

BLAGDON LIFE AND TIMES

A **VE DAY** SPECIAL NEWSLETTER FROM THE BLAGDON LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY



THE NEW BEGINNING AFTER WORLD WAR II

Looking back at the press cuttings of events in Blagdon in the immediate aftermath of the war, there was very little celebration of VE Day in Blagdon, possibly partly out of respect for Sir Peter Wills who died 'on active service' with the Coldstream Guards in Italy right at the end of the war - an extremely well respected 'Lord of the Manor' who was a very active supporter of charity work and all of the wartime fund raising campaigns within the village. His memorial service was held on 30th April.

Also, the whole process of getting 'our boys back from Blighty' had only just started, and then there was the lengthy process of 'demobbing'. To many folk, the lads (and lasses) had to be back safe and sound before there was any real cause for celebrations. The newsreel footage we see of the tsunami of revelers in rampant, wild celebrations in the cities would have caused relatively minor ripples within the lives of the locals. No media, no TV, only the radio would have conveyed the effect VE day was having on city people. Besides, there was still the terrible remnants of the war going against Germany's ally Japan.

At the Parish Council AGM in April 1945: *Mr Hope (local resident) inquired if any arrangements had been made to celebrate the coming Victory. The Chairman said no, but there would be services at the Churches which was the best way to celebrate this event.*

CONTENTS

THE NEW BEGINNING AFTER WWII.....pg1

BLAGDON HORSE & PONY SHOW.....pg3

THE FIRST WELCOME HOME EVENT.....pg4

£1000 GATE & MUSICAL CHAIRS FOR DOGS.....pg5

FOR THOSE MEN RETURNING FROM WAR WHO MAY HAVE HAD DIVINE REVELATION.....pg6

THE ORDINATION FUND FOR EX-SERVICEMEN EXHIBITION - "O'ER HILL AND DALE"pg7

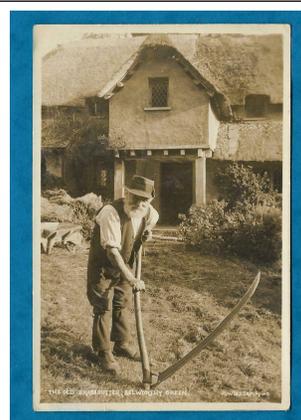
Cuttings from THE WARTIME PARISH MAGAZINE 1939-40.....pg8

DIGGING DEEP INTO POCKETS
By Sheila Johnson.....pg12

WARTIME MEMORIES OF GEORGE TRICKS.....pg14

MEMORIES OF JOAN LYONS- family memories.....pg14

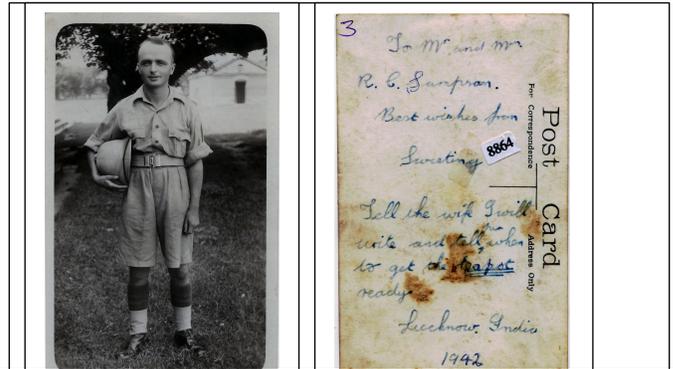
Compiled by Sheila Johnson and other members of the Blagdon Local History Society. Edited by Peter May. With source material from the Western Daily Press, the Wells Journal, Addicott Archive, The John Gallup Collection and the BLHS Archive.



After the war some country folk would have been quite happy to carry on as before.

But as the celebrations of VE Day become a memory, we get a sense of folk looking forward to a new beginning. Even though the vestiges of an old pre-war world emerge in the cuttings, with the return of the men that had fought for the freedom of this country, this would slowly slip away.

The conservative proposals for fundraising for a somewhat low-key celebration would unlock a rural version of the radical mood in the cities, a desire to let go of the past and look forward to a new peaceful future and enjoy it.

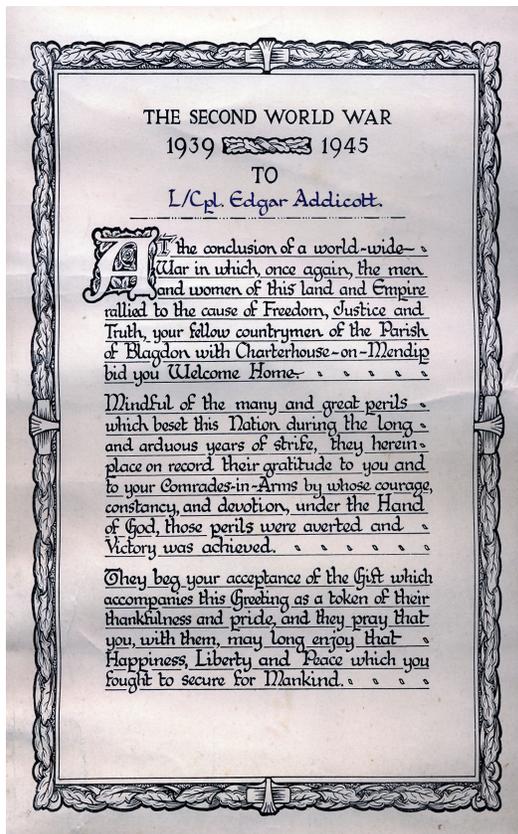


Sweeting's card from Lucknow tells Mr and Mrs Sampson to tell his wife that he will write to tell her when to get the teapot ready

