

An email from 'Down Under'

One of the great pleasures of doing the research for this book has been the arrival of information from quite unexpected places. I was about to close the contents for this supplement when I received the email below from George Harris in Australia. It is a most appropriate entry with which to complete this Personal Stories section because it covers almost the entire spread of time of the book in one short email; George's father served in WWI, George was born in the parish (Clifton), he recalls WWII as a teenager and he did his National Service in the far reaches of what was then still (just) the British Empire - as did his school friend, Robin Hall, whose name is the last one to have been inscribed on the War Memorial.

Ceylon 1950
(l to r) George Harris,
a fellow RE (Harry)
and Horace French



Dear Robert,

I have recently received a copy of *A Parish At War*, by your good self and Michael Allbrook. Your research has been painstaking and extensive. However there may be a few omissions, not in any way reflecting upon your research. Time passes, memories fade and records are not always kept and of course people move away, as I did in 1969 to live in Australia.

I was born in Clifton in 1931 and lived there until I returned from Military Service in 1951, I then lived in Deddington for a number of years⁸ moving over the border into Northamptonshire in the sixties. I remember the war years in Clifton quite vividly (the bombs, the aircraft crashes, barrage balloons, the Home Guard, the black out &c.) At the western end of Clifton there is a small hill, which is locally known as 'The Clump'. From this vantage point, we were able to sit and watch the destruction of Coventry (probably about 24 miles, as the crow flies).

⁸ The Harris family lived at No 2 The Paddocks. George worked for 'Doughy' Course for three years until called up. In 1954 he married Pauline Potter who he had met on holiday at Bournemouth on holiday in 1948. They lived at No 1 Chapel Square then moved to Kings Sutton and later Kidlington before emigrating to Australia as £10 'Poms' in 1969. They have four children, eleven grandchildren and five great grandchildren.

Looking in the opposite direction, night after night we could see the orange glow of the London blitz. We joined in with the Home Guard when they marched or throwing make believe grenades (stones) at their home made tank. The one thousand bomber raids, with the air filled with Lancasters, Stirlings etc, barely clearing our rooftops as they lumbered off with their heavy loads. Sadly hundreds did not return. Later in the war, the convoys of tanks and lorries passing through the village in preparation for D Day. Then D Day, the air filled once again with Stirlings, Dakotas, etc, towing gliders, with broad white bands painted on their wings and fuselage.

Four boys were born in Clifton in 1931, myself June 4th, Horace French June, Peter Plasted July and Christopher Hartwell August. We all started and left school together. Chris and Peter were farm workers and therefore were not called to service. Horace and I were called in 1949. I was drafted to Malaya in 1950 and travelled with Horace aboard the *HMT Lancashire*. However, on arrival at Singapore Horace and I parted company as I was sent on to Hong Kong, where I served for one year, with 11 Field Squadron, Royal Engineers, then posted back to Austria as part of the occupation forces till demob in September 1951, our unit now becoming 11th Independent Field Squadron, RE. Horace and I both returning to our respective jobs with British Railways. Peter had an older brother Aubrey, he too joined the Royal Engineers in 1947 and was at Cowley Barracks with Arthur Lewis as his drill sergeant and then posted to the lower end of the Suez canal in Egypt. Aubrey and I have been best friends from schooldays and still keep in regular contact. Sadly Peter died from tetanus as the result of an accident on the farm. Horace died from cancer a few years ago and Chris lives on at Bloxham.

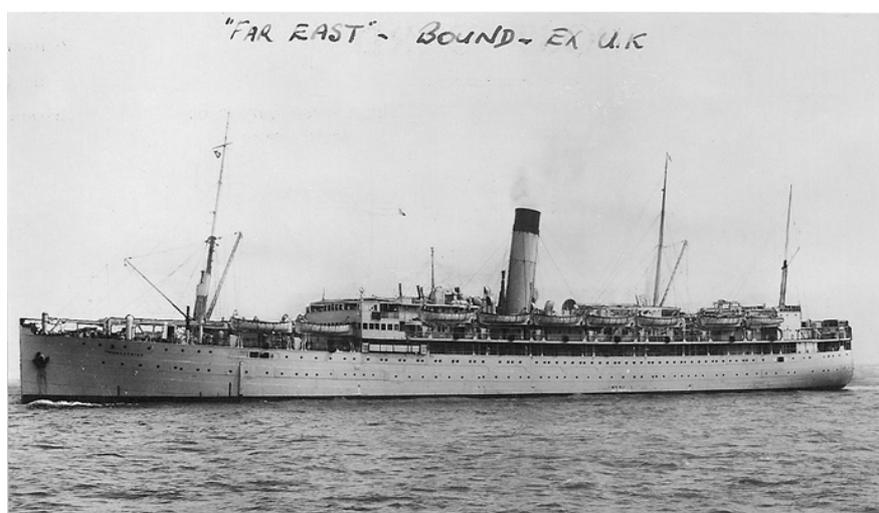
Attached is a poem I wrote some years ago.⁹

Kind regards

George Harris

Gawler, South Australia.

HM Troopship
Lancashire



⁹ George's poem is on the back cover of this Supplement as a tribute from those who survived to those who died for their country.

DEDICATED TO THOSE WHO DIED FOR OUR COUNTRY

A Soldier

I too was a soldier many years ago
Fully trained and ready to go
It was early 1951
The Korean War had begun
Stationed in Hong Kong, not far away
We were ordered to sail to join the affray
From Headquarters came a last minute communication
We were to be diverted to a different location
A soldier must go where he is sent
My schoolmate Robin was in a different Regiment
Serving in Malaya to fight the insurgents there
The jungle thick and so unfair
A burst of gunfire from a river bed
Robin and his patrol lay dead
As I live my life I often wonder why
Who decided that I should live,
Whilst Robin and so many others had to die?

George Harris, Royal Engineers 1949 - 1951

