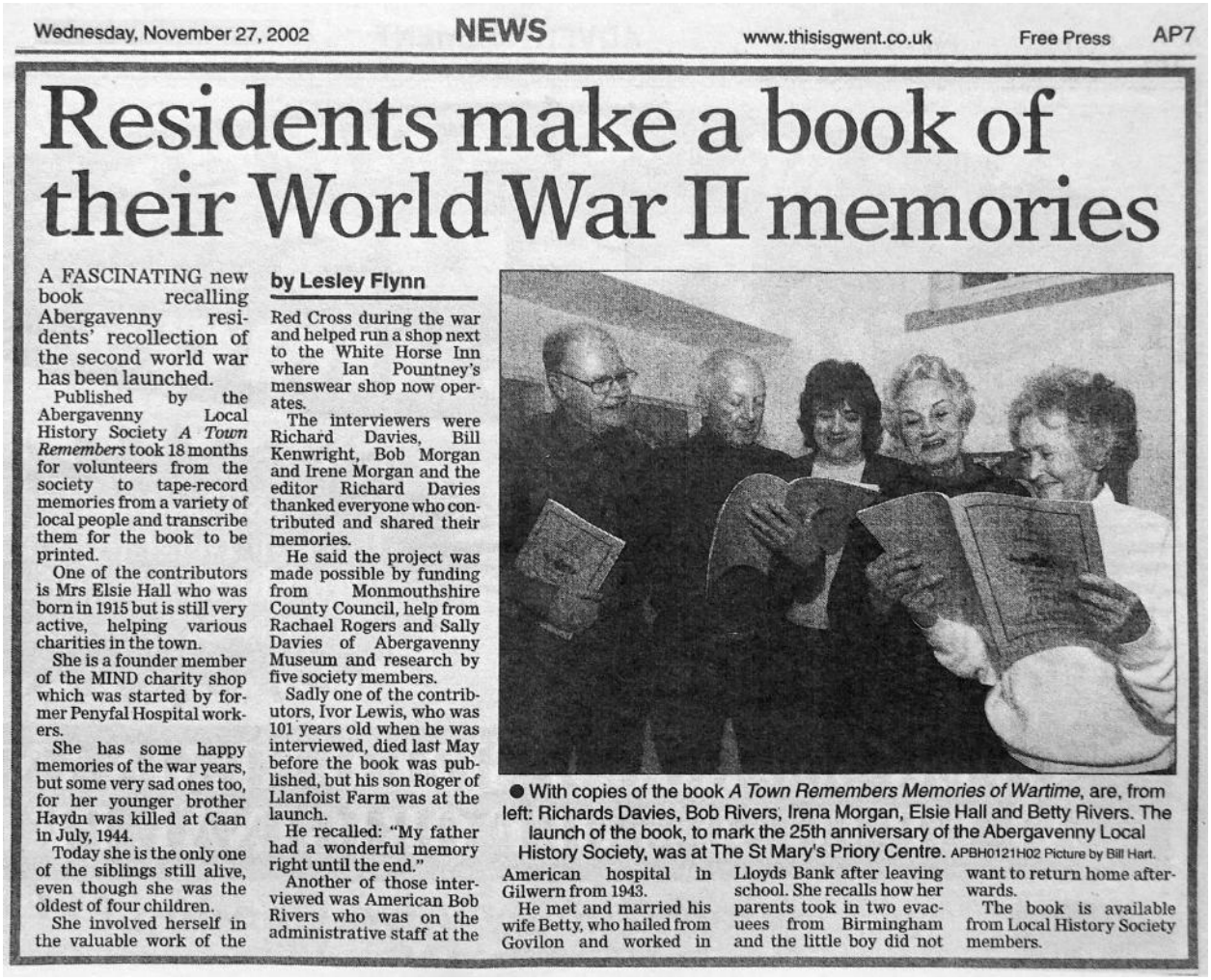
A TOWN REMEMBERS

Memories of Wartime Abergavenny
1939-1945



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Residents make a book of their World War II memories

A FASCINATING new book recalling Abergavenny residents' recollection of the second world war has been launched.

Published by the Abergavenny Local History Society *A Town Remembers* took 18 months for volunteers from the society to tape-record memories from a variety of local people and transcribe them for the book to be printed.

One of the contributors is Mrs Elsie Hall who was born in 1915 but is still very active, helping various charities in the town.

She is a founder member of the MIND charity shop which was started by former Penyfal Hospital workers.

She has some happy memories of the war years, but some very sad ones too, for her younger brother Haydn was killed at Caan in July, 1944.

Today she is the only one of the siblings still alive, even though she was the oldest of four children.

She involved herself in the valuable work of the Red Cross during the war and helped run a shop next to the White Horse Inn where Ian Pountney's menswear shop now operates.

by Lesley Flynn

The interviewers were Richard Davies, Bill Kenwright, Bob Morgan and Irene Morgan and the editor Richard Davies thanked everyone who contributed and shared their memories.

He said the project was made possible by funding from Monmouthshire County Council, help from Rachael Rogers and Sally Davies of Abergavenny Museum and research by five society members.

Sadly one of the contributors, Ivor Lewis, who was 101 years old when he was interviewed, died last May before the book was published, but his son Roger of Llanfoist Farm was at the launch.

He recalled: "My father had a wonderful memory right until the end."

Another of those interviewed was American Bob Rivers who was on the administrative staff at the American hospital in Gilwern from 1943.

He met and married his wife Betty, who hailed from Govilon and worked in Lloyds Bank after leaving school. She recalls how her parents took in two evacuees from Birmingham and the little boy did not want to return home afterwards.

The book is available from Local History Society members.

● With copies of the book *A Town Remembers Memories of Wartime*, are, from left: Richards Davies, Bob Rivers, Irena Morgan, Elsie Hall and Betty Rivers. The launch of the book, to mark the 25th anniversary of the Abergavenny Local History Society, was at The St Mary's Priory Centre. APBH0121H02 Picture by Bill Hart.

When *A Town Remembers* was first published in 2002 it featured in the 27th November edition of the Monmouthshire Free Press

Introduction to 2025 Digital Edition

This edition of *A Town Remembers: Memories of Wartime Abergavenny 1939-1945* is published as part of the celebrations for the 80th anniversary of VE Day.

We have tried to retain the 'feel' of the original book by keeping the original text and general layout with only minor changes. But we have replaced the illustrations wherever possible, meaning that many are now in colour. Images have been created by re-photographing the original documents from the collection in Abergavenny Museum (Monlife Heritage) or by using images from the Imperial War Museum website and from Wikimedia Commons. The cover photo is by kind permission of the Abergavenny Chronicle (Tindle Newspapers Ltd.).

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This publication is a by-product of an oral history project undertaken in 2001-2002 by members of the Abergavenny Local History Society. A grant of £300 by the Monmouthshire County Council under its Community Pride scheme enabled us to buy the tape recorders, tapes and other materials necessary for the project.

We are grateful to the following local people who willingly shared their memories of the War years in Abergavenny and district with us:

Betty Adams
Richard Ahrens
Mary Bucknell
Joe Clifford
George Cobourne
Don Davies
Gordon Davies
Dorothie Eden
David Edwards
Eunice Gilbert
Harold Gregory
Anne Griffith
Maureen Griffiths
Elsie Hall
Mary Holland
Bill Jones
Chrissie Jones
George Leslie
Glyn Lewis
Ivor Lewis
Pamela Mason
Richard Merton-Jones
Mary Morgan
Don Powell
Don Prosser
Ray Prosser
F. Owen Richards
Betty Rivers
Bob Rivers
Magaret Rumsey
Viv Sadler
John Straker
Mary Swinnerton
Christine Thatcher
Marjorie Tidley
George Vater
Gwyn Watkins
Mary White
Glyn Williams
John Williams
John G. Williams

The interviewers were Richard Davies, Bill Kenwright, Bob Morgan and Irena Morgan.

We are also grateful to Anna Pavord for sharing with us her memories of her father and to Richard Wilkinson for information that he has gathered about Llanover Park.

In addition to extracts from interviews we include research done in the wartime editions of the Abergavenny Chronicle. We wish to thank the Editor of the Chronicle for allowing us to visit the Chronicle offices for this purpose. Researchers were Richard Davies, Peter and Mary Hulme, Mollie Johnson and Christine Scott. Another primary source of information was provided by the Castle Street Girls and Hereford Road Boys School logbooks at the Gwent Record Office. Thanks are due to the staff there and to Rachael Rogers, the Curator, and Sally Davis at Abergavenny Museum for their cheerful assistance in fielding our queries. Richard Symons of the Department of Printed Books at the Imperial War Museum kindly supplied additional information about Rudolf Hess to be found in secondary sources there.

INTRODUCTION

This booklet is not intended to be a history of the Second World War. Rather it is based on the recollections of a number of local residents who lived in Abergavenny and district during the War and is concerned with the Home Front. Many of our contributors were quite young in those days and their comments must be considered as the clear sighted, occasionally impressionable, ones of childhood. Our researches also included the stories in the wartime editions of the Chronicle and, where they survive, the wartime entries in school logbooks. These and other documents consulted were intended to supplement the oral evidence whilst confirming, where applicable, the timing and details given by the interviewees. The end product we hope provides a composite picture of the town and surrounding area at that time. Whether disparate individual recollections can ever be synthesised into a totally accurate overall picture is debatable. However we were convinced that the exercise would be a productive and worthwhile one and so it has proved to be. As a number of the interviewees were in their late 80's and 90's we felt that many of these recollections would be lost if we delayed such a project.

We hope that you will enjoy this booklet as much as we enjoyed the project itself. The recordings and transcripts will be stored at the Abergavenny Castle Museum and visitors are welcome to listen to them. In the course of our interviews we spoke to a number of people who had begun to write down or word process their memories of lives spent in the area and all the changes that they had seen. We hope the project will have encouraged more local residents to record their memories in this way and that copies of their work can be added to the Castle Museum's collection.

Richard Davies
(Editor)

THE END OF THE WAR: A TIME TO CELEBRATE

To begin at the end seems perverse but V.E. day and the days around it seem as happy a place as any to begin our story. The sense of release must have been almost tangible. In its May 11th edition the Chronicle noted that, 'on V.E. day it seemed that having waited for it for so long and having been so often promised that it was near at hand people could hardly believe it had come at last.' It was like a Sunday with the shops closed but at least there were flags in the streets. The evening of V.E. day was better. A Mr Lloyd had a loud speaker in his premises in Cross Street below the Angel to hear any special BBC announcements. There was music and dancing in the street. There were some street parties for children and fires on the mountains as beacons. The pupils had also floodlit the Grammar School in Penypound.

Our happiest witness to the celebrations was undoubtedly ***Eunice Gilbert***.

'There was a whisper going round that the War was nearing the end. We thought… couldn't possibly be. Think of the blackout lifting – we were always in a blackout and all of a sudden the War was ended. This was at night. We heard this hullabaloo outside. We got up to look out of the window and there were people out in the streets, out in their nightclothes, dressing gowns, pyjamas and we joined them and we danced up and down the street. The War was over. We just couldn't believe it. Everybody lit a light. Everybody lit up. We hadn't had lights for years. We could see everything without blackouts. Blackout curtains came down with a crash. Never again put up a blackout curtain. It was wonderful. It was a marvellous experience and everybody talked about it for days. The end of the War… we had been going flat out from 1939 to 1945 and then the War was over. It was summertime… but it was something to go out in our nightclothes and just put dressing gowns and bed slippers on…. dancing up and down the streets. Quite mad ! Then there were parties up and down the street. We used to have street parties for the kids and the grown-ups would join in… We were so excited. It was wonderful really, the atmosphere in those days. That's it. That anxiety had passed us and all the bad news we used to get…'

Maureen Griffiths remembered her street party: 'We formed a little band as a number of people in the area where I lived were musicians and played in various dance bands. I played the piano accordion and we had a small band of violins, drums and accordions for the people to dance in the street.'

Not surprisingly the celebrations were most noisy in Lower Cross Street and outside the George. Even the pets wanted to join in! ***Viv Sadler*** remembered : 'When V.E. day came it scared our cats… yes we were upstairs listening to all the hijinks and various thunder-flashes. Lord knows what going on and our 2 cats… they'd got down as far as Sydney George and somebody let off a thunder flash just beneath them. Les Taylor in the bank said he'd never quite seen cats move so fast in his life. As luck would have it our window was wide open. They both came in and sat under the tables swearing, oh dear dear their language!'

In its next edition the Chronicle described ongoing celebrations. There was a St. Mary's

service and Victory parade in which about 1000 people took part. There were more street parties for children, dancing, community singing and fireworks. A teenaged ***Don Prosser*** remembered the celebrations. 'The highlight for me was that there was a poor chap with a black moustache, Hitler, and he was indicating to go up by the Angel pitch with his hand in an almost German salute and a couple of my close friends lifted this effigy off the ground at the back because we couldn't move. The streets were thronged as you can imagine with fireworks going off.'

Not surprisingly school logbooks recorded holidays on the first 2 days of peace on May 8th and 9th. Even so the celebrations affected the subsequent attendances. In the Hereford Road Boys School logbook for instance the May 10th entry noted that only 83% of the pupils were there due to 'very late hours kept by the children during the Victory celebrations'. All things considered, this seemed to be a surprisingly high turn-out!

For a number of our interviewees, it marked a major change which they found hard to put into words. To ***Pamela Mason***, even though she joined in the celebrations, 'It was a strange thing… it seemed that there was a vacuum… all of a sudden it was as if everything you had been working for had gone somehow'.

THE BEGINNING: ABERGAVENNY AT THE OUTBREAK OF WAR

On 1st September 1939, Hitler invaded Poland. Britain required him to withdraw or face war with this country. He did not and from Sunday 3rd September the people of the Abergavenny area, like others throughout Britain, were at war with Germany. This was the way that the South Wales Argus announced the news on that fateful Sunday.

SOUTH WALES ARGUS
Best for Local and General News
THE WEEKLY ARGUS
The Home Paper

South Wales Argus

IN 85th YEAR OF PUBLICATION

NEWPORT, SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 1939 ONE PENNY

DAME WALES
FLOUR

BRITAIN AT WAR

Peace Ended at 11 a.m.

Ultimatum Ignored

For many local people it was the wireless announcement by Chamberlain that made the biggest impression. ***Mary Morgan*** vividly remembered it. 'My grandfather came over from the next farm because their wireless battery was flat. In those days you had a big dry battery and a wet battery, you see. The Prime Minister was going to speak at 11 o'clock and I can remember the bleak look on both their faces when it was announced that we are now at War with Germany, which was a horrible moment as to me, at 14, I didn't know what was in front of us.'

Don Davies who lived in Wyndham Road also remembered the broadcast but mainly for the reassurances of family and friends which followed it:
'Shortly afterwards our family and 3 or 4 other families went for a picnic on the edge of Llwynu Lane. We played games and afterwards father and the other men talked to us about the war. We might not realise what was happening, they said, but things would never be quite the same for some years. Father had been at Gallipoli and mentioned something about the horrors of war but we children were told that we would be looked after and that we should stick together as families and friends.'

Preparations for a possible war had been going on for some time, but the Chronicle of 8th September showed that they had been increased. The Town Council had met on the Monday night and ordinary business was postponed. The Mayor Alderman Rosser was now the chief operating officer and chief evacuation officer. Plans for reception of evacuees were outlined and it seemed that Abergavenny could expect 770 evacuees from Birmingham from 3 of their poorest schools. The first batch of 329 pupils, 35 teachers and 12 adult helpers had arrived. Once the children had settled most of the teachers left.

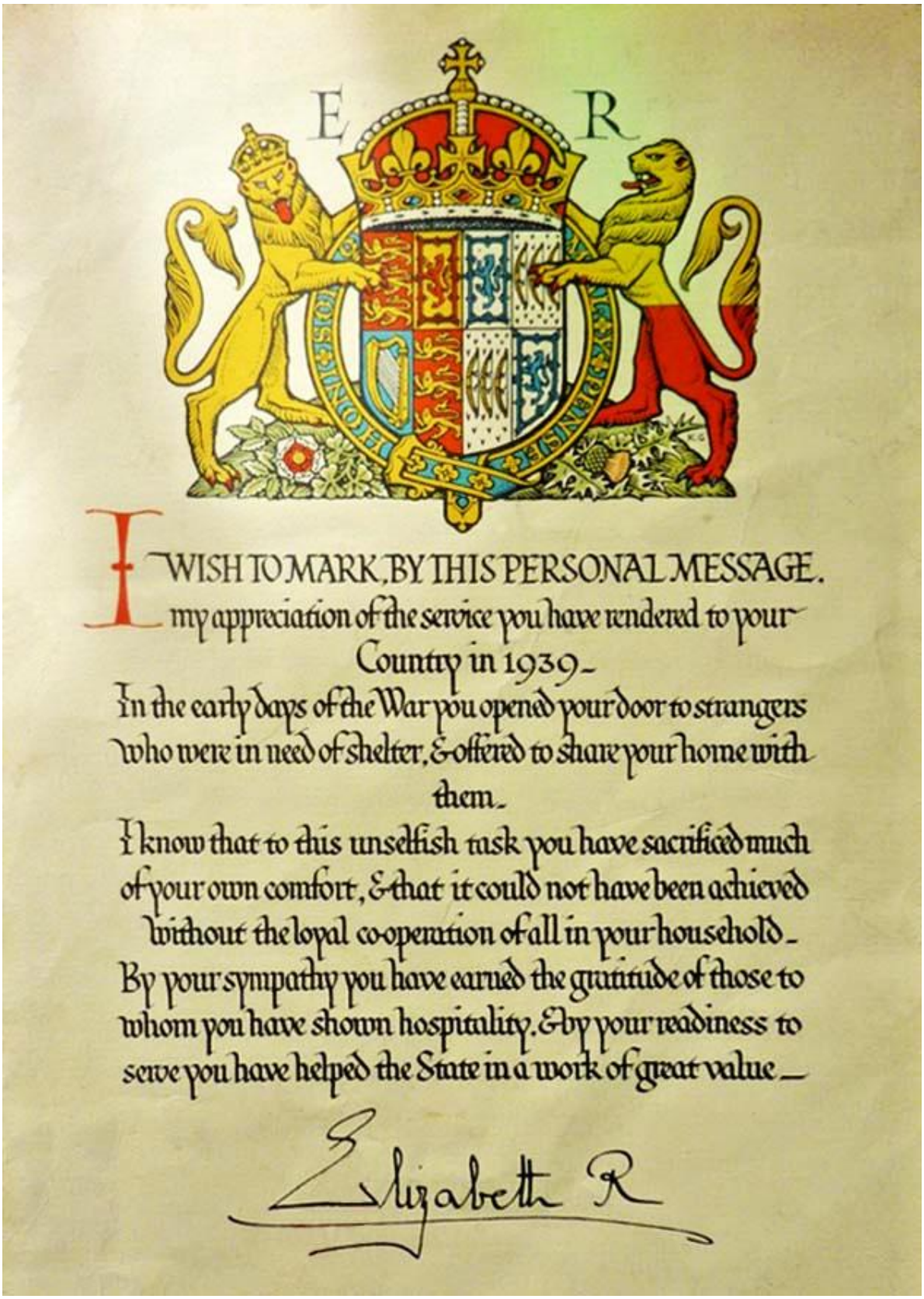
From the station, the newcomers went to the Market Hall where they were given refreshments and 2 days emergency rations in paper bags by Mrs Jim Thomas and the W.V.S. Some 360 evacuees were soon on buses to the rural areas, with a car to show each bus the way. Many needed decent clothing and accommodation was rapidly found. The children who were placed in Abergavenny were initially attached to schools in the Castle and Priory wards. In its next edition the Chronicle reported that 2 children had made their way back to Birmingham so some found it to be all too much. Undoubtedly the extra fortnight's holiday to the 18th September helped the settling in process, but life changed for local children too.

