

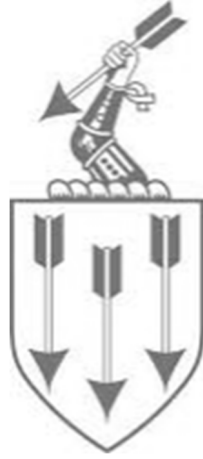
The Most Disastrous Year

September 1940 – July 1941

**A year in the life of King Henry VIII School
- and how was it survived**



Chris Holland and Rob Phillips



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by

Chris Holland and Rob Phillips

“The good fortune, which attended the School the previous year when we were as yet untroubled by the effects of war, deserted us completely in the year under review, which has to be described as the most disastrous in the history of the School.”

A.A.C. Burton: Headmaster’s Review of the School Year ending July 1941

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The School before the Second World War

In 1935, King Henry VIII School celebrated the 50th anniversary of its move to the Warwick Road site. It did so with growing confidence in its future, as the School seemed finally to be fulfilling the expectations that had accompanied its move, in 1885, from Hales Street to modern premises on Styvechale Hill.

The early years at Warwick Road were difficult. Specifically, the School found it hard to attract the number of pupils needed to give it a sound financial basis. In 1890 the School roll was only 110; by 1910, when John Lupton took over as Headmaster, it had risen slightly to 146. However, Mr Lupton was told by his predecessor that *"the School at the top of the hill"* was referred to in Coventry as *"that bankrupt concern at the top of the hill"*. During John Lupton's tenure as Headmaster, from 1910 to 1931, there was a steady improvement in the School's situation. By the

time of his retirement, there were about 250 boys in the Main School, plus those in the Preparatory Department. Nonetheless, the School's income was barely enough to meet expenditure and there was no reserve in the bank.

John Lupton's successor, Mr A.A.C. Burton, was also a classicist; thereafter, the similarities between the two men cease. Kenneth Richardson, in his book *'Twentieth Century Coventry'*, made the point that Mr Burton's predecessors had *"all been public school men"*, who *"looked for their educational ideal to such places as Shrewsbury and Rugby"* and, in effect, tried to turn Coventry's ancient grammar school into a minor public school. Mr Burton's approach was different. He came to Coventry after five years as Headmaster of Burnley Grammar School, where he had gained a reputation as an efficient organiser. Richardson said of him: *"Academically Burton*

lacked much of the quality and public school background of his predecessor but was far superior to him in business sense." Within a few years he had transformed the School. He developed the Preparatory Department into a proper Junior School and he took far more pupils from the local authority – the Special Place Holders. Aided by an improving economic situation, numbers on the School roll increased steadily and a three form entry was introduced into the Main School in 1937. During the School year 1938-39, there were nearly 500 boys in the Main School and just over 100 in the Junior School. To accommodate these rising numbers, a significant building programme took place in the 1930s, which included new classrooms and laboratories, as well as the conversion of the ground floor of the Headmaster's house into premises for the Junior School.



Alfred Charles Burton was invariably referred to as A.A.C. Burton, or 'Monty' Burton by boys at the School. Born in 1889 at Shillington in Bedfordshire, the son of a local farmer, George Burton, and his wife, Emma, Albert was educated at Hitchin Grammar School and St Catherine's Society, Oxford. He then taught at Wigan Grammar School and Cowley School, St Helens, before moving to Preston Grammar School in January 1915, where he became the Senior Classics Master and a House Master. In May 1917, he went to France as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Royal Garrison Artillery. He was wounded the same year; it was subsequently disclosed that he had been left with fragments of his metal helmet in his skull. He returned to Preston before moving to Burnley Grammar School in 1925, where he was Headmaster until 1931.



It was also a time of rising academic standards, although the number of boys staying on beyond the age of sixteen was still small, especially by comparison with the present-day School. In his annual report to the Governors for the School year 1935-36, Mr Burton stated that there were only 17 boys over the age of sixteen years at the start of that year. It follows that the number going on to higher education was also very small: at the end of the year 1937-1938, a successful one for the School, four boys went on to Birmingham University, three to St John's College, Oxford, one to Liverpool University and two to teacher training colleges at Saltley and Winchester. The great majority of leavers went directly into employment locally, many among the firms underpinning Coventry's prosperity: Courtaulds, Alfred Herbert, GEC, Dunlop, Armstrong Siddeley, Armstrong Whitworth, Daimler, Triumph Motor Company etc. Others took jobs with Coventry Corporation or with local banks, or with firms of accountants and solicitors; some entered family businesses. A few entered the armed forces, including Derrick Bailey, who joined the R.A.F. in 1939 and was killed in 1942.

