

Laurence Henry Ford

My name : Laurence Henry FORD

Born : Rainham, Essex JULY 1927
Youngest of 8 children one of whom died aged 5 years, 6 months before my birth.

Education : Rainham (Infant/Junior schools) 1932 – 1938
Grays (Palmer's Endowed) 1938 – 1939
Great Stambridge (Mr Rochford) 1939 evacuation days
Kingsbridge (Devon) 1940 “ “
Marlow (Borlaise school) 1940 “ “
Oxford (St. Clement Danes ex London) 1940 – 1943 “

Employers : Banking: London: Glyn Mills (now part of RBS) 1943
Odeon Cinemas: Cookham, Berks. 1944

Army : Volunteer aged 17 years 1944 – 1948

Evacuation : Although at Palmer's School, Grays, I was not allowed to be part of that school's evacuation as I lived in a neighbouring borough (now Havering) and so was part of party from Rainham schools system

Transport

Sunday 3rd September, 1939 before the 11am deadline. Buses used were the "FAIRPLAY" fleet owned by a local benefactor ROBERT MIDDLEMAS (see extract write-up attached) and see PHOTO (attached).

18th JUNE 1940

Buses to Hornchurch District Line Underground station – then system to Paddington (GWR) and so to small station SOUTH BRENT Junction (now no longer in existence, Beeching days et al), and branch line to Kingsbridge, South Devon. The most surprising thing was that our train passed right through main stations such as Newton Abbot and Exeter, without stopping. A good plan I guess bearing in mind the large number of children on board!

(Note: we were then closer to German Forces in Channel Islands than if we had stayed in Rainham)

NO DIARY so dates are guess-work but after a few months I moved to MARLOW where my Mother had come 1940 (possibly October). Mother moved to Oxford so I went too.

OXFORD

Various billet homes (about 6) and 2 Children's Hostels. As St. Clement Danes School were 'visitors' too from Shepherd's Bush, London, arrangements were made by local authorities for us to use various schools and colleges e.g. Milham Ford (Girls), Oxford High (Boys), Southfields (Boys); Mr Cowley, Oxon and St. Clement Danes, Holborn Estate Grammar. Whilst at Oxford, at which (1943) I took the University of London exams and passed in 5 Credits.

After Army Service I attended the Sir John Cass Institute at Aldgate and then the Moorgate College, finally passing the Association of Certified Accountants: Finals.

The months at Great Stambridge – we evacuees sat at the back of the classroom waiting for arrangements to be made for us to attend (we were told I believe, for us to attend Southend High School but this did not materialise due to the short time we were there). Similarly, I guess, for our days at Kingsbridge, bearing in mind that we arrived just about the beginning of the long summer break anyway.

My wartime days at Rainham were really from part 1939-1940, and then from July 1943 to about February 1944, during which times of the latter we were subject to enemy air raids. On one day during my stay in Marlow the German planes sought to bomb Marlow or maybe an isolated incident about 5pm: a coincidence perhaps was that the King and Queen passed through the town at about lunch time.

3rd September 1989 (Sunday)

Exactly 50 years to the day of my 1939 evacuation.

I re-created the journey made on that momentous morning but this time I used my knowledge of Public Rights of way footpaths (gained from my experience of planning and leading Cross-Country walks for charities). I started my walk at 1:30am at the same Rainham School and after 31 miles through the dark night over ploughed fields and the countryside oaths, crossing streams and farmlands etc, I reached the main square in Rochford at 1.15pm (15 minutes later than planned) to be met by a crowd of well wishers, including the leader of Rochford Council and other friends. The letter which I carried with me (from the Mayor of Havering) included belated 'thanks' to Rochford area householders, who so kindly too 'waif'

evacuee children into their homes so long ago, and this letter was, I was later informed, read in full council of Rochford Council, and thus entered the records of the Town Council.

18th June 1940

I followed the above 9 months later by travelling by train to Newton Abbot, thence by taxi (no other transport now available – the first bus was not until 11am when I was due to meet the mayor of Kingsbridge at the Town Hall). I walked, using local roads, to Totnes from 4:15am, arriving at 8:45am. My walk was totally in pouring rain (though the district was in the midst of a formal drought). Similar reception at 11am as for Rochford – welcome speech and photos, followed by a personal ‘walk about’ before being driven by the Deputy Mayor back to Totnes at 3pm. The 1940s train from South Brent to Kingsbridge no longer exists.