



Duncan's primary school memories
1940-1945

Duncan, born 16th March 1935 at Ilford, retired to Lincolnshire:



I was three years old when my family moved to Chelsfield in Kent in 1938. I had one brother who was two and a half years older than me. My earliest recollection was the Battle of Britain in the summer and autumn of 1940. Chelsfield was only a few miles from Biggin Hill which was a fighter defence air station guarding London. I



can remember taking shelter in an under-stairs cupboard with my mother and brother and the door rattling with the constant screams and wails of aircraft shooting at each other in the skies above. Being only five, this meant nothing to me as at that age it was pure entertainment; fear had not entered into it. It was at this time I also started my primary school education at Warren Road School, Orpington. We had to walk just over a mile to school each way. In those days it was quite safe for young children to walk to school as a) there was hardly any traffic and b) it was a completely different world.

Time spent at primary school was interrupted by air-raid warnings. The planners had had the foresight to build several underground shelters. We all had to use our sweet ration coupons to take bars of chocolate down the shelters. To us, doing school-work in the shelters, having mock air-raids, as well as real ones, and going down the shelters, was fun, something different from the usual routine. Most of the children showed no signs of any effects from the war and it was like an adventure game. Perhaps today's computer games are the nearest thing to it, but in our day it was real.

At night there were many bomber raids and I was constantly kept awake with air raid sirens and the bangs of aircraft guns. I can still remember the drone of the German bombers with their unsynchronised engines, "*wom, wom, wom*". As a young boy it was exciting to look up and see them having dogfights. I remember my father taking me to some high ground and holding me up to see London burning in the distance, a sight I shall always remember, this big orange glow in the sky. Of course, I didn't realise how much death and destruction it meant.

We lived near the railway line and some guns used to go up and down the line in mobile artillery units. I remember standing on Chelsfield Station when a train came through full of wounded servicemen; they looked a very sorry lot with bandages everywhere. We waved at them as they went through towards London. They were probably survivors of the Dunkirk evacuation.

Sometimes, later in the war, we had to pass through a wooded area along the main road to school and we were told not to go into the woods because German paratroopers might have landed there. Looking back now, I think these were scare tactics because Orpington Hospital was nearby with patients from the armed forces in

bright blue uniforms, white shirts and red ties and the 'walking wounded' were able to go courting in the woods with their nurses.

At Chelsfield they built an ARP shelter on open ground in one of the housing estates. It was an adventure for us to go down there by an access ladder. We'd go down and see the wardens in their tin hats. We didn't really understand what they were there for. They would go round at night making sure nobody had a light showing anywhere.

My father was in a "reserved occupation" during the war as an engineer. He never told me exactly what he did but I gather he was working on heating and air-conditioning for 'shadow factories' throughout the United Kingdom which were built to disperse production facilities to prevent them being wiped out by enemy bombing.

Just after the Blitz my mother became very worried about my brother and me so my father decided to evacuate us to mid-Wales. I can remember going there and there was a girl with the name Mefanwy. It was the only time in my life I tried to ride on horseback. It was a primitive farm with a two-seater loo over the edge of the hillside and when you looked down, it was like a giant precipice. Needless to say, I didn't spend too much time in there. This part of Wales had seen very little enemy action from the skies and they didn't seem to want to observe the blackout code. This unnerved my mother and after two or three weeks she brought us back to the south-east, back to the bombing.

My father then decided to evacuate us to Chesham in Buckinghamshire. We had only been there a few weeks when a string of bombs dropped in our street and blew out all the windows. It completely demolished the house opposite. My father went out to see if anyone had survived and found that the old ladies who lived there had been killed. It was the closest we came to a bomb. The strange thing is I can't remember the bang, but I can remember all the broken glass in the sitting-room.



I always remember the time they brought the barrage balloon to stand by the railway station. It was manned by the Women's Auxiliary Air Force and we scruffy little urchins would watch them gas the balloon up before letting it up on its wire to float in the sky and try to attract enemy aircraft to bring them down. Occasionally there would be a loose rogue barrage balloon which had broken away from its moorings. I don't know what the staff who

ran these operations thought of all these little kids standing watching, amazed. It was when I was at this barrage balloon site I saw another one, about a couple of miles away, and a V1 bomb called a "Doodle Bug" fly into one of the cables and explode. The amazing thing was that it didn't destroy the cable but it definitely destroyed the Doodle Bug!

