A Shared Moment of Celebration



80th Anniversary of VE Day
8th May 1945

Some War Memories from Stoneleigh and Ashow

Stoneleigh History Society

2025

World War II and VE Day in Stoneleigh and Ashow

1939 - 1945

This booklet has come about through research, mainly using newspaper articles, to put together a show on Saturday 10th May 2025, in St. Mary the Virgin Church, Stoneleigh, to commemorate the 80th anniversary of VE Day.

The script was written by Sheila Woolf, Chair of the Stoneleigh History Society, and it was performed by members of the Society.

Philip Jones of the Stoneleigh Male Voice Choir contributed songs from the era to reflect the mood of the country at the time.

Residents past and present kindly recorded their memories or family stories of World War II. Not all the memories are of Stoneleigh and Ashow, but they give an idea of what was happening around the country and beyond.

The script, songs and poetry were enhanced by pictures, and additional material was included in this booklet by Lisa Reay, a researcher for Stoneleigh History Society.

There was also an exhibition of some wonderful artwork created by Mel Bianco.

The Church was also beautifully decorated by Mandy Freeman and her talented team of flower arrangers. Thank you to everyone involved for making this Moment of Celebration such a memorable occasion, which started with the bells being rung at 6:30pm on Thursday 8 May, as they did across the rest of the country. Additionally, the bells were rung on Friday, 15 August, in observance of VJ Day.



Photo courtesy of Mandy Freeman

World War II and VE Day in Stoneleigh and Ashow
1939 - 1945

We shall be celebrating and commemorating the eightieth anniversary of the second world war.

May 8, 1945.

Broadcast, London, and House of Commons

German armed forces surrendered unconditionally on May 7. Hostilities in Europe ended officially at midnight, May 8. 1945.

Yesterday morning at 2:41 a.m. at Headquarters, General Jodl, the representative of the German High Command, and Grand Admiral Doenitz, the designated head of the German State, signed the act of unconditional surrender of all German Land, sea, and air forces in Europe to the Allied Expeditionary Force, and simultaneously to the Soviet High Command.

General Bedell Smith, Chief of Staff of the Allied Expeditionary Force, and General Francois Sevez signed the document on behalf of the Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force, and General Susloparov signed on behalf of the Russian High Command.

To-day this agreement will be ratified and confirmed at Berlin, where Air Chief Marshal Tedder, Deputy Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force, and General de Lattre de Tassigny will sign on behalf of General Eisenhower. Marshal Zhukov will sign on behalf of the Soviet High Command. The German representatives will be Field-Marshal Keitel, Chief of the High Command, and the Commanders-in- Chief of the German Army, Navy, and Air Forces.

Hostilities will end officially at one minute after midnight to-night (Tuesday, May 8), but in the interests of saving lives the "Cease fire" began yesterday to be sounded all along the front, and our dear Channel Islands are also to be freed to-day.

The Germans are still in places resisting the Russian troops, but should they continue to do so after midnight they will, of course, deprive themselves of the protection of the laws of war, and will be attacked from all quarters by the Allied troops. It is not surprising that on such long fronts and in the existing disorder of the enemy the orders of the German High Command

should not in every case be obeyed immediately. This does not, in our opinion, with the best military advice at our disposal, constitute any reason for withholding from the nation the facts communicated to us by General Eisenhower of the unconditional surrender already signed at Rheims, nor should it prevent us from celebrating to-day and to-morrow (Wednesday) as Victory in Europe days.

To-day, perhaps, we shall think mostly of ourselves. To-morrow we shall pay a particular tribute to our Russian comrades, whose prowess in the field has been one of the grand contributions to the general victory.

The German war is therefore at an end. After years of intense preparation, Germany hurled herself in Poland at the beginning of September 1939; and, in pursuance of our guarantee to Poland and in agreement with the French Republic, Great Britain, the British Empire and Commonwealth of Nations, declared war upon this foul aggression. After gallant France had been struck down, we, from this Island and from our united Empire, maintained the struggle single-handed for a whole year until we were joined by the military might of Soviet Russia, and later by the overwhelming power and resources of the United States of America.

Finally, almost the whole world was combined against the evildoers, who are now prostrate before us. Our gratitude to our splendid Allies goes forth from all our hearts in this Island and throughout the British Empire.

We may allow ourselves a brief period of rejoicing; but let us not forget for a moment the toil and efforts that lie ahead. Japan, with all her treachery and greed, remains unsubdued. The injury she has inflicted on Great Britain, the United States, and other countries, and her detestable cruelties, call for justice and retribution. We must now devote all our strength and resources to the completion of our task, both at home and abroad. Advance, Britannia! Long live the cause of freedom! God save the King!



World War II and VE Day in Stoneleigh and Ashow
1939 - 1945

We all know, if only from our parents' or grandparents' stories, what a moment that was, when it seemed that five long years of hardship were over, and normal life could begin again. But let us not forget those families who had less cause than others to be joyful, as they were grieving the loss of their loved ones.

We start by remembering those local young men who paid the ultimate price. It is a solemn beginning, after which we shall be delving into some of the lighter moments from life in Stoneleigh and Ashow during those long war years.



Photo courtesy of Douglas Faulconbridge

I VOW TO THEE MY COUNTRY

I vow to thee my country all earthly things above
Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love
The love that asks no questions, the love that stands the test
That lays upon the altar the dearest and the best
The love that never falters, the love that pays the price
The love that makes undaunted the final sacrifice.

And there's another country I've heard of long ago
Most dear to them that love her, most great to them that know
We may not count her armies, we may not see her King
Her fortress is a faithful heart, her pride is suffering
And soul by soul and silently her shining bounds increase
And her ways are ways of gentleness and all her paths are peace.



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Humphrey Desmond Cooke 26 June 1942
Wing Commander, 206 Squadron,
Royal Air Force. Service Number: 37062

Humphrey was born on 18 January 1914, the second son of Stoneleigh's vicar, the Reverend Herbert Cooke. He was educated at Shrewsbury, and in the summer of 1938 was married. He and his wife Maureen had a daughter, Sally, born in summer 1939. He had served in the RAF since January 1935, training in Egypt, and then flew Spitfires and Hurricanes as part of Training Command in England. Initially reported missing in air operations over Germany, Humphrey was killed in action over Bremen on 25 June 1942. His squadron was part of Coastal Command, working in co-operation with Bomber Command. On that night they took part in the attack on the city of Bremen, carried out by a thousand bombers from all the combatant commands. Their Hudson aircraft flew in four formations of three aircraft each. Owing to heavy cloud it was impossible to locate the special target allotted, which was a U-boat building yard. The first aircraft was badly damaged by anti-aircraft fire, landing at Base with its main spar broken. The second and third failed to return. The Squadron Commander, Wing Commander Cooke, was on the second aircraft; it was his first operational flight with the Squadron.







Geoffrey Lee 31 August 1943
Sergeant, 102 Squadron
Royal Air Force Service number: 921759

Geoffrey Lee was born in Ashow in 1920, the youngest child of Mabel and Frederick Lee, an architect who designed many of Leamington's buildings and who became Chairman of Warwick Rural District Council. Geoffrey had joined 102 Squadron, part of Bomber Command, and became a navigator, based at Pocklington in Yorkshire. In May 1943, while on an operational flight to Dortmund, his aircraft was fired upon by flak guns on ships in the North Sea, receiving damage. Just a few months later, on 31 August, his aircraft crashed in Germany with the loss of all six crew. They had been shot down by a night fighter just south of their target during a raid on Monchengladbach. He and his comrades are all buried at Rheinberg War Cemetery, Germany.



Donald Stewart Hegan 31 October 1942
Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve Pilot Officer
Service Number: 129635

Donald was born in Coventry in 1916 and was educated at Coventry Preparatory School and Wrekin College before going up to Exeter College, Oxford; like his father he became a research chemist and although his work was a "reserved occupation" he joined the RAF in 1940, undertaking training in the USA. He was married in 1941 to Valerie Kerby. Donald became a Pilot Officer Observer in the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve and died on 31 October 1942 during training at Amerton, Staffordshire, as the result of a flying accident in a Wellington bomber. He and five other crew were all killed. He and Valerie had been married for less than a year. He is buried here at Stoneleigh, Section C, Row 5, Grave 11.



John Alun Edmonds 25 July 1944
Flight Engineer Sergeant, Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve.
Service Number: 1816413

John was born in Coventry on 24 November 1916, the second son of John Odey Edmonds and his wife Margaret. He had two younger sisters. In mid-1938 John was married to Edna Powell, in Coventry. He had worked at Armstrong Whitworth Aircraft in Coventry but at the time of his death on 25 July 1944 he had become a sergeant in the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. On the night of the 24th he was flying with two others on a Short Stirling III aircraft on night training from Winthorpe in Nottinghamshire. Sadly, the aircraft developed engine problems and while trying to land at Gaydon crashed just short of the runway at 0236 hours. All three men perished. He is buried here at Stoneleigh, buried in Section E, Row 9, Grave 1.



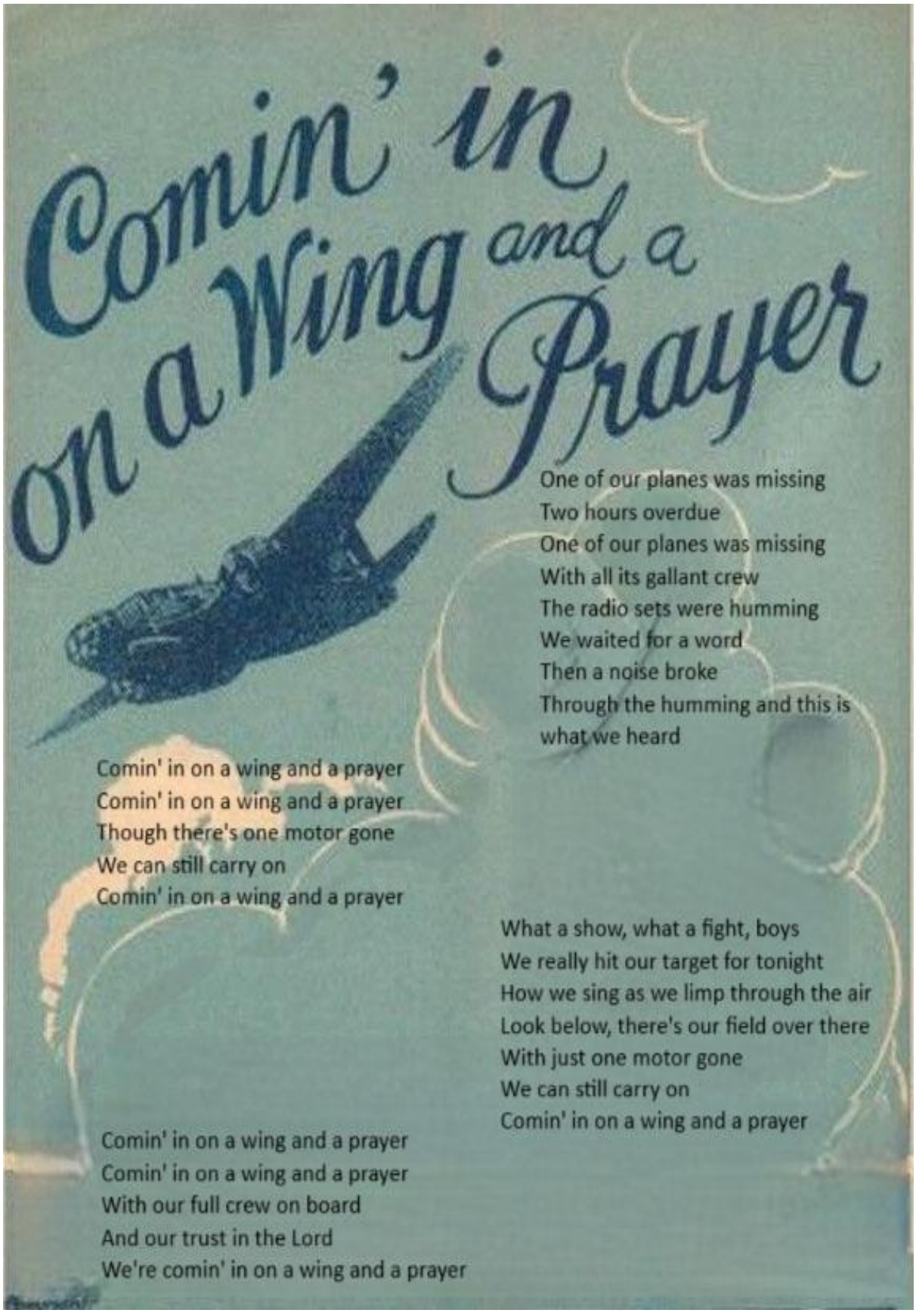
HIGH FLIGHT

"Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of Earth
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;
Sunward I've climbed and joined the tumbling mirth
of sun-split clouds, — and done a hundred things
You have not dreamed of – wheeled and soared and swung
High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there,
I've chased the shouting wind along, and flung
My eager craft through footless halls of air....

Up, up the long, delirious, burning blue
I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace.
Where never lark, or even eagle flew —
And, while with silent, lifting mind I've trod
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,
– Put out my hand, and touched the face of God."

Written August 1941
by
John Gillespie Magee Jr - American aircraft pilot and war poet
(9 June 1922 – 11 December 1941)
He was killed in an accidental mid-air collision over England in 1941.




Comin' in on a Wing and a Prayer
One of our planes was missing
Two hours overdue
One of our planes was missing
With all its gallant crew
The radio sets were humming
We waited for a word
Then a noise broke
Through the humming and this is what we heard
Comin' in on a wing and a prayer
Comin' in on a wing and a prayer
Though there's one motor gone
We can still carry on
Comin' in on a wing and a prayer
What a show, what a fight, boys
We really hit our target for tonight
How we sing as we limp through the air
Look below, there's our field over there
With just one motor gone
We can still carry on
Comin' in on a wing and a prayer
Comin' in on a wing and a prayer
Comin' in on a wing and a prayer
With our full crew on board
And our trust in the Lord
We're comin' in on a wing and a prayer

Alfred William Jones 17 July 1944
6th Battalion, Royal Welch Fusiliers.
Service Number: 14552826

Alfred was born in Coventry in 1925, but the family went to live in Ashow; Alfred had a younger sister, born a year after him. He joined the 6th Battalion Royal Welch Fusiliers and landed in Normandy at the end of June 1944. He was killed in battle in the Bocage a few weeks later, on 17 July 1944, when he was just 19. Such was the ferocity of fighting there that he has no known grave but is commemorated on a panel on the Bayeux War Memorial, which honours the names of over1800 Commonwealth service personnel who died in the Battle of Normandy and who, like Alfred, have no known grave.



The 'Memorial of the Missing'

JONES, Fus. ALFRED WILLIAM, 14552826. 6th Bn. The Royal Welch Fusiliers. 17th July, 1944. Age 19. Son of Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Jones, of Ashow, Warwickshire. Panel 14, Column 2.

Harold Mills 31 August 1944
Private, 5th Battalion Sherwood Foresters
(Notts and Derby Regiment)
Service Number: 14208085

Harold, born in Ashow on 19 June 1921, was the elder son of Albert Mills and his wife Alice. When war broke out, he was working as a groundsman on a local golf course but joined the 5th Battalion Sherwood Foresters. He was twice wounded while serving, before being killed in action on 31 August 1944 during the Italy campaign. On that day the 5th Sherwood Foresters took Monte Vecchio on the second day of their assault. It was an extraordinary feat of arms, and his battalion received seven gallantry awards over those two days. He is buried at Montecchio, along with 581 other Commonwealth servicemen.



1045/1/A/8 4.D.10 32
14208085 Private
H.Mills
The Sherwood Foresters
31st August 1944 Age 23
(Cross)
The Lord gave
And the Lord hath taken away
R.I.P.

John Copeland Aris 12 August 1942
Ordinary Telegraphist HMS Nigeria, Royal Navy.
Service Number: C/JX 207145

John was the son of Ernest Aris and his wife Margaret. His father served on HMS Queen Elizabeth during the Great War and then spent much of his life serving as a naval reserve in Australia. John (or Jack, as he was known) was born on 5 April. He had an older brother Ernest and two younger siblings, Gordon and Jessie, all of whom emigrated to the USA with their mother in later years.

He served with convoys providing supplies to Russia in 1941; then served on HMS Nigeria, a flagship light cruiser which on 10 August 1942 left Gibraltar as part of a large escort for an important convoy carrying supplies - particularly fuel - to Malta. On 12 August the air attacks started, from both German and Italian aircraft and submarines; they lasted all day until at around 8pm a torpedo from the Italian submarine Axum struck the ship. The ship listed in a few minutes. John was one of the 52 casualties: 4 Officers and 48 Ratings were killed. He is commemorated on the Chatham Naval Memorial, Kent, and a plaque commemorating him can also be found in the Church here at Stoneleigh.





IN WATERS DEEP

In ocean wastes no poppies blow,
No crosses stand in ordered row,
Their young hearts sleep…beneath the wave…
The spirited, the good, the brave,
But stars a constant vigil keep,
For them who lie beneath the deep.

Tis true you cannot kneel in prayer
On certain spot and think "He's there".
But you can to the ocean go
See whitecaps marching row on row;
Know one for him will always ride…
In and out…with every tide.

