



# **The Unlikely Invaders**

**Evacuees in Llangwm During World War 2**

**W. Grenville Thomas**

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by local historian and author W. Grenville Thomas.

The entire book is available to read via the [Llangwm Local History Society website](#).

At 11 o'clock on Sunday, September 3rd, 1939, practically the entire population of Llangwm tensely sat in their living rooms, intently listening to a much trailed wireless broadcast by the Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's solemn pronouncement that a state of war existed between Britain and Nazi Germany confirmed their worst fears. But few of them could have appreciated the difference the ensuing conflict would make to their lives. Those with clear recollections of the First World War instantly perceived that all their able-bodied young men would be recruited into the Armed Services. Others soon predicted that war would inevitably bring hardship and several kinds of deprivation, and that it would certainly disrupt the settled routines of their community life. Those of a lugubrious disposition anxiously contemplated the unnerving prospect of military defeat, even of occupation. None of them anticipated that, in the next few years, their village in relatively remote South West Wales would itself be invaded, not by armed alien soldiers, but by successive waves of children from distant towns 'up the line'.

This unforeseen development was an indirect consequence of the military campaigns. After the so-called 'Phoney War', in which there were no major engagements for 6/7 months, in May, 1940, Adolf Hitler launched sustained blitzkrieg offensives, in which German forces swept through Holland and Belgium and seized control of France within 7/8 weeks. During the Battle of Britain, the famous contest from August 15<sup>th</sup> to September 15th for air supremacy between the Luftwaffe and R.A.F., Hitler suddenly changed his strategy in favour of 'The Blitz' against the densely populated industrial cities. The intention was not only to inflict physical damage, but to undermine the will to resist by spreading demoralisation among the civilian population. Immediately appreciating the vulnerability of children to the relentless raids, the Churchill coalition government ordered their large-scale evacuation to the more sparsely populated parts of Britain. Llangwm could hardly fail to attract the attention of those in Pembrokeshire entrusted with the responsibility for the allocation of evacuee children to temporary homes. in spite of its reputation, not entirely deserved, for clannishness and hostility to outsiders, it was a sizeable rural community, situated in a congenial riverside environment and surrounded by spacious fields. Its people, though straight-laced by sophisticated standards, were hard-working, socially responsible, and unreservedly patriotic. Moreover, there was unused capacity at the village school. A building which, at the beginning of the century had accommodated over 240 children, was in 1939/40 attended by little more than a quarter of that number. It is true that it had been placed on the Department of Education's list of defective buildings in 1924, but since that time, it had been substantially refurbished. During October/November 1935, four large new windows had been installed in the road-facing side, the floor and ceiling of the Main Room had been replaced and three of the walls replastered, and the two lobbies had been reconstructed and fitted with new windows and wash basins. With the installation of electric light, during the Christmas holiday of 1937/38, the school had symbolically entered a new era. Any shortfalls in staffing or equipment could quite easily be remedied as the need became urgent.

On the afternoon of 13<sup>th</sup> November, 1940, the school was closed to its local pupils, and converted into an Evacuation Centre for 104 children and women, who arrived by train from London, and by bus from Haverfordwest, for billeting in the districts of Llangwm, Burton and Hook. When the village pupils presented themselves on the following morning, they discovered that since 14 evacuees were still on the premises, they were not required for lessons, and the school did not formally re-open until the next day. On 18th November, 15 evacuees were officially admitted in the morning, with the expectation that six more would join them during the remainder of the week. The following list, extracted from the school register and elucidated by other research, contains the names and ages of the London evacuees and the names of the schools from which they came, and, in most cases, identifies the places where they stayed.

DENNIS MARSHALL (10 yrs) from Ballamore Road School, Bromley, Kent, his brother GERALD (5 yrs), and their mother, Millicent, at Guildford Bridge, with Mr and Mrs Howard Rees.

ALLAN RAY (10 yrs) from Burnt Ash School, Bromley, and his mother, Doris, at No.10 Main Street, with Mr and Mrs F. Bevan.

JOHN LEONARD (8 yrs), from St. Saviour's School, Lewisham, with Mr and Mrs Albert John, Belmont, The Gail.

