

## **Air Raid Shelter Stories**

### **The Interviews...**

Pupils asked their interviewees all sorts of questions that they had devised themselves. These included – asking if any of the former pupils had visited the shelters under the school, how they entertained themselves, games they played and food and rationing. They also asked their interviewees how they had felt about the war and its effect on them as starting points for the conversations. Many interviewees recalled the Cavendish Road Bomb... there are interesting anecdotes about it being two separate schools, and the cane! There was lots of talk about rationing – how some children found fruit a rare treat, and having to eat tripe and whalemeat! There was talk about the sirens and army convoys driving down Aylestone Road and of course air raid shelter practices and drills.

Here are some excerpts from the audio interviews we recorded.

### **Terry Roper born 1938**

#### **“How would you entertain yourself in the air raid shelter?”**

“You’d go to sleep, that was the best bit...if you were going to school you had to have had some sleep...the one thing you could hear was the drone of the planes going over...Cavendish Road caught a big bang...you often heard them making that noise, the humming noise”

#### **“How did you feel when the war ended?”**

“I was just getting to that little bit of an age where I could go out ...when we got music on and there was dancing all across Aylestone Road...there was an electrician’s shop and he had arranged all the sound and the music for dancing, at that time the road wasn’t as wide and the pavement was twice as wide because it was only for a tram to come along and move in turn up the bar to the other side...none of them went up Lutterworth Road they stopped in Aylestone”

### **Ray Gee who was seven in 1944**

#### **“What was it like in the shelters?”**

“The first things I can remember was going down, there were concrete steps going down and there was a door that opened. The first thing you realised was the smell. It smelt cold and damp. Of concrete...bench seats made in wood. What we’ve found out we think...there were air raid shelters here for the first world war which looked as if they went all over underneath the playground but when I was here there was two in line of each other...it rang along in a line and there were two with some sort of fence around them not sure if it was tube or wood. You went down the steps and into the shelters, and I think there could have been a connector. I only remember going down

there for practice not for a real air raid. We had to bring our gas masks with us as a precaution...they were in a cardboard box, lid and thick string in a brown box. They weren't very nice...for practice you went down in classes in single file... the boys enjoyed it"

"I remember the sirens, there was a siren, and it was on Lewis's Tower which is on Humberstone Gate...on a diamond shaped tower. There were search lights in Victoria Park on lorries that would criss cross when they saw a bomber"

### **On school dinners...**

"They were all in the hall. My Mum said 'I think you'll have to stay for dinner' so I got permission to do it, I'd only stopped for lunch for three or four times and I sat down. There was a bit of a noise in the hall when they were having dinners and one of the teachers that was taking the duty – I remember he said 'the next one to speak will not stop for dinner anymore' well just at that time this lad said something to me and I answered him and that's the only thing the teacher heard, he said "Ray Gee out!" I went home and told my mum and she went crackers.

### **Wendy Hall**

#### **"Were the bombs loud?"**

"They were very loud at times...I'll tell you a little story that happened to me, I can remember it very plainly – there's a road called Cavendish Road and along that road at that time there were lots and lots of shops...we used to shop every day, we'd go to the greengrocers and the butchers...one day we'd done the shopping and were just about to leave and we stopped on one of the corners of Cavendish Road, my Mummy said "oh look there's an aeroplane. Oh look the man has just thrown something out of that aeroplane" we went home and five minutes afterwards...it was a bomb and it dropped on Cavendish Road and did an awful lot of damage and killed some people so we were very lucky"

#### **On life as a child during the war...**

"We didn't have a telephone, or central heating, we had to have a bath once a week and the bath was brought in from the backyard and put in front of the coal fire and filled with kettles of water and that's how we had a bath"

#### **On songs sang during her school days...**

"Vera Lynn – We'll meet again"

"White Cliffs of Dover"

"Pack up your troubles"

"It's a long way to Tipperary"

"Keep the home fires burning"

## **Reg and Gill Talbot**

### **“What type of games did you play at Granby?”**

“We played playground games, we didn’t have much indoor play we were simply turned out for playtime. So we had chasing games, we didn’t have footballs so they tended to be imaginary games...cowboys and Indians..cops and robbers...”

