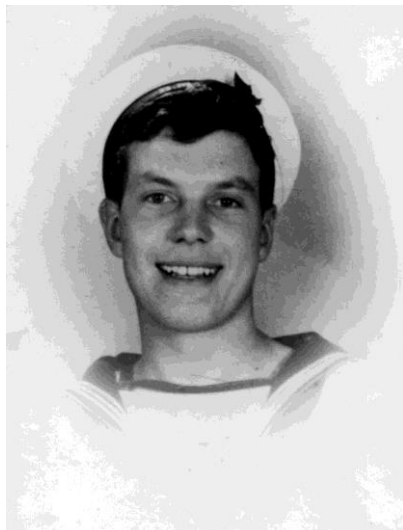


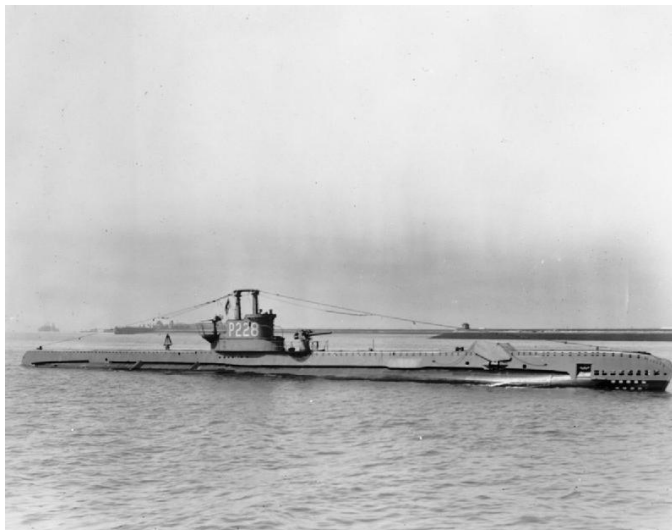
High Wych History – 30 – The Kempthorne Story continues

This second Kempthorne article concentrates on the families of Martyn and Lillian who live at Noonses and of William and Flora Kempthorne who live on the Village Green. William sadly had passed away suddenly in 1929. So Flora had to bring up her children single handedly.

Flora had four children, Arthur aka Jim, born in 1917, Leslie, born in 1921 and Jean born in 1929, who later became Jean Pedder. (Jean's twin sister Joan sadly died young). Jim served in North Africa during World War II and worked as a cook. Leslie served in the navy.



Leslie Kempthorne



HM Submarine Splendid.

Leslie served on a submarine: the Splendid. Built at Chatham Dockyard and launched on 13th January 1942, it was only in service for 16 months. Splendid was based in Malta and in her short career sank 9 enemy vessels. On 17th April 1943 Splendid left port to patrol the waters off Naples and Corsica. On 21st April she was detected by the German destroyer Hermes and damaged by depth charges. She was forced to surface and surrender. The crew scuttled her before abandoning ship to prevent her capture. Thirty crew were picked up by the destroyer, eighteen men were lost with the ship. Leslie Kempthorne was amongst those who lost their lives. His death was reported on 2nd May. He is commemorated on the Chatham Naval Memorial and of course on the WWII plaque in St. James's Church.

Meanwhile Martyn and Lillian had settled at Noonses with their eight sons and one daughter. World War 2 brought great changes to the family. Six of the eight boys served in the army. Below we will discuss the Kempthorne siblings one by one.

Frederick Martin, the oldest, born in 1918 served in the Royal Artillery. He took part in the liberation of Paris and was also involved in fighting around Nijmegen in the Netherlands. The bridge across the Rhine there was the bridge "not too far" just 25 miles south of Arnhem where, in September 1944, the Germans temporarily stopped the advance of the allied troops. Coming home he brought gifts of perfume and (perhaps not so strangely) parachute silk. Fred stayed on in the army and served in Java for a while.



