

# Guide to researching the history of World War II in Canterbury

## ***Museum resources***

Anyone interested in World War II should visit the Blitz Gallery at the **Museum of Canterbury** in Stour Street. Discover the wartime stories of the city's people and a wealth of artefacts associated with the Home Front and air raids. View newsreel footage of bomb-damaged Canterbury the morning after the Blitz, and take part in a range of hands-on activities. Admission charge; free to local Residents' Card holders. A selection of World War II books and merchandise is on sale in the shop.

The story of the local East Kent Regiment (the Buffs) in World War II is highlighted in the **Buffs Regimental Museum** on the first floor of the Beaney Institute in the High Street. Displays of artefacts, photographs and medals tell the story of campaigns from North Africa and Burma, to France and Germany. (We regret there is currently no wheelchair access to this part of the building.)

A World War II case forms part of the displays at the **West Gate Towers**. Canterbury's only remaining medieval city gate was used during the war as a look-out post and control centre. Admission charge; free to local Residents' Card holders. (We regret there is currently no wheelchair access to this historic building.)

**Canterbury City Museums** also has a World War II object handling box, which may be borrowed free of charge by local schools and community groups.

To see wartime artefacts, paintings and photographs not on display, please contact Martin Crowther, Collections Manager, at the Museum of Canterbury to arrange an appointment.

## ***Printed sources***

A fascinating account of the war years in Canterbury was written by Catherine Williamson, Lord Mayor from 1938 to 1940. This is called *Though the streets burn* (London, 1949). Eye-witness accounts of the Blitz have also been published. Anne Pope's *Memories of the Blitz: the people's story of the bombing of Canterbury 1<sup>st</sup> June 1942* (Canterbury, 1992) is based on a series of oral history recordings prepared for Canterbury Museums. See also *A time to weep: Blitz memories of the Oaten Hill District* (Oaten Hill and District Society Local History Group, 1992). For memories of evacuation in Canterbury, see Peter Hayward, *To a safer place: more memories of Kent evacuees* (Dover, 2000).

Published volumes of photographs are extremely useful for documenting life in Canterbury during the war years, as well as war damage in the city. See particularly Paul Crampton, *Canterbury after the Blitz* (Rainham, 1993).

These and other relevant publications are available at **Canterbury Local Studies Library** and at **Canterbury Cathedral Library**.

### ***Local studies and archive sources***

**Canterbury Local Studies Library** holds a range of pamphlets and photographs relating to the War, as well as newspapers and press-cuttings from the period.

**Canterbury Cathedral Archives** holds an extensive collection of records maintained by the authorities of the City of Canterbury during the War (CC/U). Topics covered by these records include air raid protection, civil defence, evacuation, casualties and injuries, and war damage. Also of interest for the city as a whole are:

- minutes of the Emergency Committee (CC/A/J/6)
- returns from city businesses listing firewatchers (CC/BB/347)
- maps showing war damage to Canterbury, 1940-1944 (Map/207)
- admission register of the Canterbury Casualty Bureau (U250/1)
- war damage files (U395 and MW/1/1)
- scrapbook of Stephen Williamson, Chief Air Raid Warden (U436/6)
- diary of air raid warden duties maintained by W P Blore (U91/10)
- notes of air raid warnings by Mrs E H Urry (AddMs/120)
- account of the 1 June 1942 air-raid, by Frank Clark (AddMs/121)
- drawings of post-War Canterbury, by Joan Russell (AddMs/81)

There are further records relating to Canterbury Cathedral during the war, with information on air raid protection, firewatching, and damage to Dean and Chapter properties (DCc/CO). Lists of cathedral firewatchers are found in DCc/MAB/10, and there is a useful study by Clare Debenham on the measures taken to protect the cathedral in wartime (Thesis/71).

Researchers are asked to telephone the Archives in advance of their visit to make a booking. Advance notice is required for access to the DCc/CO series.

### ***Online resources***

For the BBC People's War website, see <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/ww2>>. This site contains a wealth of information on the War, including personal memories contributed by hundreds of people across Kent.

Public access computers are found at **Canterbury Library** and **Canterbury Cathedral Archives**. Please telephone to make a booking.

### ***Telephone numbers for further information***

Canterbury Cathedral Archives and Library	01227-865330
Canterbury Library/Local Studies Library	01227-463608
Museum of Canterbury	01227-475202
Beane Institute (Buffs Regimental Museum)	01227-452747
Westgate Museum	01227-789576

