

# WORLD WAR II

WHAT HAPPENED IN SEDLESCOMBE?

# BACKGROUND

- In September 1938, with war against Germany seeming increasingly likely, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain flew to Munich to meet the German leader for a “peace meeting” where it appeared that Britain and Germany reached agreement. On his return to Britain, Chamberlain declared – **“PEACE IN OUR TIME”**.
- Although Chamberlain made humiliating concessions to Germany, Hitler did not keep to his part of the bargain and in September 1939 invaded Poland. Within a few days Britain had declared war on Germany – a war that would last for 6 long years and affect every town and village in the land.

## EVACUATION OF LONDON

**MOTHERS** let them go-  
give them a chance of  
greater safety and health



MINISTRY OF HEALTH EVACUATION SCHEME

©Victoria and Albert Museum, London

The responsibility for evacuation was placed on the individual. The Government issued a booklet called *The Protection of your Home against Air Raids*. In the booklet, people were advised to think about sending children, invalids or the elderly away from immediate danger.

In 1938, Battle Rural District Council wrote to all parish councils in its area, including Sedlescombe, about their involvement in the evacuation of London. The letter stated that evacuees who were to be accommodated in Sedlescombe would be arriving at Tunbridge Wells Rail Station and then moved on to Hurst Green Police Station.

Chief Billeterers were asked to send responsible volunteers to Hurst Green to help with the distribution of “refugee children”. Two days’ rations would be available. Pink notices would give the Billeterers authority, blue notices would give authority to requisition empty properties and white notices would give information regarding rationing for the first few days. In due course it would be expected that the elderly would be evacuated as well as children.

In 1939, Sedlescombe Parish Council Minutes record that the 1938 arrangements for billeting children in Sedlescombe were unsatisfactory but without further information.

## PREPARATION FOR WAR - AIR RAID WARDENS IN SEDLESCOMBE

### A.R.P.

The list of A.R.P. wardens will be found on the Church Notice Board just above Mr Button's shop, where any other important notice will be posted. The Wardens urge all parishioners to realize the importance of carrying out all instructions, both for their own and the well-being of others. Attention is specially called to the necessity of full names and addresses being written clearly on all gas mask boxes, and some provision made in the event of fire such as buckets of water, sand or earth. It is well to remember that the Wardens' service is as yet entirely voluntary and its sole object to help the community in any emergency. The parish is well covered by a system of Wardens, so that due warning of any air raid will reach each house without delay (Sedlescombe Parish Magazine October 1939)

The Rector wrote: ONCE MORE AT WAR! It seems almost incredible, like a bad dream from which we might hope to awake to find it no more than a vision of the night. Alas it is all too true though the reality has yet to force itself upon us with its ugly consequences. But it is no time to sit and wring our hands, we must stand up and look around to discover what part each individual should play.



Poster out of copyright

## GAS

Everyone in Britain (38 million) was given a gas mask in a cardboard box to protect them from gas bombs, which might be dropped during air raids. They were never needed.

THE FOLLOWING RHYME WAS FOUND IN THE GARDEN OF A CHALET AT TRESKO, HURST LANE, SEDLESCOMBE:

**LEWISITE**, if it should come, would smell like a geranium.

**MUSTARD GAS**, though rather faint has a sort of garlic taint.

**PHOSGENE**, as the teachers say, has a smell of musty hay.

**CHLORINE**, a disinfectant smell, though it makes you far from well.

**PEAR DROPS** and nail varnish scent means that **K.S.K.** is sent, while smells like polish on the floor means **C.A.P.** is at your door.

**BUT**, if in doubt, don't hesitate to recognise the smell – **DON'T WAIT**, but ere the precious time has gone **JUST POP YOUR RESPIRATOR ON.**

## PREPARATION FOR WAR – FOODSTUFFS

Sedlescombe Parish Council Minutes of 1938 report receipt of a pamphlet called *“The Protection of Foodstuffs against Poison Gas”*.

The pamphlet emphasises that non-persistent gases such as chlorine and phosgene are much less likely to contaminate food than the persistent type such as mustard gas and lewisite.

Lewisite and other arsenical preparations introduce the danger of arsenic food poisoning. While the risk is low, the pamphlet states that all food possibly contaminated with arsenic must be viewed with great suspicion and must be submitted for expert examination.

All foods in contact with liquid blister gases must also be regarded with suspicion, but fatty foodstuffs of all kinds are likely to be dangerously contaminated. While airing of the food is valuable for non-fatty foods, it is not effective for fatty foods.

The pamphlet also discusses the relative value of different containers, possibilities of contamination on the farm, warehouses, docks, shops and hotels. In the home as much food as possible was to be placed in air-tight containers and kept under cover. Decontamination always had to be carried out by experts.

## PREPARATIONS FOR WAR IN SEDLESCOMBE

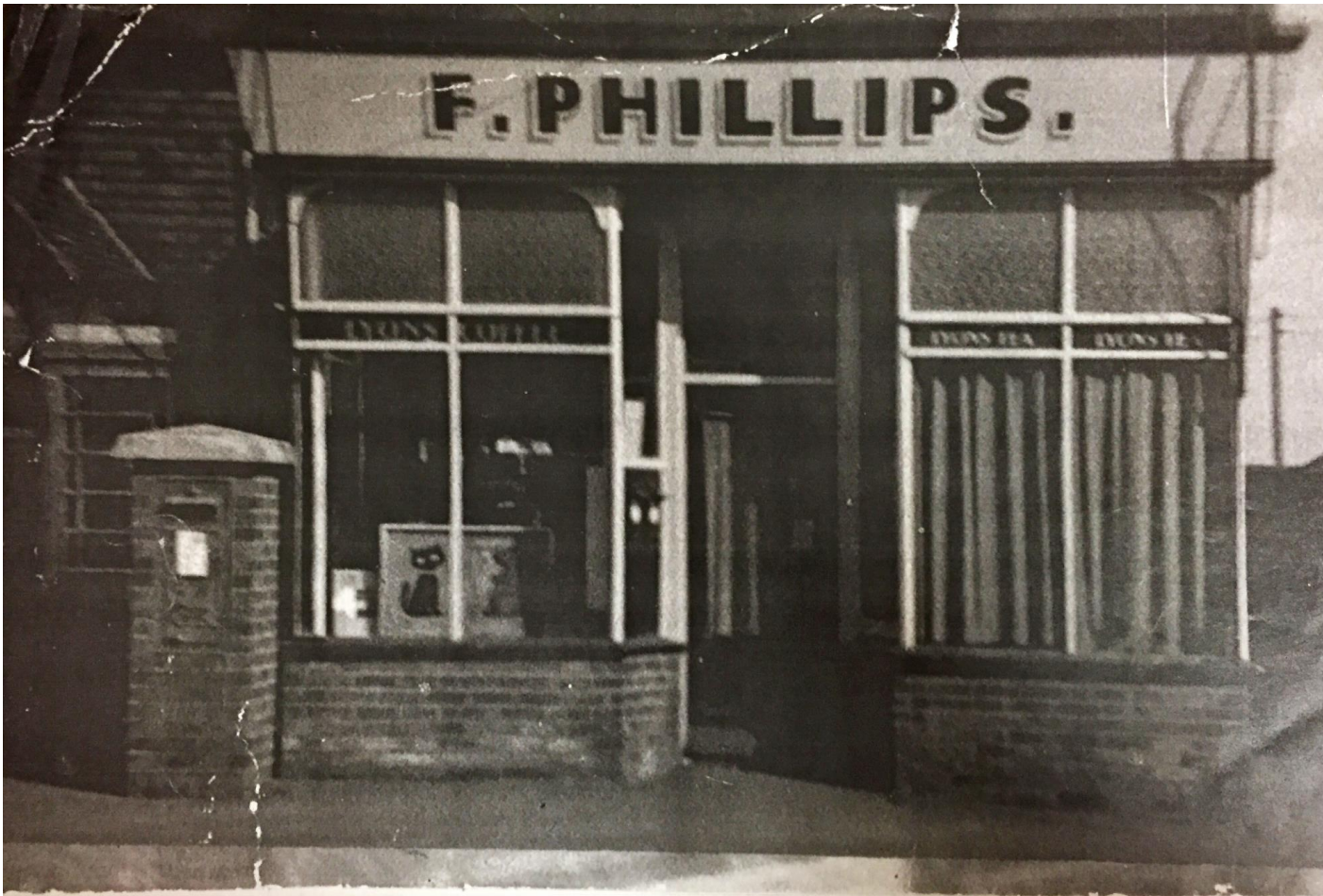
In September 1939, a warning was issued to Sedlescombe residents: Battle Rural District Council requests that, in view of the emergency, residents should not waste water and should watch out for wastage through leaking joints, taps, tanks etc.

In the same month, Rutherford Bros (concrete swimming pool manufacturers) in Marley Lane advertised sectional reinforced concrete shelters ready for rapid erection. They could be delivered to homes at the shortest possible notice. Complete with concrete floor, walls and reinforced roof, timber door, etc. Of one standard width but any length available. The smallest shelter could be erected indoors in a spare room which would save going outside during a raid. The price was “surprisingly modest”. Orders would be taken in the strictest rotation.