Mary Bucknell who was at Park Street School was one who noticed the difference: 'Some evacuees came to live next door to us and I had to go to school with them and stay there.' Previously she had often truanted!

Once schools resumed the evacuees were allocated to 6 of them: Victoria Street had had 110, Park Street Infants 86, Hereford Road 20, Castle Street Girls 25, Castle Street Infants 30 and the Roman Catholic school 30. A number of adults also arrived as they thought that it was a safe area. ***Mary Swinnerton*** for instance took in a bus driver and his wife from London. Curiously many locals were less convinced and 3000 people left Abergavenny for the west to get 'out of the danger zone' in the first week of September.

Pamela Mason's first impression of the children was that 'their experience of life had been very different to that of youngsters in rural Abergavenny.' The Chronicle confirmed this by citing 2 examples from a Birmingham Post article. One undernourished Birmingham 8 year old, asked if he could eat a whole egg, said that he had 8 inside him as he was allowed 1 every Christmas! Another newcomer was reported to have cried 'Oh miss, if you wash me any more I shall go home a shadder.' ***Don Davies*** remembered an evacuee girl called Doris from Birmingham who moved in next door to him. 'All she had was a paper bag with some underwear in it and her name on a piece of cardboard around her neck. She didn't stay very long as she was so homesick. She'd never used a knife and fork and she just couldn't settle to the way of life in Abergavenny.' ***Don Prosser,*** on the other hand felt that 'The Birmingham children in the Mardy settled down well after an initial 'skirmish' and became good friends, playing football and walking up the mountains with us'. These were from the Barbury Infants School children from Birmingham and others from that school went to Govilon.

Lord David Owen was a pupil at Govilon during the War. His parents had many friends and relatives in South Wales. His mother, a dentist, had first taken a house in Newport.



Royal appreciation of the local response to the arrival of evacuees was shown in letters from Queen Elizabeth, wife of King George VI. Mrs Adams received one like this.

Lord Owen recalled in his autobiography, *Time to Declare,* that when they moved to Penpergwm 'we lived an extended family life' as cousins were evacuated to a farm close by. 'We then moved to Govilon where we had our own house and I went to the local village school. Eventually when 'bugger' became my every second word, my mother in desperation sent me to a private school in Abergavenny.'

Betty Rivers remembers the evacuees' effect on their family in Govilon. 'Mother said 'You're the only girl, so we must have a girl who can share with you.' So they went up to the local school and they'd come in from the railway station, all with their gas masks and their bags in one hand, and there was this very small boy who was 5 and he was crying his eyes out and holding his sister's hand and she was 7 and they allocated the girl to our place and mother said 'Well you can't split them up… he's upset now'. So we took the two. So all of a sudden I was part of a family of 3. They were from Hockley in Birmingham and the boy was with us for 5 years as he didn't want to go back because he couldn't remember his parents… father would have loved to have kept him. He became for father the son he'd have loved to have had - working the garage'… Betty was not as impressed by the lad because when she started courting her future husband Bob, an American soldier, he used to follow them and tell her parents so she had to bribe him to ensure his silence!

There were other village billets too. ***Harold Gregory*** was at Llanover School when the War broke out. He recalled girls from Wallasey and Chatham and his farming family took in 2 sisters for 2 years and a mother with 2 smaller children for a year. The evacuees had their own school at the Chapel. ***Mary Morgan's*** family also farmed in Llanover. Initially they took a Birmingham pupil called Edith Jansson who was a 'skinny little kid who could eat like a horse'. When Edith's mother visited her from Birmingham she got homesick and soon went home. She was succeeded by a little girl called Gwennie Andow whose sister stayed at a neighbouring farm and they were there for some 2 years. Gwennie was a delicate child but benefitted from the country air and from the cod liver oil tablets purchased with a half-crown postal order that her father used to send to Mary's mother. ***George Vater*** could recall the places which took children in the Llanddewi Rhydderch area as his mother was billeting officer. The first evacuees arrived on a very cold night and his family took all those who were left over which meant George ended up in the attic! School for these children was in the village hall and there were many socials. His family have made annual visits to some of the evacuees ever since. He also mentioned a Kent farming family which arrived when the doodlebugs were landing.

These were the hosts' impressions but we also have accounts from the evacuees themselves. In the Castle Museum in an account sent by one of the evacuees called 'Wartime in Wales' a Birmingham lady described arriving at Abergavenny Station on 1st September 1939 as one of a group of at least 150 Brummies aged between 5 and 14, 'destination unknown'. 'Our school sported green and yellow silk ribbons, held on by gold safety pins. Each one of us carried a brown square cardboard box which contained our gas mask and instruction for use'. They went to a church hall where they were given a bag containing biscuits, condensed milk, corn beef and a bar of chocolate which they were supposed to give to their hosts. Unfortunately this girl was one of a group of 'unchosen' children. So their teacher took her, her friend Irene and Irene's brother Fred in a car to be 'fixed up.' She carried a list, presumably of likely landladies. Eventually they found a house for Fred. Irene didn't want to be separated from him. Then the two girls were settled at The Hall, Windsor Road with a 'wonderful lady called Miss Pearce'. The girls thought it was a mansion. There were 2 living-in maids, a cook-housekeeper and a

chauffeur-cum-gardener. Even so, they did not stay more than a few months before 'Irene was fetched home with her brother Fred'. So she moved to a house in North Street.

School for her was a hut in the Catholic School grounds. The only teacher who remained from her school, Miss Owen, 'daily reminded us that she should have retired had it not been for the War, and we daily wished she had'. Miss Owen had to deal with 50 of them, aged from 5 to 14. Two 14 year old cousins of hers were in the group and they wanted to go to work to help their widowed mums so they ran away! These must have been the ones mentioned in the Chronicle. They hitch-hiked and slept rough but they arrived home safely.

Few of the class could say Abergavenny... most said either Aber Gavney or Aber Vagny. They wrote letters home which Miss put in one large envelope and posted to their Birmingham school for distribution to their mums. Many dads were in the forces and the children sang to the tune of 'Roll out the barrel':-
Roll out the army, roll out the navy as well,
Roll out the air force, we'll bomb old Hitler to hell.
Bombs, guns and bayonets, we'll show them we're not afraid,
Now's the time to roll out the forces in a real air raid.

'The tiniest mention by radio from Alvar Liddell saying 'A Midland town came under heavy bombs last night' immediately had us wailing that 'Hitler's killed our mum' but then we'd get that longed for letter again and sigh with relief.'

They enjoyed their nature walks but were made to attend Church up to 3 times on a Sunday. Even so, Pastor Roberts at Frogmore Street Baptist Church made a big impression and she was proud of the certificates she won in Scripture exams there. She was less happy as dried powdered eggs became part of her rations and carrots took the place of fruit in Christmas puddings. Saccharin replaced sugar in tea. Dresses were also a problem for teenage girls and often men's suits were used to make skirts or two-pieces. Two of her friends left school to become living-in maids: one was paid 5/- a week and the other £1 a month for working from dawn to dusk with only Sunday and one half day in the week free. On Sunday they had to back on duty by 6 p.m. to prepare the supper while their employers were at church. All their food was found for them so they thought the wage was not too bad. She did not want to become a maid so at 14 she returned to Birmingham.

This account was unsigned but on the back was written Mrs Tyazkiewicz of Kingstanding Birmingham. She ended her account 'I have much to thank Abergavenny for.'

The Government instruction at the end of August 1939 to 'Evacuate Forthwith' had led, in some estimates, to no fewer than 3 million children being moved in 4 days, nearly half of them from London. This makes the numbers who came to Abergavenny and the surrounding villages fairly modest but they still presented both a problem of administrative planning and, especially, of human relationships. Also, after the first heady months of the war, practical questions were more frequently raised and billets became harder to come by.

SCHOOL CHILDREN AT WAR

The influx of so many evacuees must have had a big effect on the children of Abergavenny. At school the newcomers were usually taught separately, but when with host families and at play, the newcomers must have supplied the most immediate impact that the War had on local youngsters. However at the schools themselves there was War work to be done too.

At Castle Street Girls School ***Pamela Mason*** helped to assemble gas masks in 1939 at a shed by the old workhouse in Union Road. All the schools took part in what she thought wasn't a very pleasant task. 'We had to stretch the rubber band to cover the nozzle and the mask you see. So it was supposed to be perfect for keeping out the gas but of course they were impossible… they never worked' ***Harold Gregory*** recalled the shortcomings of the gas masks issued at the beginning of the War. 'We were all issued with gas masks which came in a cardboard box with a piece of string to put round your neck… and I can recollect the gas mask drill initially. We thought the gas masks were effective. We were all given a lot of training on how to put them on quickly and about 6 or 8 months later they came along and they produced another round piece which fitted on to the end of the gas mask which we were told was for new gases that were around and this was taped on to the end of each gas mask. Of course, much later we found out that the gas mask we were issued with was quite useless and in fact the real gas mask was the bit they taped on about 7 or 8 months later.'

Maureen Griffiths said that there were no school outings in the war but 'our treat at the High School was to go out in the countryside to pick blackberries and rose hips which would be used for rose hip syrup'. Another task for the senior High School girls was to go along to the Donut Dugout, the drop-in centre for American troops, to help with the serving and to a forces' canteen in the Presbyterian church. Maureen and some of her friends used to go along there. 'It was held in the evenings for the forces and we used to help make the sandwiches and serve the forces who came in. It was always very well attended by the forces. I think they found it a great help to find that there was somewhere in the town that was open in an evening where they could get a snack and meet the others.' ***Betty Rivers*** whilst at the High School, had another job. 'We had to stamp ration books in the Food Office making out all the new ones and the names and we had to stamp them once a week'. Occasionally she and her friends had a day where they went out to the local farms and dug potatoes. 'It was good; it was expected and there wasn't any grizzling.'

Whilst the local High School girls found their new responsibilities and new friends to be an exciting change in their lives the newcomers had some problems to overcome, not least in accommodation. By March 1941 the Mayor was criticising local women as the girls from Wallasey High School could not all be placed. A room at the local Girls High School had to be converted into a hostel to accommodate 17 of the girls until the Easter holiday. Considering that the population had increased by 30% by this time this was a predictable problem. There was a suggestion that a large house in Castle Street should become a hostel for senior girls but nothing came of it and by the summer of 1942 most of the Wallasey girls had left. For all these accommodation problems, the Wallasey girls themselves remembered the time spent here with affection. Some of them wrote down their memories in response to an appeal by Mrs Carol Bentley in 1998 when the High School celebrated its centenary…

Ailsa Jones arrived in May 1941 after her school was bombed. She spent the first night bedding down in the school hall until she went to her billet the next day. She and her friend stayed with Mr and Mrs Manuel of Park Crescent and had a happy time there. 'When petrol allowed we used to go off on a Sunday in their little Austin 7 to visit their elderly aunt.' They didn't see much of Abergavenny High School girls as they had the building for half a day each. They had a curfew at night and the teachers had to walk round to make sure that they were not out enjoying themselves but indoors doing their homework.

Grace Wolfe (nee Ogilvie) also arrived in 1941 and said that only about half the school came as many had already been evacuated privately to safer parts of the country. Some pupils were absorbed into another local school because their parents would not allow them to be evacuated. Grace was 13 when she arrived and could remember the train journey and the reception church hall where she waited to be billeted with local residents. She felt apprehensive and homesick and her first 3 nights were spent on camp beds in the school hall, moving out when the school re-opened after the Easter holidays. After a couple of temporary homes she stayed with Mr and Mrs Charles Price in Linden Lea, Avenue Road. The High School girls used the school in the mornings and the Wallasey girls used it in the afternoon. Miss Sargent her Deputy Head was in charge and Miss Perrott the Head came down from Wallasey every few weeks. She was well looked after and could remember school outings and concerts. In one concert a young Austrian girl who had escaped the Nazis played the violin and they also saw Dame Sybil Thorndike and Lewis Casson in Candida in the Town Hall.

Another girl remembered the 2 lovely grass tennis courts where she spent many happy hours. Her afternoon lessons must have worked as she passed her School Certificate in her last year in Abergavenny.

Mary Phillip was one of four girls who with her teacher went to Ty Gwyn in Llantilio Pertholey to stay with a Mrs Cleeve. All Mrs Cleeve's sons were in the Army and her daughter was away doing War work. She had a German companion who was married to a British Army officer. This lady was not very popular locally as they thought she might signal to the German bombers, though of course she didn't.

As the trains went past the house, they would toot the victory sounds on their whistles using the Morse code for V (··· —). Every Monday they were given their butter ration for the week - about 2 ounces which had to last the week and had a spill stuck in it with their name on it. In the mornings they went to the church hall to school and then to the High School in the afternoon. She used to meet her friends at the Swimming Pool in the evenings and at weekends and played water polo there. On Saturday afternoons they were allowed to use the school hall for dancing lessons, rehearsals etc. She remembered too a party they gave for local children. Food was rationed so they all brought something to eat and the cook made a blancmange from custard powder and cocoa.

Mary White one of the Abergavenny girls, recalled that the fifth and sixth form had to do some extra work in the hall behind the Presbyterian Church on some afternoons. The fifth form had the large room and the sixth form, which probably had not more than a dozen girls, had the small room.

F. Owen Richards (formerly of Richards Store in Frogmore Street) had 2 cousins from Wanstead in London staying with him from September 1939 to Christmas when they

returned home as the London bombing did not seem to be getting any worse. His family then took in a succession of some 8 Wallasey girls as they waited for permanent billets and later some ATS girls. The local youngsters, like the Wallasey girls, enjoyed playing tennis on the local grass courts not least because they could go on until 10.30 at night because of double summertime! He, like Richard Merton-Jones, had started his schooling at Beaconsgate Primary School in St Mary's Priory in the 1930s and he had gone onto the Convent School and then to the Grammar School in 1939.

The King Henry VIII School of those years was a very much smaller school than the one we know today. ***Viv Sadler*** recalled 5 forms of some 24-30 boys and a small sixth form, in all no more than 200 pupils. They were there as a result of the 11+ while other boys remained at Hereford Road Boys School until the age of 14. ***F. Owen Richards*** remembered the school heating with fireplaces and coal fires in the classrooms. The only exception to this was the Hall which Class 4 used and this had 2 stoves in it. ***John Straker*** recalled the 'stoke hole' under the woodwork room where he and his friends were taken by Mr E.O. Jones and Mr Sharpe when an air raid warning sounded in the middle of a C.W.B. (Central Welsh Board) exam. When the 'All Clear' sounded they were brought back up to finish the exam. The boys did not enjoy the way in which the candidates' results for these exams were announced publicly in alphabetical order in Assembly. Among jobs he was given whilst at school were filling sandbags for the old Victoria Cottage hospital and potato picking. The latter was back-breaking work. Mainly he went to a farm on the Patricio road. He also remembered his time in the A.T.C. which included being part of the first gliding school in Wales which was on the golf course. The Birmingham boys at the Grammar School were taught separately and the gymnasium was used. The local pupils also finished earlier to allow the evacuees to have extra classes as at the High School. ***Harold Gregory*** thought the masters were quite old and he could only remember one having to enlist. Textbooks tended not to be replaced and he was issued with only one new book in all his time at the school from 1941 onwards. Stationery too was of a recycled and poor quality. ***Don Powell*** also remembered the shortages of paper and that school exams became tests on little bits of paper. In his four years there from 1939 to 1943 it was the shortages of everything that were most apparent, including a shortage of wood in the woodwork classes.

George Cobourne had left Victoria Street School in 1937 at the age of 14 but he was a keen footballer and as the A.T.C. were short of a goalkeeper he joined. The A.T.C. met in the Woodwork room at the Grammar School and the headmaster Mr Newcombe was the Squadron Leader with Mr Sharpe as a Flight Lieutenant. They trained once a week and he went also to the old Workhouse in Union Road where there was an old aeroplane on which they used to practice.

Don Davies began at Hereford Road School where the teachers were very strict and the cane was much in evidence. The school was for 5-14 year old boys with some leaving to go to the Grammar School. The 'big room' at Hereford Road was divided into 3: it had a wooden and glass partition and a curtain to separate the groups. 'If you were sitting near the curtain you had a choice of lessons to listen to unless you were being taught by Daddy Parsons whom you ignored at your peril!' The head was Mr W. Rosser, who had earlier been head at Victoria Street School and he lived in the house next door to the school. He was to become Mayor of Abergavenny on 5 occasions including during the War. Other staff included 'Chicken' Powell, 'Pasty' Pavord and 'Daddy' Parsons who had also taught at Pandy School. The local ENSA representative used to visit the school and they sang songs to keep their minds off the War. For the children too there was a new activity from

the end of May 1940 when the open air swimming pool opened in Bailey Park with a schools gala. Soon the schools took pupils to the baths for regular swimming lessons. ***Mary White*** remembered 'many happy hours in the swimming pool… as long as we did our homework we were free to go. It costs 7/6 for a season ticket, 7/6 very well spent'.

Glyn Lewis and his friends always knew when Mr Pavord was arriving at the school as he rode a little motorbike and at the sound of its approach everybody scattered. It was no doubt because of the influence of men like Mr Pavord who became the Divisional A.R.P. Warden that air raid precautions were extended in schools. The Chronicle reported in September 1940 that air raid shelters were proposed for Castle Street and the Roman Catholic school and that the Hereford Road practices had resulted in children reaching their home or billets within 5 minutes. Similar practices at Victoria Street had resulted in the children reaching their home within three minutes. Where necessary the schools were to have blast walls built and the windows were to be taped or shuttered the Chronicle added. A week later it was announced that teachers were required to erect public and communal air raid shelters at seven sites – the bus parking ground at Monmouth Road, Frogmore Street, Market Street, Lion Street, Blorenge Road, St Michael's Road and Cantref Road. The Castle Street Girls School log book minutes tell us that in January 1941 Miss Whent and Miss Wetherspoon, two of the staff, remained overnight at the school as firewatchers and that a rota was to be set up for each night. So teachers who were not called up were not immune to the demands of War.

Many children followed the fortunes of the War by studying an Atlas as they listened to the news. Many studied charts of the different planes and also collected any fragments which came to ground. ***Harold Gregory*** and his friends started an aeromodelling club and put on an exhibition of their painted balsa wood models in Llanover. The £15 raised was sent off for the War effort. Among their prized possessions was part of the fin of a German incendiary. ***Ray Prosser*** and his friend Les Lane were outside the Kings Arms in Llanvetherine one day when they saw a German aircraft on the back of a lorry:

'This articulated Bedford unit had picked up a German Messerschmidt. So Les and I decided we were going to have the radio out of this Messerschmidt – what we were going to do with it I don't know. But the snag was the driver came out and started up and he started up with Les and I still on the truck. So, as luck would have it, in those days, the old Bedford used to go up past Lanes in second gear quite slowly. We just lowered ourselves over the back and got our little legs running as fast as we could go and then let go and just hoped that we didn't end up in a heap on the floor!'

BLACKOUT, THE A.R.P. AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

In the opening weeks of the War fears of invasion, or at least aerial attack, were very real and national blackout regulations were quickly introduced. Ironically the town's street lights were brand new in September 1939 as ***Glyn Lewis*** recalled:

'They were all gas operated and they were on about 20 foot poles with a lantern which was about 2 feet square with about either twelve or sixteen mantles in each one, so they gave out quite a good light for them days like and they were only on for a matter of a couple of weeks and then they were all shut off.' After the War he was working with the Electricity Board. 'Well, by the time the end of the War came obviously they'd all gone rusty, the paper had rusted up, so we had to convert them all to electric light.'

