

Memories of the Brownies & Guides in Wartime

Before World War 2 there was a flourishing Brownie Pack and Girl Guides Company in Alderbury, meeting in the WI hut and using the woods nearby for outdoor activities. Lady Elizabeth Pleydell-Bouverie (always known as Lady Betty) and Miss Dorothy Stevens led the two groups. Lady Betty was Brown Owl and Miss Stevens was Tawny Owl for the Brownies, meeting every Saturday morning. I joined as soon as I was eligible becoming one of the Pixies. I think there were four 'sixes' – Pixies, Elves, Gnomes and Fairies so there must have been 20-30 little girls. We sang and danced around a wooden toadstool, baked cakes, promised (along with other things) to 'lend a hand' and learned how to make a secure parcel with brown paper and string, taking our parcels to the Post Office for Mr Maidment's approval. Highlights were the Easter egg hunt, Christmas parties, plays we acted in for families and friends, trips by train to Bristol Zoo and bathing in the River Avon from one of the fields near Longford Castle. All this came to an end when Lady Betty and Miss Stevens were enlisted in the ATS at the start of the war and only started up again when Miss Stevens was demobbed in 1945. She asked me to be her helper. We started with 3 brownies, Vera Browne, Joyce Tucker and Barbara Riches. It soon became a thriving group again.

In 1939 the Guides had managed to carry on and I was just old enough to join by then. We could not use the WI hut, so we had meetings in all kinds of venues. One was at 'Greenset' where Mrs Jackson made us welcome. Colonel Jackson was a retired Army Officer and it may have been his idea that we should make camouflage netting. We threaded strips of coloured material through strong nets 'to provide camouflage for tanks, or so we were told. We also dyed our shabby, faded Guide uniforms a deeper shade of blue in one of the outbuildings there.

Alderbury Guides had always been keen on camping and had won competitions for camping skills. One difference the war made was that we had to camp within our own county. This stopped us going to the seaside! Luckily, we were able to camp at Longleat and bathe in the lake there. One incident I clearly remember. During the war a large herd of black cattle

roamed the park. As we came back from the lake one afternoon, a cow attacked Lady Betty's spaniel. She dived in among the herd to rescue her pet. A brave act as cows had horns in those days! The first camp I went to was at Bowood, another lovely estate in Wiltshire. There my patrol slept in a splendid tent which had been used by one of Lady Betty's relatives in India. Transport there was by canvas-topped lorry. We sat on our kitbags and took sacks of vegetables donated by our gardener dads, mostly potatoes and runner beans. With food rationing, it must have been a feat of organisation to get enough food for the week. I don't remember if we took our precious ration books.