

# THE SILVER GHOSTS

AN ELTHAM SCHOOL STORY BY HOLLY WEBB



ELTHAM CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
PRIMARY SCHOOL

2014



“Arthur! Wake up!”

Someone elbowed him in the ribs, and Arthur jerked awake, blinking. The great silver shapes were still floating in front of his eyes, lit up in the beams of the searchlights.

“Miss Stone was watching you,” his friend Will whispered.

“Thanks,” Arthur muttered, hiding a yawn by pretending to scratch his nose. He looked down at the arithmetic he was supposed to be doing, and his scratchy pencil marks wobbled in front of his eyes. The numbers just didn’t make sense.

He nibbled his pencil, keeping a careful eye on Miss Stone at the front of the class, and smiled to himself as he saw Elsie Beckwith on the other side of the classroom, slumped across her desk. Elsie lived down the street from him, and



she'd been out watching the raid last night too. Her dad had been carrying her on his shoulders, so she could see above people's heads.

Carefully, Arthur leaned over and poked Grace, the girl who sat across the aisle from him. She glared, and Arthur rolled his eyes, pointing with his pencil at Elsie. "Wake her up!" he mouthed at Grace, and she looked sideways, and then nodded.

Arthur shot upright as Miss Stone turned round from the board, and stared down at his book, trying to look deep in thought. She hadn't seen him.

His shoulders slumped a little, and he felt a warm blanket of sleep begin to wrap itself round him again. Anxiously, Arthur bit the back of his hand to wake himself up.

Miss Stone wasn't all that strict – not nearly as bad as Mr Poulter, who'd been their teacher before the war started. Arthur had felt quite sorry for the army recruits, when Mr Poulter went off to be a PE instructor at the barracks. But at least it meant Mr P was







shouting at somebody else instead. And the soldiers would be the fittest they'd ever been, before they went off to the front line. Mr P would make sure of that.

Arthur gave himself a little shake, and carefully wrote down what might be the answer to the next sum. Miss Stone might not be as strict as Mr Poulter, but she didn't like daydreaming.

But it was so hard not to! He'd hardly had any sleep at all the night before – the Zeppelins had come over at about half-past eleven, and the sound of the guns firing up at them had wakened the whole neighbourhood. Everyone had piled out of doors, wrapped in coats, and trailing blankets. It was only October, but there was a cold bite to the night air already.

It had been like nothing he had ever seen. The Zeppelins were so enormous, so huge as they glided through the golden shafts of searchlight. They seemed to move incredibly slowly and yet their engines made a great low growl, like a thunderstorm echoing around the sky.




Arthur shivered. There had been something ghostly about them, that slow, stately flight across the village, even with the thunder of the guns, and the fireworks of the bursting shells scattering shrapnel across the sky. Every time he closed his eyes, he seemed to see the great cigar-shaped airships travelling by.

When he got to school this morning, everyone had been talking about it, shouting excitedly about the fiery flashes of the anti-aircraft guns, and the bombs they'd seen falling from the great ships. Timmy Hodge swore that he'd seen one fall behind his house, and it had blown a great big hole in his dad's vegetable patch, but no one believed him. The bombs hadn't come any closer than Woolwich, Arthur's dad had said at breakfast.




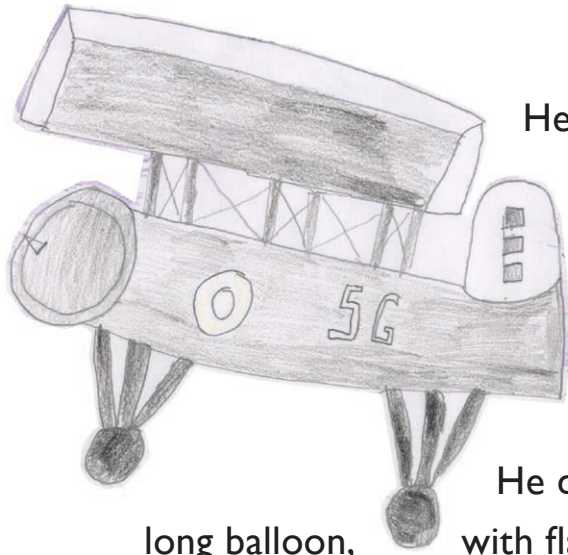




Maybe they'd play Zeppelins in the playground now, Arthur thought. Airships instead of cavalry. That would be good. When they played cavalry charges, or infantry attacks from the trenches, someone always had to be the enemy. Even though they all took turns, it still meant getting properly beaten up for the half the week. Timmy Hodge had punched him in the stomach yesterday, and called him a Hun, and he hadn't even sounded very sorry afterwards.