Essentially, the pre-war School remained the city's "Grammar School", and was still frequently referred to by that name. ("King Henry VIII School" was only commonly used as a name following the move to Warwick Road in 1885.) The great majority of its pupils came

from the city: of 107 boys entering the School in September 1938 (including 39 into the Junior School), only seven came from Warwickshire. Of the 68 admitted to the Main School, 37 held Special Places and another four Governors' scholarships. The large number of boys holding Special Places had significantly widened the social basis of the School, with a smaller percentage of pupils being drawn from the local professional classes than was the case before the First World War. The Admission Register for the Main School in 1938 records entrants coming from a wide variety of backgrounds. The largest group are the sons of men working in engineering and other jobs in local industry – tool room machinist, engine fitter, jig designer etc; several are inspectors in local factories. Others are the sons of civil servants, local government officers, clerks, commercial travellers or men working in the retail sector. One boy is the son of an accountant, and two have fathers who were company directors but the list also includes the sons of a boiler room attendant, a bus driver, a railway guard and a farrier. Indeed, the list is so varied that it defies easy classification.

Behind the transformation of the School in the 1930s was the forceful and dominant personality of A.A.C. Burton, who was to remain Headmaster until 1949. If the pupils called him 'Monty', it was probably not with any great affection, and certainly

not to his face. Mr Burton was a disciplinarian of what is sometimes termed 'the old school', a firm believer in corporal punishment. Boys at the School seem to have regarded him with a respect born, to a considerable extent, of fear. He harangued the boys attending his first assembly in 1931 in no uncertain terms; they might have been consoled had they known that he had addressed the staff the previous day in much the same way! His relations with his staff appear always to have been formal. C.B. Shore, an Art teacher at King Henry's during Mr Burton's tenure, and Acting Headmaster for nine months in 1949-50, said of him: "*he was a man you worked for rather than with, for he was a man who made his own decisions; and with him an instruction was always an order.*" Yet Mr Burton brought energy, determination and an exceptional grasp of detail to his position. If Kenneth Richardson said of him that he had "*a touch of ruthlessness*", he also thought that this "*was probably very useful in the difficult years with which he had to deal*".

Whatever people felt about Mr Burton, there is no doubt that he had turned his School into a much more viable concern by 1939. In the words of the School History, published in 1945, the School "*now seemed likely to enjoy an era of prosperity and stability*"; however, "*the advent of the second European War proved fatal to any such hopes*".

The School in the First Year of the War

By comparison with the problems of 1940-41, the first year of war had only a minor impact upon the School. Nonetheless, the School could not start the autumn term in September 1939 because it lacked air raid shelters. The problem was not unexpected: from early 1939 the School had known that, in the event of war, it would be in Coventry's 'neutral area', as opposed to its 'evacuation' or 'reception' areas. This meant that the School could operate, but only if it had shelters for its pupils. The construction of shelters had been discussed by the School's Governors and plans for them had been drawn up. However, it was decided not to proceed with structures that had no direct educational use, and which entailed a cost that the School could ill-afford, until their need was obvious.

Soon after the outbreak of war, the local A.R.P. (Air Raid Precautions) authorities permitted gatherings, of not more than 50 pupils at a time, in an unprotected school. Accordingly, at the end of September, the School's Governors decided to open the School on that basis, thereby allowing boys to collect assignments of work to be done at home. This arrangement lasted from October 2nd to November 18th, 1939, during which time most of the pupils in the Main School attended for about two hours per week. Meanwhile, work started on shelters at the School. In the event, these shelters were paid for by Coventry Corporation, on the understanding that they would be available for use by the public out of school hours. In addition, "black out" had to be provided for all the windows in the School – no small matter – and some temporary protection had to be provided in the corridors, for use

in the event of an air raid warning.

