

AN OBJECT OF INTEREST FROM HUNSTANTON HERITAGE CENTRE

A WANDERER FROM THE START

– the third in a series of interviews with local people by Margi Blunden.

This is the first part of an article about **Ivy Scales's** life.

PART ONE.

Sitting in Ivy's house, I am aware that this one chat will not suffice to cover the many experiences which have filled her life until now. Every wall, showing pictures of French liners, prints of Gaugin, posters of Geneva, villages in the Jura mountains and all kinds of other colourful and intriguing pictures, speaks of her adventures.

But her story starts locally in Stanhoe in 1937 when the world was quite a different place. The war was looming and although Norfolk being a quiet, rural county was not used to much disruption, the conflict would bring its surprises to the little village with two pubs and a sweet shop and a two mile walk to the train station.



Ivy Scales Uncle's Ironmongery in the High St.

where the SmokShop is currently located

The family initially lived in Pond Cottage overlooking the green and pond, next door to her maternal grandfather. He was a farm foreman and was very much part of their lives. Her parents had met at the Dormy House Hotel in Brancaster where her mother worked. The Scales family, having originally come from Normandy, had been tenant farmers and occasionally publicans all over Norfolk for centuries.

From the start Ivy enjoyed exploring her surroundings. One of her earliest memories is from the age of four when having been told by her mother she could not go out as Grandad was busy and couldn't look after her, she determinedly put on her red wool coat. She disliked being confined, was cross that Grandad couldn't take her, and once outside the back door planned her route across the field to see him. The men were picking the sugar beet as she made her way diagonally over the field.

Her mother, pregnant with her sister, red faced and panting, appeared running down the road towards her.



Ivy Scales in 2015

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Ivy's recollection is that she felt quite pleased with herself despite the consternation from the grown ups she had caused.

Of course by now the war was on and it did not go unnoticed by the village children of whom Ivy was one. The social life however carried on through the war and everyone went to the blacked out village hall for dancing, games, singing and mounds of sandwiches.

The children became familiar with the different sounds of the plane engines and knew when they should run for cover.

Playing one day at the top end of Station Road they witnessed a plane nose diving over the village only to crash in the field in front of them. They rushed to the plane, uninterested in the dead pilot slumped in the cock-pit. They were after the anti radar ribbon which, for a reason now forgotten, they wanted.

Ivy mentioned here that all the dead German pilots from the area were buried in Great Bircham churchyard and to this day a few gravestones can still be seen.

She recalls the Italian prisoners of war who helped in the fields. They loved the children and would give them wooden articulated animals which they had carved.

Although there was a lack of schooling at this time due to teacher shortages, Ivy's curiosity about the world was satisfied by reading any book she found in the bookcase at home and listening to the radio. She was not interested solely in children's books but read books about WW1 and the newspaper.

There was in the Scales's house a big steamer trunk which had the labels of steam liners on its exterior. Like his brothers, Ivy's father thought it might be a good idea to emigrate to Australia and decided to prepare by buying the trunk. Ivy would examine the labels advertising the Cunard line with fascination dreaming of the day when they would leave. That never happened but these sources of information fed her conscious wish that at the age of eight she wanted to see the world.

However that had to wait. In the meantime she was delighted to be taken by train from Stanhoe via Hunstanton and Kings Lynn down to Esher in Surrey where her Aunt Ivy lived. She loved the journey observing details like the black out blinds on the train and drinking in all the views of the stations and their gardens on this busy line.

Her knowledge of history was expanded further when the family moved into the pub The Norfolk Hero. This old inn (which lost that status when Ivy's father became the tenant) had two staircases and the spiral one, constructed of brick and wood, led to Ivy's bedroom. Here, many years before her, Nelson had taken his rest, using the inn on his way to Burnham Thorpe.

The way of life was still simple – each morning Ivy would take her ewer (a large jug) downstairs to fill it with water from the sink behind the bar, return to her bedroom and fill the basin for her wash.

Her eagerness to be part of something larger than Stanhoe and then Fakenham Grammar School from the age of 11, made her a lively girl who refused to accept the conventional boundaries of the time.

When she announced to her father she would like to be a sailor the response was:

Girls don't go to sea.

She felt devastated.

However knowing that she had to earn money once she left school, she entered nursing. This proved to be totally unsuitable for her and after thirteen months she left and found employment in King's Lynn at Plowright, Pratt and Harbage.

She was put in the Despatch Department with employees who had been there a long time.

One day packing parcels and amidst the general chat she burst out with the words:

I didn't go to Grammar School to pack parcels!

Her fellow workers were astonished but Ivy left and found another job with Cooper Roller Bearings.

Looking out from the room where she worked, she would notice bearings lying in the grass outside getting rusty and wondered what they were doing there.

What she discovered was that the bearings had to become rusty before they were put in the engine of a ship.

But what she didn't realise at that moment, was that there was a significant connection between the bearings and the direction in which her life took her.

For Ivy, ships became the instrument by which she saw the world and the means by which she made a living.

How she got from the interior of a manufacturing business in King's Lynn to the interior of a merchant navy ship is for the next instalment of this fascinating life story of a girl born in the unassuming village of Stanhoe.

.... More to follow