

Chapter 3 The War Years

Bombing

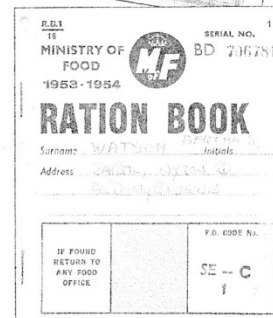
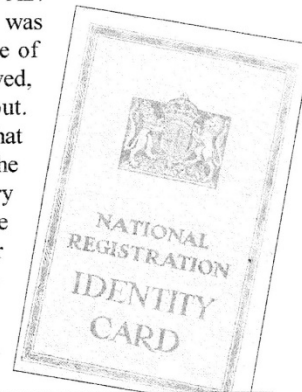
In July 1939 I had a baby, Barrie, and we went to live at Alafin at the western end of Nyton Road, one field and a bit from Tangmere Aerodrome. I was not personally frightened. I suppose I was pre-occupied with the baby. The one occasion I'll never forget was when they bombed Tangmere in broad daylight in early August 1940. Barrie was in the pram at the back of the bungalow in the garden. I was in the front, watching these little black blobs falling. Our defence had been drawn off to the Selsey Peninsula and though we had heavy ack-ack around, it certainly didn't stop the Germans bombing; that terrified me. I just had to get the baby out of the pram and get indoors and wait for the bombing to subside.

On another later occasion there was a string of bombs dropped. The bomber was going back from London and had spare bombs. It must have been early 1941 because we moved out of there in March 1941 to stay with my Mother-in-law at Eastergate.

There were six spares from this returning bomber. The first was just off the A27 in a direct line between Fernfield and Alafin. We were so fortunate - it was certainly a case of Lady Luck as the last bomb dropped just over the hedge of Alafin. It affected all the properties along the Nyton Rd. Our shed was moved, the back door was blown over and the kitchen window was blown out. Damage was only light because the bomb had fallen into arable land and at that time of the year it was moist so the explosion was certainly cushioned by the area it fell in. If it had been on a hard surface it would have been a very different matter. That wasn't the only instance we were so lucky because when the land mines came down at Eastergate, on the Thursday of Easter Weekend 1941, that again was on arable land which soaked up the explosions which otherwise might have been horrific, so there was the minimum of damage.

At Alafin we were issued with Identification Cards which later led to the Ration Books. Also, like many others, I took lodgers, three wives of RAF lads that had been called up. They came mainly from the Birmingham Area and would stay for perhaps a month. In one case it was a little bit longer - she had a little girl. They were obviously upset and disturbed. Their husbands were at Tangmere and sometimes came if they had a night off. I also had the mother of one poor man who was very ill in the old Sanatorium. He was a musical gentleman from Kneller Hall and was, I think, high-ranking. I hoped we were useful to them. They got to know who to go to by word of mouth. The lads at Tangmere would get to know where they might get accommodation.

Portsmouth was getting so badly bombed the sky was often aglow which was horrible. On one occasion both Portsmouth and also Ford to our East seemed to be all on fire. I think it was May 1941 when there was this awful glow visible. It was quite horribly spectacular. On one Sunday



Identity Card and Ration Book

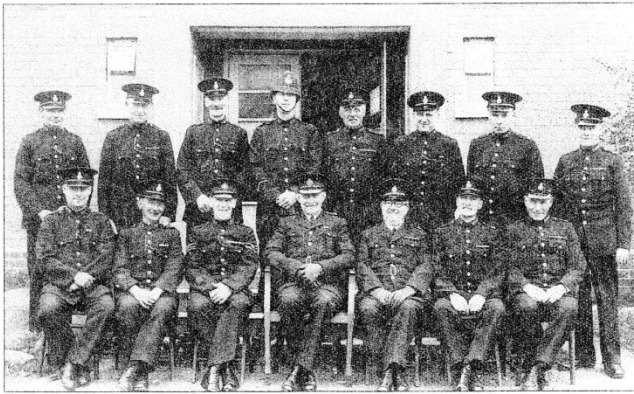
there was a daylight raid at Ford and they hit a Fleet Air Arm shelter, which was terribly sad. Southampton was too far to see unless you went up onto the Downs; you could then have seen the glow north of the Isle of Wight and people talked about this. I remember seeing Dog Fights in the air. We always prayed for the victor being Spitfires or Hurricanes. They would be seen spiralling up in the sky and then so often they would disappear over the sea and you used to hold your breath.

