

BARBARA FELL'S WAR MEMORIES

In August 1939 I was on holiday with my family when we had a message to go home early as my father was a teacher and all teachers were recalled to help organise the evacuation. Evacuees arrived by train from London, then put on buses to various parts of town where they were collected by the householders who were taking them in. It depended on the number of vacant bedrooms in your house as to how many evacuees you were given. Children too dirty or difficult were housed at the Gate House.

Three schools were evacuated to Aylesbury. Mile End Central and Sir John Cass used Queens Park in the afternoons and Ealing County Boys School used Aylesbury Grammar School. Ealing county Girls School went to High Wycombe. I was at Queens Park at the time and in the afternoons we had school in different halls in the town, such as the Comrades Club which stank of beer, the Happy Wanderers Hall in Church Street with its brightly coloured chairs, the chapel in Castle Street and the Christadelphian Chapel in Albert Street. Depending on the size of the hall and the seating we either had gym lessons, poetry or needlework and knitting. All schools had air raid shelters and the ones at Queens Park were brick built buildings rather than dug-outs and had benches all round for us to sit on. We all had to carry gas masks with a bar of chocolate inside the case so we didn't go hungry if we had to wait in the shelter a long time. Some of us also wore bracelets with our name and identity number on them for identification purposes if you were killed or injured.

By the time I went to the Grammar School most of the evacuees had gone home and only one form from Ealing was left in Aylesbury. I can remember senior pupils being on a rota to stay at school overnight fire watching. During the summer holidays harvest camps were held at Steeple Claydon and these were great fun as well as hard work. Odd days were taken off school to help on farms and I remember a back-breaking day picking flax at Whitchurch. We were also paid a small amount (6d I think) for collecting hips which were then made into syrup for babies.

We were luckier with food than people in the cities. Meat was our main problem as we grew all our own vegetables. My mother would queue for hours for meat and fish but my uncle shot a rabbit for us each week and we preserved eggs for the winter in a large can of isinglass. The Americans sent us big tins of jam which was delicious. The only thing I really hated was whale meat which contained bit globules of disgusting fat. Any food left over or gone off was put in a large container at the end of each road and was called buck. Notices were put up saying "Bucks in the buckets in Bucks".

I was a Girl Guide and we had to do our service for the country. We learnt 1st Aid and did various jobs such as collecting rags and iron railings travelling on the back of a lorry which was great fun, washing up and preparing vegetables in the Royal Bucks Hospital and working on Saturdays in the Fairmile Nursery looking after the children whose mothers were working in factories. I was also a messenger which entailed learning all the ARP posts and street names as all signposts and street names were taken down. If a bomb dropped I had to report on my bicycle to my post which was a house in Turnfurlong. One evening I was just going out the front door to cycle to my post when the landmine fell and the blast was so great it blew me off my feet and back into the house. The next moment the blast from a landmine near Bierton blew out the windows at the back of the house. To my dismay my father would not let me go out to my post that night and I felt I had let everyone down. The next morning we were unable to go to school as the ceiling had come down so I was able to go to the bomb area and pick up a piece of the rope and parachute of the landmine which I still have.