



THE MUSEUM
OF ENGLISH
RURAL LIFE



University of
Reading



Evacuee Douglas Andrews

First evacuated from Stamford Hill, North London to Great Shelford, near Cambridge. Second evacuation to Oakford, Devon and finally evacuated to Manea, Cambridgeshire.

The new billet (first evacuation)

September 1939 my older brother and I were sent away with our mother (because I was 2 months short of my fifth birthday) evacuated to Hinton Way, Great Shelford, south of Cambridge. We were billeted with Mr and Mrs Stageman. Because this was the period of the *phoney war* we came home.

Travelling from home to billet (second evacuation)

September 1940. My brother and I were sent off without mother this time. Our journey from Paddington took all day, and I have no memories of the trip. We ended up, however, sitting on the floor of a village school in Oakford in Devon.

The local residents came and chose suitable children to stay with them. But no one it seemed wanted a five year old and an eight year old boy who were determined to stay together. Gradually the numbers dwindled, until finally we were the last two left.

The new billet (second evacuation)

We were put into a car and driven round the district until we were firmly deposited with a Mr and Mrs Clark and their two children John and Rosie, who were roughly our ages at Steps Cottage. Our new life with the Clarks was something of a culture shock. We had arrived in Devon with footwear totally unsuitable for our new way of life. Mrs Clark wasted no time buying us some leather ankle boots. It quickly became apparent that our foster parents were disciplinarians at mealtimes if you dare reach out for another piece of bread without first saying "Please may I have" Failure to do so would result in a sharp rap across the knuckles with the cane Mrs Clark held in her lap. Looking back I do not think that the Clarks really wanted us and there really was not much room. What we believe persuaded them to take us was the money they were paid each week plus the



extra rations. We were not happy under the Clark's regime and my brother wrote home to make our parents aware. Matters came to head when Mrs Clark was taken ill and we were removed from her care at short notice. This must have been the winter of 1940. My brother tells me we passed through several addresses before we were moved to Mr and Mrs Bastow (Bert and Maud) and their grown up son called Fred at Pincombe Farm, outside Oakford. The Bastows were lovely people, very welcoming and open hearted. There was an outside toilet, on the far end of the farmhouse situated very handily over a stream, (no flushing cistern necessary), and the door had a large gap both top and bottom. Our stay at Pincombe Farm was only ever intended to be a temporary one and was all too soon over. So we were moved once more to Frederick Coles, his wife Clara and their daughter Dorothy (34 years old), Manor Farm, Oakford. On one of our mother's first visits to us at Manor Farm she was aghast at the fact that although we had been issued with a third of a pint of fresh milk every day at our London School, this was not the case in Devon. Mum created such a fuss the local educational authorities this facility was introduced and thereafter it was my task to go to school every day carrying two metal cans full of the stuff for my schoolmates. I can still feel the wire handles cutting into my fingers. The Coles family was a self-supporting unit. Clara was the matriarch, in total control of the house and meals. Dorothy had been professionally

trained at a diary college and was responsible for all aspects of the poultry and dairy produce. Her father in overall command of the farm and there was one farm hand in full employment.

Work (second evacuation)

One job a six year old could be of real use to Dorothy was in collecting the eggs from the henhouses, at the same time feeding and watering the birds. I was despatched to bring the cows for morning milking. Only when I was almost upon them would they start to form up one behind the other, there is an established pecking order amongst cows and an order of seniority and woe betide any cow which tried to usurp another's position. I would follow behind them. The lead animal would turn up the yard by which time MR Coles, Dorothy and Stan would have the cowshed open.

Returning home (second evacuation)

After being uprooted from our North London existence in a block of flats, we were given a strange and completely new way of life, in the hands of absolute strangers. It was my big brother who broke the spell, merely by passing his Eleven Plus. He was brought back to London to continue his schooling and I returned in spring or summer 1943.

The new billet (third evacuation)

In June 1944, I was evacuated to Manea, where I was billeted with Mr and Mrs Wayman (Mabel) and their two sons Jack, and Peter who was my age more or less. Peter and I occupied the same bedroom where I had observed that the ceiling above my bed was uneven. This particular night I was awakened by the turning on the bedroom light and concerned voices. It was as if I was in bed with a packet of broken biscuits. A gale had blown down the chimney and it crashed through the slates onto the beams in the loft, thereby bringing down the ceiling. Ordinarily, this would have been plasterboard but it had happened before

and My Wyman had repaired the ceiling with cement. There was a large piece of it on my pillow. My habit of sleeping curled in a ball probably saved my life.

Returning home (third evacuation)

Looking back over my three periods of evacuation from September 1939 to about March 1945, with spells in between spent at home in North London. I was, on the whole, treated very well indeed. The entire experience made me independent and self-reliant and has left me with a love of the countryside and of animals that will last a lifetime.

Schooling (third evacuation)

There was no room in the village school so our school was in the Village Hall. Our teachers were a Miss Pye for the younger children and a Mr Tedeschi for the older ones.

