

Barnet & District Local History Society

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LOCAL WARTIME MEMORIES



Bomb damage in Wood Street

Memories of Sam Sunderland. He was born in 1918 in Bells Hill and lived in Cedar Lawn Avenue. During the war he served with the Middlesex Regiment. Sam's family were haulage contractors, working out of the Bull yard and in 1939 they moved the temporary cabins down to Barnet General. His mother was an Abbot born in Salisbury Road.

"In 1940 I had been admitted to the Victoria Cottage Hospital for a bunion operation when at about 8.30 in the evening a bomb was dropped in Wood Street. The patients had been settled down for the night by the nurses and the black out had been hung. When the bomb landed it blew open all the French windows in the ward. The nurses got us out of bed. In the street the male passenger of a car sitting in the back seat with his girlfriend had his arm injured when the glass from the back window blew in. There

was one German nurse who helped at the hospital. She was a good nurse but suffered some ribbing."

Sam says the reason Barnet got bombed was because of the dummy airfield.

Memories of Brian Warren included in Oak Hill College and former grounds

"For some twenty-five years I lived in Hampden Way and the fields bordering Pymmes Brook were my playground. There I started to play football and cricket and gained a life-long interest in natural history. Oak Hill was not within my province yet I can still remember some things pertaining to it which might be of interest to the reader.

"During the War my father had an allotment near a large elm tree which was one of a line stretching from Church Hill Road, near St. Mary's Church, to the path near the present tennis court. The line of trees was destroyed much later by Dutch elm disease. My sister and I used to play at the foot of a large elm tree while our father worked on the allotment. As we grew up we helped on the allotment. The large black pram, when we had outgrown it, was used to transport potatoes from the allotment to home. In the valley, where the football pitches are today, there was a line of large air-raid shelters at a right-angle to Pymmes Brook. I never saw anyone use them and from the proximity to the brook I wonder if they were not flooded on numerous occasions. After the war, when the shelters were removed and the allotments reverted to grass, we had an allotment at the back of Arlington Road, which was later incorporated in the grounds of Ashmole Secondary School. So ended our allotments.

"In the latter years of the war, at one lunch-time, I looked out of our front room window to see a doodlebug overhead. I do not remember leaping back into the Anderson shelter to join my mother and sister. The doodlebug was blown round and landed at the far end of the park near St. Mary's School. After the war the same piece of ground was used by a travelling fair for some years, to the delight of all children. Later it was held in the park not far

from the bandstand, where once there were band concerts.

"Fifty years ago, in 1945, the local Victory Sports were held near the present cricket pitch adjacent to Parkside Gardens. I remember that Bryan Almond won my running race and I think I came third. About this time Monkfrith Sunday School had a picnic for some reason or other, when a long gaggle of children with their teachers walked up Monkfrith Way into the College grounds. The picnic and games were held in the field abutting Cedar Rise. I thought in those days I had walked miles; it seemed like it!"

Memories of Colin Gibbens taken from notes written in November 1994, passed to the Museum by Brian Warren

"A large area of the park, extending from the west bank of Pymmes Brook to the base of the hill leading up to St. Mary's Church and Church Hill Road, was a rubbish dump during the war years. It was reclaimed eventually, grassed over and is now part of the extensive playing fields in the park. The 'Dump Road' is now a wide footpath offering a pleasant walk through the western side of the park.

"I spent many hours playing cricket in the park. However I used to watch Post 21 play cricket most Saturdays on the pitch adjoining Parkside Gardens. The team comprised former Fire Wardens who manned the brick built square building opposite number 21 East Walk. (I believe there was a Post 31 located in Hampden Way whose cricket team played in Arnos Park.)

"The Home Guard exercised regularly in the park during the war years. Located on the edge of a copse in the lower field (south side) of Oak Hill College Farm and visible from the end of Brookside South was a pill box. Is it still there? Is it hidden in the undergrowth? I hope to answer these questions by taking binoculars to the area during the winter months when foliage is scarce.

"I used to help my father run our allotment during the war years. Its location was roughly in the middle of the present pitch and putt course near an infant spinney, which has now matured.

"During the cold winters of the 1940's the steep hill leading to Brookside South became an ideal spot for tobogganing, with its long run and virtually no traffic at a time of petrol rationing.

"I remember scouring the woods in the park for firewood at weekends during the winter as fuel was in short supply. A gale would be welcome as it meant there was likely to be rich pickings in the woods.

"The artichoke field was the northern part of the land currently occupied by Monkfrith School. It was part of the 'Dig for Victory' campaign during the war years and was sown with artichokes which grew to a height of about five feet and became an ideal 'hide and seek' playing area for us local children.

"Various events were organised by the local Council both during the war and in the immediate post-war years during August in the Park. Many of these (e.g. babyshows and concerts) took place in the bandstand, which is still in situ but crumbling. Large audiences attended the various events.

"I recall being in the garden with my mother, who was hanging out washing, at about lunch time on a day in 1944 when we saw an object coming out of the sky from the south towards us (in East Walk). She ushered us at speed into the Morrison Shelter in the lounge and we waited with baited breath for the explosion. The Doodlebug just skimmed the rooftops of East Walk and landed at the far end of Oak Hill Park. Many nearby houses in Church Hill Road and Brookside North suffered window and roof damage from the blast. We were grateful to be unscathed."

Terry Fairhead was a young boy during the war and lived in Lakeside Crescent, East Barnet from 1935 to 1950. He wrote to us about Bohun Lodge...

