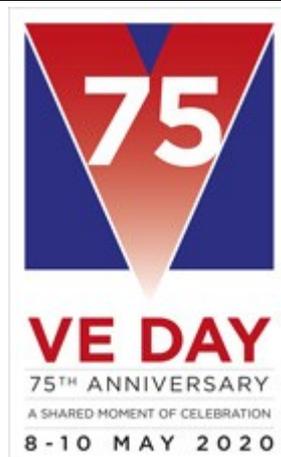


VE Day 75



When VE Day dawns on 8th May 2020 it will be 75 years since the guns fell silent at the end of the war in Europe. Years of carnage and destruction were almost at an end and millions of people around the world took to the streets to celebrate peace, mourn their lost loved ones and hope for a better future.

The 75th anniversary provides us all with an opportunity to reflect on the enormous sacrifice, courage and determination of people from all walks of life who saw our parents and grand-parents through this dark and terrifying period.

We will remember the members of the Armed Forces and Merchant Navy from many countries who gave their lives or returned home injured in body and mind; the hard working men and women who operated the factories, mines, shipyards and farms; the ARP wardens, police officers, doctors, nurses, firemen, local defence volunteers and others who toiled day and night selflessly on the home front during difficult, frightening and uncertain times.

Friday 8th May has been designated a Bank Holiday and up and down the country towns, parishes, voluntary organisations and individuals have organised events over the three day holiday to provide us all with an opportunity to pay tribute to those millions at home and abroad who gave so much to ensure we all enjoy the freedom we share today.

Coronavirus has forced the postponement of these events but it is hoped that some, if not all, can be moved to the weekend of 15th/16th August when we celebrate the 75th anniversary of VJ Day. On 8th May it is hoped that solo pipers and town criers will still be able to mark the occasion from a safe and suitable location.

Hopefully Tara Haines from Great Yarmouth will still be able to climb to the top of Scafell Pike and undertake the nation's toast to the heroes of WW2 on behalf of the women of the nation. We will have to wait, however, to see 1,000 people from Bexhill holding individual cards above their heads which, when filmed from the air, will form a giant union jack flag. At 3.00pm on the 8th the middle cards would have turned to form the word PEACE.



One of the most famous (some would say infamous) military men of WW2 was Sir Arthur Harris, chief of Bomber Command, one of the most controversial military commanders of World War 2. He had received distinguished honours from France,

Poland, the USA and Soviet Union, but in Britain he had been criticised by a cohort of Bishops, MPs and writers for the area bombing of German cities.

Arthur Harris had attended Allhallows School in Honiton (now Allhallows Museum) between 1906 and 1909. In July 1945 Harris was awarded the Freedom of Honiton Borough and at the ceremony in Mackarness Hall he paid tribute to the men of Devon and those of Bomber Command “of which I can never say enough”. In his (unpublished) speech the Air Marshall reflected on the subject, not of the bomber war, but of war itself:

“If you stop to think the result of war has always been and always will be barren... Twice in my lifetime I have seen the whole effort of the nation poured into war. If only one such effort were to be put into working for peace and progress what height of human happiness and decent human way of life might we attain.

Twice I have seen the youth of nations butchered. Let us not see that again. All this will not be achieved unless a similar effort is put by the nations into waging of peace and progress as they are prepared to put into waging of war.”

REMEMBERING MEN OF OFFWELL



Three men from Offwell village were killed in World War 2 – one in each of the three services.

CHARLES HENRY BAUGH

Before he was called up Charles worked for the Devon County Council.

He was posted to North Africa in 1942 and by a strange twist of fate another man from the village met him when Charles was on guard duty in Benghazi Docks. They had a chat and passed on the Pullman's Weekly.

Charles was killed crossing a mine field aged 32. He left his wife Mary and two children, Jean and David. Mary was still living in the village in the 1990s.

STANLEY GERALD NORTH

Stanley was a quarrymen before joining the Royal Navy in January 1940. He became an Able Bodied Seaman one year later. He was serving in the Destroyer Janus when he was killed during the attack against the Port of Tarranto in Southern Italy in January 1944, aged 24.

