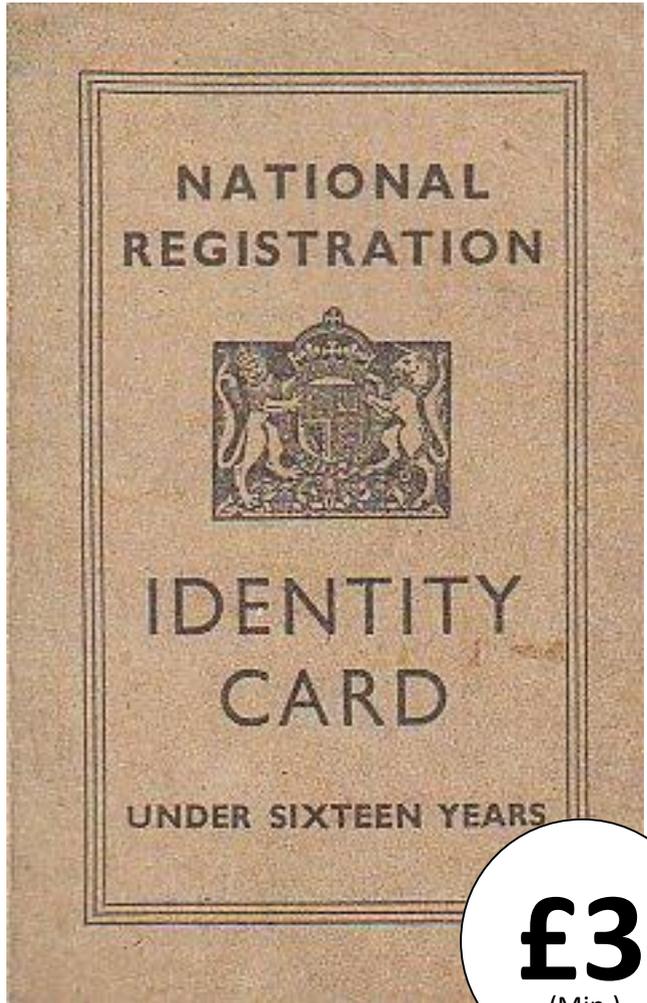


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**... a Glance over
the Shoulder**

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IN THE BEGINNING

..... was the word – well not THE word exactly but the words spoken by the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, from the Cabinet Office in Downing Street at 11 o'clock on the morning of Sunday September 3rd 1939. After days of intensive but fruitless diplomatic negotiation, he came to the BBC microphone and said this to a waiting world :-

“This morning the British Ambassador in Berlin handed the German Government a final note stating that, unless we hear from them by 11 o'clock that they are prepared at once to withdraw their troops from Poland, a state of war would exist between us. I have to tell you now that no such undertaking has been received, and that consequently this country is at war with Germany”

As a nine year old schoolboy, I – along with many of that generation - remember that day as though it were yesterday. You can probably picture the nation as they gathered around their radio sets (no TV in those days) to hear this chilling announcement. Somewhat surprisingly perhaps, a few people said ‘Don't worry, it will all be over by Christmas’. Well, were their predictions justified? At first, we might have thought so because for everyone across the country, and certainly us living here in West Bridgford, the horrors of war which we feared would happen within days of this solemn announcement did not, in fact, happen.

Instead we began to call it the “Phoney War” because although the conflict soon developed rapidly across Northern Europe – even as far as Dunkirk – here in the UK there was no drama to suggest that the war had actually started. Yes, the news correspondents were busy reporting from the Western Front and even from places like Montevideo in South America where the German pocket battleship “Graf Spee” had been forced to scuttle itself, having been pursued there by the British destroyers Ajax, Achilles and Exeter. That was in December 1939 so there was drama at that time. But here? Well, our thoughts were confined to the more mundane tasks of preparing ourselves for what might happen in the weeks and months ahead – things like air-raid practices, filling sandbags, setting up blackouts, sorting out our ration books and, sadly, waving goodbye to the young men and women as they took on their military uniforms.

Of course, what we now know is that those “four months to Christmas” became six years of bitter struggle before victory was won.

How did we manage? What was life like here in Nottingham and more especially in West Bridgford? Many people have written books about their war time experiences - Winston Churchill certainly did! However, within this modest little booklet we can only paint a brief, personal and impressionist’s picture of what the war was really like.

First of all – blackouts These were introduced straight away. Black curtain linings became the order of the day and so too were sticky strips of brown paper which you stuck on your windows in a criss-cross fashion to prevent glass from splintering into your room as the bombs fell around. Cars – no more glaring headlights, but instead special light fittings with a small slit at the front emitting just enough illumination to let other drivers and pedestrians know you were coming! Yes, blackouts were absolutely essential with cries of “Put that light out” (embellished with a few potent adjectives) becoming a common cry!

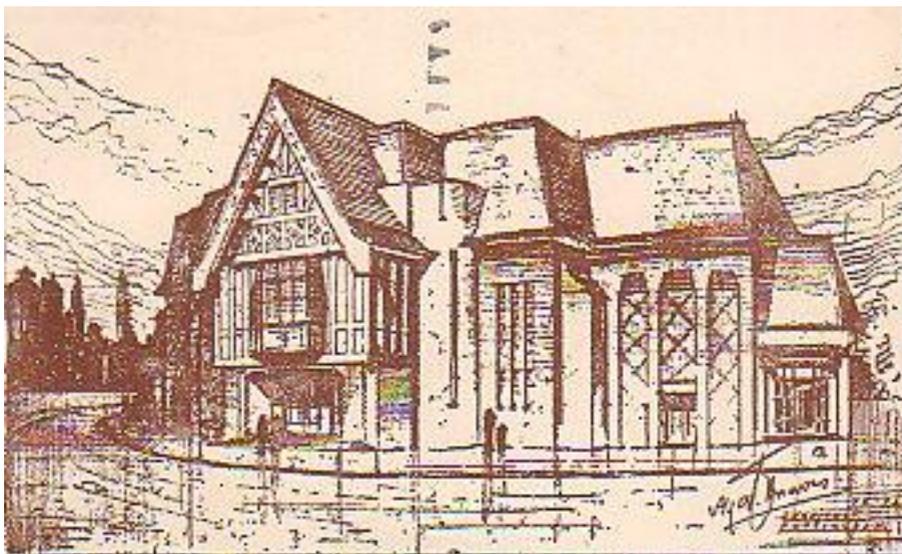
Then rationing Many of our staple foods were rationed, one exception being bread, which was not rationed until after the war (that’s a separate story!) Meat, sugar, butter, even sweets for the kids – all went on the list and the quantities allowed were, by present day standards, minimal to say the least! 2ozs of this and 4ozs of that was all that we could have. Clothing was rationed too with garments also requiring coupons - a problem especially for brides – and the fashions were, shall we say, very austere. Back to foods – the kind of things you would keep ‘in case the vicar called’ such as tinned fruit or tinned salmon, were supplied on ‘points’. You had the points but such was the scarcity of these items that you had to queue for them for seemingly hours (always assuming they were available, of course).