From the Government information booklet “***The Protection of your Home from Air Raids***”, everyone was advised to choose a place in the house suitable for a “refuge-room”. It stated that the best place in the house for such a room, if it could be made gas-proof, was either a cellar or basement. Alternatively, any room below the top floor could also be used.

Despite Government advice, Freddie Phillips, one of Sedlescombe’s grocers during WW2, decided to knock a large hole inside the chimney of Tanyard House in The Street and the Phillips family used it as a shelter. Freddie said that when a house was bombed, it was usually the chimney stack that remained standing and that it must therefore be the safest place to be. (*Julia Chapman provided this information in her booklet “The Time of Our Lives” 2008.*)

# A SEDLESCOMBE GROCER – F.PHILLIPS



Fred Phillips's post office at Tanyard House (next to Tithe Barn). He was postmaster for 40 years (also Clerk to the Parish Council)  
 Post box and telephone box to left of shop.  
 Throughout the war Fred Phillips looked after the telephone exchange from Tanyard. There were 350 lines and he was on duty 24 hours a day

6 ENTER NAMES AND ADDRESSES OF RETAILERS

Page from Derek Wilton's  
 ration book

FATS	F. PHILLIPS SEDLESCOMBE.	If Coupons Deposited Retailer Enters** D ** If Coupons Deposited
CHEESE	F. PHILLIPS SEDLESCOMBE.	
BACON	F. PHILLIPS SEDLESCOMBE.	
SUGAR	PHILLIPS SEDLESCOMBE	
SPARE		

## SEDLESCOMBE POST OFFICE.

Telephone : SEDLESCOMBE 1. July 14 1944

M. Gosse

GROCER & PROVISION  
 MERCHANT.

BOUGHT OF

*Frederick Phillips*

FRUIT  
 AND VEGETABLES.

Families waited upon daily for Orders.

Freddie answered the phone no matter what time of day or night. After a while his wife put her foot down and said she could no longer stand the ringing of bells in her ears even when she was in bed. Her complaint was met with sympathy and a letter came announcing that the telephone exchange would be moved further up The Street next to Brickwall.





*Inside Gregory's bakery*

**PROVIDING PIES, BREAD AND CAKE**

**'Phone: Sedlescombe 10.**

**W. L. GREGORY & SON,**  
**The Sedlescombe Model Sanitary Bakery.**

**Our Bread for Flavour and Nutriment.**

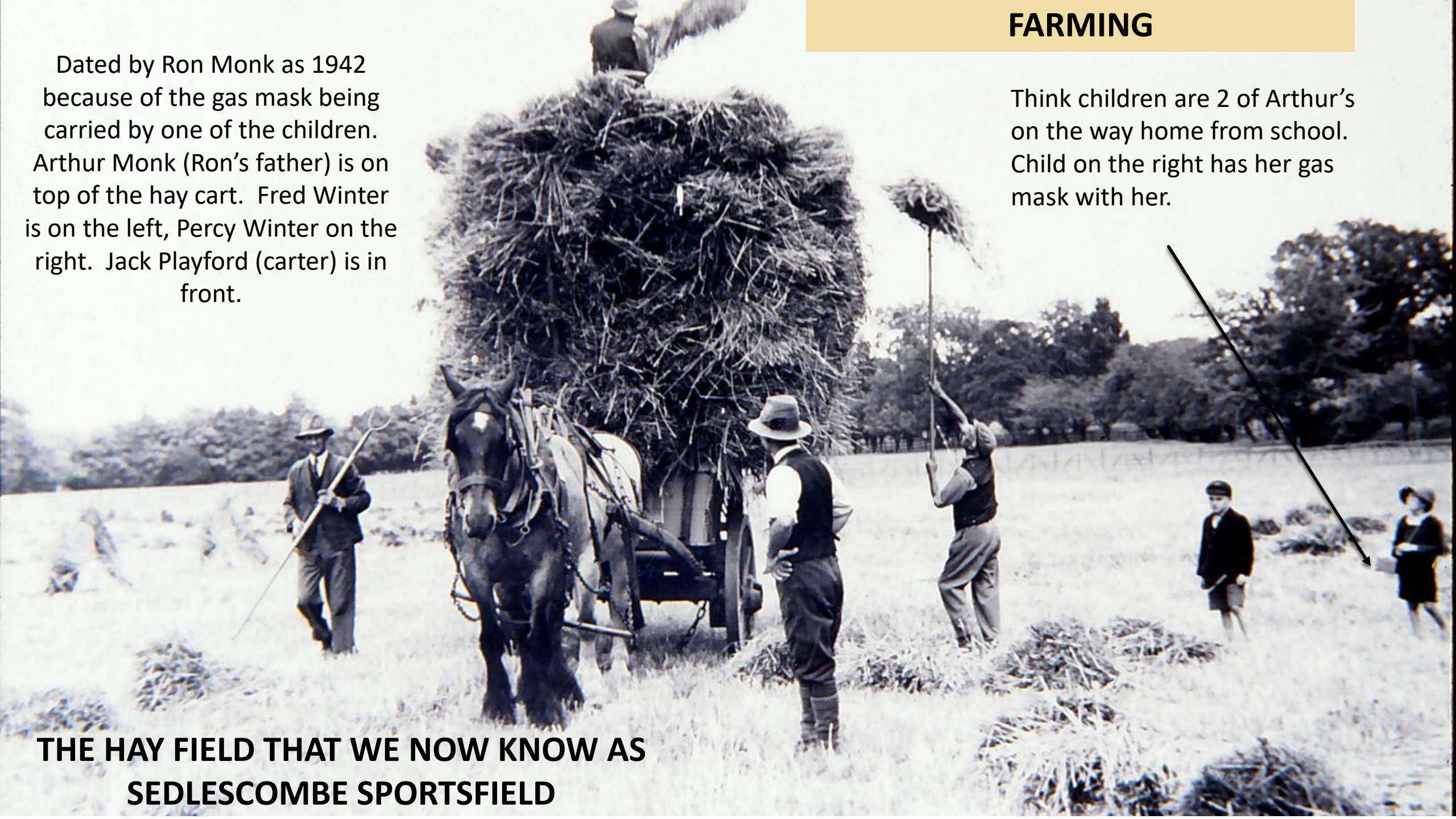
**Dainty Cakes, and Flour for Quality. Lyon's Confections and Fry's Table Waters.**

In 1942, Gregory's the Bakers was actively involved with supplying food for over 3,000 hop-pickers who were working at Guinness's hop farms at Bodiam. According to a newspaper report, well over 7,000 pies a week were being supplied to the hop-pickers, approximately half of which were being made by Messrs. Gregory and Son of Sedlescombe. In addition they were baking 12,000 loaves a week, involving 60 sacks of flour. Also, between 40 and 50lb of cake was supplied for sale to hop-pickers. One Army baker was released to Messrs. Gregory and Son for the duration of the hop-picking season.

## FARMING

Dated by Ron Monk as 1942 because of the gas mask being carried by one of the children. Arthur Monk (Ron's father) is on top of the hay cart. Fred Winter is on the left, Percy Winter on the right. Jack Playford (carter) is in front.

Think children are 2 of Arthur's on the way home from school. Child on the right has her gas mask with her.



