

The Second World War

BY AIR MAIL  
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# OUR LIVES

**The Second World War and its Legacy  
in the Northwest and Causeway Regions**

BY ORDINARY MAIL



EDITED BY JANE WILLIAMS

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Ronnie Gamble, *The Coleraine Battery Causeway Museum Service 2006*

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# OUR LIVES

IS DEDICATED TO THOSE WHOSE LIVES HERE TELL THE STORY OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND ITS LEGACY

OUR LIVES marks the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War and records the roles played by the people of the city of Derry, the Northwest and Causeway regions. It is one of a series of events and resources organised by the Causeway Museum Service and Derry City Council's Heritage and Museum Service with support from the Big Lottery 'Their Past Your Future' programme administered by the Northern Ireland Museums' Council.

OUR LIVES also tells of the legacy of the war and life after the war. This pack includes a CD, WWII Memories, in which local people share stories of the war; and activity sheets to help families, schools, community groups, local historical societies and others engage with the history of their area.



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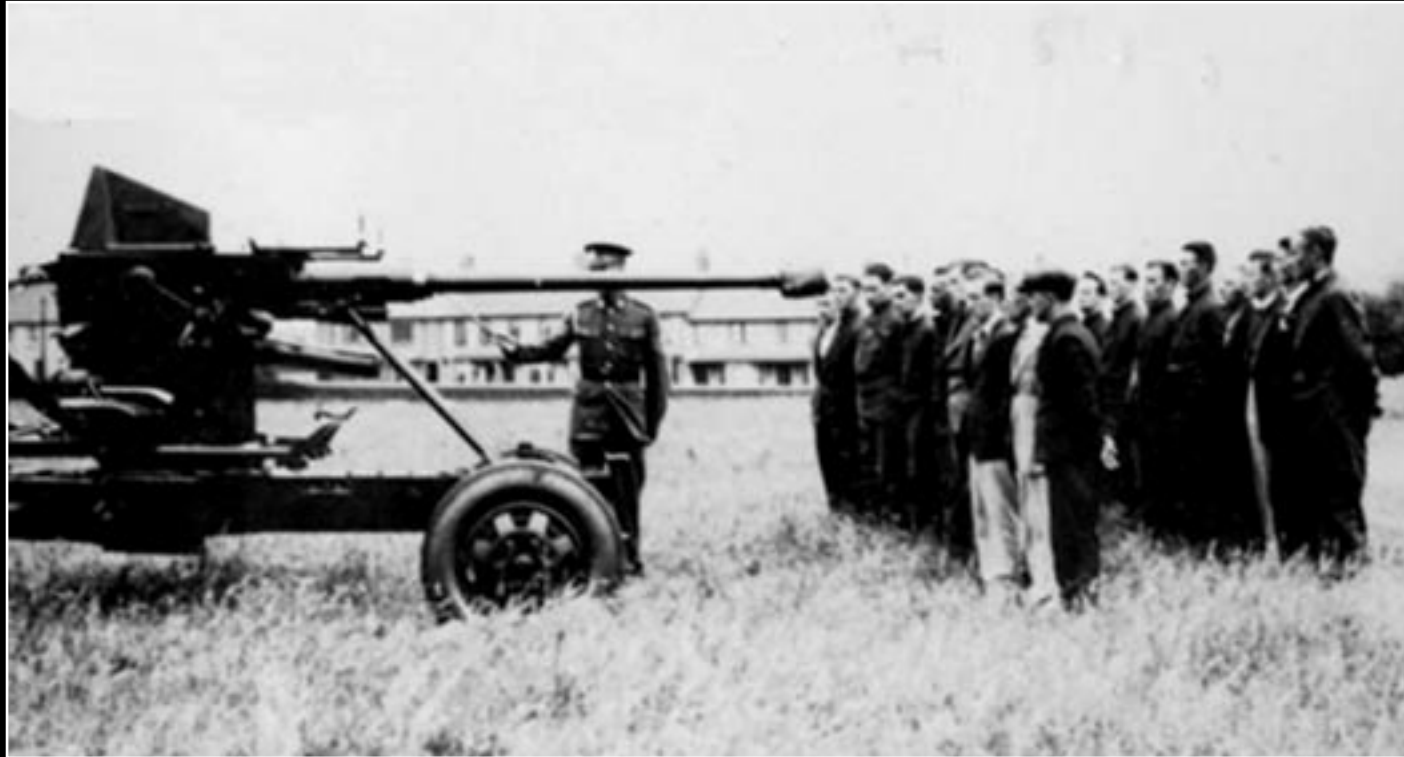
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# THE

# WORLD WAR





The Coleraine Battery training on the Bofors Gun at Calf Lane, Coleraine  
 Courtesy of Coleraine Museum



Drilling at Calf Lane Camp Drill Hall in 1939, at what is now Artillery Road  
 Courtesy of Ronnie Gamble Coleraine Museum

## War Breaks Out

On the 3rd of September 1939 Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain announced, 'This country is at war with Germany'.

Well, I was 7 years old... I just remember it coming through the radio. We had to sit very quiet while the news was on for my father wanted to hear.

MARY HENRY

I was getting up to go to Sunday school. My mother called me down for breakfast and she said, 'Did you hear that, James? Mr. Chamberlain's on and he says England has declared war on Germany.'

JAMES WHITE

I was actually in Sunday school and my parents came to meet us and told us. I didn't really understand. I was about nine at the time, but I knew it was a very sad thing they were telling us.

MARGARET DUNLOP

I remember soldiers coming to a field that was opposite where we lived, and they were showing searchlights every night, and we used to enjoy going out to see this and to see the soldiers. My father had bought a radio. There weren't so many around and when the war was declared the soldiers came over to hear the news on the radio and they said 'That'll not affect us,' but it did, for they were sent off. I don't know where they went. I never heard tell of them after that.

KATHLEEN HUTTON



A British army recruiting sergeant marches new recruits from the Labour Exchange in Bishop Street, Derry down Abercorn Road towards Ebrington Barracks.  
© Londonderry Sentinel



Members of the 9th (Londonderry) Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment parading down Clarendon Street in 1939  
© Londonderry Sentinel



© Derry City Council Heritage and Museum Service

## Joining Up

All my pals were joining up. We'd heard about the 6th Battery, an Anti-Aircraft regiment being formed. We weren't too sure what we were joining. We did our local training in Artillery Road. It used to be called Calf Lane in those days, where Crown Building is, that's where the camp was.

**NORMAN IRWIN**

Four of us worked in a firm at Mountsandel that grew mushrooms and tomatoes. I was the van driver there. They were forming a battery, the Coleraine 6th Light Ack Ack Battery. I remember the four of us decided to join up. We went over to the courthouse in Coleraine and joined up there. I was only 17½ at the time, but they asked me when I was born and I had the presence of mind to say the 7th of November 1920. That made me 18½.

**SAM ANDERSON**

As one of the first volunteers I joined the Battery early in 1939, late January or February, at the age of 26. The chance of a fortnight in Morecambe and a Training Bounty were the motives for enlisting. That was long before there was a general call up for volunteers. The recruiting office was above Bobby Love's seed shop in New Row. We normally met in Coleraine Boathouse for training. The instructor was a full time soldier from the Royal Artillery. He taught us by using posters and a set of forms that explained all the parts of the Bofors gun and how to man it.

**ROBIN MARTIN**

The majority of us joined the Battery at the Calf Lane. From here we were told to report to the recruiting office in New Row where they had taken over an auctioneer's office. At New Row we were given a series of mental tests. After we passed

these we were told to report to the Mary Ranken Cottage Hospital opposite the Old Court House on the Castlerock Road. Dr. Evans was there to conduct the physical examinations.

Now when I was five and a half years old, I had a serious accident. The milk was delivered to our street by a man on a motorbike with the milk churn in the side car. As a dare we would jump on the seat behind the driver as he moved off. One day I jumped on the back of the bike, but instead of putting my feet somewhere safe, I put my right foot near the chain. The bike moved and my foot was pulled into the hub.

I lost my big toe and the one next to it. Dr. Evans attended to me for that episode and here I was twenty years later standing in front of him trying to pass my Army medical. I kept my socks on that day and got through the medical with flying colours. I went on to serve in the Army for over thirty years. I was wounded a couple of times and still managed to hide the problem.

**ANDY MCGOWAN**

They had big adverts in Coleraine and they were offering a fortnight's holiday in Wales, and a bonus at Christmas. I joined up in April 1939. They were fighting to get into the local battery. I got married on the 19th of October 1939. I was with the wife for two months and then not back for five years.

**ROBERT McDONALD**

We'd never heard of the WRENS [Women's Royal Naval Service]. Here was a whole new world opening that gave women employment. I signed up. They paid me £2 a week.

**MAEVE KELLY**



Painting the kerbstones white as a blackout safety measure at Eden Terrace, Rosemount, Derry  
© Londonderry Sentinel

## The Home Front

For the first time people away from the battlefield were directly affected by the war, and there was a war to be fought on the home front too.

## The Black-out

On the 2nd of September 1939, the last night of peace, the blackout came into force so that lights could not lead enemy bombers to their targets.

I remember the black-outs. There was just a tiny wee speck of a battery lamp you had to let you see on your bike. We had to keep black-out blinds on all the windows.

MARY HENRY

We had to put up with air raid wardens coming round and tapping your window if you were showing a bit of light at all, and you didn't argue with them, you just pulled the blinds. You maybe didn't even see the man.

GERRY THOMPSON

I'll give you some idea of how dark it was in the black-out. The siren had gone off. The ARP [Air Raid Precautions] post was just across the street from where I lived. As soon as it went off I dashed out to cross the road and half way across the road I hit something. I was terrified for a second. I didn't know what it was, but it turned out it was the policeman on his bike on his way down to the barracks, and I ran right into him. Knocked him clean off the bicycle. I stepped over him and tore off like mad and hid in the air raid shelter and never said a word. It was quite a topic of conversation. What did this man hit? But no one seemed to know.

FRED DUNLOP



Children were encouraged to practise wearing their gas masks  
©Victor Hunter Coleraine Museum Collection



Gas mask practice in Derry  
© Derry Museum

## Gas Masks

Gas had been a deadly weapon in the First World War, so civilians were issued with gas masks in the Second World War.

At school we had gas masks and we used to have training - mock-air raids. You got your mask on and paraded into the classroom as if it was a raid.

MARY HENRY

We had to go get gas masks fitted first and a fortnight later we got issued with a gas mask. There was a little square cardboard box to carry them in and every day in life we had to take them to school and every day we had a wee practice run wearing them for a few minutes. It was an awful thing to wear. I don't think anybody could have kept it on for any length of time.

DAN HANNAH

This is my gas mask, with the rubber badly dozed now, but I have memories of wearing this, not to fight Adolf Hitler, just trying to make my classmates laugh. When we had gas mask practice we were crowded into the largest room, six or seven classes together, and we wore these for afternoon school. We soon learned that if you made your friend in the next desk laugh it would steam up the window.

I carried this to school in a cardboard box every day. My little baby brother Allen was provided with a kit like this, a complete body enveloping gas mask. My mother would not use it at all. She was frightened of it. She wouldn't dream of putting her baby son in it, using that monstrosity as she called it, so we didn't use that at all.

ROY ALCORN

Quite close to our school was an air raid shelter. When gas masks were first issued, we were really frightened not only getting it on our heads, but I felt we'd stop breathing in them they were so close and tight round you. We used to have these drills. We had to put them on and go into the air raid shelters, where it was dark and very cold. We were all right, but we had a baby in our family and the worst thing was when her apparatus arrived. She had to be placed in it. Father had to do it. Mother was so upset, she was afraid something would happen to her. The gas masks were very frightening things.

MARGARET DUNLOP



© Derry City Council Heritage and Museum Service



# Wartime Shortages and Rationing

Convoys bringing food and supplies to the United Kingdom were attacked by enemy submarines. Rationing was introduced to share limited resources fairly.

The first day my sister started work was the day that rationing started. The first day sweets were rationed it was July 1942. People were issued with ration books. Food was rationed, everything. A half pound of sugar per week and the same for butter. Eggs, we had dried eggs made into scrambled eggs. There were coupons for the different things you needed, for the butcher, eggs, cheese, fats, bacon and sugar.

We also had coupons for clothes. You weren't able to buy clothes unless you had these coupons. You may have had enough for one rig out in a year. For milk we were lucky we had cows, so we had our own milk and butter. My mother made jelly with carrageen moss, when you couldn't get jelly. We all learned to live with what we got and seemed to be fed pretty well.

MARY HENRY

Some people didn't have the money to buy sweets so you could have bought another coupon or two if you had the money, but it was difficult getting money then. Coupons for sweets were Ds and Es. D's were worth a quarter pound and E's were half a pound. Everything was rationed, butter, margarine, sugar, even meat.

DAN HANNAH

In the summer we always went to Portrush for the month of August. I remember one day when I was about four years old seeing bars of chocolate in a shop window. I was given the money and I went in to make my purchase, only to be told they were dummies. I didn't understand what that meant. Another time I queued for ages and was able to buy a bar of rock. This my father cut into seven equal parts so it lasted for a week!

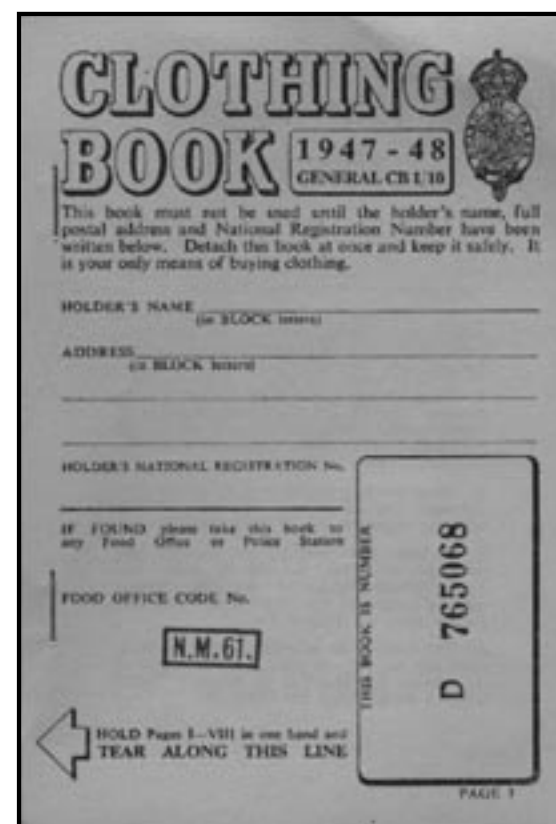
LYNNE LAPSLEY, WW2 PEOPLE'S WAR

We had a farm near so we went every week for buttermilk for mother's baking. Once a month the farm lady made country butter, and she put it in a can and put a lid on and said, 'Don't let anyone see, we're not supposed to do it.'

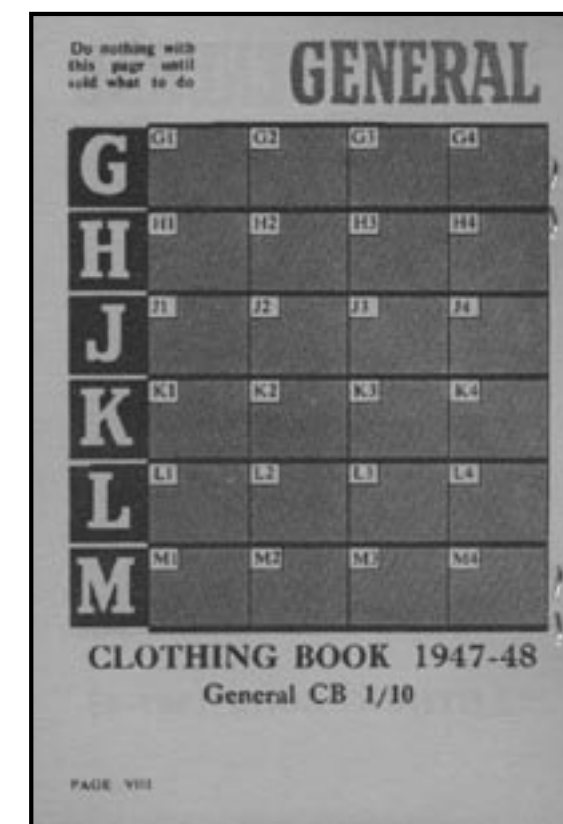
MARGARET DUNLOP

You couldn't get white flour. It was rationed so we had this National bread. They called it black bread, but it was brown and not the lovely brown you can get nowadays, terrible stuff, husks all through it, all coarse.

DAN HANNAH



Coupons were needed for food and clothes  
© Coleraine Museum collection



We lived in the country so during harvest season we had apples and plums and damsons so we did very well. Even tinned fruits were very scarce. Tinned plums were a luxury. My mother was a great baker. When she baked cakes she filled them with a cream made from a parsnip and it was flavoured with banana. It was really nice. Also we got a ration of dried egg or powdered eggs. Some didn't like them, but I quite liked them in an omelette. Mother tended a big vegetable garden and kept us supplied and some of the evacuees who came to live around us.

MARGARET DUNLOP

Rabbit was much better than chicken at that time- lovely. You were lucky if you knew someone who could do a bit of shooting - get you a rabbit. Then they got scarce. Once the Army took over a stretch of land, you couldn't trespass.

DAN HANNAH AND FRED DUNLOP

There were innumerable cyclists flying across the border to bring in food and bring out tea. We didn't have to worry about enough rations. We were younger, we didn't have to worry about next day's dinner.

MARY HUGHES

The police got very suspicious at this funeral that kept crossing the border with the same mourners. They stopped the hearse and opened the coffin and what was in it? Not your man, it was butter, sugar and eggs.

CHRIS WILSON

My father was also a butcher and there was a farmer was a great boy for smuggling pigs. My father did the killing and curing. One night they had killed a sow and it was in the back of the van and they were stopped by the B Specials. Well it was somebody they knew and they got through alright. We always had plenty of pork.

MARY HENRY

Tea had to come from India and different places like that during the war, and they hadn't the shipping. In those days the shipping was for the war effort.

ARMANDO BERTUCCELLI



## MAKE THIS GAY JUMPER OUT OF "ODDS AND ENDS"



*Stripes ahoy! Every gay colour from the box of oddments has been brought forward to make this jumper as bright as the beach in summer time. Wear it with slacks or with your new tailor-made.*

## Make Do and Mend

Textile factories, including many in the northwest, were making shirts, uniforms, parachutes and supplies for the army, so fewer new clothes were available.

We had coupons for clothes. Mothers did a lot of knitting, a lot of making clothes, and in housekeeping they remedied not having the actual article by producing it by adding something. My own mother never stopped knitting for us.

MARGARET DUNLOP

I remember every dress I had there was always a bit of material put in to lengthen it for me and the hems on my coats were always let down

RITA McLAUGHLIN

I think it was a great credit to the women. We didn't have any recollection of problems. Mother always had dinner on the table, always had clothes for us, they improvised all the time.

