

*(transcribed from Ann's original handwritten memoir)*

Here are a few brief memories of my time as a pupil of Winceby House School when we were evacuated to Wales for the duration of the Second World War

I went to Winceby House School, as a boarder, at the age of 9 years. There were 70 pupils and about 20 staff, and the school was built on the cliff at Bexhill-on-Sea in Sussex. The owners and headmistresses of Winceby were Miss Angela Wilson and her sister Winifred – we called her 'Madam'.

At the start of the war the fighting in France became very intense and we could hear the gunfire coming across the Channel – have a look at the map! As a result of this it was felt that, should the Germans invade England, we were in a danger area on the coast. Therefore, it was decided to evacuate the whole school for the duration of the war – however long that might be – and the army eventually used this building in Bexhill.

A new home for the school was found in Herefordshire in Wales. Shobden Court was an old country house near Presteign in beautiful grounds – with hard tennis courts and two lakes included. Winceby then started again although some of us had to sleep in accommodation outside the main house. A few slept in a cottage nearby which was quite fun and about 20 girls had to walk down the long drive (it was very dark in winter) and sleep in dormitories in the old rectory. This was a huge and gaunt building and the rector himself was a very strange man. He lived there alone until we arrived and he was very fat and tall and we used to hear him singing and shouting in the night! It was very spooky, but we were all together and there was always a member of staff with us each night.

School routine was much as usual – but we were in beautiful countryside and enjoyed marvellous walks. A friend and I created lovely pressed wild flower collections – we used to press the flowers between sheets of blotting paper under the marble slabs of our dressing tables. Of course this was all done after matron had been round and said, "Goodnight, girls!" and we were meant to be fast asleep.

At this time the Battle of Britain was being fought between German bombers and our fighter aircraft over London and the Home Counties and my home was in Surrey (Warlingham). Those of us whose homes were in these danger areas therefore stayed at school during the holidays and our parents would come and stay with us. We had good fun, then, with lots of outdoor activities. I remember three of us found an old punt in one of the boathouses next to a lake and decided to take a trip to a little island in the middle. We did not get far as our craft leaked badly and we were lucky not to have a ducking or worse! Nobody knew!!

After about 2 years at Shobden a large airfield was made near the school, and once again it was felt that as it would have been a target for German bombers the school was in a danger area. Once again the headmistresses looked around for another large house to accommodate us all – but in a safe area. They found one.