

Out of Harm's Way

Written by John Trafford

It was on Friday September 1st 1939 that many children of London were evacuated from the capital in one of the greatest organised movements ever seen in this country. War was coming over at any moment and enemy bombers were expected to strike at once, so the London County Council arranged to send all the children to safe areas. Many bits of film and photographs show these children carrying their bags and their gasmask boxes. They were also labelled, just like a lot of parcels, with their names. Many were sad scenes of farewell between parents and the young ones, many tears being shed on both sides as the parents did not know when, or even if, they would be seeing their children again. So the special trains went off to various places, some near, some far, but all way from London and other big cities. I did not go at this time was taken, with my mother, brother and grandfather, to a friend of Father living just out of town at Englefield Green. My father had to stay at home because his job. I was actually in Windsor Great Park when war was declared at 11a.m. on 3rd September 1939, although we did not know it at the time. When Grandfather, Brian and myself arrived home at dinner time we found the grown-ups were very seriously 'listening in' to the one o'clock news on the 'wireless' and we two boys were sent out of the room and told later of the news. The air raid sirens went on a couple of times, once when we were in the park that morning but we thought it was a 'practice' and carried on with our walk; then once during the night when we all had to take cover. Being woken from sleep and sitting on the floor in the hallway with a blanket round you is not much fun but these were false alarms anyway and the 'All clear' soon sounded. Nothing else seemed to be happening and the war seemed to us not to exist. I have learned later that the war at sea was in earnest and many brave seamen were losing their lives by having their ships sunk by submarines, surface raiders and air attacks. This period is called 'the phoney war' because the war on mainland Europe was static. The French and British armies were facing the Germans with very little action between them and this state of affairs carried on all that winter and into springtime.

As things were quiet my family was back home in south-east London, at Catford, by mid-September 1939. I found a very changed London on my return. No schools were open so it was like a very long holiday for the very few children left. Many of my friends were away, so I only had my brother, who was five years younger than me, to play with. I seem to remember that we had a lot of fine weather at that time so I was able to ride my bike, skates and our homemade trolley guided with strings reins (great fun going downhill but no brakes!). After a few weeks I met a school friend and he told me that many children were returning home and also some teachers who were trying to gather together children and start unofficial classes. These were to be held in people's houses; as yet there were no schools open but the few teachers that were around had arranged that about ten of us, of all ages, met in a private house for a couple of hours in the morning one day and perhaps an afternoon another, in someone else's house where we had very makeshift lessons. I remember we had a Christmas party in one house so these arrangements went on into 1940, by which time the London County Council schools were beginning to open for the odd morning or afternoon and more often as teachers were coming home from their evacuation. Also more children were returning, so for a few

months I was attending half a dozen different schools in my neighbourhood for either a morning or afternoon, with different teachers making up the lesson as they went along. But, at last, things settled down to a more regular attendance at one school until the German Army began its offensive through the low countries, ending in the return of thousands of fighting men by the Royal Navy and the little ships in the action known as Dunkirk.

This aroused the government again and the L.C.C. organised another mass evacuation. This time my parents decided that I and my brother Brian should go, so all the necessary arrangements were made and on the day set we were up very early. I think we had to be at the school by 5 or 6 a.m. I have a vague idea we had taken our bags to school the day before, so all we needed now was our gasmask cases and packets of sandwiches for the journey. We did know we were going to Cornwall but that was all, not exactly where. We all sat around in various classrooms in groups made up of, I suppose fifteen to twenty under our initial letter our's being 'T'. I was the eldest boy in my group, being now 13: a teenager, although that term was not heard of in those days. I remember that Hilda Watts was the endless girl. She had been in my class in primary school some years before. So we were both put in charge of our relevant sexes. After waiting for what seemed like hours, I suppose it was only a couple or so, buses arrived to take us on our way and farewells were made to our parents and so, carrying our own bags and packages, we were all labelled with our names and addresses and off we set.

We arrived at our local railway station, boarded a steam train and got settled into our compartments. I do not recall if we were six or eight to each compartment but with all our luggage we were soon full up. I seem to remember it being a corridor train as there were windows for looking out on one side only, and of course, everybody wanted to sit by the window. As I was the one who possessed a watch I had to set time limited so that we all took turns, to stop the squabbles.

