

A BROKEN LEG AT BARLING SCHOOL

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I started at the tiny Barling School in 1940 when I was five, in the very dark days of the war. The School had been transformed. Air raid shelters had been built alongside the rear playground and on the playing field near the road. These shelters weren't very nice. They were dark, cold and sometimes smelly but they protected us from bomb attacks. (I believe one still remains).

Most schools had many iron railings. Barling was no exception. These railings were removed to be sent away to make bullets and bombs. Inside the long entrance corridor there were wartime posters displayed. This also served as a cloakroom and washroom.

On a summer afternoon, I think in 1941, we had been on the field for some reason (maybe to go to the Air raid shelter). Alongside the bridge over the ditch from the field to the playground the railings had been removed and were leaning against a wall waiting to be taken away. Although I was a quiet lad I could be a bit of a tearaway. I decided to climb the loose railways. When I reached the top I fell backwards pulling a section of railing with me. I hit the ground with the section of railing on top. The railings were fixed together by an angled iron lug. This lug went into my left shin shattering both bones and leaving a hole about one and half inches across and down to the bones which were compound fractured.

I remember being picked up after the railings had been lifted. I tried to stand but that leg just buckled under. I was taken into the School and patched up a bit but don't remember a lot about it. At that time there was no National Health Service. You couldn't just call a paramedic and ambulance. All treatment had to be paid for. It was decided I should be sent home. I don't remember how I got home but my Elder sister tells me I was put on the 4B bus.

When I got home I can remember laying in the living room at Victory Cottages in agony and screaming with pain (no morphine then). My family had to get medical attention for me. This was wartime, although we had food and shelter and love we had very little money. There were very few motor cars and those who had them couldn't get petrol. Telephones were few and far between. The usual form of communication was by walking, running or by bicycle. Doctor Shallottie was the only local doctor. He lived in a big house next to the Anchor Pub. He was called and attended to me. I remember him using our wood chopper to break up some old box wood in the yard to make splints. His visit cost my parents 7/6d, which was a lot of money at that time. He left saying, "You had better get him over to the Hospital"

How this was to be achieved was another problem, as I have said there were very few cars and no petrol available to ordinary people, not that we had a car anyway, but this area had a Guardian Angel, in the form of Mrs Mercer from Little Waking Hall. Mr and Mrs Mercer were prominent people in the area. They had a car and somehow were able to get petrol. I don't know how she got to know of my predicament, whether she heard on the grapevine, but most likely someone cut across the footpath

alongside Uncles field to the Hall and asked for help. Whatever way it was Mrs Mercer took me and my mother to Southend Hospital.

I have to speak here about the Mercers who were just wonderful people. Mr Mercer kept a low profile. I think he was a prominent business man somewhere but kept in the background. I am not a particularly religious person but am quite prepared to believe Mrs Mercer had been sent to watch over the people of this area during those dark days. She probably did more for the people of this area than anyone else has done since or before. She was always there to help everyone and anyone. Little Wakering Hall was something of an open house. Everyone was helped. At that time the Hall had no gates and walls just a large lawn in front. Local fetes were held on the lawn. On Mayday the Maypole was plaited by local children. Boxes of apples from the Orchard were 'Scrambled' by Ernie Adcock. All the kids gathered and Ernie threw apples by the handful into the crowd to be fought for by us kids. Local Ladies like Mrs Merchant sang patriotic songs like 'Land of hope and glory and Rule Britannia' to the screechy sounds of a 'His Masters Voice' type wind up gramophone.

Back to my broken leg, having arrived at the Hospital I received treatment, the shattered bones were set. I can remember the hole in my leg was filled with a long length of bandage soaked in Iodine. My leg was put into Plaster of Paris. I was transferred to Sportsman Ward where I stayed for two weeks and spent my 6th birthday there. There is still a Sportsman Ward at the Hospital today.

The wards then were very different to today. The hospital was fairly new then. The wards were long 'Nightingale type' with a lot of beds each side. There was a large veranda at the far end. It was high summer, during the day we used to be wheeled out onto the veranda where the view was right across Westcliff to Leigh. All the houses had a lot of chimney pots. I thought one must be Victory Cottages where I lived. I called it the 'Land of Chimney Pots'. When my mother came I asked her to put a flag in our chimney pot so I would know which one was my house, but of course our house was in the other direction.

I received fantastic medical treatment. I was told that one leg would always be shorter than the other due to the crushed bones but this turned out not to be the case. The leg healed perfectly. The skill of the surgeons then equalled those of today.

During my stay in hospital and for many months after the Angel of Barling and Wakering was always there to bring my parents to see me, to take me for further treatment, to cater for our every need always with perfect willingness and money was never mentioned.

I fortunately made a perfect recovery, but as I have said there was no National Health Service and all of this had to be paid for, against Mrs Mercer came to the rescue, being an educated lady I believe she acted for my parents and arranged payment under the terms of the Nation Assistance Acts, something we could never have done ourselves.

I'm sure Mrs Mercer is looking down on us still, I can only say, 'Thank You'.

Laurie.