

Sarratt Local History Society – January Meeting

'Local Disasters in the 1940s' could have been a rather gloomy subject but Ray Potter kept us enthralled with stories of his boyhood in and around Berkhamsted. To a boy, the Second World War was an exciting time. Collecting shrapnel, cartridge cases and other debris of disasters was an absorbing hobby! At the merest whiff of an air crash or a bomb falling, off all the boys would race to see who could bring home the most spoils. Having Bovingdon Airfield nearby meant there was no shortage of such events. One of the most dreadful crashes was when a B17 full of fuel failed soon after takeoff from Bovingdon and crashed just above Bourne End. Fortunately all ammunition had been removed as the plane was used for weather reconnaissance but all aboard were killed. Ray and friends rushed to the scene, debris was spread over a wide area and one of Ray's abiding memories was of finding a USAF glove - sadly the hand was still inside it! Another disaster happened on the 30 September 1945, also at Bourne End, but this time on the railway. Two trains hit head-on, as instructions to change tracks had not been heeded. 43 people were killed and over 90 injured; the worst rail crash for over 30 years. Ray had been given some superb black and white photographs of this disaster which he has deposited at the National Archives. What was noticeable was that the rescuers were just in ordinary clothes, nurses in aprons and frilly hats, men in trilby hats! No protective clothing as nowadays.

The talk also stimulated several of the audience to tell us about plane crashes in and around Sarratt. One American plane crashed in the Recreation Ground, just missing the houses in Deadmans Ash Lane. The pilot had baled out over Suffolk, setting the controls to take the plane out over the sea - unfortunately it made its way to Sarratt instead, where it ran out of fuel! Several people remembered a mid-air collision of two planes over Whitedell Farm at Belsize, and a Spitfire crashing at Chipperfield. As Terry Simmonds said in his vote of thanks, we must all be thankful that no-one on the ground was killed or injured in any of these local crashes.

The AGM preceding the talk reported another successful year, but more Committee Members are needed. Please contact the present Committee or Chairman Pam (267000) if you could lend a hand.

*The next meeting is on **Tuesday 27 March** in Sarratt School, 7.30pm for 8pm. Mary Nobbs from Chipperfield will tell us of The Blackwells of Chipperfield and the Sarratt Connection. Sounds intriguing!*

Dawn Pitts