

World War 11

When the British Government declared war against Germany in September 1939, notices went out to many people requiring them to report to recruiting centres for assessment of their fitness to serve in the armed forces. Many deaf men went; and many were rejected and received their discharge papers. Two discharge certificates are shown, both issued to Herbert Colville of Hove, Sussex.

NATIONAL SERVICE (ARMED FORCES) ACT, 1939

After examination by all the members of the Medical Board assembled at
The Deaf Men's Hall 118 Sussex St Brighton
on 8 July 1940 it is unanimously agreed that the man stating
himself to be Herbert Colville
residing at Courtyard Hotel, The Drive, Hove
and described on his Medical Examination Record as suffering from
Deafness & Amblyopia
is in consequence permanently incapable of being placed in Grades I, II, IIA or III.

Names of members of the Medical Board.

Dr. Gowers
Dr. Goss
Dr. Soden
Dr. Snell

[Signature]
Signature of Chairman.

Date 8 July 1940

N.S. 66.
(5688-4478) WL 1702-1188 75,000 6/40 T.S. 677

NATIONAL SERVICE (ARMED FORCES) ACT, 1939.

MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND NATIONAL SERVICE,
Employment Exchange,
39 DYKE ROAD, BRIGHTON

Date 10 JUL 1940

To Mr. Herbert Colville
Courtyard Hotel, The Drive.
Hove. 3.

Registration No. BKW. 9521.

DEAR SIR,

I have to inform you that notification has been received that you have been medically examined and found to be permanently incapable of being placed in medical Grades I, II, IIA or III. You will, therefore, not be liable for service under the National Service (Armed Forces) Act, 1939.

Yours faithfully,
[Signature]
Manager.

N.S. 67.
(5687) WL 1702-1188 75,000 6/40 T.S. 671
(5710-4478) WL 1802-1188 75,000 6/40 T.S. 677

With many men called up, Britain was soon in dire need of workers not only to contribute towards the war but to replace men called up by the armed forces. Many willing and able hands were found in the form of Deaf workers. While many workers continued in their employment during the war, there were many others who were requisitioned under Essential Works Orders (EWO) and instructed to report to factories elsewhere to **carry** out work essential to the war. Deaf females had to do ammunition work, as well as welding and heavy riveting work in armoury divisions along with males. Deaf women were generally so impressive in their war work that they were in much demand. Some Deaf ladies were called to the Land Army. Carpenters were also in great demand and they were posted all over Britain, in particular in naval yards where new ships were being fitted out and existing ships altered for the war. Deaf tailors and seamstresses were kept busy making not only uniforms and clothing materials essential for the war, but utility clothes that were cheaply bought during the war. Farms and poultry farms were other places to which Deaf people were posted for the product of essential food supplies. Once an EWO had been issued instructing a Deaf person to do a particular job, there was no refusing it. One Deaf carpenter had to go into a factory making candles and soap for the forces until the war was over. Another Deaf man, who was a tailor, was ordered to work as an aircraft fitter. He had to do shift work, and even when the air raid sirens were sounding, he was forbidden to stop and had to continue working.

A very large number of Deaf people were trained and engaged to do some professional and supervisory tasks, mainly as air raid wardens (**ARPs**), firewatchers, casualty and decontamination workers and were also in rescue teams.

The situation in Britain during the Second World War was different to that of the First War in that warfare technology had made great leaps during the intervening years. Warplanes were faster and more powerful than biplanes - there were single winged speed terrors and massive flying fortresses capable of dropping huge bombs that would destroy not one house, but twenty or so per drop. A state of highest alert was on at almost all times and air raid sirens frequently blared out. For the Deaf, they had to keep their eyes open and make a dash for the safety of air raid shelters the moment all hearing people made for, even though not all air raid shelters were safe. There was a Deaf couple with six children. One day the air raid sirens went and the couple were notified by neighbours of the situation. The father for some unknown reason decided to head for his house with all his six children, but his wife went for the shelter which was destroyed when a Nazi bomb hit it.