‘British Restaurants’, such as the one situated at the Friary Church on Musters Road, enabled you to eke out your rations should the need arise. Dieticians now tell us that because we were denied all the indulgences that we enjoy today, we were much slimmer, fitter and generally more healthy during the war years. Now there’s food for thought!

Entertainment – BBC radio kept us well entertained during those long,

dark winter nights. Cinemas were very popular, especially with some excellent British films such as comedies and particularly war epics (good for the morale!)

Our local “flicks” was the iconic Tudor Cinema which, alas, is no more. Situated on the corner of Central Avenue (now the Thomson travel agency); that was where the back row of the balcony was always a favourite haunt for courting couples, while, on Saturday mornings, the “White Moth Club” gave rousing entertainment for the kids – Last of the Mohicans being a great favourite with the young cowboy fans!



Tudor Cinema, main source of public entertainment throughout the war years - alas, no more!

Dancing couples spent most of their time in Nottingham, where the Palais de Danse and the Astoria (now the Oceana) were always extremely crowded, not least with American servicemen!

Education – schools continued largely as normal. Gas masks had to be carried every day in case of an air raid and, if there was a problem, it was that many teachers had been called-up for military service and this made staffing difficult. Nevertheless teaching standards were surprisingly well maintained in the circumstances. It is interesting to note however that in 1946 only 5% of school leavers went on to university. Nowadays it is

nearer to 45%.

Air raid shelters – these were of varying types. Communal shelters were constructed either of brick with a very thick concrete roof and were situated mainly in the streets. They held approximately 5/6 families. The



Still standing - the air raid shelter that can be seen within the confines of Abbey Circus. Photo: Geoffrey Oldfield.

others were made entirely of concrete and were of considerable length (post-war, many were converted into cycle sheds). These could be found in parks or other open ground and would accommodate many more people.

Domestic shelters were similarly of two kinds. Named after members of the Government, the Morrison shelter was like an armoured table, with protection on all four sides, and was positioned in the house.

The Anderson shelter – situated out in the garden – was made of corrugated iron sheets with a rounded roof, topped with soil. The shelter was set in a large hole dug in the garden, and was usually sufficient for one family. All were largely effective against anything other than a direct hit and certainly saved many lives.

Evacuees - Very few evacuees came to West Bridgford at the beginning of

the war but later, with the advent of the V1 and V2 bombs over London, 3,200 evacuees were allocated to the area, with specified conditions of residence. The great majority returned to London by the time the war ended.

Now – to that Air Raid

We said that the war did not affect us greatly during the first few months. However it did – alas – make its presence felt with a vengeance on the night of May 8th/9th 1941. The Battle of Britain had been fought and won by the RAF, but the German Luftwaffe was far from beaten. Here in Nottingham – situated, as it is, right in the middle of the country - we found ourselves unfortunately situated immediately below the flight paths of hundreds of enemy aircraft as they made their way towards Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham and Coventry. Consequently the sirens would go as the aircraft passed over or near to Nottingham and not again until after the planes returned by a similar route. This meant that we spent many seemingly endless and uneventful hours in our shelters simply waiting for them all to return before the ‘all-clear’ was sounded!

TARGETS

This was true until that fateful night when nearly 100 enemy aircraft set their sights on targets in and around Nottingham. Anti-aircraft fire became intensive as the bombs fell and one could hear the ambulances and fire tenders speeding through the streets. The sound of the bombs falling was quite horrific. The bombs descended with a fearful rushing sound followed by a ‘crump’ as they hit the ground We later understood that their targets were Wilford Power Station (now no more), Boots factories, the Ordnance factory, the LMS railway sidings, Raleigh and Ericssons.

CASUALTIES

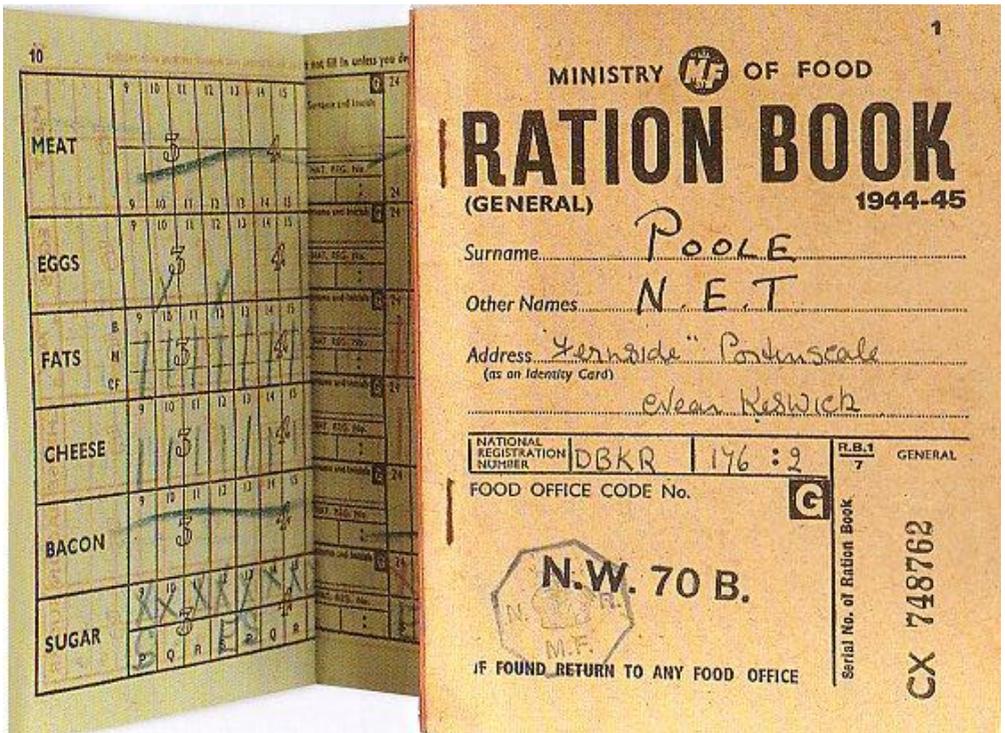
In the event, their efforts were largely unsuccessful. However, after two hours of intense bombing 159 people had been killed and many more injured. More than 40 people died in the basement of the Co-Op Bakery on Meadow Lane, while in West Bridgford 43 residents were killed and 47 injured. No fewer than 63 high explosive bombs fell on West Bridgford that night, some on Bridgford Park itself, some at the junction of Musters Road/Bridgford Rd/Millicent Rd (near the cricket ground) while others fell where Wilford Lane, Loughborough Road and Melton Road meet. (You can

find more information by obtaining a back copy of 'Nottingham in Flames' published by the Nottingham Post, price 65p, or a copy of "West Bridgford Past" written by our own local historian Geoffrey Oldfield).

