



Evacuees from Bow, London.

Taken 1940 at Weald Manor, Bampton

Oxon

Leslie Tucker is on the left of the photo

↑
Just behind
the
arr

next to him is Kenny Howe.

They lived together in New Road with
Mr + Mrs Whitting.

From: Shirley Boyce,

Tunbridge Wells.

War memories in Bampton, Oxfordshire.

Dear Jenny Chaundry,

I was only five -six years old, when we stayed for about sixteen months, so memories, although very clear in my mind, may be wrong in detail. I am sure we stayed with Mrs Nibs, (is that spelt correctly?) We met the present house keeper there who explained that several of the larger the rooms have been sub-divided since then. Please feel free to use, or not, any of these memories as you wish.

Our family lived in Hayes, Kent, consisting of Father, who worked in the Ministry of Transport in London, Mother and us two girls. War was declared on 2nd September 1939.

On September 11th 1940, my young sister celebrated her third birthday. The small party was interrupted by the siren, the birthday cake, carried into the air-raid shelter and the candles relit. We were used to hearing the siren and a few buildings around us had been bombed. However the following Sunday, September 15th, enemy bombs hit the railway station, The New Inn and several homes and shops, only five minutes' walk away.

My parents grew anxious and three days later, Granny, and her older sister Auntie Flo, took Pat and me on the train to Bampton, to stay with a friend, of a friend, Mrs Nibs, at the Manor House. Father drove Mother and ten day old Christopher down to join us ten days later. We had a long downstairs room, on the right of the front door the length of the house, with a door on to the garden. Christopher's pram stood outside there most days. A pump over the kitchen sink gave us water for drinking, cooking and washing. When it ran dry, a girl was paid to bring us two buckets of water a day. There was a gas stove for cooking and, I think, for heating up an iron. Mother spoilt several garments when the iron was too hot! The loo was outside, complete with spiders, but we children usually used a convenient "potty". We had two bedrooms, one for Granny and Auntie Flo. The other one was for all of us.

I went to a small school very near my home in Hayes. Upon arriving in Bampton, I was eager to go to school, so I was sent to a tiny private one in the village. I can't remember the teacher's name but she had about ten pupils aged five to twelve. We sat at a long line of desks, the youngest to the eldest, the desks and the children growing in size! Our reading book, the Bible, an old very large black volume, was passed along the row and then the eldest girl carried it carefully back to me at the beginning of the line. I was passed over, to my great indignation, as being too young to read. I said, "I can read. I want a turn please." I soon proved that I could read and struggled along with Genesis.

My only other memory of school, is tracing and painting two butterflies, one red and the other green. When measles struck, Pat and I were confined to bed. The light hurt my eyes and we lay there with the curtains drawn. An elderly Doctor came to see us and prescribed a yellow mixture, which I refused to swallow. I then had some red liquid and was told that Pat got better more quickly because she took her medicine without a fuss. One day someone delivered an envelope from school. Mother started to open it. I was frantic. "Don't look, Don't look", I cried, "they are Christmas Presents!" Eventually Mother discovered that the butterflies, now beautifully transformed into calendars with red and green ribbons, really were meant to be presents and she pretended that she had not seen what was inside. I didn't return to school after the illness but was taught by Auntie Flo., who had been a headmistress in Lewisham before she retired. I can still remember the interesting reading book that she bought, full of different characters, including a story from the Water Babies, all illustrated in colour.

We made our own entertainment. We had colouring books, our dolls, for whom Granny made clothes from time to time and I even tried my hand at knitting. We could play in the garden and one day Mrs. Nibs took us to feed her flock of geese. The whole flock came rushing towards us, cackling loudly and we were both a bit frightened. At Christmas, I had a tricycle and I think Pat had a dolls' pram. Christopher slept outside the door of our room, in the garden, even on one occasion when it was snowing. There was another lodger in the house, whom we rarely saw, but

who told my mother that the baby would get too cold. Christopher survived without any problems, well tucked up under plenty of woollen blankets. He was baptised in Bampton Church.

It was quite cold in the house too. Girls did not wear trousers in those days, so Mother sewed suspenders on my Liberty bodice and bought me long woolly stockings.

Two buses went to Oxford each week and three went to Witney (or the other way round). Mother occasionally went to one or the other and would buy me a book of Rupert stories. They were not the colourful pictures in today's editions, but had bright yellow hard backs, with black print and illustrations inside.

We walked up to the local shops where the Baker sold freshly made bread and sometimes we bought lardy cakes for a treat at weekends. The very kind Butcher at the time made a fuss of Pat, she disliked being the centre of attention, so hid behind Mother's skirts and refused to talk to him.

