

Message from Yvonne Rick regarding her mother's recollection of life in the Albany Home Westcott

The puzzle surrounding my late mother's early years is gradually being solved and I am very appreciative of the prompt help you have given me.

The article "Westcott in the News 1918" was so interesting - a lovely insight into how things were in a small village. The paragraph about the failure of the standard fruit crop at Westcott rang a bell as I remember my mother saying that the Home always made a lot of jam from fruit grown in their own garden, but one year the children were all sent out to pick wild fruit. Perhaps she was part of this fruit collection scheme during her first year at the Home. She also remembered food rationing coming into force during WW1, so I found that particular paragraph fascinating also.

On the whole my mother and her sister (Gertrude and Lily Budden) were very unhappy at the Albany Home for Girls which was, as described, a place where homeless girls were trained for domestic service. My mother said the girls did constant housework under a very strict regime. They all had chores to do both before and after school and she remembers often having to scrub a floor before leaving for school over snow covered fields in mid-winter. On one occasion she was so cold that she fainted on reaching the warm school assembly hall ! Apparently the orphans were always shivering with the cold in winter and suffered terribly from chilblains.

There were two women in charge of the children at the Home and the girls had to call them "Aunt" which my mother resented as she knew she was not related to them and as they were so strict my mother and her sister felt no affection for them at all. My mother said the children did all the domestic chores at the Home, helping with the laundry, cooking and cleaning and everything had to be done to perfection as part of their training to become domestic servants on leaving the Home at 14 years of age. Not surprising really that the sisters never wanted to say much about their early years !