AROUND KEYNSHAM & SALTFORD PAST AND PRESENT

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AROUND
KEYNSHAM & SALTFORD
PAST & PRESENT

Contents

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Mosaics from Room W, Keynsham Roman Villa
(under cemetery)

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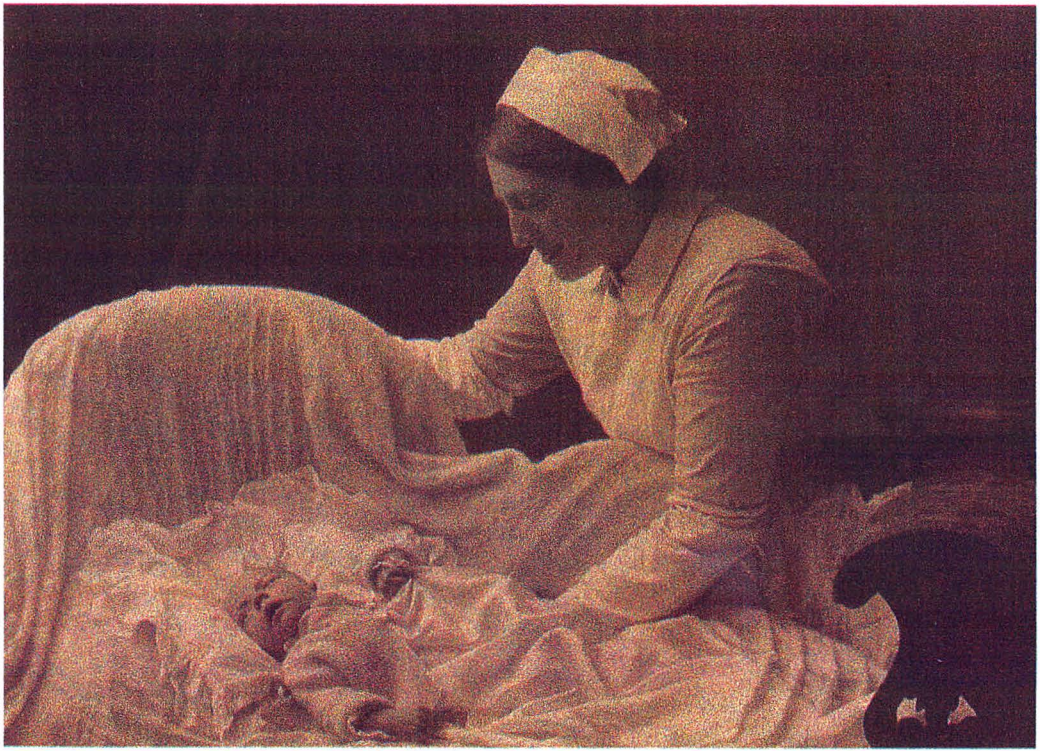
Nurse Allen



Nurse Allen

A DISTRICT NURSE IN THE 1920's

On March 1st, 1920, Frank Allen, aged 28, died, leaving a widow and two boys. With him went his smallholding and his pay as a farm labourer in the village of Upton Cheney.

The boys, aged five and one, were lodged in the village shop in the care of their great aunt, Elizabeth Mortimer, while their mother, Hilda Allen, went to train as a nurse at Bristol General Hospital.

It was a long, hard training in a harsh, disciplined regime. General nursing was followed by midwifery training, and one night, she was sent with a doctor to a tenement in York Road.

There they found a woman in labour, living in appalling conditions. There was no furniture, no bed — just a soiled mattress and a dirty blanket on the floor. There was no running water and no hot water until the incapable husband got some from a basement neighbour. After a difficult birth, the baby was wrapped in an hospital maternity pack. The next day, even though she was told she was wasting money, Nurse Allen took a basin, a blanket and a towel to the woman. When she returned again, the basin and the blanket had been sold, presumably to buy food and drink.

When her training was finished, she returned to the Bitton area as district nurse with Dr Thomas Aubrey, caring for patients from Bath to Marshfield.

Often in midwifery cases, the responsibility for running the home and the caring of any other children fell on the nurse until the mother recovered. On remote farms, she often helped bring in the cows for milking or fed the animals, too.

As her skills became known, she was booked early in pregnancies, and was often midwife to three or four children in the same family.

At one time she was nursing at Blue Lodge, where "Black Beauty" writer, Anna Sewell, once lived, when a swarthy and unkempt man called her to help his wife who was giving birth. It was a filthy night, but she packed a bag, wrapped a cape round her and followed the man to a gypsy encampment on Holbrook Common.

There, in the confined space of a caravan, in the presence of five children, she safely delivered a child in a difficult birth. The gypsy walked silently with her back to Blue Lodge and pressed half- a-crown into her hand. She told him she would come and see his wife again next day, but when she reached the camp the following evening the caravan had gone. A feeling of guilt overtook her: she had helped a child into the world which was unlikely to be registered — and she had accepted payment, making her an accessory. Dr Aubrey assured her that, had she not helped, the child would not have been registered anyway and the mother may not have survived.

Dr Aubrey, an overworked and dedicated G.P., was not above a bit of collusion himself. A lady patient was barren, but she and her husband desperately wanted a child. She told her neighbours she was pregnant and padded herself out more and more as the months passed. She bought a pram and then about a week before she was 'due', Nurse Allen was installed in the household. Early one morning, the doctor arrived with a little more than his traditional black bag .....He had a "present' from a Bristol hospital. Nurse Allen helped to play out the little charade, hanging out the nappies on the line.

Another, longer, job was the care of a family who were badly burnt when a Tilly lamp exploded. Doctor and nurse had to pick out the shards of glass from faces and hands, then Nurse Allen remained in residence to dress the wounds on hands and faces twice a day, and help run the household.

