

# HOME FROM HOME: THE HISTORY

*Home from Home* is based on a book called *School Errant*, written in 1951 by the then Headmaster John Leakey, and describes the school's evacuation from Dulwich during the second war, first to Cranbrook in Kent and then later to Betws-y-Coed in North Wales. But why Cranbrook, and why the later move to Wales?

During the late 1930s the threat of war was an increasing anxiety and many thought that London would become an immediate target once hostilities started. A major plan was thus set up by the then London County Council (LCC) to evacuate schoolchildren out of London should this happen. Showing remarkable foresight while many still held hopes of appeasement, Leakey set up a camp in an orchard at the home of his wife's parents in Cranbrook. His idea was that, should the worst come to the worst, DCPS boys could evacuate with their friends to this camp and be together and, equally importantly, the school would survive as a unit and not be fragmented if boys evacuated individually. A false alarm in 1938 resulted in the camp being improved and by the summer of 1939 it was ready for those boys whose parents wished to take advantage of the scheme. When war seemed inevitable on September 1<sup>st</sup> 1939, the LCC Evacuation Plan swung into force. After a long wait at school all that day, 135 boys with their teachers were eventually transported from West Dulwich Station to Cranbrook by train. It was not an easy journey and when the boys arrived it was dark, there was no street lighting and it was raining. Furthermore the camp was about three miles from the station.

School of a kind started at the camp and Alleyn Park was closed. It was a cold winter but things went reasonably well until the end of May 1940 when France was invaded. Cranbrook was then nearer to the front line than London and given the imminent threat of invasion, the school could not possibly stay there. With all its equipment, DCPS had to find another home – and quickly. In less than a month Leakey's wife, Muff, had found that the Royal Oak Hotel in Betws-y-Coed was available and that is where the school went on Friday June 17<sup>th</sup> 1940, the very same day that France finally fell. There it was to remain for five years, although a small section did re-open in London. *Home from Home* is set principally in Wales where a great camaraderie soon developed. Thanks to the endeavours of a number of former evacuees, a link between Dulwich and Betws has been built up, a link which continues to this day and reunions are still held each year at The Royal Oak.

*School Errant* is available for sale in the interval at £5 as is *Dulwich & Beyond*, the complete history of DCPS recently published for £19.99. (Both books: £23).

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