

BARBARA RAFFERTY

The Italian Minesweeper

I was about seven when we moved from Middlesbrough to Lackenby, it was only a small village of exactly 31 cottages, and they were proper cottages with an old midden, no toilets and I never wanted to go on the midden. I would stand and dance rather than go. But the German bombers used to come over the village and aim for the steel works which were right near by and as far as I can remember they only ever had a couple of hits and the majority of the bombs fell on the marshes just out the back of us. Every day the Italian prisoners were brought in the green bus and marched over to the marshes to clear the bombs. I used to stand in awe looking at them. This was the enemy. I'm looking at the enemy who dropped bombs on us! One day one of the soldiers came up to me, he was in his uniform which was a grey green colour and he handed me a note. Written on this note in kisses were the words "my darling." I went back home and told my mam about this note, well, my mam was full of fun and she was laughing when I saw this soldier pass by and knock at our door. I shouted to my mam "it's the Eitie at the door!" My mam went over to the door and answered it, the soldier said "I am Nicholas, I come to ask if I can marry your daughter and take her back to Italy." "Yes" replied my mam, "you can have her." "Oh no!" I thought, "I'm going to have to go and live in Italy." Consequently I never went near the Italian soldiers again.

Amusement

During the war, in Lackenby, the things that we used to do to keep ourselves occupied was nothing like what the kids of today do, we used to go winkling, mussling and brambling, and we loved it. There was also an old duck pond that we used to go down to and swim in or one of our favourite things to do was to go into the air raid shelters in the village and roast potatoes. There were also fields round and about where we used to go and pick turnips, this was known as "Bungie picking" and after we'd picked them we would eat them. The fields were our entertainment and we knew how to entertain ourselves. There were a lot of rats and one of the lads had a small dog and he would take it into the fields and go ratting, when he came back he would show everyone his catch.

We were just as mischievous as all kids and I remember there was one lady who lived in Lackenby and we called her "Fuzzy" because she never washed her hair and it just stuck up from her head. This day we were tormenting her outside her house, I can't quite remember what we were doing, calling her names, I think, but the next thing we knew she had opened the window and emptied the jerry pot on us. Ahh the good old days.

King and Queen

The memory that is clearest in my mind is the day the King and Queen came to Middlesbrough. My mam said that Mr Elgee, the curator at the Dorman museum, where my dad worked had said that we would get a better view of them going by from the roof. So there we were, me, my mam and dad, and Mr and Mrs Elgie watching the royals go by, but I had a fear of heights and I screamed and screamed for my mam to come away from the wall near the edge. I remember my dad was stood in his uniform and we were all looking down to see the King and Queen, but it was the fear that my mam was going to fall that I remember the most.