

New Forest Remembers WWII Project

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My name is Stephen Wright, I was born Frederick Stephen after my two grandfathers but known as Stephen, Stephen Wright. I was born in September 1935 and my father having taken the tenancy of a 240 acre mixed farm, Stanswood Farm on Cadland Estate in October, that was Michaelmas 1934. So, I spent my early years there and with my father, I can remember going into the fields and that sort of thing, with him as a young lad and you know, brought up on the farm. At the start of the war, of course I was only five years old and it is a little difficult to remember specific events but some I can remember. I can remember the things like the bombing of Cowes, on the Isle of Wight, I remember seeing the glow in the sky, sort of thing, I remember having to go down into the shelter in the garden which used to flood so it wasn't very comfortable and I remember times when, one particular time when it was considered, you know, there was a raid coming and we tried sleeping under the dining room table in the bed but we couldn't get between the two in Stanswood Farm in the front room on the left. We had a cellar there which was quite useful, we used to go down there but, the other thing I can remember during the war, there was all the shrapnel, which, as a lad, we used to collect this shrapnel. And I also remember collecting quite regularly, the holding frames for the incendiary bombs that the Germans used to drop. And whether they threw them out of the 'plane afterwards or something, and occasionally we did find an incendiary bomb, unexploded, but, you know, it makes you shudder when you think of the things we did at that time. But, no, I can remember my father going down to shut the ducks up on the pond in front of the house and he put a tin bath over his head to go down there which, you know, knowing the speed with which the shrapnel was falling, I wouldn't have thought that would have done much good but there you are, that's the sort of thing one did.

I've got one or two photographs of that period when I was very young. One in particular I've got is of

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me on a bicycle outside the, outside the, the farm. I'll give you a copy of that. And some of the things on the, happened on the farm. The people that worked, I've got account books, which show in great detail, the transactions on the farm from 1935 right through to 1945. And which, so to remind me, there's a list of the people working on the farm, reminds me of the names of the people and people who in fact, lived in this house where we are now, Stanswood Cottage because it used to be, these two cottages were eventually turned two into one but at that time, they were separate so the workers used to come with the tenancy on the farm and workers used to live one in each side here, so, and that, you know makes you remember those times. The, during the war, I went to school at Furzedown School in Long Copse in Holbury, the private primary school and the, I was looking at a, an invoice the other day which was for one term's tuition fees, two pounds, fifteen shillings. And so I used to go there, it was a very good school, good grounding and before, eventually going on to Hardley School when I was twelve but that was after the war, of course.

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But anyway, that, that period during the war, to a young lad like me was, you know, something of an adventure, goodness knows what it must of felt like for my parents, I don't know, with the imminent threat of invasion and that sort of thing. But it was quite an exciting time. I remember spending a lot of time on a, on a gun, an anti-air craft gun site which was in the, it was on the farm and it was about half a mile up from the farm and I can show you that on the aerial maps in a moment. And I remember there were these 'bell tents' that the crew of the gun used to sleep in and they always had, always had, seemed to always have beans, tinned beans on the go and I remember having these somewhat stewed beans on toast with them and, which was, always remember that. And used to sit on the gun, the anti-air craft gun and operate the pedals to make it go round and that sort of thing, it was great fun. The other, the other thing that I remember, you know, that sort of thing was a searchlight battery that was sited just at the back here, from where we are at the cottage here and in the area known as Stanswood Common and I'm looking at it now, the site actually where it was and we used to go up there [sneezes] and, and sit on, well go round with the circle, they had the searchlight in the middle and you could move this searchlight round and that sort of thing. Once again they were, they were living in tents but the sergeant who was in charge of them there, he came to my parents one day and said, could, he wanted his wife to come down from Newcastle and, for a few days and could she stay with us at the farm and we said 'yes' and I remember her very well and so that was, so there was a fair amount of, you know, that sort of thing going on, talking with troops in the area.

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Stephen, when you were with the gun, were you ever there when it was fired?

Er, no, no, no it, it, I don't remember that, no, I certainly don't remember that, no it was, I think I would have had to make myself scarce, I think 'cause I was very young then.

Do you remember the sound of it being fired?

