

Surname: Binns	First Name(s): Margaret E	Army Number: W/163515	
Maiden name (if applicable): Bell	Name used during service: Bell	Rank: Private	
Main base: Aldershot	Training base: Fenham Barracks, Newcastle upon Tyne	Enrolled at: Newcastle upon Tyne	
Platoon/Section:	Company/Battery: A Company	Group/Regiment: Aldershot	Command:
Year(s) of service: 24/4/1942 to 12/2/1946	Reason for discharge: Demob	Trade: Sick Bay Orderly	
Uniform Issued: S.D. Skirt and Jacket Khaki Lisle stockings Tie Bloomers (3 Khaki 'passion killers') Underwear – 3 pink bras (felt like canvas) Brown shoes (2 pairs) Greatcoat Shoulder bag Gas mask and helmet PT clothing Khaki wrap- around overalls Equipment for keeping shoes and uniform buttons polished	Photo: 		
Description of daily tasks:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Company Stores. • ATS mess duties – very hard work. • Sickbay orderly at Aldershot and then attached to the Medical Corps until discharged. 		

Pay book:	Not available
Memorable moments:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I wasn't conscripted until the age of 22 on 24 April 1942, so was able to experience some time on the Home Front; air raids, blackouts, shortages etc as well as serving in the ATS. Up to this time I had thoughts that my call up might have been deferred as my father had recently died after being ill for several years as a result of being gassed during WW1. Sadly he had never received a war pension, so my wages were vital to the household income. • I remember the shock it was to my Mam, then a widow with I believe, a government pension of only 10 shillings per week, to lose the only wage earner but still having a younger child to support. • I had my interview in Newcastle and remember it well as I sat there a little scared, ready to answer honestly any questions I would be asked. I was informed that they (whoever they were!) had chosen for me to be sent to Birmingham where I would be trained to fill shells underground. Me! who had never travelled farther than my daily tram trip to work, a couple of miles into town, to my job as a dispatcher in a high-class family confectioner business sending out items to hotels shops etc. I thought about the danger and the horrifying prospect of working underground and being claustrophobic (I panicked if I couldn't get my sweater off quickly enough or if I had to use the lift on my own!) I said in all seriousness, I couldn't do that explaining my problem but adding, that I was prepared to do something else to help the war effort. "Is there anything else I could do?" She must have thought 'I have a right one here!' as she said, 'well there is always the ATS.' She went on to explain who they were and what they did and said there were other benefits too. Uniform would be issued free, although the underwear was not mentioned - that might have put me off joining had I seen it first!; travel home was free, of course, every 12 weeks; weekend breaks; my Mam would be sent a regular allowance home. That made my mind up but, being rather naive I asked if I might go home and discuss it with my mother. The interviewer looked at me in such a pitying manner and said in a very commanding way, 'indeed you can't, you have to say yes or no now', so it was make your mind up time. I said 'yes, I think that will suit me better.' When I returned home and told my Mam I had to report for service in the woman's army, she shed a few tears (like so many mum's I guess) and said 'your poor Dad would turn in his grave if he knew that his first born was going into the army'. • I was very lucky and had an easy first day when I reported to my enrolment centre which happened to be Fenham Barracks, in Newcastle-on-Tyne, my home town. Although I spent 6 weeks training, we weren't allowed home until we had finished and had been told where we were going for our first posting. So at the very first opportunity, I proudly dressed in my nicely pressed uniform, complete with gas mask and case, and issue tin helmet. I left the Barracks and went off to meet my Mam, younger sister and my loveable very old fashioned fun loving wee Granny, all of 5 ft, at her house. This was nearer to the barracks than my home, and as I was only on a day's release we all wanted to make the most of it. Unfortunately, I had reacted badly to the injections we were given in our early medicals, and my arm had swollen up and become so inflamed that I could not get it into the sleeve of my uniform jacket. Therefore, I had to wear a sling around my arm which left the sleeve of my jacket hanging loose. In effect I really looked the part of the wounded soldier (even to pitying looks on the bus) on that day, as I turned into the street and saw my family waiting on the doorstep for my promised arrival. Who ran first towards me with shock and horror, but my little Granny, in a distressed

voice saying, 'oh my God Mary (my Mam's name) she has been shot already!' Well, the laughter that followed my explanation for the sling eased the situation and indeed gave them a reason to completely spoil me until my return to barracks.

