**Eileen**

In the beginning of the war in 1939 I was twenty. I was born in Victoria but we moved to South East London near the Surrey Docks, which later in the war was burnt terribly, with all the ships.

I worked in a place that made nets for farmers, using binder twine and things like that, but at the outbreak of the war they needed to carry on with war work so we made camouflage nets instead. I wanted to join the forces with some of my friends but I had an important job where I worked, as I did the wages and telephone duty. My employers said they’d have difficulty getting anybody suitable, so they employed me for a few months at a time, which excused me from having to join the forces, although I am sure they wouldn’t have stopped me if I had been determined to join. I suppose I thought I would be letting them down if I left, but I came to regret it later as some of my friends in the forces did enjoy themselves. But it didn’t deter me from having fun; I didn’t settle down and have my child until I was forty-four.

The war years with the terrible bombings were really scary, but I thought I might be dead tomorrow so I was really keen to enjoy myself, I know that’s a terrible thing to say especially when you read about all the people who died, but being a dancer (I had been on the stage years before the war) I would go dancing every night and I went to the pictures (cinema) and even at the pictures when there was a raid the manager would say you can take your chances and either go out or stay in and watch the film, so I thought “no if they are playing the film then I’m not going to miss it” so I’d stay in there.

In some ways at the end of the war I felt as though I’d missed out, but I did get to learn first aid and fire watching so I did my bit watching the property especially when we moved to Pimlico. We’d watch out for some of the big houses with the ‘la de da’ people (I shouldn’t say that!) but the more ‘important’ people with money that had gone away. We looked after their houses in case they got hit by an incendiary bomb, which could do a lot of damage and we’d have to report any incidents to the AFS.

In South London we didn’t have an Anderson Shelter but my friend across the road did, her father had made it all nice with bunk beds, so when the warnings sounded we’d dash across the road, even our cat followed us! One time I remember the warnings sounded so we dashed out to get to the shelter, I could see the planes above and I didn’t have my tin hat on so I covered my head with my hands like that would protect me from the shrapnel! We were all crammed in the shelter when their house was bombed, the impact caused the door of the shelter to burst open covering us with dust, now that really was frightening, we shook for days after that. When we came over here (Pimlico) the shelters were all underground under the pavements, which was much better.

Strangely for me I didn’t lose anyone during the war, though my cousin was fighting in Dunkirk but he came back and he thought it was terrible here because we couldn’t get at the people attacking us. But really I was very lucky not to have lost anybody.