The Bugle

A special commemorative issue remembering the wartime experiences of men and women from Alport, Middleton and Youlgrave, and dedicated to those ten brave men who made the ultimate sacrifice.

July 1945 – July 2005

Youlgrave Remembers

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Chapter One: The Fallen

It is not with any thought of giving their lives that young men go to war, any more than the rock climber scales a precipice in the expectation that he will die in the attempt. There is a challenge and they rise to it. They who risk their lives are sustained by the adrenalin of action and comradeship; it is for the families and loved ones left behind to endure the constant anxiety, to perform the workaday routine with fortitude knowing their lot is but to wait and hope. For some, the end of both comes suddenly and brutally with the arrival of a dreadful telegram: expressions of regret without remorse; condolence with no comfort.

In Youlgrave and Middleton the names of those we call 'the Fallen' are enshrined on the war memorials. Once a year, we stand together and solemnly promise: *"We will remember them."* But for how long will there be anyone left to remember? Mothers and fathers are long gone to join them and we that are left grow old. Widows and siblings, friends and acquaintances grow fewer with each passing year and faces fade from the memory.

The purpose and privilege of *The Bugle* on the 60th Anniversary of the end of the Second World War is to preserve those memories that survive so that, in the years to come, there will be something more to remembrance than disembodied letters carved on a marble tablet. These, then, are the men who *shall grow not old*.

Philip Rowland

The 12th May 1941 brought Youlgrave the first direct experience of the tragedy of war. Philip, only son of Philip and Emily Rowland, husband of a mere five months to Mildred, was killed by enemy bombs while serving as an LAC fitter on Sunderland flying boats at Pembroke Dock. Educated at Lady Manners School, he had a bright future ahead of him when he joined his uncle Sidney Johnson at the flour mill in Two Dales. But the call of duty prevailed. Inspired, perhaps, through his gliding activities at Hucklow, he volunteered for RAF service in 1940. Mildred joined him at Pembroke Dock early in 1941, but after Easter leave in Youlgrave he refused to take her back with him. Philip's sister Mildred Bacon believes he had a premonition of what was to come. Following a Luftwaffe raid on the RAF base, a solitary plane – almost as an afterthought – dropped two bombs on the residential quarter where Philip was billeted. And with him would have died his young wife had she been there. Mrs Bacon believes Mildred wished she had been: "She was inconsolable. Perhaps had there been a child she would have found something to live for, but she died shortly afterwards – some said of a broken heart and I believe it to be true." Philip was buried in Youlgrave churchyard on 19th May 1941, aged 23.

Rupert Buxton

On call-up, Rupert joined the 2nd Royal Gloucester Hussars, part of the Royal Armoured Corps, and trained as a tank driver before being drafted to North Africa. His parents and friends back in Middleton toasted his 21st birthday, but the celebrations and presents had to be withheld – sadly, never to be renewed. In May 1942 Cyrenaica was a dangerous place to be. Rommel and his Afrika Korps were driving hard for the Suez Canal – vital to our Far East communications – and the Commonwealth defences were concentrated on a few strong points linked by deep minefields. The most important of these was called Knightsbridge and it was here that fierce tank battles were fought to the death. On 27th May Rupert died in his tank. His last letter home expressed his sadness at the news of his father's recent death. For his mother Ellen, notification of the death of her only child brought utter sorrow about which she found it unbearable to speak. Rupert lies in Knightsbridge War Cemetery at Acroma.

Harry Birds

Harry was living on Stoneyside with his parents, John and Sarah Ann, when he was called up to join the Inniskilling Fusiliers. His brother, George, was already serving in another regiment. The battle for North Africa was drawing to a close at the beginning of 1943 when the Axis forces were pinned into a small corner of north-east Tunisia and the Allies were grouping for the final offensive. Reinforcements to swell this attacking force were disembarking at a point about 40 miles west of Tunis called Medjez-el-Ban, and it was here that Harry landed with his regiment on 13th January. His sister, Martha Prime, remembers the poignancy of what was to follow. Unknown to either, George had travelled on another ship with a Youlgrave comrade called Colin Evans and, as they were disembarking, Colin spotted Harry on the gangway. There was time for only a brief exchange, but they all agreed to meet at 7pm. Sadly, by that time Harry was already dead, killed Martha believes, by a sniper's bullet from the high ground occupied by the enemy. Harry lies in Medjez-el-Bab war cemetery.

James Rowland Birds

During the Great War, the most desolate word in the lexicon of horror was *missing*. For the wives and parents of young men blown up and buried without trace or sunk in a morass of mud, there was never to be the comfort of a closed book, the consolation of a lovingly-tended grave. Thankfully, the Second World War saw fewer such tragedies, but the loss of James Rowland Birds was one. Jim, an accomplished runner and playing secretary of the football club, volunteered for the Navy and rose rapidly to the rank of Petty Officer. On the night of the 6th February 1943, he disappeared from his ship without trace, thought most likely to have been washed overboard to die a lonely death in the dark. His younger sister, Kathleen, now Mrs Skidmore, remembers that her father, William, and Uncle Jim travelled at the invitation of the Navy to meet his shipmates at their naval base in Scotland, but they returned none the wiser. The war ended and Kathleen, sitting with friends in church for the Remembrance Service, was startled to hear Jim's name read out among the dead. It was the end of delusion: no longer could she think of him as just *missing*.

Ronald Cavendish

In early April 1943, the 6th Infantry Brigade was strung out north and south of the Brigade Headquarters in the Burmese Arakan peninsular when the Japanese attacked across the Mayu Ridge. With his village headquarters about to be overrun, Brigadier Cavendish issued two significant orders. His young and agile staff (at 47 he was neither) were to evacuate the area and make their escape as best they could; thereafter, the area was to be regarded as hostile territory and the commander of the artillery regiment nearby was to "blast anything that moved without question". The Japanese were jubilant to capture a brigadier. News was flashed to Tokyo and *Tokyo Rose* announced it over the air, but the triumph was to be short-lived. Next morning, 6th April, Ronald Cavendish accompanied his unwitting captors onto the village square, he alone knowing what was to come. The British Artillery carried out their orders and shelled them. Back at their home in Middleton, Mrs Cavendish was told that her husband was missing, but she knew in her heart he was dead. Two and a half years later, before he died by his *Bushido* code, the Japanese general described him as "a very brave and admirable gentleman". Nowadays, after 60 peaceful years, the accolade 'hero' is awarded for mere sporting achievement. Ronald Cavendish was a real hero in two world wars; but his life and exploits still await the biography they deserve.

George Rowland

Recruit training with the North Staffordshire Regiment at Alton Towers would have been no hardship for an already-fit George, aged 20 in 1939. A keen Youth Hosteller and cyclist, he thought nothing of cycling home from camp whenever the opportunity presented itself. Soon he was to find an even greater interest. On being posted to Barnard Castle, he was given a local address by a former workmate where he was told he would find a welcoming family – so welcoming, it proved, that George was married to the daughter Beatrice by the time he was posted abroad. Trained as an armourer, he had transferred to REME via the Royal Engineers and it was his job to service the personal weapons that REME carried. After service in North Africa, where he swam ashore after the sinking of his landing craft, he followed up the invasion of Sicily with the unit he was supporting. On 3rd August 1943 he was riding on the tailgate of the 17cwt truck with which he, his driver-mate and their equipment were going forward when, on arrival, George was found to be missing. His mate returned for him, only to find him dead by the road – killed outright by a bullet or a shell splinter. George was buried in Catania War Cemetery, perhaps never knowing that Beatrice was to present him with a son, Richard, who sadly, survived him by only 2½ years.

Bennett Dawson

The eager young Sherwood Forester whom Dorothy Shimwell waved off to France in 1939 returned from Dunkirk, haggard and hollow-eyed, in June 1940. No sooner was he out of one danger when he was into another – rushed into Derby Infirmary with a burst appendix. Recovering in Scotland, he was visited by Lt Colonel Cavendish, then Commanding Officer 7th Worcesters, who asked him to be his batman/ escort. They embarked for India in April 1942 and Corporal Dawson was with, by then, Brigadier Cavendish in Burma on 5th April 1943 when a Japanese attack left him crawling through ditches to escape, as ordered. “After some time a number of us got down close to the sea and joined up with some of our gunners”, wrote Bennett. He rejoined the Worcesters in reserve in the rear and was promoted to Lance Sergeant. In April 1944, the Japanese advancing across from Burma to India were halted by a small Commonwealth force at Kohima, “the scene of perhaps the most bitter fighting of the Burma campaign”. Relieving forces, which included Bennett and the Worcesters, were immediately engaged in fierce hand-to-hand fighting around the tennis court of the Deputy Commissioner’s bungalow and the Japanese were driven back. It was an heroic defence which cost many lives, including that of Bennett Dawson on 12th June. He lies in Kohima War Cemetery, remembered with his fallen comrades by the celebrated inscription (see right).

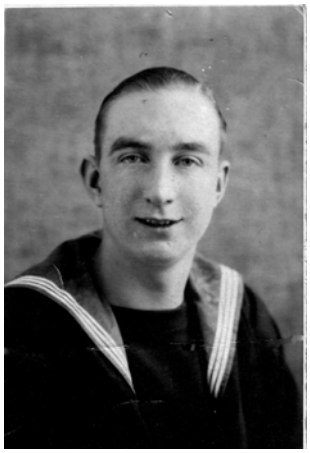
When you go home
Tell them or us and say
For their tomorrow
We gave our today

Alan Oldfield

Just a few days before she was notified of his death, Alan's mother, Mary, received a letter from him at home in Alport to say that she was not to worry about him as he was all right, and had attended a church service and stayed for Holy Communion held in a wood. Before he was recruited to the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment in 1942 at the age of 19, Alan had served his apprenticeship as a joiner with DSF at Friden, and had previously been a popular Boy Scout patrol leader and choirboy. He was sent to fight in Italy two years later and within two months of disembarkation he was dead. The Allied advance had been halted north of Rome as the German Army made a stand on the Gustav Line, and there was a heavy price to pay for the breakthrough in which Alan was killed. He died on 28th June 1944, aged 21, and is buried in the Assisi War Cemetery.

Enos Yates Taylor

When war came, Enos, the elder surviving son of Aaron and Emily Taylor, was working at Friden brickworks in a reserved occupation which exempted him from military call-up. Regardless, he volunteered for the Navy and was killed in action at Ostend at the age of 22 on 1st November 1944. Several days later, his mother, alone at home at Mawstone Lane, opened a telegram expecting news of his imminent arrival on leave. It said:



DEEPLY REGRET TO INFORM YOU YOUR SON ENOS TAYLOR TELEGRAPHIST HAS BEEN REPORTED KILLED ON WAR SERVICE. LETTER FOLLOWING.

