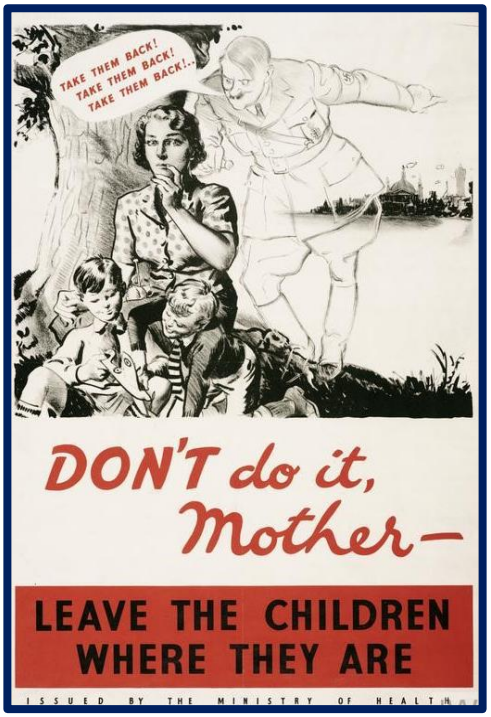
Wigston Children at War



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Wigston School Girls in Some Kind of Theatrical Performance, perhaps as part of end of war celebrations, 1945

Introduction

This publication contains three superbly written accounts of childhood memoirs of living in Wigston at a time of war, providing a young person's perspective and perception of events very different from that of the adults around them. For their parents war meant being forced to confront the problems of separation, shortages, rationing, long hours at work often followed by extra voluntary duties, even the fear of being bombed that war inevitably brought in its wake. With fathers often away and mothers carrying the extra burden of coping with the exigencies of war, children, if not quite ignored, were presented with freedoms and opportunities unimaginable before hostilities began.

This was certainly the case for Terry Morris who was six years old when war broke out in September 1939. His father and older brothers soon left home to serve in the forces (his father was later rescued at Dunkirk) leaving his mother to manage the home front. In fact, most of Wigston's young men left for the services leaving behind a village of older men and women preoccupied with trying to fill the gaps left by this exodus – children were largely given a free reign. Terry and his friends took full advantage of this freedom to engage in extraordinary escapades and enterprises which included breaking into the nearby American base and stealing food, setting up in business with local Italian prisoners of war, collecting unexploded bombs and many other amazing adventures.

In the second contribution by Dorean Boulter, we get the female perspective on being a young girl growing up in the village during the Second World War, again extremely well written with much humour and full of detailed stories of everyday life during those difficult times, providing wonderful memories of how ordinary Wigstonians' dealt with this new reality.

The third article takes us back to the years of World War One with Robert Walden's well-remembered and well-observed description of life in Wigston over a century ago (edited by his son John Walden) during

the height of the British Empire. A period when Britain was permanently involved in conflicts somewhere around the globe where the sun never set, but this was the first occasion when the realities of war were brought closer to home.

In fact, all three memoirs reveal through the eyes of children the fortitude, adaptability and stoic acceptance of the difficulties and sacrifices needed to be faced in order to prevail against a great evil and potentially an extremely dark future. These three insightful accounts are a fitting testament and memorial to the contribution of a small village in that national effort.

Steve Marquis.

School Pupils on the way to Wigston Railway Station for a Practice Run (see Photo on Front Cover) in Preparation for the Arrival of the First Child Evacuees in 1940

‘Running Wild’: A WW2 Wigston Childhood

Terry Morris born on the 16 June 1933 in Huncote, Leicestershire, his family later moved to the Landsdown Grove Estate in South Wigston. Terry emigrated to New Zealand and died there on the 2 July 2002. We start his story the day War broke out.

I still remember being told to keep quiet whilst the radio was on for the news. It came one Sunday morning in September 1939, war had been declared and all men of dad’s age had to report to the local barracks. We were all upstairs in the bedrooms and watched from the window, dad marching up the street with a bag on his shoulder and the other men following him. It looked funny but off they went, little did we know it was for six years and that some wouldn’t be coming back. To kids of our age group, it seemed like the families suddenly got smaller – no dads about, older brothers gone too.

Terry’s Dad

In our family I ended up being the oldest at home. Dad was in the army (Royal Army Services Corps), Owen, in the army (Kings Own Scottish Battalion). Ted, in the Royal Navy, sister Eileen in the ATS and Roy in the navy. Roy only saw the end of the war. Later still I went into the RAF, Norman into the airborne army (Paratroopers) and John [younger brothers] into the army (Royal Signals).

As soon as the bombing of London started, families – train loads of them – began to arrive at Wigston Magna Station and filled all the empty houses in ‘Rat Alley’. I think they became more overcrowded with evacuees from London than when we lived there. Everybody was asked to give whatever they could house wise to help them. Little did we

know then as kids that these new arrivals would become our rivals ... grrr!

Evacuees arrive at Wigston Magna Station in 1940

Next, we were all seeing men knocking on doors asking for all your aluminium pots and pans to help the war effort. These were needed to make planes etc. Then the iron railing fences etc. were cut down from properties without as much as a thank you. Of course, nobody gave a thought to the fact that now us kids could get into places shut off before with fences. It made our world a much larger place with free access to places beyond our dreams!

Our first introduction to the war after the arrival of the evacuees was the bombing of nearby towns. We sat at the bedroom windows at night watching Coventry burning night after night; it was only 25 miles away. While all this was going on everybody was under what was called 'Blackout' – all windows had to be blacked out at night so that no light showed for bombers to see. ARP wardens walked the streets checking all windows for lights showing.

By this time our gang was moving through the railway yard wondering what all the things were in the open railway wagons in the sidings. We discovered they were German aircraft that had been shot down. Well, if you'd ever seen ten kids climbing all over them and then finding machine guns still inside the aircraft! Wouldn't it be nice to have one of them in the street nobody would beat us then? Well, it wasn't to be, railway police chased us off. They couldn't catch us, they had no chance, they were retired policemen that had been called out of retirement at the request of the railway. All the young ones had gone off to war.

After we were put to bed that night we sneaked out (the council slipped up by putting a concrete awning over the front door) we went out the bedroom window onto the awning and jumped to the ground. We had been talking earlier about finding the machine guns to others and discovered the most saleable thing was any parachutes or the Perspex in the cockpits. So off we went into the dark – we were being very brave having been told the dead pilots might still be in the planes, but together we all met at the bottom of the street. Since we were talking money, we decided that even if we got caught sneaking back into home (which happened many times) it would be worth the risk.

On arriving at the railway, we found that the wagons we had been working on before had gone, now don't forget it was dark there was no lights because of the blackout, and it was 10 o'clock at night – very late for us. Well not to be outdone we split up and went to see what was in the large railway siding. Off we went agreeing to signal if anybody found anything. I had Norman with me and wouldn't dare go home without him, there was also Mick and Jim Granger – I think we all held hands... not because we were frightened (not much!). It was so we didn't get lost in the dark.

We came across what was to be the first low loaded wagon we had seen. After half an hour in the dark and inspecting it, we found the plane was sort of together body wise, though it had no wings, but the tail looked good in the dark. We all found our way in through a hole in the

side. Wish we had a light can't see a thing. We did manage to get right up in the front into the cockpit. It was like a dream world if only we could get a light - there were all sorts of things to play with.

All of a sudden there were noises coming from further down the track, we could hear people running and shouting. God! Hope the others haven't been caught and snitched on us... but they don't know where we are, best to stay still and say nothing. Okay, what do we do now? Don't fancy going without something to take with us or we will have failed our mission and besides we don't want to go home to a hiding for doing nothing. If it had been daylight, sitting there in the cockpit would have given us a good view, which is why before any of us could do anything more we could see a small light coming towards us, the person was walking.... Do we make a run for it? Hide or stay put? Well, we had little choice the light was already there. There was a clanging of heavy chains. So, four of us sat frozen to the spot. Nobody daring to talk, though now I'm sure nobody would have heard us anyway. Things went very quiet. We could hear a train in the distance and then suddenly a big crash. (I'm not sure if I peed myself but I'm sure that the others did!). We were on the move, the things going through my young mind. What's Mam going to say? Another hiding? How are we going to get back home from hundreds of miles away? We still daren't move, we were not going very fast but still going. It seemed we went miles. Then all of a sudden... stop!

It's time to go I don't care where we are. So being slightly older than the others I decided we should make our way out. We jumped out and stopped to get our bearings. The moon had come out a bit and it was easier to see. When all four of us were out we found we were back where we had started. We'd just been shunted onto another line with more crashed planes in wagons. Instead of taking off we decided to do or die. The next wagon had a plane with a broken cockpit, some Perspex each! Mission accomplished we thought we'd better move off; we were full of the joys of spring. Hope the others had the same success. We all managed to get in home without being missed, it was all right for Mick and Jim their mam was deaf – half their battle was won!

Next morning, we all got together talking about last night's goings on. All the others had been chased off before finding any goodies. So as proud as punch we showed off some of what we had got. But what good was a load of Perspex up to ½ an inch thick? There were no outlets for it, somehow the war was still going on all around us, and this was our biggest worry. Then lo and behold a prisoner of war camp not far away from us became our outlet.

Wigston's extensive railway junction provided an ideal playground for Terry and his friends

Most of the prisoners were employed on farms – digging drains, or making roads etc. Who's going to talk to them? Not me. I wasn't scared of them; I just wasn't giving them a chance to get me. Now Norman was coming to the front – mouth wise, he could talk to lamp post for ages. So, he volunteered with a little push from us. We all watched from a safe distance in case they grabbed him then we could fetch the police. Well, as only he could, he came back saying there would be no money, but they wanted the Perspex and would swap for things instead. Norman was on trial. Off he went, then he came back with all sorts of wooden things they'd [the prisoners] made. A monkey climbing a ladder, four chickens on what looked like a table tennis bat with a weight on a string

hanging through and underneath, so that when you swung the weight the chickens pecked the bat. God, what do we want all this girly stuff for, haven't they got any guns or bombs or stuff like that? So, we sold them to the local toy shop and said we had made them – weren't we clever – and so we were in business.

The Perspex came back to us to sell on the prisoners' behalf, no money again just fags. They made beautiful rings and bangle, necklaces etc. out of it. Where do we get rid of this lot? Well, there was nothing like it in the shops so all the girls at school were falling over backwards for them. Cash only, we weren't into anything else in those days, girls were yuck! Well for every packet of fags for them there was a packet between us kids and needless to say only the rough fags were on the shelves in the shops: Abetulla, Phasser, Nosegay... most I think were made from camel dung but still it was a smoke when nothing else was around.

The war was moving on and for the time being we were giving the prisoners a wide berth. Local places were getting bombed, part of the town was bombed one night, why we didn't know? But a few nights later they came back to try to bomb the power station (only 3 miles from us), but they missed, a good job too, as the hospital was only two hundred yards away. Still, they came back in the daylight – we were all sitting around a fire in the field near the bottom of the garden. Norman had pinched a mat off the clothesline that mam had been beating ready to take back in home. We were all sitting on it when the sirens went off for an air raid. We did nothing, who would want to bomb kids in a field? Everybody was talking about what to do if a bomber came over during the raid, just about all of us said we weren't afraid and would stay where we were. No sooner said than they were over us really close with a British spitfire chasing them. When I say low, I mean low, if anybody had stayed near the fire (where earlier they had said they would) you could see the pilot in the cockpit, a two-engine Junker fighter bomber. Well, some bright spark thought we must put the fire out or they would see us and drop their bombs. Mam's mat was thrown

on the fire to put it out, it was all over in seconds. So back we came, not getting far away. Mam's mat on the fire with a great big burn hole in it. I think I know who did it because he said to put it back on the line and blame the Germans for shooting holes in it (about a two-foot hole!) So back on the clothesline it went. Guess what? We got the blame but not for what actually happened. Mam said it must have been a spark from our fire – little did she know how true it was!

The bombers dropped their bombs making a run from the fighter, most of them went straight down the Leicester Racecourse. Well, we were just about there before the bombs landed! They went about one and a half to two feet into the soft ground. What a trophy, a German bomb would be worth a few bob. So, my shadow and me started digging around one bomb and Mick and Jim on another. It didn't take us long before we were the proud owners of a 7lb incendiary bomb – the type that starts fires. We took it in turns carrying them home, all we said on the way was "don't drop it on any hard ground because it might go off" – they were still live. Creeping around the back of the house we got caught by mam wanting to know what we were up to. On finding a small 7lb bomb stuffed up our shirts she got all carried away. Oh dear, what's wrong? She was screaming her head off; we were told to put the bombs in a bucket of water (later we were told this was the worst thing we could have done with them being phosphorous). It wasn't long before the street was taken over by police, army, vans, trucks... Everybody was called out of their houses and had to wait at the top of the street, while they took the bombs away, and nobody gave or paid us anything for them! Never mind we had bigger ones to come later.

After this we became very popular, everybody wanted to talk to us – though we never did tell them that we had actually dug the bombs up. Even at school the next morning the headmaster told the school what brave boys we were, that we had found the bombs and put them in a bucket of water and then told the police. (What do they say about tongue in cheek?) Still, it was nice to be top dog for a while.

Most of the country was going through a patch of 'Dig for Victory' posters on walls and billboards everywhere. Kids of our age couldn't understand how you could beat the Germans digging for victory. We thought, maybe if you dig holes then the Germans would fall in them. Anyway, we would do our bit. All the fields at the back of the houses had been ploughed up with spuds, cabbages, and carrots growing.

So, we all went with spades and digging for victory we finished up with trenches all over the fields about 3 foot deep. We then found out that if we covered them with old roofing iron it made a good trap.

But instead, in one we ended up digging a small fireplace and making a great den. Three or four of us in each hole and of course with plenty of spuds growing up around each den, we'd put spuds on sticks and hold them in a fire until they were black them break them open and eat them.

The only problem was the fire. It smoked a lot because of lack of air – we used to block up the entrance. We all finished up with black faces white eyes and tears streaming down our cheeks. What a great night out hhh in a den, but we lost interest in it because we always got into trouble going home with black faces.

It wasn't long before the farmers were ploughing up the potatoes and pickers were there in force. It also wasn't long before the first tractor fell in a deep hole in the field either. The tractor was pulled out by another tractor with all the pickers helping. Well, it must have happened half a dozen times – we were watching from a good safe distance up a tree. We thought the holes had worked great, but they were meant for the Germans not the farmers.

Dig for Victory meant plant vegetables in your garden instead of flowers. Well, we had tried, but we wished they would explain things

properly, it happened a lot of times, just couldn't understand what all the posters were going on about. Like mind what you say somebody might be listening – now ain't that daft, people should listen when you talk. Coughs and sneezing spreads diseases catch them in your handkerchief – then what do you do with it? Anyway, we don't have handkies, we only have jumper or shirt sleeves! Buy a Plane for your town.... or help buy a ship.... we'd love to buy a plane, but they wouldn't let us have it.

The war was still going strong in all the news at the flicks [cinema]. There was still 100% war effort. One day people in the street came around home to see mam. They were talking about dad (who was by this time hard to remember) our minds were racing away, we had seen this happen to other families, their dad killed in action (or brothers or uncles) or missing. What it turned out to be though, was the newsreel on the pictures the night before had my dad in them at the evacuation from Dunkirk. So, mam went to see the manager at the Wigston picture house, the result was we went to a private showing of the newsreel. All the soldiers were in the sea wading out to try to get to the waiting boats. It was a scene I would never forget, although at the time I didn't really understand any of it. Dad was saved with thousands of other soldiers, and we were top of the street gang because of dad being on at the pictures.

