

School children were taken to Shotover House sometimes and given a tea by the late Mrs Miller, who built the Merry Bells. (All transport) used horses and carriages, or four-wheeled pony carriages in those days, and there were liveried servants to sit behind with folded arms. There were cart horses for farm work and lovely airs of horses for driving out. (Fox) Hunting has taken place through all the long years.

It was very exciting to see old caravans arriving for feasts and fairs 60 & 70 years ago, erecting stalls under the trees near The Alderman's House (*now College Farmhouse*) or sometimes on the path opposite the White Hart Club Room. They sold glittering china, rattles, dolls, wheel-barrows, sweets, gingerbread snaps etc. There were coconut shies, peepshows, and dancing booths with a local fiddler. A butcher used to come in from Oxford and cook sausages - the gas flames lit up the night. One amusement, which was called Sea on Land, made the older people feel sick. Once there were waxworks and a Wild Beast Show. Men used to come with dancing bears; and there was a music-man with five instruments all working at once: bells on a trumpet-shaped hat, a drum, cymbals, triangles etc. and there were carriers' carts, milk floats etc. - all now changed to motors. Many old pitchings have been taken up: women used to wear patterns for swilling down.

Many families kept pigs and cured their own bacon sixty years ago. People used to have a huge boiler, hung on a chain, over the fire in the hearth. They would cook a nice dinner all in one boiler.

Fifty years ago many families used to take their dinners to the bakehouses to be cooked on Sunday mornings. These were put in a divided tin with potatoes, batter pudding, and a joint on a stand. They were charged 2 pence to bake the dinners.

Men used to work 12 hours a day for under £1 a week.

Babies were wrapped in head flannels and they hardly saw any daylight, or taken into the fresh air for six weeks. Both boys and girls were dressed in frocks and petticoats. Many children wore Holland pinafores bound with red braid till they were six years old. Prams were made like wicker baskets on three iron wheels - really no comfort.

Fifty years ago ladies wore long dresses with wide sashes tied at the back with long bows which reached the hem of their dresses. They had deep lace collars & lace to fall over the back of their hands. Ladies did hand-embroidery & needlework most beautifully and all the garments were handmade. Nightcaps for ladies all had frills - and the men's nightcaps extended down the back with tassels. Most of the beds were four-post besteads with curtains all round to draw. No labour saving.

1. “.....Just the drains!”

It always seemed to happen on Fridays... Standard 2 classroom overlooked a large wall which backed on to cold and very basic old-fashioned toilets, reached along a muddy path outside. But what was actually contained within that wall by our classroom window was something of a mystery to we younger children. All we were aware of was of great activity taking place within the wall itself as the older boys under the strict eye of Mr. Key, the headmaster, directed them. As we sat at our desks our minds wandered as we watched the older boys through the classroom window as they clambered over some obstacle or other and appeared to be digging there. It was distracting and noisy and if our attention wandered in that direction for too long, we would be brought quickly back to earth again by the shout of our teacher or worse still, the crash of a ruler hitting the desk in front of us! Why this distraction always happened on Fridays remained a mystery and why the older boys were taken out of class to deal with it was never properly explained. These were the days before “targets” and “assessments” and the loss of an hour of so of Teaming’ time was not regarded as too serious a matter. What exactly required most of the Standard 6 boys to vacate their desks most weeks, so the boys told us, were ‘just the drains.’ However, at the time, the sight of those lads apparently digging, with heads and arms just visible over that inner wall, as viewed from Standard 2 classroom remained a mystery to the younger members of the school - that is until they reached Standard 6 and they too became participants in these mysterious activities and the digging started all over again !

2. 7th May 1945

We had just sat down for the afternoon class in one of the huts in the playground where Mrs. Chambers was preparing to take the girls for a sewing class. She had just started the lesson when the door opened and in walked, Mr. Key, the headmaster. Our murmurs were quickly silenced as he addressed us.

“There is talk of peace being declared and if this does happen, tomorrow will be a holiday!”