Oh yes, I remember that, the sound of it, oh yes, I remember that well and the shrapnel falling, you know, the shrapnel used to fall and hit the galvanised iron roof, the roofs on the farm, farm

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buildings, and I'm trying to remember that well. And as I said just now, I remember the blitz over Cowes, I don't remember Southampton because that was a bit far away really, whereas Cowes, you see is only from Stanswood Farmhouse is just four miles across the water and you can hear it and, you know it's very shocking really. But anyway, the other things, I remember the balloons and that they used to put up. There was one here, on the, on Stanswood Common, just at the back of the cottage here and it broke lose one day and the cable dragged right across the farm buildings and got caught in a elm tree the other side and it was all rescued, you know, by the troops, but I remember that happening.

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The other thing during the war that happened, well fairly early on, was, as I said to you on the 'phone, the, they decided that obviously there was an imminent risk of invasion so one of the ways to try and foil the invasion was to erect these fir poles and these poles were dug into the fields all across the farm, any field of any size, you know, and most of the fields were twenty acres or thereabouts, so a fair, fair length so, and they would have been ideal for gliders to land so they put these poles in every, I suppose every 30 yards I suppose, that sort of thing and which made life very difficult for my father and the men on the farm for cultivations and everything 'cause they, all these poles were in the way. But anyway, it was all in the National interest to do it, anyway they stayed until the risk of invasion was over, which, I don't know exactly when they were taken out but the, it must have been, they must have gone in in '40, '41 and been taken out in '42, '43, something like that. They weren't there very long, but I remember those. And sometimes, instead of digging them out properly, they used to leave, used to leave them just by the surface which of course with disastrous consequences and I always remember after the war, we were, we were putting some tile drains in and we had a contractor doing it and in charge of this machine that the contractor was using was an ex-German prisoner of war and I went down and, one day and I could see they'd stopped and I said "What's going on then Albert?" and he said, "Well," he said, "we've hit something" and so, anyway I had a look and I could see straight away what it was, it was one of, the base of one of these poles and I said, "well, we did stop you!" [laughs] and we had a good old laugh about that.

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Anyway, talking about prisoners of war, that was another thing that I remember from the war, it must have been towards the end of the war, I suppose and perhaps after for a short period after, we had quite a few German and Italian prisoners of war working on the farm and I remember coming back from the fields one day, being carried by one of the German prisoners of war, you know, on his shoulders and, you know, they were jolly good chaps, you know the Germans, they were very good workers although I'm not sure my father and the chaps on the farm would agree about the Italians, but the Germans were very good. Anyway, the, they came each day in a lorry from the P.O.W. camp at Setley, it's on the Lymington to Brockenhurst Road, where they, where we now have these car boot sales, and that was the site and that's where I understood they came from. The other workers we had on the farm were Land Army girls and they, I've got pictures of a couple of them for you to see. And they used to help generally on the farm because we were producing a lot, a lot of crops and there was, my father, his background, right back, you know, for centuries, had been market gardening really in the Ringwood area and indeed my mother's family as well, so growing

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vegetables came somewhat naturally to him and he used to grow a lot of green vegetables, in particular, for the NAAFI, supplying the NAAFI and the account books bear that out, swedes, potatoes, a lot of potatoes, that sort of thing. So all those crops, in addition to the normal cereal crops (the wheat, and barley and oats) they, the, naturally a lot of the wheat and barley was for seed, for them to grow, for seed for other farmers to grow their crops with but anyway, the, the name of the game was to produce as much as you could, you had as many cattle as you could stock, you had as much acreage down to crops as you could, that you could manage and the, with the farmers support. The soil on Stanswood Farm was quite good, but, compared with other, sort of along the, other places on the estate which are basically quite gravelly, but the, but the, to maintain that fertility, you had to keep sheep and as many cattle as you could to produce the organic manure and pigs, I'll tell you about the pigs in a minute, but, the sheep, the aerial photograph, the Luftwaffe photograph that I've got for you, there's a, you'll see that there's a squared off area that for years I couldn't understand what this was, I suddenly realised it was where my father had folded the sheep on the swedes, swedes and turnips, you know, so that was quite interesting.

