



## 'Evacuee Experience' is a hit with schools

**For the past two years the education department has been extremely busy throughout the autumn term with delivery of the 'Evacuee Experience'. It has quickly gained a reputation throughout Cheshire, with primary schools as far away as Chester visiting!**

Many people are aware of what we do, but very few know exactly what it consists of. The children arrive at Woodcocks' Well Primary School, Mow Cop, dressed as evacuees and are greeted by Mrs Ada Davies (Linda Ward), ARP Warden and all round 'good egg'. She is most surprised to see a host of unexpected evacuees as she was only going to hang out her washing! They are escorted to the school hall where the magic begins. Bunty Strickland (that's my part), the Billeting Officer is busy sweeping the yard and is very flustered to be presented with a group of evacuees. At times, we have an additional character, Aggie Andrews (Julie King), who is responsible for chivvying the villagers to participate in the government's directive, 'Dig for Victory'.

From the moment the children arrive we stay in character, setting the scene to 'just last year when

war was declared' and listening to Neville Chamberlain's broadcast, allowing the children to express how it makes them feel. Unfortunately, these poor 'wee mites' have to be sent back, but it is Bunty, Ada's and Aggie's duty to give them vital information to ensure their safety during the war. This provides an opportunity to ensure they all have name tags and identity cards, followed by one of the favourite activities, the 'Gas Mask Drill'. Each child puts on a gas mask and stands and recites their 5 times table, to prove they can go about their day whilst wearing it. The children have

*Continued on page 2*



Pictured top: Bunty Strickland and Ada Davies'.  
Below: Inside the shelter.

# 'Evacuee Experience' *continued from page 1*



Foot drill with Bill Pegley

an opportunity to suggest what they would put into their suitcases and look at the amount of food a week's ration would provide.

Towards the end of the session the air raid siren goes off and we walk 'sensibly', escorted by our ARP warden, to the Anderson shelter (an original, renovated shelter in the school grounds). There, we sing songs to lift our spirits and deaden the sound of the bombing and perform a spot of first aid on someone who fell and broke their arm. Finally, the 'all clear' sounds and we go back to school and have our lunch.

The children are transported to the museum for the afternoon session, where they meet Bill Pegley and handle the amazing artefacts he has made. Afterwards they are seated and are able to ask questions. Bill uses this as a springboard to share the memories of his past in London as a child and teenager during WW2. At the end of the session Bill has an opportunity to display his alter ego as a sergeant major and makes everyone jump with his booming voice as he tells them to 'STAND UP!' Much to the delight of the class they are instructed to stand to attention, stand at ease and dismiss.

We are extremely proud of how well our 'Evacuee Experience' is received by all the visiting schools, but without the invaluable assistance of Linda Ward, Julie King and Bill Pegley, it would not be possible!

## **Here are some of the teachers' comments:**

- 'All fabulous, inspirational and educational – thank you to all those involved.'
- 'The children talked about the time spent in the Anderson shelter a lot and it has really contributed to their literacy work.'
- 'The children are keen to investigate more fully the artefacts seen at the museum – they have asked to make a doodlebug in class!'

# New

## Local History Booklets

### Discovering Congleton's Heritage

Author: Ian Doughty

Price £1.50



### Bearbaiting to Bearmania

Author: Joan Alcock

Price £1.50

### The Masonic Hall

Author Peter Boon

Price £1.00

*These and many other titles are available from Congleton Museum. A complete list of our local history booklets may be found on our website:*

[www.congletonmuseum.co.uk](http://www.congletonmuseum.co.uk)

Pictured: Joan Alcock with her booklet



## Curator's Corner

# Remembering National Events



Congleton has over the years, like many towns often commemorated national events. You may remember the bookmarks made to mark the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977? This item from the museum's collection was issued by the corporation to commemorate the coronation of King Edward VII.



On its face there is an image of Edward, who is described as both King and Emperor. On the reverse there is the inscription 'to commemorate the coronation of His Majesty King Edward VII August 9<sup>th</sup> 1902' surmounted by the then borough badge of a lion standing on a tun or barrel flanked by conger eels.



## Christmas Lights Switch-on

A big **Thank You** to all the museum volunteers, trustees and staff who organised and manned our Tombola table and Santa sack! Thanks also to everyone who very kindly donated items for the tombola and to Berisford's for their gift of ribbons!

Just over **£170** was raised on the night, for which the museum is very grateful!

# COLOURING COMPETITION WINNERS



A total of 39 imaginative entries were received for our children's colouring competition, held during last year's Bearmania festival, with the two young winners announced in October.

The children were eager to showcase their colouring skills before the judging panel and after much deliberation, **Daisy Poole** and **Abbie Simpson** were declared the winners in the 5-7, and 8-11 year-old categories respectively. Both Daisy and Abbie received a certificate and a teddy bear prize.

A number of highly commended entries were also chosen for which a certificate and free museum pass were awarded. **Hollie Simpson**, Abbie's younger sister, was among those highly commended in the 5-7 year-old group, making the competition a particularly successful outing for the Simpson family!

