80: The Boer War peace celebrations

Law and order has been maintained by the police in Bourne for the last 150 years even through turbulent times except for one instance in the early years of the last century when for a few hours, uniformed officers lost their authority during one of the biggest cases of civil disturbance in our history. The Second Boer War that had started in South Africa in 1899 aroused deep feelings of patriotism in English hearts but a jingoistic fervour was also whipped up by the popular press and soon spread throughout the country. The conflict had began with a string of British defeats that have become bywords in our history, Mafeking and Ladysmith among them, but finally ended on 31st May 1902 after two years and seven months when the Boer leaders signed the terms of surrender although the announcement did not become public in London until the next day which was a Sunday.

The news reached Bourne soon after midday on Monday 2nd June and there were immediate demonstrations around the town and although the police were patrolling the streets, there were no infringements of the law that called for their intervention. But by evening, after the public houses had opened, the atmosphere changed and from 9 pm, the police were involved in a running battle with revellers, many of them who had been drinking heavily. Bonfires were lit in the Market Place and South Street and blazing tar barrels rolled down the road.

South Street in 1902

The police made repeated attempts to break up the disturbances but were met with such cries as: "Bring out another, boys! Get another ready, boys!" and instead of dispersing, the crowd started more fires, sometimes using fireworks such as squibs and crackers, and at one point, planks and piles of faggots stolen from the yard of the Red Lion public house were brought out to keep them burning.

The Bourne police chief, Superintendent Herbert Bailey, joined his men on the streets in an attempt to halt the demonstration and tried to prevent a lighted barrel being rolled down South Street. "I managed to stop it before it got to the Red Lion", he said afterwards, "but stones were thrown at the police. The streets were packed and the crowd was a very disorderly one." There were also disturbances in West Street after a

lighted tar barrel was rolled out of the yard adjoining Cliffe's furniture shop. The police moved in to stop it with some constables striking out right and left with their truncheons but this incensed the crowd who attacked them and many angry and violent scuffles ensued.

The police strength in Bourne at that time was one superintendent, one inspector, two sergeants and 15 constables, all based at the station which was then situated in North Street, but these proved to be insufficient to deal with the growing turmoil and so Bailey called in reinforcements from surrounding villages including Morton, Bourne Fen and Little Bytham, and order was eventually restored in the early hours of Tuesday morning. A total of 29 people had been arrested and the following week, on Tuesday 10th June, all appeared before a special sitting of the magistrates at the Town Hall.

There was great excitement in the town as the word went round and half an hour before the court was due to start at 11 am, large crowds had assembled in the Market Place in an animated mood and when the defendants arrived, there was a rush for the available spaces in the public gallery amid cheers for the defendants and jeers for the police. The first 22 accused were charged with starting a fire and the other seven on a variety of offences involving assaulting and obstructing the police, throwing missiles, including fireworks, assaulting the police and resisting arrest. A total of 30 summonses had been taken out against the defendants who all pleaded not guilty and the bench agreed to hear the cases as one, a wise decision because by this time the magistrates were well aware of the mood in the town and that rioting could break out again at the slightest provocation.

They were defended by a local solicitor, Alexander Farr, who tried to discredit the actions of the police in bringing the charges against the few when the majority were equally culpable. He told the bench: “I really would have thought that under the exceptional patriotic circumstances it would have been much better if the authorities had used a little more discretion and pandered to the crowd who were not out for any unlawful cause but merely for a spree in common with the rest of the country. The whole crowd were all out to see the fire although the defendants have been singled out as scapegoats. There are others inside and outside this court house who were as guilty as the defendants."

After a day long hearing, the magistrates decided to take a lenient view but the chairman, Colonel Albert De Burton, told the defendants: “It must be thoroughly understood that a day of rejoicing must not be a day of lawlessness. The news of the peace declaration was a great occasion but there is no reason why a large part of the population should be forced to lock themselves in their houses. Nor could it be much enjoyment to the police to be knocked about. It must be perfectly understood that on the next occasion, such as the Coronation, the town must not be turned upside down."

All of the cases were dismissed except for three defendants accused of incidents against the police who were bound over to keep the peace for three months in the sum of £5. The decision brought an outburst of applause in the courthouse and cheering among the crowd that had gathered outside and the town band was quickly turned out to parade the accused men in triumph through the streets. But many waited outside the Town Hall for the departure of Superintendent Bailey who was given a hostile

reception when he left and the protestors followed him to the police station hooting and jeering all the way. There was an air of jubilation in the town and the parades continued up and down the street until past ten o'clock when everyone dispersed quietly and went home.

81: Our patriotic contribution during the Great War

One of the most impressive patriotic gestures ever made in Bourne was the establishment and running of a military hospital to treat and care for soldiers wounded or gassed in the trenches of Flanders and France during the Great War of 1914-18. The government asked the town for its help in a time of national crisis and the people responded in no small measure, making a major contribution to the war effort without seeking to ask the reason why. Selfless work to ensure that the project succeeded was carried out by people who came from all walks of life who were prepared to help when the call came and by the time the war had ended, almost 950 wounded soldiers had received comfort in this town.

The main hospital ward

On Saturday 31st October 1914, the War Office notified Major Cecil Bell, a local solicitor with extensive military experience as the former commander of H Company, the 2nd Volunteer Battalion, the Lincolnshire Regiment, that the first detachment of wounded soldiers were being sent to Bourne within the next few days and asking the local branch of the Red Cross to make all the necessary arrangements for their reception and comfort. This immediately sparked a flurry of activity in the town and male members of the branch were summoned at once for an ambulance practice that took place in the goods shed at the railway station adjoining the Red Hall. A meeting was held that evening attended by all doctors in the town, the matron of the Butterfield Hospital, Miss Marion Pile, and on Sunday afternoon, the Red Cross committee met with Mr Arthur Wall, chairman of Bourne Urban District Council, presiding.

It was decided that the old Drill Hall in North Street, originally built as a Calvinist chapel in 1868 and then used as the church Vestry Hall, be converted into a military

hospital with additional accommodation in the National School next door [now used as the Conservative Party headquarters] which had an inside communicating door. Technical instruction classes organised by Kesteven Educational Authority were usually held at the school during the week but these were transferred to the Council School in Abbey Road while other venues were also found for the various meetings, including the regular Sunday School, which were then held in the Vestry Hall.

A long list of requisites needed to equip the hospital was read out at the meeting and sufficient promises were made to provide them the following day when horses and wagons to collect them were loaned by several businesses including T W Mays and Sons Ltd, the local firm of fellmongers. By noon on the Monday, all of the necessary items had been delivered to the Vestry Hall where beds were erected around the room. The school was equipped for cooking the food and general scullery purposes while one of the classrooms was converted into a sitting room for the soldiers. The lady members of the Red Cross, under the supervision of Miss Pile, made up the beds, 20 in all, although this number was to increase in the coming months, and in the evening, the male members polished the wood block floor and by Tuesday morning, everything was ready for the reception of the wounded.

No definite information as to numbers or arrival date had been received although arrangements were made in anticipation of receiving 20 men on the Wednesday and prior to their arrival, the new temporary military hospital that had been prepared within a matter of days, was opened to the public for inspection and several hundred people turned up to take a look. In the event, the hospital did not accept its first patients for another two weeks. Seventeen soldiers arrived in Bourne by train from Lincoln General Hospital on Tuesday 15th December 1914, and were met by a party from the Red Cross Voluntary Aid Detachment.

Two of the town's family doctors, John Galletly and John Gilpin, were also in attendance and Dr Gilpin was eventually appointed commandant of the hospital. The men were all convalescent and only one required assistance in walking because of a leg injury, and they were ferried to hospital in cars provided by the Earl of Ancaster, Dr Galletly and other owners. On arrival, the soldiers were allocated their various beds by the two doctors.

So began the regular arrivals of wounded soldiers from the front that continued for the rest of the war. A report from September 1915, during a week in which there were 16 fresh admissions, said that the patients came from a variety of regiments fighting in France, some who lived locally, and most of them were suffering from gunshot wounds. Once they were able to walk, the town offered them the use of its facilities. The Bourne Institute in West Street made them honorary members during their stay, entitling them to borrow books and play billiards without charge, while the Bourne Angling Society granted free fishing permits to all members of His Majesty's Forces and all wounded soldiers and the Bourne Tennis Club allowed them free use of their courts which were then situated in Burghley Street.