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Anyway, the, as I said, the Ministry of Food was insisting that, that production on the farm was maintained at the highest possible level and even if that meant ploughing up areas that would not normally be ploughed and permanent pasture and that sort of thing which, quite honestly it was kept as permanent pasture over the years because it wasn't really suitable for cereal production but, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Food would, you know, insist that those areas were ploughed. There was a lot of resistance amongst farmers to doing this, obviously because they could see the folly of it, you know, not understanding nearly quite as much as they should have known. And anyway, they used to have, all this was controlled by a War Agricultural Executive Committee and my father was one of the farmers that used to assist with this and he, he obviously must have conformed to requirements, 'cause otherwise he wouldn't have been asked to do it but anyway, they asked him if he would come with them and visit these farmers and obviously help pave the way, you know, with these farmers, particularly the smaller farmers that didn't really want to do this, they when they heard it from my father who was very much a rural character and well known in the area, they, they accepted it so that's what used to happen [coughs]. My father and many other farmers used to do, used to do that sort of thing in addition to running the farm which was a big job anyway but farming is very much a, you know, 24 hour a day job, you know, you're calving cows at night, you know, looking after sheep that are lambing and that sort of thing and, and getting up early for milking, milking was all by hand at that time, until the latter part of the war when, yes, actually I don't think we had a milking machine until after the war, but we had a herdsman called Bill Hall and he, he lived in one of these cottages and it was, I've got a picture of him, and the milk was collected by a Mr Morgan Soffe, who used to deliver the milk in the area and one of his customers was the site at Stone Point where they built the Mulberry harbours. We, he had special permit to go down there and that sort of thing, but we weren't allowed to go there, I always remember being prevented going there, 'cause, we'd been used to going down to the beach and swimming, you know, from very early years and I remember being very upset because I was prevented from doing so but it was obviously because the, the period, 1943 running up to D-Day when they started building the Mulberry harbours.

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VAT Reg No. 871 9343 00

CHAIRMAN OLIVER CROSTHWAITE-EYRE CHIEF EXECUTIVE ALISON BARNES

The, there's quite a lot that the County have done to show the Mulberry harbour site. I gave them a copy of one of these aerial photos that was done in 1946 which I've referred to which I've got copies for you and it shows the site, it shows the jetty and it's quite interesting that there are very, very few photographs of the landing craft being loaded there and there were a large number of troops went from there obviously, none of which I saw anything of but what I did see, after D-Day, immediately after we were able to go down there and of course the site was deserted but all the infrastructure was there and the buildings were just left and the platform that the Mulberry harbours were built on, that was still there and I remember the, they had these tracks along the surface of this big platform which was about, it must have been 200 yards long and they, they built them and they rolled them along as they were, like a production line and they were, now bear in mind that these caissons were several hundred tonnes each, and made of concrete, reinforced concrete, and they were really just big concrete boxes and so these were rolled along and to make them roll along, they had ball bearings in a track and these ball bearings made very good shot putting, you know, I remember it was after the war when we were having our own, on the farm, us lads were having our own Olympic games in 1947, that was, and we (or was it '48, can't remember) anyway, I remember us using these as, as, very good for Shot Putting. But there must be some of those, they were like a cannon ball, they were about three or four inches diameter, very heavy, cast iron and they were littered about all over the site, there must be still some there now. Anyway, there was a jetty there, now this jetty, I'll show you on, on the photograph later, and there are no, there's no record of this jetty in the County Council about Stone Point so I took this aerial photograph down to them, taken in 1946, showing the jetty and I've got a copy of that for you and now, what happened in 1944, in early 1944, it must have been about January, they were launching, launching these Phoenix caissons as they reached the end of the production line, you know, and they would slide them down a sort of slipway which they covered in grease and anyway, they were hauling them along with great big winches and when they got to the end they released them and they slid down into the water at high tide. Well, one of these, apparently, I wasn't there, wasn't allowed to be there, I was told immediately afterwards, that one of these got free and got out of control and it went right through one of the linkspans of the jetty, the first linkspan well, of course, this was at a very critical time, running up to D-Day and early '44 and so they replaced it all with scaffolding. Now, I'll show you later, there's a photograph, one photograph of a, perhaps I should say first of all, next to the jetty, there were two dolphins which they called dolphins, which were sections of pier which were always there to one side, there were about, oh I suppose thirty, thirty yards west of where the jetty was. They were exactly the same as the sections of the jetty which was four of these long with linkspans going between them, the two which were at the side didn't have links but there's a picture which the County Council do use, which I've got a copy of that for you to see, which shows this big landing craft, it was one of the very big ones with big front doors open and it's sitting there between the two dolphins and the jetty and loading vehicles onto it. Now, you can see the scaffolding and that was the scaffolding I'm talking about. And that, because, you know they had to get on and put the scaffolding up to enable the troops to go onto the jetty to go onto these big landing craft to go off to D-Day, you see. So it was critical they got it all working.

