

**Interviewee: Ben Howard**

**Interviewer: Malin Lundin**

**Date: 13/04/2013**

Interviewer: Ok, this is an interview with Ben Howard and the interviewer is Malin Lundin and it is the 13<sup>th</sup> April 2013. Would you be able to tell me your date of birth please?

Ben: March 1927.

Interviewer: And whereabouts were you born?

Ben: In Guys Hospital, London.

Interviewer: And where were you living as a child?

Ben: I lived for the first part of my life in Bermondsey.

Interviewer: Ok, and did you have any brothers or sisters?

Ben: Yes, I have two sisters.

Interviewer: And what about your parents what did they do at the time? What did your parents work as?

Ben: My father, I don't know what my mother worked at, but my father worked in Spitafields market and he was a pea and potatoes salesman.

Interviewer: Ok, and what year did you start school then?

Ben: I started a senior school in 1938.

Interviewer: Had you been to an infant's school before that?

Ben: I went to an infant's school, yes, in Bellingham which is in Catford, southeast London. Then I started senior school in 1938.

Interviewer: And was that in Bellingham as well?

Ben: That was in Catford.

Interviewer: In Catford?

Ben: Yeah, I went to Catford Central School for Boys, Brownhill Road, Catford. Ok, go on.

Interviewer: Can you remember the outbreak of war?

Ben: Yes, very distinctly.

Interviewer: Can you tell me what you can remember?

Ben: Yeah, on that particular morning which Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> of September 1939, the time that Neville Chamberlain made the announcement I was actually in a Baptist church. I'd been taken to a Baptist church in Ashford because I was being evacuated. 'Cos I was evacuated on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> to Ashford in Kent with a school. Then I was billeted with two people and these two people happened to be Baptist. I was at church when the announcement was made at eleven o'clock, when Neville Chamberlain said that we were at war. I recall the sirens going at that time. Probably everybody tells you this but the amusing thing which I remember is going back to the house after leaving the church when the siren was going was an air raid warden dressed up with a steel helmet and coloured gas cape going down the road shouting at everybody to take cover. It was probably the first opportunity to go out and say that. But that is how I remember the outbreak of the war.

Interviewer: So you were evacuated on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September?

Ben: That's right.

Interviewer: What had your parents told you about evacuation? Did you understand why you were being evacuated?

Ben: I understood that I was going away because war was potential. That there was likely to be a war and I would be safer. I think like the majority of children I accepted it as that because my parents said 'You're going away because it will be safer for you'. I think I accepted that. I don't think I was terrified or anything. In fact, I was never terrified or anything. I just accepted it as something that happens.

Interviewer: What can you remember about the day that you were evacuated?

Ben: Well, we lined up [pause] we lined up and went in a long queue down to Catford Station. We went to Catford Station to Ashford and it took, if I remember, about four hours to do so. I remember this because – I've related it at other times – because I belong to an evacuee group. But to continue on with that, we went to, which I'm told was a very large room. It was actually a theatre in which we were given tea and a bun and our iron rations, you've probably heard about that, in a carrier bag. Then a bunch of us set off down the road and eventually I went into this house. They took a lot of fuss of me but [unclear] I wasn't with this particular couple very long and moved to another. But that's how much I remember of that particular day of being evacuated.

Interviewer: So how long did you stay with the first couple that you were billeted with?

Ben: Well, to continue we were in Ashford for September 1939 to May 1940. In Ashford we shared schooling with the senior girls' school. They went in the morning we went in the afternoon. I don't recall a lot about that except there were fields over the back at Ashford that we played a lot in. We were there a lot of the time, in these fields over the back by a railway line. We were there until May, until 15<sup>th</sup> of May 1940. On 15<sup>th</sup> of May 1940 we were all coached up, took in coaches to Ewhurst in Surrey, Sayers Croft Camp. Have you heard of that? Sayers Croft Camp, it is still there.

Interviewer: Ok.