From time to time there were spells of nursing in Mangotsfield Isolation Hospital where contagious diseases such as smallpox were treated.

At Christmas 1927, she was helping me into a clean shirt when she noticed a scab on my arm. There was only one phone in the village and the next thing I was aware of was Dr. Aubrey. He inspected my arm, lifted the scab with a scalpel, looked down his bewhiskered nose through a magnifying glass and declared: "I think its only impetigo."

Transport to anywhere from Upton Cheyney was by sit-up-and-beg cycle with feeble acetylene lamps front and back and a

flat rear carrier for the strap-on suitcase. There was a skirt guard (a web of strings from the rear hub to holes in the mudguard) and punctures were frequent. The forays out to remote farms on bitter winter nights can well be imagined.

Clean aprons and headwear and starched cuffs were essential but washing conditions were often primitive. Sunlight soap, reduced to threads by a cheese grater; Reckitt' s Blue and Robin Starch were the prime agents. Bandages were washed and reused and Lysol, iodine and gentian violet seemed to be the main antibacterial agents.

Occasionally, the doctor' s richer patients required nursing companions, and one took Nurse Allen away to Ashby-de-la-Zouch for a month. She was also employed to nurse newly-born twins on a sea passage to Australia, which enabled her to meet relatives descended from family members who had emigrated from Bristol in the 1850's.

On her return, Nurse Allen was again in great demand, but, sadly, in 1935, was forced into retirement with arteriosclerosis. She lived for another *25* years in Upton Cheyney and Bitton, and shared her bungalow with refugees from the blitzes.

Her sacrifice in those hard years of the 20's and 30's sustained her two sons in their formative years. Happily there are still a few people in the neighbourhood of Bitton who first saw the light of day in her arms.

JIM ALLEN

Bitton Church

KEEP THEM CLEAR!

The moon was just floating clear of the black Cotswold skyline as we climbed into the narrow spiral staircase and followed the fleeing lantern upwards. It was Frank who carried the lantern and he had little concern for those who followed. So we followed in the dark holding on to the banister of old bell ropes and feeling with our feet for the eighty-five worn and narrow stone steps that led to the ringing chamber. We could hear old George, who had an electric torch, puffing away behind us "in his own time" as he called it, and behind him was Stan Spare who always followed George up to make sure he didn't fall. George was eighty-three. We youngsters climbed breathlessly into the ringing chamber where Frank, already anxious to get going, called for volunteers to tie on the muffles. The younger of us volunteered and soon we were away again up the narrow stairs, past the empty chamber where the bell ropes only could be seen, to the bell chamber.

Here the great mute bells hung mouths downwards. The lantern flickered and we worked mainly by touch, clambering among the great oaken beams, reaching through the huge wheels, disturbing bird lime and dust. To each bell clapper we secured the muffle of leather, tying the thongs round the shank of the clapper. We took care that the muffles were all on the same side of the clappers. Just occasionally someone would hit the side of a bell and the great resonant note would echo around the walls before escaping out through the louvres into the moonlight. Frank checked that all was well, that the ropes were in the wheel runnels and that the stays were all firm and set.

Now we descended to the ringing chamber where a second lantern had been lit and already, in spite of the cold, coats had been removed. George was there, red in the face, but with determination written in his eyes. Tom opened the window. We listened.

"There she is," said Tom. We listened. Over the elm-lined hill

hill from ten miles away came the faint cry of the Doynton treble.

"Like a bird crying, ain't she?" asked Tom. We made a point of listening for Doynton every New Year's Eve. Other sounds came to us. The screech owl in the wych elm; the distant noise of a train; the rumble of the engineering works; the crisp crackle of footsteps on the gravel below.

"Here' s old Fred bringing the beer." Tom spoke irreverently of the Vicar, who was indeed bringing the beer to the foot of the tower, there to leave it before climbing up to join us.

"Let' s give him an earful," someone said. We untied the ropes and took our places in the circle. There -were ten of us and only eight ropes. Two sat out in the deep window bays. The lanterns stood on the centre platform. The door to the stairway was closed and Frank said; "Let' s raise 'em."

The treble rope snaked as the first pull was made - each rope snaking in turn. Up in the bell chamber the wheels began to swing and the bells with them. Then the treble started to strike, the unmuffled side of the clapper making contact with the bronze - "Dang" - two pulls later Number Two joined in -"Daing," and then Number Three joined with a "Doing." Soon all eight were striking. The pace quickened for the bells were swinging through gradually increasing arcs. As they rose higher the striking became more distinct until at last all eight, including the tenor, were swinging the full 358 degree arc.

For a minute or so the bells rang in sequence - (rounds) - the crisp, clean notes of one sequence contrasting vividly with the muffled, kettle-drum roll of the next.

"Set," shouted Frank and the eight bells were dexterously balanced - now mouths upward - on their oaken stays. The Vicar was at the door and he was let in.

"Good evening, Sir," -"Happy New Year to you." "Sharp frost tonight."

"Could hear Doynton just now and Keynsham - wind' s in the wrong quarter for Dundry."

"Just gone half eleven," Frank broke in. "Let' s have 120 doubles."

We took our places at the ropes.

"Will you call, George?" George nodded his head and nodded it again to Tom on the treble. "Treble going, treble gone.~~

The treble rang out and soon the rounds were going evenly. 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8, and then muffled: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8.

Suddenly George called: "Go Grandsire," 2-1 -3-5-4-7-6-8, 2-3-1-4-5-7-6-8, 3-2-4-1-5-7-6-8. The red, white and blue sallies flickered up and down in the lamplight, now almost disappearing through the ceiling, now dancing by the ringers' chins. The shirt-sleeved arms were tensed to control the bells as the huge wheels high above overswung their arcs.

"Bob," called George.