JAMES (9 yrs), IRIS (7) and MAUREEN (6) MALEED, from Nottingham Road School, Bromley, and their mother, Florence, with Mr and Mrs J. Brock, Sycamore House, 16, Main Street.

DORIS (15), JEAN (9), JOSEPHINE (7) and EDWARD (5) GARDNER from Pendragon School, Downham, Bromley, with their mother, Alice, rented 'The Shack' at the top of Vinegar Hill, Black Tar.

ARTHUR ROGERS (6 yrs) from St. Stephen's School. Lewisham, his sister, EILEEN (5), and their mother, Lilian, rented 4 Edward's Pill, from Mr and Mrs Arthur Thomas.

JEAN (9 yrs) and MOLLY (6) COCKAYNE from Alfrida School, Bellingham, with Mr and Mrs Tom Jones, 2 Edward's Pill.

DENIS COCKAYNE (11 yrs) from Alfrida School. Bellingham, in Main Street.

PAUL COCKAYNE (5 yrs) at Great Nash Farm.

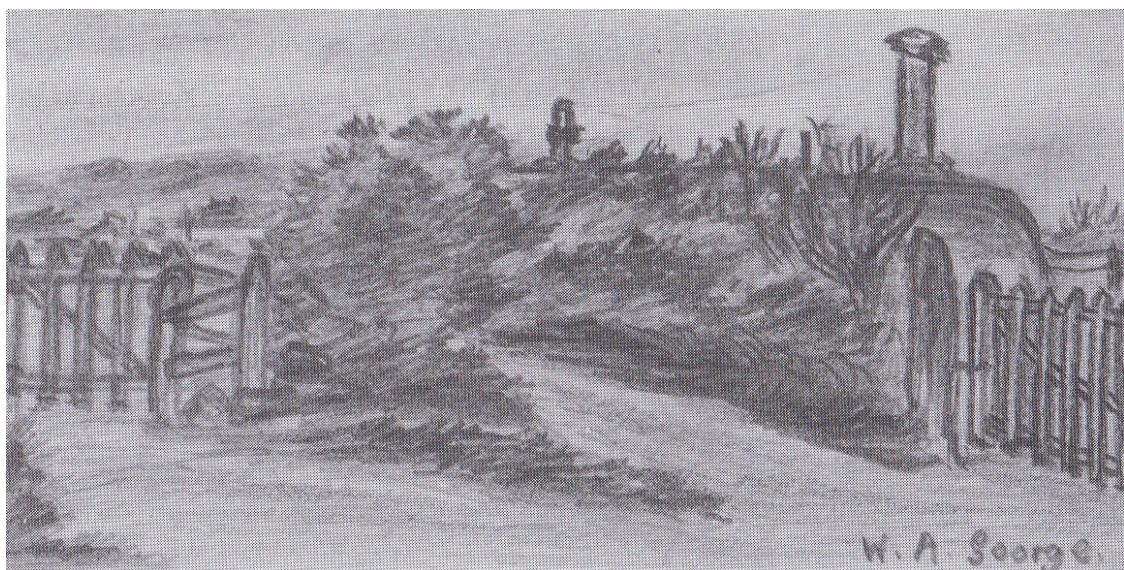
DOREEN CHARLES (6 yrs), from Alfrida School. Bellingham, and later, her brother RAYMOND (5), at Great Nash Farm.

JULIA ROSE ELLIS (5 yrs), and her sister. SHIRLEY (3), and their mother Matilda, from Lewisham, with Mr W. Palmer at the Kilns.

RONALD (5½ yrs) and FREDERICK (4) FRANKLIN (no previous school) with Mr and Mrs Sam England. Guildford Bridge.

During the first few months of 1941, a few other evacuees arrived from other parts of England and Wales. DOREEN VIOLET (8 yrs) and JEAN IVY (6) FERNANDEL from Bristol, with their mother took rooms at Knapp Farm. Two months later, the Peters family also extended the hospitality of their home to ROYSTON WARING from St. Simon's School, Bristol. UNA PALMER (10 yrs) and her mother. Elvie, from Cwmbwrla, Swansea, were accepted by Mr and Mrs Albert John, Belmont, The Gail.