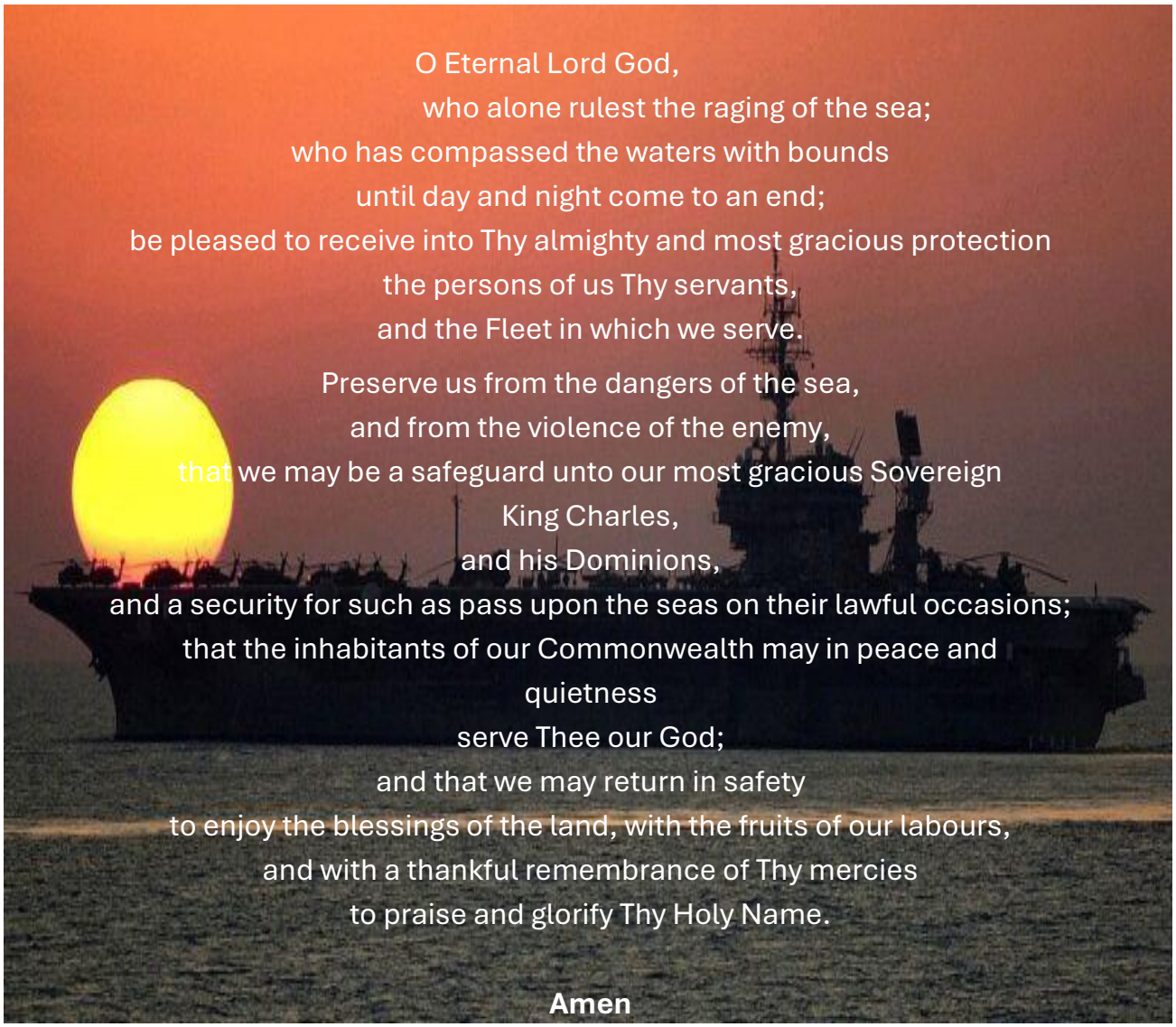
And when your span of life is passed,
He'll meet you at the "Captain's Mast."
And they who mourn on distant shore
For sailors who'll come home no more
Can dry their tears and pray for these
Who rest beneath the heaving seas…

For stars that shine and winds that blow
And whitecaps marching row on row.
And they can never lonely be
For when they lived…they chose the sea.

Eileen Mahony wrote this in 2001, aged 90 to commemorate more than 7,000 sailors of the First World War and almost 16,000 from the Second World War



THE NAVAL PRAYER



This prayer was first published in the Book of Common Prayer in 1662.
The Naval Prayer has remained mostly unchanged since then,
except for a change to the name of the monarch,
the change from “Empire” to “Commonwealth”,
a more recent deletion of the phrase
“through Jesus Christ our Lord”
near the end.

World War II and VE Day in Stoneleigh and Ashow

1939 - 1945

It's time now to wind back the clock to the beginning of the war and to look at what life was like here in our two villages, and to see what preparations were being made so that everyone stayed safe.

From newspaper articles throughout the war years, we can discover how people were experiencing the changing times.

After the **First** World War, the government began to clear away housing which was thought unfit for habitation: three houses on Motslow Hill and the same number at Pipes Mill were therefore ordered to be demolished…presumably the war saved them!

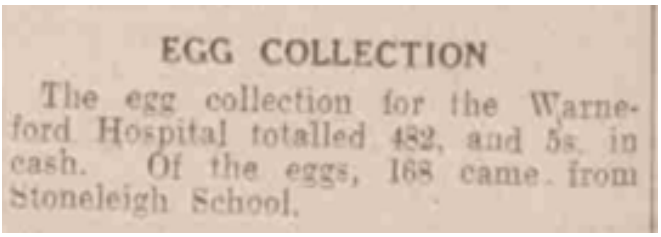


Clearance Orders were confirmed in respect of three houses at Motslow Hill and three at Pipes Mill, Stoneleigh, owned by Lord Leigh; four at Camp Cottages, Wappenbury, owned by Mr. W. Davey; and two in the village, owned by Mr. W. Lyons.

World War II and VE Day in Stoneleigh and Ashow
1939 - 1945

In the year in which war was declared,1939, life seemed at first to go on as usual...

At Easter, eggs were being collected for Warneford Hospital, 168 of which came from Stoneleigh School!



EGG COLLECTION

The egg collection for the Warneford Hospital totalled 482, and 5s. in cash. Of the eggs, 168 came from Stoneleigh School.

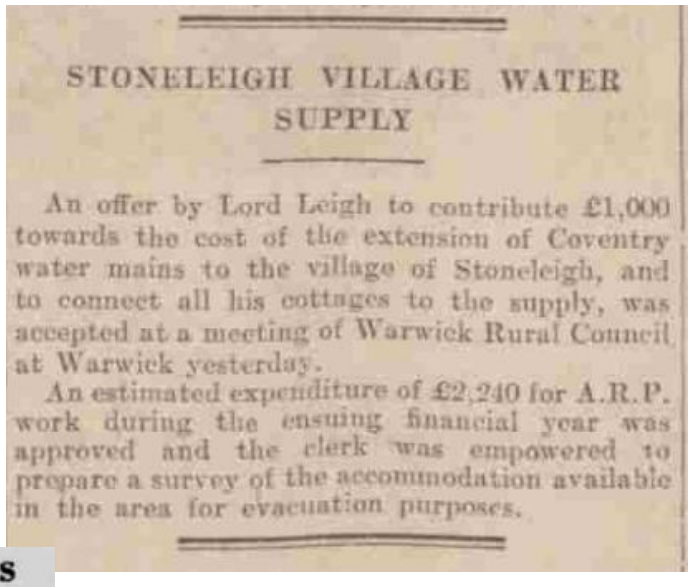
The weather was lovely, and many day trippers were coming here to enjoy the countryside.



BANK HOLIDAY

The charming weather brought many visitors to the village, and each day during the holiday from early morning onwards the local lanes and fields proved an attraction to lovers of the country from neighbouring towns.

Early in 1939, we see how life in Stoneleigh was beginning to approach the modern age, when Lord Leigh offered £1k towards connecting a water supply...



STONELEIGH VILLAGE WATER SUPPLY

An offer by Lord Leigh to contribute £1,000 towards the cost of the extension of Coventry water mains to the village of Stoneleigh, and to connect all his cottages to the supply, was accepted at a meeting of Warwick Rural Council at Warwick yesterday.

An estimated expenditure of £2,240 for A.R.P. work during the ensuing financial year was approved and the clerk was empowered to prepare a survey of the accommodation available in the area for evacuation purposes.



WOMEN AMBULANCE DRIVERS WANTED

On a dark, wet evening at the end of March motorists on the Leamington–Coventry-road were probably surprised to see a long line of cars drawn up at the entrance to Stoneleigh Park, with lights dimmed and shadowy female figures in attendance, wearing gas masks. These were the women volunteers for ambulance driving in Leamington and Kenilworth districts who, weekly during March, engaged in night driving practice in Stoneleigh Park, by permission of Lord Leigh.

The ranks of women ambulance drivers in Warwickshire are not yet complete. Nearly 800 are required to cover the county, and women who wish to join are asked to send their names immediately to the local A.R.P. Officer, or to the Women's Voluntary Services Local Centre, or County Centre, 6, Northgate-street, Warwick.

War was very definitely on the horizon by the middle of 1939, and appeals were being made for women ambulance drivers and for Air Raid wardens. First aid demonstrations were being held at Stoneleigh School.

STONELEIGH.

A.R.P. Practice.—Following a series of lectures by Mr. E. A. Lyne (Assistant Divisional Warden), the Air Wardens of Ashow, Bubbenhall, Burton Green, Green Lane and Stoneleigh have been doing practical training at Stoneleigh Abbey. On Tuesday evening Mr. Lyne paid another visit and directed the operations, afterwards expressing his satisfaction with the way these were executed.

The course of first aid lectures and practical demonstrations, which have been in progress at Stoneleigh School since January 2nd, and which have been attended by A.R.P. volunteers from Bubbenhall, concluded on Monday evening. Mrs. L. Smalley, of Kenilworth, and Sergeant Jones, of Warwick, who have so ably conducted the practical work for the women's and men's sections respectively, were heartily thanked by their enthusiastic students.

Some things don't change: Stoneleigh Church needed a new roof and fund raising for the required £300 was begun! The abbey was opened at a shilling a head and brought in the crowds by bus and car; the house had been closed to the public for 30 years, and the grounds for more than a dozen. Hundreds of local people manned stalls and over three thousand visitors came for a special day out.



The ancient parish church at Stoneleigh, which is badly in need of repairs. A new roof is required, to meet the cost of which between £250 and £300 has to be raised. To aid the restoration fund a fete is to be held next month at Stoneleigh Abbey, which will be thrown open to the public for the occasion.

Whilst the WI was holding its annual fancy dress dance and whist drive, a survey was being undertaken to consider possible billeting accommodation for war refugees, including Stoneleigh Abbey. Lord Leigh suggested its being used as a hospital or convalescent home, and as a training school for horses.

FANCY DRESS DANCE AT STONELEIGH



THE Stoneleigh Women's Institute held its annual whist drive and fancy dress dance on Friday last. Mrs. J. H. Hurst, of The Crew chairman of the Entertainment Committee, was the organiser, and the result, if not a record, has certainly never been surpassed in the village.

Fifteen juveniles entered for competition, and the judging was by no means easy, the dresses, all home-made, including many of considerable merit and originality. Prizes were awarded to Freda Walden and Hilda Worrall—Micky Mice; Ivor and Dorothy Selwyn—Pierrot and Pierrette; Gordon Clarke—Gollywog; Bobbie Harris—Drummer Boy; and the remainder received chocolate.

Dancing began while whist took place in another room, Mr. J. Craddock acting as M.C. Mrs. G. Hancox won first lady's prize with a score of 174, Mrs. A. Thorley second, and Mrs. B. Taylor third. Mrs. Jones (Ashow), playing as gentleman, was first with 176, Mr. Norman Morris second, and Master A. Jones third.

After refreshments had been served, the judges, Mrs. Chapman, Mrs. Hayes, and Miss Hammerton, were engaged for a considerable time with the adults' fancy dresses. Besides a few who did not compete, 19 members and friends paraded. Prizes for originality went to Mr. G. H. Thorley—"Mr. Walker Wants to Know"; and Mrs. F. Lovell—"Small Holder." For the prettiest dresses Miss M. Cooke and Miss D. Walton (Egyptian Gentleman and Lady) and Mrs. Cooke (Welsh Lady) gained prizes, while Mrs. Batchelor and Miss Beryl Walden won those for the Home-made section. An extra award was made to Mervyn Edmunds—"Schoolmaster."

For dancing, spot prizes were awarded to Misses Edmunds and Walden, Miss Burbury and Mr. G. Scarsbrooke, Miss D. Morgan and Mr. J. Bennett.

Among members and officials present were Mrs. H. E. Cooke, Mrs. R. R. Hollick, Mrs. Hunt, Mrs. W. Hand, Miss Orton, and Miss C. E. Hollick. Mr. H. Bennett operated the gramophone amlifier.

Warwickshire in Wartime

Potential Billeting Accommodation

Lord Leigh and Stoneleigh Abbey

(Special to the "Coventry Standard")

The task of making a survey of all the potential billeting accommodation in Warwickshire is gradually being accomplished by the local authorities round about Coventry, and there is every indication that it will be completed in the near future. Everywhere there has been a readiness to co-operate, and householders have shown a willingness to suggest barns, assembly rooms, halls, and other places where suitable accommodation could be provided for refugees should the necessity arise.

Stoneleigh Abbey has already been scheduled for billeting purposes, but Lord Leigh made it known to a "Coventry Standard" representative, who investigated the progress of the survey this week, that it might be more suitably used as a hospital or a convalescent home than merely as a refuge for school children.

8,000 HOUSES

ONE hundred and sixty women canvassers who have undertaken the duty of finding out what billeting accommodation there is available in the Meriden Rural District have been impressed by the courtesy and consideration shown to them by householders, who in almost every instance have agreed to take in refugees. Although there are about 8,000 houses in the area, the number of refusals does not amount to more than about a dozen. About half the census is now complete, but much work still remains to be done.

STONELEIGH ABBEY

Although Stoneleigh Abbey, which contains about 400 rooms, has been provisionally earmarked as a billeting centre, and about 72 rooms have been scheduled for use if an emergency occurs, it is likely that the Abbey, offering, as it does, a magnificent retreat within easy reach of Coventry, will be used as a hospital or a convalescent home. This Lord Leigh feels would be far more desirable than allowing the place to be used merely as a billeting centre for children. If war should come, there will be a great need for hospitals in the country, and Stoneleigh Abbey, as Lord Leigh pointed out, is ideally situated for the purpose.

His Lordship suggested that the facilities at the Abbey could be of use in time of emergency as a training centre for horses. At present there are only about half-a-dozen horses in the stables, but 30 or 40 could be accommodated there, if necessary, and with the excellent training facilities offered by the park, an ideal training school would be provided. Although mechanical vehicles have to a large extent superseded horses, there is still a lot of jobs which horses do far better than anything else.

FAMILY HEIRLOOMS

Lord Leigh was asked by the writer if any special precautions were being taken with regard to the preservation of the family heirlooms in case of emergency.

His Lordship replied that there was a strong room in the basement, and that here would be placed the most valuable relics. This room would not hold a large quantity of things, but there were other rooms on the ground floor where pictures and furniture would be reasonably safe.

Stoneleigh Abbey, it is well known, is solidly constructed, and would be able to withstand considerable force. A certain amount of underground protection is provided, but it is not necessarily ideal for A.R.P. purposes.

ALLESLEY HALL

Allesley Hall—until recently the residence of Dr. J. Orton—is admirably suited to its present purpose as a convalescent home, and it is unlikely that it would be used to accommodate refugee children. In time of war, however, it might be used for acute cases instead of convalescent cases.

No plans have yet been made for the evacuation of the Coventry and Warwickshire and the Gulson Road Hospitals, but in case of prolonged hostilities it is probable that the personnel, patients, and equipment would be moved to large houses in the country districts.

BERKSWELL HALL

Colonel C. J. H. Wheatley and Mrs. Wheatley, of Berkswell Hall, are naturally anxious to assist in any way they can should an emergency arise, and already Mrs. Wheatley has, with other ladies in the district, assisted in the work of making a survey of billeting accommodation. It is felt in certain quarters, however, that Berkswell, owing to its proximity to Coventry and some of the city's most important factories, may be regarded as a neutral zone, in which case no refugees would be accommodated there.

Berkswell Hall has been scheduled for the reception of children, as have the Rectory and other large houses in the neighbourhood.

No proposition has been made as to the use of Berkswell Hall as a hospital or convalescent home.

PACKINGTON HALL

No special steps have been taken with regard to the utilisation of Packington Hall in time of emergency. The Earl of Aylesford is abroad, and until he has been consulted it cannot be said if the hall will be put to any special use.

Naturally, as it is in an isolated position, it would afford an excellent retreat, and no doubt his Lordship would be willing to assist if the necessity arose.

By late summer, **serious** precautions were being taken. Stoneleigh Abbey was bombed!

The newspapers tell the story: Three aeroplanes zoomed over Stoneleigh Abbey on Wednesday night. Out of a cloudy grey sky they rained bombs on that historic pile, with reverberating explosions. Fortunately, the main buildings were not hit, but several bombs dropped on the stables, causing a great deal of damage and inflicting casualties among those people who lost their heads in a panic...

It was merely part of an Air Raid Precaution demonstration...Lord and Lady Leigh had given permission for the stable yard to be converted into a typical village, and they and two to three hundred villagers and the local residents watched the volunteers at work with great interest. The report went on:

“Wardens caused the first thrill by sounding the alarm, and there was a hasty scurry for shelter. A few minutes went by, and three aeroplanes, piloted by members of Coventry Aeroplane Club, hove into view, swept over the abbey and “dropped bombs”.

The effect of exploding bombs was gained by the exploding of over-sized fireworks, which crashed very realistically. Further imaginary scenarios were that houses had been hit, and victims treated. The enthusiasm of the locals was matched by the speedy arrival of the decontamination squad from Warwick, who “flashed onto the scene by lorry”. The demonstrators were all in full uniform and gained valuable practice in the running of a warden’s post, of first aid and firefighting.

On a separate occasion a practice was held in Stoneleigh village itself. It assumed that an unsuccessful bombing attack had been made on the bridge over the Sowe, but the local garage had been wrecked and the petrol tank set on fire, causing many casualties. At the Co-Op stores, people had been injured by shrapnel and one crushed by a falling wall. The Stoneleigh Arms was supposed to have received a direct hit, and trapped casualties in the basement required the assistance of a demolition party before rescue. The AFS was also needed to cope with a fire at a cottage on The Bank, where an incendiary bomb had found its mark. The high-tension cable supplying the village had been cut at Hudson’s Bridge (Motslow Hill). The Finham Air

Auxiliary Service were called together with an ambulance from Kenilworth. Local Scouts were engaged as casualties.

Perhaps everything had seemed a bit like play-acting till now, but things became more serious when a bomb exploded in Broadgate, in Coventry, and several people were killed. Later known as “the bicycle bomb” it was the work of the IRA and a young man from Stoneleigh Road was injured



WHITE CLIFFS OF DOVER

There'll be bluebirds over
The white cliffs of Dover
Tomorrow, just you wait and see

There'll be love and laughter
And peace ever after
Tomorrow, when the world is free

The shepherd will tend his sheep
The valley will bloom again
And Jimmy will go to sleep
In his own little room again

There'll be bluebirds over
The white cliffs of Dover
Tomorrow, just you wait and see

The shepherd will tend his sheep
The valley will bloom again
And Jimmy will go to sleep
In his own little room again

There'll be bluebirds over
The white cliffs of Dover
Tomorrow, just you wait and see

World War II and VE Day in Stoneleigh and Ashow

1939

On September 4, 1939, the day after war was declared, the school logbook tells us that the older boys opened up the school cellar as an air-raid shelter, and the Infants' room was taken as an Air Raid Warden HQ. Sandbags were put in place, and the 122 children had daily practices in case of air-raids.

In summer 1939, the decision had been made to evacuate school pupils from St Joseph's Convent, in Coventry, to Stoneleigh Abbey. We tend to think of the convent school as being in Kenilworth, but at the time it was on Walsgrave Road in Coventry. Along with the Reverend Mother and the Sisters of the Convent, 98 children made the abbey their home. Some small boys had been allowed to join their older sisters, and they all occupied the west wing of the abbey. There they were allowed to play cricket, and the little boys would have tricycle races around the old gatehouse. The older girls would help look after the younger ones, making sure they were tucked up with their teddies at night in dormitories. The nuns used the library as their office and children could look around the natural history collection in the family museum. The younger children stayed at Stoneleigh throughout the war, but older ones moved to Offchurch House in Leamington at the end of 1941.