Ben: It was an, again I don't know how much you know about the National Camps Corporation? [Interviewer: Not that much] Right. In the early 1940s the Government, people in the Government, decided that it would be a good idea to send people in big cities, not people, sorry, children in big cities, out to the country for a couple of weeks. They formed what's called the National Camps Corporation and their aim was to build fifty of these camps, all over England. But in the end they just were able to build thirty-two. Sayers Croft Camp was one of the camps designed for this particular purpose. When we marched in on 15<sup>th</sup> of May 1940 it wasn't yet quite completed. But, of course, Dunkirk had just happened and it was decided to take all the children in the Kent and Surrey area away and we were moved to Ewhurst in this camp. There was two hundred boys, it was. A combination of two schools in Catford actually. It took two hundred boys in five dormitories. I was there until 1943 and I had a marvellous evacuation.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about it?

Ben: Well, you see, there were two hundred boys, not much in the way of education because there were no books or pencils. Well, there were but in very short supply. The methods for teaching were in short supply. So the teaching was either outdoors, we played games: football and cricket and storm ball and all sorts of things. Long walks, nature studies, chasing butterflies, all sorts of things. So it was really a very good evacuation as far as I was concerned. And, of course, we tell people – like we were there all that time and I tell children that we never had school holidays. But, of course, it was a holiday all the time. There was so much – so many things to do – each house, 'cos there was five dormitories – five dormitories all names after castles. Once a month one of the dormitories put a stage play on, of some kind. A lot of it was messing about but at least entertainment was put on. And, of course, once a week we had a cinema show. Will Hay, you've never heard of him again? Will Hay? No, he was a funny school master in that time. I'm talking about years ago. Mickey Mouse of course and all those sort of things. So I had a good time there. I must say, take the opportunity of saying that what you might call the 'old boys' are still going. There's forty of us on the list now, after all that time. If you consider that from 1940 to 1945, there were two hundred boys to start and then of course some left and some went. So there must have been about four hundred pass through in that time. To have ten percent still there is quite remarkable actually.

Interviewer: So who was looking after you then?

Ben: Well, there was a – only – there were the teachers first of all, the masters. They had a rotation and there were two in charge of each dormitory. There was, what we called an 'in-camp commandant', but somebody was in charge of the camp and the staff. There was ladies who did the domestic work and cooking and things like that and there were two nursing sisters there all the time. I think we had a scarlet fever outbreak once, all those sort of childish complaints [unclear] and these two nursing sisters coped with it all.

Interviewer: So how many people were you in one dormitory then?

Ben: That was [Interviewer: About forty?] forty that's right. Five dormitories of forty, yes, and there were two masters that had a room each end in charge of it.

Interviewer: So how were they laid out? A large room with bunk beds?

Ben: There were double bunks, there were double bunks. Iron double bunks. Yeah. Of course now they have proper beds because it's still being used actually. The camp itself is still being used. I think it's the last one in existent. But it is still being used.

Interviewer: And what kind of contact did you have with your parents during this time?

Ben: Well, there was an arrangement made that the parents would come visiting by bus once a month. My parents came down to see me roughly every three months. But there was a parents visiting day every months. Coaches came down from Catford. So I was in contact. Of course, they wrote to me and we wrote back – letters. So I was in contact with them over that time.

Interviewer: Ok. How close were you to the war? Even if you were – this is in Surrey you said?

Ben: Yes.

Interviewer: So did you notice, kind of, what was going on? Did you realise that London was being bombed at the time or?

Ben: Oh well, yes. In September 1940 during the great raid on the docks, we all stood on a high point of a field and watched – saw the red glow. Being young, you were a bit awestruck by it but you didn't really recognise the actual danger. But we watched it burn. And of course, German bombers were going overhead but we weren't touched.

