

Munich and the Czech Refugees in Surrey

[120MunichandtheCzechRefugeesinSurreybyTrevorBrook13October2022.mp3](#)

45 minutes. There is also a set of 133 slides accompanying this talk.

Three years ago, when I researched this story, nobody had any idea that 84 years later we would be seeing turmoil in Europe again and I'd be hosting a Ukrainian refugee family at home.

I am going to take you on a journey, using as much as possible the writings of those who experienced it.

Some parts were written by children just starting to learn English.

Much was in German and many thanks to Janet Brown and Margaret Clarke for helping with translations.

My huge thanks also to historian Thomas Oellermann in Prague, refugee daughter Sylvia Daintrey and refugee Vik Heike and family.

Sudetenland constitutes the border areas of Bohemia, Moravia, and Czech Silesia, inhabited primarily by German speakers since the days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Following the First World War, German-dominated Austria-Hungary was dismembered and Sudeten Germans found themselves living in the new country of Czechoslovakia.

Germany's expansionist demands led to the Sudeten crisis of 1938.

After a visit by Chamberlain, in September the Munich Agreement permitted Germany's annexation of the Sudetenland into the Third Reich. Churchill condemned the Agreement, calling it "a total and unmitigated defeat."

Karl Löwit wrote:

"After living and working in the Sudeten area all my lifetime, I was compelled to flee to the interior of the country when the Czech Government was forced to cede the Sudeten districts to Nazi Germany by the Munich Agreement.

Very soon we could not help realising that there would be no possibility of finding adequate means or jobs for starting a new life in the state made smaller and deprived of the very foundations of its economic structure.

"We also saw, clearer than the creators of the Munich dictate, that this 'settlement' was not a definite solution but merely a postponement of the European war, and that the reduced Czechoslovakia as a whole would fall victim to Hitler's drive towards his dominance over Central and Eastern Europe, unless he could be stopped by force and power."

Just six months later, in March 1939, Germany did indeed invade the rest of Czechoslovakia.

As Germany took over, the anti-Nazis who fled were Social Democrats, trade unionists and Jews, with the men escaping to safety first.

Learning English, 15 year old refugee Karl Löwit described the later but similar journey of himself and his mother following their father, in this Brook Lodge School Magazine and his diary:

"I am writing on Wednesday 14th December 1938. It's late in the evening and the night fast train for Moravská-Ostrava is ready for departure at Wilson Station in Prague.

One carriage has long been full: worried women, frightened children, depressed men, all sacrifices to the Munich Agreement, at the start of their journey into exile and an uncertain future.

I am with my mother and amongst the others, purely by chance and unknown to us, is also my future wife, likewise with her mother.

Shortly before departure the police clear the platform. They want to prevent any possible protest against the originators of the Munich declaration and particularly against their all-powerful Nazi neighbour and new master. Only Franz Macoun of the Social Democratic Party is allowed to stay until the end, his official status still according him some respect.

When the train moves off he is therefore the only one who waves us off and sees and hears how fists appear at each window and the station concourse reverberates with a last resounding cry "Freedom!" and a defiant "We'll be back!" We are sitting in a locked compartment.

"The train has to cross occupied territory twice, since the demarcation line set down by 'Munich' crosses the mainline to the east of the Republic several times. We breathe out when we reach Moravská-Ostrava, now the border station, without stopping. With mixed feelings we say farewell to the Czech train and border officials.

In a few minutes we are on the other side of the border in the former Oderberg, now Polish-occupied Bogumin. The Polish border guard stamping our passports makes disparaging comments about us and our country. I consider such pleasure in our misfortune to be out of place, he might like to remember us when his country is next in line.

The train crosses the flat and desolate Polish landscape throughout the whole of the next day, with short stops in Katowice and Poznań (we pass an unimportant place called Auschwitz on our right) and an unplanned stop in Gdańsk. Unexpectedly, and we hope for the last time, we see brown shirts and swastikas. We reach the port of Gdynia in the late afternoon. It is snowing. An Englishwoman, who is accompanying us on our journey, organises transport to the port; a bus for us, a lorry for our luggage. -This was 29 year old Tessa Rowntree, working for the Quakers and representing the British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia.-

"A sorry sight meets us on the quayside. The luggage has been thoughtlessly thrown down in the melting snow, with many cases burst open and their contents strewn around and damaged. After that, we are not sorry to be leaving European soil and we embark with a feeling of relief.

