

## SCHOOL EVACUATION TO WESTON-SUPER-MARE

(This is very ancient history, but a period of nearly two years cannot be lightly ignored in a magazine which purports to be a record of a school's life in weal and woe.

After four weeks of the London blitz, the school, as a corporate body, ceased to function in Mitcham on Oct. 3, 1940. It re-assembled here in Sept. 1942, after an exile in Weston-Super-Mare which lasted for about a third of the average school life of any of its pupils. A party of 80 girls and 4 mistresses from the Girls' County School accompanied 220 boys and 10 masters from the Boys' School. The remainder of the boys and masters were transferred to other schools in the immediate and, in some cases, distant neighbourhood of Mitcham; some 30 eventually formed a strong nucleus at the Girls' School, which tolerated them very nobly and cordially. Owing to normal leavings and returns from evacuation, we finished up in July 1942 with 80 boys and 20 girls. Our return to Mitcham was hastened by circumstances beyond our control.

We were very kindly accommodated by the Weston County Boys' School, whose buildings we used in the afternoon and on Saturday mornings. The girls shared the same school life as the boys. Societies generally carried on:-the Scouts, the Debating Society, the Geographical Society for a time. Games periods took place in the mornings and matches were played against neighbouring schools with very reasonable success. The School Flight of the Air Training Corps was formed; the French Circle met enthusiastically and the girls knitted Free French jerseys. Cycling, bathing, walking and even caving were popular. Examinations went on with the normal success that we would have expected at Mitcham.

We have asked for some impressions of those days that are no more from the Headmaster, a Senior boy, a Junior boy, a girl, a master and, last but not least, a billeteur.)

### The Headmaster

The School was evacuated for nearly two years. The members evacuated suffered little real hardship though there was some irritating discomfort. Those evacuated learnt more about themselves and their companions than those who remained behind. They became more self-reliant and less inclined to be upset by trifles. By the general standard of their behaviour and work they upheld the good name of the school, and even won good reports in the local press.

I think we all found it very pleasant to live by the sea and in such pleasant country. Far too few of us took enough advantage of the opportunities which this offered to get to know Somerset better.

We all have memories of kindnesses in varying degrees from foster parents and others. A not discreditable chapter of school history closed in July 1942.

A. J. D.



#### A Senior Boy

Personally, I have never liked seaside resorts crowded with jaded holiday-makers and bursting with cheap jokes, dirty bodies and dark glasses. Weston during our stay had lost this character, and its civic qualities were allowed to show themselves, unhampered by the commercialisation of its charm. So we found a town which had regained its placid character and with it some of its rural charm.

The people, too, were not the satirised boarding house ladies and their insignificant husbands, whom we had dreaded as being the necessary complement of watering places. They were good to us, insistent in their efforts to make us a second, if only temporary, home.

In Weston, because of these facts and because of the clean air and lovely countryside which now surrounded us, we grew stronger and more appreciative of the world outside Mitcham. Our school became more of a family and less of a Corps. Our two years from home was worth it.

JoGoDe

#### A Junior Boy

The fact that Weston was a coast town greatly enhanced it in the eyes of all the juniors; whereas, before, Mitcham Common had provided the sole large hunting ground in the district, they now had the sea, the beach, the river Axe, the woods behind Weston, the Mendips behind the woods and, to crown the lot, what was affectionately known by all self-respecting evacuees as the 'Super' Baths. Of the sea and the beach perhaps the less said the better, but it was still a beach, however muddy, and, anyway, if one tired of the sands there were always the cliffs to fall back on; and what cliffs, to those whose only 'craggs' had been chalk quarries! These were the real thing.

With all these attractions, however, Weston was still lacking in a very important quality, and that was one's home. This is where the school came in, not as a building, but as the sole connecting link, other than letters, with home. This may have accounted for the strange unity that the school is only just beginning to regain since its return from that distant part of Somerset, Weston-Super-Mare.

