscription. He was a quarryman and carter. In the latter capacity he drove a 'horse and putt' [two wheeled wagon] for Huish and Sons in Kewstoke Road, which was essential war work, but he certainly did his bit on the home front.

Throughout the war years Bob kept a record of happenings in the village. He noted the Worle people who had died in the conflict on the home front and his notes extended to names and addresses of various ARP officials, the ARP posts and Rescue Services. There are also dates of meetings and exercises; dates of whist drives; dances; flower show committee meetings; information about profits made on dances and whist drives. You name it, Bob noted it down. Bless him, and grateful thanks to his son, John, Bob's sixth child, who was born in 1942, and who generously gave me notes about his Dad. Like father, like son, as they say.

## The End of the Beginning?

The Battle of El Alamein had raged in the North African Desert from July 1942 until November that year. Montgomery and Rommel were arguably the most able generals of the entire conflict. Many Worle boys were involved in the epic battle, and everyone

in Britain followed the news from the front with a mixture of fear and hope.



Montgomery's victory was greeted with relief, rather than joy. Churchill, reflecting on the outcome, said that the battle of El Alamein marked the turning point in the war and ordered the ringing of church bells all over Britain. As he said later: "Before Alamein we never had a victory, after Alamein we never had a defeat."

So, at home and abroad, November gave the folk of Worle a few causes for optimism. Firstly, Ken Lane came home on leave from flying training in Canada. Ken Burgess and Sergeant Hatherall were both 'home from Gib' and Reg Jones, Ernest Doddinton and Cyril Cousins were home having a break from minesweeping. I wonder whether they were still at home when the Church Bells rang out at Churchill's behest, on November 15<sup>th</sup> to mark victory in Egypt and to welcome the Civil Defence volunteers to Church Parade.

### Trouble with the Scouts

I was particularly amused to note a headline in the Gazette – much better at interesting phraseology than the Mercury. *'Worle's Wild Willies Want Leadership'*, read the article. It seems that local Boy Scouts had entertained themselves by burning all the wood collected by the Girl Guides. Mr Raike [Ginger] wrote a reply to the criticism a week later. His letter gives us an insight into the troubles afflicting the village, and so I reproduce it here:

*"In reply to Miss J. Bruce-Kingsmill, I should like to give her the only reason for the apparent inactivity of the Scouts in Worle. Unfortunately, we have had to suspend activities temporarily because we have not succeeded in finding suitable premises as headquarters. We lost our 'Den' in the blitz, and also, for a while, our greatest friend and helper, who lost his house to which our room was attached.*

*The boys did some very good and hard work in the days following the blitz, and prior to that did numerous types of jobs to help the national effort, such as ARP messengers, collecting scrap, etc.*

*During the long evenings of daylight and fine weather we were able to carry on out of doors. Black-out and inclement weather has stopped this until the Spring, unless, of*

*course, some benefactor in the neighbourhood can let us have the use of a fair-sized room, garage, barn or loft. We have been offered the use of the schools. As these are not 'blacked-out' it means meeting on Saturday afternoon, but unfortunately, my half-day is on Thursday, and now I have no assistant to carry on instead of me. This means more work and trouble for me. We hope this letter will catch the eye of someone willing to help."*

So 1942 came to an end, with hopes that the tide had turned on the continent, and with the usual difficulties to be overcome at home. The good old Home Guard did have a social at the Church Hall on the 29<sup>th</sup> December, with a dancing and a concert. In contrast, on New Year's Eve the ARP wardens attended a lecture on dealing with gas warfare. What a way to welcome 1943.

**1943**

### **73. January 43**

Maybe there had been some private celebrations that year, maybe not, but the people of Worle displayed signs of carelessness that January. Sam Pitt of Kewstoke Road blamed the blackout when he fell off the kerb and cut his head. Derek Loud, who I must admit was only nine years old, was run over. Not by a motor vehicle or even a steam train, but by a hand propelled truck on the WC and P railway line which was being demolished. Rather like the Key Stone Cops, I think. His leg was badly cut and had to be stitched at Weston Hospital.

The village was further reminded of the need for care on the roads when large numbers attended Fred Vincent's funeral. Fred had sustained serious head injuries when a lorry collided with his bicycle on Locking Moor Road.

There was also a heart-warming report in the Mercury from Mr G. Kingsbury of the Rows who wrote in to thank a kind benefactor who had left two parcels full of little luxuries on his doorstep just before Christmas. The good Samaritan remains anonymous, but I suspect Mr Fussell of having a hand in it.

Worle Savings Group was still going strong and their progress warranted a weekly mention in the Mercury, especially when other news was thin. The January savings brought the grand total to £33,397. 9s., a huge sum for the straightened times.

Endless warnings, accidents and prosecutions seem to have done nothing to make folk adapt to the dreaded blackout, and being Worle, the animals were as bad as the people. The 'Cow versus Car Case' made the headlines. Edgar Hawkins of Apple Tree Farm was sued by Alfred Pawley of Hughenden Road. Edgar's cows had decided to go for a wander over Puxton railway bridge: enterprising of them, really. The plaintiff, rather oddly, claimed that there were 'over 11' cows right across the road. I fondly imagined that the cows were engaged in an evening stroll before bed, but I was wrong, it was a dawn constitutional at 6.15 a.m. Poor Edgar Hawkins had to pay up, and wondered if he should attach a torch to each animal, just in case.

### **74. Women at Work**

With so many men away at the front women were playing an ever more essential part in keeping things going at home. The Women's Land Army were expecting to be stretched this year, partly because of the special food production drive called for by the government. Girls of seventeen or over were asked to apply for enrolment at the Women's Land Army county office. Women of conscription age needed to go to the Employment Exchange.

There was, however, one proviso, they needed to be of 'good physique' and 'generally suitable for farm work', whatever that meant. There was a mixed response locally to the use of girls on the land. Jack Winsor, a 74 year old farmer told a Mercury reporter that he had ploughed his own land whilst waiting for the land girls to arrive.

Perhaps in an attempt to dig their heels in, the weekly knitting party resumed activities. During 1942, one and a half hundred weights of wool were made in 947 articles for the Somerset Comforts Fund, with a further 80 being given to the Merchant Navy. Not to be outdone, the Milton and Worle Ward group held a competition, the prize for which was a table cloth handsomely worked by Mrs. Mingay of Pine Hill. Oddly, the report in the Mercury fails to mention the nature of the contest, but it did raise £23/10/-

The need for women to become engaged in wartime activities was certainly underlined when the government lowered the call up age for young women to nineteen years from twenty-one which encouraged many couples to rush to the altar. Local magistrates gave permission for Joyce Gillam to marry James Page. I expect Joyce was under the age of majority, but did not have parental approval for the match and decided not to wait for anyone!

