

AN EVACUEE FAMILY IN EASTCOMBE

I (Muriel Brooks) was enormously pleased to discover among Dr Malcolm Lambert's papers some correspondence about evacuees that he had with Joyce Morgan, *née* Gosden, nearly 18 years ago. I wrote to her at the same address, and was delighted to find she was still there. She has given permission for her reminiscences to be included here, but her own words of course remain her copyright and should not be reproduced without application to Mrs J Morgan via this website.

In 2000 Mrs Morgan wrote to Dr Lambert that a friend had sent her his then-new book about Eastcombe, *Then and Now*: a friend she had 'only seen once since I was evacuated to Eastcombe in the last war. To me, a child spending those years in a Cotswold village, [it] brings many happy memories'. She asked for Phyllis Gaston's *Oil Lamp and Candle* to be sent as well. I would like to mention at this point that Dr Lambert had appreciative letters from many people with fond memories of our region and its people. I too sent copies of these books to far-flung places in Canada and Australia where they evoked happy recollections of time spent here. 'The enclosed brief tale of our stay in Eastcombe I thought might be of interest to yourself and also Miss Gaston as I note she has written in particular of the '40s. I thought too that a copy of a newspaper cutting that my father kept might be of interest as well. It is hard to believe it is nearly 60 years old. My father being a teacher was very good at keeping cuttings which he thought might at some time be interesting to others. I look forward to seeing Miss Gaston's book – thank you. Hope this all may be of interest from an evacuee's point of view. (I haven't mentioned little friends in case of embarrassment!)

Hurrah for such people! This fills a gap that I had not even noticed was there. We know about the men and women in the services and we know about war-work at home and we know about local bombs and crashes and we know about prisoners-of-war and rationing and digging for victory – but stupidly I have never picked up on the fact that this area played host to evacuees (even though I have always remembered that a long-ago boss spoke of leaving Essex for a village near Cheltenham). Anyone who has read Margery Allingham's *The Oaken Heart* will remember the shock she and fellow villagers had in their homes near the Essex coast when, after Dunkirk, the army arrived to defend those shores and their major said 'You do realize that this is now the front line?' And in *As I Remember* Frances Deacon speaks of WW1 life at Brightlingsea while her father was posted there: the family watched 'dogfights' as German fighters attacked nearby. This, then, is what Mrs Morgan wrote in 2000.



Brimcombe: first port of call

'I remember so well being evacuated to Eastcombe. I was much more fortunate than most in that my father was a teacher and one of those who accompanied the schoolchildren to the Brimscombe/Eastcombe area. He took along my mother, brother aged four in 1941, and myself aged eight. At first we had a temporary lodging very close to the canal in Brimscombe (my mother was terrified we would fall in). Then Dad found us lodgings with another teacher and his wife, Mr and Mrs Thurman in Berwick House in Eastcombe. He no sooner had us settled when he had to return to Clacton – presumably because some children must have stayed behind.



Mr and Mrs Thurman

We were given the Reading Room at Berwick House – one large room, parquet flooring and three beds at one end. My mother managed to cook, etc, with the help of a Primus Stove (temperamental!) in the porch. As you entered by a slope down to the door it was not unusual to be flooded and I remember well the parquet blocks floating around and also the odd mouse or two. The Thurmans were very kind and I was fascinated by what happened in the garden with the beehives. My mother (a Yorkshire woman) was introduced to village life, WI, etc, and registered for eggs with a Mrs Pilling [of Honeyhill].

I joined the village school which I remember with pleasure, especially the nature walks. There were just two classrooms and two teachers – Miss Rogers and Miss Smith the Headmistress. The latter lived in a house opposite to Berwick House. I well remember taking

the 11-plus exam *on my own*. The exam papers were sent down from Essex. I was seated at a table under a front window and class had to be quiet behind me. (Yes, I passed!) In particular I can remember to this day the total sorrow that descended on us schoolchildren when the local publican's son Maurice died of (I believe) TB at the age of 13.



Guides at Lypiatt Park

I joined the Girl Guides and we met at the Orphanage. We looked forward to going to Lypiatt and cooking our rabbit stew over open fires. There was a certain fascination with Lypiatt and a girl I knew – Jennifer Crundle – took me to her house in that area – secret passages, etc. She put me on a horse – I was terrified. It was the first and last time!

The nuns at the Orphanage also ran the Sunday School at St Augustine's (I still have a text or two in a photo album). We used to be taken on farm carts to Bisley for the well dressing service. My Mother was amused at one such blessing when at the end it was said what a pity it was that the water was not fit for human consumption.



Joyce Gosden	
was present	42 times out of 46
during the	half year August 1944
(Signed)	Sister Edith Mary
Q.W.11.	FAITH PRESS

Joyce Gosden Sunday School Attendance Card

Naturally being in an area near American bases we often saw Americans in the village and we children used to hang about outside the corrugated hall (near the church) when they came to the weekly dance. Mostly we were given gum. When my little brother went missing one day I was sent to look for him. I found him outside the pub sat at a table surrounded by Americans and they had put a large beer in front of him...