S. Yass



#### A Girl

Another spring. The almond is lifting her rich blossom into a clear blue sky. And as I have watched the chill earth rise to live again, I have remembered, as I shall always remember, another spring, a fragment of my life which passed in another world.

I lived as a stranger among strangers. Above all, I was regarded as a Guest. But all the sad truth was that all the Guests who had gone before me were Men (spoken of in hushed tones with low music.)

A miserable little soul, therefore, I was not welcomed. I was criticized and condemned. My heart grew more and more heavy and I might indeed have given up trying to be approved of, when suddenly there came a new light. On my bedroom wall was a cross-stitched notice which included the information that 'It is better by far to die at your post

Than to flee from the battlefield.'

I gathered this glad knowledge into my heart and, self-commiserating little martyr that I was, I died at my post.

.At least, I was just about to die at my post when I thought of all those who had gone before me and who had not needed to try to be appreciated.

And so I started to live again. I ignored the cats whose moulting coats I had been wont to fondle in a vain effort to gain the affection of their mistress. Even their asthmatic gasps no longer revolted me as they ate their boiled Norwegian dried cod. I no longer sat at my window appearing to work, while on Sunday afternoons the grinding of a mower on a bald lawn went screaming through my brain. I no longer offended the dear ladies by singing as I hung my Washing. (But that was because I broke the flat iron and had to send my laundry home.) The sound of 'Raindrops' tinkling up the stairs at half-hourly intervals, from music lessons below, no longer irritated me. I never again felt the pain which used to come when I had five minutes in which to run to school, and sat waiting for gooseberry pie to come straight from the oven and burn the soul out of me. I no longer minded not hearing a wireless, but how could I, when there were two gallants who kept me up-to-date with the Jack Benny show?

One of my greatest joys was to look into the next house at nine o'clock each evening and watch a blacksmith called Joe eating his supper and listening to the news. Somehow I missed this little scene a lot when I came home. But I miss, too, the rain sweeping in from the sea, and the ships sailing into the Channel, and the lighthouse at night, beaming out across the water, under the stars. I shall always miss the hills, where one could walk alone in peace, and look down on to a town of little houses. There were violets and wild strawberries on the hills, and dog-roses in the hedges, and everyone in the valleys there was peace.

G.O'L.

#### A Master

We had heard of several possible destinations, but the evacuation coaches assured us that it was to be Weston-Super- (we were given to understand) Mud. Mer or Mud, we could see neither when we got there, but only a blank drizzle and a pitch-black night. It was, however, only the bad beginning and did not last long - the sun beat on the promenade, the north-easter blew off Worlebury, the waves crashed on the Knightstone and we soon forgot the unrealities of that first night. Staff and helpers

we navigated our boat-loads of mariners round the sea-lanes of Weston until we found a port for them. (It is true that many of them saw many other ports.) And we settled down to try to teach girls as well as boys and to welcome mistresses to our Staff-room. And it wasn't too bad.

We shall remember Weston - Saturday mornings in the winter black-out - the long lift of Exmoor over the bay - four periods before the blessed relief of afternoon break - the icy plunge from classroom to classroom in winter - the residential air we could adopt towards the day-trippers - the times we stood up in the Cheddar bus - a boy and a girl, in a Senior form, arm-in-arm looking into a furniture shop - the mixed feelings when it was all over.



