

New Forest Remembers WWII Project

Oral History Team: Transcription Document

Contributor's name	Mrs Joan Stephens	Name code	J-S
Interviewer's name	Susan Jackson	Code number	007
Audio Typist name	Helen Wallbridge	Transcription Date	15 th March 2013
Transcription file name	J-S - Joan Stephens		- OH Transcription.doc

Web Pages:

Oral History article:

<https://nfknowledge.org/contributions/memories-of-pennington-and-a-battle-of-britain-wedding/#map=10/-1.55/50.74/0/20:0:0.6|34:1:1|35:1:1>

Project information:

<https://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/discover/history-culture/new-forest-remembers/>

Checked by - John Martin

File name	J-S	007	0001M0.WAV	Interview date: 18.11.12
-----------	-----	-----	------------	--------------------------

[00:00:00]

So could I ask you to just to tell me your name, and where and when you were born?

Well my name officially is Katherine spelt with a K, Joan Stephens. And I was born on the thirteenth of August 1912. Therefore I am 100 years old.

Where were you born?

In Pennington which is now part of the Borough of Lymington, but at that time it was a small village in its own right. We had out our own Parish Council and governed ourselves. But it was quite small; there were only nine hundred and eight inhabitants and two hundred and two houses. Up until 1932, when we were swallowed up into the Borough of Lymington as were one or two other villages round-about. And it was a purely farming area but of course now all the fields have been built on. We're bricks and mortar now and I wouldn't like to say how many the population are, it runs into thousands. But we were originally part of the parish of Milford on Sea.

[00:01:29] *And you were living in Pennington at the outbreak of the war were you?*

Oh Yes, I've lived here all my life, and my father before me, and my Grandfather before him.

© 2019

New Forest National Park Authority

Lymington Town Hall, Avenue Road, Lymington, Hampshire SO41 9ZG

Email archaeology@newforestnpa.gov.uk

www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/wwii

VAT Reg No. 871 9343 00

What were you doing when the war started?

Well I was married in 1940 and I was just a housewife.

So you were married during the war?

Yes, it was a Battle of Britain wedding and we took our gas masks to church with us and our identity cards. The service was quite early in the morning after the German bombers had gone back home and the daylight ones hadn't arrived.

Fascinating

So were there many guests at the wedding as it was during the war?

Oh no, no, just my mother and my brother, my father had gone in 1928. And my husband's mother and her sister. No, there was no hopes of having a proper, you know, official wedding, but I didn't mind, I don't like a lot of fuss.

Did you manage to get a dress?

Oh no,no,no. I had a costume which I had made at a local tailors. Something that was going to be very practical. Oh no, I wasn't a blushing bride in white array, oh no! (laughs).

Was you husband a local?

Yes, his people had a local nursery business and a shop in the High Street.

[00:03:20] *So for most of the war you were a housewife living at home?*

Well, until 1942. I had to do part-time work, I was conscripted into, you know, work. You had to in those days. And I went as a Clerk Accountant at the, I don't know whether you've ever heard of the Ancient Order of Foresters? They were a Friendly Society which administered National Health Insurance, so I was conscripted into there.

Where were they based?

Well, the house, it was a lovely old house, was called "Ridgeway." One of the local old big houses. And then it was a girls school but it's now pulled down and there's an estate of smaller houses on the ground, and that was in Pennington, near Pennington Cross.

© 2019

New Forest National Park Authority

Lymington Town Hall, Avenue Road, Lymington, Hampshire SO41 9ZG

Email archaeology@newforestnpa.gov.uk

www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/wwii

VAT Reg No. 871 9343 00

And when you stopped that, what were you doing next?

Well I went back to being a housewife. After that they went back to Southampton. They had evacuated themselves from Southampton which was the headquarters of their South Western District. And of course they had a lot of documents, medical records and that sort of thing so they'd evacuated themselves to Pennington, (laughs), and the house they were catered in Southampton was never bombed (laughs). So they went back you see and they had twenty men that was there sole sort of well the people that worked there, there were only men. And we did it with about ten women in the war.

I didn't realise women were conscripted for work like that.

Yes.

[00:05:27] *What do you remember of the New Forest during the war?*

Oh well this was a very very no-go area. Especially leading up to D-Day. I mean, as you know there's only three routes, isn't there, to get to the Isle of Wight. Portsmouth to Ryde, Southampton to Cowes, or Lymington to Yarmouth. Well the Lymington to Yarmouth was closed altogether, barrage balloons, all down the river. And my Mother had a young lady evacuated onto her from, she lived at Blackgang, and she was conscripted over to Wellworthy's which was in Lymington. They made Piston Rings. And when she went home for the weekend, she couldn't go from Lymington, she had to go up to Southampton and over to Cowes.

