

Memories of World War II

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War memories – translated from a tape, 27 February 1995

Moved from Ilford to Pitsea in 1938 and has lived in Pitsea ever since. At that time Vange was desolate except on a Saturday and Wednesday on market days when Pitsea was packed. The market is not where it is now but on the Tesco site initially, and then moved towards Pitsea Station. The stall holders erected temporary accommodation in tents, etc. and then on Sunday evening they would all go. In the summer they used to come for their holidays! Pitsea was also mainly unmade roads.

War years – 1939-45

There was panic at first with the threat of air raids, gas attacks and blackout curtains were put over all windows. My sister moved in with us from Dagenham the very next day with her children to be with Mum as she thought it would be safer here. Altogether there were ten children. All we had was a 'bungalow' bath and we used to hang blankets up at the windows to catch the steam/water and water was dripping everywhere!

An explosive bomb dropped in Southview Drive and another in Rectory Road. In Pound Lane a German Messerschmidt crashed from the Battle of Britain and I remember, as a boy, going to see the burned out aeroplane.

There was not much social life as there were no cinemas, but one did open later during the war. I was kept away from school for quite a while. Before that I went to Nevendon School (which is still there). No air raid shelter and the cloakroom had been converted into a school and Mum then let me go!

Rationing

As a child I didn't really notice the rationing and shortages. There were no sweets (until rationing) and eggs were allocated or alternatively, chicken feed.

I remember walking along on my own in a field and there was an air raid siren and a blacked-out aeroplane with swastikas flew over heading towards Southend – he was lost! He was really low and on top of the aeroplane was a machine gun, I thought I had 'had it'. To my surprise as he went over he waved to me, and I waved back. I thought he was going to machine gun me! I also remember collecting shrapnel from the guns in the holidays after spending all night in the shelter.

During the last year of the war I worked in London during the Doodlebug era. It was more frightening up there. At the end of the war and coming home from work a Doodlebug went over Rectory Road, going over to London and a jet aeroplane was trying to shoot it down.

Towards the end of the war I used to stand on Pitsea Station and see the V2 rockets going over. In London (Poplar High Street, where I worked) a rocket came down and hit a nearby church and the debris dropped in front of me. There was a shop nearby who must have had mustard pickle in the window and this had been blasted and all around me was this yellow mass.

I also remember my Dad waking me up and saying 'Quick, get up, we are being invaded' so we all went and sat under the table and all we could hear was crack/crack. It was a local house on fire. When this had stopped we went out to have a look and the local fire brigade had put it out! The noise had been the wood cracking. My Dad had thought we were being invaded!

Air raid shelters

These were given to us. Dad dug a hole in the garden but it kept getting filled up with water. The Council then came round and concreted it so that this didn't happen. We put bunk beds in it. We had a couple of ducks and these used to come in the shelter with us! We had tape on windows all round the house. Some people had concrete shelters erected and I think they were called 'Morrison' shelters.

Pill boxes appeared everywhere and some are still there. On the road Chelmsford to Southend there are quite a lot of them. Concrete blocks were all along the seafront at Southend to stop invading tanks, etc. A lot of soldiers were in the town at Southend – I think they were Canadians.

Basildon Station did not exist then and Pitsea was a junction only with a station master's house which has gone now.

Council houses commenced being built in Timberlong Lane. The town centre in Pitsea was where the bingo hall now is.

Buses

Campbells buses used to run one way to Wickford (A127). Eastern National to Nevendon, The Cricketers pub. There were quite a few buses around.