All over the country camps were being built - (by this time the yanks had joined the war 1941). The Yankee camp was on the racecourse army camp, down next to the railway (which now had armed guards) and the council building had been taken over by female army ATS. Best of all was the aerodrome just outside of Oadby where bombers took off every night. Of course, we were getting around the countryside covering large areas, and into everything. Anywhere there were guns, bombs, or food, we found it. How we won the war God knows, we were like junior commandos, no one could stop us, underground, over fences; once we even tried to make a glider to get over one high fence.

We made canoes from sheets of roofing iron, we folded them down the middle then we nailed a piece of wood at either end, then nailed a piece of wood across the middle for a seat and melted pitch from the road to seal the ends. They were a bit "airy", so you had to sit still and keep the balance or else upside-down you went. We found if we blocked up the main storm water drains, we could create a flood around the army barracks, so we could use the canoes to get into the barracks without having to get by the armed guard at the gates. We did most of this in the semi-dark because during the war years we had 'double British summer time', clocks were altered by two hours in an effort to save power. So, it was still quite light late at night. Once inside the barracks we hid the canoes and ran around looking in windows, climbing on roofs. What we found was a storage place for the army engineers as well as the mess hall and the kitchens (to be raided as soon as possible!) We watched the soldiers sitting ready to eat their meals, there was nobody in the kitchen. In we went, about half a dozen of us, two left as lookouts. There wasn't much we could lay our hands on, it was mostly uncooked stuff, but Norman opened one of the big ovens – Boy, what a big bread pudding, ready to eat. It was hot and seemed to be in a three-foot square cooking pan, though it was probably only 18 inches square, we grabbed it and took off. Imagine it, six kids running with a big pudding all frightened they would miss out on their share. We had to take turns in carrying it because it was so hot. Quick into the canoes and away. We could hear a lot of shouting in the background, but we were on the water and away for a feast in our den far away.

Some of the dads and brothers were coming home on leave bringing home some mementos. The first ones we liked were the bullet cases made into fag lighters, they looked great, and we could get all the bullet cases we wanted. But who could make them for us? Well, a chap living in the street was a bit of a 'spiv' [a con man into everything] he had been in the army, but we thought he had been kicked out. He could lay his hands on anything and everything, so we told him we could get bullet

cases for him, and he agreed to buy them from us. Needless to say, he had more cases than he could deal with, so the market dried up again.

One day he (Bill Riley the 'spiv') said if we came across any scrap lead, he would buy it off us. Well, we looked around a bit here and there and Norman came up with some saying he found it on the tip. Well, we searched the tip and found none, but he still kept coming up with this lead and getting paid for it. We were helping Bill make toy lead soldiers, animals etc. in his house. We melted the lead on his gas stove pouring it into moulds, trimming them off, painting them and then packing them into boxes while he was out selling them around the town. There were none available from anywhere else because of being war time. Then we had to stop work for a while because the council were after somebody who had been ripping off all the lead waste pipes to the drains from every house in the street. There was water going everywhere but down the drains, it was only then that we realised where Norman was getting all the lead from.

We just about covered the area trying to discover where the lead was. At a row of old cottages, a couple of streets away we came across an old pump in the garden well. This had served the cottages before town water was available to them. It turned out to be 3-inch lead pipe from the pump to the well some 15 foot or so. It took a lot of getting out, but it paid for a feed of chips and a night at the flicks and a Saturday morning matinee for all us kids. We all thought old Bill was great but now we know he robbed us blind.

Food was hard to come by in the early days of the war. Rations kept you alive but that was it. So, it was poaching for us on Sundays, that was the best day. Mam came up with a bottle of orange made from black market orange juice (it was for pregnant women), a couple of slices of bread with dripping on it or jam if you were lucky, then off we went, the great hunters. We could cover up to 10 or 20 miles, all over the country searching for rabbits, duck eggs or any country chicken sheds we could raid. Rabbits became the main targets, we put down snares on our way out and checked them later on our way back home. We'd sometimes get

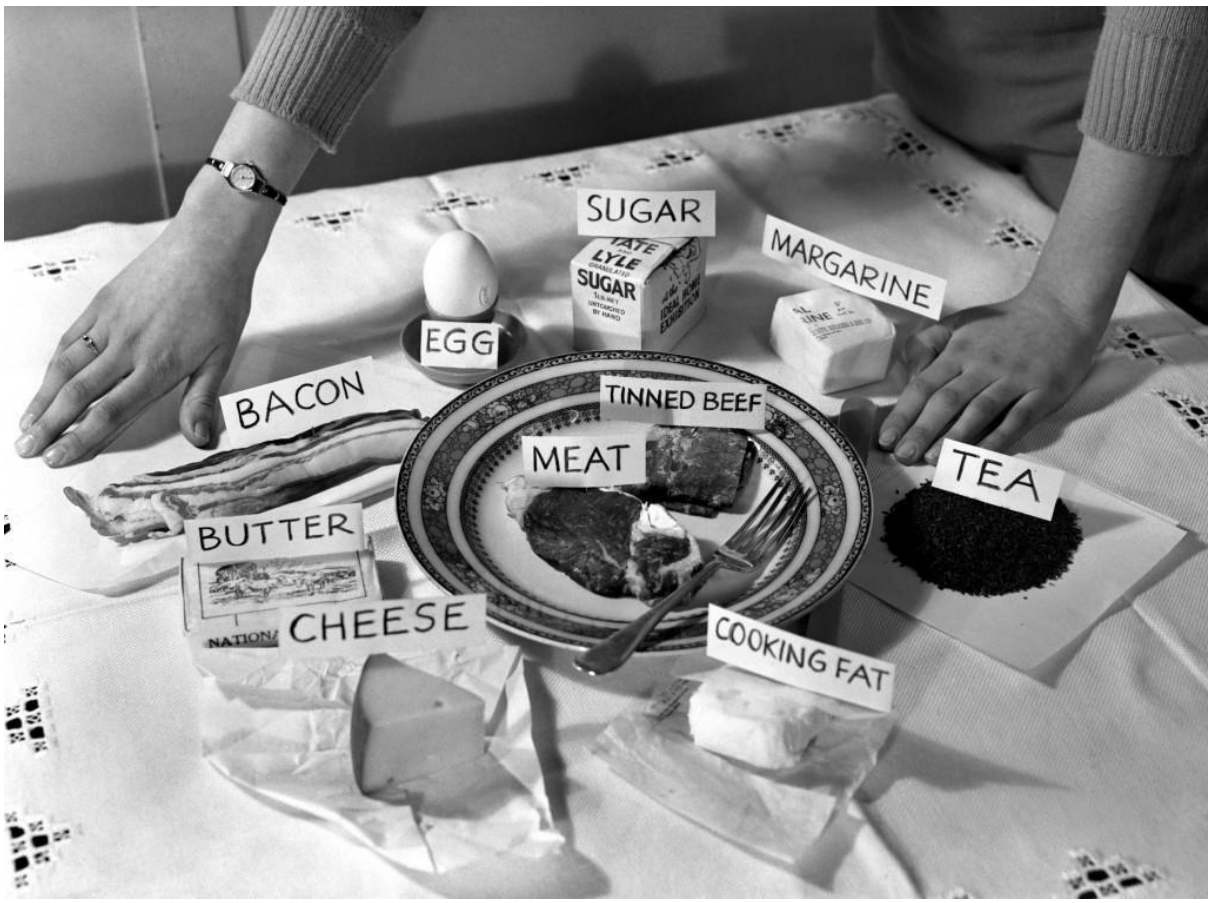
one or two. We had been told by older people what to do with them, hold them by the back legs, if it's still alive, and whack it at the back of the neck to kill it, we got quite good at it after a few times. Then we'd use our home-made knife, it was made out of a hacksaw blade that had been ground on the edge of the concrete step, with a handle made out of a piece of wood. While it was still being held by the back legs you cut the belly open from the between back legs up to the chest, then you'd turn it over so that the guts fell out. You'd do it there and then so that it was lighter to carry it the few miles home. If we took home a couple of rabbits, we never seemed to get both of them to eat, but later we found Mam was trading them for sugar, margarine or jam etc. There was a lot of people in the black-market game.

You weren't allowed to have a pig without it being registered, so that when you killed it half went to the Ministry of Food. The same with chickens you were only allowed to keep so many eggs the rest went to the Ministry. We had a chap on an old motorbike with a sidecar shaped like a coffin, inside were two bins where he collected any food scraps at night and in return you were promised a bit of meat when he killed the pig – he kept in an allotment shed.

I think we finished up with a few bits of bacon, which we didn't get to eat, though we had bread dipped in the fat – it was lovely.

We never went without a ration of meat even though it was very small, a small tin of corned beef for four to last a week. Every Wednesday I would have to walk five or so miles into town to queue (for heart, kidneys, black pudding etc.) at about six o'clock in the morning and wait for Mam to arrive and take my place in the offal queue. She'd arrive at about eight, stick a couple of sandwiches in my

hand (breakfast) and send me off to school. If I was lucky, it would be bread and marge with jam (though the marge in those days was like axle grease), though most of the time it was lard dripping – still if you were hungry, you ate anything – well nearly!



The Weekly Ration for One Person

When winter arrived with only hot water coming from the fire, we needed fuel. Coal was rationed to a hundred weight bag a week for each household. We had to cook using this fuel as well. So off I was sent at six o'clock in the morning on Fridays to the gas work's coke sale. I would take the big old pram and once in the queue I'd climb in the pram and cover myself with the sacks for the coke and have a bit of a nod until about nine o'clock when the office opened up. You'd pay your two-bob get a ticket and go down to get the coke then it was weighed in the sack and off home all two miles of it with a pram full of coke – a great a day off school.

None of us liked school at this time, because of the war all the young teachers had been called up and we finished up with every teacher out of retirement, all over the age of 65, some 70. God, what a bunch of old crocks! The headmaster was Mr A. R. Kind and my teacher Mr A. Wild, he carried on like his name. Another teacher Mr. Strikland – which he was! I made one of the greatest mistakes of my life not knowing at the time, we all sat the eleven plus exam, or whatever it was called in them days. We finished up with a letter each to take home to our parents, which we opened before they got to see them, everybody was the same except mine. It asked did they want me to go to this other school down South Wigston, the Tech Grammar School? So, I ripped up the letter, I wanted to stay with my friends, they were not shipping me off by myself.

Well things got a bit airy at school, I fell out with the woodwork teacher and got a bonk on the head with piece of wood. My own teacher seemed to be on my back most of the time. One day after a maths lesson old Archer Wild had marked our work and was going over the results. He made me stand up in class, which I hated – telling everybody how I had made stupid mistakes on two or three maths problems, or I would have received a good 100%. He then questioned me in front of everybody, I found the answers hard to come by, so he hit me in the back with his fist and walked back to the black board to show everybody what I did wrong, bearing in mind I was one of the top in the class at maths, and of course, by this time I was crying. I thought bugger this and picked up the wooden block holding the ink well and threw it at him. I missed, hit the wall in front of him, it bounced back and hit him on the forehead, the pot of 32 ink well smashed on the wall covering his face with ink. Oh dear, the silly so and so turned round and asked who did that? All the girls shouted, "Morris did it". I was ordered out of the classroom and told to wait for him. He went to the washroom. I took off before he came back, I'm not waiting to get a hiding from nobody! Like a burke I went home but Mam wanted to know why I was home so early. So, I told her, knowing full well 'the mouth' (Norman) would tell

her when he got home from school. Not much was said until the next morning, I had made up my mind not to go back to school ever again. Mam said you have to go today or tomorrow and face the music, so off I went. God! was I afraid, though not on the outside that anybody could see.

When I got to school all the kids picked me up in the air and carried me around the playground on their shoulders. What a hero! The teacher came out to blow the whistle to call us into class, and who was it but Archer Wild, and he saw me being carried around. We all went into our classes. Archer Wild called out the names on the register, when it came to my name "Morris – Here" (all quiet). "Go out into the hall and wait for me this time". Which I did, he came out of the class, "follow me straight to the headmaster's office". And with that he left me there with Mr Robert Kind, what a name! "Well Morris what's the punishment to be? The police and be charged with assault, or six strikes of the cane with your trousers down in my office, or six in front of the school tomorrow morning. Your choice!" Well, I wasn't going to let him take my trousers down, and I daren't get the police involved and get done for assault, so I had to face six of the best in front of the whole school in the morning. Time passed very slowly that evening, though the morning seemed to arrive so quickly! Everybody was telling me what to do: "put onion on your hands or put hairs on your hands, but first and foremost – don't cry in front of the whole school." There were four or five hundred kids in the hall with teachers standing around the perimeter. Prayers went off okay, so did the messages. Then it came to my turn, and all went quiet. "Morris come out here, up on the rostrum" I felt so small against the big pig. "Pass me a cane". There were half a dozen or so, I picked a thick one, I didn't like the look of the thin ones. I got three whacks on each hand, boy did it hurt. I think some of the girls in the front row were crying for me. I was then told to go to the toilets and wash my hands. I was off, once in there I cried to myself.

The next event turned out very sad and it brought home to us what it was meant to be killed or dead. When we wanted to go to the 'cut'

[canal] for a swim we'd tie a towel and 'cogey' [swimming trunks] to the bike and with an old bag on your shoulder (containing orange drink and whatever bread you could lay your hands on) we'd head happily off. It was like this one Saturday morning, it was 11 o'clock about one mile from home and we were all going down a steep hill towards the 'Spy-n-Cop', doing a bit of follow the leader, there was a double decker bus behind us, but the first we knew of it was a squeal of brakes and the scream of one of our mates, Ronald Brookes, he was under the bus. It looked like to us that the front wheel had gone over him. He was removed and laid on the pavement right outside the ATS building, the women bought out blankets to cover him, but he had turned a horrible grey colour. The ambulance came and took him away and we were told later that he died before getting to hospital. He was bought home on Monday, we lived two doors from him and were made to go and see him in his coffin. We also had to touch him, God, was he cold and he looked awful, like a little old man, and he was only eleven years old. We had never been so frightened. We, all his mates and most of the street went to his funeral. We walked in front of the hearse carrying a wreath to the church and then to the cemetery, we watched them put him in the grave; boy did it look deep.

This had a great effect on the whole street for weeks we just stayed around the street playing games but very subdued and quiet. During this period of mourning for Ronald things didn't seem right in the street, a girl four doors up the street, Madeline, got knocked down by a car on a Saturday morning. Eric Swan got a broken leg when a swing collapsed with eight or ten of us on it. The swing was a rope tied high up in a tree which swung over a brook and each time it came back to the fence where we were standing then another person would jump on it. Must have been eight on the swing before the branch broke and we all finished up in the brook with Eric at the bottom of the pile. Off to hospital for him, that was also a Saturday morning.

In this period most of our lives were centred around the co-op society shops. We (our family) had a co-op number, ours was 5789 – they

counted up how much you spent with them over six months and paid out a dividend which could amount to a few pounds. As most of our clothing, shoes, meat, bakery goods, milk, coal and insurance were with them, it seemed like saving up.

Well, the coalman, the baker, the milkman and even the greengrocer delivered by a horse and cart belonging to the co-op. Most of the farmland around us was owned by the co-op. We'd jump on the back of the carts in the street every chance we got until the delivery man chased us off. All these draught horses were 3/4 breed shires very quiet and docile, especially after the horses had done their work for the day when they were given a feed and turned out in the bottom field next to the co-op dairy. After seeing Bronco riding at the flicks, we thought it was time to try our luck – only for the brave. "I'll do it if you will, but you go first" and all that rubbish. We all decided Alka's dad had been in the horse army in 1918 or there abouts, so he should know better than all of us, he would have to go first (logical, eh?). We finished up giving the horses any apple cores we came by illegally. So, we got the horses to the fence so Alka could get on the back of one. Once he was on two or three others joined him by this time the horse was wondering what was going on he had never been ridden before he had only pulled a cart. Off he went charging around the field till one by one they fell off. Great fun was had by nearly all of us. The coalman's horse was the only one we couldn't get on, but he still wanted to be fed apple cores. He came close to the fence one day and before he knew it Derrick Stevens was on his back, there was no chance of anyone else getting on, off he went galloping around the field. Derrick was hanging on to his mane and did two or three laps of the field which was the most anyone had stayed aboard on any of the horses – he liked to be the winner all of the time.