Yes, I think I remember the thing I remember mostly which was really devastating was the blackout. For the simple reason, that the New Forest ponies, which are now confined to the forest are they not/ cause of traffic. Well, they then could wander at will anywhere, they were up and down the Lymington High Street. When you went out, you didn't lock your door but you had to shut your gate else the ponies would be in. I've got some delightful pictures of ponies just wandering about. Well the thing was, in the blackout you couldn't see these ponies but you could hear them munching the grass and snorting you know, and you didn't know where they were. If you clapped your hands they would move but you didn't know where! (laughs) and it was really very difficult. Very difficult.

[00:07:35] *Did you see any air-raids?*

Oh yes. Yes, we did. They came over this way you see. I remember the night that Coventry was bombed. We heard the drone of the engines very high up. You knew something very big was going to happen. And we learned of course, we know now, that it was Coventry. I don't think they did much about intercepting them, because they had to save our planes for London. We saw Southampton burn, that was blitzed and Portsmouth was blitzed. We saw both of those burned. And we did have sixty two bombs fall on Pennington. For the simple reason, that they didn't want to take them back home, if they'd been hit, they just dropped the bombs. Fortunately, there was no loss of life.

© 2019

New Forest National Park Authority

Lymington Town Hall, Avenue Road, Lymington, Hampshire SO41 9ZG

Email archaeology@newforestnpa.gov.uk

www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/wwii

VAT Reg No. 871 9343 00

Nobody was hurt?

They were incendiaries a lot of them.

Were any buildings destroyed or were they all in the open countryside?

No, in the countryside, as I have said. This was a farming area. Agriculture. No, we were very fortunate. But there was an old gentleman who evacuated himself from Southampton. And he had a caravan in the corner of a field up at Sway and that caravan had a direct hit on it.

Oh, gosh.

And he lost his life (laughs). Oh, it's not funny, but there you are you see. You never know do you?

[00:09:20] *Were there searchlights?*

We had an anti-aircraft gun quite near. We were living at that time, in a cottage at Upper Pennington and we had an anti-aircraft gun on the common, and there was another one down on the marshes and a searchlight. Our problem was you see..., there were quite a lot of planes brought down and it's really terrifying to see a plane zigzagging down on fire out of the sky.

Yes, not knowing where it's going to land.

But you get used to it. It's a strange thing to say, but we got used to it. But there was, nobody seemed to worry, you didn't ever seem to think that we weren't going to win. It never entered your head, we were all in it together and in a way it was a very friendly time, because everybody helped each other, you know, and you shared things with each other.

[00:10:30] *Presumably quite a few of your local neighbours were away, there were a lot fewer people around were there?*

Away? do you mean...

Forces?

Oh yes, oh yes there were quite a lot. But of course being agricultural, like my husband, he was in what they called a "reserved occupation" but my goodness, they had a home guard you see and he was one of the first to join and it really ruined their health because they were at work all day growing, haymaking etc. and then out at night with the home guard.

[00:11:08] *So your husband was a farmer, on the land was he?*

© 2019

New Forest National Park Authority

Lymington Town Hall, Avenue Road, Lymington, Hampshire SO41 9ZG

Email archaeology@newforestnpa.gov.uk

www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/wwii

VAT Reg No. 871 9343 00

He was a nurseryman you see but they had to dig up all their shrubs and trees and their livelihood and grow vegetables and fruit. But what was the ironic part they sent people down from the Ministry to tell them what to do who had never grown anything in their life, they knew it on paper and they were told at one time to grow onions. So they grew onions. What did they do the onions? As you know you string up onions so that the air gets to them. They put them in sack bags, and the last I heard they were in Bournemouth growing out through the sack bags. Sweating so you see, that's it; it's not good having these degrees and that sort of thing on paper if you haven't done any practical work.

Did you have any extra assistance to help? Land girls and people like that to help on the nursery?

Well, that was another thing. There were men on the nursery, older men really. Well my husband was sort of in charge of it, and he wouldn't have been medically fit for the forces anyway and he was in the territorials. So he knew about that. Well anyway, he was in the Home Guard. Yes, they did have girls, but what made me very angry...there was one or two men, middle aged men, who paid to become... sort of students, so that they could say they were in agriculture.

I see, avoiding conscription

Well they weren't conscripted then, because they were in agriculture, but they weren't. I think, I mean, it wasn't general but there were at least two I know of who did that. And it's surprising who went to live on the farms!