Two ringers exchanged significant glances — their bells were to "dodge" in the sequence.

"Single," called George.

There was a momentary pause as Eric forgot what bell should follow, and the rest held their bells in check until it was obvious to him that he should lead. For one round there was confusion.

George scowled. "Keep 'em clear," he grunted. Now the sequence came right again and twenty changes later the bells came into correct numerical order.

"Stand," called George, and suddenly all was quiet. The ropes were temporarily looped to keep them off the floor. When Tom opened the window again the rest of hastily put on our coats. Yes, there was Doynton — five bells calling crystal clear in the night air. The moonlight flooded across the tombstones and the yews loomed blacker than ever.

"Close the window, Tom." Frank, whose hands were gnarled and crippled with arthritis, took a rope again. "Another 120," he urged. "Here. Eric, you take the treble this time."

"Treble going, treble gone."

It was eight minutes to twelve when we stopped again. Four of us hurried to the tower to remove the muffles. Carefully we untied the thongs for the bells were delicately balanced, mouths upward. Two of us climbed further up the tower and out through the tiny door in the turret onto the leaden roof. Down below the eight assembled at the ropes again. George' s great turnip watch

hung on the wall ticking off the seconds to midnight.

"Fire 'em," shouted Frank.

Simultaneously the eight ropes were pulled, and simultaneously the eight bells rang. Twelve times the bells fired in unison and then Frank called "Rounds" and away they came clear: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8.

On the roof of the tower we had watched the shapely shadows thrown by the tracery of the parapet shiver as the building shook to the firing of the bells. Now rhythmic cadences made the tower sway and the whole stonework became tremulous with the rhythm. Away across the hams over the riband of river, past barn and farm, up the sloping escarpment the sound went, beating a rude cacophony on the nearby yews, but whispering a sweet melody through the thin bare elms on the skyline, and drifting ever further and further to the very stars. Frost and moonlight combined to give the world a cloak of silver unreality. The bells, released from their muting, shouted joyously down the moon valleys of the night. It was the New Year. The world was beginning again.

So we thought as we climbed down the stairs again into the arrogant din of the bell chamber. With our hands over our ears we paused to watch the tumbling bells, the swinging wheels, the hammering clappers, the snaking ropes, lit by the streaks of moonlight drifting in the louvres. And then we went down to the ringing chamber.

"Better take 'em down now." The bells were gradually lowered. At each stroke the swing was checked, an inch or two of rope gathered in. The notes quickened as the swinging became shorter. For a moment there was a jumble of sound and then they came clear still swinging sufficiently to strike the clappers on the bronze.

The tenor stopped — then Number Seven - Number Six, 5-4-3-2-1, 4-3-2-1, 3-2-1, 2-1, 1, silence. The ropes were tied back. No one spoke. The Vicar stepped forward and read from the plaque on the wall: "Oh Lord, grant us that those of us who have been called to Thy service be worthy of our calling. Keep us we beseech Thee,

under the protection of Thy good providence, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

Down the tower we tramped, George last of all. Out we came to the moonlight and the beer. Cold it was as we sipped at our pewter pots and wished each other "Good health."

We never assembled again as a band of ten. Within a week George lay beneath the wych elm and a few months later Frank, too, was dead. So the muffled peals rang out for them, but here was to be no muffled peal for Eric, shot down over Germany at the close of the year. For the year we had heralded was 1939, the year of the Second World War, the year that began in the glamour of moonlight and ended with the total discrediting of any light at night.

Fevrier.

BITTON CHURCH TOWER.

JIM ALLEN

Ellsbridge Close (Bottom Right)

KEYNSHAM IN WAR TIME
Two accounts by people living here in 1940

Historians are always elated at the discovery of contemporary accounts of events. Keynsham is fortunate that several people kept diaries, journals and letters in the war years. They bring events to life in a way that figures, statistics and facts often fail to do. Each writer has an individual viewpoint, and sometimes a completely different account of events. It is not a question simply of factual accuracy, but the way the events were viewed by the observer. This contrast in accounts of events shows up very clearly in the two accounts of bombing raids on Keynsham written by Kathleen Sabin and Patricia Askew. Kathleen Sabin was a young housewife and mother of a baby, Elizabeth, aged two years and three months, living in Saltford. She kept a diary of the raids, largely to record these events while they were still fresh in her memory. Patricia Askew was a fifteen year old evacuee, living with relatives, the Carey-Parkers, in Ellsbridge Close, which she describes as 'quite outside Keynsham'. She had come from Sturry, (near Canterbury) one of the most bombed villages in England, so she was not unfamiliar with raids. She wrote a weekly 'budget' of news to her great friend, Monica Risdon-Brown, who had stayed behind in Sturry, because her father, the vicar, would not leave his parish, and his wife and daughter would not leave him. Patricia describes events with great energy and enthusiasm. She rarely complained of anything, though she did not have a very high opinion of Keynsham.

What a place! It's half asleep. Do you know the General Post Office closes at 12 o 'clock on Saturdays?

She did however love living in the country and entered whole heartedly into country life, helping with hay making, and harvest, milking and butter making.

They both recorded the first raid on Keynsham. Patricia wrote on June 27th 1940,

We have actually had two sirens. The first they have ever had here. On Monday night at twelve ~fifteen we heard the first one which lasted until 3.30. We heard Nazi planes and gunfire and I think

they did some damage but nowhere near us. Then on Tuesday night at exactly the same time we had another! We heard nothing at all and after about an hour we went back to bed. I was just going to 'peepings' about half an hour later when the sirens went again!!! I heard a queer sounding plane and the searchlights went up too. Everyone said it was a German plane. This siren lasted until a quarter to four!!! After the All Clear I couldn 't get back to sleep until about five-thirty so altogether it was an eventful night.

