

Joyce Margaret White

I'm Joyce Margaret White (at that time). I've never been called Joyce, I'm always Margaret except for official purposes and I lived in Canterbury until I got married.

So, your stay in Bridge was between 1942 and 1944. What brought you to Bridge?

Yes. We were in Canterbury on the first night of the Blitz and we were woken up with the raid and we went under the stairs and all sat in there. In the morning of course, because we were very close to the bombs with the Cathedral there, so close and Mum felt she didn't want to stay in Canterbury at night. She sent my brother John, who was four years older than me, to her friend's, Edie to ask Dad Fagg if we could sleep there overnight. Fortunately, John got there early enough because somebody else afterwards wanted to go there as well.

So that night, the Monday night when we went out, you couldn't obviously get up the main road because everything was a mess. So, we walked round and had to go up Broad Street and up to the Dover Road and they used to stop the Dover- Folkestone buses and they turned round there because they couldn't get through. Also, they'd lost a lot of buses at that time. The memory of that walk. A lot of houses on the left-hand side had been badly bombed and we were walking over glass and rubble because it was all still piled up there. But what always stuck in my mind was the masses of hosepipes that were covered because they'd all got caught and covered when the buildings collapsed. So, we walked round that and then we got the bus out to Bridge.

Which street were you living in?

Palace Street. Do you know round there?

We do indeed.

We lived at number 21 and it was the RSPCA because Mum was caretaker. It's not there now they pulled the wooden building down and built flats. We lived there. Before we moved there, Dad had a butcher's shop two doors up from that but when he gave up the butcher's shop that's when we went there. So, I lived in Palace Street most of my life.

So, you took the bus up to Bridge but you say you stayed just overnight.

Yes, just overnight. We didn't have food or anything but we went to the entrance Daddy Fagg gave us a room. We went to the back door. Nobody ever used the front door. We went in and we had this little room down and then when we were ready for bed we'd walk through their sitting room and there was a corridor and round the corner were the stairs and we had the first bedroom upstairs. It was a huge room with two double beds, there was plenty of room in there for all of us. Edie Fagg was along the corridor.

How did your Mum know Edie?

They were friends. She had a lot of farm friends because my Dad knew them, but before that. He was a widower when Mum married him and he had a hop farm at Four Oaks so he and his sons were all farming.

So, at age 10 you were at school.

I was at the school in Broad Street. You know when you go down Military Road, there's a school at the bottom.

Diocesan Payne Smith?

It wasn't Payne Smith School there, but on the night of the bombing Payne Smith School got bombed. So, the girls from there came in to our school. A lot of girls were evacuated still and so we absorbed the Payne Smith girls.

So, what did you see of Bridge at that time?

Well, all over the place. You didn't take in much of it but my main interest was to get out in to the fields and I cut down through the fields. I can't remember the name of the stream that goes through Bridge.

The Nailbourne.

Yes. He had a part where his cattle could go and that was just right. In the Summer I was always going paddling. One time I thought I'd be adventurous so I walked under the road. You couldn't go very far because it got deeper in some places, but that was my favourite.

You went under the bridge but did you go up to the ford?

We've been through it but you couldn't walk up the stream to it. I tried but it started to get deep in one place and I couldn't go any further.

It must have been a much bigger stream.

Is it shallow now?

It's not running at the moment. It runs every five or six years.

All the two years I was there it was lovely.

You were ten. Was there a sweet shop in the village?

I don't remember but we were rationed to a quarter of a pound of sweets and we'd got our little favourite sweet shop in Palace Street that was there four years. A little tiny shop and that was my sweet shop. So if I'd got any coupons and money that's where I'd go.

Did you then go back into Canterbury the next morning?

We caught the early bus and walked at that early time down through. Of course, they bombed the second night we were at Bridge and it had been a big raid. Not quite as big as the first, and of course we went to look at Northgate and I can remember looking round and was our house still there?

Luckily, Palace Street wasn't badly hit like St George's Street and along there.

The ones that came near us were in the King's School grounds and the Deanery got badly damaged and the Canterbury Cathedral Library. I can remember sitting under the stairs and hearing the bombs that came nearer and I can remember hearing those that came there and thinking "Is the next one going to hit us?"

I can understand your mother not wanting to stay there. So, you went to Bridge every night.

Every night for two years then we were stopped. I think it was the army stopped us. Only people that actually lived that side, you could more or less get to the top of Bridge Hill and then they had an army thing there and that was coming up, we think now, to D Day.

They were keeping it all out of bounds.

Yes, all the time we were in Bridge the army was there. What's that big house as you go out of Bridge? Something to do with Powell-Cotton, Baden Powell?

Bifrons? Highland Court, Bridge Place?