Arthur sighed. At least they were only playing at it. Mrs Bailey next door had walked into his mum's kitchen last week, and his mum had taken one look at her, and pushed him and Annie, his little sister, out into the street to play. Albert Bailey had died, Mum told him afterwards. He'd been missing for a long while, but there'd been hope that he was just a prisoner in the hands of the Germans. But Mrs Bailey had had a telegram. She'd known what it was – she hadn't even had to open it. She said she could tell, and she'd brought it round to Arthur's mum, because she couldn't bear to open it on her own. Arthur had liked Albert Bailey.





He gave Arthur and Annie peppermint bulls' eyes out of a bag he always had in the pocket of his uniform tunic. He was huge, with great big shoulders, and it was hard to imagine that he used to be at this same school. Arthur couldn't imagine him ever fitting behind a desk.

He doodled in the margin of his arithmetic book, a long balloon, with flashes exploding all around it. Then he rubbed it out quickly – Miss Stone didn't approve of drawing in books either.

Arthur rested his chin on his hand, and tried to think about multiplication, but the numbers kept shooting up in the air and exploding, and his shoulders drooped. The classroom darkened to the blackness of the night sky, split with long fingers of light, stabbing and pointing as the Zeppelins coasted overhead.

Arthur stared up as the bombs fell, counting them as they dropped spiralling down. Ten? More like fifteen, or twenty even...



He blinked and jumped awake as Will jabbed him in the back again.

“Well? Are you paying any attention, Arthur Banks?” Miss Stone snapped. “How many?”

Arthur swallowed. “Er, twenty, Miss?” He hadn’t any idea what she’d asked him, but it was worth a try.

Miss Stone looked rather surprised. “Yes. Exactly. Well done. But sit up straight, please. I almost thought you were asleep there for a moment.”

Arthur nodded, and tried to look awake. Only five more minutes, until the bell for dinner...



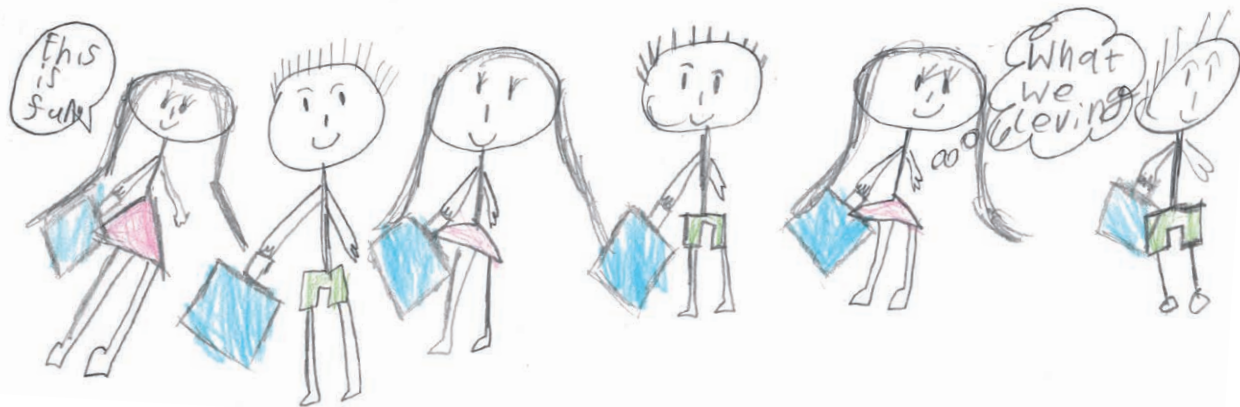


The old man closed his eyes, remembering the great silent ships, and that terrifying, exciting night. Then he opened them again, and stared out at a very different classroom.

