

Wartime Memories

Remembering growing up in the Second World War



**A project by students of drama and history at
the University of Greenwich**

**With the European Reminiscence Network,
Greenwich Pensioners Forum and**

Charlton Manor and Meridian Primary Schools, Greenwich.

2015-2016

Wartime Memories
Compiled by the European Reminiscence Network
The University of Greenwich
With Greenwich Pensioners Forum

An Introduction by Pam Schweitzer

The Background:

These memories have been gathered as part of an 18-month Europe for Citizens project entitled “Remembering the Past – Building the Future”. The project has partners in Dresden (Germany), Thessaloniki (Greece), Wroclaw (Poland), Budapest (Hungary) Skopje (Macedonia) and Greenwich (UK). It is coordinated by the organization Jugend- & Kulturprojekt e.V. in Dresden.

Partners are mainly small voluntary organizations who have developed work in their home countries around the theme “Remembering the Past – Building the Future”. They have worked in partnership with universities, museums, galleries, schools and local communities. Most have focused on World War II memories and enabled school and university students to create responses to these memories through drama, visual arts, sound-scapes, music and dance.

Here in Greenwich, we have undertaken a series of reminiscence arts projects based on wartime memories. Students of drama and history at the University of Greenwich have worked with children and their teachers from local primary schools and with older people from the Greenwich Pensioners Forum. All of this work has been coordinated by the European Reminiscence Network as a contribution to the “Remembering the Past – Building the Future” project.

Two special events open to our project partners and the public:



We have held two days of performances and lectures with the participation of all the above partners. The first, in autumn 2015, also featured a group of senior school students from Dresden who performed a play they had made with their director, Matthias Neutzner, based on the wartime experiences of their German grandparents and great-grandparents. This was performed alongside a specially produced

reminiscence play by older people from Greenwich and a student production based on memories of the end of the war from the Reminiscence Theatre Archive. Young and old co-operated in a memorable joint workshop using drama to share experience and to generate mutual understanding.

The second day, in December 2016 featured presentations from partners in our European project and performances by students working with local schools and older people from Greenwich Pensioners Forum.

An On-going programme of work on the project:

We have also had on-going programmes of work with drama and history students. Drama students have studied Reminiscence Theatre and Theatre-in-Education on the Applied Drama course of the University and worked with older people, listening to their stories and improvising scenes based on their memories. They have gone on to produce reminiscence-based shows aimed at children in primary schools and older people in sheltered accommodation. History students attached to the project have worked on transcription of these memories, editing them into this booklet, and adding them to the Reminiscence Theatre Archive, which can be seen at www.reminiscencetheatrearchive.org.uk

Our Process:

We began by recording the memories of a group of older people aged 82 to 98 of their wartime experience, whether as children or young men and women. These recordings were transcribed by 3rd year students of history in autumn 2015 and placed in the Reminiscence Theatre Archive, which is based at the University of Greenwich.

The older people bravely agreed to make a short play about their experiences, which was a completely new experience for all of them. Working with Pam Schweitzer (Director of the European Reminiscence Network and Reminiscence Theatre Archive), Heather Lilley (Senior lecturer in Drama) and Charlotte Price-Stevens (3rd Year Greenwich student on work-placement to the Archive) we created, rehearsed and performed the show to over a hundred people in the Bathway Theatre of the University in autumn 2015. Third Year Drama students also created short plays from their readings of end of war memories stored in the archive and these too were performed for that occasion.

In spring 2016, Charlotte Price-Stevens and a group of her 3rd year colleagues devised a Theatre-in-Education play for 9-year-old children in two local primary schools, Meridian and Charlton Manor. Their play included some of the older people from the Greenwich Pensioners Forum, who shared their memories of wartime childhood with the children. The programme was very enthusiastically received by the children and their teachers, especially when it emerged that one of the older



people had actually been evacuated as a nine-year-old from the school where we were performing.

In autumn 2016, as part of their Applied Drama programme, 2nd year students of drama began working with Pam Schweitzer. They were introduced to Reminiscence Theatre and Theatre-in-Education (TIE) and had the chance to meet and work with some of the older people from the Pensioners

Forum and other older volunteers. They listened to their stories of growing up in wartime, improvising with them and devised their own plays to perform. Two groups chose to create a TIE show and one created a play for older people. All the shows were performed for their intended audiences, either in Charlton Manor School, where the older people participated in the performances, telling their stories and working with the children, or in a local sheltered housing unit for an audience of older people, including some former evacuees.