FRED DUNLOP

You had to be very, very careful with your clothes. You just daren't destroy shoes and everything.

GERRY THOMPSON

It was quite difficult to arrange the wedding. In those days there were no big white weddings or elaborate weddings. There were no coupons, not enough to buy extra things. Everything was rationed. We were fortunate enough, this aunt I lived with was a dressmaker, she was very good. I got the material and she made my outfit, which was a dress and jacket, which was fashionable at the time. My cousin, she was my bridesmaid, she made her a skirt and jacket. She wore blue and I wore pink. We had to order our shoes specially, you couldn't just go and get them, from Bishops of Coleraine, for months before they came in. We got them eventually, and everything went well.

ANNA DOHERTY

The Blackout's Bright Spot

# WAR CHARITY BALL

(In aid of St. John's Ambulance and British Red Cross)

IN THE

# TOWN HALL

## BALLYMONEY

On Friday, 24th November, 1939

Music by Dave Nesbitt and his Million-Airs.



Dancing 9 p.m.—2-30 am.

Evening Dress Optional.

SUBSCRIPTIONS :

**GENTLEMEN, 5/-**  
**LADIES, - - 4/-**

JOINT SECRETARIES :

Mr. W. D. Tweed, 15, Queen Street,  
Ballymoney.

Mr. W. D. F. Steele, Ulster Bank,  
Ballymoney.

TREASURER :

Mr. W. Greer Walker, Northern Bank,  
Ballymoney.

## The War Effort

Each school had a savings group to help with the war effort, and kids were encouraged to save. We bought stamps for a penny. You had a card to stick stamps on and when 15 cards were filled you got a 15 shilling savings certificate. I think it was worth a pound after five years. That was some money in those days. This lady called one day a week to collect the savings. It was all pennies. We didn't have anything more than that.

DAN HANNAH

There was a collection of second hand books from home by the government for the war effort. Primary school children were encouraged to bring old books in and we'd get paper badges according to the number of books you brought in and you rose steadily up the ranks. I scraped our house clean to bring in books. I rose in rank to General. I was very annoyed I never got to Field Marshall. I brought in hundreds of old books. The books were stored in two unused air raid shelters in the school play ground. These became so full books were stacked up to the roof. By the end I had a red General's badge.

ROY ALCORN

Children collected jam pots and tins, like syrup tins, for the war effort. They went around knocking the doors to get them. Then they did different things on school holidays. Some gathered spuds, helped on farms and worked in the market gardens. The church had sales of work, and my mother was involved in knitting, cooking, and working to help the war effort, mending old clothes, setting up jumble sales.

JAMES WHITE

Railings were all taken away from the courthouse and around gardens. Gates were taken away for scrap metal. The coal merchants all became scrap merchants. You weren't asked, you were just told to give. It was all for the war effort. The captured gun in Brooke Park was said to be taken away to fire back at the Germans!

PADDY GILLESPIE, WW2 PEOPLE'S WAR

The [Campbell College] Corps band led numerous local War Fundraising events [in Portrush] such as Aid to Russia, Wings for Victory, mostly presided over by Field Marshall Montgomery's mother from Co. Donegal, who always ended her rousing appeals for money with the chant 'Run Rommel, run Rommel, run, run, run.'

BILL TAYLOR



Shirt manufacture became war work  
© Sammy Walker Collection Coleraine Museum

## War Work

Northern Ireland was a major supplier of food to Britain during war. 17,000 gallons of milk were shipped across the Irish Sea every day. Land Girls and greater mechanisation helped increase production. Another key contribution to the war effort was the manufacture of 30 million shirts, most made in the northwest.

Every street you went round [in Derry] there was a factory making shirts, and of course, with government contracts, uniforms too! It was a boom time.

**KEN, SILVER THREADS, WW2 PEOPLE'S WAR**

My father was a farmer so they were exempted from joining the army, but I had cousins who joined and friends up the road.

**MARY HENRY**

[The farmers] had trouble getting the labourers to work for the wages - cause there was a lot of men went to the war.

**GERRY THOMPSON**

The women used to come in army lorries to the farm at harvest and for digging spuds. They worked hard at that. Maybe twelve came one week to one farm then moved on to the next. Some girls stayed on the farm, maybe a couple of girls, for a year or more. They were sent to help because, with the menfolk away, there were no farm labourers to do the job.

**DAN HANNAH**

I joined the Land Army in 1941, because there was no other work. I was sent to Knockbrack near Derry. I fed the chickens, cleaned the hen houses, collected eggs and did anything that needed to be done. I worked from seven in the morning until everything was done for the day. If you were lucky you might finish at six o'clock but sometimes you were working until ten.

**CHRISSIE HARGAN, WW2 PEOPLE'S WAR**

My father had to leave [Coleraine] during the war to work in England because he was a machine operator, making munitions, in Bedford I think.

**GERRY THOMPSON**

I was aware of women working during the war, a tremendous amount of women were employed. I walked into this place and it was absolutely full of women, on lathes, all women.

**NORMAN IRWIN**

My father died during the war in 1941 in Barrow on Furness. He was over there putting roofs back onto factories that the Germans had bombed, factories that were building submarines. He caught pleurisy. He was only 42. My oldest brother Leo was working in England at the time. He got a telegram to go and he attended the funeral in England.

**BILLY O'NEILL**



Sir James Wilton inspects members of the ARP Messenger Despatch Corps in the Guildhall Square, Derry  
© Londonderry Sentinel



Londonderry Auxiliary Fire Service taking part in a fire fighting exercise at the Guildhall  
© Londonderry Sentinel

## The Home Guard

Ordinary people with daytime jobs volunteered to defend the home front in the Home Guard or in other services such as fire, ambulance or air raid precautions.

Many men of the countryside joined the Home Guard and did patrol duty at night, stopping any traffic - which was very little as petrol was rationed - and always inquiring what their business was for being out at all. Farmers had a ration of red petrol for tractor use and sometimes this was being used unlawfully on one's car. I remember my brother using it one night to go [from Limavady] to a Young Farmer's interclub activity as it was too distant to use his bicycle.

**ANNE MARTIN, WW2 PEOPLE'S WAR**

At the time of the war, I was too young. My friend and I, instead of going to work one day, we went to Clifton Street in Belfast and asked for the recruiting station to join the navy. We were 16 and had read that an electrician became an officer and a carpenter became a petty officer, so I said this is for us.

We knocked the door and a massive big petty officer came out and asked what we wanted. I said we wanted to join the navy.

'Away home to your mother!' he said.

'No', I said. 'We're here to join the navy.'

He put his hand on my head and turned me around and gave me a kick out the door.

'Go on home to your mother,' he said again.

'I'm no going home to me ma,' I said in my broad Ballymoney accent.

'Well, go join the army,' he barks.

'If I can't join the navy,' says I, 'I'm joining nothing.'

And we made our way very disconsolately, and got on the train and went home and joined the Home Guard.

**FRED DUNLOP**





Children being evacuated from Londonderry Model school  
© Londonderry Sentinel



Campbell College was evacuated to the Northern Counties Hotel in Portrush  
Courtesy of the Old Campbellian Society



## Evacuees

Children and mothers with small children were evacuated, mainly from Belfast, though many had returned home by the time of the air raids of 1941.

I was brought up in Albert Bridge fire station. Dad was out at a bomb in a margarine factory and when he came in the next morning, his uniform was all stinking with margarine. It was so stiff with margarine that it stood up on its own. He informed my two brothers and I that we were being evacuated that day.

I was evacuated to my aunt's in Ballymoney and my two brothers were evacuated to Dunmurray, which was very rural then, not like now. I couldn't get used to the quietness in Ballymoney, after being used to all the noise in a fire station, but eventually before I returned to Belfast, I had got used to it and came home with a Ballymoney accent.

You'd worry about how your father was getting on because he was in such a dangerous job in the fire service. We saw them occasionally, maybe once every six months. In those days there wasn't much transport. They had to wait to get transport to Ballymoney, which to me seemed like thousands of miles away.

**MILDRED DAVIDSON, WW2 PEOPLE'S WAR**

We were evacuated to Ballylong up near Artigarvan. There were two families and it was like a barn. We gathered spuds. We were evacuated from the Fountain. It was decided the accommodation wasn't suitable in Ballylong and we were sent to Strabane. It was in a Catholic school. And when we came back our Drew was able to recite the rosary right off when my mother made us kneel to say our prayers. My mother came to visit with my aunt and brought us scones and other food. In Ballylong we went to school and we seemed to be more advanced and were put up a class.

**BERTIE LYNCH, WW2 PEOPLE'S WAR**

Each parent received a letter saying that the school buildings [at Campbell College] had been taken over for a military hospital, and the school was being evacuated to the Northern Counties Hotel in Portrush.

**ADAM CAPPER**

In July 1940 I was evacuated to a farm in north Antrim, just before my tenth birthday. The son of my school's principal teacher was meant to go with me but he, like most of the others who were supposed to be evacuated on that day, stayed at home.

I arrived at Ballymoney railway station with a crowd of other evacuees but knowing no one. A woman from the reception committee checked me in and expressed surprise that I was on my own. I was given a lift to my billet by a farmer and had to share the back seat of his little car with a sheep.

The Hodges family treated me like a son of the house. Mr. Hodges was a hard working north Antrim farmer who expected his family and his evacuee to help when necessary. His younger son was called Billy, a year or so older than I, and we became fast friends.

I learned to milk a cow, to tread flax in a dam, to catch eels, to drive cattle, to stack turf, to find the eggs the hens and ducks laid and to bud potatoes. Although some of the farm work was hard, for a ten year old it was a wonderful time.

The only hated chore was budding the potatoes. We did this job inside the shed on a wet day, rubbing the buds off potatoes which had been stored over the winter in mounds called clamps. They were damp, sticky, sprouting white shoots through a coating of mud. The potatoes were crawling with insects, beetles, centipedes, bugs of every description. They crawled all over us, on our clothes, in our hair, up our arms and legs.

In the autumn I came back home, to strict rationing, shortages, soldiers in the streets, the blackout, air raid sirens, the war news on the wireless and the spectacular sight of immense barrage balloons floating above the city.

**BERT SLADER, BEYOND BLACK MOUNTAIN**

I do remember some evacuees staying with the farmer who lived across the road. I remember playing with them during my school days. There are one or two about here yet.

**GEORGE HENRY**



**HOME OFFICE**

# THE PROTECTION OF YOUR HOME AGAINST AIR RAIDS

**READ THIS BOOK THROUGH  
THEN  
KEEP IT CAREFULLY**

## Air Raids in Belfast and Derry

On the night of Easter Tuesday, 15th/16th April 1941, German planes bombed Belfast killing more than 900 people. The same night two large parachute mines were dropped on Derry. One landed in a sand pit at Collon Terrace and caused limited damage. The other fell on ex-servicemen's homes in Messines Park destroying 5 houses, killing 15 people and leaving many more homeless. The target may have been the port of Derry, which played an important role in the Battle of the Atlantic.

All sorts of rot going on here. Air raid warnings and blackouts! As if anyone cared or wished to bomb Belfast.  
**LADY LONDONDERRY, 1939**

When the Second World War began in 1939 the defence forces installed an anti-aircraft system around the city to protect Derry docks, which were to become a major North Atlantic naval base. A ring of huge helium-filled barrage balloons were anchored with steel cables and they floated about a hundred feet above the ground to keep enemy bomber planes from flying low over the area.

**PHILIP CUNNINGHAM, DERRY DOWN THE DAYS**

It was late in the evening when the sirens sounded. My younger brother and I were already asleep upstairs. My father woke us and told us to come to the kitchen 'You'll be safer under the table,' he said.

My parents were kneeling on the floor and had started to pray. The plane was rapidly approaching from upriver. The sound of the engines was a surprise to me. It was more like an uneven throb than anything else. By this time it was directly overhead. The noise was tremendous and truly terrifying to a child. I was convinced it was at a level with the rooftops. Then it swung in the direction of Pennyburn and the American base. For a brief moment there was silence as the plane's lethal cargo of landmine drifted towards us on its parachutes. There was a tremendous explosion, so much so that the very earth shook as the shock waves travelled under ground.

After the raid many people refused to sleep in their own beds and for several nights after. They preferred to take to the hills armed with a bin lid for protection. The German aircraft returned safely to its base in northern France and we children were perfectly happy the following morning to comb the back lanes of the Waterside for bits of shrapnel.

**BERNARD McCORMACK, VVW2 PEOPLE'S WAR**

I heard the planes when Belfast was blitzed. German planes had sort of a screechy sound, different from the British, which was a sort of a drone. Next day we discovered they'd blitzed Belfast. The docks and all that area took it very badly.

I was at the old technical school in Ballymoney in the Air Training Corps. A lot of pupils got involved in that. They asked us would we go up to do rescue in Belfast. We had to look for bodies. It was a terrible sight to see. I was about 16. You've never seen a disaster on that scale. It was very frightening, and to see so many people homeless.

**JAMES WHITE**

I was born in 1940, in St Brigid's Avenue in Messines Park. I was the sixth of seven children. It was very scary because when you heard a horn you knew that was bad. You'd lie in bed sound asleep and someone would get you out of bed, help you up, and take you to safety. Just up our street a house was bombed and the family was almost wiped out. You were always scared of the horn.

**RITA McLAUGHLIN**



Anti-aircraft training at Downhill  
© Old Comrades Association Collection Coleraine Museum

## Defending the North Coast

It was all barbed wire and you weren't allowed on the beaches in case of mines round Portrush and Portstewart and Ballintoy and Castlerock. The mines had washed in to shore. Today they still come across them washed in. One was discovered at Benone a while back.

**JAMES WHITE**

The beaches would have been mined anyway by the British Army in case of landing. There was always a fear that the Germans would land, but a bigger fear they'd come up from the southern Irish side.

I was working at that time, though I was only 14. We were involved in Army work, the firm I was with, working on maintenance, putting up Nissen huts, etc. One trip I used to love was round the Causeway coast. The Army had a post there and whenever I was there I got to climb into the observation tower. I was handed the binoculars. They used to keep an eye on airplanes coming over. It was great until one day a wireless message came through for the sergeant, 'Get that child out of the box and get a proper sentry up there!' Some officer had been keeping an eye on these guys because they were falling asleep in the box. Their job was to watch for British planes dropping practice bombs.

**FRED DUNLOP**

Magilligan was a big military base, they did a lot of training there. They'd have been crawling all over the coast, Americans, Canadians and British doing pre-invasion training on the beaches, for D-day and beyond. Because it was remote there were also firing ranges.

**IAN McQUISTON**

The sandhills [in Portrush] served as a training ground for both the British and US armies, including a rifle range; a place for the school 'compulsory walk' on a Sunday afternoon, including picking up empty shells and occasionally live ammunition; a place for courting couples to walk and sometimes hide from view in the golf huts; finally, a place to play golf. How all these activities functioned simultaneously without serious injury or loss of limb is now a mystery.

**LEXIE CAMPBELL**

Every now and again the war would make itself evident. About three weeks after we moved in [to Portrush] a mine was spotted drifting inside the Skerries, and an army anti-tank unit set up their guns on the esplanade and fired at it. The range was extreme and the mine was bobbing up and down. No hits were recorded and eventually the navy towed it away.

A Whitely bomber came down at Portballintrae. I think it must have been a crash landing because it had managed to reach dry land, find an open piece of ground and avoid demolishing any houses, but bits of it were scattered about. I do not know if any of the crew came to grief. Convoys could be seen skirting the Mull of Kintyre and every now and again a submarine on training from Londonderry surfaced inside the Skerries.

Nearly every Sunday one of the hymns was 'For those in peril on the sea' and this took on a new significance. It still exerts a tug. On either side of Ramore Head yellow painted wooden rafts were moored and these were targets for bombers (Wellingtons and Hudsons) to try hitting with smoke bombs and later on Typhoons used the rocks for cannon firing.

**ADAM CAPPER**



## The Battle of the Atlantic

Derry played a key role in the Battle of the Atlantic. Convoys crossing the Atlantic were an important lifeline and Derry was the first port they reached. It was a base for the escort vessels which shielded the merchant ships from U-boat attack, and for refuelling and repairs. Planes to protect the ships operated from local airfields, and servicemen from Canada, Poland, Norway, Holland, Belgium and France were based in Derry.



Members of the 59 squadron at Ballykelly Army Base with a Shackleton bomber  
© Hugh McGrattan



Ship called the Laird's Loch which sailed between Derry and Glasgow carrying both passengers and livestock. Burns and Laird line and sailed from 1944-4966.  
© Sam Mitchell

The only thing that ever frightened me during the war was the U-boat peril.

**WINSTON CHURCHILL**

We were down at Magilligan Point where you can see right across Lough Foyle. At that time the Republic or the Free State was neutral and German U-boats came right up to Greencastle. They could see the Germans on their U-boats right across the Foyle. At Torr Head there was a man who was caught with a wireless. He was transmitting to the Germans.

**JAMES WHITE**

I served on HMS Snowberry as a submarine detector operator from April to November 1941. Snowberry escorted several convoys from the Clyde and Londonderry to Iceland, Newfoundland and Nova Scotia often in appalling weather. Convoys often took weeks because they had to zigzag, heave to or slow down in bad weather. Their speed was often that of the slowest ship, such as a whaling factory. It was common to be stopped for days in hurricane force winds and 40 foot waves, rolling 45 degrees and slowed down by thick fog.

**PETER WALKER, WW2 PEOPLE'S WAR**

The next convoy began quite peacefully, like the others, in very calm sea to Londonderry for the usual refuelling. We wasted little time in Londonderry and sailed again at almost full speed to pick up the convoy. It was reported that one of their number, a tanker, had been torpedoed. We finally reached them in mid-Atlantic and joined HMS Walker to bring the

convoy home. During the night that followed four more ships of the convoy were torpedoed, and it became clear that U-boats were operating among this convoy, surfacing and firing torpedoes at will.

What use could two First World War destroyers be amongst this? Just after midnight Walker sighted the fluorescent wash of a U-boat retreating on the surface and immediately gave chase, dropping a pattern of depth charges over the likely diving position of the U-boat.

Unfortunately contact was lost, the U-boat disappeared and Walker steamed to pick up survivors from yet another tanker. What was not known was the fact that the U-boat had been damaged by the depth charges, and, unable to stay under water for long periods, it decided to surface for inspection of the damage. As it did so my RADAR operator immediately reported a dark green blob which he thought might be a U-boat. This fact was reported to HMS Walker and both ships then raced at top speed along the bearing given by the RADAR operator.

