

A SUFFOLK MAWTHER'S CHILDHOOD 1929-1945

Viv Mason continues her account of the coming of the wartime evacuees to Ashfield-cum-Thorpe and describes some

Unexpected Visitors

Next morning I was sent on my mother's drop-handled Rudge to Debenham to buy up every fine tooth comb in the place. Those few shops carrying stock, gathering the dust of years, had already sold out - Debenham had taken a few loads of evacuees too. I raced to the Cobbling and Hair Cutting establishment and said "Please, please search everywhere for fine combs, we have evacuees and they have NITS..." I'd practised this new word along the 32 bends. The cobbler rummaged in his murky muddle and found one pink tooth comb.

He also found several other interesting things bordering on antiquity and kept exclaiming "Cor blarst Bor" and "Never knew that that wuz here". I was all impatience to nip into the next room to the "salon" and ask the hairdresser to do a similar search, as one comb was not enough and someone else might pip me to the post. When I finally reached her she turned out her entire shop and came up with a whole display card of nit combs. All neatly (nitly?) held in place with striped elastic. As neither he nor she had known the goods were in stock, and anyway it was part of the war effort, I was given the combs.

I raced off to Abbots to collect vinegar (which I'd never realised was also a 'louse douse' as well as hair shiner. SUGARBUTTERFATSMARGARINE was loading up his mobile emporium as I skimmed up to the shop. "In a hurry int yew, Miss Jones?" I was not in too much of a hurry to miss my "Town Crier" act, so I filled him in with the latest saga from Ashfield so he'd know what to expect

2) when he drove on his round on Wednesday. "Thass a rummin" was all he said. I loaded up some bottled vinegar in a canvas bag dangling from the saddle, pushed off along the street with left foot on left pedal, right foot getting up speed and then swung right foot over saddle in my usual style. It seemed pretty tame to me to get on a bike the "ladies way", cross bar or no cross bar, and I set off for the 32 bends home.... About the 18th I felt the first bite.

Previously I'd always loved that ride. The bends were, in my mind, the old cattle trail, and I'd weave in and out of the imaginary cows and obstacles. Nuts were forming on the hazel-nut trees and there'd be king cups in the marshes in the spring and red valerian smelling like tom cats in the summer. My magic river. My magic ride.

Today out of my mind went everything but one thought. NITS. My hair! It would have to be shaven!

But what if it grew so slowly it was not ready I started at my new school? Would they think me a convict? I rounded Swan Corner and went straight up the hill (no doubt stretching my mother's chain several links) passed the ancient oak named "Buttocks", then downhill, sharp left at White Post Corner, and along the few yards to home, scissors, vinegar and, probably, the razor. I propped the Rudge against the kitchen lean-to and raced indoors.

I could hardly wait for the kettle to boil before breaking the news that I'd have to have my head shaven.

"What on earth for" she asked.

"Well, I think I have caught them from our lot" I mumbled, pointing dumbly to the vinegar and combs. Mother completely forgot about her tea. There were the waepons and here was a victim.

Not one parasite was found but I was still steeped in vinegar. That night as the ten were all combed and dunked I watched facinated as the harvest was gleaned and found out that either the nit or the egg made a satisfactory click as it was popped. One evacuee, a

frizzy blond call "Dawreen" ran away howling that she had had a perm three months earlier and her mum "Would kill 'er if she caught 'er wasting a perm by washing 'er 'air".

"Never mind that" said mother, "I'll settle this with your mother".

She gave "Dawreen" the treatment, wrote to mum in London and waited. Within 24 hours she arrived, dressed in black as if in mourning at the passing away of Dawreen's nits and Dawreen's perm. (She was actually foaming at the mouth, but I later found out from one of Dawreen's friends that she must have had a faulty saliva system as she was always like that.) "Pack your case, me girl" she foamed. "We're orf.. not staying in a place like this."

Phew! We waved Dawreen off down the road, her mother panting in her wake, to walk the two and a half miles to Pig Corner Barn for the one and only bus going to Ipswich that day. Mother and I returned to the house to find the remaining nine jumping up and down in the pink bedroom, turning somersaults and hanging upside down from a beam above the bed. As I'd already learned, a jump from the bed, connecting one with the beam, then a swing over, back down again was great fun, after you'd kicked your shoes off. The evacuees, with high-heeled monstrosities on, had already done irreparable damage to ceiling and walls, while those not performing on the beam were pillow-fighting, and there were feathers everywhere.

Our spirits dropped like stones. Just then the phone rang. It was father, he was on "Foreign Service" in Chelmsford. "I say Doll, you will never believe this - I asked the exchange for Earl Soham 60 and the fellow said "What?" I repeated Earl Soham 60 very slowly and clearly and the operator then said "Blimey, someone will be wanting the Duke of Wellington next".

We didn't laugh. There was such a long silence at the Ashfield end of the line father asked what was up. "Up, Bob? Wait till you see what we have got in the house." "A few evacuees?" he asked. "Only a few" mother said, "I keep getting landed with

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the rejects no one will have. They've all got nits. One left today. No, not a nit an evacuee. But I've still got nine left."

"Hmm!" Male parent obviously thinking... "Shall I put in for compassionit leave then."

It was best for us all that the pips went.

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YOUTH GROUPS IN DEBENHAM

"ARE YOUR CHILDREN BETWEEN 6 AND 26?"

If your children are between the ages of 6 and 26 you may want to know what activities are on offer in Debenham during their leisure time.

We have therefore, planned an evening for you to meet with the many leaders of all the local youth organisations so that you may discuss with them what they offer and what their aims are, and thereby alleviating any fears and concerns you parents may have about what it is they do and what their thoughts are on issues concerning their children.

The evening will be held at Sir Robert Hitcham's School, Debenham on Tuesday 14th February commencing at 8.00 p.m. and opportunity will be given during the evening for informal discussion, over a glass of wine or tea or coffee, with the leaders.

We are hopeful that many parents will identify a need for this evening and will accept this as an invitation to attend.

THE LEADERS OF YOUTH GROUPS IN DEBENHAM 6 - 26