Things were looking increasingly bad as 1939 went on, and villagers were collecting money for the Spitfire Fund, for soldiers' comforters and for local ARP expenses. Of course, by now, many families were coping with the knowledge that their loved ones were away serving their country, and those left at home were experiencing rationing of food, clothes and fuel.

World War II and VE Day in Stoneleigh and Ashow

1940

By July 1940 the Stoneleigh School shelter was equipped with battery torches, sanitary buckets, seats and first aid equipment. Gas masks were regularly inspected. On September 30 “air-raids during both morning and afternoon caused the whole school to adjourn to the shelter”.

In September 1940 the Harvest Festival took place and the Village now had it mains water supply



THE HARVEST FESTIVAL

Harvest thanksgiving services took place at Stoneleigh Parish Church on Sunday last. The early morning celebration at 7 a.m. was followed by sung eucharist at 10.30, a children's service in the afternoon, and evensong at 6.45. All were well attended, and collections during the day on behalf of the Warneford Hospital, Leamington, realised the total of £6 9s.

The Vicar, the Rev. H. E. Cooke, conducted all the services and preached at evensong. In addition, he was responsible for harvest festival services at Ashow. The singing of the harvest hymns were a feature of the eucharist, many more men than usual being present.

At evensong, Stainer's anthem "Ye shall dwell in the land" was sung by the choir. Flowers, fruit, vegetables and corn filled every available space in the church. These, with the gifts brought by the children to their service, were taken later to the hospital.

WATER SUPPLY COMPLETED

The village has now been supplied with water by the Coventry Corporation, thanks to the agreement reached between Lord Leigh, the owner, the Warwick Rural District Council, and the Corporation.

"Negotiations began during the life of the late Lord Leigh, but no agreement was reached, and his death caused a suspension of proceedings for a time. His heir has now had every house connected with the mains, and the supply was turned on for general use on Tuesday last.

Villagers now have the convenience and benefit of wholesome water in their houses, instead of having to fetch, sometimes from a distant pump, water which, on the advice of the sanitary authority, was unfit for drinking unless boiled on account of the amount of organic matter it contained.

There is an excellent pressure, which would prove of great service in case of fires occurring in the village.

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Then, in November 1940, came the great Blitz on Coventry. The school logbook on November 15th noted "During the night an extremely heavy air-raid was made on Coventry." Evacuee children were admitted to the school. From then until Christmas there were still more raids, and the children often had to take shelter during the day. Some children came to live in Stareton or in the hutted camps just outside the village.



KEEP RIGHT ON TO THE END OF THE ROAD

Keep right on to the end of the road,
Keep right on to the end,
If the way be long, let your heart be strong,
Keep right on round the bend.
If you're tired and weary still journey on,
Till you come to your happy abode,
Where all you love that you're dreaming of
Will be there at the end of the road.

Memoirs of Stoneleigh Abbey, by Catherine Binns (1928 - 2019)

Courtesy of www.historiccoventry.co.uk

I was at Stoneleigh Abbey during the War. St Joseph's Convent, Coventry was evacuated there, and I went too, though for a while I went daily from my home in Coventry. This proved a problem as it meant two buses and a long walk down the long drive and back again, so I became a boarder. We were given the basement area, the next floor up and the top floor, and changed use over the time. The basement was the dining room, though for a while we used the Monk's old refectory which meant a walk through the cloister area and across the courtyard... not ideal especially in bad weather. The floor above, which is the area now shown to visitors at the Abbey, was two dormitories, I can't recall how many slept in each room, but we were in camp beds in rows. The rooms were oak panelled and with large paintings on the walls and large windows with heavy shutters that had to be closed every night, black out. I was in the room on the corner which had four huge windows.

Life at Stoneleigh was hard in many ways for the girls. Firstly, we were away from our families who were living in a city of factories which were attractive to German bombers... the factories had made cars and bicycles but changed to munitions etc. during the war. I was at Stoneleigh the night of The Blitz, November 14th, 1940. The nuns had heard the bombers flying over and suspected they were heading for Coventry so spent the night praying in the chapel. The girls heard about it the next day and, as we all had family there, it was a worrying time. Gradually over the day news came, but I and two other girls had heard nothing. Lord Leigh said he would drive over with our addresses to see what he could find; that was two days later. There was no post or telephone connections, and the city was under military control. However, I was looking from a window on the top floor and saw my father cycling down the drive! My family were all OK, my parents, sisters, grandmother and aunt... and by a miracle not one girl at the Abbey lost anyone. The Convent in Coventry was bombed, however, which is why after the war the nuns had to find somewhere else to live and bought an old house near Kenilworth.

One lunch time I went for a walk over a ploughed field away from the Abbey with a friend. As we walked, we heard machine gunning and, turning, saw a German bomber being chased and machine gunned by three or four

Spitfires. We ran and got behind a large oak tree, and whilst my friend was in hysterics I watched as they flew overhead and over the next field. I then saw black objects dropping from the bomber and I grabbed my friend, and we ran back towards the Abbey drive. I don't remember hearing any explosion but as the field had recently been ploughed, they would have landed in soft ground. In my opinion it had been a decent German as he had turned away from the Abbey and didn't drop the bombs until he was clear of buildings, not one who would have turned towards the Abbey to machine gun children!

I do know that no one at the Abbey lost anyone in Coventry that night. My two younger sisters had been evacuated elsewhere but were brought back to Coventry, and after the Blitz there are other younger children who were taken in at Stoneleigh, including the new friend I found. I was in Coventry during another raid however, in the following April. We had gone home for the day, but I wasn't well, so stayed back and that night the Germans bombed Coventry again, twice during that week. Apart from broken glass in every window of our house and a crack which later had to be filled in we survived.

I remember how cold it was in the Abbey; we all got chilblains on our toes and fingers! The food was pretty grim, but some of that could be excused as there was rationing. We had to give the nuns our ration books, so if we went home our parents had to share their rations. I often tell younger people the story of "true friendship"! We were rationed to one egg each a week, but my parents and my friend's parents kept hens in the back garden, as many people did during the war. We both took three eggs each from home when we went on a Sunday and wrote a day from Monday to Saturday on them... we got our ration egg on a Sunday, but we had an egg every day between us alternating days. For example, I would have a whole boiled egg Monday, Wednesday and Friday and she would have the other days, but we gave each other the top of our egg... true friendship! When I was teaching little ones, they were fascinated by this story.

When we were sleeping in the two huge rooms at Stoneleigh Abbey we were woken early in the morning, then it was a rush down a flight of stairs to the basement, then up along a corridor and up another flight of stairs to the top floor where the bathrooms were! After washing etc., it was repeat journey back to the dorm! Once I had been so worried I dreamt about it and woke to find I had got dressed in my sleep! If you needed a toilet in the night that was another problem, especially for those in the furthest room... it was

completely dark so you could see nothing but had to feel the way out of the one room and across the other, both full of beds with sleeping girls. Then you crossed an area at the back of the chapel organ balcony to the one toilet... and repeat back. Strange things happened on that journey, but one I recall is as I passed one bed the occupant sat up, still asleep, and said "I have three houses on the Strand!"... this referred to the game of Monopoly which was very popular at the time.

I don't think it ever got easier finding the way in the dark; remember, they were big rooms with many rows of camp beds and nothing else. Had it been a smaller room with more differing furniture it might have been easier.

Walking in your sleep was also quite common as we were disturbed youngsters. One incident I remember is, I was dreaming I was at home and the siren had sounded. When this happened, I would grab a pillow and go and wake my parents and sisters; the dog and I always seemed to hear the siren before anyone else, in fact I felt I heard or sensed it before it went, and so did the dog! In the dream I was banging on my parents' bedroom door but in fact I had walked in my sleep to the other side of the room and was banging on the bed of another girl, who happened to be Italian, and we both woke with a start! Incidentally, her Father and older brothers were interned on the Isle of Man.

We would put on shows, and the headmistress was a very talented lady, she would write songs for us to sing, she would make words to a popular folk song, and I can still remember most of the words.

The older girls left Stoneleigh Abbey and moved to a lovely house in a village near Leamington, whilst the younger ones stayed at Stoneleigh until the nuns bought a bigger house in Kenilworth which became St Joseph's Convent. It is no more, sadly, and the house itself was pulled down.

I went to Offchurch with the older students, and so did my sister who is 18 months younger than me, but our younger sister stayed at the Abbey then went to Crackley Hall. The house in Offchurch was a lovely building with gardens in a village. In the old church opposite the house there was an old stone coffin which was said to be Offa, King of Mercia, hence the name Offa's church, Offchurch.

I think the house in Offchurch wasn't big enough to take all the children which is why only the older ones went there, three classes if I remember

correctly. As it was more like a normal house the dormitories were small and only held about five girls. There were two bathrooms just at the other side of the corridor, which was bliss after the Abbey.

The room next to the one I slept in at the Abbey was also a dormitory, the one I had to go through to get out. The Saloon was not used except for very special occasions like giving a concert, but I remember how beautiful it was, and I loved a painting of a lady, probably a Lady Leigh, standing on some steps with a small dog in her arms.

The classrooms were on the top floor, and later the dormitories were moved up there too, though not for long in my memory.

During our free time at Stoneleigh Abbey... there were tennis courts that the sporty girls used, or we would go for walks along the drives which went both ways with wooded areas. We didn't go near the river. I don't think we were allowed to do so as it was thought too dangerous. Indoors we had games like Monopoly which was very popular... and we would take a slice of bread and marg after supper and try to toast it on the open fire in the dormitory! It wasn't very successful, and we called it "Jimmy Frizzle". Living in such a large building, getting to and from rooms took a lot of our time, too. We sang a lot, in the chapel etc. and especially songs Sister Frances wrote to old tunes. I remember when we did concerts for various reasons, she did this. When the Rev. Mother was celebrating her golden jubilee, we had a celebration and there was a song to the Lincolnshire poacher tune. Some girls (one was me) held letters spelling "Happy Jubilee" and sang a verse in order. I can remember some of those words still!

Nora’s story

These are memories of the Blitz as told to me by Will, my late husband.

William James Blagburn was born and grew up in Whoberley Avenue Coventry.

Many children were evacuated to the country, when World War 2 was declared. Will and his younger sister Jean went to stay on a farm at Corley Moor to be safe away from the city but when nothing happened after a few months they went home again. When raids began several houses in and around Whoberley Avenue were bombed but not number167, Will’s home. There was a group of lads similar age to Will who played together and after bombing raids they would collect pieces of shrapnel comparing who had the

best bits and possibly a piece with a bit of Swastika on it. Will attended Henry VIII School which was partially bombed. They had school assembly outside in the courtyard and for P.E. ran around the block 2 or 3 times.

In October 1940 a bomb landed on the warehouse of E. Laxon & Co the family firm of food wholesalers. The bomb crashed through the roof into the basement but did not detonate. The Coventry Evening Telegraph took a photograph of the bomb in the basement with Will's father James looking down at it. Will was 10 and remembers his father taking him to see it. (Rather a risky thing to do!)



James Blagburn at Chapel St. bombsite

The bomb was removed by the army and taken by lorry to Whitley Common but on the way, it exploded, killing the seven men with it. A Memorial to them was unveiled with a service at Whitley Common in October 2008.

In November 1940 the Luftwaffe launched its most devastating bombing raid so far. Coventry had already suffered bombing attacks but on the evening of 14th November 1939; 'The Moonlight Sonata' raid was due.

Will's father James was the Managing Director of E. Laxon & Co in Chapel Street Coventry. That evening, he said to his wife Winnie, "I think tonight will be a bad one. I'll go down to the warehouse, get the records from the safe and see if the Watchmen and Firefighters are alright."



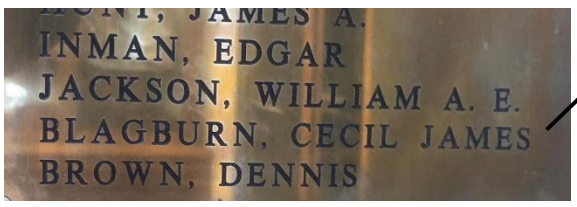
Photo courtesy of Derek Robinson

On that dreadful night of the Blitz the warehouse had a direct hit, killing them all, including James. Their bodies were not found for several days. James' grave is in the London Road Cemetery, not in the mass grave of so many killed that night.

Will was 10 and his sister, Jean was 6 years old.

In 2024, following a talk from the Friends of the Coventry War Memorial Park, at Stoneleigh History Society meeting, we have had a Plaque placed on a tree in the War Memorial Park in memory of James Blagburn who died supporting the firefighters.

A plaque was also unveiled at Coventry Fire Station in grateful remembrance of those who fought fire in defence of the City of Coventry and who gave their lives during the Second World War.





The Coventry AFS/NFS memorial is now mounted on the wall in the AFS/NFS Room in the WMFS Heritage Museum, Aston.

Would those bombed out of their houses ever go home again?

Memories

John Piers, Lord Leigh, later remembered:

"I was only five years old. After the big November air raid on Coventry, 69 refugees were housed in the Abbey. They had beds here in the Long Corridor and in the basements – anywhere that room could be found. My mother and Mrs Lee, the housekeeper, gave our temporary lodgers porridge and toast for breakfast, baked potatoes filled with dripping and cheese for tea, when they got back from Coventry after clearing up and salvaging their belongings. For supper – home-made soup made from anything edible that could be found in the garden, toast and pudding. There was a roaring log fire, but no other means of heating and a baby born in the basement unfortunately died from the cold."

Harry Edmunds

When war broke out, I worked seven days a week and when the sirens went, we used to go on police duty till all the all clear went and all the villagers were busy making a big air raid shelter under the arches under the bridge on the main Coventry to Leamington Road. A lot of people helped to make it and when the bombers came over, we used to have lots of Coventry people come out and stay till all clear sounded.

On the fourteenth of November 1940, the night when none of us who remember will ever forget how anyone living in Coventry came out alive, we'll never know a continuous bombardment for twelve hours non-stop – it was as light as day. I was on duty in the middle of Stoneleigh Village and bombers came overhead. They made a right hand turn for the east coast; the guns stationed around us got that hot they had to stop firing. I had to go into Coventry with one of the police officers the next morning. We had a job to get through to Cross Cheaping, we were surprised really, there were not so many people as we expected killed on the streets.

WE'LL MEET AGAIN

We'll meet again, don't know where, don't know when
But I know we'll meet again some sunny day
Keep smiling through, just like you always do
'Til the blue skies drive the dark clouds far away

So will you please say "Hello" to the folks that I know
Tell them I won't be long
They'll be happy to know that as you saw me go
I was singing this song

We'll meet again, don't know where, don't know when
But I know we'll meet again some sunny day.



1941

And so, life went on, another Blitz on Coventry in April 1941 bringing more local devastation. Miraculously the villages survived, though meetings were held for the people of Stoneleigh & Ashow to discuss how to protect the crops which were the food of the nation. People of all ages were encouraged to do what they could, and a newspaper account in October shows a seven-year-old evacuee from Coventry helping to bring in the harvest!



A Coventry evacuee, Jeffrey Nelson, aged 7, helps in the harvest field at Stoneleigh.

Stoneleigh School children increased the amount of produce from the school garden by 250 per cent and did a total of 150 weeks' work in the harvest fields.

STONELEIGH

Children of Stoneleigh School this summer increased the amount of produce from the school gardens by 250 per cent. They have collectively put in a total of 150 weeks' work in the harvest fields and have also collected berries for the local jam centre. The gifts to the school harvest festival held last week-end were sent to St. Faith's Shelter, Coventry.



Lord Leigh had decreed that the Deer Park should be ploughed up for potatoes and oats. To modern eyes it seems sacrilege that oaks in Stoneleigh Park should be felled, but the need was urgent, for light modern naval craft. Seven hundred oaks were felled by women of the Land Army Forestry Corps, led by Mrs Beatrice Parker "probably the only woman saw doctor in the country", as the newspaper said. Her skill was in setting the band saws which cut up the huge logs. The intention was to plant three young oaks for every one cut down and the whole enterprise was seen as continuing the tradition of providing oak for the British navy over the centuries.

1942

News of casualties began, and in 1942 the first deaths of local men, as we have heard.

Humphrey Desmond Cooke - 26 June 1942

WING-COMMANDER H. D. COOKE.

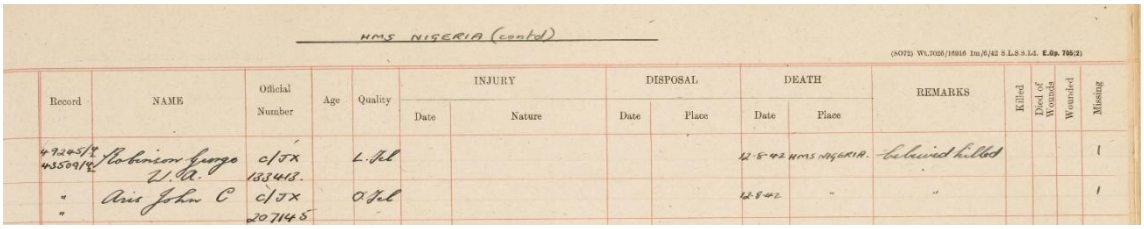
SON OF VICAR OF STONELEIGH FEARED KILLED.

It is feared that Wing-Commander Humphrey Desmond Cooke, of the Coastal Command, R.A.F., younger son of the Rev. and Mrs. H. E. Cooke, of Stoneleigh Vicarage, lost his life in the thousand bomber raid on Bremen on June 25th. Two of the bodies of members of the Hudson aircraft, of which he was in command, have been picked up in the North Sea by the Germans, and their identity disclosed to the Red Cross Organisation at Geneva.

The Wing-Commander, who was 28 years of age, was educated at Shrewsbury. His young wife is at present working in London, and his three-year-old daughter is at Stoneleigh Vicarage. His brother, Major R. J. H. Cooke, is serving with the Royal Welsh Fusiliers.

