

Wartime in St Peter's Infant School, Farnham

Note The information about St Peter's School comes from the Log Book and is very scanty. However I was a child at the same time so I propose to use the facts from the School Log and add in my own memories where they are relevant. For clarity I shall use different fonts to indicate the change from Farnham facts to those of my childhood elsewhere.

January 1942

Snow. Only 65 out of 95 children attending school. There was water streaming down the walls of one room. On one day no milk for the children arrived and on subsequent days it was frozen. Cough and Colds were prevalent.

Milk was provided for children daily in small bottles each holding 1/3 pint. This was to try to ensure that children had enough nourishment in times of great shortage. It was often unpleasant to drink because it was left too long near a radiator.

By February the snow was still around. The doctor came into school and immunised 5 children against Diphtheria. There were 3 fresh cases of whooping cough.

It was a regular thing for doctors and nurses to come into school. Children were regularly inspected by the doctor to ensure they were healthy and developing well. The nurse came even more frequently and carried out inspections of heads to ensure that infestation by fleas or lice were treated. Generally the school nurse became known as "Nitty Nora."

Whooping cough was a childhood ailment which left children with a racking cough for months after infection had passed.

On 22nd May the overflow in the lavatory was mended and a broken chain mended. The piano was also tuned and a new rope fitted to the flag pole so that the flag could be hoisted on Empire Day (24th May)

The Police gave a talk on Safety First.

The school closed for 3 weeks summer holiday on 10th July but would be open daily for holiday activities. The new term started on 4th August with a new head teacher. That same day there was an air raid warning.

School holidays were different from those of today. For a start there were two long breaks of 3 weeks, one in July and the other in September so the children could help with hop picking.

My school also had to deal with air raids. When the siren went off we were lined up and marched out to the shelter which was partly underground with earth heaped up on the top to diminish the effect of blast should a bomb drop near by.

Inside was long and narrow with wooden planks along each long wall for us to sit on but my memory was always on kneeling on the concrete floor in order to use the seat as a surface to draw on.

The school closed again for hop picking on 4th and reopened on 28th September. Air raids were continuing but amongst other events reported was an accident by a child who fell when getting out of the desk and suffered a cut which needed to be clipped by the doctor.

Before Christmas there was a carol service at St Andrew's Church, a long walk for young children on 16th December. The following day there was a Christmas party provided by the Farnham Evacuation Committee.

When I was a child my mother was required to have a boy from the East End of London to live with us. He had been evacuated to escape the bombing. His up-bringing was nothing like mine and he caused my mother great embarrassment by stealing vegetables from the greengrocer's shop for her. He really didn't understand when, instead of saying, "Well done" as his mother would have done, she marched him back to the shop and made him give the things back.

He only stayed a short time because it quickly became unsafe where we lived as well and I was offered the chance to be evacuated myself but my mother said I would stay at home and we would sink or swim together.

Early in 1943 a telephone was fitted at the school!

By March there was a measles epidemic. The school closed for Easter on April 21st but a few children came to the school each day for their milk.

The school year continued much as before with the addition of an inspection of gas masks in June. The produce from the Harvest Festival was sent to the isolation hospital.

Infectious diseases were a serious concern. Most children caught several as they grew up and some could cause death or serious long lasting disabilities. Because of this children with serious infections could be sent to the isolation

hospital where they often stayed for several weeks. This was to prevent the transmission of infection to other members of the family.

By May of the following year hot meals were being provided to the school from the British Restaurant. Air raids intensified so it is hard to imagine that much work was able to be done but the school tried to provide interesting events like a visit to the pottery in Pottery Lane.

After a visit by the school dentist to inspect all the children's teeth the whole of the afternoon of 30th November was spent in mixing Christmas puddings.

In my own family the stirring of the Christmas pudding was a great event. It was made in a huge china bowl that had been intended to be used with a matching jug for washing in the bedroom. Remember that our house had no bathroom and even the lavatory was outside the back door.

Everyone had to have a go at the stirring and make a wish, never to be revealed or it wouldn't come true.

You should remember that food was in short supply. In order to buy it you didn't just need the money to pay for it but the coupons in the Ration Book as well. Every member of the family had a weekly ration of all the foods that were in short supply like meat, cheese, dried fruit, butter, margarine, eggs etc. In fact we seldom had real eggs but had to make do with a fairly unpleasant yellow powder known as dried egg but not seeming like anything that had ever been near any chicken. The ingredients for the Christmas cake had to be saved over a period of several months.

1945 began with yet more heavy snow and the last hour of the day was given over to sliding, tobogganing and building a snowman.

The next item of note for the year was the celebration of VE Day. The end of the war in Europe had come at last. I was rather puzzled by the records for this year because there seem to have been 3 different dates for VE celebrations but no mention of VJ Day (Victory against Japan) which came in the autumn.

My own VE Day is still clear in my memory. We all met in the town square and danced the conga in a long line. I was amazed that even the policemen joined in!

VJ Day for our family was a much more gloomy affair because my Uncle Bill had died in a plane crash in Burma just as the war came to an end and we went to Leith Hill to get away from all the people celebrating. It rained all day!