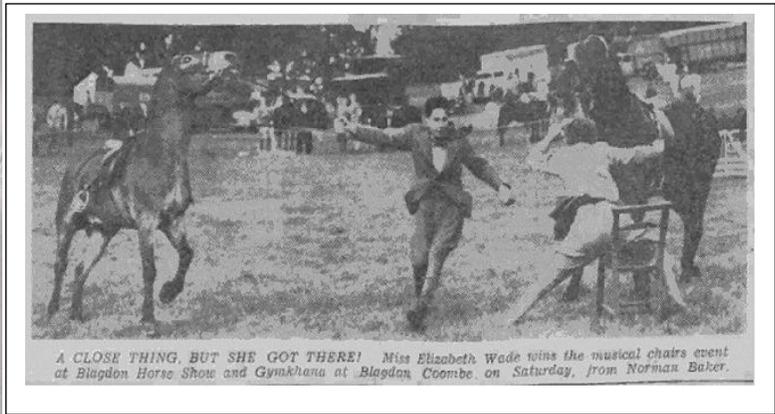
At a Parish Council meeting held in October 1944 the Chairman Mr E F H Godwin proposed that something should be done to prepare for the homecoming of those from the Village, now serving in His Majesty's forces. A meeting was scheduled for the following month to discuss the matter. Nothing more was reported in the minutes until October 1945 when plans for VJ Day were discussed and it was recorded:

The balance in the Welcome Home Fund stood at £510-10-9. It had been suggested to make a present to the home coming soldiers, sailors and airmen also to every ATS, Wren and WAAF a gift of Saving Certificates to the value of £10. The Scheme would include every person who lived in the Parish in September 1939 or anyone who had been called up, or was in the Services, and had been living in the Parish prior to joining H.M Forces before that date.

It was agreed that a printed letter of appreciation would be given to all the homecoming Forces, and the next of kin of those fallen would also receive £10 and a letter.



This was the Greeting that accompanied the gift to all service personnel returning from home to Blagdon at the end of the war and presented with the £10 token.



In order to boost the Welcome Home Fund for the returning service men a Horse Show was arranged. One of the most popular events as far as the press was concerned was 'Musical chairs with horses'. Perhaps not quite as bizarre but just as entertaining was 'Musical chairs with dogs'!

Fields on both side of the Coombe were used and it was necessary to stop the traffic to allow the stock to cross the road to parade in the ring. The show attracted thousands of visitors and took

months of planning. It was closely followed by another big village event - The Flower show which was held in the Mead.



The first Welcome Home Social event organised by the *Welcome Home Committee* took place in March 1946 in the Parish Room [School Hall]. The social was held in honour of the first 39 men and women returned from the Forces. On behalf of the people of Blagdon the president, Lady Wills, handed to each of the 39 a scroll and savings certificates. The printed scroll presented to Edgar Addicott is shown above.

Harry Headford, headmaster of Blagdon School, was treasurer for the *Welcome Home Fund*. The accounts for December 1946 show the Whist Drives, Concerts and Dances held from January 1945 to March 1946 raised just under £188. Personal donations totaled £375. The Home Guard, Village Club, Horticultural Association, British Legion and Bristol Waterworks also contributed. The 'Gymkhana committee' raised over £137 bringing the grand total to just over £1125 - a great effort by everyone involved.



FIRST RE-UNION SUPPER FOR BLAGDON EX-SERVICEMEN was held at Blagdon Parish Hall last night. The supper was organised by Mrs. E. R. Skillman from funds raised in the village by her band of helpers, who are seen standing behind the table on the left.

First Re-Union Supper for Blagdon Ex-Servicemen in Blagdon Parish Hall. Organised by Mrs Skillman and funded by her helpers, all standing on the left. This was in December 1945. The 'Welcome Home Event' would come in March 1946. (cutting courtesy of Les Barnes)

£1,000 'Gate' Saw Quality

AS ORGANISERS of the fourth annual Blagdon Agricultural and Horse Show counted receipts—which included nearly £1,000 gate money—last night, the twisted streets of the village jammed with a mile of traffic from the show ground.

Holiday-makers had attended in thousands from Bristol and other centres. Extra buses brought whole families to The Park, Blagdon Coombe, where cars were more than three deep around the jumping ring, and horse-boxes dotted the slopes that made the ground a natural amphitheatre.

Relief buses rolled into the village to clear the crowds leaving from 7.30 onwards. Departures steadily swelled to a flood of cars, motor-cycles and pedestrians. Horse-boxes blocked their path, and drivers and conductors left their loaded vehicles to take control of the stream of traffic.