Leamington Spa Courier - Friday 28 August 1942

John Copeland Aris - 12 August 1942

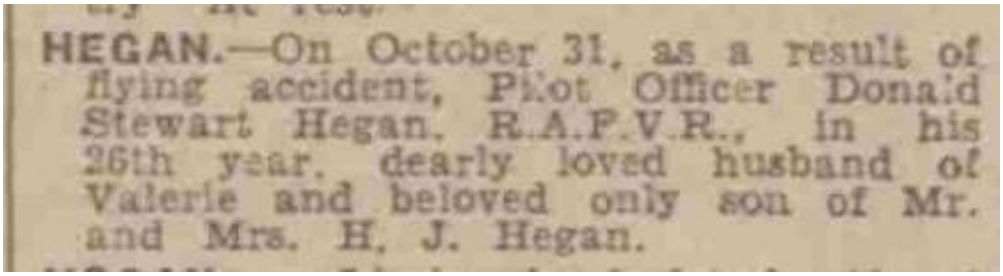


HMS NIGERIA (contd)

Record	NAME	Official Number	Age	Quality	INJURY		DISPOSAL		DEATH		REMARKS	Killed	Died of Wounds	Wounded	Missing
					Date	Nature	Date	Place	Date	Place					
49245/43 50918	Robinson George V.A.	C/JX 138418		L. Sto					12-8-42	HMS NIGERIA	believed killed				1
"	Aris John C	C/JX 207145		O Sto					12-8-42	"	"				1

British Royal Navy Casualty Logs 1939-1945

Donald Stewart Hegan - 31 October 1942



HEGAN.—On October 31, as a result of flying accident, Pilot Officer Donald Stewart Hegan, R.A.F.V.R., in his 26th year, dearly loved husband of Valerie and beloved only son of Mr. and Mrs. H. J. Hegan.

Coventry Evening Telegraph - Wednesday 04 November 1942

1943



In 1943 efforts were now being made to support the armed forces, and dances and social events were held in Stoneleigh for Wings for Victory Week in May. The target had been £2000 but over £5000 was raised.

All the same, familiar concerns and activities are reported during these war years. Mrs Walton retired from the school after nearly 40 years' service. Mr Wells the headmaster was presented with £50 for having completed 50 years as organist and choirmaster at church... and the Avon was polluted by sewage. Life, simply, went on.

ROLL OUT THE BARREL

Roll out the barrel, we'll have a barrel of fun
Roll out the barrel, we've got the blues on the run
Zing Boom Tararel
Ring out a song of good cheer
Now's the time to roll the barrel
For the gang's all here

Roll out the barrel, we'll have a barrel of fun
Roll out the barrel, we've got the blues on the run
Zing Boom Tararel
Ring out a song of good cheer
Now's the time to roll the barrel
For the gang's all here.

THE LAMBETH WALK

Anytime you're Lambeth way, any evening, any day,
You'll find us all doin' the Lambeth walk. Oi!

Ev'ry little Lambeth gal with her little Lambeth pal,
You'll find 'em all doin' the Lambeth walk. Oi!

Ev'rything's free and easy, do as you darn well pleasey,
Why don't you make your way there,
Go there, stay there,

Once you get down Lambeth way, ev'ry evening, ev'ry day,
You'll find yourself doin' the Lambeth walk. Oi!

Anytime you're Lambeth way, any evening, any day,
You'll find us all doin' the Lambeth walk. Oi!

Ev'ry little Lambeth gal with her little Lambeth pal,
You'll find 'em all doin' the Lambeth walk. Oi!

Ev'rything's free and easy, do as you darn well pleasey,
Why don't you make your way there,
Go there, stay there,

Once you get down Lambeth way, ev'ry evening, ev'ry day,
You'll find yourself doin' the Lambeth, doin' the Lambeth, doin' the Lambeth walk. Oi!



Unfortunately, there would be more casualties, this time for Ashow

Geoffrey Lee - 31 August 1943
Sergeant, 102 Squadron RAF
Service number: 921759

In October 1943 a 1000-bed convalescent hospital opened at Stareton in the Deer Park. At first it was known as the 8th Convalescent Hospital Unit. The main aims were Rehabilitation, Military Training and Morale. “Return the patient to fighting fitness in the shortest possible time.”

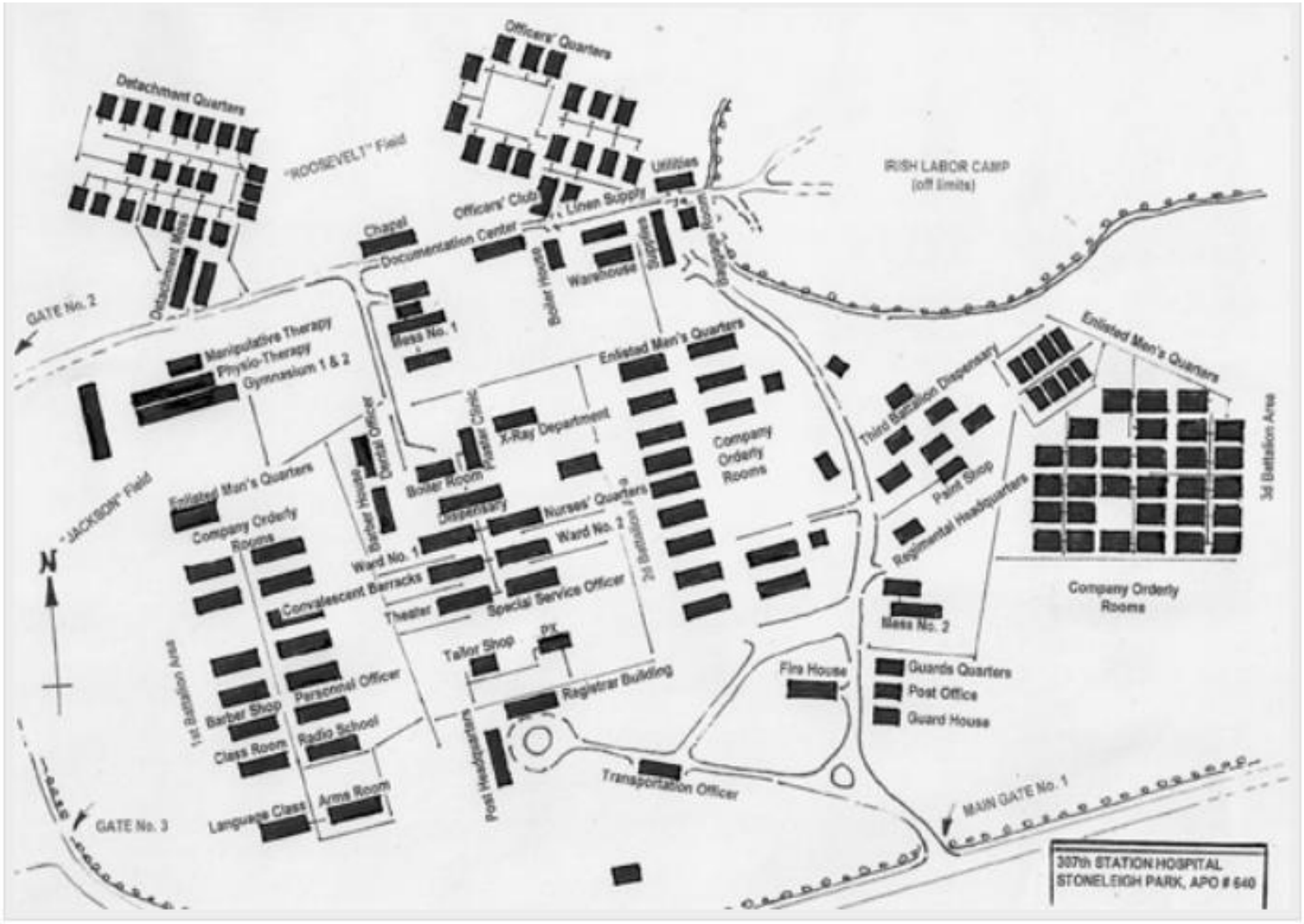
Many of the patients were US Army and Air Force personnel and after medical examinations the patients were given remedial exercises, physiotherapy and general PT. They were divided into classes according to whether their injuries were to their knee, back, shoulder etc.

In December 1943 the hospital was replaced by the 307th Station Hospital. It was regularly inspected by Generals and other high-ranking officers from the US Army. A popular visitor was the boxer Joe Louis, who refereed a boxing contest in June 1944.

LEANING ON A LAMP POST

I'm leaning on a lamppost at the corner of the street
In case a certain little lady comes by,
Oh me, oh my, I hope the little lady comes by.
I don't know if she'll get away, she doesn't always get away,
But anyhow I know that she'll try,
Oh me, oh my, I hope that little lady comes by.

There’s no other girl I would wait for,
But this one I’d break any date for,
I won’t have to ask what she’s late for.
She wouldn’t leave me flat; she’s not a girl like that.
Oh she’s absolutely wonderful and marvellous and beautiful
And anyone can understand why,
I’m leaning on a lamppost at the corner of the street,
In case a certain little lady passes by.



1943-1944 overlay map of the 307th Station Hospital's installations at Stoneleigh Park, Kenilworth, Warwickshire, APO # 640, United Kingdom.

1944

By June 1944 an Irish labour camp run by the British Ministry of Works was added adjacent to the American camp and 350 more beds were added.

There was a theatre, and dances were held. Stoneleigh residents were invited to these, and their children to the cinema. The American band played at events in the Victory Hall.

THERE IS NOTHIN LIKE A DAME

We got sunlight on the sand
We got moonlight on the sea
We got mangoes and bananas
You can pick right off a tree
We got volleyball and ping-pong
And a lot of dandy games
What ain't we got?
We ain't got dames!

We get packages from home
We get movies, we get shows
We get speeches from our skipper
And advice from Tokyo Rose
We get letters doused with perfume
We get dizzy from the smell
What don't we get?
You know damn well!

We got nothin' to put on a clean white suit for
We have nothin to look masculine and cute for

There is nothin' like a dame
Nothin' in the world
There is nothing you can name
That is anything like a dame

We feel lonely and we long
For the fair and gentle sex
We would like the feelin'
Of some arms about our necks
We feel hungry as the wolf felt
When he met Red Riding Hood
What don't we feel?
We don't feel good!

L*ots of things in life are beautiful, but brother*
Oh, there is one particular thing that is nothing whatsoever
In any way, shape, or form, ha, like any other

There is nothing like a dame
Nothin' in the world
There is nothing you can name
That is anything like a dame

There are no books like a dame
And nothing looks like a dame
There are no drinks like a dame
And nothing thinks like a dame
Nothing acts like a dame
Or attracts like a dame
There ain't a thing that's wrong with any man here
That can't be cured by puttin' him near
A girly, womanly, female, feminine dame

1944

After D Day many more injured Americans were transferred to Stoneleigh. All were flown in via Baginton. The centre became known for its orthopaedic surgery as well as for remedial work such as electrotherapy and hydrotherapy to stimulate the nerves. Several men had had limbs amputated and needed to work with prosthetic limbs.

D Day Dodgers

We're the D-Day Dodgers, way off in Italy
Always on the vino, always on the spree;
Eighth Army scroungers and their tanks,
We live in Rome, among the Yanks.
We are the D-Day Dodgers, way out in Italy
We are the D-Day Dodgers, way out in Italy

We landed in Salerno, a holiday with pay,
The Jerries brought the bands out to greet us on the way.
Showed us the sights and gave us tea,
We all sang songs, the beer was free
To welcome D-Day Dodgers to sunny Italy.
To welcome D-Day Dodgers to sunny Italy.

Naples and Casino were taken in our stride,
We didn't go to fight there, we went just for the ride.
Anzio and Sangro were just names,
We only went to look for dames
The artful D-Day Dodgers, way out in Italy.
The artful D-Day Dodgers, way out in Italy.

Dear Lady Astor, you think you're mighty hot,
Standing on the platform, talking tommyrot.
You're England's sweetheart and her pride
We think your mouth's too bleeding wide.
We are the D-Day Dodgers, in sunny Italy.
We are the D-Day Dodgers, in sunny Italy.

Look around the mountains, in the mud and rain,
You'll find the scattered crosses, some that have no name.
Heartbreak and toil and suffering gone,
The boys beneath them slumber on.
They are the D-Day Dodgers who stay in Italy.
They are the D-Day Dodgers who stay in Italy.



The unit was disbanded in November 1944, but many Americans stayed on as we know from newspaper articles. The camp was then in use for several years afterwards, looking after British wounded. In fact, by the end of July 1945 there were 3500 British army personnel being cared for at Stoneleigh.

World War II and VE Day in Stoneleigh and Ashow

1944

In September a new theatre, transformed from a tunnel-type hut was opened by the mayor of Coventry. It could seat 800 people and provided the men with entertainment there since it was difficult to get to and from Coventry.

There was another casualty for Stoneleigh Village in 1944

John Alun Edmonds - 25 July 1944

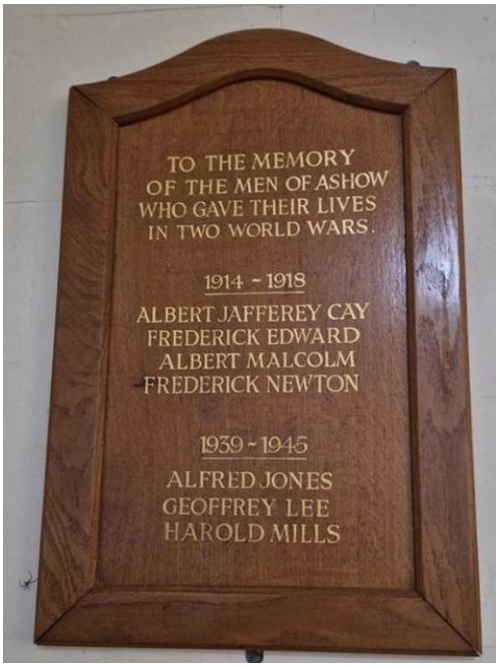


On Active Service

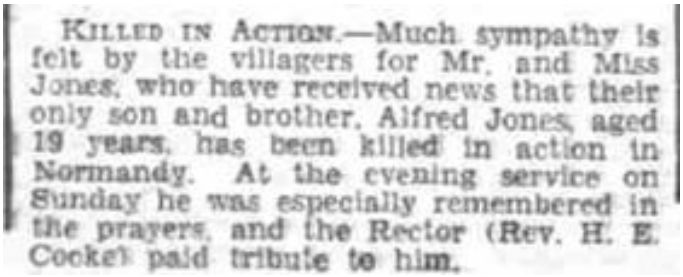
EDMONDS. — Sergt-Flight Eng. John Alun Edmonds, of 134, Anchorway Rd., Coventry, killed. Service 12 o'clock, Saturday, 29th, at St. Martin-in-the-Fields. Interment Stoneleigh.

Coventry Evening Telegraph - Friday 28 July 1944

Sadly, Ashow would not see two of their men return.



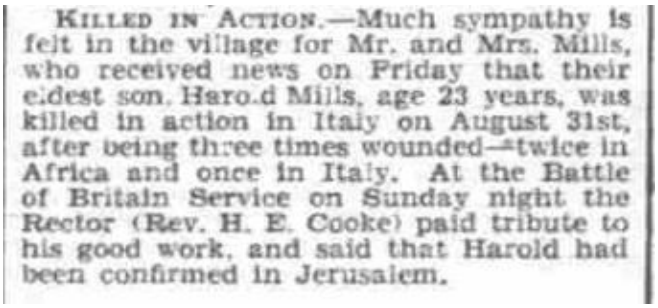
Alfred William Jones - 17 July 1944



KILLED IN ACTION.—Much sympathy is felt by the villagers for Mr. and Miss Jones, who have received news that their only son and brother, Alfred Jones, aged 19 years, has been killed in action in Normandy. At the evening service on Sunday he was especially remembered in the prayers, and the Rector (Rev. H. E. Cooke) paid tribute to him.

Leamington Spa Courier - Friday 25 August 1944

Harold Mills 31 August 1944



KILLED IN ACTION.—Much sympathy is felt in the village for Mr. and Mrs. Mills, who received news on Friday that their eldest son, Harold Mills, age 23 years, was killed in action in Italy on August 31st, after being three times wounded—twice in Africa and once in Italy. At the Battle of Britain Service on Sunday night the Rector (Rev. H. E. Cooke) paid tribute to his good work, and said that Harold had been confirmed in Jerusalem.

Leamington Spa Courier Friday 22 September 1944

He would be the last casualty of the war for the villages.

Childhood Memories of Stoneleigh Children

We now turn to some personal memories from those who were children in Stoneleigh and Ashow during the war… how different their perspectives are!

Bob Scarsbrooke (born in 1930) Head Boy at Stoneleigh School

I remember the air-raid shelters, one on the blacksmith's green and one outside Craine's store (now The Old Post Office).

I remember when I was in the school playground and saw bombs leaving a German bomber which was being chased by a British fighter plane; a line of bomb craters came from the National Agriculture Centre's field, across the River Avon and to a further field. We children went to the field to see the damage and collected spent bullet cases and clips and made belts to wear round our waists. A bomb also dropped in the field behind the village hall but did not explode.

Peter Lambert (born in 1935)

On the night of November 14 I watched Coventry burn, the light of the fire lit up the German bombers coming over our house. [Peter lived opposite the Co-Op on Coventry Road]. Later when we were bombing Germany, bombers took off from Baginton every teatime, so heavily laden they barely cleared our roof – the noise from the engines was deafening. I remember a morning in school when a brave Polish airman crashed just on the other side of the bluebell wood, less than half a mile from the village.

Dennis Craddock (born in 1934)

I remember going to the picture shows at the army camp in the Deer Park and trying to scale the high training walls there.

I remember when American army trucks got stuck under the Rocky Lane bridge.



Shirley Jean Edmunds

Shirley was born at number 12 Coventry Road (it was then known as “Bridge End”).

Her mother Annie was then 46, so – what a talking subject for the village. Annie and her husband, Harry, must have thought their family complete as the eldest children, Ray and Gwen, who were twins, were nineteen years old and Mervyn, was seventeen years old.

Coventry was bombed heavily in 1940 and 1941, so families with young children were evacuated. Shirley being a small baby, was taken by her mother to stay in Welshpool with Shirley’s maternal grandmother, Sarah. She was then christened in Welshpool. Shirley’s Dad stayed in Stoneleigh, working seven days a week and going out on police duty when the sirens sounded.

Shirley’s three siblings all served in the second world war.

Shirley’s youngest brother, Mervyn volunteered for the army in February 1941, he was seventeen and a half. He was specially trained for the D Day landings. Gwen was in the WAAF and Ray, volunteered but was not allowed to join up because he worked for Armstrong Whitworth Aircraft as a tool setter, which was a reserved occupation. Three days before peace was signed Ray got his papers and joined the forces for two years, serving in Greece.



Raymond Edmunds



Gwen Edmunds



Mervyn Edmunds

Her brothers told Shirley more than once) how they would go to Miss Walden's sweetshop (not there now), it was where the entrance to Stoneleigh Close is now and ask for vinegar or something from the garden shed and then they would take sweets – childhood pranks!

Philip Healey

I remember the Americans in the Deer Park and when the British Army replaced them, some "army children" attended Stoneleigh School.

I remember that refugees from the East End of London - some of whom were rough! - came to stay with village families. Those who had been bombed out of Coventry came to live at Stareton and on the Finham Road in hutted camps, and their children came to Stoneleigh school.

When the American Air Force was based nearby, I remember a crash on Motslow Hill when two pilots were looping the loop. Boys used to like scavenging for "aeroplane glass" – Perspex – and by using a red-hot poker would make rings from it.

