

RONA LOVEGROVE Remembers... ..

GROWING UP IN WARTIME BRIXHAM

'I went to school at Furzeham and vividly remember being outside on the Green, when German bombers came over, machine gunning all the children. I must have been about 10 years old. We all laid flat on the grass. When I got up after the raid, they had sunk the coal hulk at the Harbour and I saw smoke coming up from it. The Germans later reported that a warship had been sunk! One Sunday, I was walking from Berry Head House up a lane (that now leads to Wall Park Road) with Mother and my sister, Nancy, when the sirens sounded. An ARP warden told us: 'Get down' and Mother pushed Nancy and I into the hedge. We were wearing our Sunday clothes and Nancy was concerned that her stockings would be spoiled as we took cover. The bombers were making for the oil tanks that were concealed underground at Berry Head. When the 'All Clear' sounded, we saw a mound of earth where an enemy mine had been dropped in the field next to the tanks, which was properly blown up the following day.

I remember the U.S. troops billeted at Monksbridge under canvas. When the weather was bad they were flooded out. They had a lot of vehicles and I remember several houses in Brixham being demolished to make way for them. I particularly remember the houses being pulled down where Churchill Gardens now stands. Mr Jackson, the butcher, had to move out. He moved to another house near Grenville House, further along the road. The Americans also demolished Miss Watts' shop at the bottom of Ranscombe Road, where we bought ice cream, so that they could get the tanks round. She moved to Berry Head Road. We lived in New Road and one evening, my grandfather was locking the house for the night, when he heard movements and told us: 'Something is going on tonight'. It was the soldiers and tanks going to the Harbour for D Day.

My father William (Bill) Gouch was a fisherman and served in the RNR. He had already served in the Great War and was called up again a week before war broke out in 1939. He spent time on minesweepers and was mentioned in despatches. After the war, he worked on the Western Lady ferries. (Note: Skipper William Gouch is one of Brixham Museum's Heritage Heroes).

I went to train as a hairdresser at Dorothy Dean's in Paignton, near the Bus Station, coming home to Brixham in the middle of each day, as it was cheaper to get a 6d workman's fare than pay for lunch in a café. As there wasn't much traffic, I was able to travel home, eat a meal and then go back to Paignton on the returning bus, all within an hour! On one occasion, there was terrible flooding in Brixham and Mother told me that I wouldn't be able to come home from work at the end of the day, as even the back of the house was cut off! I had to stay with the salon manageress who had a flat in Victoria Street in Paignton.'

Rona has three daughters, several grandchildren and still lives in Brixham.