

Chapter 27

Military

Village People of Two World Wars – For King and Country

This chapter is about the people from Castor and Ailsworth who fought in the First and Second World Wars. It charts those who joined up and where possible their Regiments and any war decorations they received. The first part of the chapter concerns the men who served in the First World War, a list of their names, followed by information about all those remembered on the War Memorial. The second part includes many anecdotes and personal memories from ex-service men and women from both villages who served in the Second World War, followed by the names listed on the War Memorial and information about their service lives. The next part of the chapter is about the involvement of the Home Guard in protecting the villages during the Second World War and memories from some of those people who served in the Home Guard. In the final part reference is made to the Women's Land Army, the Ex-servicemen's club and about children evacuated to the villages.

The First World War

At the outbreak of World War I, on August 4th 1914, some men from Castor and Ailsworth were already regular servicemen and many more soon joined Kitchener's Army, looking on it as an adventure, which was to be over by Christmas. Most began their Army careers in the New Northamptonshire regiment, but were often transferred to other battalions. By September over 30 men had joined up and on the eve of their departure for Northampton, along with their parents, were entertained at a dinner in the Fitzwilliam School. Canon Hulbert held daily services of intercessions in the parish church and nursing classes were also set up. A Ladies' Committee was formed with weekly working parties being held at the Rectory, to produce garments, such as socks, which were sent out to the troops.

By September 1914 Private George Neville (1st Northamptonshire) had already been wounded and was invalided home for a short while after a bullet grazed his leg. He had been under fire for four days in the battle of Mons and was with his regiment in Louvain shortly before the town was entered and burnt by the Germans. He told of the many German atrocities but was "*anxious to get back to the front*".

In November a recruiting meeting was held in Ailsworth Chapel, '*when practically the whole of the village was present. The Longthorpe Boy Scouts Bugle band marched through the villages to the Chapel. Many speeches were heard, Lady Buxton's was very well received as her husband was in the Navy. At the end of the meeting recruits were invited to come forward but none responded, however several men from Castor and Ailsworth had previously volunteered and been rejected because of slight physical disabilities.*'

By January 1915 at least 40 men from Castor and Ailsworth were serving in the forces, two were officers in the Navy, the remainder being non-commissioned officers and privates in the Army. In May 1915 Private J Hobbs (6th Enniskillen Dragoons) was invalided from the front suffering as a result of frostbite. He was among the first of the troops to go out and was in the trenches on and off for five months. The 2nd East Anglian Brigade was stationed in Castor and often held military concerts for the villagers in the grounds of the Rectory. The Red Cross Committee was busy raising funds, which were used to buy sheets, slippers and operating stockings for the Kensington War Hospital supply depot. From June to September 1915 2,280 eggs were collected in the villages for the National Egg Collection. Money was raised so that every soldier from the villages received a parcel valued at five shillings, which also contained a Christmas card from friends and mittens knitted by pupils from the school.

As the war continued many families had more than one son serving in the forces. By March 1916 Mr and Mrs John Jakes ('*a most respected and esteemed family*') had three sons at the front, Reginald (Queen's Royal West Surreys), Percy (6th Northamptonshire) and Arthur (2nd Northamptonshire). '*The family has set a splendid example to the rest of the village and neighbourhood.*' In July 1916 it was reported that '*Private Reginald Jakes had been severely wounded in the head and it is feared that he will lose the sight of both eyes. He is in hospital at Chelsea, London*'. The following poem appeared in the Peterborough Advertiser dated November 4th 1916, which is thought to be about Reginald Jakes.

Blind!

*From Castor Hill, a youth went forth to fight
His country's battle o'er in Northern France,
Leaving home, his mother and his promised wife;
He saw the path of honour lying clear before him.
And so he went down to the Devil's caldron.*

*Through the battle of the Marne he came unscathed,
Ypres was passed with wondrous lack of wounds;
Then on the Somme, a fateful, bursting shell
Shattered his eyes, and left him poor indeed.
Two weary months in hospital, and then
The doctor's verdict cut all hope away;
Henceforth, for him, must be for-ever night.
And yet, the promised bride must have her say:*

*Nobly she played her part - the wedding bells must ring,
And she would be his light, his love, his day.
They wandered through sweet woodland glades together,
And nature, pitying, smiled upon him:
The flowers, the bees, the birds, and all the wild things
Called: 'Welcome! welcome! see, we dearly love you,
Because we know you're blind!'*

*A golden cord the maid wove round her boy,
And to the altar tenderly she led him,
Guiding his steps - a wife and mother blended:
Then, raising hands with heartfelt gratitude,
She thanked the God Who spared her hero's life.*

*High on the hill stands the shrine of the mighty Nazarene,
Crucified near two thousand years ago,
He lives to-day; deathless, immortal.
The young bride, gazing on the sacred edifice,
Took her darling by the hand and led him to the light.
W.A.C.*

In December 1916 Percy Jakes was promoted to Acting Quartermaster Sergeant of his regiment and received the Military Medal for '*bravery on the battlefield.*' Later his brothers Ernest (Queen's Royal West Surreys) and Alexander joined up.

Mrs and the late Mr Harry Gibbons had three sons who enlisted in the 6th Northamptonshire at the outbreak of war, Ernest, John and Albert. In 1916 all three brothers were wounded, but returned to the front. Before the war they helped their mother in her business as a threshing machinist. Albert received a parchment certificate from the Major-General Commander of the 18th Division, British Expeditionary Force in France for '*conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty while on active service*', a copy of which was sent to his wife. He received the Military Medal which is now in the Northants Regimental Museum.

Mr and Mrs J Hornsby's three sons enlisted, Harold was at the front almost from the outbreak of war, George was badly wounded during the retreat from Mons and Ernest served in the Near East. All three were to survive the war.

Lance Corporal A. F. Hill, son of Mr William Hill, was awarded the Military Medal in 1916. The following letter was received: '*I have read with great pleasure the report of your Regimental Commander and Brigade Commander regarding your gallant conduct and devotion to duty in the field on 26th and 27th September 1916, at the capture of*

Thiepval.

