

Some Observations and Events of War Time in Hinton Waldrist 1941-44

By The Reverend John Cole M.A.
Rector 1935-1944

Edited by his Daughter
Mrs Jaquetta Everitt
1998

December 1941

Now that the long winter evenings have set in when one sits over the fire, it seems to me that in this third winter of the war, that it might be of some interest to those who are yet unborn to put on record how we in a remote Berkshire village lived our daily lives during these epic days when Britain alone keeps alight the torch of freedom in Europe.

For the war has affected the lives of us all, even here in Hinton where men are called up, as are some of our women and girls, and all are rationed for food – even the cows and hens have their ration cards.

Old men as Special Constables patrol the lanes after a hard day's work in the fields until midnight. Our old women save their empty bottles to throw at or in front of German motor-cyclists if they come.

Haven't we all heard night after night the drone of enemy planes overhead on their way to bomb the Midlands, and once the crash of twenty bombs in our fields? Did we not see the burning bodies of Canadian airmen amid the wreckage of their flaming and exploding plane?

Have we not in our midst those who have come for safety to our village – children and mothers with their babies fleeing from unspeakable horrors? All these things have come upon our once peaceful village and God alone knows what we shall yet see before we have won for our children that liberty which our fathers handed down to us.

First some reference must be made to the events of the past two years, to the various wartime organisations in the parish, to the conditions under which we live and to our future plans. These should not be without interest, for they reflect the spirit and the very soul of our people and our yokels that were never greater than when, in that unforgettable June of 1940, they stood guard over their homes, women and children with shotguns and rabbit shot, defying the armoured hordes of the Hun.

But, so far, the greatest hardships have fallen upon the women. Later, when rationing became strict, the burden of this too fell upon the women, who, as in the days before the war when money was scarce and food not plentiful, often go short that their children and men may have what is in the larder.

Of the wartime organisations in the parish, the first to appear was the Wardens Service. Hinton had four Wardens: Mr Smart the tenant at the Glebe, Mr Gibbens the Carrier, Mr Batts a market gardener, and myself. We attended anti-gas lectures and a first aid course in Faringdon during the

summer of 1938. In our district the plan was for each village to have four Wardens, one of whom to be the Senior Warden, while 4 or 5 villages formed a Group under a Group Head Warden. Up to the present time there has been little for the Wardens to do except the fitting of Gas Masks. We not patrol as we cannot hear the siren which is at Faringdon six miles away; but if any sound near I usually get up and prowls around the village. So far bombs have only dropped once, in the night of March 19th 1941 at 3:05 am when one blew up the Duxford Road about 440 yards north of the Rectory and 19 others made craters in the fields, most of them near Welmore.

The Wardens' duties are to report enemy action to the Report Centre at Faringdon and from there to summon any help needed. Linked with the Wardens Service is the first aid post at the Rectory. My wife is in charge of this with Mrs Broad and several other women as helpers, but apart from some triangular bandages, dressings, a tourniquet and a little anti-gas ointment we have not been provided with any equipment. Splints, stretchers, disinfectant etc we have had to make or buy.

On the outbreak of war the Special Constables were called up – they are Walter Ball the Sexton, Will Gibbens the Carrier, Ronald Fitchett a market gardener and George Absalom a labourer. These men do a great deal of work patrolling at nights and are mainly responsible for seeing that the blackouts of the windows in the village are efficient.

After Dunkirk the Home Guard was formed. There were about twenty men of the village under the command of Major Tristram of the Grange, but largely organised by Roach, the gardener-chauffeur and butler at the Manor. They meet for drills and exercises on Wednesday evenings and Sunday mornings. During the summer of 1940 some of these men were on guard all and every night; now their duties are not so arduous.

In their early days they were armed only with rabbit guns but now they are well-equipped and wear khaki battle dress. On one practice exercise occasion Arthur Ball was sent to man the telephone kiosk and later emerged saying "I never spoke with her before". Another time in practice for an alert, one was posted on the main Oxford to Faringdon road by the Roundhouse to stop any vehicles, and actually held up a car containing some very senior Army personnel. He stood his ground until orders were rescinded – the top brass were not amused.