At the ground, the village policeman, P.C. "Bill" Small, controlled traffic from two parks flanking the ground on either side of the road that effectively cut the venue in half. He had been "reinforced" by another constable and a sergeant.

On the showground itself, officials cleared up after a record-breaking day.

Entries to all sections had "topped anything in the past," and generally speaking, this year's judges found

I you ever doubted the popularity of this event then this cutting of the 1950 event would leave you in no doubts.

Musical Chairs for Dogs

(By Man o' Mendip)

THE music-hall proprietor is a realist who knows that there are many kinds of laughter. My old friend Bert Gallop is no music-hall proprietor, but he has what it takes to make a successful showman. In such weather as we had on Saturday how often have I been one of a damp group standing round the local squire in the committee tent while the rain poured on the roof of the marquee and a lugubrious farmer asked the unfortunate secretary some unanswerable question, such as "Be tha band kummin' or be 'um at tha pub?"

Bert's shows don't run like that, and on Saturday he had a weather-proof attraction in a big marquee at Blagdon Horse Show that gave me the best laugh I have had this year, and that was the dog show. If you haven't seen "musical chairs for dogs," and I had not, then you ain't seen nothing yet.

I should think that we that every kind of dog there is. The dachshund has no legs to speak of. His underslung carriage practically slides along the ground, but despite his "Weeping Villiam," rather pathetic face he is one of the pluckiest dogs alive, and was bred that shape to go down holes after badgers. Sheer pluck and nothing but it carried Miss L. Verbyst's dachshund from West Town into second place in the musical chairs. The music played "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?" and round he went, strictly business. He well deserved the applause he got, though he was beaten by an extremely well-trained cocker spaniel belonging to Terry Lyons which was naturally quicker coming into the straight when it was no longer a question of going round in circles but only one chair left in the middle of the ring.

Extract from the Western Daily Press describing musical chairs for dogs at the 1946 Horse Show. If you think that's strange, check out the picture of musical chairs for horses on pg 2.

For those men returning from war and who may have had some Divine revelation

whilst on campaign, there was a fund set up to sponsor any ex-serviceman to go into the Church Ministry. Blagdon became quite the star fund-raising-village for this endeavour, *The Ordination Fund for Ex-Servicemen* organized by the Bishop of Bath and Wells and our local Reverend E. Marriott.

TREASURES OF MENDIP

Novel Show at Blagdon

(By Man o' Mendip)

FEW villages in England could put on a show of "Old Time Treasures" to equal that staged yesterday at Blagdon, for a particularly good cause. Blagdon and its inhabitants are indeed privileged in many ways. A sum of £350,000 is needed for the ex-service candidates ordination fund throughout the country. This exhibition was to raise money for the fund.

I was particularly asked not to mention names of owners of the "treasures" for fear of burglars, but I may mention that the genuine Mendip dog is distinguished from all other breeds in that it bites first and barks afterwards; also Mendippers are almost as quick on the trigger as dangerous Dan in the well-known Cowboy song. Further they have a zealous constabulary in the district.

Cromwellian silver was hardly ever seen even by the connoisseurs before 1914, because there was so little of it. Yet lovely specimens made in Cromwell's time, on which no price could be put, were included in yesterday's show.

Also on a table full of the goldsmith's art, was included a gold snuff box, four inches across and covered with brilliants, given to Nelson by the Shah of Persia

PLOUGHING CUPS

In contrast were ancient silver cups won by Mendippers at ploughing and shearing matches long ago. Regency dresses, rare silk Persian carpets, beautiful lace robes, William Horris vestments with 16th century orsreys (that is the silk work panels which form the cross and are still in use at Blagdon Church on Feast days) were included

I hope to refer to other items on Saturday in my column.

The rector (Rev. E. Marriott) said that a wonderful exhibition represented a month's work. Every house in the village was visited by the stewards, and they did not have one refusal

In a graceful tribute to Lady Wills, the rector remarked how ready she was to help every good cause.

Lady Wills, in opening the exhibition, said that she realised that country people were far too busy to give much time to considering beauty, but they should try to realise what intrinsic beauty really was. There was much in that hall which was old, beautiful, and of fine workmanship, but she would much prefer good modern work, than something, the only merits of which was age. Much good work was still being done to-day by first rate craftsmen, using good material.

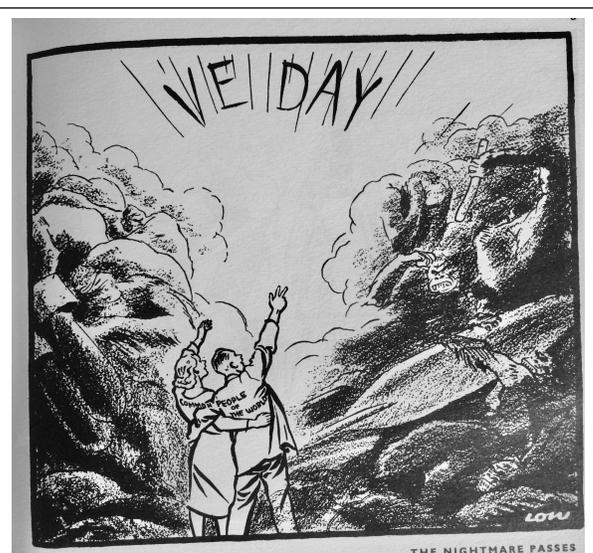
In so far as they could, they should look for these craftsmen and encourage them.



