



Thanks to Margaret Nobbs and Gill Blackgrove

As most of you will know Margaret Nobbs and Gill Blackgrove stood down as Chair and Treasurer of the Epsom and Ewell Local and Family History Centre (LFHC) committee at the AGM in April.

We must thank Margaret for her Chairmanship of the LFHC for the past three years. To take on the Chair of a new and untried organisation is a daunting task, but Margaret unhesitatingly volunteered to give her time to being the first Chair. Her knowledge of local places and particularly local archaeology has been of use and interest to many of us and our clients. Whilst she is now turning her attention to other areas of local historical interest, she will remain a valued member of the Centre.

We would also like to thank Gill for all her hard work and commitment to controlling our finances and helping develop the LFHC over the past few years. Gill is returning to teaching but we are delighted she will continue as a volunteer and give her time and experience to further development of the LFHC.

The new Chair of the Epsom & Ewell Local & Family History LFHC will be Bert Barnhurst and Peggy Bedwell will be Treasurer (see the item on who the new Committee members towards the end of this newsletter).

Visit to British Library Newspapers, Colindale

On 30th March 2005 a group of volunteers visited the Newspaper Library at Colindale and were given an introductory briefing about what the Library holds and how it operates, followed by a guided tour that took us 'behind the scenes' to see where the volumes of newspapers and microfilm records are stored. We also saw the processes applied to the large number of newspapers received each day, which includes, would you believe, ironing each sheet by hand before microfilming them.



Colindale holds more than 660,000 bound volumes of newspapers and 370,000 reels of microfilm, which includes:

- copies of some newspapers dating back to the 17th century
- full sets of the London edition of all national daily and Sunday newspapers from 1801
- copies of most daily and weekly provincial British and Irish newspapers from the 1840s
- popular periodicals, including many no longer being published
- copies of many overseas English language papers, particularly from former colonies
- some foreign language papers

A few volumes are not available for viewing as they are in disrepair and it can take up to two years for recent editions to reach the shelves, so it is advisable to check by telephone before making the journey to Colindale: you can pre-book up to four items 48 hours in advance of your visit. This can save waiting as, while a computerised catalogue is available at the site, it can take up to ninety minutes from requesting an item to its being delivered to you. You can find out more at the British Library website: www.bl.uk/collections/newspapers.html

For those who want to visit, the journey to Colindale is straightforward: Northern Line from Waterloo to Colindale Station, which is about 100 yards from the Library. Unlike the PRO at Kew there is no café or restaurant but there is a room where drinks and chocolate can be bought from machines (no change given) so your choices are: go prepared, be a chocoholic or starve.

Thanks to Tim Bauckham for this report.

World War 2 Remembered – The People’s War Stories

Over the summer LFHC volunteers have organised four events to celebrate the 60th Anniversary of VE Day:

- A ‘VE Day Street Party’ and display combined with a story-gathering day at Ewell Library, Bourne Hall on 11th May, 2005
- A living history lesson for schoolchildren on 18th May 2005, again at Ewell Library, Bourne Hall
- Another story-gathering day, this time at Epsom Library, The Ebbisham Centre on 7th July 2005.
- And a final story-gathering day at Swail House, Epsom on 14th September 2005 to record the memories of the visually impaired

As a result of these and other events over the past year, Epsom and Ewell LFHC has recorded some 240 People’s War Stories, which, we understand, is the highest number recorded for any centre in Surrey. Well done and thank you to all those who assisted in making this such a success.

And here’s what happened at each event . . .

‘VE Day Street Party’ a great success

We welcomed over 200 people to their celebration of the 60th Anniversary of VE Day on 11th May at Ewell Library, Bourne Hall.

The focus of the event was to collect and record people’s memories and stories of World War 2 as part of the BBC’s People’s War project. At least 20 stories were recorded on the day and many more people collected the forms to record their stories for later, all of which will be added to the BBC People’s War website for anyone in the world to read (www.bbc.co.uk/ww2/) and for future historians to research.