The following list contains all those men from Castor and Ailsworth who enlisted during the First World War. Through

Barnes Charles	Gibbons Ernest	Hornsby George	Sharpe Cecil
Bass Cecil	Gibbons Ernest William	Hornsby Harold	Sharpe George
Buxton Bernard	Gibbons John	Hornsby Walter	Smith Arthur
Carter Frank	Goulding Frank	Jakes Alexander	Smith Percy
Chapman John	Griffin John	Jakes Arthur	Sismey Albert
Cliffe Arthur	Hankins George	Jakes Ernest	Sismey Percy
Cooke Alec	Harman Bernard	Jakes George	Taylor Charles
Coulson	Harman George	Jakes John Chapman	Taylor Walter
Coulson Walter	Hill Albert	Jakes Percy	Tranter Albert
Cox James	Hill Arthur	Jakes Reginald	Wadd
Cox William	Hill Cardinal	Longfoot H	Ward Amos
Crane (Arthur) Daniel	Hill Frank	Mossendew Albert	Ward James
Crane David	Hill Fred	Neville George	Warr Horace
Darby Charles	Hill Frederick	Newborn Percy	Warr William
Dudley George	Hill Walter	Nix Herbert	Wilkinson William
Ellis William	Hilton Leonard	Pank Hack Walter	Wood Frank
Garfield Samuel	Hobbs J	Parker Robert	Woodward Alfred
Gibbons Albert	Hornsby Ernest	Pearson Sidney	

the passage of time some names will inevitably have been omitted.

War Memorial – 1914-1918



*Fig 27a.1. William Cox
died 8 November 1914*



*Fig 27a.2. Daniel (Arthur)
Crane died 16 February 1916*



*Fig 27a.3. Percy George
Newborn died 23 May 1916*



*Fig 27a.4. Albert Hill
died 1 July 1916*

The following information details the service records of those men who gave their lives during the Great War.

1914

Private William Cox 12060

William, a native of Ailsworth was the first person from either village to be killed. He had two brothers who worked in Sutton and his father, a horse keeper, lived at Upton Lodge. William first worked for Mr Amos Brown, of York Cottage, Sutton, later getting a job in Thorney from where he enlisted. William was in the 2nd Battalion, Grenadier Guards and died on November 8th 1914, during the First Battle of Ypres, when a small British Expeditionary Force succeeded in securing the town, pushing the German forces back to the Passchendale Ridge. His name is listed on the Menin Gate Memorial at Ypres, Belgium.

1916

Private Daniel Crane 13899

Daniel (6th Battalion, Northamptonshire Regiment) was the first person from Castor to lose his life. He was the son of Mr and Mrs H Crane and was married with three children to whom he wrote almost daily. He worked for Mr Gordon Smith and was very well liked by all his workmates. Daniel was seriously wounded in the back while on active service in France, on January 28th. He was taken to the casualty clearing station, where he remained for nine days before being taken to the base hospital at Rouen where he died peacefully on February 16th 1916, aged 31. He was laid to rest, with



Fig 27a.5. John W Chapman
died 2 October 1916

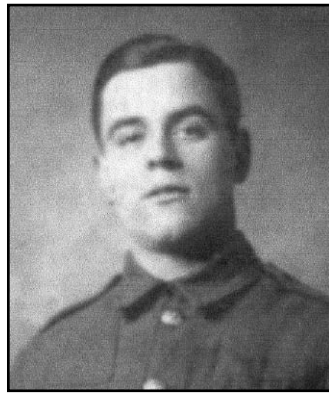


Fig 27a.6. Arthur Jakes
died 7 March 1917



Fig 27a.7. Samuel Garfield
died 23 July 1917

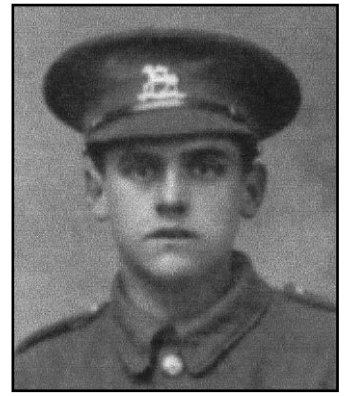


Fig 27a.8. Ernest Stuart Jakes
died 1 August 1917

full military honours, on February 17th in St. Ewen's cemetery, Rouen. The Chaplain spoke of 'Pte Crane's great courage and fortitude' and said that 'he was a great favourite with his comrades at the Front.'

Sergeant Percy George Newborn 679

Percy was the son of William and Eliza Newborn, of Castor. He joined the Mayor of Leeds' Battalion at the outbreak of war and served in Egypt for some time. He had been in France only a few weeks with the 15th Battalion, West Yorkshire Regiment and in charge of a machine gun section, when he was killed in action on May 23rd 1916, aged 31. He was buried in Gezaincourt Communal Cemetery Extension, in Somme.

Private Albert Hill 13202

Albert was the son of James and Elizabeth Hill of Castor and served in the 6th Battalion, Northamptonshire Regiment. 'He was always a very steady and promising young fellow and a great favourite with his brother soldiers.' He was killed in France on July 1st 1916, aged 24. He was laid to rest in Dantzig Alley British Cemetery, Mametz, Somme. There is a memorial stone for him in Castor churchyard.

Private John W Chapman 6127

John was the only son of William and Mary Chapman and lived at the Ferry, Milton Park. He worked for many years in the stables at Milton and 'was a general favourite both with Mr and Mrs Fitzwilliam and his fellow workers. He was of a most bright and amiable disposition and always had a pleasant smile and cheery word for everyone.' He served with the 23rd Battalion, London Regiment and was reported missing for some time before his parents received official confirmation that he had been killed in action on October 2nd 1916, aged 24. He was buried in Warlencourt British Cemetery, Pas de Calais, France and has a memorial stone in Castor churchyard.

1917

Private William Edward Warr 23532

William was the son of James and Elizabeth Warr of Ailsworth and served with the 2nd Battalion, Northamptonshire Regiment. His brother Horace joined the Royal Buckinghamshire Hussars, but was invalided home. William was anxious to take part in the Great War and one of his Officers spoke very highly of him. He was killed in action on March 4th 1917, aged 30, and his name appears on the Thiepval Memorial, Somme. A memorial service was held at St Kyneburgha's church on Sunday, March 18th, attended by a large number of friends. A memorial stone can be found in Castor churchyard.

Lance Corporal Arthur Jakes 16173

Arthur was one of five sons of John and Hannah Jakes of Church Hill, Castor, who joined up during the Great War. Before joining the army Arthur was a regular member of the Church choir, a communicant and attended the Rectory Bible class. He was a keen Scout and for many years worked hard training others. Arthur was in the 2nd Battalion, Northamptonshire Regiment and was seriously wounded in action on March 4th. He died in hospital in France on March 7th 1917, aged 22 and was laid to rest in Bray Military Cemetery, Somme. A memorial service for Arthur was held on Sunday, March 18th and a memorial stone for him can be found in Castor churchyard. On the War Memorial Arthur is listed as Corporal, but as Lance Corporal on information from the War Graves Commission.

Private Walter Leonard Hornsby 201715

Leonard was the son of Thomas and Sarah Hornsby of Castor. He was in the 1st/4th Battalion, Suffolk Regiment and was killed instantly while in France, on April 23rd 1917, aged 30. He was buried in the Cojeul British Cemetery, St.

