

John Young a Wartime Schoolboy

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An unexpected meeting with John Young, visiting from Cheshire, furthered our knowledge of wartime childhoods in Ewelme. In 1940 he was 10 when his father was posted to RAF Benson bringing his family from Liverpool. They were billeted with Adelaide Smith and her young son Gerald at No 1 Watercress Cottages. The Young's all slept in the top room, mother and father in the bed and John and his older brother Harold on the floor! (In contrast to the majority of Ewelme's wartime 'refugees', the Young's Liverpool home had mains water and a flush toilet - in Ewelme the drinking water came from the brook).

John thrived at Ewelme School – largely due to headmaster Mr Robert Quixley's tuition, and was doing so well that when her his father was posted, his mother returned to Liverpool with Harold, leaving John with the Smiths. Mr Quixley coached John and Eric Knowles (another son of an RAF father billeted in Ewelme) for the County Intermediate Exam when they were 13. In his Headmaster's Log Book entry on June 1st 1943 Mr Quixley records them both passing the exam. John then left Ewelme for the Toxteth Technical College to further his education.



Upper classroom, Ewelme School

John remembered fondly his young chums, Gerald Smith, Dennis Belcher, Norman Winfield, Arthur Young, Eric Knowles, Len Gilbey, Bob Quixley (the headmaster's son) and Eric and Jenny Townsend next door. Most were in the Church choir and John recalled Norman Winfield's exceptional singing voice.



John Young on far left (holding a pocket knife)

Whether in peace or wartime ‘boys will be boys’ and ‘scrumping’ seemed to have been a major pastime - although ration distribution went too far when one boy ‘liberated’ a chicken from the Fords Farm flock, wrung its neck, and took it home for dinner! The fire at The London Road Inn in August 1942 was a major attraction, and John remembered his gang ‘salvaging’ some bottles of spirits, (probably sherry), which were laid out on the grass verge. These were opened at the top of Days Lane – and found to taste ‘quite horrible’. John’s legitimate war-work was brief. He spent a day helping with the harvest at Lower Farm leading the cart horses for the wagons to be loaded, and expected to be paid six pence per hour, as per the wages for the young potato pickers. However, farmer Tom Orpwood only paid him four pence halfpenny, and when John protested, told him not to return!

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