

MINCHINHAMPTON LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

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MINCHINHAMPTON LOCAL HISTORY GROUP COMMITTEE 2009/2010

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PROGRAMME OF PAST MEETINGS

2009	November	A.G.M. and “Old Minchinhampton” - Michael Mills
2010	January	“Stroud Hospital” - Dr. Roy Lamb
	February	“James Simmonds & Sons - The Arts and Crafts Years” - Tony Simmonds
	March	“A Victorian Rector and Nine Old Maids” - Michael Boyes
	May	“Cavaliers and Roundheads in Gloucestershire” - Russell B. A. Howes
	June	A Visit to Rodmarton Manor
	September	“River Severn - Fish, Farming and Floods” – Simon Draper
	October	Exhibition - “Happiest Days of your Life”
	November	A.G.M. and “Magic Lantern Show” - Patrick Furley

How Death was handled in the 1930s.

Margery Woodward

Margery is a long time resident of Watledge. She has put down her reminiscences of the family business from between the wars.

When the undertaker was called – this was sometimes late at night – it was necessary to check that the body had been “laid out”. A lady who could be called upon to provide this service normally did this. When this was done, the undertaker measured the body to decide on the size of coffin required.

The coffin was then made, usually from elm but occasionally oak was requested. Workman’s of Ryeford supplied the timber; it was selected, collected on a hand truck and pushed back to Nailsworth. A set consisted of two long planks, about 20 inches wide, $\frac{7}{8}$ inches thick and 10 feet long, which could be cut to provide two sides and two ends. These were planed on one side. In addition to this two large boards were supplied, large enough to be used as a base and a lid. Also, narrow strips, about 2 inches wide were prepared on one side; these were described as hoops and were fitted all round the base, on top of the sides and ends, and all round the lid.

One of the large boards was then marked out and cut to the size required on the circular saw. Once the sides were cut to size it was necessary to put saw cuts on the inner side to help the bending required on the shoulder area of the base. These were attached to the base, using round-head wire nails. A board, known as the breast-board, was temporarily fitted to the base to ensure that the correct width could be maintained on the shoulder area.

Wooden tapered wedges were cut and driven into the slots on the sides where they joined the base, to prevent the pitch, which was added later, from running out. The two ends were cut to size, nailed to the base using two-inch round-head nails. The hoops were cut to length and nailed on using oval-headed nails. These nails were punched and the hollows formed filled with putty, coloured to blend with the final polish.

The lid could now be cut to size, the surface planed and the hoops fitted, again using oval-headed nails, punched and puttied. The whole outside could be sandpapered to obtain a suitable surface for linseed oil and French polish to be applied. This was done with a soft pad, in a warm atmosphere, to obtain a satisfactory finish. The brass furniture was then fitted; three handles on each side and a previously prepared nameplate and two small plates on the lid.

The base was then covered with pitch, warmed to make it liquid enough to be brushed on to fill up any cracks. Next it was lined with wadding over a layer of sawdust. A layer of white material, domet, was tacked to the top edge of the sides and then folded over on to the base. A pillow made from domet filled with wadding was put at the head. A shroud was supplied if requested. Finally the lid was fitted with screws, which could be left loose as required.

In many cases the body was left at home until the funeral and the coffin had to be taken to the house as soon as possible. It was delivered after dark, covered with a black sheet. This was done with the hand truck if distance made it possible but otherwise a hearse had to be used. In the early 1930s a horse hearse was available for hire but later this changed to a motor hearse. On one occasion I carried a lantern to Scar Hill to accompany the delivery truck.

In the meantime, arrangements had been made for the burial, a grave dug and the parson found to conduct the service. Normally three or four bearers had to be employed. Costs seemed to be around £20 for the whole procedure.



The above photo shows George Woodward's Joinery and Undertaking Business at Watledge

Avening Women's' Institute in the Thirties

Shirley Hand

This year Avening W.I. celebrates its 80th birthday, and the current treasurer, Shirley Hand, delved into the archives to give a glimpse of life in the thirties to members at their celebratory dinner.

The first record of a committee meeting is on October 4th 1930, at Brookside House, chaired by the first President, Mrs. Stanley Clarke (her Christian name was Evelyn, but the use of her husband's name is an indication of the formality of the time). Every decision had to be proposed, seconded and voted upon – for example the purchase of blue/grey crockery from the Bon Marché in Gloucester (now Debenham's) in 1936, and the choice of teaspoons – either Woolworth's at one shilling a dozen or Bon Marché at two shillings six pence; the latter was chosen as being more serviceable!