I remember the King driving along the Kenilworth Road when visiting Coventry, and when Churchill came, the children marched with flags to Gibbet Hill to see him go past. Lord Leigh arranged for the car to slow down, and the great man was presented with a cigar tied with a red ribbon!

John Henry Smith

I was 8 years old at the beginning of the war and living in Vicarage Road.

I recall seeing a German fighter plane come down Vicarage Road with a British fighter in hot pursuit. Also, a German plane dropping its bombs on Stoneleigh Hill as it had missed Coventry and needed to shed its load. There was also a crash on the Hill of a German plane.

Once I came home with a live grenade that I had found in the river.

Whilst on my paper round I would be stopped by the American airmen. They would ask to look at the newspaper to catch up with the news.

Finally on VE day there was a huge bonfire I think maybe where the Orchard is now and there were 3 effigies that weren't burnt Hitler, Mussolini and Himler.

Frederick Smith

Fred was John's father. Fred had served in the First World War and was working for the water board during the Second World War. On the night of The Blitz Fred cycled to Coventry from Stoneleigh to keep the water supplied to the fire engines. He did not return home for 5 days. His wife, Margaret, thought he was dead and when he did come home, he was black from head to toe.



Nora Blagburn

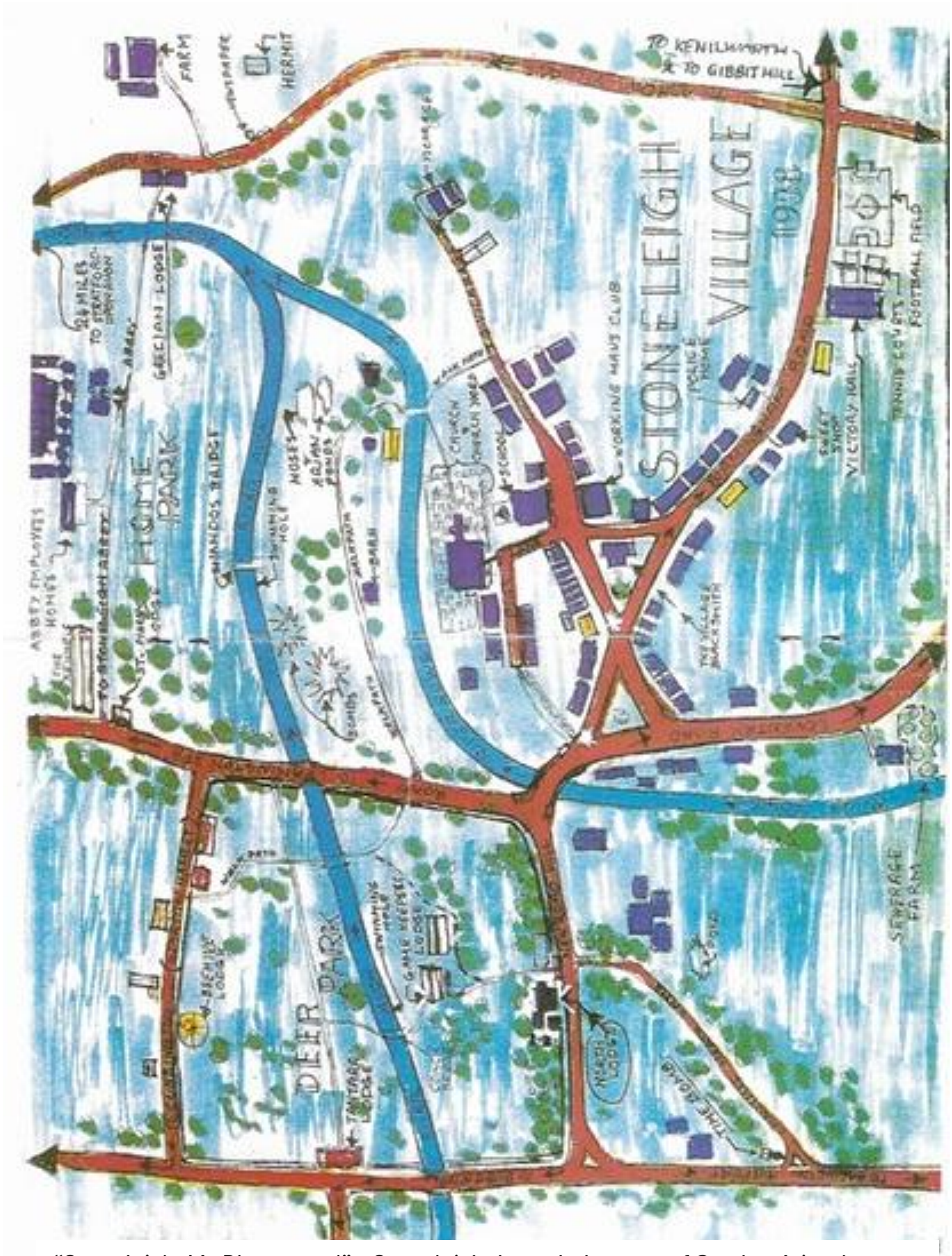
In complete contrast, my family moved from Birmingham just before the War began to the Worcestershire countryside where as children, we enjoyed the surrounding woods and fields and attended a small village school.

We could see the night sky lit up with flames over Coventry and Birmingham.

Only once we woke up to a Large Thud.

Mum said, 'It's alright, go back to sleep.'

A bomber plane returning home after a raid had jettisoned a bomb in a field some miles away.



"Stoneleigh, My Playground" – Stoneleigh through the eyes of Gordon Aris who emigrated to the United States in 1947 and who drew this map from memories of his childhood in the thirties and forties.

Stoneleigh and Ashow News Special Millennium Magazine January 2000

We end these memories with a reflection and a poem by Avril Newey.

It is summer 1944. A group of mothers and their young children are walking to Ashow from Kenilworth, to picnic by the river. The war is on the turn; the Allies have landed in Normandy and Hitler's troops are being pushed back. In the Far East there are fewer hopes. Allied prisoners are being starved and tortured in Burma and Singapore. Two fathers are fighting overseas, making the threat of the telegram boy's knock on the door a constant terror for their families, whilst our other fathers have, for the past four years, spent days and nights working among sirens and raining bombs in Coventry's factories, and are exhausted.

In Coventry, the centre of the city is broken, and scarred, wooden market stalls sell their few goods from amongst the ruins, the cathedral spire stands witness to death and flames, whilst in Kenilworth the Clock Tower has amazingly survived the devastation around it.





Glasspool's, the chemist's, props itself up against its ruined neighbour whilst the elegant houses in Abbey End gaze out through the tumbled stone of their windows and now purposeless doorsteps, on one of whose steps Dr Asplin's beloved dog no longer suns himself. A rubble of brick, stone and long grass marks the spot where the neighbours from one street in Stoke came to escape the bombs whilst, opposite, Reeves Corn Merchants spill out their sacks of grain and gardening paraphernalia onto the pavement.

But we are going to Ashow! Our journey has started from a small group of houses in the hollow of Spring Lane. Up over Whitemoor Bridge we skip, but not before we have stood on the iron tread of the bridge to wrap ourselves in the steam of a passing train. Then, down the hill and along the path past Hawkes Brickyard on one side and the adventures of the osier bed between the stream and the railway on the other. We rush over the brickyard railway siding to swing open the heavy wooden gate and step on to the Black Pad. On our right is the field where our mothers potato and pea pick to make a little extra for food, clothes and Christmas, but on our left, the scraping, screeching sound of the trucks with their heavy loads continuously climbing and sinking up the sides of the deep-as Hades' clay quarry. Where we are walking was once where the horses began the task of pulling the wooden trams along the rails to Ashow. Now, with only an occasional rail still set in the earth to remind us, we chatter and laugh between the wild rose, hawthorn and blackberry bushes, past the big white house and on to Windy Arbour. Crossing there, we step over the stile next to Mrs Donaldson's house, the bicycling Second Class teacher at School Lane School who would one day teach us all the Tonic Solfa and the folk songs of the British Isles. Next, over the fields and past the long glasshouses of the Casita Nurseries and out into Glasshouse Lane. Up the road and into the fairy land of Rocky Lane, we are nearly there!...

For we are going to Ashow!

THE WAY TO ASHOW

Alan, Jean, Dawn, Cynthia,
Merrick, Ruth and me,
Jam and fishpaste sandwiches,
Tizer and cold tea.

On the way to Ashow,
Trying not to run,
Mothers following after,
Laughing in the sun.

On the way to Ashow,
Between the lichen banks,
Whilst dads are in the factories,
Forging guns and tanks.

Or far away, still fighting,
To save us from the Hun,
While we are hopping, skipping,
And practising our fun.

Willowherb and foxglove,
Campion, dock, ox-eye,
Lady's mantle, bedstraw,
All touch as we pass by.

Meadowsweet and bramble,
Goosegrass, sorrel, rose,
Pulling at our fingers
Where the summer grows.

On the way to Asceshot
Where the fletchers walked
And after them, stout horses
Dragged clay carts to the wharf.

With lad and men a- shovin'
And a runnin' up and down
To get their sticky treasure
On board for Gloucester Town.

But we danced that way to Ashow
Between those hay-hazed fields,
Gay poppies in the furrows,
Mist-scabious, their shields.

And when we got to Ashow
There was hop-scotch on the street
With nodding from the doorsteps
And the shop with couponed sweets.

Then, by the riverbank, the beach
With pebbles, grass and trout
And knitted bags to open
To get our costumes out.

And plate and bottle, cup and spoon
And gossiping and tears
From nettle stings and dock leaves
And…after eighty years

Childhood Memories of Stoneleigh Children

Do you who go to Ashow
Along that windy way
Still hear us, calling, laughing
Small children out at play?

Can you glimpse the purple heaven
in the sky above the arch
Where the rhododendrons blossomed
Along the carriage path?

Yes? Then take along to Ashow
Your song that must be sung
And our sorrows will all vanish
And you'll once again be young

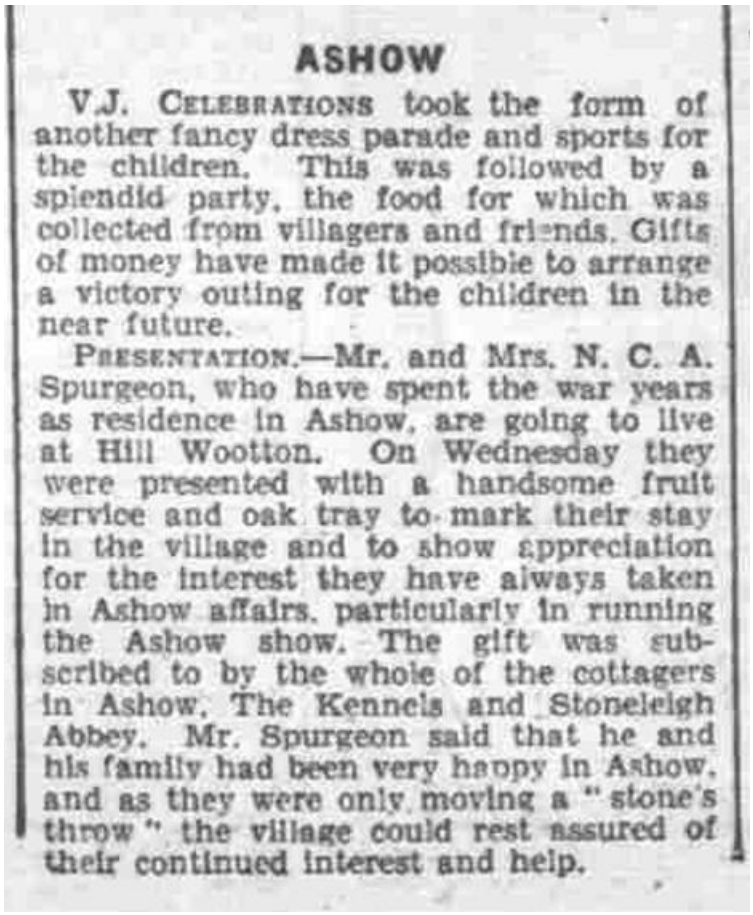
And when you get to Ashow
Remember us, who came
And plaited dreams in Ashow
And sit, and do the same



World War II and VE Day in Stoneleigh and Ashow
1945

Eighty years ago, on May 8th, 1945, victory in Europe was finally announced. Some of the Americans that were based at the 307th Station hospital played in the band which headed Coventry's thanksgiving parade in the Memorial Park on May 14th.

But the war was far from entirely over, as fighting continued in the Far East, until the atom bombs were dropped on Hiroshima on August 6th and Nagasaki on August 9th. Emperor Hirohito of Japan addressed the nation on August 15th – a date we now commemorate as VJ Day – and the surrender was finally signed on September 2nd. Five years to the day since the outbreak of war in September 1939, it was all over. Celebrations at this point were much more muted than they had been in May, and when those men who had spent long years in prisoner of war camps arrived in Britain in November, it seemed to many of them that nobody wanted to talk about the war, let alone congratulate them on their service.



ASHOW

V.J. CELEBRATIONS took the form of another fancy dress parade and sports for the children. This was followed by a splendid party, the food for which was collected from villagers and friends. Gifts of money have made it possible to arrange a victory outing for the children in the near future.

PRESENTATION.—Mr. and Mrs. N. C. A. Spurgeon, who have spent the war years as residence in Ashow, are going to live at Hill Wootton. On Wednesday they were presented with a handsome fruit service and oak tray to mark their stay in the village and to show appreciation for the interest they have always taken in Ashow affairs, particularly in running the Ashow show. The gift was subscribed to by the whole of the cottagers in Ashow, The Kennels and Stoneleigh Abbey. Mr. Spurgeon said that he and his family had been very happy in Ashow, and as they were only moving a "stone's throw" the village could rest assured of their continued interest and help.

UNMENTIONED IN DISPATCHES

Some of them never come home to fanfares,
They dump their kitbags down at the door,
Kiss their wives and let the children
Wrestle them down on the kitchen floor,
Switch the telly on, pour out a whiskey,
Search for the local football score.

Some of them skip the quayside welcome,
Dodge the bunting and cannonade,
Make their landfall in silent harbours,
Nod to the coastguard but evade
The searchlight of public scrutiny
Like those engaged in the smuggling trade.

Some of them land at lonely airfields
Far removed from the celebration,
Hang their flying gear in a locker,
Cadge a lift to the nearest station,
Make for home and take for granted
The short-lived thanks of a grateful nation.

Peter Whyton ex-RAF officer 2014



AND WHEN THEY ASK US

And when they ask us,
How dangerous it was.
Oh! We'll never tell them,
No, we'll never tell them.
We spent our pay in some cafe.
And fought wild women night and day,
T'was the cushiest job we ever had.

And when they ask us,
And they're certainly going to ask us.
The reason why we didn't win the
Croix de Guerre.
Oh! We'll never tell them,
No! We'll never tell them.
There was a front but damned if we knew where.

And when they ask us,
How dangerous it was.
Oh! We'll never tell them,
No, we'll never tell them.
We spent our pay in some cafe.
And fought wild women night and day,
T'was the cushiest job we ever had.

And when they ask us,
And they're certainly going to ask us.
The reason why we didn't win the
Croix de Guerre.
Oh! We'll never tell them,
No! We'll never tell them.
There was a front but damned if we knew where.

Slowly life began to return to normal.

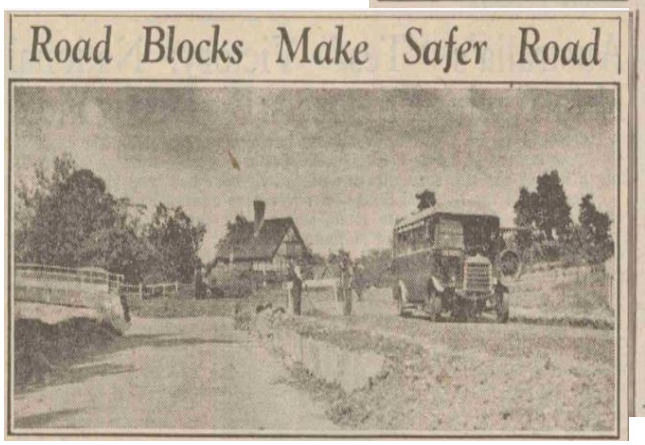
The road down the hill was widened, making it less dangerous for transport, and its surface was created using redundant concrete roadblocks - these were broken up by explosives and used as foundation!



INVASION BLOCKS FOR ROAD-MAKING

The Warwickshire County Council has found a good and novel use for the concrete road blocks which were taken up when the danger of invasion passed. After being broken up by explosives the material is used as a foundation for the road widening scheme at Stoneleigh Bridge turning. This is effecting a considerable saving on the cost of the scheme.

No. 1 picture shows an engineer plugging explosive in a hole in the block. No. 2 depicts the resultant explosion, photographed 200 yards away; and No. 3 the material being levelled on the new roadway.



Road Blocks Make Safer Road

Every returning service person was given £10 from a welcome home fund to which the villagers had subscribed. The home guard was stood down, and 53000 oak tree seedlings were being prepared at the abbey to take the place of those felled for the war effort.

Gradually, and quietly, families patched together their community and their lives.

A LONG - AWAITED road improvement on the Coventry-Stoneleigh-Leamington road is now nearing completion.

By the realignment and regrading of the approach from Stoneleigh Hill to the river bridge much of the danger of the acute road bend has been overcome. The improvement gives traffic a better view and allows more room for vehicles to make the turn on to the bridge.

A new length of carriageway—seen on the right of the picture—has been built at a higher level than the old one, and in its construction a number of concrete cylinders and octagons used as road blocks for defence measures during the war have been embodied.

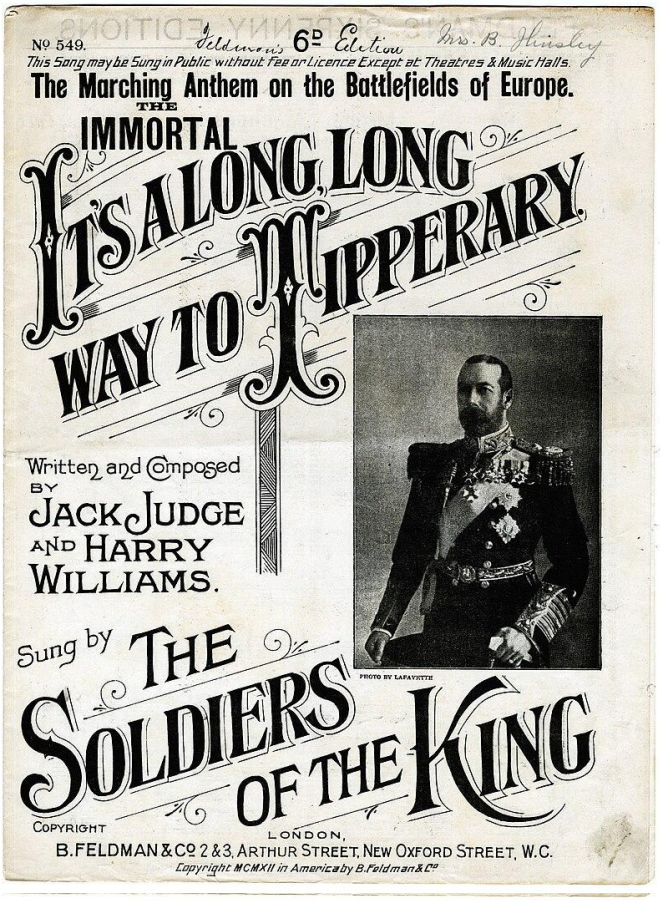
The octagons, each weighing three tons, were conveyed to the site on a low-loading vehicle and demolished by explosives. The materials incorporated in them were then used to build up the foundation of the new road.

