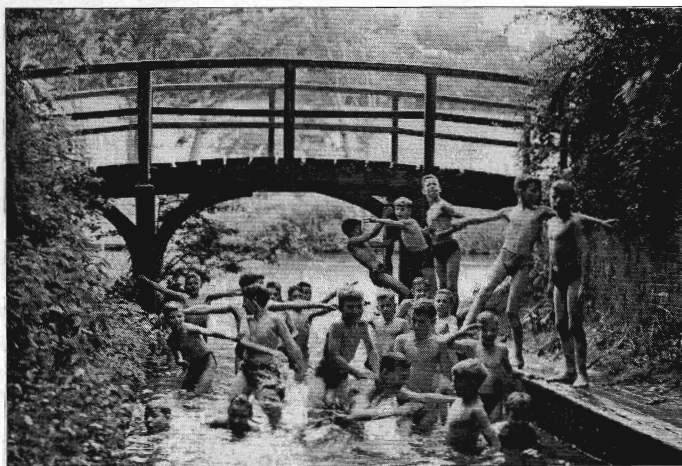


## **60<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF VICTORY IN EUROPE DAY**

Christopher Marsh organised a special visit to Wallingford-on-Thames with a reunion dinner where old pupils of the Royal School for the Deaf and Dumb, Margate, as it was called in those days of World War II, gathered for their 60th Anniversary celebration of Victory in Europe over the weekend of 20th to 22nd May. It was a most enjoyable and successful event for all who attended and credit must go to Chris and his organising committee (Shirley Collins, Pat and Lesley Ticehurst, Clive and Anne Davis) for their hard work in bringing this notable anniversary year to fruition.

On Saturday May 21st a large number of visitors gathered at a meeting place, ready for several visits to sites where deaf evacuees from Margate school were sheltered during the war. This was more or less a repeat, which has been described in the *DHJ* December 1998 issue. Three groups were formed and the first and second groups were already on their way to Nuns Acre when there was a sudden downpour of rain. The 3rd group had to dash for shelter and found themselves under a building in Nuns Acre. They found time to discuss this site, which used to be the residential quarters for young deaf children. After lunch in the local pub, the afternoon sunshine greeted us and the groups continued to make their way to the Grange, which was used as a residential place for most of the deaf juniors, and a most attractive place it was. To see the old timers who recalled their days at the Grange, signing excitedly with each other was a sight to behold. Here was a rich visual source of Deaf history unfolding spontaneously before that very building that still survives to this day as a nursing residential home for the elderly. The oldest Deaf male evacuee is Pat Cubis from Luton, who left school in 1941. The oldest Deaf female evacuee is Mrs Maureen Corcoran (nee Brooker) from Southampton. Chris Marsh then led us to an isolated and disused boating house very close to the River Thames and embarked on a personal piece of Deaf history, telling us how he and the (other boys used it to swim around!)?? Attempts had been made to preserve the boating house site, but to no avail. On the whole it was a splendid day for all concerned.



*Boys about 10 years old swimming at the Grange boathouse, Goring on Thames in 1945 Summer*

*By courtesy of William Ball*

We returned to Wallingford for the re-union dinner, which took place at a beautiful riverside inn. After a splendid meal, feasted on by more than 110 Margate evacuees and guests, speeches were the order of the day. Chris Marsh as the M.C. opened with toast to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and read out a letter of acknowledgement from Buckingham Palace, stating that her Majesty the Queen sent her best wishes to all those present. Chris also read out, briefly, letters of acknowledgement from the Countess of Wessex, the patron of the Margate school, and Wendy Eadsforth, the head of Margate school who wrote:

## HISTORICAL NOTES

"As head of the school at the RSDC, Margate, I wish to extend warm wishes from all the staff and pupils at the school to those pupils who were evacuated to Wallingford and Goring-on-Thames during the war years. From reading the annual reports from the years 1939 to 1944 it is obvious that school life was very different with pupils becoming involved in war work on farms and assembling and packing nuts, bolts, file handles, bicycle tyres and ball bearings and cartons for a Royal Ordnance Depot. Like all evacuees I'm sure that many of you have stories to tell about your time at Wallingford and Goring on Thames and will enjoy meeting old friends."