In a Chronicle report of 8th September 1939 the Town Council had considered the blackout situation. Colonel Bishop asked for a good blackout with no cigarette smoking in the streets. Early difficulties had arisen in walking in the blackout including hitting lamp-posts. Cars were to keep off the roads at night if possible. Bumper bars were to be painted white. Every car lamp must be obscured by at least 2 thicknesses of newspaper or its equivalent. No bulb was to exceed 7 watts. The reflector in every lamp must be blackened (stove-black). Side lamps were to be white – blue paper was not permissible. There were other rules for cyclists. The War-time flood of central directions and regulations had begun for local communities throughout the country.

Pedestrians did find it to be very dark to walk on the roads. One particularly dangerous point from the outset was an iron post in middle of White Horse Lane and it had to be whitewashed. By January 1940 the Chronicle announced new lighting restrictions. They affected motorists, cyclists and torch carriers and a 20 mile an hour speed limit was imposed in blackout hours in built up areas. ***Eunice Gilbert*** remembered that 'you weren't allowed ever to strike a match. You were allowed a little torch which you could just shine on your feet, but if you lifted it up for anything, if there were police about, you were nabbed straight away.' She recalled some funny incidents… 'Hurrying home one evening, all of a sudden, crash. I had walked straight into somebody. He put his arms around me and I said "Oh, I'm sorry", and he said, "I'm not"!'

Glyn Lewis' grandmother used to live on the Mardy. 'Father and I and mother used to walk up to her house and where Croesonen Parc is now there were no houses at all and the kerb… well it wasn't a kerb, it was like a dirt path and you had about an 18-inch drop down onto the road. Well very often walking up there in the dark, especially if there was no moon, you'd fall off the kerb and end up sprawled in the middle of the road like! So you used to walk side by side and if the other one fell off you knew where to keep away from!' Glyn and his friends liked the sirens when at Hereford Road School because it meant time out of school. 'Whenever the sirens went the school was emptied. Now if you lived within a certain distance of the school you'd got to come home, but if you couldn't get home in that time, you were sent to a house which'd been agreed previously within a certain radius. Now I ended up in a house in Park Crescent. That's where I had to go every time the siren

went. Course, you'd run like hell to get there and when the 'All Clear' went you took your time coming back'. They must have missed a lot of schoolwork.

At the start of the war some firewatching was done by volunteers. One of the firms which took the task seriously was Seargeant Brothers the printers. ***Pamela Mason*** worked as a binder and like others in her age group was expected to do firewatching. 'We took our bed in and a key and there were 3 men and 3 women and the ladies slept in the Directors room and the men slept in the offices. Mr Alf Charles, a brilliant carpenter, who made everything for the works, made steps to go out onto the roof and a place so that we could walk right across the roof. It was half glass half tiles, so we didn't go up there very often but we had to go at least once a night.' ***Elsie Hall*** also did her share of firewatching. 'Now one night a week we had to stay up all night and go out if there was a siren going and see if any firebombs were dropped and try to count the planes going over. Now it was nothing to count 76 or well over a hundred if they were going up both sides, but you do not know if it was the actual amount because there were sort of echoes with the clouds. You know perhaps you'd hear a double reverberation or something. So all the firewatchers, even if it wasn't your night on, if there was a siren you'd go out and try to count and then they'd sort of correlate them down at the School and just have an idea how many planes had gone over and of course everybody tried to do some, even the Scouts.' ***Mary White*** as a High School sixth former had to do her share of firewatching. 'There were 2 girls and one teacher. They would put camp beds in our classroom… we'd have to walk around the school and see that it was all locked up and say goodnight to our teacher who was staying in the staff room. We were supposed to be looking out for incendiary bombs, but luckily we didn't have any because I don't know what we would have done. We had to know the position of all the fire buckets and things but I don't think we had any training or instruction. Things were a bit haphazard but we enjoyed our evenings…'

F. Owen Richards' father joined the Royal Observer Corps and spent one or two nights a week in a bunker built into the bank alongside the Old Hereford Road, just above the current King Henry VIII School entrance. Their task was to listen for enemy aircraft. When they heard them they used a kind of theodolite to track them. This gave an approximate bearing and angle of height which was then phoned through to H.Q. When they had two or more bearings and angles they could estimate the position and height of the plane and send fighters to intercept. His father was told that these readings led to successful interceptions on more than one occasion. To keep them dry in the bunker 'Bunny' Hiron's father had his engineering works, Davies & Co., make a sliding roof that could be slid back when readings were taken and then be closed afterwards. Even so it must have been a cold and wet task.

A.R.P. Wardens were soon a familiar sight and they took their duties very seriously. There were frequent prosecutions and no-one was given special treatment. The Vicar of Holy Trinity, for instance, was fined £2 for a breach of the regulations. The Wardens were led by A.V. Pavord (the Hereford Road school teacher) as Divisional Warden. ***Anna Pavord*** has written about how her father 'used to putter around on his bike, a Francis Barnett motorcycle, which made a very distinctive noise. People used to tell me as a child how much they associated that noise with the all-clear sirens'. The A.R.P. control office in

Monk Street was manned by volunteer special constables. In fact it was hoped initially that the A.R.P. could be entirely staffed by unpaid volunteers. According to the Chronicle there were 5 Wardens' Posts in the town. A1 at Prangley's Stores on the Hereford Road, A2 at King Henry Eighth Grammar School, A3 at Castle St School, A4 at Park St School and A5 at the Girls' High School. Rural District posts included B2 at the Parish Hall in Pandy and B9 at the Council School in Llanfoist.

Blackout curtains became a feature of domestic life. A number of housewives tried to lessen their drab nature. ***Mary Holland's*** grandmother appliqued beautiful brightly-coloured flowers all over them on the inside to brighten up her rooms.

From early in the war the A.R.P. arranged exercises. On Sunday 22nd October 1939 there were 4 'incidents' of high explosive bombs in a joint A.R.P. and Ambulance service test reported in the Chronicle. Three weeks later a further A.R.P. bombs exercise had 8 incidents and 10 casualties. It was these sorts of exercises that ***John Straker*** recalled as it was so difficult to provide credible 'events'. 'I can remember for one exercise that we had, I was the messenger running back from one incident to Head Office and they stopped me and they said 'Do you realise you've just driven over a crater in the road?' There was nothing there, just imaginary so they let me go through to the office and then they called me back and I had to take charge of this incident... me, a schoolboy, in charge of the incident, having to stop everybody on the road 'Can't come through here there's a crater, you've got to go so and so'. Then they had incendiary bombs falling so I did the necessary, took protection behind a wall or that's what you were told and one of the umpires said 'Well what are you doing there?' I said 'I'm behind an imaginary wall'. 'What do you mean an imaginary wall?' 'Well', I said, 'there's an imaginary incendiary over there'!

John had joined the A.R.P. because his father was a warden and was attached to the Park Street H.Q. 'It was only a little tin galvanised shed and apart from that exercise it was really a case of going down there, playing darts, drinking tea – because you had a special ration – eat any biscuits you could get, until the all clear went and then you went home'. There were about 20 at that post and the men were all over military age. John remembered them with affection. 'It was good. They taught me how to play cards!' As with so many of the volunteer groups, the A.R.P. became more professional as time went on and as, in response to local demand, they began to have paid staff. Abergavenny was not a major target for enemy bombers so it was inevitable that some complacency must have set in. The Chronicle of September 20th 1940 carried the following advertisement for the Coliseum and Pavilion cinemas:

AIR RAIDS

In the interest of public safety:
Should a red light show - air raid warning.
Should a green light show – all clear.
"Patrons are advised to make for the nearest shelter or their homes if near - failing this they can remain and the programme will continue."

This was not as bad as it sounds in the case of the Coliseum as the Fire Station was next

door and ***Glyn Lewis*** remembered all the firemen and air raid wardens dashing out when the warning sounded. At the outbreak of the war though there was only one fire engine in Abergavenny. Even so, as ***George Leslie*** commented, that was one more than Crickhowell had – they had to try to borrow the Abergavenny one if they had a fire. In the Castle Museum there is an extensive correspondence about the Auxiliary Fire Service. It includes advertisements for the purchase of large cars and receipts for the subsequent transactions. These cars were used to tow water tenders and so supplement the meagre firefighting equipment. The Chronicle noted on 7 March 1941 that the 22 members of the A.F.S. still had no uniforms. However this had not prevented them from responding to calls from as far away as Birmingham and Swansea during the Blitz.

At family level a degree of complacency set in early on with regard to the use of air-raid shelters. ***Don Davies'*** father built a shelter at the back of their house:

"It was quite deep, down to about 10 feet and had a good roof, about a foot to 18 inches of concrete. You went down steps into it and it had an escape hatch at the other end. It had electricity and lighting. In there we kept bottles of Ovaltine tablets and biscuits. When the air raids started to come - they came thick and fast for a while - the planes used to follow the railway lines up to the Midlands. Once the air-raid warnings came, down the shelter we would go - my father and mother, grandfather, brother Glyn and I - and wait for the 'all clear'. After about 2 or 3 weeks my grandfather used to forget his false teeth so I had to go into the house and bring his teeth down, as he didn't want to be found without his teeth… Then the next night he forgot something else, then his teeth again. So he said, "Blow this I'm going to stay in bed now and if they want to kill me they're going to have to kill me in my bed." After that we very seldom went and in the end we didn't go at all. We just stayed in the house and just forgot about it.'

Anne Griffith had come to stay on her uncle and aunt's farm in Abergavenny when War was declared. Her mother had said that it would only be a few weeks and then it would all be over. Even so she joined her cousins at the High School. Then in 1940 her mother and baby brother joined her.

'We were asleep in bed when the siren went. My uncle woke us up and told us to go down to the cellar. My reaction was to go down and grab my brother and wake my mother. She had pulled back the blackout on going to bed and now lit a candle – we had no electricity – and proceeded to look for her slippers and dressing gown. By this time my uncle had arrived on the landing below with his First World War pistol… meanwhile my cousin disappeared into the dark looking for her gas mask. Uncle proceeded to shout at my mother 'put that bloody light out!' I suppose the Germans were going to follow this minute light which must have hardly been visible! My mother answered that she was certainly not coming down into those cold cellars without her dressing gown and slippers, enemy or no enemy. There was a family called Hunt who were also staying at the farm to escape the bombing of Liverpool and they had experienced real air raids. A conflab took place on the landing. Hunt said he really didn't think the Krauts would turn up or bomb a lonely farm house. The best thing we could all do was go back to our beds. 'Thank God', said my mother. We all went back to our beds. It was an unexciting end after all, though uncle

came into our room and sat on the windowsill clutching his First War pistol.' There must be thousands of family stories like this from the War. Yet for all the scepticism of the family and the Hunts this was the night that a bomb was dropped on a field near Wernddu, a neighbouring farm.

In January 1941 the Town Council was reported to have a scheme for fighting fire bombs. A demonstration for putting out incendiary bombs was to be given in the Market Hall and every house in Abergavenny was provided with a proper supply of sand. The mayor told the Council that he wanted 65 stirrup pumps to be kept on loan for the town. How he arrived at this figure isn't made clear but some of our interviewees mentioned that they were later issued with pumps.

By 7th March 1941 the Chronicle reported a means of easing the blackout situation. What was called Morrison time was introduced. There was to be another hour of daylight. Clocks were to be put on another hour on 3rd May and back on Saturday 9th August. Therefore on 21st June (the longest day) there was to be no need to blackout until 11.21p.m. and blackout would last a little less than 6 hours. On 26th September 1941 the newspaper announced that 'summertime' was to be continued for the winter months. By September 1944 the Editor of the Chronicle, Gobannium, was welcoming the return of some street lighting. By mid-October gas street lighting, when supplies could be obtained, was to be the same hours as before the War. In the light of Glyn Lewis' comments about the condition of the 'new' but unused system this was probably far more difficult than it seemed.

The Chronicle of December 1942 noted that the W.V.S. Housewives Section had 863 members. They were making by then a major contribution to civil defence. They had been the hosts for evacuees from the start but now also helped the A.R.P. Wardens by firewatching on a street basis in addition to the many other fundraising and voluntary efforts discussed later (see pp. 48-51). The Chronicle on 24th March 1944 had reported that Abergavenny was the first place in the county to establish a 'Housewives Service' ready to meet war emergencies and that one hundred and twenty members met at the British Restaurant to hear an address by Mr Pavord of the A.R.P. It is likely that the picture outside a 'Civil Defence School' was taken around this time. Mr Pavord is seated third from the left and standing third from the right on the back row is Enid Williams, mother of the late Peter Williams, who was the manageress of the British Restaurant.

The other emergency service, the ambulance service, was also in difficulty. There was probably one only ambulance at the start of the war. However the Chronicle on November 29th 1940 noted that Lady Herbert of Coldbrook, an American, had handed over a brand new fully equipped ambulance to the Red Cross at the Market Hall. It was 'a spontaneous gift' from her native Rhode Island, U.S.A. Its green body was inscribed Rhode Island Ambulance and it was to be 'a permanent memorial of American sympathy with this country in its stupendous struggle.'

Housewives at a Civil Defence School

Abergavenny Civil Defence A.R.P. Post A4, October 1944: divisional warden A.V. Pavord, senior warden S.M. Straker, deputy warden P. Phillips

BOMBS

There were very few bombs dropped in the Abergavenny area. The enemy's preferred targets were the industrial towns further South and the Royal Ordnance factory at Glascoed. Considering that Abergavenny was such a garrison town and at the hub of a number of railway lines it was surprising that it was not considered to be a major target. It is also surprising that the few bombs that were dropped did little damage to buildings. A number of two-seater spotter planes were seen in the area and with the presence of obvious landmarks like canals, rivers and railway lines greater accuracy could have been expected.

Betty Rivers remembered the first bombs dropped in Gilwern which were on the site of the American Hospital before it was built in 1943. She could remember no further bombs being dropped there but there were some incendiaries on the Blorenge and at Blaenavon.

George Cobourne mentioned that four or five incendiaries were dropped in a field in Llanwenarth between the show-ground and the Brecon Road. These were the ones that ***David Edwards*** saw when he went to the scene with regular police officers when he was in the Police Auxiliary Messenger Service. 'We stayed well away from the actual site but I remember one of the soldiers approaching across a field unwinding a very long cord which we assumed was to take out the detonator... and some bombs were made safe.' David Edwards also recalled another bomb related occasion 'A fairly senior police officer arrived at police headquarters and removed from the boot of his car a number of incendiary bombs. When the bomb disposal officers saw these bombs they were very surprised to as they were of a new type and there was a possibility that they could have exploded at any time!' (The County Police headquarters, incidentally, were in Abergavenny during the War, before the move to Cwmbran in 1971.)

The best remembered incident came near Maindiff. ***Don Prosser*** was one of many who recalled a stick of bombs which was dropped and that some did not explode. 'The local policeman, Taffy Davies by name, a formidable man of about 18½ stone was deputed to go to look after the unexploded bomb and of course the bomb went off the following day and he was somersaulted over the hedge and he ended up in hospital. He was the only policeman I knew in Gwent to get a wound stripe.'

Another unexploded bomb incident occurred in Pandy. ***Don Powell*** was living at Trewyn Lodge when four bombs dropped in the grounds of Trewyn. They landed near a stream which may have been shining in the moonlight. The bomb nearest the lodge did not explode and simply left a red mark in the ground. The police came and had a look at it but thought it must have been part of a plane rather than a bomb.

Then about eight months later the Army were on manoeuvres in the area and an Army officer saw the site and said that there was a bomb in there. The bomb disposal unit in Hereford was contacted. They dug for two days and found the bomb. They thought it was too dangerous to move and decided to explode it. The people in all the houses nearby had to go down to the river bridge and then the bomb was detonated leaving a huge crater and sending masses of stone and debris up the fields towards Trewyn, smashing some of the greenhouses. It is likely that the bomber had been hoping to bomb a large ammunition dump at Ewyas Harold. Don Powell suggests that local people believed this was the target because of a German gentleman called Trafford who had lived at Michaelchurch Court before the War. He was said to have had all the German leaders staying with him, including Goering. He had his own aircraft and at the outbreak of the War he returned to Germany, where he joined the Luftwaffe and was killed in action.

Bill Jones worked at Glascoed for 7 months during the War. It had as many as 13,000 workers on its round the clock shell making shifts. Many of the workers came by train and he remembered on one occasion being on a train pulling into Pontypool Road station as a bomber passed overhead. The train stopped and the passengers, many from the valleys, spontaneously began to sing Welsh hymns. Fortunately no bomb was dropped but he did remember one being dropped in street 3 at the factory (there were 4 streets in all). It did little damage and he didn't think Glascoed was an easy target as it was set in a hollow surrounded by quite high banks. The pilots had little time to make an accurate attack. However ***Margaret Rumsey*** recalled an attack by a plane one lunchtime where a group of workers were in a queue. She thought it must have been a spotter plane but it shot at them and several were killed. Others, including her mother-in-law, were wounded.

THE HOME GUARD

On May 17th 1940 the Chronicle reported that a new Home Front Army was to be created by the War Office called the Local Defence Volunteers. To join you had to be between 17 and 65 years old and 'capable of free movement'! In one week 250,000 signed up in Britain. On 6th June 1940 ***Glyn Lewis'*** father was one of the first to join the Abergavenny L.D.V. They were, he said, jokingly referred to as the Look, Duck and Vanish boys. By July 1940 half a million had signed up nationally and the L.D.V. became known as the Home Guard.

Vic Sadler said that his father too was one of the first to join. They had a shotgun and a long overcoat that his father had provided. Unfortunately his father was a much taller man than his fellow recruit and so when it was worn by his friend it hung around his ankles and made him look like a monk! ***Glyn Lewis*** said that as time went on 'They were issued with more kit until they were issued with… Canadian Ross rifles. All their kit, including their equipment, they kept at home. I took great pride in cleaning father's rifle. It was about as long as I was tall and had a bayonet about 18 inches long.'

Glyn Lewis' uncle, Cliff Newton, was a Captain in the Home Guard. He had been a member of the 3rd Mons Regiment in the First World War. He lived in Grosvenor Road and had a small car for official duties which he parked outside his house, on a bend. Glyn could not understand how the car remained undamaged as, 'At that time the Air Force was transporting aircraft in crates on a vehicle called the Queen Mary. These were Bedford articulated lorries with a bed about 60 feet long.'

One of the Sergeants, Sergeant Rumsey, joined the L.D.V. in 1940 and had an even longer military record than Captain Newton. He had served in the Brecknock Battalion from 1886 to 1895, had fought in the Boer War and had been in the Home Service Battalion in World War One. The Chronicle of Christmas Day 1942 recorded that a presentation was made to the veteran sergeant at a Home Guard Smoking Concert. Such ex-servicemen had a difficult task as the Home Guard was in urgent need of training. In September 1940 the Chronicle reported that 2 of its members had represented Abergavenny at Osterley Park training school where they aimed to teach members to be "first class irregulars". By November the local men were reported by the paper to be 'training in the modern methods of warfare including anti-tank warfare, bomb throwing, stalking, rifle fire and other points in attack and defence'. Such claims need to be measured against other contemporary reports. In January 1941 the Chronicle noted that 'thorn hedge trimmings were of great use for the Home Guard and the co-operation of farmers was called for'!

Don Davies remembered one anti-tank ploy. He watched the pill-box being built at the end of Croesonen Lane and 'then they built a line across the road, like a railway line. On that line were small trucks, hidden on the side of the road and filled with cement. If the

Germans came these were to be wheeled across the road to hold the German tanks up and the Home Guard could fire at them from the pill box.'

