

The Borough in War Time

At the outbreak of war on the 3rd September 1939, the Civil Defence Services – some 3,000 local men and women from the Borough in all – were mobilised and made ready for duty. When the first incident occurred in the Borough in September 1940, the Services stood the test and tackled the situation with complete confidence. The opening of the Battle of Britain saw formation of the Local Defence Volunteers, soon to be renamed the Home Guard. As elsewhere there was no shortage of local volunteers, and 1,400 men served in the local force. An Invasion Defence Scheme was prepared to deal with the civilian side of the threatened invasion; plans were made to house and feed some 10,000 people but fortunately they were never needed. In the meantime, the Borough accommodated many Dutch, French and Belgian refugees.

During air raids the wounded were taken immediately to hospital; the ambulances, which were mostly driven by women, had to make their way through the Blackout, while air raids were still in progress. The homeless were removed to Rest Centres to be cared for and re-housed. These centres were run by groups such as the Women's Voluntary Service, while Repair Parties tackled necessary work on houses and roads. The voluntary groups did much to relieve suffering and distress; the Citizens Advice Bureaux helped people find their way through the maze of new wartime regulations and problems, and dealt with the evacuation of local children. Some 17,000 men and women took on fire-watching duties, while hundreds joined the National Fire Service, fighting fires not just locally but in the worst of the London Blitz. Many hundreds of boys and girls joined one of the pre-service units.

The Borough suffered heavily from bombing between 1940 and 1944, with 890 alerts sounded. 33 People were killed by enemy action, and 384 seriously injured; the 200 most serious incidents saw the total destruction of 192 houses, with a further 413 seriously damaged and 12,234 properties slightly damaged. 440 high explosive bombs, 54 oil bombs and 30 doodlebugs fell in the Borough, along with thousands of incendiary and a large number of anti-personnel bombs.

The Borough Council set up four British Restaurants to augment the rationed diet, and in response to the Dig for Victory Campaign provided an extra 2300 allotments. Many young women from the area served with the Land Army on local farms. In order to keep up the morale and spirit of local people, the Council joined with local organizations to run Holidays at Home in the parks. The Savings Movement locally raised the magnificent sum of £7,000,000 – some £200,000,000 in today's money.

The Borough of Epsom and Ewell can be proud of the part that its people played during the Second World War and the noble response with which they defended their town and neighbours throughout one of the longest and darkest periods in recent history.