

# High Wych History - 9 – Wartime in High Wych.

## The Child evacuees.

In the first week of September 1939 175 evacuees (children, teachers and helpers) from Millfields Junior School, Clapton arrived on 4 double decker buses from the Depot Station in Bishops Stortford. Accompanied by their head teacher Mr. R.H.Ball, they were greeted in High Wych by a delegation headed by Mrs. Wentworth Stanley, the local billeting officer. Just how momentous the occasion was we cannot now imagine. Many of the children continued to be housed and educated within our Parish for the next 4 years or so.

Preparations for such evacuations had already started in May 1938. By September 39 some 1.2 million people, half of them children were moved out of the cities.. And whilst many of the London people had returned home by early 1940, they would return to the countryside once again when the Blitz bombings started.

The 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary booklet of High Wych School describes the consequences. Initially the two schools remained separated with one lot being educated in the mornings, the other in the afternoons. This proved unworkable and eventually the schools became fully integrated. When Alfred Mabey, the HW headmaster, was called up, Mr. Ball became headmaster of that one school.

Imagine the culture shock. The East End children were unused to our “country ways”. They ate, looked and played differently. Those “townies” might as well have come from Mars ! “Young evacuee in trouble” the local paper reported only two weeks after the first influx of East End children. The authorities took it upon themselves to inform host parents about basic nutrition. Mrs. Wentworth Stanley, our own billeting officer told everybody how well we were doing locally. Indeed at Christmas time a special celebration was laid on in the Village Hall.

Was High Wych doing well? Evacuee children drawing chalklines on the street were told off: “we don’t do that sort of thing here”. It is hard to understand why. More seriously, one of the local host families did not want a Jewish child staying with them. Millfield School, being in the East End of London, had a sizable proportion of Jewish pupils. This was an isolated incidence I believe and the problems were sorted out. On the whole, yes, High Wych did cope well.

I have been fortunate enough to link up with a number evacuated children and members of their host families. Leila (Lee) Wexper, now Gudgeon and her sister Frances stayed with Cis and Bert Clements a childless couple living in a cottage along High Wych Lane. Lee’s parents were greengrocers. She stayed in High Wych until 1942. Diana, Lily and Cissy Girlis stayed with the Mabey family. Sid and Brian Lindford stayed with the Buxton family at the Manor of Groves. Doreen Pocock stayed with Mr. and Mrs. Bird. Last but not least Irene Elvin, Pamela Addis and Doreen Brialey stayed with the Kempthorne family. All of these remember their stay in High Wych as a very happy time.

Lifelong friendships, an adoption and even a marriage resulted from the evacuation project. Jean Pedder (nee Kempthorne) was the first to alert me to this when she kindly passed me contact details for Doreen Price (nee Brialey). As a result Doreen wrote up her memories of High Wych and you will find these two pages later on in this article. Audrey Chillingsworth stayed with May Blackaby. Rene Bastin staying next door with Mr. and Mrs.White ended up marrying Alan Wilson. Joan Sharman stayed with the Greengrass family and eventually got adopted by them. Norah Holden remained friends with Leila Gudgeon as did Peggy Holden (then named Wilson) Norah told me of an instance when Leila came to play in the Wilson house where they had a piano. Secretly the young girls had started to share the occasional cigarette. (a lot more people smoked in those days) This dangerous play with fire resulted in badly scorched piano keys. Mrs. Wilson upon her return was not best pleased.

Thanks this time go to Jill Clark, Leila Gudgeon, Norah Holden, Peggy Holden, John Oliver, Jean Pedder, Doreen and David Price, Mandy West and Lorraine Winser of High Wych School plus of course the kind people at Hertfordshire Archives and Library Services. As always: my work as self appointed High Wych historian would be impossible without your contributions, your memories, stories and photographs. Keep them coming; please get in touch !! Contact me at [theo@vandebilt.co.uk](mailto:theo@vandebilt.co.uk) or phone me at 01279 725468

## Evacuation To-day (Friday)

“Purely as Precautionary Measure”

Purely as a precautionary measure, the Government has ordered the evacuation of children and other priority classes, in all areas included in the evacuation scheme, to begin to-day (Friday).

Certain hospitals in London and other towns have also been ordered to evacuate.

It was officially announced on Thursday afternoon that the evacuation in London will start with children in the East End. They will begin their journey into the country at 5.30 a.m.

The evacuation was announced in a joint statement issued by the Ministry of Health and the Secretary of State for Scotland. This says:

She's in the Ranks too!