Long before the outbreak of war, Mr Hawkins and two or three others had been trained as Observer Corps; their post, manned by men from this and other villages, was at Longworth. Two men are on duty in four-hour shifts day and night; these men are paid at the rate of five shillings per shift [25p in decimal currency]. Their duties are to plot all planes. During the summer of 1941 the women organised fire-watching squads of about four women each night, being responsible for giving warning if incendiaries are dropped.

On September 1st 1939 fifteen boys of school age, a master in charge and his wife arrived in Hinton; they were received at the Village Hall, given tea and sent to their various billets; later they had the use of the Reading Room in the Rectory Orchard as a school. This continued until all but 4 or 5 had drifted back to London or transferred to other schools. During 1940 about a dozen mothers with small children were billeted in the village to escape the heavy bombing in London, but as soon as this abated they returned home. Now at the end of 1941 there are only two families of evacuees in the village, and four unaccompanied children.

In the autumn of 1941, at the request of the Military Authorities, there were formed in all these villages Local Defence Committees whose function was to co-ordinate the work of the various wartime organisations and to make plans to deal with situations that might arise locally in the event of invasion.

Here are extracts from the Minutes of the first two meetings held at the Rectory on August 24th 1941.

Mr Leo Page (Chairman)

Mrs Page (Womens Voluntary Service)

Mrs Cole (Casualty Services)

Mr Roach (Home Guard)

W. Ball (Special Constable)

The Rector (Air Raid Precautions Service and Emergency Food Controller)

Plans were to be drawn up to meet an emergency such as the village being isolated by the enemy. Mr Roach said plans were completed for all outlying farmers to come in to the village with their stock and men. The Home Guard had their plan for defence of the community and were supplied with Iron Rations. Mrs Page reported that in the event of communal feeding being necessary the W.V.S would cook and serve meals. Mrs Cole stated that the Rectory was a first aid point but that she wanted further equipment and morphine. The Rector as Food Controller would have the powers to requisition stocks of food. Normally, the village shop carried 2-3 weeks supply of rationed goods. We had plenty of meat, milk, potatoes and vegetables to last a while. The supply of bread was enough for 10 days but coal and oil fuel for cooking were very short, although wood was available. The following buildings were set aside for special purposes:

Casualties – Dining Room and Drawing Room at the Rectory

Mortuary – Manor Stables

Communal Feeding – Village Hall and Hawken's Barn

Emergency Sleeping Accommodation – Grange and Church Barns

At a second meeting held on 14th September, Mr Morris from the Shop was present to advise on food problems. Mr Green, Baker of Longworth, has increased his stock of flour to 3-4 weeks supply. Fuel problems still acute. Second casualty station fixed at Manor Farm, and County Medical Officer had promised more equipment and morphine.

It may be of interest to record what our rations are at present, i.e. December 1941

We get each week about 1 lb of meat, 2 oz butter, 4 oz margarine, 2 oz cooking fats, 4 oz cheese, 2 oz tea, 8 oz sugar, 4 oz bacon. Also 1 lb of jam a month. These rations are fixed by the Government. They are adequate but there is no margin. Coal and paraffin are difficult to get, chocolate and sweets are very scarce.

We were unable to send a Christmas parcel to the men and women in the forces this year, as we couldn't get supplies.

The Shop rations us to 2 boxes of matches a week, while soap and lentils are unofficially rationed. Tobacco and cigarettes have to be bought whenever possible.

These notes will perhaps convey some idea of how the war is affecting our village community.

Before beginning my diary I shall describe briefly the Rectory household which consists of myself, my wife and daughter now aged 5½ years, 3 nanny goats and 1 neutered goat, 15 hens, 2 hives of bees and 1 cat. Woolloff who was deafened and badly wounded in the last war comes and gardens 2-3 days a week, and Florrie Hyde (nee Edney) and her 9 month old baby lives in the back of the Rectory and helps my wife a little in the house.

I am Rector of both Hinton (population 270) and Pusey (population 80).

1942

January 1st

Saw Peter (one of our goats) eating a piece of paper which I removed. It read "In loving memory of Granny from Bert and Ethel." Woolloff had emptied the church dustbin onto our rubbish heap and Peter was enjoying the ivy on an old wreath. Nothing is wasted in the country.

Last summer as I made churchyard hay for my goats and helped old Cole to cart it, I thought that some of the old agriculturists who lie at peace there would be glad to know the grass covering their graves was being put to good use.

