

Walthamstow School Trips In 1947

In the aftermath of World War II, Britain was a very austere place. Strict rationing was still in force and huge efforts were being made to repair and rebuild great areas of its towns and cities that had been badly damaged by the effects of German air raids.

It was against this background that, in 1947, the Walthamstow Education Committee under Chairman *Alderman E C Redhead* (who later was to succeed *Clement Attlee* as the MP for West Walthamstow) and his committee promoted and facilitated Open Air Education trips and a Swedish cultural trip for Walthamstow children.

In 1947, The Walthamstow Education Committee was a role call of people who were to become legendary in Walthamstow politics. It included the Mayor, *Sidney N Chaplin JP* (Who later had a school named for him) *Catherine (Later 'Lady') McEntee JP*, whose husband was Valentine La Touche McEntee, a Walthamstow Mayor and MP who was made a Baron for resigning his seat so that Clement Attlee could stand and who was remembered in the naming of McEntee school. *Alderman George S Mace*, who later became a Mayor. *Alderman William Fitt* (Later to have a school named for him. *Councillor Walter Savill*, who had a high rise block named for him. *Alderman Ross Wyld OBE and JP*, who was in charge of Walthamstow's civil defence during the war and who wrote the definitive account of the effects of German bombing of Walthamstow (*War On Walthamstow*)

An Extract from the 1947 Medical Officer of Health's Report To Walthamstow Committee For Education

Open Air Education

From March onwards arrangements were made for the medical examination of parties of 35 boys and 35 girls each four weeks before proceeding to the permanent school camp at Itchingfield, and three parties of 11 boys and 11 girls before proceeding to to the permanent school camp at Kennylands, Reading.

School Journey

In December 1947, your committee agreed to the provision of £720 in the estimates for the following year towards the expenses of 60 children and necessary escorts from secondary schools in Walthamstow in proceeding to Sweden under a holiday scheme arranged by the Swedish/British Society.

Later a method of selection was decided for children in the 14-15 years age group.....

The following extracts are taken from Mr Speakman's report:-

'Viewed as a five weeks holiday our stay in Sweden was. I believe, an outstanding success. But its measure is not to be taken merely by the friendliness and generosity with which we were everywhere met, but by our lasting and growing understanding and appreciation of a people's way of life and our affection for that people.'

English children are approximately one year more mature than Swedish children of the same age – a point to remember if the chances should recur to send a party.

Such a holiday was not arranged without much hard thinking and hard work. Commodore Oberg who organized the broad scheme from Stockholm, worked out most of the details. One time Naval Attache in London, he was during the war, in charge of the fleet for the defence of the Swedish Archipelago; organising is his second nature. His was the mastermind behind the whole Swedish arrangements.'

Commodore Oberg, in replying to the letter from the Borough Education Officer, included the following paragraph.

"I also want to let you know that the children themselves almost without exception made a very good impression from the moment of their arrival and throughout the visit, and they are kept in good memory by their hosts and by all members of our organization who got in personal touch with them. They were excellent ambassadors of their families and their country"

Notes

British-Swedish Cultural Relations

The Anglo-Swedish Society was Founded in 1918 in the aftermath of the First World War, to foster greater understanding and friendship between Britain and Sweden. In 1919 the British-Swedish Society in Stockholm in 1919 and the Anglo-Swedish Society in Gothenburg in 1920 were set up.

All had similar aims and worked closely together and helped each other set up lending libraries. Summer holiday courses were soon organised in Sweden, comprising the "Swedish language, physical culture and gymnastics". The courses received support from members of the Swedish Royal family and business enterprises in Sweden, who placed their houses and hospitality at the disposal of the Society.

The Society provided an information service for Swedish visitors to London. By the 1930s, a thriving exchange programme between British and Swedish school children had been established.

The cultural exchange holidays for British children were set up after WW2 at a time of great austerity in Britain and in a situation where huge areas of British towns and cities were suffering from the effects of war damage.