Two 3rd year history students were attached to the project and they have been working on this booklet of memories. They have also had access to previously unpublished memories on the same theme in the Reminiscence Theatre Archive and have included a small number of these stories in this booklet. The history students have been learning about editing memories for publication and have written about their experience of participating in such an inter-disciplinary project. They have observed the drama students working on their theatre productions so that they could see how the memories could form the basis of a play and encounter students from working within a different discipline at the University.

This little booklet is produced to mark the occasion of an international workshop on reminiscence theatre as part of the Europe for Citizens project on 9th December 2016, attended by partners in the project from other EU countries, by staff and students from the University, by members of the Greenwich Pensioners' Forum and by representatives of local schools.

Warmest thanks are due to the following people for their participation in this project:



Greenwich Pensioners Forum: May Wellard, Ann and John Webb, Jean Wilkins, Joan Plant, Olive Williams, Joan Harbottle
Additional contributors of memories: Pamela Lyne and Alan Lee Williams
University of Greenwich Drama and History lecturers: Heather Lilley, June Balshaw, Jillian Wallis, Simon Bowes, Dave Hockham and Ed Currie
History students: Andy Morrell, George Levy, Fern Ball, Fatjet Curraj
Drama Work Placement: Charlotte

Price-Stevens

2nd and 3rd year Applied Drama Students at the University of Greenwich

Staff and children from Meridian Primary School and Charlton Manor Primary School

Partners in the Europe for Citizens project “Remembering the Past – Building the Future” who participated in the London events: Myrto-Helena Pertsinidi, Matthias Neutzner, Anna Stavrakopoulou, Monika Malobacka, Alex and Pam Schweitzer.



Reflections by University of Greenwich History Students

Working alongside my fellow history student and Pam in order to create the booklet was exciting. This can be attributed to the nature of the booklet, it being a collection of memories and stories from people that survived the horrors of World War 2 and us having the power to publish their stories for others to read. People reading this booklet are invited to see Britain through the eyes of those who lived through the war years and confronted significant challenges during their time. Being able to shine a light on these stories and increase the accessibility to them makes the work we have done worthwhile.

Having worked closely with the drama students over the past five weeks, witnessing their performances take shape has proved to be an interesting and engaging task. It has also offered us as history students, an insight into the process that drama students undergo when using historical context and content to construct a role-play made to entertain and simultaneously educate. Entertainment is undoubtedly the primary focus of the actors. However, using the memories of those who lived through the Second World War added an underlying tone of credibility to the plays they made and therefore served the dual purpose of entertaining and educating the audience. This was particularly noteworthy for me because it is different from the work of a historian, and way they extracted information needed to create their stories was certainly fascinating.

Fatjet Curraj



The making of this compilation of stories has been an incredibly rewarding and enjoyable process and I would like to thank Pam Schweitzer for giving me the opportunity to participate in this and to view the Reminiscence Theatre Archive,

which holds the memories of many older people. It has been an honour and a privilege to explore these memories and to include some in this booklet, along with the memories specifically collected for the current project, “Remembering the Past – Building the Future.”

Much of my enjoyment in working on this project has been my wish to preserve these memories in this booklet and in the Reminiscence Theatre Archive, so that younger people can connect with the experiences of those who fought for our future. This booklet was also created to allow students from other disciplines to adapt these stories in their own way, be it into an academic text or a theatrical production, and my hope is that this small glimpse into what the Reminiscence Theatre Archive provides will motivate students to do just that.

Once more I would like to thank everyone involved in this project and also thank those who submitted their stories for the benefit for future generations.

Fern Ball

Left: Alan and Geoffrey Lee Williams at the outbreak of war before evacuation
Right: Children who remained in London through the war playing in the street