Monthly meetings were held in the schoolroom until 1934, when the Parish Council approached the W.I. to use the Memorial Hall (where members still meet); the cost was set at £4 10s. 0d. for ten evenings a year. The emphasis was on domestic skills in the early years, with talks on vegetable preservation, poultry keeping, how to cut paper patterns for dressmaking, bottling of fruits and even hat making. An evening started with the singing of "Jerusalem" and concluded with the National Anthem, and in the days before television the social half-hour was an important part of the meeting. Here the Entertainments Committee devised items such as plays, competitions, monologues and games; this proved to be a popular way to serve the membership, so much so that by 1938 the committee size had to be restricted to fifteen! As well as the cups and saucers teapots and milk jugs had been bought (no mention of coffee!) and, contrary to expectations, cakes were purchased not home made; in 1936 to decision was taken to purchase locally from Mr. May, rather than Mr. Phillips of Tetbury.

There was a market stall at meetings and two competitions, judged by all the members. Again these focussed on domestic skills – best darning, neatest buttonhole, garden on a soup plate, toy made from matchboxes, and the annual home-made wine competition, which in 1936 featured beetroot wine in the red and parsnip wine in the white categories.

On a wider scale group meetings including several W.I.s were held from the first, and in 1934 Avening were hosts. Travel in the days before the private car was difficult, and buses were hired from either Red and White or Western

National; the cost was subsidised by fund-raising efforts such as jumble sales. In 1931 a whist drive was held at Brookside House, and a contribution of £2 was sent to the National Debt fund (these were the depression years), for which Avening W.I. received a letter of thanks from the secretary to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Whist drives continued in popularity throughout the period, attracting many people to venues such as Holcombe House. The first mention of Cherington, which now has many W.I. members, occurs in 1937 when villagers were invited to join the summer outing.

Early members bought the national magazine "Home and Country" (now "W.I. Life"), and part of the subscription was passed to the Gloucestershire and the National Federations. This was a bone of contention (as it often is now) and Avening and other local institutes raised a resolution for consideration at National level "*welcoming possible economies as to the financial burden, which considerably hampers the work of smaller W.I.s*". A record of the result has not been found!

The year at Avening concluded with the annual Christmas Party, (in early January!) to which the whole village was invited but (by a resolution in 1934, reaffirmed every subsequent year) NO CHILDREN UNDER TEN. What difficulties this caused for families are not recorded. Visitors paid a nominal charge, but refreshments were always generous, and in the latter part of the thirties a band was hired for the dancing. Local groups such as the Minchinhampton Concert Party and Coates W.I. provided entertainment, but probably not as much as when two unauthorised youths took Mrs. Whitney's place at the piano and played for the dancing! In future years a closer watch was kept on the door.

The year 1939 heralded in great changes. Mrs. Clarke was replaced by Miss Catherine Holt, and the former was presented with a cigarette box, inscribed "*From Avening W.I. to their founder President, 1939*". The outbreak of war brought blackouts, petrol rationing and evacuees but the impact of these, and the role of Avening W.I. during those difficult years is another story.

Gloucestershire Births, Marriages and Deaths from 1837

New on the Internet from information supplied by Gloucestershire Family History Society. See: <http://ww3.gloucestershire.gov.uk/bmd>

Minchinhampton and the Hawke's Bay Earthquake

Diana Wall

At 10.47 a.m. on Tuesday February 3rd 1931 an earthquake, magnitude 7.8 on the Richter scale, devastated the Hawke's Bay region, on the eastern coast of North Island, New Zealand. The main shock lasted only a little over two minutes, but was felt over most of the lower part of North Island; in the following two weeks over five hundred smaller aftershocks were recorded. Nearly all the buildings in the central areas of the main towns, Napier and Hastings, were levelled, with a national newspaper commenting that "*Napier as a town has been wiped off the map*"¹. A total of 258 people were killed, with thousands injured; the fires resulting from the fractured gas mains in the towns added to the general devastation. The fact that the death toll was not higher has been attributed to the presence of naval and merchant ships in the area, whose personnel aided the rescue attempts.