Fred Kempthorne



Lamsdorf POW camp – This is where it was

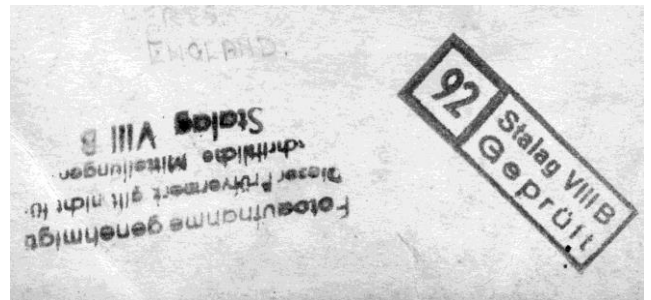


Stan and his mates in the snow at Lamsdorf

Of all 8 brothers, Stanley Clifford, born 1919, had the most eventful time. As a member of the Durham Light Infantry, he was sent over to France with the British Expeditionary Service in late May 1940 but got captured on the beaches near Dunkirk. Along with thousands of other POWs, both French and English, he was then marched off across Northern France and Belgium to the Netherlands. That march must have taken them some 2-3 weeks. Somewhere on the border with Germany, it might have been Arnhem, they were then put on a train or lorry eastwards. Their ultimate destination was the Lamsdorf POW camp also known as Stalag VIII B.



A POW working party cutting timber



Correspondence had to be censored

Lamsdorf is in Upper Silesia, an area, just north of the Czech border, which until 1945 was part of Germany. Nowadays Lamsdorf is in Poland and called Lambinowice. The POW camp, Stalag VIII B, is one of the oldest perhaps the oldest in existence. It was already in use during the Franco Prussian War of 1870-71. From September 1939 the camp housed Polish soldiers. Later on French, British, Canadian, Russian and other nations' POWs arrived. Lamsdorf was certainly one of the biggest of its kind; all in all some 100,000 men passed through the camp.

If POW camps make you think of Colditz and the Great Escape, please reconsider. These accounts, exciting though they were, concentrated on the officer classes and offered a bit of a “boys own” view on matters. Stalag VIII B was a cold and grim place. Escape was nigh impossible. Temperatures in winter hardly got above freezing. Summer was short and hot. Soldiers were sent out on working parties, Arbeitskommandos, to work in the forests, some even in munition factories or coal mines.



“Lagergeld” - special camp money

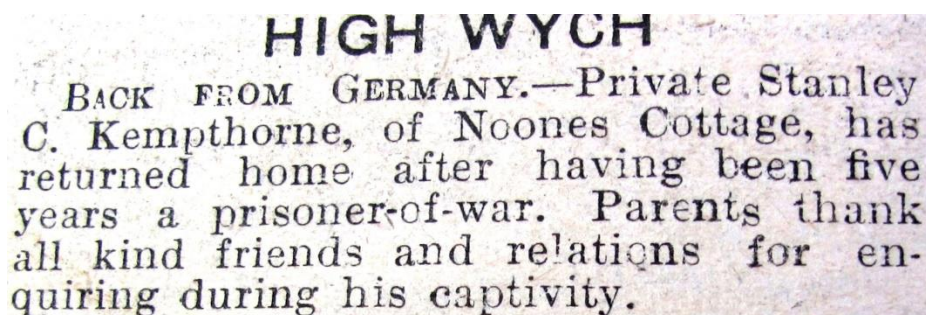
Stan, now prisoner 13911, was often sent out to do timber work in the woods. There is also evidence that he spent time in labour camp E 336 “Niklasdorf” in the Freiwaldau district. Niklasdorf is now called Mikulovice and situated in the Czech Republic. There are stone quarries in the area and I saw a document where prisoner 13911 was described as a “Steinschleifer”, a stone polisher. Working parties consisted of some 60 people and compensation was by way of “Lagergeld” special coupons that could only be used inside the camp. These were not much use. The true currency in POW camps was in fact the cigarette, especially those made from Virginia tobacco from the Red Cross parcels. Although there were some diversions such as sports days, musical evenings and a camp newspaper, the Clarion, life on the whole dragged on endlessly and drearily.

Stan spent more than three years in Lamsdorf. Unlike the officers who were excused all labour, ordinary soldiers were forced to work. Out in the open, often in deep snow, life was hard. Treatment by the camp guards was harsh. On one occasion Stan had all his teeth knocked out from being hit by a rifle butt. Apparently though, the Poles were treated worse and the Russians worse still. POWs wrote home of course, but letters were always censored. Brother Raymond tells of letters with sentences being blacked out or even cut out.

