

CARDALL'S CORNER

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The Winter of 1947

By Rowan Parker



In January 1947, along with his 18th birthday cards, Rowan Parker received his National Service call-up papers. It snowed on and off from Christmas, but in March the snow fell in earnest, and this is Rowan's account of a trip home from Leamington in that famously snowy Winter of 1947, nearly 70 years ago.

The roads were relatively clear 'cause they used to put black ash on them in those days - never heard of putting salt on roads then. It was clinker they used to call it. Come Wednesday 4th March, my father very magnanimously gave me the afternoon off, because I was joining the army the next day. So I and my friend, the late Alec Baldwin, decided we'd go to the pictures to celebrate my last day of freedom and we went, catching a bus outside Albert Smith's shop on Market Hill and the bus got us there, no problem ... bang on time.

As we were walking along to the Regent Cinema from the bus stop in High Street, Leamington, it started to snow - great big flakes - but we carried on. When we came out of the pictures it was dark, it was still snowing, and the snow outside the Regent Cinema was at least a foot deep. We waded round to High Street, and believe it or not, there was a bus waiting at the bus stop, so we all got on it.

Now I remember there were only about four males on the bus - the rest were Land Girls - Land Girls always had Wednesday afternoons off, so they'd all been to the various picture houses in Leamington. The next thing we know the conductor comes onto the bus and says 'the driver's quite willing to have a go to get to Southam, but he doesn't think he will be able to'. 'However', he said, 'we're going to have a go' and we set off ploughing through the snow. He got us as far as Radford Semele and actually got up the hill past the brewery and into the middle of the village by the pub. There he came to a halt 'cause someone waved him down telling him the road was blocked. There was no way he was going to get through, because a bus was across the road by the police house. So that was it. We started off walking and we were very good 'cause we were escorting these poor 'defenceless' Land Girls!

As we got nearer Southam it started to snow heavily again so by the time we got to the bottom of Woodbine Hill we looked like walking snowmen and we were all very tired and very cold. The boys were only dressed in wartime grade utility clothing, which was not very good quality, whereas the Land Girls were wearing thick cord trousers and army issue type greatcoats. Alec Baldwin was first to reach home on the Leamington Road and I was second on Market Hill. The remaining two lads escorted the girls to their hostel in Welsh Road West. I don't remember much about what happened after reaching home, but later my Mother told me that I spent much of the rest of the night in agony thawing out. I had arrived home at 12.30am, so the journey had taken about 3 and a half hours. It snowed for the rest of the night and by morning there was at least 2 feet of snow and in a lot places there were drifts reaching 6 to 7 feet. I was supposed to report to Budbrooke Barracks at Warwick on 5th March 1947, but instead reported to the Police station. I did not get to Warwick until the following Sunday, but that is another story.

Do you remember the Winter of 1947? If you are interested in sharing your memories, please contact Southam Heritage Collection. We are in the basement of Vivian House, Market Hill and are open on Tuesday mornings from 10am to 12 noon. Contact: 01926 613503 email southamheritage@hotmail.com visit our website www.southamheritage.org and find us on Facebook.



This 1947 image from our archives is not Rowan's bus, but shows a similar situation with another snow-bound bus near Southam.