

**OUR HISTORY**

**PARTRIDGE GREEN AT WAR**  
**SOME MEMORIES OF GROWING UP IN THE WAR-TORN YEARS**  
**1939 – 1945**

War was declared at 11am on Sunday September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1939. For years I was convinced I was in St Michael's on that fateful day and the Vicar made the announcement; I am now not too sure because in my mind it all bears a striking similarity to the scene in the film "Mrs Miniver" which may have influenced me when I saw it during the war. The effects of the coming war were apparent in Partridge Green a week earlier with the arrival of the evacuees from Brixton. As children it was all different and exciting and the fact that I had to move into a single bed in my parents' room while my brothers shared a room to allow two strangers to have the third bedroom did not bother me at all. Londoners were strange to us; they understood so little about the country and had so much to tell us about city life. What also remains vivid in my mind is that most of them (certainly our two) had about one month's pocket money which meant for a short while they were all stocked up with sweets and chocolate bars; it paid to be their friends.

I understood little of what was involved but I recall Mrs Darrington (WVS) working non stop to house children and then, quite often, having to re-house those that were found to be unacceptable by some families.

Their arrival, naturally, brought chaos to Jolesfield School C of E School, which was not equipped for a sudden doubling of its intake. Initially, a scheme was devised where we, the locals, used the School in the mornings under our Headmaster, Mr Garton and the evacuees used it in the afternoon under their headmaster, Mr Greenwood. The following week the timing was reversed. I remember how difficult it was to return home from a morning's play in time to get to School for the afternoon. After a time the Village Hall and the Methodist Chapel Hall were brought into use and I recall we would have one week at the School and the following week in the Halls.

An early wartime action was the need for air raid protection and the fathers set to work to dig a shelter on the land immediately to the south of the School with the entrance opposite the doors from the cloakroom. I remember having a practice visit into the shelter but come the winter rains my recollection is that it was thereafter knee deep in water. I wonder how many projects like that were worked on in haste with huge enthusiasm but were not well thought out.

We were all fitted out with gas masks and were instructed on wearing them. I always felt I would suffocate in one and am so thankful we never had to wear them. Small children were given 'Micky Mouse' style masks; they may have looked all right but must have been terrifying to wear. Gas masks had to be carried at all times and we would be

challenged by Messrs. Darrington and Kidd, the A.R.P. Wardens, if we were caught without them. Watchers of "Dad's Army" will know what Mr Hodges' duties were, namely, making sure houses were not showing lights, riding bicycles through the village blowing whistles when there was an air raid warning and, I am sure, many other duties which would not have been known to me.

During the first year of the war we put up with quite a lot of inconveniences (hardships by modern standards) but the realities of the real war had not yet hit us. Young men had, of course, enlisted and were in France, or training as Air Crew or were somewhere unknown in the Royal Navy but our problems at home were coping with evacuees, shortages and rationing. Not that the latter hit us as hard as it did the town and city dwellers. We kept chickens (for which we got a chicken feed ration), often managed to get wild rabbits and kept a large number of tame rabbits for the table. Everybody grew as much food as they could and many households were self sufficient in vegetables. Nothing was wasted - apples, pears and plums were bottled and I recall picking quite enormous quantities of blackberries. Because of the shortage of kilner jars good use was made of candle wax to seal the jars.

Everything and everybody was working in the name of "The War Effort". I mentioned "Dad's Army" in relation to the A.R.P. Wardens and we had our own L.D.V. (Local Defence Volunteers). This was the forerunner of the Home Guard but there were no uniforms, only armbands. The equipment consisted of a sentry box positioned on the top of the Station Bridge, a rifle with a bayonet but no ammunition and a great deal of enthusiasm (everybody has to belong to something). The Partridge Green Auxiliary Fire Service was formed, based in the garage attached to the Station Hotel (now The Partridge) and Herbert Mitchell, the Butcher, was an Inspector in the Special Constabulary.

My brothers joined the Air Force Cadets at Henfield and we ate, drank and slept the Morse code in our house for weeks! The Fire Service did; of course, swiftly become an efficient unit and the L.D.V. developed into the Home Guard with real uniforms and some basic equipment. It is only in very recent years that I learnt of the Special Units, highly trained in sabotage with caches of arms and explosives; these units would have become very active and important in the event that we had been invaded. It still amazes me that the secret was so well kept; I don't think there was anyone at Steyning Grammar School who had any idea that the Headmaster, John Scragg, was an active member of such a special Unit (Mr and Mrs Scragg retired to live at Jolesfield House). The L.D.V. Home Guard was a shambles in the early days but they were not all "Dad's Army" later on.

*To be continued.*

*Mr D Pennifold*