The letter, when it came, said: "*I was one of your son's officers and have known your son for quite a long time. In all frankness, I must say he was one of my best, most reliable and cheerful ratings on board. In many awkward and tight corners in which we have been previously, Enos always radiated a smile and a cheerful disposition to those men working around him. His death was one of the worst shocks to my men on board, who knew him so well as 'Lofty'*". It was only through his precise and detailed diary of the D-day landing that his family learned of the perils he had endured through the shock and shell of five sea-borne invasions (see page 8). He wrote of the slaughter off the beaches of Normandy – the floating corpses and the mayhem – yet outwardly he remained the same cheerful comrade. The capture of Ostend was vital to the Allied supply lines and, as the letter said: "*Our job at Watcheron was a most hazardous one… the action will go down in the annals of history… definitely has hastened the end of this dreadful war.*" Sadly, Enos did not live to see it. He was killed instantly by shellfire and is buried in the military cemetery in Ostend.

Harold Hadfield

Harold went to war with a heavy heart. To him, the loyal son of a devout father, conflict was execrable and, as a married man in his thirties, he had a strong case to avoid it. But it was not in his nature to shelter behind his conscience so, reluctantly but resolutely, he joined the Sherwood Foresters and served his country in the Middle East. At last it was over and Harold, his duty done, was safely homeward bound. His unit had stayed on in Syria to 'tidy up' and now, 11 weeks after VE Day, the job was done and they were on the eve of repatriation. Nothing to do on the 23rd June 1945, but wait and relax in the sunshine, perhaps half-listening to the sound of firing from the distant gunnery range where an Indian troop were training with live ammunition; perhaps thinking about home, his wife, the village he had never wanted to leave and the cricket team he could soon expect to rejoin as an accomplished opening batsman. It was not to be. A misdirected shell flew suddenly amongst the Foresters and Harold's homecoming dream died with him. He was buried in the Damascus Commonwealth War Cemetery.

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Enos Taylor's account of the D-Day Landing in Normandy

Mon 5th June: We set sail from P with convoy

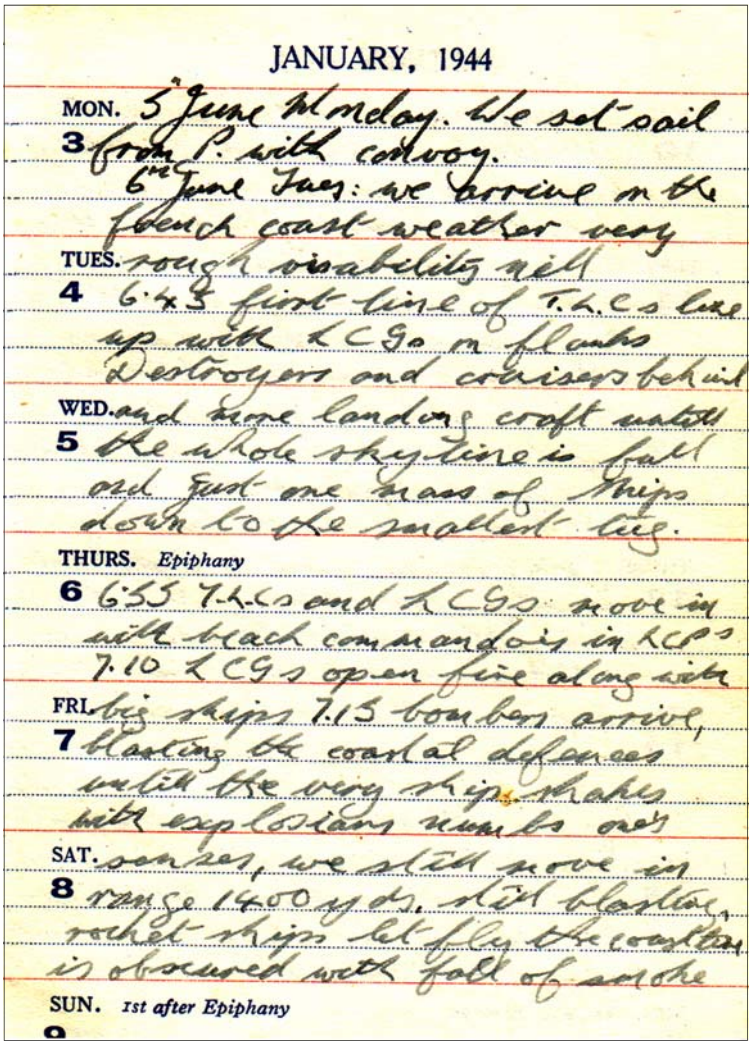
Tues 6th June: We arrive on the French coast weather very rough visibility nil

6.45 first line of TLCs [*tank landing craft*] line up with LCGs [*landing craft, guns*] on flanks destroyers and cruisers behind and more landing craft until the whole skyline is full and just one mass of ships down to the smallest tug

6.55 TLCs and LCGs move in with beach commanders in LCPs [*landing craft, personnel*]

7.10 LCGs open fire along with big ships

7.15 bombers arrive blasting the coastal defences until the very ship shakes with explosions, numbs one's senses, we still move in range 1400 yds, still blasting, rocket ships let fly, the coastline is obscured with pall of smoke stretching for miles. RAF still coming over.



JANUARY, 1944

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6th June Tues: we arrive in the
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THURS. *Epiphany*
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SUN. *1st after Epiphany*
9

Extract from the diary found in Enos's effects and returned to his parents.

7.30 First ships land and enemy opens up hitting landing craft and setting two on fire. Tanks and troops on shore. TLCs let fly with all they have got, raking houses with cannon fire. We tear along firing salvoes. After salvoes empty shell cases pile up around the guns and paint blisters on the barrels. 8 o'clock landings going on in good shape with enemy still firing. We travel along the coast blasting at pillboxes – very near misses on us from pillboxes. I've never seen as many fighter aircraft in the air at once (all ours) Spits, Lightnings, Thunderbolts – all the modern fighters we have are constantly thundering overhead. At last the guns of our ships are silent making the quietness hit you like a wall. More and more landing craft take their loads on the beach, which is dead level for at least 60 miles. Further up the coast J Force have their landing well in hand but are still getting it hot. We see our tanks move in but nothing much is happening as regards enemy action now.

12 o'clock Landing troops and material still at its height. The destroyers and cruisers let go with occasional salvoes. We weigh anchor and move up the coast looking for trouble (finding none). We go round again and a concealed pillbox opens up on us with near misses (light stuff). We engage it moving in all the time. We score hits but cannot tell if it is silenced. She fires no more after an hour. Nothing much to report in the afternoon.

9 pm Here is one night I shall never forget. The sky is black with giant gliders carrying troops towed by all kinds of twin-engined aircraft as well as four-engined. What a sight, wave after wave pass over, they still keep coming in from the horizon, releasing the gliders to carry on themselves then the returning planes turn back sweeping over the sea at zero level so as to miss the oncoming aircraft. High above, the fighters scream around. Feel it's like a fiction novel coming to life. The gliders sweep around looking for landings like bees over a jam pot (Oh for a camera).

12 o'clock Once again, all in dark, fires are burning on the shore.

1 am Enemy aircraft bomb us but no ships hit – all bombs landing on beach. God knows how the poor blokes are going on over there.

2 am Our bombers come in to blast his supply lines and convoys had a lot of flak going up. I never thought I'd be so near an RAF air raid, bombs seem to come down as if coming down a chute (the ship shakes).

8 am There seems to be more ships than ever now.

9 am We have 7 hit and run raiders coming in – JU88s – flak opens up and, oh boy, what a sight. First plane to die has its tail cut in half as if by a bread knife. He never pulls out hitting the beach with a tremendous explosion. Just imagine those poor guys inside. Never had a chance to bale out, it's just one big bonfire, bombs burst inside it throwing debris all over the place... fighters, fighters, fighters everywhere coming from nowhere. They get another JU88 but cannot complete their destruction because of our flak.

11 till 12am More bombardments by our ships. We are at anchor.

5 pm One of the lads sees something floating in the sea. It comes nearer and its an American paratroop with his full gear on. It kind of turns one sick to see a man floating upside down.

Nothing much happened the next two days. Still firing and unloading stores and supplies for the boys at the front. Big air raids at night but most of us are seasoned to this having been in plenty of raids at Sicily.

Friday 9th June: We get orders to watch for 11 inch gun battery. We anchored near it all night but most of the shells drop in the sea because we are too far away and dare not go in, only closer.

12 o'clock Everything seems to be okay. A few star shells go up now and again.

2 am The RAF are bombing again, a little place inland. We can just see the flak, it appears to be shooting out of the hills like jets of water.

Saturday 10th June: We try to get fresh stores but cannot. We are told by HQ we have to go on Compo Rations. These aren't too bad including a bar of chocolate and five fags a day.

9am We go along to our anchorage of the 11 inch battery. At twelve noon we get orders to

escort minesweepers. We weigh anchor without seeing sweepers. Destroyers ask us to have a crack at a battery.

2pm We slide in, nothing happens. We can see the towns very clear now. Hold it. Enemy opens up, shells crash all around us. We go tearing out with guns blazing. LCG 9 & 10 have a go. They come out as well; too hot for them. Hello! Number Ten has been hit astern. We pull out as fast as we can go. Number Nine has gone alongside 10 to tow her. At safe distance from everything we observe Ten's damage. There is a hell of a hole in her stern and it has damaged her steerage (No casualties). Cruisers open up on battery. We go along to Depot ship with Ten. They say they can most likely repair her in lifting her stern by crane, which depot ship is equipped with

4pm Enemy long range open up on our shipping but no hits. It must be a long range for we cannot see gun flashes. We go alongside to draw fresh water. Then we go alongside Ammo wagon for shells and cordite. We have a chat with the crew and they say they have only been out since Friday and they will be glad when they can go back.

9 pm We cast off and cruise around to the HQ ship for orders. Holy smoke, we get orders to go to our old friend the 11 inch again in the morning.

11pm We anchor

4 am All is dark and nothing unusual is happening. 4.45 we up anchor along with Number 9 and move in. We have orders to shell a road with HE for half an hour and, if the 11inch battery opens up, to engage it (Some hopes) and leave 9 to shell the road.

5 am Action stations alarm bell rings... gun crews dash up on deck awakened out of their slumbers once again.

5.05 we move along coast, firing all the time until we reach 11inch battery. We turn about (Good for you Skipper) and come back still firing. 66th Paratroops are also firing. We stop having fired 68 rounds of HE and go back along the coast to see if there are any moving targets. On the return journey a shell just misses Number 9 by inches. We pull out as fast as we can go. Nothing happens the next few days. Some of our ships ran down to see how the old eleven inch is doing and two of them get hit. Number 10 gets word to go back to UK. Are we chokker. The enemy start shelling the Harbour from Le Havre and all the shipping moves out of range. Smoke screens are made all day long. Bombers and warships attack Le Harve. Fires burning all night and sheets of flak going up. Searchlights by the hundred. Today is Friday. We have three separate bombardments. Hoping we have wiped old Jerry up. Most of the time all this was on I was down in the wireless cabin sending and receiving messages in hundreds. It's now just after ten and I am on watch at half past, so I shall have to stop now till tomorrow.

