

## Written by Arthur Moy

The reader of this short article may wonder how a child aged nine from the north of England came to be an evacuee in Eastry in September 1939, so first of all I will briefly tell you about my personal background.

I was born in Grimsby and an only child. My parents had a fish shop and my grandmother ran a small sweet shop. It was hard work for them and I think is one of the reasons strife and arguments were always breaking out, which sometimes became violent between my mother and father. Many is the time I sat on the stairs crying and pleading for them to stop, but for my grandmother I would have been put in a children's home. I think I was in the way. My two grandparents came up with what they thought was solution, which was that I should spend 6 months in Grimsby, then 6 months in Gillingham, Kent. At the beginning this seemed to be a solution and I would be away from the constant war that was always going on between my parents. But no thought was given to my feelings and I was never settled in a school for more than a few weeks. Coming from the North, I had strong accent that caused problems with teachers, who I am sure thought I was uncouth and bad mannered. The other children would make fun of me, which would lead to fights in school and it seemed that I was always to blame. This scenario would repeat itself when I returned to Grimsby, because after 6 months with a Southern dialect I was looked upon as being very snobbish and the war still continued between my parents. Then came June 1939 when I was sent to Gillingham and so begins my story that would lead me to being evacuated in Eastry.

Summer 1939, as far as I can remember, was the usual routine – I would be put on the train at Grimsby (the guard would look after me) to be met at King's Cross by my Uncle Stanley who was my mother's twin brother, and taken to Gillingham where my grandmother lived. She was a very strict person and they told me she had been the matron of a large London hospital and whatever she said was 'law'. There was talk of war but as a child I did not understand – all I knew was that my grandmother had an indoor air-raid shelter that was also a table. It seemed great fun to play in. I have been told in later years that it was a Morrison Shelter. Play around the house did not last long – it was off to Byron Road School even though there was only about 4 weeks to the end of term. School did not seem the same – all children were given a gasmask and taught how to put them on. It seemed great fun but little did we know what the future held for us all. The teachers seemed to be nicer, they were only interested in my name and address, where I lived and who was looking after me. The school holiday went very fast and soon it was time to go back to school, although this did not happen. Instead Grandma told my 2 cousins, Paul and Peggy, and myself that that we were going on a holiday near the hop fields. On arriving at Gillingham station we found what looked like hundreds of children all going on the same holiday. Everyone was carrying their gas mask and were all given an apple and a bar of chocolate.

I could not understand why so many were crying. My only fear was that I would be separated from my cousins Paul and Peggy. After having our names taken we all boarded the train for the unknown. This did

not bother me as I was used to travelling on trains. On arrival at our destination (I was told later it was Sandwich) buses were waiting for us. Now I seem to have blank spot in my memory, as all I can remember is a big room and lots of ladies picking children to go with them. My two cousins and I kept close together as we did not want to be parted. Then a lady chose Peggy and off she went. I do remember crying because I did not know if I would see her again. Paul and I waited a long time, so it seemed, but we did not want to be parted and the ladies only wanted one child. At last a lady said that she would take both of us – it was a very frightening time and I cannot remember how we arrived at the lady's house. I have a feeling it was by bus but I am not sure. All I can remember is that it was a big house with a lot of garden, but not a children's home, which I thought Paul and I were going to. Coming from a town where we had no gardens it looked wonderful but I could not understand what all the glasshouses were for. I was soon to learn that tomatoes did not grow on trees. I remember I was told I could eat as many as I wanted but not to make myself ill. It was wonderful as tomatoes were one of my favourites.

I have a lot of blank spaces in my mind for the next period. All that sticks in my mind is being made to eat a thing called 'stuffed marrow.' We also had marrow jam and other thing that Paul and I had never tasted before. I think we must have been very difficult to feed. We were allowed to go around the greenhouses and help in our limited way after a few days we were allowed to go out but not stray too far from the house. To our great surprise we met Peggy who was living not far away and Paul and I were very happy. The people she was staying with had an orchard full of plums and kept dogs that I think were Greyhounds. Another name that sticks in my mind was of a girl – I think her name was Snowdrop. She lived a few houses down the road and was a few years older than me. I made the mistake of making fun of her name – she hit me and Paul hit her and he did get in trouble for hitting a girl. The people we stayed with were Mr. And Mrs. Belson, who had a nursery in Felderland Lane, Eastry.

