



THE MUSEUM  
OF ENGLISH  
RURAL LIFE



University of  
Reading



## **Evacuee** Peter Terry

Evacuated from Ilford Essex to Ipswich with Beal School,  
Ley Street, and then to Sonning Common, Berkshire

## Travelling from home to billet

The Beal boys returned to Ilford in preparation for departure to a camp school by coaches on Monday 19 February. Our destination was known as Kennylands Camp and was some 4 miles north of Reading on the edge of Sonning Common.



We were met by hoards of press photographers who wanted to record this unique event. We had to walk up and down several times waving and cheering for the cameras before we were allowed to go to our dormitories.

## The new billet

The Council for the Preservation of Rural England recommended to the Government in 1938 that camps should be built in various country areas with the object of giving deprived children from inner cities the opportunity of having a holiday in the countryside. It was envisaged that the camps could be used as evacuation centres

if necessary. Kennylands was the first camp to be finished and occupied.

There were five dormitories, each 90 feet long by about 15 feet wide with a large covered veranda at the far end. Inside there was a small partitioned room at each corner. Two of these were occupied by masters, another was a prefects room, there being 2 school prefects and 2 dormitory prefects to each dormitory and the fourth room was used as a locker room for sports equipment. The beds were all bunk beds, there being about 12 along both walls with a space in the centre of the room. Lights out at 9pm. The dormitories were named after famous British heroes, Wolfe, Drake, Clive, Blake and Scott Houses. There were inter-house competitions.



A dining hall, which had a masters rest room, tacked on to one end with a tuck shop at the other. An assembly hall with a stage at one end. A religious service was held here every Sunday morning. Two blocks containing toilets, washbasins and a shower area, which were



across the road from the dormitories, so it was a bit chilly having a wash in the winter time. Class rooms A small sick bay with 4 beds and a matron in charge. I remember being on the list at one time to receive a daily dose of cod-liver oil and malt. The matron gave it to each boy in turn using the same spoon but we didn't come to any harm, as far as I know! Wouldn't be allowed these days would it?

## Schooling

The rest of the site which covered some 23 acres in total, contained a cricket pitch and pavilion and later on 2 football pitches. A running track was laid around one of them. There were also allotments behind the main buildings plus pigs and chickens.

The headmaster [was] Mr Walter Norman, known to the boys as Wally, and there was also a Camp Administrator, Captain Mee, who was responsible for food supplies, upkeep of the buildings and employing kitchen staff. He was employed by the National Camp Corporation, which was a company set up to run all of the camps.

## Family connections

Our parents started a Parents Association mainly for the purpose of hiring coaches on one Sunday a month to visit the camp. On those Sundays, some of us would go to a point at the far end of the camp where we would eventually see the sun reflecting from the roofs of the coaches. We would then run back to the camp entrance to welcome our parents. Unlike my experience at Ipswich, I can never remember feeling homesick at Kennylands.

## Returning home

Finally after taking my school leaving certificate, I left Kennylands on 17 March 1944, after spending 4 years there and started work in the City of London, just in time for the doodlebugs and rockets, but that is another story.

## Pastimes

On 30 Sept 1940 we were told an important visitor was expected. About 11 o'clock we were lined in 2 rows on the edge of the cricket field when 2 limousines drove up and out stepped the King and Queen. The Queen came along the boys she said "Do you like it here boys?" To which we all replied in one voice "Yes Ma'am".



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