CARING FOR EVACUEES IS A NATIONAL SERVICE

## Death of Young Evacuee in Trouble

Juvenile Court at Bishop's Stortford

“Hardship” on Receiving Households

It is a great hardship on the people in whose homes boys are billeted if they are continually getting into trouble,” observed the Clerk of the Court (Mr. W. Goss) when a Clayton boy, aged 12, who is billeted in the town under the evacuation scheme appeared before a Juvenile Court at Bishop's Stortford on Thursday, charged with wilfully damaging a wireless set, and after evidence had been heard, he was remanded for 30 days and warned that if he did not behave himself during that period the case would be dealt with very severely.

The Magistrate granted costs: Mr. F. Fines (prosecution), Mrs. C. B. Bland and Mrs. E. M. Smith.

That is a Truce.

A 12-year-old boy living in Maple Avenue, Bishop's Stortford, stated that he had a friend had a hot lamp in a box at the rear of Maple Avenue. In this hot lantern kept a wireless set, a cigarette, a lantern, some nails and a pair of spooling bays. On the afternoon of Friday, September 26,

H&E Observer 9<sup>th</sup> September 1939 Propaganda poster H&E Observer 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1939



Child evacuees leaving Kentish Town – photo taken from BBC website

## Feeding the Evacuees

Housewives in the country are facing entirely new problems in catering for their war-time families. City children have no use for some of our special country dishes, and their different tastes must be borne in mind, if they are to feel completely “at home.”

### Essential Foodstuffs.

First of all, what are the foods that must, for health's sake, play as large a part as possible in the menu? Milk heads the list. The word “food” may be applied to it, because its nutritive properties make it one of the finest and most sustaining meals in the world. At the price of milk it is obviously very difficult to give the family the ideal allowance of one pint per day. So the housewife must try to include milk whenever she can in sweets and puddings.

Fish, meat, raw salad and fresh fruit must be worked into the menu; but it is, perhaps, not always realised that meat has a first-class substitute, namely, cheese. There is little, if anything, which meat supplies that cannot be supplied by cheese at considerable less cost.

Children, as we all know, burn up a tremendous amount of energy. In fact, watching some of these little Londoners playing havoc with our country villages, one could wish that they had far less! Nothing is sacred: garden walls, church walls, haystacks, and the village pond (though heavily railed), are all but a natural part of this vast new playground that has suddenly been shown to them. Small wonder, then, that they come in to meals ravenously hungry. Appetites of this kind can be assuaged by the cheaper, energising foods, such as bread, treacle, potatoes and chocolate.

## Solving an Evacuee Problem

To the Editor.

SIR.—One of the most difficult problems of the evacuated children is the very natural wish of the parents and friends to visit the children. There is no accommodation in the houses for these extra visitors, and the usual day on which they come is Sunday, when the foster parents need their homes to themselves.

In High Wych, where we have some 90 children billeted, the Evacuation Committee have been able to make a really useful contribution to the comfort of all concerned. They have arranged to open the village hall on Sundays from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Two volunteers at a time are in charge in two hour shifts, i.e., 11 to 1, 1 to 3, 3 to 5. Parents can bring their children here and find a welcome, and hot drink (tea, oxo, biscuits, crisps, cakes), are served at minimum prices which just cover expenses. There are two first round which small tables (four card tables with American cloth covers) and chairs are grouped, a wireless set is provided as well as such games as snakes and ladders, dominoes, etc.

The parents have been asked to co-operate by confining their visits to Sundays, and to use the hall as much as possible, and not to stay at the billets. Many have said what a help our venture is. During the last three Sundays on each occasion an average of 80 teas have been served, which I think goes to prove it is appreciated and helpful.

If anyone would like to know more I shall be very pleased to give all the help and information I can.

Yours faithfully,

N. WENTWORTH STANLEY,  
Milleting Officer for High Wych.

High Wych Grange,  
Near Sawbridgeworth,  
October 23rd 1939

## Christmas at High Wych

Christmas was a happy time for all in High Wych. A large number of the Milnefeld School evacuee children left their billets for the Village Hall on Christmas afternoon, where a series of games kept everyone busy and joyful. These were arranged by Mr. Ball (headmaster), Mrs. Ball and their two daughters, Mr. Butler, Miss Whittingham and Miss Harvey. Before tea Lady Wentworth Stanley gave a talk. Then came tea, organised by Mrs. Wentworth Stanley, with her family and the Vicar (Mr. Lamb) as helpers. Then more games and so home to bed.

Boxing Day saw all the evacuee children and their parents in the School in the afternoon, where an excellent cinema show was given by Mr. Robinson, of Wareside. Followed by tea in the Village Hall, arranged by Mrs. F. Tyler, with Mrs. Clements, Mrs. Emmens, Mrs. E. Ward, Miss Braae and Mrs. Maskell as local helpers. The following helpers from Milnefeld Schools were also there: Mr. and Mrs. Ball and the Misses Ball, Miss Whittingham, Miss Harvey, Miss Grange and Mr. Butler. The Vicar, and Mrs. Wentworth Stanley also assisted. Mr. Tyler and Mr. Ted Ward helped to arrange the Hall for the tea party. Thanks are due to Mr. F. J. White for providing the tea on both days. After tea, the Hall was cleared and the children gave an entertainment which included singing, dancing and drilling. Presents were then given to all, and so another happy day ended. The Hall was beautifully and appropriately decorated with streamers, etc., sent by the evacuees' parents, who had also provided sweets and oranges for all.