"A pleasant surprise awaits us. The crew of the 'Warszawa' greet us politely and show a certain sympathy for our fate. At the outbreak of war, this ship and her crew put themselves at the disposition of the Royal Navy.

The Warszawa weighs anchor the next afternoon. We cross the Baltic Sea and, in the evening of the following day, reach the entrance to the North Sea-Baltic Kiel Canal. The Captain had insistently asked us to avoid any incidents and preferably to remain below deck during the passage. He said he hoped to be able to bring larger numbers of refugees to safety without problems. Not until after breakfast were we allowed on deck to get some fresh air and to assure ourselves that the ship had actually left German territorial waters and was making for the open North Sea.

The feeling of well-being, however, did not last long. It became clear that we were not experienced sailors, in fact it was the first sea journey for many and the Baltic had spoilt us over the first two days. A different wind was blowing in the North Sea and heavy seas slowed us down. Our little ship defied the swell for two days during which the stewards called us for meals in vain. But then, in the late afternoon of the fourth day of our sea journey, calm re-established itself; we were in the Thames estuary.

"Everyone collected up on deck. Soon we could see the first buildings, the huge brightly lit Ford works in Dagenham, a suburb of London.

A magnificent sight met our eyes at midnight; we were approaching the symbol of London, Tower Bridge. The two halves of the bridge rose majestically, as if to greet us, and the Warszawa anchored in London's inner harbour. We spent the rest of the night in our cabins. The next morning, by now Thursday 20th December 1938, immigration officials came on board. Every asylum seeker, young or old, received a permit to stay for three months on the condition not to take any paid or unpaid occupation. At the moment we considered conditions unimportant. The main thing was that we were safe.

Thanks to the superhuman endeavours of our comrades, the Social Democratic Party in Czechoslovakia and the practical help of various British organisations, we had escaped the Nazi henchmen. We spent the first two nights of English asylum in the docks area, in a boarding house which had perhaps seen better times. Willi Wanka came, welcomed us in the name of the party executive, distributed some pocket-money and organised an immediate continuation of our journey, so as to deliver us to families before the Christmas holiday if possible.

“As we travelled on it began to snow.

When we reached our destination of Surrey Hills we saw my father again. It looked really Christmassy.

The county of Surrey, bordering directly on London, has one of the most beautiful landscapes in southern England. The gentle hills, lush woods, meadows, heathland and ancient villages are constantly enticing destinations for excursions, nowadays mainly for Sunday trippers fleeing the sea of houses in London.

Before the last war however, when for most people a holiday abroad was generally out of the question, Surrey was a popular place to stay for the whole week's holiday which the average working person was entitled to.

There were numerous hotels, pubs, restaurants and holiday homes to accommodate and cater for holiday guests. Because of the whims of the English climate these places only enjoyed a short season and in autumn and winter were for the most part closed.

“In the unfortunate year of 1938 these guest houses were not empty in the autumn.

They offered welcome accommodation to numerous victims of the Munich Agreement who had landed in England.

“In the most beautiful corner of Surrey, near the picturesque community of Albury, were to be found three such holiday homes

“transformed into refugee camps: 'Surrey Hills Guest House'...

“and the holiday camps 'Brook Lodge'...

“and 'Tree Tops'.

When these hostels filled up towards Christmas 1938 there were nearly as many foreigners as locals in the village. Understandably, the villagers regarded this influx of foreign guests with mixed feelings. Not so, commendably, their Anglican vicar who, since the arrival of the first refugees, had made their care his priority.

Reverend Philip Gray, being fully aware that the majority of his foreign charges were estranged from his beliefs and church, should be properly honoured here for his selfless care and efforts for his 'refugee children'.

One of his greatest achievements was a school for them.

Refugee Josef Schneider wrote:

“We got a small pocket money from the Czech Trust Fund but we were not allowed to work – a big drawback.

Surrey is a well loved place by better-off pensioners. After our arrival three women came to see us and gave us a pair of warm socks, or a few cigarettes.

Two days before Christmas a new transport arrived with our wives and children. Our first Christmas (it was a white one) was quite a merry one.

We even had Czech Pilsner beer which our landlord discovered was better than the English.

“After Christmas my daughter got a job in a posh house.

“They had a spastic child and Theres became an assistant to the elderly nurse.”