Blackouts and the Sentry System

Blackouts and the dreaded sentry system were put into force in Britain during the war. Blackouts were necessary to prevent the enemy on night time bombing missions spotting targets by picking out lights on the streets or from the houses. Casualties among the Deaf during the blackouts and sentry system were quite alarming and a short account of selected events occurring in **1941** and **1942** illustrate this.

1941

A **65** years old Leeds Deaf man, Patrick Cosgrove, a former pupil at St. John's, Boston Spa, died on January **19** after he was knocked down by a tram during the blackout on January **15**. He was unconscious for four days before he died.

A Deaf man, Henry Holland, had to be rushed to hospital when local Stockport Corporation bus knocked him out during the blackout as he was returning home from work. He was pronounced dead on arrival.

On December 23 Alfred Powe was walking with a group of Deaf men on a ship during a blackout when he fell nearly 40 feet down into the hold of the ship. Powe survived the fall but suffered spinal injuries.

1942

A 56 years old Deaf electrician from Gillingham (Kent) named Thomas Sidney Pearce went out in the darkness to post a letter near a sentry post in Southport. The sentry spotted him and challenged him thrice to stop, but Pearce continued to walk towards the letterbox, whereupon the sentry fired. Severely wounded, Pearce was rushed to Southport hospital where he died 24 hours later.

In Wakefield Martin Dalton, a Deaf man, was knocked down during the blackout by a Special Police car. He was rushed to hospital, but never regained consciousness and died four days later.

In Rye in Sussex, the famous Deaf artist, A. R. Thomson, RA (right), was making his way home after visiting his friend Lord Davenport. Walking past a sentry point near an army encampment, Thomson did not hear the sentry calling him thrice to halt three times. The sentry fired and Thomson went down. He was shot in the shoulder. Thomson clutched his shoulder and staggered up while the sentry came running with his bayonet aiming for his stomach. Thomson gesticulated by pointing to his ear and shouting "Deaf!" whereupon the sentry halted and lowered his rifle. The shot alerted the commanding officer who came in a car. When they found out who Thomson was, the soldiers were very apologetic and drove him to hospital. Thomson was discharged from hospital two days later with the bullet still in his arm. The surgeon had told him he would be paralysed if the bullet was removed.



Two Deaf men were walking home along the Woolwich Tunnel footpath during the blackout, communicating with each other in sign language. The sentries patrolling the area spotted them. Despite the fact that the two Deaf men were using their hands and arms for communication the sentries could not perceive the movement and they called out for them to halt, and they called out twice more, but to no avail. Volleys of shots rang out and down went the two Deaf men. They were both seriously wounded but survived the terrible event.

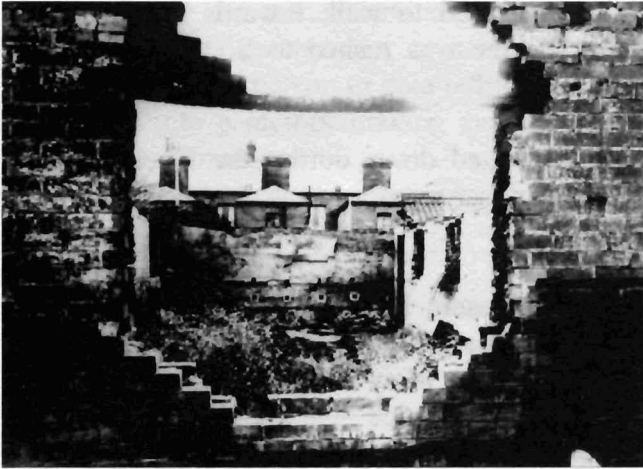
The imposition of strict blackout regulations severely disrupted the adult Deaf Club activities and many were forced to cancel long-arranged social events and to re-arrange social club hours. The circumstantial dangers to the Deaf were not restricted to the blackout and the sentry system. In Britain almost everyone was seemingly a suspect first and foremost until proven otherwise. This is illustrated by two examples out of numerous actual events:

1. In Warrington, a Deaf man decided to pay a visit to a relative he had not seen for

some time, and set off to cycle there. Unfortunately all road signposts having been removed, he soon lost his way and had to ask someone for directions. **Because** of his speech impediment he was mistaken for a German spy and was arrested. He spent some uncomfortable hours in custody before being released.