Gifts from local people poured into the hospital for their welfare including grouse and rabbits, cigarettes, eggs, soap, apples, marrows, plums, beans, chocolate, butter, aerated waters, cabbages, onions, pears, celery and lettuce, and among the donors

were the Countess of Ancaster of Grimsthorpe Castle and Mrs Sarah Gardner, wife of Robert Gardner, the Bourne bank manager and artist who lived at Cawthorpe Hall.

As the number of casualties at the front increased, more beds were needed to care for the wounded at home and extensions were carried out to the hospital in 1917 when a temporary structure was built in front of the Vestry Hall and the entrance diverted through the National School, so allowing space for a further 15 patients, bringing the total capacity up to 40. The work was carried out by a local builder, Mr John Henry Roberts, of North Street, and completed in April of that year.

The war ended with the Armistice on 11th November 1918 and the hospital officially closed on Wednesday 1st January 1919 when the remaining patients were transferred to Lincoln General Hospital. The evening before, New Year's Eve, a dance was held for patients, nurses and orderlies. It was a tearful farewell as the last wounded soldiers, all recovering well, left from Bourne station the following morning aboard the 9.20 am train and many of the townspeople turned out to see them off.

Nurses and patients outside the hospital

The building was eventually cleared and returned to its previous role as the Church Vestry Hall which re-opened in February 1919 with a celebratory concert when its wartime role was recalled with fond affection. The many staff who had helped during its four years as a hospital were officially thanked when the peace celebrations were held on Saturday 19th July 1919 and during a ceremony at the Abbey Lawn, former Red Cross nurses received a gold bar brooch with the inscription "Bourne VAD Hospital, 1914-18" and Dr Gilpin paid a fulsome tribute to their work, speaking of the ungrudging spirit with which womankind had taken their part in the war while he himself was awarded the MBE for his dedicated and efficient work as commandant.

The hall has had a chequered history as a school classroom, a meeting place for various organisations and as a youth club but has recently been sold and converted into a private house. A plaque which once hung inside the building but is now in the Red Hall remembers those times with the inscription: "The South Lincolnshire branch of the Red Cross Society gratefully acknowledges the loan of this building as a

military hospital from November 1914 to December 31st 1918. 40 beds 945 patients treated. Staffed by V A D's Lincoln 46 & 17."

82: Letters from the trenches

Remembrance Sunday each November is intended as a living memorial for all those who gave their lives in the service of their country but is particularly associated with the Great War of 1914-18 which inspired the tradition. The conflict that cost the lives of so many touched most families in this country whose young men answered Lord Kitchener's call to arms to defend liberty and join the fight for freedom. Reality was to be a life of unimaginable horror in the trenches of Flanders and France and the beaches of Gallipoli yet they managed to remain optimistic and even cheerful in the letters they sent home to their loved ones. Their often heart rending correspondence also contains evidence of a deep loyalty to family and friends and the town where they lived which stirred their patriotism and allegiance to a cause that was often questioned yet they never wavered.

The first 15 volunteers from Bourne in 1914

Many of the soldiers sent to the front had been pupils at the Boys' Council or Board School in Star Lane [now the Abbey Church of England School in Abbey Road] and before leaving for overseas they had been persuaded by their old headmaster, Joseph J Davies, to keep in touch by letter and he replied to every one. In addition, he kept up a regular correspondence with his own two sons, Oliver in France and Victor, serving in Gallipoli. Thoughts of home have long produced a fruitful bounty for writers and the letters from Oliver Davies are particularly poignant. He was master at Edenham village school but volunteered for the army after his mother, Mrs Elizabeth Davies, had offered to take over his teaching duties in order to free him for military service. By the late autumn of 1915, he had been promoted to lance corporal and was serving as a signaller with the 2nd Battalion, the Lincolnshire Regiment, at the headquarters of the British Expeditionary Force somewhere in France.

He wrote home frequently and always poetically, and one particular letter sent on Friday 5th November compared his present surroundings with those of his home town: "If you want to imagine the kind of country we are in, take a walk down Bourne

Fen as far as Twenty. Put heaps more poplar trees there, blow down nearly all the houses, grow crops of barbed wire instead of corn and, above all, don't forget the mud, mud and more mud! There you have a fairly good idea of what the country is like. Many of the French people seem loath to leave their homes which are within shell range. If this were only a holiday, one could enjoy the country and the conversation of the people immensely. In some parts we saw truly magnificent scenery, the railways and villages while the guns are at it pretty frequently. Some fairly rattle, like gigantic carpet beaters."

On Thursday 11th November, he was again making comparisons with home when describing a countryside in the grip of war: "The villages look like ghosts of a bygone age. Houses are without roofs, some have the rafters standing, making them appear as gaunt skeletons. Of course, the big houses and the churches suffer most from shell fire. Just picture Abbey Road and the church in that plight. Not a house with a wall or roof standing intact, a church without a roof or spire, just traces of walls showing where it once was. Some of the villages round here must have been very pretty in peace time, all studded with trees. But now there is nothing but rain and mud. The untilled fields, some of them with unreaped standing crops in them, form another very melancholy setting in the countryside."

And again on Wednesday 17th November: "We work in one dugout and sleep in another. We are not so far back but that stray bullets don't reach our way for they do whiz harmlessly over the trench or dugout. One must be on the alert every minute. It is a case of responsibility and plenty of it. *Vigila et ora* or Watch and Pray, the old school motto. Kindest regards to all friends at Bourne and Edenham and to the schoolchildren and the scouts. This place is muddier than a Lincolnshire fenland dyke. Now it is past midnight. Hark! Boom! Bang! Again."

Meanwhile, Victor Davies was serving as a stretcher bearer at Gallipoli, and he too added his contribution to the letters home to Bourne and on 19th August 1915, he was already recognising the futility of the conflict. "We have cleared a considerable space of the prickly bushes which abound and formed a rough and ready hospital", he wrote. "Here at first we had wounded, but it became latterly more or less reserved for cases of sickness. This was because the firing line had advanced out of reach. The boys of our division have done yeoman service, as you have doubtless read ere now. The cost, I fear, is in proportion to the achievement. These things don't bear thinking about. They only make us realise what a hideous and monstrous thing war is and what a miserable, antiquated and senseless method it is of settling difficulties."

Victor was later badly wounded during an aerial bombing attack and sent back to Britain for surgery while his brother survived the war unscathed. Fighting ceased at 11 am on Armistice Day, Monday 11th November 1918, and within weeks, the soldiers started coming home but many never returned.

83: Bourne's reluctant hero who won the V C

Charles Richard Sharpe was born at Pickworth, ten miles north west of Bourne, to Robert and Charlotte Ann Sharpe on 2nd April 1889 and christened at the village church of St Andrew's the following year. He attended the village school and then became a farm labourer but left the village in 1905 when he was only sixteen (the

family legend is that he ran away from home) and enlisted in the Second Battalion, the Lincolnshire Regiment as a private but received his first promotion to lance corporal at the age of 19. When the First World War broke out, his regiment was serving in Bermuda but was called to active service, arriving in France on 6th November 1914, and by the following spring, he had been promoted to the rank of acting corporal.

During the spring of 1915, in an Allied assault on Fromelles by General Henry Rawlinson's 4th Army during the Battle of Aubers Ridge, Sharpe, then aged 26, became the first soldier of the war from his regiment to win the Victoria Cross, Britain's highest military decoration for gallantry in the field, awarded for most conspicuous bravery, a daring or pre-eminent act of valour, self sacrifice or extreme devotion to duty in the presence of the enemy. When two companies of his battalion reached the German lines near Rouges Bancs, north-east of Neuve Chapelle, after crossing No Man's Land under heavy fire, he captured an enemy trench single handed and led a successful assault on another.

The official citation published in the London Gazette on 29th June 1915 said: “Victoria Cross - Acting Corporal Charles Sharpe, 2nd Battalion Lincolnshire Regiment. For most conspicuous bravery, near Rouges Bancs on the 9th May 1915. When in charge of a blocking party sent forward to take a portion of the German trench, he was the first to reach the enemy's position and using bombs with great determination and effect, he himself cleared them out of a trench fifty yards long. By this time all his party had fallen and he was then joined by four other men with whom he attacked the enemy with bombs and captured a further trench 250 yards long."

