

THORPE HISTORY GROUP

Newsletter - January 2020

Our next talk
Forty Years of Thorpe 1980-2020
John Balls

Thursday 20th February 2020, 8pm

St Andrew's Centre, Thunder Lane

There will be a charge of £3 per person.

Forthcoming Events

This edition has a very strong focus on wartime memories - perhaps very appropriately as we remember the events of 80 years ago. It includes a reprint of an article first published in 1985, and the memories of former Thorpe woman Ruby Paternoster who has a vivid recollection of the day her brother returned from imprisonment in the Far East.

Our next talk will be 'Forty Years of Thorpe 1980-2020' by John Balls. This replaces 'The Public Houses of Thorpe.' Apologies to those of you who were expecting to hear about the pubs but we will be including it in next year's programme.

In April our talk will be on 'Thorpe Schools 1937-1997' which will be accompanied by an exhibition of material on the schools of Thorpe from the Janet Smith Archive.

If you have any material relating to the schools - particularly photographs - please bring them along on the night. We would be delighted to see them.

Appeal for information

We recently received a request from Barry Freeman for information about men and women, who worked at Classic Cruises on Griffin Lane in Thorpe around 1979. Barry worked there then and would like to hear from any of his old workmates. If you can help please email Nick and he will pass the details on to Barry.

Thorpe St Andrew 1939-1945

Written by Gilbert Howard this article was first published by Thorpe St Andrew Parish Council in 1985 to commemorate the 40th Anniversary of Victory in Europe day..

Introduction

1985 is a very important year as it marks the 40th anniversary of VE Day (Victory in Europe) when the Second World War ceased on 8th May 1945.

The writer of these notes thought it would be appropriate to place on record the efforts of those who served in the various Civil Defence organisations that were set up in Thorpe St Andrew as a tribute to all those who were trained in their various groups to help the civilian population to cope with their safety.

I was 29 years of age when war broke out on 3rd September 1939 and was employed at Laurence Scott & Electromotors, Thorpe Road Works, working on equipment for the fighting services. I was therefore exempt from military duty and in my small way took great interest in Civil Defence. The following notes set out what organisations were available for the duration of the war.

Hillside School was the centre, used by the authorities for lectures, training etc., and was in great demand for a long period. On 28/29 September the school was closed to enable 3,000 gas masks to be assembled and issued to the public. Recruiting meetings were held going on quite late in the evening. The main hall was always full of good folk who signed to join the various sections.

In 1939 white bands had to be painted on all the lamp posts to help pedestrians who were out in the blackout. In 1940 posts were erected on the Recreation Ground to make it impossible for aeroplanes to land in case of invasion.

Wardens Service

This section was under the control of Mr. C. J. Bullard (Senior Warden) and 5 Wardens Posts were set up.

These were situated at -

31 Gordon Avenue (bungalow at corner of Pilling Road)

The Piggeries, Thunder Lane (now Police Station)

The King's Head public house, Yarmouth Road

The Red Lion public house, Yarmouth Road

The Cottage public house, Thunder Lane

The wardens patrolled in their patch during an air raid warning. They had to get to know their public, looking out for good blackout of windows and reporting any incident to their post to summon whatever assistance was required. They supplied and checked gas masks and would have given gas warnings by waving a wooden rattle.

Rescue Party

This unit was also stationed at The Piggeries, where lorries were stationed, loaded with equipment to dig people from brick rubble, etc. The personnel were lead by men who were familiar with building work, ropes, ladders, and

physically very strong. One of their first call outs was to a pair of houses on Salhouse Road which had been hit by bombs during an isolated daylight road.

On Sunday, 27th October 1940 about 4pm a single raider dropped a bomb on a pair of bungalows in Furze Road (opposite Furze Avenue). Severe damage resulted to the building which was incidentally occupied by two brothers who were both ARP wardens. On that Sunday morning they had taken in a London school girl evacuated to Thorpe and she was found safe under the dining room table. Also a small unexploded bomb was lying on the grass verge outside the damaged bungalows and the police had to arrange for all the people living in the area to stay elsewhere for the night until the bomb was removed.

First Aid Parties

Two of these units were manned in our village each night, one being at the Cottage public house. All the outer buildings, such as the garden sheds, coach houses, were cleared out and bunk beds installed where personnel slept. Private cars were used, pulling a purpose built trailer, fitted with racks to take four stretchers. Another unit was stationed on the Yarmouth Road near Dr. Davidson's and they were mobile too.

