

Memoirs of Margaret and John Pearn

World War II September 1939 to September 1945

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Article prepared exclusively for the
St.Dennis Village Website

By
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In preparation for a possible invasion of England by German troops there were a number of things done. Iron gates and railings were removed from all properties i.e. public buildings and private homes. This scrap metal would be used for all warfare elements. Streetlights were switched off or removed and signposts giving directions and mileage removed. Stone barriers were built at Indian Queens but not at St.Dennis. One carriage way was blocked making progress still possible but slowing things down. There was such a barrier just as you turned off the A30 main road at Indian Queens corner, by the Wesley Sunday School. Every house had to have blackouts. Constable Taylor at St.Dennis and Constable Richards from Blue Anchor Police Station were extremely strict on their walk about tours in the dark. Cars had to be fitted with hoods on their headlights making a beam of light quite dim for the driver. Petrol was rationed and available for essential journeys only, while coastal areas such as Newquay and Porthpean near St.Austell had cones in the road. Margaret remembers barbed wire at Porthpean. Cones made it difficult to leave the beaches with vehicles.

Radios, if possessed would be run off batteries and would have to be charged. Some of Trelavour Road had no electricity until after the war. Gas masks were issued to children and we had to practise how to use them. They would mist up around the eyes and smelt of rubber. Food was rationed and a limit set for butter, margarine, fats and meats as well as clothing.

All men under the age of forty had medicals and if fit drafted into the forces. Conscientious Objectors had to serve in coal mines and other useful jobs. Girls were expected to join the Land Army, hence many were driving tractors and doing heavy work. Older men were expected to join the ARP (Air Raid Precautions) or Home Guard so there were duty rosters. Other services benefited such as dockyards, fire service, quarries, ambulance driving, Red Cross, vital food industries, ammunition factories and building of airfields.

Defence was given a priority with search lights, barrage balloons and pill boxes for the placement of light Ack ack and heavy guns. Sirens would sound if there was an air raid. The chance of a raid would be a low and high note over a period of time, while the all clear was a continuous same pitched note. Prime areas of attack would be aerodromes, dockyards, bridges, railways and power stations. Some important landmarks were left by both sides as guide lines. St.Dennis Church and St.Eval Church were

landmarks which were useful to our aircraft as well as the German aircraft. Saltash Wesley was hit and was ruined with flames. Obviously Saltash Railway Bridge was the target to disrupt the rail service to Cornwall !

Bombing a Target, Shelters and Other Buildings

Plymouth was a target in the early 1940's and Margaret's dad remembers standing in the back garden of their bungalow in Trelavour Road, seeing the glow in the sky from the blitz on Plymouth. An attack on St.Eval aerodrome led Lord Haw Haw to say on radio, "we have bombed St.Eval to the ground". I was told that this was propaganda by the Germans as they had hit a "dummy" aerodrome at Winnards Perch between the churches of St.Dennis and St.Eval ! Another raid destroyed a house at Goss Moor and Mr.Smale's farmyard. My grandad had stood outside his bungalow near Indian Queens Wesley Sunday School and saw a blue flash as petrol burst into flames. He said, "You could read a newspaper". Another two bombs were off loaded at Iron mine lane between Goss Moor and Gaverigan. I remember walking out to see the damage and craters with my father on a Sunday afternoon. Another raid tried to damage the power station on the road from Blue Anchor to Sea View. Fortunately it missed the electrical power station.

Very few people had shelters dug in their back gardens. People sheltered under the stairs if living in a house or under tables. I can remember a night under the stairs with our evacuees and their mother. The evacuees' mother was visiting to see where they had been billeted. She exclaimed, "this is worse than London. I will take them home tomorrow". The next day they departed for London from St.Columb Road Station. A telegram arrived from her husband after they had departed, "Don't bring the children home - the London Blitz has started". She and the children arrived at Finsbury Park (N. London) after a twelve hour journey being stopped several times because of air raids on the journey ! One never realised how many people lost their lives when stationed at St.Eval. It is worth a visit to St.Eval Church to see the books of remembrance and the war memorial which is outside in the car park. Further aerodromes were built at St.Mawgan and the Fleet Air Force occupied St.Merryn. This is now a holiday camp.

At White Cross a prisoner of war camp was built close to the Par - Newquay branch line. It was occupied by Italian prisoners of war. They wore a brown uniform with a coloured patch on the back of the tunic. Many were sent out to work on local farms and quarries. There was a dirt football pitch for organised games. Many made tough wearing slippers which were sold locally. Today this is a holiday camp area !

Evacuees

During the early part of the war evacuees descended on Cornwall. They were supervised by the WVS (Women's Voluntary Service) on arrival in the county. The children would be allocated to people with spare rooms. Many came from London and Plymouth. Families were split up and it must have been frightening for some. Margaret's parents had a boy to start with but he was moved to someone who had requested a boy.