Sharpe, who was always known by his nickname "Shadder", returned to England on leave for two months and on 24th July 1915, received his award from King George V at Windsor Castle and then took part in a recruiting drive, visiting many places in Lincolnshire including Spalding and Bourne. He was eventually recalled to his regiment and again became involved in front line action when he was the sole survivor on a ten-man bombing raid on the German trenches in Flanders and was badly wounded by a bomb and although he recovered and continued to serve, he carried several pieces of shrapnel in his body until he died.

He remained in the army after the end of the war, reaching the rank of sergeant and served for a brief spell in India and apart from his VC and campaign medals, he was awarded the Long Service and Good Conduct Medal for 18 years of exemplary service. He continued with the colours for a further five years after that and was discharged in 1928 with a total of 23 years' service but returned to the army for a further two years during the Second World War when he was in his fifties and although too old for active service, he was gainfully employed at home as a Master Sergeant Cook.

Charles Sharpe married a widow, Mrs Rose Ivy Sibley (née Cutting), and they had three children, Elizabeth Ann, who was born on 8th October 1933, John William, born on 4th September 1935, and Norris, birth date unknown but who died at the age of seven. As a civilian, he worked on various jobs in the Grantham and Bourne areas,

including time as a labourer and cleaner with the BRM organisation at Bourne and he also taught gardening and physical training at the Hereward Approved School in Bourne. It was here that he was injured by a splinter when the school was bombed towards the end of the Second World War. He lived at No 68 Woodview and after a spell as a council refuse collector, his last job was as a gardener for the Bourne United Charities and ironically, one of his duties was to tend the cenotaph and surrounds in the town's War Memorial gardens where the dead from two world wars are remembered.

He eventually moved to live with Dorothy, his daughter from an earlier marriage, at Workington, Cumbria, but thirteen months later, on 17th February 1963, he was taken ill and died in Workington Infirmary after a fall, aged 73. The funeral was held at St Nicholas' Church, Lincoln, with full military honours and he was later buried at the city's Newport Cemetery.

Charles Sharpe and his other medals

Charles Sharpe was from all contemporary accounts, one of the most unlikely war heroes. He was a farm worker fiercely proud of his rural Lincolnshire heritage, totally unpretentious and an utterly unassuming and modest man. On returning to England after winning the VC, he was asked by a journalist to relate the details of his actions but he said simply: "A British soldier will never glorify his own deeds. I only did my duty."

After his death, his medals and decorations passed to his children who decided to sell them in 1989 and they were sent to Christie's auction rooms in London where they were bought by South Kesteven District Council for £17,000 and copies are displayed in the chairman’s room at the council's headquarters at Grantham while the originals are on permanent loan to the Royal Lincolnshire Regiment and can be seen at their museum in Lincoln. The name of Charles Sharpe has also been remembered in Bourne's street names and a small cul-de-sac off Beech Avenue is known today as Sharpe's Close.

84: The Belgian refugees of the Great War

The plight of refugees arriving in this country hoping to start a new life became an emotive political issue during the last general election campaign and although there is widespread opposition to illegal entry, we tend to forget that Britain has a creditable record for providing homes to those who have been displaced by war and who come here with government consent. Many have settled here permanently,

becoming part of the communities in which they live and adding greatly to the richness of our national life. The occupation of Belgium by Germany during the First World War of 1914-18 resulted in a flood of refugees from their homeland into this country. There was great public sympathy for them among the British people and every town and city was asked to help find them somewhere to live. A Central Committee was set up by the government in London to co-ordinate offers of accommodation and in November 1914, a letter was sent to the Vicar of Bourne, the Rev Harry Cotton Smith, seeking his help and he called a meeting of the Relief Committee set up by Bourne Urban District Council to handle wartime emergencies. It was held at the council offices in North Street on Monday 2nd November under the chairmanship of Councillor Arthur Wall.

The vicar told the meeting about the request but he pointed out that since receiving the letter requesting assistance, Bourne had also been asked to organise a military hospital to take wounded soldiers from the front line and these preparations were now underway. There was likely to be a charge on local funds for this purpose, he said, and several people he had spoken to had questioned the advisability of accepting refugees until they had ascertained the liability of the town to the reception of the military personnel because a government grant was available for this purpose only and did not extend to assistance for refugees.

It was suggested that accommodation for a large family could be provided at the hospital for infectious disease in Manor Lane for which the urban council paid a retaining fee for use when required but formal permission would have to be obtained from Bourne Rural District Council which was responsible for its administration. There was some discussion on this but the meeting then decided that it would be an unsuitable place for a refugee family and other accommodation should be found. The meeting also agreed to raise funds locally to cover the weekly sum necessary for the maintenance of the family.

Fund raising was also arranged and the headmistress of the Council School (Girls) in Bourne, Miss Clara Ward, collected 100 second hand garments that had been brought in by her pupils and after being repaired where necessary by the older girls, they were parcelled up and sent to the Central Committee in London for distribution among the refugees.

The first family sent to Bourne arrived in October 1914 and were housed at a cottage on a farm in Bourne North Fen. It consisted of a woman and her seven children, the youngest only seven months old, accompanied by her father. They said that their home in Belgium had been burned by the advancing Germans. The family stayed only a few weeks before returning to London and were housed elsewhere by the Central Committee.

The next refugees, a family of four, arrived on Thursday 26th November 1914 after the Congregational Church [now the United Reformed Church] undertook to house them in one of the cottages at the west end of the schoolroom, although they have since been demolished. The offer was put to the Central Committee that approved the idea provided church members contributed £1 a week towards their keep and this was agreed. Until then, the new arrivals, a man and his wife and two children, had been staying at a refugee hostel in Earl's Court, London. They were the Van Den Burgh

family from Malines, a cathedral city near Antwerp, a husband and wife with a son, Henry and a daughter Marie. They remained in Bourne for 2½ years when they returned to London. During their stay, they had been looked after by the Congregational Church and they left on their own initiative in May 1917 hoping to meet with fellow Belgians and secure work in the capital.

After the war, they returned to Belgium but one of them, daughter Marie, came back to Bourne. She had struck up a romantic attachment with a local lad, Harold Luesby, who was serving with the Royal Navy and they had met while he was home on leave. Marie lodged at first with Russell Hamling, a seedsman and greengrocer, and his family at their home in North Street, until the couple were married at the Abbey Church. Harold was then working as a builder and decorator and they went to live in Woodview and then in 1928 moved to a new home in Recreation Road. They had three children, a son, Graham, and two daughters, Jean and Pat. But Harold died of blood poisoning at the early age of 36 and Marie subsequently re-married to Dennis Martin but she too died in 1953 from cancer at the age of 52.

The Van Den Burgh family

Graham Luesby, now aged 78, a former painter and decorator, who lives in retirement in Gladstone Street, Bourne, remembers his Belgian relatives with affection because he spent many happy holidays with them before foreign travel had become so popular, staying for two weeks every year at Malines and elsewhere. A link with the Belgian refugees therefore remains alive in Bourne.

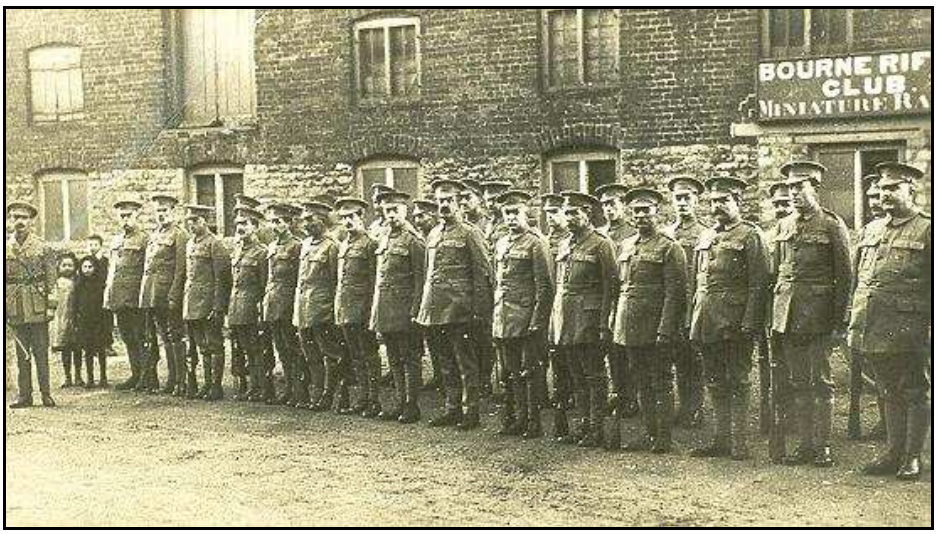
A similar situation occurred in Britain when Belgium was invaded by Germany during the Second World War of 1939-45, creating a flood of refugees seeking asylum and by 1941 there were 23,000 Belgian civilians living in this country, constituting the largest allied colony in the United Kingdom, although none came to Bourne. Most of them had reached England in May-June 1940 and the majority found employment as a result of assistance from the Ministry of Labour.