*"The standard was high for both groups, and competition fierce,"* said Diane Ritherdon (one of the judges). *"Judging was difficult, but seeing the children's faces with the certificates and the teddies made it all worthwhile."*



Left: Abbie and Hollie Simpson  
Inset: Daisy Poole

# Meet the Volunteers... *Bill Pegley*

Our volunteers are our most important resource. You are the backbone of the museum and vital to its continuing existence. Simply stated, without volunteers there would be no museum.



## *Interview by Colin Lansley*

**Bill Pegley has been a volunteer at Congleton Museum since late 2001, just after it opened. You only have to hear Bill talk to realise which part of the country he comes from - London. Bill is well known at the museum for the “Captain Mainwaring” approach he adopts in his role educating children about life during the war years. The children especially like it when their teachers are, to their surprise, not excluded from his commands.**

When Bill was in his twenties he loved car rallying, which took him all over the country. He was chief marshal at an event, giving instructions to one of his colleagues, when he noticed a car lose control at speed and spin towards him. Bill’s immediate reaction was to push his colleague to safety, which left him to take the full impact and resulted in the loss of both legs below the knee. Remarkably, surgeons were able to reattach both legs, but then his right leg developed gangrene and had to be amputated. He remained in hospital for some time, almost losing his fight for life on several occasions. Interviewing Bill made me feel very humble; he is an inspirational man.

**Q: Where were you born?**

**A:** Shoreditch, London on 23 April 1929.

**Q: Where was your first job?**

**A:** Electricians mate with Sainsbury’s, in their factories. I used to get paid 25 shillings per week.

**Q: I hear your father did his bit for queen and country.**

**A:** Yes! My father was chief postmaster at the time and was seconded with full security clearance to the war rooms in London. He was the only civilian with such a high level of security. He was working with the likes of Montgomery & Eisenhower.

**Q: I believe your brother Ron also had an important job.**

**A:** Ron kept what he was doing very, very close to his chest. I saw a TV programme in 1975 on what they were doing at Dollis Hill. Apparently, they were building Colossus, the very first electronic computer! So I thought I’d ask my brother about this. “Ron”, I said, “you worked at Dollis Hill during the war didn’t you?” “Yes”, he said. “Did you work on Colossus?” I asked. “How did you know that?” was his answer. That’s all he would say on the matter. I could not get any more information from him – except that he told me that our father knew nothing of what he was doing.

**Q: Where and when did you meet your wife?**

**A:** About 1950 in Golders Green, Finchley. I ‘picked her up’. She

was a children’s nurse at the time. I saw this gorgeous brunette walking along, and funnily enough, I had to go out and repair the car I was working on! It went on from there, and I have known her now for 61 years.

**Q: Why did you move to Congleton?**

**A:** My daughter married a ‘Stokie’, so we decided to retire here. We’ve been here now for 10 years.

**Q: How did you come to volunteer for the museum?**

**A:** To meet people, pure and simple. I saw an ad in the ‘Chronicle’ and applied.

**Q: Do you think the museum does enough for the people of Congleton?**

**A:** We can’t do any more than what we do. It could be bigger; in my opinion, it couldn’t be more efficiently run, and we couldn’t have anybody nicer to work with than all of the volunteers. We have a very good name as far as the evacuee experience is concerned, we’re known all over Cheshire for that. We get schools from all over Cheshire, so that is very, very popular with the kids.

## RECYCLING NEWS!



*Well done everyone! Since we started making a real concerted effort to recycle our paper, cardboard, metal and glass, I can report that 65% of our waste has been recycled. FANTASTIC!*

# Life During Wartime

## Interview by Betty Butterworth

Well known in Congleton for her many years of charity work, **Marie Johnson** (née Duffy) lived with her family on Mill Street during the war, where her parents ran Duffy's Chip Shop. As teenagers, Marie and her friend Mona Williams entertained the troops barracked in town with renditions of songs from The Andrews Sisters catalogue, which led to an appearance on the popular Carroll Levis Discovery Show. Marie also proudly served in the local branch of the Women's Junior Air Corps.

**Marie:** Myself and Mona used to listen to The Andrews Sisters records and copy them. We were only young, 14/15/16. And because of what we did, we got invited to join a concert party in Congleton. They started up this concert party group – mainly with the soldiers in the town – because we had a lot of good performers who passed through. Clement Freud was stationed in Congleton and he produced the show. Every two weeks we'd get a new show. We'd put it on at Conlowe's Canteen, occasionally we used the Capitol (Cinema). Mona and myself got involved when the Yanks came into town. They set up a British Legion Canteen on the Vale, and we got invited to go on the Sunday afternoon to entertain these Yanks.

**Q:** Which songs did you perform?

**M:** We did them all: "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree", "Chattanooga Choo Choo"... One of the soldiers taught us the boogie-woogie so we could do "The Boogie-Woogie Bugle Boy of Company B". He also taught us one called "Murder, He Says": "Every time we kiss/He says, murder, he says..." The Yanks also taught us to Jitterbug – it was brilliant!

