

NOW ON TAPE

# AGE TO AGE

*Hereford Lore Reminiscence Newsletter*

Vol. 2 Issue 1 July 1994

Hereford Lore, 26 Quarry Road, Hereford HR1 1SS

## Lest We Forget

**T**he D-Day commemorations sparked off many memories of the last war. In this issue of Age To Age we remember not only those caught up in the fighting 50 years ago, but also some of the children like those pictured here, uprooted from their London homes and evacuated to Herefordshire.

The Hereford Lore team were in action themselves at the Town Hall in June, collecting D-Day memories. If you would like an insight into their work, come and meet the team at the marquee on the King George Playing Fields, Hereford on Friday July 15 at 2.00pm. As part of the Hereford Summer Festival they will be interviewing Herefordians about times past and reading extracts from Age to Age and Amazing How Times Change.



## Six Of The Best!

**W**e have now produced our first six Age to Age newsletters and have covered many subjects and shown a lot of old photographs to stir up old memories. The stories of the past from interviews that we have done have brought back a few memories of our own. The subject matter is provided by you, our readers, so keep it coming in. In this, our seventh issue, we cover wartime memories, a Territorial Army story and tales of evacuees who came to our county and stayed. I wish you all good reading and thank you for your support in the last twelve months.

Tom Woolaway.

## Quest for Coopers

Have you a 'cresset' or a 'devil' you wish to donate to the Hereford Cider Museum? The Cider Museum is planning a new gallery which will look at the craft of cooperage. If you were a cooper or you know a cooper, active or retired, or you have photographs or documents about producing and repairing casks, contact curator Karen Bradbury at The Cider Museum, 21, Ryelands Street, Hereford. HR4 0LW (0432) 354 207. Can you tell us what 'cressets' and 'devils' are? (Note our new address at the top of the page)

Our next issue of Age to Age will be out in September. Copies are available from City and Belmont Libraries, Hereford Tourist Information Centre, The City Environment Directorate at Garrick House, Age Concern Offices, Berrows House, Bath Street and Hereford Town Hall. Hereford Lore Editorial Group are Alf Evans, Edith Gammage, Roy Kennett, Jim Thomas, Vi Thomas, Vi Woolaway, Tom Woolaway, Bill Morris and Bill Laws. We are grateful for the support of:



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# "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat"

Winston

## Hero's Tribute

In a tribute to "the true heroes of D-Day" **David Mitchell**, a former Flight Lieutenant in R.A.F Bomber Command recalls his experience of the Allied invasion "My own aircraft took off one minute past midnight on June 6 1944. Five hours later having successfully completed our Special Operations duties, my crew and I were safely back at my base in East Anglia sipping a large mug of very sweet tea into which had been poured a liberal measure of brandy. Then came a de-briefing session with Intelligence. "After this a smack-up meal of eggs, bacon, sausage and chips. And so to a warm snug bed. The stalwarts who stormed the beaches were still fighting and dying."

## On The Beaches

One of those still fighting below was Peter Prior, deputy Lord Lieutenant of the County and until recently chairman of a local public company.

**Peter Prior**, interviewed here by **Roy Kennett**, landed on the Juno beach head during the Normandy invasion. He had known the location of the invasion for some months having been involved in its planning. He provided intelligence concerning the beach defences, the mine fields and the disposition of the enemy forces.

A Beach Group after landing was responsible for establishing the facilities which enabled the main body of the invading army in this case the 3rd Canadian Army to reach their objectives.

When talked to Peter Prior, now retired and a Sutton St Nicholas resident, asked him what his principal recollections of the D-Day operation were: "Well firstly," he said, "none of us had anticipated that we should be landing in a very rough sea, the waves were 6 to 8 feet high as we came ashore and everybody was soaked and many were seasick."

"Officers were armed with a .38 pistol and this had seemed to me to be an inadequate weapon for an initial assault. However when I reached the beaches I had obtained a Bren gun and was ready to sell my life dearly."

### Saying it with flowers

"In the event when I ran up the beach I could find no enemy to shoot at; instead I was greeted by a beautiful eighteen year old French girl who threw rose petals at me and shouted, inappropriately in my case 'Vive les Canadiens.'"

asked **Captain Prior** about the difficulties that had to be overcome after the first landing.

"In fact the establishment of the beach head at Bernieres sur Mer was remarkably successful although another of our units suffered heavy casualties at the adjoining village of St Aubin. In all military operations in my experience confusion seems to reign for the first few days. Nobody knows what is happening or where they are supposed to go. Moreover there is a tendency for trigger happy

troops to shoot not only at the enemy but also at each other. Not intentionally of course, but with the same deplorable effect."

## Sniper in the Tower

"On the night of D-Day after dark, heavy firing was going on all over Bernieres and, in desperation, I mounted a loud hailer on my jeep and went around the place shouting in English to tell people that they should stop firing. I pointed out that the Germans would not understand what I was saying and therefore, if the shooting stopped completely it would prove that our troops were only shooting at each other."

"Another self defeating activity which concerned me was, 'There's a German sniper in the Church Tower. Word would get round that there was one in the tower and eventually some would-be hero would climb up inside the tower weapon at the ready only to find no-one there. He'd then have the bright idea of sticking his head out of some hole at the top of the tower to shout 'it's all clear'."

