

**Chapter 32: Growing Up in Wartime**

At the outbreak of war, in September 1939, mum was about to turn five. By the time it ended, in September 1945, she was about to turn 11. So, much of her childhood was during that period. At the end of August 1939, she started school. Outside of school, she had music lessons and learned to play the piano. She also had dancing lessons.<sup>1</sup> In September 1945, when mum had just turned 11, she started at Nottingham High School (for girls). The previous month, grandma and Olive<sup>2</sup> went into Nottingham to buy school clothes for her.

There are few, if any, details of mum’s school life in grandad’s diaries of this period, and mum’s diaries had not yet started. However, among mum’s papers were a number of her school reports including four from East Kirkby Junior Girls’ County School.<sup>3</sup> They are similar in format and cover the period from February 1944 to June 1945. They include reports for particular subjects and an overall mark and position in the class. In three of her four reports, she was first in her class.

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

### East Kirkby County School (Junior Girls)

MARKS MAXIMUM  
396 400

Report of Sheila Parkin Term ending June 1945

Class 3A Position in Class 1st Number in Class 44  
*well done*

	Term A B C or D	Exam Marks	Maximum	Remarks
Composition ...	A	40	40	<i>W. good careful work.</i>
Literature ...	A	30	30	<i>Shows great interest - very good.</i>
Poetry ...	A	10	10	<i>W. good.</i>
English Exercises ...	A	40	40	<i>W. good careful work.</i>
Reading ...	A	20	20	<i>W. good.</i>
Comprehension ...	A	20	20	<i>W. good.</i>
Writing ...	A	20	20	<i>W. good neat work.</i>
History ...	A	40	40	<i>Excellent.</i>
Geography ...	A	40	40	<i>Excellent.</i>
Arithmetic ...	A	30	30	<i>Excellent.</i>
Arithmetic - Mental ...	A	17	20	<i>Good.</i>
Nature Study ...	A	40	40	<i>W. good shows interest.</i>
Art ...	A	20	20	<i>W. good neat work.</i>
Physical Training ...	A			<i>W. good.</i>
Needlework ...	A			<i>W. good.</i>
Handwork ...	A			<i>W. good careful work.</i>

A—Very Good.      Number of times absent \_\_\_\_\_  
 B—Good      General Progress Excellent.  
 C—Fair      General Conduct Excellent.  
 D—Weak

*J. J. Redgate* Class Teacher.  
*S. Bullen* Head Mistress.

*Sheila has worked very hard and should do well.*



Left – mum’s school report for term ending June 1945  
Top – mum’s school photo 1941  
Above – mum around this time. She thought it might have been outside Cyril’s shop in Ruddington

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 30.  
<sup>2</sup> I have assumed this was grandad’s sister and not his niece.  
<sup>3</sup> I believe this is now [Morven Park Primary School](#) on School Street.



Photos in mum's album of what is now Morven Park Primary School  
Top – view of school from Welbeck Street across Morven Park  
Middle – shows infant school furthest away then junior girls then junior boys (left only)  
Above – Junior Girls school

Much of mum's time and energy were spent in church and Sunday School activities and with extended family, both on grandad's and grandma's sides. She spent time with grandad's brothers and sisters, Cyril, Eva and Olive. For example, she and her friend Dorothy stayed for a few days' holiday with Cyril in Ruddington in both 1941 and 1942. She also spent time with grandad's sister Olive who she recalled calling "Ant Pant".<sup>4</sup> She also recalled car trips with grandma's brothers Ray and Bert. Tom and Annie were like another uncle and aunt. Mum often went to spend time with them. She was involved in a number of family weddings and was bridesmaid twice in this period – for (Alf and) Olive in 1939 and for (Jim and) Renie in 1942.<sup>5</sup>



