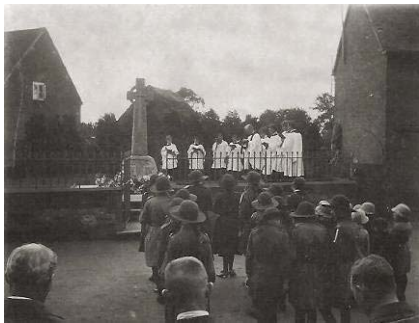


for the children.

Then at last on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> May 1945, V.E. Days were celebrated. The school was closed and a tea for the children was provided by Mrs Morley on the lawn of Bellamour Lodge and impromptu sports took place with Savings Stamps for prizes.

But not all the families were able to celebrate the end of the war. Sadly Harry Devalle, a villager who was serving with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion King Shropshire Light Infantry, died on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1944. He is remembered on the village war memorial with many others who had died in World War I.



Remembrance Day service early 1920's

We have been in contact with many of the evacuees who came to Colton; some of whom have recently visited the village.



### References.

Staffordshire County Council  
Local History Resource Book on  
Colton.

St. Mary's School Log Books.

### Acknowledgements.

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Editors Gill Sykes/Gay Lawrence.

### Pictures.

Tony Atkinson - school picture.

Gill Croft –wartime books.

Colton History Society collection.

*“The Local Heritage Initiative is a national grant scheme that helps local groups to investigate, explain and care for their local landscape, landmarks, traditions and culture. The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) provides the grant but the scheme is a partnership, administered by the Countryside Agency with additional funding from Nationwide Building Society”.*



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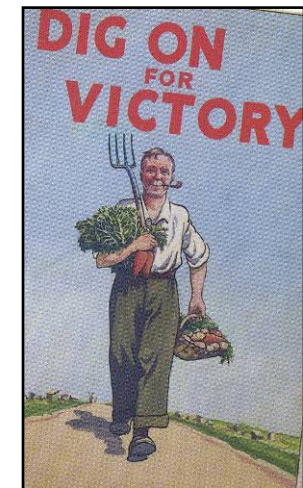
# Colton History Society

## Colton and World War II

Colton is a small village in Staffordshire, situated approximately two and a half miles from Rugeley. When war broke out in 1939 the population was about 630 and many people were employed on farms either as labourers, stockmen or later in the land army or as servants at one of the big houses. There was a Church of England church, a school, a Reading Room, two shops, a post office and two public houses. Transport was sometimes by pony and trap. Main shopping would be in Rugeley with a bus running twice a week, or in Stafford by catching a train at Trent Valley Station. Other provisions would be delivered by a butcher and a baker. These were brought to the door in vans. As petrol was rationed they were given a special petrol allowance.

War was declared on September 3<sup>rd</sup> and as with everywhere else in the land precautionary measures had to be adhered to. All forms of lighting in houses, streets and even

headlights on cars had to be masked with blackout material. Air raid wardens and billeting officers were appointed amongst the villagers. The rationing of food very quickly became a way of life and people were encouraged to dig up their gardens and grow their own produce.



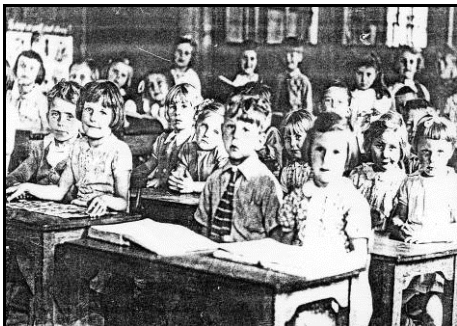
This picture was a government poster of the time urging people to “get growing”.

As with many villages the war did not affect them straight away because unlike the cities and towns, there were no bombing raids. However the reality of war

soon became evident when a squad of Royal Engineers was billeted at Colton House.

In January 1940 there was severe weather. Snow was 3ft deep on the main road and piled up to 6ft up the hedgerows. The school was closed and the Colton Road was impassable for ten whole days. The soldiers from Colton House helped to clear the road for one way traffic.

In June 1940, 68 evacuees from St Saviours Church of England School, Westgate on Sea, Kent, arrived at Lichfield station and after a drink and medical inspection, continued their journey by bus to Colton. This bewildered little group each with a label, gas mask and small case were "chosen" by women from the village for accommodation. Ten children were sent to Hamstall Ridware and nine to Mavesyn Ridware parishes.



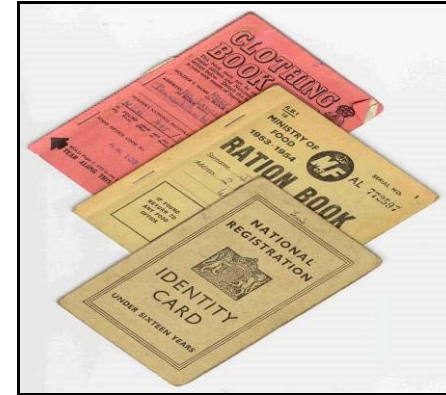
A picture of the children in Westgate on Sea before they were evacuated.

The evacuees attended the local school, initially taught by their own teachers. Then later they were taught together with the village children. The village children admired them for coming such a long way from their homes, but they were not so thrilled to have to share some of their toys and clothes! However they brought along new games and skipping rhymes and soon marbles was very popular. The evacuees were horrified by the sanitation and disliked having to move around in the pitch dark as no chink of light was allowed. They soon became used to having a bath once a week in a galvanised bath in front of the fire, in some cases with water from a pump.

On November 25<sup>th</sup> 1940, 12 delayed action bombs fell in Colton Parish, six fell in Wilmour Farm fields, one in Lount Farm fields, one behind the church, one in Martlin fields and three on Martlin Hill. The bomb disposal squad of the Royal Engineers secured the bombs at Wilmour Farm; others around the Martlin disappeared in the running sandy soil never to be discovered.

Rationing was carefully monitored. The fact that they were in the country meant that most homes grew their own vegetables. The

headmaster at the school had all the boys growing vegetables in the school garden. Some meat was available. When one animal was slaughtered another had to be available to the Ministry.



Everybody had to have an Identity Card that they had to carry with them at all times.

At the beginning of the war gas masks were issued. Children had practices at school where they had to go into an air raid shelter and wear their gas masks.

Rationing went on for some time after the war ended, the last to finish was for sweets in July 1954.

National Savings was greatly encouraged by the headmaster and the school generously supported "Wings for Victory week" and "Salute the Soldier week" The school children also collected massive amounts of rose hips from the hedgerows to be turned into rose hip syrup for the troops.

By 1944 some American soldiers were billeted at Colton House. This was a great source of fascination to the children, who delighted in catching sweets thrown to them by the soldiers as they passed through the village. Some coloured Americans were stationed near Admaston and villagers remember one truck bouncing off the parapet of the village bridge causing considerable damage and then it somersaulted. It is thought two men were seriously hurt. Notably, Harry Secombe a famous performer was stationed in the grounds of Bellamour Hall.

When E.N.S.A came to entertain the troops the children were often included. Occasionally a mobile cinema, in the back of a large van, showed films. Other times children went to the Reading Room to see films presented by the National Savings Committee. The Reading room was used by the NAAFI and also used for dances for villagers and troops to enjoy. One villager met her future husband there.

Italian prisoners of war who were interned in camps near Rugeley were sent to work at local farms, cycling out from Rugeley in their dark brown battledress, sewn with brightly coloured patches. In the evenings they would make toys