

Memories of evacuation – full versions and some extra contributions:

Memories of an Evacuee: Pamela Gooder.

Mrs Pamela Gooder was evacuated three times during the second world war and this is her story.

When war was declared Pam's family were staying with her Aunt in Lancashire, and as her Father had served in the first world war, and was only thirty eight, he expected to be called up, so he returned to Surrey, shortly followed by her Mother. Pam and her sister stayed with the Aunt who in turn moved to the comparative safety of Wilmslow in Cheshire where another member of the family lived. As everything remained calm they returned home by Christmas. When the blitz started they were again evacuated, this time to a farm in Shropshire, where they spent a happy two years until they returned home to continue Pam's Sister's education, as the village school stopped at fourteen years old.

In 1944 after a bomb had fallen close to home and German bombers flew over their house at night, Pam and a school friend went to stay with a family in Monmouthshire.

During her times away from home Pam remembers the kindness of her host families. She also remembers being chased by cows, walking or cycling two miles to school every day, being thrown oranges by American troops and being smiled at by an Italian prisoner of war when on their way to school. She wondered if he had a child of her age back in Italy.

She also remembers the death of a host family's younger son during a raid over Germany,

and the aeroplane shaped wreath at his funeral.

Memories of long ago but still vividly remembered.

Judy Roberts

John Downing:

In 1940 Hastings was considered to be in the front line of any invasion by the Axis powers. The two piers had been cut into two (a pointless exercise, from which the pier at St Leonards never recovered), and barbed wire and “tank traps” (lengths of railway line placed at angles and concrete blocks) seemed to be everywhere.

So, at the age of 5, I and a lot of other children assembled at the local school. We were put on a train, with the window blinds pulled down, dim light bulbs and told that the train would wait in a tunnel if there was an air raid. I clearly remember a woman wearing a Red Cross apron giving out apples. I still have the label that was pinned to me!

After what seemed an eternity we ended up in Somerset. The children spent the night sleeping under an enormous table (I think it was in Chard Town Hall). Next day buses took us to various villages in Somerset. We ended up in a village close to Shepton Mallet, and after a short day in one house, finally settled in Banks Farm.

So began one of the happiest times of my life. The local school was too full to cope so we were free to explore the countryside (I started school aged 6 back in Hastings). The nearest we came to the war was when a German bomber, returning from a raid on Bristol, jettisoned its remaining bomb. This caused a large crater in a field, near to where it had been planned to dig a pond to provide drinking water for cattle. This was then lined and may even be in use today (it certainly saved the farm hands hours of work).

Returning to Hastings later in the year but thereafter we made regular trips to the farm during the school holidays. Over time, I used to “help” with farm jobs (rounding cattle for milking, pigs to the bacon factory in Evercreech, etc). About the age of nine I learnt to drive a Ferguson tractor (I think ‘Elf’n’Safety would have something to say about it now).

I’ve always kept in touch with my “wartime friends”. The farmer’s wife and daughter came to our wedding. We still correspond with the farmer’s children (although life on a farm nowadays is somewhat different from those far-off days).

I appreciate that not everyone has happy memories of such a time but I shall always be grateful for experiencing a different way of life.

Dorothy Jenner's memories:

I was six years old when the Second World war broke out. Nothing really happened in the first year. Then Sussex Rd School had a very near miss from a bomb. They were aiming at Tonbridge Station, so the schools were closed down until they built some air-raid shelters underground in the playground.

I wasn't evacuated till the doodle bugs started to fall in Tonbridge around 1944. One dropped on Tinkers Island, which is at the end of Tonbridge Sports Ground. This brought our ceiling down and the windows fell in, luckily we were all in the Morrison Shelter (which is a reinforced table) in our sitting room.

My Father arranged my evacuation through the railway as he was a signal man. My Mother took me down by train. We hadn't been travelling for very long when the siren sounded, so we had to stay in a tunnel which seemed a very long time as it was pitch black. When we had arrived at Exeter Station it looked worse than Tonbridge. The city had been flattened by bombs.

I went to stay with a train driver and his wife in Devon. They had no children and I called them Aunt and Uncle. They made me feel very welcome and they introduced me to Devonshire cream. My Mum went home the next day.

They lived in a row of terraced houses in a suburb of Exeter. They kept chickens in their back garden. I was allowed to hatch one. I called her Joe and she followed me around like a dog. I stayed with them for a year and in that time my parents came to visit once. They took me to the seaside in Exmouth. The military had removed some of the barbed wire from the beach so we could go swimming.