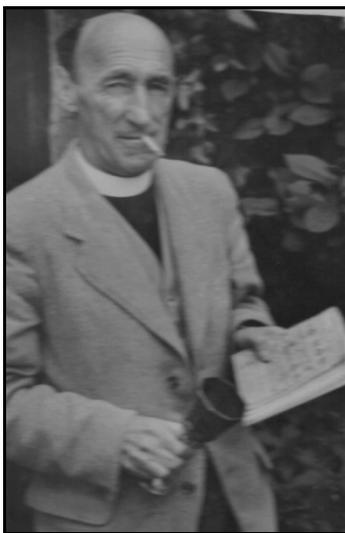
LORNE CURRIE

Lorne started his service career in the Royal Navy at 16 years of age, later resigning his commission to settle in Kenya. He joined the RAF at the outbreak of the War and later volunteered for Bomber Command. It was during training, in May 1941, that Flying Officer Lorne Currie was tragically killed when he walked into the spinning propeller of his Wellington Bomber. He left a widow and two children.

His Commonwealth War Grave in St. Mary's churchyard is still maintained by the CWG Commission. In front of the War Grave are the graves of family members.



Evacuees arrived in Offwell in September 1939 and then again in 1944. This is just one child's memories of staying with Rev. Frederick Elford Copleston, the last in a long line of Copleston rectors of Offwell:



EVAN'S STORY

“I stayed with the Rev. And Mrs. Joyce Copleston who were very kind to me. I had been evacuated from Wilmington School, near Dartford in Kent, and by way of coincidence landed up in Wilmington School in Devon. My friend attended Offwell School. I was ten years old at the time and had never been to the seaside. It was a pleasant surprise when we were taken on a trip to Seaton by Vic (our name for Rev. Copleston). Later we had trips out to Budleigh Salterton, Lyme Regis and Sidmouth. We were expected to go to Church on Sundays of course and we had the job of pumping the organ in Widworthy Church, which was pumped by means of a lever worked by your feet.

The Offwell Church organ was pumped by hand. I remember buying packets of Woodbines for 5 1/2d. from the Village Shop opposite the Church. American soldiers came through Wilmington one day in their tanks and just before the invasion of Europe they were in a tented camp up past Wilmington School on the left. My friend and I often went with the vicar on his visits to parishioners in the village and we were always accepted with kindness. I feel that I should say a big thank you to all the foster parents on behalf of myself and all the other evacuees. It meant hard work for them and all for 9/- per week, not exactly a fortune. God bless them.”

FOUR OFFWELL RESIDENTS LOOK BACK AT THEIR OWN WARTIME CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

BARRY TUKE aged 9 on VE Day 1945

Barry was born in 1936 and is part of the Tuke family of York - Quaker innovators who established their own chocolate factory; this was later sold to fellow Quaker and ex-employee Joseph Rowntree. The Tuke family were also responsible for building a mental hospital and three Quaker schools. Samuel Tuke, Barry's grandfather, was born in Hitchin Hertfordshire and died at the home he built in Colwell Woods after the First World War, having previously lived at Netherton Hall in Farway.

Barry's father, Bill, was employed as a timber 'broker' in the City of London, procuring and importing timber. When war was declared in 1939 Britain was almost completely dependent on imported timber but only had seven months' worth of it stockpiled. With men being sent to the front line the Women's Timber Corps, nicknamed the Lumberjills, was established, to fell trees, operate sawmills and run forestry sites. Approximately 15,000 women, some as young as 14, volunteered to leave home for the first time and carry out arduous tasks, previously done by men.



Shortly before the outbreak of WW2 several radar stations known as Chain Home (CH) were constructed along the south and east coast of Britain. These radar stations were built by the Royal Air Force, before and during the war, to detect and track enemy aircraft. CH proved highly effective during the Battle of Britain and was critical in enabling the RAF to defeat the much larger Luftwaffe forces.

During the first years of the war Barry's father was responsible for looking after these radar stations and the family travelled the length and breadth of Britain with him. On one of these trips Barry, aged 4, remembers seeing the merchant convoy ships at Southend and saying to his father:

“I want to drive one of those when I grow up.”

When war broke out in 1939 seaside piers around Britain were blown up as a precaution against invasion. But Southend Pier, the longest in the world, was taken over by the Royal Navy and played an important part in the war effort. The pier, codenamed HMS Leigh, organised 3,367 convoys over five and a half years. The estuary was divided into invisible squares, like a giant chess board. Each ship had a designated place. All had to set sail at the same moment and at the same speed.



In 1943 Barry's father went to Burma with the Hertfordshire Yeomanry, Royal Artillery. (The Regiment that featured in the movie 'Bridge on the River Kwai'.) Invalided out he was sent to India to recuperate and worked there as a military judge.

