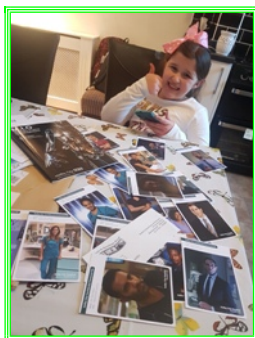


Elstree & Borehamwood Museum
Friends Newsletter
September 2021 : Issue Number 23



WE'RE BACK!
Museum opens in September

It's good to be able to open our doors after such a long layoff, and to welcome Friends and visitors again into our Museum. By the time you receive your Newsletter we will be up and running with the same opening hours as before, and with the continuation of the **Holby City at 20** Exhibition. This Exhibition has created much interest from all over the country with fans visiting from far and wide, and requests for our special 'cast cards' from those who couldn't attend in person. This is unprecedented for one of our Exhibitions.



Thanks!

So another two to three months will allow more visitors to enjoy the 'behind-the-scenes' view of their favourite medical drama. And with the news from the BBC that the

series will end in March 2022 we hope to attract even more fans this time.

Here's a five star review left on **TripAdvisor** just before the first lockdown :

"Travelled across from Bristol especially to see the exhibition, myself and my daughter love Holby, and we were not disappointed. The displays were fabulous, the inside information on the show was lovely to read about, my daughter and her boyfriend even got to dress up in scrubs and do a mock operation on the mannequin that was there. Staff were also very helpful and informative - they told us where the outside scenes for Holby were filmed so we could have a little look."

And we haven't been inactive during this hiatus. The **Collecting Covid Campaign** organised across the Hertsmere Museum network has been busy collecting evidence of the unprecedented events of the last 18 months - photos of all the different aspects, oral evidence, diaries, rainbow drawings, and objects such as masks and other paraphernalia. Maybe you can add to the archive? Please contact us via the usual email.

Examples of our Collecting Covid Campaign are on the final page.

THE STORY OF ELSTREE'S OBSERVER CORPS POST DURING WW2

Here's an extract from an anonymous memoir by someone closely involved with the Elstree R.O.C. :

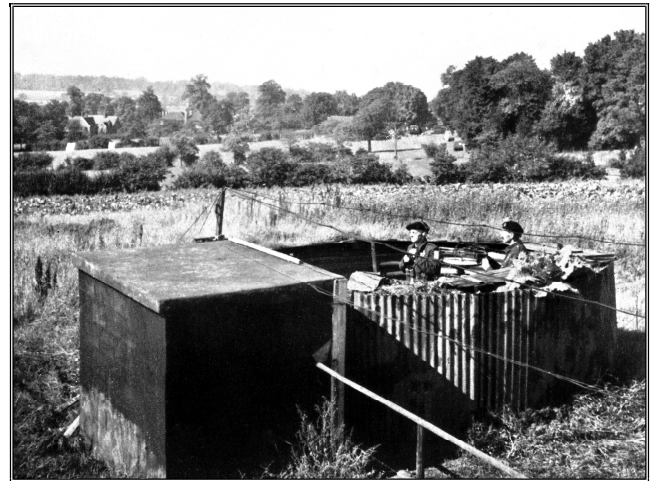
The story of *Charlie 2* begins in March 1933, when the Edgware Sub-Division of the Metropolitan Special Constabulary was instructed to send a representative to Elstree to meet Air Commodore Masterman to choose a site for an Observer Corps Post. No one knew what the Observer Corps was, or what it did, but Sub-Inspector Crone was detailed for the duty, and a site was chosen in a field on the north side of Barnet Lane belonging to Lady Louth. This site, however, was afterwards changed to one on the other side of Barnet Lane to the South of Fortune Lane, and was in the extreme North Western corner of the Borough of Hendon.

The next step taken was to call for volunteers to form the nucleus of a Post crew. Sufficient members were soon forthcoming to enable training to be started. Sergeant P. Brough was nominated as Head Observer and training was carried out under the general supervision of Sub-Inspector T. A. Williams, Metropolitan Special Constabulary.

