

AFTER THE WAR WAS OVER

On 8th May, 1945, VE Day, All Saints Church bells rang out for the first time since hostilities began, and as in towns and villages throughout Britain, Crudwell celebrated Victory in Europe with its street party, albeit on the Village Green, for the school children. Extra rations were available, but mainly mothers donated some of their precious points for little cakes, biscuits, jellies and sandwiches for a "real" party.

In 1946 servicemen were being demobbed and Toc H Canteens were no longer necessary, so Crudwell canteen helpers declared that an outing to London would be a fit ending to their war effort.

One morning early the small party (including Joan Dring and Daisy Nurden) set out to catch the first train from Kemble Station. Their first extravagance was breakfast on the train, followed by shopping in the big London stores. Dinner time came and a three course slap up meal in the Trocadero was the order of the day, when there was much hilarity as oysters were sampled. After more shopping and a tea-time visit to a Lyons Corner House, it was on to the Criterion Theatre for a show. Very late an exhausted group returned to Kemble on the last train, and home.

It would seem that on this exciting day out their feasting was much more exotic than the fare which they had served in the canteen during the war.

OUR OLD VILLAGE HALL

The old Village Hall was used for many wartime activities - as a boys' schoolroom, a dance hall and as a canteen.

Regular dances were held on Friday nights, when girls would cycle in from the surrounding villages, and among the servicemen who danced the night away, were American soldiers, who were camping in Charlton Park. They would travel in a big Army lorry, which would park in Carpenter's Yard.

Every Sunday evening the Toc H Canteen was open to members of the services, including airmen from Kemble, Searchlight and Ack-ack crews from Quelfurlong, and the local Cadet Training Corps. They could relax over tea at 2d a cup (less than 1p each), chocolates (off the ration), cigarettes, Camp coffee, beans on toast or sandwiches - the fillings were meagre, perhaps spam or betroot when in season. The men and women were glad to get out of their quarters and often confided their worries about loved ones left at home to the canteen helpers, two of whom were Daisy Nurden and Joan Dring.

Many happy hours were spent there and occasionally, as a "thank-you, the servicemen would give a little concert.

IN THE HOME

Memories of shopping for food came flooding back - of registering with the grocer and butcher in Cirencester or Malmesbury - of always joining a queue when you saw one, perhaps for cigarettes at 1/- for 20 (5p), or for precious lisle stockings.

(Before nylons everyday stockings were of the baggy "Nora Batty" kind, but there were finer ones for "best" in exchange for 3 clothing coupons.

Many registered at the Village Shop for their weekly rations, 2oz. butter, 2oz. cheese, 2oz. tea which could be bought on each Ration Book.

Each person was allowed 1/2d. (6p) worth of meat per week. To supplement the ration one egg per person a week many Crudwell families kept hens. Sometimes extra butter and cheese, and "under the counter" meat could be found if "you were in the know".

Vegetables were always in the garden, and the school children took home to mum the vegetables they grew in their "Dig for Victory" plots in the school garden.

The sweet ration (12oz. every 4 weeks) could be bought from "The Kennels", a sweet shop opposite the Mayfield Hotel.

Catering for celebrations was not easy, although Kit Holmes says that a baker would bake a wedding cake (one small tier only), but the bride had to supply the fruit, fat and sugar, and friends and relatives would help by giving some of their precious coupons and points. No icing was possible, and only a very thin layer of marzipan (quite likely made with dried egg powder).

Eileen Morter remembers a very "sickly looking" Christmas pudding, with hardly any fruit and only a little white sugar, which looked more like a spotted dick.

Keeping warm in winter was a problem, for although wood was available, coal was rationed. Each household was allowed 1 cwt. per fortnight costing 7s 6d (37p), and this could be bought from Carpenters coal business, which they would transport from Coate Station to Crudwell.

Compiled by RUTH PAIN from 2nd World War reminiscences of residents within the Courier readership, who lived in the parish of Crudwell during 1939-45, and are still here in 1995. This fragment of local social history is as factual as memories will permit after the passage of 50 years.