

## LOCAL PEOPLE

### *Keith McArd – call out the guard!*

Keith McArd was a local Port Erin boy, born in 1936. He and his grandfathers were builders who constructed much of Rushen and beyond. In 1940 he and his family were living at *Crofton*, Bayview Road, on the corner with Bridson Street.

When interviewed, Keith (pictured right, courtesy of Keith McArd) at first claimed to remember little of the effect of internees on his life because he was so young, nevertheless the stories below soon came pouring forth.



Keith's grandparents built and ran Windsor House, which was occupied by internees with strong German Nationalist sympathies. One of the internees taught Keith's mother German. Another was their house help and she was escorted from the barrier to the end of the road by a policewoman, from where young Keith escorted her to the house.

### **Call Out the Home Guard – Boy Missing!**

Keith would sometimes play with Peter von Flugel, the son of a wealthy internee, a Baroness. She had her own accommodation in Port Erin, complete with servants, and sent Peter to King William's College, the Island's private school for boys. Keith also went to school there. At first Keith was wary of Peter because he was German, but they became friends later despite Peter being three years older.

One day, during their games, Keith shut Peter in their rabbit hutch. Keith's family kept rabbits, as many people did to supplement food in wartime. At the internee roll-call, there was a big hue and cry when it was realised a boy was missing. The Home Guard was called out. It was then that Keith remembered where Peter was. Keith was in 'Very Big Trouble' with his dad, but, according to Keith, Peter seemed none the worse for his ordeal when released.

Keith and his friends used to watch the Home Guard (which was much like *Dad's Army* on TV) as they drilled and practised using ARP (air-raid precautions) pumps in the plot behind the Snaefell Hotel.

To get to and from school, children had to have a pass to get through the barbed-wire barriers. Sometimes the gateway was supervised by the Home Guard and at other times by a policeman. No pass meant literally 'no pass' and if Keith forgot it, he'd have to cycle back for it.

### **The Dandelion Lady**

The McArd rabbits were also an attraction for one of the internee women. She would gather bunches of dandelion leaves to share with them: internees were resourceful and keen to avail themselves of whatever food and vitamins were available. Dandelion tea is regarded as a traditional remedy for many things, including kidney problems, iron-deficiency anaemia, liver damage and constipation.

### **A Rook's Revenge**

Keith also recalled they had a gardener from the camp – Keith's father said he was Russian – and one day this man was given the task of moving the position of the rabbit hutch. He was told to wait for help. Instead the 'Russian' smashed it to bits. Presumably for easier transportation? Keith felt sure there had probably been some confusion in the instructions, due to language difficulties, but at the time everyone was very upset. No doubt the 'dandelion lady' particularly so!

Later the Russian gardener's bald head suffered an attack from a rook, which drew blood. This was 'divine retribution', according to Keith's father.

### **The Cat Woman**

Keith recalled an internee, called Miss Fischer, who bred cats in their builder's yard. Eventually it was overrun with the animals – but at least there were no 'longtails' (Manx alternative word to 'rats'). By the end of the war 40 cats still resided there. Something had to be done. The cats could not be rehomed – only Miss Fischer could catch them – so they were humanely despatched by Kermodes the Chemist.

Keith remembered that another internee was allowed to have some spare quarry tiles from the McArd's yard and she made intricate handicrafts from them.