

Mike Scott Archer

My school friend, Peter Hawkes, and I would sit on the corrugated garage roof at the foot of the garden and count the trains as well as gaze at the many motor-bike & sidecar families (mum on pillion and two or more kids in the sidecar!) driving past on their day out.

Peter lived with his parents and brothers, Bill and John, at Abbey Grange and for much of the next five years we played together at our homes or explored the country between, swimming in the river or canal, making dens and so on. The bicycle was an essential.

The two years before the war were enjoyable for me, I continued to cycle to the Hawkes' at Abbey Grange where we played tennis, skated on a frozen field pond, climbed up to the slate quarries at Clogiau or Moel Faen and, sometimes on a Sunday afternoon several of us cycled on to a cottage at Hen Bandy below Pentredŵr where an elderly postman named Mr Stevens lived (must be talking here about Ernest Nicholls). He was great story teller - we would cut logs for him and then go in for tea with condensed milk and biscuits and hear about first world war adventures in 'Mespot' in 1916 or 1917. He was a descendant of the tea merchants Stevens of Chester. It would be dusk when we sped down the road from the Britannia Inn with only one acetylene lamp on the first bike and possibly a rear light for the last one.

Early in the summer of 1940 the Local Defence Volunteers were set up, Dad was asked to be the local commander with three platoons under him. Bill Hawkes had charge of one consisting of men living Pentredŵr way. Dad's Sgt Major was a first world war veteran John 'MM' Roberts. Sixth form pupils over 16 (I think) could join. Rifle practice took place on the old rifle range above the abbey.

When the Germans invaded they often dropped men by parachute ahead of the attack. It was important for the LDV to be able to man key locations to intercept potential saboteurs. One Saturday in August three of us who knew the countryside well were transported to a remote location with instructions to try to get to HQ unspotted. At that time HQ was in the unoccupied bank building in Castle St, opposite the end of Parade St.

I was taken by car early in the morning to the vicinity of Moel Faen slate quarry. I had a good idea where LDV sentries would be posted or patrolling so I started off by crossing the old Horse-shoe pass, skirting through the woods above Pentredŵr and down to Hen Bandy. From there I contoured above the track known as the Sheepwalk, above the rifle range. I spotted a patrol in time to hide in the bracken while they passed and I managed to get as far as the County School grounds before being caught.