At the top of the hill on the right. I've got a feeling it was Baden Powell's place years ago; I don't know why. Well, the army had that they were all there under the trees. All the time we were going there, the army lorries were going up towards Canterbury and back and Bren gun carriers trundled past but looking back we think it was the same two or three that were making out that we were getting ready to go over from Dover. We didn't know it at the time but they were kind of decoys.

So, when were you stopped going?

I can't remember how early in '44 it was, probably early in '44 that we were told you couldn't go.

That's extraordinary that every night you and your Mum were doing that.

There was my brother John, my sister Joan, they're half brothers and sisters. My sister Joan was twenty years older than me and she'd got my nephew who was two years old in '42, born in 1940. So, there was five of us there.

I got used to it out there and as soon as I'd had my tea, I'd get on the bus and go out. I made friends with the girl that lived at the Red Lion. She'd got lots of animals. She was a bit older than me. I can't remember her name. She persuaded me to join the Guides, so I joined the Guides in Bridge.

Where did you meet, in the Village Hall?

It's gone completely, where we met. I just remember we went up near some woods and had a little campfire and found different things like that. Some things have stuck in my head and others have gone.

Did you have breakfast at the farm? What time did the early bus go?

No. Well I'd be at school at 9 so it must have been at least 8, coming up from Dover or Folkestone.

Did you have any breakfast?

Yes. When we got home, we had breakfast and then obviously I had to go to school. In the Winter it was so cold, you'd come in the house we'd only got one fire which was range. Everything had to be lit. In the little scullery we had a little gas oven, so when it was so cold Mum used to open the door, light the gas and the gas pressure was about like that- the highest you could get like that – because sometimes they used to cut the gas pressure. I used to sit with my feet in the oven to warm myself up. Then we'd have a bit of breakfast and off I'd go.

And what about supper? Did you have supper when you got to the farm?

We had a tea before we went, so as far as I know we didn't have any food there.

And you were the only family there, I think.

Yes, just us. The first night we were there we all went down to the Red Lion and I don't know what time it was, but the siren went for the second raid on Canterbury. Of course, they came in over Bridge and they were fairly low, you could really hear them. There weren't many anti-aircraft guns round Canterbury when we first went there. They must have brought guns in. The noise of the guns firing at them was tremendous. Because we were down there, Dad Fagg turned up. I don't know whether he happened to be a Warden or something because he'd got a tin hat. He grabbed me and we were all, instead of staying there, I don't know why, we were all running up Bridge High Street with all this going on. I can remember thinking "Oh, it's alright for you, you've got a tin hat on."

In the first part of the war, my brother would go out looking for shrapnel and he used to bring whole great big lumps in and I'd got visions of that falling on my head.

So, to get to the shelter we had to come up the road and somehow or other we'd come from the shed. I remember how high the step was to get over. We'd come out of there and then into the field at the back of the cow shed. We would sit in there. But we'd come all that way round.

You talked about "Dad" Fagg and they say "Daddy" Fagg's Farm, why is that?

There was Dad Fagg and Wag Fagg and others. They were all farmers you see, in that area.

One of them was at Barham. I didn't know the others very well.

It's a common East Kent name isn't it?

Yes, Dad Fagg, Wag Fagg.

I'm intrigued. I've heard of him a lot, but what did he look like?

He was a lovely man, putting up with me trailing round behind him. He'd got the cows and when you went in to the yard from the house, he had it where he used to bottle the milk. If he was doing that I'd go and help wash the milk bottles. It always intrigued me, but on the wall (I don't know how the milk got there in the first place) he'd got a wavy metal thing and hosepipe things with water went through the middle of it, and milk went down to cool it. Then he'd fill them and I'd stick the old cardboard discs on. When you'd done that, he'd got a little cart. To me it was a little black box, tiny, and he'd put the milk crates into that and off he'd go round the village.

So, he would sell it?

Yes.

Margaret, you were 8 when the war started? Can you remember Canterbury before the War?

Just, I was 7. Do you know the Long Market? I can remember, I must have been about 3 I suppose, I remember my Dad taking me through in there. It was like antique places and they'd got a little oval of shops all the way down. All the people squashed in there and it's stuck in my mind. I remember Woolworth's. Their glass windows on either side were curved and I remember all the stuff in there.

Then or course, you saw the devastation.

The morning after the first raid, Mum and Joan and I think John, went up to see. I was miffed because they wouldn't let me go. They weren't long because they couldn't get very far, only to the end of Palace Street and that was it. They came back and thought they'd just go round and look at Northgate and they did let me go. In some ways I wished I hadn't. We were walking over the glass and the smell, burnt. Just up Northgate, bombs had dropped on two or three houses and I saw them bringing somebody out. As soon as we saw that we went.