Martin-Sur-Cojeul and has a memorial stone in Castor churchyard.

Gunner Samuel Garfield 86585

Samuel was the second son of Mrs Jane Garfield and the late Samuel Garfield of Ailsworth and before the war was employed at the Elastic Factory in Peterborough. He served with the 190th Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery and was killed in action in France, only a week after being discharged from hospital. He died on July 23rd 1917, aged 22 and was buried in the Achiet-le-Grand Communal Cemetery Extension, Pas de Calais. There is a stone in memory of Samuel in Castor churchyard where his age is given as 24.

Lance Corporal Ernest Stuart Jakes G/6907

Ernest was the youngest son of John and Hannah Jakes. *'He was a very quiet and amiable lad, and was very much liked by all who knew him.'* He belonged to the old Castor Scout troop and voluntarily joined the 11th Battalion, the Queen's (Royal West Surrey Regiment). He had been wounded some months before he was killed in action on the Somme, only 20 years old and just five months after his brother Arthur. His name appears on the Menin Gate memorial, Ypres. On his memorial stone in Castor churchyard his death is recorded as July 31st, but the Commonwealth War Graves Commission have the date as August 1st 1917.

Gunner Charles William Victor Taylor 146339

Charles joined the 112th Brigade, Royal Field Artillery and was the eldest son of Richard and Miriam Taylor of Malting House, Maffit Road, Ailsworth. After leaving school he was telegraph boy at Castor Post Office and was later promoted to Peterborough Post Office. He volunteered for the army on May 10th, 1916 and was stationed in the North of England and Scotland for part of that time. He was a staunch churchgoer, a member of Castor church choir and the Rectory Bible class. He also belonged to the Castor Scouts and was an agent for the Peterborough Standard for several years. He was killed on August 2nd 1917, aged 20 and was buried in the Menin Road South Cemetery, Ypres. A memorial service was held at Castor church where there is a stone in his memory in the churchyard.

1918

Rifleman William Ebden Wilkinson R/34448

William was the second son of Caroline and the late William Wilkinson of Allotment Lane, Castor, brother to Len, Charlotte, Mary and Edith. He was a member of Castor church choir and Brass Band, beginning his working life as a forester on the Fitzwilliam Estate. Later he became second forester to Lord Lansdowne, at Bowood House, Wiltshire and it was from here, in 1914, that he joined the 2nd Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps. In June 1916 he was wounded at Ypres and took part in the Battle of the Dunes, when he had to swim a river to save his own life. He had been on active service in France for nearly two years before he was killed by a shell, which fell at his feet, while he was standing at the door of his dug-out on June 7th 1918. He was buried aged 36, on June 8th in the Cambrin Military Cemetery, Pas de Calais and there is a memorial stone in Castor churchyard.

Private Arthur Henry Cliffe 49531

Arthur, the eldest son of Jacob and Annie Cliffe of Splash Lane, Castor joined the 6th Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment. He had only been in France a few months before he was killed on August 6th 1918. His name appears on the Pozieres Memorial, Somme. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission gives his age as 18, but the local newspaper states that he was 19 years old.



Fig 27a.9. Charles William Victor Taylor died 2 August



Fig 27a.10. Ernest William Gibbons died 15 October 1918



Fig 27a.11. William Ellis died 22 January 1919

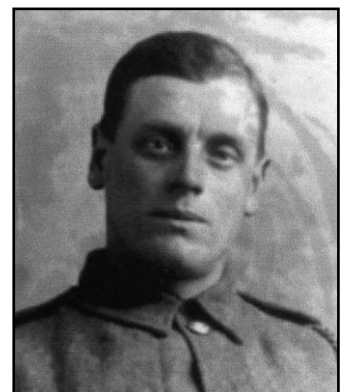


Fig 27a.12. Reginald Jakes died 2 July 1920

Corporal Ernest William Gibbons 850888

Ernest was the youngest son of John and Emma Gibbons, 52 Peterborough Road, Castor and joined the Peterborough Battery at the start of the war. He was in the Royal Field Artillery drafted first to India and later to Mesopotamia. His first job was as a footman at Milton Hall, later working in Chertsey, from where he joined up. His parents received a letter from his former employer expressing sympathy and saying *'what a good, faithful and trustworthy servant and friend she had lost.'* Ernest died of pneumonia, in Mesopotamia, on October 15th 1918, aged 29 and was buried in Basra War Cemetery, Iraq. A memorial service was held in Castor church and there is a memorial stone in the churchyard.

Private William Ellis 57239

William was the son of Charlotte and the late William Ellis of Ailsworth. He joined the 25th Balloon Section RAF in 1916 and was posted to France in 1917. He died suddenly on January 22nd 1919 aged 38 and is buried in St. Andre Communal Cemetery, Nord. There is a memorial stone in Castor churchyard. His mother received the following letter. *'Dear Mrs Ellis, I very much regret to confirm the sad news of the death of your son, No. 57239, Pte W. Ellis, RAF, 25th Kite Balloon Section. He was admitted two days ago suffering from heart affection. He was not complaining at all and seemed very well and comfortable. This afternoon he complained of a sharp pain at his heart. The Medical Officer saw him and ordered some remedies, but he grew rapidly worse and died quite suddenly at 6pm. He did not suffer long and died very peacefully. He left no message and spoke of no one at home. His personal effects will be sent to you later through the War Office. With very sincere sympathy, Yours truly, H.M. Ferguson. Sister.'*

Private Reginald Jakes

Reginald was the third son of John and Hannah Jakes to die as a result of the Great War. Before joining up he was a coachman for the Fitzwilliam family. He was in the Queen's Royal West Surrey Regiment and after being badly wounded in the head was sent back to a hospital in Chelsea. He never regained his sight and was invalided out of the army in 1917, going to St. Dunstons where he learned to read Braille. Later he married Mildred, but sadly died on July 2nd 1920, aged 36, having picked up an infection in his eye sockets and was laid to rest in Castor churchyard. Three months later their son, also Reginald, was born.

The Second World War

Ex-Servicemen from the village

Many are the experiences recalled by the village born ex-servicemen of Castor and Ailsworth who returned safely



Fig 27b.1. Jack Atkins



Fig 27b.2. Ernest Gibbons



Fig 27b.3. Reg Burton



Fig 27b.4. Harold Burton

having served their country during the Second World War. Nineteen men who joined up have very clear memories of that period in their lives, fighting battles in far off places, most of which were known previously only as names on the school atlas.