This was with the Eustace family at Stoodwell (the old rectory) in Merrow, and the nurse is here, on the right.

So, in 1938, three holiday hostels accommodated over 100 Czechs: Surrey Hills along the Chilworth Road beside Postford Pond, Brook Lodge beside the level crossing on Albury Heath, which later had the German-English school, and Treetops along Shophouse Lane in Farley Green. At that time Edgeley Park in Farley Green was still Captain Sykes' Edgeley Egg Farm.

At the start, in November 1938, Janus in the Spectator wrote this appeal:

"I drove to see a party of Sudeten German refugees for whom temporary quarters have been found in a remote corner of Surrey. They had escaped their homes as the German armies entered; otherwise they would be in concentration camps.

They could not go out, for it is pouring with rain and they have no mackintoshes. They could not read, for they have no German books and only one or two understand English. They have only the clothes they stand up in; most of them have not even pyjamas; and they have, of course, no money.

In this party there were nineteen; not far off there is a larger party, of professional men mainly, also temporarily installed in makeshift quarters; others will be quartered near as accommodation can be found.

Many of us in this country felt that Munich had brought us peace at other people's expense; these are some of the other people, and here is an opportunity of a small practical expression for our own immunity.

These refugees are having their bare board and lodging paid by the Czech Refugee Committee in London, but they want waterproofs, German-English dictionaries, pyjamas, and old suits (for rough work, since most of them came in their best clothes)."

Being most at risk, men had arrived first and Karl Löwit, having good English, was soon giving talks to hundreds of people in the area about the worsening situation in Czechoslovakia and the destruction of democracy in Central Europe as a result of the Munich Agreement...

here to the Milford League of Nations.

The Secretary of the Surrey League, Miss Butler, said: *"there was now quite a colony of such refugees, who were honoured guests in our midst.*

Had they remained in their own land they would have been imprisoned simply because they did not hold the Nazi creed.

These refugees were now hoping to become subjects of the British Empire."

The vicar of Milford said: *"sympathies were with Czechoslovakia, because if there was anything the people of England hated it was to see a bully kick a small boy, which is really what had happened to Czechoslovakia."*

On a happier note, two days before Christmas the women and children arrived.

There were parties and luncheons provided by Guildford Rotary:

"The rooms were decorated, a high and beautifully glittering Xmas-tree stood in a corner.

The supper was unusually rich, many Xmas presents from English benefactors showed again their kindness and understanding, and it looked as if there was really a new home for us, prepared by good people in a country we had known before by books only in a vague manner.

It was not least this Christmas and all its accessories which made me love England and the English more and more."

There were concerts from Guildford's Dennis Male Voice Choir at Surrey Hills and Treetops.

As life settled down in new year 1939 the adults needed to learn English and the children needed educating, as described by a Sudeten pupil:

"On Brook Lodge's land there was a garden house and already, by the middle of January 1939, lessons had begun.

We lived separately from the refugee camp, but could be fed by the kitchen.

"This was proof of the enthusiastic and determined way pastor Gray tackled projects.

In his community he had found a senior school teacher who had recently retired and entrusted him with the running of the school. Mr. F.R. Cobbold had taught at a well-known private school and thus 'Brook Lodge School' was based on a typical public school, i.e. as a boarding school and originally only for boys.

In these schools sport and physical education are on a par with academic education and the whole day is carefully filled not only with normal lessons, but also with preparation and revision, gymnastics, games and sport.

At all times the pupils are under a regime of strict discipline for which not the staff but the pupils themselves are responsible - or rather prefects chosen from their circle - for in his school the Englishman learns his proverbial self-discipline."

The head boy is on the right.

"Mr Cobbold taught English language and history.

Dr. Rudolf Fischer supported him by teaching geography of the British Empire and very wisely kept up our mother tongue and awareness of our unsurpassed literature.

Eduard Berner, fluent in English, was tasked with familiarising us with the peculiarities of English mathematics, weights, measures and currency while, outside the school timetable, keeping a fatherly eye on us.

Miss May Knight has to be named, who tried to interest us boys in the fine arts.

Much later, when girls too finally joined the classes, Miss Lydia Hyde took over some of the English lessons."

It was all done properly, with school reports, which even, at the top right, noted a pupil's weight increase or decrease!

"Our great benefactor, the Reverend Philip Gray, rector of Albury, had arranged a trip to Windsor. In two motor coaches all the refugees living here were taken there.

