

EUNICE GIGG (NEE PILL) - PRE-WORLD WAR 2 MEMORIES

February 2013

Eunice Pill, daughter of Mr and Mrs F Pill, was born at Gate Farm House in Shellingford on 18 January 1924. The family moved to Kingstone Winslow when Eunice was 18 months old and lived in what is now known as Telephone Box Cottage. (Gate Farm House was later burnt down, when a firework ignited the thatch). The family moved to Jessamin Cottage in Ashbury when Eunice was 11 years old. Eunice was married to Ray Gigg on 16 August 1952, and was aged 88 when these memories were recorded.

SCHOOL

Eunice attended Ashbury School from aged 5 to 14 years. There were three classes, and Miss Irene White taught the infants. She was a lovely, Christian teacher, who lived in Ashbury shop. The infant classroom was in what is now the Village Hall, with the infants based at the stage end. It was cold by the door, in spite of the coal furnaces, but Miss White used to swap the children round so that they didn't get cold, and would call the children out in groups to come and warm their hands.

They had singing lessons, learning poetry, reading, a few sums, and physical exercise: skipping, running and jumping jacks. The desks were long, with two pupils to a desk, and the tops, which lifted up, had an inkwell in them. Books went in the desk and pencils went in a special well on top.

At playtime, everyone was all together in the playground, but the big boys had to stay in the playground near the road.

Eunice lived in Kingstone Winslow and an older girl would walk two or three children to school, but when Eunice was 11, the family moved next door to the school, so she could go to school by herself. Pupils went home for lunch, and Eunice used to go to her Grandma's who lived in the cottage next to the school. The school day started at 9a.m, and finished at 4pm for the older children and 3pm for the younger ones. Children came from Ashbury, Compton, Odstone, Ashdown, Idstone, Kingstone Winslow and from Zulu farm, and some were from very big families of 8 or 9 children.

From aged 7 to 10 years old, Eunice was in Mrs. Woodhouse's middle class, in the smallest classroom, with about 20 children. This teacher, a widow with 2 daughters, wasn't pleasant, looked cross and was very strict. They had sewing and knitting classes and played outdoor games. An instance of her unpleasantness was that she wouldn't speak to Mr. Saunders, who took the top class, or even respond when he said goodnight.

Mr. Saunders, quite a nice teacher, lived in the school house and had a son called Dick, but they left when Eunice was about 11 or 12, and Mr.Culley came. He was married with 2 children, played the organ at church and was keen on music and physical exercise. He was "alright" but said things that wouldn't be acceptable nowadays. Six girls didn't have shorts, because their parents didn't want them to wear them, probably because it wasn't the thing in those days for girls to wear shorts or trousers. This meant that Mr. Culley wouldn't let them go out for P.E., so they had to stay in and do writing. He was rude to the children, for instance he used to say to Eunice, "You nice pill". He had his favourites, that he would pamper and ones he didn't like as well. With one girl from Kingstone, when he sat at her desk to see what she was doing, he would roll up her sleeve and slap her on the arm. The mother got a flannelette shirt, tight at the wrists, so he couldn't do this.

He was very good at music and made pipes from bamboo with the children. He made violins from boxes and cat gut string, and a xylophone from a bicycle. He also made Miss White nervous when she played the piano for assembly in the morning. Eunice played a treble pipe and along with the rest of the class, went to Bristol with their instruments to play for a broadcast on BBC Radio in 1937/8. She remembers Mr.Culley commenting that this would put Ashbury "on the map".

Mr. Culley was the first teacher to have a cane at Ashbury School, and used it quite often on the boys' hands. Yes, he was a good teacher, but he had unpleasant ways towards some children.

SHOPS

There was a grocer's shop in Berrycroft at the Sheilings, which was run by Mr. Haines, who, with his wife and son, was there for a long time.

Mrs. Simpson had a shop where "The Cottage" in the High Street is. She sold mostly sweets, plus tea, sugar and cigarettes.

Mrs. White had a shop at the crossroads. She sold butter, bacon and all groceries. When you went to get your bacon, she always put the little bones on to make the weight up. She ran the Dyson and Horsfall Christmas catalogue, so you could order Christmas things and pay her the money each week.

