



SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE SECOND WORLD WAR STORIES

Memories collected from our reminiscence
sessions and community events

'I lived on a farm between Wickwar and Kingswood. I remember, in the dead of night, a pig being killed and all the meat being shared out.'

Tony, Severn Beach reminiscence session

'I was 15 years old and working at Newman's. The all clear had gone and we were walking home across the fields. A plane was coming up the railway line from Gloucester towards Yate. I could see the faces of the crew in the cockpit. My future wife lost her sister at Parnall that day, Barbara Amos; she's the first name on the memorial at St Mary's Church'.

Tony, Severn Beach reminiscence session

'The planes came over our house one Saturday lunch time. I remember looking out of the window at the street and seeing my brother on the butcher's bike. The planes starting firing and he suddenly fell off the bike. We thought he'd been shot. But he hadn't, it was the noise that made him fall'.

Betty, reminiscence session.

'Berlin was no longer safe for us. With the help of the Quakers we escaped on Kindertransport to Bristol. I wanted to pay back the country that gave me shelter. I became the first non-British nurse at Southmead Hospital and have lived in Downend for 50 years'.

Hella, Downend

'My mother continued to live at our flat in Berlin – we had occasional contact through Red Cross messages – we were allowed 25 words every 6 months. In January 1942 my mother wished us goodbye. She had been informed that she was to be deported in an extermination train to Riga, Latvia. All the Jews were killed in the wood and the bodies left to rot. Her name is in a book of remembrance in Riga. I hold a copy of the page'.

Hella, Downend

'We were all examined by the County medical officer. The regime was quite hard there. If a child wet the bed they had their nose rubbed in it and would have to scrub the bed clean'.

John Heath

'We weren't able to go to Weston-Super-Mare for day trips anymore because the beaches had coils of barbed wire to stop enemy invasion'.

Kay, reminiscence session

'I remember my brothers peeping out of the air raid shelter at night, wanting to see the planes in the searchlights. My mother would tell them to come back in. Once the all clear siren had gone, I would dance down the garden'.

Kay, reminiscence session

'Sweets were rationed, we were only allowed a 1/4 a month. I didn't like that. It was lovely when it stopped'.

Ken, reminiscence session





Girls assembling gas masks at Chipping
Sodbury School
Yate & District Heritage Centre

'I hated putting on my gas mask. Mother said 'put it on or else' so I went for 'or else'. I'm claustrophobic. I'm sure it was the gas mask that started it'.

Margaret, reminiscence session

'I wanted to join the WAAF (Women's Auxiliary Air Force.) I was 17 so under age. I forged my signature, and my Girl Guide Captain signed as well to say that I was 18. They took me. My six years in the WAAF were most enjoyable. I learned all sorts'.

Marjorie, Yate

'I worked at Parnall's. On the day of the first air raid I remember the sirens going off and racing to the top of the shelter. People were running up to the roof of the factory to get to the anti-aircraft guns. They were being shot at by the plane. The bomb went off and I was blown down the steps and knocked out'.

Marjorie, Yate

'I worked as an usherette at Yate Cinema. I went out with a friend to the pub and a couple of airmen walked us back. I needed to go fetch my bike lights from the box office. When I got there the manager was in there with all the curtains drawn. He shouted at me and seemed suspicious. It turned out he was hiding a transmitter and sending messages to the Germans. The police caught him and he spent the rest of the war in prison'.

Marjorie, Yate

We had an allotment and grew beans and potatoes. We were never actually short of food, but you got a bit sick of soup. When you got your 2 ounces of butter you would beat it down to make cream. We enjoyed a little bit of luxury'.

Molly

'I remember waking up and being on my own in the air raid shelter. My family had all gone back to the house and left me sleeping there. I was so scared'.

Martha, reminiscence session

'Fifty bombers came in the daylight raid on Filton. Someone shouted, 'It's ours,' and someone else shouted, 'It's the Germans.' Everyone was running. We couldn't get in our shelter because people were already there. We started to go back to the house to go under the stairs. With that the house took a direct hit and just vanished in a cloud of dust. Not a brick left. Nothing happened to us at all, except my gold watch dropped off my wrist'.

Molly

'My cousin and I went to stay at my grandparents' farm. We went swimming at the beach. We weren't meant to because of all the barbed wire. We put on our costumes and folded our clothes and put them in a boat. When we came back the boat had gone. Our clothes with it. We were in such trouble. My Grandma had to send off for our ration books to be posted so she could get us more clothes to go home in'.

Pam, reminiscence session



**Newman's workers at the end of their working day
Yate & District Heritage Centre and Creda Archive**



Warmley Auxilliary Fire Service
Kingswood Heritage Museum

'I was a boy soldier. For part of our training we had to smell a bit of gas so we knew what it smelt like if ever there was an attack'.