[00:13:35] *Did you, were you aware of a great shortage of food and other everyday things?*

Well in the country here, no. We mustn't complain because we had a small holding next to us that had cows who grazed on the common. So we could take our jug of milk, because of course they had to be milked twice a day. So we were able to take our jug round next door and have as much milk as you wanted (laughs). So that was no problem. We were registered, you had to register at the shop for food and our little local stores, they always had a little extra for anyone on leave. So perhaps we'd have a little extra pot of jam or something like that. And of course I made butter with this full cream milk straight from the cow, and I put it in a kilner jar, took the cream off, put it in a kilner jar and shook it up and made butter (laughs). So we didn't do too badly. And of course we grew all our own vegetables and our own fruit. And then we didn't keep rabbits, but our next door neighbour kept rabbits. So we saved food for the rabbits. And the small holding where the milk came from, they had pigs. So everything, you know, leaves from lettuce and cabbages, they went to the pigs. So when they killed a pig we had a liver or something like that. No, we managed. We managed.

[00:15:00] *So I know you said the man from the Ministry told your husband what to grow, but you were allowed to grow something's for yourselves were you?*

Well we had a garden at home. Oh we had our own gardens at home and small holdings, a lot of

© 2019

New Forest National Park Authority

Lymington Town Hall, Avenue Road, Lymington, Hampshire SO41 9ZG

Email archaeology@newforestnpa.gov.uk

www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/wwii

VAT Reg No. 871 9343 00

people were small holders and they had land and grew things and everybody helped and you know, so with all these rabbits, we were never short of a rabbit. And you'd be surprised how nice, a well fed rabbit they weren't sort of wild ones, you wouldn't know it from a beautiful chicken at Christmas, a roasted rabbit, beautiful! (laughs)

[00:16:14] *You mentioned the ponies were able to roam free... so they weren't contained...or there was no poaching or anything like that?*

No, they grazed on the common and the roadsides were so tidy they nibbled all the verges and now it's all wild. Our common has gone wild, because the ponies aren't there, and the cows, oh, and donkeys. I mustn't forget donkeys; every villager had a little donkey cart.

Oh, I see, that was the main means of transport locally was it?

Oh yes, I've got pictures of little donkey carts tethered to the lampposts in Lymington High Street.

So individual people owned them?

Oh yes, well they grazed on the common, they didn't have to feed them (laughs)

And did you travel further afield? Did you ever go into Southampton or anywhere further away during the war?

We had to get permission to go out of this area. I went to see a friend, I went with a friend to see her mother in hospital at one time, and we had to get permission to go out.

Who did you ask for permission?

Well, the powers that be I suppose, the police or there were plenty of A.R.P people and that sort of thing. Oh and that's another thing we had to do, we had to fire watch and we had buckets of water with a stirrup pumps and incendiary. Oh yes.

So you were doing that...

Oh yes, all through the war.

And the crew of the anti-aircraft gun that was near us, they took over a hut that was the men's social club and they had there where they lived that was their headquarters. And the men's, and the Women's Institute Hall, the men's cloakroom that was an A.R.P post.

And the people who manned the anti-aircraft gun were they local Home Guard?

Oh no, no, no, they were professional soldiers and one crew, I always remember, they could sing and they sang in harmony and on a beautiful still night, I remember you lay on your bed or under the cupboard in the stairs, they sang "you are my sunshine, my only sunshine" you remember the rest, oh it was beautiful (laughs)

When you were on fire watch, was that on a rota basis? Did you go a certain number of nights a week?

Oh yes, you were told when you were on duty, yes. Yes.

And then, how did you know where to go to? You just waited in a central place until...

Oh no, we did fire watching from our own home.

So you always had a stirrup pump and bucket ready?

Oh yes, a bucket of water, oh yes. And of course at first when the air raids started we brought our mattress down and put it under the stairs, under the cupboard, under the stairs which we were asked to do. Of course, there were no interior sprung mattresses in those days and we woke up absolutely aching all over and crawling out of the cupboard. And I said to my husband, look if I'm going to die, I'm going to be comfortable (laughs) we're not coming down here, so we stayed upstairs and we were fortunate, we never got hit. But you could hear the shrapnel coming down.

You heard air-raid sirens around?

Yes, oh yes. We had a siren in Lymington; Wailing Willy we used to call it (laughs) Wailing Willy!

And how often did that go off?

Oh my dear! All through the day, you never knew. And when it first started the buses used to stop and everyone had to get out and get down in the ditch. That was early when the Battle of Britain first started but that soon had to come to a stop because there was no bus timetable. And people were waiting for the bus (laughs), so they had to abandon that and you just took your luck (laughs)

And the buses kept going locally throughout the war? The main means of transport?

