

First World War

Men and boys, from both Upwood and Gt. Raveley, joined the flood of volunteers at the outbreak of War in 1914. Some men were already in uniform, serving either as regular soldiers in the Army or as volunteers in the local Territorial force.

Many of the local men, such as George Walker and Fred Malt from Gt. Raveley, joined the Hunts Cyclists Battalion, either at Ramsey or Huntingdon. One of the 'perks' of joining this local volunteer force was your own bicycle. The Battalion never served overseas as a unit but, along with other mobile troops, was used for coastal defence when German warships were shelling the East Coast and a close watch was kept for German submarines in coastal waters. When it became apparent that there was not the need for mobile (cyclist) units in France, the Battalion was broken up into several drafts for different regiments in France.

Some of the young men had their photograph taken to send home and a photograph album, now preserved in the church, depicting some 68 soldiers from the two villages and the surrounding area was made by the then vicar, the Revd. Kitchener.

Three brothers and two first cousins all from the Braybrook family of Upwood joined up. Fred, the youngest of ten children born to William and Mary Ann Braybrook, enlisted in the Hunts Cyclists in May 1915, aged just 17 years. He transferred to the Royal Berkshire Regiment, sailed for France in July 1916, was wounded in November and sent to Rosemead Military Hospital in Wales. He died from septic poisoning on 22nd December 1916 and his body was sent to Upwood for a military funeral. The local newspaper records that six members of the Ramsey Coy. of the Hunts Cyclists formed a firing party and fired six volleys over his grave. His grave, in Upwood cemetery, stands alongside that of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

A few soldiers managed to send letters home but, for most families, the only news they received was the dreaded telegram. Kate and Cornelius Murfin lost their son Cyril in March 1918 but nearly a year later they received a letter from a comrade-in-arms, held a prisoner since that time, who was able to reassure them that their son had served bravely and died instantly.

The war memorial lists the names of the seventeen men who gave their life:

Fred Braybrook, Stephen Corney, John Thomas Deighton, E.J. Giddens, John Henry Hughes, David Victor Ingle, Cyril Murfin, Ernest Pierson, George William Shelton, R. Shelton, Henry Cecil Sinclair, Edgar John West, L. St. J. Moubray, R. Gray, E.G. Groves, AE Parks, A.J. Thompson.

There is also a framed 'Piece of Paper' listing the names of all the men from both villages who served in the Great War both at home and overseas.

After the War, those men who had survived returned to their families in Upwood and Raveley. Some were to suffer for many years from war wounds, gassing and mental trauma. Lawrence Revell survived the war unscathed only to be crushed under fallen scaffolding in 1920 leaving a wife and young children.

Second World War

During the second World War, in common with many villages, life changed drastically for the people left behind in Upwood. To cope with food rationing, there was a scheme whereby the village 'mums' could make jam. This process was carried out in the coach house of the vicarage. Revd. Turner was the incumbent at that time and Miss Lowings the cook. The fruit was weighed before cooking and once cooked was put into pound jars. It was all cooked in a large pan over an oil stove. There was no limit to the amount of jam which could be produced. Freda Greenwood (née Gaunt) recalls how, as a young girl, she used to take the jam-makers a jug of tea which was always welcomed.

Meat pies were another speciality which could be obtained from Upwood House. Of course, no one asked what type of meat was in them!

As with other villages, a certain amount of bartering went on — butter in exchange for eggs etc., especially

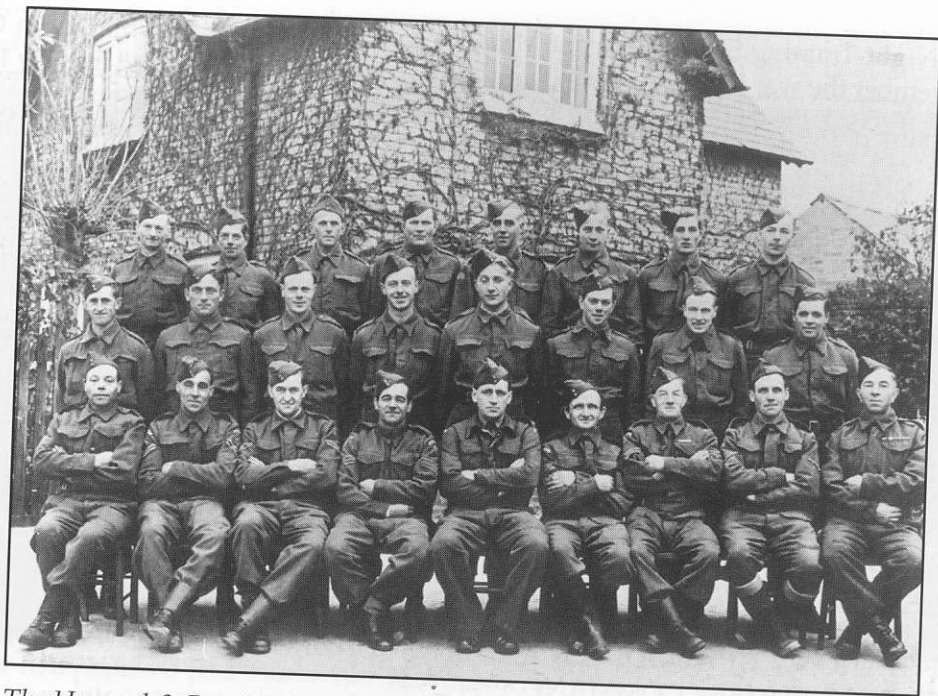
in the local pub. Pigs were very popular, taken to Ramsey for slaughtering. Again, Freda recalls bowls of pig's blood and 'bits' in the kitchen, hams hung from the ceiling and wishing she could be anywhere else but at home just then. Many of the hams were eaten at Upwood Feast. Most of the meat was salted down as there were no freezers. Many of the villagers had allotments and supplemented their diet with the occasional rabbit, pheasant or anything else 'that happened along'.

