

DOUGLAS EMMS

Evacuation

I didn't actually get evacuated until 1940, but made up for it by being evacuated three times in all. The first time was to a small place just outside of Helmsley called Hareham, just about the whole of Ayresome school was sent away. I was billeted with Kenneth Caswell, my friend from just up the street and we stayed together with a lady who made it plain that she had wanted two girls. She made our little lives absolutely miserable. We had always been free to play at home, but not so here, we had strict restrictions but on us, she even confiscated our swimming trunks so we couldn't even enjoy a swim. In the end she decided she'd had enough and she dumped us in Helmsley market square and told us to get the bus back home, of course my mam got quite a shock.

About two months later I was once again evacuated, but this time it was a whole new experience, I was billeted to a small village called Cutherstone outside of Barnard Castle with an elderly gentleman and his wife. He was head gardener to a big estate and lived in the purpose built gate house. Well it was like living in the lap of luxury not only was it the most beautiful of homes but it had all the mod cons. I had my own room and right next door to me was an indoor bathroom. I'd been used to having a loo at the bottom of the yard and a bath on a Friday night when the tin bath was dragged in front of the fire, so to be billeted to a house with an indoor bathroom was a dream. They were a wonderful couple and I stayed there for three months until the wife became ill and I had to leave.

The next place I went to was a small place called Lartington which is the first village outside Barnard Castle, it was made up of just one street, and I stayed in a cottage which was one of six, three quarters of a mile up the railway track from the village, the middle of nowhere really. I was billeted with the farmer's son and his wife and small baby, there was no running water in the house, just a pump in the road which served all six cottages and the loo was an ash midden at the bottom of the front garden. There was no gas or electric, all the cooking was done on the range and oil lamps were used for lighting. I remember being quite upset for the first couple of days but they were a lovely couple and soon made me feel at home. I did my share of chores, helped bring in the water and also helped on the farm, but I also did my fair share of playing. There were five lads altogether who had been billeted to the cottages and we would get together and play, we built a den in a nearby quarry and we would go swimming in the nearby river. On a Saturday we would go in to Barnard Castle to the pictures.

My clearest memories are of the winter of 1940, it was the worst that I can recall. I remember waking up, and the snow had fallen over night, it came up to almost the top of the door, I was snowed in and missed two weeks of school. I stayed in Lartington for two and a half years.