

New Forest Remembers WWII Project

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00-00-00

Well, I'm Barry Clarke. I came to live in the Forest here in 1939 when my parents moved down from London. I think they bought the house in Linwood as a 'holiday home', but then the war came. My father was sent off to Palestine where he was an army doctor all during the war and my mother came down to live in our cottage at Linwood. I don't believe they can really have intended to live there permanently because it was extremely isolated. It was a mile from the nearest gravel track, 2 miles from the nearest metalled road and 7 miles from the nearest shop. No, that's not quite true. During the war there was a Post Office in Linwood, but that closed very shortly and has not reopened.

We had no electricity; no main water. The electricity was not a worry and I would never worry about being without electricity, except these days, all these gadgets that one has to have depend on it, but having no main water was very difficult. The whole of Linwood was dependant on wells and they all dried up. I've never discovered why. Except for one well – big house – which was much deeper than everybody else's. Most wells were about 20 feet deep; they all lost most of their water, and towards the end the water company was sending round – I think it was 100 gallons of water per house twice a week, which isn't a lot. I'm not quite sure when the water shortage started. It wasn't really that bad when we first went there, but it got very bad towards the end of the war. It was alleged at the time in the village that there was something to do with somebody down at the water levels of the Avon, but I

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find this difficult to believe.

00-02-26

Linwood really is a very isolated village. It was then. It still is. I never quite understood how it came to be, because there was some farms there and during the war everybody had to plough them up and try and grow things. I know, the biggest farm near us, they always planted the wheat because they had to. They never harvested it because it never grew. The soil in the New Forest – well I suppose in most of the New Forest – in Linwood is extremely bad. It's only really suitable for grazing land at best.

Was there many farms around Linwood?

Well there was – yes there were quite a lot. Most were very small. They were Forest holdings rather than farms. There was one at the bottom of our garden and then there was a big one a bit further up, and there was a very big one – but lots of little holdings which people made do by the use of their Forest rights. So I think most people in Linwood did. We did, even though our house was new, 'cos the rights go with the land. We had the right of turbary. I've never understood where they thought we were going to get any turf from, but we had that right.

00-04-19

What else was there in Linwood? There wasn't a lot. Very certainly of course there were things. We got a searchlight battery just at the bottom of our garden. That of course made the track even worse because they kept on bringing their three tonners down it and it got very rough indeed (chuckle). In fact, just at the end of the war, friends would come to visit us. They would leave their cars half a mile away and walk the last half mile because they didn't want to break their cars up (chuckle) on the last bit. But we always had a car and they gave us 2 gallons of petrol a week, except when my sister was going to school in Ringwood, which I'm trying to think - I'm not sure whether that was just after the war or just at the end of the war – but then we got enough petrol to take us to school and back again. So my mother would take her to school with the bicycle on the back of her car, then bicycled home to get on with her jobs, bicycled back to pick her up in the evening.

We also got petrol for going to church on Sunday. Luckily, the church in Ringwood is quite close to the pub. I think we spent more time in the pub than we did in the church.

And how did you get your food and things?

00-05-59

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Oh, the food? Well of course we had the car and we went shopping, but there was a grocer in Ringwood – Greenfields - his shop is now a pub just where the station used to be, and he used to deliver to us twice a week, in if I remember rightly, I think it was a Ford van. He was very good and we would ring up, because though we hadn't any electricity as I said, we hadn't any water, we did have a telephone. I can remember distinctly it was 'Ringwood 34'. I think they've added a lot of extra numbers to it now, but I still think the last two were 34. Otherwise, because there were local farms, we could always get milk even though it was theoretically rationed. We generally get eggs, and of course in those days there were an unbelievable number of rabbits in the Forest. From quite an early age I would go out shooting them. We had both a 4/10 and a 12 bore, neither of which did we had a licence for as far as I can remember. Of course, you didn't have to in those days. My mother would send me out saying "We've got some of the soldiers from Ibsley coming over for supper. Do you think you could get me two rabbits?" and if I took the 12 bore – I never shot at a moving rabbit because you might miss – with a 12 bore I reckoned to be able to get two with one shot. With a 4/10 only one with a shot. Then I would gut them and bring them home on my bicycle, and my mother would cook them.