Oh yes, yes, yes. Well you couldn't go to the Isle of Wight on the ferry. I think you could go if you wanted, but you couldn't land but nobody would want to go because the Isle of Wight was a garrison. You know they built a road right along the cliff, it's still there and they use it. Oh yes, that

© 2019

New Forest National Park Authority

Lymington Town Hall, Avenue Road, Lymington, Hampshire SO41 9ZG

Email archaeology@newforestnpa.gov.uk

www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/wwii

VAT Reg No. 871 9343 00

was very fortified.

[00:21:38] *Were you very aware of the troops in the build-up to D-Day? Were you aware that was going on?*

Oh, my dear. Yes, long before D-Day all the big local houses, they put troops in there. The people had to go and live in one of the lodges or yes, the military, we were garrisoned around here. The first ones to arrive were the Northumberland Fusiliers and they went into Pylewell Park. And then we had the Oxford and Bucks. They were at Buckland Manor, Buckland Manor (laughs). And of course they were very bored really because there was so much time with nothing going on leading up to D-Day and they all used to come to the local whist drives and dances you see, course the girls liked it. I used to go down to the whist drives at the WI because I belong there, and we all, I always invited two of these troops to come to our house and play a game of cards and have a bit of supper with my husband. And they loved it. They loved to sit by a fire and play cards and that sort of thing. On one occasion we had one a Free Frenchman, one of them, and I shall never forget. It was during that time before the second front opened, there was nothing going on, the Battle of Britain was over, and there as a lull waiting for the second front. And we were talking about this and this Free Frenchman, Gustav his name was, I don't know what his other name was, and he said "you don't want to worry" he said, "you wait to Montgomery gets cracking". I said "Montgomery? Who's he, never heard of him?" "No" he said "but you will" and sure enough we did with Alamein of course and Montgomery has always been one of my heroes. I've read his memoirs many times. Most fascinating man. He was very much like the same make-up as my husband, never thought anyone should have an ounce of flesh on their bones (laughs) It was really stupid and you know, he never did anything that he hadn't thought things out and was pretty certain they were going to succeed, and sure enough he was right and he was a very religious man as you know, he called his troops to prayer before going into battle and it was always my ambition to go and sit in Monty's caravan, which I did. It's now of course in the Imperial War Museum in London and we went there a lot for taking our son when he was growing up. I went there and I said to the attendant "could I sit in that chair?" I don't suppose everybody was allowed to sit in the chair and I told him why I wanted to sit in it and he let me sit in the chair (laughs).

[00:25:14] *Did children still go to school every day as normal? Did it affect school life during the war in Pennington?*

Well, no. It went on as usual, but of course they had air raid shelters in the playground and they built a kitchen in the playground, so that the children could have meals. Then after the war there was a lot of trouble because when all the men came back we were over-populated. You see, we had evacuees here and a lot of them didn't go back, they had nowhere to go. So they stayed on and married local girls and we had a population explosion.

[00:26:02] *Did you have any evacuees living with you?*

No, we only had a very small cottage and in 1939/1940 when Southampton was blitzed, 1940 yes, you weren't allowed to have a spare room, nobody could have a spare room.

© 2019

New Forest National Park Authority

Lymington Town Hall, Avenue Road, Lymington, Hampshire SO41 9ZG

Email archaeology@newforestnpa.gov.uk

www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/wwii

VAT Reg No. 871 9343 00

You just had to take evacuees?

Well, I, we didn't actually because we only had a very small cottage, but anyone with, you know, more space, they were filled up. My mother, that's how my mother had an evacuee.

Were they locally from Southampton, or further away?

Well this one came, that my mother had, I said, over from Blackgang. She was in Wellworthy's, course that bought a lot of people to Lymington.

Yes, were there many munitions factories producing things for the war?

No. Wellworthy's was the main one. Yes, they were employed making these piston rings for Rolls Royce engines on the planes. And of course there was a lot of boatbuilding going on over at Southampton way, Hythe way, you know. And we've got a boatyard in Lymington. Before D-Day it was very secretive. Mind you, the New Forest was a wonderful camouflage because they couldn't see what was going on under the trees. They widened all the roads and when this time we went up to see my friends mother in hospital, when we came back we knew something was about to happen. There was tanks and military like jeep sort of things, military stuff, tail to tail right down through these extended roads. It was like another road at the side of the road. And all the troops were there with their washing hung out under the trees (laughs).

So you got special permission to visit this friend in hospital, in Southampton were they?

No, she was at Winchester.

How did you get there?

