

A PEEWIT IN WARTIME

A Child's War in Somerset

Gordon Rendell

The village of Hardington Mandeville lies at the very southern edge of Somerset, its parish boundary being also the county boundary with Dorset.

A lad, Gordon Rendell, three years old when the war started in 1939, experienced the following six years with a sharp intensity.

An only child, with a father who was involved in engineering and agricultural contracting and a mother who was the head teacher at the local school, he was often left to find his own amusement. Having an enquiring mind and time on his hands, he studied the village characters and was often caught up in their activities.

At the age of seven, he could be asked to cycle over to Farmer Gifford's to sort out his stationary engine – usually it was the float chamber full of hay seeds again, no problem!

Those were the days of paraffin lamps, cooking on a Primus stove or a black range, and a diet of bread and cheese, eggs and rabbit stew. Roast chicken was for a special occasion only, and sausages used to burst out of their skins.

The history of life in Hardington Mandeville in the 1940s might have been lost for ever if its events had not been stamped upon the mind of an enquiring little boy who, eighty years later, has brought the characters back to tell their own eccentric stories in the rhythmic dialect of Somerset. The stories are not only a history – they are great fun!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gordon Rendell was born in Hardington on 19 June 1936. At the age of ten he won a scholarship to Crewkerne Grammar School where he spent his time, when possible, gazing out of the window, wishing he was on one of his father's tractors.

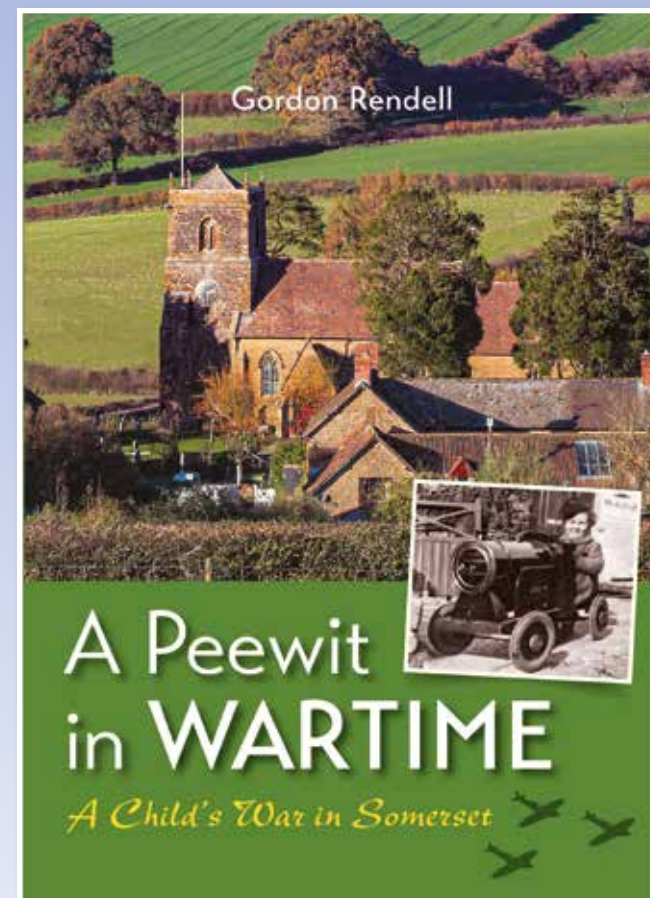
On leaving school in 1952, this wish came true, until he was called up for National Service in 1953 and entered into the RAF. He finished up in Coastal Command at St Mawgan in Cornwall with a squadron of Lancasters. He actually flew in the last Lancaster to leave the service. While there, it was at a dance in St Ives where he met his future wife, Una; they were married at Hardington in 1958.

Whilst resuming work with his father he started restoring antiques in his spare time until he bought premises in Montacute in 1963. He and Una secured a contract with the National Trust looking after furniture and furnishings for the whole of the Wessex Region, covering Devon, Somerset, Wiltshire and part of South Gloucestershire. Having got the National Trust tidied up, he then concentrated on the industrial woodwork side of his business, making moulds for nose cones of rockets and cab roofs for airfield crash tenders among other things.

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