The horse finished by dropping him and then turning on him and it picked him up it his teeth by the shoulder and shook him like a dog does a rat and threw him to one side. We all ran to him and by this time he was crying but okay, it wasn't until a couple of days later after he had been to the doctor that he showed us his shoulder. He was black and

blue front and back. So, we decided no more feed for that horse and no more than two people on the other horses.

Things were getting a bit tough not much money to go round so we had to try to beat people with tricks like going to the flicks where we found out that if half of us paid to get in then went to the toilet and pass our tickets out the toilet window so the others could get in. Thus, we only needed half the money and spent the rest on goodies. It didn't last long though, before they found us out and locked the window shut. But we did manage to get in through the exit fire door, it had large heavy curtains over it so by arrangement those inside had to get behind the curtain and open the door for the others to get in – didn't I (To be continued when my grandchildren are a bit older).

Terry Morris, 2000

Terry later joined the RAF, in fact, all eight of the Morris siblings joined the armed forces, as well as his dad, of course.

Unfortunately, this will never be updated by my dad as he died 2nd July 2002, his death has left a huge hole in our lives .... we are the richer for having known him and so blessed to have him as a father but that makes it oh so hard to have him leave us so suddenly. Terry's son.

‘WIGGY’S WAR’ – 1938-1945

1938 – The Lesson

The Laundry hooter had ‘gone’, so had the gas mantle. Father had taken the glass globe off so that mother could give it a good wash and in doing so, caught the mantle with the chains which hung each side. These chains, enable us to regulate the gas jet, high, low, on or off. Anyway, it meant a quick dash up to ‘Luds’ shop on the cross-roads before I went to school. Even when the shop was taken over by Freckingham’s, it was still known as ‘Luds’ (Ludlams) by Mother.

Tearing back home I collected my newspaper-wrapped lunch, rammed on my navy beret straight down across my eyebrows and fled through The Lanes to ‘Boardies’ (Long Street Board School). I arrived breathless in the school yard as the whistle blew. Nipped to the back of my class line as we moved into school, hitching up my wool stockings en route. My elastic garters had gone saggy again, therefore, any strenuous activity on my part resulted in my stockings coming down in wrinkles. I hadn’t as yet graduated to a suspender belt, freedom of movement was my first consideration. I could always obtain stronger elastic for my garters, even if it did leave a red and purple weal around the tops of my legs. I knew some of the girls hitched their stockings to the attachment on their liberty bodices. Bit dicey, I thought, not for me, I’ll stick to ‘laggy’ while I could.

It was about this time that I acquired an admirer. Opening my desk lid one day I discovered a magazine and two apples. Uncomfortably aware of the smirks and grins on the faces of my school friends, I gazed around and demanded ‘who’s put these in my desk?’ – more giggles and jerking of heads towards a boy sitting at the other side of the classroom. The poor lad, by this time had turned a fine shade of beetroot red. I glared across at him, marched across the room and returned his gift with a thump on his desk, and marched back to my desk, highly embarrassed. Boys! I had no time for boys, anyway, mother had gone

to such pains to tell me how I was growing fast and everything, I was to keep away from boys. How I was to accomplish this was beyond me. As I pointed out to mother at this time, boys were everywhere, always had been, how could I possibly avoid them?

I asked this question of father one day when we were up the allotment. Father leant on his spade, cleared his throat, stared into the middle distance and said I'd best take it up with mother, and resumed his digging.

After consultation with the other girls in the schoolyard, as to what, if anything, their mothers had said, and more importantly, what Mary's elder sister had told her, it was sorted out, at least, for the time being.
Came the day we all went to the Magna pictures from school to see an educational Film.

"What's it all about then?" queried Joyce.

"It's all about you know what", said Marion.

"Oh that" said Betty on a note of scorn.

All agog, we sat in our seats while a solemn faced lady told us that what we were about to see was of vital importance to us all. We assumed expressions of solemn and rapt attention.

We sat through a dreary diatribe about diseases of one sort or another we were liable to catch if we didn't live a Clean and Upright Life. The climax of the film showed us a woman sitting on a bed in her underskirt; a man came into the bedroom and walked towards her, with a knowing leer on his face, that's what it looked like to us, the camera then switched to a statue of a naked lady and 'THE END' blazed across the screen; the curtains closed with a swish, the lights came on in the auditorium and we prepared to leave our seats.

"Is that it?" exclaimed Mary.

That was certainly 'it' as far as we were concerned.

So endeth the Lesson.

Mother's Remedies

On the adage "Prevention is better than Cure", I had a tablespoonful of cod liver oil and malt spooned into me daily; followed by a spoonful of Parrish's Food, and iron tonic - especially beneficial for growing girls. It was one of those vagaries in life that when I had a mouthful of gooey cod liver oil and malt that welded my teeth together, Mother thought fit to ask me a question. I was suffering with chilblains.

"Dip your toes in the po," said Father briskly, "That'll cure them".

I tried Snowfire ointment instead.

Snowfire Ointment

Camphorated Oil

Mother's sure-fire remedy for a chesty cold was goose-grease spread thickly on a piece of flannel and pinned securely to my vest with four gold safety pins. Oh! those greasy flannels; easing them away from my skin, the grease penetrating through my vest and underskirt.

Holding my head, swathed in a towel over a basin of steaming Friars Balsam and inhaling the vapour. Coming up for air, only to be ordered sharply to "put your head down, don't waste it!" Mother was very thorough in her battle with chests.

In the absence of goose-grease, camphorated oil was applied. That winter's night when I was seven years old, mother applied camphorated

oil to my chest neck and back, slipped a warm vest over my head, and the vapour took my breath away. I couldn't breathe.

I turned from mother to father terror-stricken, unable to breathe. I was turning a nice shade of blue, when father dashed into the kitchen, came back and threw a cup of cold water in my face. I gasped with the shock and gulped great breaths of air, whilst father blamed mother for rubbing too much camphorated oil over me. Talk about kill or cure!

1938-1939 – Peaceful Times

'If it were peace, why all these preparations, and why have we all been issued with gasmasks?' I asked mother. Even babies were to have a gas helmet, a small airtight container in which the baby was laid down, while its mother pumped in air by hand bellows. 'What happens if the baby's mother fainted or something and couldn't pump, the baby would suffocate, wouldn't it?' I continued.

'A picture is worth a thousand words'

There you go again, trust you to think that' said mother irritably. 'I expect somebody else would pump air in, if that happened, now go and get that table laid, it's gone past one o'clock now.'

Mother was dishing up the tripe and onions and mashed taters for our dinner. Father put down his newspaper.

'Neville Chamberlain might well come back from Germany waving his bit of paper. Hitler won't stop now, just because we say so you can say what you like, all Chamberlain's done is to gain a bit of time afore the balloon goes up good and proper, you mark my words.' Father's words were marked.

We did, in fact, gain a bit of time, almost a year in which to prepare for war. Even so, when the fateful announcement came over the wireless in September, we listened with sinking hearts. My feelings were a mixture of fear and excitement. Mother said, 'Dear God, not again,' and wept. Father went broody and then angry, went out and banged about in the shed.

Preparations went apace. Wardens Posts appeared and underground shelters were dug, we had one in the field alongside Ross's Lane. Sandbags were everywhere, I was of the opinion they multiplied overnight. Steps and curbs were painted white, and there was an Air Raid Siren on top of Two Steeples and others at strategic places in South Wigston, Oadby, in fact, all over the place. When they all started up, the eerie rise and fall of the warning sent a chill through our hearts. The 'All Clear' was one long clear note.

During the months leading up to the announcement of war, mother had the foresight to put things by; she replenished the store cupboard and the linen cupboard. Shades were made for the lights and lanterns, and she made extra jam, Home Made Wine, mushroom ketchup, bottled fruit and laid down eggs in a big earthenware crock filled with isinglass.

Up the Co-op

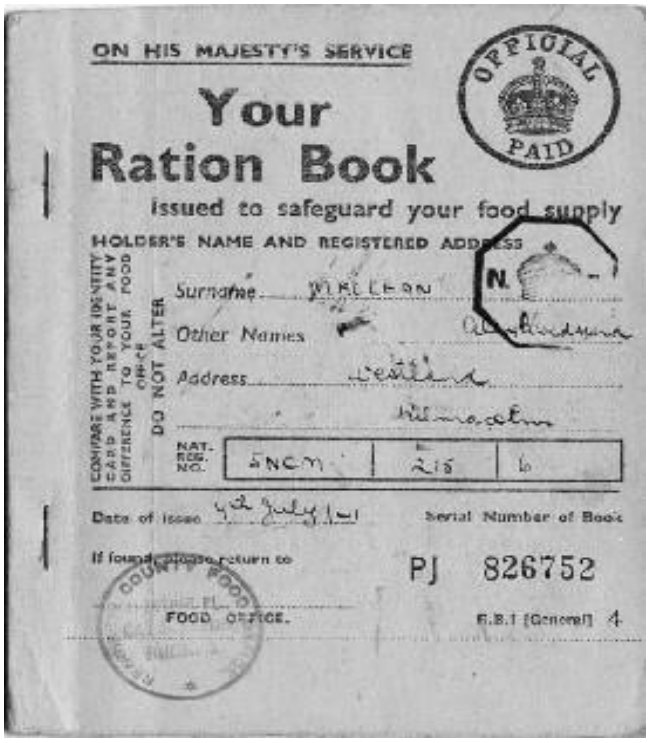
Places of entertainment were closed down as soon as hostilities were announced. Mind you after a short time they all re-opened again, when it was discovered, we were not all going to be blown to bits at once. Later on, when the bombers came, many people were blown to Kingdom Come, but this was the time of the 'phoney war' as the history books call it, and the Magna and the theatres and the dances were soon under way again.

I remember when mother sewed my first long frock ready for the firm's dance at the Co-op Hall on the corner of Central Avenue and Long Street. Mother also presented me with a little sequinned evening bag and a pair of silver shoes in that material that looked like fine crinkly silver paper, to complete my outfit.

My first long frock was white patterned with filigree silver threads and tiny flowers, over which, soft pale pink net flowed fastened down the front with tiny silver bows from neck to hem. I was the cat's whiskers, to be sure. The effect was somewhat marred by having to wear my wool stockings and lace up shoes, holding up my frock meanwhile, as we walked through the Lanes to the Co-op Hall. Into the ladies' cloakroom to change into my ankle socks and silver shoes, I could hear the band playing a quickstep.

Food rationing

Food rationing came in January, sugar and butter first, then later on meat and tea, and then everything else. We had to register at certain shops; we were registered at the little Co-op in Bull Head Street, near the old Quaker meeting House. If you were registered, then you became applicable for any tinned goods that came in on quota, providing, of course, you had the necessary 'points'.



Ration stamps

Meanwhile enterprising traders had come up with gas mask covers. Instead of the cardboard boxes, covers could be purchased in shiny American cloth, black, grey, brown, red and blue. These were carried slung over the shoulder by 'les girls' as a fashion accessory. If we had to carry gasmasks about our person at all times, then we might as well make them as attractive as possible. As the war progressed and it became obvious to all, thankfully, there would be no gas attacks, we just stacked them on the dresser, or in a cupboard, forgotten, unmourned, until, years later they were unearthed during a spring-cleaning session.

It was the blackout that irritated most of us. Despite white paint on steps and curbs, we fell up things and down things and over things. Flashlights and lanterns had to be shaded with blue or red paper, which defeated the object somewhat, except that it stopped folk bumping into each other. A dim wavering light coming towards you meant you could take evasive action. Buses and trains had small blue lights for interior illumination, and you fumbled your way to a seat if, of course, there was one available, otherwise you stood swaying and lurching about as the bus conductor bawled out the destination at each stop for the benefit of his passengers.

Woe betide you if a chink of light showed after blackout. "Put that light out," bawled the warden banging on the door, "don't you know there's a war on?" This expression was used frequently by shopkeepers, innkeepers, public transport officials, and others, if you dared question why anything was non-existent or late.

More often we were treated to a homily on thoughtless civilians, who would do well to consider the fate of those men fighting to bring supplies to our shores and others up to their necks in mud and bullets, just to keep us safe in our beds. As it turned out, civilians didn't do too bad when the bombs rained down in the Blitz and plastered Coventry, Birmingham, and the coastal towns.

Air Aid Practice

"Oh Blimey, what next," we grumbled as we were bundled from our desks for yet another air raid drill. Formed up in lines, marched hither and thither, to and from shelters for no apparent reason, or so it seemed to us. Obliged to carry our gasmasks everywhere, the cardboard boxes slung over our shoulders with string or tape. We had to practice putting on our gas masks at speed whenever the rattles sounded. With the tight straps and overpowering smell of rubber, talk about claustrophobia. Teacher came round the class to see if the straps were tight enough, pulling the straps even tighter to her satisfaction.

We had to laugh, we all looked so funny, and we occupied our time making grunting noises at each other, until the statutory time had elapsed before we were allowed to remove them. What a relief to take them off, I only hoped we would never have to wear them for any length of time, else I would suffocate.

"Nashes" and "Boardies" windows were all criss-crossed with sticky tape against the bomb blast, so we understood. Mother said" how she was going to clean her windows with that stuff stuck all over them, she didn't know, it might be all right for schools and factories and such, she saw no reason to lower her standards, just because there was a war on." Glaring at the windows, she gave a great sigh, and continued her lament, "Making blackout curtains was enough, if she could get her hands on that Hitler, she'd give 'im war."

Children were evacuated from the cities and sent to the country, although we didn't have any billeted on us, Aunt Flo at Market Bosworth had two girls to look after. She said she could have taken the whole bus load when she saw them, lost and bewildered with labels tied on their coats. The poor mites didn't know where they were. After a few months, however, she revised her opinion, and she informed us that she had had to give up her evacuees: being in business, she didn't have the time to keep an eye on two rapidly growing girls. Aunt Flo, having no children of her own, and very strict regarding behaviour, (as I knew to my cost) wouldn't have had much patience with them.

Rumours

Mother decreed that we cleared out the paraphernalia from under the stairs. Our 'under the stairs' had a door to it, situated as it was in the middle of the house between the front room and the living room, therefore, in her opinion, the safest place in the house. We set to and cleared out the accumulation of many years, and Mother placed stools, flashlight, candles and matches, a first aid box (it only held plasters and a bottle of iodine) and father's cricket bat inside; closed the door and

announced that "when the sirens went, under the stairs we went, dog and all."

Questioned about the cricket bat, relic from the days when father played for Wigston Prims Cricket Team, mother informed me that it was to clout any German parachutists should they come down from the skies and dare to set foot in our house. Perhaps that was the reason they never invaded!

As the months went by, many of the evacuees returned home. Rumours abounded in the schoolyard.

"They reckon as 'ow there's 'undreds of cardboard coffins stored down the council, ready for the air raid 'casualties'," Robert informed us. His Father was in the A.R.P. and had a respirator, armband and a tin hat.

"Cardboard's no good, the bodies will fall outer the bottom," said Albert ghoulishly.

