

Norwich Training College: 1942-1944.

Memories by Marguerite Watts (nee Carter)

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1942 - 1944: SIXTY YEARS ON

We were a very small year. The start of our first term was delayed for almost two months. Eventually 34 eighteen year olds, most away from home for the first time, came to the burnt out shell of the former college building. They discovered three pre-fabricated "huts" and accommodation in houses in College and Recreation Roads, which had kitchens reinforced with stout beams to withstand bomb damage. Air raid shelters were in some of the gardens and at the College school. I was in Hollies. We had no heating in the house, except a four bar gas fire in the kitchen. Until we returned after Christmas 1942, we wore outdoor coats indoors.

American service men were arriving in East Anglia and accents, other than Norfolk, were heard in the blacked-out city and, although there was little traffic, the streets seemed full of people after dark. Norwich had a number of cinemas, the Theatre Royal, the Hippodrome and the Samson and Hercules Dance Hall.

Of the 34 would-be teachers who first met at the end of 1942 and went their separate ways in the summer of 1944, eleven of us are still in regular contact and we began an annual re-



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union in 1985. When we met in July 2004 for lunch, news and nostalgia, we looked back 60 years to our N.T.C. days - memories were happy, sad and many hilarious. Miss Johnson (then well into her nineties) once told me that from Rothwell, at nightfall, she put the cat in the air raid shelter to get rid of any mice which might have been there.

All school practices were in schools in Norwich and we were allowed 9d a day for lunch in a British Restaurant. These were war-time facilities for inexpensive meals and as I remember no one tried them more than once or twice.

After the College building was destroyed in April 1942 the determination, vision and unremitting effort of Miss Duff, which inspired others to support her, allowed us to begin our teacher training course only six months after the apparent destruction of Norwich Training College. The library, half of one of the pre-fab "huts", consisted of books given or loaned by well-wishers of the College and the other half of that hut was the Common Room - it had a nice round highly polished table and some chairs. The second hut was the dining room and kitchen - we ate much stodgy food and some of it was mysterious. Each student had her week's ration of 4oz of butter and sugar and jam which we carried into meals, breakfast and high tea, but it was not necessary at lunch time. The heads of hostels took milk for us to have a bedtime drink and there was usually bread. It was also the head of hostel's duty to arrange a rota for us to have a (weekly) bath. The facilities for those tasking Craft subjects and Art were in the third hut.



Our time as students was spent with like-minded people. We all hoped to become proficient teachers, as far as we were able to, and we were growing into independent adults with the benefit of Miss Duff's regime being less rigid, even relaxed, for its time. Nevertheless we had to be in our own hostels by 10pm., extensions could be granted until 11 on Saturdays, with permission from the member of staff in the hostel, so we could go to the cinema or theatre or the Samson and Hercules but getting back to College Road took quite a slice of that extra time. No Male persons (including brothers) were allowed in a hostel after 9pm.

College dances were an Event! It was the chance to wear a dress which was carefully looked after, as clothes were strictly rationed by "coupons" in 1942. The college gym, which escaped the incendiary bombs, looked attractive on these occasions and music was provided by a forces band, usually American but sometimes R.A.F.

In a way we were insulated from the war, the only source of news was the newspapers, or what somebody said somebody else had heard. Newsreels shown in the cinemas reported things which had already happened some time earlier, no instant non-stop coverage of events as they happen as today. Members of staff had radios (the Wireless!) so we were told about D-Day at the time it was happening. Some girls had brothers, fiancés, relatives in the forces and we were all conscious of their anxiety, as we prepared to take our final exam to become recognised teachers, almost two years after arriving at Norwich Training College as a group of mainly Norfolk girls, some from Suffolk and a few from Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire, most straight from school.

After April 1942 there was a time of uncertainty but for us Miss Duff's tenacity had paid off. We were taken to our hostels by our "mothers" and the College was functioning. Demolition of the burnt out building was well advanced and arrangements were in place for college life to go on. Children from the college school were dispersed to other schools in the neighbourhood and the school building provided adequate rooms for lectures. It must have been less than ideal for the staff but as students we were quite unaware - everything seemed fine!

The Chapel was created within the school building and linked the former and the ongoing life of Norwich Training College - Miss Pratt used her talent and skill to carve a Cross

from wood she reclaimed from the remains of the original building and it has been taken from College Road to Keswick Hall to the U.E.A.

Marguerite Watts (née Carter)