In Burma the climate, disease and ill-health were often greater enemies than the Japanese. The following was written by Jack Nield who fought in the Burma campaign:

“The climate was most unhealthy and temperatures often exceeded 45 degrees centigrade. At one time the humidity rose to 98.4... Tropical diseases were rampant. Most people suffered from dysentery and fair-haired troops suffered badly from prickly heat which often became septic... We suffered from tinea ‘Bengal foot rot’ especially in-between toes and in the crotch. Ringworm was very common as was heat exhaustion. We were in an area endemic for malaria... Sunburn, jaundice and sprue were also quite common.”

Barry attended various schools during the war years as the family followed his father from radar station to radar station. When Bill left for Burma, in 1943, Barry and his brother stayed with their Grandmother in Hitchin. Her large house was the reception area for evacuees arriving from London. Barry remembers children sitting on the stairs and the floor with their little cases and tags, waiting to be allocated a new 'home'.

Barry's education would remain sporadic until after the war when he went to The Nautical College, Pangbourne. The school was founded as a training ground to produce high quality officers for the British Merchant Navy and prepare boys for the rigours and demands of life at sea. Pupils were known as cadets and they wore the uniform of the RNR Officer Cadets.



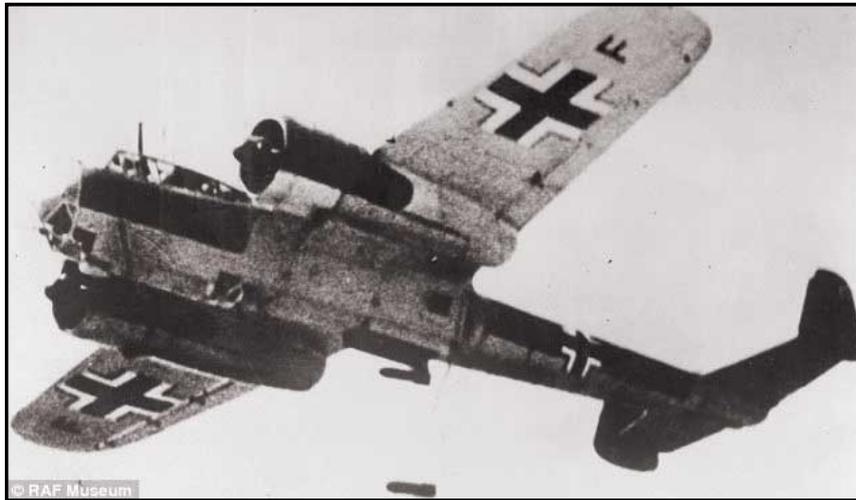
Barry (on the left)
at an inspection by The Duke of Edinburgh

Barry has no memory of VE Day celebrations as his father did not return from India until 1946. Barry would fulfil his childhood ambition to *'drive a ship'*. He became a Lieutenant Commander in the Royal Navy.

MAY WHITE aged 13 on VE Day

May was born in 1931 near Bridport in Dorset and the family then moved to East Woodhay, near Newbury, Berkshire - a village only five miles from Highclere Castle, the setting for 'Downton Abbey'. During the war years May's father worked on a farm and her mother drove the Newbury chemist's van.

May attended the Senior Council School in Newbury, situated directly adjacent to the railway line, and on 10th February, 1943, two German Luftwaffe bombers, on a 'nuisance' raid, followed the Great Western Railway line running west from London to Reading. At 4.35pm one of the bombers veered off towards South Reading while the other continued to follow the line to Newbury. With no time to sound the air raid siren the bomber arrived at Newbury at 4.43pm and dropped eight high-explosive bombs.



The first bomb struck the house of the borough surveyor. It travelled through the roof, out of the wall, then through the neighbour's house, finally landing at the end of the terrace where the 500kg bomb exploded. The second bomb went through the roof of the First Aid Post and exploded in the centre of St. John's Church, leaving only the altar standing. The third bomb struck the centre block of St. Bartholomew's Almshouses.



May had left on the school bus heading for home in East Woodhay at 4.15pm but a handful of children were attending an after school club being held in the Science Block adjacent to the Senior Council School. An eight year old pupil, Margaret Armstrong, (an evacuee from Stepney in London) was sitting on a wooden bench and looking out of the classroom window when she saw the approaching German Bomber. She called over to the teacher: "Look Miss, it's dropping sticks!" The teacher realised what was happening and quickly took shelter with the children under some wooden desks. The fourth bomb travelled through a window and a nine-inch thick wall of the school, where the 500kg bomb exploded on impact. The building was reduced to dust and rubble. May remembers seeing her school mistress's coat hanging high up on the branches of a tree.



