



## Sheila Tolley

Sheila was born in Keswick in the Lake District in 1929.

Although her mother cried when she heard that war had been declared, Sheila couldn't help feeling excited and wondered what would happen next.

Sheila's father was a blacksmith and a master farrier. This was classed as a reserved occupation and he became very busy mending farm machinery, shoeing horses and removing iron gates and railings claimed by the Government to produce ammunition.

Keswick was a 'reception area' for evacuees and soon the town seemed full of strangers. Roedean School relocated from Brighton to Keswick and the pupils were billeted in two local hotels along with the students from St Catherines Teacher Training College. Soon, evacuees from Newcastle arrived.



Sheila and Bernard, the evacuee billeted with her, taken at Church Street, Keswick in 1941.

As we had a spare room we were asked to take an evacuee. I was really delighted as I was an only child. However all the girls were found homes and we were asked to take a very pathetic looking little lad - Bernard. He was the same age as me and was treated as one of the family. He called my Mam and Dad Auntie and Uncle and got the same pocket money as me, sixpence a week. His mother wrote to my mother and occasionally sent a little parcel of food.

After a few months, Bernard's parents decided it was safe for their son to return to Newcastle.

In 1941, Sheila passed a scholarship to Keswick Grammar School. They shared their classrooms with the girls from Roedean, but found them '*a snooty lot*'.

Pupils at the Grammar school could choose to pick potatoes in Hope Park as part of the 'Dig for Victory Campaign' instead of PE lessons.

As he regularly worked for farmers, Sheila's father often brought home eggs and sometimes pork or black pudding. He once bought a black market ham only to find it was full of maggots and it had to be secretly buried in the garden. He joined the Civil Defence and helped to guard the pencil mill - the only factory in the area.

There were no air raids in Keswick, but Sheila can remember hearing German planes flying overhead at night. It was thought they were following the eleven lakes to locate target areas such as Glasgow, Liverpool and Manchester.

There was an army military vehicles driving and maintenance school nearby and soldiers drove round the countryside in bren gun carriers terrifying anyone who got in the way. Land Army girls and German Prisoners of War worked on local farms.



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I also remember Canadian Commandos... training in the area, scaling Friars Crag and Castle head... prior to D-Day landings. They went to Normandy.

More evacuees arrived from the London Docklands, but they were more afraid of the mountains and Lakeland than bombs, and soon returned home.

Sheila hoped to join the Wrens, but when the war ended she was just fifteen and still a schoolgirl. She stayed in Keswick and later married an ex soldier and in 1999 they celebrated their Golden Wedding.



Pupils from St John's Girls School with Miss Odunzi from Africa in 1940. Sheila is on the bottom row, extreme right.