As the war progressed the bombing raids became less and life carried on as normal. My mother would get distressed when the steam trains caused fires in the stubble fields after the harvest. She thought it would attract enemy action. My schoolfriends and I were fascinated by fire and were always playing in the woods opposite our

house, lighting bonfires to cook things like crab apples with sugar stolen from the larder. My mother was terrified we would attract Germans and she was always chasing us.

In our house at Warren Road in Chelsfield my father had a Morrison shelter built in the dining-room. It was a large table top with steel legs and mesh round the sides which would support the roof if it caved in from a bomb. My brother and I slept in it at night. We were evacuated to other houses with Anderson shelters in the gardens. Every time I smell dampness it reminds me of sleeping down in the garden shelter. If we were in our normal bedroom at night and there was an air-raid we had to go to the outside shelter. We had many a sleepless night in them.

We would collect shrapnel in the mornings on the way to Warren Road School. This was forbidden by the Headmaster. Outside his study was a big steel bin and we had to put shrapnel into it. If we were caught with shrapnel in our pockets we were caned. The smell of sulphur on the casings of these shells is something I shall never forget; it must have been imprinted. Shrapnel was great to collect. As it was banned in the mornings we collected it after school on the way home and shared it with friends.

Normal life for children carried on. We had a local Cub pack and Akela taught us how to use a telephone box; this was the old two pennies in the slot with Button A and Button B. We spent all our time calling Akela. I don't think she taught anyone else how to use the telephone after that.

Once, when I was crossing a field, I was strafed by a German fighter and had to leap into the hedge. It wasn't unnerving; in fact, it was rather exciting. There was nothing you could do about it. I didn't dare tell my mother.

My father's offices were evacuated to a place called Bolney Court in south Sussex. My brother and I went to stay there for a short while in a large country house which he must have rented. We enjoyed ourselves in the formal gardens. There was a lovely pond with a bridge over it and a large ornamental frog which we managed to push into the pond. Whether or not my father had to pay for it I never knew.

It seems strange now that nearly all the men we saw in those days were in uniform, Army, Navy or Air Force. It was rare to see a man in normal civilian clothes. I used to get severe thrashings for tearing my clothes climbing trees because clothes were on ration. When we went to buy clothes the shop owner would quite often ask my mother if she wanted to buy extra coupons, money would change hands, and I would have an extra pair of trousers. Boys up to the age of 13 or 14 wore short trousers in those days.

With my father working in Sussex we only saw him some weekends. When he did come home, one of my jobs was on Sunday morning to take a holdall and knock at the local grocer's shop. The grocer was a very vain man with a bright ginger wig. He would usher me through the back door and fill up the holdall with various goodies, always giving me a couple of biscuits. In my naivety I didn't realise I was a black market runner. My grandmother lived nearby, as did my father's brother and sisters. My brother and I have vivid memories of many parties held at our house and others. I

suppose this was natural for the adults because they didn't know if they would be there the next day. Beer and cigarettes seemed to be always available.

In 1944 my father decided to evacuate us to Wales once again, my mother, my brother and me together with a cousin and my mother's sister, and we were sent to Llandudno. It was a beautiful area, virtually untouched by bombing despite its proximity to Liverpool. The locals had only had a couple of strings of bombs and couldn't understand why we Londoners wanted to come and invade their town. They did not give us the best of receptions. At our house the woman used to keep a big cauldron of soup, throwing all the leftovers into it, and it often went off the boil. From time to time maggots would appear - but we survived.

In North Wales we met Americans for the first time. Tanks arrived near the school there and Americans were very free with their gum. They always wanted to know if we had sisters at home. Of course, being so young we didn't realise what they were getting at. We did get some gum and sweets, though. We actually got into one of the tanks but didn't know how to start it, luckily.

