

## **Wrens Warren Camp for Evacuees Hartfield, Ashdown Forest, East Sussex**

Jill Tait contacted WSCC Library Service in 2011 offering to lend a family photograph album for use in the Wartime West Sussex 1939-45 Project. The album includes images of the Wrens Warren Camp for evacuees, a selection of which were scanned and appear on the West Sussex Past Pictures website: <http://www.westsussexpast.org.uk/pictures/>

Jill was also interviewed for the projects and clips appear on the Wartime West Sussex 1939-45 website:

<http://www.westsussexpast.org.uk/>

Click on the Wartime West Sussex 1939-45 icon, select Memories, then Memories by Person and choose Jill Tait.  
Please refresh the page if the clip doesn't appear immediately.

The full interview is available to listen to at Worthing Reference Library.

Jill also lent the original album and some other records to East Sussex Record Office. ESRO staff made copies of all the photos and documents. Below is their full catalogue record which includes more information on both the family and on the Camp.

### **EAST SUSSEX RECORD OFFICE**

<http://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/leisureandtourism/localandfamilyhistory/esro/default.htm>

Details of records:

#### **Photographs and reminiscences of Wrens Warren Camp for Evacuees, Hartfield; 1939-1945**

Ref: **AMS 7005**

##### Introduction

The donor is Jill Tait, the daughter, born at Sheppey in 1938, of Stanley Jesse Francis (1906-1995) and his wife Doris (1906-1999).

Stanley Francis was born at Erith on 13 December 1906, and married Doris Ethel Cole at Sheppey in the last quarter of 1933. At the beginning of the Second World War the family was living at 101 Jersey Road, Strood in Kent, and Stanley (Stan) was a maths teacher at Temple Farm School in Strood.

In 1940, along with children from schools in the East End of London, children from Temple Farm School were evacuated to Wrens Warren Camp on Ashdown Forest. Stan was one of the teachers who accompanied them and in order to be near him, Doris and her daughter rented a house on Gallipot Hill, Upper Hartfield where they were joined for part of the time by Doris's parents. Grandpa Cole (Walter John Cole) was a journalist and photographer,

hence a good record was maintained. As far as the donor is aware, her father stayed on the forest and was not often with them (they went to the camp to see him), so presumably he was with the children or in other accommodation.

The family remained at Hartfield until Stan was called up in 1942, to become gunner Stanley J Francis 1147480. He was taken prisoner in North Africa and ended the war as a Prisoner of War in Germany, returning home at the beginning of June 1945. The archive includes a letter from his father-in-law describing Stan's life as a PoW and his liberation by the Red Army.

The pictures in the album provide a good idea of life at the camp and the activities provided for the children. Accommodation was in wooden huts which had been designed as a holiday camp for under-privileged children.

In 1939 the National Camps Corporation Ltd had sought approval under the Camps Act, 1939, for a camp at Wrens Warren. On 28 August the Ministry of Health forwarded to the clerk of East Sussex County Council a specification by Sir John Burnet, Tait and Lorne of 1 Montague Place, architects, of June 1939, with a revised final layout plan for 'Holiday Camp No 17' by Serge Chermayeff of 19 Grosvenor Place, architect, of 14 August 1939. An existing building was to be augmented for the camp manager, and six dormitories, dining hall and kitchen, assembly hall, hospital block, staff quarters and lavatory block built, with provision for further dormitories. The file discusses the potential use of the camp for the 'national emergency', and that although it would be preferable for the whole of Ashdown Forest to have remained undeveloped, 'the present proposal is infinitely preferable to development by bungalows'. The Minister had given approval by 11 September 1939 (C/C 69/163). The land lay on the Buckhurst Estate, and it is possibly the case that Chermayeff, one of the architects of the De La Warr Pavilion at Bexhill, had come into contact with the National Camps Corporation via the landowner.

There is an extensive series of records at The National Archives concerning the National Camps Corporation Limited, 1939-1962, under the references ED 23/983, ED 100/54 & 122, ED 135/11, ED 136/139, ED 147/375-382, 999-1000, J 13/18164 and LAB 30/240.

By the 1970s the site of the camp had become a home for dogs and cats, and during the 1990s was pulled down to make way for luxury housing.

Stan Francis died at Crawley on 10 November 1995 and Doris at East Grinstead on 3 September 1999.

for scans of the originals see ScannedImages>AMS>AMS07005

AMS 7005/1	Copies of photographs of Wrens Warren Camp and the Francis family	1939-1942
AMS 7005/1	Three photographs showing Jill Francis with her parents at 101 Jersey Road, Strood, Kent, before evacuation	1939
AMS 7005/1	Two commercial photographs showing buildings at Wrens Warren from a distance	?1939

AMS 7005/1	Five photographs, including nine members of staff (including Stan Francis), and walks in the woods (including 'Tuck' and Stan Francis)	c1940
AMS 7005/1	Eight photographs including HA Skerrett outside the staff room, huts, boys on hut verandah, building a bonfire and airing sheets	c1941
AMS 7005/1	Seven photographs including boys surveying, cricket pavilion, mixed group of pupils, four boys and one girl with silver cup, boys running, boys swimming in lake	c1941
AMS 7005/1	Two photographs of a group of boys and a master in the woodworking shop	c1941
AMS 7005/1	Two photographs of boys and girls exercising in the gymnasium	c1941
AMS 7005/1	Two photographs of kitchen with staff	c1941
AMS 7005/1	Four photographs of kitchen (with staff) and dining hall with pupils and Christmas decorations	[1941]
AMS 7005/1	Five photographs, including Jill Francis with her father Stan Francis, and a group of boys and girls sitting on felled logs	1941
AMS 7005/1	Eight photographs of snow-scenes, including pupils sledging	1941-1942
AMS 7005/1	Five photographs of Jill Francis in the snow at Ryedale	1941-1942
AMS 7005/1	Photograph of group of boys exercising, superintended by man and watched by man and youth with wheelbarrow	c1941
AMS 7005/1	Photograph of seven boys with landscape model and maps; shows scale of one inch to one mile	c1941
AMS 7005/1	Photograph of 15 boys with landscape model and maps	c1941
AMS 7005/1	Photograph of four boys with landscape model	c1941
AMS 7005/1	Photographs: four boys carrying bundles of wood; group of boys in shorts running between huts	c1941
AMS 7005/1	Four photographs showing Jill Francis with Miss Le Mare, a donkey and stone cottage	c1941

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| AMS 7005/2 | Copy letter from Walter John Cole, Junecroft, Minster Road, Sheerness, to Sydney                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 9 Jun 1945  |
|            | describing the experiences of his son-in-law Stan Francis as a prisoner of war, and his liberation from a camp about 50 miles from Torgau in Germany by the Red Army; 'they had no food to offer ..., relying entirely on "loot". They told them to knock at the doors of houses and ask for what they wanted. If it was refused to shoot the inmates and help themselves; that was what they were doing!'.<br><br> |             |
| AMS 7005/3 | Recording of an interview by Elizabeth Everett and Barbara Pavitt with Jill Tait                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 12 Dec 2011 |
|            | compiled as part of the Wartime West Sussex 1939-1945 Project                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |             |