

Air Raids

"The first indication I had that the war might be serious was the news that the British army was being evacuated from Dunkirk. At the time it was not announced as a heroic epic and must have been really bad news for the country. Everyone expected a German blitzkrieg and invasion to follow immediately. Miss Shears, our class teacher, told us what had happened and spoke gravely of the possibility of attacks on the school. We then practised taking cover under our desks as quickly as possible on her command. I suppose there wasn't much else that could be done but luckily the Germans did not come.

By September 1940 I was one of the Reedham boys attending the County School at Old Coulsdon and fortunately it was decided that, unless a raid prevented us from setting off, it would be best for us to continue to attend as normal. If there was an alert while en route we were supposed to take cover but there was little chance of that. The Battle of Britain was on and we wanted to see what was going on. We thought ourselves lucky to be in the open air making the two mile journey each morning and afternoon and, with no thought of danger, we several times watched large formations of German bombers flying north over the valley while a few British fighters planes, mostly Hurricanes then, kept wheeling and turning to attack from the rear. Kenley aerodrome was just over a mile from Reedham at the head of the valley. It was a fighter station and German bombers had already attacked but failed to put it out of action. Now there were Hurricanes and Spitfires taking off and landing there almost every day. We heard they had a squadron of Polish pilots who were particularly daring and certainly we saw some spectacular flying with victory rolls and steeply banked low-level turns." **(Derrick Smith)**



"I remember also, in the dining hall during an air raid, hiding under the tables, and then trying to locate our grub which we had left on our plates." **(Ron Thomas)**

“Our education was affected by breaks in lessons which we thought great fun at first. Several of our favourite teachers were called up and their replacements must have found it very difficult to get any continuity into their schemes of work. I must say I was not sorry to see the teacher who seemed to be forever telling me off for talking, go off to war. I remember singing the hymn ‘For those in peril on the sea’ each Friday and thinking of Mr Wilkes and other teachers.” **(Eileen Jewell – nee Briggs)**

“I remember in the infants, we used to go down to the girls’ shelter when the siren sounded. Also one could hear ‘from the valley down below’ the sound of ARP Wardens blowing their whistles. All the post-boxes had their tops painted yellow and they were supposed to change colour in the event of a gas attack.” **(Mike Murdoch)**

“I joined Reedham Orphanage in 1943. During the next year we spent many hours under the hill in the boys’ playground.” **(Chris Skinner)**

“I remember one visitor's day in Croydon, it must have been in early the summer of 1940 seeing a dog-fight over the town, with everyone looking up to watch the planes wheeling above. For the summer holiday that summer my mother arranged for me, for safety, to stay with friends at Thatcham, near Newbury. On the way back to Reedham in early September I passed through London and from the train crossing the bridge over the Thames at Victoria saw a great pall of smoke to the east, which I was told were the docks on fire from an air raid the previous night.” **(Tony Barber)**

“Do you remember at about 6.30 - 7.00 a.m. hearing the Spitfires and Hurricanes warming up their engines? Do you also remember when they took-off roaring over the playground; off to who-knows-where.” **(Mike Murdoch)**



A pilot's eye view of Reedham