

Johnny Leach -An Evacuee's Memories of Bugbrooke in Wartime

From 1941 until 43 things did not look all that good on the war front not that we knew much about what was going on other than what came over on the radio who never gave much away. Food was on rations we used to shop at the local co-op shop in the Village So what was our rations ?-

4oz of meat (100g), butter 2oz or 50g Cheese anything from 2oz to 8oz depending on the stock sent to the shop, Margarine 4oz (100g), cooking fat 4oz dropping to 2oz very often, Milk did not affect us but it was 3 pints a week, 1 packet of dried milk every 4 weeks, Sugar 8oz (225g) Preserves Like Jam and soft fruit 1lb every month, Tea 2oz every week, Eggs 1 egg a week often they did not have eggs some weeks, but we knew how to find them (Mum the Word) 1 packet of dried egg powder a month, Sweets 12oz a month, Sausages was not rationed but it was hard work finding them or who had them, you could get Rice Macaroni & sago - say go and it went. We could get Flour Plain & self raising plus the odd rabbit from the fields but we had to set the nets down or send the ferrets down the burrows ,

We never had too much food with two growing lads. Every household was in the same boat, This is where Mrs Champion was very kind. She would call me into the farmhouse and give me maybe 6 eggs a pat of homemade butter plus now and again a joint of pork if they had killed a pig this lady was so very kind to us. By 1943 I was earning 3 shillings a week in the Fish & Chip shop in the evenings making crisps then packing them. Life was good. Bill left school and was working for Belgroves on the coal wagon. Gurney was the driver the odd bag of coke and coal found its way to our house every so often. Coal them days was 6 pounds a ton which was a lot of money in them days, especially in our household. On a Sunday evening we would get a small loaf of bread this was given by the parish to the not so well off. This was always welcome, and this was to go on all the time during these very dark wartime days but life had to go on and it did.

By 1943 I was without any doubt part and parcel of this Village everyone knew just who I was. Happy days lay ahead for me in more ways than what I had been though, and away from London boy I was lucky to be in such a nice place. Unlike other lads in Barnardo's I've met, who had real bad homes, I had a good one, Our new Vicar came to Bugbrooke and Bill Got the job part time as the Vicarage odd job man; and who had to be his side kick? – Me! This was just my cup of tea, I could tell the other kids in school when the orchard was ready for us boys to have a look at at night-time with all the village lights out; in a word Heaven lay behind the Vicarage in those gardens in them summer nights.

Mr Disney was the new Vicar a little man white hair getting on in life never really got that close to him other than on Sundays when I had to go to church. I later found out we Barnardo boys had to attend Church or Chapel otherwise it was back to the homes! Because Mrs Clarke was church, I had to go to church but I did go once to the Chapel. The pastor was Mr Capel. He played football for the Village team. a very good player in his day,

My very close friend was Walter Cunningham who lived two doors away at Number 6 with Mr & Mrs Bottems. Sadly Mrs Bottems became very ill and died while I was in the Village living next door. Mrs Cunnidgham was a very nice lady honest, she had a large family but whenever I was with Walt, I had to sit down and eat whatever the others had. There was always some sort of food - milk puddings or bread & Jam when mum made some Jam after some of our ventures to different orchards which was in abundance in the Village Kislingbury was 2 miles away so it was a long walk or a penny bus ride carrying apples or plums if we got caught we had always found them but what it was more homemade Jam mum always made sure Mrs Cunningham had a 2lb jar of Jam, Betty Elleen and Wait was to become very close friend Doreen was a lot older than Us four she had her friends Bill was a bit keen on Doreen roundabout his age, Jimmy Flood had a nice orchard in the Village we often had a look if only to see how the apples where getting on. One day I'll never forget is when Rayburn Adams had a lovely pear tree next to the co-op; one day I climbed that pear tree and it only had a bell fitted in it. While I was up that tree Rayburn came down the pathway and waited for me to come down what a mistake I made that day when I think about it today. It still hurts no more said.

With most of the Men away fighting for King & country this place was very quiet. The old Ladies would only swear at us, or tell Mr Oliver the headmaster which meant 6 of the best next day at school. And how many times did I get them PASS. I now moved up a class to a Miss Smith she came from London with the Evacuee's. Boy a nasty bit of work was she. That's in my time of course I don't know about later on. We had what was called dictation she told us a story everyday "Children of the New Forrest" next day we had to

write an essay on what she had read to us. Bill told me to write Sheer Rubbish which I

did. The prize I got was the cane everyday for a week plus I had to ring the school bell every morning. What

a mistake Bill got me into. All the mums would bring the kids to school and ask what's that little bugger been up to now? Funny as it made me come to like her. Often she would say John you stay behind after school. When they had all gone she would give me a few sweets and let me go home.

1943 & 44 soon came. I was like the cats tail - all behind the others. Well I had things to do. School was sort of an interference with other plans I would hatch up. Like notes Colin Wright with his Invisible ink would write on where we was going that night and who's orchard was due a visit. Boy we had a few on our list. In a funny sort of way the War was a good thing. Us lads more or less had a clear field to operate in - more on that later on.

Bill left Belgrove's for a Job with Mr Campion farm in the Village as a tractor driver It was a Fordson, so gone was the days of the horse & plough. Mr Campion still retained the horses for a while and used them during hay making, and at Harvest time they would pull the hay and wheat from the fields back to the farm after it had been cut by the tractor as they grew older they would not be replaced.