We went to Southampton on a bus and then there was a special coach that took the visitors out to Winchester.

So when you went across the Forest on the bus you saw all these troops lined up?

Yes, that was from Lyndhurst to Brockenhurst along that stretch and Avenue Road in Lymington that was widened. And of course as you know the Mulberry harbour and all that was assembled over on the Beaulieu River. You know all that, yes.

[00:29:00] *Do you know what the boatyard in Lymington was doing during the war?*

Well they were building boats, they're still there, they're a very old firm the Berthon Boat Company

© 2019

New Forest National Park Authority

Lymington Town Hall, Avenue Road, Lymington, Hampshire SO41 9ZG

Email archaeology@newforestnpa.gov.uk

www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/wwii

VAT Reg No. 871 9343 00

it's called. Yachts, but of course they weren't building yachts in the war. Oh yes, I had a cousin employed there. He was a cabinet maker doing the insides, that sort of thing.

Those boats were used by people for fishing...?

Well I expect they were making boats you know for D-day and that sort of thing but that was a most wonderful operation wasn't it, how it was kept so secret. And PLUTO how they put those pipes under the Channel, it was wonderful!

[00:30:00:] *Was the railway line to Lymington still open during the war?*

The what?

The railway line to Lymington?

Oh yes, that saved us from extinction, because of the Isle of Wight you see. They'd have closed that down, or Mr Beeching would have done.

[00:30:20] *Could you use the train to go into Southampton?*

What during the war? Well we never went. You didn't go out of the area, you couldn't. You'd go by bus really. But you didn't go. There was no need unless you had to.

[00:30:40] *Was Lymington High Street, the shops were all still open were they?*

Yes, oh, yes, but of course we never had any supermarkets in those days; they were all little family businesses you see.

End [00:30:57]

Keywords:

Joan Stephens
Pennington
Lymington
Battle of Britain
Wedding
Conscripted
Ancient Order of Foresters
Ridgeway House
Housewife
Southampton
D-Day

© 2019

New Forest National Park Authority

Lymington Town Hall, Avenue Road, Lymington, Hampshire SO41 9ZG

Email archaeology@newforestnpa.gov.uk

www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/wwii

VAT Reg No. 871 9343 00

Isle of Wight
 Portsmouth
 Ryde
 Cowes
 Yarmouth
 Blackgang
 Wellworthy's
 Evacuee
 New Forest Ponies
 Blackout
 Air raids
 Coventry
 Blitz
 Bombs
 Sway
 Anti-aircraft gun
 Searchlight
 Reserved occupation
 Home Guard
 Ministry of Agriculture
 Farm
 Food
 Milk
 Rabbit
 Donkey
 Fire watch
 ARP
 Wailing Willy
 Bus
 Northumberland Fusiliers
 Pylewell Park
 Buckland Manor
 Whist drives
 Montgomery (Field Marshal)
 School
 Boatbuilding
 Berthon
 Winchester

File name	J-S	007	0002M0.WAV	Interview date: 18/11/2012
<p>[00:00:00] <i>You mentioned the Whist drive, what else did you do for entertainment? Did you have any concert parties or cinema?</i></p> <p>Well we had a cinema in Lymington, The Lyric, which was next door to here where Marks and Spencer's now is. And that kept going, yes.</p>				

© 2019

New Forest National Park Authority

Lymington Town Hall, Avenue Road, Lymington, Hampshire SO41 9ZG

Email archaeology@newforestnpa.gov.ukwww.newforestnpa.gov.uk/wwii

VAT Reg No. 871 9343 00

CHAIRMAN OLIVER CROSTHWAITE-EYRE CHIEF EXECUTIVE ALISON BARNES

[00:00:20] *Did you have any other concert parties? Was there a village hall? Or you had other entertainment?*

Well, you didn't assemble people together you know you were advised not to. I mean for obvious reasons. The Women's Institute, yes that kept going but we met in the afternoons instead of the evenings as did the Mother's Union. Church, of course you couldn't black out all the church so the services were held in the afternoons, none in the evenings.

[00:01:00] *You said you were aware of troops billeted in the local buildings, were there any foreign troops? Or did you come across the Americans at all?*

Oh, well they didn't come to later did they, after Pearl Harbour. They came over before D-Day of course and oh yes, they brought nylons with them didn't they (laughs) yes, for the girls. Yes. Some of them did marry local girls and some local women went off with the Yanks (laughs) Oh dear!

