

AND ALL THE BELLS WERE SILENT

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A n d A l l T h e B e l l s W e r e S i l e n t

An autobiographical account of  
the war years 1939 to 1945.

To Timothy  
with much love  
From Mum.

Patricia Dennis

Patricia Dennis  
Neston November 1991.

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## P r e f a c e

All autobiography may be said to be an ego trip and this is probably no exception. However, this book is intended to be as much if not more about Edwin than about me, and about the war years in which we began our life together. They were traumatic years which had a deep and lasting effect on us and on our generation.

In addition to being a personal story, it is a picture, seen through my eyes, of the war and its effect on one family and one community. In my references to Pimlico I have tried to show, without too much drama, how ordinary people tackled the terror of the blitz and the sadness and upheaval of war, and triumphed over all with remarkably little fuss.

In 1940, after the fall of France, a defeated and defeatist French general described England as a 'chicken waiting to have its neck wrung'; to which Winston Churchill lustily replied, 'Some chicken, some neck!' and the whole nation echoed, 'Hear hear!' The chicken did not intend to have its neck wrung!

We are not a war-like nation but when attacked we defend ourselves. Since the war had to be fought, it is right to remember what it was like, to record courageous deeds and inspiring events with pride, as well as the horror, the sorrows and the misery; and to recognise the nobility to which the 'ordinary' person can rise in time of trial.

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## T H E   W A R   T O   E N D   A L L   W A R S

As a 'post-war' baby I grew up in a community still stunned by the effects of the Great War in which a million men died and a further thirteen million were wounded, in a community still grieving over the 'flower of English youth' whose lives were cut so tragically short. Believing that it had been 'the war to end all wars' made it possible for the bereaved to accept that those young men had not died in vain. Determination grew that such a disaster must never happen again.

The very memory of loved ones was kept fresh by the ideal of a world in which disputes were settled without war. Hopes ran high for the new League of Nations. Any diminution of those hopes was seen as a betrayal of the ideal. Because of this, many ordinary people could not bear to look realistically at the situation developing in Europe. And the 'war to end all wars' became instead the prelude to an even greater and more tragic conflict.

During my childhood it seemed that the Great War was never out of the conversation for long, so deep was the effect on the lives of ordinary families. The names of young men from Pimlico who had died were mentioned so often that I was never sure whether they were alive or dead. Dad's best friend and the older brother of Alice Rodwell, who years later married Dad as his second wife, was one of them.

The scars of war were only too visible, even to children. There were boys and girls at school without fathers, young wives without husbands, parents without sons and many unmarried women who still wore on their left hands the rings given them by fiances who never returned from the

battlefields to marry them. It is estimated that there were two million 'surplus' young women in this country in 1918. Perhaps the most poignant reminder was to be found on the streets of central London. Ex-service-men, many of them wounded, were a regular sight as they sold matches to passers-by to make some kind of a living, too proud to beg, but unable to find work. We saw these men every time we went shopping in Warwick Street or went to Victoria Station to meet Dad from work; they made a lasting impression. They must have had bitter thoughts about the 'land fit for heroes' they had been promised after the war.

Given such a legacy of suffering during and after the conflict it was not surprising that both Government and people preferred at first to look the other way when a second war threatened, leaving Hitler to build up his National Socialist Party and prepare for his attempt to take over Europe and as much of the world as possible. It is a terrible thought that had the British not eventually and at the last moment woken up to the realities of the situation, Hitler might well have realised his ambitions.

The First World War ended in 1918 but even as long after the armistice as the 1930s many newspapers ran series with titles like 'Tales from the Trenches' or 'Your Favourite War Stories'. We children read them avidly because they took us into an important part of our parents' lives, into a period which had shattered many of their dreams and brought them unexpected misery and hardship.

Doubtless the stories as written were exaggerated, even doctored to make a better story, but, based as they were on truth, they formed an important part of our education. The horror, so graphically described, helped us to understand the passion and determination behind the words, 'The war to end all wars.' The tales of courage and humour, though heightened by the odd touch of drama, gave us inspiring examples of comradeship in difficulty and courage in dreadful adversity, of loyalty to friends and to ideals. We

were horrified at the degradation to which man can fall yet marvelled at the glories of self-sacrifice to which he can rise. Tough mental food for youngsters, but parents of that generation were not as reluctant to talk to their children about their experiences and point the morals as we were to talk to ours, in the more self-conscious and guilt-ridden society which developed after 1945.

In pursuit of knowledge about our parents' past we persuaded them to tell of their experiences. From Mother we had in simple but graphic terms descriptions of how it felt to look up into the sky during a zeppelin raid and see the enormous cigar-shaped object hovering overhead, ready to drop its deathly load; of the difficulties of food rationing and the invention of margarine to replace the butter which could not be imported; and other similar privations.

Dad was a natural raconteur. Grouped round the fire of a winter's evening, we listened in attentive silence as he painted for us vivid word-pictures of his experiences as a soldier in France, Greece and the Middle East. Often his stories were very amusing despite their grim back-ground. He had joined up with three of his five brothers. Harry, badly wounded in the face, had a completely false jaw. Walter had been buried alive for three days. Yet they all insisted that there were times when they could extract laughter from their situation even in the trenches. Dad liked to give the impression that he had laughed and joked his way through the war; I can imagine that to be partly true, as he had an unconquerable spirit and an irrepressible sense of humour.

There was always a touch of bravado and 'derring-do' in his stories, (how else do you endure memories of horror?) but he also gave us a true picture of what it meant to fight in the trenches. The deprivations made the most vivid impression on us; the filth and mud, the total lack of privacy, and the longing for decent food.

In the trenches a tin of condensed milk was a much-longed-for luxury. He would describe vividly the red-letter days which brought a parcel from home. We pictured him, his friends standing round, cold, hungry, ankle-deep in mud, excitedly tearing at the wrappings to get at the contents. All would be speedily devoured on the spot, the condensed milk poured over the fruit to make a dish of exceptional richness and enjoyed by the whole group, each dipping in the tin in turn, more appreciated than any dessert ever consumed at the Ritz.

From the trenches he had gone to the Middle East, from the squelching mud of Europe to the hot, dry sand and the discomforts of the burning sun. After nearly four years away from home fighting a war which threatened the stability of the whole world, it was small wonder that he, along with many others, felt some good had to come out of it all.

They needed to believe that the 1914 to 1918 conflict had been the 'war to end all wars'. It is not difficult to understand why many people, perhaps already bereaved by war, viewed with dread the prospect of once more seeing members of the family enlisting in the armed services; and found it difficult, indeed almost refused, to face the facts of the situation developing in Europe in the 1930s.

Mother in particular had always wanted desperately to believe that never again would any members of her family be involved in fighting a war. It was sad to see during the months preceding the outbreak of hostilities in 1939, how she and other Pimlico mothers gradually steeled themselves for another ordeal. She dreaded the thought of Jack, her eldest, the son born while Dad was serving abroad in World War 1, being called up for service in a second global conflict. 'Oh no! Not Jack too!' That prospect was almost more than she could contemplate.

That which she most dreaded happened. She saw Jack join the Army and knew that eventually the rest of her family would be caught up in the war.

Once more, as with so many other mothers, her dreams were being shattered. Two major wars in one very short life-time must have been hard to bear. She was only forty-six when she died in 1941, as much a victim of war as if she had been killed by a direct hit.

## S i V i s P a c e m P a r a B e l l u m

Miss Mary Soden who taught us Latin at the Grey Coat Hospital made us learn lists of Latin 'tags', as she called them. 'Si vis pacem para bellum' was one of them. To a twelve-year-old the meaning of this tag was somewhat obscure but in a few short years events in Europe provided a more than adequate explanation.

Since 1918 the British Government had followed a policy of drastic reduction in the Armed Services on the assumption that all other countries in Europe would do the same. Although there were voices raised in protest, among them that of Winston Churchill, on the whole and perhaps understandably, people were more concerned with the spectre of unemployment and the problems they faced in building their family lives than in facing the prospect of once more fighting in Europe. Disarmament conferences held out hope to those sincerely seeking peace, but provided an opportunity for others to manipulate those very hopes and the aspirations of millions of ordinary people all over Europe.

For centuries the English Channel had been regarded as our main outer defence. In the last resort, if political and diplomatic activity should fail, the sea would keep Europe's troubles in Europe and these shores would remain inviolable. Since it was the job of Government to manage relationships in Europe, the general attitude seemed to be 'Let the politicians get on with it'. Hitler affirmed that he had no designs on England and the possibility of invasion was not at first taken seriously.

The harsh peace terms at the end of the First World War had been partly responsible for the disastrous economic situation in Germany; the ensuing

unemployment helped to create the climate for the rise to power of the Nazi Party. There were other social and political issues in Germany which helped plant seeds of discontent. The Nazi Party fed on this discontent and turned it into demands for territorial expansion, conquest and domination of Europe. The doctrine of Aryan supremacy grew with it, menacing the world, not only Europe, feeding on racial hatred and threatening to throw Europe into another Dark Age. The Nazi Party alone, led by Hitler, must be held responsible for all the evils which sprang from their aggressive doctrine.

When the Nazis gained the majority in the Reichstag in 1933 and Hitler became Chancellor, calling himself Der Fuhrer (The Leader), Germany left the League of Nations. This was a warning sign which largely went unheeded. The League, brainchild of President Wilson, had been called into being to provide a forum for the airing of grievances between nations. It had struggled from its inception to keep going; the defection of Germany heralded the beginning of the end of the dream and was a sure indication that Der Fuhrer had no intention of negotiating the demands he had already begun to make on other European nations.

Between 1933 and 1938 Germany took back, or bullied other nations into 'voluntarily' returning, territories taken from Germany after the First World War as reparations. In Germany itself the persecution of the Jews had been taking place openly since the rise to power of Hitler. His avowed intention of exterminating every Jew to be found in Germany in order to create a 'purified' Master Race appalled the world. In the late 1930s many countries including Great Britain took in Jewish refugees but no other action was taken or considered possible.

Mussolini, Fascist Dictator of Italy, had already launched his bid to dominate the Mediterranean in imitation of the ancient Roman Empire by invading North Africa. As Hitler mesmerised German youth with his dreams of



the Master Race, so Mussolini mesmerised Italian youth with the prospect of reviving an empire based on Rome. Only as events unfolded was the horrible truth of their intentions gradually revealed to the world. In 1936 Hitler and Mussolini met and, having agreed to carve up Europe and the Mediterranean countries between them, signed a pact of mutual help; they became the Axis Powers.

Even then the British Government was slow to accept the situation; but the menace behind the Axis was gradually being recognised by political journalists and commentators as well as by informed members of the general public and calls came to build up once more the Armed Forces. It took the annexation of Albania and Abyssinia by Mussolini, and the seizure of the Saarland, the Rhineland, Sudetenland and finally Czechoslovakia by Hitler for the danger to become a real emergency for Great Britain. I believe that the average man and woman in this country, even though reluctant to become involved in another war, recognised and accepted long before the Government did so, that the price of peace must always be constant vigilance and may even be war.

A change in attitude came about. Force would have to be met with force. Unprovoked acts of aggression and inhuman treatment of non-aryans and other groups and nations could not go unchallenged. As more Jewish refugees came into this country, so a crusading spirit pushed its way up from the depths of the national subconscious; this evil had to be dealt with. Together with the realisation that Great Britain was also at risk, the natural desire to defend one's own country against aggression joined forces with a genuine recognition that it was no longer possible to stand on the side-lines while evil deeds were done. A crusade had to be fought and won if European civilisation as we knew it was not to be lost for succeeding generations.

Cynics would say that the decision to confront the tremendously powerful German Army, Navy and Air Force was entirely a matter of self-

interest. I believe that although inarticulate in expressing the feeling, most people knew in their bones the enormous gravity of allowing Nazism to triumph. However much, as the war progressed, ideals may have shrunk, and the defence of these islands seemed at times to be our only objective, there was always initially and also finally in the hearts of most people the knowledge that something • greater than national interest was at stake.

1938 was a crucial year. The Saarland had been regained by Germany and remilitarised; and the Sudetenland, a part of Czechoslovakia with a large number of German inhabitants, was threatened with annexation and was finally taken over by Germany, Britain and France agreeing in an attempt to buy peace. At that time I was in Tours at the university and had first-hand experience of the bitterness between German and Czech students who fought at every opportunity. At the Munich Conference, Austria was incorporated into Germany. Having secured that part of his grand plan, Hitler declared that he had 'No more territorial demands'. Neville Chamberlain chose to believe him. Many did not and saw that Europe was on the way to a war more bloody than the last, if that were possible, which in the end was to prove even more devastating than any war had ever been, especially for civilians.

Neville Chamberlain came back from the Conference in 1938 waving a piece of paper which many strongly suspected would prove worthless but in which he foolishly put his trust, desperately wishing for peace. He announced that he had achieved 'Peace with honour'. For many, and I numbered myself among them, it was 'Peace with dishonour'; we considered we had lost our honour in allowing Hitler to take Czechoslovakia. This was in my banner-carrying days when I joined peaceful demonstrations, firmly believing that such demonstrations could eventually influence the Government. Standing in Whitehall with other students, holding a banner proclaiming that 'Chamberlain must go!' and chanting the same slogan, while others, in even more vivid language, urged 'Down the Drain with Chamberlain', I shared in

the great upsurge of feeling against the policy of appeasement which Chamberlain had espoused.

To be fair, it must be said that Chamberlain was haunted by memories of the first war and wanted above all to spare his country another conflict in so short a time. He himself summed up his attitude in the following words. 'In war there are no winners, but all are losers. It is my prime duty to strain every nerve to avoid a repetition of the Great War in Europe.' He was guilty not of cowardice but of poor judgement, of failing to understand that a bully can never be bought off; that there is a price to pay for peace and that price may well be war. 'If you wish for peace, prepare for war.' Or, in the words of William Shakespeare, 'The readiness is all'.

The growing power of the Nazis, even their territorial demands, were seen by some as a bulwark against the menacing power of communist U.S.S.R. There were even those well-placed in Society who, frightened of the menace of communism and fearful for their own fortunes and position, wished to make overtures to Nazi Germany and may even have made them in an indirect fashion. Newspaper articles revealed somewhat suspicious friendships and gatherings, always well-disguised as 'semi-diplomatic' or purely social occasions, of people who showed sympathy and even approval of the 'strong government' in Germany and were not slow to suggest that we might benefit from something similar in this country.

I was an avid reader of newspapers. My reading led me to the conclusion that a fairly influential if small section of the aristocracy in this country, ultra-right-wing politically, would have preferred to make a deal with Hitler, rather than risk the spread in Great Britain of socialist or generally liberal ideas. Fortunately they had few followers in the mass of the people, who had clear ideas of the kind of country they wished to live in and were prepared to fight for their way of life.

In the forefront of this group was Sir Oswald Mosley and his organisation

The British Union of Fascists, formed in 1932 and known as the Blackshirts from their uniform modelled on that of the Brownshirts of Nazi Germany. At its height the BUF had 20,000 members, a collection of right-wing activists and common thugs recruited from the worst element in society, who provoked anti-semitic violence, particularly in the East End of London. They made no secret of their admiration for all things fascist and nazi, emphasising in particular the orderliness, cleanliness and discipline that prevailed in Germany. Afraid of losing their position at the top of the economic and social pile in the event of a liberalising of British society, they were suspected by many of making covert overtures to Hitler, a close friend of the Mosleys, so that, in the event of the occupation of these islands, they would become leaders under the Nazi occupying power. Astonishingly, vestiges of that admiration for Hitler still remain, such was his magnetic hold on those who were his willing acolytes.

Recently, (November 1989) fifty years and a few weeks on from the outbreak of war, a special time for my generation, evidence of the demonic fascination Hitler had for some came in a B.B.C. programme. The guest of the week on Desert Island Discs was Lady Diana Mosley, widow of Sir Oswald Mosley. What an insensitive choice of guest for that particular time!

During the course of the interview, Lady Diana described Hitler as 'a charming and fascinating man' whose actions were much misunderstood. She also expressed her disbelief that millions of Jews had been exterminated under the Nazi regime, finding the number too large; as though exterminating a smaller number was somehow more excusable! Despite historical evidence to the contrary, she suggested that her husband had not been anti-Jewish. Yet in his ranting speeches he directly and indirectly vilified the Jewish race in true Nazi style. I heard him myself on more than one occasion. Refusal to admit this flies in the face of all the evidence and is a flagrant attempt to rewrite history!

Diana was one of the six wealthy and aristocratic Mitford sisters, daughters of Lord Redesdale, all six famous before the war for many extravagant gestures. They seemed to crave excitement and publicity.

In particular, Diana and Unity came under public criticism for their close friendship with Hitler who was said to have been present at the marriage of Diana and Sir Oswald Mosley somewhere in Europe. Unity visited Germany in the thirties and was introduced to Hitler with whom she became firm friends. She stayed in Germany even after war was declared but on 5th September 1939, unable to contemplate the defeat of her hero, she attempted suicide by shooting herself in the head. However, she did not die, the bullet lodging at the base of her skull. Hitler arranged for her to be taken to Switzerland where she was met by members of the family who brought her back to England. She died in 1948.

Sir Oswald and Lady Diana Mosley were both interned in 1940 as being persons who risked the security of the country. She maintained during her interview that this was unjust, even suggesting that Winston Churchill was opposed to their imprisonment although obliged to agree to it. Whatever the truth, they were released in 1943. They still had friends in high places!.

By the mass of the people they were regarded as traitors in thought and potential traitors in deed. They had made no secret before the war that they considered England would be better off under Hitler and they had obviously expected to run a British Government under Nazi domination once this country had been occupied.

And so, after the disastrous capitulation at Munich, preparations began for sending an army into Europe and for defending our islands. One of the first actions was the formation of the the Local Defence Volunteers, later renamed the Home Guard and immortalised in the affectionately satirical television series 'Dad's Army'. A skeleton Air Raid Precaution system had already been set up but needed to be expanded rapidly. Plans which already

existed in outline for evacuating children and other vulnerable people from London and other cities were finalised and evacuation rehearsals were held from London. The provision of gas masks seemed a vital necessity. The possibility of gas attacks was at first the most frightening aspect of the coming war; when those attacks did not materialise there was naturally tremendous relief.

We learned to black-out our windows at night and to organise some kind of shelter from air-raids. Houses with gardens were issued with Anderson shelters, named after the Minister who introduced them. They resembled small, metal tents which had to be half-buried in the ground to be at all effective. Much digging went on in suburban gardens to sink the shelters and cut steps down to the entrance. Inside there was seating accommodation along both sides, just enough room for about six people to sit opposite each other. Some people rigged up lights and heat and took pieces of carpet as extra comfort as well as blankets to keep warm. These shelters were useless against a direct hit but provided some protection against blast, flying glass and falling masonry.

In Pimlico we had only small back-yards so Anderson shelters were not issued to us. It would have been an almost impossible task for householders to dig up the yards, even if they had been big enough to take a shelter. So we were advised on converting the coal-cellars under the pavements in the street. Outside each house, set into the pavement, was a heavy, round, iron lid, often quite prettily decorated. When coal was delivered the lid was taken up and the coal shot down to the cellar below.

We had two cellars, leading one to the other. We gradually piled all the coal into the right-hand cellar and cleared the one immediately at the end of the basement passage to make our shelter. Everybody helped. First came the sweeping and wiping down of the walls and ceiling which Dad then whitewashed. Attempts were made to stop up mouse holes but this could not

be completely accomplished. Our fear that mice, or worse still rats, would join us in the cellar was as great as our fear of the bombs! It was not difficult to run electricity to give light.

Then, with some rugs on the floor, some chairs and a small table piled with books and magazines and anything else we could find with which to pass the time, and a pile of blankets in the corner, we had organised a shelter which we hoped would serve against blast. In the event, it proved to be good protection from all but a direct hit.

June and July 1939 were restless months. Every-one tried to behave as normally as possible although the very air was electric with rumour and speculation. Newspapers were snapped up as soon as they appeared on the stands and the news-boys were hoarse with shouting the headlines of the many editions which appeared throughout the day. Sales of newspapers soared!

Yet young couples still married, dreamed dreams, set up home, obstinately refusing to believe that their plans might not be fulfilled according to expectations. 'Don't worry, it may never happen' was a current catch-phrase. Nevertheless, this determination to live a normal life was set against the realisation that life was changing daily. The significance of normal events such as birthdays or other family celebrations became more sharply defined against a background of uncertainty. Would this be the last time we would see these particular relatives? Such words hung in the air, unspoken.

Reactions to fresh news items were sharp and immediate, the pace of life speeded up and decisions over which one might previously have pondered for a month or two were made promptly, with a sense of urgency. We were unusually conscious of the need to stay close to family and friends, to make the most of precious moments together. No longer would we be able to amble through life at a leisurely pace.

It is also true to say that we young people were curiously excited and expectant as well as frightened. It was an instinctive reaction to

challenge, an atavistic response to danger. The knowledge that we might well be called upon to defend our very homes against the invading army forced us to take a much closer interest in international negotiations than we might otherwise have done; the more particularly as we came to realise the great superiority in numbers and equipment enjoyed by the Nazi forces. It was a sober thought that the coming war might well be fought on British soil if we did not act decisively to prevent an invasion. However, it was plain that the invasion of Czechoslovakia and Poland by Nazi Germany were acts of aggression which could not be allowed to go unchallenged.

At first reluctantly, then with great determination, the nation prepared to defend itself and help restore Europe to civilisation.

Every sane individual, every responsible government is pacifist until attacked. In the management of the world's affairs all that is open to us is to choose the least of all the evils. Sometimes war is the least of those evils. The price paid for peace is heavy unless preparations have been made for strong defence. 'If you wish for peace, prepare for war'.



## Meeting the Challenge

Those families with holidays already planned set off defiantly for the sea-side, determined to have one last, happy family time together before 'it' happened. For the past year or two we had spent our holiday in lodgings at Brighton; Mother, Joyce, Maurice and I went as usual that August. We enjoyed ourselves as much as possible, but we were all four somewhat restless and Mother was anxious to get home to Dad. Although war had not yet been declared, talk among holiday-makers was of evacuation from London and the coastal towns, the possibility of bombing and invasion and what mere civilians could do to defend themselves. We fully expected the enemy to drop on us from the skies and Joyce and I discussed quite seriously what we would do if confronted by invaders. We even amused ourselves on the beach practising self-defence movements we had picked up from various sources, on the basis that any kind of preparation was better than none at all. We decided that our first job on returning home would be to look out as many 'weapons' as we could find and place them in easily accessible places ready for any emergency; such things as broomsticks, loose iron bars from the railings round the basement area, hammers and heavy tools and our school rounders' sticks.

How extraordinarily naive our attitude and our preparations must seem in this sophisticated and technological age! How can I explain that it was necessary for us to be doing something to help ourselves, however simple? Once arrived home from holiday Joyce and I carried out our plan. We looked

out our school rounders' sticks and placed them together with any other makeshift weapons we could find in a handy position by the front door and the basement door. Would we, could we have used them against the paratroop invaders who were expected in their thousands? Was this mere bravado, whistling in the dark, or perhaps a gesture of defiance necessary to our mental readiness for what lay ahead? Whatever prompted us, we gained comfort and satisfaction from our actions. No-one laughed at us.

We travelled home to London from Brighton by coach. Joyce and I sat on the back seat, Mother and Maurice in front of us. The thought that London would be the first and prime target for enemy bombers was at the back of all our minds. I suppose every-one on that coach was frightened of what lay ahead; although from the chatter and laughter and singing we might all have been off for a day's outing rather than returning to unknown danger.

As we struggled to cope with a mixture of fear and excitement, singing to keep up our spirits and those of our travelling companions, we had a glimpse of the degree of fortitude which would be needed in the months and years to come if we were to survive with dignity. We sang all the way until the coach turned into the Coach Station in Buckingham Palace Road, not far from home; popular songs, national songs and anti-nazi songs which by then were being sung and played on the radio. I remember that Joyce and I sang over and over again one which began, 'I'm going to hang out the washing on the Siegfried Line, Have you any dirty washing mother dear?' Somehow, the very silliness of the words reduced the thought of war to manageable proportions, suppressing fear with childish, defiant humour. Pouring scorn on the enemy became a regular morale-booster for the next few years. Ridicule has always been a potent psychological weapon; as David hurled verbal defiance at Goliath before beginning his successful attack and as Beowulf taunted Grendel.

A school-friend, Ida Greenwood, had a German mother. Ida, quite naturally, had a German pen-friend named Ursula whom she visited in Hamburg and who returned to London with Ida to stay for a few weeks in 1938. During her stay we had entertained her to tea in our home several times and got on well with her. She was a quiet, almost secretive girl, but seemed appreciative of our friendship. Was she a member of the Nazi Party? We never asked her, not wishing to risk spoiling her visit. It was very sad and strange to think of her a year later as the enemy. Ursula came into our thoughts from time to time during the next six years, especially when the Allies were bombing Hamburg.

After much persuasion, Mother agreed to leave the centre of London to stay with her sister Edie at Hayes in Middlesex until the situation became clearer. Dad stayed at home in Stanley Place to go to work as usual. There was great activity on the river at that time and he had much hard work to do. In a short while it was to be not only hard but dangerous, putting Dad once more in the front line. Maurice, much to his disgust, became an evacuee, and left with his school for an unknown destination which later turned out to be Shaftesbury in Dorset, a beautiful and picturesque small country town, though I doubt whether Maurice was able to be very appreciative of its beauty. Joyce and I went to Hayes with Mother. Aunt Edie was her elder sister, a very sweet, generous and hard-working person.

Much to the surprise of the rest of her family who were firmly based in Fulham and Chelsea, she had married a countryman, Uncle Tom, or 'Long Tom' as he was known in the family, because of his height and to distinguish him from the other Uncle Tom, Mother's half-brother. After the First World War, Middlesex was still largely country-side and Hayes was a small country town. It was still more or less in the country in 1939, although the London

suburbs were encroaching. Aunt Edie and Uncle Tom, with their three children, our cousins Violet, Peggy and Albert, lived in a quiet corner down a country lane, Yeading Lane, in a house which had a long back garden with fields beyond. We were welcomed by them lovingly and generously. We had always got on well with our cousins and although the house was overcrowded and sleeping arrangements were difficult, we all lived harmoniously together.

Uncle Tom was an agricultural worker, slow and deliberate in his ways, not much given to long conversations or discussions. Dad and he had very little in common, although they got on well. Dad, a confirmed 'townie', could never understand why Edie, a bright and chirpy girl who enjoyed the bright lights of London, should happily bury herself in the country with Tom. Nevertheless, Uncle Tom and Aunt Edie were very happy and we 'townies' learned a great deal from them.

I remember being impressed by the fact that much of their food was free. They grew most of their own vegetables in the long garden behind the house and what they did not grow Uncle Tom brought back from work. We ate stuffed and baked rabbit and jugged hare, the latter an unknown luxury in Pimlico, and had fruits from the garden and eggs from their chickens. They had very little money and hardly ever travelled away from Hayes; but they lived well and shared their happiness with all who visited. We had good reason to be grateful for their loving care.

I stayed there in the autumn of 1939 together with Mother and Joyce, until it was time for me to go home and collect together my books and clothes for my own evacuation with King's to Bristol. As we were the two eldest, cousin Vi and I frequently had charge of the younger children, Peggy and Albert. On the morning of Sunday September 3rd. 1939 Vi, Joyce and I together with Peggy and Albert set off for a long walk round the

fields and lanes. War was imminent and neither Mother nor Auntie Edie were very keen that we should go out but we were all restless and it seemed sensible to get the younger children out of the house to work off some energy. On that bright September morning, warmed by the mellow sunshine, we wandered round the hedgerows, picking and eating blackberries, making small posies of flowers to take back and watching the aircraft manoeuvre in the clear, blue skies. So we missed the historic broadcast made by the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, telling us that we were in a state of war with Germany.

However, we soon knew that something momentous had occurred. The still, autumn air was suddenly rent by the banshee scream and wail of the air-raid siren! I knew that we had to hurry the children home as soon as possible but first we had to take cover. By that time we all knew our air-raid drill and promptly put it into practice, the first of many hundreds, thousands of times. There was a small ditch by the side of the road into which we flung ourselves, lying face down, our arms wrapped round the backs of our heads. But not for long! Being more curious than afraid, we could not resist poking our heads up and looking round to see if anything was going on. There was some increased activity in the skies, Northolt R.A.F. station being near-by, but no sound of guns, no explosions. Once the initial reaction was over we felt rather silly lying there but I was unwilling for us to set off back to the house lest the raid should develop in earnest. Fortunately the 'All Clear' sounded after a short while. We leapt up and set off for home, quite jauntily. In a sense we had been 'blooded' and were quite pleased with our reaction to our first real air-raid warning.

We did not run home, that would have given the wrong impression, but we walked smartly! Mother was waiting anxiously outside the house by the garden gate; Aunt Edie was still in the kitchen, putting the finishing

touches to the roast. Mother said, 'Chamberlain has annouced that we are at war'. This was no surprise. There was even a strange feeling of relief. We trooped into the house and sat down to a succulent dinner of roast beef with all the trimmings and fresh garden vegetables, with apple pie and custard to follow.

That evening we listened to King George VIth broadcasting to the nation. As he struggled with the speech impediment which made public speaking torture for him, we became conscious of the strength of his character and his determination to lead from the front; the apparently weak and gentle man who had had kingship thrust upon him, possessed an inner strength and determination which was to be the inspiration of us all. He set the tone for that day and for the rest of the war.

'For the sake of all we hold dear, and of the world's order and peace, it is unthinkable that we should refuse to meet the challenge....With God's help we shall prevail'.

He expressed publicly what we all thought privately. In a few simple words he had set out the task for the nation. His very simplicity caught at our hearts and we were proud to follow his example of courage and determination throughout the whole war.

From that day onwards I wanted to leave Yeading Lane. It seemed wrong to be away from London in time of trouble, almost as though we were deserting. This compulsion to return was felt by most people who had evacuated themselves. I knew that I would be obliged to go to Bristol with King's at the beginning of October but throughout the war I never lost that urge to be in London, nomatter what was happening. It was not bravado, it was not merely loyalty to family and home; it was an instinctive need to be on my own territory when it was being attacked, a primitive urge to defend what was ours. So, despite Aunt Edie's very great kindness and generous

hospitality, I was eager to get away. Mother too wanted to get back to Stanley Place to be there to look after Dad when he came home from long stints on the river. And Joyce had a job to go to in London.

Eventually, when it became obvious that Hitler had no plans for invading England that year, people drifted back home to the cities, although the younger children who had been evacuated had to stay put. Maurice was one of them. He hated his period away from home. There was little for a twelve-year old 'townie' to do and in any case he felt out of things, too far removed from the action. Whatever was going on in London, he wanted to be part of it.

The call-up began. Older brothers and boy-friends aged twenty or over left home and reappeared on leave three months later in their respective uniforms to ecstatic reunion parties. Jack joined the Army. He had already left home, having married Fran at Christmas 1938, but his call-up into the army was still a blow for Mother.

Life changed in many ways, some of them unexpected. For example, the fashion houses, until then occupied only with the production of ever more glamorous and expensive garments for the ultra-rich, turned their talents to designing for the average woman. Having given careful thought to the kind of life women might be called upon to lead, they designed the 'siren suit'. This was a garment originally intended for pulling on over pyjamas in the middle of the night before running out to the air-raid shelter. We liked the name as much as we liked the garment, the double meaning of the word 'siren' not being lost on us! Under Mother's expert guidance Joyce and I spent some time that autumn making our siren suits, partly because they promised to be such practical garments, but chiefly to be in the forefront of fashion.

After the first few weeks of war, when we realised that nothing much was

happening that need interfere with our daily lives, a pattern of living returned which was almost normal. Real war seemed a long way off, further than it had in those first few days after September 3rd. when invasion was thought to be imminent. Time had been granted to us to prepare in earnest.



## E v a c u a t i o n

The mass evacuation of children from London and other big cities was one of the most poignant events of the war and one which had wide-ranging social consequences. In many cases for the first time in their lives, city children saw food being grown, animals being tended and had fields to play in; while country children learned about life in the streets and the bright lights, with all the attendant dangers and excitements. This interchange of experiences was to help in bringing about the social revolution which took place in this country once the war was over.

As I write this I am looking at two beautiful Royal Doulton ceramic pieces, produced to commemorate the 'Children of the Blitz' of fifty years ago. These two figures, sculpted by Adrian Hughes, each one hand-made and hand-painted, are evocative models of child evacuees, a boy and a girl. They look young and forlorn.

There she sits on the mantelpiece, a reminder of a tragic period in our lives, in her white ankle socks and black patent shoes, wearing her best coat and clutching her teddy-bear. Both she and her bear are tagged with labels giving name, home address, school; there was no destination as no-one knew where she would eventually live or with whom. She sits patiently on her suitcase containing a change of clothes, all she was allowed to take, waiting her turn. Over her shoulder is a small haversack containing sandwiches for the journey, her gas-mask case and the hideous gas-mask itself, hanging loose, ready for immediate use should the need arise. The expression on the delicate face framed in straight fair hair, neatly drawn

to one side with a slide, shows resignation and courage.

By her side stands her younger brother, labelled, suitcase and sandwich pack held firmly like a soldier at attention. But already his socks have slipped down round his ankles and the carefully groomed little boy shows signs of the inevitable dishevelment he will present at the end of his journey into the unknown.

These figures recall perfectly the drama and trauma suffered by the evacuees. The sculptor has captured with sympathetic accuracy the pathos of children torn from their parents in circumstances beyond their comprehension. Many of these children had never been away from home before, some had never left the streets of London. They were shepherded onto trains and finally disembarked at stations many miles from home, into the care of people they had never met, into an environment which must have seemed totally alien to them. The following is a quotation from the pamphlet presented by Royal Doulton with each piece.

'Hours before war was officially declared on September 3rd 1939, the evacuees were on the move. The Munich scare of '38 had served as a useful dress rehearsal. So the whole operation, planned months in advance, was quick, quiet and very efficient.

'But that didn't stop the evacuees, who were mostly children, from being bewildered and, in many cases, downright frightened. For one thing, they were not told their destination. Inevitably it would be far away from home. Assembled in school yards and church halls, some had been ill-prepared for the long journey ahead by unsuspecting mothers, who thought it was just another trial run.

'Labelled like luggage, clutching gas-mask and a change of clothes if they were lucky, they set off into the unknown, not knowing when they might return, their lives to be changed for ever by a war many knew little about.

'During those first dark days among strangers, the familiar voice of Uncle Mac ( radio Uncle) gave precious comfort. He was the friend and companion of any child who could get to a wireles wherever they were billeted - as he famously liked to remind them.'

Uncle Mac's 'Goodnight children, everywhere!' delivered in warm, confident tones, brought comfort and stability to many a child far from home in those troubled days.

More than anything else in my possession those pieces evoke the emotions of six turbulent years of war.

In 1938 I had been involved in a dry run of the evacuation of children from a school in Southwark. All prospective teachers on a four-year Government grant at university had to fit in teaching practice during university vacations to make up the number of practice days demanded. We were given some help in finding schools but much was left to our own initiative. I decided on Southwark as I could walk there from Pimlico or take the bus if I had the money.

I taught in the Girls' Department. During one of my short periods there during the academic year 1938-39 we had a practice evacuation. Children were instructed to arrive at school with one small case containing a change of clothes and a packet of sandwiches; they were to wear a label giving name and home address. The only other item they might have had was a gas-mask but they had not yet been distributed. At the appointed time, we lined up our classes according to instructions and set off in double crocodile for Waterloo Station nearby. The station staff were ready for us.

Although the exercise was treated by pupils and teachers alike as a welcome hour or two out of the class-room, it had a sombre aura and heralded a dark future. Yet as with so much that happened during the war, there were amusing situations and happenings to lighten the spirits. It was

unusual in those days for working-class mothers to have jobs except charring which they did at the beginning and end of the day, so they were free to 'take part' unofficially in our exercise. They accompanied us to the station, keeping up conversation with each other and from time to time shouting instructions and advice to their girls, punctuated by dire warnings about what would happen to them if they did not behave!

The occasion was too much for some who indulged in a good weep as though the exercise had become the real thing. Then, once arrived at Waterloo and being convinced that this was in fact merely an exercise, all the mothers went home except one. She way-layed the Headmistress with her complaint; she had been looking forward to a rest while her daughter was away 'practising' her evacuation and obviously felt cheated when she realised her daughter would be returning home that evening! Why couldn't the Headmistress keep her daughter a bit longer? and so on. It took all the tact at the disposal of the Headmistress to persuade the mother that she had to take her daughter home, since war had not actually been declared!

Who would have thought that the mother who had wept most and made most fuss at the prospect of losing her daughter for the 'duration', would be the one to upbraid the Headmistress for sending her girl home at the end of the day?

I was not there for the real evacuation later when the school walked in crocodile to Waterloo Station to entrain for a safer area 'somewhere in the country'. I am sure the proceedings then were more solemn and restrained.

On the whole it was the children of working-class families who formed the bulk of the official evacuees. Many Independent schools and Direct Grant schools in London made their own arrangements to evacuate the whole school, usually to another similar school in a less vulnerable area. Facilities were shared on the basis of half-days, one school occupying the

premises for the morning and the other in the afternoon. In a sense this was part-time education but as there was very little for the children to do apart from work, I suspect that standards did not suffer much, if at all. The host school made arrangements for the evacuees to be billeted with their own pupils. My sister Joyce had decided to leave school at sixteen so neither she nor I had any experience of this arrangement but it seems that it worked very well on the whole. Our school, the Grey Coat Hospital, went to Farnham in Surrey, where they seemed to have had as happy a time as it was possible to have during a war. I know that some of the young teachers took a house between them and enjoyed the experience immensely.

The children of wealthy families were often sent further afield, to the United States and to Canada. Some were sent to boarding schools there, others to stay with relatives. They went at the very beginning, before the war had developed its full ferocity in the Atlantic, but it was still a hazardous journey and some children lost their lives when their ship the City of Benares was torpedoed, although fortunately the vast majority arrived safely. Once there they had to stay; they could not return until the end of the war, nomatter how home-sick. Not only would it have been dangerous, the shipping could not be spared to carry them. So it was a big upheaval in their lives. Some found on their return that they could not relate to their contemporaries as they had not had the war experiences of those who had stayed behind.

There was much pressure put on King George and Queen Elizabeth to send Princess Elizabeth and Princess Margaret to Canada. This plan was stoutly rejected by every member of the Royal Family. They all stayed together in London, the King and Queen doing as much as possible to help in the war effort. They became much beloved of the British people for their courage and cheerfulness and their ability to empathise with the rest of the

population. They could all so easily have left for a safe haven. As it was they chose to share the danger with the people of London and were greatly respected and admired for that decision.

As I have said, Maurice was a very unwilling evacuee. Those who took in evacuees were prompted by the best of motives but often their experience of 'townies' was as meagre as their guests' experience of country life. Maurice went with his school, Archbishop Temple's, to Shaftesbury in Dorset. It is still a slow, somewhat sleepy country town, albeit quite delightful, but in 1939, before the advent of the motor car as a general means of transport, it was even slower and sleepier.

Maurice was billeted with two other boys with a very old lady who lived alone in a tiny cottage. The boys had to sleep three to a bed and were obliged to follow a very strict way of life. She was unused to boys and imposed impossible standards. Before entering the front door which gave straight onto the living-room they were obliged to remove their shoes in the street, even when the snow lay thick on the ground. Any tiny trace of dust or dirt had to be cleared up immediately. They had to help with the house-work, which was to be expected, but had no means of recreation in that tiny cottage during the long winter evenings.

This particular billet was unfortunate as the hostess, anxious to do her duty and take some children, was singularly ill-equipped to do so. Such mis-matches were eventually sorted out but Maurice made up his mind to return home. He not only missed his family and the freedom to which he had been accustomed, he missed the vigour of life in Pimlico. He returned home in July 1940. Compulsory schooling finished at the age of fourteen but he virtually left school at the age of thirteen as there were no schools open in Pimlico for him to attend once returned, apart from a few desultory classes for returned evacuees. By the time he was fourteen he had matured

into a young adult, having graduated to being a War Service Scout and a seasoned voluntary worker in Civil Defence as a fire-watcher.

After our return from Aunt Edie's at the end of September 1939 life resumed something of its normal pattern. We lived from day to day, adapting to the changes in life-style which became necessary. Joyce was already working as a clerk in the Gas Light and Coke Company Show Rooms in Edgware Road and I had my own work to do.

It was different for Mother. She had to watch all that she had worked for being gradually dismantled. Her family was the centre of her life. Instead of being able to wean us gradually from the family fold, watching us carve out careers, or marry, or both, all she had to look forward to was the gradual break-up of family, if only temporarily. She knew only too well the fragmentation of life that war could bring and she must have despaired in her heart, while remaining as calm and practical as ever, going about her household tasks with purpose, organising us all and supplying our needs.

Like other young people of my age, I was anxious to join up and get on with what had to be done. Early in September I presented myself at the recruiting office, the first of many attempts to get myself into one of the armed services. It was not a great surprise when I was turned down but I was still intensely disappointed. We had already been told at King's of the Government's insistence that women students in our category had to finish the degree course. I had hoped I might catch a recruiting officer off guard and achieve my goal but I had no luck. At various times during the university vacations when I returned home, I tried to enlist but was always refused. In September 1939, along with hundreds of other young people, I had to content myself with helping to fill sand-bags to stack round the doors of public buildings as protection against blast damage.

At the beginning of October, having sorted out my grants and packed my

books and clothes, I entrained for Bristol with some reluctance. I was very unwilling to leave London and the family.



## U n e a s y   B e d f e l l o w s

After London, Bristol seemed extremely provincial. Many of us felt that we were once more back in the school-room, our lives were so hedged around with rules and regulations. Perhaps one of the chief characteristics of the University of London was the freedom it allowed its students, many of whom lived at home or in lodgings. The very geography of London, the wide area over which the colleges were scattered, the fact that it was the capital city , would have made it impossible for university authorities to impose even the mild disciplinary measures exercised, for example, by the proctors at Oxford and Cambridge. Total individual freedom, which now all students take for granted, was not 'de rigueur' in British universities. However, it was normal in continental universities and I had experienced that kind of freedom at L'Universite de Tours, as Edwin had at Grenoble. The desire for individual freedom and responsibility for myself was certainly a factor for me in choosing to apply to King's College in the first place.

In London, the only regulations we were obliged to observe were those pertaining to our courses; we had to make the requisite number of attendances at lectures and produce work for our tutors on time. How we organised our lives was entirely our own affair. Students who lived in hostels had to observe the rules set by the Warden but these were reasonable ones necessary for communal living. Friends who lived in the women's hostels in London could get passes out till midnight without difficulty. In Bristol, the school-room atmosphere of the lectures and the general attitude to students, particularly to women students, therefore seemed repressive and was quite unacceptable.

Those of us who had been allocated rooms in the Bristol University hostel for women, Manor Hall, had a nasty shock. The rules governing our daily lives were more restrictive than many of us had experienced before; even those who had been at boarding school resented the authoritarian regime. My parents, who had been strict in many ways, had given me more freedom at the age of sixteen! Signing-in time was 10.30 p.m. and late leave was not automatically granted. Men were not allowed to be guests in our study-rooms, even with another student as chaperone, after tea-time. However, male members of the Student Christian Movement were allowed to attend group meetings in Hall during the evenings. That first term in Bristol there were a good many unexpected 'conversions' and the numbers of King's and Westminster men in S.C.M. swelled amazingly for a short while!

Interviews with the Warden on the matter of Hall regulations were difficult and unproductive and produced some astonishing ideas. To be told, confidentially but firmly that 'At six o'clock (or was it seven?) the passions rise' and that it was better for a young woman not to be alone with a man after that time, was not a statement that could be treated with much seriousness. It is true that women were not 'of age' in those days until the magic twenty-one years had been reached; but I think we can be forgiven for thinking that in travelling geographically from London to Bristol we had also travelled back in time to the Victorian era, unable to move without a chaperone! No doubt the Warden was a very good woman, highly-principled, with the welfare of her students at heart, but she was certainly out of tune with the enlightened approach to freedom and discipline to which we had grown accustomed at King's.

King's College itself was situated in the heart of London, close to theatres, cinemas and concert halls. Students were often offered cheap seats to places of entertainment; for example Edwin and I saw the film *Pygmalion*, starring Wendy Hiller, at the Stoll Cinema for 6d each instead

of 1/6d each (sixpence, and one shilling and sixpence in old money). It had even been possible to get into a performance at Covent Garden at reduced price just minutes before curtain-up when unsold seats were sometimes sold off cheaply. We were accustomed to a good cultural life. If at Bristol we had stuck virtuously to the regulations of Manor Hall, we would have been hard put to it to avail ourselves of the many cultural opportunities that presented themselves to us during that first year of evacuation.

Apart from King's College, other organisations and groups had evacuated from London to Bristol, among them some departments of the B.B.C. The Colston Hall became the home of the B.B.C. Symphony Orchestra and many students of King's became regular patrons of the cheapest seats. To scurry back to hostel like naughty children after such an experience, when more fortunate friends not billeted in hostel were still gathered round a table in a pub or cafe, happily rounding off the evening, was little short of humiliating.

Dances in the Victoria Rooms, the Student Union building at the bottom of Whiteladies' Road, were a particularly sore point. There was a dance with a live band every Saturday evening, either a 'formal' when evening dress was worn, or an 'informal' when what were known as afternoon or cocktail dresses were worn by the girls and lounge suits by the men. These dances were the social high-lights of the university. It was quite impossible in Manor Hall to be given a late pass every Saturday; all too frequently the entire evening was spoilt not only for us but for our escorts as we rushed away before the last dance, anxious not to be 'booked'. Hurried glances at the clock and muttered apologies for having to rush back, made King's girls lodging in Manor Hall the cinderellas of the university.

No time was lost in requesting greater freedom to come and go as we wished until midnight, but the Warden found herself quite unable to grant

such a request. In her view, any young woman who wished to be out till midnight was 'fast'. Moreover, in granting such a privilege to King's students she would have been obliged to liberalise the lives of Bristol students and this she had no intention of doing.

Looking back, I can still sympathise with our sense of outrage but I also have some sympathy for the Warden, faced as she was with a bunch of assertive, liberated young women from London bent on changing attitudes and determined to live their lives as they chose, willing to accept only those regulations they considered reasonable. Doubtless she thought she had our welfare at heart but she was certainly out-of-tune with the emergent, self-confident young women who had battled their way into King's College and were determined to get the best out of it.

At the end of my fresher year in London I had been elected, somewhat unexpectedly, Secretary of the Faculty of Arts Society. As such, I was the only King's student in Manor Hall with any kind of representative position. I was often asked to carry our complaints and suggestions to the Warden. This did not endear me to her and when the opportunity presented itself in the following June, she almost ruined my university career in what was no more than an act of petty revenge, although doubtless she considered she was acting on the highest principles.

There were many discussions with her, usually heated, during that first term, but she could not be persuaded to change her attitude. We felt we had the moral support of our own teaching staff, but as they too were guests of the university we demurred from involving them. Finding a way round these petty restrictions became something of a game but it was not a happy situation and the great majority of women students from King's determined to find lodgings for themselves for the next session. We tried to feel grateful for the hospitality offered to us as evacuees but refused to surrender our personal freedom in return.

In addition to the difficulties in hostel, we had worries concerning the course we were being asked to follow in the French School. We thought the staff less well qualified and considered that the course offered was not as rigorous academically as the one to which we had been accustomed at King's; there were general fears that the final degree awarded might not be as well-regarded as the one we would have gained had King's stayed in London.

At the very beginning of term there was some justification for this fear. However, soon after voicing our fears, we were reassured to be told that we would be awarded a London degree and that King's students would be taught by King's staff. In particular, Professor Saurat, obliged to stay in London as adviser to General de Gaulle and the French Government in exile, promised to make the journey to Bristol at least once a week to lecture to the French School.

