

Robert Hudson – The experience of an evacuee

In February 2017 Robert Hudson left a brief comment on one of the posts, on Quorn Village On-line Museum's Facebook page. In his comment he mentioned that he had been evacuated to Quorn, from Hove during WW2. Sue Templeman asked Robert if he could write a piece about his experiences, and he kindly agreed, also providing a lovely photograph of the children enjoying the harvest in the fields off Buddon Lane. The story continues in Robert's words:-



After the fall of France, it was decided in 1941 to evacuate all school children living on the South Coast, because of the danger of a German invasion. The children living in Brighton and Hove were to be evacuated to Leicestershire. It was early in January 1941 that we boarded a train that took us direct from Brighton to Leicester London Road station. On arrival we were taken to the De Montfort Hall where we were fed and housed for the night. The next morning we were taken by bus and alighted at The Bulls Head Hotel in Quorn and then went to the school/church room next to the church. There we were allocated billets and I was taken to Warwick Avenue to stay with the Smithard family who had two young daughters Cynthia and Erica. In those days Warwick Avenue was a cul-de-sac and ended with a gate to an entrance to a field.

We quickly adapted to our new way of life, we came with our own teachers, and school was quickly set up in local church halls, first at the Methodist church and later at the Baptist church in Meeting Street. I can recall the names of three of our teachers; Bill Liddell, Mr Green and Miss Dagnall.

Sunday school was also attended, it was held in the village school and afterwards walk up to the church for morning service, we were allowed to leave before the vicar delivered his sermon. Long walks were also the order of the day, Trips to Woodhouse Eaves, Beacon Hill and across the slabs to Barrow then by the canal to Loughborough to name a few.



The photograph above shows a group of evacuees at haymaking time in 1941 in the fields off Buddon Lane, near the railway line. I am on the far left at the back, and next to me is my best friend from the time,

Peter Billingham. Peter was billeted in Mansfield Street with Mr and Mrs Webster. Also on the photograph are my cousins, John and Betty Powell. John is the second boy kneeling on the right (with some hay in front of his face!) and Betty is the second girl standing from the right. John was billeted with his friend Dereck Stewart in Beacon Avenue, while Betty stayed in a very grand house in Chaveney Road. I can also remember the names of Ivor Curry, Edwin and Florrie Lewis but cannot place them on the photograph.

Although we were away from the coast I still remember some air raids. One night Nottingham was heavily bombed and I can remember seeing huge flames on the horizon and afterwards the sky was red from the flames.

After several months with the Smithards I was moved to Frank and Frieda Hope in Spinney Drive [no 17]. Frank was well known in the village for his connection with the Quorn Cricket Club and the Quorn Methodist Football Club. He used to take me to all their matches home and away, playing teams in the local area, but we did go to Filbert Street for one match when The Meths played Leicester City Colts, Quorn lost 15 Nil. The Hopes also used to take me to see the latest films at the Odeon in Loughborough.

My mother, with my younger brother, did make the trip to Quorn once to see me, and I remember going to the cinema in Leicester and having tea in the large Lewis's store. I can remember a few of the people living Quorn at the time. There was Tom Long the farmer [lived at 3 Spinney Drive], Gaffer Jones the headmaster of the village school. Next to the Hopes lived the Wesley family [19 Spinney Drive], and I used to play with their son.

Another thing I remember was how well Quorn was served by buses in those days. There was Midland Red, Trent, Allens, Kemp and Shaw, Howlett and Barcus, all operating between Loughborough and Leicester and serving Woodhouse eaves, Swithland, Barrow, Sileby and Syston.

As the year drew to a close, and invasion seemed unlikely, my father decided it was time for me to come home, and so I travelled with a teacher, just before Christmas back to Hove. There the war continued for another three and a half years, and we experienced several air raids and the V1 Doodle bugs. I have been retired for several years and now live in Eastbourne, but still remember mostly happy times I had in Quorn.

Quorn Village On-line Museum is extremely grateful to Robert for sharing his memories of this unique period in the life of Quorn. Robert has also kindly supplied a more recent photograph of himself. The picture on the right was taken at the National Arboretum in Staffordshire, when he was Standard Bearer for the Eastbourne Branch of the Royal Army Medical Corps Association. Thank you again Robert!