“Thank you so much, Mr Banks. That was really fascinating for us all to hear about. Now, has anyone got any questions? Yes, Jessica, you can go first.”

“You were really alive during the war?”

“The First World War,” Miss Thompson pointed out. “So it started in 1914. One hundred years ago.”



# WELCOME TO GREGORY CLASS!

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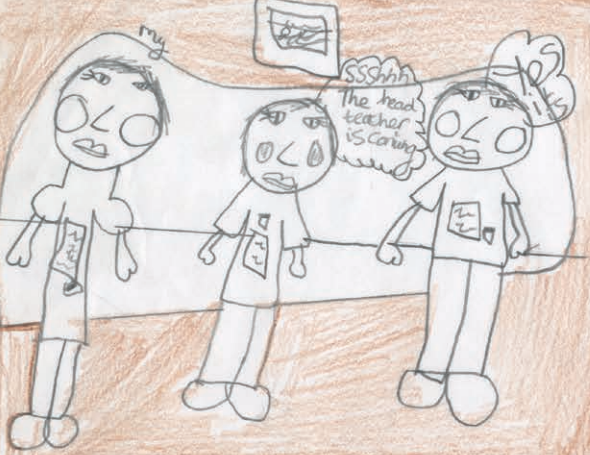
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Smart board

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We are  
super  
teachers!







Jessica frowned, and muttered to Lucy, who was sitting next to her. Then she waved her hand in the air again. “Umm, how old are you, Mr Banks?”

Arthur, sitting at the front of the class on Miss Thompson’s chair, snorted with laughter. “When those Zeppelins came across, in 1916, I was eight years old. So you tell me how old I am.”

There was a buzzy, thinking silence as everyone tried to work it out.

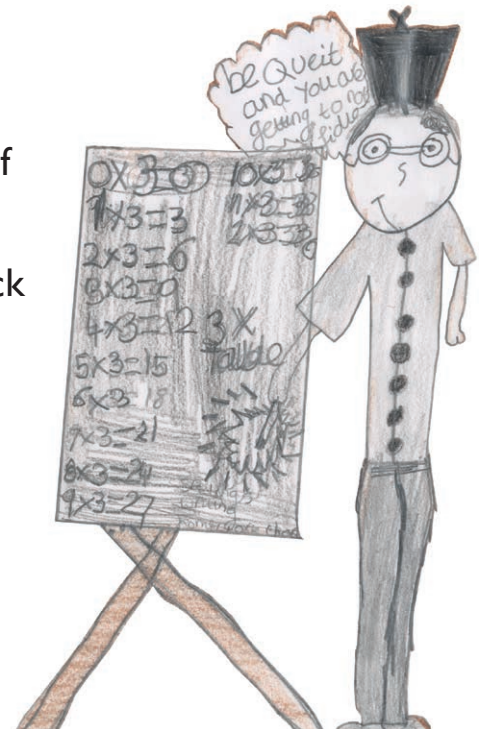
“A hundred and six!” Jessica gasped, eventually.

“Exactly.”

“And you went to this school? Our school?” one of the boys asked.

