

REMINISCENCES OF MY TIME AS AN EVACUEE BY RICHARD PYE

I suppose the start of the 2nd World War for me was, what do they mean, I was a seven year old skinny little runt who hardly knew left from right , What I do know there was a lot of talk that schools were going to close and all the children were going on holiday, well that made me happy. I asked my sister if that was right to which she replied no, so I flew in a temper and howled my eyes out. My sister who was two years older than me didn't want to go so hence her answer.

Cometh the day the parents had to take us to school as normal, only this time we all had a little brown attaché case with some clothes in it, also a label with our names on it tied to our button hole and the dreaded gas mask. After a short while we were loaded onto some buses, waved goodbye to our parents and taken to Lowestoft train station. After a long journey we arrived at a place called Worksop, then once again another coach trip to a place called Barlborough which in those days was more a farming village, and of course a coal mining community.

The coach dropped us all off at the village hall with our teachers where there were lots of other people there to greet us, mainly our new foster parents. Having been told my sister and I would be staying together well, that didn't happen, so I had a good cry again.

I was taken to a small cottage in the centre of the village where a little lady took me in. Bearing in mind it had been a very long day for us kids, I do not remember much until I woke up the next morning. When I woke up the next morning there was a person in bed with me and as I look round there was another single bed in the room with another person in it. I finally found out it was the ladies' two sons who had come off night shift from their job in the mines. I cannot remember much at all about the family, perhaps it was a short term stay while I was found other accommodation.

My next foster family lived in a road called the Crescent, Number 22 whose surname was James, father, mother and daughter who was two years older than me. After being there a couple of years, the lady had a stoke, so once again I found myself on the move,

I was then moved to No 17 Barlborough Common with a elderly couple by the name of Betts who I stayed with until I returned home in 1945.

I know in the past there has been talk of ill treatment to some of kids by their foster parents but I never experienced anything like that at all, apart from

when I asked for a second round of bread and jam at tea time and was told "no you can't!" No names No pack drill.

I must go back to the Betts they had a daughter that I can remember who was married and lived in the village.

They were a lovely couple Mr & Mrs Betts, how they ever put up with me I will never know. One of my fondest memories was her Sunday dinner. Whether it was a custom for this part of the country but Sunday dinner was my favourite. First we had the batter pudding on a plate with a lovely thick gravy and I mean thick, after that we would have our vegetables on the plate with another lovely gravy. The next fond memory was tea time when we had the dripping off the meat on lovely home made bread. (God am I feeling hungry!).

The old chap (Mr Betts) would help out on the farm nearby and take me along when it was threshing time, which I enjoyed, It seemed I was given the job no one else would do under the threshing machine, which in these days were static machines. My job was to hold a sack near a funnel were the chafe and muck came out; needless to say I came out looking like the Ace of Spades.

There were a couple of land army girls also on the farm, one asked me if I was Australian, and me with a broad Suffolk voice.

When we started to mingle with the local kids we had the mickey taken about the way we talked, we did the same to them they were all thee and thou. At least we sounded our h's they never could. The funny thing about all this was after being in there company for five years, we had picked up the Barlborough slang, so when we got home to Lowestoft, we had the mickey taken again (we just couldn't win).

Next - Being a choir boy. That took up most of Sunday which kept us out of trouble, (or did it?). Having then palled up with a couple of local lads, one of which was a choir boy, I was told there were vacancies for two new lads, so I went to the next choir practice with him. I was given a scale singing test there and then and got took on - you know me - 'in for a stick of liquorice, in for a halfpenny' because that was the going rate every practice night.

I can explain that, in the beginning it was a stick of liquorice, until sweets went on ration, then we got paid half a penny, which was collectable at the local post office - why? Because, well the choir master was also the local post master. That did not go down with us boys, so after practice we used to dash to the

post office, put our half penny in the stamp machine, get our stamp and stuck them over his windows!

One of the men in the choir was a local farmer who had a very deep voice. When we were not singing as the parson was doing his sermon, we could hear this man stuffing his face with toffee, so one night after practise when the male singers had gone home, someone dared me to put my hand in his cassock pocket to see if there was any toffee there. Oh yes - plenty of sticky toffee that I grabbed, what a mess, so I cleaned my hand on the rest of his cassock!

A bit more about us angels in the choir, it seems as well as stamps on the window, some of the lads were buying the odd OXO cubes, it didn't take me long to catch on why. They were taking them to church to ping little tiny balls that they rolled between finger and thumb, and then flicking them at each other from one side of the choir stalls to the other. So I joined in the next Sunday armed with a couple of OXO's. Things then started to get a bit hectic, this all happened while the parson was doing his sermon in the pulpit. He swung round and his eyes were straight at me and I sat looking quite innocent whilst the older boys got a reprimand. When he looked at me he must have seen wings sprouting out of my shoulders!

The Scouts, again I was talked into joining where there were a good number of evacuees and local lads which lead to a lot of competition and fighting with each group. We had the usual badges to earn and sew on our shirts and lots of skills to learn.

The scouts hut was on a piece of land where there was a good few craiges about so we had a good play area after scouting had finished, climbing up and then daring each other to jump off, needless to say a few of us were limping home with sprained ankles or knees.

The Clown boys further down the road always knew when we were there and would charge across the field armed with stones then there was a battle royal with more wounded limping home (All good fun though) not.

At the start of the war my dad was a fisherman on a trawler out of Lowestoft, so at the start of the war they were automatically brought into the navy. Boats such as the big trawlers were fitted with quite a large gun on the fore deck and would be out on the North Sea searching for gun boats. Later on he and a group of sailors were sent to Newfoundland to commission some new mine sweepers.

While he was there he sent home two pairs of roller skates one each for me and my sister which was great as you could not buy stuff like that at Christmas time. While out skating it started to rain hard and me being a choir boy I knew the church doors would be unlocked so, that was the nearest place to make for. Meanwhile my sister got fed up and had enough and took her skates off.

I should mention we were not in the church proper just in the main entrance. Me being a boy who couldn't keep still for long started to do a few circles in the doorway. Well somebody reported us about skating in the church; I had a visit from the local bobby a few days later. I admitted that I had done a few circles in the porch, "No" he said "you skated in the church down the isles". My sister backed me up but he still would not believe her so I got a good warning.

A long while after, I think I was back home in Lowestoft, I started to think about my evacuation days; the skating in church came to mind. I now know why he accused me of going up and down the isle.

Choir practice, in the summer and light evenings was done in the choir stalls. In the winter and dark nights the choir boys had to drag a small organ from the chapel isle at the side of the main church. Well over the years, there must have been quite a lot of marks from the metal casters on the organ, similar to the metal wheels on my skates, too late now I was back home.

As time went by and we got older we were sent from our makeshift school to another makeshift school in Clown which was two miles away. We got two pence a day for our bus fare. Some of the kids would get the bus to school and spent the other penny on a glass of lemonade which a lady sold from her shop door, and then the kids would walk home after school was over.

I was no different; I was one of them, until I had a brain wave. I'd got a pair of skates at home so from then on, I skated the two miles to school and home after school so I had twice the spending power. Saturdays mornings was tuppenny rush day when all the kids in the neighbourhood went to the Clown Odeon cinema, well it kept us off the streets.