

Roger Leivers

Author and Historian
Godmanchester, United Kingdom

1. How did you learn about GLH and what motivated you to receive the seeds of the survivor plants?

Back in 2019 I started work on my second book, 'Godmanchester at War', Whilst we are only a small town, just south of Huntingdon, we have a rich history that stretches as far back as Roman times, and beyond. My focus has always been on the town's wartime history, In the summer of 1945 ten German Nuclear Scientists, captured during the allied advance through Europe, were flown into RAF Tempsford and brought to Farm Hall where they were kept, under licence not to escape.

This large mansion had been

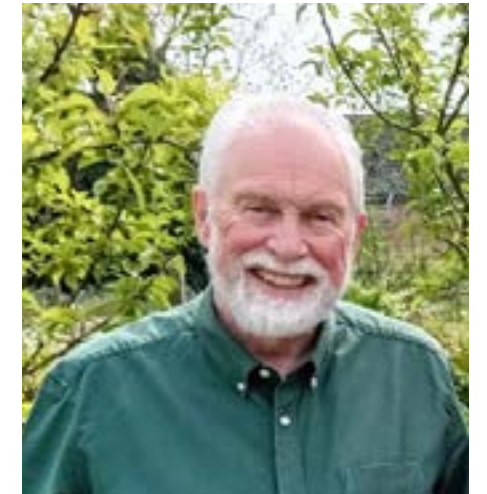
requisitioned by the Royal Air Force in the summer of 1942, and used as a transit point for agents being dropped in occupied Europe.

They were well looked after, good food, wine, freedom of the garden and grounds. They even had German POW's with them to serve them.

In reality every room, including the garden, had been kitted out with microphones, which recorded their every word. A team of transcribers across the road then translated their conversations and, eventually, produced a document known as 'Operation Epsilon'.

The objective was to learn more

Roger Leivers from Godmanchester worked as a sales manager. His interests in the town's local history led him to become a historian and author. His first book 'Stirling to Essen' recounts the story of a RAF bomber command pilot who crashed into fields in Godmanchester and the officers who served alongside him. His second book 'Godmanchester at War' recalls stories from World War II. Roger Leivers also conducts war walks around Godmanchester recounting the stories of those that went to war and mysteries behind the buildings around town from both World War 1 and 2.



about the German wartime nuclear programme, it was in Farm Hall that they heard the BBC News announcing the Hiroshima bomb. The realisation that the Americans had succeeded where they had failed, caused shock, shame and also heated discussions as to how they could have done it. The Germans believed that America were at least 10 years behind them. This story connects our town forever to the story of Hiroshima and the birth of the nuclear era.

2. Please share with us your life trajectory and how you came to be an author and historian.

After many years as a sales manager with various companies I retired in

2021, however even before then I had developed an interest in our town's wartime history. I started giving war walks around the town, covering both WW1 and WW2. The money raised was donated to our local museum. My life changed really in 2012 when an email was passed onto me by the local council. A gentleman was enquiring about a WW2 bomber that crashed close to the town in April 1942. This led to 5 years of research where I traced the families of all the crew members, the raids they went on and what became of them, and my first book 'Stirling to Essen', the book has now sold over 3,500 copies worldwide and received excellent reviews. It also allowed all the families to meet for the first time at



the placing of a memorial close to the crash site. The book even reunited families across the Atlantic, apart for over 50 years.

The success of this book encouraged me to research and write 'Godmanchester at War', which tells the remarkable story of our small town. Around half the money from sales is donated back out to local, national and international causes. I also give talks across various local groups and do book signings, all of which help raise funds.

3. The survivor plants are also living witnesses of the atomic bombing. How important is it to protect these reminders of the past and what are your thoughts on GLH's aim to spread the message of peace through plants?

We have three junior schools in the town and all of them study WW2 history. This year I was asked if I would give them a talk on the subject and give them a walk around the town. The children were totally

engaged throughout my time with them, it allowed them to feel personally connected to the conflict. The addition of the Hiroshima tree, will enable to the children, and the population as a whole, a place of reflection.

Few of that wartime generation are still with us, a few children, now in their high 80's and 90's. The Hiroshima tree will ensure that future generations never forget.



Roger Leivers with the Nursery Manager and Assistant Nursery Manager of the Godmanchester Community Plant Nursery with the A-bomb survivor seeds.

4. How can you tell the horrors of war and sensitize people to the threats of war and the war machinery through the survivor trees of Hiroshima and Nagasaki?'

During WW1 77 men of our town were killed in the battlefields of Europe, not a single family were not impacted by the conflict. In addition to the dead, there were many more physically injured, or who carried the mental scars for the rest of their lives. In WW2 14 of our town were lost, including women. The town was again impacted by the conflict, in January 1945 we were targeted by a German V1 flying bomb. Air raid sirens. and the threat of invasion were constants for the population. It's vital that these stories are never forgotten, that we realise that conflict is not the answer to disagreements, that humanity can only survive if we learn from the past, and don't repeat the same mistakes. As our tree grows and matures its story will be told through talks and local media, including newspapers. I'm hoping that my

local TV contact will enable the story of Green Legacy Hiroshima to be spread far and wide. A message of peace and reconciliation.



Roger Leivers at a book signing of 'Godmanchester at War'

Feature edited by Saeeda Razick of GLH