Being only a local London station not on the main line, but in the south-eastern suburbs only, once we had started a certain amount of shunting took place. Goodness knows which way we went to get to the main line to the West. I don't recall much about the journey but my brother reminded me that at least at one of the stations stopped at, ladies were offering drinks of water to the children, scooped up from large galvanised baths all along the platform. Whether anything to eat was offered I can't remember but I would suppose buns or something like that. We had brought sandwiches with us and I imagine we ate them, I don't remember being hungry.

At long, long last we stopped at a station called St. Germans, very ominous I thought in the circumstances. We were all shepherded off the train onto a fleet of single deck buses, all carrying our bags and packages and me hanging onto my young brother who was only eight years old. We were all very tired and I think rather quiet for so many children. The buses set off and Brian and I were in the nearside front seats so had a view forward and I very clearly remember the deep red sunset right in my eyes as we travelled along. I listened to our teachers talking with the driver as to where we were going and it seemed that two places were possible: 'Gunnerslack' on the hill or a strange place called 'Cowstuck' down in the valley where it was always foggy and damp. I was to get more used to Cornish accents in the forthcoming weeks. At long last we arrived in the playground of a school just as it was

beginning to get dark. We were quickly ushered inside, all thoroughly tired out carrying all our luggage. We must have looked like a miniature Retreat from Moscow!

We were given drinks and cakes made by the good ladies of the district but I suspect that they were not sure of our arrival time so the cakes had been out for some time and got rather dry. Anyway when we were told that they were rock cakes we christened them 'Cornish granite cakes' and I don't think a lot were consumed. The next move was to various classrooms where we just sat at the desks and waited while local folk walk around choosing children they were going to 'foster'. It seemed to me to be a bit like a slave market. Grown-ups would walk in and after spending some time looking at us would either walk off to another room, or say to one of the children 'would you like to come with me?' and so, in ones and twos, our numbers dwindled but my brother and I would not be parted so we were among the last in our room. It was getting late by this time and we were both ready for bed. At long last a lady looked at us longer than usual and told me that she knew of a nice gentleman who would like to look after us. She helped us with our bags and took us to a motor car and, after a short ride, we had arrived. I think that we were soon in bed and, feeling already homesick, we quickly dropped off to sleep.

The next day we felt much better and enjoyed a good breakfast. I remember just outside the dining room window was that Cornish trademark, an ivy covered chimney, just beyond a wall. From the front of the bungalow was a fine view out over the valley of the Tamar to Dartmoor, with Bren Tor away to our left. Our foster father was a very kindly middle-aged man, called Mr Dew, who lived with his elderly stepfather and the arrival of two young boys to his establishment, I believe, rather livened things up. Luckily the weather was glorious that summer of 1940 so we were able to get outside a lot to play with other children. There were three more evacuees in the house opposite, two boys, one with a sister.

I think it must have been on a Friday we had travelled down, as I seem to remember it was on Saturday morning that all the Londoners had to go into a field by Chilsworthy Halt to have a talk by some of our teachers who had come down with us. Even my old pre-war headmaster, a certain Dr Caughey (we boys called him 'Old Coughdrop' as he was always sucking some kind of sweet) had come. The talk was about how to conduct ourselves in our new surroundings, we were having the weekend to settle in and had to report to the new Delaware School on Monday morning. There we were sorted out in age order and the younger ones, including my brother Brian, had to go to the old school in Delaware Road, the Infants with a Headmistress. We remember her because of her hair done in 'drop curls' which amused us. The new school was a wonderful new building, only recently opened, and the headmaster was a Mr Johns. I was put in Mr Vian's class at the end of the corridor, the windows of which looked out to Plymouth. To remind us of London, we could see the barrage balloons hanging over the city and docks like silver pigs, especially on a still day when the tails hung down loose like ears. One day during class time someone called out to look at Plymouth and there were two of these balloons on fire and going down, leaving a trail of black smoke. Probably a German aircraft had shot at them, although we did not see it.