00-08-06

You mentioned there the soldiers coming over, do you have memories of soldiers coming for tea and things?

Oh yes. I've got some pictures of some of them, because my mother was also a physiotherapist and she used to go out – sure she had extra petrol for that, but don't remember that – she used to go out to the hospital down near Wimborne doing her physiotherapy, which in those days was called massage. They were all American airmen at Ibsley, and they used to come over. I think my mother was being a bit of an anti-snob because she said that all the other ladies were doing things with the officers. She thought it was a shame that the airmen shouldn't have some home comforts, so she rather adopted a few of them. Which of course they were very lonely. They were a long way from home and for most of them, home was very parochial. A lot of them came from the southern states and they'd never been outside their state let alone outside America and they knew very little about anything outside America, or even outside their own state. So we had quite a lot of them coming over.

I remember just after the war, one of them brought me back a present from north Africa where he'd been flying things out and things back. He brought me an ostrich egg. It was a full ostrich egg. My mother said "When was it laid?" He said "Oh, quite recently I think". So we cut it open, which we had to use a hacksaw for because ostrich eggs are thick, and made an omelette for sixteen, and it was very good as I remember.

I can never remember food being short but there wasn't a lot of variety and you couldn't

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afford to waste it. But then we lived in the country. I think people that lived in towns found it much more difficult, even probably towns like Ringwood or Fordingbridge. Living in the country we were relatively all right.

00-10-59

You mentioned, going back a little bit, soldiers coming to tea. You also mentioned the searchlight guys. Did you have anything to do with them?

Not a lot, no, because they were English and they had contacts with home. When they got some leave, they would go shooting off and go on the train to where their homes were I think. There were very few of them. It was a very small – you don't need many people to run a searchlight. I think there were probably at best a dozen of them. They had one or two Nissan huts which they lived in. I don't remember them using the searchlight in retrospect. I think they must have done, because we did have German aeroplanes come over. One of them dropped a bomb. I think it was by mistake. I think it had failed over Southampton and jettisoned its bomb when it was going home, but it landed up on the Forest. I don't think I ever found the hole but it must have been there.

Did you spend much time on the Forest?

00-12-02

When I was old enough to have a pony I did, because I used a pony as a means of transport. It was very much more comfortable and faster than using a bicycle, which we also used of course. It would have been just at the end of the war or just after that we would go out riding. I was on holiday, because I was at boarding school, but when I was on holiday we would go riding every day. We regarded a day that we didn't go riding was a wasted day and the short ride was one that only took 3 hours. A proper ride took all day and we used to go just riding. We had regular rides that we used. We also rode to Pony Club meets and to shows. I remember going to Burley Show and to Ellingham Show and once right down to a show in the south. It was a very long ride,

Was that still during the war?

No, that would be just after. I don't think we had shows during the war. It would be just after the war, '46/'47.

What were the shows like in 1946/47?

Well, they were – I was interested in the events. They had show-jumping, they had pony racing, which you had to have a Forest pony. You didn't, because my pony wasn't, so it

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must have been eligible for any pony. I can remember having to persuade my pony, that it was under 14-2, by practicing measuring it with a measuring stick with a pin in it, so that if he sort of shrunk down out a bit, 'cos he was just under 14-2 ...

And what of agricultural things in the show then, cattle and things like that?

Yes, as I remember, they had cattle. They didn't have any sheep because you don't have many sheep in the Forest. We had cows and goats and donkeys, but there weren't a lot of show stands and things, but they had all the sort of regular events, as I say, like show-jumping and musical logs I remember distinctly, and the racing. The racing was very brutal. Sensible people did not race with stirrups because if you raced with stirrups, people would take a hunting crop and hoick you off. I don't think there were any rules about racing except that you wanted to come in first.

00-15-10

And as it was just after the war, were there still soldiers and that involved?

Yes, there were still soldiers or airmen at Ibsley that I remember. Then of course there was a motor race track at Ibsley, but that I think we are going out of our period.

