

JOHN MATTHEWS

John was born in 1915. He lived and worked in the village all his life, apart from his **war service**.

When the war came John joined up with the Royal Artillery. He was with the army for 5 years and 3 months, not returning until 6th May 1946, though the war in Europe was over by May 1945. He was on heavy guns. He trained at Arborfield near Wokingham, Berkshire, with no ammunition, then at Weybourn near Cromer for 8 weeks where you'd learn to fire a 56 lb shell from 4.5 calibre gun. John wanted to come home. He spent some time at naval bases in Rainham in Essex, in the Orkneys at Scapa Flow, also in Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen.

He liked Orkney and the farming there. He was let out to farmers on 24-hour leave and lived on a farm that kept beef cattle and poultry for export to the mainland. Oats were the only crop, and the first to ripen, so particularly suitable for that part of the world. John kept 12 chickens there, and they used the eggs in camp. By chance he met Dr Smallwood's daughter at the Thanksgiving service held in Kirkwall cathedral to celebrate the victory at El Alamein. Each Sunday they would visit the war ships at Scapa Flow. There were two routes to the Orkneys: Aberdeen to Kirkwall, and Thursoe to Inverness – an eight-hour journey on a single-track railway.

He was sent to the Middle East attached to the battalion of the Worcestershire Regiment but never got posted to North West Europe as the Russians had won the war there. He was sent to Cairo on a clerical job and didn't return to Europe until the end of the war. He worked with the natives at GHQ, 2nd echelon Egypt where the locals resented the presence of the British and there was lots of bomb throwing. He came home on the Caernarvon Castle luxury liner and was back in Europe for 10 days. South to Alexandria, then to Mombasa. Caught a disease at Tarranta, on the toe of Italy, but couldn't stop. Came home via the Medlock Route: Alexandria to Toulon, then 850 miles to Calais. It was mine-ridden. The men slept in lifejackets. 'The deserts weren't that lovely,' said John. 'I was one year in the green fields of France where the railways are impressive.'

[Extracts from notes taken by Ruth Jeavons in conversations with John]