"Windsor Castle and its rooms filled with inconceivable treasures of every description were like a dream.

And then the interior of St Georges Chapel and the marvellous choir who sang their evensong!

"Words are not enough to describe all these deep and powerful impressions.

All this is unforgettable as is the far-reaching kindness and readiness to spend money for such purposes.

We pupils did not have much free time but on one or two weekends and for most of Sunday (at least until evening service) we were left to ourselves.

A community room with a piano and a library stood at our disposal; vicar Gray had collected German books from his churchgoers.

It went without saying that from the first evening we were together we boys formed a group called 'Brook Lodge Red Falcons' and we invited all the young refugees to our meetings.

"Not long after school time and free time had been satisfactorily organised we found ourselves embarrassed by a suggestion from the staff.

In their efforts to acquaint us with the English way of life as quickly and thoroughly as possible

Reverend Gray and Mr. Cobbold suggested that we should join the Boy Scout movement.

Our tactful misgivings were dismissed with the comment that Scouts welcome all youngsters into their ranks regardless of their political or religious opinions.

And so it came about that we Red Falcons, dressed in khaki coloured shirts with green neckerchiefs and funny floppy hats, were with much ceremony blessed and baptised into the Boy Scouts.

"According to our wishes we were allowed to keep our original name, Red Falcons.

Names of animals and birds of prey are not unusual for scout groups - and why shouldn't falcons in the "far off and unfamiliar country", as the British Prime Minister had instructively described our country, have been red?

During the next months we led a generally content double life.

Outwardly we had fitted into our new life but to our eyes the shirts were blue, the neckerchiefs red and we swore to be true to our home community where possible, with deeper determination because it was more familiar to us.

The troop had its own Brook Lodge banner and went on parades, here in Guildford Castle grounds.

One refugee girl, Helga Gerberich, here with her parents either side of her at Brook Lodge, wrote this:

"In mid-January, two representatives of the Czech Trust Fund came into the camp. After an interview, I received the message that I had a place at a private Methodist girls' boarding school in North Yorkshire.

This school had decided to take two refugee students, one from the Sudetenland and a Jewish girl from Germany. The parents of local students were responsible for all school and uniform costs through offering to pay higher school fees for their own children.

I was at this school until July 1941, followed by another six months in a secretarial college, also funded by the school.

It was assumed, as a matter of course, that I would spend most of my school holidays with some of these families, which allowed me an insight into the life of the English middle class.

In any case, the willingness to help was remarkable.

So I spent my first three years almost exclusively in English society, separate from other refugee children of my age, and my parents were in agreement because they always had my future in mind."

The weather improved...

but many were still accommodated in bell tents with wooden floors...

so the Sudetens set about building chalets to live in

in the grounds of the camp sites.

The target was one for each family with children

Everybody helped...

and the job was soon done

They even strung mains cables between the chalets, to provide lighting

Dinner's up!

This photo across Postford Pond shows bell tents as well as some of the chalets which had appeared at Surrey Hills.

One city-dwelling pupil who had been learning English for just a few months described the area...

"When I came to Brook Lodge I had a peculiar impression because I had never lived in an English country house.

When I looked out of my bedroom window all looked otherwise than I thought it would be. I saw a footpath and opposite was a shed and the large house of Brook Lodge.

I heard every morning the song of the bells and the noise when a train passed by. I looked out of my bedroom window to see songbirds and I saw the view of Farley Green and of Little London.

The environments of Brook Lodge are very nice, but I cannot describe it all exactly, because it takes me too long."

Another boy, Rudi Schor, describes the walk from Surrey Hills:

"When we go to Brook Lodge School, we go by the road which is coming from Guildford and going to Dorking. We must go on the road to Albury. On the sides of the road are trees.

From Albury we must go the way by the church. Behind the church we continue the way through the wood. It is a long narrow lane and before we come into the wood are on both sides big trees. It is a very nice way through the woods.

"Behind the wood is the Albury School. It is a very nice building.

We pass by the school and we come to the football-ground. It is a big place where we often play football.

Behind the football-ground we come to the road.

“We must go down, over the railway and behind the railway we come to the Brook Lodge School. This is the best way where we go into the school and home.”

Brook Lodge Guest House is on the right, just over the level crossing.

More locations in the area were found for refugees, with Sheerwater Lodge in West Byfleet...

