

The Story of Fred, Gladys, Norma and Betty Pope during the Baedeker Raid on York, 29th April 1942

THIS STORY WAS TOLD TO KAREN LAWLEY, FIRST BY HER GRANDMOTHER, GLADYS POPE (WHITE) AND THEN BY HER MOTHER, NORMA BIGGS (POPE) WHO WAS BETTY'S SISTER. BOTH STORIES ARE EXACTLY THE SAME AND NEITHER WERE PRESENT WHEN THE OTHER TOLD THE STORY.

The Air Raid Sirens went off and we were dragged out of bed. Betty and I put on our red dressing gowns with our Burberry coats over the top. Dad carried Betty (who was 6yrs old) and I held Mum's hand and we ran to the Queen Anne school gates where the shelter was.

We couldn't get in because of the barbed wire on top. Mum had wanted to stay home but Dad had insisted we go to the shelter. Then a Home Guard came and helped my father cut the wire to get into the school field where there was a brick air raid shelter.

My father lay Betty down on the bunk. Then the bomb hit, right next to the shelter, the next thing I remember, was Mum shouting at me to, "push, push, push" as I was buried under rubble.

I was saying, "I can't I can't" and she was saying, "yes, yes, you can, I will help you."

Mum and I together moved the HUGE slab of concrete from on top of me (we were later told that it was physically impossible for us to have done that).

My mother was bleeding profusely from a large cut on the back of her head which permanently scarred her. I combed her hair on her 90th Birthday and she had no hair where the scar was on the back of her head.

We then realised Dad was buried up to his chest under rubble and part of the roof which pinned him down.

We couldn't see Betty who had been below his feet as she was completely buried but I could hear her calling.

The elderly Home Guard didn't stay to help and we never saw him again.

Dad was in terrible pain, he wanted Mum to help him get out and they both tried. However, it wasn't possible as the wall was too heavy and it was too painful for him.

This effort, went on for a while with he and Mum arguing about who should go for help. He then told me to go to his battalion for help which was about 100 metres away in a large requisitioned house.

I ran through the continuing Blitz to the requisitioned house and all the Royal Corps Signallers were outside underneath large barrels of cables as there were no air raid shelters there.

There were no guns or balloons to stop the planes from dive bombing in York, we were totally defenceless.

A few of the Home Guard came back with me to the field where the shelter was. Then a young Home Guard took me to a neighbour's house close by (the Kelly's who was a Bank Manager).

While I was standing there, with the Kelly's, I watched the German planes bombing the rail yards. During that time, even though I wasn't that close, I could still hear my father screaming as they got him out from under the rubble. His circulation had been cut off and they hadn't wanted me to stay there. Later, the same young Home Guard came over again and took me from the Kelly's house to the private girls' school nearby to wait for my parents.

There were quite a few people in the school just sitting, in shock. There was one dead body outside the air raid shelter. This was William Long who hadn't made it to the shelter for safety.

Whilst I was at the School, Mum, Dad & Betty were taken to the Hospital. Mum wasn't aware that Betty was dead as she was still in shock.

Mum told me that a man carried Betty to the Hospital and she thought Betty was sleeping.

Mum had a very big hit to the head and had many stitches and Dad ended up on crutches for at least a week. He also had lumps all over his legs caused by the loss of circulation.

I was almost blind from cement dust which had irritated my eyes. However, I had lost my stutter, which had crippled me for years.....the shock had cured me.

When Mum and Dad walked into the private school after leaving the Hospital, Mum was beside herself, as she thought she had lost me.

I kept asking about Betty but they wouldn't tell me what had happened to her; they said she was alright.

However, I knew from the look on their faces that they were lying, so I screamed at them "YOU'RE LYING, YOU'RE LYING "!!

Friends (the Crane's) came to take us to their house where we stayed for several weeks because ours was uninhabitable. Part of the roof of our house had caved in on Betty's and my bedroom.

Then Aunty Connie turned up and washed my hair and eyes and stayed a couple of days. We took a few days to sort out food and clothing coupons and eventually Dad got a death certificate issued for Betty (after shouting and waving a crutch in council chambers).

I got primroses from my neighbour's garden and we had Betty's funeral, of which I do not recall other than throwing the primroses on her casket.

These were Betty's favourite flowers.

Betty was buried in the York Cemetery with several other people.

The balloons and anti-aircraft guns were wheeled in a couple of days later much to my father's anger. If they had been there earlier so many more people would have been saved.

Dad got a new posting, so Mum and I went to Hayling to stay with Gran White until Mum rented a bungalow where she lived for 57 years.

We never got over losing Betty.