George Cobourne joined the L.D.V. in the early days of training with broom handles. He had no uniform at first, just an arm band with L.D.V. on it. Later he drilled with the Home Guard in 2 hour sessions outside the Memorial Hall and had a rifle. 'We used to walk up from the Memorial Hall to the Coliseum and back, that was our route. It might be 6 o'clock to 6 o'clock the next morning… so many of us were supposed to be on duty. We used to do our training on a Sunday morning in fields near the Brecon Road just past Nevill Hall.' There is a housing estate there now but then George had rifle exercises in fields in which trenches had been dug. 'We took it seriously as if we were to meet the enemy'.

David Edwards' recollections of the Home Guard also came from personal experience: 'Knowing that I was going to the army in early 1943, my call up, I was able to join the local Home Guard Unit to gain experience. We met at a chapel building on the site of the present Tesco's store near the Monument in Abergavenny. I have memories of some drill with very few weapons but we did some training with a quite incredible weapon called, if I remember correctly, a blackerbombard. This was a large canister with a sort of bicycle handlebars aiming device. It was designed to project a bomb-like missile but I never saw the projectile at all.'

David Edwards also went on an exercise with the Home Guard to Talycoed Battle School near Monmouth. 'Here I saw and used a very unusual grenade which I never saw again even during my later service with an infantry regiment. It was like a large toffee apple. A glass sphere covered with a thick layer of strong glue. This was covered with a thin metal casing which was split into 2 halves. This was attached to a handle. In order to use a grenade a clip was removed from the handle and the metal cover was taken off. Holding down a lever which activated the fuse detonator the toffee apple grenade was smashed on to the target where it stuck, then exploded several seconds later. We smashed the grenades on to a large tree and were told to walk, not run, back into a trench nearby before it exploded. There was just enough time to get back to the trench before the actual explosion. The main force of the explosion was designed to take the route of least resistance, that was from the broken area of the glass into the target. I understand that one of the Home Guard looked back at the target as he got back into the trench. The grenade exploded and his eye was caught by some of the blast and was moved out of its socket. It was later replaced in hospital and he apparently recovered well and had no serious problems.'

A variety of home made weapons were devised in the early years. When excavations were being carried out in early 1979 on the Tesco site 86 small petrol bombs were discovered on what had been the old garage situated at the back of the Memorial Hall. The brothers Walter and Doug Jones ran this garage. Walter was an inventor and in the Castle Museum is a collection of some of his models, specifications and blueprints. One of his ideas was for an anti-bomber parachute bomb and he sent drawings to Churchill. In the Home Guard context his brother Doug, a welder was more active. He was the Home Guard's armoured car supplier. ***Glyn Lewis*** remembered these: 'He would take a large car like a Wolseley 12 or 14, take off all the body work and then weld steel sheets to the chassis and so build up a new body. One some he even built a turret in which was mounted a Lewis

machine gun. What effect they would have had on the Germans I do not know but I do know that they frightened some of the people who drove them. The original vehicle weighed approximately a ton but by the time Mr Jones had finished with them they weighed perhaps 3 to 4 tons and there was no alteration to the brakes, steering or suspension!'

Nevertheless they played their part in training exercises. In its report of a Home Guard 'Battle of the Usk' in May 1942 the Chronicle referred to the part played by Sergeant Doug Jones and 2 of his armoured cars fitted with Lewis guns. This Sunday exercise was to test the Usk stop line defences from Abergavenny to Newbridge-on-Wye. ***John G Williams*** remembers Doug Jones for his car and the Lewis gun mounted on a swivel turret at the back. 'This was thought to be very good for the time and on manoeuvres one day in Abergavenny the gunner was knocked out by someone throwing a bottle which was supposed to be a petrol bomb or Molotov cocktail.' In earlier days Doug Jones was said to have searched for gold in Alaska and had been a pilot in the First World War so an armoured car seemed in character!

By the end of May 1941 the Home Guard had tommy guns and anti-tank weapons but there was growing concern about personnel. Many had enrolled by then but the Chronicle noted them to have been 'more conspicuous by their absence and would have to be weeded out.' They needed active men and not names on paper. At the same time the Government was taking no chances in beating the invader as it issued leaflets at the Post Office. 'What to do if the enemy lands.'

One of the recruitment difficulties for the Home Guard was that young men were being continuously called up for the services. Ultimately conscription was to be mooted but in the meantime there was a drive to increase interest in the Home Guard Cadets. In September 1941, 4 local boys attended a Home Guard weekend camp at Llanover Park. Interest must have increased with the more frequent Home Guard tests and competitions. In November 1941 members of the No.3 Platoon of the local Home Guard became county champions in a fighting patrol competition.

Recruitment for the Home Guard became more and more difficult as increasing numbers were called up to the services. On January 23rd 1942 the Chronicle claimed that there would be an improved chance of deferment from military service if you were in the Home Guard. A week later it announced that there would soon be no resignations allowed from the Home Guard except on grounds of age, medical unfitness or hardship. There was also a suggestion that compulsory enrolment was to apply in some areas. Increasingly there was to be closer co-operation between the Home Guard and Civil Defence authorities which would include the Home Guard doing police and fire-fighting duties as well as active military work. Recruitment problems persisted however and in March 1942 the Chronicle reported that there was to be compulsory enlistment in the Home Guard in the county. Shortly afterwards a national announcement meant that the Home Guard was to be subject to military discipline.

John G Williams was living at Chapel Farm Llanvapley in 1940 and attending King Henry VIII. He gave us some insight into the rural L.D.V. and Home Guard. 'In May 1940 I joined the L.D.V. and was one of the few local schoolboys to do so. They met at the Llanfapley Parish Hall and the officer in charge was Hamilton Bowcher of Llanddewi Skirrid who was then working in Barclays Bank in Abergavenny. 'The L.D.V. were only issued with khaki armbands at first and no weapons and Ernie Breillat and I used to go on patrol duty with our 12 bore shotgun and an old .22 rifle.' Later they were to be issued with some special shotgun cartridges and an old Canadian Ross rifle. 'In the summer we did a nightly patrol duty from a chicken shed at Wern y Cwm in Llanvetherine and later were issued with khaki uniforms after being changed to the Home Guard. In the winter we were based at Llanfapley Hall. We used to do an all night duty about once a week in groups of 3 or 4 when one used to stay in the village hall and the others would patrol along the road towards Court Morgan, Llanddewi Rhydderch.' He could recall little drill and only one fire practice at Llanddewi Court as ammunition was scarce.

Another ***John Williams***, a Llanthony valley farmer's son was also in the Home Guard like a lot of farmworkers. 'We had regular soldiers who came at times to instruct us and we used to have competitions between Llanthony and Cwmyoy in stalking… one would attack the other and I can remember we used to take the pellets out of the cartridge and just leave the powder there so that we could shoot and you'd get a bang… but unfortunately one time someone took the pellets out but left one in there and it accidentally pierced someone's ear without causing any real damage apart from a very loud shriek when it hit him! The Home Guard also issued us with cartridges to fit a 12 bore that had a ball bearing the size of a marble in the cartridge instead of pellets. One day I thought I would test it… a 12 bore shotgun normally shot a rabbit at about 50 yards… so I thought I'd try this out against an oak tree 150 yards away and when I shot at the oak tree and went to inspect it there was a piece about 2 foot long and an inch wide taken out of the side of him so I wondered what damage it would have done to a human body.'

The last year of the Home Guard was 1944. Much progress had been made. The Chronicle of February 19th 1943 praised the 11th Battalion Monmouthshire Home Guard for its performance in manoeuvres where 3 companies had attacked Nantyglo, Blaenavon and Pontypool. Sunday 18th April saw the 'Battle of Abergavenny'. 'A' and 'C' Companies had to defend the town against an invading force of airborne enemy troops. There was supposed to be a 3-pronged attack from the Skirrid in the East, the Old Hereford Road in the north and the Chain in the North West. In the same month 2 rifle ranges were being built for them at Stanton and near Pantygoitre bridge. Whilst it is hard to assess local standards in relation to the full time servicemen there was an obvious improvement with regular drilling and training and the imposition of military discipline. The change was reflected in their weapons as the Chronicle noted in October 1943. They had come a long way from the man of summer 1940 armed with a wooden truncheon to defend a power station. By October 1943 there were Vickers machine guns, Browning machine guns, Lewis guns, sten guns, all kinds of automatic weapons, mortars, anti-tank weapons, a dozen kinds of bombs and the Mills 36 grenade. For all this, compulsory drills and training stopped by September 1944. The final parade and stand-down of the 11th Monmouthshire battalion of the Home Guard was announced in the Chronicle on 8th December 1944. The tide had turned in the War and the imminent threat of invasion that had required an L.D.V. and Home Guard in 1940 had receded.

THE 'SPECIAL DUTIES' AGENTS

One of the most remarkable stories of the war surrounds the 'Special Duties' agents. ***George Vater*** of Llanddewi Rhydderch was recruited for this work. As a 17 year old George went to Newport to sign up:

"I had an Army medical, then I had an interview - well an I.Q. test - and then an interview with the Colonel, Colonel Hughes, who told me that someone would be calling to see me shortly. There arrived a week or so later a chap who said he was Tommy Atkins, who I've later found out was a Captain or a Major Todd in Army Intelligence. First of all he gave me the third degree on my medical etc. and my life and then told me that he wanted me to serve my King and country and when I agreed to do so he pulled a little ivory plated Bible from his pocket, and said 'Put your hand on this and swear after me'. Then I swore the oath of allegiance and then he said 'There's other duties that we are going to ask you to do and you'd better now swear the Official Secrets Act because nothing from now on with your name on must be written down. 'There will be no writing whatsoever'." He was then presented with papers marked Top Secret which were lists of all the German units on the other side of the Channel from the Hook of Holland to Cap Gris-Nez and he was told to learn them by heart.

Tommy Atkins taught George a salutary lesson early in their association. "He told me, I think probably the first or second time I met him, that any message from him would contain the word 'precisely'. Now one day I was presented with a message from Gower Rees who told me it had come from Tommy Atkins and I accepted the message. I took it to Llantilio in the dead of night and felt a hand on my shoulder – it was Tommy Atkins asking me what I was doing there. I said I wanted to deliver this message which I thought had come from him to the wireless operator and he said, 'What have I told you?" and I said, 'you told me to deliver the messages to the wireless operator' and he said, "What have I told you would be in the message?' and then I remembered the word 'precisely'. He said 'Precisely and it's not in the message… now you needn't bother to deliver the message just walk home.' I had to walk back home to Court Morgan and he drove away in his car."

The agents were drawn from a group of people who could travel around the countryside without arousing suspicion. Later George was to find that this often meant the local clergy. His 'group' was headed by the Rev Richard Sluman, Vicar of Llantilio Crossenny. It also included Rev Vincent Evans of Llanddewi Rhydderch and Rev Cecil Gower-Rees of Llanarth. Their two-band radio was hidden under Rev Sluman's altar and a 40-foot aerial was concealed behind the lightning conductor of the steeple. They were also provided with a .3 calibre rifle complete with telescopic lens and silencer. 'We were shown a list of people in the neighbourhood likely to be well-disposed toward the Germans. If we ever got firm evidence that they were collaborating I was going to be the sharpshooter', said George. Fortunately he never had to use it.

One of George Vater's stories was about the day that Rev Gower-Rees visited a huge American camp nearby which was shrouded in secrecy. For his visit Gower-Rees dressed

in such a way that the Americans would regard him as a very eccentric British vicar. He was shown in to the C.O. and told him he wanted to invite his men to a Sunday service. The C.O. smiled and said 'Well it had better be a big goddamn church vicar, because do you know how many men I have under my command here?' When the Vicar said that he did not the C.O. proudly listed the size of every unit, which state it had come from and what it was going to do to Hitler's Germany. Understandably George added that Tommy Atkins was delighted with their intelligence gathering in that particular report!

Their usual duties were 'Spying and carrying messages – we were told what information was wanted in the area and had to carry messages to the radio operator in Llantilio who transferred them to Western Command. We carried out a variety of exercises for about 4 years. Throughout the War we spied on our own men. We reported back to Western Command. We were taught map reading and on exercises we pinpointed the exact spot where things were.' George's main job was to carry secret messages to Sluman. They came in a tennis ball hidden in the base of a yew tree and he never met Sluman face to face. For a time he was not allowed to know the others' identity but later he got to know them all – the other two Vicars, Percy Evans a carpenter, John Owen an Aberystwyth graduate and Percy Steal a gardener. 'I suppose that Tommy Atkins left the message which normally Rev. Gower Rees picked up and brought me. He had somewhere a secret letter-box to which he had to go to collect messages. Opposite the Vicarage in Llanarth he had his own letter-box into which messages came. Vincent Evans had a loose stone in the Churchyard behind which messages were being put and I had the tennis ball in which the messages would be put if I wasn't available for them to see me. I was the last link in the chain and I carried those messages to the Rev Sluman at Llantilio Crossenny… I had to ring a little bell, probably a battery bell, and leave the message on a rafter. Messages came through the chain and we were timed, each message was timed, the time it left, the time it was picked up, the time it was delivered and the time it was delivered to the radio. Each message was timed with every person that handled it.' For the group's own safety they worked in pairs and only knew the identity of their partner. George did not send his own messages and his partner Gower-Rees collected the messages from the secret letter-boxes. 'It was our job, Gower's and mine, to pinpoint exact positions on an O.S. map… it was vital that the position was exact'. George added that to read a map accurately by candlelight at night in a barn was not the easiest of tasks. 'Most of the work was done at night and there was an awful lot of walking through fields and through the woods and we were told that we were to keep our eyes open for any other people, any movements, any people we saw in the woods because besides ourselves, unknown to us then, were the fighting forces, the auxiliaries, and they were stationed in these woods. We were told if we did see anyone to report back to Tommy Atkins.'

The Government stressed the need for people to be on their guard as this famous poster at the Imperial War Museum shows.

George spent a lot of his nights on a particular bridge over the main railway line and had to watch for paratroopers at the time when an invasion was expected via the Bristol Channel. 'The main line had to be looked at because of fireboxes and it was so easy for planes to see what was happening there. They could see the fireboxes and see the river and everything.' Eventually Tommy Atkins supplied him with petrol coupons. "We'd walked for three years at least and then one day Tommy Atkins turned up with petrol coupons and said, 'Well things have got a lot easier now and we can provide you with petrol coupons to get to the radio station, to the wireless operator'."

The story of the Special Duties Agents, the stay behind troops called Auxiliary Units has only recently come to light. In the event of a German invasion they would have hidden in underground chambers around the country coming out at night to create havoc for the enemy. It is one of the wartime stories which seems stranger than fiction. George went to See Rev Vincent Evans just before he died and was asked: 'Do you remember George? Do you?' George replied that of course he did… how could he forget? The old Vicar settled back and said, 'I'm glad they didn't come, aren't you?'

WOMEN AT WAR

The twentieth century saw a transformation in the status and rights of women. In this change the Second World War was a particularly significant time. Traditionally the woman's place was in the home but as we have seen that home was now more crowded with the arrival of the evacuees. As the initial voluntary enthusiasm waned and more and more local people were called up into the forces, it was women who now extended their role even further to become firewatchers, Red Cross workers, drivers, factory workers and much else besides.

Chrissie Jones was nursing in Bristol at the outbreak of War but returned to Abergavenny as her father was ill. She was prepared to do any work that was available. She thought that her father had got her a railway job as an engine cleaner but it had been taken by the time she returned. Instead she found a job as a telephone engineer covering a very big area – Abergavenny to Brecon and Sennybridge in one direction and out to Pandy, Monmouth and Symonds Yat in the other. Her headquarters were at the back of the Trocadero café (which is now Nicholls), 'At the back of that was our linesman's room. Just a little linesman's room with a little stove in the middle and that's what we worked in.' (Opposite was Seargeants the printers and nearby where the car park is now was Facey's Brewery).

Chrissie installed telephones in all sorts of places and learned to keep quiet about the things she found out. For instance when D-Day was being planned she had to see a Major White of the South Wales Borderers at the big house at Ty Gwyn. 'I put the telephone in especially for there. Then I went round all the camps and put the telephones in and it was special telephones for everything and they were all talking about the ships and everything. I thought to myself that there is something coming and that was on Whitsun Monday and I think it was on the Whitsun Tuesday that the invasion came.'

Pamela Mason who had started work as a binder at Seargeants later moved to the new factory opened by Lang Pen from Liverpool at Llanfoist. 'I had to either go to Lang Pen or join the forces and my parents didn't want me to go to the forces. Lang Pen was far longer hours and we were making radiators for planes. It was hard work at times but still we had Music While We Work which everyone used to sing to and Workers Playtime and variety artists would come to entertain us you know.'

Recently, in St Petersburg, Pip Sadler of Llanfoist and her husband met Neil Wade, the son of the owner of Lang Pen. When their common link with Llanfoist was discovered he sent them copies of newspaper articles and photographs of the Lang Pen factory. The headline for a Western Mail report of the opening was 'Spitfire Parts Made On Old Ashtip'. The factory was described as 'a model factory equipped on up to date lines'. It went on 'Here women and girls with no previous factory experience are doing skilled work in assembling and putting the finishing touches to radiators for Spitfires.' Lang Pen had

Front view of Llanfoist Works showing new offices in the foreground.

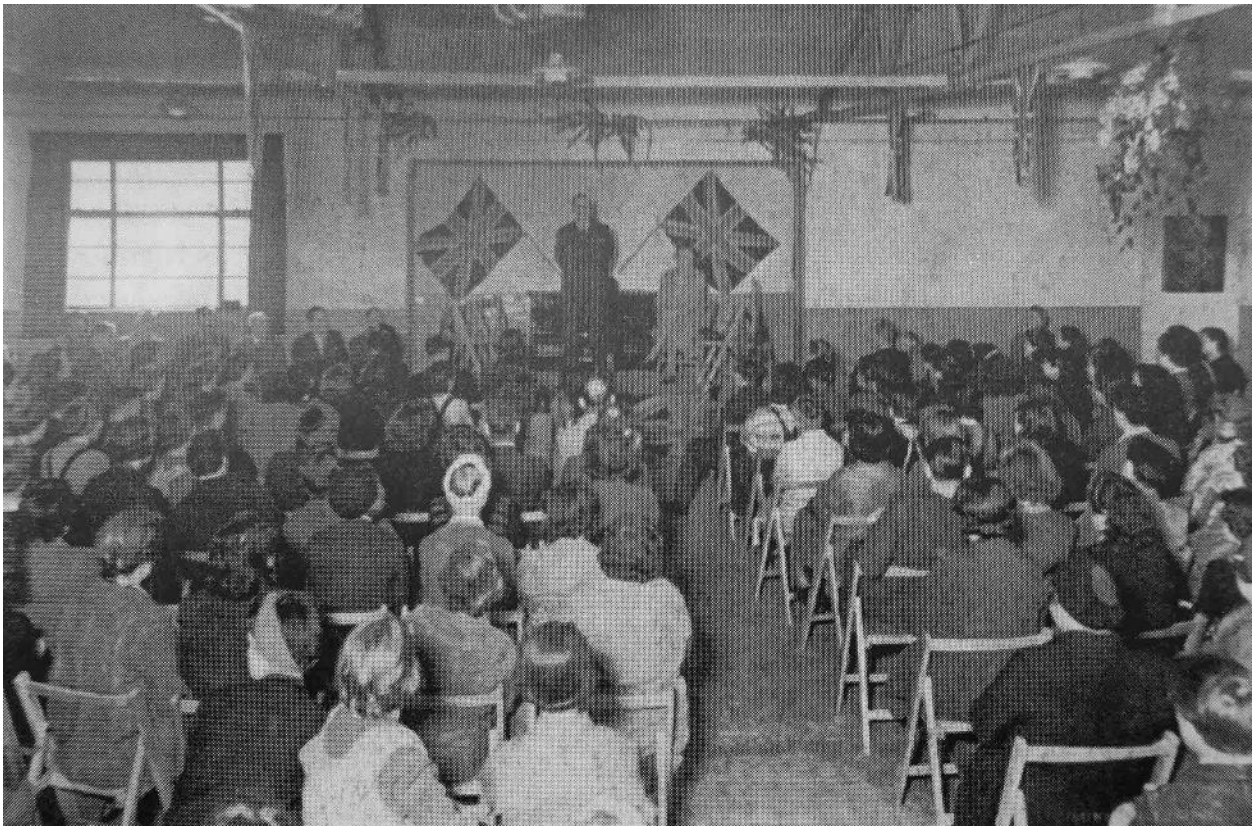
made fountain pens and gold nibs since 1899 but had converted its Lancashire factories to munitions work once War had been declared. They took over a number of works in North Wales to increase war production and in August 1943 were asked to set up a new works at Llanfoist using unskilled labour to produce aircraft radiators. Within 3 months the work force was engaged and trained, the plant designed and installed and the first radiators produced. At the opening an official paid tribute to the women and girls for the way they had set about their tasks. 'Many were from the country and many were the wives of serving men. All were tackling their respective tasks with assiduity and skill as though born to it.' Among the guests at the opening was Captain Geoffrey Crawshay, Regional Controller for Wales of the Ministry of Aircraft Production. In May 1944 Sir Stafford Cripps, the Minister of Aircraft Production visited the Llanfoist works himself and spoke to the workers.