The school had lower ceilings than we were used to but we were all on one level, toilets and everything inside, not a bit like our London schools. We did the same lessons as the local children and these were not much different to what we were used to at home but only two or three stick in my memory. One was a science class in the lab, we were making lead mouldings. All the class were to bring some small article. I took two small china figures, one of Red Riding Hood and the other a Pixie given to me by Mr Dew. I still have these in my possession. The teacher had obtained some clay from the River Tamar, quite a reddish colour, and we pressed out shapes into small boxfuls of clay to make a mould, into which we then poured some molten lead. When cold some of these results were rather good, other times the clay was too wet or air was trapped and molten lead splattered everywhere – all good fun. Then there was, I'm not sure if it was called English or Reading but for most of the lesson a member of the class had to stand and read a couple of lines or so, then someone else would do the same, Londoners and locals alike: except when it came to my turn. The teacher discovered I was a good reader so my spell went on and one, pages at a time. I was told that they liked to listen to my London accent. In those days regional accents were stronger than now, there was no television only the wireless and in many homes that was only used for news, although children might be allowed to listen to Children's Hour, so local accents stayed put. One day Brian and I went down to Gunnislake village and in the greengrocer's an elderly lady spoke to us but I had not the faintest idea what she was talking about, we didn't understand one word. She must have thought us foreigners were a funny lot, not understanding English. Her son came to our rescue and we got what we came for, which I think were the last bananas to be seen in the area for some time. These were two small green ones but we carried them in our trouser pockets and by the time we had toiled back up the hill on a very hot day and out to our home these two were ripe, in fact overripe. One we had at teatime but the other was rather too 'squidgy' and I think had to be thrown out in the end.

Our trips down to the village were always a bit of an adventure. In those days the road down below the station, just past the field on the left, was only about half as wide as it is today with no pavement. There was a high but more upright stone wall holding back the woods above and this went right down to where the little cottages face on the other side of the road. There was, set in this wall, a water tap that was the cottagers' only water supply. Later in the War when the American Army came to the area they needed to get their big trucks up and down Gunnislake Hill so the road was widened quite a bit to what it is today. We used to start at the field at the top, it was houses on it now, and walk along the top of the bank which in turn carried on to the wall, and so we went on, at times 12-15 feet high. We would then climb down to the road and have a drink from the tap before going back up the hill by the road usually as the younger ones found difficulty in climbing back up the wall. I sometimes went back that way though, it was much more fun. Once two or three of us climbed up the hill through the woods and when we reached the top we found a large galvanised shed there. We seemed to be at the back of it so we crept up to it and looked through a crack and found men working. What at I don't know but at what seemed a secret place in the middle of a wood. They could not be up to any good, even working for the Germans, so we crept away as quietly as possible. Of course, there probably was a road and houses the other side of this large shed but we did not see it and our imaginations took over. On one occasion we went a little way past our usual climbing down place and then, due to grass over

– hanging the edge, we could not see over to find footholds. In the end I jumped from this great height, the soles of my feet still tingle when I think of it. Gosh! That road was hard and I was only wearing plimsolls. After a while when I could walk again, I had to climb back up the wall to guide the other boys' feet down safely into the gaps between the stones.

On a few occasions I remember 'bunking out' of school. At playtime I would slip out of the gate when the playground teacher was not looking and ducking below the wall, run up to the crossroads and across to Miss Page's shop on the corner to buy sweets. I would have been in trouble if caught but I was lucky or, as I thought at the time, clever. As there was hardly any traffic at all on the roads in 1940 it was not the dangerous escapade it would be today. At dinnertime I would go and meet my brother and we would go home for a meal cooked by Mr Dew which was quite good. His cooking stove I remember had a glass container at the side containing a clear liquid, maybe it was paraffin, but it was efficient anyway. Then back to school for the afternoon. On returning home we would have tea and then go out to play for a while with other evacuees who lived in the houses opposite. There were two more of us Londoners billeted at a farm further down the road and when we asked them to come out to play they said they were not allowed out but had to do work around the farm out of school time. I believe they returned to London fairly soon, being so unhappy.