If I may continue on there, we were five dormitories and because it was a hutted camp people were afraid it would look like an army camp. What they did, they built five air raid shelters across the other side of the field, in the ground, and there were benches down there. The idea that – there was always a duty officer, one of the teachers was a duty officer, he blew, I think it was three blasts on a whistle. You stopped what you were doing and paraded up and went across to the air raid shelter. It was never, actually afterwards, looking back on it, it was never mistaken to be an army camp because any enemy air craft coming over had seen all these huts with no vehicles. There were no vehicles there you see. If it would have been an army base there would have been vehicles everywhere. But being no vehicles I think they dismissed it. They were looking for a camp with vehicles 'cos there were soldiers there. But during the Battle of Britain, 1940, when the German fighters came over, you get three blasts on a whistle and the class was stopped and you paraded up outside and you marched across the field, well that was the idea, you see. But unfortunately, again being schoolboys, there were [unclear] all over saying, 'Oh, look that's a Spitfire', 'Oh, no, that's a Messerschmitt'. And all the time, of course, there were bullets falling around. But nobody took a notice of that. It was such a great deal of excitement, seeing all these fighters in the air. We never really went down those shelters so after a time they said, well, no 'If we think the camp is in real danger then we'll do it. But we won't do it

as we've been doing it at the slightest sign of an enemy aircraft blow the whistle. We'll wait and see what happens'. So that was our touch with the war. It was near a village and you got soldiers in the village, Canadian soldiers and things like that. That was, while I was at school, that was my contact with the war.

Interviewer: You were young teenage boys in this, was it two all boys schools?

Ben: It was all boys, yes.

Interviewer: Did they kind of do any training to kind of prepare you, 'cos I guess, not knowing when the war would end that there was some expectations that you would go on and fight in the war? [Ben: Oh, yes] Did you kind of receive any training or did they prepare you at all?

Ben: Not as such, no. But when we were, everybody agrees now, that when you went, or were called-up in the army, you went in without any qualms, without any bother, took to the army life very, very easily because you'd been away in a group like that. We all would agree now that we took to it very easily, you weren't scared; you weren't even scared of the officers so to speak. But you took to the army life quite easily because of that.

Interviewer: Ok. Did you, kind of, do anything else for the war effort whilst you were evacuated? Did you kind of grow any food or anything like that?

Ben: Yes, we obviously had, we grew, we had allotments and you could grow, mostly, radishes because radishes were easy to plant, grew quickly and easy to eat. Yes, we did. And also, of course, we did war work planting cabbages, collecting fox gloves for medical reasons, planting cabbages, yeah. We were roped in every now and again to do things like that. Something to do with sheep we did one day. I can't recall what it is now. But yes, we did help the local farmers, yes. Not frequently but it did happen. It did happen.

Interviewer: Do you feel that the education that you were given when you were evacuated that that was kind of an adequate education or?

Ben: Do you mean – you mean academically?

Interviewer: Yes.

Ben: No, not really. Not really. I don't think I've suffered for it. We all agree talking afterwards we don't think we've suffered for it because it made us much more self-reliant in a lot of ways. And of course, the majority of us went to some sort of evening class or school after the war. So even though – academically in fact it wasn't, but the abilities to learn were never diminished really and even though the amount of facts that we were given, because the school books weren't available, were not noticeable in any way.

Interviewer: So for the first part of the war when you were evacuated to Kent, you were billeted with a family?

Ben: That's right, yeah.

Interviewer: Could you tell me a little bit about the family that you were billeted with or how much can you remember from that time?

Ben: Well, not a lot. The man was a builder, the lady – Cook, their name was, Mr and Mrs Cook, the man was a builder. They never had any children of their own as far as I can recall. The lady was a typically country lady in that she made everything, like pickled eggs and made jams and everything like that. A lot of the stuff was home-made, country-wise. They had somebody else living with them as well that was connected with the building trade. It was quite comfortable, I'm sure they looked after me alright, quite reasonably. It was Godinton Road, Ashford. I can't remember the number. I've never been back there since but it's Godinton Road, Ashford. Mr and Mrs Cook, they were ok. The first people who were the Baptists I can't recall much at all. I was only there two or three days and I'm unsure of the reason why I was moved but I was. And that's what happened.