THIS GOLD SNUFF-BOX, given to Lord Nelson by the Shah of Persia, was one of the exhibits of "Mendip Treasures" at Blagdon yesterday in aid of the Ordination Fund for ex-Servicemen.

If this seems to be an echo from a world that seems to bear very little relation to how most people see things now, *Man O' Mendip* covers it in yet another article below. The style is almost unreadable by today's slick snappy standards, but it is worth trolling through if only to imbibe its other-worldliness. A time when everyone was still expected to know their place in society.

Also, Considering the artifacts on display there would have been a number of the present-day History Society members would have given up a few Sunday roasts to be there! [Maybe not]



The view of cartoonist Low in the *Evening Standard* - 'common people of the World' celebrating the end of the war.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 1946

O'ER HILL AND DALE

ONE of the best put over rustic endeavours for years took place at Blagdon this week. I congratulate the Rev. E. Marriott and others responsible for the exhibition of "village" old time treasures." Probably no other village of its size in England could produce a collection of equal cash value. I am not concerned with that or their rarity though much of the craftsmanship in precious metals was what collectors call "specimen pieces." What impressed me so much was that the stewards had put in a month's work calling on every house in the village and not had one refusal. It is unity in a village—this corporate feeling which is so precious and so rare. I have already mentioned such unique items as the gold snuff box covered with brilliants given by the Shah of Persia to Nelson and the choice Cromwellian silver. The William Morris vestments after medieval patterns and the finest silk Persian carpets. There were some charming dresses. A gold coloured Regency ball dress with the tiny little kid dancing slippers with long ankle ribbons as fresh as if they were made yesterday. A magnificent wedding dress worn by the late Mrs Geo Edwards and from another source a christening robe of the most delicate lace long coveted by the South Kensington museum. The variety of porcelain, china, glass, including a choice set of antique ale glasses which so many mistake for wine glasses, the furniture of all periods and many woods had to be seen to be believed. The ancient documents relative to Aldwick Court included the only ones I have seen of the time of Phillip of Spain and Queen Mary the First, also the Great Seal of England in George III's reign. The supporting animals in the coat of arms at that time included a greyhound so the importance of this breed of dawg is nothing new in this country.

Then there was a remarkable collection of dolls in the national dress of many countries. Each doll had been made by the natives it represented. Even a fur clad esquimau from Iceland and a Red Indian were included. Among the villagers treasures were half size horse shoes well fullered like a hunter's shoes, made by a soldier at the front and sent home for good luck and one of those famous boxes of chocolate sent by Queen Victoria with her picture to the soldiers in South Africa during the Boer war. The chocolate was still intact 45 years later! There was a remarkable collection of amulets and scarabs from ancient Egyptian tombs. Who had kept those three little early Victorian silk parasols with their deep tassel fringes to protect complexions from the sun or a coquette's sparkling eyes from the ardent glances of an admirer in the days of bonnets and crinolines?

THIS wonderful array of treasures could not, as I say, be equalled as regards the precious metals by other villages, but the same amount of work would collect a very much worth-while exhibition in most villages. The cause was well worthy of support. The Bishop is collecting towards £350,000 needed by ex-Servicemen who wish to become clergymen. As Lady Wills said, they will not have an easy road, and in some ways have a more difficult battle in front of them. Lady Wills also made remarks which cannot be too strongly stressed on cultivating an eye for what is worth while. She said she fully realised that most country people were far too busy to spend much time in contemplating beauty and considering what it was. For too many people if a thing was old and valuable it was also beautiful. That was far from being the case. Much valuable old stuff was ugly. She would far rather have a modern reproduction in good material of a master craftsman's work. Contrary to some ideas, much good work was being executed to-day in good materials and with good workmanship. Insofar as they were able, it was people's duty to search out and encourage such craftsmen. My own view is that the Church badly needs more strong-minded clergy of marked character, having qualities of leadership and not easily daunted by the stubborn peasantry or the callous city folk who neither help nor hinder but "pass by on the other side of the road." There the ex-Servicemen may supply if you will put up the cash for their sustenance while training. Our country badly needs more clergy who will "dare to be a Daniel."

MAN O' MENDIP.



The Western Daily Press report on the Ordination Fund for Ex-Servicemen Exhibition.



Visitors to Blagdon's Village Exhibition in aid of the Bishop of Bath and Wells Ex-Servicemen Candidates Ordination Fund found plenty to interest and attract them on all the stalls, while one lady (above) was particularly interested in the church vestments which were shown to her by the Rector.

