



*Overton in an era of
change
1939 – 1953*

This was the theme for the Overton Sheep Fair in July 2012.

OVERTON IN AN ERA OF CHANGE

1939 – 1953

Presented by

RICHARD WALDRAM

TONY MORRIS

PETER BAKER

BRIAN LANGER

RICHARD ORAM

We will show what Overton was like in 1939 and then how the village prepared for war and invasion. You will see how life went on during the war, the slow recovery afterwards and how Overton celebrated the London Olympics, the Festival of Britain and the Coronation in 1953.

TIMELINE

1924	Air raid precautions committee formed.
1925	Royal Observer Corps formed to detect enemy aircraft.
1933	Adolf Hitler becomes Chancellor of Germany.
1934	Development of radar defence against air attack started. Public demonstrations of gas masks in Britain.
1935	Air Raid Precautions Plan published.
1936	Men and women recruited to the R.O.C. to cover Britain.
1937	First ever concerted air raid on a civilian target at Guernica during the Spanish civil war.
1938	Gas masks are issued in Britain.
1939	
April	Conscription begins for men aged 20 to 21.
September	Britain and France declare war on Germany. Mass evacuation of women and children from major cities. Petrol rationing started. R.O.C. mobilised.
October	I.D. cards issued.
1940	
January	Food rationing begins.
May	British forces evacuated from Dunkirk. Churchill appointed prime minister. Government calls for 'Local Defence Volunteers'.
June	Ringling of church bells prohibited unless enemy parachutists are seen.

August	Battle of Britain begins.
September	Start of the 'blitz' on London. Hitler's 'Operation Sealion' for the invasion of Britain is postponed.
1941	
May	Last heavy air raid on London.
June	Clothing is rationed.
July	Male conscription extended to age 41.
December	Women aged between 20 and 30 conscripted.
1942	
February	Soap is rationed.
March	Petrol ration abolished completely for private cars.
May	First US airmen arrive in Britain.
July	Sweets are rationed.
October	Call-up age reduced to 18.
November	The ringing of church bells is resumed.
1943	
July	Conscription for women extended to age 41.
September	Italy surrenders.
1944	
February	Proposals published for a National Health Service.
June	Allied invasion of Normandy. First V1 flying bombs fall on London.
August	Last V1 launch sites overrun by British troops.
December	Home Guard stood down.
1945	
May	Germany surrenders on May 8th.
July	Labour landslide in general election.
August	Japan surrenders on August 14th.
October	United Nations Charter signed.
1946	Bread is rationed for the first time. School leaving age raised to age 15.
1947	Potatoes are rationed for the first time.
1948	Bread and jam rationing ended. National Health Service started.
	Summer Olympics held in London.
1950	Petrol rationing ended.
1951	Festival of Britain.
1952	I.D. cards abolished.
1953	Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.
1954	All food rationing ends.

This is the permanent record of an exhibition during the Overton Sheep Fair held in July 2012 at the Community Centre.



Overton is an ancient village in north east Hampshire with roots going back to the year 909 when the whole Parish was granted to the Bishops of Winchester. A charter for an annual sheep fair in July dates from 1246 but it may not always have been held in medieval times. However, in 1798 it was noted as ‘the most capital fair for lambs in the county’ and in the mid 19th century it is reputed that tens of thousands of animals changed hands. The fair finally ceased in the early 1930’s.


The July Fair was not universally popular. In 1809, the farmers and dealers petitioned the Bishop to allow the fair to be held in a field rather than in Winchester Street. The Bishop ignored the petition but in fact the fair continued to flourish. However, there was general relief amongst the residents when it finally ceased because of the smell, the drinking and the fights associated with the fair.

The Sheep Fair was revived in July 2000 to celebrate the millennium and was such a success that it was repeated in 2004, 2008 and 2012.

For those who grew up with decimal currency it may be helpful to know that in those days the pound was made up of twenty shillings and each shilling was twelve pence. One pound, two shillings and six pence was written as £1 2s 6d.

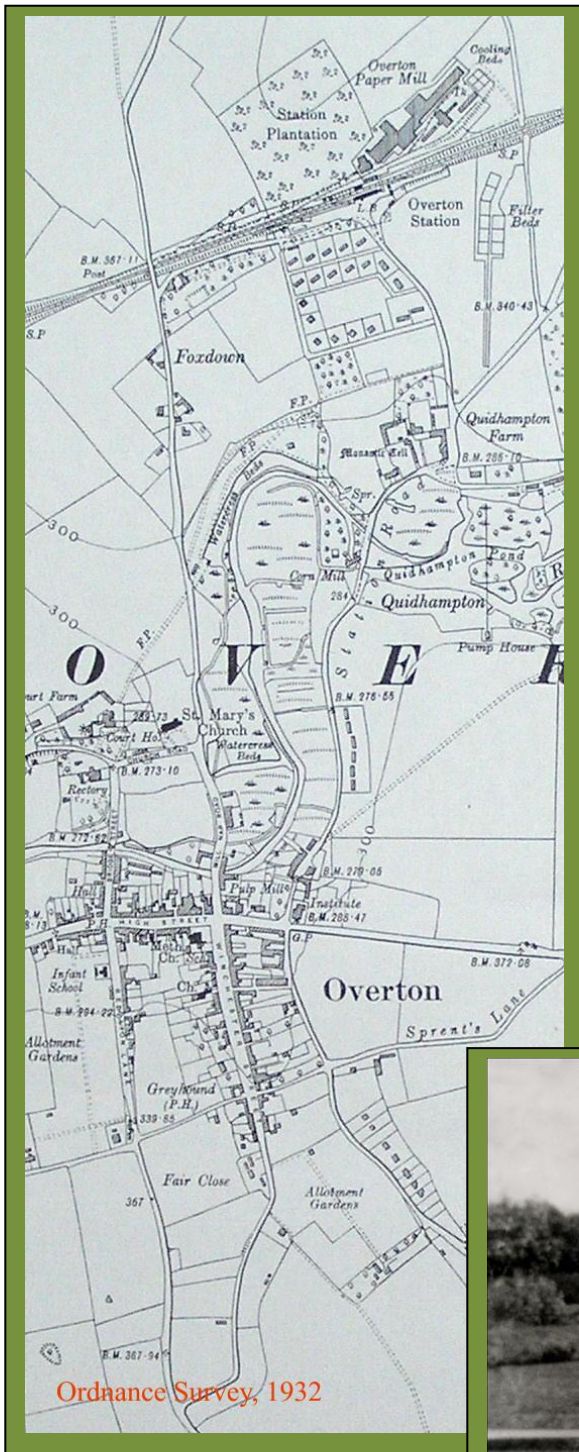
The value of money has changed a great deal since then. Something costing £1 in 1939 would cost £48 now.

www.measuringworth.com



*Overton
before the war*

OVERTON BEFORE THE WAR



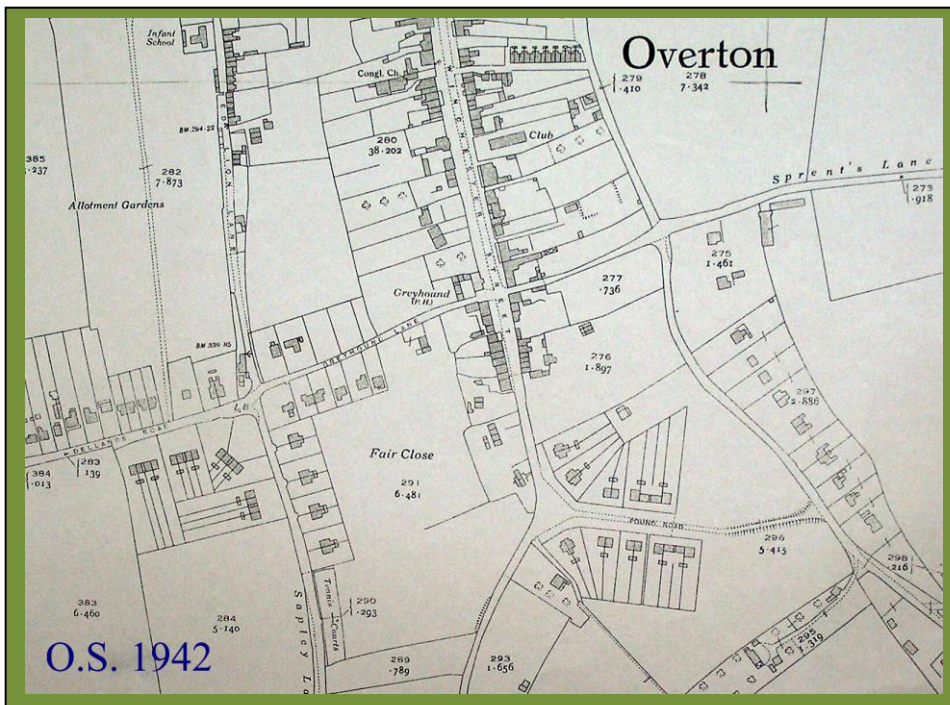
In 1932, the map of Overton village looked much as it had been in medieval times with houses in Winchester Street, High Street and some in Red Lion Lane and Bridge Street. There were outlying settlements at Polhampton, Quidhampton and Southington.

Overton's first 'estate' had been built near the Mill at Copse Road and there had been some 'ribbon development' along Waltham Road and Station Road.

Quidhampton Mill was still a working corn mill. There were extensive watercress beds to the east of Kingsclere Road, in Polhampton and in Southington. The cress was bunched and boxed to be taken by cart to the station every day and sent to Covent Garden market in London.



Photograph: Tony Morris,
www.overtonpictures.com



By 1939 there had been further development along Dellands, and Sapley Lane.

Only half the houses in Pound Road had been completed at the outbreak of war when building stopped for the duration of the war.



Building No 4, Dellands, 1937

From the left, Bill Webb, Bill Locke, Herbie brown, Ernie Wake, Alfie Shadwell, George Akehurst

Photograph: Tony Morris, www.overtonpictures.com. Contributed by Paul Holmes.

Overton Parish now has twice the number of people and three times the number of houses as there were in 1939.



Photograph: Tony Morris, www.overtonpictures.com

SCHOOLS

The infant school was in Red Lion Lane. Children went on to the primary school (now the Community Centre) and then to Whitchurch for secondary education. They could leave at fourteen and four out of five did so.



Photograph, Richard Oram

In 1937, Miss Hide opened a private school over the family store in the High Street which she called 'The Elizabeth School'. It was for about 30 children between 4 and 10 and she charged just over £2 a term. She taught them French, singing, percussion band, nature study, drawing and needlework and gave special attention to 'character and initiative'. It is said that the pupils used to taunt those at the village school opposite by calling out of the windows. The school closed in 1957.



Photograph and information supplied by Gill Surtell.

HEALTH

Drs. Gallimore and Gable held their surgeries at Yield House in Winchester Street. They had a portable operating table which could be set up for minor or emergency operations, such as appendicectomy, either at the surgery or, if need be, in the patient's home.

In the days before the NHS it was a question of whether you could pay the bills. Men in work could pay into insurance schemes which put them on the doctors' 'panel' but this did not extend to their wives or children.

The Overton Nursing Association was a charity paying Nurse Godby to provide home nursing for the needy. Those needing hospital treatment were sent to the Royal Hampshire County Hospital in Winchester. This was also a charity, paid for by public subscription.

Average life expectancy was 61 years for men and 66 years for women, about 17 years less than it is now. About half the men did not live long enough to get the state pension they had paid for. Eighty percent of them were smokers.

EMPLOYMENT

If you lived in Overton you almost certainly worked there too. Farming was still labour intensive especially at harvest time. Portals' paper mills employed 630 people in 1935 and were in the process of expansion.

During 1939, Portals let the lease on Town Mill to Airpak Ltd. It was understood that at least one hundred people would be employed to start production. They imported kapok and purified it by removing the seed husk, dust and other foreign bodies always present in the imported fibre. The product was called 'Tropal' - an anagram of 'Portal'. It was lapped on a special machine and made into linings for life jackets used by the Royal Navy and flying suits for the RAF.

Well-to-do people had butlers, drivers, nursemaids, gardeners and other full time domestic servants providing employment for many people 'in service'. Even those with modest incomes could employ a 'daily'. All that was about to change.

RECREATION

There were ever popular cinemas in Whitchurch and Basingstoke, local events at St Mary's Hall and the annual 'Overton Carnival'. The Vyne Hunt with kennels at Quidhampton met three times a week. For many people, social life revolved around the churches or the pub. There were six; the Greyhound and the Three Horseshoes in Winchester Street, the White Hart, the Red Lion with the Fox almost opposite and the Old House at Home.

A favourite spot in the village at that time was the 'bathing place' in the pool just upstream of Town Mill. It was deep enough for diving but the water was very cold because some of it came from springs in the river bed. The parish council provided tin huts for changing rooms but they remained a constant bone of contention throughout the war.



Photograph, Tony Morris, contributed by Brian Burgess

Racing in tin baths or lorry tyres was a village sport. The 'bathing place' fell out of use with the poliomyelitis epidemic of 1952 and was never revived.

TRANSPORT



Photograph: Jim Stickland

Few people had cars. Most got around on buses, by bike or on foot. People thought nothing of walking to Whitchurch to go to the cinema. The horse and cart were still much used.

Buses calling at Overton were supplied by Venture Buses, King Alfred Buses and Royal Blue Coaches.



There were trains of course, but they were expensive. They were well used for trips to Basingstoke but ‘commuting’ by train was very unusual.

Mrs King and a friend leaving Parsonage Farmhouse to go shopping. Photograph contributed by Janicwe Fooks.

SHOPS AND BUSINESSES

Kelly's Directory, 1939

OVERTON

AKEHURST, Geo.	Builder
AYERS, Hilda	Ladies' hairdresser
BASINGSTOKE COOPERATIVE SOCIETY	
BURGESS, Arch.	Blacksmith
COBB, D.	Wallpaper dealer
COUSINS, Henry	Carrier
COX, Norman	Drugstore
FIELD, Rose	Confectioner
FOX, Fred.	Fishmonger
GLASSPOOL, Geo.	Fruiterer
HARDING, Jn.	Fried fishmonger
HARDING, Jn.	Butcher
HIDE & SONS	Grocer, ironmonger, draper, clothier and boot dealer.
HOWARD, Phil.	News agent
HUNT, Vine	Hairdresser
HUTCHINS, D.	Marine store dealer
INTERNATIONAL TEA CO. STORE	
KERCHER, Fred.	Butcher
KERSLEY, Ed.	Builder
LAMB DEN, Ernest	Butcher
LLOYDS BANK	
LOCKE, Gerald	Butcher
LOVELESS, John	Miller (water)
LOVERIDGE, Thos.	Draper
MIDLAND BANK	
MILLINGTON, Ed.	Builder
MILLINGTON, Leo.	Carpenter
NORRIS, Thos.	Garages
PILBROW, K.	Confectioner
REDSTALL, Albert	Baker
ROPER, M. D. Ltd	Motor car proprietor
SHAW, G.H. (Mrs)	Stationer & Post Office
SWITZER, Jn	Carman
WADLEY, Jn.	Boot repairer
WALKER, Jn	Confectioner
WILTSHIRE, Ed.	Cycle agent.

Overton was well served by shops and businesses just as it is now.

OVERTON FIRE BRIGADE

In 1937, there was a disastrous fire at the International Stores in the High Street. At that time, Overton paid Basingstoke Town Council £10 a year to provide fire brigade cover for the village. On this occasion they arrived too late.