After a little more than a mile, the silhouette of a U-boat could be seen on the surface, so without hesitation our captain gave the order to 'Stand by to ram'. This [our ship] Vanoc did in no uncertain manner at full speed hitting the U-boat amidships and toppling her over. It brought Vanoc to a sudden standstill, embedded in the U-boat which was only cleared by both engines, full astern. The U-boat rose high in the air and sunk, the Captain, still on the bridge wearing his white cap but badly injured, went down with her.

Continued...





The port of Derry played a key role in the Battle of the Atlantic  
© Derry City Council Heritage & Museum Service

## The Battle of the Atlantic

We swept the surface of the waters with our searchlight in order to pick up survivors. I well remember and will do so always the cries of those men in the icy waters 'Kamerad' [comrade]. In my youth my bitterness towards them was extreme. They had sunk our ships and many of our seamen drowned at sea. Their air force had bombed our cities relentlessly killing thousands of innocent civilians. I just had to shout 'Leave them there.' Fortunately perhaps the older members of our crew had more compassion and pulled up the side as many as they could, before the next alarm. It had amounted to just five, one officer and four men.

**W.PEDNEY, WW2 PEOPLE'S WAR**

When HMS Londonderry sailed up the River Foyle on its return from a spell of duty as a convoy escort the Captain would play a record of Danny Boy at top volume on the loud hailer. In the spring of '42 the Battle of the Atlantic was far from over but we were consistently fortunate. Some convoys were heavily attacked, some slipped through almost unnoticed while the submarines were back at base picking up more fuel and torpedoes. When on one trip we were attacked south of the Azores it was by two Italian submarines, which lacked the training, experience and ruthlessness of the U-boat crews.

**PHILIP MARSHALL, WW2 PEOPLE'S WAR**

The minesweepers used to go down the river [Foyle] to Moville, patrolling for mines. The U-boats were lying off the south of Ireland waiting for us boys to go out and knock the bottom out of us, waiting for the convoys coming in.

**BILL WELLS**

My dad was on mine sweeping duties stationed at what is now Sea Eagle. The base in Derry was called

HMS Ferret. He was on mine demolition when he was here in the Foyle Estuary, dropping depth charges.

**W. REES, WW2 PEOPLE'S WAR**

At Ebrington at HMS Sea Eagle they had a research facility and they developed a depth charge system that improved the ability of destroyers to locate and sink U-boats. They invented a three-chambered launcher that lobbed the depth charge - rather than simply rolling it off the back - and that allowed them to surround the U-boat quickly with charges and gave them a better chance of getting a result.

**IAN McQUISTON**

I was in the supply section. The ships came up the Foyle. We supplied them with anything they needed like blankets. All the navies came into Derry. Once looking down the Foyle from the office I counted 36 warships tied up in Derry docks.

**MAEVE KELLY**

My parents took a house near Fanad Head where you had to carry the water. They thought they were getting as far away as possible. It was lovely. We had a picnic one time on the top of the hill overlooking the mouth of Lough Swilly with the Atlantic on one side. We saw a [British] convoy being bombed. At that time it didn't scare us as it might have when we knew the implications. Mother thought it would be a quiet place for young children to go to sleep, but every night you heard that characteristic clomping sound of German planes, as it was directly on the way to the Atlantic.

**MARY HUGHES**

All had to come in around Northern Ireland. Here by the grace of God, Ulster stood a faithful sentinel.

**WINSTON CHURCHILL**



R.N. AIR STATION		
<b>MAYDOWN</b>		
RUNWAYS ONLY. GRASS SURFACE U/S. EXTREME CARE, CIRCUIT - IN CLOSE PROXIMITY WITH EGLINTON.	55° 02' 00" N. 07° 14' 25" W.	R/T FACILITIES - NIL ALL AIRCRAFT TO WORK EGLINTON H/F AND VHF LOCAL CONTROL H/F VHF CROSS COUNTRY W/T 400 K/CH. YO IDENTITY LETTERS JP GROUP 1
ALL AIRCRAFT FOR MAYDOWN TO BE CLEARED THROUGH	HEIGHT 50' ABOVE MEAN SEA LEVEL	

At Maydown like many Second World War airfields the runways were in a characteristic cross pattern  
Courtesy of Fleet Air Arm Museum Yeovilton

## The Northwest Airfields

The airfields played an essential role in protecting Atlantic convoys. The first to be opened was Limavady (Aghanloo) in December 1940, then Eglinton in April 1941 with a satellite at Maydown in 1942. Ballykelly and Aghadowey (Mullaghmore) came into service in 1942.

My bedroom looked down the countryside towards Lough Foyle and Donegal. In between was Aghanloo airfield, a very busy place, and an important part of our war effort, flying out planes to bomb the submarines in the Atlantic.

One night I watched a bright fire on the side of Benevenagh where a plane had crashed after taking off from Aghanloo. We heard afterwards that three had crashed that same night. Some said it was because of iced-up flaps and some because of inexperienced young men taking out planes they did not know enough about. Many of the young men were still in their teens.

ANNE MARTIN, WW2 PEOPLE'S WAR

My father was a foreman fitter with Stewart and Partners who built the airfields, so he was on the move quite often. We moved from Derry to Lismacarrall, and in 1945 my father was transferred to Eglinton and we moved down there.

I don't remember the pilots of the famous Eagle Squadron, but I remember seeing their aircraft. There were Corsairs, Hellcats, Wildcats. There were big naval aircraft, such as Seafarers, Barracudas, Swordfish. They were all prominent in the naval battles of World War II. Maydown was a very important place during the war. It had the biggest ever naval squadron, 836. They had a pool of 90 aircraft there, all Swordfish.

The sinkings in the Atlantic of merchant ships became so serious drastic measures had to be taken. They converted 19 merchant ships to mini aircraft carriers by fitting a flat top on them. There were 13 tankers, and six grain ships and they still carried 70% of their load. They also had up to three or four aircraft on board, Swordfish from Maydown. They all had names, MAC [Merchant Aircraft Carrier] this or MAC that, that's why they were called MAC-ships.

As soon as the convoy assembled off the Clyde to go to America, and appeared off the north coast of Ireland, the Swordfish took off from Maydown and landed aboard. Up to this time as many as 40% of some convoys were being lost in sinkings and that was serious. When Swordfish and MAC-ships starting operating from Maydown that was the end of that. After that only one merchant ship was lost in the many convoys escorted by aircraft from Maydown.

All the naval stations were named after seabirds. Eglinton was called HMS Gannet, Maydown was known as HMS Shrike, they were actually ships at shore. There were thousands there, up to 4,000 at Eglinton. The bases made a big contribution to the war, and there was a contribution to the local economy too.

NAT McGLINCHEY

I was appointed to 836 squadron at Maydown, HMS Shrike. 836 was made up of 23 flights of three or four Swordfish in each. It operated in 17 Merchant Aircraft Carriers or MAC-ships. My aircraft, The Dingbat, had painted on the side a black cat riding a rocket. After two months escorting Atlantic convoys between Britain and Halifax, Nova Scotia, we returned to Maydown.

JACK THOMAS WW2 PEOPLE'S WAR

My dad served in the RAF at HMS Eagle for a couple of years. His job as a Fabric Worker was to patch up the aircraft, Swordfish etc.

ROBERT BAPTIST, WW2 PEOPLE'S WAR

When the WAAFs [Women's Auxiliary Air Force] were stationed at RAF Ballykelly the people who lived in the area were very good to us, they treated us as part of the community. Ma Hassan ran an open house where any of the service personnel were made welcome.

ELIZABETH GEDDIS, WW2 PEOPLE'S WAR



American, English and Newfoundland sailors share a drink in Bill Dalton's bar in Derry  
© Derry City Council Heritage and Museum Service



GI and his Derry bride, Brooke Park, Derry  
© Derry City Council Heritage and Museum Service

## The Yanks are Coming

The United States of America officially entered the war in December 1941. Before this American 'technicians' arrived in Derry and with local assistance constructed accommodation camps at Springtown and Beech Hill, a hospital at Creevagh, ship repair and refuelling facilities, and an administration complex with underground bunkers in the grounds of Magee College. A new quay was built at Lisahally The construction helped bring full employment to Derry. By May '42 there were 37,000 Americans in Northern Ireland, with many at the US Naval Operating Base in Derry. In the build up to the Normandy landings there were 120,000 Americans in the north.

I was living in Derry and I worked down in the shipyard for an American company that built the bases way before America came into the war. So America was coming in to the war whether Japan had attacked it or not because all the uniforms were already in storage. At the top of Great James Street in Derry there were big warehouses there and my boss took me in one day and showed me all these American uniforms way before Pearl Harbour.

**MAUREEN MATHES, WW2 PEOPLE'S WAR**

I was six years old in 1941 when I remember the American technicians building Beech Hill. They were clearing tons of earth with big caterpillar tractors, earth moving equipment, to make a foundation for the US marines. They were civilians. America didn't enter the war until Pearl Harbour was struck.

**NAT McGLINCHEY**

I was at the top of Main Street [in Ballymoney] and the Americans came up just ambling along. I was used to the regimental boys marching smartly and these chaps were waving at everybody and sauntering along up Main Street. It was good to see them. We got to know some of them quite well.

**FRED DUNLOP**

In wartime, censorship and tight-lippedness about troop movements in particular, made sure that nobody knew anything about anything that was worth knowing. So nobody, but nobody, was expecting in Portrush anything in the line of overseas armies.

Wartime (1942) off-season Portrush. No petrol so no cars, shops empty of anything interesting,

indeed the town all but deserted. Gradually there could be heard, perhaps far distant, the indistinct but unmistakable sound of a military band, oompah brass. Round the bend from The White House swung a huge US army band. Flanking bandmen were marching on both footpaths. Our windows rattled. The Stars and Stripes fluttered and behind their flag marched a seemingly endless column of troops in full marching kit, rifles, the lot.

In the days to follow, I got the chance to speak to some of these Yanks and found out what they thought about being whisked off to Ireland, preliminary to being invited to die for their country. I felt a lot of sympathy. They had been mobilised, moved by train to the East Coast of the USA, put on board ship (standing room only) then on landing (they knew not where) marched to another train, finally to be paraded, band playing and Old Glory flying, through Portrush.

**IAN DONALDSON**

In the backyard one morning, I must have been about four years of age, I looked up and saw American fighters flying over. They had two tails so they were obviously Lightning fighters. My mother was pointing up and saying 'There go the two-tailed devils'.

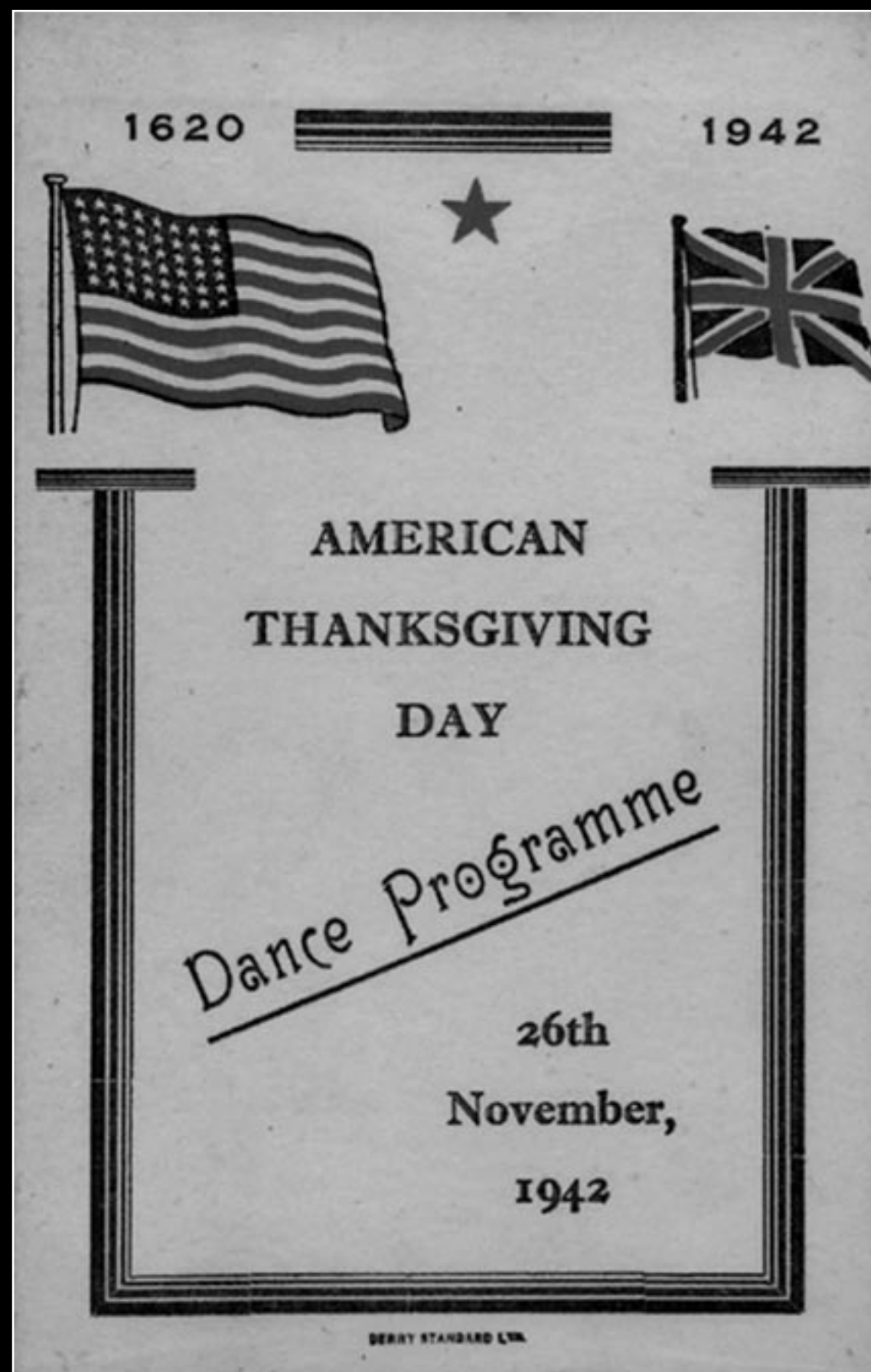
**HUGH McGRATTAN**

The GIs were our main cheap source of fags. You lent one your bike for the afternoon for a couple of packs of Lucky Strike or Camels.

**JOHN DOE**

The Americans and Canadians brought in a different way of eating. We never ate popcorn or doughnuts or Coca Cola or chewing gum.

**MAEVE KELLY**



## The Yanks are Coming

American soldiers in Coleraine would have been friendly. If you met them and talked to them they would have given you doughnuts or Juicy Fruit or Dentine chewing gum. Dentine was my favourite. They were stationed in what used to be the Queen's Café and then it was changed to the Lombard. Plus they stayed on down a bit in Sir Dawson Bates' big fruit store. Where the football pitch is now on the Portrush Road was their training ground and that was dug up and full of trenches that they did their training in.

Some of them would have asked you if your mother would take in laundry which you would have collected and taken back to them at the end of the week and they would have paid you for it.

GERRY THOMPSON

American soldiers gave us a Christmas Party in the Orange Hall [in Portrush] and I saw Santa Claus and was terrified. And they took us on various rides in Barry's. They treated us so well and when they left us home, presumably by jeep, they gave us money. These guys were very well paid and they gave my sister 10 shillings which was probably a day's pay to my father. And I remember my mother running after this soldier, saying it was far too much and trying to get them to take it back.

HUGH McGRATTAN

I remember the ambience of the city [Derry]. You could stroll anywhere you liked and if you were out at night at a debate, or the pictures or a dance, you were safe coming home. There was never any fear. It was a very dignified city at that time. You were aware there was a war going on, but we never felt the suffering of the war.

If you went out for an ice cream or a coffee to Yannarellis or Fiorentinis you were aware of people from many nations. It was more interesting than frightening.

I was glad to get a job for a month or so at the American hospital at Ebrington barracks collating medical records. The great thing was we had all the luxuries that the Americans had. We had beautiful lunches worthy of a Thanksgiving dinner, vanilla whips for elevenses, and bars of chocolate in between with no rationing. They were very kind to us, the supervisors, they'd come round to see if we were comfortable and well-fed. There were a lot of nurses there from around here, doctors, dentists, technicians. They had stores there, they must have had a chocolate store, that seemed to be where all the Hershey's bars came from.

MARY HUGHES

[In Derry there were] thousands of troops, every nationality. They all hated each other, especially the Canadians and the Americans. Canadian soldiers broke a plate glass window in Phillips' music shop in Shipquay Street, and this was the last plate glass window broken, it was not replaced. Military police took no nonsense, they would come along with truncheons, hit the soldiers and throw them in the jeep.

PADDY GILLESPIE, WW2 PEOPLE'S WAR

You would read in the papers in the local dance halls they would have jive competitions. You would see that someone called Brunovsky or something had won the jive competition, and you knew he wasn't from Aghadowey, that he was an American soldier. The influence of the Americans, during the short time that they were here, was quite an impact.

HUGH McGRATTAN

We were standing at the Guildhall steps spotting the talent go by, and this group of army men went by. Someone said, 'Look at those American soldiers, fine looking men, take a look at these.' And someone, maybe me, said, 'Who's that wee man in the middle in the uniform?' And it was Eisenhower, General Eisenhower.

MAEVE KELLY





Coleraine Battery deployment WW II  
Courtesy of Coleraine Museum



6th Light Anti - Aircraft Battery June 1944 in Ipswich preparing for the invasion of Normandy on D-Day  
Courtesy of Coleraine Museum



The Coleraine Battery in Egypt where they defended the Suez Canal  
Courtesy of Coleraine Museum

## The War in Europe, Africa and the Pacific

Men and women from the northwest served in the army, navy and airforce, and throughout the world. Anti-aircraft batteries were raised in Coleraine (the 6th) and Londonderry (the 9th). Local men in the Coleraine Battery served in Scotland, Egypt, Libya, France, Belgium, Italy, Greece, Holland, and Germany. The Londonderry Battery saw service in Egypt, the Sudan, Libya and Italy.

We were called up [the Coleraine Battery] and went to Scotland for about nine months. Then we headed for North Africa in 1940 and were three and a half years out there. We were very low on troops on the ground and on aircraft so the German Stukas kept bombing. We were the only line of defence until Montgomery took charge. He built up the airforce and the troops on the ground. We were up and down the salt flats God knows how many times. Once we got bogged down and the Germans chased us back. Then we reformed and chased them up again. It was like the Grand Old Duke of York.

**SAM ANDERSON**

We had a camp just beside the Pyramids for a couple of months because we had no equipment. It was on the convoy. They were still unloading it and getting it organised. I stayed with the [Coleraine] Battery through Egypt, the Western Desert and France until Caen fell on 8/9 July 1944. After the final bombing raid that finished Caen we were all in the Troop HQ for breakfast. I heard a dull thud and saw steam coming out of the banking behind me. It was a 3-inch AP shell steaming in the wet ground. I left it there and finished my breakfast. After the meal I was detailed to leave the battery for good.