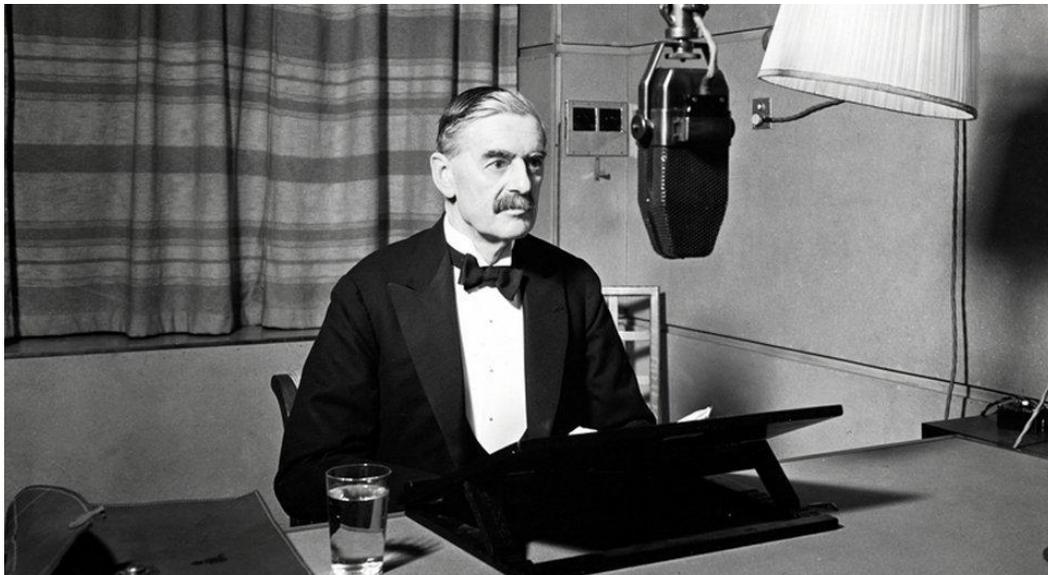


Wartime Memories

The Outbreak of War

I was 22 years old when war broke out. I remember the day that war was declared; it was a sunny Sunday and we were waiting for Chamberlain to talk to us on the radio and there was this feeling, a sort of excitement, because we had no idea what it was really like. Well, we listened and while we were listening the wind blew the curtains gently in and knocked over a vase of flowers onto the side board just as Chamberlain was saying we were at war and my mother was far more interested in the damage to the top of the cupboard than that war was being declared.

May Wellard, born in 1917



We came alive to what was happening around us when we were 7 or 8, and since we had an interest in what was happening, we were not surprised when we were playing in the woods not far from where we lived, when our mother came up to us and said, "You must come home. Neville Chamberlain, who was then the Prime Minister, is going to make a statement". We knew what it was going to be and she said "I think it is war". So we came back and heard Neville Chamberlain's speech, stating that we had asked the German's to withdraw their troops from Poland and they had not done so and consequently, we were at war. Well, that excited us! We thought "War! That's very good", because we had been playing war in our local woods in one form or another.

Alan Lee Williams

I can remember I was about five years old when war broke out. We lived in a flat below Gran's. My mother came from a large family. My father had died when I was two and we lived at Gran's, all the family. Aunties and uncles played a big part in my life. Once war broke out, they started to not be available. They disappeared and then

came back in uniforms. That was quite fun for me. Because I was very tiny and I can remember being popped, two legs, into one of uncle's flying boots.

Ann Webb, born in 1934

I was eleven at start of war. I was the youngest of nine. We lived near Roman Road, north of the river. I had six brothers, and when war broke out, five of them went in the forces. I was never evacuated. I went through all the process, but I didn't want to go. And my mum said: All right, if you don't want to go, you don't go.' My mother was a very strong lady... well she had to be with six boys, didn't she? So I stayed with my mum. Lots of my classmates from school didn't go away either.

Olive Williams, born in 1928

Childhood in war-torn London

We would go to the beach, down on the Greenwich Reach and look for piece of chalk and that was to draw out hopscotch. Gran always made us take a broom and scrub the chalk markings off after so we wouldn't disfigure the street. And then there were alley gobs or five stones. You could make those out of little squares. You would have them in your hand, throw them up and catch them on the back of your hand. Then you'd throw them again and try to pick up more.

Ann Webb



I had three or four sticks, and they were made like a cricket wicket and you put them against the wall and you had a ball and you had to knock them down. If you knocked them down you had to dash forward to rebuild them before the ball had been retrieved and thrown at you. If it hit you then you were out. We had lots of neighbours and particularly a few of them were old, very old, and we would run errands for them and it was generally a good relationship with people in the street.

Except the man next door to us, that is. During the week he was okay, but on a Saturday, we had a very long garden and we loved to play out there, but he kept homing pigeons and of course you had to have absolute silence when the birds were coming home, so we used to fall out with him on a Saturday.