One is glad to say that this was the one and only air raid that Nottingham suffered throughout the war. But the memory of it remains vividly in the minds of all those – now in their 70's and 80's – who sat through it all that night.

This includes people within our congregation here at St Giles' so we asked them if they might be prepared to give their own eye-witness accounts of what happened during the bombing, and more generally, how they faced up to all the fears and privations of a six-year war.

The following pages reveal what they, in fact, told us...



Something you could NOT do without - your ration book!

Writes MARY GEE ...

I was six years old when war was declared and being given this opportunity to reflect on those years has brought back many memories and makes me realise how vivid they still are. I can understand now how protected we were by our parents not knowing at all the seriousness of the war. Maybe we were too young to understand. I remember the sirens going off, warning of a coming air-raid. More often than not this would happen in the middle of the night and we would be taken from our beds down into the cellar where our mother had prepared a bed for us. Also arguing with my brother whose turn it was to be at the top of the bed! This would happen very regularly night after night.

It was after one of the worst of these raids that my parents decided to send us to stay with two aunts away from the danger into the country. (Radcliffe on Trent believe it or not!!)

We stayed there for the duration of the war (two years) going to school and making our home there, our parents visiting us most weekends. Of course, wherever we went we had to carry the inevitable gas mask. I also remember one day on our way home from school the

siren going off making us get back home in record time! The siren was, at that time, situated on the top of the Police Station which is now a private house. I wonder if it is still there.

My father was in the Auxiliary Fire Service and would be on duty every third night. He was involved in the Lace Market bombing.

Two cousins of mine were in the RAF and took part in the Battle of Britain. They did come through the war unscathed but it was an anxious time for all the family.

Ration books were very much part of our lives but the part that interested me most was only one coupon per week for sweets!

At one time we had soldiers billeted out with us from the local army camps, two of them staying with us for about six months.

DEREK GEE adds his own recollections

I well remember the vicar, the Revd J.C Meers at St Paul's Church, Hyson Green - which was the family church at the time, interrupting his sermon at Morning Worship on Sunday 3rd September 1939.

I was nine at the time. He announced that he had just been handed a piece of paper which stated that "we are now at war

with Germany" this did not mean very much to me, a mere choirboy, but to my parents this must have been a terrifying announcement. Invasion, food rationing, 'joining up', bombing and destruction.

My father, along with most of the men in our road, quickly signed up for the A.R.P. (air raid precautions) and I remember that our local dentist, Mr Sworder, had his surgery acquired as a base HQ. As far as I was concerned life carried on more or less as normal, although to others the situation must have been very serious with the imminent threat of invasion from just across the Channel and, of course, aerial attacks.

Probably the incident I remember most vividly, as I actually saw it happen, was while at Stanley Road Junior School in Forest Fields. During morning break, I witnessed an aerial 'dog-fight', immediately overhead between R.A.F. fighters and German planes, probably Messerschmitts. We could hear the canons firing as the planes were fairly low and we were immediately ushered indoors to safety, much against our will!!

Within a few months of the declaration of war, our home, just a stone's throw away from the Goose Fair site, was turned into a

veritable fortress, with a corrugated iron Anderson shelter in the garden, a huge Morrison shelter in the dining room and a converted cellar complete with food, drink and heating to see us through the night.

Thankfully we all survived the war, but I would mention that my elder brother volunteered for the R.A.F. earlier than he should have done by providing an incorrect date of birth!

Life-long Bridgfordian, SYLVIA JAMES tells us

I was only seven years of age but I well remember that Sunday morning of September 3rd 1939, with my parents and two uncles who were intently listening to Neville Chamberlain on time was in Victoria Road close to the Catholic Church - school was St the radio announcing the declaration of war with Germany.

My home at that time was in Victoria Road, close to the Catholic Church - school was St Margaret's, at the corner of Melton and Patrick Roads.

While not being affected seriously by the war, I have many vivid, random memories of that time in West Bridgford. My mother volunteered as a 'first aider' and my father (exempt from service

through age and profession) carried out fire-watching duties at Boots on Station Street. Among my memories are the gas masks we had to carry everywhere, and the drills of putting them on at school.

The 'smoke-screens' on Rectory Road, consisted of large cylinders the contents of which, I believe, would be activated to baffle the enemy during an air attack! Making light of the situation, I remember going to the Tudor Cinema (where Thomson Travel is now) to see The Wizard of Oz with my mum. Going home, in the dark of course, we zig-zagged round the smoke-screens singing Follow the Yellow Brick Road! At the time of the raid on Nottingham we had moved to Harrow Road where we were able to go into the shelter our neighbours had constructed in their garage. As we left after the All Clear had sounded we could clearly see the buildings on fire in various parts of the city. Of course we did not know until the morning the extent of the damage and casualties. A number of people were killed in Bridgford and there are still several sites Bridgfordians will recognise as being where bombs had fallen. One site I remember where no one was hurt was a crater in the immaculate bowling green in the Park!

Talking of the Park, all children (I

think under 5) had a regular supply of either concentrated orange juice or rose hip syrup. This was on the 'coupon system' and it was distributed from the Hall in the Park. In our family this came to be known as 'Parka juice' the description given by my young sister!

Rationing of course made quite an impact on our lives and many years later I still remembered that a 'tall tin' of salmon required 48 points, saved up for a special occasion. I have regularly told my sons, when having a cheese-board on the table, that 2 ozs was our ration for the week!

I remember that amid all the excitement of VE day - the end of the war in Europe - my mother insisted on wearing a brooch similar to my Uncle's (her brother) cap badge of the 14th Army still in Burma. She said she would not celebrate until the war in the Far East was over (and of course many people felt the same). That was not until August 1945, after Hiroshima.

