

BOOK REVIEW

AROUND WARTIME UXBRIDGE by James Skinner
ISBN 978 0 7524 45434 132pp 160 illustrations Price £12.99

James Skinner was born in Uxbridge in 1928. He was educated at St Mary's Primary School, Rockingham Road and at Gunnersbury Grammar School. His love for the area where he has spent most of his life has inspired him to write several nostalgic local history books. His especial interest, from an early age, as is evident from this new book, was the cinema and he is perhaps best known to RNELHS members for his *Hillingdon Cinemas* (2002) and for the entertaining talk that he gave at our Christmas meeting in 2003.

Although his new book concentrates upon the war years, it actually covers the period 1930-1950 and includes some of the author's family history. James Skinner writes well and with touches of both humour and pathos and holds his reader's attention. There are many sidelights on Uxbridge life. For instance, if you wanted the Walls Ice Cream tricycle to stop at your house, you displayed a large card with a W on it in your window. A photograph showing a crowd of children around such a source of delight includes a very young Ken Pearce now chairman of Uxbridge Record Society. When the Odeon cinema opened in Uxbridge in June 1938 with the film, *The Drum*, the stars Sabu and Valerie Hobson made personal appearances. Sabu was often seen driving through the town from his school at Beaconsfield to a skating rink at Ealing.

There are several heart-rending tales of the tragedies of war. A mother, Lucy Baker, sent her sons to Canada for safety, travelling on the SS *City of Benares*. The ship was hit by a torpedo in September 1940 and John Baker was one of only seven of the 90 evacuees on board to be rescued. The older boy, Bobby, had passed his lifejacket to his brother and then missed his footing climbing into the lifeboat and had been drowned.

The book has 160 photographs, including smiling WRNS and ambulance crews, scenes in the RAF Hospital at Uxbridge and the Battle of Britain Ops Room as well as Uxbridge Open Air Swimming Pool and many pictures of local people. Altogether it is an entertaining and informative read.

E. M. Bowlt