

THE DAY BETTY FELL DOWN THE WELL.

On the rare occasions that I am able to visit Dolton nowadays, one of the older inhabitants will inevitably say "Ah yes! I remember you, it was your sister who fell down the well". David Woodland who along with his brothers Peter and Michael and sisters Barbara, Jean, Dorothy and Ann who were also wartime Dolton evacuees, recently reminded me of this particular incident and asked if I also remembered the day he fired an arrow that embedded itself between my eyes, (sixty five years later I still carry the scar), and of several other best-forgotten escapades.

To put the record straight here is what really happened that day.

It was on a Saturday in the summer of 1942, on Saturday evenings Mr. and Mrs. Sanders would drive down to the village from Halfpenny Land to Mrs. Martin's shop in the village to collect the meagre grocery rations which was all anyone was allowed in those days and it was not unusual for them to accept invitations from their various friends in the village for the evening, on this occasion they were visiting Mr. and Mrs. Fishleigh, the local butcher and his wife.

I along with Ivan Jones and his sister Edith who lived in a cottage at Dolton Beacon, my younger sister Betty aged eight and Violet Fowler who along with her sister Josie were evacuated with Mr. and Mrs Youdle at Homelea, Violet on Saturdays would cycle up from the village to spend the day and stay the night with us at Halfpenny Land, whilst Mr and Mrs Sanders were away we children apart from being told to 'behave yourselves and to watch the road' were usually left to our own devices, I also remember it quite well because on that particular evening Ivan Jones had run home in tears owing to the fact that Violet, who was thirteen years old and with a wicked sense of humour had inadvertently shoved a short length of rubber pipe down the top of his trousers and emptied a can of water down it, later on that evening the rest of us were playing hide and seek in Jack's yard across the road from the house, in one corner of the yard was a shallow well which Jack used for washing out the cattle lorries and which was partly covered with old rotting boards, Betty was running across the top of the well when one of the boards gave way and she disappeared down the hole into the well, luckily I saw her go through and yelled out to Vi who rushed over, reaching down through the broken boards she grabbed hold of Betty by the hair whilst I held on to Vi's legs and together we managed to lift Betty out, I dashed back into the house and telephoned the only number I could find which was Knights Stores in Church Street, a voice said "Knight, Dolton," it was Mr. Knight himself, I said to him "could you tell Jack and Mrs Sanders who are at the Fishleighs that Betty had fallen down the well but it's alright we've pulled her out now," they rushed back from the village and were home in minutes, we were given a darn good telling off and sent to bed. This incident was reported in the Western Times and Violet, who is now in her 80s, and with whom I still keep in touch, was commended for her brave and prompt action, from then on every Saturday evening whilst Mr and Mrs Sanders were collecting groceries or visiting friends two or three younger members of the local Home Guard would come to stay for the evening and keep an eye on us until they returned.

Bill Baker.