The Hollerith Girls

Memories of the Met Office, 1937-1945

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1937-1945

by Meg Griffin

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From quiet homes and first beginnings
Out to the undiscovered ends,
There's nothing worth the wear of winning,
But laughter and the love of friends.

Hilaire Belloc

This is a story about Friendship. Spawned in the heady days before World War 2, it was nurtured in the dark days when England was alone in the fight. It continued to grow through regular reunions and in spite of natural attrition still lives on.

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Foreword

Everyone said: “We *must* write a book about our experiences!” ‘Everyone’ was a group of women and two males who were evacuated from London in 1939 to carry on the Marine Division’s work in the peace of England’s West Country.

When our work was practically done and the dreadful war nearly over, we began to wonder “Where shall we be in a year’s time?” So we decided we would have a reunion in a year’s time. The venue was to be Lyon’s Corner House or the site thereof.

Every year following the first meeting in 1946, the original twelve girls, plus a few more who were recruited in Stroud, used to meet to talk over old times and renew old friendships. It is amazing that this reunion of old faces has continued for at least sixty years!

Two are no longer with us, unfortunately, and it was significant that in a letter dated July 1999 Betty wrote to say: “The reunion was rather sad this time, as only six of us could attend.” That is life, though, and I think we would all choose to remember the happy times we spent in a lovely corner of England when we were very aware of our good fortune, billetted together, free of the misery which was to be the lot of so many lives in those days.

It was the untimely death of one of our number, Mary, which prompted me, in Australia, to start the job of writing the much sought-after book, nearly *sixty-five years* after it all happened!

Without the help of my colleagues, who supplied their own little vignettes, I could not have succeeded. I send my grateful thanks to them all! Many friends have helped me in my quest for a book to remember the past. Mr Alan Heasman, manager of the Met Office Library and Archive in Bracknell, who provided the chapter on the history of the Met Office, Jacqui Kosmala from Queensland, who helped me find information on the origins of the computer, Joan Willson, who sub-edited the book long before Nick Tapper came to help to put it into the format for printing; all these friends are owed a very great vote of thanks. Without their help, there would not be this history of the Marine Division of the British Meteorological Office during World War II.

1. Arrival

The third day of September, 1939, was as beautiful as any English summer day in living memory; the future maelstrom was indeed remote from the pleasures of such a lovely day. Our perception of it was marred forever by the Declaration of War on Germany at 11am.

The office we were working in was the Marine Division of the Meteorological Office (MO1), which had been run solely by ex-Naval Captains and a small male staff for many years. The incumbent was Captain Brooke-Smith.

Every year since the early 1850s, sailing ships' Masters had been entering into weather log-books their observations of wind, weather, sea and sky. As they were completed the books were sent to London, where they were eventually stored in the nether regions of Adastral House in Kingsway. With a war in the offing, someone exercising a lot of foresight had suggested that the vital information in the logs – wave size, currents, temperature, barometer readings – should be recovered by a process of punch-card tabulation and used to create charts for the use of the Navy in a war that was as inevitable as day follows night. Even in 1937, the evil rumblings out of Germany had many worried. This tremendous job was assigned to the Marine Division, and the Captain had to request more staff. Imagine his surprise when he was confronted in his office one October morning in 1937 by two young ladies! Claudia well remembers the start of her employment:

I was greeted with, 'You young ladies should be at home darning your fathers' socks.' This was certainly a good start! The next missile was 'What is today?' Fortunately for me, I had come through Trafalgar Square on my way to the Air Ministry, and had noted the celebrations. 'Trafalgar Day, sir,' I answered. He brightened considerably and threw another staccato question at me. 'What is the Plimsoll Line?' The answer to that question had remained in my mind as one of the useless pieces of information one collects, and I answered abruptly and with assurance, 'The loading line of a ship, sir.' I could almost see his mind ticking over and thinking 'Maybe it won't be so bad after all!'

When war was declared two years later, a dozen or so more young lady clerks were taken on to work on the ships' logs with, to their delight, a few young men. We had to go in pairs down into the lower reaches of Adastral House to retrieve the logs, bringing them up in the lift.

The whole office was at this stage moved to Victory House, sharing the building with the Air Force Recruiting Office and other Air Ministry Departments.

Each day we had to code the logs with numbers for all the observations. Later, when coding was complete, and had been checked, we had to punch holes into cards cut to about seven inches by three inches. (The Hollerith system was the invention of Hermann Hollerith[1] of Germany). The machine which made the holes was about 12 inches long and seven inches wide, with typewriter-like keys. Each card was divided into 47 columns, each column headed appropriately with what had to be punched into it. The whole system was supplied by the British Tabulating Company.

For instance, barometer readings took five columns, date four columns and year two columns. A stack of new cards was kept at the left side of the operator; she picked up one with the left hand and slid it into the machine. The machine was purely mechanical and worked by cutting small round holes into the cards.

It was amazing how quickly we got used to using them, and learning how to use two keys together to make the alphabet, as well as being able to carry on a conversation while still punching correctly. On completing the coded information, the card was taken out of the machine with the right hand, while the left hand already had another card ready. The completed card was then stacked, upside down, on the right side of the operator, to be verified by another person.

To verify, one had to do the same operation on a similar machine, which did not have cutting keys. If there was any discrepancy, the machine would block the operation. Then it was a case of determining what was wrong, and repunching the card. Usually, it was a case of the wrong key having been pressed in the first operation. The stack was measured with a ruler, and sent on to the Sorting section.

The cards were kept in strict order of being processed, and then went into the Sorter, a five-foot giant of a machine. This had vertical pockets for the cards to tumble into, as the machine sorted all columns of the same heading into separate pockets.

It was decided by the head of the Department what was wanted from the sorted cards, and of course the machine could be programmed to sort any one column needed out of the 47 on the card. The cards were collected in order from the top pocket, then went into the tabulator, which gave the results of the tabulated information. The information then went to the drawing office, where the charts were created. Although always called the drawing office, it was actually manned by cartographers, who created charts.

We all became very good friends. Visits to theatres and shows kept us busy some weekends and holidays. The Captain began to call the clerks 'My young ladies', and whereas the male clerks were always in trouble, the ladies could do no wrong. He never missed a chance to show visitors his 'young ladies'. He was a character who lived unto himself. One day, he called in the clerks and said "You must be tired of all those logs, you shall learn navigation." And they did, with the expertise of Commander Hennessy, who even taught them how to box a compass, something which has stayed with some of us to this day. Training was also given on how to use Admiralty charts. As civilians, we clerks referred to them as maps, to the horror of the Captain. We learned to chart ice on the St Lawrence River, and how to navigate a ship around the south of Spain without getting a navigational reading on dry land.