Four more 50kg bombs were dropped causing less damage but the Dornier bomber was fitted with two machine guns and the forward gunner and dorsal gunner machine gunned incessantly through the streets. Fortunately it was a Wednesday afternoon, early closing day, and the streets were practically empty. 15 people were killed, a further 41 people were injured of which 25 were seriously hurt. In spite of an air raid warning 41 people were killed by the second bomber in Reading.

An eye witness on lookout on the roof of the Reading jam and pickle factory reported later: *“I looked into the sky and saw one plane was coming in on my eye level so I assumed it was enemy aircraft...I could see the pilot hunched up...we saw the bomb doors open and heard the sound of bullets.”*

Both bomber crews became victims of war; their Dorniers fired upon and brought down by RAF Spitfires as they flew back on their homeward journey.

May's mother had also been in Newbury that afternoon driving the chemist's van. When she heard about the bombing raid on the school she feared the worst. If the German bomber had hit twenty minutes earlier all the pupils and teaching staff would have been killed. Schooling now involved uncomfortable afternoons perched on tiny chairs at the primary school while alternative premises were found.



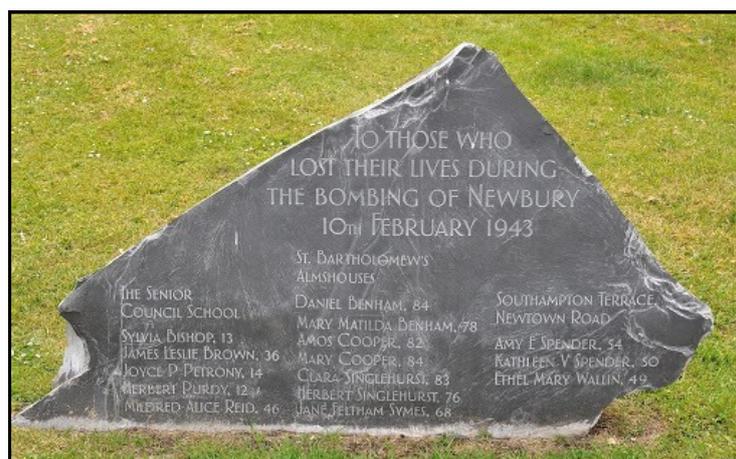
When Newbury was bombed in February 1943 Shaw House, a 16th century Elizabethan Manor House, was occupied by American and Canadian troops, preparing for the D-Day Normandy landings. The troops quickly vacated the House and the girls occupied the first floor while the boys from Lancastrian School (also damaged in the bombing) occupied the ground floor. May remembers getting a detention for having a snowball fight when they first moved in. Shaw House remained a girls' school until 1985.



May is 3rd from the left on the back row.

May remembers singing in the church choir, the GIs with their sweets and chewing gum and as a teenager, along with many of her friends, she joined the East Woodhay Red Cross cadets and was awarded her proficiency badge. Young people helped the Joint War Organisation (JWO) by becoming Red Cross cadets and working in hospitals and wartime nurseries. They also collected scrap metal, worked on the land, in canteens and went shopping for the elderly and disabled.

On VE Day there were no special celebrations that May can remember and it was not until February 2013 that a memorial was erected in Newbury for those who lost their lives 70 years earlier.



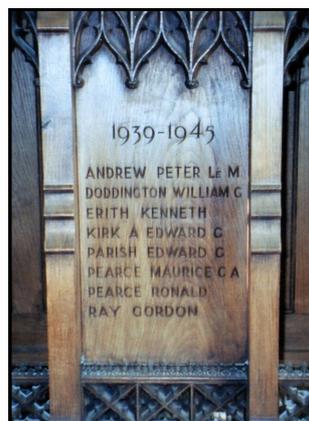
DICK ERITH aged 19 on VE Day

Dick was born in Redgrave, a village on the Suffolk/Norfolk border, in December 1926. The eighth of 10 children (9 boys and 1 girl) he was descended from botanists, university lecturers, clerics, councillors and school teachers. Dick's parents were farmers and Dick's older brothers all worked at Ivy Farm. During the war years Dick attended the secondary school at Eye, a nine mile cycle ride.



