

A black and white photograph showing a formation of Luftwaffe bombers in flight. The central aircraft is a large four-engine bomber, likely a Heinkel He 177, with two smaller twin-engine bombers flying on either side. In the background, a larger formation of bombers is visible. The sky is filled with clouds, and the perspective is from a low angle, looking up at the aircraft.

The Night the Luftwaffe Bombed Granby-cum-Sutton

And Other War Time Memories (Part 1)

**Produced by the Granby History Group
Illustrations by Julie Powell**

Contents:

The Night of 8/9th May 1941

Night Watch & the Home Guard

The Farm

The following are the memories of Norman Wilkinson (born 1934) with additional information from David, Isabel and Martin, his brothers and sister, Robert Brown who has lived in Sutton all his life, and other residents who have kindly contributed their stories.

Interview notes were transcribed by Isabel and John Daw.

All illustrations are by Julie Powell.

The image on the front page is from The Battle of Britain – Luftwaffe Blitz, by Philip Kaplan, published by Pen & Sword Aviation.

The Night of 8/9th May 1941

Introduction

On 8/9th May 1941 the German Luftwaffe launched a night-time attack on Derby, Sheffield and Hull and Nottingham, where the Boots and Raleigh factories had been turned over to war production.

Despite being targeted by eleven waves of bombers, Nottingham suffered relatively little damage compared to the other cities.

This was thanks to two sets of counter-measures: the use of radio-signals to jam the Luftwaffe's directional targeting system; and, the deployment of the 'Starfish' fire decoy system, a series of specially-controlled fires designed to fool the air crew into thinking they were flying over a fire-bombed town.

In the Vale of Belvoir the Starfish system was located near to Cropwell Bishop. Possibly this contributed to the severe bombing in Granby-cum-Sutton that night, together with the fact that searchlights had been set up locally to attract bombers and so distract them from Nottingham.

A nearby target was the strategic fuel reserve at Redmile which supplied Langar and other airports.

The attack left us with, as Len Watson stated, "the unenviable reputation as the most heavily bombed parish in Nottinghamshire."

Norman Wilkinson describes what happened on that fateful night...