As 1939 drew to a close, confidence grew that air raids were not immediately likely and the Government decided that schools in neutral areas could re-open, as long as shelters were in the process of construction and parents were in favour of the move. At a meeting of the Governors on November 16th, the decision was taken to open the School as soon as possible, boys attending with the written consent of their parents. To reclaim lost schooling, the Christmas and Easter holidays were drastically curtailed. Among other changes, Saturday morning lessons were moved to Wednesday afternoon, in order to save fuel. Until the end of January, the School closed at 3.15 p.m., so as to allow boys to get home in daylight (as black-out restrictions were now in force once darkness fell). To compensate, the lunch break was reduced to one hour and each lesson shortened by 5 minutes. There were no after-school activities until daylight was sufficient and sporting fixtures with other schools were greatly reduced. However, many of the boys who had been moved by their parents to safer districts at the beginning of the war had now returned to Coventry. Over the year as a whole, the loss in numbers of pupils in attendance caused by the war was estimated to be about 40-50 boys. Part of this loss was the result of boys finishing their schooling earlier than usual because of the high demand for juvenile labour in the local economy.



Window frames in the IT corridor still have wartime additions to hold black out screens

The Coventrian



EDITORIAL - APRIL 1940

"The school has taken on a different appearance and is littered with curtains, buckets, hoses, sand, pumps, shovels, rakes, men and balloons. Life at first was altogether different, summed up best by fanatical reverence for the sacred curtains, a life-shortening scurry to get home and back in an hour for dinner, and the patient voice of a master faintly heard above the munching of multifarious sandwiches explaining that there is a difference between *dining* and *eating*. The Sixth, with the prospect of a mere couple of years' grace before being called up, have grown somewhat frivolous, and their renderings of songs composed by themselves have become a regular feature of school life."

The Midland Daily Telegraph

20th February 1940

Closing King Henry VIII School for two days and the notification that twelve people each week are falling sick of influenzal pneumonia are indications that Coventry's influenza epidemic has not yet reached its zenith. The epidemic is of mild type, but, as Dr. A. Massey (Coventry Medical Officer of Health) told a Midland Daily Telegraph reporter to-day: "Every office and works has a large number of absentees. It was found necessary to close down King Henry VIII School yesterday and to-day because 25 per cent of the boys and staff are away owing to the epidemic. Influenza is highly infectious and has a sudden onset with headaches, shivering, and raised temperature," said Dr. Massey. "There is often a sore throat and sometimes a short, dry cough. The possible complications are bronchitis, and in bad cases pneumonia. The big majority of cases make an uneventful recovery, although convalescence may be a little slow. In any case, medical care is advisable."

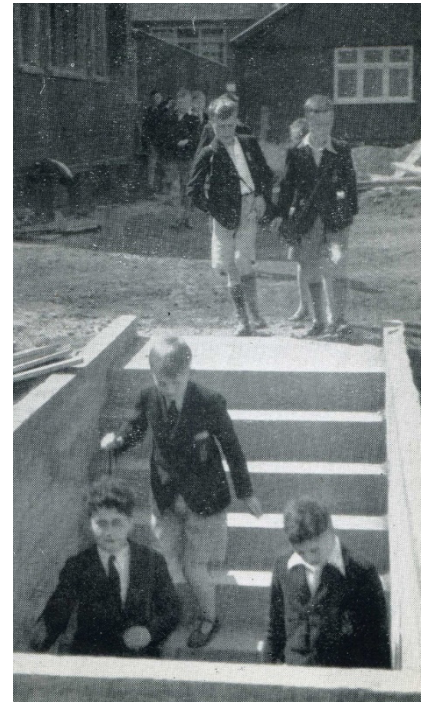
Inevitably, some of the teaching staff were called up for military service, a process that started in the first year of the war. The first to go was the Second Master, Arthur Sale M.C., O.B.E. He had served with distinction in the First World War, rising to Acting Second in Command of a battalion of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment, and he was now given responsibility for the defence of bridges and other strategic points in a wide area of the south Midlands. Most of those who followed Sale into the Forces did so in 1940 and 1941. By the



Second Master A.B. Sale

end of the war, 12 had joined the Armed Forces, including one of the Bablake teachers who came to King Henry's in late 1940. Another teacher was called away for other war work. Three of those called up returned before the end of the war to teach at the School, having been discharged from the Services. Sadly, two teachers were to be killed: E.A.A. Webb and A.R.R. Bower. The loss of teachers to the Forces, or to other war work, clearly added to the disruption that the war caused.