Royal Air Force

Ted Hilton

Ted is the son of Len and Mary Rolfe-Hilton late of Main Street, Ailsworth. A year after joining up he was posted to India – sailing from Gourock, Scotland – on the troopship *Maloja*. Destination was Bombay – then on to St Thomas Mount, Madras, and later to Colombo, Ceylon. Here a unit of the RAF Regiment was formed – which Ted did not take to, so he promptly volunteered for aircrew. He was posted to Palestine for training to join his future crew, flying Wellington Bombers. His next destination was Italy, bombing enemy territory in the North, Austria and Yugoslavia.

Leaving the Squadron in 1945 he was sent to Cornwall prior to being demobbed. Ted finished his Service as Flight Sergeant Air Gunner – with a total flying time of 344 hours. He comments on how much he enjoyed his time in the RAF and getting the opportunity to see places and people he would not have done otherwise.

Jack Smith

Jack, born 1920, is the son of Percy and Fanny Smith – formerly of Peterborough Road, Castor. After basic training he was attached to the RAF Police. His first posting was to Iceland, later returning to the UK having volunteered for aircrew. Flying Halifax Bombers, raids were made on major German cities, mine laying in the Oslo fiords, bombing Doodlebug sites along the French coast and the German held positions at Caen. After the D-Day landings, jerry cans filled with petrol were flown by the plane load, endless times, into Belgium. Jack was demobbed at Oxford in 1946. He married Kath in 1944 living on Martin's Farm at Haddon. She died in 1966 and 9 years later, he married Alice. They still live in the same house at Haddon and in the year 2000, celebrated their Silver Wedding.

Royal Navy

Reg Burton

Reg, second son of William and Maud Burton – late of Stocks Hill, Castor – was the only village born lad to serve in the Royal Navy. He joined at Chatham Barracks, took a trade test, and became an Engine Room Artificer. Three months later he boarded a troopship to Malta and joined HMS *Brixham* – a minesweeper. They carried out duties in the Mediterranean, notably clearing a minefield in the Straits of Boniface and took part in a landing operation close to Toulon. Eighteen months later Reg was transferred to a Cruiser – HMS *Delhi* – which was attacked in the harbour of Split, Yugoslavia by German E-boats. He also served on ships in the Far East – visiting Australia, New Zealand and Hong Kong. He remained with the *Delhi* until it returned to the UK, on the day peace was declared in 1945. Reg was finally demobbed in December 1946.

Army

Harold Burton

Harold, brother of Reg, served with the Irish Guards, stationed in the Home Counties, and witnessed intensive bombing raids in those areas. He was in the D-Day landings, wounded in heavy fighting at Caen, and sent home to a military hospital at Stoke-on-Trent where he met and married Nellie. Their home was in Ailsworth – later moving to the former home of his parents in Castor. They had two daughters – Dorothy and Rosalind.

Ernest Gibbons

Ernie – son of Jack and Ethel – of Peterborough Road Castor – now Carlton Court – was in the Reserves and called up in 1939 immediately war was declared – aged 20. He served with the Suffolk Regiment. His first posting was to Bury St. Edmunds, and later to Chipping Camden, where the battalion was merged with the Green Howards. Ernie was at Dunkirk on D-Day and after 48 hours leave, was refitted with equipment and uniform and sent to the Middle East. In June 1942 he was taken prisoner by Rommel and the Africa Corps, and sent to three different camps, finally arriving in Stalag 4F in Germany. Most of the time he worked in gangs relaying and repairing railways and similar jobs. He was demobbed in 1946 – working on Wade's Farm, Horrell's Dairies, and later Peterborough City Council until his retirement. In 1952 he married Phyllis (nee Cooper). They made their home in the City where they still live.

Harry Gibbons

Harry – son of Tom and Harriet Gibbons – late of High Street, Castor, joined up in 1940 and was posted to Special Z3 Radar Unit and later to 103 Infantry Brigade Workshops as Staff Sergeant. A week after D-Day the regiment landed in Normandy pushing on to Belgium and Holland helping to get the lads out of Arnhem. From here he was sent to Germany and based at barracks in Munster Lager, on the edge of Luneberg Heath, later moving to Berlin. Harry was



Fig 27b.5. Harry Gibbons



Fig 27b.6. Arthur Gibbons



Fig 27b.7. Richard Griffin



Fig 27b.8. Percy Griffin

demobbed in 1946 and rejoined his old firm of Rota-Electric, becoming Manager of a branch at Colchester and later, Company Director. He retired in 1979 to care for his wife (formerly Millie Oliver of Ailsworth) who later died. They had one son. Marrying again, he now lives in Torquay.

Arthur Gibbons

Arthur was the son of Albert and Ellen Gibbons – late of Peterborough Road, Castor. He joined the Army in 1939 serving with the Royal Engineers. He was stationed at Dover when the Battle of Britain was at its height but later sent to join the Eighth Army in the desert of North Africa and onwards into Italy with his unit. After the D-Day landings in France the regiment stayed in France until peace was declared. Arthur was always thankful to have returned safely – relatively unscathed – having been in many different theatres of war, all of which were in the thick of military action. A widower, he cared for his elderly mother until she died, afterwards living alone. He was a regular churchgoer, a faithful member of the Ex-Servicemen's Club and a good friend to many.

Richard Griffin

Dick – son of Jack and Ethel Griffin, late of Main Street, Ailsworth – joined the Royal Suffolk Regiment in 1942. A year later he was posted to Turkey and then to North Africa. In March 1944 he was sent to Tunis and in the June to Algiers. At the end of the same month he was in Italy and then on to Naples, followed by a posting to Gibraltar. Here he was promoted to Lance Corporal, serving with the Military Police until demob in 1946. On joining up Dick married Joan (nee Spademan from Woodnewton) in St. Mary's Church there. After demob he returned to work with Milton Estates, living in a Milton cottage in Church Hill, Castor, later moving to Great Gidding as Estate Manager. Here they brought up a family of seven girls, losing one of them – Elizabeth – while still a schoolgirl. Dick died in 1984 aged 64 years.

Percy Griffin

Percy – brother of Dick – was called up in the Army and was posted to Bury St Edmunds with the 49th Division Royal Engineers. After intensive training the regiment moved all over the British Isles, bridge building, mine laying, etc. He was in the invasion of France with the Second Front landing at Arromanches on D-Day plus One, pushing on through Belgium and Holland into Germany. During this time he was wounded twice, spending long periods in hospital. When demobbed at Aldershot he returned to Ailsworth in 1947. Two years later he married Ella (nee Wingrove) from Wansford where they made their home. They had two children – Jill and David.