The logs gave the ship's position at noon and midnight, and we had to interpolate the intervening positions. Sometimes, as in the open sea, we could do this without concern, but without a map or chart to show where the land was, the straight line between these two positions could give a reading in the middle of Spain or Portugal.

Our dear 'boss', Mr Ransley, used to pick up these errors when he checked our coding of the logs, and never gave a more intense chiding than 'You are nothing if not consistent!'. There was a special notebook in which we had to note any unusual

observations like “inflorescence”, “halos round the moon”, “flying fish”, and, once, “turtles all around us”.

One day, the Captain send the staff home early, and wrote in the attendance book, ‘12.30, mustered staff, piped down at 1pm, then sent them home’. This sort of behaviour was quite taboo in the Civil Service, and was probably the only time it was ever used, and glossed over by the upper echelon.

Brooke-Smith often arrived with a flourish, and standing behind the clerk working on a log, would give a full and vivid recollection of the very master of the ship who had originally written the log in the beautiful copperplate handwriting of the day. This added immeasurably to our interest in the work of the Marine Division.

The Captain retired eventually, and we clerks were pleased to give him a memento, an anchor paperweight, in memory of the Marine Division. It was revealed later that he was a loner who was not adept at spelling and would not have a secretary. A male clerk took down all his letters in longhand. It was truly the end of an era when he finally left his post.

The Captain’s replacement was an ex-Admiralty mariner, Captain Frankcom,[2] in his early thirties, who had the dubious responsibility of navigating the Marine Division through the war, with many more young ladies plus a couple of the male clerks far from home in the ‘wilds’ of the West Country. Many more clerks had been taken on to use the data from the logbooks, the office eventually comprising 15 lady clerks and seven males. Some of our men were sent to work in Customs. Later, some were to serve in the Armed Forces.

We were recalled to the office one Saturday morning in early September. This must be important, as we had never had to front up to the office on a Saturday before. The special meeting was to inform us that we were to be spared the expected upheavals in London and were to be evacuated as a complete office to the west of England! The Cotswolds in fact! Many thoughts flew through our minds. Most of our small group had heard of the area and some had visited there. It had a reputation as a lovely place of peace and tranquillity. What a place to spend a war! We were sad to lose some of our male friends, but were buoyed by the thought that we would all be together wherever we ended up.

War preparations had begun. Air Defence was organised under the banner of Air Raid Precautions, and many dads and mums were being trained to work in clearing up after the expected bombs. As Hitler’s first objective was to put the Royal Air Force out of action, the threat of invasion became prevalent. Signposts in many areas were taken down and names of many railway stations and roads were also removed. These were all thought to be an aid to the enemy in recognising their whereabouts after landing by parachute. The Navy was also busy, installing 600 coastal guns. Road blocks were hurriedly erected, as were hundreds of air-raid shelters in every suburb of London. In the once-peaceful seaside holiday places, pill-boxes were erected to give protection for those whose job it was to see that no-one approached Britain by sea.

This was now a world of ‘make do and mend’, not a place of plastic and chemicals. Every person was expected to do his or her bit to defeat a bitter foe, and to get Britain back on her feet.

The day came, late in November of 1939, when we were due to leave our homes and loved ones. About a dozen ladies, all around 19 years of age, met Claudia, a couple of years our senior and our unofficial mentor, at Paddington Station. Then we found Roger and Hugo and our immediate ‘boss’, Mr Ransley, who shepherded us to our seats in the waiting train. There were many other departments of the Air Ministry involved in this move of evacuees, and soon the packed train set off for Stroud, 100 miles to the West. Some were sent to Tetbury, others to Cheltenham. We evacuees were very happy with our destination. Stroud has a lovely position at the junction of five valleys and the surrounding country is delightful, with hundreds of footpaths through beautiful woods and villages on the slopes. There would be ample time and opportunity to ramble, and we looked forward to our free weekends.

A local bus picked us up at the station, and took us a couple of hundred yards to the Subscription Rooms, where we were welcomed and served watery cups of cocoa. The same bus then took us to our various billets, which Commander Hennessy and Mr Smith had chosen for us some months before. The last dozen of us were left off at the gates of an old Cotswold stone house in its own grounds: Dudbridge House. We congratulated ourselves on the charm of our new surroundings, although Betty always considered it to look more like a prison!

Traces of better days were obvious, like the huge old yew tree which graced the grounds, and the overgrown rock gardens which needed much attention. But it looked a good place to live, and as we would all be together, we had no misgivings as we disembarked the bus in an excited mood.

We were again welcomed, this time by our landlady Mrs Carey and her daughter, Anita. After a quick look round the ground floor of the house we were served tea and cakes in the pretty and well-furnished drawing-room, obviously another relic of past glories. Soon, we were all writing home to tell of our good fortune in landing in such a paradise.

We shared three bedrooms, each with two beds. Signs of water penetration were all over, on sheets, mattresses, and the walls. Stroud was often shrouded in mist, and if windows were left open, as they were in Dudbridge, these signs and stains soon became evident. As well as sharing a room, we had to share a bed, and once all our baggage had arrived there left little room to swing the proverbial cat! It was so cold that we slept with woollies on, with a large sausage of clothes down the middle of the bed, to keep out draughts. The water in the old-fashioned jugs and basins in the rooms often formed ice on the surface, which we had to break before washing ourselves in the mornings. Claudia was probably the unidentified person we named the ‘curler dropper’. While we were in bed, she hummed a tune of the day, while the curlers were applied, and in the morning we heard them being withdrawn, going ‘clink’ into a tin. This was her way of making sure that we didn’t show up late for work!

We realised how lucky we were to be living in the beautiful Cotswolds, with hills surrounding us as well as one beside the house, which brought thoughts of morning walks and weekend hikes. Chris has her own memories of the surroundings:

My first impressions when we evacuated to Stroud was the sheer beauty of the autumn scenery. My home was in the East side of London, and summer holidays were usually a week at the sea on the East coast or the sunny South coast. We went by charabanc (coach), so I saw the countryside only in the summer months, when we did our little bit of travelling.

When we reached Stroud, the beauty and the colours of the autumn trees made a big impression on me. Then came another very big impression, when the landscape changed to the white of Winter, with huge snowdrifts and roads closed at times. I enjoyed our Winter rambles up the hills of Selsley and Rodborough, often slithering down to find a hot drink at the NAAFI [Navy, Army, Air Force Institute]. If we were lucky, we found cigarettes and chocolates as well!

Springtime was especially beautiful! The woods were alive with purple and white violets, snowdrops, primroses, and later cowslips, all in a profusion of colour which was previously unknown to me.