**ROBIN MARTIN**

On Nov 9th 1941 we moved out in convoy from Jarabub: the 29 Indian Brigade to which our Coleraine Battery unit was attached, along with Sikhs, Punjabis, British and South African troops. It was a sight not to be forgotten, about 400 vehicles and guns moving along through the desert. All went well for two days but on the third morning just after breakfast a spotter enemy plane had a little peep at us and sure enough about one hour later they came diving down. We were

having difficulty crossing a wadi [river] owing to the soft sand. The planes dropped anti-personnel bombs and strafed. Our troop lost one three ton lorry and a Bofors tractor and I am sorry to say one of the Coleraine boys, Paddy Toner, was killed. We buried him alongside the burnt out vehicle.

**HARRY NEIL MORRISON (FROM A LETTER WRITTEN IN 1944)**

I was a member of the 9th Londonderry Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment. I forged my age to join as I was only 17. When we arrived in Egypt things were quiet. Eventually Italy came into the war and that heated things up for us as we were the defence of Alexandria Harbour, which was the biggest port for the navy and all the ships in the Mediterranean. There was one week especially that both night and day we were in action.

**GEORGE McCALLIAN, WW2 PEOPLE'S WAR**

The Battery was deployed on the anti-aircraft defence of the Suez Canal. The guns had been in position for quite a while. They were in a state of dangerous disrepair. I made a tool kit that was used to remove the automatic loader in order to clean my own gun. As soon as Major Brian Clark discovered that I could strip the automatic loader and clean the gun, he changed my job.

There was a shortage of qualified Engineers in the British Army serving in Egypt. I was posted to the workshops in Port Said. We worked round the clock in twelve hour shifts. Our main task was to ensure that all the equipment coming into the Desert campaign was ready for use. This included jeeps, trucks and tanks. On many occasions this equipment had been sabotaged before it reached us.

Continued...

## The War in Europe, Africa and the Pacific

I was transferred to the Army Ordnance Corps and then attached to the 201 Guards Brigade until the end of the war. My task was to organise the recovery of damaged vehicles and equipment from the battlefields as the Brigade fought their way from Salerno to Monte Cassino [Italy]. We lost more men at Salerno than we did on D-Day. The 9th Londonderry Regiment provided the covering fire at Salerno.

**NORMAN IRWIN**

[On D-Day] Mrs Briggs the teacher came in and announced to the kids that the invasion had started, she was in floods of tears as her brother was involved in it.

**DAN HANNAH**

In 1944 the Americans brought a big film projector into Ballymoney and showed us the newsreel film of the D-Day landings. It was the greatest thing, for a lot of Ballymoney ones were involved in the invasion, so we were worried about them.

**JAMES WHITE**

The [Coleraine] Battery troops were posted to gun pits at the Nijmegen bridge area on September 17 1944. There were a few Dutch farms near so we approached one and it was not long before the farmer was bartering with us for army rations and stores in exchange for fresh farm produce. We had soap, sugar, flour, and powdered milk. He had chickens and vegetables.

Living in the cow stalls was another family, the van Empels, and their daughter Trude, who had to evacuate their home when the fighting had started

a week previous. Trude's two brothers had been taken by the Germans for forced labour. They could have been taken to a concentration camp. As forced labour they had to be fed to a certain degree. They survived, working in the Ruhr at armaments.

They were lucky, despite the fighting around the bridges, their home was intact. I was invited quite often for a cup of coffee, and during these quiet interludes Trude and I were teaching each other our language. One day I said to Trude 'Will you marry me?' To my total surprise she understood me and immediately said 'Yes'. The wedding took place ten months later, and I brought Trude back to Portstewart in 1946.

**ANDY MCGOWAN**

Just after the German occupation of Holland, father and the local men were taken by the Germans and used as slave labour. Food was scarce at this stage of the war. On September 17th 1944, my brother Peter and I cycled to a nearby farm to see if we could get any food. We usually bartered with the farmers for our food at that time. The farmer refused to barter because the area was surrounded by soldiers. Peter and I left the farm to go home.

At this stage we were under observation from Norman Walker and his gun crew. Norman sent one of his men over to the farmer. The gunner gave the farmer a packet of cigarettes, it was Gallagher's Blue. The farmer gave the gunner half a bag of potatoes and half a bag of carrots. Then Norman called us over to his gun. We did not speak each other's language but he ended up giving us the two half bags of vegetables. We thanked Norman and made our way back home.

## The War in Europe, Africa and the Pacific

When we arrived home my mother said we were covered in mud. There had been a lot of rain in October. The soldiers were also covered in mud due to the continuation of the bad weather. Mother suggested that we must return to the gun crew the next day and ask them if they would like to come back to our house. Norman used to bring at least four different men back to our house every night. There they were able to sit down and write letters home and relax away from the mud and rain. But the Americans needed help in the Ardennes. The Battery had to pack up before Christmas and headed off.

Later Norman Walker and his friend Sammy Nevin from Portrush used to borrow a motorbike and ride the 120 miles from the Ardennes to our home in Nijmegen. That year, 1945, Norman asked me to marry him. When we married in October 1946 we settled in Coleraine.

**HANNEY WALKER**

Johnny McGill lived in upper Nailor's Row and regularly walked my father's greyhounds. Johnny was a tall slim man and always had a pleasant smile and a twinkle in his eyes. He was of a quiet nature and wore a brown brimmed hat, but only had one arm; he lost the other in the war when he was in the trenches in Borneo. The Japanese soldiers overran them and he pretended to be dead but had a bayonet stuck through his arm, which later had to be amputated.

**PHILIP CUNNINGHAM**



The Battery relaxing  
Courtesy of Coleraine Museum



Temporary accommodation for the Coleraine Battery  
Courtesy of Ronnie Gamble

## Prisoners of War in Loughguile



This pecking chicken toy was made by a German POW  
© Ballymoney Museum Collection

We used to have to go up to the POW camp at Loughguile to do some repairs as joiners for the building contractor I worked for. I was amazed at the things, like carvings, the fellows were making out of old bits of wood. They carved a chicken, put it on a flat board, hooked the head on a string with a stone on it, so when you shook it the head bobbed. The things those lads made with next to nothing! They weren't allowed any carving tools or knives, but made all sorts of toys. They were quite pleasant lads. We didn't know what they were saying, and they didn't understand what we were saying, but it didn't matter.

**FRED DUNLOP**

I was attending a wedding in the local Loughguile parish church when a friend said 'Come over and have a yarn with these prisoners'. I was terrified. I didn't know what to do, they were all along the barbed wire fence, but we shook hands. Seemed like terribly nice people, but they were pointing to my breast pockets and making puffing motions. I got the idea they wanted cigarettes, then they pointed to the guard up the way. So I gave this fellow some cigarettes and he gave me a lovely wee lighter engraved with a swastika, which was made out of a syrup tin. They got syrup and salmon tins and made different ornaments.

**JAMES WHITE**

**ROLL OF HONOUR. A Few of Londonderry's Sons who made the Supreme Sacrifice**



**Sgt. D. HETHERINGTON,**  
Brookhall, Culmore Road, Londonderry.  
Educated, Culmore P.E.S.  
Joined R.A.F., 3rd June, 1943.  
Killed over France, 28th June, 1944.  
Interred in France.  
Prior to joining R.A.F. worked in G.N.R.



**546224 Sgt. W. J. HETHERINGTON**  
Brookhall, Culmore Road, Londonderry.  
Educated, Culmore P.E.S.  
Joined R.A.F., 8th November, 1937.  
Killed, 28th October, 1944, at age 25.  
Buried in Suez Cemetery, Bombay, India.  
Prior to joining R.A.F. worked in Messrs.  
Fatterson's, Londonderry.

Both the deceased are brothers. Both served as operational air-crew and were killed within four months of one another.



**549689 Sgt. JOHN LUMSDEN DAVIS**  
69 Ferguson Street, Londonderry.  
Attended First Derry School.  
Joined R.A.F. in March, 1938, at age of 18.  
Served in No. 6 Bomber Squadron and missing through enemy action at sea, 12th September, 1942.



**CPL. 566120 GEORGE NIVEN**  
8 Kennedy Place, Londonderry.  
Educated Model School and Technical College, Strand Road.  
Joined Boys' Service, 1st September, 1932.  
Was a member of 216 Squadron Bomber Command.  
Killed on Raid on Benghazi on 15th July, 1940.  
Interred at Cairo.



**Sergt. JOHN (JACKIE) BOYD**  
96 Fountain Hill, Londonderry.  
Educated at Cooney P.E.S. and Municipal Technical College.  
Joined R.A.F., 12th October, 1940.  
Trained as Wireless-Operator Air-Gunner.  
Was engaged for some time on Coastal work in spotting submarines on American supply routes.  
Killed in Action on 25th August, 1944, with 114 Squadron.

**Sgt. ERNEST HENRY MACKENZIE BARR**  
17 Rosewood Avenue, Londonderry.  
Educated at Londonderry Model School and Foyle College.  
Killed in action over Hannau, Germany, on 6th January, 1945, age 22 years.  
Navigator, Bomber Command.

**F/O STANLEY AUSTIN**  
Victoria Park, Londonderry.  
Educated at Foyle College and Queen's University, Belfast.  
Killed in Action in Tunisia, North Africa on 2nd February, 1943.

**ROBERT GILMOUR YOUNG**  
24 Strand Road, Londonderry  
Educated at Foyle College.  
Joined R.A.F. in 1939.  
Killed in Battle of Britain, 1940.  
His name appears on the Roll of Honour in Westminster Abbey.

© Derry City Council Heritage and Museum Service

**RED CROSS PARCEL FOR A PRISONER OF WAR**

3kg soap, 2 pencils, shaving soap, 6 razor blades, toothbrush, 2 boot polish,

4 pairs of socks, vaseline, nail brush, dusting powder, comb, 2 pairs boot laces,

disinfectant, germolene, shirt, towel and leather belt.

# A Heavy Price

My brothers, the two of them, went away together, and of course that broke my mother's heart for she thought she'd never see them again. They went to Coleraine to join up, then they were sent to Enniskillen and then abroad.

One was wounded and sent home about two years after he joined up. The other one carried on until 1945. He used to send word of the terrible things that were happening to him, people being shot either side of him in a trench. When he came home from the war it must have affected his nerves, because my sister and I were scared of him, he had come through so much.

**KATHLEEN HUTTON**

One young man I remember was Gerry McClelland who lived across the street from me on Charlotte Street [in Ballymoney]. He joined and had become a navigator on bombers. One flight over Germany the pilot was killed and Gerry managed to bring the plane back and got an award. Shortly after that on another series of bombing raids he himself was killed.

**FRED DUNLOP**

My eldest brother Tommy joined the Army about 1938. He was home on leave. Then he went away on the 26th of March and he was killed at Dunkirk on the 28th of May 1940, two months later. My last memory is the day that he went back. The entire family was there. We said our goodbyes and my mother and sisters were crying and I wondered why. He was gathering up all his army equipment and had a haversack on his back. It was a sad day. My mother cried for days afterwards.

The first thing was a telegram from the War Office letting us know at first that he was missing,

presumed killed in action. Then the letter from Buckingham Palace arrived, just a few lines, signed by King George the Sixth. Then the medals for his war service arrived some time later.

I knew when I came home from school that something was wrong. My mother was crying and my sisters were in a bad way, crying. I had no idea what it was. It never even dawned on me that Tommy had been killed. I couldn't understand what was wrong. For weeks after that my mother wasn't the same, she was weepy, crying, and there seemed to be nothing done about the house. Everything stopped. She was sitting there in a daze. My father was working so it was not as noticeable with him. He had to keep going.

**DAN HANNAH**

Eventually we joined up with the Russians at the end of the war and somewhere along the way we came across Belsen. We didn't go in there, but you could smell the stench of bodies from a mile away. They just dug out the soil, dumped the bodies in, and covered them over.

**SAM ANDERSON**

I joined the Royal Marines when I was 16 years and 11 months. I was a Vickers machine gunner when I was taken prisoner. I was a prisoner of war before my 18th birthday. We thought we were great heroes going into battle. We didn't have a care in the world. We were young and foolish. I was captured in Calais. I'd been sitting at the machine gun all day on the Sunday. That was when they moved in on us.

There was a phone beside me. It rang, and I answered it. They said to get a senior officer. I called out and this young sergeant came in, he answered it.

Continued...



## A Heavy Price

He was told, 'You have to surrender. Put the white flag up.' But he said, 'No, death before dishonour,' and he walked away. He didn't have a flag. We didn't know whether he shot himself, or whether he was shot by a sniper, but he went down. Another chap put the flag up and they came in like ants. The Germans had been sitting there watching us all day and we hadn't seen them. When we heard we had to surrender we destroyed the guns straightaway, that was the first thing you did.

They force-marched us out the next morning at half five with nothing to eat. The Germans didn't feed us. We were starving. When they eventually set up a field kitchen we got nothing but sauerkraut. We marched into Belgium and Holland on a road near a convent and the nuns came out and offered us bread and cigarettes and were talking to us and we passed messages to them for our families and some of them actually got home.

Near Maastricht there was a blooming great cigarette factory and a crowd of girls came down, and ones on the top floor started throwing cigarettes down from the windows for us. The German guards opened up a machine gun and fired at them. Whether they killed anyone or not we don't know but they broke the glass anyway.

When we came near the border into Germany there was a narrow road with a bridge at the bottom and people came out of their houses and brought milk, bread, water and even wine for us. Two girls came along with bread who spoke English and one was heavily pregnant. The German soldier told them to get away, and the woman said no. The guard lost his temper and kicked her in the stomach. She

went down unconscious. We all ringed round him. He could have been torn to bits, there were some big men there, and the girl's parents. A German officer came along. We told him what happened. He made the boy stand at attention and he hammered him into the ground with a baton, he just stood there and took it, he couldn't do a thing. I don't know what happened to him after that. They threw him in the back of a wagon and took him away.

The first camp we came to was about a mile into a swamp, mosquitoes and flies everywhere! Thank god we were only one night there. They marched us the next morning to a railway siding and along came cattle trucks they herded us into. We were bunged in with no place to sit. You could only stand. We took turns sitting. Three days and three nights we were in the wagons, and six died there.

The first job I got [as a Prisoner of War] was in a coal mine in East Sudetanland. On the coalface it was about 9 foot high and you could stand up, but when the coal came down you were only able to shovel it by lying on your side. We did that for 12 hours at a stretch and all you got to eat was two thin slices of sawdust bread and a flask of coffee. If you were lucky you got a hot shower when you got back to the billet and a plate of sauerkraut or potato soup. You were working from 6 o'clock, and sometimes were lucky to be back at 9 o'clock.

If you worried too much there was no hope for you. Some got really ill and ended up in the hospital, they got so depressed they couldn't do anything.

**WILLIAM BALMER**

(William gave two interviews about the same events so this account varies from that on the CD)

## Victory

Victory in Europe, VE day, was celebrated on the 8th of May 1945, and victory over the Japanese, VJ day, on the 15th of August 1945.

American reconnaissance tanks liberated us. They got the German guards' weapons and told us to take charge of the village, control all the German POWs coming through. It was a small village of less than 300 people and we saw this big lorry come in with a big bruiser of a German officer in the truck. I asked him to get out. He wouldn't. 'Give us your pistol,' we ordered. I just took it out of the holster as he hadn't it fastened down. 'I am an SS Officer,' he said. 'You are only soldiers. You are dirt. I will only take orders from an officer.' The boy with me just took his pistol and hit him on the side of the head. Blood poured from him.

'What's in the back of the truck?' we asked. We opened the back and it was full of provisions that he was taking into the camp to feed the Germans who were now going to be our prisoners. Food the like of which we hadn't seen for years - oranges, apples, bananas, chocolate, sugar - all for the German officers. The children in that village had never seen chocolate or oranges or white flour. We just dumped it all out on the road and gave it to the villagers.

**WILLIAM BALMER**

I witnessed the Allied Airborne invasion [in Holland] at the start of our liberation from the German occupation. The sky was full of parachutes. It was terribly sad to see because the Germans were shooting the paratroops as they descended.

**HANNEY WALKER**

The officer of the day asked the staff if they wanted to see a very interesting thing happen. 'Does anyone want to go down to Lisahally?' Nobody did, but I did, probably to get out of the office for an hour.

I went on the naval bus and waited at the jetty. I looked down the river. There was a thin line coming up. I realised it was submarines, one after the other tied up. I think I counted 13 of them. They came in and tied up in the dock, and there was no one there but me. It must have looked very stupid - one woman.

When a ship leaves a dock the sailors all line up. In this case the German sailors were all standing along the submarines. The first one came up and out stepped the captain. He took off his cap, tucked it under his arm and stepped onto the wooden jetty. Standing there was a British officer. His name was Max Horton.

The German stepped forward with his hand outstretched to shake his hand. I will never forget it. The Englishman completely ignored the outstretched hand. Young and all as I was I realised there are winners and losers everywhere. It was common courtesy. He completely ignored him. I will never forget it. It was terrible, unnecessary. All the sailors saw their commanding officer humiliated. As if he wasn't humiliated enough with the surrender, this was worse.

**MAEVE KELLY**

We were living in Limavady, and my mother took me to Derry in a bus that had utility seats, wooden slatted seats, which left a lasting impression on you. Our destination was Culmore Point, on the north side of the Foyle at the Narrows so we looked across at the naval base at Lisahally. That was where the U-boats were coming in to surrender. There was one directly opposite Culmore Point. The German ratings were all lined up on the deck with the British ratings at either end with guns, like bookends. The punchline was 'Right my boy, you remember this!' and indeed I do.

**IAN McQUISTON**



Surrendered U-boats tied up at Lisahally, Derry  
© Derry Museum



German U-boat officers surrendering  
to Admiral Sir Max Horton  
© Central Library, WEELB

## Victory

I remember we were all proudly painting the flags of the Allies on the air raid shelters: British, American, French, Chinese flags, all the allies when we won the war. It was a great moment.

**ROY ALCORN**

I knew of one prisoner of war who came home and it was such a jolly occasion. The neighbours had a party with the place decorated with balloons and it was a good feeling, although I did hear later how he had been very badly treated as a prisoner of war.

**MARGARET DUNLOP**

A short period of dancing instruction was hurriedly arranged in preparation for the visit of Victoria School, temporarily based at Portballintrae, who were invited to join us [Campbell College] for a Victory Celebration Dance in the ballroom.

**LEXIE CAMPBELL**

VE Day in 1945 and the celebrations in Portrush. I travelled on the Giant's Causeway electric tram covered in red, white and blue bunting, the town was alive with celebrations with flags, bands, including street parties, and arched water sprays by the Fire Brigade. Immediately outside the main entrance to Barry's amusements was a huge water boating pool, in which people drove small boats round and round.