What of the effect of the war on my life? I reflect that nearly 40 years ago we started a friendship, through a school exchange, with a family from Hamburg. Our German friends lived through the terrible bombing raids on that city. Since

then we have exchanged visits with them and when in Hamburg we were told of the vast areas that were completely devastated by the fire-storm which engulfed the city and then we saw for ourselves the many new buildings that have arisen since.

But the most poignant moment was the occasion when we stood with them in the remains of Coventry Cathedral with its cross of nails with the legend 'Father Forgive'. And then, in the Cathedral in Berlin where there is a replica of that same cross we saw in Coventry.

It is interesting to note that there is now a 'Community of the Cross of Nails' worldwide - 160 of them - where these crosses are being displayed.

DAVID TRATHEN who lived in the South of England, writes ...

Though only aged two at the outbreak of the war, events that occurred once the Blitz had started in 1940 have left a permanent impression upon my life, so here are a few of those memories:

Firstly, air raid sirens – the mournful and increasing wail of the warning siren struck a feeling of fear into the stomach and even today the sound turns the tummy over. There was always a great

sense of relief at the cheerful sound of the All Clear siren.

The second most dreaded experience was that of the V1s and V2s which bombed London during the later stages of the war. The V1 flying bomb came with the notorious 'chug chug chug' sound. The noise would stop, then dead silence followed by the dreaded explosion as it reached the target. The V2 rocket was the worst however - it struck without any warning at all. There were memories such as being carried down the garden in pyjamas to reach the safety of the shelter and in the course of this short journey, two fighter planes racing across the sky firing as they went.

There was the smell of shrapnel that crashed into the back garden which turned to hard metal lumps by the next morning.

Blue/green silk material was found in the flower beds from the markers of the incendiary bombs that had been dropped all round. These were gratefully collected by my mother and grandmother.

Radio – the main source of information and entertainment provided many memories. News of the progress of the war was eagerly listened to, which Alvar Liddell read in stern tones, preceded by a short

extract from Beethoven's 5th Symphony.

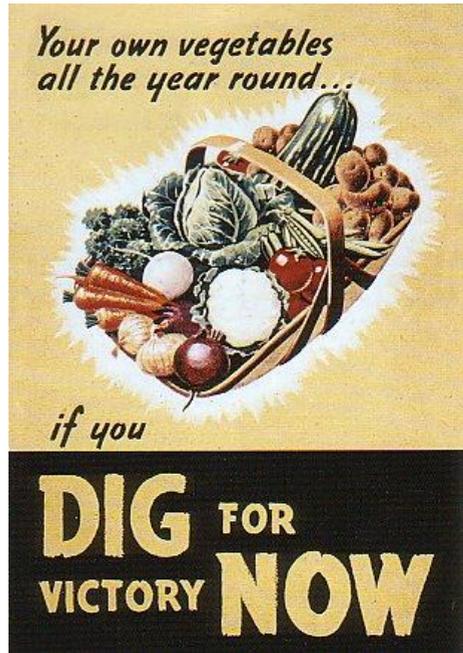
Lighter relief came in the form of ITMA (It's That Man Again) with Tommy Handley, while twice daily we had 'Workers Playtime', timed to coincide with the tea breaks of the factory workers turning out munitions for the war effort.

In their wisdom the government decided that in order to help the war effort there would be double British Summer Time – that is GMT plus 2 hours which meant it remained light at 11pm. Not easy for any little ones being urged to go to sleep!

In London the buses and underground trains had bomb-proof netting on all the windows. Visibility was difficult but at least we were allowed a small diamond shaped cut-out for us to see outside.

Propaganda was rife with hoardings everywhere urging us to 'Waste not, Want not', 'Careless Talk Costs Lives', 'Dig For Victory' and so on.

D-Day was a dramatic time particularly in the South of England with enormous numbers of aircraft flying overhead. The sky was filled with them, and how could one ever forget their drones as they made their way across the Channel?



Unlike my parents, my childhood had been spent entirely in a wartime environment and it was only in 1946, when I started school, that I began to be aware of what peaceful living was really like!

GLORIA TRATHEN remembers with sadness members of her family ...

My first conscious thought was being glad that I was a girl and not a boy and so would not have to go to war and fight. However, that was not so with the male members of my family. My father fought with the 14th Army in Burma and two of his cousins were held in a Japanese prisoner of war camp. Meanwhile his three brothers saw war service

– one with the army in Africa, one with the Royal Navy and the other in the RAF. Also, as a child, I remember accompanying my maternal grandmother on visits to Wilford Hill cemetery. An uncle was killed in November 1944 serving with the RAF and six weeks earlier his sister had died as a result of an illness caused by her home being bombed following the raid over Nottingham.

My most vivid memory was in 1946 when my mother came into my bedroom and told me that my father - who had been ill for a considerable time in Burma – had finally come home. I had never seen my father before – only photographs of him – but I ran into my parents’ bedroom and jumped into bed with him.

He had lost a lot of weight, malaria had caused his face to yellow – and he had a prickly chin. He had been away for four and a half years and yet we bonded instantly!

ERROL HARRISON lived in the Meadows and he, too, mourns the loss of friends ...

When war was declared, I was ten years old. I was due in September to go up to Trent Bridge Senior Boys. Unfortunately – or fortunately – depending on your point of view, return to school was

delayed because there was a fear of large numbers gathering together. When eventually we did return it was on a part-time basis. My class went to the ‘New Pavilion’ on the playing field next to the Rock Gardens. We would attend on Tuesday mornings for two hours, then be sent home with a load of homework and told to come back on the Thursday when the process was repeated. Eventually “Normal Service Was Resumed”. In the meantime, Bosworth Road Boys’ School had been taken over as an Emergency Kitchen and Air Raid Refuge centre so the Bosworth Rd boys came to Trent Bridge. We simply doubled up. Another difference was that we had a number of female teachers to replace men who had gone to the War.

As time went on, of course, there were losses. The boy next door - Charlie Long - was shot down on a raid over Germany, while a young man over the road was killed on another raid. His mother gave me his Scout hat. A few doors further down Billy Wells was lost on H.M.S. Hood.

Then there were the civilians as well. The two families who lived either side of Sheila (Oliver) had sons who worked at the Co-op Bakery on Meadow Lane where

they were both killed during the bombing over Nottingham.