In 1936 special constables who were also Observers were invited to transfer to a new division to be known as the Observer Corps Division of the Metropolitan Special Constabulary. Those who transferred would no longer be available for ordinary Special Constabulary duties. The Post thereupon lost most of its personnel.

The Head Observer, however, with the enthusiastic assistance of Col. M. St. L. Simon, C.B.E., R.E., also a member of the crew, started a recruiting campaign. Their efforts were so successful that by the time of the Munich crisis eighteen members were fully trained up to the standard then required and turned out for duty. Recruiting and training were intensified after Munich, and when the call "Readiness 18 hours" was received on August 23rd, 1939, the strength was twenty-five members, each of whom reported for duty.

None of those who were then members of the Post will easily forget the hardships of the first two winters of the war. To walk, cycle or motor several miles in hard frost, through deep snow or fierce blizzards was a test of endurance that few of those residing in the London area ever expected to experience. That it should be done night after night, without suitable clothing of any kind, with crews normally relieved at the proper times, was a testimony to the loyalty of the men to the job and to their comrades.



ROC Elstree 1940

For a few months in 1940, until shortly after Dunkirk, *Charlie 2* had a duty that seems to have been shared by a few only of the other Posts in 17 Group, namely the lighting of flares when called upon to do so by Centre. These flares consisted of hemp or rope about the size and shape of fire buckets, stood in a flat basin containing paraffin. When lighted they gave a flame and column of greasy black smoke several feet high. It was a constant job, that might last as long as a couple of hours or more, for one Observer to plod from one flare to another replenishing each basin with paraffin, while his colleague remained harnessed to the telephone. The object of the flares was to guide aircraft in a desired direction. They were only lighted during the blackout hours, when their appearance caused a great deal of excitement and apprehension in the minds of worthy citizens. From far and near they would telephone the Police, whom we had orders to notify as soon as instructions to light the flares were received. Not unnaturally it was thought to be Fifth Column action, and that the flares were signals to the enemy.

These flares were the cause of two amusing incidents. Just after Dunkirk, when everyone was invasion minded, a picket of soldiers from Mill Hill Barracks was posted at the cross roads every night. Unfortunately these lads had not been told about the flares, and one night, just as H. J. A. Walpole was stooping down to apply more paraffin to one, he was pounced upon by a burly Scot, armed with rifle and bayonet, who ordered him brusquely "to put out that ruddy light". Walpole narrowly escaped being bayoneted in that part of his anatomy most prominent when stooping down. The soldier was only convinced of our bona-fides after an interview at Elstree Police Station.

The second incident was when a whole platoon of a Territorial Battalion, recently arrived in

the village, with fixed bayonets charged across several fields to the Post enclosure, where they loudly enquired about the whys and wherefors of the flares, and were re-assured about our aims and objects. Thereafter, until flares were done away with, the Post had a guard of the L.D.V. posted every night.

Walpole was one of the "heroes", and might have been the victim, of one of the most exciting incidents of the war so far as *Charlie 2* was concerned. The event took place on the night of September 26th, 1940, when a land mine fell on "The Fortune", a big house about seventy-five yards from the Post.



The Fortune

Considerable damage was done, and five of the six occupants were killed. All communications with the Post were destroyed, and the Observers on duty, together with others sleeping there, were badly shaken. Walpole, who was going for water at the time, was about twenty-five yards away when the mine fell. He was blown through the air for some yards, but fortunately was not much the worse for his narrow escape. His car, which was parked in the lane, was practically destroyed, and another, a little further away, was slightly damaged. (For more background on this incident please visit our blog on the website under Object Of The Week : F for Fortune).

On another occasion, during a particularly noisy night, a stick of bombs fell. One bomb went down the well of the nearest house, barely fifty yards from the Post, one fell in the field about thirty yards north-east of the Post, and a third to the south-east over the ridge. Such was the noise of the Ack-Ack and falling bombs that the crew only discovered the nearest bomb crater, thirty yards away, at daylight. Official records show that throughout the war some thirty-one high explosive bombs and one land mine, plus a number of incendiaries and unexploded anti-aircraft shells, fell within a radius of one mile of the Post. Other Posts endured more than this, but what we had was quite enough for comfort.

