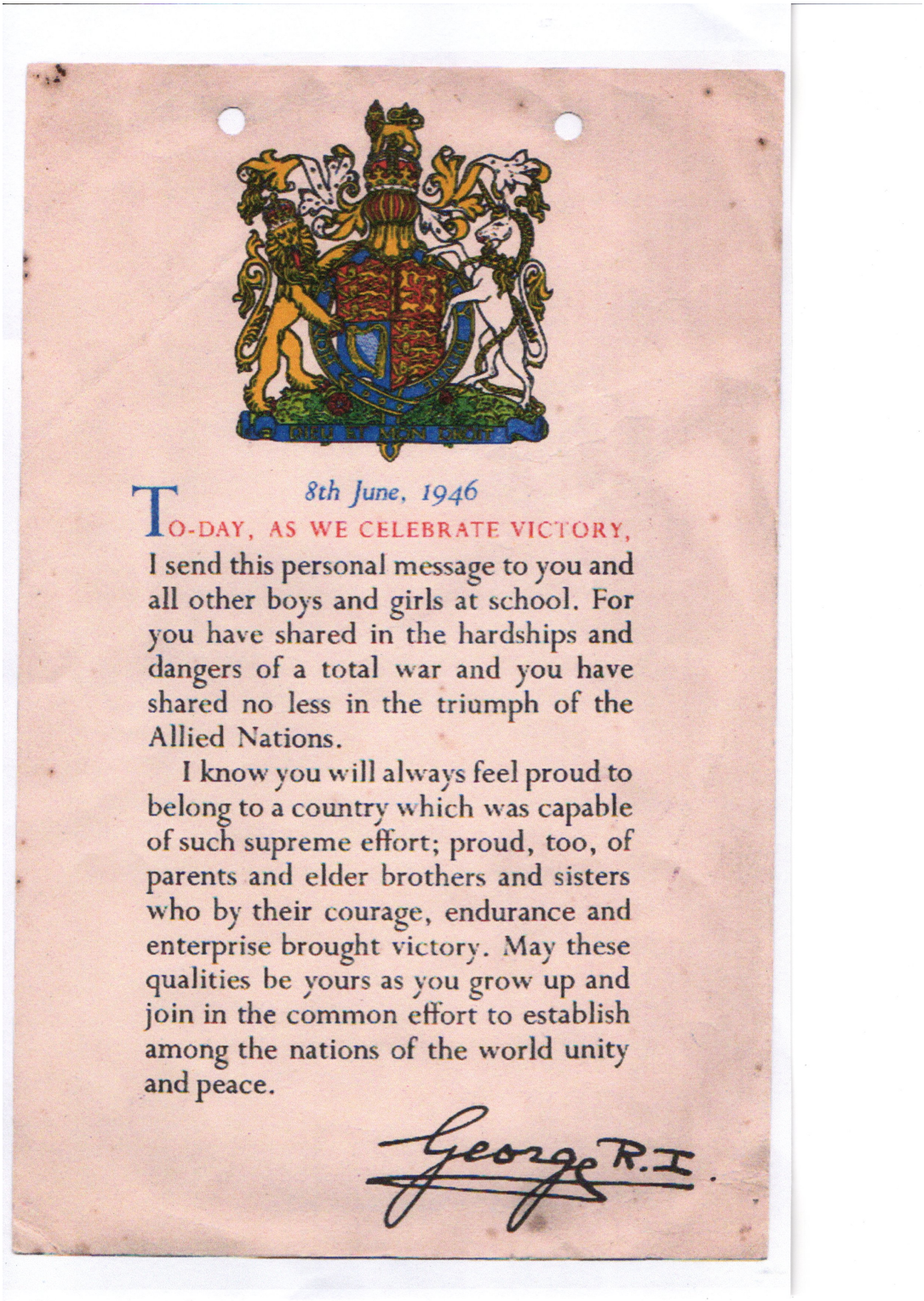
World War II 1939 – 1945

Life in the Hemingfords



8th June, 1946

TO-DAY, AS WE CELEBRATE VICTORY, I send this personal message to you and all other boys and girls at school. For you have shared in the hardships and dangers of a total war and you have shared no less in the triumph of the Allied Nations.

I know you will always feel proud to belong to a country which was capable of such supreme effort; proud, too, of parents and elder brothers and sisters who by their courage, endurance and enterprise brought victory. May these qualities be yours as you grow up and join in the common effort to establish among the nations of the world unity and peace.

George R.I.

Preface

This project began as a response to the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, first as a talk we gave to the HEMLOCS AGM in 2007 and now as a written record for the Society archive.

We started our research at the Huntingdon Record Office, using in particular, back numbers of The Hunts Post. We also drew heavily on *Huntingdonshire in the Second World War* by Caroline Clifford and Alan Akeroyd, published in 2007 by Tempus Publishing of Stroud in Gloucestershire, ISBN 978 0 7524 4420 8. We had access to Hemingford Grey Parish Council Minutes, Hemingford Grey School records, Hemingford Grey WI Minutes, the fourth Log Book of Hemingford Abbots School (1915-1978) and the Managers' Meeting Book (1933–1978), ARP circulars and details of air raid precautions, and documentation concerning the opening of the Peace Memorial Playing Field.

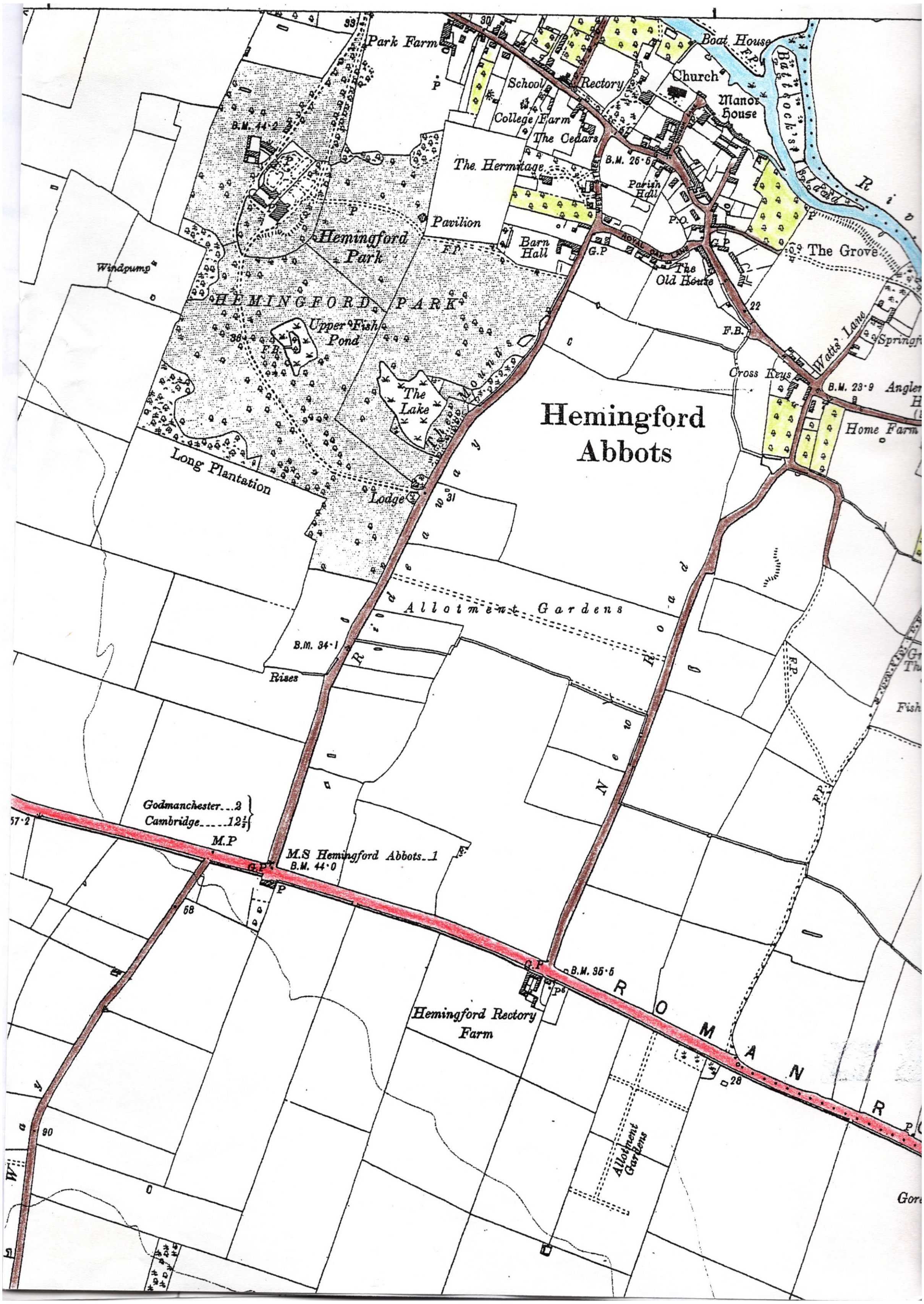
Our best sources of information, however, were the reminiscences of village residents who had actually lived here at the time, namely: Derek Clifton, Gay Parish, Gerald Rook, Peggy Seamark and David Viles. Their reminiscences are in the Appendix, page 26 onwards. There were also other contributors who did not wish their names to be mentioned. The input from all these people was invaluable. So too, the input, help and advice from Bridget Flanagan and thanks also to Tish Peek for information re the Playing Field.

By sheer chance it happened that as we were manning the HEMLOCS stall at the Hemingford Abbots Flower Festival in 2006, Anne Goddard introduced herself to us as having spent the war years here, not as an evacuee but staying with her grandparents in Ross Cottage, Hemingford Abbots. Although now living near Stansted she had fond memories of her time here and revisited whenever possible. Her memories too are in the Appendix.

We all know that The Manor, Hemingford Grey is one of the oldest inhabited houses in the country, if not the oldest, and has a beautiful garden. Less well known perhaps is that it, and the gramophone concerts and hospitality Lucy Boston and her friend Elizabeth Vellacott provided were a refuge from the horrors of war for servicemen and women from RAF Wyton, wounded American servicemen from hospitals in Cambridgeshire and members of *Les Amis de France Libre*. We are indebted to Diana Boston for allowing us to quote and use photographs from Lucy's book *Memories,* published in 1992 by Colt Books Ltd of Clarendon Road, Cambridge. The book is available from the Manor. ISBN 0905899 05 9.

The AGM talk took place to a background of wartime songs and the noise of a siren, refreshments afterwards including jam tarts and spam sandwiches; the latter at the particular request of Michael Knight, our then Chairman and all very much in the wartime spirit. We hope we have created something of that spirit again in these pages.

Pat Douglas
Sarah Power
March 2021


Park Farm
School
Rectory
Church
Boat House
Manor House
College Farm
The Cedars
The Hermitage
Parish Hall
Pavilion
Hemingford Park
HEMINGFORD PARK
Barn Hall
The Old House
The Grove
Windpump
Upper Fish Pond
The Lake
The Mounds
Watts' Lane
Cross Keys
Home Farm
Hemingford Abbots
Long Plantation
Lodge
Allotment Gardens
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Cambridge 12½
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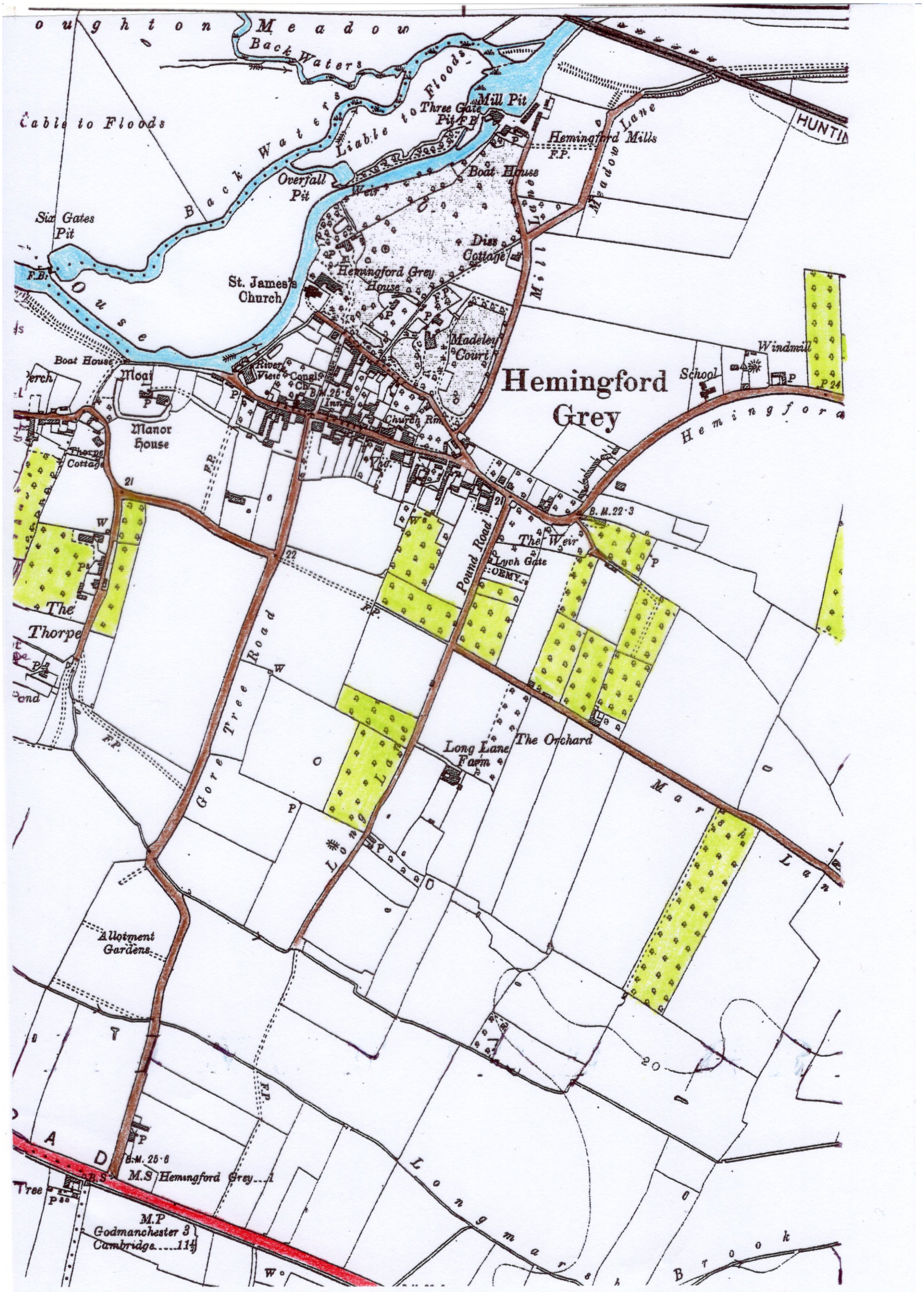
Allotment Gardens