A group of us, usually at weekends, would delight in walking over the lovely Selsley Hill, stopping off at the flower-rich woods, picking primroses and cowslips. Vicky was so keen, she sent some home to her mother in London – by post! Imagine the scene! About fifteen of us, including a group from other offices who lived nearby, would set off from Dudbridge House, chattering our way uphill. The colder the day, the better for us. As we reached where the hill flattened out, we naturally filtered across the grass at both sides of the road and started singing. On our first Christmas morning, we were lucky to find a newly-born lamb in the barn of a farm in the vicinity. This was a significant event for such a day, and lifted our spirits even higher than they were.

Chris continues:

From the beauty of these scenes to our personal beauty. Very few cosmetics were available in Stroud, but in my home area there was a market stall which, somehow, had our favourite brands in stock. When I was due to go home on leave I sent a list of beauty aids which my friends had requested to my mother. She would buy most of them at the stall, and I would distribute them on my return to Stroud. What excitement that engendered!

Mrs Carey didn't have much to say to us directly. She seemed rarely to leave the Stygian gloom of the kitchen, and sent one of her seven children (usually the diplomatic Anita) in the event that she needed to communicate. Mr Carey was away in London, and presumably Mrs Carey had been left to help with finances. But she should never have been persuaded to take in evacuees, as she was no organiser and certainly no cook by any standard!

The generosity of the first afternoon was short-lived, as was shown in the meals we were served later by the junior members of the family. Tommy, about six, was quite our favourite, as it was his pale face we saw each morning through the hatch when he gave us our bowls of porridge or other mean fare. It was also Tommy's duty to look after a goat that was tied up at the back of the house. Naturally, our favour for him lessened in intensity as the aura about him increased!

Food had already been rationed, and ration books distributed to every person. We had to surrender our ration books to whoever was responsible for feeding us. At first our menu consisted of a choice: sardines, cheese or soup. The last two items were soon off the menu and the result was one sardine on a huge, heavy dinner place, another relic of obviously better days! We had no surprises about the sweets that were served – it was always plums, stewed or tinned.

The ballroom of the house had been let to a couple with three children – the Lindleys. She was a sweet lady, who helped in hanging out some of our washing in exchange for our setting her hair. Claudia remembers one cold evening when she rocked the log in the fireplace to raise a spark and how, when it came, we all cheered, huddled around in our topcoats. The Lindleys were unique in that they had a washing machine! A salesman had left one to try out one day and had never called back. It was quite modern for that time; it had an electric wringer, but had to be filled with water from a hose.

We soon got to know Stroud on our weekend forays into Town, by bus or on foot, to buy fillers for our empty stomachs. We found it a very old town, which we learned later had developed on the backs of the sheep which found lush and plentiful grazing on the slopes and on the vast Common on top of the hills. Naturally, wool became a valuable commodity from which to make a living in the area, and the excellent returns from the fleece became the instrument whereby so many grand houses had been built, including our own.

The whole area became recognised for the warm and attractive material known ever after as 'West of England Cloth', used especially in the making of the Royal Guards' uniforms. Its old buildings wore a patina of soot from the numerous steam trains which had serviced the town in the past, and still did, in spite of a war being in progress. But it was all new to us, and now our home town, so we made the best of the soot and grime, and resolved to live there in harmony with the lovely surroundings.

2. Winter

The winter of 1940 was the coldest for about 50 years. Inevitably, the pipes burst in Dudbridge House so we had to wait to use the toilet until we reached the office, or we went out back and melted the snow. Our employment by the Air Ministry was in the Wycliffe Boys' College in Stonehouse, a village about four miles from where we were billeted. The college had shifted to safer premises in Wales, leaving all its buildings unoccupied. (Presumably it was safe enough for a Government Department to take over during the war period.) There were the usual offices, a sanatorium, swimming pool, sports areas, and a separate house, on the opposite side of the road that ran through Stonehouse, where masters had resided. It was called Springfield House, and is where our office machines were installed, and where the clerks of MO1 worked.

The headmaster had been a spartan man who, they say, kept all the windows open both summer and winter. His zeal for sunshine and fresh air was discovered by Alison one day when she found a bottle of turtle oil in the bathroom. Our suspicions of his spare time activities were increased by someone pointing out that the bathroom windows were made of Vitaglass, a type of glass which lets in ultra-violet rays. His propensity for sunbathing in his spare time was made clear by the bottle of turtle oil.

We walked to work from Dudbridge each morning along the canal path. This was very interesting as it recalled much busier times, with parts of the waterway still in place, just awaiting the renewal of better days that never came.

The swans were our greatest hazard, hissing at everyone who went too close to their nests. We followed in the footsteps of the numerous horses that had plodded the path into existence, towing the heavily-laden barges to town from canals far away in other English counties. Many of our office colleagues lived between Stroud and the office in Stonehouse about seven miles away.

Very few people had cars due to petrol restrictions, but those who did never ran empty of passengers, as they picked up anyone walking. One accepted lifts from strangers, and everyone was very friendly – one beneficial aspect of the war.

The whole of our office from London had been set up in Springfield House, which was even more like home! Fortunately for us, the bathroom came in more than handy when the weather turned sour, as it did in February. The building had a janitor, Mr Smith, a kindly soul, who revelled in the fact that he had to serve a variety of ladies rather than cheeky boys. He was one of our favourite people in the area. He would welcome each one of us as we arrived, always with a smile, and sometimes a joke as well. He was also a fund of information on how the war was going on that particular day. He always made us feel better as we got off our bikes or arrived by bus ready to start the day's work.

To get home again, two double-decker buses would line up in Stonehouse and the staff would herd like goats to get on. One of our number, Mr Barlow, who had a disability that forced him to walk with crutches, used them with great agility to help him through the crowd, and of course, it was not long before complaints were made to the bus-driver.

No-one stood back, politely – it didn't help to be polite in the system as it was. But, soon, the power that be trained us into making queues, which was wonderful once it became routine. The rest of the country was in the same boat and surprisingly, the queuing system caught on and became part of life, and still is!

Winter was early that year, and we soon sent home for warmer clothing, to be able to battle the snow and ice which befell us. It was really beautiful, to awake to a soundless white world outside. The magnificent yew tree not far from our windows was transformed into a fairyland picture of glistening snow which we could never have seen in London.

One early morning, the world outside our windows glowed a silvery white! We got out of bed to be amazed by what we saw! Groups of girls pressed noses to the windows guessing what had happened to the sparkling trees. Our combined warm breath made the ice on the outside of the window slowly slither to the ground, and gave us a better view. 'It's snow', 'No, it's ice', 'No, it's rain'. The whole world was covered in films of thin ice. Every leaf on every tree, every blade of grass was coated in ice.