Interviewer: So was it quite different then comparing the first period of evacuation and then the second? Was it quite different in kind of experience, being billeted with a family and then going in to a camp?

Ben: There is a difference. Because [unclear] successfully, I must say that the school, being with a school had many, many advantages because you were with friends all the time, if you like. It was much better being in a camp than – because there were restrictions – obviously the people you were with in most cases you were restricted. I know that there were families who treated evacuees just for the extra 8 and 6d. a week and thought it were just right to help them with their work on the land and things. I know of many cases where evacuees weren't treated correctly but I personally never came across it but there must have been cases.

Interviewer: Did any of the boys that you were originally evacuated with – did any of the boys return home?

Ben: Oh well, yes. In September two – there were two – in Brownhill Road, Catford, there was the two schools. There was a senior boys school and a central school for boys and they were both evacuated. The senior boys school were evacuated on 1<sup>st</sup> of September and the central school was evacuated on the 2nd. I don't know figures in full but there were again around about two hundred boys from each school. Well, come the December or January, because it was then the phoney war nothing happened, half of them had gone back home again. The two hundred boys who went to Sayers Croft Camp were taken both from the central school and the senior school but certainly, as I say, half the people who were evacuated in September went home by Christmas. Some of the boy, I can remember their parents coming down and taking them back again because nothing had happened. Then, of course, they were all evacuated again later on.

Interviewer: And then you returned to London in '43?

Ben: I did, yes.

Interviewer: Is that because you reached the age when you were [Ben: Sixteen, I was sixteen]. And how was it kind of leaving that life behind and then returning back to London to work? Is that the reason – did you start work in London?

Ben: You mentioned to me before about the army. Knowing that you were pretty certain to go in the army was a thing that was with me, and I think it was with others. School offered me a job with Lewisham Council in the coal rationing, because coal was rationed then you see, in their office. But I didn't fancy it and actually for the next two years, or eighteen months, I went to work with my father. Looking back it was, I suppose, a stop-gap idea that I was working. In March 1944, of course, I was called-up. But I went to work with my father in his market, at Spitalfields market, at that time.

Interviewer: And how was it returning to London? Kind of coming back to your family after having been away for such a long time?

Ben: I can't remember much. It's a mixture of – I wanted to go back home obviously. I wanted to go there's no doubt about that. I wanted to be back with my mother and father. There was also a great deal of reluctance to leave school, really. It was a lot of reluctance to leave that life. Sport and activities. We used to have three or four roll calls every day, which is good, well, because the teachers had to keep check on everybody, you see. They had to keep check with one the first thing in the morning – I'll tell you something in a minute – anyway, one first thing in the morning and then midday and before we went to supper. Usually before all the meals there was a proper rolls check to makes sure that everybody was there because now and again one or two [unclear] did run away as must happen. But that was done quite regularly. Looking back we were all – there must have been some attraction because after seventy years some of us still talk about it.

Interviewer: And you're a member of an evacuation association?

Ben: The Sayers Croft Evacuee Group.

Interviewer: And when did that come about? Is it in recent years that you kind of started to meet up?

Ben: It grew again from 1990. So it's been going the last twenty-three years. When somebody got in touch with somebody. Because what happens, of course, like all these groups, the old boys groups if you like, that you get to an age when you marry and have families and everybody satisfied, everybody go different ways. People go off to different jobs, some people emigrate, people go all over the place. But somebody decided to call everybody together in 1990 and we've had, quite a lot of us, we've had eighty, at one particular time about eighty boys there. For various reasons they've gone and now our list is forty people. Forty people. We've just collected subscriptions for thirty of them so from after seventy years that's not bad at all.

Interviewer: And how often do you meet up then?

