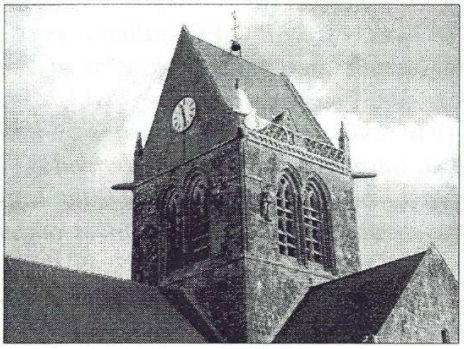
THE WEST END LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

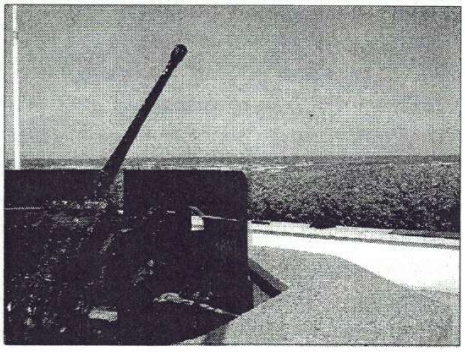
WESTENDER

MAY – JUNE 2004 VOLUME 4 NUMBER 5

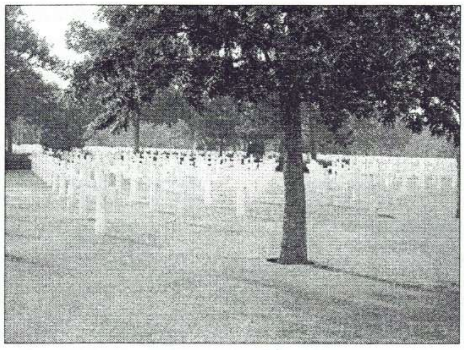
D-DAY....6th JUNE 1944 ... 60 YEARS ON!



ST.MERE EGLISE AND THE LONE PARACHUTIST



REMAINS OF THE "ATLANTIC WALL" DEFENCES



THE AMERICAN CEMETERY AT "OMAHA BEACH"



REMAINS OF MULBERRY HARBOUR AT ARROMANCHES

D-Day, 6th June 1944 60 years on. Above are some views of the area of Normandy that saw such bitter fighting with the loss of so many young lives 60 years ago. As we commemorate the 60th anniversary of the start of the liberation of Europe from Nazi tyranny this month, it is right that we should reflect on the cost of that undertaking and how it changed the world we live in today. West End played it's part in this, the largest amphibious landing in history!

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Website: *www.hants.org.uk/westendlhs/* **E-mail address:** *westendlhs@aol.com*

EDITOR
Nigel.G.Wood
EDITORIAL AND PRODUCTION ADDRESS
40 Hatch Mead
West End
Southampton, Hants
SO30 3NE
Telephone: 023 8047 1886
E-mail: woodng@aol.com

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DAD'S ARMY – but not as we know it

Pat (nee Pitters) and Derek Amey

And you thought Captain Mainwaring was a bank manager, didn't you? Well, he wasn't: he was a telephone engineer! Well, of course that well loved character was never anything else but the very epitome of High Street respectability. But there was another kind of Home Guard, a Dad's Army within Dad's Army as it were. Family archive material sifted through recently revealed the existence of what was, if not exactly a secret army, one that was probably unknown to all but those enrolled and their families. One piece of archive turned out to be a printed message, issued probably in late 1944 or early 1945, from the Officer Commanding 22nd Hants (32 G.P.O.) Bn., Home Guard.

This "other" Home Guard, to quote the C.O.'s words, (was) *'composed of 55,000 officers and other ranks – mainly Post Office Servants.....The 22nd Hants (32 G.P.O.) Battalion is part of this impressive body..... It includes the Ports of Southampton, Weymouth and Poole, the town of Bournemouth and the famous military centres of Salisbury and Winchester. The communications which the Battalion helps to provide and maintain.....were to have been in 1940, 1941 and 1942 the means by which an invasion of the South-Western coast would have been controlled: instead, in 1944, they provided the links over which final orders were given for the storming of Europe at the beaches of Normandy – the beginning of the end which will bring retribution to a relentless and unscrupulous enemy. Every officer and man.....is proud to have had these precious lines in his care."*

This particular copy was handed not to Corporal Jones but to Corporal Pitters, who had his own story to tell of how Post Office lines played their part in the run-up to D-Day. Nowadays, of course, we have BT and a host of competing service providers, but certainly Post Office Telephones lacked nothing in their service in those days when, again to quote the Commanding Officer; *"We have been privileged to form part of the defences of Great Britain during the most perilous hours of its long and famous history. We have been in the fight for good things against evil things, and we have borne a small part in the final Victory. This is our pride and justification"*. Quite a stirring message to come out of a suitcase-full of photo's and old "papers"!

