

Memories of the Birmingham Blitz

A night like never before

Nov 10 2010 By Paul Suart



MUCH like any ordinary night during World War Two, thousands of workers would arrive for the night shift at the Birmingham Small Arms factory.

Yet the night of November 19, 1940, was far from ordinary.

For 53 tragic employees at the Small Heath plant it was the last time they ever clocked in.

Bombs fell like never before in one of the most sustained and devastating campaigns the Luftwaffe ever embarked on in the skies over Birmingham.

As a manufacturer of guns and ammunition the BSA was a prime target.

Sheila Pugh, who was only a baby at the time, lost her uncle, Albert Hird, that night. He was aged just 38.

"It's just so sad when you think about what happened," she said.

"Albert's family home in nearby Bolton Street was also bombed but thankfully his wife and their 12-year-old son had been moved.

"It took months before some of the bodies were found under the rubble and I don't think Albert was buried until March 1941."

Sheila, aged 72, was one of five children and grew up not far from the BSA factory in Armoury Road.



Despite only being a toddler many painful memories of the Blitz have stayed with her.

"I can still hear the air raid sirens – that wailing noise – but I suppose most people probably can.

"Those noises were just matter of fact, like hearing a car go by, but you knew something was not right.

"I remember being fitted with a gas mask and going down into the shelters.

"I can also remember celebrating in the streets on VE Day."

It's only in the last ten years, since Sheila joined the Birmingham Air Raid Remembrance Association, that she has learned more about her uncle and how he died.

It was thanks to BARRA that Sheila was able to trace her cousin Albert, uncle Albert's son, to Ross-on-Wye in Herefordshire, fulfilling a lifelong promise she had made to her mum Aida.

* A special event to commemorate the BSA bombing tragedy will be held on in Armoury Road at 2pm on Friday, November 19.