Kohima

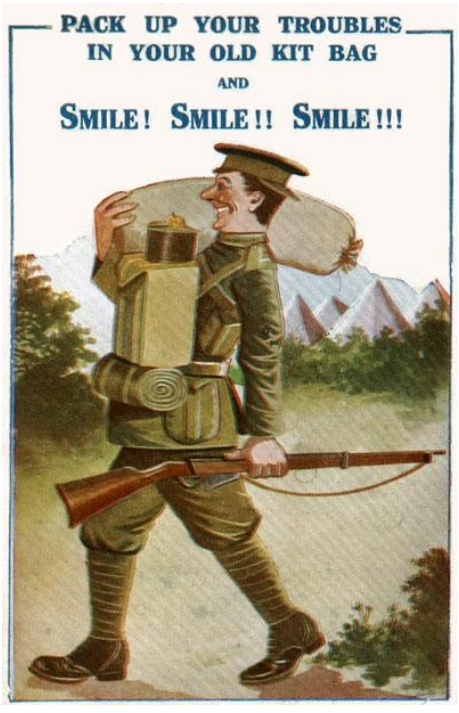

WHEN YOU GO HOME
TELL THEM OF US AND SAY
FOR YOUR TOMORROW
WE GAVE OUR TODAY

IT'S A LONG WAY TO TIPPERARY

It's a long way to Tipperary
it's a long way to go
It's a long way to Tipperary
to the sweetest gal I know
farewell to Piccadilly
so long Leicester Square
It's a long, long way to Tipperary
but my heart lies there



PACK UP YOUR TROUBLES



Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag
And smile, smile, smile.
Don't let your joy and laughter hear the snag
Smile boys, that's the style
What's the use of worrying
It never was worthwhile
So, pack up your troubles in your old kit bag
And smile, smile, smile.

BYE, BYE, BLACKBIRD

Pack up all my cares and woe, here I go, winging low
Bye, bye, blackbird

Where somebody waits for me
Sugar's sweet, so is she
Bye, bye, blackbird

No one here can love or understand me
Oh, what hard luck stories they all hand me
Make my bed and light the light,
I'll be home late tonight
Blackbird, bye, bye

WHEN YOU'RE SMILIN'

When you're smilin', when you're smilin'
The whole world smiles with you
When you're laughin', when you're laughin'
The sun comes shinin' through

But when you're cryin', you bring on the rain
So stop that cryin', be happy again
Keep on smilin', 'cause when you're smilin'
The whole world smiles with you




BLESS 'EM ALL
'THE SERVICE SONG'
Bless em all, bless em all, the long and the short and the tall
Bless all the sergeants and w. o. ones,
Bless all the corp'rals and their blinkin sons,
'Cos we're saying goodbye to them all, as back to their billets they crawl
You'll get no promotion this side of the ocean,
so cheer up my lads, bless 'em all

World War II and VE Day in Stoneleigh and Ashow
1945

At 9.00 pm on 8 May 1945, King George VI made a radio broadcast to his people officially marking the end of the Second World War. His speech marked to the people of the United Kingdom the end of the Nazi occupation of Europe.

In his Victory in Europe Day (VE Day) speech the King expresses his relief that the fighting was over thanks to those who made the ultimate sacrifice.



Today we give thanks to Almighty God for a great deliverance. Speaking from our Empire's oldest capital city, war-battered but never for one moment daunted or dismayed - speaking from London, I ask you to join with me in that act of thanksgiving.

Germany, the enemy who drove all Europe into war, has been finally overcome. In the Far East we have yet to deal with the Japanese, a determined and cruel foe. To this we shall turn with the utmost resolve and with all our resources. But at this hour, when the dreadful shadow of war has passed far from our hearths and homes in these islands, we may at last make one pause for thanksgiving and then turn our thoughts to the tasks all over the world which peace in Europe brings with it.

Let us remember those who will not come back: their constancy and courage in battle, their sacrifice and endurance in the face of a merciless enemy; let us remember the men in all the services, and the women in all the services, who have laid down their lives. We have come to the end of our tribulation, and they are not with us at the moment of our rejoicing.

Then let us salute in proud gratitude the great host of the living who have brought us to victory. I cannot praise them to the measure of each one's service, for in a total war, the efforts of all rise to the same noble height, and all are devoted to the common purpose.

Armed or unarmed, men and women, you have fought and striven and endured to your utmost. No-one knows that better than I do, and as your King, I thank with a full heart those who bore arms so valiantly on land and sea, or in the air, and all civilians who, shouldering their many burdens, have carried them unflinchingly without complaint

With those memories in our minds, let us think what it was that has upheld us through nearly six years of suffering and peril. The knowledge that everything was at stake: our freedom, our independence, our very existence as a people; but the knowledge also that in defending ourselves we were defending the liberties of the whole world; that our cause was the cause not of this nation only, not of this Empire and Commonwealth only, but of every land where freedom is cherished and law and liberty go hand in hand.

In the darkest hours, we knew that the enslaved and isolated peoples of Europe looked to us, their hopes were our hopes, their confidence confirmed our faith. We knew that, if we failed, the last remaining barrier against a world-wide tyranny would have fallen in ruins.

But we did not fail. We kept faith with ourselves and with one another, we kept faith and unity with our great allies. That faith, that unity have carried us to victory through dangers which at times seemed overwhelming.

So let us resolve to bring to the tasks which lie ahead the same high confidence in our mission. Much hard work awaits us both in the restoration of our own country after the ravages of war, and in helping to restore peace and sanity to a shattered world.

This comes upon us at a time when we have all given of our best. For five long years and more, heart and brain, nerve and muscle, have been directed upon the overthrow of Nazi tyranny. Now we turn, fortified by success, to deal with our last remaining foe. The Queen and I know the ordeals which you have endured throughout the Commonwealth and Empire. We are proud to have shared some of these ordeals with you and we know also that we together shall all face the future with stern resolve and prove that our reserves of will-power and vitality are inexhaustible.

There is great comfort in the thought that the years of darkness and danger in which the children of our country have grown up are over and, please God, forever. We shall have failed, and the blood of our dearest will have flowed in vain if the victory which they died to win does not lead to a lasting peace, founded on justice and good will.

To that, then, let us turn our thoughts to this day of just triumph and proud sorrow, and then take up our work again, resolved as a people to do nothing unworthy of those who died for us, and to make the world such a world as they would have desired for their children and for ours.

This is the task to which now honour binds us. In the hour of danger, we humbly committed our cause into the hand of God, and he has been our strength and shield. Let us thank him for his mercies and in this hour of victory commit ourselves and our new task to the guidance of that same strong hand.



God Save the King

God save our gracious King,
Long live our noble King,
God save the King!
Send him victorious,
Happy and glorious,
Long to reign over us,
God save the King

On 15 August 1945, King George VI delivered a speech again, this time informing us that Japan had surrendered, and it is today known as VJ Day, Victory in Japan.

Three months have passed since I asked you to join with me in an act of thanksgiving for the defeat of Germany. We then rejoiced that peace had returned to Europe, but we knew that a strong and relentless enemy still remained to be conquered in Asia. None could then tell how long or how heavy would prove the struggle that still awaited us. Japan has surrendered, so let us join in thanking Almighty God that war has ended throughout the world



Civilians and service personnel in London celebrating V-J Day on August 15, 1945

This photograph comes from the collections of the Imperial War Museums.

NEW DWELLINGS FOR THE VILLAGES *Warwick Rural Councils Allocation Warwick Rural District Council has made a start the erection of a good type of house in the villages.*

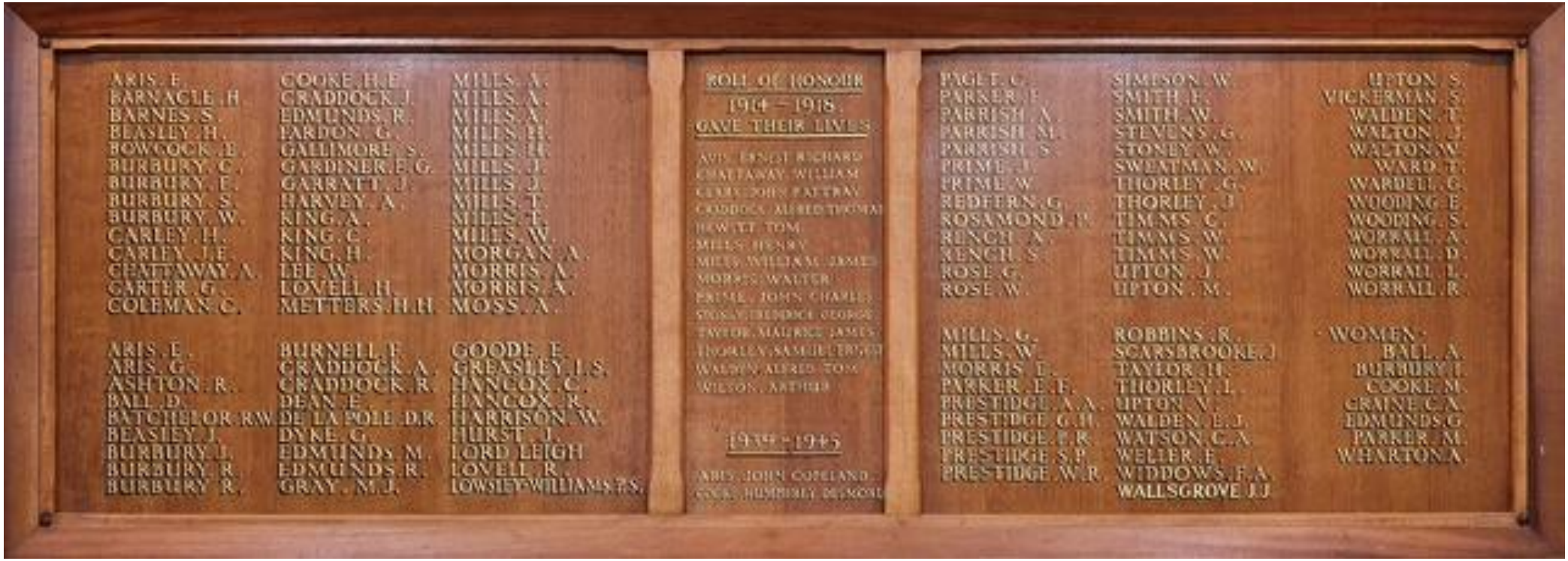
The number and allocation of the dwellings between the various parishes has been carefully considered to meet the local housing needs of to-day and the near future. It recognised that housing is a continuous problem; there is no finality. The allocation is as follows; - Stoneleigh 36 permanent and two Swedish timber; Ashow 4.

Leamington Spa Courier - Friday 18 January 1946

A tree was planted in the meadow, which is now known as Stoneleigh Orchard, to commemorate the end of World War II.



Those that had served and lost their lives in the War had their names added to the Roll of Honour Board which is situated in Stoneleigh Village Hall



Charles Edward Richard Hind, 1925 - 2023. Royal Navy.

Ted and his wife Betty lived in Stoneleigh for many years.



A former Jugoslavian freedom fighter, Ted's banking career was interrupted when he joined the Royal Navy in 1943, aged 18, and was posted abroad joining first a Motor Torpedo Boat and then a Motor Gun Boat operating in support of Tito's Jugoslav Partisans in the Adriatic. Within six months of joining these boats Ted had been bombed, attacked by fighter aircraft, and been in close range action with enemy vessels in total darkness, been bombarded by shore gun batteries, done an air-sea rescue, landed agents into enemy held territory, operated in narrow channels where British boats were lost through hitting mines and involved in the capture of 92 German prisoners.

At the end of World War II Ted joined another boat in mine sweeping activities in the Northern Adriatic" until 1946.

Picture and information provided by his daughter

Harry Herdmann, 1921 - 2016. Army.

Served in Army North Africa, Sicily and Italy.



When war broke out in 1939 Harry signed up with the Royal Signals and initially was based in the buildings we now know as the Cabinet War Rooms. It was here that he regularly passed Winston Churchill coming the other way as they moved between the rooms, underground tunnels and the radio mast base on the island in St James' Park Lake. Harry said that Churchill

always had a cheerful word or two to say to them, despite those dark days of 1940.

Harry was assigned to 8th Army Group, to the slow attrition of the battles of North Africa, Sicily and Italy, where the embarked troops had a very lucky escape on the troopship as it was bombed in passage. The bomb passed straight through, with only 5 deaths out of 4000 on board. The campaign in Italy proved even slower than before, the battle of Casino being one of the bloodiest of the war, and Harry often put straight a detail or two as he gave his recollections. Those who ventured into the open were often doomed. For him the war ended in Trieste, and he came back to the Northeast and recommenced his job at the pit, in County Durham, where he started as an apprentice carpenter.

In 1960, Harry married Winifred Parker in Durham, having met in Yorkshire. Win had family in Ashow, and they wanted to move back to the area to look after her ageing parents. They arrived in Stoneleigh in 1980 and made a home for themselves on the Birmingham Road, where they opened the Post Office in their front room. Whilst the post office shop operated, they also used it as a base for numerous charitable works and raised money for many local charities. Some residents have commented that a visit to the shop for some stamps was usually an expensive outing!

February 2017 Stoneleigh and Ashow News

Edward (Ted) Morris1922 - 2019
Born and lived all his life in Stoneleigh

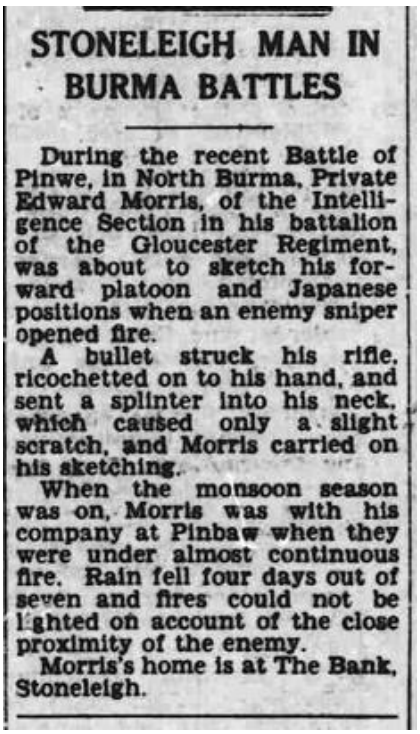
Before being called up in 1942, Ted was in the ARP in Stoneleigh. He was also an apprentice indentured joiner, according to the 1939 register, which may account for his late call up.

Ted was sent for initial training to Bodmin in Cornwall, and then he was transferred to the 10th battalion Royal Gloucestershire Regiment, an armoured division, which was then sent to India.

Once arriving in India, the war with the Japanese in Burma was escalating and the regiment he was in converted to an infantry division which was transported into the top of Burma and then Ted basically spent 2 years

fighting the Japanese and forcing their way down to the bottom of the country.

On Saturday 06 January 1945 The Coventry Standard reported the following about Ted.



STONELEIGH MAN IN BURMA BATTLES

During the recent Battle of Pinwe, in North Burma, Private Edward Morris, of the Intelligence Section in his battalion of the Gloucester Regiment, was about to sketch his forward platoon and Japanese positions when an enemy sniper opened fire.

A bullet struck his rifle, ricochetted on to his hand, and sent a splinter into his neck, which caused only a slight scratch, and Morris carried on his sketching.

When the monsoon season was on, Morris was with his company at Pinbaw when they were under almost continuous fire. Rain fell four days out of seven and fires could not be lighted on account of the close proximity of the enemy.

Morris's home is at The Bank, Stoneleigh.

STONELEIGH MAN IN BURMA BATTLES

During the recent Battle of Plnwe, In North Burma. Private Edward Morris, of the Intelligence Section in his battalion of the Gloucester Regiment, was about to sketch his forward platoon and Japanese positions when an enemy sniper opened fire. A bullet struck his rifle, ricochetted on to his hand, and sent a splinter into his neck, which caused only a slight scratch, and Morris carried on his sketching. When the monsoon season was on, Morris was with his company at Plnbaw when they were under almost continuous fire. Rain fell four days out of five and fires could not be lighted on account of the close proximity of the enemy.

Morris's home is at The Bank, Stonelelgh.

The photo of Ted in uniform was taken on 31 August 1946 after he returned from Burma but before being demobbed. He was home on leave for his sister's Winnie's wedding to William Eric Louch. The photo shows the two of them at the top of the steps of 9 The Bank, Stoneleigh which was his home from around 1936 to 1972 when he moved to 9 Birmingham Road.



Picture and information provided by his son

Rupert William Dudley Leigh, 4th Baron Leigh of Stoneleigh, 1908 – 1979



Rupert, known as Robin, was educated at Eton College and then at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. He joined the 11th Hussars (Prince Albert's Own) - The Cherry Pickers from 1926, and in 1932 he joined the 11th Royal Gloucester Hussars.

On the outbreak of the Second World War, Robin and his Royal Gloucester Hussars were called up but remained in Great Britain. Robin requested in 1944 that he be attached to a front-line fighting group in France and was sent as Second in Command of the famous Sherwood Rangers under Colonel Stanley Christopherson. He joined the Sherwood Rangers as they broke out of Normandy in August 1944 and they succeeded in being one of the first fighting units to liberate Brussels in early September 1944. The men called Robin 'The Baron' and he was to remain with the Sherwood Rangers until February 1945 having supported the US 82nd Airborne around Nijmegen during Market Garden. The Sherwood Rangers were one of the first troops to enter Germany at Wyler near Beek on 21st September 1944 which was commemorated in the papers, on film and on a Sherwood Rangers Christmas card - 1944.

He was a very popular character among the Stoneleigh villagers for his genial personality and generosity. He died on 24 June 1979 at Adlestrop and was buried at Stoneleigh on 6 July.

In addition to the churchyard headstone, Section F, Row 8, Grave 10, there is a touching memorial stone in the Leigh Chapel which states that Rupert was married to Anne from 1931-1977 "In which he was most fortunate". They are the last members of the family to be commemorated in the Leigh Chapel.

www.stoneleighhistorysociety.org



Jesse Paul Wilkes,1920-1974. Army.
Jesse Paul Wilkes, known as Paul, was a corporal in the army and served in North Africa, Italy and Malta. Whilst a standard bearer for the Stoneleigh Branch of the Royal British Legion, at the Remembrance Service, Stoneleigh, on Sunday, 10 November 1974, he died suddenly. Poignantly, his tombstone reads "His friends were legion in number."



