

It is the 7 July 2025, and this is Claire interviewing Win Rawlings about World War Two and VE Day.

Well, I can remember that it was a Sunday as plain as day. I was sweeping down my mum's stairs because I wasn't married then. I had five brothers, and three of them were already gone (left home). One of my brothers had joined Bath Yeomanry, with his mates, bit of the fun of it. Well, they got called up straight away, not much fun in that, that shocked them. The other two were younger than me, so they were okay till they become 20 and then Ron was in the Fleet Air Arm in in Yeovilton and by the time Bob became 20, the war was over, and he had to do two years national service.

As for the war, you see, there was no television for which we should have been very pleased because now we would be told blow by blow, every little inch that we're losing or something. But then, see, we weren't told until it was something we could all shout about and be pleased about. So, I mean, the war lasting six years, it became a way of life. When you became 20, the ladies could either join the forces or the land army or go on the buses or into industry. Well, my sister's husband worked for a carpentry firm (Longs) in Bath, and they were making boxes for the Admiralty for the ships to take the ammunition to where the forces wanted it. They were made of beech and they were that square. The first day I went to work there, we had what they called batons, and I suppose they were about two or three inches wide, made of white deal, and we had to hamme in nails. The noise! Oh, I can never stick this, I thought, but It's surprising what you get used to.

A lot of the children had been evacuated, and some of their mums had come with them. So we had a few ladies from London, one had been a hairdresser so we all ended up with these bits here rolled up in the latest fashion for the ladies. And then we got bombed with the Bath Blitz in 1942. They were aiming for the train station because it was quite near us, the factory was around the back of Marks and Spencer's.

The boxes inside, they were padded with some little fitments, shaped in a little arch lined with felt because it had to hold ammunition. They had to be finished to a certain measurement and we had a lady came from Bristol work for the government that passed them, like an inspection. Then any little fault, she'd send back for us to do and they had to be sanded off. Of course, it was all make do, we had great big thick wheels, steel, heavy with sandpaper glued on, sanding each corner and then goes on to the next corner. You got used to it.

Now Bath Blitz - I had a friend. Now my brothers were gone, except my youngest two brothers so we had room so we had a girl, Pat, that was about my age where I worked, that was living with us. We had gone the palace, it's called something different now



(Komedia) that Saturday night, Oscar Rabin¹ and his band was playing, it was all big bands then, of course, we loved it all. Our servicemen didn't like it when the Yanks was here because they said they're overpaid, oversexed, and overerrere! I didn't dance so much with them because it was all this rock and roll, we weren't used to being chucked around! So we got home, all unsuspecting (about the bombing raid that happened later that night). The people of the band did a lot to dig people out afterwards.

We were okay at Fairfield Park. My father worked for Bath Tramways, mainly at nights because he and his associates worked underneath down the pit, as we said, to check all the electrics because it works the trams went on the lines. So he was at work, but he came racing up.

But they did get the Pearson family, John at very end of the rank and him and his wife and children, they were hit². You wondered who you were gonna find next, walk around next day and see what was left.

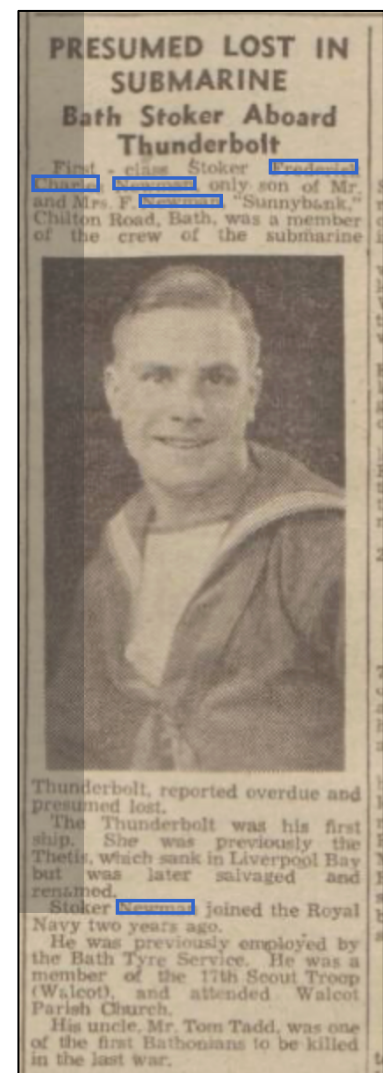
And at one time, this is a different time, nearer the end of the war. My two younger brothers they worked for Horstmanns along Lower Bristol Road. They were going to work and had to lie down in the gutter by Walcot church due to machine gunning by planes coming over. And then my husband's uncle, they lived on Walcot parade, he got right back in his doorway because they came on through.

So your older brothers were fighting. Were they okay, they came back?

All back. They were very, very lucky. Now my oldest brother, he was older, I think he was in his forties. He was he was in Ireland, somebody's batman.

Arthur, the one that joined the Bath Yeomanry, never got on with his horse but after a while in the desert, they realized that mechanised stuff was a lot easier and quicker and he was okay with the car.

When Len had to go, my husband was the same age as me, 20 in 1939, he was working out his last year of apprenticeship to be a plumber. We got engaged before he went. He wanted to go in the navy because his father was in the navy, but they said you'll be more useful in the army, as a coppersmith, mending the tanks. Much safer because his mate he would have gone with Fred Newman got torpedoed. He was in a submarine and didn't survive³. He (Len) did come home with some scars, they were sat in the back of the lorry going along and they went over a landmine and threw them all out but it's only minor.



¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oscar_Rabin_Band

² John Pearson, his wife May and their two sons, Dennis, 19 and Horace, 16, all died on 26 April 1942 when their home 21 Snow Hill was hit by a bomb

³ Frederick Charles Newman died on 28 March 1943

What do you remember of VE Day in Bath 1945? Do you remember street parties?
Of course, it was still rationing so you couldn't put on much that was party like. But everybody was together and singing. I think jam sponge and bread and jam.
Mind you, it wasn't so much of that jam, not enough sugar for jam.

Is there anything else that you can remember about the war that you would like to tell me?

Well, we had to do fire watching. When it was your turn, you had a bucket and a stirrup pump. Those hoses are quite something to hold. I was amazed. They took us out once to the Queen Square and they took us out in the proper fire engine once and had to hold one of those hose pipes. Of course, there was quite a lot more water going through than what we would be doing but to let us know what it was like. Up on the roof if the planes go over low it was incendiary bombs and they set things alight, Colmer⁴'s roof was set afire. Up on the sky light in the loft, get up on the roof, I don't like heights! My mum and Pat and me, needed 3 one to keep filling up bucket, to soak the roof just in case, when there was a raid.

⁴ Colmer's was a department store on Union Street