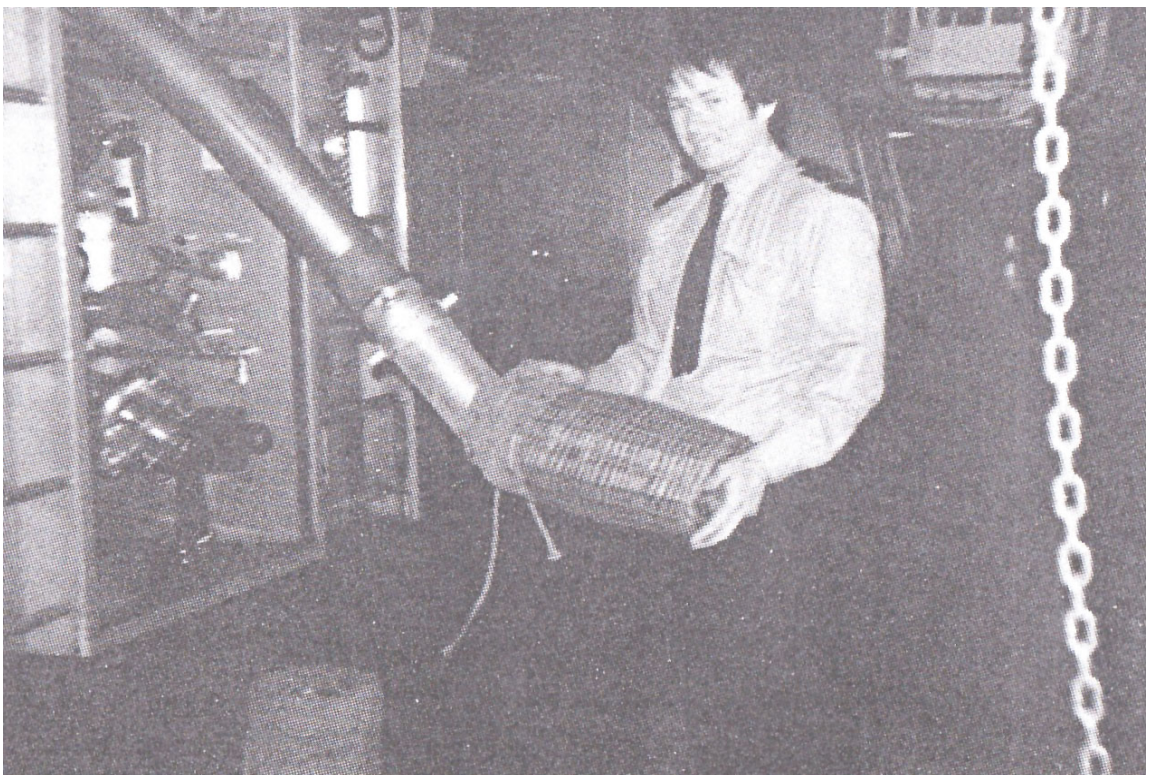

oughton Meadow
Back Waters
Liable to Floods
Three Gate Pit
F.B.
Mill Pit
Hemingford Mills
F.P.
Meadow Lane
Mill Lane
Boat House
Overfall Pit
Weir
Six Gates Pit
Ouse
Diss Cottage
Hemingford Grey House
St. James's Church
Madeley Court
Hemingford Grey
School
Windmill
Boat House
Moat
River View
Congl. Ch.
Inn
Church Rise
Manor House
Thorpe Cottage
The Weir
Lych Gate
CEMY.
Pound Road
The Thorpe
Gore Tree Road
Long Lane
Long Lane Farm
The Orchard
Marsh Lane
Allotment Gardens
M.S. Hemingford Grey 1
M.P. Godmanchester 3 Cambridge 11½
Longmarsh Brook
HUNTIN

3 September 1939
Britain is at war with Germany

David Viles, a pupil at Hemingford Grey School at the time, remembers that Sunday morning, not because at age four he fully understood what war meant, but because he saw a woman crying. Until that moment he hadn't realised that adults could cry. He also remembers his mother writing a letter of condolence to Mrs Clifton whose elder son was killed at Dunkirk. Later he remembers the sails of the windmill being dismantled so it couldn't be used as a marker for enemy aircraft.

The first thing to think about is what the villages were like in 1939. The maps show two very small villages. Hemingford Grey had approximately six hundred inhabitants and Hemingford Abbots about three hundred; everyone knew everyone else by name. The main roads through the villages – the High Streets - were metalled roads but most side roads were tracks. There were few motorcars; most people used bicycles or walked. The area around the villages was farmland and orchards. The whole of the area between St Ives Road and Marsh Lane was a series of orchards, growing apples, pears, plums and cherries. There were arable farms, the land worked by horses. Mr Radford ran a dairy farm. Many of the men worked on the land and women also. There were sand and gravel workings and working mills. There was also employment in St Ives, which at that time had a railway station and a gas works, situated behind what used to be the car dealers in London Road. In Filbert's Walk there was a basket maker's where, as well as the normal products, wicker filters were made for fire fighters to use when water was pumped from the river and also wicker containers for dropping supplies from aircraft, probably arms and supplies for the French Resistance or SOE.

A basketwork filter made for the Fire Service, used when taking water from the rivers or ponds: by kind permission of Charlotte Harrison from 'Old Industries of St Ives' by Ken Ballard (pub: Friends of the Norris Museum



Both villages had shops and a Post Office and their own primary schools. Mr Watts ran a large general shop where The Willow B&B is and a smaller shop in Common Lane, attached to his house (where the mock Elizabethan house has been built). Frequent deliveries of meat, bread and milk were made to both villages and the well-stocked village shops, selling groceries, hardware, knitting wools and children's clothing, meant that there was no need to leave the village to obtain everyday essentials. There was Matson's Garage and Taxi Service in the centre of Hemingford Abbots, with a cigarette machine selling *Woodbines* for 2d. a packet. *Players* were more expensive at 11d and half a penny a packet. You put in a shilling and the half penny change was stuck on the packet. There was a laundry in the High Street, Hemingford Grey employing seventeen girls and older ladies, a boiler boy and two men who operated the machinery. An old horse drawn van was used for collections and deliveries, petrol being too scarce.

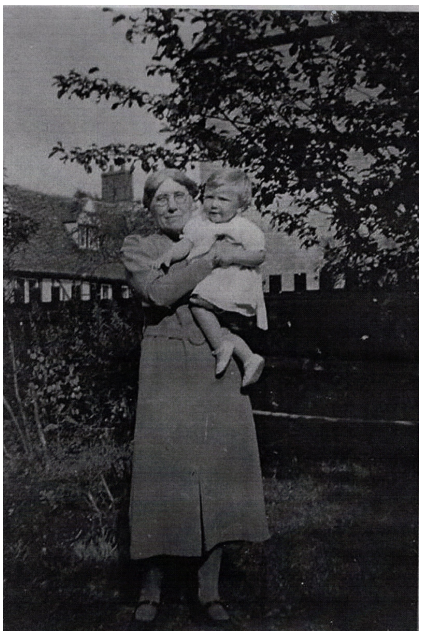
Hemingford Abbots (circa 1944)

Many gardens were large and most people grew their own vegetables and soft fruit. In January 1941 the Hemingford Grey Parish Council as part of the **Dig for Victory Campaign** approved a scheme for providing land for allotments for the use of residents in Filbert's Walk and Victoria Terrace. Although wartime shortages meant that providing for families was hard work, most had enough to eat. Farm workers were used to using a shotgun and there were plenty of rabbits, hares and pigeons to be shot; they were a cheap and useful addition to wartime rations. Everyone remembers suet puddings, which could be served with gravy or as a pudding with custard. Many families kept chickens and eggs were preserved by pickling. Surplus fruit and vegetables could be bottled.

Neither village had mains drainage. Some houses had water piped to them but many had a pump outside the back door. We were sent photographs by Anne Goddard who helped her grandfather to pump water at Ross Cottage in Common Lane. Anne's father was a policeman in London and his wife and young daughter spent the war years with his mother at Ross Cottage. Anne remembers being banished to the end of the garden or upstairs when the soil cart came to collect the contents of the earth closet. At the school the soil was buried in ash heaps from the heating boilers. Others tell of waste from the earth closet being buried in

trenches at the bottom of the garden to be used subsequently as compost for growing vegetables. Being Green is nothing new!

Anne Goddard with grandfather at the pump (Ross Cottage)



Anne with great aunt in the garden of Ross Cottage 1943

We have used the words 'village' or 'villages' indiscriminately but at that time people living here thought of them very much as separate villages. Even at the end of the war when there was a serious shortage of housing and overcrowding was common, Hemingford Abbots Parish Council thought it was inappropriate to expect young families to move away from their village to live in houses in Hemingford Grey and fought hard for the right to have their own Council houses built.

We expected to find lengthy records of war preparations in the Hemingford Grey Parish Council Minutes of the period but, initially, there is very little mention of the war. In November 1939 discussion centred on speed limits in the High Street and the ever-present problem of flooding and drainage. A receiving officer was appointed --- for rats' tails. The County would pay a penny per tail. It was not until April 1940 that, in connection with a boundary dispute in The Thorpe and Cherry Orchard the remark was made that ***'In war-time there is not likely to be much building development'***. In the same month the Parish Council received a reply from the County Council concerning access to the highway and maintenance of Meadowbank, saying ***'the matter would no doubt have been dealt with in the Autumn after the August vacation had not the war intervened. Since then the Board has been working under considerable difficulties (the Clerk, Deputy Clerk and Assistant Solicitor to the Board are all on active service)***. Later the Local Authority asked men to inform their heads of department if they were intending to volunteer for the armed forces.

Although War had not come as a complete surprise, few could have foreseen the difference it would make to life in the villages. Everyone had to carry a gas mask but Hemingford Abbots was one of only two villages in Huntingdonshire still waiting for gas masks to be delivered. A board was placed outside Hemingford Abbots Village Hall, painted with a special preparation, which would change colour in the presence of gas. Gerald Rook told us that road signs were removed, so that in the case of invasion the enemy would be confused, and barriers were prepared which could be put in place across some roads; all locks on the river were closed. Before the war the Government had requested a collection of old iron. Derek Clifton of Dockseys Farm told us that his father had been to the coast and seen a ship leaving laden with iron railings and other scrap iron, en route to Germany, he was told. The informant remarked,

'You wait, it will all come back as bombs'. It seems strange that we should have shipped scrap iron to Germany when many believed that war was inevitable. A War Savings Association was set up; sand to douse fires had to be provided and there was concern about the expense of maintaining fire fighting appliances. Parish Councils were involved with overseeing these events and in appointing suitable people to organise them. There was an influx of new people to the villages, evacuees, service personnel and civilians working for the military. More spaces were to be provided in the cemetery for non-parishioners. Hemingford Grey had to make a mortuary available. It was located in Miss Bevan's coach house (St Francis House). Fortunately it was never needed. Colonel and Mrs Watts arranged a First Aid Post at Hemingford Grey House for animals injured in air raids

The provision of places in the cemetery was an ongoing concern for the Parish Council. They wanted to extend the existing cemetery but lacked the funds to purchase more land. An application for a loan was made to the Ministry of Health but they were told in 1942 that loans were only being made for the war effort or in the case of a threat to public health. Hemingford Grey was deemed to have enough spaces in the existing cemetery to last for at least five years. It seems to have been a time of continuing frustration and niggling difficulties for the Parish Council, in which the problems with the cemetery played no small part. The gravedigger who had been digging graves for twenty-five years wanted to retire but nobody could be found to take his place; presumably most men were fully committed to war work or had enough to do growing food and providing for their families. Eventually a man from St Ives agreed to take on the task of grave digging. What he failed to tell the Parish Council was that he would dig the grave but did not consider he had to wait around to fill it in. Once again the 'retired' gravedigger had to be brought back to complete the job. It was not that the Parish Council did not get involved with what was happening with the war, rather that it was their duty to keep the village running as normally as possible in the face of great difficulties and shortages.