**TREVOR MOFFET**

On VE Day we were in bed and my mother and father came rushing into the house and ran up the stairs and made us get our clothes on and we went down to the bottom of the entry. Everyone was out in the streets and there were lights on. It was always a blackout and we'd never had street lights and it must have been very late at night but I just was speechless at all these lights and all these people out at night.

**KATHLEEN THOMPSON**

The Army was still here. The streets were chocabloc. I remember seeing an Austin 7 trying to get down Main Street. It had so many men in it, it couldn't move.

**FRED DUNLOP**

On VE Day there were great street parties. I remember great white tables lined up in the street and cakes and wee buns and baking and the celebrations went on for two days.

**JAMES WHITE**

At the end of the war I was about 8 or so. I remember on Main Street [in Ballymoney] below the clock seeing the parade, and dancing.

**MARY HENRY**

People knew victory was imminent so for weeks we'd been gathering up stuff for bonfires. That night there were bonfires all round and dancing and singing in the streets. The celebrations went on the whole night - terrific!

**DAN HANNAH**



The River Bann frozen over at Coleraine in February 1945  
© Sammy Walker Collection, Coleraine Museum

## On Reflection

The war opened my vision, my world. It made me realise there are bigger places than Derry, bigger and better people than me, and I'd better get out and see them. It was a revelation to me the war in every way.

**MAEVE KELLY**

You must remember that the army's got to be a disciplined force. Imagine being in a hole in the ground and 20 yards ahead of you is a fully armed enemy. You've got to get past to clear a road, or help another section come through. The sergeant orders 'After three, we go!' He blows his whistle, and nobody moves. You might as well put a white flag up. You have to automatically do it. The young have to go through awful training, but the British Army is the best in the world. It's cruel and tough, so it's not or everybody.

**FRED DUNLOP**

Even when you were in action fear wasn't very prominent. You'd be mad if you weren't frightened, but nobody showed any fear.

**NORMAN IRWIN**

I wouldn't have missed it - not for any highfaluting ideas of keeping the freedom. I was with a crowd of blokes who couldn't have been better; they're not here to hear that, they were great, the greatest little battery that was ever formed.

**ROBERT McDONALD**

[The Coleraine Battery had] 57 years of comradeship and a great pride in their country, their unit and each other.

**ANDY MCGOWAN**

I think about the people who died during the war so we could live.

**BILLY O'NEILL**

It's not worth the sacrifice I don't think. It's doubtful if war is worth it, certainly not for the ordinary foot soldier. It's difficult to determine what would have happened if Hitler had been left alone. It's all hypothetical.

**NORMAN IRWIN**

To me war is so awful. Our country has to defend itself, but I just can't find words to describe how I would feel if a child of mine was killed in action, what thoughts I would have about the whole thing. I don't think I would see much goodness in it.

**MARGARET DUNLOP**

**OUR LIVES**



**40s**

**THE POSTWAR**

**50s**





GI brides from Derry pictured on their arrival in New York, Summer 1944  
© Derry City Council Heritage and Museum Service

## War Brides

As a family we owe a debt of gratitude to Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini, because without them our parents - John Logue of Campsie, County Derry and Edera Santin of Malamocco, Venice, Italy - would never have met. My father had originally enlisted with the Enniskillen Fusiliers, but transferred to the Royal Army Service Corps as a driver:

He was 26 and she was 23 when on 16th November 1946 they married in Malamocco. As part of her going away outfit the bride wore a coat she had made from dyed army blankets. In June 1947 my father was discharged from the army and they headed to Ireland to begin the next phase of their life together.

**ROGER LOGUE, WW2 PEOPLE'S WAR**

I worked in the shipyard in Derry for an American company that built the bases. My boss used to say to me 'I have a young fella in my outfit who would really like to meet you.' And that's how we ended up getting together. I was 15 but he thought I was 16, and I didn't tell him that I'd forged my age to get the job at the docks. Bob was 19.

We went together for two years, and then when the base was breaking up and the Americans were moved out later in the war Bob said, 'Maybe if I've got the permission your mum and dad would allow us to marry before I leave because it would be a lot easier for me to get you out to the States if we were already married.' I said 'Oh they'll never allow it.' But he went ahead and put the papers in because he had to get the all clear from his commanding officers.

One day I came home from the office and my mother had a funny look on her face. She said

'I had a visitor today. A police officer came by to make enquiries apparently someone had put in for permission to get married.' I was being checked out and of course he was being checked out too. I said 'Oh Mum, we didn't say anything because we figured that it would never go through.' She said 'You'll have to discuss this with your father.' Of course we ended up getting permission. They made sure he wasn't already married in the US because a lot of girls were marrying guys and they were already married.

We ended up getting married on the 22nd of June and we had quite a big wedding for a wartime one. The base was breaking up but Bob didn't know exactly when he would be shipped out. We ended up getting word that a ship was ready to take all the brides and children to the USA one day before it sailed. We were so lucky as Bob was leaving on the very same ship as me. It was difficult to get everything ready and get passports too and of course it was sad to say goodbye. That was how we sailed off to the USA.

**MAUREEN MATHES, WW2 PEOPLE'S WAR**

When I arrived over here [from Holland] my English was nil, but I tried and I used to say to Norman if I make a mistake be quite honest. I didn't like them to laugh at me, but to tell me where I was wrong and that's the quickest way you learn. Once at Coleraine First Presbyterian Church there was a cake sale and games night. The minister came over to me and welcomed me, and he said, 'How do you like the Christmas cakes and puddings?' I said, 'It stinks nice!'

**HANNEY WALKER**

## Yes, We Have No Bananas

Rationing continued for a long time after the war. But you were used to rationing, and gradually things came off. Sweets remained rationed right until the early 50s. The day that sweets came off rationing, I went downtown when I came home from school to get sweets and there wasn't a sweet to be got. Every single sweet shop - empty bottles. The only thing you could get were Victory-Vs [cough sweets].

**HUGH McGRATTAN**

Once going up the street I saw queues and I couldn't believe it when I asked the people what it was - bananas had come in! That was just after the war. Rationing would still have been on. Johnny Kean had a grocer's shop cum small café. He had ice cream and there were queues of people. Some people had never tasted it before.

**GERRY THOMPSON**

After the war had ended, a variety of fruits started to arrive in the shops. On one occasion, Paddy, who drove a fruit lorry for Bannigan's fruit and vegetable store on Foyle Street, brought home a bunch of bananas. He gave me one and I began to eat it without removing the skin; it tasted horrible!

**PHILIP CUNNINGHAM**

One day a boy was sent round all the classrooms in the school - I would have been in Infants at the time - to show us this object, which it was claimed was a banana. It was shaped like a banana but it was black, and I knew bananas were yellow and it wasn't a real banana. But of course it was one that had probably been in transit for months. The headmaster sent it round for all of us to see it. And that was my first banana in 1946.

**HUGH McGRATTAN**

When rationing was still on the go Magilligan and the sandhills were rabbit warrens and, a bit like

the french onion sellers, guys would come along wheeling bicycles, you couldn't see the bike, it was completely draped in rabbits. You'd just see this furry thing wheeling in. They'd walk wheeling their furry contraptions the five miles into Limavady to sell them to the local butchers.

**IAN McQUISTON**

What everybody had they shared. You'd see the wives of the street walking up and down with a bowl in their hand, which they were either loaning somebody something to see them through the week, or borrowing, or returning what they had borrowed. But nobody paid any attention to it. It was just one of those things, a way of life.

**GERRY THOMPSON**

We had a family business. We were all in it together, brothers and sisters. We had three restaurants [in Ballycastle] in those days. There was the Strand down at the sea front, then the Harbour that operated in the summer time, but I worked mainly in the Anne Street restaurant, near the centre of the town. During the war and after it things were right and dicey, you just couldn't get everything that you wanted for the catering business at that time.

**ARMANDO BERTUCELLI**

There wasn't a great selection of fashion as clothes had also been rationed during the war and the style was only coming in again. It's not like nowadays where we are spoilt for choice.

**CHRISIE WILLISHER**

Everything was short at that time and I know when we were married everything was just to your knees. Any dresses or skirts or suits were all very short. I suppose there was less material in them and that was one of the reasons.

**ANNA DOHERTY**



Food and clothes were still rationed after the war  
© Charles Logue

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## A Labour Government and the Welfare State

When Winston Churchill called an election in 1945, he was relying on his popularity as a war leader. However it was Clement Atlee's Labour party with their socialist programme for a fairer society that won people's support.

The ill, the old, families and the unemployed could now rely on the state to assist them without having to enter the workhouse. Gratitude for Northern Ireland's support during the war played a part in the government's offer to pay for the welfare state and the National Health Service in Northern Ireland.

But for the loyalty of Northern Ireland... we should have been confronted with slavery and death and the light that now shines so brightly throughout the world would have been quenched... the bonds of affection between Great Britain and the people of Northern Ireland have been tempered by fire and are now, I believe, unbreakable.

WINSTON CHURCHILL, 1943

It was a time of great expectation. I could feel it as a child. The war was over and the future ahead was rosy. Everything was going to happen. It was going to be a wonderful world.

HUGH McGRATTAN

My mother was a twin. Her twin brother James died at the age of 21 of pleurisy.

BILLY O'NEILL

My godmother was a rector's wife from Ballymoney. In the 40s her only child, Hope, died, aged about twenty from tuberculosis. Half the deaths among young people at that time were from tuberculosis.

JANE WILLIAMS

Salaries were very low after the war. Everything was scarce and expensive. The health service made a huge difference no doubt about it. There were scanning campaigns for TB [tuberculosis]. They took x-rays of people. I attended a number of them from the factory.

NORMAN IRWIN

[The health service] improved out of all recognition after the war had finished. The same applied for dentistry, and eyesight and the hospitals.

ROBERT McDONALD

My mother got free national dried milk. They collected it from a clinic in Queen Street in Ballymoney. You got orange juice too for vitamins, and of course, we got free milk at school.

BILLY O'NEILL

When you had a problem the doctor came to you.

IAN McQUISTON

When the welfare state came in, it was great and it definitely improved our health care. It was one of the best things to happen in those times. Before the welfare state came in I remember my mother being worried how she was going to pay 5 shillings for the doctor to come out if one of us was sick. Yes it was very expensive. It also got rid of those terrible dispensaries where you had to queue up to see the doctor who made up your medicine.

CHRISSIE WILLISHER

# Coleraine Chronicle

SATURDAY MAY 17, 1952.

## ONLY PROVINCIAL TOWN THAT HAS A WORKHOUSE

MINISTRY'S ALLUSION TO COLERAINE

## NO TRIBUTE INTENDED

COLERAINE IN SPITE OF ITS REPUTATION FOR PROGRESS  
IS THE ONLY PROVINCIAL TOWN IN NORTHERN IRELAND  
WHICH STILL MAINTAINS A WORKHOUSE



The welfare state brought the closure of the last workhouses like this at Limavady  
© R. Cassidy



Everyone benefitted from the new National Health Service, particularly the young and old.  
© Sammy Walker Collection Coleraine Museum



Nissen Huts at the Roe Valley Hospital, Limavady  
© R. Cassidy

## A Labour Government and the Welfare State

The workhouse children, about six of them attended our school. They wore the dark, dark, very dark grey suit of heavy coarse material with what we used to call semi-longs - they were supposed to be short trousers but they were below the knee - and the big black boots. That was the uniform.

GERRY THOMPSON

Periodically at school the nurse came and each child had to go up and she gave you a thorough examination and she looked in your ears, looked through your hair, looked in your throat, got you stripped down to your vest. She gave you quite a going over, each child individually.

KATHLEEN THOMPSON

Just at the end of the war I was seven years of age and I developed a very serious ear infection. I was off school for seven weeks and was told I was being given these magic tablets that would make me better. They were the first antibiotics and they had been brought in just before the war but they had been reserved for the armed forces during the war. Now these were becoming available and they tell me, I don't know whether it was true or not, but probably they saved my life.

HUGH McGRATTAN

[The National Health Service] was tremendous. I think people really abused it at the start because they were getting [false] teeth and then they didn't

like them and just threw them away and got another pair and glasses were the same. They did use the doctors a lot. It was a welcome thing because before they just couldn't have afforded to have paid things. Plus every two or three months a dentist visited the Irish Society School.

GERRY THOMPSON

There was a baby boom just after the war obviously when the men all came home. I was expecting, and our friends were expecting. When our first child was born we had to pay for everything because I wasn't in a health scheme. [Being from Holland] I never paid stamps or anything like that. When our second son was born, I didn't have to pay for it, and we got half a crown a week for child allowance.

When my husband took ill it would have been maybe ten to twelve weeks till you got your sickness benefit. It took a long time. It wasn't very much. You just had to be very careful.

HANNEY WALKER

The local [Roe Valley] hospital, which developed from the old Limavady workhouse, still has some of the Nissen huts. They were built during the war to deal with local military requirements though they had fewer patients than expected. I visited my mother, who had a problem with her knee, in one of the Nissen huts in the early 50s.

IAN McQUISTON





Much rural housing was of poor quality  
© Glassey Collection Coleraine Museum



Many houses lacked toilets and bathrooms  
© Glassey Collection Coleraine Museum

## Homes fit for Heroes?

Much housing was poorly built and overcrowded before the war, and during the war little was done to improve it. After the war there was an urgent need for new homes.

There was no public expenditure during the war years: no houses or roads were being built. Everything was in decay, and the bricks and houses were crumbling around the people.

**PHILIP CUNNINGHAM**

[Having gone] around some of the devastated places [after the Belfast Blitz] I hope and trust they will never be rebuilt again. A minister said to me whose congregation had been bombed, if he could get the people out of the way he would be happy if the Germans would come and bomb the place flat.

**REV. DR. J.B. WOODBURN, MODERATOR OF THE PRESBYTERIAN ASSEMBLY, 1941**

Without a very substantial measure of Government aid, not a brick can be laid of houses which ordinary people can afford to rent.

**WILLIAM GRANT, WHO SET UP THE NORTHERN IRELAND HOUSING TRUST IN 1945**

I was only about three months old when we went to Park Street [in Coleraine]. One side had flush toilets although that was outside and covered over. The houses on the other side, except for a few of them, had what you called dry toilets which had to be emptied every so often by the council in a cart.

They were terraced houses with two bedrooms upstairs, a living room-cum-kitchen and back bedroom downstairs. That was the dry toilet ones. The ones we lived in had two fairly good-sized bedrooms upstairs, and then a good large bedroom downstairs and a good living room and kitchen, a scullery. No bathroom - all you had inside, like the houses across the road, was what you called then a jaw box - just a sink.

**GERRY THOMPSON**

There were no houses, houses were very scarce. There were lots of houses built after the war and that was a great boom too. Lots and lots of people got housed that wouldn't have otherwise been able to get a house, and then of course people were able to take out mortgages and buy bigger and better houses. It was a couple of years, two years from I got back [from active service] till I got a house, so you were in lodgings for a couple of years.

**NORMAN IRWIN**

We lived in Portrush at the bottom of Kerr Street at the harbour. There were two rooms downstairs and two rooms upstairs. No inside toilet and no inside water supply, a cold water tap outside.

**KATHLEEN THOMPSON**

The houses that we had [in Portrush] were built in 1880. The others were progressively built from the 1840s, so we were in some of the newer houses. Just simple little two up, two down houses, two bedrooms upstairs. There was no bathroom. The bathroom was a tin bath in front of the fire on a Saturday night, and the toilet was outside. My father had done a lot of work when he bought them in 1927, and he had installed a kitchen and a flushing toilet and a pantry.

I remember them building the pre-fabs at Arcorn Square, round about 1948/49, and this was quite a novelty, because they had bathrooms and they had fridges. That was the start of it. My aunt and her new husband moved there. The council built them and you applied and according to need they were allocated. And him being an ex-serviceman and she being local, they were quite high up the list.

**HUGH McGRATTAN**



Houses were often overcrowded  
© Glassey Collection Coleraine Museum



This Portrush family only had an outside tap in 1958  
© Janis Thompson Bolan Collection Coleraine Museum

## Coleraine Chronicle

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 11, 1958.

### COLERAINE BOROUGH SLUM CLEARANCE PROPOSALS

308 HOUSES WILL BE DEMOLISHED  
IN NEXT 15 YEARS

Under the slum clearance envisaged in the Province, 308 houses in Coleraine will be demolished in the next 15 years. In the recent survey carried out by the Divisional Sanitary Officer, Mr. R.P. Glassey, they were found to be unfit beyond repair at reasonable cost. Dwellings shown as unfit but repairable totalled 241 and notices will be served requiring that they be brought up to standard.

## Homes fit for Heroes?

When the war ended the Americans abandoned the [Springtown] camp, leaving about eighty empty Nissen huts behind. A lot of people from our area, and especially Fahan Street, went to live in the huts. It was like moving into a mansion, especially for a family who had been living in terrible conditions in one room of a house with no electricity that was home to maybe six families who all had to share the one outside toilet.

PHILIP CUNNINGHAM

Gradually as people came back from the war housing became scarcer and scarcer. They just couldn't get enough houses, then eventually the first development was what we called the Calf Lane off the Bushmills Road. That's where men really started to get work in the late 40s. And then the next big development was what came to be nicknamed Wuthering Heights because at that time the film was just coming on the scene and that was up The Heights in Coleraine, over the far side of the Bann, the Killowen side.

GERRY THOMPSON

Nothing could have prepared my mother for the huge difference in lifestyle she had in Venice where she lived in a large house on the Via Merceria, and which had every amenity, compared to the home which awaited her.

My father's mother, father, brother, and five sisters all lived in a small semi-detached cottage on Cloughole

Road, Campsie, County Derry. They had no gas, no electricity, no running water, no inside toilet, but what they did have was a cast iron range to cook on and to heat the home, paraffin lamps, a well from which to draw water, and to the rear of the cottage a small hut with a wooden seat from which the human waste was covered in ash and then buried some distance away.

Later they lived in Messines Park, and with the O'Kane family in Duke Street in the Waterside district of Derry. In the early 1950s their lives were transformed when they moved to what would be their final home at 34 Rinmore Drive, Creggan Estate.

I was about five years old and vividly remember the Sunday when together with the O'Kanes we went to see our new home for the first time. My mother and father's delight at entering this three-bedroomed paradise was great and increased as they toured the kitchen with its modern gas cooker and built-in cupboards, the bathroom with a full-size bath, sink and flushing toilet, a sitting room, three separate bedrooms and front and back garden. At last somewhere to call home.

For us the benefit of having an Italian mother was most obvious in the cooking. From the start we were introduced to olive oil, herbs, garlic, pasta, pizza, polenta, salami, parmesan cheese and ways of cooking that were alien to most people living in 1950s and 1960s Derry.

