

Written by Russell Spencer

At that time the Group Scoutmaster of the 2nd Hornchurch was also a local councillor, on the Wednesday prior to September 3rd 1939 he asked all the Patrol Leaders to report to the Council Offices on that very Sunday morning.

The first job was putting together the components of the Service type respirators. This involved attaching the tube to the filter. This was then inspected by a more senior person who using pliers secured it with wire before they were placed in the canvas holder. Another job which I recall was heavy work, was the filling of sandbags.

When the air raid siren sounded just after 11 am the Clerk to the Council appeared looking grim faced and already wearing his tin hat.

Everyone was ushered into the nearby old stable buildings and he closed the door and then proceeded to pull a large blanket like curtain across the opening; I never did find out what this was supposed to do.

Following the worst of the blitz in May 1941 we were asked to volunteer in teams to erect Morrison Table Air Raid Shelters. For this we attended a short training session, but as most of us had Meccano sets we found this a bit elementary...

As I recall the top weighed about 40 or 50 pounds and was the most difficult part to manoeuvre.

The biggest drawback was that we were expected to always wear the scout uniform and it was rather filthy work, most of the parts had been left outside for several days so carried a light film of rust and in some cases had accumulated a certain amount of grease. This didn't go down very well with our mothers who had to do the frequent washing with the soap powder being a fairly scarce commodity. Of course we eventually got over this by taking along an old change of clothes to don on the site.

The original intention was of course that the householder himself should erect these shelters, and the scouts would do the job where the man of the house was away in the Forces.

Even in those days there were instances where some people thought 'it was a job that the Council should do' and we found a mature male to be present at the house who was considerably embarrassed when a group of 14 -16 year old boys arrived on the doorstep.

Until September 1942 I worked in The City where it was a requirement that all the male employees took part in the firewatching rota for which I think we got one shilling (5p) for breakfast.

I then spent four years in the Royal Navy, but that is another story.