

WARTIME MEMORIES

I was born on the 21st December 1928. So when war broke out in 1939 I was 11 years old. I remember when it was announced on the radio. No television in those days!! I was in the sitting room and father called out to my mother in the kitchen and used her christian name, something I had never heard him do before. It was always mother!! I knew how important this moment was.

The first few months were pretty quite. When I was 12 I used to go regularly for a hair cut to Hadley's the barbers in Kenilworth. One morning I was waiting my turn while the assistant, a tall chap with hair growing straight up, was using the hand powered clippers on the back of a customer's head. Suddenly for the very first time the air raid warning siren went off! The clippers went right up the back of the chap's head and the assistant started shouting "don't panic, don't panic" just like years later in Dad's Army on the television. We kids didn't panic, it was all exciting because we didn't know what would happen next. The siren was just a test as far as we could make out.

It was about this time the first bomb was dropped. I do not remember whether it was jettisoned from one of our 'planes or if it was German. But it fell in some woods at the back of the village of Ashow. We went on our bikes and found the crater but didn't find any shrapnel. It was quiet for a long period after that until the bombing raids on Coventry and Birmingham started to build up. When we looked out at night we could tell by the glow in the sky which city was getting it that night.

During this time my holiday was visiting my maternal grandmother who lived in Tolworth near Kingston on Thames. Mother would put me on the train at Leamington Spa to Paddington. I must point out I had made this journey with my mother on several occasions and I knew the way. I would go by tube to Waterloo and get the train to Surbiton and then a bus and walk to Sandhurst Avenue where Grandma lived, all on my own at the age of 13! One evening at Grandma's there was a lot of noise outside. I went out to see the most amazing sight, the whole sky was full of bomber aircraft all going the same way. I mean full of aircraft, hundreds all going to the continent. Later on I found out it was one of the thousand bomber raids on Germany.

In Kenilworth I had a pal just down the road from me and we both had bicycles which were our only means of travel. One day after a big raid on Coventry we cycled to the city and I remember being in the cathedral only a day or so after it was bombed. It was still smouldering but the cross that still stands today had already been made and erected. Coventry suffered badly, there were notices up saying 'Unexploded Bomb' all over the place and the destruction was huge. Of course, many people lost their lives.

It was about this time that Kenilworth got hit. One evening we heard a German