

## **‘Long Compton in World War II’**

### **Bill Cook’s lecture to Warwickshire LHS 18/10/22**

Warwickshire Local History Society members met at Warwick’s Aylesford School on 18 October, the first meeting face-to-face in over two years. Bill Cook gave a lively talk about a Warwickshire village in wartime and on the cusp of social change. The speaker, a longstanding resident of Long Compton, drew on some unusual sources from the period, including a register of all inhabitants from 1939, a national survey of agriculture in 1946, and a documentary film set nearby, ‘Twenty-four Square Milles’. Long Compton has always been influenced by its geography, located in the far south of the county and spread along the Stratford--Oxford Road (the A3400).

Between 1939 and 1945, the direct effects of war on the village were limited. While some inhabitants served in the Armed Services or in other emergency roles, many local men joined the Observer Corps, working in a local observation post tracking enemy aircraft. Soldiers of the Durham Light Infantry were billeted in the village before going on to various foreign theatres, while child evacuees and European refugees also found a home here. In 1943 a local woman, Betty Wainwright, was officially commended for her bravery in aiding the crew of an aircraft, burning after crash-landing in a local field. An audience member mentioned her mother, who worked locally as a land girl.

In 1939, many village ways had changed little over 100 years, most of the 450 inhabitants working on the land, with extensive reliance on horses. Local farming was mainly mixed and small-scale. Seventeen of the thirty farms covered less than 200 acres, many inevitably generating only a meagre living. Housing was mostly poor, with virtually no inside WCs, mains water or electricity. In most rural districts, Village schools offered only the 3 Rs, taught with little relevance to pupils’ home lives or their future employment. In the village, a local headmaster was an exception, establishing a pig farm and allotments to aid children’s learning. In the 1930s local economic activity became more diverse, with the growth of motor trades and even a noted small publisher. That had continued post-war, and developments in recent years had helped the village grow and thrive. While a few might regret the picturesque old patterns of life, the lives of local people were now much improved.