- I remember doing PT in Fenham Barracks in an open field wearing khaki shirt and bloomers – open to viewers passing by on the buses!
- My first posting was to Christchurch in Gloucestershire, home to me and another girl, which lasted all of one week, thankfully. It turned out that no-one knew we were coming and there was no-one there to meet us at the railway station. So two new recruits, tired and weary from travelling were to be seen dragging their heavy kitbags and other stuff including the 'always with you' tin helmet and gas mask, about 2 miles along a grit covered country lane, meeting not a soul that might help. On arrival at the reception area, they were surprised to see us and had to find accommodation hurriedly. We had to be given replacement kitbags as there was hardly a bottom left in the ones we had, due, to the heavy constant friction between grit and canvas! For one week, we filled in time by picking up or looking for any litter that dared to land on this tidy camp and repainting the edging stones white. I can honestly say that I left that camp much brighter than I found it but I never did find out what happened to my companion.
- Next move was to Tidworth, near Salisbury Plain, a land full of heavy tanks and other types of army equipment and very noisy, as I found out whilst staying there for two months. During that time, I had an office job but I realised that wasn't for me and was glad when a posting came through for me for Aldershot. I wondered how long would it be before another move came, but little did I know that this was to be my home for the remainder of my four years service!
- My first allotted job was working in Company stores which I did like and was happy there until I met up with another girl named Jessie who was to become my best friend. Jessie and I were together for quite some time and shared many a happy hour together. Two people from far ends of the country - she came from London, a true Londoner, and me from Newcastle. In spite of the different dialects, we managed to understand and get on so well with each other, we became firm friends.
- Jessie was a fully experienced office worker and typist who, due to there being no office jobs available, had to work in the ATS Mess. This involved various shifts which did not always fit in with our social life, and although she had asked to move to the office, this did not come about. We got fed up not being able to attend social events because of the different hours we worked, so came up with a plan. She couldn't move from the mess, so it was left to me to ask to be moved to the mess with her. Not many people requested this sort of move and I was advised to stay where I was as promotion was more likely there, but that was not my priority. I put in for the transfer and when it came along we two became workmates. Strangely, I enjoyed my change to hard work and the atmosphere in the mess. We had many a laugh and at last Jessie and I were able to visit each other's homes on leave; her to visit the North with me, and I at weekends to experience the terror of London doodlebug raids with her and her family.
- Jessie and I continued to work and take advantage of our off duty times, which included dances, held at different units, with free transport. When Jessie's mother's health deteriorated, she obtained her discharge from the ATS to care for her mum and this changed my future yet again.
- Once Jessie had gone I lost my need to work in the mess hall and applied for yet another move to ATS sickbay when a vacancy cropped up. There I had another role to play, one which I did enjoy in spite of seeing things that I hadn't experienced until then, but this showed me a different slant on life. I loved my duties in the sickbay as an orderly, where auxiliary nurses did the actual nursing

	<p>and a Queen Alexander sister acted as Matron.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Due to advances on the fighting front, our sick bay was moved out of Aldershot into a small village named Hathend, a couple of miles between Aldershot and Farnham. The staff, were billeted in a large manor house turned over to the ATS, with huge grounds filled with trees, bushes, flowers and I remember vividly the lovely show of coloured lupins. Not a lot went on in this small village. Most things revolved around the small cosy pub, run by George, the innkeeper who knew everyone and everything that went on in the village; a wonderful cheery smiling man. We four ATS girls had the sympathy of George and the villagers for being away from home and were made very welcome in his pub by them all. Patients in the White House couldn't enter this sacred place, being out of bounds to them. I was kind of adopted by a lovely family in the village, the Blackmans, Jim and Lil with two young boys and a beautiful little girl, Diana who I loved dearly. Sadly she died whilst I was there, aged 5 years. This family made their home mine all the time I was stationed there, even bringing my Mam and sister down to stay with them for a holiday. I am still in touch with Lil, the Mother, who is now 93 years of age living on her own in comfortable sheltered housing. • It was there in Heathend that I witnessed the huge bonfire lit for VJ day, sharing it with the villagers with whom I had spent many happy days and nights. Then came the sad day when I had to say goodbye to them and my adopted family with promises all round to keep in touch. • I was discharged from York, then travelled home to my family and in time, took up with the job I so rudely had to leave. My boss said to me, 'where is the young immature wee girl who left here four years ago, to go into the woman's army and had now being replaced with a grown up, confident young woman'. I couldn't help but remark 'oh I left her there, this is the real me now.'
<p>Photos:</p>	<p>Not available.</p>