

## **Letter from one of our readers. © Vera Agar. EARLY BIRDS OVER YORKSHIRE.**

My father G.W.T. Hartwell (better known as Bill Hartwell) after leaving Raleigh Cycle Company in Nottingham, came up to Leeds to manage the Blackburn company, Olympia Works for Robert Blackburn. Then about four of his friends came from Nottingham to Leeds to be employed in different jobs at Blackburn Aircraft.

The factory, that had been derelict for several years, was in a terrible state when my father started there in 1935. It had an old wooden gatehouse and the offices were where the original bandstand had overlooked the small factory floor. This was where the Skua and Swordfish aeroplane were made. The Skua didn't last long, but the Swordfish was in service for many years.

My father with the permission of Robert Blackburn arranged for the factory to be built in brick and the offices and drawing offices were built on the first floor over the factory. There was a canteen built, also the old wooden gatehouse was pulled down and a brick one was built together with heavy iron gates. No visitors were allowed in to the factory until they had signed the visitors book, then the gates were opened by the two guards on duty. The last building to be built was the new paintshop.

In the grounds was an old cottage which was turned into the First Aid Post, two nurses were on duty all the time.

I remember my father taking my sister and I around the factory on a Saturday morning to see the aeroplanes being built and we also went around the offices. Father covered Guisley factory and a place at Church Fenton where aeroplanes were tested and flown.

In a bad air raid over Leeds the Germans tried to bomb Blackburns Aircraft but the bomb was dropped on Easterley Road, where the shops are now, near the round about. This left a big crater. So they only missed bombing Blackburn Aircraft by about a mile.

Unfortunately the factory was closed down at the end of the war in 1946 and every thing was transferred to Blackburn Aircraft at Brough. The Leeds factory was sold to a wholesale warehouse, and later demolished by Tesco to open a supermarket.

My father was also Commanding officer of 208 Squadron, Air Training Corps. Which was started originally at Tudor House off Oakwood Lane, then moved to a wooden building at the back of the Parochial Hall on Fitzroy Drive. When Safeway was being built they needed more ground so it had to be pulled down; and the Air Training Corps is now situated on Oakwood Lane.