Open Air Education

Special schools were set up for the provision of education under open air conditions for children whose physical condition required it. Wedge & Coopers Farms in Itchingfield, Sussex were established by the West Sussex and Hampshire County Councils 1946 and closed in 1956. Kennylands Camp in Reading was built by Essex County Council and was another such school. The schools were on a National Camps Corporation Site. We've actually been here before (See my article on School Camps <http://www.walthamstowmemories.net/pdfs/Bill%20Bayliss%20-%20National%20Holiday%20Camps.pdf> where I was able to identify a school camp that a *Walthamstow Memories* site contributor had attended and which promoted further correspondence from other attendees.

The National Camps Corporation

The National Camps Corporation was a British government-funded non-profit organisation established under the 1939 Camps Act. The role of the Corporation was to construct and administer camps in the countryside that could be used for educational experience

In the context of preparations for war, a Camps Act was passed in April 1939, which provided for the construction of government-financed camps for use as educational holiday centres for children during peacetime, and as camps for evacuees during war. The Act prompted the creation of the National Camps Corporation to oversee these camps.

The camp schools at Itchingfield in Sussex and Kennylands were used by evacuees during the war and as 'open air' educational establishment for children whose health would benefit. Hence the Walthamstow medical examinations of the children to determine suitable candidates.

Memorabilia & Reminiscences

There are a number of fascinating accounts by evacuees and post war attendees of their experiences at all three school camp sites. Generally, most seem to have enjoyed there time the Wedge and Cooper farm sites, although there are a few dissenters to this view.

Kennylands Farm School seems to have been enjoyed by those who have written of their

experiences. <http://www.francisfrith.com/locations/sonning-common/memories/kennylands-camp-school-913069525>

My favourite is from Kay who was at Wedge Farm in c1940

<http://www.rootschat.com/forum/index.php?topic=146277.0>

I know it's a bit late in coming but after scratching the head and talking to my other sister this is what we came up with on the Camp song:

*All we get is bread and scraps 3 times a day,
Mum and Dad we never see
get no sugar in our tea
we are in the Jubilee
far far away*

*Mummy, Daddy take me home from this convalescent home
I've been here a week or two
now I want to be with you
Good bye Mr Permain,
good bye teachers too
Good bye 😞😞? and a jolly good riddance to you!*

For those who want to read some of the reminiscences here are some links:

Wedges Farm, Itchingfield, Barns Green, Horsham, Sussex

<http://www.rootschat.com/forum/index.php?topic=146277.0>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/03/a9900003.shtml>

<https://plus.google.com/+JustinHill/posts/XKhDntRYbCJ>

Kennylands Farm School, Kidmore End, Sonning Common, Oxfordshire



This, for its time, was an absolutely fascinating progressive establishment !

'Schoolboys turn camp into a well-run town, even do their own darning - 20-March-1940'

'Two hundred boys from the Beal Modern Secondary School, Ilford, Essex, are running

what is virtually a self contained community and at the same time turning a Government experiment into a success at Kennylands Camp School, near Reading. The Government wanted to find out whether town schools could be housed in model village communities, of which Kennylands is the first. The boys, who have now been in residence for more than a month do all their own housework and boot repairing, buy their own food, run their own post office and grow and sell greengroceries. They even do their own refuse collecting. Mrs W.L. Norman, wife of the headmaster, holds classes to teach the boys to darn and knit their own socks and attend to their clothes in other ways. ‘

http://www.sonningcommonmagazine.org/issues/june_july_2012.pdf

<http://www.francisfrith.com/us/locations/sonning-common/memories>

<http://www.scienceandsociety.co.uk/results.asp?image=10551642&itemw=4&itemf=0001&itemstep=1&itemx=4>

<http://www.derelictplaces.co.uk/main/showthread.php?t=11858#.U8Gs7fRDv5g>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/45/a6954645.shtml>

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