

# Wartime West Sussex 1939 – 1945

## CANADIANS

### Horsham girls befriend Canadians

From *Memories from a town that disappeared, Horsham during World War II* (Horsham Museum, 1989)

By Mrs V. Honey

There were six of us special friends, and we used to cycle out to Southwater village Hall after our 'Health and Beauty' class, to pack into the Hall for dancing. What fun it was – the music was often supplied by Peggy Head (of the well-known head family of Horsham) and the hall would be bursting at the seams. We also were taken often in an army truck to one of the camps – Farlington, Warnham, Denne Park or Langhurst, for an evening of dancing, and then we would all come back home together, discussing the various chaps we had met and danced with.

After D-day, the Base Hospital in Crawley Road was filled with Canadian soldiers who had been wounded in the invasion, so we now turned our attention there and 'adopted' a lad – we would go and visit them and sit and talk to them. I had a 'Bill' from Vancouver, and would go up to the hospital every night for an hour to sit and chat. I wrote to his mother, as I thought she would like to have first hand news of her son – and this led to a lasting friendship. She sent us food parcels, and after the war was over, she came to England and stayed with us (I had married by now) and later, when she could not make the journey, she sent me a ticket to go over and see her and Bill in Vancouver. Even now I write to Bill each Christmas to tell him the news of Horsham.....

Although the town was blacked out, none of us girls ever had any difficulty in going to and from the canteen at nights: in fact, we could walk around anywhere with no fear whatsoever. None of us got seriously involved with anyone we met at the dances, but I like to think we cheered them up momentarily. I often took them home for a quiet sit down and a chat with my parents – and would look at their family photos of wives and children.

By Mrs S. Standing, Horsham

Most people lost relatives, and all young men from 17-35 were in the forces. The town was the headquarters of a tank brigade (Canadian), and the only traffic was made up of army convoys of huge lorries and tanks – these tore the surface of the road.

We had only bikes and buses, and as pumps, lights and batteries were like gold dust, cinema goers took all the lights and pump into the cinema with them, otherwise they would vanish in the darkness of the blackout. Many bikes were 'borrowed' by the soldiers.

Social life was hectic, we not only worked long hours, but went out several nights a week; to cinemas and several good dances every week, as well as army camp dances, with unlimited young men, girls became engaged and married, mostly to Canadians but also to Polish paratroopers who were training at Warnham Court. The only Englishmen were the unfit, and those in a reserved occupation.

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