THE WAR TIME PARISH MAGAZINE

During the war itself, no bombs fell on Blagdon or in the vicinity, despite trying to attract Luftwaffe bombers to release their loads on Blackdown, with a 'decoy city', all alight. These cuttings from the Blagdon Parish magazine reveal a gently moving account of how the people of Blagdon were active and involved with funding and support for the Allied campaign by whatever was in their power. One senses initially that there were slightly mixed feelings about the community having to take in evacuees from the city. But the 'Keep Calm and Carry on' attitude prevails and everyone settles down to accepting the 'new normal', as we would tend to say nowadays.

The Wills family figured strongly in the drama, with encouragement and setting the sort of example they would expect people to expect of them.

As appeared in Blagdon Parish Magazine - including the words of Rev. Marriott.

August 1939

'... You are all aware that we shall have no lack of visitors if war should break out. Preparations are now well advanced for the reception of children and mothers from the areas to be evacuated in the event of hostilities and I write these few lines to ask you to receive them as visitors and not as unwelcome guests thrust upon us. Some of them may not be all that we might desire tho' I feel sure our fears are exaggerated in this respect. Most people respond to kindly treatment and the very worst thing we could do for our own peace and their content is to let them feel they are unwanted amongst us. They are our own folk and far less fortunate than ourselves or they would not be coming to us....

September 1939

Letter from the Bishop

November 1939

Sewing and knitting meeting: I am asked to announce the formation in the parish of a guild for providing much needed clothing comforts for our War hospitals and for men on active service. The first meeting will be held at Coombe Lodge on Friday December 8th at 2:15pm
SSAFA – Sailors, Soldiers and Airmen's Families Association: should any cases of difficulty or distress arise in the families of men from our parish serving with the forces, I should be grateful to have particulars of the same in order that I might forward them for the consideration of the Association.

December 1939

Red Cross dance : organised by Mr W Drake with assistance of Miss Greenslade and Messrs G Jeffries, R. Stephens, L Skillman and D. Baber. The splendid profit of £7-3s has been forwarded to the Society.

January 1939 (1940?)

Sunday School Christmas Party : 60+ children. Tea games – musical chairs, spinning the trencher, general post and so on. By the kindness of **Lady Wills** there was a cinema show, *Mickey Mouse*, *Felix the Cat* and *Charlie Chaplin*. The pictures ended and there was a distribution of prizes by Sir Peter. The party was brought to a close in time honoured fashion with the arrival of Father Christmas and his disclosure of the Christmas Tree. The tree was unladen with presents for all.



"The Winters' wedding". Blagdon character Byron Winter's parents were married at the beginning of the war in 1940. The arch of rifles was courtesy of the Home Guard. The Rev. Marriot was most displeased.

February 1940

In memoriam Mary Vera Proctor Wills Feb 3rd 1940

March 1940

Advert for performance of Three One Act Plays to be held in the Parish Room on Wednesday and Thursday April 3rd and 4th in aid of Comforts for the Troops and Blagdon and District Nursing Association commencing at 7:30pm each evening. Seats Reserved 2/6d, Unreserved 1/6d and 1/-. Children half-price.

April 1940

The Plays : performed by members of the Parish Church who displayed their historic talents in three short plays. The balance sheet showed a profit of £11-12s which was equally divided between our Local Nursing Association and Lady Wills' 'Comfort for Troops' Fund. (no details of participants provided)

June 1940

A R P : Lecture by Capt Wallich in the Parish Room on

Monday July 1st at 7:30pm : this is not a technical instruction for Air Raid wardens alone but a popular talk on what to do and what not to do in the event of a raid. It has been definitely established that a large proportion of the casualties suffered in such raids is due to the neglect of simple, easily taken precautions.

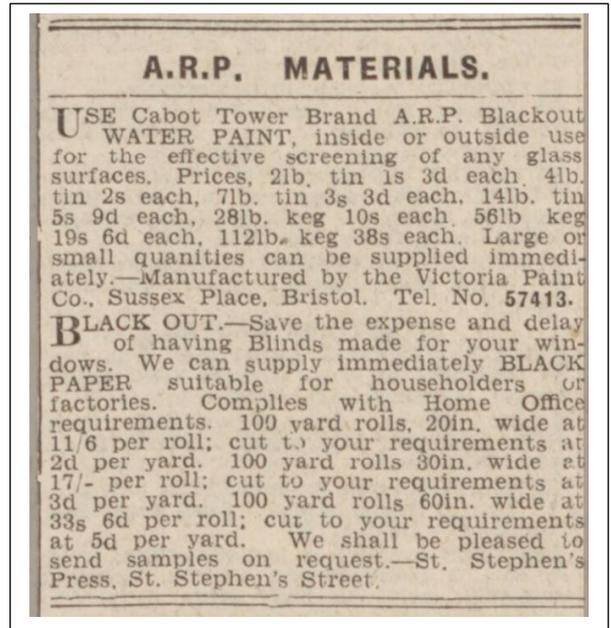
July 1940

I should like to take the opportunity of thanking foster-parents for the way in which they responded to my appeal to do all in their power, spiritually as well as materially for the welfare of the children who have come to our parish from evacuated areas. I think there is no child who did not at once join one or other of the Sunday Schools in Blagdon- and for many, I fancy, it was a novel experience!