Kathleen Sabin' s account reads a little differently. June 24th

Our first raid of the war. Midnight till 3am. Alert followed by terrific crash. Dorothy and I flew for Elizabeth and carried her to the cupboard under the stairs which we had prepared as a shelter. Away from flying glass but otherwise not much safer than anywhere else, except that there was no heavy furniture above us to fall on us should the house collapse. Arthur, being a Special Constable, had to dress and dash out immediately to go on duty on the main road Difficult to tell if Elizabeth was frightened She lay in my arms without moving or speaking during the three hours. I found it a great strain to have to remain quite inactive, with nothing to take my mind off the possible danger to Arthur wandering about outside. We found, of course that the cupboard was stocked with all the things we didn't need — such as gas helmets, burns lotions and 1st aid kit and few of the things we badly needed We got hungry and the heat of the cupboard made us thirsty, no biscuits, no water, not enough cushions or rugs. A fair number of odd crashes, which being entirely inexperienced we were quite unable to judge whether they were a few yards or a few miles away.

Kathleen Sabin had more to worry about than Patricia. She was so anxious about the safety of her baby and her worry was exacerbated by the fact she was very often on her own. As a Special Constable, and later an Air Raid Warden, Arthur was away from the house a lot. In addition he had to take his turn in firewatching at his place of employment, the Cathedral School in Bristol. Even though she did not have a husband in the services, she had a lonely war. She wrote on August 29th,

Arthur goes on Patrol Duty 9pm — 12am every other

night, raid or no raid, and continues out until All Clear on Duty nights. Raid 9.20pm — 3. 15am. Much noise of guns and planes, no bombs near. Slept lam — 3.15am. This is becoming a rotten existence. At one time, for a short while, I was so tired I could sleep at any odd hour during the day. But by now, having for so long had little sleep night after night, I am getting past the sleepy tired. I cannot really rest at any time. Sleep in daylight is impossible. At night during the odd 2 or 3 hours, I sleep with half of me. A deadening existence of work all day, and fear all night, without the slightest relief or outside existence. Arthur is always out. I go nowhere and do nothing, no outside conversations. How I envy those who are free to know the communal life of raid duty. Those in Police or Civil Defence who go on duty in groups. Who can have some sort of life and exchange of views, even if there is danger and cold and tiredness.

There were aspects of the war which Patricia entered into heartily; saving for the Spitfire Fund; accepting economies; make do and mend. Some incidents she found exciting, as she wrote to Monica on July 12th:

After giving us a few peaceful nights Hitler has of course to follow on with more raids so last night at about 1am the sirens started to wail, well we all went down stairs and heard a few guns and planes but a good way away. The searchlights were up of course. At about 2.30 the All Clear went. Back in bed again I couldn 't go to sleep and suddenly I saw a lot of flashes in the sky and then heard rumblings. I thought it was thunder at first having thunderstorms a lot these last two days but then I began to doubt it. Just then I heard a plane awfully near and before I could make certain whether it was a Nazi or not, there was a terrific explosion followed by some smaller bangs. which shook my bed and rattled the windows. It was awful. I nearly turned into a very wobbly kind of jelly!!! Surely, I thought, we'll have a warning now and just then I heard the Bristol siren starting once again and then ours followed suit so out of bed we all went and downstairs once more. This time we heard quite a few small bangs and another very big explosion. After that it was quiet for a while and Daddy went out on to the porch. He saw that as well as the air raid Bristol was

having a terrific thunderstorm with awful forked lightning. Well over Bristol they put up about 60 balloon barrages when there is a raid, so of course the balloons were up last night. Well this awfully severe forked lightning evidently struck the cables of the balloons because suddenly Daddy saw a spark. After every flash of forked lightning we suddenly saw a spark in the sky and another balloon was on fire! Do you know we counted seven balloons destroyed in the sky then it grew bigger into a flame and you could see it was a balloon on fire, then the flames seemed to explode and the next minute the balloon was falling to earth covered in flames and smoke! Daddy called us out to see it, you see, it was a marvellous sight. I shall never forget it. Some of the balloons made more flames then others, and lit up the sky for miles, fancy! In an air raid Forked lightning really did do this and not guns, we could hear the thunder and see the forks across the sky. It proves that human beings still have no power against Nature, doesn't it? It really was a weird spectacle. This raid lasted until 4.30 and it was really light when we eventually went back to bed feeling thankful we were all safe.

Mrs Sabin records this raid, but without many details, because she had been away staying with an aunt in Preston. It occurred the night she returned.

A very noisy night to greet us. Raid from 11pm till 2am. Bombs and guns. Also a thunderstorm which caused the bursting of 38 barrage balloons over Bristol. Particularly noisy bombs at Bitton (2 miles away).
[The official number is 28. EW.]

I feel sure that Mrs Sabin would have thought the destruction of the balloons, regarded as an essential part of air defences, in a more serious way than Patricia.

Both Patricia and Mrs Sabin had to cope with spending long hours in their 'shelters'. The Carey-Parkers had an Anderson Shelter, suitable for twelve people according to the authorities. From the diary, however, it seems a bit crowded with the four Risdon-Browns, the four Carey-Parkers, and the next-door-

neighbours, three of the Tatnell family. Patricia, as ever, looked on the bright side. She had christened it 'Cosy Corner'.

It is awfully snug inside. We have a hurricane lamp hanging up, and seats all round with blankets and cushions. Mummy has a big tin filled with first aid things and tins of biscuits, chocolate and oranges. Every night she fills thermos flask with a hot drink and pops it in the tin, so far it has never been wasted as we have had to get up every night this week, from about twelve to three!!!