In 1941, after the start of “Operation Barbarossa”, the Nazi invasion of Russia, a separate camp, Stalag VIII F was created. In 1943 the camp was once again split up. Many prisoners were transferred to two new base camps Stalag VIII-C Sagan Stalag VIII-D Teschen (nowadays Český in the Czech Republic). The original base camp at Lamsdorf was renumbered **Stalag 344**. Stan spent some time in Teschen. In July 44, after D-Day, Hitler issued an edict ordering POW camps to be moved away from the front. By Autumn 44 the war had seriously gone wrong for the Germans with the Russians advancing from the East and the British and Americans from the West. So in groups of 2-300 the POWs were marched away. The coldest winter of the twentieth century took place in 1944-1945. These marches became known as the “long march” or (collectively) as the “march of death”.

Organising all this took some time of course and the situation became chaotic. It is therefore difficult to say how long the marches took and exactly when they took place. It differed from unit to unit but in every single case it was horrendous. Soldiers had to steal food from farms; many died. All in all it is estimated that 3,500 US and Commonwealth POWs died on the marches. Initially the columns of soldiers were marched westwards as the Russian advance seem to go quicker. Later on they went back eastwards into Czechoslovakia. So at some point in late April Stan and his mate Gerry (Gerald Weaver from Kidderminster), a cook, escaped.

They boys succeeded in getting down to Prague where they arrived just as allied troops were approaching. Wandering round they stopped to look at a shop window when a girl addressed them from an upstairs window: "Hello English soldiers!" They were invited in and given hospitality by a Czech family. At the time Prague was in turmoil. The Americans were advancing from the west, the Russians from the east. On 5th May the Czech resistance tried to liberate the city. This "Prague rising" lasted until 8th May and ended in a "victory" for the Germans. One day later the Russian army marched into the city. The two boys then found their way to Pilsen and the American army.



HIGH WYCH
BACK FROM GERMANY.—Private Stanley C. Kempthorne, of Noones Cottage, has returned home after having been five years a prisoner-of-war. Parents thank all kind friends and relations for enquiring during his captivity.

From the Herts and Essex Observer 2nd June 1945

On 24th May Martyn and Lilian Kempthorne were informed that Stalag 344 had been liberated and their son was safe. Youngest brother Raymond remembers the excitement very well. "In readiness, our mother had prepared a big sheet bearing the message **Welcome home Stan**. Two days later I was walking towards the centre of the village when I spotted a soldier walking towards me. I ran back to tell the good news. Mother, mother, Stan is coming home!" Of course the exact details of Stan's adventures were, as yet, not clear. For one thing the Red Cross and other organisations had (willingly or not) painted too rosy a picture of life in the POW camps. Most importantly, just as many other war veterans, Stan was not always prepared to recount his experiences. He definitely did not like to be directly questioned on his experiences. Over time though, he did tell his family quite a lot, as this story, based on Raymond's recollections, hopefully shows.

Four years later, in September 1949 Stan married Ruby Sampford. The two of them had two children (Neil and Patricia) and stayed together for more than 55 years. Stan worked as a plumber. Ruby passed away in 2011; Stan one year later.

