

WARTIME MEMORIES OF BEING EVACUATED TO BROMPTON

Story and Pictures provided by by Pat Whitehead (now Pat Hunt)



Pat Whitehead at school in Brompton

From our garden in Sunderland I heard loud bangs which I thought were thunder, only to be told that it was gunfire. The Second World War had started. I was four years old, too young to understand or participate in all the subsequent upheaval. My brother's school was to be evacuated to Northallerton Grammar School so my parents rented out our house in Sunderland, my father took a small flat and my mother, brother and I came to live in Malpas terrace, opposite the present Church Hall.

Our neighbours were Mr and Mrs Baldrey who had a daughter called Bessie and a son who was in the army. We shared the back garden, wash-house and outdoor toilets. My friends were Mabel Appleby who lived up Corber Hill at Aston Villa bungalow

and Doreen Forth from Water End. Other names I recall were Beryl Alderson, Billy Thackray, Jimmy Randall (son of the policeman)



Beryl Todd, Mabel Appleby, Pat Whitehead and Beryl Alderson

I remember looking forward to starting school and I think I accompanied Isobel King on my first day. Miss Thornton, the gentle teacher of the infants

gave us a thorough grounding in reading. Later on there seemed to be a few extra teachers who did not stay long. They were probably awaiting call- up for active service. Then there was Miss Bendelow who was a determined lady - no shirking in her classroom. She played the piano enthusiastically and we stood in lines singing a collection of folk songs and on special occasions, patriotic ones. The tall, commanding presence of Miss Lamb, the Headteacher, allowed for no nonsense and we were all instructed in lots of things by rote. I can still remember learning the tributaries of the River Ouse; Swale, Ure, Nidd, Wharfe, Aire, Don, Calder. We learned to knit socks on four needles! You knitted one needle then waited for everyone else to catch up, then did the following needle. It took a long time to knit a sock so the soldiers would have had cold feet waiting for them. My least favourite time of the week was Sewing. Hemming was not my forte and I well recall having to stand in front of the class holding up my "naughty hemming". We had to make very uncomfortable garments from flour sacks donated from the Mill across the road. We learned to embroider on pieces of brown material about the size of a postcard and once the sewing had been approved we had to unpick every thread and wind it back on the reel for the next pupil.

We used slates in the infants class as paper was so scarce and then graduated to using paper later on. Every scrap was utilised and art work was almost non-existent. Gummed paper was used on all the panes of glass in the windows to reduce splintering in the event of bombing.



Pat's Birthday Party

Some of our classmates were evacuees who lived in Mrs. Eastoe's big house at the top of Corber Hill. I think they were from Tyneside. I stayed there for some weeks while my mother had an operation. Other newcomers were some 'fat' ladies from London - that is when we learned about pregnancy!

We had a communal pig in Diddy Thwaites' garden. I used to take the vegetable leaves and peelings in a bucket, going along the path by the Recreation Ground through the snicket. To help the war effort we picked rose

hips which were to be made into rose hip syrup for babies. We were sometimes allowed to pump the bellows in the forge near the school.

A regulation was to carry one's gas mask at all times. We kept our 'slate rags' in the boxes as well. At times, the gas masks had to be tested in a special caravan and I recall the fear and excitement in the infants when the big boys told us that not everyone survived the walk through the caravan. Miss Lamb dealt with our hysteria and then dealt with the big boys.

We had visits from the police or army to warn us of the dangers of butterfly bombs and Colorado beetles. We searched all over but did not find any. Occasionally we gathered round the back of a lorry to watch war films (maybe they were for recruitment drives) and there were parades in Northallerton for National/War Savings Weeks.



Pat and Brian Whitehead (a Bede boy)

Counting the aeroplanes out and in on their return; listening to the tolling 'death bell' and counting the number of tolls which told the age of the one who had died; agonising over the decision of spending the Saturday pennies and how to use the sweet coupons carefully and learning how not to lose the bread tokens on the way to the bread shop on the green staffed by Harrison Sunley - all of these became a normal way of life for the Duration. Going to Northallerton we passed the Italian Prisoner of War camp. There were many wounded airmen dressed in the hospital uniform of bright blue suit, white shirt and red tie.

As V.E. Day approached we were aware of excitement in the village. The church bells pealed, flags appeared in many buildings but some homes were not decorated as, sadly, they had lost someone whilst fighting the war. The children were given tiny flags to wave and had a half day holiday. One day at school we found a dried banana which was part of the celebrations. Not at all inspiring to look at and it tasted awful.

As the war ended so my time in Brompton drew to a close. In June 2005 I met Doreen Forth (now Newcombe) and Mabel Appleby (now Wilbor) for a happy day full of reminiscences and laughter.



Doreen Newcombe nee Forth & Pat Hunt nee Whitehead, re-united again



Mabel Wilbor nee Appleby and Pat happily re-united again in 2005

My parents were George and Audrey Whitehead and my brother, Brian, sat the School Certificate at Northallerton and moved back to Sunderland before the end of the war to study at Newcastle University. He then became a Bevan Boy and worked in the coalmines which was the alternative to serving in the army for a percentage of young men.

Pat Whitehead(now Hunt)