ROGER LOGUE, WW2 PEOPLE'S WAR



Many Derry families were delighted with their new houses in the Creggan  
© WELB Library Service



Prefabricated houses built after the war still survive in Ballymoney  
© Ballymoney Museum

## Homes fit for Heroes?

Our new home [in Derry] was a vast change for us. Now we had electric light and hot and cold running water and we could enjoy a nice soapy warm bath any day of the week. (We used to have to boil kettles to fill the big tin bath to wash ourselves in front of the fire on Saturday nights.) My mother and Julia were so happy with these extra amenities, especially the huge new washing machine with the electric wringer attached that my father had bought on hire purchase. He also got credit in Cavendish's furniture store in Bishop Street and bought a suite of furniture and a radiogram.

That first summer I lived in Creggan was one of the happiest times in my life and I took a keen interest in gardening. My father helped me to plant privet hedge slips around the edges of the front garden and to make flowerbeds under the front windows where I set my first flower seeds - daffodil bulbs and lupins.

**PHILIP CUNNINGHAM, ECHOES OF DERRY**

I remember when the Creggan housing estate was open as there were a lot of families from the Pennyburn area who we knew that got houses and moved in. A lot of my friends moved to Creggan and we didn't see them as much because there wasn't any transport up there in those days.

There was a lot of people in those days desperate for houses. I remember especially the terrible living conditions up at Springtown Camp where people

had moved in after the war because they had nowhere to live, sometimes maybe eight people shared the same room. It was awful to see how those people lived but I was glad that they got new houses in Creggan.

**CHRISSE WILLISHER**

With us getting married we didn't have a house to start with, we lived with friends of mine. Then they were building houses here in Coleraine and encouraging people to buy their own house, but it wasn't easy at that time. The Borough Council were very good and they had a scheme going. They gave you a very good offer if you paid so much to them as a down payment. That's how we got our first house, and we paid the loan off to the Borough Council monthly.

**ANNA DOHERTY**

They were trying to rehouse people in better houses [in Portrush]. You filled in a form and put it into the Town Hall, the Council. With tiny wee houses you were always out. You went out the front of the house to use this big washing line, so you were always in contact with someone. Whereas when we moved into the new house you had everything inside and your own wee small backyard to hang the clothes so it wasn't just as close. We didn't run in and out of each others' houses just as much.

**KATHLEEN THOMPSON**



Children at Dungiven Primary School  
© Bunn Collection Limavady / Green Lane Museum

## Schools for All

Free post-primary education was introduced in Northern Ireland by the Education Act of 1947. In 1957 the school-leaving age was raised to 15.

The changes in education and health were all part of this great future. There was a feeling of excitement. There was a great feeling that the war was over and everything was going to be wonderful.

I was at Kelly Memorial [in Portrush] until I was 11 and did this new qualifying exam in '49. I think we were probably about the third lot that did it, and not very many of us did. It wasn't compulsory. A lot of people wanted to get out and earn.

You had a break for lunch between one and two, when you either brought a sandwich or you went home. School dinners didn't come in at all during my primary school years. They were talked about but they never actually came in.

**HUGH McGRATTAN**

For lunch we got butter and jam or just jam or just butter. You made it up in the morning and you took it with you for lunchtime. When you went down to eat your piece the jam was black but you still ate it, you were hungry. You had a wee drink of milk along with it.

**RITA McLAUGHLIN**

Our classes in the Irish Society School were getting very big. I remember classes with over 50 in them.

**JENNIFER CUNNINGHAM**

After the war you had a lot of people coming out of the services with nowhere to go and a lot of them did crash teaching courses. It was something like six weeks in Stranmillis. At primary school in Limavady coming up to the qualifying we were taught by an ex-serviceman who couldn't get the services out of his mind. He ran his classroom like a ship. The aisles between the desks were called gangways and the open area at the front by the blackboard was the deck, 'OK boy, up the gangway, on the deck!'

Corporal punishment was rife and was meted out for lack of achievement not just for disciplinary matters. There was no attempt to identify people with learning difficulties. I remember one guy, Henry, and today he would be in a special school.

The routine was ten spellings a night. Ten was great, nine OK, but if you got eight right you got one slap, seven right and you got two slaps and he worked all the way down. Day in and day out there was this ritual of doing your spellings and then lining up for your punishment. It was brutal, and Henry was lucky if he got two or three right.

You had to take it like a man. You had to hold your hand out firmly while you took your slap with a bamboo cane. If you pulled your hand away it was one plus one. Henry never got full marks. You could be waiting there still for him to learn them. That was not a good part of primary school at that time. There was a lot of rote learning and if you didn't come up to the mark slaps for underachievement were quite routine, though not to that extreme.

Corporal punishment for disciplinary reasons was widespread and accepted. If I went home and told my father the headmaster had slapped me, I'd have got another one. You must have done something wrong and you'd let your family down as well.

**IAN McQUISTON**

There was great excitement in the area when Pennyburn school opened in 1954. It was a state of the art school for its time. It was the first time that children in the area could enjoy a hot meal at school. Very importantly it brought jobs to the area as well.

**CHRISSE WILLISHER**



## Schools for All

I went to Irish Society School. Girls and boys were separate. The boys had their own playground and the girls had their own playground. We never saw the boys, we didn't even see them in the dining hall. The first time I was ever in the boys' school was on my last day when I left in P7. As a special privilege we were allowed to go round and collect all the teachers' autographs. And the school had a beautiful garden, and I was in it once, in seven years. It was to be kept nice, you weren't allowed in it.

I loved the Irish Society. The discipline was extremely strict and you were in fear of your life if you spoke or you did anything. If you were put outside the door you were in fear and trembling that Miss Morrison would come and discover you while you were in the corridor. Cause then you had to go up to her office. If you were outside the door, it wasn't for anything awful, it might have been for talking to somebody beside you. The teacher just would've said, 'I said no talking', and you went out, that was it.

**JENNIFER CUNNINGHAM**

If you misbehaved or anything like that you were either kept in after school and made to write out a lot of lines or you were caned. They had just brought in the I-plus and they wanted me to sit it but I didn't want to sit it, I wanted to get out and earn some money.

**KATHLEEN THOMPSON**

We had free school milk. It would come in crates. As a reward you might get to fill the inkwells - we still had dipping pens - or you got to hand out the milk bottles. School meals were awful. The potatoes were never properly cooked, they were grey, full of lumps, they tasted of metal and they were served with ice cream scoops in wee dollops. Pudding was always a rectangular chunk of dry sponge covered with yellow

lumpy custard, or sometimes pink, or else semolina or tapioca. From a nutritional point of view they were probably perfectly balanced, and for a lot of kids it was important that they got the milk, and a balanced meal, and quite a few would have got free meals.

**IAN McQUISTON**

Many times I gathered potatoes, usually around October time. Houstons was a great people to work to, and they paid you 4 shillings a day. You took the time off [school]. It was back-breaking work.

**GERRY THOMPSON**

The potato digging week was very much part of the school year. The school [in Limavady] closed, there were so many children from farms.

**IAN McQUISTON**

The parish had these parades through the town, fancy dress parades, things like that. They were building the Sheskburn school. It's the council buildings now. Then it was the Star of the Sea school and they were gathering money for it.

**ARMANDO BERTUCCELLI**

They built a new school at Millburn. It had a wee nursery school, it was very good, a lovely wee place. They took them in from about three, the same as the places now but in those days that was unheard of. My son loved it and they were very good teachers. He was only three or four and he learnt more than we ever thought. They all got their wee beds out and they went to bed in the afternoon. It was just like a nursery school now but in those days that was a new thing.

**ANNA DOHERTY**

## Postwar Jobs and Unemployment

Traditional jobs in linen mills, railways or farming began to disappear, and the government tried to attract new industries like the production of man-made fibres. There were still better employment prospects for women than men.

Things were very hard in those days for jobs were very hard to get then because all the men came out of the war and everybody was looking for a job.

**HANNEY WALKER**

Our jobs naturally enough were guaranteed to get them back when we came home [from active service]. We got them back but somebody had to be displaced and that was unfortunate. I rejoined the company I had been working for before I left, the Northern Ireland Road Transport Board.

**ROBERT McDONALD**

One week after I returned to Coleraine [after serving in the Coleraine Battery] I went straight into the plumbing trade. My first jobs included setting up drinking systems on farms and then into the building trade on housing.

**ROBIN MARTIN**

After the war things were if anything worse. There was just no work whatsoever for the men. And when it started to pick up across the water first, they started to build, the men here were offered employment, and if they didn't go they were cut off the dole [unemployment benefit] for six weeks without a penny. Work was non-existent. That was the reason for my Uncle Davey clearing off to England, to Chester, for good.

**GERRY THOMPSON**

My father came back and never really settled, after a lifetime in the navy and at sea. And he had actually at the end of the war been offered promotion on a scheme whereby he would have gone to Germany and taken his family with him for a number of years to help with the rebuilding.

My aunt married a British soldier from the Middlesex regiment. And he came back and they got married and he spent the rest of his life here. When he came to Portrush, he was a trained nurseryman by trade, as was his father before him, but he couldn't get any work in that line and he joined the council.

A lot of local soldiers coming back became council workers, doing jobs that really they weren't suited to. I know there was one man from Portrush who had gone to Bushmills Grammar School and had got his Senior Certificate, which was what you aimed for to go on to university, and in spite of the fact that he had this Senior Certificate which should have opened up a lot of jobs for him, he finished up on the bin lorry and spent the rest of his life as a council worker.

**HUGH McGRATTAN**

I was discharged from the army in 1946. They were building a new factory in Coleraine known as Bengers. They were just starting the construction of the factory when I was discharged from the army, and I applied for a job, and I got a job in the engineering department as a supervisor. That was straight after I came back from the war. There was a lot of putting in new machinery. It was hard work, long hours. There weren't the same restrictions on employment then as there are now. You couldn't work people now as I worked, they'd have you in jail.

**NORMAN IRWIN**

My aunt took in washing. She had to put the big bucket of clothes on to the gas ring to boil and then took them out to the back yard and washed them with a washtub and a washboard, and then ironed them very, very particular.

**KATHLEEN THOMPSON**



Dockers at Coleraine Harbour in 1958  
© Sammy Walker Collection Coleraine Museum



Gerry Thompson working on new houses in Limavady, 1953  
© Janis Thompson Bolan collection Coleraine Museum



Meeting of the Unemployed Association in Derry 1950s  
© Philip Cunningham Derry Down the Days

# Coleraine Chronicle

SATURDAY MARCH 1, 1952.

## 5,989 MORE WORKLESS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

### HIGHEST TOTAL SINCE THE WAR

A total of 53,154 unemployed persons in Northern Ireland was registered at local offices of the Ministry of Labour and National Insurance at February 11, representing an increase of 5,989 since January, and nearly twelve per cent of the working population.

The total, which consists of 29,127 men, 2,017 boys, 18,289 women, and 3,721 girls, is the largest recorded since the war. The increase is again mainly due to falling work for women in the textile trades, but the trend had become broader as shown by the fact that there are now more men out of work than a year ago. Normally in February there is a slight fall from the midwinter peak, which last year was 33,078. The figures do not yet reflect the measures taken to absorb more unskilled men on road and other improvement schemes. The total number of factory workers unemployed in the Province is 3,529.

#### The figures include the following:-

**Londonderry** - Wholly unemployed, 4,885; non-claimants, 208; casuals, 93; temporarily stopped, 1,301; total live register, 6,487.  
**Coleraine** - Wholly unemployed, 1,202; non-claimants, 88; casuals, 7; temporarily stopped, 159; total 1,456.  
**Limavady** - Wholly unemployed, 713; non-claimants, 10; casuals, nil; temporarily stopped, 7; total 730  
**Ballymoney** - Wholly unemployed, 1,081; non-claimants, 21; casuals, nil; temporarily stopped, 61; total, 1,163.

## Postwar Jobs and Unemployment

At one time we had about five ice cream carts. My mother kept the business going and my brothers all sold the ice cream. My stepfather looked after all the horses. I helped at weekends, and in the evenings I would've helped my mother to make the ice cream.

First of all I used to have to go and collect the corn flour and custard, and half hundredweight bags of sugar. Unsalted margarine was the fat put into the ice cream then. And the ice we used to get from Patterson's, but if they ran out, we got it from the Pork Store. At the back of the house we had what we called the icehouse, a little factory built on for the business.

The smallest ice cream was a three pence slider, and the biggest one was a six pence one. They stopped making ice cream [in the mid 50s] as Walls and Lyons ice cream put fridges into shops and supplied the ice cream direct, so that knocked the business out.

BILLY O'NEILL

The narrow gauge [railway in Ballycastle] stopped operating in 1950, which meant that all those people that worked for the narrow gauge, firemen, the stationmaster, porters, they all lost their jobs.

ARMANDO BERTUCELLI

At Balmore Spinning Mill my first job was what they call a cage boy. The spinners used to put their bobbins with the linen yarn on spikes and I put the spikes with twelve bobbins on each into a cage. I looked after six spinning frames. You had to carry the cages out to the end of the spinning frame, and then somebody came along with the trolley and collected them to take them to the lift and up to the reeling room.

It was very warm. Most people worked in their bare feet. Whenever I started round March time it was nice coming from the cold outside into the warm

spinning mill, but then it wasn't so nice in the summer time. There were only about ten or twelve young fellas under 18 years of age. They didn't like paying people above that. And the spinners were all ladies. They could be very sore on you at times. You always had to be very careful.

In the spinning mill I was working from eight in the morning to six at night for five days for three pounds. I was getting three pounds the first week I started, and three pounds when I was paid off in March 1956. There was about 12 people paid off in the mill at that time, and there just wasn't any work about. Quite a lot of people went to Scotland or to England. I sold my watch for 4 pounds 10 shillings and that was my fare over to my brother Hugh in Rochester.

BILLY O'NEILL

Proper jobs were very scarce in the early 1950s [in Derry] for young school leavers, especially fourteen-year-old boys, and with very little construction work being done only the lucky ones were employed as apprentices in Brown's 'Wellington' Foundry in Foyle Street, Craig's Engineering Company on the Strand Road or in the small shoemakers' shops. There were also limited places for apprentices in barbershops and in the many family-owned public houses in the town. Few boys were ever taken on in the many local shirt factories, which employed mostly females.

When the BSR [Birmingham Sound Reproducers] factory opened in the Eastway Road in 1952, however, it provided employment for many young men from the area. I remember standing outside the factory office many mornings along with my friends and a dozen or so other boys hoping the manager, Andy McKeown, would point his finger at me and tell me to start in the morning; that is how things were done in those days.

Continued..



The shirt industry was still important after the war  
© Coleraine Chronicle



Shirt making provided jobs for women, City Factory 1949, Derry  
© Derry City Council Heritage and Museum Service

## Postwar Jobs and Unemployment

I never got a job in the BSR but my brothers, Freddy and Danny, were soon employed there. The only one of my pals to start in the factory was Jimmy; the rest of us had to search hard to find bits and pieces of work around the town to try and earn some pocket money.

I also tried to find work down at the docks where a crowd of boys and men stood every morning, hoping to get one or two days casual work loading the seed potatoes into the cargo boats at the quay in the late autumn. But I never succeeded there either and I put it down to my being too small and skinny. My friend Jimmy Lynch always managed to get a start because his father and two brothers were full-time dockers.

**PHILIP CUNNINGHAM**

My two best friends at primary school, or public elementary school, both joined the services [after the war]. One joined the Navy and one joined the Marines. So a fair proportion were still joining up. There were local jobs in the council and in shops. Another friend got a job in Christies Hardware, in Portrush, and there were people working in The White House. That was always reckoned to be a good job. There were some civil service jobs, at the Metropole - my sister worked there.

**HUGH McGRATTAN**

There was a wee man came round with a horse and cart and he was called the brock man. You kept a bucket for potato peelings and any leftovers, there wasn't always a lot of those but when you prepared veg you took off the outside leaves, everything was thrown into the brock bucket. And he came around and collected that once a week and he fed his pigs with that. So there was no waste of any kind.

**KATHLEEN THOMPSON**

The [shirt] factory across the road was very old and the facilities in it were very poor. It was cold in the winter and it was hot in the summer, and about the only thing that they could do to control the air flow was to throw the windows open, which was how we got to see what was inside the factories, because in the summer time the sash windows were thrown right up. You could see the girls working at the sewing machines, but also working with the gas irons with leads going up to the ceiling.

There were chutes that the materials came up and down, apparently they were lethal. But again the girls would have told you that there wasn't the same health and safety worries then. It was a common thing for them to put a needle through their finger when they were at the machines. They just pulled it out and went and got a new one. If they were lucky they got a plaster on it.

**JENNIFER CUNNINGHAM**

In this area of Pennyburn [in Derry] unemployment was bad. Houses in Messines Park in Pennyburn were for the ex-service men. A lot of these men had fought in the First World War and suffered from injuries, which made it very hard to find work. My father was one of these men but was lucky enough to find work as a security man in the naval stores but was made redundant again after the war was over.

There was a lot more jobs for the women because of the shirt factories. When I left school at 14 in 1946 my first job was in Ryans' grocery shop here in Pennyburn. It was only part-time and mainly to help out on Wednesday as that was that day the rationing coupons were issued. By the age of 15 I was out of work again and signed on the dole.

Continued..

## Postwar Jobs and Unemployment

I had put down my name for Woolworths but it was really difficult to get into. Then just before Christmas in 1948 I got sent for by Woolworths and started working in the toy section. I really enjoyed working in this section, as it was always really busy. After that I got trained up as a window dresser. There were eight windows to dress so you usually did one a day. Window dressing was a big thing in those days as it was the shop's way of advertising what they had for sale. I remember the big sweet displays we used to do especially at the weekends, as it was just after rationing had ended and sweets and biscuits were still a novelty to everyone.

Sometimes when it was busy I would help out on the biscuit counter as it was often queued out the door. I used to always feel sick by Saturday night, as I had sampled so many biscuits during the week. There was always a rush for the biscuit counter when something new came out, like custard creams and orange creams.

When I was getting married in 1956 I had to leave Woolworths as it was company policy, but I went to the boss and asked to stay on for six months as I was going to England, and he said yes, which made me very unpopular with the supervisor as I had gone over their heads to ask the boss to stay on. Woolworths was always a meeting place on a Saturday afternoon, you used to meet everyone in there, it was great, I enjoyed my time there.

**CHRISIEWILLSHER**

Of the industries that came in after the war one of the most uplifting ones for Limavady was the Daintyfit brassiere factory. The government was trying to attract in industry and address the inevitable unemployment after the war and built an advance factory near Drumachose Presbyterian where we went to church.

**IAN McQUISTON**

Walking home from school we would've stopped at different places, looking into the factories. Harris's and Stanley's would've had their doors and windows open. You could've looked into the iron works and seen the smelt, and seen them pouring the iron into the moulds. The distillery was still going when I was at school. The malting would've hung in the air for weeks. It's the same smell you would get still in Bushmills. It's a nice smell, a smell you could get used to, a sweet smell.

