IMPACT OF WAR

CENTURY of CHANGE

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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These Background Notes support historical enquiry into the Impact of War during the Century of Change.

Century of Change focuses largely on the period 1850 and 1950. These resources focus on the Impact of the First and Second World Wars on the area.

- How did the First and Second World Wars impact the Century of Change and the Sherwood Forest area?
- What is the evidence of the impact of the First and Second World Wars on Sherwood Forest and surrounding villages?
- How did war change the communities in and around Sherwood Forest?

How did the First and Second World Wars impact the Sherwood Forest area?

When thinking about the impact of war on communities we usually think about largely men but some women too signing up to the armed services, (army, navy and air force) to serve their countries. The focus is often on what happens when men and women go to war, rather than the communities they leave behind.

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How did the Second World War impact the communities in and around Sherwood Forest?

The Second World War affected every single family in Britain and the Commonwealth. In Nottinghamshire and Sherwood Forest communities were affected in lots of different ways. The War meant many men left to join the army, navy or air force.

Image credit: Proteus Army Training Camp at Thoresby Hall http://thoresby.blogspot.com/2009/10/thoresby-park-thoresby-estate-various.html

Some women, who would have previously stayed at home, left to join the armed services, to work in munitions factories or to take over the jobs left by the men, such as farming or forestry. Men and women working in industries that were essential to the war effort, for example mining, had to remain. They could however join organisations like the Home Guard and Women's Voluntary Service to support their hometowns. Children from large cities were at risk from bombing so were evacuated to live in the countryside, often staying with strangers or distant relatives. Food and items in shops were harder to come by and rationing was needed to make sure there was enough for everyone to get by.

1st Nottinghamshire Yeomanry

An example of British soldiers from the 1st Nottinghamshire Yeomanry in Normandy on 30th June 1944, featuring Sgt. Dring (leftmost). Image credit https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Sherwood_Rangers_Yeomanry

While soldiers were away fighting, many were killed in action. There are over twenty memorials built to help us remember those lost in the War across Sherwood Forest.[1] Some soldiers were not killed, but were captured by the enemy and held prisoner, sometimes for many months or even years. These were known as Prisoners of War, or POWs. The British army also captured German and Italian soldiers and kept them as POWs too.

Italian Soldiers

An example of Italian soldiers in 1941, featuring Giorgio Monteforti and his peers. Image credit: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Italian_Soldiers_WWII_GM6.jpg

POWs were often released at the end of the War and allowed to go home.[2] Other soldiers returned home injured, sick or badly affected by the horrors they had seen in battle and in need of hospital treatment and care. Some buildings were adapted to make hospitals or convalescence homes, and a brand-new hospital, King's Mill near Mansfield, was built initially for American soldiers. It is still a hospital today![3]

Volunteering

There were plenty of opportunities for both men and women to volunteer in their community in Sherwood Forest. Men could join the Home Guard. These were trained local people who could set up patrols in their local area, organise defensive action if there was ever an attack on British land, and ensure any enemy soldier who parachuted into Sherwood Forest was captured to keep the community safe.[4]

The Civil Defence Service included several different roles such as Fire Guards, Wardens, Medical Services, Messengers and Welfare. They were responsible for everything from enforcing the blackout rules to prevent bombings, to sounding the air raid sirens, helping people at the scene of a disaster, to finding them alternative accommodation if their home had been bombed.[5] In Sherwood Forest there were no targeted bombings because it is a rural area, but two enemy bombs were dropped, probably on the way back from a raid on Sheffield.[6] There were air accidents though including a training bomb being dropped through a farmhouse roof and plane crashes from the RAF bases in the area which were

attended by the Civil Defence Service.[7]
The Women's Voluntary Service worked alongside the Civil Defence Service to provide practical help, feed and clothe the volunteers and the community. They provided comforting tea and childcare while the adults dealt with the immediate danger, and supported the community when it was most vulnerable. The WVS is still collaborating with communities today.[8]

Supporting the War Effort

The communities in Sherwood Forest were mainly rural, so many farms needed to be worked despite the men leaving to fight. A new workforce arrived to help fill the gaps: The Land Army. This was mainly young women who wanted to help the war effort, plus conscientious objectors who were men of the right age to fight but who disagreed with war and were imprisoned or made to work instead of joining the army. The Land Army learned to drive tractors, work with farm animals, plant and harvest crops, mend machinery and lay fencing. The work was hard, starting very early in the morning with long workdays. It was work that traditionally men would have done and wasn't considered "lady like."[9]

Because Sherwood Forest is rural, it was much safer than the big cities which were being bombed by German planes, so children were evacuated out of cities to the countryside. Many children were sent to live in Sherwood Forest. Betty Edmunds remembers that many children in Mansfield came from London and spoke with East End accents using "colourful" language. When one evacuee, Albert, was told he had to have a bath every three days he said "cor blimey Missus, I ain't a muddy duck!"[10] The children returned home when the War was over, although some had to move house if their home had been damaged by bombs.