The murmuring started again but was swiftly silenced, “But of course, if this does not happen and peace is not declared, “you will come to school as usual.” He then withdrew to the main school building and left Mrs. Chambers to quieten us all down. Peace, of course, was declared and the Second World War was at an end at long last. In a state of great excitement, we related the events to our parents who obviously were well aware of the situation. School was closed the next day and the flags that had been hidden,

in lofts and attics for the past six years were suddenly brought out of their boxes. The metal arch by the playground steps at the front of the school was decorated with red, white and blue ribbon. Certainly a time to rejoice although it was difficult to imagine anything different from the way things had always been. Most of us in the sewing class that afternoon were barely eight years old.

3. Dancing the Maypole

Mrs. Chapman who had been at Wheatley Primary School for years and indeed had taught most of our parents there was the main teacher of maypole dancing. Although tradition usually demanded that such dancing took place on 1st May, maypole dancing at the school was usually performed on the last day of the summer term when the parents were invited along to watch and to probably reminisce. We practised endlessly beforehand. Mrs Chambers sometimes took over the instruction when Mrs. Chapman was not available and both aimed to include as many of her Standard 1 pupils (all about 7 years of age) as possible. There were about 8 pairs of dancers - eight girls and eight boys but in truth most of the class had the opportunity to practice their dancing skills. As far as I can remember, the teams in 1944 were as follows:-

Christine Tombs (Wheatley)	Margot &	Ronnie Morris (Wheatley)
Hinton (Wheatley)	Margaret	Derek Hildreth (Waterperry evacuee)
Wheeler (Wheatley)	Phyllis Day	Tony Bossom (Wheatley)
(Wheatley)	Gillian Knight	Peter Wakelin (Littleworth)
(Wheatley)	Jean Wilson (Wheatley evacuee)	Michael Crimmins (Littleworth evacuee)
		Myrtle Smith (Wheatley)

However, Mrs. Chapman was keen that as many children as possible of her Standard 1 class had the opportunity to join in and others whose names now escape me were eager participants. Names of the dances apart from the Barber's Pole I cannot remember but we were accompanied musically by means of an old wind-up gramophone and enthusiastic clapping. The boys did not take the dancing quite as seriously as the girls but nevertheless they were very competent on the day. We had no set 'uniform' for maypole dancing as this was wartime and clothing rations were a nightmare for parents with fast-growing children. Most of the girls wore light-coloured summer dresses and the boys were asked to wear light-coloured shorts but here again, it was not possible to be too rigid about clothing options. The overall effect was pleasing enough and it certainly allowed those children who had been evacuated a glimpse of a tradition which many otherwise would not have known.

The maypole itself was painted brown and was stored for most of the year by the back door leading off Standard One classroom. Its red, white and blue streamers were sewn to it by Mrs. Chapman and frayed ribbons needing

emergency repairs were usually tackled by Mrs. Chambers when necessary. The days of 'garlanding' of which my father was a participant at the school, sadly was no longer done.

4. 'Elevensies'

One of the great delights of going to the Church Road Primary School was the proximity of Dodd's the bakers just across the road from the school entrance. Each morning at 10.50. those who wanted to supplement their diet, were lined up in an orderly queue and waved safely across the road by the teacher on playground duty . They had a well-established pattern as we waited quietly. Dodd's sold two types of bun - Chelseas and Cream. One morning the boys were sold Chelseas and the next morning it was the turn of the girls to have them whilst the boys had the cream ones. At a penny a time, both sorts of buns were good value and there were no food coupons involved. Bread Units came a little later but so well organised were we that we were all back and across the road safely within a very short time where we completed our 'elevensies' with either our government sponsored 1/3 pint of milk or a drink at the fountain in the playground by the wall overlooking Church Road. The fountain was well-used and in the summer an orderly queue to make use of this facility was the norm. I think that it had been installed to commemorate one of the Royal Jubilee celebrations but of that I cannot be sure. Is the fountain still there, I wonder?

I enclose a copy of a couple of old school photos from family 'archives.' You may, if more convenient delete the names on the upper one. It was taken about 1914 I think when a school play was performed at the school. My father, William Tombs, was apparently 'The King of Poland' but the school had problems finding costumes. I understand that my grandmother's teacosy eventually became the perfect 'crown.' Even so, father had to sit at the back! The lower photo is more difficult to date and I cannot be more precise about the names of those in it. I suspect it could be older than the one above and could be possibly photos of my father's older sisters but of this I am uncertain. But its actual date might possibly be more accurately ascertained of course, by checking with church records re the Rev. Maurice Bell.