### **On evacuees....**

“We were very much a mixed school, we came in separate entrances, infants and juniors but in school it was boys and girls together. We had children that we didn’t know because of course we had evacuees, they generally came with their teacher and they came to school with their teacher so they were a little bit separate, although they lived with us in our homes, at school they tended to be taught by the teacher who’d come with them”

### **On rations...**

“You had to eat everything put in front of you...if you didn’t like it you went without. I didn’t have school dinners, I lived near enough the school to walk home, my mum was a dressmaker who worked from home and my dad was a blacksmith who worked at the gasworks and he came home for lunch as well...so we had home-cooking every day of the week...”

“I remember the very first time I saw a banana I ever saw which was at the end of the war because during the war you see, the ships were being bombed as they came across from Africa and India some of the food couldn’t get here...I didn’t know what to do with it...we had very solid food...sponge pudding, rice pudding that filled us up”

“Saucepans had to be given up to the army, they needed the metal to make planes”

### **On the Cavendish Road Bombing – Gill Talbot**

“I was very lucky that day, my father was away in the Army and my Grandma lived round the corner and she came round that morning to say we’d got to take the dog for a walk...I didn’t really want to go because I was playing in the garden with the little girl who lived next door who was the same age as me (three and a half) but my Grandma insisted and I was an obedient little girl, I had to go with my Grandma and take the dog for a walk and while we were out the siren went off. We had to go into one of the public shelters on Lansdowne Road, but when the all clear went and we went home our street had been badly bombed – Cavendish Road – and the little girl and her mother next door were killed, they had just been in the garden with me”

## **Mollie Frost**

### **On the air raid shelters...**

“We used to have to practice to go down and we used to stand in line with our gas masks on and our coats. Every class had its own part to go down...there were two staircases in Granby Road School and so many classes had to go that way or that

way...so you didn't get mixed up together. You had to keep in line and when you got to the school yard you had to stand in line again and then you were shuffled into the shelters...I can only remember going in once or twice"

## **Margaret Brown**

### **On her time at Granby during the war...**

"I remember starting at Granby...there were little beds...all the pupils who had got fathers away in the army got taken to De Montfort Hall and had a tea and on each plate was an apple to take home"

"Every day we came home from school for dinner. There was a round of bread each on the bread board...with jam on it, just jam nothing else..."

"You'd have to get yourself to and from school even aged five...Grandad use to come home for lunch and he drove a horse and dray for the railway, he used to take us back to school after lunchtimes on his dray and as we were going down Duncan road any kids we knew they used to jump on the dray as well and we'd say "Come on" and Grandad would take us back to school"

## **Pat Spencer**

### **"What did you play in the playground?"**

"Skipping, whip and top, you spun the top and got a whip and you had to keep it going...I used to spend quite a bit of time standing up again the wall on my hands upside down..."

"I can remember a few of the teachers names...Miss Yarnelle, Mr Clapton, and Miss Jackson who once slapped me for eating a toffee in class...and if you were really bad you got sent to the headmaster and got so many lashes with the cane on the hand"

### **On the air raids...**

"The air raids did seem to happen at night, but we weren't in the area where there were any bombs, the nearest was Cavendish Road, they were targeting the gasworks there but they missed so they offloaded them in Cavendish Road..."

My mother and father went into the cinema one night when Freeman Hardy and Willis was bombed and they said there were fires all the way home..."

## **Mike Ross**

### **Former pupil and Head teacher of Granby 1981-1995**

"During the war I was three or four, I came to the nursery in 1943...I lived opposite the school, banks road, next to the shop on the corner"

“You might think this is a big school with 500 pupils, but around wartime it went up to 700 because London...that was what they really wanted to bomb...sent evacuees and a lot came to Leicester. The hall had one or two classes , we couldn't have PE or assemblies...”