The High Wych children are having their Christmas party in the Village Hall to-day (Friday).

Left to right H&E Observer 14<sup>th</sup> October, 28<sup>th</sup> October and 30<sup>th</sup> December. 1939

## **HIGH WYCH Schooldays**

**As told by Doreen Brialey**

At the beginning of September, 1939, I was on holiday in Wales with my parents. Before the school broke up for the holiday, there had been a parents meeting and talks about the likelihood of war, none of which I understood. I was to be nine years old whilst on holiday and was very excited, so you can understand how upset I was on having to leave for home before having my special present, a night at the theatre. I cannot remember the journey home, other than it was by train and dark when we arrived. Windows had to be blacked out as best we could before putting any lights on.

The next week is somewhat hazy and I do not know why I did not follow the school (Millfields) to High Wych. I went instead to my younger cousin Geoffrey and his family whilst waiting to go to Horsham, Surrey. There Geoff and I stayed with an elderly couple, or so they seemed at the time, and another man, who was a prison barber. He shaved all our hair very short which upset our parents when they became aware of it. I do not know how long we were there, but remember getting very little to eat and being told ones stomach was the size of a clenched fist, so I needed little to fill it! We did start going to school there, but our parents were not happy with the arrangement there, so we went back to Geoff's house. I think I was there till after Christmas as I seem to recall Santa bringing me a doll dressed in a lovely knitted outfit. I recall Geoff's mum knitting, but not realizing at the time what it was.

Meanwhile, the bombing was getting worse and nearer to where I was staying (Southgate, London), so once again I moved house. I at last joined the children of Millfields Road School in High Wych. The girl who lived next door to me in Clapton (Irene Elvin) was staying with Mrs. Kempthorne and she kindly took me in too. Pamela Addis, another friend was also staying there. The Kempthornes had a daughter called Jean with whom I became quite friendly. My Mum and Dad took me and Mrs. Elvin showed us the way. They did not stay long as darkness came early and no one had cars then. The lighting was gas mantle and candles, so it was early to bed after tea. We had bread and jam or bread and butter, not butter and jam!

Toilet facilities at the Kempthorne house were the same as at home. Toilet outside and wash at kitchen sink. I have a vague memory of a bath with a cover on it that was used like today's worktops. After breakfast someone would shout "first to be washed" then "second to be washed" and so on. I always seemed to be the last, but it may not be so.

The school was operating in morning and afternoon shifts with the High Wych and Millfields children taking turns. I was in Mr. Richards class. Don't remember if Irene and Pamela were too. Jean, of course, would have been on the opposite shift to us at that time. I wasn't very good at school and it wasn't because of only having half lessons for a while. However I learnt lots about the countryside, for instance, the different breeds and colouring of cows, the black and white Friesians, brown Guernsey's and Jersey's. We went gleaning after the stooking of corn had been done. Picking wild berries for pudding and making jam. The names of hedgerow flowers, Peggles are Cowslips everywhere else than High Wych and the village of Precious Bain.

Mrs. Kempthorne was a lovely lady and treated us girls all the same. She grew what vegetables she could and sometimes her brother, I think that's who it was, came to lend a hand. She had two sons, Jim, in the army and Les on the submarines. We had to ration the use of the radio or be up to the shop every day getting the accumulator charged up. I first heard of Mothers Day when I was in High Wych, maybe the Yanks brought it over with them, there were some stationed not that far away. On the first Mothering Sunday, I recall, during Sunday school we went along the hedgerows and picked primroses for our Mums. Most children got a visit from their parents once in a while. Of course there were no televisions or computers or even cinemas in High Wych, but we could always find something to occupy our time. We embroidered dainty hankies and made paper flowers as Christmas gifts for family members.

## **HIGH WYCH Schooldays**

**As told by Rose Pocock**

I arrived in High Wych two or three days before war was declared and lived with Mr. and Mrs. Bird in their thatched cottage by the village green with two other evacuees. I was there for nearly three years. Living conditions were harsh. There was only one tap in the front garden and an outside toilet with no chain. Lighting was by oil lamps. We had (three of us evacuees) a weekly bath at another house in the village. The evacuees shared the village school with the local children at first, us in the mornings and them in the afternoons. Then change about the following week. This didn't work too well and soon wooden screens were put up to make more classes and we all went at the same time. We roamed the countryside around the village for many hours each free day and I greatly missed the countryside when I returned London. After so many years it isn't easy to remember all we did.