

# Herefordshire Lore

# Age to Age

## Reminiscence Newsletter

Vol 10 Issue 4

john.herefordlore@btinternet.com

Comments to:

P O Box 2  
Hereford  
HR2 8YE

August 2002

### Inside this Issue



Wartime Women at Rotherwas



St. Mary's School, Fownhope.



BBC Hereford and Worcester's **Jane Gething-Lewis** interviews former radio presenter **Norah Foster** about the German bombing of Rotherwas 60 years ago.

**'Thank you and your team for having the foresight and interest to tap into local people's memories and record these for future generations.'**

*Alan Williams,  
Mayor of Hereford*

## Gentle Reminder

OVER the last twelve months we have been working hard to set up a new system to ensure subscribers receive a prompt service. We have designed a database that lists all subscribers by name and address and we can now update your records as soon as your subscription is renewed or a new

reader registers. The database will also record the date of payment. This will allow us to remind you when your subscription is due.

From time to time an Age To Age fails to reach a reader. The database is checked immediately and any necessary changes made. I have to add this is a rare occurrence.

Age To Age needs your continuing support in order to exist! The cost of a year's subscription still remains at £5. Please make all cheques payable to Herefordshire Lore.

Enjoy your summer break.

**Harvey Payne,**  
Treasurer.

## Herefordshire Lore - Living Local History

Herefordshire Lore was set up in 1989 to collect, remember and celebrate our past. Age To Age is our bi-monthly newsletter. We want as many people as possible to receive Age To Age so we send free copies to the county libraries and Tourist Information Centres and Museums, Age Concern (Hereford), Hereford Town Hall and Herefordshire College of Technology. But **we rely on your subscriptions**, grants and donations to keep

going. Take out a subscription if you can - details on the back page. Herefordshire Lore is Margaret Beare, Bobbie Blackwell, Mary Blackwell, Siriol Collins, Eileen Klotz, Bill Laws, Elizabeth Semper O'Keefe (County Archives), Harvey Payne, Sylvie Smith and John Turner.

The next Age To Age will be out in October 2002.





# Open to Attack

*How a Dad's Army disaster prevented an anti-aircraft gun from defending the Royal Ordnance Factory in Rotherwas sixty years ago.*

WHEN a German bomber attacked Hereford sixty years ago, a military blunder left the city's munitions factory at Rotherwas undefended. According to eyewitness **Albert Double**, the Home Guard men could not use the anti-aircraft Bren gun to defend the munitions factory - because their own ammunition was under lock and key. The Dad's Army scenario came to light when former munitions workers' memories, collected by Herefordshire Lore, were lodged with Sue Hubbard at Herefordshire County Archive office by Hereford mayor Alan Williams. They heard how the factory was bombed early on the morning of July 27 1942. The German bomber dropped two bombs, one hitting a police superintendent's house and killing all but one of the occupants, the other killing around 19 people inside the factory.

## Locked Away

Albert Double was an apprentice electrician at ROF Hereford on the day the bomb dropped. "They had built a tower in front of the firemen's quarters with a Bren gun on top," said Albert of Standale Road, Hereford. "Merchant navy men taught the Home Guard how to use it. When the attack came two Home Guard ran up the tower. But they could not get the ammunition because the major who had the key in his pocket was asleep in bed," he said. War time reporting restrictions meant that very little was published about either this incident or two other explosions which tore through the factory during the Second World War. In all around 25 people are believed to have lost their lives making munitions during the last war. Albert also recalled rumours of pollution on the Rotherwas site. "There was a bridge that ran over to the railway lines and there was a



*This rare picture, taken inside the factory, shows Peggy Putnam's mother, the late May Morgan (second from the right) with six fellow workers. **Katie Causer** (see opposite) remembers the persistent rumour that circulated at the time about how the German pilot tried to avoid civilian casualties. "He flew low over the factory just as the two shifts were switching over and people said he was waving at the shift workers to get down before he dropped the bombs."*

field there with no grass or anything growing - I was told this was pollution caused by mustard gas stored there in the World War."

## Experimental Unit

**Mrs. E.A. Winders** from Hallow, Worcester, worked on the North Side "after I was taken off painting those yellow shells. If I remember rightly Bill North and Mr Devlin were over my friend and I in the 'Experimental Unit' (where we worked) with cordite."