It put me right off my dripping sandwich, and we all told him to "shurrup, he was just making it up," Robert was affronted by this slight to his integrity and told us "He'd never tell us anything else again, not never!"

The Seat

"Now we had to contend with the blackout, do you think we could have a new lavatory seat?" I asked Mother hopefully.

"A new lavatory seat?" echoed Mother, "whatever for?"

"Well, when I 'go' at night now, I can't see with the flashlight covered up," I complained.

"You'll just have to manage, we'll not get a new seat now, there's a war on," said Mother dogmatically.

Our outside lavatory had a wooden seat, scrubbed weekly with strong disinfectant which made your eyes water. Over the years, it had turned white with constant scrubbing and had developed a wide vertical

crack straight down the middle. This crack squeezed together when any weight was applied. During daylight hours, this crack could be avoided by careful manoeuvres. The problem arose during the night hours. Even before we had to dim the flashlight, it was unwise to attempt to sit down quickly, otherwise you were apt to suffer dire results to your nether regions, therefore I perched on the pot rim; cold and uncomfortable maybe, it was better than having your flesh pinched in that crack!

We did eventually obtain a new wooden seat, but not until long after the War ended.

Beads and Bath Salts

Christmas came and went as all Christmases are apt to do. We decorated the Christmas Tree, and it stood as always, on the closed top of the treadle sewing machine in the living room. The Star gleamed in the firelight, and the old clock slowly ticked away the hours; the holly and the ivy stuck behind the pictures on the wall; somehow in our quiet living room, the war seemed far away.

My presents, for the first-time included scent and bath salts, and a necklace from Aunty Flo in Market Bosworth. The scent was called "Evening in Paris", a small midnight blue opaque bottle enclosed in a novelty black top hat. This occupied pride of place on the dressing chest together with the jar of rose scented bath salts. I also received, a hairbrush, mirror, and comb in a box with a gilt clasp, a present from mother and father. Things were looking up indeed.

Before Christmas, mother and I had been to Leicester on our Saturday shopping expedition, and to my surprise, mother bought me a lovely new wool frock in deep sapphire blue with long sleeves. I discovered the stones in my new necklace matched the colour of my new frock exactly. A plot between mother and aunty, I have no doubt.

We took tea as usual in The Mikado Cafe in the Market Place. I remembered earlier years when, after an exhaustive afternoon traipsing round the stores and the Market, we would take tea in "The Mikado".

The smell of fresh roasted coffee permeated the area as we approached. Through the door, passing the high counter where you could purchase coffee, weighed up to your requirements, and into the cafe beyond. Mother ordered our repast according to season.

During the summer, it was a pot of tea and a toasted teacake. The onset of winter, heralded sardines-on-toast: it never varied. On a nearby table, stood a two-tiered cake stand filled with mouthwatering cakes. I was called sharply to order.

"It was bad manners to stare at people," declared mother, "Anyone would think I'd been dragged up."

I applied myself to my sardines-on–toast and wondered why such delectable delights never came my way.

Daylight Raid, 21 August 1940

The daylight raid in August when Cavendish Road was hit was too near for comfort. The solitary plane came out of the clouds and "whurrump!" devastation. People were killed others injured. That was for the openers. The Luftwaffe came over in earnest through August and September, our fighters, the now legendary Spitfires and Hurricanes were continually in the air fighting them off. Daily the scores mounted, how many shot down, and still they came. The history books call it "The Battle of Britain." We didn't know it at the time of course, all we knew was the German bombers were coming daily, and our fighters hardly had time to re-fuel before they were in the skies again.

Things were looking bleak indeed, what with one thing or another. News bulletins were depressing, although for relief, we had Arthur Askey in "Bandwagon" and Tommy Handley in ITMA (It's that man again). Later on, "Can I do yer now Sir," intoned by "Mrs Mopp" became a catch phrase.

"Searchlight's up again," said father coming into the living room. There was a searchlight battery on the Oadby Lane. The searchlight: vertical, it's broad beam unwavering, stabbed the night sky. It usually

meant trouble; after a time, it would be turned off, plunging the streets into inky blackness. Soon the sirens would start wailing over Wigston.

Cavendish Road after being bombed, 21 August 1940

How many times did we hear "moaning Minnie" during the following years, it became part of life, along with the blackout, ration books, identity cards, long queues for everything, and the posters that appeared everywhere. "Dig for Victory" – Lawns and flowerbeds were dug up. Father dug with manic ferocity on his allotment and up the back garden. "Careless Talk Costs Lives" warned another.

19th November 1940

The short November day had closed in, the blackouts were up, and Aunt Clara had come round to see if mother had any grey darning wool to spare. Uncle Ted had "taters like craters," in the heels of his socks, aunty grumbled, and she was everlasting darning them.

Mother ferreted about in her bit-bag and produced some thick grey wool. "This should do," said mother. Uncle Ted always wore thick army type socks. I often wondered how he got his feet in his boots with those socks on. I was of the opinion that Aunt Clara must darn them with a

bodkin! There was a hurried knock on our back door and a friend of mother's came in.

"Did you know they're dropping flares over Leicester?" she exclaimed.

We looked at her gone out!

"Flares? – Do you mean German flares?" we asked incredulous and flabbergasted all at once.

Father said he'd neither seen or heard 'owt and he had just been up the garden for a look round, anyway the sirens hadn't gone. Off he went to have another look outside when the sirens started up. One after another, they wailed their warning.

We were used to German planes droning overhead on their way to bomb Coventry and 'Brum'. It was only a few nights ago they had plastered Coventry. Aunt Madge and Uncle Len lived there, and we hoped they were all right. Father came back.

"You are right, gel, they have dropped flares, that means we are for it tonight." Leicester was indeed 'for it'.

Freeman, Hardy and Willis warehouse was set ablaze 19 November 1940

Tichbourne Street being bombed 19 November 1940

Outside we could see the glow in the sky from the fires, and the ground shook to the crump of bombs as they fell with increasing velocity. The Midland Red buses were lined up outside the Horse and Trumpet in Bull Head Street. They had never stopped running before. Even the little blue lights were extinguished inside the buses.

As the raid increased, our warden said we would have to go to the shelter alongside Ross's Lane. I didn't want to go and leave 'Prince'. Pets will have to take their chances, said the Warden.

"Well, they haven't dropped any bombs on us yet," I argued.

The shelter smelled of damp concrete. There were plenty of people already installed. "If anybody wants to 'go', you can use the facilities through there," said the warden indicating a curtain at the back of the shelter. It proved to be a bucket: the facilities that is.

A young chap had brought along his accordion and entertained us with selections from his repertoire. One elderly lady got to her feet and asked our accordionist to "Play a bit louder lad, I'm going to have a pee in that bucket back there".

We seemed to be in that shelter a long time. The raid increased as time went on. Around midnight, I went outside for a quick look round, I

didn't care what the warden said. We sat on in the shelter, more fed up than afraid – sleep was impossible. It was about four o'clock in the morning before All Clear sounded. We trailed wearily home with our flasks, torches, and blankets and fell into our beds.

"Don't suppose you know Handels Water Music?"

High Tea

The wondrous occasion we paid a visit to the "Oriental I" to take tea with two of our better off relations, remains engraved in my memory**.** Mother had accepted the kind invitation, and as we alighted from the bus, I was given strict instructions to mind my P's and Q's, keep quiet, use my hanky, and don't ask silly questions. Thus admonished, we met our waiting relations outside the I, who expressed astonishment at my growth. Since I couldn't recall ever having met them before, it seemed hardly surprising, and what's more, they spoke "bay-windered"- as mother used to say about posh people. Shown to our table by a waitress in a black frock and snowy white cap and apron, I gazed at the display of cutlery laid out.

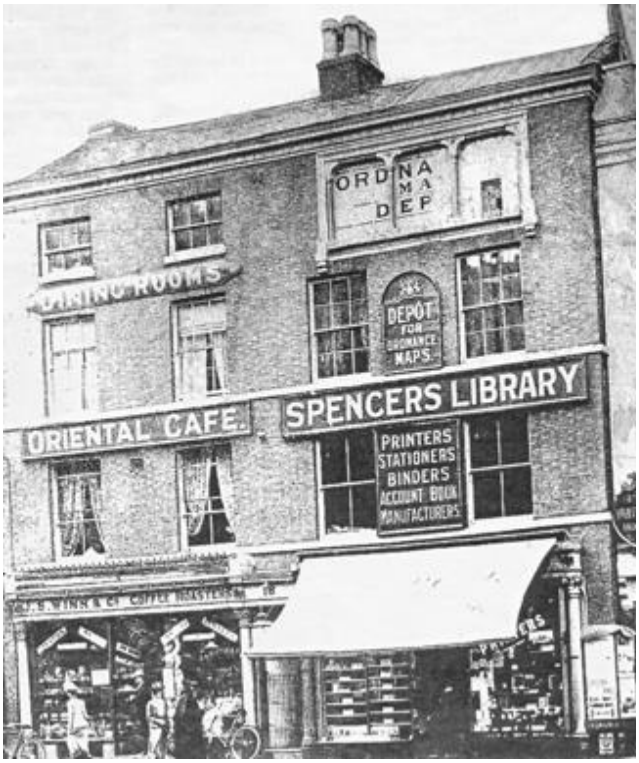
"What's this for?" I whispered to Mother, pointing to an item of cutlery alongside my plate.

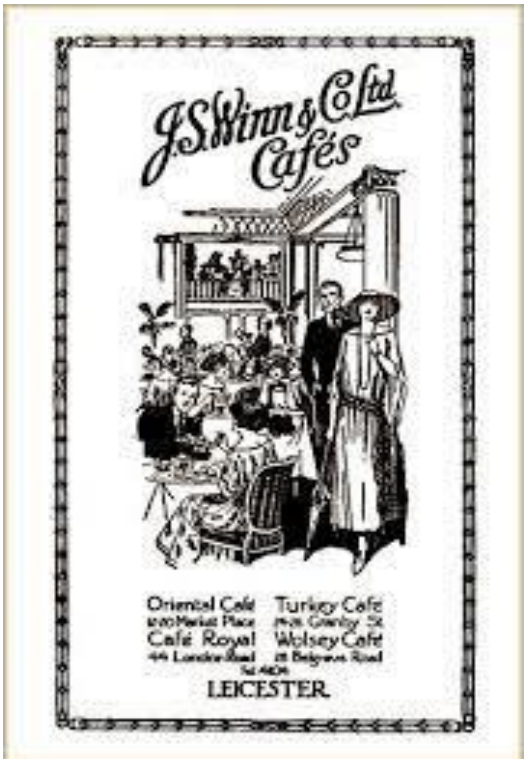
"It's a pastry fork," said Mother, struggling with her fox fur stole; it would keep sliding off the seat.

I pondered on pastry forks, whilst the musical ensemble struck up with a selection from Gilbert and Sullivan. After we had consumed the thin bread and butter (brown and white), the waitress appeared with a trolley laden with cream pastries and cakes. The ladies made their choice; mother chose mine, a sponge slice.

"Use your pastry fork" hissed mother.

A pastry fork? For a slice of sponge cake! Crikey! If this was High Tea, give me 'low tea' anytime.





Meanwhile, the musical ensemble, deserting Gilbert and Sullivan, launched into a spirited rendering of "The Merry Widow". I waited politely until the ladies had finished their tea. As we prepared to leave, I pointed out to mother that she had left a sixpence under the plate.

"That's for the waitress," said Mother.

"Oh! Had she lost a tooth?" I exclaimed.

Our relatives, shoulders heaving, led the way to the door just as the musical ensemble rendered, "Tell me pretty maiden, are there any more at home like you"-"One is enough," declared mother.

The Home Guard

At the beginning of May 1940**,** Neville Chamberlain packed in, as father put it, and we had a new Prime Minister, Winston Churchill. The 'Phoney War' had come to an end. My word it had!

News bulletins came thick and fast. After Anthony Eden appealed for volunteers on the wireless, father went out and joined the Local Defence Volunteers and came home with an armband. Mother gave one look and said "What are you going to do with that if the Jerries come? Choke 'em with yer arm band?" Father said they would soon have uniforms and rifles when they got properly organised. Anyway, they would have to make do with pitchforks and shotguns, and do the best they could. The idea of Father and the rest of his platoon standing up to fully trained German Paratroops brought on an outburst of unseemly mirth. At the time, such was our sense of humour. No one in their right minds ever believed that Jerries would ever set foot in Wigston.

Soon, father had a battledress top; a week or so later came the trousers and forage cap. They were no longer called L.D.V.'s – the new force was to be called 'The Home Guard'. Father went off on manoeuvres and was one of the 'medics' and sported a red cross armband. His platoon helped to guard the canal bridge at Kilby Bridge and "The Navigation" as well!

The Powers That Be decreed that all signposts and nameplates be removed so that if the enemy landed, they wouldn't know where they were. Brilliant! All this achieved was confusion for folk about their lawful business. Army convoys became misplaced, and when they got

to wherever they thought they were going, they didn't know where they were anyway, consequently, enquiries as to their whereabouts or to the camp they were seeking, met with deep suspicion by the locals who thought they were being invaded by German parachutists disguised as British soldiers, and promptly called out the Home Guard.

Then, early in September, father was away all night. The Home Guard Stood to arms, invasion was imminent. The signal 'Cromwell' was flashed to units everywhere. We all waited. They never came. The bombers did. Fire watching was compulsory, rotas were pinned to notice boards in all factories, warehouses, public buildings, shops, banks; personnel were required to fire watch forthwith. We had a stirrup pump in our kitchen and a bucket of sand for dousing the incendiary bombs and father made us practice putting out imaginary fires. Thankfully, we never had to use it in our house."

Wigston Home Guard, 1943

Rabbit and Rhubarb

Mother always mixed the butter and margarine together, she said it went further that way, besides, spread on the bread with a bit of damson jam or fish paste, you couldn't tell the difference. I could, but it wasn't a wise thing to say so. Mother could get very touchy about food now; trying to eke out the rations, queuing for every mortal thing, doing her best to provide meals for those who did not appreciate her efforts; at her wits end, trying to think what to get each day. Mother often made long and impassioned speeches if we so much as grimaced when "Vegetable Pie" was placed on the table in awful silence.

"Vegetable Pie" consisted of layers of vegetables, topped by mashed potatoes.