Officers of the Battalion and their Location

BATTALION HEADQUARTERS. Lt.-Col. W. R. Tyson, Major H. L. Halward, Capt. J. F. Binington, Capt. J. L. F. Pennefather, Lt. K. E. Ball, B.E.M., Lt. H. G. A. Powell, Lt. H. Sales.

"A" COMPANY, BOURNEMOUTH. Major L. B. Shackell, Capt. A. R. T. Wright, Lt. J. Lauer, Lt. W. G. Tarrant, 2/Lt. G. S. Dennis, 2/Lt. R. J. Warren, 2/Lt. A. G. Barber.
SHAFTESBURY and BLANDFORD. Lt. P. Bye, 2/Lt. B. E. Baugh.

"B" COMPANY, BOURNEMOUTH. Major E. W. Budden, Capt. W. C. Street, Lt. C. W. Dennis, Lt. R. C. Slingsby, Lt. F. A. Sargent, Lt. W. G. Melley, Lt. W. H. Stocker, Lt. F. C. Macey, Lt. A. M. Grimmett, Lt. R. Webb.
WIMBORNE. Lt. E. F. Osman.

"C" COMPANY, SOUTHAMPTON. Major H. A. Cole, Capt. C. A. Steedman, Lt. C. A. Charlesworth, Lt. A. G. Chuter, Lt. C. H. Hislop, Lt. Z. Baker, 2/Lt. A. F. Gammon.

"D" COMPANY, SWINDON. Major E. Blewitt, M.M., Capt. M. Stevens, Lt. W. C. Waite, 2/Lt. H. J. Phillips.
MARLBOROUGH. Lt. R. E. Tucker, Lt. W. D. Bedbrook.

"E" COMPANY, SALISBURY. Major E. H. Granger, Capt. W. H. T. Young, Lt. T. Moss, Lt. F. F. Baker, Lt. C. B. E. Lamb, Lt. W. R. Pentecost.
WARMINSTER. Sgt. H. R. Minhinnick.

"V" PLATOON, WEYMOUTH. Lt. L. V. Davis, 2/Lt. S. T. Symes.

"W" PLATOON, WINCHESTER. Lt. H. P. Eames, 2/Lt. T. Bath.

"X" PLATOON, ANDOVER. Lt. S. A. Barnes, 2/Lt. A. W. Churchill.

"Y" PLATOON, LYMINGTON. Lt. F. G. Lovett, Lt. S. P. Goff.

"Z" PLATOON, DORCHESTER. Lt. W. S. Sansom, Lt. R. W. Holland.
BRIDPORT. Sgt. W. C. Walters.

SIGNALS OFFICERS. Capt. L. A. Luck, Capt. P. Stevenson, Lt. H. G. Head, Lt. H. E. Robinson, Lt. P. C. P. Barratt, Lt. W. F. Goodman, Lt. W. A. Hunt, Lt. H. W. Smith, Lt. G. H. Allen, Lt. A. Jewers, Lt. C. A. Jones, Lt. E. J. Smith, 2/Lt. W. Kershaw, 2/Lt. F. A. Carroll.

Cpl. T. F. Pitters

THE

22nd HAMPSHIRE (32nd G.P.O.)

BATTALION

HOME GUARD

We shall not flag or fail, we shall go on to the end . . . We shall defend our Island whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills, we shall never surrender.

Mr. Churchill. 4 June, 1940.

Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duty and so bear ourselves that if the British Commonwealth and Empire lasts for a thousand years men will say "This was their finest hour."

Mr. Churchill. 18 June, 1940.