Father was still living in Hayes but had to fire watch on the roof of his Ministry building two or three nights a week and put out small fires with a stirrup pump. He came down to see us very infrequently, as petrol was rationed. Birthdays and Christmases came and went. Mother and Granny stretched the food rations as best they could and we never went hungry. We had many milk puddings, macaroni, rice, semolina and junket, which I liked, except for the skin! One day I shoved my plate of rice away and said, "I can't eat this, it's awful" There was a shocked silence and the Mother said, "There are children in Germany starving, they would love it". "Then they can have it," I retorted. This was greeted with a horrified silence which I found embarrassing. It was a lesson I had to learn and I don't think I grumbled again. We didn't remember oranges or bananas which were unobtainable, but enjoyed local fruit in season. I think most of our sweet coupons were spent on sugar, which could be used on our ration books, as an alternative to sweeten blackberries or apples or to make jam.

In January 1941, Mother took Christopher back home for a few days, as there had been less bombing. While she was there Granny's sister died, unexpectedly. I was full of questions about how the angels collected her! Death, war and other sad subjects were not talked about within children's hearing in those days. I don't know where Auntie was buried. We all went home soon after, perhaps for the funeral, I don't know.

Thank you very much for talking to us when we visited the exhibition, last month. It was kind of you to come along.

I am presuming that your interest is confined to Bampton and you are not collecting details about our time probably in 1942 when we returned to Aston for a few months in the summer/ autumn. If a few reminiscences from there would interest you, please let me know.

With best wishes for your memoirs, yours sincerely,

Shirley Boyce.

*Shirley Boyce née Armstrong
Granny's surname was Tringham*

Second letter

Dear Jenny,

I am so sorry that this has been so long coming. Retirement isn't as time freeing as I thought. Thank you for your card and photo. I don't recognise anyone, myself, but I posted it to my sister today to examine it -was it taken at Bampton or Aston? I am not sure that the remainder of my memories will be of interest to you. However here they are.

We returned to Oxfordshire in the summer of 1943, when the bombing in Kent worsened again.

Mrs. Nibs had taken in other lodgers by then but somehow we were found a cottage in Aston, which my brother thinks was called Honeysuckle Cottage. It backed on to the maternity yard of a farm, so we could hear the cows mooing often. Mother discouraged us from looking out of the bedroom window, as birth, and what happened, was not talked about! Needless to say my brother tried to see what was going on! How life has changed! Today we encourage children to watch nature and visit farms, to ask questions and take a natural interest.

Granny had stayed at home this time to make sure Father was looked after(?). My Mother's brother was doing ambulance work (in Africa I think) so Auntie Marjorie and 4 year old David came too. Somehow we all packed in: Mother, Auntie, me aged 7, Pat aged 3/4, Christopher aged 2+ and David aged 4 years. Pat remembers going to school after the bell rang out across the village each morning.

In the summer holidays we went for walks, one I particularly remember was walking along a straight country lane, when a car raced past and frightened the adults. Of course there were few cars on the roads and the car was totally unexpected. We walked to a stream, where we paddled and tried to catch tiny fish. Another friend of Mother came to stay in the village for a short time with her baby girl. They stayed with two elderly ladies. We used to go up to the fields on the opposite side of the road to watch the animals, including pigs. There were other refugees in the village, I remember because they couldn't name the animals, not having seen cows etc..

Christopher remembers the Lord of the Manor riding on a large horse through the village. Pat remembers a parachutist coming down in a field of rape(?) when the adults panicked as to whether he was English or German.

While we were at home in 1942, I had started going to Bromley High School, G.P.D.S.T. So as there was a system that children being moved around in the war could attend the nearest School, I went to Oxford High, where I was billeted out with Mr. and Mrs. Swain and their two children, a sixteen year old girl, called Priscilla, who went to the High and a fourteen year old boy, whose name I can't remember, who went to the Dragon School.

They had another refugee girl, Susan, staying and we shared a bedroom, she was older than me but in the same class and resented my intrusion. On the whole we jogged along happily and ignored each other. One night though, she said scornfully something like, "Your Daddy isn't brave like my Daddy. He is fighting for our country, not staying safe like my daddy." To which I retorted, "My daddy has to do fire duty on top of the roofs in London. That is very dangerous and he has to put fires out!"

Priscilla and her brother used to go swimming in the river sometimes in the evenings and they took me with them and left me in a rubber tube to paddle around. Priscilla looked after Susan and me and I was fond of her. Early in the morning we would go into her bedroom, sometimes waking her up, and climb into bed with her, where she read a bible passage for the day to us and probably said a prayer. I loved that feeling of comfort and after the war asked my mother to get me some bible notes.