John Hay, Chair of the BDHS, sent best wishes on behalf of the BDHS and wrote:

"... I remember being here when I was a 2nd former at the MHGS, accompanying David Spayne and enjoying cream teas with his two gentlemen friends at one of those numerous riverside tearooms.



***Boys armed with homemade dummy wooden rifles and pistols at Wallingford, Summer 1941***

Standing: A. Davis, D. Crewe, S. Wallace, R. Reeder, V. Skelt, J. Colgate, P. Davis, S. Cherrinton

Kneeling:- L. Williams, K. Simmonds, R. Skidmore, A. Lennox, B. Stayner

*By courtesy of Kenneth Simmonds*

It has been 60 years since most of you left Goring-on-Thames, at the end of World War 2, when the evacuation of school children ended. We can visualise the scenarios of children returning to their loved ones within family circles but, for you being deaf, it was a case of moving from "school - to - school" - from the riverside town back to the seaside town. I am sure that you had, however, hugely enjoyed both the tranquillity and the idyllic life of living by the Thames for more than 5 years. Your experiences are so different from the hearing ones' who were often placed in small units such as farms, cottages, private houses and so on and often, finding themselves a bit lonely with few children to play with. You, by contrast, had your friends round you all the time, playing and learning together and, more importantly, communicating effortlessly... There was one big particular sign I enjoyed learning from you ... the sign for Goring so signed after the Air Marshal of the German Air Force!" John finalised by reminding the remaining evacuees of the famous wartime song,

*We'll meet again!*

Clive Davis was next and, straight off the cuff, he clearly unfolded the history of the war evacuation of Margate school as previously described in the said issue of *DHJ*. Next came a surprise visitor from South Africa, an ex-Margate school evacuee, Maureen Neethling, the mother of Louis, who is the Deaf Producer with See Hear! She flew in especially to greet all her old friends on this special evening. Charles Herd followed by reading out his poem, beautifully executed in BSL in an eloquent and dignified style:

***"Remember Goring on Thames"***

*The sun on the river, the snow on the hill,  
60 years on ... I remember them still,  
The fun and laughter, the tears and the pain,  
60 years on ... let's remember again.*

*The Grange, Cariad, Wallingford too,  
The babes at Nuns Acre, all homesick and blue,  
All of us different, but the same in one way,  
Bound by OUR school, right up to today.*

*We swam in the river and climbed the tall trees,  
Played in the rain and smelled the fresh breeze,  
We were happy and healthy, with hardly a care,  
Enjoying the beautiful countryside there.*

*Playing football and rounders, having great fun,  
Those were the days we were able to run,  
Laughing and shouting, running so fast,  
We were young, full of life ... long ago in the past.*

*Do you remember the food (ugh!) potato and cheese,  
We never said "can I have some more please",  
The bread and the dripping, frog spawn and ground rice,  
They kept us alive - BUT - they weren't very nice.*

*The teachers all women, the men - gone to war,  
The women were soft, so our behaviour was poor,  
But they knew we were only kids, so they didn't mind,  
We thought they were ogres, but they really were kind.*

*Remember how matron searched for fleas in our hair,  
And shaved it all off if she found any there,  
Dosing cod liver oil (ugh) that tasted like shit,  
It really was awful - BUT - it kept us all fit.*

*The long walk from the Grange to the Vicarage school,  
Walking in crocodiles, but still playing the fool,  
Over the bridges and past the Old Swan,  
60 long years ago ... where have they all gone?*

## HISTORICAL NOTES

*It's sad to look back, but please don't be glum,  
We have many more wonderful days still to come,  
Families, friends, all the things that we do,  
Many more dreams that still can come true.*

*So ... will you join me in toasting the school of our youth,  
And those friends who are sadly now gone,  
The school and those friends are with us no more,  
But their memory will always live on.*

**Charles Herd, May 2005**

Lastly, Tony Boyce, the guest of honour, gave a brief speech on how evacuation plans were made before the war, having been finalised in 1932 and how they were to be executed when Britain felt the threat of invasion becoming imminent. Throughout the war, many pupils survived at Goring-on-Thames and it was fortunate that they were not at Margate where heavy bombing took place resulting in severe damage to the school buildings. Not wishing to repeat the incidents as mentioned by previous speakers, he went over some points worth mentioning and in the end gave a toast to all survivors.