What was the link between this disaster on the far side of the world and Minchinhampton? The answer was a Church Army Captain, Robert (Bob) Kirby, who had spent his boyhood in Vestry Cottage in Bell Lane. Robert was the third son of the Verger, Victor Kirby, and he was working in the small town of Wairoa on Hawke's Bay; his family received a telegram confirming his safety three days after the earthquake.

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THE INFORMATION OVERLEAF WILL INTEREST YOU.

DLT Kirby M Hamplon - England

Safe - Bob

¹ The Dominion 1931

In his own words: *“At the time of the ‘quake I was chatting to some of the navvies in the railway camps, where the Church Army has its headquarters. Suddenly, without any warning, the earth began to groan and rock in an alarming fashion, and I had to hang on to the fence for support. To see the roads heaving and bumping, and the hills swaying about, was a sight never to be forgotten. With it all was heard that uncanny “creaking” as if the very earth was in pain. Fortunately there was little damage done in the camps, but news soon began to filter through of the awful havoc wrought in other parts of Hawke’s Bay.”*

A few days after the earthquake he was summoned to Napier to help with the relief effort, witnessed the cathedral reduced to ruins with many of the congregation trapped inside, and began the task of issuing clothes, running a refugee centre and *“bringing a little sunshine into the lives of those poor sufferers who had lost their all.”*²

By July the Church Army in New Zealand had moved its headquarters to Napier, in an effort to bring further relief to the suffering population. *“Four borrowed tents, some kerosene tins for the soup, borrowed beds and we were ready for the first “cases”. Before very long we found it necessary to secure a house ... and every night more than 20 destitute men find shelter within its hospitable walls ...I should like to see television perfected to such an extent, that you could tune into Napier and see what wonders God is working amongst the sons of men.”*

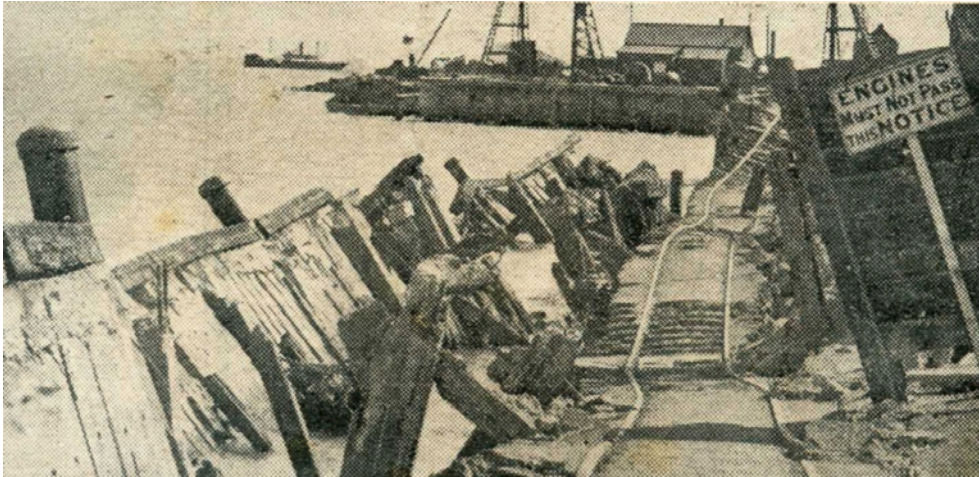
The reconstruction of Napier and Hastings was commenced a few months after the earthquake, with strict building codes in place to prevent a repetition of the damage should a further shock be experienced. Even now, few buildings in Hawke’s Bay are over five stories, all are reinforced, and as the building took place in the 1930’s, Napier is today known as New Zealand’s Art Deco city. Some 40 km² of the seabed became dry land, where the airport, industrial areas and housing now stand.

The Church Army, with Captain Kirby’s help, established a social centre in Napier, for the men engaged upon the reconstruction work. The reports of the work at Hawke’s Bay were carried in letters to the Kirby family, and often printed in the local newspapers. Minchinhampton folk, then as now, were quick to respond to a disaster, even if it was in the antipodes. £7. 10s. 0d, half the profit from the presentation of the operetta “The Flower Queen” in the

² Holy Trinity, Minchinhampton Magazine 1931

Market House in April 1931, was sent to boost Church Army funds.³ Other monies, from individuals and organisations in Gloucestershire, were sent direct to the appeals for reconstruction.

Ten years after the earthquake Europe was gripped by war, Robert Kirby was an ordained minister working in Australia, and Hawke's Bay "*had risen from the ashes like a phoenix. Napier today is a far lovelier city than it was before*"⁴. For a few months Minchinhampton and Hawke's Bay had shared a piece of history.