Up to about '47. Maybe go back to the war then a little bit. You had the soldiers around. How did you find out what was going on, or didn't you find out what was going on?

00-15-47

Well, we found out, I think largely because of my mother's work as a physiotherapist. I was quite young, just waiting to be told what we were doing or what I was to do, but my mother was going out to the hospital and I think there must have been groups of people who were trying to be helpful to the soldiers. There wasn't much of a social life. I remember we were limited to one bottle of gin a month. Beer was always available, but gin was only one a month and it was always a great pleasure I remember when one of the ladies became pregnant because she got given orange juice, so we could all have gin and orange then.

What other social activities were there?

The cinema was important. There was a cinema in Ringwood in those days. Don't think there was one at Fordingbridge. Well, we didn't go to Fordingbridge, our town was Ringwood. There was definitely a cinema in Ringwood. We used to go to that. Not all that often because of the difficulty of getting there. As I said, petrol was in extreme short supply. Apart from that I don't think there was a great deal of social life.

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There was social life with my family because I had an aunt and uncle who were living at – at that time they were living just outside Totton, but their three daughters came to live with us because they were frightened of being bombed in Totton. For some reason we even got a dog from one of their next door neighbours. The house was bombed. I think the people were killed but the dog wasn't, but it was definitely shell shocked and it came to live with us. I think the people must have been killed. I don't see otherwise why we would have got lumbered with the dog. So there was a certain amount of family going on. And then we had friends around. I don't remember a lot to be honest.

00-18-27

D'you remember anything of Christmas?

Well we certainly celebrated Christmas. I can remember making decorations and things. Of course we had the wireless. The wireless was important in those days because we had to take the battery in once a week – we had two batteries, one was at Bickhams in Ringwood being charged up, the other one in use. It would last a week and then we'd change them over again. That really was important. I don't think that we got newspapers. I'm sure nobody would have delivered newspapers to us. I don't ever remember getting any. So we must have been dependent on wireless for news which we were all of course quite interested in.

What about other times of the year, summer and all that, 'cos you were at boarding school and you came home for summers. That right?

00-19-38

Yes, boarding schools had quite long summer holidays. I would come home at the end of July and go back at beginning of September – halfway through September. So I think we had about eight weeks holiday. That was of course time I did most of my riding, 'cos the days were long.

So when you were out riding, other than what you've told me, what else did you see of the Forest during the war? Or didn't you?

The thing I remember seeing is – which we don't seem to do anymore – the gorse burning. I remember at one time the gorse was burning on all four sides of us. You could look out and see it. I think it was mostly being burnt deliberately to clear the Forest. They don't seem to do it now, or occasionally. Oh, they do sometimes. I don't know whether it's deliberate or not, or whether the grockles set it alight. But I can't remember much else on the Forest.

Was there any other evidence of soldiers about on the Forest?

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00-21-06

Certainly airmen, because there was the airfield up at Ibsley. The airfield at Ibsley and there was one at Stoney Cross and of course during the war when it was still an operational airfield, we couldn't go on it. It was cordoned off. But after the war when they abandoned it, and they abandoned the Stoney Cross one quite early, it was very good because they'd cleared all the gorse and it was good riding across there.

00-21-45

There was the bombing range of course, but there wouldn't be many soldiers on the bombing range. They'd have got bombed if they had been. The 'Big Bomb' we were warned about in advance and they said leave all your windows open because they may get broken. Well we left all the ones we could. Some of ours didn't open and I think two windows did get broken because I measured it up on the map the other day. I think it was only about three miles away from where we were where that bomb went off. I remember when they stopped using the bombing range, various people – not, I hasten to add me – found ways of cutting through the wire fencing, which was extremely high. It was about – it must have been about well over six foot high wire fencing. It was meant to stop the deer. It didn't. But people would cut holes in it. I think because they were rounding up ponies and things, and we found our way in with our ponies and found it absolutely fascinating because there was the Lodge which was still intact but falling to pieces. It's all been removed now. And there was also an apple orchard, which was extremely good news.

Is that the Lodge that was in Pitts Wood?

