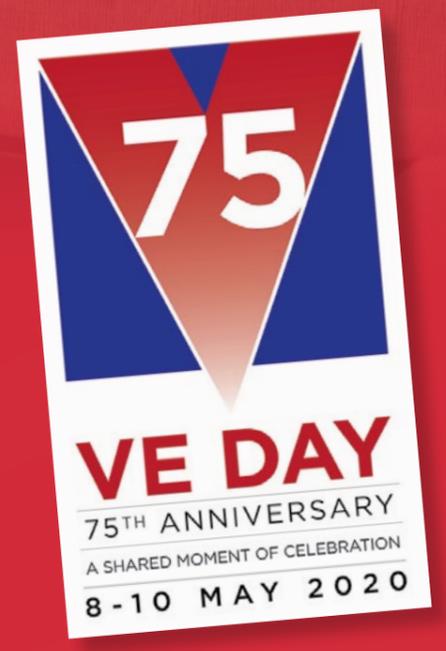




VE DAY 75<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY



Life on  
the home  
front



ASHFORD  
BOROUGH COUNCIL



LIFE ON THE HOME FRONT

# Evacuation

During the Second World War many children living in cities and towns that were at high risk of being bombed were temporarily evacuated to places that were considered safer, usually to more rural locations in the countryside. The first official evacuations began on 1 September 1939, two days before the declaration of war.

Thousands of children were evacuated to Kent towns and villages. Catford Central School for Girls evacuated pupils to Smarden, Bethersden and Biddenden. Mrs Blundell the Head Mistress, as well as some younger brothers and sisters were also included in the group of evacuees.



A play performed by the Catford Central School for Girls "to cheer themselves up" during the war. Image courtesy of Smarden Local History Society.



Catford Central School for Girls outside Smarden School, March 1940, the same day the Mayor and Mayoress of Lewisham visited. Image courtesy of Smarden Local History Society.



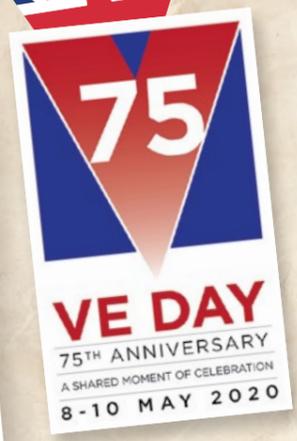
Mrs Emmie Marchant's evacuees: Dennis Brockenshire (left) and Keith Richardson (right). The younger brothers of pupils from Catford Central School for Girls. Image courtesy of Smarden Local History Society.



The Rathbone's evacuee, Raymond Keene (left) with John Furse (right) who was visiting his grandmother at Hegg Hill Farm, Smarden. Image courtesy of Smarden Local History Society.



Rehearsal of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" by the pupils of Catford Central School for Girls. Image courtesy of Smarden Local History Society.



# LIFE ON THE HOME FRONT

## Home Guard and Civil Defence

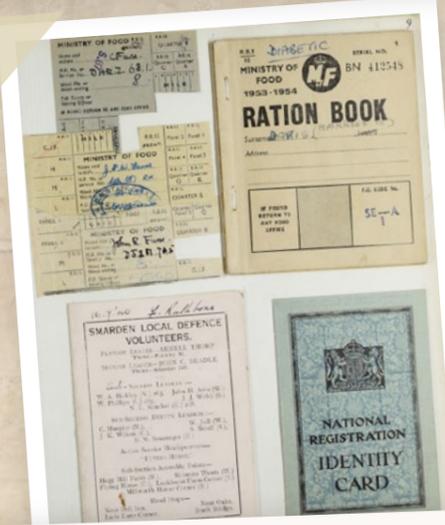


(Left) J.C. Beadle M.C., Section-Leader, "Local Defence Volunteers" 1940.  
Right) W.G. Rushton, later Captain, Smarden Platoon, "Home Guard".  
Image courtesy of Smarden Local History Society.

Due to the threat of invasion and the impact of bombing the government called on volunteers to join the Home Guard and to be trained in civil defence duties such as firefighting, first aid and ambulance driving.

Civil Defence consisted of the Air Raid Precautions, St.John First-Aid Detachment, Special Constables and the Fire Service.

"To begin with they were the 'Local Defence volunteers' (LDV), with no rifles, no uniform, only their LDV brassard (armband). A year or so after the Home Guard proper was in being, with uniforms, rifles, ammo and all, I was enlisted (not too willingly) as paid auxiliary, plus my typewriter, for B company, of which Smarden, Pluckley and Hothfield formed a platoon, and every afternoon reported at Company Headquarters in the room next the post office. The H.G. was kept hard at it; training in the Schools during the week, and every Saturday rifle practise at Pluckley Brick Works. As D-Day drew near, we became officially part of the Army, and were responsible for posting a night guard at the railway bridge in Godinton Park."  
M. Rathbone, Smarden.



