

# DOWN MEMORY LANE

## Stewkley on the Home Front in World War II

### Attention.... Stewkley on Invasion Alert 1941!

A recent visit to Buckinghamshire Archives turned up the minute book of Stewkley Local Defence Committee, locally termed the 'Stewkley Invasion Committee', set up at the time by Winslow Rural District Council. The minute book was deposited in the County Archives, PR193/29/9, on 12 May 1964 by Stewkley Parish Council. The parish committees were to represent the civil power in an emergency and their duties included organising reserves of food and compiling 'war books' in which local resources in manpower and material were recorded.

The Stewkley committee's inaugural meeting took place on 29 September 1941 at Tythe House, the home of the Earl of Orkney, when his lordship proposed Mr E Faulkner as chair (Lord Orkney was elected vice-chair) with Mr Thomas Mead as secretary. The first committee was augmented by the formidable team of Miss Eleanor Johnson, Mrs Alice Beasley, Mrs Katherine Horsley, Mrs Judd and Mr Frank Mayne.

The meeting highlighted to Winslow RDC the urgent need for emergency stocks of fuel and food to be stored in the village, the food supplies to be kept at Tythe House. 210 tons of coal and 500 gallons of paraffin were requested together with adequate supplies of food. (The fuel was still not forthcoming by the April 1942 meeting.) Other early matters discussed were the provision of a mortuary, an emergency fire pump, emergency water supplies, volunteer labour squads, and horse-drawn transport. Later committee meetings were planned to take place in the Village School. The minute book records 14 wartime meetings. The Village Hall had already been requisitioned by the Red Cross as headquarters and a homeless shelter, with the Billiard Room as casualty clearing station. As they were close to bakehouses, the two Methodist School Rooms were designated as emergency communal cooking and feeding stations.

The following meeting on 28 April 1942 was attended by Major Morton, the senior military officer for the district. He demanded that a village defence plan be put into operation at once and a public meeting was called for 22 May in Stewkley School to put the village on alert.

Morton explained that in the event of a hostile invasion, Stewkley

itself was of little value to the enemy, but that the road (today's B4032) through the village was of great importance and that it would become necessary to harass the movements of enemy forces. He appealed for villagers' co-operation with the home defence forces in the defence plan. He urged villagers who were not in essential services to stay indoors and to not obstruct roads which might hamper British forces and could assist the enemy.

The plan for village defence was to be centred on a central point or keep, designated as The Old Swan Inn. This was to be sand-bagged and trenches dug all around.



*The Old Swan Inn- the Keep*

80 additional Home Guard soldiers were to be trained as part of the plan. At the North End, trenches were to be dug at the Bletchley Road junction. Mr Thomas Heley's home, Bleak House, and the White Horse Inn were to be occupied by Home Guard and designated best to defend the road into Stewkley from the north. Mr Bill Grace's loft was requisitioned to defend the Soulbury Road village entrance, and at the South End, trenches would be dug either side of Wing Road with the upstairs of Mr Joe Carter's home designated a firing point with a clear field of fire to the south. On Dunton Road, the existing roadblock would be strengthened, and Mr Randall's cottage would be

'loopholed' for small arms. If the enemy drove back the village defenders, they would fall back on The Swan blockhaus which would be defended to the last.

Major Morton stressed the importance of holding a rehearsal of the plan so that on 'action stations', everyone knew what to do and where to report.

The supply of water and sanitation naturally preoccupied lots of local folks. Although mains water came through Stewkley in 1941, in the event of disruption to supply it would be necessary to revert to the remaining village pumps and wells, as



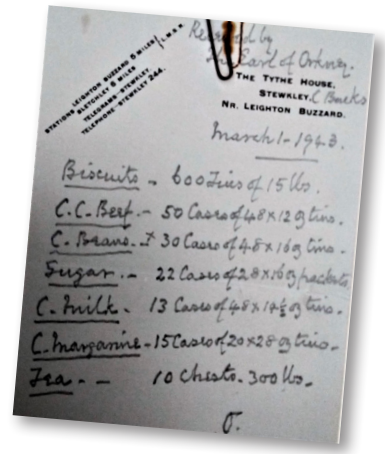
*Buckinghamshire Battalion Home Guard 1942*



The Bleak House blockhaus guarding the North End

ponds would soon run dry in summer. Emergency stocks of toilet paper were purchased, and emergency latrines were to be dug by volunteer labour.

The last recorded committee meeting was minuted on 18 October 1943 when the Ministry of Home Security had suggested that activities could be reduced in view of the changing war situation, although the 'need to remain in readiness to function as required' was stressed. A provisional date of 14 November 1943 was agreed for the next meeting, but the need, clearly and thankfully, did not arise.



Wartime invasion emergency stores at Tythe House 1943