We played either in the road or in the field as there was a gap where a gate had once been. This field had a large plot of bracken growing which was higher than our heads, so we had trampled down part of it and made tunnels, passages and rooms. The last time I saw this field a few years ago it had been cleared and a smallholding established with chicken runs and whatnot. At the bottom of the field we could climb a wall and see the trains go puffing by. We were then next to what I was told was an old arsenic mine and we sometimes explored around there. I can remember seeing tunnels under the flooring, reminding me of the Romans and their hypocausts but there were too small for us to get into, so I don't know what they were for. I was also a good site for coloured pieces of mineral of one kind and another; very shiny reds and greens and blues, some shining like diamonds. I used to collect a lot of the more interesting ones but they all got left behind when I came back to London, I regret to say. There was also a strange smell around the old mine that again I smelt a few years ago and all memories came flooding back.

One game we all played often was called 'forty-forty'. This was played on the bank at the gateway of the field. One of us would be 'It' and hide their eyes and count to one hundred, while the rest of us scattered and hid. At a shout that one hundred had been reached we waited until It climbed on top of the bank and looked around to find one of us. On spotting someone they shouted out (say it was me) 'John forty-forty' and I would get up and have to make my way back to base without being caught. Meanwhile the other would try to do the same without being seen. If they were, they would be called out by name and 'forty-forty' and a dodging chasing game ensued until we had reached 'home' safely. Usually one of us was caught and sometimes we all got in but not often and the person caught then became It.

One day I remember standing on the bridge at Chilsworthy Halt waiting to see the train come along. This was a little steam engine of the tank type with, I think, one or two small coaches and it ran a shuttle service from Bere Alston to Kelly Bray for Callington via Gunislake. As it had to twist and turn on its way between the hills after crossing Calstock Viaduct on the single track, it kept tooting its whistle: whoo! whoo! whoo! It kept going on and off and you could hear it coming from miles away, puff, puff, puff, chuffing and puffing, rattling along the gradients and cuttings past where we were standing and on past Hingston Quarry, on to Kelly Bray when, after a certain time lapse, it would come back again. On one of the days we stood to watch, I heard an aeroplane and I saw flying up to the valley of the Tamar a Blenheim Bomber. The surprising thing was that I was looking down on it as it flew low up the river. I can clearly remember the green and brown camouflage on its upper surfaces.

One of our longer adventures was a trip to Jan's Rock, the weir down below Chilsworthy. We would cross the railway bridge round to the right and just off the road on our left were some cottages and an old ruin. We would go down beside these old remains and come onto a great heap of large stones and we had to watch that we did not sprain an ankle passing by these as they were very unstable.. At the end of the stones we came to an old mine dump of red sand, a very coarse grained sand and very red when damp. We sometimes stayed here to play, running up and down the hills. A narrow lane ran along below the red sands coming from Dimson. We would cross this and make our way through the woods downhill until it levelled out on some old mine workings with an old track and ruined buildings. When exploring on my own I once found an old adit in these woods but with a cracked roof and fallen stones and much water on the floor. I had more sense than to enter. The entrance was about five feet high and it went straight into the hillside, all very dark after the first few yards. We would walk past the mine and come out onto a plateau of white sand. It was in many places really white and glistening in the sun, so much so it hurt one's eyes. A few years ago I took my own children down there but found the weather had made it all dirty grey and there were no more clean white places left and many trees had grown up, altering the appearance of the area enormously. I have two small phials, one each of white sand and of red among my treasures even today. Our usual path down was round the bushes, across the plateau and down the very steep slope of sand to the rocks and river. There is a tongue of rocks sticking upstream out into the river and many happy hours were spent there catching eels and getting out to the end rock as the river was low that year of 1940.

