

Mulberry Harbour

One of the most remarkable achievements of the 2nd World War took place under the noses of the people in the Havant area. Under the code name "*Phoenix*", several vast concrete "*caissons*" which formed part of the Mulberry Harbours, were built in record time on the shores of Hayling Island. The operation was very "*hush hush*", and much excitement and speculation was rife in the area. Sir Winston Churchill paid a visit to the works, travelling by rail to Havant and thence by car. Skilled workmen were brought in by coaches from the mainland. After the bombing of Coventry, special trains carrying rubble for use in making the concrete were run to the South Coast.

On D-Day the caissons were towed to the French coast to form "*moles*" in the artificial harbours for landing troops, equipment and stores. One caisson sank in Langstone Harbour soon after it was taken in tow, and it can still be seen today. The caissons varied in size, the largest being 200 feet long and 60 feet high, weighing some 6,000 tons. The firm Airspeed, who made aircraft components, was at Langstone Village in the garden and paddock of Langstone Towers and a Sheet Metal Factory was at the rear of the Dolphin, West Street (where the Meridian Centre entrance is).

When the war started I was 16 and with my twin brother Peter worked at Carrell's in South Street Havant. We both went there as apprentices straight from school - me as a brick layer and Peter as a carpenter. After we finished our apprenticeship we were sent to Lake Road, Portsmouth, and helped with the bomb damage. Mr. Bevin then called up everybody whose registration number ended in 0 or 9 - that included Peter and I - and we had to immediately report to Portsmouth Dockyard. We were to work on the Mulberry Harbours for Bovis. We were fitted with duffel coats and wire cutters and were well looked after. The only day we had off with pay was when they floated the harbours - and then when Field Marshall Montgomery came to thank the workers, we had an hour off!

After the platforms were complete I went to work for AR West at Purbrook. We had the maintenance for the Army Camps out at

Hambledon and Denmead. King George VI came and viewed the work. I remember the building trade got an extra cheese ration, which helped with our packed lunch.

I was a member of the Home Guard in Havant. We worked from the garage of Langbrook House in Langstone. Eight of us would be on duty; two would be out while the others slept. The drill hall in West Street was our Head Quarters.

We lived at 10 Lower Grove Road, during the worst of the bombing. There was a family that used to come out from Portsmouth and sleep in the front room. Prior to Dunkirk we had two soldiers billeted in the house. We had an Anderson shelter at the bottom of the garden - it had an extension and there was enough room for 7 of us.

John Freeston