January 11th

Sunday – usual 5 services:

8:30 am Holy Communion Hinton
10:00 am Matins Pusey
11:15 am Matins Hinton
2:15 pm Children Pusey
3:30 pm Evensong Hinton

also today a baptism at 12:15 pm at Hinton.

On duty Faringdon Report Centre (Air Raid Patrol) from 9:30 pm to 8:00 am. Monday quiet night, slept peacefully.

January 12th

Children's party at Hinton. About 65 children present. 1½ cinema show operated by RAF man who is giving 3 shows daily. Wild West film, Comic and a Ministry of Information film on Scotland.

January 14th

Fetches goat back from billy at Longcot. Went pigeon shooting. Heavy frost.

January 15th

Took choir to pantomime in Oxford. Road very slippery.

January 21st

Received forms on which to enter casualties due to enemy action if we are cut off from Faringdon.

January 27th

Warned school children to be on the look out for Air Ministry meteorological balloons filled with hydrogen.

February 2nd

Began confirmation classes. Heard from F.I. that Home Guard have had to hand in most of their rifles for the Army. For a platoon of 30 men we only have about 6 rifles in the village.

February 5th

Still snow and frost. My wife and I visited young mothers and amazed about them receiving government supply of fruit juices for children up to 2 years old and cod liver oil for those up to 6 years. The government has made the fruit juice dose too strong and most of the babies in the country have been purged a little too thoroughly.

February 13th

Mrs Rose can no longer do our washing owing to soap ration of 4 oz a week. How fortunate my wife got a mangle and washtub from her Uncle's last year. The Scharnhorst and Prince Eugen sailed from Brest through Channel to German ports. Outlook in Singapore is hopeless. Road to China is open but Rangoon is threatened.

My petrol ration cut by one sixth for next 3 months for my Austin 7. Tyres a problem; sale of new ones forbidden, old covers have to be surrendered for retreads. Can't get new ones for District Nurse.

February 28th

Eva Smith arrived in evening with a soldier wanting to get married next day by licence.

March 11th

Busy with Warships Week, in charge of selling certificates and tokens in village. We hope to raise £3,000. Social and auction on Tuesday, Whist Drive on Thursday and Darts competition Friday (men and women).

March 13th

Heard that Peter Page's ship the Valiant is lost; no news of him yet. My tenant, Towersey, at Glebe Cottage, called down to see his goat, which kidded 3 fine billys. Taught him how to milk.

March 24th

Heard that Keates my predecessor had died. A good man and very much loved.

March 25th

The Air Raid Patrol controller arrived with more equipment for the First Aid Post, including anti-tetanus and morphine which in a tight corner my wife and I would have to give by injection.

April 10th

Meeting of Local Defence Committee. Census taken of all farm horses and carts, also War Book compiled.

April 12th

Memorial service for Keates. Full church.

April 13th

Mrs Hawken took my cock chickens; she has provided me with food for them all and I am going to hatch her another lot.

April 14th

Budget came out. No rise in income tax thank goodness. Ten shillings in the pound [50p in decimal money] is enough. Managed to get some carrot seed, though no leek yet available.

April 15th

Publication of Deanery Magazine becoming difficult as Editor has been told to cut down to 19% of weight of paper used in 1939.

April 25th

As treasurer of Nursing Association I have received a form on which to apply for a form on which to apply for a new tyre for the District Nurse's car.

April 27th

Church Council decided to renew churchyard gates at a cost of £22.12/6d. Peter Page missing in the Mediterranean for weeks, walked into his home this evening with his Naval uniform in rags.

April 29th

Distribution of topcoats and stout boots of excellent quality to the Wardens of my sector.

May 11th

Have bought hive of bees and young crossbred saddleback gilt pig (50 shillings). Ration of food for it ½ cwt each month.

June 5th

Not much time for diary recently as so much to do in garden and look after animals that we often don't come in until 11 pm (due to double summertime).

The Glebe Farm is sold. This has been a constant anxiety to me and my predecessors. It was valued at £7000. But as two people were bidding for the farm it made £7,650. Plus £100 for expenses.

June 14th

Bees swarmed just before Sunday School. Very savage bees and stung the keeper who came to help take the swarm.