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Anyway, this shows, this shows what I'm saying is right, this picture, anyway, after D-Day, when everything disappeared, the Solent instead of being covered in landing craft and ships, was almost

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completely empty and we were able to go down there by then and we used to spend hours and hours down there fishing from this jetty and to get out onto this jetty we had to go over this scaffolding linkspan and, of course, I'm talking about a period, until they demolished the jetty, they and I think they demolished it in, it must have been late '47, early '48 when they demolished it. Anyway, by then of course, it was beginning to deteriorate a bit and it wasn't very safe but of course, us kids didn't worry about things like that. We used to get on there and make it swing from side to side as much as we could 'cause that was much more exciting. And it to get out to go fishing, we used to catch a lot of Bream and Whiting and Bass off the end of this jetty, had a lovely time. But it was, we were down there surrounded by all this detritus, you know, really from, from when they were building these, you know, building the Mulberry harbours, the Phoenix caissons, as they called them.

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Anyway, the, so that was that, anyway, I've got photographs, aerial photographs of that jetty which I've tried to talk to historians about it but they, either didn't believe me or didn't follow it up but anyway, I can now prove it but, anyway, so, but also, I think it's important to remember that at least two of those lads that were with me, you know when we used to go down there, are still living in the area and they can be talked to and they can back up everything I say. I talked to them about it and they say, "yea, no, you're dead right" and so, anyway, you'd be able to talk to them if you wanted to.

Stephen, just taking a step back, you must remember the build up to D-Day and the troops being around the area...you talked a little bit about that...

Oh yes, well that's right, I ought to come back to that. (drinks tea) Yes, the troops were billeted on the Estate here, there was the favourite place for them to be billeted was amongst the trees, obviously for security reasons. The whole area running up to D-Day, there was a complete clamp down, I had to have a pass to go to school, you know, if my father wanted to go to market, you know, which he, he could get petrol to go to market and in Ringwood or Salisbury, we had to go through check points and show passes and that sort of thing, and he also needed petrol to collect the swill from Calshot Camp for the pigs, which I'll tell you about in a minute, anyway, the, these troops were billeted just up the road here, you came in from Langley way didn't you? If you go out this way, as you go up the hill, there are trees on the right, well those, those were mature trees in the forties and were then harvested after the war and re-planted, and the ones you can see now are the new ones, the ones that were planted after the war. Anyway, amongst those trees, there are quite a few sort of trenches and that sort of thing which have been recorded by the National Park people and you know, there's evidence for where they were. This road was very much used for tank transporters and that sort of thing, you will have come round an 's' bend just the other side of Stanswood Farm, and that it was always amazing to us that that wasn't straightened out [laughs] by them but in fact it wasn't but you can imagine what it was like. When you go away from here you'll see it, a very narrow road, Stanswood Road, it's amazing really.

