

089 Albury War Memory, July 2005, two speakers, 25 minutes

<http://www.alburyhistory.org.uk/Media/089%20%20Albury%20War%20Memory,%20%20name%20needed,%20July%202005,%20MD%2025min.mp3>

Who is the second person recorded in July 2005?

089 SPEAKER 1: Rae Barber nee Smith

Well, I was born at 5 Guildford Lane in March 1931 and when I was three months old we moved to the village and we lived at 3 Weston Dean. Just before the war, in 1939, we moved to what was then called Garage Cottage which is now Streamside Cottage. This is the house in which my father grew up. He was an Albury boy. His father John Smith worked at Bottings Mill all his life as a foreman miller. Dad's mother died in 1919 from the Spanish Flu when my father was sixteen.

My father was a motor mechanic and he worked for Mr Parfree who kept the garage. My father was in the Territorial Army. He was called up a month before war was declared and he went on manoeuvres as they said, but I believe they was expecting war to come and so he was gone straight away. The beginning of the war I can remember Czech refugees, at Surrey Hills Guesthouse, because we went down and presented a nativity play. My friend Elizabeth Sherlock and I were angels knelt at either end of the crib; we had wings made of real feathers. It was quite exciting actually.

At the beginning of the war, my mother, my brother and I went to live with my other grandparents because invasion was expected. And I had to change schools from Albury village school and go to the village school at West Wickham where I wasn't very happy. So nothing much happened, the phoney war, we returned to Albury. My mother got a job at Pratts Stores in the village working in the cash desk. We had different evacuees come to stay but eventually my mother rented a bedroom to Jack Nicholas for him to store his furniture so we didn't have a spare bedroom and we didn't have to have any more evacuees.

Now I went back to Albury School where I was very happy. We had to go through the woods where there was an encampment of soldiers. They were under the trees with the camouflage nets over, and adults had to show an identity card at the beginning and the exit of the woods but we children were just allowed to go through. Then the Battle of Britain came. We had a student teacher at the school a lovely chap, he was only nineteen, and he went off to be a pilot and he was killed in the Battle of Britain. We were all very sad.

Then of course it was time for the London Blitz and we didn't have a shelter, we used to hide in the larder under the stairs when the siren went, came out when the all-clear sounded, wasn't much room in there and at night, when the Blitz was on in London, we used to sleep at the foot of the front stairs. That house had two sets of stairs one at the front and one at the back. I don't know why; I think it had belonged to two families at one time. Then when the all-clear when we went off to bed.

Now I took a scholarship and I was lucky enough to pass, went to the County School. What I remember about that most was traveling by bus and, goodness me were the buses crowded, they just crammed people in and you had to queue up for a bus and maybe the first one that came would be full. You'd have to wait another half an hour for another one, so it wasn't very easy going to school in Guildford. But that was life.

Wasn't much going on in the village in the way of entertainment. Most exciting thing was the Ministry of Information films in the Village Hall and those films were mostly about how our agriculture had been in the doldrums before the war and now that the war had come, and everybody had to grow food, everyone was working like crazy on the land. There were weekly dances on a Saturday. My brother, who was three and a half years older than me, he used to go to the dances. He was in the Air Training Corps, later he went off as an RAF apprentice at Halton.

I remember with affection the Reverend Phillip Gray. He was rector at Albury at the beginning of the war, but then he left and somebody called Cannon Farquar came and he was from Hexham Abbey in Northumberland and he was a very austere gentleman. He wasn't married and he didn't seem to understand much about children but he took us to confirmation. There were five of us, there were the Barker twins, Mr Barker was the village blacksmith, and the Barker twins, Peter Parfree, me and Elizabeth Sherlock. One thing I do remember quite vividly about this time was that a lady called Miss Dodsworth (Dodswell sic) invited us to tea. Now, she lived with Mrs Potter who lived in the old schoolhouse and I believe she thought she was being very kind inviting we five children to tea and she said "I'm going to give you jelly". Well she made this terrible jelly and it was made out of gelatine and water and it was chewy and it tasted just like glue and she stood over us and said "Are you enjoying it" and we said "Yes". It nearly made us sick.

Then a bit later on, of course, there were the flying bombs. I actually saw two flying bombs go over. I happened to be out and about the wretched things would go across the sky making a horrible noise spurting out flames at the back. But the two I saw luckily flew past, their engines cut out and they just dropped to earth away in the woods. But there was one at night, in the middle of the night, I was in bed with my mother and my two little brothers who'd being born by then, and this flying bomb went over and its engine stopped right above our heads and my mother said "This one's for us" and we all dived under the covers and waited. Silence... and it must have drifted, because sometimes they did drift, and then there came a loud bang and it was away in the woods so it wasn't one for us after all.