Despite all the restrictions on our freedom, we developed an exciting social life, living closer together than we had in London. Although in many ways that first year of evacuation to Bristol was lively and memorable, particularly for me as it was during that time that I got to know Edwin so well, I felt that King's College and Bristol University were uneasy bedfellows, even though officially the whole exercise was recorded as a success. We were not the most popular evacuees. But we liked to think that we took with us some new ideas and helped to liberalise a university which to us was unacceptably provincial in attitude.

## T h e P h o n e y W a r

After the formal declaration of war on September 3rd and the false air-raid alert which immediately followed it, civilian life returned to normal. From time to time in London a lone, momentarily unidentified air-plane would alert the defence system and the sirens would be sounded, to be followed fairly quickly by the 'All-clear'. These occasions were useful practice runs for both the Air Raid Wardens and the general population.

People in the streets made their way good-humouredly to the nearest shelter, directed by wardens who appeared smartly on the scene. Office and shop workers took an unexpected break down-stairs in the basement or in the re-inforced ground-floor of their building. While house-wives, caught in the middle of their daily chores, made their way to the cellar or the Anderson shelter, carrying with them some small domestic task such as the preparation of vegetables in order not to waste the time. This proved to be a useful habit when air-raids took place day and night. Carrying out a practical task was a soothing occupation and helped while away the hours.

Meanwhile, behind this apparent calm, furious activity was going on to recruit and train an Army, a Navy and an Air Force of sufficient strength to match our adversaries. The wide-ranging disarmament programme carried out since the First World War with the blessing of the League of Nations, had left the British Isles almost defenceless against the might of the Axis. Germany and Italy saw Britain's disarmament not as proof of a policy designed to promote peace but as a sign of weakness and evidence that England would be unwilling to fight for any cause, even her own liberty.

Some years previously the Oxford University Union had held a debate on

the proposition 'That this house would not fight for King and Country': the motion was carried. From being reported in a national newspaper, this item of news was siezed on by the world press and widely publicised. Many foreign peoples and some governments concluded that the youth of England had gone soft and could not be counted on to defend their own country.

In university debating societies such as the Oxford Union members voted according to the quality of the argument and not according to their personal conviction. This was not always generally understood and the voting was misinterpreted. A comparatively run-of-the-mill debate in a students' union was regarded by many internationally as a reliable guide to current attitudes in this country. The fact that it was the Oxford Union, famous for the quality of its debates and the breeding-ground of so many pre-war politicians and men of power, carried considerable weight with international opinion. The debate was afforded too much credence.

Britain's attitude of appeasement and obvious desire to avoid war if at all possible, culminating in the compromise of Munich, compounded the view that this country would not resist for long. It took the Battle of Britain to convince Hitler that the British would indeed fight, both to defend themselves and to uphold the principle of freedom.

As the weeks wore on it became more and more obvious to the civilian population that this country was ill-prepared for war. So too were other European countries, although France thought itself impregnable with its Maginot Line. The British Expeditionary Force was sent to Europe to demonstrate British determination to resist and to give fighting support to France and the smaller European nations. In comparison with the mighty German army, the gallant B.E.F., for such it proved to be, was small, too small for the enormous task it was left to undertake.

The first young men called by age-group from civilian life to the Armed Services were in many cases astonished to find that there were no weapons

for them to use in training; some were even obliged to share a rifle when learning to shoot. Then again, not all volunteers were taken immediately into the Services; they were often told to go home and await their call-up. Camps and training grounds had to be set up, armaments manufactured and uniforms made, before the Army, Navy and Air Force could be recruited to the strength needed to face the might of the Axis abroad.

The first arrangements for the defence of the civilian population could only be described as amateur. Right up until the very day war was declared it seemed to the people of London that no serious preparations for defence were being made. The Government relied on the will of civilians to resist invasion with the absolute minimum of weapons and materials and almost no training. Only the voluntary organisations such as the British Red Cross and St. John's Ambulance Brigade and the Women's Voluntary Services had any practical help to offer the civilian population. An Air Raid Precautions network had been set up some time before by local authorities but with only a skeleton staff which had yet to be fleshed out. The Local Defence Volunteers were hurriedly recruited from men unable to join the Services proper for one reason or another but for months they were a token defence only and were pitifully ill-equipped. The Girl Guide and Boy Scout Movements were prominent in offering their services and eventually played a vital part in the war effort. Young people little more than children showed themselves willing to shoulder responsibilities normally only undertaken by adults of maturity and experience.

Ordinary people felt very exposed, especially in London and in the vulnerable south coast towns. Small wonder that in Pimlico people gave serious thought to what they would do themselves if the enemy should drop from the skies; and that through-out the country every little village and urban community had its own local arrangements for dealing with invaders, determined to defend life and homes to the last. Every-one knew that the



chances of defeating an invasion were slim, yet the spirit to resist was strong. If the Government regarded it all as a giant bluff to gain precious time, the people did not. Bluff or not, it was kept up and it worked!

The Local Defence Volunteers or L.D.Vs., (later renamed the Home Guard), the subject of many good-natured jokes but also very much respected, had no weapons at all in many cases. It was not difficult to detect from the occasional newspaper picture of an L.D.V. unit in training 'somewhere in England' that the 'weapons' they were using looked remarkably like broomsticks and garden implements! Even blurring the picture for security reasons could not hide that fact. Yet the invasion, expected immediately after the declaration of war on September 3rd., did not come. It is said that Hitler took action only after consultations with an astrologer. How fortunate for us all that the astrologer got it wrong! A 'Pitchfork Army' was all we had to ward off attack!

Noel Coward wrote a satirical song about the difficulty of finding weapons for local defence, entitled:

Could You Please Oblige Us With A Bren Gun.'

Colonel Montmorency who

Was in Calcutta in '92

Emerged from his retirement for the war.

He wasn't very pleased with what he heard and what he saw.

Whatever he felt

He tightened his belt

And organised a corps,--poor

Colonel Montmorency thought,

Considering all the wars he'd fought,

The Home Guard was his job to do or die;

But after days and weeks and years,

Bravely drying his manly tears  
He wrote the following letter to the Minister of Supply.

Could you please oblige us with a Bren gun?

Or failing that a hand-grenade would do.

We've got some ammunition

In a rather damp condition

And Major Huss

Has an Arquebus

That was used at Waterloo.

With the Vicar's stirrup pump, a pitchfork and a spade

It's rather hard to guard an aerodrome;

So if you can't oblige us with a Bren gun,

The Home Guard might as well go home!

There were several more verses in the same humorous but bitter vein. Delivered in his dry, inimitable style on the radio, this not only amused and to some extent reassured people, but must have helped to sting the War Office into action.

Noel Coward himself wrote of this song that it was 'too topical to outlive for long its immediate moment. I think, however, that it has some funny lines in it and as a period piece is not without merit'.

This general feeling that we were ill-prepared was echoed when in June 1940 Edwin was called-up and, according to instructions, presented himself at Bodmin barracks for Initial Training. Writing to me on day 2 of army life: 'I have hardly been here twenty-four hours and I have all my kit and am sitting writing this in battledress. Fancy, uniform first day!-- What is the British Army coming to!' Soldiers expected to have to 'make do' for some days before being properly equipped.

As part of this general effort to repel attack there were men and women of the Royal Observer Corps raking the seas and the skies with keen eyes for enemy ships and planes. They worked throughout the war and were an invaluable aid to all three services, especially those units engaged in coastal defence. Arrangements had been made for lighting bonfires around the coast should an invasion fleet be spotted and church bells, officially silenced for the duration, were to be rung throughout the land. These were the signals to every-one, man, woman and child to take up arms or take cover, as the circumstances dictated. When peace in Europe was finally declared, the sound of the church bells ringing out from every church tower was the most joyous noise of all.

All the small things of life had to be organised in such a way as to foil an invading army or foreign spy. All road signs and indications of location were removed. Boards giving the names of towns and villages were removed, road junctions were left without directions, even local signs indicating remote hamlets were taken down, lest a parachute group, dropping in a quiet country area, should be able to find a target or locate themselves easily. This made it very difficult to get about the country. Even travelling by train was difficult, as name-boards were removed from stations. In order to know where to alight, it was necessary to study one's train route before setting off and count the stations, or hope to be sitting next to a traveller familiar with the route. Life sometimes took on the aspect of a Scout Wide Game, except that this time it was real.

Finding one's way around in an unfamiliar area was difficult. No-one was to give information to a any stranger, however innocent-looking; such a person might be an enemy agent. Children in particular were warned against talking to people they did not know and against giving information, however simple. Pictures in the newspapers with-held location from their captions; most pictures carried the legend 'Somewhere in England'. This considerable

inconvenience in daily living helped to make the population at large more aware of the realities of war although some people, living far from the main target areas, found it difficult to understand the reason for such detailed precautions which caused them difficulty.

We were warned against discussing too freely anything we had seen which might indicate the setting-up of defences. Catch phrases were used to emphasise the message and to alert a hitherto unsuspecting people to the dangers inherent in normal conversation, particularly in pub, club or on public transport. Once, people talked about the day's work. Now, they had to remember that discussion about an apparently harmless civilian job, for example with a local service industry, might give useful information to an eager, listening ear. Mention of troop movements in general was taboo; even the whereabouts and movements of family members were not to be broadcast unnecessarily.

'Remember, WALLS HAVE EARS!'

'Be like Dad. KEEP MUM!'

'Careless Talk COSTS LIVES!'

There were many others. Although people grumbled, they cooperated.

In Europe the rapid progress of the Nazi army and the fall of country after country had been considerably helped by the existence of traitors in those countries. They came to be referred to in this country as Fifth Columnists or Quislings. (Quisling was the name of an infamous Norwegian traitor who betrayed his country and was responsible for the deaths of many of his fellow-countrymen). Any such potential traitors in this country failed miserably in their mission and decided to keep very quiet. Occasionally one might detect in a report of some minor gathering an attempt to foster discontent, aimed at sabotaging the war effort, but any attempts to do this proved unsuccessful. The obvious suspects were previous members of the British Union of Fascists; not the rank and file who for the

most part were ill-educated thugs, recruited in the 'thirties from the worst elements of our society, but the leaders, the brains behind the organisation. They were closely watched and some were imprisoned 'for the duration'. Our worst traitor, William Joyce, made sure he was in Germany at the outbreak of war and spent the next six years broadcasting to England under the name of Lord Haw-Haw. He was later captured and executed.

On what came to be known as the Home Front, households had to perfect their arrangements for blacking-out each room so that no chink of light could escape into the dark of the night and act as a marker for the enemy above. Sealing the windows completely was difficult. Many people solved the problem by nailing the curtains to the edge of the window-frame and pinning them down the centre when drawn. Inelegant, but adequate to meet the demands of local Air Raid Wardens who took their work very seriously. The indignant roar, 'Put that light out!' prompted one to run to the window and check immediately that no light was escaping.

Yards and yards of black material were put on sale in the shops. This cloth was very strong and therefore expensive; buying the black-out became a first charge on every family budget. When the lights went up and those curtains finally came down six years later, some people threw them away joyfully but others, remembering how much they had cost in hard cash, kept them until another use presented itself, when they were used until the material finally wore out. I made mine into school shoe-bags and toy-bags for Tim and Bob and thus got full value for money!

There was an awareness of vulnerability but also considerable optimism regarding the future. The war had not been brought immediately to the shores of England as had been expected, although it was generally felt that the attempt to invade had merely been postponed. But it was still impossible to envisage these islands being occupied by the enemy. In that refusal to accept the possibility of defeat lay the seeds of ultimate

success in the war. Never at any time, even when the country was most vulnerable, was the possibility of defeat entertained.

There began a period of unnatural peace when a veil of unreality hung over the country. It was almost as though one was watching a film where the action was so slow to develop that one could not believe there would ever be a denouement. Even in Europe there seemed to be little taking place, although the populations of the occupied countries would hardly have described the beginning of their long ordeal in such a way. For some reason the enemy missed the opportunity of invading Great Britain in the autumn of 1939, the ideal time from their point of view. Winter set in. The country was safe until the spring.

This period was referred to in newspapers at the time as the 'phoney war', the war which started fiercely in Europe then seemed to come to a halt. There were calls from certain quarters to step up our forces in Europe and force the issue. Fortunately for the whole country those calls were ignored. The time of the 'phoney war', from September 1939 to May 1940 was well used in preparing people and resources for total conflict.

## Waiting

The 'Phoney War' was not well named. There was little fighting during that time but the preparations were real enough and urgent. It was as though both sides were playing a waiting game, if such an analogy can be permitted; two adversaries with the English Channel between them, sharpening weapons, building defences, watching, waiting.

From cinema news-reels, which played a vital role in disseminating information to the general public, we gained a vivid impression of the arms build-up and the training of men and women in the various Services, both civilian and military. The race was on to get ready for the expected spring onslaught and the co-operation of the entire nation was necessary.

More and more women went to work outside the home for the first time. Some were taken into factories to produce both daily necessities and the tools of war. Others were employed in shops and offices to replace men called up. Women had worked outside the home during the First World War but most had afterwards gone back to their domestic duties, except for single women who were permitted to earn a living in the lower ranks of trade, industry or commerce. For the few would-be professional women the choice was fairly rigid; marriage or a career. Now, in 1939, women were needed in great numbers to perform many tasks which had hitherto been considered suitable only for men. For example, the number of women motor-vehicle drivers increased rapidly and by the end of the war the sight of young women in their early twenties handling army and civilian trucks and lorries with easy expertise was so common as not to excite comment.

During those months of waiting people carried on with their usual activities. Clubs and organisations held their routine meetings. Theatres,

cinemas, dance-halls and restaurants, blacked out like other buildings, remained open for business and were packed to the doors. There were no street lights. We became accustomed to walking through the city in complete darkness, seeing new shapes in familiar buildings silhouetted against the dark sky, enjoying the silent streets, now empty of traffic. A kind of primeval peace settled on town and country-side on those blacked-out nights. When the skies were clear of cloud, the road-ways were vividly illuminated by moonlight while the buildings either side shrank back into the shadows; stars shone and twinkled against the blue-black sky as though on a christmas card. The north star and the evening star became familiar friends while other constellations, hitherto known to 'townies' only through diagrams in books, completed the pattern of earth and sky which then became a whole.

The vault of heaven came closer. It was easier to understand the concept of a vast, magnificent universe such as astronomers had been describing to us for generations. Even so, the sky was still a mystery; that space itself might one day be navigable was still an unformed thought except in the minds of astronomers. The beautiful sky revealed to us by the absence of artificial light was later to be criss-crossed with the moving beams of search-lights in their hunt for enemy planes; those beautiful, clear nights became known as 'bombers' nights' and the silvery moon hanging by invisible threads became a 'bombers' moon'.

My year was divided between Bristol and London. The university term was a bare eight weeks and between terms students were expected to study at home. Indeed, most of our general reading was done in the vacations. The term 'reading for a degree' was an apt description of how we spent much of our time. We read widely, in our chosen discipline and in related ones. Building a personal library was expected of all students, but particularly of those in the various Departments of the Faculty of Arts. That year, as I



had done on previous vacations, I spent most of my time reading, chiefly the Symbolistes, the nineteenth century French poets whose works I found so intriguing. It was escapist literature of a particular kind, where one could chase the elusive 'beau ideal'.

The academic year 1939-1940 was exciting. We worked hard but played hard as well, watching the war but hoping that the reprieve might last just a little longer. One of my duties as Secretary of the Faculty of Arts Society was to organise a programme of social events and cultural pursuits. There were plenty of concerts and plays in Bristol that year but the most popular proved to be the B.B.C. Symphony Concerts in the old Colston Hall. We went in a large group, sometimes filling a block of the cheaper seats. To go regularly to a symphony concert was a great experience in itself, something I had never been able to do previously, and to have been present on great occasions, such as an early performance of William Walton's first symphony was a tremendous thrill.

We continued with our sporting activities, sharing facilities with Bristol students. I had been obliged to give up any idea of continuing to row, as most other members of King's Rowing Club had been evacuated elsewhere and there were no facilities available for women rowers in Bristol. Instead I played netball on Saturday mornings and the occasional game of mixed hockey, a somewhat boisterous game in which we girls gave as good as we received. I had never played hockey before but I had plenty of energy and a good eye; as I could also hit hard I was included in the mixed team which some of the really skilful players declined to join. On Saturday afternoons I watched Edwin play rugby, while the evenings were reserved for dances at the Vic. Rooms.

I had met Edwin during our first year at King's but did not know him particularly well. During that first pre-war year I had friends in several Faculties, Arts, Engineering and Theology; my escorts ranged from the very

wealthy who had their own sports cars to the totally impoverished, from the serious to the frivolous! They were all fun. Edwin was the tall chap in the French School who came in late to lectures and disturbed every-body trying to fold his long length into the small space left for him on the bench! I was trying to be a serious student and he infuriated me! A baleful glare cast in his direction was the only contact I had with him for many weeks. Prof. Saurat, our dapper little Professor, was very tolerant of this regular late-comer. Hands clasped behind his back while he rocked gently to and fro on his small, beautifully shod feet, he would nod his head and wiggle his tiny tooth-brush moustache in recognition of the late arrival and carry on unperturbed with his lecture. There were many Westminster students at King's and I knew others far better than I knew Edwin, during our first year, sharing the occasional tutorial with them but never with him.

The day after our arrival in Bristol in October we had all met together quite by chance in Woolworths, where we were buying teapots, cups and saucers and other small domestic items for our rooms, necessary if the institutionalised atmosphere of Hall was to be softened by homely touches and customs such as tea by the fire. From that time onwards we formed a group, John Hodgson, Edwin, Ron Clarke, Noel St. John Williams and myself, with others on the fringe. I remained a member of other groups, notably the officers of the Arts Faculty Society with whom I spent a great deal of time, and had other friends in the Engineering Faculty, but gradually over the year spent more and more time with Edwin and his friends, the Ws.

All Westminster men, fiercely loyal to their College and a formidable bunch, were known as Ws. They lived in a delightful house ~~located~~ which the College had taken over as a hostel at Westbury-on-Trym, on the outskirts of Bristol. Being located so far out ought to have put a curb on their activities but there were always Westminster men in the thick of things.

They managed their divided loyalties very well. Without in any way diminishing their allegiance to Westminster, they were full members of King's societies and clubs. During Edwin's fresher year in London he had played rugby not only for his own college, Westminster, but was given a place in the London University team following the first trials. He was immensely proud of playing in his purple shirt for London University; when there was no University team match he wore the yellow and green of Westminster College. Rugby was always very important to him. Later, during his army days, he would write to me to describe matches he had played and on occasion made nostalgic reference to games he remembered playing in his purple shirt.

It became our practice every morning between lectures to congregate in a cafe across the road from the university. We paid 3d (three old pence) for a cup of excellent coffee, roasted and ground in the shop, plus an extra penny for cream if we could afford it. Morning coffee was an important element in our social life; we would go without many things in order to economise but not our morning coffee. Our cafe, the Berkeley, employed a Trio consisting of a piano and two violins, which played regularly during morning coffee and afternoon tea. There was another cafe on the opposite side of the road, in a department store called Bright's, where there was also a small orchestra. I sampled both places but quickly settled for the more bohemian atmosphere of the Berkeley. Bright's was the meeting place for the city's matrons and the chic set, to which I certainly did not belong!

The manager of the Berkeley was very understanding and indulgent towards students. For the price of one cup of coffee each we were allowed to occupy a large table near the orchestra for a full hour. During that time we laughed and joked, flirted and made dates, discussed our work, had vigorous discussions on the war, its justification and its progress, launched into

spirited political arguments and generally set the world to rights.

We lived with a sense of urgency. Men in the Arts Faculty waiting for call-up did no academic work beyond the bare minimum and wasted no time that could be pleasurably spent. It was rather different for women students and men in the Engineering and Science faculties who were obliged to complete the degree course and consequently treated their work more seriously. Somehow we had to squeeze in academic work between social sessions in the Berkeley with those soon to be off to war. Those sessions were the high spot of the day.

Anxious as we were about the future, we were all very happy. Intellectual activity excited us like a drug. At King's we had some of the most distinguished professors of the time, whose lectures and tutorials stimulated us to make intellectual excursions way beyond the parameters of our own specialisms. Ron Clarke was in the Faculty of Science while John Hodgson and Noel were in the Faculty of Arts with Edwin and me, but in different departments. Because of this, our 'Search for Truth', as we pompously described our discussions, led us into unexpected by-ways, wandering all over the field of learning.

King's was an Anglican college, Westminster was Methodist, so religion and its relevance to politics was a natural topic. There was also a strong Socialist Society, marxist in emphasis, of which the leading lights were two good friends of mine in the Faculty, Joyce Casson, my personal friend, and her boy-friend Bertie Crouch, who was President of the Faculty while I was Secretary. They would sometimes join us at our table. On those occasions argument flowed backwards and forwards with even greater vigour as we each defended our positions.

Joyce and Bertie followed the marxist line on the war, which meant that for the period when the U.S.S.R. was in alliance with Germany, their attitude to the war was somewhat equivocal. It changed dramatically when

Germany invaded the U.S.S.R. Then the cry became 'Second Front Now!'. Joyce and Bertie did their best to convert me from Christianity to Marxism but without success. They took me to many Socialist Society meetings addressed by the Revd. Mervyn Stockwood, then a young priest in Bristol and a dynamic speaker with a large following, particularly among women students. I suppose they hoped the clerical collar would influence me! He failed to convert me to his brand of socialism.

The marxists' well-argued defence of their own philosophy was always impressive. We were forced to admire the way in which the communist cells trained their members in debating skills; their degree of preparedness was astonishing. They had their arguments at their tongue-tips, ready with a detailed counter to every point put to them. We were hard put to it to hold our own, despite our education in christian doctrine and philosophy.

We were all seeking an earthly Utopia, hoping to get there by different routes. Once Hitler had been defeated the chance would come to create a new, more equal and democratic society and we were all putting in our bids for the best way to organise our new world.

[Even as I write this, President Gorbachev of the U.S.S.R. is engaged in dismantling the communist structure there, Poland has cast off its communist regime as has Czechoslovakia and Hungary, and just today Romania has revolted against the Ceaucescu regime and is in a state of chaotic rebellion. It seems that the system based on marxist philosophy did not work after all!]

There was also a great deal of banter at our table, but inevitably the war intruded into every area of conversation, light-hearted and serious. Reality had an uncomfortable way of pushing through the idealistic theorising, bringing us into actuality with a jolt.

All this vigorous and earnest discussion took place against a background of music played by the Berkeley musicians who were versatile and obliging.

They seemed glad to have the student population to listen to them and willingly played requests. Although their programme consisted mainly of light music, they played popular tunes, classical music and jazz with equal ability. Such mini-orchestras were not at all uncommon. Most restaurants and small cafes provided live music. The canned music we are now obliged to listen to in restaurants, pubs and shops lacks not only the variety and spontaneity of the live players but the pleasant relationships which developed between performers and audience.

We made at least one request each day. One of the most popular songs of that period was called 'Tristesse'. The words had been put to a haunting tune, a Chopin etude, opus 3 number 9, one which Edwin and I knew and liked very much. The words were sad and said much to a generation facing separation and loneliness. The song became very popular as was Chopin's music generally. It was played frequently on the radio as a tribute to occupied Poland. That etude in its original form was one of the first pieces of music Edwin played for me on the piano at Manor Hall. We often requested it in its song form from the Trio. Later, while he was in the middle of his army training at Bodmin, he wrote warning me against listening to it too often, as it was such a haunting and evocative tune 'which would leave me no peace'.

As 1940 moved into early summer and the prospect of an escalation of the war onto British soil became more of a possibility, I spent more time in the Berkeley with Edwin than I did in the lecture theatre. The Trio came to recognise us and would slide unobtrusively into that particular tune, the leader giving us a welcoming nod as we sat down at our usual table near the stage. This caused much ribald teasing from our friends but I think they were all as touched as we were by such a warm gesture. That group of musicians, themselves beyond the age of call-up, certainly did their best to help us all have a good time in the run-up to all-out war.

Songs and tunes played an essential part during the war in helping people to manage emotions and fears, even bringing a kind of stability in the way they linked people and events. The most cynical listened regularly to broadcasts by such artists as Vera Lynn, gaining comfort and a feeling of community. Favourite songs became woven into the fabric of life, recalling periods and episodes, keeping hope alive for some and bringing comfort to others in the happy memories they evoked.

## D u n k i r k   a n d   T h e   F a l l   O f   F r a n c e

On the morning of Saturday 10th May 1940, the German Army, in another blitz-krieg, invaded the Low Countries, thus, from our point of view in England, ending the 'phoney war'. Eventually they gained valuable bases along the coast-line from which attacks could be launched on Britain. On that same momentous day, Winston Churchill became Prime Minister. He presented himself to the people saying he had "nothing to offer except blood, sweat and tears." The waiting was over.

From then on there was a rapid acceleration of events in Europe. The British Expeditionary Force moved into position to repel the invaders but Belgian policy had delayed collaboration with the Allies in making defensive preparations. A combination of this indecision, and the fallacious belief of the French that the Ardennes were impassable, left the B.E.F. in an untenable position, defeating their efforts to give effective aid to Holland and Belgium. On May 15th Holland was forced to surrender. The Germans had smashed into the troops of the 9th French Army, admittedly not their best, on one side of the British and had also siezed vital bridges on their left flank. I quote:

'While British anti-tank rifles checked German reconnoitring units the enemy concentrated against the Belgians and French with such success that the Allies withdrew on the night of 16/17 May, reaching the River Scheldt safely by the morning of the 19th. But with less than three feet of water on the British front, owing to opened sluices, the river was no longer a tank obstacle.(i.e.to the Germans) ...Men and units of every description gathered to delay the flood; engineers, Royal Army Service Corps men, cooks, clerks and even a mobile bath unit fighting stoutly where they



stood. By the 18th May the enemy was in Amiens, but emergency bodies such as Mac-Force (Major-General F.N. Bruce-Macfarlane) were partly shielding the British right. On 20th May Abbeville fell. The R.A.F., forced to abandon its airfields, fell back on Boulogne and Britain.' It was when we learned that the R.A.F. had been forced to leave that we realised with a shock exactly what the defeat of Holland and Belgium would mean. With the Low Countries gone, would France be far behind?

Holland and Belgium were defeated, France was near defeat. The British were pushed back to the coast at Dunkirk with the prospect of losing a whole army.

An extraordinary rescue operation was put together in a few hours. The story of the little boats of the Dunkirk operation has been graphically written by war correspondents. It is a story of cooperation and courage, of ordinary civilians making swift decisions and refusing to count the cost of their determination to rescue 'our boys'. The evacuation began on May 27th and was probably only rendered possible by the gallant defence of Calais until the early morning of that day by a British Brigade and a few French troops holding back two German Panzer Divisions.

Congestion on the roads was increased by refugees and French transport which should have been left behind. German troops made desperate efforts to get to the beaches to prevent the evacuation but were stopped just in time by the British 4th Division, flung in to check their advance, and by the guns of the British Navy. At first embarkation arrangements were complicated by confusion in French orders, until one beach and two British ships were placed at the disposal of the French Commander. Later, the much smaller French force was evacuated with the British.

I have related some of the fighting detail in order to highlight the determination and very great devotion to duty of the B.E.F. and the frustrations caused them by the poor understanding of the total situation

displayed by the French Army. Pictures in our newspapers of the chaos on the roads caused in the main by French transport which ought to have been left behind and more understandably by French peasants fleeing before the foe, their goods and families piled high on slow-moving farm vehicles, sometimes even with their animals, showed graphically the difficulties faced by our troops. Had the the French been more realistic perhaps the whole story of the war might have been different. But that is speculation. Certainly the French army was not popular with the British public in 1940!

In addition to the armada of naval vessels which spear-headed and co-ordinated the whole rescue operation, hundreds of little boats, pleasure steamers and coastal yachts, together with small boats from the Thames and the Medway designed only for river work, sailed across the Channel. Many of the larger boats had been commandeered by the Navy and men in the Naval Reserve living near the coast had been temporarily called to duty.

The owners and skippers of the little boats had been alerted by that mysterious grape-vine which operates in time of emergency. Discreet telephone calls which conveyed urgency without panic called men from their daily jobs. Boats making their way at speed down-river on the Thames and Medway to the assembly points set up on the coast by the Royal Navy quietly passed word of the operation, adding to their number as they neared the sea. The W.V.S. (Women's Voluntary Services) prepared to be on hand with tea and comforts for the rescued soldiers. Hospitals prepared to receive wounded.

Bloody but unbowed, despite having suffered a temporary defeat, the soldiers stood in the sea up to their waists, or camped on the sea shore, waiting in good order for their turn to be taken off, amidst the dive-bombing attacks from the enemy. Some waited nine days in that hell.

That so many were brought back to the English shore was a tribute to the self-discipline of the soldiers themselves, to the Navy and to the little

boats whose owners and skippers unhesitatingly answered the call. 330,000 soldiers were ferried to safety in nine days; but 50,000 men and masses of equipment were left behind. It was a defeat for that small army, one which every-one determined would only be temporary; but the staggeringly successful rescue operation which stunned the German High Command was a tremendous moral victory which hardened even more determination to resist.

Since the war there have been attempts to dismiss the episode of Dunkirk as a defeat and nothing else; perhaps some of those who deride the suggestion of it being a victory were not even born when the momentous event occurred! Those of us who were alive and were in a sense party to it know that it was indeed a victory as well as a defeat. It was a tremendous triumph over disaster, both practically and psychologically; if the rescue from Dunkirk had not occurred as it did, the war might well have taken a very different course. At Dunkirk, defeat was turned into victory.

There were still British troops on the Continent, determined to prevent the defeat of France if possible. As late as the 12th June troops were rushed from England to bolster the French army which was disintegrating. Back home in England we could hardly believe what was happening. That the French should collapse so readily, both politically and militarily, was a shock and incomprehensible, especially to francophiles in the French School at King's. We were alternately miserable and angry, our anger directed at the French politicians and Generals who had so let down their people.

In no time at all France was over-run. The 14th June 1940 saw the Nazi forces enter Paris after bitter and bloody fighting. Paris was defended by some units of the French army but most fiercely by young Parisians, many of them students, others little more than boys and girls, too young to join the army. They fought for their city with vigour and passion in a noble but unsuccessful last-ditch stand and many of them paid for it with their lives. Plaques on the walls of houses in the city and the suburbs

commemorate the names and ages of those who fell; they are a poignant reminder of what it means to defend one's home from attack.

On 17th June 1940 the French asked for an armistice. The famous Maginot Line which the French had considered to be invincible, 'Ils ne passeront pas!', had never been completed as far as the sea and stopped short of the Luxembourg border. The enemy had skirted quickly round both ends, coming up from the Low Countries. The Line had not been breached, it had been proved useless, a terrible blow to French pride as they had relied totally on this underground fortification for their land defences. Once more the British had to return to England, as many British troops as possible being evacuated from Cherbourg when the Germans were but three miles from the port.

France surrendered officially on 22nd June. Britain now stood alone against the might of the Nazi forces, out-numbered in manpower and machines, "waiting to have its neck wrung like a chicken", according to one French General, a comment which did not go down particularly well with the British public. Hitler still thought Britain would make peace but his astrologer and his advisers had seriously misled him. Churchill rejected all overtures. He addressed the British population in realistic terms, at the same time calling on all that was best in the nation. The following is an extract from one of his major speeches.

"The Battle of Britain is about to begin. Upon this battle depends the survival of christian civilisation. Hitler knows that he will have to break us in this island or lose the war. Let us therefore brace ourselves to do our duty and so bear ourselves that, if the British Commonwealth lasts for a thousand years, men will say, 'This was their finest hour.'

Imagine being part of such a momentous situation and still expected to continue with lectures and academic work! In one sense we were on what would now be described as a 'high', gearing ourselves to meet whatever came

along but endeavouring to regard each day as normal. Added to the mental and emotional turmoil into which we were thrown, was the additional worry of important examinations. Most men students awaiting call-up had abandoned all pretence of doing academic work, although John Hodgson decided he was going to take Finals at General Degree level before his call-up. He worked frantically during this period. Women students had to continue with their courses and tackle the examinations. Fitting in the necessary work became extremely difficult.

I managed by getting up at five o'clock and working for two hours before breakfast, leaving the rest of the day free to spend with Edwin, except for an occasional appearance at a lecture. Groups of close friends, not wishing to spend these last few days apart, attended each other's lectures. Our crowd sat in on French, English, Latin, Geography, and Science lectures as the spirit moved us.

In June I had to tackle 'finals' for my subsidiary subject, English Literature. Edwin and John Hodgson spent much time and energy giving me intensive coaching over coffee; feeling somewhat guilty that I was spending all my time with them instead of swotting, they were quite determined that I would complete the year successfully. Those coaching sessions in the Berkeley over cups of coffee, in the tense atmosphere of national crisis, were the best tutorials I had in English!

In academic life no concessions were made. There was no suggestion that standards should be lowered because of the difficulties we were facing, for which we were all very grateful. There were to be no 'war degrees' which might be regarded as inferior qualifications once the war was over. 'Don't you know there's a war on?' became a standard excuse for many failings in civilian life for the six years of the war but was not acceptable as an excuse for poor degree work.

That summer of 1940 the weather was idyllic; each day dawned with a

clear, blue sky, the sun poured its warmth on us and we filled every waking hour to the full. There was little we could do immediately to help in the war effort so we spent our free time out-of-doors, walking and rambling when not actually engaged in organised sport. Edwin played cricket for College and I spent many happy hours watching. Nearly every Sunday saw about thirty members of the Arts Faculty gathered at Temple Meads station for transport to a country village somewhere in Somerset. We would take a walk of some twenty miles over the Mendips, with a halt for a sandwich lunch and ending up at a country pub for a hearty tea washed down with Somerset cider, arriving back at Temple Meads late at night for the long walk back to hostels.

On those days the war was quite forgotten. We rejoiced in good company, the exhilaration of exercise in the fresh air and feasted our eyes on some of the loveliest country-side in the world.

Fortunately we did not need money to amuse ourselves as we had none! Edwin and I spent our evenings walking on Clifton Downs and gazing over Sea Wall. Sometimes we would cross Clifton Suspension Bridge and make our way into Lea Woods, or join Bristolians wandering along Trym Gorge on the other side of the city. Those were precious hours when we pretended for a while that there was no war to interrupt the normal progress of our lives.

The wonderful weather contributed to the illusion we sometimes had that the war was happening in another world from the one we inhabited; that is, until the drama of Dunkirk and the Fall of France. Those events awakened us all sharply from our idyll. That wonderful period in our lives was drawing rapidly to a close. Faces wore thoughtful expressions. Many men students went straight home to their families for a quick visit, knowing that on their return they would soon receive an O.H.M.S. envelope instructing them to report to a camp somewhere, anywhere, in England, for Initial Training.

We had one friend who was a Channel Islander. We were all in the

Berkeley the morning the news came through that the Islands had been occupied. He had not seen his family since September 1939, as travel was a costly business. There was no means of knowing whether they were alive or dead and it was a very sad morning for him.

Each day dawned with uncertainty for the men students. The daily post became of the utmost importance. If it brought a brown O.H.M.S. envelope there was excitement mixed with sadness and apprehension; bags were packed, hasty farewells were taken and those who could, rushed home to take leave of their parents before reporting to their base camp, but often there was no time for a home visit. If there was no call-up letter, that day was a bonus and every ounce of enjoyment had to be extracted from it.

I had friends in Normandy, very dear friends. They were my pals of Quiberville days, summer 1937, with whom I had spent so many happy hours, swimming in the sea, playing beach-ball and cycling round the Normandy countryside and along the coast roads. It was sad to imagine what must be happening to that little country community whose members had received me so warmly. I feared for all my friends but particularly for Robert and Pierre who were fiercely patriotic and impetuous.

Robert had already been called into the army and I had a photo of him as a 'poilu', striking a characteristically heroic pose, in the style of the nineteenth century Romantics. We had been special friends, sharing interests in sport and art. He had at one time tried to persuade me into a promise of marriage but although I was very fond of him, I realised at the time that we were not suited for a permanent relationship. But I was anxious for them. Knowing that all the inhabitants of the villages of Ouville and Longueil and the little coastal watering place Quiberville now lived in occupied territory brought the fighting right into the middle of my own life, some months before the attack began on our own homes.

I have very few photographs left of those days spent in Normandy before

the war. After the fall of France the War office asked for any holiday photographs of the Normandy coast-line to be handed in for help with reconnaissance work. I had some very clear photos of the castle at Dieppe, the surrounding cliffs on either side, and the beaches along that whole stretch of coast and sent them to the appropriate address.

The full impact of the war and what it might mean to us personally came as we witnessed the accelerated mobilisation of our own men students. It was a time of confused emotions for all of us. There were so many things we wished to do, so many people to visit, and all at once. Edwin and I spent every possible moment together, each day expecting the arrival of his brown envelope. Fear of war itself, fear of the unknown, was mixed with relief. We were glad the phoney war was over and that action was to begin.

Examinations seemed irrelevant. In Manor Hall we packed our bags to be ready for whatever happened. Certainly, it seemed almost inevitable that Hitler's army would now be able to cross the Channel with ease and occupy this country, yet strangely not one of us really believed that this could ever happen. Nor was this possibility accepted by the nation as a whole.

Edwin's call-up papers came. He had three days before needing to report to barracks at Bodmin. There was just time for him to rush home to see his parents and family, return to Bristol and then entrain for Bodmin. Despite his height and the fact that he had been born a Yorkshireman he had been drafted to the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, a regiment for small men! Fortunately that was corrected at a later date but not before he had spent his three months Initial Training trying to adjust his long legs to the short, extremely rapid stride of a light infantry regiment!

On his last evening in Bristol we gathered with friends for a short while, then took our favourite walk over Clifton Downs to Sea Wall. We were not formally engaged, in fact 'just good friends', although earlier in the term, Jock Ross, Principal of Westminster College, had told me that he was



glad Edwin and I had 'become a pair', which surprised me. I thought he had a cheek to arrange our lives for us! But in our hearts we too knew that we were a pair. Being together seemed a natural destiny, going through life apart quite unthinkable. That last evening in Bristol was bitter-sweet: the end of youth and a poignant beginning to really adult life.

By 11.30 p.m. that evening I was already long overdue for signing in at Manor Hall but such a misdemeanour seemed ridiculously trivial compared with the great events in which we were all caught up. Mrs. Skemp, the Warden, did not take this view. The war might not have begun for her. Rules were rules and had to be obeyed, no-matter what the circumstances. My late return proved to be the last straw for her. I was told to pack my bags and leave first thing in the morning. A recommendation would be sent to King's College that I be sent down!

We should have been very worried about this turn of events but the whole episode seemed to belong to another world, a world we had left behind when Edwin's call-up papers arrived. What had happened simply did not matter.

The next morning, early, Edwin arrived to collect my bags. Joyce Casson, unable to stand the restrictions, had already moved out of Hall the previous term. We went round to her digs and she arranged for me to share her room till my exams were completed within the next day or two. We then went to see Mr. Jones, the Dean of the Faculty of Arts. He already knew the full story having received a telephone call from Mrs. Skemp. He was a good friend to all his students and remembered his own student days when he waited for call-up during the First World War. To our relief he dismissed the complaint against me and assured us he would take no action.

He too felt that international events which called on us all to accept adult responsibilities of a particularly demanding and frightening nature had already rendered inapplicable rules which belonged more to the school-room than to the adult world.

The very last task Edwin undertook before joining the army was to organise my inglorious but entirely unregretted exit from Manor Hall!.

[The above was written in draft before January 7th 1990. I had intended to print it out and show it to Edwin for comment, correction where necessary and additions, as we had planned. To my great sorrow he died at home from a massive coronary on the afternoon of Sunday 7th January before I could show him what I had written. The Chopin etude, made into the song 'Tristesse' we unashamedly called 'our tune'; it remained dear to us through-out our lives and was played at his Requiem Service of Thanksgiving, as he was brought into and carried from Neston Parish Church on 19th January 1990.)

## S o l d i e r   a n d   L a n d   G i r l

The same glorious weather that had favoured the British at Dunkirk now favoured the enemy. It would have been so easy for the Nazis to sail an armada across the Channel, yet they never grasped that opportunity.

As soon as possible after Edwin set off for Bodmin I went home from Bristol. Joyce was at work with the Gas Light and Coke Company in Edgware Road, and Maurice had brought himself back from evacuation, determined to take his full share of whatever had to be done. How could I 'do my bit'?

Edwin was pounding round Bodmin Moor on his initial training. He was amazed and delighted to see his address: 5442473 Pte E. Dennis,

Platoon No. 2.

I.T.C.D.C.L.I.

Berry Tower Houses,

Bodmin, Cornwall.

Even the Army did not intend us to forget each other!

On the first day as a private soldier he decided that the only way to salvation was to climb the ladder! He described his Sergeant as a decent chap and enjoyed the P.T. and the exercises across the moors but found the off-duty hours hard to endure. Later on in this Initial Training he filled in a good deal of time teaching other recruits, mostly soccer players, to play rugby, organising seven-a-side games; this gave him great satisfaction and relieved the tedium. He found the lack of intellectual stimulation very difficult and even sent home for his books on Old English and Anglo-Saxon, thinking he would do some of the work he had not done the previous year! He carried a small volume of Keats' poetry in his top pocket to while away an

idle moment.

The training itself presented only one problem. Being athletic, he had no difficulty with marching rhythmically but had to learn to adjust to 140 paces, each of 30", per minute, the rate for light infantry, not easy for one his height! The rest of the training was easy for him; the necessary repetition of drills he found boring.

By the end of June, about three weeks after arrival, he was a Section Leader which meant that he was in front when on the march. This was a little difficult for the men behind him, for although he had to keep the speed of a Light Infantry Regiment, he could not shorten his pace and in his own words, 'the smaller fellows behind me are grunting and groaning and straining every muscle to keep up with my easy swing. Why I was put in a regiment with such a small, quick step I can't imagine'.

The air-raid sirens were sounding at the barracks at the same time as they were sounding in London and East Anglia that summer. The target was Plymouth and all the army units were on the alert. Edwin's platoon was at first on patrol during these periods but later he was sent to man a machine gun.

Like all civilised men who accept the call to arms, he was disturbed by the thought that he was learning to kill. Although he found the war justified he had yet to come to terms with the apparently cold-blooded nature of his training. Since he also believed that you have to be prepared to fight for peace, and had the strong male instinct to protect those whom he loved, he was able to settle his scruples and threw himself wholeheartedly into the course. When it came to the realities of war and the bombs fell near me and mine, he could not get into action quickly enough.

On August 8th he received his first stripe several weeks after he had passed the necessary course. I think he had expected to be given his stripe the next day and was very impatient with what he called army inefficiency,

particularly as he had for some time been doing the work for which the stripe would qualify him. This work was instructing and lecturing, something at last to get his teeth into! He described it as 'the first step in the long ladder which leads to the baton which I cannot find anywhere in my kit-bag'.

He began to enjoy his training as being much more purposeful, particularly as they were out on exercises to counter invasion. The regiment had as a motto: *Cognosce Hoste: Know Your Enemy*. Very apt, as they were on anti-invasion exercises. On one exercise of tank-spotting in which the local L.D.Vs (Local Defence Volunteers) were the enemy, he chose to perch in a tree, where he remained in reasonable comfort for one-and-a-half hours. Using his rifle butt as a table he spent the time writing to me in between 'potting' the enemy.

I also wanted to be useful. On my return to London from Bristol at the end of June I tried to join first the Wrens, then the Army, but with no success at all. In desperation, having once more spent a good many days in Hyde Park filling sand-bags, I acted on an advertisement for the Women's Land Army and presented myself for enrolment. They were eager for recruits to bring in the bumper harvest of crops, vegetables and fruit and signed me on without hesitation. At that time the W.L.A. was a civilian volunteer outfit organised with Government help and blessing but with few of the restrictions and regulations which governed the Armed Forces. I was recruited as a temporary member of the W.L.A. engaged to spend the long vacation doing something useful as well as earning my keep. Mother was not keen for me to go away again but understood my need to do something, however little, to help in the national situation. Study was impossible in such an atmosphere of watching and waiting.

I was sent to Somersham, which was then a comparatively remote village in Huntingdonshire, not far from Huntingdon itself. We had travelled from

London in a group, a motley crowd from all walks of life and all ages. I remember only three other students. This surprised me as I expected most of the summer volunteers to be women students. There were quite a number of shop girls, glad of an opportunity to do something different away from London; some of these returned home fairly soon after arrival in Somersham, being unable to endure the slow pace and unusually quiet routine of the countryside.

We were mostly aged 18 to 35 years but there was one much older woman; at that time she was the most worldly person I had ever met. Her real name escapes me but Marie would suit her well. She reminded me of the dust-jacket pictures of Colette, the exotic and eccentric French woman novelist, popular in pre-war France. Her hair was dyed a vivid auburn, she smoked and drank like a man, unusual in those days, and had a fund of racy stories. With all this, she was truly warm-hearted and protective of the rest of us whom she regarded as exceptionally innocent of the ways of the world, and sitting targets for the unscrupulous, amongst whom she included all authoritative figures. We all liked her and trusted her.

Then there was Ailsa, another unlikely person to find in the W.L.A. She was in her twenties, a beautician in a west-end salon, who had joined the Land Army for the duration, anticipating her call-up. We shared lodgings for a while and during that time it was she who first introduced me to full facial make-up. I was not a good disciple; after just one week of cleansing and creaming and putting on the morning mask, I gave up and went back to scrubbing my face with soap and preparing for the day with no more than a dash of lipstick and some Pond's vanishing cream. Ailsa was horrified!

For the first few nights we were all billeted together in a very old, tumble-down, insanitary building. We slept upstairs dormitory fashion, on make-shift beds. Despite the summer weather we were chilled, the place

smelt musty, the floor-boards were broken and dangerous and we could hear animals, which we feared might be rats, running around on the roof and outside. There was absolutely no privacy (that was probably too much to expect anyway under the emergency circumstances in which we were living) and the toilet and washing arrangements were primitive in the extreme. Those of us who had been Girl Guides were accustomed to camping and making shift and therefore coped reasonably well but most of the other girls were lost and uncomfortable.

Marie took charge of the situation. Having obtained an interview with the local organiser from Huntingdon, she quickly made it plain that we all had to be found suitable billets within the next few days, intimating that if this did not happen we would all down tools and go back to London. This was something of a surprise to the local organising committee who seemed to think they had settled us for the whole of the summer.

Conditions in the Land Army in that first full summer of war were far from ideal, judging from my own experience. It seems that later the situation improved and the women of the Land Army received their due recognition and were properly accommodated. The custom had always been for leaders of voluntary organisations to be drawn from the 'local ladies', well-intentioned but not widely experienced beyond their own social group. Our 'local ladies' may well have thought the accommodation they had found quite suitable for the type of women who worked in the fields! After the confrontation with Marie, they were obliged to scour Somersham for suitable billets for us all with the villagers, who eventually proved to be very welcoming, once they had overcome their suspicions of the 'townies'.

I was sent, with Ailsa, to stay with the local doctor. He and his wife were very pleasant to us, if rather formal. I did not mind this as I had lived in a very formal house-hold in France and could accommodate to the pattern of life, but Ailsa moved out after a week or two; understandably,

she wanted more freedom to come and go as she wished in the evenings and get back in the small hours if she chose.

Work in the fields began incredibly early, at seven-thirty a.m. We were collected and returned in a farm wagon. Once at the field, work was allocated and we began at once, being kept hard at it until 'docky time' at about ten-fifteen a.m. when we stopped for a sandwich and a drink. We had prepared our own 'docky' before setting out for the day from food provided at our lodgings. The back-breaking work continued all day, with two more breaks, one at midday and another in the afternoon. We finished at about four-thirty p.m. after a very long day, arriving back at our billets dirty, sweaty and very weary, with aching bones and muscles.