This was a good incentive to get out of bed early, as we wanted to explore what had happened to our world. We walked to work as usual, there being no transport of any other kind. We found fun in kicking off the brittle tops of the grass underfoot. We heard lots of minor cracklings and splitting noises as twigs snapped, sometimes large branches breaking off trees with the added weight of the ice which enveloped them. We saw the brave robins searching for food, a few hopping on one leg – the other presumably having been left behind, frozen to the branch where it had rested the night!

Water, which must have come from thawing snow, had poured out of down-pipes, only to be frozen in mid-fall leaving a stalactite in ice. We did our own version of skating on ice, with many a fall, of course. But it was an event, unusual in any country, that we remember with awe. The local paper came up with an explanation next day: "After snowfall, a thaw had set in, which had covered everything in water. Then, suddenly, an extreme cold snap appeared (probably from Siberia), freezing everything in the state where it was in mid-thaw." It was an amazing phenomenon, and we felt privileged to have been its witnesses. The paper gave it the name of "Silver Thaw".

Claudia remembers going to a dance in Cheltenham with Ross and Mary on the night of the Silver Thaw: 'The ride home was horrendous. Branches were falling on cars, telegraph wires wound around the wheels, and the whole job of driving became a nightmare. But Ross, always the gentleman, arrived home safely with us two ladies and then made his own way safely back to his home in the hills.'

As for the poor old goat, it was given shelter of some kind, and we missed his aggressiveness whenever we had to arrive home via the back door, the front one having been locked at 10pm.

This often late arrival home came later to a prickly end for three of our number. Due to the inefficiencies of the Dudbridge household in looking after a dozen working ladies, a local vicar offered to take three evacuees. After having met the vicar in

church each Sunday, he invited them to tea. 'We were fed very well, on luscious cakes, and later, were invited to go stay with them in their home.' The three must have given some hair-raising accounts of the place where they were billetted! Alison tells her story:

We felt thrilled with the idea of receiving all that comfort after living in Dudbridge House. We could see that the Hardakers wanted us to go and stay with them. We felt sad at the idea of splitting up from the other girls – even guilty at the idea of deserting them. But I'm afraid we succumbed. Mary, Hannah and I moved into the vicarage soon after Christmas and everything went well for a fortnight. We ate in the dining room with the family – the Hardakers and a son of about 16 years. Suddenly, one day, we were told we were to eat in the kitchen off kitchen crockery! We did not ask why, just meekly complied. At the age of only nineteen, we had had no experience of such people as Mr Hardaker.

I think this was the beginning of a deliberate plan to get rid of us. We realised what it was all about. All the local people had been approached to take in evacuees from London as soon as war was imminent. At breakfast one morning, the talk had been of their friends who had 'been landed with three snotty-nosed kids from the East End of London.' The Hardakers dreaded the thought of this happening to them too, and had looked around for three more 'acceptable' evacuees. So they devised the idea of inviting someone 'more acceptable', and then getting rid of them, hoping they would end up by having to take in no-one.

The food was quite good – better than they were still getting in Dudbridge. The Government allowance was 35 shillings per week, which was paid to the billetor. She also received our ration books. But by evening time we were all starving! One night, the son was making toast by the fire, and I asked him if we could join him. His parents were not around. "You'll have to ask Mum", was the reply. So, we just had to stay hungry. After that put-off, we used to take home rolls and whatever we could buy in our lunchtime in the local little grocery shop. Fortunately, bread was not rationed at this stage of the war and we could fill ourselves with dry rolls (butter was not rationed until July) but we did not have control of our ration books so our purchases were limited. [After hostilities ceased in 1945, bread went on ration, as the Nation was committed to feeding the Germans from our own meagre supplies of grain.]

I used to go to shorthand and typing lessons twice a week, the bus service to Stroud still being good. I didn't know what the other two did. It was warm and somewhere to go at night.

My newly-wed husband, Andrew, visited me on a one-day leave from the Army. We had a good day out together, and dutifully arrived back home at 9.30pm. I could not believe it when he was not allowed inside the door!

One day, Mary got into a state about a letter she had received from her Father, asking 'what was going on'. Reverend Hardaker had written to him, with an envelope addressed to 'Himself alone'. The letter said that his daughter was 'behaving badly and going out on the Town'. Mr Henley was not worried, but wanted answers.

Then it happened to me! My Father wrote to say that 'he trusted me, but what was going on?' All this occurred after we had been to a dance, having been given special permission to be back late. Normally, we had to be in by 9.30pm but this night we were graciously allowed out until 11.30pm. We arrived back ten minutes late, due to the bus being late from Cheltenham. The bolts and lock on the front door were all in place, slowly unbolted a little later by an angry Mr Hardaker.

Next morning, I remember a commotion at the kitchen door, revealing Mr Hardaker posing with his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets and legs apart. He told us in no uncertain terms that he was upset and annoyed by our behaviour. Then, I suppose, he wrote his letters.

We had to stay on there, not knowing what to do for the best. We felt bad about Mr Hardaker's reaction to our 'misconduct', and asked ourselves later why we remained meek and had nothing to say.

Eventually, I received a letter from my mother, who wrote that she was disappointed with what had happened to me at the vicarage. She said that she had just realised that we had a relative living in Stroud, and she suggested that I go and visit her.

So, I put on the best of the clothes I had, including two pairs of stockings (it was very cold). Then I went to Merrywalks (part of Stroud) by bus and knocked on the door of my second cousin's house. Jenny opened the door with a welcoming smile – she was a lovely lady – and asked me in for tea.

The result of the visit was that I was invited to stay with her and her husband Jack – both old enough to be my parents. They had a daughter, Joan, just about my age! So, once again, I deserted my friends and moved out. Mary and Hannah insisted that I take up the offer and I could not refuse. Fortunately, it was not long before they too found more convivial places to live.

Joan and I became very good friends, of course, and we joined the hospital fire-watching group. It became quite a laugh with Jack. The siren would go, meaning that enemy planes were coming into our area, and Joan and I would awake – sometimes. Jack would awaken immediately, and had to waken us in turn, when he knew that we were on duty. The Junkers 88 would by now be overhead, and we had to dress for duty, and then walk in total darkness to the hospital some 20 minutes away. But we never made it in time, as the All Clear sounded before we had even reached the centre of town! Luckily, the Junkers never stayed long, moving on to bigger places like Birmingham and Coventry, a few miles away to the north.