Paul married Joyce Cecily Sibley, on 5 July 1949 at Stoneleigh



Joyce Cecily Sibley 1925-2016,
WRAF, rank ACW1.

Joyce joined the WRAF in 1943 as a wireless operator and was posted to Egypt.



In later years she worked in accounts at the British Showjumping Association.

In October 1975, after 24 years of service in the office of Treasurer for the Stoneleigh Branch of the Royal British Legion, Joyce retired but still remained an active member.

Joyce died on 22 September 2016, and the funeral was held at Holy Trinity Church in Leamington, as Stoneleigh Church was closed for building restoration at the time. She was buried with her husband in Stoneleigh churchyard on 26 October. Section B, Row 12, Grave 13



Information and photos from Stoneleigh and Ashow News May 2025, Stoneleigh History Society and their niece Mandy Freeman

The Ratliff Family

Derwent William Ratliff served with the Royal Field Artillery in World War I, losing his right leg in March 1917, a year after the Battle of the Somme. He resigned his commission as a Lieutenant in 1918 due to his injuries, receiving the rank of Honorary Captain. In World War II, he became Chief Civil Defence Warden in Coventry, participating in every city raid and receiving the M.B.E. in 1943 for his service. Alongside his civil defence responsibilities, Captain Ratliff also helped raise £9 million as vice-chairman of the Coventry Savings Committee and worked as secretary and director at Phillips and Marriott Ltd., the Midland Brewery. (Phillips and Marriott had bought and taken over the family business of the Ratliff Brewery of Coventry in 1900). This company was itself taken over by Bass, Ratcliff and Gretton, where Captain Ratliff became district manager, retiring in 1954 after 30 years service.

Derwent Ratliff married Dorothy Murray Pearson in 1910, and together they had three daughters Peggy, Nancy and Angela. Nancy married Paul Richard Ballin Glover at St Mary's Church, Stoneleigh, on July 7, 1938, and they made their home in Kenilworth. At the start of WWII, Angela was aged 18 and volunteered to join the ATS. She was stationed at Bletchley Park and worked on enemy wireless transmissions. Peggy trained as a nurse and had joined the Red Cross Hospital Welfare in 1940 and was eventually sent out to the Far East.

To be with her wider family, Nancy had returned to Stareton House, where she had lived with her parents before being married, for the birth of her daughter, Wendy, in 1940, while her husband Paul was serving in the 7th Royal Warwickshire Regiment in France with the British Expeditionary Force. Nancy's son Simon was born in 1942. Sadly, Dorothy passed away on 28 January 1943 at the age of 55; however, the family remained in Stareton until the end of the war in 1945.

Wendy and Simon remember the Army Hospital base in Stareton and being given sweets by the American soldiers over the garden fence. They recall being woken up and carried down to a large bonfire set alight to celebrate the end of the war in Europe.

Captain Ratliff was not the only family member to receive an M.B.E.: his eldest daughter Peggy Murray Ratliff, was also honoured with her M.B.E. on 12th July 1947 for her work with the British Red Cross Society in Southeast Asia. She worked as second in command to Lady Edwina Mountbatten and arrived in Singapore three hours after the Japanese surrender. She worked tirelessly in the repatriation of prisoners of war and earned additional recognition, including the Red Cross Distinguished War Service Medal and the Burma Star.

At Bletchley Park, Angela met her future husband Edward Gawne, an academic from Oxford University, who worked on the code breaking efforts and they were married at St Mary's Church in Stoneleigh on 26 June 1946.

Their achievements illustrate the family's remarkable commitment to service during the war years, with each member contributing in significant ways both at home and abroad.





Dorothy and Derwent Ratliff with a grandchild

Photographs courtesy of Simon Glover



Photograph courtesy of Derek Robinson

Sam the Fox – his contribution to Victory in Europe

On D-Day, 6 June 1944, the first vehicles ashore on Gold Beach were the light armoured cars (Recce Cars) and jeeps of the 61st Reconnaissance Regiment within the 50th (Northumbrian) Infantry Division. Their role was to provide contact patrols with the assaulting divisions, reporting back to Divisional Headquarters, and to reconnoitre ahead once the breakout from the beachhead was achieved.

Amongst them was troop officer Lt. T. R. Compton-Bishop's pet fox, Sam, who accompanied him in his Recce Car. Sam was adopted as the unofficial mascot of the regiment and accompanied it through its campaign in Europe. At times ranging 65 miles ahead of the assaulting battalions, Sam and his troop were involved in the push to Arnhem ("A Bridge Too Far") reaching Nijmegen Bridge and up the south bank of the Rhine.

Lt. Compton-Bishop found Sam as an abandoned cub while on manoeuvres in the UK a few months before D-Day. Sam was raised on tinned rations and had a liking for beer. He was very tame and not bothered by gunfire while on patrol.



Sam with an admirer

After Arnhem, the 50th Division was disbanded and the 61st Recce went on to join the 11th Armoured Division that was involved in countering the German offensive in the Ardennes (Battle of the Bulge). In October 1944, the 61st Recce withdrew to Izegem to be disbanded. After several months of being constantly on the move,

Sam returned to the wild in Izegem. No doubt that he was a morale booster for a regiment that suffered losses of 76% killed, wounded or missing. The 61st Recce was reformed on 16 December and sent to Namur in response to the German offensive (Battle of the Bulge). It was finally disbanded and reassigned to other units once victory was won on 25 January 1945.

It was with the 51st Highland Division in northern Germany and while making a reconnaissance of the village of Ringstedt that Lt. Compton-Bishop was approached by a German major wanting to make arrangements for the surrender of his division, 15 PG Div, some 110,000 men.



Lt. T.R. Compton Bishop with Sam the Fox, 61st Reconnaissance Regiment.

Detail from a painting by Sandford Handley. The Tank Museum



61st Reconnaissance Regiment by Sandford Handley (1919-2014).
The Tank Museum

MEET SAM —THE LUCKY FOX!

He Drinks His Beer In France

PET of Lieut. Terence R. Compton-Bishop, of Blenheim-gardens, Sanderstead, and mascot of his squadron with the 50th (Northumbrian) Division in France is "Sam," a six months' old beer-drinking fox. "He's a great lad, really," says Lt. Compton-Bishop. "We got him in England when he was only a fortnight old, his mother having left him in the middle of a field, and he took part in the invasion.



Sam's Owner

"When we first found him, he would neither eat nor drink until we put a kitten beside him. The two chummed up and became good friends. Sam was with us when we came to France. The boys think the world of him. He has been with me in my armoured car on dozens of patrols, and gunfire doesn't disturb him a bit.

"He likes beer. One night he drank himself tight before we left England. He also likes cider, whisky, tinned meat, bootlaces, bandages, and anything sweet. His dislikes include dogs and raw meat."

Lt. Compton-Bishop is an Old Whitgiftian. He went straight from school into the A.R.P., and joined the Army at the age of 17. Although he started as a trooper, he had gained his commission by 1941, and travelled in Ireland, Yorkshire, and Scotland before he was transferred to the "Recce" Corps. His mother believes that he went to France on D-Day, but she says that, because he is a censor, he is careful about what he writes to her.

Com

SAM THE FOX

Sanderstead Officer's Pet

By a Military Observer

MASCOT of a squadron with the 50th (Northumbrian) Division in Normandy is "Sam," a six months old beer-drinking fox.

"Sam," formerly of Nightingale Wood, Romsey, I first met in a forward position with his unit.

"Here, 'Sam'," called his owner, Lieut. T. R. Compton-Bishop, of 16, Blenheim Gardens, Sanderstead—and out of the hedgerow trailing behind him his lead, trotted "Sam."

"Sam," a dog fox now the size of a terrier—the possessor, too, of a lovely brush—was quite affectionate. He allowed himself to be patted, and clearly he wanted to play.

"He's a great lad, really," said Lieut. Compton-Bishop. "We got him in England when he was only a fortnight old, his mother having left him in the middle of a field—and 'Sam' was in the invasion.

"When we first found him, he would neither eat nor drink—not until we put a kitten beside him. The two chummed up and became good friends. 'Sam' was with us when we came to France. The boys think the world of him. He has been with me in my armoured car on dozens of patrols, and gunfire doesn't disturb him a bit.

"'Sam' likes his beer. One night he drank himself tight before we left England. He also likes cider, whisky, tinned meat, bootlaces, bandages, and anything sweet. His dislikes include dogs and raw meat."

"What will you do with him when he is fully grown?" I asked.

"Keep him, I hope," was the cheerful reply.

Lieut. Compton-Bishop is an old Whitgiftian. He went straight from school into the A.R.P. and joined the Army at the age of 17. Although he started as a trooper, he had gained his commission by 1941, and travelled in Ireland, Yorkshire and Scotland before he was transferred to the "Recce" Corps. His mother believes that he went to France on D-Day, but she says that, because he is a censor, he is very careful about what he writes in his letters to her.

From the Coulsdon & Purley Times. August 18th 1944

A VE Day 80th Anniversary present



Lt. Terence R. Compton-Bishop was my father.

On VE Day 8 May 2025, I received through the post his canvas coat that he wore during the Ardennes campaign and the Battle of the Bulge (16 December 1944 to 25 January 1945).

It was sent by the granddaughter of the farmer in whose house he and his troop were billeted near Namur, Belgium. 80 years later, Mme Chantal Labarre contacted me through social media to say that she had a British army greatcoat with "Lieut. T. R. Compton-Bishop" stenciled inside it and asking if I was any relation.

Mme Labarre also sent photos of the farmhouse and the troopers standing in the yard, seemingly ready for a snowball fight.

The coat, it turns out, is a heavy dispatch rider's coat, typically worn by motorcyclists fully exposed to the elements. It may be that he wore it because he was usually more outside his armoured car than in. I can only guess that he jettisoned it once the 61st Reconnaissance Regiment was finally disbanded after victory in the Ardennes and he was reassigned to another regiment for the final spring push into Germany.



Quentin Compton-Bishop
8 May 2025





Troopers from 61st Reconnaissance Regiment near Namur, Belgium.
Courtesy of Chantal Labarre



The farmhouse near Namur where Lt. Compton-Bishop's troop was billeted.
Courtesy of Chantal Labarre

An extract from a letter to Lisa Reay from her Great Auntie Gwen (born 1917). Auntie Gwen lived in Small Heath Birmingham, and these are her recollections about the war. The letter was dated 30 September 1985 for a school project that Lisa was involved with.

Now, all civilians had to carry a gas mask. A small baby had a special kind of enclosed cradle and fresh air had to be pumped in by hand. It was just large enough for a normal sized baby so lie full length and about 12" deep. Of course, one could not carry it with one all the time as it was rather heavy.

All streetlights were put out. Buses and other vehicles had the headlamps masked so that only a slit of light showed. A warden used to walk all around the streets and if a house showed <u>any</u> light through curtains or a door, the warden or police would knock the door and tell the house holder to put the light out or pull the blackout curtains together.

Food was not strictly rationed the first few months of the war, and although a few items were short, it wasn't until about the beginning of the 1940's that ration books were issued. Green books for babies and children and a yellowy fawn coloured ration book for adults. As food rationing got under way, and the war became more severe, (i.e. ships bringing food and petrol from South Africa, America and other countries, these were sunk by submarines) one found that things we always in the past had bought, were now scarce.

Children with a green book were allowed 1pt milk daily (children under five free). 1 bottle concentrated orange juice and one bottle of cod liver oil. The last two items one had to go to the welfare clinic to get. 1 egg per week and the same rations as on an adult book. I think this is correct, but as I am trying to remember 46 years back, please allow for an occasional mistake. Adults were allowed 1 egg per month and 1 packet of dried egg (sent from America). One mixed the dried egg with water and that was scrambled egg. It could be used to make pancakes or if dried fruit was available, the very occasional fruit cake. Weekly, 1 ½ oz. cheese 1 ½ butter, 2oz margarine, 1oz lard, 2oz tea, 6oz meat and 2oz corned beef. If one had chickens, the egg coupon from the ration book had to be given up and a form issued to buy chicken feed instead. Offal, i.e. liver, heart and kidney were unrationed. When word got around that the butcher had offal that week, people waited in a long queue

in the hope of getting some. Of course, one had to go to the same butcher all the time you couldn't get any extra bits if you didn't. Then, one only got fruit in season over here. No oranges, bananas, lemons and grapefruit. Sometimes the greengrocer had a few oranges, and I have waited 1 ½ for 2 (green book). Bananas were very scarce, about twice yearly. Vegetables were plentiful and when our fruit was in season, we bottled plums, apples, tomatoes and beans. Also dried apples in rings. There were no freezers then or fridges. Beans were also salted down. Children used to go out (Brownies or Guides) in the country and pick wild rose hips. These were collected by the WVS and made into rosehip syrup for children.

Toys were very scarce and the For Sale columns of the papers were always checked for second hand toys for sale.

Firemen and Police, and fire watchers used to repair and make toys in their spare time for children in hospitals. Also, for the Christmas party at the fire station or church halls. Ladies made a lot of soft toys out of old pieces of blanket or coat material, and they were presents for birthdays or Christmas. I made two big dolls in soft brown cloth and dressed them in straw skirts, bright coloured tops and curtain rings for earrings, black wool for curly hair and embroidered eyes, nose and mouth. They were quite good.

Christmas time about two weeks' beforehand, one had an extra ration of dried fruit and suet. Then it was a choice between Christmas pudding and cake. It was surprising how we managed a healthy diet.

1940 was the start of the bombing of the cities of Britain. November 1940 was when Coventry was bombed. The southern part of Birmingham got quite a lot of that raid and in Lily Road, where I was born and my mother still lived, a land mine fell that night. 10 houses were flattened, families all killed. My aunt was buried for 24 hours. Her husband was killed in the next room. All the glass in the rest of the houses was blown out. The windows had to be boarded up, and my mother came up to Scotland because my husband was in the RAF and his station was near Edinburgh. I was lucky, the first two years I missed most of the bombing. My friend Gladys lived in London then, and she saw London on fire. Her house was at Harringay, and it was on a hill, so

she saw most of the terrible fires. Many people slept on the underground stations.

When war was declared, Anderson shelters were issued to civilians who could not afford to make or buy one. These were erected so that one went down about 5 feet into them. They were in the garden and bunks for sleeping and food and water were left down there when the war time raids were bad. Earth was piled over and around the sides and top and an escape down was at the back in case the entrance was blocked by debris from bombing. If the solid was well drained it was ok, but some filled slowly with eater and were no good. Later another shelter was made called a Morrison shelter. This was erected indoors, in a downstairs room. It was 6'-6" long (2 meters) and about 4 foot in height. The top was solid steel, and the sides and end pieces were mesh steel like a girder shape. Each course support was ¾" thick steel like a girder shape. I used to sleep in that with Maureen from 2 years until she was 4 ½. Then the flying bombs were coming over France. They didn't reach the Midlands; it was the south of England and London that suffered. We sent a lot of our shelters from the Midlands to help the people down south.

Petrol was issued on coupons only to doctors, ambulances, fire engines and commercial vehicles. Private car owners took the wheels off their cars and put the cars on blocks and shut them away until peace time. Farmers were much better off. They had petrol or paraffin for tractors and coupons for their vans or cars. They had plenty of food as they grew it. Butter, eggs, milk, bacon and meat, they were never short. One pig per year was the allowed ration for a farmer but more than one was killed. Chicken, ducks all there. In the towns things were much worse. I waited 2 hours at the greengrocers for a rabbit for Christmas dinner, my husband was overseas then. Families used to put their rations together for times like birthdays and Christmas.

Men not in the services had to do fire watching so many hours weekly. They had to keep a watch all night and when incendiary bombs fell, they had to put them out before they started a fire. This was compulsory and extra too their days work. All road signs were taken down in case of invasion by Germany. So, there were no signposts or place names anywhere. Trains were only lit by one blue coloured bulb in the compartment. Beaches were

mined and had barbed wire barricades along them. Concrete pill boxes were along the cliffs and some main roads. There weren't any motorways then. We had to mend and make do. Clothing was on coupons. So, we had to darn our socks, stockings, jumpers. Put patches on pyjamas, sheet etc.

Auntie Gwen

Martin Smith shares his parents' and aunt's memories.

Alexander George Smith born 1920.



He was conscripted in 1940 and joined the Royal Fusiliers. In late 1941 or early 1942, Alex transferred to the Royal Navy; however, he was unable to swim. Apparently, there was an agreement that the Navy, which was short of sailors after Arctic and other convoy duties, could appeal for recruits from the army.

He trained as a signaller and went operational in May 1944, marrying Dorothy Ensum just before, at All Hallows, Bow Church, London.

He operated on a MGB (motor gunboat) part of HMS Ajax battle group, mainly minesweeping, possibly at D Day as Ajax shelled the guns at Longues Sur Mer on D Day

He saw active service in Greece and was demobbed 1946.

Dorothy Smith nee Ensum Born 1921.



Dorothy was born in Nelson, Lancashire on 12 October 1921. She was the middle child of three daughters born to Alfred and Margaret Ensum, nee Airey.

The September 1939 register had her recorded as living with her older sister, Sylvia and her husband, Harry Armistead, in Wolverhampton. Her occupation was soldering batteries.

It is not known when Dorothy went to Bow, London but it is known she was there during The Blitz and was involved in war work.

Dorothy married Alexander George Smith on 02 May 1944, in London.

Dorothy's sister, Sylvia and brother-in-law Harry stayed in Wolverhampton until 1947 when they then emigrated to America to join Marjorie, the youngest sister. Harry was probably exempt from active service as the 1939 register states he was an aircraft engine fitter.

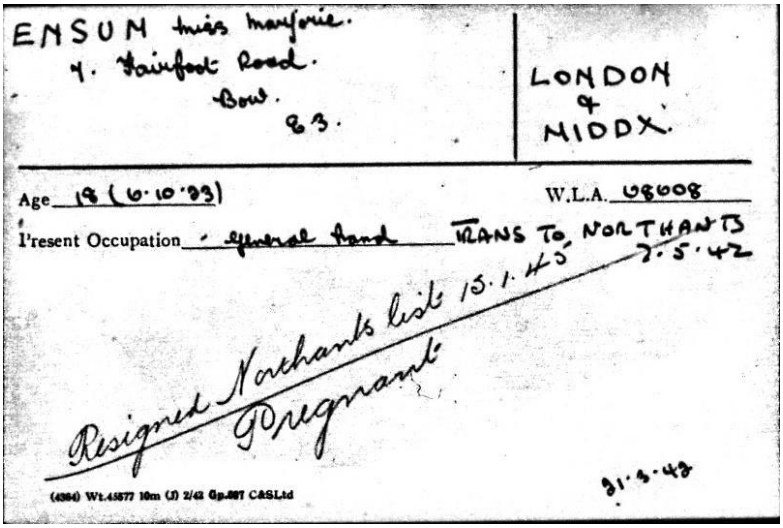
Marjorie Ensum, seen here second on the right, was born in Nelson in October 1923.