Miss F. M. Hartree did her bit for the war effort by becoming engaged to a Dunkirk Hero, Driver W. Brice. An excellent contribution.

**75. Ken Burgess**, a paratrooper, was featured in the parish magazine in February. Ken had been home on leave and he wrote to his family to report his safe return to his unit. He was somewhat shocked when he had to make his first parachute jump on the day after his return to duty. The Mercury reporter was moved to reproduce the following imaginative report of the occasion:

*'Get ready, number 5. Ken sits on the floor, legs dangling through a circular hole. Now is the moment; what a moment! Will the parachute be all right? Bated breath, the order, 'Go' – he slips through....'*

The tone of this report reminds us of the necessity, especially in wartime, of humour to keep people going. Gratitude is certainly due to those who introduced a smile to daily life, whether in print or on the ever popular wireless programmes, such as ITMA. 'It's That Man Again' was a BBC radio comedy programme which ran from 1939 to 1949. The title refers to a contemporary phrase concerning the ever more frequent news stories about Hitler in the months before the declaration of war, and specifically a headline in the Daily Express written by Bert Gunn. This was humorously transferred to Tommy Handley, the popular comedian around whom the programme was developed. ITMA is believed to have played a major role in sustaining morale on the "home front" during the war – a timely reminder of the need to avoid taking ourselves too seriously.

Ken's family much enjoyed the amusing take on the poor boy's first parachute jump.

## **76. Sergeant Major Frank Atkin**

Company B of the Home Guard was overseen by Sergeant Major Frank Atkin, a middle-aged chap who lived at Abbot's Side in St. George's – always described in the

local press as 'St. George's, Worle'. Frank had served in the First World War in the Infantry and had become a sergeant-instructor at the age of 20. He held the military medal. He is described in the paper as having the 'happy knack of maintaining discipline'. The Gazette described him as 'a fine patriotic type of Britisher'.

All companies of the HG used a firing range at Uphill to hone their skills. On the afternoon of Sunday 21st February they were engaged in a routine practice session. Towards the end of a long training session for recruits and partly-trained men they began a 'snap shooting test', in which the targets only come up for about 20 seconds. The men, 100 yards from the target, loaded their weapons in the standing position but fired from the lying position. Frank Atkin was responsible for keeping up the supply of ammunition from the store, about 20 yards away. Running back, at the double, with new supplies, he passed in front of the detail and heard a report of a rifle being discharged. Frank was within three feet of the detail when the shot was fired: he died almost immediately.

The inquest found the incident to have been a complete accident.

Many local people were affected by the incident. One of the youngest Home Guards at the practice was Sam Cox, a great friend of Frank's son, Sgt. Roy Atkin. The families were both from Wick St. Lawrence. Sam was only a boy and was horrified to see Frank shot dead in front of his eyes. He says that he was only about 10 feet away when it happened. Poor Sam had to go back to Frank's wife and family to break the news. 70 years later, when Sam was telling me this, he still had a tear in his eye. Some things you never get over.

The funeral was held on 27<sup>th</sup> February at Weston Cemetery. Led by the band, the coffin was draped in the Union Jack topped by a family wreath, and was taken from the Drill Hall in Weston to the cemetery. Almost all of Company B attended, attired in great coats. Frank's eldest sons marched with the cortege. The Gazette and Mercury both carried detailed reports of the incident and the funeral.

In May 1943 the Home Guard celebrated the third anniversary of its inception. Under the command of second lieutenant H. A. Perkins and with an escort of eight sergeants, a wreath was carried by CSM. H. F. Ackland and laid on Frank Atkin's grave. The red, white and blue flowers also had a card: 'In remembrance of our friend, the late C.S.M. Frank Atkin, M.M. on the third birthday of the Home Guard, from officers and sergeants of B Company, 8<sup>th</sup> Somerset Home Guard.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **77. Dealing with Grief**

Whilst tragedy was striking at home, many Worle boys were still serving overseas, among them Donald Disney – one of six brothers in his family serving abroad.

Donald was 29 years old and a member of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry. His mother, who lived in Kewstoke Road, had heard from him on 27<sup>th</sup> April. The poor

woman must have been on constant tenter hooks awaiting news of her six boys. Donald had married Kathleen Culliford in the first week of the war; as a young man he had several jobs as a painter in Worle, before joining up in about 1941. At the end of May 1943 he was reported missing. On July 31<sup>st</sup> his death was confirmed, in Tunisia during April. His name, together with that of his twin brother, appears on the role of honour in Worle War Memorial.

**The Heybyrne family** from 'Hillcote' Spring Hill were also suffering sadly. On May 8<sup>th</sup> a report appeared in the Gazette telling the village, that Councillor Heybyrne and his wife had received news that their elder son, Lieut. A.G.D. Heybyrne, R.N.V.R. had died from wounds. Gordon Heybyrne had married Miss Humphries, and they had a baby son, Malcolm. The Admiralty had informed his wife that he was on the 'seriously ill' list and in hospital abroad as a result of enemy action. It was thought that he had been in the Mediterranean.

Corporal Harry Heybyrne, Gordon's younger brother was also abroad, serving in North Africa and the letters he wrote home were a great comfort to his parents and often appeared in the Gazette. Harry was 23 years old and had been employed by the Bristol Co-operative Society before the war. He joined the Army in February 1940 and went abroad in November 1942 on the Torch Landings, with my father, Mervyn Jones. I'm sure they never met, but I really feel for Harry Heybyrne. My father came home, Harry did not. His already bereft parents were told that he had died in action on October 8<sup>th</sup> 1943.

Harry's final letters came from Sicily, but his parents believed that he might have been moved to Italy. The Gazette report gives us a clear picture of how many hearts had been touched by this remarkable young man's vivid letters, and I repeat the report in the issue of 13<sup>th</sup> November, 1943, below.

*Before the business of Mayor-making on Tuesday the Council stood in silent sympathy with Councillor and Mrs. Heybyrne in their loss.*

*By his [Harry's] death Weston-super-Mare has probably lost one who would have brought young, virile ideas into the council Chamber of the future.*

*It was not my privilege to have known him intimately [writes the columnist]. I knew him by sight only before the war, but in dealing with his letters, which have given our readers such a vivid, colourful picture of the North African and Sicilian scene, I have also come to know, to some extent, the writer, so that the news of his death has come to me, almost with the shock of a personal loss.*

*But my sense of loss must be infinitesimal compared with the loss suffered by Councillor and Mrs Heybyrne, who, by the death of the second son, have lost their whole family.*

*It will be some comfort to them to be able to lavish their affection upon their little grandchild, the son of Gordon, who died from his wound a few months ago.*

*Harry Heybyrne had a soul sensitive to beauty, allergic to cruelty in any form. He didn't like a soldier's life – few do- but because he felt it was his duty, he asked to be relieved of a 'cushy' office job in the army.....*

In August, Harry described Mount Etna, thus:

*'Mount Etna is towering over to our about a mile away but is actually She has been smoking rather more this afternoon clouds have been her scarred lips, casting shadows down her sides.'*



Fig 28. Mount Etna

*right. She looks about 10 miles. today and since draped across*

It is easy to allow ourselves to accept the death of so many young men of that generation – not to mention the previous one – as just names on a memorial tablet, but Harry Heybyrne was special. They were all special. We just did not know them well enough to realise that. I wonder if Harry foresaw his fate and wrote his wonderful letters so that people would remember that he was a whole person, not a name.

