



A Newton Abbot resident remembers World War II

Bombing of Newton Abbot

On 20th August, 1940, Newton Abbot suffered a shock daylight air raid on its Railway station. It happened between 6.00pm and 6.30pm. I had been to a friend's house in Courtland Road near the station and we had walked up to Forde Park to book a tennis court for a game of tennis the next day. From there we had walked down Keyberry Park into Decoy Road and were about to cross to the bottom of St Michael's Road when hearing aeroplane engines we looked up to see two fighter-bombers with swastikas on their wings coming towards us. We saw bombs falling and a girl standing in a doorway on Kingskerswell Road screamed at us "look out – they are Germans". We flung ourselves down by a wall and the planes roared over St Michael's Church, machine gunning as they went. Afraid that they would return, we ran in the end house of Keyberry Road where the lady of the house was sheltering under the kitchen table. "I am so glad to see you" she said, as we joined her! After a while we made our way to my home. My father had just come home from the station, we were all safely in. We had no idea where the bombs had fallen, but very soon a man with a bicycle knocked on the door to say my father must go quickly to the station, it had been bombed and so had a row of houses near Station Bridge, also the Parks.

My father took my friend to her house in Courtland Road where her mother was relieved to see her, and made his way to the Railway Station. He was out most of the night and when he did return he told us that the station had received a direct hit on the restaurant room and on a train which had just arrived. Some lives were lost. A terrace of old cottage houses, the site now occupied by David and Charles, was almost demolished and bombs fell on Forde Park and houses at the top of the park. It sent a shiver of fear through us to think how near we had been to this. A piece of railway line had been thrown over into Courtenay Park and the front windows of my friend's house were all blown in. Her mother always maintained that I had saved my friend's life as before I called she had been sitting in an armchair by the lounge window and this was showered with shards of glass. This air raid put us all on our guard and made us aware that there was indeed a war.

Newton Abbot received more night time bombing raids and St Paul's Church was severely damaged as were houses at the bottom of Mount Pleasant Road. There were people killed in this air raid, including a Special Constable from Decoy. On other occasions bombs fell on a farm adjoining Wolborough Churchyard, Hackney Marshes and Milber Down.

By this time we had all been issued with gas masks, we bought vinyl cases with long straps in which to carry them as one would a shoulder bag or hanging on the handlebars of one's bicycle. Identity cards were issued also with an identity number and letters. I remember mine was WFRN 169/4. If you were caught out without your card you were given a reprimand and told to take it to the Police Station the next day. I remember the police visiting the cinemas, restaurants and dance hall. I also remember going for a ride on my bike and being stopped by a Special Constable and asked to produce my card. He also wanted to know if my mother knew I was out! There was very little traffic on the roads, so it was safe for cycling.