



Working the garden

By Mark Walden

We had German prisoners of war working in our garden. We also had Italians prisoners of war working in the garden, because we had a big garden. It was quite a moderate size house but it had a big garden that went down to the railway. That was where my railway interest started. It was the mainline from Paddington to Bristol and the trains used to fairly thunder through there. The prisoners of war were camped nearby and to give them something to do they were sort of passed out to farmers and people with fairly big gardens who wanted gardening type jobs doing. There was no guard standing over them while they worked. They had a uniform with a big yellow circle on their backs and they were dropped off at the beginning of the day and picked up and taken back to the camp.

First of all, we had the Italians, they were billeted nearby, I remember and they used to make baskets. They worked in the garden and then when Italy dropped out of the war they were all repatriated. Then we got the Germans, they were very good workers. We weren't allowed to give them money or anything like that, so, we had to pay them in cigarettes.

We went on a trip during the war to South Wales. It was packed, we sat in the corridor. It was packed with soldiers and sailors and all that sort of thing and there were no seats so we just sat in the corridors. We were going to visit my mother's sister who had been seconded to work on the railways in South Wales. She worked as a shunter and she fixed up for me to have a trip on a loco, a Britannia Tank. I went in the guard's van and in the signal box. That was superb.