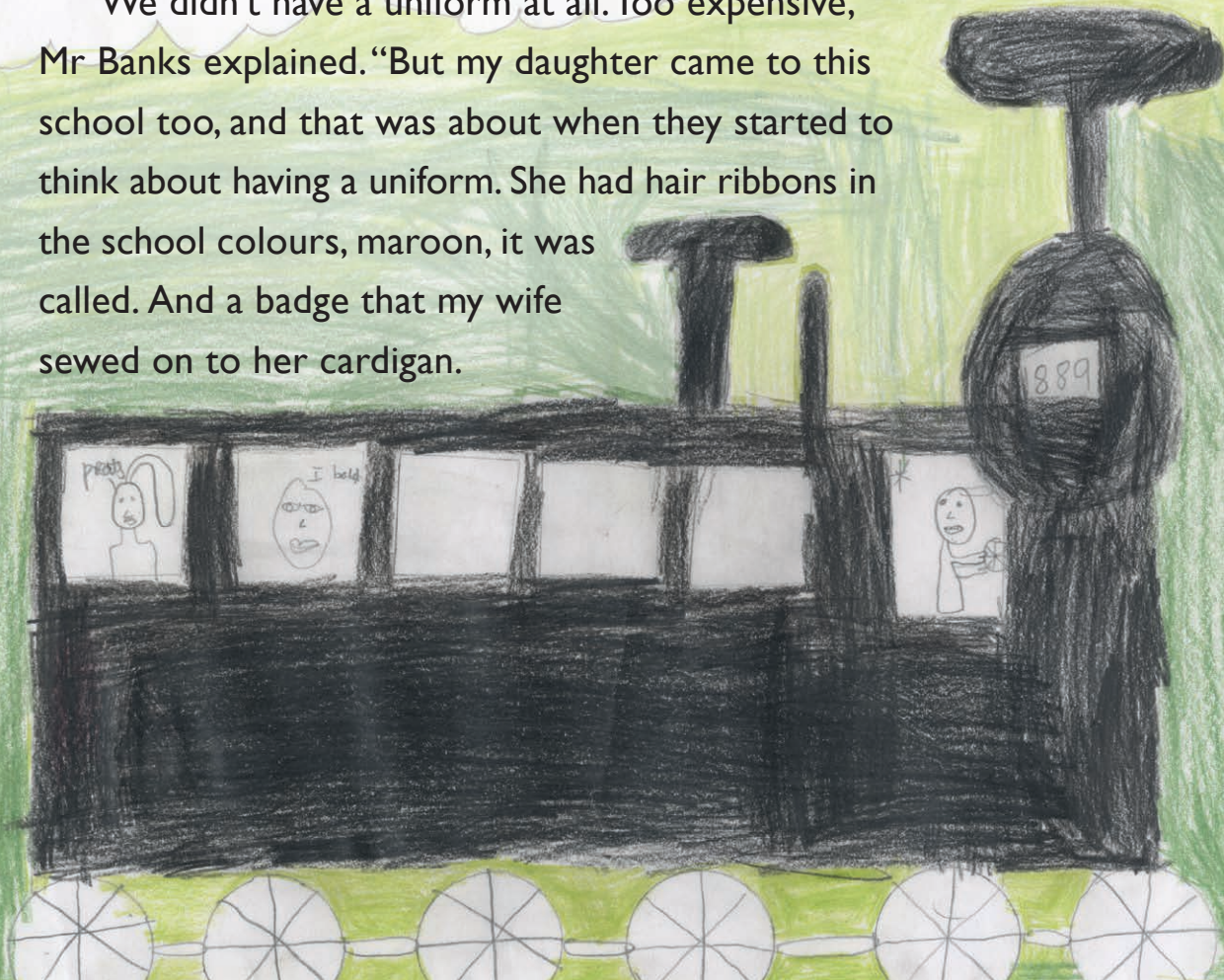
“I did. It looks a good bit different now, though. Back then we had fifty in a class sometimes. And all of us sitting in desks in rows facing the front.”

Everyone in the class looked round, trying to imagine what it had been like.



“Did you have the same school uniform as us?” Tom asked. “Dark red jumpers?”

“We didn’t have a uniform at all. Too expensive,” Mr Banks explained. “But my daughter came to this school too, and that was about when they started to think about having a uniform. She had hair ribbons in the school colours, maroon, it was called. And a badge that my wife sewed on to her cardigan.



That was just after the war. The Second World War, I mean.”

“Was your daughter one of the children who was evacuated?” Miss Thompson asked thoughtfully. “No, perhaps she was too young.”

“Lizzie was definitely too young. She was only three, but she went anyway. On the train, just them and a couple of the teachers. Her and her brother John, he was six, so he’d started school already. We wanted them to go – we were worried about them staying in London. We knew what it was like, hearing bombs drop all around us, you see. We’d had it already, twenty-five years before.”