I was also on the roster for fire-watching at the College, but didn't like the idea of staying awake for two hours every four hours. But we made time quicken by playing Bezique. Phoebe and I got quite good at it in time. All the volunteer fire-watchers were given a very brief training by the boss fireman. We were taken up ladders onto the roof of the old college building, through skylights and over small hips and valleys. All this was to make us feel comfortable with climbing to retrieve incendiary bombs which may have rained down at any time from an unfriendly aircraft. The small bombs were to be immersed in buckets of water. Many buckets had been dispersed about the roof. In fact, no bombs fell in our vicinity during our stay in Stroud, a reassurance of the fact that we were now in an area of tranquillity.

Getting to work in Stonehouse took about half an hour. I walked to the bus stop, and caught the double-decker bus. It scared me every time, not because there was no driver up top but because, as the bus turned a corner, it would lean over at a truly frightening angle, and occasionally scraped the kerb. Even at the end of our stay, when the war was nearing its end, I remember the buses getting so near to buildings in the centre of town that upstairs passengers were able to get a good view of the interior of the upstairs flats. But, I still sat on the upper deck, to get a better view, come what may!

By August 1940 invasion was a serious possibility and everyone knew it, and was prepared to meet a German parachutist at every turn of the road! But, we were 'all in it together', and our revered leader, 'Winnie' Churchill kept our spirits high with his nightly broadcasts to the people. September brought the first bombing of London. But we were also aiming back. Berlin was heavily bombed, bringing a kind of delight to

the suffering British. On one December night, 115 tons of metal rained down on the capital and the docks area of London. The numerous fighters escorting bombers were targets for our ack-ack guns and many fell to earth. A total of 2698 German aircraft were claimed as destroyed.

Later in September of 1940, Chris was ready to go on leave for her marriage in London. Her husband-to-be, Charlie, was stationed in Wales and had to travel through Stroud to reach London. On arriving back at Dudbridge after a cinema visit, she was told of a phone call which stated that Charlie's leave had been brought forward a week and that she should be ready to meet him in Stroud station at midnight. Hastily packing, her billetor assisting, Chris took the bus to the station, where she duly met Charlie, and feeling very guilty, arrived at her parents' home in the very early hours of the morning with her husband-to-be on her arm.

'I was very concerned about having to leave my position in the Met Office without permission,' says Chris. 'But much nicer things soon took over, and in spite of the blitz (German for *blitzkrieg* – meaning lightning war) we enjoyed our leave together. We attended a football match at West Ham and had to walk home as all traffic had stopped.

'Numerous enemy planes were overhead, bombing London, as Hitler had promised. After our wedding, we drove home in silence, not a person or even a dog to be seen', says Chris. 'Our reception took place with the All Clear having been sounded, so we and our guests enjoyed the celebration until light began to fail and the fear of more bombers coming over became a priority. So, our guests began to leave before the expected raids began.

'Of course, the day had to come when I returned to my duties in Stroud. Charlie made it a little easier as he was able to travel with me as far as Stroud on his way back to Wales. But my knees were knocking with trepidation as I entered the door in Springfield on my first day back at work. Dear Mr Smith gave me a wave as I entered expecting dismissal. I had already written a letter of apology to my senior officer, whilst still on leave, hoping that this would make an improvement in my situation, but I still felt bad!

'I was lucky after all! Severely reprimanded by my seniors, the guilt turned to elation as I was congratulated by my peers, with many good wishes for a long and happy marriage. Their wishes came true, ending after 51 years with the sad death of my Charlie.'

3. Social Life

We needed some kind of social life, of course, and all kinds of games had been organised at the college after working hours. Badminton, drama, chorus work all helped to bring in the local people, who had at first taken to us only as an alarming intrusion from a place far away. We were spoken of as being ‘night-clubbers’, the term being synonymous with Londoners. But with a lot of tact and empathy, we won a lot of them over. Our evening ‘Soirees’ became very popular. These were simply an evening of entertainment, with Peg on the piano, Chris on the violin, and Claudia and Betty harmonising. The kindly Lindleys also joined in on occasion. We were told later by a group of locals that they missed us on our return to the ‘wicked city’. (The vicar must have had a similar opinion of these people from London.)

Betty was badly ill with flu that winter, and Claudia had been given permission to stay home to look after her. Mrs Carey would not have a doctor in the house, her family being Christian Scientists. (She even put poor Tommy out in the sun when he had measles!) So Claudia had to call the doctor. On seeing his ill patient, he said ‘I know this house, you had better look after her yourself’. But Betty, when fit enough, took advantage of the free transport tickets allowed each of us by the Air Ministry, to go back to London to be pampered with the comforts of home, sweet home.

Back at Dudbridge, the rest of us had been treated well for a while, even being told by Mrs Carey that we could have a party if we liked, since Christmas was nearly upon us. We had to do all the organising ourselves, however. This was quite difficult as we had little money and no rations. The food in the small shops was not in great supply. There were no supermarkets then. But we wanted to act as good hosts to all the people we intended to invite. With many diverse army groups in the Stroud district we had naturally met quite a few of the men at dances or at the local Toc H club in Stonehouse. So we had a good list of party-goers. Betty’s brother Bill and Alison’s husband Andrew were both stationed somewhere in the area, and they came to help out.

On the night of the party, we had small tables of goodies set out, and some music playing from the hired radio. All ready for dancing! Most of the time, we played ‘Murder’ and ‘Sardines’ which brought the large number of cupboards in the upper regions of the house into play.

Then, of course, there was ‘Postman’s knock’. Alison remembers:

‘In my case, it was a quick kiss and back inside the room again. For some reason, I actually remember what I wore to that party. I had a midnight blue dress and following a new fashion of the day I had sewn white frilled lace all round the full skirt, forming a pretty flounce. Clothing and material was already rationed, with a points system allowing small purchases. “Make do and mend” was the cry of the day, and quite ingenious people had started the idea of making topcoats from warm, woolly blankets of the right colour. None of us had enough “points” to buy petticoats and the make-do of a frilly petticoat hem was a very clever alternative. I remember Andrew being there – we had married in September 1939, just before our move out of London. Andrew was a prized guest, as he had joined the London Scottish regiment,

and wore his kilt, to the pleasure of everyone. We danced in the hall, which had a polished wood floor, and for once, we had plenty of partners to go round.'

During the course of the evening, Claudia discovered that the Fifth Survey Regiment had a 'jolly good dance band' and received an open invitation to attend their dances. We naturally took this offer into our hearts, as it meant it was 'somewhere to go which was not too far away'. The fact that we would have to walk home did not deter us at all as there would be always someone else walking too – even if only another of the Dudbridge Dozen! It turned out that the exceptional band was as good as Glenn Miller's (in our uneducated eyes) with an excellent drummer, Mike Wide. We also received invitations from the US Air Force, who had a Fighter Wing at Aston Down Aerodrome but these were not in the same league as the Survey Regiment dances. The Commandant sent a coach to pick us up. We were assured that we would all have an escort when we reached the 'drome. Alison recalls:

Young Andrew was the only man on the coach, and when we got inside the 'drome gates a sergeant with a flashlight came in and looked under all the seats. They did this on our way out too – presumably looking for anyone who thought he could escape this way! We had to wait until 10pm before Andrew was allowed to dance! Andrew was a Lieutenant. So we sat chatting to the two officers until 10 o'clock. Eventually the Major got to his feet and we took the signal to do the same and started to dance. What a waste of good dancing time!

