

Memories of a Froxfield Childhood

Part 2 — GIs and Jam

During WWII Littlecote House became home to the staff of the American 101st Airborne Division. In July 1941 King George VI and the Queen visited the troops at Littlecote and no doubt began their journey from London on the A4, travelling as far as Hungerford before turning off for Littlecote. I am unsure of the date, but it was on another occasion that the King and Queen visited Littlecote and we all walked down from the school and lined up on the Littlecote Road to wave flags as the Royal party drove by. From a press release later it seemed they then re-joined the A4 at Froxfield and went on to other military establishments in Wiltshire.

Some years later on a summer evening we heard on the radio that Princess Margaret was in Bath to open a new children's wing at a hospital before returning to Windsor. We thought it likely she would be passing by at about 7.30 p. m. So I waited on the front lawn and sure enough I saw the small procession of cars coming into view one of which had a flag flying and there she was wearing a lovely pink outfit. She waved and so did I — but not so the 3 or 4 elderly

gentlemen leaning on the bridge over the chalk stream with their backs to the road they were unaware of Royalty passing by!

On the whole the village children seemed to deal with crossing the A4, although their mothers took them to school each morning; (probably more to make sure they actually went!) collected them at lunchtime and then again at the end of the afternoon. However, one day my mother was not outside waiting so I decided to go home on my own. Those days it was possible to cross the road by the green. I had to wait because a convoy was approaching from Hungerford with a despatch rider in front on a motorbike. He saw me, slowed down, stopped the convoy and came over, took my hand and led me across and then they went on their way! To think that I stopped the War effort for a moment!!

Americans were very generous to the local children — organising Christmas parties and giving them chocolate. One day, having played with friends on the green most of the afternoon, it was time to go home at 5

p.m. I had just crossed the A4 and an army lorry came by, then slowed down to turn into Manor Farm. I saw something fall to the ground from the lorry. When I reached it I could see it was a large round tin and printed on the side it said 'APRICOT JAM'!APRICOT JAM?! No one had tasted apricot jam for years. I picked up the tin and went to the farm to hand it back. The soldier at the gate didn't know anything about it and wouldn't take it. So I took it home, but my mother was still worried and wanted to know how, on earth, I came by it. I said (like you would!) "...it fell off the back of a lorry" (a likely story). Just then, my father came home from work and was told the story and my mother said he must take it back to the farm, which was only a few yards away, otherwise we would get a visit from the Military Police! He went, but was back quite

quickly still holding the tin because he was told to keep it. We were able to share it with all our neighbours along the row of houses. I have often wondered if it was a way of giving. The American soldiers were very well fed and, although they knew that we were all on tight rations, weren't allowed to share their food.

Moya Dixon

