

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

Remembering wartime in Storrington

My Memories of Wartime Storrington 1939–1945

by Eric Hues

My memories of Storrington during the second world war are only for about the first 18 months because I left the village at the age of 17 and came back in my 20s.

The first air raid warning was a false alarm, it was on a Sunday morning in September 1939. I remember it was because I was in the choir at the time.

At 16 I joined the A.R.P. as a dispatch rider. I used my new motor bike which was a Royal Enfield and had several call outs. The A.R.P. H/Q was where the R.A.F. Association is now. Petrol was rationed for pleasure at the time and later stopped completely. You could only get petrol for essential services.

The village itself didn't suffer too much war damage. The only thing I can recall is a bungalow in Nightingale Lane, owned by Mr & Mrs Lanceley being demolished by a bomb, but they survived.

During the Battle of Britain several German planes were shot down over the South Downs and surrounding areas. We used to try and collect souvenirs but were always caught out.



Also on the downs was a broken down Canadian Tank which was used for target practice but was never recovered. The tank still remains on the downs above Kithurst.

There were various army camps. One at Barns Farm which was a searchlight unit and later Canadian Troops were stationed there. Also they were stationed at Fryern Hall and Sandgate House and Parham Park. Fryern and Sandgate houses have now been demolished. Also at Monkmead Lane, West Chiltington, Polish soldiers camped in the woods. Then after the war several local girls were married to them. Also there was a Polish Air Force Squadron stationed at Coolham air field which included Spitfires. These pilots shot down many enemy aircraft.

Mulberry House in the square was the food office where people collected their ration books etc. It is now offices and Estate Agents.

The owner of the Corner Garage which is now Tesco, was Mr Ralph Sagger who joined the Navy and was involved in making the Mulberry Harbour which was towed across the Channel to France and used on the beaches on D Day for unloading supplies, vehicles etc. My father, who was in the first World War, was manager of the Corner Garage so was responsible for maintaining tractors and implements to keep the farm industry in good working order. This included local delivery vans. When the war first started, Storrington didn't have an air raid siren, so my father, with some help, made up a whistle off the garage compressor but it was only used once. You could only get petrol from certain garages and our local supplier was at Washington. The reason for this was if we had had an invasion, it would have been easier to demolish a few garages rather than many.

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



The shops and businesses carried on as usual. Women used to drive the delivery vans. Some local girls became Land Army Girls working on local farms doing the jobs that the men who had joined the forces used to do, like delivering milk and harvesting.

At the start of the war it was mostly horses still working on the farms. During the war the government allowed 1 extra hour's light which was known as double summer time to help with the harvesting etc.



Mary Farhall drives a horse-drawn cart

The fire station then was a wooden building opposite Bunces the ironmongers. The vehicles they had then was a Dennis and an old 1927 Fiat with solid tyres, which was pensioned off when they got a Green Goddess appliance.



Fire engines at the fire station

A.F.S. volunteer firemen and firewomen



We also had a Red Cross Ambulance. The Special Constables headquarters was at School Hill Garage & also there were A.R.P. wardens. In all, the village was very well supported.

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

Fire chief C. Mant (c front) with A.F.S. telephone operators L-R G. Blackwell, Mrs Mant, A. Powell, and A. Marking



Volunteer firemen Fred Hearn in overalls and uniform

One more little bit of interest is a gentleman called Mr George More had a workshop in North Street where he used to make wooden boxes for shells and ammunitions, this is now houses and flats.

For a short time during the war, School Hill Garage was used by the army for a vehicle workshop. After they moved out, it was used to store airplane spares. After the war it was reopened as a garage and then later taken over by my father and myself until it was demolished in 1979 to make way for the precinct.

Before I left the village, I joined the Home Guard. Their headquarters at that time were held in the Cloisters at the monastery. Many local families, including Parham House, took in evacuees.

My mother had a lucky escape. She was walking along the pavement by the White Horse Hotel, when a convoy of Canadian Bren Gun Carriers came through the village too fast. One of the drivers lost control, mounted the pavement and dragged her along under one of the trucks. Luckily for her, Dr. Hardy happened to be driving through the village. His quick action and skill saved her life. She lived to the ripe old age of 94.

Another incident that happened was a Canadian Dispatch rider came down the Amberley Road, straight across the road junction into the gate post of Holly Cottage, which is now Holly Court and was killed outright.



One thing I would like to mention is that 3 of my school mates lost their lives. Norman Stockes a 16 year old boy seaman 1st Class, went down on HMS Hood; Mick Funnell, R.A.F. Flight Sgt air gunner, sadly crashed in this country just after the war; Fred Guill, Private R.A.S.C. was killed in South Africa.

That's what I can remember.

Like the rest of my generation I left the village to work on spitfires and bomber engines at Southampton Airport, then I joined the Army and ended up in Egypt.

Eric Hues in army uniform