Ben: It's only regularly once a year now. We contact each other on the phone of course. But we meet once a year at the Union Jack Club at Waterloo. We meet at a central place, you see. For those

people that want to come by train it's a central place, Waterloo. So we meet at the Union Jack Club there.

Interviewer: And have you been back to the camp?

Ben: Yes. Oh yes. When they had the 50th anniversary celebrations of the war, after the war, it was 1995, wasn't it? We went down there and took – we were part of the victory parade. Our secretary at the time lit a beacon. The people in Ewhurst village have been very good to us. They have always welcomed us when we got back. The last time was three years ago when they put on a show about the war, which I can't remember the name of now. But they invited a lot of us down there and we went down and we had a meal all together. We got on quite well. We have been back. We still have a distinct interest in it. In Sayers Croft. I must tell you this, I must tell you this while we're talking about it. It's a booklet about it. About all that I've been telling you there's a booklet, which you're quite welcome to take away. That's me.

Interviewer: And how old were you there?

Ben: I was twelve.

[Pause]

Ben: Sorry, this is so old – I'll have to see if I can find – it's in pieces. But there's an illustration, you see, of the dining room. But what I wanted to tell you about was this, you see. These murals were painted each end of the dining hall by the boys. They're still there but now they've been renovated and protected by a glass panel. But they are still there. Our ongoing interest is that we want to make sure they're preserved to a great deal of time. But as a matter of fact we can't find any organisation which will do it for us. They are registered as war memorials but the War Memorials Trust won't take any responsibility for the upkeep. They will give us money to upkeep them but they will not take responsibility themselves. As we're all in, almost, we're all between eighty and ninety years – every one of us is an octogenarian – we're a little bit anxious what will happen in the future. I'm sorry there's a page missing. I'll see if I can find another one. But what we did, in order to raise money to get these protected and renovated. We sold these booklets, you see. I'll have a look to see if I can find the extra page in a minute. But it's very little left because that was, what? Ten years ago we did that, you see. Ten years. After we had them protected we left it at that. But that's a book I put together for sale to tell everybody about it. But there's a lot – some of what I've just said is in there. So you're welcome to have that.

Interviewer: Can you tell me a little bit about returning to London? And kind of the latter part of the war? You must have been in London kind of in time for the V1s and the V2s.

Ben: Right. Yes, I dodged the V1s and V2s, certainly. Just something that when you're in a war, under fire so to speak, the majority of the people just accepted it. Let me give you an illustration. I went to work for my father and we travelled in a – I travelled from Catford Bridge Station to London Bridge or Cannon Street and it's a raised area from New Cross to London Bridge. I don't know whether you



know that. It's over arches. There's maybe six people in this carriage – men of course at that time of the morning – six people in that carriage and you'd be there and you'd see a V1, a flying bomb, come over and you'd say, 'Oh look. It's one of theirs'. You might call it a rude name, of course. You'd watch it but people would say, 'Do you think that will go as far as Barking?' or 'Do you think it might hit off towards Chiswick?' or 'I bet it gets down before we get to the river', that's the Thames. And that sort of comment would go on to show that, you know, it was just accepted. You couldn't avoid it. You couldn't avoid it. Can I tell you another story?

Interviewer: Yes.

Ben: During that time when the V1s were coming over, I had a sister, my mother and my two sisters were evacuated but they came back again. And I had a sister who was then at senior school. One particular day – on this particular day – my mother said to me, 'Will you go and pick Sheila up from school and make sure she gets home properly', you see, in case something had snuck down. So I did. Off I go to the school, waiting outside the school for my sister to come out. She gets on her bike and I get on my bike and then we cycle back home again. As we're going home one of these V1s pokes its nose up there, you see, and the engines stop. Do you know all about these doodlebugs? You probably heard all about this. And the engine stops so I dive behind the garden wall one side and my sister dives behind the garden wall the other side of the road and it goes over and explodes a bit further on. So we both get up and on our bikes but my sister can't find her school hat and it's a very strict school and she cannot go to school without a school hat. So there we are, my poor mother is probably worrying, we spend a long time looking for the hat which has blown away in the confusion! But eventually we found the hat and got home. But that's the sort of situation we were in. I'm just emphasising the fact that you might have been scared but you accepted it. And the V1s you know that once you heard the explosion you were alright because somebody else had got it. That was the two years before I went in the Army.