Graphic nursing experiences are recorded by BERYL DAVIS ...

When war broke out I was in my first year of training as a Student Nurse at St Bartholomew's Hospital, Rochester in Kent.

In 1940 we were in the middle of the Battle of Britain. For what seemed an interminable time we were bombed night and day. At first those of us who were off-duty had to go across the road to tunnels under Ford Pitt, used as air raid shelters. I was on night duty at the time and so had very little sleep. After 72 hours without proper sleep, the powers that be closed the basement ward (the hospital is built into the side of a hill) and put mattresses on the floor for the night staff. Until the basement of the nurses home was fitted with 3 tier bunks, both bedrooms and the lecture room were utilised to accommodate six 3 tier bunks. These were occupied throughout the war by both day and night staff, taking our bedding back to our rooms on the upper floors.

We watched 'dog-fights' in the sky, not knowing whether the planes coming down were British or German. We had both British and

German crews admitted to the hospital for surgery before being taken on to military hospitals elsewhere.

All the hospital beds were issued with 2 mattresses, one on top of the bed and one underneath so that during raids patients could be made comfortable under the beds.

Planes passed over us en route for London, but we also had our targets. Short's Seaplane works, with its 10,000 employees building Sunderland flying boats, was a mile long – a sitting target! Chatham Dockyard was another, as were the airfields nearby where Stirling bomber engines were made - all were attacked as the German planes unloaded their bombs on their way back from London. Preston Hall, Maidstone - a TB hospital - was requisitioned as an Emergency Hospital for the duration. Student nurses from six hospitals around London, including St Barts Rochester, were sent to staff the EMS and I was one of the first batch, sent for three months.

We were billeted in peoples' houses and I was there during the evacuation of Dunkirk. What a nightmare that was! Troops sent straight up from Dover, some in a most terrible state, had to be anaesthetised before their clothes could be removed. The theatres



Jennie Phimister (extreme left), then 15 years old, stands beside the refreshment vehicle provided by the American Red Cross. She was the youngest member to join the West Bridgford branch of the Women's Voluntary Service who throughout the war carried out a variety of essential services to the community, not least during the night of the blitz on Nottingham. Now well into her 80's, she lives in Plumtree and kindly provided this photograph which was taken where the Bridgford Library car park now stands. The year - 1943.



No play today - a strike by the Luftwaffe on the square-leg boundary at Trent Bridge!

worked round the clock – we were allowed 4 hours off in 24 hrs to sleep. Some of the soldiers were completely off their heads, such terrible traumas they had been through.

Back at St Barts after 3 months, we were very heavily bombed, with rows of houses completely demolished. Sailors from Chatham were used as porters to bring in the casualties. Some were terribly injured, others died before we could attend to them. The hospital never had a direct hit, although we lost all our windows. We nurses slept through the raids – from sheer exhaustion- never knowing if we would be alive the next day.

After I qualified in 1941, I moved to the Seaplane works in 1942 where we manned 3 surgeries, one at each end of the factory and one in the middle – 10 nursing staff all told.

It was so well camouflaged in the side of the hill that we only had one direct hit. They were very busy surgeries.

I married in 1942, our first house was near the Stirling bomber airfield and most of our nights were spent in the Anderson shelter in the garden. My husband had slipped off the wing of a Sunderland flying boat whilst fitting

the engines - in the ice and snow - falling 20 feet onto the concrete below and was left with a 2inch shortening of his leg which never properly recovered, so we moved to a small holding near Meopham. That was when the ‘Doodle bugs’ (V1 flying bombs) were launched. They had noisy engines, and when the engines cut out, you knew they were coming down. These were followed by the V2 rockets, which were silent until they hit the target, causing massive destruction. As the crow flies we were very near Biggin Hill RAF airfield – so our ‘quiet village’ was far from quiet!

For two years we travelled to the factory by train daily until my daughter was born in Dartford Hospital - during an air raid! – in 1944. My husband then received a medical discharge from Short Bros. and we moved to Nottingham to a bungalow in the middle of Bunny woods, with our pigs, calves, chickens, ducks and geese. For us, peace at last!

PAM SHAW recalls her ‘brief encounter’

To anyone living in the South of England the approach of D-Day became increasingly evident day by day. I was then a 19 year old and although living in Oxford with my aunt – near to my place of work as

a telephone operator – I paid frequent visits to my parents who lived out in the country, in a village called Stadhampton. While I was there, we were surprised to see many soldiers (I believed them to be Canadian paratroopers) suddenly encamped in the field directly opposite my parents' house. I remember my parents plying them with refreshments before everyone settled down for the night. However, the next day - they were gone! I often wonder how many of them lived - and how many died - in the days that followed.

GILLIAN CLARKE tells the story of a rugby tackle with a difference!

I was born in January 1941, on the first night without an air raid warning for three weeks. We lived in Sidcup, on the border of Kent and London, so there were many air raid warnings as enemy bombers flew over us to attack the London docks. Fortunately we suffered little bomb damage, unless the navigator had miscalculated!

This changed when the doodlebugs appeared over London – they were quite indiscriminate.

One of them damaged our local forge, and another nearly landed on the field where my father was playing cricket. My mother seized

me under her arm, ran for the boundary ditch and scored a neat rugby try with me as the ball!

On yet another occasion she rolled me down a flight of outside steps, wrapped in an eiderdown, as one of the missiles came over.

My father, a science teacher in peacetime, was working at Siemens on various war projects. These included PLUTO, the 'pipeline under the ocean' which ran under the Channel immediately after D Day to provide the army with fuel.

Other projects included particular testing procedures involving synthetic rubber. For this he used a freezer cabinet and when he had a spare moment he would put into it a jar of custard, leave it there all day, and then bring it home as ice-cream! The windows of our flat overlooked his bus stop, and I remember running round to meet him, and claim my treat.

At night he was a volunteer with the ambulance service. After walking over the road to our large communal air raid shelter with me and my mother, he would cycle off to the ambulance station, wearing his tin hat. Obviously, many of his duties were grim, as he helped to rescue the injured from bombed houses, but there was one night when he had to deliver a baby in

the ambulance – that really shook him!

Everyone had to live on their rations, with housewives doing their utmost to spin them out, and achieve acceptable substitutes for what had previously been readily available.

My mother said that her greatest deprivation was a shortage of onions. When bananas reappeared I was entitled to three, on production of my ration book – but I was not very impressed. I was persuaded to give two to an elderly neighbour whose ration book did not allow her any. In return, she kindly gave us some eggs from her hens – a great treat!