Together with a few local women workers we were all employed on the same fruit farm. The first task allotted to us was picking red-currants and black-currants. This hardly seemed like war work to us but the produce was there to be picked and there was still a market for such luxuries. We were supervised by one of the experienced farm hands known to us as Old Bob. He was somewhat contemptuous at first of our ignorance of country ways but we gradually teased him out of his surliness and by September, when our work with him came to an end, he was quite pally and professed himself sorry that we were leaving, a very different attitude from when he first met us!

He showed us how to sit under the bush and pick it clean, first making sure we knew how to cup the strings of currants in a gentle hand while nipping off the stalk near the top with our finger-nails. 'There's an art in it, y'see', Bob would declare gleefully as he watched us squash our currants in our over-eager hands that first day. Then the currants had to be placed in the skips, not thrown in; we had to do everything possible not to break the fruit. The best fruit, picked for a big London hotel, had to be placed in small baskets, all the stalks facing the same way, to facilitate



handling the other end.

When we first looked down those seemingly endless rows of currant bushes we were dismayed. But as the days wore on and we settled to our task, we worried less about the number of bushes we could pick in a day and paid much more attention to our own physical comfort. Our pay was the same, however many baskets we picked, and while we did a fair day's work, we soon learned not to rush at the task, being more concerned about having a little energy left at the end of the day for amusing ourselves. The village women who also worked in the fields were on piece work. They took good care to work as far away from us as possible. We never quite dispelled their suspicion that we were bent on taking their work from them even though it was obvious that there was plenty of work for us all.

By the end of the first week most of us had acquired second-hand bicycles from a shop in Huntingdon and we set out in the evenings to explore the countryside. East Anglia was fast becoming dotted with R.A.F. fighter stations and it was not long before we met up with the young airmen. At that time they were on full alert and spent their time patrolling the air above our heads.

The sight and sound of the Spitfires and Hurricanes wheeling and diving became part of our normal experience. For the first part of the month of July we were under the impression that they were chiefly exercising but as the month wore on we realised that we were actually watching dog-fights between British and German fighters, there above us, dangerously close, over the East Anglian fields, and we became more wary. At the same time, we were philosophical about our situation: we could not get up and run to take shelter because there were no shelters, so we crouched under the bushes and prayed! Later that month, and particularly in August and the beginning of September, as the Battle of Britain developed, we had some exceedingly unpleasant experiences, a real baptism of fire.

We had moved from picking currants to stripping the plum trees in the orchard. This meant climbing the ladders with baskets tied to us and picking until the basket was full, when we would call for another basket. We felt very vulnerable and even at times feared we were the targets for the guns of frustrated enemy fighters forced to turn for home; in fact they were probably emptying their guns without aiming at any-one specifically before dashing back to the Continent. On those occasions, all we could do was to lean into the trees and try to hide in the foliage.

Death from enemy action was difficult to imagine during that lovely summer of blue skies and jolly companionship with the airmen. We used to gather, land girls and young pilots, all in their early twenties, in a pub near Huntingdon, to chat and enjoy each others' company. We talked about family and friends, careers, sport, hobbies, anything rather than the war.

It was never the same group that gathered two evenings running so when one of our friends failed to show up we assumed he had decided to stay at camp. However, during the evening, one of the pilots commented that we had not asked where he was. 'O.K. then. Where is he?' Came the quiet reply, 'He bought it'.

R.A.F. slang was new to us and it had to be explained that this meant that he had been killed in a dog-fight that day. No-one spoke for what seemed an age. Then glasses were raised to his memory. One of the boys gave a brief description of how he was shot down and we resumed our teasing, bantering conversation.

'These fly, now engined by all human need.

These, wishing life, must range the falling sky,

Whom an heroic moment calls to die'.

From: The Dead.

If this attitude seems callous, remember that these brave young men had to find some way of absorbing the idea of sudden death so that they could carry on with their task without faltering. They had a tacit agreement to

accept their dangerous, daily task courageously and with as much equanimity as they could muster. Any undue show of emotion might have undermined their resolve. Any day might be their last. Lose no precious time in mourning!

Do not despair  
For Johnny-head-in-air;  
He sleeps as sound  
As Johnny underground.

Fetch out no shroud  
For Johnny-in-the-cloud;  
And keep your tears  
For him in after years.

Better by far  
For Johnny-the-bright-star,  
To keep your head,  
And see his children fed.

For Johnny.

In these and other poems written about this time John Pudney captured both the tragedy of young lives cut short and the gallantry with which they contemplated death.

From our vantage points in the plum trees, we had seen planes shot down during dog-fights and realised that men must have died; but this was the first time the dead pilot was some-one we knew and with whom we had been having fun only twenty-four hours previously. Death had become a vivid and horrifying reality.

Edwin and I corresponded regularly during that summer. Although the sirens sounded alerts in and around Bodmin there were no raids on the camp. The fact that he was tucked away in comparative safety on Bodmin Moor while I seemed to be in the firing line offended his sense of what was

proper. He said that during that period he noticed for the first time that some of the hairs he shaved from his face every morning had turned grey! By late July there were more serious raids in the West Country as well as in the London area. Edwin wrote:

'The air-raids seem to have moved from the London area down to the west. Bristol caught it hot, Plymouth (only thirty miles away) has had visits, Falmouth, further west, has been bombed several times and several small places in the vicinity have had stray eggs drop on them for no apparent reason. The officers seem to think that we shall be visited before long, but I see no reason for worrying before it happens. I should imagine that Jerry has done quite a lot of effective reconnaissance and spying and is now massing for a glorious air bombardment. But we shall be ready for him and I shall see that my (machine) gun is never without ammunition so that he will find a hornet's nest behind the barracks'. In fact Jerry was massing for a big attack, but it came on London, not on the West Country.

There were some periods of relaxation for him, but not many. John Hodgson was in a naval training establishment reasonably nearby and they managed to meet once during that three months. That meeting was the first time that Edwin rescued John from potentially serious trouble during the war period! We both had to rescue him in December 1945 when he was sent back from Germany for a disciplinary hearing! Although he served for four years as an officer in the Royal Navy, John never really accepted the full rigour of service regulations and had scant regard for discipline.

On this occasion they had met at a pub in Bodmin. John, ever the one to tempt fate, and convinced of the innocuous nature of his tippie, ignored all advice and consumed rough cider as speedily as he would have supped lemonade at a Methodist Sunday School feast back in his home village of Thackley. At the end of the evening, believing firmly that the cider had had almost no effect on him, he walked boldly out of the pub and promptly

fell flat on his face as the cold night air struck him. Edwin was then faced with the task of getting him back to his ship, as he had already missed the pick-up sent to collect the ratings.

Getting John back involved hopping a local train, persuading a taxi to take them on to John's ship without payment except some cigarettes, and a bribe to the sentry when they arrived, only for John to be apprehended for making a noise! However, John must have had a persuasive tongue that night as he managed to talk his way out of trouble. Surprisingly, this escapade did not affect his recommendation for officer training at the end of his three months.

While I was at Somersham news came that I had passed my English Subsidiary examination. Edwin was as pleased as though the success had been his and sent me an 'I told you so' letter, adding that I had better get going for Finals! He also informed me that John had a Second in Finals, and that 'hearing all this good news makes me rather envious. I consider myself a fool for not having a shot at it'. That feeling was only temporary, he did not really want a General degree, having always aimed at an Honours.

Towards the end of August the war in the air over the South East and East Anglia became deadly. The papers were using Churchill's phrase 'The Battle for Britain', thus recognising the seriousness of our situation, and the brave young men from the fighter stations all over southern England became known as the Few.

Compared with the enemy they were pitifully outnumbered. Their rest periods between sorties became shorter and shorter, their machines became more battered and the ground crews had to work continuous shifts to keep their planes in the air. If the Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton, the Battle for Britain, or the Battle of Britain as it was later called, was won in the play-grounds and in the Combined Cadet Forces of the grammar schools of the nineteen-thirties. These were the boys who

had won for themselves a grammar school education by hard work and application. In those schools team spirit and loyalty were fostered and hard work was expected. Those qualities were amply exhibited by the young airmen who defended us in the skies that summer.

But for that gallant and sacrificial defence in the air during August and September 1940, the outcome of the war would have been very different and we in this country would have led very different and much less comfortable lives over the last fifty years.

It was during my time in the Land Army that I came to love Cambridge and Ely and discovered the Fens. We rode out on our rickety bicycles on Sundays, sometimes to attend a service in one of the lovely chapels in Cambridge or in Ely Cathedral; at other times we rode round the countryside just for the joy of having the freedom of the roads. I shall never forget the first time I caught a glimpse of Ely Cathedral through the mist of the Fens, mysterious and beautiful, in a golden haze; nor the first time I rode along the Backs in Cambridge, and eventually made my way to Grantchester, to pay homage to that gallant young poet of the First World War, Rupert Brook, whose poetry I found particularly appealing at that time. Wonderful and exhilarating experiences were grotesquely mixed with more sombre and harrowing ones.

At times I almost felt ashamed that there was still so much to enjoy while the war engine was rapidly gaining speed and people were dying. Yet without those experiences of exquisite beauty it would have been so much more difficult to cope with the darker side of life. I enjoyed my time in the Land Army. Youth can always find something to laugh at and things to savour; moments of exhilaration come during the oddest circumstances. It was like that through-out the war. There were wonderful occasions, made more wonderful by the very fact of war, amidst the misery and heart-break.

Once all the plums were picked at the beginning of September, I resigned

from my temporary position as Land Girl and went home, to share with the family the onslaught on London. Edwin, still in Bodmin and fretting to get his transfer to O.C.T.U. (Officer/Cadet Training Unit) so that he could 'really get into things' tried to persuade me to go anywhere but to London while understanding that I would not wish to go anywhere else.

## S u n s e t   i n   t h e   E a s t : T h e   B l i t z

No church bells had been rung since September 1939, by Government order. Bells and bonfires would signal across the country that the invasion had begun. During late summer and early autumn of 1940 we listened for the bells day and night, constantly on the alert.

Records reveal that Hitler had planned his attack by sea and air for 15th September; he called it Operation Sea Lion. Before ordering his armada to set sail, he first needed to defeat the R.A.F. This he never achieved although he had superiority of numbers in men and machines. During July and August wave after wave of bombers attacked R.A.F. bases in Southern England and East Anglia in broad daylight. I had watched the dog-fights over-head from the 'shelter' of the currant bushes or the leafy branches of a plum tree and had wondered how soon it might be before we heard the bells.

The air battles were fierce. Much to their surprise, the raiding planes were frequently intercepted before reaching their targets by Spitfires and Hurricanes, alerted by an early form of Radar which Britain had developed, unknown to the Germans. Our brother Jack had been set to work on this new technology soon after his call-up, although, being sworn to secrecy, he told us nothing of this until the news was officially released.

Losses were high on both sides; despite their superiority in numbers the Germans lost many more men and machines than the British; but British pilots were dying faster than recruits could be trained. Britain was as close to defeat then as at any time in history but refused to admit it, remaining defiant. In the end, defiance paid off.

It had not been Hitler's intention to attack London at that stage. All



the forces of the Luftwaffe were concentrated on destroying the R.A.F. and gaining mastery of the skies. The extraordinary success of the R.A.F. in fighting off attack convinced him that he would have to find more vulnerable targets. An incident which occurred on the night of August 24th and its consequence to Germany further reinforced that view. A group of Dornier bombers discharged their bomb loads over the very centre of London. This was construed by Londoners as a deliberate decision to carry the war to the civilians and action was demanded.

There was an immediate retaliation against Berlin from the R.A.F. Although damage to the city was slight, considerable damage was inflicted on the pride of the German High Command, notably on Goering, the Luftwaffe chief, who had repeatedly promised the German people that Berlin would never be attacked.

Hitler changed his plans immediately. R.A.F. bases were no longer the sole targets. The aim was to destroy the morale of the British people. In an attempt to intimidate the population and also to save the lives of his pilots, he ordered bombing to take place at night as well as during the day.

London, as the centre of government and commerce, was the obvious prime target. When I arrived back home from the Land Army at the beginning of September 1940 there was an air of general alertness. Fighter-planes screeched over-head and air-raid sirens wailed on and off through-out the day and night; they sounded louder and in a strange way seemed more menacing than when we were working in the fields. For the first few days of September, before the blitz developed its full horror, Pimlico escaped damage. We lived in a state of readiness. Only essential tasks were undertaken and every-one in the household endeavoured to be as orderly and self-sufficient as possible. Not wishing to spend time unnecessarily in the cellar, we learned to identify the planes overhead by their engine-noise

and to assess the degree of danger, only rushing for the shelter at the last minute.

We were once more a complete family as Maurice had returned from evacuation in August. He refused to return to Shaftesbury, wanting to be part of the action in London. He was thirteen years old. From that time onwards he had little or no schooling, apart from occasional classes arranged for returned evacuees, and was glad to reach the statutory school-leaving age on his fourteenth birthday in the summer of 1941.

Joyce would reach her seventeenth birthday on September 8th. A party had been planned for the Saturday evening of the 7th. On the first floor of our house we had a large 'best' room, originally the drawing or with-drawing room when the house had been built at the end of the nineteenth century. It stretched the width of the house, over the downstairs entrance passage, a well-proportioned room, enhanced by two elegant windows from floor to ceiling over-looking Stanley Place, with stylish, wrought-iron balconies on which we kept pot plants. It was a lovely room, perfect for a party.

The piano, carefully dusted, the keys painstakingly washed with milk, stood ready against the wall; music was piled on the floor by the stool. The lino was as brilliantly polished as a dance floor. Among his many social talents Dad claimed that of party pianist. He was expected home in the early evening and we were looking forward to dancing to his rhythmic and vigorous playing. We were expecting some interruption from air-raids but there was never any question of cancelling the party.

The day had been spent preparing food and soft drinks, arranging the furniture and in making happy preparations. All Joyce's friends in the Scouts and Guides had been invited, and some of mine, a veritable gathering of Pimlico 'Society'. It was a lovely autumn evening and Joyce was excited as she greeted her guests at the door. In no time at all the house was resounding to laughter and banter, music and shouting, while downstairs

Mother put the finishing touches to the buffet. The long windows onto the balconies were open and we could hear the familiar drone of the planes and the occasional whoosh and shriek of a bomb, but it was early in the evening and we hoped to have our party before the other 'party' got going.

It was to be a memorable night. Saturday September 7th 1940 saw the beginning of months of horror and years of anxious waiting. It was the night that the Luftwaffe launched its first mass raid on London, the night that London burned.

The first we knew of the saturation bombing taking place down river was when we noticed the exceptionally vivid colour of the sky. At first we thought we were seeing an unusually brilliant sunset. Looking out of the windows over the balconies, we saw the sky aglow and bathed in an unnatural light down river in the East. A vast vault of violent colour, yellow and orange turning to a deep, fiery red at the centre, filled the eastern sky. With horror we slowly realised the truth. No sunset, however glorious, had such colour or ever glowed with such intensity. And there could be no sunset in the East!

Outside in the street came the shout of 'fire!' The noise of planes and bombs grew louder by the second. Suddenly around us everything seemed to explode. Wardens rushed round the streets, telling every-one to take cover, knocking on doors and reminding householders to black out thoroughly. The red in the sky deepened and we realised that our beloved London was on fire.

Some-one shouted 'Dad! What about Dad?' When he had not arrived home at his stated time we were not unduly worried but now we knew the reason for his delayed return we felt cold with fear. The river was on fire and he would be in the thick of it, once more in the front line.

Without undue fuss, Mother organised us all calmly, suppressing her personal anxieties. She shepherded our guests downstairs to the cellars,

much too small for such a number, and supervised the transfer of the party food from the basement kitchen. The food was consumed and the party continued with singing and games.

Skipper Adams was a guest. He and Mother between them decided that every-one should be escorted home as soon as possible, the youngest first, to allay parental fears. Older scouts joined together in pairs as escorts; boys and girls were organised in groups according to where they lived, and eventually, after several trips, every-one reached home safely. Only then did Mother allow herself to think about Dad.

Although bombs fell all over the centre of London, the attack was more concentrated on the river and the docks; the glow and the flames could be seen for miles. From time to time we would leave the cellar for a breath of fresh air and to view what was going on, until driven in again. Waves of bombers were dark against the red sky. It was an unforgettable night. The sheer volume of planes in the sky is best illustrated by the following extracts from reports by R.A.F. pilots.

'One German bomber formation stretched from over London right out towards Southend, twenty miles long or more, and, I suppose, about a quarter of a mile wide. And with an escort of fighters above. It was a breathtaking sight.'

'I'd never seen so many aircraft....You could hardly believe it. As far as you could see there was nothing but German aircraft coming in, wave after wave.'

The night wore on towards dawn and still Dad had not come home. We listened anxiously for the familiar sound of his footsteps ringing on the pavement, each moment an hour. Silently we prayed hard that he would survive and come home to us.

When eventually, long after dawn had broken, we heard the uneven ring of his boots on the pavement as he rounded the corner, Joyce and I rushed up

from the basement to greet him. We stopped in our tracks. He was so weary he could hardly put one foot before the other. He was black, his jacket torn, his trousers in shreds, and he smelled of burning.

He attempted a smile but it was nothing like his familiar, cheeky grin. 'Don't touch me girls. I'm sore', he said apologetically as we rushed to fling our arms round him. 'Tell your Mother I'm O.K.'

His clothes had to be taken from him with care before his burns could be dressed. He made no fuss. Almost immediately after a restorative cup of tea he fell asleep and remained so for hours, through the noise of the continuing raid. On awakening, to our astonishment, he was his old lively self, making light of his experiences and announcing his intention of going to work as usual the next day.

We never did learn the full truth of that night. His boat, the Prince, had been one of the first to make its way up-river through the fires, with flames licking the sides and bombs dropping round as it passed the burning docks. Once the boat had been tied up, Dad had walked many miles to get home. He had picked his way through rubble and past terrible scenes of devastation and death, helping where he could; but his one objective had been to get home and allay Mother's fears. That was the first of many nights during the war when he walked home amidst the bombs and flack, with one thought in his mind, to reach home and reassure her that he was alive.

Later that night a high explosive fell on near-by Victoria Station, and rocked our house. On that occasion the damage was slight but the station was hit ten times in all during the war. Pimlico, bounded by the river, docks and warehouses at one end and Victoria Station at the other, was the worst hit area in Westminster during the whole six years of war.

During that one night of September 7th 300 bombers and 600 fighters attacked the centre of London. More concentrated on the environs. The full extent of the fire damage to the City and the docks did not become apparent

to us for some weeks, although the nation knew immediately that by a miracle, St. Paul's Cathedral had been spared. I remember trying to walk to the City shortly afterwards to see for myself and being turned back by the rescue squads who were still digging in the rubble for bodies of victims of the first raids and also struggling to rescue alive victims of subsequent attacks.

The news of this attack shocked the country and people became aware, perhaps for the first time, of what might lay in store. Edwin wrote to me immediately on the Sunday morning, September 8th, as soon as he saw the morning papers.

'I suppose that by now you are home once again, but from what I have gleaned from the news and odd papers here and there, London seems to be having it hot. The news of the latest attack struck us all like a bombshell. It seems incredible to me that there are so many men in training to win the war and yet the brunt of the attack has to be borne by the people carrying on in their usual occupations. Why the deuce can't Hitler fight fairly and against the soldiers who are itching to fire rifles at him'.

And again a little later:

'Don't let Jerry get at you because I have not yet the opportunity of doing anything to stop him.....I feel that I ought to be the one in danger, not those who mean so much to me'.

The frustration of being a soldier unable to do the job he was there to do irked him all the time he was in England. Like most people at the beginning of the war he still perceived war as a fight between professionals. 'All-out' war involving civilians was a concept well-known to the Nazis and Fascists but at that time almost inconceivable in Britain.

Edwin also had his part to play in anti-invasion preparations. The enemy could be expected to land anywhere, including the West Coast, and a

reception had to be prepared. Part of their duties were to stand to and be ready to carry out the particular task they had been allotted in such an eventuality. He wrote;

'There is a task on hand and by gum! I shall see that I play my part to the best of my ability. Some of our fellows are getting impatient already and are almost hoping that Jerry will come over here soon. Personally I think the longer he stays away the better. I hate to think that England, our England, should become a battle-ground to suit the will of a maniac. The longer he delays, the more prepared shall we be. And you see, if he doesn't attack before long we shall attack him! I am getting quite cold-blooded towards the war. I never thought I should be able to, and am surprised at myself for being so. It is no longer a case of tit-for-tat even, with me, it is both tit and tat on my side'.

A walk along the street meant picking one's way carefully over rubble, avoiding areas cordoned off as dangerous, stepping over exposed gas pipes and electricity cables, walking through water spurting from broken mains. Rendering these safe and then getting them back into service was a round-the-clock task for the engineers.

From then on there was no let-up in the attacks. By day and by night we lived with an unholy cacophony of sound, becoming so accustomed to the whizz of the fighters as they tore across the sky, to the deeper, more menacing note of the bombers and the thump of explosions, that any moment of silence was unnatural. No anti-aircraft guns fired. There was no defence from the ground at the beginning of the blitz. It was a lonely feeling; isolation, complete vulnerability. When eventually we heard the distinctive sound of a Bofors gun, every-one rushed up from the cellars to cheer.

All that lay between us and complete defeat were the gallant young men in the British fighter-planes, 'the Few', and they were rapidly being killed off. Even so, after the first shock of that onslaught, it gradually

became clear to us that we had won the Battle of Britain. Gallantry in the air and endurance on the ground had triumphed for the time being. No invasion had been attempted although all conditions favoured the invader. Captured records show that Hitler called off Operation Sea Lion on September 13th, two days before his scheduled invasion date.

The young men who fought the battle for us in the amazingly clear blue skies of August and September 1940 can never be forgotten. They were true heroes, who saved us and civilisation from destruction. Always gallant and debonair, they oozed confidence, whatever their innermost feelings. Maybe they needed to create that aura of gallantry for their own sakes and in case they should die, wishing to leave behind them a strong, lasting impression of courage as comfort for their families and inspiration for those following them. This is how I saw the young pilots I met in East Anglia that summer.

They laughed and joked, seeming to go light-heartedly into the blazing sky where their dog-fights or 'jolly little scraps' as they called them, took place. Hair immaculately cut, scarves knotted carelessly round their necks, profiles turned to the sun, smiling and debonair, almost acting a part, they lounged in deck-chairs seemingly without a care in the world, waiting for the tannoy to call 'Scramble! Scramble!'; when they would catapult themselves from their chairs, race across the tarmac and jump into their planes in seconds, apparently eager for the fray, their fears carefully buried under a mask of almost ritualistic behaviour. In that adoption of a pose they were more courageous, more gallant, than they themselves realised, much more than the conscious image they projected.

Let no-one think they were unaware of what they were about to do or what might happen to them. Closeness to death prompts soul-searching of a painful nature. Under the froth they were very serious, dedicated young men, not wanting to kill or be killed, but accepting the possibility of



death for themselves and the inevitability of the fight for all that they loved and a cause in which they believed.

Crew Room.

by John Pudney.

Beyond this disregard  
The casual answer and the hard  
Brief pranks,  
Is kindness which is metal  
Patterned as stalk and petal,  
As the wide flower frank.

Yet fear and death, abstract  
And terrible as dreams, enact  
The scene  
Against which these stand gainly,  
Living nobly or vainly  
Parting with casual mein.

Beyond some sum of words,  
Some bashful imagery of birds  
Are spun  
Together out of laughter  
More than the senses after  
Ever will make of disregard or fun.

They achieved the impossible. They held off the enemy by sheer courage, skill and determination, saving this country from invasion and making it possible for us to live to fight another day. No wonder that my generation will never forget them. Churchill's words rang true at the time and should

never be forgotten: 'Never was so much owed by so many to so few'.

All of us in Pimlico accepted that we might have to fight should an air-borne invasion occur. It is easy to smile now but we were all in deadly earnest in the preparations we made for our own self-defence. Across London house-holders made what preparations they could. It is recorded that one journalist, calling at a badly bombed house in the East End of London one morning in a lull after a raid, was terrified to find himself mistaken for an enemy parachutist in disguise, being accosted by a large lady wielding a heavy piece of brass from a broken bed-stead! Joyce and I with our rounders' sticks at the ready were just a small part of Britain's 'Pitchfork Army', determined to resist invasion. There was even an occasion, amusing in retrospect, when we went into action, on a false alarm.

Sunday dinner-time was still the most important time of the week for a Pimlico family. Early in the war food was reasonably plentiful and our delicious Sunday dinner, the gastronomic high-light of our week, was always eagerly anticipated. One Sunday in September there had been an air battle going on for some time over-head but we had decided to carry on with our normal routine. We were about to sit down at our large, round table in the basement kitchen at noon when amidst the noise of the battle, a shout went up in the street. Parachutists! They had been seen, dropping in the vicinity of the railway line behind our house.

Joyce and I grabbed our sticks and rushed up the area steps, with Maurice close behind and Dad in hot pursuit shouting 'Come back you two girls!' We sped along Stanley Place to Ebury Bridge, together with others similarly equipped, to find when we reached the high point of the railway bridge that no heroic deeds would be necessary. There was no invasion from the skies, only one or two pilots baling out of planes before they crashed.

That particular air-battle over Pimlico had been especially fierce. Twenty Dorniers had made a deliberate sortie to attack Buckingham Palace.

Most had been stopped on the outskirts of London but some had got through. There had been a memorable fight over our house between a Dornier and a Hurricane. Both planes fell in Pimlico, the Dornier in Vauxhall Bridge Road and the engine of the Hurricane in Buckingham Palace Road, the rest being scattered in small pieces far and wide. The Dornier had deposited two time-bombs on the lawn of Buckingham Palace but had been deflected from the Palace itself. The pilot of the Dornier was killed but it was the pilot of the Hurricane who was seen coming down in Hugh Street, just behind our house. His boot dropped in the back yard of the house two doors away from us and was immediately claimed by the police, to the disappointment of our neighbour who wished to keep it as a souvenir.

Some days later, on Friday 13th September 1940 during a day-light raid which lasted from 9.45 a.m. to 2.00p.m. bombers succeeded in hitting Buckingham Palace. The swimming pool and other parts of the Palace were destroyed completely but the Royal Family were unscathed. It was after this raid that Queen Elizabeth (the present Queen Mother) was heard to say, 'Now I can look the East End in the face', this being a reference to the fact that the East End of London had taken the heaviest bombing since the start of the blitz.

Attitudes were strangely paradoxical. The terror of the bombs did not altogether stifle natural curiosity. Together with the high explosives and the fire-bombs, the enemy was also dropping delayed action bombs; there were also a number of unexploded bombs which failed to go off. One such unexploded bomb was found in Shaftesbury Avenue on 15th October 1940. It was decided to load it onto a lorry and drive it away. This operation was fraught with all kinds of danger as the bomb could have exploded at any time. The street was cordoned off before the work began, but the Londoners' love of a 'show' defeated all attempts to keep the public away from the danger. Gradually people began to collect at the barriers, craning their

necks to see what was happening, oblivious to the raid which was still in progress. By the time the lorry was ready to drive off a large crowd had gathered to see it pass.

In October 1940 a new and much more deadly weapon was launched on London; the land mine. This was a huge naval mine which fell slowly and silently to its target by parachute, especially deadly at night when it could not be heard and not always seen. Its blast could blow a man a quarter of a mile and toss whole railway carriages into the air.

The first land mine to hit a residential area in Westminster fell in Pimlico, on 16th October 1940 at 1.55 a.m. on the corner of Alderney Street and Charlwood Street. In that one incident 150 houses were demolished or badly damaged, 23 people died and a further 60 were injured. The fatalities included 11 rescue workers who refused to leave the trapped and the injured while the raids continued. In 1950 Russell House, a block of flats, was erected on the site by the City Council. This was one of the many rebuilding projects on bombed sites which completely changed the face of the Pimlico in which I grew up.

Contrary to expectations there were no gas attacks, thanks to an acute shortage of rubber in Germany. Rubber was necessary for making gas-masks; being unable to supply enough masks for its population and fearing possible reprisals should he launch a gas-attack on London, Hitler decided not to use this weapon. During the months before the blitz many people had become sceptical about the efficacy of the gas masks and wondered whether they would be worth carrying. Edwin had to try out a civilian gas-mask as part of his training. Soldiers went into an improvised gas chamber wearing civilian masks and stayed there with no ill-effect for some minutes. Then, following an order, they removed their masks. Immediately, the gas took effect. They gasped and choked and their eyes stung and watered, forcing them to rush out blindly. The effect of just a few seconds in gas without a

mask did not wear off for several hours. Edwin wrote immediately to me telling me to have faith in the civilian mask and to carry it always.

It was surprising how matter-of-fact it was possible to be about bombs. The nature of the noise we heard was our guide to action, since the noise made by a bomb dropping varied according to its distance away from us. The shriek descended the scale as the bomb neared the ground; a brief silence followed, no more than a hiccup, before the explosion. A bomb falling a couple of streets away had a more muted sound and the explosion was felt and heard up through the ground. One nearby had a deafening shriek and the blast roared like a sudden terrifying wind, knocking over everything and everybody in its way. There was little hope of surviving a direct hit; blast could kill and maim but there was hope of survival and diving for cover became instinctive. The only way to keep sane and have a chance of survival was to take all reasonable precautions while living as normally as possible.

People did behave heroically. But in general, actions and attitudes which might now seem heroic were also the result of people being obliged to make a realistic choice. In September 1940 the choice was: fight or surrender. There was only one choice. Surrender was impossible. We did not wish to be subjected to the Nazi regime. We wanted to continue to live the British Way of Life, with all its irritations, contradictions, out-moded customs, even its inequalities, because of the freedom it gave us to be individuals, to think, speak and act as we chose and not as we were told.

American journalists stationed in England produced some graphic accounts of the blitz for newspapers and news-reels but it must have been difficult for the average American to appreciate exactly what was happening in England and in London in particular. The following is an extract from a commentary to an American news-reel in the autumn of 1940. I quote it because it sums up exactly how we felt in those beleaguered days.

'Today the morale of the British people is higher than ever before. They know that thousands of them will die, but they would rather stand up and face death than kneel down and face the kind of existence their conqueror would impose upon them'.

Pimlico settled to war. Once it was realised that for the time being the threat of invasion had been removed, life took on a recognisable pattern. The worst air-raids took place at night, although day-light raids continued. Every-one determined that as far as could be managed life would continue normally; but it was an abnormal normality that we created.

Routine took over. Plainly, the war would be a long, hard slog. Delco Remy in Glasgow Terrace was turned over to war production where the work force consisted of local women and girls, many of them former city office workers whose jobs had disappeared through evacuation or who had chosen to work locally. Joyce continued to travel daily to her job as a clerk in the office of the Gas Light and Coke Company in Edgware Road. Maurice attended school part-time when eventually classes were arranged.

Shops which had been damaged during over-night raids boarded up their windows and doors and continued to trade. The phrase, 'Business as Usual' was coined and was painted on the outsides. It became a much-used slogan, indicating that no-matter what happened, life would continue on its regular path as long as possible. That slogan, and others that were <sup>invented</sup> ~~coined~~ as the war continued, helped to determine strong attitudes and boost morale. It was whistling in the dark but it worked.

There were no specially constructed, large air-raid shelters for the general population in Pimlico. The only alternative to the cellars were the underground stations. People who chose to bed down there took their own bedding and slept side by side on the platforms. For the next five years this became a form of life for those who slept there. People became expert at folding bedding into a small tight bundle together with food and drink,

reading material and games; women took their knitting. As soon as dusk fell groups made their way down, prepared to stay there till morning.

We never went down there for shelter, even if caught out during the day, preferring our own coal cellar or whatever cover we could find in the street. The idea of being cooped up with hundreds more deep in the earth below London, without adequate facilities, sleeping next to strangers, and above all not knowing what was going on above, was most unappealing. We preferred to take our chance 'up top' where we could make our own decisions about our safety. Many Pimlico residents had the same attitude. Home was best.

We did not escape unharmed in Stanley Place during that first blitz, but that story is told in a later chapter. The blitz on London continued until the end of May 1941. They were strange days and nights, with bizarre incidents to arouse a smile. We developed a certain kind of black humour as the following extract illustrates.

'Flying Officer Pisarek, a Polish flier, had to bale out (when his Hurricane caught fire), leaving one of his boots in his burning plane. He landed in a suburban garden full of roses. A man came over to him and said, 'Sir, I would like you to know this is private property'; and then invited him to tea!'

At the end of September I had to pack my trunk once more and head for Bristol. Now that the attack on London had started and was set to continue I was reluctant to return to my studies. I arrived in Bristol in time for the blitz on that city. As Edwin commented in another letter from Bodmin barracks, 'The Jerries seem to be following you round the country'. Up to that time raids on the Bristol area had been sporadic. Then Hitler decided to extend the blitz to other major cities. Bristol, an important port, was high on the list and was fiercely attacked, great damage being done.

In the last five months of 1940, casualties in London alone were 13,596;

in the rest of Britain, 10,171. By the end of the first blitz in the early summer of 1941, 43,000 people had lost their lives, more than half of them being Londoners. Many more were seriously injured. That was only the first of the prolonged attacks on the capital. Much worse was to follow before the war ended in 1945.

If Londoners had panicked, the war would have been over in 1940 and the course of history and of two world wars would have been changed. Tyranny would have won.



## A u t u m n 1 9 4 0

It was a much more subdued group of King's students who returned to Bristol that October. Many of the men had been called up. Those who remained to complete their degrees, such as Medicals, Engineers and Scientists whose training would be useful to the Services, undertook work in the hospital and with the A.R.P. and rescue units during their spare time. Social activities were confined chiefly to coffee and tea breaks. Together with other women students I had enrolled to train as an Emergency Nurse during the previous term and continued the training in the autumn.

News bulletins became an important part of the daily programme, starting with the morning news at breakfast. There were no small personal radios but any dramatic news was soon passed round the library and lecture rooms. When we heard that King's itself had received a direct hit our concern was for Beaver and his staff. Beaver was our popular, avuncular Head Porter, confidant of staff and student alike. We thanked God they were safe.

Although some university students were afforded the privilege of delaying the call-up until studies were completed, university was no ivory tower. At no time did we feel remote from the activities and trauma of war. Avonmouth, down river, was a regular target, but Bristol itself escaped heavy attack until the end of October and the beginning of November. Then we wondered why we had evacuated from London!

Paradoxically enough, continuing normal student activity seemed of great importance. There were still a fair number of men in the Arts Faculty, disqualified for various reasons from immediate call-up into the Services, and together we endeavoured to keep the ~~various~~ <sup>Faculty</sup> societies running according

to tradition, in order to leave the structure intact and the committee mechanism in good running order for the future. Following a contested election I had been elected President of the Faculty of Arts Society and felt keenly the importance of continuity. How much this mattered in the long run I was too busy to enquire, once my time at King's came to an end.

It was an honour to be the first woman student to hold that position. The election of officers had been carried out with the usual canvassing, there being three candidates for the Presidency, two men and myself, so my election was no foregone conclusion. However it was not the victory for feminism it would have been had times been normal and had the full quota of men students been in residence; but it was a victory for women students nevertheless.

Meetings continued, but although not nearly as lively as they had been the previous session, the men still in the Faculty were determined that I was not going to have an easy run! Although my year of office occurred under such abnormal conditions, I learned a great deal about chairmanship, the organisation and conducting of meetings, (including the control of dissident elements!) and correct procedure, which stood me in very good stead two years later when I found myself for a while Organising Secretary of the Imperial Prisoners' of War Committee under Major-General E.C. Gepp at the War Office. On the whole my fellow students were more difficult than my superiors at the War Office!

On my return to Bristol I found that lodgings had been arranged for me in Redlands, within walking distance of the university, together with another girl student from the History School. No more Manor Hall for me! The landlady, Mrs. Phillips, was a widow who had decided to take students into her home to help out with her budget. She was unaccustomed to students but we managed to rub along together. My room was at the top of the house, an attic, cold and sparsely furnished, but I was happy to exchange the

physical warmth and comfort of Manor Hall for this spartan existence as I also gained the freedom to run my own life.

She was not an easy land-lady at first and I must have written a miserable letter to Edwin for he wrote back that

'if they worry you much more I shall come with a loaded rifle and clear up the mess and ask questions afterwards....You have enough (problems) already without being pestered...'

That letter, although written partly with tongue in cheek, made me realise that he was indeed concerned about my welfare and taught me how unwise it was to worry men in the Services about issues they could do nothing about. Telling the truth in a letter without causing unnecessary worry, particularly during the blitz, was very difficult. Later Edwin accused me of worrying him by not telling him of dangers and difficulties, so I don't think I ever got it quite right!

Mabel, the other girl, was a good pianist. Each evening, before or after our meal, she would spend half-an-hour at the piano. She introduced me to Scarlatti, her favourite composer. The music of Scarlatti never fails to bring back pictures of that shabby little house and the two of us preparing for the evening.

My position as President of the Faculty of Arts involved me to some extent in helping to organise fire-watching duties at the University building. However, I was not allowed to do anything really useful beyond collecting names of men students for the rota. I thought the general arrangements only barely adequate and the numbers on duty each night too small; and was particularly incensed at the over-protective attitude to women students which debarred us from registering as regular fire-watchers. This seemed particularly ridiculous in my case, given my experiences in London. When the time came and the University building was in danger of complete destruction by fire, no-one noticed whether the fire-fighters were

male or female!

The attempt to organise fire-watching duties at the various university hostels brought sharp criticism from the press and from students themselves. The majority of Bristol University students lived in Halls of Residence. An advertisement was put in the local paper asking for women to apply for work as fire-watchers at night at the Halls of Residence, including those housing men students. This raised a local furore among the citizens of Bristol who considered, quite rightly, that men students should be able to take care of their own safety. The few King's men who were housed in Hall were furious that they should be made to look so cowardly and lost no time in disassociating themselves from the advertisement.

The row spread to the national newspapers and was fired afresh by the extraordinarily ill-considered remarks made to a journalist by the member of staff responsible for inserting the advertisement.

Edwin saw the article in the paper and was disgusted. He immediately wrote me an angry letter, enclosing the following cutting from the Daily Herald, from which I quote:

'Women Watchers Will Guard 400 Students- Most of them Men.

'Women fire watchers are to guard the scattered buildings of Bristol University while the 400 students, most of them men, sleep in peace.

'An advertisement in a local newspaper asks applicants -'training essential'- to apply to Dr. F.W.Rixon, who is in charge of the university's A.R.P.

'The advertisement has called forth some caustic comment, and I went to Dr. Rixon today to see what he had to say about it.

'Critics of this scheme', he declared, 'must be very ignorant. They can have no conception of what life in a university amounts to. Our students have to work very hard during the day; they could not carry on with this work if they had to stay awake all night.'

The King's students in the Halls once more complained loudly and bitterly and announced that they would do their own fire-watching.

I saw the whole situation as yet more evidence of the 'nanny' approach to students in Bristol University. Men students not allowed to behave as men and look to their own safety. Women students not allowed to take their turn at fire-watching. But women workers from the city could well be employed to carry out this dangerous work on their behalf!

At this stage of the war it was mostly men in uniform and women at home. Knitting comforts for the troops was almost de rigueur for the female population. I decided that I too would try to do my bit and would make a pair of gloves for Edwin, since they were not part of army issue. My skill did not exactly match my enthusiasm but they were almost finished by the end of his first leave, during which time Edwin had been able to see for himself the tremendous effort required to produce them in a wearable condition. When he eventually received them he commented that he hardly dare wear them since he knew how much effort they had cost me in unpicking and reworking, but that he 'felt proud of them when he could show them in a salute.' How tactful and kind! I later knitted him a pullover which fitted more or less but I gave up my 'knitting for the troops' when I made him a pair of socks to order but which turned out to be several inches too long! I never really regained confidence in knitting.

In October 1940 Edwin was still waiting for the promised recommendation for officer training. Eventually, after a series of very brief interviews with superior officers, during which little appears to have been said on either side, he was finally recommended for a commission and was given a week's leave prior to being transferred to an O.C.T.U. (Officer Cadet Training Unit). This was his first leave since joining the army in June. He broke his journey at Bristol as he had promised and we met one morning at the end of October for coffee.

He had gone to Bodmin well-fleshed from good Yorkshire feeding, a burly rugby player; in nearly four months of hard training he appeared to have lost weight and looked even taller. He carried not an ounce of spare flesh. His face was now much thinner, which made his mother exclaim with horror when later he walked into her kitchen to begin his first leave. This was the first time she had seen him in uniform. The fresh-faced, eager student she had last seen and whom she carried in her mind's eye had been replaced by the trained soldier, leaner than before and even more physically hardened.

When we met he was hung about with packs and carrying a rifle which he kept always close by; it was his constant companion. We needed a whole table to ourselves to accomodate his equipment. He had one hour before catching a train north, hardly time to swallow a cup of coffee but time for us to decide that I would join him in Yorkshire for the period of his leave.

At twenty years old I was still a minor according to the law. If I had followed custom I would have first asked permission from my parents before making such a decision. There was no time for that kind of negotiation and I knew that my mother would have given her consent had she been asked, as my telephone conversation with her later that evening confirmed.

Edwin travelled home that day and I followed the next day. Until then I had been no further north than Burnham Beeches on a Sunday School outing, except for brief visits to Birmingham and Leeds on Student Union business. Travelling to Yorkshire was a great adventure in more ways than one.

I was as strange a phenomenon to Dodworth as Dodworth was to me! My accent sounded too 'plummy' for West Riding ears, even with its Pimlico overtones, which I remember exaggerating in my anxiety to present myself as 'ordinary'. What I did not realise was that I could not be 'ordinary' in Dodworth; I was from the South of England, from London, and was therefore

different, almost a foreigner. I think they feared I would have too many airs and graces, and were determined to make sure I understood that being Yorkshire born and bred was the most important qualification man or woman could have! Being proud of being born a Londoner I could appreciate their local pride but I felt less happy regarding the assumptions made about southerners by some of the people to whom I was introduced.

The West Riding dialect was as foreign to me as French, more so, because I had learned French and could speak it fluently. No-one had taught me the language of the West Riding! Edwin had very little accent, his vowels being almost perfectly southern. Ron Clarke, his friend from Normanton, had only a slight accent and John Hodgson, while overtly proud of his Yorkshire accent, was nevertheless easily intelligible and an amusing conversationalist. We all used the current student vocabulary of our generation.

At that time the dialectal differences in the English language were very marked. The war made a great difference in the way the English language was spoken throughout the land. Movement around the country during the war of both troops and civilian population helped to soften the edges of very varied pronunciations and introduced a more general vocabulary. The necessity for troops to communicate easily with each other over radio links, telephone and various other kinds of intercom. further eroded differences of vocabulary and pronunciation but it was not until after the war that dialects became more homogenised into the standard language spoken and understood throughout the British Isles today. Standard English, as it used to be called before the war, was the English spoken by educated people of the London area. Now, we accept any accent providing the vocabulary is not too local and the diction is clear. I would also add that the sound made by the voice should be easy and pleasant to listen to.

At the time I made my first visit to the West Riding of Yorkshire the

dialect and accent of the Barnsley area was surprisingly unintelligible to me. Over the years I became attuned to it and as the local language became modified, so difficulties disappeared. Yet even as late as the early 1950s Tim and Bob had difficulty in understanding when we made our family visits from Middlesex to Dodworth.

During Edwin's first leave I was teased mercilessly but not maliciously in a dialect I could not understand. Edwin had a mischievous sense of humour and found my predicament most amusing although he consented to 'interpret'. I rose to my own defence and was soon giving as good as I received. As a result I was warmly accepted and quickly received into that tight village community. Yorkshire folk admire a fighting spirit!

My introduction to Dad Dennis typified his blunt and uncompromising approach to every-one and every situation. He came in from work that first evening to find me there with Edwin. It had been difficult enough for him to digest the fact that his younger son had become a soldier, the first and as it turned out the only one in the family, thereby moving even further away from the traditional pattern of life in that Yorkshire mining village than when he went away to university. Now here he was on leave, his education for which they had struggled so hard in abeyance for an unspecified time, with a girl-friend from the south and heaven knew what plans! We were introduced. He looked at me, then turned to Edwin.

'Ah don't mind keeping thee, but I'll not keep tha lass as well!', referring, of course, to the time after the war, which he expected to be soon over, when Edwin would have returned to university. I was stung into making a sharp retort;

'You don't have to worry, I'm perfectly capable of keeping myself!'

Not the happiest of ways to begin a relationship. But Dad Dennis was full of surprises. Giving me a hefty slap on the back and saying 'Tha'll do!' he proceeded to extract a cigarette from his packet of Goldflake and,



for the first time ever, offered the packet to his son, a tacit acceptance of his change of status. Until that moment Edwin had never smoked in the house with parental approval.

Once we got used to each other, which we did very quickly, Dad Dennis and I became very good friends. He often confided in me over the years and we had many an interesting discussion. He was very intelligent and well-informed. In another time and place he would himself have had a university education.

We spent our time during those few days going round the family, most of whom still lived in Dodworth, and meeting Edwin's old friends from chapel-going and school days. Out of courtesy to Mother and Dad Dennis who were adamantly opposed to drink of any kind, we went into Barnsley or walked to the next village for a drink in the evenings, not wishing reports to go back to the house that we had been seen in a pub. Edwin had tried to warn me about some of the difficulties of village life when I was in Somersham and had recounted in my letters the tales going round about the land girls and the air-men. He had written, 'it is sometimes hard to keep up the standards expected of you by the village'. That was indeed true.

I was made very welcome in the Dennis home and by all members of the family. I wonder if they knew how nervous I was? They seemed so confident in their Yorkshireness, I wondered at first if I would ever be totally acceptable. Their household seemed to be the centre of one circle of village life; there were always visitors in the large, homely kitchen but, true to Edwin's prediction, there were many more visitors than usual during that week of his leave, keen to meet his girl from the south. I had to have the Dodworth seal of approval!

Leave was soon over. I had to return to Bristol and Edwin had to report back to Bodmin, prior to being transferred to O.C.T.U. in North Wales. We travelled together on an overnight train incredibly crowded with

service personnel. I left Edwin at Temple Meads station in Bristol early next morning and made my way to my digs.

When I next saw him he was an Officer/Cadet with smart white flashes on his uniform. But between my visit to Dodworth and our next meeting much was to take place.

When the Luftwaffe turned its full attention to Bristol as it did in late October and early November for a short, sharp blitz, the University along with the docks and other major public buildings suffered considerable damage.

Mrs. Phillips, our landlady, was hysterically frightened. I had already shown her how to perfect her black-out and how to tape the windows to prevent damage or injury from pieces of broken glass. We made a shelter for her under the stairs where she would sit from the moment the siren went, her hands clamped tightly over her ears, trembling. We felt very sorry for her and tried to cheer her up with frequent cups of tea but nothing could dispel her terror. Mabel and I agreed never to be out on the same evening, so that she would not be left alone.

We two opted for sitting under the heavy table in the ground-floor back room. On the nights when we were not on duty, we sat hunched up with our books and notes, striving to study and to ignore what was going on above and around us. It was our Finals year and we both wished to get the best possible degree despite the war; there seemed little point in taking a degree at all otherwise.

Each morning, after listening to the news, I would telephone home. The attacks had continued on London and I was as anxious to learn about my family as they were to learn about me. The blitz on Bristol was comparatively short-lived in comparison with the continuous attack on London but the damage to the docks area was tremendous. The Colston Hall, where we had listened to so many concerts the previous year, had been

completely destroyed, as had many other fine buildings. The university was badly damaged and it was impossible to use the building in the immediate future.

The blitz on Bristol and the sporadic raids which preceded and followed it, had changed attitudes completely. The city could no longer be considered a safe haven for individuals and organisations evacuated from London. What had seemed to be an ordeal for London only, now became a terrible reality for the population of Bristol too. One could only guess which city would be the next.