We had a family called Offwood from Finsbury Park, London. There were four children and Grandmother. We had June and Irene. John and Grandma stayed in the bungalow with my Grandma and Granfer. Alan, who was older than John was allocated to Mr. and Mrs. Osborne – opposite to Gunvena and up a short lane. Their mother came on a visit to see where they were billeted. (See previous section). The Blitz in London led to my mother writing to Mr. and Mrs. Offwood offering to take the children again. They returned to Cornwall but due to my illness we only took Irene. John and Grandma White were in the bungalow, while Alan was with the Osborne family again. June went with my Gran's sister – Elizabeth Bullock and her husband at the top of Fraddon Hill. Irene was quieter than June and was often content with a book to read ! June had passed for a Grammar School place but stayed with the group of evacuees at Indian Queens. They all returned to London in the middle of the war to continue their education at Secondary level for the three eldest children.

In 1944 we had another evacuee. John Gross came from London and was with us for 10 months. My mother felt sorry for John as he was the only child left in the Sunday School. He describes it as follows – “You took me in when there was no room elsewhere”. He wrote to my mother when my father died in 1992 saying how grateful he was for the love and care shown to him. The following description is his words. “The Sunday nights spent with Fred and John around the piano (Reverend Quick would be at chapel !) and that Christmas with uncle Charlie after the Carol Service at the “Enamel” (Immanuel) chapel, all moments of joy”. He left on 3rd.May 1945 from St.Columb Road Station.

John's wife is still in contact with us in 2021 despite his death. Again I looked on John as a brother. We played games like Snakes and Ladders, Ludo and Draughts while both of us were in the cubs. There were badges to be won so we spent time learning knots and various subjects.

Opposite our house in Newquay Road was Mr.Veale's village shop and they had an evacuee from Plymouth. Sidney Wood was a tough boy and able to handle Mr.Veale's dog “Nip”. Nip was quite nasty if not on the lead !

One was grateful that we learnt to share in those days. Much time was spent outdoors playing marbles, conkers, jump backs as well as football, while Junior Guild, Band of Hope and Sunday School gave us many things to do !

Preparation for D-Day

The area was inundated with American troops in preparation for D-Day. They camped on the downs in St.Dennis at the top of Hendra Road and towards Treviscoe. At Indian Queens they camped along the Goss Moor. I remember a large tent on the corner as you turned for St.Dennis. There would be other areas where they kept vehicles and camped. It was the first time that as children we saw people of colour. Their vehicles consisted of trucks, amphibious "ducks" and open Jeeps. They smoked their brand of cigarettes such as "Camel" and chewed gum. It was good to receive gum and sweets from them. They gave us glass marbles which had coloured lines in them compared to our clay marbles !

Margaret remembers a Christmas Party at the institute in St.Dennis at which all children were fed. I cannot recollect parties but remember a canteen being established at Indian Queens Sunday School which welcomed all the American soldiers.

Vehicles were lined up in the roads of both villages before D-Day. Housewives in Trelavour Road brought out tea for those men looking after the vehicles. The day after troops and vehicles had disappeared from the villages. Tents had gone as all troops left the area to be taken across the English Channel from Falmouth and the Helford River to the beaches of Normandy. The area returned to some sort of normality apart from air activity.

Hospitals For Military Wounded

Many military persons were badly wounded during the war. Casualties suffered when the forces had to leave Dunkirk early in the war, as well as those in Italy and the desert. Hotels were taken over in seaside areas. The Victoria Hotel in Newquay on the Parade and close to the police station was turned into a hospital.

If visiting Newquay beach one came across wounded men from the forces. All men, irrespective of army, air force or navy wore similar clothing. They were provided with a light blue suit, a white shirt and red tie. In the summer those that could walk would be seen around Towan Beach and the Killacourt. Wounded personnel might have lost an eye, leg or arm.

After recuperating, those with minor injuries would be returned to their unit and fought until the war ended.

Christmas Presents and Food During The War

Christmas presents for children in the war years would be homemade where possible. I can recollect having a Sten gun and a tin helmet so we could play soldiers ! On another occasion a destroyer made by a next door neighbour and painted grey appeared. This would float in the tank between our semi-detached houses. A cousin of my mother, Mr.Eddie Gregor made a bomber from parts of a disused cart. Socks , scarves and woollen helmets were knitted. The helmet kept you warm as it covered the head, ears, neck and chin. You pulled it over the head but there was a gap for your eyes, nose and mouth. Stockings would be filled with nuts and apples as bananas were unavailable.

Girls had cots and dolls while Margaret was fortunate to have a cooking set as well as a pram. She describes the pram as a tin box with wheels as metal was required for the manufacture of weapons and bombs. A cot, desk and doll's house followed.

The back garden might be used to produce the Christmas Dinner. People kept chickens, hens and cockerels. Potatoes, parsnips and carrots would be grown. Such vegetables could be stored. Turkeys were generally unavailable. Farmers might supplement this with ducks or geese. Neighbours sometimes kept a pig and once butchered, salted the various pieces. Tripe provided a cheap meal done with milk and onions.

Our Christmas dinner was roasted cockerel, potatoes, vegetables with bread sauce and gravy. This would be followed with Christmas Pudding containing silver 3d pieces (silver threepenny pieces) covered with homemade custard. Tea would follow around 5:00pm with a piece of bread and butter first, fruit (tinned), mince pies and Christmas Cake. The latter two homemade and iced. This would be Christmas fare, NOT produced in those days in November but nearer Christmas.

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February 2022

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