## Museum's Medals

Work came to a halt at Franklin Hodge on Rotherwas industrial estate some years ago when workmen discovered what they thought was a German incendiary device. "Later they found out it was a First World War fire extinguisher," writes **John Lewis** from Kings Acre Road. He was a mere babe in arms when, in May 1944, an explosion shook the factory. "A family friend Mrs Price shot right off her chair and across the room!" John mentions the subsequent awards given to factory workers. The city museum in Broad Street holds two of the George medals awarded for bravery together with photos and documents relating to those who were awarded.



***I'll Take Those:** Sue Hubbard from the County Archive Office in Harold Street, Hereford receives memories of Munitions Workers from Councillor Alan Williams.*

**Leonorai Williams**, former munitions worker (and mother to the Mayor) joined **Norah Foster, Sidney and Eleanor Keates, Eve Lichfield and Albert Double** at the ceremony in June. Leonorai was one of those who was moved to other munitions sites around the West Midlands during the war.

**Martin Morris** from Ross was the first to point out we had published the wrong date for the German attack. "The diary I kept as a 16 year old schoolboy records the attack as being on 27th of July not June 1942 as you reported. It's wrong to describe Rotherwas as a secret factory. Its reopening in 1937 or 1938 was announced on the radio and in local newspapers." But Martin, a former journalist on the Ross Gazette, agrees that official information about the raid was scant owing to wartime censorship.



Thank you for inviting me to the Presentation of Recollections of workers at the Royal Ordnance Factory, Rotherwas, on 27<sup>th</sup> June last.

I found the whole thing educational and fascinating. The fact that my own mother was part of this particular piece of local history, although known to me, the full details she had kept to herself. She was so pleased to have come along and met some old friends from her youth.

Thank you and your team for having the foresight and interest to 'tap into' local people's memories and record these for future generations. I am quite sure that the records will be utilised by students in years to come.

Thank you again for a very interesting morning.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Alan Williams,  
The Right Worshipful the Mayor.



# Snippets

## Sporting Recollections



**M**ARION Lister sent in this photograph of a rounders team at St Peter's School, Hereford, taken in 1966. Her daughter Heather is on the front row, far right. "I do enjoy Age To Age and have introduced two former Herefordians to its delights."



**H**ELEN Black, Alice Whittall and Lyndsay Neil from St Mary's School, Fownhope enjoy Age To Age. To celebrate Herefordshire Lore going county-wide, Age To Age has been touring the county. As well as St Mary's, Age To Age editor, Bill Laws has been to meet Hereford's Age Concern mobile day centres at Ewyas Harold, Sutton St Nicholas and Sellack, Ross and Leominster Libraries and residents at Dulas Court. The County tour was made possible by a grant from the Rural Development Area's Small Projects Fund via the Herefordshire Partnership.

## Boy Racers

**T**OM Bradstock from Ashperton recalls racing on the Whitecross Road, Hereford around 1925 (see Road Racing — June 2002). "I was taken to see Time Trials there. The start line was near the present roundabout and the finish opposite the Bay Horse pub. I don't know how speeds were recorded but the fastest was a motor bike at the dizzy speed of 60 miles per hour!"

## Air Crashes

**L**ES Causer recalls a Percival Proctor trainer monoplane from Madley crashing in Harold Street during the last war. Another came down in the churchyard at Tupsley while an American plane crashed at St Mary's Hospital, Burghill. He also remembers the unusual launch of an observation aircraft, a Taylor, flown from a little field on Dinedor Hill during the last war.

**Jack Wakefield** from Lincolnshire was close to the St Mary's crash. "I was only a field or so away from the badly shot up USAF Liberator which crashed in the grounds. With bullets and cannon shells flying everywhere and the aircraft burning fiercely there was little we could do to help although most of the crew would have been killed in combat or on impact."

Jack has good memories of the former RAF Station Hereford - he's even named his Lincoln home 'Credenhill'. "My wife and I met there in 1942 in the glamorous surroundings of a NAAFI dance!" Now he is trying to find where the contents of the Station History Room have gone.

## That's My Mum!

**M**ENTION of Olive and Arthur Wathen in our February 2000 issue prompted **June Joiner** (nee Wathen) to write from Mansel Lacy: "After your issue came out I met so many people who had seen it: dad would have been so happy to hear them saying how they missed his ice-cream, which he was very proud of. Keep up the good work."

## Tile Workers

**W**E can name all those pictured at Holmer Tile Works in our December 2001 issue, thanks to Mr Roberts, Mr Collier and now **Stan Barnes** from Disraeli Court, Hereford. From left to right, back row, Bill, H. Collier, J. Evans, Stan himself, Trevor Sullivan, Jim Davies and Tom Smart. Front row Connie Purchase and Vic Cox. Now, who can tell us about life at the tile works? Contact Age To Age, at P.O. Box 2, Hereford HR2 8YE.