Fire Service (A.F.S.)

1939 was an important year for the peacetime Fire Service as a new act came into force by which the Rural District Council assumed responsibility for Thorpe St. Andrew instead of the Norwich City Brigade. However, special arrangements were made for this Act to be suspended until the new system could be organised. The Blofield and Flegg R.D.C. were one of the first in the country to build the fire station at Acle and organise a crew. About 30 men volunteered for Thorpe A.F.S., but there was a 60 hour training course. After long delay due to the new Act, Norwich City Brigade volunteered to do the training. It was lectures three nights per week and a "wet drill" on Sunday mornings. This all took place at the Steward & Patterson brewery in Barrack Street. When the National Fire Service was formed all these problems disappeared as we came under direct control of the Home Office.

The Thorpe A.F.S. was split into 3 crews of 6 men with Mr. J.Platt as Station Officer and a Leading Fireman in charge of each crew. There was a Coventry Climax light trailer pump which was pulled by a large aged saloon car with ladders on the roof. Every third night members reported at 10 p.m. in the coach house at the Cottage and came off duty at 6 a.m. next morning. This arrangement existed until the stand-down in 1945, but housing was improved by the building of a hut (a Horsa wooden hut) at the rear of the Cottage public house, which was used afterwards as a temporary school and finally by Thorpe British Legion until it was burnt down. Our slumbers were frequently interrupted by surprise exercises during the night in various parts of the City and large exercises were frequently held on Sunday mornings.

Home Guard

This unit does not really come under Civil Defence but Thorpe unit was very strong and under the control of the late Mr. de Carle Smith. One interesting point was that the local unit built their own armoured car in Wards Boat Yard and was often to be seen on the local roads during exercises. On one occasion there was such a huge Sunday morning parade of all the local Home Guard units on the Recreation Ground that it was inspected by Field Marshall

Lord Ironside (who incidentally nodded off to sleep, sitting on the front of the pavilion, during the service!) The picture below shows the inspection with Lord Ironside third from the left and Russel Evans fourth from the right.



Invasion Committee

These were set up in 1941 all over Norfolk (being very confidential at the time) to deal with relations with the enemy in case of occupation of this country. By now the writer was Training Officer for all the Civil Defence personnel at Laurence & Scott, Thorpe Road Works, for day and night shifts and had attended a meeting at Stuart Hall behind locked doors when a General from the North Africa campaign addressed the audience on the organisation of the Invasion Committees. I was co-opted onto Thorpe Committee with Mr. H. Booty as Chairman. Houses were earmarked as hospitals, iron rations were stored in other buildings and instructions on dealing with water supplies were prepared. Mr Watson was nominated as the Registrars of Births and Deaths and was to record where casualties were buried. We were instructed on correct approach and liaison with the enemy - thank God it never happened.

I am grateful to Neil Evans for lending me a copy of Gilbert Howard's reminiscences and the photograph above.

Ruby Paternoster

Recently I had the pleasure of meeting Ruby, who lives in Lakenham but was born and brought up in Thorpe. She has vivid memories of it and the events that occurred during her time here.

Her father Robert Thomas Cogman was a French polisher by trade while her mother Florence raised Ruby, her three sisters and her two brothers. Robert had served in the Norfolk Regiment during World War One, seeing action in the middle east and in France where he was captured by the Germans and spent time as a prisoner of war. Upon his return to Norwich after the war he was selected to lay the first wreath upon the memorial to Edith Cavell when it was unveiled in Tombland in 1918.

The Cogmans had a shop in Rupert Street in Norwich which they sold in 1934 and moved into a newly built house on Charles Avenue. Ruby was born there the following year and lived there until 1954. From 1940 she attended the new Hillside School and can clearly remember many of the teachers. Her first teacher was Mrs Edrich, the brother of the cricketer Bill Edrich. The headmaster was Mr Parker and among the others were Mrs Burrige, Mr Bishop, Mr Sturman, Mrs Golder and Miss Wright. Ruby left Hillside aged 15 in 1950 to begin her working life. When she married in 1954 she and her new husband moved to Primrose Avenue (pictured below in the 1930s).



During the war Ruby recalled there was an anti-aircraft gun and searchlight on the Recreation Ground on Laundry Lane with soldiers billeted there. She also recalled German bombs being dropped on Ring Road and the sight of German aircraft flying low on their way to bomb Norwich. The end of the war brought a celebration at The Cottage public house where the landlord Sydney Fiddler put on a spread. For Ruby the end of the war meant the welcome return of her brothers - one from Burma where he had fought with the 14th Army at Kohima, and another from Japanese captivity. He was lucky to survive, having been torpedoed twice after being captured at the fall of Singapore.