I suppose that I was already accustomed to raids and had developed a fatalistic attitude; what would be, would be. It was difficult to convey the truth in letters to Edwin without either exaggerating or playing down what had happened. Writing home to my family or telephoning, I could use the vocabulary and phraseology we had unconsciously developed to meet the situation and could rely on shared experience to give an accurate impression. Edwin had not experienced an air-raid close to and I wished neither to worry him nor to pretend that nothing much had happened. I did not succeed in painting the right picture. He wrote:

'You say it was not a bad raid, then you say that the University building is burnt out and Queen's Road a shambles. I could hardly believe my eyes when I read that....Are there any casualties among the people I know?'

In fact there were no casualties among students. One former Physics student from King's, a very clever girl who had earned a First and was working on research at the Filton air-craft factory was the only casualty; she was killed in the first raid on Filton.

Edwin resented more than ever the fact that he was safe and I was not. He commented on my fatalistic attitude towards bombing, remarking that it was usually the soldiers who adopted such a philosophy; 'the civilians are bearing the brunt, hence their fatalism. The army is safe and well, hence

its boredom'. He meant more than boredom. He was impatient with training and wanted to get on with things. In his opinion he was seeing a little too much of the 'servitude militaire', even if it was in the good cause of a thorough training, and nothing of the 'grandeur militaire'.

The authorities of both Bristol University and King's decided to cut short the term and send all students home while the buildings were cleared and reorganised, ready for the next term. I packed my belongings once more into my tin trunk and returned to London, where the blitz had continued unabated.

## T h e D e n n i s F a m i l y

It seems appropriate here that I should write down as much as I know about Edwin's family. I tried to persuade him, over the years, to talk about himself and his background but he was a reticent Yorkshireman and was also a modest man who, despite admitting to feeling great family pride, saw no reason to talk much about himself.

Edwin was very different from some of his Yorkshire friends at Westminster and King's; for example, John Hodgson. John was an exceedingly aggressive Yorkshireman. Nothing in London or the south of England was good, as far as he was concerned; I wondered why he had chosen a southern university! John took great delight in exaggerating his Yorkshire accent and had no intention of 'talking posh', the result being that he was often deliberately unintelligible! He actually did his fellow Yorkshiremen a great disservice by adopting such an attitude.

Nevertheless John was a very good friend and we were all fond of him. It was difficult to be cross with him; he received insults and compliments alike with a broad, some said silly, grin, delighted that he was drawing reaction. He lived in Thackley, a village outside Bradford in Yorkshire. The youngest in his Methodist family, born to parents who would have been described as elderly in the nineteen-thirties but scarcely middle-aged according to current standards and attitudes, he was spoilt by parents and siblings alike, the more so because he was very bright intellectually. He won a scholarship to Bradford Grammar School, one of the many excellent schools in the West Riding of Yorkshire. When the time came for university, he made the same choice as Edwin, King's College and Westminster College.

I knew John quite well during our first year in London as we both needed to sharpen up our Latin before being allowed to take an Honours degree. Oddly enough, we had both fallen down in the same way, having omitted to study one of the texts during our last year at school. We were allowed to be 'referred' in Latin which meant we could make up the work alongside our main subjects rather than waste a whole year. So it happened that we shared an evening lecture and tutorial, which we both ignored for the first two terms of the year '38 to '39, sprinting hard and successfully towards the exam. in the summer term.

John was considered by the Professor of English to be able but too immature to start on an Honours course and was obliged to spend one year on the General Degree course to give him time to mature! John was greatly chagrined by this but we were much amused.

Edwin was totally different in temperament and attitude from John. Where John was aggressive, Edwin was controlled, even gentle, except on the rugby field! He was often referred to throughout his life as 'the gentle giant'. Soft-spoken, his Yorkshire accent had already modified before arriving at university. Where John took delight in keeping alive north/south wrangling, Edwin preferred to find areas of common experience and enlarge on them. He was a good ambassador for his home county.

His father, Roland Joseph Dennis, was a railwayman, a main-line engine driver. Apart from the glamour that such a job held for many boys, there were useful bonuses. For example, when Edwin went to Grenoble University for three months in the summer of 1938 while I was at Tours, he travelled to Grenoble and back by rail/sea/rail on a free pass! He had worked for many months as a grocery delivery-boy to finance the whole project, paying his own course fees, board and lodging and providing his own pocket money, no mean feat. Those three months were invaluable in helping him make the change from the unsophisticated environment of a Yorkshire mining village

to the cosmopolitan life of London.

Living, working and enjoying himself with other students from different countries and cultures gave him the opportunity of standing back from life in Dodworth, seeing it in relation to a wider world, in the same way as my time in Tours had helped me. Until that time his horizons had been bounded by the West Riding of Yorkshire and his home village. His ambitions had been geared to what his family and the whole village expected of him: to get a good degree then go back home, marry a local girl and work in the local Grammar School. He had decided before he met me that he would probably not go back to the West Riding and make his career there. Proud as he was of his home county, the intellectual and social constraints of a strong but narrow culture were becoming oppressive to one whose horizons were widening.

The Dennis family originated in Derbyshire, according to Edwin, although Jessie was not sure that this was true. William Cooper Dennis, Edwin's paternal grandfather, was an engineer journeyman. He married a girl from the Norfolk fens named Eliza Coulsey and according to the information on the birth certificate of Edwin's father, Joseph Roland, went to live in the Handsworth district of Sheffield. During Edwin's childhood they lived at Gilroyd, not far from Dodworth where William was chief engine-room mechanic.

They lived in a cottage in the pit yard opposite the engine room and next door to the stables where six beautiful black horses were kept. These horses were used to pull the carriages used by the pit manager and his family, the 'aristocrats' of a mining village. Edwin and his brother and sisters liked to visit their Grandparents, as they were allowed to go into the engine-room to see the engine which operated the cages. Like all true mechanics, their Grandfather was very proud of his engine which he kept spotlessly clean and highly polished. Jessie remembers 'the brass shining like mirrors'. She also remembers the cottage as being very old, pre-dating

the pit, with stone floors and mullioned windows, pretty and romantic if it had not been for its location in the pit yard.

William and Eliza had four children, of whom Roland, Edwin's father, was the third. The first, Betsy, married a miner who died young; they had six children but were not close to their cousins. The second, John Coulsey, married Hannah Senior, a cousin of Edwin's mother. They had one child, Cousin Kathie, who became a nurse and later matron of a hospital in the Hull area. The fourth child, Lena, was the black sheep of the family. She had an illegitimate child in her teens, unforgivable at that time and in that community; she also liked to 'tipple and pub-crawl', activities totally shocking to such a strong, methodist family. However, she must have been a compassionate person as she lived at home and cared for her parents until they died.

Later she married a man with money and property by whom she had a daughter. Despite attaining respectability by marriage, the two families saw very little of each other as Edwin's father disapproved very strongly of her wild ways and would not allow her in his house. Years later he relented, after she had shown her willingness to settle down, and allowed her to visit his family occasionally. I never met her, which was a pity. Her husband was considerably older than she was and died early, leaving Lena very well-off. The black sheep ended up wealthier and more comfortable than any-one else in the family, a fact which Edwin found very amusing!

Joseph Roland, Edwin's father, married Hannah Kenworthy, the fourth of thirteen children born to George Kenworthy, a coal-miner, and Sarah Senior. Both the Kenworthy and the Senior families were well-known in the district and played a considerable part in local affairs. Grandfather Kenworthy was not known to Edwin and his brother and sisters as he was killed in a pit accident in 1911. Grandmother Kenworthy was Sarah Senior, from an old Dodworth family. They had thirteen children of whom nine lived:



Lizzie, Walter, Albert, Hannah, Sydney, Wesley, Alice, George, Jim, in that order of birth. Except for George, whom I never met, they all married locally. In fact, members of the Senior, Kenworthy and Dennis families married each other with the result that Edwin had some cousins who were related to both families.

George married, moved away and lost touch. This upset the family as they felt it to be his duty to keep in touch with them; they expected all members of the family to regard Dodworth as their base throughout their lives. Sydney, another uncle whom I never met, had been an electrician at the pit, but he also moved away, suddenly and mysteriously, 'presumably to avoid a scandal', to quote Jessie. The rest all married locally, each couple having several children who took leading roles in every aspect of village life.

Roland Dennis and Hannah Kenworthy married and set up home in Dodworth, at first living in a council house in Thornley Avenue from which they later moved. They had four children, Jessie, Walter, Edwin and Phyllis. When I first visited them in September 1940 they had been living for some years in Barnsley Road in a comfortable-looking stone house which was the property of Hannah's brother Walter, who also owned and lived in the adjoining property. It was this house, 54, Barnsley Road, which as well as being home to Edwin and the immediate family, became the centre for the 'clan', the place where all the cousins met. Although Wesley was the wealthiest and in many ways the most influential member of the family, Hannah was regarded as the centre of the family, the one whose home was home to every-one.

Although the house had been sufficiently modernised to have a bathroom with running hot and cold water, the only lavatory was at the bottom of the garden. This had originally been an earth closet but not long before Edwin left for university, all the closets in that row of good, solid stone houses had been converted to flush toilets, a source of great pride to the

owners and tenants.

Life for the Dennis family centred round the Wesleyan Chapel. At one time Hannah, Edwin's mother, had sung in the choir but had given it up as the family took up more and more of her time. She was a devoted mother. Edwin and Wally both sang in the choir and Roland, their father, was a Trustee of the chapel and the Sunday School Superintendent. This was an important and respected position in the village. I was surprised to learn that Sunday School was not only for children; all the young people whose families were 'chapel' went to Sunday School, up to and into their twenties. When Edwin decided not to go to Sunday School on his first leave from the Army in autumn 1940, his parents were surprised and just a little shocked. It was unfortunate for me that this defection co-incided with my first visit to the family; I had the feeling that I was held responsible, since I was 'church', but that was probably untrue. I was over-sensitive to atmosphere during that first visit.

We were expected to go to Chapel twice on Sunday, morning and evening. As the sermons were long, the prayers 'extempore' and the liturgy very flexible, this was hard for me. But the singing was good and I was able to join in with some feeling of belonging. Each Sunday the visiting minister had his mid-day dinner with Edwin's family. This threw a certain constraint over the proceedings as far as I was concerned, as the talk was somewhat 'preachy'. It was during Sunday dinner on my first visit that I learned that Edwin had been destined to become a local preacher, a role associated in my mind with excessive piety and puritanism. This was disturbing news! Edwin sensed my reaction and very gently but firmly made it plain that his plans had changed, for which I was heartily thankful! Edwin must have seemed a very different person to his parents from the boy who had left home just two years previously.

The chapel was the centre of activities for the Dennis family in much

the same way as the church formed the focus of our social life in Pimlico. Apart from the choir, there was the Chapel Tennis Club which, amazingly, had its own courts. What a wealthy chapel! In London tennis was a game for the middle classes. The great difference in land values between inner London and a Yorkshire mining village made it possible for such a club to be established but I was still surprised that the chapel could raise enough money to keep the courts in good condition. No wonder Edwin was such a good tennis player, despite not having played at school. There was also a chapel Dramatic Society which presented operas, plays and a yearly pantomime. I never saw a production as they stopped at the outbreak of the war for lack of young men to take part but I readily believe that they reached a good amateur standard and provided for the village community a great deal of fun for participants and audience alike.

Two uncles played a considerable part in Edwin's life when he was a boy, Uncle Albert and Uncle Wesley, both Kenworthys. Albert was a good musician and played the chapel organ for most of his adult life. He produced the operas and plays for the Dramatic Society and organised concerts for the village. He also taught Edwin to play both piano and organ and in that way greatly enriched our lives, mine as well, as Edwin played for me every day once we had set up home together. Albert worked in the local pit and died in his fifties from the usual chest condition contracted by miners.

Wesley became big news in the village and elsewhere. He married a local girl, May Thems and had two children, Luther and Minnie who were both musical. Luther took a degree in music and eventually became Principal of an Emergency Training College before he retired. Minnie had a beautiful contralto voice and won many prizes at festivals; she was known as a singer in the West Riding but never pursued a musical career further afield.

Uncle Wesley was a powerful man, both physically and in terms of local influence. He was a well-known Local Preacher on the methodist circuit and

a councillor. Formidable in aspect and voice, he tended to intimidate those around him and was surprised when he met opposition. He would have liked to have taken Edwin's career in hand as he had a very exalted opinion of his own knowledge and experience; but Edwin listened to all he said and then went his own way. It was easier than arguing with Wesley!

Salesman for Dodworth Colliery, Wesley had at one time owned a 'day-hole' for extracting surface coal. He finished his career in coal as a trader in the Blackpool area while still living in Dodworth and became President of Manchester Coal Exchange. By the time I knew him he had made money and had built for himself an imposing house on a beautiful hillside outside the village. It was reckoned to be one of the best houses in the district and he was very proud of it. He commanded great respect but also a degree of fear, being a difficult man to cross.

He and I clashed on our very first meeting, which was in the chapel, he being the preacher at the evening service the first time I attended. He had chosen a specifically moral theme, railing against sinfulness (i.e. sex!) and mentioning the dangers to 'our young men' away from home in the Services, at the mercy of unscrupulous young women from the big cities in the south! Wesley knew I was there and was 'having a go'. Edwin, sitting in the choir behind the pulpit, at first grinned broadly, then shook his head meaningfully at me when he saw me try to rise from my seat in the congregation to make my protest.

Uncle Wesley and I faced each other in the porch after the service. I demanded an apology and he invited me to supper in his imposing house. I declined supper until I had an apology there and then, refusing to be mollified by his bluff and hearty approach. When Edwin backed me and gave his uncle what really amounted to a severe reproof (probably the first time anyone had ever challenged Wesley in that way!) I received my apology and I agreed to go to supper. He never bore me any ill-will but was always

surprised when I challenged him. He was not used to opposition and certainly not from a female!

Alice was the favourite Aunt of the family. She married Herbert Sanders and they went to live in Oldham. They had one son, Moffat, who won a scholarship to Manchester Grammar School and lived near enough to travel each day. He later took a degree in forestry and followed a career in Zimbabwe.

This large family was not only close-knit but talented in many directions. The musical ability has passed on through Edwin to our children and grandchildren, augmented by talent from my own family. It is also obvious that being so numerous and living in the same village they were a formidable group to infiltrate!

This account would not be complete without mention of Edwin's brother and sisters. Jessie was the eldest. She had left school at fourteen but had determined to become a nurse. By persistence and hard work she was eventually accepted for training. This was unusual as only girls with academic qualifications were allowed into the profession in pre-war days. She rose to become a much respected theatre sister and worked as such for many years in Leeds General Hospital. She met Harold Baker, an army officer, while nursing him through his war wounds and later married him. They made their home in Otley where Jessie still lives. Their daughter Wendy and her husband farm on a Scottish island while their son Richard lives in the Isle of Man.

Wally was a railwayman, in charge of the signals high up on the moors at Dumford Bridge, a very isolated and lonely spot. He used to go home at week-ends to get warm and have a good meal! He married Mary, the daughter of a baker in Barnsley. He then left the railway and became sales manager for the bakery and helped his father-in-law run the shops. Their only child, Sally, trained as a teacher and lived in Brazil for some years where her

husband was an engineer. They now live near Taunton.

Phyllis, the 'baby', was in the Land Army when I first met her, working at a stately home not far from her own home. Later she too became a nurse. For some months after the war she lived with us in Edgware, then later married and lived in Otley. Her husband died in a motor-bike accident leaving her with four young children to rear, which she did most competently, raising a happy and successful family. Phyllis still lives near her old home, at Gilroyd, on the outskirts of Dodworth.

This was the family and community I was later to join and which welcomed me so warmly. In social status much like my own, it was a close family again like my own, which meant that in spite of completely different attitudes, customs and even standards in some respect, we all made harmonious relationships.

But I must confess that at first the differences between our two cultures seemed very great. No wonder that when I first went to Dodworth I found Yorkshire more foreign than France!

## B o m b e d   O u t !

The face of Pimlico had changed in the time I had been in Bristol. Whole streets had been reduced to rubble. Houses had yawning gaps in their frontages, enormous, ugly mouths with broken teeth. The whole side of a house could be sliced off, as though with a massive carving-knife, to expose complete rooms, furniture still in place, like some giant doll's house waiting for its owner to begin her game. Bombs exposed the privacies of family life to public gaze, leaving intimate belongings for all to see: a night-dress fluttering defiantly from the end of an iron bedstead, itself perched precariously on the edge of a broken floor: clothes in a pile where the owner had tossed them: a teddy-bear, a child's well-loved companion, head down, abandoned in the rubble: favourite possessions tantalisingly within grasp yet dangerously unapproachable.

By Christmas 1940 land-mines were being dropped with increasing frequency, more having landed in Pimlico since the first one in October, taking out whole blocks and wreaking death and destruction. There were more young men in uniform. I hardly recognised some of the husky young soldiers on leave as boys with whom I had grown up. Brother Jack and his friends, Vic Smith, (who fought with the Desert Rats and was killed at El Alamein) Jack Perkins and others, all in their early twenties, had been among the first to be called up and were already deployed about the country. Others, just out of their teens, who a few months ago in the summer had been youthful and untried in appearance, now looked manly and experienced, already touched by the sombre duties of a soldier. Like Edwin, they had not

yet reached their official majority of twenty-one.

Through-out the entire period of the war, St.Gabriel's Scouts and Guides kept meetings going. There in the Scout hut behind the Parish Hall they practised First Aid and rehearsed for the Gang Shows which Skipper Adams continued to produce until all his cast had departed for the Services. When I was home I joined in their activities, a welcome relief from study, helping Skipper Adams as his aide. Rehearsals were frequently interrupted by the banshee call of the siren, causing every-one to scatter. Joyce and I preferred to race for home but if the bombs followed too hard on the warning we were obliged to take what shelter we could find.

During the first few months of the blitz the high-explosive bombs had been accompanied by showers of incendiary bombs designed to burn down those places not blown up. In Westminster, hand operated stirrup-pumps were issued for dealing with them but this was only intended as a temporary measure. There was no stirrup pump allocated to Stanley Place so we were obliged to develop our own technique for dealing with incendiaries. It was really very simple. We loosened all the gratings over the drains so that it was the work of a moment to hook them up and kick the bombs down the drain to the sewers below. We soon became expert at this operation.

In other areas of London people had made their own fire-fighting equipment. For example, in Leyton, the Lea Hall Road Fire-bomb Fighters, a volunteer squad formed by the residents, invented their own home-made stirrup-pump using a child's go-cart, garden tools such as a hose and spade, and a dustbin lid; the photograph in the archives shows the equipment to be Heath-Robinson in design and very primitive. But by all accounts it was used to great effect.

From the beginning of the war the Scout Movement had assumed an important role in Air Raid Precautions. A special patrol was initiated for



boys from the age of fourteen upwards. This was called the War Service Scout Patrol or the WASPS. In Pimlico they began their service by manning small stirrup pumps under the guidance of the local A.R.P. Wardens, to deal with incendiary bombs; but they became so efficient that they were soon promoted to being in charge of a trailer pump and were the authorised fire-fighters in the area. The pump was a heavy Coventry Climax Trailer Pump, the type usually towed behind a fire-engine. The boys hauled it manually round the streets to wherever it was needed, a truly herculean task.

Speed of movement to the fire and speed in setting up the pump and getting the water on was absolutely essential. The boys trained for this in the evenings, before the wail of the siren called every-body to duty. They became expert at pulling the heavy pump at running pace through the streets. There were other trailer pump crews in Pimlico, manned by men too old at that stage for the call-up. In order to increase efficiency, regular competitions were held over measured distances, the object being to pull the pump to the nearest Emergency Water Tank, set up the pump and get the pressure up, then be the first to shout 'Water on! 60lbs pressure! Water on!'. .

Emergency Water Tanks, enormous green-painted metal vats which held thousands of gallons of water, were set up in as many places as possible, but particularly on bombed sites. They became a fixed part of the wartime landscape and remained in situ for several years after the war.

Although they were all young boys aged fourteen and fifteen, the WASP Patrol won every one of the competitions and earned the praise and admiration of the other crews. Since they were also brave and efficient in action, their contribution to Air Raid Precautions in Pimlico cannot be over-estimated.

Maurice joined the WASPS as soon as he was eligible and served on the

pump until he joined up in the Royal Marine Commandos at the age of seventeen. He had never been particularly strong as a boy but his training in the WASPS helped to develop him into a husky young man whom the Marines were eager to recruit.

I felt guilty not having a significant job to do. Every-one else in pimlico was hard at work, either in the Services, or working locally to keep life ticking over, or in the Civil Defence. I set about finding work for the vacation. It was coming up to Christmas and the Post Office had advertised for temporary workers. I applied and was taken on at the big sorting office in Westminster, near to the Grey Coat Hospital. I set off very early in the morning and by 8.a.m. was well into my stride.

The work was exceedingly boring. I sat in front of a frame of pigeon-holes, labelled for counties as far as I remember. My task was to take the letters from the trough in front of me and throw them into the correct pigeon-holes. I soon developed sympathy for people who would be doing that job for the rest of their lives!

The Head Postmaster seemed to have little respect for prolonged, formal education. In his opinion education was for children, work was for adults and therefore all adults should do a job of work and earn their keep! That went for me too. He could not understand what a girl was doing at university. He was not alone in thinking in this way; such an attitude was widespread among both men and women at the time. He conceded that prospective teachers needed to extend their education but could not understand why I wished to teach. In several interviews he attempted to persuade me to give up my studies and do what he called a 'real' job in the Post Office, holding out all kinds of inducements and promises of rapid promotion. He found it difficult to understand why I refused his offer.

My wages, more than Edwin received when he was at Bodmin, seemed a

fortune to me. With tremendous pride I took home that first week's pay-packet and offered it to Mother. During previous vacations I had earned a little money by coaching Sixth Formers in French, work found for me by staff at the Grey Coat Hospital, and had kept myself during the previous summer vacation in the Land Army, but the pay had been very poor. I had not minded the low pay as I was there trying to play my part in the war effort. Now I was just a few weeks from my twenty-first birthday and this was the first money I had ever earned in what was always described to me as the 'real world'. When the vast majority of young people left school at fourteen and had been earning since that age, it was a relief to me to have a proper pay packet for a few weeks.

At first Mother refused to take any money at all but eventually, to my satisfaction, she agreed to accept two pounds a week while I was working. I kept a few shillings for pocket money and saved the rest. My work came to an unexpectedly abrupt end before Christmas but by that time I had a small cache of savings and had been doing a socially useful job.

Even though he was now at O.C.T.U. and looking forward to a more purposeful task as an officer, Edwin found it very difficult to reconcile himself to being in safety while I was not. The 'longueur' which assailed so many soldiers in training and which we had studied so assiduously in 1938 in Alfred de Vigny's 'Servitude et Grandeur Militaire' hung about him. In his free time when he had time to consider his position he was alternately angry and wretched.

'I have some bad dreams when I think of you in the wreckage of Westminster. It seems all wrong that you should be there in danger when I am absolutely safe and it is I who am supposed to be fighting for my country'.

On hearing of my temporary job in the Post Office he was very disappointed. He was expecting Christmas leave and wanted me to spend at

least part of it with him at his home in Dodworth out of danger for a while. In the event I was glad I had stayed at home.

With only six months to Finals I did not lack academic work and there was plenty to do helping with household duties. It never occurred to us not to continue with housework and cleaning to our normal high standard, even though we knew that next morning all might be rubble or at best, covered in a thick film of dust and broken plaster. As soon as darkness fell it was time to prepare for the night. Books, games, hobbies, blankets, food and drinks were put ready in the cellar, this chore becoming as much a part of daily routine as washing and dressing, shopping and cooking.

The family hovered between basement rooms and cellars while I worked in the basement kitchen, seated under our heavy, round table, surrounded by notes and books. It was not always easy to persuade myself that my studies were important. Sometimes only the knowledge that failure would be a bitter disappointment for my parents kept my nose to a task which I would have enjoyed so much in normal times.

The land-mine that robbed us of our home descended in sinister silence, completely unheralded. Designed to drift down by parachute, unseen in the dark, its devastating explosion was unexpected and unnannounced. We had learned to cope with ordinary bombs which we could hear. The volume and pitch of their shriek as they hurtled towards the ground gave a good idea of where they would drop. We used to say that if you couldn't hear it, you wouldn't hear it, as it would have hit you! Land-mines were different. There was no noise on the approach, just the explosion on impact. And they always came after dark.

It was inevitable that at some time our house would be hit, since just one street, Hugh Street, separated us from the Southern Railway line which ran into Victoria Station. On December 21st 1940 at 7.04 p.m. while Mother,

Joyce and our Grandparents were in the cellar and I was in the kitchen, there was an immense explosion, the largest we had experienced in our immediate vicinity until then.

Our world split apart. The ground shuddered and the house seemed ready to collapse like a pack of cards; miraculously the walls kept upright. Then came the momentary silence which always followed an explosion; this was broken again by the thunder of falling masonry, the tinkling sound of shattering glass, the splatter of plaster shaken from walls and ceilings and the thump of furniture sliding and falling.

The table under which I was sitting was supported on one, central leg. This collapsed. Pinned to the floor amid a choking mass of plaster and broken glass, unable to see anything through the thick cloud of dust, I lay there breathless, thankful to be alive and straining to hear what had happened in the cellar. Plaster from the ceiling covered the table and pressed it down on me. Dust filled my eyes and mouth and lay thick on my tongue. I coughed and spluttered.

For what seemed an age but could only have been seconds, there was an eerie silence. Every-one else must be dead! Then came Mother's voice calling my name. Thank God! I had to spit the muck from my mouth before trying to shout back, the while wriggling out from under the table. All round me was plaster, broken furniture and a myriad jagged pieces of glass. Once free from the table I climbed over the rubble, making for the door. Before I could get there another explosion, this time not quite so near, shook the already badly-damaged house and I was thrown across the room, through the broken wall into the downstairs passage.

Maurice, who had been out at Scout meeting and had run for home when the siren first sounded, was caught outside in the street, just at the top of the area steps. He came down the steps quicker than he had intended,

helped by the blast! He was lucky to have escaped serious injury. The family in the cellar had been thrown about and Mother had banged her head against the wall but although badly shocked they were relatively unharmed.

It was thanks to Mother's presence of mind and prompt action that we did not suffer the worst of all terrors, that of being trapped by fire. A valor stove, fuelled by paraffin, had been installed in the ice-cold cellar at the insistence of Grandma and Grandad Berry who were by then living with us. At the impact, the lighted stove overturned. Mother's swift action in righting it immediately and turning it out saved us all from being trapped under a house in flames.

Our escape was miraculous. Many houses were destroyed in Hugh Street. Much damage was done to the railway, where the land mine fell. To this day repairs to the walls along the track can be seen from the Brighton train if one knows where to look.

It was assumed that the missile was a land-mine. No evidence was found as to its exact nature and to this day mystery surrounds the whole incident. Recent investigation in the City Archives and talk with the Archivist support this; it was not an ordinary high explosive, there was none of the usual evidence left by a land-mine. Was it some new experimental missile, as the extraordinarily wide area of damage and lack of recognisable evidence suggested? Or something even more sinister? We shall never know.

It was our custom to dash along to the scullery during temporary lulls in raids to make tea and sandwiches. That night we had not had time for our usual refreshments before the missile struck. Joyce and I wanted to go back into the house to collect some of our belongings (I particularly wished to try to find my books and notes) and to make that much-longed-for cup of tea; but Mother, backed up by the Air-Raid Warden whose word was law in

these situations, forbade us even to try to reach the scullery. If there had been any gas or electricity available it would have been too dangerous to attempt to use it. A quick examination of the situation by the wardens and rescue squad suggested that we would be safe to stay in the cellar and that is where we spent the rest of the night, shaken, dirty, cold and very, very thirsty and hungry. Next morning, at day-break, weary and caked in dirt, we emerged to assess the extent of the damage.

For me the worst disaster was to lose three years' work in a second. My note books had disappeared in shreds and I had nothing whatsoever from which to organise my revision for Finals. At first I could not take in the enormity of my loss. Hundreds of pieces of torn paper lay mixed with the plaster and fallen masonry, all that remained of my work. My spirits sank. Most of my books were in my tin trunk but they could not make up for the loss of nearly three years' lecture notes, essays and language work. The problem was too over-whelming to contemplate and I pushed it to the back of my mind, to concentrate on other problems more immediately pressing.

In a remarkably short time Air Raid Wardens and the Police had everything under control. We had to leave our cellar and were told we could not return to the house, although from a cursory inspection it seemed that we might be able to get upstairs. We had hopes that after the initial structural examination which took place on all buildings damaged in the raids, we might be allowed back into our home, to live in it, damaged as it was. However, this was not to be. What remained of no.12 was deemed to be unsafe and we were not allowed near it, not even into the street. We had only the clothes we were wearing, plus the few belongings kept in the cellar for such an emergency.

Our first thought was for food. We trailed somewhat wearily to the Emergency Rest Centre, set up in a school, where washing facilities and food

were provided for the homeless. Nothing could be done about clothes until we were able to collect the cash allowance due to all people bombed from their homes. There was enough money and coupons to provide one simple change of clothing, adequate for the time being.

It was a strange feeling to have no base except a space in a public room; no-where to cook, no place of our own to go when night fell.

Bomb-blast behaved strangely. Despite the tremendous shaking, the destruction of windows and doors, falling masonry and plaster, and holes in the floors, the piano remained intact, though badly scratched and caked inside and out with plaster and thick dust. Astonishingly, the china cabinet, in which Dad's silver rowing prizes were arranged, was found standing upright, dirty but with hardly a scratch on its polished wood. Mother's more delicate pieces and in particular Dad's Doulton vases had been packed away together with Grandma's victorian vases and lustres and were easily recovered. So, thanks to the strange direction taken through the house by the blast, some objects of sentimental value were saved and we are able to pass them on to our children and grandchildren.

After the house had been given a further structural examination, Dad was allowed in under close supervision, to salvage such items of furniture as he could safely reach. He had only Maurice to help him as the house was too unsafe for more than two people at a time. They had to tread very warily, under instructions from the demolition experts. Mother, Joyce and I had to watch from behind the temporary barrier. Westminster City Council had provided a dust cart on which to load the furniture. Dust carts had very high sides, thus the only possible way to load the furniture was for Maurice to stand in the cart and for Dad to lift the items up to him. By a process of push and pull they eventually succeeded in loading all that could be retrieved, with special help for the piano. The cart was then



driven away to a depository where what was left of our home could be stored under the care of the Council until such time as we could find or be allotted another place in which to live.

My tin trunk with some of my clothes and some text books was rescued when Dad moved the furniture. I had half hoped that he would find some of my note-books but it was really a forlorn hope. I could hardly believe that not a piece of paper remained of nearly three years work.

There were no Christmas celebrations for us that year. My twenty-first birthday also occurred during the time we were homeless, on January 3rd. No party had been planned although my parents had marked the occasion with a present, which gave me great joy. As it turned out, neither Joyce nor I celebrated our coming-of-age, as both dates came within the span of the war years. Jack had already had his before the war and Maurice's was to come well after hostilities had ceased.

Nevertheless, my birthday was not forgotten by college friends. Reaching one's majority was really very important in those days. Edwin found me a lovely present which he posted to me later. John Hodgson wrote me a sonnet from where he was 'somewhere at sea'. I copy it out below, not because it is a great piece of poetry, but to illustrate a phenomenon of our student life. We all wrote verse, most of it pretty poor, but it was a medium we liked to try out, one well-suited to the heightened emotions of wartime. Nothing that we wrote merited being kept for posterity but our years of training in literary genres, our studies in prosody, and the many poems we had learned over the years, tempted us to try to express ourselves in this particular way.

We were steeped particularly in the traditions of the Romantics, both English and French, although I had a penchant for the English Metaphysical Poets and the French Symbolistes. Trying to write in those styles was

amusing while we were at university. Edwin used to say we were all 'poseurs' like the Romantics. Once he had joined the army he wrote no more verse.

John on the other hand wrote a great deal of verse, favouring the sonnet form. We destroyed all our efforts once we had read them to each other but I kept this one as I am sure John intended me to do. It was kind of him to write it and is a fair example of what John could do almost at a moment's notice.

To Pat On Reaching Her Majority.

The moon has long-since cooled and lost its fire;  
The sun is wheeling to his ice-cold death;  
Man after man, through meadow and through mire,  
Has stayed to draw a joyous, painful breath.

For his small moment in Eternity--  
Blinded by self-love and gross arrogance--\*  
Each fool has lived and thought himself the lone  
For whom creation played, that he might dance.

Celestial bodies, man, creation, all,  
Move to their end and slowly peter out  
Like candles snuffed, and then beneath the pall  
Of darkness lie; their triumphs end in rout.

But thou, for me, 'though seeing majority,  
Still young wilt live, throughout eternity!

\* Here John put a note admitting that all the lines did not scan properly and saying that he expected me to return it to him corrected!

Having no desire to spend our days in an Emergency Rest Centre and our nights down in the Tube we again left the centre of London temporarily, this time going to Aunt Win in Greenford, while Grandma and Grandad were taken to Aunt Florrie, their daughter in Perivale.

The Dennis household was not on the phone otherwise I would not have been able to prevent myself from telling Edwin about our plight. As it was, I saw no reason to spoil his home leave by writing him a letter which would have worried him, so I did not tell him we had been bombed out when I wrote, but suggested I might join him in Pwhelli before going to Bristol. However, I still had to explain to his mother my reason for not joining them after Christmas for two days as arranged. I wrote to her a separate letter, explaining our situation and asking her not to worry Edwin with the bad news.

I should have realised that I was creating a mystery. First of all I had given Edwin no reason for not joining him in Dodworth when he would be free to spend some time with me; then I suggested that I should join him in Pwhelli when he would be on duty all day and not free to be with me! He was completely mystified. True to my request, his Mother refused to tell him what I had written until he was due to return to O.C.T.U.

He was very, very angry with me for not having told him the truth, and for treating him as though he had to be protected; and for thus preventing him from coming down to help us. He tried to get his leave extended but without success, as we were not his family. Making such a mess of that situation convinced me for ever-more that it is always preferable to tell the truth even if it hurts. When he eventually found out the full story Edwin made immediate plans for me to stay in Pwhelli before returning to

university.

The first sustained blitz on London lasted from September 1940 to the end of May 1941. Before it ended there was another furious burst of raids. By that time night-fighters had proved their eyes under a 'bombers moon' with the result that more raids took place on dark nights; but to the end of the war Londoners were always wary of those lovely night skies brightly-lit by a 'bombers moon'.

Noel Coward again expressed the sentiments of the average Londoner in song. Years later in 1980 he wrote in explanation: 'London Pride' was written in the spring of 1941. I was standing on the platform of a London railway station on the morning after a bad blitz. Most of the glass in the station roof had been blown out and there was dust in the air and the smell of burning. The train I was waiting to meet was running late so I sat down on a platform seat and watched the Londoners scurrying about in the thin spring sunshine. They all seemed to me to be gay and determined and wholly admirable and for a moment or two I was overwhelmed by a wave of sentimental pride. The song started in my head then and there and was finished in a couple of days. The tune is based on the old traditional lavender-seller's song 'Won't you buy my sweet blooming lavender, there are sixteen bunches one penny'. This age-old melody was appropriated by the Germans and used as a foundation for 'Deutschland uber Alles', and I considered that the time had come for us to have it back in London where it belonged. I am proud of the words of this song. They express what I felt at the time and what I still feel, i.e. London Pride.

London Pride has been handed down to us,

London Pride is a flower that's free.

London Pride means our own dear town to us,

And our pride it for ever will be.  
 Woa Liza! See the coster barrows  
 Vegetable marrows and the fruit piled high.  
 Woa Liza! Little London sparrows,  
 Covent Garden market where the costers cry.  
 Cockney feet mark the beat of history,  
 Ev'ry street pins a memory down,  
 Nothing ever can quite replace  
 The grace of London Town.

There's a little city flow'r ev'ry spring unfailing,  
 Growing in the crevices by some London railing.  
 Tho' it has a Latin name, in town and countryside  
 We in England call it London Pride.

London Pride has been handed down to us,  
 London Pride is a flower that's free.  
 London Pride means our own dear town to us,  
 And our pride it for ever will be.  
 Grey city, stubbornly implanted,  
 Taken so for granted for a thousand years.  
 Stay city smokily enchanted,  
 Cradle of our memories, our hopes and fears.  
 Ev'ry blitz your resistance toughening  
 From the Ritz to the Anchor and Crown,  
 Nothing ever could over-ride  
 The pride of London Town.

London Pride has been handed down to us,  
 London Pride is a flower that's free.  
 London Pride means our own dear town to us,  
 And our pride it for ever will be.  
 Hey lady, when the day is dawning  
 See the p'liceman yawning on his lonely beat.  
 Gay Lady, Mayfair in the morning,  
 Hear the footsteps echo in the empty street.  
 Early rain and the pavements glistening.  
 All Park Lane in a shimmering gown.  
 Nothing ever could break or harm  
 The charm of London Town.

In our city darkened now, street and squares and crescent  
 We can feel our living past in our shadowed present.  
 Ghosts beside our star-lit Thames who lived and loved and died,  
 Keep throughout the ages London Pride.

London Pride has been handed down to us,  
 London Pride is a flower that's free.  
 London Pride means our own dear town to us,  
 And our pride it for ever will be.  
 Grey city, stubbornly implanted,  
 Taken so for granted for a thousand years.  
 Stay city smokily enchanted,  
 Cradle of our memories our hopes and fears.  
 Ev'ry blitz your resistance toughening  
 From the Ritz to the Anchor and Crown,

Nothing ever could over-ride

The pride of London Town.

I have included all the words of this song as it so aptly says what all Londoners were feeling at the time.

Many important buildings were hit or destroyed, including Buckingham Palace. King's College received a direct hit; Burlington Arcade, Queen Anne's Mansions, Old Palace Yard, Westminster Abbey, The Houses of Parliament( over a dozen times), Carlton House Terrace, The Carlton Club, St. James' Church Picadilly and many beautiful churches in the City of London, Admiralty Arch, Lincoln's Inn Fields, Harrod's, Victoria Station (ten times), our school the Grey Coat Hospital, and many, many others were hit so badly it seemed that London would be irrevocably changed.

Some of these buildings, together with others subsequently damaged by the even more deadly V1 and V2 missiles, were rebuilt, others were demolished and the face of London did change after the war but still remained recognisable.

During May 1941 some of the worst incidents took place in Pimlico and Westminster. 1000kg bombs were being dropped. One such bomb fell right through a complete block of council flats on the Millbank Estate and exploded beneath the foundations, destroying the flats completely. Fortunately not all the flats were occupied at the time as families had been evacuated but there were still 35 casualties. Rescuers dug out 20 people from a surface shelter which had been completely covered by debris; to every-one's amazement and joy none of them were seriously injured. There were many incidents in Pimlico during that spring and early summer and people were glad of the respite that came in July and August.

On May 10th 1941, exactly one year after Winston Churchill became Prime

Minister, 300 bombers en masse again attacked the centre of London and Westminster in particular. The House of Commons was hit and was burned out. Many other beautiful and famous buildings in Westminster were also damaged, some beyond repair. The next night, the Mayor of Westminster, Councillor L Eaton Smith, was killed in a trench shelter in Eaton Square, while making one of his regular nightly visits to shelters in Westminster. That night saw the largest number of casualties of any night of that first blitz: 1,436 people died and 1,792 were seriously injured.

Yet, as I remember us, spirits were still buoyant. We had a fundamental belief in our ultimate victory because evil must in the end be defeated, there could be no other outcome; we just had to patiently endure.



## P w h e l l i

In early January 1941 I set off to visit Edwin in Pwelli. The long journey from London to North Wales was tiring, alleviated only by the beauty of the countryside through which we ambled. It was a typical war-time journey. There was no buffet car, and no opportunity to leave the train to forage for a hot drink. The train clanked along at an absurdly slow pace, pulling into sidings to allow the swift passage of troop and goods' trains, even making a detour, eventually reaching Crewe when almost all hope of arriving in time for the connection had evaporated.

Edwin had planned my route: London to Crewe, thence to Llandudno and on by local trains to Pwelli. This was my first visit to Wales and the beauty of the countryside overwhelmed me. As the day wore on and night fell, the towns and villages disappeared into the darkness and a full moon rose over the mountains etching them sharply against the sky. Though cold, hungry and deeply weary from the journey and all the events which had preceded it, I was already partly restored by the beauty and the thought of a week in such surroundings with Edwin.

He had found me digs in a doctor's house. Through-out my stay there I received great kindness from my hostess, Mrs. Evans, and from every-one I met in Pwelli. The slow pace of life, the quietude, the beautiful setting of the town, made it possible to put the war behind me for that brief interlude. Edwin had promised that I would have 'a day or two of real peace' and that proved to be true. There, peace was no illusion or distant hope. The action of war was suspended and we lived out of time. Even the presence of the O.C.T.U. failed to dispel the aura of other-worldliness. A

morning spent in a leisurely walk round the little town was like a whole day in the world I had left. There was time in the afternoon to read quietly by the fire, even to carry out such ordinary and necessary tasks as a manicure and hair-set at my leisure, instead of rushing through them as quickly as possible in between air-raids.

Edwin enjoyed that course much more than he had enjoyed his basic training at Bodmin. Lectures in military skills and leadership exercises were interspersed with practical instruction during which he learned to drive cars, trucks and motor-cycles. They trained on the beach. Civilians were not allowed near but I could walk along the sea-front to the edge of the training ground to watch them go through their paces on their motor-bikes. By the end of the course they rode their machines as if they were horses, jumping them over low obstacles and performing hair-raising stunts to prove their control. Edwin thoroughly enjoyed it all. He was a good rider and announced his intention of buying a motor-bike after the war. He never did. My infrequent but exhilarating experiences riding pillion behind him shortly before we were married were considerably off-set by memories of pushing the old bike he had borrowed over the Pennine moors in the cold and dark after a break-down. When the time came to consider buying road transport, some years after the war, I wanted a vehicle less prone to break-down and much more comfortable.

In such peaceful and beautiful surroundings the bruising reality of recent experiences receded. The security from bombs, the absence of screaming sirens, the regular sleep and the meals taken at leisure gave the illusion of a normal life. The only disturbance to my peace was Edwin's conviction that he would be sent abroad in the spring or early summer of that year. Yet even that thought could be put aside for the time being. The immediate past was shut out, the immediate future unknown. Only the present

mattered.

The day's training over, Edwin had no other duties to perform and was free for the rest of the evening. There was one cinema in the town. Once we had seen the current film there was no other entertainment available. Each evening, before seeking the warmth and comfort of Mrs. Evans' sitting room, we took our evening meal in the restaurant situated on the first floor of the cinema building. The menu was always the same, the main course being a dried-egg omelette, the wartime stand-by. That omelette tasted good to me, nomatter how many times I ate it! The clientele was small, consisting chiefly of officer/cadets from the O.C.T.U.; but we two dined once or twice in splendour, the only diners, cossetted by a carefully-attentive waiter, in the cream and gold room, somewhat faded from its pre-war art-deco glory. Judged by current standards, Pwhelli in wartime was a dreary town, but it suited us well.

The nights were cold and clear. I could enjoy the sight of a brilliant moon against a dark sky without thinking of it as a bombers' moon. After dinner we would climb a small hill which gave a view over the town; there we watched the movement of the sea and listened to the peaceful shushing of the waves on the beach. It was a cold January and I was glad Mrs. Evans allowed us to spend the rest of the evening sitting before a roaring coal fire, until it was time for Edwin to return to camp.

Our peaceful interlude was soon over. One morning early, while the moon was still up, Edwin carried my case to the station. We had been late the night before and Edwin had overslept, ignoring the pleadings of his batman to get out of bed. Improperly dressed and unshaven, he had rushed to pick me up at the house, and expected to be put on a charge immediately on his return. I felt very guilty and had plenty to think about on my journey across Central Wales to Bristol.

Arriving anywhere is usually exciting and full of anticipation; leaving, a miserable experience. My route took me through Barmouth. Not even the beauty of the estuary and the mountains in the strange light of dawn, and the calm sea beyond, could alleviate my wretchedness. For the first half of the journey I sat huddled in a corner of the carriage, wallowing in my misery.

Few people needed to travel across Central Wales during that winter of the war and my journey was lonely as well as slow and cold, well suited to my black mood. The prospect of preparing for Finals without any of my previous work was daunting. Mother's frail health and the knowledge that we were without a family home was an additional worry. I had wanted to stay in Pwelli but that was impossible. Bristol, a city I loved, was univiting to me then without Edwin. There seemed to be little cheer in life.

As the day wore on and the train gathered momentum, so my spirits rose, and I was able to heave myself out of the mire of self-pity into which I had been sinking. I began to think positively. By the time I had arrived at Temple Meads station I had decided what had to be done to cope with my immediate problem. My confidence had returned.

## 1941, A Sad Year

We had no reason to welcome in the New Year on 1st. January 1941, nor did we wish to forecast what the year might bring. It proved to be a year of great sorrow. Family life as we had known it up till then just ceased to exist.

My twenty-first birthday fell during that miserable time. No celebration had been planned, given the circumstances in which we were living. Birthdays, even coming-of-age milestones, had lost their significance, although secretly one regretted the absence of any celebrations. Life had been stripped down to the business of basic survival. One grew up overnight; maturity did not come with a date on the calendar.

Once back in Bristol after my visit to Pwelli I tackled the problem of my notes and essays. The staff of King's were immensely sympathetic and I was afforded many privileges to enable me to have the best possible conditions for making up the work; but I felt that for all their encouragement they were doubtful that I would have much chance of a decent honours degree, with the single exception of Mr. Jones who supported me in every way possible. The suggestion was made that I should apply for a year's extension but I rejected that immediately. Apart from the fact that there would be no source of money for fees or maintenance, I had no intention of spending another year at university when Edwin and all my friends were doing their bit to help bring the war to an end. Edwin's letters often had a post-script; 'You must pass Finals'. I felt I had to make an all-out effort.

I spent many hours copying from friends' note-books and endeavouring

frantically to commit to memory those notes I had no time to copy. I had always been able to work at a high degree of concentration; now, driven by desperation, I ploughed frenetically through note-books and texts, scarcely bothering about food or appearance and with little time for recreation with friends.

Apart from making up work I had to continue with lectures and write essays, and, in addition, prepare an Expose of a text, that most difficult of exercises for those who study French literature. This is a detailed examination of a passage from the literary, linguistic and philosophical points of view. Edwin was a tremendous help, not only in encouraging me from afar but in discussing points by correspondence. His former tutors would have been amazed to note how much detail of the texts he had remembered from the two previous years. He almost wrote one passage of a very difficult essay in French entitled 'Le Beau Ideal', which I had to prepare for a certain Dr. Spink who was notoriously tough. And all this from memory! When my essay was well received I felt Edwin ought to have had a large share in the credit.

He was also working hard to complete his own course successfully and was over-joyed to receive a good report at the end of his second month. He was said to have a 'very sound knowledge of tactics, and the personality to command'. His Commanding Officer then told him in interview that he would have no trouble with the men under his command as they would look up to him not only for his height but because he was tough, and played a first class game of rugger. He could not have been told anything better, rugby being one of his two major passions, the other being classical music.

Edwin's personal report came, most appropriately, soon after a series of conflicting letters and articles in various newspapers on the subject of officers and the qualities necessary to make a good officer. I believe there was even mention of the matter in Parliament. Those who had most to

say on the subject were Lady Astor, not surprisingly, and a certain Colonel Bingham(retired).

It was their view, forcibly expressed in different ways, that only men from an aristocratic background had the necessary qualities to command! There were some equally ridiculous comments about the superior nature and abilities of those men who had been educated at the major public schools, and many other unsubstantiated assertions. I too was angry and would very much have liked to confront Lady Astor. Views such as she was expressing could have seriously undermined confidence in our Armed Forces at a time when this country needed all the good leaders that could be found, whatever their social background. Even at that stage of the war class barriers were high and it was surprising how much support Lady Astor commanded, even though she was well-known for her extravagantly-expressed, out-dated opinions.

Edwin's report confirming his OLQs (Officer-Like Qualities) made him feel very satisfied with himself as an example of a non-aristocratic Officer/Cadet; he would have enjoyed showing it to Lady Astor and Colonel Bingham!