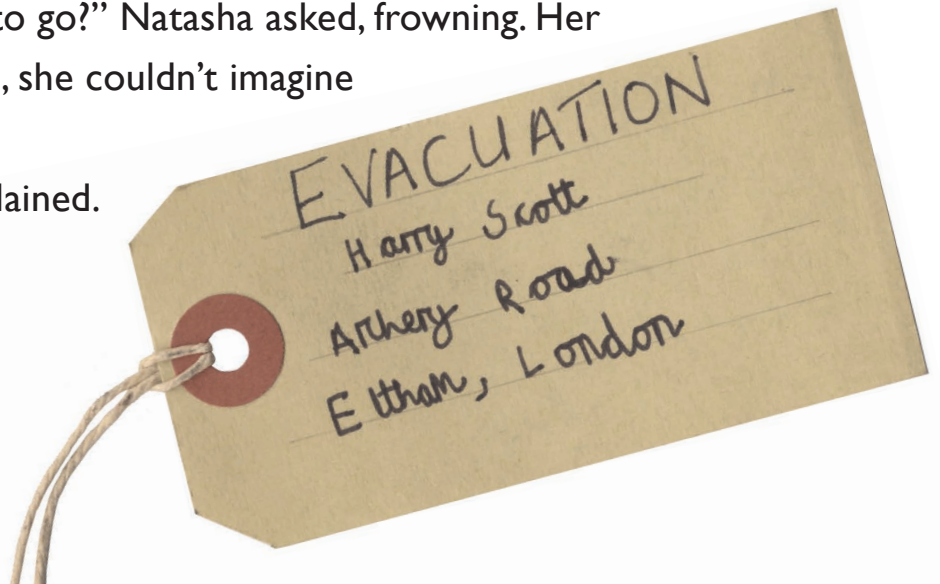
“Where did they have to go?” Natasha asked, frowning. Her little sister was only three, she couldn’t imagine her being sent away.

“Wales,” Mr Banks explained.

“Near Swansea.”

“Wales!”

“I’ve been there!”



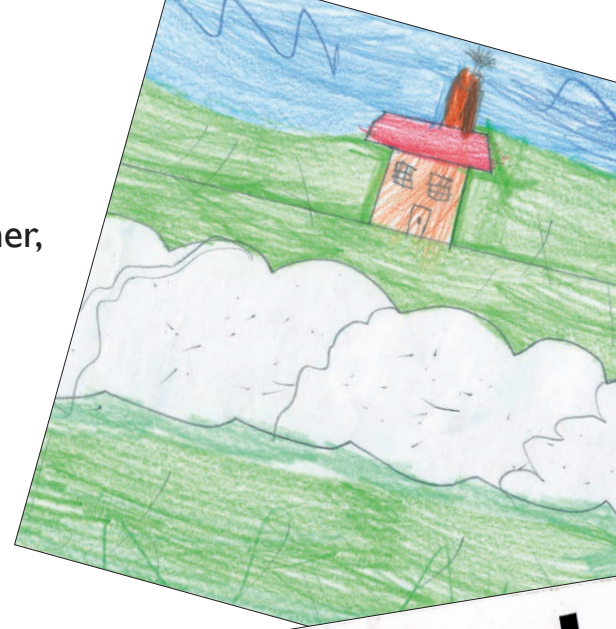
“That’s hours away!”

The class muttered and whispered to each other, thinking about going off without their parents.

“They were lucky,” Mr Banks added. “They got to stay together, and the family they lived with looked after them. Their mum went to see them a few times, and so did I, when I was on leave from the navy, but I didn’t get long.

I only saw Lizzie and John twice, in three years. Then they came back to London, when the Luftwaffe stopped dropping so many bombs, in 42.”

“Three years living with other people! So she was six when she came home? And he was nine?” Lucy gasped.





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“They shouldn’t have come back so early,” Mr Banks told her.