Anthony Eden announced that Empire casualties in the first three years of war were 92,089 killed, 226,719 missing, 88,294 wounded and 107,891 captured.

## 78. Signs of normality?

It does seem as if there was a growing belief in the population of Worle that there was a light at the end of the tunnel, and perhaps it was worth attempting to plan towards peace.

Early in June the youth club which met on Wednesdays started their outdoor summer activities on Day's field at Court Farm, used in peace time as the cricket pitch. The pitch was still playable and some practice was indulged in. There was even talk of the club running a junior eleven.

In July, having heard talk of cricket, there was a meeting of Worle Minors' Football Club at the Village Club in Mendip Avenue. It was decided that a team from Worle should join the Minor League for the season. A list of officials was published in the Mercury, as follows: secretary, Bert Skidmore; Treasurer, C. Knight; Captain, Bill Skidmore; Vice Captain, R. Burroughs. Matches, it was thought, would be played on the recreation ground, but there was no kit, so an appeal was put out, suggesting that any donors would really be supporting the future Worle Old Boys team. There must have been a good response since September saw the first match report in the local papers. The score was staggering: Worle Minors, 14; Claverham Lads 2. T. Hutchins scored 6 of Worle's goals, T. Pitt only managed 3, Eric Maggs appeared on the score card for the first time with 2 goals, Bert Skidmore, K. Burrows and Dennis Urch got 1 each. What a success.

Since the early days of the war sporting activities had been restricted, more from necessity than by restrictive measures. Ingenuity was called for, and it seemed sensible to use the still open countryside around the villages. The rhynes were pressed back into service that autumn for an activity known as 'rayballing'. This demanded bait in the form of balls of earthworms and string made of worsted. The object was to catch eels, cook them and eat them without using up precious points. It was, however, a complicated business. Firstly, baskets, supported by car tyres, were anchored out in the middle of the stream. Half a dozen anglers with rigid poles, often withy sticks, would rapidly pull the eels out before they could disentangle themselves from the worsted thread, and dump them unceremoniously in the basket, ready for cooking. This activity was only really successful at dusk, and it seems that thundery conditions were helpful. Gosh.

With the approach of Christmas, social activities were organised, and here the Civil Defence came into their own. The ARP Wardens for Worle had already set up a social committee and one Thursday in November, the Church Hall was pressed into service for one of the most successful and enjoyable socials ever held in the village. The hall was packed and they made much more money than expected for the Merchant Navy Emergency Kits. Splendid entertainment, all by people belonging to Worle, was a great surprise to the audience. Bessie and Eva Walford played handbells and musical glasses! Betty Fry sang; Joyce Brooks played her accordion; Ginger Raikes played the piano. On top of all this an amusing sketch, 'Oh Law' was presented by Harold Gooding, Mary Fry, Dorothy Wilson and Kathleen Huish.

## 79. Fond Farewells

The turn of the year is always a time for reflection, and the end of 1943 was no exception. Worle looked back solemnly on the loss of some old friends.

**Norman C. Moody** departed this world at the age of 62, at the end of July, following a rapid decline in health over the summer. Norman ran a grocery and provision business officially known as The Stores in Kewstoke Road. In reality, everyone called it Moody's and continued to do so following its sale to Mr R. W. Count of Dulverton. It was still known as Moody's well into the 1970s and remarkably is referred to as such until this day. Norman had bought the shop in 1911 from Albert Batt, but was forced to leave it in 1914 to fight for his country on the Eastern Front. This experience gave him an appreciation of the contribution of servicemen and he did invaluable work as a member of the local War Pensions Committee. He was also secretary of Worle Club. Perhaps his greatest peace and war time contribution to society was his work as a volunteer at Weston General Hospital, where he was appointed to the governing body. In his memory, the hospital flew the Union Flag at half-mast.

Summer 1943 was a season of a surprising number of goodbyes. The Mercury reported the death of F. F. **Swatridge** on 10<sup>th</sup> of June. Fred Swatridge had been the village constable from 1913 and is described as having 'a long period of service'. He

was involved in many aspects of life in Worle and was held in high esteem. The Harvest Home and the flower show were particular interests and he often won prizes. Luckily for a police officer, he was a chap of fine physique and exceptional strength, which he displayed as anchor man of the Weston Divisional Police Tug-o-war team. Following his retirement, Fred Swatridge settled in 'Talana', Kewstoke Road with his wife.

**Jimmy [James William] Lock** was on active service when his death was reported in July. Jimmy lived in Farm Road, Milton, but was a member of the choir at St. Martin's Church until he joined up. He had also been Treasurer of Worle Parish Savings Group, a task for which he was well qualified since he was an accountant in civilian life.

Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> July saw the untimely death of **Monica Ruth Corner** in Bath and Wessex Orthopaedic Hospital. Monica had lately been accepted into the membership of the Methodist Chapel in Lawrence Road, and it was there that her Funeral service was held.

The name Thyer is still well known in Worle, mainly because of the contribution to village life of **James Thyer**, The Cottage, Kewstoke Road. His death at the age of 81 was recorded in the Mercury as having occurred on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> October. James was a native of Worle and earned his living for many years as a dairyman. Eventually, he opened his shop in Kewstoke Road, opposite Moody's and augmented his income by gardening for Rev. Bentley, a former vicar of Worle. His son, William, had died in World War 1, and his daughter, Betty, also predeceased him, but 2 married daughters and his widow survived him.

**G. A. Holley**, a 59 year old father who lived at Glentworth in the High Street on the corner of Hill Road died on 25<sup>th</sup> October. He had been in poor health for some time and as a result had missed a trip to London in August in order to send a radio message to his younger son, William, who was stationed at Gibraltar. His other son, Tom took his father's place at the 'mike'.

