

## Evacuation to Langham

**Patricia Patey** (nee Hearn) writes:

My sister Margaret and I (aged four and seven) were evacuated to Langham on 1st September 1939 with our school, Maynard Road School, South Walthamstow together with our head mistress, Miss Widdecombe and teachers. My mother and baby brother, Bill, went to Kettering. My father, who had been in the Auxiliary Air Force was called up and sent to an unknown destination the previous week.

Margaret and I stayed for a short while with Mr and Mrs Spencer, then we went to Mr and Mrs Lambert. My mother came to visit and was unhappy that the family was split up. She told Miss Widdicombe of her plans to return to London and the head mistress pleaded with her not to do so. Unbeknown to Mum she approached Mrs Owen Smith who offered the family the living quarters of her grooms at the Old Hall Stables - Mum accepted.

We were allowed to play in the orchard and have happy memories of all the lovely flowers, shrubs and trees. We lived at Old Hall Stables until 1947 - due to the housing shortage in London. They were good days in Langham.

**Terry Weeden** was eight years old when he arrived from Walthamstow to experience for the first time the delights of village life - his bedroom looked down on Staff Smith's farmyard. He remembers: seeing hams curing; new born lambs; tree climbing; fishing for newts; jumping over the brook and playing on "The Gun". Summers were long, with tea in the hayfields, and the almost certain heavy snow each winter brought the delights of sledging on the Rifle Range.

The first schoolroom for the evacuees was the old Scout Hut, where, Terry recalls the inkwells froze.

Terry also has an amazing memory for where the evacuees lived and has produced a map.

Terry was paid twopence by **John Carter's** mother, to keep an eye on him and the two sat together on their journey to Langham and were asked by Mrs Staff Smith if they would like to stay on a farm. The boys accepted, though John says he had little idea of what a farm was.

"On entering her home I was awe-struck by the living room with its Welsh dresser, armchairs and brass warming pans hanging each side of a large fireplace containing the kitchen range. The place seemed so strange and luxurious and 'posh' that when Mrs Smith asked us what we would like to eat and drink I suggested the two most expensive and exotic things I had heard of: 'wedding cake and whisky', (a request Mrs Smith could recall to her old age); I got bread and cheese and a glass of warm milk."

September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1939 was a significant day. John listened to the broadcast which told him that "we were at war with a place called Germany and, soon after, Mr Smith took his wife and us boys for a ride in his Ford 8 Saloon, oh joy of joys!"

John recalls being "educated" in the School, Institute and Scout Hut where he says he must have learned a few things such as 'real writing. "Our relations with the village children were at first wary... After a while though, as we settled down, we grew used to each other and some friendships were formed."

When the older boys played football outside the Scout Hut the smaller boys had to join in or clear off. John did not like football so took the latter option and says there was plenty to clear off to. "Fields and hills, trees and streams to play round, using one's school cap to help dam a small stream in the pasture by the Cold Overton Road was a marvellous way of spending a summer morning, even if the penalty was a ticking off for getting the cap in 'such a state'. Trespassing on and scaling the gorse covered slopes of Ranksborough Hill ... Even being chased from an orchard by an old man in breeches and carrying a crop had its thrills."

John and Terry sang in the church choir and John remembers enjoying the singing, particularly the carol services when another Mr Smith sang the king and Terry the page in 'Good King Wenceslas'.

The boys were also taught the value of saving money, and with Mrs Smith controlling their spending, John recalls having about £21 in his Post Office Savings Bank Account by the time he returned home.

Home life was very different from that in Langham and evacuation was an unsettling experience for John, not least because return to London meant parting from Terry who had become an older brother.

**Maurice Cocking** was a "private evacuee" coming with his mother, sister and brother to stay with his aunt, Miss Friel at Old School Cottage (now Old Hall Cottage) where the bow and arrow wars between "the occupation forces of London and the Langhamites" were fought. Maurice led the evacuees (the Archers) while John and Charlie Davenport were in charge of the village forces.

Maurice recalls his journeys to and from the Central School in Oakham (now VCC) with David (Eb) Nourish, David Burdett and Ben Oldring. "We would frequently stop at a house in Barleythorpe for a good guzzle of Tizer." Also in Barleythorpe, Maurice remembers, there was a tree with a yellowhammer's nest.

As Ken Hale's baker's boy Maurice found himself affluent. "It was the dawn of prosperity... Two memories abide: the toppling of the trade bike propped against a telegraph pole, spilling a multitude of loaves, higgledy piggedly across the road and, nearby, Miss Horton... her torso draped about with many cats, climbing, descending and clinging."

(More of Maurice's connections with Langham can be found in the display on Parochial Charities and in "Another Look Back at Langham".)

**Tony Parrot** became "the evacuee who stayed". Billeted with Mr and Mrs George Fowlkes, who had no children, Tony had no wish to return to London when the time came so stayed with the Fowlkes who brought him up as their own. Tony had many tales to tell of Langham in the war years, most quite unprintable! Apart from his National Service and a short spell living in Melton Mowbray, Tony became a true Langhamite. Sadly he died in 1997.

(More about Tony can be found in "Another Look Back at Langham".)