During these dark war years we always had things going on within the Village life, like the June holiday held at Mrs Harrison's big house every year. The war didn't stop that nor the Village fair. Rev Disney was the Vicar he was getting on in life but he did have a big orchard at the back of the rectory. To get into that we had to go along the canal tow path up a steep bank into the orchard. One day we got spotted so we bolted off down this bank loaded with plums and I couldn't stop hence I was in the Cut as we called it I got out on the other side Low & behold right in front of me was another orchard and who was working that night in this other orchard no other than Bill he said where have you come from All I said I don't know best if we tell Mum you slipped into the brook near H Wards so I got out of that mess, (or Did I) Miss Smith wanted to know who had been raiding orchards around the Village last night everyone looked at me and Darkie Briton any way someone had told her Six of the best yet again he hadn't been with me he was in mont Grants orchard that night so he told me, You might not believe this but its true one night Mr Disney wanted too see me at the rectory after school so off I went to see him he had two things in mind one he wanted me to join the Church choir for this I would get 2pence a service paid once a month which I did then he Gave me an old Wireless with 2 accumulator's which was rechargeable this was the very first radio mum had ever had obviously he had noted We had no wireless in the house and he had this spare one my opinion of him changed overnight he was very good to us honest a real kind gentleman he gave me something to stop in at night, With the radio working the long dark nights of 43/44 soon flew by spring of 44 was a very cold every night was very cold our village had German POW's working on the farms, On our way too school we would see them marching along the High St in 3 ranks I wonder how many village folk recall them P O W 's and who's farm they was off to all I know Begroves had about 6 working for him at anyone time, By now I was becoming well known in this village for a lot of things lets just say I plead Guilty that will save any name dropping lets just say it was not only at my doorstep either we was all in it Pete Perkins lived at the lodge and after school we would make our way up camp hill and his dad would bring us home in his pony and trap boy could that pony shift, In 44 the Fish & chip shop closed down so I had to look for another little earner in order to keep up my lifestyle so Joe Hakes asked me if I would like too lead the horse round the Village with the Honey pot as we called it Boy did that Stink'round the Village on a Thursday night so one door closed another opened by the time we finished the round it was full then it had to be emptied or discharged in different fields within the village then wash the cart out put the horse away goodnight 2/6p better off twice a week 5 shillings pocked money not bad for a 11 year old, I wonder how many recall that Honey Pot, Now we had a Village Road - Sweeper he always wanted to know what fresh fields we used for this I would get a Shilling I know why he wanted this info this was because once we had filled the field with our goods the farmer would be out to plough it in the next day but not before Henry Jeffs had had the best of it , one may wemder why he did this well he would collect the best take it home in the West End dry it out mix it with leaves acorns brew it all up and then fill up his clay pipe and smoke it he once told me He had never bought Tobacco why should he when he had a water butt full of it, I know I'd seen it Stink once he lit his gun up keep away from Henry he told me once the dung was ripe it would sweeten his pipe, And he lived to a good age everyone knew Henry a real character a distinguish person the roads was always kept clean never any tippers about Henry had them to mix with his brew up Later on I was too try his home made beer oh dear what a brew made me bad for about two days it was due to what we now call a hangover, I was to get friendly with one of the German P,O,W who worked on Belgroves farm I would Buy him a bar of soap for this he would make me a toy like a puppet on a string or a ring he told me he had a son about my age back home and Hitler was a bi:l.d map he feared for his son He said one day when this war was over he would like me to go ~to his home in Germany I never did that because he never gave me his address all I can say he was like a father figure to me which I'd never had, Mrs

Belgrove would cook the:tn a hot dinner Corned Beef hash with roast Spuds he would always save me a spud for this ifhe needed something or other I would try my best to get it for him, Of course the war was having its effect on this Village Some of the Village boys got killed or missing in action we would pray for their safe return but alas some never came home our Vicar Mr Harrison was on his back in some far away Hospital very ill But he was to Return thank God. Now I had another Job a meat round wed Thu & Sat with a Mr Childs who had taken over from Tom Collins who was now an old Man and retired but stilled lived the house at the top of the yard.

In Gilkes yard we had new residence moving in as the old ones moved out Mrs Bottems next door to us Died she had been bed ridden for some time omong the new ones was Anne Boswell with her Husband Reg I got on well with them two plus Mr & Mrs Clarke Jimmy Kyle along with Freda Bannard lived in Mr Leedon old house at the top of the yard Jimmy would help me pull water from the well outside his house because we had no running water in the Cottage's in all fairness we could always get water from the well, One afternoon I had the shock of my life I came home from school Mum said your got a parcel It looks like its come from London it had Barnardo' s had forward it on to me apparently my real mother had sent it too head office for me this was to cause me some anxiety inside this parcel was some games like ludo hoopla plus other things like sweets

and other games Bill said I was to say Nothing about it forget it was his words Miss Wilson the home lady when I asked her about it all she said write to Stepney They came back with Best if I did not Know who sent it and from where it came,I was later on to find out why they had done this obviously was Barnardo's way of putting up that brick wall we boys kept bumping into not just me but all us lads within Barnardo' s knew this brick wall was in place Hence to quote a friend of mine Les Thomas to write This time next week where will I be Sitting by the fire scoffng my tea, I was content with Mum so best if I stay at Bugbrooke all my mates was here why go anywhere else yet Note the word Yet, Why would anyone want to go back to London Not me so I was to stay on here until my schooldays was over "thank God" at least I knew where I was, Me and Bill became very close after that parcel because we was in the same boat as I was he once met

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