... and Woodside in Elgin Road, Weybridge, as well as at Fairhaven Guest House in Holmbury St Mary. Holmbury St Mary British Legion entertained Fairhaven refugees...

while Weybridge Townswomen’s Guild made Sheerwater Lodge residents honorary members.

In 1940, Czech refugee photographer Dr Paul Neustadtl put on an exhibition raising money for the Red Cross with mountain scenes of Czechoslovakia and Austria and his photographs of the Mediterranean, Norway, Greece and North Africa.

In 2021, a refugee descendant in Melbourne, Australia got in touch with these photos.

After her pregnant mother escaped, the first refugee baby was christened in April 1939 by Reverend Philip Gray...

and here he is holding baby Edeltrude Christ on the steps of Albury church., before the family emigrated to Australia.

Nazi intelligence was remarkably good.

All of these places and many of the refugees were being tracked by the Gestapo and names appear in Hitler’s Black Book for immediate arrest when Germany invaded England.

In April 1939 Reverend Gray asked for parcels via The Mayor of Guildford’s Fund for German Refugees, thanked 250 readers for their support and described the situation:

“The most difficult problem is the question of daily occupation. Under the Home Office Regulations, no paid work which might interfere with local employment is sanctioned. For highly industrious men, many of whom have held responsible professional and industrial positions, the complete aimlessness of their existence is an intolerable strain. In Albury, as in most other refugee settlements, we have concentrated on the teaching of English.

Under a staff of voluntary teachers, whose service is beyond all praise, the refugees have been given two hours’ instruction in English daily. The men have been granted permission to do a certain amount of manual work in the grounds of the guest houses. Improvements to the gardens and buildings have been carried out, and the men are thus getting a little daily occupation and physical exercises.

“The younger women and elder girls, under the Home Office sanction, have been placed in domestic service.

The elder married women, who are unfit for domestic service, have been taught English cookery, housekeeping and dressmaking in a domestic science school, under a trained instructress. This is held each week in the village hall.

The girls of school age attend the village school.

Eight boys, from ten to sixteen years of age, are being educated in a German-English boarding school which has been started here. The boys are housed in a cottage adjoining one of the guest houses, and are under the charge of a retired English preparatory school headmaster, assisted voluntarily by two Sudeten school masters, who are resident in this settlement.”

As a 10 year old boy, Roger Taylor remembers Frau Seifert doing housework for his mother at their home, The Mu, in Brook Lane.

Her Sudeten husband who was a barber also visited to cut his father’s hair.

Reverend Gray’s account continues:

“The boys play football with the village school; have been enrolled as Boy Scouts and attached to a Guildford Patrol; they do their gym and physical training under a Sudeten P.T. instructor; have their gardens and their carpenter's shop, where they have turned out simple furniture for their school. Lectures in German on English life and customs have been given fortnightly by a skilled lecturer on the staff of Messrs. Thomas Cook and Sons.”

Two older couples got engaged. One of the parents wrote:

“Our son Ludwig had made the acquaintance of a German girl, Anneliese, at Easter 1939 when she happened to come into our camp, together with a few girl friends, to watch a football match. She was employed as a housemaid by Reverend and Mrs Hutton at The Squintz in The Fairway, Merrow.

Soon the two young people fell in love...

“On Saturday, 1st July 1939, we celebrated their wedding at the register office at Guildford. So we had gained a daughter-in-law!

Good English friends of ours had arranged a reception so that the wedding was one of our happiest days.

“Also the 'Surrey Times' published a large picture of the wedding party, and a report on that important event: “Cupid among the Refugees”.

On Monday evening, Rev. Gray granted a special blessing to the young couple in Albury Church; this simple ceremony was very impressive.

Alas! already on Friday, 14th July 1939...

“Ludwig and Anneliese left us for Canada, under the auspices of the emigration scheme for Sudeten refugees, to found a new future as settlers and pioneers in the Province of Saskatchewan, full of best hopes and accompanied by our heartiest wishes.”

The Red Falcon Scouts meanwhile had an invitation:

“As the summer holidays approached, we accepted with enthusiasm and real gratitude an invitation from the national organisation to take part in a tented camp.

We were veterans of countless international childrens' republics, so with aplomb we erected our tent at Selsey on the south coast in August 1939 and carried out camp activities.

“We were overjoyed when joined by southern-looking Boy Scouts.