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Anyway, we got quite used to all these troops around. One of the, one of the men who was billeted in the woods here, he got quite friendly with the daughter of the tenant who had Little Stanswood

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Farm which is just down from here, and he actually married her after the war, so he was in the Eighth Army in Africa before coming here, before D-Day, so, no, one was very conscious of that sort of thing. Now, also in the services, we were going to, my father was going down to Calshot to collect the pig swill from the canteens down there, he used to have the swill from the airmen's mess and the sergeants' mess but the, the swill from the officers' mess, that was collected by the tenant of Ower Farm, a chap called Ron Creed and we always used to say his was the posh swill, you know, it was a better quality in the officers' mess, anyway, he, so, so, we used to go down each day, now, my father had a trailer that was like a horse box, without the high bit, you know, it was, it was up to sort of waist height the, the sides of this and inside there, there would be all the swill bins, you see, they were like dust bins and so I used to go with him and he would tow this trailer with the, with the family car which was a Rover 14, it was, I remember the number it was OW2344 and anyway, we used to go down and you had to go through a check point at the top of the hill at Calshot, above B's Garage, and used to drive into the, into the mess, the Airmen's mess at the top there the sergeants' mess and we also used to go down to Calshot Spit 'cause they had canteen down there for the Airmen, we used to go to and fro down to Calshot Spit and I've got the aerial photographs of Calshot Spit as well, and it would, they used to go to and fro on a train, a steam train, always remember that, you used to cross the road, you used to have to wait for the steam train to go by with all these airmen in, you know, these sort of open wooden carriages, you know, if you could call them carriages, and used to go off down there and it, the sort of engine shed at the station was sort of up at the top, the top camp as they called it, where they lived and anyway, we used to go down there to collect swill and also on the way down there, and this was also running up to D-Day, the American troops arrived and there was obviously nowhere to put them, you know, the whole area was covered in troops everywhere and there was nowhere to put these poor American chaps and at that time, of course, the area on the left of the Spit as you go down was at a much lower level, I mean it wasn't built up like that, like it is now, and they now call it Tom Tiddler's ground. And that area was filled with shingle and mud from Southampton Water when they expanded the port in the sixties and they built that up prior to, prior to building the power station. Anyway, when the Americans came, must have been early '44 I suppose, they put these chaps under canvas, on duck boards, on what was really a salt marsh and, you know, it would flood at very high tide and, anyway, we used to collect swill from them and that was really posh swill, you know, that was really good swill and the, and I always remember they had big tins of pears that, which were a luxury that all of us, you know had never, hadn't seen really. But anyway, that, that, so we used to collect the swill and in the account books, there's the bill for the swill which my father had to pay and he used to supply the sergeants' mess with potatoes as well so it was, one was very much working with the, with the troops and services in the area.

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I remember B's Garage, that was at Calshot, we used to use that, we used to take the car down there and they used to, you know, do anything mechanical. It was owned by a chap called Bergeson who was Norwegian extraction an old boy, he seemed a very old man to me, probably wasn't but anyway, he, that's how it became, how it was called B's Garage which is quite interesting. The other people at Calshot, there was the South family which is well documented, you know, he used to run a carrier business into Southampton and back, prior to that a bus service, before the Hampshire and Dorset Bus Company took over and, I always remember them. There was the post office at the top of the hill at Calshot, which was our nearest Post Office at that time.

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But, but the whole of the camp was very, you know, very security conscious, you know, you had to go through the gates, barbed wire Gates and things and they had Sunderland Flying Boats there which were Coastal Command and I always remember, that my ~~poor~~ over riding sound memory was these, these Sunderland Flying Boats going over the, over here, all through the night and the day and that they would land on the Solent and they would be going out on the, out into the Atlantic on Submarine patrol and they also had Air Sea Rescue craft down there that they used to maintain, they used to go out from here out into the Channel rescuing pilots and that sort of thing and once again, the photograph shows those as well as the Sunderland Flying boats. And so, so that's all of those sort of things.

