

INKERMAN BARRACKS & ENTERTAINING THE TROOPS IN WOKING

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Many troops stationed at Inkerman, could enjoy the facilities of Woking whenever they had free time – and the bus fare to get into town.

In April 1939 the Recreation Grounds and Swimming Pool Committee of Woking Urban District Council received a request from the 2nd Battalion of the Durham Light Infantry (DLI) then stationed at Inkerman Barracks, for permission to play football on Waterer's Park (below) on two afternoons a week. After discussion it was decided to grant

them the permission and further not to charge them for the privilege of using the park, although it seems the DLI later pushed their luck too far when in June 1939 they asked for a reduced rate to use the swimming pool in Woking Park! That was not entertained, although a proposal in 1940 that the council should provide free baths for soldiers stationed

in the area was partially approved when in May they resolved that 'organized parties of soldiers be granted the use of shower-bath facilities at the Byfleet Decontamination Depot at a charge of 2d per man per visit'. How much this generous offer from the council was taken up is difficult to say – it certainly would not have been much use to the troops stationed at St Johns!

Later the council did agree to charge just a penny per person for members of the armed forces to use of the swimming pool in Woking Park, but how many of the Durham men took advantage of this concession is hard to say.

Meanwhile the DLI (and others) could look forward to new 'Sunday entertainment', with local cinemas showing films, and a fun-fair being set up in Duke Street; and in the summer of 1940 the Council's Library Committee decided that members of His Majesty's Forces could borrow any book from Woking Library provided they paid a twenty-five shilling deposit and a further deposit equal to half the value of any non-fiction book they borrowed over the value of ten shillings. Again how many took up that generous offer from the Council is not recorded.



As well as housing the DLI, Inkerman Barracks was also the temporary home for many Canadian soldiers who appear to have been stationed in camps all over Surrey. Most seemed to have been well accepted, although in Addlestone five Canadian soldiers were arrested for disorderly conduct in a local pub and at Camberley there appears to have been a number of fights between them and member of the Scottish Black Watch (with knives being drawn and at least two Royal Canadian Dragoons injured in December 1941). Fortunately in Woking there doesn't appear to have been anything like as much trouble (although one Canadian was convicted of being 'drunk in charge of a pedal cycle') – the only serious local 'casualties' being a few trees in The Broadway at Woking as the council decided in July 1941 to remove the trees between the railway and the road to allow extra room for the troops queuing for the St Johns and Knaphill buses!

Some of the trees on the slopes of the hill running down from Inkerman Barracks to the Robin Hood Road were also 'attacked', with three soldiers from Vancouver, British Columbia, scratching their initials and the date 'Feb 18, 1945' on the trunk.

There was also apparently some American soldiers stationed locally as in 1944 Vera Russell, a Land Girl working on Secret's Market Garden at Send, recorded in her diary on the 13th April 'Cabbage pulling first thing, then rhubarb. Cycled to Woking. Watched some Americans play baseball'.

Her diary, now at the Surrey History Centre, is perhaps not the most enthralling with more mention of leeks and lettuces than we really need to know, but she does record dances and the cinema in Woking and meeting soldiers at the Seven Stars at Newark, as well as knitting items for the troops.

Some of the Land Girls and Gypsies employed by Mr Secret during the war were housed in huts that can still be seen in the fields by Mays Corner at Send.

From what I can tell Woking seems to have got on well with their new 'guests', either soldiers, evacuees or those coming to the area to help with war work. Indeed it might be said that the town prospered during the war as everyone came together to do their bit.

Who 'R.B' 'M.L' and 'J.A' were we may never know, but they certainly left their mark on the area.



WAR WORK IN WOKING

I mentioned last week about the bomb that fell on the Vickers Aircraft Factory at Brooklands in September 1940, but that was not their only factory in this area as workshops had been set up all over the district partially in an attempt to mitigate against any disruption such an event would cause. Hardly a month went by without the name Vickers Armstrong appearing in the local planning department minutes for permission to open or extend workshops in the area.