[00:001:40] *Any particular incidents that you remember, from during the war? (repeated)*

Well at the moment I can't think of anything but I'm sure there were some. Oh, we played, my mother used to like playing bridge and her cronies so yes I joined them and we played all through the war. And we had friends of course; we visited when you could. But, yes, life went on. It wasn't the same of course, but as I say, there was a spirit of comradeship somehow that doesn't exist nowadays. We were talking about the High Street at Lymington. We had no supermarkets; they were all little tiny family businesses which have absolutely gone now there's only one family business and that's the Undertaker and he'll never be out of business will he! (laughs)

[00:02:51] *Obviously food was rationed, so were the shops empty? Did they have full stocks of things?*

Well they might have, you see, in this area, they always had extra for service men on leave. So if they came home there had to be rations for them. But I don't think we were really hard pushed, not in this area. I think probably in the big cities they were.

I worked, as I told you at Ridgeway, well the Chief Accountant there, I was her assistant. They were evacuated from London because they had an old mother and she had a young niece and her brother came down and he worked at Wellworthy's as an accountant and they were in lodgings and they were here all through the war. And then they eventually went back but it was only that sort of people that came into the area for a specific purpose.

[00:04:15] *Did Wellworthy's take on extra workers?*

Oh yes and they worked right round the clock, night shift you know and day shift, non-stop.

© 2019

New Forest National Park Authority

Lymington Town Hall, Avenue Road, Lymington, Hampshire SO41 9ZG

Email archaeology@newforestnpa.gov.uk

www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/wwii

VAT Reg No. 871 9343 00

CHAIRMAN OLIVER CROSTHWAITE-EYRE CHIEF EXECUTIVE ALISON BARNES

But I don't think we had any other, at that time, factories of any kind. No we didn't only shipbuilding. A lot of the people, men, from Pennington and Lymington went over to Hythe you know where they built the boats. And I think aircraft, didn't they start, Whittle, engines and that sort of thing?

But it was all very secretive, you didn't talk about things. And of course they took all the signposts down and if anyone had asked you the way you wouldn't have told them. It was all very hush-hush. This blackout, this will tell you how deadly it was. My husband was walking out from Lymington to Pennington on one occasion. And there's a pub called the White Hart, near Pennington Cross. And the door opened and out came a gentleman, local gentleman, and he was blind. He couldn't see a thing and he heard my husband's footsteps and he said "oh mate, he said I'm Chirpy Green can you put me into North street, I don't know where I am" That's what the blackout, how intense it was.

So yes it would be very difficult to walk at night wouldn't it?

Oh no, you couldn't. I used to cycle but you only had a little lamp that shone a little beam down on the road. That's when you could have gone into the ponies.

There must have been a few accidents at night, yes...

So, and of course if you had a crack in your curtain or anything, you were for it. Mustn't show a light.

And of course, a full moon was dreaded because that showed up everything, the rivers particularly. We used to call that the parish Lantern.

[00:06:47] *You mentioned your husband was in the Home Guard...*

Yes,

What did he do with that? Were there any particular incidents with that?

He volunteered the very first night, day, you know. They met at the drill hall down in Bath Road. But that night they were asked to go to Rook's Gardens, that was a family called the Rooks who left their house and grounds, it's a park now, to the Borough. And they met there that first night. And men of all ages went particularly men from the first world war and they had no arms or anything, they were told to bring pitch forks or anything that would do anybody an injury and there they went. People, men, of all ages. Well then of course they got themselves organised and they just took the men who were, well, going to be useful. My husband, he had been in the Territorials and he had been used to using a gun and that sort of thing, so he was a permanent one, and in the end they went to the Drill Hall and trained. Believe you me, I've got pictures of it, they looked really very well trained and they were in uniform. But at first they only had a little armband with LDV, Local Defence Volunteer. That was their only identification, but latterly of course they were formed into proper platoons and then they were on duty different nights. Either down on the beach at Milford on Sea, they took over a house there as their headquarters. Of course the beaches had barbed wire all along and they were mined all along them, the whole coastline was mined so they spend a night

© 2019

New Forest National Park Authority

Lymington Town Hall, Avenue Road, Lymington, Hampshire SO41 9ZG

Email archaeology@newforestnpa.gov.uk

www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/wwii

VAT Reg No. 871 9343 00

down there, or up on the church tower in Lymington. Watching and that sort of thing.

[00:09:00] *So he was mainly a look-out. Did he get involved in any particular incidents at all?*

Well, one occasion, he was on duty in Lymington and there was a plane, a German plane was brought down and it landed in a field down by Efford Mill. I was in with my neighbours, because when my husband was on Home Guard duty, they had a family and they wouldn't dream of me being in there on my own next door, it was a semi-detached. So I was in there and we all rushed to the window and looked out at this plane engine jaggging out of the sky on fire and it turned out that my husband had called down there and he pulled the pilot out of the plane, 'Course he was dead, but he got him out of the plane and he had his harness in his hand, he had taken off his harness, but the Police came and took that away (laughs) so that sort of thing they did.