The next thing that sticks in my mind was on a Sunday. I think we were having breakfast when a siren sounded and we all went to a boiler house for the glasshouses. We had to collect our gasmasks and take some warm clothes but I do not know how long we sat in the 'air raid shelter' – it was a long time for a frightened child. The siren sounded again and we all returned to the house. Everyone sat listening to the radio and then someone said the war had started. If I remember correctly I was so terrified that I wet my pants!

I now have another blank in my memory – I do not know the reason, or the day we left the Belson family. My next recollection is arriving at a house called Walton Villa to stay with Mr Alfred and Mrs Dorothy Martin. (The house is now called Foxes Crossing, on Sandwich Hill, Eastry.) Thus began the happiest time of my young life, and when I come to think about it, it was the first time I felt wanted. The Martins had no children of their own and I never heard arguments like the ones I was used to – everything seemed so calm. Paul and I shared a bedroom and then only problem was that we had to share a bed. Like all boys, we argued who had the most space but a sharp word from downstairs soon made us be quiet.

At the rear of Walton Villa there was a field with sheep in it. At first I was afraid of them but you must remember I was a town boy and everything was new to me. Paul and I used to go to the tomato nursery (Poison Cross Nursery) with Mr. Martin. He taught us many things about tomato growing and we did many things like helping to grade and pack the tomatoes – I hope we were helping! But most of all everyone was so kind to us. I also remember a caravan at Poison Cross and I think that Mr. Martin's brother used to live in it. (Harry Martin was recuperating from TB and was advised to sleep in the open air – he also spent two years in a sanatorium at Lenham.) I also remember a train went past the nursery on a singly-track line – its nickname was Paddy or something similar. The East Kent railway.

On our way to the nursery we would pass a house where two boys lived (the Hockett children from Statenborough). Sometimes Paul and I went to play with them but I cannot remember their names. Soon it was time to start school and I was afraid of what may be awaiting me. We would walk to school and if I remember correctly after nearly 70 years, we would leave the house, turn left, walk to the bottom of a hill, turn and then left down a lane. On that corner lived an old couple who were very nice to me – they even gave me a little purse for my birthday which had printed on it the words 'look after the pence and the pounds will look after themselves'. We then turned right past the hop fields and I think this brought us out near the school gate. There is one thing I am sure of, there was an old Yew tree near the gate. The reason this sticks in my mind is that the teacher told us that in olden times they used to make long bows from the Yew – it's silly what sticks in a young mind!

School was a good time and all the evacuees would go for long walks on Saturdays down the lanes and sometimes to the woods. I do remember that there was a big building opposite the woods, they told me it was a children's home. Whenever I saw it I felt sorry for the children in there. I cannot remember how many children went on these walks but as we strolled along we would sing 'Run Rabbit Run', 'Hang Out Your Washing on the Siegfried Line' and many other things. The people in charge of us would tell us about the flowers, birds and other things of the countryside. At school I was even given a place in the football team but I don't think I was very good. They were very happy times and I was still happy that when they told me that Paul and Peggy would be returning to Gillingham I was not bothered at all if I ended up alone – I did not want to leave as I felt the Martins were my family.

The things I learnt were great, helping to get the honey from the comb and sucking a piece of honey comb, going into the garden to pick up some purple sprouting broccoli (I had never heard of it before). One day after helping Mr. Martin at the nursery I found that all my fingers had gone green. He told me that it would never come off again and it would spread all over my body. I soon found out he was pulling my leg. The only time I was in trouble is when I was playing in the pit behind the house. There I met a Gypsy boy who showed me how he cooked hedgehogs. I even tasted it. When I went home I and told them the story I received my one and only smack from Mr. and Mrs. Martin, who gave him a ticking off for doing it. I deserved the sack as I had been told never to go in the pit.