Their eyes, too, lit up when they spotted our falcon pennant fluttering in front of our tent.

They turned out to be refugee children from the Spanish Republic.

There was a language barrier unfortunately but in the evening, when we were singing camp songs well known to both groups, there was no such problem.

“The next morning we had an embarrassing interview with the camp leadership.

It was reproachfully pointed out to us that in the English Scouting movement it was not the custom to close the evening get-together round the camp fire with the Internationale.

When we insisted on continuing to express feelings of solidarity with our Spanish comrades there followed a noticeable cooling of goodwill and tolerance.”

Refugees were not allowed to take paid work but, to start with, there was plenty to do ...

around the grounds of the holiday camps

There was tennis to play

at Brook Lodge

The Sudetens built a swimming pool at Surrey Hills...

with an official opening

and enjoyed by all thereafter.

Days of innocence - look at that knife in the waistband of the boy on the diving board!

Eventually, there was time for sitting outside the many now-completed chalets

...

as well as playing cards ...

preparing food...

enjoying the sunshine at Brook Lodge...

or at Surrey Hills...

and generally ragging about.

I don't believe a single one of these chalets still survives.

The owner of Brook Lodge Guest House, Mrs Bedford in the white dress, is here with some of the refugees

One lucky family ...

had a balcony at Brook Lodge.

There were flowers to pick ...

Interesting places, like Gardeners Cottage with its six Pugin chimneys, to look at...

and local beauty spots in the Surrey Hills,

with" the lakes

and Silent Pool to visit.

But then:

"In September the next and final school term began under changed circumstances. Great Britain was on a war footing.

Until then, the possibility had existed - in fact the probability - that we would be deported sooner or later to some remote part of the British Empire. The outbreak of the war put an end to overseas transports and allowed us to stay in the United Kingdom for an unlimited period. And from now on, girls were allowed to attend our school lessons.

Our nostalgic evenings became more serious considering what was ahead of us in the way of taking part personally in allied war action, about the coming fate of our homeland and its inhabitants and last, but not least, that we would soon be saying farewell to each other

"In late autumn we took part for the last time as Boy Scouts in a thought provoking ceremony.

The 11th November was a general memorial day on which at 11 a.m. - the hour at which the cease-fire came into force in 1918 - all traffic stopped for 2 minutes.

"On that 11th November in 1939 we honoured, at the express wish of our English friends, not only the fallen on the side of the allies but also all victims of the First World War, whatever their nationality."

Also amongst those at Brook Lodge were the Austrian owners of the famous Café Schindler at Innsbruck, Hugo and Edith Schindler.

They operated this long-standing distillery in Innsbruck as well.

The family, with their son Kurt, fled before Kristallnacht, which resulted in the takeover of their businesses by Nazis.

After the war, the Schindlers were able to return and repossess their café.

One hundred years after its foundation, Kurt's daughter, Meriel Schindler, has just published her remarkable book 'The Lost Café Schindler - one family, two wars and the search for truth'.

As winter 1939 drew on, Connie Miles, who lived at Springfield in Shere, kept a diary which described how things were for the refugees:

"Met Margaret Bray, who is a land girl and was milking cows at four-thirty in the moonlight this morning.

Her hostess, who is chairman of a Sudeten refugee committee, was rung up today to be informed that

a) they wanted more pillowcases, and

b) some felt so miserable that they even contemplated suicide.

"I was horrified to read of the Gestapo methods with the Czech students in Prague.

Rousing them at 3am and making them come off to prison in their night clothes; pouring cold water all over them when they arrived.

It is admitted it seems, in Germany, that there were 1,700 executions of these students.

What a time we live in, yet all seems so safe in this little Surrey community tonight, where supper slowly warms in the oven and there is perfect stillness outside.

Not one glimmer of light can I see in the village.

"We went to lunch with Mrs Rayne at the Farm; a lovely room, big white chrysanthemums, huge chimneypiece and log fire.

In the farmyard was a man with a brilliant blue shirt, piling logs. "That is the national shirt of the Sudeten Germans", said our host.

The foreigner, happy-eyed, was piling the logs with great art.

Czech President Dr. Benes, they think, is not keen that his men should join our army, and many have no jobs: lawyers and doctors.

"Mrs Rayne had just got permission for a young doctor to 'observe' in Guildford hospital, and was fighting to get a Czech boy into the technical school at Guildford, already overrun with evacuees.

