

# The Unveiling of the Evacuee Plaque

*Contributed by Phillipa Malins*

On Sunday, May 19th 2013 Cuckfield celebrated a friendship which goes back nearly 74 years to Sept 1st 1939 when, at the outset of the Second World War, a group of evacuees arrived in the village from Stepney in the East End of London. The story of seven of those children is told in the Cuckfield Museum publication '[Safe in Cuckfield](#)'. On Sunday four of them came down with their families to dedicate a plaque in the entrance of the Queen's Hall, thanking the village for the kindness shown to them during the War.

*Evacuees Eric Dunn, Tom Newton, June Friend and her brother Bill*



*Hayes in front of the Evacuee Plaque.*

Evacuee Bill Hayes who had been instrumental in setting up the plaque performed the unveiling, helped by Tom Newton. The wording reads:

## **1939 "SAFE IN CUCKFIELD" 1945**

**'This plaque is dedicated to the people of Cuckfield on behalf of the staff and evacuees from Heckford Street and Broad Street Schools, Stepney in the East End of London, with grateful thanks and appreciation of the kindness and care shown during the Second World War.'**

David Jamieson, Chairman of the Museum Executive Committee, welcomed the evacuees and representatives of Cuckfield who had come to meet them: Mayor, Lindy Elphick; Chairman of the Parish Council, Nigel Page; Chairwoman of the Cuckfield Society and School Governor, Jo Roche and Holy Trinity School teacher, Anne Marie Nicholson.

Bill Collins of the Museum described the links that bind the village to this group of Londoners: how the evacuees had visited the village throughout the years and Joyce Mangan had sent her memoir to the Museum and encouraged others to do the same, culminating in the publication of the book. The Museum has since staged displays around the story of our evacuees to support Holy Trinity School's World War II studies and Joyce Mangan regularly comes to talk to the children about her experiences of arriving in the village as a 5 year old. Groups from the Museum have gone up to London and been shown around Stepney by East End historian Ray Newton, younger brother of two of the evacuees.

Joyce Mangan and Tom Newton spoke on behalf of the evacuees: Joyce telling of the life long friendship with the Sayers family with whom she was billeted in Glebe Road and how in spite of her anxiety at the separation from her parents she grew to love the village, the natural world and animals. Tom was lucky enough, together with seven other boys, to be billeted with the kindly Mrs Reid at [Mill Hall](#). She took a particular interest in Tom and his brother Alec and they remained in contact with her for the rest of her life. At 12 years old, Tom was ready to enjoy all the village had to offer and became a choirboy, later a King's Scout and an Army cadet as well as taking part in amateur dramatics and learning to play the banjo! They both felt that in spite of the strictures of war time, their lives had been immeasurably enhanced by life in the village.

Nigel Page thanked the evacuees on behalf of the village and hoped they would find that feeling of kindness still alive in Cuckfield today by asking them to come down to the White Harte to enjoy a lunch provided by the village.

Afterwards the whole party walked to the Courtmead Road allotments for a group photo in the sunshine recreating one which features on the cover of 'Safe in Cuckfield' where evacuee boys are digging for victory. The allotment holders were most welcoming and lent Bill Hayes a spade! Everyone agreed it had been a very memorable day and that those links of friendship were as alive as ever.

*Then: Evacuee boys dig for victory in WW2. Bill Hayes on left.*

*Now: Evacuees at the Courtmead Road allotments. Bill Hayes on left.*