We used to annoy the old man on the pier at the penny arcade. There was a type of shooting machine that issued film showing where your shots went. We used the film to unlock the pinball machine so that we could have lots of free plays. The elderly gent would chase us out with his money bag and keys jangling. How he hated those London brats! I have fond memories of Llandudno because we could swim there and it was a change to live by the seaside. During the war we didn't go to the south coast.

Another special memory is the D-Day invasion. The whole sky was full of airplanes and gliders going to France. They all had black and white stripes. From that day to this I have never seen so many planes fly over for so long.

KENT EDUCATION COMMITTEE
ORPINGTON WARREN ROAD COUNCIL SCHOOL

Report on Duncan Woodcock 1st Year Ending July Term 1942.
Class 3 Age 7 1/2 Academic Irregular

	Grade	Remarks
Spelling	C ⁺	
English	C	Fairly good.
Reading	C ⁺	Satisfactory progress.
History	C ⁻	Duncan most volunteered more answers.
Geography		
Arithmetic	B ⁺	Progress good. Neatness commendable.
Science		
Nature Study	C	
Arts and Crafts	C	Fairly good.
Writing	A	A very good writer - clear and bold.
Speech Training	C ⁻	
Physical Education	B ⁺	Good, alert work, but a little hampered by ^{nausea post meal}
Rhythmic Work		Duncan has been able to join in with dancing during his work of pleasure.

*A - Excellent. B - Good. C - Satisfactory. D - Weak. E - Un satisfactory.

GENERAL (including out of class activities)
Duncan is a quiet, happy, controlled boy. He is making satisfactory progress.

H. S. Heaven
Head Master of School

E. W. St. John
Head of the Institution

Encourage in a social way

We came back to Kent early in 1945 and I went back to Warren Road School. It's amazing to think that of all of those children who went through the war, I can't remember anyone in my class of at least thirty not being able to read or write. Our teachers had taught us the "3R's" despite the adverse conditions. We were privileged to go to that school which was brand new in 1938.

Afterthoughts: our primary school days were before the Welfare State but we were well looked after with regular visits at school from the "Nit Nurse" looking for fleas and another nurse who came round to make sure we weren't

pigeon-toed or knock-kneed, who made us turn our feet outwards; we were also tested for deafness and had basic eyesight tests. We were also punished for minor misdemeanors. One of mine was that I walked about with my hands in the pockets of my short trousers. I was warned but continued to do it so the teacher sewed up my pockets with vivid bright red wool and I had to put up with it all day.

My school report in 1942 under Physical Education said although I was good, I was a little hampered because I didn't have the proper soft footwear; obviously Mother hadn't been able to buy any on the black market; and for Rhythmic Work, I was unable to join in with the dancing because I didn't have any plimssoles. And I'm still a poor dancer. Nowhere in my school reports are comments as to how any of the children were affected by the war. It seems funny that we could go through five or six years' education in sometimes fairly horrendous conditions and it not showing up in unruly behaviour at school or outside, or even worse things needing medical or mental attention. I would like to thank all the teachers who dedicated their lives to teaching us under the most arduous conditions in war time with fairly large classes. I wish I could thank all of them.

I forgot to mention that we also found, in the woods, a lot of aluminium foil backed with black paper, called "chaff", I think. The bombers used to drop it to foil radar. It was ideal for making Christmas decorations at school and at home. We had to make our own in those days because there were none to buy. There were also fewer and fewer toys as the war went on and we made bows and arrows, old spinning tops were found, also marbles and fivestones; in season there were conkers. We played soldiers in the woods. I can't remember ever being bored and we generally amused ourselves with simple board games such as Monopoly, Snakes and Ladders etc.

We always seemed to have enough basic foodstuffs although rations were very tight and mothers had to be very clever in how they prepared the food. For instance, liquid paraffin was used to

make cakes as cooking fats were not available, and cakes were made from vegetables and various other concoctions. Funnily enough, towards the end of the war some Italian prisoners of war were sent to pick potatoes in the fields and, believe it or not, they had oil to cook chips and every day they had chips for lunch. When I was off school I would go and see them at lunchtime and they would offer me some. We couldn't have chips because we couldn't get the fat. My mother didn't like me mixing with Italian prisoners but they loved children – and I loved chips.