To create a wartime atmosphere and help the visitors remember what life was like during WW2, a ‘Street Party’ was laid out in the library with rations typical of the ‘Victory in Europe Day’ parties, like the famed Spam Fritter. Background music heightened the atmosphere, featuring famous wartime stars such as Vera Lynn and Glen Miller. Tim Richardson, local military historian, added authenticity in the uniform of an ARP Warden and showed off many wartime artefacts, like a baby’s gas mask.

Some of the many displays showed WW2 rations for a person for a week, locations of the

Flying Bombs that landed on Epsom & Ewell, wartime entertainment and ‘Make do and Mend’.

Charlie Peall, from the Burma Star Association was there to remind people the War in the Far East was not over by VE Day and that our troops were still fighting to make the world safer and BBC Southern Counties radio also came to interview some of the many visitors.



The Enigma team from Bletchley Park and Scarborough.

This was one of the most successful events we have ever run and showed how many wonderful stories of WW2 people have still to tell. One of our lady visitors had worked as a

machine operator at Bletchley Park, the famous Enigma code-breaking centre. She met two ladies who had been based in Scarborough as Wireless Telegraphists (Interceptors) and who recorded the Enigma radio messages for passing on to Bletchley Park. The three sat and swapped stories for an hour or more on how their jobs were connected, although they weren't allowed to speak about it for 50 years after the war because of the Official Secrets Act.

We also were delighted to welcome Alan Swan and his family. Mr Swan's mother was tragically and regrettably killed when a Warwick airplane, on a test flight, crashed onto their house in Ruxley Lane in 1945. Mr Swan, who was only a child at the time, was taken in and looked after by a neighbour, Mrs Canter. Mr Swan had not seen Mrs Canter since the end of the war, but he met up with her again, now in her nineties, during our VE Day celebration, together with Margaret Dyson and family, Mr Swan's sister, and two neighbours, Mrs Pam Mason (nee Worsfold) and her sister June, who had lived in a house backing on to Mrs Swan's garden. They had lots to talk about and Mr Swan was also interviewed about his memories by Adrian Harms from BBC Southern Counties Radio.

A living history lesson - WW2 Re-enacted for Schoolchildren

On the 18th May, LFHC volunteers repeated the exercise, this time for schoolchildren from Kingswood House School and Ewell Castle School.



Kingswood House School listen to Tim Richardson.

The children learnt from Tim Richardson, dressed again as an ARP Warden, what life was like in wartime Britain, with exercises for air raids and the use of gas masks, and from Charlie Peall how he and his fellow soldiers

died and survived building the notorious Burma Railroad (as featured in the famous film 'Bridge on the River Kwai').

The children were also issued with identity cards and ration books, which they needed to enjoy the wartime rations served as refreshments. Each ration book feature a choice of 12 wartime dishes but each child could only have 3 dishes, for which they had to get their ration books stamped. With several displays featuring life in wartime the children had a living history lesson.

On departing the children were asked to remind their older relatives to record their memories of WW2 for the People's War project. To date, nearly 20 such stories have been received.

Story-recording day at Epsom Library . . .

The People's War story-recording day at Epsom Library on Thursday, 7th July attracted considerable interest and over 30 WW2 wartime stories were collected from residents of Epsom & Ewell.



Bert Barnhurst, LFHC Chair, with the Mayor, Councillor Jean Smith, and Dennis Smith, the Mayor's consort.

One of those who recorded their memories was Epsom & Ewell Mayor, Councillor Jean Smith, who visited the library to show her support to the volunteers in helping to create this marvellous historical archive. The Mayor recalled a moving childhood story, when she was living in Battersea, London, of the death of her best friend as a result of an air raid.

Other visitors during the day included:

Peter Glaysher, a former ordinary seaman on HMS King George V, who was in Japanese waters when the atom bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, which led to the Japanese surrender; Mr Glaysher also showed volunteers a copy of the Japanese surrender certificate.

Roy Green told a number of hair-raising stories of evacuation to the village of Worle, near Weston-Super-Mare when he was 8 years old; he experienced bombs, strafing by enemy airplanes and a friend who found an anti-personnel mine which later exploded under his desk; we're glad to say he survived (*of course he did or we wouldn't have his story, would we!*).