The 'Big School in Church Road' - remembered by Christine Jackson, nee Tombs
(Taken from her 'Diary of a Wheatley Family')

In 1943-4 I was ready to go to the 'Big School' in Church Road, and I was full of fears and anxieties. How would I manage? I had become used to Miss Wren's class with its cosy informality: Big School was going to be different.

Actually, it was not so different at first: I knew Mrs Chapman, the Standard One teacher. She had taught my father: indeed she had taught the parents of most of the children in the class! She always looked the same: her grey hair was sparse and covered in a grey hairnet with tiny curls poking out at the sides. She wore metal-rimmed spectacles with thick lenses - and she was married to Hurrill Chapman - a local builder and undertaker. Every morning I saw her on my way to school taking a short cut to Church Road through the allotments that used to back onto her house, Rosemary Cottage, in London Road. She nearly always wore the same clothes: two astrakhan coats (one white, one black) and these were worn, alternately, winter and summer alike, over a variety of indoor clothing. At first I thought they were knitted with an intricate twist stitch: I had not realised that animals grew wool like that!

Like Miss Wren in the Bell Lane School, Mrs Chapman had a high chair from which she conducted registration. She also had a high chair from which would read to us at the end of the day: it was from Mrs Chapman that I was first introduced to the Sherlock Holmes stories by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and the Just So stories by Rudyard Kipling - but I regarded the stories about Winnie-the-Pooh as babyish!

In Mrs Chapman's class I shared a double desk with a hinged lid and flap-up seat with my friend Margaret Wheeler. We were given exercise writing books with lines, and maths books with squared paper, with different coloured covers to distinguish the separate subjects. (There was a strange system in practice: when using the lined books we had to miss out every alternate line and, when we reached the end of the book, we had to turn the book upside down and use the lines in between, starting from the as a valuable commodity and waste of any kind was frowned upon. The squared arithmetic books were not so versatile: for daily mental arithmetic, tom up envelopes were slit and used: nothing, absolutely nothing, was wasted!

Our desks were equipped with ink wells and from time to time the ink monitor from an older class would go to each desk and pour a concoction of ink and water from an earthenware cider-jug complete with cork and rubber bung. This ink had to last a considerable time. We were given pencils, and later pens. We were allowed new pen-nibs occasionally - once we had been taught how to use them properly. We had to take great care of the nibs lest they became twisted and refused to write. Most pens 'bit the dust', literally, when the contents of the inkwells began to dry up and the sediment at the bottom thickened and caught in the nib. New blotting paper was given out at the beginning of term and this was expected to last. It did not, of course, blotting paper dipped in ink was the perfect missile and could be launched from a well-angled ruler! The boys were particularly good at this 'sport'!

Our school day at Church Road began with a hymn and a prayer led by Mr Key, the Headmaster. As there was no large assembly room, all the doors of the classrooms were opened and he would wander from one door to the other during the service, his voice ranging from a whisper at the furthest point from Standard One to a bellow when he was actually speaking from the door leading to our room. The system worked well enough. Apart from prayers in the morning, there was 'grace' at lunchtime when once more the doors to all the classrooms were

flung open so that we could hear Mr Key's voice. This ritual was repeated at 3.30 pm when we were dismissed to our homes following a closing prayer.

Mr Key seemed an aloof character and better kept at a distance: I was always a little frightened of him. He taught the older children in Standard Six. He was also responsible for a number of bizarre punishments which, even at seven years of age, I found a little disconcerting and rather odd. At the end of each playtime he would come out into the playground where the area next to the churchyard was for the boys, and the rest of the area for the girls. On entering the playground to announce the end of playtime a whistle would blast out and everyone - and I mean everyone - would stand stock still and woe betide any child who dared move! A silence then settled on the playground and he could be heard moving among the boys and talking to them - although we couldn't catch exactly what was said. The period of silence following the first whistle was absolute and would be followed by a second blast which meant that we were all to line up in front of the school steps in class order ready for filing into our classrooms. If by any chance a noise was heard between the two whistle-blasts he would institute a number of bizarre punishments: one of his favourites was to line up a class and then, in single file, make each individual walk heel-to-toe around the perimeter of the playground, holding their tongue at the same time! I was never quite sure what result this was supposed to produce! He had been known to enforce this punishment on a whole class of children walking out in the street - usually between Church Road and the Merry Bells - where Standards Four and Five had their lessons. This particular form of 'correction' was never imposed on me beyond the Church Road school entrance although I was forced to undergo the heel-toe tongue punishment in the school playground once when someone in the playground circle around me spoke just after the first whistle had gone!

