

Wartime West Sussex 1939 - 1945 ON THE HOME FRONT - DAILY LIFE

Remembering wartime in Horsham

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

By Mrs S. Glaysher

One of my earliest wartime memories was of having to try on a gas mask – I was frankly terrified, and thought that I would not be able to breathe properly. We had to carry them everywhere with us, and each week had a gas mask drill at school, when every child had to try on their mask, breathe in and out a few times and then remove them. Some of the boys quickly learnt how to use their masks to make odd noises, causing great annoyance to the teachers.

Almost overnight brick air raid shelters appeared in each street and these gave rise to a new form of ball game - 'two ball'. This was played by the girls who would devise different combinations of throwing the balls against the wall and catching them, underthrow, overthrow, bouncing them between throws and even one-handed throws. The boys found the air raid shelters very useful for chalking cricket stumps on, thus enabling an improvised game to be played with one batsman, no wicket keeper, but numerous fielders! I don't recall anyone owning a proper cricket bat, but any piece of wood with a handle served the purpose. Street games were popular, there being no cars in our road at that time. The only traffic to pass along it would be trades vans, and bicycles ridden to work in the morning and home again in the evening. All the young men had joined the forces, and so we only saw older men or those engaged in war work. Many homes had airmen billeted on them from Faygate or Gatwick aerodromes, and these men were collected in long trailers each morning and returned home again at night. I added to my weekly sweet ration by cleaning 'our airman's' buttons for him! At Christmas all the children were taken to a party at Faygate, and received a gift from the huge tree. Later in the war Canadian soldiers were camped on Denne Hill and the town's children were again entertained, this time in the Drill Hall in Denne Road.....

Nothing was wasted during wartime. Our fathers used every part of the back garden for vegetable growing, and many people planted cabbages and potatoes in the front gardens as well. Every type of fruit was gathered for jam making – blackberries, crab apples, even rose hips, which made a nutritious jelly. All waste vegetable peelings were placed in a swill can with a lid, and once a week Mr. Smith, the pig man, came with an evil-smelling truck to collect the swill, which he fed to his pigs. I think he kept them on an area known as 'New Town', in the area behind the Tanners Arms and what is now Kennedy Road...

In the holidays we played in one another's gardens, made camps, played ball games, organised races and sports, performed concerts – when all the mums would leave their household chores for an hour, and come and sit on some neighbour's lawn or doorstep while their own often untalented, but enthusiastic, children would sing, dance, recite poetry or perform made up plays, and afterwards take a collection of 1d a head for the Red Cross or some other deserving cause.

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