The Mercury issued on 20<sup>th</sup> November carried more sad news. **Harry Mingay**, aged 53 of Pine Hill died in Weston Hospital on the previous Sunday. He had lived a full and active life. As a lad he joined the regular army and was a 'big drummer' in the regimental band of the 2nd Bedfordshires. On his discharge he went to the South Africa Mounted Police, but was recalled in August 1914 and went straight to France. In the first battle of Ypres on October 9<sup>th</sup> of the same year, he was severely wounded in the spine. He met and married a nurse from the National Hospital. He and Mrs Mingay had lived in Worle for over 20 years at the time of his death and his association with the Weston Music club, the Red Triangle Orchestra and the Victoria Brotherhood Orchestra gave him a full life, despite his incapacity.

**Reg Huish** was well known in Worle, and the report of his death in the Mercury, reflects this.

*'The funeral took place at Worle, on Tuesday of Sergt Air Gunner Reginald John Huish, youngest son of Mr and Mrs H. Huish of Crossways, Kewstoke Road, Worle, whose death occurred while on active service.*

*Sergt. Huish was well known in Worle and Weston, where, prior to joining the RAF in 1941, he was employed by the firm of Freeman, Hardy and Willis.*

*With his parents, he came from south Wales seven years ago to take up residence in a house near the stone quarry in Kewstoke Road, which his grandfather, the late Mr. William Huish, had owned.*

*He [Reg] took a keen interest in village activities and was a popular member of the Worle Young People's Club. As a player in the Weston Thursdays Football Team he showed himself an expert at Soccer and had he not volunteered for the RAF would have had a trial with a First Division club.*

*Sergt Huish took part in several operational flights after completing his training as a wireless operator-air gunner.'*

The list of people who attended his funeral, given in the paper, is too lengthy to be reproduced here, but does much to tell us how much he would be missed.

It was the Gazette that carried the story of the sad loss of **Mervyn Edwards**, after a long illness on December 4th. He was 19 years old and had lived with his parents at Laurel Farm, Worle. To add the family's troubles, his father and brother were both too unwell to attend his funeral which took place at Wick St. Lawrence, with Rev. Lutley officiating. The list of those who were able to say goodbye to Mervyn ran to a column of the paper and included many well-known Worle names and most of the cricket team, the New Inn skittlers and representatives from the Village club.

### **Son of Mendip**

One story of great interest locally was published in the Bath and Wiltshire Chronicle under the heading 'Who is He?' It concerned a coincidence from the Italian Front. A Bath officer was allocated a driver for his car from the Royal Army Service Corps. The driver was known to be a farmer's son from Worle. The officer wrote that this Unknown Soldier was 'a grand lad....an out and out son of Somerset. Nothing shakes him – he's as solid as the Mendips.'

This admirable young man was **Gordon Hicks**, son of John Hicks of Westwick. He was formerly employed at Garrett's Garage.

**1944**

## 80. Predictions unfulfilled

This final full year of the seemingly endless conflict began, as New Year's often do, with predictions which turned out to be misguided.

The most notable such prediction came in the Home Guard Notes in the Mercury of the first of January, headed 'A Backward Glance'. The paper does not attribute the column.

*"We have come to the close of another year and as Home Guardsmen can, with pardonable pride, look back and claim that we have carried out the duties assigned us with cheerfulness and competency. The fourth Christmastide since the formation of what is undoubtedly the most unique citizen army in the world finds us better trained, better equipped and in every way more ready to tackle the job expected of us. That in this coming, eventful year our responsibilities will be increased is a fact generally recognised and it is certain that in the final overthrow of the Hun, the H.G. will be called upon to take a vital part. It is up to every man-Jack of us to see that we are fully fitted to carry out our own particular task...."*

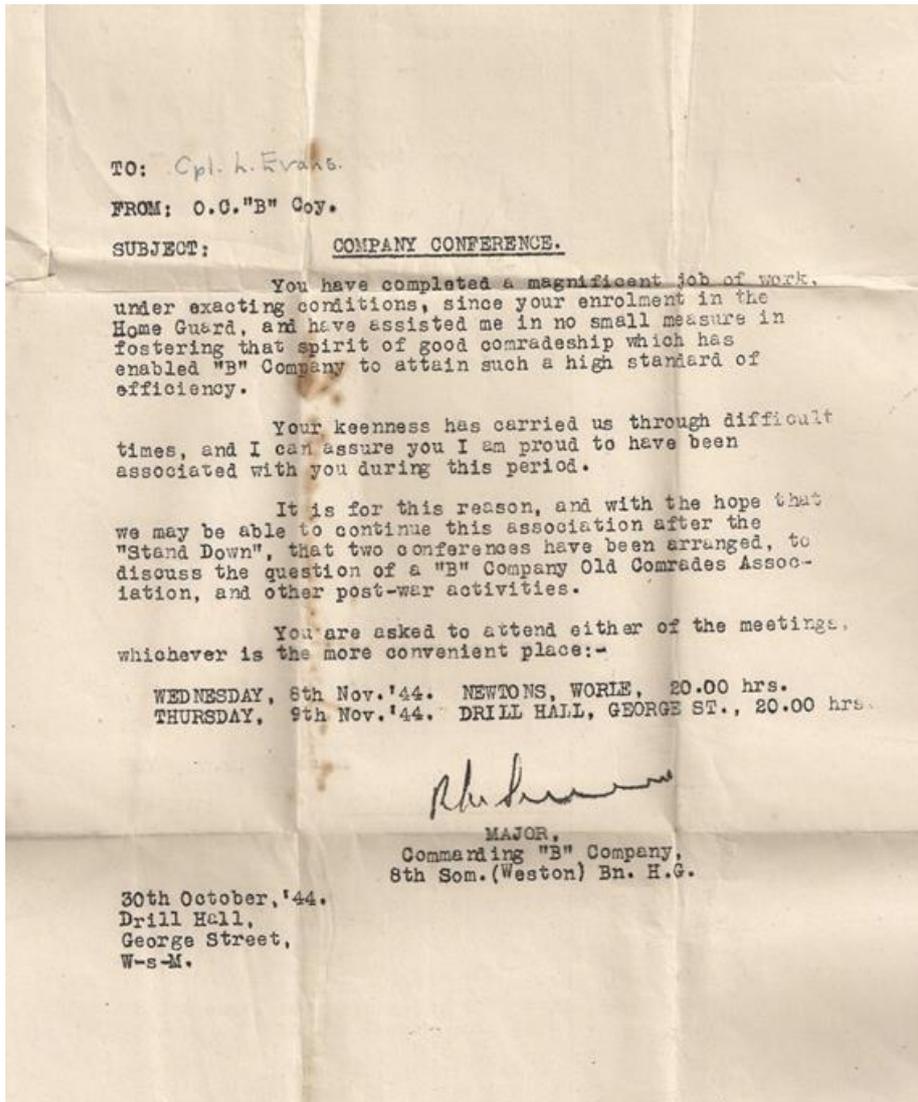
In fact, on a national level the Home Guard had already lost much of its sense of purpose and absenteeism was rife. Whether this experience applied to the local units, we do not know. It is unlikely that it would have been made public in any case. The stuttering but undeniable decline dragged on until October 1944, when the government announced that the Home Guard would stand down in November. There was no talk of medals or any other reward for services rendered, but following Churchill's intervention, the men were allowed to keep their battledress and their boots.

