

The 1942 Barford census and 'War books'—a unique record? [part 2]

In my previous article (224 22, March) I gave a brief description of the format of the Barford War Book and more detailed information on the ARP census of 1942 of which the Barford sample in the Oxfordshire Record Office seems to be a unique survivor¹. This article gives more information about the Barford War Book, and War Books in general.

'According to the Imperial War Museum, in the face of the threat of a German invasion of this country in 1940, all local civilian responsibilities were made the concern of "Invasion Committees", each of which looked after the interests of its own district. These committees were to prepare War Books in accordance with a standard *proforma* issued by the Ministry of Home Security. Should hasty evacuation become necessary, the war books were to be destroyed.'²

If the Barford War Book is a rare item and its Census perhaps unique there is ample documentation at a county level describing how the books were to be compiled. The Oxfordshire Record Office details the various county committees and

their powers³, and these are summarised by their indexer: the County Emergency Committee for Civil Defence was 'appointed in response to Home office ARP Department Circular 57/1939 which required the council to appoint an ARP Controller and Emergency Committee with executive powers in the event of war. The Clerk to the Council was appointed County ARP controller along with Sub-Controllers in each of the six civil defence areas on 31 August 1939 [just three days before war was declared]. The Committee's responsibilities included overseeing the implementation of the Government Evacuation Scheme and making preparations for an invasion as well as providing links between military and civil authorities.'

'The [County Defence] Committee was appointed at the request of the military authorities to provide a direct link with the civilian authorities and populations in the event of an invasion. It was composed of the existing members of the County Emergency Committee together with the Area Commander,

home Guard Zone Commander, County Controller and Chief Constable. The Controller and Committee were given full executive powers to act on behalf of the Council. A system of Area and local Defence Committees (representing essential services in each town or village) was set up to prepare for invasion and ensure compliance with military instructions. They were later called Invasion Committees.'

Fortunately I did not have to go through *all* the committee minutes, as the outcome of many of their meetings is recorded in the memos and instructions sent to the LDCs and in the case of the Barfords these are preserved in the ORO.

A slow start

Although preparations for war were in hand well before September 1939 (re-armament, including the construction of some of our local airfields had started not long after the Nazis came to power in Germany) it took time to get the local civil defence organisation going. The minutes of a conference held at

Programme for the rest of the 2005

14 September, Dr Kate Tiller: 'Church and chapel in North Oxfordshire in the 19th century'

12 October, Peter Sheasby: 'The River Swere project'

9 November, Malcolm Graham: 'The Packer Collection'

14 December: Christmas social

We normally meet at 7.30 at the Windmill Centre on the second Wednesday of the month. Visitors and new members are always welcome.

From the Chair

It is frankly difficult to summon up energy for a 224 editorial, composed as this is from a hammock during a summer heatwave rather than at a desk on a chilly winter evening. Nevertheless, the occasional thought is turning towards next seasons programme, which we intend to be better than ever. At our first talk (see panel on left), Kate Tiller will speak about church and chapel in North Oxfordshire in the 19th century. In October, Peter Sheasby will speak on his and Walter Meagher's River Swere project. Their recently published book, stunningly illustrated, has attracted great interest and much local publicity. We are, as you see, deter-

mined to maintain our reputation for variety.

Many thanks once more to all members for your continued support. Our membership remains strong, but there is inevitably some turnover each year as people move away or find that they have unavoidable rival calls on their time. It is scarcely credible, I know, but it does happen. May I therefore ask all members to invite a friend or neighbour along to sample our meetings and activities? New faces and fresh ideas are welcome and, indeed, essential for the society's continued vitality.

Chris Day

County Hall on 18 September 1941 show that already the majority of the four then Boroughs and three Urban Districts, along with the larger parishes had Defence Committees. There were also committees in 75% of the smaller parishes.

