

High Wych School, WW2 and Alfred Mabey

Theo van de Bilt

In 2011 our village school celebrated its 150th anniversary. To mark the occasion Mandy West, headmistress at that time, wrote and published a book about its history and it was that book that set your High Wych historian on the road to local history. Recently I rummaged through some original source material. This included school log book entries made during the early days of the Second World War by headmaster Alfred Mabey. They make fascinating reading. Let me give you some quotes.

1st September 1939

Owing to the increasing gravity of the international situation the British Government has decided to put into operation its previously prepared scheme for the evacuation of schoolchildren from vulnerable areas. In this parish we are scheduled to receive 175 evacuees (children, teachers & helpers) and all day the school yard has been the scene of mattress filling and sewing up. Notice has just been received that the first evacuees will arrive in the village at 8.30 pm today Friday Sept. 1st. At 8pm two double decker buses arrived from Bishop's Stortford distributing centre. Children and teachers were supplied with rations (two tins milk, 1 tin beef of 12 ounces 1 lb biscuits ¼ lb chocolate) By 10.30 all had been established in billets.

The evacuees at High Wych School came from Millfields Junior School in London's East End. The headmaster there was a Mr. R. H Ball. The local billeting officer, whose name was blacked out in the logbook was in fact Mrs. Wentworth Stanley who lived in the Grange at that time. Initially the two heads agreed on a shift system with High Wych children being taught in the mornings. Millfields children in the afternoon. In the end this proved unworkable and from May 20th 1940 the two schools were amalgamated. Let's have some more quotes

September 3rd 1940

Air raid warning at 10.15. Normal work proceeded till violent action almost overhead. Children parked under desks – One enemy bomber and a British Hurricane brought down. 11.40 all clear sounded, children dismissed at 11.50 am German raiders overhead. At 2.07 pm German raiders overhead 2.45 pm air raid warning again sounded at 17 pm All clear sounded.

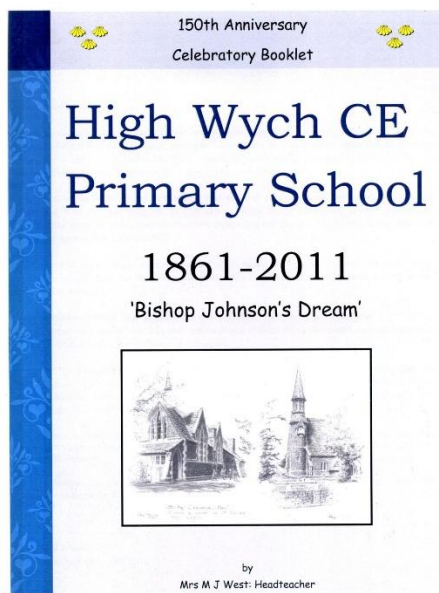
September 4th 9.30 am air raid warning sounded - 10.15 am all clear sounded.

September 5th 3.15pm air raid warning sounded - 4.35 pm all clear sounded.

September 6th 9.05 am air raid warning sounded - 10.30 am all clear.

September 9th Children having been up till 5.30 am for the past two nights - they were very sleepy and permitted to go to sleep sitting at their desks.

When the school reopened on 5th January 1941 the headmaster noted that several children had been removed from the registers. During the rest of that month there were several more air raid warnings and subsequent calls of all clear. On one occasion the children once again had to hide under their desks. On the 16th an inspector called to investigate reports of evacuee children misbehaving during classes held at the Village Hall. On January 21st Mr. Mabey reports that bombs had fallen “in a line from Hardings Farm, Hoskyns Farm, Stonards Farm and between Great Penny’s and Actons Farm.” It became clear that two men had been wounded, one of whom later died: Percy Wilson, the father of 4 children that attended HW school.



On the left the HW School memorial book – On the right Alfred Mabey

This might be a good occasion to give you some background on HW school’s headmaster Alfred Mabey who was born in 1898 in Brading on the Isle of Wight , the son of Alfred and Clara. In 1915 he lied about his age and volunteered for the Hampshire Regiment with whom he served with distinction in Gallipoli and in Egypt. In 1929 in Watford, he married Dorothy Rolph with whom he had a daughter: Jill who was born in 1924. In the mid-thirties he became headmaster of High Wych School continuing in that role in the early war years until November 1942 combining his duties at school with the captaincy of the High Wych Home Guard. In November 1942 he was called up for the regular army possibly because of his experience in WW1. He served until the end of the War when he returned to his post as headmaster and stayed there until the early sixties. He died in 1968.

Sources used were and thanks go to: The HW School Logbooks, Mandy West’s 2011 school memorial book, Ancestry co.uk and Wikipedia.