Reginald Hill

Reg was the second son of the late Cardinal and Hilda Hill, Main Street, Ailsworth. He was called up in 1942, sent for training to Kimmel Park, North Wales, serving with the Royal Artillery Driver Training Unit. First posting was to the Orkneys – via Aberdeen. Here he joined the 19th Light Ack-Ack Regiment with their Bofor guns on Scapa Flow. Three weeks later – on Christmas Day – he was posted to the Isle of Wight stationed on Osborne Beach. One specific duty there was to give gun protection to the nearby Sanders Row Mosquito Aircraft Factory. Leaving the IOW, Reg was sent to London where gun emplacements were set up on the top of Canada House, Hyde Park and Green Park, their HQ being in Deans Yard, Westminster Abbey. From London the regiment moved to Haltwhistle, Northumberland for a tough six week battle course. From there his next move was to Doddington Park followed by another to Holyhead – Dawlish in Devon – and on to firing camp at Aberaeron, South Wales, for battle training with guns, and then to Pembroke. The Regiment left here for Sudbury and later returned to Wales. Next posting was to the Isle of Grain – giving gun protection to the Shell fuel tanks and the airfield at Biggin Hill. In June 1944 Reg was in the second wave of the D-Day landings at Arromanches, then on to Caen. Crossing the Seine at Elbeuf, a lot of German prisoners were taken, and again at Rouen, before moving off to Dieppe and Cassel. On again to the Ardennes and the Battle of the Bulge and on to Mardic, near Dunkirk, where sadly Reg saw his best friend killed as they were laying telephone cables



Fig 27b.9. Ted Hilton



Fig 27b.10. Reg Hill



Fig 27b.11. Alec Jakes



Fig 27b.12. Pam Jakes



Fig 27b.13. Peggy Nugent

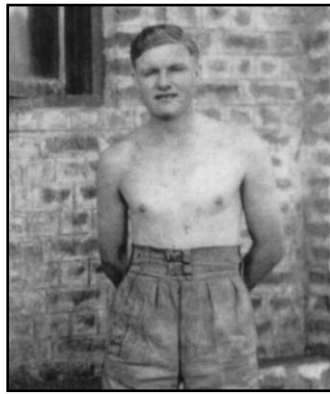


Fig 27b.14. Bill Pearson



Fig 27b.15. Geoff Sharpe



Fig 27b.16. Jack Smith

at Lune Plage. At the end of the War he was with the Army of Occupation in Schleswig Holstein, Eckenford, near the Danish border. His next job was transporting women and children refugees to Ludenscheid by road and later as guard on a boat taking them to Oslo. Demob was in 1947 and in 1948 Reg married Phyllis (nee Brawn) from Moulton, Northampton, having met her when she was working as a Land Girl for farmer Walter Longfoot. Their family home was Thorolds Way where Reg lived until his death in 2003. They had three children – Margaret, Colin and Wendy.

Edward Mortimer

Ted was the stepson of Alexander and son of Olivia Jakes – late of High Street, Castor. He joined the Grenadier Guards serving from 1939-1945. He was in the battle zone of North Apulco, Italy and Casino. After demob he worked as a charge hand on the railway. He later married a Castor girl – Adele (nee Longfoot) and lived in Peterborough. They had one daughter, Rachael.



Fig 27b.17. Ted Woodward

Alexander Jakes

Alec was the son of Alexander and Olivia Jakes – formerly of High Street, Castor. He volunteered for the Army in 1942 and was called up in February 1943, aged 19, joining the Royal Marine Commandos. Following training at Lympstone in Devon he was posted to Malta, spending some time in hospital having contracted sandfly fever. On recovery Alec was sent to a gun site in Sicily before returning home for training in preparation for the D-Day landings. Stationed in France, Belgium and Holland, he volunteered to join an advanced Commando Course based in Scotland where he received his 'Green Beret', having acquired the necessary qualifications. From there he was sent to India with the 42nd Marine Commandos to prepare for the relief of Singapore. This was aborted with the dropping of the Atom Bomb and the unit sent, as part of the army of occupation, to Hong Kong instead. On demob in 1946 he married Pamela (nee Baker) and they had two daughters – Lynne and Anne. In 1953 they moved into one of the newly built council houses in Thorolds Way where Alec lived until he died in 2003. He was widowed in 1999.

William Pearson

William is the son of the late Sidney and Charlotte Pearson formerly of Long Row, Peterborough Road, Castor. Bill joined the Northamptonshire Regiment in 1944 and after six weeks training at Britannia Barracks in Norwich was posted to the Old Barracks at Northampton. Later he received special training on mortar guns at Shrewsbury and also attended the Army Driving School, gaining experience on motor bikes, Bren gun carriers and tanks. After being posted in Sloane Square London for a time, the order was given for the unit to move to an aerodrome at Cambridge. Here they were crowded into converted Lancaster Bombers for a ten hour flight to the Middle East, finally arriving in Tripoli, North Africa. The next stop was Egypt being stationed near the Pyramids. On then to India, refuelling in Iraq and landing in Karachi on Bill's 21st Birthday. A train journey across India – involving ten days and nights travelling – took them to Fort St. George Barracks, Madras. He was later transferred to the Manchester Regiment, India Command, moving on to Poona and Bangaban. Intensive training was done on Vickers machine guns ready to attack the Japanese on the many islands they occupied. Thankfully for the troops, the Atom Bomb was dropped and ended the war. Bill's journey home began aboard the ship *Strathnavenda* leaving Bombay and sailing via the Suez Canal, the Mediterranean and the Bay of Biscay. After 16 days at sea they docked at Southampton. Bill was demobbed at Chester, arriving home in the early evening just in time to enjoy his mother's rabbit pie! In July 1947 he married Joan (nee Sismey) from Ailsworth at St Kyneburgha's Church. They had two sons – John and Richard. Sadly Richard died whilst still a schoolboy in 1969. In retirement they live in Silvester Road, Castor.

Geoffrey Sharpe

Geoff joined up in 1944 serving in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical, Engineers (REME). His first posting was to Fort St. George – second to Royal Arsenal, London, and third to Derby. Here he became a 3rd Class Armourer. His fourth move was to Tunbridge Wells and later back to Derby as 2nd Class Armourer, a job which entailed inspecting Arms for the whole of Southern England. From here Geoff was posted to Portland as Armourer to the Royal Artillery and promoted Sergeant before being demobbed in 1947. In 1945 he married Nora (nee Pearson). They lived in Sharpe's Yard, Ailsworth before moving to Glinton where they still live today. Geoff and Nora had two children – Patrick and Mary Anne.

Edward Woodward

Ted was the son of Alfred and Louise Woodward, late of Stocks Hill, Castor. Ted enlisted in 1944 as Apprentice Fitter with the Kings Royal Rifle Corps and was stationed in York. In 1945 he was posted to Tripoli and Palestine, then with the British Army on the Rhine until June 1952, returning home in August of that year. Following a period of leave and on the expiration of his service with the KRRC of almost 9 years, he was sent to the Army Reserves at Exeter – serving 3 years making a total of 12 in all. After demob Ted drove for Frank Taylor's Transport at Ailsworth, Read's Removals, Peterborough, and later for John Taylor's Haulage. In 1971 he married Nancy living in Peterborough Road, Castor until his death in 1994 aged 67 years.