Indeed it was not until a circular was sent out on 1 October 1941, a full year after the Battle of Britain, by the County Council that A J Woolgrove of Barford St John seems to have been approached as 'one person of recognised authority in the community' to chair the Local Defence Committee and to have 'sole executive power in the event of an invasion'; he was given just a week to decide. The three-page duplicated letter started by pointing out that in the event of an invasion communities might be isolated and have to live off their own resources. It went on to explain the extent of his powers and, more importantly, the limits.

The LDC was, as one would expect, made up of the local great and the good, see *Figure 2*.

In a further circular, in July 1942 a specific reference is made to the 'Stand Firm Policy' in the event of an invasion. The Local Defence Committee had to provide every member of the public with a role in the event of an invasion: this would include the very young or old and infirm staying at home and not clogging up the roads by fleeing—the lessons of the Fall of France must still have been fresh in the minds of the authorities. This was a core reason for the census and an undated circular from the Banbury Area says that it should be done under the cover of distributing a circular about gas precautions and even provided a script: 'Here is the new leaflet on Gas for your information, and I am required to check on the number of occupants in this house to bring our records up to date and to facilitate rescue work in the event of air raid damage'. There were follow-up instructions on how to categorise the occupants.

This circular also included a specimen of the census forms reproduced in the last issue of 224. The local committee was also instructed to set up an invasion HQ, were given instructions of how invasion warnings would be given and told that a specimen War Book was being prepared so that they could be

Examined and approved
on behalf of the
County Invasion Committee

M. J. Smith
Clerk of the Council and
County Controller.

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Note.—Numbers in margin (e.g. 57—62) correspond to numbers of paragraphs in Consolidated Instructions to Invasion Committees.

Figure 1 *The Barfords' War Book* contents page, as approved by the County in January 1943 and (facing) Figure 2, the members of the Barfords' Local Defence Committee, and their phone numbers

standardised. From Figure 1 it can be seen that the eventual Barford War Book met the standard, and also the scope and content of a War Book. They were also urged to press on with their invasion plans.

By this time the LDC had already been meeting since 29 October 1941, and their minutes were kept in an exercise book. On 12 January 1942, under the heading 'Food store', Mr Hudson [Bakehouse] reported that he kept approx four months supplies in hand, & he thought yeast in powder form could be obtained, which would keep, he said he would investigate further; Mr Hudson also stated that he had an adequate supply of coal.' Often information in the War Books seems very obvious to a local, but it was presumably so outside authorities would know that the existing wa-

ter supply was from wells and that in an emergency there was a stream running through the village. Iron rations and flour were kept in store (unspecified).

Mr George Glassey was in charge of the emergency labour pool and the names of 15 men were given as available for heavy work and no less than 20 women; there were also 14 women available for light work. The book is full of what now seems either quaint or macabre information: the church was designated as the mortuary and there were only two lorries and three vans in the village as well as six cars, with the Mouldsdales and the Lovells having two each. Parking must have been easy then! There were a further 16 names given to help in the village hall and school if they were needed as rest centres.

WAR BOOK

TOWN.....
 PARISH *Barford St Michael*
 DISTRICT *Barford R.D.C.*

POPULATION (approx) *350*

PART I.

HEADQUARTERS *Barford House*

TEL. NO. *268*

Composition of Invasion Committee.

Name	Address	Tel. No.
Chairman <i>A.J. Woolgrove</i>	<i>Mead Farm</i>	<i>Blackon 259</i>
Deputy Chairman <i>Geo. Glancy</i>	<i>Colton Farm</i>	<i>268/269</i>
Military Member <i>Infantry Officer</i>	<i>Barford St Michael</i>	<i>Blackon 261</i>
Home Guard <i>Sgt J.E. Mouldsdales</i>	<i>Barford House</i>	<i>268/269</i>
Civil Defence <i>Mr. Holden</i>	<i>Blackon</i>	<i>per de de</i>
Police Representative <i>S/Inspector H. Tew</i>	<i>Barford</i>	<i>268/269</i>
<i>Definity</i> Food Executive Officer or Vol. Food Organiser <i>A.B. Hudson</i>	<i>Blackon</i>	—
Doctor <i>—</i>	—	—
N.F.S. Representative <i>—</i>	—	—
Town Clerk or Clerk of the U.D.C. or Secretary	—	—
† <i>Mrs Mouldsdales</i>	<i>Barford House</i>	<i>268/269</i>
†	—	—
†	—	—

† Add co-opted Members (if any).