We lost dear Arthur Hayman from the Irene Garage. He hadn't been in the RAF very long when he was lost, as also was Mr Seymour from the village, who had been bombed out of Portsmouth. Those are the two that stick in my mind. We lost a lot in the Army. Lily Hammond's eldest brother, Bill, was killed in Italy which was very sad. The family very much relied on him. Mrs Tutt's husband went down on the Grenville which was also very sad as she had a little girl, maybe 18 months old, called Barbara. She certainly didn't remember her Daddy. Mrs Tutt later married a Canadian Serviceman and emigrated to Canada.

ARP and AFS and Special Constabulary

They were based in the Village Hall to begin with. Then they moved over the road to a Nissen hut in Mr Hann's field.. To begin with it was rather a joke. When the ARP were brought into being we had this lovely Corps of gentlemen, Mr Wilson, Mr Wiley, Mr Port, who was partially sighted, and Mr Pople, who lived at Milliards at the time. He was our Registrar for the Area. He registered Barrie so I know he was there by 1939. Mr Wilson used to ride a very high man's bicycle with the cross-bar that seemed miles off the ground and he would ride along with his umbrella to guard what is now the A27.

I presume if we had had an invasion on the coast, the A27 would have been the first line of defence. I suppose they would have let this area go so as to make a stand on the Downs. Thank God that never came about. I had a very big pram - an old Royal - which had a lovely well in the bottom with quite a solid board on and I always kept some rations in there because I was sure we would get an invasion and I would have to push this pram with my children through Fair Mile Bottom and over the Downs, which was the flattest route I could think of; and down to Bury. I would have been alright by the time I had got to Bury Hill because I could have free-wheeled down there. It was a very great and genuine fear of what was going to happen in the event of an invasion.



Special Constables photographed outside Aldingbourne village Hall

Back row - left to right

Mr Lynn, Mr Arthur Brown, Mr Phillips, PC Cooper, Unknown, Mr Bill Hayman, Mr Robert (Mudge) Wilson, Unknown

Front row - left to right

Mr Ernie Russell, Mr Eddie Digance, Mr Wally Martin, ?, Mr Farley, Mr Tom Malthouse, Unknown, Mr Cedric Russell

Woodgate

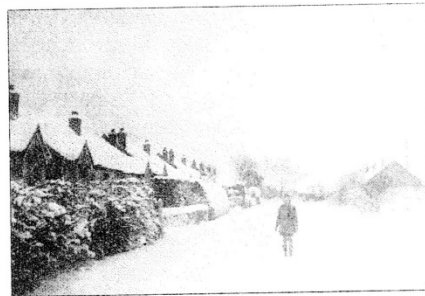
I moved to my Mother-in-Law at the end of Church Lane, Eastergate, where my daughter was born on the 11th May 1941. We stayed there until moving into 19, Woodgate Road in October. Barrie now asks how we got into that little house, but it was easily done. It suited me beautifully for it was a very good area. Everyone was so neighbourly. Most of the men were away, but there were allotments. My friend over the road looked after her husband's allotments so I gave her a hand if I could. I remember growing some very good carrots at the time which were valuable. The whole atmosphere of Woodgate Rd at the time was extremely friendly.

At Woodgate Road life ticked over almost comfortably. Rationing didn't affect us much. I had Ration Books for the children, but we had a lot of home-produced food while lack of meat didn't worry us much. I used to cook veal bones for the broth. At that time you weren't supposed to bring children up without giving them veal broth. We stayed in Woodgate Road right through the war and after until 1948.

There were people there whom I had known for many years, but even so the neighbour's friendliness was encouraged because of the war. Our children also went to school together. You could always turn to someone. Mrs Carter was my next door neighbour while Mrs Schofield lived opposite. I think the fact that Mrs Schofield and Mrs Carter didn't have their husbands at home made a difference. In the house opposite were Mr and Mrs Bullion.