The family in 1926 - minus the three youngest
Left to right: Ted, Walter, Kenneth, Bill, Doug, Bob, John

Four of Dick's brothers served in the war: Bob was an RAF despatch rider in Kenya; Bill was in the army and mentioned in despatches. Doug returned in August 1945 from a Japanese POW camp and Ken was killed at Anzio in 1944. Part of the Italian campaign the Anzio beachhead was reclaimed marshland, surrounded by mountains. It was chosen as an amphibious landing for its element of surprise but the US Army Commander failed to capitalise on this and the Allies were pinned down on the beachhead by a vastly superior German force for over four months. Dick's brother was one of 87,000 Allied soldiers to lose their lives at Anzio.



Dick's memories of the war years were mainly 'getting on with life on the farm' but with 67 USAAF airfields in East Anglia and 200,000 US personnel it was difficult to avoid contact with this 'friendly invasion'. Halls and country houses became command headquarters and the impact on East Anglian life was huge; US service personnel profoundly changed the places they inhabited. In 1944 one in seven residents in the county of Suffolk was American, including the actor James Stewart who, in 1942, was stationed at an RAF base just north of Diss. The British actor, Michael Redgrave, who served in the British Army, was also stationed nearby.



Early in the war Dick remembers the night sky criss-crossed with searchlights to illuminate the enemy bombers aiming for Norwich, Lowestoft and Ipswich. When the American bombers arrived they flew by day and on one occasion a returning Flying Fortress (on fire) crashed into a nearby cottage and only missed killing the occupant because the old lady was at church. Local girls worked on the farm together with a Land Girl, Mary Capaldi, a member of the famous Italian ice cream family in Lowestoft. Mary worked at Ivy Farm Dairy helping to produce cheese and butter.



Later in the war, as the Americans moved further into Europe, the smaller airfields, now vacated, were used to house prisoners of war. Dick recalls the POW camp at Redgrave Park, while on the other side of the lake the manor house itself was used as the US Army's 65th General Hospital. In the POW camps first came the Italians, reluctant to work: too hot, too cold or too dry, followed by German prisoners. The latter were accompanied by German officers - dropped off at each farm in the morning and picked up at the end of the day. An evacuee from Tufnell Park in London remembers *"...one or two of the German prisoners of war walked about the village freely, in fact one, Erich, used to dig gardens for the locals"*.

A local child remembered the Christmas parties given by the American GIs:
"I remember seeing quantities of food (and) dishes of butter... We were given a hot lunch with roast beef. Remembering our strict rationing of 1/- of meat for a week, no wonder the Americans weren't as slim as we were."



On VE Day Dick, his father and brothers all went to The Greyhound village pub to celebrate. Dick's brother, Doug, did not return until VJ Day in August 1945. He was little more than a skeleton and Dick's mother commented that she was forever cooking potatoes as Doug was always hungry. Life on the farm continued as it had always done and to this day RAF Lakenheath still hosts the largest deployment of United States Airforce personnel in the UK.

GRACE AYRES aged 14 on VE Day 1945



Grace was born in Colyton in 1931. Her father and grandfather were Colyton bakers and Grace grew up in Nourse Cottage, opposite The Old Bakehouse, then a bakery and shop. Grace's schoolfriend, Graham, lived at the nearby jewellers. Childhood friends they both went to Colyton Grammar School during the war years and would later marry, have three children and move to Offwell. Before WW2 Colyton Grammar had 150 pupils; that number rose to 200 when wartime evacuees began arriving. One evacuee from Sheffield wrote about her time at the school: ***"I had attended so many schools which had closed down in my primary education because the teachers had been 'called up' I was practically illiterate."***

By 1940 Devon became the primary reception area for London County Council (LCC) children. Devon's elementary population rose from 38,411 in August 1939 to 74,752 in December 1940.

Other memories of evacuees to rural Devon include the following:

"Billeting officers came round to see what rooms we had. On arrival children with some mothers and teachers were taken to the parish hall to await allocation. Some of the more canny local ladies went and made their choice. Mostly though it was a knock on the door and: 'Here you are Mrs. X'. The poor souls were tired, disoriented and forlorn. The locals too were somewhat apprehensive but most people on both sides tried hard to make the best of a bad job."



During the war years, with rationing, life became very hard for Grace's family. ***"We used to call the cheese ration 'mousetrap cheese', you couldn't make very much with that."*** Grace's father was renowned for his wedding cakes and Grace was the one to check the marzipan: "If I said it was alright, then Father was happy."

