

Clopton World War II Memories – Brian R. Button

Father: George William Button born on April 11, 1904 in Otley, died January 2000

(Travelling Salesman, Store Owner (pre-war, adjacent to Red Cottage, Clopton) Insurance Agent and finally Civil Servant – Air Ministry retired 1969)

Joined the village ARP at the onset of World War II. Volunteered to serve in the AFS (later known as the National Fire Service) in London during the Blitz. (Invalided out after about a year)

Mother: Evelyn Ellen Button (née Whiting) born on May 24, 1903, died September 1981 (Housewife)

Son: Brian Rex Button born on March 18, 1936 in Clopton. Educated at Grundisburgh Primary School and Woodbridge School. National Service in the Royal Air Force (1954/56) serving in Egypt and Cyprus. Bank Executive (1956/1993) worked and lived in the U.K, Iceland and Germany Retired and living in Germany. Widower (married Ingeborg Zinkkann (German national) in 1974 (Ipswich) who died in May 2004). No children.

Residence: Red Cottage, Birds Hill Road, Clopton – 1935 /1969.

Later residences: Ipswich, Suffolk. Brian: Iceland (1960/62) and Germany (since 1971)

Clopton

Childhood: Barbara Barham, Jean & Arthur Barham, Roseanne Priestnall,

Friends: The Palmer Family (7), the Mortimer's (3) Roy Compton.

Father. Parish Councillor 1936(?) –1969. Choir Master and Organist (St. Mary the Virgin, Clopton); organized touring concert parties (Clopton & local villages): Joined local ARP unit. Volunteer fireman in the London Fire Service at the outbreak of the 2nd World War (invalided out in 1941): Founded and ran

the wartime "Welcome Home Fund" arranging social fundraising functions in aid of returning servicemen and women: British/American and later British/German POW committees: Secretary to Clopton Annual Flower and Sports Fete: Etc, etc.....

Brian Choirboy and later deputy organist: Server: Church councillor: Organised Church Transport Pool: Leader of Otley and Clopton branch of St.Edmund's Guild, district committee member and treasurer (Woodbridge area): Arranged and captained boy's village football team: Founded and ran village Youth Club (primarily assisted by Michael Brown): Assistant Secretary and committee member to "Flower Show and Sports Fete".

Wartime Memories-

Servicemen/women: Names listed as at the time, subsequent married name shown in [],

William (Bill) Pearce; Lily Simmons [Pearce]; Avril Sidebottom [Wilkinson]; Clifford Balaam; Ronald Balaam; Frank Smith(?) who lived in Church Lane, uncle of Tony Soames (Otley Buses). Violet (Pam) Button [Barker]; Harold Wright (????); ?. Lancaster (????). George Button (NFS);

Winifred Simmons [Stannard) – Factory War Effort; Walter Simmons (Special Constable)

Events:

Seeing my father extinguishing small incendiary fires started by German bombers.

Local men in the Home Guard prepared dugout at Potash Corner, armed with shotguns, pitchforks and the like.

An Army tank crashing through the hedge of our meadow.

Returning home from London after visiting my father after the Blitz ended, where he had served in the AFS (later National Fire Service), and finding that a stray German bomb had exploded in a field quite close to our house.

Mother and son (evacuees from London) living with us.

The death of an old gentleman, a retired farmer who had owned and farmed at Hill Farm (?) Clopton Common (Drabs Lane) a family friend who lived with us and known to me as Granddad Turner and

my mother's younger sister Dora replacing him until the return of my father from London.

The dogfights between RAF and German 'planes. One particular occasion when a German aircraft was shot down and later crash-landed in a large field where in my grandparents lived. I recall Dad throwing me under his car as it came down firing its guns in a last desperate bid to escape from the fighter.

Searchlights seeking out the night raiders which were caught in the shafts of light like moths in a ray of torchlight.

The massive fires glowing in the night. One time Dad informed us that "the sea had been set alight" to repel a German landing. This has never been officially confirmed or denied by government authorities!

The arrival of the Americans. The candy, chewing-gum and other treats we received from them. The building of the camp and airfield, widening of several roads etc. Installation of necessary electric & telephone lines, water and sewerage pipes. The building of the purification unit. All so modern to us in this remote village. This was easily viewed by us as Charsfield Road, Manor Road, Snipe Road and Drabs Lane remained open to us throughout the war.

The bombers taking off and returning from missions, often shooting red flares in the air prior to landing to indicate there were injured on board. Some crashed on landing. Learning that some airmen who visited our home had been killed (one had garaged his motorcycle with us)

Having to immediately rename my new puppy, a black Labrador, a birthday present from a family friend who had cycled from Dallinghoo through the camp calling it to heel using the "n - word"

Several American servicemen coming to our house, Dad particularly helping the underprivileged and uneducated who often could neither read nor write. One unsavoury incident occurred when two white officers came to the door to protest that we had invited "n..." to our house and demanded this should not recur. They got very short-shift from my father.

The "ladies" hanging around the camp did more than their share to help foster relations too!

A huge Christmas party arranged by the Americans for school children from several towns and villages, some a long distance away, who were brought in by military trucks. It poured with rain,

everywhere was a quagmire and being wartime the camp lighting was kept to a minimum. Kids got separated from their school parties and Dad played a prominent roll in sorting out the ensuing bedlam. He actually travelled with some trucks to show them the way. To cap it all each guest was given a present, generally a toy made by a serviceman. Oh how, as I stood in the queue, I had hoped to get one of the big trucks or an aeroplane. No....I got a beautifully crafted snake, the problem was, and still is, I am adverse to reptiles etc, so was bitterly disappointed.

Mr. Donald Lark who had been forced to leave his large farmhouse (Snipe Farm) due to its location in the camp area and living in our empty shop on the land adjacent to our cottage. A few "political stories" made the rounds as a result of his eviction!

1945, the Victory Fete was held in a meadow owned by Frederick Balls and hired to the Barham family. The meadow is situated on the corner of the junction of Birds Hill Road with Church Lane. I think it was a routine fete, with sideshows, typical funfair fundraising games, the set of boat swings owned by the village (does it still exist?), a large stage set up in the middle for a concert including performances by some of the local talent, I believe that the Woodbridge Excelsior Band was also in attendance to provide ongoing music. Sporting events were restricted to comedy events (sack, three legged, egg and spoon races and the like). Numerous American servicemen attended, finding it all rather quaint! I seem to remember the day ended with a dance in the then Village Hall which was owned by the church.

Several years later (it would have been in 1960) I was working at Keflavik Airport, Iceland and in the hotel lounge watching the snow clearing and met an American major who had served at "deeback" (Debach) and knew my father. It's a small world.

Also while I was in Iceland, my parents were visited by a German and his school class who were touring the area on bicycles and had pitched overnight on the very spot which had been his barrack on the camp as a POW. It was dark and the children greeted my parents by singing songs which he had learned earlier during musical evenings with us.

The memories are flooding back and I am certain there are many, many more.

Brian R. Button

Rodenbach, Germany.

November 2014