The first of the few. Finishing off the first of the radiators.

Factories like Lang Pen could not have operated without female labour. At the end of September 1941 the Chronicle passed on the news that all women born in 1914 were required to register at a local office of the Ministry of Labour and National Service and by

the end of the year a big call-up of women was underway. On 19th June 1942, the Chronicle noted that it was the national intention to call up women over 50 for war work. Seven million women born between 1902 and 1923 had already registered but many more were needed in industry. Probably those up to 45 years old would go to the war factories and those between 45 and 50 into other war work. There was also the possibility that the more elderly might have to register for part-time work. With their well established voluntary contribution, their evacuee work and Land Army contribution there was no doubt that the contribution of women to the war effort was immense.

Eunice Gilbert worked for the War Department from 1939 to 1946 in a building off Station Road. It was a big house with large grounds and several outbuildings were built in the grounds. 'We worked six and a half days a week, from 9.00a.m. until 6.00p.m. Monday to Saturday and until 12 o'clock on Sunday. A brigadier came in one day and he was shocked at the hours. So he said that we must have one hour's walking exercise in the week. The men had to do running but the ladies could go walking. So from 12 to 1.00p.m. on a Friday we gaily went walking until one day we decided we should walk down town to the coffee shop and have a coffee instead. But unfortunately the sergeant-major spotted us and we were all on the mat and we were told that that was the last time that would happen.'



Sir Stafford Cripps in the Lang Pen canteen on May 20th 1944 addressing the predominantly female workforce. With him on the platform was Lady Cripps.

Though the war years were to see an increase in leisure activities some shortages affected women a lot. Clothes were rationed and even make-up. Eunice recalled that 'you were lucky if you could get a pot of cream which would last you for twelve months and you would be very, very careful using it. Life was very difficult in that sense.' The Chronicle of October 25th 1940 announced a ban on silk stockings by the Board of Trade to conserve silk for War needs. Some 'bright and gay' substitutes were suggested: 'women will be glad to hear that there are attractive fashions for winter. Colours will be bright blue, gay greens and deep reds.' The stockings would be plain knit, rib and fancy rib stitches and, apparently, very stunning for thick ankles! In June 1942 the newspaper turned its attention to hair styles as "perms" might disappear from salons as essential chemicals were unavailable.

Government appeals for help in the War effort were many and varied as these posters from the Imperial War Museum show.

During the War there was a clothing exchange in a shop next to the Baptist Chapel, which was much appreciated by housewives. ***Mary White*** told us that 'It was only for children's clothes and people brought in children's clothes and were given points, no money changed hands… a vest perhaps one or two points and a coat would be five points. It was always very busy and people were very glad to have clothes… because clothes rationing did mean that people did not have many clothes and children still wore out their clothes very quickly.'

Housewives took the Government's advice to 'make do and mend' to heart. Mary White said that during the War clothes were re-made and re-made again. People unravelled their jumpers and re-knitted them up. Socks had new feet put into them. On one occasion some Army blankets were released and people made dressing gowns out of them. ***Mary Morgan*** just 'renewed the feet' of her husband's socks. 'Also if you had a hand-knitted jumper and the cuffs began to go under the arms or the elbows, you took the sleeves out. You made something out of the sleeves and made the jumper into a pullover. There was also a way of doubling the lives of trousers.' Rather than patching knees there was a way of cutting them and reversing the legs. Mary did admit that there were problems matching up the seams and that her family eventually rebelled against this treatment of trousers!

THE GARRISON TOWN

In the Castle Museum there is a document which lists the staff officers based at the H.Q. of Western Command South Wales District at St Ronans, Abergavenny in December 1944. Major General J.G. Halsted C.B., O.B.E., M.C. was the District Commander but what is most striking in this list is the many-sided nature of the organisation that these officers led. In addition to General Staff, there were the A. & Q.M.G. Branch, Royal Engineers, U.S. District Engineers, Royal Corps of Signals, Royal Army Service Corps, Medical and Dental Services, Ordnance, R.E.M.E., Movement Control (covering freight, personnel, RAF movements and USA movement) and Quartering. Even though the main thrust of this work was administrative it was vital in Civil Defence and meant that the town had very many British troops stationed here. It also meant that large numbers of houses were requisitioned to accommodate them, like the one in which Eunice Gilbert worked.

There were also many foreign troops stationed in Abergavenny in the War and it became virtually a garrison town. Troops from many different countries spent time here. There were Belgians, Poles, Indians and, in the largest numbers, Americans. It is estimated that there were 100,000 American troops stationed in the town and surrounding area from 1943. The small market town must have seemed to be bursting at the seams. The noise of military vehicles on the move was an abiding memory of the war to the majority of the interviewees. It was the American and Indian troops who made the biggest impression on the locals.

Don Davies used to watch the Indian troops 'peg sticking' in Bailey Park. 'The officers rode little ponies and they would have lances and they would charge down the park and try to pick up pegs with their lances. The ones who picked up the most pegs won the competition. We used to cheer them on but we did wonder what they would do in the war to attack the Germans. These Indians were characters, very quiet and gentle except when the Americans made a comment about their colour.' ***Betty Rivers*** recalled that in Govilon 'Certain Indians who had trades like mechanics or blacksmiths were lent out to different people in the village – my father had a mechanic and a blacksmith helped the blacksmith in the village shop.' She also remembered things like tasting chapattis for the first time!

Betty also recalled the arrival of the Americans. 'There were different groups of Americans stationed in the area – a big Tank Corps at Cwrt-y-Gollen, an Engineering Corps out at Lady Llanover's place at Llanover and the 99th Infantry, all Americans of Scandinavian descent out at Glanusk House. The 99th were all ski troopers waiting to go into Norway or something. Later on there were black Americans.'

Richard Wilkinson has found that there were four battalions of American troops in all who spent time at Llanover Park between June and August 1944. These were the 283rd and 284th Field Artillery Battalions, the 807th Tank Destroyer Battalion and the 191st Field Artillery Battalion. Many had landed at Liverpool and been brought down to Llanover for no more than six weeks in the build-up to D-Day. One soldier's tale would have it that his

unit was on its way to Sennybridge for artillery practice when the driver turned right rather than left at Hardwick and they ended up at Southampton en route for Utah Beach!

The American Hospital at Gilwern

from a small picture supplied by Bob Rivers, enhanced by Bryn Probert.

One of the Americans who arrived in December 1943 was Betty's future husband ***Bob Rivers***. He was on the administrative staff at the newly built American hospital in Gilwern. 'We had come by train from Greenock and arrived in a snowstorm. We were asked to fill our mattresses with straw and that was what we had to sleep on for the first month until we got all the hospital sorted out.' The new hospital was the 279th Station Hospital and had some of the best surgeons of the time. Bob explained how patients were referred to Gilwern. 'If a soldier was wounded in battle he was treated by the aid man there and, if necessary, transferred to the field hospital. The worst cases requiring skin grafts, amputations etc were transported back to the Station Hospital.' In 1944 many of the Normandy casualties were back in Gilwern within 48 hours. It helped that Abergavenny was a railway town not too far from the coast. 'We had a fleet of ambulances waiting at the Abergavenny Junction which took a circular route. They went from the junction to Crickhowell and then along the back road to Gilwern whilst other ambulances would be making the trip from the hospital to the Junction, so that it did not interfere with other traffic too much… it would take up to 12 hours to empty a train which could contain up to 400 stretcher and walking cases. The hospital had some 52 wards and 4 operating theatres so we could carry out any operation which was required.'

Americans and their forms of transport were soon a familiar sight in the area. Their

driving was occasionally reckless and more than a few Jeeps came off the road on Blackrock hill. More seriously, the Chronicle of 28th April 1944 reported that 4 American servicemen were killed and several injured in a lorry coming down Blackrock hill Clydach when the driver turned on to a tramroad rather than the main road. ***Ray Prosser*** told of an equally serious accident in Llanvetherine when 'Just above the barn corner above Lane's garage there were about 3 of those sort of sport tanks, a tank on the bottom and a canvas top, went over the hedge on a Sunday morning. Well, of course, when they tipped up and you'd got the weight of the tank on top, the black Americans inside weren't left for much.' He also recalled that 'Down below on the doublegates corner there were some of these amphibious Jeeps went through the hedge and about half a dozen went through the hedge before they realised the road went left!'

The soldiers were very generous and many children were given gum, chocolate and cookies. One interviewee remembered some of the troops walking down Frogmore Street with doughnuts on sticks which they handed out. The Americans could also be quite extravagant and they thought nothing of throwing away things which the locals would not have done such as cans of food which were surplus to requirements. Certainly there was soon a black market. ***Betty Rivers*** was working in Lloyds Bank after leaving school: 'The Americans came in and we started a bit of wheeling and dealing because they said "Do you know anywhere where we can get fresh eggs?" and we exchanged the information for films for cameras, nylon stockings and lipsticks. So a nice little black market thing started.'

The best known centre for American troops in the town was the Donut Dugout. One of the last Chronicle editions of the War on 4th May 1945 reported an At Home at the Dugout the previous week where the American Red Cross could thank local female volunteers. In all some 220 women attended. Miss Mary M. Pulte, Director of the Donut Dugout and Miss Lucille Parzendak, American Red Cross Field Director at the Hospital, thanked the volunteers for their work and co-operation. Over 40 volunteers were given certificates for loyal service to the 279th Station Hospital and the Donut Dugout. ***Elsie Hall*** was one of those given a certificate. She enjoyed the work very much.

'They took the little shop next to the Angel as the entrance. The owner had retired and they had the Angel ballroom and the Wedgwood Room. Now the Wedgwood Room was the quiet room. On Thursday night they had a film there. There was a record player, classical records, chess sets, anything that was quiet was played there… cards whatever. The Americans certainly looked after their troops. Then the ballroom itself… well sometimes they had dances there. They could play darts, the piano, oh it was just a jumble like a social club and then the other part that was like an L-shape, we had a long counter and Mrs Viggers was the cook. She made lovely doughnuts. Albert Lyons was the general factotum. The troops used to come in and the American Red Cross ran it – we had a Lieutenant, an American Red Cross Lieutenant Connie from Hartford Connecticut. She was absolutely lovely. When the British troops were here we also had a British Red Cross Lieutenant. (It was Molly Tresawna, Dr Tresawna's little daughter. We were in the same form at school so I

knew her very well.) Anybody could go in really, even prisoners of war who were walking about could go in. It was open house and they were all made welcome and they had free coffee, free doughnuts, free cigarettes and there was always plenty of socialising. They were only here a few weeks but we used to get, I always felt, the nicest quietest ones, not drinkers and aggressive. They were really nice lads but you know they were only here a few weeks and we were just getting to know them and they were off.' Volunteers like Elsie clearly helped troops who were very far from home, especially those who had been wounded.

However it was not easy to overcome deep seated prejudices. As ***Bob Rivers*** put it, 'The trouble was that we were still fighting the Civil War.' White and black American troops used the Dugout on alternate nights, effectively segregation. Sadly there were some serious incidents which ended in fatalities. ***Elsie Hall*** remembered one boy that used to come into the Dugout whose name was Highcrick and 'Apparently he'd been to the dance one Saturday night and he didn't pick up with a girl to take home and he walked to their transport which was down by Rockfield and there were black troops stationed around here. There were some down the Brecon Road, you know, not many but they were there. A gang of them, they knifed him to death.'

Chrissie Jones recalled another death. 'Well I was in the Donut Dugout in Abergavenny and we'd come out from the Angel and some of the black Americans and some of the white ones were there – and their military police were called snowdrops because they had white hats, white helmets – and we seen a commotion and I found out after that they'd stabbed a lieutenant and he died. Nobody knew really, but the reason I knew was because I went into the camp with the phone and they told me but I kept it quiet. I wasn't allowed to report it to anyone.' There was nothing in the Chronicle about these deaths but on 11th June 1943 a town councillor was reported to have raised a question about members of the army charged with serious civil offences being tried by the military. This may well not have referred to the American cases but illustrated the questions that would inevitably arise in a quiet market town occupied by thousands of troops.

It was little wonder that they had alternate nights for white and coloured troops at the Dugout as there was so much prejudice. ***John Williams*** of Llanthony gave me another example of the division. He had come into the Town Hall to a dance one evening. When he went to the gents he found a black American soldier outside and asked him why he hadn't gone in. The soldier told him he couldn't as there was a white American soldier in there. The days of the Civil Rights movement lay far in the future.

The Americans however played leading parts in one of the most humorous stories we were told. ***Glyn Lewis*** had a paper round for Shaws the newsagents on the Brecon Road and he used to go down there in the morning, pick up all his papers, sort them into order and then deliver them to the King's Street and Queen's Street area. 'I would start off in King's Street and then up past the Fairfield where the car park is now and then carry on from there. But on this morning, either the 6th or 7th of June 1944,

they'd just announced that D-Day was taking place and of course it was all the headlines that day then. Well the car park was full of Americans waiting to go on the second wave like and as soon as they seen me coming that was it like, one clamour for papers… but I said 'No, no, you can't have one' I said, 'They're all ordered.' So when they… they were about a halfpenny or a penny then in old money… when they started offering me 2/- and 2/6 which was a lot of money in them days like, you know, I succumbed to temptation and sold the lot!' I did make quite a few pounds, went back to the shop and told them what I'd done and he said you'll have to pay for them so, that was no problem, I paid for them like, face value, and pocketed the difference and then had the sack!'

The presence of so many different military groups in the town also posed problems for communication. Chrissie Jones and her colleagues had her work cut out installing telephones. We heard stories too of planes regularly dropping military mail in containers at the Hospital and in the back gardens of some of the requisitioned houses. Most curious of all was ***Glyn Williams'*** story:

'I kept pigeons. I was a racing man and used to win several prizes with them. During the War the services took them over and they used to collect them and take them and let them go with messages. They put a phone into my loft and whenever they arrived at my loft the phone would ring and I would have to phone that message back up to headquarters at a house near the Great Western.'

THE KAISER OF ABERGAVENNY

Undoubtedly the most famous of the prisoners of war at Abergavenny was Rudolf Hess. A close friend of Hitler's since the 1920's he had risen to be the Fuhrer's Deputy for all party affairs, next in line in the succession to Goering. On 10th May 1941, he flew alone across the North Sea to Scotland, hoping to negotiate a peace between Germany and Great Britain. He chose Scotland as he had met the Duke of Hamilton at the Berlin Olympics of 1936 and he thought that the Duke could put him in touch with influential anti-War politicians in London. Instead he became a prisoner of war.

Joe Clifford, one of his guards, takes up the story:

'Well I met Hess first in January 1942 in a big house just outside Ascot and he came there from the Tower and there were 120 Brigade of Guards guarding him and there was very heavy snow for a time. Then on a Friday in the last week of June 1942 I came down with him to Maindiff Court. It was an old Austin Estate and I stayed with him all the time he was at Maindiff until the autumn of 1945. He was very arrogant and tall. He used to walk with a semi-goosestep. We were his servants you know. We were thirty guards plus six Royal Army Medical Corps just for him. They converted two rooms into one for his bedroom and they had another room for the RAMC, who used to sleep next door. He had the same food as the officers... occasionally he used to dine with the officers. He had a compound about the size of a tennis court which he used to walk round and he had a bench outside where he used to sit and he'd write and draw at a table.' Joe had spoken to Dr Ellis Jones' wife when he arrived and she said that they had been given less than 24 hours notice to remove patients before Hess arrived. Hess and his guards occupied half the hospital and the other half was occupied by some of the wounded from Dunkirk. News travelled fast. Joe Clifford recalled: 'On the Friday we arrived I went down to the Town Hall to a dance and I was sat there at about 8 o'clock and I heard one of the staff say that a famous personage just arrived at Maindiff Court. They knew already!' For all that the local people kept their secret well and were very cross when some national newspaper stories appeared. Nothing was said in the Chronicle even though he was seen by many people on walks the area. The Editor of the Chronicle must have been very tempted as on 16th May 1941, just after Hess had landed in Scotland, he wrote that Adolf must be a regular reader of the Chronicle as he'd sent the paper an advert for the agony column which, in the national interest, he'd been unable to accept. "Rudolf, return immediately and all will be forgiven – Adolf." Further in February 1942, in common with others in the country, the newspaper tried to establish Hess's motives for his flight. It wondered whether Churchill was right when he suggested that Hess was here to contact powerful elements in Britain in an attempt to get rid of the 'Churchill clique' so that Hitler could offer a generous peace. Once again this was before Hess had arrived at Maindiff and the recollections of locals were of a more personal variety as they saw him on one or other of his walks.

Rudolf Hess

One of those who saw him was ***Ray Prosser*** who grew up in Llanvetherine:

'I can remember walking along the road with Bill this one morning and 2 soldiers were by the pear orchard gate and there was a chap in civvys sitting there on a rug and so Bill said to one of the soldiers 'Is he anything to do with you?' So this guard said to him 'Well you have a good look at him.' It was no good me looking at him as I didn't know who he was. I didn't use to read the papers – we didn't have them very often and there were no pictures on the radio. Bill said 'Well that's old Hess isn't it?' He said 'Look at his eyebrows'. Well it was. He very often used to go up to White Castle because Pop Jones used to be the keeper there then and there were photographs I know in the national newspapers of Pop Jones, Mrs Jones, the dog and Hess up at White Castle. So we used to see him as well. The thing Les Lane and I couldn't make out was if Hess was German and the Germans were fighting us why he used to wave at us!'

A newspaper cartoon deposited at Abergavenny Museum by Joe Cliford showing Hess and Goering at the Nuremberg trials in 1945.

FLASH BACK "And what did you do during the great retreat? Nutting – around Abergavenny."

