

FOREWORD

The Battle of Britain might have been over but the battle for Britain still raged when I struggled into this world in the early hours of the 21st July 1942. Although I was born in the relative safety of the village of West End, just four miles or so over the hill to the south west, was the City of Southampton with its strategically important docks. This had been the focus for frequent German bombing raids and there was widespread devastation. My 40-year-old father Reg cycled daily to the Docks to drive a crane. He saw first hand the way in which the heart had been ripped out of the City. These were tense and anxious times. Nobody knew where the next bomb would fall. There was no Air Raid shelter in the vicinity of the cottage where we lived. As the Planes droned towards their target it was a case of 'under the stairs and hope'. Fortunately the menace eventually receded and barring the rapid removal of an incendiary bomb from the gutter of our neighbour's adjoining house we survived unscathed and the Gas Masks remained unused on their hooks in the cupboard.

Mercifully I was oblivious to all of this though what impact such tension and anxiety had on such a small baby I have no way of knowing. On the day I was born in the front room of our little house my father scuttled off to Eastleigh just four miles away to register my birth and returned to be handed a newspaper package by the Midwife containing the after-birth. Acting upon her instructions he lit a bonfire and burned it. The smell was apparently so obnoxious that it lingered in his memory for many years afterwards.