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One of a series of eight posters published in 1940 by the Ministry of Information. Designed by Fougasse (Cyril Kenneth Bird), art editor of the magazine Punch, he offered his services for free. Their popularity set a new tone for official mass communication.

Poppyland Publishing is pleased to announce *When War came to Wymondham 1939 – 45: what the townspeople experienced, said and did ...* by Adrian and Anne Hoare.

In the 1930s Wymondham was self contained and self sufficient – a shopper's paradise. Just over 5,000 people enjoyed a quiet life, the majority employed at the two brush works, in agriculture, on the railway or in local shops and businesses.

When war came it brought with it many new faces - evacuees, construction workers, refugees, members of the armed forces and American servicemen. There were many adjustments to be made. This book documents the townspeople's experiences, words and actions as well as those of their wartime visitors.

The Urban District Council led by Edwin Gooch its chairman, later to become Labour MP for North Norfolk, had to take control and put into practice government policies for the defence of the town. Such measures needed large numbers of volunteers to help. This book is a tribute to those volunteers, in whatever role they served – such as Air Raid Precaution Wardens, Home Guard, Firefighters, Fire-watchers, Land Girls or in the Women's Voluntary Service, Women's Institute, the Church Army or the Red Cross and St John.

These groups worked with the Council to keep people safe, fed and cared for in this challenging situation. Their work required commitment and readiness to go to work as normal the next day.



Some of the land girls who worked at Browick Hall farm

Back row left to right: Lauren Ringer née Chamberlain, Betty Blake née Elvin, Renée Bartram, Mary Flatt

Front row left to right: Audrey Townsend, Doreen Giles née Wingrove, Freda Cavill née Wicks



Members of the Morley platoon of the Home Guard at their last meeting in the old village hall in 1972.

About the authors

The authors met at Hull University in 1959 where they both read history and became teachers. They came to Wymondham in 1974 and have been enthusiastic supporters of Wymondham Heritage Society and its Museum ever since. Adrian soon developed an interest in Robert Kett a local hero, which resulted in three books between 1983 and 2016.

After they retired, they recorded the memories of Norfolk Home Guardsmen and 'secret army' survivors, which were used in *Standing up to Hitler*. Another interest has been the history of Wymondham's houses. The knowledge they acquired over 35 years, was used in two books, one about Damgate and the other about Wymondham's main streets.

Their latest book describes the impact of World War Two on Wymondham townspeople, but is also illustrative of what was happening in many communities throughout the country.



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Excerpt from *When War came to Wymondham 1939 – 45: what the townspeople experienced, said and did*

Wymondham gets ready for war 1938-9

The first fear in the expected war was an air attack with gas and incendiary bombs. Plans for the Air Raid Precautions (ARP) in Wymondham, set up nationally in 1937 to protect civilians from such attacks, began in May 1938. The Council formed a sub-committee to plan an efficient organisation. Leading councillors, a Medical Officer and the Chief Fire Officer were members. Representatives of Briton Brush, Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS) and King & Son, timber and furniture factory, were co-opted to provide materials and labour for building public air raid shelters.

Wymondham was divided into sectors, each one responsible for a small section of the town – a few streets or some 35-40 houses. In the event of an air attack, the role of the ARP would be vital. ARP volunteers, known as wardens, had many responsibilities such as, sounding the air raid warning siren, enforcing the black-out introduced in 1939, supervising the streets and safely guiding people into public air raid shelters. They issued and checked gas masks, would evacuate areas around unexploded bombs, rescue people where possible from bomb damaged properties, locate temporary accommodation for those who had been bombed out, and inform the Control Centre about incidents and fires. On 28 September 1938 the town bellman announced that gas masks, to protect people from gas bombs would be distributed at Fairland Hall. 5,000 were brought from the depot at Attleborough and they were assembled by volunteers. By December 1938 40 ARP wardens were in training. The Control Centre was set up in Market Street in April 1939 with extra phone lines to co-ordinate things in emergency and organise fire, ambulance and other rescue services.