The fear of fire caused by incendiary bombs was very real. In fact only two fires occurred in the Hemingfords, one was in the kitchen at the canteen and the other in a barn, but the local fire-fighters attended with members of the ARP to render assistance. People were expected to keep buckets of water and sand ready for use. Some places, like the local bakery in Hemingford Grey where Gerald's father was the baker, already had a stirrup pump as a precaution against fire from the coal-fired bread ovens. A motorised fire-fighting appliance was housed in an emergency fire station in front of Grey Hall. Originally there had been a handcart and hand pump kept in a field at the end of Rideaway. Hemingford Abbots had an ambulance, kept in Royal Oak Lane. A small van had been converted which unfortunately was not quite long enough to take a stretcher, so the patient would have been very uncomfortable. Many families had dug their own air raid shelters in the garden, lined and roofed with corrugated iron, with soil heaped on top on which grass was allowed to grow. Some remember playing in them as children but they did not seem to have been much used during air raids, although one lady remembers diving under tables in Hemingford Abbots Village Hall during a Punch and Judy show, when the air raid warning was given.

At a school inspection one small boy was asked what ARP stood for and he replied **'Are Ramsey Prepared?'** The reply, **'Yes indeed, as is the whole of Huntingdonshire!'** Some questioned whether it was necessary to be so vigilant in such quiet country areas. Was it really necessary for ARP volunteers to be on duty? The answer was yes for the following reasons:- our small towns could be mistaken for other areas, pilots could be five or even twenty-five miles off course, a pilot might be forced to divert because of anti-aircraft guns or to avoid fighter planes. It is possible that undefended areas could be selected to create confusion – **'bombs could reduce our small towns to the state of Guernica or the Cities of the Plain'.** In the face of such an obvious need most places were able to raise a volunteer force of Home Guard and ARP (Air Raid Patrols) to ensure the safety of their neighbours. These men gave

their time and put themselves at risk for no reward. It was certainly no small commitment they made to their communities.

On 12 September 1939, the following item appeared in the Hunts Post.

The Secretary of State wishes the following message from HM the King to be conveyed to the Civil Defence Services. Now that the emergency has come I wish to express to all the Civil Defence Volunteers my appreciation of the way they have responded to the call and of the fine spirit in which they are facing the long hours and discomfort inseparable from the performance of their duties. The Queen and I have seen for ourselves something of your organisations and we have no doubt whatever that the courage of the volunteers will be equal to whatever tasks may be in store for them.

Signed George R. *(Sent to the Hunts Post 12 September 1939)*

Weekend training camps run by Colonel Duberly took place. Hemingford Park became the temporary home for Royal Engineers. They lived in wooden huts in the grounds of Hemingford Park and trained for bridge building by making bridges across the river in Hemingford Grey. The concrete bases of their Nissen huts can still be seen in the Regatta Field. David Viles remembers peeping into one of these huts with his friends and seeing a model bridge made of what looked like Meccano.

View showing Nissen huts in the Regatta field WWII

It was at this time that New Road was metalled to take the heavy vehicles travelling to and from Hemingford Park. Later the same huts at Hemingford Park would be used to house Italian POWs and in 1943 captured German aircrew, returned to Europe from Canada. There was a curfew at 8.00pm and they could be identified around the village by the uniforms they wore; the Italians had a large yellow circle sewn on to their jackets. Later still, displaced persons,

Latvians or Lithuanians, have been mentioned. On the Common there was a searchlight battery and an anti-aircraft gun manned by six members of the Royal Artillery.

It seems that even the POWs became part of the community. There were no guards as such at Hemingford Park. The men worked on the local farms and in the basket making workshop and were allowed to grow vegetables in gardens around their huts. They played football with the local team on Vicarage Fields and were invited to eat with local families. Peggy Seamark remembers a German POW teaching the children to ice skate on the village pond; a ship in a bottle was presented to one family and another POW made sandals for the children. In addition to POWs and evacuees, there were also Land Girls in the village. One, from Ossett in Yorkshire stayed with Peggy and her family, where the two girls in the family and she shared a bed, sleeping top to toe. At the same time the front room was occupied by an Army sergeant, his wife and two children and three POWs who worked on Radford's farm regularly came to supper.

By the end of August 1940 two ARP wardens had been on fire watch at the First Aid Post night after night but the threat of raids had become so frequent that more volunteers were needed. Following a Parish meeting in Hemingford Abbots sixteen men volunteered. At the same time Huntingdon managed three volunteers and Godmanchester one. St Ives RDC reported no problems with recruitment. Women were not left out, the WVS organised canteen facilities; every report of Home Guard and ARP exercises seemed to end with tea being provided in a church or school hall by the WVS. The WVS also organised a laundry for the use of evacuees in The Priory in St Ives, which ran successfully for five years during the war. ARP and Home Guard volunteers were committed to sessions of training, exercises, church parades and long periods on watch in addition to their normal daytime jobs

Warnings of possible air raids were made by rattles, whistles and eventually sirens. The nearest siren to the Hemingfords was in St Ives – it could be heard when the wind was in an easterly direction and that of Huntingdon when the wind was in a westerly direction. No siren could be heard if the wind was in the north or south. It seems strange that in a time when wages were low the Hemingford volunteers were not only giving their time voluntarily but were paying for the lighting of the first aid post out of their own pockets by putting pennies in the gas meter. In 1941 a telephone was requested urgently for the Hemingford ARP Post so that proper warnings could be given. It was signed by twenty-four men, fire fighters, wardens and a special constable. The reply addressed to '*Dear Coote'* and signed by the County ARP Officer, replied that no more telephones could be installed following an instruction issued in May 1940. The ARP were on duty every night, making sure that no lights were visible on the ground and ready to help in any emergency.

Members of the Home Guard, which had its headquarters in Springfields Barn, were on duty guarding the railway line which passed across the Common and near the river at Hemingford Grey and was an important link to the marshalling yards in March. It crossed the St Ives *'Keep Area*', defined as an area which would be defended by local soldiers and for which no withdrawal orders would ever be given. The guard post has been described as a sort of circular metal shed which could be swivelled to look up and down the line. The only machine-gun kept in the villages was under the care of Derek Clifton's father, who had been a machine gunner in the First World War, so knew how to handle it. The other members of the Home Guard drilled with shotguns if they had them or broom handles until the proper equipment arrived. However it never did! Two bombs fell on the Common, but no one was injured and the railway line was untouched. The depressions they left in the ground are still there. We were told that local boys went to the Common to try to collect debris from the bombs. On one particular occasion an incendiary bomb landed near St Neots – the fire was clearly visible from Hemingford Abbots. The only casualty noted was the remains of a charred pheasant. On 22 December 1940 a high explosive bomb landed at the Woolpack crossroads. It was not until 5 July 1942 that

investigations revealed that the bomb had not exploded. A bomb disposal crew dealt with a 1000kg bomb which had been buried twenty-five feet below ground level for about eighteen months.

The lower part of the Common was protected from any chance of gliders landing by wires stretched across between tripods. There is a record of the farmer requesting their temporary removal so that hay could be harvested. On the Meadow between St Ives and Hemingford Grey trenches were dug by the Home Guard, overseen by Colonel Watts, to make aircraft landings impossible. Men and boys were set to work to help dig the trenches by hand. Groups of boys from the local senior school helped with the task and if the same boys belonged to village groups, eg Scouts, they had the doubtful privilege of being able to do more than one tour of digging duty, as some remember with indignation. Lucy Boston's son Peter was staying at the Manor while waiting for his call up papers and was press ganged into helping with the trench digging. After a morning of doing this, he straightened his back, looked at what they had achieved that morning, looked at the size of the meadow and at the numbers of people digging and decided it was a waste of time so he didn't return after lunch. By 1943 large areas of Hemingford Meadow were under cultivation for potatoes.

Arrivals

What excitement, what a scurry,
Tying labels in a hurry,
Mother shouting from the stairs,
Have you got your socks in pairs?
Haversacks full to the brim,
Clothes all folded neat and trim,
Round each neck is tied a label,
To tell who's Joan and who is Mabel.

Evacuees started arriving almost immediately.

Not just children, but whole families and businesses. An iron and steel company, for instance, set up their offices in Grey Hall. The Hemingfords were part of the St Ives Rural area, and at its peak, something like 6,554 evacuees were involved. The first wave, in September 1939, came mostly from London and surrounding areas. The second wave, in May 1941, came as part of the **Special Scheme of Evacuation of South Coast Towns,** from places such as Portsmouth. The local billeting officer was John Winter, Huntingdon Town Clerk. Jack Giddins and Mr FW Norris were responsible for their welfare in the two villages.

Not everyone welcomed the evacuees. Some people complained about the cost of keeping them, some felt they were having a holiday in the country which they didn't have to pay for. Prosecution and a fine could be imposed for refusing to accept an evacuee, but no instances were recorded in the Hemingfords.

Evacuees arrived with a gas mask, ration book, national registration card and spare clothing. Children under five had to be accompanied by a parent or responsible adult. Those aged five and over could come on their own. If an individual child lost his or her gas mask or ration book, another one was issued free, otherwise the family or other adult had to pay for a replacement. *(Home Security Circular 47/1940)*

On arrival, the evacuees were medically examined and de-loused! Many were sent to sick bays and hostels, usually with scabies or impetigo. Sometimes the examination was not quite

as careful as it might be. One irate host phoned the medical officer to complain that obviously no-one had thought to take the children's socks off and if anyone in her family developed impetigo she would hold the council responsible! It also helped if the children were good and house-trained. The nearest sick bay was in St Ives; children could also be sent to the Leys Hospital in Cambridge or St Peter's Hospital in Bedford. There were Nursery Homes for babies and pre-school children at the Brampton Park Hostel, The Holme in Godmanchester and at St Edward's House in Huntingdon.

The whole business of evacuation was an enormous undertaking, particularly at a time of stress and hardship, with family members away serving and it being difficult to get food. Also you had very little say about who and how many were billeted on you. It wasn't like having one's grandchildren to stay for a few days! It was hugely difficult too for the evacuees themselves, many of whom had probably never been away from home before, never seen grass other than in a city park and for whom the whole way of life would have been totally different. One little boy aged five was reported as being unable to feed himself, didn't know a spoon from a fork, ate eggs complete with their shells, and couldn't wash or dress himself. It was particularly difficult to accommodate handicapped or disabled children, yet enormous trouble was taken to do so. A child suffering from rheumatism for instance would need a sympathetic billet. An asthmatic child would need a room of her own and a kapok mattress, without feather pillow or down. Many children had lost siblings and parents in the blitz or from enemy action. Genuine efforts were made to keep families together but it was not always possible.

Parents tried their best to keep in touch, but children did get lost. For example children being moved from one billet to another at short notice or being sent to hospital or back from hospital without parents or foster parents being informed. Also efforts to contact parents were difficult, some bombed out or gone away. Others visited regularly. The father of one evacuee child in Hemingford Abbots worked for Basssets and always came with bags of Liquorice All Sorts then returned home with fruit and vegetables. One local family remembered an electrician billeted on them putting in a row of transformers and torch bulbs upstairs with beaten out Vaseline tins behind them to reflect the light.

Inevitably there was a huge amount of paperwork involved One little boy lost his glasses, for instance, and it took six letters going to and fro between various bodies before he could get a new pair. There were lists for everything: medical supplies that a foster home could apply for, money that foster parents could claim, rent that families were charged, billeting contributions they could be expected to pay, money for medical treatment. The list of supplies needed in connection with evacuee children included lint, bandages, plasters, Dettol, mending wools, elastic, wide black and white cotton tape. The authority for issuing medical supplies was the Local Education Authority with the consent of the County Medical Officer.

An unaccompanied child could receive medical treatment free and immediately. Accompanied children were not eligible for free treatment, the family had to make its own arrangements and pay. If they couldn't pay they could apply to the Relieving Officer and get an order from the District Medical Officer or the Public Assistance Committee <u>before</u> the doctor could attend (emergencies excepted!) The cost for calling in a doctor was 7s.6d. Families were not always very happy about this, as in the towns they came from they could have had the advice from a hospital or the welfare free! Parental contributions were assessed by local Social Welfare Officers who were also responsible for collecting the money.

The provision of toothbrushes was the responsibility of the host parents, but some did not reckon they should have to pay for such things. The County Medical Officer agreed there should be a scheme for providing toothbrushes. He wrote to Boots in Nottingham asking them to quote for two hundred toothbrushes, even enclosing a diagram of the sort of toothbrush the Senior Dental Surgeon thought appropriate. Needless to say no toothbrushes were

forthcoming! There were also requests for hot water bottles for sick children, it being virtually impossible for ordinary people to obtain them. The Education Authority replied that it had no power to purchase hot water bottles, rubber or stone, so people should try heating a brick and wrapping it in woollen material instead!

Bathing was an issue, many host families still only having the weekly bath in the kitchen! The WVS requested that a bath be installed at their premises in the Old Grammar School in Huntingdon at a cost of £35.5s.6d. The request was approved as *'the need for the provision of bathing facilities for evacuees appeared to be very great'.* Not everybody agreed. If the evacuees had to be bathed, then the slipper baths at the Public Assistance Institution would appear to be adequate, but then there would be the question of stoking. It would be wasteful to have the boiler constantly hot in case an evacuee turned up, yet it took a long time for the fire to get going. And, as one local organiser was heard to comment, it was not only evacuees that needed to bath, some very decent people might need bathing facilities as well. People could also go to the Emergency Medical Service Hospital at Walnut Tree House, where there was constant hot water, trained staff available and a laundry on the spot.

The legal minimum provision for an evacuee was a bed and water. A dirty unheated attic containing a bedstead for a woman with two children, no bedding and no access to water as the kitchen was out of bounds, was not acceptable. Two rooms properly furnished for a mother with a large family, with access through a window as the owner of the house did not want them trooping through her hall, was also not acceptable. Needless to say the husband was outraged and swept them all back to the bombing, saying he wasn't going to have his family treated like monkeys! The question of husbands raised much feeling. There was nothing about husbands in the Evacuation Order. Some hosts were happy to accept husbands visiting, others were not. The wives were concerned that if their husbands were not allowed to visit, they might go off and find someone else. The solution was a punt, at two shillings for the evening!