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Chapter Two: The Forces

At the outbreak of war in September, 1939, just eight men from Youlgrave and Midddleton were immediately required for active service. Tom Birds, Ivor Hayes and Cyril Upchurch were already serving under the 1939 Military Training Act; Joe Thornhill and Jack Smith were Territorials; George Oldfield was an ex-regular reservist; and Wilfred Pursglove, though by this time well over conscription age, was in the RAF Volunteer Reserve. Ronald V.C. Cavendish was a career soldier. By August 1945, they had been joined by a further 186 men and women who had either volunteered or been conscripted under the National Service (Armed Forces) Act, by which all men aged between 18 and 40 became legally liable for call-up. After extensive loss of life on the various battle fronts, the age limit was raised to 51 at the end of 1941, when single women between 20 and 30 also were required, for the first time, to do some kind of war service (principally the Women's Services, factory/munition work or the Land Army – Youlgrave and Middleton were represented in all three).

'Legally liable' excluded those in reserved occupations. Everyone within the age range had to register, but certain workers, notably farmhands and brickmakers, could be listed for exemption at the request of their employers. This led to some local friction between those who wanted to volunteer and their employers who wanted to keep them. Unlike volunteers, the conscripts had little say in where and how they would serve. It was the Army pool for most, although a better organised system later on did permit redeployment more in keeping with the aptitude of those caught up in the haste to mobilise. For instance, Ivor Hayes, as priorities changed, transferred to the RAF and became a decorated bomber pilot.

The system of indiscriminate recruiting was prone to bottlenecks in logistics and training and by 1943 some volunteers were enlisted then sent home as reservists for a period of deferment – mostly with a lapel badge to ward off (intended or not) any zealous remarks. They were enjoined to "keep fit, work hard and live temperately." At the same time, the Services had begun to look beyond the imperatives of war. Periods of deferred service could be used constructively to raise educational standards and provide for a smooth transition from wartime to peace-time command structures. Reservists with the required matriculation certificate could apply for a six-month university course, provided they were considered suitable for commissioned rank at the end of their training. Equivalent pre-entry training schemes were available for those who had not had the benefit of a grammar school education.

'Duration of the present emergency'

All the wartime recruits were enlisted D of PE (duration of the present emergency). The peacetime jobs of many were filled by women, so the servicemen had to be gradually assimilated back into 'Civvy Street' when the war ended. Everyone was given a demobilisation number (demob group), based largely on first in/first out principles, and for some this meant that 'duration of present emergency' lasted until the beginning of 1948. This frustrating delay led to a condition known as 'demob happy'. Some were able to use their down time constructively by signing up for EVT (educational and vocational training), thereby acquiring new skills and qualifications for immediate use when the magic number came up. Others, still, who had an essential job to return to could apply for a Class B release and escape the hiatus.

For the majority, service in the Armed Forces occupied no more than five years, yet it is the part of their lives they remember most vividly. A tablet on the wall of the Knoll Club, base of the Youlgrave & District Branch of the Royal British Legion, records the names of the 194 men and women who served. Because surnames are followed only by initials, identification cannot be guaranteed, but so far as can be ascertained there are now only 16 left living in Middleton and Youlgrave to tell the tale. This is what they remember.

Ronald Birds

Ronnie joined the Lincolns in 1942 at the age of 18 and completed his basic training in Lincoln, before being posted to Scotland for combined operations training. His unit landed in Normandy on 'D-Day+4' to encounter the battling German army at Caen. Whilst in France, Ronnie, a trained bren gunner, had a brief spell of secondment in a Canadian tank pending replacement of the gunner who had unwisely stuck his head out of the turret. This somewhat clandestine detachment was all too brief for Ronnie, who enjoyed the circle of friends – and Canadian hospitality – in which he found himself. He also liked the idea of the armour plating between himself and the schmeissers. Accompanied by his guardian angel in the advance to secure the Channel Ports in northern France, Belgium and Holland, he ended up in hospital with a minor injury to his ear when the chap he had been sitting next to on the edge of a trench was shredded by a missile they called a 'Sobbing Sister'. Today, Ronnie regrets nothing save the respect and regard for others that illuminated his service life, but now seems a thing of the past.

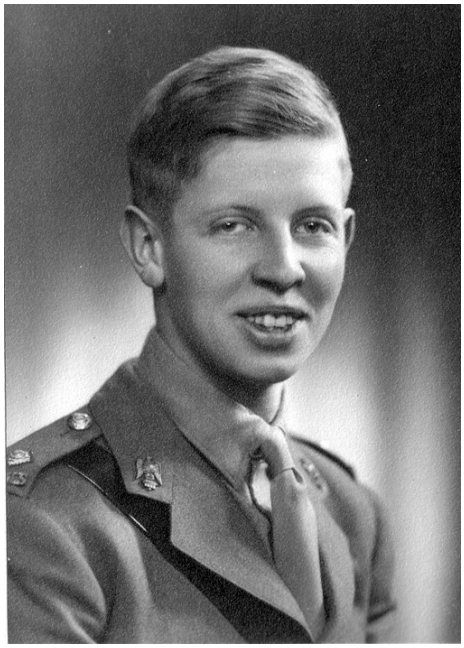
Tom Birds

When Tom reported to Normanton Barracks in July 1939 for six months conscripted training with the 1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters, he little realised that he would still be in uniform almost seven years later. War came within two months and he was off to France with the British Expeditionary Force, to be marched up and down from southern France to Belgium and back again with no apparent battle plan, in the confusion of which his commanding officer managed to get himself captured by the German army. Even the boat that evacuated them from Le Havre inexplicably put in at Brest and Cherbourg as if unsure where to go. Back in England at last, he must have been looking forward to a spell of relative peace and quiet in a Sheffield billet when hell returned by way of the Blitz. And the Lufwaffe even followed him on leave to Youlgrave where, as the firebombs rained down, he carried his grandmother from her Conksbury Lane bungalow to the comparative safety of his sister's cellar at Church Corner. However, misfortune was not all bad news: when he was granted agricultural leave to help out on his sick father's farm, he missed the draft that landed comrades Jim Ardern and Raymond Brassington in Burma and a Japanese prison camp respectively. However, an extra six months was tacked on to his 'demob group' to make up for the time on agricultural leave.

Ken Brassington

Called up to the East Surreys at the end of 1941, Ken was engaged mostly on guard duties: in Fishguard, where there was a large ammunition dump, and in Northern Ireland on detachment to the Royal Irish Fusiliers. At this time, Ken was medically graded B1 and ineligible for overseas service because of an earlier hernia, but when his regiment were due to leave for North Africa without him, he applied successfully for an A1 category and left with his comrades. From Tunisia they went to Egypt for battle training in the Canal Zone, prior to joining the Italian campaign. It was here, at Casino, that Ken's unit were involved in the bloodiest battle of the theatre. He remembers most vividly how, moving north, they strayed into a minefield. Several were killed and one incident left itself indelibly on his memory: a young soldier who had lied about his age to enlist, was lying with both legs blown off – singing. They had to move on and leave him for the medics without ever learning his fate. After advancing past Rome and on to the Lombardy Plain, the campaign ended at Rimini and there, at peace once more, Ken might have expected to be rewarded with a home posting. But no, civil war had broken out in Greece and there they went to hold the line for democracy. They found a more elusive but no less deadly foe. As Ken recalls, you could clear a street and by the time you got to the end of it, the fighting had started again at the other end. It was 1946 before his demob number finally came up and brought an end to the longest four years of his life.

Peter Cavendish



Peter was on school holiday when news of his father's probable death reached Middleton. Not surprisingly, when he reached 18 years of age a few months later, it was for the Army that he volunteered. However, the Forces were, by this time, looking to their post-war structure and suitable candidates were being offered university short courses prior to service training. So, after three days in the army getting kitted out in early October 1943, the next six months were spent at Oxford University. He served from March to December 1944 training first as an infantryman, then as an Armoured Corps soldier before going to OCTU (Officer Cadet Training Unit) until June 1945. Commissioned into the 6th Airborne Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment equipped with airborne light tanks, he was lined up to land in Tokyo Bay when the atom bomb ended the necessity. He was posted to Palestine, instead, and swapped fighting for peacekeeping, which in the post-war turmoil that prevailed, was more or less the same thing. Peter made the Army his career and retired as a Major General.

Peggy Clark (m. Bacon)

The Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) had a ready niche for smart young ladies with hospitality skills. So, despite her preference for the Equipment branch, by dint of coming from her parents' home at the George Hotel on call-up in January 1942, Peggy found herself classified as a 'batwoman' bound for No 3 Principal Reception Centre (PRC) at the Grand Hotel in Bournemouth. First came basic training in Morecambe. Most of the Bournemouth hotels had been requisitioned by the RAF for the duration and the PRC was used largely as a transit and deployment centre for airmen arriving from and returning to Canada. It was the job of Peggy and her colleagues to act as receptionists, welcome the airmen and allocate them to their quarters. She admired the Canadians. They were friendly and entertaining – only too pleased to help her celebrate her 21st birthday – but it distressed her to see the condition of some being repatriated. "Those who had been burned were terribly disfigured," she recalls, "and we were strictly warned not to react to them or stare." With D-day looming, space had to be found for Allied troops concentrated on the south coast, so Peggy was temporarily deployed to Gloucester, before returning later to meet the new wave of homebound Canadians. What she found onerous, especially when she came home on leave, was the stern instruction not to talk about the work she did and where. 'Careless talk costs lives' was the poster prominently displayed on every hoarding. Several of her friends married Canadians and went to live in Canada when the War ended. Peggy hadn't so far to travel: she came home and married Roger.

Brian Colman

Brian had already made up his mind what he wanted to do when he joined the RAF in January 1943. His father, the RFC equivalent of a flight engineer in the Great War, had approved his choice of the trade of flight mechanic, and Brian's service in the Air Training Corps paved the way. Many would-be mechanics never made it to the course at Cosford because, by this time, the army was using its increasingly offensive capacity to raid the untrained ranks of the RAF for soldiers. Happily for Brian, the RAF set more store by its fledgling ATC cadets and he achieved his purpose. After qualifying he worked on a variety of aircraft at different stations, the most important of which were the Lancasters of 115 Squadron at Wychford in East Anglia. Few came back from sorties as immaculate as the state in which he signed them over. The end of the war saw him en route through the Suez canal to Lahore, where he joined a maintenance unit servicing Spitfires and Hurricanes. Then it was home again for Class B release in November 1946.