The completion of the shelters took a considerable amount of time, partly because work came to a standstill for about eight weeks during the harsh winter of 1939-40. The shelters were not properly finished until the summer of 1940; once completed, pupils had to practise getting into the shelters quickly. However, the shelters were prone to flooding in wet weather



Junior School boys entering the shelters during an air raid drill

and had constantly to be pumped clear of water. To the annoyance of the Headmaster, the construction of the shelters had left deep ruts to the playing field, as well as mounds of excavated material that had been "tipped in a very unsatisfactory way". Another inconvenience was the loss of the School 'tuck-shop', which was transformed into an A.R.P. Warden Post 604, its entrance protected by sandbags. January 1940 saw the installation of a barrage-balloon and its crew on the School field by 917 Balloon Squadron. The pavilion was requisitioned for use by the crew, although Nissen huts were built later. The thinking behind the balloons was that they deterred

STAFF CASUALTIES

Lieutenant **Edward Arthur Alexander Webb**, Royal Armoured Corps, died on June 11th, 1944, aged 31; he is buried at Hottot-les-Bagues War Cemetery in France.

Lieutenant **Anthony Reginald Richard Bower**, Royal Artillery, died on April 12th, 1945, aged 38; he is buried at Pihen-les-Guines War Cemetery in France.



E.A.A. Webb

low-flying enemy aeroplanes, which risked having their wings torn off by the heavy cables that the balloons supported. The School site was, of course, elevated in relation to most of the city – ‘the School on the hill’ – and thus suitable for the purpose; a point no doubt raised by the Squadron Equipment Officer, H.N. Reynolds. [*Norman Reynolds attended KHVIII 1907-1912 and went on to serve with the Royal Warwickshire Regiment during the Great War, rising to the rank*

of Captain, as well as being awarded the Military Cross and bar.] On one occasion, the School’s balloon broke loose and drifted off over the city, its trailing cable causing some damage to Queen’s Road Baptist Church.

Despite the problems, the Headmaster was able to report to the Governors that the School year 1939-40 had been a satisfactory one. With respect to examination results, “*the School has never fared better*”. Philip

Larkin was one of 11 pupils going on to take up places at university or college, in his case at St John’s College, Oxford. Almost without exception, other leavers had obtained employment, mostly with firms and businesses in the city. The war “*had curtailed many of the amenities of school life*”, which had not been “*so pleasant or so full as in peacetime*” but, in general, the School had been able “*to carry on with the minimum of interruption to its work*”. Its good fortune was about to end.



A Balloon Site, Coventry: Dame Laura Knight (1943)

Laura Knight was commissioned to produce an inspiring artwork to support recruitment for Balloon Command, which by this time was predominantly staffed by WAAFs (Women’s Auxiliary Air Force).

Dame Laura visited the balloon on the School field (now the site of the swimming pool) on 8th July 1942 with Flt/O A. Stewart, Public Relations Officer at the Air Ministry.

IWM



Potato Harvest - with Warwickshire school children helping: Norma Bull

It is not known which farms KHVIII pupils assisted during the 1940 harvest but this location, thought to be just beyond the Foleshill gas works, shows a typical scene.

IWM

task that took longer than he had anticipated. Nonetheless, by early November, it was hoped that the School could return to something approaching normality. These hopes were destroyed by the raid of November 14th-15th, 1940.

As is well documented, the November 'Blitz' caused enormous physical destruction in Coventry, as well as taking the lives of more than 500 of its inhabitants. One of those killed was a pupil at the School, John Ernest Roughton. He lived at 4 Beanfield Avenue, Green Lane, although he was killed at 28 Beanfield Avenue, along with his father, Alfred. John was aged 13 years and 11 months and was in form IV. The School escaped with only very light damage to its buildings, the Headmaster noting that: "no bomb was dropped

within a hundred yards of the School". Some windows were broken and tiles dislodged, and the School field was left with one or two craters, of which one was large.

