

HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING AT WAR

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Memories of a town's war

New section is launched on website

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WARTIME memories from one North town have been put online to mark the 70th anniversary of the start of the Second World War.

The site contains a growing collection of rare memories and information about life in Houghton-le-Spring between 1939-45.

Paul Lanagan, 28, a local historian who has published books on the history of Houghton, said: "The Houghton Heritage website has been online for a couple of years now and has a growing collection of rare photos, articles and memories, but I am particularly pleased to launch the World War Two section. I have always been interested in the Home Front and it was fascinating to discover what the people of Houghton went through.

"I focused on what the town was like during the war. These memories will be of interest to lots of people. It will be really great for young kids to see what the world was like back then.

"Things are just so different today, it is hard for them to imagine life during war."

Among the memories on the site is that of 80-year-old Harry Smith, who was 10 years old in 1939.

He talks of remembering the older teenagers in Houghton leaving to fight: "We watched them walk away up the street in their brand new khaki and kit, never dreaming that it would be five years before we saw them again."

Mr Smith, who now lives in Middlesbrough, has contributed lengthy memories of life in wartime Houghton, including what the air raid precautions undertaken at Newbottle Street School:

"A board was stuck in the ground near

the school entrance, and had special paint on it which would change colour if there was any gas about. Naturally, like most of the others, I didn't take my eyes off it for three weeks, and in class from wanting to sit beside the exit, now everyone wanted to sit by the windows!

"We soon as got back to normal, until one day a lad had been to the toilets (which were of course outside) came back running through the school, still holding up his pants, screaming at the top of his voice "Sir! Sir! It's gone green, it's gone green!"

"Pandemonium and any gasmask will do! However, when it was sorted it was found the lad had got himself a load of plums and scoffed them the night before. It was his poo that had gone green!"

Other memories on the website show that life during the war was not all doom and gloom.

Joan Lambton, who was four years old when war broke out, remembers going to the shop and asking for eggs with shells on. And five-year-old Richard Wilson remembers rushing to Houghton Market Place with his friends to see a banana for the first time.

To look at more of these memories, go to <http://www.houghtonheritage.co.uk/worldwar2>

“Naturally, like most of the others, I didn't take my eyes off the board for three weeks



LOOKING BACK Paul Lanagan and his website on Houghton's history.

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VILLAGE LIFE: New Market buildings, Houghton and, right, a Remembrance Service is held to remember Houghton's fallen war heroes in November 1956.

Stories of a village at war



OLD SCENE: Church Street, Houghton

HOUGHTON historian Paul Lanagan is marking this month's 70th anniversary of the start of the Second World War with a special project.

The 28-year-old author, who has published several books on the history of Houghton, has just added a new section to the village's heritage website.

Memories, photographs and information on Houghton during the war have been included in the section, and the collection is growing all the time.

"The Houghton heritage website has been online for a couple of years now, but I am particularly pleased to launch the World War Two section," said Paul.

"I have always been interested in the Home Front, and it was fascinating to discover what the people of Houghton went through."

Among the memories included on the site are those of Harry Smith, 80, who was just 10 when Houghton's oldest teenagers left the village to fight.

"We watched them walk away up the street in their brand new khaki and kit, never dreaming that it would be five years before we saw them again," he said.

Harry, who now lives in

Memories of wartime Houghton are now available to view around the world at the click of a button. We take a closer look.

Wearside Echoes
with Sarah Stoner



Middlesbrough, has also contributed memories on other aspects of wartime life too, including air raid precautions at Newbottle Street School.

"A board was stuck in the ground near the school entrance, and had special paint on it which would change colour if there were any gas about," he recalls.

"Naturally, like most others, I didn't take my eyes off it for weeks and, from wanting to sit beside the exit in class, now everyone wanted to sit by the windows!"

"We soon got back to normal though, until one day a lad who had been to the toilet came back running, still holding up his pants, screaming 'Sir! Sir! It's gone green.'"

Pandemonium followed the young boy's shouts, as pupils scrambled to pull Government-issue gasmasks from their boxes.

"However, when it was sorted, it was found the lad had got himself a load of plums and scooped them the night before. It was his poo that had gone green!" said Harry.

Harry believes Houghton "got off fairly lightly" as far as air raids - with most war damage being done by shrapnel from British guns landing on roofs.

But the sound of the air raid siren still resonates in Harry's memories, as the Luftwaffe carried out raid after raid over Sunderland, Hetton and East Durham.

"I don't think I've ever heard a more horrible sound than those sirens warning of the impending raids."

"The most beautiful sound was

when they blew the all-clear," he said.

The teenagers Harry had watched heading off for war all returned once peace was declared - unlike the thousands who were killed on land, at sea and in the air.

"Some had been on the other side of the world; some had been prisoners of war in Germany. But they came home safe, thank God," he said.

Other memories on the website show how life during the war was not all doom and gloom, and that there were some laughs to be had during the hard times.

Joan Lambton, who was four years old when war broke out, recalls on the website how she went to the shop and asked for eggs with shells on," said Paul.

"This was the talk of Houghton for weeks and, of course, helped to lighten the burden of food rationing."

"Another memory, from Richard Wilson, recalls how he rushed to Houghton Market Place with his friends to see a banana for the first time. He was five at the time, and the fact that a seaman also had a monkey there paled in comparison to the glimpse of such a rare fruit."

● These memories, and many more, can be found by logging on to: <http://www.houghtonheritage.co.uk/worldwar2>

Retro

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Next edition out Monday, Sept 21

But what did it mean for you? Share your memories and pictures with us in our nostalgia supplement Retro. Write to Retro, Features Dept, Sunderland Echo, Pennywell, Sunderland SR4 9ER, or email echo.features@northeast-press.co.uk.

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The Sunderland Echo, September 19th 2009



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A small Home Front stall was erected in the Broadway to commemorate the 70th anniversary of WWII at Houghton Feast 2009.



The exhibition, at Houghton Feast 2009, featured many period household items.