85: Shooting for King and country

The gun culture has largely disappeared from our society but it played an important role in years past when the ability to handle a rifle was considered an essential part of manhood and a necessary attribute for young men about to enlist in time of war. The late 19th century, when firearms were still a novelty, is a potent period in our history in the training of marksmanship when accuracy was an achievement and most towns and cities had a rifle range to develop these skills. Facilities for shooting practice were therefore seen as an inducement to recruiting and rifle ranges became popular, being used by both military units and civilian clubs.

Such a facility was provided by Lord Willoughby on the Grimsthorpe estate. It was used by the 15th Lincolnshire Company from 1861 until the unit disbanded in 1873

and in April 1890, the range was made available to the Bourne Rifle Corps that had been formed two years before, drawing its members from the Bourne district and from Billingborough. "It forms one of the safest and prettiest inland ranges in the country", said a local newspaper at the time. "The range extends 900 yards in front of the target, one and a quarter miles in the rear, and its width is 500 yards. The entire space comprised within these limits is free from the intervention of any building whatever. The butts are really cut into a large hill which gradually rises for some distance in the rear of the targets." The new range was formally opened in April 1890 when the veteran volunteer sergeant, William Hall, who had supervised the construction of the targets, had the honour of scoring the first bulls eye, despite a very high wind blowing from the left and heavy rain falling.



Volunteers parading outside the rifle range

A decade later, there was an added impetus to rifle training for young men. As a direct result of the Boer War of 1899-1902, in which many local lads went off to fight, the Countess of Ancaster suggested that more men in civilian life ought to be trained to handle a rifle in case they were needed for military service in the future and this lead directly to the formation of the Bourne Rifle Club.

The idea was first mooted early in 1902 when the troops were returning from South Africa. A meeting was called at the Drill Hall in North Street [now the Vestry Hall] on Thursday 20th March to consider the formation of a club to be affiliated to the National Rifle Association when the vicar, the Rev Hugh Mansfield, took the chair. He said that the objective was to provide instruction and practice in the use of the service rifle, to encourage recruiting for the army and auxiliary forces and to be a reserve for home defence.

The committee was delegated to draw up suitable rules and make arrangements for the running of a miniature indoor range for target practice. Forty members were enrolled during the evening and as the annual subscription was only one shilling and ammunition was to be provided free, it was expected that the membership would be large. The site chosen for the range was in the old maltings buildings behind the Bourne Institute in West Street. Conversion work got underway immediately and within two months the range was ready for an official opening by the Earl of Ancaster, accompanied by Lady Ancaster, on Wednesday 28th May 1902. A large

number of members and friends attended and Captain Cecil Bell, a local solicitor and commander of H Company of the 2nd Volunteer Battalion, the Lincolnshire Regiment, told them: "It is mainly through a suggestion by Lady Ancaster that this club has been started and it is chiefly due to their generosity that we now possess such an excellent indoor range." He then declared the range officially open and fired the first shot, followed by Lady Ancaster who scored a bull's eye. Several other ladies and gentlemen among the guests afterwards tried their hand at firing on the range and during the proceedings, the band of H Company played musical selections in the grounds of the institute.

William Hall, whose encouragement and advice had been so important for the success of the project, was a cabinet maker with premises in South Street, Bourne. He was also a prominent member of the volunteers, holding the rank of sergeant, and had won a reputation as a crack shot, representing the company several times at Wimbledon, the venue for the annual competition of the National Rifle Association since 1860, later transferred to the present venue at Bisley in 1890.

He was undoubtedly the longest serving soldier in the Volunteers and when he eventually resigned in May 1890, his impressive record was detailed by a local newspaper: “His length of service, his conspicuous ability as a non-commissioned officer, his almost unique success as a marksman, combined with his geniality, have rendered his name familiar among the rank and file of British volunteers. He has been practically identified with the Volunteer movement since its inauguration in this locality, having joined the 15th Company, 2nd Administrative Battalion, the Lincolnshire Rifle Volunteers, upon its formation in January 1860.

“He was made a corporal in 1864 and sergeant in 1871. When, in 1872, the 15th was disbanded, he joined the 18th Company, now the H Company, the 2nd Volunteer Battalion, the Lincolnshire Regiment. He has been an efficient marksman every year and upon three occasions he proved himself the best shot in the regiment. He has attended the National Rifle Association prize meetings every year since 1863 with one exception. He has been a winner at Wimbledon every year since 1872 and upon several occasions, a winner in the Queen's prize series, his successes in this competition being without a break from 1873 to 1879. He secured the Prince of Wales' prize in 1873 and was the only volunteer in the county who won the three great Wimbledon badges, the Queen's, Prince of Wales and St George's. He also had the distinguished honour of dining with the Prince of Wales at Wimbledon in 1887 at the invitation of Lord Wantage.”

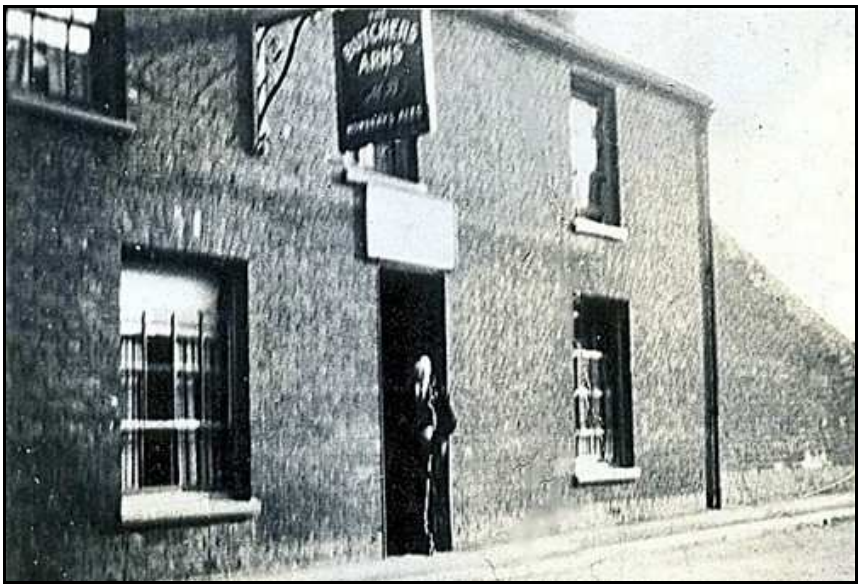
In January 1891, the contribution he had made to the unit was acknowledged when he was presented with a purse of money and a handsome testimonial as a token of the high esteem in which his services to the volunteer movement were held. Hall's politics were right wing and he was an ardent supporter of the cause, being secretary to the Conservative Club in Bourne whose members presented him with a gold watch for his services three years before his death and handed over by Mr William Younger, MP for the Stamford division which included Bourne. He retired from business in 1904 and contracted cancer soon afterwards, resulting in a long and painful illness and after a spell as a patient in Peterborough Infirmary, he spent the final five months of his life in a Bath chair that became a familiar sight in the streets of the town where he was still fondly known as Sergeant Hall. He died on Friday 7th July 1905, aged 68,

leaving a widow, three sons and three daughters. Two members of the volunteers represented his old company at the funeral.

86: The Eastgate plane crash

Compared with many other areas of the country, Bourne escaped the worst of the bombing during the Second World War of 1939-45. Enemy aircraft were often heard overhead at night, on their way to industrial targets in the Midlands, and occasionally incendiary bombs were dropped but little damage was done. On one occasion, the Hereward Approved School, situated on the outskirts of Bourne Wood, an area which is now Beech Avenue, was hit and one person injured, but this was a rare occurrence and probably the result of a Luftwaffe bomber jettisoning its load before returning home across the North Sea.