Warren Road war time pupils at a 1998 re-union

Duncan's wife, Joan, born 16th May 1938 in Hertfordshire:



I was only a baby when the war began. We lived in the countryside. I remember my father calling us out onto the back doorstep to see all the gliders going over, filling the sky; I must have been about six then. My parents ran the post office and village stores. We kept chickens and rabbits to supplement the meat ration and my father, who was over fifty, was in the Home Guard. Possibly the worst thing was the ration

coupons. My parents would sit over the table till quite late at night cutting, sorting and counting coupons. When I was old enough it was my job too; rationing went on into the Fifties and always made a long day even longer.

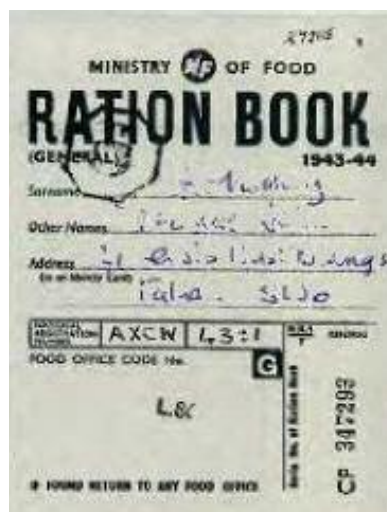
Joan's sister Mary born 1922

My big sister, Mary, who lived and worked in London at the height of the Blitz, wrote:

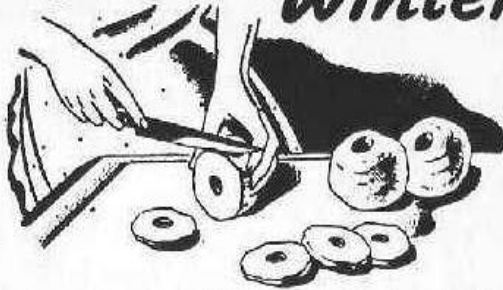
"I certainly remember standing on the stairs at Ashley House and watching Maples on Tottenham Court road burn and the glow from the city; I cried so much I couldn't have had any more liquid in my body. Of course, being British, I couldn't let anyone see me, and they didn't. They were all in the basement, where I should have been."

Mary and her office at the Ministry of "Ag & Fish" were evacuated to Lytham St Anne's. At war's end she married an American GI and disappeared from our lives.

Our cousin, Meg, was evacuated to Stroud with her office from the "Met" Office, Marine Division, to become a "Hollerith girl", punching cards with meteorological details from old ships' logs, a source of vital information to the wartime navy.



Preparing for Winter!



HOW TO DRY APPLES

Remove cores with a round corer and peel thinly. Slice into rings rather less than $\frac{1}{2}$ in. thick. Steep for 10 minutes in water containing $\frac{1}{4}$ oz. salt to the gallon.

If you have a warm, airy kitchen thread the rings on string and suspend from the ceiling. Take care that the rings do not touch each other. They will take about ten days to dry and should resemble chamois leather when ready.

Apple rings may also be dried over a hot water cylinder or on the rack of a stove or by the heat left in your oven when baking is done. Temperature should be below 150° F. At this heat you will need a total of about 4 hours, which can be spread over several days.

When finished, cool for 12 hours, then pack in paper bags and store in a dry place. Inspect occasionally.

ROSE-HIP SYRUP

for your Children's Health

This syrup is suitable for infants, very palatable and so rich in Vitamin C that 1 oz. is sufficient for 1 month. It is 15-20 times as rich as orange juice.

Ingredients:—2 lbs. rose hips, ripe and red. 1 lb. 2 ozs. sugar.

Wash hips and put into an aluminium or enamelled pan. Well cover with water and bring to the boil. Simmer until tender (about 10 minutes). Mash well with a wooden spoon. Put into a jelly bag made of flannel and squeeze out as much juice as possible. Return pulp to the saucepan and add as much water as at first. Bring to the boil and simmer for 5-10 minutes. Put back into jelly bag and squeeze again. Empty bag and wash it thoroughly. Mix the two lots of juice and pour into the clean jelly bag. Allow to drip overnight. A clean juice is now obtained free from the hairs that cover the seeds

inside the fruit which might cause irritation if not removed.