Flower pickers behind Rosenthal, Hemingford Grey

It wasn't always the families who were unhappy about the arrangements for their children. In a letter dated 10 July 1943, Dr Lilian Phillips wrote that during her regular school medical examination she came across Denis Wilkins and Sidney Cables, both billeted with Miss King in High Street, Hemingford Grey. Miss King already had two other boys from the Public Assistance Institution. She was in full time agricultural work flower picking.

Dr Phillips did not consider it a very suitable billet and thought the boys would benefit from a change. The older boy should be attending the boys school in St Ives and it might be better to find him a billet there. Dr Phillips' fee for the examination of evacuee school children under the Special Evacuation Scheme was £1.11s.6d. per session.

For some the change to a rural life was too difficult. Many of the evacuees billeted in Hemingford Abbots returned to London, because they found the village too quiet and there was no evening entertainment. Amid all the difficulties, however, there were some very real success stories and many evacuees and foster families kept in touch for years. Officials too spoke of help and kindness received. A Mr AB Bailey, representative of the LCC wrote to the Senior Medical Officer *'thanking him for his help and cooperation in connection with his work for evacuee children and to him personally. He had greatly enjoyed his work and the kindness of local people had been a great contribution'.* One mother in Chelmsford wrote that she quite agreed her boys should be moved to a new billet because the lady they were with was 70 and getting on in years. Their sister however could stay because she could look after herself and be of use to the lady. Another wrote to say that if the foster mother thought it advisable to send her son to hospital with his ears she would agree and thank you for your kindness to my son. Mabel Allen in Hemingford Abbots, received an illuminated personal message from the Queen in 1943 acknowledging her work in housing evacuees.

Village Schools

Hemingford Abbots Village School

Note the tape on the windows as a precaution against flying shards of glass caused by bomb blasts

Inevitably both Hemingford Schools were immediately and very much involved and study of their school records reveals considerable effort and initiative in giving local children and evacuees every opportunity of a good education, despite difficulties in acquiring materials and equipment. Teachers came and went, children came and went, often without notice. On one occasion two evacuee boys were removed by the Police and moved to an LCC Home at Alexandra Hall in Hatfield. Doctors visited, dentists visited, social workers visited, inspectors visited. Attendance records were meticulous and the figures generally high.

To start with, evacuees in Hemingford Abbots came into school for the morning session and local children in the afternoon, changing over each week. This moved to the groups coming

into school on alternate days, including Saturdays. They also experimented with using the Village Hall and the school, alternating week by week. A visiting HMI for Religious Instruction commented that the Headmistress gave a very descriptive lesson on *Joseph* and a shorter one on the *Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard,* although he felt that though the children listened attentively, their co-operation might have been enlisted more than it was. He appreciated that the school was operating under great difficulties and that under more normal circumstances the syllabus would doubtless be supplemented by courses on the Old Testament and Church Catechism. Cod liver oil was delivered for the children, the school nurse visited and they were all pronounced clean and then immunised against diphtheria. On one occasion the school was closed by order of Dr Moss Blundell because of an outbreak of measles, mumps and chicken pox.

In the summer there were school holidays for Ascension Day. Sports Days took place on the local cricket field, the rector providing prizes and tea. There were Christmas parties each year, with toys and money for the children, but no tea in 1942 because of food rationing. In April 1944 Daphne Perkins passed the first half of the scholarship test for the Grammar School.

Meetings of the Hemingford Abbots' School Managers, chaired by the Rector, Reverend RW Balleine met regularly. In July 1939 there was a credit balance of £2.18s 2d. A tender for coal at £3.0s.6d was sent to the LEA. Mr Edward Herbert offered the field behind the Parish Hall to the village as a playing field, chiefly for the children, its management to be in the hands of the School for the time being. The farmer using the field was asked to arrange that *his animals and small boys playing should not disagree with each other*. Its purpose was to be a playing field for children under the age of sixteen, but if the whole area was not required for the children some could be used for '*any other recreational purpose for the good of the village, eg bowling green or tennis court'*. By July 1941 the playing field had been handed over to Trustees, including John William Winter, already a School Manager. George Herbert had given a strip of land for widening Oaks Lane, an entrance to the field had been made beside the Parish Hall; Dolly Read was cultivating the triangular piece of land behind the hall as a garden. There was concern that widening Oaks Lane and possibly Rideaway and the road between the villages would encourage more traffic

In June 1942 ten applications were received for the post of Uncertificated Head Teacher to replace Miss Cadd. Mrs Anderson of Houghton was appointed in August. Her letter to the School Managers is interesting:

'*Sept 1942*

On taking the post at this School, I find hardly anything to use. The younger children do not appear to be catered for at all; no reading books, infants exercise books, drawing paper, not a pencil in the school – in spite of these things being entered in the stock book. I have had to make reading cards etc to occupy the children. I start with a debt, so cannot pull up all at once.

I write this just to cover myself in case of illness, but I would rather not make a permanent entry in the Log Book, as I hope to get straightened up in time.

JR Anderson (Mrs)
Uncertificated Head Teacher'

On 19 December 1946 Mrs Anderson finished her duties as Head Teacher.

As well as individual children and families evacuated here, there were two large self-contained groups; one a class of twenty-five children from Torrington Park School in Hornsey, North London, complete with their Headmaster and another teacher, Miss McLennan. The other the Ramsgate Abbey Boys Preparatory School from Ramsgate in Kent. Both were compulsory evacuations. The Ramsgate School moved into Madeley Court where stables and outhouses were turned into classrooms and dormitories for the boys, staff going over the road to *Rosenthal* to sleep.

The North London children were given their own classroom at **Hemingford Grey School,** brought their own desks and materials and did their own lessons, but played with the local children at breaktime and of course were billeted around the village. They actually arrived two days before war was declared.

The London Headmaster was a Mr Spilman, dubbed instantly by the local children as Mr Spillmilk! Those were the days when children were given bottles of milk at morning break, sometimes put on the boiler to warm up and with a cardboard top with a hole to push in for a straw. The boys soon learned that if you pushed the whole top in hard, the milk sprayed out everywhere in a great fountain which they thought was lovely fun. Needless to say the Headmistress was not amused and thereafter spent a long time every morning pushing the holes in properly herself! School fire drills changed to air raid drills with the children being told to dive under the desks for safety. The boys discovered that they could make lovely snorting noises out of the side of their gas mask, again the Headmistress was not amused and there were no more gas mask tests! At one stage there was a plague of cabbage white butterflies with whole armies of caterpillars seen marching across roads and fields. The government issued a directive that they should be exterminated and the children were told to bring dead butterflies and caterpillars to school for which they would be paid. Needless to say the smell was appalling.

The Headmistress was a Miss Nancy Robinson, known generally as Nance. She was quite a martinet. One particular morning Peggy Seamark, now a very upright member of the community, remembers walking along to school from Victoria Terrace with some friends and their throwing themselves into the ditch alongside the road for a bit of a lark as Nance, who also lived in Victoria Terrace, cycled by. Of course, they failed to realise that she could still see them from the vantage point of her sit-up-and-beg bicycle and as she got off to reprimand them, they shot off across the road into a field of kale with Nance in hot pursuit. She was certainly very cross with them when they eventually got to school, but nothing like as cross as their parents. Everybody in the village knew everything about everybody else and if you misbehaved you let your parents down.

The School Record kept by Miss Robinson at this time demonstrates that despite the war effort and air raid warnings and the momentous events taking place, great efforts were made to maintain normality. The school was constantly cold. The children had to go home for lunch but often got so wet they failed to return in the afternoon. In February 1940 some children were unable to attend at all because of floods. Attendance percentages were regularly noted, pupils took annual tests and prepared for entrance to secondary school. Evacuees seemed to come and go quite regularly. For instance, twenty-five arrived from Hornsey at the start of term in September, by the middle of October this number had increased to forty, then in January 1940, twenty-three girls went back to London. In June 1940 the older children were having First Aid lessons. In July they were invited to see a performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by the boys of the Ramsgate School. In July 1943 Police Sergeant Craghill gave a talk entitled *Dangerous Objects* about incendiary bombs and butterfly bombs that were designed to hang in rafters and go off later. In June 1944 a Minister of Publicity came and spoke to the children who were collecting books for the Forces. Book collections took place quite frequently and the children received certificates for their efforts. David Viles for example

reached the dizzy heights of Corporal, his future wife made Field Marshal! There were frequent drives for collecting things, especially waste paper for salvage and supplies of paper for the children were strictly controlled. All work had to be done in rough before being transferred to proper exercise books. Rough paper was kept in a folder on the chair by the teacher's desk. Ink was watered down. There were school concerts ('*Daddy wouldn't buy me a Bow-Wow'),* and David remembers being taken to a house to watch *Mickey Mouse,* but the television broke down in two minutes!

An HMI report dated July 1940 showed pupils in Stage V had reached a good average; one boy had brought the average mark down in Standard IV; Standard III were weak in several subjects, especially history; two children in Standard II were below average. Standard I were working nicely. Two newcomers were very poor at their work, reading particularly. Pastel work generally was the weakest subject, oral lessons among the top classes were good.

David joined the London group for special lessons in preparation for the grammar school entrance examination. The teacher drove and stretched the children in a way he had not experienced before. Lists of spellings every morning before prayers for instance, and being encouraged to become more imaginative in his writing, phrases such as '*sedge fringed banks of the meandering river Ouse'.* The London School went back at the end of the war. The Ramsgate Abbey School stayed nineteen years. David learnt on 30 June 1944 that he had gained admission to Huntingdon Grammar School.

The following article from the Hunts Post, dated 28 June 1945 marked a fitting end to evacuation:

Sad Hearts As We Bid Evacuees Farewell

St Ives and district bade an official farewell to its Evacuees on Friday when about 70 children joined a special train, and the sun shone for their return – as it had in September 1939 when they first arrived. The Free Church Schoolroom which had been used as the Evacuee Reception Medical Inspection Centre was again the assembly point and soon after 9.00 am small parties began to arrive from villages by bus or WVS cars.

All the kiddies had gifts to take home, varying from a kitten to a bag of strawberries.

They sat in groups whilst the medical inspection took place and during this interval coloured labels with names and addresses were tied to each child.

Some were excited, others sad and bewildered as if a second upheaval was too much in the short span of their lives. A foster mother was in tears at losing a small boy she had come to look on as her own.

One organiser said it was difficult to comfort these sad hearts but she felt proud to belong to this little town which had received the children with such mixed feelings and had then taken them into their hearts and cared for them.

The children were received at St Ives Station by an escort and quickly sorted themselves into groups. The long special train having on board refreshments for the journey arrived to time and the train marshal saw that the children were accommodated according to the different colours. Thus with a waving of arms and leaving many sad hearts behind, the non stop journey to London began.

An onlooker expressed what all who watched their departure felt – she prayed that the horrors of war from which these children had been saved would not darken their lives in the future to which they had gone.

The Grammar School

The Grammar School was behind the Cromwell Museum where the ex Anglia Water building now stands. Some children cycled. Others went by bus leaving at 8.30am and returning at 5.30pm. It would have been very dark with no street lamps or house lights and the lights on the vehicles themselves very restricted. Homework was done by oil lamp or candlelight, later electricity. Children often worked before and after school too. Derek, for instance, was expected to care for his father's farm horses, rack them as he called it. He racked them so much that after the war he only agreed to join his father on the farm if he got a tractor! Another child cut mangleworzels and put them through a mangle for cattle food. In the evening, families would read, listen to the radio, ITMA for example *(It's That Man Again),* but never Lord Haw Haw and his propaganda, also play cards, dominoes and tiddlywinks, always with thick black curtains at the windows! There was billiards and a library in the Reading Room. Men would go to the pub, often by bike, piling their bikes against the pub wall in the order they arrived, then taking them back in the same order when they left, pretty uncomfortable if you were 6' tall and the bike you picked up was meant for a shorty! There were Scouts, St John's Ambulance and Sunday School, and WI in each village, many of whose members did sterling work with the WVS. There were weeks during which money was raised by dances and other social events for the Services. Money raised in Huntingdonshire helped equip *HMS Ramsey.* There were sports days with prizes being sixpenny National Savings Stamps, also football on a pitch where Vicarage Fields now stands and cricket in Hemingford Abbots on land donated by Mrs Carr of Hemingford Park, her son, AW Carr, being an England and county player. Players had to wear whites. The prisoners of war often joined in these games. The regatta was cancelled. Troops from Scotland taught girls to Scottish dance in the Church Room in Hemingford Grey.

The Manor at Hemingford Grey

Lucy Boston placing a record on the gramophone

Air and ground crew from RAF Wyton listening to music at The Manor, WW2

Lucy Boston moved into the Manor on 31 May 1939. The winter of 1939/40 was very hard. The river was completely frozen so that one could skate from Huntingdon to St Ives. When the ice thawed, icebergs came down the stream. Flooding was extensive. Remembering her experience of nursing in France in the First World War and playing classical music on her gramophone for patients in the evening, Lucy wrote to the Welfare Officer at Wyton Aerodrome offering her house for hospitality, convalescence and music. So began the concerts that brought pleasure and an escape from the horrors of war to large numbers of airmen, ground crew and WAAF, sometimes as many as thirty in an evening; also some Non-Combatants employed in sewage work in Fenstanton.

Music was played on a handmade hand-wound Expert Accoustic Gramophone made by Ellis Michael Ginn in 1935 kindly loaned by Captain Toller. It used fibre needles that had to be sharpened regularly. There were two concerts a week. Friday night was *highbrow* night, *Enigma Variations* a favourite. Above the music, the droning roar of bombers flying overhead could be heard.

