

Mrs Dorothy King has celebrated her 100th birthday.

Dorothy was born in Worcestershire in 1920, at the end of the First World War. She lived in a small village where there was no school, but the church in Kings Norton was used during the week for Kindergarten children. She passed her 11+ and went to the Grammar School. From there she went to a College to learn shorthand and typing, which she hated, so she went to the Birmingham Youth Employment Bureau and got a job with a large engineering firm. She worked there until WWII broke out. She volunteered for the Red Cross and was a part-time nurse in the Civil Nursing Reserve, working in many hospitals in Birmingham, in her spare time after work.

Wanting to take a more active part in the War, she went to the Recruiting Office and in 1941 signed up for the WAAF, as they were looking for Signals Personnel. She was eventually posted to RAF Cranwell to the Signals School where she learnt to 'touch type' (with a cover over the keys). She wore woollen gloves as it was so cold, which made typing rather difficult! She also learnt how to use a tele-printer and to learn more about RAF procedures. All the young girls she met were patriotic and eager to defeat Hitler! There was a shortage of men for this work as many were posted to the Middle East to man the big signal section there. Later, she was given a warrant to go to a large country house in Buckinghamshire, which was about 10 miles from Bletchley, (although she did not know that at the time),

She said 'We were in the middle of England, and surrounded by OTUs (operational training units) for the bomber pilots. We worked shifts in the signals section. Coded messages would come in – in groups of five letters and numbers – which had to be booked in and put on message sheets and given to the Cypher Officer. If in coded language they were booked in and were taken by a despatch rider to Bletchley'. Dorothy didn't know much about Bletchley, except that it was all signals and very secret. She spent the rest of her WAAF career at HQ 92 (originally 7 Group).

In 1944 she married an airman from Bomber Command, before being demobbed in 1945 and set up home in Hastings.

When we celebrated VE Day, Dorothy recalled the day when, as a young woman she travelled with a friend, on the train to go to Trafalgar Square in London, to join the crowds of people celebrating there, and remembers the great excitement and joy of all the people!

She came to live in Bridge, a small village near Canterbury, Kent in 1986 to be near her son, where she has been actively involved in all aspects of village life. especially the church and the WI (Women's Institute). Last year she entered one of the categories at the Horticultural Show and at the age of 98 she was the oldest member of the Society to be a prize-winner!

This September she was thrilled to celebrate her 100th birthday, and was delighted to receive a card from the Queen. She still lives in her bungalow, and her room was filled with flowers, cards and gifts from so many people. Because of Covid, she was unable to hold the large party she was hoping for, but her WI friends came to her garden, suitable spaced out, to sing Happy Birthday, raise a glass, and cut a specially made birthday cake.

As told by Mrs Dorothy King (nee Bartlett), to Joan Hill, September 2020.