

Memories of a wartime childhood.
Brian Thomas

While in Gosport Road, Fareham

The siren in the night

I was living in my maternal grandmother's shop on Gosport Road, Fareham in early 1944, probably March/April, together with my mother and baby brother. The timing I recall because my brother was in a Moses cradle. He was born in late February 1944, so must have been no more than one or two months old. I was therefore about two and a half years old.

It was night-time and I was woken from sleep by urgent shouts from downstairs:

“Brian! Brian! Get up - and stand on your bed!”

I could hear the air raid siren wailing as I groggily did as told. A few minutes later my mother dashed into the bedroom, bundled me into her arms and quickly took me downstairs into the shop and put me into the shelter under the counter, where my brother already was, in his Moses basket.

“Stay there” I was told.

I could hear my mother and grandmother talking in the shop front and peeked out to see what was going on. They were standing near the outside door looking up through the window and pointing upwards. I quietly emerged from the shelter and crept up behind them to see what they were looking at.

I saw two aeroplanes manoeuvring around each other and, forgetting that I was not supposed to be there, asked “What are they doing?”

I was immediately told to get back into the shelter and look after my brother, which I did.

I guess it was a “dogfight” that I had glimpsed.

The convoy

I remember watching from the shop front, maybe a few weeks later, as a procession of military vehicles went down Gosport Road towards the coast. They made a great impression on me because of the continuous, almost hypnotic, noise of tyres, or possibly caterpillar tracks, as they droned on their way.

Maybe part of the build up to D-day?

The flying elephant

While living in Gosport Road I used to play in the field next to the house. The field formed a reasonably large gap between our house and the next one further towards the coast, and it sloped upwards in that direction.

Toward the back of the field, at the top corner, was a hut and I remember being amazed to see what, to my young eyes, looked like a huge elephant next to the hut. It slowly rose through the air, flying from a cable anchored near the hut. It was of course a barrage balloon.

One day I ventured up to the hut and poked my nose in. I was invited in by the men for a drink.

They sat me down and gave me a cup of very strong hot tea which made me splutter and cough as I tried a sip.

They all laughed and I first heard the expression “It went down the wrong way”.

A close call

I recall hearing my mother talking about her time living in Gosport Road during the war. Apparently she was told by an air raid warden, after a nearby bombing raid, that if the “stick” had contained one more bomb our house would have been right under it.

Luck can play a large part in life's events.

When living in Camborne, Cornwall

Evacuees

We moved to Cornwall later in 1944 to live in my paternal grandmother's house.

Several older children, evacuees from London, moved into the converted stables just up the lane.

One of the girls liked to play tricks on me.

While playing in the lane one day she got me to hold a broomstick by the end, close my eyes and spin round and round, telling me to let it go when she said.

Her timing was impeccable, I released it and “Crash!” - it went straight through a window. It made quite a neat hole, slightly greater than the diameter of the broomstick, with short cracks radiating from it! I was in trouble.

The pane was 3 to 4 feet wide, although not very high. Getting a replacement for anything in those days of shortages was not easy. No one had the money for it anyway, so the hole was covered with a smaller piece of glass.

Some years after the evacuees went home we had to move into the house where they had been. For quite a long while we had to live with the rather unsightly “temporary” repair to the window.

Poetic justice?

Brian Thomas