**JENNIFER CUNNINGHAM**

My mother and father both worked. My mother was a waitress and my father worked at a former airstrip near Derry, and after that they worked in Barry's Amusements, so they both worked long hours. You didn't just have an eight-hour day then. My mummy didn't get home until about ten or half ten. She was out through the day so my aunt fed us and put us into bed at night because our two houses were adjoining.

**KATHLEEN THOMPSON**

In 1957 Chemstrand, which produced a synthetic fibre called Acrilan, bought a large 200 acre site on the Bann. The factory employed large numbers of people, both in the construction and later in the factory, bringing prosperity to depressed Coleraine. The basic material acrylonite had to be shipped in but as it was very flammable the tankers couldn't be berthed alongside the coal boats and other ships. So a new jetty was built at the foot of the Coleraine Inst sports ground and the acrylonite was pumped in pipes to the factory.

## Postwar Jobs and Unemployment

In the summer of 1959 the Chemstrand factory was officially opened by the Duke of Edinburgh. Bales of fibre were produced at the factory, and they were sent all over the world to be made into things like blankets, carpets and jumpers. There were complaints from New Zealand that their sheep were not in demand any longer. There were complaints about the emissions, which in certain weather conditions formed a white layer of dust on the cars eating into the paintwork. The washing on the line also suffered.

**MARGARET BOYD**

When Chemstrand came the Americans came into the school - I suppose they visited all the different local schools - and they brought us in each an American apple and milky icelolly. And it was the first factory made icelolly we ever had. Up to that the only icelollies we had had were ones that were made by people in their own shops. They were just raspberry flavoured and round on a stick.

**JENNIFER CUNNINGHAM**

I left school at fifteen and went on to serve my time in plumbing. I did an apprenticeship for six years. All this housing development was taking off all over the place and my very first job was round the coast road at Ballycastle. We had to catch a lorry every morning at Coleraine at ten to seven, made our way through Bushmills and collected workmen there, and went to Ballycastle.

The building of Chemstrand started in 1957, and just shortly after it started, I got a job in it. When I went there, with working a bit of overtime, I was coming out with about £17 and we thought we were millionaires. I bought my first car on hire purchase, although I said never ever again and I never did it again.

**GERRY THOMPSON**

In daddy's shop the hours got much longer whenever Chemstrand came. That was the first lot of shift work in Coleraine. So in order to catch the people going to their work, daddy opened at half seven. So you had the people going at 8 o'clock, the people going in at 4 o'clock, then there was a late shift at 12 midnight. People'd come in then mostly for cigarettes, some sweets. At that time there was two-way traffic still at the shop on Bridge Street. So the cars were able to draw up at the door and nip in.

At night after the banks closed daddy's shop was the bureau de change for Coleraine. When the boats came in a lot of the sailors had just a foreign currency and they wanted sterling to go into the pubs or the cafés, so daddy changed the money for them.

**JENNIFER CUNNINGHAM**

In the hosiery industry we had a lot of women in the factory where I worked. 700 employees. Most of the office staff were women, and the laboratory staff and the quality control people. We had women on the machines as well as in the factory and I found women more reliable than men. It was my business to keep the machines running. If it was a man running it and it broke down (they were very complicated machines) he would tell you what he thought you wanted to hear, but a woman would tell you what actually happened. On the boring jobs a woman was much better. A man would lose interest with a boring job, whereas a woman wouldn't lose interest as quickly.

**NORMAN IRWIN**

The girls got out of the offices for their tea break in the morning or afternoon. They came round looking for ice-cold drinks, because my father was one of the first that had a big Coca-Cola fridge, one of the big chest ones. The factory girls came in en masse, the whole place was standing full right out to the street. They got crisps, Cadbury snacks, Snowballs and Wagon Wheels.

**JENNIFER CUNNINGHAM**





Many, like Billy O'Neill, had to seek employment across the water.  
© Billy O'Neill

## Emigration

Quite a number of people emigrated and everybody who emigrated seemed to do better than they did at home.

**NORMAN IRWIN**

My father went through all the procedure [for emigration] and everything was in place to go and we were going to Canberra. He had got his job and everything and then for some reason or other it all just fell through. But there were quite a few people - it was £10 assisted passage - took advantage of it.

**GERRY THOMPSON**

We had a maid. They were young girls who came in from the country. They got their room and board and a little bit of money. One left us to emigrate to Tasmania. Emigration was a reflection of the employment situation. Australia and Canada were encouraging emigration. They fitted you out with jobs, starter homes, the trip out was practically free.

**IAN McQUISTON**

My brother Joe decided to emigrate out. I think it was £10 you paid. My mother was working that day. I didn't want to leave him to the station, so I went up and did her work for her while she went down to the station.

My sister worked in Coleraine in a factory, and she met her husband-to-be in Coleraine. After they married they went to Scotland to get jobs and save up and then her husband went out ahead of her to Australia and then she went out, and they both emigrated too.

**KATHLEEN THOMPSON**

All my brothers had to go to England or Scotland [for work], Leo, and Eddie, and Hughie, James and Jack. Leo worked in the hydroelectric scheme, Eddie was working in Yorkshire. Hughie left home I think in 1948 and married a girl there. I worked in England. Once it was twelve hours a day on a contract to build an oil refinery. There was five thousand people worked on it, and a lot of people from the west of Ireland and Dublin, and the first time I think ever I heard Gaelic being spoken was when I went to live in England.

**BILLY O'NEILL**



Milking machines and tractors meant fewer people were needed to work on farms  
© R. Cassidy Limavady / Green Lane Museum

## THE LONDONDERRY SENTINEL

Thursday morning, June 29, 1950

### NEWS FOR THE ULSTER FARMER

Some months have passed since last in this column we sounded a note of warning to our farmers as to the competition they might expect to have to face in the years that lie ahead. To whatever quarter of the globe we turn there we see signs of preparation for the coming struggle for the best places in the commodity markets of the world. Not only are Denmark, Holland, Norway, Sweden and Finland preparing to send more butter, cheese, eggs, poultry and bacon, they are preparing to send more of everything they produce to Britain. Empire countries such as New Zealand and Australia are even now sending steadily increasing supplies of butter and cheese, meat, mutton and lamb.

With all the potential competition piling up it is only to be expected that the housewives of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, who after all are the farmer's main customers will become more progressively more particular, 'choosy' is probably the best way to describe it - both as regards quality and price.

In the days before 1939 we had experience of marketing schemes for both bacon and eggs, which in the few short years of their operation raised our Northern Ireland output of those commodities from a comparatively lowly position to the top place on the British market. What we have done before we can do again.

## Farming

Increasing mechanisation meant there were fewer jobs in farming after the war.

The farming was changing. When I was a boy they were still using horses, the tractor was just coming in. They were still lifting potatoes by hand. We used to get a week off every year from school to go potato gathering, which was a bit silly in Portrush because very few of us went potato gathering - it was just a week off.

In those days you had clusters of farms and everybody helped, everybody. So it meant my uncle might say 'I'm for Kennedy's today' for pulling flax or whatever, and everybody would go to Kennedy's and work there for several days. Then they would come to my uncle's farm and everybody would work there. It was very much a communal thing. And if the neighbour next door had a tractor he brought it, so everyone got the benefit of that tractor.

They still helped each other out. And my uncle of course did get a tractor. In fact he bought a car. He didn't know how to drive. You just bought the licence. He didn't know how to drive it and he sat in the yard and went through all the motions until he actually plucked up the courage. And that's how he drove.

HUGH McGRATTAN

Beresford was where the market was. We had to go in the back gate to school and on Tuesday mornings that was side to side full of cattle. They put a railing on the footpath and we had to go up the footpath behind the railing to get into the back gate. But I

used to run, for I was terrified of the cattle.

Occasionally we forgot at home to close the gate on a Tuesday morning and we could've woke up on a Tuesday morning with the whole front garden full of cattle, because at that time the farmers walked the cattle in. They didn't come in in lorries and trailers. There were a lot of drovers employed to bring cattle in.

JENNIFER CUNNINGHAM

When I came home from school I went out gathering or pulling lint as they called it, flax. I remember going to the farms and cutting seed potatoes, things like that.

BILLY O'NEILL

The winter of 1947 was a very severe winter, with frost and snow, and the River Bann completely froze over. There was a policeman called Paddy Burns stationed in Coleraine at the time and if he weighed a pound, he must have weighed about 15 or 16 stone, and he walked across the River Bann at the harbour and back again.

Then the summer after that was a glorious summer, really, really beautiful, continuous sunshine, and the Government introduced double summertime for that year to allow the farmers more light to get the badly needed crops in.

GERRY THOMPSON

## Dances, the Pictures and Coffee Bars

The show bands used to come [to Ballycastle] and there were dances in the Quay Road Hall. That brought the younger crowd. They'd have dances in the Orange Hall or the Parochial Hall. Jimmy Young did a show in the Quay Road Hall.

ARMANDO BERTUCCELLI

Whenever I used to get my three pounds a week for working in the spinning mill, I gave two pounds to my mother for my keep, and I got a pound. Five shillings would have been to pay you in on a Friday night maybe to the Top Hat Ballroom, that then became the Strand Ballroom. And maybe the next night it would be the Arcadia Ballroom, five shillings. I had a bicycle, the other 5 shillings would pay for it. But I didn't smoke or drink in those days so I didn't need a lot of money.

BILLY O'NEILL

On a Sunday night [in Portrush] you would have met at Papa Forte's, the café underneath the Majestic picture house. You'd have a night at the pictures, and with my father working in the dance hall we'd have gone dancing a couple of nights. Other than that you were content to walk up and down the street, but you were never allowed to stop in doorways because we had a police sergeant at the time, Sergeant Fulton, and there's no way you could have let him catch you standing in a doorway 'cause he'd just have said 'Right girl, have you no home to go to?' and you didn't loiter.

KATHLEEN THOMPSON

I remember that the dances were great. They would have been on every Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday night [in Derry]. My favourite was the Corinthian, and sometimes maybe once a month for a big dance we were allowed to stay out late until 1 o'clock and always ended up walking home to save money on taxi fares as they were expensive. All the top bands used to come to the big dances held at the Guildhall like Joe Goss and Ivy Benson, which was a girl band. There was always great excitement surrounding the big Christmas Night Dance at the Guildhall. There was the picture houses as well for entertainment which was always very popular. You always had to queue to get in and there was a mad rush when it was over to get the last bus home.

CHRISSIE WILLISHER

There was a dance every night of the week at Barry's. But the girls all stood at one side of the hall and the boys all stood at the other side of the hall and they may have had just about two ladies' choices during the night when you could ask a fellow to dance but other than that you stood there until a boy came over and asked you to dance.

KATHLEEN THOMPSON



Many learned to jive from American soldiers  
© Billy O'Neill



Coleraine Dance Team in 1954. Skirts are wider and longer in a move away from utility fashions  
© Sammy Walker Collection Coleraine Museum

As teenagers you went to the pictures at night. That was the number one. Television was only just starting to come in. You went to Forte's to drink coffee. That was the done thing. A cup of coffee was sixpence and a cup of tea was four pence. And after the pictures you could go into Forte's and have fish and chips for about 1/6, if you had the money.

There were dances at the Arcadia. I went to the Arcadia once or twice. I couldn't dance. Rock and roll was coming in. We had juke boxes in the cafes that you always played - Connie Francis and even Elvis Presley. The wartime tunes had disappeared fairly rapidly. The new music took over. I think it was the influence of the wireless.

HUGH McGRATTAN

I passed my test on the motorbike and that night I went to the Arcadia Ballroom and that's when I met my wife Lily. I was able to leave her home to Ballyreagh, outside Portrush, because I had passed my test that day. I was able to take her on the pillion without a helmet. You were allowed to do that in those days.

BILLY O'NEILL

My sister was always shouting that there was a dinner dance coming to the Town Hall. You had tea and buns and sandwiches and stuff. I was about 15. It was wee local bands, saxophone, drums, maybe clarinet or

trombone. They tried to get up to date but they were nearly all stuck on tunes they knew, until some great club sounds came along like Clipper Carlton and the Cadets.

GERRY THOMPSON

You didn't go into bars then. I wasn't inside a bar even when I got married - not until a few years after that. Because it would have been too disgraceful.

KATHLEEN THOMPSON

In those days whenever you danced, and if you were pretty good at dancing, the people used to stop and watch you. Then they encouraged you to dance even better by clapping their hands and you had a jam session. We danced for two or three minutes as fast as we could, doing all these special steps. Then you came out of the circle and touched somebody else to come in and take over for a little while.

I used to have different partners that would prefer a quick jive, or somebody who liked doing the charleston, or in the early days a jitterbug. A lot of the people, around Ballymoney, well Northern Ireland actually, learnt to jitterbug and jive from the American soldiers and the navy in Derry. They brought that big band music. Of course in the dance halls there was no alcohol and no bars. People just didn't drink, and danced all night.

BILLY O'NEILL



As few could afford holidays, Portrush was a favourite for days out.  
© Ulster Museum



The popular West Strand at Portrush in the 1950s  
© Janis Thompson Bolan Collection Coleraine Museum



Style returns to postwar Portrush, the Arcadia 1953  
© Gerry Thompson Collection Coleraine Museum



Local families spent summer days at the beach  
© Janis Thompson Bolan Collection Coleraine Museum

## Beside the Seaside

Sunday school socials were the big thing. Kids didn't get holidays. We went by bus or earlier by train - to Limavady, train to Coleraine, then change again for Portrush. You'd have your day out and then you'd meet up in some church hall for tea and buns.

**IAN McQUISTON**

Laharna Tours and different tours would come to the Strand [in Ballycastle] for their coffee and scones in the morning certain days in the week and you had to be ready for them coming in, because they only had a certain amount of time to spend before they were on the road again.

**ARMANDO BERTUCELLI**

During the school summer holidays you knocked off on a Friday off school and between what you gathered up yourself and from what your mother and father gave you, the first thing you did, you ran over to the station and got your weekly ticket [from Coleraine to Portrush]. The train left you off right where Barry's is now. And that allowed you to go down in the morning and back up for your lunch and then down in the afternoon. Or if you didn't want to go in the afternoon, if you were the elder type, you'd have went after tea - went down and spent the night there and then back up on the last train which I think was about 10 o'clock. If you missed it you walked. Many a time I had to. Barry's have the dodgems yet and the hobby horses and, right at the front, there was an artificial water lake with boats that went on the water, and the big wheel.

**GERRY THOMPSON**

Whenever I was six, seven or eight years of age, just the odd time, maybe once a year, I remember going

to Portrush [from Ballymoney] in the horse and trap. And when I was about eight years of age we went to Downhill in it, for the Sunday School Spin.

**BILLY O'NEILL**

We didn't really have enough money to go on holidays. We went all the time to Portrush when the children were small, in the summer. When the weather was good, we took them over in the school holidays. We went on the bus and took them down to the beach, and the strand at the harbour, that was a great wee place. All our friends went there with their children. It was a safe wee place for them, and we went round to the Arcadia, it was good too. If the weather was good we spent our time down in Portrush, but we didn't go away much when they were small. We were paying off the house and we were trying to live, and we didn't have money for holidays in those days.

**ANNA DOHERTY**

Portrush was lovely then. Because you had bathing boxes all round the harbour and a raft in the harbour, so you didn't really want to go away. The summers always seemed so warm and long and you went into the water every day.

**KATHLEEN THOMPSON**

We would have gone over to Scotland to my wife's people but that's about as far as we would have went. Money was scarce you know, salaries were low, people didn't go on holidays because they didn't have the money to go. Even those who were rich didn't go on holiday, they maybe went to the south of Ireland.

**NORMAN IRWIN**





Small boys with a new tricycle  
© Janis Thompson Bolan Collection Coleraine Museum



First Christmas in a brand new housing development in Portrush  
© Janis Thompson Bolan Collection Coleraine Museum

## Children's Lives

We had a different season for everything when I was young. You had a certain time of the year you did skipping and then another time of the year came round and you seemed to do hopscotch and then it was a bat and ball.

The gooseberry bushes happened to come up against the wall at our backyard where we had an outside shed and we used to go up on the roof and my brother lowered me down and I sort of eased myself down the wall and he held on to my ankles and I got gooseberries off the bush, which was silly because if we'd asked the man he would have given them to us, but it was more fun to do this.

Your jam always came in jars. For a pound jar you got a halfpenny if you returned it to the shop, and for a two pound jar you got a penny so we spent quite a lot of time going around people asking them if they had any empty jam jars to get ten pence – ten old pence – and that got you into the pictures.

KATHLEEN THOMPSON

When we were maybe five, six, seven, around that age, my father thought he had done the great thing taking us over to live in Strand Road and providing us with this lovely garden. But we being children wanted company, and we were in everybody else's garden but our own. And he never could understand why we couldn't just play in our own garden. We were everywhere else.

We had a lot of freedom. There was fields and trees and a stream near where we were, we called it the wee wood. And we spent a lot of our days in the wee wood. Then up at the top of our road there

was a hole in the hedge where you could sit down on a long steep bank down to a lovely stream. And it was like being in a building cause the hedges met over the top of the stream. We played a lot of time there building dams and catching sticklebacks and newts. That was the burn that used to go up to Burnside. On Sunday afternoons as a family, like a lot of people then, we went for very long walks.