A Billeter

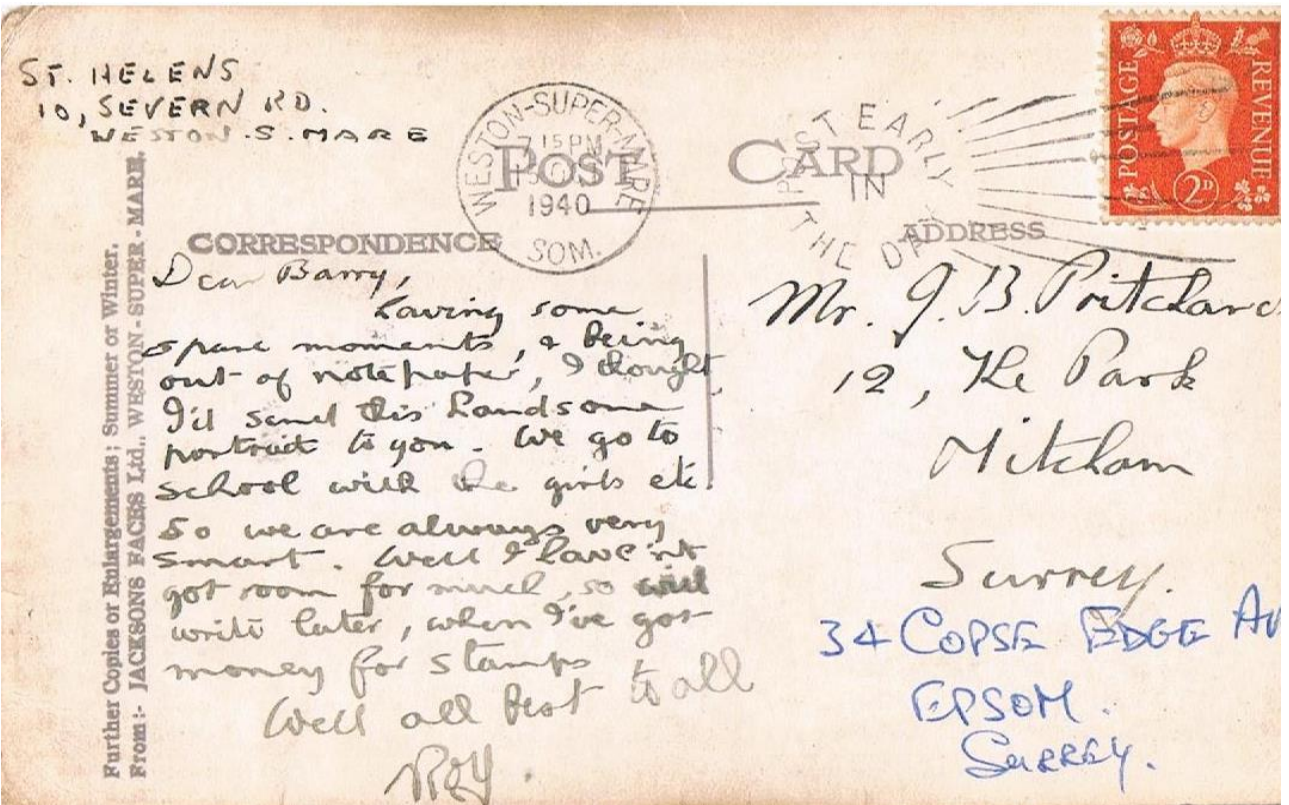
Dear P.....

How rash of you to ask me to give an account of life here from Oct. 1940 to July 1942! It may well be that your first steps in analysis, like mine, taught you that 'Distance lends enchantment to the view', but one would have thought 'The evil that men do lives after them', that perennial teaser of somewhat more advanced students, might have sounded a warning note in your mind.

S. & D. were decanted on us in the pitch blackness quite without warning 'just for one night' (4th Oct. '40), and stayed until the school returned to Mitcham in July 1942. As this household had always been boyless, the situation was not without difficulties for us all. However, the shaking-down process did not take long and a workable family routine was soon established. Then you appeared, intermittently at first, but with increasing frequency (you were always extremely anxious not to outstay your welcome) and, after a while, you really joined the family. You all agreed very well, and kept each other up to the mark over the jobs you were scheduled to do to help us in the house; you got up when you were called, and went to bed at the appointed hour without undue argument. There were times when I could have wrung your necks individually and collectively with great joy, but the feeling was mutual, no doubt, and it soon passed. It was unfortunate for you all that I remembered much that had happened in my own school days, remote though they were, because I still knew 'all the answers' - your own bitter comment on many occasions. We were happy in having the confidence and co-operation of your parents; they always realised that we wanted to do for you all what would be best in the long run, not as a temporary, trouble-saving expedient, and, in our opinion, that sort of feeling on both sides was essential to the success of the adventure. We are all good friends still, and that should speak for itself. It would seem strange now to cook breakfast while hearing Shakespeare (you hoped) on one side and giving a History test on the other, or to wash up with a masterly impression of Donald Duck plus two renderings of popular songs going on simultaneously among the Wipers, but that was routine at one time, wasn't it?