Under the minuted heading 'First aid' '... [unsatisfactory as Mrs Sullivan was away and it was uncertain when she might return]. ... to ask Mrs Connor, Old Vicarage, to take charge. [There is a letter to A J Woolgrove from Vera Sullivan on 18 June 1942 at the Regal Hotel Cleveleys—between Blackpool and Fleetwood—in Lancashire apologising for being away and saying Mrs Connor would do the job very well. There is also an, undated, pencil note saying Mrs Sullivan was trying to let her house. At this period the Old Vicarage seems to have been called The Old House.] Mrs Connor subsequently wrote with a list of eight first-aiders in the village, but the LDC deleted four of these and added two others.

The minutes for 22 June 1942 show that they recognised the need to select an invasion HQ—and appoint a woman member to the LDC. They duly chose Mrs Mouldsdales,

wife of Lt Mouldsdales, who was already on the committee, and whose home at Barford House in St Michael was selected as HQ. The fall-back HQ was the chairman's home, Mead Farm in St John. The LDC agreed to conduct the census as soon as the forms were supplied to them.

Membership of the LDC was not remunerated, but limited expenses were repayable by the Department of Home Security (which these days has a familiar ring to it). Postage and stationery were refundable as were phone calls (not that there were that many phones in the village⁴), as was accommodation, travel for the Chairman to meetings, hire of halls for public meetings and the printing of 'posters and announcements to bring the existence of the Committee to the notice of persons living in the area, and questionnaire forms to elicit information required by the Committee ...' The County

Council could authorise expenditure up to £15 pa.

The last (surviving) minuted meeting was on 19 December 1942, but as late as 13 October LDCs were reminded by circular of the importance attached to the preparation of War Books by the Regional Commissioner (a tier above the County Council). Only a few LDCs had done so and a deadline was set for the end of the year. On approval (see Figure 1) one copy would be kept by the County as their reference to local contacts, while the other would be sent back to the LDC as its operational handbook, but this did not happen until 5 January 1943 with some minor amendments. There was to be a limit to the number of official notice boards in the parish (in charge of the police), the Voluntary Food Organiser had to live in the parish, the location of the Committee HQ had to be shown and the 'Central channel of communication' had to be located there.

As late as April the risk of invasion was considered sufficient for the County to write to A J Woolgrove pointing out that, following a statement by the Prime Minister in the Commons, church bells were not to be rung other than on Sundays, Good Friday and Xmas Day, and then only for services, this despite the fact that church bells were not to be used to signal air- or sea-borne raids. Fred Smith was the designated bell ringer. In August the Southern Regional Commissioner wrote instructing LDCs to fill in on page 1 of their War Book 'a note containing in order of priority the action which will have to be taken and the official, service or authority responsible for initiating it if and when the chances of invasion recur', but it does not seem to have been done. As an aside, only on 6 September 1944 was the Home Guard partially stood down.

As to the whereabouts of any other War Books, Oxfordshire's Assistant Archivist states: 'The uncatalogued backlog of OCC records is enormous and not particularly easy to investigate! I suppose it's possible that [the War Books] might still be somewhere at County Hall (although I doubt it) ... The most comprehensive collection of OCC records we have is from the Clerk's/Chief Executive's Office. These were originally stored in the

Modern Records Section created in the 1930s I think along with the Archives section and under the control of the Clerk. I therefore think that if these records had been preserved as stated in the minutes they would have been transferred to us.'

