

Refugees in Dolton

As a child I was told about some foreign fishermen who lived near Stafford Barton. At the time this seemed a bit unlikely, so needed further investigation. This is what I have been able to find out. [As always there may be things I miss out or get wrong, so please do let me know]

On 9th April 1940 Norway was occupied by German forces. At this time a Norwegian whaling boat was out at sea, and as a result of this news, the crew decided not to return to an occupied country, instead they sailed on to England.

Not really sure why they were then placed so far from the sea, but they ended up being housed here in the little valley beside the stream below Stafford Barton, on the Dolton/Dowland boundary, and here they remained for the rest of the war as refugees; Some think that they did some forestry work while they were here.

They were housed in single-decker buses which had been converted in London for the purpose and were towed back to Devon by Jack Sanders of Halfpennyland, along with two of his brothers. These were lined up in Jack's yard before being taken down to their final destination. They had been painted khaki and one of the buses contained rows of wooden lockers, some had several bed spaces, one had kitchen equipment and one or more had round wood burning stoves and was where the men could sit, relax and spend spare time together.

One of these Norwegian men was called Aksel Molvik. Described by people who knew him as a giant of a man, with "hands like shovels". They must have seemed, to the local population, like an odd bunch of men who spoke a strange language, but they were accepted here as all comers are.



Aksel, who would have been in his late-30s at that time, caught the eye of Archie Parkhouse's sister Laura; both had been married before – Aksel's first wife had died, but he had 3 daughters and 2 sons in the Norwegian county of Trøndelag, and Laura was the mother of Claude French.

They eventually married in London (see photo) and after a while living there, followed by a spell at Merton, they eventually settled in Upcott, where they raised their daughter, Julie. They also kept a smallholding on the Stentiford land.

The rest of the crew, as far as we know, eventually returned to Norway. Aksel died in 1971 and Laura in 1988. Both are buried in Dolton churchyard.