The staff of the village school were excessively experienced, Mr Thomas A, Harries, an unrepentant Burton man, had been Headmaster since September 1919. and the other two teachers, Miss Elizabeth Skyrme of Park House, The Kilns, and Miss Mary Ann Brown of Guildford Steps. had been assistants since 1902. But their skills in classroom control had been refined in the management of local children. whose general inclination was towards deference and obedience. They may well have doubted their capacity to contend with more socially precocious children from urban backgrounds, perhaps rebelliously resentful of their enforced transfer to a rural backwater. The London children must have experienced a profound culture shock during their first few days in the village. Through the



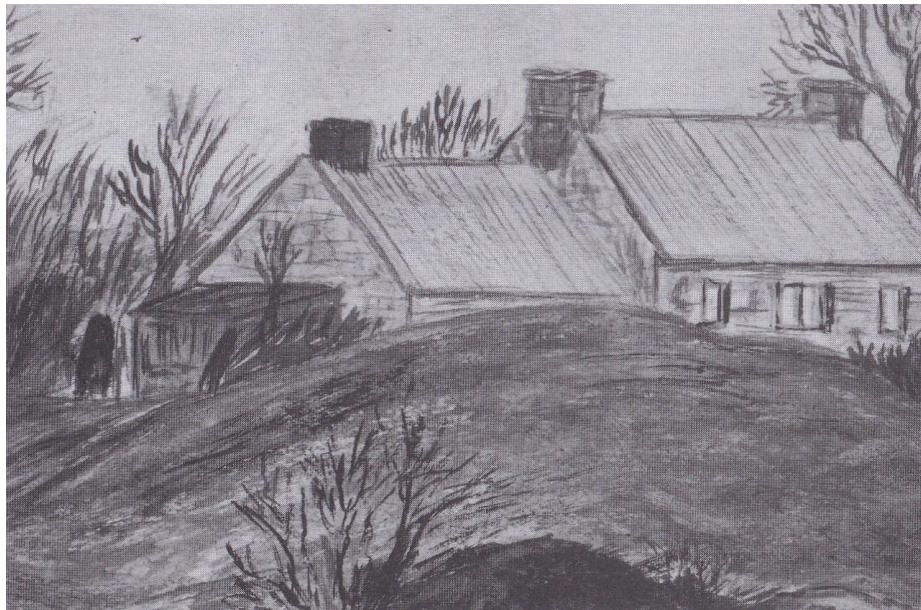
*An Arla George pencil sketch of the top of The Dark Lane. On the right is the bungalow, with its conspicuous chimney, where the Gardner family stayed.*

main public electricity supplies had been erected in 1935, there was no street-lighting (until 1964/65), and many of the houses were still illuminated by oil-filled brass table lamps. Since the Rural District Council had only just begun the three year task of laying the water mains, the villagers depended for their supplies on public taps - 'screws' and roadside pumps. There was no public sewage system (until 1954), and in the majority of households the relief of nature necessitated a visit to the 'closet', and outside zinc privy, usually at the bottom of the garden! The evacuees daily encountered adults and children whose accents were unfamiliar, and whose vocabulary often consisted of words and phrases only they seemed to understand. Strangely, there were no public houses, and on Sundays, as the church bell tolled, the locals, in their hundreds, and dressed in their best clothes, made their way to services, in the parish church and at the two large chapels. It was a village ethos and life-style of which the newcomers had no previous inkling.

However, forebodings of a time of exasperating difficulty and mounting tension were not fulfilled. On 4th, December, 1940, the staff of the school were heartened by the arrival of Mr J.H. HUDSPITH, a certificated assistant from Laxon Street School, Borough, South East London. Tall and slight, this euphonious gentleman quickly demonstrated his professional competence. Unfailingly good-humoured and quietly persuasive, he established a ready rapport with both evacuee and local children. If it was necessary to deny a pupil his or her playtime for a blundering attempt at an arithmetic exercise, he would sit patiently alongside, making helpful suggestions, and he would then reward the relieved pupil with three-pence or sixpence on the completion of the exercise. Lodging with Mr and Mrs W. Morgans at Edward's Pill Cottage, Mr Hudspith was a soccer enthusiast, eager to spread the gospel of Association football. He regularly and actively played the game with the older boys in the playground at the rear of the school, and there was more than one occasion when he had to be assisted back to his classroom, having sustained a sprained ankle or leg abrasions in the course of a boisterous game! Invariably attired in a fawn mackintosh and dark trilby, he became a familiar and warmly regarded figure in the village. His popularity and sympathetic disposition made him the ideal person to act as the liaison officer between the evacuees and the local community.