Although the School avoided material damage, the raid still had a considerable impact. Not surprisingly, fewer than 20 of its pupils presented themselves for school the next morning. One of them was Brian Taylor. Despite an eventful night in the bombing, not to mention the damage inflicted on his home in St Agatha Rd, he made his way through the shattered city on the Friday morning to Warwick Road:

"I turned to the school and to my surprise it looked untouched, apart from the barrage balloon on the school field that hung limp and punctured beside its tethering lorry. The Headmaster was out in

the school yard as I arrived and welcomed me,

"Good morning, Taylor. Keen to come to school, I see. But it's best you return home today."

"Is everything alright, sir?"

"It seems to be, but come back on Monday. We should have sorted things out by then."

In fact, a lack of water, light and gas meant that the School had to remain closed for the next 10 days. Moreover, the authorities now took the decision to make the whole of Coventry an evacuation area. This meant that provision had to be made for all those boys whose parents wished them to be evacuated.

Finding accommodation of suitable size and location to take the evacuees proved difficult. However, with the assistance of the Board of Education and the

local authorities in Coventry and Warwickshire, Alcester was chosen, although the Grammar School there was unable to offer much by way of classroom provision and ruled out the operation of a double-shift system. Additional premises in the town had to be hired. As soon as the decision to go to Alcester was taken, those boys who wished to evacuate were given a day's notice to prepare themselves. On November 25th, just 11 days after the raid, 125 boys and nine masters assembled at the School and then left for Alcester. In addition to sufficient clothing, each boy would have taken with him his ration card, identity card and gas mask.

School resumed on November 25th, following the restoration of water and light, with some lessons dedicated to filling in nearby bomb craters. Initially, about 150 boys remained in Coventry; however, as the term went on and families moved back to Coventry, the number of pupils at the Warwick Road site increased, rising to about 200 by the end of term.



25th November, 1940 - parents look on as boys line up with their suitcases outside the woodwork shop, ready to depart to Alcester

AIR DEFENCE CADET CORPS No. 91 (KHVIII School) Squadron

The School ADCC was formed in the summer of 1939 under the command of PT Master, **Jack 'Gymmy' Mattocks**. The Squadron met at School on Sunday mornings and no doubt provided a significant number of fire-watchers.

In 1941 the ADCC was officially incorporated within the RAF and was re-branded the Air Training Corps.



J.M. Mattocks

The Squadron appears to have survived the bombing and the departure of Jack Maddocks in 1943.

The Coventrian,
December 1939

THE AIR DEFENCE CADET CORPS

THE School has at last formed its own squadron of the A.D.C.C. About sixty boys have so far joined and we hope that before long we shall have reached the hundred mark. As we now have our uniforms, we all feel a lot smarter and as a consequence our squadron drill has improved. We have been one route march and the squadron performed very creditably, satisfying the officers. Apart from squad drill we have done very little with the exception of lectures on the organisation of the R.A.F. and, recently, preliminary lectures on airmanship and the Morse Code. We hope before long to have our engines, air-frame, etc., from the Air Ministry and then we can go straight ahead with our practical work.

The work of the Air Cadets consists of the following :—

- (i) Squad drill.
- (ii) Physical Training.
- (iii) Boxing.
- (iv) Air Force Administration.
- (v) Airmanship and Navigation.
- (vi) Theory of Flight.
- (vii) Principles of Aircraft Engine Erecting, Running and Repairing.
- (viii) Rigging.
- (ix) Meteorology.
- (x) Wireless Operator's Course.
- (xi) General A.R.P. work.

After passing satisfactorily through the above syllabus, the older cadets, with their parents' consent, will be taken gliding and afterwards, will be given instruction in flying power-driven aircraft. Gliding will take place in Derbyshire and actual flying at one of the local aerodromes.

I should like to make it perfectly clear that there is no compulsion on an Air Cadet, when he leaves the Corps., to join the R.A.F. He will find it useful when he comes to do his Militia Training in that first preference will be given to ex-members of the A.D.C.C. to serve their six months with the R.A.F.

The officers of the School Squadron, No. 91 Squadron, are as follows :—

Squadron Leader	..	..	..	J. M. Mattocks.
Adjutant	..	..	..	H. L. B. Saint.
Fl/Lieutenant	..	..	..	W. A. Kyte.
Fl/Lieutenant	..	..	..	P. J. McGill.
Fl/Lieutenant	..	..	..	C. W. Norris.