- DUNKERQUE -

A poem written by Bert Misselbrook (11th August 1918 – 25th June 2001)

We fought our way like heroes, from Brussels to the Coast,
So they said, and believe them, a betrayed and battered host.
We didn't fight for victory, or for glory, but for life,
In every march was discipline, there was coolness in the strife.
But through all that bloody struggle a star above us shone,
It was our Nations honour, upheld when hope was gone.

So after miles of hardship 'twas in the dawns grey murk,
We battled through the shell fire to the beaches of Dunkerque,
Before us stretched those beaches, bestrewn with hit and dead,
La Panne in flames behind us, Dunkerque ten miles ahead.
And in all that weary distance was no cover worth the name,
And then like hordes of locusts the German warplanes came.

Their guns aflame raked o'er us, we scattered 'neath the storm,
And ere the droning vanished, the order came "reform".
Then on to face the bombers that pasted Bray les Dunes,
To see our shipping vanish to the missiles spiteful tune.
But they didn't pass unchallenged for as they zoomed o'erhead,
From desperate men with rifles they met a storm of lead.

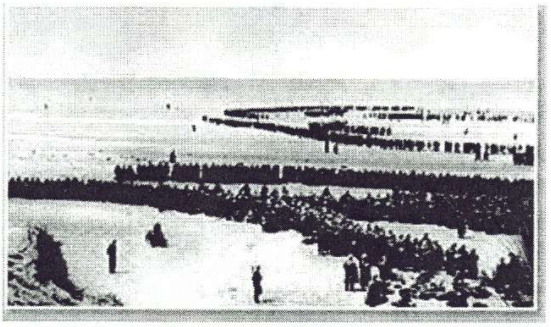
So up in three's we mustered and on tired and blistered feet,
We marched along the foreshore a'sweat in the evening heat,
T'was thus we entered Dunkerque, our goal in ruins stood.
We couldn't smell the glory – we could only smell the blood,
Of those who'd gone before us, whose labours were in vain,
For there in desolation forsaken lay the slain.

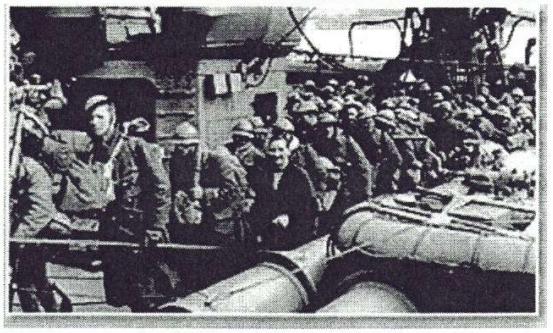
The final phase, the greatest test, before us lay the "Mole",
And down it weary warriors trudged towards the ships, their goal.
It lay just like a ribbon just holding four abreast,
Without a scrap of cover we stood there on the crest,
As we stood and waited out turn to go aboard,
Oh! God, we made a target – our only shield "the Lord".

God must have had compassion as in the flame-lit dark,
Although the Jerry shelled us he seldom hit his mark.
And so by light of morning we made the Dover Roads,
Set foot at last in England, the land of curious codes,
Which made others brand us madmen, but then they're blind.
For the battle had been won for us by those we left behind.

We were just the lucky ones, we'd played a risky game,
And fought a rearguard action which brought unheard of fame.
For cut off, part surrounded, starving, weary, short of guns,
Of men and ammunition we had left for our son's sons.
The story of a miracle, a truth we almost doubt,
Of how by God's great mercy the B.E.F. fought out,
And how we rest in England whose smiling acres roll,
And the care of many thankful hearts revives a shattered soul.







Above: B.E.F. & French soldiers on the beaches awaiting embarkation at Dunkirk and disembarking in England.

BERTRAM FREDERICK HARRY MISSELBROOK born in 1918 at Eastleigh, left school at 14 years old to work with his father, at 17 he went to work for Southern Railways. He enlisted six months prior to World War 2, joining the Hampshire Regiment and later transferring to the 4th Btn Sussex Regiment. He was part of the BEF which was taken off the beaches at Dunkirk in 1940, and rejoined his regiment in England which became 4th/5th Btn Sussex Regiment and went on to serve with the 8th Army and saw action at both Tripoli and El Alamein. He later became Sub-Station Officer at West End Fire Station.