At the end of February Edwin left Pwhelli, having discarded the uniform of an Officer/Cadet for that of a Second-Lieutenant, and spent part of his leave at Bristol before going home to Dodworth and then on to Pontefract. Shortly after his visit a small parcel with a long explanatory letter arrived from him. In it was my twenty-first birthday present, an ivory-bound copy of the Book of Common Prayer, a beautiful gift. He wanted me to have it because he knew I would like it but was deeply embarrassed because Wally had been teasing him, pointing out that a white prayer-book was usually considered an appropriate gift for a bride! He gave me the choice of using it or hiding it until such time as I could use it for the purpose for which it was intended. I suppose you could describe that as a proposal

of marriage!

Later in the year, on his own twenty-first birthday in April, I gave him a small, leather-bound anthology of poetry which he kept with him in his breast-pocket with my photograph throughout the war.

Bob Templeton, a friend who brought my parcel into me where I was sitting by the gas fire chatting with Joyce Casson, also brought some sad news. Eric Lunoe, one of the trio of friends from the Engineering Faculty I had made during my first week at King's in 1938, had been killed. He was a fighter-pilot and was expected on leave that week-end and was to have been my escort that evening to one of the few dances held in the Vic. Rooms that term. It was difficult to believe that we would never see Eric again. Joyful news was all too frequently accompanied by bad news and one had to learn to receive both with equal sincerity.

At the end of March Edwin left Pontefract for Filey. He was much less frustrated, as his role was more active, defending the coast-line from invasion (which he did not expect to happen), but he was still eager to get into real action. I quote from one of his letters.

'You need have no fear of my going abroad yet because we shall stay in England as long as there is any fear of invasion. Not that that will be very pleasant. It is comforting for such people as Mother and yourself to know that we are to stay, but very disturbing for us when we think of other people going out where there is action while we are vegetating and getting bored in a defence role. I have thought it out, Pat, and am sure you will understand me when I say that I want to get into action. I have been in the army nine months now and feel that all my training is being wasted so long as I am not in the front line. I dislike defence roles at any time. I believe in the principle -Attack is the best method of defence. If we attack Germany hard enough, we shall have no occasion to defend our own shores, then, we can go and fight him in his yard, not in ours.'



I could not help but sympathise with that point of view as it coincided with my own heartfelt wish to be taking a more active role, but I could not contemplate the possibility of Edwin going abroad without shivers of apprehension running through me.

The raids on Bristol had subsided by the new year, enabling us to get on with our work more easily. Half my mind dwelt on my family and Mother's frail health. I was convinced that, once home, exams over, I would be able to organise life to give her time and peace to enable her to recover.

Although Aunt Win had extended her hospitality to our family for as long as we chose to stay there, it was our avowed intention to go back to Pimlico as soon as the opportunity presented itself. This opportunity arrived and the decision was made to move to 110 Cambridge Street, almost immediately opposite St. Gabriel's Church. It was not difficult to find empty houses in the large squares in Pimlico; the usual residents had evacuated to the country and the agents were only too pleased to let such large properties for comparatively small sums 'for the duration'. Otherwise we would never have lived in such a potentially grand house.

I was in Bristol when the move was made. The furniture was brought from the council store and Mother set up home once more. Edwin was very touched by this decision; he wrote from O.C.T.U.: 'I must tell her (his mother) of the admirable decision of your family to brave it and keep a home together'. His mother had most generously offered a home to the Berry family for the duration if they needed it, a typical Yorkshire gesture, sincerely meant.

The 'new' home was large and hard to manage under the circumstances of war. Even with the help of Joyce and Maurice and Dad when he was at home, Mother was really too frail to keep such a large house clean and care for the family. I began to think of the possibility of going home until Finals and wrote to discuss it with Edwin. He suggested that if it could be

arranged I should go home and then take my Mother to Dodworth for a rest before returning to Bristol. That would have been a good solution but Mother refused to leave Dad and the family.

I made up my mind to go home in March. I would be able to ease the burden for her and finish my preparation for Finals and would be with the family now that the air-raids on London had become heavy again. I hoped that the University would fall in with my plans but knew that assent was by no means certain. Once more Mr. Jones proved to be a good friend in time of need. We both agreed that becoming an external student was out of the question; I wanted a full, internal honours degree even though I would be unable to meet the requirements of attendance at lectures and tutorials for the next two months. He put my case to the University of London and must have argued most persuasively as it was agreed I should remain an internal student while working on my own at home, a highly irregular arrangement.

It was a relief to be home. Dad, Joyce and Maurice were at work during the day and I spent my time between home where I could keep Mother company, and Westminster Public Library in Buckingham Palace Road, where I resumed my frantic scanning of books. The librarian there was a great help in securing for me the exclusive use of all ten large volumes of Nyrop, *La Phonétique Française*. Obviously nobody else was requiring them in London at that stage of the war. I worked my way painstakingly through all ten volumes, replacing lecture notes and committing detail to memory. I did the same with many tomes of a similarly forbidding size on French Morphology and Syntax. Time was so short, I became an automaton. It was obvious that my chances of distinguishing myself in Finals were not good, but I was determined to escape the ignominy of a third class degree.

At the end of March the blitz returned in full fury. Houses around us, in Sutherland Terrace near-by, in Belgrave Road and Lillington Street a little further away and public buildings in other areas of Westminster were

destroyed and many people died.

1941 was a grim year for the country. Energies were divided between the defence of our own country and preparation for fighting once more in Europe. Such an event seemed a long way off. From time to time Churchill came on the air to encourage and exhort. He knew just how to touch people at the core of their being. Following one of his grave speeches at the end of March, Edwin wrote me a long letter from which I quote:

'What did you think of Churchill's speech? At any rate he presents facts without hesitation. I believe he trusts the people and realises that they want bare facts that they can get their teeth into. Offering sops will never do and I don't think anyone can accuse Churchill of offering sops of false optimism. The more you examine it, the longer it appears the war will last. I heard a fellow yesterday say, It's about time it finished one way or the other, I'm fed up with this .....army! I wondered if I felt the same.

'But what happiness can there be for individuals if we lose the war? Not only that, if a shameful and dishonourable peace was drawn up, I should personally feel ashamed just as though it had been my fault. It would be my fault too, as my opinion combined with that of many others makes up public opinion and helps to direct policy. Thus my attitudes and opinions are important.

'And I intend to fight on until either we are all killed and beyond it all, or we have reached a satisfactory conclusion. I couldn't live in a land where I couldn't please myself and direct my own life. I am willing to give up voluntarily a certain amount of freedom of action in order to create a social order such as we had in England, but I refuse to surrender all freedom, not only of action but of thought.

'I have said all that before but I felt it very strongly just now as I was writing'.

In May we took up the invitation to go to Dodworth. We had decided to go

back to Greenford to stay with Auntie Win to take Mother away from the worst of the bombing, but we wanted to take her north for a few days first. When Edwin learned this he was delighted and vowed he'd get over to Dodworth to see us somehow. 'I shall beg, borrow or steal a motor-cycle or a car with several gallons of petrol and come over for a day on Sunday. I haven't got a licence, of course, but that's a small matter'.

Edwin's Mother was her usual calm, welcoming and hospitable self and the short holiday was successful, the two Mothers relating easily to each other from the very first. Later, I was very glad they had met and so glad that Edwin had met Mother.

Once back at Greenford I settled to a last spurt of work. Mother spent her days sitting in the garden, Joyce and Maurice travelled to town together each day to their jobs and Dad came down when he could. We all thought that things were going as well as possible. At the beginning of June, my final preparation over, I was ready once more for Bristol, where I was to stay with the aunt of a friend, Margaret Orpen, outside the city.

I set off from the house in Greenford one sunny morning. Mother came to the gate to see me off, her knitting in her hands. She was making a summer jumper for me in an intricate lacy pattern. 'Don't worry Mum, I'll be fine. I'll pass'.

A quick hug and I moved off down the road, turning to wave several times until I reached the corner. That was the last sight I ever had of her, standing at the gate, smiling and waving. 'Good luck!' were the last words I ever heard her speak.

Margaret Orpen was taking her finals in History. She and her Aunt were extraordinarily kind to me and created a haven of comparative peace for the fortnight or so of our examinations. I had met Margaret in 1938 at the University of Tours where we were both taking a course in French Culture and History and we had remained friends during our time at university.

Throughout that fortnight I tried to give my whole attention to the examinations. Edwin bombarded me with letters which alternately exhorted me to greater effort and told me not to over-work. He was as anxious as if he were the examinee!

On the Thursday morning of the second week, on June 19th, while sitting in the garden preparing for my last papers, an inexpressible sadness crept over me. I thought longingly of home. I did not then know that it was on that day that Mother died. My final examination, the Viva, was to take place on the Saturday morning and I had arranged to go home on the afternoon train. Until then, for just two more days, I had still to concentrate on the job in hand. It was not merely exhaustion that made me so restless that day; I experienced a strange forboding which the peace of the garden could not dispel.

From time to time planes wheeled over-head from nearby Filton and one could hear the inevitable hum that comes to a suburb from a near-by city, but it was still a haven of rest. But not for me. I wandered round the garden, unable to work, until finally the day was ended. I was glad to be whisked off to Park Street on the Friday for the last two examinations.

On the Saturday morning I gathered with friends at the top of the stone staircase in the university building where we waited our turn for the Viva. My turn came. Once into my stride I enjoyed my half hour with the examiners who gave me a tough but exhilarating test. At the end Prof. Saurat, following the usual practice, shook me by the hand, as did the other members of the panel, somewhat solemnly I thought. Mr. Jones, who had done so much to help me over a very difficult period, accompanied me to the door and as he opened it told me I was to go immediately to Miss Brittain, the Tutor to Women Students. He called my friend Joyce Casson and told her to accompany me. By this I guessed the truth.

When Miss Brittain began by asking me how my mother had been when I left

home, I knew for certain that Mother was dead. I walked back down the stairs in a daze, repeating to my friends who accompanied me, 'Dad will be absolutely distraught', and 'I've got my degree, I know I've done well enough. And my Mother won't even know.' That my success came just too late for her to share in it, has remained one of the biggest disappointments of my life.

The Viva had finished around noon. Joyce Casson accompanied me in a taxi to Temple Meads station where I caught the London train. It was crowded and I stood in the corridor all the way, my face pressed against the window, wet with silent tears; one of the worst journeys I ever made.

Arrival at Paddington that Saturday afternoon was traumatic. The first person I saw waiting beyond the barrier was a fellow student from King's, Bill Lord, an engineer already in the army. He was older than the rest of us and had fought in the Spanish Civil War on the side of the Republicans. At first he was all smiles and wanted to take me for a drink, until I managed to tell him my news. That was the last time I saw Bill, as he was killed shortly afterwards.

Dad, a completely broken man, was waiting there with his brother, Uncle Bill. To see my father so totally unable to cope with his grief, was a tremendous shock; he had always been so strong. It is only now, forty-six years later, that I can fully understand the torment that wracked him.

Grandfather Berry, 'The Captain', had died just six weeks before our mother. We were very sad when this happened as he was a jolly, friendly person, much loved; but we were not terribly surprised. He was not very old, into his seventies, but had been ailing for some years; 'nerves' we were told. The stress of air-raids finally proved too much for him.

Mother's death was quite different. It was very difficult indeed to come to terms with the death at the early age of forty-six of one so beloved. Although the stress of the air-raids and the loss of her home were the

immediate cause of her death and the final blow which robbed her of years of her life, over-work from the age of twelve had contributed to her premature ageing and had turned a bonny young girl into a 'worn-out old engine', in the words of the doctor. We resented what had happened to her.

Immediately he heard our sad news Edwin put in for leave which was granted. Auntie Win managed to squeeze him into her little house which was bursting at the seams and his quiet presence helped us in the immediate period of grief after the funeral.

Life continued, as it must, along its track. I was home for the summer vacation. The heavy raids continued until August, then there was a lull. We left Auntie Win's shortly after Edwin returned to Filey and I helped Joyce keep house in Cambridge Street for the summer, apart from one week when I went to Scarborough where Edwin was taking a catering course.

Edwin was billeted in the Cumberland Hotel which had been taken over for the course. It was a welcome relief for him from the tedium of watching the sea and the sky on coastal defence duties. The course finished at five o'clock each day and we had the evenings to ourselves.

Scarborough was not a target for bombers so the pattern of life was almost normal. There were plenty of soldiers around, guarding the coast, and the beaches were covered with barbed wire and concrete posts. But apart from minor irritations I gained the impression that life was comparatively untroubled, as it had been in Pwelli.

There was plenty of food available in Yorkshire during the war. To a Londoner, living on skimpy rations, the full tables I encountered in Scarborough and in Dodworth were a surprise and a shock. Food severely rationed in London was often sold in quantity in Yorkshire and coupons were not always taken. It amazed me to see on grocery counters whole cheeses, from which one would be offered a large wedge freshly cut, in sharp contrast to the tiny piece allowed weekly on the ration book to each person

in London. Shop-keepers were required to take coupons but as they often had more to sell than was allowed on ration they were generous to their customers. Making the occasional hesitant purchase of 'off-ration' food I expected to be tapped on the shoulder and arrested for black-marketeering! When the two of us ate as much cheese after evening dinner as we were allowed for a whole week's rations for four at home in London, I felt horribly guilty. However, I quelled my conscience and ate my fill of cheese, meat, butter and eggs for that one week. What a pity I was not able to take any home!

It was still possible to enjoy oneself in Scarborough. We dined and danced each evening in the Grand Hotel, just as holiday-makers had in pre-war days when Scarborough was a popular resort. The only difference now was that instead of tourists, the clientele consisted mostly of soldiers billeted locally and their partners. Those happy evenings were good to remember during the long years I spent alone while Edwin was in India and Burma. My week over, I returned to London until it was time to begin my post-graduate year in October.

Although invasion had been fought off there was much yet to prepare for and endure and journalists frequently referred to 'dark days.' Yet the British people displayed enough courage and self-sacrifice for Winston Churchill to be able to state, in October of that year: 'These are not dark days, these are great days - the greatest days our country has ever lived'.

Our greatest anxiety was not the war but Dad. He was lost without Mother and feared the lonely life ahead of him. His loneliness was accentuated by the knowledge that we all had our own plans. Joyce, engaged to be married to Francis Smith, had some-one in whom to confide when he was on leave from the R.A.F. It seemed her future was as settled as possible in those unsettled times. Maurice crystallised his determination to join up by deciding to opt for the Royal Marines as soon as he reached the minimum age



of seventeen-and-a-half. Edwin and I knew that our lives, however long or short they might prove to be at that precarious time, were inextricably bound together. In Jock Ross's words, we were a pair. Brother Jack was already married and the centre of his life had naturally shifted. Against that background, the future must indeed have seemed bleak to Dad.

When in October I had to report back to university, Joyce took over the house-keeping with Maurice to help and worked hard to make Dad comfortable. They had a very difficult time, as I could judge when I returned home after eight weeks for the Christmas vacation. Dad, still in grief, had become impatient and short-tempered. No longer the man who had struggled through the blitz on the river with great bravery and an indomitable spirit, he had sunk into a deep misery from which he could not be extricated. He had aged and even seemed to have shrunk in stature, a man without a future.

## G l o b a l   W a r

In December 1941 the war extended dramatically to the Far East, a development which had a direct effect on the war in Europe and also on the personal lives of many families. Japan, governed by War Lords of medieval ferocity, had terrorised the Far East for many years and had looked with watchful and envious eyes on the growing power of its Pacific neighbour, the U.S.A. Events would seem to suggest that the U.S.A. had under-rated power-hungry Japan in much the same way as they had under-estimated the evil intent of Hitler and the consequences if he were allowed to triumph. Apart from sending food-parcels and encouragement to Britain, the American Government and people had from the out-break of hostilities in Europe demonstrated their reluctance to become involved with the European conflict. Nevertheless the U.S Government did keep an eye on events in Europe but failed to recognise the signs of aggression at its own back door. Japan decided that the time was ripe to attack its giant neighbour.

At 8.a.m.on the morning of Sunday December 7th 1941, Japanese bombers zoomed out of the sky without warning and destroyed the U.S.Fleet in Pearl Harbour, in the Pacific. 8 battleships and 350 planes were lost, 2,400 died.

From the moment the devastating news of the attack broke over a stunned population, the attitude of people in the U.S.A. changed. What had been our war became also their war. In realising that Japan must not be allowed to succeed in its plan to dominate the Far East, they also came to understand our determination to thwart Hitler's bid to dominate Europe and to end Mussolini's annexation of Mediterranean countries. The cold, hostile

douche of reality delivered at Pearl Harbour shocked the American nation into acceptance of a situation for which we had been trying to gain their understanding since the outbreak of war: namely, that if Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany and now Japan were not defeated, the end of western civilisation would follow and we would be back in a new Dark Ages.

In Europe we had watched the gradual taking-over of countries by both Hitler and Mussolini. Mussolini had been the first aggressor in the 1930s. By the time the Allies in Europe had declared war on Germany, Mussolini had already annexed vast territories in North Africa beginning with his conquest of Ethiopia and while his actions had been debated in the League of Nations in Geneva and Britain's Foreign Minister Sir Anthony Eden had done his best to secure the condemnation of Italy, no action had been taken to stop Mussolini's aggression. By September 1939 his Mediterranean Empire included vast areas of North Africa as well as Rhodes and other smaller Greek islands and Italy fell naturally into the role of ally for Nazi Germany.

Few countries in Europe remained outside the conflict. Some had been drawn in by being annexed and occupied, others by their opposition to these acts of aggression. Only three countries, Switzerland, Sweden and Spain managed to remain neutral. Switzerland, home of so many international organisations including the Red Cross, was willing to be of help in a humanitarian role. In fact, without Switzerland to act as the neutral Protecting Power, it would have been impossible to prevent our prisoners of war in Germany and Italy from suffering even more than they did.

Sweden's position was equivocal. It was at first generally expected that the Swedes would come to the aid of neighbouring Norway but their determination to remain neutral and unoccupied over-came any natural feeling they may have had for fellow Scandinavians. Many people were convinced that the Swedish Government had a sneaking sympathy with the

Third Reich; maybe there was little sympathy with Nazism but an overwhelming sense of intimidation. Whatever the true situation, it would have been useful to have had Sweden on the side of the Allies.

Spain's neutrality was different again. General Franco, the Dictator of Spain, was himself a Fascist who had overcome the Republican opposition in the bloody Spanish Civil War of the late thirties. His sympathies were with Hitler and Mussolini although he drew back from involving his country in yet more blood-shed. Later in the war, Spanish people just over the border from France, high up in the Pyrenees, risked their lives helping escaping Frenchmen and Allied prisoners, defying both the German troops and their own Spanish Fascists. The Spanish Government remained officially neutral but in truth pro-Nazi.

The role of the Roman Catholic Church both before and during the war has been analysed many times since and apologies have been written for the strange attitude of the Pope and the Vatican. The Vatican had always been ultra-conservative and vigorously anti-communist. It had done little publicly to condemn the war in Spain because the Republicans were predominantly pro-communist; Mussolini's aggression in North Africa went largely uncriticised because of the Vatican's close relationship with Italy. No great public protests were made against the outrageously cruel and inhuman treatment of the Jews in Germany, although we are told that the Pope did his best behind the scenes to alleviate the lot of the Jews.

Many ordinary people were puzzled that the Pope did not vigorously and publicly condemn Franco, Mussolini and Hitler. The attitude of the Vatican seemed difficult to equate with Christian beliefs. Perhaps the opposition of the Roman Catholic hierarchy to Communism was so extreme that they were blind to the realities of the situation. It certainly seemed at one time that any regime prepared to fight Communism was an ally of the R.C.Church, if an unwelcome one. I longed for the Pope to condemn roundly and

unequivocally Nazism and Fascism and all that had been done in their names, and for him to send a stirring message to all Roman Catholics everywhere to fight the evil in their midst.

The extension of the war round the globe brought an additional fear; fear of the unknown. People in Britain knew Germany and Europe and therefore felt that they knew their enemy. While many Britons had lived in India, comparatively few people had experience of China or Japan. Those who had lived in Burma, Singapore or Hong Kong had brought back differing tales of attitudes, customs and religions. But the Japanese were an unknown quantity to the average person, except for a reputation of extreme cruelty.

With Japan on the move, determined to 'liberate the East from Western domination' as was claimed, it was obvious that troops would have to be sent not only to India but to Burma and other British stations in the Far East. This prospect was viewed with apprehension by the families of service men and women.

It was not long before the advancing Japanese, taking every-one by surprise, had taken Singapore and had a toe-hold on Southern Burma. Britain had to prepare for an even greater exodus of service personnel from these shores, to defend far-away territories, in the determination to defeat another aspect of the same evil disease that infested Europe. By the time Edwin arrived in India in the summer of 1942, almost the whole of Burma had fallen to the Japanese. The fierce and bloody war in the jungle of Burma and all over the Far East had begun.

## Teacher - Training 1941 - 1942

London University Institute of Education where I was to take my post-graduate teacher training had evacuated to Nottingham University. With a good deal of looking over my shoulder at the family situation in London, I had presented myself for the course in October 1941. I felt my training could well have waited until after the war and did not expect to find it a particularly inspiring experience. Somewhat to my surprise, the course and other related activities proved to be very exciting and by the end of the academic year I was happy to have been at the Institute at that time.

The I.of E. was unique. It not only trained graduate teachers but engaged in research into every aspect of education. Most universities had small departments for training graduates in teaching but it was not until after the war that more Institutes were developed. The London Institute became their proto-type.

The course and the life that centred round it was exacting and absorbing. It did not take me long to realise my good fortune in being part of the intense educational and political activity generated by staff and students. I had already had two years in student union politics at King's and had greatly enjoyed the modest part I had played in extending the role of women students in university life. Apart from the special slots set aside for women, such as Senior Woman Student at King's, holding office in the Union was very much a male preserve, even in war-time. It was a logical progression of my work as President of the Faculty of Arts at King's to present myself for election as Union President at the Institute. Owing to the Institute's unique status in the university world, the office of

president of the Institute Union was rather more prestigious than similar office in an undergraduate college. It was an inviting and challenging prospect.

The contest for President was well-run and hard-fought. Students of the Institute were drawn from several colleges but most were from King's and University College, ancient rivals! The rivalry continued into this election, though it remained civilised and friendly. U.C. fielded some formidable candidates for the three major offices, including Elizabeth Bondfield, a very clever young woman well-skilled in debate and accustomed to electioneering of all types by virtue of family experience; she was the niece of Margaret Bondfield, a prominent member of the Labour Party and first woman Cabinet Minister in any British Government. However, I had good backing and excellent canvassers who secured my election as President. Elizabeth became Secretary. So began a fascinating, difficult and eventful year.

We were blessed at the Institute with a formidable staff of brilliant people. The Director was Professor Sir Frederick Clarke, an educationalist and innovator with wide experience and innumerable useful contacts. Fred as he was affectionately known, persuaded Professor Karl Mannheim, a refugee from Europe and an expert in the comparatively new study of Sociology, to become visiting lecturer to the Institute. He set our teacher-training in the wider context of the development of society as a whole and gave us a very real sense of the important role we would play as teachers in post-war reconstruction. This was a tremendous boost to our self-esteem and did something to assuage the guilt felt at not being in the armed services. It is interesting to remember that even at the most crucial time of the war, when all efforts were bent towards the one aim of victory over the Nazi regime in Europe and oppressive Japanese militarism in the Far East, newspapers, politicians, universities and, to a surprising extent, the

general public, were deeply concerned about post-war reconstruction and were actively engaged in producing programmes for reform, particularly in education.

We ran a full union programme of visiting speakers. There was no shortage of politicians willing to make the journey to Nottingham in the hope of making converts to their own particular programme of post-war reform. In addition, we did all we could to help with the war effort in the locality. My particular contribution was to travel out to an army camp twice a week to give coaching in reading to soldiers who had never managed to master the skill during their school-days.

Parliament was taking an unusually keen interest in Education. Part of the reason for this was the number of men found to be illiterate at the time of their call-up. It took a war to reveal that the system which had produced such excellent grammar schools for the academically able among the population, had failed many others. Sophisticated weaponry, the need for courses of instruction which presupposed the ability to read, the necessity for soldiers to understand as much as possible about the equipment they were called upon to use, pointed to an urgent need which had to be met. Immediate steps were taken to give help to those unable to read; students helped in this task wherever possible.

This pressing problem led to thinking about the future; it was clearly seen that the post-war way of life would demand a much better educated population, prepared to apply to civilian life the advanced technology which was being developed as part of the war effort. The Army Education Corps whose task it was to keep soldiers based in the British Isles occupied fruitfully while defending our shores or waiting to be sent abroad, set about the task of educating the soldiers not only in reading skills where needed, but also in understanding political and social issues and preparing them for the demands of the post-war world.



It was plain that the old order was changing and that without radical social change and educational reform Great Britain would not be able to compete in the post-war world. The British Isles was in danger of becoming a vast museum, a kind of impoverished Ruritania of grand palaces, ancient history and out-dated customs, its only industry that of tourism. The Chairman of the Board of Education was therefore charged with the task of finding out what reforms it would be necessary to make to the pattern of education and framing such reforms into a Bill to place before Parliament.

The Chairman of the Board was R.A. Butler. He decided to consult widely before coming to any conclusions himself. Among those consulted were all sections of the Education Service. Teachers in training were also to be invited to put forward their ideas and Mr. Butler chose to consult us at the Institute as representative of future teachers. As President of the Union it was my responsibility to make arrangements for his stay in Nottingham and select a panel of post-graduate students to meet him.

Choosing the panel developed into a subtle political struggle. The extreme left-wing of the socialists saw this as a great opportunity to spread their influence, trying by many devious ways to secure the majority on the panel. However, there were enough people of independent mind to influence the voting and we eventually came forward with a democratically elected, balanced panel.

We had several very good debating sessions in which staff and students took part. When the time came for our panel to meet with Mr. Butler and his Deputy, Mr. Chuter Ede, we had a list of well-thought-out suggestions to put before them. Having managed to avoid being mandated to put forward a particular policy, we were able to present for consideration any ideas which merited discussion. As a result, our talks with the Chairman were free-flowing and creative. The one reform to which all could give assent was that in the post-war world there must be secondary education for all.

This was a reform accepted by all major political parties and turned out to be the central core round which the Education Act of 1944 was constructed. In that act the importance of education to the nation was marked by the promotion of the Board of Education into the Ministry of Education, with a Minister at the head. Alas, this did not last for long and Education was relegated, its affairs being placed in the care of a Secretary of State, a situation which still exists today.

An extraordinary rapport existed between the Chairman and his Deputy. Mr. Butler was a Tory, albeit on the liberal wing, while Mr. Chuter Ede was a member of the Labour Party, one-time Education Officer for the County of Kent. They both had the same objective; to produce the best Education Bill possible and get it through the Commons and the Lords. Narrow party politics seemed to play little part in the deliberations; the discussions were on education, not politics. Very refreshing in retrospect! Mr. Butler was very impressive. He was the best Tory Prime Minister this country never had!

The wider the field of war became, the clearer became our vision of the post-war society we wished to see. There had to be some recompense in the shape of a more just and equitable society, for the loss of life and the horrific destruction the war was bringing. As the buildings came tumbling down, so did old mental and social structures and attitudes. People were determined that 'the better world' for which they were fighting would be fundamentally better, not just a cosmetic over-lay.

The new democracy which eventually emerged in Britain after 1945 was forged in the furnace of a dreadful, world-embracing conflict. While nothing could alter the horror of the death and destruction we witnessed, the idealistic vision we clung to helped to keep alive the determination to rid the world of Nazism and Fascism at least in our time.

Only those of us born before the war can realise to the full just how

different post-war Britain became compared with the society in which we grew up. It may not seem such a wonderful society to today's generation, its ideals may be tarnished, but we had the satisfaction post-war of seeing some of our ideas come to fruition. Perhaps those ideas have now been left behind and it is time for a new pattern to emerge. Certainly, at the time, and in the fury of a terrible global conflict, we at least had the courage to see visions and keep them alive until they could be put into practice, however incompletely.

Edwin and I met whenever we could but that first term up till Christmas was difficult for both of us. He could not get leave but as I was on the end of a phone in my office at the University as well as in digs, we were able to keep in close touch. I was exceptionally hard pressed, having a great deal to do for the Union and our tutors drove us hard. No concessions were made to the difficulties created by the unusual circumstances, nor did we expect any. In fact I think we were expected to work much harder than students had done pre-war.

Stress takes its toll in different ways. Always a prey to allergic rashes, in November 1941 I produced a mammoth display of bodily fireworks which frightened every-one, including the doctor, and which thankfully was never to be repeated on such a grand scale.

Some allergies are comparatively trivial and are easily treated. Others are much more menacing, as was the case with this one. Imagine a body inflated like a Michelin advert for motor tyres. Decorate with large red and white weals. Conceal the eyes almost completely in mounds of pappy, swollen flesh, inflate the throat to such an extent that breathing becomes almost impossible and you have a picture of me that horrendous week-end at Bramcote. I was obliged to sit in a bath of luke-warm water to ease the irritation, with a finger down my throat to help me to breathe.

Since the local doctor was out of his depth with this strange and

terrifying condition, I decided to return to London to seek specialist advice. Swathed in a huge tent coat under which I wore nothing but a nightdress, hiding my face as best I could and enduring agonies of skin irritation, I made the nightmare train-journey to London to be met by my sister who failed to recognise me!

The eventual diagnosis, 'Angio-neurotic-oedema, giant urticaria', was made by our doctor's lady partner, Dr. Eve Kornerup who, fortunately for me and most unusually at the time, had done some research into symptoms of this nature. She prescribed the drug ephedrine and almost immediately after the first dose the swelling began to subside and the irritation lessened. It was as though I had a tap in my body and the tap had been opened to allow all the excess fluid to drain away. A truly strange experience! The condition recurred several times up to 1945 but the swelling, though embarrassing, was not as dangerous.

In 1941 there was no National Health Service; all fees were paid by the patient. I had given no thought to the fee I would have to pay but both Dr. Carter and Dr. Kornerup were exceptionally generous and charged me only a nominal sum for consultations and nothing at all for the blood-tests and other investigations they made. This was extraordinarily kind of them as I had no form of insurance which left them with no opportunity of claiming their fees.

Edwin knew only that I had gone home to London not feeling well. Vanity prevented me from letting him know about my disfiguring affliction, temporary though it was, and I saw no reason for him to use a precious leave pass only to see me in that condition!

I was billeted in Bramcote, a village on the outskirts of Nottingham, where we were at the mercy of a much curtailed public transport system; even getting into the University could be a major triumph some days. 1941-42 was a fierce winter. Standing on the road-side on a dark, cold, winter's

morning ankle deep in snow, waiting for the bus to grind its way to a stop and take us on board, was not an easy start to the day.

It was even worse when we were doing our school practice. For the most part we were obliged to travel to different towns. My practice school was Bemrose Boys' School, Derby, a Boys' Grammar School well-known in the area. I travelled from Nottingham to Derby by bus each day, setting off in the dark at a very early hour. By the end of that winter snow had no glamour for me! I had no waterproof foot-wear and no coupons or money with which to buy such a luxury, which meant that I spent most days with wet feet from early in the morning until my return to digs at night.

However, being away from the regular air-raids on London meant that nights were undisturbed and I was thankful to be able to get a few hours consecutive sleep each night. That was until Nottingham also became a target for the Luftwaffe. Even so, Bramcote was just far enough on the outskirts for us not to be greatly bothered although it was frightening for those who had not before experienced a raid.

Schools were short of teachers by that time, particularly boys' schools. Bemrose was no exception. When I joined the school in January 1942 for six weeks of teaching practice, it was to find that the school was very understaffed in the French Department. Boys were struggling to prepare themselves for General and Higher Schools Certificates under very difficult circumstances without a qualified teacher to guide them. My tutors Mr. Parker and Miss Calthrop agreed with the Head of the school that I could help out. Instead of taking a few classes under the instruction of a teacher and observing for the rest of the week, I was given the responsibility of a full time-table, preparing groups of boys in the Fifth and Sixth forms for their examinations. This meant that I worked at the school for the whole term, going into Nottingham to the University on two half days only.

This was a tremendous burden even though I enjoyed the challenge. In addition to doing a full-time teaching job, ( for no pay!) I had to keep up with my own work for my Diploma and also run the Union. I learned not to waste a second of the coffee-break and dinner-hour and worked on the bus to and from school. My working day started at six a.m. and usually went on into the late evening. I was also rushing off whenever possible to meet Edwin, prior to our hastily-arranged wedding, taking my books with me and working in trains and on draughty platforms. January, February and March 1942 were the fullest and most exciting months of the war but also the most exhausting. The rest of the academic year up to the end of June proved a prosaic anti-climax and a time of great strain while I waited for news of Edwin.

## W a r - T i m e   W e d d i n g

We see what we expect to see. Edwin's newly-grown moustache, an entirely unexpected embellishment to his features, changed his appearance to such an extent that I failed to recognise him, much to his amusement.

King's Cross station concourse at night in early January was hardly a romantic place for a rendezvous. A few blue lights strategically placed were all that was permitted to illumine that cavernous vault. Figures moved warily through the eerie shadows, picking their way to the exit. I had walked from Pimlico to King's Cross along the unlighted streets, keeping carefully to the middle of the road, thankful to have arrived in a period of 'All Clear'. Now, in the shadows of that vast building, I paced up and down peering into the darkness. After I had completed several laps, a tall figure stepped out of the background to greet me. I had looked covertly several times at the officer standing by a pillar, his face only dimly discernible, and had walked on; I knew no-one with a moustache!

In January 1942 Edwin was still stationed near Filey. I spent a week there before going back to Nottingham. It was very cold, made colder by the biting wind which blew in from the sea. I was not suprised that the residents of the town seemed to spend their time indoors, venturing out only for essential business and shopping. There is nowhere as stark and deserted as a North East Coast town in winter. This atmosphere of desolation was increased by the enormous coils of barbed wire spread over the shore, from the edge of the sea to the promenade, with concrete anti-tank blocks at intervals, a first line against invasion.

The small sea-front hotel where I stayed had remained open throughout

the year in order to accomodate wives and girl-friends of the troops (officers only!). Edwin had arranged with the proprietor's wife to place flowers in my room; where she found two beautiful orchids in wartime was a mystery. She refused to enlighten Edwin even though he paid for them! In contrast to Scarborough there was absolutely no entertainment in Filey. We spent the evenings in front of the fire, chatting to the one permanent resident, the wife of a Wing-Commander from a near-by R.A.F. station.

In early 1942 Edwin moved to Lincoln. Rumour suggested (correctly) that this was preparatory to a posting abroad. Lincoln was not far from Nottingham as the crow flies but could have been at the other end of the country judging by the time it took to make the journey between the two places. We tried to meet at week-ends with varying success. Sometimes we cut short the cold, slow train journeys by arranging our rendezvous at a station where our respective routes crossed. This arrangement proved somewhat hazardous. On one infuriating occasion we missed each other altogether when one of the trains failed to stop as scheduled; we were obliged to return whence we had come without having met at all that week-end!

When we did succeed in meeting for a few hours, it would often be at the local Railway Hotel. Life in such an hotel in a small, half-empty country town in the North Midlands in midwinter, under wartime conditions, was hardly glamorous; but we usually managed to get the landlord to light a fire in the lounge to provide us with warmth and the illusion of luxury for our brief stay.

The leisurely 'getting-to-know-you' that in less urgent times preceded engagement and marriage, that period in a relationship described by the old-fashioned but lovely word 'courting', had been squeezed out for most couples by the exigencies of war. We were fortunate; during two years together at King's we had forged a strong friendship which deepened into an



abiding love. So although when we married, it was apparently in a great rush, ours was not the sudden wartime romance some of our relations feared it might be.

The imminence of Edwin's departure for a war zone abroad brought us face to face with reality. We realised that we could not envisage a future without each other.

One cold February evening I was called to the phone and settled myself on the uncarpeted floor of the hall in my lodgings at Bramcote, huddled in an overcoat for extra warmth. There was no central heating and the house was exceptionally cold. I envied Edwin the warmth of the mess at the other end of the line. When I put down the phone a few moments later Edwin had formally proposed and we had agreed to announce our engagement.

We had nothing at all with which to drink a toast. The only 'treat' available was our sweet ration. So my fellow-lodger and 'Garg' Jessop, our landlady, raised their coffee mugs to me in congratulation and we three ate a precious bar of Cadbury's chocolate by way of celebration!

Despite wartime restrictions, Nottingham University Union tried to keep up its social activities. Edwin attended as many as possible with me, including the annual Union Ball on February 21st, at which, as President of the I. of E. Union, I was to be a special guest. He had a week's leave and we were both going home to Dodworth after the Ball. This meant arranging to be away from university and school. I put Union affairs on hold, set work for my classes to keep them usefully occupied, and informed Institute and school of my plans.

Even in the exceptional situations thrown up by war, students had far less freedom of decision than they have now and my announcement was received with some surprise by the staff; however, they were sympathetic and were willing to bend the rules on my behalf.

By common consent, the Ball was to be as elegant and as glamorous as we

could make it. Men not in evening dress were in uniform. All the women students managed to find long dresses, borrowing, cutting down or letting out; some even wore night-dresses suitably adapted! I had an evening dress which Mother had made for me when I first went up to King's and which I had worn on only a few occasions. We had all arranged to stay in town that night, with friends or with the intention of sleeping on the floor of the union; there would be no transport out to the suburbs in the early hours. As it happened, few of us went to bed at all as we kept up the festivities till dawn.

When I set off from Bramcote with my suit-case that cold February day I was naturally excited and eagerly anticipating the Ball and the week's leave to follow. I prided myself on being prepared for anything but had no intimation then of the surprising sequence of events which swept us along on a fast-flowing tide.

Edwin must have known that his departure over-seas was more imminent than he had allowed me to think as he had bought my engagement ring before proposing to me and had it in his pocket when he met me in Nottingham. Our engagement was announced publicly at the Ball which became a wonderful engagement party. For us two it was an especially glittering and exciting occasion. It was also special for every-one else. It had the feel of a final fling before-- who knew what? No-one cared to speculate in detail. Waiting round the corner were dark days, but for that one night all were deliberately carefree, bent on having a good time.

Sitting in the Dennis's kitchen next day, that large, homely room redolent with the baking of pies and fresh bread, the kettle steaming gently on the open fire, we faced Edwin's mother.

"Well, what's to do?" Maternal instinct to the fore, she had sensed an unusual situation and had composed herself in her usual chair by the scrubbed table, hands folded in her ample lap, waiting for an explanation.

In answer Edwin held out my hand to show her my ring and made the obvious statement. "We're engaged".

Never one to show much emotion or waste words, she replied simply, "Well, I never." It was difficult to tell whether or not this was the news she expected. I had certainly hoped for a more enthusiastic reception of our announcement. After a pause, during which I could hear my heart thumping, she added with a smile, "Well, you're just as high as his heart". I heaved an inner sigh of relief. What lovely words to welcome me into her family!

It had never occurred to Edwin and me to consult others about our personal lives. We made our decisions swiftly as circumstances demanded. Edwin's parents were at first taken by surprise. They had welcomed me warmly as a girlfriend but had not expected any engagement until after the war, when Edwin would be settled in a career. Accustomed to long-term planning they were obliged to adapt to a swiftly-changing situation which they must have found difficult.

Edwin's mother had already opened up the front room in honour of his leave. The highly-polished furniture gleamed in the glow of the banked-up fire, the well-dusted, extremely tidy room a testimony to the joy she felt at having her soldier son home for the week.

We had a typical reception from Dad Dennis. On hearing our news he took out his packet of Gold-flake and offered one to Edwin. They smoked in silence till their cigarettes were going well. I wondered if he would ever speak! Then, gesturing pointedly, "Can't tha' manage to keep a wife, our Edwin?" I reminded him that I could keep myself and he laughed, remembering our first meeting.

Wally, his face beaming with delight and rubbing his hands together gleefully, shook his brother's hand. "What's tha' been up to then? Tha's beaten me to it, tha' knows Ned! I suppose I shall 'ave to congratulate thee". Turning to me with a typically mischievous grin, he gave me a hug and

a kiss. "Tha'll do, tha knows, lass".

Once Edwin's sisters had come home and greeted our news enthusiastically I could relax. My own Father had been informed on the telephone and had expressed pleasure but little surprise although I think the news had not registered deeply with him.

I had already met most of Edwin's relatives and friends in Dodworth on previous visits but now my status had changed and I had to be more formally introduced round the village as his fiancée. He was very popular and I was warmly received. During that week we drank a great deal of home-made wine. I found it very amusing to be so feted by people sworn to fight the evils of drink!

Edwin had to return to duty on Saturday. Having put me on my way to Nottingham he returned to Lincoln. Late that afternoon after my return to Bramcote, sitting somewhat disconsolately in the Jessop living room, I was called to the phone. Edwin had been given a week's embarkation leave starting that very day!

Before telephoning me he had worked out my journey back to Dodworth to the last, very precise detail, like a military operation. For once in my life I was grateful to be told what to do! I threw my clothes back into the suitcase, wrote two hasty notes, one to my tutor and the other to the Headmaster of Bemrose School, informing them I was taking another week off, and rushed to get the bus into Nottingham.

It was a cold and dark journey with changes en route, which I thought would never end. Edwin met me at Cudworth and we travelled the last few miles together. Arrived at Dodworth station we set off to walk to 54, Barnsley Road. It was February 28th, a cold, bright, moon-lit night. The wind whipped through our clothing and bit sharply at our faces. Dodworth, by day a grubby, busy mining village, assumed an unexpected night-time beauty. The pit-head buildings and machinery, outlined sharply against the

sky in the silvery light, dominated the scene. The slag heap, its buckets immobilised at intervals from bottom to top, loomed like some giant fair-ground attraction waiting to grind and clank into motion. Smoke curled up from the chimneys to disappear gradually into the sky in delicate, wispy fragments like tiny clouds.

By the time we had reached the back door of no. 54 our plans had been made and Joyce had been telephoned from the one call-box in the village. It would be impossible to break the news gently so we went into the kitchen to tell Edwin's parents that they would be travelling to London on Tuesday to attend our wedding the following day. They took the news calmly, as they must have taken Edwin's unexpected reappearance that evening, though the adjustment to the almost simultaneous announcement of their son's overseas posting and his marriage must have cost them a great effort. In the way of youth, we expected them to fall in with our plans without question, so absorbed were we in our own situation and with each other.

Edwin stayed home on the Sunday while I entrained for London. He had to help his parents adjust to the bomb-shell dropped in their midst and organise travel to London for them all. He also had to go to Leeds to order his tropical uniform and kit.

I had a mixed reception on arrival home. Joyce was excited, Maurice was surprised and Dad went round muttering to himself that he would never understand 'those two girls!' Poor Dad! He had received the telephoned news of my engagement just a week previously and had been pleased, doubtless envisaging a post-war wedding with leisurely preparations. To be presented with these whirlwind nuptials was almost more than he could cope with.

He rumbled and grumbled throughout Sunday evening and was thoroughly miserable at first. He seemed to have forgotten his own marriage during the First World War. Modern in many ways, Dad had some curiously Edwardian and out-dated ideas about women; he found it difficult to cope with

independence of mind in his daughters.

Some very speedy action was necessary. Joyce had already informed Skip, our vicar. Family and friends were told by word of mouth, by telephone and telegram. Close friends in Pimlico were roped in to help. By the time Joyce and I went to bed late that night we had our plans mapped out. All would be ready for Wednesday.

Shall Joyce and I ever forget our dash along Oxford Street on the Monday morning? We had less than ten pounds between us with which to buy everything for a white wedding. Fortune favoured the bold! Richards in Oxford Street produced a white lace dress for three pounds, much less than the original price. The manageress, thrilled by the romance of my last-minute rush to the altar, threw in white shoes and stockings free of charge! A quick dash across the road to a small Jewish dress shop long-since gone, produced another suitably reduced bargain in pink taffeta for Joyce. Our purchases were nearly complete. Only a veil and head-dress to find! A few yards of white tulle unearthed from long-forgotten stock in John Lewis's and a small spray of artificial orange-blossom ended our quest.

By noon, as planned, we were on our way home, with just enough money left to pay our bus fares back to Pimlico. We dropped off in Warwick Street to order flowers for bouquets and returned to Cambridge Street, very well pleased with ourselves.

Dad had made it clear that he considered all this dashing around to be unnecessary. In all seriousness he had suggested that I should be married in Girl Guide uniform, particularly as Edwin would be in army uniform! Poor Dad, he found it difficult to appreciate our point of view, that wartime restrictions must not be permitted to deprive me of a white wedding. When we returned in triumph from our shopping expedition, he conceded that it had been worth the effort and forgot about the Guide uniform.

In our haste we had overlooked that a licence would be necessary, a special Licence, as the normal notice could not be given and Banns had not been published. Fortunately Skipper Adams had already begun the procedure for obtaining one. He collected it for us from Lambeth Palace, the official home of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and paid the fee as a wedding present.

Of necessity, the reception, which would be very simple, was to be at home. 110 Cambridge Street was a large victorian house with a first floor drawing room eminently suitable for a party. Food had to be provided for a large number of guests. The Berry family had a reputation for giving good parties on a shoe-string and that reputation had to be maintained! By war-time standards in Pimlico the wedding breakfast we eventually produced was a veritable feast.

With the generosity that often characterises people with only a modest share of worldly goods, friends willingly gave us their rations of butter, sugar, tea, cheese and even some tinned Spam, precious as it was. This was a big sacrifice made by people living on the minimum allocation of food.

The menu was devised from such food and materials as we could assemble. For example, we made jellies and trifles because we happened to spot some battered wax-paper cases on the bottom shelf of the newsagent's shop. Slices of bread and jam replaced sponge and the ubiquitous, off-ration Creamola masqueraded as custard. The jelly cubes, I must admit, came from 'under the counter', the shop-keeper salving my conscience by insisting that they were 'old, pre-war stock'. So, the feast was planned.

Awaiting our guests would be a first 'course' of the inevitable Spam and cheese sandwiches, a dessert of jelly and trifle, the whole to be rounded off with a half-glass of sherry each and a piece of wedding cake. Ah, but there was the rub! Ingredients for such a cake were severely rationed and we had nothing in stock. The regulations regarding sugar of

any kind were so severe that bakers were forbidden by law to make and sell any kind of cake with sugar icing on it. Yet a wedding without a wedding cake was unthinkable.

It was here that Dad came to the rescue. Once accustomed to the idea that the wedding was indeed to take place, he entered into the arrangements with gusto, some of his old spirit returning. He returned within the hour from a foraging expedition to the shops in Lupus Street, face beaming and clutching some bottles of sherry, eager to announce that he had found a cake! The baker at Smith's, the local bakery we had always patronised, had a two-tier wedding cake hidden away for such an occasion. It had been made just before the war and was properly matured. We could have it, but there would be no icing. Quite rightly, the baker was not willing to break the law.

So far so good; but we wanted icing as well! After a good deal of discussion, Joyce and I found the perfect answer. Chocolate icing! As far as we knew, chocolate icing was not mentioned in the rationing regulations. We decided to pool our chocolate rations and offer the coupons to the baker in return for chocolate icing on the wedding cake. This would surely not be breaking the law!

Dad, who had a persuasive tongue, was charged with putting our idea to the baker. He, a generous man but uncertain about his legal position, nevertheless promised that a chocolate-iced wedding cake would be ready the next morning!

Late on Tuesday afternoon Edwin arrived with his family, bringing their rations, according to wartime custom, plus a large wedge of cheese and other 'goodies' such as had not been seen in any-one's home in Pimlico since before the war.

110, Cambridge Street, a large, draughty and dilapidated house, must have contrasted greatly with the cosy warmth they had left behind in Yorkshire.