Another favoured punishment for boys and girls alike, was to force miscreants to walk around the playground with their hands on their heads! Such a punishment, had I had to undergo it for any length of time, would have sent me into a giddy faint. Fortunately for me, it did not happen. Corporal punishment was accepted as a normal part of school routine and, for emphasis, a swishy cane was kept prominently at the side of his desk and was used on the boys with some frequency.

One aspect of Mr Key's 'discipline' which I found totally degrading, was the fact that toilet paper was not allowed in the toilets; Should such a commodity ever be necessary, a roll was kept on his desk and this would be handed out, a sheet at a time! Even as a child, I failed to understand why a Headmaster needed to waste precious time dealing with such menial tasks. He was not cruel in the accepted sense of the word, but some of his actions toward the more sensitive children were difficult to understand. He was a strict disciplinarian and seemed to be highly respected by the parents - although it is well to remember that this was the 1940's a time when people tended to accept situations without too many questions being asked. To have done so would have been on a par with lack of patriotism. The 'glass ceiling' syndrome was not the invention of the twenty-first century, it was well and truly in force sixty years beforehand when aspirations and ambitions were not encouraged among the 'lower orders'

Monday, 03 April 2017

Mr. G. Moms, Mayday
Committee, The Parish Office,
The Merry Bells, 89 High Street,
Wheatley OX33 1XP

Dear Mr. Morris,

Mayday Celebrations

With regard to the Mayday celebrations, as per the April-May Wheatley Newsletter, you mentioned that there was no maypole dancing in the late 19th or early 20th centuries in Wheatley. This seems to be at odds with local hearsay. My father (D.O.B 1907) certainly spoke of garlanding and of the maypole dancing. He had been taught by Mrs. Hurrell Chapman when Mr. Leyshon was headmaster there.

In the mid 1940's, under the headship of Mr. Key, Mrs. Chapman had come out of retirement (presumably because of wartime staff shortages) She taught the 7 & 8 years olds from the junior class at the Wheatley 'Big School' in Church Road, to dance the maypole. The maypole was stored at the back entrance of the school and brought out during the summer term when Standard One class (her class) were paired up for dancing. Several of the pairs were evacuees who had no idea what maypole dancing was like! We practised the dancing with Mrs. Chapman who provided the background music with a wind-up gramophone, 'la-lahing' and hand clapping. It really was fun. I do not remember whether the dancing was actually performed on 1st May but it was certainly performed on the last school day of the summer term when many parents came along to watch. The maypole was then returned to the school's back entrance porch where it gathered dust till the next year!

Later, Standard 4 and Standard 5 (9/10 and 10/11 year olds) were taught country dancing in their their main classroom at the Merry Bells by Mrs. Chambers (again I suspect brought back from retirement) We did something called "Gathering Peascods" and other folk dances - again to a rather elderly wind-up gramophone and then around 1947 we were taken to a folk dance festival at Bury Knowle Park in Headington where the Headington Quarry Morris dancers performed. Things were getting back to 'normal' - or so it seemed!

I hope this information will be of some use.

Yours sincerely,



(Christine Jackson)

OLD SOLDIERS

Archie and Emily Harding were our elderly neighbours when we were children and were living at “Milne Cottage.” They had known us all our lives and always stopped and chatted to us whenever they saw us.

“Well, what have they learned ‘ee at school to-day?” was Archie’s usual opening sentence as we skipped down the path that linked up our two gardens.