They were very hard working weren't they, and as you say, doing a job in the daytime as well...

And then he'd come home and change and have breakfast and go back to his own job.

Very tiring...

It was. He ended up with gastric ulcers of course.

So how many nights a week would he have been on Home Guard duty?

Well he'd have been on officially one night a week, but if there was something really nasty happening, they'd be calling them all out you see.

Very tiring wasn't it...and worrying for you as well....

We didn't worry! (laughs) We never worried! (laughs) We never believed that anything could happen, you don't. You just don't believe it. You just don't think about it. You get on with what you're going to do. But war, I don't know, it doesn't have to happen...its men that make them isn't it.

Yes, Yes.

[00:11:04] *What about at the end of the war, were there big celebrations around here?*

Oh yes. But you were relieved. But nobody really wanted to celebrate because there was so many lost of life. You really couldn't rejoice about it. You were glad the war was over. But there you are. There's been wars ever since and will be.

Yes, only one year without war somewhere in the world...

© 2019

New Forest National Park Authority

Lymington Town Hall, Avenue Road, Lymington, Hampshire SO41 9ZG

Email archaeology@newforestnpa.gov.uk

www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/wwii

VAT Reg No. 871 9343 00

But one wonders why? You question why don't you.

Well there we are.

[00:11:48] *So all your family were living locally were they?*

Yes, my mother was a school teacher all her life, and she was at Milford School from 1920-1940. Well then they were building... oh, there was a school evacuated from Portsmouth to Milford. So they had to stagger lessons. One would come in the morning and the other in the afternoon, and then they built shelters and they had to, you know, get the children down into the shelters. Well she was 65 by this time. And she felt it was all too much. And so she retired and she stayed at home of course. But yes, the lady that was headmistress from Portsmouth, she had an old mother, they lived at Milford and she never went back. She liked it so, she became headmistress of Pennington Infant school and she was there when my son started school.

[00:13:00] *Was your son born after the war?*

My Son, Oh yes, 1950. Oh no, we didn't feel it was right to start a family in the war. You know, we might have been taken and the child left, I should think anyone with any sense would think these things out. So we didn't, I was a late starter! (laughs)

[00:13:30] *Did you work on the market garden? Did you work in the nursery with your husband?*

I used to go down before I went to Ridgeway for a while, to help prick out the plants (laughs). Yes, but no, I love gardening, it was my hobby but I didn't do it for a living, no. Actually, when I left school I was 18, and I taught in the Kindergarten in the school where I went, which was a private school for girls in the High Street at Lymington.

But you didn't carry on as a Teacher?

No, I wasn't a born teacher because I quite liked it, but I was with the infants when you just got them to learn to read, and they went on and then you had another lot that didn't ... no that wasn't for me. (laughs).

[00:14:30] *I think you've answered most of my questions. Nobody felt that they could go into the forest just for a picnic or anything at all presumably?*

You say you had to get permission to go into the forest, so nobody would just go off and have a picnic in the forest or anything?

Well, you wouldn't have wanted to, you mean for a picnic or something? No, you wouldn't have

© 2019

New Forest National Park Authority

Lymington Town Hall, Avenue Road, Lymington, Hampshire SO41 9ZG

Email archaeology@newforestnpa.gov.uk

www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/wwii

VAT Reg No. 871 9343 00

CHAIRMAN OLIVER CROSTHWAITE-EYRE CHIEF EXECUTIVE ALISON BARNES

dreamt about it (laughs).

And presumably you couldn't go to the beach at all? You said they had the barbed wire?

Well nobody would have wanted to. You couldn't sit on the beach. No, no. it was barred, no go. But we were very busy, there were other things to do, you were tired. Well when my mother came home from school at 4 o'clock we had our tea and went to bed. Because you knew you would be up half the night in the shelter. And nobody put on any night attire; you had another set of underwear. So that your day lot came off and you put another set of underwear on and that's where women wearing trousers started you see, it was easy to pull on a pair of slacks and a jumper and get yourself down to the shelter.

[00:15:54] *So there was a central shelter somewhere in the middle of Pennington was there?*

Well, what we did, we had, we were lucky, there was three of us, three neighbours. One in the back garden, he was a builder. So we got together, him, my husband, we weren't married then, but my husband did our work for us, digging the shelter, and there were two elderly, a man and his wife this side. And there were two children in the ones down there. And there was about seven of us, and they built a big shelter, concrete shelter, properly built with two steps down, then round the corner for the blast. And there were bunks on the bed for the two children and a table in the middle and seats all around the side and we sat down there playing cards at night.

