

# OFF DUTY

HIGH SPIRITS  
IN LOW TIMES

Transcripts for  
exhibition audio

# Kathleen Parker

(1 min 22 sec)

Kathleen Parker (KP):

In 1940 they said they needed someone to organise some sort of recreation activities, because no one was allowed to leave. And so I came in and did that, and we started a club, a recreation club. And then I organised all kinds of activities, chess, bridge, fencing and tennis, and the drama group. We had so many people here who were brilliant at all kinds of things... And so you only had, someone had to say, oh we ought to be doing so and so and there was always someone who knew something about it and could start it. And we started, well of course that grew and grew and they were restricted travel and so forth. And it grew till, ooh we had tremendous membership because, as I say, there was always someone here who was absolutely a champion at what it was, so it wasn't really difficult to get something going.

Interviewer:

And where did you get the equipment? If you wanted to set up fencing, how could you get a hold of it?

KP:

Yes, well, oh most of them had some sort of.., they were attached to some clubs and so forth. And we were allowed to have a certain amount of money for recreational activities. I think from that point of view, from the government point of view, it was run more or less like an Army unit. We were allowed to have what an Army unit would have, you know, that sort of thing.

# Jane Fawcett (née Hughes)

(1 min 29 sec)

Jane Fawcett (JF):

I was a very keen member of the Scottish Reel club, and people really took that seriously. Men came dressed up with their tartan socks and kilts. The man who ran it was a Scot of course, a very keen Scot. And we learnt a lot of interesting Scottish dances, that I, although I am half-Scottish, I didn't know them. And it was all very spirited. And we did it on the lawn in front of the house. We had the pantomimes, which were good fun, but again, took up a great deal of time. Everyone enjoyed them and enjoyed watching them, so we all let our hair down a bit for those. My having been trained as a dancer, of course, was quite a help. There were countless things, there were language classes, there were literary classes.

Interviewer:

Did that all fit in with your shift pattern, and the fact you had to catch the bus back?

JF:

Well, no - it was difficult to fit them in. And I don't remember ever not working shifts. In other words working normal hours, so I really don't quite know how they did integrate it, but it tended to mean you had different people each time because the shift pattern prohibited a lot of people from coming.

# James Thirsk

(1 min 11 sec)

James Thirsk:

A lot of people had formed groups I think and had musical evenings, and there were the plays. I saw one or two. And then they started showing in the big hall outside the perimeter, there was a big hall where they could show films. And they were showing captured Japanese fictional films and German films and things like that which were well attended.

I didn't take any part in things like the amateur dramatic society, there was a choral or music societies, tennis. There was a small rifle range that I remember I used to go there occasionally and try my hand. I took part in the formation of a film society club. We organised a loan of films from the British Film Institute, showing documentaries and things like 'Night Mail' which was a famous film at the time. And that was quite successful and had good attendance.

# Betty Lawrie (née Terry)

(1 min 42 sec)

I think that I shall never see  
A site so curious as BP.  
This place called up at War's behest  
And peopled with the queerly dressed;  
Yet what they did they could not say,  
Nor ever shall till, Judgement Day.

For six long years we have been there  
Subject to local scorn and stare;  
We come by transport and by train;  
The dull, the brilliantly insane!  
What were we for, where shall we be  
When God at last redunds BP?

The Air Force types that never fly,  
Soldiers who neither do nor die,  
Landlubber sailors, beards complete,  
Long-haired civilians, slim, effete!  
Why they were there, they never knew  
And when they told, it wasn't true.

If I should die, think this of me;  
I served my country at BP.  
And should my son ask; "what did you  
In the Atomic World War 2?"  
God only knows, and He won't tell,  
For after all, BP, is Hell!

# Shaun Wylie

(41 sec)

Interviewer: What did you do in the Home Guard?

Shaun Wylie (SW): I belonged, I was... went on an unarmed combat course (laughs). I was made a Lance Corporal indeed! But no, I played no real part in the Home Guard except just as a foot-soldier.

Interviewer: When you say 'unarmed combat' you mean how to disable people with your bare hands and so on?

SW: That sort of thing, yes!

Interviewer:

Were you any good at it?

SW: Not particularly, no! (laughs)

Interviewer: Were you irritated with having to be in the Home Guard?

SW: Oh no no, you accepted it.

Interviewer: Did you enjoy it?

SW: No.

# Rolf Noskwith

(52 sec)

Interviewer: Were you in the Home Guard?

Rolf Noskwith (RN): Yes, we were all made to join it, there was a gentleman called Captain Keith Shaw. And one of the skits in one of the revues was about being in the Home Guard. Yes, we had to dress in uniform and I think we did some arms drill and we thought it was a bore and it was a waste of time.

Interviewer: Were most of the civilian men in the Home Guard at Bletchley?

RN: I think so, yes.