At Kingstone Winslow, there were 3 shops. One, where Mill Stream Cottage is, sold sweets. All round the wall instead of wallpaper, she had taken pages out of old comics and papered the wall, so you could read comics on the wall while you were waiting to get your sweets.

Another shop selling sweets, coffee, tea and biscuits, was run by Mrs. Norris, with the shop being part of her living room. The cottage, which was demolished, stood where Orchard Way is now.

Mrs. Seally had her shop inside her front door, next door to Lower Mill. She sold sweets, eggs, sugar, flour, all kinds of things. Eunice liked going there, as there was a nice earthy smell from the potatoes from the garden, all laid out.

At Lower Mill, corn was ground up in the roof and dropped down the chute, where the bags were filled up with meal. Eunice can remember going to get the meal for the chickens and pigs.

In Crosstrees, next door to Jessamin Cottage where Eunice lived, the Hallidays farm dairy used to make butter, and cool and store the milk from their farm.

MOBILE SHOPS

Johnnie Ball and his brother Leslie, from Bishopstone used to bring all kinds of things such as home-made ice cream, or paraffin on a lorry on Saturdays. Eunice remembers this from when she was a tiny tot.

Mr. Webb, a baker from Bishopstone, came two or three times a week, bringing his own homemade bread.

Mr. Jimmy Cole lived in what is now the Lovegrove's house and he used to go to Swindon on the bus, carrying a huge basket. He filled this with joints of meat and on his return from Swindon; he would take it round the village, selling it to people. Mr. Cole sold his house to Mrs. Woodhouse the school teacher, and moved away from the village.

A butcher from Faringdon used to come round every Friday, and someone from Faringdon would come selling clothes. There was also a butcher called Mr. Boalch from Swindon.

Eunice remembers standing under the arch at the Rose and Crown to get on the bus, for buses ran as late as midnight back to Ashbury, before the war.

COUNTRYSIDE, FARMS ETC

The Heys/Jones lived at Berrycroft Farm, but they were not farmers. The Spences were at Manor Farm, the Tuckers at Kingstone Farm, Frearson at Odstone Farm, Jeffery Lawrence at one Idstone Farm, and Eber Read at the other. They were mostly dairy farms but when the war came, they were made to plant things. Nothing was grown on the Coombs, though. Orchids grew in the hollow and all round the Coombs. It was free land for all to walk on.

Eunice remembers getting milk from Tom and Jack Hallidays farm. This was a smallholding where Malthouse Close is. They had 7 or 8 cows and 3 horses. They milked the cows and brought the milk round the villages on a yoke over their shoulders every morning, using a dipper to pour out the milk.

ASHBURY WATER SUPPLY AND WATERCRESS BEDS

There were standpipes around the village, and you had to take a container and fill it up. You didn't need to boil the water, it was nice, fresh, lovely spring water.

There were two big watercress beds, which were cleaned out and re-planted every year. People from Childrey looked after the beds and you could buy a nice big bunch for sixpence. The cress was bundled up and taken by lorry to London. Eunice's mother told her a story about some cousins from London (a different world) who came to stay, and were met at Shrivenham station. When they got to the watercress beds, they thought it was a leafy field to play on, so ran on to it, only to fall into water, to their great surprise.

JUBILEE KING GEORGE V AND CORONATION KING GEORGE VI

Eunice can remember the day Queen Mary was coming to Compton Beauchamp House. Lots of people walked to Compton Beauchamp with Eunice, aged 5 or 6, being held in her mother's arms, to see Queen Mary waving as she went by. The person standing next to Eunice threw a bunch of flowers into the car, and a local newspaper reported that a little girl had thrown flowers. Not me, says Eunice!

When Eunice was older, she went with the crowds to see the Duke of Windsor landing on top of the hill near Compton Beauchamp, to visit the Lloyd Thomases at Compton House.

The clothes for the Coronation are clearly remembered. The children were asked to wear red, white, and blue. Cousin Daphne and Eunice each wore a blue skirt, white blouse, red tammy shanter, and a red, white and blue tie. Dressed like this they went to the field at the back of Idstone Road council houses for competitions, games and a tea-party, and Mr. Culley said they looked the best of the lot.