Pamela Malone recalled joining the WRNS when she was 18 and being sent to the highly secret code-breaking centre at Bletchley Park where she worked as part of the group breaking Japanese messages (*we do seem to have a plethora of ex Bletchley Park people living in Epsom and Ewell*).

Cyril Moore, who was with No. 4 Company, Grenadier Guards, told how he and his colleagues liberated Stalag 10b at Cuxhaven, near Hamburg at the end of the war.

And there were lots more, which can all be viewed on the BBC People's War website: www.bbc.co.uk/ww2

But the mystery of the WW2 airplane crash on Epsom Racecourse is still unresolved

We have been trying to unearth more information about the plane crash on Epsom Race Course in 1943 or 1944. We had been led to believe that it was a Mosquito. However, despite, or perhaps because of widespread publicity in the local press we are now more confused than ever. So far five people, who were all schoolboys at the time, have come forward with information to say it was definitely not a Mosquito but have named different aircraft instead.

Mr. Tony Brewis, who was an airplane-spotting schoolboy at Epsom College during the war, said he was sure it was an Avro Anson that he saw crashed on the racecourse. He saw it whilst walking across the Downs one Sunday in September 1943. He also saw the air crash inspector's tag, which was pinned to the propeller of the port engine and said 'engine failure'.



Avro Anson

Semi-retired electrician and local history buff, Doug Haseman also says the plane was an Avro Anson that had got lost in a real pea soup fog - ran out of fuel and landed on the racecourse. He and a friend found it just as it was starting to clear and the pilot and navigator were standing guard. The only damage was a couple of inches rust on the winning post pole. The pilot thought if it could be turned round to face Tattenham Corner he could take off after fuelling up. They must have flown it out as it had gone by the following day and no sign of it having been there, apart from some tiny pieces of plywood.

However, Mr R. Kitchen, reported it was an Airspeed Oxford, which is also a twin-engine airplane and is similar in appearance to an Anson; the two were often confused.

Another gentleman has said it was a Spitfire and it landed on the road alongside the racecourse and not on the racecourse itself as it had wires across it to stop enemy planes or gliders landing. This is the only mention of a single-engined airplane, all the others are twin-engine so this may be another incident we are not aware of.

Stranger still, Mr Terry Smith has stated it was actually a German Dornier 17, known as 'The Flying Pencil' because of its slim shape.



Dornier 17

Mr Smith said the German crew were caught running down the road towards Headley, and by the time the police and ARP wardens got to the crash it was swarming with young boys, of which he was one, collecting souvenirs, including the swastika insignias. Coincidentally, Mr Smith's mother knew Miss Long, the ARP warden who drew the map of wartime incidents in Epsom and Ewell that first raised the query about this particular crash.

It so happens that Miss Long is now living in the New Forest. Bert Barnhurst has been in contact with her but she says she did not see the crash and does not know the make of the airplane, only that one crashed on the racecourse.

We have also contacted the RAF Museum at Hendon with all this contradictory information to see if they can help but they replied that

they have no record of any such incident on Epsom Racecourse during WW2.

So we seem to have reached an impasse. Bert is now hoping to visit Mrs Long in the New Forest to see if he can jog her memory and help resolve this mystery. But if anyone has any further information on this crashed airplane, please do contact us at the LFHC at Ewell Library, Bourne Hall.

Residents of 'Swail House' record WW2 Memories

Thanks to 'Talking Newspapers for the Blind' the people at Swail House, Ashley Road, Epsom – which is the centre for independent living for visually impaired people - heard about our recording of memories of WW2 people's War and the staff contacted us to say they had a number of residents who wanted to record their memories for the BBC website and for history. So on September 14th volunteers visited Swail House and took down the memories of twelve residents all of which will be placed on the BBC website.

One resident the volunteers were especially keen to meet was Mrs Phyllis Brooksbank, who has recently had her 104th birthday (yes, *that's right, her 104th birthday and what a remarkable lady she is*). Phyllis had a number of fascinating stories of not only WW2 but also of The Great War, WWI.



Phyllis Brooksbank, age 104, talks to Jill Alford.

