

Amber Valley Camp Revisited – with John Booth 24th August 2021

Eighty years ago, Derby School was evacuated to Amber Valley Camp (now Ogston Reservoir) and the venerable OD and organizer of the original “Forty Years On” John Booth, took Andrew Polkey, Maurice Cass and his wife Anne on a photographic reminiscence to his former haunts. Once an active and energetic member of the OD Committee, John is now probably one of the very few who still have memories of the Camp, and the archivist team joined up with him on the 24th of August 2021 to make a photographic record of his time spent there as a young evacuee from Derby School.

Now living with his wife Marion at St. Elphin’s retirement home at Darley Dale, Andrew and Maurice drove him up to the former site of the camp where the school was situated from 1940-45, and asked John to take us to places that he remembered and thought worthy of commemorating.



Ma Young's Tea Rooms - Grid ref: 53°08'34.6"N 1°27'01.4"W

Armed with a map on which he had numbered the places to visit, and wearing his old school boater and scarf, he took us first to the former site of Ma Young's tea rooms, situated immediately opposite the camp entrance and then to the site of the JTC (Junior Training Corps) rifle range close by and then to Marshall's Farm . Both places had radically changed and were now prosperous-looking private residences. The actual site of the former camp has long been submerged under the reservoir, so the tour focused on places surrounding its location



Junior Training Corps Rifle Range - Grid ref: 53°08'33.3"N 1°27'01.6"W



Marshall's Farm - Grid ref: 53°08'23.6"N 1°26'41.9"W



Marshall's Farm - Grid ref: 53°08'23.6"N 1°26'41.9"W

Next came Brackenfield church where the boys (other than Methodists and Roman Catholics) were herded a mile or two down the lane on Sundays. Unfortunately, the church was shut, but John had many stories about having to pump the manual organ during services, and how many of the boys converted to other faiths in order to avoid the otherwise compulsory route march every Sunday.



Brackenfield Church – Grid ref: 53°07'36.3"N 1°26'40.7"W

Close by was Church Farm where some of the boys were billeted and enjoyed a week-end retreat, whilst helping the farmer. This place seemed still to be a working farm and John showed us the lean-to shack with its original roof where he and his pals were quartered.



Brackenfield Church - Grid ref: 53°07'36.3"N 1°26'40.7"W



Church Farm – Grid ref: 53°07'40.4"N 1°26'40.7"W



Church Farm Billet – Grid ref: 53°07'40.4"N 1°26'40.7"W

We drove up to the site of the former Stretton Railway Station where the boys would arrive at the start of term and then depart at its end. Most of the original buildings are now transformed into private residences, but the location of the platform can still be made out alongside the main line from Derby to Sheffield and beyond.



Former Stretton Railway Station – Grid ref: 53°08'54.9"N 1°25'19.1"W

Lastly, we found a local hostelry so that the four of us could refresh ourselves and examine some of the black and white photos from the OD collection, dating back to those almost forgotten years.



Inside the Greyhound at Higham for lunch

Left to right: John Booth, Maurice Cass, Anne Cass, Andrew Polkey