Auxiliary Territorial Service.

Pamela Jakes (nee Baker)

Pam was the daughter of Charlie Baker, late of High Street, Castor, who was groom to Major Pelham of 'The Cedars'. She joined up in 1942 – in the Royal Signals – stationed at Beverley Barracks in Yorkshire. She was demobbed in 1945 and married Alec Jakes in 1946. They had two daughters – Lynne and Anne. Pam died in April 1999.

Peggy Nugent (nee Garfield)

Peggy is the daughter of Grace and Ernest Garfield – late of Main Street, Ailsworth. She joined up in January 1940, enlisted at Durham and was finally posted to the Duke of Wellington Barracks at Halifax. At the end of 1940 the Regiment were moved to barracks at Barnard Castle. The ATS became Number 6 Training Centre for permanent staff to train 1000 conscripted girls for their initial training – kitting them out with uniforms, doing drill, gas lectures, PT and route marches. In 1943 the centre closed and Peggy was posted to an Ack-Ack battery at Chesterton and later to Cambridge. She took her discharge in 1944 for family reasons and said – although wartime was so terrible – she had truly enjoyed her life in the forces.

Behind these memories is a record of just how far the men of Castor and Ailsworth travelled during those war years. Until now – beyond their own families – and often not then, little was known as to where they actually went; the European Continent, North Africa, Gibraltar, India, Egypt, Hong Kong, all the many theatres of war – the daily hazards encountered on land, sea and in the air. In retrospect, reaching and returning from such far flung destinations seems nothing short of a miracle. One common denominator among them all stands out, the great comradeship and friendship forged between themselves and their fellow men – something treasured – never to be forgotten.

War Memorial – 1939-1945



Fig 27c.1. Frederick William Thompson died 29 April 1943



Fig 27c.2. Maisie Rachel Hill died 23 October 1943



Fig 27c.3. Anthony Arthur Whittome died 23 April 1944

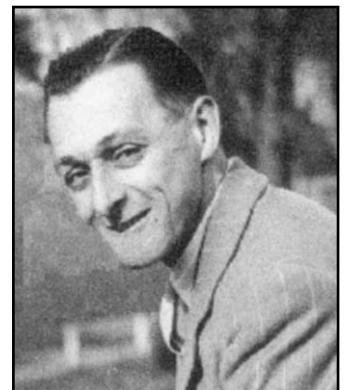


Fig 27c.4. Cyril Kingston died 14 August 1944

The following information details the service records of those men and women who gave their lives during the Second World War.

1943

Corporal Frederick William Thompson 5889128

Frederick was the son of George and Isabella Thompson, from East Jarrow and was born on January 7th 1916. He was married to Elizabeth and lived in Maffit Road, Ailsworth. Before leaving Jarrow Frederick was employed by Bilton Nurseries Ltd, moving to Castor to work for Goodyer's. He joined up with the 5th Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment at the outbreak of war and was killed on April 28th 1943, aged 27. His son Raymond was just one year old. He was buried in Thibar Seminary War Cemetery in Tunisia.

Gunner Thomas William Gibson 914882.

Thomas was the son of Laura and the late Thomas Gibson and husband of Alison. He came to live in Castor when his widowed mother married Charles Baker, who was groom for Major Pelham. His mother was the district nurse in Castor and the family lived in High Street. Thomas served as a Gunner in the Royal Artillery and was later attached to the 18th Indian Division. He was posted to Singapore and taken prisoner by the Japanese, later working on the Burma-Thailand railway. He died while in Japanese hands on June 30th 1943, aged 29 and was buried in Kanchanaburi War Cemetery, Thailand. A memorial stone can be found in Castor churchyard.

Private Maisie Rachel Hill W/113748.

Maisie was the only daughter of Cardinal and Hilda Hill, 49, Main Street, Ailsworth, sister to Stanley, Reginald and David. On leaving school Maisie first worked at Elton Hall and then in the accounts department of the London Brick Company before joining the ATS at the age of 17. She worked in the accounts department at Chilwell Barracks, Nottingham. Maisie was killed on October 23rd 1943 while travelling home from Nottingham on unexpected leave, she was 19 years old. Maisie was given a lift in a jeep at Wittering, by a sergeant in the American army, two minutes later it struck a stationary lorry and Maisie was killed instantly. Her brother, Reg, who was in the army, was given compassionate leave. The funeral service took place on October 27th, local residents saying they had never seen the church so full. Her coffin was draped with the Union Jack and she was buried in Castor churchyard where there were seventy-four wreaths. In the ATS Maisie was shortly to receive her first stripe as Lance Corporal. Her commanding officer said *'She was a remarkably fine girl, not only physically, but in her general character. She was of an amiable disposition, possessing many sterling qualities and she made friends wherever she went.'*

1944

Flight Sergeant Anthony Arthur Whittome 1324622

Tony was the eldest son of Arthur and Hilda Whittome of Thorney, living with his wife Freda, at Three Chimneys, Castor. He was a keen rugby player winning his King's School colours and also playing for Peterborough Town. He was in the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve and spent a year in Canada training for his wings. He had been in the RAF for about two and a half years when he was killed, while on active service, on April 23rd 1944, aged 29. His funeral service took place at Thorney Abbey, where he is buried in the churchyard. His coffin was draped with the Union Jack and was carried by six members of the RAF. On his gravestone it states that he was killed by enemy action while on duty.

Private William Cyril Kingston 14601247

William, known as Cyril, was the second son of Ethel and the late William Kingston and was born in Church Hill, Castor. He had two brothers and five sisters and attended the Fitzwilliam School in Castor. Later he went to Peterborough Technical School, learning the trade of carpenter/joiner. He sang in the church choir and was a talented sportsman, playing football for Castor and Ailsworth and the Post Office Engineers and was also vice captain of Milton Park cricket club. During the Second World War he was first called up to help repair damage to airfields and then for active service on May 6th 1943. He was with the 2nd Battalion, Royal Warwickshire Regiment before he was killed on August 14th 1944, aged 36. He was buried in Bayeux War Cemetery, Calvados and there is a memorial stone in Castor churchyard. A memorial service was held at Castor church when a pair of standard oak candlesticks for the altar, given by his mother, were consecrated.