RN:

“My object all sublime, I shall achieve in time  
To make civilians toe the line, civilians toe the line.  
Through smoke-filled huts, these decadent mutts  
On their bellies are forced to crawl.  
Anaemic scholars, with dirty collars  
And hair on their lower jaw,  
Are being degraded by being paraded  
And cursed by Captain Shaw.”

# Shirley Wheeldon (née Cotterall)

(44 sec)

Shirley Wheeldon:

And also there were dances. I loved to go to the American dances because at the American dances we used to have ice cream. This sounds so ridiculous. You would get - and whereas the English during the war we couldn't have ice cream - but the Americans had. You'd go and you'd get an ice cream that size.

Actually Americans, they didn't go for me. They'd always say 'oh, you remind me of my granddaughter'. So but I always had plenty of people to dance with but they were looking on me, and 'their granddaughter'!

# Pamela McRoberts (née Prowse)

(1 min 06 sec)

Pamela McRoberts (PM): There was an American aerodrome and they used to put notices on the board '40 WRNS wanted for a dance. Put your name up'. And I used to say 'I'm not going'. I was a bit of a prude in those days. Anyway I did go. Because they'd say 'come Pam - lovely food, it's lots and lots'.

And they did, it was lovely food. And they were so well looked after, the Americans, it was something to do with Bletchley Park, but as opposed to our poor old Privates, they had lovely uniform, wonderful food. They had proper bands - they had Glenn Miller there! It wasn't an old sort of dance like you were likely to have in the city in the church hall or something. And great music. Wonderful food.

Interviewer: So this bus that took the 40 WRNS. Would that go to an aerodrome...

PM: No. They'd send a lorry for us.

Interviewer: Lorry?

PM: We'd have to climb up on the tailboard, in uniform! Not easy. All these people whistling at us.

# Doris Lucy (née Newman)

(1 min 12 sec)

Doris Lucy (DL): We met in the evening because we had a special club for just us which was an old building, and we could go in there and it was turned into a club.

Interviewer: At Bletchley park or in Wolverton?

DL: No, at Wolverton. So of course we used to go in there and sit there and chat, and that was it.

Interviewer: Just for Bletchley Park workers?

DL: Yes, just for Bletchley Park workers. It was sort of taken over by us and that was quite all right, it was like an evening institute for us. A couple of buses used go from Wolverton every night. I don't know who the drivers were, I imagine it was just some bus company because they were wooden seats and with sort of rattle things, you know, very old.

DL: They occasionally had cinema showings in Bletchley Park which I can remember. They had foreign films and things coming and they used to take us in by bus, no bring us home by bus, I should say. When we were in Wolverton they used to have a dance hall, the local hop, you know. I used to go there, Margaret didn't, but I used to go. No, I didn't do much at all in the evenings.

# Marigold Freeman-Atwood (née Philips)

(46 sec)

Interviewer: So how often did you get up to London?

Marigold Freeman-Atwood(MF-A): Oh, I suppose once a month, apart from anything else we were so badly paid that you probably couldn't often afford your fare and, as I say, coming from the background we did, we were not expected to need money. So we weren't given any, I had never earned any.

Interviewer: So where did you go in London, just to the theatre?

MF-A: Well yes. We were very innocent; we used to either go in twos and threes to a theatre or some of us had brothers or boyfriends who we met and had dinner with which was the height of glamour. Because I say we were so innocent, so well brought up, we were also as beady as hell at getting round authority.

# Margaret Cooper (née McKeever)

(1 min 05 sec)

Margaret Cooper (MC): We weren't told anything and we were supervised the whole time. Not only on duty, but off duty as well. We didn't have any social life in Bletchley Park. That was mainly for the, what can I say, the civilians.

We used to go up to London, because of the station was quite near and we used to get up and stay in various accommodations which is allotted to service people – oh we had a lovely time on our breaks.

Interviewer: Did you work seven days a week?

MC: We must have done, work never stopped.

Interviewer: And then you had leave, how often did you have that?

MC: 48 hours and I think the seven days was probably once in three months, but that I can't really be sure about, the 48 hours we were entitled to but I do know we made the most of them.

Interviewer: Did you go home for your seven days leave?

MC: Oh yes. I lived in Banbury, I was born in Banbury in Oxfordshire.

# Raymond 'Jerry' Roberts

(1 min 22 sec)

Interviewer: Did you take part in any of the social activities? We hear a lot about the music, the drama, the sport.

Jerry Roberts (JR): That was difficult because there were plenty of clubs for this that and the other, but you weren't tempted to do something like that because if you had a 30 minute walk at the end of a shift, you start walking back at half past ten or eleven when you've done a day's work, it was too much. So although I'm a sociable person, I didn't get much opportunity for it then. From that point of view, it was considered disappointing.

Interviewer: Too focused on the work?

JR: Absolutely. Girlfriends had to be either very strong or very devoted. I had friends who were girls but no long term association.

Interviewer: How did you spend your leave?

JR: Oh, I used to see my family, they lived in Wembley. You didn't get all that much leave, you only had one day a week, and very often you just used that to relax around Bletchley.