Three weeks later after some intensive raids, she writes,

We were up last night after two nights of rest. We heard gun fire and a few bombs also Nazi planes. We all got so cross with Hitler after having sat in Cosy Corner for about two hours that when we heard planes coming over for about the tenth time we started to sing Jerusalem! We sang this twice and when we ended the 'Nasties' had gone so we sang 'Rule Britannia', 'There 'll Always be an England', 'The British Grenadiers', and 'Old man River'! Then we must have become really 'warmed up' so we sang nearly the whole of 'The National Song Book' What do you do in a raid? Sometimes we all try to rehearse sentences which we could use if Germans came to Cosy Corner. We get some queer results! How does one say 'take these biscuits and go away'?

Mrs Sabin' s circumstances were more difficult. She was intensely worried in case there was an invasion. It was Elizabeth she feared for.

My greatest worry is for Elizabeth. What would I do with her if I knew the Germans were coming up our road? Leave her to her fate, perhaps starvation or separation nor should I have the courage to kill her — or would that be cowardice? I love her so terribly. I try not to think of it.

Despite her anxiety she used her ingenuity to create a zone of safety for herself and Elizabeth. After her trip to Preston she seemed to be a little more philosophical about her situation and a little less anxious.

One can never tell what place may be safe. Any day there might be a heavy raid on the congested town of Preston. At home we are more or less in the country. It seems that by far the worst danger at home is the danger to health and nerves by

continually dashing out of bed and pushing Elizabeth into a cold cupboard, and the lack of sleep it caused her. I have decided that in the unlikely event of a direct hit no-one is safe anywhere. This is about a million to one chance. For the rest, the downstairs rooms are really as safe as anywhere excepting the windows, which I plan to paste over with this anti splinter net. I also plan to turn the house upside down for the duration of the raids. That is to say Dorothy and Elizabeth will sleep in the dining room, the safest in the house. It looks out onto a backyard with a high wall afew yards from the window which acts as a blast wall. I will sleep on a bed put up in the lounge in front. We will all here be near the cupboard should there be a bad raid Otherwise we can remain in bed, awake but comfortable. Elizabeth will I hope continue to sleep through it. The siren did not wake her when she was at home. I woke her bringing her downstairs. As Arthur, anyway, has to get up and go out on duty at every siren, it doesn't matter where he sleeps, because he will be out before the bombs drop --- in theory!, so he can have his own comfortable bed in the bedroom for the few hours that he is not on duty.

One side effect of the raids affected both of them was tiredness. Both complain of it, and eventually slept through the sirens and only woke if the bombs rocked the houses. Over time it produced a depression in Mrs Sabin, and tears in Patricia. Mrs Sabin wrote on August 25th, 1940,

Night raid 9.15pm till 4am. A few bombs. I fell asleep at midnight but Arthur out till the All Clear It would appear that so far the German Pilots did not intend to brave Bristol barrage, so they drop them all around us. So far we have had much more noise, and therefore more sleepless nights than Bristol, and certainly more than London. Blitzes have not yet started, but lack of sleep is going to wear us out before they do. Though the bombs have not yet landed on top of us, any one is liable to do so any night, which means I am constantly strung up waiting to dash to Elizabeth. I have a nightmare dread that she will be buried or injured. If she were not here, she would be quite different. I think I would go to sleep and not bother, as I am so tired.

Her anxiety was increased by the fear, a very common one, that there would be gas attacks, and she would not be able to get the baby into its gas mask. There had been rumours that the Germans would use poison gas as they had accused the British of doing so.

It means I would not then dare to leave Elizabeth to sleep on after a siren. She will have to be away from the windows ready to put on a gas mask — though goodness knows how that will be done. In spite of all my coaxing she screams at the very sight of her mask, and would have hysterics if ever I had to force it on. I would need to tie her hands down.

Patricia was more fortunate in that she was not at school or college and not working, so she could sleep when she had the chance. She wrote on Sunday, September 22nd,

I have great pleasure in announcing our first peaceful night for about seven weeks NO SIREN. It was delicious. I just slept and slept. On Monday 23rd she was writing at 2.30am.

ALL Clear. Hooray! It is about ten to three. I can't stop to write any more. I must get back to my nice soft bed.

Tuesday. When I got back to bed after the All Clear last night I slept with no interruptions until twelve o 'clock this morning I did have a shock when I saw what the time was. Mummy let me sleep as long as I could. When I got downstairs Ann was home from school!!!

Despite her cheerful attitude and her determination to be brave and positive, there were times when the letters reveal how much she missed her friends and her school. Tiredness made these feelings worse. She wrote in a long letter started on July 30th,

Everyone is resting now; we are all tired from a series of sleepless nights, so I thought I'd write (word crossed out) talk to you, as I am feeling lonely. (She drew a row of six tear drops labelled My Tears).