A damaged wharf at Napier



Fires follow the earthquake at Hastings

³ Kirby Family Scrapbook

⁴ New Zealand Listener 1941



Napier, New Zealand's Art Deco City

The above article is relevant now following the recent earthquake in Christchurch.

I have just received an email (September 2010) from my relatives in New Zealand whose ancestors emigrated from Stroud in 1851.

It is some time since Christchurch got well shook up, and the after shocks are often nearly as bad as the big one. No one in our family was hurt except Phil, the glazier. An occupational hazard, a piece of glass he was removing came down with some force and slid down the back of the fingers on his right hand. All healed up nicely but last week he got caught when he was in a cherry picker several floors up at Princess Margaret Hospital. A bit scary I dare say. You wouldn't need to be the type that suffers from sea sickness.

All their houses have damage, mostly minor and here in Timaru, although we are often aware of movement, there has been little damage.

Hugh Kearsey - Editor

Excursions to London, 1885 and 1910

From the Holy Trinity Church Magazine September 1885

The Senior Members of the Choir had their annual Excursion on Saturday, Sept. 8th. Advantage was taken of special opportunities afforded by the G.W.R. to visit London. In obedience to the time table, the party (numbering 18 in all) assembled at Brimscombe at the early hour of 5.45 a.m.. The promises of the railway company, however, proved to be but broken reeds, as far as we were concerned, for owing to the large number of people from



Waiting to go

Gloucester and Hereford, who availed themselves of the advantages offered, the special train was quite full before reaching our station, and we were obliged to wait a long two hours before the extra. accommodation could be provided. A start, however, was made shortly before eight o'clock, and when once under weigh we got along at a tolerable speed - Paddington being reached soon after eleven. A trip down the river to Woolwich had been determined on as the first event in the London programme, so all haste was made by the Underground

Railway to Westminster Bridge. Here most of us were very glad to fortify ourselves for our water journey with a second breakfast, as five o'clock seemed quite eight hours ago. We found a very excellent light refreshment establishment next door to the station, which, for cheapness and comfort , we heartily recommend to all visitors to the neighbourhood. On adjourning to the steamboat pier, we met with another tiresome delay, as for some reason or other the Woolwich boat was an hour late. During the time of waiting,

however, we strolled up the Green, before the Houses of Parliament, and inspected the statues, with which it is plentifully adorned, and among them, that to the Earl of Beaconsfield, which has been lately erected there. The trip down the river, though late, was at any rate better late than never, as the ninety minutes run was most enjoyable to all, and quite a new experience to many. Woolwich was reached at 2.45. Here another disappointment met us, as we were too late to visit the Arsenal, for which an order had been obtained for a small number of the party. Woolwich, moreover, we found to be a very dirty and uninteresting place, though we were able to make a very satisfying dinner there. The return to town was made by rail to Charing Cross, whence we proceeded by the Metropolitan Line to the Exhibition. Here the time was spent till dark in a stroll through some of the courts, a visit to Old London, and a Concert in the Albert Hall. At half-past seven the gardens and the fountains were splendidly illuminated by the electric light, in every variety of shade and colour, and besides this feast of beauty for our eyes, plenty of music was provided by the fine bands of the Coldstreams and Marines. About nine, a start was made for Paddington, *via* Hyde Park and the Edgware Road. Our train made up for its unpunctuality of the morning by starting quite by its appointed time. The journey home was made in a little over three hours, as it was a few minutes after two in the morning when we reached Brimscombe. The party, which toiled somewhat slowly up the hill, was considerably less in number than the expedition of the morning, as several stayed with friends in town till Monday night. The day was certainly a long one, and we hope, notwithstanding the unpunctuality of train and steamboat, enjoyable to all concerned.

