

Memories of Clopton by Rosanne Girling nee Priestnall

My Mother's family were friends with Mr Larke who owned Snipe Farm and a pair of cottages called Snipe Cottages. When my parents married in 1935 they rented one of the cottages for holidays and weekends. I was born in October 1939 just after World War 2 started and my father felt it safer for my Mother and I to live at the cottage all the time, little realising that in a short time the cottage would be in the middle of a military camp! Building started!

To one side of the cottage was the cookhouse, canteen, cinema, various offices and sleeping quarters for officers and other ranks. To the other side, with a large field in between, was the Headquarters Building (still there I believe). Opposite the cottage there were large Nissen huts, a theatre, chapel, shop and recreational facilities. Also on site was the power house provide their own electricity as there was no supply in the area at that time.

Debach Airfield was a few fields away behind the cottage with all the facilities for the military personal manning the Station plus the aircraft hangars. We were in the thick of it!

When the American Air Force left German prisoners of War were housed on the site. They were taken in lorries to work on the local farms. European Volunteer Workers came later and they also worked on the farms. They were people who had lost their homes and families due to the fighting in their country during the war. They mostly came from Eastern Europe --Latvia, Ukraine and Poland.

During the East Coast floods in 1953 British troops who helped with the clear up were billeted in the camp for a short time.

The land used for the camp was gradually returned to the original owners and not a lot now remains except at the airfield site and a few concrete roadways here and there.

It is now peaceful countryside once more and it seems unbelievable what happened all those years ago.

My Father was a dentist and had a surgery in our home, firstly at Snipe Cottage and then in Church Leas a bungalow near Clopton Church where we moved in the late 1950's. He would hold surgeries in the evenings which was useful for people working on the farms in the area. He also treated the German POW's and the EVW's. My Father sadly passed away in 1966 and is buried in Clopton churchyard. My Mother stayed in Clopton until 1984 when she moved to Levington. In 2011 she moved to a care home in Felixstowe.

Rosanne Girling 2014.