

Wartime West Sussex 1939 – 1945

EVACUEES

Remembering evacuee life in West Wittering-1

From *Wittering's War, Reminiscences of village life during World War II* (East Wittering Local History Group, 2004)

By Janet Smith

My mother was pregnant with me in early 1941 and as a result she was despatched by my Grandmother in Portsmouth to stay at Ricasoli, Rookwood Road, West Wittering, the home of family friends, Mr and Mrs Kewell. The City was suffering very heavy bombing at the time. Mr Kewell not only drove the village taxi, but he was also the Requisition Officer, which proved to be very fortuitous for our little family. At this time, my father was a Petty Officer in the Royal Navy and was away at sea on commission. In those tough days, these lasted some three years and often children who were born after their fathers left for war simply did not know them when they returned several years later.

I was born at the end of June and Mother remained at Ricasoli until I was two weeks old. In the meantime, she had been shot at by a passing aeroplane and had also nearly been arrested for spying for the enemy when sat on the green at Snow Hill, writing a letter to my father. My mother then decided that childless, middle aged hosts and a young, squawking baby were not a compatible combination and we were found a home with the District Nurse living at 2 Lavender Cottages, in Stocks Lane, East Wittering. By the time my father returned from sea when I was three, we had the house to ourselves. We were lucky enough to find ourselves living next door to the village postman, George Phillips, and his family; these were the days when the kindness and generosity of neighbours was so important. An example was the teapot passing across the passageway from their house to ours, as tea (two ounces per week per person) was among the many things rationed.

The countryside and the beach here were a world away to the evacuees more used to city life and it must have been very traumatic being taken away from home to live with complete strangers. But the Witterings have a charm all of their own and so quite a number of these wartime visitors remained living and working here, marrying and setting up homes of their own.

© East Wittering Local History Group XX00073448