

CHAPTER 6

ARP (Air Raid Precautions)

As it was thought that as soon as war was declared, we would be bombed and invaded, air raid precautions commenced immediately. So when the sirens or ARP Wardens' whistles were heard, with great haste we all jumped out of bed and hurried post-haste to either the cellar, trenches, entries or under the stairs, wherever we felt safest. Then when the "all clear" was sounded, back into bed.



ARP Wardens in Anchor Lane, 1944. From the left, back row: Don Peake, Tom Truswell, David Evans, Edwin Fern, Bert Morris, Sam Mattison, Ray Allen, Charlie Exon, Herbert Savage. Front row: Marjorie Exon, Harry Stanton, Jack Scream, Fred Farrands, Sid Hicks, Eric Miller.

During the year before the war, it was envisaged that should war come, the country would be subject to air attacks, so throughout the country, Air Raid Precautions (ARP) were established. Jack Scream, the postmaster of Hathern, was an early ARP Warden, who trained and so became the head warden of Hathern team. The first ARP post was in a cellar of the Stone House in Wide Street, at that time the residence of Jack Goodacre. Later, an unoccupied house in Anchor Lane, now demolished, became the ARP post.

Although no bombs were to fall on Hathern, in August 1940/1 a small one fell near Hathern Railway Station. I remember a group of children searching there for bomb fragments and one bright lad hoping a bomb would fall near his home; of course, he wanted fragments!



ARP badge.



Pieces of high explosive bomb, dropped near Hathern Station, 1940.

including black paint, were used for this. Street lights were left unlit, so unless there was moonlight we groped about with the faint light of semi-blackout torches. Bikes likewise were only permitted enough light to see with and to be seen.

During the blackout days, there were no organisations for teenagers in Hathern, so one evening my friends and I called on Miss Hilda Dormer, who was a councillor; she was sympathetic but unable to help. Miss Dormer became first Lady Mayor of Loughborough in 1947.

Francis Savage

When the sirens went in Loughborough we could not always hear them and the local wardens, Jack Screaton and Gaffa Fern and one or two other people, would come round shouting "Air-raid Warden, take cover", and blowing their whistles.

Jack Dennis

For the safety of Hathern schoolchildren in case of an air raid, the school bell tower was taken down in October 1940. The bell was inscribed: Taylor, 1850. The school was built in 1849.

Geoff Fletcher



Sign indicating Wardens' post.

There were no lights in the village. Everybody had to black out the windows, sometimes with something fastened at the window. If you did not black out, somebody soon used to come round. If you rode a cycle, you had to have a light that dipped down on to the road. You couldn't see anything in front of you; all you could see was the road! The ARP had a place at Fuller's factory. At night they used to bring potatoes for me to roast for them for their supper.

Grace Miller nee Monk



An ARP Warden would wear a distinctive helmet.



The bell and whistle would be used to alert the population.



The Defence Medal was awarded to those who had served as Wardens.

Iron railings and gates, etc. were taken by law to be melted down to help the war effort. Lots of people criss-crossed their windows with sticky tape to protect them from shattering in case of any blasts from bombs or shrapnel. Windows had to be blacked out, and many men made shutters for their windows. If there was the slightest bit of light showing, the ARP wardens who patrolled the streets, would knock on your door and ask you to "Put that light out". My dad was an ARP warden, and was out patrolling the streets most nights.



Incendiary bomb, approx 35 cm in length. These would be dropped in great numbers, and would burn for several minutes.

Cycle lamps and torches had to have a hood so that the light shone down; they were very dim. My grandparents lived next door to us and often at night if the sirens sounded, there would be ten of us in their house including five children lying on grandma's bed, which was downstairs.

Vera Sparks nee Savage

The local ARP branch was in charge of advising on blackout precautions (no lights showing), sounding the air-raid siren, and fire watching. They took turns in manning buildings such as Fuller's factory, in the expectation of spotting and putting out fires if incendiary bombs were dropped on the village. They had special long-handled scoops and containers for incendiary bombs, which were quite small but generated intense heat.



A firewatcher would pick up the burning bomb with a special shovel and place it in a bucket of sand, where it would burn harmlessly. A simple stirrup pump would be used to put out any fire that had been started by the bomb on a wooden roof.

There were a few incendiary bombs dropped in surrounding villages but none in Hathern. It was suggested that the German bombers jettisoned their bomb load when returning home from missions to the likes of Coventry or Rolls Royce in Derby. The German bombers could be identified at night by the distinctive noise of their engines which could be heard for many miles as they flew over Leicestershire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. Their fighter escorts did not have the range to fly with them and neither did we see many of our fighters, which were mostly based along the south coast and the approaches to London. Therefore not many German planes were brought down in our area unless the guns around Coventry and Derby managed a hit. The saturation bombing of Coventry caused huge fires, the glow of which lit up the sky and plainly visible from Hathern.

With no street lights and the headlights on cars and lorries shrouded, navigation during fog was a bit of a lottery. Fortunately, there were only a few vehicles on the roads and it was usual for pedestrians to carry a torch to keep them on the straight and narrow.

Tony Swift

Used to take gas masks to work, in a box over your shoulder. Everything had to be blacked out including bicycles with things over the lights. But you couldn't see properly in the dark with them. No wonder we've got bad eyes now!

Jean Reid nee Strutt

Gas Masks were uncomfortable things that were soon issued to everyone when war was declared. They had to fit very tightly. How grateful everyone was that they never had to put them on for a gas attack. It was uncomfortable enough to have to practise regularly putting them on and that was only for a short time.

Mary Warrington

Mr. Fern, the former Headmaster of Hathern School, went round the village to enquire about gas masks.

Nancy Hilsdon nee Bramley

We had to carry our gas masks everywhere, and every so often had to practise wearing them to make sure they fitted properly.

Audrey Sharpe



Everyone was issued with a gas mask.

Gas masks had to be taken wherever we went. My daughter Joan and her friend Pat Adcock were always forgetting to bring them home from school.

Ruth Thompson

The gas masks all had to have another bit taped on to make them more efficient because they had got some other gases we thought they might use. They were a bluey-green colour. You used to take your gas masks to the pictures and to school, and when nothing happened, nobody bothered anymore. It always amazed me how the boxes survived because they used to get wet through. To make them more fashionable, people used to get an oil cloth and make a cover for them.

Bill Tollington

Everyone was soon kitted out with gas masks, which we had to take with us everywhere we went. Babies and small children had gas masks similar to carrycots and had to lie in them. Fortunately, they never had to be used.

Vera Sparks nee Savage

The Conway sisters of Garendon Avenue can remember that you had to take a gas mask when you left your house. The small children had Mickey Mouse ones.

Margaret Quemby nee Conway