Vincent was one of the first of many pilots from RAF Wyton to attend Lucy's concerts. He was sent to Malta then moved on to Egypt where he was killed in action three months later. His letter is dated 5 December 1940.

Dear Mrs Boston

Here I am again! I do hope you have received some of my letters by now. I have not had any at all sent here yet, they do take a time. I am quite sure I shall go crazy when one does come.

Give Elisabeth my love and ask her how the painting is going. I just close my eyes and I can see the dining room fireplace, looking so very grand with its 'Wyton figures' keeping beautifully warm. I am sure it must be wonderful beside the fire these days. I have nearly forgotten just what a fire looks like, one made with logs and coal and things, not one made by incendiary bombs, which as you can well imagine, are very numerous.

Have you been having bombs at all Wyton way? I do hope not, if they so much as even chip one little stone of your most beautiful home, they will have me to reckon with.

I heard recently that the old Squadron had left Wyton, do you still have fellows for tea etc? I did love it and it helps an awful lot when I think of the happy times I have spent at your home. I wonder how many years will go before I see it and you again.

Cheerio Mrs Boston,
Love to you all
Sincerely yours
Vincent xxx

PS I will be able to write a more interesting letter when I hear from you, but at the present there is very little to write about.

Wounded American servicemen from hospitals around Cambridgeshire were regular visitors. They were entertained in various gardens along the river in both villages, enjoyed boat trips and were given tea at the Boathouse by Mr and Mrs Giddins. One wrote back after the war that '*The Old Manor is what every American wants and doesn't know it.'* The Manor was on the books of *Les Amis de France Libre* to receive for leave or convalescence whoever they sent. Two eighteen-year old Free French who had decided to escape to join de Gaulle, were the first to arrive. The Manor was also on the list drawn up for the Civil Defence by architects

Sidney Inskipp Ladds and William Lee of historic buildings considered worth saving if hit by a German bomb.

There were evacuees too. One evening Lucy and her friend, Elizabeth Vellacott, arrived home to find a woman and a toddler sitting on the back door step. They came from the East End and had been sitting outside the house for some time having spent the previous night lying like sardines on the floor of a church hall in St Ives. No one had told Lucy to expect them. Mrs Lilley took over some of the cleaning, the toddler addressed Lucy as 'bomb-bomb'. Mrs Lilley was the last evacuee to leave the district and the whole time she was here never got over her fear of the countryside.

7 May 1945

And so it all came to an end. Church bells rang, sirens blew, hooters sounded and the partying began. There was a street party outside Watt's shop, now *The Willow*, with a piano brought out into the street and dancing round a bonfire. But there would also have been sadness. Servicemen were still abroad, many of them prisoners of war. Many had been terribly wounded. There were homes and lives to be rebuilt.

What came across very strongly during our conversations with people who were here at the time was the way that everyone just got on with their lives. Those who were children at the time seem to have happy memories of childhood but many were aware of how hard life was for their parents. They may have lacked all the things we take for granted but they were very involved with the life and work of the village. There was the constant threat of air raids, food and clothing were rationed but the social life went on. Hemingford Abbots Village Hall was a service canteen by day but village socials were still held on some evenings. As one lady remarked, dances at St Ives Corn Exchange were much more exciting now that there were so many servicemen to dance with. Although the people we talked to were very young during the War, the period was significant enough to have left them with vivid and lasting memories.

One person still to come home was No.950273 Aircraftman First Class James Ronald LABORNE, Royal Air Force, missing as the result of enemy action at Tobruk on 21 June 1942. His father, Maxim Laborne of High Street, Hemingford Grey, received the following letter soon after.

Telephone No.: SPRINGWELL (GLOUCESTER) [illegible]
Telegraphic Address:
RECORDS TELEX, GLOUCESTER.
Any communications on the subject of this letter should be addressed to:
AIR OFFICER i/c RECORDS,
Address as opposite,
and the following number quoted:—
Your Ref.: C7/950273

RECORD OFFICE,
ROYAL AIR FORCE,
GLOUCESTER.

Date 10th July 1942

Dear Sir,

In confirmation of my telegram of the 8th July 1942, I regret to inform you that your son No.950273 Aircraftman First Class James Ronald LABORNE, Royal Air Force, is missing as the result of enemy action at Tobruk on the 21st June 1942.

This does not necessarily mean that he is killed or wounded. I will communicate with you again immediately I have any further news, and would be obliged if you, on your part, would write to me should you hear anything of your son from unofficial sources.

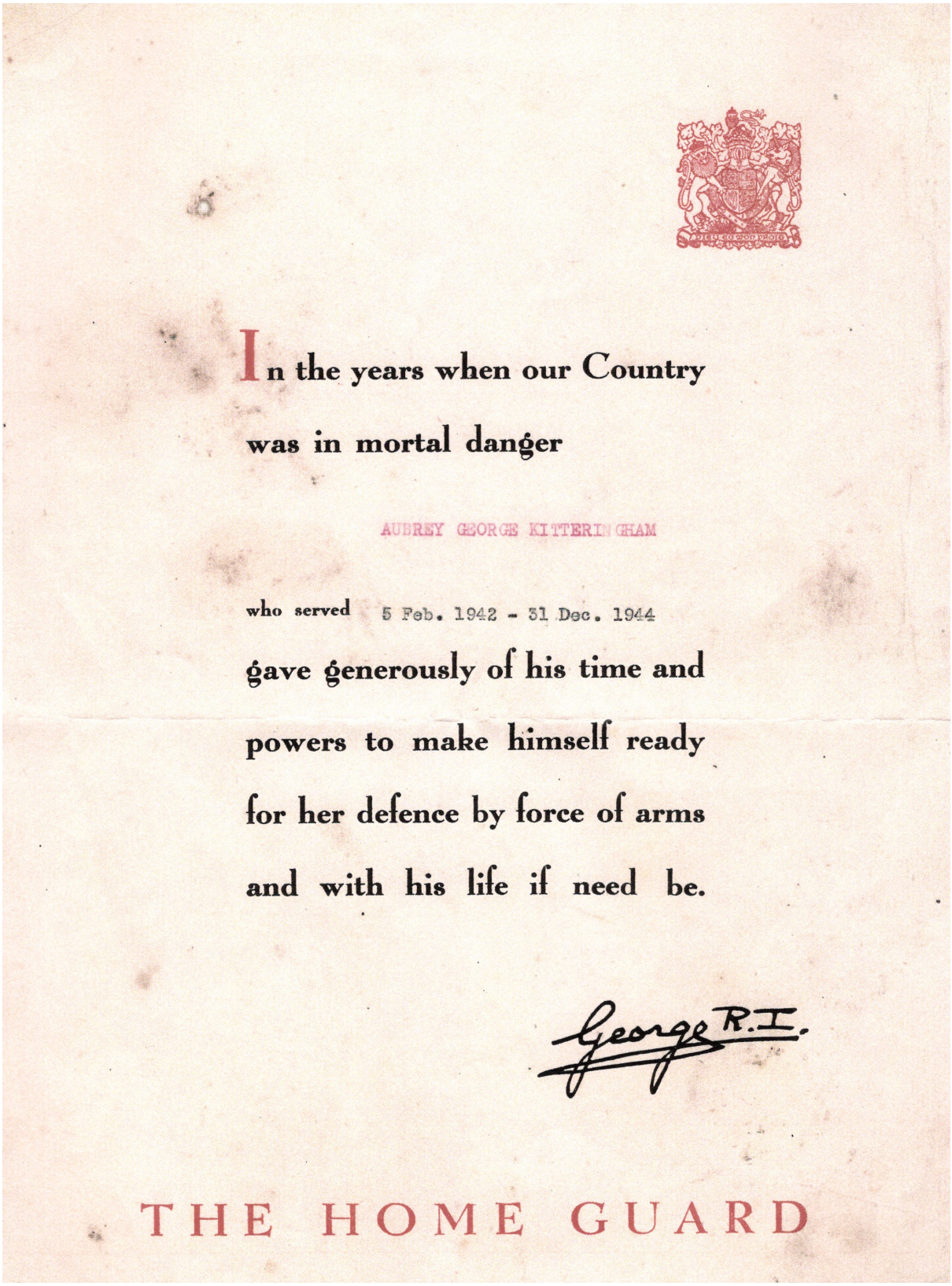
In conveying this information, may I assure you of the sympathy of the Royal Air Force with you in your anxiety.

I am,
Dear Sir,
Your obedient Servant.

Air Commodore,
Air Officer i/c Records.
ROYAL AIR FORCE.

M.E.Laborne Esq.,
High Street,
Hemingford Grey,
HUNTINGDONSHIRE.

This letter and the Civil Defence Certificate below were kindly given to us by Veronica Boland, who still lives in the village. ME, (Maxim) Laborne was her grandfather and Ronald Laborne her uncle. Veronica's mother, Ron's sister, remembered someone cycling some distance to tell the family that Ron's name had been mentioned on a list of Prisoners of War issued, probably, by the Red Cross. Sadly, Maxim died quite soon after his son was called up. Happily, Ron returned. He married, raised a family, became a Parish Councillor and played an active part in village affairs. Aubrey George Kitteringham was Veronica's father. His work involved the construction of runways and so was a reserved occupation.



In the years when our Country
was in mortal danger

AUBREY GEORGE KITTERINGHAM

who served 5 Feb. 1942 - 31 Dec. 1944

gave generously of his time and
powers to make himself ready
for her defence by force of arms
and with his life if need be.

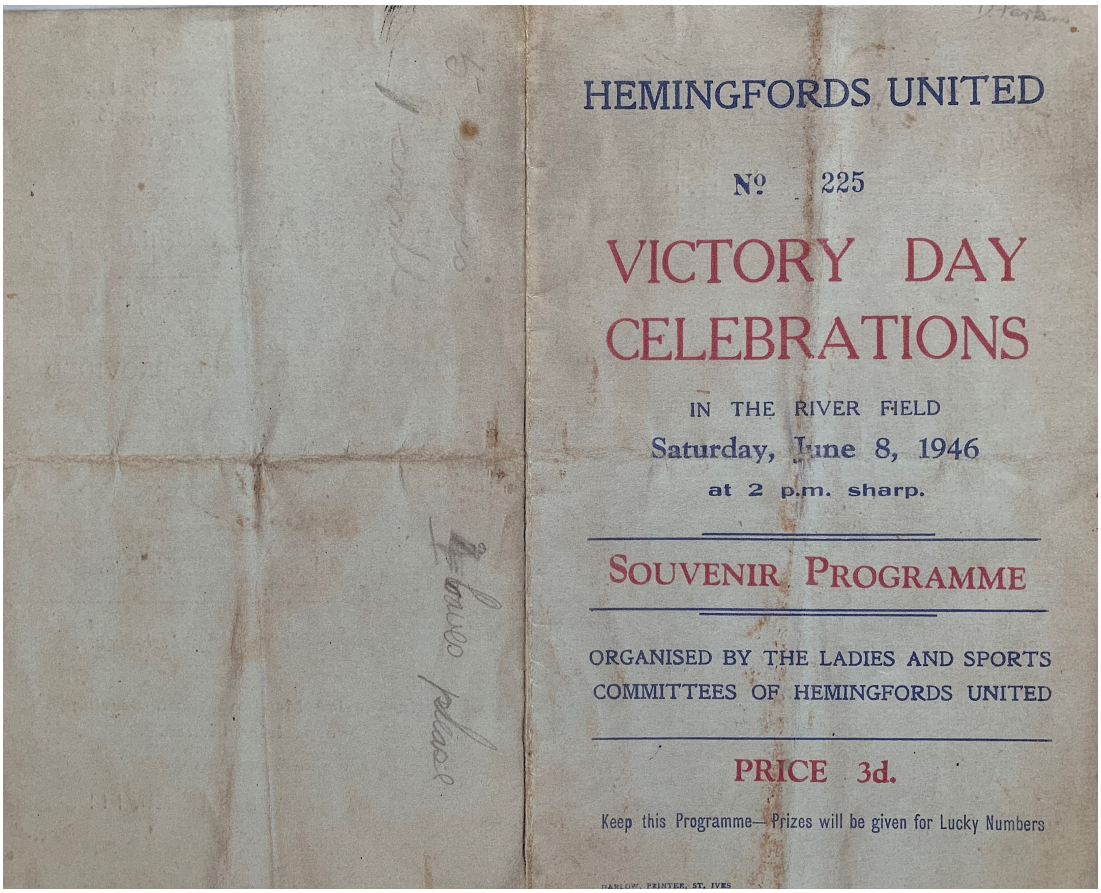
George R.I.

THE HOME GUARD

It is possible that representatives of the Hemingfords were among the 2,500 who attended a Rally of all branches of Civil Defence in Hyde Park on 10 June 1945 where Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison paid tribute to them: '***Yours is a great story. It was a voluntary effort started to numerous accompaniments. But when the bombs did come, you all did your duty. My heart is full of emotional gratitude to you all.'***

At the same Rally, the King said, ***'Your path of duty has been the way to glory and amid the glorious records of the war, the story of Civil Defence takes a high place'***

Hemingford Abbots deferred their celebrations until the following year.



HEMINGFORDS UNITED

No 225

VICTORY DAY CELEBRATIONS

IN THE RIVER FIELD

Saturday, June 8, 1946

at 2 p.m. sharp.

