

## RON AND DAPHNE CANNING

*Rob Forsyth*

Ron lived in Deddington as did his father. At the outbreak of war (see page 123) he was farming for his uncle Sid.<sup>1</sup> This was a reserved occupation but Ron wanted to enlist so, in 1942 aged 18, he forged a letter in his uncle's name saying that he was willing to release him and Ron was duly accepted by the RAF as a volunteer wireless operator. His uncle never did understand how Ron managed to enlist.

Daphne Tucker was a London girl who also joined the RAF in 1942. She did her six months' initial training as a high-speed morse operator at Compton Bassett Radio School in Wiltshire where this picture of her group was taken in June 1943.



*(standing l to r) Daphne Canning Tucker - remainder unknown*

*(seated l to r) Lily Pringle, Margaret Morton, Joan Pittaway, unknown with dog*

Daphne then moved for further training to a radio school in the Science Museum in London where she remained until her very comfortable digs in luxury flats called Thurloe Court were hit by a V1 'doodlebug' in mid-June 1944<sup>2</sup> which killed some and injured many of the service women accommodated there. The flats had six floors. Girls on the top three floors had evacuated to shelters on hearing the air raid alarm but the bottom three were deemed to be safe and not required to be evacuated. Daphne was on the third floor. Daphne heard the rocket coming during the middle of the night. It exploded in a gap between the two blocks comprising the flats and pushed the front of the buildings into the road.

<sup>1</sup> Sid Canning's farm was a collection of fields around the village in the vicinity of Daeda's Wood, the Pest House field, Field Barns and Plumden Lane.

<sup>2</sup> The first salvo of V1 'doodlebugs' were fired at London on 13 June 1944. By 16 June, 73 bombs had hit London. Although they were commonly referred to as 'rockets' they were, in fact, drone aircraft driven by a pulse jet engine.

She had to be rescued by fireman using ladders to bridge the gaps across stair wells and where stairs had been demolished.

She lost everything except the pyjamas she was wearing. She was 'walking wounded' and was sent to recover at her parents' home for a few weeks. She did not return to the Science Museum but was sent to the RAF station at Chicksands Priory, Shefford in Buckinghamshire. This was an outpost of Bletchley Park, famous for the Enigma code-breaking activities during the war. Much of the work was highly classified of course and required a high degree of skill. Daphne can still read and send morse and on a recent visit to Bletchley demonstrated this by hand keying a message for a radio ham who was working there. Daphne's father was also a signals officer at Chicksands.

Another person serving at Chicksands was ... Ron Canning ... and the two of them became engaged just before Ron was posted to the Far East in June 1945.



When the atom bombs were dropped on Japan Ron's troopship was diverted to India where he served for the rest of the war. One might have thought that communication between the couple would have now become somewhat sporadic and entirely dependent on the speed of sea mail; however, Ron was working in the signal centre in New Delhi which contained a very new and secret high-speed radio teleprinter linked of course to ... Chicksands! In order to test the service and keep the line 'open' (so that other units did not steal the frequency) continuous transmission was needed. While some of this consisted of real traffic, a lot of it at night was just a tape of garbled transmissions. Ron recognised an opportunity and he and Daphne spent many hours talking, quite illegally, through the night instead of running the tape. They must have been one of the first couples to experience what we now take as a matter of course with internet chatrooms and emails.

Both of them left the service after the war and were married in 1947. In later years Ron worked as a nurseryman in Ascot, before returning to Deddington to help

establish the agricultural side of the Windmill School. The RAF connection led to him taking a commission in the Air Training Corps. Various jobs followed as the family moved to Banbury and then to Heythrop Park Estate. Ill-health meant Ron retired at 60. Ron and Daphne came back to Rose Cottage in The Stile as neighbours of Rob Forsyth. He became a Parish Councillor. In the words of Reverend Hugh White 'While Ron declined physically ... he remained courteous and generous, courageous and uncomplaining under his afflictions. Those who visited him enjoyed his immense knowledge of Deddington past and his sly, gentle, well turned wit. He liked to bemoan the performance of the England Cricket Team and the inability of people to mow lawns properly; however, he was a radiant not a grumpy old man.'

**Editors' note:**

Ron's memory of hearing of the start of the war was published as an article in the *Deddington News* in July 2003

'It was Sunday 3 September 1939. The Vicar of Deddington, the Reverend Dr Maurice Frost had come to the end of his sermon preached from the pulpit. The choir boys in the stalls, by now a bit fidgety, suddenly heard the heavy oak door, leading to the South porch, creak and slowly open. That event alone, happening in the middle of a service would enthral the most pious of choristers. But greater things were to happen. There, in the open door, stood Police Constable Reg Butler with his helmet tucked reverently under one arm. Hardly daring to breathe the boys watched him slow march along the centre aisle towards the chancel. He seemed to will his big boots to tread as noiselessly as possible, not wishing to disturb the sanctity of the church. On the steps to the chancel, priest and policeman met and exchanged a few whispered words. A deadly hush hung over the congregation while the policeman almost tiptoed back down the aisle to the door which he closed with the greatest of care. Congregation and choir now turned their full attention to their vicar who stood head bowed for a moment, then stepped to the centre of the nave to inform his parishioners that "Great Britain is at war". Ron hardly remembers singing the closing hymn, but to this day he remembers clearly the moment in church when war was declared, and he still sees his elders who at close of service stood together in little groups fearfully speculating on a future that would change most of their lives.'