Photograph: Richard Oram

Overton Parish Council wanted to have a village fire brigade. In 1938 the government invited volunteers for an Auxiliary Fire Service as part of air raid precautions and ten men volunteered. The council built a hut at the pumping station near the junction of London Road and Waltham Road.

All they had was a hand cart for a hose and the equipment to connect it to fire hydrants around the village. They were given helmets, uniforms, boots, axes and an extending ladder.

A photograph of the fire trailer taken outside Norris' Garage has recently come to light. It had a petrol/paraffin engine for the pump.



Photograph: Tony Morris contributed by David Read.

In 1946, the village acquired a fire engine and a fire station was built in Waltham Road.



Photograph: Tony Morris, contributed by Peter Cowmeadow.

SANITATION, WATER, POWER & TELEPHONES

All the things we take for granted arrived in the village in the 1930's. Mains water and sewers were proposed 1932. One parish councillor objected,

*'Is the expense justified that the whole village is put on main drainage?
What's wrong with a tin bath in front of the fire a few times a year?
After all, does everyone want a flush toilet and a regular bath?'*

Everyone did. The work was done in 1935-6.



Digging the main sewer.

Photograph: Tony Morris, www.overtonpictures.com contributed by Kenneth Clarke.

By 1936, the old gas lamps in the streets had been replaced with electric lanterns and Overton had its own telephone exchange and a public phone box. Hide's store was 'Overton one nine'.

Nevertheless, in 1939, many houses still had outside toilets and no bathroom, some did not have electricity and few had telephones. Most houses had a scullery at the back with a copper for boiling up clothes.

Sources: Overton Parish Council minute book, Richard Oram, Gill Surtell, Peter Baker and Tony Morris.

SHOE REPAIR SPECIALIST

BEST LEATHER and
WORKMANSHIP
Guaranteed.

J. G. WADLEY

15, HIGH STREET, OVERTON

SHOE SUNDRIES
OF EVERY DESCRIPTION

Prompt and Personal Service
Modern Methods, Reasonable Prices

T. H. LOVERIDGE
WINCHESTER STREET, OVERTON

GENERAL DRAPERY
MILLINERY

GENTLEMEN'S OUTFITTING
AND
BOOTS AND SHOES

THE BEST POSSIBLE VALUE FOR CASH ONLY

HIDE'S STORES, OVERTON.
(A. & T. G. HIDE) 'Phone 19.

6, HIGH STREET, OVERTON,
Grocers and Provision Merchants.

Ironmongery and all Domestic Requisites.
GARDEN TOOLS, SEEDS, Etc.
FIRE LIGHTERS 6d. PER PACKET.
PERSONAL ATTENTION GIVEN. YOUR WANTS SUPPLIED.

DRAPERY DEPARTMENT—4, HIGH STREET.
'Phone 19.

Noted Store for all Ladies' Underwear.
Large Variety of Art-Silk Knickers, Petts, Vests.
Nightdresses. Sanitary Towels, various makes, from 6d. PER DOZ.
Latest Shapes in Corsets, Corselettes, Elastic Belts.
Lovely qualities in Stockings in Art-Silk and Silk from 1/- to 3/11 pair.
Summer Hats, Jumpers, etc.
Men's and Boys' Suits, Flannel Trousers, and Sports Coats.
Shoes for Men, Women and Children.
In the London Road Stores we stock Floor Cloths, Linos,
Mattings, Rugs, Furniture, Bedding, etc.

HIDE'S STORES, OVERTON.

BASINGSTOKE
Co-operative Society LTD.
BRANCH:
WINCHESTER STREET, OVERTON
'Phone 18

SAVE AS YOU SPEND
SHOP AT THE CO-OP.

OVERTON BRANCH DEPARTMENTS:
GROCERY AND PROVISIONS
BOOTS AND OUTFITTING
DRAPERY :: HARDWARE

WE STOCK ONLY THE BEST.
DIVIDEND 1/6 IN THE POUND.
JOIN THE CO-OP. NOW.
Our Motto is Service. Dividend on all Purchases.



E. NIGHTINGALE
ACCREDITED MILK
PRODUCED AND BOTTLED AT
Moore's Farm Dairy







DELIVERIES TWICE DAILY.
BUTTER AND EGGS.
'Phone : Overton 63

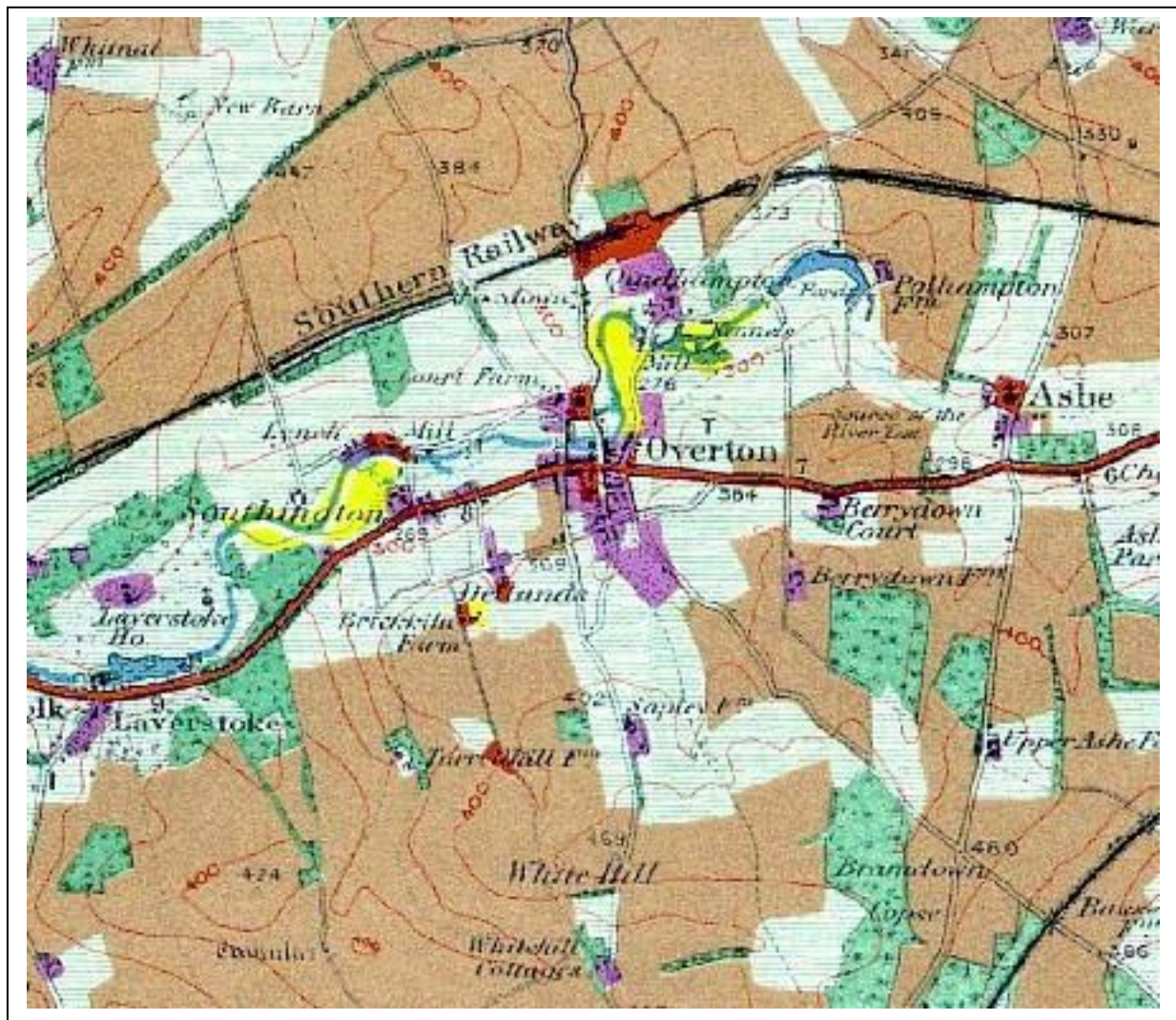


*Preparing for
war*

FOOD PRODUCTION

In the early 1930's, Prof. Dudley Stamp started mapping the use of land in England and Wales for the Royal Geographical Society. School children and students surveyed their own parishes and coloured Ordnance Survey maps by hand.

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
|  Woodland |  Arable |  Meadow/Grass |
|  Water meadow |  Gardens/allotments |  Unproductive |



This shows Overton in 1936. The maps were invaluable for planning how to feed the population during the war.

AIR RAID PRECAUTIONS

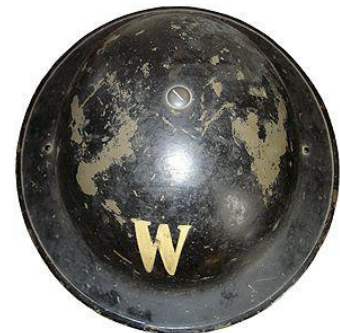
As early as September 1935, the government published a circular inviting local authorities to make plans to protect their people in the event of war. From 1937 there were lectures at St Mary's Hall to give information to the public.



Mr A.E. Hide became Overton's first Air Raid Warden in April 1938. It was his job to issue gas masks which he did in September 1938. He then to make sure people always carried them. Persistent offenders could be fined. He also had to issue materials for making air raid shelters to those who wanted one and many in Overton did. ARP's had to attend incidents and evacuate people within 600 metres of an unexploded bomb. Part-time wardens were supposed to be on duty about three nights a week.

Overton did not have an official air raid warning siren. The District Council thought the risk was too low to warrant the expense. However, there was a hooter at Overton Mill for shift changes and Mr Hide planned to use it as an air raid warning signal.

Black-out regulations were imposed two days before the outbreak of war in the cities but street lighting was not switched off in Overton till March 1940. Thereafter it was the job of the wardens to ensure no lights were visible. The road blocks, petrol pumps, telegraph poles, the public phone box and lamp posts were painted white to prevent people bumping into them in the dark.



CALL UP

Compulsory military service started in April 1939, well before the outbreak of war. Men between 20 and 21 were called up and in October 1939 it was extended to age 23. Those in 'reserved occupations', including farming, were exempted. However, many more volunteered. By the end of 1939 over one and a half million men had been recruited into the armed forces.

In January 1940 over a hundred Overton men were away from home in training or on active service.

Hants & Berks Gazette, contributed by Brian Langer.

In May 1940, registration was extended to men aged 27 and by October, 150 Overton men had been called up.* Registration did not reach those aged 40 until June 1941.

In 1941 single women aged between 20 and 30 were also conscripted. They were required to take up work in reserved occupations, especially factories and farming, to enable men to be drafted into the armed services.

*Source: Overton Parish Church Magazine, October, 1940.

GAS MASKS

After the First World War, when poison gas was used by both sides in the trenches, it was assumed that, in any future conflict, chemical weapons would be used against civilian populations from the air.



As early as 1934, the government gave public demonstrations of gas masks and had already trained 100,000 volunteers to train people how to use them.

OFFICIAL INSTRUCTIONS ISSUED BY THE MINISTRY OF HOME SECURITY

GAS ATTACK




HOW TO PUT ON YOUR GAS MASK

Always keep your gas mask with you – day and night. Learn to put it on quickly. Practise wearing it.



1. Hold your breath.
2. Hold mask in front of face, with thumbs inside straps.
3. Thrust chin well forward into mask, pull straps over head as far as they will go.
4. Run finger round face-piece taking care head-strap are not twisted.

IF THE GAS RATTLES SOUND



1. Hold your breath. Put on mask wherever you are. Close windows.
2. If out of shoes, take off hat, put on your mask. Turn up collar.
3. Put on gloves or keep hands in pockets. Take cover in nearest building.

IF YOU GET GASSED

BY VAPOUR GAS Keep your gas mask on even if you feel discomfort. If discomfort continues go to First Aid Post.

BY LIQUID or BLISTER GAS

1 Dab, but <i>don't rub</i> the splash with handkerchief. Then destroy handkerchief.	2 Rub No. 2 Ointment well into place. <small>(Buy a tub, far more from any chemist). In emergency chemist supply Bleach Cream free.</small>	3 If you can't get Ointment or Cream within 5 minutes wash place with soap and warm water.	4 Take off at once any garment splashed with gas.
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Mass production of gas masks started in Blackburn in 1937. By September of that year they had already been issued to the French and German populations. A year later everyone in Britain had one too.



During the war, chemical weapons were never used in combat or in bombing raids by either side.

Air raid precautions

The first of a series of nine lectures was held on Thursday evening last week at the Bush Room, Memorial Institute for all ladies interested in this work. Overton has been fortunate in securing the services of Dr R. Gallimore and it is hoped that the keen interest shown at this first lecture, when 36 ladies were present, will continue throughout the full course.

Twenty three ARP wardens have attended a course of anti-gas lectures and have passed the test. These wardens are now attending a short course of six lectures on first aid on Monday evenings to complete their training as Wardens before receiving their badges.

The booklet on 'How to protect your home against air raids' has now been received by every household in the District. How many people, especially the heads of households, have read and digested the contents?



OVERTON
Parish Church Magazine

May 1939

A First Aid Point will be established at St Mary's Hall with a personnel of five on duty and as many reserves as possible prepared to deal with casualties. On June 6th and 7th, the Mobile School & Gas van will be in the school yard. Capt. Elliot will give a short talk on gas, a demonstration on how to deal with an incendiary bomb and some instructions to Wardens on reporting.

ROYAL OBSERVER CORPS OBSERVATION POST, OVERTON HILL

The ROC was established in 1925. From 1936 onwards, men and women wishing to enlist in the observer corps were sworn in as special constables. These volunteers worked in groups of four and were in telephone contact with nearby posts and the HQ in Kingsworthy. They all had to be trained in aircraft recognition. The equipment they had for tracking aircraft consisted of a round table marked with a grid. A sighting bar with an eyepiece was mounted at its centre. From this they could estimate height, direction and flight path.



R.O.C. Training. Left, Ted Kersley, Right, T. G. Hide and E Ansell.

Photograph Ann Pitcher

They were trained by Thomas G. Hide from 1937. He had previous experience from the first world war.



The ROC was mobilised on 23rd August 1939.

The post, code-named 'King 2', was on Overton Hill at the north-west corner of the football field with good views except to the south. It was manned day and night in four hour shifts. People volunteered for this over and above their normal working day. At first there was no hut, only a canvas windbreak with one paraffin stove in winter.



To begin with they had no uniform, just a striped arm-band. Later, they were given uniforms and badges. They were also armed with .303 rifles

Alfred Terry, John Barton, Barbara Whitehorn, Reg Akehurst and Wally Rivett. Photograph Anne Pitcher.



Ruth Holmes, John Barton, Alfred Terry and Wally Rivett. Photograph: Anne Pitcher.

SEARCHLIGHT BATTERY

A searchlight battery was installed near Lower Ashe Farm. David Denning recalls that the generator was in the farmyard. The post was manned by a dozen soldiers who helped on the farm in their time off.

They were armed only with a single Lewis light machine gun. This was an obsolete WW1 weapon taken out of stores and pressed into service. A lucky hit might bring down a low flying aircraft and occasionally did. It is likely that the purpose of the battery was to detect and shoot down low flying aircraft dropping parachutists before dawn.