The juniors of Norbury College joined our own Sunday school and Catechism and the choir found some new recruits.

Sunday School: Outing cancelled owing to present numbers

Waste Not Want Not: appeal for metal or paper of any description - send word to Mr Dowson or Rector or any member of the British Legion who will arrange for its collection. Or better still convey it yourself if possible to the dumps officially established in the village for this purpose.

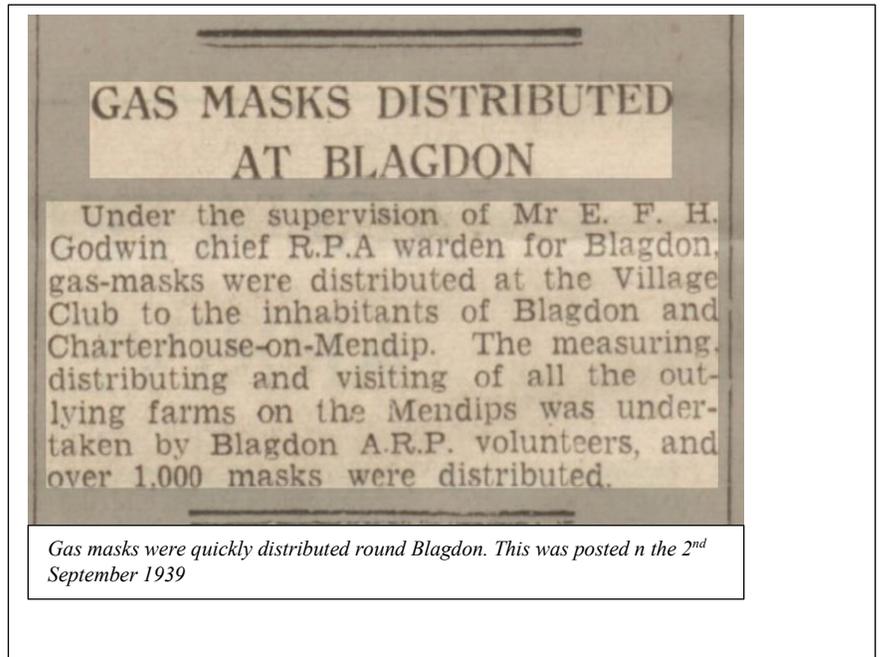


Our local 'Dad's Army' in 1943. The Home Guard was normally a predominant mix of very young men and retired individuals. But out here we had a good smattering of tough farmworkers excused the 'call up' in the interests of keeping agriculture thriving in the country and feeding the nation.

August 1940

Comforts for H.M. Forces ; Lady Wills has very kindly provided me with a list of comforts made and dispatched to sailors, soldiers and airmen between Dec 8th 1939 and July 21st 1940 – including some received from the children of Blagdon School. It is an imposing list and one of which the working party may well be proud:

108 Helmets
167 Scarves
85 pairs of gloves
240 pairs of Socks
103 pairs Sea-Boot Stockings
46 pairs of fingerless Gloves
123 pairs of Mittens
4 Pullovers
13 Pairs of Cuffs
2 Body Belts
9 Pairs of Hospital Stockings
14 Pairs of Pyjamas
17 Hospital Coats and Bed Jackets
13 Hospital Shirts
4 Many –Tailed Bandages
2 Hot Water Bottle Covers
2 Feather Pillows (gift from a member)
Total 952 Articles



September 1940

It seems but a very short time ago that we were lamenting the decline in population of our countryside – a decline especially amongst the young, which came with such silence and rapidity as to cause serious alarm to all who have the future welfare of rural England at heart. Like many other things the War has changed all that and Blagdon, in company with neighbouring parishes, has experienced an even more rapid reversal of the process. Our parish is very full – I won't say of strangers, for those of the same nation and blood ought not to be that to each other even in times of peace, still less in those of war. It has not been easier here than elsewhere to accommodate those who have sought shelter in the Parish from London and the South Coast as I dare say they themselves have not found it easy to fit in with the conditions of country life.

We haven't a score of shops in every street, or a cinema round every corner or buses at every hour to wherever one may wish to go - but we have open spaces, clean air, and healthy countryside with no raucous sound of sirens to disturb our relative peace ...

We must all give and take in these difficult days ...

Of other visitors the rules of the Censor forbid one to say very much. There was a time when their advent to a quiet country village would have caused a certain perturbation and even dismay. But they have been amongst us long enough now to allay any qualms we may have had in that direction.

I should like to take this opportunity to thank all those parishioners who so readily responded to my appeal for voluntary helpers to establish the Parish Room canteen, These are busy days for most of us – not least for our womenfolk – and it says much for them that the response was both immediate and adequate. We now have more than fifty helpers on our rota and so far as their part in the organisation is concerned the Canteen runs amicably, efficiently and well. And I know it is very much appreciated by those who use it.

Although the Room has become a Canteen this does not mean that it is no longer available, either in the daytime or evening, for what may be called purely village functions. It can still be engaged for these as usual.