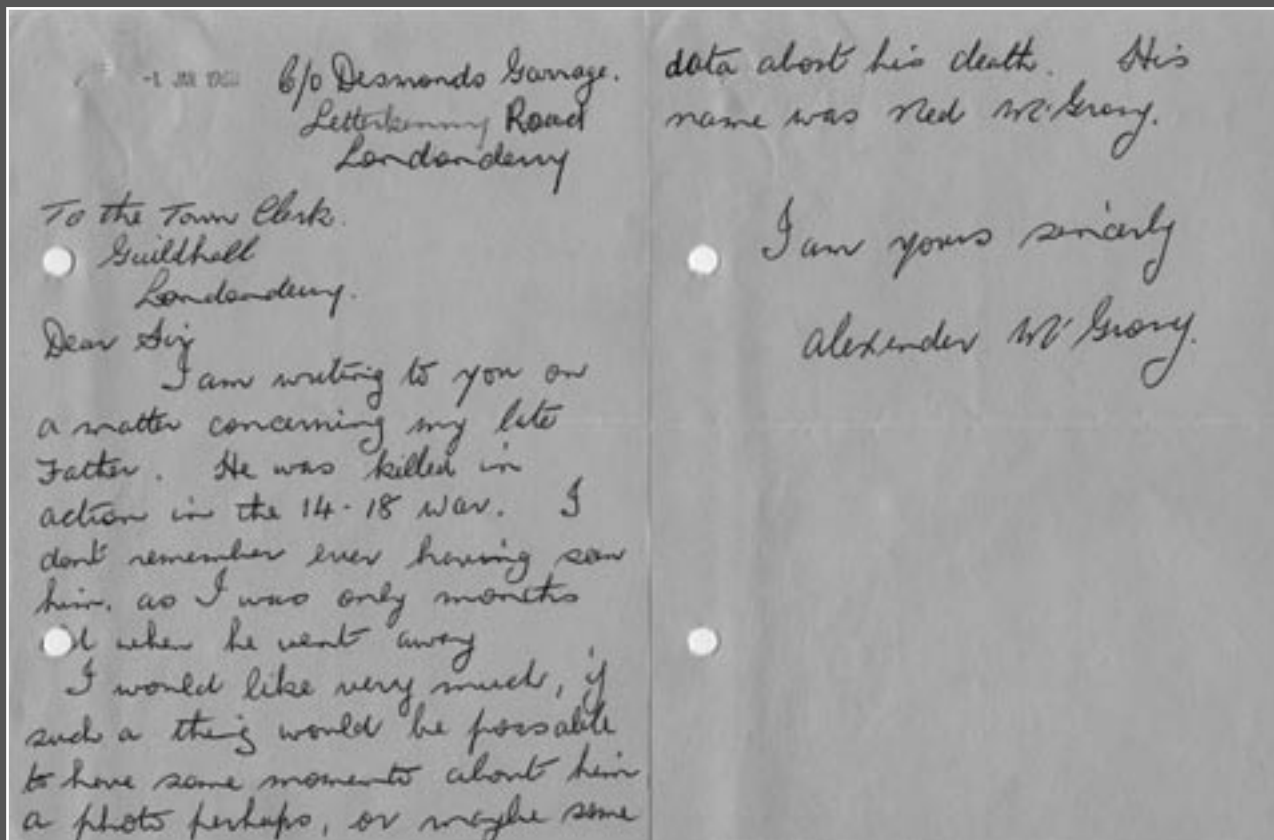
JENNIFER CUNNINGHAM

Christmas was great. All you hung up was one of your own socks. You got an orange in the toe and sweets and a few wee knick-knacks and one present which made you feel very excited about Christmas, because you would be asking for this one thing but you never knew if you were going to get it or not. Christmas and birthdays meant an awful lot simply because you got nothing in between, you might have got about threepence or sixpence in old money, pocket money, but that just bought you some sweets.

KATHLEEN THOMPSON

When we started serving our time [as apprentices] at about 14, 15, and you had a wee bit of money, the hire purchase came on the scene. There was about six of us and we bought a bicycle each and for a good while we use to cycle every Sunday to Muff in the Free State. You cycled to Derry and then down the other side [about 40 miles each way]. We cycled that on a Sunday, spent the day there, took a packed lunch with us, and brought our mothers back tea and butter and sugar.

GERRY THOMPSON



A son requests a photograph of a father killed in action  
© Derry City Council Heritage and Museum Service

# THE LONDONDERRY SENTINEL

Thursday morning, January 21, 1950

## WOMAN AND HOME LOOKING AFTER HOUSEHOLD TOOLS

### DEALING WITH DUSTERS

Dusting is a daily duty in every household, for if it is neglected furniture will lose its polish and gleam, and no amount of occasional 'elbow grease' will bring it back. The best results will be obtained by providing dusters for each job, and they must be properly washed and cared for if they are to be real friends to your furniture.

### BRUSHES AND BROOMS

Brushes and brooms are very necessary household tools so treat them well if you would have them give you long and faithful service. How often do you give them a thorough overhaul? Dust and dirt must be removed daily from brushes, but handles need scrubbing with soap and water fairly frequently, or wiping over with a damp cloth if they are varnished. Never allow brushes to stand on their bristles when not in use; always suspend them from pegs or hooks.

### YOUR HOT-WATER BOTTLE

Hot-water bottles are being filled in every house these cold nights. But how often are they filled properly? 'Oh anyone can fill a hot-water bottle' you say. For all that, half of them are incorrectly filled, which accounts for ruined bottles, damp beds and cold nights. It is a safeguard to see your water is just off the boil. Do not fill absolutely to the brim. Leave unstoppered for just a minute to allow steam to escape.



These women from the Heights in Coleraine have their hands full  
© Sammy Walker Collection Coleraine Museum

## Shopping

People tended to buy things fresher. Meat and fish and things like that my father bought on a daily basis and brought them home. Then the big shop was done once a week. When I say a big shop that was two shopping bags, cause you carried everything home. We had no car.

We did our shopping up at Danny Todd's up at the Waterside, and mummy would have sent us with a list, and we stood and read out the list to the girl and she went and got the stuff, be it going weighing you a half pound of tea, or cutting you off a bit of cheese on the cheese block and then wrapping it up in the greaseproof paper, and putting the bacon onto the slicer and slicing you off whatever you wanted and ending it up in the greaseproof paper. She went and got you the things, then she totted it up, and then you went over and paid it in a wee office.

JENNIFER CUNNINGHAM

The shops started to pick up [after rationing]. You got a great selection of things, around the 50s again. Things really took off when hire purchase came on the scene. People just went mad. They hadn't got these things before and then it was just free to them.

GERRY THOMPSON

## Housework

I went to cooking classes as the woman's role was very much to look after her children and her parents.

CHRISSE WILLISHER

There were no fridges. You had these metal gauze safes which sat in the yard for things like milk and butter. My mother cooked on a two burner paraffin stove and it was a red letter day when she got a new electric cooker. She didn't have a fridge or a washing machine by the time we left Limavady in '57.

IAN McQUISTON

You didn't buy as many clothes then, there wasn't that much money. I buy far more clothes now than I did in those days. I would have knitted. I never bought a cardigan in my life, nor a jumper, except now! I remember buying the long look, down to your ankles, I liked it because my legs were always quite fat.

HANNEY WALKER

My mother was an accomplished knitter. While we listened to the radio, she was clicking away knitting jumpers or cardigans, or darning socks. People wore jackets and pullovers more at home. If you were cold you put your jacket and your pullover on. Heating was coal fires or free standing paraffin heaters.

IAN McQUISTON

I was lucky enough I got a wee electric boiler you could plug in and it boiled up the water and boiled the clothes for you. Because you didn't have disposable nappies then, you had terry towelling nappies and you didn't just wash them, you always boiled them. Which meant you were having that boiler on every day. You'd have had maybe about ten nappies a day along with other washing. Then I got a twin tub when I moved into this house and I thought it was just marvellous, and an electric cooker, which we couldn't get over.

KATHLEEN THOMPSON



The horse and cart was still a familiar sight in Duke Street, Derry  
© David Bigger

## From Horses to Motor Vehicles

My father had a car before the war, but when the war came you couldn't get fuel. After the war it was some time before car production got going again and my father didn't acquire another car - a second-hand one - until 1957 when he absolutely needed it for his job. Driving tests only came in about this time. My mother had a driving licence and never drove a car.

**IAN McQUISTON**

When they reintroduced the North-West 200 [after the war] they were only allowed one practice and that was the Thursday morning. I remember the first year it was to be held at six o'clock. All the young boys in our street got up and you could just see the people in their hundreds going down the roads to watch the practice in the morning.

**GERRY THOMPSON**

Jim had a bicycle, and he rode the bike into his work in Coleraine, and that's what people did in those days. You could have got a bus if you wanted to, there were plenty of buses, but people just had bikes.

**ANNA DOHERTY**

There was less traffic. Kids walked or cycled considerable distances to school and never thought anything of it.

**IAN McQUISTON**

The breweries delivered by horse and cart, and the heavy goods from the train came by horse and cart. There was Hart's milk cart and the occasional wee low level hay cart being pulled through the town by

horses, and the bin lorries as we call them now, they were horse and cart. The dry toilets were emptied by horse and cart. And the funerals, McFarland's hearses were all horse and carts then. At the start off they had big black horses with the plumage on their heads and they were lovely animals. Somewhere around maybe the start of '60, I think [they were replaced by] motor vehicles.

**GERRY THOMPSON**

When I worked in the Braid Water spinning mill in Ballymena in 1959, that's when I bought my first motorbike to travel from Ballymoney to Ballymena. You just didn't have the money for cars in those days.

**BILLY O'NEILL**

I got my first car about '59, an old banger that I fixed up. I used it to travel to work and then we'd go an odd wee jaunt at the weekend. You wouldn't have depended on it too much. It was an old Ford Anglia.

**NORMAN IRWIN**

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## From Radio to Television

Prior to TV we listened to a lot of radio as a family. Once a week on a Sunday everyone got round the radio to listen to the children's programme, 'We are the Ovaltinies, little girls and boys.'

We got our first TV set in the mid 50s from a man called McCaughey who ran the bicycle shop. The TV was black and white, about three feet high with a 14 inch screen. It was quite a piece of furniture, in shiny mahogany. You had to have an aerial outside. They fiddled about with this aerial - he was a bicycle repair man, he hadn't a clue - and eventually they got this snowy picture. You waited until your father came home to turn it on. It ran for a few hours a day.

IAN McQUISTON

By the end of 1958 most of the homes in the estate had televisions and a jungle of multi-pronged aerials stretched across the rooftops, where flocks of starlings and rooks settled down to roost every evening at dusk. Whenever someone's TV picture was acting up, by ghosting or rolling, they blamed it on the roosting birds, and it was a familiar sight to see members of the household throwing missiles up to scare off the intruders.

PHILIP CUNNINGHAM

In 1959 me and my husband got a TV. We were one of the first in our street to get one. It was really expensive, cost about £65, which would nearly buy one these days for the same price. We used to watch Dixon of Dock Green on a Saturday night and the Black and White Minstrel Show.

CHRISSE WILLISHER

If you were lucky enough and you had a television set then you let your neighbours, if they didn't have one, come in and watch it with you.

KATHLEEN THOMPSON

## The Second World War Sites and the Cold War

The redundant airfields presented opportunities for future investment. The land had been cleared and levelled and had hard standing and services. Aghanloo was tucked in beside Benevanagh and was difficult to attack, but that made it difficult to take off and land, especially in poor conditions. Walking the slopes of Benevanagh after the war, you would come across bits of aluminium, parts of the wreckage.

Eglinton and Ballykelly remained active after the war. Eglinton was a navy airfield and there were fantastic airshows at Eglinton with the Royal Naval Air Service, and recently it's been rejuvenated as the City of Derry airport, though it lay unused for some considerable time.

Ballykelly had a longer active postwar life, as it was part of Coastal Command and was involved in patrolling during the Cold War. There were RAF children at Limavady Grammar School - one was a good friend of mine. The continuance of Ballykelly brought money into the local economy and some civilian support jobs. With the onset of the troubles it became an army base and still is to this day.

Maydown airfield became the base for a large industrial estate, with Coolkeeragh power station, British Oxygen and Dupont. Aghanloo was also promoted as an industrial estate when Northern Ireland decided man-made fibres were the way forward, and Hoeschst was there. Now it's got Seagate, the computer firm.

The overseas navy presence continued through with the Cold War. The American Navy were still in Derry out the Limavady Road. The hotline from Russia to America allegedly came through the area. Benbradagh, overlooking Dungiven, was the highest mountain close to Derry and it became a pincushion with all sorts of aerials, all to do with this US communications base in Derry. Now the Cold War is over and all that has been removed.

IAN McQUISTON



-1 JUL 1960

24, Buchwood Avenue  
Londonderry,  
1st July, 1960.

Dear Sir,

On behalf of my parents, Mr. and Mrs. John Stewart of above address, I should like to submit the names of my two brothers for inclusion in the list of the fallen on the City War Memorial.

Particulars are as follows:-

(1) D/JX 146752  
A. G. STEWART, DONALD CAMPBELL,  
H. M. S. THRACIAN., R. N.  
Died in Osaka P. O. W. Camp on 7/5/44.

(2) 153775B,  
SGT. AIR CORP. STEWART, JAMES DIXON,  
R. A. F.  
Shot down on air operations over Germany

© Derry City Council Heritage and Museum Service

Dear Sir,

On reading in the Sentinel of your request for those killed in the last war. I forward you my late husband's name etc.

Number 7897752.  
Rank 2/Lt  
Name Archibald Jackson  
Regiment North Irish Horse  
Killed in Italy 19<sup>th</sup> June 1944  
Mrs Jackson  
15, Beldonia Rd.  
Waterloo  
Londonderry

© Derry City Council Heritage and Museum Service

7 Gordon Place  
Londonderry  
6-7-60

Dear Sir

My son was killed at sea on 4 H.M.S. Submarine Transport 1702  
Stanley M. Edgar  
122 Glass Blakes  
I would be very grateful if you could have his name added to the City War Memorial

Yours faithfully  
M. J. Edgar

© Derry City Council Heritage and Museum Service

5, Albert Street  
Londonderry  
15th June 1960.

Dear Sir

When reading the Belfast Telegraph on Tuesday night I saw the column asking for the names of those who died in the Second World War and so I would like to give you my father's name.

He was Sergeant William James Wright of 5, Albert Street and he served in the 2nd Battalion Royal Ulster Rifles, attached to the 6th Airborne Division and he was killed in action in the Ardennes on the 23rd January 1945.

Yours faithfully  
William J. Wright

© Derry City Council Heritage and Museum Service

-1 JUL 1960

60 Pergamon Street,  
Londonderry,  
7.7.60.

Dear Sir,

Please find below name etc., of my son, missing, presumed dead.

549609 Sergeant John Iansten Davis,  
No. 6.B. Squadron,  
Royal Air Force.

Yours faithfully,  
THOMAS DAVIS.

© Derry City Council Heritage and Museum Service

2 Gordon Place  
Londonderry  
6<sup>th</sup> July 1960

Dear Sir

My son was killed in Italy with the 9<sup>th</sup> Regt R.A. 25<sup>th</sup> Battery No. 1489361  
L. Ader William S. Peoples  
21st October 1943  
I would be very grateful if you could have his name added to the City War Memorial

Yours Faithfully  
W. Peoples

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JAMES P. BOWEN

Stability House,  
Cr. First Street and  
Jameson Avenue,  
SALFORD,  
Southern Rhodesia.

21/12/60

Dear Sir,

In connection with the new war memorial being planned for Londonderry, to commemorate those who lost their lives in the last war, I would like to give you a few details of my brother, who unfortunately lost his life during that episode.

His name was Andrew Maher & his ship was sunk in the North Sea on 28th April 1940, he was then only 20. & was regular Royal Navy on the name of his ship was H.M.S. GLOWWORM. Our family resided at 99, Dungevin Road, Waterside then & before joining the navy, he was apprenticed to the newspaper 'The Sentinel'. Should you require any more details, I will be only too happy to oblige. Thanking you.

Yours sincerely,  
Blair M. Maher (Mrs)

© Derry City Council Heritage and Museum Service

# Londonderry's War Memorial

In 1960 people were asked to write to the Town Clerk with the names of relatives who had been killed in action so that they could be added to the city's war memorial.



Remembrance Day in the Diamond in Derry.  
© Derry City Council Heritage and Museum Service

# Looking Back

The war I know initially left a lot of bitterness. I'd an aunt who was very bitter. She'd lost two brothers in the First World War. I remember a young school teacher coming to the Primary School and teaching us to sing Silent Night in German and that didn't go down well. But I think us younger people gradually overcame that. But I know there was a bitterness for a long time against the Germans.

**HUGH McGRATTAN**

If the police came on the scene, you ran, you didn't give them cheek. They were the law and that was it. There was more respect when we were growing up for the law and things like that than there is now. There's no question about that. I mean if a policeman had have come to the door, to your parents, about you, you knew all about it when the policeman left.

**GERRY THOMPSON**

I remember us all sitting in Forte's café at the time of the Suez Crisis of 1956/57— we were just at the point of leaving school - and thinking 'Oh this is it, we'll all be in uniform before long', and in a way looking forward to it almost. Of course that was very quickly dealt with.

**HUGH McGRATTAN**

The community feeling in the town is one of the main things I miss. It didn't matter where we were, but other people knew who we were. If I went home through Killowen, coming from Brownies or coming from school, I knew I was safe as houses, there never would anything happen to me, because there was always somebody to look out for me.

Now, although I've grown up in the town, most people in the shops don't know who I am. I remember sitting one day in Moore's café with my husband at Christmas, and looking down onto the main street and we must have watched the people for about half an hour and I never saw one person that I recognised.

**JENNIFER CUNNINGHAM**

[The war changed things] enormously. All wars do. The Second World War changed things technologically and everywhere. Every country was involved in the conflict, and then such technology advances, in all spheres, in medicine and in others.

**NORMAN IRWIN**

[The war is] bound to have changed the whole world, particularly when you get that knowledge of the wiping out of the Jews, that is something that was absolutely horrifying and it still is. It's something that's unbelievable.

**ROBERT McDONALD**



An aerial view of Derry in the 1950s  
© Bryan Kirkwood

People's attitudes have changed: respect for the law, for parents, for age has all gone, at least I think it has gone. What youngster gives a damn about a policeman nowadays? They don't care about a priest or clergyman, they don't care about school teachers. The parents are at fault. The government is too mealy mouthed to come out and tell them to look after their youngsters. If the parents hit them now, the government would put them in jail, the whole system is crazy. It's alright being liberal but you still need rules and regulations to be obeyed, but they're not obeyed.

**NORMAN IRWIN**

There's definitely more opportunities for kids now going to school and going further on in school. I didn't get that chance. I sometimes look back now and miss having a wee bit more education. I remember my mother saying to me, 'Billy, you didn't get the education that I would've liked you to have had.' Because my father died whenever I was 15 months old. The minute I was 14 years of age I left school and went to work, to help with the younger brothers and sisters. My mother said, 'Remember there's two things that will take you every bit as far - honesty and good manners.'

**BILLY O'NEILL**

I think the rationing and having to live like that for years taught you to be economical. Nowadays the young ones go out and buy and spend money, but in our day they couldn't have done that, they hadn't

got the money. They just made do with what they could afford and they didn't get into debt, and they didn't go out to the same extent as they do now, and go away for holidays. Even if we had the money we would have saved it because you never knew when you'd need it. You saved for a rainy day.

**ANNA DOHERTY**

Every time you look at the television it's buy now, pay later; buy now, pay later and I just can't do that. Because when I was young if you wanted something you saved the money and then you got it.

**KATHLEEN THOMPSON**

The [Coleraine] Battery that I originally belonged to was held together by my younger brother and once a year he called us all together to a reunion. Coleraine Town Council held a reunion just immediately after the war. Blokes were coming from England, Scotland, all over the countryside to attend this reunion. It was a really marvellous get together, but that continued in a smaller way until even now eight of us locally, who are able and willing to get together, every October usually have a reunion.

**ROBERT McDONALD**

There are so many facets of the war, some of them good, some of them bad.

**NORMAN IRWIN**

# OUR LIVES

IS DEDICATED TO THOSE WHOSE LIVES HERE TELL THE STORY OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND ITS LEGACY

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