

Malcolmson

## A Soldier in Bedfordshire, 1941-1942

The Diary of Private Denis Argent, Royal Engineers

Denis Argent, a professional journalist, joined the British Army in 1940 at the age of 23. He was then already writing for Mass-Observation, the innovative social research organization founded in 1937, and during most of his first two years in uniform - he was billeted in Bedfordshire in 1941-42 - he kept a remarkably detailed and probing diary. He wrote of street life and other aspects of the Home Front in Luton and Bedford (the BBC's Symphony Orchestra was relocated there shortly before he arrived); daily military routine; bomb disposal; transportation; women, sex, and leisure; his political views and cultural interests (he loved music and was widely read); the crucial importance of leaves to see his girlfriend; and his fellow conscientious objectors - he was in the Non-Combatant Corps, though he later chose to take up arms. Denis Argent had a keen and observant reporter's eye; he was also highly attuned to the modernist intellectual culture of his time. His is a wartime diary that is perceptive, colourful, wide-ranging, sometimes amusing, and very well written.

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