

Leatherhead & District Local History Society

Potted Histories No 57

Heather Godley née Couper - Her World War 2 Story



Barton Cottages before conversion to
Apple Bough circa 1950



Heather visiting her family home in 2003

Heather was born to Cyril and Sybil Couper in London in 1927. At the outbreak of war in September 1939 she was a pupil at the City of London School for Girls in Blackfriars. Her Parents took her on holiday to Jersey where they were overtaken by imminent threat of invasion and left for Southampton on one of the last boats to leave. On arriving back in London they discovered that her school had been evacuated to Ashtead - to the City of London Freeman's School. She was billeted across from the school gates in Park Lane. The Girls were based in a disused cafe by Ashtead Railway Station in the morning playing games, sewing and the like. In the afternoon they swapped with the Boys and Girls of Freeman's school for lessons at Ashtead Park. Heather had a lot of freedom and on a bicycle ride one day she discovered a very old neglected cottage and, later, she persuaded her parents to move in! This cottage had been condemned and would be knocked down at the end of the war. At one time 3 cottages, known as Barton Cottages, 1/3rd being occupied by the Prossers and the other 2/3rds were let to the Coupers for 18/- per week. (After the War, in 1954, the Coupers bought the whole cottage along with the first Ashtead school in the garden and this became known as Apple Bough cottage, Rectory Lane.)

Returning to the war, soon after moving in, the flat in Battersea suffered a direct bomb hit so the family were lucky a second time! One day Heather was walking in a field past the end of Rectory Lane when she and friend were machine-gunned by a Messerschmidt: they dived to the ground and luckily escaped. The school was relocated again so much of the next three years was spent in Yorkshire with Heather travelling back to Ashtead at Christmas - it must have been quite daunting for a young girl to travel by train unaccompanied doubtless squeezed between travelling service-men! The school returned to London by 1944 just in time for the V1 'Doodlebugs' and V2 rockets. Heather and her Father suffered near misses in London from the V1. When the V2s started Heather was again despatched to Yorkshire. She was back in London by VE day and she, with friends, went to the Mansion House to join in celebrations with the Lord Mayor.

John Rowley

The full story is quite long and a fascinating read. It is a very recent acquisition for the Society and we have decided that we want more of your war stories and photographs. We are hoping to gather enough material for a book - Ashtead at War 1939-1945 so we need your help NOW!

For information regarding Membership, Lectures and Museum opening hours contact:

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