Eunice doesn't remember much of the Jubilee, though she recalls that they went to Compton House for the handing out of mugs both at the Jubilee and the Coronation.

DOCTOR

Many years ago, the doctor was at Shrivenham. It was an Irish doctor when Eunice was a child, who used to clamp you with his knees so that he could look at you. Later they had an army doctor and people were not very pleased with him. Eunice had measles when she was 23, and after she had cycled to Shrivenham to see the doctor, he told her to go home and wait for his visit, which never came. At this time people left the Shrivenham surgery and went to Lambourn, where Dr Morrison, a local magistrate, was a wonderful doctor, very attentive. Eunice saw him from her mid-twenties until he died, and in fact he delivered Madeleine, who, like all Eunice's babies, was born at home.

WAR TIME - WORLD WAR TWO

EVACUEES

All the evacuee children came from East Ham except Eileen Cole, Mr and Mrs Pill's first evacuee. She came from West Ham so arrived with a lot of strangers from a different school and part of London, at only eight years old.

Another child, Pat Stevens, (a little terror!) was first billeted at Zulu farm, but as they didn't want to keep her, Mrs Pill had her as well, with both of the children going to Ashbury school. Eileen's mother visited her every two or three weeks, coming for the weekend. When it was safe, nearly at the end of the war, Eileen went home for a weekend and then Mrs. Pill received a letter to say they were keeping her, and she wouldn't be back. Eileen did keep in touch, sending news of marriage and twins, but

sadly, she passed away when the children were young. Pat married and became Pat Rose, visiting Mrs. Pill once.

Eunice's memories of her feelings at this time were mixed. The Pills lived in a two bedroomed house, so Eunice at 16, had to share her room with two evacuee children. She remembers feeling jealous of Eileen, as it seemed that she was pushed aside by her own dad, which made her a bit unhappy.

Some of the evacuee children were happy and some weren't, depending on who they were billeted with. Eunice's auntie had one of the school teacher's children. Elsie Cottie was billeted with Miss Tucker at Winslow Combe. Two spinsters lived there and didn't have much idea how to look after them. Two children were with the Miss Bunces, who were Sunday school teachers, so more used to children, but the children were a bit offended when they were made to have their hair washed as soon as they arrived.

Some of the evacuees went to the allotments and pulled up the cabbages because they thought they were growing wild. They brought the cabbages back to the home and it caused a bit of a fuss!

Three or four lady teachers, Mr. Duckham and another male teacher came from London with the children. Once Mr. Duckham came to see Eunice's parents about something and Eunice's dog bit his ankle! Some of the children had to be taught in the village hall which is now Church Lane House.

DUNKIRK TROOPS RETURNING

Eunice's cousin Arthur Jefferies drove one of the amphibious vehicles which picked up the troops from Dunkirk.

MANOEUVRES

Ashbury was full of army lorries, bedded down with camouflage around the village, by the memorial, before they moved on. Sometimes they just stopped for one night, and then the villagers knew there was some movement abroad. They were on their way to or back from somewhere, possibly the Southampton area, but it was all very hush hush.

PRACTICE BOMBING RANGE

Eunice remembers hearing quite a lot of that going on, on the downs. She was walking on the Downs with girlfriends once as a plane let go of bullets, which peppered the road close to the girls, so they ran home.

WAR-TIME ACCIDENTS

Eunice remembers only one when she was walking with her dog on a Wednesday evening. As Eunice came back, a car came down Lambourn Hill and a motor cycle left the searchlight battery at Winslow Bank. At the crossroads, the motorbike went straight into the car, and the rider went into the wall. Both survived the accident.

LAND ARMY GIRLS

There were lots of Land Army girls working on the local farms. Eunice had girls over for tea on a Sunday, one who was billeted next door, and Vera Hide and Winnie Storey from Odstone. Eunice's family used to take some people to church on Sunday. Eunice remembers Doreen Reade from London who married Gordon Reade, Ruby Bunce who married Charlie Bunce, Edna Long who married Bernard Simpson, all Ashbury men. And there was Pamela Collins, who was Ray's friend before he went with Eunice! Some girls were brought to the farms from a hostel at Sparsholt.