Mum also had several friends during this period. In May 1939, grandad took mum and her friend, Joyce Copeland, up the "44 steps".<sup>6</sup> Mum was friendly with Beryl Green, who also lived in Station Street, but she died in July 1941.<sup>7</sup> Mum developed a long-lasting friendship with Dorothy Lofthouse, the daughter of one of the Methodist ministers in Kirkby during the war.<sup>8</sup> In 1945, grandad noted that mum's friend, Sally Rosser was killed by a Trent Bus.<sup>9</sup> Another friend was Margaret Bird.<sup>10</sup> In April 1945, grandad, mum and Margaret cycled to Linby and Papplewick. Margaret also went with mum and grandma to tea at Bert's the same month. In June that year, grandad took mum and Margaret to the Regent. Among mum's papers was an envelope labelled "childhood friends". This included a number of photos including this one of Margaret and the one below of Fred Wilkins and his mother.<sup>11</sup>

The family had an evacuee from Birmingham, Fred Wilkins, stay with them for some of the war. Initially, he lived with Eva but, on New Year's Day 1941, he came to live with the Parkins. They celebrated his birthday in January and involved him in family activities, including cinema trips. Various family members came to visit him including his mother, sister (Elsie), brother (Jack), sister-in-law, niece or nephew. He was also visited by at least one friend, Dennis. In 1942, Fred started working, initially for T Oldham<sup>12</sup> and then on a farm along with other boys from school. Grandad didn't note when Fred left them but he was last mentioned in July 1942. The evacuees that came to Kirkby came from Birmingham. Grandad noted



<sup>4</sup> Presumably one of those childhood nicknames that sticks! In the photograph of "Ant Pant", mum does not explain what Olive is doing. She just says "don't laugh"!

<sup>5</sup> These matters are covered in more detail in Chapters 29 and 31.

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 31.

<sup>7</sup> See Chapter 29.

<sup>8</sup> See Chapter 31.

<sup>9</sup> See Chapter 31.

<sup>10</sup> I do not know if she was related but Birds were a well-known butchers in Kirkby. I recall dad buying sausages there when we visited grandma (his mother) there when I was a child, They [ceased trading](#) in 2015.

<sup>11</sup> There was also a childhood photo of David Hill, a later photo of mum with Joan Storer and a baby photo of Sharon Rowe, the daughter of Barbara and Ron Rowe.

<sup>12</sup> Fred was paid 2/-. He was Charles T Oldham who was a fruiterer and greengrocer in Harcourt Street. In 1947, he was taken to hospital with gallstones. In 1955, mum and grandma looked at his mother's house but decided that it was not what mum and dad wanted. He died in November 1967. Mark Ashfield, in his book "A Carnival Crown and a Roasted Ox" describes Tommy Oldham in some detail (pp41-42) including that he only had one arm having lost the other in World War 1, a fact that grandad did not mention.

that 780 came in November 1940 with a further 750 in December. I recall dad telling me that they also had an evacuee stay with them during the war.