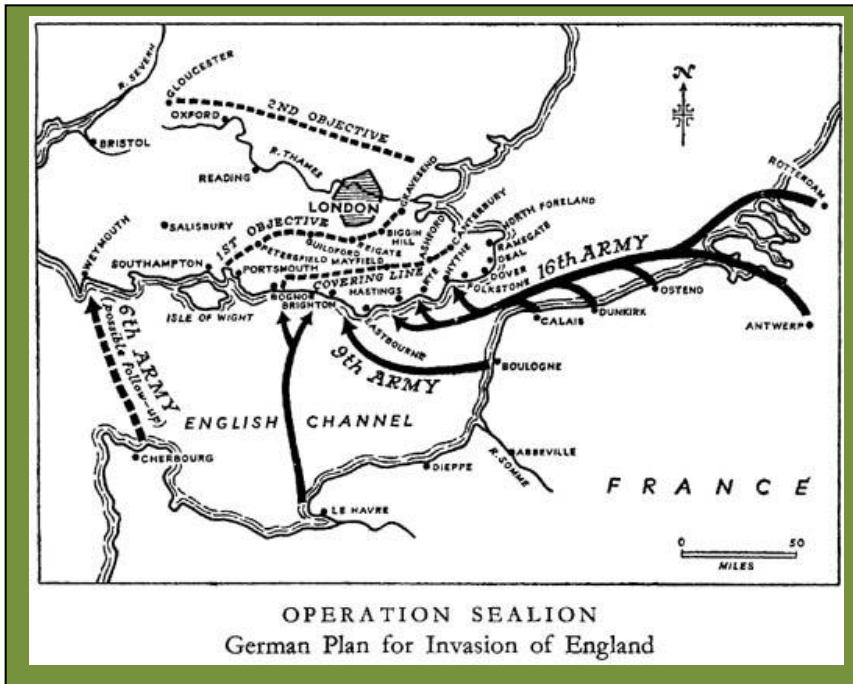
The farm was also home to a bomb disposal unit.



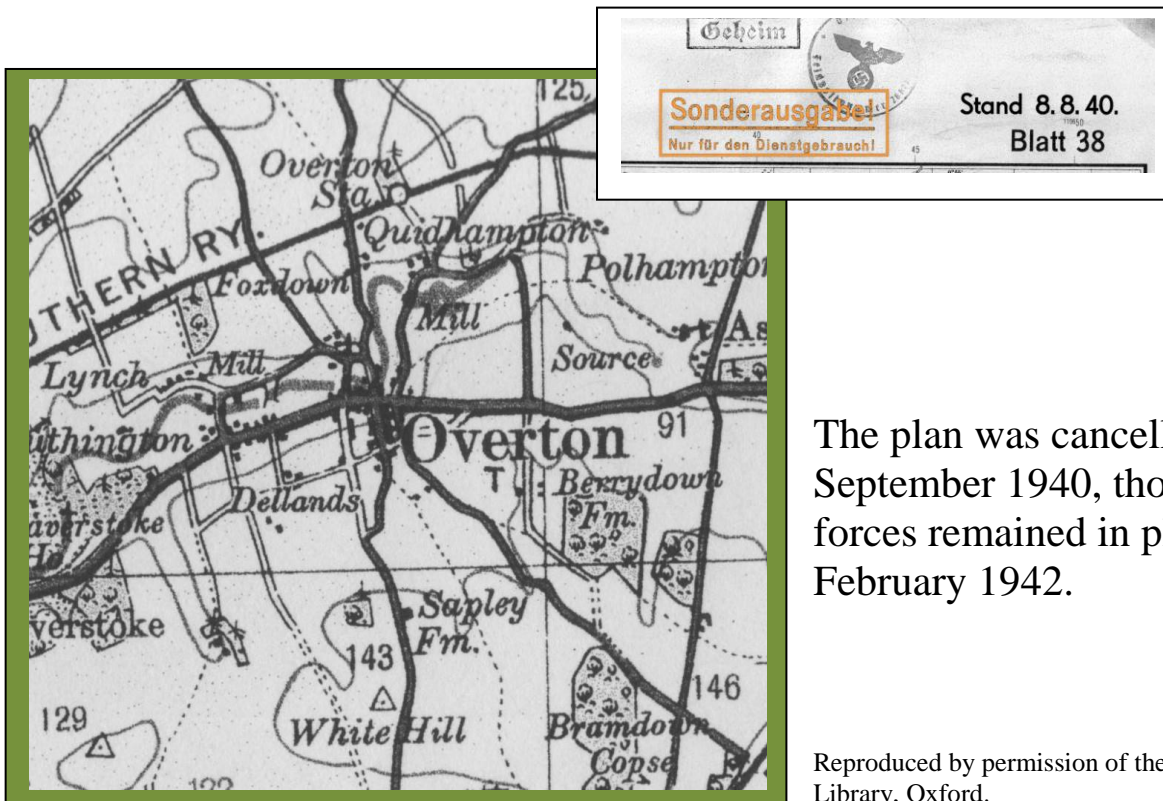
*Preparing for
invasion*

HITLER'S INVASION PLAN

Hitler's 'Operation Sealion' was scheduled to start in September 1940. The German 9th army coming from Le Havre were aiming for Oxford and would have passed our way.



Invasion maps were printed in Berlin in August 1940. They were copied in black and white from out of date one inch Ordnance Survey maps at a reduced scale and were hardly adequate for an invading force. They were printed on flimsy paper which would not have withstood a shower of rain.



The plan was cancelled on 17th September 1940, though the forces remained in place until February 1942.

Reproduced by permission of the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

OVERTON HOME GUARD

The idea of civilians taking up arms against an invasion force was highly controversial. The government eventually bowed to public pressure and recruitment to 'Local Defence Volunteer' forces began on 17th May 1940 during the battle for France. Within a week, 250,000 men had signed up. Churchill later re-named it the 'Home Guard'.

Many men were enrolled at a Local Defence Volunteers meeting at the Overton Memorial Institute on 31st May. They were led by Capt. E.M. Ford. The force was in two sections; one to guard Overton Mill where zig-zag trenches were dug, the other to patrol the parish.

Some of the duties of the Overton Village section were

- To spot strangers and check ID cards.
- To remove or rotate sign posts to confuse the enemy.
- To man road blocks around the village and patrol the village at night.
- To get to the site of any bomb damage or aircraft crash and to report unexploded bombs.
- In the event of an invasion, to erect poles and wires across Frost Hill Farm Airfield to prevent the enemy from using it.
- To guard the Lichfield tunnel under the railway.

At first their HQ was at the Airpak factory at Town Mill and later at Howard's newsagents shop in the High Street. Many years later, quantities of hand grenades and Mill's bombs were found in the attic in a dangerous condition.

The Home Guard were drilled at the primary school and in Town Meadow and did exercises in the fields south of Rotten Hill. Rowley Eastman was the dispatch rider, carrying messages on his motorbike between the various posts around the parish.



Initially they were given an arm band but no uniform and no weapons. By November 1940, the Overton Home Guard had denim uniforms, boots and Canadian Ross rifles with just one round of ammunition. The instructions were to shoot a parachutist as he landed and then to take his gun.

Overton was also required to have a Parish Invasion Committee which would operate ‘in case of invasion should the parish be cut off and isolated.’ The members included Capt. Ford, the policeman (P.S. Harris), the senior ARP Warden (A.E Hide) and two retired military gentlemen, Viscount Monk and Maj. Gen. H. Isacke. No records of their deliberations have been found. For obvious reasons, they may not have written anything down.

Because of the 1968 television series ‘Dad’s Army’ the Home Guard has come to be seen as an object of fun. It was not so at the time. The men who volunteered fully expected the Nazi invasion to come. Home Guardsman Victor Denning said, ‘We had absolutely no doubt about it.’

They armed themselves with whatever weapons they could get hold of and were prepared to die in defence of their parish.

The Home Guard stood down on 3rd December 1944. Every member received a signed message from King George VI.

Sources: Parish Council Minutes, David Denning and Richard Oram.



In the years when our Country
was in mortal danger

DONALD ERIC MOUNT.

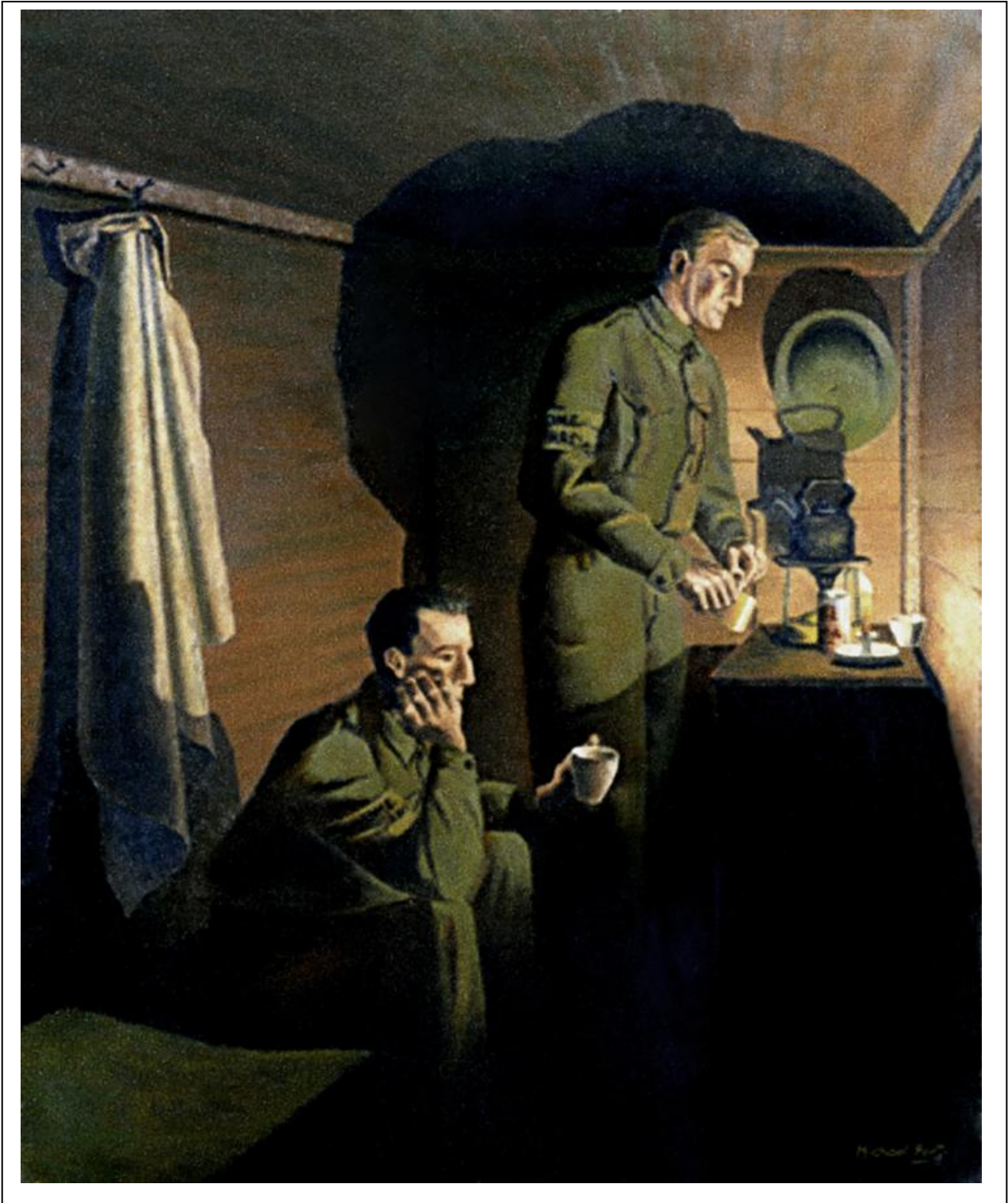
who served 10th JULY 1940 - 31st DECEMBER 1944.

gave generously of his time and
powers to make himself ready
for her defence by force of arms
and with his life if need be.

George R.I.

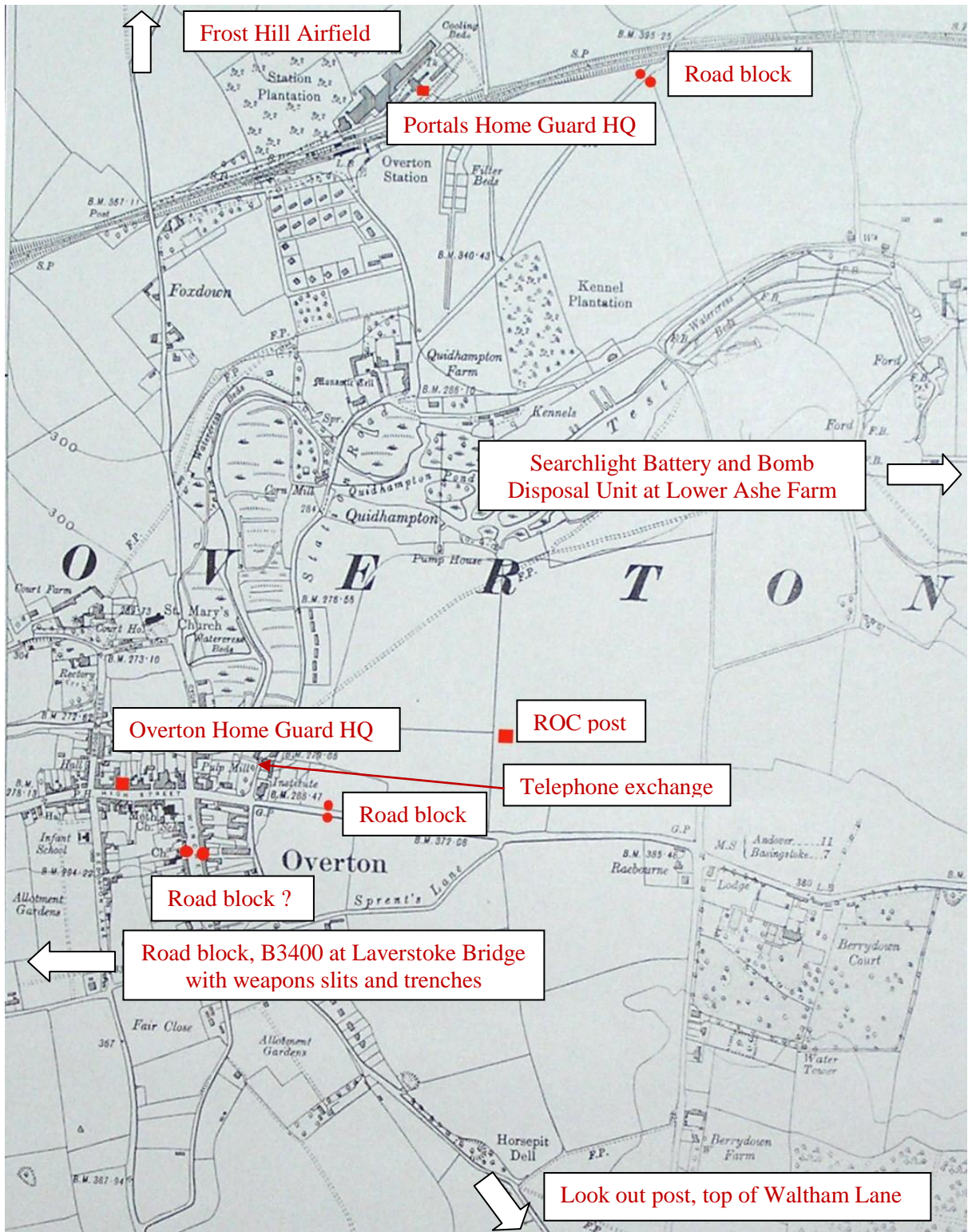
THE HOME GUARD

*From 21st June 1940 the bells of
St Mary's Church fell silent. They
were only to be rung if German
parachutists were seen landing.
The restriction remained until
November 1942.*



'Home Guards brewing tea just before dawn' by Overton artist Michael Ford.

