

Written by Lily Jupe

We were a family of 5 living at 76, Llewellyn Street, Bermondsey, S.E.16. when world war two began. Father was Francis (Frank) Drewell, Mother – Florence (Flo), Eldest child – Lilian (Lily), Second child – Florence (Flossie), and youngest child – Beryl.

Our dad volunteered to join the Royal Navy. At thirty years of age he was the oldest man on most of His Majesty's ships on which he served, consequently he soon acquired the nick-name of 'Pop' on craft such as Duke, St Christopher (MGB51) Wasp, Hornet (MTB 754) and Suffolk.

Llewellyn St was very long the top end consisted of large Victorian houses with steps leading up to the door. Further down on one side of the road, were still quite 'well to do' houses with aeries below probably used for domestic staff in earlier decades. Further down still (our end) were smaller families but even these were substantial consisting of the kitchen, and two family rooms. Upstairs were two large bedrooms and a box room. Adjoining the kitchen was a large outhouse which in our day contained a huge mangle. The outhouse led out on to a small paved yard where the flushing toilet was situated and where the Anderson shelter was eventually installed. (This was used by us three children as play room as we used the basement of Chambers Wharf as a shelter which was considered far safer.) Our house was the very last house on our side of the road. The family lived upstairs so having a living room, one large bedroom and the box-room also used as a bedroom. The cooker was on the landing at the top of the stairs. Water had to be brought up daily in a bucket. Downstairs lived 'Nanny Nethercot'. (She was actually mum's aunt who took mum and her two brothers and a sister in when mum's father died whilst fighting in world war one and her mother died soon after, (so she was nanny to us).

Chambers Wharf an imposing white stone building, seven stories high adjoined our house. This is where food etc was loaded or unloaded from the barges on the river Thames. Families were allocated bunk beds sufficient for each families needs in the basement of Chambers Wharf. As soon as the air-raid warning sounded everyone made a beeline for the safety of the wharf as we knew the enemy planes were close. When returning from school each day mum made us take our folded blankets into the basement ready for the expected air-raid. We slept there every night, most times sitting on our bunks listening to the aircraft overhead. We soon learned by the hum of the planes whether they were enemy planes or our own going over London. Late into the evening the warden used to walk through with his torch making sure no pilfering was going on whilst we slept. The adult ladies used to sleep with their handbags under their pillow. They also came over dinner times in the hopes of finding more people in their houses so we often had to make a dash for the shelter leaving our food getting cold on the table. Nanny Nethercot refused to use the shelter sitting in her kitchen hoping for the best. I am pleased to say she survived the war unscathed. It was a mystery to us why Chambers Wharf never had a direct hit from enemy bombs throughout the entire war as it stuck out 'like a sore thumb'. When we came out of the shelter all the kids would look for shrapnel and sometimes when we found it, it was still warm.

On the opposite side of the road in a small side turning, directly opposite our house was a factory called Lanes. Mum worked there a few hours a day during school hours packing Bullets for the war effort. During the summer the women could be seen sitting on the top floor of the factory. The whole side of the factory had a wooden flap that could be dropped down so you would see them all inside quite clearly, the trouble was if we could see them they could see us!!

When dad's ship came in for repairs he was given a few days shore leave and when mum said 'dad will be home for a while today' we kids loved it when we saw him coming down the street with his kitbag on his shoulder and a big grin on his face. He knew why we were impatiently looking out for him, and running to meet him, for he always had some chocolate in his kitbag for us. He would torment us by coming indoors, throwing his kitbag down, having a welcome cup of tea and a cigarette whilst we hovered around waiting for him to open his kitbag. For us those moments seemed like an eternity. Eventually he did open his kitbag producing to our great joy the long awaited chocolate. Chocolate was a luxury in those days as food was rationed so we were only allowed four ounces of sweets a week. Our ration books had to be registered with one confectionary shop only, so as you can imagine the shop keeper would 'tip the wink' to his favourite customers on which sweets he had 'under the counter'. The rest of us got what he deigned to put on show.

One time when dad's ship came in for repairs as normal it was docked at the side of Westminster Bridge. The Navy decided to have an open day allowing the people to look over the ship. Dad had to be on board that day so Mum and us three kids were waiting in the long queue to go on board when dad came sauntering sown the gangplank, walked along the queue spotted us and said 'what are you waiting here for? Come on'. We followed him back up the long queue in order to follow him on board. We got some dirty looks that day I can tell you and a lovely day was had by all.

Footnote

My sister Beryl and I took the bus to Bermondsey one day in 2004 but we could not find Llewellyn Street. We asked several local people where it was but they all looked at us vaguely saying they had no idea. We walked in the area where we thought it should be and came across Chambers Wharf. We could not get to it because of high fencing. I looked at my feet and said to my sister 'look we are standing on the pavement that was outside our house'. The houses and the street were gone but there was Chambers Wharf still standing there in all its glory like a monument. The enemy had certainly tried to hit it because very close to it was a factory called Megazones it ran the length of the street. It manufactured health tablets. One night a thousand pound bomb dropped on it. The bomb did not explode and had to be defused.