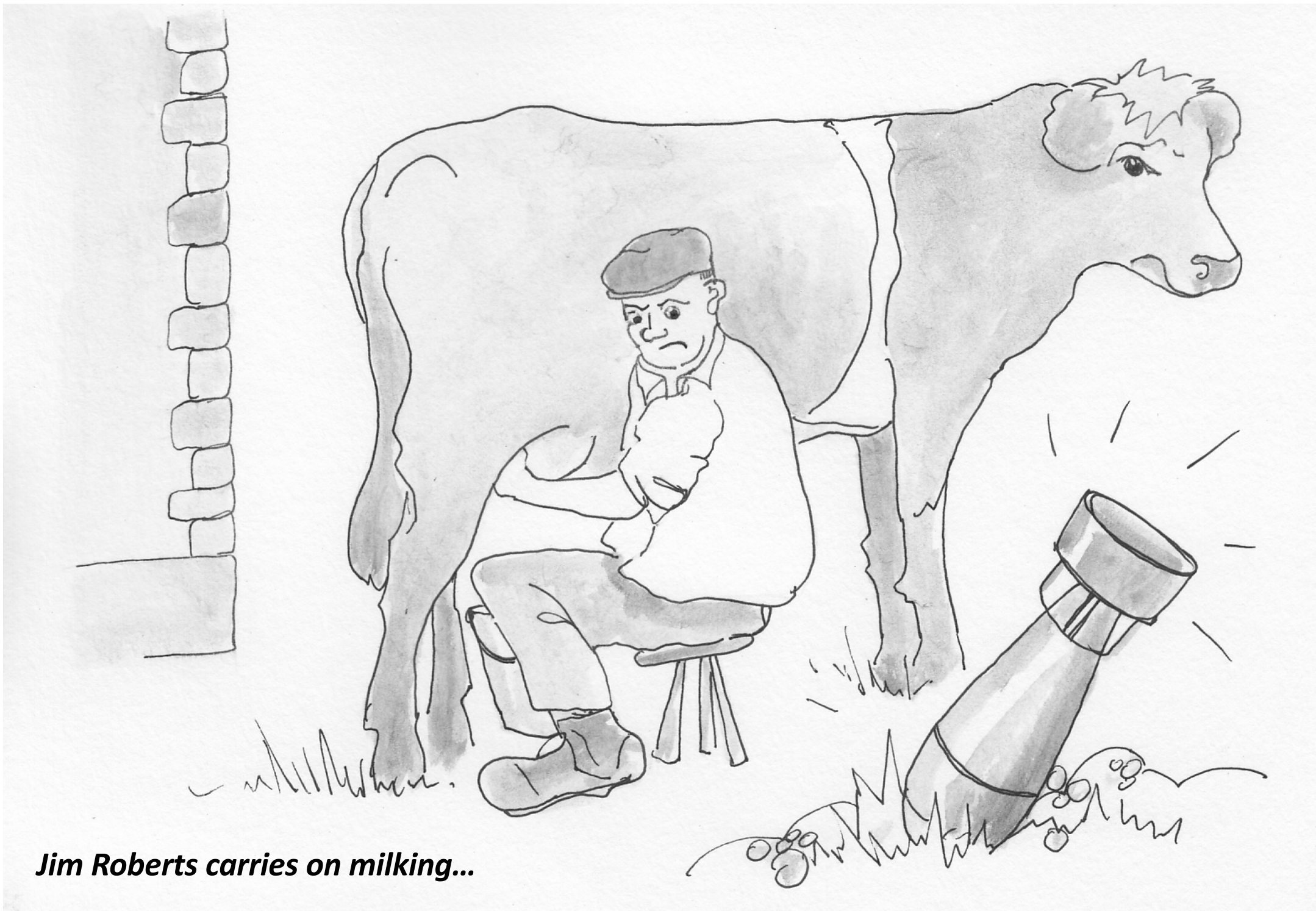
There was severe bombing over Sutton. Lots of incendiary bombs had landed near Jim Roberts' brick milking barn (at the side of the footpath near to Hornbuckle's land) where one ticked visibly for weeks.

Mr. Roberts was told not to milk the cows, but he carried on regardless!

Another bomb underneath the railway bridge at Plungar did not go off.

The incendiary bombs had vanes to make them spin and they embedded themselves deeply in the ground.

They whistled very loudly and burst into white flames so as to light up the ground for the bombers to see to land and also to set fire to the haystacks.



Jim Roberts carries on milking...

During that particularly bad night
Edith and Muriel Wilkinson walked
around with saucepans on their heads
because of slipping roof tiles and
shrapnel.

Some laughed at them but at least
they were safe.