**Q:** How did you and Mona end up performing on The Carroll Levis Discovery Show?

**M:** We went up to the Potteries because my friend's mother saw that they were doing auditions at the Theatre Royal. We sang "Murder, He Says", and they just said, "Thank you very much. We'll let you know." We didn't hear anything until quite a long time after, and then a telegram came saying, "Would we go and appear at the Paris Theatre in London?" I remember the assistant director couldn't get the rhythm of how this piece had got to go. In the end, Mona said, "Give me the baton", and she knocked them into shape! We went away and put our uniforms on – we were in the Women's Junior Air Corps. We were both sergeants at that time. When it was our turn, Carroll Levis said, "I've got two young ladies here and they're wearing uniforms. Who are you?" We said, "We're Marie and Mona, and we are in the Women's Junior Air Corps." We were ever so proud! But we didn't win; this woman on the piano-accordion won.

**Q:** What was the Women's Junior Air Corps?

**M:** It was the equivalent of the ATC – the Air Training Corps (for boys). We were the JACs for short. We used to meet Thursday nights at Daven School. We did Keep Fit, Aircraft Recognition, Transport... We were supposed to know how to put a car engine together – I



The Andrews Sisters (above) set the style for Marie and Mona

never did; I wasn't interested. I only went along for the PE and the marching.

**Q:** How many girls were involved locally?

**M:** About 70. During the war, we did a lot of concerts at the Town Hall. The Yanks asked us to do something at the Town Hall for the children one year. And then, when they were all leaving, they all had an apple, an orange and a bag of sweets off the Yanks.

**Q:** Did you march through town?

**M:** Oh, yes. It was all for the war. There'd be 'Soldier Week' and 'War Weapons Week'. We were invited to go to the chapel on Biddulph Road – a tiny chapel. We lined up in Kinsey Street and set off by the left, quick march. Then we could hear feet... Your eyes faced the front; there was none of this moving your head about. We just had a sneaking look. We'd only got another brigade of Americans marching behind us! They followed us up to this little chapel. They didn't know what to do because we all arrived en masse. We came back down Leek Road, and these Yanks broke the line and started trying to chat the girls up. We said, "You can't do that!" But they took no notice.

# Coming Events 2012

## Friday 24 February

### Who Lived in a House Like This? Behind The Scenes

*Talk by Lyndon Murgatroyd*

Explore the making of Lyndon Murgatroyd's new book as he illustrates some of the problems he came up against while preparing 'Who Lived in a House Like This?' Problems with sources used and bizarre examples of how information was obtained will be highlighted. Lyndon will also pose some unanswered questions, discuss feedback from purchasers and review how proceeds have been distributed.

## Sunday 4 March

### Religion in Congleton

*Walk led by Peter Aston*



This walk through the religious history of the town will use buildings to

show how Astbury Church imposed itself upon Congleton and how the town's Victorian expansion led to diversity in religious buildings, practice and belief.

## Friday 23 March

### The True Story of Little Bess

*Talk by Catherine Haworth*

Little Bess appears in Head's "History of Congleton" as someone who helped victims of the 1641 plague, but for some time nothing else was known of her. However, Catherine Haworth has uncovered items in the Borough Account Book mentioning this caring and

selfless woman, which has enabled her to construct something of Bess' life story and which show that she was an interesting and unusual character.

## Sunday 1 April

### In the Footsteps of David Livingstone

*Walk led by Ray Rowe*



On 29th January 1858 David Livingstone visited

Congleton. He was presented with an address by the town council and delivered a lecture in the Assembly Rooms. This walk will feature places associated with his visit and explain his connection with the town.

## Friday 27 April

### Turnpike Roads of Cheshire

*Talk by Dr. Keith Lawrence*

From the first 'Justice Trust' set up in Cheshire in 1705, Dr Lawrence will describe the gradual growth and subsequent decline of the turnpike trusts in Cheshire. Initially these trusts tended just to just improve existing main roads; it was really only from the 1800s that re-aligned and new roads were built. Along with the turnpikes came the toll houses and milestones and roadside furniture – surviving examples will be shown. The people of the turnpike trusts, from the trustees to the toll collectors will also be covered.

**Walks:** £4 (includes cream tea) - meet at the museum at 2pm.

**Talks:** 7.30pm start, booking is essential. Friends of the Museum may reserve up to two places, subject to availability. If your guest is not a Friend of the Museum, a £2 charge will be made. Please contact the museum to book a place.

## Contact Us

### Address

Congleton Museum  
Market Square  
Congleton  
Cheshire  
CW12 1ET

### Phone

01260 276360

### E-mail

[info@congletonmuseum.co.uk](mailto:info@congletonmuseum.co.uk)

### Website

[www.congletonmuseum.co.uk](http://www.congletonmuseum.co.uk)

## Opening Times

### Tuesday - Friday

12.00 - 4.30pm

### Saturday

10.00 - 4.30 pm

### Sunday

12.00 - 4.30pm

### Monday

Closed

*For holiday opening times please contact the museum.*

## Your newsletter team

Editor: **Betty Butterworth**

Designer: **Jan Johnson**

Sub-editor: **Anne Gubbins**

Contributors:

**Ian Doughty**

**Colin Lansley**

**Karen Stratford**

**Andrew Stubbs**