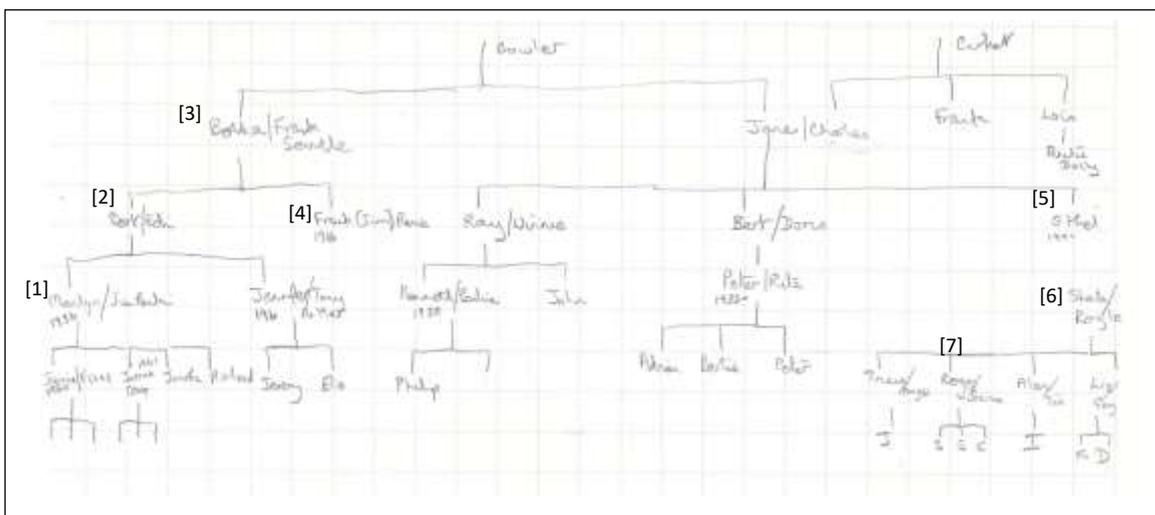
### Evacuees in the second world war

During the second world war, children were evacuated from major cities at risk of bombing, such as London and Birmingham, and moved to smaller towns and villages considered safer. Three waves of evacuation have been described. The [first](#) was at the start of the war with the expectation of bombing, the [second](#) was in 1941 with the threat of invasion and actual bombing of cities and the [third](#) in 1944 and 1945 with the use of flying bombs. In the [first wave](#), more than 1.5 million were evacuated from cities in three days but by January 1940 around half had returned.

In the first wave children were moved from inner Nottingham to other parts of Nottinghamshire. In the second wave, children came mainly from the South East of England to Nottinghamshire, a pattern repeated in the third wave. As a result, many [evacuees](#) came to Kirkby and surrounding towns and villages.



Mum was also friends with her (second) cousin Marilyn. Marilyn [1] was born in Yorkshire on 25 August 1936, so was almost two years younger than mum. Her father, Albert (Bert) Edward Seville [2] was son to Uncle Frank and Aunt Bertha [3], and brother to the younger Frank Seville (who we knew as Uncle Jim) [4]. Bert married Edith (Edie) Taylor on 20 May 1933 and grandma [5] went to the wedding. Bert and Edie are first mentioned in grandad's diaries when they came for tea in May 1931 and they visited twice more that year. Marilyn is first mentioned in May 1940 when she came for the day with her parents and grandparents. She came with them periodically throughout the war years, usually for a meal but, in February 1941, she and her parents came and stayed for the weekend. Marilyn and mum were also both bridesmaids for (Jim and) Renie in 1942.



Family tree showing relationship between Marilyn [1] and mum [6]



Top left – Bert and Edie's wedding  
Top right – mum, grandma, Edie and Bert outside "Elstow" Mansfield  
Middle row left – Marilyn  
Middle row right – Bert and Marilyn  
Above left – Bert  
Above centre – Marilyn  
Above right – Marilyn and mum  
Left – Marilyn

So what was mum's wartime childhood like? She did talk about it but not excessively. From the diaries, it seems that although the war did provide a backdrop, as a child, mum was influenced more by the foreground of family and chapel. The family were relatively well-off in a fairly poor mining community. Much of what mum did day-to-day related to family and chapel.

What was grandad like as a father? From the diaries, he could come across as somewhat remote and distant. For example, at Christmas, he sent his wife and child to relatives while he went to the cinema by himself! However, these were days before the family had television so perhaps we should not judge too harshly! When preparations were needed to buy clothes for mum to go to High School, he left that to his wife and sister. But, perhaps that was just reflecting the norms of the time. Of course, my perceptions are coloured by my own recollections of him as a child. I am sure mum would have disagreed with any perceptions of remoteness or distance. I think she regarded him as a kind, generous and loving – if not demonstrative – father. The diaries show that they did things together and that he frequently made things for her, as he did for us his grandchildren. Clearly, he had high expectations of himself and others. So, for example, when a clock he purchased did not chime as expected, he mobilised the family to send it back. Similar characteristics were visible in mum and, I fear, also in me!