

LOCAL PEOPLE

Local historian, John W. Qualtrough – in his own words

During the early part of the war there were internees billeted in Port St Mary on The Promenade. The area was surrounded by barbed wire, with gates and barriers, and with guards who, with uniforms and a little bit of authority, were 'Little Hitlers'.

Early in the war, the first fire tender in Port St Mary was Collisters' coal lorry towing a trailer pump; the fire station was built by the Commissioners' store, now used for the bin lorry. Later they got a proper fire tender – John Hislop was Chief Officer and my father was First Officer. John Hislop, his son and I used to get a lift to Port Erin cinema in the fire tender when the crew were going for a practice. One night we got to the barrier of the internment camp in Station Road and one member of the crew did not have his identity card. They would not let the fire tender through.



At least one member of the Special Constables on the barrier could not read. On one occasion the manager of the Perwick Hotel forgot his identity card, but he had a menu card about the same size in his pocket. He showed that and they let him through.

The wartime was interesting for young boys, as the RAF personnel from Cregneish Radar Station were billeted at the Golf Links Hotel in Port St Mary (now Carrick Bay apartments) and there were some Canadians there. We used to sneak into the boiler room and get American comics which had been left out for lighting the boiler.

The army – the Royal Army Pay Corps Officer Cadets Training Unit - was billeted at Ballaqueeney. They had one of the Cronk Skybbilt Quarries as a rifle range, where we found 303 bullet heads in the sand.

There was a dummy training village built in the fields where Rhenwyllin Close is now. The buildings were made of square petrol tins fastened together. We found many items in this area: I still have a bayonet.

The live ammunition training ground was at Spanish Head. We used to go out there on days when the red flag was not flying (which meant it was not in use) and find all sorts of live ammunition – bullets, mortar bombs and hand grenades. There was also army billeted at Perwick Hotel and WAAFs (Women's Auxiliary Air Force) at Moorlands at the Four Roads.

Needless to say, all the ordnance – ammunition, etc. – had to be cleared away at the end of the war.