



Bletchingley Conservation and Historical Society

The Parish Magazine in World War 2

We all know and love our Parish Magazine but Nigel Price fittingly showed the Conservation and Historical Society in 2015 how useful a historic record it has been over the years. A lot of research was put in to find samples from the publication which strongly demonstrated how life changed, yet also remained the same, in the village during the six years of WW2.

The magazine was published throughout the war with regular updates on all areas of life without resorting to propaganda or (too much) hyperbole. One of the most striking continuous themes was the successful appeals for various causes and the huge amounts of money collected. The Bletchingley Savings Group reported the total amount saved, by ordinary residents between 1940 and 1944, as £13,891 18s 3d (over £540,000 in today's money). The initial 600 people who joined were praised with the author musing about the large number of people who hadn't joined: "...it is obvious to the rest that these citizens are helping Hitler, but why they should wish to do so is not quite so clear." Other fundraising included an American Tea held in April 1941 which raised £75; Warship Week the following December raised £17,130 9s 0d through the sale of bonds, certificates, etc. through Barclays Bank (on the corner of the High Street and Outwood Lane); a Flag Day in May 1942 raised £10; there were collections for Greece (£64), China (£72) and Russia (£216). Wings for Victory week in 1942 produced £9,844 and The Prisoners of War Parcels Fund held a private sale raising £365. Even after the war there were appeals for the "Bells for Victory" fund (to restore the church bells which had been buried in sand for the duration) and the "Welcome Home" fund. Even Southwark Cathedral was looking for half a million pounds to "straighten out the Diocese". Local people not only were digging for victory but also digging deep into their own pockets.

Another theme of course was the personal sacrifices made by local families. There was news of people volunteering for active service: Bletchingley Garage struggled on with Mrs Molyneux literally manning the pumps after Mr Molyneux and his foreman, Mr Davis, received commissions into the Fleet Air Arm while Mr Perfect, the mechanic, enlisted in the Army Service Corps. Reports were made of exploits at home and abroad; Nigel's three readers really engaged the audience recounting the story of a Merchant Navy Apprentice who was torpedoed not once, but twice within days on board ships in the North Atlantic. We heard of the chaos of trying to launch lifeboats from a sinking ship and the horrors of seeing colleagues unable to swim in the cold sea, followed by the prospect of a harrowing 550 mile journey in a lifeboat using just the oars for propulsion – during which decisions beyond any belief had to be made about casting adrift crew in order to save others. These stories must have been extraordinary to the people at home reading their monthly magazine. Not that they were always safe at home – the death, through enemy action, of Mrs Diana Lambert at home at South Park was recorded in the September 1944 edition. Well earned awards were reported: Ralph Harrington received the Distinguished Flying Cross and David Hughes-Hallett the Military Cross – just

two mentioned amongst many. The members of the Home Guard though had to remain anonymous as that remained an Official Secret.

Of course the lighter side of life was covered; football matches continued, there were knitting circles, teas and welcome events for the troops. Those stationed in the neighbourhood were invited to the Village Hall for Tuesday evening socials. "Hostess" tickets were issued to all helpers. These were "intended primarily for married ladies and, in certain cases, unmarried. A limited number of tickets for a single evening are also available and may be issued to girls over eighteen. Exceptions may be made for girls under eighteen accompanied by their parents." The success of the events could be judged by the account in the April 1941 edition: "Already two weddings have resulted between people old enough to know their own minds and with every prospect of happiness before them when peace is restored". These types of announcement were also a continuing trend throughout the war.

It was a fascinating evening really brought to life by the expert readings by Dee Bennett, John Clare and Angela Price presided over by Nigel Price.

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