Fetches billy kid from Southmoor, but as my petrol allowance is again cut I shall not be able to take the goats away to mate, so I am compelled to keep a billy.

June 22nd

The new oak gates to the churchyard are a great success. They cost £22.10/- with posts.

July 4th

Garden fete at Rectory very successful. People very generous with donations for good causes, and we are able to send funds outside the village.

July 9th

Heard that young Parrot is missing. His wife Doris (nee Harris) is expecting a baby having lost the first child.

July 13th

Cases of smallpox in Swindon. Hope it doesn't spread as very few children around here are vaccinated.

Cannot get anyone to take hay from the Orchard, as labour is so short and not many cattle about. The butcher has plenty of veal, which is not a good sign.

July 20th

Cycled over to dinner at the Meyricks at Sheep House. Before the war it would have been a dinner jacket and the car, now it is flannels and wellington boots on the bike with slippers in the basket on the handlebars.

July 27th

First air raid warning since 4th May at 6:00 am. Heard bombs in the distance.

July 31st

Diocesan inspector came to examine our school in religious knowledge – result satisfactory.

There are persistent rumours that large numbers of American troops are coming into the neighbourhood.

September 15th

Sunday School party at Rectory. In spite of war managed to muster quite a good tea – bread and paste sandwiches with a little margarine we had saved, and some cakes. Children enjoyed it.

Apple crop looks well – price fixed by Gov't. I get 18/- [90p in decimal money] a bushel (40 lbs) wholesale in Oxford. Coxes fetch 10d [4.2 pence] a lb.

September 29th

Smart departed from Glebe Farm which he has sold for £10,000 to a Mr Cameron.

October 3rd

Married Louie Smith for second time. Her first husband, Alf Evans, died having a foot torn off in a threshing machine. Louie insisted on foot being dug up and buried with the body.

October 29th

Invited to join Faringdon District Council as representative for Hinton in place of Smart. I shall accept.

November 9th

Ministry of Information films free in Village Hall; most of the village there. Took collection for Christmas parcels for Hinton men and women in the Forces. 36 names on list out of population of 260.

November 15th

Church bells rang for first time since summer of 1940 to celebrate Montgomery's victory over Rommel in Egypt.

November 24th

Attended Faringdon RDC [Rural District Council] meeting. Granted permission to local cinema to apply for a licence to open on Sundays for duration of war, in view of troops – mainly American – in the vicinity.

November 27th

Tried mating 2 of our nanny goats with Churchill our 7-month old billy. I doubt if it will be successful.

December 14th

Reading competition at School for Leo Page Cup.

December 15th

Finished writing Christmas letters to all the men and women from the village serving in the Forces.

December 17th

Yesterday King the butcher at Buckland came to kill our pig and we have spent all today dealing with the bacon and hams. We cured the hams with a mixture of salt, black pepper, black treacle, brown sugar, bay leaves and juniper berries.

1943

January 1st

Party for 64 school children in Village Hall. Film show, tea, games and 3 chocolate biscuits and 1/- saving stamp when they left. Sent a 2/- stamp to 19 children under school age. The Food Controller allowed us 1 lb of sugar, ½ lb tea, ½ lb margarine, ½ lb jam, and 4 pints of milk. The rest we obtained by various means!

February 23rd

Meeting in Village Hall to discuss corporate buying of seeds and disposal of surplus vegetables. No action taken as most prefer to market individually and choose varieties. As Arthur Ball put it, "somehow I could never take to another broccoli".

March 3rd

Set 72 eggs in my incubator. 50/- for these eggs and had to sign a paper saying they were for breeding.

March 9th

A detective came to try to discover a thief in village school. Culprit turned out to be an eight-year-old. I expect case will go to court and child put on probation.

March 16th.

RDC meeting. War Agricultural Committee has taken from us the right to decide where the 8 new council houses are to be built, the selecting of the tenants and the fixing of the rents. All 8 houses have been assigned to the Craven Estate, which has been selling and letting its cottages to non-agricultural workers at high rents.

March 25th

Hatched 49 chicks from 72 eggs.

April 4th

Back to Summer Time services. 8:00 am Holy Communion, 11:15 am Matins and Sermon, 2:45 pm Sunday School, 5:45 pm Evensong and Sermon.

