



*No.2 Platoon, "A" Company, 10 Battalion Worcestershire Regiment Home Guard
c.1944 outside the Parish Rooms*

HAGLEY AND THE DEFENCE OF BRITAIN PROJECT

The Defence of Britain Project is a national scheme to record and interpret the remains of military installations including, amongst others, airfields, coastal batteries, radar sites, bombing decoys and pill boxes. Such sites transformed the landscape in the first half of the twentieth century and are a vital source of information on important historical events. After more than fifty years both man and nature are destroying them at an alarming rate and the project was launched in 1995 to record them before they disappeared completely.

Initially a five-year exercise, a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund in the summer of 1999 enabled work on the database to continue until 2002. Augmented by documents, photographs and memories of those involved, this will provide a basis for the preservation and display of a range of sites and will also supply valuable information on others which have already disappeared. Until the granting of lottery funds the ground work for the project was almost entirely carried out by volunteers and members of Hagley Historical Society Archaeology Group undertook to identify local sites and report their findings to the Hereford/Worcester Co-ordinator based at the County Archaeology Service. Since the county has now divided into two, information is fed to the Worcestershire Archaeology Service.

So what has participation in the Defence of Britain Project revealed about Hagley in wartime?

It must be remembered that Britain had not experienced a major foreign invasion since the Norman Conquest because as an island with a strong naval tradition it was comparatively safe. By 1939, however, the invention of such weapons as the aeroplane and submarine, coupled with German military might, caused the situation to change and invasion could come at any time and anywhere. As Hagley was close to the essential industries of the Black Country, Birmingham and the West Midlands, it was vulnerable. To this end, at the onset of hostilities, Worcestershire County Council earmarked certain local buildings for possible requisition. Such properties included, for War Office use, the Station Inn, Hagley Hall, Hall Barn, the Country Club and School in School Lane, Dene Lodge in Middlefield Lane, Oldfields in Park Road and Winds Point in Worcester Road. The Cross Keys and Central Garages were designated for use by the Auxiliary Fire Service, the Parish Rooms on the corner of Worcester Road and Church Street as a First Aid Point and the Free Church Hall as an emergency feeding and sleeping centre. However, not all the buildings listed were used, others, not for the purposes originally intended, and others for a variety of activities. For example, Hagley Hall, requisitioned by both War Office and Air Ministry for use as a military hospital continued to be the family home of the Lytteltons, although the grounds were used for Home Guard manoeuvres and fund-raising events for the war effort.



*Oldfield Hollies in Middlefield Lane, now demolished,
was used by the U.S. 53rd Field Hospital prior to the
invasion of France in June 1944*



The Church Hall used for many activities during the 1939-45 war

Oldfields, a large house with extensive grounds was taken over by the U.S. 53rd Field Hospital Unit for a short time before D-Day. The house was the administrative area and PX (the G.I.'s equivalent of the N.A.A.F.I) and the grounds accommodated military personnel in purpose-built wooden huts. The soldiers used the school playing field opposite for training exercises such as tent erection.

Winds Point, another large private house was occupied by a detachment of the Welch Regiment at around the same time, also preparing for D-Day.

Another large house The Birches, which was not on the requisition list and remained the family home of the Wooldridges, had sixteen U.S. servicemen from the Hospital Unit billeted there for the final build-up to D-Day and also several young evacuees from Birmingham (who were taken home by their mothers when they discovered there were no air-raid shelters there, only cellars – which were probably safer). The Birches also took in two R.A.F. men, part of a group manning a highly secret beam-bending site near the Four Stones at Clent. This threw German planes off course on their bombing missions to the vital industries of Birmingham. There was an associated mobile site in top Hagley, sited on Furlongs Farm. The servicemen were billeted on local families, mainly in top Hagley, and used Hall Barn for recreational activities. This was also the meeting place of the local Boy Scouts who organized collections of aluminium and waste paper to help the war effort. They also assisted in Home Guard exercises.

Adults, too young, old or infirm for active service joined the Home Guard (originally known as the Local Defence Volunteers or L.D.V). 'A' Company of the 10th Battalion, Worcestershire Home Guard had its H.Q. at 87, Worcester Road, Number 2 platoon of 'A' company had temporary wooden shelters housing three men doing two-hour shifts guarding the Rifle Range on Palmers Hill, scene of Home Guard manoeuvres and training exercises, Hagley Railway Station and the Elan Valley aqueduct. The Battalion's battle H.Q. was the Station Inn and there was an Home Guard post at the Lido, where there was a static water tank for the Auxiliary Fire Service, while the Fire Station itself was opposite on land belonging to the Cutlers of the Central Garage next to Spout Mill Cottage. The Lido also housed an Observation Post (Air Raid) and there was an Air Raid siren on the Telephone Exchange and a searchlight in the grounds of Field House.

The Parish Rooms, once the Mission Church, on the corner of Church Street and Worcester Road and initially ear-marked as a first-aid post, were used by the Home Guard and A.R.P (Air Raid Precautions) wardens, by the Girls' Training Corps and the Food Production Club (after 1944). The G.T.C trained members to carry despatches, to administer first aid, to operate morse code, to recognize aircraft and read maps. At the age of 18 the girls were expected to join the armed services. They also studied singing and drama and it is interesting to

note that the present thriving Hagley Theatre Group developed from their early efforts. The Corps also met at the school in Park Road where the playing field was partially turned over to allotments as part of the Dig for Victory Campaign.

Some of the sites recorded have long disappeared for housing developments, for example Oldfields and Winds Point but they survive as road names. The Lido has also been covered by homes, but the ticket office cum cafeteria, once the Home Guard Post, has been converted into a bungalow. The Parish Rooms were demolished to build shops. However, one tangible wartime defence remains – four concrete anti-tank cylinders now neatly arranged at the roadside behind the Little Chef, while two others lie neglected in the nearby ditch. These would have been dragged across the road heavily festooned with barbed wire to impede the advance of German tanks. Fortunately they were never needed.

Two civilian sites are worthy of mention, 'though not recorded by the Defence of Britain Project. Pandyke, in Station Road, and home of Mrs. Mildred Johnson, was the hub of the billeting committee organizing the placement of evacuees from Birmingham and Felixstowe. Holm Lacy, in Middlefield Lane was the meeting place for Hagley Womens' Working Party for the Red Cross which met on Tuesdays, Thursday and Fridays.

The Defence of Britain Project basically records military sites, although its net is gradually widening; the sites are then marked on maps at the Archaeology Service in Worcester i.e. the Sites and Monuments Record (S.M.R) which may be consulted by members of the public by appointment. However, Hagley archaeology group is also interested in researching the everyday life of wartime Hagley. Although the Parish Magazine had to be circumspect for "Careless talk cost lives", wartime editions do provide some information. Jean Pritchard, group member and Honorary Parish Archivist has extracted it and produced a booklet "Hagley in the Second World War". Members are also building up an audio library of reminiscences of long-established Hagley residents, which includes life in the 1940's.

This material, together with the S.M.R. and other Defence of Britain Project records will enable future generations to be aware of the village's past and to appreciate the effort of villagers living with the terrifying prospect of total war, a challenge they met with courage and hope. In the words of the Prime Minister then, Winston Churchill, "This was their finest hour".



*Anti-tank road blocks near the junction
of Worcester and Kidderminster Roads*



*The Lido ticket office and cafe used by the
Home Guard and A.F.S. during the 1939-45 war*