He shuffled painfully along the garden path, dragging one of his legs as he went. In one’s early years, one lacks sensitivity in dealing with this sort of situation and Rachel and I were no exception. We watched his unusual shuffle and copying his ‘waddle’ we would shuffle along behind him. Dad used to watch us from the back door of “Milne Cottage” and constantly chided us over what he considered to be our cold and unfeeling actions.

“If I catch you kids again copying old Archie and imitating his shuffle - you won’t be able to sit down again for a week!” he said. “Archie was at Passchendaele in the First War and spent most of his time in water-filled trenches. He had one hell of a time there on the battlefield and this shuffle of his is the result of being condemned to weeks at a time of just standing in water.”

We listened and bore his words in mind - that is until the next time! On reflection, I am sure that old Archie was aware that we copied his walk but he never ever complained to our parents.

“Well, have they learned ‘ee to read and write yet?” he would say, as I ventured down the garden again after school. “It’s important you can read and write.”

I told him that I enjoyed reading and spoke of my Enid Blyton “Sunny Stories” recently given to me by schoolfriends. He seemed genuinely interested in our school progress. Occasionally, his pigs in the sty that edged onto our path, would put their front legs on the adjoining wall and snort and snuffle at us as we passed by. They were smelly animals and had wet, smelly snouts and yellowed teeth. Nevertheless, we chatted to them and watched them as they lumbered along afterwards to their food trough.

Archie and Emily Harding and my parents got along well and Archie’s anxiety over my school progress was apparently because he had seen at first hand what effect illiteracy can have on one’s life. Archie was no scholar: he spoke with a broad Oxfordshire accent and his humour was unsophisticated but he could certainly read and write. He told us that when serving in Belgium during World War 1, he found himself fighting alongside Russian soldiers from Europe’s eastern border. He was genuinely shaken to find that any communication with them was difficult. Apparently, they were ill-equipped for the job in hand. Clothing and footwear was totally inadequate for the Passchendaele campaign and general fighting conditions but what shook him more than anything else was the total ignorance of the Russian contingent. He was horrified to learn from one of the few ‘enlightened’ Russian soldiers that few of them had any idea where they were! Most thought that they were still ‘somewhere in Russia’! Most had never travelled outside their own small communities before but what really shook him was when he learnt that most could neither read nor write. It horrified him that they had no way of communicating with their families back in Russia. It brought home to him quite forcibly that they were quite literally the original ‘cannon fodder’. Hence his concern when chatting to us

that I must learn to read and write. Talking to Archie was better than any formal history lesson.

Tom Ray was one of the sons of Granny Tombs's sister, Sarah. Sarah had died many years ago when Tom was a young lad. Granny had brought him up together with her own young family when they all shared one of the flats at the Manor House, Wheatley in the early part of the 20th century. When Tom enlisted in the Army as a First World War recruit, he gave Granny's name as his next-of-kin. His home leave was always spent at her home in Wheatley.

I remember him always as an 'old man' - always with a flat cap, a very wrinkled face with one of his eyes permanently blood-shot and one of his arms permanently bent at an angle. In his later years, Tom was Landlord at "The Bull" in Great Milton, Oxfordshire. He was a chatty man and talked happily of bygone times with 'Aunt Kez's family.'

I was always intrigued to learn that Uncle Tom's First World War experiences did not cease at the '11th hour and in the 11th month' as everyone else's had. His had continued for several days after that. He was already working out ideas for his eventual return to Wheatley when quite unexpectedly he was shot by a sniper - sometime after the official Armistice came into effect. But worse was to come - he was taken to a German doctor to have his wound examined and to have his injured arm examined and set. But feelings were still running high as Tom's arm was certainly 'set' but wrongly set by a doctor with old scores to settle. Sadly, Tom's arm remained a problem till the end of his life and yet he remained a happy and well-liked man to the end of his days. Any form of bitterness remained totally alien to his nature. He was a true Christian although I never remember him ever going to church.

CLASS WARFARE AND THE GENEVA CONVENTION.