On Sunday, 3 December 1944, there was a farewell parade in Hyde Park. King George VI, the Home Guard's Colonel-in-Chief, declared: '*History will say that your share in the greatest of all our struggles for freedom was a vitally important one.*'

According to the BBC website: '*At its peak the force had numbered 1,793,000; 1,206 of its men had either been killed on duty or died from wounds, and 557 more sustained serious injuries. They had cost little, but contributed much. It was therefore meant sincerely when, 33 years later, on 13 November 1977 - Remembrance Sunday - the very last episode of 'Dad's Army' bowed out with a special toast: 'To Britain's Home Guard.'*

Locally, commanding officers set about the task of writing letters of appreciation to the men who would no longer have an active role in matters of war. One such letter [fig. 28] was received by **Llewellyn Evans**, whose son kindly allowed me to reproduce it here. It was written on 30<sup>th</sup> October, 1944 and allows us to understand the depth of feeling at the time and the determination to extend the new camaraderie beyond the coming victory celebrations. Many letters of the same ilk will have been proudly kept

in albums across the country. Of the conference at the Newtons on 8<sup>th</sup> November 1944, I have no reports.



There is, however, a lengthy report in the Mercury of 25<sup>th</sup> November of the Home Guards' Farewell Parade, which took place on 'The Recreation Ground, Weston-super-Mare' and was attended by over 2,000 men from all parts of the west country. "Well done! Carry On!" was the keynote of the day.

Back in January 1944, life in Worle was trundling along much as usual. Sporting fixtures and results began to feature more prominently in the papers and there was the normal flurry of bereavements.

**William Thorne** of 26 The Rows died in his prime at the age of 40. He was a sportsman, playing golf and billiards and would be sadly missed by colleagues at St. John Ambulance.

The sudden and mysterious death of **George Jackson** at the tender age of 18, shook the village. George had lived at Boscombe Villas, Greenwood Road and the report in the paper suggests that he had been on the sea front the previous evening. He was found dead in bed in the early hours and was apparently 'saturated' with sea water. A very sad set of circumstances, and dreadful for his poor parents. The inquest, reported at length on 5<sup>th</sup> February, revealed that George had died of Arsenic poisoning, but it was not possible to establish how the toxin had entered his system. His father told the coroner that George had been studying chemistry and often carried out experiments. No conclusive verdict could be reached, but the report implies that he was a young man without much direction in life and whose parents were rather anxious about him.

## 81. Savings Group Triumph

The savings group in the village had begun in July 1940 and owed a great deal of its success to Mr **Stephen Jones** of Fairfield House, High Street. He organised the group with considerable vigour and enthusiasm and motivated his team of collectors to such an extent that by January 1940 the cumulative savings had reached a total of £50,000. The Mercury carried the story and besides giving a list of collectors, speculated that the news might be mentioned on the BBC Home Service Sunday broadcast. There was much disappointment and annoyance when this did not come to fruition. By way of recompense, I think it is right to give the names here. Eleven of the original sixteen collectors were still in harness after four years, as follows: Miss Jewsbury, Mrs York, Mr G. E. Bradley, Mr George H. Parker, Mr D. C. Bergin, Miss Talbot, Mrs Midgley, Miss Chaplin, Mrs Mead, Miss Wilson and Mrs Tom Chapman. The group had 949 members who had saved regularly.

A week after the initial Mercury report a congratulatory airgraph was received from North Africa. It was sent by Mr Leslie Lane who earlier been secretary of the Savings committee in Weston. The report also mentioned that Mrs Tom Chapman collected nearly £8,000 in three and a half years. The first meeting had been held in a Worle schoolroom – sadly we do not know which school is referred to – and doubts were expressed about how people would react to street groups. By 1944 there can have been no doubt that the people of Worle responded to the initiative with zest.

**Captain A. E. Hewlett Burgess**, whose parents lived at the Nook, High Street, was reported wounded on active service in Burma. The injuries occurred during February. Captain Burgess was serving with the Sierra Leone Regiment. It was to be six months before his parents received a letter which told them he was fit and well again. His descriptive letter of the "Glamorous East" is most engaging:

*"...and then the leeches!!! Not just caterpillar size, but about three inches long and striped like a tabby cat! And do they suck blood!! I am usually fairly lucky – probably because I have hairy legs. Some people seem to have a tremendous attraction for them and get as many as a dozen at a time. It would amuse you to see us collecting bamboo shoots [the young suckers that come from the old*

*roots] and boiling them for 'chop'. Another thing that would amuse you is to see us when we start battling with the sand flies. Yet in spite of all these apparent hardships we still manage to keep fit and happy and we have plenty to laugh over – like me when I fell into the river for the sixth time in a day amid bubbles, froth and cursing!"*

I am constantly amazed at the literary capabilities displayed by the serving men when they write home. Hewlett Burgess had been well educated at Bristol Grammar School, I grant you, but this does not always lead to fluency on paper. Mr and Mrs Burgess must have been relieved and uplifted upon receipt of his epistle, trials or not.

**Cliff Knight**, caretaker at Worle Club in Mendip Avenue died on March 5<sup>th</sup>, he had been unwell for some time. He and his wife had been caretakers of the Club for several years, so that he was well known to everyone, especially the members. His skill at billiards, snooker and skittles was sadly missed by the club teams, and his funeral on the 16<sup>th</sup> March was attended by many folk who were seldom seen at St. Martin's Church. A rota of stewards was organised to help Mrs Knight with the care of the club for the duration of the war.

I wonder whether the bells were rung for Cliff. There had been considerable discussion, if not argument, that Spring about the bells. It seems that Kewstoke and Wick managed to ring regularly for services, but Worle was often silent. It was suggested that the calls of the Armed and Civil Defence forces had left Worle short of ringers, but someone described in the paper as 'a bell lover' investigated and found that '*Worle is no worse off for ringers than any of the neighbouring villages and it should be not trouble find a fairly regular six. It only requires a little initiative from the right quarter in order to set the bell going again.*' There we are then! When the bells rung again on Easter Sunday, the Mercury took the credit!

The bells must have been needed to say goodbye to Worle's oldest resident, Mrs **Hannah Webber** of Hampden Road. Hannah had been a widow for 23 years and had lived in Worle for over 70 years. She was 91 when she died.

In the 'heartless' 21<sup>st</sup> century we often think back to these times as full of community spirit and togetherness, but it wasn't so for 69 year old Thomas Marwood Bray of Chestnut Cottage in Lawrence Road. The poor man had little food and no fire and was in such despair that he attempted to take his own life. Rather than being given sympathy and help, he was taken to court and put through yet another ordeal. Some aspects of life have certainly come a long way since the war.

