

## East Meon Memoirs

In the summer of 1941 I was offered the post of Vicar and went to see the parish. The village had just suffered an air raid, the Germans having rained it with flames and dropped incendiary H.E. bombs into the circle. Rumour had that Lord Haw-Haw (the Nazi broadcast) had boasted that Southampton had been raided. No doubt this was a case where our air defences had misled the Germans by interfering with their radio guidance. There was an assembly - a big!!

(C) For the most part the war left East Meon quietly alone. Farmers went on with their tasks. A field where the villagers had always found mushrooms was ploughed up and sown to kale.

In the autumn there was a prodigious crop of mushrooms. ~~At the~~ Working baskets, buckets and anything else that would hold them were filled but Eric Payne, agent of the Berkeley estate decided that too much damage was being done to the kale and the mushroom harvest was stopped. (B)

The peace of the village was interrupted as the war years passed. Prior to D day there were tanks and trucks parked everywhere and air defences AA defences were strengthened. We even had a battery for a time behind the vicarage and the noise when they went into action was appalling. (A) I served as a Warden in the A.R.P. but had little to do other than go out on patrol when there was a warning. ~~On the night of~~ Part of the D-day preparation was that a fake camp was set up on the slopes of Butser Hill. The Germans duly dropped a number of "butterfly bombs" on it. These were ~~extra~~ small anti-personal bombs which floated to the ground in spread-out metal cases and wire them intended to be detonated by moving feet. This attack was taken out of the hand of Colonel Smyson and his trusty A.R.P. wardens.

and as the exact number of these devices were known from the exact number of candles in which they dropped, a huge search was made in the copse and fields of that part of the parish. The area having been searched. A policeman visited the school to warn the children of the danger and that afternoon Mrs. Hayes, the Headmistress, was stalked. The naughty boy of the village (who shall be nameless) proudly announced that he had found one, and Mercifully, it turned out to be an old tin can.

Just before D-day I was standing in front of the Vicarage, looking towards Portsmouth when I saw the A.A. guns fire at reconnaissance planes overhead. The shell bursts ~~were~~ <sup>made it possible</sup> to trace the path of the planes although they themselves were too far off to be visible. Then I saw a burst of smoke and a long diagonal trail downwards. It was later said that this aeroplane had been shot down from 37,000 ft and had come down in Langstone Harbour.

About this time we began to be troubled with V.I.s or "doodle-bugs" as they were known. These were spectacular weapons ~~were~~ flying low and making a noise like tin-cans being rattled together. For the most part they travelled South of the village, being aimed at Portsmouth, Gosport or Southampton. But some were much nearer. On Sunday evening, we heard the familiar rattle out towards Old Winchester Hill. Then it stopped - the prelude to an explosion - and a great burst of smoke rose into the sky. There was no candle. <sup>with another word</sup> More fighting was a still night when I was on patrol in the village. From the East came the threatening din and at the critical moment, silence. Without hesitation we dived for the ditch but all we heard was a faint whistling as the V.2 glided on its path towards West Meon. I fear that we were so pre-occupied with our escape that we gave too little thought.

3

for the or neighbours along the valley. Mercifully it cleared the village too and exploded in open country.

One another facet of the East Men war effort was the formation of a platoon of the Army Cadet Force. As the only able-bodied man who seemed to be available I was enlisted as a second lieutenant. After taking out A. at Clarendon College, Petersfield I was let loose with 12 or 14 of the bright lads of the valley.

Frank Collins' son, Sydney, was sergeant and we had Corporal Yates and Corporal Paine as N.C.O.s. I enjoyed myself hugely marching the lads up and down the High Street & taking them out on the downs to do Map-reading and Fieldcraft. The best entertainment, however, was .22 rifle shooting in the range we set up in Athol's Vineyard. We certainly shook up the rabbit population and some of the cadets became good marksmen.

Church life was, of course, the major part of my life. Here the dominant figures were ~~Mr.~~ Mr. Reggie Nicholson, owner of Berdeley and his wife Lady Margaret. In many ways the situation of East Men, away from the major centres of communication, had shielded it from the far-reaching changes already taking place in much of the countryside. This meant that Berdeley played a very important part in the life of the community and so, the Church. Two events stand out in my mind.