The Evacuees

Personally I became anxious when the school provided half-day for the evacuees and only half-day for our own children; but by the time Barrie had got to school in 1944 the problem was solved. By that time the County had taken over the whole of the Village Hall and there were classrooms everywhere. I felt for the teachers. We had five young teachers and it was a lot to ask of them to be teaching in the Gallery Room or the Club Room or on the Stage with the Curtains pulled. Just imagine keeping a class together under those conditions. Later the huts on the side of the building on Mr Digance's land were built for the evacuees which solved that problem. As far as the adults like the expectant mothers that came, my experience with them was that they integrated extremely well. I can't say anything adverse. Nor can I remember my Mother and Father saying anything and they were considerably older. They showed no anxiety as regards the evacuees. There was a sympathy for them, as they had been uprooted and it must have been quite something for those children stuck in the country. However, many of them stayed, so they must have been happy about it.



Snow at Woodgate Road, 1947



'Woodgate outing' - 1945

Women on the Home Front

Those able to drive were quickly taken up by the butchers and the baker. Delivery vans were driven by Betty Billiness (Betty Bennett by this time) who drove the baker's vans, or Betty Robinson who drove the butcher's. Those were the two who delivered to me down in Woodgate Rd. That was beneficial as they used to take any children around who wanted a ride out to Shripney. The kids enjoyed it of course and so did we. It was nice to have them.

The blackout was a trial. I suppose because we were near Tangmere we were very conscious of not showing any lights. I felt very strongly about this. We used to put frames up at the windows covered with black material. As it happened, the summer of 1942 was a hot one and we also had Double Summer Time by then which meant the children going to bed early. It would only be 5 o'clock in the evening if they went to bed at 7 which really was a problem but we had to acknowledge it and conform with it. I always felt the black-out was very important because of our location, but it didn't make life any easier. Of course, there were no outside lights, but we didn't have any street lights to worry about in Westergate. I don't know what Eastergate did about their gas lights. Cars had hooded lamps. They all had guards over the headlamps, so they only shone on the road in front of the vehicle. They didn't shine any distance. Bicycles again had guarded lamps on the front to shield the light. It was, I thought, all so terribly amateurish, but it was all we were instructed to do at the time.

At Bognor the reinforcements were all along the Promenade, great rolls of barbed wire. They had huge concrete blocks on the beach itself, for tank traps. You could still walk along the Esplanade Road on the north side. I remember so well when Barrie was 5 or 6 and there was a convoy going up the Channel. Barrie, who had always wanted to be a sailor, looked out and said, 'Oh Mummy! I don't want a big ship, I only want a little one,' and he held his fingers out, indicating a matchbox ship.

Road conditions were not improving with the Forces' traffic which consisted not only of that stationed at Tangmere, but also the Army in Aldingbourne. I've got Little Westergate House in mind as one of the Army's centres. Later on, Westergate St became busier and busier with forces' traffic. A lot of the RAF were based in Bognor and they would use the A29 to go this side of Tangmere where there were a lot of huts. If you wanted the Eastern Part of the Aerodrome you would come up the A29, if you wanted Western you would go along what is now the A259. That was RAF traffic. The Army traffic, mostly Canadians, was heavy. They had big lorries, and the road didn't get wider. It did cause me a lot of concern when I was trying to push a pram along there. That's what took me to the first Parish Council I attended which was in 1942 or 1943 while we were at Woodgate. I went to ask what could be done about the conditions and I was told, 'Very little,' as there was a war on, which I was very well aware of. Barnham Market had eased right off. There was very little traffic by this time. I don't know what happened to the animals. I expect they just weren't produced which was another problem.

Requisitioning of houses and Allied Forces

Examples were Step-Aside, Hazel Bank and Little Westergate House which was full of Canadians - I was particularly aware of that because it was the nearest to me. Westergate House itself seemed to be some sort of depot as, I presume, was Westergate Wood. Step-Aside (now Church Farm) suffered badly from the forces' treatment of it. Eventually there was a nasty fire there. Lady Henderson had moved into Hook Cottage and done a very good job of restoration-cum-development there. In the village, the Forces used our Village Hall a lot for their social activities. One Unit from Ontario felt so responsible for ripping our floorboards so badly with their hobnails that when they went home to Canada they very kindly sent us a consignment of British Columbia Pine and the Village Hall Council only had to collect it from Southampton and get it laid. That in itself was quite a project, but it gave us a beautiful floor which was the envy of the Area. Of course, this was some time after the War.

Our attitude to them was that the Canadians had come a long way to save our skins and we appreciated them being here. The Americans were loud and used to shout from the lorries and that sort of thing, but there were more Canadians than Americans in Aldingbourne.