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Now, I said to you on the 'phone about the PLUTO pipeline, now I've got a County Council piece here which will bring you up to date, you personally up to date on the 'photo by my, PLUTO stood for Pipeline Under The Ocean and it, it went from, I think it went originally from Hamble on the other side of the Southampton water, under Southampton water, through the old AGWI refinery, Atlantic, Gulf and West Indies Refinery and then across the Estate to a, there was an underground tankage which you can see on the photograph the 46 photograph at Badminton and then it would cross Stanswood Farm, I remember that being laid and on one of the photographs I can show you, the, you can, in '46 you could still see the route of the pipeline, they were very short sections and the reason that short section you can see at that time, in '46, was because, still see it then, 'cause this was laid in late '43 early '44 and I've got one of the, a copy of one of the letters where the Estate gave permission for that to be laid and it, and the reason that you can still see it, is because that piece of ground was a very wet, marshy piece of ground and couldn't be ploughed. Now I remember when they laid it, I remember one day an army officer (my father said he was a Major) came in and said, "Mr Wright, I'm afraid we can still see this pipeline route from the air". And, of course my father knew obviously that it was very important but didn't know that it was gonna go all the way to France. Anyway, he, he said, "well," he said, "what can you do about it?" well father said, "well I can't, you know, I've got to crop it really, plough it and crop it and even then you'll still be able to see it in the crop, a big trench like that." And it, "oh" he said "good gracious" and by then, of course, it was, we were talking about the Spring of '44 so by then of course, looking back on it, we'd gained air supremacy and there was very unlikely to be any German aircraft coming over, photographing or looking at it...so, I think they obviously had to grin and bear it, you know, the fact that it could be seen. Anyway, it went all the way across Stanswood Farm, and then across Stone Farm, I, on the Stanswood Farm bit as far as, you remember when you came it, you came off the Lepe road, you went along a straight bit and then down a slope. On that corner there, it went under that road, just on that where there's a road off to the left with a gate, and it went under there and then went down through those fields right down to Stone Point. And the, and then it went across, under the, under the Solent and I'm not sure whether that bit went into lead pipe, I think it must have done because I think all the under sea bit was in a, it was either lead or a combination of lead and steel that allowed it to be flexible and they put it on great big drums and reeled it out and laid it, laid it on the bed. But across the farm, here, it was either a, yes, it was an eight inch pipe, steel pipe, welded, and I remember that going in, I remember that, them putting that in 'cause I was fascinated by these chaps welding and everything.

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And, anyway, that went on across the land in this steel pipe, then it went into this flexible pipe under the Solent, across to Egypt Point on the Isle of Wight, it went over the Island to, I think it was Ventnor, then from there went into the flexible pipe again, all the way to Cherbourg. So that provided, and there's quite a lot of documentation about that, but the, that, I remember the bit on the farm. I also remember when it was all dug up after the war, 'cause they came back and dug it up, for steel, scrap steel, and I remember one piece fell off the lorry, you know, as it was, as it was leaving the farm and my father used it as a drain pipe and I think it's still there now but, where, one particular spot, I've never heard that anyone's dug it up or anything. Anyway, so it, so that was that, oh now, going on, going on, that reminds me that going down to, when it got to the beach, at Stone Point or Lepe, really, yes, this side of Lepe, really Stone Point where it entered the water, it, there were guns there, shore battery guns in the cliff, it's a sort of cliff that's about oh, fifteen, twenty foot high and they, these guns were in the, in the face of this cliff and I remember them being there until well after the war and I didn't see them during the war, obviously but I remember them after and, but I do remember a camp down there and that camp was in fact to protect those guns and obviously to protect the, the Mulberry Harbour site, construction site. The actual construction camp for the, for the workers, and at one stage there were something like two thousand men working down there, you know, on these Mulberry Harbours. They were said to be Irish Nationals, a lot of them who'd come over for the work and they were living in, in a construction camp just up the Lepe road. Now, I've got the photograph here, which shows it. Now, there's a book been recently published, as I said to you on the 'phone I don't want to go into any detail Or anything but it states in there that the construction camp was on the field on the cliff but it definitely was not, the construction camp was up the road. I've got a letter which refers to, a letter from the Estate to the contractors complaining, no I think it was the other way around, I think it was the contractors from the bus company complaining that the trees were quite low and the buses taking the men to and fro were hitting the trees and so that proves what I'm saying, that they were bussed down there. Anyway, they were living in that camp and those huts were there until well after the war and I remember them very well. They, actually, I remember they, a film company came, this is well after the war, must have been the late forties, early fifties and they used these huts for filming, they pretended it was a P.O.W. camp, you know, in Germany. Anyway, so that was that aspect of it.