Herbert Evans

On 13th June 1940, just three weeks after his 23rd birthday, Bert was reporting for 'squarebashing' with the North Staffordshires in Lichfield barracks. For a young man who had never before been away from home, the experience was what would now be described as something of a culture shock. He survived, of course, and soon found himself a trained infantryman in Northern Ireland. A fairly uneventful two years were to follow, during which he transferred to the Dorsets, until, on 20th June 1944, he landed in France to battle his way with the Second Army through Normandy and the Low Countries, heading for the Rhine bridges at Nijmegen and Arnhem. He speaks sadly of their failure to reach and relieve the paratroops at Arnhem, having encountered unexpected resistance on the way. They reached the river, but were faced on a wooded slope by a rain of stick grenades which left him with a concussion and a spell in the field hospital. Although he was not to know him at the time, a soldier in another company of the Dorsets who had met and married a Youlgrave girl was killed in the same engagement. For reasons that he is yet to understand – a not uncommon condition in the ranks – he was posted to Italy immediately prior to demobilisation. He left the army on a day he has no difficulty remembering: it was the day in 1946 that Derby County won the FA Cup.

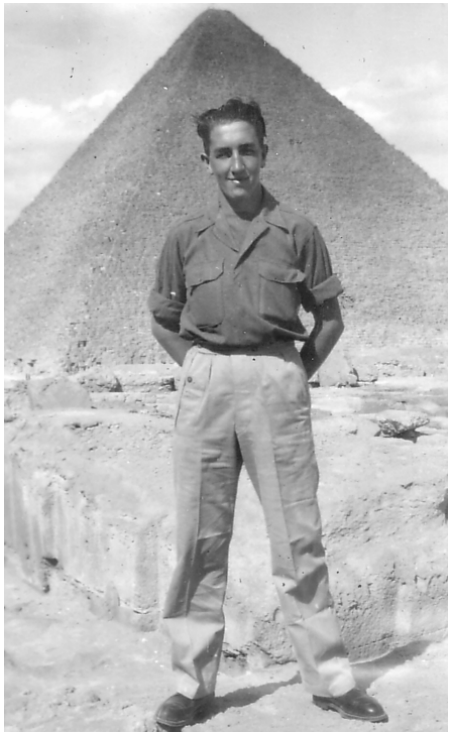
Bernard Oldfield

Bernard volunteered to join the Sherwood Foresters at Lincoln in April 1942 and soon found himself on coast watch at hotspot Lowestoft. 'I do like to be beside the seaside' was a severely out-of-date refrain by this time – barbed wire and minefields were a far cry from sandcastles and sunbathers – and Bernard witnessed at first hand the disintegration of a comrade who neglected to recognise the difference. On transfer to the Royal Artillery, he trained as a gunner and, at the end of 1943, arrived in Italy via North Africa. He was soon in action on the grinding slog up the Italian peninsula, but the *dolca vite* awaited him and his comrades in Venice and Padua at the end of it. Then on to India – the Japanese had surrendered but the War Office was slow to react – and home at last to be reunited with family and the two brothers, one of whom had survived the Russian convoys and the other a prisoner of war camp.

Ernest Oldfield

Ernest was called up in March 1943 and, in the course of his basic training in Lincoln, he was found to be unfit for active service due to a medical defect in his legs. He was assigned to the Pioneer Corps and engaged on munitions preparation and distribution in Shropshire for most of his service. The vast depot at Craven Arms was keeping the tanks and guns in ammunition throughout the UK and abroad, notably North Africa, and it had to be a precise operation to avoid either shortages or undesirable stockpiling at the front. Filling detonators, fusing AA shells and loading and unloading of all kinds of ordnance was not a job for the careless, although Ernest took it in his stride. In fact, when one of the Youlgrave farmers applied for him to help with harvest leave, he was only too keen to get back to duty. When the war's end obviated the need for munitions, he served out his time to demob in Chester.

Cyril Rowland



Cyril was something of a rare bird in terms of army deployment. On conscription, he was actually assigned to the job he was already trained to do well, contrary to the usual Army habit of deploying recruits to the vacancy of the month regardless of their aptitude and experience. He was called up in April 1944 from Derbyshires' bakehouse in Bakewell and, after undergoing the inevitable six-week spell of lifestyle re-modelling at the hands of the drill sergeants in Fort George and a further six weeks acclimatisation on Barry Island, he was assigned to the RASC to carry on providing the staff of life to the grateful soldiery in East Anglia. There can be few creature comforts for which the American GIs envied their British counterparts, but on this occasion they spurned their own field kitchens in preference to Cyril's bakery. In July 1945, with the European war already over, he was posted to the Middle East for reasons other than the photo-opportunity he shared with the Sphinx – whatever they may have been – and at the end of 1947 the Army returned a fit A1 soldier to Derbyshires in return for the C3 civilian they had commandeered 3½ years earlier.

George Thornhill

George was 23 years old in March 1940, when he enlisted in the Royal Artillery, having declined an offer from his employer to apply for deferment. And so began a six-year slog that took him from England to Tunisia to Italy and back. After basic training at Catterick, he joined the 2nd Antitank Unit which, in the absence of its normal targets following the Dunkirk evacuation, had turned its attention to the Luftwaffe and was pointing its guns skywards. The Tyneside shipyards were building warships, including the battleship King George V, and the 2nd Antitank Unit, stationed at Wallsend, shared with the barrage balloon units and fighter squadrons the vital task of defending them from air attack. In 1942, George transferred to the 3rd Parachute Battalion. The maroon beret worn by the Airborne regiments was a badge of honour. All troops were volunteers and all were renowned for their fighting qualities. In November 1942, the Allies invaded North Africa and the paratroops had the vital task of occupying the airfields. George's battalion dropped onto an airfield called Bone and, as luck had it, arrived just ahead of the German paratroops who, seeing the British parachutes on the ground, wisely stayed in their aircraft. "They would have been sitting ducks," George recalls. From there they fought as infantry, wresting Tunisia hilltop by hilltop from the Afrika Korps. A foot injury meant a return to the artillery for George and, with the campaign in North Africa won, George fought his way through Italy with the field artillery. The war ended and Italy proved a more convivial place to be for the next six months, but demob in 1946 came as a great relief. "We'd had enough," says George. "In six years I'd spent five Christmases abroad and we were ready for home."

Joe Thornhill

The call to war came to Joe with a tug on his trousers while he was up a ladder at DSF, Friden. He looked down and there was a soldier handing him his call-up papers! Joe joined the Territorials as a 19-year-old in 1938 and was barely back from summer camp with the Sherwoods when the call came to re-muster. Downing his electrician's tools, he cycled home, packed his kit and reported to the Town Hall in Bakewell, where he met up with his fellow Terriers. They collected the equivalent of their 'king's shilling', adjourned to the Queens Arms to spend it, then it was off to the serious business of manning searchlights on the East Coast. As an electrician, Joe was soon recruited to the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (via the Royal Engineers) where his talents were put to developing the radar potential in anti-aircraft defence. Already a sergeant on detachment to the Military College of Science in Bury, he emerged as a Warrant Officer, expert on AA gun predictors, and was soon in the thick of it in the Blitz on London and Coventry – wherever the Luftwaffe were attacking. Then came the flying bombs and the development of a defensive barrage. Throughout this time, Joe was engaged in servicing and adapting equipment shipped over from America and in training junior technicians – a very busy war and, as Joe recalls from the Blitz, frequently a gruesome experience. After VE Day he was posted to Middle East HQ on intelligence duties, finding as he puts it, what the Germans had been up to. So the war that began up a ladder for Joe ended in May 1946 when he was released to resume civilian life with Pauline, now an ex-WAAF, whom he had married in April 1940 "never knowing when they would see each other again"

Douglas Wardle

Douglas volunteered for ground duties with the RAF in 1941 and served initially as a Wireless Operator in Group 3 of Bomber Command before re-mustering to General Duties. Prior to joining the 2nd Tactical Air Force in the drive through occupied Europe and north Germany, he was attached to 210 Squadron who were flying Catalina anti-submarine patrols from the Shetlands. He left with enduring friendships and a love of the islands and with Eileen, his wife later to be, made post-war holiday visits to experience Auld Acquaintance at first hand. Douglas still sets store by his service years. “The lives of our generation were changed for the better,” he says. “We learned to live with each other and, when we came home, we could settle down with a broader outlook on life.”

Ben Wilson

There was to be no easing into warfare for Ben when, aged 19, he was called up in February 1944. Within six months he was in action as a Bren gunner with the 55th Field Regiment, Guards Armoured Division, as it fought with the Second Army to outflank the Siegfried Line. It was a period of bitter fighting that Ben would like to forget – dead and mutilated comrades and the sheer waste of conflict. Relief came on Christmas Eve when they were pulled out of the line and transported back to a quiet sector, but it was a false hope. They were still unloading their kit when a despatch rider arrived and ordered them to load up again. Von Runstedt had launched his offensive through the Ardennes and Ben’s unit were rushed to the defence. He remembers the privations of a bitter winter campaign, sights such as German soldiers, some presumed to be snipers, frozen to death at their posts. It ended for them in Aachen, when the tannoys [loudspeakers] announced a ceasefire. From there it was briefly back to England before being shipped out to India. Emerging from a spell of jungle training on the Burmese border he was told he should have embarked for home weeks ago. Ben didn’t argue.

Ernest Yates

Young men and women who would normally be called up for military service could be classified exempt from conscription (at the request of their managers) because their job was vital to the War effort. Ernest was a young man of 19 working for High Peak Silica Company when war broke out. He was an automatic choice for the reserved list, but there was a snag: Ernest's manager was his own father and that left him exposed to innuendo. So he asked his father to leave him off the list; and he awaited the call-up papers that came in 1942. His choice of service was RAF ground duties and, perhaps unusually, his wish was granted. He became a MT [Motor Transport] driver and served the next two years on home postings. Then, a couple of months after D-Day, he landed in Normandy and began a nomadic life with 2nd Tactical Air Force. This was a period of no fixed abode for the RAF, rolling up from one airfield to another behind the advancing army, so Ernest was soon in Ypres and beyond. With enemy fighter bombers scouring the roads for targets, driving a RAF truck was not an occupation for daydreamers, but Ernest brought himself and his truck home intact after VE Day. So that left only the Japs and, by the end of July, he was on embarkation leave for Singapore when, actually on his way to embark at Morecambe, he heard in Manchester that Japan had surrendered. Well, he thought, the RAF will not need me in Singapore now, and he toyed with the idea of returning home. He was quite right, of course, the RAF did not need him in Singapore, but they sent him there just the same prior to demob.

The Thimble Hall Academy

Five teenage chums who readily raised their eyes from Scouting to the skies in 1941 were nicknamed 'The Maclagans', although nobody seemed to know why. **John Hall, William Hawley** and **Joe Dawson** were founder members of the Town Flight of 610 ATC Squadron; **Norman Wilson** and **Howard Clark**, being still at Lady Manners (then Grammar) School were in the School Flight. With 17¼ being the minimum age to join the RAF and 18 to begin flying training, there was nothing for it but to line up on the springboard and be ready to jump when the time came. The ATC and Thimble Hall were their springboard, or at least, the upper floor which they renovated and furnished by somewhat dubious means and equipped with such tools of their intended trade as they could lay their hands on. Access was by a ladder and a trapdoor that was firmly barred to all non-members, particularly female intruders. They taught each other Aircraft Maths, Theory of Flight, Navigation and the Morse Code. A little more than a year later, they were down to four.