2. In Manchester a Deaf tramp, who had roamed the country for nine years, was arrested as a spy because he had 55 Ordnance Survey maps in his possession as well as two compasses and twenty crisp £1 notes. He was eventually released.

The greatest danger to the Deaf came from the air: falling bombs and debris from shot-up planes. A number of Deaf people, including children, lost their lives during air raids by German warplanes, including a family of eight killed when a bomb scored a direct



Southampton Deaf Centre after being bombed



St. Bede's, Clapham before the bombing



St. Bede's after the bombing

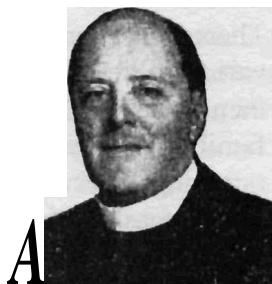
hit on their dugout. In the Tyneside area, one huge bomb hit and blew up a small, humble public convenience that contained an elderly Deaf man who had gone in and sat down in answer to the call of nature.

Although a number of Deaf people, especially in London, Coventry and Southampton, lost their homes, Deaf institutes, churches and schools seem to have received more damage. Deaf centres destroyed by enemy action included Southampton, Coventry, Clapham St. Bede's, Great Yarmouth, Manchester's Roman Catholic Centre and the premises of the National Deaf Club. Other centres that received some damage were Norwich and Birmingham, whilst in Bristol the square in which the Deaf centre stood was reduced to rubble except for the Deaf centre itself, which was unscathed apart from blasted windows. In Manchester the Church of All Saints was reduced to rubble whilst the Deaf institute remained unscathed.

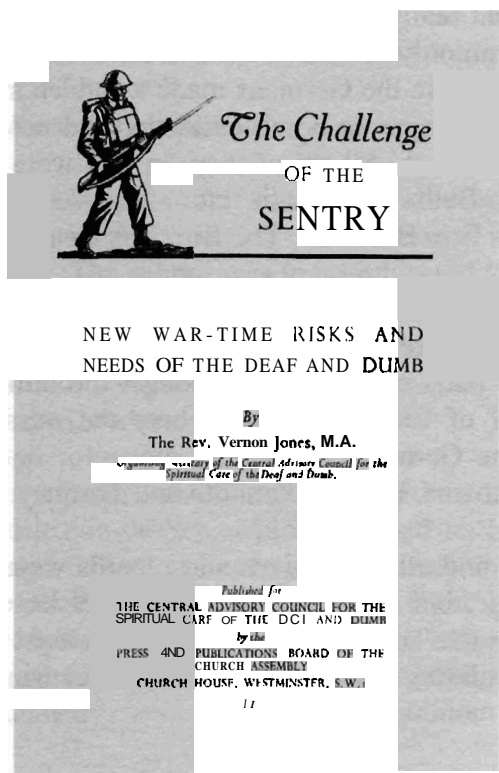
There were attempts by the authorities to help the Deaf overcome circumstantial difficulties created by the state of war. Deaf people in Hull were issued with whistles that would enable them to call for help should they get trapped under rubbles. Deaf people in London were issued with round white badges with the word DEAF in blue to enable people, in particular the sentries, to identify their handicap. The National Institute for the

Deaf manufactured these badges, but many Deaf people avoided wearing them because they had no wish to parade their deafness in public and become embarrassed.

The Reverend Vernon Jones (right) was so concerned about the situation of the Deaf under the sentry and blackout systems that he wrote and produced a booklet entitled *The Challenge of the Sentry* and distributed it among the authorities and armed forces. His opening paragraph simply read:



A deaf woman was walking near a factory recently and was unaware that she was in a prohibited area. The sentry on duty challenged her. She did not hear, and walked on. She was shot, and died. This tragedy was entirely due to deafness.