Community Spirit

Communities tried to keep their morale and spirits up, despite the hardships they faced, by hosting events like concerts and dances. One Lumber Jill, Mrs Hutchby, who was working at Carburton said "we all enjoyed it, especially disappearing off to the dances at the local RAF base and coming back at 1 in the morning cycling down the country lanes"!

Sports were played to keep some form of normality, and to keep communities healthy of course.[11] Professional sport provided a distraction from the War and gave communities something else to talk about and focus on, even if it was only for an afternoon.

The government recognised that communities needed good morale to survive the War and that the arts and community spirit were important as well as practical support. British Restaurants were created to provide nourishing but affordable food in pleasant, comfortable surroundings.[12] In Sherwood Forest there were several of these restaurants either to sit-in or take-away, or both. Most served three courses: Bread and soup; meat and two vegetables; then sweet and tea.[13] Lots of new paperwork was needed to keep track of supplies to ensure there was enough for everyone in the community and new forms of ID and employment paperwork were introduced.[14]

VE Day marked the end of the War and was celebrated in every community in Sherwood Forest.[15] It was the start of some big changes here though as the Land Army and Lumber Jills were disbanded, and the Prisoners of War were sent home and Displaced People replaced them in the camps here. Soldiers started to return from the front and had to adapt to life back at home. Children who had been evacuated returned to their home cities.

How did the War change the Sherwood Forest landscape?

The Second World War impacted the Sherwood Forest landscape in lots of different ways. During the War, there were changes in how the land was used. New buildings were also constructed during the War and immediately after it. Some of the changes to the uses of the land stayed after the War and some returned to their original use, but clues have been left behind to tell us about what happened in the landscape between 1939 and 1945.
Sherwood Forest itself made a good hiding place for tanks, munitions (weapons, bullets and machinery), and other equipment needed by the army.

Ammunition Storage Hut
Image reproduced by kind permission of the Edwinstowe Historical Society

The trees made it difficult for German planes to see the equipment hidden in the forest. Lots of pits were dug which were covered with corrugated steel or canvas to store equipment and a railway system was built across the forest to transport the equipment to the pits and out again when the Army needed it. These pits and remnants of the railway tracks can be found all over the RSPB Sherwood Forest site and other areas of the Forest.[16] Another reminder of the tanks that once hid in the Forest are the deer that now inhabit it – they escaped after a tank on a training exercise flattened a fence and populated an area of the Forest they hadn't been in since the Middle Ages, and they are still living there today.

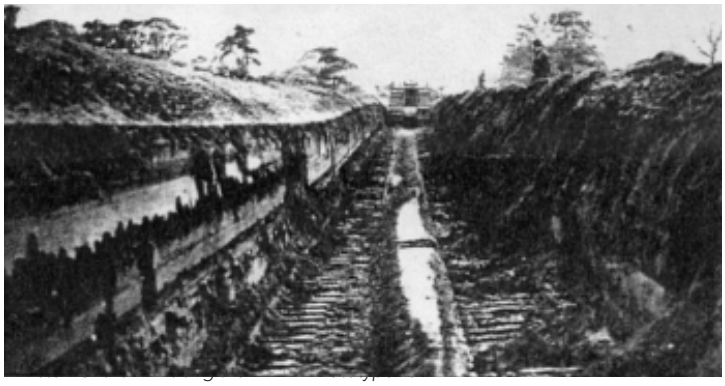
[17]

Image reproduced by kind permission of Forestry Commission. The original image is from Peter Barton's collection, from his mother Edna.