Howard Clark

Having obtained his School Certificate, **Howard** was advised to apply for an Engineering Cadetship at Loughborough College prior to a technical commission in the Army. He applied for it, got it and decided he was no longer anxious to slip the surly bonds of earth. He left for Loughborough in mid 1942. **Johnny** was first to come of an age to volunteer for aircrew duties. He reported for medical tests – and failed! He had made the mistake of admitting to rheumatic fever in childhood which, in those days, it was automatically assumed, left a weak heart. The rejection was a cruel blow and he dropped out. **William** discovered that the Fleet Air Arm was taking aircrew volunteers for immediate enlistment through what was known as the Y [youth] Scheme. Too eager to let the colour of the uniform stand in his way, he opted for navy blue and off he went in early 1943. He was awarded his wings after training in Canada and saw squadron service before the war ended. **Joe and Norman** cycled to Derby one Saturday afternoon in May 1943 and volunteered for aircrew. They were classified PNB [pilot/navigator/bomb aimer] at Padgate before being sent home for 10 months deferment. **Joe** applied for pre-entry training and was sent to Bradford for six months. A disappointment awaited him at the end of it. The RAF was, by this time, running out of air gunners faster than pilots, so he was sent to gunnery school in Scotland to train on Wellington bombers. He was awarded his aircrew brevet and sent to Canada for OTU [operational training unit] on Liberator bombers where, crewed up, they were about to leave for Far East operations when the atom bomb was dropped. They altered course and came home. He was demobbed in 1946. **Norman**, meanwhile, had been selected for a University Short Course and sent to Queen's University, Belfast, until September 1944. He was confirmed as a trainee pilot on completion of a spell at an elementary flying school on the Humber and, after two short detachments to bomber airfields in Lincoln and East Yorkshire, he boarded the *SS Aquitania* for New York and onwards to Oklahoma for basic and advanced training. It ended abruptly a few weeks short of 'wings' when the war suddenly ended and they all came home on the *SS Queen Elizabeth*. He completed his training in Shropshire, but decided to leave the RAF in December 1947, although he continued to fly with the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve.

John Hall

William Hawley

Joe Dawson

Norman Wilson

Postscript

Howard gained his diploma at Loughborough and was commissioned in the Royal Engineers in 1946. He returned to Civvy Street in 1949/50 to become Works Manager at DSF, Friden, before moving to a post in Sheffield. Johnny overcame his disappointment, studied for a technical degree in electricity and gravitated to electrical design. William made the Fleet Air Arm his career. He served on aircraft carriers at home and overseas, commanded an airfield and retired as a Captain after 29 years service. Joe studied for a technical degree in mechanical engineering and followed Howard as Works Manager at DSF. Norman returned as a Regular to the RAF following the outbreak of war in Korea, but in crash-landing his burning jet fighter on an exercise, he was disabled and invalided out. Thimble Hall, of course, went on to fame and fortune… but not as a seat of learning.

Chapter Three: Soldier Bridegrooms

Of the many changes that war brought to Youlgrave and Middleton, one of the more radical was the conduct of courtship and marriage. Hitherto, boy meets girl was a fairly predictable local affair: the respective families usually knew each other, were already associated through religious and social connections, and progress from friendship to marriage was normally a leisurely if inexorable process. Suddenly everything changed. The prospect of imminent separation hastened marriage for some; others left home and found romance elsewhere, while the girls who were left behind soon found a whole new range of exciting suitors to chose from. The pace picked up considerably with the arrival of khaki-clad strangers with new tales to tell and new interests to reveal.

Glamour came to Bakewell with the arrival of troops in the new camp at Burton Closes and to Stanton where a searchlight battery was stationed. There were artists and musicians, professionals in Civvy Street who formed dance bands, staged entertainments and brightened up the social spectrum. Dances in the Town Hall were a weekly event and from time to time the dusty floorboards of Youlgrave Village Hall would bounce to the boots of artillerymen from Stanton as the battery held their Unit dances. Later, there were blue-suited soldiers to be entertained from Middleton Hall, then staffed by Red Cross ladies as a convalescent home.

'Absence makes the heart grow fonder' is an old saying that lost none of its meaning in wartime. Brief encounters ended with promises to write and perhaps the gift of a photograph for a keepsake. Reunions after years of enforced separation were quickly followed by weddings, proof that Cupid was as handy with the pen as with the bow and arrow. Nowadays it would be text messages and the odds are he would have found romance a little harder to instil.

Where the exigency of service allowed, brief courtship and marriage were often followed rapidly by embarkation leave and separation for the years that remained of the war. Then it was time for joyful reunion and – decision time – where to live? His folks or hers? Or perhaps a new start with neither. Youlgrave and Middleton bade farewell to so many, but just occasionally the villages kept a daughter and gained a son. This is their story.

Jim and Evelyn Bristow

When Evelyn Taylor found herself separated from her friend and cousin Millie, late at night, on the way home across the fields from Stanton, it worried her a good deal less than it would have done today. Solitary girls, then, could reckon themselves safe from unwelcome encounters. But when she broke the strap of her sandal and was fumbling in the dark to repair it, the encounter she did meet was far from unwelcome. “Let me help you,” said a soldier from the searchlight battery, and help her he did – for the next 40 years. Jim Bristow from Liverpool lost no time in securing a place in the heart of Youlgrave’s one-time Carnival Queen. They were married in 1942 at Bakewell Registry Office before being blessed at the Catholic Church – Evelyn remained true to her Methodist upbringing. But separation came all too soon. Jim served out the rest of the war in Italy and, when reunion came in 1945, they lost no time in settling to home life in Grove Place and completing the family of five boys and three girls that they had already started.

Harrold and Sheila Campbell

As a ‘Terrier’ in Liverpool, Harrold was mobilised at the beginning of the war into 353 Battery, Royal Artillery, a searchlight unit based at Stanton-in-Peak. It was, in effect, a holding unit as many of the personnel were later redeployed into other regiments or even into one of the other Services. Harrold later became an infantryman with the 5th Battalion, Dorsetshire Regiment, but not before he had met Sheila Wright at a dance in the Village Hall. They were married on 20th June 1942 and their daughter, Angela, was born just over a year later. Sadly, the family happiness was not to last. Harrold was posted to France with the 2nd Army and was killed in action on 25th September 1944, in the attempt to relieve the embattled paratroops at Arnhem. He is buried in Arnhem Oosterbeek War Cemetery.

Tom & Eva Rhodes

Had Tom Rhodes not been sent to Middleton Hall for convalescence in 1944, he would have been most unlikely to meet Eva Birds, his wife-to-be, despite coming from the same county. He was a gas fitter in Chesterfield when he was called up early in the war. Trained as a gunner in the Royal Artillery, he was detached from the usual regimental duties to find himself at sea behind the gun of an armed merchantman on convoy duty in the North Atlantic. It was constant 'action stations'. Severely wounded in one fighting engagement, he was hospitalised in Canada before returning to England for convalescence. Off-duty socialising in Youlgrave earned him the affectionate nickname of 'Mighty Fine', reflecting his invariable response to the question 'How are you?' Meanwhile, Eva was in service at Lomberdale. She met Tom and, while they were not what might be called courting, there must have been a spark of romance waiting to be fanned. However, it seemed to be extinguished when he left to rejoin his regiment, with no plans to keep in touch, and it was quite by chance that, with the war ended, a friend of Eva pointed out a wartime photograph of Tom in the *Derbyshire Times*. She wrote to his mother in Chesterfield, contact was restored, Cupid took a hand and they were married on his demob in 1946.

It was quite by chance that they made their home in Youlgrave, but it was a chance that did the village a considerable favour. Tom, a bandsman and natural entertainer, used his on-stage talents to wow village hall audiences and, in due course, to enhance the fame of the annual pantomime.

Bob and Peggy Skinner

Bob had already had a hectic two years with the Royal Engineers when he arrived in Vernio, Italy, via the Middle East. How he came to be there is entertainingly described in the unpublished memoir of his war service, a story that might never have been had he not volunteered for active service. As a 17-year-old hospital plumber and maintenance fitter in 1939, he was exempt from army service and could have served out the war as an auxiliary fireman in East Sussex, but he was resolved to "follow his mates" to war in 1942. It was at Vernio that he first heard of Youlgrave from his good friend Ron Wood: "Ron and I were on detachment with dozer and crane. We were in our billet one night writing letters and showing photos and he showed me one of Peg, Eileen and Lilian (Ron was engaged to Lilian). I said I would like to write to Peg as a pen pal. It must have been a good letter… we've been married over 50 years." In the course of which, it must be added, they have raised three enterprising and successful sons. So, thanks to a chance encounter in the land of romance, Peggy got a husband, Youlgrave got a plumber and the British Legion got a long-serving standard bearer who, at the age of 83, can still give lessons in military bearing.

Arthur and Vera Smith

When, in 1940, young Chelsea electrician, Arthur Smith, volunteered to join the Royal Corps of Signals, he had probably never heard of Youlgrave. Yet it was on the cards that here he would spend the rest of his civilian life, thanks to a quirk of army posting. Square-bashing at Catterick was followed by embarkation for the Middle East, but not before the briefest of spells at Burton Closes had enabled him to meet Vera Wilson at a dance in Bakewell. That was almost the last they saw of each other for four years. In Cairo for his 21st birthday, Tobruk for his 22nd and a prisoner of war camp for his 23rd, Arthur must have greeted the letters from Vera with a growing sense of attachment. Captivity in Libya and Bologna was followed by a Stalag in Poland which, unbeknown to the inmates, was within 15-20 miles of Auschwitz. 1945 saw the Russians advancing from the east and Arthur's POWs were marched out ahead of them to criss-cross northern Germany for a thousand miles on foot, during which they saw Dresden go up in flames. Happily, the Allied armies were advancing from the other direction and it was a case of all's well that ends well. Arthur and Vera lost no time – they were married in May 1945 and celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary this year.

Chapter Four: The Prisoners of War

One of the more enduring clichés beloved by cinema and TV is the moment when the German officer consoles his British captive with the words: 'For you the war is over'. It was never the case either for the captive himself, who faced perhaps years of hunger and privation, or for his anxious family back home. But the future for those held by belligerents who observed the Geneva convention, like Germany and Italy, was a good deal less grim than for those held by the Japanese. The latter were to endure brutality, disease and starvation of which no news was mercifully good news for their families, although they all sensed the peril and uncertainty that lay behind it. The ordeal of **Raymond Brassington** and his wife, Alice, is typical and we are grateful to her for allowing us to quote her account.

