



Playing the role: Richard Holdsworth signs his book *Six Spoons of Sugar* (above centre) and above right, Arthur and Lesley Cook, members of the 'Blitz and Peaces' music band which performed at the launch party. 084003b, e, f

Gum-chewing GIs bring 'historic' book launch alive

THE STRAINS of Glenn Millar hung on the air, gum-chewing GIs from the 101st Airborne swapped yarns in one corner and members of the Home Guard watched vigilantly over proceedings from another.

Nobody got through the front door without showing their Ministry of Food Ration Book (1943 edition), but the male guests got a welcoming smile from several of the ladies, dolled up like glamorous versions of Private Pike's mum from Dad's Army, clearly experts in keeping the home fires burning.

Apart from the venue, the upper gallery of the Broad Street branch of Waterstones in Reading, the other giveaway that it was 2008 was the oblong-shaped sandwiches containing real ham (not corned beef or Spam) and genuine scrambled (not powdered) eggs. But the atmosphere was just about right for the launch of 71-year-old Richard Holdsworth's book *Six Spoons of Sugar*, based on his wartime experiences as a 1939 evacuee. He was sent with his mother and older sister to Upper Basildon, where his bank manager father would briefly find himself arrested as a Nazi spy after revealing that he had been a regu-

lar pre-war visitor to Germany. The village, re-christened Bumblethorpe in the book, was a haven but Richard was not totally war-proof - he and his mother were caught in one of the bombing raids on Reading and his grandmother perished in the Blitz.

The book, told through the eyes of a child and tracing the path of the war in the form of a scrapbook, got its title from the size of the weekly sugar ration.

Richard met his wife Heather in Australia where he worked as a cattlehand and then became a journalist. Later they ran a firm selling camper vans from Woodley.

The couple live in Sonning and Richard admitted: "I decided to write a book because I didn't know what else to do when I retired. I joined the Thames Valley Writers Circle, founded by a wonderful woman named Barbara Smith, who both encouraged and inspired me and I am delighted that she was able to be with us tonight."

At that point munitions worker Ida Potts, in dungarees and a colourful headscarf, edged past, her gas mask hanging from her shoulder, its case marked with the message, "Hitler sends no warning".

Later Prime Minister Winston Churchill would put in an appearance and stir the guests with that "we shall never surrender" speech.

Richard said: "I think my book will appeal to two types of buyers - parents whose kids are studying World War Two at school, and people like me who want to reminisce."

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Slice of a by-gone era:

Sir Winston Churchill look a like. Joe Mahoney at the book launch party. 084003k



Pretty good: Melanie Ames ('Lilliane'), Rowena Turner ('Clementine') and Jo Nutley ('Violette') in their wartime clothes. 084003i



Power of the written word: Richard Holdsworth with his book and left, the author with Doug and Chris Mundy, dressed as 'Alf & Ida Potts' at the launch party in Waterstones. 084003a, d

