

AINSWORTH in Wartime

Wartime memories of Audrey Jennings

Two air-raid shelters were where the Vicarage now stands – which were the school air-raid shelters. We lived at 69 Bury Old Road, and when the siren went (from on the top of the church tower) in the night, we would go there.

For us children, it was entertainment, as everyone from roundabout was there, and various comforts were created. Mr and Mrs Entwistle and family, who lived at the second smallholding after Arthur Lane, all came along. I can remember her bringing a big potato pie one night. In fact, I think us kids looked forward to the outings. Mind, if the bombing had been nearer, I think we would all have been very frightened.

I can remember having my gas mask fitted by Mr Mason – he lived down Bradley Fold Road (a big Unitarian family). He was the Air Raid Warden in his navy blue outfit. The Library was his venue.

I can remember going to church when the services were on the hour – not sure whether that would be Dunkirk or D-Day. I remember being in a pantomime at church. Although a Methodist, I was in the Girl Guides and have happy memories of Muriel and Stella Metcalfe. We did this panto for the soldiers at Lowercroft camp.

My Dad worked in the wages office at Dobson and Barlow but he was in the LDV and fire-watched another night at Red Bridge. The LDV was every Sunday night and he had to sleep in the stables, which were at the back of the Black Bull at Starling. They had to practise in the trenches they made in the field opposite to Delph Lane, and we used to spy on them. He was doing one of these night watches when it was the Manchester blitz, and I can remember my Mum holding me up at the bedroom window and showing me where Manchester was ablaze. There weren't the buildings then that there are today.

As children living in wartime Ainsworth, I don't think we realised what war was about. We roamed where we wanted, as everyone knew each other, from Red Bridge to the end of Church Street. I can remember the Pison family, who must have lived on Bury Road near the Coach and Horses. They came to Ainsworth school, as did the other Bury Road children. They had come from the Channel Islands, as had the Noel family, who lived in the flat-roof houses on Church Street.

My Mum was also a fire-raid warden – her partner was Kathleen Reynolds who must only have been a teenager. She was Andrew Street's auntie and later married a Canadian and went to live in Canada. When it was their duty night, if the siren sounded, they had to walk as far as the ARP post and meet up with two people from the estate side of the village. I can never remember being left on my own in the night, so the duties of my Mum and Dad must not have clashed.

At VE day, we had a huge bonfire on the recreation ground.

The Royal Army PAY Corps were stationed at Black Lane mill, and I well remember they had a concert party which was called the Pen Knibs and, every now and again, they would come and entertain us at the Methodist school. We had good amateur dramatic societies at the Unitarians and at the Methodists, who gave us many Saturday nights' entertainment. I can Remember "None so Blind", "The Joan Danvers" and "Hobson's Choice". Us youngsters had front-row seats. "Dorrie Horne's Dunky Dots" – a super children's dancing acrobat troupe – used to give us Saturday night's entertainment. All these were well-supported.

I can remember, after one of these Saturday nights, my Mum and I were taking my friend, Hilda Fish, home to Hey Cottages where she lived, in the blackout and it was a foggy night, and we were wandering round a field in the pitch-dark until a crack came from an open door at their house and we able to find our way. My Mum confessed after (much later) that she was worried we might have fallen in the Delph, which was then full of water. Later, they went to live at No 1 Arthur Lane (now Lord's Nursery), where they kept hens. Her Mum used to send two or three new-laid eggs now and again, slightly cracked, which were a super treat for us, as eggs were rationed. I can remember taking a bag of tea in exchange for a bag of sugar to Mrs Green's house at 72 Church Street. My Mum made marvellous concoctions wth dried milk and egg powder, as did many other mums. I can remember going for pies to Greenhalgh's shop for Nelliie Clegg and her husband, ready for when she came home from the ROF factory, which was next to Dobson and Barlow's. My Dad had to walk down Ainsworth Hall to his work but possibly there might have been some sort of transport after the flat-roof houses were built. Nellie lived at about 59 Bury Old Road.