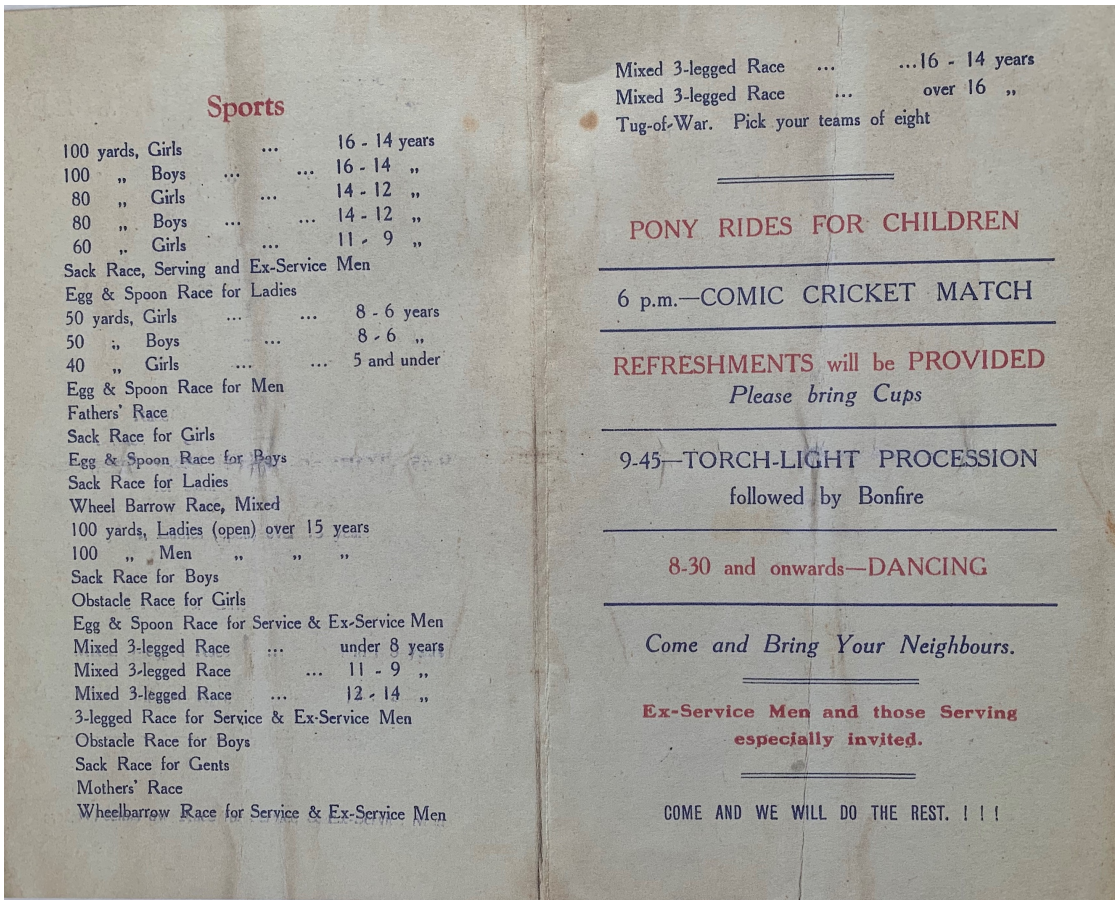
SOUVENIR PROGRAMME

ORGANISED BY THE LADIES AND SPORTS COMMITTEES OF HEMINGFORDS UNITED

PRICE 3d.

Keep this Programme—Prizes will be given for Lucky Numbers

HARLOW, PRINTER, ST. IVES



Sports

100 yards, Girls ...	16 - 14 years
100 „ Boys	16 - 14 „
80 „ Girls ...	14 - 12 „
80 „ Boys	14 - 12 „
60 „ Girls ...	11 - 9 „

Sack Race, Serving and Ex-Service Men
Egg & Spoon Race for Ladies

50 yards, Girls	8 - 6 years
50 „ Boys ...	8 - 6 „
40 „ Girls	5 and under

Egg & Spoon Race for Men
Fathers' Race
Sack Race for Girls
Egg & Spoon Race for Boys
Sack Race for Ladies
Wheel Barrow Race, Mixed
100 yards, Ladies (open) over 15 years
100 „ Men „ „ „
Sack Race for Boys
Obstacle Race for Girls
Egg & Spoon Race for Service & Ex-Service Men

Mixed 3-legged Race ...	under 8 years
Mixed 3-legged Race ...	11 - 9 „
Mixed 3-legged Race ...	12 - 14 „

3-legged Race for Service & Ex-Service Men
Obstacle Race for Boys
Sack Race for Gents
Mothers' Race
Wheelbarrow Race for Service & Ex-Service Men

Mixed 3-legged Race ...	...16 - 14 years
Mixed 3-legged Race ...	over 16 „

Tug-of-War. Pick your teams of eight

PONY RIDES FOR CHILDREN

6 p.m.—COMIC CRICKET MATCH

REFRESHMENTS will be PROVIDED
Please bring Cups

9-45—TORCH-LIGHT PROCESSION
followed by Bonfire

8-30 and onwards—DANCING

Come and Bring Your Neighbours.

Ex-Service Men and those Serving especially invited.

COME AND WE WILL DO THE REST. ! ! !

The Future

At a public meeting held on 12 December 1944 it was decided to inaugurate a scheme for commemorating the Peace and that, for this purpose Hemingford Grey and Hemingford Abbots should combine. A committee, representative of the two villages, was formed. The scheme was intended to include the thought of thanksgiving for victory, to be a tribute to those who had served their country in His Majesty's Forces and in the Merchant Navy and to be something of permanent value to them, their children and their neighbourhood. The memorial took the form of a Playing Field to serve the needs of the two villages, its equipment and amenities and conveniences to depend upon the funds available.

In 1946, Lieutenant Colonel SD Hayward most generously gave the field known as The Vineyard for the purpose. It lay almost on the borders of the two parishes and was in a central position. Ownership of the field was transferred to its Trustees. The estimated cost of turning The Vineyard into a playing field as recommended by the National Playing Fields Association was £2,500. The Ministry of Education offered £1,350 provided the balance was forthcoming. A fund was set up to lay out and equip the field and to provide a fund toward the maintenance of the ground in a proper manner in the future, subscriptions to be sent to the Hon Treasurer, Mr EH Palmer of The Thorpe, Hemingford Grey. Money also came from the Home Coming Fund.

Lana Morris at the opening of the Peace Memorial Playing Field 1949
'Pavilion' (Nissen Hut)

The playing field was officially opened in August 1949 by Miss Lana Morris a J Arthur Rank film starlet who, still in her teens, had had a meteoric rise to fame and was best remembered for the part she played in *Spring in Park Lane.* Her visit was the culmination of four and a half years work on the part of the Playing Field's Committee for what they considered was the best playing field in the county.

The Conveyance of the field by Lieutenant Colonel Stuart Dewes Hayward is dated November 1946 and lists the names of the twelve trustees: Reverend Robert William Balleine (HA), George Alfred Gowler (HA), William Stanley Hicks (HA), William Henry Hutson (HA), George Albert Reed (HA), Tom Markley Scotney (HA), Benjamin Peace Corbett (HG), Ernest Harris Everitt (HG), Jack Giddins (HG), Ernest Harold Palmer (HG), Frank Ernest Rook (HG), John William Winter (HG). The Conveyance also states that the Playing Field will include a Children's Playing Field and that the Trustees shall erect a tablet on the Pavilion or elsewhere stating that the land known as the **HEMINGFORD PEACE MEMORIAL FIELD** was presented by Lieutenant Colonel Stuart Dewes Hayward in memory of the late Alfred William Hayward, Artist of Hemingford Grey.

On 3 September 1999, The Rt Hon John Major CH MP, our Member of Parliament and one-time resident of the village, officially opened the Pavilion we see today: a two-storey brick building with an enlarged function hall downstairs, to be called **The Hayward Hall**; a new meeting room upstairs, to be called The Manor Room, new changing rooms and improved bar facilities, replacing an earlier brick structure opened in 1983 and before that a simple wooden structure dating from 1964. As Secretary to the Committee, Chris Page wrote to Mrs Penny Ferens, daughter of Lieutenant Colonel Hayward, inviting her to the official opening so she could see *the fruits of her father's gift over fifty years ago.*

Chris was Secretary of the Trustees for over thirty-three years. By coincidence when he and Tish moved into Manor Road in 1984 they discovered their new garden had been both the village tennis court and bowls green before Colonel Hayward donated the land to the villages. The original tennis/bowls pavilion was still there, with fourteen layers of flooring, one for each year it had been in use up to 1948 *(see picture below).* In 2012 The Manor Room was renamed **The Chris Page Room** in recognition of his services.

3 September 1999. John Major and Chris Page

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Reminiscences

Derek Clifton

Anne Goddard

Gay Parish

Gerald Rook

Peggy Seamark

David Viles

Memories of World War II in Hemingford Grey, as told by Derek Clifton of Dockseys Farm, St Ives Road, Hemingford Grey.

I was almost six years old at the beginning of the war and about twelve years old when it ended and have very clear memories of that period of my childhood.

Hemingford Grey was very small in those days, even the children could name everybody who lived in the village. Victoria Terrace existed, Mill House and just a few houses on the same side of the road. At Dockseys Farm my father grew sugar beet, potatoes, corn and oats and all farming was done with the help of horses; it was my job, as soon as I was big enough, to get the horses ready for their work before going to school in the morning. There was one house opposite the shop and nothing in Pound Road except for Myra Murray's house, Rose Cottage and a place where Newman's flowers were grown and sold. The High Street has changed very little. There was no street lighting, no main drainage or running water, no electricity and no gas. We had earth closets in the garden and the village school had outside closets which were emptied by the caretaker and the soil was heaped up with the cinders from the solid fuel heaters. I remember a huge heap near the playground.

At the start of the war we dug an air-raid shelter in our garden; it was only partially underground and the sides and top were made of strong sheets of galvanised metal and covered with earth. After some time the grass grew and the shelter was camouflaged. We only had to use it occasionally. The siren on the fire station would sound and we went into the shelter, taking hot drinks with us, if there was time, and remained there until we heard the 'all-clear' sound. We could hear the distant sound of bombs dropping but none fell on the village. The village fire station was in front of Grey Hall in the High Street and had one fire engine.

Black out rules were very strict. We all had dark, heavy blackout curtains at our windows. Every night my father would check from the outside to make sure that no light was showing from our house. Tom Palmer, a teacher in St Ives during the day, acted as the village Warden and went around the village on his bike every night warning anyone who had left a crack in their curtains to close their curtains properly. There were many pubs in the village, one called 'The Wagon and Horses', now Apex House. People would arrive at the pub on their bicycles which were leaned haphazardly against the wall. It was so dark that, on coming out, the custom was to take the first bicycle; after a week or so you might end up with your own bike again. I remember walking down the road at night with some family friends from Windsor who were amazed when my father exchanged greetings with somebody we passed in the dark. We saw nobody but knew each other so well we could identify each other by the sound of footsteps. Not much chance of spies infiltrating Hemingford, even on the darkest of nights!

There were many airfields in this area and we often watched the planes flying out in groups of sixteen, arranged in fours and we counted them back the next morning, knowing that any gap in the formation meant that one or more had been hit. Sometimes their arrival was followed by the sound of a damaged aircraft attempting to reach the home base and we held our breath hoping not to hear the sound of a crash or to see the column of smoke which would signal a disaster.

For the children life went on very much as before. School fire drills became air raid drills and we all had to carry gas masks. When I was small mine had the face of Mickey Mouse, which didn't make me like it any better. It was difficult to put on and stuffy, smelly and unpleasant to wear. I don't think I ever succeeded in doing it properly so I'm glad I never had to use it for real.

It was always difficult for mothers to feed the family on the meagre meat rations we were allowed. My mother was a good cook and we were never hungry. Lots of people kept chickens

which meant there were eggs and we usually had a cooked breakfast and often porridge. My father would shoot rabbits and pigeons on the farm and these were made into stews to eke out the meat mother bought from the butcher in St Ives. She made rissoles and there were always dumplings to fill us up. To this day I cannot bear to eat dumplings! The main meal was eaten in the middle of the day and we had sandwiches for tea, and toast and a hot drink before going to bed.

In the evenings we listened to the wireless or played dominoes and card games. Lord Hawhaw broke into the programmes with his propaganda telling us that all our men would be killed. We just used to turn him off. We had an evacuee child living with us who had come with the whole class and their teacher from Hornsey, in London. They were given their own classroom at school and had lessons separately but we all played together in the playground.

My brother was killed at Dunkirk which had a terrible effect on my mother. I don't think she ever came to terms with it. When we had a German POW working on the farm my father was very worried but she treated the POWs well, saying that she hoped that our POWs would be looked after well in Germany or elsewhere. There was a POW camp in Hemingford Abbots at Hemingford Park where Germans, Latvians and Italians were imprisoned. They wore jackets and trousers which had coloured patches on them to identify them as POWs. They worked on the farms and some worked at basket making in Filberts Walk. One German we had was enormously strong. I saw him lift a whole tree trunk and he could clap two 56lb weights above his head as if they were cymbals. Later in the war some even joined the village football team which played on the village pitch where the houses on Vicarage Fields now stand. We also had help on the farm from land girls. There were several on the surrounding farms and after the war some married local men and stayed in Hemingford.

My father was in the Home Guard and was in charge of Hemingford's one machine gun. He had been a machine gunner in the First World War, so had experience. Some of the others had 12 bore shot guns, normally used on the farms, most had broomsticks to drill with while they were waiting for the proper guns to arrive. They never came, so training on Sunday mornings and guard duty on the railway line continued to be done with 12 bores and broomsticks. They did guard duty in a metal pillbox which could be turned to look along the railway line in each direction. The Meadow had trenches dug and soil heaped up to discourage landing by enemy aircraft.

At the end of the war I remember a street party organised by women from the village and I remember POWs returning, one from Japan who was so ill he came home in a wheelchair. Everybody cheered.

