

CARDALL'S CORNER

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The Harbury Cement Works in WW2

By Janet Cox



The Harbury Cement Works (HCW) was as near to Bishops Itchington as it was to Harbury. Indeed the men from Bishops Itchington walked or cycled down a lane or across a field from the village to go to work at HCW, which for many years was the only work around, apart from agriculture.

We lived in Bishops Itchington and my father was the 'Kiln Burner' at HCW. The kiln was where the newly excavated clay (blue lias) was burnt and treated before becoming the cement in bags as we know it. There were others doing the same job as my father, but as WW2 progressed, there were fewer younger men around and those not drafted into the services had longer hours of responsibility.

My most vivid memories were from 1942 onwards, when I was four years old. My father wasn't 'drafted' due to my mother's serious illness and so he became more involved in the local war efforts. His responsibility as the Kiln Burner was increased and if and when there was an Air Raid warning - usually at dusk or later - he was called out to dampen down the kiln. He had to cover the fire glow with ash or something, so the German bombers flying from the South to Coventry couldn't see any glow from the fire to locate and help them on their way. The German bombers used 'landmarks' to help guide them to their destinations and the HCW chimney was one of their landmarks. Even today on a low approach to an airport, landmarks are still used and this was verified to me recently by an airline pilot.

The HCW chimney has long since gone, but in 1942 the German bombers coming up from the south travelled over the Burton Dassett Hills; then Knightcote; then Bishops Itchington and then the HCW chimney to locate the railway cutting, along which they could then travel below the radar detection and on to Coventry. The Harbury railway cutting was the deepest in the country (and indeed in Europe) at that time.

I can remember my father being called out at night and then hearing the bombers coming over the village heading towards Coventry. We often heard the noise and saw the sky lit up over Coventry, especially so on that fatal bombing raid of the City and Coventry Cathedral. We then waited for the bombers to return back over the village. Sometimes 'loose' bombs fell in the surrounding fields - these were bombs that had been 'stuck' in a bomber during a raid and the pilots shook them free on their way back to Germany.

The surrounding search-lights were visible and occasionally lighting up one of the bombers. Indeed, one that had been caught by the lights and hit came down in a field near our house. The pilot survived and was taken to a 'prisoner of war' camp nearby, but that's another story.

The photograph is from our archives and shows some of the earlier Harbury quarry workers. If you are interested in finding out more about our local cement industry, come along to our Summer exhibition 'Cementing Relations In Southam'. We are in the Basement of Vivian House on Market Hill and open on Tuesday and Saturday mornings from 10am to 12 noon. Group visits can be arranged at

other times. Contact: 01926 613503 email southamheritage@hotmail.com visit our website www.southamheritage.org and find us on Facebook: Southam Heritage Collection.