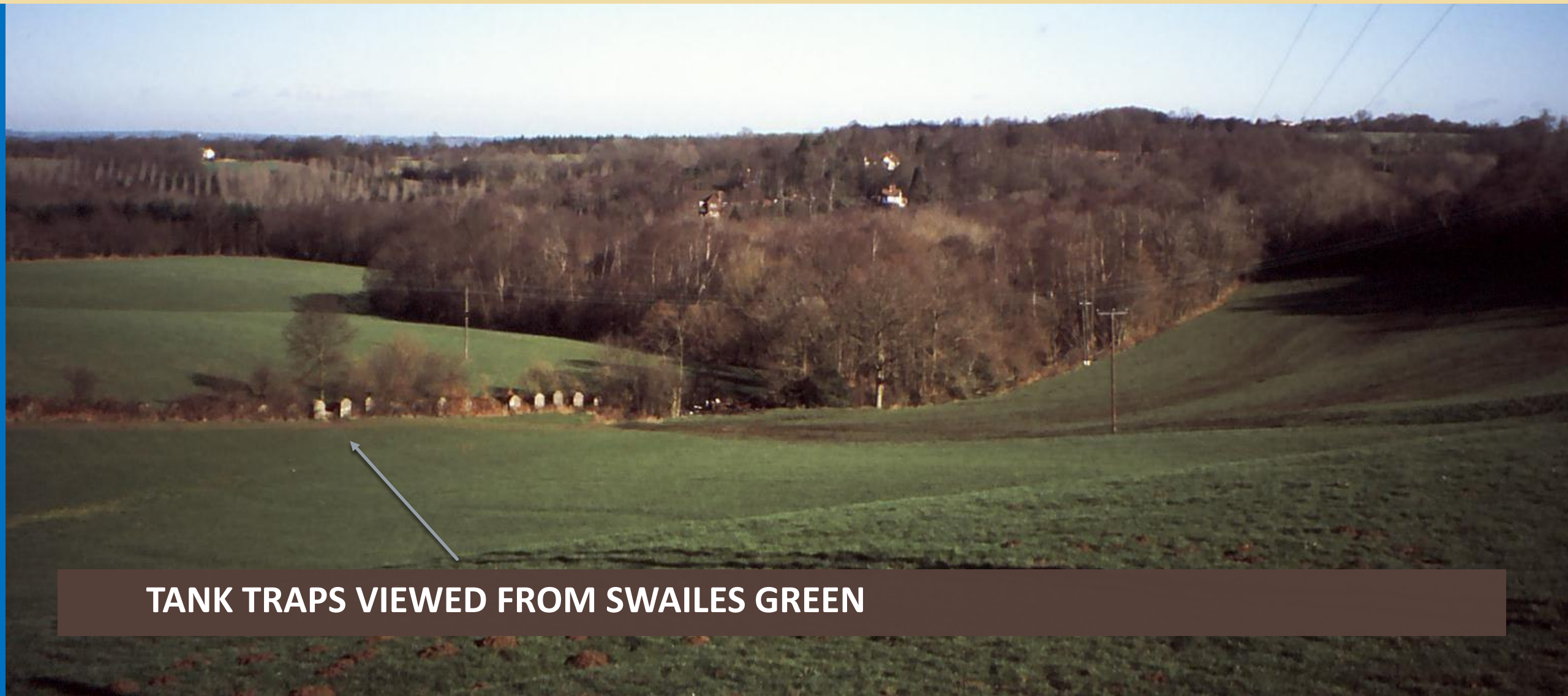
**THE HAY FIELD THAT WE NOW KNOW AS  
SEDLSCOMBE SPORTSFIELD**

## PREPARATIONS IN SEDLESCOMBE FOR A POSSIBLE INVASION



Between 20<sup>th</sup> August and 19<sup>th</sup> September 1940, the 205<sup>th</sup> Field Company Royal Engineers with the help of several civilian contractors built a chain of 750 concrete blocks around the area of Cripps Corner. There were also a couple of pillboxes. Together with existing woodland and several houses and buildings that were in a state of defence, they had the intention of slowing down any German invasion that might occur. The position of planned roadblocks in the area can be seen today on German plans of British defences.

The anti-tank blocks, including the portion in the ground, are nearly 7' high and are 5' square with chamfered sides at the top, a design thought to be unique to East Sussex. The 750 in the Cripps Corner area are thought to have been cast in situ and would have taken, according to the Pillbox Society, 131,250 cu.feet of poured concrete. The digging of the holes alone, probably done manually, would have been an enormous task. These concrete defences are thought to be the best surviving WW2 obstructions in the country and are considered by some to be of national importance.



**TANK TRAPS VIEWED FROM SWAILES GREEN**

**Blackout blinds were commonplace during the war because shining a light at night was a serious but not unusual offence. This is an example that occurred in Sedlescombe in April 1941:**

- Ena Rawretta, of Riverbridge Cottages, Sedlescombe for permitting an unscreened light to be seen from a fire in a bedroom, was fined £1. P.W.R. Murdoch said he saw a light 300 yards away coming from an upstairs window. Obtaining a ladder, he climbed up and arranged a black-out of sacking, there being no-one at home.

- Defendant said she had gone out in the afternoon and left a small fire in the grate because she had several children in the room ill in bed with colds.

.....

- Similarly, in 1940, a teacher, John Papworth at Merrion House School (Great Sanders) appeared at Battle court before Countess Brassey and was fined 5s for permitting a light to be shown at the school.

- At the same court, however, Robert Selmes of Sedlescombe was given the same fine for cycling without a rear light after dark.

## WARTIME OFFENCES CONCERNING LIGHTS



Between 1943 and 1945, a high-ranking RAF Officer, Gerard Combe and his wife Brenda, owned Durhamford. In 1943, Gerard was Chief Superintendent of the Chemical Defence Experimental Station at Porton. In 1945, he was made Air Vice Marshal and Director General of Armament at the Air Ministry. These Combes were related to the Combes of Oaklands Manor but on a different branch of the tree coming from the impressive Cobham Park in Surrey.

Gerard had two sons who, from time to time, were home from boarding school and living at Durhamford. One son, Tony Combe, recalled that Gerard had brought a Vickers machine gun back to England in 1940 when he escaped from France where he was serving with the British Expeditionary Force. The gun was buried behind Durhamford where it presumably remains.

## 1943-45 AT DURHAMFORD, STREAM LANE, SEDLESCOMBE



**CRASH LANDING OF SPITFIRE.** Tony Combe has provided a map showing the estimated position of a crashed Spitfire on land at Durhamford. The aircraft is said to have approached from the north-west in a wheels up configuration, belly landing and skidding across the field, hitting a tree. One wing was ripped off and the plane cartwheeled, finally coming to a stop. A neighbour rescued the pilot who was not seriously injured. Quickly, a salvage crew came to dismantle the plane for recycling helped along by copious cups of tea provided by Tony's mother. 20mm cannon covers were given to Tony's brother as a memento. These were painted with the names of the pilot's girlfriends – Margaret and Phyllis.

## CAPTAIN BOYCE ANTHONY COMBE, BORN SEDLESCOMBE, DIED FRANCE

Tony Combe visited Sedlescombe in the mid-2000s and, calling in at the village shop to try to ascertain the whereabouts of Durhamford, found Beryl Lucey's book *"Twenty Centuries in Sedlescombe"* for sale.

Tony had no idea that he had had direct relatives living in Sedlescombe in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, so he was surprised and delighted to find through the pages of Beryl's book that members of his extended family at Oaklands had played such a prominent role in the history of Sedlescombe and that several are buried in Sedlescombe churchyard.

While visiting the Parish Church, he saw on the Roll of Honour of men who died in the Great War, the name **BOYCE ANTHONY COMBE**, who was killed in France in the early days of the war on 11 November 1914. He said that a weird feeling came over him because his own full name was Boyce Anthony Combe too.

For generations, both branches of the Combe family tree seem to have given their offspring the name **Boyce**.

*Capt Combe was one of 3 officers from  
Sedlescombe who were killed in  
November 1914 – full story in "WW1"*

## RABBITS FOR THE POT DURING WW2

Food rationing meant that meat was in short supply as the war dragged on. In order to help out with supplies, young Tony Combe was designated to shoot as many rabbits as possible on the land around Durhamford when he was home from boarding school. It was, however, easier said than done, as the only weapon he was allowed to use was an ancient air rifle. In order to guarantee a kill with such a gun, he had almost to press the muzzle against the rabbit's head. This meant he spent hours stalking his prey at Durhamford in order to get as close as possible. **Tony Combe said that this early training turned him into a crack shot and, during his National Service, he did competition shooting at Bisley for the RAF!**

Sally Cotton from Sedlescombe wrote in her book *"More Cotton Reels"* about a group of boys walking up the Green with half a dozen rabbits slung over their shoulders when they heard a doodlebug coming. They dashed up the Green and hid under the pumphouse seats until it had safely passed overhead!



*Stewing rabbits slowly with a little onion and carrot makes a delicious, nutritious meal.*

Hilary Hannam recalls how Sedlescombe's butcher used to keep rabbits at the back of his shop on The Green which were in due course sold for meat in his shop. She and a friend bought one each from him to keep as pets.

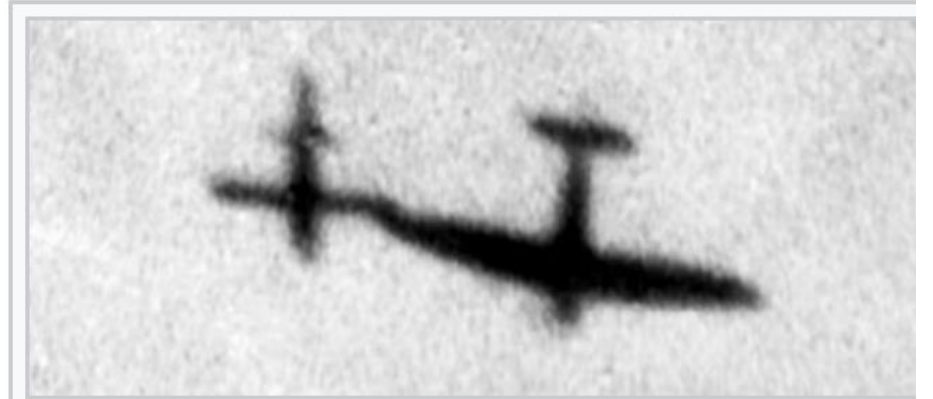


## 1944 DOODLEBUG ATTACK ON SOUTH EAST ENGLAND INCLUDING SEDLESCOMBE

For 6 months from June 1944, the Germans launched thousands of V1 missiles, known as “Doodlebugs” or “Buzz Bombs” from France and Holland aimed generally in the direction of south east England. 4,261 V1s were destroyed by our fighters, anti-aircraft fire and barrage balloons across the south east of England. They were non-guided offensive weapons with a range of about 150 miles designed to bring terror to the population. Many landed locally.