At Margate there were over 400 deaf children. When war was declared, cellars were used as air raid shelters. Gas masks were immediately issued. Deaf children were taught how to use them. What a pungent smell gas masks gave when they were put on. Tony recollected that when he was young, he was shooed into the underground station in London. No light was shown at night from streets and houses, it would have made them an easy target for bombers from the sky. Tony continued that he was terrified by the darkness. Tony emphatically stated, *"My eyes have always been my best friends, but they did not help me to feel safe. I suppose you felt the same."*

The first nine months passed quietly. When the Germans overran Holland and Belgium, moving nearer and nearer to England, the air raid gongs vibrated now and then, and as a sort of a ritual, the staff rounded up the bewildered four hundred deaf children like sheep, to take them to the shelters.



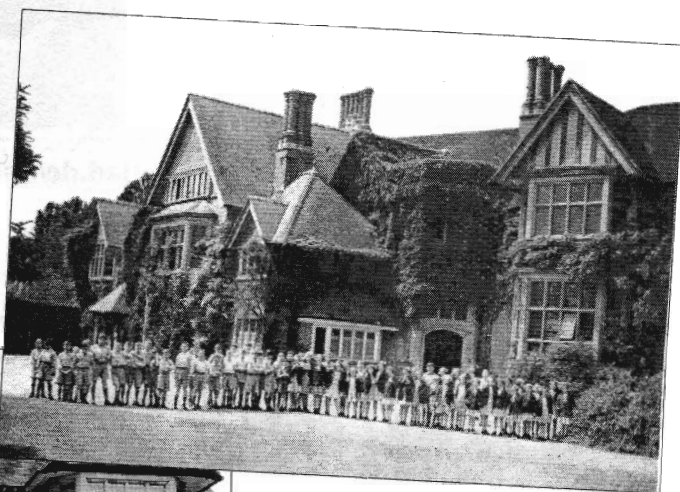
*Another photo shot of Wallingford Boys, 1941*

*By courtesy of Kenneth Simmonds*

When the time came for the evacuation plans to be implemented, Margate was lucky to have three large houses in Goring ready. They had planned well. Tony continued, *"When I say lucky I mean there were other local schools and organisations wanting to have large vacant buildings, and searching for them took some time. Vacant rooms in houses were searched for too, but some residents were not keen to*

*share them."* However, vacant rooms at Newnham Manor, five miles from Goring, were offered and accepted for seniors. It was chaotic at the start, when school was transferred from one place to another distant one. There, the school settled into a normal routine. Most of you were evacuated. Do you remember those days? For this special gathering, this is what it is all about.

*Right: The Grange, Goring-on-Thames, Boys and Girls, in Summer 1945*



*Revisiting The Grange 60 years later - in Summer 2005...*

*Photo by Anthony J Boyce*

Memories are shared amongst those of you who survived through the war and who are still alive today.

Each of you has a unique experience of living through the war. Some memories are terrifying. What would have happened if some of you had remained at school in Margate? What an impossible picture to imagine! Some memories are sad; some bring laughter and jokes galore. Some are cherished and bring tears of appreciation. These memories should be recorded for Deaf history's sake. It is up to you to take this important step.

Victory in Europe Day, May 8th 1945, is a day of happiness. Peace! No more fear of being bombed. It is also a day of thanksgiving for survival through the war.

*O, let in glorious light in our lives. No more blackout.*

It is worth noting that the Margate Ex-pupils' War-time Reunion is the only reunion in Great Britain to celebrate the special 60th anniversary of Victory in Europe Day.

*Christopher Marsh and Anthony J. Boyce*