From the Holy Trinity Church Magazine September 1910 *Twenty Five years later*

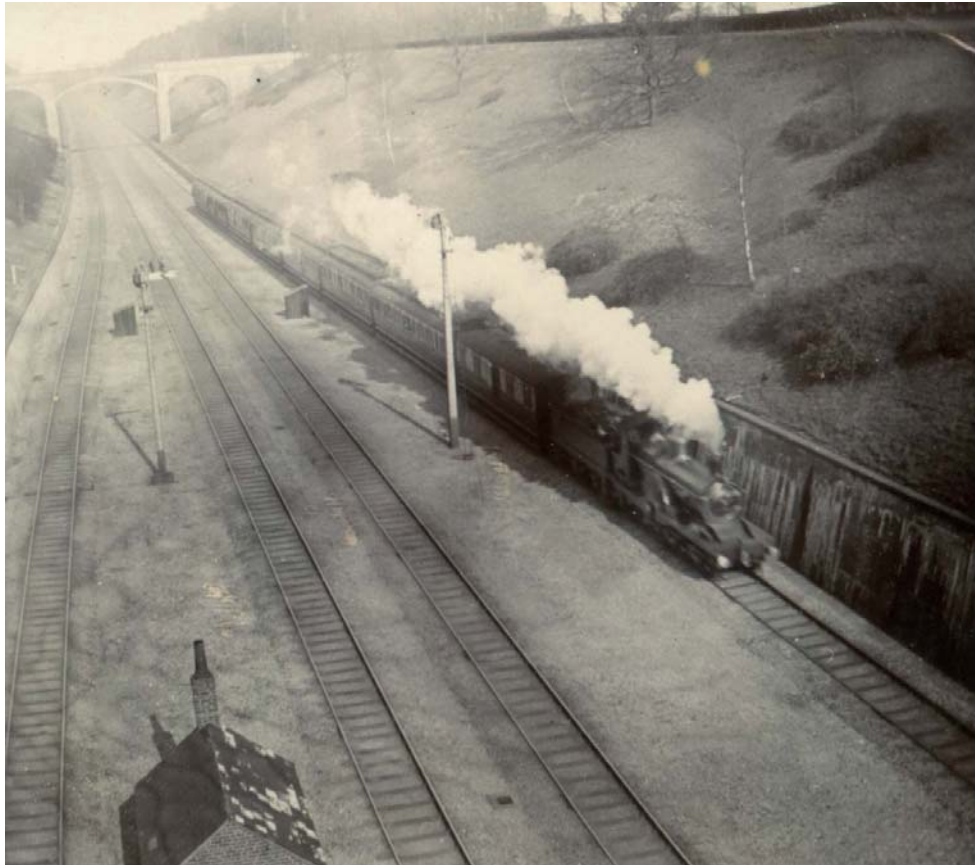
A day at Weston! What could be more delightful? So thought our party of sixteen Choir Boys which assembled at Nailsworth station shortly before 7 o'clock on the morning of August 22nd.

Favoured by the weather our pleasant anticipations were fully realized, for after three weary hours in the train, we reached our journey's end to find the attraction of Weston greater than ever before; never has the Old Pier provided such marvellous entertainments, and seldom have the donkeys shown greater speed, or the crabs given better sport.

Needless to say the day was a huge success, Not until 8 p.m. did we regretfully turn stationwards, and though fifteen crowded hours had passed since rising, spirits remained high and energy unabated; indeed, fervent hopes were expressed that the journey home would last "a very long time." At

Bristol we were glad to see Herbert Clarke, formerly a member of the Choir, who had visited the station to exchange greetings with his old friends. After a protracted halt we once more moved slowly onward to the strains of "We won't go home till morning;" nor did we, for midnight found us at Stroud, with 20 minutes in the train and a two mile walk still before us. So ended a very happy and most enjoyable day.

After an interval of two years the Choirmen again visited London, leaving Brimscombe at 9 a.m. on Saturday, Sept. 31st. From Paddington a bus was



On the way to London

taken to "Madame Tussaud's," and after a very interesting hour among the famous Wax-Works the party left for lunch at a restaurant in Marylebone Road, no one feeling inclined to make a bid for the large cheque which we understand awaits the courageous visitor who is willing to pass a night in the Chamber of Horrors.

The afternoon was spent at the White City, inspecting the wonders of the Anglo-Japanese Exhibition, and patronizing the various amusements, of which the Mountain Railway was quite the most popular. The evening was concluded by a visit to the Hippodrome, where the programme, as usual, was highly appreciated, several of the items being exceptionally clever and entertaining.

The weather was perfect throughout the day; and all felt they had enjoyed an outing that would well bear comparison with any of its predecessors, the only regret being that several members of the Choir had found themselves unable to make the journey.

Though none of the party could have got to rest much before 6 a.m., on Sunday, it was pleasing to find all in their places at the 11 o'clock service, and a very satisfactory muster at Evensong.