There, a delicious aroma of freshly-baked bread and pies, and meat cooking slowly in the coal-fired oven, greeted family returning to 54, Barnsley Road at the end of the day. Visitors were immediately enfolded in the warmth of a well-kept, comfortable home. To me on the few visits I had already made, it seemed as though for generations the very walls of the house had absorbed the delicious smells of home cooking; the house basked in a comforting back-ground of good living.

But such was life in war-torn London that only a cold, damp blast greeted any-one who opened the door of 110, Cambridge Street. A leaky roof, buckets dotted around the upstairs floor to catch the drips, broken windows patched with brown paper, grubby walls streaked with bomb-blast dust and only a tiny fire in the basement of that large house, eking out the small ration of coal which had to be saved for the coldest weather.

We did our best to create an atmosphere of welcome but Oh! how I wished that we were still back in our cosy, well-kept home in Stanley Place with Mother there to create the homely comfort in which we had grown up and to be present at my wedding! I had one great comfort. She had met Edwin and they had immediately formed a bond. Both Joyce and I felt her loss deeply as this was the first family get-together since her death. We had done our best to create a festive air with a few bits of greenery scrounged as I remember from the churchyard opposite; we hoped the warmth of our welcome made up for the deficiencies of the house.

Fortunately London was enjoying a lull in the bombing. Snow clouds had gathered and lay over the city, heavy and menacing. 'Not good bombing weather', we said as we went joyfully about my wedding preparations, welcoming the overcast weather. A clear, frosty sky, lit by a brilliant silver moon, however beautiful, would have been unwelcome. Who would want to see a 'bombers' moon on the eve of a wedding?

We had yet to find a wedding ring. Gold was a precious commodity.

Jewellers were permitted to make wedding rings but of 9 carat gold only. It was possible to find a 22 carat ring of pre-war stock if one looked long and hard enough but we were in such a hurry we had to take what we could find. Late on Tuesday afternoon, immediately after the arrival of the Dennis family and just as the shops were shutting, Edwin and I rushed off to a jeweller's shop in Warwick Way where we were lucky to find a ring to fit.

When we woke on Wednesday morning we had one last touch to put to the feast. Dad had returned once more from Lupus Street with two boxes containing the cakes carefully cradled in his arms. Proudly we set up the two tiers, magnificently iced in gleaming chocolate, in the centre of the table and proceeded to complete the decoration with ribbons, unearthed from the local haberdashery shop; blue and red for King's College, green and yellow for Westminster College.

Joyce and I had assembled our wedding outfits in the minimum of time. It was not therefore surprising that we had failed to remember all that was necessary. Joyce was obliged to sew the length of tulle and the artificial flowers to my hair, in the absence of the proper fastening. This was no easy task and was only accomplished in the nick of time. After many jabs to my scalp she finally succeeded in making it all hold together and with strict instructions to me to keep my head level in case the precarious arrangement should fall off, she rushed over to the church in the wake of the family and other guests.

It would seem that no wedding is complete without the little family hiccup. Ours came in the form of Aunt Annie, our mother's sister and my Godmother. She was incensed that she had not been invited to help dress the bride. Rushing into my room where Joyce was putting the final touches to my veil she castigated me mercilessly, even shouting that I had killed my mother and was now on the way to killing my father! She then rushed out

again and over to the church. I was dumbfounded and could think of no reply. She probably forgot immediately the angry and unjust words she had flung at me in temper and would deny later that she had ever uttered them. Annie's behaviour was never capable of rational explanation.

Before I could leave for the church there was another unexpected incident. Sisters Baker and Baxter of the Church Army, who had served the parish church of St. Gabriel's throughout my childhood and were still serving there at the time of my wedding, came to the front door just as I was about to leave, every-one else being already in the church. There they stood, their hands held piously in front of them, their faces solemn. "Oh, Pat," they said, " we never thought this of you!" and not waiting for a reply from me, they made their stately way back across the road to the church. Whether they attended the wedding or sat in the vestry I never knew. At the time I was completely non-plussed but wasted no effort in trying to work out their meaning. Some months later, still puzzling over the incident, I realised that they had assumed my hastily-arranged wedding was because I was pregnant!

110 Cambridge Street was opposite St. Gabriel's Church. By the time I needed to leave it had just begun to snow, covering the roadway with a light, white blanket. I turned back into the doorway, ready to leave on my father's arm. He was nowhere in sight. I called through-out the house. No reply. In his agitation he had forgotten his role as bride's escort and had gone across to the church without me, where he was discovered pacing up and down, asking in great anxiety, "Where's that girl now?"

It was a case of the R.A.F. to the rescue. Pilot Officer Ron Clarke, Edwin's college friend and his Best Man, and Sergeant Francis Smith, Joyce's fiance, rushed across to the house where I was standing under the imposing but dilapidated portico; making a 'bandy-chair' they carried me across the road to the cheers of those waiting outside the church.

Our three-day honeymoon, from Wednesday afternoon to Saturday, was spent mostly in draughty trains. On Thursday morning we walked on the snow-covered banks of the Thames at Marlowe, before travelling north through the whitened country-side to Doncaster. Thence the next morning to Dodworth, to spend our last day at Edwin's home and to collect his tropical kit from an army outfitter in Leeds. Only then did I realise that his destination would be the Far East and the war with the Japanese.

By Sunday evening Edwin was back at base and I was back in my room at Bramcote, exhilarated by the past two weeks but fearful for Edwin and what lay ahead, disconsolate at parting so soon.

We met once more before he sailed. Two weeks later, which seemed an eternity, I was in Lincoln, this time for what we both knew to be a last fare-well. Edwin was the only young officer with a wife. His brother officers were a splendid crowd and endeavoured to give us a good time that week-end but none of them, including Edwin, could disguise their natural curiosity at what lay ahead and satisfaction that they were called to play a more positive part in the war.

Really active service at last! I knew Edwin was relieved that the period of waiting was over. Since there was a war to be fought, he was eager to get on with it. The atavistic urge to protect the home and fight off the aggressor dominated. Although Edwin would have preferred a posting to Europe to fight Nazism, any move was better than a continuously defensive role. They were all anxious to prove themselves, as well as being keen to get the job done, despite the agony of leaving loved ones. For my part, it was a case of keeping up a brave show to cover the empty, aching void inside.

In marrying one makes a joyful leap into an exciting future; at the same time one gives a hostage to fortune. For the first time in my life I knew real fear. Fear of what might happen to Edwin, fear for myself if he should

not return, fear for him should I not survive. The last sight I had of my new husband before he left for overseas was of him standing at the very end of the platform at Lincoln Station giving me a gallant salute as my train drew out. We did not meet again for three years and nine months.

## The Forgotten Army

Edwin sailed to India from Liverpool at the beginning of April 1942 on a troop-ship which in peace-time had been a sumptuously-appointed liner of the Union Castle Line. For trooping, the ship had been stripped of all but the bare essentials to accomodate as many soldiers as possible, plus their kit and weapons, greatly increasing the number of passengers normally carried. With anti-aircraft guns mounted on their decks, they set off on their 'cruise'. A brief telephone call and they were gone.

The first and most hazardous leg of the journey was from Liverpool to Durban. The Atlantic and the English coastal waters were alive with enemy submarines. The Bay of Biscay had its own treacherous currents and storms to add to the menace of the U-boats. But once past Gibraltar, the guardian of the Mediterranean, and the Canary Islands, some relaxation was possible. The one luxury left to the soldiers was the sunshine; there was little else to do but sun-bathe and they took full advantage of the opportunity for relaxation.

The traditional ceremony of 'Crossing the Line' was observed, a diverting interlude for all on board. Edwin and every other officer crossing the equator for the first time had to undergo a ducking in the swimming pool, where King Neptune, seated high on his throne, arrayed in flowing robes and long beard and wielding his trident, received their homage. This boisterous horse-play was much enjoyed by the onlookers though somewhat rough on the victims! With so many people now travelling the world and taking cruises, this amusing tradition, once an eagerly-awaited event in the calendar of the wealthy traveller, seems to have faded away.

The 'Line' ceremony and the sunshine was all that could create the illusion of a cruise but Edwin enjoyed the voyage immensely. How I wished I could have sailed with him!

It was almost six months before I received a letter from him, with news much out-dated; by then he was serving with the Fourteenth Army, the 'Forgotten Army' as it came to be known for very good reasons. Perhaps not surprising under the circumstances, the Services' post was somewhat erratic. My first letter from abroad came, not from Edwin, but from a kind lady in Durban, South Africa, three months after he had set sail. The ship had stopped there for a brief stay to refuel and take on supplies. Edwin together with other officers had been invited out to tea; their hostess had taken their names and addresses and had promised to write to wives, mothers, sweethearts. It was nearly three months after that and nearly six months after he sailed, that I received a letter with Edwin's familiar hand-writing on the outside. What had happened to the letters he himself had posted in Durban we never knew.

One of the advantages of taking the troops by sea was that they had time to acclimatise to tropical conditions, though I suppose if transport aircraft had been available at that stage of the war they would have been whisked off and would have missed the sea voyage. This acclimatisation was continued for Edwin in Meerut, an Indian Army hill station, where he stayed for three months before going to Burma. This seems to have been a pleasant interlude. He had his own officer's bungalow with Indian servants to run the house and his army batman to ensure that all his needs were met.

Social life continued there much as in peace time and centered round the Club. Officers new to India had a great deal to learn about the social set-up and how best to conduct themselves in the unfamiliar and very tightly-knit society of British India. In Meerut in 1942 the British still lived the life of the British Raj, a life-style which was becoming out-

moded and politically unacceptable but which still exerted a powerful influence on Army life. During those weeks in Meerut, acclimatisation included learning to adjust to the social mores as well as to the weather.

Before Edwin sailed we had discussed the chances of my following him out to India. It would probably have been possible if we had known how to set about it. If I had been able to join up myself I could have applied for a posting to India but without any guarantee that I would get it. As a member of the Fannys I might have had more opportunity but my chances of joining the Fannys were slim. One needed an 'entree' to that select group who were usually given the plum jobs of chauffeuring senior officers and had therefore to be from a certain background! Reluctantly, the hope of getting to India had to be abandoned.

While at Meerut Edwin received his second pip and became a full Lieutenant. A short while after that, in the autumn of 1942, he was transferred to the 1st Gloucestershire Regiment in Burma and some months later was promoted to Captain. He held this rank until April 1944 when he was again promoted to the rank of Major. It was while serving in India and Burma that he met Dick Wilkins who, being a Bristolian, had been commissioned into the Gloucesters. Having been in the same 'melting pot' in India and Burma they had much in common and formed a life-long friendship.

The families of men serving in Burma received very little news of the conduct of the war and at first letters were few and far between. News came of large numbers of British soldiers and civilians, men, women and children, having been captured in the fierce fighting which followed the initial surprise attack on Burma. By all accounts the large British population, mainly tea-planters and their families, could not believe that the war would touch them and were almost completely unprepared; the small garrison was poorly equipped to meet invasion and the southern part of Burma was quickly taken by the Japanese. Many Burmese had no special love



for the British and were reluctant to risk their lives in open hostility to the Japanese, although after experiencing great cruelty at the hands of the invaders they made common cause with the British to oust the Japanese entirely from Burma.

News that trickled through to the British public was filled out by disturbing reports of unbelievably cruel and degrading treatment meted out to men and women alike by their Japanese captors.\* This added greatly to the worries of the families back home. There was comparatively little substantiated official news of our fighting men. The Fourteenth Army was rightly named 'The Forgotten Army' and those of us who had husbands or relatives fighting in the Burma campaign were angry at this neglect. And yet, the Fourteenth Army was the largest army in the world at the time! Who would have thought that?

Later in the year, after I had been working in the Prisoner of War Directorate of the War Office for some months, I had the opportunity to see a film of our troops in Burma and to listen to an official account of the campaign. This film was made on the order of the Adjutant-General, Sir Ronald Adam, who during the course of visits to various Directorates and after conversations with civilian employees including myself, as well as military, had recognised the depth of feeling about Britain's Forgotten Army and decided to take action. From then on more information was given in the press and on the radio but the feeling that the campaign was too far from Europe to merit much attention was never completely dispelled. The Fourteenth Army remained the Forgotten Army in the opinion of those of us anxious for news.

\* I learned more about the cruelty of the Japanese when I worked in the P.W. Directorate in the War Office. I prayed every night that Edwin would not be captured. It has since been difficult for people of my generation to forget what happened, the more so because no kind of compensation has

yet been paid by the Japanese to the vast number of British and Dutch prisoners they held and tortured, some to a terrible death, although American prisoners were long ago compensated. This year, 1991, sees a Japanese Festival in Britain, presumably in aid of good relationships and good business between the two countries. This has touched old wounds. I certainly cannot bring myself to visit any of the exhibitions. I quote here two letters published in the Daily Telegraph on 23rd and 25th September 1991.

Debt of Honour.

Sir,- Would it not have been wiser for the money being spent on the Japanese Festival, presumably to foster good relations between Japan and Britain, to have been used to compensate British and Dutch prisoners of the Japanese during the 1939-45 war?

The American prisoners have received compensation, but the general public probably does not realise that the British and Dutch PoWs in the Far East have received nothing by way of compensation from the Japanese Government.

I was a small boy when our family was torn apart and transported to different camps or prisons. I ended up with my mother and sister in a prison on the island of Java. At the end of the war my mother weighed only 37 kilograms and looked no different from the Jews in Belsen or Auschwitz.

My sister and I were forced to witness our mother's torture. My brother, interned in a different camp, lost the sight of one eye. My father was deported to a camp near Singapore; he survived, but died last year having waited all his life for some compensation for all that we had suffered.

I only wish that all those involved in setting up this festival, and the Chairman, Sir Peter Parker, were better informed about what actually happened in the Far East during those terrible years. One might have expected that the Japanese business-men would first have contributed to a

compensation fund to pay off a debt of honour. As it is, the Japanese festival will be stained with our blood, the colour of the Japanese flag.

Gerard Lemmens, Cranbrook, Kent.

#### Special Japan Tax.

Sir,-Until I read Gerard Lemmens's letter (Sept 23) I thought that I was the only one who had such thoughts. Mind you, I was only machine-gunned in the water after my ship had been sunk off Ceylon, April 9, 1942.

I,too, resent this festival. But what really made my blood boil was to see that blood-stained flag (i.e. the Japanese flag) waved frantically all through the Last Night of the Proms, especially during the singing of Rule Britannia. At least the bearer had the decency not to flourish it during the National Anthem. Tell that to those who rest in peace in H.M.Ships Repulse, Prince of Wales, Hermes, Exeter, Dorsetshire, Cornwall, Hector, Hollyhock, Skate and Vampire, and all those in other places, of other Services, all over the Far East.

If this nation won't pay up,why not have a tax on all imports from Japan, and those Japanese goods made in this country, and call it a war reparation tax?

Captain the Reverend D.A.Farquharson-Roberts,  
Fareham,  
Hants.

## I n d i a   a n d   B u r m a

Not surprisingly Edwin's name in the army was Tiny. In trying to recreate a picture of those times it is difficult to think of him with any other name. So, in this chapter, he is Tiny Dennis. He spent nearly four years in India and Burma, a large slice from the life of a man in his early twenties. Six years in the army as an infantry officer, during a war, left a lasting stamp on his personality. Always a strong person, experience in Burma and India strengthened those character traits of tenacity of purpose and forthrightness inherited from his Yorkshire forbears, often mistaken for obstinacy!

It was never easy to get him to talk about Burma though he was quite forthcoming about his time in Calcutta, chiefly because that was where he played a great deal of rugby for the 28th against other service teams. When first demobilised he had no desire to dwell on the war but was eager to 'start real life'. However, when books appeared about the Burma Campaign he read them all. If the account was superficial he would fill out the military events recorded, occasionally adding his own assessment of the campaign in a detached, analytical fashion, with no 'blodd and guts' stories of which he disapproved anyway. A normally reticent man, he could be quite passionately angry if people he had known or events he had taken part in or knew about were inaccurately described, exaggerated or underestimated on T.V. or in print. His reply to a direct question which he considered too probing was usually, 'It wasn't very pleasant'; he would then steer the conversation to 'the lighter side of jungle life' as he once

described it.

What follows in this chapter is the mental picture I am left with of those years from spring 1942 to November 1945.

The Japanese attack in the Far East took the U.S.A. and Great Britain by surprise. After Pearl Harbour the Japanese turned their attention immediately to Malaya and Singapore. This meant that British forces would now be committed to three very different theatres of war, Europe, North Africa and now the Far East; training had to be directed towards fighting in snow, mud, sand and jungle. Our comparatively small resources in materials and manpower were severely stretched and the garrison at Singapore had earlier been reduced in strength. After a particularly bloody struggle which lasted two months, the decision was taken to surrender Singapore, otherwise 750,000 Asiatics and a very large number of British civilians would have been faced with bombs, starvation and thirst. As it happened the British civilian population still suffered horribly in Japanese PoW camps. I recall vividly the shock with which news of the surrender was received at home.

After Malaya and Singapore had fallen and the Japanese had invaded and taken at least two thirds of Burma from the south, the North East Frontier of India was threatened. There were many thousands of Indian and British from the Indian Army already deployed in Burma, having been sent there across the Bay of Bengal immediately after Pearl Harbour; they had been pushed north by the Japanese. Reinforcements needed both to defend the Indian frontier and recapture Burma could not be sent across the Bay as the Japanese held the ports in southern Burma and their fleet had control of the Bay of Bengal. The only way in would have been from the North East Frontier, through the mountains of Assam. There were no roads, only mountain passes and jungle tracks, so troops had to be flown from India to

Burma. Roads for the transport of troops and equipment had to be built before any decisive action could be taken.

This was the situation into which reinforcements were pitched. Tiny said the first job he learned once he left Meerut and had been flown into Burma was how to build a mountain road round a precipice with totally inadequate tools, but plenty of muscle power and sweat! This was the Tiddim road. What unkind quirk of fate was it, that as soon as the road was finished, the Japanese advanced straight down it to begin another offensive? How galling for everyone concerned in that gruelling task!

Once the Tiddim Road was finished they seemed to go from mountain to jungle and back again as the situation demanded. I know that Tiny was at Imphal and in the Kohima Khuts, along the front line of the 14th Army, at various times and spent months in the jungle. Looking at the map to find all the places he mentioned, many, including Imphal and Kohima were in the Naga Hills of Assam, on the frontier between India and Burma, while the Rivers Chindwin and Irrawaddy, the jungle between, and Chowringhee, were further to the east, in Burma proper.

This was the area where the campaign was fought from 1942 onwards until Burma was finally retaken in 1944. The front line of the 14th Army was in the Naga Hills, and went from Kohima to Imphal; in all, the battle front extended over 700 jungle miles, a vast area. 700,000 Indian soldiers fought alongside approximately 300,000 British, demonstrating what has been described as 'British/Indian co-operation at its highest level'. So little appeared in the British press or on news reels regarding the war in the Far East that the extent of the battle area and the number of men engaged in that fierce struggle was never truly appreciated.

East of that front line, towards China, was the territory where the irregular forces operated; the Chindits (British) under Major-General Orde

Wingate and an American/Chinese force under General 'Vinegar' Joe Stilwell, so named for his sour temperament and his particularly unpleasant attitude to the British.

By this time I was working in the War Office in London and although in the P.W. Directorate, heard a fair amount of informed gossip about the various theatres of war. What I heard about the Burma campaign did nothing to cheer me, particularly as letters from that area arrived most irregularly.

Stilwell was Chiang-Kai-Shek's military adviser and hoped to help him to retake China, once the Japanese had been pushed out of Burma. However, despite high hopes and the sacrifice of many brave men in fierce fighting, neither the aspirations of Wingate nor Stilwell were realised in that campaign; although it would seem that Wingate gained valuable information and showed exactly how much could be achieved in jungle country by well-trained and well-equipped troops. As far as the operation of Stilwell's group was concerned, there were many local successes but in Tiny's words 'the Chinese never came up to scratch'.

It has been said that neither Wingate nor Stilwell seemed totally clear about their respective roles. They were two highly unorthodox individuals of unusual character and ability, perhaps too much alike to get on with each other and too intent on 'their' bits of the war to integrate successfully into an over-all strategy.

As far as I have been able to ascertain from reading various accounts, the British 14th Army under General Slim had eventually to do the job of defeating the Japanese in Burma without help from other forces. Victory was only gained after much fierce fighting over two long years. The General, very much a 'soldier's soldier' and known affectionately as Uncle Bill, led the 14th Army to victory over the Japanese, first in the Arakan, then in

Assam in the area of Imphal and Kohima, and went on to lead the offensive which utterly defeated the Japanese and led to the recapture of Mandalay and Rangoon. In 1945 General Slim was placed in charge of all Allied land forces in South-East Asia. Tiny admired him greatly and considered his role in final victory had not been adequately recognised.

Gurkhas from the tiny Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal played an important part in the campaign. Their country had long had a treaty with the British to accept their young men for training in the British Army. This treaty, still obtains and benefits both countries. When first instituted it helped to provide a measure of prosperity and security for Nepal, in educating their young men as well as making them into disciplined soldiers; and it provided a most useful addition to the British Army, first of all in India and later wherever in the world it might find itself in an engagement. It became and still remains a great honour for a Nepalese village boy to be accepted for the British Army; his family shares the honour and prospers from his education when he returns home. The Gurkhas proved to be such good soldiers that they eventually had their own officers and mounted their own Brigade. The Gurkha Brigade, raised entirely from volunteers from a foreign though very friendly country, still has a much honoured and respected place in the British Army.

They are mountain people. Tiny liked them as individuals and admired them immensely as soldiers. He found them gentle, happy by nature, with an infectious sense of humour. Yet as fighting men they were among the best, courageous and loyal, terrifying of aspect when wielding their kukris. Tiny said that although they were 'on his side' they frightened him when preparing for battle, so he didn't know what they did to the enemy! Their self-discipline in and out of battle is much admired, their loyalty to England unquestioned. They have always been and remain immensely popular



with the British public for their impeccable turn-out and cheerful good-humour.

The Naga tribesmen, also mountain people and with whom the troops came into fairly close contact, interested Tiny greatly. They had been head-hunters in the past and retained a reputation for ferocity. He liked them and told me he thought they were really quite gentle people; then, with a grin, he would add, 'If they liked you!' Being mountain people, they were individualistic and not pleased to be plunged into a war which had very little to do with them; but they seem to have co-operated with the British during that campaign. What a pity that their history has been so sad in the years since the war. Part of their territory came under Indian rule, a fate which did not please the Nagas who wanted to keep their own way of life and remain independent. Years of argument and sometimes periods of rebellion have made them a problem group on the North-East frontier of India.

The jungle itself produced almost as many hazards as did the enemy. The extreme climate with the intense heat and the torrential rain, the difficulty of obtaining clean water and the inevitably basic and sometimes inadequate rations, together with infestation from insects and microbes, brought diseases new to men from this country, despite all that could be done to be as hygienic as possible. Prickly heat, from which many if not most suffered to some degree, set up an intolerable itching all over the body; in some cases men had to be sent back to base for treatment, they were so seriously ill. Malaria and dengue (jungle fever), dysentery and other intestinal diseases were common and took their toll. Treatment was available but sufferers must have had that peculiar feeling of helplessness that comes from having a disease hitherto unknown to them.

Tiny escaped lightly in his own opinion, even though he did have at least one bout of dengue while in the jungle, which recurred on his return

to England. I have never been so frightened or felt so helpless as on that occasion. He lay on the bed, trembling so violently from head to foot that the bed shook, with a raging temperature, muttering to himself, and in more lucid moments telling me not to worry as it would pass in time! Our local G.P. could prescribe nothing effective; the fever had to be endured until it worked itself out. It was a terrifying experience back home in England. What it must have been like for sufferer or onlooker out in the jungle I can hardly imagine.

In the field, rations were barely adequate and it was necessary to supplement their diet on whatever the jungle itself could provide. I have heard amusing tales of men catching jungle chickens, even competing with Japanese soldiers for the same chicken, ( although I must say I would not vouch for the truth of that particular story!) and wringing the necks of the poor creatures to make them ready for the pot. They were described as being nothing like chickens as we know them, being grotesquely fashioned scrawny birds with hardly any flesh, which nevertheless brought some change of taste to the inevitable stew. Tiny's catering course at Scarborough was not very beneficial under those circumstances. He said it merely served to emphasise what was lacking!

However short they may have been of nourishing food, I formed the impression that there was a regular supply of cigarettes. From being a reasonably moderate smoker Tiny became a heavy smoker. He explained this as necessary to keep away insects, which I suppose was true. Perhaps it also helped to assuage the hunger for a really good meal which assailed them from time to time. When he and Dick were together in London on disembarkation leave, I used to buy tins of 80 cigarettes almost every day!

News of the final defeat and surrender of Hitler in 1945 and of the celebrations in England must have filled the troops in the Far East with

some envy. Although Burma had been recaptured there was still fierce fighting in the Pacific and the Far East war had not ended. There could be no repatriation of troops until the task was finally accomplished.

During the last part of the campaign Tiny was in Calcutta, Major i/c Headquarters Company where he stayed until repatriation. There he played a great deal of rugby and boxed in the Army Championships. Thanks to the great kindness of Lieutenant-Colonel Radice, I have photostats of cuttings from the Calcutta Times describing rugby matches in which Tiny figured fairly prominently, his prowess being highly regarded.

It was possibly during this period, while waiting for repatriation, that he took part in a court martial as the Defending Officer. I have no idea what the charge was, nor of the identity of the prisoner, who may have been an officer or a soldier from the ranks. Tiny said he was more nervous of his part in that court-martial than he had ever been in the jungle! Having had no training in the law, he felt all the more keenly his responsibility towards the defendant. However, he had Dick, a potential lawyer, to advise him. Between them they examined the case and worked out the defence. When the time came, Tiny was on his own.

To his delight and the great relief of the defendant he succeeded in presenting to good effect the defence worked out with Dick and the defendant was acquitted. He was immensely proud of this achievement, particularly the fact that he had presented the case lucidly and well.

While waiting for repatriation he tried to see as much as possible of the Indian way of life. He also did some shopping and had a trunk full of Indian souvenirs to give me when he returned. There were examples of local craft work from the villages, including intricate hand-carved tables and Benares brass ware, some furnishing textiles and a beautiful sari which I wore only once, soon after his demobilisation. Opening up that trunk was

like opening Aladdin's cave to one deprived of clothes and beautiful objects for the six years of war.

Tiny was offered the opportunity of applying for admission to Staff College with the object of staying in the Army for the rest of his career. He gave this very careful thought but eventually turned down the offer. He had a natural longing to get home, to start our long-delayed married life. Had he decided to stay I could have joined him in India and would have been willing to do so. However, he knew me rather better than I knew myself at that time. He could not imagine me leading the comparatively inactive life of an Army officer's wife as it was at that time in India. Moreover, he wanted me to have the chance of pursuing my own career eventually if I should want to do so, and could not see how that would have been possible if he were to stay in the Army. In fact I had no career aspirations left at that time and they did not re-emerge until nearly twenty years later! It was typical of his consideration for me and his unselfishness that he should give as much weight to my possible career as to his own.

He had another reason for turning down the chance of Staff College. Having proved himself as a soldier, he felt obliged to prove himself in the career he had envisaged for himself before the war and to which his parents attached such importance. He felt he owed it to them to go back to university and complete his degree, whatever he did with it afterwards.

Instead of being posted off to Staff College, he spent time in Calcutta, Bombay and Karachi before eventually being drafted back to England. The Indian Subcontinent is now divided into three different countries. During his time there, Tiny was in all three of the modern countries; India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, Karachi being the port from which he sailed for home, arriving back in England on November 14th 1945 for six weeks disembarkation leave, before once more reporting back for duty.

The same Lieutenant-Colonel Radice who sent me the press cuttings also wrote an obituary for Tiny in The Back Badge, the Regimental magazine of The Gloucester Regiment. He also published three letters he had received from former comrades, from which I quote.

From Colonel P.G.H.Varwell.

'Tiny Dennis was one of my platoon commanders, He was a sterling chap. He joined long before Calcutta . He was with us in the Kohima Khuds. I well remember an occasion when I was trying to get the soldiers used to handling grenades. I had the whole company sitting round and was handling a grenade supposedly fused but in fact empty. I dropped it on purpose, and the fuse started and everyone ran like hell except Tiny, who picked it up and threw it away. A very brave thing to do because he and everyone else thought it would go off at any moment. It was only me who knew it was a dud. I remember playing rugger with him too. He was a splendid chap in the pack.'

From Ex Sgt. Phillips.

'--how sorry I am to hear that Lt. Dennis has passed away, for that is the way I remember him (not as a Major) as a Platoon Commander in B Company and of course his ability as a rugby player. If it's possible please convey my deepest sympathy to his wife and family. He was a very respected officer and I know that all ranks in the Company thought highly of him. I am sorry I have no particular incident in mind but I do remember as his Platoon Sergeant he was a 'stickler' for all details and instructions and I knew that everything had to be carried out correctly. I am sure Colonel Varwell will have happy memories of 'Tiny'.

From Gungha/

'My memories of him are for his prowess as a rugger player mostly operating in the line-out, a department of the game in which he excelled.

He was Company Commander of the mixed bag of nuts and bolts entitled H Q Company in Calcutta late 1944-45.'

These letters and other tributes were from men who had not seen or heard of Tiny since 1945 or earlier and are thus all the more precious.

## E a s t   E n d

After Edwin had left for the Far East at the beginning of April I had to apply myself to my examinations for my post-graduate Diploma. Somehow I struggled through that last term. Union activities had ceased and we were all bent on finishing satisfactorily and then applying ourselves to whatever war work we had chosen. I had discussed what job I should opt for with Edwin before he left. As I could not be with him in the army in India he asked me not to get myself into any other Service but to see what would be offered. I accepted this. He knew that I had also considered volunteering for special services in France, since I spoke the language and was very familiar with certain areas in Normandy. He was confident that no consideration would be given to me for such a job as I was the wife of an officer serving abroad; and he was right. He had even suggested with a grin that his permission would be necessary and he would not give it! I could not resist taking a preliminary step to test out the situation and was swiftly told I was unsuitable.

Following the examinations, which for me had included a 'special' practical teaching test by an H.M.I., I was awarded my Diploma with A grades, the highest of teaching qualifications, which I found very satisfactory. Once back in London at the end of June I had to find work. Schools were evacuated so there were no teaching jobs. My position with regard to the call-up had undergone a change on my marriage. I could not be drafted into the Services in the usual way but nor could I suit myself entirely. Following an interview at the Employment Exchange to which I had gone for advice I was told to find a job for the time being, with the hint

that there would be work for me in a Government Dept. I found work that interested me in the East End of London in the heart of dockland, in Milwall on the Isle of Dogs. I would not be able to live at home but would be free to return to Pimlico most week-ends.

This was an interesting part of Milwall on the north bank of the Thames, opposite Greenwich. The Isle was not a true island; as the map shows, the north bank of the Thames juts into the river forming an oval spit of land with a narrow neck. This neck was criss-crossed by docks, virtually cutting the land from the mainland, hence 'Isle'; I have no idea where 'Dogs' originated. This is the area now redeveloped on a grand scale with luxurious and expensive river-side homes for wealthy city workers. It is no longer the Isle of Dogs as I knew it; the character of the area has been fundamentally changed and sadly a vibrant community has been destroyed in the name of progress.

In the 'thirties the East End of London was a very deprived, slum-ridden area. Public Schools, religious bodies and other charitable institutions set up trusts to buy property and establish settlements which became the focal points for charitable work in the surrounding areas. I found work at a Church of England Settlement, St.Mildred's House, a somewhat dilapidated and inconvenient building on Dock Road, backing onto Monty Meyer's wood yard. I joined the staff as Youth Leader at the beginning of July 1942.

Dad was not pleased and I could understand his reasons. He wanted me to stay at home. However, apart from going into the munitions factory at Delco Remy in Glasgow Terrace while I waited for a suitable post in Whitehall there was no work for me and I could not be idle. It was natural that he should be concerned that I was moving into an area which was the prime target for bombing but somehow that was of relative unimportance to me; I needed to do something actively useful.

The Warden of St. Mildred's was Elizabeth Soutar, a wonderful person, as



large in spirit as she was in stature. She ran the Settlement with one other full time worker and me. My job was specifically with the youth of the area, mainly boys up to call-up age, and also with any young merchant-seamen whose ships might be in dock. Each evening, once the youngsters were home from their daily work, we opened our doors to run a club. Despite air-raids we were full to overflowing; one place was as dangerous or as safe as another in that area and our boys and girls preferred to spend their evenings together having fun rather than cooped up in small shelters.

The boys in particular were tough characters, rowdy and aggressive, but once inside the club, an old warehouse next to the Settlement, they behaved reasonably well. The large warehouse door intended originally for the passage of vehicles was kept locked. At club time we opened the small personnel door which meant that our clients had to duck their heads and enter with care. This gave us control of club members from the outset as they were obliged to cross the thresh-hold one at a time. A simple, practical way of establishing authority! We were able to hold back the rush and remove from the boys any weapons they might have in their pockets. It was a tough area and outside the settlement the boys spent a good deal of their time fighting. Inside, they had to behave or they were not allowed to stay.

They liked our simple club. There was no fancy decor, no expensive equipment, but there was an atmosphere of safety and stability, and freedom too, providing they kept our rules. Elizabeth had gained enormous respect in the area as a strong person, able and willing to help in any situation. I benefitted from that reputation and was immediately able to establish my own authority over our club members.

Our boys frequently fell foul of the law, often for street-fighting but also for petty larceny. On those occasions the parents came first to St. Mildred's to ask advice. Sometimes the 'ladies of St Mildred's' were asked

to provide some-one to speak for the boys in court since they were our 'clients'. Elizabeth usually did this but there were occasions when one of us had to go as her deputy.

One of our boys, Tommy Jobling, was frequently in trouble. I liked him. He was a cheerful, rough, tough rogue with little sense of right and wrong but great natural loyalty. His one ambition was to get into the Navy and he intended to volunteer as soon as he attained the right age. It was our job to see that he stayed out of custody until that time!

I decided that what our boys most needed was physical activity. With the help of local advice, I set up a St. Mildred's House Football Team. We went out each Saturday afternoon to Hackney Marshes where we hired a pitch and played our matches throughout the months of July and August and the beginning of September. They were a loyal group. I realised that I was working with some of the toughest youngsters in the East End but I always felt completely safe with them.

St. Mildred's House itself was pretty uncomfortable, although we did have a well-furnished staff sitting-room on the first floor. My pay was minimal but as I was also lodged and fed, the money proved to be just adequate. There was enough to clothe me in a modest way and pay my fare back to Pimlico on my day off; and that was all I needed for the time being. However, it was plain that only those with a private income could undertake such work for any length of time. Social work was not regarded as a career but as work appropriate for ladies of independent means whose consciences demanded that they serve society in some way. While this was doubtless a good, christian attitude, such an approach to social work helped to perpetuate the gulf between the classes.

Shared experiences of life on the river ought to have brought me immediately close to the people we served at the Settlement. It was therefore a considerable shock to me, as the daughter of a waterman and

lighterman, to realise that I was thought of as one of the 'ladies of St Mildred's', a different breed from the rest of the population. I had known but had not fully appreciated the extent to which social work was the province of 'ladies'. By taking up this kind of work I had automatically put myself into that category of people who, while their devotion to their work and their efficiency were undisputed, could never be nor wished to be, really close to the people for whom they were working. I did not fit into that slot and determined to establish my own kind of relationship with the local community.

My false identity as 'one of the ladies from St. Mildred's' embarrassed me. It was almost as though I had been deprived of my birth-right as the daughter of a river-man. Since my father, a waterman and lighterman of whom I was immensely proud, was still earning his living as 'one of them', I set about making this fact widely known. At first the local people found it difficult to accept that 'one of the ladies' whom by custom they almost revered, sprang from a family of watermen and shared many of their experiences. Eventually my intimate knowledge of the life of the river and those who worked on it, even the discovery of mutual acquaintances in the close-knit river brotherhood, proved my authenticity. My position became more honest and as a consequence my contribution to the work of the Settlement became more worth-while.

St. Mildred's was the only Settlement on the Isle of Dogs but there were others elsewhere in the East End. One of the most famous was Dockland, organised for the Jewish community by Basil Henriques and other members of that wealthy Jewish family. They took immense care of their local young people; it was noticeable that young Jews were not often in trouble with the police or so it seemed to me at the time.

There was also a wonderful priest, Father Groser, who devoted his life to the area. He had a small house among his parishioners; as well as being

a priest he was also a scholar and had collected a very fine and much-envied library of theological books, many of them rare. His house received a direct hit one night. Fortunately he was out amongst his parishioners but his fine, cherished library, built up over a life-time, was completely destroyed. This represented a tremendous loss not only to Father Groser but to the many people privileged to use his books. He himself was a simple man. Questioned by a journalist about his feelings on the loss of the library he had built up over a life-time, he replied that although he was sad to have lost his books he felt wonderfully free; his responsibilities had been reduced and he could concentrate on his people now that he did not have to worry about the safety of his possessions.

Air-raids on the docks continued during those summer months. There was no proper air-raid shelter for St. Mildred's but as we were on duty during the raids this was unimportant. We each had official nights off duty when we tried to catch up on sleep. I must confess I slept only fitfully, the bed-clothes pulled tight round my ears to muffle the continuous popping of the Bofors guns, the louder boom of larger anti-aircraft guns and the deadly whoosh and crack of the bombs as they dropped on shipping and houses alike.

The worst night was when the wood yard caught fire. This was on the dock-side, immediately behind St. Mildred's, so we had to get out of our building quickly. It was a truly awesome sight, the flames leaping high into the air above the roof-tops, the wood crackling and spitting sparks over the surrounding neighbourhood; the whole area was lit by the fire; the shape of the dock buildings and the little houses in between stood out sharply, black against the red sky. There was an awesome beauty in the scene, another example of beauty and horror juxtaposed. 'The colours are marvellous, aren't they Miss?' One of the lads was with me, watching. 'Is'nt it weird, how such a rotten thing as a fire like this can be

beautiful!'

My time at St. Mildred's came to an unexpected end some time in September. Dad did not wish me to stay there and in any case he was very unhappy and was living a life which worried us all. I was sorry to move from the Settlement but decided that I had to move back home. Since Mother's death the previous summer Joyce had kept house for Dad and Maurice during my term times and had done a sterling job. However, Dad was difficult and the situation was such that we were both needed at home. While I was pondering the problem of how to live at home and still earn my living in some socially useful way I had a summons from the War Office to attend for interview. My problem was about to be solved for me.

## T h e W a r O f f i c e

During our childhood one of our family recreations was walking. The streets of Pimlico and Westminster were wide and elegant. There was plenty of room for a family to walk together and much to look at. One of our favourite summer walks took us from Pimlico along Buckingham Palace Road to the Palace, down the Mall and through Admiralty Arch, down Whitehall to the Houses of Parliament and the Abbey and along Victoria Street to home, a circular route which we could take in either direction. As we passed the various Ministries and Government Departments in Whitehall we would speculate on the lives of those who worked there and try to imagine ourselves in important posts running the Affairs of State! What went on behind those elegant facades? As a child I longed to know. Perhaps one day I might even work there and be part of a life which seemed glamorous and exciting as well as important.

Now that I was to get inside one of those mysterious buildings, and by invitation so to speak, through the front door, I felt nothing to stir me beyond curiosity and the expectation of a worth-while job. I was surprised that my interview was to take place in the War Office itself and not in some little room in a side-street building. That was not my only surprise.

Facing me in the large room into which I was ushered were rows of desks set out as for an examination. I almost turned on my heel and walked out and might well have done so had I not been eager to be offered a job. To my relief it was not an examination but an aptitude test, designed to avoid putting square pegs into round holes, I assumed. There were two tests in the morning. We were to return after lunch for further instructions.

While I ate my Spam sandwiches in St. James' Park and fed the ducks with the crusts, our papers were examined and the sheep divided from the goats. That afternoon the sheep, of which I was one, were instructed to return next morning for interview while the goats were politely thanked and sent on their way. Since all the candidates were graduates I felt sorry for the goats. They must have felt very inadequate.

The interviews took place in a much grander part of the building than our test the previous day. Having been shown up an imposing staircase I was offered a seat outside a highly-polished door to await my call. I do not remember seeing any other interviewees that morning; perhaps I was first on the list.

I was shown into a large, high-ceilinged room, with long windows which obviously overlooked Whitehall. Having looked at those windows often enough over the years from the outside, they were easily recognisable. Facing me, seated behind an arc of polished tables, was a splendid array of officers, high-ranking to judge from the gold braid and other adornments on their shoulders. At the centre of the arc was a single, lonely chair. Mine!

It was a most intimidating situation. There was not one woman amongst my inquisitors, a fact I registered immediately; if there was a civilian, I did not notice him.

My experience of formal interviews up till then was limited to a brief and pleasant chat with the Sub-Dean of Arts when I first applied for entry to King's, and my French viva for Finals. Since that day in September 1942 I have attended other interviews, but none so unusual as that one. It began with questions about my husband, which I tended to resent, included a most interesting discussion on poetry and poetic language between one officer and myself, and ended by two officers both putting in bids for me to the General who presided! It was like being up for auction.

Surprisingly, my fate was decided on the spot, for which I was thankful.

Lieutenant-Colonel Elwes, the officer with whom I had discussed poetry, had 'won' me, to use his own term. He came round from the back of the table and escorted me to the door, leaving me in the hands of an official who gave me all the necessary information some time later. I was to be appointed a Civil Assistant to the Prisoner of War Directorate. The office was in Curzon Street, Mayfair, and I had instructions to report there to Lieutenant-Colonel Elwes, once my papers had been processed.

The Monday following the interview saw me at my desk in Curzon Street. Except for one other Civil Assistant, the General's P.A., two secretaries and one or two girls in the typing pool, the P.W. Directorate was staffed by uniformed soldiers who could be drafted to more active service at short notice. I had been brought in to replace a Captain who had been drafted abroad, hence the speed of my appointment. My work was sorted and brought to me by Sergeant-Major Bryant, a cheerful, sandy-haired man who was tremendously efficient; he set me to work immediately. Few explanations were given. I found my own way through the confusing mass of paper that landed on my desk that first morning and by closely questioning Sergeant-Major Bryant and refusing to sign or pass on anything I did not understand, I learned a lot in a very short time.

The only office I had ever worked in up till then was the Students' Union Office where we got through our work efficiently but knew nothing whatsoever about office practice. The functions of the 'in' tray, the 'out' tray and the 'pending' tray were obvious. I decided that when I went home each evening my 'in' tray would be empty, my 'out' tray full and as little as possible would be 'pending'. Since I found I had a natural ability for dictation, composing letters and reports presented no problems. It was the files, those bearers of messages and secrets by the stange system of minute-writing, which so often drove me to picking up the phone and asking for help from Sergeant Bryant during my first week. What a cumbersome and



time-consuming system it was! We would even write a 'minute' to some-one at the other end of the room instead walking along to hold a conversation. I realised fairly soon that this system made sure that a record was kept of all suggestions and discussions; it could be seen as very efficient. I would have preferred a more spontaneous method of communication.

All the work was highly confidential and much of it was secret. At first I decided that as far as I was concerned it was all secret, I would not be bothered with the various gradations of confidentiality and secrecy; until I realised that the gradations referred to the people in the Directorate and in other Directorates who were allowed to be privy to certain pieces of information. I learned the meaning of the current phrase 'need to know'. General Gepp and Colonel Elwes decided that I was one of those with a 'need to know' if I was to carry out my duties satisfactorily and apart from those matters which they kept entirely to themselves, they kept me fully informed. It was satisfying to know that I was so trusted.

Major Phillimore with whom I shared a desk at one time would probably not have included me so easily in those with a 'need to know' had he been in Colonel Elwes' position. Not because he did not trust me but because I was a mere woman. I got the impression that he had not come up against many professional women who were also married; to him the professional woman and the married woman were two distinct breeds. He did not really know where he was with me. He was surprised at the range of secret information passed to me, as when the Colonel told me of their suspicions that some prisoners in Germany were being shackled. Since a whole section of my work was concerned with the camps in Germany it was plain that this was information that I really did 'need to know'; but I felt Major Phillimore disapproved.

'Confidential' or 'secret' meant the same to me personally. I never discussed my work with any-one in the office unless it was necessary and never at all with any-one outside. Friends would occasionally ask me to

enlighten them about an item of news concerning POWs. When the newspapers got it wrong or only half-right it was tempting to show my knowledge and put the record straight but I never succumbed. I had decided from the very beginning of my appointment that the only sensible and safe way to behave was never to talk about work.

The Director of the Prisoner of War Directorate was Major-General E.C.Gepp, recalled from retirement to fill the post. His Second-in-Command, Lieutenant-Colonel Elwes, had been with the British Expeditionary Force and had been seriously wounded at Dunkirk. A lawyer by profession he guided the Directorate on matters of law relating to the Geneva Convention on Prisoners of War.

The work of the Directorate was divided into two sections, P.W.1 dealing with prisoners in the Far East, with Staff Captain the Right Honourable the Earl of Iddesleigh of the Welsh Guards in charge, and P.W.2 dealing with prisoners in Europe. I worked in P.W.2., together with Major Harry Phillimore, also a lawyer. Minutes addressed to me were headed PW2(b), which in a sense was my War Office 'name'.

My most interesting task was to read letters from prisoners sent to me from Censorship and Intelligence and, using the letters, compile a regular summary of what conditions seemed to be like in the various camps. This summary went to the General who used it, as appropriate, in discussions with his superiors and with politicians. The reason for the conversation about poetry during my interview became apparent. The Colonel needed someone with an interest in words and a knowledge of idiom, with sufficient skill to read between the lines of prisoners' letters and interpret any hidden meaning. Prisoners were adept at conveying information by the skilful use of phrases which they hoped would be unknown to their captors and would therefore escape deletion. Most letters from prisoners arrived with words deleted in thick, black ink, impossible to penetrate by the

naked eye. Many had whole sentences blacked out. Sometimes there was very little of the original letter left which must have been heart-breaking for the families receiving them. Although in many ways it was a sad task, I was often struck by the cheerful and even amusing letters the prisoners managed to write, rising above their harsh treatment in an attempt to cheer up their families at home and lessen their worries.

Conditions in some of the camps were bad. It was part of our job, working through the Red Cross and Switzerland, the Protecting Power, to get those bad conditions alleviated as much as possible. Our 'Bible' for this work was 'The Geneva Convention on the treatment of Prisoners of War'. One of my first tasks was to familiarise myself with this document. Getting the Germans and Italians to honour its terms was a tricky business as so much depended on the Camp Commandant. Without the help of the Protecting Power and the International Red Cross our prisoners would have suffered much more than they did.

Although the work concerning prisoners in the Far East was the responsibility of PW1 at the other end of the office, I learned how very cruelly our men, women and children were being treated by the Japanese. I had not appreciated what the word 'cruelty' meant until I worked in the PW Directorate and learned what was happening in the PoW camps, particularly the Japanese ones. I prayed every night that Edwin would not be taken prisoner. I would rather he were killed in battle than suffer that fate.

At times we were concerned with prisoners taken by the British and put in camps in England. On one occasion, after the defeat of Rommel in North Africa, some high-ranking German officers were brought to this country as prisoners, among them a certain General Cruewell, if I remember his name correctly. It fell to me to compose and send off a document setting out the prison conditions which befitted his rank under the terms of the Geneva Convention, a task which gave me considerable satisfaction. I took great

pains to make sure it was correct.

Escapees were also interviewed in the Directorate. Some had stories of great hardship endured by themselves and by people in the occupied countries who risked their lives and in some cases lost them for harbouring prisoners on the run. Others had amusing stories to tell such as that of a naval petty officer who, while being marched through Rome to work, siezed a bicycle left unattended by the roadside and pedalled away furiously, not knowing what he intended to do or where to go. His fellow prisoners closed ranks to hide his escape and he had gone some disance before his absence was spotted. By happy coincidence he found he had cycled into the Vatican. Although situated in Rome, the Vatican was, as it is now, a separate political state. Great Britain and the Vatican were not officially at war with each other so the petty officer was able to claim sanctuary in a neutral country! He was eventually sent back to England.