We always enjoyed our walks to Holton at any time of the year. It was quiet in those days - few cars and fewer still motor-cycles. We usually went in the afternoons when there were not many people about and before the schoolbus off-loaded the children from 'The Big School' in Church Road, Wheatley. As far as I understood from Granny, most of the children who now lived in the small cottages and farms around the area were evacuees from London. The School bus used to go to Waterperry and Worminghall and then to Holton every morning and those children who missed the bus had no choice but to walk the three or four miles to school. In the event, there were few walkers!

In 1941, the countryside was a new world to some of the new residents there. Granny and I would amble along as we divided our walk into stages. The Waterperry Road stroll from Wheatley had its first stage that ended by the first oak tree on the left hand side of the road. Acorns that fell in the autumn were gathered up in a large carrier bag and eventually taken home to be given to a neighbour's pigs. Granny supervised as I scrambled down into the ditch to retrieve those that had missed the path. The wild arum had to be avoided at all costs as they were poisonous and the dangers of eating berries that abounded in the hedge there, were also a 'no-no'. Ring's farm on the bend of the road was the second stage of our walk as we turned at the fork of the road and headed towards Holton and the duck pond.

The duck pond was a child's dream and was almost next to Holton Church. It belonged to Mr. Hoddinot whose house was on the same side of the road as the duck pond but whose farm was on the opposite side of the road. The duck pond itself was our usual destination unless we had previously arranged to go into Holton itself and meet up with relatives. I would carefully take out of the carrier bag a smaller paper bag full of dried bread with which I would 'help' feed the ducks or rather I would direct my grandmother to feed the ducks. She knew I liked looking at them but that even at that early age, I hated them to approach me as I had a phobia about feathers. She never gave up on her quest to 'cure' me of that fear but sadly never succeeded. I would watch as they quacked and headed for the bread as I stood and watched from a small bank at the edge of the fence at the site of the duck pond.

It was from here that I watched as usually the only 'vehicles' of the afternoon would round the bend of the road and cross over the duck path from the farm. The cyclists would then turn into the path that led to the vicarage on the other side of the road and then instead of going into the vicarage, would make for the white gateway nearby and disappear up the drive there. I knew from the dark brown uniforms that the cyclists wore that they were Rumanian prisoners of war. They had POW printed on their backs.

"What are they doing there?" I would ask Granny.

"They are doing Mr. Tilja's garden," Granny would reply.

Even at that early age, the situation behind the stone wall of the big house there used to interest me. The stone wall at the side of the road hid the house within but apart from the barbed wire over the top of the high, white gate, there was nothing else to distinguish the place from any other country house of the neighbourhood. Mr. Tilja was known by all the villagers and was well regarded. I was told that he was a 'gentleman.' The local tradesmen knew him and he must have been one of the last 'gentlemen' to be acknowledged by the touched forelock. But to a young child, the vibes that surrounded him were mysterious ones. If he could command Rumanian prisoners of war to 'do' his garden, I could not understand why other people were not privileged in the same way! Each time, Granny and I did our Holton trip, the Rumanian bicycles with riders aloft, would tear along the road and disappear up the drive to the house. There were other people as well who would appear in the village and shop there. A Mrs.

Florescu, in particular, interested me. She had friends in Wheatley and occasionally would come to father's shop for items that presumably she was unable to purchase elsewhere. I imagined that Mr. Cane who had Holton Stores situated near the village school there had similar visits by such visitors. Many of them with unpronounceable names. Again, her social status was way ahead of ours! According to the villagers, she was a 'lady.' The class system was alive and kicking in the 1940's and completely accepted by everyone.

But it was the Tilja household in Holton that intrigued me as perhaps I was a very curious and persistently nosy little girl! Most foreigners were regarded with some suspicion but Mr. Tilja was regarded in the village as 'one of us' and was respected.

It was not till many years later that my curiosity was satisfied. Mr. Tilja, apparently, had been the Rumanian ambassador in London up till the outbreak of the Second World War when he was recalled to Bucharest when the Rumanian Government went over to the side of Germany and Hitler. Apparently, he had refused to return home. He spent the rest of the war at his house in Holton with what became 'the Rumanian Government in exile.'

