

## **Recording the War in East Ilsley – Terry Ashwood, War Photographer**



Terry Ashwood, roving reporter for Pathe News, was a friend of Edward and Hilda Sneller and it is likely that he stayed with them at Poplar Cottage, East Ilsley, on his various visits to East Ilsley. He was often seen filming around the village and taking pictures of the local inhabitants. Early in the war he took a number of pictures using local inhabitants in subjects of topical interest and to promote the general public morale. They were often intended for, and published in, the national press or magazines.

Fortunately there are surviving examples of Ashwood's photographs of local people who were often used as models for his various projects.

### **Pictures from 1941**

These two photographs are of children purporting to be evacuees, 'digging for victory' and enjoying the idyllic country life, which were shown in the 'World at War' series. The images include Marion, Tessa, and Benita, daughters of Henry Graves who was landlord of the Crown and Horns at the time. The second picture was taken in the stable yard of the Crown and Horns.



This picture shows Peter Eacott with his bicycle, his official dark blue uniform and tin hat. It does not seem to have appeared in the British national press but somehow found its way to America where it turned up in the Chicago city archives. A caption attached to the photo read

*Britain's youngest fighting man, East Ilsley, England. Peter Eacott, eleven, of this Berkshire town, is the youngest messenger in Britain's Home Guard, which he joined last July. Thus he can be considered the youngest person pledged to defend the British homeland from invasion*



The picture of Gilbert Graves, son of the Crown and Horns landlord, is in a posed photograph outside Florence cottage, opposite Poplar Cottage. The pub is in the background. Gilbert was also issued with a regulation tin hat and given the task of riding round the village alerting the village in the event of an invasion. He is mounted on 'Kiwi', the same animal as in the picture of the stable.



These two pictures could well be by Terry Ashwood as they were taken outside Poplar Cottage.

They show two East Ilsley servicemen, Stuart Sanderson and his brother-in-law John Gibbs, acting out domestic tasks for the photographer's project. Stuart served with

the RAMC, and John was a Flight Sergeant in the RAF at the time the photographs were taken. The larger pram almost certainly belonged to the Graves family.

Stuart is seen putting out washing, pictured outside Poplar Cottage, although it is known that he never lived there. Again, this strongly suggests that the photographer was Terry Ashwood.



### **Homecoming 1944**

Early in 1944, Terry Ashwood, returned to England having spent three years filming in the Middle East, and once more visited East Ilsley.

Later in 1944 he made a film entitled 'Homecoming' which tells the story of a soldier coming home on leave to a rural village. He was familiar with this area and therefore, naturally, used East Ilsley as the setting and Poplar Cottage for the soldier's home.

The film opens with the soldier's train journey from London to his local station. We then see him walking along a country lane and the reunion with his wife who has come to meet him. They arrive home where their children wait excitedly. He distributes presents, they sit down to a meal, then put the children to bed and spend a quiet evening together.



The next morning they make their way to church where they are among parishioners greeted at the door by the rector, The Rev. Arthur Ogle. We see the congregation singing together, the bells being rung and the boy pumping the organ.



The boy has been identified as Jim Wilson, an evacuee who came from London, and eventually stayed in East Ilsley for the rest of his life. He became a schoolmaster and a keen local historian. The organist whom we hear playing but do not see, is almost certainly Kathleen East who recalled in a memoir –

*“In those days the organ had to be pumped, which was quite an art. It was nothing for an inexperienced boy to start pumping too late, or not pump enough, and so cause consternation”.*

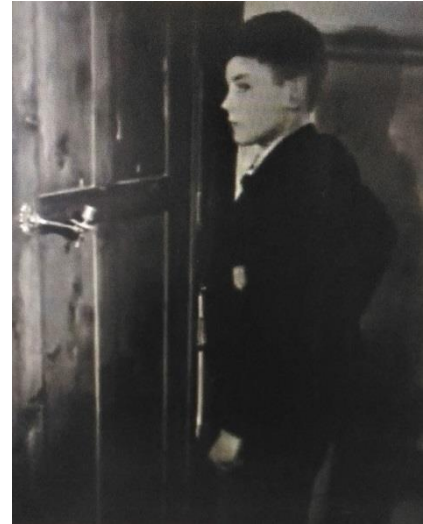
Kathleen recalled several embarrassing moments for the organist when the pumping was not done properly. It is believed that it is Kathleen who is seen entering the church wearing a dark coat and hat.

The soldier and his wife were not played by professional actors, but were a genuine married couple and friends of the photographer. The younger of their supposed children has been identified as Jennie Mee, who lived with her parents in the other half of Poplar Cottage.

The strong message of this film is the contrast between this peaceful country life and the harsh memories in the soldiers' thoughts.

### **Didcot Atom Village 1947**

There is another film on Youtube entitled 'Didcot Atom Village'. Again, although it is supposedly Harwell village, some scenes were filmed in Blewbury and East Ilsley. Several shots show East Ilsley characters. Bert Bailey, the shepherd, and Tom Johnson are shown among the sheep in the fields off Haydon Lane.



A group of ladies, again recognisable as East Ilsley folk, includes Dorothy Bishop, on the right, wearing glasses.



Customers in the Public Bar of the Swan who have been identified and verified as follows –Jack Phillips standing on the extreme left, Ben Roberts in cap, Jack Woodage, and Billy Mills in the centre. On the second table, three villagers, named in commentary as Bill Bradfield, Fred Carter, Ben (Walter) Mullins.



Bill Bradfield



Fred Carter



Ben (Walter) Mullins

This film dates from 1947, after the war ended, but has the hallmarks of the earlier film. Terry Ashwood is not named, but he could well have had a hand in it somewhere.

Photos by courtesy of Kay Sanderson and Tessa Maria (née Graves)

Both films have been uploaded to Youtube by British Pathé."

‘Homecoming’ [www.youtube.com?v=tG2ok4z\\_06c](http://www.youtube.com?v=tG2ok4z_06c)

“Didcot Atom Village’ [www.youtube.com/watch?v=1zOsSx\\_Yd7](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1zOsSx_Yd7)