

RAF STONEY CROSS

Memories of Life at Longbeech

Mrs Olive Bevan

We arrived at Long Beech in the summer of 1947 and stayed till the spring of 1952 when we were allocated a new council house in Totton. At the time we had a very active ten-month-old baby, so our first priority was to fence off an area around our hut to allow our son to play outside in safety. As the RAF had left a lot of chain link fencing lying around in the forest, we used that.

When we had been living there for a short while, the New Forest District Council, or Rural Council as it was then, took over the running of the site. We were charged a small weekly rent to start with, 6/6d (32½ pence). Cooking ranges were installed, and water piped to each hut. Previously we had to fetch water from the tap in the nearest toilet block which we shared with others in the area. Walls were built to divide the huts so that we had one large living room and two bedrooms.

There was a large building on the campsite which I believe was used as a church by the RAF, the local doctors held regular surgeries there and a weekly welfare clinic was also held there. One of the communities gave her services to run the weekly library. Books arrived in large boxes which were kept locked till the evening designated for us to come and choose our books. There was plenty of time for reading, no gardens to dig and weed, no lawns to mow, no decorating or DIY to take up the evenings.

We lived in our first hut number 327, for about two years before being offered a slightly upmarket hut at the top of the camp nearer the bus stop on the aerodrome. We had a two hourly bus service to Southampton via Minstead and Lyndhurst. But we did not need to use the buses to collect our weekly rations and other provisions as there was a small general store on the site. Also, milkmen, bakers, butchers and greengrocers called regularly. Having been a member of the Co-op since I started earning, I was keen to continue to patronise them, so I contacted them, and the result was that a mobile shop called once a week with all our requirements. They were particularly obliging and would bring out anything from Southampton that we asked for if they could obtain it.

Our new hut number 282 has its own toilet which was a big advantage with the family growing up. The District Nurse lived on the site and had attended the birth of my second son, only just getting to me in time. We now lived very close to her, but as it happened, she was on holiday when baby number three was due. My husband had left for work before I realised the birth was imminent, so I asked a neighbour to phone from a nearby public phone box to get the nurse from Wellow to come. The delay meant that my little daughter brought herself into the world with no help from anyone. Luckily it was midsummer and very warm, so she suffered no ill effects. But the neighbour was in such a state of shock that she cut herself with the breadknife. My husband had been fetched home by then as he only worked a short distance away at the Compton Arms Hotel, now a Little Chef. However, he felt obliged

to accompany the neighbour to hospital to have her hand stitched. That was a day none of us have forgotten.

At weekends we would pack up a picnic and explore the surrounding countryside. Life seemed quite idyllic, and I think it is true to say that most people who spent some time at Long Beach look back at that time with happy memories.