1945

Aircraftman Jack Atkins 1185673

Jack was the son of Irene Atkins and Bob Gibbons of Stocks Hill, Castor and was married with one daughter, Ann. Before their marriage his wife worked for Major Pelham



Fig 27c.5. Jack Atkins died 8 October 1945

and Jack was a driver for Taylor Brothers, starting work there in 1937. He served with the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve in North Africa, where he contracted severe dysentery. He was invalided out of the RAF in 1943 and died in Roehampton hospital on October 8th 1945, aged 25. He is buried in St Kyneburgha's churchyard, his headstone was erected by the War Graves Commission.

Castor and Ailsworth Home Guard

Castor and Ailsworth Home Guard formed a company from the two villages, comprising 34 men. Those exempt from National Service, being in reserved occupations, were officially 'called up'. The remainder were volunteers, some above the age limit and others retired. Most of them took the job as a duty to be done, and others more seriously, becoming well trained in many aspects of Army life.

Castor and Ailsworth were officially a Platoon of the Old Soke of Peterborough – 2nd Battalion of the Northants. Regiment, the 1st Battalion was Peterborough City, whose Chief was Colonel Crowden. Officers in charge of Castor and Ailsworth were Colonel Mellows (Chief), Major Percival (Company Commander), Platoon Chief (Mr. Shorrocks) and his Deputy (Mr. John Cooper) who, with his wife, owned the Grocery Shop and Post Office at No. 12 Church Hill. Len Hilton – Ailsworth – was Sergeant Major – strict and very smart on parade! Sergeants were Sam Catmull – village blacksmith and Harry Brewin. The youngest in the Platoon was 16 year old William Pearson (Bill) who joined in 1941. His father had been a Sergeant in the regular Army and also in the Great War. Being very keen, Bill trained hard, and was soon promoted to Sergeant and so became the youngest in the Battalion as well as the Platoon.

The old Village Hall was used for twice weekly training when a regular Army Sergeant attended, giving advice on guns, drill etc. Occasionally, weekends were spent at Uffington Park, near Stamford, training with the Regulars. Once platoon sergeants were given a month's training in an army camp at Dorking in Surrey.

Every fourth night Castor and Ailsworth Platoon took a turn guarding the Bridge over the Nene at Wansford – considered a vital link for keeping lorry convoys moving along the A1. The men slept in a room at the Cross Key's pub in Wansford, changing guard every two hours through the night. One man was stationed at each end of the Bridge, his first duty being to inspect beneath the arches checking if explosives had been placed there during the day. Both men had to challenge any person approaching the bridge during the night. When their shift finished it was home and get ready for the day's work ahead.

Other members of the platoon would be on night time duty - according to the rota - stationed at the top of Loves Hill. Two would also be based in the garden of 'Thornfields' - the home at that time of the Paten family. It overlooked the whole of the Nene Valley from Castor Mill to Milton Ferry. An observation post was concerned with the possibility of German parachutists landing in the area, having followed the line of the river! Should this have happened, an instant alert was to be sent

to the HQ in Peterborough heralding an imminent invasion. Following advice received from the Ministry of Defence, nationwide, all kinds of obstructions were to be placed at entrances and exits to every village in case of invasion by German tanks. Ancient farm carts, old tractors, ploughs etc, long past their sell-by date, stood in

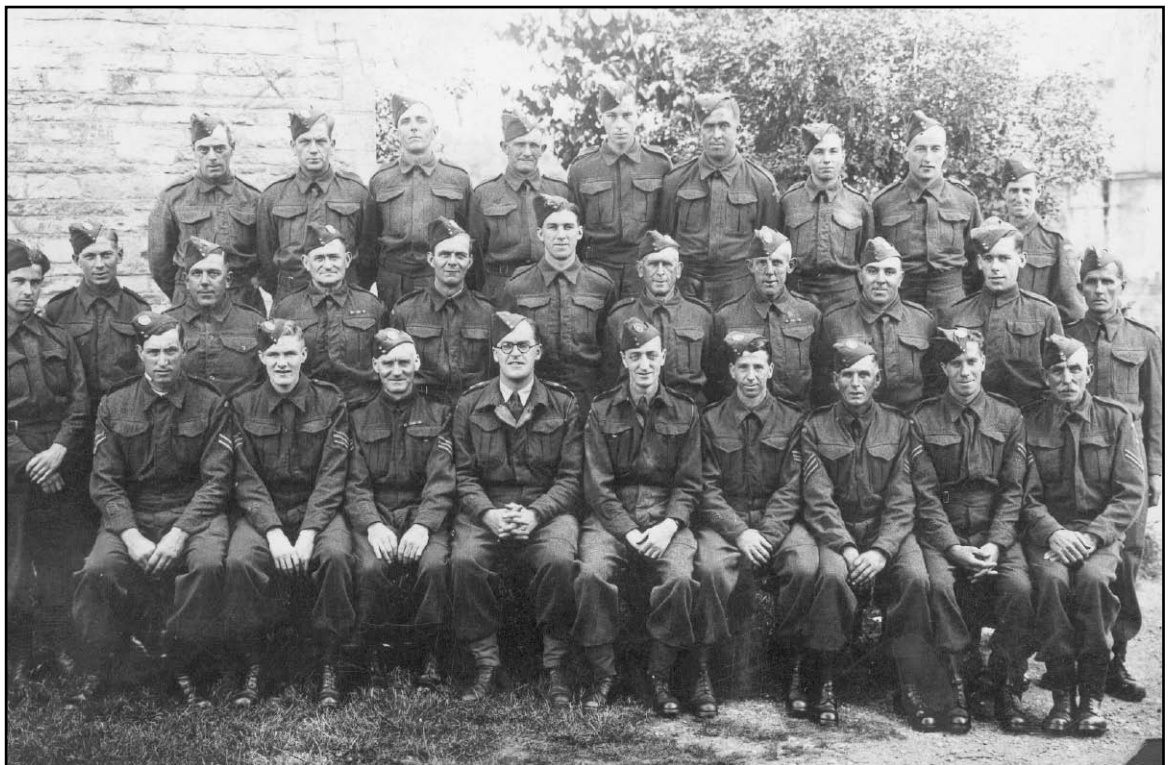


Fig 27d. Castor and Ailsworth Home Guard 1943.

readiness – again on the brow of Loves Hill, Marholm Road Hill, Chapel Lane Hill, Ailsworth, Station Road and the A47 to Wansford. Faced with the might of an enemy tank corps the ‘push-over’ would have been swift to say the least!