For a time, there was a degree of mutual distancing, prompted more by embarrassment than antagonism, between the evacuees and the villagers. Some well-meaning official attempts were made to assist the former in overcoming any acute home-sickness they might have felt at festive times. Mrs Harcourt Roberts, of Little Milford, the evacuee area leader, took the initiative in organising a Christmas Social Gathering for all evacuees in the Llangwm, Hook, Freystrop, Sardis and Johnston area. Attending the event at Llangwm School on December 24th, 1940, the children were treated to a tea and presented with gifts from a Christmas Tree during the afternoon, and in the evening, they were entertained by a concert party. Obviously, there were problems of adjustment. The records reveal that a few of the evacuees remained in the village for a significantly brief time - the Maleed children and Raymond Charles for barely a month, and Doreen Charles for only two months. In some instances, the initial accommodation was either too cramped, or too lacking in necessary facilities, for reasonable comfort. Having stayed in London during the final illness of one of his daughters at Great Ormond Street Hospital, Mr George Ellis joined his wife and their two daughters at the Kilns. He struck up a friendship with the late Gwyn Morgan, and within a few months, in the early part of 1941, the Ellis family moved into rooms at Brynhyfryd, 7 Butter Hill. After spending four months in Guildford, the Franklin brothers transferred to Hook, but four months later returned to Llangwm, to spend the remaining four months at Lower Black Tar, probably in one of the Fold cottages (The Chase).

However, often revelling in the freedom of a rural environment, the majority of the evacuees happily integrated with the indigenous population for the 10/12 months of their exile in Llangwm. Young Auriel Thomas of Edward's Pill found congenial playmates in Eileen Rogers, the Cockayne sisters, and especially in Jean Gardner. Coming from a showpiece mod-con large estate in the Downham area of Bromley, the latter's family managed the transition to the rustic simplicities of life in Black Tar by-the-river with admirable equanimity. Their resourceful and self-sacrificing mother, Alice, quickly transformed the cabin-like structure, built at the top of 'The Dark Lane' with stones, timber and zinc, into the homeliest of dwellings. Starting with that home, the second of the Gardner girls,



*An Arla George painting of the two cottages in the Fold, Lower Black Tar. They were demolished in the late 1950s, to make way for 'The Chase'.*

now Mrs Jean Christensen of Bromley, has vivid recollections of an idyllic ten months spent on the banks of the Cleddau in Anglicised West Wales.

"Mother cooked all the meals on an open range which had to be kept going even in Summer. Our water was drawn from a well at the bottom of the hill just beyond the wooden bridge (and behind the present garage) at Edward's Pill. We children would take an enamel jug, fill it in the well and struggle back up the steep hill (Vinegar Hill) to our little shack. The water was for drinking and cooking - all our other needs were served by a large water butt. Bath nights had to be staggered as we could not all bath on the same night, especially if there had not been much rain, and we often had to share baths. Our 'loo' at the end of the garden, consisted of a wooden seat with a hole in it, under which was a bucket which had to be regularly emptied and the contents buried in the garden. Food was scarce as most items were rationed, out our Mother managed, by careful planning, to stretch our rations to feed us all. Along our lane was a villager (the late Mr Edwin John Palmer) who trapped rabbits, and to supplement the meagre meat allocation of 8 ounces per week per person, Mother would send us along to his stone cottage, (later demolished and replaced by a fine continental-style house) to enquire whether he had a spare rabbit we could buy. The rabbit would be prepared in such a way by my Mother that the meal amounted to a banquet in such frugal times. She would clean it out, stuff it with herbs, and bake it. with potatoes and vegetables from the garden, in our open range oven. It was absolutely delicious, and to this day, I have never tasted the like."