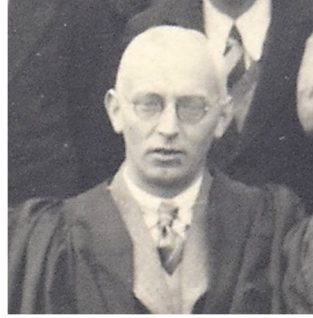
We have only decided definitely on one of our N.C.O's. Cadet Ridgewell has been appointed Sgt./Major to the Squadron. We have a special N.C.O's class where we are giving our potential N.C.O's an intensive course. Promotion, however, in the A.D.C.C. is given solely on merit and not age. In the A.D.C.C. there are no School Forms, only flights which are part of the squadron. A Fourth former has as much influence as a Sixth Former; in fact, he may get promotion sooner.

Now, any of you "waverers" who are thinking of joining the A.D.C.C. make up your minds and join in with us. We can assure you of an interesting life and good friendship, and also the knowledge that you are doing something that may be of use to your country if need should arise.

J.M.

Life at Alcester

Those pupils evacuated to Alcester continued their education in a variety of buildings. Alcester Grammar School was used for two classes in the morning and five in the afternoon. A large room in the Town Hall became a classroom in the mornings, and rooms at the Baptist Church Hall were used in both parts of the day. The Junior School evacuees briefly made use of the Church House, before finding accommodation in the village hall at Arrow, just outside Alcester. The School, of course, rented the accommodation – for example, 2½ guineas a week for use of the Town Hall, and 3½ guineas for the Baptist Church Hall. Early arrangements were not always satisfactory. In his diary, Frank Metcalf, head of the King Henry's Junior School, described how he had *"a very pleasant and comfortable room"* in which to teach but had to share it with another teacher and his class. This proved *"rather difficult"*, so they gave up the attempt.



*Head of the Junior School,
F.H. Metcalf*

The School's pupils did not share lessons with their counterparts from Alcester Grammar School and they continued to be taught in their age cohort. Classes were obviously smaller: end of year reports for one of the pupils at Alcester shows that he was in a class of 11, whereas, in Coventry, his classes usually numbered about 25. The timetable appears to have been much the same as had been followed in Coventry, with the exception that lessons in handicrafts and singing were discontinued. Boys were billeted on families in the town, the

arrangements being made by the local Billeting Officer. Accommodation for staff is mostly unknown; however, Frank Metcalf initially found *"a good billet"*, along with A.R.R. Bower, with Miss Evans, senior Mistress at Alcester Grammar School. Subsequently, Frank Metcalf rented a flat, where he lived with his wife and two children. Their house in Earlsdon, in Coventry, had been damaged in the raid of November 14th and left temporarily uninhabitable. They put their furniture into store and joined the party that went to Alcester. It may be that similar practical considerations helped determine the composition of the staff accompanying the pupils to Alcester.

Relations between pupils and staff at Alcester appear to have been closer than at Coventry. F.S. Atkinson, one of the teachers there, wrote at the time: *"Life here is much more communal ... Most of us are savouring the sheer*



Junior School boys smile for the photographer despite working at desks constructed from planks resting between saw horses



Alcester Grammar School Air Training Corps, including several evacuated KHVIII pupils

delight of comradeship." He described their existence as combining some of the features of a boarding school with those of an ordinary day school. In 1946, A.E. Maddison (KHVIII 1938-1945), who had been a pupil in the Alcester party, paid his teachers a somewhat back-handed compliment when he said that *"they seemed to be much more human than they had been at Coventry"*. All the teachers, recalled Maddison, worked hard to ensure that the pupils enjoyed their stay, *"as, in consequence, we did"*.

The people of Alcester played their part in making the visitors feel at home. A rent-free room was placed at the disposal of the boys to be used as an after-school club. This was presumably the additional room at the Baptist Church Hall that was mentioned by A.E. Maddison, where the school club met three times a week. The teachers paid for the purchase of books, magazines and papers, whilst the School's Parents' Association made a grant of £5, provided a wireless and made an appeal for old furniture, games and books. Maddison recalls pupils at the club playing billiards and cards, reading or just talking. Half-way

through the evening, one of the staff appeared with cocoa or Oxo. *"Some nights Mr Metcalf would bring confectionery which we could buy."* Most pupils learnt the rudiments of chess during their time at Alcester, *"for Mr Atkinson was a good tutor"*. The club, in Frank Metcalf's opinion, was *"a blessing"* for the boys, especially in the severe winter of 1941-42. Despite the cold weather, Mr Metcalf considered that the boys' health was good.

