

Pete Weston - Evacuee and Band Leader

Chapters Two to Three

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PETE WESTON - EVACUEE

This is part of the memoirs of Pete Weston, Swing and Jazz Band Leader.

Pete spent the war years as an evacuee billeted at Hurst Farm, Worton, Wiltshire with Mr. & Mrs. Cox, their children Kathleen & Graham and 2 other evacuee brothers.

Chapter two.

Sept 1939 Britain was about to go to war with Germany

So I had returned home from convalescing only to be evacuated to some unknown place far away from my home & my mother & father. It was a Saturday morning Sept 3rd 1939. I recall being taken to my school, there was a long line of London transport buses waiting outside the school, on which we were loaded. Each one of us had a brown parcel label pinned onto our left hand lapel with our name & address printed on it. Also we had a piece of green material cut into a diamond with a white button in the middle this was an other identification probably to ID us to our school.

I Don't remember much about the journey until we reached our destination, this was a station somewhere. I Later found out it was a town some hundred miles away in the county of Wiltshire the town was Devizes. It was a short station as I recall as the train would pull in to the station after coming out of a long tunnel which ran under the town & the front half would empty then the train would pull forward to let the rear end empty as the train was longer than the platform itself. At this point we would be lined up & marched up a long & winding road with some small hand luggage into the local Corn exchange where we would be given a brown paper carrier bag with some emergency rations, I remember having a packet of cream cracker biscuits as part of the contents.

At this point we were divided up into small groups by some local boy scouts & adults put into cars & moved off to some unknown places where we would stay, this being our new homes for the time being at lease. I was taken off on my own the a village called Poulshot about two miles away form Devizes. There I was to stay with two ladies who at that time seemed to be elderly at leased to me after all I was still only FIVE years old.

The next morning Sunday I had some pocket money & was allowed to go over the road this being a small country road onto the village green where there was a village shop I would buy some sweets, on the green there was a small pond which had some Geese & Ducks swimming around this was a new venture to me being a townie from London Town.

After having some lunch a car came to the house with two other boys in it, I also had to go off in this car to another unknown destination. This time we had arrived on a farm this is where the other two boys were to be billeted, I remember getting out of the car with the other two. As the lady driving the car knocked on the house door I saw a lady come out with her hair in a bun and wearing a rap over apron which was the fashion of the day. the lady who was driving the car said to Mrs Cox the lady on

Pete Weston - Evacuee and Band Leader

Chapters Two to Three

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4

the farm here are your two evacuees but I have this other little boy who has nowhere to live. Is it possible for you to have him as well? There stood this tall lady with her long white hair up in a bun style & wearing a rap around apron which was all the fashion in those days she took one at me & said

O well alright then we can squeeze him in as well he will have to share the bed with other two boys. Their names were Bert the elder of them & his younger brother John Longhurst Bert was about two years older than me & John was about the same age as myself.

The Lady of the farm Mrs Cox she also had two children of her own Kathleen was then eight years old & her younger brother Graham was Two So this good lady had her hands full with her new found family of five children to cope with all under eight years old. To think that this lady Mrs Cox now had to cope with Five of us & her husband Mr Cox. Also she helped with running a farm.

So this is my new home, as I stood outside of the farm house I was looking around its about mid afternoon on this bright & sunny day, I could here a strange noise coming from behind me it was a sound I had not heard before. Moo Moo came from a compound just in front of the house it was milking time with lots of big cows waiting to be milked about 100 plus!. To the left side of the house were some trees. So I took a look, it was like a small wooded area where was some steps cut into the ground as it led down a steep bank to some other buildings, these were very large steps for me to get down to find that there was two cottages & old mill attached to them.

The farm house was a very dark house inside as it had only one small window into the living room with a big heavy door & a large latch type door handle which you lifted up two open it, on one side of the room there stood an old fashion black range which had a large black kettle standing on it this kettle was always there as this was the only way that you had hot water for what ever reason you may need it. Either side of this fire range stood a small armchair brown leather with an old type kitchen table in the middle of the room with four kitchen chairs around it, in the corner near the window there was a small table with a (wireless) radio standing on it.(these wireless had a small battery called an accumulator it was like a very small car battery which had to be taken to a local shop to be recharged)

Back in the 1930's many houses especially in the country had no electricity, gas, or water so when it was dark there would be a paraffin lamp standing on the table for light, as we are in the middle of the country it was total darkness out side. Should you want to go to the toilet there was a small building outside in the garden area so you would need to take a touch with you, it was very scary out there in the pitch blackness of the night as it was surrounded by trees, the wind would blow & the Owls would be calling out to each other & some times you would hear a fox cry out like a person screaming out loud. The brick toilet had a bench type box arrangement with two round holes cut in it which had two wooden lids to cover them, this was the loo of the day. All toilet waste went into this compartment which was a large pit below that had a rear access so when it was full about every six months or so it would have to be emptied by shovel this in turn would be spread over the fields to dispose of it. When it was bedtime we had a candle to see our way upstairs to our new bedroom the three of us, that is Bert slept on the left hand side His brother John was in the middle & I was on the right. Mrs Cox would come up to make sure we were alright then take the candle away. Now it was very black all round, nobody went out to toilet at night. (Not likely).

