

## **KNOLE ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH ARNOLD ROGERS (A.R.) 13<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2013, at HIS HOME IN TONBRIDGE**

**Interviewers: Geoff Dawber (G.D.) and Joy Wyman (J.W.)**

G.D.: Ok, right, this is the 13<sup>th</sup> November 2013 and we are with A.R. and his wife in their home in Tonbridge. Also present is J.W. and G.D. from Knole House National Trust history project. And we're here to hear Arnold's memories of when he was a schoolboy in 1944 at Sevenoaks School during the Second World War.

[0:32] G.D.: So Arnold, do you want to just say some of your memories that you have?

A.R.: I was a day boy at Sevenoaks School during World War Two starting there actually after the Battle of Britain but during the time of what were called sneak raids when individual German bombers would come flying low and create havoc. But more particularly my memories of the flying bombs. The German V1 vengeance weapons and then later the V2 rockets. The V1s became known as Doodlebugs, perhaps, I think, because a sort of comic name took away some of the menace. I think that Doodlebugs was a term coined by the Americans who were stationed over in the country. As children we tended to call them Buzz Bombs because they made a throbbing buzzing noise because they had pulse jet engines. And I don't know whether this will work but I will try to do a sort of imitation, but they went (*makes throbbing noise*) which is a distinctive sound. And even thinking about it I can feel the prickles going up at the back of my neck, because it meant there was a, a flying bomb was coming our way. But they were in a way OK so long as the engine was going, they were going, because they were aimed at London and overflowed mostly over Kent. If the engine stopped that meant they were coming down. So all the time, generally speaking, all the time the engine was going you were OK. So what we tended to do, if we were out and about, was sort of look around for somewhere you could sort of dive for a bit of shelter. And if you were indoors and at home a lot of people actually at the time had indoor shelters, and people, from previously in the war and people who hadn't sort of hastily got them because they were tending to just stop for no apparent reason. And of course the defences system worked it out that, at the coast there were a lot of anti-aircraft guns and then further inland fighters tried to shoot them down. But one of things I can vividly remember a Spitfire flying overhead us pursuing a Doodlebug and directly it fired its guns, visibly the Spitfire slowed, which it seems amazing but it slowed it that bit. So they looked as if they virtually more or less only got one chance. They might have had two chances because they've then got to catch up again.

[4.22] G.D.: So as a schoolboy could you see these Doodlebugs coming over?

A.R.: Oh yes. Yes. I mean the main thing was you heard them because they were relatively small. I actually don't know the exact dimensions but I would have thought that they were about 11, 12 foot wing span and possibly a little bit longer. And the one thing was of course once they were gone past you were alright. And another thing that my wife and I remember both of us had younger sisters and we were told by our parents that if a Doodlebug came over and the engine stopped we were to push them down into a sheltered corner and lie on top of them to protect them. Now, our, we both think this, now why our younger sisters were more important than we were? Luckily we, luckily, I don't think I've ever, that never occurred.

Now in relation to Knole Park, I was at Sevenoaks School at the time, and used to in lunchtime used to go off into, go and buy sandwiches and as a day boy go and buy my sandwiches and go and sit up a tree in the park or whatever. So I've got one or two particular memories. The specific one, was that we bought our sandwiches in Sevenoaks and gone down Seal Hollow Road to go into the park in the

gateway in the wall, which in, I don't know if it still is, in those days was called the, yes, it was known as the Hole In The Wall.

J.W.: Hole in the wall, yes.

A.R.: Oh that's good, it's still like that. And we went in there on this particular lunchtime and walked just straight on with the golf club up on the left, up up the hill, and to our surprise in that valley immediately below the golf club was a complete Doodlebug just sitting there. And there was a skid mark, probably yards long, with the Doodlebug sitting there at the end on the grass. And we strolled over to it and had a good look round and suddenly for both of us it dawned on us that we were standing there beside a live bomb. And, so our reaction then was we tiptoed away, up away and up away behind trees and discussed what should we do because obviously nobody had been there to fence it off or put warnings on the gate or anything. We thought perhaps we should go circle round and go up to the golf club and say do you know that 50 yards down the hill there there's a live Doodlebug, or should we go back to school and tell them. And we had a bit of a discussion and decided that whatever we did we'd probably get into trouble so we went back to school and we said nothing to anybody.

The other specific Doodlebug that I remember, again associated with Knole, was at Sevenoaks School, in effect overlooks the park directly towards Knole House. And Phillip and I were in the classroom during a lunchtime and we were the only ones there. And we heard a Doodlebug coming, with that familiar sound in the distance, and looking straight out of the window towards Knole House and beyond there was a Doodlebug coming with a Spitfire pursuing it. And it was probably, I don't know, a mile or half a mile away from us, and you could actually see the flash from the Spitfire's guns and then there was a big flash and the Doodlebug disappeared in a cloud of smoke and the Spitfire appeared from behind the cloud of smoke peeling away for safety. And then, and we cheered, I can remember we cheered. And then there was an enormous bang and we dived under the table for shelter and then came out looking at each other rather sheepishly because we realised that it was far too late...