John Webb, born in 1932

You would play flicks with cigarettes cards. You would flick them against the wall. Yes just flicking, it's such a simple thing. You would play flicks with cigarettes cards. You would flick them against the wall. Yes just flicking, it's such a simple thing.

Joan Plant, born in 1930

My favourite was skipping. I always loved skipping. In fact I still do. And sometimes people in the street would turn the rope for you and you'd jump in. And we'd sing:

*Jelly on the plate, jelly on the plate
Wibble wobble wibble wobble, jelly on the plate*

Jean Wilkins, born in 1931



Propaganda photo to encourage children to use their gas masks

We used to play in the streets every day; you never went out of your own street. Oh, the games we used to play! There was marbles made of glass... My dad made us a special game. It was a piece of wood that had arches and each arch had a number on and you tried to get the marbles to go through. We'd play with the ball against the wall, sometimes with two balls and sometimes throwing it under your leg. And we'd sing:

*One two three Alairy, my ball's down the Airy,
Don't forget to give it to Mary, on a Sunday morning*

We used to find pieces of shrapnel and you'd keep it for yourself and I have to say we often got a bigger bit than anybody else.

Olive Williams, born 1928

Running Errands:

I can remember the elderly people in our road, mainly the old women, would sit in the front window and as you passed they would rap on the glass and you'd knock on the door and they'd say: 'Please go to the shop and get me so and so, and there's tuppence for you.'

Ann Webb

I remember one of my errands: people would leave on their doorsteps the little glass batteries with a handle for their radios, the accumulators. These had to be charged up. They were quite heavy. I would take them to the shops for a charge.

Olive Williams

Living in shelters



I was 8 years old when war broke out. We stayed in London for the first four years. We used to go down the air-raid shelter at Southwark underground station. Each night we'd have a blanket over our arm and we would get on a 36 or a 38 bus and go and sleep down in the public shelter. As we went down they used to spray our throat every night with Dettol spray, in case of infection as there were so many of you down there. We used to come up in the morning and always go into a little cafe and have bread and dripping, which we absolutely loved, especially the jelly bit on top.

Jean Wilkins

Oh and there was also the gramophone. When we came home from work one day my mother said, "I have brought you a gramophone. It's one of these big ones", she said "He has forgotten to take his record with him. Shall we play it?" And we put it on and

it said "You are now the proud possessor of a Marconi Gramophone." It came with it and she thought he had left it behind. You had to wind it up. All those little needles. Oh yes, we had two very old records, one was 'Won't you come home Bill Bailey?' and I can't remember what the other one was, but they were so scratchy and very old. Well, they were used and used and used.

May Wellard

Blackout:

Do you remember how we had to tape over all the windows inside the house with sticky tape? So that when the blast blew the glass it didn't shatter. It broke, but it wasn't tiny shards, it was chunks.

Ann Webb

We had blackout curtains and they had to cover the whole window. If there was even a chink of light showing The air raid warden would come and knock at the door and it'd be, 'Put that light out!'

May Wellard



And all the buses had their windows blacked out. There was just a little square of light. You didn't know where you were. So the nippy (the bus conductor) used tell you where you were. They'd call out the name of the station.

Olive Williams

And if you went out you could have a torch, 'cause there was no street lighting, but it was covered over except for a little round hole the size of a sixpence. And bicycle lamps were the same. Just a tiny beam. I think the blackout killed more people to start with because they were totally unused to complete darkness.

Joan Plant

Rationing and food

I was five and looking after baby so Mum could get on. She had to go to the shops each day to buy food. You could only get things on ration at a shop you were registered at, and that had to be on a daily basis as you had no fridge and they may not have had a supply of things. Some days you had a fruitless shopping journey.

In Britain in those days, each shop specialized in certain food and you had to register so that they had the number of your ration book and each shop you went to you had to produce your ration book so they could either clip a coupon or mark a coupon. And you were limited as to how much you could have each week. And you couldn't choose what you had; you had to have what was available.

Ann Webb

Doctor Hill on the radio. And how to make a meal out of what you got, but I don't ever remember going short of anything apart from fruit during the war. In Roman Road, where the market was, my mum knew all the people that she had always dealt with and you never went without anything.