0:48:43

There was an overhead power line which, we didn't realise the significance of at the time, put in but think it must have been to supply the, the construction site and that went all across this farm here and that stayed until well into the fifties, you know. And the other day, just to tell you one more thing, the farm manager got in touch with me, he said, "we've been in the New Close field," he said, "we've hit something, hit a block of concrete with steel in it, you know, you don't know anything about it do you?" and I said, "well, where is it?" and he described it and I said "well, that was one of those, one of those poles." Anyway, I looked up on one of these maps and I could, you can just see the poles in exactly where it happened, so. These things always come home to roost. But, no, so that's the sort of thing I think I can, that immediately come to mind. When I'm looking at the photographs with you, other things will probably come to mind.

0:48:04

I think you mentioned about storing food [oh, yes]

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

Email archaeology@newforestnpa.gov.uk

www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/wwii

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Yes, forgot all about that! At Stanswood Farm, there was a cellar and the steps to this cellar, used to they don't now, but they've been partly changed, but at the time, during the war, the steps were quite long and reasonable wide, stone steps down into the cellar and turned, you know and went into the cellar. The cellar was always a bit of a problem, it was always, always getting wet in winter, and that sort of thing, not very good, anyway the steps were very dry and fine and, anyway, the Ministry of Food used to bring, used to maintain a store of sugar and margarine on those steps and there was about half a tonne of each, which was an enormous quantity, you know, stacked up right in these boxes right up to the ceiling, and we could just squeeze by them to get down to the cellar. Anyway, the, my, they used to change this every six months and we used to think it used to go off to feed the troops or something, you know, then they'd bring some, an amount back. This went on from fairly early in the war and, when invasion was considered to be imminent, my mother was charged with, you know, with distributing this if there'd been an invasion, to the local populace. She had a trestle table and all the instructions of how to do it and, anyway so that was quite interesting and something that very few people knew about obviously, because you weren't supposed to talk about things like that. So that was something, something about that period.

Did they come and take it away at the end of the war?

Oh yes, yes, yes it was well before the end of the war because if you recall the threat of invasion receded very rapidly in '42, you know, early '42, '43 and so it, it changed a lot from that point of view. So that didn't go on but it was obviously, I think you'd have been taken out and been shot if you'd been tempted to use any of it. But that's what life was like then. So those are the sort of things, there was something else that occurred to me, oh, yes, going back to, talking of cellars, Ron Creed, he was a tenant of Ower Farm, while I've remembered something else so say 'land army girls' to me in a bit. But anyway, Ron Creed, quite an amusing fellow, and he used to, he had a big cellar in Ower farmhouse which is still there now, obviously, it was quite a dry one too and anyway, he used to have a churn, a milk churn, it wasn't a ten gallon churn, maybe a six gallon one, which he used to leave with the lid off at the bottom of these steps and he used to throw a half crown from the top of these steps, open the door, throw this half crown, every day, into this churn and it was his way of saving, you know, and he took great delight in rolling this churn to the bank when it was full and said "Count that!" and anyway, next time he wanted to do it, they said, "Here's the bags, you do it!" [laughs]. It was quite amusing though. I used to spend quite a lot of time up there with his family who, he took over from his uncle, Mr Squibb, and used to spend quite a lot of time with Ron Creed's sister and in the farmhouse there, when I was little, I've got a photograph which I was hoping to find but I couldn't find it of me in the garden, looking out where the power station is now, and of course it was just marshes, but then I was only about two at that time but anyway, that, that, I used to spend quite a lot of time there. Anyway, he had a Land Army girl working on the farm and she used to live there, she used to help milk the cows and anyway, in the end, Norma, she married my cousin who at the latter end of the war was working on the farm here with my father and anyway, fifty odd years later, we have, we still do have a metal detectors club on the Estate and the chap who runs this club, he came to me one day and said, "What do you think of this then?" and he produced this Land Army badge and sure enough the clasp on the back of the badge had broken and it was a cap badge that they used to have on those thick hats that they used to wear and I said, "I know who used to wear that." And anyway, I got in touch with her and I said, "Did you lose your badge?" She confirmed that she had in exactly the field it was found.

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{interview ended}

Keywords:

Herdsmen Bill Hall
milk collected Mr Soffe
Stone Point
Mulberry harbours
PLUTO
Pipeline Under The Ocean
Workers camp
POW
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