April 8th

Petty thieving case from school before Magistrates. Case dismissed.

April 13th

RDC. New Government plans for proposed sites of council houses. Owing to timber shortage they are to have flat concrete roofs, stairs and bedroom floors.

April 14th

Met Major Robert Loder-Symonds DSO and bar, MC. Grandson of the old squire of Hinton. His father, 3 uncles and 2 aunts were lost in the 1914-18 war; his only surviving uncle Vice Admiral E. P. Loder-Symonds is Patron of this living.

Robert is most anxious to settle in Hinton, his ancestral home. While he was away at war his uncle sold the Hinton estate and I, Glebe Farm, never thinking that he would be interested. He tried to buy back a farm, but was not successful.

April 22nd

Permission given to ring church bells tomorrow, Good Friday and on Sunday as invasion no longer imminent.

May 16th

Thanksgiving service for Africa victories. Church parade of Home Guard, full church and bells rung.

May 15th-22nd

Wings for Victory week. Village has arranged some festivity for every day of the week. It has plenty of money and means to enjoy itself! During the week we raised £4516.00 for investment in War Savings Stocks and £18 for RAF Benevolent Fund; altogether a magnificent effort for a population of 260.

June 22nd

Distributed new Ration Books. The Govt wanted us all to go to Faringdon for them, but locals refused and many letters were sent to the press and Regional Food Officer so in the end people got their way and books were handed out in each village.

A victory for democracy has been our fight against the Govt plan to build 3000 Wartime Agricultural Cottages with concrete floors, stairs and flat roofs. Our council and others, by resisting, have got their way. The cottages are now to be built in blocks of 4 at a cost of about £900 each.

June 26th

Signposts taken down when invasion seemed imminent in 1940 have recently been replaced; countryside looks more normal again.

July 3rd

School Managers' meeting. I urged that mothercraft lessons be held for older girls. This was agreed and the County Education Committee to be asked to include it in the curriculum.

July 23rd

71 tins, i.e. half the quantity of biscuits withdrawn from local invasion food store.

August 3rd

Interesting RDC meeting with report of Post War Planning Committee presented re housing, water supply and drainage.

In the district 505 houses considered unfit for habitation; 33 in Hinton. Proposed to build 554 new houses to be let at 9/6 [47.5 p] per week plus rates.

August 20th

Rain at last after about 2 months drought.

August 25th

Soldiers arrived to fix up search lamp and radio location station in Lower Hangings field, about the wettest spot in the parish. Shall try to get them moved but that field is particularly suitable for radio location. About a dozen soldiers there.

August 31st

All wells in district very low, Bourton has been without water for a week. Visited an American in the Radcliffe and a Canadian in St Hugh's College hospital whose plane crashed 10 days ago in Longworth. It didn't catch fire and they were dragged out alive.

September 3rd

Day of National prayer. Good attendance at evening service in Hinton.

September 26th

George Gibbens died suddenly in hospital of a brain tumour, following months of illness.

September 30th

Searchlight unit moved to Longworth. I still take Padre's Hour with them when we sit around the fire and talk; very interesting sessions.

December 18th

Mr Wyatt, the agent for St Thomas's Hospital in London who have recently bought a large portion of Hinton village and land came to see me. The hospital will pay an annual rent of £2/10 shillings for the Church House, some land at Duxford which nobody can define exactly, but which belongs to the Church. They will also give £5 per annum towards a voluntary rate, which goes into Church funds and has been paid on the land in the parish since the 18th Century.

I told him about half the houses in the village were being condemned and of the sites for the new council houses to be build in the first year after the war on the present allotments.

December 25th

About 10 American soldiers came to Christmas Communion at Hinton. I asked no questions as to whether they were confirmed or not.

December 31st

End of another year of war. Day to day existence is long, hard and tiring, but we in the comparative peace of country living are among the lucky ones.

In 1943 perhaps the most important international events have been

(1) The failure of German counter-attacks to the Russian advance from Stalingrad to beyond Kiev.

(2) The failure of the German U-boat campaign and the increase in English and American shipbuilding.

(3) The steadily increasing weight of our air offensive against Germany and the huge build-up of forces for the invasion.

(4) The stemming of Japanese attacks in the Pacific and the expulsion of the Germans from North Africa.