Towards the end of the world we got a Morrison Shelter, which was in the front room, but we only ever went in it once. It wasn't very convenient and the babies used to cry when they went in there, they didn't like it at all. Then later on, I remember coming home from school once and my mother saying "Oh, the Germans have invented a new thing now and we've had it. It's a rocket and you can't hear it coming". I was absolutely terrified I thought goodness me, whatever's going to happen? But they were aimed at London. They never came over here.

And at last, eventually, we had VE Day and I can remember that so well. I was 14, it was a beautiful day, blue sky, and I remember wandering about the village dressed in a red, white and blue dress looking up at the sky and thinking to myself "The war's over, there won't be any death coming from the sky any more". Oh it was wonderful. We had all sorts of celebrations for VE day. We built a bonfire in the Ten Acre Field and in the evening we set fire to it, burnt effigies of Hitler and Mussolini and some of the people in the village arranged races and a tea party in Jack Miles's field. Then there was a beauty competition. It was supposed to be for people over 16 I think but there wasn't anybody over 16 went in for it. Only about six or seven of us and I won, and I won five shillings. Oh, that was so exciting!

Then my father of course was demobbed. He came home and he changed his job and he went to work for a friend in Guildford. So, my parents decided that we'd have more of a life in Guildford so we left Albury when I was 14 but I still think I'm an Albury girl!

The village was a real community during the war. It was almost self-sufficient. There were quite a few shops. There was, in the building with the chimneys in the block of buildings there, there was the post office and that was run by Annie and Nellie Fuller and their brother George was the village postman.

Next door to the post office the Sherlocks lived and that was where the doctor used to come once a week. It wasn't our doctor but a lot of people in the village went to the doctor there. Miss Sherlock had the front room as a waiting room and then another room called pugs at the back which was where the doctor did his interviewing in a room there where he could wash his hands and make up medicines. But I suppose later on he didn't make the medicines himself because we had a chemists. The next building was a chemists and I can't remember the chemist's name but he and his wife used to serve in the chemists. My father told me before it was a chemists shop it with a haberdashers.

Then Weston Dene, Mr Hollingdale lived, he was a baker, worked at Pratts Stores and there was Tom and Mrs Field. Tom was the village, I think they call them a lengthsman, he used to look after the tidiness of the village and remove weeds from paths and sweep up and everything.

Then there was a butchers', run by Jack Miles and his nephew George Etherington, known as nipper. Next door to that there was a baker's, George King and his brother Charlie. They used to go up to Farley Heath delivering bread with a horse and trap I remember. Then there was the garage, Parfrey's Garage, run by Mr Noah Parfree and his son Arthur latterly, when Mr Noah Parfree retired. Then there was a blacksmith, Mr Barker, who was an ex Indian army soldier. He was a blacksmith and a wheelwright. And that was really the hub of the village. Everybody that went past used to hang over the door and talk to Mr Barker when he was shoeing horses. Because horse and carts were still being used during the war, I suppose because of the petrol shortage, and one of the houses down there, was the village tailor, Mr Fuller. He had a Czech refugee family come to live with him during the war. Now I can remember John Dvorak was a very nice young man, and after the war they went back to Czechoslovakia.

Then there was Pratt Stores. Mr Nicholas ran Pratt Stores, and that was a general store. But it also had a bakery attached so there were two bakers in the village. There was a village cobbler and there were two farms that delivered milk and you could buy watercress from Mr Coe. So it was really quite a self-sufficient village in lots of ways.

089 SPEAKER 2 - Who is the second person recorded in July 2005?

I don't know quite why I joined the land army, the WLA. Probably because so many friends said with horror "But you can't do that". However, I was, still am I suppose, a Londoner and had read Cold Comfort Farm. I wonder how many other girls joined the WLA looking for Seth and the sukebind? And there was Mary Webb, with Precious Bane and A G Street with Strawberry Roan. One other land girl said to me rather bitterly "That A G Street's got a lot to answer for". After a year of hoeing - can you imagine? - I opted for dairy farming and had a month's training. The only bit of this which really sank in was: if you're in trouble raise the knee sharply and as hard as you can. It worked, probably still does.

Then came an interview with a Mr Gilbert Coe who farmed in Albury. Where was that? I came to Gomshall station where I was met by Mr Coe, a double for an actor named George Arliss, and was immediately reproved for pronouncing it Gomshall. "We say Gumshall" said Mr Coe. It wasn't far to Albury and we drove straight to the farmyard. Shock number one. The midden was large and very

close to the cowshed which I found housed a mixed herd of twenty cows. Perhaps Mr Coe noticed my expression, "I'm aiming for a pedigree herd" he said. The cowman, Dick, who had been introduced and stood silently by, small and glowering, looked a bit startled at this flight of fancy and we passed easily to "Start at 4am and do a small milk round before breakfast".