Outside, there was much to engage the interest of town children –

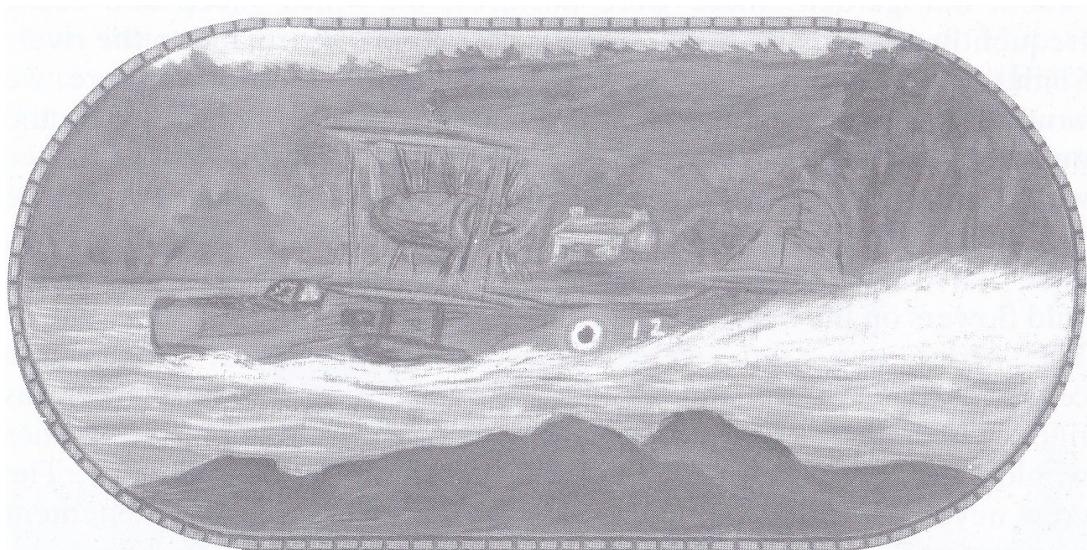
"From our garden, there were pastures, on which sheep and cattle frequently grazed, and which sloped down to the beach and to the river. Sometimes when the animals escaped from the field onto the shore, we would go out and coax them back, lest unwarily, they foundered on the nearby mud-banks. At the lower end of the field was a trough which we would keep replenished with water for the cows. When Spring came, we would get up in the morning to discover, much to our amazement as town kids, that some of the sheep had given birth to lambs during the night. The wild flowers on the beach were prolific, and we were thrilled to see them. The hedge-rows, too, were covered with primroses, violets and celandines, and our two-mile walk to school (through the Pill Parks) was filled with enjoyment. Occasionally, one of the patrolling sea-planes would land at the bottom of the field near the beach at Black Tar. The crew never left the plane, but the very landing caused great excitement amongst us."

The imperturbable Gardner children seem to have approached any obstacles and difficulties in a spirit of adventure. During the severe wintry conditions of the second half of January. 1941, the streams which often flowed down the

unsurfaced and deeply rutted Vinegar Hill were so solidly frozen as to give the incline several of the properties of an Alpine piste. Climbing the hill on the way back to 'The Shack' from the well, the children cheerfully stumbled and slithered, unable to avoid spilling much of the water in the process. Edward's Pill was periodically liable to flooding, and when a high Spring tide barred their way to school, they enjoyed the experience of rowing across from the foot of Vinegar Hill to the steps leading to the Pill Parks on the other side. In those days of full employment, fishing had ceased to be a means of livelihood for the villagers. But the Gardners were intrigued by a number of the older menfolk who, in early Spring, set out from Black Tar in their tarred boats to fish for herrings further down river. They were among the village children who, hopefully greeting them on their return, were delighted by the gift of a few very edible fish for their tea. They could not but notice the manner in which the locals threaded the fish through their eyes on a long stick, which they carried on their shoulders on the walk back home.