I can find no mention of these records. Large numbers of records were stored in the basement and strongrooms of County Hall and, as far as I can see, anything we retained has been recorded and accessioned. I can only suggest that the War Books were either never collected or, if they were, they were destroyed at a later date perhaps for reasons of space. According to the Civil Defence minutes ... there were two copies—one to go directly to County Hall, the other to the local borough/district council and failing that also to County Hall. I wonder if the Clerk in his role as County Controller occupied a separate office or building where these things were collected and later destroyed. The fact that a (very) few War Books have survived in parish collections supports the theory that they weren't returned as stipulated in the minutes ...¹⁵ [and that most parishes destroyed their own copies].

If anyone is interested in a more thorough search for more Oxfordshire War Books or even a Census, I shall be delighted to help. Otherwise this appears to be the end of this particular line of research.

Concluded. Once again I am grateful to Chris Gilliam at the Oxfordshire Record Office and to Ian F Angus for their help in the preparation of this article.

Colin Cohen

Notes

¹ ORO MSS DD Par Barford St Michael c6 for all references specific to the Barfords

² www.britannia.com/lympstone/warbook.html for the published background, also in *The Devon Historian*, no 54, pp 27-29. April 1997, Exeter. Both by Ian F Angus

³ ORO OCC Minutes at CC1/27/A1/1-2 and CC1/28/A1/1-2

⁴ Four phone numbers were given for the seven Committee members. In 1924 even Barford PO had no phone. In 1935 there were three private phones and three 'trade' phones including the PO in Barford St Michael. There was one of each in Barford St John.

⁵ Emails to the author from Chris Gilliam, 23 and 27 November 2004

D&DHS Family Research Group

Thank you to those who responded to my call to set up a Family History Research Group.

We now have about 8 people interested and we have now had our first meeting.

My idea is to run a two-fold group. Firstly, to help people to research their own family history. This should be a mutual aid function, where good ideas and tips can be shared amongst those interested, supported by visits to useful places. Perhaps the most useful as a starting point, would be a visit to the Family History Centre of the General Register Office, in London. I plan to use websites which are very good if you do not live where your ancestors lived.

Secondly, I hope to compile a register of Deddington Family names, together with any useful information on the family name. This information would be available to any researcher, local or otherwise interested in a Deddington Family.

To illustrate the last point and to ask if anyone has any knowledge of the incident, the following came from a contact researching an Abingdon family.

It comes from *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, dated October 23rd 1858:

Melancholy Death at Clifton

A distressing and Fatal Accident. A fatal accident occurred on Saturday afternoon last, between 2 and 3

o'clock, on the turnpike road between Deddington and Clifton, to Mr William Davis, aged 18 years, son of Mr Gabriel Davis, of Abingdon, maltster and corn dealer. It appears that he was riding a horse belonging to Mr Jas Hands of Deddington, a miller, to whom he was apprenticed and it is supposed that the horse ran away with him, for on passing the barn of Mr Malinge, at Clifton, he was observed by John Kilby and William Rymill, who were at work in the barn, unseated and nearly off, and the horse going at a very rapid rate. Kilby, on looking after him, saw him fall very heavily to the ground upon his head, and immediately ran to his assistance; he was then quite insensible. Medical assistance was sent for, and Mr Morris and Mr Turner, surgeons of Deddington were soon in attendance; he was conveyed to Mr Hands house, and died about an hour after the accident occurred, from concussion of the brain.

An inquest was held the same evening at the Unicorn Inn, Deddington, before J Churchill Esq, Coroner and a verdict of Accidental Death was returned. This sad calamity has cast a gloom over the neighbourhood, the young man being very highly respected by a numerous circle of friends.

Moira Byast

Why 224?

For the still curious: 224, the title of this newsletter, is taken from the sheet number used by the draughtsmen of the Ordnance Survey in the early years of the nineteenth century to identify an individual drawing made by the surveyors for the first edition one inch maps. For more information see 224 March 2000.

If undelivered please return to: Deddington & District History Society, c/o 37 Gaveston Gardens, Deddington OX15 0NX. 224 is the newsletter of the Deddington & District History Society, published three times a year and distributed free to members.

The Society meets on the second Wednesday of the month during the season, normally at the Windmill Centre in Deddington. Membership £9/16 pa single/couples, or £2.50 per meeting at the door.

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