

Memories of the War Years

By Jim Tanner ex Pages Lane Hornton

I remember a few days after the war broke out in 1939, (I was nine years old), going to Hornton school with gas masks in boxes, we carried them over our shoulders. We hung them on our own "peg" at school.

I have so many memories that I will not be able to include them all here, but here are a few; The evacuee boys arriving by coach on the village green and we stood gazing at these pasty faced boys, as they got off, Bill Dodkin, Charlie Evans and George Oslier to name but a few.

There was no water laid on in the village or electricity, we used candles to light our rooms, and went to bed with a candle, the toilets were outside, we fetched the water from the tap down at the bottom of Holloway at the green end of West End Road.

The Home Guard starting up and my dad Harry Tanner joining up, first he had a pitch fork, then a rifle with one bullet.

At the top of Hornton Hill a little way towards Horley was a Searchlight camp, we saw the beams panning the skies at night for German bombers, then at Shenington was a busy aerodrome with mostly Wellington bombers, we boys used to watch them fly low over Hornton on their way to bomb German targets, the odd one or two crashed on the way back, we used to go and look at the wrecks, and get souvenirs off of the planes, especially the Perspex glass from the planes windscreen, many in the village were good at making rings and trinkets from the glass.

There was an Army camp nearby, we used to go up Holloway to get to it, and talk to the soldiers, and if we were lucky they would take us in to the camp cinema free.

In the village there were many things to do with our free time, bows and arrows, catapults, playing marbles, the girls played hopscotch, then there was hide and seek, climbing trees, "scrumping" apples, the evacuee boys asking for our apple core to eat. Then they learnt to scrump the same as we did.

I remember Winston Churchill's famous speeches on our home made radios, which used a glass battery to run it, one on charge and one in use. Also we used to watch through the school window our own planes dropping "flares" a parachute with a burning flare hanging from it, they used these to light up the targets over Germany, but they RAF would drop them in daylight to test them out. We used to wait until the clock came round to leave school for the day and run and try and get a parachute for our Mums, they were made of a rare silk, I managed to get one for my Mum, Mary Tanner once, she was so pleased.

During the war most of the men kept an allotment, as food was rationed, as were sweets, vegetables was one of our main diets, after the days works, most of the men worked at Edgehill pits, once they had had their tea, they would all go up to the allotment to grow vegetables for the meal table.

I remember once the German planes dropped incendiary bombs and there were some burning on the road near Bill Freeman's house, they were still hot, and had burnt a small hole in the road.

There was an Aluminium factory at Banbury, (My Dad worked there for a time) and they built what they called a "Dummy Ally" which was a decoy for the real Aluminium factory, and the Germans bombed it once or twice, we boys used to cycle to Banbury to have a look at it, it seemed to be made of plywood and had imitation guns on the roof.

We also used to cycle to Banbury every Saturday and Sunday to go to the cinema.

Back at school I remember that each year during the war, someone donated a Chocolate Easter egg, and the pupil that could draw it the best could have it, it was always won by Nancy Jarvis, much to my annoyance, as I wanted to win it badly.

There was only one car in the village during the early war years, the publican at The Dum Cow in West End Road owned it, and was envied by many, because of this, and until about 1945 there were not many motorcycles, I remember Ron Grub, coming down Miller's Lane on his and coming off and he rolled along the road by Bill Freeman's house on the Green, I was a boy, I said " Did you come off Ron," he replied "No I always roll along the road like this"!!

Snow was very deep in the early and late thirty's, the drifts could be three to four feet deep, in the winter of 1946/47 Hornton was cut off by the snow, we had to dig our way out, when we were digging we came across some milk churns at the top of the hill buried in the snow, and we had cups with us, so we drank the cream off of the milk, the snow drifts were so deep that at the top of Hornton Hill the telegraph wires were in the snow.

Mr Sumner was the means of collecting the weekly shopping for the villagers, he came round, with a pencil in his ear and a note book and he would collect all the housewives' shopping in Banbury, and bring it back in his bus, I used to take a pram along West End Road to collect ours from the back of his bus.

A lot of the women used to go mush rooming in the early hours, we used to go at 5 a.m. along the Piece and we could fill a clothes basket with mushrooms, Mr Sumner would take these also to Banbury and get a good price for them, maybe a £1.00 and give my Mum the money when he next came round the following week.