Accounts for a dance Aug. 31st for Comfort for Troops Fund and a Whist Drive Sept 18th in support of The Red Cross Society. Three bookings for Parish Room: British Legion Dance, British Legion Whist Drive and Nursing Association Dance

October 1940

Red Cross Flag Day accounts – organised by Daisy Wood - £11-3-1d

November 1940

The Patronal Festival : we must I fear forgo what has been for several years past a happy feature of the Patronal Feast – the Parish Social. I think you will all agree that rationing restrictions and the many calls upon our time and energies as well as other considerations too, make it desirable not to hold a Social on this occasion.

December 1940

Day School Christmas Party: a party for all children attending our day school at Blagdon has been arranged by the Evacuation Welfare Committee for Sat. Jan 4th next. It will be held in the Parish Room, commencing with tea at 3:30 and will be followed by a short Pantomime given by members of the Blagdon and Burrington Women's Institute.

The Parish Room Canteen: I hope I am not transgressing any regulations which the Censor may have laid down if I take this opportunity, when changes are being made in the personnel of our Parish, of saying how much we have enjoyed the stay of our visitors amongst us. The past four months have seen much friendship made between ourselves and the men from the north and nothing has occurred in any way to mar it. We wish them "God Speed" wherever they may go, I should also like to take this opportunity to say Thank you to those ladies – some 60 in all – who have so generously and consistently given of their time and skill to the work of the Canteen.

If the Canteen has taken the success and help to the men which I believe it has, it is due in the largest measure to their ever-ready and happy service.

During the first three months of its existence the Canteen provided just under 2,000 hot meals, nearly 400 cold suppers, and served, amongst lesser refreshments, some 5,000 cups of tea and coffee.

Up to the time I write this, some £41 has been raised for various good causes by Whist drives and dances run by the Entertainments Committee in conjunction with the Canteen. The best recompense for their work is contained in the following letter from one who recently left us....

Letter received:

Dear Sir

May I express to you and every one at Blagdon, on behalf of the lads and myself, our sincere appreciation for the interest and kindness shown to us during our stay with you all. I'm sure we were all very sorry to leave you, but unfortunately it could not be helped.

I hope many of us and myself will get the opportunity of visiting Blagdon some time in the near future. May I say once again how we all appreciated your kindness to us:

we were all very grateful. May I wish everyone a very Happy Christmas and good health?

Yours sincerely

***** [name omitted]

January 1940

Air Raid Damage to Churches : an appeal for funds from the Bishop of Bath and Wells

Sunday school Christmas Party

Nursing Association Dance Accounts 26th December 1940 : profit of £13-2-7d dance.

February 1940

Church Accounts for St Andrew's & St Hugh's, Parish Room Accounts, Parish Magazine Accounts

Parish Room Accounts include: 4 x Troop Concerts, 2 x N C O dances, 5 x British Legion, Home Guard, Nursing Association, Army Billets.



25th March 1941, stepping up on the precautions against the possibilities of being hit by an air raid.

Digging deep into pockets BY SHEILA JOHNSON

Lady Wills and the incredible fundraising abilities of the people of Blagdon.

Throughout the war years there were constant demands to support worthy causes. Lady Wills was chairman or president of several local organisations including *the Blagdon and Charterhouse Nursing Association*, *Comforts for Troops fund*, *the British Legion*, *WI*, *Blagdon Agricultural and Horse Show*, *Flower Show*, and *the Village Club*. The annual *Flower Show* was suspended during the war years but opened again in time for its 60th anniversary in August 1945.

Fundraising activities provided a great deal of entertainment in the village throughout the war years, there were whist drives, dances, smoking concerts (attendees were given a pack containing three cigarettes for their enjoyment during the concert), theatrical performances, concerts, fancy dress parades, dog shows and fetes.

The George Inn and *Seymour Arms* had large 'club rooms'. The Seymour Arms could seat 100 for a Ploughing Match dinner and the function rooms were frequently used for property auctions. The Parish Room (the School Hall) was ideal for whist drives, dances, drama productions and concerts. The *Village Club* did not have a function room at this time. Meetings of local groups were often held in the *Rent House* which was used as the annex to the Club.



In April 1940 the gardens of Coombe Lodge were opened to the public to raise money for *the Comforts for Troops fund* and *the Nursing Association*. Upwards of 1000 people passed through the gates and over £60 was raised.

A description of the glasshouses in the local press by *Man o' Mendip* in July 1947 gives a glimpse of a visit to the gardens.

... there is no heat but the sun's rays in the glass houses now ... but what has been done is marvellous. The grapes are superb. One glass roof was liberally full of green bunches and there were peaches, apricots and nectarines. I

went to see the zinnias for which this garden has been justly famous. But probably the best of the day, unless it was the gloxinias, was in the carnation house, a glorious show of White Perfection. From orchid house to lily pond it's a wonderful place. When the old timers made high walled gardens to keep the warmth in and the wind out they knew something ...

The head gardener was Mr A J Poulding. When he retired in 1949 a local newspaper recalled the first time Coombe Lodge gardens were opened to the public in support of *the Nursing Association*. Nearly all the professional gardeners around Bristol turned up, a real tribute to his standing.