We sometimes wondered about the work we were doing and how it related to the war effort. To keep in touch we had hired a radio which kept us informed each breakfast time. Without it we hardly felt part of the world and we had great reservations about the work we were doing and how useful it really was.

Commander Hennessy was adamant when asked about this. 'One day' he said, 'you will realise just how useful the charts you have helped to devise have been, not only to the British Forces but to those from overseas as well.'

Our questions were answered in full one day, when the Marine Division received a commendation from the Admiralty informing us that our charts of sea currents had been most important in the battle of the River Plate. No more was said about our usefulness to the war effort. We continued punching thousands of Hollerith cards each day until we were advised that, to help the war effort, we would be obliged to work until 7pm each weekday instead of 4pm. This did not affect most of us except for swimming in the college pool which became too cool after 7pm. The evenings gave ample time to get out and cycle or walk over the lovely hills, sometimes for many miles, one of the few remaining signposts the only reminder of how far away our billet was. (It was a legitimate official fear that the enemy might drop troops by parachute at any time.)

In an effort to conserve energy, the Government instituted Summer Time, when all clocks were advanced one hour. In 1940 it started in February and went on until the end of December. It was such a success that in the following years from 1941 to 1945 it became Double Summer Time, thereby making our evenings even longer. Walking across the hills became even more desirable, especially with a well-chosen companion!

We all enjoyed dancing, even some who had never danced before, and once after a long week of dancing almost every night somewhere or another, someone suggested that we buy a packet of glucose to replace some of the energy that we were missing in our food. It certainly helped us stay awake.

Memories of the 1940 summer are of blue skies and lovely, warm days. We were revelling in the outdoor life we were leading in the lovely places that were new to us amongst the hills and dales of the Cotswolds. The bright, moonlit nights were also providential for the enemy bombers which came over in their hundreds. Our fighters were quick to intervene and of course, many bombers were shot down. I used to keep a daily record in my diary, and the number 100-plus was prominent and frequent. How could the Germans keep this up?

One night, on a walk home from the dance, Claudia and her escort came across a motorcyclist who had just come off his bike after crashing into a wall. He was injured, but not badly, so Claudia and her friend helped him to Dudbridge and cleaned his wounds in the bathroom, hiding his bike in the bushes. On enquiry he told his rescuers that he was in OCTU training and had gone to Bristol to see his girlfriend. There was no way he could get back with a broken-down motorcycle, so they hid it in the bushes at Dudbridge House to be picked up later. On realising he was in a home of some sort the soldier asked 'What kind of place is this?' He must have had reservations, with the few of us who were at home giving him the once-over from around the bathroom door! Luckily, Claudia's escort was from the same regiment and was able to escort him and his bike back to barracks at the Stroud workhouse the next day.

Our office in Springfield House had an Observer Corps. These were specially-picked, keen civilians who were skilled in aircraft recognition. They worked in shifts on the flat Springfield House roof. They were able to give us early notice if enemy aircraft were in our vicinity. But all the aircraft we heard were on to better things than a small Air Ministry set-up, and were on their way to deliver bombs to Coventry and Birmingham.

One day, however, we heard an aircraft which screamed rather than made the usual noises, and the Observers on duty were quizzed about it. But they were not forthcoming in any way. Much later we realised that the new jet-engined aircraft was being built in Bristol and we must have heard one of them being tested.

The local searchlight Battery did good service every night and we often saw the beastly bombers in their probing beams, feeling very sorry for the recipients of the horror they were soon to impose on those cities. Each searchlight was of 12 and a half million candlepower! There were 96 in a Regiment and placed 6000 yards apart to concentrate a cone of three beams. Of course, the Observers had to be kept well supplied with tea and coffee and they were, by us, from the tea room in Springfield. We had a small allowance from the office imprest account to buy tea and sugar but these two commodities kept disappearing. Someone put a note in the tea caddy one day. It read, 'God helps those who help themselves, but He won't help the thief of this tea'. We found one of the cleaning ladies very indignant one morning! Tea was rationed to 2 ounces per person per week from July of 1940 but, fortunately, we never had to do without.

A few of the local residents had become quite friendly with us. One, in particular, Ross, had an MG sports car, and obviously the wherewithal to run it, and was often to be seen at our front door ready to take a couple of us to a dance. Others of us sometimes went by bus which ran fairly regularly in the evenings. Of course, it nearly always meant a walk home but we were used to walking everywhere. Over the flat-topped hills, on the Common, one would not realise how far the walk had been until a solitary sign-post told the whereabouts of a certain village some ten miles from 'home'.

Many of us Dudbridgians had acquired bikes soon after we arrived and, again, these were very useful in reaching far-away dances in remote villages, as well as useful in attending picnics and so forth often arranged with other Air Ministry departments.

We all had to put in our required amount of 'fire-watching' in the college and we were given sheets to help in our bedding arrangements on camp beds. We went in groups and were often not called upon for the whole night as the men took on main duties, and as far as is known, we were never called out in an emergency. We were paid 30 pence a night for fire-watching which soon accumulated into a nice little nest-egg for the more thrifty of us.

What I remember is the scuttling of little feet deep in the night when the resident mice came out to forage. They must have been as hungry as we were so I softened to them and kept them quiet from the others with a few crumbs from biscuits which were always in good supply.

Sometimes, after getting off the train from London, it was too late to expect to get into the house so some of us, after walking from Stroud, would put two chairs together in the College and try to get some sleep. There was usually a blanket of sorts to be found, and sometimes this ruse worked – mostly it did not! I well remember walking from the London train which had arrived about 10.30pm in Stroud, and deliberately keeping to the middle of the road, away from the hedges at the sides, which could have harboured undesirables ready to jump out on me.

During the day, in the middle of a punching session, a clerk would surreptitiously walk away upstairs, to the bathroom where much-needed washing was done. Then, with a little smirk, resume her seat and her work.

We were all punching away as usual one day when it started to rain hot water! Finding that it came from a split ceiling board, some of us rushed upstairs to investigate while others removed the piles of precious logs to a safe position. The drizzle became a small flood in a few minutes and we realised that a pipe had burst in the bathroom upstairs! There was a mad rush to remove the rest of the logs while someone made the necessary phone call. Soon help came from somewhere and all was peace again.