Smarden Local Defence Volunteers pocket book. Image courtesy of Smarden Local History Society.



Smarden Fire Service. Image courtesy of Smarden Local History Society.



Wartime Special Constables. Image courtesy of Smarden Local History Society.



Sydney E. Small (centre) with sons E.J. Small (left) and L/ Ac. Arthur L. Small (right). Image courtesy of Smarden Local History Society.



Smarden Home Guard. Image courtesy of Smarden Local History Society.  
The Smarden Home Guard was formed in 1940 and was awarded the Military Cross. Image courtesy of Robin Britcher.



Tenterden Home Guard. Image courtesy of Tenterden and District Local History Society.

LIFE ON THE HOME FRONT

# Air Raids



Beaver Road Primary School Bombed, March 1943 (c) Ashford Borough Museum

The Ashford Railway Works was a prime target for German bombers. In fact, during the war, there were some 4,000 air raid alerts and bombs regularly fell in the vicinity.



New Street bombed, March 1945 (c) Ashford Museum

The worst incident for Ashford came on 24 March 1943 when an air raid that lasted just three minutes, killed 50 people and seriously injured a further 77. Two spotters saw enemy aircraft flying from the Mersham area directly out of the sunlight. They sounded the danger signal and the staff at the railway works had only 25 seconds to find cover.

Although the railway works was the main target, the surrounding areas were also badly hit. The worst of the damage occurred in Milton Road, New Street, Hayward's Garage, Dover Place, New Rents, Star Road, Hardinge Road and Kent Avenue.

During the raid, a bomb also fell on Beaver Road Primary School, formerly located on the corner of Beaver Road and Victoria Road. Thankfully, the sirens sounded in time and the children were already in the playground shelters. Two classrooms which 80 girls had just vacated were completely destroyed. Long before the all clear sounded, parents and friends rushed to the school to find the children unscathed. Miss Adams, the Head Teacher, received an award for her actions, which ultimately saved the lives of the schoolchildren.

German pilot Paul Keller, nicknamed the "Bombenkeller" (bomb shelter), led the attack on Ashford. Keller did not survive the raid, his plane was hit by anti-aircraft fire and he crashed in Godinton Road.



Haywards Garage bombed, March 1943 (c) Ashford Borough Museum



Heinkel bomber that crashed on Spearpoint Rec in May 1941. Image Courtesy of Robin Britcher.



Dover Place, Kent Arms bombed March 1943 (c) Ashford Borough Museum



Wrecked houses in Grosvenor Road, December 1942. Image courtesy of Robin Britcher.



LIFE ON THE HOME FRONT

# Buzz Bombs



On 13 June 1944 Britain came under attack from a strange new German weapon, a V-1 flying bomb. The allies called it the "buzz bomb" or "doodlebug" because its engine produced a very loud buzzing sound. The V-1 was essentially what we now call a cruise missile. It was used for bombing London, but it also caused great devastation throughout Kent.



1944 a buzz bomb fell on Bert Wood's bungalow, Burnt House Lane, Smarden. Image courtesy of Smarden Local History Society.



The result of a buzz bomb crashing at Luckhurst Farm Corner on 29 August 1944. Image courtesy of Smarden Local History Society.



Luckhurst Farm Corner from the other side, 29 August 1944. Image courtesy of Smarden Local History Society.



The Royal Dragoons trying to fix the damage caused by a buzz bomb at Hothfield Place, Hothfield, 28 June 1944. Image courtesy of Hothfield History Society.



A buzz bomb fell on Coronation Villas on 29 August 1944. Mrs E. Ledger and her baby John were saved and unhurt. Image courtesy of Smarden Local History Society.



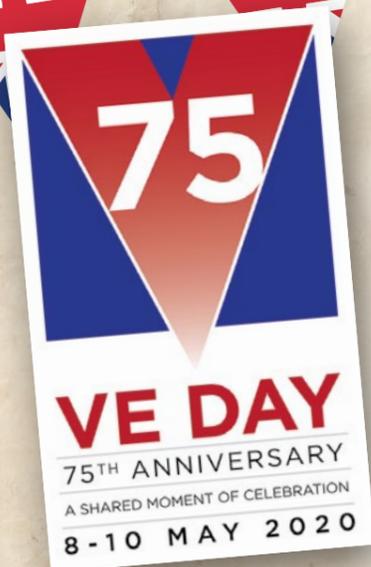
29 August 1944, Fairview Villas completely destroyed by the same buzz bomb at Luckhurst Farm Corner. And before the war. Images courtesy of Smarden Local History Society.