The Comforts for Troops group was formed in December 1939 to produce much needed clothing for war hospitals and for men on active service. Money raised was used to buy wool and materials for clothing. A list of clothing provided was published in the parish magazine in August 1940. A total of 952 articles had been produced including hats, gloves, socks and pyjamas - some received from the children of *Blagdon School*

Many readers will remember *the National Savings Movement* that operated between 1916 and 1978 which was used to help to finance the deficit of government spending over income. The movement was instrumental during World War II in raising funds to support the war effort

The War Savings Campaign was set up by the War Office in November 1939 and Regional Savings Committees were reorganised. *War savings* used local collections to raise money for aeroplanes, warships and any items which were urgently needed for the war effort. Campaigns such as *War Weapons Week*, *Warship Week*, *Wings for Victory* etc. were organised each year. *Axbridge Rural District Council (ARDC)* agreed a total for the district and then allocated a target for each parish.

The *ARDC* target for *War Weapons Week* in 1941 was £35,000, allocated to eleven parishes. When the week came to an end, they were surprised to discover they had raised almost £225,000! Blagdon raised an astonishing total of £30,000 - over six times the target originally aimed at. From the start when Lady Wills unveiled the indicator, which was an aeroplane in flight, there was a generous response from the villagers. Events included a fancy-dress parade and a display of ancient Roman remains dug up by Mr Walters in Charterhouse. The school log recorded £521 9s was taken for investment in *War Savings Certificates* through the *School Savings Group*. Blagdon's total was also supported by other local villages.



'Blitzed but still beautiful' - the parade from Coombe Lodge
(Addicott's archive)

In 1942 the RDC aimed for a target of £225,000 for *Warship Week*, split between 29 parishes. However, 13 of the 29 parishes failed to reach their individual objectives, but the *District Savings Committee* concentrated their efforts on these parishes so they soon had active Savings Groups operating in all of them. Blagdon had a target of £10,000 and raised £7,900.

The mastermind behind the fund-raising efforts in Blagdon was Llew Webster, sales director for Kleen-e-ze (remember them?), who was also an organising secretary for *Bristol's Savings committee*. He had moved to Blagdon at the outset of the war, first living in West End house and later Rhodyate House. His wife was also very active in the village - she helped to raise over £1000 over two and a half years, organising events in support of the *Red Cross*. At the annual Parish Council meeting in 1943 the chairman expressed the thanks of the meeting to Mr Webster for all he had done to make *War Weapons and Warship Week* the success that it was.

In peacetime *the National Savings* movement provided an easy and safe way for ordinary people to save small sums of money. The movement grew to around seven million members before ceasing during the 1970s as more modern methods of saving took over.

Unlike larger towns and cities, here was no celebration in the village for VE day, although the children had a day's holiday from school. No doubt the news that Sir Peter Wills had been killed in action in April cast a shadow over the village. His 21st birthday celebrations in January 1943 had been marked by a large assembly of staff and tenants from the Coombe Lodge and Langford Court estates where a number of presentations had been made to him.

In May 1945 a letter from *ARDC* was read asking if the Parish Council could organize a Victory Garden Week and Fete. The Chairman felt the Village had done and was doing a lot in regard to the *Red Cross* work this year and that no further arrangements were necessary. The Council agreed that letters of thanks should be drawn up by the Chairman and sent to the King and the Prime Minister, Mr. Churchill.

Celebrations were held for **VJ Day** in October 1945 – the war was truly over. A tea was held for the children and their parents, followed by some entertainers and community singing. In the evening there was a bonfire at The Rocks, with fireworks, followed by dancing in the street outside the Village Club with music provided by 'radiogram speakers'. There was some difficulty in finding fireworks for the occasion – it is not surprising that Llew Webster managed to obtain them!

WAR TIME MEMORIES OF GEORGE TRICKS

American troops were in Blagdon during the war. The Green Howards were first at Norbury College and then at Mendip Bungalow.

Two land mines fell at Holt Farm.

The Home Guard met in Court Lodge

Mr. Light the postmaster commanded the Home Guard because he had a telephone. George's father was of higher service rank but had to be sergeant.

Mr. Lye, whose head was totally bald would not wear a forage cap, and at inspection wore his old flat cap.

The lake was covered with boats and rafts all tethered together with wire to prevent landings by the enemy.

Mr Tripp, who lived in 'The Shrubbery' [The Old Parsonage] once nicked his hand when a Sten gun went off by accident. He later applied for a wound stripe.

George's mother ran a Camouflage factory in the basement of the Court, knotting strips of cloth into coarse netting.

George and his father took the pony and trap over Mendip and found the roads closed off from Paywell Farm to the Miners' Arms. They had a pass and could go through. There were lorries etc. all waiting to go to D-Day.

MEMORIES OF JOAN LYONS

Family Memories

How lucky Roy and I are to have walked across the Score when it was full of harebells, orchids, shivery-shake grasses, and seen all the wild crocus growing in Fullers Hay, Bourne Lane with its banks of white violets and primroses (still some there). But gone are the glow-worms that shone at night from the banks of the lane when we walked back from the Mill Inn.