The Gardner family mingled freely with the four George brothers who lived further down the Dark Lane, in one of the semi-detached cottages a few yards from the beach. Over some Summer weekends, they would join them, their parents, and other relatives, on a trip up river in the family boat. Given the recreational habits of the time, natives will not be surprised to learn that such outings invariably involved a landing at Landshipping, where the adults slaked their thirst at the hospitable 'Stanley Arms'! Though they were always concerned about the safety of their father, obliged by the essential nature of his occupation to remain in the capital, the Gardners developed a real affection for the community into which they had been thrust by the imperatives of war. For a time, there was some prospect that Mr Gardner would secure a job on Milford Docks, and the family briefly entertained the hope of moving from Black Tar either to Rose Cottage in Main Street, or to Fern Cottage on the Gail Hill. Circumstances dictated otherwise, but it was with some reluctance that they departed for Bromley. During their stay in Llangwm, they had become particularly fond of Arla George, an engagingly friendly young man with marked artistic talents. After they returned to the London area, and he had joined the R.A.F., to become a rear gunner on the Wellington bombers, he visited their home several times, before, in February 1945, he was tragically killed over Abbeville, France.

For the first part of 1941, Llangwm school was preoccupied with adjusting to the new intake and with responding to the usual distractions of winter. The problem of adequate and suitable seating was solved by the delivery during the Christmas holidays of 1940/41, of eleven dual desks from the London County Council. On January 20th, severe weather conditions reduced attendance from 93 to 53 in the morning, and to 46 in the afternoon. If some of the evacuees had assumed that their removal to West Wales would absolve them from all the obligations of peace-time, they were mistaken. On 13th March, two boys and one girl from Llangwm, with others from Burton and Freystrop, sat the Examination for L.C.C. Junior Scholarship. (Eleven Plus).



*An Arla George painting of a seaplane landing on the Cleddau at Black Tar.  
In the background, on the other side, is Eynon's Cottage.*



The Gardners photographed with their visiting father in the garden at Black Tar.

Left to right - Doris, Edward, Mother and Father.

Front row - Jean and Josephine.

When the school re-opened on 22nd April, after the Easter holiday, no fewer than 35 cases of measles were reported. The Schools' Medical Officer promptly visited the premises, and to the delight of those not already affected, ordered the closure of the school until 5th May. It was only a fortnight later, on the evening of May 22nd, 1941, that the building was again pressed into service as an Evacuation Centre with the arrival of 40 children from St. Helen's Council School, Swansea.

Formally registered on 26th, May, they were billeted with the following householders:

ALEC CURTIS (10 yrs) , GLENVILLE LANGDEN (10), and DOUGLAS BEVAN (9) with Mr and Mrs Colin Cale at 7 Main Street.

WILLIAM EVANS (11 yrs) with Mr and Mrs Tom Lewis, 21 Main Street. JACK JOHN (11 yrs), EDWARD FROST (12), and ALBERT KIDWELL (13) with Mr and Mrs F. Bevan, 10 Main Street.

BETTY (9 yrs) and GEORGE FUDGE (12) with Mr and Mrs Ernie John, The Kilns.

DAVID (12 yrs) and RONALD (9) GIBBINS with Mr and Mrs Dick Jones, 16 Rectory Road.

LEONARD HAYES (11 yrs) and JOHN McCARTHY (10) with Miss Sarah Davies, 17 Main Street.

PETER HAYES (12 yrs) with Mr and Mrs Arthur Thomas, Edward's Pill.

ALBERT JAMES (11 yrs) and EDWIN (10), with Mr and Mrs Watkin Childs, Laburnums, The Kilns.

BRIAN KIFT (8 yrs) with Mr and Mrs Albert John, Belmont, The Gail.

DAVID QUINN (8 yrs) with Mr and Mrs W. Wilcox, The Cottage, 19 Main Street.

TERENCE STOTE (11 yrs) with Mr and Mrs Basil Allen, Myn-yr-avon, Guildford.

JOHN WILLIAMS (13 yrs) with Mr and Mrs Reg. Stephens, Holloway House.

IVY EVANS (9 yrs) with Mr and Mrs Ted. Brock. Primrose Cottage, Coronation Avenue.