Raymond was called up in June 1940, joined the 5th Sherwood Foresters and was captured at the fall of the Singapore Garrison early in February 1942. This is what Alice was to learn after the war and, 60 years later, committed to paper.

Raymond and Alice Brassington

Thousands of troops were then taken to Changi Jail and Ray was among many who slept on the roof – it was almost impossible to find room anywhere. This went on for nine months in terrible conditions. Malaria, Beri Beri and many other fevers were rife. Part of the problem was caused by the rice which had been treated with lime. All fit men were sent to build the 'Death Railway' up to Moulmein – Ray being one of them. Apart from this work, he also still helped the doctors. Conditions were dreadful. They had to build their own camp which was made of Bamboo with Banana leaves for the floor and roof, and was built on stilts because of the snakes. They started building the railway through solid rock and deep ravines with pick and shovel. This was virgin jungle. They worked from dawn to dusk in blazing heat with only a meal of rice a day. To supplement the diet they boiled grass, killed small snakes and even picked sparrows for extra protein. As time went on they had little left in the way of clothing. Ray's boots were the last thing to wear out; he then had to wrap his feet in Banana leaves. His legs were covered in tropical ulcers due to bamboo poisoning. As they moved up the railway line more camps had to be built and were numbered one, two, three and four. Many men died every day and had to be buried at the side of the line. In a camp at Chunkia they had a cholera outbreak. This was a killer disease and terrified the Japanese so much that they came to the doctors and gave them vaccines and medical supplies to inject the prisoners against this. The doctor that Ray helped asked him if he would go to the hut which was used as a hospital. He injected Ray and himself, then went to inject the other prisoners; some survived but many died. When the railway was finished, all the men who had worked on the line

were put on the train and took the first ride up to Moulmein in case they had sabotaged the line.

Ray came back to Singapore in poor health and only weighed eight stone, but the Japs said he was fit for more work, so he and thousands more were packed into the holds of ships called Lisbon Maru Hell ships and sailed for Japan. It took three weeks, a terrible journey, many died on the way, and some of the ships were bombed by the American Air Force. Some men escaped and were picked up by the US ships.

On arrival, Ray and many others were taken to a place called Yochachi and worked in a factory making cobalt for hardening steel. Whilst there he lived through two earthquakes. They were marched to the factory and before every shift had to visit the Shinto Shrine and make a bow. As you can imagine, lots of funny things were said. One morning when they arrived the Japanese were wailing and making terrible noises. The men wondered what had happened, but were not told anything. When it was time to go back to the camp, they washed in warm water which drained from the factory but they had no soap. The Japanese Guard brought some soap and started washing. Ray said to his pal: "The war must be over." This Japanese guard could speak a little English because he had been to Glasgow as a cabin boy, and he said to Ray: "There is something I'd like to tell you but I'm not allowed to – go back to camp". Later they heard that the atomic bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, thus bringing the war to an end.

When they arrived, all the guards had gone so the first thing they did was to write POW on the roof. Soon after this, a small American plane came flying over and dropped a parachute with a canister containing the news that two atomic bombs had brought the war to an end. They asked that if there was anything that they needed they should write it in the sand. The men went to the factory and got a bag of lime and wrote 'PLASMA' in the sand because a few days before an American lad lost both feet when the camp was straffed by US planes and they had no medical supplies. The plane returned in half an hour and dropped plasma and medical supplies, thus saving the life of the US prisoner. These planes were from the aircraft carrier Indefatigable *which was anchored in the bay. It was another three weeks before the camp was located by the US Army – 25 British; the rest were Americans and Dutch.*

They were then taken to Tokyo to a cleansing ship to be de-loused and given clean clothes. Then they started their journey home. First they were flown to Okinawa, then on to Manila. Ray had to stay there for a month as he was taken ill with malaria. He was brought home on the troop ship US West Point. *The long journey home by sea was to help the men get well. Ray was so well looked after that when they docked at San Fransisco he was feeling much better. He crossed America on the Canadian Pacific Railway to New York, then boarded the* Queen Mary *for the home journey to Southampton, arriving there on 22nd November 1945, having completed a round the world trip.*

From 1942 to 1945 I received six postcards from Ray, all of which were six months old when they arrived. The first card was dated June 1942. It had been 17 months since I heard the news that Ray was missing, believed killed, and this card was 14 months old. I received two cards in 1943 which were not dated. One card on 15th January 1944, and one on 10th June 1944. The last one was received on 30th January 1945. It was always six months between cards and I was informed by the Prisoner of War Association that if I had not heard within the next week I was to be classed as a War Widow, but thank God, many times there were only days left before receiving a card.

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Chapter Five: The Home Front

What it meant to be part of wartime Youlgrave and Middleton cannot be meaningfully described in the context of today's lifestyle because the underlying social conditions are so very different. Imagine a home without electricity or piped water, as so many were in 1939; and that portrays just one aspect of how our everyday expectations have changed – even a simple thing like the wireless. If you had one at all, it was run by 2-volt wet batteries that had to be taken to Evans & Prince's garage to be periodically charged-up. Deprivation had a different meaning. What would now be considered impoverished was, then, the normal way of life.

However, there is one sense in which comparisons can be usefully made, and that is in the way we relate to each other. It was not the hollow community that one might expect with so many young adults away on war service – it was filled with purpose and mobility. Servicemen were constantly coming and going on leave with tales to tell (amused or bemused by the invariable first greeting 'When do you go back?'). Everyone from schoolchildren to pensioners had a part to play that was not primarily concerned with their own self-interest. Common cause and shared experience ranged from the threat of imminent invasion in 1940 to the austerity and discomfort of the later years. It was the 'Dunkirk spirit' that we would love to evoke today but, of course, without the shared peril and sacrifice that generated it.

So were we so altruistic as we like to paint ourselves? Er, not altogether. Yes, we could pull together and share and share alike, but the hunter/gatherer instinct is too strong to be entirely self-suppressed. We were all black marketeers at heart, even though the indulgence may be nothing worse than accepting a little extra from under the counter.

'Dig for Victory'

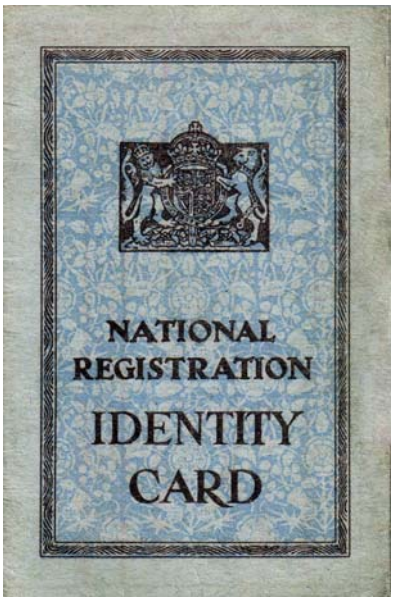
Everything was in short supply. Some things, notably commodities like food, textiles and petrol imported through the sacrifice of merchant seamen, were strictly rationed and on coupons. There was a mileage limit to travel by private car, if any was available at all, and most owners just left their cars propped up on bricks in the garage for the duration. All kinds of travel were discouraged: 'Is your journey really necessary?' was the remonstration on posters repeatedly confronting those who did venture forth.

Winters were dismal and hazardous. Before the lamp could be lit, the blackout curtain (often a frame fixed to the window with turn-buttons) had to be in place; no streetlights and only shielded torches were allowed for pedestrians; cars and cycles obliged to mask headlights were a potential menace to themselves and others on the road; solid fuel was in short supply – the harsh winter of 1940 saw people collecting sacks of coal on sledges from lorries that had struggled through the snow to disposal points on New Road and Holywell Lane.

And we thrived on it. We 'Dug for Victory', raised pigs, collected fruit from the hedgerows, made currants from dried elderberries and gathered wood for the fire. The WVS had a pie centre in what is now the Knoll Club and the grateful purchasers asked no questions about the recipes. Shortages were also a great social leveller and a purge of trivial distinctions. 'Fashion' went out of the window and 'style' was what you could cobble together from the blanket chest. People who had never before seen the inside of a Hulley's or Silver Service bus cheerfully found themselves on a voyage of discovery to Matlock, Bakewell and beyond. People who were not used to fending for themselves suddenly found fulfilment in fending for

others. ‘Mucking in’ was the order of the day; and the role of women changed dramatically to fill the men’s work left by conscripted manual workers.

It was a highly regulated life, particularly in the edgy aftermath of the fall of France, that nobody seemed to resent. Everybody had to carry his or her gas mask and produce an identity card on demand by a Police Officer in uniform or a member of HM Armed Forces in uniform on duty. The Army set up on-the-spot checkpoints like latterday police speed traps, even boarding the Lady Manners school bus on Haddon Road and inspecting the pupils’ identity cards. Spies, saboteurs, parachutists and fifth columnists (the subversive invention of the Spanish Civil War) were expected, if not already here, and some bright official thought to make life difficult for them by removing all the road signposts. Lower down the list of undesirables to be checked were the home-grown offenders: the ‘spivs’, the black marketeers, deserters and unauthorised motorists.



Identity cards had to be carried and shown on demand.

Not all precautions were patently logical. For instance, presumably to make life difficult for the expected glider troops, the playing fields at Lady Manners School were littered with old motor cars and upright railway sleepers embedded in the ground, while across the road, an adjoining field was as uncluttered and aircraft-friendly as the time when, just a few years previously, Sir Alan Cobham had used it for his Flying Circus. Equally suitable for landing grounds, as the RAF inadvertently demonstrated from time to time, were Haddon Fields and the big meadow at Meadow Place Farm.

Taking in Evacuees

Apart from the very young, almost everybody performed some kind of war service, compulsory or voluntary, and the extent to which people were willing to put themselves out – although nobody gave it a thought at the time – was both striking and salutary. How willing would we be today to have our comfortable domesticity disrupted by the arrival at short notice, for an indefinite period, of bewildered children from city homes? That is what happened. Evacuees arrived, mostly from Chorlton-cum-Hardy, and were distributed to various homes under the supervision of Mrs Mainprice of the Old Hall. (Mrs Mainprice seemed to be at the helm of most good causes, be it Girl Guides, Women’s Institute or WVS.) Typically, Mr and Miss Leach of Brookleton, both elderly unmarried gentlefolk with no experience of child care, accepted three brothers into their home. It helped, of course, that they had a housekeeper, but it was still a considerable disturbance at a time when they could have expected nothing more than quiet retirement. They made the best of it.

There were many good causes to be served: fund-raising targets to be met (‘Wings for Victory’, and so on), war bonds to be sold, soldiers to be comforted and committees to be served on. Whist drives raised money for ‘Soldier Comforts’ and, nearer the end, for the ‘Welcome Home and Memorial’ fund, knitting needles produced scarves, cap comforters and gloves for the troops and pens fashioned letters to ward off lonely vigils. Serving former

scholars of the Wesleyan Reform Sunday School were sent a copy of the New Testament together with a handwritten letter of encouragement from Mr Tom Hadfield, the President. Yes, short of young adults Youlgrave and Middleton may have been, but short of vitality and commitment they were not.