The disaster which hit the town at 11.52 pm on Sunday 4th May 1941 brought home to the people of Bourne the real consequences of the war and it remained a talking point for many years to come. A few minutes before midnight on Sunday 4th May 1941, the people of Bourne were woken by the sound of gunfire and the throb of aircraft engines as two planes battled it out over the town.



Charles Lappage at the door of the Butcher's Arms

World War II had broken out 18 months before and the German Luftwaffe was engaged in a massive bombing campaign against sensitive British targets in the industrial cities such as Sheffield, Birmingham and Newcastle. On this occasion, an enemy Junkers 88 was bound for the East Midlands, probably Grantham which was home to several munitions factories producing weapons and other military equipment for the armed services, when it was intercepted by a Royal Air Force Bristol Beaufighter and a dogfight ensued.

The Junkers loosed a number of incendiary bombs over the town but they failed to inflict any damage and after several minutes of combat, with flashes of machine gun fire lighting up the night sky, the Junkers was badly damaged and the pilot injured and the plane nose-dived earthwards with flames streaming from the fuselage. It crashed

on the Butcher's Arms alongside the Bourne Eau at No 32 Eastgate, demolishing the public house, setting fire to the ruins and killing seven people inside.

Among those first on the scene was the late Ernie Robinson who was on duty with a team of volunteers from the town's Civil Defence unit based at the Old Grammar School in South Road that had been specially trained to deal with air raid casualties. In 1998, then aged 97, he recalled the scene when they arrived: "We heard the plane coming down", he said. "It was only on the other side of the Abbey Lawn and so we did not have far to go and we turned out immediately. It was a shambles, a real mess. Soldiers were billeted in Eastgate and one of them who had been on guard duty had been killed. There was not a lot we could do to help and it was really a case of clearing up as best we could. We found two of the German aircrew and carried off their bodies to the stables behind the Six Bells public house in North Street. The police station was next door in those days and they took over as soon as we arrived and we left them searching through their clothing to find some identification. Bourne was usually peaceful during the war years but it certainly was not on that occasion which turned out to be one of the busiest nights of the war."

The Junkers had a crew of four and three of them baled out but two were killed when their parachutes failed to open and their bodies were found some distance away. The pilot, Adam Becker, aged 28, had remained at the controls and was buried in the wreckage of the inn where the aircraft had embedded itself in the foundations. The other two who lost their lives were Reinhold Kitzelmann, aged 22, radio operator, and Karl J Focke, aged 22, observer. A third crew member, the rear gunner, Rudolf Dachsesel, survived. He landed by parachute south of the town near Northorpe and was slightly injured but gave himself up to the Home Guard next day after walking into Bourne along South Road. He later returned with a police escort to recover a revolver he had hidden at the roadside a few yards from Baldock's Mill. The body of the pilot, Adam Becker, was found after extensive digging by the rescue services and all three of the bomber crew who had been killed were buried in the town cemetery the following Thursday after a short graveside service conducted by the Vicar of Bourne, the Rev Charles Horne. Shortly after the war, they were exhumed and the remains returned to Germany.

Engineering experts from the Ministry of Defence arrived next day and removed what was left of the aircraft for workshop examination but they did not recover everything and it is believed that one of the engines and other parts of the wings and fuselage still lie on the bottom of the Bourne Eau. The couple who ran the public house were killed in the crash. They were the landlord, Charles Edward Lappage, aged 63, and his wife Fanny Elizabeth, aged 59. Also killed were two relatives who were visiting, Mrs Lappage's sister, Mrs Minnie Gertrude Cooper, aged 62, and her daughter, Mrs Violet Frances Jackson, aged 29, who had only been married for a fortnight, her husband George, a fitter with the RAF, having been posted to Egypt a few days before. All four were buried together in Grantham cemetery.

The soldiers who were killed were all serving with the Loyal Regiment (North Lancashire) based at Grimsthorpe Castle although some platoons were billeted at various locations throughout Bourne, including Eastgate. They were Lieutenant Harold Schofield, aged 28, Private Harrison Mackean, aged 33, and Private Clifford James, aged 29, who was fatally injured and died in hospital at Sleaford a few days

later. Six other soldiers were hurt in the incident but all recovered from their injuries and returned to duty.

During the war, salvage teams had no time to retrieve debris after such incidents and so the hole was filled in and the site of the Butcher's Arms levelled. It remained derelict until after the war when it was bought for a garage development by the late Jack Edmund Lovell (1929-2005) of Riverside Motors that opened in 1959. Five years later, in September 1964, he was expanding the business with the installation of new underground petrol storage tanks when a digger that had been brought in to excavate the necessary holes to accommodate them unearthed a 1,000 lb. unexploded bomb eight feet below the surface, buried so deeply in the ground that its presence was undetected when the crater caused by the plane crash had been covered over and left 23 years before.

The remains of the pub signs and the l,000 lb. unexploded bomb

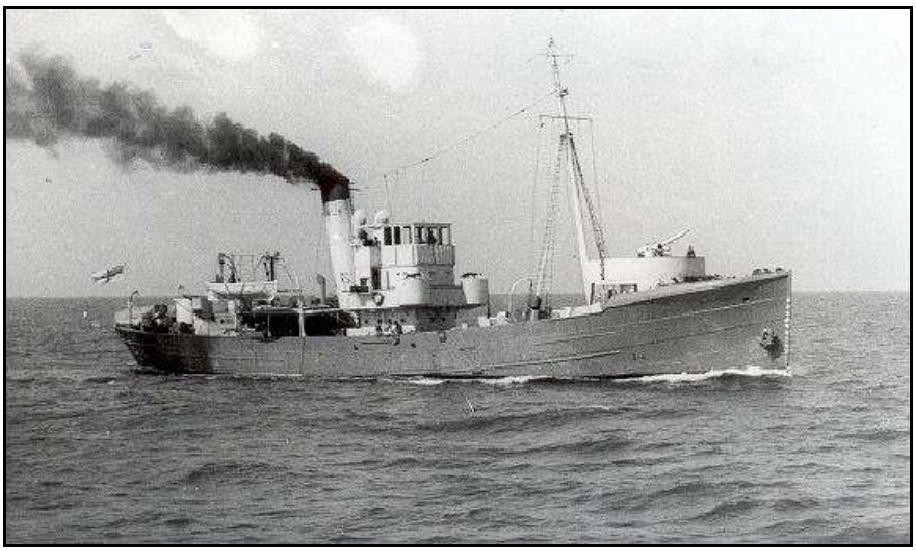
The police were alerted and the area cordoned off for the night while residents in Eastgate spent many anxious hours fearing that it might explode and some even went to sleep with friends and relatives as a safety precaution. The following morning at 3 am, a squad arrived from RAF Newton near Nottingham and loaded the bomb on to a lorry and took it away for disposal together with several clips of live ammunition, electrical wiring and a fuel pipe from the aircraft that had also been unearthed.

After Jack retired from business, the garage was demolished in 2001 and new homes built the following year now occupy the site but there is no indication of the tragedy that occurred there more than half a century ago. Memories of the disaster were revived in 1998 when a campaign was launched in Bourne to provide a lasting memorial to those who died, both German and British, in order that the younger generation might be reminded of the conditions that existed during those wartime days. An engraved plaque to be financed by public subscription and placed in the Abbey Church was contemplated but interest waned and the idea of a memorial came to nothing.

87: The warship that Bourne adopted

One of the great acts of national savings to fund our military forces during the Second World War was an event known as Warships' Week that was held throughout Britain to finance fighting vessels serving with the Royal Navy fleet. This was a patriotic appeal by the government for the public to dig deep into their pockets and provide the cash to fund new ships and Lincolnshire responded magnificently

with each town and village raising massive amounts. Here in Bourne, the Warships' Week appeal was held from 7th-14th February 1942 with a target of £35,000 to buy a minesweeper but in the event, £54,168 (£1.5 million at today's values) was collected and in June, the town adopted HMS Beryl at an official ceremony on the Abbey Lawn when Rear Admiral F A Buckley of the Royal Navy handed over a plaque to mark the occasion. In return, Bourne Urban District Council also gave a plaque that was eventually fixed on the ship and stayed there for the rest of the war. The Maritime Museum in Malta contains the actual contract signed by Rear Admiral Buckley on behalf of the Admiralty and the citizens of the town of Bourne who helped finance HMS Beryl, together with a brass plaque from the ship which commemorated the adoption.