Did you ever rebel, as children, about having to go out to Bridge every evening?

No, it was just something we did.

And you would have continued there if the army hadn't stopped you?

Yes, 'til the end of the War. Then Mum had got some friends at Chartham and that's where we went 'til the end of the War.

Where about in Chartham? I know Chartham quite well.

You know the paper mill? Right opposite that, there's a little alley way. It came out into a green of cottages and Mum's friends were in the first cottage on the right where the well was. Outside the house was the well and that's where they all came for their water. Because it was right outside the house, they'd got a little pump on the sink, the same as the outside, but a miniature one. The water from that was lovely. Fresh, cool water. The toilet was down the garden and you could sit in there and watch other people coming in and out because there were holes all over it. So there was Mrs so and so going in to hers!

So, you caught a bus out to Chartham which is further than Bridge.

Yes, and did the same thing.

So that stopped at the end of the War?

More or less to the end of the War, yes. The memories of there – there was a lot of children and we had plenty to play with. It must have been coming up for Christmas. I'd gone out early as usual, I didn't want

to stay in and I was playing. The lady in the cottage opposite had 2 or 3 children and there was a Christmas do up at the mental hospital (St. Augustine's). She said to me "Would you like to come?" I'd go anywhere, but did I tell anybody? No. I just went.

Your poor Mum she must have been frantic.

But up there, it was lovely. We got orange squash or something and a little show. Unfortunately, whilst we were there, a doodle bug came over and its engine stopped just over us. There was a big explosion. Mum and them had come out. Where was I? I didn't half get told off.

Having been safe in Bridge all that time you were in the path of a doodlebug. Now is there anything else you'd like to tell us?

Well, I'm just nattering on and it's not about Bridge but the one real fright I had during the War there was what we called a hit and run or tip and run. It was afternoon, about 4 and a friend of Mum had come up visiting her. He asked me to take him to someone he wanted to meet. I can't remember who that was, but we'd gone just round the corner into Knott's Lane and there was Jackson's the scrap merchant on the corner and we'd got more or less level with that and there was a terrific noise, gunfire. There'd been no siren and these planes came over the rooftops. This was a Saturday, the planes came at rooftop height, firing all up the High Street. Because it was down the narrow end people couldn't get in to the shops, there was nowhere for them to go. A lot of people got killed. Right from Jackson's yard, more or less over our heads a plane came. I looked up and it was low enough, I could see the pilot and the one behind him. It had a bomb hanging underneath it. A man came from nowhere and pushed me down against a wall and stood over me. It was over in seconds. As it was happening, what we called the hooter went and that was only done when the planes were very close, but they'd already come under the radar. They'd done the same at Whitstable and of course that's a straight line. By the time Whitstable let us know, they were over. The thing was, Mum's having a lot of country friends, they all came into Canterbury to do their shopping. Of course, all those friends, once they'd done that, they'd all come round for a cup of tea at Mum's tea shop on a Saturday afternoon. Apparently, they were holding Mum back because she was coming out to find me but they wouldn't let her. We had an outside toilet. It flushed and everything. One of Mum's friends had already gone in there and she soon shot back indoors. We never did get where Ernie wanted to go. That wasn't very nice.

It's so sad for us because we came to the village in 1968 and in 1963 Daddy Fagg's farm had been pulled down.

But when you think how old that was, you know in your picture of the house something about that staircase. This is the road and you came in down there in the back door. This is the big kitchen. It was all red brick and along the wall were two large bread ovens and I can't remember the rest but it was all the length. But our room was only small but I've no idea what that was and that's where you said that old staircase was. So I can't make out what that was because we only had a small room there.

It was a very old building wasn't it?

Yes, but to my mind it was lovely. Their front, this is the room Edie and Dad Fagg used. When you went down the corridor there was another big room here, it would be like their front room. I only remember the door being open once for a glimpse and it was full of furniture and ornaments but nobody went in there. I only got a glimpse and there was a huge fireplace there and they sat either side.

Did Edie and Daddy Fagg have children?

No, not that I know of. When you went outside, they'd got a yard here and a great big walnut tree and then at the back of that was the wall of a barn or something, whatever was going up there and as you walked up there to the little gate to get into the field, all this part, Dad Fagg had made a vegetable garden and he'd got it crammed with everything you could think of. He really did work. All along this wall were fruit against the wall. The sun went round on that wall and then you used to go out into the field if the

geese weren't there. I used to get so cross if the geese were near because I couldn't go through. I never went up to their rooms so I've got no idea of the layout or anything.

Somebody else I've interviewed said she could remember a village fete on Daddy Fagg's meadow.

No, I don't remember anything like that.

At weekends, did you still come out in the evening?

Yes, just the same.

That's really fascinating and thank you very much Margaret.