Olive Williams

We usually had to queue up for things. As children, we were sent down to the Greengrocers for potatoes and things. We used to have neighbours knocking on the door saying, "They've got sausages up at the co-op!" And we used to queue up and somebody from the shop, an assistant, used to come out and say "Sorry, after this, there's none left", and we used to have to go home without, after queuing for a long long time. We had Australian jam given to us. My mother used to get it because we were a big family, there was seven of us.

Joan Plant



Bombing: Blitz, Doodlebugs & V2 rockets

I worked in Siemens, the big cable laying factory. They had concrete shelters in each factory building. There were green and red flashing warning lights. Green meant 'be aware' and red meant 'evacuate now'. On Saturday 21st September 1940, the red light flashed. So we made our way to the shelters. As we crossed the yard we saw a line of bombers flying low and as we seated ourselves on the wooden benches, we heard the bombs begin to fall. The ground shook and we were filled with fear. Two hours later, the All Clear sounded and we emerged to rush home. Was my family safe? When I looked back towards the river, the whole of the docks on the north side were burning.

May Wellard

When the local bombing of the docks and things around here became so bad, my step-father suggested that we go away. My mother was in service to a family in Blackheath and they had property, cottages, in Yorkshire. I can remember us going, packing up things. There was me, Mum had another child by then, a baby, and an auntie and a cousin. We were all crammed into this friend of Dad's taxi and taken to Yorkshire. Mum couldn't stand it up there because there were no local shops, it was a big walk to the shops. After about four days of getting water from a well and having to read by lamp-light she got fed up. We didn't have a phone at home but she phoned Dad's place of work, and we arranged to come home again back to Greenwich as quick as we could.

Ann Webb

The V1s were awful. I was working in the East End then as a machinist and we had a man on the roof on the lookout to see if they were coming. Sometimes they'd change their routes and veer off away from you. On one occasion we were told to evacuate to the shelter. We were just coming down the stairs to the cellar when this V1 exploded across the road and we were just covered in dust. It was very sad because the house it hit had a young couple and two little children and they were all killed.



On the whole though, we never worried about the bombing. We'd go to the pictures and they'd announce, "There is an air raid beginning now. If you want to leave, please leave the cinema now". Well, my friend and I would say "Oh we don't want to go. We'll stay and watch the film"

And then one night they were dropping the big bombs and Mum heard they'd dropped one on the cinema where I was. Well she and my brother, they panicked. She said "Ooh you'd better go and find them..." And my brother panicked. He'd got a kettle in his hand and he spilled boiling water all over his foot in the rush. He dashed out to find us and there was my friend and me just walking along singing..... When he got home and got his sock off, his foot was all blisters.... He was off work for two weeks after that, poor boy. You got used to the raids and carried on.... An old lady said 'I love hearing you young people singing on the way home at night'. We'd sing all popular songs: Lambeth Walk, things like that.

Olive Williams

While we were still in school, we became part-time messengers in the National Fire Service. We were 13, but pretended we were 15 to get in. We were dressed up in fire messenger's uniforms and we were both stationed at Plumstead Fire Station. We did our work on bicycles. When an incident took place, our job was to follow the fire engine, if we were crafty we could grab the back of the truck and drive with it. The idea was, if the Chief Fireman wanted two more appliances, we'd go back to the station and say, "Two more appliances." At the time the telephones couldn't be relied on. If a bomb went off, the entire service was out. That was where we earned our first medal. We did it for 2 years so we got a national service medal for that.

Alan Lee Williams

When the V1s first came, I thought they were noisy low flying planes, with courageous pilots. One almost dropped on our house but the wind turned and carried it two streets away. I went indoors to tell my mother and just as well I did, because the garden had become littered with panes of glass and huge lumps of concrete. Fronts of houses were torn out, twisted iron bedsteads hung off exposed floors. With the first bombings the streets looked as though a giant had spilled great sacks of flour over every street.

Pat Taylor

On D-Day, 6th June 1944, my son John was born. We weren't evacuated, we just stayed in London. My husband had found a house for us and I shared it with my sister and every night we took a case down into the shelter with clothing for the children. When John was six weeks old a bomb fell about 2 o'clock in the morning and just blew everything in the house, the windows, absolutely everything. The clearest memory of the whole thing is getting out as soon as it was light and seeing this dirt and dust absolutely everywhere.