Two of the young girls from the village worked at the local munitions factory, walking to Bury to catch the bus each morning. When the bus reached Warboys, about 30 men got on. These were brickyard workers, released from their job to work in the factory. Many Italian POWs were employed locally on the land and one, living with an Upwood family, used to bike to Sawtry once a week to check in.

Men from both Upwood and Gt. Raveley joined the armed forces for the duration of the War. However, many were in reserved occupations as farmers. One of the main complaints made to the War Agricultural Committee was about the lack of men to work on the land, hence the use of POWs. Two men, 'Hadge' Brown and P. Mason, gave their lives in the Second World War and are commemorated on the War Memorial inside St. Peter's Church. Many other local men served in the local Home Guard.

RAF Upwood

RAF Upwood traces its origins to the September 1917 requisition by the War Department of Hill Farm, then owned by Lord de Ramsey. The area, named Bury (Ramsey) Airfield, was initially used as an Emergency Landing Ground. War Department instructions permitted the tenant farmer to graze his stock but with an hour's notice to remove them should the field need to be used. The airfield was later used as a Home Defence 1st Class Night Landing Ground for BE2 aircraft of 7 Squadron, Royal Flying Corps. By the summer of 1918, permanent huts and five large hangars had been constructed and the site renamed Upwood Airfield, under 6th Brigade, Midland Area of the 47th Home Defence Wing of the newly formed Royal Air Force.



The Upwood & Raveley Home Guard taken at Warboys. Back row — Jack Duall, Bob Howell, Pete Wright, Percy Taylor, George Gaunt, A Hufford, Aubrey Johnson, Bill Bannister. Middle row — Alf Dolby, Albert Drage, Eric Townsend, Tom Dunham, Bill Hufford, Charles Herbert, C Jacobs, Arthur Dellar. Front row — Len Duall, George Spolton, Alfred Thompson, Sidney Hollis, Neville Gingell, Sidney Berridge, Tom Johnson, Fred Curtis, Ernie Bannister.

In July 1918, a Night Training Squadron from Marham, augmented from Newmarket in October, was located there. In November the war in Europe ended and the two squadrons disbanded in early 1919. The airfield reverted to agricultural use, the buildings being salvaged by local farmers.

The Royal Air Force returned to Upwood Airfield in January 1937. Two Squadrons, 52 and 63, equipped with Hawker Hind and Audax biplanes, were located there. These biplanes were replaced in January 1938 with more modern Fairy Battles. Two new units, 90 and 53 Squadrons equipped with Bristol Blenheims, replaced 52 and 63 Squadrons by February 1940 — their main mission to train RAF personnel for bombing missions. These two units later merged to form 17 Operational Training Unit (OTU). In September 1940, No. 11 Beam Approach Training (BAT) Flight unit was formed at Upwood, with emphasis on bad weather and night flying training. By April 1943 the airfield came under No.8 PFF (Pathfinders) Group but as the grass runways were frequently waterlogged, upgrading work was required. Three new concrete runways were constructed by October 1943, allowing the first of the Pathfinder Squadrons, No. 139 (Jamaica), to use the airfield the following January. From this time forward, Upwood Airfield was home to 139 Squadron equipped with Mosquitoes and 156 Squadron with Lancaster bombers.

At the end of the Second World War, 156 Squadron was relocated at Wyton whilst 139 Squadron remained at Upwood until February 1946. Their memory is preserved in a stone memorial outside the main gate of RAF Upwood, with the inscription:

FROM THIS RAF STATION / UPWOOD / 139 AND 156 SQUADRONS / NO. 8 (PATHFINDER) GROUP / MARKED TARGETS FOR Bomber Command 1944-1945.

The airfield was host to several airshows and flying displays in the inter-war years and immediately after the end of the Second World War. Villagers can remember helping with catering arrangements and latrine building. The base was used as a training centre for some time after the end of the Second World War and was later leased to the USAF.



Civilian workers at RAF Upwood post World War II. We have no names for the people on this photograph — if you recognise someone, please let us know.