Noel, reminiscence session

'The couple who took me in didn't have children of their own. When the war was over I wanted to stay with them. I don't remember much about it but it must have broken mother's heart'.

Pauline

'We had a lovely little dog. We always knew when the planes were about to come over, because he always went under the kitchen table. It was like an early warning'.

Ruth, reminiscence session

'I was evacuated to the countryside. But not for long. My father came and fetched me back because he and my mother missed me so much'.

Ruth, reminiscence session

'I saw silver aeroplanes high up in the blue sky. I thought they looked beautiful. Later I found out that they were the planes that bombed Parnall Aircraft factory in Yate. They were shooting them in the road as they were running out of the factory'.

Eileen, Thornbury reminiscence session

'In Berlin, on Kristallnacht 9th November 1938, I saw Jewish shops broken into, burgled and set on fire and the owners dragged out and beaten. My father said to me, 'If you survive this, tell people about it'.

Hella, Downend

'We lived at the White Hart in Olveston. My job was to put up the blackouts every night and take them down in the morning. There was a mock invasion to simulate the Germans coming up the River Severn. Girl guides and scouts pretended to be casualties and there were military teams and medics. They were going to set off a gas bomb. Grandmother was an invalid and mother protested so they didn't do it'.

Eric, Olveston

'I met my future husband when he was billeted in Thornbury. He was from Cornwall and everyone called him Corny. After the war he had shell shock, he would shout out in his sleep. He never talked about what he'd been through'.


Iris, Alveston

'My husband was a fire watch volunteer at Bristol Aeroplane Company. The night Filton got bombed I paced up and down with baby Peter in my arms, praying that my husband was alive. There was no way of knowing until he walked through the door'.

Irene, Downend reminiscence session



*Special Constables on parade on Thornbury High Street
Courtesy of Thornbury & District Museum*



Dog fight over Filton 25th Sept 1940
© Imperial War Museum (CH 1823)

*'One of our teachers arranged for us to help with war work. We would roll bandages for first aid kits and picked the fluff from cotton sheets which was used as gun fluff'.
Iris, Alveston*

My uncle volunteered for bomber command. As a four year old, I remember me and my cousin sitting on his knee. He was only 21 when he was killed. My grandfather would go out into the garden firing his gun at stray enemy planes. Even after the war, he couldn't accept that his son was never coming back and, to this day, we never knew what happened to his plane'.

Jean, Kendleshire

We left Harwich on Mother's 28th birthday. Parents had been asked to say their goodbyes at home and not attend at the railway station. We assembled at the school and marched crocodile style to the station. We didn't really know what was happening; we just thought it was a great adventure. Our hosts were a mature family. I believe they shaped our future lives, and for my brother and I, for the better. Thornbury is guaranteed at least one visit a year'.

John Heath, Harwich evacuee

'The war had a very strange effect; it seemed to divide people into two groups depending on their experiences, those who couldn't adjust and those just got on and made the best of it. Yes, the war changed everything'.

John Heath, Harwich evacuee

In the early days there was no uniforms and they were short of weapons. It was very much shotguns and pitchforks'.

John, Alveston

'Because we lived close to my school, if the siren sounded I was allowed to run home to be with my Mum. Others that lived further away had to stay at school'.

Jean, reminiscence session

'In Filton we had a wonderful street party. The butcher's boy stood on the table and sang. He was Welsh and had the most beautiful voice. Everyone was clapping and cheering'.

Kay, Thornbury reminiscence session

'As a child my husband was left handed. At school they used to tie his left hand to a chair to make him write with his right hand. One day, when the siren went off and all the children were taken to the shelter, they realised they had forgotten him and the teacher had to come back and untie him'.

Margaret, Avon Valley Railway event

'I was a seven year old and lived in Hanham. We were in our shelter and could hear bombs dropping. I can remember Mother shaking with fear. The planes were going to BAC where Father and Uncle Fred worked. When the sirens went there, Dad said, 'Let's go in this shelter,' but Fred said, 'No, let's go to the other one.' So they did and it was a good job because the first was one that got bombed'.

Lillian Buck, Avon Valley Railway event

**Newman's Factory bomb damage
Yate & District Heritage Centre and Creda Archive**





*John and Arthur from Harwich playing at being 'airmen' in Thornbury
With kind permission of John Heath*

I was born in Patchway, in 1937, the youngest of 9 boys and 2 girls. All my brothers were in the military services, posted across the world. One was on HMS Petard which captured the enigma cypher machine. One sister drove ambulances and was bombed out of her house three times. Amazingly not one of us was killed but I don't know how mother stayed so strong'.

Ken Evans, Almondsbury

'I thought it would be exciting to join the Land Army. I lived in London and was billeted to Marshfield. To begin with the farmers didn't want us. They thought we weren't strong enough, but we soon proved our worth. I met my husband there and lived in Marshfield for the rest of my life'.