Her WWI memories ranged from helping her father run a forces leave centre in Nice to her future husband's life being saved by a horse falling on him at the battle of the Somme. As for WW2 she told of the dreadful experiences of her son, who was in the Navy, on Russian convoys from Reykjavik to Murmansk. She remembered living with

rationing (she says the dried eggs were particularly awful) and 'making do'; of her husband being sent on an armoured train to collect gold bars from the bank vaults to be stored in a cave in the Malvern Hills; and between the wars she lived in Paris, Biarritz and Brussels as her husband moved around with his career in banking. A fascinating story.

And there were many others, especially Bill Pryor, who also brought along his father's WWI medals, including the Distinguished Conduct Medal he received at the battle of the Somme.



Bill Pryor with his father's WWI medals

One medal we are especially interested in finding out more about was given to his father by the Italians and has an inscription 'Al Valore Militare'. Bill assures us that as a recipient of this particular medal (*far right, above*) his father and family could have a free month's holiday each year in Italy during his lifetime. Unfortunately, his father died of gas poisoning shortly after the war and never had his holiday. Bill also had his own tales of WW2 including the retreat from Dunkirk.

Mary George told of her nursing experiences in Docklands and later at Newhaven.

Elizabeth Brown remembered living on the Clyde in Scotland during the war when Lord Haw Haw announced on the radio that the Luftwaffe would bomb and burn a huge sugar refinery on a hill in Greenock and light up all the ships in the nearby shipyards – and they did!

I wish we had space for more, but they will all be placed on the BBC website for anyone to read.

Finally, we would like to give a big thank you to all the volunteers who helped at Swail House in particular to Sheila Walker, Jill Alford and

Hilary Marogna for giving so much of their time to record the residents' memories.

Last chance for anyone who wants to record their WW2 memories

Finally, if anyone hasn't yet recorded their own experiences of WW2 and would like to do so, then they should get in touch with the LFHC at Ewell Library, Bourne Hall, tel: 020 8394 0951 or e-mail: libraries@surreycc.gov.uk and make an appointment for one of the volunteers to

arrange for their memories to be taken down for history.

However, if people prefer to write their story themselves, then they should ask for one of the People's War yellow forms and they can fill it in at their leisure.

Although the People's War website will remain open for people to read the various memories, the BBC will only be keeping it open until the end of November 2005 for people to add their stories, so stir the old memory cells and get recording.

Forthcoming Projects and Events

Victoria Cross 150th Anniversary – January 2006

Tim Bauckham and Clive Gilbert are preparing a display to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Victoria Cross by Queen Victoria on 29 January 1856. The display will feature the VCs won by officers and men of the Surrey Regiments and will be mounted at the LFHC in Ewell Library in January 2006 to coincide with the 150th anniversary.



Showing people what we do!

Joanna Grant and Carol Hill have produced a semi-permanent display for the LFHC showing how we help people wanting to research the history of their family or their house. This is currently on display in the Local and Family History Centre in Ewell Library.

Welcome to New Volunteers

Since we do not get much opportunity to get together we thought it might be useful to announce new volunteers to the LFHC.

Clive Gilbert

Clive's specific interests are The Great War, World War 2, family history and digital photography – by the way he's taken some great photos for the VC anniversary display. Clive will normally be at the LFHC on the Friday afternoon sessions.

Helen Gripaos

Helen's main interests are cataloguing and research and so will be a great help in getting our records organised. Helen will normally be at the LFHC on the Thursday afternoon sessions.

Welcome to you both.

Can you help?

We're seeking information on Woodcote Grove, Chalk Lane

Does anyone know anything about Woodcote Grove house and gardens prior to when it was taken over by W S Atkins? We would also like to see, and copy, any photographs or pictures anyone might have.

If you can help, please inform Carol Hill at the LFHC.

Unusual, or what?

It has been suggested that if any of us meet a visitor of unusual or entertaining interest, it might be an idea to put it in the newsletter, so here is one from Jill Alford:

On a recent Friday duty, I was asked to take the wartime evacuation story of a gent from Epsom. He was a real character and very amusing with his war story - he seemed to me barely old enough to have been an evacuee, but said he was 67. He began his evacuation when he was only 2 in Bridport, Dorset and apparently was a real harum-scarum lad, making friends with the American airforce, finding ways to be an 8 year old entrepreneur, learning to kill rabbits....

