

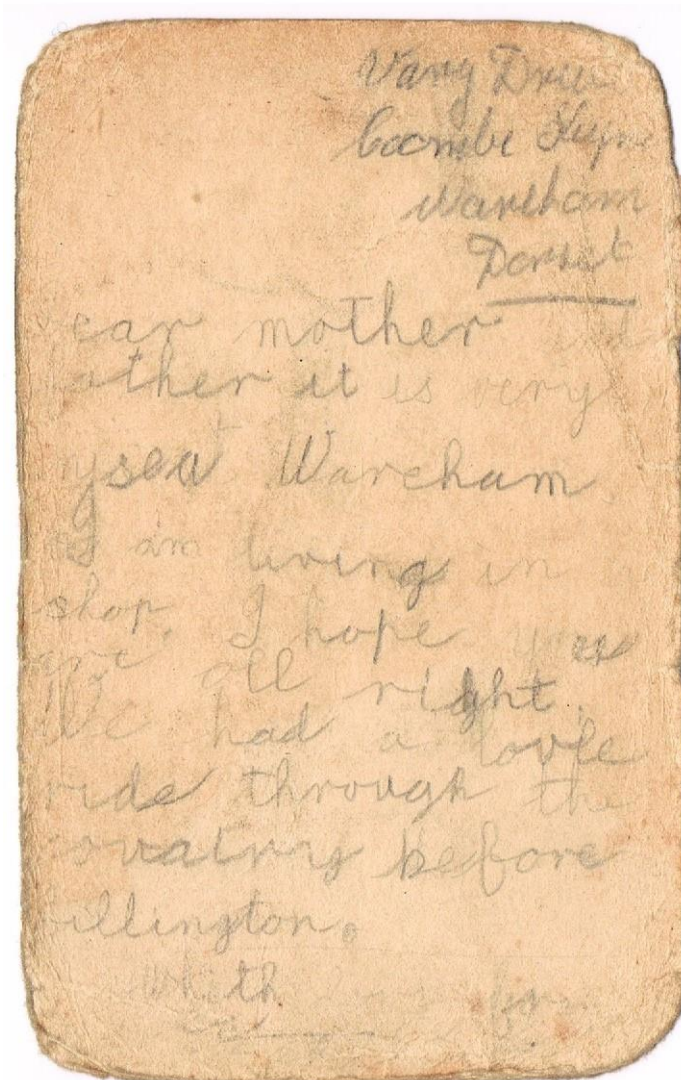
Mums memories as a 1940 evacuee to Coombe Keynes, Dorset

Photo of mum, **Gwendoline Wilkinson**, aged 9.



Postcard sent home 27/7/40 from Coombe Keynes in Dorset. This is a pre-paid postage card with a King George V stamp from around 1936, so presumably the post office kept an older stock!





It says, we think,

“Dear mother and father. It is very (?) by sea. Wareham. I am living in a shop. I hope you are all right. We had a lovely ride through the country before ? Illington? With love from Gwen.

The original is actually in pencil and is now very faint in parts.

Mum has written down her memories of that time – she has sketchy memories now however, and doesn't remember the school at all (names & faces have gone). Anyway, I hope these are of interest to the village history archives and for future residents.

My memories.

I was evacuated from my home in Woolston, Southampton around early summer 1940 because the Luftwaffe was bombing our area due to aircraft (Spitfires) and ships being built there for the war effort. I was 9 years old and although I didn't fully understand the war I realised things had changed dramatically. It was quite a traumatic thing to be suddenly taken away from my family. My mother was expecting (my younger sister) at the time and also had my two younger brothers to look after (one around 4yrs old and another of around 1yr). My father was manager of the Solent Shipyard at

Sarisbury, east of Southampton on the river Hamble, and was employed on vital war work specifically building motor torpedo boats [MTB's].

I remember being picked up one day by a bus/coach and, with many other children from the area, driven down to Dorset to stay in allocated homes in the county. I was taken to a family living in Vary Drive, Coombe Keynes. The house was much smaller than I had been used to and the area, being in the country, was very different and very quiet.

I remember missing my family very much especially early on until I had become acclimatised. Mr and Mrs Brown owned the post office & shop in Vary Drive where I was now living, and I remember having rabbit very often for dinner (presumably caught by Mr Brown?). The house seemed to be on higher ground as I recall a good view across the village & fields. There was a counter in the shop with groceries/sundries also being sold. Every week I was given a sweet 'ration' which I could choose – however I ate these all in one go rather than having some each day!

I did think Mr Brown was a 'thatcher' but can't be sure.

Often I would see masses of German planes flying overhead and wondering where they were headed, and still remember the throbbing drone of the engines and just how many there were. They could have been going up to the Midlands I suppose (from France) on bombing raids, or over to the west country ports?

Every week I would sing in the church choir and recall being praised for finding the hymn number so quickly! Also, I remember getting a bus and going to the pictures on occasion. My assumption this was in Wool but I think it could have been in Bovington.

The local school was in Wool but I can't really remember much about it now (or of any other evacuees), although I think we got a bus there every day. It was just a wooden hut and was specifically for the evacuees.

A local farmer allowed me to visit and feed the chickens and collect the eggs. One time I was shown how to milk a cow but just as I was getting the hang of it the cow moved, kicked over the bucket and stood on my thumb! This hurt, so I was taken back and tended to by Mrs Brown. Thankfully no harm done!

We often walked over to Lulworth Castle where I remember seeing peacocks for the first time. The countryside was very peaceful and beautiful. The summer of 1940 was long and warm with endless blue skies – of course the 'battle of Britain' was raging at the time although I had no understanding of this.

Mum and dad came to visit me around August or September 1940. They eventually came back to pick me up and take me back to Southampton in the spring of 1941. They had in fact moved to Locks Heath (an area between Southampton and Portsmouth) as it was deemed to be 'safer', and was also closer to dad's work. Much of the Woolston area in Southampton had been heavily bombed (*in fact most of the Spitfire production was secretly moved to other areas around the city environs and up to Salisbury*).

Mum visited Coombe Keynes and the church on **31st March 2019**. It seemed very different to her although the church was instantly recognisable, including the place where the choir sat! Mum is now 87 years old. [NB: The house in Vary Drive is no longer there being replaced by "The Old Post Office" a modern building in the 1980s]

Mike Rickeard. April 2019