Mary, Marshfield

'My father was a young aircraft designer at Bristol Aeroplane Company. He was in their home guard division as well. During the September 1940 raid he was in the pill box halfway up Filton hill. It still stands there covered in ivy. During the air raid a bomb fell about fifty feet from the pill box. With each explosion my father said that another hair stood up on his head!'.

Mr Mountney

'One night, I went with my sister to the communal shelter in Speedwell. It was a disused mining tunnel. We went there because it was more fun. Someone played the accordion all night and there was dancing. Mother and father were furious with us'.

Mo, Hanham reminiscence session

'A Girl Guide organised a gang of us children to collect scrap materials in a cart. We deposited it in front of the forge in Hill Street in Kingswood'.

Mervyn, Kingswood reminiscence session

'Uncle Ernest had been a Prisoner of War. When he came home we were all there to greet him and had hung up a welcome home sign. I can see him clearly; he was a shadow of his former self'.

Maureen, Downend reminiscence session

'I was in the ARP in Filton. When everyone went to the shelters, we walked the streets making sure there were no lights. We had to throw ourselves into a trench when the planes came. Mine and father's tin helmets were dented all over from the shrapnel'.

Nancy, Winterbourne reminiscence session

'Our family loved butter, our neighbours loved sugar. We traded those coupons, it worked out well'.

Pam, Kendleshire reminiscence session

'I worked at BAC in an office. During an air raid, the office was split and went to different shelters. It meant that if one was hit, everyone wasn't killed all at once'.

Olive, Filton reminiscence session

'One day we took a hit. I can remember a soldier saying, 'Over here, Sergeant. Can't you see it?' There was blood pouring out of him. I applied a pad to stem the flow, but I couldn't do anything to save him'.

Noel, Yate reminiscence session



*Group photograph showing evacuees at Thornbury
With kind permission of John Heath*



*Soldiers from 52nd Heavy Artillery based at Kyneton House, Thornbury 1939
Courtesy of Thornbury & District Museum*

'When I was on leave we would play darts at the pub in Kingswood. Some black GIs were there and we taught them how to play. We got on well. Then the white GIs came in and told the black guys to leave. The landlord said that everyone was welcome and if they didn't want to be in the same pub, they would be the ones that would have to go'.

Roland, Hanham reminiscence session

'I was eighteen and lived on a farm in Elberton. I got to know one of the German prisoners who worked there and we fell in love and wanted to get married. Mother wouldn't hear of it. But when she got to know him, she loved him as much as I did. Everybody did. He suffered a lot of prejudice but I wouldn't have changed marrying him for the world.'

Rose, Hawkesbury Upton reminiscence session

'They were sending boys my age down the coal mines in Wales – the Bevin boys. I didn't want to do that so I put my name down for the Royal Navy'.

Roland, Hanham reminiscence session

'After the all clear, Mother went out of the shelter to make a cup of tea. Father followed her and she said, 'Put your helmet on, Bill.' He said, 'I survived the last war and I'll survive this one.' She told him again to put his helmet on, so he did, and with that we heard a 'ping' and a jagged piece of shrapnel six inches long hit his helmet'.

Roland, Hanham reminiscence session

'The German planes were on their way back from a bombing raid. Our cottage was by Grovesend quarry, next to a railway line and a spoil heap. In the moonlight it must have looked like a huge building. We were in the kitchen; suddenly we heard the whistle of a bomb and dived under the table. I can still see the chenille table cloth. The bomb blast knocked off the chimney. Two bricks landed in the middle of my pillow.'

Rosemary, Alveston

'Father worked as a coal merchant all day and then at night as a special constable, helping the police force. I've got a scrap of paper with his instructions about what to do in the case of an accident.'

Rosemary, Alveston

'At the school, vegetables were grown and the older boys were taught how to garden. A big shelter with duckboards and sacking over the door was built. I can still remember the smell of the soil.'

Rosemary, Alveston

'The Ministry of Labour told us where we had to work. I was sent to Fry's – making chocolate bars for soldiers. Some of the girls were cheeky; they wrote messages inside the wrappers, 'If you're married pass me by, if you're single please reply,' and then we added our address. One day an American jeep with a GI turned up with a chocolate wrapper from me – father went berserk'.

Tina, Cadbury Heath

'The most feared person during the war was the telegraph boy. They wore blue uniforms, rode red bikes and had a little leather pouch with the telegram inside. If he came along the road, everyone would disappear into their houses, not a soul on the street. They were worried that he was coming to you with bad news'.

Tom



Men of Maritime regiment being kitted out at
quartermaster's stores, Thornbury
Courtesy of Thornbury & District Museum