But it wasn't so much his childhood that became interesting as his digressions. He told me he couldn't pass his 11-plus when he came back to London because the curriculum was so different from what he had learned, but that he had passed the scholarship entrance exam for Christ's Hospital School, but his Dad wouldn't let him go because they couldn't afford the uniform. He was told later that it would have been provided free, but it was too late then, so he went to Paddington Secondary.

A little later, when I said he had had an interesting life, he told me 'all his lives had been interesting'. He had been regressed and knew that he had been a Roman soldier, looking after the elephants! Hmm! He said he had always loved elephants and now he knew why. He had also been a pirate and had been hung, drawn and quartered (how could you kill

rabbits after that??) and in another life had actually been an executioner. Hmmmm!! By now, I was beginning to think he was trying to see how gullible I was, but I was going along with him because I was trying to get on with the war story.

Well, he certainly wasn't a quitter: he was talking about the many things we humans don't understand and said he had personal experience in this line. (Oh dear!) He had been in his brother in law's pawn shop when two women walked in. He thought the jewellery they were offering was dodgy and was thinking 'no, don't touch it' when a little bloke beside him said, "I agree". Our contributor said, "I didn't say anything," but the little bloke said, "You don't need to, I'm telepathic. I don't come from this planet" and my gent assured me he believed him because he was the strangest little bloke he'd ever met.

By now I was feeling a little insulted; I didn't *think* I looked that dopey. I did feel slightly mollified when he told me he paid to have his family tree done, because his mother suffered from delusions and was always telling one or other of the family that they were descended from the Duke of Derbyshire or Lord St. Aubyn etc.

Like Mother like son??

Thanks to Jill Alford for this 'memory'

Tell us your Special Interests and Expertise

Many volunteers have taken on separate tasks within the LFHC as well as replying to IRs and gathering some specialist knowledge (even if it's knowing just what goes where) and it seems like a sensible idea to compile a list of what are volunteers' special interests and expertise. For example:

- Jeanne Wing collects sales particulars of interesting houses and keeps an excellent indices of the various transcribed "registers" that we hold (thanks to Brian)
- Philip Clifford is transcribing Epsom Vestry Minutes
- Hilary Marogna looks after all the pamphlets and newspapers
- Eileen Hunter and Carol Hill cope with the maps and have been stocktaking the catalogues again!

I know the rest of you are busy at something or other, so can you please let Carol (ckmhill@tiscali.co.uk) know what it is you are doing or would enjoy doing – and there's plenty to do, especially cataloguing. Thanks to everyone's help, we are finding out at last what great talents we actually have in the LFHC.

New History Centre Committee Elected

Following the resignations of Margaret as Chair and Gill as Treasurer the new committee for the LFHC was elected at the AGM on 25th April 2005, and includes:

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------|
| • Bert Barnhurst | Chair |
| • Peggy Bedwell | Treasurer |
| • Hilary Marogna | Secretary |
| • Carol Hill | Projects Co-ordinator |
| • Peter Wakefield | Roster Organiser |
| • Ian Parker | Publicity Co-ordinator |
| • Jean Walsh | Surrey Local & Family History Centres |
| • Pat Lucas | Ewell Library |
-

Have You got News for Us?

We hope you've enjoyed reading this newsletter. It's a bit longer than usual but we haven't published one since May.

But to keep up the momentum we need contributions, like those from Tim on the visit to Colindale, Carol on her request for information on Woodcote House and Jill's delightful tale of her re-incarnated storyteller.

So if you have any

- reports on visits
- intriguing Information Requests
- forthcoming projects or events
- interesting facts about local history or genealogy
- new research documents the LFHC has received
- or just strange tales to tell

please let Ian know (ianparker@dsl.pipex.com) - supporting photographs and pictures, if available, would be most welcome. It will help make the newsletter more interesting for us all.

Many thanks for reading this far! I promise we will make it shorter next time.

IRP
September 2005