The first was seeing the famous font for the first time. At the outbreak of war it had been surrounded by sandbags. But as time wore on we came to know more about the effect of bombs and thought that if a bomb was close enough and powerful enough to destroy the thick walls of the church then the font would not escape. Further, we feared that the wall might be suffering damage from the sandbags. So one Lent (1943, I believe) a voluntary effort was made and the sandbags were removed in time for the Easter services. It was indeed a

thrilling moment

The event had to do with the bells. ~~At the time~~ For the first part of my ministry they were silent kept for the purpose of warning against invasion. During this time I wanted to learn to ring. Luckily the ringing chamber at East Meon had no windows and so could be used at night without the bother of black-out. So the captain of the bellringing instructed me on a "tied" bell, that is a bell with a wooden clamp ~~across~~ fixed to the clapper to keep it silent. There, in the tower I learnt to handle a bell and I wondered what a stranger would have made of the creaking and groaning coming from the bearing, the wheel and the rope as these were audible down in the road.

Then came the day when the ringing bar was lifted and I was able join the village other ringers in calling the faithful to worship and in ringing in the New Year. The custom for this was that we ring in rounds and then "fire" the bells, ringing them all at once. After the ring we repaired to Archie Hobbs' house there to salute the New Year efforts as appropriately as we could in wartime.

The church organ at East Meon was a modest affair but we were blessed in having in Mr. Lodge from West Meon a very devoted organist. We had a choir too with a number of boys and a few men. Another devoted member of the team was Frank Collins the sexton. I was instituted to East Meon by Bishop Partridge who, when I was reciting the customary oath of loyalty barked at me "Don't stand <sup>with you back to</sup> in front of your bishop!" I then had thought it right to face the assembled congregation!! In spite of this inauspicious beginning there is much that is still treasure of my 3½ years as vicar of East Meon.

A. For two days tanks and armoured vehicles from the U.S. forces parked on the long drive up to the Vicarage. Our two daughters had a grand time with the friendly Americans - especially when they took their trolley-cans of tea from the Vicarage kitchen.

B. The Vicarage played its part in the war effort. One family of women, the Lincolns from Battersea, occupied the West end of the house for the whole of the war. At the other end rooms were let to ~~the~~ Naval Families. There was always great demand for this kind of accommodation, particularly as Seydine House was made the ~~last~~ centre of the rapidly growing H.M.S. Mercury. The Vicar enjoyed the hospitality of the ward-room there and his children shared in the lunch parties given to children in the village.

C. Inevitably, with the German air assault, there were dog fights over the village and we saw planes shot down and the airmen floating down on their parachutes.

On the whole we in the country suffered little from real food shortage. After all we had rabbits, pigeon and even pheasants to augment the ~~food~~ <sup>meat</sup> ration and our gardens gave us plenty of vegetables. The egg ration was dispensed in Archie Halls with the village grocer's shops.

We, at the Vicarage, suffered a long pain. The Curator was a locked shed let into the hill at the back of the vicarage. One <sup>Monday</sup> morning we found it broken up into ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> one mill, bacon & the remainder of our Sunday joint was missing. In the village P.C. went into action and traced the intruder through the dewy grass & the wood behind the house on the way to the down. He enquired of the Home Guard, who kept watch and ward on the Hill. They gave a description of a man seen leaving the Vicarage wood in the early morning and he was caught a longish later in the day - a deserter who was on the run.

The Home Guard were ~~sometimes~~ <sup>sometimes</sup> over-zealous in their

waterfulness. One fine evening my wife and the Mr. & Mrs. who  
who at that time was living at the Vicary, were out for  
a walk on the path to the lane going by the Doctor's house at  
the corner. They were challenged presumptuously by a Corporal  
of a section of the Home Guard "Advance and be recognised".  
This was a bit stupid because they the walkers were all  
well known! The Vicar expressed his own views forcibly  
when he met the Corporal next day in the High Street.