

A SUFFOLK MAWTHER'S CHILDHOOD

1929-1945

In this extract Mrs Viv Mason (nee Jones) moves on to the war years and

THE COMING OF THE EVACUEES

The final outcome of Father's handiwork was a deep, wood-lined and heavily shored-up air-raid shelter. A blast wall was made from a vast oil drum, filled with soil and placed in front of the entrance. There was just enough room to squeeze through to take cover! On top of the shelter was a thick layer of soil, and handfulls of poppy seeds were thrown over that. "Poppies" I croaked, "Everyone will see our shelter for miles."

Father signed on to become a full-time Special Policeman in the event of hostilities breaking out and a steady stream of air-raid shelter enthusiasts trampled over our lawn.

I helped get the harvest in again and went to three farms to churn for the Youngmans, Goslings and Turners. I'd turn the handle, watch the little peep-hole with its glass window to see when the contents were "ready", then stop and summon help for the next stage.

In our garden were two laburnum trees, one straight and tall, the other a short wishbone. I used to sit in the wishbone and cogitate by the hour where I could not be seen from the house and galvanised into some action or other. The weather was perfect. I was at peace with the world. One day I heard a car engine and stood in the wishbone to get a better view. It was Father in the Armstrong Siddeley. In blue uniform. He had left home in the morning, a haulage contractor and returned in the afternoon a policeman! War had been declared.

The next few weeks were hectic. Mother said she thought

2) she could continue to run the haulage side of the business. The Armstrong Siddeley was put up on chocks for the duration and Father said, "See what happens when I buy her a new set of tyres?"

There was a sudden increase in the interest shown in the air-raid shelter, though some farmers said they'd "Hull themselves into a ditch if Jerry cum." Mr Youngman had a brainwave. He had a large stack of straw near his house. It was tunnelled into and then the interior opened up into a square room. It had a lovely smell and I was to spend quite a few hours in that unique shelter later on in the war.

"Absolutely shrapnel proof" its proud owner said.

"What about incendiaries?" someone asked.

"Oh! They'll just bounce off."

What confidence we all had in those early days?

Then Mr Youngman arrived and announced that he and Mother were the Billeting Officers for the village, 48 kids were due to arrive at the ^{Village} school (which normally housed the 20 inter-related children) and an unknown number of 'Pink Labels' were coming too! "Pink Labels?" queried Mother. "Yes" said her fellow B.O. "They are expectant mothers and will be wearing pink labels on their coats."

Two coaches stopped by the school's spiked railings and disgorged a motley throng. Bringing up the rear were the pink labels, some with toddlers in tow, and all around shrill East End voices fell unpleasantly on our Suffolk ears. A list had been drawn up of farm houses willing to have evacuees.

"Poor little owd things... in't right being taken from their hooms - poor little owd things." Mother and Mr Youngman were delighted with the success they had achieved and reckoned that within two hours the two coach loads would be safely placed in their new surroundings. Little did they know what was in store.

The children were uncontrollable. The mothers-to-be were cross after their journey from "The Smoke" and, in

of tea and sympathy being dispensed by many willing villagers, the newcomers did nothing to endear themselves. The Joneses had four allocated to them, females and about 12 years old. Within 24 hours we had ten. The extra six had been foisted onto us by irate farmers and wives... "We don't have 'them fook' in our house... They in't even house-trained."

"Rather have my owd hosses indoors than that mucky lot." The list of complaints was unending. More and more evacuees were crowded into Thorpe Hall and the two billiting officers were getting crowded out of their own homes.

Having asked Mrs Friend to keep a eye on our lot, my Mother toured the area on her bike trying to calm down frayed tempers on all sides. "Give them a day or two to settle in and I'm sure they will be all right" she pleaded with those who had unwittingly taken 'monsters' into their homes. Talking to the evacuees seemed a thankless task. They fired questions at her as to the nearest fish and chip shop, cinema, bus, pub etc. Both B.O.'s were playing for time in which to scratch their heads and have a think.

The locals put all the blame on them for the invasion of 'furriners' and, when they wanted to offload their unwanted guests, our house and Thorpe Hall just had to take them.

That night several people were scratching their heads. Our lot had lice, and no doubt we would get them too!

FRIENDSHIP CLUB

Father Christmas managed to fit in a visit to the Club in December. We thank him for sparing the time, and for bringing so many gifts with him.

Next meeting on Wednesday, January 11th. 2.30 p.m. at Coopersfield.