

Fulham

I made it into the world just one week before WW2 was declared (my brother was born just one week before Pearl Harbour – (rumour has it my parents stopped there in case the next child brought yet another disaster on the world!)) Like so many working class families of the time my parents rented our home. The first one I can recall was an upstairs flat where the owners of the house lived downstairs. I still know the address and the name of our landlord – it came in handy when I was trying to trace the family on the 1939 'census'. Not really a census but registration for identity cards and ration books. Luckily I knew the address because the transcription bore no resemblance to the family name . There I found the landlord and his wife, my father, my mother and a thick black line – my entry is redacted because they assume that I am still alive! My father is there because his work in the motor trade meant that he was in a 'reserved' occupation so not called up for military service . He swapped his working life from coach trimming Rolls Royces, Daimlers and Bentleys with top quality leather, some of them royal and government vehicles, to canvas for military vehicles. I was too young to remember much about our time in the flat but we moved on. Our move may have been accelerated by my actions, apparently, I came in from the garden and proudly presented my mother with my collection of 'green marbles' which were in fact the green tomatoes that our landlord had so carefully nurtured to supplement his rations.

Our next home, I do remember clearly, it was just across the road from my first home and was on the second floor above a butcher's shop. I cannot recall the butcher's name but he was always cheerful and friendly with his blue striped apron. At the back of the flat was a balcony overlooking the yard at the back of the shop and I can still recall my father lowering a piece of string over the balcony and the butcher tying a string of sausages on the end for my father to retrieve, not sure whether it was quite legal in the days of strict rationing! Fulham did not get the bombing that the East of London got but on one occasion, I assume it must have been a weekend because my father was home, the sirens went so we were all bundled downstairs on the way to a shelter. We were in the road when my father remembered he had left the gas on under a pan so he left us standing in the street and went back upstairs. The sirens had been sounded because there was a doodle bug or V1 flying bomb attack.



These were un-piloted early jet engined craft packed full of explosives, the idea was that they dived to earth when they ran out of fuel and the engine stopped. On this

particular craft on this day it ran out of fuel and dived and exploded in the park nearby Fulham football ground and the noise and blast came our way. I can still recall the plate glass window of the butcher's shop coming outwards onto the street, not very far from where we were standing waiting for my father to return. I gather the initial blast is followed by a reduction in pressure and it was this that 'sucked' the window outwards. Fortunately, we were all far enough away to be unaffected. This was the only bomb that I actually remember in the whole war although I heard the sirens go off many times. There was always the fear of a gas attack so the whole population was issued with gas-masks. I was very proud of my Mickey Mouse styled gas-mask which fortunately was never called into use.



Our next move was to an end of terrace house – well it would have been a terraced house if Hitler had not removed a whole section of the crescent it formed part of. The previously inside wall had been covered with a layer of cement and great wooden props stopped it falling out. My parents rented it but it was the first time they had lived in a whole, albeit small, house with no bathroom and outside toilet. In the small scullery there was a built in copper boiler with a fire underneath for doing the washing. The kitchen/living room was dominated by a Morrison shelter which was a large steel structure about 7ft long, 5ft wide and 2ft 6in high in the form of a solid steel table under which we sheltered when the sirens sounded.



During the rest of the time it was the kitchen table. There was a brick & concrete community shelter built in the road of the crescent with a solid blast wall about 6ft in

front of the entrance but I can only recall using it once, my parents preferred the privacy of their Morrison. (After the war, when the shelter had been demolished, the blast wall remained and painted on it was the wicket used by all us kids in the street – you bowled across the road and the kerb in front of the wall was the crease and the opposite kerb the other crease)

Where the whole section of houses had been demolished the area was excavated and a reservoir formed to hold water for fighting fires in case of incendiary attacks. The reservoir was surrounded by a wall but there was an opening like a letterbox about 8ft wide and 3ft tall, I assume to feed the hoses through but I remember being fascinated by looking through and seeing the water.

I remember chained to the lamp post opposite our house was the 'pig-swill' bin where all waste food scraps were deposited – never did work out why it needed to be chained to the lamp post!



Whilst my father worked full time he also was a member of 'Dad's Army' - as when he was on duty it was overnight I only remember seeing him a couple of time in uniform and on one occasion seeing his rifle and all his military bits and pieces lying on the bed. It is thanks to him and his mates that we still have the remains of Battersea Power Station because his unit manned the ack-ack guns that protected it.



My father's sister lived in Whitstable on the Kent coast. Not sure how we did it but we did spend at least one holiday with them during the war. Not much of a beach holiday! When we went down to the beach it was covered with anti-tank pyramid shaped blocks of concrete, great lumps of steel sticking out of the shingle and all around them coils of barbed wire so I didn't need my bucket and spade. Out at sea there were mysterious buildings on legs



Towards the end of the war coal, the main source of heating, was difficult to get and I remember be dragged over 2 miles to the gas works where my mother must have heard there was coke available. On the way back the sack of coke was in the push-chair with my brother perched on top – and I had to walk!

Like so many the street celebrated the end of the war with decorations and a party. Somehow from somewhere people found the materials to make the decorations. My father used the sewing machine to use remnants of out worn clothing to make the bunting.

Although we stayed in London throughout the war we were fortunate to have been in an area that got away comparatively lightly when the bombs fell.

Post war I remember some very cold winters and some really dense smogs, some so thick that bus conductors had to walk in front of the buses to find the way.

And just a postscript on the 'end of terrace' house. Not long after the end of the war my father was given the opportunity to buy it for £250 but decided it was 'not worth that much'. Just recently, albeit with considerable work having been done on it, it was on the market for £1,200,000 – how times have changed!