HMS Beryl at sea

The boat had a chequered history. It was built at Hull in 1935 as a 650-ton fishing trawler named Lady Adelaide but was bought by the Admiralty at the outbreak of war in 1939 and renamed HMS Beryl, an auxiliary minesweeper of the Gem Class named after semi-precious stones, others being Jade, Coral, Ruby, Amethyst and Agate. The boat was 150 feet long, powered by a 700 h p engine and capable of 12 knots. The first commanding officer was Commissioned Bosun Harry Sellwood (later Lieutenant Commander Sellwood) and after the ship had been altered and adapted for minesweeping and anti-submarine work, he took it to Malta where it became involved in the long and bitter siege of the island during which action he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

HMS Beryl was sunk alongside Parlatorio Wharf in French Creek during an attack on the aircraft carrier HMS Illustrious on 19th January 1941. Only part of her funnel and the tip of her mast were still visible above water in the harbour and she remained submerged until refloated and repaired the following October. At that time, the waters around Malta were littered with mines sown by Italian naval craft and dropped by German aircraft. These claimed various naval and merchant ships. Two of Beryl's sister ships, Jade and Coral, were wrecked early in 1942 and Beryl became the largest naval vessel remaining afloat at Malta, the lone bulwark in the campaign, and was nicknamed "the Flagship of Malta" by the islanders because she flew the flag of the Flag Officer, Malta. After the Malta campaign, Sellwood left the ship in November 1943 when there was a complete change of crew and it went to the Greek Islands and

Turkey and later took part in the Sicily landings leading up to the invasion of Italy. HMS Beryl was decommissioned when the war ended in 1945 and the following year was sold to the Iago Steam Trawling Company at Fleetwood in Lancashire and renamed the Red Knight. It continued fishing until 1963 when it was sold for demolition and so ended its days in a maritime scrap yard at Barrow-in-Furness. Commander Sellwood had joined the Royal Navy in 1922 at the age of twelve, enlisting as a cadet at the Royal Naval College, Greenwich, and serving until 1947 when he was invalided out of the service and became a salesman for a firm of steel stockholders. He died in 1996 at the age of 86 and was cremated at Harlow, Essex. Checking through their father's papers after his death, his three sons, Richard, David and Robert, discovered the connection with Bourne and in the summer of 2004, made a pilgrimage to the town as a mark of homage to their father.

Their main port of call was to the Heritage Centre in South Street which contains a display of papers and artefacts connected with HMS Beryl, the centrepiece being the cast iron shield carrying the ship's crest that was presented to Bourne Urban District Council by the Admiralty in 1942. It would have been destroyed had it not been for the intervention of Bert Johns, of Stanley Street, secretary of the Bourne branch of the Royal Naval Association, who managed to save it for posterity together with the plaque presented by Bourne Urban District Council which had been returned when the vessel was broken up in 1963. This had been specially carved for the council when the ship was adopted by Jack Rayner, a woodwork teacher at Bourne Grammar School, and so it was sent there for safekeeping but that too was almost lost. It was about to be thrown on a bonfire when some of the old wooden buildings were demolished in 1995 but Bert again managed to save it.

A second warship associated with the Bourne area was adopted by South Kesteven Rural District Council whose administration at that time included several villages around the town. Their target was much more ambitious and they managed to raise £120,000 which was used to adopt HMS Polyanthus, a 925-ton vessel with a crew of 85 and one of the Royal Navy's Flower Class of corvettes of World War II whose main duty was safeguarding the passage of merchant ships bringing in vital supplies from the United States and Canada.

They were built mainly in Canadian and British dockyards in 1940-41 and soon became the workhorses of the North Atlantic, escorting supply ships and attacking submarines. In the autumn of 1943, the ship was part of the escort group with the combined westbound convoys that became the first victims of the new acoustic torpedoes introduced by the German Navy. In addition to several merchant ships, four of the escorts were hit and sunk including the frigate HMS Lagan, the four-stack destroyer HMCS St Croix, the frigate HMS Itchen and HMS Polyanthus that went down on September 21st.

88: Dad's Army protected the town against invasion

The Home Guard has won a place in our affection because of the excellent television comedy Dad's Army that was made 40 years ago yet delights us still. We may laugh at the antics of Captain Mainwaring, Sergeant Wilson and Corporal Jones but behind the humour of this organisation was a serious purpose when Britain was in danger of invasion. The Second World War began on 3rd September 1939 and

on May 14th the following year, the government broadcast a message asking for recruits to join the Local Defence Volunteers or LDV. On 23rd August 1940, Winston Churchill, then Prime Minister, changed the name to the Home Guard and it became the main protection for Britain until the war ended in 1945. The Home Guard was formed because there was a real risk of invasion by the enemy. Most able-bodied men were already in the forces and those left were either too young, too old, unfit or in reserved occupations, those jobs vital to the war effort. But those who did volunteer were expected to fight an invasion of crack German troops with nothing more than a collection of old shotguns, pieces of gas pipe, broom handles and sticks with knives tied on the end instead of bayonets. The government expected 150,000 men nationwide to join but within the first month, 750,000 had volunteered. By the end of June 1940, the total had exceeded one million and this number did not fall until they were stood down in December 1944 although the Home Guard was not actually disbanded until 31st December 1945.

The objective of the Home Guard was to delay an invasion force long enough for the regular army to form a front line from which the enemy could be repelled. The force relied on makeshift kit and equipment at the outset but were eventually issued with proper uniforms and conventional weapons. The Bourne company was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Horace Stanton, a Bourne solicitor, and the total strength was 339 men who were armed with 220 rifles, 20 machine guns and one Browning heavy machine gun and its responsibilities included guarding a number of public utilities such as electricity sub-stations, the railway stations at Bourne and Twenty, Braceborough reservoir and the waterworks at Wilsthorpe, the crossroads at Witham and Northorpe and other strategic points on main roads around their sector.

Some of the company at the old tennis courts in Burghley Street in 1943

Most of the officers and NCOs had no military training and there was a great deal of confusion during the early days as they began to set up their administration and organise regular supplies, particularly petrol which was rationed because of the war. The source for Bourne was the Jubilee garage in Abbey Road but most of what they had went to the regular troops who were stationed in the vicinity and so the Home

Guard usually went without. New equipment slowly filtered through and soon the unit was issued with rifles and live ammunition.

By 1942, an acceptable standard of efficiency had been established and the unit began issuing its first Routine Orders on January 14th giving details of future training and other rules and regulations concerning weapons, clothing and equipment. The battalion had by this time established its headquarters at No 11 North Street [the offices of Col Stanton's law firm, Andrews, Stanton & Ringrose] with the Vestry Hall in North Street as the Drill Hall. One of their jobs at this time was to advise the Bourne Invasion Committee which was formed at a meeting at Wake House on 18th March 1941. These discussions were always kept secret but included contingency plans for the parish of Bourne, the marshalling of resources, medical aid, communications, the distribution of food, the welfare of the civilian population and liaison with the military authorities. The committee's deliberations were wide ranging, studying every aspect of their actions if they were invaded and often their imagination exceeded the practicality of the situation. At one meeting, the committee decided that in the event of an invasion, women and children would be evacuated to Bourne Wood but the scheme was dropped as being unworkable.

In May 1942, Colonel Stanton had written his first Bourne Invasion Committee Report, a secret but impressive document detailing the location and vulnerability of the town in the event of an invasion and the contingency plans that had been drawn up for the protection of its 5,300 citizens which was then the official population figure. This document makes grim reading today and any thoughts of the laughter of Dad's Army soon fade for it talks of war at the front line in the peaceful countryside of England. The sombre tone of the entire document is summed up in the final paragraphs that reflect the seriousness of the situation and an indication that war might eventually be brought to our own doorstep: “Burials - circumstances permitting, all burials to take place in the cemetery but in the event of urgent necessity, it was decided that the west end of the Abbey Lawn adjacent to the vicarage garden should be used as an emergency burial ground.”