Michael Ford was the son of Captain E.M. Ford who lived at Quidhampton Farm and led the Overton Home Guard. Michael was deaf and dumb.



REGISTER

Cpl. C. Shadwell kept the register of the 3rd and 4th platoons of the Overton Home Guard which includes 52 names. If the 1st and 2nd platoons were of similar size it means that over a hundred men were enrolled. It tells us what weapons they had, who was trained to use them, their proficiency in map reading, dealing with incendiaries, field-craft, signalling by semaphore and first aid.

It is not known when the register was written but by that time every man had a rifle and was trained to use various sorts of grenades. Some were proficient in the use of Sten guns and mortars and a few could use Lewis and Browning machine guns.

Here are some of the entries in the register.

5 Section, No 4 Platoon, Overton Home Guard

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Name</i>		<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Armed with</i>	<i>Comment</i>
<i>Sgt</i>	<i>Upton</i>	<i>E.</i>	<i>Paper worker</i>	<i>Sten</i>	
<i>Cpl</i>	<i>Shadwell</i>	<i>C.</i>	<i>Lorry Driver</i>	<i>Sten</i>	<i>Good & reliable.</i>
<i>L/Cpl</i>	<i>Fiske</i>	<i>F.</i>	<i>Gardener</i>	<i>E.Y. Rifle</i>	<i>Good.</i>
<i>Pte</i>	<i>Brading</i>	<i>C.</i>	<i>Paper worker</i>	<i>Rifle</i>	<i>Good.</i>
<i>Pte</i>	<i>Brickwood</i>	<i>E.</i>	<i>Agricultural worker</i>	<i>Rifle</i>	<i>Shows keenness.</i>
<i>Pte</i>	<i>Day</i>	<i>J.</i>	<i>Gardener</i>	<i>Rifle</i>	<i>Slow at times.</i>
<i>Pte</i>	<i>Faulkner</i>	<i>P.F.</i>	<i>Agricultural worker</i>	<i>Rifle</i>	<i>Not qualified.</i>
				<i>Lewis</i>	<i>Good and really</i>
<i>Pte</i>	<i>Fish</i>	<i>B.</i>	<i>Engineer apprentice</i>	<i>Gun</i>	<i>keen.</i>
<i>Pte</i>	<i>Flood</i>	<i>P. A.</i>	<i>Engineer apprentice</i>	<i>Rifle</i>	<i>Good.</i>
					<i>Good fieldcraft,</i>
<i>Pte</i>	<i>Holmes</i>	<i>F.H.</i>	<i>Water keeper</i>	<i>Sten</i>	<i>reliable.</i>
					<i>Good steady</i>
<i>Pte</i>	<i>Litchfield</i>	<i>A.</i>	<i>Mould maker</i>	<i>E.Y. Rifle</i>	<i>worker.</i>
<i>Pte</i>	<i>Lyewood</i>	<i>J.E.B.</i>	<i>Farmer</i>	<i>Rifle</i>	<i>Keen to learn.</i>
<i>Pte</i>	<i>McCann</i>	<i>D.</i>	<i>Labourer</i>	<i>Rifle</i>	<i>Keen to Learn.</i>
<i>Pte</i>	<i>Taylor</i>	<i>A.</i>	<i>Thorneycrofts</i>	<i>Sten</i>	<i>Good.</i>
<i>Pte</i>	<i>Taylor</i>	<i>J.A.H.</i>	<i>Apprentice</i>	<i>Rifle</i>	<i>Good semaphore.</i>
<i>Pte</i>	<i>Wake</i>	<i>L.J.</i>	<i>Paper worker</i>	<i>Rifle</i>	<i>Keen but slow.</i>

Contributed by Jim Stickland.



Photograph: Tony Morris, contributed by Janet Watts.

This is Harold Light, an Overton shoe mender, who later became a sergeant in charge of No 2 section of the Overton 2nd platoon. He trained all the Overton Home Guard in the use of the Northover mortar, an improvised short range anti-tank weapon made in large numbers for the Home Guard which was reputed to be more dangerous to the operator than to the enemy.



This famous poster was prepared by the Ministry of Information for use if an invasion happened. It was never actually used.

People just carried on anyway because there was nothing else they could do. Many felt that this kind of propaganda was patronising.

In September 1940, when German parachutists were expected to fall from the sky at any moment, the Mission Committee of St Mary's Church met to plan their 'Missionary Day' in November. They did so as if there was no war on at all.

Throughout the war, village life went on as usual despite the restrictions. People got married, bought and sold houses, played bowls, complained about the state of the roads and footpaths, the facilities at the 'bathing place', the late delivery of mail, refuse collection and breakdown of the sewage pumps. Children got scholarships and schools played their football and cricket fixtures.

The annual church fete happened as usual, though they had to get a special allowance of tea from the Whitchurch Food Office and to persuade the cook-house at Foxdown Camp to provide the cakes. Later on, people worried about the rise in venereal disease and the number of new houses planned to be built after the war.

Sources: Hants & Berks Gazette by Brian Langer, minutes of the Overton Parish Council and minutes of St Mary's, Overton Mission Committee.



*During the
war*

THE BANK OF ENGLAND

On September 3rd 1939, the day after the declaration of war, the Bank of England moved its whole operation to Overton including 1,200 staff, the bank note printing presses, all the ledgers and even the inkwells and blotting paper.

The 'advance guard' arrived on 29th August to find the plans far from complete. The Foxdown 'Chalets' were not yet habitable. Plans to accommodate 309 women at Hurstbourne Park were also behind schedule so they had to sleep wherever they could and shared just seven washrooms between them. They were the Dividend Preparation Office girls who were bussed to work at Overton Mill and became known as the 'Div Prep Harem'. Despite the teething problems the work of the Bank never faltered.

Others were billeted at 'The Yews', 'The Lawns' and 'The Grange' in Whitchurch (where they were amused to be in a former workhouse), at two hotels in Winchester and at Queen Mary's School in Basingstoke. Many were lodged with families in Overton. Mr and



Mrs Hobbs took in five girls. They got 8s 6d for each of them every week (equivalent to £18.00 now). They are pictured here with the girls and their grandson. Doris Heighes at Dellands took in two Bank girls 'for company' while her husband was away in the Royal Navy.

Photograph: Richard Oram

When the chalets at Overton were ready, Rose Tutin was one of those who moved there. Each dormitory had space for 24 girls. All they had

for the next five years was a curtained area, a bed and a chest of drawers.

Rose recalled,

'The main working area was open plan so all the factory staff were working together, from when the paper was delivered from Portals to the time the notes were delivered to the Bank. The staff were required to work wherever they were needed, on the litho- and numbering printing machines, cutting section, sheet and final examination and hand counting. There was a pleasant atmosphere everywhere.'

As the men were called up, the women took over working the machines. They quickly started to create their own amusements at the Chalets and in 1941, five cottages in Winchester Street were demolished to make way for St Luke's Hall, paid for by the Bank and used by its staff for dances, whist drives, table tennis, bingo and revues. Planning permission was granted by the council though they described the design as 'deplorable'. It was sanctioned only for the duration of the war.



The 'Foxdown Follies' performing at the Chalet Revue, November 1940.

Photograph: Tony Morris, contributed by Clare Wallis from 'The Old Lady of Threadneedle Street', the Bank of England staff magazine.



Nairee Craik (seated) performing at the Chalet Revue. Contributed by Claire Wallis.

Nairee Craik recalled that,

'Whenever there was a lull at work, any girls who wished to were allowed to help the farmers who were short handed. I learned to bind and stook the corn, build a haystack and to thin beet. It was hard work but interesting for me as a town girl. I felt I was doing my bit towards the war effort.'

She also bought a bicycle and explored the countryside with her friends. They visited pubs where she tasted beer and played darts for the first time. It was not the 'done thing' for girls to go to pubs before the war.

The Bank stayed in Overton till the end of the war and donated St Luke's Hall to the village. A few of the girls married men in the forces and some married local lads in Overton. The Foxdown chalets were used as council houses for another forty years.

Rose Tutin, *'St Luke's at War'*, Portals Newsletter, Christmas 1985.

Nairee Craik, *'How the Bank looked after its evacuees'*, Portals Newsletter, Spring 1982.

Dorothy Smart was one of the 'Div Prep Harem' living at Hurstbourne Park. She wrote a poem entitled 'Evacuation Blues' which was set to music for a Christmas production of 'Cinderella'.

*In the wilds of Hampshire, among the cows and pigs,
Montague's young ladies are living out in digs.
The rooms are very crowded, with twenty in a bed,
But we're all girls together, so nothing need be said.*

*Up at Hurstbourne Manor, each fighting for herself,
One hundred girls or more are sleeping on the shelf.
Draped around the stairway, hanging over rails,
Bathrooms here are rather scarce, so they wash down in pails.*

*In the mill at Overton, just three miles away,
The girls of Div-Prep Harem slave eight hours a day.
There's barbed wire round the fences, to keep out prying eyes,
But what happens if old Adolph tries bombing from the skies?*

*They've camouflaged the building for our safety's sake,
They say that from the skies above it looks just like a lake.
The chimney in the middle is supposed to be a swan,
So we must be the mermaids with too much clothing on.*

*It looks as if we're stuck here for ten or twenty years,
Going home alone at night and buying our own beers.
Growing rather crabby and getting rather fat,
They say we'll have a pension soon but what's the use of that?*

Sir Montague Norman was Governor of the Bank of England from 1920 to 1944.

From Alison Deveson, 'Who was Dorothy?' reproduced in the Hampshire Genealogical Society Journal, 2008.
Contributed by Tony Morris.

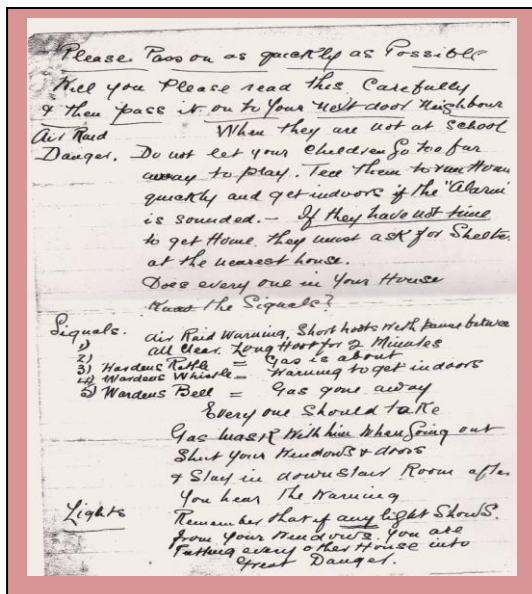
BANK OF ENGLAND
OPERATIC AND DRAMATIC SOCIETY
PRESENTS

Laburnam Grove
A comedy by
J. B. PRIESTLY
at
OVERTON CHALETs
April 14th and 15th, 1943
April 20th & 21st Hurstbourne Camp
'Wings for Victory'
May 10th Overton Village
May 11th & 12th Whitchurch
May 13th Hurstbourne Priors

**Bank of England Operatic and
Dramatic Society**
(by permission of Rupert D'Oyly Carte)
PRESENTS
H.M.S. PINAFORE
OR
**The Lass that loved
----- a Sailor-----**
by
**W.S. Gilbert and Arthur
Sullivan**
at 8.45 p.m. on
Wednesday and Thursday, 18th & 19th
April, 1945

THE BANK OF ENGLAND
OPERATIC AND DRAMATIC SOCIETY
Presents
**Ladies in
Retirement**
by
EDWARD PERCY AND REGINALD
DENHAM
OVERTON
March 1st & 2nd, 1944

A LETTER FROM THE CHIEF AIR RAID WARDEN



A handwritten letter was circulated around the village about air raid precautions.

It was not signed or dated but it was almost certainly written by the chief air raid warden, Mr A.E. Hide, early in 1940.

Here is some of the advice he gave.

Contributed by Janet Oram

Will you please read this carefully and pass it on to your next door neighbour.

Air raid danger

When they are not at school, do not allow your children too far away to play. Tell them to get to your house quickly and get indoors if the alarm is sounded. Does everyone in your house know the signals?

Signals

1. Short hoots with pause between - *Air raid warning.*
2. Long hoot for 2 minutes - *All clear.*
3. Warden's rattle - *Gas is about.*
4. Warden's whistle - *Warning to get indoors.*

Lights

Remember that if any light shows from your windows you are putting every other house in great danger.

Gas

Everyone should take a gas mask when going out. Shut your windows and doors and sleep in a downstairs room after you hear the warning. If you want to make a Gas Proof Room and do not know how to do it, will you call and see me any morning and I will do my best to help you.

Incendiary bombs

Never throw water on to an incendiary bomb. You can put water on to the fires started but only a Proper Pump with a fine spray can be used on the bomb itself. Have some sand or dry earth ready NOW. This will help to smother it till help comes. If you can smother the bomb with sand quickly within the first two minutes you could shove it into a strong pail and get it outside.

High Explosive Bombs

Remember your best chance is to lie down as low as possible if these bombs are being used. If you are caught outside, lie down in a ditch or even on the ground rather than stand up.

NOTE

At least three houses in Station Road have already been reported as showing lights at the back. I have given a great deal of time, energy and study during the past fifteen months so that I may be ready to help you when and if the need comes. Well, you do your part, Please, in seeing that all lights are hidden.

Contributed by Peter Baker and Janet Oram.

OVERTON AIRFIELD

There was a small airfield at Frost Hill Farm, a mile north of the village, which was used from December 1940 to train pilots from R.A.F. Odiham to fly Lysanders, affectionately known as ‘Lizzies’. Though never effective as a combat aircraft, the Lysander was capable of using small grass airfields and found a role ferrying secret agents to and from occupied France.



The fixed ladder shown here was put there to get agents in and out as fast as possible.

The airfield was also used for training Polish pilots to fly in little yellow training machines. There was tented accommodation there for ground crew but it was often not occupied. There was also a large fuel dump in jerry cans which needed protection. Jack Mills was an Overton constable and the airfield was on his beat. He recalled that most of the flights were made at night.

In July 1942 the field was designated as an ‘Alternative Landing Ground’ and in 1943 two Sommerfield Track runways were laid. The runways were removed in 1945 but the site continued to be used for helicopter training till 1994.

Sources: ‘*Hampshire Air fields of the Second World War*’, Robin J. Brooks; Richard Oram and Paul Holmes.

TERRITORIAL ARMY

B COMPANY, 4TH BATTALION, THE HAMPSHIRE REGIMENT



Photograph: Richard Oram

Overton T.A. Troops pull through an anti-aircraft gun on
Southampton Common, September, 1938.

