

War Memories by Betty Sharpe (nee Southwell)

Hosts of memories flit through my mind of the last three decades or so,
Some are very vivid, others just quickly come and go;
Some of the most recurring ones are of the latter War years,
In which 'The Mad Englishman' singly or collectively appear.
Though we hated the horror and destruction of War in near and far-distant places
We learnt to respect and love so many new-found friendly faces.
At the tender age of sixteen (although I thought myself grown up at that)
I helped my family and friends put out the 'Welcome Mat'.
From that first evening in which we joined at 'Eastbourne',
Pictures flash across my mind screen, too quickly to fully discern;
That first evening was tough going for me to make out that foreign tongue,
But how quickly I learnt the inflection to each voice – one by one.

Our C.E. Meetings, with mostly uniformed men at the time,
All doing their part towards making the 'Victory Bells' chime.
After meeting's end, all trooping two by two to 'Eastbourne' or 'Menangle Road',
To friendly fun and fellowship, by the load;
Getting to know their loved ones by word and picture,
At times joking one of them out of their blues; we made a happy mixture.
To achieve this, we had creaking tables of food and buckets of tea;
And could those fellows put it away? You're telling me!
Having toasted cheese on toast – around Southwell's open fire –
Will we ever forget Phil arrayed in white unmentionables, plus bonnet, for us to admire?
Then there was that chair catastrophe up at Aud's,
Sometimes a couple with too quick wit crossing swords.

Mid numerous comings and goings, the six 'Old Faithfuls' stood firm –
From Tiny, Bernard, Phil, Eric, Keith and Ron we had lots to learn –
Of another country with lots of rain, snow and fog;
Remember when the Bridge was under water?
So a taxi was hired to go through Kirkham Lane, water or no water.
Those many sign-songs round the pianos we all enjoyed,
Then to help out for our Church Services, some of them we employed –
Was refreshing to hear different view-points and voices at Worship,
Our common Church-work helped to concrete our friendship.
Trips in Aud's car to some of Australia's beauty spots
With I think, full agreement that the scenery was tops.
With many of them treating our places as homes away from home
Free to spend week-ends, whenever from the Aerodrome they were free to roam;
In shorts and barefoot in our heat, free from regulations,
Or smartly dressed, joining our Church Congregations.

Our many visits to the 'Picture-Show' were a success
Although to their eyes, I think our 'Cinema' was a bit of a mess.
Remember our hikes by the mighty Nepean River?
Where we of the weaker sex arrived with legs aquiver.
But it was worth the walk when the food was spread on the ground
And we hungry hunters all drooling, gathered around.
The disaster of too many stuffed eggs will be remembered by some,
This was in way of celebration by Aud, the day the War was won.
We all had our separate upsets in those years, one way or another
But as a group there were many helping hands to help us recover.
There were many sad thoughts inside us, mingled with the glad
When 'Go-Home' word arrived – to sweethearts, husbands and Dads.
There was a secret tear or two as we waved them on their Homeward way,
But our hosts of Memories remain with us, for ever and a day.



L to R: Betty Southwell, Mavis Southwell, Fred Harvey and Merle Southwell – 1942 at 'Eastbourne' in Camden



L to R: LAC Keith Ward & LAC Eric Barlow – St John's Church Camden in May 1945