The girls belonging to the Box Choir were taken to Cheltenham in the Motor Cars belonging to the Rector and Mr. Fyffe (Miss Fyffe kindly accompanying them) on Monday, Sept. 12th, and a very pleasant day was spent.

The Sunday School Treat in 1885

Holy Trinity Church Magazine May 1895

The Rector has been advised to postpone the Sunday School Treat till later in the year when the days are longer and warmer, and the grass has been cut. As, however, he does not wish to make any change in a hurry, he proposes to keep the Treat this year at all events to the old date, *viz.*, Witsun (*sic.*) Monday.

In settling the details of the Treat, the first thing to be borne in mind is, that it is a Treat for the *Children*, and not for the general public; therefore, everything must be done to keep it for them, so that they may thoroughly enjoy themselves.

The Rector proposes therefore to hold the Treat this year in his own garden, and he intends to send tickets of admission to the Parents of all scholars, and also to the Subscribers, and to all Church workers.

Holy Trinity Church Magazine July 1895

It was a sad disappointment to all our scholars when Whitsun Monday dawned, and it was seen that we were going to have a thoroughly wet day. However, there was nothing to be done but to make the best of it, and it was determined to carry on the School Festival as far as possible, and to defer the out-door amusement to a fine day. The Festival began with a Service in Church at 2 p.m. An adjournment was then made to the Schools, where a good and substantial Tea was provided for the 280 children who sat down to it. Besides these, 28 children were provided for at the Box Room, so that there was a muster of 308 in all. The next day being fortunately fine, the Church Bell was rung at one o'clock, as a signal to all the children to assemble at the Rectory Grounds for their sports.

GENERAL MONTGOMERY'S FORGOTTEN DESERT RATS

Arthur Beard (LAC1412693)

At the end of the Second World War tributes were paid to all those who had helped overcome the enemy. However, to many the role of the North African veterans was often overlooked. L.A.C. 1412693 Beard wrote the following article in the hope of redressing the balance in 1948. Years later the importance of the campaign has been recognised.

Arthur Beard, who served from 1939 to 1946, one of the last "Desert Rats" now lives in Minchinhampton and has given permission for his article to be published here.

In 1930 the Italians conquered Ethiopia in Africa with the help of the Germans and when England declared war on Germany in 1939 the Italians decided to extend their empire into North Africa from Tripoli to Egypt. General Wavell commanded the British in Alexandria followed by Auckinleck.

When I was sent abroad in 1941 in convoy from the Clyde via Cape Town, Indian Ocean, to Port Tufice on the Red Sea and then up to Ismailia and joined the 8th Army in the Healopilis RAF near Alexandria.

Wavell's 8th Army had got to Benghazi and it was stalemate against the Italians at Derna. Wavell was relieved of his command for Auckinleck. Then the Germans entered the war. They had better equipment than either the Italians or the British and drove us right back to Alexandria.

They would have gone through to Egypt but had trouble with their supply lines. Then General Montgomery replaced Auckinleck. By this time Lecclend was getting through with better equipment, Grant tanks for the 8th Army and some better aircraft, Fairy Battles and Comet, to replace the few Bristol Bulldogs which the 8th Army processed. Most of them were out of commission. If an aircraft crash came down near the front line we had to go and strip it of parts to service others.

When Montgomery started his offensive in 1944 the Air Force followed him up, that was the time many men on both sides lost their lives. First the 8th Army took a few towns up the coast road then the Germans recaptured it and so it went on with the 8th Army finally getting to Tripoli.

Then the Americans entered the war and landed their army in North Africa, Libya and a large force of Germans escaped to Italy but a lot were captured, including 14 and 15 year old troops which goes to show that Montgomery's 8th Army had destroyed most of the Rommel's German troops or captured them. From Tripoli the 8th Army crossed to Sicily then Italy. Also the Americans under General Mark Clark. Montgomery's 8th Army taking the east coast up to Foggia Bari Casino and finally the Germans surrendered.

After that Montgomery returned to England to lead the attack on D Day and the Battle of the Bulge. But for 4 years the North African Desert, humid head, sand storms and the bitter cold nights and sometimes low food rations but when we got to Tripoli we occasionally got a NAFFI van bar for cake and biscuits and sometimes a bottle of beer and English cigarettes.

Now one can see how good General Montgomery was. He destroyed the cream of the German army before D Day and should be awarded the highest honour of the country.



General (later Field Marshal) Montgomery