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Email received from Anne Goddard, 23 March 2007

Dear Mrs Douglas, Thank you for your email of last month which encouraged me to send any small details of my memories of Hemingford Abbots during World War II. I was born in September 1941, so my memories are scant at best and unreliable at worst.

My great aunt, Miss Alice Haynes was housekeeper to Mrs Williams of Barn Hall. Great Aunt Alice owned Ross Cottage in the High Street where Mrs J Stewart now lives. As she lived in at Barn Hall, my grandparents Ebenezer and Annie Thoday made the cottage their home, together with their children Ralph, Eddie and May. Uncle Ralph went on to become Head Gardener at St John's College, Cambridge and Aunt May (aka Attie) became Matron at the Metropolitan Police Nursing Home. It was at Ross Cottage that my mother, Marjorie, was born in 1908. She lived there until she married Harry Joyce of Huntingdon on 9 September 1939, followed by a reception at Barn Hall. Grace Unwin was the organist at the wedding. In 1989 my father, by then a widower, met Grace again in St Margaret's when we returned on what would have been my parents' Golden Wedding anniversary.

As my father had joined the Metropolitan Police Force he was required to remain in London during the war. My mother and I spent most of the war years in Hemingford and I returned to Hemingford for Easter and summer holidays until I was fifteen years old. During the war, and for some time afterwards, Ross Cottage had no electricity, no running water and no outside sanitation. (This was a wooden hut ten yards from the back door.). The cottage was lit by oil lamps and water was from a pump also by the back door! (*See photo of me aged two years, attached.)*

The cottage was much smaller than it now is. An estate agent might have described it as having a scullery, an entrance hall and two downstairs reception rooms with a narrow staircase leading to the two adjoining bedrooms (where the floors sloped). Cooking and water heating were done on the kitchen range in the front downstairs living room where the bay window still looks straight onto the street. This room was also my bathroom - a tin bath in front of the range.

Mr Watts ran the Post Office and general stores from his bungalow one house away from ours. I believe the Post Office was originally in the centre of the village. Each week a grocer called in his van and he would come into the cottage carrying a huge round wicker basket from which my grandmother chose food to buy. On Mondays we caught the bus into St Ives where there was a cattle market. I was allowed to go to see the sheep and pigs penned in where Waitrose and the car park now stand.

Some sort of cart came round to empty the toilet buckets. I don't know what the cart was like because I was always banished upstairs or sent to the bottom of the garden on collection days. I do remember the strong smell of disinfectant like creosote.

Mr and Mrs Smith, grandparents of Arthur Smith at Park Farm, kept the farm next door to us. Mrs Smith (Net) ran the dairy which was at the front of the farmhouse close to the road. Of course we went to her for our milk and cream. Net sometimes acted as midwife to women in the village. Great Aunt Lizzie Lock (my grandmother's sister) lived in the High Street. Her husband, William, was chauffeur to Mrs Williams at Barn Hall. Sometime after Mrs Williams died and a court dressmaker owned Barn Hall, I acquired a tiny piece of ermine. Family legend has it that it was a leftover from Lord Hemingford's Coronation robes. My mother used it to trim my baby bootees. Just before the war ended, my friend took me to Hemingford Abbots School with her. I can remember the milk being warmed on the stove which heated the big school room. I dislike tepid milk to this day.

In 1946 my mother and I returned to London, to bomb-damaged Holloway where I learnt to play hopscotch in the street with chalk and broken roof slates rescued from the bomb sites.

I recently phoned an octogenarian friend of my mother who was brought up in Abbots but who has lived in Grey since she married at the end of the war. She assured me that wartime life in Hemingford Abbots was not so very different. The most notable changes were the presence of soldiers in the street, American soldiers in jeeps, a shortage of things in the shops and more exciting dances at the St Ives Corn Exchange. If the word got round that bananas or stockings had been seen in St Ives or Huntingdon shops, she raced off on her bike to bring home what she could, but rarely got there before they sold out. Coal was in short supply during the war and when my father came to visit us, he'd bring a bag of coal with him on the train from Kings Cross.

For several years after the war eggs were in short supply (they came off ration in March 1953) and my grandmother, who kept chickens in the back garden, posted eggs to us when we were in London. The egg box had a tightly fitted lid and was made of very thick cardboard with reinforced corners. It was divided into twelve padded compartments. My parents kept this box to use when they went on a drive into the countryside to hold the eggs they used to enjoy purchasing from selling out points. It was eventually discarded, together with some of the original postage stamps when we were clearing their house in Cavendish in 2004.

The night the bomb fell on the Common my granny was making toffee. I remember the night clearly, not just because of the noise but because the toffee was such a disappointment; it was not the small soft pieces wrapped in wax paper which we bought from shops, but a hard brittle sheet which tasted of scorched sugar and had to be smashed into sharp irregular pieces.

Last week I visited my friend who used to live in a farm cottage in the High Street, she now lives in Hemingford Grey. She is eighteen months older than I am and she too remembers the night the bomb fell. Apparently it had been a noisy night in general and her father said that all four of them should get into the big bed so if the worst were to happen, they'd all go together!

On a happier day I remember going with my friend to meet her father who was driving a horse-drawn cart loaded with hay and he helped us to climb up and ride on top. My friend's father and his two brothers were not allowed to 'join up' as farming was a reserved occupation but each was given a wartime duty. One was a fireman, another a special constable and the third was in the Home Guard.

My mother's friend used to do laundry for British billeted at Hemingford Park. The young women in the village were encouraged to help the war effort by joining the ATS or choosing work from a limited selection. As my mother's friend did not want to leave Hemingford, she worked with fourteen other girls in the Hemingford Grey laundry (owned by Mrs Winter, wife of a local solicitor). She clearly remembers enjoying the work. The American uniforms were easier to wash than those of the British because they were made of far superior and finer materials. Twice a week the jeep came down to the laundry when the girls would be showered with Camel cigarettes and bars of chocolate.

The Hemingford WI had been in the habit of visiting Hemingford Park one evening a week to provide tea and cake for the servicemen stationed there. There were engineers sent out to replace the Black Bridge with a Bailey Bridge. When the Italian POWs came to work on Park Farm, they too were given tea and cakes and danced to music from gramophone records. When the war ended there was a dance held in the old Village Hall. My mother's friend said she went to the celebrations in Hemingford Grey (where her friends from the laundry lived) and they danced in the street.

My husband and I visit Hemingford several times each year to tidy the family grave and if you would allow us to attend your AGM to enjoy your short present on 19 April, we should be delighted to make an extra trip.

Email received from Anne Goddard, 20 April 2007

Dear Mrs Douglas, Christopher and I enjoyed every minute of the time spent in the Reading Room yesterday.

The three-part presentation about the Hemingfords during World War II was both informative and entertaining. We were truly fascinated and look forward to learning more. How I regret not asking the questions whilst were growing up and spending so many family holidays in Hemingford Abbots. My octogenarian friend who worked in the laundry in Hemingford Grey during the war has remembered a little more.

The staff consisted of seventeen girls and older ladies in addition to a boiler boy and two 'workhouse' men who operated the machinery. A 'van man' drove an old horse-drawn 'fever van' which Mrs Winter acquired as petrol was so scarce. My friend and two other girls took it in turns to deliver the laundry on Saturday mornings to the Hemingfords and to all the little villages around. I remember my mother talking about the horse-drawn fever van as she caught diphtheria as a child and was taken on the bumpy ride from Ross Cottage to the isolation hospital at Papworth.

My friend remembers Mrs Winter supervising the laundry girls. She used to sit on a bench doing some mending whilst making sure the girls wasted no time by talking. Mrs Winter's friend (whose parents were landowners at Papworth St Agnes) lived in the flat above the laundry and entertained some of the American officers in the evenings.

My friend clearly remembers twenty-five child evacuees being billeted in the Hemingfords. Each of her two aunts received a boy aged around seven from the East End of London. The boys had never seen farm animals before and were quite frightened as well as being homesick. However, by the end of the war they didn't want to go home.

Thank you again for allowing us to intrude on your AGM and for crediting us with more praise than we deserve. Above all else may we thank you for the warm welcome we received.

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Notes of a conversation with Gay Parish (nee Watts) 29 March 2007

As a child I lived in the store/Post Office in Hemingford Abbots, a bungalow which used to be next to Ross Cottage in Common Lane. My father also owned the shop in Hemingford Grey, now the Willow in the High Street. I remember hardware hanging from the ceiling, children's jumpers, ties and shoes. My father ran the large store in Hemingford Grey and mother ran the Post Office in Hemingford Abbots. Many goods were rationed and everyone was issued with a Ration Book, filled with coupons which had to be cut out with scissors when a purchase was made. My mother smoked Craven A cigarettes and also rolled her own herbal ones.

I attended the Grammar School in the centre of Huntingdon, later the Anglian Water building. I cycled every day along the main road. I enjoyed, English, Geography and PE but hated Science. We had homework every evening and I remember we three girls sitting at the kitchen table and working by the light of an oil lamp, there was no electricity in the village during the war. Our water was pumped from a well in the garden. We had a tin bath in the scullery which had to be filled with warm water.

We had a roast joint on Sundays, cold meat left over from the joint on Mondays. I also remember eating rabbit stews, dumplings and suet rolls. My brother had gravy on his dumplings but I preferred syrup. We grew our own vegetables in the garden and had fruit trees.

I had two older brothers, one a telegraphist on minesweepers, the other in the Merchant Navy. His ship was torpedoed and he ended up in Bombay. Throughout the war we only had one family reunion when all seven of us were at home together.

I remember Royal Engineers in a camp in the grounds of The Park. Six men manned a searchlight post on the Common where two bombs fell, probably being aimed at the searchlight. We heard doodlebugs when they came over and I was pushed under the table with my nephew. The camp was later used for prisoners of war, German and then Italian and later still for displaced persons. One tried to teach me to ice skate on Mrs Carr's pond.

There were Socials in the Village Hall which was also used as a canteen. There were clubs like the Bunny Fellowship. We played cards and tiddlywinks, listened to the radio and our parents read about local news in the Hunts Post, edited by Mr Fisher. We read books and on Sundays there was a Sunday School where the children were taught by Miss Ivatt. There were hardly any private cars, and petrol, if available, was strictly rationed anyway. Matson's garage in the centre of Hemingford Abbots ran a taxi service. Scouts met next to the Royal Oak pub in Royal Oak Lane. The publican was Mr Perkins. The pub was next to the tall house, known locally as The Erection.

Evacuees arrived early in the village, in September 1939. A little girl (Anne Thoday) and her mother came to Ross Cottage, next door, and Mrs Carr had two boy evacuees with whom we used to roller skate. In spite of the shortages and all that was happening I remember a very happy childhood.

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Gerald Rook, Memories of World War Two

Sunday 3 September 1939 – I was a boy in Hemingford Grey, aged nine and four days. I shall always remember Mr Chamberlain, the then Prime Minister, making a radio broadcast at 11am. He said that at 9am that morning the British Ambassador in Berlin had presented an ultimatum to Germany which had expired and that the British Empire and Germany were at war.

My grandfather, Mr George Darlow, who was the village baker, my grandmother Jessie (nee Summers) and my mother and father were all living at the bakery, now number 40 and 40a High Street. War had been a talking point for at least two years but no one liked the idea of men having to fight, and with the Great War within their memories were not welcoming the thought of the killings. Many things had been prepared and the Reservists and Territorial men had been mobilised and a Civil Defence Force had been formed.

The many ways that *Hemingford* had been pronounced and spelt over the years was now brought to nothing, for all the road signs were removed and signs that included any place name. All lights were removed from the outside of buildings and were windows were blacked with screens and shutter every night. Road barriers were erected at various points along the roads which would have been fully closed had an enemy approached. Trenches were dug in straight lines across the Hemingford Meadow and across Hemingford Abbots Meadow scaffold posts like tripods were erected and stout, taut wire strung across, all to prevent the landing of any aircraft.

The ringing of church bells was banned, for these were to be rung only if any enemy forces attempted to attack from the air, ie by parachutes or gliders. Other forms of alert were the sounding of the mill whistle, wardens with hand rattles in the streets and police and Special Constables blasting on their whistles. We later had the new air raid sirens.

Every householder was instructed to tape all windows to prevent shattered glass from flying about and causing injury. We also had to keep a supply of water and sand in tin baths or buckets in readiness against fire. Remember that all water in those days had to be pumped out of public or private wells. Some households had their own stirrup pumps but these were mainly kept by the fire fighters and air raid wardens. We had our own stirrup pump because the bakery ovens were coal fired and needed to be protected as the village would always need its bread and some was also supplied to the additional forces stationed in the area.

Bread was not rationed but everyone was instructed not to waste any items of food. All flour had to be home produced and could be in short supply as imports could be stopped without warning. Ration books were issued and everyone had to register with their local suppliers in order to receive their fair share. Food was not plentiful but everyone had an equal amount to live on. Many people had their back-yard hens and were encouraged to grow their own vegetables - *Digging for Victory* - anything produced in this way could be used by the family or shared with others where surplus was produced. We had two pig sties and were able to raise litters which had to be sold to the Ministry but we were able to keep a percentage for our own use. Food for the animals and chickens had to come from kitchen scraps and field gleanings. Our milk could be obtained from one of the two dairy farms which supplied only door to door. Groceries from the general store and greengrocery from local market gardens were also delivered. Meat was also delivered as our only butcher's had closed and the owner had joined the forces. Our bakery did not close until my grandfather retired in 1942.

I remember while at the village school how we helped to tape the windows and had fire drills and hid under the desks as a precaution against the likely attack of bombing. We also had always to carry a gasmask and practise their use.