JOAN HAYES (7 yrs) with Mr and Mrs Wilfred Phillips, School House.

ANN (7 yrs) and BETTY (9) JOHN with Mrs Rosie Jones, Cartref, Mill Street.

ELAINE KIDWELL (12 yrs) with Mr and Mrs J. Brock, Trindall House, The Green.

BERNARD BOTCHER (12 yrs), JOHN COLLINS (9) and ROBERT CUDE (12) with Mrs Annie Davies, Vinegar Hill.

KENNETH FOWLER (12 yrs) with Mr and Mrs Ted. Hutchings, Sunnymead, 12 Main Street.

BYRON DAVIES (7yrs) with Mrs S. Owens, Muriel House, Guildford.

GRAHAM DAVIES (9 yrs) with Mr and Mrs W. Stokes, Court House, 18 Main Street.

PETER (11 yrs) and BRIAN (9) JONES with Rev. and Mrs T.M. Jones, The Manse, Butter Hill.

ROY KIFT (10 yrs) with Mr and Mrs Gwyn Skyrme, Wellhead Cottage.

IVOR PRITCHARD (11 yrs) with Mr and Mrs Sam England, Guildford

Bridge. FRANK REED (13 yrs) with Mr and Mrs Pearson, 7 The Green.

GRAHAM TREW (9 yrs) with Mrs Lena Palmer, 5 Chapel Row.

GORDON (10 yrs) and KENNETH (9) WATKINS with Miss B. Skyrme, Park House, The Kilns.

A week after the arrival of these evacuees, two Swansea teachers the tall ascetic-looking MR BOYLE, and the stocky MR BEYNON joined the staff of the school. Mr Beynon's stay was rather brief - on July 2nd, he was transferred to Roch to take the place of a teacher called to the Colours. In October of the year, two other evacuees - PHYLLIS (11 yrs) and JOHN (7) HARDY and their mother Kathleen, arrived from Hellidon Village School, Daventry, and were billeted with Mr and Mrs J. Thomas, Park Villa, Coronation Avenue.

It was also during this year that staggered Summer holidays - 15th August to 8th September; 22nd September to 3rd October - were introduced. By the end of the year, the majority of the English evacuees had left - the Gardners and their cousins. the Marshalls in September, and the Rogers and the Fernandels in December. Mr Hudspith was absent for a week in mid November, attending the funeral of his mother in Newcastle. On 9th January, 1942. the school was closed for normal purposes to enable a special function to be held. The local children and the evacuees from Llangwm and Burton attended a belated Christmas Party, which the Rural District Council subsidised to the tune of £3:3:6d. The County Council donated packets of sweets. the American Red Cross sent presents, and at the end, the surplus of £1:0:2d was distributed among the evacuees. During the following few months, the Blitz abated as Nazi Germany concentrated on preparations for Operation Barbarossa against U.S.S.R. On February 6th, Mr Boyle was recalled to Swansea. and two months later, Mr Hudspith was switched first to Wiston, to Treffgarne, and then to Newport, Pembs. By 27th May, 1942, there were only six London, two Swansea and two unofficial evacuees in attendance. The two Swansea boys - George Fudge and [(Kenneth Fowler - lingered in the village for several months, the former operating a newspaper round, and the latter delivering bread with the late Emrys John, the local Main Street baker.

It was during the last year of the Second World War that the final influx of evacuees, again from London, took place. In May, 1944, Betty (11 yrs). Ruth (10) and ANN (8) BEYNON, with their mother, Winifred, and their young brother, Peter, came to live in the inner of the two cottages al the Fold, Lower Black Tar. The girls had previously attended Rudbaxton School. and their time of over twelve months in Llangwm included the V.E. celebrations of the 8th and 9th May 1945. In July 1944, FREDERICK SELLECK (10 yrs) and his young sister, with his father. a naval officer at Kete, and mother, and his cousin, IRIS NOKE (9 yrs), took rooms with Miss Clara Bryant at 2 Orchard Row, Guildford. Frederick senior was the owner of a prestigious four-speed dropped handlebar bicycle, which he used, almost nightly, to visit 'The Jolly Sailor' at Burton. There were