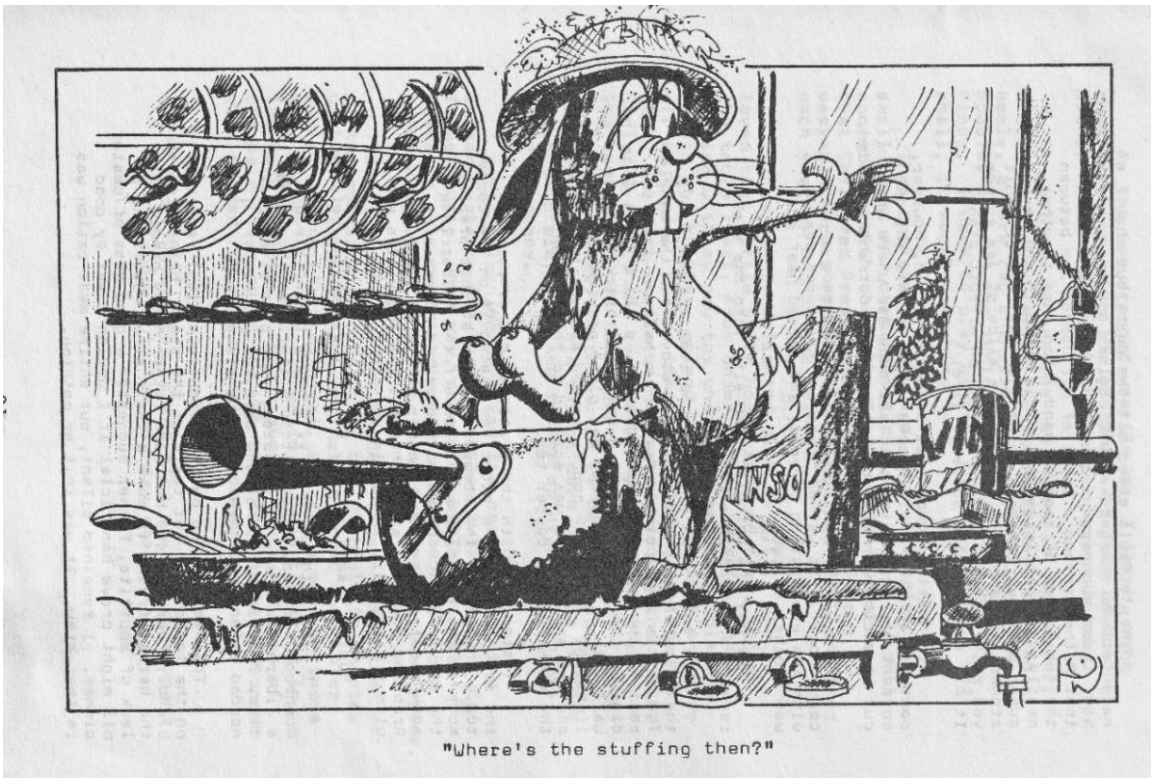
Sausage meat balls, baked taters and onion rings appeared with monotonous regularity. Rabbit and Rhubarb, not necessarily together, made frequent appearances. Mother cooked rabbit every which way; roasted, boiled, stewed and stuffed. She made stuffing of one sort or another for practically all meat and poultry dishes, "it went further" – that was mother's War Cry!

During the summer months, we fared a bit better with fresh vegetables and fruit from the allotment. Up the back garden, father grew salad stuff, lettuce, radish, spring onions, beetroot and such. Mind you I began to feel an affinity with the rabbits as large quantities of lettuce appeared daily on the menu!

Fruit pies were still produced. Having been brought up on stewed fruit, pies and tarts "au naturelle" (no sweetening, cream or custard accompaniment) I didn't miss the sugar. The pastry was a bit hard though. Mother said she couldn't spare much lard, therefore her pastry crust was very thin, and we could like it or lump it. We lumped it!

Grated carrots were used in practically everything. Puddings, cakes, soups and stews. There was the delectable Carrot Flan. Grated carrots in a thin pastry case, topped with lemon or orange jelly. A great treat. I still shudder at the memory of parsnip pudding. Aunt Clara's parsnip wine

was something to be reckoned with, and was always treated with great respect, but parsnip pudding p-Ugh!



Two new 'popular' Wartime foods

Make Do and Mend

Make do and mend was the order of the day. Knitted jumpers and pullovers were unpicked, the yarn washed and re-wound and knitted up again. There were some weird and wonderful creations around in those days. Frocks and skirts were lengthened or let out with pieces of contrasting material from old pinafores or curtains. We performed miracles and came up with astonishing designs with ric-rac braid, bits of lace and sequins. The button box was raided for fancy buttons, and we scoured the haberdashery counters in the stores for anything that could tart up jaded frocks, blouses and skirts.

Not wishing to use our precious coupons for stockings in the summer, we painted our legs with "liquid stockings". It took ages to paint your legs evenly, some girls made a dark pencil mark up the back of their legs to resemble a stocking seam. It was alright till it rained. I only used my bottle of "liquid stockings" once. When mother saw the state of her unbleached twill, (the stuff had rubbed off in the night,) it brought to an abrupt end anymore painting of legs as far as I was concerned.

Mother turned her sheets sides to middle and top to bottom. Pillowcases were made out of sheets too fragile to stand any more 'turning'. Tablecloths were darned, only the best white damask was saved carefully for Christmas and Feast Sunday. As for towels and tea-towels – the pots were left to dry by the sink. 'It'll save the towels," was the oft–repeated phrase. Even the bath water was to be only a few inches, to save fuel, and it was sinful to leave the soap in the water – it still is.

Being patriotic, we put out everything we could for salvage in different piles, as instructed by the many posters and leaflets which appeared almost every day, or so it seemed to us. Paper and cardboard, tins and old saucepans (for Spitfires and Hurricanes, so we understood). Bones for making glue and scraps for the pig-bin. Mother said no pig would get fat on our leavings, that's for sure, and as for bones, where

did they think we'd get bones from? With a bobsworth of meat, she wasn't likely to get bones in that, and went on to reminisce about the joints of sirloin, legs of lamb, and roast pork of the pre-war years, which did nothing to help us face our vegetable pie and carrot flan.

MAKE DO AND MEND LEAFLET No. 4 ISSUED BY THE BOARD OF TRADE

WHAT MOTHERS CAN DO TO SAVE BUYING NEW

Reinforcing children's clothes

One of the first things to remember is that reinforced clothes last twice as long. This applies particularly to children's clothes which receive such a lot of wear and tear—and they should be reinforced when they are first new.

HERE ARE ONE OR TWO SUGGESTIONS

KNICKERS

The seats of knickers and trousers should be strengthened by patching on the inside — the shape of the patch is shown on the sketch. Patches should be kept in position by herringbone stitch. When there is already a lining they should be fixed as an interlining.

SOCKS

Hand - knitted socks should have the heels and toes knitted either in double wool, or with one thread of wool and another of strong cotton thread. A similar idea is to darn stockings at the heel and toe before being worn and the centre back seam should be firmly oversewn on the inside of the heel.

Eating Out

We could obtain a meal in the British Restaurants and Factory Canteens. Queuing up by the notice that said "Queue here" – the menu was chalked up on a slate thus:-

MON	TUES
Mash, peas and Mince	Cottage Pie & Cabbage
Steamed Sponge	Baked Sponge

The cabbage, stalks and all, resembled miniature tree trunks when sloshed onto your plate!

The general opinion was that the mince left over from Monday went into the cottage pie on Tuesday and left-over steamed sponge was turned into baked sponge. Mince was regarded with deep suspicion, but as there was no alternative, we ate "mince" whatever it was stoically and tried hard not to let our imagination run riot.

Typical British Restaurant 'Plain and Stodgy'

Day	Breakfast	Dinner	Tea
Monday	Porridge with black treacle (no Milk)	Jam Sandwich	Corned beef stew with Soya bean dumplings, bread & peanut butter
Tuesday	Porridge	Potato Crisp Sandwich	Whale meat, carrots & potatoes suet pudding
Wednesday	Porridge	Cheese Sandwich	Scrambled dried eggs & Stewed apples
Thursday	Porridge	Potato Crisp Sandwich	Baked Potatoes & Cake made with dried eggs
Friday	Porridge	Spam Sandwich	Liver, one sausage, potatoes & Bread & Butter
Saturday	One Slice of Bacon & a piece of Fried Bread	Bread & Cheese	Dried egg omelette, cabbage, potatoes & carrot flan
Sunday	One Slice of Bacon, fried egg & Fried Bread	One lamb Chop, carrots, potatoes, Yorkshire Puddings, roast potatoes & Pear flan	Potato Pie, Bread & Butter, Jam

Typical British Restaurant Menu

All around the walls, notices and posters were plastered everywhere. Rules, Regulations, Air Raid Precautions and Fire Watching Rota, jostled for space with other posters urging us to "Save This, That or the Other. "Shelter" with a large arrow pointing down towards the stone steps was prominently displayed, together with "THESE DOORS MUST BE KEPT CLOSED"- invariably left open.

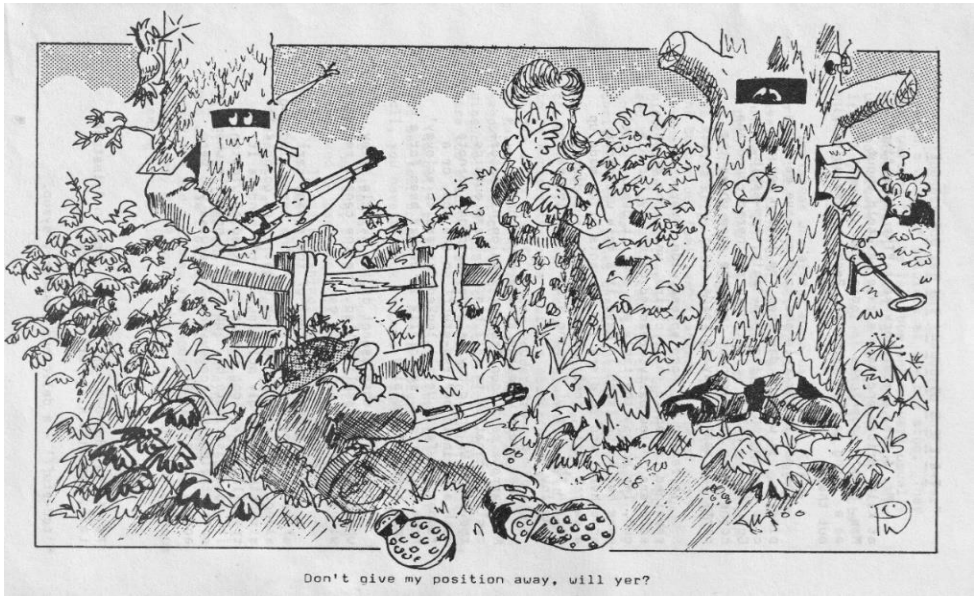
The Platoon

You never knew where you might come across members of the Home Guard. On summer walks, you were apt to find them lurking behind hedges or lying about in ditches, or marching up and down country lanes, or suddenly appearing from behind trees with bits of foliage about their person. At times, it could be very disconcerting.

Out for a walk across the fields one day, I was about to climb the stile into Cooks Lane, when I heard a loud hiss. Frozen, I stared around. Looking hard into the ditch, there was a prone figure; khaki clad, tin helmet askew, adorned with bits of tree branches.

"Can you see anybody?" asked the apparition.

"No" said I, recovering swiftly. "Do you have to frighten people like that? What are you doing down there, anyway?"



"Never mind what I'm doing, if you see anybody, don't give my position away will yer?" he asked.

"Why on earth should I tell anybody I've seen you?" I exclaimed, "and who's likely to ask anyway? You can lie there all day as far as I'm concerned, I only hope you don't frighten the life out of anyone else who happens to pass this way."

With that dampening remark I continued on my way.

On another memorable occasion, we had been on a visit to mother's friend at the Navigation Pub at Kilby Bridge. It was a dark night, and it was Shanks' Pony back to Wigston, and we didn't relish the thought of walking past the cemetery, we three girls. As we prepared to leave, we noticed a platoon of Home Guard formed up ready to march back to Wigston. Hallelujah! Perhaps we could walk back with them? We consulted the sergeant. The sergeant quoted Regulations. "Sod the Regulations," said a member of the public, "it won't hurt to let them walk aside of you lot, any road it's too dark to see 'owt."

"All right, get fell in at the back, and keep up," said the sergeant brusquely.

We got fell in.

"Ere, you carry the lantern, you're on the outside, last man carries the lantern in case 'owt comes," said the chap in front of me, turning round and handing me the red light.

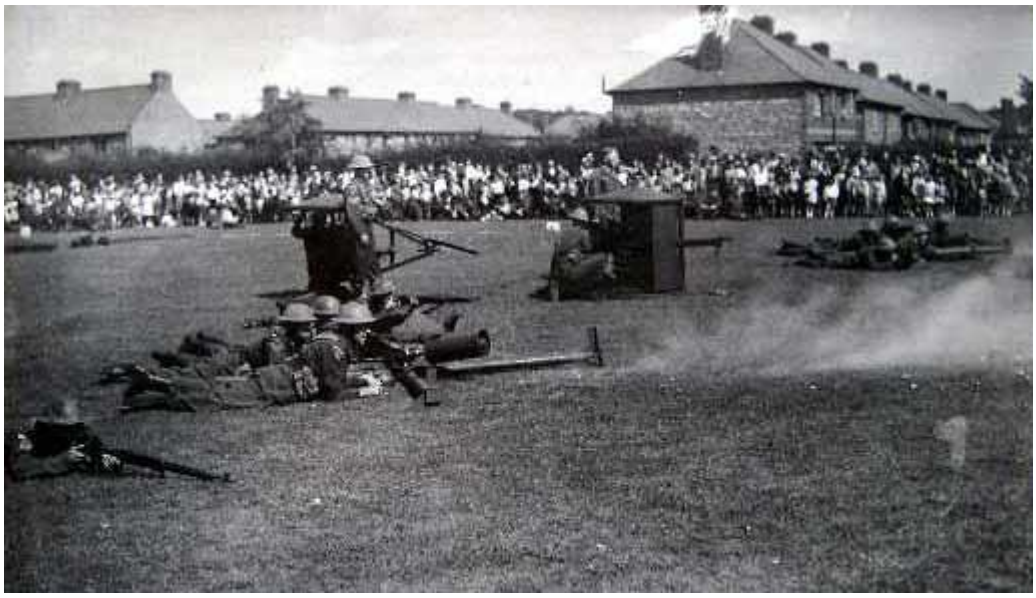
"Quick March," roared the sergeant.

Clutching me lantern, we marched off. We certainly had to step it out, there was no shortening of stride to accommodate the acting, temporary members of the platoon. As we approached the cross-roads, the sergeant bellowed "LEFT TURN". We girls were going straight on, we didn't want to turn left at all.

"Take your lantern, we are going straight on," I urged the chap in front. There was no response from that worthy. The platoon turned left into Moat Street.

"What about your lantern," I yelled desperately, as they marched into the night.

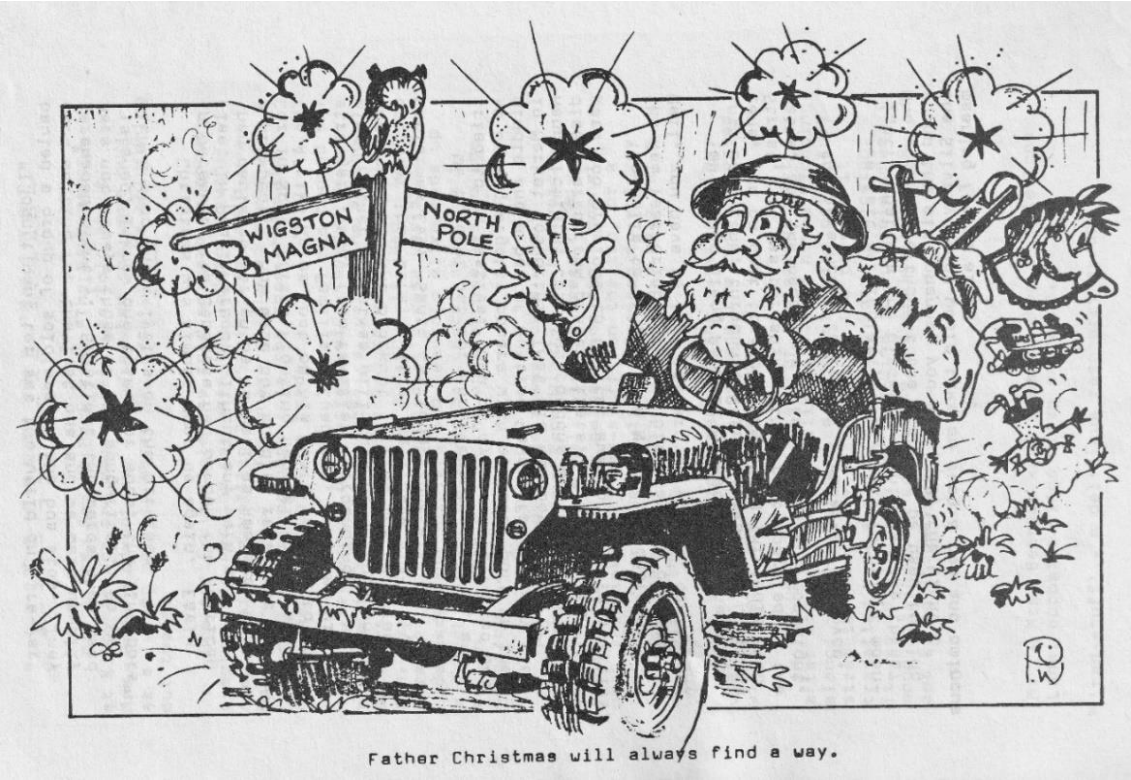
Last Man broke ranks and ran back and picked up the lantern which I had deposited at the side of the road. We didn't quite catch what he said. Just as well, we were already well along the road towards home.