Boil the juice down until it measures about 14 pints, then add 1 lb. 2 ozs. sugar. Stir until dissolved, boil for 5 mins. Bottle while hot in perfectly clean hot bottles and seal at once. Small screw-capped bottles with rubber washers are suitable. A circle of rubber cut from an old hot water bottle or cycle inner tube, and boiled for 10 minutes to sterilise will do for a washer. The syrup should be stored in a dark cupboard.

A saltspoonful (15 drops) should be sufficient for an infant each day.

USEFUL FUEL-SAVERS

Warm foods are not the only "warming foods"—get out of the habit of cooking a hot meal every day.

Never heat the oven for one cake or pudding; plan a baking day.

Try and arrange with neighbours to share ovens. One day one neighbour could cook two or three joints; another day, someone's milk pudding might be rucked into a not quite full oven, or a cake baked while a casserole is slowly cooking. While you are doing this, you are not just helping each other. You are helping the Miners who work to provide our fuel.

A vacuum flask is a useful fuel saver. Haricot or butter-beans, lentils, dried peas or prunes can be put in the flask, covered with boiling water, stoppered and left for 12 hours; prunes will be done in that time the other things need cooking afterwards for only a short time (leave room for expansion of dried foods). Use the vacuum flask for storing a mid-morning cup of coffee. Pour it off into the flask as breakfast time; (If you have no flask for this, pour it into a jug; it will not take half as long to heat, in a small saucepan, as boiling a kettle of water.)



The Butcher says...

"That's right, Mrs. Smith. We're getting a seventh of our meat now in corned beef—twopence in the 1/2 as you might say. Lord Woolton's watching his stocks—he likes to be sure he's got a bit in hand. I don't mind telling you I was rather afraid the whole ration would be cut down. It's lucky for everyone there is this corned beef to help out with. Cold or hot, you can dish it up in a dozen different ways—and very tasty, too. No, Mrs. Smith, I don't want any points coupons, it's all part of the meat ration."

And here are some new recipes:—

HARICOT BEEF

Soak $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. small haricot beans for 24 hours, then cook for 1 hour. Slice 1 lb. corned beef and shred one small cabbage. Put the beans, meat, cabbage and a chopped leek, if possible, in layers in a fire-proof dish, with a few peppercorns and a little salt sprinkled between. Mix one dessertspoon mustard and 1 tablespoon gravy thickening with $\frac{1}{2}$ pint vegetable stock and add to the dish. Cover closely and cook in a slow oven for about 45 minutes.

CORNERD BEEF WITH CABBAGE

Wash and slice a leek and fry lightly in a little cooking fat, in a stout saucepan. Add 1 lb. corned beef cut into small pieces. Cut 1 lb. cooked potatoes into small pieces, add to the pan, sprinkle with 1 dessertspoon flour and pour in $\frac{1}{2}$ small cup vegetable water. Add a little made mustard, if liked. Stir all together until very hot.

Wash and shred a cabbage and cook in a very little salted water with the lid on the pan for about 10 minutes. Drain and serve on a hot dish with the meat mixture on top.

AMERICAN CORNERD BEEF HASH

Mix together 1 breakfastcupful of chopped corned beef with the same quantity of diced raw potato, and season with pepper. Put into a frying-pan $\frac{1}{2}$ a teaspoonful of vegetable water and a teaspoonful or two of fat over the top. Place a plate over the pan and cook quite slowly for about 45 minutes. A thick delicious crust will form on the bottom. Fold across and serve on a hot dish with cooked green vegetables.

Food Facts

NUMBER 76



THE MINISTRY OF FOOD, LONDON W.1

MILK NOTICE TO RETAILERS

The introduction of the Milk Scheme today does not mean that you are required at once to limit your sales to the "weekly total authorised" shown on your certificate of requirements. You may sell all your milk, to the customers and establishments who have registered with you, until you are otherwise advised by the Regional Milk Supply Officer.

Some Wartime advice from The Ministry of Food