

JOAN STOBBS

Being evacuated

I was almost 13 when the war started, it was a Sunday, I was having a lie in and I could hear people in the street talking, I looked out of the window and everybody was talking about the war starting, mind you we had been warned to expect it. Straight away I was evacuated to a big hotel at Cayton Bay but when the land mines on the beach went off we were sent back to Middlesbrough. But the bombs were dropping here too, so after Christmas I was evacuated again, this time to a small village called Oswaldkirk. I was billeted to the gardener of a large manor house; we lived in a cottage on the grounds which at the time were very modern because it had electricity. The people who lived in the manor house never spoke to me and even the two girls who were billeted with them had to live in rooms above one of the out houses and they ate their food with the staff. They had a horrible time of it, they were always frightened, not just of being alone in the dark but also because the cones from the bees were stored in the workroom below them and there were always bees buzzing around their room.

We used to help the gardener, myself and my cousin Margaret who also came to stay. We would chat to the gardener, but pinch the gooseberries behind his back.

The nearest village to the manor was over a mile away and school was almost 3 miles away. Margaret and I were very happy there apart from the cold but we didn't get a proper hot meal a day so we were moved to the village. We stayed with an old man and his sister, he was lovely and my, could his sister cook! You know I've never tasted Yorkshire pudds like them since. The place was very old fashioned with oil lamps and such, and once a week for a treat we would go over to another sister's house and listen to the radio. I stayed there until I was 14.

Work life

I came back from being evacuated when I was 14 and started work in a Price', which was a tailoring factory. We made white duffle coats for the arctic, they were so beautiful that when they were made we would all try them on. They were used for the forces when they were on arctic expeditions. Our working day started at 8 and didn't finish until 6, I had an hour for my dinner and in this time had to walk home, grab something to eat and then walk back. I always walked to and from the factory because the buses were always jam packed. By you were fit in those days.

The Jitterbug

When you went to the dances they were mostly ballroom to start with, maybe the odd tango but I remember a couple came in one night, he was a sailor and I think his partner was his wife and they started to jitterbug, well it was banned in some places and in others you could only dance it in the corners. We all stood round and watched them, they were really good.

Going to the cinema

There were a lot of cinemas in Middlesbrough during the war, and if you wanted to go to see a film you just turned up at any time and went in, and you stayed until you had seen what you wanted, if the film was very good then you would find that there would be people stood queuing outside to go in. You always saw two films, the first one was called the B picture, then came the news and sometimes even a cartoon then the main attraction. In the interval usherette would waltz down the aisle with the spot light on her selling her goods. An

evening at the pictures could be a good three hours long, you'd go out at 6.30 and it would be nearly 10.00 when you came out. You got good value for money in them days.