Several ‘Dads’ Army’ anecdotes have become part of village folk law. One relates to 18 year old Reg Hill who reported late for duty one night when he should have been on ‘parachute’ parade on Loves Hill. Reg’s day job was long distance lorry driving for Frank Taylor’s Haulage at Ailsworth. Having been on the road to and from Glasgow (top speed 28 m.p.h.) for almost 2 ½ days he arrived home at midnight. Falling into a deep sleep he failed to hear his alarm – set for 2am – and the start of Home Guard shift. Rousing an hour later he noted the time with dismay. Flinging on his clothes he grabbed his bike and pedalled furiously to his post. Reporting to his Officer (forced to cover for him), before he could apologise, he was greeted by *“What time do you call this Hill?”* Short of sleep, tempers flared and Reg was put on a charge of insubordination. The court martial took place at the HQ in the Royal Oak yard before all the ‘top brass’ from Peterborough and resulted in a Dishonourable Discharge! On reflection, Reg thought he had come off lightly and quickly repaired to the Royal Oak bar for a pint and a peaceful game of dominoes! Later he received a demand to hand in all uniform and equipment at once, which was done with tongue in cheek, as he had only ever been issued with an armband! Three weeks later he was in the Royal Artillery, serving for five years, having been at Dunkirk, France and Germany.

Bill Pearson recalls a particular training night when the Platoon Officer ordered him to take some men down to Castor Mill with their rifles at the ready. The Home Guard was acting on a report received that six Italian prisoners had escaped and were making their way along the riverside. Instructions were to hide in the Mill House garden and endeavour to capture them unharmed. Hidden in the bushes – and not feeling too brave – the silence of the dark night was suddenly shattered by geese, shut up in a nearby shed, setting up an unholy racket, adding to the tension! At the same time the men were alerted by a group of men making their way along the path in their direction. Bill gave the order to jump as they moved nearer and they were quickly downed with some force! Immediately an officer spoke, shone a torch and said *“Well done lads”*. It was a set-up test – passed with flying colours. Luckily no one was ‘trigger-happy’ that night.

Tom Cooke, younger son of the late Alec Cooke, was 11 years old in 1939. He recalls a Home Guard incident. At the time manoeuvres, in and around the villages, were a source of much curiosity and amusement for the youngsters. They followed them everywhere possible! Lots of training practice took place in the area of the Winfrey’s wood on the brow of Loves Hill. Tom remembers the local army cadets acting as the enemy there once and when the Home Guard arrived no cadets could be seen. They had earlier shinned up the overhanging trees and a bombardment took place, thunder flashes raining down from above as the men marched along! No doubt havoc ensued – good entertainment for the spectators – with the ‘enemy’ proclaiming victory.

In hindsight, the Home Guard did a very worthwhile job, giving a sense of security within the community. There were

The Castor and Ailsworth Home Guard Company

Officers:

Major Percival
(Company Commander)
Mr. Shorrocks
(Platoon Chief)
Mr John Cooper
(Second To Chief)
Sergeant Major: Len Hilton

Sergeants:

Sam Catmull
(Village Blacksmith)
Bill Pearson
Harry Brewin
(Builder)

Members:

Bill Ashton
(Gardener for Winfrey Family)
Bill Bailey
Harry Coulson
(Carpenter)
Bill Capon
Jack Darby
(Farmer)
George Darby
(Farmer)
Gilbert Gibbons
(Threshing Machinist)
Reg Hill
(Haulage Driver)
Stan Hill
(Farm Hand)
Arthur Hill
John Harker
Harry Hill
Herbert Jackson

Eric Kingston
Jock McIlish
Doug Oliver
(Dairyman)
Bert Pell
Jack Pell
Bob Peppercorn
Sid Sharpe
Cecil Taylor
(Haulage)
Ernie Venters
Alf Wade
(Farmer)
Tom Woods
Charlie Ward
Ernie Ward
(Tailor and Postman)
Albert Wyldbore
(Railway Man)

many young mothers and widows alone in their homes, with men-folk in the forces, and most of them abroad. The threat of invasion was very real at the time and although many people did not always take them seriously, the rules – as laid down by the Wartime Government – were carried out in a well regulated manner of which they could be justifiably proud.

(With acknowledgement to Tom Cook, Reg Hill and Bill Pearson for their help and factual details) Joan Marriott. June 2003.

Women's Land Army.

During the Second World War many 'girls' came to Castor and Ailsworth to work on the farms replacing the men who were serving with the Armed Forces. They helped with the ploughing, harvesting and with milking the cows. Some of these girls married local men and made their homes here including, Phyllis Hill, Joyce Herbert, Ellen Longfoot, Mary Neal and Kathleen Oliver.

Ailsworth and District Ex-Servicemen's Club.

The idea of starting a club for ex-servicemen was first thought of in 1935 after the Armistice parade by S Pearson, A Woodward and T Smith. They had marched to church behind men who had never served in the Forces and being serving soldiers decided to do something about it. A meeting was held at the Barley Mow on February 8th 1936, which was very well attended. *'There were many heated discussions and a vote was taken. Eleven voted for the club, five voted against and many dare not vote at all.'* The first meeting was held on February 22nd 1936 when officers were elected. Chairman S Pearson, Vice Chairman A Jakes, Hon Secretary G Hudson, Association Secretary C Bass, Hon Treasurer G Sharpe. The Committee consisted of L Hilton, W Fitzjohn, A Woodward, G Dudley, F Goulding and G Wilkinson. The rules of the club were, *'Members going against the rules of the club be dismissed, all medals to be worn on parade and that any member being a teetotaller need not break his promise.'* Over the years annual dinners and concerts were held until the club was disbanded in 1976.

Evacuees.

At the beginning of the Second World War a group of children, from Islington, North London, along with two teachers, were evacuated to the villages. On arrival they went to the village hall where local residents took the children to live with them. Irene and Betty Mann along with Julia and Irene Foster went to live at the shop on Castor Green, with Mrs Fox and her daughter Hilda. Irene and Betty's brother, David, went to live with the village policeman, Mr Trundle. The evacuees went to school in the Reading Room, while village children went to the Fitzwilliam School. Irene (Woodward) and Betty (Want) were here for just over a year, but eventually came back and married local men, still living here today.

Joan Mary Marriott (née Nix)

Including myself, I am at least the fourth generation on both sides of my family to have been born in Castor and lived here all our lives. My parents were Herbert and Mabel Nix (nee Jakes). They lived in the East cottage of three, converted from Castor's first Rectory (built in 1631), where I was born in 1923. I was married in 1949 and in 1957 moved with my husband and two year old son Geoff, to Thorold's Way Castor and in July that year our daughter Julie was born. I was widowed in 1988 and am presently living at the same address.

Margaret Rachel Brown (née Hill)

The Hill family has lived in Castor and Ailsworth for many generations and I was born in Main Street Ailsworth. My mother (Phyllis) and father (Reg) were married in 1948 after my mother came to work in Castor in the Women's Land Army. I have been involved with the church choir, the Sunday School, the Brownies, Girl Guides, Tennis Club and Bellringers, being Tower Captain at one time. I teach in the Peterborough area and live in Castor with my husband, Colin, and our sons Simon and Christopher.

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