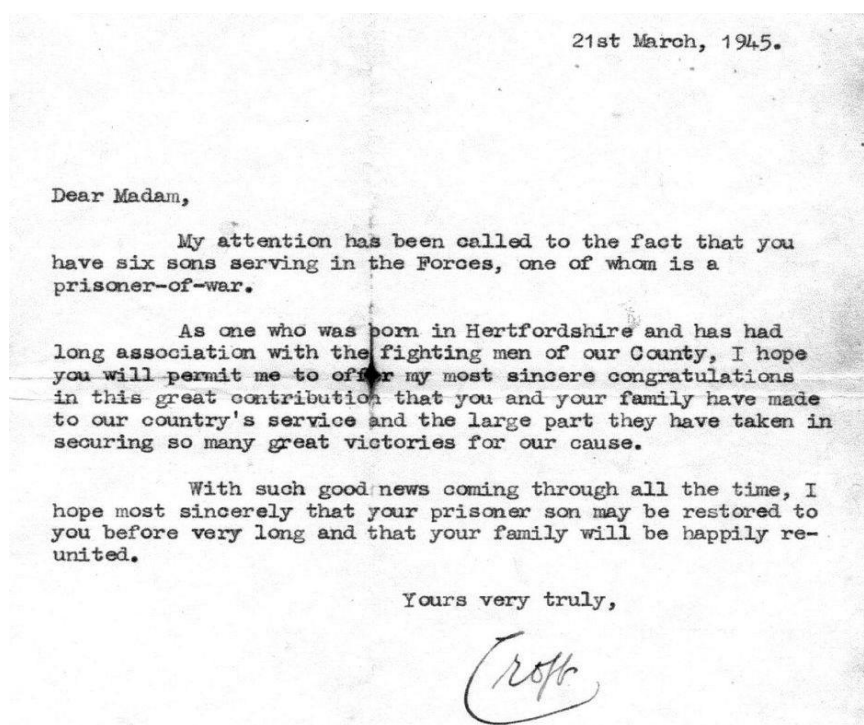
Let us continue talking about the rest of the Kempthorne family.

Brother Leonard George (Len), born 1921 served in the Essex yeomanry. He took part in the D Day landings and was also in the Netherlands. He became firm friends with a family there and kept in touch with them for the rest of his life.

Brother David William, Billy, born 1923 was in the Royal Army Service Corps during WW2 and served in India.

Kenneth John, Ken, born 1925 was in the navy and served around France and in the Mediterranean, most of the time on board HMS Arathusa. Raymond, the youngest of the family remembers Ken singing a song from his time during WW2: "We went to France and shot the coast to Hell, about a fortnight later we took the King as well". Ken stayed in High Wych for most of his life, got married to Phyllis and had a son and a daughter. Towards the end of his life he moved away to Hastings where he passed in 2011.

Gerald Arthur, born in 1925 was given the choice of going in the army or working in the mines as a "Bevin boy" He chose the army, went in the Service Corps and stayed in the UK.



General Croft writes to Lilian Kempthorne

In March 1945 General Croft wrote to mother Lilian Kempthorne and paid homage to the sacrifices made by the family for the defence of the country. Brigadier-General Lord Croft, C.M.G., T.D. was an additional Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the war office then.

Sister Joyce Lillian, born 1927 and the brothers Ronald Desmond, born 1930 and Raymond Alan, born 1933 stayed at home. Raymond, the source of much of this article remembers war time exploits with his slightly older brother. One day a mosquito came down. (where ??) The boys went to look for it hoping they could scavenge some Perspex which Italian prisoners of war could fashion into rings. Lo and behold though they then found an enormous gun. They started carrying the thing home. "But what will mother say" one boy said to the other. Obviously mother would not be best pleased. So the big gun ended up on the bottom of a lake.

Martyn and Lilian carried on living at Noonses. During WW2 Martyn worked for the air ministry, particularly at the North Weald and Hunsdon airfields. The winters during that time were particularly harsh and often he was called out to clear the runways of snow. After the war he worked for the railways. In 1966 Martyn and Lilian celebrated their golden wedding anniversary. The below picture was taken then. Lilian passed away in 1970, Martyn three years later.



December 1966 Martyn and Lilian Kempthorne at their golden wedding

Fred Kempthorne, who we mentioned at the start of this article, returned to civilian life in the late forties. He never married and carried on living at Noonses until his death in 2000.

Raymond Kempthorne lived in High Wych for most of his life but moved away around 2009. The last surviving brother he now lives in Bexhill on Sea, West Sussex.

Sources this time were Raymond Kempthorne, Jean Pedder, Patricia Smith (nee Kempthorne), Roman Janas from the Cech Republic, the Durham Light Infantry website, the James Henry Miller website, Wikipedia, Peter Doyle's book "Prisoner of War in Germany, the Herts and Essex Observer and as always HALS, aka County Archives. Thanks to all. The High Wych History Project needs your contributions, memories, stories and photographs as well as your criticism be it positive or negative. Get in touch!! Check my blog at <http://vandebilt.co.uk/history/> Contact me at: theo@vandebilt.co.uk or phone me at 01279 725468