*"I remember the first night of the buzz bombs - like nothing so much as a quick succession of diesel trains, only just overhead. It was a dangerous night for us, for all the soldiers round about were firing with everything they'd got. Day after day, night after night they went on. Most of us were sleeping downstairs now or in shelters. Our people were trying to shoot down the buzzers outside the towns, where the population was less dense."*  
  
*L. Rathbone, Smarden*

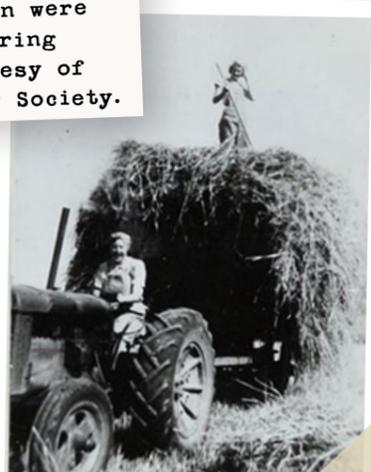
LIFE ON THE HOME FRONT

Women at Work



During the Second World War men aged between 18 and 41 were needed in the Armed Forces and this would take them away from their jobs in factories and farms. To fill the shortage in the workforce, women worked in the factories constructing weapons and many others joined the Land Army to work on farms.

Land Army girls working at Hamden Grange Farm, Smarden where around 350 women were trained in milking during the war. Image courtesy of Smarden Local History Society.



Driver Joan Sharpe (Mrs Sydney Millen) attached to the Corps of Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, Repton Manor, Ashford. She was a driver for Army Officers, called up in 1939. Image courtesy of Smarden Local History Society.



Land girls working at Vesper Hawk, Smarden, c.1944. (Left) Florrie Bennett and (Right) Tilley Stevens, Women's Land Army. Image courtesy of Smarden Local History Society.



Lucy Morris (later Mrs Relf), Women's Land Army. Worked at her home at West Hoy, Smarden. Image courtesy of Smarden Local History Society.



Sybil Batt (front), Land Army 1942-1946, was a tractor driver and carried out other farm work at Bobbing, Smarden. Image courtesy of Smarden Local History Society.



Leading Wren Audrey Batt (Women's Royal Naval Service), with her sister, December 1944 to January 1949. Audrey Batt spent two years on H.M.S. Somerseset and two years on H.M.S. Gannet, Londonderry. Image courtesy of Smarden Local History Society.



W/O Julia Davis, Women's Auxiliary Air Force, who joined at the outbreak of the war and served at a Kent aerodrome. Image courtesy of Smarden Local History Society.



Kate Rofe, munitions worker. Kate was employed at a factory at Fooks Cray (London Borough of Bromley) that constructed spitfires for the war effort. Photo taken before the war. Image courtesy of Smarden Local History Society.

# The Battle of Britain

The Battle of Britain, July - October 1940, is without doubt the greatest air battle in history. The battleground was the skies above Kent and the orchards, fields and villages below where hundreds of aircraft crashed.

"And now the Battle of Britain was on, and we in the Weald were in it, or rather under it. A.A. guns appeared in various fields. Dog-fights all over our heads, with the dramatic effect of exhausts in the cold upper air making white streaks around the fighters as they swooped and swirled against the blue of the sky. We used to see parachutes descending with the bailed out pilots; bombs were jettisoned around us at night; shrapnel fell."

L. Rathbone, Smarden.

The first major incident of the Battle of Britain occurred on 2 September 1940 when more than 70 Hurricanes and Spitfires intercepted 250 German fighter and bomber planes over Ashford.

Later, on 15 September 1940, now celebrated as the Battle of Britain Day, waves of German bombers and fighters flew above the Kent countryside bound for London. 21 squadrons scrambled to meet the fray and by nightfall the RAF had shot down 61 German aircraft, 34 of which were bombers, for the loss of 26 fighters.

In the whirling dogfight that ensued, the skies were filled with curling tracers, smoking aircraft and the crackle of ammunition. For the people of Kent who watched from below it was impossible to distinguish friend from foe.

St Paul's Cathedral with contrails in the sky above it during the Battle of Britain, 1940. © IWM.



RAF P-51 Mustang takes off from a wet runway during a test at the Ashford air base, 21 October 1943. © IWM.



Two German Dornier 17 bombers over West Ham in London during a raid on the first day of the Blitz, 7 September 1940. © IWM.



A Heinkel He 111 bomber flying over the Isle of Dogs in the East End of London at the start of the Luftwaffe's evening raids on 7 September 1940, the first day of the Blitz. © IWM.



A battle-damaged B-24H Liberator of the 490th Bomb Group at Ashford airfield on 30 June 1944. © IWM.



A formation of German Heinkel He 111 bombers, 1940. During the Battle of Britain, the Heinkel's ability to take heavy punishment was one of its strengths. © IWM.