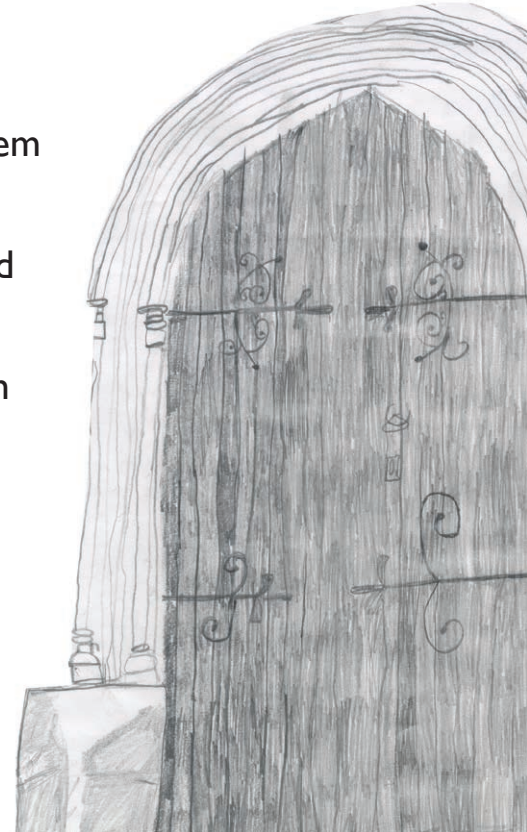
“After that there was a new sort of bomb, the doodlebugs. Have you heard about those?”

“Flying bombs!” Riley yelled, and Miss Thompson glared at him.

“Yes, but put your hand up!”

“Flying bombs, that’s right. One of them took the church spire off, did you know that? Then it landed on the paintworks, and covered the whole of Eltham Hill in paint!

After that the school was used as the church instead, for a while. My sister Annie got married here. You can see in her wedding photo, she’s standing outside the school.”



“It’s nearly lunch time,” Miss Thompson pointed out, glancing at the clock.

“Time for one more question. Ummm, Hannah.”

“Do you still live in Eltham?” Hannah asked, and Arthur Banks grinned at her.

“I certainly do. And so does John, and my granddaughter, Emily. And her son, my great-grandson, Alfie, he’s in your Reception class. He looks just like me, a hundred years ago.”





## **Brief History of Eltham National School**

Our school was founded on 19 September 1813 by the Vicar of St John the baptist, John Kenward Shaw-Brooke, and whilst it cannot lay claim to being the oldest provider of 'education for all', it is certainly amongst the earliest. Up until the 1800s children were rarely educated and from an early age a life of work awaited them. Reading and writing was confined to the wealthy and most certainly not for the masses. However, the industrial revolution changed everything, with many now living and working in villages and towns. Wealth was being created outside of traditional land ownership and 'education for all' was very much in its infancy, mostly through Sunday Schools at the local church. In 1811 the Church of England established The National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church (The National Society). Its aim was to provide a school in every parish, to teach the '4 Rs': Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, and of course, Religion. Unsurprisingly many local clergy often took on this initiative wholeheartedly and to this day the Church of England continues to have a significant role in primary education. This brings us back to the Vicar of St John the Baptist, John Kenward Shaw-Brooke. On 19 September 1813, he proposed to a meeting of local parishioners, that St Johns should accept the National Society's challenge and establish a school to teach 100 boys and 100 girls from the parish. The Eltham National School opened in Pound Place on 16 April 1814.

## **Drawings by pupils of Eltham Church of England Primary School**

Endpapers, Ben Angel, Jaheem Bennett, Max Chappell, Brooke Cloke, Daniel Minendahun, Yasmine Thompson and Jazsmin Trimblett. Title page, Alfie Ballard, p.2, Israel Olaigbe, p.3, Enya Nestic, p.4, Layla Memish, p.5, Olivia Clark, p.6-7, Alex Pasha, p.8-9, Georgia May, p.10, Tara Oloyede, p.11, Oliver Stone, p.12, Jack Stubbs p.13, Lorin Budak, p.14, Nara Ubajekwe, p.15, Elsbeth Bradley, p.16-17, Sadie Jones, p.18, Chisom Iheaku, p.19, Harry Scott, p.20, Amber Forbes and Anezka Bulter, p.21, Kavin Pushparajah, p.22, Victoria Raileanu, p.23, Tyla Farrer.

## **Acknowledgments**

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– David May, Parent Governor