Some of the men worked at the Oxford Ironstone Company, my Dad did for a while, I asked him once what he wages were, he replied "why do you want to know?" I replied that "I just wondered" he said " £3.10 shillings a week" once some of us boys were playing on the hill coming into Hornton from the Langway and we saw Mr England (Jim's Dad,) as the hill was slippery with black ice, we called out " Br careful Mr England its icy" he applied his brakes of his bike, he had been alright until then, and he skidded and came off in the hedge, he shouted at us " to keep our mouths shut." I used to go to Mr and Mrs England's on Boxing Day to Bell Street, for many years to see Jim and Alec's presents and have tea with them, I loved Christmas , we used to hang our stockings up at the end of the bed, and wriggle with excitement, and in the morning the mince pies put on the mantelpiece for Santa were gone, and the bucket of water on the back lawn was empty , his Reindeer had drunk the water in the night, we used to rush down stairs to look at the Christmas tree, and shout up the stairs to Mum and Dad, " He's been ".

When I left school in 1944 (I was 14 years old) I worked for Nancy's Dad, Oliver Jarvis at his poultry farm, my pay was £1. 6 shillings a week, I gave my Mum a £1 for my "keep".

Then in 1945/6 I went to work at Edgehill pits with my Dad, Harry who was stone mason, many of the men from the village also worked there, Mr Percy Stanley was our boss, he was a very hard task master, he wouldn't allow talking by the men, if he heard them. And yet on a Sunday he preached in Hornton Chapel, one year after the Harvest Festival, I remember they used to sell the products in the Sunday school next door, and he (Mr Stanley) had bought some grapes, I had never tasted a grape in my life, they were such a luxury, so I went across to him (I was a boy) and I said to Mr Percy Stanley, "Could I give you a penny for a grape" he turned to me and said "Go away boy" I felt so embarrassed; I would be about 12 then.

I remember my Mum coming into our bedroom at Pages Lane and saying to me, my sister Joy and Fred, we all slept in the one room, (they have both passed away now) did you hear the machine gunning in the night, it seems that they had watched from our door step a Spitfire firing at a German bomber, Mum said that the bullets were rattling down, some into our garden.

When we got up, we heard that the bomber had been shot down near Edgehill, so some of the boys, myself included set off to find it, we met my Granddad Fred Tanner (who lived in Millers Lane) coming down the hill, towards us, he said that there are bits of the German plane in the fields, shot of by the Spitfire, we carried on and found the downed plane, with the crew all dead, there were I think four bodies with blanket over them, we could see their feet, with their shoes on, and another dead German, hanging by his parachute in a nearby tree, we think he jumped out too low to save his own life, there was an English soldier on guard with a rifle, he told us boys to not go near the bodies.

I remember some of the boys in the village, Douglas Jarvis (he became a policeman, but was killed whilst on his police motorbike, a large tanker stopped in the fog, to turn into a garage and Douglas hit it and was killed, it was reported in the Banbury Guardian, the boys were Jim England, Geoff Freeman, Arthur Cleaver and his brother Ken Cleaver, we used to sit on the path outside the Cleaver's house in Church Lane, and listen to Monday Night at eight or Sexton Blake and Tinker, on their radio, and of course I remember the evacuee boys, my Granny had George Oslier as her evacuee. I have many more memories, but not war years, how I went into the Royal Air Force in 1952 after working for six years at Upton House for Lord Bearstead, I say in my book that I had to touch my "forelock" if he spoke to me. He was Master of the Fox Hounds, his car number plate started with MFH .

Howl left the RAF in 1955 and how I went into lodgings and spent some time driving double decker buses in the town, then how I got into politics, and became a County Coimcillor and a District councillor, becoming the Mayor of High Wycombe in 1989/90 how during that year I welcomed Princes Diana to High Wycombe to "open" The Reggie Goves Centre, and how my wife Sylvia (we now have been married for 47 years,) became my Mayoress, and between us we carried out 400 engagements, we raised £37,500 for the local hospital for stroke equipment, my dad having died of a stroke in 1979.

I have written a book about my life in Hornton, before the war, during the war and afterwards, it is called "'I'he Village and Beyond" the first issue is at Hornton school, but I have updated it recently, and it is available on my computer, I have sent Julie Stanley a copy, and Kevin Wain.