

Les Brouard.

Evacuated from Guernsey

Les Brouard was born in St Peter Port, Guernsey on 23rd July 1922. His father had come from St Malo and had been a ship's carpenter. Les was proud of the fact that one of his aunts had been a maid to Victor Hugo during the French author's exile in Guernsey. Les Brouard attended school at Mount Pleasant School Mount Durand, St Peter Port. From the age of 14 onward he worked first as a van boy for a baker and then melting lead at a printing works. Men in Guernsey had to spend 6 months in the island militia when they reached the age of 18 but Les was only 17 years old when he was evacuated from the island and so never served. Les' evacuation came just 6 weeks before the German invasion of Guernsey (30th June 1940). The evacuation was voluntary and Les' cousin, who was a farmer, chose to stay behind. Les left St Peter Port in a Dutch coaster and after a 12 hr journey he arrived in Weymouth where the WVS met Les, his father and sister with a welcome tea. The family was then broken up. Les found himself in Stockport, his father in Huddersfield and his sister in Wolverhampton. Les' brother had left Guernsey in 1938 to join the RAF. He had been in India as a Flight Sergeant responsible for ground transport.

In Stockport 60 boys including Les were billeted in a Methodist Chapel. Channel Island evacuees who were old enough for National Service were nevertheless given 2 year's exemption from being called up, so that they could adjust to a new life. So he found himself working in a factory in Woodford (Stockport) where they made wings for the Avro Anson aircraft. The things he remembers about his early days in Stockport include being introduced to corned beef hash for the first time and his first experience of air raids. Soon he had a job on the railway and was living in Longsight in Manchester. His railway job meant he was able to make rail journeys to visit his father and sister. His job with the railway was that of a shunter. He was also a fire watcher and remembers times when he had to rush from his digs to the nearest air raid shelter. He had become friendly with an air raid warden who was killed in one raid. With his two years of grace expired he was called up to the RAF but he was considered unfit for flying Lancaster bombers and was told that the job he was doing with the railway was an important one and he should continue. One incident involved the derailment of a train loaded with beer barrels and there were 'barrels all over'.

In 1947 he married Dorothy Vernon Pybus and they came to live at Froggatt Edge, where his wife came from. They had a son Christopher and a daughter Jane. He continued on the railways but had to accept a cut in pay when he went to Grindleford Station as a porter. But his engineering knowledge came to the fore when he went to work as a sheet metal worker at Calver Mill. While still working at Calver he became a County Ranger based at Middleton Top. As a Ranger he was responsible for environmental damage repair and first aid provision but he managed a lot of walking. He brought his knowledge as a Ranger to Calver and became the walk organiser for the Sissons' Sports and Social Club. His typed sheets describing the coming walk and reviewing the previous one were highly regarded. After his wife died he came to feel increasingly isolated at Froggatt Edge and so he sold up and moved to Bradwell in 1995. He bought the Old Smithy on Netherside from Maggie Wood. He regretted the appearance of the traffic lights outside his house with the lorries and the racing to beat the lights. He brought his great experience and knowledge as a walk leader with him to Bradwell and became a regular 'Tuesday Walker' into his late seventies. He was also a founder member of the Hope Valley Photographic Society.