The extra farming

A lot of potatoes were grown - acres and acres because of the war. I wasn't personally involved, but my neighbours were because they used to go potato picking, taking their children and getting 6d a sack. I think they quite enjoyed it as it was out in the open air and they were doing an essential job. The poultry houses down at Woodgate were very big ones producing a tremendous lot of eggs. They belonged to Mr Langmead and were on the road going up to what was known as Black Sheds Dairy. There were two very big poultry houses. I used to be able to go down with a basin and get two dozen cracked eggs for I think 2s which was a very good buy. They employed several women including Mrs Madgwick, and Mrs Thomas in the poultry houses. I wouldn't have liked to have worked there because there was a smell about these poultry houses. But it was important food production. Nyton House definitely grew commercially while Colonel Cohen was there. Mr Malthouse, Mr Martin and Gordon Collins were there in the gardens. At the back of Nyton Lodge there was 1/2 acre which I think they included as part of the Farm. At the time Mr Wylie lived there. I know they had a lot of onions there one year.



*Woodgate Road, circa 1942
Home from helping on the land.
Freda Carter & Lolly Smith*

D-Day

There was a build up. I knew about the Mulberry Harbour. My husband was working on that and he became seasick when delivering one load on it because it was on pontoons and the sea was very rough. On the day itself the sky seemed to be black with the Dakotas towing the gliders. They were following the

initial drive that went in and these were the supplies and personnel. It was quite spectacular so you couldn't take your eyes off it. It's something that stays with you. I can see it now.

The V1s

They decided to evacuate the expectant Mothers away from the coast. I'd had 2 children during the war and that had been okay when things were really difficult in this area. Then when Richard was going to be born I had to go up to Hindhead a month before he was due, to get away from the doodle-bugs which I found extremely nerve-wracking. They were going beautifully over here at a good height; but they were dropping in the Hindhead Area so I only came across them after I had been evacuated. You listened to these wretched things and if the engine stopped you just held your breath for you knew it was coming down. The engine was like a mower engine. It was so ridiculous to evacuate expectant mothers into an Area where these things were dropping; Richard was born in Guildford Hospital which was a little bit further on. The V2s went right over there.

VE Day and the End of the War

We had a street party in Woodgate Rd. We all got together which was lovely. The children were entertained in the Village Hall later as part of the celebrations. Personally, I didn't do any work towards that; then also we were waiting for VJ, for we had several involved with the Japanese in the East. My two cousins were out in Malaya. When they came home I didn't think they would get over it. They were like skeletons. One was Bert Stewart from The Haven in Woodgate. He was my Mother's nephew. The other was Ron Godley, who was awarded the Military Medal and whose father had been killed in the 1st War. He lived at Walberton and was my father's nephew. Henry and Leonard Collins from the Elm Tree had been out in the Middle East and they weren't so affected, but these two had been in the jungle. Ron, who got the military medal, saved his platoon by climbing up on something and shooting the enemy. He was such a gentle creature so I can't think what it cost him. He knew it had to be done, I suppose. They both had bush hats on as they had been with the Australians. I remember the prominence of their teeth. Ron's wife was living in Arundel with his mother at the time and he came to see me and I thought he wouldn't last out the year. However he got over it and lived to be 83 and when Bert died about 5 years ago, he was coming up to 80.






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.

LAMEIN + ARNHEM  MATAPAN + TORUK

**IN REMEMBRANCE OF
 VICTORY DAY
 8th JUNE 1946**

**AS YOU GROW OLDER, LEARN
 TO LOOK ON THIS DAY WITH
 PRIDE & THANKSGIVING. THINK
 OF ALL FROM YOUR VILLAGE WHO
 SERVED OUR COUNTRY IN ITS NEED
 ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO GAVE THEIR
 LIVES THAT THE WORLD MIGHT BE FREE.
 REMEMBER THEIR SACRIFICE & WHEN
 YOU IN YOUR TURN TAKE YOUR PLACE
 AS A CITIZEN OF THE WORLD, SEE TO IT
 THAT YOUR CHILDREN & YOUR CHILDREN'S
 CHILDREN DO NOT FORGET THEM.**

FROM THE MEN &
 WOMEN OF THE FACTORY
 OF ALDINGBOURNE
 SUSSEX

ATLANTIC + BATTLE OF BRITAIN + NORMANDY + MALTA + LIBYA
 COLONE + NARVIK + MOHNE DAM + DENMARK + RIVER PLATE
 BURMA + RUHR + SICILY + DIEPPE + BERLIN