They were not the only company do war work. In Portugal Road the factory set up by James Gregory and Raymond Quilter – G Q Parachutes – were busy trying to keep up with

demand from the Air Ministry for not just airmen's chutes, but also parachutes so that vehicles and other supplies could be dropped to allied forces. The two storey factory had only been built a few years before the war, but already it was full to bursting.

James Walker's at Maybury were likewise busy keeping up with demand for their seals and packings for military vehicles, aeroplanes and ships; not to mention the numerous little firms dotted around the district making parts for the larger firms like Walkers and Vickers. Most garage workshops and little local forges were turned over to war work, as the Send & Ripley History Society recorded in their book

'Memories of War' published in 2009. 'Behind Fisher's Garage on the Portsmouth Road, May and Hardy made screws for the aircraft industry. At Burnt Common during the war Mr Oliver's premises were used as a Dispersal Unit for Faire Oaks, Chobham. Many of the skilled aircraft workers were sent to work in small groups away from their main centre of Faire Oaks in case of direct hits. Those working on the ground floor repaired aeroplane wings of Blenheims and Beauforts.'

Fortunately Faire Oaks, or our other wartime workshop, appear to have escaped any direct hits and work continued apace with many local women joining the workforce in place of

the men called up for duty.

Maud Ceelley (whose diary I have quoted from before) recorded in June 1941 the work that she was doing locally. 'I have at last got a war job, rivet making, starting at nine and three-farthings per hour, 47 hours a week. Previous to this I worked as cook in a canteen at one of Vickers works, but I was so disgusted at the methods used that I gave it up. Half milk, half water for puddings. Gravy made only with greens and potato water. Greens and potatoes left over from the day before served up. A disgusting way to feed men and women doing hard work.'

Her riveting work was at the General Aircraft Company in Goldsworth Road, but in September 1942 she left to work at G Q Parachutes before returning briefly to Goldsworth Road and then onto James Walker's Factory at Maybury in August 1943. 'I started this diary with the object of showing how this war affects me', she said. 'It has certainly improved my education as I have learnt metal work, electric sewing machine and am now learning quite a bit about making rubber articles - and I shall be 50 next Wed.'

The world of work would never be the same again.



THE BROADWAY FIRE WATCHERS



In previous weeks I have written about some of the bombs that fell on the area and the work of the Auxiliary Fire Service, but to assist the AFS a number of local businesses got together to help themselves by organising 'fire watch' teams who would look out for incendiary bombs. One such group

locally was the 'Broadway Fire Watchers' – whose remit appears to have been to not only look after the shops of the Broadway, but also Chertsey Road – with Mr Robinson of Robinson's Department Store in Chertsey Road as the organisations President.

One of the contributors to the voluntary scheme was Hugh Butcher's furnisners, whose wartime shop front can be seen here with wooden shutters to help protect against any local blast and help towards the blackout of the premises at night.

It appears from this letter that not everyone was pulling their weight (at least not financially), and some needed prompting for subscriptions, if not personnel, to keep the scheme going.

The Broadway Fire--Watchers

9, THE BROADWAY
WOKING

All Communications to
ROBINSONS (WOKING) LTD.
CHERTSEY ROAD
WOKING

President : W. H. ROBINSON
Hon. Secretary : A. L. LEVY
Hon. Treasurer : Miss L. DUGGAN

31st January 1941.

Dear Sirs,

As we have received no help ~~either personally or~~ financially, from your firm in the matter of Fire-Watching of the block in which your shop is situated, we are not aware if it is your intention to co-operate in the Scheme.

If you wish to join in, please send us your monthly subscription within the next three days. Failing to receive this we shall assume that you are making your own arrangements.

We have to notify the Council of any firms in this block of buildings that are not co-operating with us.

Yours faithfully,



Hon. Secretary.