D-DAY MEMORIES OF A SEVEN YEAR OLD

Ray Upson

I was at a very impressionable age during the build-up to D-Day. Although my memories are very vivid, at the tender age of seven, one can be excused if they appear a little exaggerated. I was living in Chalk Hill, West End at the time, in "Walnut Cottage", next door to SGB (*Scaffolding Great Britain depot*) and I remember the furious activity of laying a concrete road, the length of Church Hill. Later this same road seemed to be full of marching soldiers, mainly Americans, their destination I then knew not where; all day long it seemed convoys of tanks, DUKW's (*amphibious craft)* and army lorries towing field guns proceeded up this concrete road.

The sky was filled with aircraft towing gliders, the continuous drone of American "Super Fortress" aircraft and then in a few days ... silence! One morning we awoke to find our road filled with parked army supply trucks, obviously the back-up to D-Day. I imagine most roads in West End were experiencing the same sort of activity – they seemed to be there for days. The drivers and their mates slept in the cabs of their vehicles. I remember my mother inviting them into our house for bowls of hot soup and supplying them with hot water to wash and shave with.

My brother and I climbed into the back of one of these trucks to find it full of artillery shells – thank God the German airforce was then in a depleted state! If they had bombed West End at that moment in time it would have been no more! Suddenly, one morning the trucks were all gone. A few weeks after D-Day I remember crossing the old Northam Bridge in a gas-driven bus – the ones with a trailer on the back with a boiler to heat coke and create the gas. I wonder if the conductor had it written in his job description – "boiler stoker". I digress, crossing Northam Bridge the River Itchen seemed to be jammed with abandoned landing craft of all shapes and sizes. At the tender age of seven one didn't understand the importance of what was going on. Perhaps it's just as well!



THE "CONCRETE ROAD" CHURCH HILL AT THE NEW INN JUNCTION A FEW YEARS LATER AROUND 1950 *Photo Adrian Fray*

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Pat & Derek Amey



On the face of it, this is just another group photograph (dating from the mid 1920's). Someone's workplace, obviously, but probably just of interest to those who once worked there, and most of those long gone at that!
Well, this photo includes amongst the ranks, one Rose Bailey (6th left, middle row), and in fact depicts the time when she was one of the domestic staff at a key local facility. There can be few who haven't heard of Ellis Island, the famous (notorious?) entry point into the United States in the last century. But if you look more closely at the photograph, you will see that the building against which the workers are posed bears the words:

(Atlantic Park) Hostel
(Cuna)rd – White Star
Lines

This reveals the workplace to be Atlantic Park, which was in fact located at what was to become Southampton Airport, and was in effect the British end of that long chain which stretched across the Atlantic Ocean from these shores and indeed the rest of Europe, bringing into reality that resounding promise engraved on the Statue of Liberty –

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless, tempest tossed, to me:
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.
(Written by Emma Lazarus)

Many achieved their dream and entered into a new life on that vast continent, many suffered the fate of being refused entry. We don't know what happened to one emigrant who became a particular friend of Rose, all we know is that he was a Russian Count, no less! Was he allowed to stay, did he find the American Dream? Who knows, but at least you now know something of the story behind the road name in Townhill Farm – ***Atlantic Park View***.

NOTE: Just to explain the 'link'! ***Rose Bailey married and became Rose Pitters, who had two daughters, Pat (now Pat Amey) and Brenda.***

A MOST IMPORTANT PHONE LINE

Derek Amey

This story by Derek is taken from *"Capture Their Voices" a collection of family stories gathered by Eastleigh Brownies and Guides and other people – Compiled by Emma Golby-Kirk and Chris Vine as part of the* ***Eastleigh Voices oral history project*** *(funded by a Reading Families Millennium Award) and produced as a booklet.*

My father-in-law, the late Thomas Frederick Pitters, had a story to tell me of those crucial days before D-Day the 6th June 1944, the invasion of Europe.

He was in charge of a mobile gang working for Post Office Telephones, (the forerunners of BT). One evening in June 1944, after finishing work, he was called into the supervisor's office and given an address on the old Meon Valley railway line (closed in the 1950's) at which he should report the following morning. He should not tell his gang anything about this or where they were going.