The emergency arrangements were never needed. Colonel Stanton issued his last order on 22nd December 1944 when the tide of the war had turned in the Allies’ favour and the Home Guard were being stood down. A total of 1,600 men from the town and district had passed through the ranks of the Bourne battalion and three men died while serving. One of his last tasks was the handing in of arms and equipment and a list drawn up shows the progress the Home Guard had made since those early days in 1940 when they were equipped with makeshift weapons and the formidable armoury that had been amassed since then. It included 878 rifles, 400 Sten guns, 56 Bren guns and 54 Lewis machine guns, eight anti-tank rifles, 700,000 rounds of small arms ammunition and 100 hand grenades. Not one of them had been fired in combat.

89: Welcoming the wartime evacuees

One of the exemplary patriotic acts by the people of Bourne during the Second World War from 1939-45 was in giving homes to hundreds of children who lived in sensitive areas of Britain that were likely to be bombed by enemy aircraft. Even before the declaration of hostilities, the government was making plans to evacuate vulnerable members of the population and although the war did not officially start

until 3rd September, billeting officers were already in place in safe rural areas across the country, knocking on doors to identify suitable accommodation. Over the next few months, 1½ million children were moved to safe places, by road, rail and sea, with gas masks, identity labels tied to their clothing and baggage and a supply of food for the journey. It was a step into the unknown for all of them and many were frightened at being away from their families for the first time.

Among those cities that were evacuated was Hull, the east coast fishing port where British shipping was a regular target for enemy planes, and the children were sent to safety as it came under attack. They were found temporary homes inland in the Yorkshire countryside, at Soham in Cambridgeshire and at Bourne where the arrangements for their stay were in the hands of the Women's Voluntary Service [the WVS] which established a network of 200 volunteers looking after the town and 28 of the surrounding villages to receive the evacuees, mainly from the Estcourt Street Board Schools for infants and juniors in Hull, the Craven Street School for juniors and the West Dock Avenue School.

Hull evacuees at the Abbey Road school in 1943

The lady in charge was the late Mrs Kate Cooke, the WVS chairman for the area, who was subsequently awarded the MBE for her community service. She checked on the available homes with her band of helpers, among them her teenage daughter Joy, now living in Canada. “The children arrived with labels around their necks, many quite distraught and lonely of course”, she told me. “They were magically taken into homes around Bourne quickly although I never understood why they came to us as we were on an obvious target ourselves if the Germans invaded. Many were unhappy at being away from their parents and developed bed wetting problems that distressed the people taking them in. I helped a little, but being only 14 was not that valuable other than talking and giving reassurance to some of the younger children and taking them out for little walks, but in that situation, every little helped.”

Evacuees arrived at regular intervals over the next three years, usually in large parties accompanied by several teachers. They made the trip from Hull by bus to the ferry that took them across the Humber, escorted by Royal Navy patrol boats, to Immingham where they caught a train to Essendine, on the main east coast line, and then they were transferred to a local train for the final leg of the journey to Bourne.

On arrival, they were marched in a crocodile from the railway station to the Corn Exchange where the WVS ladies were waiting with cups of tea and comfort and small parties of children were then taken around Bourne to the various homes selected by the billeting officer and the householders came out and chose the children they wanted to live with them. By early evening, most had been allocated a family and were settling into their new homes while others were sent to Bourne House in West Street, a large property that had been vacated by local solicitor Cecil Bell in 1940 and bought by Kesteven District Council for use as dormitory accommodation. A total of 900 children from the Hull area were eventually found homes in the Bourne area during these troublesome times.

The boys and girls were soon participating in the life of the town. Most of them attended the Abbey Primary School but accommodation was limited and so overflow classes were held in the schoolroom at the Baptist Church in West Street which was taken over by Kesteven County Education Authority in 1940 in order to create additional classroom space. The authority paid an annual rental of £10 plus rates, heating and lighting costs and the wages of a caretaker. The threat of aid raids meant that all windows were blacked out to prevent lights from showing after dark and a blast screen was erected in front of the two main windows in the schoolroom.

The evacuees remained until the war ended in the summer of 1945 although it was the early months of 1946 before arrangements were made for them all to return home. But their stay had made a lasting impression. One of the boys who came was Dennis Staff, then aged 11 years old, and he was billeted with Ernest and Lilian Grummitt at their home at No 42 Burghley Street. After the war, he emigrated to Canada and joined the Royal Canadian Navy where he had a distinguished career as a naval intelligence officer. But he always remembered his years in Bourne for the hospitality and generosity he received. "I have the deepest gratitude for your town", he wrote later. "You willingly opened your homes to dozens of strange children who were frightened and afraid but it was an enlightening experience that gave me confidence and determination for the future. My evacuation to Bourne opened up a new life for me, teaching many values which I still cherish, and I am truly grateful to you all. I wonder how many people today would open up their homes and turn their daily routine into chaos to provide a place of safety for strange children who spoke with an odd dialect. It is only in my old age that I can appreciate exactly the inconvenience they endured."

Our links with the Hull evacuees have continued to this day. Many remained in Bourne, married and brought up families, while others returned home to continue their lives. In the summer of 1990, some of those who had been sent to the Dyke area returned by coach for a tearful 50th anniversary reunion, arriving on Saturday 14th July to coincide with the annual fete and the thirty visitors all turned up wearing identity labels tied to their coats exactly as they had done in 1940. The Lord Mayor of Hull, Councillor L A Taylor, also sent a message of goodwill which now forms part of a small display in the village hall to commemorate those events.

90: The Battle of Arnhem and the link with Bourne

Veterans are remembering the Battle of Arnhem which took place 64 years ago this month and so provided a link with Bourne, a little known chapter of the town's history that occurred during the Second World War when troops waiting to

take part in this now famous action were billeted in the vicinity and established a bond that has never been broken. Arnhem is a city in the Netherlands and the airborne operation was launched in an attempt to secure a bridgehead over the Rhine, thereby opening the way for a thrust towards the industrial areas of the Ruhr in Germany and a possible early end to the war. It took place between the 17th and 26th September 1944 but was only partially successful with 7,600 casualties. In the months preceding the action, troops were massed in eastern England and particularly in Lincolnshire, where the airfields within easy reach of the Continent were situated and so began the intricate logistical operation of finding accommodation for them until the fateful day and Bourne was chosen to house the 1st Battalion of the Parachute Regiment.

The unit had returned to England from Italy in time for Christmas 1943 having been constantly in action with its two sister battalions for the previous 12 months, participating in the occupation of Algiers in North Africa, the seizure of Tunis and in helping Montgomery's Eighth Army drive out Rommel's retreating Africa Corps. The troops had established a reputation as an aggressive assault force, despite suffering enormous casualties but the unit still went on to the invasion of Italy and once it had been securely established, sailed for home and awaited further orders.

An advance party arrived at the beginning of November 1943 to start making the accommodation arrangements and the entire battalion of nearly 550 officers and men arrived by train at the end of the month. They established a headquarters at Grimsthorpe Castle and the various companies were encamped or billeted at Bulby Hall and in and around Bourne itself, at the Bull (now the Burghley Arms), the Angel and the Nag's Head public houses. The officers' mess was set up on the ground floor of the Masonic Hall, which was then situated behind Woolworth's store in North Street, while the officers were given rooms at private homes.

Troops were also billeted at the former English Racing Automobiles workshops in the Spalding Road that were taken over by the Delaine bus company in 1939. This building had been requisitioned by the army for military accommodation at the outbreak of the war and a total of 240 paratroopers were stationed here. A cookhouse and latrines were added to the premises, both of which survived until building alterations in 1989-90.

Major Christopher Perrin-Brown, one of the battalion's company commanders, remembered later: "Although these troops were not particularly well behaved, there was a total absence of evil. The affinity between host and guest blossomed overnight and in retrospect, like a happy marriage, the loves and laughs remained. Joys and sorrows were shared and borne. Rationing was in force and meat was hard to come by but the hosts had their ways and their pigs and the guests responded with venison from the park, despite a near miss on a park keeper that was later explained as weapon testing. And then there were the bicycles! Suffice to say that if the lake at Grimsthorpe Park had been drained after the troops had departed, it would have yielded a veritable treasure trove of two-wheeled transport."

When the action became imminent, the First Battalion was briefed and then confined to quarters ready to depart but there were five false alarms before they eventually left on Sunday 17th September 1944. "It was a bright and lovely morning", recalled Major Perrin-Brown, "and the townspeople of Bourne thronged the streets as flight after

flight of transport aircraft flew low over the town from the nearby airfields at Colsterworth, Grantham and Barkston, supported by massed formations of Lancaster bombers. Then suddenly, the guests had gone. The town was empty."