### **On Granby Road School...**

“This was two schools, infant school downstairs, and junior upstairs. A head teacher upstairs and headmistress downstairs...when I came here as head I was the first to be head of both schools. It was called a primary school when two schools were joined together”

### **On rations and food during the war...**

“Rabbit. We had rabbit... I didn't like it very much... Mum used to give us tripe...it the linings of intestines, you had gravy with it”

“People had ration books...I lived next door to a shop, on the first day of the month there was a queue past my window...lots of children queuing up for sweets...It was difficult food wise. Coke (coal) as well. The gasworks...people used to go down there and queue up to get sacks of coke...little pieces of coal, that I remember you'd see them trekking down Aylestone Road”

### **On Aylestone Road...**

Aylestone Road was different then, in those days there weren't many cars, the motorway wasn't built...no one coming down Braunstone Lane...On Wednesdays each week, there were cattle, cows being driven down the middle of the road all the way down to the cattle market which was near the Tigers ground ... to be sold at auction every week...we also had trams that operated on lines and rails in the road...they stopped running in 1949.. sometimes if you looked out there'd be lots of armoured tanks, a convoy of 10,15,20 vehicles going from one camp to another, the last vehicle was always a jeep with a green flag on it to say it was the last one”

## **Glyn Haines**

### **On Granby Road School...**

“Teachers...Mrs Browning...we all called her Ma Browning, the headmaster had his desk in the hall and he was Mr Foxon...upstairs there was Pop Place...One day in Ma Browning's class I was talking to my friend Brian and we must have been told to stop talking ...she shouted at us to go for the cane, I said to my friend I didn't want to go, when they cane you they have a stick and hit you right across the hand three times...sometimes it hurt. We didn't go, we waited on the bend in the stairs, and then went back to our classroom pretending we'd been caned. I told some of my pals and they snitched on me...so instead of three we got six.”

### **On the Cavendish Road Bombing...**

"We came to Boundary road ...this was 1940...War had started...Cavendish Road, where there were some shops, one day my Mum sent me from Boundary Road to Cavendish Road and I had to do some shopping, I was seven. I got home and then ten minutes later ... boom boom boom...a German aeroplane had dropped bombs all down Cavendish Road. Ten minutes earlier I had been there. They missed me. In the next street Dartford Road, the aeroplane was trying to get rid of his bombs and shells and bullets and so he could be lighter and escape and he shot his bullets down Dartford Road and some children were playing and they got shot"

## **Anita Ribot**

### **"What did you feel like at school during the war?"**

"We weren't scared about anything to do with the war, because it didn't really come to Leicester and the grown-ups were careful, they didn't discuss anything dangerous in front of children...I liked school"

"You sat in rows, you faced the front and we had desks that were for two people with a lid that went all the way across...she made boys and girls sit together"

"There was a system you see which was rather nice, when you started to write, you had a chalk and a slate, when that was good enough you were given a piece of paper and a pencil and when you were good enough you were allowed to write with a pen and ink...it gave you a feeling you were improving"

### **On rationing...**

"We used to have liver once a week...and kidneys and sometimes fish...there were some things that I used to turn my nose up at...tripe and onions – the smell was terrible!"

"There were some things you couldn't get so easily...you couldn't get cornflakes you had to have wheat flakes because the corn had to come from America or Canada and it wasn't worth the sailors losing their lives for that so we had wheat flakes. You never saw things like oranges or bananas because they had to come from abroad. One of my very first memories is the taste of an orange...some American soldiers were coming through and marching down Aylestone Road and they came into the shop (my parents had a shop) and there were some birthday cards up, they asked whose birthday it was and it was mine. They gave me an orange because it was birthday"