I often wondered many years later whether German agents ever guessed where the 'alternative' Rumanian Government resided. Holton was the perfect place. It had no transport system - no public transport at all and the house behind the wall would never have been noticed by an outsider. The villagers were canny enough not to ask too many questions and as far as I knew, there were no specific indicators that anyone special lived there - no guards on the gate - just barbed wire on top of the large white gate outside. It was the perfect spot.

My amused query, in retrospect, was whether the Geneva Convention had somehow been contravened by the Commandant at the Shotover Prisoner of War camp by arranging to send so many Rumanian prisoners of war to tend the garden at Holton of someone who to them had been the head of an alternative government. The villagers regarded him as 'one of us.' Those wartime 'gardeners' there must have had their doubts.

Where Ignorance is Bliss.....!

No one in the village knew or if they did ever talked about the various comings and goings there. There were strangers everywhere but this was accepted as normal for a village like Wheatley in the early 1940's. The local nursery school took in many evacuees and a fair number of village children of which I was one. Later on, of course, the Bell Lane school accepted many more and the Church Road school took in other evacuees settled in the outlying villages - Holton, Waterperry and Worminghall, all of whom were collected by coach each day and brought to school. There were few private cars as petrol was for emergency vehicles only - the only exception of which I was aware was the car of our local doctor - Dr Orchard. Anyone who missed the coach then had a four mile walk to school. The only exception was that of a member of a family from Holton. One of the boys had a distinct dislike of school or seemed to and this was 'cured' by his mother who followed him along the road from Holton wielding a springy stick! It seemed to work wonders as far as the school attendance register was concerned! This was, of course, before the days of the child 'experts' and parenting classes! School attendance was a very serious matter indeed.

Mrs. Jinnie Hall, the landlady at the "King's Arms" public house in Wheatley had seen it all. Archie Harding, our neighbour, and King's Arm patron, said that many airmen from the Worminghall airfield used to ease their concerns at the King's Arms from where we all knew that if any of them had had 'difficulties' whilst on flying missions, the first thing that happened on their return to Worminghall, was to be sent back to flying duties immediately to 'recapture their nerve.' Most of the villagers had a great deal to say about what they considered to be barbaric treatment but such opinions did not count for anything in a society where patriotism counted for everything and keeping personal opinions to oneself was accepted in what was then a strictly classified village society. Patrons of the "The King and Queen" in Wheatley High Street expressed similar views but like Jinnie Hall, Bernard Perkins, the Landlord there, listened to all opinions and said nothing. Indeed, as a family, we had little to do with either establishment as father was almost a teetotaller and our only contact had been through the family dog, Snooker, who had been introduced to "The Kings Arms" by a visiting relative some time ago and who regularly turned to go into the place each day when passing! Jinnie Hall kept a special drinking bowl for the animal and allowed him a free beer on a regular basis! Snooker never forgot!

It was many years later that it was revealed that Woodeaton Manor, a large house in one of the outlying villages, was named as the B.B.C's 'Tittle place in the country' for their national daily broadcasts to wartime Britain but not one of our acquaintances and certainly no one at "The King's Arms" had any idea that history was being made in their midst and I suspect that "The King and Queen" patrons had little idea either. Woodeaton Manor kept its secret from the locals till well after the War when girls from Thame Grammar School shared the Manor for a few months with the B.B.C. before moving to Holton Park in 1947/8. My father spoke of an air-raid at Noke nearby and mentioned a villager who had left a light on the stairs on view with fatal results one evening when a bomb dropped in the vicinity. But here again, the feeling was that the bomb must have been a 'stray'. Villagers on the whole never bothered to question such incidents. These were not times when such enlightenment was encouraged. Awkward questions were frequently evaded by reminding villagers of their 'patriotic duty.' Most people accepted this, no doubt, to the relief of the powers-that-be. Advertising hoardings reminded people that 'Careless talk cost lives' and it seemed to work. Those in charge of the local hostelrys were in a privileged position. They listened to all opinions and kept quiet. Woodeaton Manor kept its secret from the locals till well after the War. One can only surmise that German intelligence was far more 'clued up' than anyone in authority here ever gave them credit for. It would indeed, have been an almighty 'coup' for the enemy had they been able to eliminate the main broadcasting system on which Britain depended for its wartime information. It cannot have been sheer coincidence that local villages nearby were targeted at the time.