

Life in Lydney as a Jewish refugee

Letter reunites war evacuee Joe with family 70 years on

IN 1939, shortly before the beginning of the Second World War, 14-year-old German Jew refugee Günter Stern, speaking no English, left his parents in Koblenz, and arrived in London on a Kinder-transport train.

He was transferred to a new home in Birmingham where he was offered a place at Yardley Grammar School, but almost immediately the school was evacuated to Lydney away from the dangers of the Industrial Midlands.

Consequently, on a cold and snowy January day in 1940 Günter took the train to Lydney to begin his education. Here he was met from the train by Mrs Carson, the local doctor's wife who took him to 35 Springfield and introduced him to Eddie and Doris Allsopp, with whom he would lodge for the next three-and-a-half years.

Günter, who later changed his name to Joe Stirling thrived under

A letter appealing for contact in The Forester has reunited wartime evacuee Günter Stern, now known as Joe, with the family he stayed with in Lydney in the 1940s. Academic Phyllida Scrivens is writing a biography about the remarkable 88-year-old she met in a university library. Here she tells his tale.

their care and recalls the family warmly.

"What wonderful people they turned out to be," he said. "The father was a great man. The lady came from South Wales and spoke English with a very Welsh accent. They had two children. Allan was 11 and just starting at Lydney Grammar School, and Hazel was only six," said Joe.

When Günter joined his family, Eddie Allsopp was working at the Lydney Tin Plate Works, where members of his family had been employed for generations.

Joe recalls: "He would work at the mouth of fierce furnaces, lifting and swinging hot bulky pieces of steel in and out of a furnace onto huge rollers. When he set on his shift he would take a gallon or more of drink to replace the heavy perspiration that went with the job. I would sometimes walk down to the Works to take him some more water."

Doris Allsopp was a stalwart of St Mary's Church and was anxious to introduce her new young

change to the Sunday services, where Allan would sing in the Choir. But Günter had been brought up in a Jewish family and soon persuaded Mrs Allsopp to allow him to spend his time studying English on a Sunday morning. Günter knew that only hard work at school would bring him the educational rewards he craved, and Joe remembers Mrs Allsopp as a kindly woman who would worry about him, insisting he take breaks from his books.

During the war years, Yardley and Lydney Grammar Schools shared the school day, with the local students studying from early morning until lunchtime, and the evacuees working for an extended afternoon. Günter would spend his mornings in the village hall playing Monopoly and table tennis and then join classes after lunch, often with much younger children to help him catch up with his peers.

Joe remembers well characters such as Mr Burch the headmaster, Joe Ellison who taught handicrafts and organised the 'Old Boys' network for those in the Forces, and Miss Rattus, a diminutive figure who drove a black Austin 7 car and who honed Günter's 'too-Germanic' accent into one that would assist his transition into British society. His endeavours paid dividends and Günter left Yardley Grammar School in the summer of 1943 with a Higher School Certificate in scientific subjects. He was offered a place at Birmingham University to read chemistry, but instead chose to join the British Army for the remainder of the War, working with munitions in Basingstoke and the Education Corps where he met his future wife.

It was not until 2002 that Joe learned of the fate of his beloved parents. A newspaper in Koblenz, commemorating 60 years since the final Jewish deportees left on a Nazi transport train for an unknown destination, published a list of names of the people on that train. Joe's parents and grandmother were on the list. They ultimately were to die in a Nazi Death Camp in Poland. If it had not been for his parents' courage in



A LIFE LESS ORDINARY: Wartime refugee Joe Stirling with a photo of his parents killed during the holocaust.

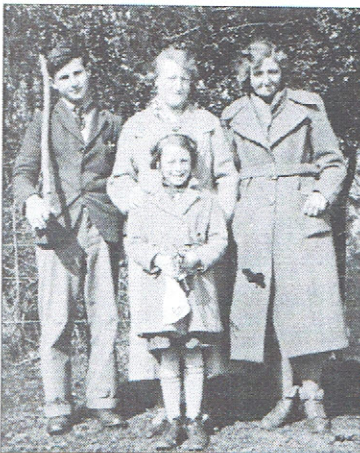
allowing their only child to travel to England, this might have been Joe's ultimate destiny. Instead, he is now able to look back on a long and happy life, much of it due to the example and the nurturing of the two families he was fortunate enough to grow up with: Oliver and Freda Frex in Birmingham, and Eddie and Doris Allsopp in Lydney. Joe went on to make a success of his long life, becoming a father of four, running his own travel business, taking high office in Lions International, and becoming Sheriff of Norwich in 1972, where he still lives.

Eddie, Doris and Allan Allsopp have sadly all since died, but Hazel,

now 80 and living in South Wales was contacted by Lydney relatives who saw the recent letter in *The Forester*.

Hazel immediately called Joe, who had lost touch with her some years ago. Joe was delighted to receive a welcome unexpected telephone call, re-establishing their friendship begun over 70 years ago.

Also back in touch is Barbara Hyde (now Vedmore), 84, who remembers living two doors down from the Allsopps, and, along with her brother Derek, spending happy times with Günter. Allan and Hazel All these years later, Joe, Hazel and Barbara are now able to once again share those memories.



WARTIME FAMILY: Joe with Doris Allsopp and eight-year-old Hazel and a family friend in 1942 or 1943.

Bericht in einer englischen Zeitung
über Joe Stirling, um 2010.