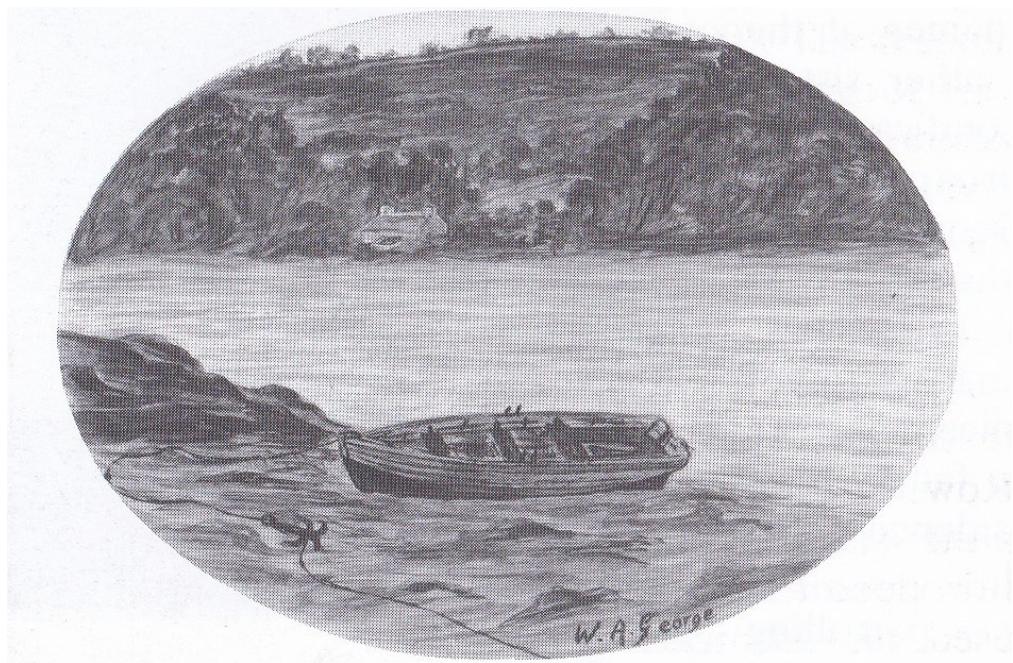


Rear Gunner

Arla George

times when returning in the dark, he experienced some difficulty in negotiating the sharp left turn into the Row, and made glancing contact with a large stone situated outside the forecourt of Number 1! Freddie jnr, who had attended the Coronation School, Pembroke Dock, before coming to Llangwm, was a bright, intelligent boy, and an accomplished sportsman. Particularly adept at mental arithmetic and well primed in matters of general knowledge, he passed the Scholarship Examination to Haverfordwest Grammar School at Grade One level. The local Guilford children used to watch in awe as this outstanding swimmer performed spectacular aquatic feats from the boats moored in the Pill. When he left, in July 1945, for 76a, Oaklands Grove, Shepherd's Bush, London, he had every intention of pursuing a career in the Royal Navy.

Only one of the evacuee families stayed long enough for three of its members to put down permanent roots in the Llangwm community. During 1943/44, the Ellis family moved to the bungalow previously occupied by the Gardners at the top of the Dark Lane, Black Tar. With the completion, in 1950, of the second phase of the council houses at Rectory Road, they transferred to Glan Hafan, where Ronnie was born. After her marriage, in 1953, to Mr David Golding, the older of the two daughters, Julia, lived for five years in Llanelli, and a further eight in the Windsor area. In February 1968, the Goldings returned to Llangwm, where for the next five years, Julia and Dave were the genial stewards of the Rugby and Cricket Social Club. During 1979/86, many of the inhabitants regularly encountered Julia in her role as village Postmistress at Mill Street. The father, Mr George Ellis, died in January 1960, and the modest and quietly worthy Mrs Matilda Ellis, who made her home at Lake Villas, died in 1994. For her, the evacuee phenomenon was not just history - it was an experience which profoundly altered the course of her life.



*An Arla George painting of the family boat in which the Gardners made several trips.*