Ruby has vivid memories of her brother's return and has written the piece below which provides a graphic record of a very emotional time for her and her family.

My mother used to come to our school, Hillside Avenue Primary for sports days and events in the school hall, concerts and at Christmas time. Usually the siren interrupted part way through and we would all end up in the air raid shelter in the playground until the all clear sounded. My mum used to say that one day she would see something through to the end but she never did. We used to have talks at the school about the war and one day a policeman came and showed us a buzz bomb and told us not to touch it if we ever found one (which we never did). The worst memory is a big van coming into the playground and we would all line up and step inside to test our gas masks. I hated that and I am sure it's what caused me to be claustrophobic all my life.

I remember the celebrations when the war ended at the Cottage pub in Thorpe when I was 10. My niece Gloria and I were always together (her father, my brother Donny was stationed in Burma). Even though it was war-time, we were always happy as I don't think we realised exactly what the war was about. There were celebrations on the river at River Green and all along the river celebrating victory.

My brother took me to River Green when they added the second world war names to the war memorial. I was in the picture taken which used to be on the wall of Roxley Hall and wonder where the picture went eventually. I also remember the unit of men practising on Thorpe Recreation Ground and how my dad made us sit in a field during an air-raid as he thought the air raid shelters weren't up the job! When the siren went in the middle of the night we all had to get downstairs as quick as we could, coats on over our nightclothes to go into the shelter (until my dad decided we were safer in open ground). We were lucky in Thorpe to have been missed when Norwich was bombed but we used to go in the fields after a raid and pick up bits of shrapnel and bullets. If my parents had stayed living in Rupert Street we might not have been so lucky.

When my brother Bob came home from being a FEPOW, the whole of Charles Avenue came out to welcome him home, with flags across the road from one house to another. I will never forget that night. The whole street was in darkness, pitch black because there were no streetlights. Sadly both my brothers are now gone.

Ruby had a number of jobs including in the shoe industry - she worked at Southalls. machining the linings at first before moving to the uppers as she gained experience. She worked as a machinist at Regency Covers on Salhouse road for some years. During the 1970s Ruby worked for both Jenners and Hearts cruisers in Thorpe doing much of the upholstery and making curtains for their hire boats.

Ruby now lives in retirement with her second husband in Lakenham but continues to take an interest in what goes on in Thorpe and is a keen reader of the Thorpe History Group newsletter. She still alters clothes.

Programme for 2020

Below is our programme of events for this year which we hope. There is a modest charge of £3 per head for the talks other events are free.

Please note - the number of people we can accommodate the Rosary tour, the Chapel Lane walk and the walk in October is limited so booking in advance is necessary. Book by contacting Nick Williams.

Date	Title	Venue	Time
Thursday 20th February	Talk: Forty Years of Thorpe 1980-2020 John Balls	St Andrew's Centre, Thunder Lane	8pm
Thursday 16th April	Talk: Thorpe Schools 1937-1997. John Balls, Joanna Barker, Phyll Hardy	St Andrew's Centre, Thunder Lane	2pm
Sunday 14th June	Guided walk up Chapel Lane Joanna Barker	Meet Chapel Lane (at junction with Yarmouth Road)	
Saturday 4th July	Archive Day - an opportunity to see some of the material from the Janet Smith Archive	Roxley Hall, Yarmouth Road	2pm - 4pm
Saturday 25th July	Tour of Rosary cemetery	Rosary Cemetery, Rosary Road	2pm
Friday 11th September	Heritage Open Day: Talk and tour of Thorpe Lodge	Thorpe Lodge	2pm
Sunday 27th September	Guided walk: The builders who built the Spinney, Hillcrest and Plumstead estates	Thunder Lane corner (by the garage)	2pm
Thursday 22nd October	Talk; Life and times of Robert Caston 1887- 1981. Dale Wiseman	St Andrew's Centre, Thunder Lane	8pm

Getting in contact

If you would like to know more about the Thorpe History Group or have something interesting on the history of Thorpe you would like to share please contact Nick Williams on 01603 438766 or email him at Spinney72@aol.com

You can also find the Thorpe History Group on Facebook - Google Thorpe History Group to find information and photographs.

We have a website at <http://www.thorpe-history-group.org/> so do take a look.