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Wartime Evacuees
to
WOTTON-UNDER-EDGE
1940 - 1942

WARTIME EVACUEE IN WOTTON-UNDER-EDGE

1940 - 1942

by

BRYAN CLEAL

Writing as I do, in 1990, some fifty years after the wartime evacuation, I find it difficult to recall very much of the event, but will try to recall what little I do remember, and be as accurate as I can.

I was aged 15½, a pupil in the fifth form at Harwich County High School, Dovercourt, Essex, preparing for the School Certificate examinations. The school, with a two form entry, numbered about 350 pupils, boys and girls, and occupied fine modern buildings with extensive playing fields overlooking the river Stour between Harwich harbour proper and Parkeston Quay, the continental ferry terminus. On the outbreak of war in 1939 much of the installations at Parkeston had been taken over as a base for the Royal Navy, and we were well used to the sight of destroyers, minesweepers and submarines entering and leaving harbour. (the winter of 1939/40 was a bitterly cold one and even the sea and tidal river froze near the shore). The destroyers included three ships of the Polish navy which had escaped from the Baltic in 1939 to England and from then on operated from Harwich. One event which brought the war right to our doorstep was the loss of the destroyer Gipsy, sunk by a mine in the harbour mouth in full sight of people, some of my fellow pupils included, who could hear the cries for help of the sailors involved.

During May, 1940, the news on the wireless and in the newspapers of the German armies' advances into the Low Countries and France was supplemented for us by the increased shipping activity in the harbour. School continued as before, including the compulsory weekly period, introduced earlier, spent digging over some spare land below the tennis courts and growing the vegetables, our part in the 'Dig for Victory' campaign.

With the defeat of the allied armies, and the evacuation of the British and French troops from Dunkirk, the government had to consider the possibility of a German invasion. It was obvious that the south and east coasts