TROOPS STATIONED AT ASHDOWN

There were lots of troops at Ashdown House, filling the house and the military huts. Mr. Edwards from Claremont, who was pastor of the Free Church, had a pass to go through any Army Camp because he talked to the soldiers. He used to have soldiers from Ashdown for services and people at the

church, like the Pills, used to have 3 or 4 soldiers in for supper after the service. There were black Americans, Canadians and British at Ashdown and some of them corresponded with Eunice's parents during the war. Eunice can remember Sergeant Pedder, Cyril Holmes, Wall Emery from Nuneaton, John Cooke from Scotland, amongst others who came, and who often corresponded, sending photos that Eunice still has, or once even sending French francs from France.

The Americans were lavish with food. Eunice remembers being with her Mum, Auntie and Daphne, aged 16 or 17, when the troops went through to go to Ashdown, being given treats like tinned meat with hard-boiled egg in the middle. One Land Army girl was by the war memorial as the troops came through, and was given big bars of chocolate.

Once, a black soldier on a bicycle came down the hill at such a speed that he fell off in front of Eunice's Aunt Laura Jefferies and her friends. Her Aunt had a chest full of bandages and first aid kit, and she bandaged him up.

TROOPS RELATIONSHIPS WITH VILLAGERS

Eunice remembers the troops as being friendly, though there was one lot she didn't like at all. A soldier was in a crowd by the Rose and Crown, making fun, saying oh lovely this, and lovely that, trying to make out it was a town. Soldiers had to walk wherever they went or catch a bus.

Some of the girls got in with the troops but Eunice doesn't think that anyone married a soldier and went abroad. May Welsh's sister was in the Women's Royal Army Corps, but she was the only one in the army, and the other girls either worked in the factories, or spent their time looking after folk. When Florence Burson (May Welsh's sister) came home, they would get up a dance in the village hall, and sometimes the troops would come and join in.

RUBBISH TIP

There was a smelly, unpleasant tip at the top of the hill, opposite the wood, where people would sometimes go scavenging.

DUTCH AUCTION ETC TO RAISE INVESTMENT IN NATIONAL SAVINGS

Auctions didn't happen that often. Eunice's father once bought a goose egg for 5 shillings, and mother cooked it for breakfast, cut it into three and served it with bacon.

LOCAL ENGINEERING WORKS, WAR TIME SERVICES, EMPLOYEES, ETC

Bunces were a local agricultural machinery firm and made things for the forces. A lot of village girls were employed by Bunces, so they were exempt from going in the forces. Eunice had a doctor's letter to show she was exempt because of the health of the family she was working for who lived in Claremont. Her cousin Daphne was the same, but Daphne was cross because she said she WOULD have gone in the forces.

PRISONERS OF WAR - GERMAN AND ITALIAN

The prisoners were brought by lorry to work on the farms, digging ditches and hedges. Eunice saw a crowd of them on the road to Shrivensham and also at Odstone Farm. One prisoner used to make ships in a bottle and Eunice's dad once bought one for 2 shillings, which Eunice still has. The Italian prisoners had a reputation for not working, and troops with guns would stand around guarding them when they were working.

RATIONING ETC

Butter, sugar, tea, bread: it seemed that everything was rationed. Families grew their own vegetables, either in gardens or on the allotments at Winslow Combe. They kept pigs, bees, and chickens for the eggs. Sometimes, a little tit-bit of something would come into the shops and would be rationed round to everyone. Half the week they would eat without butter, so butter was a real treat, as was cheese, and the once-weekly bacon ration. Bread was made with wholegrain, and was very

heavy and chaffy to eat. Eunice worked at Claremont and was there for lunch and tea every day, so Eunice's parents were better off, because she didn't need to use her ration. They made ends meet with suet puddings which were put on the plate with dinner to help fill you up. People were slimmer and probably healthier than today. Housewives had to be clever to make things go round, especially as, without fridges or freezers, nothing could be kept.