"Somebody with an anti aircraft gun would see the head assume it was the sniper and 'bang' the tower would have a hole in it and of course a dead hero. Which is why after the war visitors found perforated church towers all over Normandy."

Mr Prior who was awarded a Croix-de-Guerre with silver star by Gen de Gaulle after D-Day finished the interview on a serious note: "Not everybody was as lucky as I was and we must remember those who did not come back could it really be 50 years ago?"

## Sick and Weary

**R.D. Macduff** recalls the rise and fall of the landing barges. "Lurching about after the storms which swept the channel the day before June 6. "Looking over the tops of the barges we saw the green bags we were issued with being thrown over the side most of us were sick and weary."

"Disembark!" came the order and off we jumped. How we managed to establish a beach head and move forward I shall never know! Sheer will power and British bulldog stubbornness no doubt."

## D-Day Jubilation

Many memories were stirred up recently by the remembrance of D-Day. **Stan Keeble**, who served in the Royal Air Force from 1942 to 1947, recalls his excitement when the news filtered through to him in southern Italy. "When news of the D-Day landings reached us, there was great jubilation in our camp. After V.E. Day in May 1945, I was able to take more advantage of my whereabouts and sample more of the delights of my surroundings. This included weekly visits to the opera in Naples, trips to Sorrento, hitch-hiking to Rome and visiting the ruins of Pompeii. But the only trip we were all waiting for was the return home."





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# SNIPPETS

## That Phantom Pig

**A**lf Evans' story of the 'Pig That Was' in our last issue, prompted a reader to write in with the following tale: During the last war her husband, then a High Town shop manager was approached by a well spoken gentleman in full RAF uniform

Would the manager he asked, be interested in a share of a pig being reared 'on the side' at the local RAF station? The share price was ten bob (10/-). Having promised to say nothing to anyone, the manager parted with his money and from time to time was given information on the pig's progress.

Curiously this information eventually dried up and the manager heard nothing more until he was visited by a policeman who told him confidentially to beware of committing the grave offence of blackmarket activities.

And, our reader adds, although her husband eventually got over the embarrassment of having been conned, both his wife and mother-in-law who had been saving their kitchen scraps for 'that ruddy pig' were rather less forgiving.

She wonders how many more Herefordians fell for this war time scam?

## Organ In Action

**M**ention of the Ritz organ in our May issue prompted a letter from **George Burton** explaining that the Ritz Compton, as it was known had been removed by a **Mr Bob Heard** who had it installed in his Dursley Gloucestershire home. Although built into two rooms in his converted stables, the Ritz Compton was still used as a performance organ, notably on one occasion by **Nigel Ogden** from the BBC programme The Organist Entertains.

When Bob Heard's health deteriorated the organ was sold on to someone in Gloucestershire. "I don't know the actual siting," writes George Burton, "but I do know it is still in action"

**Alf Evans** asks if anyone recalls the St George's Hall

where the world's biggest organ was built around 1910. It was shipped to Melbourne, Australia together with a team to erect it, including a Mr Portlock who later had a business in St Nicholas Street, Hereford around 1924.

## Scudamore

**M**ary Mackie of Drybridge House found her brother **Stephen Healey** in the picture of Scudamore school pupils on the front page of our last Age To Age. He is sitting in the front row second from left. Mary dates the picture at about 1932.

## Mary Hankins

**L** Digger of College Road remembers **Mary Hankins (nee Mauvan)** who wrote to us from Birmingham. She was their neighbour 60 years ago. And so did **Muriel Williams (nee Breeze)** who worked alongside Mary at Alec Evans hairdressers.

## Romance at Redhill

**N**icky Roberts and **Pearl Mitchell** both worked at Redhill Hostel during the war. The hostel then known as the Holiday Fellowship Hostel, was home to about a thousand factory workers, land army girls, railway men, nurses and office workers. There was, she says, a great sense of camaraderie in which many romances developed and several still flourish!

## Sorry!

**M**onasteries or monastries? The spelling mistake in Issue 5 was spotted by **Betty Winsor** who writes: "Correct spelling was something that was very important to my age group unfortunately not so important today maybe." Abject apologies from Bill Laws, your editor



Hereford Times

**S**ergeant Nicholson  
Corporal O'Reilly  
Corporal Woolaway, Corporal Taylor and Private Wharton seen here during their training days with the Territorial Army at Norfolk

recall the night they came across a young boy with life-threatening injuries. Their first aid efforts saved his life.

**Geoff Price** remembers working as an RAF wireless operator listening in to

German transmissions in the run up to D-Day. Their efforts gave the allies vital information about troop movements.

Finally a sobering memory of the first World War from **Alf Evans**.

"Charley Meredith known as Marcle after his home village, retained his pension for a leg wound in the First World War. But when it caught gangrene he was told it would have to be amputated.

"He got drunk in town then walked to a shallow part of the river and continued until he disappeared and drowned."

The Coroner held the inquest at the Wye Inn, Marcle's last port of call before his suicide.

## FRIENDS OF AGE TO AGE

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