

# Bryanston in Wartime

## From the Common Room Window, January 1941 Old Bryanstonian Yearbook

by Mr G.V. Morris, Shaftesbury Housemaster and teacher of Modern Languages

Many times during the last twelve months one has looked out of a Common Room window at the familiar stretch of green lawns, stone balustrade, the round pond, empty of water now, trees in blue haze, and the distant line of the Dorset downland, and wondered how things are going with so many people who have played on that grass in lighter-hearted days.

And news has been as never before welcome. It has come in the daily paper....from BBC announcers, and from Old Boys who have dropped in from the four corners of the world....Two days after Dunkirk, John Finlinson was telling us of his share in that heroic retreat, as a few months before Dick Pullen had told us of Narvik.

Now, in this Yearbook for 1941, it occurs to me that you, too, may be glad to know how Bryanston fares in wartime.... Outwardly there is but little change. Grey-uniformed figures still speed clamorously down the stairs and decorously along Main Hall: the Library guards its studied calm...if you enter, however, the Old General Work Room ...you will find it together with the old classrooms on the ground floor, full of – beds. We sleep downstairs. In the upper regions work is done, ping-pong is played in Junior House Rooms. Safer so.



Fire service training in 1940. Mr E.J.N. Bramall (Senior) and Mr D. Potter (Assistant) were in charge of air raid precautions and Mr G.H.W. Boys was in charge of the school fire brigade.



HM King George VI visits the harvesters, 1940

On the Dorset floor when the siren from the roof goes, spotters report on duty and if dog-fighting takes place overhead send the school to earth in their basement shelter rooms by means of the electric bell. This has only rarely been necessary..... At night the low drone of planes is heard passing over us to more distant objectives; only once this autumn have missiles been dropped to explode harmlessly in the ground, missing both rugger and hockey pitches....

Over-seventeens have done their nights of Home Guard Duty at the Bryanston Observation Post

on the Gallop....we must be prepared for all things; and gas masks are worn for practice the last five minutes of Friday's after-lunch rest period.

Pioneering goes on as strongly as ever. And has turned perforce during holidays from journeys across Europe to wartime jobs – farming, defence work, activity in factory and business life. There was a Holiday Camp held at Bryanston in August last, which gathered together some fifty harvesters from half a dozen public schools and had the honour of a visit from His Majesty.

# Eric John Dainty

1931 - 1935 | Connaught House

**Contemporaries remembered Eric as a conscientious boy, cheerful, and unassuming. He liked sport and played Rugby for the 2nd XV. He achieved the Bronze Medallion in the Royal Life Saving Society instructional course run by the Pioneers at Bryanston and also sang in the choir**

Eric joined the Royal Horse Artillery in 1939 and, as a Second Lieutenant, he was posted to the Middle East in 1941. On 19 October, he joined Jerboa Battery. Posted to D Troop, he saw action as part of Operation Crusader in which the Eighth Army sought to lift the siege of Tobruk in Libya. Heavy losses were sustained in the battle for the airfield at Sidi Rezegh. On 23 November 1941, at the height of the fighting, following a wound sustained by a fellow officer, Eric assumed the role of Gun Placement Officer in D Troop. Hours later, he was badly wounded. Only about fifteen men remained at the position, including Second Lieutenant Dainty, and, with the ammunition situation critical, they managed to get on a lorry and get away under heavy small-arms fire. Reports state that he died at around 1900 hrs that evening.

He was survived by his wife, Mary Elizabeth.

**Second Lieutenant Dainty is commemorated on the Alamein Memorial in Egypt which bears the names of those who died in the Western Desert campaign and have no known grave.**



Eric Dainty, far right, in a homemade canoe on the River Stour, 1934



He was 24 years old

Connaught House, Summer Term 1933

1945



# Bryanston School

## War Memorial

On Speech Day 1953, Mr T.F. Coade, the Headmaster, said,

*'if we need a figure to symbolise, in one swift gesture, all we stand for, I can think of none more inspiring than the statue carved in Dorset stone by Titus Leeson [a Dutch sculptor whose son was in school]. A youth, just on the threshold of manhood, wholly vulnerable, but careless of the fact because he is not looking at himself but lifting his eyes to far horizons, a figure unhampered by the defensive armour of convention, his eyes unclouded by the spectacles of prejudice and fear, resolutely*

*seeking the truth, so he might live in the light of it, in a spirit of absolute commitment. One hand is shielding his eyes from the brightness of the vision, and the other is on his heart, the seat of human affection, indicating a truth men have not yet grasped - that a sense of duty is not enough. Public service, the watchword of the ancient English public school, is not a sufficiently strong ideal to set the world right, unless it is animated by love.'*

In 1954, Don Potter, a longstanding and much cherished art master, gave up his summer to engrave the names of the Roll of Honour. Modestly doubtful of his own accuracy, he insisted that every pencilled name should be inspected before he would cut the stone. This collaboration created a War Memorial that is an everlasting tribute to those Bryanstonians who gave their lives.



Headmaster, Mr T.F. Coade, far left, at the unveiling of the War Memorial