"Mrs. Cordon (Hendon Local Studies Library) mentioned that, during the war the house was used as temporary accommodation for bombed-out families. I do recall that there were civilians there at one time but it was also occupied for a

period by a Canadian army detachment. I know this for certain because, as a boy of about thirteen, I used to scabble about among the sandbags on the rifle-range looking for spent bullets. This activity brought me into conflict with a Canadian sergeant who possessed hands, the size and texture of a frying-pan, which he applied to that part of my anatomy deemed, by contemporary society, to be the appropriate area for inflicting pain on a young person.

"I think that there were troops of other nationalities there (including British) at various times and it is possible that it was used as some sort of transit camp. I recall that there was an armoured car parked in the grounds, about two or three hundred yards from the house, which I and of a couple of friends clambered inside on one occasion. Incredibly, we turned the starter motor over (but not the engine) without attracting any attention.

Wartime diary of Dorothy May Pymm (known as Ivy), living at 9 Queens Avenue, Whetstone, N.20; wife of Freddie Pymm who worked at Standard Telephone & Cables.

Thursday March 23rd, 1944. - Went down to recreation ground by Standard. Air raid but no guns.

Friday 24th - BAD RAID.

Saturday 25th 1944 - Soldier display in Electricity Showrooms for Salute the Soldier Week. No raid.

Tuesday - Band at Whetstone for "SALUTE SOLDIER WEEK".
Lovely day again.

Thursday 30th March - AIR RAID. NO GUNS.

Wednesday 19th April - Had a bad raid last night. Heavy AA barrage.

Saturday 25th April - Fred played football for Barnet at Hitchin again.

D DAY JUNE 6TH - Great news today. Allied Invasion of France. Special news bulletins. King's Speech. Feel very moved by it all. I want to run out and cheer the planes that keep going over but everything goes on here just the same, as if nothing has happened except for the planes. May it be over quickly; there will be so many killed.

June 25th – Well a lot has happened lately. The Germans have started sending flying bombs over. The alert has been on nearly all the time but has been better these last two days. Yesterday morning one landed on the golf course. No casualties, thank goodness. Everyone has some windows out, including us.

Mrs. Muegoran has a ceiling down but otherwise there is little damage in Queens Ave. I sleep under the shelter every night. Mrs. Reynolds (no. 11) died last week which was a merciful release. Mrs. Hurd went to Manchester with the baby.

June 28th – Went to cinema. Saw "Random Harvest" It was lovely. Cheered me up considerably. Lots of buzz bombs today. I wish they would stop. I don't want to die. I've so much to live for – my husband, home & babies. May they all be spared for me to give them a happy future life.

August 26th – 2 months have passed since I last entered in my diary. Such a lot has happened during those 2 months. The bombs got worse so I went to Banbury (father's home) with the children for 6 weeks. Have been back three weeks now. A few pretty close bombs. One last Wednesday on Standard. Minnie Goffe killed amongst many others.... Today we've had a lull for twenty four hours. Is it over or are they cooking up something else? How heavenly it was to sleep comfortably in the bed last night instead of under the shelter. Lily (younger sister) sent me some Yankee chocs yesterday they were delicious. Fred started football today.

August 30th – Well, the lull has been broken several times. Last night was rotten; heard four buzz bombs within half hour. Thought each one was 'ours' but we are still here. Still, the troops are getting nearer the depots so it can't be much longer. Every one I hear I hope is the last. Had a lot of warnings all day yesterday.

Sept. 1st – We have had two peaceful nights and it was wonderful. The troops have captured one third of the bomb bases! It was announced tonight that the Canadians had entered Dieppe. Perhaps it will soon be all over. We're frightened to cheer too much, just in case. Hurry up the day when we don't have to listen for what we don't want to hear.

Sept. No raids. Is it all over? It seems too good to be true. The Germans are retreating to Belgium in a great hurry. Poured with rain all day but who cares. Fred played football.

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very gay. How I should love to be there.

MAY 8TH 1945 – VE DAY – Flags and decorations everywhere. Went out early to shops as they were only open two hours. Went to Wembley after dinner. Stayed the night. There were bonfires in the middle of the road. People dancing and singing. Wish we could have joined in but couldn't leave the children. Never mind, so long as it's over that's all that matters.

Saturday May 19th – Watched Fred play football. Barnet won 2–1. Jolly good game. Had some wine from the cup. Potatoes are very scarce, peas 1/6d lb but they have been 4/–. Queued up for fish for 40 mins.

Saturday – Won't it be lovely when there is more food about. Good job we have the garden.

August 6th BANK HOLIDAY MON. – Weather very thundery but not too bad later on. Went to Fete at Underhill Barnet.

August 10th – Rumours of surrender by Japs.

11th – Negotiations going on between Allies and Japs – won't be long now.

August 15th 1945 VF. Final Day – Peace the whole world over! Mr. Atlee made THE announcement at 12 o'clock midnight. Shops all closed early. Had a job to get some bread but just managed it. Fred took the children to the park in the afternoon. Fireworks and bonfires later on.

EASTER Saturday 20th April – Lily came to relieve me from my duties and Fred and I went to watch Barnet play Bishop Auckland in the Amateur Cup Final. Smashing game. Barnet 3 Bishop 1. Coming home in the coach Finch and a couple of others got on top of coach. Cheered by crowds through Barnet. Had a lovely dinner at the King George. GREAT DAY.

July 21st 1946 – BREAD RATIONING COMMENCED. Lots of fuss made about it by the Bakers.....

And so life went on