JACK BROWN, is aged 88 and for many years was a member of St Giles' choir ...

Jack has written a book* recording his life as a member of a large family which includes a chapter devoted to WW2. In an appendix to the book he writes of a conversation with his great-granddaughter Madie for a school project.

Question: Were you near a bomb when it exploded ?

Answer: Some of the German bombs that dropped on Nottingham in May 1941 exploded

within a few hundred yards of our home where my parents, my sisters and I sheltered in the cellar; the nearest being at the top of the street about 50 yards away. During my service in Libya we were occasionally machine-gunned and small bombs dropped close to us.

Question: Was it good news for you when the war finished ?

Answer: Indescribably fantastic news and looking forward to eventual demobilisation and going home to be with my loved ones and to start a new life.

* *“His, Hers and Theirs” and Ours*

JEAN STEVENSON who left West Bridgford, witnessed the war in the South West and returned before the war ended ...

I was eleven years of age the day war broke out and remember that the air raid alarm went off that very day. I was the youngest of a large family and we all sat in a circle with gas masks on our knees nervously listening to a plane flying nearby - but it was a false alarm!

Within weeks our house – quite a large house – was checked out by the authorities and subsequently taken over by the Army. My father was a senior manager at Boots, and they decided to regionalize the company and, as a consequence,

our family was split up and we went in different directions, we being sent to Devon. Four of us – plus parents – moved to Torquay.

Here I was transferred to Torquay Grammar School, where I soon found that our lessons were staggered to accommodate the schools being evacuated from London.

While in Torbay we witnessed a number of air raid alerts as the Germans started to spray the beaches with machine-gun fire, so we then moved to Crediton where from my bedroom window - being careful not to show any light - I could hear planes passing over to bomb Swansea and Plymouth. Exeter was another target and, one particular night, I stood outside the house with my brothers to see the city - miles away - consumed by fire. Visiting the city later I could see the main street was reduced to a heap of rubble.

One of my brothers remained behind to study at Nottingham University and became an ARP messenger. It was during the raid on May 8th/9th that he found himself in Bridgford Park when a bomb came whistling down. He flung himself to the ground as it landed just yards away on the Bowling Green (in front of the Hall) leaving a huge crater! He was

uninjured but the park seat beside him was demolished.

Before the war ended, it became necessary for us to return to Nottingham and we took up residence in Davies Road. On the morning of D-Day we looked to the skies and saw planes towing gliders packed with troops, making for the Normandy landings. I also saw them return, minus the gliders of course, with one in particular, on fire, endeavouring to make for home.

MICHAEL EGGINTON shares his experiences in the West Midlands

When war was declared I was living as a schoolboy in a village between Dudley and Wolverhampton and I had just obtained a scholarship to Dudley Grammar School.

As Neville Chamberlain was making his historic announcement I was helping to dig a trench in my grandmother's garden which was to become an air raid shelter. She called me in and that was when it all began.

My father, injured in the First World War, could not undertake military service and was placed in a reserved occupation. My mother had four children to look after but nevertheless served as a volunteer nurse, while my aunt, Dorothy, became a Commandant of the Red

Cross. Despite his exemption, father joined the Home Guard during which he also undertook fire watching duties on Sedgley Beacon – particularly high ground from where many bombing raids in the West Midlands could be observed. Though still a schoolboy, I did, on occasions, take over from my father; doing 'my bit' as it were!

Also, interestingly, my aunt Mildred became an active member of the local fire service! School life was affected in that many teachers had been 'called up' and were replaced by previously retired teachers, women particularly, and by conscientious objectors. The school playing field had been dug up to make way for air raid shelters and, with transport in short supply, we had to walk one and a half miles to play our games! Unfortunately when the Victory celebrations took place, I became ill and was confined to bed .

EILEEN SHIPP who witnessed 'The Raid' before moving to the North-East ...

I was 4 years old when the war started and lived here in West Bridgford when we had the air raid on the night of May 8th/9th 1941. That same year my father was called up and served as a mechanic in the RAF. Since all our relatives lived in Co.Durham, my mother and

I moved there for the 'duration' but we still kept our home here and returned to Nottingham at intervals, usually when my father returned on leave.

Before joining the RAF, my father served in the ARP and on the night of the Nottingham raid, he called in to see that we – in our Anderson shelter – were OK. As he crouched near the door of the shelter we heard the distinctive whistle of an incendiary bomb as it fell towards the ground.

"That one was a bit close" he said – just as it landed no more than 6 feet away, close to our garden fence. Fortunately, it failed to explode. We learned later that the firing pin was missing and you can see me here, complete with the bomb!



Returning to West Bridgford after a period of separation - even though my father never went abroad - it required a degree of adjustment!! Indeed, for a while we found it rather strange. However, what it was like for families whose separation lasted for a number of years, I find it difficult to imagine.

JULIE ROBSON tells how she had a lucky escape from a German fighter...

We lived in Norwich which suffered extensively from air raids. One Saturday my father, who was manager of the Gas Works, had to go to his office and, while there, I was left sitting in the car awaiting his return. One of the local factories had been taken over for the production of munitions and, as the employees were streaming out of the works for lunch, a German aircraft suddenly appeared overhead and sprayed them with machine-gun fire! It then came over the Gas Works and machine-gunned my father's car, and although the car was badly damaged, I fortunately escaped injury. Our house also suffered from enemy action and on one occasion we were hit by 15 incendiary bombs – those on the roof did not explode but those in the garden all exploded, so we were very lucky!

Here's an interesting recollection from PAT TINSLEY ...

My father was Rector at Bulwell Parish Church and I do remember helping to fill lots of sandbags while, in the evenings, with the sirens having sounded, sheltering under the stairs with our Curate (Revd Renshaw, later killed in a cycle accident) taking charge of the children. My father shared a half-pig (!) with the gardener from which Elsie, our housekeeper, cooked everything from trotters to sausages!

GERALD CLEAVER – now aged 91, who has spent many years in the parish as both Reader and Priest, writes this ...

Living in York, where I lost my two front teeth through walking into a lamp-post in the black-out, I volunteered for military service at the local recruitment office. I was medically classed as C3 because I was short-sighted and assigned to the Army Pay Corps and given a shilling as expenses for travelling from York to York by the shortest possible route!

After eighteen months, and without any notable change in my visual capabilities, I was, along with thousands of others, re-classed medically as A1 at the stroke of a pen!