So, I think those are the two Doodlebug exploits associated with Knole. And I wonder now, whilst we were preparing for this talk and thinking about it, is whether that Doodlebug actually would have caused damage to Knole House, like breaking windows, because it must have been quite close.

[10:31] G.D.: Oh the one that exploded?

A.R.: The one that exploded.

[10:38] G.D.: We could probably check that out, see whether that was. So you could see all this happening from the school?

A.R.: Yes, it was just straight in front of us.

[10:50] G.D.: So did you, from school did you go into Knole Park quite often?

A.R.: I did. A friend of mine particularly, Phillip and I. We were supposed to go to the British Restaurant for our lunch and we were given money to go because being day boys we didn't get school lunches. Boarders had school lunches but we, day boys didn't. And if it was nasty weather we would dutifully go and have a British Restaurant lunch, but if it was a nice day we'd go into a shop and buy sandwiches and go into the park and sit up in a tree or something and have our sandwiches and a wonder round.

Another little exploit that's just come to mind, and this was a bit stupid I suppose. I was again in Knole Park at what would have been lunchtime and we found an old empty oil drum with neither a top or a bottom. I don't know what it was doing or how it had got there. And you know Knole Park has got all these little hills or valleys I suppose. The others dared me to go in the barrel and roll down this...

Wife: He's never been the same since.

A.R.: Which I duly did. And it went, it was far more alarming than I expected.

[12:29] J.D.: More alarming than a Doodlebug?

A.R.: Yes, yes far more alarming. Because it seemed to be bouncing almost vertically as I tired, I thought I'd wedged myself. And at one of its tips it caught, took hold of a shoe and pulled my shoe off. And we bought, well I was probably wearing a school cap. And the school cap, as the others watching they found that they were falling, literally falling about laughing because as it rolled down my shoe flew out one end and my school cap flew out the other end.

[13:09] J.W.: Did you have boaters when you were there?

A.R.: Oh yes, but. When we were first there, bearing in mind it was wartime and there was rationing, boaters weren't very available but there were school caps. And in fact I don't really remember the exact detail it could well have been that only perhaps 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> formers wore caps rather than boaters. So I was wearing a school cap on this occasion. Boaters were alright, you know we were all sort of rather proud to have them. But you know, again during the wartime walking along the road wearing a boater when an army convoy went by, you know soldiers used to jeer and stuff. So my defence was to raise my, to politely raise my hat.

[14:09] G.D.: But with these Doodlebugs flying over Knole, was the grounds out of bounds for people? Or were they...

A.R.: No. No.

G.D.: You could still wander?

A.R.: No. Oh yes, we did cross country running in Knole. And I used, I was fairly small and skinny so I wasn't very good at rugby but I could run. And I used to do training runs sometimes at lunchtime to run from the school round, right round the walls of Knole House and back. And other times when I was senior, I was sent to be in charge of junior boys for a training run in the park and we usually used to go down from the school and then along the valley to the right that takes you to where there is a lookout over the Weald, a wooden, a big wooden stand thing that you had a look out. So I would escort them there and tick them all off that they had come and then I was able to sort of run back quicker than them because it was up to them to find their way back.

G.D.: But with those Doodlebugs lying around that could be quite an exciting run.

A.R.: But that was the opposite direction where the Doodlebug was. And it didn't last very long. I mean obviously, I suppose the RAF or somebody came along and disarmed it and. But they are the brave people who did things like disarming bombs.

[15: 54] G.D.: So was your partner in crime Phillip, Phil, is he still...do you still see him, or is he..?

A.R.: I haven't seen him for quite a long while. We did keep up for years, but I think particularly when we went off and lived up in XXX for a long time, we were, lost touch.

[16:15] J.W.: Was the house lived in when, do you know? Was the family still living in the house at Knole?

A.R.: That's a good question, I don't know.

Wife: I think they must have been because it wasn't National Trust in those days.

A.R.: No it was their home.

J.W.: I just wondered if you know, during the war they sort of evacuated themselves somewhere.

Wife: I don't know. That's something for you to find out.

A.R. I have a feeling that at least some members of the family did, because family like that probably had homes elsewhere, didn't they, or estates elsewhere even. I don't know. But I'm sure it wasn't open to the public during the war.

Wife: I didn't know Sevenoaks then.

[17.03] G.D.: Oh no. Good. Excellent. Any other thoughts that jumped into your mind since we started talking? Like oil drums escapades?

A.R.: Not a Knole one. I did write down another one of... No. What the one that I wrote down which is sort of seemed to be strange, is that at home in Borough Green, on the A21, you know across country, you used to see Army convoys going west and then a couple days later another army convoy would go right and even as a youngster aged 10 or whatever, I used to think this is like the noble duke of York who's armies he marched up the hill and marched them down again. It's only a few years ago when we went to Dover Castle and there was something there about the effect that they had put dummy tanks and guns and lorries parked up on the hills around Dover Castle to make the Germans think that the invasion was going to come from Dover end across the Channel when in fact it was going. And then somewhere after that I read that they deliberately drove convoys to and fro across the south of England for exactly the same thing, so that the Germans wouldn't, would be unsure as to where the invasion was going to go.

G.D.: Excellent. Ok. We'll stop there.

*Transcribed by Louise Carmichael, May 2016*