

## Life in Ashfield in the War

*In 1996, the village of Ashfield-cum-Thorpe organised an exhibition which documented "Life in Ashfield", both present and past. As part of that work, a number of local people were interviewed, and their memories of the village recorded.*

**Bob Abbott** remembers that the LDV, forerunner of the Home Guard, met in his father's shed and did their drill on the school playground. It was started by Michael Abbott and Mr Howe; the members had to bring their own weapons. Later they were issued with ex-USA rifles from the first world war.

There was no air raid siren in Ashfield – the nearest was at Debenham.

**Bill Cook and Bessie** lived in High House (now Timbertop Farm) then moved to Framlingham. Their house there was destroyed by a bomb so they moved back to Ashfield in 1940.

Bessie's father lived next door at High House and he kept rabbits for the pot. There used to be about 2-30. To catch a rabbit he would point one out and set the dog at it. Bill says the dog always caught the one pointed out to it.

**Doreen Baxter** was not very old when the landmine fell but Bob Abbott remembers it and Cyril Freston recalls seeing it fall from an aeroplane caught in the searchlights. It created a new pond with good quality water to supply the village. It became known as 'Hitler's Pond'.

The children obtained souvenirs and until quite recently some still had pieces of the parachute cord. A German Dornier was shot down and landed in Wilson's field at Cretingham – to the delight of the children who went to see it.

In March of 1945 a V1 came down in Whiting's field.

**Audrey Roe** remembers the sky being black with planes on their way to Arnhem in September 1944 where the British suffered defeat.

**Don Roe:** "I remember the landmine falling on Ashfield in September 1940, it caused a lot of damage. The windows of the church were blown out, Church Farm House and Bulls Barn were damaged. I was living at Ashfield Hall with my mother and sister; the bomb brought down the ceiling and smashed the windows. We couldn't sleep in the house because of the damage so Freddy Clements, who lived at No.8 Sunnyside Corner, put us up until the house was repaired. The bomb did do some good – the bomb crater created a water supply for the village.

Living in the country during the war, we were able to get eggs, milk and butter; we used to have a kitchen garden to grow our own vegetables. People swapped foodstuff among themselves thus managing to have a reasonable diet. One chap used to get coal which was used for steam thrashing engines and either sell on the black market or swap it for vegetables, eggs, etc.

I watched 3 Spitfires attacking a German Dornier which was eventually shot down in a field near Framsdan (*Wilson's Field, Cretingham*). The crew escaped alive and were promptly taken prisoner by the Home Guard. I also remember seeing Lancaster Bombers practicing low flying manoeuvres in preparation for the Dambusters operation; they were flying so low that they caused leaves on the top of the high hedge opposite the house to fly off.

In June 1944, I watched the V1 doodlebug pass over Ashfield to eventually land at Worlingworth. Towards the end of the war, my brother-in-law and I were shooting rabbits early one morning in the meadow at the back of Church Farm when a V2 went over, and the terrific roar which followed. We were able to see the white streaks it left in the sky illuminated by the rising sun."

**Ernie Friend** lost his brother during the war. It was the only death in the village during 1939-45 war. [4 Ashfield men were killed in the first world war – one was a 'Friend']

**Viv Mason** provided material for an article by David Green published in The East Anglian Daily Times.

The coming of World War Two brought a new excitement with a sudden increase in the interest being shown in air raid shelters, though some farmers said they would '*hull themselves into a ditch if Jerry cum.*'

However, it was not "Jerry" but London evacuees who invaded the village and caused no little problem for a reception committee expecting a convoy of angelic children and placid mothers-to-be.

The children were often uncontrollable, said Viv. Farmers and their wives rebelled saying, "*We oon't have them folk in our houses ... they in't even house trained.*"

Viv's pride and joy was a little metal Silver Bullet pedal car. "We loaned it to an aunt for my cousin to play with and she handed it to the authorities to be melted down for the war effort," she said.

A school-friend and I were machine-gunned by a German aircraft during the war and we had to throw ourselves in the River Deben to get out of the way. It seemed great fun.

Hitler unwittingly helped create a new water supply for the village when one of his parachute mines plummeted through the Suffolk clay of the village football pitch before exploding and "plumbing" hidden depths.

A great pond formed and water was piped from it to a pump for everyone's use although wartime football matches were never quite the same.

"If that mine had exploded when it touched the ground there might not have been a house standing for miles," said Viv.