### **"What did you do for entertainment?"**

We played out on the streets a lot, tick and releasio (where you would run around in groups and grab somebody and they would have to get onto the end) acrobatics...tissing up against the wall (handstands)...we used to go to the pictures on Milligan Road. There was the Aylestone. The cinema. My Mum would take us to the cinema and we would walk up Duncan Road along Milligan Road they turned it into a Bingo Hall at one stage...we'd stop at the chip shop on the way back ...that is still there"

### **“What clothes did you wear?”**

“Boys had short trousers, above the knee, and long socks usually and a proper jacket...boys often had a cap on. Girls had to wear a skirt and short socks”

### **Mavis Roper**

#### **On the war...**

“We all had gas masks, mine was a Mickey Mouse one...we used to wear what they call liberty bodices, these were garments to wear under your blouse. They were sort of like a waistcoat, with rubber buttons down to keep you nice and warm. You had to wear a disc with your name and address pinned to it, so if anything happened to you they knew who you were”

#### **On rations...**

“Because you didn’t have sweet things we used to get cocoa powder and sugar and put it in our hands and eat it, and rhubarb and sugar and arrowroot sticks that got softer as you chewed them”

### **Jackie White**

#### **“What did the shelter look like?”**

“It was all just concrete and it was just a long passage with wooden benches that we all had to sit on... I remember once embarrassment as I was having a shower (at school when the sirens went off) and so they wrapped me in towels and they just stared at me...it was cold down there but you were surrounded by your friends so it was exciting getting away from lessons”

#### **“What did you have to eat at lunchtimes?”**

We had potatoes, we were only allowed a pennyworth of meat so it could be stew, and mince and everybody grew vegetables in the gardens ...I can remember my mother serving us up dinner and she didn’t eat any, she sat there looking....she had given us whale meat...people must have been desperate for food...all the parks everywhere had been given over to growing vegetables or they brought in sheep and cows to graze on them”

#### **On Aylestone Hall and Gardens...**

“Italy joined the war with the Germans ...In Aylestone Hall there were Italian prisoners of war, they all had to wear brown uniforms that had bright coloured patches in shapes – of other materials sewn on...what they used to do was as we walked to school they stood at the gate and they’d give us “nice” (the brand) biscuits. They were often allowed out to help people with their gardens”

## **Sandra Zastawny**

### **On the air raid shelters...**

We used to have air raid practice...I used to love it, the noise when the sirens went off, the noise sounded from where Montrose school is up Wigston Lane. It wasn't used as a school then... the home guard took it over. They did the sirens. I used to love the noise, it meant we could go down into the air raid shelters. There were two air raid shelters in the playground. They were rectangular, enough to house about 30 or 40 children. One was situated in the infant's part and the next in the junior part...between the nursery school and the first air raid shelter was a wooden climbing frame and a wooden slide. There were just steps going down, we were forbidden from ever going down without a teacher to it being an air raid. I used to think it was wonderful. There was a tiny dim light in there and the teachers and torches – some of the children didn't like it and they cried but I liked.

### **On dinners...**

School dinners cost a penny a day, but I used to walk home every day and we had normal dinners, cabbage, potatoes, meat, not much meat but you always got a sausage. It was adequate...we had sponge pudding, and stodge...it was sponge pudding that was rather heavy that's why we called it stodge.

### **A convoy of tanks...**

Tanks used to come down Wigston Lane – we'd walk to school watching all this convoy of tanks going down and once there was an aeroplane on a lorry and it literally took the whole space of wigston Lane and it inched along and anybody walking they had to go up in somebody's garden or up the entrance to make room but it never got damaged...I've only ever seen that done the once...but the tanks were normal...the tanks didn't stop for anybody.

### **On Evacuees...**

"There was a little girl called Mary she was five years old when she came. On Sanvey Lane there was a church hall and all the children were sat there, evacuees with labels on with their names on. My Mother wanted a girl - I'd got three brothers and she wanted a girl to be with me, and she chose a little girl called Mary. She fitted in very well....very talkative telling me about all the bombings in London. My Mum would get eight shillings a week for looking after her. My mother wrote to her Mother to let her know how she was getting on and being well cared for.