WAR TIME PRECAUTIONS

- Be sure you have someone to warn you of Air Raids, whether in the day time or night. If there is no one in your house ASK your A.R.P. Warden and arrange how he can warn you. Let him have the key for day-time use. Have a piece of clothes line and tie to bolster or leg of the bed so that he can wake you up at night.
 - Take care of your Gas Mask. Be sure it fits. Always take it with you when you go out.
 - Keep food in air-tight tins as far as possible. After gas raids eat nothing that has not been covered up.
 - Keep a bottle of water tightly corked for use after a gas attack or during the attack in your gas-proof room. Change this from day to day to keep it fresh.
 - At night see that you have shoes and warm clothing ready to put on quickly so that you do not catch cold. Don't take more than two minutes in dressing or covering yourself with warm coat or overcoat.
 - Keep your pension book, insurance and other important papers, and money where you can easily get them quickly. If you like the Chaplain will take care of valuable papers for you.
 - Be sure not to show a light at night. Turn off Gas Mains when there is a raid, or every night when you go to bed. If you can, see that your windows are all closed during raids. Cover them with cellophane or strips of gummed paper.
 - When there is warning get to your gas-proof room, or shelter or Public Shelter if YOU HAVE TIME. But directly any firing begins get under cover. Remember it is safer to be in your house than in the streets.
 - The strength of the nation is really spiritual.
 - Faith and confidence in God will uphold our morale.
- Here is something in which the deaf can be of the greatest help to our country.*
- To do this—
 Make your life right with God by giving up bad habits.
 ... daily.
 Come to church as often as you can.

Jones included a list of "War time precautions" in the booklet. Whether his efforts to promote awareness of the Deaf among the hearing under wartime conditions succeeded or not has yet to be verified.

Food Rations

When the government introduced rationing, Deaf people became alarmed because there was no accompanying information explaining the rules of the system. Once they understood the system, their frustrations did not end there. Food was in scarce supply and people had to queue for hours with ration books outside shops. Deaf people were very often the losers – there was many a time when hearing people in the queue would suddenly rush off to other shops upon hearing shouted announcements that certain foods were out of stock and that

other shops had opened. Being deaf, the Deaf were left standing behind. Learning this lesson, many Deaf parents brought along their hearing children to the queues, using them as their ears so that they would not be left out in their quest to obtain rationed food.

There was a great spirit of camaraderie among those within local Deaf communities in various cities and towns. Many would help each other by queuing outside various shops and then meet up later in the Deaf centre to swap and sort out the food according to each family's needs. Birthday parties and special celebrations were not spared because of rationing; everyone contributed a little bit of saved rationed item of food and this enabled a mini-feast to be organised for the special event.

The Baedeker Raids

Perhaps the greatest amount of damage done to Deaf centres within a short span of time occurred during the Baedeker raids of May **1942** in Southwest England. This was an intensive bombing campaign by the **Luftwaffe** that really had little to do with the war. The air raids during this particular campaign were commonly known as the Baedeker raids, after a publishing house that produced travel guides, because the Germans made a sudden switch from bombing major cities, industrial and military targets to bomb cities that did not have anything remotely connected with any major war effort. All six of them in fact were what might be called tourist towns: **Torquay**, Exeter, Bath, Weymouth, etc. – the very towns which had travel guides on them published by this firm Baedeker. The firm was a casualty of the raids and never published again.

There was first a minor raid on a Thursday night on Exeter, followed on the next night by a much larger raid, which caused great damage to parts of the town. Amongst the buildings damaged was the Church Hall, where the Deaf of Exeter met and where the missionary (Canon A. Mackenzie) had his offices. Then the Germans left Exeter alone for one full week, during which they bombed, amongst other towns, Bath, Weymouth and **Torquay**.

The Deaf Institute in Bath was totally destroyed and all its archives and records were lost. **Torquay** Deaf Club suffered some minor damage, but nothing which could not be easily repaired. In Weymouth, one of the casualties was the **Toc H** building, which amongst other things was home to the local Deaf club. This building was totally destroyed, causing the Deaf of Weymouth to be without a club for some months.

