

## WOLF WAHLE

Wolf Wahle was born in Berlin in 1925 to photographer Max and his wife Erna. He had a happy childhood with his parents, grandparents and siblings. Wolf was 14 ½ years old when World War II started. By 1943, Wolf was 18 and the war was still going on – he was called up to fight and left Berlin.

### **Becoming a prisoner of war**

In September 1944, Wolf was taken a prisoner whilst fighting in France. Wolf managed to escape with another soldier and got on a train. However, their plan didn't work as they were soon found and sent to a prisoner of war (POW) camp in Belgium.

After a while, Wolf was moved to Britain. He was sent to Ettington Park Camp near the Vale of Evesham, where POWs worked on the land. Wolf worked on many farms and market gardens in the area and got to know it well.

### **Working on the land**

Farmers had to pay £4 and 10 shillings a week for each POW they hired. Of these £4 and 10 shillings, POWs were paid 1 shilling a day in plastic money, which could be used in the camp shop. They were paid in plastic money rather than real coins to make it harder to escape.

### **Creating work**

POWs only got paid if they worked and there wasn't enough work for all 1000 prisoners in the camp. Those without work made wooden objects, such as toys, sewing baskets and wooden shoes for women, which they smuggled out of the camp and sold to local people.

## ***Bending the rules***

Most farmers found the German prisoners of war (POWs) to be good workers. POWs were only allowed to help with farming or market gardening. However, farmers would sometimes ask for a POW with certain skills, such as a watchmaker, builder or carpenter. This usually meant that the farmer needed a clock fixing or a wall repairing, for which they would pay the POW in food or cigarettes.

## ***Life in a prisoner of war camp***

Camp life was strict, but there were some comforts. POWs had access to doctors, a library and English lessons, which Wolf used to study hard and became good at English. The prisoners amused themselves by putting on plays and shows.

## ***Going home?***

World War II ended in 1945, but most German prisoners of war weren't allowed to return home for another 3 years. Some POWs were unsure about going back to Germany, as their country had been divided up, with America, Britain and France controlling one part and the Soviet Union (Russia) the eastern half.

Wolf wanted to stay in Britain, as he knew that the food and money parcels he was sending back to his family were useful. Even though Wolf was no longer a prisoner of war, he was only allowed to stay in Britain if he had a job on a farm or as a builder. Luckily for Wolf, he was able to find work – one of the jobs was for a market gardener in Offenham. A couple of years later, Wolf married a lady from Evesham and they stayed in the area for the rest of their lives.

*These snippets are taken from an account of Wolf Wahle's life written by Gloria M Winfield in 2020 for the Market Gardening Heritage project. The account is based on Wolf Wahle's memoirs, local memories and archival research.*