

Wartime West Sussex 1939 – 1945

EVACUEES

Remembering evacuee life in Ardingly

From *Ardingly, Sussex at War 1939-45 and the Evacuee Experience*, (Ardingly Evacuee Experience Committee, 1999)

By Dennis Tait

Myself and younger brother Tom, aged 9 and 7, were last minute evacuees. On the morning of what I always thought was Sunday 3rd September 1939 our elder sister came to our home at no. 15 Crichton Street, Battersea, and persuaded our parents that we should go with the rest of the school on evacuation. New clothes were purchased and we were dragged, protesting, to our school in St. Rule Street, just around the corner from our home. The other children, already assembled there, had been prepared for some considerable time, having had their baggage left at the school for a quick departure. On registering I recall my teacher, Miss Jones, tut-tutting.

We were assembled in our groups in the Infants and Junior playground, given barley-sugar sweets and put aboard London buses. Tom and I were on the top deck. As we waited to move off I looked down across the road and there was my old school chum, a lad called Yates, he was waving to us from the entrance of his house which stood on the corner of Roundell Street. It was the last time I ever saw that building, though I did finally meet Yates many years later alive and well.

We de-bussed at a school on the opposite side from Battersea Park Station, where we were again assembled in the playground in our groups, eventually marching off to the station and boarding the train, my first train ride; and when we started to move I said, 'Look, that telegraph pole is moving', much to everyone's delight.

I remember our arrival at Haywards Heath. We were given each a brown paper shopping bag which contained some food, a few tins and some biscuits. The seniors were bussed to Horsted Keynes, we to Ardingly. I do not recall the journey, but I do our arrival at Ardingly Hall. While the others went into the Hall to be met by the people that they had been allotted to, we were told to sit on the little kerb by the wall of the Hall. Eventually we were all alone, my young brother and I, feeling very sad. Had they forgotten us! Eventually a lady came up and said, 'We have found someone for you' - and there was Aunty Sis (Mrs Couzens).

She took us by the hand, led us past the Pump House, and then to no. 3 Jubilee Cottages. My young brother Tom wanted to go home and was upset, as I too. Aunty Sis says, 'Have you been to a farm, have you seen the cows?' and off we went. We got as far as Dyers shop when it started to rain, we turned back, but it was just a shower. We were taken into the shop where we met Aunty Gert (Mrs Lee). We were each given a two-finger Kit-kat and off we went to no. 3 where we both broke down. Every effort was made by Aunty Sis and the girls, Jean and Joyce, when they came home to make us feel at home. I remember going to bed with some of the biscuits and milk....

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Our schooling, which was really non-existent, was at first an hotch-potch affair. I don't think the authorities had made any consideration about schooling. Our class under Miss Jones was first conducted in one of the upper rooms of the rectory.....This was not to last long. It was then arranged that we would share the school and the Hall with the country children but this didn't last long either, and eventually we held our school in the Village Hall. Infants and Juniors all together, attempts were made to hold classes, but were not very successful.....

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Courtesy of Ian Tait