

A SUFFOLK MAWTHER'S CHILDHOOD 1929-1945

Viv Mason's wartime recollections move on to

THE COMING OF THE DANES - AGAIN -

One morning Margaret and I biked to Sir Robert Hitcham's School, went into assembly and got the shock of our lives. We would attend school only in the mornings. Afternoons we were to spend in the Guild Hall or another hall in Debenham, or if the weather was fine go for nature walks, perhaps pick hips for rose-hip syrup or collect acorns for the pigs. The girls were to knit comforts for the forces. The boys to play football...!

An influx of evacuees and their teachers from the Dane School, London meant we'd have to share our educational facilities from the very next day. We raced home that night with the news and our mothers were not at all pleased.

However we soon got established in our new routine. A canteen was set up in the 'Cherry Tree' public house at the opposite end of the village and baths full of vegetables had to be carted across Debenham by willing pupils. I always volunteered for this task and two of us would amble as slowly as possible pretending to totter under our load. Lessons were chaotic and I was not learning very much.

During some particularly heavy snow storms Margaret and I had a struggle to get in. We walked in a straight line from her parents' farm across snow drifts frozen hard by cold frosty winds. The only other tracks we saw were rabbit, hare and bird. We were allowed to leave our afternoon knitting, in ~~one of~~ ^{one of the} ~~halls~~ ^{halls}, early so that we could get home before dark. (We must have knitted miles of khaki wool into balaclava helmets and scarves at these sessions.) We left with some other children who

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lived near Winston. I was wearing a bright red fluffy pixie hat which ended in a black and white scarf when it reached my neck. We slid our way along the road beside the river Deben and were about to part company with our fellow-travellers to cut across the fields when we heard the drone of engines.

Out of the low clouds, near enough to see the occupants, came a Heinkel. There we all were standing on a white snow covered road, next to a grey river shining with frost along its edges. At the first burst of machine-gun fire we flung ourselves through a hedge, off the road and clung onto the river bank, our hearts pounding. The plane went on to shoot up a horse and pepper a few outlying barns before flying off. My red hat got the blame of course. Margaret and I hurried home to two very anxious mothers. They had heard the plane and the gunfire, and Ashfield and Earl Soham had also had a few stray shots. I wore a brown hat to school the next day when we swaggered around relating our narrow squeaks.

Every day the school trooped to the 'canteen' for food. Evacuees and locals soon began to sort themselves out. The former seemed brighter and quicker off the mark in many things and some friendships started between the two groups exist to this day.

After the snow came the great thaw and flooding. Margaret and I managed the last river crossing outside the school gates just as a thin layer of water broke across the road. By mid-day, when we were due to hand over to the Danes, the Deben was half way up the three-foot-high guard rails of the bridge. We learned that the Cherry Tree "canteen" was isolated by flood water so we could not go there. It was lucky 99 per cent of us wore wellington boots, for we were told by the head to walk along the middle railing of the bridge, hold on to the upper rail, not look down and shuffle our way along to dry ground on the far side.

We got over intact. The Danes had, meanwhile, been marched down the High Street near to the school. Being 'townies' they hadn't a pair of wellingtons between them, but across they went, slipping and screaming, and

into school. (Most of their footwear was still drying out, or falling apart, when we got to school next day.) About an hour after our brave crossing the long-distance pupils realised that their bikes were still back at the school. I got permission to go across to the Doctor's house near the church to telephone home. My mother said a lorry and driver would collect and deliver as many children as possible. At 4 o'clock the lorry came and although we had three floods to get through all went well and Margaret and I reached home safely.

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COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Community Education are planning a summer for adults during the first two weeks of the long summer holiday and will be organising creche facilities to coincide with this. Adults will be invited to return to school, using the facilities in Debenham High School, to undertake short 1 or 2 day courses in the following suggested subjects:

Languages (Holiday French and German), Photography and Video work, Word Processing, Emergency Car Repairs, First Aid on Holiday, Crafts, Relaxation and, for the budding musician, opportunities to have a go with a wide range of musical instruments.

At the time of writing these were still in the planning stage and further details will be circulated to each household by the end of the month.

For your information at present the courses will be held during the weeks commencing 24th and 31st July between 10.00 a.m. and 3.00 p.m. and the cost will be in the region of £5.00 for a day course. The usual concessions will be made for those people who are retired and/or are full-time students or unemployed.

Further information regarding these summer schools may be obtained from Ray Burton tel. Debenham 860430.

Ray Burton, Community Education Officer