It was the duty of every British service man or woman taken prisoner to attempt to escape if possible. Many tried from camps all over Europe. Some, after months of dangerous wandering through enemy territory, befriended most bravely by people in the occupied countries, eventually made it home. Many did not and were severely punished when recaptured, while their brave helpers in the local population were shot, often after having been most cruelly tortured. In the case of the petty officer, a daring grasp at an unexpected opportunity succeeded by its audacity, much to the surprise and delight of the escapee himself.

There was a third element to my work in the Directorate and that was to be Organising Secretary of the Imperial Prisoner of War Committee. This was a body whose sole responsibility was the welfare of soldiers from Great Britain and the British Empire who had been taken prisoner. My name and position was published in the War office Gazette . I was quite proud of this. It appeared in something like the following form:

Imperial Prisoner of War Committee

Chairman: Major-General E.C.Gepp

Organising Secretary: Mrs. P. Dennis, B.A., A.K.C.

I was glad my name had appeared in this way as it made my position clear and helped me to establish myself in a job which had hitherto been done only by men. I was the only woman at the meetings and several of the men, particularly those in uniform, objected to a woman being in such a position. I still remember with anger a certain Major Wheeler, an Australian who represented the Australian High Commissioner on the Committee. He was most rude and objectionable to me, until General Gepp, always a kindly and courteous champion, made him see the error of his ways.

The Committee, chaired by General Gepp, consisted of the High Commissioners or their representatives of the various member countries of the British Empire. I sat next to the General, took minutes in long-hand and wrote a report when the meeting was over. Short-hand writers were not allowed in to the meeting, presumably because of the secret nature of the deliberations. Apart from writing the report, I was responsible for all the practical arrangements, working through the General's P.A.

Sometimes I was used as a special messenger, between our Directorate and other government departments. On those occasions I would be taken by car to my destination, usually the Foreign Office, where the necessary business would take place. Sometimes I was required to wait and return with an answer, on other occasions I went straight back to Curzon Street. The occasion I remember most clearly is a visit to the Foreign Office to hand over documents to a distinguished diplomat for his consideration. It may have been Harold Nicholson. He was utterly charming. Instead of sending me straight back once he had attended to the business, he offered me tea and we talked pleasantly, mostly about literature, for about half-an-hour, before he finally escorted me to the car which was to take me back to

Curzon Street.

General Gepp was always charming and helpful to me; I felt completely at ease with him. Twice during my time in his Directorate he took me to lunch at his club in St. James', the United Services Club. I met other senior officers who were also guests of the General and enjoyed myself hugely. The conversation was stimulating and the food was nourishing and 'off ration' so there was more than one reason to savour the occasion.

All of the officers with whom I worked were from wealthy, even aristocratic backgrounds. Intellectually I could easily hold my own. I was less sure of myself socially. I could not readily accept the differences in war-time sacrifice which money created between the rich and the rest of us. This made it difficult for me to be completely at ease with the people in our Directorate.

For example, despite food restrictions, it was possible to eat in restaurants without giving up ration coupons. This way of supplementing a barely adequate ration was only possible for those with plenty of money. There was a great gap between people like our family and others all over London, trying to eat decently and healthily on the very meagre rations, and those who could afford one meal out each day. People in our office often went round the corner to the Mirabelle, a restaurant much favoured by the wealthy, for their lunch. I never joined them, though invited to do so from time to time. Being taken out to lunch by the General was one thing; lunching regularly at an expensive restaurant when I knew the rest of my family had to manage on the rations was quite different. This attitude tended to isolate me from the social life of the office but I concentrated on my work.

I was very conscious of the vastly different life-styles between the social classes in wartime London. The war was supposed to have brought equality of sacrifice but in my experience this was not always the case.

The rich remained privileged, although less so. The same people who were able to eat well in restaurants were also the ones who had country estates which provided them with game and other luxuries unobtainable for the ordinary citizen.

Total equality of sacrifice would have been impossible to ensure and nobody expected that it could be done, but I was strongly of the opinion that no-one should be allowed to eat in a restaurant regularly without handing over ration coupons. The only restriction imposed was a ceiling of five shillings on the cost of the meal but this was supplemented by a 'cover charge', set by the restaurant, which varied according to the standard of service offered. In this way, by imposing a very high cover charge, expensive restaurants managed to keep open through-out the war without great loss of income. In addition they were able to provide luxurious meals from unrationed food such as game and game fish for those who could pay.

When Colonel Elwes talked about poetry during my interview it was because he had a genuine interest; he himself wrote poetry and had already had a slim volume of his own poems published privately. We had many interesting chats about literature in general and the writing of poetry in particular. He knew that I had written a little myself but I could never bring myself to show him what I had written.

He gave me a New Year-cum-birthday present in January 1943, a copy of the volume of his own poems. Characteristically, there was a touch of humour. On the fly-leaf he had inscribed it to me as though he were passing me a War Office file. Our section of the Directorate was known as P.W.2 and I was P.W.2 (b). The fly-leaf reads:

P.W.2 (b)

Patricia Dennis

To see Minute 45.

Richard Elwes

P.W.2

War Office

January 1943.

On receipt of this I turned to 'Minute 45' i.e. page 45, the last page in the book, to find there, written in his own hand, a sonnet not included in the printed volume. I have no knowledge of the circumstances of the writing of this poem and would not presume to think that it was specially composed for me, but I was deeply touched that he should have thought of writing it out in this way. Maybe it is not a great poem but it shows his skill with words and also reveals his deeply religious approach to life. It is also a delightful reminder of a very gentle and kindly man who was unfailingly courteous and helpful.

Upon the summits where the beacons burn,  
 and in dark places where the faithless are,  
 from high and low the lesson still I learn-  
 Truth is assailable and Life is War.  
 So Evil towers in its turn and I  
 in turn must front it as I am a man,  
 but O, my scope is earth and sea and sky,  
 is timeless age within one mortal span!  
 For unborn armies in the mind of God  
 are present with me in the vast command;



the vanguard in the march we shall have trod  
 stoops from Eternity with outstretched hand;  
 I was, I shall be and I am with them  
 in comradeship before Jerusalem!

At a time when life was rather grim and for me exceedingly lonely, I was fortunate to work for and with one who, as well as being a tough and courageous soldier proven in battle, was also gentle and thoughtful, motivated by a strong christian faith.

Richard Elwes came from one of the leading Roman Catholic families in this country. He had a large family but that did not prevent him from adopting another daughter. He would occasionally discuss their education with me in a general way, as he was genuinely interested in the promotion of careers for women. One of his daughters, Polly, became well-known as a T.V.Presenter in the early days of television after the war.

Harry Phillimore also came from a well-known Roman Catholic family. Although we shared a desk for some months I never got to know him as well as I did Richard Elwes. Both were exceptional people and I was fortunate to be working with them.

There had been talk for some time of the need for the Allies to set up a War Crimes Tribunal to try war criminals. This was naturally of considerable interest to the P.W.Directorates. Since both Colonel Elwes and Major Phillimore were lawyers it was highly likely that they would be required to work with the Tribunal. I realised I could well be drawn in on the fringe, either in Germany or in England which would not have suited my plans at all. I wanted to be free to spend as much time with Edwin as possible once he was home. I also doubted whether I would be able to bear the recitation of horrors which the tribunals would occasion. I decided to resign from my War Office post.

My interview with General Gepp was rather amusing. I simply told him that I was going to hand in my resignation to which he replied, 'My dear Denny, you cannot resign from the army in wartime just like that!' We had a discussion during which I pointed out that I had never been taken into the army and did not hold a commission. After several more talks he finally agreed that if I found myself a teaching job, (he would not countenance any other kind of work) he would do his best to facilitate my resignation.

Some months after that I resigned with his blessing and in the autumn of 1944 was in a temporary post at Putney High School.

## M a k i n g   D o

Making do became a virtue during the war years. Everyone saved scraps; pieces of string, a few strands of mending cotton, maybe just one piece of cold potato or half a slice of Spam till the next day. We had to make do with what we had and could not afford to waste anything.

Of all the food shortages, the shortage of fat was one of the worst as it drastically affected home baking. Every fraction of an ounce was vital. We scraped the paper until every last vestige had been removed. New recipes were invented for making fatless cakes with dried egg and pastry with the minimum of fat. Meat was rationed and vegetables were short. By the summer of 1941 when I was at home prior to going to Nottingham, even potatoes had become scarce and we were obliged to queue for our share.

In summer 1942 our stand-by, potatoes, became scarce but remained unrationed. To queue for over an hour in Warwick Street and be rewarded with just one pound for the four of us, with no prospect of any more for the rest of the week was exceedingly frustrating. As Edwin wrote, 'What can you do with a pound of spuds?' Edwin felt guilty about food as he was well fed in the army; and at home in Dodworth they were easily able to supplement their more generous rations with locally-grown vegetables. When I went to stay with him on various occasions he felt it his duty to fill me with as much food as I could comfortably consume and always found something extra for me to take home.

Major food items were strictly rationed. When I lived alone from summer 1943 onwards, my meat ration amounted to one lamb chop each week. Chickens were unobtainable and would have been too expensive as poultry was a luxury

in this country until the sixties. Fish was very scarce and when it could be found was expensive. Many of the fishermen were in the Merchant Navy, thereby reducing the number of fishermen; catches were therefore small. Transport could not be spared to bring the limited supplies from the coast on a regular basis. Such fish as did come into London seemed to find its way into the expensive shops and restaurants in the West End.

Vegetarian cooking was virtually unknown, but if we had been familiar with it, we could not have bought fresh vegetables in sufficient quantity. Purchases were severely rationed by the greengrocer in his endeavours to treat all his regular customers fairly. Once the build-up to D-Day began there was even less transport available for bringing produce from the countryside to London. Tomatoes and other salad vegetables had always been scarce, unless one could grow one's own. Now they became almost a currency!

The girls in the Land Army worked hard to keep up the supply of food but it was a difficult task to produce enough for the civilian population as so much had to go to the Services. Volunteers to help in the fields were gladly accepted even for as short a time as a week. At Easter 1944, I spent a week's leave in the Fens, this time not far from Wisbech, cutting cabbages, a cold job when the frost was on the ground in the early morning.

Tinned and dried food such as beans, peas, pulses and dried fruit, were also rationed, on a points system. Items of food were given a value in points and each person was given a points book in addition to the ordinary ration book. Once the points were used, there were no more until the next issue, possibly months ahead. By juggling points and normal rations it was just possible to eat a little protein once a day but producing meals was a tiring and frustrating business. It was easier to manage in a family since it was possible to have more variety and somehow the amounts seemed larger. People living alone on one ration book had a very difficult time.

The British Merchant Navy did a magnificent job bringing basic supplies

across the Atlantic but at terrible cost of lives. Nobody minded that they brought only essentials and no luxuries such as fruit. The only fruit in the country, apart from that grown in our own countryside, was that brought in by the American Services for their troops. British servicemen greatly envied the American G.I.s who could offer their British girl-friends extras such as fruit from their own rations and extra goodies from the PX. I remember the delight with which I received three large tomatoes from an American sailor one evening in 1944 when I was helping at a 'Welcome' evening. I had not tasted a tomato since we left the house in Cambridge Street, in the late autumn of 1942; Dad had grown tomatoes in the conservatory there, the one good thing about living in that house! Later in November 1945, six months after the cessation of hostilities in Europe, when Edwin came home on leave, he could not at first understand the thrill I had when our local green-grocer produced for me on Christmas Eve just one banana, not only the first I had had, but the first I had seen for years!

There was a Ministry of Food, headed by Lord Woolton. The staff of the Ministry included cookery experts who specialised in creating recipes from the skimpy rations and substitute foods with which we had to produce our meals. Every morning after the news came a special programme, 'The Kitchen Front' to which we all listened. Recipes were given, coupled with advice on how to manage rations and 'points' foods to best advantage, a favourite being 'Woolton Pie'. The Ministry performed a most useful service, but the emphasis was on family meals and those of us living alone benefitted only marginally. Our diet was barely adequate and many doctors thought that the rations of those living alone should be increased. By the end of 1945 I was suffering from anaemia and a mild form of malnutrition which dogged me until well after Robert was born, and did not help with the bouts of oedema which recurred from time to time and which were so embarrassing, as I appeared to be alternately plump and skinny!

Clothes were also rationed. It was not possible to buy a pair of shoes and a coat at the same time as the coupons would not stretch to such luxury. Sometimes we bartered, clothing coupons for 'points', but not very often as we needed the food more than we needed the clothes. It was possible sometimes to buy clothes coupons on the black market but this was illegal and we saw no reason to put money into the pockets of spivvy profiteers. On the whole war profiteering was controlled by the people themselves as most people disapproved strongly of such activities. When we married, neither Joyce nor I had any new clothes at all, not even a pair of stockings, apart from the dress we bought for my wedding and which Joyce borrowed two years later.

For those who had no stock of clothes from pre-war or who had lost their clothing through bombing, rationing was a severe trial. Both those situations applied to us. My student wardrobe had contained the absolute minimum and even that was lost when the house was bombed. In our family we all had to 'make do and mend'. In fact our clothes were mended so regularly that often there seemed to be more 'mend' than there was original fabric!

There were no fashions except those dictated by factory and service life. Hair had to be short or rolled up round the head for safety. Elaborate hairstyles were unsuited to uniform headwear and could be dangerous in factories; hair had to be short, or secured in a net or snood, or alternatively tied up in a scarf. This was often done turban fashion with a bow on top. The only fashion models were those girls chosen to demonstrate sensible styles in propaganda pictures or news-reels.

Make-do-and-mend also applied to house furnishing. Even if there had been money to make good our home and refurnish in 110 Cambridge Street it would not have been easy, as furnishings and furniture were difficult to buy. In other times and other circumstances we would have delighted in the challenge to make that house into a home, but that was never likely since

we were only there because of the war. Such a house would have been well above our financial level in peace time.

The original grandeur of the house was still perceptible despite the ravages of bomb-blast, which had torn large chunks of stucco from the porch pillars, blown off coping-stones from the top of the house and left it with a general appearance of delapidation. Inside it was cold and uncomfortable although we did our best to create a welcoming atmosphere.

We had only the bare essentials. There was no carpet for the floors, except for one small Persian carpet which had been rescued from Stanley Place and which now graced the centre of the large drawing-room on the first floor. Strategically placed in the rest of the house were odd pieces of lino, some bought cheaply from the traders who still scraped a living in Warwick Way, but most of it having been left by the previous tenant. It had been down so long it had adhered permanently to the floor-boards.

It was not a house of happy memories, apart from my wedding. It had been our Mother's last house but she had not had the time nor the strength to make it into a real home. The family had all struggled to make it homely for Dad but against difficult odds.

While we were living there Joyce received some very sad news. Her fiance, Sergeant Frances Smith R.A.F. was reported missing believed killed in a raid on Cologne. They had become engaged when Frances joined the Air Force. 'Smithy', one of the Scout gang, was a lively, cheerful young man, liked by every-one and very courageous. He trained as a rear-gunner, one of the most dangerous jobs in the R.A.F. and certainly the loneliest. The rear-gunner sat shut into a separate compartment in the tail of the plane, completely isolated, with only a machine-gun for company. In the event of danger he could take no evasive action of his own volition. He could see no other living person, except the enemy in his gun-sights: a sitting target for an attacking plane, with almost no hope of getting out in a crash.

For some months every-one hoped that news would come of Smithy having been taken prisoner but eventually that hope faded. His name is recorded in the R.A.F. memorial book of honour in St. Clement Dane's Church in the Strand, London.

Dad was still grief-stricken and difficult to live with. His work on the river remained hard and dangerous. Previously he had always lived a very regular life, getting home from Dagenham as quickly as possible, even though often it meant walking from Fenchurch Street to Pimlico. Now, his life no longer followed that predictable pattern. After a gruelling twenty-four hours at work, instead of making straight for home, he would stop off at the pubs in Fleet Street where he got to know printers and journalists, notoriously hard drinkers.

He had never been a drinking man, except for special occasions, but he must have found consolation in the company he met. He was good-looking and attractive, and a good conversationalist. I can imagine him enjoying pitting his wits against his new-found friends, all professional word-spinners who doubtless found it unusual to be challenged at their own skill by one from such a totally different working milieu. In his coal-blackened working clothes, his hands and face hastily washed in cold water but still grimed, his old working cap stuck on the back of his head, he must have been an unusual companion in that sophisticated company. But he was earning good money and enjoyed flashing it around, which must have added to his attraction. As his friendships developed, instead of stopping off on the way home, he would rush home and change before meeting his new friends.

For a time he had an attachment to a woman journalist, a divorcee named Pat Darke with a son of my age. She was a slim, dark-haired, good-looking woman in her forties, very chic and hard, as different from our mother as she could possibly be. She visited the family in Cambridge Street twice, once while I was still living on the Isle of Dogs and once after I had



returned to Pimlico to take up my job in the War Office. Neither visit was particularly successful. She was difficult to entertain and had failed on her first visit to make any kind of friendly relationship with Joyce and Maurice. Dad was still young; I would have been happy for him to remarry sometime but doubted in my heart whether Pat Darke was the right person.

The friendship ended after a few months and Dad began to see more of his former Pimlico friends. He eventually renewed acquaintance with Alice Rodwell, from Glamorgan Street. He had been to St. Gabriel's School with the Rodwell family and had been good friends with Alice's brother, killed in the First World War. This common background helped them to form an easy relationship and before long they were regular companions.

1942 to 1944 was a time for enduring. There was a hard and cruel war being fought to protect India and regain Burma and also to defeat the Japanese in the Pacific. The struggle in North Africa went backwards and forwards across the desert and at one time seemed as if it would never end. In Britain, although the air raids were not of blitz intensity the raids on London continued in an attempt to sap the will of the people. It seemed that hostilities would drag on for years and it was not easy to see the end. They were trying times for every-one and we longed to see the light at the end of the tunnel. But we refused to entertain any conclusion to the war except that of total victory.

## St. Augustine's Mansions

During the autumn and early winter of 1942 Dad, Joyce Maurice and I used only the basement kitchen and the bedrooms in the Cambridge Street house in an effort to keep warm and to save the coal ration, which was just sufficient to keep a modest fire going in one room. Our shelter was again in the coal-cellar under the street although we had made no effort to make it comfortable as we did in Stanley Place. We were often out in the evenings; Dad down-river, Maurice on trailer-pump drill, Joyce at the Scout hut or in the Parish Hall while I divided my time between fire-duty at the War Office and duty as a part-time Warden.

It was a time of waiting and holding on. I was looking towards the future determined to have some kind of home ready for Edwin on his eventual return, however long I had to wait. Joyce would be eligible for call-up in September 1943, Maurice had determined to volunteer for the Marine Commandos at the earliest possible age, and I had no intention of staying in the house in Cambridge Street, where Dad and I would rattle around in cold discomfort.

I found a second-floor flat in St. Augustine's Mansions, Vincent Square. It was a pre-war luxury block and still retained the services of a porter. The rooms were enormous and there was plenty of room for us all. Joyce liked it and we all decided to move in. Dad and I came to an arrangement about rent; I undertook to pay more than a half share of the rent on the assumption that the flat would become my home after the war.

Moving was a problem. Dad, although he had agreed to the move, was exceedingly difficult about the details and left all the arrangements to

Joyce and me. We managed to find some-one to move the furniture but to save money we did the preliminaries ourselves. The porter at the Mansions, a pompous man, was amazed and appalled to see two young women marching up the stairs to the second floor carrying a roll of lino between them. Never before had he seen prospective tenants arrive in such an unorthodox fashion! We were a marked family from that moment and had to tread very warily indeed during the time we lived there. He was determined that we should not upset the sensibilities of the other tenants whom he described, to our great amusement, as 'real gentle folk'.

Joyce, Maurice and I had a lot of fun in that flat. We managed to furnish it quite respectably with some pieces from our old family home and one or two second-hand pieces I had bought for myself in the King's Road, carrying them home in a taxi.

It was somewhat disconcerting to discover that our two teachers of gymnastics and games at the Grey Coat Hospital, Miss Chamberlain and Miss Jackson, still maintained a flat in the Mansions. I came face to face with them one week-end when they were making a check visit. They were as surprised to see me as I was to see them. I hoped very much that the gang, Maurice's boisterous Scout friends, would not come bursting through the entrance while they were there. Those two teachers were sticklers for ultra-correct behaviour and stood very much on their dignity. (Perhaps they were the 'real gentle folk' the porter had mentioned!) Luck held out. They left the building before they could discover the awful truth.

We had succeeded in getting our battered old piano moved from Cambridge Street to the Mansions, although Dad had wanted it left behind as worthless. It was a Broadwood and had once been a good family instrument; now the keys were damaged, many of the felts needed replacing and it was hopelessly out of tune. However, we cleaned it to the best of our ability and discovered that we could still get a recognisable tune from it. We put

it to good use.

The winter of 1942-43 was the time when Maurice learned to ball-room dance, particularly the tango! Evening after evening, air-raids or duties permitting, I sat at the piano playing the song 'Jealousy', thumping out the rhythm and singing the words, while Joyce led Maurice through the steps. I put all my strength into hammering out the notes in strict rhythm. The Mansions shook but nobody apart from the porter ever complained; the few residents left liked to hear us enjoying ourselves. Our efforts bore fruit. Maurice still dances a good tango!

In the spring of 1943 I had accrued some leave and Joyce was due for a week's holiday so we decided to go off together, far from London. We could have spent the time with Edwin's family in Dodworth but instead decided on an energetic holiday youth hostelling and walking in Derbyshire. Train travel was unreliable and expensive so we decided to hitch-hike, a popular way of moving from town to town during the war years. Road transport companies co-operated by turning a blind eye to the practice. Provided one was sensible and respected the strict conventions which quickly grew up, there was little danger, very different from the situation today.

The practice was so widespread that while I was President of the Union during my year at the Institute of Education, one of the services I organised was the Students' Hitching Service. Information was gathered concerning the lorries plying from one town to another, advice was given as to the most reliable firms and routes and we drew up a list of 'Dos' and 'Don'ts' for the benefit of students. The most important 'Don't' was never to travel alone. The most important 'Do' was to take extra sandwiches and our chocolate ration (a real sacrifice), to share with the driver, a packet of cigarettes to help him with his 'smokes', and to pay for all the cups of tea consumed.

We were highly organised even to the extent of a Hitching Time-table so

that two pairs of hitchers were not at the same spot at the same time. Our service became so popular that we were obliged to appoint a student in overall charge. She was Pat Higginbotham, a very good organiser, known to every-one from then on as 'Hitching Higgy'. (I believe that she later became a distinguished headmistress). So I knew enough to be confident we could hitch our way to Derbyshire.

Our travel plans were carefully kept from Dad, still as protective of his daughters as an Edwardian father, despite the war. We took ourselves by underground to the Great North Road and picked up our first lorry. With only one change on the way, we arrived within a mile of our first hostel well before dark.

From then on we had a most wonderful time, with several minor adventures. The country-side was beautiful and peaceful and we were totally free of worry of any sort; a week of total respite. The war was far away from that part of England. There was plenty to eat and we found that frequently coupons were not cut from our ration books when we bought our food. The area was new to us. We had an Ordnance Survey map and were completely confident that our Girl Guide training would enable us to find our way with ease. Confidence and optimism were justified in the main, although there was one occasion when we became lost, apparently miles from anywhere with the sky darkening towards evening. Discretion prompted us to abandon our proposed route; we slithered down a steep hill-side to a village we had seen in the valley below, to discover that we were within two miles of our original destination.

The journey back to London was astonishingly easy. We picked up a lorry in the main street in Ashbourne and travelled all the way home on the same 'hitch'. The driver dropped us on the corner of Vauxhall Bridge Road, a few yards from the entrance to the Mansions in Vincent Square!

Unfortunately, our residence in St. Augustine's Mansions was of brief

duration, not quite a full year. Dad and Alice decided to get married in the summer of 1943. This took us by surprise but perhaps we ought to have expected it. When we had taken the flat this possibility had not presented itself and we were unprepared. Dad assumed that Alice would join us in the flat for the time being, until I could find somewhere else. Joyce, due to be called up in three months time on her twentieth birthday, decided to volunteer; Maurice was determined to join the Marines at the earliest possible opportunity which would be within the next year. I would be left with Dad and his new wife, two women sharing the same kitchen, not an ideal arrangement.

Reluctantly, for I liked the flat, I agreed with Dad that I would move out. This was something of a blow as the flat was to have been my post-war home according to our arrangement; I had been paying the lion's share of the rent on that understanding. I began to look around for another flat, at first without success, as so much of the property was unfit for habitation. Eventually I found a flatlet, part of the ground floor in a house in St. George's Square. The best flat was already occupied. My room had originally been the kitchen at the back, behind the staircase. Part had been partitioned off to house a cooker and a tiny sink. A bathroom with scarcely room to turn round had been fitted under the stairs. The one window, criss-crossed with brown sticky-paper as a precaution against blast, looked out onto a small yard at the side of the house where the dust-bins were kept. It was small and gloomy, but at least it would be a roof over my head.

Just before Dad and Alice were married on July 10th 1943, Maurice, Joyce and the Scouts moved my few belongings from St. Augustine's Mansions across Pimlico to St. George's Square on the Scout trek cart. Joyce and I followed behind with my clothes and other small but precious items in a suit-case.

Joyce made a sensible decision in volunteering before her call-up. Once

called up, she would have had no choice of war-work, but would have been obliged to go where told. For a woman this could mean joining any one of the three Services, or compulsory posting to the Land Army or to work in a munitions factory. Volunteering gave her choice. Dad was very displeased and could not see that such a move was very much to Joyce's advantage. In the event she did not get her call-up papers until her birthday in September but by volunteering had secured her desired place in the Wrens.

Dad and Alice stayed in St. Augustine's Mansions for a month or two after his re-marriage, then to my surprise and dismay, decided to give up the flat and move to rooms in Cumberland Street. I tried to take over the tenancy of the Mansions flat once more but was forstalled; Dad had already given up the tenancy and another tenant had already signed the contract. I did not mind Dad moving out, that was his business, but I did mind not being able to get back what had been intended as my home!

With Joyce now in the Wrens, and Maurice living with Dad and Alice until he could get into the Marines, our family was disbanded. In September 1943 I began a very long period living alone until Edwin's final demobilisation in July 1946.

## A w a i t i n g   T h e   F i n a l   S t r u g g l e

At St.Mildred's House we helped in Civil Defence in a voluntary capacity. Later, as an employee at the War Office, I was required to play my part on a more regular basis. All personnel were obliged to undertake fire-fighting duties on a rota system in the building in which they worked, unless engaged as volunteers in their home area. Preferring to help in Pimlico I joined Post 26 as a part-time warden.

At that stage of the war Civil Defence posts, which had always been well organised, were to all intents and purposes on a Services footing. The full-time wardens were augmented by volunteers who took up their duties on returning from their daily work. Our area was organised by a retired Admiral, Admiral Evans of the Broke, a man famous for his courage and superb leadership during the 1914-1918 war. Down to the youngest and least important volunteer we knew exactly what we had to do in any kind of emergency.

Post 26 had always been smart off the mark from the very first alert. By September 1942 when I joined their ranks as a regular volunteer, the post was a model of efficiency. Admiral Evans had been able to call on a community steeped in local pride and with a long tradition of self-help. Although when we moved to St. Augustine's Mansions we were further away from Post 26, during the time we lived there Joyce, Maurice and I kept our close association with the post and that part of Pimlico. My association as a volunteer carried on after Joyce and Maurice joined up, while I was living first in St. George's Square and later in St. George's Square Mews, until the end of the war.



Each main post had several out-posts under its general management. Post 26 was managed by the father of one of the Scouts, Goff Beeze. I was sent to help man one of the small out-posts, in Gloucester Street. This was a cleaned-up coal-cellar, with two iron bunks, blankets and nothing else, apart from the companionship of the inevitable mice. I had two companions who kept me company and the mice at bay, Father Farrington, (Farrie) Skipper Adams' successor as Vicar and later Robert's godfather, and a boy scout volunteer.

During the period when there were few serious raids, we extended our social life by entertaining in our bunker. Our guests ranged from youngsters in their early teens bored with inactivity and lack of any social life of their own, to lonely older people whom we would collect from their cellar homes to while away an hour or two in different company. Squashed on the bunks, sharing our flasks of tea or coffee and our rationed jam or Spam sandwiches, we passed the time singing, doing crossword puzzles and often playing silly, childish games. Impromptu parties! Later on in 1943 I was very grateful for this company as a change from my gloomy little bed-sitter in St. George's Square .

The Boy Scouts and the Girl Guides feature regularly and at times prominently in this account. They were very useful to the Civil Defence force in Pimlico, being willing to do anything or go anywhere. They were a comparatively small band of boys and girls from the age of thirteen to eighteen, generally referred to as 'the Gang'. As the boys reached the age of eighteen and the girls twenty, they gradually vanished into the Services. Young men like my brother Maurice began the war as small, physically undeveloped, inexperienced twelve-year olds and ended it as tough, seasoned soldiers who had seen a great deal of action.

By 1943/44 there were few of the original gang left in Pimlico, but more youngsters came forward, eager and willing to play their part; they were

the ones who had been evacuated from London but who, like Maurice, had come back home. It was difficult to find official leadership for the Scouts and Guides but somehow the Group was kept in being and the tradition of service maintained.

Until the start of the V-1 attacks in 1944 there were periods when there were no serious air-raids, merely sporadic attacks. Nevertheless, constant vigilance was essential and our pattern of volunteer duties was maintained. In the autumn of '43 and the early spring of '44 we tried to spend the evenings pursuing our own interests, always within call, ready to race to our posts immediately the first wail of the siren assaulted our ears.

I joined a Sea Ranger Crew as First Mate. We had about a dozen girls from the age of seventeen to twenty, awaiting their call-up and wanting to take some kind of useful training and have some fun. Our Skipper was Nancy Evans, later Godmother to Robert. Apart from the inevitable Civil Defence training which was first on our schedule, girls had first to learn to swim before tackling boat drill and being instructed in the conventions and rules which governed taking a boat on the river. If possible we went 'up river' on Saturday or Sunday afternoons. On my first river outing after receiving my Mate's 'ticket' I was unceremoniously thrown in as part of my initiation ceremony. Fortunately it was a warm day!

Our present Queen was at one time a Sea Ranger. Years later, when she married, she remembered those days of happy companionship and invited representatives of her former Sea Ranger Crew to her wedding.

As the V-1 raids developed in 1944 such meetings once more became difficult; members of our small crew were conscripted into the Services and meetings ceased.

There was plenty to occupy me, with my job at the War Office and volunteer work in Pimlico but I lacked company of my own age and interests. I could have found plenty of company amongst the officers of various

nationalities billeted in other houses in St George's Square but chose not to become a 'hostess', either official or unofficial, even though the rewards would have been very welcome; nylon stockings and additions to skimpy rations from American officers, wine from the Free French (how they managed to get wine I never knew, perhaps it came over with them in 1940), or meals in one of London's expensive hotels, still in business but with their former magnificence much reduced.

Off-duty summer evenings and week-ends found me sitting by the lake in St. James' Park, always a favourite place with Edwin and myself. On one occasion I met by chance an old friend from university days and discovered she was living in Dolphin Square, round the corner from my modest flatlet. We met a few times after that but I felt our paths had diverged too much for us to become close. She was working in Whitehall and greatly enjoyed the kind of social life I had not taken up for various reasons. However, through her I met one or two very interesting people, one of them a Hungarian artist who fashioned plaques and medals and hoped to set up in England after the war. I took up his invitation to a party somewhere in Kensington.

At first the party was fun and I met some fascinating people; one, Louis Kentner, found world-wide fame after the war as a pianist. His short recital was the focal-point of the party. I was exhilarated to be once more part of a gathering where the conversation was fast and challenging and the personalities dynamic, if somewhat more bohemian than I was accustomed to meet. But their level of sophistication proved to be well beyond my experience. I was shocked by their 'liberated' behaviour and decided to beat a retreat.

I did not see these brilliant and talented people again, in many ways to my regret, for I had so much enjoyed their scintillating and stimulating conversation. They made such a welcome contrast to my humdrum life,

punctuated as it was by work, duties, air-raids and many hours alone. Except for one formal concert given by Louis Kentner in another large Kensington drawing-room which I attended with Farrie, that was my last contact with them. The artist who introduced me to this milieu presented me with one of his medallions. I accepted it, but some months after, thinking back over that time, I gave it away.

After that experience I became wary of new acquaintances, however much I felt the need for companionship. I realised that loneliness was the great enemy to be over-come and tried to occupy such leisure hours as I had with reading; but when not at work or on duty the hours stretched out interminably. I dared not look at the calendar. The weeks, months, years were passing and I felt I would be old before ever seeing Edwin again.

Farrie, who had many contacts in different areas of society was from time to time offered tickets for concerts in private houses; he took me as his guest. These were unusual occasions, organised to provide concert experience for musicians who would otherwise be unemployed now that the concert halls were closed. They were charmingly reminiscent of the private concerts traditionally given by wealthy patrons of the eighteenth century anxious to present their proteges to a discerning audience.

One such concert, in a large house in Kensington, stands out clearly in my memory. It was given by a duo who later became world-famous, Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears. Visualise the scene: Britten a slight figure at the grand piano, his fair, curly hair lit by the evening sun, his fingers running firmly but sensitively over the keys in accompaniment to Peter Pears' silky, beautifully-controlled tenor voice: Pears, a more thick-set figure, standing almost to attention, his hand resting lightly on the piano, half-turned towards his audience but his eyes constantly returning to the pianist. For that evening there was no war, no worry, no loneliness, only a wonderful, unworldly sense of peace flowing from the beautiful

sounds made by that incomparable pair of artists.

The only public concerts I remember throughout the whole war were those held every lunch-time in the National Gallery. Famous musicians gave free concerts. People who worked within walking distance of Trafalgar Square would take their packet of sandwiches and rush to the Gallery to listen to such magical performers as Myra Hess. Those who could not get in sat on the steps outside, hoping to hear something through the half-open doors. Day after day the Gallery was packed. There I heard Myra Hess play much of her extensive repertoire. At the beginning of the war, she travelled regularly to the East End of London to play the piano in one of the settlements. East Enders were not noted concert-goers but she was exceptionally well-received by them; maybe her courage and generosity were as much appreciated as her skill at the piano. She was one of many classical performers who during those very dark and dreary days introduced many people to the satisfaction and peace which can come from listeninmg to beautiful music.

Farrie was a good friend to me. We were both very interested in the debates on Post-War Reconstruction and attended seminars together, mostly at Toc H Mark 11 which met in a house in St. George's Square. Toc H was a religious organisation and club founded in the trenches of the First World War by an army padre, the Revd. 'Tubby' Clayton. Our discussions embraced many topics, ranging from the religious to the narrowly political.

Most people were well aware that the all-out effort being made by the nation would leave us very poor as a country, with many institutions having closed down for want of money and personnel. Ideas were changing radically. The structured, class-ridden society in which Lady Astor could say that only aristocrats or men from the better public schools were fit to become officers, had disappeared. Such thoughts were laughable in 1944. Society would have to be put together again in a way that would embrace the newly found strengths which had been demonstrated by people from all areas of

life; and the freshly-defined ideas on equality of opportunity. The economy would have to be reconstructed, not only to recreate industry and commerce and produce the wealth necessary to fulfill the aspirations of returning service personnel, but also to cope with the serious financial debt to the U.S.A.

Much thought was given to these problems at different levels of society. One man, Sir Richard Acland, decided to attempt to put his ideas into practice by the formation of a new political party.

It was in the Toc H meeting room, after having listened to Sir Richard, that I became a founder member of his Commonwealth Party. He was the head of a long-established, land-owning family in the West of England, with strong liberal traditions ('liberal' in the English sense). He was a practising christian who endeavoured to construct at least in theory a political system in tune with his christian beliefs. He saw that the old social order would have to change, had indeed already changed considerably, and that a new party was needed in Parliament to champion the change.

He did not believe that either the Labour Party or the Liberal Party had the right programme or enough fire and idealism left to carry out this task. His approach, although not socialist or communist in the accepted sense, rejected the inequalities of the old social order and sought a path to reform through much greater sharing of wealth and a fundamentally changed political system. Motivated entirely by christian ideals, the sharing of wealth was basic to his programme.

The other three political parties took the new party seriously at first, sensing a challenge which might capture the imagination and the hearts of some of the electorate and succeed enough to tip the balance of power, should any Commonwealth candidates be elected to Parliament. The programme of Sir Richard's Commonwealth Party was in the end condemned generally as too idealistic. It failed at the polls in the first post-war General

Election and the party was disbanded. Nevertheless, it had served a very useful purpose, focussing on the detail of issues, whereas the other parties preferred the obfuscation of generalities; and had introduced a strong moral element into political thinking. In one sense the party was a complete failure. Yet, maybe from time to time we need a political Don Quixote to raise our sights and remind us of our original ideals.

When the Party was eventually dissolved, Sir Richard became a lecturer in Religious Education in a Teacher Training College and ended his distinguished and most valuable career in Education as Professor of Religious Education at Exeter University.

Those of us who worked in Civil Defence, even part-timers like myself, enjoyed the support and practical help of the community in general. We sometimes received favours from the most unexpected quarters. The Dorchester Hotel had been built in Park Lane a few years before the war and was one of the most luxurious hotels in the world. It kept open through-out the war, much to its credit, as its business must have been much depleted despite the many high-ranking officers and their entourages who stayed there.

One of the privileges I greatly enjoyed as a volunteer warden was that of taking a turkish bath at the Dorchester Hotel entirely free of charge. Throughout the war there was always a uniformed doorman on duty in the front reception hall. All I had to do was to wear my warden's uniform to be received royally, with the dignified ceremony expected from the doorman of a such a hotel. The bone-shaker second-hand bike which I had bought for cycling to the post at the bidding of the siren was taken from me by the doorman and handed to a porter to 'park' and I was then conducted down to the lower floor where the Turkish Baths were still in operation. I could not have been better treated had I arrived in a Rolls with chauffeur and personal staff in attendance.

Everything needed for a turkish bath was provided. Wrapping myself in a huge, luxuriously fluffy white towel such as I had never before experienced, I graduated through the various heats until, pouring with perspiration and feeling utterly exhausted, I plunged into a small pool of cold water. Having emerged, I then lay prone on a marble slab while a muscular masseuse pummelled and probed, slapped and kneaded me back to life! A wonderful experience! Then, upstairs into the lounge for a beautifully-served tea, no coupons demanded. I could so easily have grown accustomed to such luxury!

In early 1944 the horror of the Vls and V2s was yet to be experienced. Although some final retaliation on Britain was expected once the launching of the Second Front approached, we could not imagine what form it would take. Since the reality was so devastating perhaps that was as well! Meanwhile we filled in time. My sights were always on Edwin's return.



## I n v a s i o n F r o m T h e W e s t

In 1943 a friendly invasion of the British Isles took place. American troops began to arrive in large numbers, together with their arms, equipment and financial aid. Britain had withstood the hordes of the Nazi invader but could not mount a Second Front on Europe to achieve final victory over Hitler without a strong injection of money and arms. Troops were also needed as so many men of the British Army were deployed in the war in the Far East. The Fourteenth Army in Burma, with which Edwin was serving, was in fact the largest army anywhere in the world, including the enemy forces.

Since the British Army in India had the necessary experience of the land and the people, it was of vital importance for that army to be strong, if the Japanese were to be prevented from taking India and furthering their aim of over-all supremacy in the Far East. Having sent so many men to India and Burma, troops had to be brought in from the U.S.A. for a joint assault on Europe. Since the tragedy of Pearl Harbour, the wars in Europe and in the Far East had come to be recognised as one struggle and forces from all the Allies served in all fields of operation.

Of course there was rivalry between the British Forces and the G.I.s for the affections of the girls. The G.I.s were very highly paid and could afford to give their girl-friends a very good time, in comparison with the poorly-paid British servicemen; in addition, the G.I.s could provide goods such as chocolate and fruit, nylons and make-up from their PX Stores, luxuries which could not be bought in Britain. It was rather hard on those of us struggling to look reasonably decent on a severely restricted

clothing coupon issue and trying to eat healthily on one ration book.

This situation understandably caused some friction during the fairly long period of the build-up to the Second Front and gave rise to the description of the G.I.s as 'over-paid, over-sexed and over here'; but that phrase was used half-humorously and was heard no more after the opening of the Second Front. In my opinion and in that of many others at the time, such feeling could have been avoided if the pay of the G.I.s had been kept closer to that of the British Army, the surplus being banked for the G.I.s back in the U.S.A. as a bonus on return, either for them or their families; but the Americans did not see it that way.

Living in the little flatlet in St. George's Square I had many foreign officers as neighbours. I only hope they were more comfortable than I was! Although air-raids were sporadic during the last months of 1943, on two separate occasions my home sustained considerable damage from blast. The windows were blown out and I lived in semi-darkness until they could be replaced. In the day-time when I was at home I left the door open to let in some light but it was like living in a tomb. The single electric light bulb hanging from the centre of the ceiling seemed to add to the general feeling of gloom instead of bringing cheerful illumination. There was precious little room for furniture. Keeping the room clean and tidy took almost as long as it had done to clean the whole flat in St. Augustine's Mansions, as I had to move every-thing round to get at the dust and rubble which seemed to fall daily. It was never home to me; even the vast, shabby rooms in 110 Cambridge Street had given more of a welcome. I was always on the look-out for other accomodation.

Joyce stayed with me when she came on leave, sharing the tiny room. We talked the hours away, making optimistic plans for after the war. She had already met Arthur when she came on that first leave; he was her Petty Officer Instructor at H.M.S. Fledgling, the Fleet Air Arm Station at Mill

Meece, in Staffordshire, where she was training to be an Electrical Air Mechanic. Joyce loathed taking examinations and had a nasty shock when she realised she had to sit papers as well as be examined practically before she could pass out! Arthur was her mentor and support and gave her the necessary encouragement. There was never any doubt about her ability but oh! how she loathed the prospect of those exams!

Christmas 1943 was to be my second Christmas without Edwin. In my heart I knew he would be gone for a long time. I never expected the war in Europe or in the Far East to be over quickly and my time in the War Office confirmed that opinion. Public holidays were the loneliest times of the year. Men fighting on the Continent of Europe some-times had home leave. Those stationed in the British Isles usually managed to get a few snatched hours at Christmas. For the families of those in the Far East theatre of war the situation was very different. There was no chance of meeting again until all was over; they were there for the duration.

There were times when this contrast of fortunes was particularly hard to bear and Christmas was obviously one of them. I spent that particular Christmas with Joyce. Arthur's friend, Petty Officer Ron Batten, was married. He and his wife had rented a house on the outskirts of one of the Five Towns. Since they were not on an operational station, both Arthur and Joyce had leave and the Battens most kindly included me in their invitation to stay over the holiday.

That was not my only visit to Joyce while she was at H.M.S. Fledgling. On Joyce's invitation I travelled to Mill Meece to attend a Station dance. It was an extraordinary experience in many ways. Joyce had found me lodgings in a miner's cottage, situated in the middle of what seemed to me to be an endless field of mud. There were half a dozen cottages in a row, in the wilds of the country, no other place in sight. It was difficult to imagine how they came to be built there. They were primitive in the extreme. Apart

from the outside privy and no running hot water ( no new experience to me ) the only source of light was from two oil lamps and a collection of candles. This was their normal way of life, not the result of enemy action!

When I climbed the stairs to bed that Saturday night I lit my way with a candle up to the tiny room which had been vacated for me by its regular occupants. But before I did so, I sat with my host and hostess into the very early hours answering their questions about the bombings and the war in London. From a distance, they had seen and heard bombs drop in the Midlands but were too far away to have experienced them first-hand. The war had affected them but fortunately only by the influx of service training camps in the area.

I remember that little family with respect and gratitude for their exceptional hospitality. They were obviously poor and until the advent of war had not met people from outside their own community. Yet they rose naturally to the occasion with warmth and considerable dignity, making no excuses for the obvious lack of modern amenities, welcoming me wholeheartedly for just one night into the very centre of their family.

It was during that week-end that I met G.I.s in the mass! At the dance at H.H.S.Fledgling Joyce and I learned to jive! There was an American base near-by and as was the custom the G.I.s and their officers had been invited to the dance.

The band, composed of service-men who had been professional musicians, had begun by playing the accepted ball-room dances: waltz, quick-step, slow-foxtrot, the occasional tango. Then, to every-one's great surprise and delight, they swung easily into the new jive rhythm with verve and expertise. The G.I.s sprang into action.

Gradually we all moved to the side to watch the brilliant demonstration given by our transatlantic cousins. We had never even seen jive. We watched, our feet keeping time to the intoxicating rhythm, as they gyrated

athletically, accenting the beat with flailing arms and legs, apparently wild, yet in miraculous control. All of which proved so infectious that it was not long before we allowed ourselves to be swept onto the floor, to be swung round, thrown out at arm's-length only to be brought back with a quick jerk of the wrist and an arm round the waist, following on with slides and twirls of breathtaking exhuberance and skilful execution.

Arthur did not like dancing. Joyce therefore jived the night away while Arthur watched. I had several exhilarating whirls with the experts then, as befitted a married woman, I turned my attention to my partner for the evening, 'Toothy', the Ship's Dentist, and endeavoured to pass on the lessons in jive I had only moments before learned from the Americans. It must be said that I had only a moderate degree of success. For 'Toothy' belonged to that category of independently-minded dancers who perform their own routine no-matter what the music or the rhythm!

It was a splendid evening, when our 'invaders' were more than welcome, one of those 'time out' occasions which made the war bearable. Having arrived in Mill Meece late in the afternoon of Saturday, I was on my way back to London on the Sunday morning, another long, cold, tedious war-time journey but this time somewhat enlivened by memories of the previous night's fun.

## T h e   H a y l o f t

Although in early 1944, before the advent of the doodle bugs, the end of the war seemed far beyond the horizon, I thought all the time of having a home ready for Edwin when he returned. The small bed-sitter in St. George's Square was obviously unsuitable; when it was blasted by a bomb almost next door the task of finding better accomodation became urgent. There were plenty of empty flats and houses but most were bomb-damaged, in a sad state of disrepair and dereliction but I still clung to the hope of finding a little place with some character where we could begin our married life.

Then I came upon St. George's Square Mews, built originally to house the horses and carriages of the residents in the Square and later used as lock-up garages. Immediately pre-war when the fashion for 'gentrifying' run-down property first emerged, some of the stables in the Mews together with the haylofts above them had been converted into small, luxury flats; the rest remained unconverted, still serving as store-sheds and garages for costermongers.

I found the juxtaposition of flats for the well-heeled and bases for costermongers, or barrow-boys as they had come to be described, very intriguing. The Mews reflected the personality of Pimlico as I had known it all my life; the place where Duke and dustman so to speak walked and lived side by side, as in no other place. Of the half-dozen conversions, one was standing empty. There was the ideal home for us! I determined to have that flat.

There was no 'To Let' board outside. I had no idea where to apply for tenancy. Although there were signs of occupancy in the two flats either side, I never managed to encounter either of the tenants to ask their advice during my investigations. After wandering past the door of the empty flat several times I decided to go inside, since the door was not locked. In fact, stretching a point or two, I decided to carry out my duty as a part-time warden and inspect this unoccupied property!

The front door by the side of the garage opened onto a flight of well-constructed, solid oak stairs to the flat above. That stair-case made an immediate impression as evidence of an elegant conversion for which expense had not been spared. At the top of the stairs to the right was a long, narrow living-room going from back to front, heated by an electric fire set into the wall, an arrangement very much in the fore-front of fashion before the war when the conversion was carried out. Fronting the Mews were the bathroom and kitchen, each equipped with an electric immersion heater. A small bedroom to the left of the staircase completed the accomodation.