The Post, such as it is, was largely the creation of the members themselves. They contributed the funds and provided the labour needed for the various structures. Obs. Hopcraft paid most of the cost of the re-

inforced concrete shelter, but even before it was finished he left the Corps to join the R.A.F. Although he was never able to use it himself, it has been well and truly used by others.

Late in 1941 the Post started a quarterly magazine called "The Seetoo Post". This was very well produced by Obs. R. L. Goodliffe, of the *Daily Telegraph*, assisted by Obs. J. St. A. Jewell. Those who contributed items thought it was very good, though not remunerative, but the cost of production was too high for the small circulation and the magazine died after the second issue. A more successful venture was the raising of a Post Benevolent Fund through which any member falling sick was paid £1 per week.

Mention of Jewell is to remind one of a very fine Observer and good companion. A man of leisure, with plenty of time on his hands, and moreover, skilled in many drafts, he unstintingly gave of his best in improving the amenities of the Post or helping the members. He did not join us until after the worst of the blitz was over, but one of his peculiarities when an alert sounded in his tour of duty, was to load the two rifles and place them on the surround in readiness for any German who might parachute down within range. It might be contrary to standing orders, but he cared not. He had been at sea in the old windjammer days and in the R.N.V.R. in the last war. But his first love was the sea, and we still remember his delight when at the age of sixty-nine he succeeded again in obtaining a commission in the R.N.V.R. Shortly afterwards he was killed by a bomb at Bournemouth, meeting his death, as he would have wished, while in the service of the Navy.

In May, 1944, when preparations for the invasion of Normandy were well advanced, and Seaborne Observers were called for, two members of the Post were accepted, namely, Obs. R. A. S. Lloyd and Obs. B. Miller. Both completed two months' service and the Post is grateful to them for representing it on that great occasion.

The members of the Post carried on faithfully and well through good days and bad, conscious that they had made some contribution, however small, to the defence of their country and to the winning of the war.

"Whate'er the course, the end is the renown."

A postscript from Museum Volunteer Alan Robins :

"I had a part in setting up a private wire to an ROC bunker in Elstree back in 1981 or 82 when working as a Post Office telephone engineer. We parked our vans in Fortune Lane and climbed over a gate into a field. Across the field was a grassy mound with a square metal trapdoor set in concrete in the top. We

had to unlock a padlock with a key that must have been obtained from somewhere and open the trap which was held open with a metal stay. Inside was a square hole going down into the ground with a vertical ladder. At the bottom was a cubby hole to one side with a Elsan toilet in it. Facing the ladder was an underground concrete chamber about 10ft long by 7ft wide and 7ft high. There was a desk and chair and some metal brackets presumably to hold some kind of equipment. The lighting was battery powered and rather dim. A private wire line came into the bunker and was connected something that looked like a sandwich toaster. When this was opened up and a call button pressed it must have connected to a headquarters. I assume in the event of nuclear war some poor devil must have to hide down in the bunker and report nuclear fallout levels back.

It was quite a game setting up the private wire as there were no mobile phones then and no telephone line to the bunker. One of us was down in the bunker, another up on the top with a walkie talkie provided by the home office (there were strict instructions on the correct use) and another engineer on a phone on the top floor of North Edgware telephone exchange with the other walkie talkie. There were other engineers in various exchanges along the route of the private wire. I remember the walkie talkies were rather unreliable and gave a lot of trouble. I do not know if the bunker still exists or if it has been dug up and the field returned to its original state." The Post was removed in 1991 : see <https://www.subbrit.org.uk/sites/elstree-roc-post/> for more details.

Elstree & Borehamwood Museum

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Instagram :

<https://www.instagram.com/ebwm2007/>

Trip Advisor : <https://goo.gl/RTbKQi>

Open : Tues, Wed & Thurs : 12pm - 6pm

Sat : 10am-3pm

Supported by : Hertsmere Borough Council

Elstree & Borehamwood Town Council

The Heritage Lottery Fund

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VISIT OUR WEBSITE AND BECOME A FRIEND



Collecting Covid Photos :



Tesco bread aisle - March 2020



Shenley Road - January 2021



Iceland Sign - March 2020



Robinson's Bridge, Borehamwood-February 2021