

On the 23rd of November 2017 the Heritage Centre was visited by the Farnham based Christmas Pie WI. A tour of the Spike was followed by one of our speciality Cream Teas during which I had the pleasure of talking with Margaret Batchelor (nee Washington) who lived in Cline Road during the World War II. The events of one particular night in 1941 Margaret will remember forever.

Margaret's father, Herbert Washington, was employed as the engineer at the Alexandra Laundry situated at the junction of Cooper and Bailey Roads and owned by a Mr E V Harris who lived in Horsley. On the evening of 11th May 1941 Herbert was helping Ernest Bookham the landlord of The Foresters Inn public house which was situated on the junction of Cline Road with Cooper Road.

Margaret had recently suffered from particularly bad bouts of whooping cough and on the evening of 11th May asked her mother if she could sleep with her parents. Herbert returned home to 79 Cline Road at around 11:00 that evening and went to bed sleeping on the side closest to the front window. Margaret remembers the head board of the bed as being against the wall to the right of the window. It was just after midnight that a wayward German bomber flew overhead. Margaret believes that the crew may have mistaken the large chimney at Warren Road Hospital as part of an industrial complex and so started a bombing run from the top of the Downs down towards the Hospital on the other side of the valley. As Margaret recalls, the first two bombs fell in Pewley Way, with the third falling in Addison Road and the fourth and final one landing in Cline Road.

The sound of the bomber and the first bomb detonating woke both Margaret and her mother and it is still Margaret's belief that everyone in the family would have survived the bombing ordeal had it not been for her mother who, in her panic, set about stirring Herbert from his deep slumber. "Mum called and called him" eventually succeeding in getting him up just as a large piece of kerb stone, which had been dislodged by the fourth bomb that struck the far side of the road, came flying through the window striking a hefty blow to the left side of Herbert's head. He was taken to hospital and arrived at around one in the morning, aged only 38, Herbert passed away at three o'clock. Margaret was just five.

Four other residents were hurt due to the bombing raid but Herbert was the only fatality.

Margaret remembers the funeral at what was then the Cathedral Church of Holy Trinity in the High Street. The funeral was held on the 17th May 1941 and was well attended. Traffic was stopped from using the High Street and was diverted via North Street. Mr Harris paid for all the funeral costs and for the burial at Stoke New Cemetery.

Other than the broken window and broken mirrored wardrobe, there was very little damage to either 79 Cline Road or 81 where Margaret's grandparents lived but the family just could not return home and so in a very generous gesture Mr Harris bought a house at 10 Cheselden Road so the family could relocate. Margaret lived in this house for the next 13 years with her mother and grandparents. Margaret remembers her grandmother working at the orphanage in Warren Road, a building that still exists today and situated between the Spike and the entrance to Lancaster Avenue.