

ALL ABOUT BALDOCK

Written by Vince Hemmings

The e-mail from you and Conrad. L. Lohoefer brought back many memories for me when you both mentioned Baldock. It was the town where we had to do most of our shopping or to visit the cinema. We had a village shop but it was small.

The munitions factory that Conrad mentioned was up the London Road. It was the Kayser Bondor. Built before the war it manufactured ladies fully fashioned stocking. When war came Irving Parachute Company from Letchworth took it over to manufacture parachute's. To confirm Conrad's statement that it had many ladies working their. On my way home on a Friday night from work I called into the Astonia cinema (just a bit farther up from the Bondor) to get tickets for Saturday night. On occasions I have seen as many as 20 service men waiting outside for their girl friends or wife's to leave work. Kayser Bondor left the building after the war and English Heritage put a preservation order on it. Tesco's one of our super market chains, bought the site and promptly knocked down the rear of the building but kept the facade.

The Astonia was the only cinema on North Hertfordshire where you did not have to get up to let someone in or out, the seats had so much width between them. The Aryes family owned it and has a very charming daughter my age. Sadly I was in a queue.

I recall one Saturday evening an American service man and his girl friend came and sat in the seat next to me, (it was the back row) and just above his seat was one of the dimly light lights. He took his coat off and hung his coat over the light.

Now on 1st November 2005 our National Archives released a document under the 60 year rule. This document related to ladies known as Piccadilly Commandos. Superintendent Cole from the West End Central Division of the Metropolitan Police produced a report to answer a letter from Colonel Clark of the US Military who was concerned about the number of prostitutes who were outside London Clubs frequented by American service personnel. In his report Supt Cole gave a summary of the types of prostitutes to be found outside the various clubs frequented by American troops. Burlington Gardens variety was rather expensive. (I am told by a 91ster who I mentioned this report to that this was his club) Those outside the club in Maddox Street were overwhelmingly French and rarely caused trouble. In Piccadilly Circus and Glasshouse Street one found the lower type. In Old Compton Street in Soho it glorified in the lowest type of all. Colonel Clark was not happy with this report and said "The impression created on the American troops and their mommas at home was bad". It then reach Government level when a minister from the Foreign Office stated in Parliament that the problem of American troops beginning accosted by prostitutes might have long term effects on Anglo-Americans relations and it had to stop.

In steps Rear Admiral Sir Edward Evans head of the Civil Defense in London. He wrote to Air Vice Marshall Philip Game the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police to say "Of course these young American troops are encouraged by these young sluts, many of whom should be serving in the Forces". I wonder if that would have helped our Armed Forces to fight any better by having these young ladies in their midst?

In the photograph accompanying the newspaper article it had a caption which states "Two American soldiers enjoy the attention of two English women along with a glass alcohol" One of the men is in

RAF uniform with RAF pilots wings above his left breast pocket, So perhaps it was the RAF who were the attraction for these ladies.

A few days later a lady from Cambridge wrote in the letters column to say "Let us not forget that over 300,00 Americans never went home. We should not take our freedom so lightly". Living in Cambridge that lady was thinking of the American Military Cemetery at Madingley. I totally agree with that lady.

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