One day there were five or six of us going down to the river and, as we were passing these ruins and clumps of bushes, we turned a corner and suddenly came across a very large billy goat lying in the middle of the track. Needless to say we did a very quick about turn and rushed back behind the bushes, except my little brother Brian. As usual he was trailing behind everybody else and so he met us coming back. 'What's up?' he said. We all told him a big goat was round the corner and not tied up. 'Where?' he wanted to know, obviously disbelieving. 'Let me see' and he calmly walked round the bush. 'Baa!' said the goat, getting to its feet. You should have seen Brian run, he's never been so fast before or since, his face was white as a ghost's and he was going like mad. With that we all took to our heels and flew. I had to slow down to keep an eye on Brian and guide him along as we did not go back up the path through the woods but through the old mine and we soon slowed down when we

found the goat was not following us. But now we were on new ground, very rough old workings and tips. We were working our way down to the rover and along upstream to our original destination of Jan's Rock. It was a hard scramble all the way, all rocks and gullies and I had a job helping Brian along, him being the youngest but we managed it in the end although our time to play by the river had been cut and it was almost time to go back home to dinner. We did our usual things, going to the end of the rocks and went our usual way home keeping a good look out for any 'wild beasts' but Billy had gone.

On one particular day when we arrived at the rover, on the inlet side of the tongue of rocks in about two or three feet of water, lay a salmon about two feet long. By its stillness we decided it was dead, after splashing some stones in near it, and I volunteered to try to reach it. I went round to the land side and worked my way along, which was very difficult with trees and bushes almost to the water's edge, and even the remains of an old barbed wire fence. At last I arrived opposite the fish which was still too far out so I had to take off my shoes and socks and paddle out. The water came over my knees and I was afraid of getting wet trousers, even though I was wearing shorts which I had turned up. (My shorts were the normal sort that all boys wore in those days and I didn't go into 'long 'uns' until sometime after returning to London.) The rocky bottom was hard on my feet and I was worried about slipping over but I did manage to get the fish and found it very hard to hold, being surprisingly heavy and slippery. I got a grip just before its tail and managed to drag it out and with a struggle got it back to the others. The big question now was what to do with it. We settled on hiding it among some more rocks and asking our foster parents what we should do when we got home to dinner. That afternoon we returned to take the fish home but when we got to the rocks it was gone. I think that it was a poached salmon and whoever had caught it had heard us coming during the morning, hidden themselves in the woods and watched us hide it. Then, when we had gone, the poacher repossessed it. But it would have been quite a job lugging that heavy fish all the way home up that hill.

Another of our river adventures was the day we found the raft. A raft of logs about four inches in diameter had drifted into our little backwater. It was about six or seven feet square and just one layer of logs nailed onto cross pieces and it wasn't terribly buoyant and very heavy to push about. There were five of us there that day: two boys Trevatt and Trevellian; and Trevatt's sister, they were billeted in the house across the road from ours; and Brian and myself. The other two boys were on the raft standing up I believe and had pushed themselves some yards upstream into very deep water. We implored them to come back as the raft very sluggishly tipped one way, then another as they moved. They at last saw sense and started back, pulling on overhanging bushes and paddling with a stick. A tree branch hung out over the river about three feet from the water and reached out eight feet or so from the bank. As they came along they wanted to stop and get off but, as I said, the raft was heavy and although they both grasped the branch, the raft kept going sweeping them straight into the water, much to our amusement. Luckily they both kept hold of the branch which bent down with their weight. The one nearest the bank was in up to his waist and the other halfway up his chest, bobbing up and down holding onto the branch for dear life. They couldn't touch bottom and were very frightened and as the bobbed gently up and down they were shouting out for us to get them out. By then we were

collapsed with laughter, they looked so funny as the raft just sailed on gently till it reached us. After a few moments they struggled along the branch until they touched bottom and could climb the bank to safety. It was just past the place where I went for the salmon so they had a job getting round to our side. We then had the question of what next, so I sent them back behind some bushes to take off their wet clothes and wring them out and hang them up on the bushes in the sun to dry. When we decided it was almost dinner time they had to get dressed in their still-wet clothes and we all went home, those two very anxious as to what would happen when they arrived. I heard no details but they did get into trouble.

Sometimes we went home through the woods and out into a lane that saved us going across the top of the white sands and up the steep wooden track. This lane led us out to the red sands. Beside the road was a little stone trough, for the want of a better description, where a stream coming down the hillside collected before entering a culvert under the road. We sometimes drank from this on a hot, dry day and lovely, clear and cold it was too. Some years later I discovered that ducks are now kept in the field above and the little stream was now all muddy and spoiled. An amusing story about this stream is that one day on our return from the river, we sat down to rest and we washed our feet drying them on our hankies, it being a very hot day. My brother left his shoes and socks on the wrong side of the road, so that when his feet were clean and cool he walked across and couldn't put his socks on because his feet were dirty again. He did this a couple of times before the penny dropped but it made us laugh.