There was better news from abroad. Dennis and Gilbert Mee had grown up at 2 Newtons Cottages in Kewstoke Road. The brothers were both serving overseas when the younger, Gilbert [21], went down with malaria and was on sick leave. Dennis

organised some leave and the two were able to meet 'somewhere on the shores of the Mediterranean'. Good news for their anxious parents.

## **82. Len George and the Pigmies**

During the first World War, Len had left his home at 'West Lane', High Street, Worle to join the Royal Navy as a flight engineer with a balloon section. When it was obvious that another conflict was threatening, Len volunteered for the R.A.F. Volunteer Reserve. He was called up in August 1939 and had to leave behind the haulage business he had established. He was a man with a sense of humour. When he was called upon to explain why he had not gone back into the Navy he said, "As I was in the R.N.A.S. in the last war, I thought I'd give the Navy a miss this time, but after being in the R.A.F. for three days, I was turned over to the Fleet Air Arm –'Shanghaied' into the Fleet Air Arm, I called it."

As a result of his transfer to Fleet Air Arm, Len spent the following three or four years in East Africa, where he enjoyed the 'wonderful hospitality' of the people of Nairobi, which he said was only matched by the kindness of the people of Cape Town. During his time in Africa, and a spell in Ceylon [now Sri Lanka] he only came across one acquaintance from Worle – Henry Lane, brother of Ken Lane. Len and Henry spent an evening together reminiscing in a Nairobi canteen.

Len's most memorable experience was a safari in the Ituri Forest on the borders of Uganda and Belgian Congo. Sergeant George found the trip educational and entertaining. He spent 12 days in the company of 'quaint pigmy folk' and visited the vast game reserves in Kenya.

He was fortunate to stay in good health throughout his deployment whilst many of his colleagues went sick with tropical illnesses. The Mercury was sent to him regularly by his wife, and he read every word, advertisements and all, to keep in touch with home. When he had finished it, he passed to men from Bristol who knew Weston as a favourite holiday destination.

## **83. Smokes for Services**

Civil Defence activities were slowing down day by day, with the Home Guard disbanding and the ARPs not needing to display the same levels of vigilance required earlier in the war. However, they still made great efforts to contribute.

One activity arose from their desire to provide service men and women from Worle with extra cigarettes as a Christmas present. They organised whist drives to raise funds and pressed the Church Hall into service. The packages for the Far East had to be dispatched early and details of names and addresses abroad were needed. Mrs Hack,

who taught at the Junior School and lived in the school house, was one contact. The other was E. H. Raikie in the Chemist shop. Luckily, Bob Durston [Head Warden] had to foresight to save all sorts of memorabilia, and his son, John, passed some on to me. Thus, we are able to see how things were managed.

School House,  
Worle  
October 20<sup>th</sup> 1944

Dear Mrs Willcox,

would it be troubling you to send your husband's full address please, as I hope to despatch the order for Worle Prisoners of War cigarettes tomorrow? you will, I am sure, realize, I'm asking on behalf of "W" Group Wreacms.

With many thanks,  
I am,  
Yours faithfully,  
(Mrs) G.A. Hack.

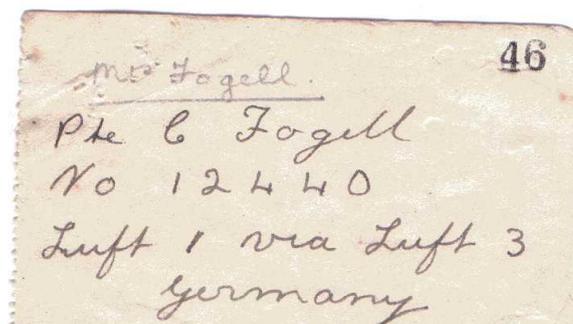
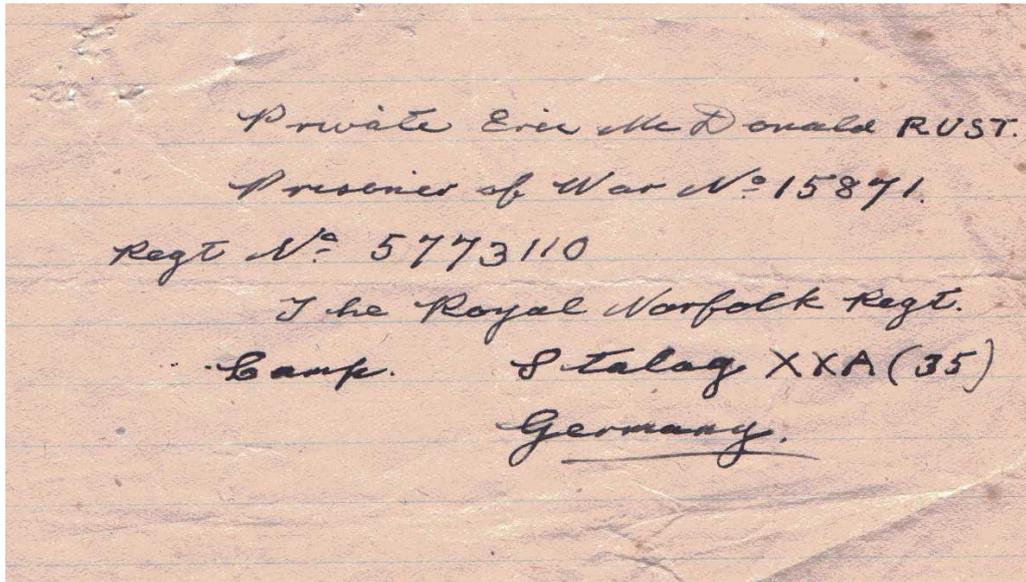
Above: Mrs Hack's letter from the School House to Mrs. Willcox at the Old King's Head

Mrs Willcox  
Old King's Head,  
Worle.

Sapper Percy Wilcox  
P.O.W. No 228155  
Stalag IV G.  
Germany.

Above: Mrs Willcox's reply on the reverse of the same paper [waste not, want not], gives the address for Sapper Percy Wilcox, P.O.W. No 228155, Stalag IV G.