KEEPING LIVESTOCK, ALLOTMENTS, TRAPPING

People kept pigs and rabbits in their gardens, to kill and eat. If you had a pig killed, one side was given to Sealey's and if they had one killed, they shared it with the Pills. Wild rabbits helped vary the diet, and pheasant, partridge, pigeon and rooks were shot for stews and pies. Mr. Pills was on the farm so he would come home with rooks to make a pie which Eunice remembered as having a nice taste, though you had to look carefully for the pellets when you were eating it.

VE AND VJ DAYS

Eunice was grown-up so wasn't involved, but she remembers there were dances, food, parties and children's sports, all sorts of things like that.

LOCAL DEFENCE VOLUNTEERS

HOME GUARD

They used to practise their Home Guard drill at night in the village, after work.

SPECIAL CONSTABLES

Bertie Gigg and Frank Pill were both Special Constables, with Walter New, Roland (Roly) Coles and Fred New. They would go out on duty at night, taking it in turns for 2 to 3 hour shifts. They worked with the air raid wardens, to see who wasn't blacked out and to see if anyone was prowling around.

AUXILIARY FIRE WARDENS

Eunice's uncle was captain of the auxiliary fire. He lived in Icklestone Cottage and one night, the Rose and Crown caught fire. Unfortunately, no-one woke him up to tell him, and in the morning he was very cross because it was all over and he had known nothing about it.

OTHER

The Women's Institute did quite a lot at this time. They got up the dances, and Eunice's aunt, Laura Jefferies, who was president for a time, did the catering for the dances. At Christmas, she collected money and made up parcels to send to all the boys from the village. The Mission Hall also used to send things like socks, balaclavas, pencils, pens etc to the troops, paying out their own money. The Mission Hall was open so that troops could go down there if they wanted to be quiet, to sit, or read, or write.

GENERAL ACTIVITIES

VILLAGE HALL

There were whist drives, dances, anything they could get up they did, and held it in the village hall (now Church Lane House.) Eunice remembers them being arranged, though she didn't go to them herself.

One clear memory she had was when a bomb was dropped at Bishopstone that actually moved Eunice's bed across the room. Eunice had been buying bacon from Miss White at the time the air raid

siren in Shrivenham sounded. Miss White said she was going to close up for the day and squeezed Eunice out of the shop so that no light showed. Eunice hurried home quickly.

CHURCHES

Once, Eunice was in a full church for the 6.30 service. The planes went over and a bomb dropped. The mother of one of the evacuees staying with Ray's mother at number 6 The Malt House, was there, and she let out a scream as they heard the terrific thud of the bomb. These were dropped quite often on the practice bombing range that was on the hills opposite Ashdown House. As she came from London's East End, it took the lady by surprise to hear an explosion in quiet Ashbury.

The Mothers' Union at St Mary's did things for the troops, and the Free Church had some of the troops to service and to supper. The Germans would have a service separately afterwards and some of the girls like Eunice and her friend Margaret, had to hand round cups of tea, sit together and try and sit with the Germans, though conversation was non-existent because of the language barrier. One very young chap perhaps resented it all, and would move when Eunice or anyone else came to sit beside him.

CLUBS

THRIFT club was probably at the Rose and Crown. Eunice's parents didn't pay into it but her aunt did. Eunice's father was secretary.

PIGS

Fred Ebsworth at Idstone used to kill the pigs and chop them up. The sides of bacon used to hang and Eunice's dad salted them. Such a feast, when pig was eaten all the time. The rashers of bacon for Sunday morning, sliced off by Eunice's mother, were thick and fatty. The head was made into brawn, the trotters boiled, the cheeks and everything was used. The pig was shared with people who you could trust to give you some of their pig back when it was killed. Eunice's family shared with Betty Sealey's in-laws. They let Eunice and Ray have ham for their wedding day, so were given it back when Eunice's family's pig was killed. The meat used to be kept in open safes outside the back door. In summer, it was put in the oven on Saturday and cooked, then just warmed up on Sunday.

OTHER MEMORIES

Eunice remembers great excitement in the village when they selected St Mary's for troops who were based in the locality, to come to a service, for their Sunday Church Parade. Villagers came out in support and to watch them march through the village. Officers from the college used to come to the Free Church for the service and lunch afterwards at Claremont