Sometimes, when we didn't go out to play, I would get one of Mr Dew's books. He had some fine Victorian wildlife books with marvellous colour plates of exotic birds and I would spend lots of time just looking through these books lying on a blanket in his front garden. He had a lot of old curios and a large number of books in his garage and also in a shed in his hayloft behind the bungalow. We found the shaft of the South Sea island spear decorated, we were told, with human hair. Luckily the blade was missing as he caught us one day throwing it about and he was rather cross with us.

One Sunday we went out to tea. Vic, the young man who came to help Mr Dew with his chores some days, took us all to tea at his place. We went over the bridge at Chilsworthy Halt and across the fields working to our left but not as far as Latchly, more toward the river, and we came to a big farm house where we had splendid tea. There were a lot of people and other children there and a goodtime was had by us all. The other boys and girls then took us for a walk through some orchards by the river and these were cherry orchards. Large black cherries were there for the taking. I never had such beauties; the only trouble was in reaching for them, the branches were very brittle and covered in a kind of moss caused by the damp riverside conditions. You would pull a branch very gently to get a bunch of large cherries, only to have it snap off, not big branches but the twiggy smaller ones. It was very strange but I've never eaten so many cherries in my life; they were lovely and sweet. I suffered no ill effects either.

Mr Dew ran a car. I don't know what make or type but it was a very squarish body, about 12-16 h.p., a brown colour I seem to remember with big leather covered seats. Mr Dew's sister used to live at the

Queen's Head, the pub in Albaston, on the corner, and he used to visit her now and again; not for very long only a matter of minutes but we were always given a Kit Kat to eat while we stayed in the car. It was a bit of fun riding with him as his driving was fairly fast, a good job in the lanes that there was hardly any other traffic about, not a bit like now. I think he got a petrol allowance on medical grounds. He always started off with a sudden jerk, shooting us forward. He took us to Looe one weekend. I remember sending off a postcard to my parents. On the way home we stopped at Pensilva and had a walk on the moor where we saw a horse running about in an excited state that made Mr Dew hurry us back to the car. He was very concerned about our health and after a few days we developed some whiteish spots on our skins. So he showed them to the District Nurse who lived next door. It seems these were only caused by a change of water. Here in the West Country it was soft, not like our hard London water. He also decided we should have a haircut one day and we were sent on a Saturday morning to the barber's in Albaston where we were operated on in one of the quickest cuts I have ever had and it only cost three pence old money that is 1 ¼p nowadays. I think we looked a bit like convicts but I didn't care.

Mr Dew told us one day that he was unable to continue to looking after us but had found a lady who would. He took us to meet her and we were feeling sad as we had come to like staying with Mr Dew and felt at home and now was coming an upset, what would this person be like? We walked up the front path of this cottage right opposite the school and I glimpsed through a window a tall, thin lady with glasses and an almost grim expression on her longish face. My heart sank, as I saw her coming out of the shade of her hallway, we hesitated then she came into the light and smiled at us and held out her arms and I began to learn what a good, kind, lovable person she was. She was a real Mum. She had her own son and daughter at home. Her son used to go to work so we did not see a lot of him and I feel he considered us 'kids' and too young to be seen with. His sister was more my age and going to Delaware School so she became a good friend while we were there. Whenever she had been to cookery classes at school she would bring home her efforts. I well remember one day she made some brandysnaps and jolly nice they were too. Mrs Prescott, for that was the lady's name, was a good cook herself and we always had good meals. She used to make jellies for teatime treats but she used a different kind to those my own mother used. Mrs Prescott used jelly granules which we thought very strange because at home we could have small pieces cut off a block of jelly to eat; in powdered form you couldn't do that. After adding the hot water the jelly bowls were stood on the floor by the hall wall to set, as that was the coolest place.