And that happened quite frequently you had to go down there?

Most nights. Well when the Battle of Britain was on it was day and night. And then, the all clear would go you know and you would stagger up and in the June, summer time, the birds would be singing at 4 o'clock in the morning, it was daylight. But mother, she had to go off to school again. You see, that's why she couldn't put up with it all.

Very tiring,

It was too much, too much.

Did you take food and drink down with you?

Food, oh yes. Well I mean the one who's garden it was in, they would come up and perhaps make a flask of tea or something. Oh yes, we didn't starve (laughs)

And it was mostly playing cards?

And that shelter is still there. The people who live in it now, they keep their garden furniture down there. They can't destroy it because it's solid concrete underground.

© 2019

New Forest National Park Authority

Lymington Town Hall, Avenue Road, Lymington, Hampshire SO41 9ZG

Email archaeology@newforestnpa.gov.uk

www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/wwii

VAT Reg No. 871 9343 00

And you played cards, what else did you do to while away the time?

Well you talk I suppose, and shut your eyes I suppose, but there you are, you got used to it, you can get used to anything you know. But there we are, it's a long time ago but some things fade and some things stay in your memory....if you've got one!

You certainly have (both laugh)

Yes I do count my blessings, I'm very fortunate.

[00:18:45] *You described yourself as a "Battle of Britain Bride". What exactly does that mean?*

Well the Battle of Britain, it was during the Battle of Britain, 1940 and that's why; I was married in the Battle of Britain.

But it wasn't that your husband was going off to ...

No, he was local and engaged in horticulture. It was horticulture more than agriculture with him. He grew tomatoes and that sort of thing. Then he went afterwards to Efford Experimental Station. They came down to Efford from Titchbourne I think, so we were down there.

So that was after the war was it?

Oh yes, 1958 we went down there. We didn't want to leave our precious little cottage up at Upper Pennington but it wasn't big enough and Bill, we had Bill by then and it just wasn't big enough for a family so we had to move.

[00:19:58] *I didn't realise there was so much airborne activity around in this area?*

Well, oh yes, it wasn't as much that we were, they didn't come to bomb us, they dropped their bombs when they were hit and going off, they weren't going to take them home obviously. And again, when they were coming over, if they were hit they would just drop their bombs. That was our danger. New Milton of course, they had a loss of life over there they were bombed at one, but Lymington escaped pretty well. For some unknown reason. But it must have been dreadful to have been in the London Blitz.

Yes,

A lot of people here had their own families come, you see, instead of evacuees.

And you could do that as long as you didn't have any empty rooms?

© 2019

New Forest National Park Authority

Lymington Town Hall, Avenue Road, Lymington, Hampshire SO41 9ZG

Email archaeology@newforestnpa.gov.uk

www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/wwii

VAT Reg No. 871 9343 00

My mother in law, she had one of her daughters and their family from London down because she had plenty of room, so they came down because there was three children and her husband, Billy he was in the London Fire Service. Now they really suffered those men in the London Fire Service, because he was a cabinet maker and he was conscripted into the London Fire Service and their health was ruined with all that hot, heat and the smoke. They had emphysema you know they were never the same again, And of course, (laughs) to go back to the Home Guard, you know they made that comedy "Dad's Army". A lot of that was propaganda you know, a lot of it was propaganda, because they made people think we were bringing down their planes at night because our pilots ate carrots. Plenty of carrots and everybody started eating carrots like mad, but that wasn't quite true because it was before D-Day they discovered radar. Well now, the leading scientist who discovered radar with his team, his grandfather and my grandfather were brothers.

Oh right,

And it was kept very, very secret.

End [00:22:38]

Keywords:

Joan Stephens
Lymington
Entertainment
American Soldiers
Wellworthy's
Hythe
Blackout
Home Guard
Rook's Gardens
Milton-on-Sea
German Plane Crash
Efford Mill
Milford School
Pennington Infant School
Forest
Beach
Air-raids
Air-raid Shelter
Battle of Britain
Bombs
London Fire Service
Propaganda

All material is © 2019 New Forest National Park Authority

© 2019

New Forest National Park Authority

Lymington Town Hall, Avenue Road, Lymington, Hampshire SO41 9ZG

Email archaeology@newforestnpa.gov.uk

www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/wwii

VAT Reg No. 871 9343 00

CHAIRMAN OLIVER CROSTHWAITE-EYRE CHIEF EXECUTIVE ALISON BARNES