One week after the second raid on Exeter, the Germans returned in force, and devastated the centre of Exeter. Already previously damaged, the Deaf centre was made totally uninhabitable. Another casualty of this second bombing raid was the Royal West of England School for the Deaf at Exeter, which at that time seemed a safe haven, not only for the children of the area the school served, but also for the 52 children and staff of the Anerley School for the Deaf, London, who had been evacuated there on **14 September 1939**. Blasts from high explosives caused substantial damage to all buildings of the school and no room escaped damage. Fortunately, the tedious but sensible arrangement of all the children sleeping on the ground floor instead of in the bedrooms paid dividends; there were no serious casualties. Within four days all the children had returned home, and the school was closed for two months to enable repairs to be carried out.

The 1943 Raids

During the Baedeker raids, there were no human casualties in any of the Deaf centres, although a few Deaf families were made homeless when their homes were hit. The Deaf in Exeter occupied temporary premises for a few weeks before settling into another building near the centre of the town, but not for very long. In early **1943** four **Heinkel 111s** made a low-level sneak raid on the town in broad daylight. The raid took less than five minutes, but the damage suffered by Exeter was greater than it had suffered in the Baedeker raids and there was greater loss of life, over **250** people killed. One of the buildings totally flattened was the new home of the Deaf in the town. Within the space of one year, the Deaf in Exeter had to find a new club premises. In the same raid, **Torquay** was also again bombed. The Deaf centre escaped with minor blast damage when a bomb fell on the St. Mary's Church building a few yards along the road, killing **18** children who were in the building.

The Bristol Deaf Centre had a very near miss when much of the square round it was reduced to rubble in a heavy bombing raid. The local society later took the opportunity to build the new deaf centre on the bombed site.

The Bombing of Schools

The first bombs to fall on any British school for the deaf came the day the war broke out, at **Margate** on **3 September 1939** when a number of incendiary bombs landed in the school grounds. The school was to be subjected to a number of air raid attacks, but the greatest loss the school suffered was when the Allen Homes were totally destroyed in **1942**. These Homes were used to accommodate boarders at the school and their destruction severely hampered the school's capacity after the war. The headmaster's house in the school grounds was also destroyed, and the main building hit.

Other schools which suffered wartime bomb damage included the East Anglian School at Gorleston-on-Sea, which also had its headmaster's house destroyed, the Royal West of England School at Exeter as previously stated, and the Royal Cambrian School for the Deaf in **Swansea**. In London the Old Kent Road and Anerley Schools for the Deaf, which were both occupied by the civil defence and military authorities at the time, were also substantially damaged and needed major repairs **after** the war before they could be reoccupied.

In Manchester the Clyne House Nursery School, then occupied by the military authorities, was also severely damaged and the main school building was hit by a bomb, which went through its roof but fortunately failed to explode.

In Edinburgh the grounds around Donaldson's Hospital in West Coates were badly shaken by a series of bombs exploding. Fortunately for the deaf pupils at the school, the destruction stayed outside and the building, although badly shaken, was left intact. Donaldson's Hospital was later taken over by the military and used to house Italian prisoners of war until **1945**.

Deaf People's Circumstances and Contributions

During times when the blackout and sentry system were at their highest state of enforcement, Deaf people were in the main afraid to venture out lest they were shot at and many stayed at home. In many cities and towns the opening hours of Deaf Centres were altered so that Deaf

people could meet during the daylight hours. Attendances were small since many had to do war work. In Deaf clubs and institutes throughout the country there were many activities such as fundraising and knitting for the armed services. Deaf women in Wakefield, Birmingham and Belfast produced hundreds of knitted pullovers, socks and other woollen articles for the soldiers. One club in London, the Spurs Club, raised £760 in three years for a variety of armed services' benevolent **funds**.

