

Round And About In The Parish...

In August last year Dee Birchell, who runs Holly House Bed and Breakfast, rang me to say a lady had booked to stay with her and would I like to interview this lady since the son told Dee his mother had been evacuated here during the War, went to Danehill School, and had photos of VE Day. I certainly did wish to see her and arranged a suitable time to go to Dee's.

The lady in question (Joan) was aged 85 and after brief introductions we settled down to the interview. I began by asking "What part of London were you evacuated from". She replied "Pardon?" I thought to myself - come on Jill, speak clearly for goodness sake and I repeated the question. The reply was unequivocal "I am not from London, I am Welsh and I was not evacuated here". At this point the funny London accent became clear - it was Welsh. I got thrown a bit here. However not yet totally flummoxed, I ploughed on.

"What did you think of Danehill School?" She replied "Pardon?" I asked the question again and I was sure I had spoken clearly. She replied "I never went to Danehill School."

Oh my giddy aunt! I was totally at a loss. Her son did intervene here to say he had told Dee about being evacuated and going to Danehill School. Here's the story.... Joan came to Chelwood Gate with her mother and brother because her father was stationed nearby. They were supposed to stay for two weeks holiday with Mrs Winnie Smith (one of the Turners) at Clifton House which was sometimes called Clifton Cottage. The family was from South Wales and came in about 1941 when Joan was around 7 years old. However, Joan had picked up scarlet fever in Barry and by the time she got to Chelwood Gate it was clear she was rather poorly. As a result she went into isolation at a Cottage hospital outside East Grinstead and they had to stay for an extra month. Mrs Smith then said to Joan's mother, "Why don't you stay on?" as she thought it would be company for her own little girl of the same age. So indeed they did, Joan's mother, her brother and herself. Yet in between times they did return home to Wales for a short while.

This photo is of Clifton House with Gwenda (Mrs Smith's eldest daughter) with John Comford in 1950. This is where the family stayed during the war and you will notice a small lean-to shop on the left-hand side which sold sweets, crisps, cool drinks etc.

Joan didn't go to Danehill School but instead went to the Notre Dame Convent School at Wych Cross but Joan thought she was not really welcomed by the nuns. After about a year she left the convent school and attended Nutley School, which she enjoyed. Joan remembered going to the Christmas parties at the Isle of Thorns and said the soldiers were friendly and gave them chocolate and they had toys etc. She also recalled that Edmund Hockridge entertained them.



We then moved on to talk about VE Day and Joan said she and her friend, Shirley, dressed up as nurses and played on the Green, and they were allowed to stay up until midnight. Unfortunately, Joan didn't have any photos. However, later when I was talking to Penny Carter relating my tale of woe she said to me "I'm in touch with Shirley (Joan's friend) who now lives in Australia, and I'll see if I can find something out for you." Months passed and I had forgotten all about it and then Penny rang me to say she had received a letter from Australia with original photos of VE Day and these are some of the photos. One of the photos is of Joan and Shirley dressed as nurses on VE Day (what a stroke of luck this is!).



This photo is taken from behind the Red Lion

where a large bonfire had been lit for VE Day celebrations and where a



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small sports day took place. In this photo the building shown at the back was used by Canadian troops from the Isle of Thorns. Shirley is in the centre, and to her left is Joan. Shirley won 9/- on the Sports Day as prizes.

My thanks to Dee and to Penny. This is not the first time that Penny has bailed me out of trouble, so many thanks.

Jill Rolfe