So there was quite an air of mystery about the journey when they set off the following day and arrived at one of the stations on that line. But this was after all war time, so they were perhaps not all that surprised to be greeted on arrival by armed soldiers and told to report to the officer in charge. They should install a phone line at the station, Tom was told, and the military would take it from there. Now, there wasn't the competition in those days to install phones that we have now, and this often involved quite a wait, especially now that it was war time. Tom pointed out the difficulty of putting in new lines, but the officer was not impressed. Take over an existing one, he was told. So, one local subscriber found that her line had suddenly gone dead and, in spite of her protests, was not restored for several days.

So why the urgent need for this particular phone? The date is significant, with the planning for the invasion of Europe in its final stages. We do know that the special train at Prime Minister Winston Churchill's disposal came down that line a day or two before D-Day and was berthed at Droxford Station. We also know that on board were top Allied leaders and military men, including General Eisenhower, the man in charge of the invasion force. We also know that initially, the decision to go ahead was postponed due to unsuitable weather, the final decision coming out of a meeting at Southwick House near Fareham. So was the decision to place everything on "hold" taken on board that special train on the Meon Valley Line? These decisions were to decide the fate of Europe; was the first one taken over the most important phone line that Tom Pitters ever installed?

WILD FLOWER WALKS IN SOUTHAMPTON OLD CEMETERY

Friends of Southampton Old Cemetery

The Old Cemetery at the south-west corner of Southampton Common boasts a great variety of wild flowers, in part due to the 'management plan' adopted by the Council in 1991. A series of monthly walks has been arranged for 2004. The focus will be on the ever-changing flora as the year progresses, as well as the insects and birds that inhabit the cemetery. Meet at 2pm at the main gates – situated at the far end of Cemetery Road where free parking is available. The following dates have been arranged – the 2nd Sunday in each month:-

13th June – 11th July – 8th August – 12th September – 10th October

There will be occasions where we will go 'off path'. Because of the uneven nature of the terrain "sensible" footwear is recommended. Children welcome. Difficult for wheelchairs.

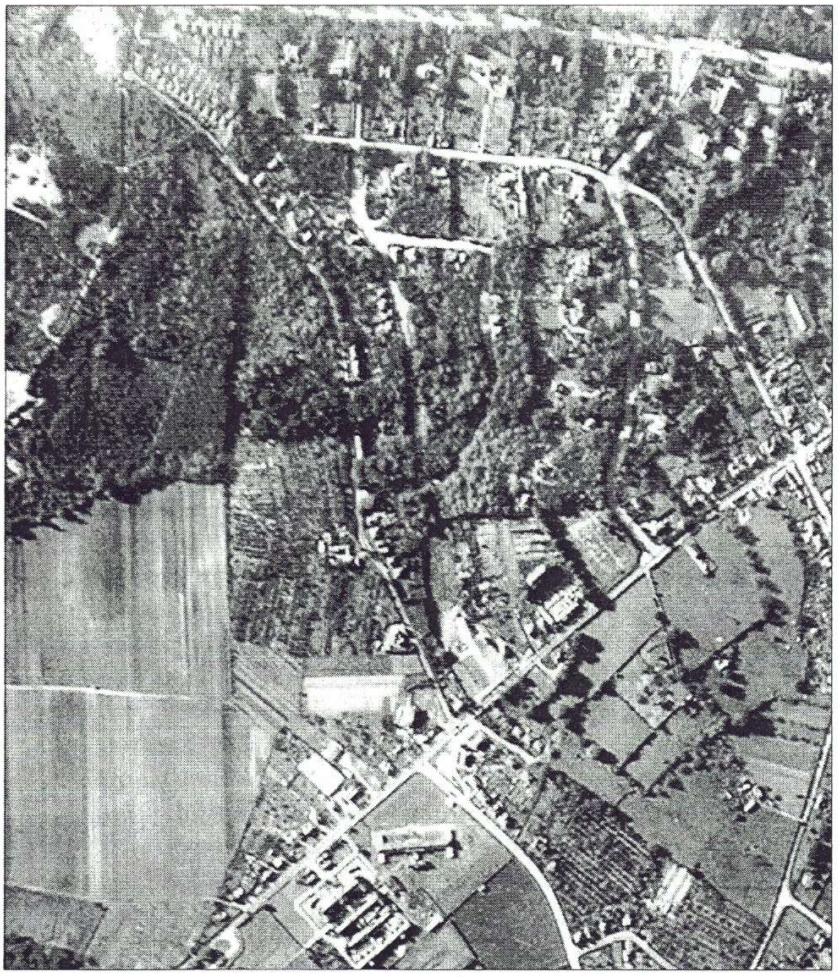
Organised by John Vetterlein – 023 8063 6080