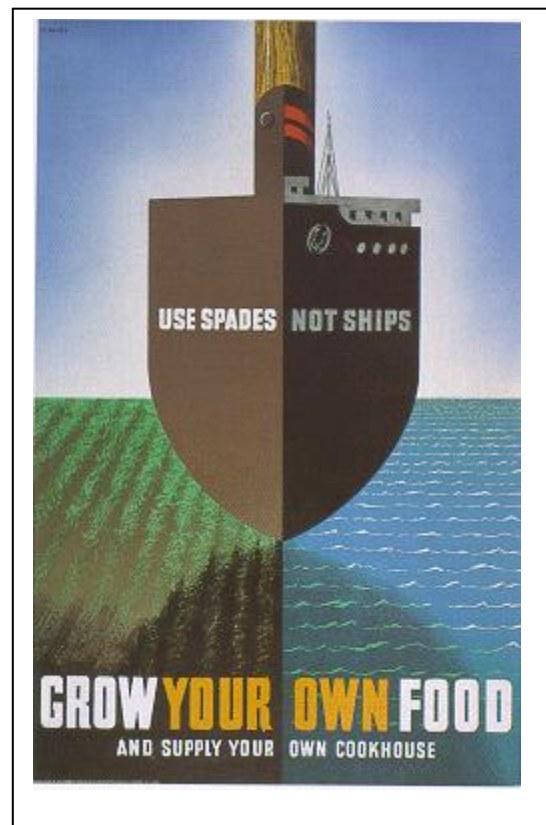
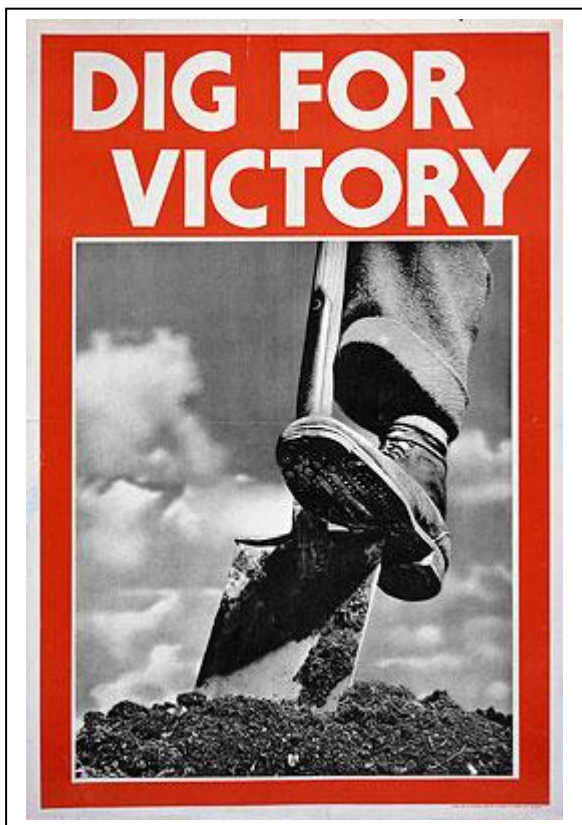
Bombardier Gordon Roberts (in front of the gun), John Hughes, Bert Shergold, Bert Winter,
Bert Pattie, Archie Oram, John Bickett and Mark Person.

Overton's B Company used the T.A. Drill Hall in the High Street which was built sometime before 1932. Traditionally, the volunteer T.A units could only be used for home defence. In the event, many were sent abroad. The 4th battalion fought with great distinction in Tunisia, Italy and Greece during the war.

FOOD PRODUCTION

Before the war, Britain imported 70% of its food.

The 'Dig for Victory' was a hugely successful campaign exceeding all expectations. Between 1939 and 1945 imports of food were halved and the acreage of land used for food production increased by 80%.



In Overton there had been a large area of allotments to the west of Red Lion Lane since the 1870's but the soil was exhausted. New land was made available at Lordsfield in 1940. Unused land on the Pound Road site was dug up along with the recreation area at Copse Road. Land at the Bank of England chalets and Lordsfield Camp was used to grow vegetables as well.

Growing your own food was seen as being essential to national survival.

FARMING

The County War Agriculture Committee appointed Basil Porter of Quidhampton Farm as Group Leader in the area. In December 1942, the farmers met at the Red Lion to develop a 'Grow More Club'.

The County 'War Ag' had considerable power. They could fine farmers who left land fallow and four tenant farmers around Overton were evicted because they were not producing enough or did not obey the rules.



Contributed by Janice Fooks

Alan King (with the waistcoat) and his farm hands at Parsonage Farm, about 1943. The boy on the left is Bill Fooks. The tractor on the lorry does not have rubber tyres. They were not (officially) allowed on public roads.

There was control at every level. The 'War Ag' told the farmers what they had to grow, a licence was required to slaughter every animal and a permit was needed to obtain any new machinery or replacement parts. They were not universally popular.

However, the 'War Ag' maintained a stock of farm machinery and tractors to be shared between the farms. This was necessary because the depression in farming in the 1930's meant that farmers did not have the machinery they needed to be efficient. Countrywide, there were fourteen horses for every tractor in 1939.

Tractors became as important as Spitfires in winning the war.

Basil Porter at Quidhampton Farm had threshing machinery to be shared with Ashe warren, Lower Ashe and several other farms.

David Denning grew up at Lower Ashe Farm. He was 11 in 1939 and left school at 14 to work on the farm and was then driving tractors quite legally. At the week ends he looked after the sheep. These were very hard years for farmers and he realised he had to pull his weight.

Crop yields at Lower Ashe Farm were increased by 52% during the war years by fertilizers, machinery and ploughing up meadow lands to grow corn.

Older school children were given cards for leave of absence from school to help on the farms. David's father had to sign their cards.

The Government offered 1penny for every rat tail to reduce the damage to crops and stored grain. Grey squirrel tails were worth three pence. David handed in rat 66 tails to Mr Lovelace, Clerk to the Overton Parish Council. Paul Holmes lost count of the number he caught. Groups of lads hunted them with catapults. They could also get a penny or twopence a bag for acorns which were used to feed pigs.

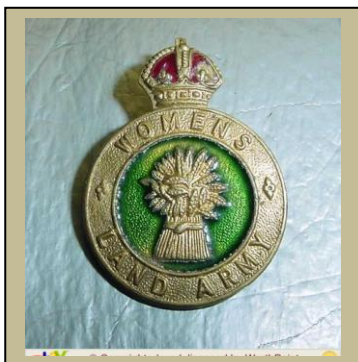
Contributed by David Denning and Paul Holmes



WOMEN'S LAND ARMY

There had been a Women's Land Army during WW1 and it was revived in June 1939 even before the outbreak of war. The recruitment posters gave no hint about how hard the work really was. At first all the girls were volunteers but later the numbers were boosted by conscription. The 'War Ag' organised where the Women's Land Army girls would go.

David Denning recalled that there were five Land Girls at Lower Ashe Farm. Anne Dawe was the first and she initiated four others. Joan Green and her school-friend Florrie were 'general farm workers'. The others worked with the pig-man and the milking bail.



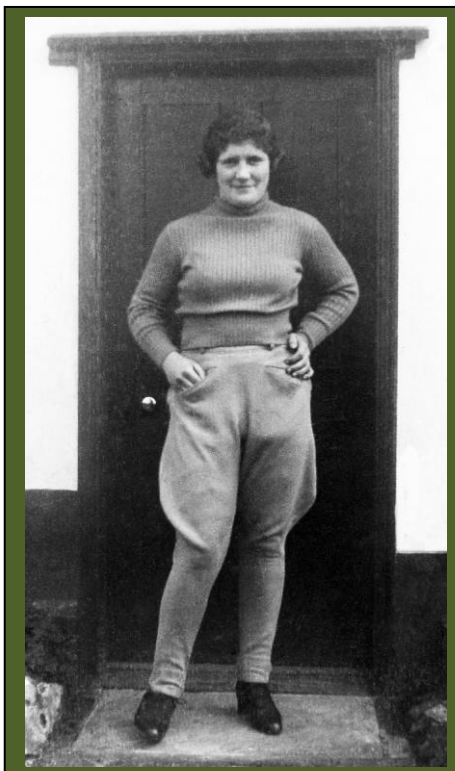
There were Land Girls at Quidhampton Farm, Polhampton Farm and Court Farm as well as a team of Land Girls with threshing tackle who went from farm to farm organised by the 'War Ag'. David was impressed by the way they handled the heavy machinery. In those days, farm work was quite dangerous and there were many accidents.

The Land Army girls were given a green sweater, a pair of baggy trousers, Wellington boots, a coat, a badge and £1.80 per week (£57 in today's money), half of which was deducted for food and lodging.

The WLA had 80,000 members by 1944. It was disbanded in 1952



'Women's Land Army girls ditching', Leonard Daniels, 1943. By courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.



The trousers were certainly baggy! Maybe it was a case of one size fits all.

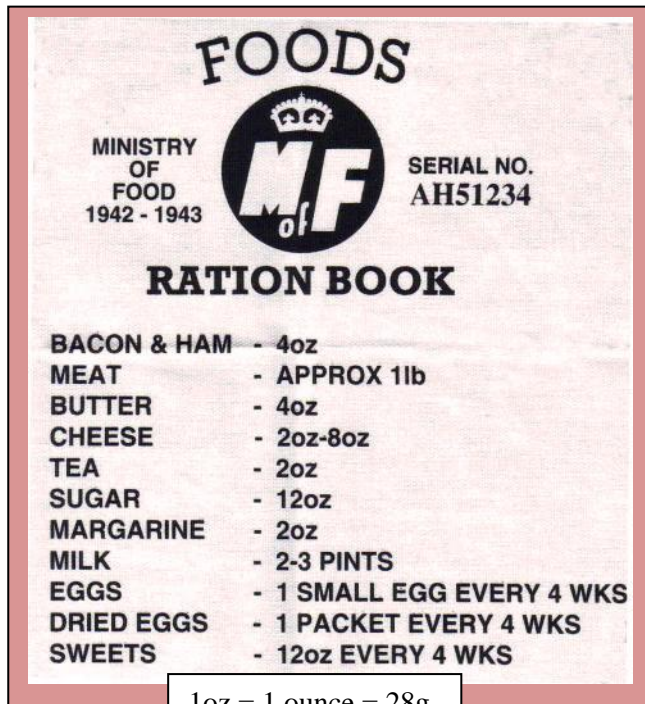
This is Hattie Wheeler who was billeted in a cottage on Kingsclere Road and lived in a caravan in the garden.

She worked on one of the local farms.

Photograph: Tony Morris, contributed by David Evans.

FOOD RATIONING

On National Registration Day on 29th September 1939, every householder had to fill in a form giving details of the people who lived in their house. They were then given ID cards. No-one objected because without one it was impossible to get a ration book. Rationing began in January 1940 to prevent hoarding, stabilise prices and to make sure



everyone had just enough to eat.

Ration books were issued from the Overton Memorial Institute. Young children and expectant mothers were allowed extra rations, including free orange juice and cod liver oil to ensure they received the correct vitamins. Vegetables, bread and milk were not rationed during the war although the amount available varied.

Overton people suffered less from rationing than those in the cities. They had their allotments and many kept pigs and chickens in their gardens. The lads found catapults and ferrets useful for getting rabbits. They were 'off ration', and rabbit stew was a regular item in the diet. Eels were plentiful in the river at that time and were caught with traps. There was a good deal of poaching of pheasant and 'tickling' trout was a skill known to many. One of the gamekeepers came down hard on them but others were more accommodating.*

Housewives were bombarded with good advice from the Ministry of Food about recipes, preserving eggs with isinglass and making jam from wild fruit. No-one in Overton went really hungry.

Food rationing continued until 1954.

*Contributed by Paul Holmes.

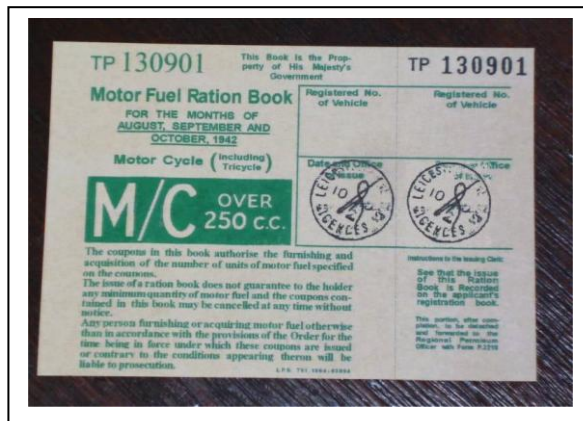
PETROL RATIONING

Petrol rationing started the day after war broke out on September 3rd 1939. The ration depended on engine size and was enough to drive about 200 miles a month.



Photograph: Tony Morris, www.overtonpictures.com

This is Overton High Street in 1940. In the summer of 1942, with the U-boat attacks on the Atlantic convoys, the petrol ration was cut altogether for the private motorist. Petrol was then only available to licensed users whose essential needs were given priority.



SALVAGE



Everything was recycled during the war.

Iron railings were removed from public buildings and private dwellings. In Overton, the task of collecting waste paper was done by the Boy Scouts. The Overton Girls Training Corps went from house to house collecting copper, brass, aluminium and lead. Aluminium was particularly important for building aeroplanes. Books were pulped or sent to troops overseas.

In Winchester Street there were bins for kitchen waste to be fed to pigs reared in back gardens.

Nothing was wasted. The problem was finding enough lorries and fuel to transport it all. In 1943, Italian prisoners of war were put to work at a sorting dump in Whitchurch. There were a few prosecutions of people stealing metals from the dump and selling them.

Sources: Kingsclere & Whitchurch District Council Minutes, Overton Parish Council Minutes.

THE LORDSFIELD BOYS



Violet Butler was fifteen when she was sent away from 'Hellfire Corner' in Dover to work at Lordsfield Camp in October 1941. It was then home to about 250 boys between seven and thirteen years old with their teachers who had been evacuated from Southampton. Violet laid tables, washed up and did general cleaning.

Apart from school work, the boys cared for their own sheep, kept rabbits and bees and tended the vegetable garden. On Saturdays they often walked to the cinema in Whitchurch and football fixtures were arranged against local schools. Some scrumped apples from gardens and poached trout from the river. Others helped with collections of waste paper around the village, lifting potatoes and harvesting. The village organised entertainments for them at Christmas.

Between August and December 1941 there were thirty one heavy air raids on Southampton, mainly at night. After dark, the boys could see the glow in the sky and hear the explosions thirty miles away.

'We would stand out in the field and watch the fires burning in Southampton, each wondering whether our home and mum and dad were OK.'

Not knowing what had happened to their families, many absconded and tried to get home by walking south to the railway line and then along the tracks. An eight year old and his brother made it by hitch hiking. They were all brought back and caned by the headmaster for causing so much trouble.



Photograph: Tony Morris, contributed by Violet Butler.



Discipline was strict and the conditions were spartan but, apart from homesickness, those who wrote about their schooldays at Lordsfield in later years remember it as a good school and a good place to have been.

Photograph: Tony Morris, contributed by Violet Butler.

Violet worked at the camp till September 1943. It closed in December 1944. Overton Primary School later occupied the wooden buildings until the present school was built in 1968.

Violet Butler, *'On a hill above a valley'*, Buckland Publications, 2001.

OTHER EVACUEES

OVERTON Parish Church Magazine

October, 1939

We have some 40 school children refugees amongst us. Let us give them a good welcome. The number of visitors will probably be much greater by the end of the month. Let us do all we can for their comfort and make them welcome in church, in school, at St Mary's Hall and in our homes.