At a national and international level there has been intense speculation about the purpose of Hess's flight. In *Hess Flight for the Fuehrer* by Peter Padfield a section is devoted to Hess's captivity. In a chapter called 'Disinformation' Hess's transfer to Maindiff from Mytchett Place was noted. Various reasons were suggested for this. Was he too near to military targets in and around Aldershot, not a good idea under the Geneva Convention on Prisoners of War, or was it owing to his health? Less convincing is the suggestion that the authorities may have felt they could learn little from him. In the autumn of 1942 there were rumours that Hess's wife was to join him in Britain, with new peace proposals. A German newspaper went further and suggested that Hess's journey had not been his own idea but was part of Hitler's policy to conclude a peace with Britain and then, together, attack Russia. Soviet files meanwhile have drawn attention to the role of the British Secret Service. It is suggested that there had been correspondence between Hess and the Duke of Hamilton that preceded the flight but Hess's letters were intercepted by the British

Secret Service who sent replies in the Duke's name and so lured Hess to England. In this interpretation too Britain would have made peace with Germany and joined them in the crusade against Bolshevism. In *The Flight of Rudolf Hess, Myths and Reality* by Roy Conyers Nesbit and George Van Acker there is some support for this view. Reference is made to a conversation that Hess had with Lord Beaverbrook in which Hess claimed to have come to persuade Britain to join the Germans against the Bolsheviks.

A Daily Mail article on November 3rd 1942 also suggested that Hess brought Hitler's terms including the recognition of Hitler as Overlord of Europe and Dictator of Britain with Hess as his Protector here. A further American report in the Spring of 1943 suggested that he had come on Hitler's orders and that his arrival was expected with the R.A.F. providing an escort in the final stages of his flight. In this report too there was reference to the Secret Service's part in encouraging the Germans. There was said to have been a reception committee of Military Intelligence officers and secret service agents at Dungavel House, the Duke of Hamilton's home, which had a private air-strip. Instead Hess had parachuted down some 12 miles away.

These and other theories are at odds with the commonly accepted version. In this Hess had come on his own initiative to find a strong anti-War opposition party and had attempted to present Hitler's views. Whilst there is scope for debate about the motives for his flight there seems to have been more widespread agreement about his state of mind. Indeed it is precisely that which makes the personal whim version of the flight more credible. The publication in 1947 of *The Case of Rudolf Hess: A Problem in Diagnosis and Forensic Psychiatry* edited by J.R. Rees gave his views and those of the seven other Service Physicians who dealt with Hess in the years 1941 to 1946. This was an unusual step for doctors to take. However it provided a telling degree of unanimity about their prisoner patient. They seem to agree that there was a 'considerable abnormality' about him. Definite hypochondriacal tendencies were noted from the start. He came with a range of homeopathic and other remedies and suffered with abdominal pains. To these were soon added a delusional condition. He became convinced that he was being poisoned and persecuted. He was assessed by Rees as a 'paranoid person of a psychopathic type'. He made a first suicide attempt at Mytchett Place in June 1941 when he threw himself downstairs, breaking his left leg. From then on he seems to have been treated as a mental patient with 6 nurses staying with him in pairs in 8 hour shifts.

The late ***Ivor Lewis***, 100 years old at the time of our interview, was the brother-in-law of Dr Ellis Jones, Hess' chief doctor at Maindiff. 'My brother-in-law did tell us about the strange behaviour of Rudolf Hess, when he behaved in a very peculiar manner on odd occasions, but he got to know the symptoms of the problem that he suffered with and he understood him all right... He had a medical problem. Something would come over him and he would get down on the floor and roll about in a most silly fashion really.' Ivor Lewis had in his possession a pair of Hess's old glasses that Dr Ellis Jones had given him at a meal one evening, when he had forgotten his own. Dr Jones had changed Hess' glasses for him while he was at Maindiff and had kept the old pair. Later Ivor Lewis had told his own optician about

the glasses and shown them to him. He was told that they had been made flat on the sides to fit under gas masks and helmets worn at the time by airmen.

Two photographs of a bunker or machine gun post built near Ross Road Abergavenny during the War, probably to defend Maindiff Court where Rudolf Hess was imprisoned. (*Photographs by Granville Hollister in Abergavenny Museum.)*

He seemed to recover when he arrived in Abergavenny. However an article which appeared in the Daily Mail in September 1942 about his life at Maindiff Court suggested that his medical problems persisted. To his earlier problems were added from 1943 an alleged amnesia. His doctors found this to be an unusual phase in a case of paranoia, but it seemed to be marked and progressive. In May 1944 he was given drug injections which he had been told would correct his memory loss.

Whilst under their influence he maintained the appearance of amnesia and the experiment was not repeated. It is tempting to think that this was all a performance so that he could be declared insane and be repatriated under the Geneva Rules. Hess himself claimed later that he had only pretended not to remember. If this was so it was a remarkable performance. In February 1945 he made a second 'suicide attempt' stabbing himself twice with a bread knife. The wounds required a few stitches. He went on hunger strike for a few days. He had access to newspapers and it is possible that his worst times coincided with setbacks to the Germans in the War. Hess undoubtedly had been a senior figure in the Nazi hierarchy, but it was widely recognised by the Germans that his influence was waning. Now, once a prisoner in Britain, he became a more and more isolated figure. His status meant that he had to be given preferential treatment and the British could not afford for anything to happen to him whilst he was in their custody. Sadly for Hess, this became even more the case after Nuremberg. The confinement of over four years in Britain was nothing in comparison with what followed. Until his death in 1987 he was to be guarded by the occupying powers in Berlin and for many of the Spandau years was a solitary prisoner. The true story of his flight and what followed in Britain remains elusive and has provoked a wide range of theories. There is even the suggestion that the Hess of the Maindiff years onwards was a double, either a substitute by the British following his death in a plane crash or even one sent by the Germans after the real Hess had been killed in Germany. To local people however he remains the 'Kaiser of Abergavenny'.

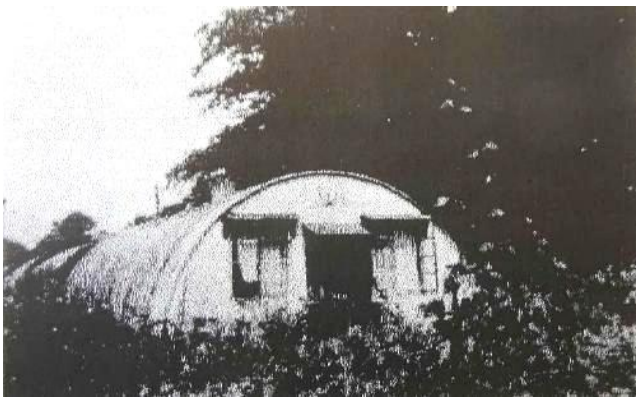
OTHER PRISONERS OF WAR

There were many other German and Italian prisoners in the Abergavenny area during the War though less is known about them than about Hess. The Llanover estate was taken over by the Government and ***Harold Gregory*** remembered that:

'It had various uses during the War, initially as an Italian prisoner of war camp because of course it was in the time of the Desert War and a lot of Italian prisoners came there who were a pretty docile lot and many of them worked on the farms. After that it was taken over as an American Army camp which was quite an exciting experience locally as you can well imagine... Then it became a German prisoner of war camp with very high security. As far as I know nobody ever escaped from there. I don't know whether they even tried and we saw very little of them but some were allowed out and they used to appear round our lanes being taken for walks. They had jackboots and overcoats and high caps on and that's about all we saw of them.'

Mary Morgan remembered the huts put up in the grounds of Llanover Hall for the prisoners. Her family had a German prisoner of war living and working on the farm for about eighteen months towards the end of the War. He was an 18 or 19 year old farmer's son and, in Mary's words, 'a jolly good worker.' A number of German prisoners were allowed to lodge on farms in this way at this stage in the War. Many also recalled the way in which Italian prisoners were free to come and go as they didn't want to go back to War. She remembered one occasion when an Italian prisoner was in the Coliseum cinema queue.

Richard Wilkinson of Llanover has researched the wartime and immediate post-war years in the village. In the period from 1944 to 1946 there were German, Italian and Polish prisoners of war there. The Americans had been there in the summer of 1944 and the camp may have been built by the Pioneer Corps or the Royal Ordnance who then stayed to look after the prisoners. There were some 50 huts for the German prisoners and it was Camp 200. They were in the fields near Ty Uchaf. At the end of the War the huts were used as homes until 1952. The families who moved there were both local and from the valleys. Many were ex-servicemen and their families. ***Christine Thatcher*** moved to 16 Llanover Park when her father left the Navy. There were both Nissen huts and square huts with roofs occupied by some 50 families.



A 1950 picture of one of the former Llanover Park camp huts which was converted into a residence.

On one occasion as part of her work ***Chrissie Jones*** visited a German camp:

'And a German gave us this uniform and I had the green jacket: I hanged it up in the linesman's room and I went… to the café in Cross Street where I always used to go for my meal and the Police Sergeant Jones, I always remember him, he used to ride a horse and he came with one of the engineers and asked for me and wanted to know… they thought a German had come into the linesman's room and was at large! So I had to give in and tell the truth!'

Richard Ahrens who settled in Abergavenny and went on to become the Parks Superintendent was a German prisoner in 1944 in Blackpool. He was moved to Chepstow in 1945. From there in 1946 he moved to Wonastow. Later he was moved to Usk, the Mardy and Llanfihangel Crucorney. The prisoners did not leave for home at the end of the War as there was a docks strike. Then they were given the choice whether to remain or to go home. At that stage Richard knew some 60 German prisoners and of these only some half a dozen decided to remain. By this time his English had improved. 'I used to go shopping in Chepstow and later I started reading… of course I couldn't make sense of the newspapers… the Beano, the Dandy and the Eagle sort of helped me on!' At Chepstow he worked in the officers' mess. At Monmouth he worked on the food supply for the camp. In Usk he worked on a small farm hauling. On the Mardy he did not go out much but was the camp cobbler. At Llanfihangel the camp was run by the Y.M.C.A. and he used to get the camp provisions. He cycled to the butchers in Abergavenny and he had to push the bike all the way back up to Llanfihangel.

Richard Ahrens married a local girl in 1949 and was naturalised in 1952. Then he joined and served in the Territorial Army for eighteen years. On one occasion he was in Devizes on an exercise. A visiting Brigadier came for an inspection in the course of which he asked Richard whether he had served in the Army during the War. He told him that he had been in the Luftwaffe! The Brigadier turned to the C.O. and the sergeant and said 'I didn't know you had ex-German prisoners of war in the Regiment!' It then turned out that he was the only ex-prisoner of war who served in the British Army.

The Mardy camp was in what is now Poplars Road. ***Don Prosser*** thought that it was first built for Italian prisoners but when they settled on farms to help out alongside Land Army girls and others the camp became one for German prisoners. Much depended on the numbers of prisoners as ***Bob Rivers,*** stationed at the American Hospital in Gilwern, pointed out. He mentioned a German camp in Gilwern next to the hospital. This was towards the end of the War and was a temporary measure because of a sudden surge in the numbers of prisoners. He thought that they were there for some three months until something more permanent could be found.

FUND RAISING AND VOLUNTARY EFFORT

One of the most remarkable aspects of life on the Home Front was the number of collections and special appeals that were made in the town. The Chronicle estimated that by June 1943 £1 million had been raised. Cynics would conclude that it was a very wealthy town which could afford it, but those who undertook the collections stressed that it was often those who could least afford it who gave most generously. From the Chronicle pages the following special funds were spectacularly successful:-

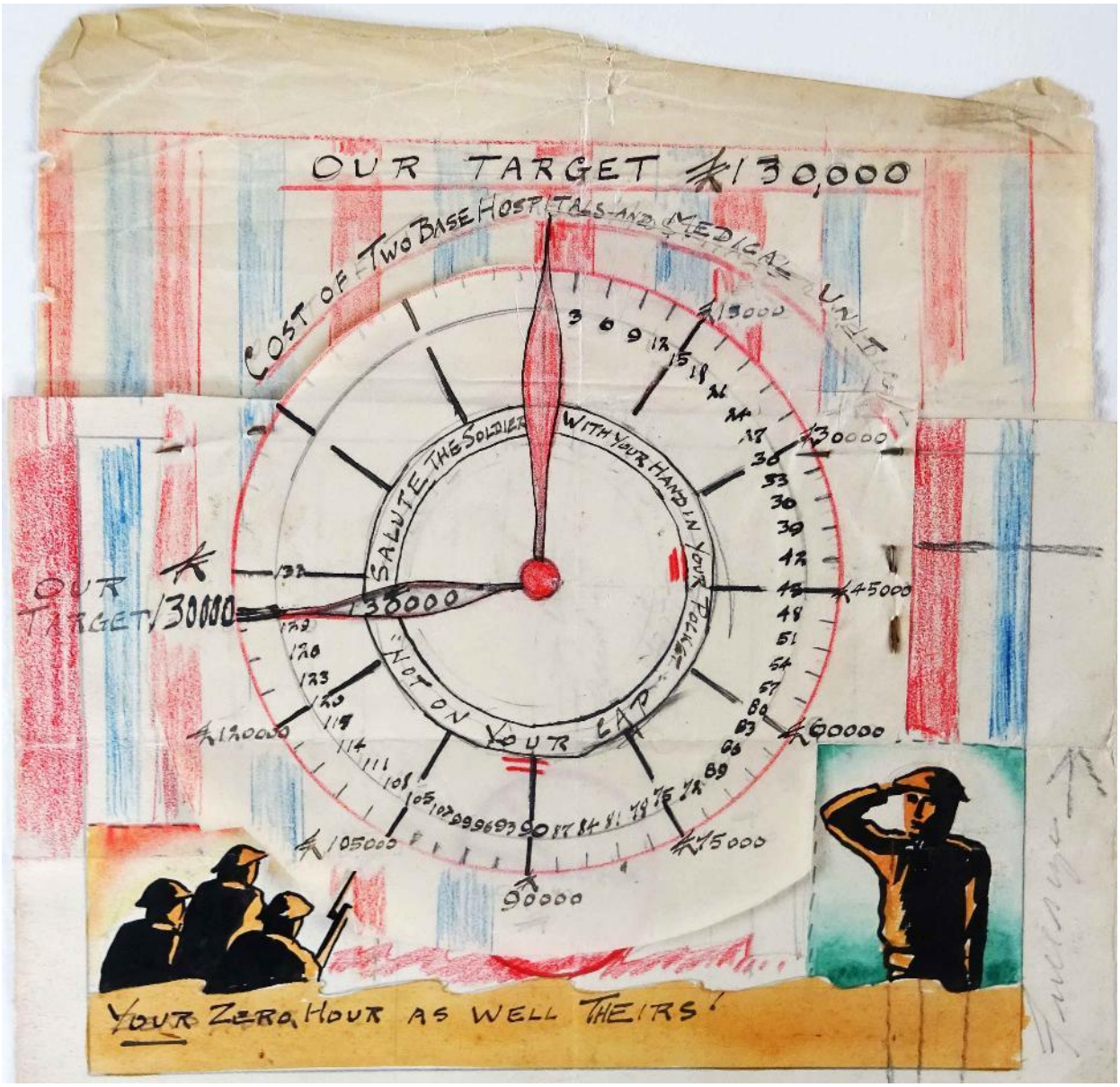
		TARGET	RAISED
1940	FIRST WAR WEAPONS WEEK (Aiming for 10 Spitfires.)	£50,000	
1941	SECOND WAR WEAPONS WEEK ('Dig deep - fork out'.)	£60,000	£120,969
1942	WARSHIP WEEK	£75,000	£117,680
1943	WINGS FOR VICTORY WEEK (Aiming for 2 Sunderlands.)	£100,000	£180,112*
1944	SALUTE THE SOLDIER WEEK (To pay for 2 base hospitals & a medical unit.)	£130,000	£182,012*
1945	WELCOME HOME FUND	£1,000	
	ABERGAVENNY RECOGNITION OF WAR SERVICE	£10,000	

(* These two appeals alone realised £21/15/6 per head of the population.)

These efforts by any standards will remain a source of justifiable civic pride. Their success very often arose from the setting of separate targets for the various organisations in the town and for different areas so there was some competition to see who could exceed their target for most money. There were other money collections too which make the area's efforts even more remarkable. Before the end of 1940, for instance, the people of Abergavenny and district had collected some £1,200 in their Red Cross Penny a Week saving scheme boxes and many other specific appeals were highly successful. In December 1942 a three day fund raiser at the Angel Hotel for the Red Cross and the St John Prisoners of War Fund raised over £1,400 and the following February a Red Cross appeal for Prisoners of War food parcels raised £20,708.

This fundraising in itself was noteworthy but voluntary effort did not stop there. There were the parties organised for the evacuees and for families of servicemen and Prisoners of War. Woollen 'comforts' were knitted by schoolchildren and others for the troops and

Draft for Salute the Soldier Week Appeal (Harld Poole collection Abergavenny Museum)



Presentation of the proceeds of the Wings for Victory Week 1943 at the Town Hall

Christmas parcels were dispatched. The Boy Scouts led by Mr T.G. Cule collected newspapers and were given free use of the old S.W.S. Office in Monk Street to store the waste paper collected from October 1939. ***Betty Adams*** used to run a Girl Guide company and they collected rose hips for rose hip syrup for babies. It was said that the hips of cultivated and wild rose produced vitamin C which could also be used as a substitute for fruit juices for children. The guides also collected horse-chestnuts for oil and bottles and jars for preservatives.

By December 1939 a survey showed that 300 Abergavenny men and women were already in the Services. The newly formed War Aid Association decided to set up a central list of those serving which would be kept at the Town Hall. They also decided to send a Christmas parcel to those in the Services. The parcel, the Chronicle reported, would have a slab of chocolate, a tin of toffees, P.K. chewing gum, a tin of Oxo, shaving soap and toothpaste, a writing pad, envelopes and pencil, bootlaces, cards, a game or a book. It also had woollen comforts and the Licensed Victuallers' Association sent cigarettes. There was a personal letter from the Mayor and Mayoress in every parcel. The first December of the War also saw the first Town Hall Christmas parties, this one for 260 evacuee children. There were also Christmas parcels for the troops on leave. It was obvious from the outset then that the town was going to do all it could to support its troops at home and abroad and to make evacuees welcome. In January 1940 a tea was held for local and evacuee children, a total of 1,400 in all. Parties were also held in the Corn Exchange at New Year from 1941 to 1945 for the parents, wives and children of prisoners of war from Abergavenny and area.

The knitting of woollen comforts for the troops and prisoners of war was amongst the busiest of voluntary activities. A depot was set up at the Town Hall. Money was raised for the Comforts Fund by holding events like dances and concerts. From May 1940 to 1942 there are regular entries in the Castle Street Girls School logbook recording the scarves, socks, mittens etc. that the girls knitted. The W.V.S. and other ladies also took to this task with enthusiasm. The Chronicle in November 1940 recorded one group's not untypical output. The Castle Ward Working Party had provided 76 scarves, 72 pairs of socks, 25 helmets, 13 pullovers, 21 pairs of mittens, 2 pairs of gloves, 1 pair of cuffs, 7 pairs of bed socks and 2 pairs of operation socks! Soon, not surprisingly, the Mayor had a file of letters from the forces who had received the knitted comforts. Not content with this, the volunteers formed 23 working parties to provide the A.R.P. Wardens with similar items. When this had been done they began the same work for the Home Guard.

Another aspect of voluntary effort reported extensively in the Chronicle concerned salvage. The country needed scrap iron, brass, lead and aluminium and so the Council began to collect from householders. Specific areas of the cattle market were designated for farmers for their scrap. The collection of scrap iron meant that there was talk of removing park railings and those in Castle Meadows. By early 1942 a schedule was drawn up of unnecessary railings in churchyards and country houses. Some of the interviewees had doubts about the need for some of the collections but it was part of a national plan designed to engage the population and sustain morale. It was suggested in the press that all the salvage efforts were useful e.g. 3lbs of waste paper was said to make containers for 2 anti-aircraft shells; meat bones provided glycerine for high explosives and glue for binding particular aircraft parts; 5 tons of ferrous metals would provide steel for 8,145 anti-aircraft shells. The meat bones were in fact collected in receptacles attached to lamp-posts and huge amounts were collected. Once every 3 months too there was a grouping of surrounding villages for a salvage week. In March 1943 there was a mobile salvage exhibition in a railway coach in the L.M.S. Brecon Road goods yard. The walls of the coach were lined with salvaged balloon fabric from balloons damaged in towns and cities. Slogans were made from cast iron letter that had originally been used as station names before the Government had ordered their removal in 1940. Oily rags were said to have provided 14,000 gallons of reclaimed oil.