The awful sound of an approaching flying bomb was dreaded but the silence that followed was even more terrifying as it meant the bomb was about to drop. The most effective aircraft that we had that could attack these flying bombs was the Hawker Tempest Mk V, but Spitfires Mk XIV and Mustangs Mk III were also used and, from July 1944, the Gloucester Meteor, our first operational jet.

Tony Combe, recalled how one day he and his brother were playing in Durhamford’s rock garden when they witnessed a most spectacular site involving a Tempest aircraft flying alongside a V1 rocket and trying to flip it over. Suddenly, there was a massive explosion, a gigantic fireball appeared and, once the smoke had dissipated, no sign of either of the machines. Apparently, the Germans had started to put explosive charges on the wing tips of the V1 in order to stop our attacks on their devastating flying bombs.



A Spitfire using its wingtip to "topple" a V-1 flying bomb



## 1944 DOODLEBUG ATTACK ON SOUTH EAST ENGLAND INCLUDING SEDLESCOMBE

- In 1944, Great Sanders House, off Hurst Lane, was being used as a spartan but friendly boarding school run by Mr and Mrs Brummell-Hicks. It was called "Merrion House". Through the eyes of a 5-year-old brother of a pupil at the school, it is reported that the doodlebugs would fly virtually "between its chimney pots".
- The boys combed the fields, hoping to find a crashed German bomber and are said to have played on a "decommissioned Dornier".  
*(Information from a website dedicated to memories of the School).*



**GREAT SANDERS HOUSE/  
MERRION HOUSE SCHOOL (1940s-1960s)**

## FIRST WHOLE DOODLEBUG IN THE COUNTRY LANDED AT STRAWBERRY HILL FARM

Just a couple of weeks after this new weapon was brought into operation by the Germans, one was shot down in our own area across a couple of fields at **STRAWBERRY HILL FARM, POPPINGHOLE LANE**. It was the first doodlebug in the country that had been found whole. A small group of bomb disposal officers who had become experts were quickly dispatched down the long, narrow and winding Poppinghole Lane tasked with recovering the fuses intact so that more could be learned about them. One of the three fuses was of an unknown type and they were determined to get it out in one piece.



*Pat and Michael Smith lived in the lovely Strawberry Hill Farm with their son Nigel. Michael's father was farming there at the time of the Strawberry Hill bomb. Before Pat died, she gave papers that described the important and top secret event to Sedlescombe Archives.*

## PAT SMITH AT 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY VE DAY CELEBRATIONS ON SEDLESCOMBE VILLAGE GREEN

Pat Smith, seen here in 1995 in the front with the RAF apron. Pat, as a farmer's wife, was a staunch advocate of British farming, an important founder member of Sedlescombe Green WI, a judge of the domestic section of the annual Sedlescombe Fete and Flower Show held in a big marquee on the Sportsfield and a marvellous and amusing actress often taking part with vigour in the Sedlescombe Green WI Drama Group. She was a thoroughly good sport.



## THE BRAVERY OF JOHN PILKINGTON HUDSON AND HIS TEAM

A BOOK BY CHRIS  
RANSTEAD ENTITLED  
“DISARMING HITLER’S V  
WEAPONS” GIVES A VERY  
DETAILED ACCOUNT OF  
THE NINE DAYS THAT IT  
TOOK TO REMOVE THE  
THREE FUSES FROM THE  
STRAWBERRY HILL BOMB.

Led by 34-year-old John Hudson, Dr Dawson and others arrived early in the morning and began their very long and meticulous investigation of the doodlebug. They photographed it from every angle, x-rayed it and did all their initial investigations without touching it as they knew the merest pencil tap could set it off.

Because they knew they shouldn’t hacksaw into the casing because of the vibration that would be caused, they went to Hastings High School for Girls to obtain some materials including nitric acid. All the time they were working so carefully on the bomb, there was a constant noise of aircraft overhead making it hard to hear through the stethoscope whether the bomb was ticking. A fighter plane flew low over them firing at a V1 and another bomb landed close to them and exploded. The toxic fumes produced as they removed the explosive made them dizzy with bad headaches. They took on an ashy pallor and their lips turned blue. Mr Smith, the dairy farmer provided copious amounts of fresh milk to counter the effects of dinitrobenzene poisoning. Despite this, Hudson spent a night vomiting and Dawson felt extremely ill. All others involved were ill too. Finally, after 9 days of toil they succeeded, and the fuses were out.



## THE BRAVERY OF JOHN PILKINGTON HUDSON AND HIS TEAM

For their efforts Hurst and Dawson received George Medals and Major Hudson received a bar to add to the George Medal he had won the previous year for disarming a bomb at London Bridge.

We are thankful to these very brave **BOMB DISPOSAL OFFICERS**

Various photos of John Pilkington Hudson can be seen online

## “BOMB ALLEY”

In September 1944, Herbert Morrison, The Government Minister for Home Security, visited Battle expressing the thanks of the people of London to this area which had been called Bomb Alley because it had taken a great load off of London during the flying bomb attacks.

340 flying bombs on the ground were recorded in Battle and the surrounding villages in the 6 months of the flying bomb attacks. Sedlescombe is recorded to have had 7 but there were others on the outskirts of the parish that may have been recorded in a different parish. The highest number of bombs dropped in Sedlescombe was 886. These were incendiaries which did not explode but set alight on impact. There were also 18 High Explosive Bombs recorded on the ground in Sedlescombe and another 2 that did not explode on impact.



Thankfully, no civilian in Sedlescombe was killed although 2 were injured (but see other reports of civilian deaths of people connected to Sedlescombe living in Westfield). There was a fair amount of damage done to various buildings and some crops.

## UNEXPLODED BOMB IN CHURCH HILL



Gerald Hilder was born in the flat over The Bridge Garage in 1932 (picture above). His grandfathers were Edward Hilder, the village grocer and Wallace Gregory, the village baker. In the 1930s his father ran the Bridge Garage (then known as Hilder's Garage). Before the war his family moved to Hastings but he, his sister and mother moved back to Sedlescombe during the War to escape the bombing in Hastings. While living in Offley at the top of Church Hill, he used to get on a go-kart at the top of the Hill and, if he was lucky, he could keep it going down to the River! He particularly remembers the long walk back uphill.

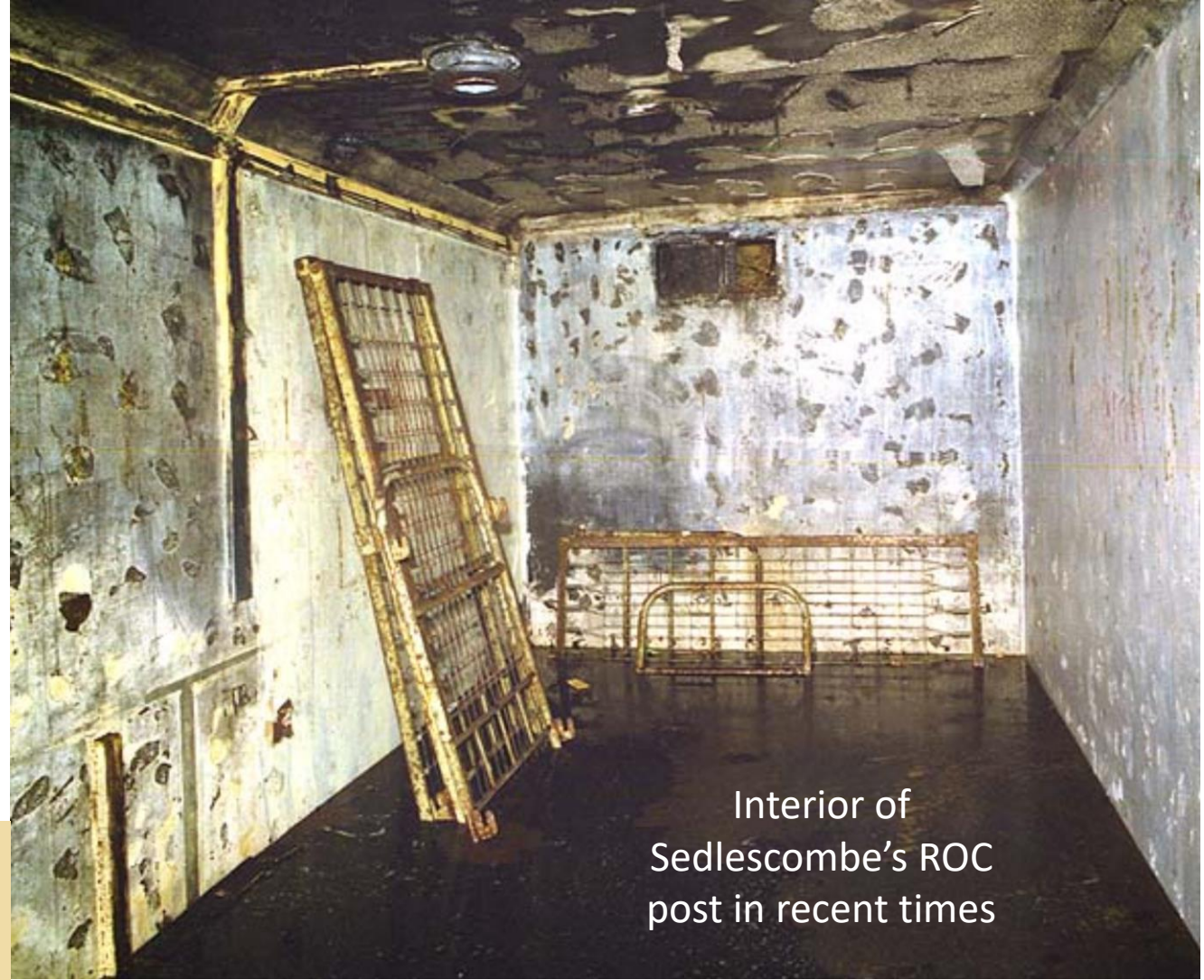
One evening he and his family were having their tea when they heard a swooshing sound and the door rattled. They looked outside but couldn't see anything untoward and went back to their tea. Soon afterwards, an air raid warden came knocking on their door with his tin hat on urging them to leave quickly as an unexploded bomb had landed in their garden. This probably was one of only two unexploded bombs that landed in Sedlescombe during the War. They realised Sedlescombe was not such a safe place to live after all!



