

Pat Ellmore (née Petre)

Pat Ellmore

'I am Pat Ellmore, née Petre, which was my name during the war when, on the 3 September 1939, as a nine year old, I became an evacuee. We were told by our school [Daggenham, Essex] that we must go to the station with our gasmasks and a small case with our clothes in, and we then had to go to Paddington Station where we were to catch the train to the country. I remember my mother bidding me a tearful farewell at the garden gate of my house in London and I felt really excited because we were going somewhere new.



We weren't even told where we were going but we eventually arrived in a place called Banbury. We'd only heard of it through the nursery rhyme "Ride a Cock Horse to Banbury Cross". We were given refreshments and taken on a bus where we duly arrived in a place we'd never heard of, called Deddington.

I remember that all the children were lined up in the Town Hall in Deddington in front of the people who were willing to take us into their homes and we must have looked a motley crew, being a mixed bunch of scruffy East End schoolchildren. I felt a little bit unwanted because I was one of the last ones to be chosen; they all seemed to want strong young boys to be a help around the home or on the farms.

It was a whole new world for me. I was also with my elder sister, Sylvia, and my younger brother, Alan, who was eventually taken to Adderbury so we were separated but my elder sister was billeted in Deddington with a Mrs Summerfield. I was taken in by a local couple whose names I've forgotten, although things did not work out so well for me there and I was then taken to stay with a lovely lady called Emily Spiers in High Street Deddington [her house is now called Cherry Trees] with her husband.



(l to r) Sylvia, Alan & Pat

Emily Spiers



She was very kind and I stayed with them for the whole time I was in Deddington. I had come a long way from Campbell School in the East of London to the country in such a short space of time but I immediately settled into country life.

I don't remember exactly how many of us were billeted in Deddington but there were quite a few, although not all of them stayed. The coach would come down occasionally from London, often bringing parents who would be in tears when they saw their children and wanting to take them back home again, especially if there was a lull in the bombing in London. My parents didn't visit me and my mother told me afterwards that she couldn't bear to come down because she knew if she saw me she would want to bring me straight back home again so it was a long time before I saw my mother again. My father was busy working on the war effort anyway so wouldn't have been able to visit. One of our neighbours from London used to come down and visit her daughter so my mother did get some news of me on a fairly regular basis until her daughter eventually went home.

I formed a lovely relationship with "Auntie" Emily (as I used to call her). I once asked her if I could call her "Mum" but she said that "Auntie Emily" would be more suitable as my real mum was at home waiting for me to return. She took me to the local church and I had my first experience of the Harvest Festival there where we gleaned the wheat and decorated the church. We also used to go for long walks in the fields and along the country lanes and one particular memory I have was later on when all of the villagers gathered together after word was received that Coventry had been bombed and we all walked up to a hill where we would see the distant glow in the sky which was Coventry burning.

I got to know Deddington very well and loved the village life. I went to the local school and our classes were held upstairs in the British Legion Hall where we used to have fire drills involving us scaling down rope ladders thrown out of the upstairs windows there. We formed friendships with the local children but were often kept within our own groups although we were able to mix with the local children when we went to go to the school premises for Assembly where Mr Wing was the Headmaster and who was very kind to us. I used to love singing hymns in Assembly and then we often would have sports activities in the playground before lessons.

I remember some of my evacuee friends from the time - Vi and Margie Coleman, Pauline Savill and Doreen Stewart who I since learned stayed in Deddington and married Deddington boys (book p.81).

I had very fond memories of my time with the Spiers family and spent a lot of time with Auntie Emily, her husband William, and their daughter Dorothy, although I had a special affection for their son Billy. He was a dashing RAF lad and I still have a picture of him in his uniform (book p.88). I had a bit of a childhood crush on him and it was always a jolly time for all of the family when he came home on leave. He used to like popular music and we would gather round the radiogram to hear the latest songs. Billy used to roar around on his motorbike and used to take me for a ride around the village. Dorothy was engaged to Tom Pratt (book p.88) who was based in Catterick, Yorkshire, and she would write to him almost every day. When Dorothy and Tom got married in the local parish church I was lucky enough to be their bridesmaid, Dorothy in a lovely dress and hat and Tom in his army uniform, and we carried daffodils as it was a spring wedding. Auntie Emily's husband who was retired used to go for walks with his little Aberdeen Terrier, Scottie, and as he

had a slight limp he always carried one of his carved walking sticks that he had made.

I learned such a lot about country life while I was in the village. Auntie Emily would make beautiful potted jams and pickles and her husband had his own kitchen garden which kept us supplied with fresh vegetables all year round. Auntie Emily was a wonderful dressmaker and would make many of my clothes for me as well as suits for her husband. She could turn her hand to most things and she was also a great cook with her native Yorkshire Puddings her speciality.

I was in Deddington for almost four years and while I didn't really want to leave, as I was now getting older, Auntie Emily said that it was safe for me to go back home to be with my mother, and so I came back home. By this time my sister had already left Deddington to return home but my brother, in contrast, did not have such a happy time in Adderbury as we did in Deddington. He was only five when he went there and being separated from his family so young he had difficulty in settling down and was moved between various different houses. The families he was with seemed to feel that he was a problem child, and minor indiscretions like wetting the bed were not recognised as signs of the distress and discomfort he was feeling that they would be today. So it was not all rosy for some of the evacuated children.

I was definitely one of the lucky ones, being with such a nice family and I kept in touch with Auntie Emily after the war, with the family even coming to my wedding, and although Mr Spiers died in 1949, Auntie Emily lived long enough to meet all of my three children.

I have wonderful memories of my time in Deddington and of the lovely people from the village who were so kind to a young girl from the East End of London.'



Pat in 2012

Acknowledgement: Bill's son, Mike Spiers, has kept in touch with Pat and took the notes for this article in conversation with her. Pat's discovery of photographs and names of the other WWII evacuee children (facing p.16) from her school just as the supplement went to print has been a most important addition to the parish records and well worth the last minute delay to accommodate them.