

Extract from *A Parish at War*. Personal Stories

Don Walker. 2012

Wartime memories - Don Walker

'I was born in 1934 in the house next to Eadle the butcher which was then the Post Office run by Mr West. Before the war my parents, Percy and Freda (Gardner), moved to No 5 Hempton Road. I can remember standing in front of it on the night Coventry was bombed and seeing the whole sky glowing red on the horizon.

My mother's childhood home was the old farmhouse at the top of Council Street. [Now Orchard House, Hopcraft Lane.] It was in the yard of this house that the War Memorial was carved. My mother's trade was Butter-maker which she took to Banbury weekly in a pony and van. The type of pony was called a 'vanner' - they were good fast ponies. Her father, Fred Gardner, was an ornamental Blacksmith working for Franklins where Johnson's timber yard is now. He made the weather vane on Deddington Church and did the iron work for the Rood Screen that went to Tasmania. My other Grandparents, Eli and Eva Walker, lived at the Plough on New Street. Grandfather did some excavation in the cellar to try and find the tunnel to the castle but could not find any sign of it.'



The Walker family outside No 5 Hempton Road 1941/42

(l to r) Don, Percy, Jenny Smith (evacuee), Freda, Roy

Joan Ley (evacuee)

Air raid precautions

'Mr Percy Vincent who lived in St Thomas Street was the Deddington postman; he was also the Air Raid Warden and, after doing two deliveries of post during the day, he would again go round the village at night to check if everyone's windows were completely blacked out. If he could see a chink of light he would shout "put that light out!" Deddington School windows were formed into a diamond shape with strips of brown paper glued to them; this was to stop them shattering in case of any blast. We could be seen going to school with our gas masks in a brown box

slung over our shoulders. It was Mr Charlie Gardner's job to test them. He then lived at the south east corner of Market Place. He held a piece of newspaper over the mask and said "breathe in"; if the paper held fast to the mask it was classed as safe. They used to hold exercises in the council yard buildings (now The Health Centre) on what was called Back Lane then but Earls Lane now. Sid Rule, who was County Surveyor and in charge of the ARP (p.16), would get me to be a 'hidden body' that they had to find and rescue.'

Helping the war effort

'Us schoolchildren used to go out and pick rosehips which we brought back to the school where they were weighed and put into bags. Fred Deeley took them to Aynho Station. We were paid for this. They were used to make Rose Hip Syrup for children.

Mr Wing took over from Mr Harmsworth as Headmaster of the school early in the war. He lived in what was always the Headmaster's house which was where the Antique Centre now is. Mr Wing was Secretary of the Pig Club. I remember that purple coloured potatoes would be tipped into the school yard. They were dyed purple because they were not fit for human consumption. Most people kept a pig.'

[The Stile House, still has the old brick pig pens and the boiler house in which the potatoes and other scraps would have been cooked in a big copper over an open fire. Perce Walker helped restore them when we bought the house in 1977.]

The army stationed at Deddington

'There were several regiments billeted here. Wychway House was one of the many barracks handy for drill in the bull ring.

They set up open workshops in the Market Place and if we children had a spare penny they would melt it down and make it into a small Spitfire with a safety pin soldered onto it to form a broach. I saw one made from a silver coin much too expensive for us lads. It would be interesting to know if there are any still around.

A voluntary canteen was run by members of the Wesleyan Chapel, chief organiser, Mr Frank Valentine. This was held in the Wesleyan Sunday School room most nights of the week. The troops could go for light refreshments, play darts and board games and there was always a roaring fire to greet them. On Sunday nights the troops were invited to various homes. I well remember our front room with soldiers sat round the fire. My father kept in touch with one until his death, Bob Roberts was his name, from Colne in Lancashire.'

The Royal Observer Corps Post and Gun positions

'The Observer Post would be about where Windmill Street and Mackley Close are now. [The location that I used in the book was the map reference provided by the ROC museum. Don's very clear memory is supported by others who have pointed the same thing out to me. See page iii for a map with the correct position.] There was a gun position opposite the school. There was also a gun position by Castle End House the remains of which were visible in the wall until it was recently rebuilt.'