"Bey came to sherry and tells me that a baker, an elderly Czech refugee, is allowed to work at last in Guildford and is radiantly happy.

His wife is to have a little home again of her own; they are leaving their sad haven here at last and taking lodgings in town.

"Robin reads out that nearly 800 Czech officers have been arrested lately in Prague and may be shot.

"The Hydcs to tea.

Bey, who teaches the local Czechoslovakians English, tells me four peasant boy weavers are at last to be allowed to weave, and depart for Manchester immediately.

Also one toolmaker has got his permit and travels off to a Kent factory with his wife and children."

September 1940 was warm and the boy in the middle, Leo Hieke, saved the life of a drowning boy at Shere Swimming Pool...

... and was awarded the Gilt Cross, signed by Lord Baden Powell himself.

Several refugees worked locally in the Women's Land Army, here in a field with irrigation pipes...

... and here in the packing shed at the Secrett's Hurst Farm in Milford.

Those who had not been given permits to work took up other tasks, like Sigmund Löwi here, firewatching at the Co-op in Guildford.

Winter brought snow, which provided purpose for the men...

... and entertainment for the youngsters.

"By the end of the year, Brook Lodge School had fulfilled its self-imposed task and its pupils were ready to continue and successfully complete their general education but with teaching in the English language."

During the week before Christmas, Czech refugees staying at Brook Lodge formed a choir and sang carols in the area, collecting £10 17s for the Red Cross Fund.

The same week the assistant curate, Rev Tupper, was fined 10s by Guildford magistrates for having an unscreened light in his premises.

Here is that very naughty Reverent Tupper, with some of the refugees at Christmas.

Growing vegetables became a major activity

There were tasks for the young ones, making clackers...

... to make a dreadful noise and scare away the birds.

At 16, the diary writer Herbert Löwit went on...

to Kingston Day Commercial School where, following an appeal at a school assembly, he was 'adopted' by the Guy family in Tolworth.

From Kingston he witnessed the Blitz over London in the autumn of 1940 and then...

On his 18th birthday, 1st May 1941, he reported for duty with the Czechoslovak Independent Brigade.

They besieged Dunkirk and on VE Day he acted as the German/Czech/English translator.

He and Theresie, a girl he met at Brook Lodge, ended up marrying and lived in Essex...

... until his death in 2012.

Others tried life in Czechoslovakia under communism and many went to Canada.

As for the guest houses, in the 1939 census 54 people were listed at Surrey Hills with 52 living at Brook Lodge.

At Surrey Hills, apart from bell tents and chalets, to the rear left of this photograph you can just see an old double decker bus for families to live in.

Surrey Hills fizzled out in the 1960s...

with the swimming pool and climbing frame becoming abandoned.

The large 3 storey house at Brook Lodge, with its loggia, gardens, lily pool, summerhouse and Lavender Walk...

where the camera stands in this photo, was demolished during the 1950s - leaving just this onetime stable block, then school house, and now cottage part still remaining.

This was Brook Lodge cottage in August 1976.

Nowadays, the roadway door to the big Lodge house porch is simply bricked up.

Treetops in Winterfold was founded in 1925 by the Merritt brothers, Clarion Cycling Club members from Leytonstone who frequented the Surrey Hills.

The house at the top there...

still looked much the same in 1982.

By September 1939 Sudeten refugees had moved on from Treetops and it reverted to providing breaks for Londoners.

During the 1940s disused railway carriages were added to provide more accommodation.

Some of their chalets remained in use...

right up until the mid 1980s.

In 1958, the 20th anniversary of Munich, this reunion of Czech refugee friends was held beside the cricket pitch on Albury Heath

In 2018, this old table was about to go onto the bonfire during a stable and outbuildings clear out at Upham near Southampton.

It had been at the premises 40 years earlier when the present owners arrived.

They looked on the internet and got in touch

In black paint it says:

"Sudeten German Refugees works for the comrades in Surrey Hills

Thomas Haberkorn - Heinrich Wirnitzer - Henry Weisbach

17th March 1939"

This extraordinary discovery is still in my garage. If it weren't for Covid, it would now be at a planned refugee museum in Berlin.

Let's end, before they dispersed, with this photo by the Brook Lodge schoolhouse of 50 of the 150 Sudeten Czechs who were the Reverend Gray's 'refugee children'.

END