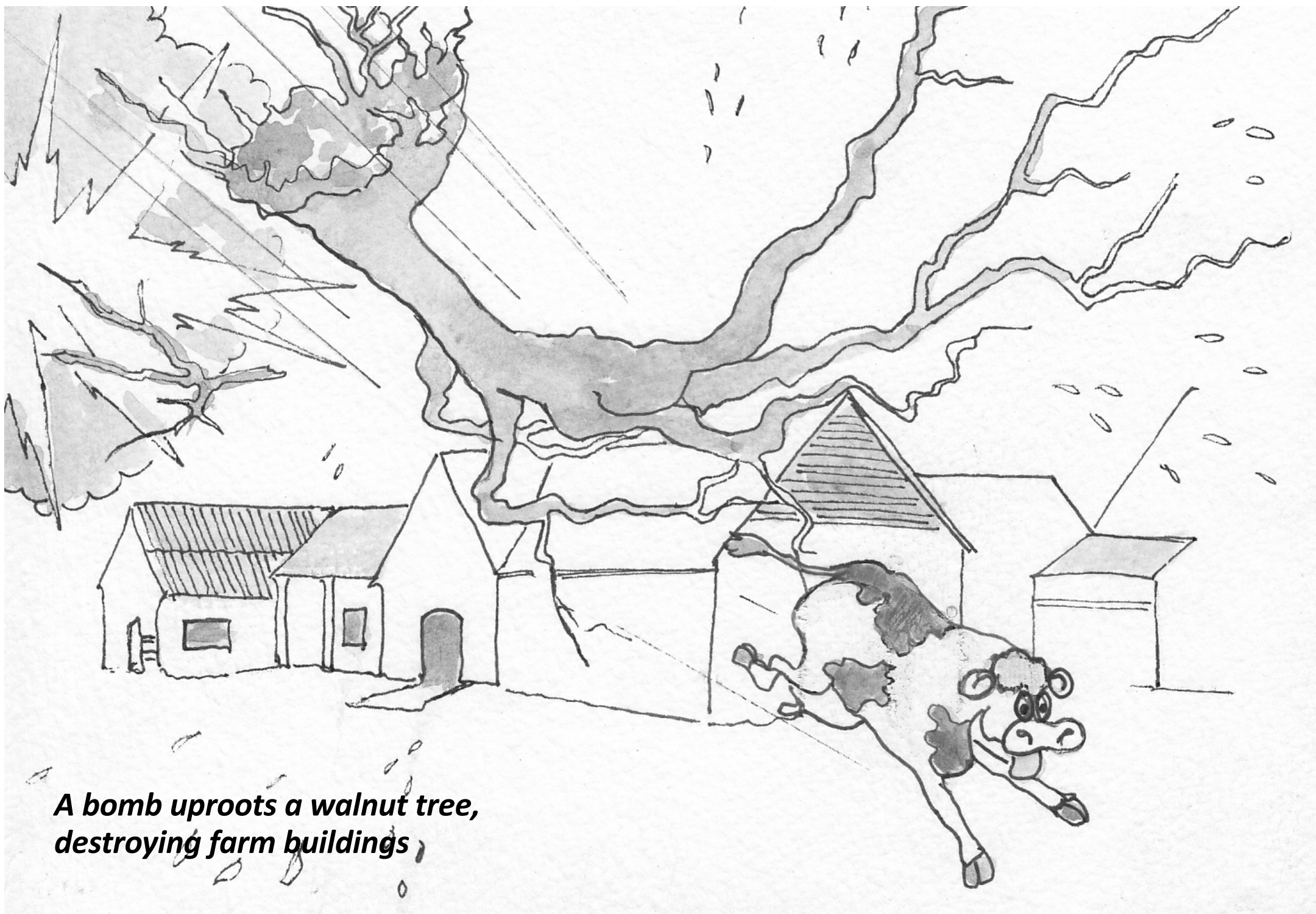
***Edith & Muriel Wilkinson
take precautions...***



Fifteen feet from the end of Poplars farm (Joseph Wilkinson's) there was a huge walnut tree.

A bomb landed next to it and lifted the tree over the buildings (two farm-houses) and into the yard where the cart sheds stood.

It took all the buildings down, razing them to the ground.

