

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

## Remembering wartime in Plaistow

By Frank Cooper

All the windows of the houses were blacked out, so that at night no lights were visible. My father was an A.R.P. Warden, and was responsible for seeing that people complied with this law. Which was rather funny because once he was making a blackout frame for our house and it was getting dark, so he lit some candles and paraffin lamps to see what he was doing. Unfortunately he forgot that the lights were shining through the windows, and within a few minutes another A.R.P. Warden shouted: 'Put those--- lights out!'

All the children were supplied with gas masks and had to carry them everywhere they went. There were three types of masks: Adults' masks, ones they called Mickey Mouse masks for children, and for babies the masks were rather like a cradle with a Perspex facepiece, which had to be pumped, using the pump attached to the side, every so many minutes, so that the baby inside could breathe. Unfortunately my mother had twins, so this meant she was supplied with two of these contraptions. Don't ask me how she would have coped with pumping two pumps had the occasion arisen! Fortunately, gas was not a problem here.

All the school windows were taped up to stop shattered glass flying. Every morning the schoolchildren would have a half-hour's rest, which meant resting your head on your hands on your desk and sleeping if you so wished. This was because if you did not get much sleep at night with all the action in the air. There were quite a few bombs that fell around the area.

We were able to watch 'dog' fights in the sky – this is when the German and British aircraft met in the sky over our village. I don't think we children realised how serious it was, and we quite enjoyed the show....

We children collected acorns for the Forestry Commission to plant and grow. We also picked rose-hips to make rose-hip syrup.

As the War dragged on we could see the sky at night, looking in the direction of London, glowing red with the fires burning after intense bombing, and this happened night after night. Being a small village in the South of England, Plaistow is in line with London, and later on in the War, V1 and V2 weapons were used which became quite frequent overhead here. The V1 was a jet-propelled flying bomb, commonly known a 'doodle-bug'. It would fly over, and when the engine cut out it would crash to the ground and explode.

The V2, which was rocket-propelled, made very little noise and this missile crashed on England with devastating effect.

Life carried on, and we children played as normal, down in the woods we would collect nuts and dig for pig-nuts, build camps out of hazel benders and ferns. We were allowed 20 half-days from school to help on the local farms, potato picking, swede pulling, kale cutting and any other jobs that we were able to do. We did cheat a bit. The farmer signed a card for the half-days we had done, and if he signed the card in pencil, we could rub it out and so have a few extra half-days off. The farmer did not mind – he was getting free labour. This was to help the war effort.

On the eve of D-Day we watched hundreds of aircraft towing gliders towards the coast and the sky looking westwards was black with aircraft.

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