

Letter written by Peggy Durham (nee Gleeson)

I was born on the Isle of Dogs in 1924. When I was 14 all everyone was talking about was would there be a war. However in 1939 when the Germans walked in to Poland, England declared war on Germany. 1939 passed very quickly. We were delivered Anderson Shelters which came in parts to be assembled in back gardens, this made us feel safe should the war hot up which it truly did. At first we slept in the house but we didn't undress so we were ready to run down to the shelter which became pretty tiresome so we began to go to the shelter at night. Just as we felt we could never go back to staying in the house the Blitz really hotted up and were bombed night after night, and then came the incendiary bombs which set all the factories alight, by this time the Isle of Dogs was surrounded by a ring of fire – you could feel the heat. All the family was terrified, we were tired and dirty and never slept – so one afternoon my father who was suffering with T.B. at that time got us all together and said 'pick up a few things, I don't know where we are going but we are getting out of here', so we packed a bag, picked up a few bottles of milk and off we all went. We had to get to Greenwich – the foot tunnel from Millwall was shut so we had to go up to the shore and men were taking people across the water in small rowing boats.

Well this is where the real story begins on September 10th (my dad's birthday), I think it was New Cross Station we arrived at, my Dad looked up and saw Sevenoaks on the board – 'right' he said 'that is where we are going'. We sat in the gangway of the train dirty and no doubt smelly, and drank milk from the bottles. We came to Tubbs Hill Station and got off, made for the road and just stood there bewildered. During this time it had got dark and all the commuters were going home to their warm and cosy homes when all at once a gentleman stopped and looked at us, asked a few questions, the said 'wait there I shall go and phone my wife and I will do my best to get you settled for the night'. He took us to a small village called Seal and set us down in a pub called the 'Kentish Drovers'. We must have looked a sight as everyone was staring at us. However the gentleman came back and said he had got us fixed up in a cottage round the corner in Elms Road – the cottage was named 'Etheldreda' and was owned by a lady called Miss Lou Collins. She has five nieces living with her one named Dorothy the other Kitty.

On this night the gentleman dropped us on the doorstep and vanished into the night without leaving his name so we were never able to thank him. When Lou Collins opened the door she looked us and said "the night before she had looked over to London, saw the sky lit up with red and prayed for all the people God had sent us to her – she took us in and without us having a wash she took us upstairs to bedrooms with beautiful white linen and feather beds. 'Get in' she said 'and sleep well, see you in the morning'. We were exhausted so we did sleep well. I don't think we even undressed. We stayed for a while, it really was a guest house, I think we paid 7/6d but couldn't keep it up so eventually moved to Kemsing. After the war we were able to come home to the house we had left in such a hurry in East Ferry Road. My father didn't come through it all – he died in 1943 of T.B. which he had had for many years. Thank God the rest of the family survived – my two brothers in the RAF also came home.