

PARK AT WAR MEMORIES

Bernie Burns (born 1928) Lived in Brook Street.

I'd be about twelve, probably early 1940, and was staying with my brother's wife in rooms in Price Street on a Saturday night. My brother was away with the merchant navy and had a little baby. It was a bad night-rainy and windy. The barrage balloon from Birkenhead Park worked free from the RAF lorry and flew through the streets trailing the cable behind it. Eventually it became lodged between the backs of the houses in Price Street and Vine Street. When I opened the sash window the balloon billowed in trying to fill the room.

All the occupants of the nearby streets were evacuated overnight because of the fire risk from the gas in the balloon. On the Sunday morning the police and the fire brigade deflated the balloon and had to untangle the cables all the way back to the park.

Bernie also remembers seven barrage balloons hit in one night by German planes as he was coming back from the pictures in Price Street.

There were air raid shelters in the park on Park Road North, next to the Visitor Centre plot. One night Bernie was running through a raid from Park Station when he was hit by shrapnel. He passed out and woke up being treated in the shelter. Some nights he slept through raids in Hamilton Square Station.

In one air raid the air raid shelter in Arthur Street was hit and twelve people were killed. Bernie helped to bring the bodies out. Some were children he played with: Lenny Hibbs and his sister and Jimmy Edge. The two Misses Hughes from Brook Street also died there.

The shelter was brick built and had four cubicles on each side, for eight people, and a passageway in the middle where people had to stand. One night a seaman decided the raid was over and went out. Three bombs fell soon after and he was never seen again.

The Grand Turk Hotel on the junction of Duke Street and Brook Street had a brick built shelter and while Bernie was in there during a raid he felt the floor crack.

Bernie remembers the 12th/13th March when Our Lady's presbytery was bombed and the old cannon and two housekeepers were killed. The curates had persuaded the cannon to stay in while they were out during the raid.

George lived near the General Hospital (Prince Edward Street?) He remembers the barrage balloon on the Balaclava Field and the huge cylinders used to inflate them.

One night he was at the Gaumont cinema when the manager lit up the floor and announced that there was a raid but people could stay inside. George's mother was frightened and so took him home through the air raid with shrapnel falling all around them.

He remembers the foul smell of the brick built air raid shelter on Beckwith Street.

On the Visitor Centre plot there were swings and an ARP warden post. He remembers filling sand bags outside the General Hospital.

He has happy memories of the Holidays at Home funfair on Park Road North.

R.A. Smith

I was born and raised at 18 Craven Place, Birkenhead (behind the Gaumont Cinema) in 1935

The volunteer fire crew of Craven Place practiced using the portable fire pump on a two wheel trailer in Birkenhead Park using the lake water supply.

The crew comprised four men from the street Mr. F. Huxley, his brother Mr. H. Huxley, Mr. B. Holden and Mr. J. Stredder. These men, plus us children would help push the fire pump into the park and would then sit and watch/learn how to handle the pump. (We usually got a soaking also). To us children it was seen as fun but, it was, deadly serious given that incendiary bombs dropping around us was the norm. Craven Place having been hit several times.

The spitfire, of course, was seen coming down and then crashing into the Park.

That story is well chronicled and I can't add anything to that.

Also during the war years, Birkenhead corporation transport would also park their buses in the Park. They used the entrance at the top of Mallaby Street. The buses would be parked up around the Park and disabled via the removal of the rotor arm on the petrol buses and ignition fuse/main fuse on the diesels. Laird Street bus depot was itself a casualty of the bombing.

Lastly, I remember the American soldiers, hundred of them, lined up from the docks via Victoria Street, Park road East and into the park itself, waiting to board the ships taking them into the conflict.

We children would walk up and into the Park asking for 'any gum chum'? and would very often go home with some American chewing gum. (and we learned some rather 'unusual' language much to our mum's shocking surprise). Swiftly followed up by a clout round the ear.

Ron Smith

Mrs Robinson

Used to live in Bidston Avenue. She remembers seeing the buses in the Park laid on their sides after the blitz. One night Mobil Oil went up and the flames lit the whole of Birkenhead. After the blitz her mother opened the front door and couldn't believe her eyes. All the people who had survived the night's bombing were trudging up Bidston Avenue to shelter in Bidston Avenue School. "It was like a scene from Germany". My mother had a house on Laird Street. After that night she was worried that her house had also been bombed. So her boyfriend and I made our way up Mallaby Street, treading on plates and pans and goodness knows what else. When we could see that the house was still standing we didn't go any further but walked back to tell her.

The bombing broke up the community-people scattered

John Leece

Donated a Baby's gas mask for exhibition. Found in his house, probably in the family, never used.

Patricia McGrath

Used her gas mask for carrying her lunch to school