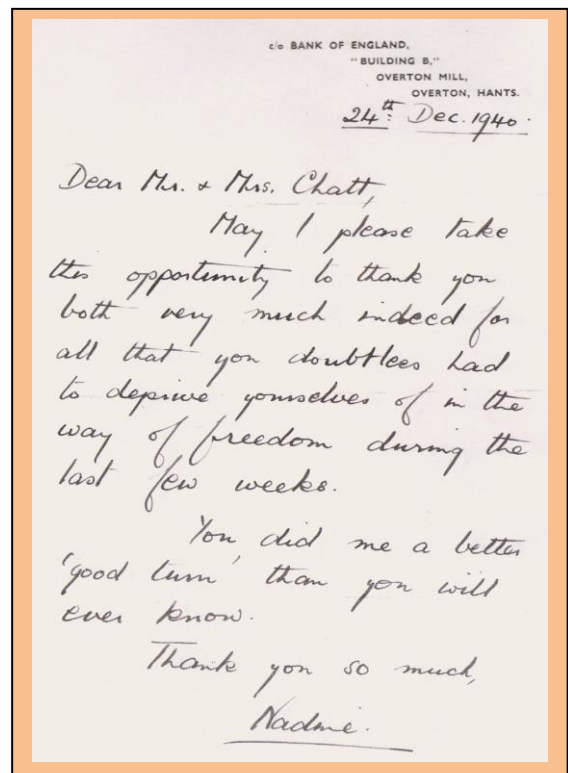
Overton was refuge to many people as well as the Lordsfield boys. It is not known how many evacuees there were in Overton but the numbers must have been considerable. The Rector repeated his welcome to all 'the new refugees' in October 1940.

Nadine Anderson was a Bank of England employee who wanted to get her elderly aunt out of London during the blitz. She asked Mr and Mrs Chatt who lived at Berrydown to take her in. The old lady died two months later and Nadine wrote this letter to the Chatts.

Source: Tony Morris, from Mrs H.E. Chatt and Peter Baker, from Mr Humphrey Chatt.

There was a further large influx of evacuees when the V1 flying bombs started falling on London in June 1944.

Source: Overton Parish Church Magazine, July 1944.



WAR CHARITIES

Throughout the war, Overton people gave generously to support war charities through street collections, flag days, whist drives, concerts and dances on top of the usual peace time collections for such things as the Lifeboats, Winchester Hospital, Overton Nursing Association and Poppy Day.

In street collections they gave to Mrs Churchill's 'Aid to Russia', the Russian Red Cross, hospitals in China, Red Cross Parcels to British POW's and the Women's Land Army.

Overton United Football Club put on a dance every week and raised £1,167 up to December 1942.

Amongst other things, the proceeds went to

British Red Cross
'Smokes and Comforts for the Troops' Fund
Royal Sailors Society
Russian Red Cross
R.A.F. Benevolent Fund
'Prisoners of War Week'
Lordsfield Boys Camp, Southampton Boys
London Air Raid Distress Fund
Overton Air Raid Distress Fund
Southampton Air Raid Distress Fund
Hampshire Regiment Comforts Fund
Prisoners of War, Overton
Minesweepers and Coastal Craft Fund
Overton First Aid

Sources: Richard Oram and Brian Langer from Hants & Berks Gazette.

WAR WEAPONS WEEK, 1941



War Weapons Week, Michael Ford, 1941.

By courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

On the right of the picture in the school playground are ARP Wardens and in front of them some members of the Home Guard. To the left of the speaker are some girl guides and boy scouts.

This was a scheme to encourage a people to save their money in War Bonds and Savings Certificates to help pay for the war. It coincided with a week of parades, exhibitions and publicity. In this painting by Michael Ford we can see people gathered in May 1941 to listen to speeches, along with a military parade and a brass band with scouts and guides, members of the home Guard and some ARP wardens in the school yard. Note the military vehicles and the complete absence of private cars. The telephone box has been painted white to make it

more conspicuous in the dark. Michael Ford has painted white tank obstacles in Winchester Street but some say they were in London Road. £63,691 was invested, well above the £50,000 target for Overton and Whitchurch combined.

A similar scheme in 1942 was called 'Warship Week' which raised another £50,000 and the village adopted H.M. Minesweeper Cypress (T09) till the end of the war. She was part of Minesweeping Group 55 operating out of Portsmouth. Money was raised to buy comforts for the crew.



.Later in the year Overton saved £16,000 to buy a tank. In May 1943, Overton and Whitchurch invested £65,000 in 'Wings for Victory' Week, enough to build 13 Spitfires.

At 'Salute the Soldier Week' in June 1944 the opening ceremony was preceded by impressive procession with the band of the Hampshire Regiment, the Home Guard, British Legion, Royal Observer Corps, NFS Civil Defence and First Aid, Civil Defence (Bank of England), Army Cadets and Girl Guides.

Sources: Hants & Berks Gazette contributed by Brian Langer.

PRISONERS OF WAR



Italian prisoners of war working on the Land

Michael Ford, 1942.

By courtesy of the Imperial War Museum

This painting by Michael Ford shows Italian P.O.W.'s gathering onions in an Overton field. They wore distinctive brown uniforms with large orange patches. The nearest P.O.W camps were at Whitchurch and Popham. They were not forced to work: this would have been contrary to the Geneva Convention. They were invited to work in return for a small allowance and free cigarettes. It is not known which farm this is. David Denning grew up at Lower Ashe Farm. He remembers the Italians but does not recall that they were

ever under armed guard. Later in the war there were Germans and Austrians and he remembers they were always guarded.

Even before Italy capitulated in 1943 the Italians were allowed to move around freely within five miles of the P.O.W camp and were a familiar sight in Overton. Some made wooden toys and sold them in the streets. Others offered haircuts. Later, they were allowed to live on the farms where they worked.

German and Austrian prisoners wore green uniforms. Paul Holmes recalls seeing them around the village. Only the lowest risk prisoners were housed in the south of England and none of them even wanted to escape.



Photograph, Anne Pitcher.

A farm in Whitchurch, 1942. On the right are four Italian POW's. They seem to have discarded their uniforms.

ENEMY ACTION

It does not seem that the Luftwaffe ever targeted Overton but they might have paid Overton Mill more attention had they known what was being made there. The roofs of the mill were painted in camouflage colours. An R.A.F. pilot was asked to report on their handiwork. He said

'It looks like a camouflaged munitions factory!' ¹

It is likely that enemy bombers reaching Overton had been chased away from their intended targets by the R.A.F. and were looking for somewhere to jettison their bombs before flying home. A factory by a railway line would be an obvious choice.

On January 18th, 1940 a German aeroplane crashed near Overton Mill. In July, 1940 an enemy aircraft swooped low and dropped a stick of bombs on to open ground just south of the mill. They failed to explode. ² Victor Denning recalled that in August 1940 at lower Ashe Farm *'there was a raid and a series of loud bangs indicated they were very close. In the morning we found that the bombs had been dropped on Deane Bottom doing no damage. They had been aiming at the searchlight battery just above the garden at Ashe. Apparently, the battery had opened up with machine gun fire which did not damage the plane.'* ³

In September, 1940 a bomber being chased by a Spitfire dropped several bombs on the sewage works. The Lordsfield boys felt the force of the blast as they huddled in their air raid shelter. ⁴

'We thought our dormitories had been hit but we found out what had been hit from the smell when we came out of the shelter – phew!'

On 26th March, 1941 there was a more serious raid on Overton Mill which is described below.

A V1 flying bomb fell into a cornfield near Sapley Farm on 27th June, 1944. The farmhouse was damaged and windows were blown out in Winchester Street but there were no casualties. ⁵ The V1's were mostly aimed at London but the guidance system was poor.

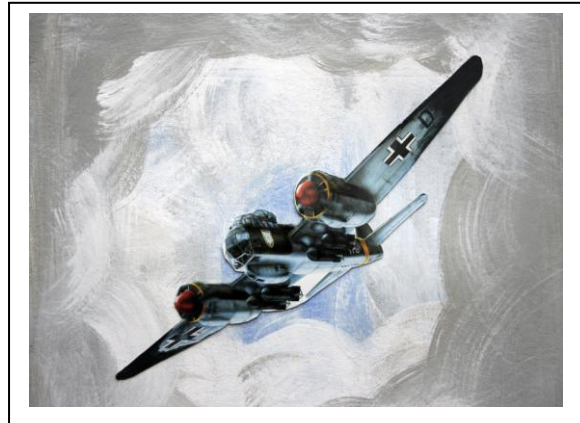
1 Craik, Nairee, 'How the Bank looked after its evacuees', Portals Newsletter, Spring 1982. 2 Pitcher, Anne 'Overton and Laverstoke', p82. 3 Raymond Denning 'The Long Road', 1995 contributed by Jane Mackenzie.

4 Butler, Violet, 'On a hill by a valley', p78. 5 KWRDC minutes, 1944. Hampshire Archives 43M66/DDC66

AIR RAID, 26th MARCH, 1941

At 3 p.m., a low flying aircraft coming from the north east was spotted at the Royal Observer Post on Overton Hill. At first it was thought to be 'one of ours' but then identified as a Junkers 88.

Alfred Terry sent out the alarm and contacted 'Dickie' Bird. He was the fire watcher on the flat roof of Overton Mill who had seen it too. The plane was so low the pilot could be seen in the cockpit. A stick of five bombs engulfed the whole area around the station in dust and smoke.

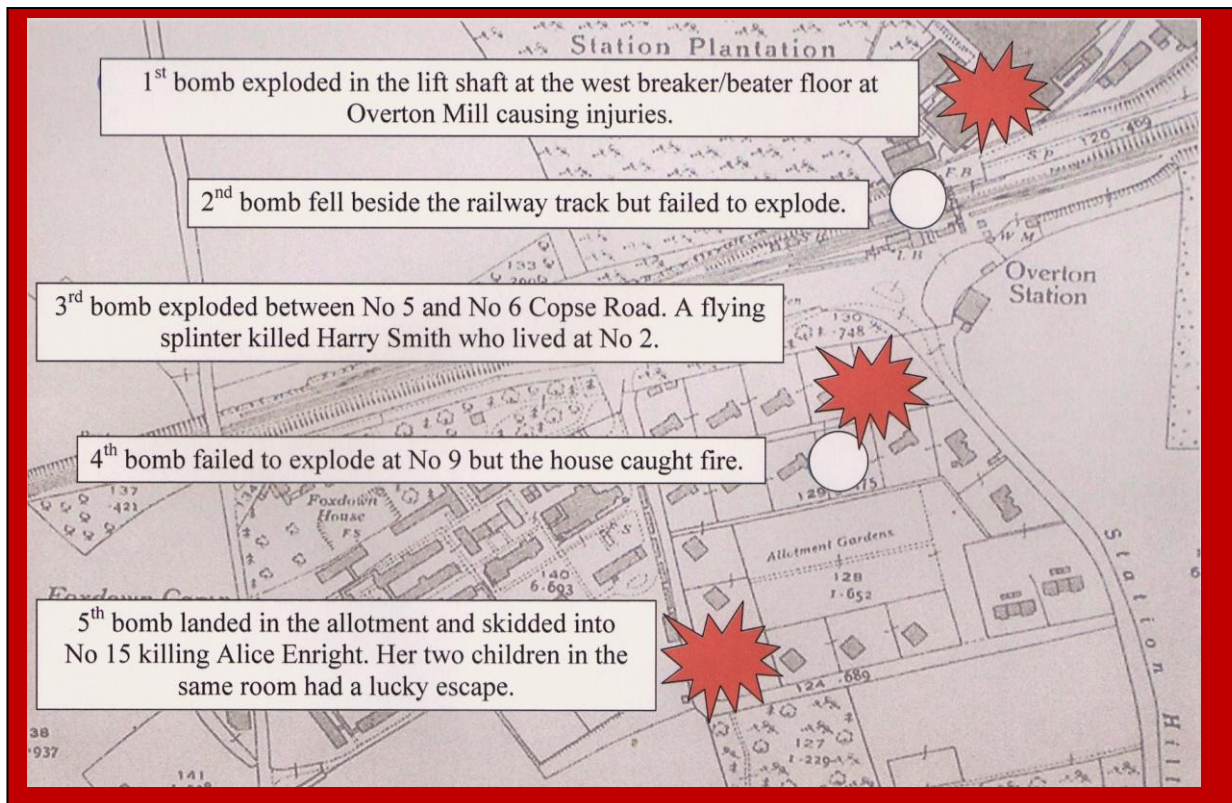


The Bank of England Medical Centre tended the shocked and injured and set up a first aid post at the Foxdown chalets to deal with the casualties from the bungalows and the mill. One of those giving first aid at the Mill was Cynthia Kemp. Stan Loader had lost a finger, and Bill Swain suffered extensive injuries to his foot and legs from shrapnel.

Three people who were seriously injured and four who were not so badly hurt were taken to Park Prewett Hospital. Bill Swain's foot was operated on by one of a team of American surgeons and who had volunteered for service in Britain prior to America's entry into the War. Afterwards Bill said that but for their skill he would have been 'one foot less' for the rest of his life.

Children in the school playground could both see and hear what had happened around the station. Those from the area were kept at school until they could be collected. Many of them had to stay with friends and relatives.

Most of the bungalows had suffered shrapnel and blast damage. Five of them were later demolished and rebuilt.



Adapted from a map drawn by Jim Burgess.



Photograph: Tony Morris, www.overtonpictures.com

AMERICANS

American servicemen were a familiar sight in Overton from late 1942 onwards. They had bases at Popham, Kingsclere, Sutton Scotney and Greenham Common. They also had vehicles and petrol. There were so many visitors that the ratepayers asked the District Council to build a public convenience in Winchester Street. The request was turned down.



Photograph, Richard Oram.

Here are three of them with the Gibbons family outside their shop. Generally, the Americans were made welcome. Dances were organised for them at St. Mary's Hall on a regular basis and they contributed to services at St. Mary's Church.

They also provided transport to take Overton girls to the base at Greenham Common for a dance every week. Apart from 'candy', the Americans always had a good supply of nylon stockings. As one girl put it,

'There wasn't much fun around then and the Americans provided it.'

There was, however, a darker side. There was a 'colour bar' between white and black American troops. In June, 1943 the St Mary's Hall Committee saw fit to publish this notice,

'The organisers of the weekly Saturday evening dances at SMH have never placed any bar on the admittance of coloured troops and their actions have been justified for they are a courteous, good mannered, well conducted band of men. As an act of appreciation the men themselves gave a cabaret dance at the hall with free admittance. Expenses were paid by the soldiers with an abundance of free refreshment.'

In August 1943,

'The dance at SMH raised £30 for British War Orphans with music supplied by the Coloured American Dance Band playing jazz 'as only the coloured folks can play'. Thereafter the jitterbug was danced even more furiously until 11p.m. when the 'Stars and Stripes' and 'God Save the King' were played.'

But racial tensions were building. There were complaints about the noise they made on Saturday and Sunday evenings and requests for military policemen to keep them in order. Paul Holmes recalls that hardly a week went by without some racial fighting in the Overton pubs. On one occasion the American military police came in hard with their truncheons and he saw a whole row of soldiers laid out on the ground in front of the Greyhound.

In November 1944, there was a shooting incident at the Crown Inn at Kingsclere in which a white military policeman shot dead a black GI and the landlord's wife was also killed. In December there was an affray in Overton involving black US troops who gate crashed a dance organised by white Americans. There was damage to St Mary's Hall and Overton was put of bounds to all Americans. There were serious riots with shooting incidents between black and white American servicemen in Preston, Bristol, Launceston and Leicester in which three were killed. Under wartime censorship these events were given little or no publicity.

