

Memories of Penny Bridge: Iris Woods

My first memory of being evacuated was going on the train with my gas mask and my name tag on and a pillowcase with some clothes in and the train setting off and being told that we were going away on a week's holiday.

The second one is possibly when arriving at Pennybridge House, the big house in Pennybridge and stepping down from, I think it was a Rolls Royce somehow, it was a big car, owned by the then Mrs. Stanley, and going up the steps.

My memory I have of being in the house was in the hallway on the side were two brown and white shields made from possibly cow hide. I thought they were maybe Zulu in origin, but I'm not quite sure. They were battered ones anyway. There were some spears, crossed spears and what I later learnt was an obkuri, which was a ball on a chain with spikes on. That was in the hall.

I don't know whether it was Miss Frances or Miss Alice, but she was very kind and the children that she had in the house had to do physical jerks in the morning but because I was young, I was only five, I didn't join in. I remember either Miss Frances or Miss Alice in the upstairs room and I thought she was disabled but she could be wheeled out across a river, onto the lawns. There were two lawns made-up of a low one and then a higher one which had a huge oak tree in the middle and one of them was a croquet lawn.

In the house there was the cellar which was very cold and they had a maid or cook that made butter from the milk that came from the farm up the road. Also, whilst I was there, I remember the "Jolly Boys", coming round, rolling the carpet out and enacting St George and the Dragon, with the slaying of the dragon. They then they went on to the rest of the village, I think.

Anyway, I don't know how long we were there, but we were then later farmed out, as I say, to cottages next to Pennybridge House to a couple, an elderly couple, and they were Stanleys (apparently not close relatives) and they were called Fred and Ellen Stanley. We went to live there and that was a very sort of peaceful life somehow. Mr Stanley, Fred, was a gardener. He used to garden and I remember Lowick, he went there. Across the road he had an orchard, an apple orchard that had hens in. Rhode Island Reds and White Leghorns, I remember that. Happy little chickens, hens, strutting around and jumping in the trees. But he did kill them, but never let me see that, he would take them in the barn, away from me. Mrs Stanley would then pluck them and set them out very nicely. They would then be sold to anybody who wanted them or we would eat them.

Anything that was killed was always eaten anyway and we had eggs that went to the war effort anyway and Mrs Stanley used to knit sea boot stockings and balaclavas for the soldiers. Every night this would happen.

They had a garden at the top that had vegetables, strawberries, runner beans, things like that, they lived on. And they were very kind, but you knew that it wasn't your real mum and dad, so I think I possibly behaved myself. Maybe not like I would at home.

Going back to Pennybridge House, I do remember they had a horse and they say it was buried at the far end of the garden, in the corner. They had a gardener / handyman / driver.

Anyway, back to the Stanleys. The Stanleys that had the cottages, the Coltons that lived next door, whose daughter was in the Land Army, and then another couple who we didn't have much to do with. The end house was Charlie Titterington. I used to call them Auntie Polly Titterington and Uncle Charlie. Uncle Charlie had the co-op at the bottom of the road that led into Greenodd.

There was no shop actually in Pennybridge, but he ran the local co-op which sold items like sugar and bacon.

But the Stanleys mostly lived existed on the vegetables and the fruit they had, the chickens and the eggs. She would make her own bread as well as cakes. They were quite self-sufficient. Nothing went to waste, if you had potatoes that were peeled, the peelings would go into a big pot in a shed at the back and I think it was boiled up and fed them back to the hens. It was like recycling.

We went to the village school which was just one room but they had a partition in between. So, the eldest children were at one side and the youngest ones were at the other side, which was me. I do remember crying when the shutters went, because my sister was in the other side. I remember being given like a paper elephant, to shut me up, to be quiet. There was one teacher who lived next door. The children were mostly village children and some farming children.

Going up the hill, which was quite steep there was the church where we went. I don't think that often, but I remember hanging on to a peg and sitting on the kneeler, the hassock I think they call them, and wishing it was over.

The Stanleys are all buried there. Fred and Ellen are buried together with just one like a small headstone. Miss Frances and Miss Alice. They were buried alongside, but they had a bigger stone with a cross on top, noting that they were the aristocracy, I think. I recently visited and I went to the grave.

Across from the church was the farm, called Sod House Farm. I remember going there to visit and in the living room, or the parlour as they used to say, it was like open and the chickens would be free to run in there and dogs and a cat, but they had hams all hanging up there. The village people would go and help with the haymaking. And the milk came from Sod house Farm and was delivered each morning by a horse and cart. It was warm. It was in big tin churns. It was warm and deposited in your own little pot on the doorstep.

I don't know how long I stayed there, and I don't remember any other evacuees staying there. I think most of them went back anyway. I had heard that Salford, where I lived, was badly bombed. The school I would have gone to was bombed.

The house that I would have lived in had the windows shattered and was unliveable. They spent most of the nights in communal shelters at the end of the street.

Being away in Pennybridge I sort of missed all that, but eventually I did have to go home. I know I didn't want to go home, which mustn't have been very nice for my parents, but because I was so young I only really remember them. Before that I didn't remember very much.

I did go home if I could have a dolly with hair on, with plaits on.

I hated it back home because it was so different from a peaceful little village to streets and streets and it was near the Docklands near Manchester Ship Canal and I didn't like it. Eventually I got tuberculosis I think through poor living. I was in and out of sanatoriums hospitals and missed a lot of schooling. The Stanleys, the Ellen and Fred Stanley kindly had me back for I think it was about six months to give me good food and look after me and fresh air because there was no cure for this spot on my lungs they said. I'd lost a lot of weight. I was very, very small for my age. I went back to them and had sort of like a bit of schooling at home. I don't think I went back to the school. But they were very, very kind.

I remember they had like a Gymkhana, a village fete in the fields near the bridge that went over the River Crake. The children picked wayside flowers and they had cakes baked. I do remember Cumberland Wrestling going on in the field.

In Greenodd, there was a village hall and that's where they had dances and plays.

But of course, eventually I had to come home again. I kept in touch with them for years. I have very fond memories of Pennybridge.

N.B.

The text above is from an interview with Iris Woods by her son Simon Woods. Iris and her sister Dorothy are mentioned in the Research Article "The Story of Penny Bridge".