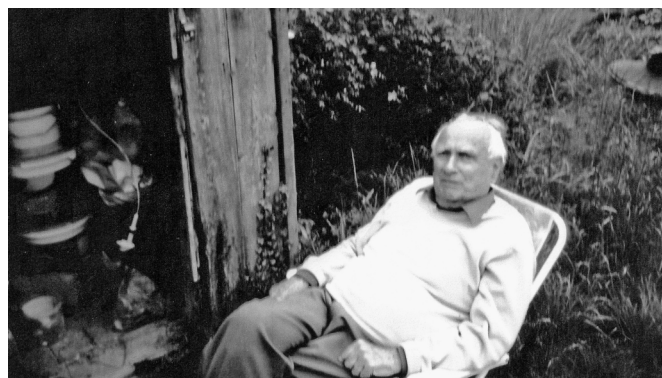


1939-45: the Society in Wartime

Wartime Memories



Mr J Bailey



Mr Bailey's son Russell (above) outside his shed on the Baldock Way site. The shed, perhaps the RAS's oldest, was built by a carpenter at Fulbourn Hospital. When Mr J Bailey's plot at Fanshawe Road was taken for council-house building the well-travelled shed was moved first to Mowbray Road and then to Baldock Way.

Russell Bailey recalls his father maintained that he had bumper crops during the war years. He attributed this to the plentiful supply of pig manure available. Mr Bailey Snr was issued with a stirrup pump to fight fires caused by incendiary bombs and later used it to water his allotment. Russell remembers his mother preserving fruit and vegetables, making rhubarb and parsnip wine and lots of chutney. He swears there was nothing like mother's piccalilli.

Mrs Downham, neé Sharp, was born in 1934 at 44 Mowbray Road, in a brand-new council house with a bathroom but no fittings. Her father, Walter Sharp, was in a reserved occupation so was not called up. He helped out with the pigs on the allotment, kept chickens and shared the eggs with neighbours. As one of the few younger men in the neighbourhood, he was "a father to all the local children", organising their games. The children went gleaning in nearby fields to collect grain for the chickens. Walter built an air-raid shelter in his garden which was so solid that after the war council workmen couldn't demolish it!

A wartime child, **Richard Tomkins** lived in Mowbray Road and remembers an incendiary bomb bouncing off their roof during a raid in 1941. He went fishing with other lads in the tank trap next to the Mowbray Road allotments. He recalls Tug Wilson's pigs on the Glebe Road site.



Ray Catlin (left, on his Glebe Road plot) has lived in the area all his life. During the war he lived in Hills Avenue. During an incendiary raid in 1941 their garden shed burnt down, with his sister's new bicycle inside. The next day Ray took an incendiary bomb he had found to Morley Memorial School to show to his classmates. It was promptly confiscated by his teacher. "And I never saw it again," he recalls. (Later, undeterred, he took the German pistol his PoW brother had brought back to show off to friends at Coleridge School....)

At the end of the war a VE party was held in Hills Avenue. Despite being told by the local bobby not to, Ray and his friends built a bonfire in the middle of the road.



Loss of long-serving members

Alderman John Conder, founder member and first President of the Society died in 1942. "Sincere in everything he did in connection with us...and one of our staunchest members" (Mr G Newman, quoted in the AGM Minutes). "Although he has done so much for allotments for others, he point-blank refuses to help in [our] acre-large garden. He admires the garden, but do it himself he won't" (attributed to Mrs Conder in a *Cambridge Daily News* pen portrait in 1929).

Mr J Blows of 264 Cherry Hinton Road also died in 1942. "One of the finest allotment holders I had ever known" (Mr G Newman at the AGM). He had been a prize-winning plotholder since 1919 and he also served on the Committee and took part in plot inspections.

A woman speaks – at last

Lady Kathleen Constance Blanche Oldfield, neé Balfour, is the first woman recorded as speaking at an AGM, in 1944. During a discussion about "The Compost Heap", she asked about purchasing manure *en bloc*.

She lived at 8 Queen Edith's Way and was a member of a prominent family: her uncle Arthur had been Prime Minister, her father Gerald an MP and cabinet minister and her aunt Eleanor Principal of Newnham College, from which she herself graduated in 1934.

With grateful thanks to long-time members of the Rock Allotment Society who have shared their memories.