Sources: Hants & Berks Gazette, contributed by Brian Langer and www.heretical.com/smith/riots.html

OVERTON
Parish Church Magazine

June 1944.

I am sorry to find there is a good deal of divided opinion about dances at St. Mary's Hall. The Church Council decided some time ago to permit not more than two dances a week. We feel that the excitement and fatigue of more than two dances a week is not to the benefit of people who have work to do.

If the number of troops attending is too great, I hope the organisers will try to arrange some of the dances for American and some for British troops. In that way we can give hospitality to both.

Through these summer months the men of the Forces will have much to do and suffer. In one way or another we want to help them all we can and if they need it we must give them the use of the Hall.

Rev. Canon E. Glossop Wells, Rector.

D DAY AND AFTER

David Denning recalls being out in the fields at Lower Ashe Farm on 6th June 1944. *'The sky was full of planes all day and reverberated with the roar of their engines'*.



American paratroopers leaving Greenham Common, June 6th 1944

An evacuee child of ten remembered,

'Americans were moved into temporary camps not far from Overton, and Rosemary and I used to walk to the nearest of them to see these men from outer space! They were part of a tank battalion, and they hadn't come across English children before. They showed us photographs of their families and, like manna from heaven, fed us fruit and chocolate. Then, one day, we happily left home to go to the camp. They had gone overnight! Nothing was left, no rubbish or tents, only tank tracks in the mud under the trees. We were totally dumfounded. It was like the end of a marvellous dream.

A couple of days later, we heard the allies had landed in France, and immediately realised where our friends had gone.'

Paul Holmes went there too. The camp was in Cobley Wood north of Micheldever Station. He exchanged eggs for sweets and chocolates. The soldiers cooked the eggs on their camp stoves straight away.



Military vehicles on the A33, 1944. Hampshire Archives.

It was not long before Rosemary and her brother saw Americans again.

'My sister and I used our pocket money to go from Overton to Basingstoke. On Basingstoke station there was a mob of children waiting. We joined them and within half an hour a train drew in and stopped. It was full of injured American troops being transferred to hospitals in England. Basingstoke was the rail centre where trains could be directed to other parts of the country.

We must have been the first contact they had with children since they left France and their generosity was incredible. We were given all kinds of food they couldn't eat themselves and there seemed to be an endless supply of fruit, ration packs and all kinds of chocolate and sweets, a veritable child's delight!

There were American cigarettes as well. No-one seemed to care that we should be given packets of Camel or Marlborough but we soon discovered the power of barter. For some reason they craved for milk and we used to carry bottles from home (which were never missed) and exchanged them for cartons of fags which we carried back to Overton and sold at the back doors of the pubs!'

bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar. WW2 People's War is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. Contributed by 141David.



*The end of the
war*



IN REMEMBRANCE



Sixteen men did not return

Royal Navy					
Tilbury	David George	P. O. Stoker	HMS Penelope	18 th Feb 1944	Off Naples
Bower	James Rodney	Boy, 1 st class	HMS Kashmir	23 rd May 1941	South of Crete
Oram	Bertram Walter	Able seaman	HM Landing craft (Tank)	18 th Oct 1944	Off Lands End
Robus	Percy	Petty Officer	HMS Avenger	15 th Nov 1942	Near Gibraltar
Army					
Armstrong	Richard George	Lieutenant	The Hampshire Regiment	20 th Dec 1941	Malaya
Watling	Stanley	Lieutenant	Parachute regiment	19 th Sept 1944	Arnhem, Holland
Hide	Garnet Norton	Trooper	Royal Armoured Corps	14 th Apr 1945	Germany
Roberts	Stanley	Private	The Hampshire Regiment	1 st Dec 1942	Tunisia
Cooper	Cecil Henry	Private	The Wiltshire Regiment	10 th Feb 1945	Germany
Smith	Denis Tom	Sergeant	The Hampshire regiment	13 th May 1942	Buried at Overton
Watts	Albert Enos	Sergeant	Queen's Royal Regiment	20 th Sept 1943	Salerno, Italy
Hopkins	Basil T.	Lt Corporal	?	20 th Oct 1944	?
Smith	W.T.	Lt Sergeant	?	10 th Nov 1944	Italy
Royal Air Force					
Collins	John Wyndham	Pupil pilot	?	28 th Feb 1945	Oxford
Hide	Kenneth John	Pilot Officer	149 Squadron	20 th Nov 1940	Berlin
Winslade	Henry Charles	Sergeant	RAF Volunteer Reserve	27 th Aug 1944	Runnymede

At least three others were seriously injured and twelve were taken prisoners of war.



Photograph: Richard Oram

The WW1 war memorial had to be altered to make room for all the new names. It was dedicated in May 1948. Six hundred people attended the service.

Source: Overton Parish Church Magazine, June, 1948



Able Seaman Bertram Oram, H.M. Landing Craft (Tank) 7015 which foundered in a gale off Land's End on 18th October 1944 whilst being towed by a merchant ship.

Photograph: Tony Morris, www.overtonpictures.com contributed by Dulcie Roberts.



Pilot Officer Kenneth Hide of 149 Squadron based at Mildenhall, Suffolk, who was shot down in a night time raid on Berlin in a Wellington bomber, 20th November, 1940.

Photograph Tony Morris. www.overtonpictures.com. Contributed by Geoff Hide.



Stan Watling was a regular soldier who was evacuated from Dunkirk in 1940. He then served in North Africa where he was awarded the British Empire Medal and went on to join the Parachute Brigade. He parachuted into Arnhem, Holland in September 1944 and was killed two days later. He was wearing a tie-pin given to his young wife as a hat brooch.

His company commander, Tom Geiling, was taken prisoner and was helping to bury British servicemen under the supervision of the German SS. He noticed the brooch and managed to hide it in his boot along with the soldier's identity documents. Unfortunately, he lost the documents and spent many years trying to find out who the soldier was. Fifty years later he succeeded.



Phyl was left to bring up three young children on her own. The brooch was returned by Tom to her and her children at Stan's grave in February 1994.

From 'The Test', November 1994, contributed by Tony Watling and Dawn Denning. Photograph by Tony Watling.



Tony Morris, www.overtonpictures.com

One hundred and sixty returning servicemen received one of these from the village along with their share of the 'Welcome Home Fund' presented by Lord Portal in St Mary's Hall. They were also given a pint of beer by the British Legion.

Source: Overton Parish Church Magazine, May 1946.

VICTORY CELEBRATIONS

The end of the war in Europe was celebrated on V.E. Day, 8th May 1945.



Bridge Street.

Photograph: Tony Morris, www.overtonpictures.com. Contributed by Brian Burgess.

'The village put out flags and bunting and Bridge Street, true to tradition, was a mass of colour. Children paraded effigies of Hitler which were burnt when night fell. St. Mary's was crowded for the Thanksgiving Service at 5pm and for Bank of England employees at 7.30pm. An evening dance found St Mary's Hall far too small but Messrs Gibbons and Smallhouse came to the rescue by floodlighting the High St. and playing the accordion until the early hours'.

Source of report: Hants & Berks Gazette, contributed by Brian Langer.



Mary Roper in the school playground,
May 8th 1945

Photograph: Tony Morris, contributed by Mary Reid.

Nancy Baker remembers the event.
She was seven and lucky enough to
be one of the ‘special attendants’.

*‘We received ribbon for sashes and
extra clothing coupons for the
dresses. I remember sitting on a
vehicle in Winchester Street and
meeting some famous star.’*



From the left, Yvonne Oram, Janice
Berry, Mary Roper, Jennifer Pilbrow,
Shirley Berry, ?, Diana Cowmeadow.

Photographs: Tony Morris, contributed by Mary Reid.

As part of the victory celebrations, there was a treat for 200 children with 15 helpers who were taken to the sea in four Venture coaches, singing all the way. They went to Southampton and many had their first look at the sea. They had a boat trip to Cowes and then walked to Gurnard where they had half a mile of beach to themselves.

Source: Hants & Berks Gazette. Contributed by Brian Langer.

Victory over Japan was celebrated on V.J. day, 24th August. The Bridge Street residents exceeded their previous efforts. A fancy dress parade for children caused much pleasure and there was racing on The Green for children and adults. There were some street tea parties and in the High Street the crowds sang and danced until 3am. Bonfires were lit and fireworks were plentiful. There were large congregations at Thanksgiving Services.

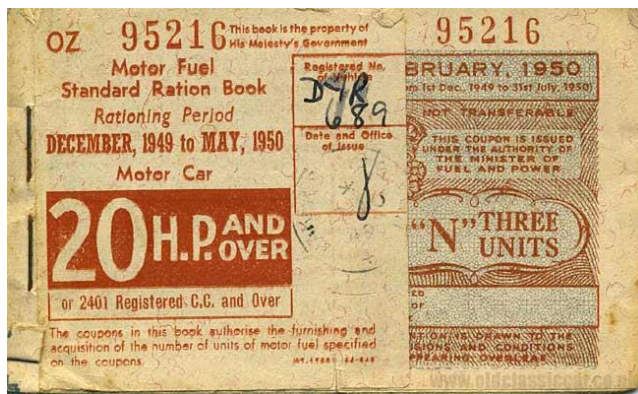
Source: Hants & Berks Gazette. Contributed by Brian Langer.



After the war

AFTER THE WAR

For many people life became even harder after the war. Rationing of food, clothes, soap and coal continued. Bread was rationed for the first time from 1946 to 1948 and the sweet ration was halved. Potato rationing began in 1947. The basic petrol ration was restored when the war ended but it continued till 1950.



There were instructions for evacuees to be returned but many had no home to go to. Nearly all of the Bank of England staff returned to London. There was a shortage of labour at

Portal's Mill and they advertised nationally for young female factory workers. Many came from Wales where unemployment was high. They were housed in the chalets at Foxdown for a while.

For a period in 1946, Laverstoke Mill was put on short time working because there was not enough coal for the boilers used for drying the paper. Rationing of domestic coal continued until 1958.

The winter of 1946/47 proved to be the worst in more than 60 years and people became desperate for fuel. The reservoir at Lower Ashe Farm froze solid for three weeks and water for the livestock had to be carted up from the river. In February there were prolonged power cuts and Portals Mill had to stop work for lack of coal. In March there were four foot snow drifts and all the roads out of the village were closed.

It was followed by a summer drought and harvests were very poor.

Sources: Overton Parish Council Minutes, David Denning, Hants & Berks Gazette, contributed by Brian Langer.

GETTING BACK TO NORMAL

As the men slowly trickled back from the war, village sports and societies began to flourish again. The choral society started up again and the Overton Carnival was revived in September 1945.



Portals Athletic Football Club, season 1948-1949
Photograph: Tony Morris, contributed by Frank Smith.



Photograph, Tony Morris, contributed by Brian Burgess.

The Vyne hunt had moved from their kennels at Quidhampton to Kingsclere for the duration of the war but returned in 1947.



Photograph: Tony Morris, contributed by Marion Bentley.

People could go on holiday again as the beaches were gradually cleared of barbed wire and tank traps and the restrictions on travel were eased. Here are Marion and Janet Brown, Carol Chase and Dawn Roberts enjoying an outing to Weymouth in 1946. They do not look underfed!

In 1946, the school leaving age was raised to 15 and the new 11+ exam decided whether children went to grammar or 'secondary modern' schools.

In 1946 the first meeting of the United Nations was held in London.

In July 1948 the National Health Service was born. Everything was free. The Ministry of Health believed that the health of the nation would improve so much that the cost of the NHS would diminish with time! By 1952 costs had risen so much that prescription charges and fees for dental treatment and glasses were introduced.

Food rationing in Britain finally ended at midnight on 4th July 1954, when restrictions on the sale of meat and bacon were lifted.

THE LONDON OLYMPICS, 1948



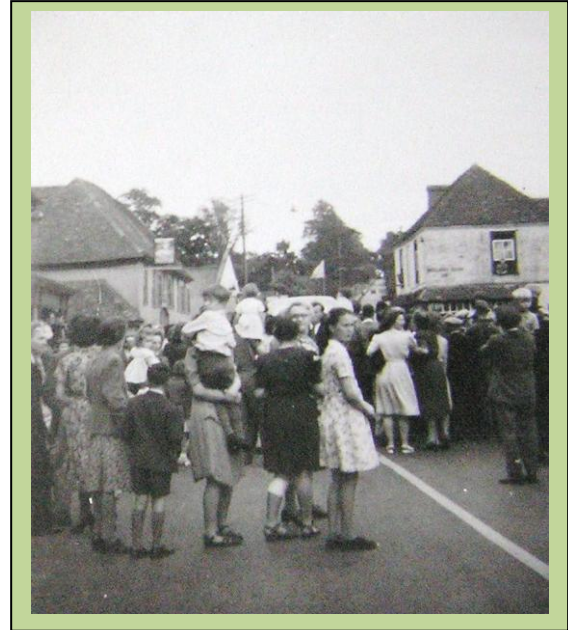
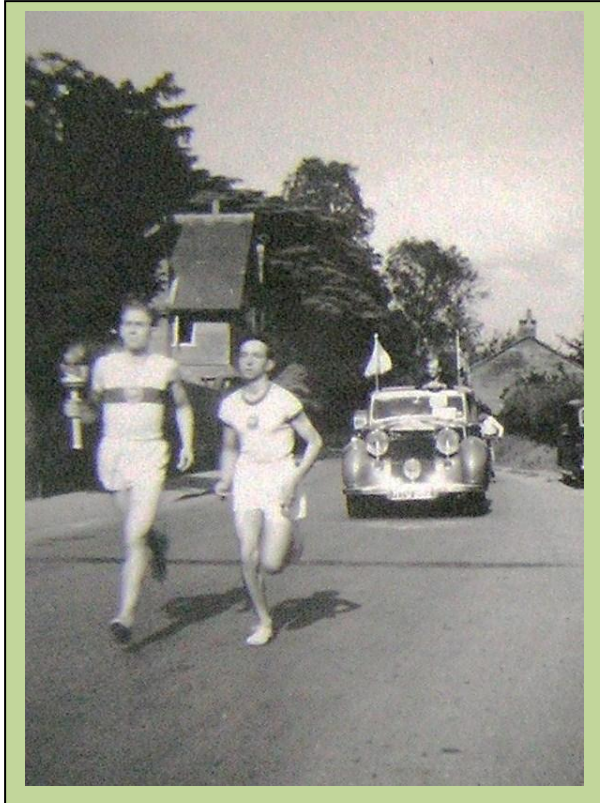
The games became known as the ‘Austerity Olympics’ since food, clothing and fuel were still rationed and large parts of London were still in ruins. The Olympic Committee had just two years to get everything organised. No new venues were built and competitors were housed in barracks, former P.O.W. camps, schools and even in tents. They and the spectators had to bring their own food. The games were shown on television for the first time.

The president of the British Olympic Association was Lord Wyndham Portal. Although he was not the organiser of the games, it may have had something to do with the fact that the Olympic torch bearers came through Overton and past his house in Laverstoke on their way from Wembley Stadium to Torquay for the sailing events.



