



ONE OF HARROGATE'S OLDEST RESIDENTS TALKS ABOUT HER CENTURY OF LIVING

If you missed Harrogate's WWII veteran 101 year-old Sheila Pantin's first-hand talk ***Road to the Concentration Camps*** after she launched the centenary of Harrogate's war memorial in 2023, now's your chance to hear this amazing and inspirational lady's long and wonderful life-story.

Sheila celebrated her own centenary on Trafalgar Day 2023, just weeks after she gave her talk at a fully booked event with the audience clamouring for more. She is pin-sharp and still a brilliant raconteur. Even if you heard this talk, she still has more to tell in a rich and sprawling memoir.

This time around Sheila has been invited to launch a local 12-month project entitled ***Women Winning*** marking International Women's Day 2025. The aim is to bring Harrogate's inspirational women like Sheila, and others from all walks of life, to new audiences.

In Conversation with Sheila Pantin will be held at 2.30pm on Friday, 7 March in St Peter's Church on Cambridge Road, Harrogate (via the side door next to Primark). Entrance is free and no booking required.

Born in Gargrave near Skipton, her mother died in childbirth when Sheila was four years old. She was brought up by her father who had served in WWI before running a bus company. After being called up aged 17, Sheila trained to be a driver of army ambulances and staff cars. A quick learner from the start, she took on additional training to become an expert physical training instructor. And on being demobbed in 1945 she made her career in teaching, becoming a pioneering physical education teacher in schools for girls.

As a Rank Sergeant with the Auxiliary Territorial Service, Sheila was posted abroad after D-Day when she closely followed our forces across France and Belgium and into Nazi Germany where she would become one of the first British service women to enter a German concentration camp in April 1945.

Sheila said: "I had been asked to lead a convoy of about ten three-tonne Bedford lorries into Germany from Holland. I thought it would be something to do with creating a PTI training centre for our troops and when we got there I was asked if I wanted to work in the camps. I thought they meant barracks but it turned out they didn't. There was a camp with this huge entrance and an awful lot of huts surrounded by barbed wire fencing. It was Belsen."

Sheila's job was to look after the survivors in the camp, to clean them, dress them, show them how to use a knife and fork, to try to restore a little humanity after the horrors of the Nazi Holocaust. She added: "So that is exactly what I did. That was 80 years ago and numbers who have first-hand experience of these horrors are dwindling. That is why it is so important for people to listen to first-hand witnesses so that they too can become witnesses."

