

MY CHILDHOOD IN DAMERHAM



BETTY PRICE (NEE BROWNING)

I first came to Damerham in the war years because my mother wanted to get out of London. She rented a cottage in the East End of Damerham from Mr Hockey who lived at the large house at the bottom of the hill. It was all so different from London where every night we had to sleep in Waterloo station because of the bombs. My mother was horrified to find a well at the bottom of the garden and was always terrified of me falling in it. I found it great fun because every time a bucket of water came up so did one or two tiny frogs and I have always been interested in animals. My mother was terrified of frogs and I used to have to rescue them before she would take the bucket indoors. We also had no electric light, only lamps.

Every year the village had a horse show and our house looked out onto the cricket field so I would be so thrilled when the roundabouts arrived with all the fair people putting it up and I would hope that my mother could afford for me to have a ride on one of the large coloured horses. We also had a great view of the horse show from our bedroom window and every Saturday we could watch the cricket match in comfort. Next door in a small cottage lived an elderly man called Mr Blake. Mr Blake always cut the churchyard and kept it tidy. When mother was busy, I used to accompany Mr Blake to the churchyard and help him pick up

all the grass. He used to tell me all the stories about the people buried there and this made me never afraid of churchyards.

After 4 or 5 years Mr Hockey needed his cottage so we were moved to No. 10 The Terrace next door to Mrs Dyer. Mr Dyer had been wounded in the First World War and was in a wheel chair. I became great friends with Mrs Dyer's daughter Joyce and we remain friends until today. Mr & Mrs Gregory lived next door to Mrs Dyer. Mr Gregory kept pigs and I was always helping him clean out the pig sties. Mr & Mrs Gregory were a grand couple and were known by everyone in the village. On show days there was always a fancy dress parade and every single year that I knew them, they dressed up as bride and groom and everyone waited to see them. They both lived to grand old age.



Opposite our little terrace was the blacksmith and in the winter, the children would go into the West Park Estate and find chestnuts and we would come back while they were shoeing the horses and Mr Percy would put our chestnuts into the furnace to cook and many children would be under his awning till late in the evening listening to tales about the village and eating their chestnuts. I went to the existing

school where Miss Barnes was Headmistress and Miss Tiller was the Junior teacher. Miss Tiller and I are still friends today. I can remember some summer days when it was so hot Miss Barnes would let us take our desks into her garden to work under the apple trees and I can still smell the blooms today. One of my other memories at school was of Miss Tiller when we had a few spare minutes, she had a wonderful large fairy tale book on a high shelf and she would get this down and read us a wonderful story. I also belonged to girl guides, which was run by Mrs Brown. I was in the Blackbird pack and many of the girls from the village belonged.

Soon we had lots of soldiers come to Damerham which brought tanks and heavy armoured vehicles and we had to carry gas masks and identity cards everywhere. My sister had a shop at Martin, which she ran while her husband was in the army and Mum and I used to cycle up to see her and on the way, there were three sentry boxes with soldiers in them. They would say "Halt. Who goes there!" and we would have to show our identity. Mum used to do a lot of washing for the soldiers to help out with money. On Sundays we used to go to church in the morning and to the Baptist Sunday school in the afternoon and I always remember the magic lantern at the Sunday school. It was a great thrill to be asked to change the slides. I was very tiny and had to be lifted onto a chair. Then near Mother's Day the Sunday School teacher would take us into the woods and we would pick primroses and she would teach us how to make a posy by putting the primrose in the centre and the green leaves all around it and we would take them very proudly back home to Mum.

I always enjoyed it when Mum wanted me to go down to Mr Bedford's watercress farm to get the cress because I used to sneak behind one of the bushes along the lane and watch a family of otters sliding down a mud slide into the river quite near his watercress bed. They were fascinating.

During the War when the Americans came, there was a terrible explosion at Knoll and many of them were killed and all the windows of most houses were blown out including the school's. A lot of the soldiers were buried in our little church at the top of the hill. Our memorial cross got knocked down by an army vehicle which upset all the villagers and it has since been re-erected at the side of the hall. The Americans also gave us wonderful Christmas parties in West Park House. We were all collected in army lorries and taken to this wonderful party with so much food and sweets and a present for all of us. I remember having a lovely doll which I was terrified even to take out of the box because we were not used to having toys at all during the war. By now Mum had also got two evacuees staying with us. We got on very well and there were many more in the village, which made our little school very crowded.

Towards the end of the war we had German prisoners putting in the pipes to give water to everyone's house and I remember when it was very cold, we all felt sorry for them. They also dug out the one bomb that Damerham had which was called the Damerham Daisy Bell. I remember everyone lining the roads when it went through the village on the lorry. We also had regular concerts in the hall and Mr Jim Drewitt always sang Jerusalem and it was a

mixture of grown ups and children doing their own thing. Once a year many people from the village used to all get together and walk to Verwood for their Carnival and then all come home together late in the evening after a wonderful day out.

These are just some of my happy memories of growing up in Damerham, the village has stayed very much the same since then.