[There is reference in the Home Guard section on page 71 of the book to tree trunks on wheels being placed in both these positions. They would have obstructed vehicles and held them up in the arc of fire from the gun positions. Similar mobile road blocks existed in Clifton and Hempton.]

Military service. Don's father, Percy, volunteered for the army in WWII (p.12) and his elder brother, Roy, served for four years in the RAF Police post war (p.23). Don also served in the RAF for his National Service (p.23).

1953

Don at his desk in charge of the Bedding Store at RAF Rudloe Manor



Prisoners of War

'These were in a camp in Duns Tew; it consisted of several Nissen huts in a field which belonged to Mr Routledge and was situated off the road to Middle Barton. Each day a lorry would bring them to various farms to work. The farmers would say how many they needed depending what work was to be done. I remember them coming to Mr Butlins at Grove Farm. They used to knit slippers for us with string. I still have a ship in a bottle which one made for my birthday.

I was at Grove Farm one morning when a prisoner of war came to work, there was normally two, so Percy Taylor who worked there said to him "where's your mate?" He said "he's very poorly with tummy ache" so Mr Taylor said "he's been eating too many blackberries" - they loved them - but his friend said "No, I found a bottle by a gatepost down the field and he thought it was milk and drank some". Mr Taylor turned to me and said "he's drunk the Jeyes Fluid we used to kill the maggots on the sheep!"

Businesses, shops and trades. There is a very comprehensive list on page 17 compiled by Don.

The Coal Barn

'The Coal Barn situated at the bottom of Goose Green was called this because the building had been used to store coal which was distributed annually by the Deddington Estate Charity Commissioners (Feoffees) to the poor of the Parish. It then housed the hand pump fire engine until the new pump was housed at the new station on Earls Lane. It was later used as a garage by Dr McCabe who lived in The Mount. I'm not sure if it was during the War or just post war but a partition was built to form a small room at the end with an external door; this was to form a mortuary. The first person to be taken there was a young teenager named Freddie Wheeler. He rode his bike out of the Tchure onto the High Street and was killed when a car hit him.'

Evacuees

'Most of the evacuees to Deddington came from the Dagenham area in Essex. Some were obviously from quite poor homes. I remember that Hilda Tritton, who was one of the evacuees who lodged with us, was surprised when we put milk on our cereals. She said that they used cold tea. Once a month a coach would come from London with parents of evacuees to see them; however quite a few found time to go to the pub because beer was in short supply in London! The war-time photograph of our family taken outside No 5 Hempton Road (see head of article) includes two evacuees - Jenny Smith and Joan Ley (see also facing p.16). Joan's parents wrote a lovely letter to my parents in 1942.'

by Camber's Rd
Dagenham
Essex

Sun 2/8/42

Dear Mrs Walker

A few lines trusting
you are all well. Also that Mr
Walker is well. Well this week has
passed very quickly with Joan home
with us. Although we have been
awake for a couple of nights with Air
Raids. I think they must have been
on their way home as no bombs were
dropped. The new guns were in action
and its fine to know we have some
effective new weapons for our defence and
are not quite so helpless & feeble as
we were during the Battle of Britain
at the time Joan came to you.
Which brings me to the real reason
of sending this. Joans behavior &

manners are really a credit to your two years of foster parentage, and it is very difficult to know just what to say to you to adequately express our grateful appreciate of your many kindnesses to her during the past two years. We can only say Thank you and express our sincere wishes that when this war is over, you may, in your united family life, find the happiness you deserve. Please do let us know if you visit London, we shall be ever so pleased to have you visit us. Please convey to Mrs Walker of New St & family, Mr Walker Roy & Donald our kind regards & accept our sincere wishes yourself

We are just
 Nell & Arthur Ley

~~From
 Joan~~