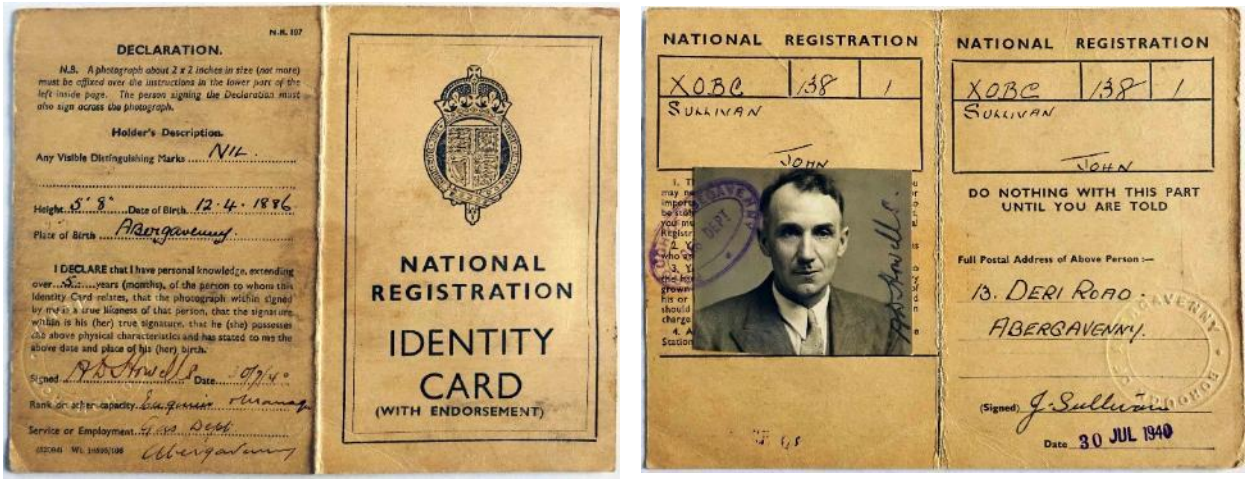
One casualty of the metal collection was a children's favourite, the World War One tank in Bailey Park. It had been presented to the town on July 3rd 1918 and had been on display near the Hereford Road entrance to the Park until it was removed at the start of the War.

There were many book collections. In early July 1942 a mile of books was laid from the Swan Hotel to the L.M.S. Station in response to an appeal by Mr Cule and his scouts. Mr Cule was delighted with a collection that yielded 2 tons 11 cwts of paper. In May 1943 a target of 20,000 was set for Book Week as part of a national book drive. In the first week alone 14, 650 books were collected and the final count was over 20,000!

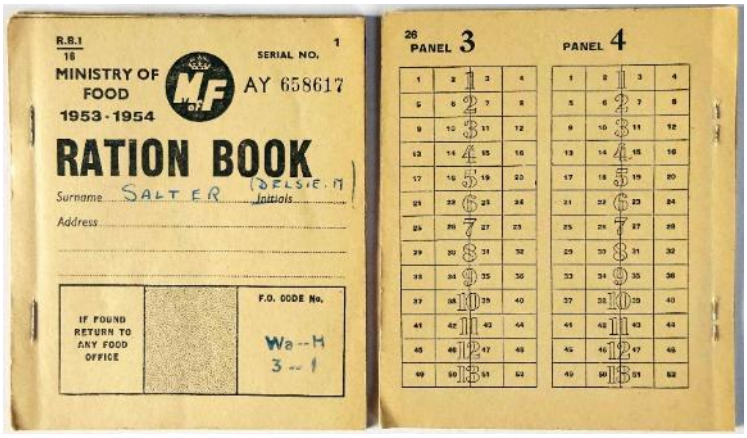
NATIONAL REGISTRATION AND RATION CARDS

The personal recollections of the War would not be complete without an awareness of increased State involvement in the daily lives of all its citizens. The evacuation scheme was an early example as were the regulations on gas masks, the blackout, employment and conscription. However one change which affected everyone from the early months of the War was the National Registration Identity Card. Suggestions that such cards be introduced and used today have provoked a mixed reaction. In 1939 its introduction and that of the 'Ministry of Food Ration Card' seemed natural requirements of war-time. Indeed the cards became two of the most familiar items of the War and lasted into the early 1950s.

A typical identity card given to us by a member of the Sullivan family.



The decision to introduce ration books for all was announced in December 1939 but it was to be introduced in stages. The ration book below was of the kind introduced towards the end of the War.



The food situation could have become critical from the early years of the War had it not been for the introduction of ration books. The way that they operated was changed from time to time but people accepted them. Much of the credit for this belongs to Lord Woolton, an inspired choice as Minster of Food. He was a businessman who had been Chairman of Lewis's Stores. He soon became a national figure and through a brilliant public relations exercise gave a human face to a process of hugely increased State control. The success of Woolton pies, meat pies without meat, showed the way and soon housewives were being offered a wide range of recipes with potatoes and carrots among the main ingredients.

Some of the interviewees remembered difficulties at shops when various shortages did arise. ***Mary White's*** parents owned Stoneham's a large grocer's shop on a corner in the High Street and saw the situation from the other side of the counter. 'I think in the shop my father was allowed a certain amount of leeway with the allowances he was given because everything had to be weighed out. All the fats came in great big blocks. The sugar came in sacks and had to be weighed.' She found some of the coupons a trial. 'Of course we had visitors sometimes and they came with their temporary food cards. The coupons had to be cut off them. The coupons were smaller than a postage stamp. At the end of the month they had to be counted and sorted into different groups and taken along to the Food Office. It was a very tedious job.'

RATIONING AND FOOD SUPPLY

The most familiar type of rationing during the War was food rationing. The Ministry of Agriculture made it clear from September 1939 that another 1½ million acres needed to be ploughed. In Monmouthshire the figures arrived at were 15,000 to 16,000 acres of grassland to be ploughed by the end of 1939. In this situation it was not surprising that farmers were treated as special cases with a special fuel supply. At the start of the War the Ministry of Agriculture agreed that some serving soldiers could help with the harvesting though the farmers had to pay them. From very early on too Abergavenny had its own Emergency Food Committee and in the Chronicle there were soon pleas that food profiteers should be reported.

From January 1940 there was to be 4oz butter and 4oz bacon per week with a voluntary ration of 1lb of sugar. To get this ration you had to register with your local shops. From March 1940 meat was to be available by price rather than by weight and in July tea, cooking fats, jam, cheese and milk including ice cream and chocolate were restricted. At first fats were to be restricted to 8oz a week. Supplies of eggs and milk were allocated to shops in proportion to the number of registered customers with an allowance of one egg a fortnight. There was a points system for some foods like breakfast cereals. In Abergavenny as elsewhere the exact amounts of food available varied from time to time according to supplies and the progress of the War. Because of this and because people today often talk of the War years as a time when people were fit, in spite of the shortages, it is worth including a table commonly used to illustrate the minimum and maximum allowances per week:

MEAT	1 shilling to 2s/1d worth	SUGAR	8oz. – 16oz.
BACON	4oz. – 8oz.	+ 2lbs for jam-making	
CHEEESE	1oz. – 8oz.	SWEETS	3oz. – 4oz.
FAT	1oz. – 8oz.	(Including chocolate)	
EGGS	½ - 2	DRIED MILK	¼ tin.
TEA	2oz. – 4oz.	DRIED EGGS	Eighth of a packet.

Naturally as Abergavenny was a market town at the heart of an agricultural area people believed that food shortages and rationing had less meaning for the locals. ***Marjorie Tidley*** who grew up on Cefn Tilla Farm certainly felt that they were spared the worst of the rationing. Her mother had plenty of food for the family and for any visitors or friends. This was not true for everyone. ***Dorothie Eden*** in Abergavenny found rationing to be a headache. She looked after two young children and had 2 Wallasey evacuees and some officers to cater for while her husband was away in the R.A.F. Her grown up children's abiding memory of rationing she said was of weekend stews made from the heads of sheep!

Another interviewee told us about the day a policeman stopped one farmer in town who had a sack over his shoulder with a joint of meat in it. His response to the inevitable query was that he didn't think it would be safe to leave it at home! When this tale was mentioned to another farmer his immediate reaction was that he could probably name that farmer.

Not all farmers were black marketeers by any means. When they did commit minor infringements they ran the risk of being found out. ***Gwyn Watkins***, a 97 year old who had begun to farm at Wernddu in 1937, recalled one such occasion with a twinkle in his eye. 'During the War we were only allowed to kill one pig but I killed two. I had them out the back and then the policeman in the Mardy who I knew quite well rang me up and said I should know that the Food Inspector was in the district and was calling at farms. Well I got 2 paving slabs and took them up to the attic and then I carried the pigs up and put them on the slabs. Then I salted them… and the inspector didn't call… and the salt came through the ceiling!'

Children were to have priority with daily milk, cod liver oil and orange juice. ***Maureen Griffiths*** also remembered different rationing books for children in her time at the Girls' High School. 'We had ration books for under-16s: 16 and under were blue and 5 and under were green. If they had an allocation of bananas or oranges at Ruther's they would allow the children with those ration books to have some on their ration books. You had to have your book stamped and I used to take my book to school as did a lot of the girls and used to go down to town afterwards to see if Ruther's had had any in.' ***Betty Adams*** also recalled a general rush when it was rumoured that there were bananas in. For many youngsters 'bananas' in the War were merely parsnips with the addition of banana essence and a drop of milk! Betty also went to a shop called The Star. 'It kept fish balls, little mean things, but they weren't on ration.' These were probably the Government inspired snoek. Some of her family were farmers 'so we did have a little help but not much because they had to sell all that they produced.'

Some children like ***Mary Bucknell*** felt more fortunate. Mary's aunt worked in Sayces 'She used to look at the cakes and work out which small cakes had got the most currants in. It was usually a Chelsea and she'd bring them home, usually on a Saturday. I used to have a lot of meals with my aunt and so my three cousins and I would have these cakes and we'd sit at the table. 'You don't eat that fruit… you put it in this dish here and I'm making a Christmas cake!' The currants had to be saved, re-cycled!' Mary had a sweet tooth and she also remembered times when fat was at a premium. 'My mother was dealing in black market with butter and you'd creep out at night and go to a neighbour and get a source of supply but it was rubbishy stuff, it really was. Anyway because dad liked cake and because mother spoiled him, the only other way you could make a cake was with liquid paraffin and it lasted for several months, not the quality of cake we were used to but it was alright. Then the Government stopped it and they started putting peppermint in instead.' ***Harold Gregory*** also had a sweet tooth. 'As kids we used to go into town looking for sweets. You couldn't get ice-cream for instance but the man who owned the Dorothy café, next door but one to Lloyds Bank, used to make it out of custard and it was very good!'

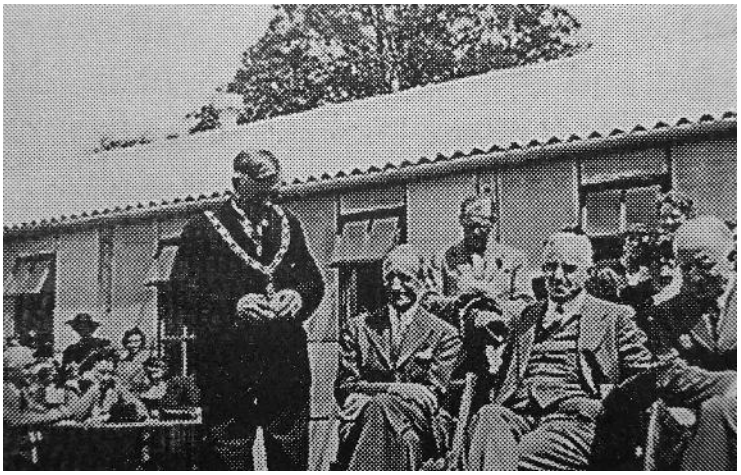
John Williams grew up on a farm in the Llanthony valley and talked about the pressure from the Wartime Government to cultivate as much land as possible including land that would not normally have been worked. He felt it had some benefits. 'I think it did improve the farming quite a bit… of course there was quite a lot of labour on the farm and we had Land Army girls and the War Agricultural Committee came when we were thrashing because there were no combines about in those days. We also had some Italian and some German prisoners-of-war. At that time there were no lorries to bring sheep to Abergavenny and we used to walk the sheep to town to be sold and they were taken over by the Government to be rationed and to be put back into the food chain. It was too far to walk pigs so they were brought into Abergavenny with a horse and float.'

In March 1943 the Chronicle reported that there were some 500 Land Army girls in Monmouthshire, including some from Lancashire, Yorkshire, Northumberland and Middlesex. The Italian prisoners-of-war were also used in small groups. Children could also earn up to 6d an hour if they were under 14 and 8d an hour over 14. Although there were some criticisms about the use of schoolchildren in this way, school camps during the summer holidays where they worked on the land were popular. Adults too could be encouraged to attend week-end and week long 'holiday camps' of this type especially to do harvest work. ***Gordon Jones*** who farmed Pistyll Farm at Llanarth said that farms were glad of any help they could get as every bit of land was being used. Occasionally land girls came to the farm and at potato picking time they had gangs of pickers drawn from anyone who was available.

One of the Land Army girls in the area was ***Margaret Rumsey***. 'I was in the Women's Land Army at Llanvapley Court until a back injury forced me to leave. We were 50 girls from far and wide. I was lucky to be only from Newport so could go home most weekends. The food was atrocious, lamb stew with pearl barley. A roar would go up if anyone found a bit of meat. Eggs and cheese were the main food. Sometimes we were lucky to be invited into the farmhouse for a bite to eat. One time in particular we were haymaking and Mr Rees brought us into town on his tractor and into the kitchen at the back of the corn shop which is situated where Pinches is now, near the Angel. What a feast we had!'

At Llanvapley Court they had a matron and a cook to look after them and there was a driver. They were up at a quarter past six and after breakfast they had to be ready to go to the farms by half past seven. Sometimes they wouldn't be back until after 8 o'clock at night. It was very poorly paid work the girls felt as if they were doing something for their country and releasing men to go to War. Occasionally they had difficulties. On one farm 'The farmer was a terrible man. He'd come up and he'd butt you in the behind and you'd go flying in the muddy field and one day I'd had enough of it. I got this nice squishy potato and we'd arranged between us to signal when he was coming and I put it in his face, before he got near us like, you know! Anyway I was reported and had to go down to Usk and a couple of the girls wrote a letter to show the people down there. By gosh didn't I get a dressing down on it! But we weren't allowed to go on his farm again. He lost out on our help there.'

Ray Prosser had grown up driving an old Fordson tractor on the farm at Llanvetherine. Many of the land girls had not had that experience. He remembered a farmer who went to collect a land girl who was working with an old Fordson in one of his fields. 'Well when he went down over the bank he could see there was a tractor with four wheels up in the air. He ran down and shouted to her to see if there was any life there and as soon as he spoke to her there was some very good language came out as much as to say 'Well get me out of here!' She was lucky really, she was underneath the height of the mudguards and she was protected, if undoubtedly bruised.'



Mayor Horsington at the opening of the British Restaurant in the Fairfield by Lord Woolton, the Minster of Food. (*The photograph provided by Rosemary Williams, daughter-in-law of Enid Williams the manageress.)*

The Chronicle supplies a lot of information about the British Restaurant saga. As early as February 1942 during the discussions about a hostel for the Wallasey evacuees at 52 Castle Street, the Town Council considered whether it could be used as a British Restaurant. A plan and estimate were drawn up but it was abandoned in March on the same financial grounds as the Hostel idea. They also considered 44 Frogmore Street, but by June 1942 the Restaurant plan had become a prefab in the Fairfield. New plans were examined and the hut was ordered in September. The cost was to be £1,468. It was finally opened on 12th June 1943 by Lord Woolton the Minster of Food. It was a new 110 feet by 25 feet pre-fabricated hut with a modern interior and space for 162 diners. It proved to be very successful. In its first 20 weeks alone it served 29,123 meals and total receipts were £1,490/19/9. It met the need for good food at a reasonable price and managed to make a profit. In February 1944 Alderman Beveridge asked whether troops were using it and wondered if it could be opened on Sundays as there were large numbers of troops wandering about town with nowhere to go.

Don Prosser recalled that the British Restaurant was later called the Civic. Then it was used as a metalwork room and classroom by the Grofield Secondary Modern School before it was taken down. For all of the success of attempts to provide cheap nourishing meals at places like the British Restaurant, the Government's message as in the famous poster on the right was quite clear. To overcome the shortages of War everyone was encouraged to 'grow their own'. By 1944 there were half a million new allotments nationally and in Abergavenny as elsewhere there was a big increase in the number of allotments. George Cobourne's father had one of the many allotments which almost reached the top of the hill near the cemetery. A branch of the National Growers Association was formed and new plots developed. Much of the golf club, for instance, was ploughed up to grow potatoes. Even a market town in a farming area had to supply ever greater quantities of basic food as trade shortages disrupted normal life.

ENTERTAINMENT

Because of all the hardships of War on the Home Front it soon became obvious that a welcome part of life had to be some form of entertainment. Initially the increased number of events such as concerts, dances and plays reflected the increased demand for fund-raising activities of groups like the War Aid Committee. Then as time went on they became an essential aspect of social life. The growing number of troops had to be entertained and as early as late September 1939 the Chronicle reported that John Owen and friends had put on a concert at an army camp. Schools' concerts meanwhile helped the evacuee children to settle in and raised funds for their parties. Another early entertainment party from January 1940 was the Aberoptimists organised by Mr Fred W. Blanch.

Soon the task of entertaining troops became more organised. In November and December 1940 for instance the Chronicle published a suggested programme. In a six week period seven events were held: two variety concerts, two Glee Parties, a thriller play, an operatic concert and a band concert. Sunday concerts began at the Town Hall too to raise money for the Mayor's Comforts fund. These concerts were to be for troops and civilians at popular prices. A Boxing Day dance for the War Aid Fund in 1940 attracted 600 troops and civilians and soon it became commonplace to attract capacity attendances to dances and concerts. A Balance Sheet for a Sunday concert showing ticket sales of 243 @ 6d, 185 @ 1/- and 145 @ 2/- was signed by Harold Poole as Hon. Sec. of the Troops Welfare Committee. Ticket sales of this size and the admission prices were not untypical. The special fundraising weeks also meant hectic programmes of parades, concerts and dances.

The two main cinemas in the town were the Pavilion and the Coliseum. They were hugely popular. ***Harold Gregory*** enjoyed his visits as a schoolboy. 'You could queue for an hour to get in and it's a shame really that they have disappeared. The cinema was somewhere that you would attend perhaps twice a week in those days. There was something about it I suppose that took you out of the real world. You'd go into the cinema and you saw all those wonderful musicals and it took you away from reality for a while until you went outside the door.' ***Mary Morgan*** who was slightly older also lived in Llanover and worked on her parents' farm. 'I would ride my bike down to the bus stop and leave it at a cottage at the bottom of the road. I was given 1/6 – 9d for the bus and 9d for the pictures. That was my night out once in a while… there were two picture house, top and bottom house. I'm thinking of Blaenavon now. But in Abergavenny we had the Coliseum and the Pavilion and they changed programmes so you could see four films a week if you could afford it!' By November 1939 the councils had even agreed to let the cinemas open after church on Sunday evenings, though with some councillors expressing reservations. This did not begin until a year later but was a sign of the times.