About an hour later at the end of the street were two elderly looking people, that was my Mother and Father coming to see what had happened to us. The news had flown very quickly. Immediately they took my son and my sister's two children and my

sister. They all went off to Sheffield to stay with relatives. I stayed to start clearing up, trying to get what we left stored with other people and then I also went off to Sheffield. We stayed there for a year. People just left London. They didn't care about what they had left behind them because everybody was being killed around them.

May Wellard

I was evacuated in about October 1939 from All Saints School in Blackheath. I was nine years old. That day, I went to school, with my little case, you could only take a certain amount of clothes, and gas mask and they put our labels on us in the classroom. I remember standing there with my sister and my brother and all the class, getting ready to leave. We marched down the road with Miss Harris, she was my teacher. We walked across the heath to Blackheath station and got on the train. Of course we didn't know where we were going to. Mum and Dad came to the station and waved us off. I was excited, we didn't know where we were going or anything like that. I'd been on a train before because I used to go and see my gran at Waterloo, but I wasn't all that used to it. We arrived at Bexhill. I can remember the teacher standing there, and all us children waiting to be billeted.

A woman said that she wanted two sisters, and my sister, Rema and I were chosen together. Her name was Mrs Page. We were completely lost, we didn't know where we were going. Fortunately, we had a lovely billet. Some weren't so fortunate. It was a big shop, a "Freeman, Hardy and Willis" shoe shop in Devonshire Road. Mr Page was the manager there, and our bedroom was the top left-hand side room over the shop. The shop had all oak panelling, and there were all strips of carpet down the shop, with a polished floor in between. Also there were lots of little wooden footstools. It was all brass outside and they used to clean all that. It looked very smart. Mr Page always wore a suit and he had two girls for staff. They used to wear green overalls with "Freeman, Hardy and Willis" on the front.

We were allowed to play in the shop in the evenings. Mr Page used to say, "Be very careful when you open the boxes, don't mark the shoes when you put your feet in them." We took it in turns to pretend to be the assistant or the customer. We used to say, "What would you like madam?" "Oh, I'll have a high heeled pair of black shoes, thank you." And then we'd go up the little wooden ladder to get the shoe box. They were beautiful shoes wrapped in tissue paper. We used to think it was marvellous. There was a "speaking tube" in the wall and it used to make a whistling noise. When Mrs Page wanted us to come upstairs, she would whistle down to us and we used to put our mouth to it and say, "Yes?" and she would say, "Alright you can pack away now, it's teatime." She was very nice, she used to give us nice food that we'd never tasted, like mincemeat balls. My mum never used to make anything like that. We used to think they were lovely, my sister and I did, we'd never had them before.

June Tillett



All the docks were alight, and my mother and all the mothers were at the school gate, Fossdene School in Charlton. And all the docks were alight, all the flames were going up and course all the mothers decided then to send the children away. We had a coach that took us up to Cannon Street station. We had our identification pinned on our jackets or coats. We had a gas mask, and a little kit bag with all our belongings in. All our Mothers waved us goodbye – my Mother was smiling, really smiling and waving. I was thinking we was going on holiday. And I had my brother that was 2 years older than me. And Mother always said to my brother “look after Joanie”. As the coach turned to go away, I looked back and my Mother had been smiling, but now she was sobbing her heart out, and I wondered why she was crying.

And then on the way, the warnings went to Canon Street Station and I was frightened. I said to my brother “Ooh, ooh the bombers are coming, the bombers are coming!” and my brother said “no its only thunder”. So when we arrived at Byfield – that was up near Northamptonshire – they were farm people; so most of the farmers only wanted boys. My friend Elsie and I were almost the last people to be picked. We were clinging to each other. We were posted to a lady, and he was a lay preacher. And my experiences there were really horrific. It was a thatched cottage, you could hear all the mice in the thatch. The toilet was outside, with no flush or anything like that. You still had to have blackout and it was only candle light. And any candles we used to take up to bed we used to have to blow it out straight away. It was very very strict. Elsie’s parents came down to see us and they took Elsie back to London, so I was left on my own.

The woman didn’t feed me properly. I had to go to church 3 times a day on Sunday. I wasn’t allowed to skip, play, the only thing I could do was sing hymns on a Sunday. It was absolutely awful. My brother did what he could to look after me. He was in a more modern house and she was a lovely lady and they had 3 meals a day and I used to go up there and she used to feed me.