I think I went to Oxford for part of the summer term and the beginning of the autumn term, so spent the summer holidays at Aston. Mother came into Oxford on the bus, once or twice. I remember her arriving while we were eating mid-day lunch. Perhaps it was half term. I wasn't allowed to see her until I had finished my meal and then she couldn't stay for long as there **was** only one bus back, so she had to queue early to make sure of getting on it.

Jenny you probably are not interested in the Oxford part of this, so throw it away. If we have anymore memories, I will let you know. I cannot find any photographs of our childhoods, although I think I remember some. Before my Mother died she had a great clear out, determined that my brother would have an easy time clearing out. I know I had some of her childhood but can't find them.

I hope the work is going well. My maiden name was Armstrong and Granny was a Tringham. If any of us comes up with inspiration, I will let you know.

Thank you for the photo and great card. Best wishes Shirley Boyce.

06.10.22.

Dear Jenny,

I was talking to my sister, Pat, last week and she asked me if I had a copy of our Mother's memories. I had forgotten that she had written and dictated them to me before she died in 2004. So, I rummaged around and lo and behold found them - very interesting!

I enclose the pages referring to our time in OxPodechue. Who has spelt Mrs Nibbs / Knibbs name correctly? There are other differences between my account and Mother's! I am sure that Auntie Majorie only came in 1943, however memory is a strange thing! I think the photo must have been taken at home in 1943, just before I went to Oxford High.

I cannot find war-time photographs, but will ask my brother! He cleared Mother's house. All for now,

best wishes Shirlee (Boyce)

Dictated by Marion Armstrong - Shirley Bayce's Mother.

September 1940. I was expecting our third child any day, when my sister-in-law's house was badly damaged, by a land - mine; Marjorie and baby David came to stay with us, until rented accommodation was found for them with a friend. Her husband, Jack, my brother, was out in the Middle East : he joined the Royal Ambulance Core as a volunteer before the war, with his friend Peter, and they were some of the first to be called up. They were put on stretcher duties and sent out to Italy and the Far East. Jack was away the whole five years. My Mother's home was also badly damaged when a bomb fell on the house next door, killing two people, so she and Auntie Flo. moved in with us. A neighbour of Mother, Mrs. Mc. Bean was also bombed out of her house, so a place was found in Bampton, near Oxford, away from Kent which took the brunt of the blitz. Mother, Auntie Flo., Shirley and Pat travelled by train to Bampton, while I stayed behind to await the birth of Christopher John. He arrived on September 18th 1940 in the middle of an air-raid. At the Nursing Home I could hear the bombs falling around us, they demolished a row of houses opposite . The following morning, an unexploded bomb was found under my bedroom window. I was brought downstairs and Christopher was delivered in Matron's drawing-room. Three weeks later John drove me and baby Christopher to Bampton. (We had bought a Morris just before the war.) Mrs. Mc Bean moved into our house, at Hayes, to look after John.

At Bampton, we lived in a mansion, owned by a Mr. and Mrs. Knibbs, which had been divided into several flats - ours consisted of a large sitting-room, with a screened-off area one end which was the kitchen - there was no running water but a tap in the garden! - washing nappies was a chore! (There were no pampers in those days.) We cooked on a gas cooker, heated the room with an inadequate coal fire and used old flat irons, which we heated on the cooker - clothes were difficult to replace as we had coupons but several garments were badly scorched! Two flights of stairs up, we had three bedrooms. John managed to visit us about one weekend in three - petrol was of course rationed and later in the war he had to come by train. The other occupants of the flats were a man and his

had three green ration books (for the children), we managed better than some folk, but we missed a supply of oranges and bananas, for which we had to queue when they became available. Orange juice and blackcurrant puree could be collected on green ration books from the W.R.V.S.. Our grocer at Hayes was Stevenson and Rush, they called once a week for my order which was then delivered and would always bring anything else I required if I telephoned.



Shirley, Pat, Christopher

While we were at Aston, Marjorie was taken ill and I was left to look after David, Christopher and Pat. The local butcher, also air-raid warden and church-warden, made a fuss of Pat, who hated him and she wouldn't go into his shop!

We returned home again ready for the autumn term, in 1944. In one raid, The New Inn, at Hayes, was bombed and two little girls were killed - one the daughter of the Bank Manager and the other of the Chemist.

Kath Sturgess and her children took refuge with us when Hayes Garden was bombed, until her husband, Norman, got leave and found them accommodation in the country. Later towards the end of the war, a land mine fell and killed several people on a garden centre nearby. Several of our windows were broken, so we went off and stayed with Kath Sturgess at Brookwood.. It was near enough for John to come too and travel to London. We only stayed a few weeks, as the war was nearly over.