Wigston Home Guard out on Manoeuvres

Christmas Spirit

Christmas was almost upon us again. Early in December, the Japanese had bombed the American Fleet in Pearl Harbour without any warning, and then declared war on us as well as America. What a prospect. How were our soldier relatives faring? Coz in North Africa fighting General Rommel and the Afrika Korps (not on his own I venture to add). The bombed-out families, evacuees, billeted with strangers, away from familiar surroundings. Never mind, Father Christmas will turn up through shot and shell and the blackout to find the children wherever they were, just as he always did every Christmas Eve. Santa was indestructible.



Father Christmas will always find a way.

We brought out our Christmas tree again and tried to be festive. One of my presents turned out to be a georgette square with a powder puff in the middle and a box of Dusting Powder from Aunty Flo in Market Bosworth. That old standby, a box of Handkerchiefs, cost two coupons

and gradually disappeared from present lists. Clothing coupons were too precious to fritter away on such frivolities!

No bells to ring in the New Year, what would the New Year bring? – My birthday to be sure! Well, you have to look forward to summat, don't you? We walked along Paddock Street, down the steps into Long Lane, through the iron gates into Coleman's Lane, and on past the Bull Head Yard into Bull Head Street. It was perishing; the frost sparkled on the paths and the hedgerows glistened in the moonlight.

"Bombers Moon, tonight," I remarked to Joyce.

We felt particularly vulnerable in bright moon light. What use the blackout on nights like these? Who would have thought the old song we used to sing round the old johanna, you know; By the Light of the Silvery Moon" would take on such a new and ominous meaning for us all.

Xmas Recipes

Christmas Pudding

2 oz. plain flour
½ level teaspoon baking powder
½ level teaspoon grated nutmeg
½ level teaspoon salt
½ level teaspoon cinnamon
1 level teaspoon mixed spice
2–4 oz. suet or fat
3 oz. sugar
½–1 lb. mixed dried fruit
4 oz. breadcrumbs
1 oz. marmalade
2 eggs, fresh or dried
¼ pint rum, ale, stout or milk

Sift flour, baking powder, salt and spice together. Add the sugar, fruit and breadcrumbs and grated suet or melted fat. Mix with the marmalade, eggs and rum, or other liquid. Mix very thoroughly. Put in a greased basin, 2 pt. size. Cover with greased paper and steam for 4 hours. Remove the paper and cover with a fresh piece and a clean cloth. Store in a cool place. Steam 2 to 3 hours before serving. The steaming is best done by standing the basin in a saucepan with water coming a third of the way up the sides of the basin. Keep the water boiling gently over a low heat. It may be necessary to add a little more water during cooking but be sure the water is boiling when added.

Christmas Cake

3 oz. sugar
4 oz. margarine
1 level tablespoon syrup
8 oz. plain flour
2 level teaspoons baking powder
Pinch of salt
1 level teaspoon cinnamon
1 level teaspoon mixed spice
2–4 eggs, fresh or dried
1 lb. mixed fruit
½ teaspoon lemon substitute
Milk to mix

Cream sugar and margarine, add syrup. Mix flour, baking powder, salt and spices together. Add alternately with the egg to the creamed mixture and beat well. Add fruit and lemon substitute and enough milk to make a fairly soft consistency. Line a 7" tin with greased paper, put in the mixture, and bake in a moderate oven for two hours.

Mincemeat

½–¾ lb. mixed dried fruit
4 oz. apples or 2 ozs. apple rings
3–4 oz. sugar
2–4 oz. suet or melted margarine
2 level tablespoons marmalade
½ level teaspoon mixed spice
½ level teaspoon cinnamon
1 level teaspoon grated nutmeg
½ level teaspoon salt
4–6 tablespoons, rum, sherry, stout or ale
¼ level teaspoon lemon essence
Few drops rum essence—optional

A MINISTRY OF FOOD LEAFLET

For method see over the page

Mince fruit and apples or chop finely. Add the other ingredients and mix very thoroughly. Put into small jars and tie down securely. Store in a cool dry place. If the larger quantities of fruit, sugar and fat are used, this should keep 12 months, but will not keep more than 10 days, with the smaller amounts.

Mock Cream

2 level tablespoons custard powder or Cornflour
¼ pint milk
1 oz. margarine
½ oz. sugar
Flavouring

Blend the custard powder with a little cold milk. Warm the rest of the milk in saucepan. Add it to the custard powder and return to the pan. Stir over heat till well cooked. Put aside to cool. Cream margarine and sugar together very well; beat in the thick custard, add flavouring, and continue to beat till creamy. This makes about ½ pint of cream similar in texture to whipped cream.

Mock Marzipan

1 tablespoon water
1 oz. margarine
1 teaspoon ratafia or almond essence
2 oz. sugar or syrup
2 oz. soya flour

Melt margarine in water, add essence and sugar, then soya flour. Turn on to a board and knead well.

Icing using Household Milk

4 level dessertspoons sugar
2 tablespoons water
6 level tablespoons household milk, dry. Colouring and flavouring if liked

Heat the sugar and water gently until the sugar has all dissolved. Add the household milk gradually, beating all the time. Add colouring and flavouring as liked. For chocolate icing use 3 level tablespoons household milk and 1 level tablespoon cocoa

Parsley and Celery Stuffing

4 oz. chopped celery
2 large onions finely chopped
4 level tablespoons parsley
4 oz. stale breadcrumbs
Salt and pepper
2 level teaspoons mixed herbs
1 oz. melted dripping
Hot water to mix

Mix all ingredients together adding sufficient hot water to give a soft consistency. Use for stuffing meat, or poultry.

N.B.—This is enough for a small joint. Double quantities will be needed for a large joint or if stuffing balls are required to cook round the joint.

Ministry of Food

5489201. Printed for H.M. Stationery Office by The Drayton Printing Works. 51-1870. Dec. '45

Sweet Tooth

If a boy showed interest in taking you to the pictures, there was one sure-fire way of finding out whether his intentions were serious or otherwise. If he offered to meet you outside the pictures he paid up. On the other hand, "see yer inside pictures tomorrer night," indicated a frivolous nature, and he had no intention of paying for you! Mind you the offer of his sweet coupons proved a strong incentive for 52cepting his overtures. On the strict understanding that acceptance did not put you under any obligation. "One Wine Gum and she's yours" did NOT apply as far as we were concerned!

Oh, for the days when we used to call in to Mrs Proctor's rock shop for some of her home-made treacle toffee; she used to make it in big baking tins, and bash it up with a little hammer, or further along the road to Mrs Pym's shop. Little Mrs Pym was deaf, and we would ask for 'a pennorth of kick-me-over-the-counter drops and a ha'porth of kick-me-back," sotto voce. "Heh?" shouted the good lady, cupping her hand behind her ear. We would then shout our request for banana toffee, or tiger nuts, at the same time pointing frantically to the box or sweet jar which held our requirements.

The 'Const'

The "Tanner-Hops" held at the Constitutional Hall in Cross Street, music supplied by "The Hotshots" – Sid Battersby, Lil Betton and Sid Savage was our venue on Wednesday and Saturday nights. From 8pm to 11pm "The Hotshots" belted it out. Sid on Drums, Lil on Piano and Sid on Accordion. What a time we had. Stomping at the Savoy had nothing on us when we got going, I can tell you! Mrs. Windridge dispensed refreshments during the interval, ably assisted by her daughter, and any time after 10 o'clock when the pub chucked out, it became very lively. Dancers thronged the floor, whilst the rest of the crowd eyed the talent available from the sidelines through a thick haze of fag smoke.

We quickstepped to "Don't sit under the Apple Tree with Anyone else but Me"- performed the slow foxtrot warbling "Amapola" in our partner's ear, not always appreciated, and the floor shook when we all linked arms and launched into the Palais Glide", yorping "Poor Little Angelina" enough to raise the roof!

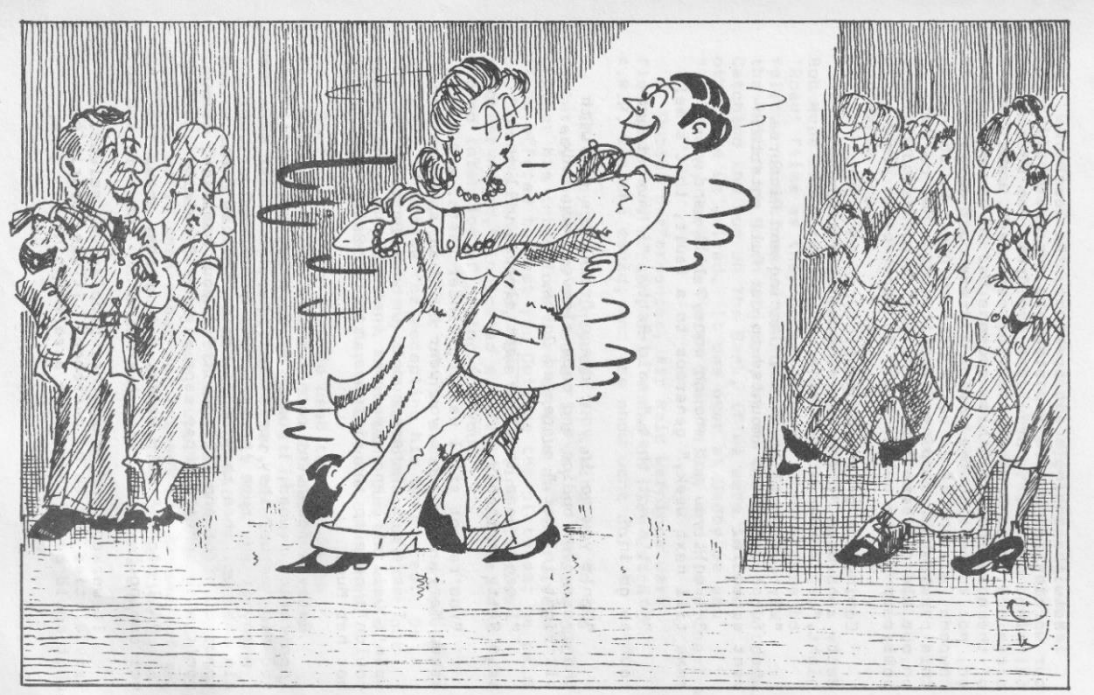
Our toes were often crushed by heavy army boots, certainly, some of my partners were no Fred Astaire. I had bruised shins and toes to prove it. I often wondered if they had their boots on the right feet! Others pumped your arm up and down as if they were at the village pump, and of course, there were those with wandering hands which strayed too far down your back! The Drill was either to grab the straying hand and firmly place it in the proper position as advocated by Victor Sylvester for Ballroom Dancing, or stop dancing and miscreant seemed intent on approaching you again, you either grabbed your girlfriend and whirled out onto the floor or disappeared smartly into the cloakroom. Only 'in extremis' was it deemed necessary to box his ears.

As I mentioned earlier, good dancers were few and far between, and we girls often danced together. However, there was one chap who came to the dances who cut quite a dash on the dance floor. All teeth and cravat he was, hair slicked down with Brylcream till it looked like boot blacking, very suave indeed! He could dance extremely well, and he knew it. Swaggering across the floor to the girl he considered worthy of his attention, he would whirl her out onto the dance floor with a flourish.

"Teeth and Cravat" as we called him, excelled in performing "The Rumba" and when this was announced he was first on the floor with his Chosen One. His gyrations were a marvel to behold. The comments of us lesser mortals, were, however, more ribald than complimentary!

We never discovered his name or for that matter, where he came from, he disappeared from our lives, just as suddenly as he had appeared. During the War, there were many such encounters, "Ships that Pass in the Night" is the phrase that springs to mind. "It takes all sorts, it wouldn't do for us all to be the same," said Mother when I

mentioned “Teeth and Cravat” had departed. I suppose that’s true; variety is the spice of life, so they say.



"Teeth & Cravat" excelled in performing The Rumba!

Enemy Plane Overhead

One golden September afternoon, I was blackberrying in the fields near Cooks Lane with ‘Prince’ in attendance. I was just reaching for the big blackberries at the top of the hedge when a low flying plane came straight towards us. A shadow passed over us and to my amazement I saw black markings on the fuselage, and then it had gone. “Was that a swastika? No, it couldn’t have been, could it?” I asked the dog. ‘Prince’ didn’t seem to care one way or another. Still, better get home, and picking up my basket of blackberries, I called the dog, who was busy with his nose down a rabbit hole and walked back across the fields, through the black pad by the allotments and into Newton Lane, down the hill and home.

I mentioned this incident to Mother as I placed by basket of blackberries on the copper lid. Mother looked at me thoughtfully.

"You know what Billy Warburton 'allus said, 'If a lie suits your purpose, tell it, but always be prepared to prove it'" intoned Mother.

Billy Warburton, I placed in the same category as "Bill's Mother's" – where black clouds always gathered ominously overhead, according to most folk.

I wasn't believed of course, same as a friend of ours was laughed to scorn when he maintained he'd been shot at a by a Jerry plane that came out of the clouds one afternoon when he was fishing up the canal near Tythorn.

Holidays At Home

In keeping with "Holidays At Home" advocated by the Authorities (where else did they think we civilians could go, was beyond me) we went off for the day to Bradgate Park during August Week.

'Prince 'came with us and we alighted from the bus at the entrance to the park in Newton Linford; carried him over the wooden steps and into the park. For some reasons which escapes me, we decided to climb the steep bank alongside the road and walk along the top, the better to see the view. Walking along we gazed down at the stream below and the people strolling along the road.

With the dog lead looped around my wrist, we started to descend the steep incline to the road when 'Prince' took it into his head to charge down after a dog he'd seen jumping about in the road below. Picking up speed, we tore downwards, narrowly missing rocks and boulders en route.

"Leggo the lead," yelled my intended.

Desperately trying to keep my feet, I tried to release the lead from my wrist. It was no use, we continued to hurtle down. Sydney made a grab for my legs and down I went, rolling over and over entangled with dog and dog-lead and fetched up on the road below, much to the amusement of passersby. They didn't expect a circus act for free at Bradgate Park.

Scrambling to my feet, trying to pull down my skirt from around my waist, I was highly indignant.

"Why did you knock me over?" I gasped.

"If I hadn't, you'd have ended up in the water, the speed you were going," said my devoted swain dogmatically.

There was one thing to be said for our Days Out. They were never dull.

Seaside holidays were still possible but wartime rationing, and transport restrictions made it difficult. Scene from the film *Hope and Glory* which is a brilliant portrayal of a twelve-year-old boy's experience of war.

Dining Out

Now and again, we would lash out on an evening at the Opera House. Working in Leicester enabled me to obtain tickets in advance for the Upper Circle, we only managed the Dress Circle once and that was a special occasion to see "Hutch"- Leslie Hutchinson.