Of course, being wartime we children had to do our bit for the War Effort. We used to pick pounds of hips and noticed silver metallic strips in the fields which I was told were to confuse radar. The Guides had a regular Sat morning job of collecting bones for soap-making. One particular cottage we called at on the village outskirts we could guarantee that *these* bones wrapped in newspaper would be full of maggots so we would leave the cottage and drop the bones over the wall into the field dropping away below. One of the year's highlights was the Annual Fête at Dr Munden's, and I used to hope to buy plants for my father as he was a keen gardener. On climbing an old stone wall one day a stone rolled off the top on to my eye and Dr Munden bandaged it up for me. No stitches – too near the eye. The day he pulled it

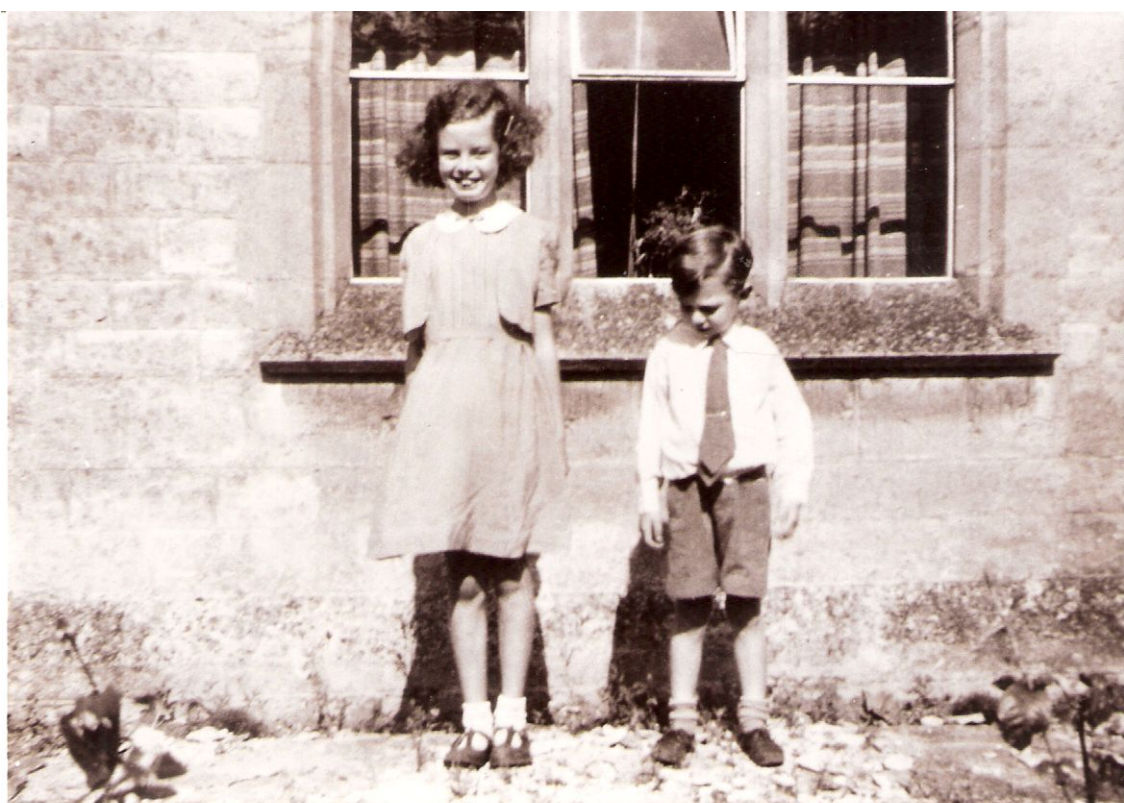
all off remains in the memory! No harm done.

A few memories of a happy time for me and a love of the countryside which is with me still. I haven't eaten wild strawberries since then.'

Mrs Morgan mentioned sending a newspaper cutting saved by her father. It is slightly incomplete and battered now, but one can see that it is from Saturday, April 19, 1941. It appears to be from the *Essex Gazette, Clacton Times and Clacton News, Frinton, Walton, Brightlingsea and Wivenhoe Times*, and the whole front page is given over to the story of the evacuated children being visited by their local MP and his wife – Mr and Mrs J Stanley Holmes. He told 'the men and women of tomorrow' that 'our nation would continue when the war had ended to lead the world in a renewed effort to secure freedom, comfort, and happiness for all peoples, and he urged them to make the most of education to take part in that work'. The tour ranged from Droitwich in Worcestershire down to the Stroud district. He spoke of the East Coast regarding itself as the healthiest part of the British Isles, but said it was good to see the children 'looking so bonny' – 'we can truly say that these inland Cotswold villages where you are now living are very healthy too'. About 250 children and their teachers attended the meeting at Brimscombe Polytechnic. His wife had a firmer grasp of vote-winning, it seems, and requested a half-holiday for all the children, which the chairman of Gloucestershire Education Committee immediately agreed to. 'Vociferous applause' followed this announcement in all the schools visited afterwards – these included Horsley, Randwick, Whiteshill, Painswick with Slad children there too, and Sheepscombe. How different all this seems from the usual images of labelled children being stuffed into trains at London stations and sent off to bucolic chaos.

Happily for us, Mrs Morgan also included photographs from her Eastcombe days, which are reproduced here. Mr and Mrs Thurman and Mrs Morgan's friend Jean Shergold are remembered with affection. Beryl Freebury, incidentally, said that her mother, Linda Roberts, at that time lived above the spring at the end of Wells Road; and since she had a spare bedroom she had two evacuees billeted with her while her husband Harry was away on active service. I do not know how many of the Clacton children came to Eastcombe in total.







A Postcard of Eastcombe sent home by evacuees