Church services were held each week and the 'Alcester Crusaders' were set up, with senior Crusaders coming from Coventry to speak to the group. During the summer, cricket was played at the ground at Great Alne, the pupils re-painting the pavilion there. Despite a walk of three miles to the ground, there was plenty of competition for places in the School's Cricket team, which was a good one. In addition, the team regularly played Alcester Grammar School at their *"fine ground at Ragley"*, where Maddison also recalls games against the Police, the Home Guard and the Farmers' Union. Another summer recreation was swimming in the pond at Hoo Mill. During the winter, the football ground at

Bleachfield was successfully converted to rugby, once posts had been *"hewn from Oversley Wood"*. Both the winters spent at Alcester saw snowfall and boys went tobogganing down Primrose Hill as soon as school was finished. A report in *The Coventrian* described local excursions that took pupils to Coughton Court and Ragley Hall, the latter being used at the time as a convalescent hospital for soldiers. Some pupils even attended a meeting of the foxhounds at Ragley Hall, *"the more energetic boys following all morning"*, whilst another trip was to the *"scientifically planned piggeries"* at Oversley Castle. Other than through sport, contacts with the pupils at Alcester Grammar School seem to have been limited, although a few pupils did join the local A.T.C.

Pupils adapted to their new life with varying success. A report by 'S.S.P.', of form V, described their *"new independence"* at Alcester. With all the worldly-wisdom of his age, S.S.P. enumerated the different groups and their characteristics. There was the *"artificial manliness"* of those who *"were seen strutting through the little town in flashy ties, their hair brilliantined, their*

school caps abandoned. They raised their voices and monopolised the pavements" and took local girls to the pictures. Others, "especially the smaller ones", looked despondent and unhappy. Generally, their parents ignored their entreaties to return to Coventry, whilst their "hostesses were not always considerate". Shy boys did not dare confide their troubles to anyone and "were often thought obstinate and thick-headed" by those upon whom they were billeted. However, "the really independent boys", presumably including S.S.P., knew how to make the best of everything and how to adapt themselves to their new circumstances. Their hostesses "considered themselves fortunate to have evacuees who were practically no trouble at all". These boys, he pointed out, usually had some experience of camping out or previous evacuation.

It seems that some boys remained in Alcester during the holidays, whilst others returned for a while to Coventry. In June 1941, the Billeting Officer in Alcester expressed concern that arrangements for the recent Easter holidays had not always been satisfactory, with boys left at a "loose end for most of the day" and, in consequence, making a nuisance of themselves. With the summer holidays approaching, he was hoping that more acceptable arrangements could be made. Part of the problem was that parents of the boys were concerned that, if the boys returned to Coventry for any length of time, they might lose their billets in Alcester.

Over time, there was a steady drift back to Coventry, no doubt encouraged by the diminishing threat of bombing following the Germany invasion of Russia in June 1941 and the diversion of the Luftwaffe's main strength. This move away from Alcester was usually orderly and done with the approval of both parents



Breaktime in Alcester

and the School. Occasionally it was not. In May 1941, Mr Burton roundly criticised a boy who had left on his own accord, without any word to Mrs Jephcott, his hostess in Alcester. The boy's excuse, that he did not like Alcester, "seems very thin ... because he should have found that out many months ago". He pulled no punches with the boy's father: "It would have been no more than what your boy deserves had I sent him away and told him to shift for himself." He insisted that the father should apologise "to the hostess, to Mr Atkinson and to

me"; whether such an apology was tendered is not known.