Pay Office documents gave way to square-bashing, weapon training and sergeant majors. Their language was memorable. One was always reminding us “men as is keen, get fell in previous” while another read a section of the Army Act at the weekly pay parade.

I volunteered to become an officer in the Royal Artillery. However, in the event I was posted to an RASC training centre where I learnt to drive 5 ton lorries and later, motor cycles. Eventually I was sent for Officer Training at Alton Towers (no less!).

The formal passing-out parade was being addressed by a General during which an American fife band was given the command “at ease” and promptly relaxed for a smoke!

I was then posted to Selkirk where my task was to train soldiers to handle 25-pounder guns on landing craft. The ‘trick’ was to steer the craft to either port or starboard before firing, otherwise the guns would miss the target!

Six months before D Day the army needed more Infantry Officers than Artillery Officers and so I was posted to a glider battalion, part of the Airborne Regiment.

Another memorable event was a visit by His Majesty the King. This was, of course, a Top Secret event.

However the railway company told the Station Master at Woodhall Junction to prepare for the Royal Train! So we had the situation where the civilian population knew all about it but not – seemingly- the Army! The children were on the streets waving flags at the Royal car while the army remained ‘stiff upper lipped’. The climax came when, just before the King appeared, the Regimental Sergeant Major gave final instructions to his troops referring to the King as ‘the personage’!

Because my eyesight wasn’t good enough for them I was posted to the depot. I then spent a few months conducting soldiers to Northern Ireland aboard troop ships provided by the Americans. They had a strange idea that meals on these ships should only be served every 12 hours – so, if you were unlucky you had lunch at 3pm and breakfast at 3am! Arriving in Belfast, clothing was made available at two prices – one with coupons and one without!

From Infantry Officer I became Education Officer (more my forté!) and after postings to Tonfanau in North Wales and Lichfield (where there was nothing to do!) I was sent to Donnington in Shropshire where I had a busy time setting up an education scheme for troops as

they left for civilian life. At that time my future wife Cynthia was serving with the ATS in Manchester. One Sunday evening - after seeing her onto the Manchester train in Stockport then waiting for a troop train back to Donnington - I was suddenly saluted by a Sergeant Major who said it was his duty to inform me that there were 200 Army and ATS personnel on the platform and that the troop train had been cancelled due to bombing down the line. As I was the senior officer on the station, and with bombing in the area, I was - he said respectfully - to take command!! Having no one to consult, I realised that I would be risking Court Martial for exceeding my authority if I sent the troops home, and for neglecting my duty if I didn't!

I chose the former and, thankfully, the next day the Garrison Major spoke to the Garrison Commander and he, in turn, thanked me for taking the right action!

When my education programme was almost complete, I was posted to India where my trip included a 4 week stay at the Grand Hotel in Calcutta which was being used as an Officer Transit Base. There I was surprised to meet more of my school and college friends than I had ever done before – or, indeed

since!

From there I moved to Burma – to the School of Education in Maymyo – a hill station 25 miles from Mandalay and 4,000 feet above it! I well remember the Communion Services we had in the Parish Church where I mixed with soldiers of more than a dozen nationalities and civilians from all the races that live in that part of Burma .There I found that the strawberry season lasted nearly the whole year!

My journey home took me across the Indian Ocean during the height of the monsoon season. Being the Education Officer I was deputed to give a commentary to the troops on all the interesting places that we passed en route, including the wonderful sight of the Suez Canal by floodlight. Arriving in Tilbury, the end came quickly with my emerging from the Demob Centre complete with brown suit and trilby hat – looking for a job!

FLO LOWTHER takes us into the country for her experiences

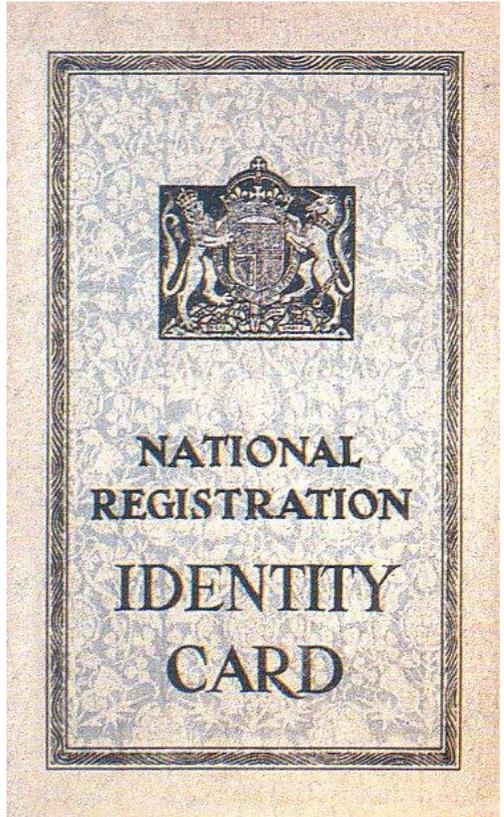
I was 7 years old in 1939 and was born and lived on a farm in isolated Lincolnshire. We had sirens, of course, but we could only hear them if the wind was blowing in the right direction. So during the day you really didn't know what was happening but at night we knew

enemy aircraft were around because search-lights were scanning the skies. Lincolnshire had numerous aerodromes which became targets for the enemy bombers.

One night, with the bombs dropping, we took to our air raid shelter which was a large kitchen table! It sheltered my mum, my dad, my 8 month old baby sister and myself. We heard the loud explosions clearly enough but it was not until the next morning that we realised that one bomb had dropped within 100 yards of us and eight others had strewn in a line across the fields! Thankfully no one was hurt – just a string of large craters. We were told later that ‘Gerry’ (that’s what we called the Germans) had missed their intended target and discharged their load on us before flying back home.

DAVID SOUTHERN lived in Derby and tells us ...

Our house was half a mile from the Rolls Royce aero engine works and one night - as the anti-aircraft fire intensified - we heard a deafening explosion followed by debris falling on top of our Anderson shelter. As dawn broke we saw that two houses over the road had been badly hit but fortunately no-one had been killed or injured. On



another occasion, about breakfast time, I heard the sound of a low-flying aircraft. From the back door I saw a ‘plane – a Dornier I believe – flying at roof level and as it passed I could see one of the crew at the rear of the aircraft! It would appear the intention was to bomb Rolls Royce but, seemingly, the plane struck a balloon cable before reaching its target. Twenty two people lost their lives that day but, surprisingly, that was the one and only occasion that Rolls Royce was attacked throughout the entire

war.