## ROYAL OBSERVER CORPS POST



This is all that remains of Sedlescombe's Royal Observer Corps Post which is beside the footpath leading from the end of Balcombe Green into the fields. There was a ladder down into the underground room with toilet. These posts operated from the outbreak of the Second War until 4 days after VE Day on 12/05/1945.



Interior of  
Sedlescombe's ROC  
post in recent times

During the Second War, volunteers based here monitored allied and enemy aircraft flying over the UK and reported movements to the RAF.

## WORLD WAR 2 AIRCRAFT IDENTIFICATION

During WW2, the Government wanted all men and women to help win the war. Like the armed services, the people at home were asked to do their bit to help the war effort. The Government used propaganda posters, leaflets, film and radio broadcasts to get its message across. Posters were put up in shops and village halls.

### **PUBLIC WARNING**

**The public are advised to familiarise themselves with the appearance of British and German Aeroplanes so that they may not be alarmed by British aircraft, and may take shelter if German aircraft appear. Should hostile aircraft be seen, take shelter immediately in the nearest available shelter. Remain there until the aircraft have left the vicinity: do not stand about in crowds and do not touch unexploded bombs.**

## ROYAL OBSERVER CORPS POST, BALCOMBE GREEN, SEDLESCOMBE

We know that many local men, too old to fight in the Second War, or in reserved occupations, were volunteer members of the Royal Observer Corps in Sedlescombe. People around the area would travel from their farms and other work or travel to Sedlescombe's ROC post.



The ROC breast badge was issued from 1941 to 1947. The first badges were issued to be used on overalls, however, with the gradual introduction of the RAF style (No.2 Battledress tunic – “Hairy Mary”), the badge found its way onto that uniform.

From 1941, the control of the Corps was transferred to the RAF and the influence of such may be seen on the badge with the use of the “bird of prey” rather than the standard ROC badge.

## MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE ROYAL OBSERVER CORPS POST, BALCOMBE GREEN, SEDLESCOMBE

- It is believed that a short way from the Post was the concrete hard-standing for a WW2 heavy gun battery.
- In Julia Chapman's book "*The Time of our Lives*", Neil Farrow from Luffs Farm, a member of the Sedlescombe Home Guard, said he used to patrol the Village between the river bridge and the Church for 2-3 hours once a week. Neil remembered getting into trouble on one occasion when he decided to pop into the ROC post in Balcombe Green for a cup of tea, instead of doing his allocated patrol.
- Beryl Smith lived at Ridge Flats in Balcombe Green and in the late 1940s she and Robert Thomas would play in the ROC post. She described it as a mound with a hole in it. Mr Skilton and her Uncle John Wood from East View Terrace were involved and she remembers them having exercises there on occasions. Mr Skilton said that his sharp eyes could detect aircraft before they had been reported. John Gosse was also connected with it.
- The 1950s were quiet at the Post but between 1961 and 1968, during the Cold War, it was made in readiness again, this time as one of 1,563 nuclear monitoring posts across the country which the Government ordered to be made ready at a distance of 15 miles apart. Often old ROC posts were put to this use. They were incorporated into the **UK Warning and Monitoring Organisation for measuring nuclear blast waves and radioactive fallout**. Thank goodness they were never needed.

## DANGEROUS TIMES

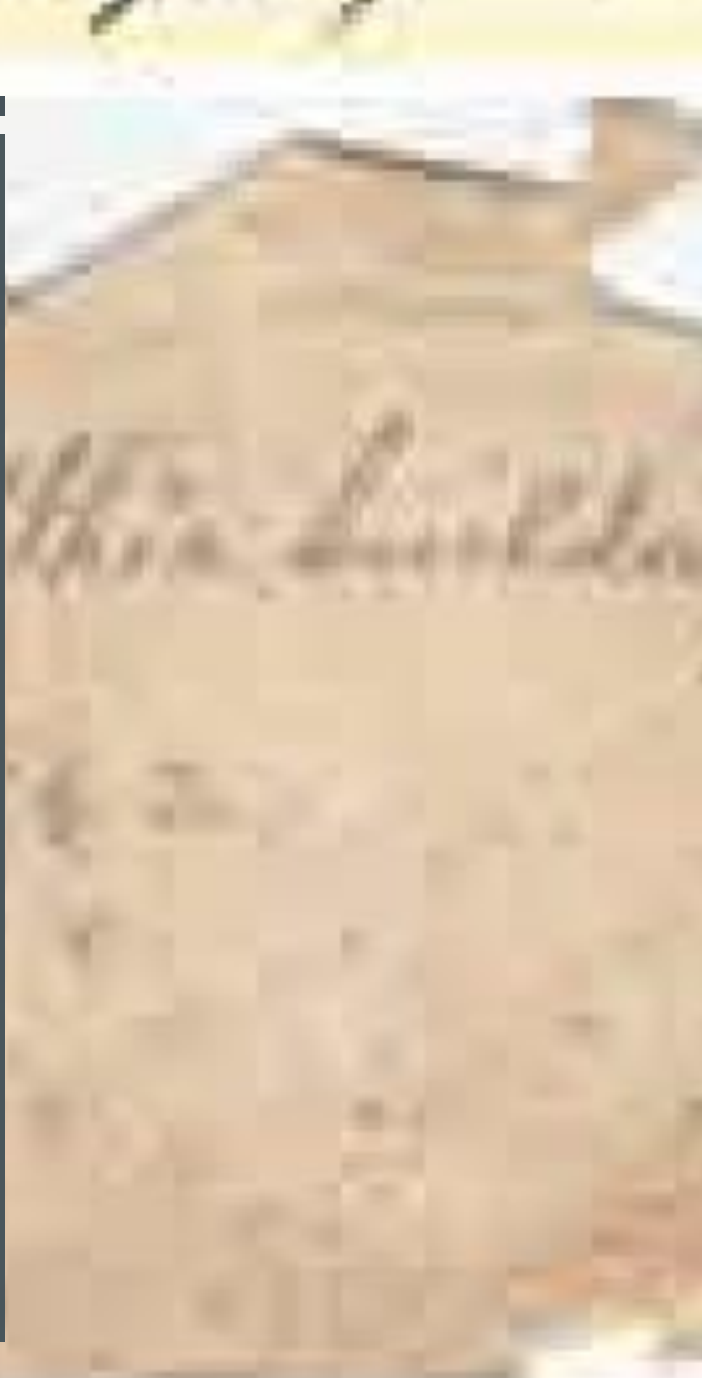
Young boys have always been fascinated to find an unknown object and so it was with Dennis Franks, a 12-year-old lad living at Yew Tree Cottage, Kent Street, Sedlescombe in 1944. Out in the countryside, Dennis came across a strange object that he did not recognise. He picked it up and took it home. While putting it in his back yard, the object exploded, very severely injuring the boy.

The St John Ambulance from Hastings rushed to the scene and took Dennis to the Royal East Sussex Hospital where the lower part of his left leg and his right arm were amputated and his right eye had to be removed. He was also found to have received other injuries.

Shame that Dennis had not seen, or taken notice of, the Public Warning about not touching unexploded bombs.

## MUNITIONS FACTORY, THE STREET, SEDLSCOMBE

■ During demolition work of RN French prior to the building of 1 and 2 Tilly House in 2010, a battered envelope was found under the floorboards by the demolition contractor Danny Mayell. Headed “The history of this building” it contained a page in the form of a letter written by Albert Jenner, Manager of the Munitions Factory in WW2, detailing the building’s interesting history between 1921 to 1943.