If I had had any doubts about wanting the flat they were dispelled when I saw the bathroom. Tiled in pale green, with suite to match, a shower and a built-in water heater, it represented to me the acme of luxurious living. Later, once I was installed in the flat, the bath-room became my refuge during raids when I was not on duty. I would fill the bath almost to overflowing with extravagantly heated water and wallow, telling myself that if I had to go, at least I would go clean! I had my most illuminating thoughts and dreamed my most encouraging dreams in that bath-tub!

Determined to become the tenant, I consulted Farrie as to my next move. Together we hung about the other occupied flats in the hope of meeting the tenants and rang their door-bells, to no avail. We concluded they were away for the duration or were 'night-birds' sleeping away the day-light

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hours; this last was a facetious suggestion which actually turned out to be accurate as both sets of occupants were in the entertainment business in the West End of London and kept very unusual hours. We did not know this at the time.

I could not bear to stay any longer in my dingy, blast-damaged 'cubby-hole' in the Square. Farrie and I decided that I would move into the Mews flat with or without obtaining permission from the owner. Those were strange times. With so many people rendered homeless without warning, we had become accustomed to waive the normal rules of conduct in favour of making the best of the current situation. If challenged I decided I would plead homelessness caused by enemy action. Thus I became one of the first 'squatters'!

However, I had no intention of cheating and decided that I would put aside a certain sum of money each month to hand over as rent when the owner should be discovered. I decided that £3 a week, a generous sum for rent in those days when incomes were very low, would more than cover the rent I intended to pay. I saved £12 a month to hand over as a lump sum once I found the owner or the agent.

Immediately on moving in I felt at home and set about finding pieces of furniture. Spending money in this way was risky at the height of a war which was growing fiercer each day, with raids increasing in intensity and frequency, but to me it was symbolic of the future I knew would come somehow, some-time. I already had my tea-trolley and my 'tree-top' table. I furnished the lounge with a divan bed, bought from a shop in Victoria Street at a very favourable price and managed without a table for some months, until I found a second-hand refectory table which looked splendid when polished. I did not know enough to recognise that it was infested by wood-worm! Later, after the war, we were obliged to get rid of it, to the disappointment of us both. Two second-hand kitchen-type chairs, scrubbed

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and painted, completed the furnishing of my living-room. I slept on the divan in the living-room. Furniture for the bed-room was a luxury not to be contemplated until the end of the war should come into sight, particularly as I spent so much time on duty at night.

As with all the property we inhabited during the war years, the roof leaked. Buckets placed at strategic places served for a time but when serious damage occurred following an 'incident', as we called the dropping of a bomb, it was time to get some kind of temporary repair. This was carried out at the expense of the Council and consisted of a huge green taupaulin drawn over the damaged roof and pinned down firmly all round. It must have been very securely fastened as it was still in situ, although somewhat ragged by that time, when Edwin came home on disembarkation leave in November 1945.

My flat had no number. On one side was number 87 and on the other number 88; I therefore decided to be 87A and put up my own number plate. Since originally what was now my home had been a storage place for hay for the horses below, I named no. 87A The Hayloft. Five other flats were occupied and I gradually came to know the residents. On one side was the radio actress Betty Bowden and her friend who was a theatrical agent. Next to them lived a theatre set designer and his mother, while in the corner flat was a jazz trumpeter who played at *Ciro's*, a fashionable West End club which kept open through-out the war. In the flat on the other side of me lived a relative of Sydney Box, the film producer. They were all delightful, unusual, charming people from a glamorous and exciting world. They took me under their collective wing and did me many a good turn.

From my neighbours I discovered that the owner of the properties was a theatrical agent, with an office in the Charing Cross Road area; which explained why all the other tenants worked in the world of the theatre. Conscience would not allow me to continue living in the flat without

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informing the owner that I had squatted in his property so I made several attempts to find him at his office. He seemed never to be there.

However, on one particular Saturday morning I decided that I would see him that day or give up for the duration. The cleaner tried to discourage me from waiting but I settled myself on the stairs where any-one going to his office would have to step over me. Towards the end of the morning a man dashed up the stairs, brushing me aside and rushed into the office. I followed him in and attempted to engage him in discussion.

He mistook me for an actress seeking work; every time I opened my mouth to speak he growled 'Not now darling', without looking up from his papers, his voice rising in exasperation until he finally raised his head and shouted 'Get out!'

This made me angry. I went nearer to the desk and shouted at him. He was so surprised he was forced to listen and we began to bargain over the rent. I had already decided to offer him not three pounds a week but two. Amazed and still angry, he demanded, not unreasonably, that I pay what the other tenants were paying. I knew I could not afford such a sum but I was also unwilling to give up the flat. The arguments went back-wards and forwards, his interspersed from time to time with ungentlemanly expletives.

As a last and somewhat desperate effort to secure his agreement to my proposal, I pointed out that at that stage of the war it was most unlikely that he would get another tenant and that a small rent would be better than no rent at all. He knew that this was true and that the other tenants were only there because they were in the theatre and needed to be near the West End.

Just as I was beginning to lose hope, he agreed to two pounds ten shillings a week, which represented only a proportion of what every-one else was paying, with the warning that the rent would be increased once the war was over. We parted without the usual civilities and I never saw him

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again. Later, all communication was through an agent, so at least I had been instrumental in making him observe more normal business procedures!

We were a strange community in the Mews. At the north end were the flat-dwellers. At the other end was a motley collection of tradesmen who used the places for storage. The Mews was usually strewn with rotting fruit and vegetables dropped from the barrows as they were trundled over the cobbles past the flats to the exit into Aylesford Street. The barrow-boys were supposed to clear away their rubbish but apart from a perfunctory gesture with a broom each evening outside the garages they rented, they paid little attention to the general mess they created. We used to clear our own section outside our flats.

The barrow-boys were sharp, spivvy characters for the most part, exploiting the war situation, all with 'under the counter' goods as well as the fruit they sold. I soon learned to limit my contact with them to a polite greeting morning and evening and to resist their tempting offers of punnets of fruit and other goodies in short supply, for which they expected return favours of various kinds.

The flats looked out across the narrow Mews to the backs of the houses in Aylesford Street. They were slum dwellings at that time, many bombed and unoccupied. Immediately opposite me lived a brave old cockney woman who befriended me in her rough and ready way, taking it upon herself to 'keep and eye on me'. She was a cheerful soul, a widow who lived alone, whose only son was fighting abroad. She made a living by cleaning the local pub and the few shops in that part of Lupus Street that remained open.

When Edwin came home on disembarkation leave she accosted him verbally from the window of her room as we left the flat on his first morning.

'Hey, You! You 'er 'usband? Just you look after 'er now, or you'll 'ave me to answer to!' Edwin, accustomed to command and to being approached with respect, was taken aback, but quickly recovered and gave her a cheery and

cheeky answer which she greatly appreciated.

All the time we lived in the flat she looked on us as her special responsibility, shouting advice from the window on all matters from how to clean the windows to the best gripe water to buy for Tim when he was first born. We never went into her home and she refused all invitations to come into ours, saying she 'knew her place', but we always counted her a friend.

Momentous events occurred while I lived there alone. The war stepped up on all fronts in Europe and the Far East. The fierce attacks by V1s and V2s wreaked more and more damage on London and the South East. General Eisenhower, appointed Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces, together with his British colleagues, built up a massive army for the D-Day assault on Europe leading to final victory and also bringing further attacks on London. Later, in 1945, it was in the Hayloft that I heard the news of the dropping of the atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, ending the war in the Far East and eventually bringing Edwin home to share the Hayloft with me.

Now, in 1991, St. George's Square Mews has hardly changed. The Hayloft and the other 'gentrified' flats still make a somewhat incongruous contrast with the lock-up storage sheds at the river end of the Mews. The only change in the area seems to be round the corner in Aylesford Street where the houses are in process of being renovated. One of them is now the Vicarage for St. Saviour's Church in the Square.

Once in the early 1970s when we were visiting Dad who still lived in Pimlico, Edwin and I took a sentimental walk to the Mews. 87A was up for sale! Curious to know the price, I rang the agent and was staggered to be told that it was £35,000, an astronomical price for those days, even for London. I asked if the roof still leaked. Taken by surprise, the agent admitted that it did, but wanted to know how I knew about the roof. When I told him I was living in the flat when the damage was first done, he

slammed down the receiver on me. Could it be that in thirty years the roof had never been properly repaired?

## V - 1 s   a n d   V - 2 s

D-Day was June 6th 1944. The build-up, long planned, had begun to gather momentum during the first five months of the year. A massive army had been gathered on the South Coast, with armaments and equipment. It was the invasion in reverse.

Travel was even more restricted in Southern England in an attempt to preserve as much secrecy as possible. On the whole every-one knew what was about to happen, although the exact date was not known. Huge trucks, tanks and armoured vehicles rumbled through the countryside of Kent and Sussex for days and nights on end. It was not possible to keep such a large concentration of forces completely hidden, although soldiers were restricted to camp for some time before the event, in order to keep the enemy guessing. Civilian personnel were very much in the minority for a month or two in the towns and villages on the coast and immediately inland.

Enough information was released to the press to keep the nation sufficiently informed and thus gain the complete co-operation of the people. It had been found during the earlier blitz and in reporting on the fighting in the North African desert that it was important to give as much information as possible to civilians, who could then appreciate what was required of them. It was also Churchill's practice to keep the people informed. He trusted the people.

When I realised where the British and American forces had landed on the Normandy coast I was pleased that I had given in my holiday photographs of the 1937 and 1938 summers, as they showed the cliffs and the beaches from north of Dieppe right down to Mont St. Michel on the borders of Brittany.

The successful launch of the Second Front had lulled the people of London and the Government into a false sense of security. In anticipation of D-Day, and to redeploy resources, London's defences had again been scaled down; the number of guns protecting the city had been almost halved and the Civil Defence Forces had also been reduced. When no attacks came on London immediately following D-Day, the Government felt justified in having done this. Londoners did not feel quite so sanguine, having vivid memories of the situation in 1940; but as yet they were unaware that they were to be the target for a new terror-weapon.

After five years of war, with air raids, severe rationing of food and clothing and other deprivations, to say nothing of bereavement at home and abroad, Londoners were exhausted and ill-equipped to face another challenge. Hitler intended this attack to be a terror campaign aimed specifically at London, to break morale. His intention was so to terrify Londoners with an unexpected attack from completely new weapons that the Allies would be forced to sue for peace. Once more it was up to the people of London to hold fast.

Intelligence received had described enormous concrete edifices built all along the French, Belgian and Dutch coasts. It was suspected that they were launch pads of some description but the exact nature of the missile was not known. In these days of missile-launching into space, those hurled at London seem primitive in design, but in 1944 they were entirely new in concept.

The V-1 was a pilotless plane, designed to explode on impact. The first one fell on Bow in the East End on 13th June. For three days, V-1s dropped on various parts of London at the rate of 73 a day. Destruction occurred within a quarter-mile radius of each missile, most damage being caused by blast. Anyone within fifty yards of an explosion was likely to be buried in debris. The destruction was terrible to see.

We called them flying bombs, or buzz bombs and sometimes doodle-bugs. The Germans called them Vergeltungswaffe or Vengeance Weapons. They came in the day-time, while people were about their normal business, and then day and night regardless of weather. After the first three days we learned their exact nature and what was likely to happen, and found ways of adjusting to this new threat.

They were heralded by a peculiar chugging noise, like that of a motor-bike engine under stress. In day-light they could be seen by the naked eye. It was strange to look up and see this instrument of death, possibly one's own death, chugging inexorably to its secret target. The knowledge that they were pilotless, robotic in nature, added to the terror they brought. The thought of being killed by a robot was infinitely more unnerving than being bombed by a pilot.

Although a V-1 was first heard, its menacing sound getting ever louder, before it could be seen, it was not possible to judge when or where it was going to drop until the chugging noise stopped. That was the time to dive for cover. There were twelve seconds between the cut of the engine and the explosion, the interval between being the most frightening.

When the attacks started in early June, people left whatever they were doing and went into shelters when the siren sounded, as in the previous blitz. As the month progressed, the sirens went so frequently that people went on working and decided for themselves what action to take after listening carefully to the note of the engine. Life was one long air-raid alert, day and night.

The first flying bomb, buzz bomb, doodle-bug, call it what you will, to hit Pimlico landed at 08.50 hrs on 18th June, five days after the first one dropped on Bow. It landed on Rutherford Street, on the corner of Vincent Square, the main damage being to Carey Mansions and buildings in Regency

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Street. There were 72 casualties including 10 dead from that incident. Later, there were others which destroyed whole blocks of houses, two in Cumberland Street and Winchester Street, near to where Dad and Alice were living, and yet another hit on Victoria Station.

That summer all of us had narrow escapes from V-1 blast. It became so common-place as to be unworthy of mention. My most vivid memory was on an occasion when I was cycling along the Grosvenor Road towards Chelsea. I heard the chugging of the motor but could see nothing, so I kept on cycling. The noise was louder than usual as two were in the vicinity simultaneously, although I had no idea of that at the time. One engine must have cut out without my noticing, as a few seconds later I was hurled across the road to land in a doorway, bruised and shaken but otherwise unharmed. The doodle-bug had fallen about sixty yards away from me near Chelsea Old Church, so once more my luck had held.

Since the cessation of regular, 'conventional' air-raids, families had returned to London, particularly in the summer of 1943. Now another evacuation of mothers and children from London was organised. On 14th July 1944, 500,000 were evacuated, then a few days later another 500,000. By August the population of London had dropped by over 1,000,000, thereby improving conditions for those left behind. Our depleted services had fewer people to consider and monitor.

Once more the civilian population was in the front line. In many ways this second air blitz on London was far worse than the first. There was an element of unexpectedness about every incident, and not much evidence of defence at first. Yet once more it became necessary to defend the capital city and what resources were available were used to capacity and with remarkably good effect. Doodle-bugs were shot down by anti-air-craft guns but they came over so thick and fast it was not possible to 'kill' more than a proportion. Channel patrols were resumed by Hawker Tempests and

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Spitfires, their task being to shoot down the doodle-bugs over the sea.

Between mid-June and early September, at a conservative estimate, 7,500 doodle-bugs had been directed at London, of which 3,916 were blown up before reaching their target, as follows:

Fighters: 1,942

Anti-aircraft guns: 1,730

Barrage balloons: 244

But in that short time the number of civilians killed by doodle-bugs was 5,780 and injured 15,530. What the death toll would have been if the 3,916 which had been shot down had reached their targets one does not care to calculate.

It was at the very beginning of this period that Joyce and Arthur chose to get married! When they had first chosen their date, London had been calm, no attacks were expected and preparations for the Second Front seemed to suggest that we were getting near to the end of the war. Between us, mostly on the telephone, Joyce and I made plans for the wedding. She was to wear my white wedding dress and I was to be her matron-of-honour. Again we went through the process of begging food from friends but this time it was much more difficult; many of our Pimlico friends had joined the Services or moved away; but we managed a reception worthy of the Berry family. They were married in St. Gabriel's Church by Farrie on June 17th 1944, just one day before the first doodle-bug fell in Pimlico. Fortunately the ceremony and subsequent celebration was not marred by any explosion near-by but the possibility of such a happening was in all our minds.

Since there had been few doodlebugs in the early days of September, by 8th of that month it seemed we had beaten the V-1. Celebrations! But those celebrations were unfortunately premature.

On that very day, September 8th 1944, the first V-2 rocket, mark 2 of the Vergeltungswaffe, fell on London. It arrived without any kind of  
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warning because none was possible. There was no noise and nothing to see. Just the explosion, the death and the devastation. At first this was disheartening, just when we thought all was ending. But the Londoner's natural optimism reasserted itself. The phrase 'Grin and bear it' had a deeper meaning than ever before. It became a point of honour always to leave the house with a smile on one's face. It was quickly realised that this second weapon had to be endured until it could be put out of action. The campaign to regain Europe could not succeed if London crumbled. There was absolutely no defence against the V-2, we just had to hope that the ordeal would not be too long. In fact it lasted a long six-and-a-half months.

There were fears among some Allies that Londoners might crack, unable to stand any more terror from the skies. But they misunderstood the nature of the average citizen. As Churchill is reputed to have told them, 'they'll grumble and criticise, nag and complain, that's their nature, but they won't give in.'

By the end of September, Londoners were resigned to a prolonged assault which they knew to be deliberately aimed at them. Having recovered quickly from the shock of the V-1s in June, and longing for their five years of war and four year's ordeal of bombing or threat of bombing to be over, they had now to adjust to what became a real and drawn-out terror. It was different and in some ways worse than 1940; this time the enemy was unseen, as though from outer-space. There was an uncanny feeling about being attacked by an unseen enemy.

Of course, we were afraid, it would be dishonest to pretend otherwise. I can even now visualise myself alone in the Hayloft in St. George's Square Mews, being alternately frightened and furious. When I was frightened I took a bath to soothe myself. When I was furious, I used to phone Farrie and we would do a round of visits to people in their homes, dispensing  
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comfort and cheer. We would follow up our visits with a drink at the Spread Eagle, a pub on the Embankment, boarded up and gloomy from the outside, but unfailingly cheery within. Fear could not be allowed to affect the running of every-day affairs and pub life continued. Since there was no defence against the V-2 there was nothing to be done but to discipline ourselves to forget the danger while remaining fully prepared for action.

Incomprehensively, the Home Guard was stood down very prematurely in 1944 as being useless under the circumstances. It was said that our slim resources would be better deployed in Europe. Should things have gone badly wrong in Europe, as at one point very nearly happened, we would once more have been totally defenceless in London. Not surprisingly, we resented these decisions. The standing down of the Home Guard was a bad psychological error if nothing else in the opinion of many and groups kept themselves going unofficially without weapons, to help in emergencies.

The V-2s were launched from Holland. They travelled in a vast parabola at up to 3,600 miles an hour or twice the speed of sound, taking only 4 minutes to reach their target. They were absolutely silent until they exploded on impact. The noise of their arrival was heard after the explosion.

The raid on Arnhem was intended partly to facilitate the capture of the rocket bases. Had this raid been successful, it would have brought about the end of the V-2 attack on London. As it was, these attacks went on unremittingly until March 1945. The more one looks into the history of the war and the campaign to regain Europe, it becomes obvious that much depended on London being able to hold out. Every-one in Europe and perhaps even further afield has reason to be thankful that we endured!

It is usually assumed that all Londoners were consumed by a hatred of all Germans. This was not so. While we all had a gut revulsion for all things Nazi, and were convinced that everything Nazi was evil and had to be

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totally eradicated, many were able to disassociate this from what they felt for the ordinary, non-nazi German, who must have existed though silent. While we may have thought that the German voter was to blame in allowing the Nazi State to come into being, for whatever reason, the ordinary German civilian was seen to some extent to be trapped by the Nazis. So it was usually the Nazis who were the object of our hatred, an attitude typified by Churchill, who had a special way of pronouncing the word Nazi, to indicate the depth of his feeling.

During the V-2 attacks more dwellings were devastated, more people were killed in Pimlico. Many were rendered homeless. In fact, dealing with the homeless was a serious problem through-out all the various attacks on London. During the V1-V2 period whole blocks of houses disappeared; one rocket could demolish a street of solid houses. It seems incredible that an average of 1,500 homes were damaged every time a V-1 or V-2 landed. This figure indicates the widespread nature of the damage and the subsequent suffering. By the end of October 1944, four of these V-2 rockets were landing each day on London, and from then on the pressure increased.

The worst incident happened in New Cross, when a small Woolworth's store was hit, together with other buildings. In the store alone the final death toll was 160, with 200 injured, from one rocket. Nearer home the Guards' Chapel in Birdcage Walk received a direct hit in the middle of a Sunday morning service. These services were attended by civilians as well as guardsmen and the carnage was appalling. The full-time wardens from Post 26 were called out to help and we emergency volunteers were left to cope in Pimlico. During that same time in Pimlico a whole block of houses was taken out, many being killed. Those large houses had been rented out as tenements; there would have been a considerable number of families in residence had it not been for the second evacuation. One family which had not evacuated lost all its children, among them Kathy, one of the little group of Guides I was

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endeavouring to keep together.

No-one used shelters during the rocket attacks as we never knew when they were coming. We lived in a constant state of alert. Dad and Alice were living on the first floor of a house in Cumberland Street. Following a visit to them one Sunday morning I was on my way down to the front door, when there was an explosion near-by. I was thrown down the stairs but again my luck held and I was unharmed. Since I was a volunteer warden and first-aider I put on my arm-band, always in my pocket and a necessary symbol of authority when not in uniform, and ran to help.

A First Aid station had been set up in a house in Warwick Square. Imagine my surprise, on arriving with my first injured person, an old man I had picked up in the street and who had been almost completely scalped by a piece of metal, to come face to face with a friend from the Theological Faculty in King's College days. He had been ordained and had become an army chaplain. On leave and passing through Pimlico when the incident happened, he had stopped to help. We worked together for that day and then went our separate ways. I have never seen him since.

Maurice was by now in the Marine Commandos, undergoing rigorous training in the mountains of Scotland in preparation for going into Europe for the last phase of the war. On rare leave occasions he came to London and took me out, to a theatre or cinema. I looked forward to these occasions very much indeed as they were fun and brought a feeling of normality into a time of unreality and strain. Joyce was permanently stationed in the North West so I saw very little of her, after her marriage. Leave was short and she and Arthur naturally spent their time together. Jack was in the Chester and Liverpool area of the North West and Fran had gone to live nearby, in North Wales and later in Cheshire. Life is full of coincidences. At one time Jack was stationed in Chester Castle, also in the Princes Park area of Liverpool and for a time on Fort Perch Rock in the mouth of the Mersey just off the

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New Brighton coast, all places very familiar to me now, living as I do on the Wirral peninsula.

As little news as possible was given about the rocket attacks on London. Newspapers reported some of the incidents but the severity and the extent of the damage was very much played down. This was Government policy. Secrecy was regarded as essential to keep the Germans guessing. Surprisingly, it was not until November 1944, a full four months after these dreadful attacks began, that Churchill finally admitted officially that London was under attack.

During this time, a great deal of what we now call disinformation had been fed to the Nazi High Command. This was done by using captured spies who had all been sent to London to assess the damage and the morale of the Londoners. The captives were used to send erroneous information to Germany, but this did not stop the attacks, which continued until two months before the final ending of the war.

I had been in the Hayloft for just a few months when the V-1 and V-2 attacks began. I had left the War Office and that autumn was employed at Putney High School for a brief and not very happy period. I was a square peg in a round hole with very little patience with some of the more ridiculous rules and was glad to leave the following summer. There were few volunteer wardens on the staff as many of them went off into the country every evening, with the result that there was little understanding for me on those occasions when I arrived ~~a little~~ late after a night on an incident, or grubby from cycling from Pimlico to Putney.

Listening to the news bulletins on the radio was an obsession. When the threat to India receded and tide turned in Burma I rejoiced, but fretted when the tide seemed to be against us in Europe. The news seemed alternately encouraging and worrying; although one never for one moment doubted the outcome, the campaign was taking much longer than Eisenhower had

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anticipated. I was glad I had made my own assessment as far as possible and had not buoyed myself up with false hopes. I was not among those who believed the first official claim that the Allies could win Europe in six months. So although I would have been relieved if that had been the case, the long hard slog which ensued did not surprise me.

Christmas 1944 was the worst one of the war for me. Jack and Fran were in Cheshire, Joyce and Arthur, also in the Cheshire area, had only very short leave, too short to travel to London, and Maurice was not granted leave. Dad and Alice had invited Alice's sister and her husband to Christmas Dinner. I had expected to join them and had joyfully taken with me on Christmas Eve a small rabbit my butcher had scrounged for me as a special treat. However, Alice did not extend the expected invitation to me and I cooked my rabbit in the Hayloft and ate it in solitary splendour that Christmas Day.

Maurice went over into Europe in early summer 1945, not quite eighteen years old, in time for the Rhine crossing. He was part of an elite force which worked in advance of the troops and was at the liberation of some of the Jewish camps. As the summer of 1945 advanced, he found himself body-guard to a U.S. Officer in Intelligence, whose job was to go to Peenemunde, the Nazi rocket research station, and capture Werner von Braun.

Von Braun was the designer of the V-1 and the V-2, the 'Vengeance Weapons' as the Germans called them. The V-2 was the first ballistic missile to carry a war-head. Some 1,200 were launched on London, each one carrying 2,000lbs of explosive.

The Allies, did not want Von Braun to be taken by the Russians who would then inherit his expertise. Even then, the Russians were seen by some as the next enemy.



In return for services to the U.S.A. Werner von Braun was let off charges of being a war criminal. Instead, after his capture by the small group of which Maurice was a member, he was flown to the U.S.A. and installed at the White Sands Proving Ground in New Mexico where he began the process of turning the V-2 into an inter-continental ballistic missile capable of delivering a nuclear war-head anywhere in the world. In effect he was the brains behind the American rocket weapons and later the space programme.

His work took a different turn after the Russians launched Sputnik 1, the first space satellite. The President of the U.S.A. called for a man on the moon in the 1960s and von Braun was set to achieve this. He developed the Saturn rocket in 1962, at a cost of 24 billion dollars and later went to Washington to plan a new space programme for NASA.

As enthusiasm for space exploration waned, von Braun resigned from NASA and ended his career working for Fairchild Industries. I find it odd that he was allowed to resign. He was, after all, a prisoner. He died in 1977.

As far as I am concerned, Von Braun, as the designer of the V-1 and the V-2 which killed and maimed so many Londoners and wreaked such terrible damage on buildings and homes, had charges to answer as a war criminal and should have been in the dock with the others. As it was, he ended his days in luxury in the U.S.A. I find that hard to accept.

In February 1945 Dresden was attacked by the Allies. The decision to do this was criticised at the time by some, as was the dropping of the atom bomb later, but those of us living in London, although sorry for the people of Dresden, had fewer scruples. The rocket attacks on London became even fiercer in March, but on March 29th all rockets were withdrawn from Holland back into Germany and the attacks on London ceased.

London was severely damaged, historic buildings and thousands of homes were lost and thousands of people were killed and wounded, but the V-1 And All The Bells Were Silent

and V-2 attacks had no effect whatsoever on the outcome of the war. They truly were Vengeance Weapons.

## V i c t o r y   a n d   H o m e c c o m i n g !

Spring 1945 heralded the end of the war in Europe. After the last fierce V-2 attack on London, the German forces, already in disarray, retreated from Holland, taking the remaining rockets with them. France, Holland and Belgium were retaken and Germany was occupied from the east by the Russians as well as from the west by the British, French and Americans. On 7th May the German High Command surrendered unconditionally.

The news was difficult to believe. Although it had been obvious for some weeks that the end was in sight, we refused to take anything for granted. The surrender was the proof we needed. One day, London was still a battered and colourless city, the people exhausted but still hanging on. Suddenly, overnight, or so it seemed, all was changed

Church bells throughout the land rang out for the first time for nearly six years. What a joyous sound! I could imagine the ringers in the bell-towers, in the tiny villages, towns and great cities, pulling excitedly on the ropes to tell out the good news. We tore down the black-out curtains, allowing the lights from our houses to blaze out into the roads. The street lights, once more switched on, seemed almost too bright for our eyes. Nobody in Pimlico went to bed very early but there was no riotous dancing in the street, only thankfulness and sober celebration, after the news had finally and thoroughly sunk in. For many the cost had been great and thoughts turned to those whose lives had been cut short or maimed in the long struggle. I rushed round to Dad, and from there to various friends in the parish with whom we, as a family, had shared the trauma of the air-raids, the doodle-bugs and six months of rocket attacks and the tragedies

which ensued. I finished the first evening of peace in Europe having a drink with Farrie in the Spread Eagle. We raised our glasses to the day when the war in the Far East would also be over.

Once the initial euphoria had worn off I felt flat. Plans were made to celebrate V E Day, (Victory in Europe) officially some time in June, with bands and parades and general jollification. I did not look forward to this. For me and for thousands like me with loved ones still in the Far East, some kept in Japanese prison camps in the most atrociously inhuman conditions ever devised, others still fighting, it seemed wrong to celebrate until Japan had been forced to surrender. Although by that time Edwin was in Calcutta, a major commanding H.Q. Company, and no longer in a fighting zone, he would not be able to be repatriated until Japan had been defeated. Celebrations for me were premature.

As a volunteer part-time Air Raid Warden in Westminster I was given the opportunity of marching in the Victory Parade. I declined and could not even bring myself to go out to watch it, probably the only time in my life I willingly missed the opportunity of being part of a ceremonial occasion in London. I thought the official parade ought to have been postponed until Japan had capitulated. For me and for thousands like me the war was not over. Yet again the Fourteenth Army had been forgotten. I went out in the evening with friends to join the thousands celebrating outside Buckingham Palace but my joy was tinged with a deep longing for the final end to the whole conflict world-wide.

It seemed as though the fighting in the Pacific would never end. The use of the atom bomb to bring an end to hostilities was openly discussed. The horror of such an action was admitted by everyone but there were two opposing views as to the rightness of using the ultimate weapon. One view was that even if many more lives were lost in a much-prolonged war, use of the atom bomb could not be justified. It must be said that this was a

minority view,( I knew no-one in Pimlico who supported it) but those who held it expressed it forcibly. The second view taken was that if use of the atom bomb would bring the war to a speedy end, thus actually saving lives, then the ultimate deterrent had to be used.

I had two reasons for wanting the Far East war brought to a swift end. Not only did I want Edwin home, I wanted all the prisoners released from the PoW camps. There had been some correct information and a great deal of speculation in the newspapers about conditions in the camps. From my time in the War Office I knew much more of what was happening and knew that those PoWs still alive had to be released as soon as possible if many of them were to have any chance of survival.

The decision was taken. On 6th August an atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. I was standing in the kitchen of the Hayloft, drinking a cup of tea when the news came through on the wireless. I wept. The knowledge that such an act had been necessary to end that terrible war and allow Edwin and thousands of others to return home to Europe and America was horrifying. But how could I help rejoicing, how could I condemn it if it was to end the war? On 9th August another was dropped on Nagasaki. Still the fighting continued, until on 2nd September 1945 the Japanese finally surrendered.

Then, I felt like celebrating. Although there was a V J Day, the first thrill of the war being over seemed to have worn off officially and while the whole nation was thankful, celebrations seemed muted.

Knowledge of the cruelties perpetrated on prisoners by the Japanese deeply shocked everybody. It has been convenient to forget those acts of barbarity in the years since the war. The men and women who suffered at the hands of the Japanese and were fortunate enough to survive are now beginning to die off. Several times recently there have been obituaries in the Times and the Telegraph which have reminded us in a dignified way of the unbelievable suffering they endured.

Fifty years is a short time or a long time, depending on where you start from. For my generation it is a short time and forgetting, while in some ways desirable, is not easy. For a younger generation looking back, it must all seem a long time ago, something best forgotten. But history teaches us that we must remember and learn from what we know to have happened. Karl Marx wrote that 'If people do not learn from history, then history will repeat itself'. He was right. (Vide Saddam Hussein 1990 and continuing.)

It seemed that every-one was coming home before Edwin. Maurice came back from Europe and spent a short leave in Pimlico. Jimmy Davidson, or to be correct Staff Sergeant James Davidson, Scots Guards, a childhood friend from Pimlico, came back from prison camp in Germany where he had been for three long years, some of the time in solitary confinement following brutal treatment for trying to escape. Returned prisoners were given extra rations. Jimmy found out where I was living and came round with a bumper box of goodies to share with me. He had come back to great sadness. His fiancée, a nurse in St. Thomas's Hospital, London, had been killed when that hospital was bombed. He had received the news while in prison camp but months after the event.

Jimmy was an interesting person. His father had been Regimental Sergeant Major of the Scots Guards. Jimmy himself was highly intelligent and public-school educated and would have made a splendid officer. However, he had refused all offers of a commission as he knew he could not live as an officer on army pay in an elite regiment such as the Scots Guards without a private income. As that was the only regiment he wanted to serve in, he decided not to take a commission. He was steeped in military tradition and discipline. Once Edwin was repatriated and he and Jimmy met, Jimmy always stood at attention even in my home until Edwin told him to stand at ease. How different from my brother Maurice! He was an ordinary marine commando, - perhaps an extra-ordinary marine commando would be a better description! -

but on meeting Edwin again, slapped him on the back with the words, 'What! Another gash major!'. I shall not record what Edwin replied except to say that he dealt adequately with the situation!

From the date of the Japanese surrender British troops were repatriated, but it seemed that Edwin's turn would never come. Some of his friends in the Gloucesters returned to England before him; he gave them my telephone number to contact me, as most would at some time pass through London. With what a mixture of feelings did I make my way to a rendezvous in front of Nelson's Column in Trafalgar Square to meet the first of these friends, Major Tom Godfrey! Edwin had sent me a description and had doubtless told Tom what he thought I might be looking like after three-and-a-half years; we recognised each other quite easily and spent a pleasant day together. By the time the poor man eventually caught his train he had been pumped dry of information and must have been exhausted by my questions. I was very grateful that he had broken his journey home especially to meet me and give me news.

Other friends returning from abroad stopped off in London. Alistair Menzies and Bill Johns, two of the trio which had included Eric Lunoe, killed in 1941, and with whom I had first made friends at King's way back in 1938 in another world, came back from the Far East at the beginning of November and took me to dinner at the Dorchester. Throughout the war the best hotels had maintained a high standard of dress. Uniform or evening dress was essential and I was thankful I still had a dress carefully preserved for such an occasion. Once Edwin came home I intended to put it to good use!

Air-letters from Edwin told me to expect that he would be sailing from Karachi at any time. Counting the days, waiting for definite news, listening for the phone call that would tell me he had arrived, was nerve-wracking. I had to wait more than two ~~more~~ months after VJ Day; some

unfortunates had to wait even longer.

Then, on Wednesday 14th November 1945 came the longed-for telephone call. Edwin's feet were on British soil and he was rushing to get the train from Glasgow to a base somewhere in the Midlands. I think it was Lincoln, as <sup>he</sup> was back once more with the York and Lancasters. He would eventually arrive at Euston in the early hours.

Hearing his voice once more, it was as though the intervening years had slipped away. All the warnings about having to get to know each other again seemed very silly and empty. Trying to fill those hours until it was time to set off for Euston proved extraordinarily difficult. In the end I decided to walk to Euston to pass the time instead of taking a taxi as instructed by my newly-returned husband.

This time it was no murky, blacked-out station where I waited impatiently with other wives. All the lights were on. As soon as the train steamed in, doors were flung open before the train finally drew to a halt and soldiers poured out, some of them throwing their kit before them, recklessly jumping on to the platform from the moving train.

Edwin was at the rear of the train but I saw him immediately, towering above the others. He was in battledress, wearing his bush hat, wide-brimmed and fastened up to one side with a flash. As soon as he saw me he waved his hat in the air, then threw it up and caught it, before striding past everyone else to reach the barrier.

He had exactly six weeks disembarkation leave and would have to return to duty immediately after Christmas. It had been agreed that any woman at work who had a husband returning from abroad after a long period could take six weeks holiday with pay, to start immediately. Edwin expected me to be able to ring Rutlish Boys' School, Merton, Wimbledon, where I held a temporary appointment, and announce I would be off for the rest of the term but settled for accompanying me to school the next morning. He would see



'Blinkers' himself.

Blinkers, or Blenkinsop, was the Headmaster. He had engaged me to teach French throughout the school to fill one of the gaps left by men serving in the Forces. I was the only female on the staff, apart from another woman who came in two afternoons a week. The senior French master was a Mr. Ellison who in his day had been a fine rugby player and had actually introduced rugby to Paris, possibly even to France, when he was a student at the Sorbonne. When he learned that Edwin was a rugby player his attitude towards me, which had been somewhat frosty, warmed considerably. He even sent me out to referee games of rugby on the strength of being married to a rugby player and on two occasions I was appointed 'master in charge' of the First Rugby Team on away matches, quite extraordinary in 1945/46.

They were all kind, if a little distant; Bobby Oulton, Mr. Hathaway and others whose names I forget. I was a shock to that shabby, ill-kept, all-male staff-room. I disliked going in but had to use it sometimes as there was nowhere else to go. Rutlish had always been an all-male establishment and there was therefore no cloak-room or toilet for me. I had to go along the road to the Technical College, which exercise required careful planning and timing!

Claiming my six weeks leave was not as easy as it should have been. I was almost made to feel as though I was letting them all down; no-one thought that Edwin was being let down! I would have resigned immediately as Edwin wished me to do, but for the fact that I would have had nothing to do once he had reported back for duty at the end of his leave. Blinkers was very reluctant to allow me the full six weeks to which I was entitled but it was finally agreed that I would work for that day and the next, then take the rest of the term off, providing I set work for all my classes! Under normal circumstances that would have been perfectly acceptable but circumstances were not normal. Even the War Office let people off at almost a moment's

notice when a husband returned from duty abroad, as I later learned. Edwin jibbed at the lesson preparation and I did not do it. As he said, he had nearly four years to make up and six weeks minus two days wasn't a very long time in which to do it.

He hung around Rutlish School for the next two days, accompanying me about the building between classes and almost mounting guard outside the classroom. On the Friday afternoon I was scheduled to take all the fourth year boys, (104 boys aged fourteen) for French in a church hall down the road, in use as a class-room following bomb damage. Edwin was furious. On his insistence we marched the boys back to the main building, where I stood over them while Edwin went into Blinkers and told him he was taking me home. I was never again expected to teach a class of a hundred boys!

Before that, during the lunch hour, a most amusing incident had occurred. I had been accustomed to take a sandwich lunch but Edwin had decided that we would go into the pub near the school for a drink then along the road to a restaurant. What we did not know was that most of the Sixth Form boys, although under age, went into the pub every lunch hour for some liquid refreshment; the publican turned a blind eye and the school staff affected not to know. That day, as we walked in one door, most of the pub clientele slowly sidled out of the other, back into the school yard!

Rutlish School was in the news at the beginning of this year, 1991, when it was revealed that our new Prime Minister, John Major, had been a pupil there. He must have started as a new boy of eleven about two or three years after I left. Rutlish has another claim to fame but one they understandably choose not to advertise. Neville Clevelys Heath, a former pupil and the half-brother of a boy in my form, was arrested, charged and convicted of sexually assaulting and murdering six girls in a few weeks after the end of the war. This was a shattering blow for his half-brother who had idolised the handsome airman, who posed as a war hero, much decorated for gallantry.

Shortly before his arrest he had been in our Staff Room enjoying the congratulations of his former teachers for the medals he was not entitled to wear.

It was a good school and I finished the year there quite happily and was given a rousing send-off when I left at the end of the summer term.

Six weeks leave went in a flash. After a week in Dodworth we came back to London where we were joined by Dick Wilkins. How we made up for lost time! We met up with other army friends also on disembarkation leave and exhausted the possibilities of entertainment in the West End, visiting as many restaurants and night-clubs as we could manage in the time. The best night we had was when we dined and danced till the small hours in the Hungaria, in the Haymarket. We were the last to leave, the tired waiters indulgently polite to the end, even when the bill had to be paid by a motley collection of cheques and small change! Our companions went off in a taxi while Dick, Edwin and I walked home round St. James' Park.

The general atmosphere was one of indulgence towards soldiers returned from the Far East. Rationing was still very strict but extras such as a tin of Spam or a bag of dried fruit would appear with my grocery order. The green-grocer always had potatoes for me during that six weeks and when Christmas arrived, he found three pieces of fruit for me to put in my fruit bowl, including a banana. I was so delighted to see fruit in the bowl that I almost decided not to eat it. I took a photograph of it before we did so, to prove to myself later that I really had been given a banana!

Edwin's mother had promised to find us a chicken somehow for Christmas. In due course it arrived through the post. Imagine our consternation to discover that it had not been plucked!. Neither of us had any idea how to set about the job.

We sat outside on the doorstep to pluck it, with an interested audience of small boys from Aylesford Street shouting encouragement. It took us a

half-day, during which time we completely covered the Mews with feathers. It was a tough, scrawny old bird but we were so glad to have something for our first Christmas Dinner in our own home.

Immediately Christmas was over Edwin had to report back, this time to his old regiment, the York and Lancaster. How mean not to give him the New Year holiday too! He set off for Woodhall Spa in Lincolnshire, while I prepared to return to Rutlish, both of us wondering when demobilisation would come.

## D e m o b i l i s a t i o n

On two previous occasions, once at the beginning of his army service and again while in Calcutta, Edwin had written saying that he was considering seriously the possibility of making a career in the Army, which would mean applying for Staff College. The first time was when he was on coastal defence, at the beginning of 1942.

He had doubts about entering the teaching profession even though it had been his ambition to be Head of his own school. Thinking back over his years at Holgate Grammar School he realised that he had been guided into teaching by school staff and by his own urgent wish for a university education. In the late 1930s, promising to become a graduate teacher was one of the very few ways a youngster from an artisan or working class family could get to university. There were private scholarships to colleges in Oxford and Cambridge and one or two other places, but they most often went to boys from the older public schools or were linked to particular schools. Holgate Grammar School had no such link.

The Board of Education (i.e. Government) 4 yr. grant was reasonably generous. Provided a place was offered, university fees were paid for four years, three years of a degree course at honours level and one post-graduate year of teacher training; the cash grant, though small, was just adequate to carry the student through at a very modest standard of living. Like many others, myself included, Edwin had taken this course. Now, from a distance, he questioned whether he wished to go on with the arrangement.

However, there was no time nor real opportunity for Staff College at that particular time, when he was waiting for an over-seas posting. While

he was still considering the possibility he was sent to join the Indian Army.

Much later, while stationed in Calcutta and with the rank of Major, the idea surfaced again when he was encouraged to consider an application to Staff College. He was concerned about the effect on our future married life and hesitated to make a decision without having a real discussion with me in person, and he let the opportunity pass.

Now, back in England and stationed temporarily at Woodhall Spa, he went thoroughly into the possibility. His former enthusiasm for teaching was returning. He liked army life but would only consider staying in the Army if he could remain in an infantry regiment. The Army Education Corps did not attract him in the very slightest.

Another consideration was purely financial. He had contracted to take a four-year university course and was not sure how far he would be held to that promise. Nor could we get definitive replies to our enquiries. The prospect of paying back fees and/or grant was not a pleasing one, particularly as we were anxious to have a family. The grant had been paid by the West Riding of Yorkshire, an authority not noted for its generosity, as was proved just a few months later when the first letter Edwin received from anyone after his demobilisation was from the West Riding County Council demanding repayment of two years grant for the years 1938 to 1940. What a gesture of thanks to a man who had served his country for six long years!

After much thought Edwin decided that he was still very interested in teaching and that the challenge of gaining an honours degree was still strong. He finally gave up all thought of Staff College. How much he was influenced by consideration for me I was never sure. I know that we both decided that whatever life offered, we were never going to be parted again. I had decided to follow wherever he went. Six years of war had cured me of

all my own ambitions for a career. All I wanted was to make a home with Edwin and for the family we hoped to have, and a life untroubled by world events.

The last six months of Edwin's army career were interesting. I visited him at Woodhall Spa and while there went to the local Hunt Ball. We had a great deal of fun but I must confess myself unimpressed by the local hunting and farming community. They were pleasant enough to me but were so dull, with little real conversation beyond the superficial. Fortunately Edwin was moved on to a much more interesting place, Welbeck Abbey near Worksop, in the Dukeries.

Considerable efforts were made by the Services to prepare men and women for civilian life on demobilisation. The Army set up various schemes, among them two Formation Colleges. Edwin was posted to No. 2 Formation College in Welbeck Abbey, the home of the Duke of Portland.

The Abbey was magnificent but neglected in many ways, the result of wartime stringency. On my frequent visits that spring and early summer I stayed in nearby Worksop and went up to the Mess for evening functions. The most magnificent of these was a Ball held in the famous underground ballroom at the Abbey, opened for the first time since the beginning of the war. Such splendour! To be a guest in such a glamorous setting, in one of the most lovely of English stately homes, was an occasion never to be forgotten. It was not a return to full pre-war splendour but was no less exciting for that. On that evening the Duke was host and his mother, the Dowager Duchess, appeared with him.

The Duke was living in part of the Abbey at the time and visited the Mess fairly regularly. On the one occasion I spoke with him I found him charming and very interesting, particularly about the Abbey and the village situated on the estate, set in a most beautiful park. Among my memories of it, the most vivid is seeing the rhododendron avenue in full bloom in May

of that year. It was a magnificent vista.

To Edwin's surprise, he was sent to the Formation College to lecture in English Literature to graduates who needed a refresher course before returning to civilian life; many of them had been teachers before joining the Army. This was an extraordinary appointment, since Edwin had no degree! He would seem to have held his own easily as his 'boss', a woman officer in the Army Education Corps who had been a don at Oxford, did her best to persuade him to stay in the Army and join her staff. While he was at Welbeck, Edwin discovered a new enthusiasm for teaching and confirmed his decision to settle for a career outside the Army.

By a curious coincidence, he discovered in the Duke's library at Welbeck, facts relating to the watermen of the river Thames which in all probability related to my father's family. The officers at Welbeck were allowed complete freedom by the Duke to wander round the house. Edwin liked to browse in the library. On one occasion the Duke was there and in the course of conversation asked Edwin if he would care to begin to catalogue some of the books and papers. This was not possible, given the work he was already doing, but from then on Edwin felt free to look through all the books and documents as he pleased.

He found a letter from Sir Christopher Wren to King Charles II asking him to do something about the rascally watermen who, while conveying his building materials by river to the site of St. Paul's Cathedral, regularly stole large pieces of wood, thus driving up the costs. The names of some of the watermen were given, among them one named Berry. It was highly probable that this was one of my forbears, as the Berry family had been watermen on the Thames for many generations. It would have been pleasing if Edwin could have found me a forbear with a slightly more respectable reputation!

Although life at Welbeck was full and satisfying for Edwin, by June 1946 we were both longing for his demobilisation. There were problems of



civilian life to face, grants to be fixed, courses to be decided and we were anxious to get on with life.

All men being demobilised, whatever the rank, were to be given a demob. suit to start them off in civilian life. Of course, there was no bespoke tailoring! The suits were mass-produced by a firm well-known prewar for its cheap but reasonably-styled suits, so we watched with interest as men were gradually demobbed. Men of average stature were given suits that fitted quite well, but we had seen some very peculiar results on men of below or above average height and wondered what on earth would be found for Edwin. Demob suits became easy to recognise, and once back in the swim of civilian life, most men relegated them to the back of the wardrobe or used them for odd jobs about the house. I remember nothing about Edwin's suit except that it did not fit and the trousers were too short. I don't think he ever wore it. The first charge on our joint budget when he finally came home was for two pairs of made-to-measure trousers.

As my year's contract at Rutlish School came to an end with the school year, so did Edwin's time in the Army. He came back to the Hayloft and this time, instead of a brief week-end followed by weeks of separation, he came home to stay. For us, in the summer of 1946, the war was finally over!

## Final Note

The war extended more widely over Europe than this personal account indicates. The U.S.S.R. played a large part in the final victory and the people suffered greatly, particularly in Stalingrad. There were also very hard-fought campaigns in North Africa, the Mediterranean, Italy and Southern Europe but since those campaigns did not affect us directly as a family they have no place in this account.

Although I have relied heavily on my memory I have verified dates, events, figures and statistics wherever it has been possible.

Our regular worship in St. Gabriel's Parish Church throughout the war strengthened our faith and was the spring-board for positive action in the face of difficulty and tragedy. The community spirit fostered over the years by the clergy and congregation stood us in good stead in time of trial. The same was true of our two neighbouring parishes in Pimlico, St. Saviour's and St. James-the-Less.

At the beginning of the war those who had built the parish community moved on. One of our curates, The Revd. Edward Barry Henderson later became the Bishop of Bath and Wells. Another, The Revd. Denzil Laborde became a naval chaplain and lost his life early in 1940. The Revd. Ronald Adams, 'Skipper', and the Revd. H.E. Farrington, 'Farrie', both worked tirelessly for their parishioners. This ought to be obvious from the narrative but I wish to emphasise the support we received from our church and our faith and also how much we owed to the devotion of our clergy.

And All The Bells Were Silent