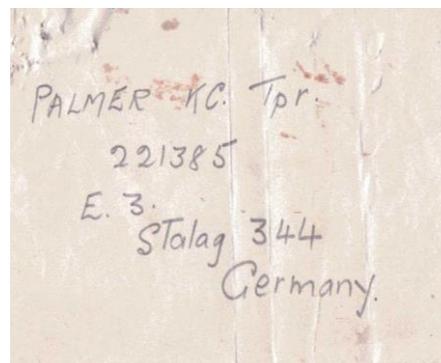
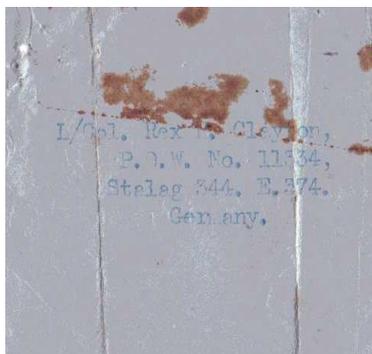
Below: Reply from parent of Pte Eric Donald Rust, P.O.W. No 15871, Royal Norfolk Regiment, Camp Stalag XXA [35], Germany.



Above: Reply from family of Pte C. Fogell, P.O.W. No. 12440, Luft 1, via Luft 3, Germany

Below left: Reply from family of L/Cpl. Rex Clayton. P.O.W. 11334, Stalag 344E. 374, Germany. [See Worle at War, The Home Front 1939-1941, pages 135 and 152]

Below right: Reply from family of Tpr, K. C. Palmer, P.O.W. No. 221385. E3 Stalag 344, Germany



I think we can assume that at least these 5 received their Christmas presents in time. Well done the ARPs.

## 84. Welcome Home Fund

With the end of the war seeming more and more imminent, it was time to start planning for the forces returning home, so on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1944 it was back to the good old Church Hall, with Rev. May as chairman, to make decisions. The committee would have the job of raising £2,000 for gifts of £10 each for the men and women of the parish returning to Worle. The meeting took three hours with Rev. May leading the way with a rousing speech when he said, *“We want to show our appreciation of those who have gone into the Forces, and Worle people ought to be willing to give handsomely.”*

**Mr. C. D. Lock** was appointed Secretary and he told the meeting what had already been organised. A General Committee and a Finance Committee had been formed and **W. R. Durston** had been asked to head an entertainments committee. It was also considered essential to secure exemption for the fund under the War Charities Act.

One very thorny question was the issue of who would be eligible for gifts. Many folk had preconceived ideas about this, but in the end they decided, rather sensibly on the following list:

1. A householder or parishioner of Worle at the time of joining up, and who returns to the village.
2. An unmarried person who has no permanent home of his or her own and whose parents were permanent residents of the village at the time of his or her calling up.
3. The next of kin of deceased persons who would have been eligible had they survived
4. Any person not covered by the fore-going shall have the right of appeal to the Finance Committee.
5. The fund should include anyone in the Armed Forces and Auxiliaries, Merchant Navy and Red Cross nurses and N.A.A.F.I personnel serving overseas.

The Church Hall had been requisitioned earlier in the war and could only be used for village, civilian functions with special permission, and in any case no longer had a music and dancing licence, which was causing considerable annoyance. It had even been suggested that the money raised might be better used towards the building of a new hall for general enjoyment. Rev. May agreed to hold a meeting of the Church Council to discuss reclaiming the hall, and agreed that in the meantime he would contact the Police to try to negotiate a relaxation of the rules. Someone was obviously successful in persuading the authorities to allow a fund raising effort to take place in the Church Hall. The Mercury published on December 9<sup>th</sup> 1944 tells us that over £300 had been collected and the collection rounds were not yet finished. The Church Council ‘acceded to the wishes expressed at the meeting of parishioners’. They granted the use of the hall for nine functions, as long as they were held before February 13<sup>th</sup> – the eve of Lent. Three whist drives, three concerts and three dances were hastily organised, and the money rolled in.

**1945**

## 85. The End in sight

There was a quiet period for the six weeks of Lent, but the Mercury of 28<sup>th</sup> April, 1945 published the picture below. Fig. 36 shows the fancy dress competition and dance in aid of the Welcome Home fund. It was accompanied by the following comments:

*'Visitors to Worle this week would have been astounded to find the inhabitants wearing costumes of all periods and nationalities. Recovering from their surprise they would have discovered the reason was wholehearted response to a Fancy Dress competition and dance in aid of Worle's 'Welcome Home Fund'. Our cameraman rounded up some of the competitors for this group picture.'*



Throughout the early months of 1945, the planning for peace went on. The men of the now disbanded Home Guard put on a New Year Party at the Church hall, and what a party. It lasted six hours. Musical games and 'frolics for the children and N.C.O.s' were followed by Mysteries from the East and West by Sing Hi and Ali Cassim Baba. The mind boggles. All this and games, puzzles and competitions for all children between 4 and 82. Then there was dancing and refreshments, which according to the spoof menu included: roast pheasant, ducks and geese, oysters, birds' nest and honey, beef, venison and horse, vodka and caviar and Olde English Ale. 'O yeah' was printed at the foot of the menu!

There were weddings of course, too many to mention, men being welcomed home on disembarkation leave, arguments about supplies for the fish and chip shop in Hill Road, and all the day to day happenings that are such a comfort.

- The papers carried lengthy, rather tedious reports of extraordinary allegations that 'evil thoughts' and mesmerism were rife in St. Georges. Amazing.
- People died their natural deaths at their allotted time, others came into the world.
- The people of Worle counted up their wartime savings, all £69,759.10s.6d of it.
- The guides put on a concert for 250 guests to raise money for the Red Cross Prisoners of War Fund.
- Oak Cottage, [the thatched one in Ebdon Road, now divided into Magnolia Cottage and Oak Lea Cottage] was sold for £4,650 at an auction in the Royal Hotel.
- There was talk of the Girls' club moving to the Senior School hall.
- Mr Griffin retired from the cycle shop, which was taken over by Reg Weadon.

Families were still beset with news of missing loved ones, like Sgt. Charles Henry Bartlett of the RAF. The hope in the hearts of the people of Worle and the World was often veiled with tears for the hopeless carnage of it all, but there was hope, and in early May it was suddenly justified. Hitler took his own life, Germany surrendered and it was over.

We can see in grateful, weary faces what a trial it had been and how much suffering had been inflicted, but over it was and Worle, with the rest of world, breathed easier and arranged street parties. The pictures on the following pages were given by the offspring and relations of the wonderful generation who got through it all, and after the pictures there is one more story which is designed to give us all a glow of thankfulness.



V.E. Day Street Party in Greenwood Road





The celebrations in Greenwood Road went on all night, thanks to the chap with his back to the camera on the previous page. Mr. Percy Bennett put loud speakers up on a pole for dancing. The leather from the soles of the dancers' shoes coloured the road brown by the next morning.

The people in the Radio shop, which was next to Porter's green grocery and fish store, put up an amplifier in the Church Hall for Old Time Dancing.

There were so many parties that only 4 girls turned up for Brownies, much to the chagrin of Nora Jefferies.



The children's tea at Hill End.  
It would be good to name as many as possible.