Ex Service Mens Club  
 Sedlescombe.  
 This building was erected in the  
 year 1921 as an Ex Service Mens  
 Club following World War No 1  
 1914/1918. It was carried on as a  
 Mens Club until 19 Sept 1942,  
 and was then purchased by the  
 Sedlescombe Engineering Co. Ltd.  
 as a Fitting and Assembly Shop  
 in which were assembled parts  
 comprising 2" Mortar Mark II,  
 Semi Automatic Firing  
 Gear (Gear 14" and hand  
 firing gear for the 6  
 pounder Gun (Anti tank)

Firing Gears 17 lb  
 " " 12 lb  
 Anti Tank and  
 Gun sights.  
 Alford James Jones  
 Ltd's Engineer, 124th Rural Dist  
 Council (retired 1942) Manager Assembly Shop  
 Nov. 27<sup>th</sup> 1943

Dated 27<sup>th</sup> November 1943

# TRANSCRIPT

## EX-SERVICE MEN'S CLUB, SEDLESCOMBE

This building was erected in the year 1921 as an ex-Service Men's Club following World War No.1 1914/1918.

It was carried on as a Men's Club until Sept 1942 and was then purchased by the Sedlescombe Engineering Company\* as a Fitting and Assembly Shop in which were assembled parts comprising:

- Semi-automatic firing gear (Gear 14") and hand firing gear for the 6-pounder Gun (Anti Tan)
- Firing Gears 17 pounder
- Firing Gears 12 pounder anti tank and gunsights.

\*The Sedlescombe Engineering Company was taken on by Paul Salkeld who, according to his obituary, made railway signalling equipment for British Rail. During the War, Paul ran a taxi service for Sedlescombe (as does his daughter Hilary in 2020)

## JOHN GOSSE OF WHYDOWN POULTRY FARM, CRAZY LANE, SEDLESCOMBE, WORKED AT THE MUNITIONS FACTORY

The image shows three handwritten payslips for John Gosse, dated 9/6/44, 23.6.44, and 30/6/44. Each slip lists deductions for National Insurance, Income Tax, and Sundry, and calculates a net pay. The slips are written on aged, yellowed paper with some ink bleed-through from the reverse side.

NAME	No.	Date	National Insurance	Income Tax	Sundry	TOTAL DEDUCTIONS	WAGE DUE	NETT
J. H. Gosse	7	9/6/44	1 10	10 0	-	11 10	5 19 4	5 7 6
J. H. Gosse	7	23.6.44	1 10	9 0	-	10 10	5 18 0	5 7 2
J. H. Gosse	7	30/6/44	1 10	10 0	-	11 10	5 19 4	5 7 6

OPEN THIS PACKET IMMEDIATELY AND SEE THAT CONTENTS AGREE WITH ABOVE AMOUNT.

Coincidentally, in 2010, at the same time as Sedlescombe Archives received the envelope from under the floorboards of the old Munitions Factory, Hope Gosse, a local resident, sent in some of the contents of an old handbag of her mother's (Margaret Gosse) dating back to 1944. In the bag, unopened for many a year, lay several of John Gosse's payslips dating from 1944 when he, a poultry farmer and therefore in a reserved occupation, worked at the Sedlescombe Munitions Factory. His daughter remembers John Gosse cycling to work through the Village always with a beret on his head. John was also in the Royal Observer Corps and did his duties at the Royal Observer Corps Post too.



## BRIEF NOTES ABOUT PEOPLE WHO HAVE HAD CONNECTIONS WITH SEDLESCOMBE WITH WARTIME STORIES TO TELL

The poetess, **PATIENCE STRONG**, was living in Sedlescombe at the time of her death in 1990. During WW2, she wrote each day in The Daily Mirror a poem for "*The Quiet Corner*". She also contributed poems to *Woman's Own* for 35 years and *This England*. Her poems were usually short, simple and imbued with sentimentality, the beauty of nature and inner strength and perfectly reflected the mood of people separated by war. Her Daily Telegraph obituary said that many a British serviceman perished with a copy of her poems in his battledress. She was also a successful lyricist, composing English words for the tango "Jealousy" and "The Dream of Olwen" and an author of several books dealing with Christianity and practical psychology.

**DEREK WILTON** was born in Sedlescombe. His father Percy ran the paper shop. At the start of WW2, he joined the Air Force and served in Egypt and Italy. His next assignment was a top secret one in England. Called the "Battle of the Beams", it saved many civilian lives by intercepting and changing the signals of incoming enemy aircraft. The Luftwaffe were using increasingly accurate systems of radio navigation for night bombing in the UK but the Air Ministry fought back with a variety of their own increasingly effective means, involving jamming and distortion of the radio waves.

## BRIEF NOTES ABOUT PEOPLE WHO HAVE HAD CONNECTIONS WITH SEDLESCOMBE WITH WARTIME STORIES TO TELL



When Freddy first came to live in Harriet House on The Green, he was plain “Col Frederick Pile”. He and his wife Pam took an active part in village life particularly relating to The Conservative Association.

On Armistice Sunday in 1976, Col Pile’s father died leaving Freddy to succeed to the title of 3<sup>rd</sup> Baronet Pile of Kenilworth House, Rathgar, Co.Dublin and he became known as **COLONEL SIR FREDERICK PILE**.

During WW2, Freddy had been awarded an immediate **MILITARY CROSS** in March 1945 for his brave action in a tank battle when commanding a squadron of the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Tank Regiment. The Military Cross is awarded in recognition of “an act or acts of exemplary gallantry during active operations against the enemy on land”.

Freddy’s father was General Sir Frederick Pile and he commanded Britain’s anti-aircraft defences in the Battle of Britain. For this work he had steam locomotive (No.34058) named “Sir Frederick Pile” after him. He had also received the Military Cross for his work in the First War. The Piles were obviously a very brave and patriotic family.

## BRIEF NOTES ABOUT PEOPLE WHO HAVE HAD CONNECTIONS WITH SEDLESCOMBE WITH WARTIME STORIES TO TELL



In 1980, Sedlescombe won the BEST KEPT VILLAGE IN ALL SUSSEX and Clerk, Pauline Raymond, was presented with the plaque by Air Marshal Sir Humphrey Edwardes-Jones of the Sussex Rural Community Council.

On 26 May 1936, Humphrey Edwardes-Jones was the first RAF officer to fly the Spitfire Aircraft, the day it was delivered. Before officials at the Air Ministry ordered the Spitfire they wanted to be sure the aircraft could be flown by an ordinary service-trained pilot. Then a flight lieutenant, Edwardes-Jones was given the job of being the first service-trained pilot to test fly the Spitfire and to report his findings to the Air Ministry.

Edwardes-Jones, when asked his opinion of the aircraft being flown by ordinary service-trained pilots, said yes, provided that they had been instructed on the use of retractable undercarriages, flaps and other systems on the new types of aircraft coming into RAF service, they would have no difficulty with the Spitfire, which was a delight to fly. One week later, the first production order was signed for 310 Spitfires.

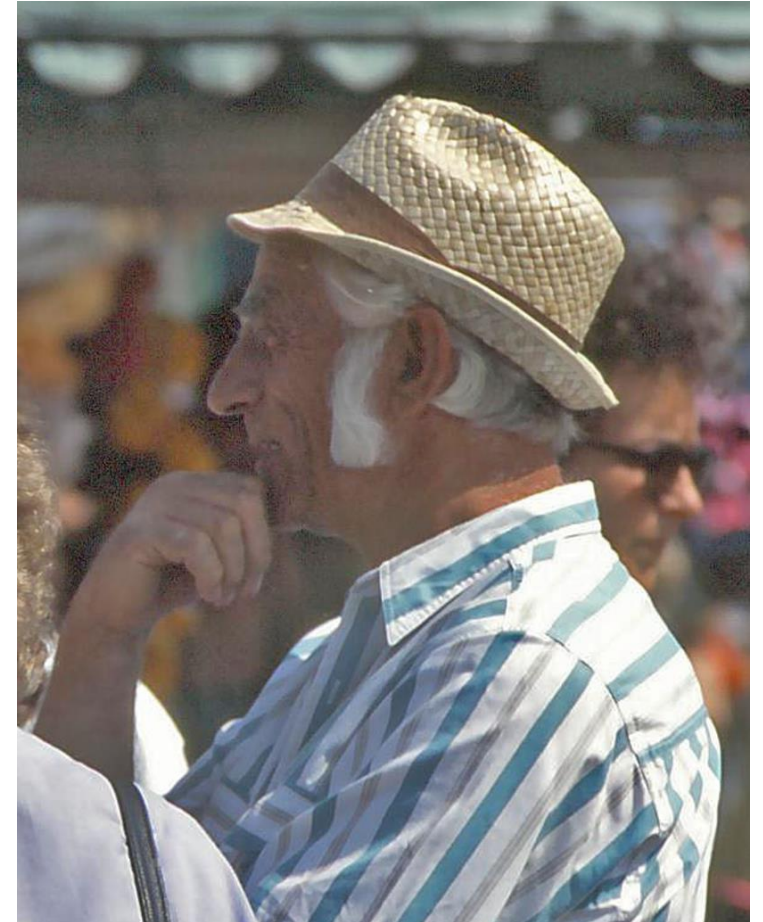
## BRIEF NOTES ABOUT PEOPLE WHO HAVE HAD CONNECTIONS WITH SEDLESCOMBE WITH WARTIME STORIES TO TELL

On 7<sup>th</sup> December 1942, Basil Beeching, who lived with his wife Brenda in Sedlescombe for many years, was a young boy aged 6 years old living in Plumtree Cottages, Sprays Bridge (just outside Sedlescombe parish). On this particular day, he was upstairs in bed with scarlet fever.