As for the young adults, not all who were called up served in the Forces. For some, it meant only a change of job from non-essential to essential. **Dorothy Wardle,** for instance, was one of several who transferred from traditional ladies' work in Bakewell to toil for long hours making bricks at DSF Friden. Others were taken further afield to work on production lines. **Dorothy Shimwell** was employed on a capstan lathe making aero-engine parts in Ashbourne, still close enough to home not to feel separated. **Mildred Rowland** left work in a Bakewell bank to take up nursing in Buxton, where, among others, she tended patients from the RAF Unit at Harpur Hill.

Others were completely separated and, to all intents and purposes, committed to a Service engagement. One such was Marie Wardle.

Marie Wardle (m. Evans)

Marie was called up to work in a munitions factory in The Potteries in 1940. She lived with about 1,000 other young women in a purpose-built hostel called Raleigh Hall at Swynnerton, where she shared a room with a friend. They travelled daily by coach to the factory near Hanley where her job, day after day for five years, was filling detonators – hazardous enough in itself but, as Marie remembers, "we all turned yellow". She was free to come home to Youlgrave one weekend a month, provided she could overcome the travel difficulties. Not unexpectedly, Marie and her workmates were strictly regulated at work. Their bus was stopped at the gate and passes were carefully scrutinised; they had to change out of their own clothes, put on special overalls and leave their personal possessions in lockers. It was a very dangerous environment to work in, but fortunately for Marie and her colleagues, they escaped the tragedies that occurred in other parts of the country.

Life was not all doom and gloom. Marie remembers tea dances in Hanley, home-made entertainment in the hostel – in fact village life of a sort where all the residents were young and active – and one very special occasion in 1944 when they were visited by the King and Queen and by Mrs Eleanor Roosevelt. And, of course, there was VE Day to be celebrated before it was back to Youlgrave and as near to normal life as the immediate post-war austerity would allow.

For those who stayed at home, there were many ways to serve in a voluntary capacity, especially at the time when the nation seemed most vulnerable. Some were part of organisations that already existed and had only to adapt to new imperatives. Others joined new formations that had no other function than wartime exigencies.

The Home Guard

On 14th May 1940, Anthony Eden made his first speech as Secretary of State for War. Part of this speech was asking for volunteers for the Local Defence Volunteers:

> *'We want large numbers of such men in Great Britain who are British subjects, between the ages of 17 and 65, to come forward now and offer their services in order to make assurance [that an invasion would be repelled] doubly sure. The name of the new force which is now to be raised will be the Local Defence Volunteers. This name describes its duties in three words. You will not be paid, but you will receive uniforms and will be armed. In order to volunteer, what you have to do is give your name at your local police station, and then, when we want you, we will let you know…'*

In the event, the uniforms and arms were slow to arrive, probably because the BEF were returning from Dunkirk without either and had to be re-equipped. So the unit that was formed in Youlgrave and Middleton was, at first, recognisable only by an armband and a penchant for marching with pitchforks and shotguns at the slope. But the uniforms and rifles arrived in due course and the detachment emerged as D Company of the 10th Ashbourne battalion of the Sherwood Foresters. **Donald Bateman** recalls: *"The younger end were mostly chaps in reserved occupations who were not eligible for the Forces – mostly farmers. I was working at the smithy and with tractors only just coming in and a lot of horse-shoeing to be done, I was kept back for the same reason. The officers and senior NCOs were the older men with military service from the Great War who were too old to join up."*

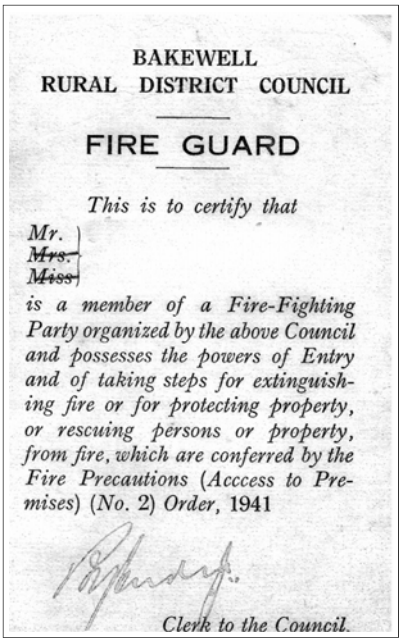
James Fryer, also engaged on the land, was another volunteer. *"The rifles we were issued with were American .300 calibre, slightly longer than the Army's .303s. In time we had Sten guns, a Lewis machine gun, a mortar and an anti-tank gun. We paraded every Tuesday and Friday evening in the Scout Hut for drill and lectures on tactics, weaponry, poison gas, map reading and the like. We had field exercises and manœuvres with larger formations and live firing on the rifle and bombing ranges. Some of it took place in small calibre ranges in Middleton Dale and Sidenooks Plantation and, from time to time, we would be collected by army trucks from Bakewell and taken to the big range at Thorpe Cloud and the bombing range at Mugginton.*

We weren't on active duty in the sense that the Army was – setting up roadblocks and manning checkpoints and the like. We were essentially a stand-by reserve to be called into action only in emergency. That meant maintaining a unit of ten men at readiness which was, at first, assembled overnight in a hut at the Two Trees and, later, in the Friden canteen. Apart from one-hour shifts on guard picket, we were able to sleep through the night and be ready for work next morning."

And work is not all that D Company were ready for, though they were not anxious to hear it. The ringing of the church bells throughout the land was no longer a welcome call to worship. As long as they remained silent all was well, for the government had decreed that they would be rung only to signal the start of invasion. And so they remained until, with the threat of invasion having receded and the victory at El Alamein to be celebrated, they pealed out joyfully once more. So the task of repelling invaders envisaged by Anthony Eden never materialised, thanks to Fighter Command, but had it done so D Company would have been ready and waiting.

Air Raid Precautions

The organisation of Civil Defence along village lines was probably the responsibility of Bakewell Rural District Council so, not unexpectedly, the district councillor for Youlgrave, George Edwin Bacon, had a key part to play in it. Statutory powers were conferred on the ARP Wardens, who were officials recognised by their uniforms and equipment, and on the Fire Guards (known as firewatchers) who were more casually employed. The wardens were equipped with a standard respirator and helmet, as opposed to the fire guards who were issued with a strange helmet that looked like a metal topee, more suited to horticultural than protective purposes. The wardens carried a stirrup pump and a rattle. The stirrup pump looked like an elongated foot pump with a spade handle that could be stood in a bucket of water and used to spray a minor fire. The rattle, familiar to all old-fashioned football spectators, was basically a wooden bird scarer; it was used – or not used, as it happened – to warn people of a poison gas attack. Anyone whose perceptions of war-time rely entirely on films will envisage ARP wardens as heroic characters in the thick of the action, fighting big city devastation; but their village counterparts had an easier life. Their main function was to patrol the streets and enforce the blackout regulations. There would be only one occasion in Youlgrave for them to do so, but an additional duty might have been to usher people off the streets and into the public air raid shelters (had Youlgrave actually possessed one) during an alert. In fact, there was one makeshift shelter – or one officially designated as such – in the fork of Bradford that had been adapted from a kind of open silo attached to the old smithy. It was never used, at least not for its intended purpose, and was long ago incorporated into a cottage conversion.



BAKEWELL
RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL

FIRE GUARD

This is to certify that

Mr.
~~*Mrs.*~~
~~*Miss*~~

is a member of a Fire-Fighting Party organized by the above Council and possesses the powers of Entry and of taking steps for extinguishing fire or for protecting property, or rescuing persons or property, from fire, which are conferred by the Fire Precautions (Acccess to Premises) (No. 2) Order, 1941

Clerk to the Council.

Civilians volunteering for firewatching duties were issued with this authority, although there can only have been one occasion to use it in Youlgrave.

Some firewatchers were discretely deployed to specific buildings or works, such as DSF Friden, and this duty generally fell to those employed there. Youlgrave's general firewatchers, mostly teenagers, took turns to sleep on camp beds at the Old Hall with someone on hand, presumably, to rouse them only if the Luftwaffe came to call.

And, in fact, the Luftwaffe did drop in on 23rd December 1940...

One onlooker's account of the 'Youlgrave Blitz'

By 23rd December 1940, we had learned to recognise the eccentric throb of a German intruder. The now-familiar sound was caused, according to those in the know, by 'un-synchronised engines', an explanation trustingly accepted by those of us who were less-technically gifted, so whenever the night sky yielded a sound that, today, might be compared to an off-balance spin-dryer, we would turn to each other and say "Jerry's over". And as, in our experience, Jerry's business was not with us, we had long-ago crossed the anxiety threshold that might, once, have had us diving for shelter. Nevertheless, familiarity with the invisible foe, coupled with the occasional wail of a siren borne on the frosty air from such self-important and more likely targets as Bakewell, had not inured us to the sudden change in tension that was soon to precede 'the attack'.

It was rumoured, too, that we were in a zone where the night-fighters operated, the significance of this being that fighter-targeted bombers were not too particular where they unloaded their ballast, so there was always the thought that we might cop it by accident rather than design.

Most old Youlgravians will have their own clear recollections of that particular evening. It was quite early, perhaps sevenish, and I was proceeding down New Road with my friend William, who had important business to conduct with the police. He had found on his way home from work in Bakewell – unlikely though it now seems – a sack of coal. (Who, with coal at 2/6d a hundredweight and in short supply, would lose a whole bag of it?) Well, of course, he was about to do his public duty and report it to the civil authority. This was a duty we all took very seriously, particularly where 'fifth-columnists' and parachutists might be involved. We could hear overhead the constant drone of Daimler-Benz engines, or whatever powered the Heinkels and Dorniers that were heading for a glow in the sky that was, we rightly suspected, very bad news for Sheffield, when there was some warning – a sudden change in engine pitch or the beginning of a dive, perhaps? And there we were, tucked prone under the wall, before the scream of the bomb had barely started. The explosion when it came was not only the loudest bang I ever heard, it seemed to come from a matter of yards away. In fact, as I later learned, it dropped at Conksbury Farm a good half-mile away, and was followed by a cascade of sound like the rattle of falling debris.

As it happened, we were at the gate of my aunt's house, and our first reaction was to dive indoors. I may be wrong but I have a vision of her heading for or emerging from the underside of the table. We didn't stay. Outside again, we were amazed to find that the sun appeared to have come up in our brief absence and everywhere was suffused in a green light which, as someone later said "you could read the newspaper by" (not that many people, I imagine, were taking advantage of the opportunity) and which later experience told me had been generated by parachute flares.