Mrs Prescott had a black kitchen range in her living room fired by solid fuel where she used to do some of her cooking, otherwise she used a primus stove and another paraffin cooker of a type I have used on early camping holidays. This was because there was no gas or electricity laid on in the cottages, even on the main road as I've said this was opposite the school. There was no water inside either, one had to keep filling kettles and buckets from a tap situated in the front garden and this tap served two cottages. For lighting in the evenings there were paraffin lamps with a brass reservoir and a tall glass chimney about it. You no doubt have seen the like in the antique shops nowadays. If the wicks were kept trimmed properly they gave out a very good light but of course it took longer than just

flicking a switch. Mrs Prescott also used to make her own clotted cream by letting the milk stand and drawing off the cream which she simmered in a double saucepan on her stove. When cool there was enough cream for our tea which we had on bread and butter or, if you liked jam, that as well. I didn't have jam myself. I have tried this since I returned home but only a very small amount of cream can be taken from our London milk, it was hardly worth the effort. Sometimes but not often, I spoil myself and have a pot of Cornish clotted cream from the supermarket but somehow it's not quite the same.

One day all the evacuees were treated to a Cornish cream tea by the good ladies of the area. It was in the Village Hall, or rather a large green painted hut up towards St. Ann's Chapel on the right hand side of the road, and a wonderful 'do' it was: strawberries and cream, I can't remember what I had instead of strawberries but I had a lot of cream, scrumptious! with orange juice or a squash to drink. We all sat on forms arranged around the hall and when we were finished and wanted to get down and play outside as it was rather warm inside, we found that we were stuck. We were all hemmed in as the tables were close to the forms and the forms were against the wall so we couldn't wriggle out underneath. There seemed to be lots of ladies and little girls around the doorway which blocked that way out anyway, but we found that there was a window at the back of us which we found we could easily open, only to find lots of stinging nettles just outside and stretching some way across. As us bigger lads could not wait to go through the proper doorway we each took flying leaps to clear the 'stingers', until it came to Brian's turn who of course landed in the and got some nasty stings on his arms and legs which made him cry. In due time he was all right and joined us running about playing in the field. The 'Strawberry Tea Hut' as it became known was taken down and moved soon after the War.

Now that we lived so near we did not have far to go to school, just across the road. It was quite a long walk out to Mr Dew's place and that made dinner time a hurry up job. Also it gave us a new area to explore. We still went to Jan's Rock from time to time but now we followed a footpath at the end of the cottages past one or two other cottages that now lie derelict but people lived in them in 1940.

Eventually we came to an old quarry and that was a most marvellous place, so mysterious and quiet at it seemed shut off from the world. The rocky sides gave us plenty of scope in climbing where we could. In one place I managed it to the top but not until I had grown up and returned in later years did I find other routes up. There was a large pool against one side where the water was still and deep and was a dark green in colour. The colour was due to the depth as the water was clear in the shallower parts where you could see large boulders under the surface. One day I noticed a large 'boulder' which moved when prodded with a stick and seemed to be floating. When my stick slipped it left a long red mark and a nasty smell. Then I realised this was the body of some poor sheep that had fallen in and drowned.

Another time we heard some strange noises and went to see what it was and found some 'teenagers' with a powerful air rifle shooting at tins placed on rocks. Then somebody called out from the top of the quarry wall that they had found a bird, so we all hurried round and up the hill outside to the top. We saw perched on a small bush, an owl. It was only about two feet from the ground and sitting on top of this bush facing into the afternoon sun, completely blinded by the light and not realizing its danger

from about half a dozen children and two big boys with a range of about four feet. To this day I can still hear that poor bird cry out, as it lay on its back while the boy shot again and again before call out to stop. The last I saw of it was floating in the middle of the water where they had thrown it when dead.

Not far from where the owl was shot, we were on another occasion wandering around when one of us found a 'hole' in the ground. Now this was about six feet by eight with wooden edges flush with the ground. The amazing part was it went straight down, we could not see the bottom, just black darkness. We all stood around looking down and wondering where it went. Of course it was an old mine shaft but it had nothing to protect any person walking across the open moor, anyone could so easily have fallen down. We threw stones down and it was many seconds before we heard a splash at the bottom. I know it was silly to stand at the edge but boys of that age seem to have no fear, we must have had a good guardian angel watching over us. I even sat on the lip with my feet hanging down, but not for long when I thought of the long way down. I hope that hole is blocked up now.

