

Home Guard Rhymes

By Roy Fletcher

Think of the Home Guard and the TV programme “Dads Army” springs to mind. However, the real Home Guard was a branch of the British Army set up in 1940 to act as defenders of our isles in the event of an invasion by the Germans. The ranks were made up of those too young or too old to join the Armed Forces or those who were in reserved occupations.

Lieutenant A. H. Watkins of the Home Guard published at least two booklet. One was on “Signals for the Home Guard”, which was a record of tested improvisations based on practical experience with Home Guard Signals. His experience of publishing such a booklet then took a somewhat diverse course as he decided to produce a booklet title “Home Guard Rhymes”: 54 pages of verse, of varying quality, interspersed with cartoon characters – a copy of which belongs to the Bishops Stortford Museum. He described it as the Home Guard in “di-verse” moods. The book was dedicated to:

Those poor Home Guard “widows”,
Who sit alone at night,
And wait, while we, their warriors brave,
Go gaily forth and.....fight.

The cartoon accompanying this dedication shows our brave warriors walking towards the Lion and Lamb pub! Obviously, the fight involved getting to the bar. Given that the mainland was not invaded we can only assume artistic licence was invoked.



A few lines from “The Legend of Bill Brown’s Boots

Private Bill Brown was a veteran “old sweat”,
As good a soldier as ever you’ve met,
A bit of a grouser sometimes, its true,
Like most of us are – even you and me,
When he joined the Home Guard, our Quarter bloke said,
He was worried so much he wished to be dead,
With every bit of equipment supplied,
Bill never was known to be quite satisfied.
For hour after hour he would argue and wrangle,
His cap would not set at just the right angle.
He tried on dozens of Battle Dress Suits,
And never could manage to fit him with boots.

Researched and written by Roy Fletcher.

Roy has been a volunteer at the museum for six years, spending his time cataloguing the museum’s collection. Roy has an interest in the local history, particularly the last 200 years.