After having breakfast I would venture out into the big wide world of the country farm, there for the first time I met one of the farm hands his name was Jack Goddard I grew very fond of him over the years to come. This morning he was taking the churns of milk out to end of the track ready for the united dairy's lorry to collect them. He said would you like to have a ride on the cart? Well there was the biggest horse you ever saw, he stood very tall against me after all I'm only Five years old he was a giant next to me. He was a lovely chestnut brown with a big white stripe down his nose & had a pink muzzle a big bushy black tail with big fluffy feet several of them were white & his name was Jolly, he was a gentle giant if ever you saw one. He was a shire heavy horse bread. And weighed over one ton. I took a look at this dirty old cart it was covered in farm manure, I said I'm not getting in that cart its all covered in toilet. It didn't take long for me to change my mind, It was fun.

On the farm Mr. Cox the farmer (Richard, Dick for short) had four horses, there was Jolly of course he was the biggest then came Blossom she was also a big brown cart horse she was ok to handle but sometimes she might like to try & give you a nip if the mood took her, then there was Darkey this one was an old London cob he was black all over & slighty smaller than the others, next there was Prince he was dapple grey in colour he was a bit on the wild side & didn't do as much work as the others. We were told to keep away from him so we did. There were two other farm hands one

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called Alf Hail & I think the other was called Roy, I'm not sure as he wasn't there very long. He left & joined the Army. Alf Hail also had a son Cliff Hail who worked on the farm at a later date

Chapter Three .

The name of the farm was Hurst Farm which laid between the two villages of Great Cheveral & the other was Worton both of them were about two miles away. Now its time for school ! the local village school was very small it only had two classes it was a pretty little school brick built, just like a small house between other houses.. So as there was an influx of some 30 to 40 evacuees all ages from five to probably eleven years old, the local village hall was to be our new school. This was a Tudor style building, built in 1911 before 1st world War On the forecourt there was a 1st World war German cannon known as a trench mortar on a concrete slab, The hall was a single building some 30feet by about 100feet wide it was not all that big & was divided by a screen to make it into two classes, there was an old round stove set in the middle this was to heat it in the winter. Our own teachers came with us from London Oxford Gardens School, my teachers name was a miss Taylor & the one other a miss Goeff. To get to school we had to walk some two miles each way so it was not practical to go home for lunch so we took sandwiches then we would have a 1/3 of pint of milk each morning this came in small bottles. This was the norm in those days for all schools. And it was free.

Each morning & afternoon the cows had to come into the cow yard for milking this was always done by hand as there were some 80 to 100 milking cows all hands were involved in this task, & it would take some two hours or more. When milking the men would have a one legged stall like a mushroom to sit on & milk the cows into a big bucket which would be held between their knees, when the bucket was full it would be taken to the dairy room & put through a cleansing & cooling process to keep it from going sour. This system was set up with a small tank set up high into which the milk would be poured

It would run out over a stainless steel radiator which had cold water running through it, this was how the milk was cooled down then it went through a cotton wool filter covered in a muslin cloth to keep it clean. As there were no mains water on the farm the water had to be pumped up from a small stream down by the old Mill. The water pump was operated by a small two stroke Lister petrol engine which in turn drove the pump with the aid of a belt drive. The milk would then go into the milk churns which held 10 gallons of milk each, the next job was to tie a label on each churn with the farm name & the amount of milk in each churn so the dairy would know how much to pay the farmer. As there was no electricity the men would have paraffin filled Hurricane lamps which they would hang overhead to see with.