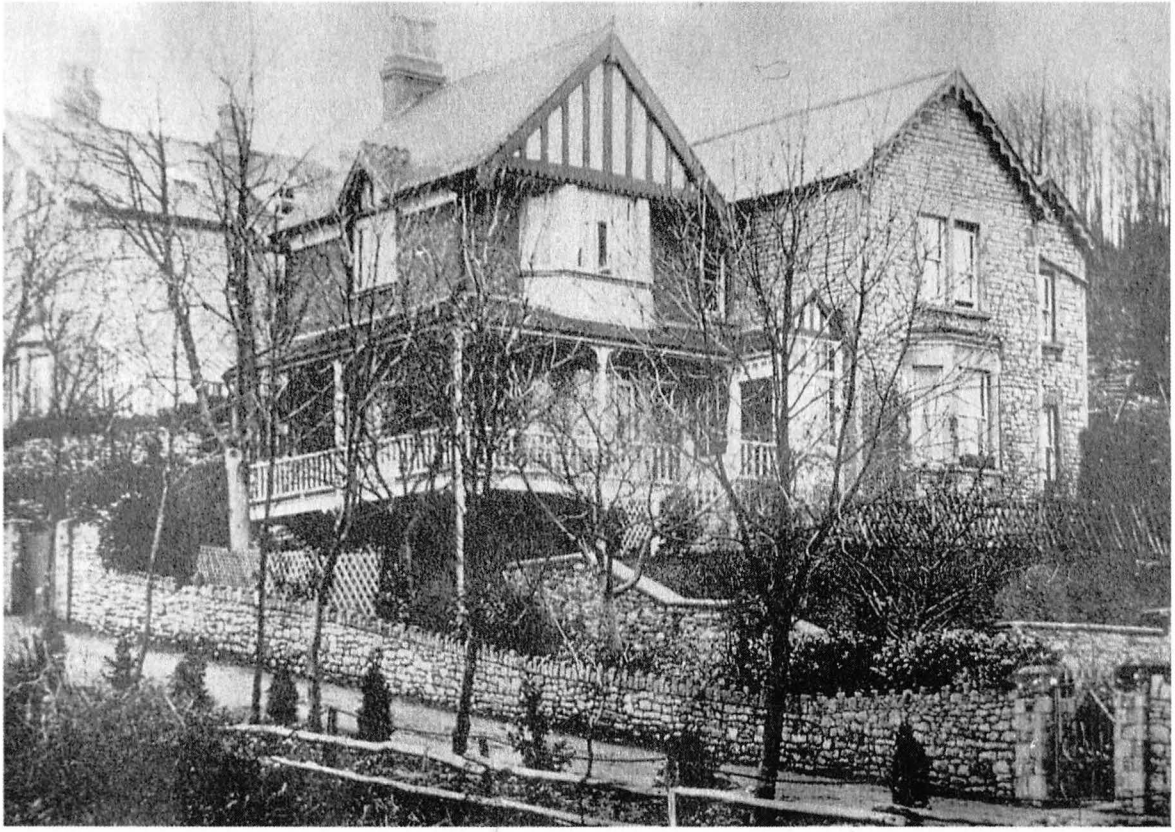
Both these accounts are well worth reading for the light they throw on life in Keynsham in war time. They show two ordinary and very different people, with different circumstances, adjusting to stresses and strains of wartime life, and surviving them.

ELIZABETH WHITE.

References

War over Saltford — Mrs Sabin' s Diary, in 'Around Keynsham & Saltford Past and Present', Series 2. No.4. 2004. Transcribed by M. Whitehouse.
Letters to Sturry from Patricia Askew to Monica Risdon-Brown Published by K.H.Mclntosh, 2003. Available in Church' s, High Street, Keynsham.

We would like to express our gratitude to the editor and publisher of "Letters to Sturry" and to Monica Headley for allowing us to reproduce the above excerpts.



The Folly, Saltford

LHS members at Stoke Mine

STOKE HILL MINE, LIMPLEY STOKE.

For a short time in 2006 Local History took on a geological timescale!

Early on a fine Saturday morning on 19th August, members of Keynsham & Saltford Local History Society arrived in a series of cars at the almost hidden works yard of the Bath Stone Group at their Stoke Hill Mine, on the outskirts of Bath, at Limpley Stoke. Everyone arrived early and soon donned boots and anoraks ready for an adventure.

The mine manager welcomed us and introduced the Company, which not only mines and cuts the stone, but also boasts a skilled in-house technical and design service. After safety instructions he issued hard hats and carbon dioxide masks, which would enable us to breathe and escape, if somewhat uncomfortably, in the unlikely event of a fire in the mine.

We inspected the many pallets of the mined stone in the works yard, much of it cut into very smooth and measured blocks ready for delivery to customers. This precision cutting is all undertaken at Yeovil, with state of the art diamond profiling technology, and transported there from the mine by large lorries.

We viewed an early deep quarry on the site, which also has a vehicle access to the mine, but as the weather had been very wet we were taken via a drier route. So, having climbed a couple of stiles, crossed several fields and walked into a wooded area, we came across an inconspicuous building which turned out to be the main pedestrian access. After slowly climbing down over 50 steps, we gathered in the safety area at the bottom and then were led through the security doors into the mine proper.

The first stone was mined here many centuries ago, the stone for Longleat House in Wiltshire being mined in 1582. Mining continued throughout the following centuries, although in the last

,war some of the mine had been used by the MOD, who constructed various secure storage areas. The mine then lay dormant until the formation of the Bath Stone Company in 1980, when the mine was reopened. It now has a 95% share of the Bath Stone market, with a yearly output of up to 18,000 tonnes.

The stone is widely used for both restoration and new buildings, such as Windsor castle, Prior Park College in Bath, Pembroke College in Cambridge (using 1,500 tonnes), the BP Headquarters in Hemel Hempstead (using 4,500 tonnes), as well as various National Trust and English Heritage projects. It is much valued for being defect free and for its consistent buff colour, depending on the geological horizon mined.

We were all surprised at the vast size of the mine chambers and tunnels, typically 3 metres wide and high, and also the dry, clear atmosphere, with all the mine being well lit. The geology of the mine was explained in detail, all the mined stone being from the Middle Jurassic Oolitic Limestone, although various beds have a different petrological specification. As we walked around, some areas of the roof were seen to be vertically bolted, to eliminate rock falls of certain relatively thin beds, which, being unsuitable for mining, are retained in place; this bolting procedure being more economic than removing the rock as waste. Some areas of major rock fissures were also evident. However, in most of the mine we were surrounded by vast areas of solid, very valuable rock.

The only dirty areas of the mine are at the cutting faces. Here we were shown a huge tractor-mounted chain saw, with diamond tipped teeth, cutting up to 1.5 metres into the solid rock both vertically and horizontally, on all sides of the front rock face. Once cut, the block was broken away from the back wall, yielding blocks up to 3.5 metres wide and 1.6 metres high. The blocks are then transported away by tractor and trailer to another cutting area near the exit, where they are inspected and checked for flaws. Huge mechanical saws trim the blocks and any unsuitable stone is cut away so that only good quality stone is taken out of the mine.