Joan Harbottle

My name is Carol Jackson and I would like to reminisce about when I was evacuated. The circumstances that led to my being away from my mother at such an early age,

my father had been killed at the docks in 1938. I was born in the east end of London in Canning Town which is right near the docks, and my mother used to work of a night at the Tate & Lyle sugar refinery and my sister was 10 years older than me, so it was her job to look after me. I've been told I was quite a naughty child so when the time came in 1943 for me to be evacuated, I thought the reason was because I had been naughty and I remember begging my mummy: "Don't send me away Mummy, I'll be a really good girl". After arriving at the station and being put on trains, none of us really knew where we were going, we were there with our little Micky Mouse gas masks with the labels round our necks with our name and address and how old we were on it, and there we were loads and loads of us.

Finally we arrived at a large school with a very large room where the boys were put on one side of the room and the girls were sent to the other side of the room. We were taken in ambulances to people's homes that had said that they would take in London evacuees. I got quite attached to the young lady whose name was Irene who drove the ambulance and, as she was taking the other children around, each time she tried to place me with somebody, I would grab hold of her and say: "I don't want to go. I want to stay with you". So at the end of the evening I was the only one that was still left and Irene said to the woman who was in charge "I'll take her home with me tonight and I'll bring her back in the morning". So she took me home and as we walked into the house it was a very old house, not very big, there was her mother, who I got to know very well as Aunt Marion, kneeling down polishing her black stove and she turned around looked at me and said "Oh my good God what have we got here?" I stayed the night, and the next morning I still didn't want to go away from Irene and I ended up staying there until March 1947.

Carol Jackson



Jean Wilkins and her twin sister

Some people who had stayed in London all through the war finally gave in when the Doodle-Bugs started coming. My father said it was too dangerous to stay in London and my sister and I must go and be evacuated. He worked on the Ak-Ak (Anti-Aircraft guns) guns in Southwark Park, he was in the ARP so every night he wasn't with us and then eventually I can remember going to Paddington Station. From there, we went to St Ives in Cornwall. It was absolutely beautiful, as we arrived in St Ives we saw that beach, Porthminster Beach, oh it was absolutely wonderful.

We were all taken to this church and my twin sister and I were holding each other's hands and the lady wanted just one girl.

They said, "She only wants one girl" and we said, "We're not going to be separated". In the end, she said she would take both of us. They were absolutely wonderful people. We called them Auntie and Uncle, he was a butcher so we had wonderful food. He knew the Co-op managers so we had clotted cream, sugar and butter.

While we were in Cornwall, I remember the D-Day landings, the Americans coming to the harbour in St Ives before they went round to Slapton Sands. They threw us chocolate and oranges and we thought this was wonderful.

Jean Wilkins

The End of the War

It was very hard for most people to get their lives together again. Gloomy grey years followed; rationing, housing and fuel shortages, derelict bombsites where once houses, schools and shops had stood.

Olive Smith

Although the war was over, food and clothing was still rationed, and a vast amount of bomb damage had not been cleared away. Everything was in short supply so an army of 'spivs' sprang up, able to get anything for anyone, at a price of course, and usually illegally. People were exhausted and had little enthusiasm for anything much, and although all were pleased that the war was actually over, somehow it seemed to leave an empty space. We didn't quite know what to do with ourselves! After being geared up for six years not only to survive but also to win the war, now having won it, what were we going to do with it?

Dorothy Barton

I was so happy when they actually said, "it's over," but a few days later I think we all came down to earth and realized that life was never going to be the same again. And I think we then started thinking, "What's life going to be like now?"

I was very relieved that there weren't going to be any more bombings. We felt safe. And you were saying to people "isn't it great the war is over!" and then when all the shop lights went on, I thought that was absolutely fantastic, that you could walk out in the streets and everything was lit up. I think I remember that more than anything.

Lil Murrell



Jean Wilkins remembers a poem she wrote at the end of the war age 13 years old in a school competition in 1945:

This dreadful war has come to an end
We now must thank our Allied friends
The Russians and their leader Joe
The Americans and their leader also

The Army, the Navy, the Airforce in blue
The WAAFs, the Wrens, the ATS too
We must not forget the wonderful Red Cross
But for their parcels, boys would have been lost
We thank them all for what they have done
Also the war, which they have won

We now can go to bed once more
And so forget that terrible war
We once again thank all our friends
Who helped to bring the war to an end.



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