At the age of 18, on 21 March 1942 Marjorie joined the land girls. Her address is given as 7 Fairfoot Road, Bow, E3. Perhaps she was living with her sister Dorothy.

Photographs courtesy of Martin Smith

On 2 May 1942, Marjorie transferred to Northants, and it is here she met William J Grzesiak, an American GI, and in 1945 they became husband and wife. William returned to America later that year, but Marjorie did not join him until 21 April 1846, leaving from Southampton to New York on the Queen Mary, and with her was their 8-month-old daughter.


ENSUM miss marjorie.
4. Fairfoot Road.
Bow.
E3.

LONDON & MIDDX.

Age 18 (6.10.23) W.L.A. 68008

Present Occupation General hand TRANS TO NORTHANTS 2.5.42

Resigned Northants list 15.1.43

Pregnant

31.5.43

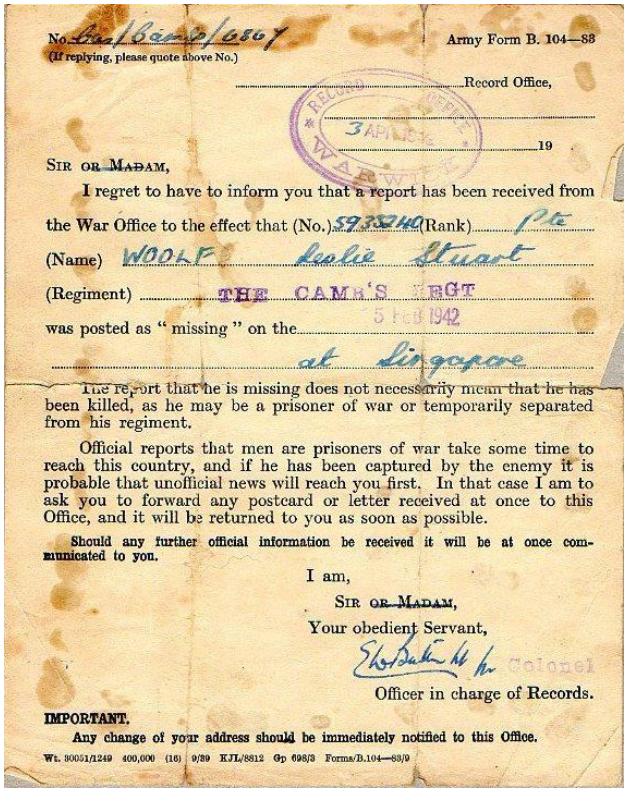
(4354) Wt.45877 10m (J) 2/43 Gp.667 C&SLtd



Leslie Ernest Woolf was born in Cambridgeshire on June 19th, 1921. His was a large family and he, with one of his brothers, was brought up by his grandmother. In early 1938 he was eager for adventure and asked his granny to sign some paperwork...she was very shortsighted and didn't realise they were his "joining up" papers for the territorial army!

When war broke out his battalion, the 1st Bn Cambridgeshires, was assigned to guarding the Norfolk coast, but in April 1941 they were moved to Warwickshire, where they were stationed at Arbury Park. (Whilst posted here, Les met his future wife!) Here they were trained in readiness to go abroad. In September they set sail, destination unknown, but in December came the fateful attack on Pearl Harbour by the Japanese, and by January 1942 the battalion landed in Singapore. After fierce fighting came the notorious surrender, the biggest capitulation in British military history.

After some time in the infamous Changi, Les was one of those sent to work on the railway, connecting Thailand with Burma. By the end of its construction approximately 13000 prisoners of war were to die. His parents received a message reporting him missing but eventually heard that he was in one of the camps in Thailand. During this time many of Les's comrades died from cholera or a variety of tropical diseases, and he volunteered to work in a makeshift hospital. Rations were meagre, often consisting only of rice and turnip tops.



No. Ba/Bar/6807 Army Form B. 104—83
(If replying, please quote above No.)

Record Office,

3 APR 1942

19

SIR OR MADAM,

I regret to have to inform you that a report has been received from the War Office to the effect that (No.) 5933240 (Rank) Pte
(Name) WOOLF Leslie Stuart
(Regiment) THE CAMB'S REGT
was posted as "missing" on the 5 Feb 1942
at Singapore

The report that he is missing does not necessarily mean that he has been killed, as he may be a prisoner of war or temporarily separated from his regiment.

Official reports that men are prisoners of war take some time to reach this country, and if he has been captured by the enemy it is probable that unofficial news will reach you first. In that case I am to ask you to forward any postcard or letter received at once to this Office, and it will be returned to you as soon as possible.

Should any further official information be received it will be at once communicated to you.

I am,
SIR OR MADAM,
Your obedient Servant,
Officer in charge of Records.

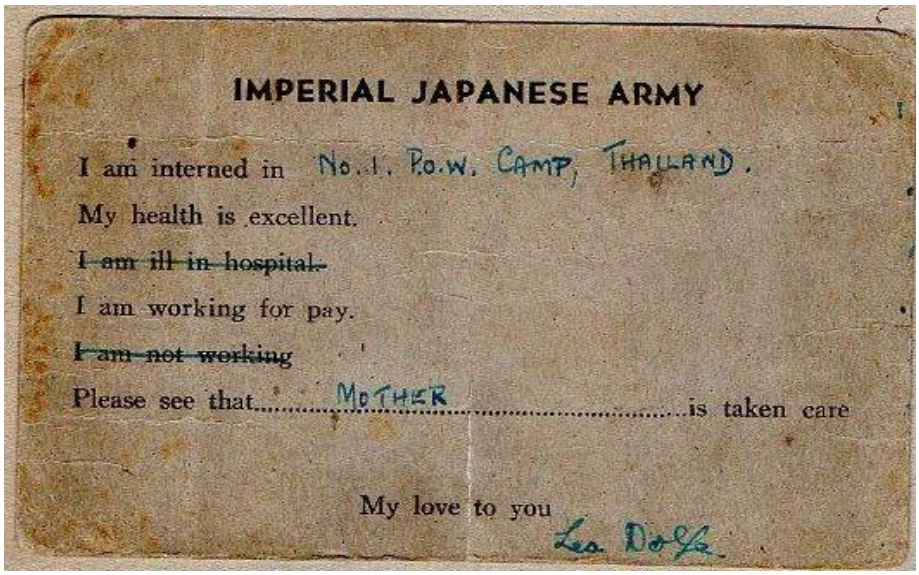
IMPORTANT.
Any change of your address should be immediately notified to this Office.

Wt. 30051/1249 400,000 (16) 9/39 KJL/8812 Gp 698/3 Forms/B.104—83/9

Once the railway was completed Les was shipped to Japan to work in a copper mine, an experience which was in many ways even worse. He suffered from claustrophobia for the rest of his life.

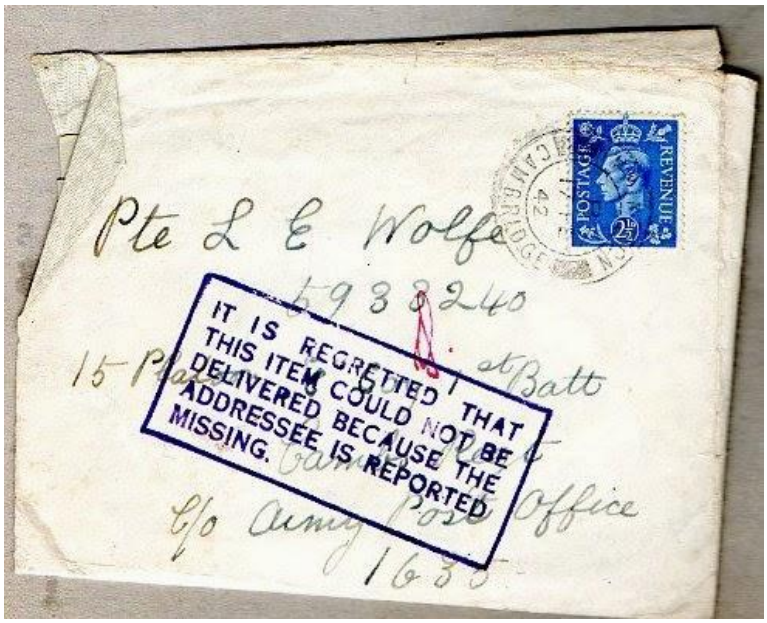
At long last the war came to an end in August 1945, but it was not until September 8th that Les was released, met by American troops in Tokyo, to travel home via San Francisco, across the continent and finally over the Atlantic. He arrived home unannounced on November 7th, to a Britain which had begun to move on since VE Day the previous May.

Those who served in the Far East were often known as The Forgotten Army, but Les never forgot those friends who had died or who returned with him, altered forever by their experiences. He died aged 84 on May 20th, 2005.



IMPERIAL JAPANESE ARMY

I am interned in No. 1. P.o.W. CAMP, THAILAND.
My health is excellent.
~~I am ill in hospital.~~
I am working for pay.
~~I am not working~~
Please see that MOTHER is taken care
My love to you
Les Wolfe



(written by Les's daughter Sheila, Stoneleigh resident).

World War II and VE Day in Stoneleigh and Ashow

June 1946

In the summer of 1946, all the schoolchildren of Britain received a message from the King George VI.

The message thanked the children for their hardships during WW2 and encouraged them to share in the Allies' triumph.

8th June, 1946

TO-DAY, AS WE CELEBRATE VICTORY,



8th June, 1946

TO-DAY, AS WE CELEBRATE VICTORY,

I send this personal message to you and all other boys and girls at school. For you have shared in the hardships and dangers of a total war and you have shared no less in the triumph of the Allied Nations.

I know you will always feel proud to belong to a country which was capable of such supreme effort; proud, too, of parents and elder brothers and sisters who by their courage, endurance and enterprise brought victory. May these qualities be yours as you grow up and join in the common effort to establish among the nations of the world unity and peace.

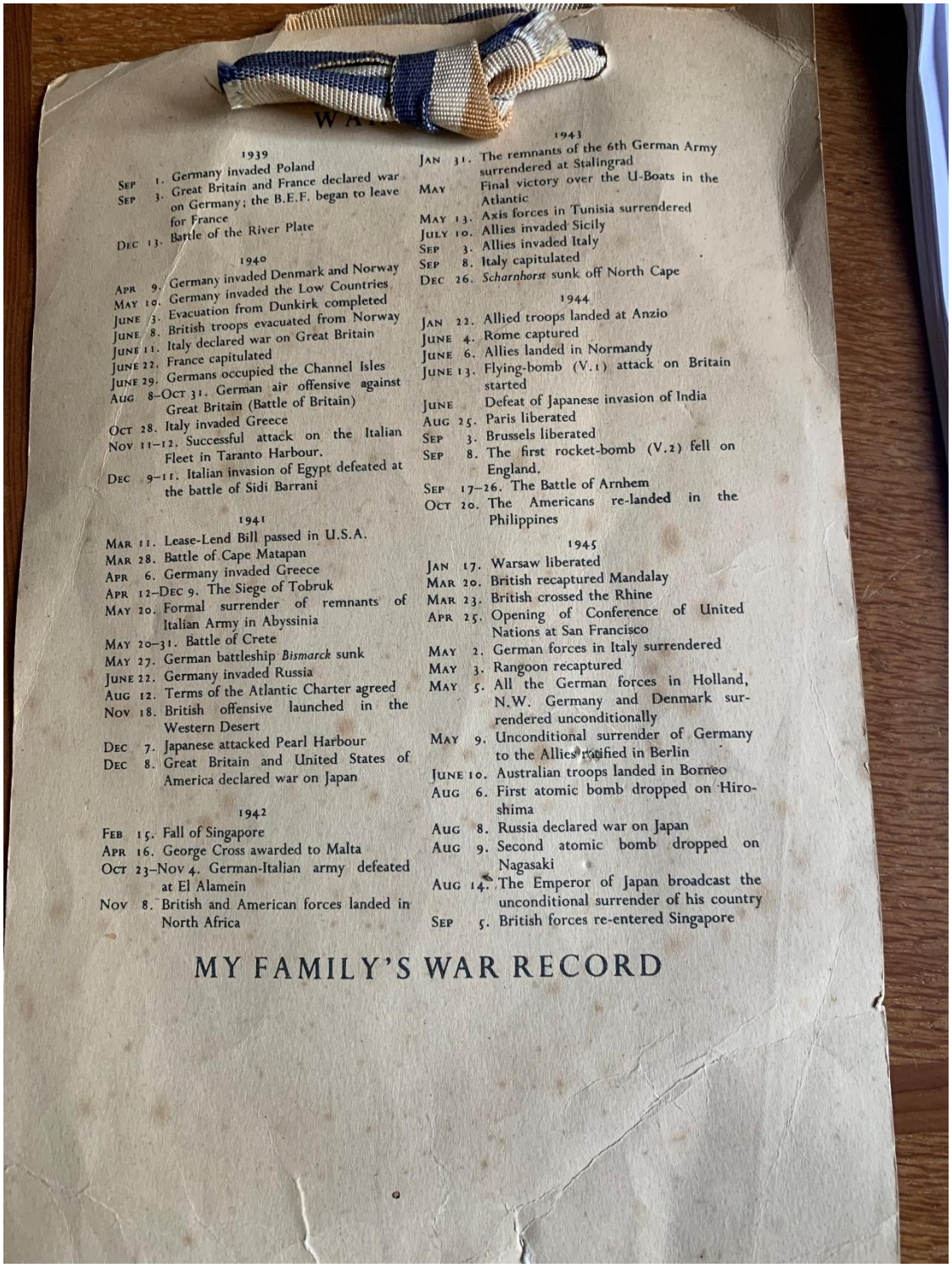
George R.I.

I send this personal message to you and all other boys and girls at school. For you have shared in the hardships and dangers of a total war and you have shared no less in the triumph of the Allied Nations.

I know you will always feel proud to belong to a country which was capable of such supreme effort; proud too, of parents and elder brothers and sisters who by their courage, endurance and enterprise brought victory. May these qualities be yours as you grow up and join in the common effort to establish among the nations of the world unity and peace.

World War II and VE Day in Stoneleigh and Ashow
June 1946

The back of the message listed key WW2 dates and events, along with a section titled 'MY FAMILY'S WAR RECORD' for families to note their wartime contributions.



1939

Sep 1. Germany invaded Poland
Sep 3. Great Britain and France declared war on Germany; the B.E.F. began to leave for France
Dec 13. Battle of the River Plate

1940

Apr 9. Germany invaded Denmark and Norway
May 10. Germany invaded the Low Countries
June 3. Evacuation from Dunkirk completed
June 8. British troops evacuated from Norway
June 11. Italy declared war on Great Britain
June 22. France capitulated
June 29. Germans occupied the Channel Isles
Aug 8–Oct 31. German air offensive against Great Britain (Battle of Britain)
Oct 28. Italy invaded Greece
Nov 11–12. Successful attack on the Italian Fleet in Taranto Harbour.
Dec 9–11. Italian invasion of Egypt defeated at the battle of Sidi Barrani

1941

Mar 11. Lease-Lend Bill passed in U.S.A.
Mar 28. Battle of Cape Matapan
Apr 6. Germany invaded Greece
Apr 12–Dec 9. The Siege of Tobruk
May 20. Formal surrender of remnants of Italian Army in Abyssinia
May 20–31. Battle of Crete
May 27. German battleship *Bismarck* sunk
June 22. Germany invaded Russia
Aug 12. Terms of the Atlantic Charter agreed
Nov 18. British offensive launched in the Western Desert
Dec 7. Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour
Dec 8. Great Britain and United States of America declared war on Japan

1942

Feb 15. Fall of Singapore
Apr 16. George Cross awarded to Malta
Oct 23–Nov 4. German-Italian army defeated at El Alamein
Nov 8. British and American forces landed in North Africa

1943

Jan 31. The remnants of the 6th German Army surrendered at Stalingrad
May Final victory over the U-Boats in the Atlantic
May 13. Axis forces in Tunisia surrendered
July 10. Allies invaded Sicily
Sep 3. Allies invaded Italy
Sep 8. Italy capitulated
Dec 26. *Scharnhorst* sunk off North Cape

1944

Jan 22. Allied troops landed at Anzio
June 4. Rome captured
June 6. Allies landed in Normandy
June 13. Flying-bomb (V.1) attack on Britain started
June Defeat of Japanese invasion of India
Aug 25. Paris liberated
Sep 3. Brussels liberated
Sep 8. The first rocket-bomb (V.2) fell on England.
Sep 17–26. The Battle of Arnhem
Oct 20. The Americans re-landed in the Philippines

1945

Jan 17. Warsaw liberated
Mar 20. British recaptured Mandalay
Mar 23. British crossed the Rhine
Apr 25. Opening of Conference of United Nations at San Francisco
May 2. German forces in Italy surrendered
May 3. Rangoon recaptured
May 5. All the German forces in Holland, N.W. Germany and Denmark surrendered unconditionally
May 9. Unconditional surrender of Germany to the Allies ratified in Berlin
June 10. Australian troops landed in Borneo
Aug 6. First atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima
Aug 8. Russia declared war on Japan
Aug 9. Second atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki
Aug 14. The Emperor of Japan broadcast the unconditional surrender of his country
Sep 5. British forces re-entered Singapore

MY FAMILY'S WAR RECORD

With thanks to Dr. Penlington for providing the document

Photo courtesy of Lisa Reay

World War II and VE Day in Stoneleigh and Ashow

VE Day Celebrations 2020

Unfortunately, due to Covid the celebrations for the 75th Anniversary of VE Day could not be held as planned but some villagers gathered by the Forge to hear Reveille and The Last Post being played.

Those who attended were socially distanced.





Flying the Flag in Vicarage Road



Mandy Freeman's Poppy that was at the Tower of London



Photos courtesy of Sheila Woolf and Mandy Freeman









Stoneleigh VE Day Celebrations 2025

Flying the flag around Stoneleigh

Photos courtesy of Lisa Reay




















2



Stoneleigh Church dressed for the VE Concert




RBL









Artwork produced by Mel Bianco for the event





A Moment of Celebration exhibition in the Leigh Chapel.

The full display can be found on the Stoneleigh History website www.stoneleighhistorysociety.org.uk

A SHARED MOMENT OF CELEBRATION

Stoneleigh History Society

&

Stoneleigh Male Voice Choir

Raised £1000 from the event on Saturday 10 May

This is to be distributed equally between The Royal British Legion and Stoneleigh Church



Thank you to everyone who helped make the event such a success.

www.stoneleighhistorysociety.org.uk

Stoneleigh History Society