Yes, Ashley Lodge. That was there, and then there was the cottage on the road across, and that was there still. That stayed there longer than Ashley Lodge. I think it was falling to pieces. Ashley Lodge, I think they had bombed it as well as practice. It was pretty decrepit.

But the apple orchard I remember. We used to go with rucksacks and fill them up with the apples because even apples weren't easy to come by. All fruit was difficult during the war. They were quite good.

D'you remember anything else during your rides around the bombing ranges?

Not a lot to be honest. We did ride around them – found our way around them, but there wasn't a lot to be seen except a few holes, and I never discovered until afterwards that the other side of the bombing range which was the explosives factory. I found out about that afterwards.

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00-24-34

The explosives factory, can you tell me a little bit about that?

Well, I don't know very much about it. It was only a few years ago that I was told about it and I looked it up on the map, and it was on the other side of the Cadnam/Fordingbridge road, adjacent to the bombing range but separated from it. I think you could always get along the Cadnam/Fordingbridge road, but on the left hand side if you were going towards Cadnam, there was this, I'm told, explosives factory. I don't know quite what they were doing there. As I say, I didn't know about it at the time.

We didn't go much in that direction. When we bicycled, we bicycled either to Ringwood or sometimes we went to Southampton just after the war. We would bicycle up to the main road, put our bicycles under a gorse bush and catch the bus into Southampton. Nobody ever stole the bicycles, I'm pleased to say. You can't bicycle up that way, they've removed that road.

00-25-58

We occasionally went to Salisbury. I remember the buses had producer gas trailers on behind. But producer gas wasn't very effective. I can remember we all had to get out when we – the long hill before Salisbury – we all had to get out. I don't think we were asked to push, but they wanted the weight out to get the bus up the hill. Only the decrepit and old were allowed to stay on. I didn't come into that category at that stage. They did run buses all during the war as I remember, but with this producer gas and actually it's not very efficient in internal combustion engines.

00-26-52

Can you tell me a little bit more about the farms around Linwood?

Well certainly the one next to us, they had cows and they had pigs. I imagine the cows were certainly for milk, but I imagine they also were for beef, and the pigs were definitely for pork. They didn't grow anything to sell or use. They didn't have many fields. The cows were turned out on the Forest; the pigs weren't. I don't think they had the pig right. They had a couple of fields where the cows would be on occasion and I think, though I can't be sure, that they would let some of their fields go to hay for hay in the winter.

Do you remember how many cows they had?

At a guess I would have thought it wouldn't be more than a dozen.

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And would they sell milk locally?

They certainly did, because when we used to get milk from the local farm – I imagine they would have sold the other – in retrospect I suspect that most of the cattle were kept for beef because they wouldn't have had any good way of collecting it – there wouldn't have been a great deal of it. It wouldn't have been economic I think.

Did many people keep cows on the Forest under the commoners' rights in those days, or were they just in farms?

I think they were mostly out in the Forest and brought in every evening the way you use your commoning because people didn't have enough fields to keep them out in the field all the time. The ponies would certainly be kept on the Forest, but I can't remember. I don't think they took the ponies very seriously during the war because they had better things to do. The ponies could look after themselves I think. I don't think the farms in Linwood were very effective. I mean, farming in the Forest has never been very effective. That's why it's the Forest.

On that point, did you – other people told me there were forestry operations still going on, logging and things like that. Was there any of that going on around Linwood.

00-29-56

I think in the enclosures there was. Yes, well, again I get confused as to whether it was just at the end of the war or after the war. We must have been doing some farming things as the only thing I ought to tell you about, was we had quite a large number of Italian prisoners of war who I think were billeted with people. They were all wearing like army uniforms with large coloured triangles on the back as I remember. I suppose so we could spot them if they ran away, which they didn't seem to tend to do. I don't think they were very good workers. They were quite pleasant lads really and of course towards the end of the war they weren't enemies anymore, they were co-belligerents.

Do you remember any of them in particular?

No, we never had any, because we weren't a farm. I remember seeing them, but I didn't meet any of them.

How big was the group of them be?