Joan Primrose Beeching, his mother, was working at the kitchen sink when a German plane returning from an attack in London strafed the house with shells. She died on the way to hospital.

Basil was unaware of what had happened until neighbours came up to look after him. His young life was changed for ever.

Basil died in 2015 and, just before he died, he arranged for his mother's name to be added to the war memorial in Sedlescombe Church.



## BRIEF NOTES ABOUT PEOPLE WHO HAVE HAD CONNECTIONS WITH SEDLESCOMBE WITH WARTIME STORIES TO TELL

George Taylor lost two members of his family locally during WW2. While he was home on a short leave, he had gone to Silverhill for the day, possibly to visit his Aunt, when there was an attack by German bombers and Silverhill was bombed and strafed. His Aunt and several other people were killed and he witnessed a lot of damage especially at Silverhill Junction.

George's second devastating loss was his sister, Doris Lynch, who in July 1944 was 6 months pregnant and in her home, Spring Cottage, Westfield, when a Doodlebug was shot down by an RAF plane, demolishing the Westfield property. Doris died the next day.

See the Battle Historical Society Account in "*WW2 Civilian Deaths in and from the Battle District*)" for more details. The account speaks of Audrey Taylor (from Sedlescombe), Doris's sister-in-law, who together with other family members including George, faithfully tended Doris's grave until they were no longer able to do it.



*George Taylor (ex-REME) (above right) was Standard Bearer for the Sedlescombe Royal British Legion Branch and its President for the last 4 years of his life until 2007*

## BRIEF NOTES ABOUT PEOPLE WHO HAVE HAD CONNECTIONS WITH SEDLESCOMBE WITH WARTIME STORIES TO TELL

**BOB HARRIS** who lived with Audrey his wife in Streetlands, was a loyal member of the Sedlescombe Branch of the Royal British Legion. In the mid-1990s he began to visit friends living in a small French village called St Laurent. Encouraged by his friends, Bob and Audrey went to the village churchyard to see the graves of 3 British commandos who are buried there. For about 10 years, Bob and Audrey regularly visited the graves each year taking flowers or British Legion poppies. The French held a commemorative service each year to remember the three who had died in the failed Operation Aquatint in September 1942.

Although Bob and Audrey knew the names of the late Commandos, it took all those years to realise that one of the men – 22 year old Allan Marcus Williams had lived in Sedlescombe with his parents. Derek Wilton had gone to School with him. He was a Sgt Commando in the Queen's Royal Regiment, son of Mr Frederick and Mrs Louisa Martha Williams and was serving with a specialist SOE/Combined Operations Unit called Small Scale Raiding Force. They took part on a secret raid on the French coast on the night of 12/13 September 1942. He and his two comrades were killed in the raid and they were buried within days in the local churchyard.





During WW2, **DR JAMES ROBERTS WRIGHT** who was Sedlescombe's GP from 1947 until his death in 1980, served with the Royal Army Medical Corps in field ambulances in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. He commanded the first ambulance train to be sent to France soon after the D-Day landings and spent the year after the invasion in France, Belgium and Holland evacuating wounded soldiers to base hospitals. He was demobilised as a Lieutenant Colonel and a member of Sedlescombe's British Legion Branch from 1953. His rendition of **"They shall not grow old"** on Remembrance Sundays in Church was very moving.

## BRIEF NOTES ABOUT PEOPLE WHO HAVE HAD CONNECTIONS WITH SEDLESCOMBE WITH WARTIME STORIES TO TELL



**FLYING OFFICER JOHN ARTHUR KEELING** lived in Hurst House, Sedlescombe where he had also spent his childhood. During WW2, he joined the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve No.23 Squadron.

In 1945, he was awarded the **DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS**. Born in 1922 at Westminster, he enlisted for air crew duties in 1941 and trained in the USA. He was commissioned in 1942.

He took part in a large number of operational sorties, achieving conspicuous success in low level attacks on enemy airfields and transport. A skilful pilot, on one occasion after flying for two hours with only one engine of his aircraft functioning, he made a masterly landing, the lighting for which was supplied by two car headlights. He was said to possess unlimited patience, ingenuity and enthusiasm and to be a valuable member of his squadron.



## BRIEF NOTES ABOUT PEOPLE WHO HAVE HAD CONNECTIONS WITH SEDLESCOMBE WITH WARTIME STORIES TO TELL

**JOHN KEELING SENIOR**, known as **Jack**, lived at Hurst House for more than 50 years from the mid-1920s until he died in 1976.

During WW2, he led the **Sedlescombe Home Guard** and was well loved and admired by villagers. Tales were told of various antics surrounding his leadership which were described, in his obituary, as “hilarious”.

He was knighted in 1952, principally for his unpaid voluntary work as deputy chairman to British European Airways, a post he held until 1965. Upon his knighthood he adopted the family motto of **SPREAD HAPPINESS**, a phrase that typically portrayed his jovial character.

Edgar Boxall spoke of an officer from the regular army coming to instruct the Home Guard on rifle shooting. The officer said to one member, “Have you ever done any rifle-shooting before?” “ Yes”, was the reply, “I was a sniper in the First War!”

## COMPLAINTS ABOUT BARBED WIRE OBSTRUCTIONS

Throughout the War, starting in 1939 and continuing until 1944, the Parish Council made regular complaints to the Home Guard asking them to remove the barbed wire obstructions on the Village Green.. In 1940, the Parish Council set up a scrap metal dump and tried to get the Home Guard to remove the large quantities of scrap metal that had been put at various points around the Village. The answer was always no.

In 1943, the Adjutant 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the Sussex Home Guard said that he regretted not being able to remove the obstacles but said they would be required in the event of an enemy attack, particularly to protect the Battalion Headquarters (Brickwall).

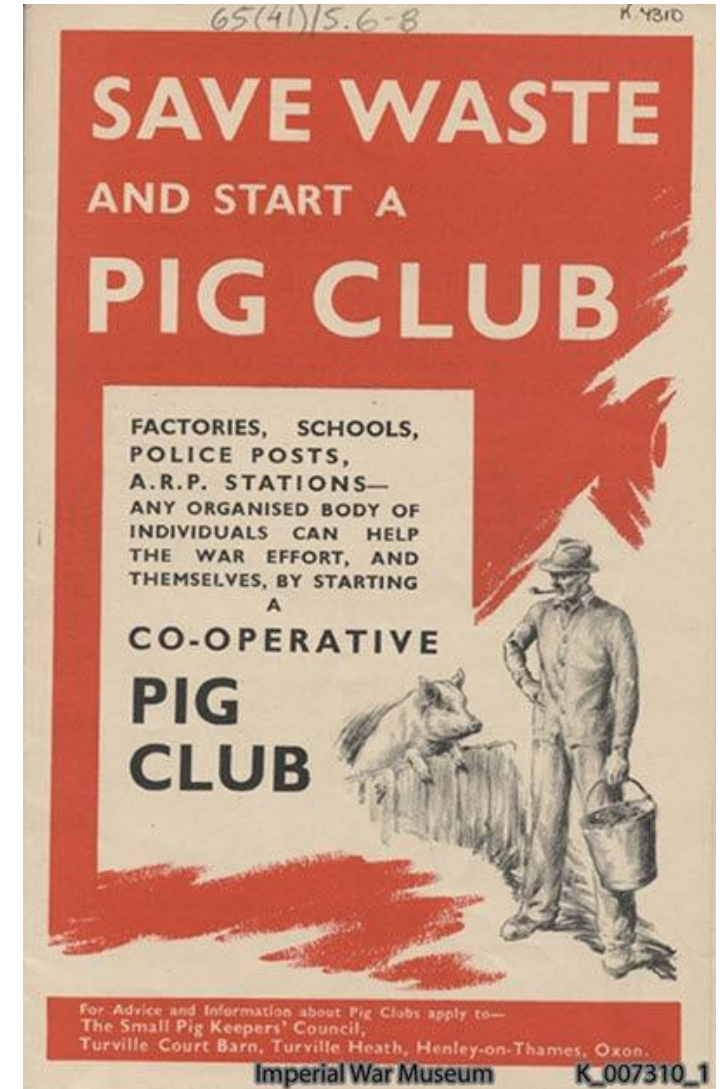
In 1944, as soon as the Parish Council heard that the Military Authorities had at last after 5 years removed the obstacles from the Village Green, the Parish Council shifted its complaints to the barbed wire obstruction of the allotments which were then in Brede Lane on the site of Park Shaw.