By the summer of 1941, the School was coming under pressure from Alcester Grammar School to relinquish some of the accommodation at the Grammar School. The Grammar School's numbers had increased by about 20, although Mr Burton clearly felt that the demands of the Grammar School were disproportionate to this modest increase. In the end, these problems resolved themselves. By the early summer of 1942 there were only about 50 pupils left in the evacuated party and the 'Alcester site' had become untenable. Although brief, the Alcester evacuation must have left its mark on all those who were involved and "formed a unique part of the School history" (A.E. Maddison). More immediately, the evacuation to Alcester had provided for the wishes of those parents who had wanted their sons moved away from Coventry. The education of these pupils had continued, although operating different parts of the School, separated by some 30 miles, had obvious difficulties and added to the mounting problems that the School was facing.



Lessons in Alcester Town Hall

Bablake Boys at the School

In addition to those evacuated to Alcester, very nearly 100 boys, who had left the School in the autumn of 1940, had not returned by the end of January 1941. Many had gone to other schools in neighbouring towns – such as Nuneaton, Rugby, Leamington and Hinckley – but others were scattered much further afield, including Shropshire, Berkshire, Nottinghamshire, Cumberland, Cambridgeshire, Wales, Cornwall, Yorkshire and even Ireland.

Yet, in the topsy-turvy world that was 1940-41, when School resumed in January 1941, the roll was not far below what it had been when the School year began – counting those at Alcester as being still on the School's 'books'. The reason for this was the inclusion of 67 boys from Bablake.

Bablake had not escaped as lightly as King Henry's on November 14th. The School's brand new library was destroyed in the raid. Far worse, a bomb had fallen on one of the School's shelters, in which local residents had taken cover, and a large number of people had been killed. The History of Bablake School records how the School's corridor was used as a makeshift mortuary



Mr E.A. Seaborne

and bucketsful of human remains could be seen in the Headmaster's garden. A few days later, the School buildings were commandeered for a Company of Royal Engineers and the decision was taken to evacuate. An invitation from the Lincoln authorities was accepted and, on November 23rd, two days before the King Henry's party departed for Alcester, nearly 300 Bablake pupils left Foleshill Station for Lincoln.

However, not all Bablake's pupils were evacuated and, during the Christmas holidays, King Henry VIII School was asked to take on those who had remained in Coventry. Accord-

ingly, 67 Bablake boys and two teachers from the School arrived at King Henry's. Mr Seaborne, Bablake's Headmaster, was insistent that the boys remained Bablake pupils and should wear Bablake uniform. Their parents continued to pay Bablake fees, with Bablake School making a per capita payment to King Henry's of £17 10s per year. However, as the History of Bablake School points out, Mr Seaborne was hardly in a position to insist that his pupils "received Bablake-style treatment". One of the Bablake pupils subsequently recalled that he considered Mr Burton's regime at King Henry's to be far more relaxed and less fearful. Given Mr Burton's autocratic approach and vigorous, if infrequent, use of the cane, these sentiments would have come as something of a surprise to King Henry's pupils at the time. Brian Taylor, who appears to have had a good deal of respect for his Headmaster, was still happy to admit that "the fear of being reported to Monty Burton was enough to terrorise every man jack of us". It is, of course, possible that Mr Burton was reluctant to treat pupils from another school with the same strictness as he reserved for his own.

The Easter Week Raids, April 1941

Following the November bombing raid on Coventry, enemy activity over the city had been sporadic. However, German aircraft returned in force during Easter Week, 1941, and the city was subjected to two heavy raids. The first of these was on the night of April 8th-9th, the second on the night 10th-11th. These raids inflicted further massive damage on the city, with St Mary's Hall, the churches of St John's, St Mark's and Christ Church among the historic buildings damaged. The raids were even more destructive of Coventry's industrial capacity

than the November raid, with Courtaulds, Armstrong Siddeley, the main Daimler plant and the GEC works at Copsewood all badly damaged. In the first raid, the Coventry and Warwickshire Hospital received 10 direct hits, causing heavy loss of life; three George Medals were awarded for acts of heroism at the hospital during that terrible night. The death toll in the city for the two raids was in the region of 450, with more than 1,000 injured, not far short of the figures for the November raid. As in November, the victims were given a mass

funeral at London Road Cemetery.

It was during the first of these raids that almost all the buildings at King Henry VIII School were either burnt out or levelled. Fortunately, no loss of life was suffered at the School and, by comparison with the city as a whole, the School might be considered to have got off lightly. However, within the narrower parameters of the School's life, the events of April 8th-9th, 1941, were a disaster from which it took several years to recover fully.