

EVACUATED TO CHIDEOCK

Violet Paczkowska (nee Barrett)

My memories of being evacuated in Chideock from the summer of 1940 to December 1943.

The blitz had started and my parents told us that we were to be evacuated. My sister Norma aged seven, my brother Donald aged five and I, Violet was aged ten at the time. We left home and met the other evacuees at St. Patricks School in Woolston. From here we travelled by bus, then train and then coach to Chideock in Dorset where we were met outside the local village grocery store by the villagers.

My sister Norma and I spent the next three and a half years living in the village stores with a lovely lady called Mrs Manning and her daughter Gwen who was probably in her mid-twenties at the time. It was part of Gwen's war effort to look after us and help in the village shop. Everybody had to do something and do their bit.

My brother Donald stayed with Mr & Mrs Smith who lived in the village blacksmiths. My brother was very happy living with Mr & Mrs Smith and never settled when we had to go back home to Southampton after the war.

I remember our first lesson at school in Chideock which was held in the Cloisters in the Catholic Church. We were taught by a teacher named Miss O'Mara who travelled with us from Southampton. After a while, Miss O'Mara was called back home to Southampton so our lessons then moved to the village Catholic school and we were taught by nuns named Sister Christine and Sister Mary Joseph. The nuns came from the Bridport Convent and travelled on the bus every day to teach us what they could. Our class consisted of both evacuees and local children of all ages and abilities. The Catholic school was situated at the back of what is now 'Warren House Guest House' but all that remains today is the low wall.

Whilst living in the local village shop I became aware of food rationing. I used to count the food coupons and these had to be taken to the food office in Bridport. I would deliver these coupons on my way to my music lessons at the convent. I remember Lord Walton was the food minister during the war.

Whilst living in Chideock, the only relatives we saw from home were our parents and our Uncle Joe who was on manoeuvres in Dorset with the army. Uncle Joe stopped purposely in his tank one day, outside the village shop, just to say "Hello" to us. Wow what a surprise that was!! On one occasion my parents rode their bikes down from Southampton to see us which was about 70 miles away and the roads were not like they are today. Nobody had cars in those days and the local transport was really bad. My sister, brother and I were very happy to see our parents.

I can remember 'gleaning' in the local fields which was picking up corn for the chickens. We had chickens in the back yard of the village shop and the corn was food for them. I used to go with Mrs Manning and Gwen to pick blackberries. We would take these to the WI hut and we

would get a few pence for every pound of blackberries weighed. They would make jam with our blackberries. I also remember picking wild rose hips, elderberries and mushrooms from the fields. I also remember gathering wool from the hedgerows that the sheep had left behind. I didn't like the smell much. I would take this wool to a lady in North Chideock who had a spinning wheel and a loom and she made a length of material from this wool.

Whilst staying in Chideock, I remember seeing sheep being dipped and sheared and horses being shod. I also remember seeing cider being made. Village life was so very different from the city life in Southampton.

In the summer I remember we had to scald the milk because we didn't have a fridge in those days. We would heat the milk very, very slowly to get the cream to come to the top this was called 'scalding'.

At meal times we always had stewed apples on the dinner table. I remember one day someone asking, 'Can we have something different for a change?' The answer given was 'Don't you know that there is a war on?'

My brother, sister and I returned home to Southampton in December 1943. I remember walking from the railway station in the City Centre and seeing the bomb damage and thinking how lucky we were to have been evacuated to Chideock and to have lived with such lovely people as Mrs Manning and Gwen and for my brother to have lived with Mr & Mrs Smith. Southampton had been badly hit but our house in Bitterne was still standing thank god. Living back home in our 3 bedroomed terraced house, I remember thinking how small our home and garden were. The house seemed so small in comparison to our home in Chideock when we had so much space and land around us and now, all of a sudden, we were in a much more confined space in comparison.

I will never forget the rough seas at Seatown. My sister and I were taken down to the beach by Gwen's fiancée Ron Stevens who was a policeman at the time stationed in Weymouth. Ron's mum lived in a bungalow in the Main Street of Chideock. Ron told Norma and I that we would see something we would never forget and this was the amazing site of the sea. The waves were mountain high and the shingle was being swept right up to the road way. We were looking from the top of the hill and it was an absolutely amazing site and both Norma and I have never forgotten it.

By Violet Paczkowska
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