Oh, only in ones or two's. They would have been sent out to help out at a farm, and as I say, the farms were all tiny in Linwood. Even the biggest ones were pathetic in size. They probably still are.

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Were they just Italians or were there any Germans?

Well, I think there were Germans but I don't remember any Germans in Linwood. I have heard of there being Germans in the Forest, but I think they were kept in camps and brought in groups to help out. I don't think we needed those sort of quantities. I imagine they were better workers but a bit more difficult to deal with.

00-31-46

Wonder if you could tell me a little bit more about Ringwood.

Well, Ringwood was definitely our shopping town and it was a very different town - it's still my shopping town – but a very different town from what it is now because where the car park is now was all open grassland and the main street was the main street. I think there were five shops selling bread, because during the war, neither bread nor potatoes were rationed, though in 1947 they both were for a short time, but not luckily at the same time. Ringwood was really quite a good shopping town in those days. They must have had Ringwood market but I can't remember going to it. It would probably still been on Saturday. I can't remember it during the war. Perhaps they didn't have it during the war. But the main street was the main street, and then there was Bickhams which was the bicycle shop and as I said before, charged up our radio batteries.

I bought a bicycle. I got too big for my little pre-war bicycle and I got a utility bicycle, which wasn't very 'utility' by modern standards because it didn't have any gears. So it was really quite hard work riding to and from Linwood. But we definitely got that from Bickhams. I remember that.

And then there were other shops all the way down to Greenfields which was just before you got to where the station was. And of course there was the railway came into Ringwood in those days. I remember I used to get the railway from Ringwood to London – I forget how I got across London when I was quite small, but I must have done – and then got the train to school.

What was the station like at Ringwood?

I don't remember it very well. It was only a tiny station. It was a double line station and the line went on as I remember rightly to Bournemouth. It was quite busy during the war which of course a lot of stuff would have come in by rail in those days, but it was certainly quite good and remarkably cheap by modern standards. It's difficult to say about what things cost 'cos the value of money has gone down. Inflation's been so huge since then, from then to now.

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And did you see any of the stuff that went through there?

Not to my knowledge. I remember – a bit out of our period but – our family business, which was a carpet factory in Southampton, and that was turned over to munitions work, and I remember going round that, and they had another branch that made barrage balloons ‘till it was bombed, then it stopped making barrage balloons. I don’t think it killed anyone but the building wasn’t worth rebuilding.

Did you go to any other places in the Forest far from Ringwood? Lymington or things like that?

00-35-44

No, not during the war, certainly.

What about Fordingbridge?

Fordingbridge occasionally. Very occasionally because it’s a lot more remote from Linwood. You have to go right round. ‘Till I had a motorbike, that was just after the war, and then you could in those days go straight over the hill. A track you could not get a car across but you could get a motorbike across. I used to do that.

00-36-14

And the other place we used to go to was Fritham because there was a blacksmith’s there. During the holidays we’d ride the ponies to Fritham to a blacksmith’s and get them shod and we would always stop at the pub, the Royal Oak, on the way back. None of us were old enough to come in a pub and that pub, which is now as you know, a very popular pub, but it was absolutely minute in those days, ‘cos it was also a croft – a Forest holding – and the bar had enough room for a keg of beer and a keg of cider and that’s about all they had. You could perhaps get three people in the bar, but they never refused to sell me a half-pint of cider or my sister and her friend, who was seven years younger than me. It was all totally illegal. In those days, children under fourteen weren’t even allowed in a bar, yet alone to be allowed to have a drink.

Did you go there very often?

We would go there on the way back from having a pony shod during the holidays, and then possibly on the way back from having the ponies unshod at the end of the holidays. Generally one shoeing certainly last the Easter holidays. We may have had to go down in the middle of the summer holidays. We probably did, because up four weeks is as much as

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they'll go without being reshod. But in those days there was no nonsense about the blacksmiths coming round to you as they do now, but you had to go to him. We used to go later on – I think we're running out of period again – for some reason that blacksmith's was closed down and we used to have to take to blacksmith's in Fordingbridge. It was next to the doctor's surgery I remember. Just before you got to the bridge.

End: 00-38-42

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