Many Deaf people were commended for their contribution towards war work and Civil Defence, but received almost nothing. In Manchester it was found that over 50 Deaf men from the Manchester Institute for the Deaf were entitled to the Defence Service Medal for their work with the Civil Defence. This could be repeated throughout the country, but many never got to receive their medals.

The activities and contributions of some Deaf people brought them renown, in particular those serving as ARP wardens. One of these was Herbert Street, an air raid warden and a sergeant in the Home Guard. He did sterling frontline work in Southampton, a principal port that was always subjected to repeat bombing raids. Herbert Street developed an uncanny knack in spotting approaching enemy aircraft before most of his fellow wardens were aware of them. He was always in the thick of rescue work for which he was later awarded the British Empire Medal. Another ARP warden was Harry **MacDonald** of **Truro**, whose work was praised by many people. Mary Swain of **Oldham** was awarded the B.E.M. for her work in a **tank** factory.

The warning system alerting people to incoming air raids or telling them to put out the lights in their houses was mainly geared to the hearing. Deaf people generally kept their eyes open and followed whatever they saw as an activity on the part of hearing people that conformed to the warning system. Deaf families with hearing children were informed by them of any alarms being sounded. There were numerous Deaf people who, after tying strings around their wrists and toes, ran the length of strings to outside the windows. ARP wardens acquainted with Deaf people in their areas would pull the strings and so catch the attention of the Deaf persons in the houses. Some reported that the wardens pulled so hard that they were flung onto the floor, and some nearly out of the windows. The egg and spoon doorbell method was also used during that period.

Schools for the deaf continued to provide education, but many were evacuated to safe places .

Wartime Evacuations of Schools for the deaf in WWII

<u>Name of School</u>	<u>Evacuated to:</u>
Birmingham, Gem Street Birmingham, Moseley Road	Stansfield Camp, Headington, Oxford Youth Hostel, Shottery , Stratford-on-Avon, Warwickshire
Bradford	Youth Hostel, Gisburn, Lancashire
Brighton Institution	Coldharbour, Wivelsfield Green, Surrey
Dundee	Belmont Castle, Meigle, Perthshire
Edinburgh, Henderson Row	Redcroft Hotel, N. Berwick
Edinburgh, West Coates	Dunglass House, Cockburnspath , Berwickshire
Glasgow, Langside	Dalquharren Castle, Dailly, Ayrshire
Glasgow, Renfrew Street	Lumsden Home, Maybole , Ayrshire
Hull	Fairview Hotel, Scarborough, Yorkshire
Leeds	James Graham Open-Air School, Old Farnley, Yorkshire
Liverpool	1. Underlea, N. Sudley Road, Aigburth , Liverpool 2. Birkdale Residential School for Deaf Children
London:	
Ackmar Road School	1. Nyetimber Holiday Lido, Bognor Regis , Sussex 2. Fir Tree Road, Banstead, Surrey
Anerley	1. Royal School for the Deaf, Exeter, Devon 2. Fir Tree Road, Banstead, Surrey 3. Maltby , Yorkshire 4. Warmsworth, Yorkshire
Blanche Nevile, Tottenham High Myddelton, Clerkenwell Jewish Deaf School	Gileston Camp, St. Athenes, Glamorgan Gileston Camp, St. Athenes, Glamorgan 1. School for the Deaf, Eastern Road, Brighton, Sussex 2. Havering House, Milton Libourne, Wiltshire
Oak Lodge School Old Kent Road Oldridge Street Randall Place Tollet Street Walthamstow West Ham	Nyetimber Holiday Lido, Bognor Regis , Sussex Gileston Camp, St. Athenes, Glamorgan Gileston Camp, St. Athenes, Glamorgan Cuckfield House, Cuckfield, Sussex Gileston Camp, St. Athenes, Glamorgan Gileston Camp, St. Athenes, Glamorgan Fyfield School for Evacuated Deaf Children
RSD Margate Middlesbrough Northern Counties School, Newcastle Royal Cambrian Institution	Goring-on-Thames, Surrey Lewisham, Yorkshire North Seaton Hall Camp, Northumberland Newbridge & Rhayader, Wales