The milk round, not a round at all really, more of a loop of string up The Street and back, came after feeding the cows, washing their udders, milking, cooling the milk, bottling and started at Vale End. Milk was rationed so there were sighs all round when there was just half a pint to be doled out.

On down to the village and past Pratt Stores. Sometimes the baker, Mr Hollingdale, portly and flowery, would be returning to his ovens after his breakfast. "Morning Baker." "How do." And then on past the tailors to the blacksmith, who was usually leaning on his gate, a round rosy face and black curly hair. "Morning Mr Barker." "How do." Then came the garage, Parfree's, a few cottages, Weston Dene, the post office, with Miss Fuller ready to tell me the milk was off. I felt quite hurt at this since I'd only just extracted it from the cow. But Dick the cowman didn't seem to be bothered "She likes to complain" and said it made her feel better. It couldn't be much fun selling stamps in a dark little post office.

Next the chemist, with Mr Francis in charge, then over the road past Mr Miles the butcher to the other baker, Kings. Here I could relax. Set the bottles down while George, or Charlie, made the tea. The bakehouse was small, warm and lovely on a cold day. "Long tea or short tea?" said Charlie, or possibly George, waving a large teapot in the air. I opted for short tea as it lessened the splashing and George, or maybe Charlie, would say "Tell 'em at the bus stop the tea's made" and I would nip outside shouting "Tea up" to those waiting for the Guildford bus. I wonder if anyone else remembers those cosy few minutes with George and Charlie dispensing tea and gathering news, and all this before breakfast.

After breakfast there was plenty to do before the ritual of afternoon milking started once more. Mucking out first, then Dick usually had something lined up for me, something he didn't want to do himself, like harnessing Kitty to the cart and driving down the main road to a field of kale, cutting the kale, loading the cart and bringing it back for feed. The first time I was given these instructions I bleated "But how will I know which field?" Dick sighed. He always knew no good would come of hiring girls. "Don't worry. Kitty will know". She did.

Or I would be sent with a sickle to the meadow alongside the mill house to cut down the nettles so that the cows could safely graze. The trick was then getting the cows from Weston Farm to the now nettle-less meadow, that is, along the main road. Whilst I'd grown very fond of the herd I was under no illusions about their willingness to walk sedately through the village. However, we started off with Dick leading them out of the farm gate whilst I brought up the rear. Margaret, a large shorthorn, was leading. She always did, with Milkmaid, an Ayrshire with large curved horns, doing her best to keep up. The rest straggled about, peering into gateways, looking into doorways, leaving cow pats on the road. It was obviously workers' playtime for cows until, that is, a short convoy of Canadians, probably on their way to Cranleigh and their camp came from the other direction.

The cows behaved like most of the female population of Surrey on meeting Canadians. That is they skittered across the road, I'm pretty sure Poppy batted her very long eyelashes and the rest just beamed, drooling, except for Tess, aptly named after Two Ton Tessie, who was always very nosy and seeing a Jeep manned by noisy soldiers decided to investigate and poked her large wet nose inside the cab and into the driver's face. Pandemonium! It took a little while to separate cows and convoy but eventually the tumult and the shouting died and the herd turned decorously into their new pasture. Dick glared "They never done that before you come". I kept quiet trying not to give up.

Work on the land is probably the hardest there is. The rules set by nature, the weather dictating each day's labour. Ask any girl about her memories and it may be imagined that these are of toil and sweat, hard work and little reward. True, but there are also particularly sweet memories. There's the regular sound of a spade biting into and turning over the earth, ready for renewal. The sight of a field where the stooks are, against all expectation, standing upright. The bumping of calves' noses against one's knees when trying to teach them to drink milk from fingers held in a bucket. The wonderful warmth, the underside of a cow in parts, to cold fingers on frosty mornings.

My own special memory is of the very early morning walks to work in spring and early summer. The world was mine, the air sweet and cool. The only sound the rustlings in the grass at my feet, of the gentle purling of the stream near the farmyard gate.

These memories coalesce into one which took place early in June 1944. The walk as calming as ever, until I became aware of a steady and inexorable droning overhead. On looking up, I found the blue morning sky literally covered by high flying planes. It was impossible to count how many. It was certainly not a squadron on the way to a raid or a dog fight, both of which were familiar. I learned later, that this close-packed formation was formed by stacking, a hazardous manoeuvre.

I turned into the farmyard to find a cowman standing by the gate to the field also looking up. "You know what that is", he said. I nodded. The gate was opened and the cows streamed into the cowshed. Udder washing, milking, bottling and mucking out, were all performed in silence. Just the ping of the milk against the side of a pail, the rustling of the straw under the cow's feet and the huffing and puffing from the milkmaid in the last stall who always huffed and puffed. There was nothing, or too much to say.