Later in our stay in the West someone back in the London Office must have decided that we needed a supervisor and sent a middle-aged spinster to sit over us. For some reason Miss Fitch didn't last long as we really did not need anyone to oversee us and

we thought she was fretting for the life she knew in London. So she went home and we were freed of all supervision and carried on punching our way through each day.

One must admit that for twelve ladies of approximately the same age to live in each others' shadows and work together each day we managed a good harmony. There was no word of dissent or argument all the time we were together, the total time being about four years. We were friends for life!

4. Fortunes of War

By the law of averages our peaceful wartime life couldn't continue. One bad day our dear Mary received a telegram to say that her husband, beloved Roger, was posted as missing. The sobering news affected all of us and we rallied around Mary to help.

Then within weeks Heidi received news through the radio at breakfast that the *Repulse*, one of Britain's large battleships, had been sunk in the Far East. This was shattering news, too, as we were all aware that Heidi's brother, Colin, was a midshipman who had joined *Repulse* some time back. We just had to look on the bright side – even a sinking could mean that some lives were saved and so we took the radio to work and listened most of the day for the good news which we felt just had to come.

The war was getting nearer to our hide-away with more bombing of the Midlands cities as well as massive reprisal raids on the huge docks complex along the River Thames in London. Every night we heard, and sometimes saw by the light of the moon, large numbers of German bombers escorted by fighters on their way to Coventry, Bristol, Birmingham and other unfortunate cities to our north and west. A stray bomb could have fallen in our part of the country by mistake, but being mostly in darkness, and blackout regulations being well observed in the towns and villages, we must have presented a massive black area to the overflying warplanes. A small chink of light from a carelessly covered window would show as a welcoming beam to those above us in the horror machines. Hence, they could be sure they were over the city they had targeted, and rained down their scourges on the fearful beings underneath.

Hallelujah! Colin was safe, and had been taken to Ceylon. Heidi had been very quiet until now but we all celebrated with a cheer and much back-slapping when the good news came through to her by telegram.

In 1941 London was bombed mercilessly and Operation Pied Piper began moving a huge number of young children from the terror. Homes were found all over the West Country – some children became happier in the new homes, while others couldn't abide being away from mums and dads and had to return home to them. In many instances the young ones found a better life with their new guardians who lived in better circumstances than those in east London, a place renowned for poorer aspects of living.

As thoughts began to surge to our own loved ones in London being under fire, many of us were anxious to go home to be with them in their hour of need. Some went almost straightaway, with many sad faces as we temporarily lost friends of our sojourn in a lovely part of dear old England. Hollerith cards were punched, appropriately showing the date of leaving and the weather of the day, and given to those departing. Many of our group now numbered local ladies who stayed on in MO1 until the war actually ended – thankfully, on the eighth of May 1945.

It had been at the least a trying time for everyone involved – those who valiantly stayed at home, the gallant Armed forces, and not least, those in the Air Force, the Army and the Royal Navy. Mr Winston Churchill and his war Cabinet colleagues' valiant efforts to dictate the war in the right direction had paid off and he became our

new hero – temporarily, however, as he was rejected by the mass of people who voted in the next government. This was a truly peculiar phenomenon, given little space in the press, other than an explanation that the great man, Winston Churchill had been the right person in a time of war, but not necessarily likely to be as astute in the role of Prime Minister. And that is how we treated him, all the time thanking him endlessly for being our second Saviour.

The office dwindled away, finally returning to London in 1945. After his distinguished wartime activities Captain Frankcom returned to MO1 as Marine Superintendent where his work continued in the planning of an even bigger fleet of ocean weather ships. The operation of these ships was his principal duty until retirement came in 1969.

Most of the ladies who made up the staff of MO1 were now either married or settled in other jobs in industry and commerce but never forgetting the friends made during the evacuation. Two ladies went overseas. Anna married an American ex-serviceman and lived in the USA until her early death. The other emigrant was Vicky who with her husband sailed away down under to Australia where she still lives. In all our various ways of life not one had a break-up of marriage, only the ultimate sacrifice was made by three.

Every year since the war ended a group of ex-MO1 clerks meets in re-union, usually in London. With natural regression the group dwindled as the years passed but the meetings still go on, proof of the love of friends.

Roll of Honour

Joan Beckenham
Edna Viveash
Pat Smythe

Colin Mahoney
Matt Grist
Leo Trafford

THE GIRLS

Rene Girdler
Ada Tunstall
Mabel Holt
Olive Maloney
Joan Taylor
Phil Smythe

Pat Scott
Barbara Bundy
Edna Bridges
Mabel Powell
Joan Bridge
Doris Leach

Margaret Parrott

THE BOYS

Harry Jones

Alan Jones

Pete Shaw

Bright Lights

Towards the end of April 1945, unusual things began to happen in the British Isles. After the day’s work was done, in the long light of the Spring evenings, people began to make their way to their nearest high point of land – a farm or common on top of a hill. They all carried something – even the smallest children carried small items – anything they could find which was flammable. They were building bonfires – the biggest ever made! The Germans have been defeated and it was known that an Armistice was to be signed any day. The British people wanted to celebrate. After years of blackout they wanted bright lights. For Nelson’s victory over the French they had put a lighted candle in every window. Now they wanted huge fires to be seen across the nation from John O’Groats to Lands End.

And so it was, on the night of May 8th 1945 as dusk crept northwards the fires were lit, sometimes with a little ceremony, often without. Many of the fires were as tall as 2-storey houses. Multitudes of people left their homes to sing and dance and rejoice around the flames. Many stayed until morning.

Simultaneously, after years of darkness and gloom the lights came on all over Europe for conqueror and vanquished alike. The stars had never seemed so bright. The moon outshone herself in glory. At long last – we were at peace!

Appendix: *The Met. Office*

It was not until the early 1800s that governments around the world decided that something must be done to ensure the safety of ships at sea and agreed to obtain observations over the oceans. As a consequence, on the British side a Meteorological Department was set up in the Board of Trade in 1854 with an experienced sea captain, Captain Robert FitzRoy, and three clerks to improve shipping information (mainly as a benefit to speedier trading rather than safety at sea!).

Prior to this appointment the Captain was on a voyage of survey and exploration from 1832 to 1836 around Tierra del Fuego and the South American coast in HMS Beagle accompanied by a young scientist, Charles Darwin, (after his return FitzRoy wrote the famous book *The Voyage of the Beagle*).

It was FitzRoy who insisted that naval vessels as well as commercial ships be invited to cooperate with the new office and by May 1855 he had already recruited 50 naval ships and 30 merchant ships to this task.