As part of the ARP structure, 20 first aid posts were planned – four were in place by September 1938 at Abbotsford, Spooner Row, Silfield, Northfield & Norwich Common and the system was complete by October 1938. By this time some 70 volunteers had enrolled. By early 1939 more volunteers were needed. Posters and public meetings drew attention to the need. The Old Drill Hall in Town Green was hired as a sub-station for fire equipment, ARP planning and recruiting and for training new volunteers.

Air-Raid Wardens Organisation

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 T. LORD
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 F.J. SEWELL
 O. POTTER
 S. PHILLIPS
 B. NICE
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 J.D. BROWNE
 W.S. HARVER
 C. BEALES
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 R. STARLING
 MISS A. LEEDER
 MRS R. RUDRUM
 J. Gamble
 A.G. SMITH
 T.W. SMITH

as sent to Mr G H Power
 on 19th June 1939

In due course drills for the new electric siren and a gas instruction course became part of ARP training too.

By the time the war began much had been achieved, the ARP was well established and organised with many volunteers trained in various duties, organised by Malcolm Ayton. It was ready for the emergency with rotas for nightly patrols. The ARP guard room was at the Working Men's Club next to the Old Post Office.

In May 1939, the Council earmarked four lorries from Wymondham laundry on Norwich Road to use as ambulances. From then emergency plans were in place and because of the threat of fires from an air attack, a fireman slept at the main fire station in Market Street every night. By August 1939 there were two new manual engines with 1,000 yards of hose ready to support the main engine in Market Street, together with stirrup pumps around the town, as well as in places like Spooner Row & Suton. Stirrup

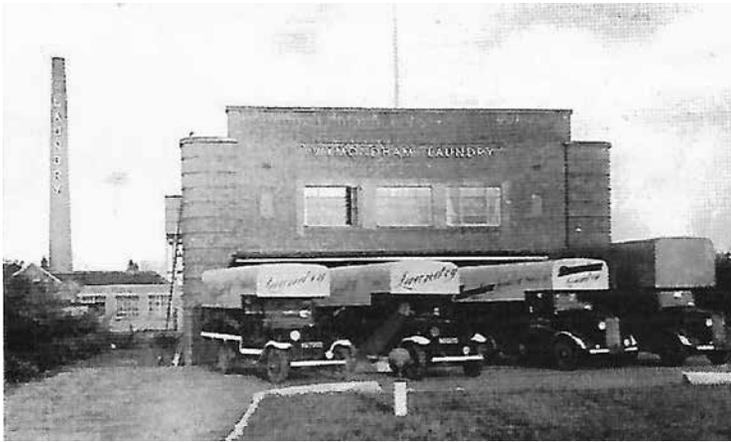
A list of townspeople in the ARP organisation by June 1939.



The Old Drill Hall, Town Green.



Working Men's Club, 2nd from right, next to Post Office.



Wymondham Laundry in Norwich Road, with lorries in foreground.



Horace Wilkinson demonstrating the use of a stirrup pump to deal with an incendiary bomb.

netting underneath in case blast shattered the glass.¹

The black-out had to be effective and the ARP cry 'Put that light out' is a reminder of the importance of observing this rule. Black-out regulations were imposed nationally on 1 September 1939, two days before the declaration of war. These required all windows and doors to be covered at night with suitable material such as heavy curtains, cardboard or paint, to prevent any sign of light that might help enemy aircraft.

The first black-out practice in the town was held on 14 July 1939 from midnight to 4 am. The ARP wardens patrolled the streets during these hours.

Two more practices were held on 7 August, from 1am to 3am and 9 August, from midnight to 4 am.

Initially the newly installed electric siren costing £110, could not be heard in Ashwellthorpe or Carleton Rode, or indoors at Melton and Kimberley, so it was fixed on a telegraph pole by the police station at the Bridewell. It could be heard within a radius of five miles. A number of hand sirens were also available.

By the outbreak of war on 3 September many townspeople had signed up as volunteers in some aspect of the ARP organisation. Their willingness to contribute for the common good in the face of the national threat continued



The police station at the Bridewell was sandbagged and the electric air raid siren was fixed to a nearby telegraph pole.

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