Interviewer: And then you were called up in the early months of '45?

Ben: Yes.

Interviewer: And can you tell me a little bit about, kind of, joining the Army?

Ben: I went to, as was the fashion then, we did six weeks primary training, general training. Then they sort of put you somewhere where they wanted to. When at the end of these six weeks I went in front of this officer and asked me where I lived and this that and the other. I said 'Bellingham' and he told me, he went into great detail about the wonderful Royal West Kent's. They were at Maidstone and they had victory in this battle and they did well in that battle and they did this and, oh, what a marvellous regiment to join. So I thought that's it, I'm in the Royal West Kent's. Anyway, I went into the Royal Engineers and I'm very pleased I did because I enjoyed being in the Royal Engineers. I was in England for about a year and I was in Italy for about two and a half years before I was demobilised.

Interviewer: Were you ever kind of – was there ever any kind of risk of you being sent to fight in the Far East?

Ben: Not in the Far East, no. No, I'm glad I didn't go there as well. All I saw in Italy really was the aftermath. For a time I was – I don't know if you've heard of Monte Casino? And the 'mad mile' that's the road that led up to it. But I did have – after it had passed by of course – I still remember the burnt bushes and the rubble still about after all that fighting. It was a – that's something that I haven't forgotten because it was easy to imagine what went on there. That was the most lasting effect of my time in Italy. I was stationed at Naples when I first went out. I did about twelve months in Naples and about twelve months near Venice.

Interviewer: Growing up during the war, as a teenage boy, were you ever kind of scared of joining – of being called-up and having to go and fight? Or was that something you kind of accepted that you might have to do?

Ben: I think you accept it. I think you accept it. You know, you see all these things about the first war, World War I, 1914, all these pals, various areas all joined up. You had no idea what you were going in for. The Army is death and glory and you only see the glory. You do. Before hand you only see the glory. It's only after you've been there that you realise the effect of death. Before that it's only the glory. As many cigarettes as you like, as much drink as you like, everybody shouting and singing and, oh, lovely, lovely life in the Army. But it's only afterwards that you understand, really.

Interviewer: And if you were to summarize your experience of evacuation what would you say?

Ben: I think it's an adventure. As far as I'm concerned it was an adventure.

Interviewer: Is there any other kind of memories of evacuation that we haven't talked about that you would like to?

Ben: It was a commercial school, actually, a commercial school. And if I'd have been – stayed in London I would have probably, well, we did do a bit of shorthand and typing. Funnily enough I don't think I learnt typing at school but the Army taught me typing. I was in the Royal Engineers and I was in a part that had to make the situation reports out about material that was needed because I did a a part building bailey bridges. I don't know whether you've heard of them? Anyway, the idea was that you had to type out, not write but type, 'cos it was clearer. You had to type out requirements for stores and equipment that was needed. But you had to do it in the dark under fire so we did touch typing. We were taught to do it with a – you know what I mean? With a typewriter. So the Army taught me to type and, of course, I can still touch type, which is useful on a computer, of course. So that's it.

