

A SUFFOLK MAWTHER'S CHILDHOOD 1929-1945

Remember the 'War Effort'? Viv Mason takes us back to the days when

Fund Raising Was Fun

While we were knitting to keep the boys at the 'front' (and all over, I hope) warm, we were often involved in fund-raising schemes. Earl Soham was our base, for two reasons. More people, with a retired Naval Captain in command, and a village hall. Meetings were held at the Captain's house and whilst the grown-ups were planning how to raise money to buy a funnel for a warship, or a gun for an ack-ack battery, I would be permitted into the cat room.

This was a room entirely given over to cats, hundreds and hundreds of them in glass cases. No alley cats these. They were of china, earthenware and fur. There were single cats, family cats and even musical cats. The Captain's wife had collected cats all her life. One real life Siamese named Telo would come into the cat room to watch with her blue eyes.

For Warships Week we had a social in the village hall and a sale of toys made by locals proved what wonderful innovators the British are. The scraps of cloth and wool turned into cuddly toys showed a lot of imagination. My father made a flotilla of warships in wood. Painted. Grey. As paint was in extremely short supply I had the job of collecting all our paint tins and emptying the lot into a bucket, through a muslin strainer. The outcome was grey and for the rest of the war we had everything touched up in grey. After the toy sale and tea and currant buns (one currant per bun) we had party games, conjuring (father) to be followed by a dance for the Grown Ups. The Grown Ups were arriving as quietly

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as possible from outlying farms, using their precious petrol ration, and to make "Their Journey Really Necessary" carried crates of indignant Hens in the cars. One even had a pig, heavily secured in a net. They all knew that the LAW was heavily engaged as a performer - it was his night off - so felt quite safe.

Between the "turns" and the band warming up for the dancers, the Captain banged on a table and called for hush. We hushed. The Captain strode to the centre of the stage and announced as if from the bridge:

"We have come to the most popular item of the evening, we will now have the draws off"

The whole hall collapsed in helpless laughter, except for one person - the Yorkshire Landgirl, chosen, as a means of making her feel one of us, to be the lucky girl to draw the tickets from a bucket. Clad in her green sweater, stout brogues and fawn breeches she stared with popping eyes at the Captain and said "EEEEHH Lad - your not having mine."

Shortly after this another low-flying Heinkel peppered our village, gave Earl Soham a burst, and punctured the Captain's galvanised iron garage-roof. After this the Captain threw himself even more heartily into fund-raising. But even Hitler's head on a plate would have persuaded the Captain to handle the draw again.

A call came for all scrap iron to be handed in and aluminium pots and pans went too. Railings were torn up and carted off for the war effort and farm yards scoured for scrap iron. As farmers in those days hung onto everything until it was worn to a frazzle and even then hoped Boinder Twaine would bridge the gap, some very odd things came to light. Unfortunately some really interesting "dibblers", man-traps and poachers traps went into the melting-pot, but these were desperate times.

I had been the proud owner of an aluminium sports pedal car. The Silver Bullet. A lot of people were glad to see the back of it, as they had felt the front of it - mostly just behind the knee when my steering 'failed'.

But I was sorry to lose it and only hope that it did some good.

I clung onto my steadily-increasing shrapnel collection, now housed in an oak coffer in the entrance porch. I nearly filled it up the night the ^{PARACHUTE} mine fell and gave us a hitherto unknown water supply. Mid-village. The parachute was green silky material, rather like tightly woven Aertex. The ropes were lovely. I got most of the parachute and the ropes made shoulder bags for my friends. I also gleaned a lot of metal which struck me as being rather thin - not at all up the normal German standards as for H. E. bombs.

The 'authorities' had given us a box of bombs and asked us to put them somewhere safe. So they went into our air raid shelter. They were yellow bottles and looked like the liquid I associated with rose hip syrup. I have a nasty feeling they were phosphorus, and were to be issued to the Home Guard when all else failed. We had a box of petrol bombs too, with wicks at the ready, made from a pair of father's grey check trousers. I joined the Youth Club but only attended one meeting. I was the thinnest and smallest member of this elite corps, and after I had been "sworn in" the leader said "Tonight we will go scrap collectin'". We took a handcart up "Buttocks" turned left into a farm drive and walked two miles across country taking in some outlying farms where we collected some old plough shares, broken harrows etc. On the down-slopes the beefy members did the cart handling, then they all relinquished the handles and made me do the uphill haul.

I went home, furious, took off my badge and said "they can have that for scrap and I am not Youth Clubbin' anymore." That was that.

SCOTTISH COUNTRY DANCING

Earl Soham Village Hall, Fridays 8-10pm from 22nd Sept.

All Welcome - Tuition Given Tel. Worlingworth 716