A special treat was tea with cracker biscuits, or Dorset Knobs, ***"You broke them up, put them in the bottom of the teacup, poured on the tea and the milk and sprinkled a little sugar on the top – yummy."*** Knowing about Dorset Knobs was a sure sign of whether you were a Devonian or an incomer!

Grace was an enterprising child who would try her hand at anything. She grew her own lettuces and sold them and was often up at 4.00am to help with the early morning flour delivery, once despatching a 100weight bag of flour down the chute on her own, much to her father's displeasure. She helped her mother in the shop and by her mid-teens was driving the Bakers lorry and making deliveries around the region with her grandfather sitting in the passenger seat – as a backup!

In 1942 Exeter became the first target of the so-called 'Baedeker Raids', a campaign to attack targets of cultural and historical, rather than military or strategic, value. On the night of 24th April two waves of 20 bombers hit the city killing 73 and injuring 54. On the night of 3rd May 20 bombers arrived over Exeter and in 70 minutes devastated the town centre causing extensive fires. 30 acres of the city were destroyed, 156 people were killed and 583 injured. Following the raid German radio declared: *"Exeter is the jewel of the west; we have destroyed that jewel and we will return to finish the job."*



During the war Grace's father drove a St. John Ambulance, an elongated estate car which was kept in their shed. In 1939 the Joint War Organisation (JWO) was set up to co-ordinate the efforts of the St. John Ambulance and the British Red Cross as they worked hard to provide medical and welfare support for British civilians and soldiers. Throughout the war the JWO provided 249 ambulances which, between them, travelled nearly six million miles and carried 681,531 patients. The work of the JWO relied entirely upon volunteers to provide their various services.

On leaving school Grace started nursing in Axminster but later switched to driving ambulances herself. This was not particularly well received by the Exeter Hospital porters who always relied on a male driver to help carry the stretchers.

The Church has been important to Grace since childhood. The family were Chapel but, as teenagers, both Grace and her husband were members of the Colyton Parish Choir. Later Grace would join the Parochial Church Councils at Colyton, Kilmington, Beer and Offwell, where she remained church warden for a number of years.

Her organ playing started as just one more thing to ‘have a go at’ when she was 16.
“You know the motto ‘a rolling stone gathers no moss’ well my motto is ‘a rolling stone gathers an awful lot of experience’.”

Her main memory of VE Day was relief at not having to sleep under the kitchen table anymore.

MEN AND WOMEN OF OFFWELL WHO SERVED IN THE ARMED FORCES DURING WORLD WAR TWO 1939-1945

Derek Ackland	Royal Air Force
Denzin Ackland	Royal Army Service Corps
Charles Baugh (Killed in Action)	Green Howards
Frederick Blackmore	Royal Air Force
Eric Blake	Royal Marines
Bruce Bowditch	Royal Navy
William Bright	Duke of Cornwall’s Light Infantry
Desmond Broom	Royal Air Force
Nelson Bussel	Wiltshire Regiment
Frederick Cann	Royal Artillery
Leslie Channon	
William Chick	
Albert Chick	
Donald Currie	Royal Navy
Lorne Currie (Killed on Service)	Royal Air Force
Albert Dicks	Royal Marines
Martin Drew	Guards
John Edmunds	Royal Navy
Peter Evans	Royal Army Ordnance Corps
Ronald Evans	Royal Army Ordnance Corps
Winifred Godfrey	Woman’s Auxiliary Air Force
Joan Godfrey	Woman’s Auxiliary Air Force
Louisa Godfrey	Woman’s Auxiliary Air Force
William Godfrey	Royal Navy
Raymond Griffin	Military Police
William Hubbard	Royal Marines
Herbert Manvil	Royal Fusiliers
Richard Mitchell	Royal Air Force
Gerald North (Killed in Action)	Royal Navy
Leslie North	Royal Marines
Caryl Ramsden	Royal Artillery
Anne Ramsden	Woman’s Auxiliary Air Force
Joyce Reeder	Woman’s Royal Naval Service
Michael Richards	Royal Observer Corps
Roy Richards	Royal Air Force
Robert Richards	Royal Air Force
Maurice Richards	Guards
Sidney Salter	Royal Artillery
Lorna Smythe	Woman’s Royal Naval Service
Frank Stanley	Royal Armoured Corps
Wolseley Stanley	Royal Marines
Ronald Tidball	Royal Air Force