## SEDLSCOMBE WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

At the start of the War, in 1939, Sedlescombe Women's Institute (the WI) wrote to the Parish Council asking it to arrange disposal of surplus garden produce. The Parish Council refused saying that the Council had no-one who could give their whole time to organisation of the scheme. So the WI itself took on the role and successfully ran the "Help Your Neighbour Market" where a person could buy someone else's surplus produce and sell some of their own. 2d in the shilling always went to some deserving cause such as hospitals.

The WI worked in many different ways. Occupational parcels for prisoners in Germany were made up and sent. They adopted a refugee, made hay and slippers. They knitted for Indian troops. They canned and bottled fruit and made jam. They responded to the Government's request for herbs and foxgloves to replace some medicines that failed to get through blockades. They organised films and talks. On one occasion a lady who had come from London to talk to them about using potatoes, went away with a recipe for delicious eclairs invented by one of the WI members.

The WI had a communal pig fed by the communal household scraps.



# THANKSGIVING WEEK



## SEDLSCOMBE WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

The WI raised a lot of money:

- War Savings Certificates
  - The 1941 Summer Drive (?whist) bought in enough to purchase one machine gun, two parachutes and a rubber dinghy
  - £797 in War Weapons Week
  - £103 in Wings of Victory Week (a certificate of honour for that effort)
  - Tanks for Attack collection
  - £1,451-13s-0d for Thanksgiving Week
- 
- **“Sedlescombe” was inscribed on a Churchill Tank for the Women’s Institute’s splendid efforts**





**50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF V E DAY, SEDLESCOMBE VILLAGE GREEN 1995**

## SEDLSCOMBE BRANCH OF THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

The Sedlescombe Branch of the Royal British Legion was formed in November 1930 and the Women's Section in May 1945. During WW2, the Branch continued to fund-raise for the Troops Comfort Fund, they held children's parties and gave small gifts to elderly villagers.



Remembrance Sunday 1989 with George Taylor with the standard

Branches march to the  
Church in 1965



Sedlescombe's Branch has been well-served by the Taylor family. Ernest Taylor was its standard bearer for 29 years from 1934-1963 when, on his death, his son George Taylor took over and continued for the next 40 years. In the 1965 photo above, George is carrying the standard over his shoulder in a parade of many branches. Presumably the parade is going to the Church for the dedication of the new standard presented to the Branch by Mr E Waller. George was Sedlescombe Branch's President from 2003-2007.

## SEDLSCOMBE BRANCH OF THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION



*Noreen Hipwell, still collecting for the Poppy Appeal in her nineties, was presented with a poppy brooch and certificate at the 2005 Anniversary Garden Party*



*The Branch Standard was paraded to music from Pipe Major Hamilton Bracken through the lovely gardens of Durud, The Street, Sedlescombe*

## SEDLSCOMBE BRANCH OF THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION



*Ernie Burgess (Chairman of the Branch), Paula Fisher (Mayor of Battle and long-time resident of Sedlescombe) and Valerie Wright (Chairman, Sedlescombe Parish Council) cut the celebratory cake*



## 2007 SEDLESCOMBE BRANCH OF THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION WINS THE JELlicOE CUP

Ernie Burgess, Chairman, of the Sedlescombe Branch of the Legion, attended the 2007 National Conference of the Royal British Legion.

Ernie was presented with the **Jellicoe Cup by Air Marshal Ian Macfadyen CB, OBE, FRAeS** in recognition of his success in raising the Branch membership.

According to Ernie, the membership was 13 in 2002 increasing to 19 in 2004. By 2007 membership was 57. This was the highest percentage increase in membership in the previous 3 years over the country.



## WORLD WAR 2 WAR MEMORIAL

These people are remembered on the Sedlescombe War Memorial in Sedlescombe Parish Church:

- **Jack CRUMP** – Private, Hampshire Regiment, Aged 24, died 15/03/1943, Son of Thomas and Elizabeth Rose Crump of Brook Lodge, Sedlescombe, husband of Ellen Annie Emma Crump of Sedlescombe. Grave – Oued Zarga War Cemetery, Tunisia.
- **Harold William FARROW** – Sergeant, Royal Corps of Signals, Aged 38, died 30/09/1945, Older brother of Neil Farrow of Luffs Farm, Chapel Hill, Sedlescombe. Grave – Kranji War Cemetery, Singapore.
- **James (Jimmy) FRANKLIN** – Lieutenant, Royal Armoured Corps, The Queens Bays (2<sup>nd</sup> Dragoon Guards), Aged 20, died 29/09/1944, Son of George Gould Franklin and Mary Howard Franklin of Powdermills, Sedlescombe. Grave – Coriano Ridge War Cemetery, Italy.
- **Harold HINDE** – Corporal, Royal Air Force serving in H.M.S. Courageous, Aged 26, died 17/09/1939. Son of Henry Clarke Hinde and Susan Mary Hinde of Swailes Green, Staplecross. Grave – Runnymede Memorial for over 20,000 airmen with no known grave.
- **John Padmore NOBLE** – Captain, Royal Horse Artillery “G” Bty, 5 Regt, Aged 26, died 08/06/1944, son of the Revd. William Hatt Noble M.A. (Sedlescombe Rector) and Elizabeth Frances Noble. Grave – Sully Churchyard, France.
- **Henry Edgar READ** – Leading Aircraftman, Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, Aged 25, died 11/06/1941, son of Edgar and Florence Read of Pump Cottage, Sedlescombe. Grave – St John the Baptist, Sedlescombe
- **Horace James SHAMBROOK** – Gunner, Royal Artillery, Aged 20, died 07/08/1942, Son of Henry William and Charlotte Shambrook of East View Terrace, Sedlescombe. Grave – St John the Baptist Church, Sedlescombe

## WORLD WAR 2 WAR MEMORIAL

**James (Jim) Percival SMITH**, Leading Aircraftman, Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, 920 Balloon Sqdn, Aged 29, died 09/05/1942. Unemployed chauffeur. Son of Arthur and Caroline Smith of Woodman's Cottage, Sedlescombe. Grave – St John the Baptist Churchyard, Sedlescombe.

**Thomas Harold SWANSON**, Gunner, Royal Artillery, 114 Field Regt, Aged 29, died 22/03/1943. From Hawkhurst Road, Sedlescombe. Grave – Colombo (Kanatte) General Cemetery, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka).

**Marcus Allan WILLIAMS**, Sgt, Queen's Royal Regiment No.62 Commando, Aged 22, died 13/09/1942. From The Bowlings, Sedlescombe. Shot by German SS troops when on a small scale raiding force failed secret mission on what later became Omaha Beach in France. Code named Operation Aquatint. Grave St Laurent sur Mer, France.

### Civilian deaths

**Harold ANSTY**, Civilian Farmer, died 1944. Killed whilst working on Poppinghole farm with a German prisoner who also died.

**MRS BEECHING**, Civilian Housewife, died 1942, mother of Basil Beeching (aged 6) of Plumtree Cottages, Sprays Bridge, Westfield, shot by aircraft returning from raid on London.

**THEY SHALL NOT GROW OLD AS WE THAT ARE LEFT GROW OLD,  
AGE SHALL NOT WEARY THEM NOR THE YEARS CONDEMN.  
AT THE GOING DOWN OF THE SUN, AND IN THE MORNING  
WE WILL REMEMBER THEM**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**Sedlescombe Archives acknowledges with thanks information from diverse sources over many years that have contributed to this account of life in Sedlescombe in WW2.**

**Apologies to anyone omitted but special mention should be made of Peter and Brenda Anson of Durhamford and the late Pat Smith of Strawberry Hill Farm, the late Edgar Boxall, Battle Historical Society, Sedlescombe Parish Council Minutes, Ernie Burgess's history of the Sedlescombe Branch of the Royal British Legion, WI Chronicles of Sedlescombe 1953, Sedlescombe Parish Magazines, Julia Chapman's "The Time of our Lives", Carol Parham's "Historical Chronology of Great Sanders", Charlotte Williams' "Derek Wilton" entry for the 2016 Local History Cup, Beryl Lucey's "Twenty Centuries in Sedlescombe" and Sally Cotton's books on Sedlescombe. Also, various websites including the Pillbox Society.**

**Photographs from various sources including Colin and Pauline Raymond and also the late Frank Johnson, who in the 1980s built up a comprehensive photographic archive with notes about most of the houses in Sedlescombe which he willed to Pauline Raymond.**

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## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION – WHATLINGTON VILLAGE

Additional information: Charlotte Moore forwarded a link to the 2020 VE Day anniversary edition of the Whatlington News which includes a fascinating feature she wrote about what was happening in Whatlington, and to her family, leading up to VE Day and how Whatlington marked the German capitulation in Europe.

See:

*WW II Whatlington*

PART OF THE 2020 SEDLESCOMBE LOCAL HISTORY VIRTUAL EXHIBITION  
COLLECTION ADDED TO BATTLE & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY WEBSITE 2024

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