

## Kibworth in World War 2 Memories

*By Sheila Hulme (formerly Hutchinson, nee Spiers)*

One special memory is of my brother-in-law visiting Kibworth from time to time having first landed his Spitfire aircraft at Harborough airfield. How he made such arrangements for leave during the war I do not know.

My husband's younger brother was Robert Hutchinson, known to us as Bob, and he joined the RAF straight from school during the early part the Second World War (WW2). He trained as a pilot and his particular work was in reconnaissance. It was wonderful training, he told us, but even so he once got lost over the Bristol Channel! In wartime one did not ask too many searching questions, such as 'Where are you stationed?', but somehow Bob would plan some weekend leave. He flew his Spitfire aircraft into Harborough airfield and we picked him up there and drove back to Kibworth. Then he would return to the airfield and take off in his Spitfire to whatever duties were scheduled. This happened several times during the war.

Bob Hutchinson was quite a reserved man and he didn't tell us much detail about his activities, even after the war. However he must have done excellent work as he was awarded the Croix de Guerre medal. He told me 'I will take you with me to Paris when the medal is presented' but much to our disappointment the medal arrived through the post. I learnt later that Harborough airfield was a RAF training unit for large bomber aircraft and I can only wonder how he got authority to fly in his Spitfire and keep it there over the weekend of his visits. He used it like a taxi! Maybe he brought photographs and other intelligence to the airfield and that was his opportunity to stay over for the weekend? I was told that his particular Spitfire was unarmed: no guns and no ammunitions. Apparently he relied on speed to get away from difficult situations when carrying out aerial photography.



Robert Hutchinson

I was brought up in Kibworth, living with my parents Ernest and Emily Spiers at Hill Brow, near the start of Harborough Road. Father was a skilled engineer and in later years had his workshop in part of an old barn behind the house, and amongst other things made small aero parts for Armstrong Siddeley. The barn was divided to accommodate the workshop alongside a garage and a billiard room. A separate old stable block was where we kept horses, at the front, and pigs at the rear. At the start of WW2 he bought a nearby farm to try and ensure a food supply for his family. The farm was Beauchamp Grange on the Harborough Road. Father knew nothing about farming and so engaged a local dairyman, Harold Minors, to manage the farm for him.

Interestingly, the farm had two Italian prisoners working there later in the war. For a time they lived in a cottage near the entrance drive to the farm and seemed free to come and go as they chose. On some evenings they would walk up into Kibworth for a drink and then return to their cottage, working on the farm during daytime. Presumably they could have run away anytime they liked, but they never did.

After serving in the forces for part of WW2, I returned to Kibworth when expecting our first child. Father had purchased 1 and 3 Main Street in Harcourt some years before and we moved in there early in 1944. My husband, John Hutchinson, was awarded the Military Medal. The house was by then a single property, adjoining the rear side of the 'Rose & Crown Hotel' (now Raitha's Restaurant). Our house had an interesting history, being over 200 years old. I don't think Michael Wood and his TV team captured number 1 when filming that end of Main Street in 2010 for his series on 'The Story of England'. I learnt from an elderly woman that the house, or rather the out-buildings at the back, was for many years used by a butcher and his family for making pork pies and other products. There was as large copper vessel in one building used for boiling pigs' feet to make pie jelly. Tripes and chitterlings were also prepared there. Years ago the poorer children of Kibworth would come to the house on Friday nights with their bowls and have them filled with jelly.



1 Main Street, Kibworth Harcourt

In the late 1930s 1 Main Street was occupied by Harold Minors, and his family, and in 1940 he became farm manager for my father. A little later in the war the tenants were two senior employees of Marks and Spencer in London. The company had sent them away from the City for a time during those difficult years. As they moved out and back to London, we moved in. In fact I lived there for over 30 years with family before moving to a smaller property on the Langton Road when the children had grown up and left home. I can well remember one of our

local postmen, George Yates, who was a talented artist. He produced many pictures but one I particularly recall is his drawing of a cruck cottage further down Main Street, on the same side as number 1. The cottage was later demolished to make way for new houses.

Returning now to WW2, I have memories of a military camp being built on open ground close to the A6 main Leicester Road, opposite the Rose & Crown Hotel. Although I never actually went into the camp I could see that it was quite large, stretching from behind The Gables house and the Navvies' Cottages down nearly to behind Croft House and then southwards to somewhere near where Hillcrest Avenue is now (the Hillcrest estate was built after the war). The accommodation was Nissen huts, not tents, and in 1944 housed a division of parachutists. Eventually, after training, they went off to Arnhem and many never returned to England.

There are just two other memories to add. One is of the weir and sheep dip in Weir Road over in Beauchamp, which we visited as children. The fields around there were very soggy and it was said that one could never build on such wet land - but developers did build sometime after the war. The second memory is of the house, 72 Main Street, nearly opposite General Jack's Old House in Harcourt. It was said that the house was haunted. A Mrs Kaye lived there on her own for many years and she would report occasionally hearing someone walking around upstairs, but she could never see anyone. Apparently she told the ghost to go away (in rather stronger language, I think).

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