Agents were appointed at the principal ports and instruments were supplied on loan to a limited number of carefully selected ships. Weather reports were first issued to the press, Lloyds's and the Admiralty in 1861 and visual gale warnings were commenced.

In the ten years he was Superintendent, FitzRoy extended his work into weather information on land.

When he died in 1865 he left a legacy of the first Voluntary Observing Fleet, various types of barometer of his own invention, and to him is attributed the coining of the word "forecast".

Thus the Met Office continued to evolve up to the First World War. The close involvement of the office in providing advice to the military during WW1 led to its becoming part of the Air Ministry in 1920 and in 1964 as part of the Ministry of Defence. The Marine Division became MO1 in 1921 when each section was given a numerical identity. In 1990 under a further management change it lost its name and became an Executive Agency of the Ministry of Defence.

Captain L A Brooke-Smith was appointed Marine Superintendent in 1919, retiring in 1938. He is described by one of his 'young ladies' as 'an irascible man' (due to neurasthenia) who could not spell. Nowadays it would be recognised as dyslexia. 'I don't know how he got his Mariner's Certificate' she said. She continues:

The men on section A took the brunt of his moods. (He had a family of six sons and one daughter.)

Despite his antagonism towards the female sex, he actually grew to accept us and indeed liked us, referring to us as 'his young ladies'. We could do nothing wrong, the men could do nothing right! He was the one who suggested we should rotate round the sections, which

meant that eventually we landed in section A and had the dubious privilege of taking down his dictation (longhand) and even the daily roll call. Due to his inability to spell, his pronunciation of ships' names left much to be desired, but fortunately those ships selected for the daily roll call were indicated by flags on the large chart of the Atlantic Ocean on his office wall. When he went to lunch we could ascertain the correct names and in time we learned them anyway.

The original intention was to interpolate and prepare information from marine logbooks in order to establish a world weather pattern, which is only able to be done if one has statistics over a long period; we were the only country with this information from all the recruited ships. I remember a Japanese meteorologist visiting Victory House, and he was amazed that we had 365 observing ships. All he could say was "Van seep" ("One ship") which was all the Japanese had.

I recall there was some suggestion, after one meteorological conference, that we would loan some of our cards to Germany. I do not know if this was ever done (one hopes not!) I think it is correct to assume that, with war clouds on the horizon, the value of some of our information, especially ocean current charts, was appreciated. Later, during the war, our charts proved to be vital in naval operations. The Admiralty would request charts of prevailing currents in specific areas and these were given priority.

This could have accounted for our move to Victory House in 1937 where we were able to have a machine room to accommodate sorting and tabulating machines and larger office space for the office staff recruited to expedite the work.

This was when the number of young ladies in the Hollerith section swelled to twelve, plus some male B.Sc. undergraduates. The young men were brought in as technical assistants.

Capt. Brooke-Smith was succeeded by Capt. C.E.N. Frankcom RD, RNR, who retired in 1969 and died in August 1999, aged 96.

The Marine Division, along with the climatological branches, the training section and the library, was moved to Stonehouse in Gloucesterhsire from 1939 until after the War, when it was moved to Harrow, Middlesex, in 1945. In the late 1950s the office moved to a new town, Bracknell, Berkshire.

World War II saw the Met Office expand to 6,900 staff serving in all theatres of war, the D-Day landings among the most famous relying on its forecasts. The centenary of the Marine Division was celebrated in 1954.

The first BBC weather broadcast was made on November 14 1922. The first regular Morse code transmission of weather bulletins for shipping took place in 1924 and this type of service has continued without interruption, barring WWII, to this day.

With the years the Met Office has kept pace with technology using one of the most powerful computers in the world and a large complex telecommunications system designed for receiving and relaying vast quantities of meteorological data. Enhanced meteorological services for shipping such as coded analysis, broadcast with the Atlantic weather bulletins, weather charts transmitted by radio facsimile and NAVTEX, have all been added over the years. Despite sophisticated data-gathering satellites, information from the Voluntary Observing Fleets of the world (over 7,000 to

date, including more than 500 UK ships) are still vital to forecasters and climatologists alike.

The Met Office continues to provide warnings and routine forecasts for shipping by radio through British Telecom stations as part of the UK commitment to the Safety of Life at Sea Convention; shipping bulletins are also issued via BBC radio.

Climatological advice is provided to ship designers and others with a similar interest in the marine meteorological environment as well as data to the legal profession to assist with litigation where the weather may make an important contribution to a case.

The Met Office's core activities today are: observing the weather; telecommunications for gathering information; computer analysis and forecasting; research and development. It operates in six business areas: core activities; aviation; the Public Meteorological Service; defence; commercial; and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. It runs a public meteorological service through the national severe weather warning service; storm tide forecasting; gale warnings; shipping and inshore waters forecasts on BBC radio; and forecasts for pollution emergencies.

For many years it has worked closely with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions to investigate issues such as global warming; world-leading computer-based climate models; climate change simulation experiments; linked atmospheric-land-ocean models; and environmental and business impact studies. It has numerous commercial customers to whom it provides weather information.

Notes

[1] Herman Hollerith was born in New York in 1860 of German immigrant parents. After graduating from College he worked for the US Patent Office and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He became an inventor, successfully using his own invention, a tabulating system to complete the US population count of 1890. Previously it had taken two years to give the results of the census using the time-old method of written records. Hollerith's latest system of tabulating saved the government $5 million dollars and took only six months to complete. His later machines used a punch-card system and sorter and tabulator. This was the system used by MO1 in its small contribution to the war which was to defeat the Germans – the country of his origin.

[2] Commander Charles Edward Frankcom, known as "Eddie", was born at North Wraxall in July 1903. He trained as a midshipman on the aircraft carrier HMS Argus and became apprenticed to the Royal Mail Lines in 1921. In 1930 he obtained his Extra Master's Certificate and was thus eager to obtain his own command. He joined the Bristol City Line as Master of the "New York City" plying between Bristol, New York and Buenos Aires. He subsequently held office in submarines as a nautical surveyor and examiner of Masters and mates. In January of 1939 he was made Marine Superintendent of the Met Office, MO1. In November of 1940 he volunteered for service in the Royal Navy and was appointed Commodore of coastal convoys. For this service he was awarded the OBE.

Not only was this distinguished mariner a Freeman of the City of London, he represented Britain at many meteorological conferences, being advisor to the British delegation at the Safety of Life at Sea conference in 1948 and 1960. After living in Malta for five years, he and his wife retired to Dorset where they supported many local activities. He died on August 17 1999.

He made a further claim to fame when he entered the MO1 office in 1939, saying, as he beheld the young ladies at their desks: "Oh, what a bevy of beauty!"