I can recall there was a very large bull & he was kept tied up in one of the Cow sheds. These buildings are known in the west country as (skilling's) as children we always kept away from him, just the look in his eyes was enough he could almost kill just with wagging a tail I'm sure but we never gave him a chance, if you upset him he could take it out on his handler. These bulls are large & weigh over a ton each. To handle them they had a ring put through their nose & a large pole with a chain & hook would be attached so he could be lead about for drinking or breeding not a very happy life for them so they got frustrated just tied up all-day on his own. Where the cow yard was next stood five pig sties with a selection of pigs various sizes mainly black & white the popular breed of the day was Saddle backs & their diet was a mixture of ground corn mixed up in a large barrel with water, you know when it was feeding time by the amount of squealing they made. Also running around the farm were hundreds of hens (fowls) with the odd cockerel or two to keep them happy. Most of them were Road island Reds & Light Sussex breeds & a selection of ducks mainly khaki Campbell brown in colour. Every afternoon Mrs Cox or one of us would have to go round to hen houses & collect the eggs in large buckets & take them indoors where they would be washed clean & packed in egg boxes each one would hold 30 dozen eggs & once a week they were collected by the egg marketing board. Next to the pig sties was a large cart shed which held some of the carts & farm machinery. In the middle of this complex of buildings there was the Stable which would house the horses when they were in. On the walls of the stable would hang all the harness for each horse. They all had there own harness as each one was a different size to fit them.

There was three orchards around the farm with a selection of good old fashion apples & pear trees the flavour then was one that one never forgot not like the useless ones we have to have today due to common market rules "Hard & tasteless." In these orchards were the hen houses scattered about each

Pete Weston - Evacuee and Band Leader

Chapters Two to Three

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7

night the hens would put themselves to roast so all we had to do was run round & shut them in to keep them safe from foxes. As these were in three areas we would run round in turn each night & shut them up. It was a fun thing to do.

One afternoon when the cows came in for milking there was one missing as all the cows know their place in the milking parlour they always went into their own place to be tied up with a chain around their necks waiting to be milked. As it got near to milking time the cows would work their way closer to the farm itself. We looked for the missing cow but could not find her as all the cows had names but cannot remember this ones name off hand. Later that evening as I was going round the upper fields to shut the hens in it was quite dark & in the evening mist I had a fright, there in the ditch I saw a cow upside down in the ditch with her feet up in the air she must have rolled over in the ditch & was unable to get back on her feet & unfortunately had died, this was a great loss of a good cow & was quite a loss financially to Mr Cox.

November 21st 1939 this was my 6th. Birthday & first year away from home & my parents. I had not seen them since September of that summer I had settled in to my new life style on a farm although this did not seem to upset me, I was one of the lucky ones after hearing some of the other children's stories. For my birthday I would have some sweets sent to me by my mother & some birthday cards which I still have now many years later, also in those days postal orders were the best way of

sending money through the post as people did not have bank accounts unless you were one of the few who had business accounts. As I recall in the past each time you wrote a cheque it cost you two pence, each cheque had a two pence blue embossed stamp on the cheque itself so when you had a new cheque book you paid for them. So I would be lucky to receive a few postal orders in my birthday cards some were as little as one shilling or maybe as much as five shillings 'one shilling in old money pre decimal days was the same as 5p those days one pound had 240 pennies to the pound & a ten shilling note was equal 50p today so there was 20 shillings to the pound. A two shilling coin was called a florin, half a crown was 2/6d & there was four Crowns to the pound or four American dollars equal to the pound, in those days.

Not living near shops we were encouraged to save our money in Post office savings this being in the form of national savings stamps which went to help the government pay for the war effort.

One of my aunts sent some wool so I could have the holes in my socks repaired as we now have a shortage of clothes & all repairs helped to make them last longer.

Christmas 1939

Its my first Christmas away from home so I was looking forward to it very much why? I had received a letter from my Mum & Dad to say they were coming down to the farm to spend Christmas also were the parents of Bert & John Longhurst so we had a very jolly time altogether. This was the first time that our parents had met the Cox family.

It was the first time that I had ever felt sad, when my parents had to go home not knowing when I would see them again. Maybe I would see them at Easter.!

We had a very cold winter & snow was very deep it came over my wellington boots but it was a long walk to & from school & I would get the snow in my boots & wet feet which give me chilblains & made my feet painful. Some of the snow would melt & start to run down off of the buildings until the next night it would freeze again and form long icicles up to two feet long (40 to 60 Cm.) which we broke off and would chew them

Jack Goddard was the main horse man or cart man so he did most of the field work. One of his jobs was to clear out all the old cow manure which was stockpiled in the cow yard, one of the carts was a two wheeled cart which could be made to tip up this was called the Dung cart. It would be loaded up with a pitch fork then taken out into the field where the manure would be unloaded into small piles so the horse would walk on some ten paces stop & next pile made until all was unloaded & the process would be repeated all day until milking came round aprox 3pm. Then one of the other men would have a pitch fork & spread the manure by hand. When the field was covered all over, the next job was to plough the field, this was done with a single furrow plough pulled by two horses that would be Jolly & Blossom or maybe Prince, just to keep him working. Life was long & hard in those days. This job would mean walking up & down the field all day come rain or shine. Jack lived in a nearby village called Potterne, He was a single man walked to work across the fields as it was a shorter journey than by road, it was about two miles away so he would bring sandwiches for his lunch