We visited the old quarry several times and found the long way to it on the track going up opposite The Volunteer Inn, it was up there that we were shouted at for walking across a meadow so we ran off and went home another way. The farmer was very cross but we had done no damage and I think walking on the grass crop did no harm. Maybe he disliked us climbing over his gate, anyway we didn't stop to find out, we ran. I've since been back to the old quarry and even taken my own children but on my last visit I was greatly saddened as nowadays it is a rubbish tip. The deep green still water is filled to the top with old rusting car wrecks and heaps of rubbish abound. The quiet solitude and peacefulness of the place has gone for ever. I shall not go again. I shall keep my memories of how it was.

Mrs Prescott used to keep a few hens in her back garden which we used to help her feed. There was a large bin filled with grain that we used to scatter to them. A thing that amused us about her back garden was the lavatory at the top of the garden. It was not behind her cottage but off to one side behind the next house which had been built at a later date and so had to fit into what was left in the way of land. But this 'loo' which we called 'peepholes' was different in many ways to hat we were used to. The door was only five feet high at the most, so even then I had to duck my head, and in the door were two round holes about three inches across. These were side by side near the top, hence the name. As there was no water laid on, the ashes from the range fire had to be sprinkled in the bucket every time the toilet was used. Of course there was a wooden seat built over this bucket which every day Mrs Prescott had to take out and bury the contents in her garden somewhere. Nowadays in that cottage there is an indoor flush toilet, running water and electric lighting, a far cry from 1940.

On Sunday afternoon Mrs Prescott would take us to church, or chapel as she called it. I remember we went to one in Albaston where we went upstairs. I believe today it has closed down. Another one we attended was down in Gunnislake, near the bottom of the hill, and I think these were the only times we went down the hill in the normal way, as we had grownups with us, and not by walking along the top of the wall. It was after one of these visits to Gunnislake church we were all walking back up the

hill; myself and Brian and Joan Prescott who was just a little older than me, behind came Mrs Prescott and her son, William, and some friends. All of a sudden both Brian and I were stopped in our tracks by a sound, a rather special whistle which we had not heard for some weeks. We both looked at each other with one word on our lips, 'Dad!'. There was no other explanation, we could not see anyone in front of us but we started running as hard as we could up the hill towards where this magic signal had come from. Then, from a recess in the wall, our Dad stepped out in front of us, within seconds we were all clasped in each other's arms. The whistle he had given was our family signal, it was better than a shout, more easily recognised and used by his father before him and I also use it even now, it's very handy when you get separated, in a big supermarket for instance.

After our greetings and Mrs Prescott had got over her surprise, thinking we had gone mad, and introductions had been made, as she had never met my father, we all carried on and went home for tea. It seemed that our parents in London had heard that the Germans were air raiding Plymouth and ships along the coast, and they were worried about us and so had decided to fetch us home. My father had come down and left the train at Bere Alston but was too impatient to wait for the connection to Gunnislake which was an hour or so wait. He decided to walk carrying a large suitcase, albeit an empty one for our things. It was a hot day so it was quite an effort on his part. He had to cross the river at Calstock by the little rowboat ferry that was in operation at that time. Then when he did arrive it was to find us all out. He was told by neighbours where we were and from which way we would be coming so he set off to meet us and, seeing us coming up the hill before we saw him, he hid himself to surprise us, which he did in no uncertain matter.

Teatime, and the evening, were spent chatting away exchanging news then we were sent to bed as we had to make an early start next morning. I don't remember much after that but it was a very upset Mrs Prescott who said goodbye that Monday morning. We were also very sad at going, we had grown to love her very much although the thought of seeing our own Mum again softened the blow. We didn't really want to leave Cornwall, we liked it so. It was to be ten years before I could come back as a holidaymaker and then I had a wife, and on later visits with my own children.

The raids on Plymouth and the Channel convoys my parents had heard about were the prelude to the Battle of Britain and the Blitz which we came home just in time to experience, but that is another story.