In the two days before war was declared the first evacuees were moved out of the towns and cities that were most likely to receive air raids. Over the next year a number of children and families with non-school age children were moved into the Hemingfords. The tall house (Rosenthal) on the south side of the High Street became the living quarters for the school evacuated from Kent. The school also occupied the whole area of Madeley Court House, outbuildings and grounds. They also used part of the fields for games purposes that are now known as Priors Road and Old Pound Close.

Another building used entirely for offices by an iron and steel company from London was the vicarage, now Grey Hall, the Vicar having left the village and the new one being accommodated in the first lodge cottage on the corner of Church Street and Church Lane. The old cottages in the grounds of the old vicarage in the High Street were used as headquarters for the local fire service, later the NFS, but they eventually moved into a Nissen hut close to the rear entrance, where the base is still visible. The outbuildings, tack room and stables of what is now St Francis House were converted for use by the Red Cross and St John's Ambulance Brigade, also to serve, if needed, as a mortuary.

One of the two remaining workhouse cottages on the High Street was strengthened by shoring up the inside and was used by the Special Constables and ARP as their post when they were not out on patrol in the village. I cannot remember where the local defence force had their headquarters but they had store buildings in Rideaway, Hemingford Abbots and these could have been their HQ. These gallant men became the Home Guard or in today's terms better known as 'Dad's Army'. They carried out many exercises with our main army and often manned the road blocks and had other exercises on the Hemingford Meadow and at the river crossings.

Other groups in the village were the WVS, mainly made up of Women's Institute members who seemed to manage all the helpful happenings not covered by anyone else. I'm sure that these were the mothers who made up the recipes and added those extra things that made the rations fill us out. Women were also recruited to serve in the Land Army, not always to serve on local farms; others were ordered to work in local industries and some were drafted into the armed forces.

From early 1940 in infantry regiment was stationed in part of the Hemingford Park House grounds, followed by a training unit of the Royal Engineers which received different companies of men for short periods to train as bridge builders and in watermanship. The training was carried out in the field with river frontage adjacent to the footpath between Grey and Abbots. The bases, where two huts had been erected can still be seen adjacent to this path.

In about 1943 the army camp was secured and became the home of many Italian prisoners of war, many of these were allowed to work on local farms. After some of these prisoners were sent home they were replaced by German aircrew, returned from imprisonment in Canada and they remained until the end of the war.

On the Godmanchester common at the end of Common Lane, Hemingford Abbots, from about 1940 to 1944 a Royal Regiment of Artillery detachment were situated which consisted of a searchlight battery and anti-aircraft gun crews. In 1941 a German aircraft released its bomb load and missed the batteries and also the adjacent railway line but left the Common with a pond, about midway across to Godmanchester. The viaduct where the railway crosses the river at Hemingford Grey had its own Bren gun position which was manned by the Home Guard.

The lighter side of life continued up to a point. There were fund raising dances and local concerts were held where the troops were entertained. We also had weeks where money was raised such as Soldiers, Air Force and Warship weeks. These mainly consisted of sports days

for which the prizes were National Savings Stamps each valued at sixpence. These were stuck in books to the value of fifteen shillings and provided these were not lost could be redeemed after ten years for one pound and sixpence. This was thrift but not how to become rich quick! Cricket and football matches were organised between works teams but often only as comic games of mixed teams with men dressed as ladies. I remember playing in these teams and also boys' matches at school and against other village teams. No league games were played and also the local Regatta was cancelled.

In 1941 I attended St Ives School, while waiting for a place at Huntingdon Grammar School which I obtained in 1942. This then meant that each day I caught the service bus at 8.30am and arrived home at 5.30pm. These were mainly dark journeys for all outside lights had been removed and all vehicles had very restricted lighting. In the evenings Scouts and Guides and other Cadet forces were held. I was a member of the St John's Ambulance Cadets and we were all expected to run between other organisations with messages. As I got older the war news was never good but became a way of life. We had the Battle of Britain, bombing of towns and cities, when the glow from the fires was visible from the village, our own attacks on Germany and then the landings on D Day, which led to victory and peace. The church bells were rung, the mill whistle was blown and the High Street was decked with flags, flood lights were put in place and in the evening a piano was wheeled into the street, while others formed a band and the village came out dancing.

Remembered and written by Gerald Rook, parts being taken from:-

Memories of Hemingford Grey; Before it's Forgotten; and My Family Tree

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Peggy Seamark, Memories of World War Two, 5 March 2007

Peggy's father had been born in the workhouse in London Road, Hemingford Grey. He was fostered as a baby by Mrs Sarah Avery who lived at 9 Victoria Terrace and worked in the laundry. He remained with the Averys until he married in 1936. He worked on Radford's Farm mainly as a cowman and delivered milk in St Ives and the Hemingfords. He joined the army in 1939, by which time he had a house in Victoria Terrace, no. 7. Peggy was born at West Street Nursing Home in St Ives in 1937. Her brother was born in 1940 and her sister in 1942. The houses had gas lighting, paraffin lamps, coal fires and cooking was done on a gas stove, supplemented by a paraffin cooker when there were a lot of people to feed. There was an earth closet at the bottom of the garden.

Father erected an Anderson shelter in the garden of no. 9, lined and roofed with corrugated iron. Earth was piled on top over which grass grew. There were camp beds inside. Peggy remembers playing in it and the neighbours using it as a shelter from air raids. She remembers the sirens sounding – the nearest being located on the roof of St Ives Fire Station which was located in the Quadrant in those days.

School was Hemingford Grey Primary School. All children had to take their gas masks to school with them. They were given milk at break-time and packets of Ovaltine or drinking chocolate which they could use in their milk or take home for use later. They were also given small bottles of concentrated orange juice.

The headmistress was Miss Nancy Robinson who lived in Victoria Terrace. She was very strict and children were not allowed to play about or dawdle on the way to school. She remembers one occasion when a she and her friends were playing about on the way to school when one of them spotted Miss Robinson cycling along on her sit-up-and-beg bike. He shouted, 'Nance is coming! Quick into the ditch!' They all leapt into a narrow ditch which was along the side of the road where 'Flowermead' now stands and lay down head-to-feet in a line. From the vantage point of her bike they were easily seen and she was furious. To make matters worse they then ran off into a nearby field of kale with Nance in hot pursuit. Miss Robinson was certainly very cross with them when they got to school but nowhere near as cross as their parents were when they found out.

Peggy's father was away in the signals regiment for the early part of the war but was invalided out after a serious operation for appendicitis and other complications. After that he worked at Radford's farm where her mother also worked. Peggy remembers being fed on rabbit stew, sometimes hare, shot by her father. Stews were usually accompanied by dumplings and followed by suet pudding and custard. There was usually liver available from the butcher and the family reared chickens so had plenty of eggs and when a bird was no longer useful it went into the pot. Food was not short but she remembers her mother queuing for fresh fruit at a shop in St Ives. There was also canned fruit available. Peggy also remembers milk fresh from the cow and 'businings', milk from a cow which had just calved from which her mother made rich egg custard. After school Peggy often went to the farm and helped by chopping up mangleworzles and putting them through a mangle. People preserved eggs by pickling them or painting the shells with a sticky substance to seal them and stacking them on wire trays. Beans were salted, fruit and some vegetables were bottled, very little was wasted.

Her mother shopped in St Ives as those shops were nearer but there was a large shop where The Willow is, which sold food, clothing, knitting wool, pots and pans etc. In fact most things could be bought in the village. There was a pub, called 'The New Crown' at Armes Corner.

The area was surrounded by orchards which grew apples, pears, plums and cherries. The area between Marsh Lane and Hemingford Road, stretching east and west between London Road and Hemingford Road was one huge orchard, also part of Radford's Farm. There were arable farms in both villages and Radford's farm had a dairy herd. In London Road there was a gas works, where there used to be a car show room, now also closed down and in Filbert's Walk there was a workshop making wicker goods, baskets, wicker crates for dropping goods from aircraft and filters for filtering river water which was used by the fire fighters.

The local work force was supplemented by land girls on the farms and by POW labour. Peggy remembers a land girl lodging with them. She was called Lena Ramsden and came from Osset in Yorkshire. She was one of two working at Radford's farm. There was not much space and she shared a bed with Peggy and her sister, sleeping top to toe. When her father had been taken ill away from home he stayed with Lena's parents in Osset until he was sent home. The families kept in touch after the war and Peggy remembers holidays in Yorkshire with them. For 18 months an army sergeant, his wife and two children occupied the front room in the family home. Overcrowding was common as there was no house building taking place.

It seems that relations with the POWs was friendly. Three POWs who worked at Radford's farm used to have meals with Peggy's family on Wednesday evenings and at weekends (curfew at the POW camp at Hemingford Park was 8.00pm). One of the POWs, Horace Hermann, married a local girl after the war and lived in St Ives until his death in 2017. He reminded Peggy of an occasion when she was about to return a letter addressed to F W Robertson at 7 Victoria Terrace when her mother swiftly intervened and told her she had not seen the letter. It was the way Horace received news from his family in Germany. The family dog attached itself to Horace and returned to the camp with him. Horace used to make sandals for the family.

Throughout the war people were encouraged to save and donate money to the war effort. Each village, town or county was given a target and made collections which would go towards the purchase of Spitfires, warships or ammunition and other war time necessities. The county of Huntingdon managed to fit out a warship called HMS Ramsey.

After the war there was a Home Coming Fund which was used to provide something for the local community. Local people decided what was needed. In Hemingford a playing field was made for local people to play sport. It was called the Peace Memorial Field which now is the outdoor space at the Sports and Social Club in Manor Road.

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Conversation with David Viles, Monday 2 April 2007

David was born in Hemingford Grey, in a house at Pond Corner. He remembers standing outside River House hearing that the war had started and seeing a woman crying. He hadn't realised before that adults cried. He also remembers his mother writing a letter of condolence to Mrs Clifton when Derek's older brother was killed at Dunkirk and standing in the school playground and watching the sails of the windmill being dismantled because they could act as a sightline for enemy aircraft. Sunday School was held in the Church Rooms.

Men, but not necessarily in the Army, began building great metal blocks, perhaps prototypes for the Mulberry harbours later? There were two Nissen huts in the Regatta meadow. He and some other boys sneaked in and saw a beautiful meccano model of a bailey bridge.

Evacuees came almost immediately. A woman and a baby from West Ham came but stayed only a few weeks; also a couple who had been holiday lodgers before the war. The girl's parents were given the front room, the couple themselves came down at weekends. His parents were killed in the blitz, and his arm badly injured. The girl's father was an electrician by trade. There was electricity in the house downstairs, he extended it upstairs, using a row of transformers and torch bulbs with Vaseline tins behind to reflect the light. A whole class came from Torrington Park School (Hornsey?) with teachers, Miss McLennan and Mr Spilman, 'Spillmilk'. Children saved cardboard milk tops at school to make pom poms. Boys learned that if you pushed the tops in, the milk sprayed out everywhere. Headmistress, Miss Robinson spent ages every morning making holes to avoid it.

Rough paper was kept in a folder on the chair by the teacher's desk, everything was done in rough first, neat afterwards. Ink was watered down for the war effort. David remembered one inspection and the question 'what is the size of those bricks?' Even the children thought it was a silly question. There were supposed to be gas mask tests, but the boys soon learnt how to make snorting sounds out of the side of the masks; Miss Robinson as not impressed, no more tests!

There was a problem with cabbage white butterflies eating the cabbages. The government said they had to be exterminated. Mrs Viles remembers seeing whole armies of caterpillars crossing Needingworth Road. Children were asked to bring dead butterflies and caterpillars to school and were paid, but the smell was terrible. The exercise was not repeated. There were frequent paper salvage drives and book drives. Children were given certificates for bringing books. David made corporal; Mrs Viles made field marshal. A policeman gave a talk about incendiary bombs and butterfly bombs, which were designed to hang in roof rafters and then go off.

At one stage David joined the evacuees for special lessons to prepare for the grammar school entrance exam. Miss McLennan drove and stretched the children, something David had not experienced before. There were lists of spellings before prayers – aeroplane not airplane for instance and more sophisticated expressions to learn, eg '*Sedge fringed banks of the meandering River Ouse'*. Children made craftwork baskets, ready cut wool mats and cane work trays. On 30 June 1944 David heard that he had got into Huntingdon Grammar School.

David remembered eating quite well, though maybe his parents didn't. The family kept chickens and grew vegetables and probably ate more sweets than now because of the sweet ration. He remembered counting the sweets out with his brother every Friday evening with ITMA on the radio. (*It's That Man Again*).

One school concert stood out in his memory and the song '*Daddy wouldn't buy me a bow wow'* and a visit to the school at Madeley Court for an open-air performance of Midsummer Night's Dream, Titania and the ass's head scene, also music that he now knows is the *Arrival of the Queen of Sheba.* One afternoon he was taken to a house in the village to watch *Mickey Mouse* on television, but it broke down after two minutes.

David's father was a shunter on the railway, a reserved occupation, also in the Home Guard. They were given 'crackerjacks' instead of bullets which they kept on the trigger of their rifles; his father's caught in the strap and went off accidentally. There were Home Guard Camps, where the men crawled out of the back of the tents, then came back in the morning. Some stole butter for their families. One man drowned near the old iron bridge while training to cross a river in full uniform. There were convoys of Army vehicles, Italian prisoners of war who had to wear yellow patches on their uniforms, German prisoners or war, and then displaced persons, Latvians.

People weren't able to go away for holidays, so holidayed on the river instead. David remembered the family hiring a punt and going up and down between Hemingford and Houghton locks, also into the frying pan and Four Gate Pit Sluice, and Battcocks Island. The locks were immobilised so you couldn't go beyond them. There were trenches on St Ives meadow, and wires on Houghton meadow.

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