

At the June 2015 meeting, Hilda recalled her life as a young girl in the war – remembering that the day war was declared - she was ill and was at home with her mother whilst her father attended church. The message was relayed on the radio and almost at once there was a knock at the door and there stood men from the Bolton Evening news asking for her father (who was a photographer for the BEN) as they were going to produce a special edition of the paper. So Hilda had to go and get her father out of church. In September, she was due to go to Stand Grammar, but this had to be postponed as the air raid shelters had not yet been built at the school (they were built on the playing fields) and during the Manchester blitz bombs fell on the playing fields.

Air Raid shelters were built in the back streets for each road and these has wooden benches to sit on. The shelters were patrolled by volunteers Air Raid Wardens, who also made sure there were no visible lights anywhere. The library served as the Air Raid Wardens' station. Originally the siren was on the top of the church, although later it was moved and put on a tall pole at the back of the library. As Hilda lived close by on Bradley Fold Road it was very loud when sounded. Sometimes though, they didn't go to the shelters but slept in a make-shift bed under the stairs. She remembers early on in the war, going to the New Room in school to make the boxes that held the gas masks, as these came flat pack. Every week there were practices at school in using the gas mask and a piece of paper was put under the bottom of the rubber tube – if it stayed there when you breathed in you knew you were doing it right! She also thinks that some bombs fell in the fields near Barrack Fold Farm. Despite all this, she never remembers being afraid during the war.

Bankfield was a private school during the war, with a number of children, whose fathers were serving abroad, being boarded there. Hilda remembers going at Christmas with the Air Raid Wardens and others to sing carols to the children, who sat around in their dressing gowns and pyjamas. She also took part in pantos and in 1945 the society took their show to the army camp at Lowercroft to entertain the troops there. The chorus' costumes were made from blackout curtains, with cotton wool sewn on.



She also mentioned that the pay corps was situated in an unused mill on Black Lane in Radcliffe and that soldiers were billeted with anyone who had a spare bedroom (and if you had a spare bedroom you didn't get a choice about it) and there were quite a lot of the soldiers in Ainsworth. This led to a number of romances - and a society member mentioned that her sister married a soldier who was billeted in Victoria Terrace. Hilda also talked about the black out – how the windows were covered in sticky-tape or net to prevent windows causing injury if broken in a bomb blast; that there were no street lights at night and that buses finished running in the early evening.

She told us of food rationing – where small amounts of food were available on production of your ration book, which had to be registered at a shop. Food stuff, such as sugar, tea, cheese, eggs and meat were strictly rationed and coupons were issued for various items such as sweets and clothing. Coal was also rationed. Imports of many goods ceased as the ships were commandeered for National purposes. Villagers were encouraged to grow their own vegetables and there were allotments at the top of Starling Road. Private cars had to be laid up as petrol; was only available for essential services.

Hilda remembers an army search light unit on Ainsworth Hall Road, just past the hall and whilst she has spoken to others who don't remember it, its existence was confirmed by her cousin.

Hilda's husband Fred was sent to Bletchley Park and in 2009 received the special medal from the Government Code and Cypher School for his service at Bletchley Park.