



Home Front: Attitudes to foreigners

This transcript is from Marjorie Cook's recorded interview in the 1980s. She tells about attitudes of local people to the Belgian refugees in Wolverton (the first foreigners that some people had seen) and their attitudes to Germans.

Wolverton had given homes to several families of Belgian refugees and lavished care on them. Marjorie Cook was a child at the time and remembers the treatment they got. She recalls in her interview an incident in the summer of 1916, which followed a winter of severe blizzards when trees and telegraph poles had been blown over:

"At that time, the only bathing place was down the viaduct. So in the summer, we all used to go down there for bathing. At that time too, we had the first refugees from Belgium and they were given a house in the Stratford Road. Well, these refugees got invited out an awful lot - out for meals and things and were made a fuss of.

And my close friend who lived next door to me, I think we were a bit envious of these refugees and the treatment they had. So one day, coming up from bathing in the river, we pretended to be refugees and we jabbered away in what we hoped sounded something like a foreign language. And two ladies stopped us and asked us if we were refugees and we nodded and they gave us a penny.

Well, my little friend had a conscience and she was quite sure that that penny would bring us nothing but bad luck. So she persuaded me to bury the penny down the bottom of a pole down the Haversham Road, that earlier on had been knocked down with the blizzard. Well, by the time we'd got to the station, I'd persuaded her that it was a wicked waste of a penny. So we went back and we tried to dig this penny up. And as all the poles had been redone and the soil was loose, we never found that penny.

.... There had been early hostility to Germans, but that dissipated as the war went on. A German family of jewellers in Wolverton had their shop window broken, and another trader hastily posted a notice in his window to say that his name was Swiss and not German."