We parted company, William heading for home in Main Street, I across the fields to Bradford, dodging and jinking as I ran, a clear target to the air gunner who had, without doubt, already picked me out for liquidation. It seemed a real threat at the time, although I doubt the Luftwaffe would have thought a schoolboy much of a target, even had the known his heart was set on joining the Royal Air Force.

Needless to say, my family were relieved to see me: we could now become refugees all together. Mother was distraught to think of all the poor people whose lives had been snuffed out

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so near to Christmas and, doubtless, many more about to follow. Christmas always added a special poignancy to Mother's perception of personal tragedy; I think it was the thought of joyous preparations fated to remain forever unconsummated.

Youlgrave used to be a village with at least three nuclei, each defined by mutual association. I don't know what the rest of the village did that night, but Bradford took to the hills – or, to be more accurate, the Coach Road. We took the cat, of course, and I remember my brother trying to turn back for the guinea pig but we hardened our collective hearts. Behind us the green glow faded to a fiery orange as Youlgrave went up in flames. Warsaw, Rotterdam, Coventry and now Youlgrave. Where would it end ?

It may have been our intention to seek shelter in the Coach Road caves. I don't know, but in any case they were overcrowded before we got there, so we walked on, waiting for the Luftwaffe to flock in and administer the *coup de grace*. It didn't happen. The fires died down of their own accord, darkness returned to the night sky and we turned for home, convincing ourselves, to be sure, that a familiar walk was all we'd ever intended.

Next day revealed all. In addition to the one HE bomb that had blasted a considerable crater in a field and exposed one or two farm buildings to the weather, a stick of at least 200 incendiary bombs – some said 2,000 – had straddled the village and all but two of them had missed. One garden is said to have received as many as six and it was a poor household that didn't have at least one for the family *curriculum vitae*.

The bungalows that were hit belonged to the Brassington brothers and, there, the fires were extinguished with minor damage. As these were the only drawbacks to an otherwise epic evening, it soon became a matter of modest pride that Youlgrave had met the full might of the Luftwaffe (well, almost) and triumphed. Hardly a mantelpiece in the village was without its spill-carrying tail-fin, carefully gleaned from the little piles of ashes and burnished with loving care. Nothing was wasted even though the gift may have been despatched with less-than-charitable intent.

What was never made clear, so far as I know, was the reason for the drama. Theories abounded, some still faithfully held. The night-fighter syndrome was popular as was the persuasion that somebody had been careless with lights, though I think it would have had to have been carelessness of a monumental proportion to pass for Sheffield. Less popular was the theory of fifth-column signalling gone wrong, yet it did have its firm adherents. The DP Battery Company making submarine batteries at Bakewell was a popular suspect and one possibility with sinister implications was the presence that very night of an ammunition train in transit at Rowsley sidings (however did they know?).

One theory was never mooted: Nobody suggested that a Heinkel (or whatever) had set course from, say, Abbeville to Youlgrave, with the express purpose of burning out the Brassington family. But, propaganda-wise, it was the only explanation from which Field Marshall Goering and his boys might have derived any operational credit. Significantly, Lord Haw-Haw had nothing to say on the matter.

So, against all the expectations of its neighbours who came next day to view the burnt-out shell, Youlgrave remained defiantly intact and getting on with the war. The farmers observed the dictates of the War Agricultural Committee and ploughed up their ten percent of virgin pasture to plant cereals and roots crops. Parties of children came from school to help harvest them and found it not to be quite the effortless skive from school they had expected. Everybody had something extra to spare from their day job to serve the war effort in one capacity or another and, mostly, it was without thought of recompense. Some had a statutory foundation, like the Auxiliary Fire Service; for others, like the Boy Scouts, it was a case of making yourself generally useful.

The Auxiliary Fire Service

Like ARP wardens, auxiliary fire duties meant a quite disparate level of involvement between the villages and the cities. In Youlgrave it was set to function as a sort of halfway stage between the warden's stirrup pump and the arrival of the fire tender from Bakewell or Matlock, after which it would act in a support capacity. The volunteers under the leadership of Peter Prince were Stanley Evans, Norman Purseglove and Billy Nuttall. Their time was spent in training for the emergency that, so far as is known, they were never called upon to deal with.

They were equipped with a trailer pump that was kept in a lockup garage behind Peter's motor garage and towed behind his car. It had no water storage capacity of its own and Youlgrave had no fire hydrants, so independent firefighting resources were limited. Its allotted role was to pump water out of the River Bradford to replenish the reservoir of the fire tender when it arrived. The detachment was disbanded after the war but, interesting to note, some villages (Elton, for instance) kept their mini-brigade into the 1980s and fought a losing battle with the County Fire Service to retain it.

The Boy Scouts

Since the building of the Bangor by-pass, any sharp-eyed passenger free to look around will notice a railway viaduct, now redundant, that has a special nostalgia for anyone old enough to remember. It was there, in the field beneath, where the 1st Youlgrave Scout Troop were encamped in August 1939. They came home to find the rest of the village had been issued with gas masks; the carefree days were gone for now. For patrol leader Alan Oldfield they were gone for ever.

The military virtues on which it was founded – discipline, obedience, loyalty, comradeship, leadership, initiative – were still universally encouraged in the pre-War Scout movement, not least in Youlgrave and Middleton. The much-respected Scoutmaster/Vicar up to 1937 was the Reverend L. W. Greenshields, who had been an army chaplain on the Western Front during the Great War and still wore his officer's uniform, suitably tailored, on Scout Parade nights. So not surprisingly, some senior members of the 1st Youlgrave Troop, the Rover Scouts, were off to war without awaiting the arrival of the buff envelope. Those still too young to follow joined up for civil defence as messengers, firewatchers and general good-deeders. This involved spending occasional nights on a camp bed at the Old Hall, but nobody seems to remember being called on to do anything. And since the guerrilla warfare in prospect in 1940 happily failed to materialise, these latent activities offered a less-than-fulfilling outlet for the young patriots.

They dutifully attended lectures on first aid, given by Frank Brindley, and learned to recognise the symptoms and smell of poison gas such as phosgene (geraniums), lewisite and mustard gas.

One small element of the war effort for which they did feel both competent and rewarded was the collection of waste paper. The sound of the 'trek cart' rumbling about its business soon became a familiar warning on the street. The trek cart was a two-wheeled hand cart built like a tank and with the same destructive potential, purchased after the Great War from army surplus like the bell tents and camping kit it usually carried. Now it was trundling about the urgent business of bringing waste paper to the Scout Hut for baling and collection and, in the process, sharpening up the survival reflexes of the nearby pedestrians.

The young warriors-in-waiting soon found an additional, more purpose-built focus for their aspirations when the Air Training Corps was created.

The Air Training Corps

Despite its close links with the RAF, the ATC today is a rather privileged youth club with no recruiting bias, open to air-minded youngsters. It was a different matter when it was formed at the beginning of 1941. Then it was very much a preparation and gateway for and to the Service.

Its formation into two flights (School and Town) at Lady Manners School under the command of the Headmaster, now Flight Lieutenant A. E. Filsell, brought a flood of applicants to 610 Squadron. There was a uniform to be worn (almost like a proper RAF uniform) new adventures opening up and, most important for the keen types, the prospect of hands-on experience to pave the way into aircrew. There was flying from Ashbourne aerodrome, gliding from Hucklow and prolonged visits to operational airfields.

The first, confined to the School Flight, was to Syerston near Newark in December 1941. Unfortunately, there was to be no flying because runways were being built in readiness for the new heavy bombers soon to come. Meanwhile, 408 (Canadian) Squadron had moved over to the satellite station at Balderton, from where they were flying their Hampden bombers on mine-laying operations. The cadets were taken to watch an operational take-off and talk to the crews at the dispersals as they checked over their equipment. It was a memory to treasure, though it left a big question unanswered: 'How many came back?' The following summer, both flights were back at Syerston, this time a hive of flying activity as 5 Group crews were converting on to their new Lancasters. They were happy to take the cadets into the air with them.

As the cadets became more proficient through the weekly lectures and demonstrations, they were able to apply as individuals for specialist courses at RAF establishments. Proficiency certificates were awarded and recommendations made which, so it turned out, led the RAF to a high opinion of its ex-ATC recruits. It did make life a little easier.

Reconciliation

The Germans, when they were winning, were the hated enemy and the Italians were not much better thought of. As we started to win a few rounds, attitudes gradually changed, first in the Forces, because in places like the Western Desert combatants came face to face and learned to respect each other; then, a little more slowly, in Civvy Street.

Youlgrave's first glimpse of the foe was the back of an army lorry carrying Italian prisoners of war from the camp at Biggin to various farms and factories throughout the county.

There was no communication beyond a few passing gestures unfamiliar to the housewives who were on the receiving end, but by no means beyond their comprehension. After a time the prisoners came a little closer – a squad was detailed to work at DSF Friden and others were employed on farms. Youlgrave eventually had two: one – or probably both – were live-in labourers for Billy Evans at Greenfields Farm. The European war was over, by now, and they were free to earn a little money and spend it as they wished. One, a self-effacing man, was German; the other, an Italian, was an extrovert.

The German, Wilhelm, saved the little money he was paid until he had enough to buy a tweed cap. Then he saved for longer to buy a jacket and, after many more months of dogged saving, he acquired a bicycle with which he used to make a lot of friends. The Italian saved nothing. He stood at Church Corner with the lads, happy in his makeshift uniform, ogling the girls like a local, and standing his round at the bar of The George. Neither seemed in any hurry to go when the time came, but go they did, leaving Youlgrave to wonder why we had been fighting people like that.

The last of the evacuees headed back to the city. The lights came on again, the anti-splinter tape was stripped from the windows, the bells rang out on Sunday and the men and women trickled home from the war. And, having waited two and a half years, presumably to make sure it really was all over, the Youlgrave and Alport Welcome Home and Memorial Committee invited the veterans to a dance in the Village Hall and presented them with a little something by way of thanks.

Yes, it really was all over.

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The Royal British Legion

- The Royal British Legion was founded in 1921 and is the leading ex-Service charity protecting the welfare, interests and memory of ex-Service people and their families and dependants.
- There has only been one year (1968) since the Second World War when a British Service person hasn't been killed on active service.
- Each year the Legion answers 300,000 calls for help to its helpline and assists with a huge range of issues, including counselling, job retraining, pensions and benefits advice, welfare grants, Remembrance Travel to war graves, convalescent and nursing care, and home and hospital visits.
- The Legion will be needed for as long as people continue to be affected by conflict. It doesn't advocate war but is simply there to support those who have been prepared to make a personal sacrifice through serving in the British Armed Forces.
- The Poppy Appeal raised over £23.3 million in 2004. More than 34 million poppies, 107,000 wreaths and sprays and 800,000 Remembrance Crosses and will be made at the Poppy Factory in Richmond, Surrey, this year. 70% of the workers at the Poppy Factory are disabled or suffer from chronic illness.