Deciding to make a day of it, we pushed the boat out and had lunch in Simpkin & James' Restaurant; considered posh; well posher than Lewis's. Even shepherd's pie took on glamour in that establishment. A meal out in town was a real treat, it helped out the rations, and we had waitress service as well.

This particular Saturday we were off to see Rob Wilton, Beryl Orde and Anona Winn, as heard on the wireless. Settled in our seats, the fire curtain rose, the stage lights came on, the conductor, down in the orchestra pit raised his baton, and the overture commenced. How we did enjoy the show and when we came home, we had to tell father all about his favourite comedian, Robb Wilton, when he intoned in his slow inimitable way "The Day War Broke Out, my Missus says to me." There was never anyone quite like him.

Showing the programme to our group at the Consti, I enthused about the show. I was interrupted in mid-flow by Albert.

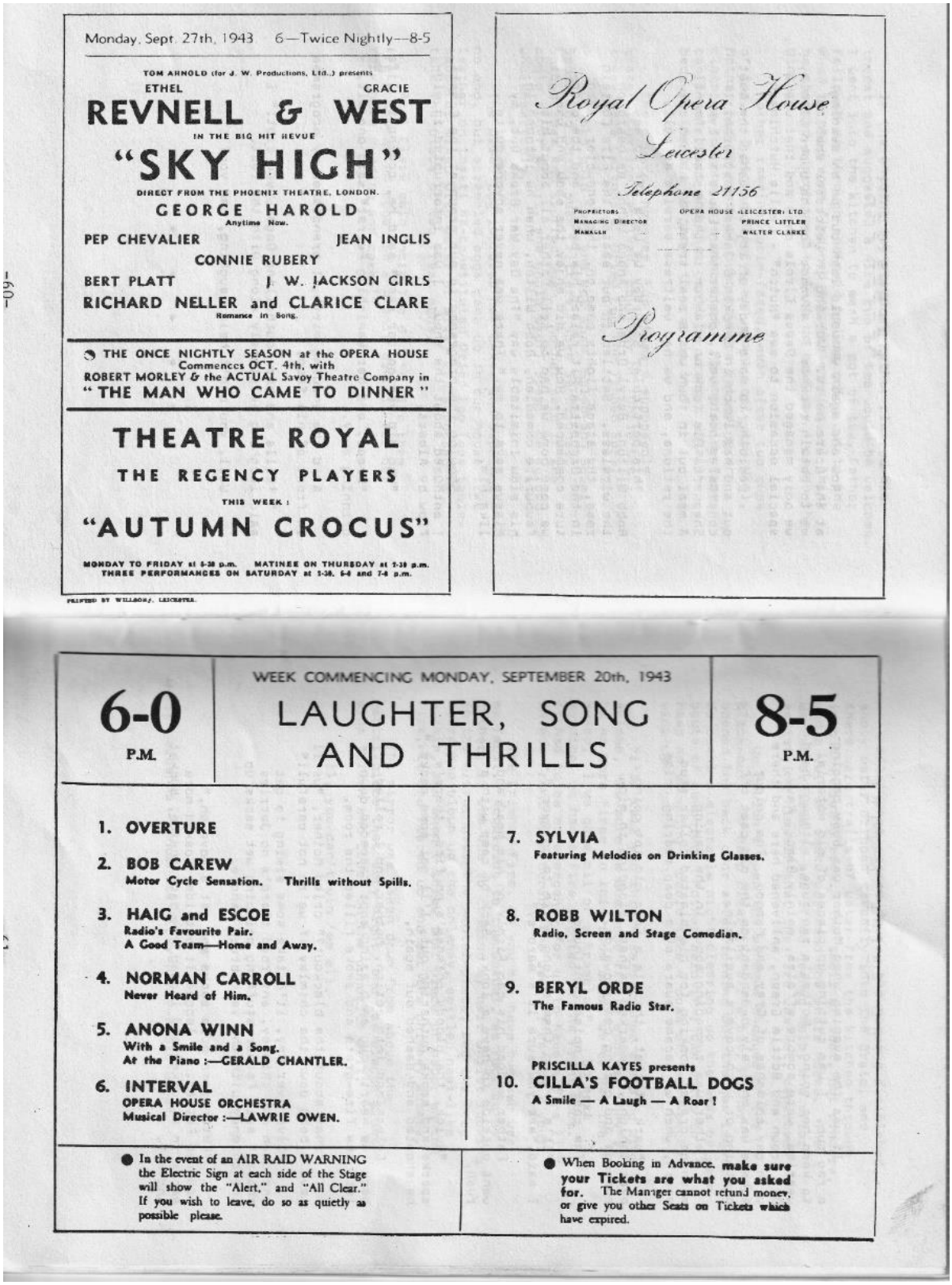
"Who did yer go ter see?" said he, coming to life.

"Freda and her Vanishing Ferret" said one wit, grinning away.

Amid the ensuing mirth, I brandished my programme in front of his face.

"'Cilla and her Footballing Dogs', you clot!" I said laughing helplessly along with the rest.

Well, you can't help laughing, can you?



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THE ONCE NIGHTLY SEASON at the OPERA HOUSE Commences OCT. 4th, with ROBERT MORLEY & the ACTUAL Savoy Theatre Company in "THE MAN WHO CAME TO DINNER"

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MONDAY TO FRIDAY at 6-30 p.m. MATINEE ON THURSDAY at 2-30 p.m.
THREE PERFORMANCES ON SATURDAY at 2-30, 6-0 and 7-0 p.m.

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Programme

WEEK COMMENCING MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 20th, 1943

6-0 P.M.

LAUGHTER, SONG AND THRILLS

8-5 P.M.

1. OVERTURE
2. BOB CAREW
   Motor Cycle Sensation. Thrills without Spills.
3. HAIG and ESCOE
   Radio's Favourite Pair.
   A Good Team—Home and Away.
4. NORMAN CARROLL
   Never Heard of Him.
5. ANONA WINN
   With a Smile and a Song.
   At the Piano :—GERALD CHANTLER.
6. INTERVAL
   OPERA HOUSE ORCHESTRA
   Musical Director :—LAWRIE OWEN.
7. SYLVIA
   Featuring Melodies on Drinking Glasses.
8. ROBB WILTON
   Radio, Screen and Stage Comedian.
9. BERYL ORDE
   The Famous Radio Star.
10. PRISCILLA KAYES presents CILLA'S FOOTBALL DOGS
    A Smile — A Laugh — A Roar!

● In the event of an AIR RAID WARNING the Electric Sign at each side of the Stage will show the "Alert," and "All Clear." If you wish to leave, do so as quietly as possible please.

● When Booking in Advance, **make sure your Tickets are what you asked for.** The Manager cannot refund money, or give you other Seats on Tickets which have expired.

Programme for the Opera House, 27 September 1943

Doreen C. Boulter, Illustrations by Peter Wilford, 1988

Childhood in Wigston during World War One

My father, Robert (Bob) Oliver Walden was born in Bell Street in Wigston Magna on 1 September 1909. In his later life Bob wrote his boyhood recollections and about things others had told him concerning life in and around Wigston during World War One. Bob passed away, aged 92 years, on 11 June 2002. I hope that you will enjoy his reminiscences – John Walden, June 2009.

"The stories surrounding the village of Wigston Magna, and East Wigston (Kilby Bridge), were told mainly by my father, George Walden, born 25 March 1868 at Wigston Magna, and by my aunt, Annie Brewin, nee Annie Mary Walden, who married George Brewin of Wigston Magna. I understood that Aunt Brewin had been a widow for many years, having been widowed early in life, and having two children, a boy Alfred, who died at the end of the First World War, in 1918 or 1919, at the point when he was about to be demobilised from the Army, and a girl, Caroline Brewin (known as Carrie), born May 1902, who married Victor Penman, of Beccles, Norfolk.

My mother, Louisa Walden, nee Allen, born 1st July 1873, also told of happenings in the village regarding my grandfather William Walden and my grandmother, nee Charlotte Anne Sturgess, born approx. 1831. I can remember both my grandmother, Jane Elizabeth Allen who lived at 23 Bell Street, next-door to father and mother at No. 25, and my grandmother, Charlotte Anne Walden, who had been a widow and then had married a Mr. King. I do not remember Mr. King. It is believed they met at 15 Jarrom Street, Leicester, the shop referred below [Ed.]. I do not know how long grandmother Walden was a widow, but grandfather's will was dated 9th November, 1902, and proved 16th June, 1904.

Grandmother King was alive in late 1918 or early 1919 when Alfred Brewin died. My grandmother lived in a cottage in John Street, off Asylum Street, Leicester, near St. Andrew's Church, Jarrom Street. This address was quite near to my Aunt Brewin's beer-off and grocery stores, situated on the corner of Jarrom Street and Atkin Street, Leicester.

Robert (Bob) Walden aged around three-years-old

Nos 23 and 25 Bell Street

Aunt Brewin and Carrie sold many different goods at their shop. It was owned by Leicester Brewing and Malting Co., of Charnwood Street, Leicester, and the beer was kept in the cellar, and drawn through lead pipes to the taps (brass colour) in the shop from the wooden barrels. Bottled beer was also sold, including Whitbread's ales and stouts, Guinness stouts, R. C. Allen's stouts, etc. I know how heavy the cases of bottled beer were carrying them up the steps from the cellar, and it was hard work for Aunt Brewin and Carrie. Cards used to hang up in the shop with things like: "Kolene" for the hair in small round boxes; small bottles of Castor oil; Indian Cereate ointment; A. Carr's Fever Powders etc., all just a few pence each (pennies in those days). The shop shelves were filled with various bottles of sweets, Victory Gums in red tins, strong lozenges, and all the usual grocery run of foods - butter, sugar, bacon, flour, lard, cheese, fresh bread, tea in large tins, and tins of Rowntree's and Cadbury's cocoa. I can remember "Camp Coffee" but not powdered coffee.

I started to deliver newspapers on my 12th birthday (I know because I started a week early and the school attendance officer made me wait until my birthday). I worked for W. Roberts, Newsagents, Bell Street, and got 2/6d for the morning round and 2/6d for the evening round (delivering Leicester Mercury's and Leicester Evening Mail's). The five shillings I earned by doing this was a valuable addition to the family income in those days, when prices are studied – e.g., daily newspaper 1d; butter 8d or 9d per Ib; sugar 2d per Ib; a loaf 3d; a gent's suit £2-10s (£2.50 today).

Father was a bricklayer's labourer and worked for Bentleys, Builders, of Clarendon Park Road, Leicester, whose yard and workshop adjoined the Corporation library (which still stands there). My father worked for this firm for about 40 years, and I understood that he had suggested moving to Clarendon Park to be nearer his place of employment, but this did not materialise as my mother's widowed mother (Jane Elizabeth Allen) lived next door at 23 Bell Street, Wigston, and father and mother did not wish to leave Grandma Allen living alone in Bell Street. So they never moved. I do not remember my grandfather, James Allen, who had been a baker both for Wigston Co-operative Society at the Bakery, Bell

Street, Wigston, and for Ross's Bakers, Moat Street, Wigston. He was a native of Gilmorton.

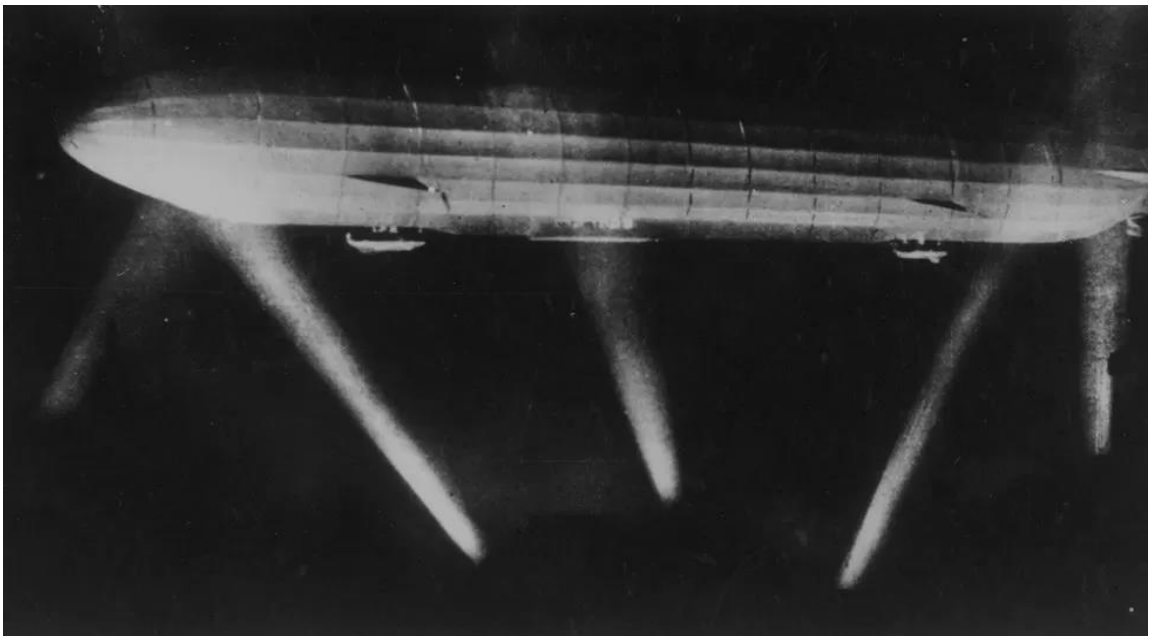
Grandmother Allen had no gas installed in her cottage and cooked by coal fire. She had paraffin lamps and candles for lighting and in the winter months used Price's night lights in her bedroom. These were placed in a saucer containing water for safety. My mother used to provide grandmother with a hot mid-day meal each day as mother had a gas cooker and gas lighting in one bedroom and 2 downstairs rooms - the kitchen and front room. I can remember the early days of the Lloyd George pension [5s per week], which I believe was first paid in 1910 to persons over 70 years of age, as Grandmother Allen received this. She used a Coleman's Mustard tin to keep her odd pence in. She could not have had much more, as she had to pay her rent, pay for food, paraffin, and coal out of this sum.

Very few houses were lit by electricity in the time of the First World War, but the factories were changing to electricity, and the first shop I remember using electricity was the Co-operative Grocery Stores in Bell Street. The streets were lit by gas lamps. The lamp standards had arms on them, and this enabled the lamp-lighter to lean his ladder against the standard when he wished to clean the glass or replace the gas mantle (incandescent white glowing with heat). The gas mantles were of a fragile nature, made of unknown material, and these stood the heat for some weeks and gave a reasonable white light, but disintegrated after a while. Later someone had the idea to fit glass reflectors in the lamps, and these certainly improved the light thrown out. The lamplighter patrolled Wigston each evening, carrying a pole with a hook fixed in the end to pull on the gas supply, and the gas was ignited by a small pilot light. The lights were only kept lit until about 1 pm, and the lamp-lighter had to patrol the town and pull off the supply. Later on some authorities allowed the lamplighter to use a bicycle, and this was very convenient as he was able to strap his ladder on the crossbar of the cycle, and at the same time ride the machine, as the ladders were only short and light in weight.

There was a young lad about 14-16 years in most large towns where the L.M.S. Railway had a depot, including Wigston Magna, who roused the drivers and firemen on night duty. Many drivers and firemen had either the letter 'F' or 'B' in chalk on the front of the house, indicating that they slept in the "front" or "back" bedroom, so that the ‘knockerup’ tapped the correct window with his stick. Amongst the staff at Wigston Railway Locomotive shed were Mr. William Ashton, who was father of Mabel, Arthur, Vera, Janet, Wilfred (later Bob's nephew by marriage, Ed.) and Nancy, and Betty Driver's (of TV's "Coronation Street" fame) grandfather, who also lived at 1 Avenue, near the Ashton family.