Sunday morning, Mrs. Martin, Paul and I would go to Methodist Chapel in Mill Lane. This was very strange to me as I had never been to church or chapel in my life as far as I could remember. But the ladies who attended chapel would often bring me treats (Little cakes or a few sweets) so it was great. Opposite the chapel there was a building which some of the local children called the Mad House. People used to shout from the windows, but I was told by Mrs. Martin that they were sick people and it was cruel to call them bad names. I did not want to go to Sunday school and preferred to stay with Mr. Martin and work in the garden or go for a walk in the field behind the house. Paul and I were getting brave by now and the sheep began to come towards us. One day they disappeared and we were told that Mr. Betts the butcher had taken them. It was only then I realised how we got lamb chops. I also remember that in the field there was a cherry tree, the fruit was very sour, I think it was called a Morrelo cherry (maybe it is still there).

Christmas 1939 was wonderful. After chapel we all sat down and opened our cards and I had a letter from my grandmother in Grimsby. It contained a postal order for 2 shillings. I was rich. I did receive other presents but I cannot remember what they all were, all I know it was a very happy time for me. We would go and visit other relations of Mr. And Mrs. Martin, one we visited was near the railway crossing in Sandwich and I was allowed to stand in the front garden and watch the trains go by. Another one was opposite the big school in Sandwich. Some of the evacuees went home for Christmas and did not come back. Peggy told us that she was going home soon, Paul said he would like to go as well. I cannot remember much about the winter, all I remember is that Peggy and Paul went home, we had to stop going for walks (I did not know why). People talked about the war but I was too young to understand. The day Paul left Walton Villa I was very sad even if we did fight sometimes.

The next thing that comes to mind is a school concert or some event like that and I was to be a wallpaper man. I do remember I got a big laugh with my roll of paper and my broad North Country dialect. Then came a pretty young girl on the stage. She did cartwheels and danced and she became my first heart throb. I never ever spoke to her, I was too afraid to, her name was Anne Hopper. I am not sure, I think her father was a builder but maybe it is in my dreams. Soon I began to realise I was about the only evacuee left. Everyone spoke of the war but I did not understand. All I knew was that many trucks with soldiers in them would go past the house, some in strange uniforms and funny tin hats. I thought they must be German until I was told they were French. Sometimes the siren would sound and German planes would come over. We stayed in the house, I cannot remember an air raid shelter at Walton Villa.

During that summer I still went to school and sometimes the siren would sound but I cannot remember if we had an air raid shelter at school, I am sure we must have. Then one day a strange thing happened. Four of my classmates did not come to school, the teacher told us that they had been evacuated to Wales and everyone started talking about the war again, and there were many soldiers about, all passing the house in trucks. I would stand at the gate and wave to them. Little did I know what fate had befallen them.

Mr. Martin bought a tandem so that we could go out for rides. I had never been on a bicycle before and the first time I got on it I was terrified but we had some great times riding around. But my time in Eastry was coming to an end. All the others had gone and my parents did not want me to stay alone. Money was sent for my fare and arrangements made for me to return to Grimsby. I cannot remember much about leaving Eastry, I was very upset. I think it was both Mr. and Mrs. Martin who took me to the station in Sandwich to travel to Gillingham, there to be met by my mother who had come down from Grimsby. The only thing that sticks in my mind about the train journey was all the wounded soldiers on the train, some of them looked very sick. One of them gave me a coin with a hole in it. He said it was a bullet hole but I found out later that it was a French coin. I did like to look at the soldiers with all their bandages but I soon realised that war was a terrible thing. At Gillingham station I was met by my mother who took me to another station to begin my journey to Grimsby in the care of the train guard as usual. The next thing I remember was arriving at Grimsby to be met by my grandmother, and can you believe it, there was an air raid in progress.

To all the people of Eastry I say thank you for caring for me in my time of need, to all my school mates if any of them still remember the funny kid from the North, to Sheila Smith nee Martin, who I have never met and have only spoken to her on the telephone. She asked me to put my memories down on paper. I have done my best but please remember that I am now 78 years young.

Last but not least to the memory of Mr. and Mrs. Martin, who returned some sanity to my life. Their kindness and compassion will always remain with me until the end of my days.

God Bless you all.

Arthur J. Moy