

Peter Martin (compiler), *Burford's Wartime Stories*, Burford: Tolsey Press for Burford Tolsey Museum & Archive, 2025, 204 pp., £14.95 (paperback).

After receiving a copy of this glossy book for review it took me some days to clear my desk before I could turn my attention to studying it in detail. When I finally did so, I wished I had not wasted time with other mundane things and instead had started to read it instantly. I even missed parts of the Winter Olympics, something normally unheard of, to devote myself to the publication. As Peter Martin tells us in his preface, the work starts with the Crimean War and concludes with a 1947 publication from the Burford and Fulbrook Women's Institute which examines the impact of the Second World War on the town. At the very end are thumbnail images with short biographies of the people mentioned in the text. These commence with Mary Sturge Gretton (1871 – 1961), one of the earliest women J.P.s in the area, and continue with people who were living in the town during 1939 – 1945, or their living descendants. Peter Martin must be congratulated for including these pictures – they add considerably to the text.

The initial Crimean War section contains the memories of Emma Durham (1848 – 1936), a nurse with an interesting life who nursed in the Zulu War and was even Lord Tennyson's nurse for two years. Her half-brother served in the Crimean War and Indian Mutiny, disappeared for years, and eventually returned to Burford. The Boer War, including the Relief of Mafeking, features next and the text is illustrated by three photos of Burford inhabitants and local school children celebrating the victory in the main street.

The First World War follows, and I found the two page spread of six posters of the time fascinating, none of which I had seen before. My Grandfather was a signaller in the Royal Regiment of Berkshire (I still have his whistle) so seeing the equipment used by the Middlesex Regiment (page 15) was a delight. The chapter is accompanied by many more images, all of which add to the story. As to be expected, the number of memories grows at this point, with the photo of the Burford Volunteers in 1917 showing how many of the menfolk volunteered. A total of thirty-five Burford men were killed during this war. All are named on the High Street war memorial, and the biographies of these men, many in their early twenties and whose bodies were often lost, makes sad reading. Included in this chapter are the details of the six men from Fulbrook who also died.

With the ending of the First World War, Burford, along with the rest of the nation, must have prayed that this was the end of such a conflict. In thirty-five homes there were gaps in the family members, and many more households were coping with the return of physically injured and mentally affected men. But as we know peace did not last long and by 1939 the country was again at war with Germany and her allies. The section (part 4) on the Second World War takes up most of the book from page 43 to page 182. This part opens with the complete text of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's speech to the nation on 3 September 1939, announcing war with Germany. It then continues with Doreen Foggett's recollection of her experiences on that day, which coincided with her eighth birthday. She describes being on holiday in Hayes with her aunt and uncle, and her mother's subsequent arrival to bring her home to Minster Lovell.

Burford became an evacuation reception area for children from London, while Fulbrook housed the Bulgarian Embassy from London in Rock Cottage. In common with the First World War and with elsewhere in the country, the events in Burford were a time of social and economic trauma, and this book, enriched by its excellent illustrations, describes vividly how the inhabitants of Burford coped with the change. We are told about the effect on the town of the London school children arriving and how they were incorporated into the social mix, causing a bewildering time for Burford youngsters as they interacted with peers with different values and schooling. One evacuee remembers returning to London with her mother as the cottage they were living in was damaged when a bomb landed nearby and plaster fell from the ceiling. Her mother on taking her back said they might as well be bombed in London as in Burford!

Another factor which impacted everyone in the town was limitations on what they could buy. Clothes rationing obviously affected many inhabitants; for example, ladies' stockings were worn inside out because of the poor quality and women ceased to wear hats. I vaguely recall sweets being rationed until the early 1950s, but this book outlines the weekly challenges people had to contend with: adults were limited to three pints of milk, one egg (prompting many to keep hens like Rhode Island Reds which were considered good egg layers), two pork chops, and small amounts of sugar and butter for the week. My Grandfather in Begbroke continued to have Rhode Island hens up until his death in 1972, I remember they had a nasty painful peck! And as we all know there was the Dig for Victory campaign, as uncultivated land was turned over for the growing of vegetables.

The Civil Defence Service was established in 1938 with the issuing of gas masks, and operated until 1945. Among the services provided were decontamination centres located at the Grammar School — which also served as a rest centre — and the cottage hospital. Fire watching posts were established in many places, although the Air Raid Wardens were not kept as busy as in other regions as German bombers continued on their flight paths overhead and seemed to have little interest in the town. If the fire brigade *was* needed, Jimmy Hicks blew his bugle at the corner of the High Street and then ran round other areas of the town alerting other fireman to the emergency. By the time he reached the final street he was out of puff! With less bombing in Burford itself, the local fire engine was able to help out at the London Blitz. Among further interesting information is a list of the Special Constables for Burford and nearby villages. Meanwhile, Church House became the venue of a canteen, run by volunteers, for the use of the armed forces quartered around the town. Here, Vera Storie describes battles with the boiler which needed to be heated by coke. The Women's Voluntary Service had 138 women from the town and did valiant work towards the war effort, including staffing of rest centres, assisting the Civil Defence and much more.

The photograph of the Burford Home Guard illustrates how many answered the call to protect their homeland in that way, and it was with regret that it was finally stood down in 1944. My Grandfather, an ex-professional soldier, was a member of the Home Guard in Begbroke and was also upset when they were disbanded and he had to return his rifle! The book contains a number of reminiscences by members of the Burford Home Guard and they add considerably to the history of the town at this time; for example we learn that Frank Soden was allocated the task of ringing the church bell should the Germans invade.

The book also touches upon service in the armed forces, and auxiliary services, both those from other places who came to Burford and locals who participated elsewhere. It was common to see soldiers in varying uniforms around the town, and empty houses were commandeered to house them. Kath Wain remembers the streets being used as parking places for lorries and tanks. When the United States joined the war, American soldiers became a common sight, with the town welcoming the US Sixth Armoured Division. The biggest excitement of the time seems to have been a Sherman tank crashing over Burford Bridge, luckily not killing the occupants, but providing entertainment for the local people as they watched American cranes trying to recover it in a rescue attempt that took two days. Elsewhere, Diana Barraclough describes in detail her work at the code-breaking centre at Bletchley Park, which finally ended in 1943 when she had to leave because of contracting German Measles. And then of course was the Women's Land Army. Only recently has their work on the farms been fully appreciated and understood. Iris Lloyd from Wales describes being one of thirty-two girls living at Elm Farmhouse and working on the many farms in the district. Iris picked potatoes and Brussels sprouts, and in winter sometimes her fingers were so frozen she could hardly dress.

With VE Day on Tuesday 8 May 1945 came celebrations, one of which was the searchlights making a 'V' sign in the sky. A huge bonfire was lit on the recreation ground and there was dancing in the streets where Kath Wain met her future husband, a young bandsman, who asked for a sandwich! Celebrations continued with 'VJ' Day. Locals had good reason to be happy the fighting was over. Nine Burford men, whose biographies are reproduced in the text, are listed on the town's Second World War memorial, and six names are listed on the Fulbrook war memorial.

Peter Martin and all those who contributed to this book should be congratulated – it is an amazing piece of history reproduced for many interested in the period. As I have mentioned before, this book is full of illustrations which add greatly to the text, the images themselves are clear and in many cases are new to me. The reminiscences shared in the text, helped by these images, show how ordinary people acted towards war and the devastating effects the wars had on the town and surrounding area. I would highly recommend this work for school libraries, current Burford residents, and anyone interested in the social and economic effect war had on a community.

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