N. V.





Return - 1942 Head Master's Letter

APPENDIX 4 MITCHAM HEADMASTER'S LETTER

PAGE 1

Mitcham County School  
at Weston-Super-Mare  
Sixteenth July 1942

Dear Parent,

After the recent air raids on Weston-super-Mare there have had to be alterations in the arrangements for this school.

Owing to the damage done to the school here, the Somerset Education Committee feel that they can no longer offer us the use of buildings in Weston which we have so far enjoyed.

The decision for each child must be left in the parents hands.

Should you decide to leave him or her in Weston, arrangements will be made for continued secondary education at one of the local county schools.

Should you wish for reevacuation to another reception area, it can be arranged and suitable provision will be made in the new area for continued education.

Should you decide to have your child back in Mitcham the Boys and Girls County Schools will be open for instruction at all stages of school life, including the sixth form. I think it likely that all members of the present staff here will be available for service in Mitcham next term.

The school here will close for instruction on or about 24th July. The school in Mitcham will reopen 15th September. There is no reason why those whose parents decide to have them back in Mitcham should return immediately term breaks up, they are entitled to remain evacuated until their return is arranged.

The Air Training Corps camp will take place as arranged from 17th to 24th August at Halton.

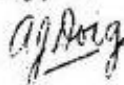
We were grateful that there was no injury to a child of this school, and I know that parents will be glad to know that their behaviour both during and after the raid has been excellent.

London University are fully aware of the effect that the raids may have had on examination candidates and will make all allowances possible.

I should be glad if you would write to me and give me your decision as soon as possible so that I may make the necessary plans.

In particular I hope that those parents who had been thinking of sixth form work for their boy or girl will not allow these changes to affect the decision adversely.

yours sincerely,



This is the Mitcham headmaster's letter informing parents that following the air raids on Weston, the schools were returning to Mitcham.



## IMPRESSIONS OF MITCHAM COUNTY GIRLS' SCHOOL

(Some were evacuated - their fortunes are narrated elsewhere. Some were not. Ed.)

When the evacuation was forced upon us many of the hardier spirits stayed at home. These boys were faced with dispersal until, by the kindness of Miss Dunn, they were transferred to the Girls' School.

Imagine the feelings of these few. They were strangers in a strange place. Will they ever forget that first assembly? I think not. After the lesson, suddenly the whole school sank to their knees. Those boys were totally unexpecting this move and were left standing, very confused and very red.

Soon, things were going very smoothly. The girls were very good, when faced with this intrusion on their peace and quiet; they even tried to teach us netball. But the animal spirits in the boys came to the fore. This peaceful game was soon transformed to a mixture of rugby and soccer. Very noisy! Then came winter with its heavy fall of snow. With tremendous courage, (we thought) about ten early comers sallied up the drive to be driven back under force of hard-rolled snowballs. Soon reinforcements arrived which started a first rate snow fight. Oh happy days!

Boys are noisy creatures. The hitherto orderly milk queue was turned to a seething mass. Boys are also cunning. On the days that chocolate was sold boys would get one slab and secrete themselves in the queue for another slab. I do not think that the prefects in charge noticed it. On wet days, when boys were enticed to dance in the hall, most of them seemed to disappear. I wonder why? I wonder if the school remembers our music lesson?

Then came a blow: we lost Mr. Helliwell. He had helped our form very much. He had given up much of his spare time to our games, but Mr. Cook came and ended our troubles in that direction.

The time went too quickly and the day of our departure came. With all our uneasiness at first we had had a very happy time. The whole school had been exceedingly kind. The last morning we walked out in deepest gratitude and with the strains of 'Jerusalem' ringing in our ears.

G. Baker(4a)