

JOSÉ STEVENS

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'I was 12 years old when war broke out and was at Banbury County School, having attended Holcombe House Preparatory School, Deddington, from the age of 3 to 10 years. The school fees were £4 18s per term and the cost of the bus fare to school in Banbury was 4 pence halfpenny.

I remember evacuees arriving by bus into the Market Place. All the village children went to greet them and I felt jealous of those families who were hosting them, as my family was not to have evacuees but had air-crew families from Upper Heyford.

My parents, Charles and Gertrude West, ran the Post Office in Deddington and for a time the family lived above the Post Office (now Eagles). They moved to Corner House (now the Police Station and the adjoining Corner House). The present police office was our family shop, selling virtually everything for the home except food.

My parents later bought Holcombe House. They had so enjoyed having the families that, after the war, they ran the Holcombe as a guest house. I remember the Local Defence Volunteers (Home Guard) doing drill in the Bullring and school playground and the Royal Observer Corps plane spotting for enemy aircraft on the fields and allotments opposite where the Windmill Centre is now.

Troops were billeted in Deddington houses, the Manor stables and the Council yard (now the Health Centre). The cookhouse was in the Unicorn yard, where the soldiers went for all their meals. The regiments were the Pioneers, the Yorkshire and Lancashire, the Liverpool Irish and Scottish and the Cameron Highlanders, who taught the villagers Scottish dancing in the school hall on Friday evenings. Then came the Americans with the jitterbug.

I was allowed to go to the dances, but regretted being too young to join in much of the fun of having all the troops around Deddington. It seemed to be the regiments' last posting before being sent abroad.

When I was 15 my father asked for me to be off school as he needed my help to look after my two younger sisters when our mother became ill.

After the war, I got a typing job at Hopcroft Holt, part of Barton Abbey Satellite Landing ground (p.82) which was manned by RAF dog handlers. They patrolled the

aircraft - Spitfires and Wellingtons - which were there to be checked and serviced. It closed down in 1945. I was then offered a job at Brize Norton.

When the family bought Holcombe House in late 1946, my parents wanted me home to help run the guest house.

Dad was in the police as a War Reserve Policeman and carried on as Special Constable until his death in 1952.

I met my husband Bob in 1948 (see page 67 for his war service); he then worked in Barclays Bank. He gave up banking and trained as a teacher. We married in 1949.'

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