

Wood Norton in WW2 : The 1939 Register



The Register was taken on the 29 September 1939 and was designed to capture every member of the civilian population with the information being used to produce identity cards and, once rationing was introduced in January 1940, to issue ration books. It was also used to administer conscription and the direction of labour, and to monitor and control the movement of the population caused by military mobilisation and mass evacuation. Registration of members of the armed forces was dealt with by the military authorities, so the 1939 Register does not include service personnel in military, naval and air force establishments, or members of the armed forces billeted in private homes, including their own homes.

At the time the 1939 Register was made publicly available (November 2015), those persons who were still living had their details redacted from the published document. Thus, in the 1939 Register for Wood Norton, only 210 names were released, and there are at least 60 records redacted, marked *This record is officially closed*. The population of Wood Norton published in the 1937 edition of Kelly's Directory of Norfolk was around 244 (although this was a population taken in 1931).

Conscription did not begin in earnest until January 1940, and most people who subsequently served in the armed forces during the Second World War were still civilians in September 1939. Plans for a limited conscription were given in the *Military Training Act* in May 1939, which applied to single men aged between 20 and 22, who were required to undertake six month's military training (and some 240,000 men registered for service). On the 3rd September 1939, parliament immediately passed a more wide-reaching measure, *The National Service (Armed Forces) Act* which imposed conscription on all males aged between 18 and 41, who had to register for service. Those medically unfit were exempted, as were others in key industries and jobs such as baking, farming, medicine, engineering-related trades, and students. A *Schedule of Reserved Occupations and Protected Work* had been drawn up in 1938 by the Ministry of Labour with the goal of exempting skilled workers from being conscripted into service, drawing on the lessons learnt during WW1 when many skilled labourers were drawn into the armed services, creating problems when positions needed filling. The idea was constantly reviewed throughout the war, as women, again, began to work more in industries such as munitions. This meant that men were free to join other organisations such as the Special Constabulary, Home Guard or the ARP. In December 1942 Parliament passed a second *National Service Act*, which widened the scope of conscription further by making all unmarried women and widows between the ages of 20 and 30 liable to call-up; later the age limit was expanded to those aged 19 to 43.¹

Men aged 20 to 23 were required to register on the 21st October 1939, the start of a long and drawn out process of registration by age group - the following May, registration had extended

¹ See: <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/yourcountry/overview/conscriptionww2/>.

only as far as men aged 27, and 40-year-olds only registered in June 1941. By the end of 1939, more than 1.5million men had been conscripted to join the British armed forces – of these, just over 1.1 million went to the British Army, and the rest were split between the Royal Navy and the RAF.²

There is, therefore, much we can learn from the 1939 Register for Wood Norton. Taking all the above factors into account, there are 84 residents who were born between 1898 and 1924, who may have been eligible for conscription. There are 5 people (3 men and 2 women) born in 1926 and 1927, but it is unlikely that they would have been called up, as they would have just missed the qualifying age criteria at the end of the war, although it is possible that men born between 1926 and 1st October 1939 may have subsequently been called up for military National Service (it was phased out from 1957, with call up formally ending on 31st December 1960, with the last National Servicemen leaving the armed forces in May 1963).³

Of the 84 residents for which information is available in the 1939 Register and who might therefore have been eligible for conscription, the following information can be ascertained:

- There were 33 women recorded, 7 who were single and 26 who were married (so not eligible for conscription). The occupations of the 7 single women were given as:

Occupations of Single Women (7)	Nos.
Dairy Work	2
Farm Worker	1
Shop Assistant	1
Midwife/Missionary	1
Unpaid domestic duties	2

- There were 52 men recorded, 28 single and 24 married. The occupations of these men were given as:

Occupations of Single (28) and Married (24) Men	Nos.
Cowman	6
Farmer	3
Farm Labourer/Agricultural Labourer	17
Poultry Worker	1
Tractor Driver	1
Gardener	3
Farm Carter	3
Farm Foreman	1
Horseman	1
Grocer	1
Baker and Confectioner	1
General Labourer	1

² See: http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain_wwtwo/ff1_conscription.shtml.

³ See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Service_Act_1948#Ending_in_1963.

Lorry Driver	2
Apprentice Motor Mechanic	1
Bricklayer	3
Engineer Storekeeper	2
Haulage Contractor	2
Railway Gas Works Labourer	1
Tractor Mechanic	1
Landlord, Sun Inn & Motor Driver	1
Sub Postmaster and Garage Proprietor	1

It is evident that the vast majority of the men were employed in farming and other reserved occupations which most probably exempted them from conscription, so it is unlikely that many, if any, men were called up.

As the 1939 Register was updated, it noted those Wood Norton residents who took on other duties supporting the war effort:

Horace Hall	ARP Senior Warden
Mrs Jean Hall	ARP Warden, WVS (Women's Voluntary Service)
Leonard Leslie Mitchell	ARP Warden, Norfolk County Council No. 66
Sidney Barrett	ARP Warden
Charles George Bullimore	CD & AA Branch RA This was most probably Coastal Defence and Anti-Aircraft, Royal Artillery.
James Smith	Special Constable He was also the Sub-postmaster and Garage Proprietor.

Horace Hall was Chairman of the Wood Norton Parish Council and in January 1939 he and his wife, Jean, had offered to ascertain if accommodation was available in the village for evacuees, under the Government's Evacuation scheme.⁴

Charles George Bullimore (born 12th July 1904) was a gardener, and the Register notes him as *Reservist 1060466*. Charles was born in Calthorpe, the son of Richard Edward and Harriet Bullimore.⁵ On the 24th January 1925, aged 20, he joined The Royal Artillery for 6 years, and had left the service on the 6th June 1931, and was placed on the Army Reserve. The 1939 Register indicated that he was involved with the Coastal Defence and Anti-Aircraft with The Royal Artillery. On the 11th November 1945, he was placed on the Z Reserve, with the note *Discharged Age Limit* in 1954.⁶ He married Elsie Violet Wright in 1934, and died in 1992, aged 88.⁷

⁴ Wood Norton Parish Council Minute Book, 1915-1967 (*Norfolk Record Office, ACC 2007/375*).

⁵ 1911 census, Wood Dalling (Schedule 14) (www.ancestry.co.uk).

⁶ Royal Artillery Attestations 1893-1942 (Army Book 358 p.94) (www.findmypast.co.uk).

⁷ FreeBMD, Marriage, *Quarter to September 1934, Walsingham, Vol.4b, p.713* (www.freebmd.org.uk); England and Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916-2007 (www.ancestry.co.uk).