The Forest was also used by the Lumber Jills, a group of women who volunteered to form the Women's Timber Corps and travel the country sourcing wood for the war effort.[18] They chopped down trees and worked the wood to create props for mine shafts and tunnels, railway sleepers, telegraph poles and other essential timber items. Many native British trees had already been cut down for similar reasons during the First World War in Sherwood Forest and replaced by quick growing pine trees, but more were felled during the Second World War which changed the landscape further.[19]

There are five big country estates across Sherwood Forest whose land was also used for different purposes during the War, changing their landscapes. At Thoresby Park an immersion tank was built from bricks and filled with water to test whether armoured tanks were waterproof before they were used for D-Day in France. After the War it was used as a swimming pool for the children who lived on the Estate.[20] Clumber Park was used to test prototype machines, so their grass lawns were churned up by trench-digging tanks. Even Winston Churchill visited to see them in action. Although the grass has returned to Clumber, you can still see the

patterns made by the tanks in the lawns.[21]



Clumber Park was a secret test site for 'Nellie', a prototype 77ft tank hybrid designed to dig trenches, although it never went into production. Image credit: https://www.nottinghampost.com/news/history/day-winston-churchill-came-notts-227771

All of the estates, like most homes, changed their gardens to grow vegetables and keep animals instead of growing flowers because food was in short supply and had to be rationed.[22] Government propaganda campaigns encouraged people to "Dig for Victory" and use home grown produce to supplement their rationed allowances. Pigs were fed using scraps instead of wasting food and people could swap their home grown produce in the community. Fuel was also restricted by the Germans attacking supply ships and in 1942 a team of American oil drilling experts were brought to Sherwood Forest to help extract oil from beneath Duke's Wood. The installation of "nodding donkey" pumps on the surface of the oil works changed the landscape and can still be seen in the nature reserve.[23]

What new communities & individuals moved to Sherwood Forest because of the Wars and why?

Sherwood Forest hosted new communities during and immediately after the Second World War, some of which stayed and settled here making Nottinghamshire their home.

Prisoners of War

During the conflict, British and Allied soldiers took enemy troops captive and housed them in Prisoner of War camps. There were five camps in Sherwood Forest, including one in Edwinstowe where the RSPB visitor centre is now located, near the Major Oak tree. This Camp accommodated Italian and German POWs who slept in huts with brick platforms for stoves to keep warm. Some of

these brick platforms survive today.[24]

Edwinstowe Prisoner of War and Displaced Persons Camp. Huts viewed from the Cricket Pitch. Image reproduced by kind permission of the Edwinstowe Historical Society https://edwinstowehistory.org.uk/young-historian/one-of-the-secrets-of-

sherwood-forest-veras-story/
The Italian POWs created a mosaic of the UK Coat of Arms using broken crockery at the entrance of the Camp. Vera Beljakova lived with her parents, Boris and Marianne, and Grandfather Alexander Beljakova at the Edwinstowe POW camp for 2 years because her father worked as the Camp interpreter. She remembers Sherwood Forest fondly with the Camp feeling more like an agricultural accommodation camp but with military guards than a prison.[25]

Another POW camp at New Ollerton had accommodation made up of tents and Nissen huts, corrugated iron bent over a concrete base. Like Edwinstowe, POWs worked on the farms surrounding the Camp during the day under the supervision of the Guards.[26] Although many POWs returned to their home countries at the end of the War, around 25,000 Germans and 100,000 Italians settled and stayed in Britain instead.

Displaced People

Towards the end of the War and immediately after it ended, many people in Europe found themselves without a home or unable to return to their countries. Some people were in danger of being captured or hurt because of politics or changes to the rules; others had no homes or jobs to go to because their communities had been damaged in the conflict. Many were released Prisoners of War, people who had survived being in concentration or slave labour camps, or evacuees. These were called Displaced Persons (DPs). The Allied governments, including Britain, wanted to help them to find permanent new homes across the world and needed to keep them safe while they found long-term solutions. Once the War had ended and the German and Italian POWs had been sent home, many Prisoner of War camps were adapted to house Displaced Persons instead.[27] The Displaced Persons camp at Caunton housed Ukrainian men.[28]

European Volunteer Workforce

Other people from Europe also needed support after the War because their communities had been disrupted by the conflict and they had no work nor money. In Britain there was a shortage of people to fill job roles such as farming and mining because so many men had been lost in both the First and Second World Wars. The British Government invited people from Europe, mainly Latvia, Poland and Ukraine, to come to Britain to create the European Volunteer Workforce (EVW).[29] In Sherwood Forest there are memories of EVW workers housed in the DP camps as well as on farms and country estates such as the five men in Edwinstowe who were housed in a Stable Flat on the Thoresby Estate when the huts on the DP camp became too run down to live in.[30]