As we walked around the mine it was intriguing to see the simple, but very effective, red/green triangular markers fixed to the tunnel walls so that only one colour was visible. The red side indicated that the route was leading deeper into the mine. Later, although we were being excellently guided by mine staff, it was reassuring to note that the green side was visible indicating that we were following a route leading us out of the mine! The mine also has a full intercom system so all miners could be in easy contact—another safety feature which is especially important, as most of the time the miners work alone.

As we finally climbed back up from the mine and blinked our way into the bright sunshine, we realised we had been privileged to have had a great introduction to an industry of which few are aware, and yet whose products we often see all around us in many types of buildings, and we expressed our thanks to the mine management.

Tragically, a few weeks after out visit a rock fall resulted in the death of a miner. This sad reminder of the difficult and dangerous conditions under which these and many of our everyday requirements are produced, serves well to emphasise the debt we all owe these workers.

GORDON R. HOBBS

Trevor Whitehead on his Retirement

TREVOR WHITEHEAD 1934-2007.

Members of Keynsham & Saltford Local History Society who attended Trevor's memorial service at St. John's Church, Keynsham on 5th March, heard tributes spoken regarding his many talents and, in particular, his musicianship and work as a church organist, his substantial contribution to the production of the Keynsham Talking Newspaper and his life-long interest in the history of the fire service.

Trevor was born in 1934 at Carrickmacross in County Monaghan, in Ireland, where his father was the Church of Ireland Rector. Trevor moved to London in 1959. He and Margaret were married in 1962. They moved to Keynsham in 1968 and their son, David, was born in 1971.

After working for a few months at the DSS offices in Bath, Trevor joined John Wright, the medical publishers, at the Stonebridge Press in Brislington and soon also obtained the post of organist at Holy Trinity Church, St. Philip' s, Bristol, later serving in the same capacity at Brislington Congregational Church.

As a teenager in Ireland, Trevor first started to take an interest in the fire service and began to research its history. This led to the publication of a short history of the Dublin Fire Brigade in 1970. Trevor became a founding member of the enthusiasts' organisation, The Fire Brigade Society, in 1963, and served successively as its Metropolitan Area Secretary, editor of its magazine "Fire Cover", Western Area Secretary and Society Librarian. He was subsequently made an Honorary Life Member of the Society.

The setting up of the Keynsham Talking Newspaper in 1983 saw Trevor getting involved from the outset on the technical side and making a substantial contribution to ensure that the editions were produced to a very high standard. At the National Talking Newspaper Conference in Blackpool in 1991, Keynsham Talking Newspaper was officially recognised as the best in the country.

Service of Thanksgiving

for the life of

Trevor Whitehead

St John's Parish Church
Keynsham

Monday 5th March 2007
11.45am

Service led by Reverend Andrew Judge

After a spell as the official deputy organist at St. John' s, Keynsham, Trevor continued to assist by playing for services there from time to time and was one of the rota of organists at St. Margaret' s Church, Queen Charlton. His knowledge of organs and their specifications was prodigious and he was always happy to share that knowledge with fellow enthusiasts.

His working life was disrupted by upheavals in the publishing industry and he was obliged to change jobs, eventually taking a post at West View Surgery in West View Road, Keynsham for a few years prior to his retirement in 1999.

Despite suffering ill-health in retirement, Trevor persevered with researching fire service history and his efforts were rewarded in 2004 with the publication of a definitive history of the Dublin Fire Brigade. His co-author was his friend, Tom Geraghty, who served in the brigade for more than thirty-five years. The book was received with great acclaim and Trevor and Margaret were honoured guests at the book's official launch in Dublin.

Dennis Hill.

BOOK REVIEW

Roman Mosaics of Britain vol. 11 South-West Britain, Stephen R. Cosh and David S. Neal (2005), xiii + 406 pp., including 390 figures in colour and black and white. ISBN-10 0-9547916-1-4. ISBN-I 3978-0-9547916-1-2. Published by Illuminata Publishers for the Society of Antiquaries of London, £160 per volume.

People in the Keynsham area will be particularly interested in this volume, though they will probably prefer to consult it at a library rather than purchase it at £160. It includes a full treatment of the Keynsham villa at Durley Hill and sets it in the context of the Avon valley, with the related villas at Brislington and Newton-StLoe. The recent discoveries at Bradford-on-Avon will be in volume IV. There is a reconstruction drawing of the mosaic floor of the hexagonal room with figured panels showing scenes from Greek legends, which helps one to visualise the power of this remarkable structure. It is sad that these panels are still languishing unseen in crates in the basement of Keynsham Town Hall. For the first time, one can see together the fragments of mosaic from the many rooms in the villa, and appreciate the wealth and culture of the establishment.

Coins found in the villa by the excavators in 1920~s (later stolen from Fry's Museum) range from AD265 to 375. But comparative study of the mosaics suggests that they were laid no earlier than the second quarter of the fourth century. This means a very short life for the villa at its peak of prosperity. Readers may like to go out to the cemetery at Durley Hill and see for themselves the stone steps in the north corridor of the villa, which have been preserved in situ near the cemetery chapel. Then consider how such a short life led to such pronounced wear to the steps. One possible answer may be that there are indications of occupation at a much-reduced standard of living, which may have continued well into the fifth century. We do not know, because the original excavators found no dating evidence for any part of the villa. Another local villa of great interest is that at Newton-St-Loe. It was discovered in 1837 when a cutting was made for Brunel' s railway: one passes close to

the site as one approaches the traffic lights at the end of the dual-carriageway towards Bath. The glory of this villa was a mosaic pavement depicting the god Apollo with his lyre, surrounded by exotic beasts. It was taken up and relaid, for a time, in the waiting —room of Keynsham Station. When it was removed it was hacked to pieces crudely and deposited in Bristol Philosophical Institute in Park Street, Bristol. Later, it languished in a Council yard and somehow became damaged by fire. Eventually it became an embarrassment for Bristol City Museum. Thanks to the painstaking and erudite work of Anthony Beeson (librarian at Bristol Central Library) much of it was put together again and displayed, for a short time, in the entrance hall of the City Museum. Like the Keynsham panels, it has now been relegated to the basement of the museum. So it is good to have the illustrations of it in this volume to remind us that in the fourth century this part of the Avon valley was one of the most prosperous and civilised parts of the Roman Empire.