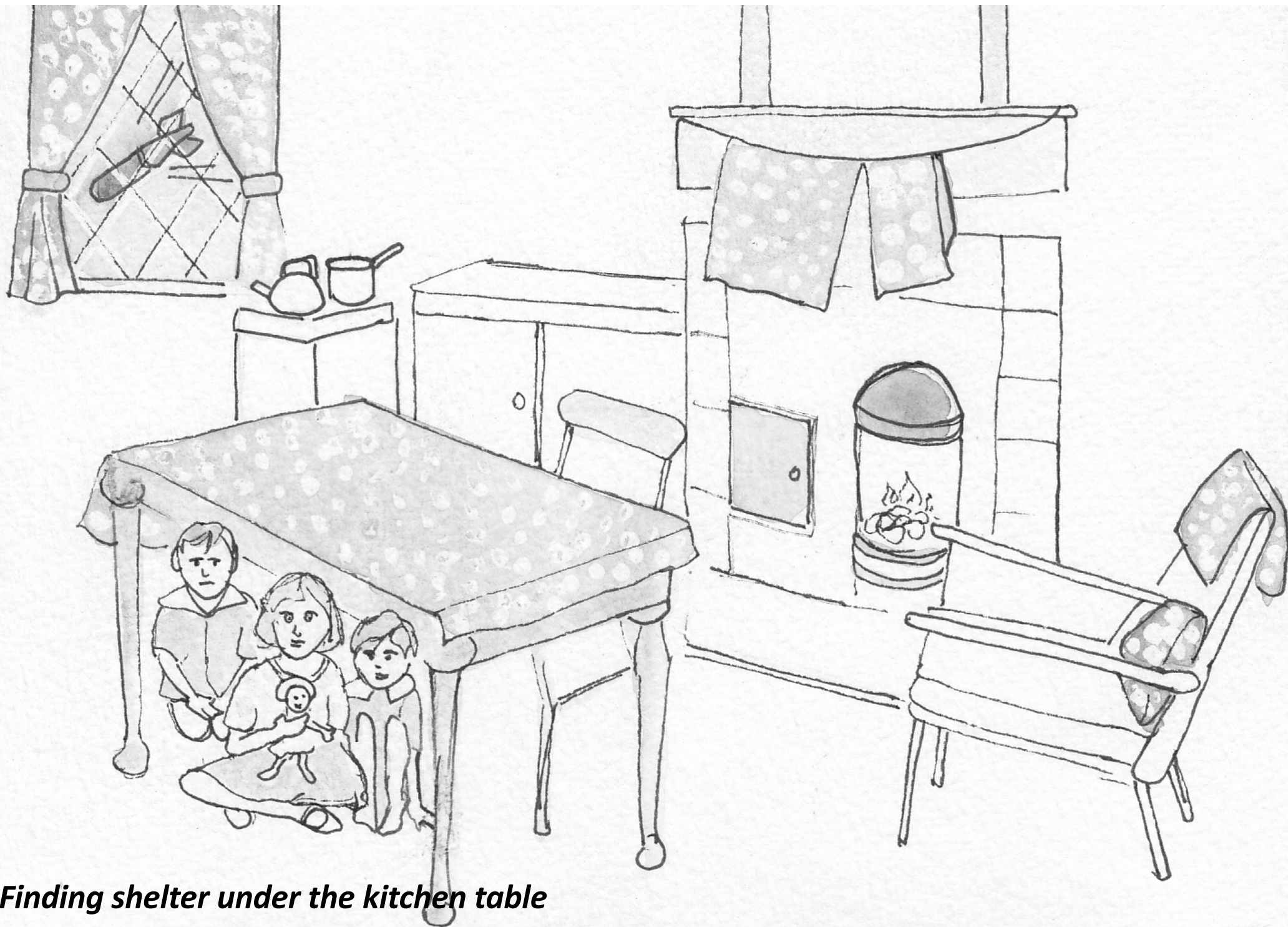


***A bomb uproots a walnut tree,
destroying farm buildings***

My mother sensed something was happening when she heard bombs all around the villages from Barkestone to Whatton, so she put her children under the kitchen table.

Ten seconds later there was a sound as if the entire house was being blown up. The Yorkist cast iron fireplace with a back boiler and cooking range was blown onto the floor and the tap on it gushed water.

A tall cupboard shattered and every pot in the house was broken because of the noise and vibration, there was dust everywhere.

