

Personal Recollections of a Gt.Yarmouth High School Evacuee.  
STARTING

I was a pupil of Nelson Junior Girls School and had "sat the scholarship" at the Greenacre School. The results hadn't been decided but my grandmother (I was an orphan) had already drilled into me that I was not to pass, and even if I did I would not be allowed to go to the High School despite the fact that my sister was already a pupil there. So off I went to Balderton near Newark and when it was announced that I was one of the lucky ones, it took a lot of persuasion from the Headmistress Miss Copeman before I was sent to Retford, joining the High School half way through the first term. I had been used to being top of the class but soon found there were plenty of girls more clever than me! It was also soon apparent that some of the girls, notably from the Priory school, had had a much more rounded education than I'd had. (Sorry Nelson School!) I had some catching up to do.

I was billeted with a Mr. & Mrs Hayes to join another High School girl Hazel Chilvers. I lived in Hallcroft which was a large pleasant Council Estate. I've no recollection of how I obtained my uniform but I turned up for school suitably attired. I was surprised at the warm welcome I received from the other girls in my Form. Yes, Form. No longer would I say Class, Teacher etc. I was in Form Upper 3 Alpha, and my teacher was a 'Mistress. There was also quite a lot of to-ing and fro-ing. I did not sit at my desk all day, there was the Art Room, the Science Lab, the Gym. etc, and different Mistresses for different subjects. Everything was new.

I was happy in Hallcroft but unfortunately Mr. Hayes became ill and I moved to 5, North Road and stayed with Mrs. Harrison. This was the Great North Road and large convoys of troops frequently passed the house. Once I was told to ask the soldier on point duty if he would like a cup of tea, and Mrs. Harrison insisted on a dainty bone china cup and saucer and even an embroidered tray cloth!

## The Building and Routine.

Retford High school was situated by the canal. The first thing that confronted us was a long sort of corridor known as The Covered Way. Here we each had a peg and a shoe bag. We hung up our outdoor clothes and changed into our House shoes, which were part of our uniform and were light black shoes with a strap across and fastened by a button. I was always untidy and frequently found I had lost a button! As the war progressed these shoes became more difficult to obtain and other styles were allowed, but shoes were always changed. Our beloved striped hat bands also fell victim to the war and a plain band with the school badge on the front was substituted. The old striped ones were highly prized. The Covered Way was supposed to be quiet and orderly and speaking marks could be doled out by a sixth form Prefect. When Miss Copeman retired and was replaced by Miss Eleanor Kerr, I recall on her first day she strode into the covered way and shouted "Pipe Down" which rather took us aback. We shared the school with Retford High school. One week we attended 8 to 10a.m. and 1 to 3p.m. and alternate weeks we 10 to 12 noon and 1 to 3p.m. My memory of the exact hours is rather hazy so this might not be strictly accurate. I do not remember seeing the Retford High school girls at all and cannot recall their uniform. I do know I once glanced at a notice for a Retford team for hockey or netball, and was struck by the fact that one or two girls were called Imogen, which was not a name found in Yarmouth at that time. The school had a large gym which was well equipped with Ribs Ropes, Horse etc. When the equipment was stored away, this is where we had Assembly every morning. We filed into the hall, Lower Third, Upper Third, Lower Fourth, Uppper Fourth, Fifth Form and at the back, Sixth Form. The Form Mistress sat on a chair at the end of the appropriate line. There was a stage or platform in the front where the Headmistress led the Service. We had a kind of mini-service, kneeling on the floor for prayers, sitting crossed-legged for the reading, notices etc, and standing for hymns, usually two hymns, accompanied on the piano by a sixth form pupil, who also played a suitable piece for filing in and out. I always enjoyed this.



Behind the school there was a large grassed space which included an air-raid shelter, a netball pitch and space for playing rounders, but for hockey we had to walk to Ordsall which was a fair walk over the railway bridge. We played tennis in Retford Park which was near the town centre. We had to cross the bridge over the canal and walk down a lane, maybe a ten minute walk. The park was quite a meeting place as was Retford Square, where the older girls would meet and chat with the Grammar school boys. For music lessons (singing) we walked to Ebsworth Hall which was next to St. Swithun's Parish Church. We were taught by Mr. Hunn who I believe was also organist at St. Albans Cathedral. Of the songs we were taught I only remember "Who is Sylvia" and "Sombre Woods" (Bois Epeé) and also Stamford's setting of the Te Deum which we (the whole school) sang in Retford Parish Church together with the Grammar school at a service held just before our leaving Retford to return to Gt. Yarmouth. We were always encouraged to attend Church or Chapel on Sunday mornings. The Vicar was Rev. Dennis James. I was confirmed there with other pupils. After some months the Gt. Yarmouth Borough Council bought "Glen Esk" which was a substantial house opposite the High school. Here we resumed normal hours and this was our "proper" school. The house had a good garden with a summer house and as I recall a particularly nice large tree. Some years ago I went back to look at "Glen Esk" and found it to be a Home for the Elderly.

#### LEISURE.

We had a good social life. If we could not go home for the holidays (It was at least a year before I saw any of my relations apart from my sister) a few outings would be arranged for us. I remember going to Newstead Abbey, the home of the late Lord Byron. We could not go inside the house but the ~~garden~~ gardens were beautiful. At Christmas I went two or three times to Grove Road Methodist Chapel to hear the Messiah. Elsie Morrison was a favourite soloist. Once we were taken to I presume it was Leeds to hear the Hallé Orchestra. I felt a bit disappointed because Sir John Baraballo was not conducting but instead the conductor was Anatole Fistoulari, who I had never heard of, but have heard of him since. Unfortunately I have no recollection of the programme, but I clearly remember eating cucumber sandwiches in the Interval!

Another time we went to Sheffield for an afternoon performance given by La Comedie Fran<sup>ç</sup>aise of Le Bourjois Gentilhomme and although we couldn't understand all the dialogue, nevertheless we found it very funny. We sang both National Anthems and Miss Bailey our French Mistress was horrified because we didn,t know the French words. The error was quickly rectified and I have been able to sing Allons Enfants etc heartily ever since. Two other concerts I remember wer~~e~~ C.E.M.A. (Council for the encouragement of Music and the Arts) when Olive Zorian came to Retford High School to play the violin.

Other than these special occasions, there seemed plenty to do to keep us occupied out of school hour<sup>s</sup> We wandered over West Carr hills (known as Whisker Hills) and walked along the canal on Sunday afternoons<sup>or</sup> went to look if there were any ducks on the River Idle. When I was older I went to Ballroom Dance classes one night a week. Mrs Harrison took me to a rather smart dress shop in Retford and bought me a new dress, grey/green with some red buttons. I always wore this dress to dancing class. During the war clothes were rationed and it was never the case of "What shall I wear?" You wore what you had.

We attended various fund-raising efforts for the forces. Once Mrs Harrison took me to a fund\_raising lunch and I had Game Pie which I had never tasted before.

Sometimes we went to a field in Hallcroft to weed carrots, four pence for a seemingly endless row.

One or two of the evacuees were unhappy and were glad to go home to face the bombs, but mostly we settled down quite well and part of me was sorry when I had to return to face the prospect of the Oxford School Certificate. I remember I was cycling round the market in Gt. Yarmouth when a friend called out "We all Passed!"

Molly Doughty (nee Nicholls)