Polish Community

Many people from Poland settled in Sherwood Forest during and immediately after the War. Newark is a particularly special place for the Polish community because when Germany invaded Poland and exiled their government leaders, their General Władysław Sikorski ('Shi-kor-ski') was buried in Newark cemetery as he could not be buried in Poland during the War. It was felt the Polish bomber squadrons stationed in the area around Newark meant that Nottinghamshire felt as close to Poland as possible and that Polish servicemen could attend the funeral on parade. Good links had been made with the Roman Catholic church and the Anglo-Polish community in the county, and many Polish servicemen requested that they also be buried at Newark if they were killed in conflict. This has led to the cemetery becoming a focal point for the Polish community who still celebrate All Souls Day in the Polish tradition to remember those who were killed in the War.[31] Because Polish servicemen fought alongside the Allied forces to help to win the War but were unable to return home, in some cases because of the changes in politics and land borders in their own country, they were invited to settle anywhere in Allied Europe after the War. This was called being "de-mobbed." Many had fought all over the world or had experienced being captured by either the Germans or the Russians, before trying to decide where it would be best to settle alone or with their family.[32] Sherwood Forest provided several options for work: farming, mining and mills making it a great place to make a new life.[33]

An example of Polish soldiers in 1944, featuring the 1st Polish Armoured Division receiving rations in Holland. Image credit: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Polish_Army_in_the_North-west_Europe_Campaign,_1944-1945_HU108865.jpg

[1] https://edwinstowehistory.org.uk/local-history/war-years/war-memorial/
[2] https://susiemcgraw.wixsite.com/mysite/post/nottingham-courage-in-the-face-of-capture
[3] http://www.ournottinghamshire.org.uk/page/30th_general_hospital_of_the_university_of_california?path=0p2p55p
[4] https://edwinstowehistory.org.uk/local-history/war-years/second-world-war/home-guard/
[5] https://edwinstowehistory.org.uk/edwinstowe-civil-defence-team/
[6] Warsop map
[7] https://edwinstowehistory.org.uk/local-history/war-years/second-world-war/edwinstowe-air-crash/
[8] https://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/about-us/our-history/
[9] https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/89/a2663589.shtml https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/24/a3059624.shtml
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[11] https://susiemcgraw.wixsite.com/mysite/post/the-game-must-go-on-notts-rugby-football-club-in-world-war-ii Warsop cricket pic
[12] https://susiemcgraw.wixsite.com/mysite/post/government-funded-food-communal-kitchens-in-ww2 https://www.findmypast.co.uk/blog/history/british-restaurants
[13] https://www.ourmansfieldandarea.org.uk/content/new-contributions/the-british-restaurant-does-anyone-remember-these
[14] Warsop documentation sheet
[15] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sr0oMytLM-o
[16] http://www.mercian-as.co.uk/sfapworldwartwo.html
[17] From "A Celebration of Kings Clipstone: 1000 Years of History" Jane Bealby et al
[18] https://susiemcgraw.wixsite.com/mysite/post/international-women-s-day-celebrating-the-women-of-wartime-sherwood
[19] Lumber Jills Edna Barton Pictures
[20] http://www.mercian-as.co.uk/sfapworldwartwo.html plus report from SoWS Project

[21] https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/clumber-park/features/classified-operation-clumber-park
[22] https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/manuscriptsandspecialcollections/exhibitions/online/war,womensurvival/foodrationing.aspx

[23] http://www.dukeswoodoilmuseum.com
[24] Archaeology to be added from Mercian
[25] https://edwinstowehistory.org.uk/local-history/war-years/second-world-war/prisoners-of-war/
[26] 633 Broughton Document
[27] https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/postwar-refugees/timeline/index.aspx
[28] More to follow about this following meeting with Kevin Pooler and work re. POWs and DPs/Refugees – need permission to use his pics!
[29] http://www.ukrainiansintheuk.info/eng/01/evw-e.htm
[30] https://edwinstowehistory.org.uk/local-history/war-years/second-world-war/prisoners-of-war/
[31] https://susiemcgraw.wixsite.com/mysite/post/all-soul-s-day-at-newark-cemetery-a-local-legacy-of-ww2
[32] Helen's testimony about her dad's story and photos.
[33] http://www.nottsheritagegateway.org.uk/people/polishcommunity.htm