Of the 10,000 troops dropped by parachute behind enemy lines over Arnhem, only 2,000 escaped back across the Rhine. Of the 545 members of the 1st Battalion who had been stationed in the Bourne area, 459 were killed, wounded, taken prisoner or reported missing. Major Perrin-Brown was among those captured and sent to a P O W camp but he escaped at Christmas 1944 and after returning to England, joined the training brigade. He had already been awarded the M C for action in North Africa and the Arnhem campaign also earned him the D S O. After the war, he went to live at Folkingham. Other members of his unit came back to marry local girls they had met while stationed in the town and settled here.

Major Perrin-Brown (second from the left) at the exhibition

Local organisations held an exhibition at the Red Hall in September 1984 to commemorate the 40th anniversary of Arnhem and it was officially opened by Major Perrin-Brown. In the same month, nine members of the Bourne and District Round Table organisation drove a 1944 American jeep 400 miles to Arnhem to deliver an inscribed plaque from the mayor and citizens of Bourne to the burgomaster as a token of friendship between the two towns and he sent back a similar plaque to Bourne by return.

Ten years later, on Saturday 9th July 1994, streets on a new residential development built in Mill Drove were named after places involved in the famous campaign including Arnhem Way, Oosterbeek Close, Lonsdale Grove, Barkston Close and Pegasus Close. The following day, there was a service at St James' Church, Aslackby, to remember those who flew from the airfield at nearby Folkingham and did not return. Veterans from France and the United States attended and afterwards, there was a parade to the cemetery where a memorial erected by the parish council to the Parachute Brigade and American airborne divisions was dedicated. Then, at exactly 1 pm, the time the battle had started, a Dakota aircraft that had been used during the

airborne operations, flew over in salute. It was a touching moment for the Arnhem connection.

91: The War Memorial remembers the fallen

Remembrance Sunday or Poppy Day is held each November to remind us of the horrors of war and those who lost their lives in conflict, particularly the Great War of 1914-18. Most towns and villages have a permanent monument and in Bourne we have a war memorial in the gardens alongside the river in South Street. The design is based on the cenotaph in Whitehall, London, and is the work of the architects W E Norman Webster and Son. It is not recorded how many men left the town to join the armed forces during the Great War but it is known that 97 men lost their lives and their names are inscribed there although there have been suggestions that the figure is nearer 140 and that 40 names are therefore missing. The memorial also includes the names of 32 men who did not return from the conflict of 1939-45 and a further three who died on active service before the century ended.

Dedication of the War Memorial in 1956

The war memorial was unveiled and dedicated on Sunday 16th September 1956. The land, known as Wellhead Fields and Baldock's Paddock, had been purchased from the Marquess of Exeter by Bourne United Charities in 1945 to be preserved as a permanent open space for the town and part was used to remember those who had fallen in the two recent world wars. A memorial fund was opened and the public were asked to contribute with the result that £1,700 had either been donated or promised by 110 subscribers and £200 of this had come from people living outside the parish. In addition, Mr William Castledine bequeathed £500 towards the cost of developing the land and a benefaction under the will of Alderman Thomas Whyment Atkinson JP, of Haconby Hall, who died in 1954, provided the rental income from 142 acres of land towards the project. The dedication service was attended by relatives of those named on the memorial, civic leaders, councillors, the charity trustees and many ex-servicemen and women, and the band of the 4th/6th Battalion of the Royal Lincolnshire Regiment (TA) provided the music and an escort for the colour party

which paraded through the town. Ministers from all denominations took part in the service during which the chairman of Bourne Urban District Council, Councillor L R W Day, read lines from the war poem For the Fallen by Laurence Binyon. Wreaths were placed at the base of the cenotaph and the day's proceedings ended with the sounding of Retreat. Until then, Remembrance Day in Bourne was observed with a ceremony in the Market Place but ever since, a service of remembrance has been held at the memorial every November to commemorate the town's war dead.

The first casualty of the Great War from Bourne was Sgt Arthur Bates who was serving with the 1st Battalion, the Lincolnshire Regiment. He was a regular soldier who had already been in action during the Boer War and was subsequently posted to India, returning home in 1913 to visit his sister, Mrs Albert Scotney, who lived in North Street. At the outbreak of the war in 1914, he was sent to France, arriving with his battalion on August 17th and was killed in action at Mons a week later, on August 24th. He was 33 years old and is buried in Frameries Communal Cemetery in a suburb of Mons. Sgt Bates was a native of Morton and so his name is also on the village war memorial. Mrs Scotney subsequently lost her eldest son Fred on the Somme in 1916 where he died from exposure after being trapped in mud, and her husband was killed shortly afterwards. News of the death of Sgt Bates did not arrive in Bourne until Wednesday 30th September and he was remembered at a memorial service held at the Abbey Church the following Sunday.

There are two plaques containing the names of those from Bourne who fell in battle. One on the south side of the cenotaph lists those who lost their lives in the First World War and that on the north side contains the names of those who died in the Second World War and subsequent conflicts in other parts of the world. The last name of the last soldier who died in the Great War to be added to the Roll of Honour is that of G Coverley. He had been overlooked when the edifice was built and approaches from his relatives to remedy the omission were refused. The case was taken up by the Royal British Legion and his name was added to the memorial in 1995. The addition, together with the names of three servicemen who had died in more recent wars, William Dodd, Richard Jennings and John Booth, was dedicated at a special service on VE Day, May 8th, conducted by the Vicar of Bourne, Canon John Warwick, and attended by the Mayor of Bourne, Councillor Mrs Lesley Patrick and Lady Jane Willoughby.

35397 Private George Coverley of the Labour Corps died on 16th December 1918 as a result of war wounds. He was aged 35 years and it is said that he died in a military hospital in Scotland and his body brought to Bourne for burial in the cemetery. George Coverley's brother kept the New Inn on the Spalding Road which is now a private residence. No relations of Private Coverley are now left in Bourne.

When the war ended, many grieving parents refused to believe that missing sons were dead and continued seeking information about them through public notices in the newspapers. A poignant example of this which reflects the heartache of war for those at home, appeared in a local newspaper on Friday 24th January 1919: "Private George Hare, No 140820, of the A Company, 34th Machine Gun Company, was taken prisoner on 10th April 1918. Nothing has been heard of him since July 25th last. If anyone can give any information it will be gladly welcomed by his parents at 26, Hereward-street, Bourne." There was no news and the name of G Hare appears on the

War Memorial. The first man named on the War Memorial from the Great War is Harry Allen, an infantryman serving with the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment, who was killed in France in 1916. He was the son of Albert and Frances Allen, of Meadowgate, Bourne. He was mortally wounded during a trench raid while his battalion was dug in at the notorious Ploegstert Woods sector in France, universally known to the troops as "Plugstreet". There is also a plaque to Harry Allen's memory in the chancel of the Abbey Church in Bourne. The inscription says: “Sacred to the memory of Harry Allen of this town who died of wounds received in action in France 10th October 1916, aged 26 years, and was buried at Wieppe cemetery near Armentiéres. He died the noblest death a man can die, fighting for God & right & liberty, and such a death is immortality.”

Four of our war dead are buried together in the town cemetery with headstones provided by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. They are Private R J Sayer of the Lincolnshire Regiment, killed on 26th October 1940, aged 19, Lance Corporal D Milner of the Loyal Regiment, killed on 3rd October 1941, aged 21, Sergeant J R Everett of the Parachute Regiment Army Air Corps, killed 13th March 1944, aged 34, and Sapper C E Michelson, Royal Engineers, killed 9th November 1944, aged 29. The last headstone is a particularly poignant one because it also contains a memorial inscription to Private W S Michelson, killed during the First World War in Belgium on 7th October 1917, aged 35, and so successive wars claimed both father and son.

The War Memorial only contains the names of those from this town who died during the 20th century but many others were killed in previous wars. A marble tablet was placed in the Abbey Church in December 1885 with the inscription: "For Queen and country. In memory of Laban James Blades, 3rd Battalion, Grenadier Guards, who died at Souakim, 22nd May 1885, aged 23. Beloved by all his comrades, and particularly by Lieutenant A P Crawley, by whom this stone was erected." Blades was one of the victims of the Sudan campaign and he died of fever while returning home on the hospital ship Ganges.

The War Memorial in South Street