The adults at Hill End





Above: VE Day at Neathway's, Worle High Street  
Below: Party in the playground at the Infants' School, Mendip Avenue





Above: V. J. Day, God Save the King and fancy dress



Above. Victory in Japan celebrations at Neathway's in Worle High Street.



Above: At last, tea is served in the front garden at Neathways, with Greenwood Cottages in the background



## 86. Ken Lane, before, during and after the war.

Ken Lane was a lad from Coronation Road. His name had a habit of appearing in the paper, for all the right reasons, from a young age. The first mention was in May 1939, when peace was still being waged with Germany. At the time Ken was a regular player for Weston Town Football Club and he was chosen to be among a party from the YMCA to tour Denmark. His talent didn't go unnoticed locally, either. In August the paper was again congratulating him. Bristol City FC had spotted him at a trial game on August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1939 and immediately offered him a contract for the coming season. The timing, of course, meant that Ken could never take up the offer. Instead he went into the R.A.F. and was sent to Canada, where he was trained as a pilot. The Mercury and the Parish Magazine both carried the story, with Rev. May writing, 'Well done, Ken. Happy and safe trips.'



Warrant Officer Kenneth Albert Lane, R.A.F., took the headlines in the Gazette of 20<sup>th</sup> May, 1944, when he was awarded the D.F.C. for 'great skill, courage and devotion to duty' during an attack on Munich. Ken was the pilot of the aircraft and the official citation described a night raid that took place in April of the same year. The plane had been illuminated by several searchlights as it approached the target and was subjected to heavy fire from ground defences.

*'The starboard inside engine was hit by shrapnel and caught fire. Soon afterwards the second engine was hit and burst into flames. Undeterred, Warrant Officer Lane continued his bombing run and pressed home his attack. Afterwards the flames in the burning engines were extinguished, and course was set for home with the two engines out of action.'*

The citation goes on to describe how a third engine was lost, but Ken flew the plane back safely, at very low altitude.

Any pride or relief felt by his family in Coronation Road was short lived. Within a week, on the eve of his planned wedding day, Ken was reported missing. His fiancée, Sylvia Phillips, and his family must have been distraught. We can only try to imagine how they felt that summer. There must have been relief and disbelief when it was confirmed by the War Office that Ken was a prisoner of war, and safe and well in German hands. Soon afterwards a card arrived from him saying 'I had a miraculous escape', and from another source his mother found out that a member of his crew had sustained a broken leg.

All went quiet for almost a year, and then on Monday 28<sup>th</sup> May, 1945 at 3.30, the news arrived that Ken had been freed and would be home within the hour!!! Within that time, the village had 'Welcome Home, Ken' signs at the bottom of Coronation Road. Ken got off the train at Milton Halt and ran to Sylvia's home in Locking Road East. Much later, when it was tipping with rain, Ken emerged and was driven home. Crowds were waiting for him and dragged him from the car. He was escorted up the hill to 'Church View', the family home.

Just over a month later, on 7<sup>th</sup> July the following report was avidly read by the whole village.

***Flying Officer-Footballer Weds***

*There was a large attendance at St. Martin's church for the wedding of Flying Officer Kenneth Lane D.F.C., second son of Mrs. Lane, 'Church View' and the late Mr. A. Lane, to Miss Sylvia Phillips, second daughter of Mr. and Mrs. W. J. Phillips, 'Sherwood', Locking Road East, Weston-super-Mare.*

*The ceremony was arranged to take place a year ago, but on the wedding day eve the bridegroom had to make a parachute landing when the aircraft he was piloting on a bombing mission was set on fire over Germany. F/O Lane who has played Soccer for Somerset, recently returned from a prisoner-of-war camp.*

*The best man was Flight Sergeant Raymond, a member of his air crew, who also became a prisoner, while one of the ushers was Cpl George Geeve, son of Councillor C. Geeve of Weston-super-Mare, who was in the same German camp.*

*Rev. F. May, [vicar] officiated and Mr. S. Gibbins was organist.*

*Given away by her father, the bride wore heavy white broche, with Juliet cap and veil. She carried a shower bouquet of dark red carnations. Mrs F. Wilson, [sister of the bride] was matron of honour and Miss M. Lane [sister of the groom] was bridesmaid. They wore blue silk marocain, with gloves and head-dresses of pink veils with feathers. Their bouquets were of pink carnations. Groomsmen were Messrs F. Wilson and M. Davey.*

*A reception was held at the Church Hall. When the couple left for their honeymoon in London, the bride wore a grey costume with navy accessories.*

Ken had been a plumber before the war, and on his return became a stalwart of local sports teams, both for cricket and football. He would never talk about his D.F.C. or why he was awarded it. He was just glad to be home, safe and with his beloved Sylvia. How many men and women were sharing that feeling and revelling in peace?

C'est la vie, comme la guerre.

### **Published Sources**

<i>Britain at War</i>	Maureen Hill	Paragon 2008
<i>Together We Stand</i>	James Holland	Harper-Collins 2006
<i>Somerset v. Hitler</i>	Donald Brown	Countryside Books 1999
<i>Penguin Dictionary of The 20<sup>th</sup> century</i>	Alan Palmer	Penguin Books 1979
<i>Chronology of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century</i>	Philip Waller & John Rowett	Helicon 1995
<i>Weston super Mare Gazette</i>		1939 – 1941
<i>Weston Mercury &amp; Somersetshire Herald</i>		1939-1941
<i>History of Civil Defence [WsM Area]</i>	John Hodsoll	1945
<i>The Good Earth</i>	Gillian Moore	1999
<i>Milton and Old Worle</i>	Stan Terrell	2003

### **Other Sources**

<i>Worle Cricket Club Minutes</i>	1939 -1941
<i>Worle Old Boys Football Club programmes</i>	1939- 1940
<i>Worle Parish Baptism, Wedding and Burial records</i>	1939-1941
<i>St. Martin's Church Vestry and Parochial Church meeting minutes</i>	1939-1941
<i>St Martin Bellringers minutes</i>	1939-1941
<i>Worle Infant's School headteacher's log and registers</i>	
<i>Worle Junior Voluntary Controlled school log and registers</i>	
<i>Worle Senior School 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Book</i>	
<i>First Worle Brownie Pack log book and register</i>	
<i>Personal Diaries from the time</i>	

### **Oral Sources: Interviews**

*Peter Snook, Beryl Green, Glyn Boobyer, Reg Barr, Jenny Gosden, John and June Beacham, Sam Cox, Lyn Harper, Johnny Tucker, Eric Maggs, Elsie Bishop, Julian and Michael Fussell, Nora Jefferies, June Charles, the family and friends of Worle Home Guard, Muriel Skidmore, Ann Baber, Irene Kinsey, Eric Moore, Mary Gould, members of Worle History Society and many other*