**D**OES anyone know the date when the College Hill Youth Club in Old School Lane was built, asks **Mrs. M. Morris** of College Green, Hereford.

## Type Cast

**W**INIFRED Preece recognised many of the young ladies featured on the front page of our last issue (June 2002). "They were students in my Typing and Business Training Class of 1959. Some of the names are Janet Wainwright, Dorothy Roberts, Lesley Jeffcott, Dorothy Bradford, Margaret Askeil, Mary Davies, Barbara Preece, Gillian Price and Carole Leverage." Where are they now?

# No Time For Bigotry

**W**ITH over 2,000 workers at Rotherwas and the city filled with soldiers, accommodation was critical in wartime Hereford. **Katie Causer** remembers how troops were billeted on local families or lived in tents around the city.

"Widemarsh Common was covered in tents, possibly in readiness for the D Day Landings. The Race Course was tented right through the war. All nationalities were there, but the black and white Americans were strictly separated. the blacks were on the Roman Road side, the whites on the Grandstand Road side and the two sides could never cross. I don't think the black GIs were even allowed into the local dances."

Her mother Hannah Leary, meanwhile, had no time for military bigotry. She was, by all accounts, an extraordinary character. A St John nursing sister, she earned the nickname Sister Hannah after setting up a tea stall for troops returning from Dunkirk. Hannah was anxiously awaiting the return of her own son.

Hannah also befriended several Indian troops; she felt especially sorry for the Indians who had to march to the Black Mountains and back on training exercises. One day, to show their gratitude, they made her a guest of honour at a simple ceremony in one of the tents — but borrowed Hannah's own potted plants to decorate the tent!



*Helping Hand: Hannah Leary, left, with husband Bill during the 1940s. Hannah is wearing her overalls she had just returned from her work in the US cold store at Three Elms.*



# Herefordshire Lore - Living Local History



**Test Your Skills:** Ron Chatburn who worked in the City Engineering office in the 1950s and now lives in Dover has sent us several photographs including this road improvement, above. "As I travel over this stretch of road, I remember much of the detail of the job which I designed, set out and supervised," says Ron. But can you identify where this is? Write and tell us at Age To Age (PO Box 2 Hereford HR2 8YE).

## River Drama

OPEN air theatre comes to the River Wye this September with a 'theatrical promenade' by New Theatre Works. "Our guide is knowledgeable, but eccentric," warns New Theatre director Dr Ellie Parker. "While we walk and hear his stories, all sorts of strange and wonderful things will be happening."

Herefordshire Lore has helped with the research. "We're delighted to find out some of the more amusing and lively anecdotes connected with the river from Herefordshire Lore," says Dr. Parker.

The walks, from September 7 to 14, are free, but you need to book (01432 359252)



Stan James loaned us this picture of the Dartmouth Castle steam engine. With him are (from the left) Vic Brodie, ? Reg Hodges, G.Healey, A. Williams, Stan and Sam Knott. Fireman Brian Jones and driver Fred George are on the footplate. The Dartmouth was on standby for the Royal train when the Queen visited the County in the late 1950s.

**In Mourning:** Munitions worker Elizabeth Yemm of Hom Green (right) is pictured in her mop cap and overalls during the First World War. She is also wearing a mourning band. Her great niece, broadcaster Jane Williams, loaned the picture.



## Friends of Age To Age

Thanks to all those organisations that have made a donation or taken out a group subscription to Age To Age. A Group subscription will bring your residential home, day centre, nursing home, group or club, 12 copies of each issue for only £25 a year.

- TUPSLEY TOWNSWOMEN'S GUILD
- ST JOHN'S METHODIST CHURCH LUNCHEON CLUB
- HEREFORD BAPTIST CHURCH WEDNESDAY CLUB
- PEOPLES ADVOCACY NETWORK
- RAIL REUNION ASSOCIATION
- THE BAY HORSE INN

**GUARANTEE YOUR OWN COPY OF AGE TO AGE WITH A SUBSCRIPTION. Still only £5 a year!**

Fill in your details below (or send them on a piece of paper) together with a cheque or postal order made payable to Herefordshire Lore to: Herefordshire Lore, PO Box 2, Hereford HR2 8YE

Name

Address

Postcode