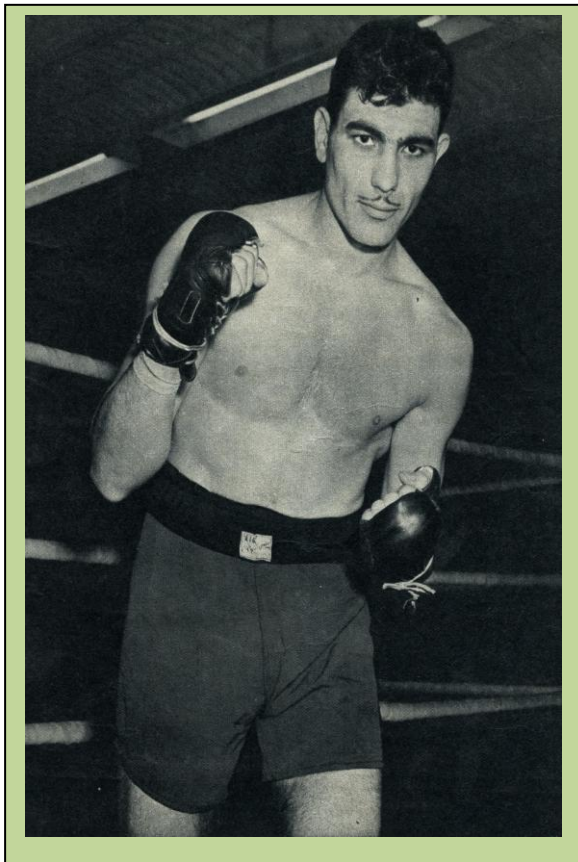
Photograph contributed by Gill Surtell,





Crowds surge into the High Street awaiting the runners.

Photographs contributed by Gill Surtell

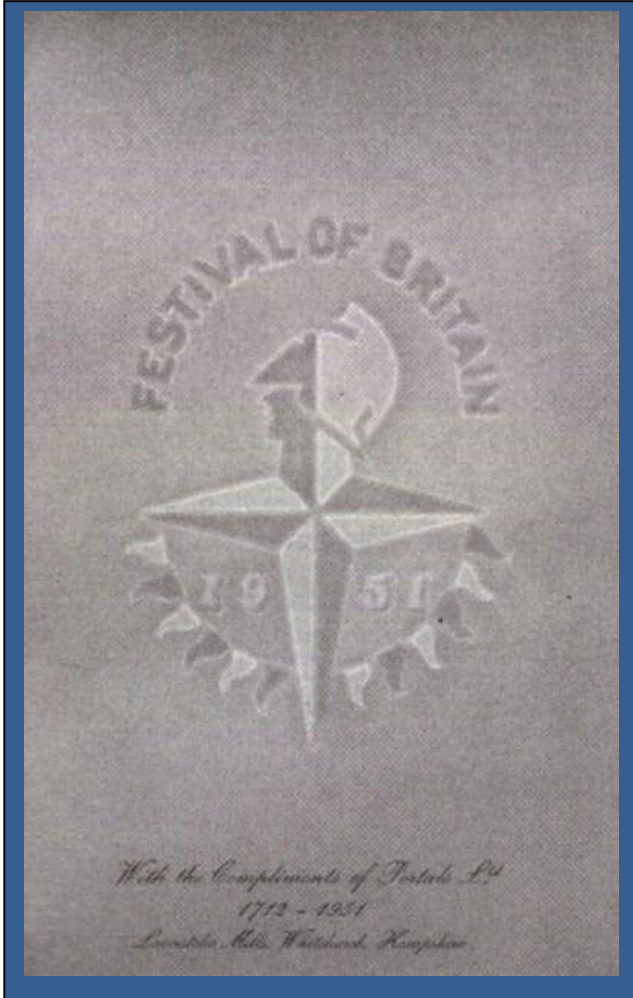


Jack Gardner, who lived at Sapley Farm, represented Britain at the games. He took up boxing in the Grenadier Guards during the war. He reached the third round of the competition but did not win a medal. He then turned professional and became British and Empire Heavyweight Champion from 1950 – 1952.

Jack became a local hero. A sparring ring was set up on the side of the road at the farm which was much appreciated by the young boys and he could be seen on training runs around the village.

Photograph: Tony Morris, contributed by P.E.Tressler.

FESTIVAL OF BRITAIN, 1951



The main event at the South Bank in London echoed the Great Exhibition of 1851 and was intended to raise the spirits of the nation after the war. Portals had a stand there and produced a watermark for the occasion.

Overton celebrated the Festival in great style with events spanning a whole week. Crowds flocked to the event. Two Overton traditions which had lapsed during the war were revived.

The Overton Mummers, dressed in costumes made from strips of paper, went from one of the more prominent houses

to another on Boxing Day (interspersed with visits to the pubs) performing an ancient play involving Father Christmas, King George, Bold Slasher, a doctor and a Turkish knight. For the Festival, they performed it in June.

Overton, being a village and not a town, did not have a mayor. However, it had long been the tradition to elect a 'mayor' and to hold 'assizes'. At the last 'assizes' in 1939, men were fined for borrowing a ladder and not taking it back, missing a penalty at football or failing to have a haircut. All the fines were paid in beer. A new 'mayor', Col. P. Wiggins, along with a number of aldermen were appointed for the Festival.



The 'mayor' and 'aldermen' being transported from the school to Town Meadow.

Photograph: Richard Oram.



Photograph: Tony Morris

SOUVENIR PROGRAMME



**OVERTON FESTIVAL
OF BRITAIN WEEK**

JUNE 3RD TO 9TH 1951 (INCL)

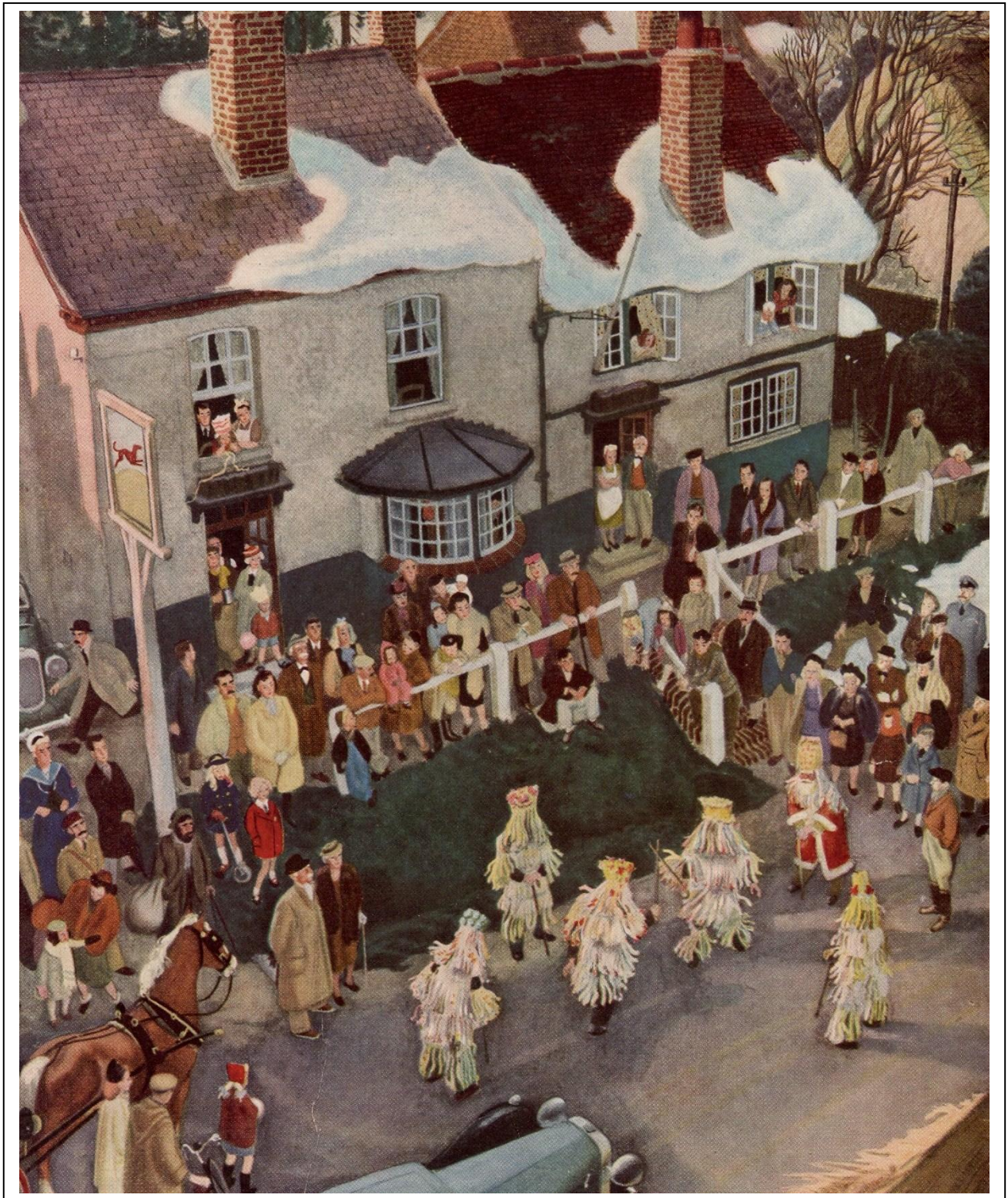
PRICE

ONE SHILLING

Photograph Tony Morris, contributed by Irene Tungate

A competition for the cover design was won by thirteen year old Raymond Holliday.

Hants & Berks Gazette, June 1951, contributed by Irene Tungate.



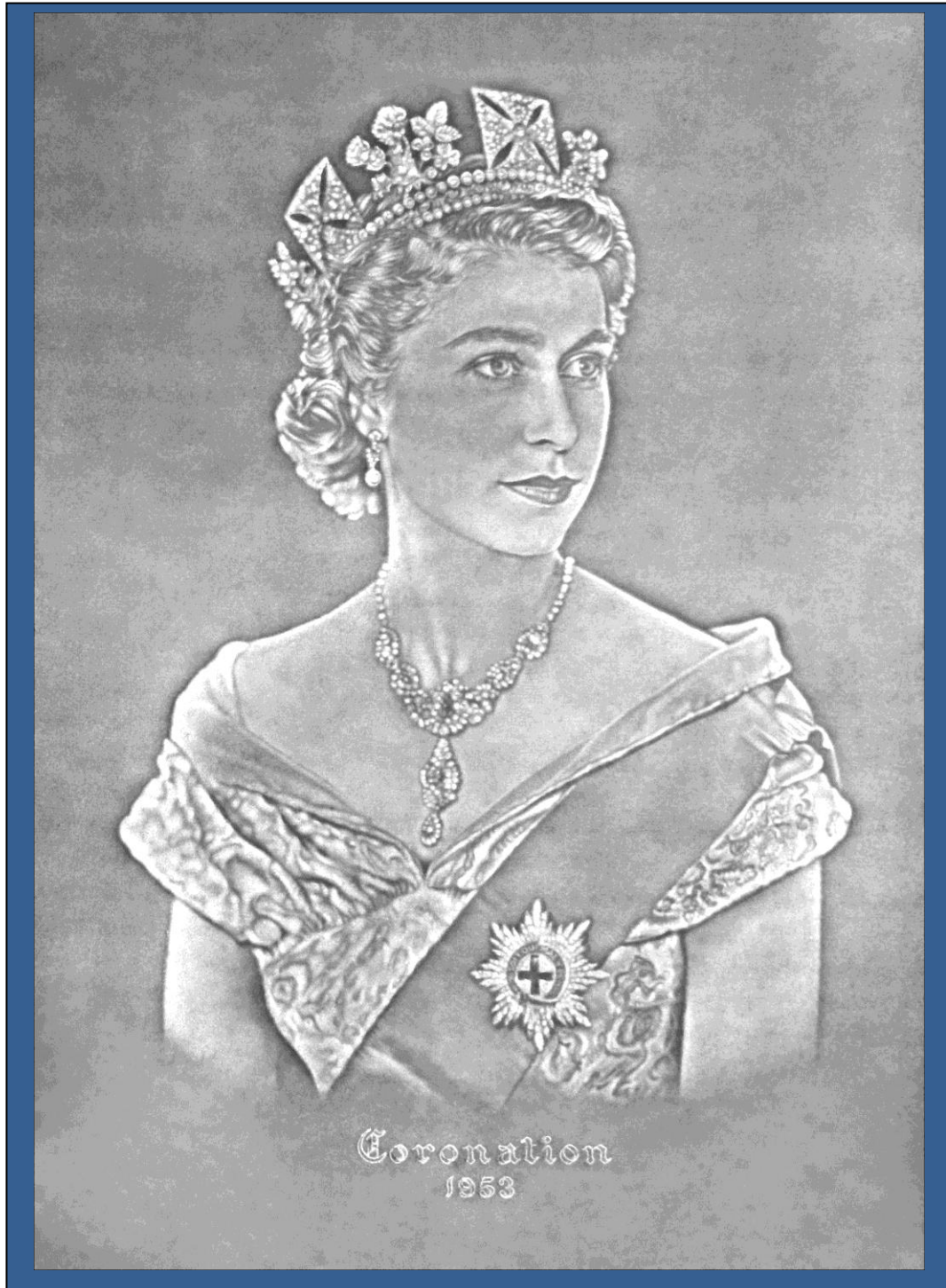
Overton Mummers by Michael Ford.

Photograph: Richard Oram

The Overton mummers performing their play on Boxing Day outside the Greyhound before the war. For the Festival of Britain they performed it in June.

THE CORONATION

2nd JUNE 1953



Watermark issued by Portals to mark the occasion.

Tony Morris, www.overtonpictures.com



People crowded into the living rooms of those who had a TV set to watch the event on 8 or 10 inch screens in black and white. For many it was the first time they had ever watched television. Then the celebrations began.

‘The size of the carnival processions, the immensity of the bonfire and the prodigality of the decorations in Bridge Street will live long in my memory. Lady Portal and her many helpers are to be warmly congratulated. The Fire Brigade showed admirable efficiency in lighting the fireworks (a reversal of their usual role) and there was spontaneous organisation of street tea parties.’

Rev Canon E.G. Glossop Wells, Rector. Overton Parish Church Magazine, July, 1953.



Photograph: Gill Surtell



Street party in Pound Road

Photograph: Richard Oram

The end

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS?

Overton was not unusual. It would have been much the same story in any other village.

What shines through is how the war disrupted everyone's lives, young and old. Many had to leave their homes and families to serve in the armed forces or to support the war effort. Those who remained served their village and their country in countless ways.

Many others found themselves in Overton when they would rather have been somewhere else. The village welcomed them all – the Bank of England, the Lordsfield Boys, other evacuees, the Land Girls, British and American troops and prisoners of war.

They all just got on with it, made the best of it and everyone 'did their bit'. They grumbled about all the restrictions, of course, but they knew what was at stake. Fascism had to be defeated, come what may. Some paid a heavy price and for others the war was a terrible experience best forgotten.

The war had the effect of improving the status of women in employment and loosening the old class structure. After the war, those who had contributed so much demanded a better way of life – better wages, better housing, better schools and better health care. The scope of the welfare state and the power of the unions increased. The way of life of the 1930's had gone forever. This was a new and very different world in an era of change.

Seventy years on, we remember the sacrifices they made with gratitude.



Some things do not change
The Overton 'Olympic' torch
bearers in Bridge Street, June
2012

Photograph: John Hodge.

This exhibition is presented by

RICHARD WALDRAM

from material supplied by

RICHARD ORAM, BRIAN LANGER, PETER BAKER

& TONY MORRIS

(www.overtonpictures.com)

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If you have more information or photographs please contact me. Please also tell us if you think we have got something wrong.

Richard Waldram
770444
richard.waldram@btinternet.com