

Diane Taylor

Diane was born in London in 1934. Her father (Harry John Brothers) had been born in the Ship Inn, Wheathampstead, but moved to Fulham at the age of 14 and this is where he met and married her mother.

When war broke out in 1939 Diane was sent to stay with her father's sister, who lived **Marford Road**, opposite the allotments. Diane attended **St Helen's school** (in the old building) for the next 6 years. Mr Housden was headmaster. She remembers doing embroidery and tapestry in the needlework classes. She used to go to Sunday School up on Brewhouse Hill, in the Congregational Church.

Dr Smallwood saved her life when she almost died from peritonitis. He took her to St Albans hospital (Oster Hospital?), in his car, on a foggy morning. Doctor Smallwood lost two sons during the war.

Her uncle, Harold Smith, had an **allotment** so they were OK for food, particularly **vegetables**. They went **blackberrying** and there were **chickens in the back garden**. Her aunty made jam and on a Friday a cake – **a wartime cake** with no fat, just a few currants. Rice pudding and treacle was good and granddad occasionally brought home a **rabbit** on his back. The **milkman** had a horse and cart to deliver the milk. She remembered Sunday teas in particular and the **big family gatherings** at 86 Marford Road.

Her father's sister, Aunty Helen Smith, worked at **Helmets** and was also a nurse in the **Red Cross**. Her uncle drove a 50-foot-long transporter called the 'Queen Mary', carrying aeroplane spares to Coventry and Plymouth. He worked for **De Havilland** on test beds, where the spitfire came from. **John Cunningham** flew the test planes. One of the De Havilland men was killed outside our house riding his motorbike.

Special Constable **PC Barker** always made sure the Cory Wrights, at Four Limes, were safe during air raids.

The **siren** was nicknamed "Wheathampstead Annie". It sounded asingle note. Her friend Jean Patten had a **trench for shelter** during a raid.

There were **nurseries off Dyke Lane** owned by Mr Barker and a bomb fell on them one night. "I was under the stairs with my dolls. Heard a swishing noise. Was told to 'Stay under the stairs!' The **bomb** had hit the cucumbers. Afterwards we all went up to the bomb hole. The boys collected shrapnel. We saw a **dog fight** in the sky.

Mr Nobbie Clark, the **ARP warden**, tested the children to test how quickly they could put on a **Gas Mask** "I was terrified and couldn't stand the smell." He used to come round and tell you if there was light showing in your house (**Blackout precautions**).

Diane remembered the names of some of the other evacuees and village children: Eileen Rodgers from Kings Cross, Patsie Mansfield who went to the Catholic school, Joyce Thackerill (a Cobb), Pat and Raymond Cobb and Violet Bracey, who lived next door.

She also remembered the **German prisoners of war** and the village boys throwing marmalade oranges at them, when they were being convoyed from Batford to work on the farms. "One of our army men sat at the end of the lorry with a gun to watch the cows being milked." He was the guard. Ruth Chapman, the Sunday school teacher, took them for a walk once and they met **Italian prisoners of war** at Nicholls Farm. The PoWs made toys out of wood: a wooden ring with a wiggling snake.

Diane's father would come to visit by train on a Sunday. He'd be wearing a trilby hat, a black Crombie coat and waistcoat. He'd go back to London on Monday morning on the **workmen's train** at 4 or 5 am. He was a postman in London.

"One day when I was blackberrying near Coleman Green with my father, we heard a doodlebug. Dad pushed me down under an oak tree. We could see it going near Marford Road. It went over our houses. It dropped in Redbourn."

Her mother came to visit every fortnight: she worked at **John Lewis in Oxford Street** throughout the war, selling lampshades. The Duchess of Sutherland bought hers there. Once they slept in the Holborn underground station all night during an air raid.

Happier memories were of winter snow and lovely summers.

Diane returned to London in 1945.

[extracts from a telephone conversation with Ruth Jeavons, on 16 August 2007.
The complete account can be found on the WHS website
<http://www.wheathampsteadheritage.org.uk/history-society-memories.asp>]