

Villagers' accounts of growing up in Farndon during the Second World War

1. Marjorie Houlston

Up until the age of nine years, childhood had been simple. Having been born in Arthingworth and returning to East Farndon with my father, mother and older brother (they had lived here previously), I just remember playing with village friends, and from the age of five years going to the village school, where Miss McDowell taught. Some time later, when Mrs March came to live in the village, she helped out when there were more children; such as those from the 'Cottage Home', where there were a lot of boys being cared for. There was one classroom and we all went home at dinner time and returned in the afternoon.

When the war broke out, we didn't realise what it would mean. We were introduced to gas masks, Mickey Mouse ones for younger children (my younger brother had one) and a carry-cot shaped one for babies. My sister was a baby and being put inside one with just a small 'window' where her face was, was frightening. She screamed while my father pumped air into it. The air raid siren would bring a chill of fear to us, and if we had been woken during the night and had to get up and go downstairs, we were able to go to school half an hour later next morning. Black blinds were put up at the windows and torches, cycle lamps, etc., had to be half covered up. The Air Raid Wardens would walk the village and tap on the windows if a chink of light was showing.

The aerodrome was built at Foxton and we would hear the roar of engines at night and back in the morning. The Home Guard would meet and practise their drill and marching. When the cities were bombed, we had some evacuees from London. One family lived in the old Rectory and others with families in the village. It must have been terrible for them to leave their homes and everything behind; at the time we didn't realise what it meant to them.

Air raid shelters were built in the gardens of the larger houses in the village, but we had to put up with the cupboard under the stairs.

My mother's parents lived at the top of the village. We were about half way down, in a two-bedroomed house. The lavatory was across the garden. We had oil lamps on the table and some 'Kelly lamps' upstairs. There was no water laid on and we had to fetch all our water from the village spring for drinking, cooking, etc. We fetched pails of water for older people and generally received a penny for our trouble. During a drought my brother and I used to take a small bath and fill it at the spring to put in the water barrels for mother to do the washing. We had an open fire grate, with everything being cooked on it and in the oven at the side. Irons for ironing the clothes were heated on a rack in front of the fire. On Friday nights the large galvanised bath was brought in, water being heated in the old boiler in the corner of the kitchen with a fire underneath it. This boiler was also used on washing

days. Being the only girl (apart from the baby), I was lucky enough to have the first bath!



Marjorie is on the left here, outside her Granny's house

My father grew lots of vegetables as we had quite a big garden. I remember he made me a swing. We spent a lot of time at my grandparents' house opposite the school. My father was a painter and decorator and cycled everywhere. My mother used to go out cleaning and took in washing, so we had dinner at Granny Allen's most weekdays. I wasn't aware of rationing very much. We always had plenty of vegetables and mother used to bake for us. The milk was delivered to the doors by pony and cart, in churns and then measured out in a jug. One baker came to the village with a horse and cart.

Spending a lot of time at Granny's, we were often over at the church, which she and Grandad looked after for over forty years. He was sexton and she cleaned the church. They carried loads of coke in for the two stoves that heated the church at that time.

I remember three shops in the village. One is now 'Hillside' and was kept by a Mr Mayes. Then there was the Post Office and shop kept by Mrs Nichols (now 'The Old Post Office') and one in 'Ivy House', kept by a rather eccentric lady called Mrs Dancer. She used to sell everything and had small bells stitched to her long skirts which tinkled when she moved about.

The May Day celebrations were kept going by various ladies making a hooped garland, which we collected flowers for. They were tied on it in small bunches. We

had a May Queen and we all had wreaths of flowers on our heads. The boys would carry the garland and we went round the village singing May songs.

We went to Sunday School at the church, but some families walked to Harborough to the chapels. Our lives revolved round the village and we would only go into Harborough when we were older. We went to Clipston School when we were eleven years old and stayed till we were fourteen, going by bus.

The prisoner of war camp was built at the bottom of the road; and when we used to cycle to work, first the Italians then the Germans used to shout at us as we pedalled fast to get by. Although we didn't have any bombs dropped near us, there was an odd one in the area and we could hear the banging of distant bombing, especially the time that Coventry was bombed so badly. The Americans were stationed in various areas and two planes crashed into each other while they were flying close together. And it was said that a plane landed in Marston Lake but the pilot parachuted out. I think it was an English plane but can't be sure. Men and women from the village joined the forces and we saw them home on leave, in their uniforms.

Marjorie Houlston (née Read)

2. Sara Upton (later Lady Grayson) who was living in the Hall



This story was submitted to the People's War site by a volunteer from Age Concern, Dorchester on behalf of Lady Sara Grayson (nee Upton), and has been added to the site with her permission. Lady Sara fully understands the site's terms and conditions.

"I was born in 1937. I was 2 when the war started. We lived in the South of France until the summer before the war started. Then we lived in Finchley Road, London in my grandfather's house. My grandmother decided that we would be safer out of London, so we moved to Hove. Then my grandmother rented a big house at East Farndon near Market Harborough, Leicestershire where my aunt and cousins joined us, her husband being away in the Navy. The Home Guard did exercises in the courtyard and stables. The Womens' League of Health and Beauty used our dining room for their meetings. The Red Cross did a practice emergency and lowered a girl over a balcony in a canvas sling. I was given a nurse's uniform.

All the German bombers going to bomb Coventry flew over. My grandmother had bombed out people from Coventry in the rooms over the stable. I was about three and a half years old. We kept pigs called Percy and Prudence who had to go to market. My mother had to go and work in London, either at the Foreign Office or the War Office. Basically my grandmother brought me up. My father, a journalist, stayed in France. My mother died of TB when I was four and my grandmother brought me up. There were Italian prisoners of war and we used to wave to them.

We moved to Petworth, Sussex. There were lots of Canadian troops. We used to see convoys of them. My grandmother used to have some of them to supper to make them feel more at home. My granny and me got under the dining room table when a doodlebug came over. I wasn't particularly frightened."

Document compiled by Judy Hodgetts in January 2021, with content provided personally by Marjorie Houlston and Lady Sara Grayson.