Keynsham and Newton-St-Loe are not alone in showing scant regard for the treasures they inherited. Apart from the Roman Bath complex at Bath, there is little to be seen today of the rich Roman life in the Avon valley, or, indeed, anywhere in the South West. We must be grateful to have this massive record of what is known to have once existed.

This is the second volume of a project to publish, in four volumes, a detailed and illustrated account of all the Roman mosaics known in Britain. It has been a massive task for the authors, Stephen Cosh and David Neal, which has resulted in almost doubling the number of known Romano-British mosaics to almost 2,000.

In addition to gathering the data, they set themselves the task of illustrating the mosaics by drawing and painting them, tessera by tessera. The result is a satisfying visual uniformity. Where the original mosaic no longer survives, use is made of the many engravings and lithographs created by nineteenth century antiquaries. These are now rare and not easy to access.

It would be unrealistic to urge readers to go out and buy this volume (though as a limited edition it might be regarded as a good long-term investment). But do try to consult it at a library, and wallow in these visual glories salvaged from the wreck of the Roman Empire.

CHARLES BROWNE.

Europa & the Bull Mosaic

Detail of a Bird Mosaic

RECENT LOCAL BOOKS BY MEMBERS OF K & S L H S.

"St John the Baptist, Keynsham. A history of the Church," Elizabeth White. Published by The Bridges Society. Friends of Keynsham Church. 2005. ISBN 0-9534402-14. Price £6-99 from the Parish Office.

This well illustrated, lively, entertaining book covers, not only the origins and history of the church up to *1975,*. but gives fascinating mini-biographies of some of the vicars, especially those from *1854* —1967. Specific chapters cover the Medieval Church, the upheaval of the XVI and XVII centuries, Anglicans and Puritans, somnolence of the XVIII century and the Resurgence of St. John' s, and XX century. The five appendices include a list of Incumbents, details about the organ and the legends about Handel and Keynsham (by the late Trevor Whitehead) and the church bells.

Elizabeth read Medieval History at Bedford College, London and obtained teaching qualifications at Cambridge. She taught at various schools, including Midsomer Norton Grammar School in 1960, and, for the last ten years to her retirement, at Wellsway Comprehensive. She then completed an M.A. in Local and Regional Studies at Bath Spa University College. She joined Keynsham Church Choir in 1971, and became an active member (later, Chairman) of K&SLHS, part writing and editing a Post-Medieval history of Keynsham & Saltford (published in 1974).

"Keynsham Abbey. A Cartulary." Barbara J. Lowe. Published Trafford.2006.ISBN 1-4120-9534-4. £12.43. Available from Society, Church's and Family Books.
This is essentially a history of Keynsham Abbey, bringing together, in roughly chronological order, all the relevant information the author has been able to assemble during forty years research and thirty years' excavation on the Abbey site. Evidence for early Christianity, an high status Christian cemetery

(Anglo-Saxon) and pre-abbey church is discussed, before giving glimpses of daily life in Keynsham' s Victorine Abbey through each of the Medieval centuries. The book is well illustrated with 24 text figures and 24 colour plates.

Barbara was educated at Bishop Fox's Grammar School, Taunton and Bristol University where she read Mathematics and Physics, later obtaining teaching qualifications and an Education degree. In 1955, she moved to Keynsham with her husband and two young sons. Appalled by the wholesale wilful destruction of Keynsham's Heritage listed buildings galore and the determination to cut a by-pass through the known precinct of Keynsham' s Romanesque Abbey she attended archaeological classes held by Bristol University and the WEA. She joined a group of volunteers from the Folk House Archaeological Society who had undertaken to chase the bulldozers along the by-pass cutting and to survey, record and rescue any revealed structures or artefacts. For her work and published reports in this field, she was made a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London (FSA). She has been actively involved with K&SLHS ever since its foundation and has worked with its research team to become author and co-author of a number of local books.

"Firefighting in Bristol 1877-1974. An Illustrated History." Dennis Hill. Tempus. ISBN 978-0-7524-4090-3. £12-99, post free, from the author.

This paperback is mainly a photographic record containing most of the illustrations from the author' s earlier book "Bristol Fire Brigade 1877-1974" published by Redcliffe Press in 1999, but which is now out of print. Further research in 2006 revealed approximately 100 further pictures which are included in this new

book. In an informative and entertaining way, Dennis portrays the changes in the service from the early horse..drawn days, through innovations like the turntable ladder and fireboat, right up to 1974 when Bristol' s service became part of the County of Avon Fire Brigade.

Dennis was born in Bristol, attended Clifton College and then trained to be a Chartered Accountant. He qualified in 1961 and worked in Bristol, Wiltshire and Bath becoming a partner with the firm Moore Stephens prior to his retirement in 1995. He moved to Keynsham in 1964 with his wife and son. Having a broad interest in local history, Dennis joined K&SLHS, later becoming the Society' s auditor and presently holds the office of Secretary. He is a keen environmentalist and is an active member of Friends of Manor Road Community Woodland.