On 11th June 1943 the Chronicle reported that there had been an American Variety show at the Town Hall for the first time. If the town had been very active on the entertainment front in 1943, it is fair to say that the arrival of the Americans intensified the activity, particularly the dancing! The type of dances changed dramatically. ***Pamela Mason*** was working at Seargeants at the time. 'In the early dances it was all locals, all local boys and girls you know. Then they started coming in their uniforms if they were on leave but it was waltzes, foxtrots and quicksteps you know, old fashioned and very sedate. Then the Americans came to town and everything changed, the town changed, it was heaving with American soldiers. They were everywhere in their Jeeps and they'd whistle at all the females regardless of age you know. But when they came to the dances that changed. No

more sedate tangos and waltzes; every dance became a jitterbug.' Pamela went to the dances organised by the U.S. Officers at the Manor at Crickhowell. 'The managers at different firms or large shops used to get about half a dozen invitations to dish out and we were picked up and also taken home after the dance. Apart from the marvellous food, the doughnuts and brownies you know dripping with chocolate… I can see it now… they used to give us a little parcel to take home. They were marvellous hosts. What my father liked, which he found out first before he allowed me to go, was the fact that we were picked up and no one else but the girls was allowed on the lorries and we were brought home safely so it was a wonderful evening.'

Margaret Rumsey and the Llanfapley based Land Army girls also appreciated the lifts home; 'The dances at the Town Hall were great. Eddy Tattersall was M.C. The Americans from Govilon had transport so we were crafty and danced with our boys early and then the Yanks so we could ride home which after working all day, dancing part of the night, six miles was quite a task to walk home.' The Town Hall dances were particularly popular but there were also dances held at other venues like the Catholic hut and the Y.M.C.A. ***Betty Rivers*** also enjoyed dancing. 'The jitterbug was my thing, I loved it. My husband would say 'Don't you realise your ankles are bleeding?' because you'd be thrown all over the place. I didn't even know. He used to dance but there were a couple of fellows at the camp up there who specialised in jitterbugging. I thought it was absolutely wonderful and I was very fit then.'

Another of Betty's interests from schooldays onwards was acting. 'I remember what was then the Old Vic I think – Sybil Thorndyke and Lewis Casson – coming around and they came to the school and asked Miss Gethin Davies for someone to play Macduff's son and I got the part as I was so small. It was very interesting because the first performance I was given at an hour's notice. I hadn't got many lines but 'No dear' said Sybil Thorndyke, 'don't say it. Just open and shut your mouth and I'll say the lines.' So there I am opening and shutting my mouth and she's saying the lines from the back. I didn't realise at the time what an honour it was really to be performing with these people. Ann Casson, her daughter, was my mother and I don't know if it was that play or another one later that Richard Todd was in. They didn't mean that much to me at the time but later I felt wow that was interesting!'

Concerts included not only those put on by the schools but those arranged by Vernon Lee and the E.N.S.A. Army Concert Party which were put on at schools for the children. Betty remembered 'lots of concert parties and the operatic societies… there were always musicals. I remember Williams fish and fruit and Bill Shackleton were very involved with the operatic societies.' ***Eunice Gilbert*** joined the Operatic Society and remembered a show towards the end of the War where rationing was temporarily relaxed. 'During the show there was a part where we were supposed to be handing out sweets. They used to give us dummy sweets of course every night. Well this one night they gave us real sweets. We were so excited, we forgot we were acting and we were jumping around with these sweets and the audience realised what had happened. We were the talk of the town!'

Following V.E. Day, Harold Poole received this letter of thanks for all the work done by him and the Welfare and Troops Entertainment Committee for the troops in this area.

From LIEUT-GENERAL SIR DARIL WATSON, K.C.B., C.B.E., M.C.

HEADQUARTERS
WESTERN COMMAND
CHESTER

To Harold Poole Esq.
Hillsboro Holyrood Rd
Abergavenny

Now that the fighting in Europe has been brought to a successful conclusion, I feel that the time is appropriate to express to you my very deep appreciation of all that has been done for the well-being of the troops under my command during the past trying years.

It is with a warm sense of gratitude that I hear so constantly of the generous and devoted service which has been freely given by organizations and individuals throughout the Western Command. The numerous funds which have been raised locally have provided many and valuable comforts for the men and women of all the Services.

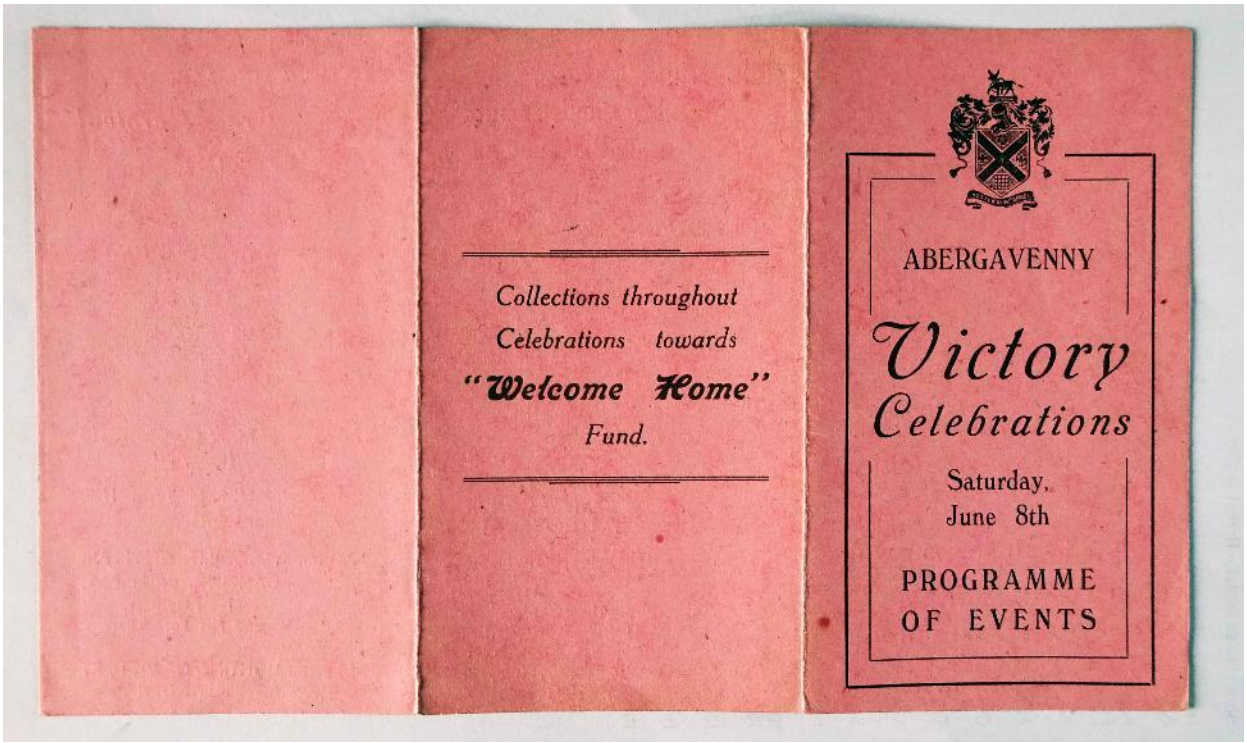
I can say with confidence that this care for the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of the troops has contributed substantially to the maintenance of the high standard of morale which has brought victory to our arms. At the same time, so long as we have large forces under arms both at home and overseas, besides a great Army fighting in the Far East, it is my earnest hope that this splendid work may continue with unabated zeal until final victory is won.

I take this opportunity to thank you for the important part which you have taken, and would ask you to convey my cordial thanks to all those who have assisted you in this work.

D Watson

Lieutenant-General,
General Officer Commanding-in-Chief,
Western Command.

Throughout the War the people of Abergavenny and district had entertained themselves and raised money in a very wide variety of social events. Each new fund-raising week would provide an excuse for parades, sporting events, concerts and much else besides. The end of the War and the Welcome Home Fund prompted a Victory Celebrations Week from 3rd to 8th of June. In the Castle Museum is a programme for the week's events, shown below.



Collections throughout Celebrations towards "Welcome Home" Fund.

ABERGAVENNY

Victory Celebrations

Saturday, June 8th

PROGRAMME OF EVENTS

MONDAY, June 3rd—

6-30 p.m. 1st - Round SIX-A-SIDE SOCCER TOURNAMENT Bailey Park. Kick-off 6-30 p.m.

TUESDAY, June 4th—

6-30 p.m. 1st - Round (*continued*)— SIX-A-SIDE SOCCER TOURNAMENT Bailey Park. Kick-off 6-30 p.m.

THURSDAY, June 6th—

6-30 p.m. 2nd - Round SIX-A-SIDE SOCCER TOURNAMENT Bailey Park. Kick-off 6-30 p.m.

FRIDAY, June 7th—

2-0 p.m. CINEMA SHOW for SCHOOL-CHILDREN (*by generosity of Abergavenny Coliseum Co., Ltd.*).

4-0 p.m. TEA for SCHOOL-CHILDREN (*by kindness of Monmouthshire Education Committee.*)

FRIDAY, JUNE 7th—*con.*

8-0 p.m. Old English Dance Town Hall, Herbert Peck's Orchestra.

SATURDAY, June 8th—

10-30 a.m. Semi-Finals and Finals SIX-A-SIDE SOCCER TOURNAMENT. Bailey Park.

QUEEN "ELECT" will kick-off at FINAL and will present the "Leo Fine" Cup to winners.

10-30 a.m. OPEN RINK VICTORY BOWLS TOURNAMENT in Bailey Park.

2-30 p.m. *Crowning of Carnival Queen* (*Miss Betty Edwards*) by His Worship The Mayor (*Ald. Max L. Beveridge, J.P.*) accompanied by The Mayoress (*Miss Helen Beveridge.*) and the Presentation of Bouquets, at junction of Chapel & Brecon Rds.

SATURDAY, JUNE 8th—*con.*

2-45 p.m. *Grand Carnival* headed by QUEEN and COURT LADIES, moves off from Brecon Road Station to Bailey Park.

6-0 p.m. WATER POLO MATCH, Team Races, at Swimming Pool, Bailey Park.

6-0 p.m. OPEN RINK VICTORY BOWLS TOURNAMENT in Bailey Park. *Second Session.*

7-0 p.m. CARDIFF CO-OPTIMISTS (Bailey Park).

8-0 p.m. DANCE in Town Hall, Billy Davies and His Band.

9-30 p.m. FLOOD-LIT OPEN AIR DANCING, Bailey Park. Noel Gulliver and His Serenaders.

9-30 p.m. LIGHTING OF VICTORY BONFIRE, Fairfield.

CONCLUSION

We have presented a picture of Abergavenny and district in the War years but it is not complete as it is based on the memories of some people about the War and some of the things about which local journalists could write. Also we have included only occasional references to that avalanche of public information and direction that was part and parcel of the War years. Nevertheless we can picture a town where posters would be a commonplace sight, where the various Ministries and local authorities added to an atmosphere which invited, even demanded, people's involvement and identification with the War effort. For all this bureaucratic emphasis, our interviewees show that a positive response was readily evoked locally.

We are taken back into a less technological age where there was a lot less road traffic and animals often were driven to market on foot. Then the town became a garrison town and a constant background noise of military traffic became a daily fact. The War also meant a big increase in air traffic with pilots intent on attack and defence. Abergavenny was spared the Blitz and we heard of a number of instances where local children waved to the pilots of German planes who waved back. Yet local people were every bit as involved as thousands of others in the voluntary efforts of a war society and the shortages of a war economy. Churches and chapels too, as in other parts of the country, were undoubtedly more crowded than usual as people prayed for divine guidance and support in difficult days. Bailey Park became the scene for some inter-denominational services.

The interviewees have helped us to relate to those days and to surprise us once again by the extent and varied nature of their involvement in voluntary activities on the Home Front. When we add the military campaigns which involved so many local young people, the way in which morale was sustained becomes even more impressive. There is room to be grateful for and proud of the efforts of so many people and it is to be hoped that their work is never forgotten as it embodies the spirit of the town and surrounding villages.

APPENDIX

Although this booklet has been concerned with the Home Front during the War, it seems to be appropriate to include details of those plane crashes which occurred during the War years in a 10-mile radius of the town. The following details have been provided by John Vaughan of Newcastle, a retired commercial pilot, who has walked to the sites. More detailed information is contained in *Warplane Wrecks of South Wales and the Marches* by Peter Durham and Dewi Jones. Map references and the height of the crashes are shown where known. The crashes, in chronological order, were:-

On 22nd September 1940 Bristol Blenheim L8610 hit Mynydd Garn Wen, 3 miles south of Blaenavon, at approximately 1510 hours. It was on an operational training flight and the three crew, Sergeant H. Wilson the pilot, Pilot Officer A.D. Coplestone, the observer, and Sergeant J. November the wireless operator/air gunner were killed. The aircraft was of Bomber Command's 17 Operational Training Unit at Upwood, Huntingdonshire and probably crashed because of weather conditions. A memorial at the site which was rebuilt and unveiled on the sixtieth anniversary of the accident lists the names of the crew.
Map Ref. 294/058 Ht. 440 mtrs.

On 9th January 1941 Vickers Wellington R3215 crashed at White House Farm Llanover. The six crew members were only slightly injured in the crash landing. The aircraft was one of five which had left the Newton base near Nottingham at 1705 for a bombing raid in the Ruhr. On their return flight, uncertain of their position, shortage of fuel dictated a forced landing. The crew were Sergeants Crich, Layfield, Cameron, Waern, Chadd and Farley and they were lucky to escape with minor injuries. The local Home Guard and a searchlight unit helped them immediately after the crash landing. However the searchlight unit had not helped them to land as its crew had been told to regard all aircraft in the area as hostile. Sergeant Crich was taken to a house in Nantyderry to telephone the R.A.F. The house he was taken to was that of Major J.D. Berrington, whose son was to die in the Halifax crash at Welsh Newton in June 1942.

On 11th June 1941 a Westland Whirlwind L6845 crashed at Llandenny. The plane was one of three of its type, single seat twin engine fighters, that were on a practice formation flying exercise from their base at Filton, Bristol. They were seen by a farmer from Llandenny with one aircraft streaming smoke from one of its engines. This aircraft broke away from the other two, lowered its undercarriage and headed for an area of open ground. The undercarriage hit a tree and the tail assemblage broke off before the aircraft hit the ground and turned over. The pilot, Sergeant R.F.G. Pascoe, was thrown clear and was found by the farmer who was standing a short distance away. Sadly the pilot's injuries were such that he died before he could be taken to the farmhouse.

On 8th March 1942 Supermarine Spitfire L1014 crashed into woods on the western slopes of Skirrid Fawr. The pilot, Sergeant Thomas Crowe, was killed. He was on an instrument flying exercise from 53 Operational Training Unit based at Llandow near Bridgend. Witness accounts tell of the aircraft appearing out of the clouds in a spin which became an opposite spin before the crash. The Usk Valley was a dedicated low flying practice area for this unit.
Map Ref. 324/175 Ht. 260 mtrs.

On 7th June 1942 Handley Page Halifax V9977 crashed at Welsh Bicknor killing the 7 R.A.F. personnel and 4 senior civilian scientists on board. They were Pilot Officer D.J.D. Berrington, A.M. Phillips and C.E. Vincent, Squadron Leader R.J. Sansom, Flight Sergeant G. Miller, Leading Aircraftsman B.D.C. Dear, Aircraftsman 2 B.C.F. Bicknell, Mr G.S. Hensby, Mr A.D. Blumlein, Mr C.O. Brown and Mr F. Blythen. The aircraft was carrying out radar trials with equipment code named H2S. Eye witnesses speak of the aircraft flying at between 2000 and 3000 feet with its starboard outer engine on fire. The flames burned through the wing and before the aircraft could carry out a forced landing it crashed. The civilian scientists lost in this accident made up almost half the team working on the H2S project so causing a considerable delay in its use. Bomber Command first used the equipment operationally in a raid on Hamburg on 30th January 1943. The pilot of the Halifax is buried on the family plot in the churchyard at Llanfair Kilgeddin.

On 6th July 1942 Vickers Wellington R1465 crashed on Waun Rhydd. The aircraft belonged to 22 Operational Training Unit at Wellesbourne Mountford some 5 miles East of Stratford on Avon and it was engaged on a night cross country exercise. The weather was bad and it was assumed that the pilot descended in an attempt to pinpoint their position. Still in cloud at 2,300 feet the aircraft hit the plateau of the mountain in a flat high speed crash. Some quite large pieces of wreckage remain. The crew of 5 Canadians were all killed and they are commemorated by a recognised Canadian War memorial at the crash site. The Brecon Beacons Memorial Cairn, as it is known, was constructed in 1980 by pupils and staff of Tredegar Comprehensive School. The crew members were the pilot Sergeant J.B. Kemp, the air gunner Sergeant J.P. Hayes, the observer Sergeant E.E. Mittell, the bomb aimer Sergeant K.F. Yuill and the wireless operator/air gunner Sergeant H.C. Beatty.
Map Ref. 062/202 Ht. 740 mtrs.

On 16th September 1943 Boeing B17 Flying Fortress 42-5903 crashed at Llanbedr near Crickhowell. The damaged aircraft which was returning from a bombing raid flew into the hillside and all 10 crew members, some injured by enemy action, were killed. The aircraft, christened “Ascend Charlie”, had taken off from its base at Framlington Suffolk with 20 others for a bombing raid on Bordeaux. Bad weather in the target area forced cancellation of the mission and the group headed north along the coast seeking “opportunity targets”. Over La Rochelle heavy flak was encountered and “Ascend Charlie” was hit in its port outside engine. Heading for home over the Atlantic deteriorating weather and on-coming darkness scattered the formation. At 2120 hours, “Ascend Charlie” struck the hillside near the Hermitage and burned fiercely, killing all on board. The official cause of the crash is recorded as a combination of battle damage and weather. The Flying Fortress was one of the best known American bombers in the War. The crew were the pilot, 1st Lt. Herbert I. Turner, 2nd Lts. Frederick M. Broers, Robert L. Schanen and Orval Tofte, Staff Sgts. Philip Catania, Stanley B. Mason, Alfred C. Monson, John J. Petertson, Sherman E. Rambo and Sven A. Zetterberg. Today, almost 60 years later, the ground remains scorched and shows evidence of engines burying themselves. A memorial at the site in the form of a metal cross has now disappeared.
Map Ref. 243/253 Ht. 500 mtrs.

On 22nd May 1944 Handley Page Halifax LK835 crashed at Waun Afon near Blaenavon. The seven crew members all parachuted to safety and sustained only minor injuries. Two landed in Blaina, three in Nantyglo and two in Blaenavon. The aircraft crashed into a peat bog where it burned fiercely. Some wreckage remains in a fenced off enclosure but extreme care must be taken if going there as the bog is very dangerous. The Halifax was

based at 51 Squadron at Snaith in Yorkshire. Nightly bombing raids took place over enemy territory from here but the flight of 22nd May was a routine cross country flight begun at 2145. Cruising at 20,000 feet over Wales, number 3 propellor oversped and became uncontrollable. As a result, this engine caught fire and could not be extinguished. The pilot Sergeant A.S. Jones gave the order therefore to abandon the aircraft. Other crew members were the navigator Sergeant D. Biddy, the bomb aimer Flying Officer G. Gowd, the flight engineer Sergeant J. Brown, the wireless operator Sergeant F. Luff, the mid upper gunner Sergeant T. Mills and the rear gunner Sergeant A. Westbrook.
Map Ref. 223/103 Ht. 420 mtrs.

Richard Davies

Chairman Abergavenny Local History Society

2000-2006

An Abergavenny Local History Society Publication