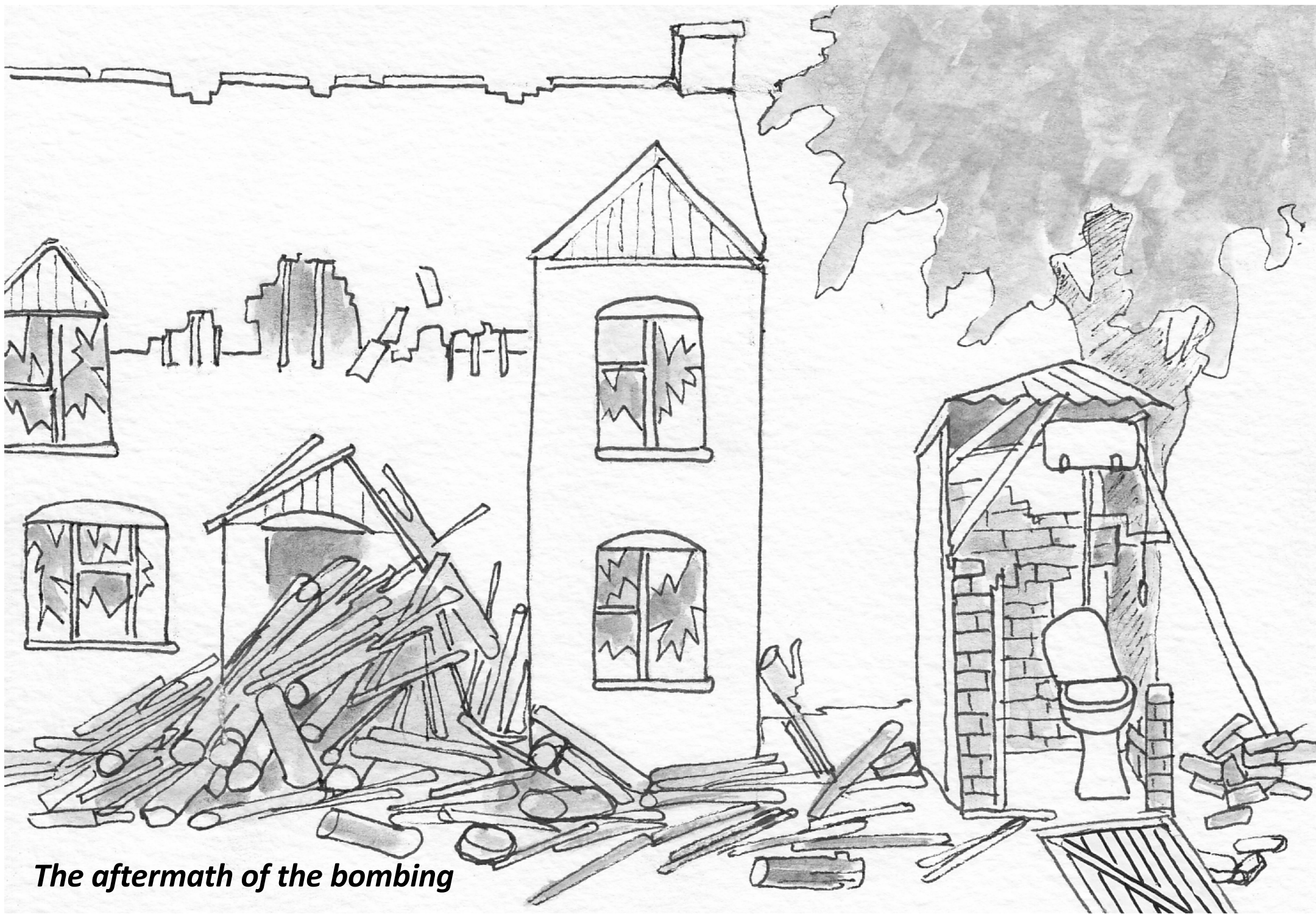


Finding shelter under the kitchen table

(To the end of her life my mother was terrified during thunder storms and could never eat until the noise had subsided).

The bomb had demolished the brick toilet and lifted an entire stick heap onto the outside porch which was made of wood with a galvanised roof.

The stick heap jammed against the main door to the house and mother and three young children, Norman, David and Ruth, were trapped inside .



The aftermath of the bombing

Father was on fire watch duty and he with other men had to clear the sticks away from the door in order to rescue his family.

A government Damage Committee paid for the repair and rebuilding which was done quickly as there was an urgent need for food.

The Wilkinson family lived at The Gables for six weeks whilst Jacques of Bingham did the rapid repair. The family found it difficult to sleep at night after this especially heavy bombing.

Manor Farm in Granby was also bombed, as was the Police House in Barnstone. All the local lads went to have a look.

The evening newspaper later reported that 24 high explosive bombs had fallen within the parish that night.

Various sets of poles and lights had been erected, for instance on Dragon Street, Granby, to attract German bombers. After the bombing of 8/9th May, these were taken down.

Night Watch & the Home Guard

As part of the Air Raid Precautions (ARP) there was a night watch of local farmers. In Sutton this was led by George and Joseph Wilkinson. This involved walking around the village twice each night. In Granby, a derelict house next to Charlton Cottage was used for training and mock practices for dealing with fires.

There were regular night bombings. Locals thought these were aimed at railway lines and the underground petrol dump near the railway bridge at Redmile.