GRACE SOUTHERN lived locally where a different kind of excitement fell from the skies ...

As children, we were staying at Harby during the Bank Holidays. Nearby was Langar airfield where a large number of Canadian soldiers were stationed. One day, hearing a droning noise and looking up, we saw several large aircraft flying quite low overhead. Then, to our amazement, out came a bevy of parachutists falling slowly to the ground.

What a scare that was – until we learnt soon afterwards that it was only a training exercise !

MARY GREEN is 96 years old but still has clear memories of the war

My most vivid memory was on August 15, 1940 at ten minutes to seven in the evening when I actually saw the bombs falling out of the German Stuka dive-bombers over the hangars where my husband Len worked. Len was doing war-work for a Cpt. Rollingson of the RAF at his hangars in Croydon airport (there was no Heathrow in those days!) Len's job was to do body work on aeroplanes fixing doped polyester-fabric to the plywood frames of the planes to make them war-ready. He was exempted from the war due to his

work, but like many men served in the Home Guard as well.

I remember being so indignant that the Germans were bombing us. I shook my fists in the air shouting, "Why are you doing this... how dare you, go away, go away!" (as if they could hear me anyway).

The German pilots were used to coming to Croydon airport during peacetime, so they knew where every hangar was. The bombs dropped on the hangars... direct hit after direct hit. I heard a neighbour say, "Rollingson's down to the ground!" I was so frightened for Len and had my two little girls, Shirley aged 5 and Pamela 4, tugging at my skirt in their bedclothes worried about their dad. I remember getting them dressed and said, "Let's go find Daddy!" We ran out into the street with the other neighbours. I frantically asked many others who were returning from the hangars about Len and after a long time I saw someone who worked with him, who told me that he was alright and was coming home soon. Finally, we saw him emerge from the crowd.

He looked like he had been down a coalmine. His face was covered with the earth that the bombs had blasted into the air. His white foreman's coat was completely

black. He had cuts on his face from the glass roof of the hangar, which had been destroyed. My Shirley and Pamela were scared seeing the blood on his face. I assured them he would be all right, as they were only small cuts, but Len suffered like most of us on the Home Front from shellshock after this horrible war. He was scared for the children and wanted us to move away from London out of the direct line of the German bombs. All the hangars were completely levelled and his boss therefore moved his business to Tollerton airfield, so we came to West Bridgford.

We lived in Roseberry Avenue so Len could be close to his work. But it wasn't long before the "night of the raid" and I remember feeling that the Germans were following us wherever we went. In fact Len decided it would be better if the family were to move up to Stanley, County Durham to live with his mother while he stayed in Nottingham.

However, after a few months, I moved back to West Bridgford to be with Len while the girls went to school up North.

One night, two houses at the end of Roseberry Avenue were blown to bits by bombs. It was the greatest and most horrible fireworks display I have ever seen,

as the Germans dropped incendiary bombs all over the neighbourhood and onto the boathouses along the Trent. I could see the boats being blown into the air and fire rising everywhere. I helped the firemen put out the fires on our street and everyone feared their houses would be next.

Because I was without the children at the time, I was signed up for war work. For several months I dry-cleaned and folded uniforms at a large hut situated in Lady Bay. Then, after there appeared to be no further raids, the girls came back to live with us in Nottingham. On Victory Day everyone was jubilant and we all celebrated together.



A night on the tiles? Hardly! A bomb damaged roof is repaired - temporarily - by tarpaulins. Photo: Geoffrey Oldfield.

.....FINALLY as your editor, may I be permitted to add three little thoughts of my own. First, the occasion when, with a school friend, we ran a street collection for ‘money to pay for the night rations to feed the crew of an RAF bomber as it carried out its mission over Germany’. Result £2-11-6d (then half a week’s wages) which was later acknowledged by an official on behalf of the Chancellor of the Exchequer!

Then, the little wooden warships we made, painted grey, which were placed in a shop window where Barclays Bank now stands – raising money for charity. And, to close, the hideous piece of shrapnel which struck the door of our communal shelter just moments after yours truly had walked through to join the family. A second or two earlier and it would have gone right into my back - not something to contemplate!

“Oh What a Lovely War” ?

NOT from where we were standing!

Our Thanks...

This publication first appeared on Remembrance Day 2011. It was produced by “the more elderly members” of St Giles’ Church, West Bridgford, Nottingham in commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the German air-raid on the city in 1941.

The editor would like to thank all those who kindly submitted their eye-witness accounts and to those who have otherwise helped in the production and distribution of this booklet.

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WEST BRIDGFORD RESIDENTS KILLED

ON THE NIGHT OF THE RAID

Musters Road (at the junction with Loughborough Road)

- No 2 Albert (69) and Mary Ann (67) SOUTER
- No 10a Philip Albert Seraphis (47) FOSTER visiting from Kent
- No 12 Harriet (73) and John Albert Swanwick (50) RUSHWORTH also
Olga (27) SHEPPERSON
- No 20 Thomas Arthur (53) and Norah Ellen (42) HULANCE
- No 20a William (59) Kathleen(28) Adeline Kathleen (6) and Stuart William (4) WHITE
- No 22a Carrie (72) MUSSON
- No 24 Paul (37) NORRIS
- No 28 Kate (60) and Joan Stewart (24) B.R.C.S
Barbara Madge (9) BERRINGTON of 2 Rushworth Road

Loughborough Road (at the junction with Melton Road)

- No 24 Edith Eliza (70) BRIGGS, Winifred (45) of the WVS, and
Sheila Doreen (12) RELPH
- No 32 William (69) Isabella (68) Ivy Evelyn (36) Rosetta Mary (34) Lucy Ivy Edna (13)
Charles George (6) and Kenneth (4) GOOCH
- No 34 John Foster (71) Clara Elizabeth(71) ARMITAGE.
Also Winifred Mary (53) STURT

Lady Bay Road

- No 56 Hilda May (24) PRIEST

Rosebery Avenue

- No 23 Constance May (24) SMITH
- No 25 Jessie (49) ROBINSON

Trent Boulevard

- No 80 Joan Arthurson (34) WHITE
- No 82 Amy (44) Isabella Grace (19) and Elsie (11) THURSTAN
- No 84 Arthur (68) BOWLER
- No 113 Letitia Irene (34) FILSELL WVS

Mona Road

- No 97 Ronald Charles St.John (58) ROSS, ARP instructor, died subsequently as a
result of his injuries.

Many more were injured – often seriously – but subsequently survived