During the First World War Germany started bombing raids over England on various towns and cities, and in 1916, 31st January, Loughborough was bombed, probably the Brush Electrical Works was the target as armaments and other important large electrical appliances such as switchgear and transformers essential for the war effort were made there.

On the evening on which the bombs were dropped on Loughborough, I was in the kitchen in 25 Bell Street with my mother and father. The gas light was still on - this meant that no Air Raid warning had been received at Great Wigston Gas Works, as the gas was turned off when a warning was received there. My father had a small flowerpot filled with soil and was in the process of putting six apple seeds in the soil ('pips' he called them) when there were several heavy thuds. Mother's large pudding bowl stood on the table and this rang out as each thud reverberated and shook the table. Dad said, "it must be the Barracks, Mother - they are on gunnery practice late tonight". He then opened the back door and stood listening. As far as I can remember, I think the time was about 8pm, and as I was only 6 years of age it must have been nearly my bedtime. Of course, there was no wireless (radio) broadcasts in 1916, (the B.B.C. started in November 1922), and it was not until the next day we heard that a Zeppelin had been over and had dropped bombs on Loughborough.



When a fleet of zeppelins bombed the Midlands on the night of 31 January 1916, killing 70 people, it ushered in a terrifying new era of warfare from the skies. It was one of the first times the horrors of World War One had emerged from the columns of the newspapers and into the homes of ordinary people.

But the Germans had actually set out to bomb Liverpool, 100 miles to the northwest, according to historians. Loughborough, where 10 died and an estimated 150 were injured, is likely to have been an entirely unintended target. SM

I think at some time during the First World War it was made compulsory to "black-out" the windows and doors, it was very weird in the evenings, and the only place I was allowed to go was to No. 18 Paddock Street, where my Uncle Robert and Aunt Annie lived with my two cousins Annie (about 12 years older and Frederick Allen Read, who was about 4 years older than myself. I cannot remember any special corps being organised to combat air raids, as was done in the 1939-45 War, but the voluntary Special Constabulary (who wore arm bands) performed duties in the evenings, assisting the regular policeman. In our case at Wigston one officer was Police Constable Robert Jones, whose home in Bell Street was his Police Station, near Walter Roberts' newsagent's shop, and opposite Shipps' draper's shop.[1]

Shipps were an old established firm and sold good quality linen, outfitting and household goods, and apparently this shop had previously been the village Post Office. Father told me that as a young man he was employed there and used to deliver the mail on a penny-farthing bicycle. This must have been about 1883 or 1884 as father was born on Lady Day, 25th March 1868, but by the time he was 19 years of age he told me he had changed his job to work as a 'cleaner' on the railway at Hendon, London, for nineteen shillings per week. He was in lodgings there and found it difficult to live on the low pay. He often spoke about Hendon and mentioned the Welsh Harp [a public house, Ed.]

I can remember Shipps' shop very clearly. They sold good quality Oxford (working) shirts and the large red with white spotted handkerchiefs that were used in those days by building trade and other workers. The firm of W. Shipp and Son went back several generations. They also owned a similar shop at Great Glen. Walter Shipp, the third generation, was the owner in the 1920s and he was followed by his son Peter Shipp, who died in January 1985.

I think of my father when he told the tale of running into one of the gateposts at Shipps' shop on the penny-farthing bike as he was returning from delivering the mail. I think this early type of bike must have been

difficult to ride, especially when carrying a mail bag and parcels. Father treated this incident as a joke and apparently did not injure himself as he never mentioned any injury either to himself, the bike, or gatepost.

There was a footpath in Bell Street which ran by the side of the Infant School yard, (now Sainsbury's) through to Frederick Street, and this gave access to a small chapel which had been built on the north side of Shipps' back garden. This chapel was known locally as ‘Shipps’ Chapel’, and I think it belonged to the Baptists. They were a small body of worshippers but very regular in attendance. Amongst the congregation were the two sisters, Misses Creasey, who owned a pork butcher's shop situated in Moat Street, Wigston. I believe some of the Shipp family attended this chapel, but I did not know any of the other persons who attended. "Bell Jetty" still exists today in Bell Street.

My mother bought various drapery items from Shipps' shop and she took me with her on some of these occasions. Materials were sold by the yard in those days and mother would say "How much is that a yard, Mr. Shipp?" I can still visualise Mr. Shipp holding a thick roll of calico and replying, "One and eleven pence ha-penny a yard, Mrs. Walden". (It probably sold more knocking off the half-penny, and it did not sound so hard as "two shillings".) This was a ploy in selling goods then (and still practiced in the present day but in more subtle forms) and most things were priced with the halfpenny at the end.

There was a shining brass metal horizontal tape measure fixed to the top of one of the counters, and Mr. Shipp used to 'plonk' the roll on the counter and proceed to unroll and measure the material. I believe my mother used to make some of her sheets from this calico using her little hand-turned 'Jones' Sewing machine. The correct yardage having been checked, Mr. Shipp produced his large pair of scissors and then made a snip in the calico at the correct point. Then came the part of the proceedings I did not like - Mr. Shipp used to grip the material and rip off the piece at the point where he had previously snipped it. To me this seemed a terrible rasping noise, and it invariably set my teeth on edge and sent a shudder down my spine.

Mother had good service over the years from her small Jones sewing machine, but at one "spring cleaning" (or similar occasion) mother was persuaded to part with it, and when I asked about it, was told "I gave the rag and bone man a "tanner1 to take it!". My reaction? - no comment.

In the 1920s mother only had a zinc dolly tub; a wooden dolly pegs had about five legs about 10 inches long, inserted in a round piece of wood about 8 or 9 inches in diameter, with a shaft and handle attached. Dollying the clothes round in the water in the tub was strenuous work after a time, as to manipulate the dolly it was necessary to twist one's body as one gyrated the dolly pegs. The only soap powders which I can remember being sold were Rinso and Hudson's Soap powder. I think many of the well-known brands on sale today came on the market much later with the washing machines. Our household always had a good supply of the Lever Bros. 'Sunlight' and 'Lifebuoy' soap, and mother used both these soaps when rubbing the clothes over the tub, prior to the dollying and boiling. Rinso at that time was comprised of very thin soap flakes and this was used more on woollen goods which were washed through and did not need boiling.

Mother had great faith in Lifebuoy soap and the family regularly used it for toiletry purposes. It had a mild pleasant antiseptic smell and was kind to the skin. It seems to be unobtainable in the present day, although there is a present 'Lifebuoy' toilet soap on sale, but this is nothing like the original soap with its mild carbolic smell.

Our small kitchen at 25 Bell Street was really cosy and warm on these occasions. Rinso was one of the oldest soap powers and it was advertised at the front of my uncle John Walden's house and house-shop window in Bell Street (Ed.). Whether this was packed in the form of soap at that time I am not sure, but if it was not Rinso there was definitely a brand of soap flakes on sale in the 1920s. The only soap powder I remember was the one mother used, namely "Hudson's", which was then packed in small packets about 4 inches x 21/2 inches, as opposed to the large packets of the present-day brands.

In periods of drought in some of the lovely summers we used to experience (June-July) mother used to save some of the soapy water from the wash tub and copper, and dad and I used to carry the water to our garden just past my uncle John and Aunty Jenny's shops on Oadby Road, and close to the Racecourse. The water was then placed round the roots of the blackcurrant bushes to help feed the fruit on the bushes. The blackcurrant bushes usually had good crops and we had fruit puddings (mixed with redcurrants and other fruit) when the currants were ripe. Mother also made blackcurrant jam from the majority of the fruit.

This garden (or allotment) was very close to the racecourse. There was only a narrow field, about 40 yards, intervening between the garden and the racecourse, and the starting gate for the straight mile was almost opposite the garden. So, when the races were taking place, and I was at the garden, I was able to climb the plum tree and see the start of some of the races over the top of the racecourse fence. The actual field was called "Jackie's Slang", local name for Mr. John Hartopp, who owned a wine and spirits store on the corner of Burgess Street and Junction Road, and he was the owner of this field.

An interesting point was the fact that one of the apple pips set by my father on 31st January 1916 when the Zeppelin raid took place on Loughborough, grew into a nice tree, and I remember when it was about 3 feet high my father grafted another kind of apple on to the main stock. I held the clay round the joint where the new shoot joined the main trunk, and my father tightly bound the graft with a bandage, which was kept on until the new wood had healed onto the tree. This tree flourished alongside the plum tree in the garden and gave good fruit.

Apparently near the turn of the century (1890-1909) it was compulsory for all children to be vaccinated against smallpox. My father and mother did not agree with this practice, and I was told that to obtain exemption from vaccination it was necessary to obtain a form and for the parents to complete it and obtain a Magistrate's signature on the document. I do not know where the form was sent in those days, but as local authorities dealt with health matters, it seems likely that the

Medical Officer for Health at Wigston Urban District Council Offices dealt with these forms. The local Registrar of Births and Deaths may have also been involved in the keeping of records. Mother said that none of her children (George Allen (5.12.95), Elsie May (23.12.97), Robert Oliver (me-1.9.09), and James Alfred (15.9.15), were vaccinated. Fortunately, none of the family suffered from any serious notifiable diseases. My mother attributed this to her life-long use of "Lifebuoy" soap, in which she had great faith.

During the First World War, 1914 to 1918, the hosiery factories in Wigston were engaged on making large quantities of grey woollen socks for the Army, and some of the operations were sent out to home workers who used to collect the socks from the factories and return them when completed. One of these operations was known locally as "stitching toes". A machine later became available to do this work, known as a "Sotco" linking machine, a circular machine which had many points on it on which to hang the toes of the socks. The machine turned slowly round and as each sock reached the back, a needle moving forwards and backwards sewed each sock in turn. This operation was done by outworkers, and my grandmother Allen, and my mother, used to have several dozens to sew each day. It must have been a strain on the eyes for my grandmother as she only had a paraffin oil lamp and no gas. She supplemented this light by two candles when "stitching toes". They were hard times and no doubt the small amount of money earned in this way helped both my grandmother and mother. I sometimes used to assist them by unravelling several rounds of the toes (spare rounds) so that they could start immediately on each sock.

Bell Street Infant School took pupils from 3 years to 6 years of age, when they transferred to Wigston Modern School, situated in Long Street, only about 300 yards distance. I started to go to school at 3 years of age and remember the rocking horse in Miss Maidwell's classroom. The second classroom had a dividing screen from the third classroom, and Miss Harris taught this class. The headmistress was Miss Jacklin,

who also taught the third class up to 6 years of age, prior to moving to Standard 1 at Long Street Modern School.

I can remember the early days of learning to spell words like 'cat', 'mat', 'dog, etc, which were drawn on paper in coloured crayons and left up on the walls of the classroom for all to see. We soon learned to count with the aid of coloured wooden "beads" on a frame of wire. The beads were pushed along the wires as we counted out the numbers. I do not think we started to learn multiplication tables until we were at Long Street School in Standard 1, when the class en masse "sing-songed" out the "Two times table" with our teacher Miss Smith, who later married a Mr. Clay, a widower. We were taught the other tables in later classes, and personally I have found them invaluable in quickly mentally reaching the correct solution to many simple problems. After many years of use I find that the numbers spring from the brain without any conscious effort. Despite all the modern office equipment and electronic gadgets, I think it will be a mistake if the arithmetic tables are dropped from the school's curriculum.

Our sports facilities at school were very limited. We had no gymnasium and had to exercise in the playground on the tarmac and did drill, marching and simple exercises. We enjoyed our netball games. Once a week we used to go to the recreation ground in Central Avenue (Wigston Urban Council-owned) for about one hour, usually in an afternoon, and played football in the winter months and cricket in the summer months. We had very little playing kit, but most boys had a pair of football boots. The school had no playing field. Our class teacher, Mr. Archy Wilde, was a keen sportsman, and played tennis. It was rumoured that in his younger days he played football as an amateur for Leicester Fosse, now Leicester City Football Club. The school colours were black and amber (yellow), black and amber stripes were worn on the football jerseys. The team played in the Mid-Leicestershire Schools League, made up of teams from the villages of Blaby, Whetstone, Enderby, Cosby, Broughton Astley and possibly Fleckney and Kibworth. The Church of England School, (now demolished) also stood in those

days in Long Street, Wigston, and there was keen rivalry between Wigston Modern School and the C. of E. School.

As I was a member of the Church of England, and in the choir at All Saints, many of the boys attended the C. of E. School. The C. of E. School always had a day's holiday on Ascension Day, but this was not observed at the Modern School. Our vicar, The Rev. Thomas Alright, MA (Oxon), always held a Sung Eucharist at 6am on Ascension Day and he gave each of the boys who attended a shilling (5p today but then 12 pennies). This was the only pay we received for our services in the choir over the year, and we did not expect any payment.

When I joined the choir in the summer or autumn of 1920, Mr. Thomas Percy Barnes ("Tippee"), the Deputy Headmaster of Wyggeston Boys' School, Leicester, was our choirmaster. His father was the Registrar for Births, Marriages and Deaths for Wigston, at that time a subdivision of Blaby. T. P. Barnes was a good musician and used to practice just the boys on one evening per week. The full choir practice was held at All Saints Church at 7.30pm on Thursday evenings when Miss Violet Moore, LRAM., attended and played the organ. Mr. T. P. Barnes resigned his post as choirmaster and Miss Moore took up the dual post of organist and choir trainer.

Miss Moore-Coltman (full surname) was a member of a large family, many of whom were musical. My father and mother said that there were enough members of the family to form their own band. Miss Moore's brother Harry was a music teacher (piano-forte) and played woodwind instruments, and another elder brother, Charles Moore, was a renowned conductor and arranger in the brass band world. Charles Moore had one son, Edward, known as "Ted", and he was a good musician. He played the cornet and was the leading instrumentalist in the Wigston Temperance Brass Band for many years. He also played the trumpet in Leicester Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Sir Malcolm Sargent for some years. Ted was also deputy conductor to his father in Wigston Brass Band, who incidentally climbed up from a Sixth Section Band to

join the crack bands in the First Section in the Championship Contest at Crystal Palace, London.

My grandmother, Jane Elizabeth Allen, lived at No. 23 Bell Street, on one side of us, and Mrs. Johnson and her two daughters lived at No. 27 Bell Street, so Dad and Mother's cottage was in the middle row. We all used the gate and entry by the side of No. 23 to walk to the back of the three houses. Our small kitchen was very cosy. We had a "pull-on" gas light and a gas cooker in the kitchen, and this was most useful. The front downstairs room was about 11ft. x 11ft. and the piano was by the south wall; the sideboard cupboard was along the east wall, and the couch was under the window on the north wall. There was a large round walnut coloured table in the centre of the room, with a pull-on gas lamp over the table. The old fireplace with coal fire was on the west side. There was a large hook in the chimney, on which the kettle was hung over the fire. [This is where Bob left off. Ed.]

Bob Walden

[1] 'Ball Dyke' was a local name from the past for the junction of Bell Street, Long Street and Leicester Road; the place where local the P.C. made his point on the hour to meet his Sergeant[Ed.].

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After working in the hosiery industry, Bob joined the police force in 1933 and was posted to several locations around Leicestershire, including back to Wigston in 1951 for a year after being promoted to sergeant. He lived in a police house in West Avenue. Bob retired from the police in 1959 and then did various jobs until completely retiring in 1974. He married Eva Arnitt in 1938 and they had two sons, David (1943) and John (1946).