TELEGRAPH WOODS DURING THE PREPARATIONS FOR D-DAY

Andrew Caws

The oval feature seen on the aerial photograph (*see below*) situated between Southern Road, Beacon Road and Eastern Road was a substantial concrete base. This was used for the testing and maintenance of the amphibious military craft known as DUKWS (*pronounced as ducks)* Locals referred to the area as the "Duck Pond" because it was thought that the craft were tested for leaks in a large water trough. In the late 1940's and early 1950's it was a great play ground for young boys. Pneumatic drills were used to break up the concrete in the 1950's prior to homes being built on the site. As far as I am aware the only part that may still remain is under the current surface of Southern Road.

The lower area of Southern and Western Roads was mature woodland at the time of the preparations for D-Day and provided ideal cover for American armoured vehicles. The locals soon became used to the rumble of tanks etc.., until one morning an eerie silence indicated that the soldiers and their vehicles had gone. D-Day was go!!



Editors Note: *The photograph above shows Moorgreen Hospital at bottom centre, whilst the area mentioned in the article is towards the centre and about a quarter of the way down. Moorhill Road goes across the top of the photograph.*

CHARLES DICKENS IN PORTSMOUTH

Review by Stan Waight

There was a good turnout to hear Madeleine Selby address our April meeting. Since Dickens only lived in Portsmouth for three years, and his first three infant years at that, you may wonder how she could entertain us for an hour under such a title. Well, she did! It was, of course, just a peg on which to hang a delightful talk about just anything that was connected with the Dickens family - and a little more besides.

Dickens was born at Landport in 1812. His father John was a lower-ranking, always hard-up Admiralty pay-clerk, and the family lived in rented accommodation. Posted to London in 1815, John built up a £40 debt for which he was eventually committed to Marshalsea debtors prison, and the young Charles was forced to find work in a blacking factory. By the age of 15, however, he had become an office boy, and subsequently a reporter. His talent for writing first brought real success with *Sketches by Boz* in 1835, and the *Pickwick Papers* appeared in serial form soon afterwards; the latter not only revolutionised the publishing world, but were so popular that there was a general improvement in standards of literacy. Dickens did return to Portsmouth in 1838 for the background to *Nicholas Nickleby*, and all the other well-known works which appeared in due course contained characters and places that were drawn from real life. We heard of his involvement with the theatre, his love for a young actress and the 'hidden mistress' of his last 13 years. Charles Dickens became the most widely read British author, and was so well loved that he was buried in the Poets' Corner in Westminster when he died in 1870.

The sideline to the Dickens story was the Portsmouth Dockyard and the squalor that surrounded it during Dickens' time. Madeleine's research for this was as meticulous as ever and was accompanied by some excellent slides.

It was all vintage Selby, no need to say more.

DAD'S ARMY

Len Payne

Armed at first with broomsticks, or handle from a pick,
with cardboard tank, and milkman's horse, sometimes just a stick,
The Home Guard were the last resort should Germany invade,
And to the amusement of the village, each Sunday held parade.
They suffered much derision, often the butt of jokes,
But really, did they deserve it, for they were just plain folks.
Names such as Dad's Army, fell from peoples lips,
But they were ready to stand and fight, with Hitler, come to grips.
Local Defence Volunteer was their name, recruited from each parish,
But local wags soon changed this tag, to the Look, Duck and Vanish.
Teacher, banker, milkman, and some old soldiers too,
Dressed in khaki misfits, they presented a motley crew.
But remember the Territorial, who also faced derision,
Who at the outbreak of war, filled the ranks of mock divisions.
So let us take our caps off, and remember with fond regard,
And raise a loud resounding cheer, Hurrah!, for the Home Guard.

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

A big "thank you" to all the members and friends of the Society who have contributed articles about their wartime memories of West End, many more of these memories will be published during the next few issues.