Now, the school, we were feed quite well, really. We laugh now about the things – we had pea soup quite often and cabbage soup quite often. We had tapioca, which we called frog spawn, and, of course, we've had re-enactments there. We went down there once and we did for – school children that were there, we re-enacted it for them. We put on a meal or you had to put on a meal. The same as we used to have. But, of course, the beef that was cut wasn't all – when we had it, it was all

different colours, perfectly alright to eat. Perfectly ok to eat but you'd never eat it nowadays, of course. The frog spawn, we said we'd have frogs spawn, tapioca, because it could be mixed with water and it was [unclear]. But we had it just mixed with water. Of course, when we had this re-enactment and they gave us tapioca it had cream and sugar and everything else with it. All the children ate it but, of course, it was nothing like we had. There was a school room, so there were classes, we had classes. Weekends, everybody went to church on a Sunday. It's something to do, you see. It was an occupation. If you were Jewish, of course, you were excused. The Roman Catholic used to try to get out of it. But everybody went, to all intent and purposes, went to church. We all went to, when they had the 50th anniversary victory parade, they had a church service and we had some of the pews marked up, 'The Evacuees'. So we were well know there.

Interviewer: Were there strict rule and regulations then at school, kind of what you were allowed to do and what you were expected to do?

Ben: You could do really what you liked in the bounds of the camp. You weren't really allowed out. Of course, since we were evacuated there we searched for the old paths that fellow, boys, used to sneak out through. And, of course, you were allowed out on a Saturday to go to the cinema at Cranleigh. The town of Cranleigh was just down the road. But we walked there to the cinema but you had to be back for roll call at five o'clock. So at about twenty to five the cinema at Cranleigh would erupt would with about fifty school boys [unclear] down the road through the woods, along the path, to get back for roll call at five 'o'clock. That's something that we still remember and joke about. In fact, part of the re-enactment was that when we went back there to re-enact all this. We saw some Mickey Mouse films and then, we were much older then of course, but we all tried to do this rushing down the road but of course we couldn't, not then. As school lads that's what we did. As I say, we were quite well fed, quite well looked after. They tried to keep us occupied with something all the time. Even football, I mean, football and cricket and sports. We kept occupied in some way or another. Some of the masters took turn, there was a duty officer everyday who patrolled the camp to make sure everything's alright. The schoolmaster were allowed, I don't know, I think they did something like two weeks on and one week off for teaching. Of course, we had a lot of the school masters were called-up themselves. We had schoolmasters who were brought out of retirement. They hadn't had the training or their training was so old. They could only do – teach us elementary stuff, really. But I don't think it did us any harm. In fact, I'm sure it didn't.

Interviewer: So what kind of ages did you have at the school? Did it start at twelve going up to sixteen?

Ben: From eleven to sixteen. That was Catford Central School, yeah.

Interviewer: Did you ever interact with the local children from the local village? Did you ever go and play with them?

Ben: That's an interesting question because no. Where there – we never – you hear stories, you hear stories about arguments between evacuees and the locals. We never did that. Mainly I think because

you weren't at that time really allowed out into the village on your own, always in a group. Always a class went into the village. We went up to Pitch Hill, the hills at Surrey Hills, we were often up there. We used to pick whortleberries, bilberries, and take them back again. And Leith Hill, we'd walk up, it'd take us quite a time but we'd do this walking. But it was always in a group, always in a class. We weren't really allowed out on our own because it was in a camp. In Ashford, of course, you were. At Ashford I never found any conflict between the local schools. Mainly because we went to the girls' central school, or the girls' school there, 'cos we were part time at the girls' school. Funnily enough I was going to say 'cos we weren't bothered 'cos they were only girls [laughs]. They were only girls. So that didn't concern us much. There was a river and these fields that we'd always go and play football and messing about on these fields. The six months that we were in Ashford we never found much contact with the local school children really in that way as some others have. And, of course, as I say, at Ewhurst we were only allowed out in a group except for those that used to sneak out and go down to the bakers, buy a loaf of bread and bring it back. We'd all eat it as starving refugees. Some fellows used to go down the fish and chip shop when it was open and buy chips and sneak them back again. You weren't allowed out on your own really at that particular time. When I talked about going to Cranleigh that was a sort of concession and then again you went as a group. You were told to go as a group. You couldn't go on your own. You went as a group. And this is what happened.

Interviewer: That's great. Thank you so much.

**End of Interview.**