The night watch carried a stirrup pump to douse incendiaries with water. Norman remembers that children helped pick up scraps of burnt out incendiaries in the morning.

To draw bombers away from Nottingham, two searchlights were positioned on the Granby side of Sutton at Cook's barn and on the edge of George Wilkinson's field.

There were ammunition stores all along Sutton Lane and Plungar Road in round Nissen huts storing ammunition for the troops.

The huts were 25-30 feet long, made of curved metal and painted a green colour... and open-ended. Local lads were fascinated by these – they looked at but didn't touch the boxes of ammunition.

Motor cars (there were not many around) had one headlamp blanked off, the other had slotted metal to point the beam downwards.

All fields had poles 20 feet high so that gliders could not land without crashing. Everyone thought we would be invaded.

The Home Guard, George, Bert and Joseph Wilkinson, had a uniform and were trained at Bingham to put out fires and look out for bombers coming. They were issued with rifles and bayonets but Norman was not sure if they had ammunition.

George Wilkinson was a Special Constable i.e. an unofficial policeman.

On Sunday mornings he went to Bingham for training drill to assist the police in maintaining law and order.

The Home Guard had two horses ridden by the Roberts brothers, Jack and Walker, of Chapel Farm.

They were supplied with leggings, breeches, and tin helmets and they carried rifles when on patrol in Granby, Redmile and Barkestone.



The Home Guard

The Farm

Land girls were based at Hawksworth. Farmers could ring up for them when required*, particularly at harvesting time when George Wilkinson brought out the binder which he shared with my father. But even then it was a slow job as the string kept getting ravelled or broke.

Farmers could get a permit to purchase a tractor provided it was also shared. The tractor was on allocation from WarAg (the War Agricultural Executive Committee).

The steel wheels had no rubber on them. The main jobs were for shire horses.

* Bill Roberts of Chapel Farm had the only telephone in the village as he was just starting up his joinery business. (Martin Wilkinson, Norman's youngest brother, remembers going up there with his father in the 1950's to make phone calls.)

The tractor was quicker than the horses had been with the binder, but there was still much manual work including standing up the stooks of cut corn. (Norman remembers he was 13 when he was allowed to drive the tractor under the watchful eye of his uncle – and disapproval of his father!)

After drying for a few days these were transported to the stack yards where the previous year's floor of wooden poles was demolished to the great excitement of children who were armed with sticks to kill the masses of mice and empty the nests full of their pink babies as they scurried in all directions. They were then picked up by their tails and put into piles; however, the rats were the worst as they played dead!



The Land Girls helped with the harvest

A huge pink threshing machine separated the corn from the stalks, which were then stacked to use as food and bedding for the animals. The threshing machine was brought by Hempshall's, a contractor from Redmile, to thresh the corn as required.

Steam power was used for this and a lot of water had to be brought from the wells in the fields and a ton of coal was needed (this was also rationed).

Some corn was kept but some sold to Simpsons at Cropwell Bishop to produce flour. Simpsons ran a weekly bread van through the villages.

Harvesting was a very heavy and laborious job. Children carried jam sandwiches and a billycan of hot tea to the workers who would not stop until dusk.

My mother also made nettle beer for the men working all day in the heat.

Jessie Roberts (later Cook) worked as a land girl and her sister Jenny was a volunteer in the air force.

Father sold his first motor car, a Bullnose Morris, to buy a hay-making machine as getting and buying petrol was difficult. Everyone used bicycles.

There was an Italian prisoner of war camp at Redmile and several farmers (Percy Knight of Highfield Farm and Joseph Wilkinson of The Poplars) used them.

Norman recalls they were grateful for the food cooked by Mum as they hated the endless potatoes served elsewhere! I do remember Mum saying that she did not know what food to give them.

David recalls that the Italians were very good at catching rabbits: they outran them!

Norman pays tribute to our mother's skill as he does not recall them ever being hungry.

The roads were very muddy and full of pot holes. The farmyards were mud as concrete entrances were not laid until the 1970s.

Disinfected straw was laid across the entrances when the seemingly frequent bouts of fowl pest and foot and mouth disease happened. The pungent smell of Jeyes Fluid or similar was a grim indicator of what was happening .

End of Part 1
