

Memories of Stoke Prior in Wartime

This article was first published in the March 2019 United Parish Church Community Link Magazine. We thank the church for allowing us to publish this article on the Stoke Parish Council Website

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A few years after I started school at Stoke Prior war was declared. I don't think many of us knew what that meant. We only had other people or the radio to let us know what was happening unlike the television news of today where all the misery caused by war is there for all to see. After a time there were raids on Birmingham and Coventry and when the siren sounded we were taken to a storage room outside the school which only had tiny windows high up and we all stayed there until the all clear sounded.

Things became short and paper had to be used both sides with no wide margins. The library of books which we could borrow to read at home was given to the paper collection but not before we were able to purchase a favourite book – I still have mine "Little Women".

On Monday mornings we had to buy a National Savings stamp (6 pence each), a government saving scheme, and to take any old metal objects (saucepans and so on) for the salvage effort.

Older girls started to knit men's socks and squares, which were then sewn into blankets. Evacuees started to arrive in local houses of those who had spare rooms, but soon most went back whenever the bombing quietened down. We had a new teacher who came to get away and she stayed.

Most roads were edged with trees, a lot of elms, and it was a sad day when lorries and men arrived and cut down all the large trees from Woodgate to Stoke Prior. Most have never been replaced.

There were no cooked meals at school and most had sandwiches or went home for lunch. I seem to remember a lot of bread and jam and apples in season.

We did not notice a lot of difference except when fathers, uncles and brothers disappeared into the forces but as it was a farming area a lot of menfolk were kept back for the important work of running the farms and producing our food. Many men worked day and night at Longbridge where all sorts of vehicles were produced for the forces and planes for the air force.

We were lucky in the Stoke Prior Woodgate area as a lot of people around us had large gardens and trees and almost everyone kept hens and pigs. You were allowed food for two pigs, one for your own household and one which had to be sold to a local butcher as part of food production. The pigs were also fed all the vegetable and household scraps. A lot of people also kept rabbits for meat.

None of the children had bicycles, we all rode around on our father's or mother's bicycles. There was a long waiting list at cycle shops. I was fourteen years old before I had one. Of course there were very few sweets, but as most of us did not get many before we did not really miss them, Looking back now I know what happened I am amazed at how our parents managed shortages of everything, food, coal, clothes, petrol and so on. Everything we now take for granted.

The war came close when the home guard was formed and men came forward again to serve. We watched them marching around the village. There are many memories for people to look back upon.