When I came home to Tonbridge I had a lovely surprise waiting for me – a puppy!

We kept in contact with them and would have regular holidays with them up until they died.

Peggy Jenkins memories (by Felicity Layton)

At the outbreak of World War II my mother, Peggy, lived in Bellingham, close to Lewisham, in South East London.

She was evacuated, aged 11, with her older sister, Kitty, 14, and brother, Jim 12, to Smarden, in Kent in 1939 until November 1941.

Her account of her stay in Smarden was recorded by BBC radio Kent and is archived at the Imperial War Museum.

Families were given ample information to prepare for evacuation about a month beforehand: what to take and not to take, where to meet on the day. Peggy's Mum took them on the bus. Mum recalls that her mother was very tearful during the journey.

Having said their farewells, the children, some 50-60 of them, walked, two by two in crocodile formation from the meeting place to Hither Green station. The sight caused a bit of a stir.

Mum remembers that, although Smarden was only 30-40 miles away, the journey seemed interminable with lots of stopping and starting, no doubt because there were a few trains headed in a similar direction carrying a similar cargo on that day. 7 teachers and the headmistress of the school travelled and stayed with the children.

They all got out at Charing Station, and were put on coaches to Smarden, Bethersden and a village near Headcorn.

Peggy, Kitty, Jim and a family friend, Vanessa, were dropped off at Smarden school where they were given a drink and a blanket. The four waited a long time for someone to take them, probably because of their number. Finally, Mr and Mrs Wood, farmers with no children, came to collect them. It was Friday, Sept 1 1939. War broke out Sept 3.

At the Woods' farm

Mum was evacuated with the Woods and lived on their farm. She loved the experience of the countryside, and particularly seeing all the animals, an experience that was new to her. Mum remembers that they ate well and were well looked after. Food was rationed, however, and Mum recalls that she did a deal with Mr Wood, known as 'Pop', that she would swap her cheese ration for his banana ration.

She does have fond memories but also some that make her shudder, like breaking the ice, and the cobwebs, in a bucket of water in the morning, so she could have a wash. However, the Woods were kind and hospitable, and this is the memory which endures.

A tour of Smarden



Mum and I recently did a tour of Smarden to rekindle old memories. As we drove around Smarden, Mum pointed out places where she had experienced real fear. One was by a bridge over a stream where the three siblings had stopped on their bike ride to wave at the overhead planes. It was only as they came closer that they realised the planes were German. All three threw themselves off their bikes and into a nearby ditch.



The same thing happened in the farmyard of the Woods' farm. This time they ran to the barn for shelter, which actually would not have been much use if the German plane had chosen to offload a bomb on its way home, something which often happened.

Labour was short in the country so the children did light work like hop picking. They were taken by lorries to hop farms. However, on one particular day, there were so many enemy bombers flying overhead that the children had to be rushed to safety, away from the hop field, to lie on the banks of the stream until the planes had flown over. There were no further hop picking trips after that.

Mum did attend school in Smarden but there were so many evacuees that they could not be accommodated in the village school. Instead they had lessons in a private house near the school (the Gillette' house)



They were also taught in a village hall, 3 miles from the Woods' farm, a distance they had to walk each day until Pop bought them bikes.

Whilst Mum was in Smarden her mother was killed in a bombing raid in Bellingham. She was not allowed to go to the funeral but was allowed to go out and pick primroses for a relative to take along. To this day, these lovely yellow flowers growing wild on grassy banks are a poignant reminder.

When Mum returned to Bellingham, she attended Sandhurst Road school in Catford until it was bombed. On that day my mother, who hated school dinners, had persuaded her aunt, with whom she now lived, to let her come home for lunch. As a major exception, Mum was allowed home. As Mum got on the bus to Lewisham she heard a loud noise and instinctively knew the school had been hit. On that day the school was bombed and many of her friends killed.

Mum met Dad in a café in Blackheath after the war. She was working for a hairdresser, Dad had decided to set up a co-operative greengrocers, having turned his back on the bank where a job was held open for him. He was upset

by what he saw during the war and was determined to build a new society. He was 19 when he entered the army and was involved in the Normandy landings.

After the war, Mrs Wood received a card from the Queen, like all those who had cared for evacuees did, thanking her and her husband for their care of the four children.

Peggy today