'MY GOD ..... IT'S A WOMAN'

Stan Waight

Our May meeting fell, to the day, on the 72nd anniversary of Amy Johnson's taking off on her solo flight to Australia. Jean Cook returned to address us, and took early women aviators as her topic. She said she couldn't find a better title for her talk than the one above, which was taken from Nancy Bird's autobiography, and I agree that it reflects the subject matter (and Jean's feminist outlook) completely. She has a good delivery and an easy manner which is sprinkled with humour.

She didn't concentrate on the celebrities such as Amy Johnson and Amelia Earhart, who hardly got a mention, but told us instead about the lesser-known women fliers who had made their mark in aviation history. These were the women whose machines were hand-made and not-too-reliable, and who flew without any of the navigational aids that are available today. It is now commonplace for people to fly around the world in a few hops, but to be the first woman to fly across the Irish Sea in a machine made of wood and fabric was a feat indeed. The hazards of flying were not the only problems they had to face. As in so many fields, they had male prejudice to overcome - hence the title, which was uttered by a marooned Australian farmer when he learned who was to rescue him!

Jean touched upon the short-lived U.S. Ferry Service (organised, and then disorganised, by women) and its highly successful British counterpart, the Air Transport Auxiliary of World War II. Many will have forgotten, indeed many have never known about, the women who ferried aircraft from manufacturer to operational station, flying Spitfires, Hurricanes and even the mighty Lancaster.

As in her previous talk, Jean took pains not to be too hard on the men in the audience, and I enjoyed her talk immensely. Since she is a professional historian, I'm sure she can find another topic for us, and I'm already looking forward to it.

A NEW BOOK AVAILABLE THIS MONTH

"C.B. FRY – his golden years at West End (1898 – 1908)"

44 pages – Price £4.99 (excluding postage and packing)

...."The golden decade during which this all round sporting hero and journalist was at the peak of his career, whilst living with his new family in the village of West End.

This new book published and available this month (June) from our Museum bookshop promises to be an excellent long awaited volume about Charles Burgess Fry and his West End connections. A percentage of all the proceeds of the sales of these books will go to the funds of West End Local History Society. Written by local Historian Pauline Berry, who just happens to be our Secretary and Archivist, it is the latest of her offerings to the local history community; previous books by Pauline include ***"Hatch Grange – a stroll back in time"*** (Memories of the Hatch Grange Estate, West End) and ***"Sister Kate Oram (1879-1918) a personal portrait"*** (The nurse who cared for Florence Nightingale in her declining years). Both of these last two books are also available in the Museum – see our book list on our website

www.hants.org.uk/westendlhs/

LOOK UP OUR WEBSITE AND SEE THE "VIRTUAL TOUR" OF OUR MUSEUM HERE IN WEST END – ANOTHER NEW INNOVATION BROUGHT TO YOU BY WEST END LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY – YOU CAN WALK AROUND THE MUSEUM FROM THE COMFORT OF YOUR OWN HOME!!!! Ed.

WHAT A DIFFERENCE 100 YEARS CAN MAKE!.....







Swaythling Road
West End

left to right

top row
circa 1900
circa 1950

bottom row
1970
2004



THE NEXT MEETINGS ARE ....

July 7
THE HISTORY OF SOUTHAMPTON AIRPORT
Eric Reed

NO MEETING IN AUGUST

September 1
GARDEN FINDS & TREASURE TROVE
(The Portable Antiquities Scheme)
Jodi McCrohan

October 6
THE WORK OF HANTS & IOW TRUST FOR MARITIME ARCHAEOLOGY
Julie Satchell

November 3
WEST END AND THE GREAT WAR
Steve Broomfield

December 1
CHRISTMAS BUFFET, QUIZ, SLIDE SHOW AND RAFFLE

On this day (June 2nd.) in.....

1840 Thomas Hardy, English novelist and poet, born at Higher Bockhampton in Dorset, the son of a stonemason.

1857 Sir Edward Elgar, English composer, born at Broadheath near Worcester, the son of a music-seller and organist.

1868 The first Trades Union Congress was held, at Manchester – finished on 6th.

1882 Guiseppe Garibaldi, Italian soldier and patriot who helped to form Kingdom of Italy, died.

1896 Marconi was granted the first patent (number 12039) for a system of communication by means of electro-magnetic waves.

1938 Regent's Park Children's Zoo in London was opened by Robert and Edward Kennedy.

1941 Clothes rationing started in Britain.

1953 The Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II took place.