

A POIGNANT STORY ABOUT TWO LOCAL MEN WHO MET WHEN THEY WERE POWs IN THE NOTORIOUS 'BUCHENWALD CONCENTRATION CAMP'. THE SUBSEQUENT WIFE OF ONE OF THESE MEN WAS SENT FROM LONDON AS A CHILD EVACUEE TO GRIFFYDAM WHEN THE FAMILY HOUSE WAS BOMBED AND HER FATHER WAS KILLED



A view of the Buchenwald concentration camp after the liberation of the camp by the Americans on April 11, 1945

**BY SAMUEL T STEWART - AUGUST 2024
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INTRODUCTION

Whilst carrying out some general research, I found the following newspaper story about two local men, George Watmough and John Clarke, who met whilst they were both German POWs in the Buchenwald Concentration Camp towards the end of WW2. I remembered the Watmough family and their two sons, from the time I was living in Coleorton, and I believe I am correct in saying that George Watmough who was a builder, built his own house towards the bottom of Pitt lane

Buchenwald was a concentration camp near Weimar, Germany. Between July 1937 and April 1945, the SS imprisoned some 250,000 persons from countries in Europe there. Together with its many satellite camps, Buchenwald was one of the largest concentration camps established within the old German borders of 1937.

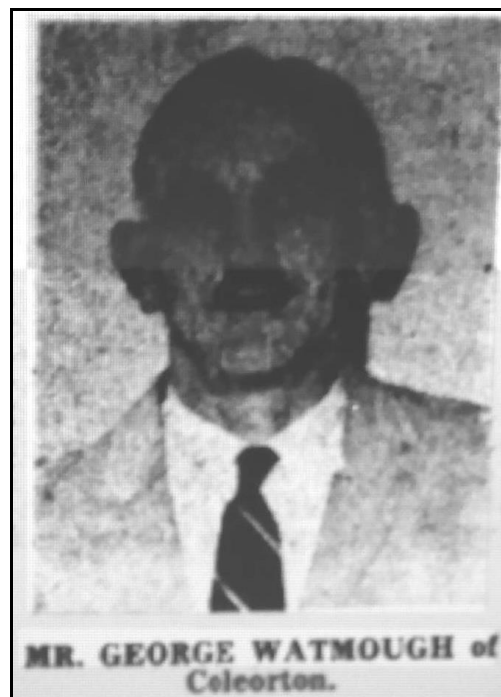
The camp was liberated by the Americans in April 1945 and the author assumes that this was when George Watmough and his friend John Clarke were liberated.

For anyone wishing to do further research on the Buchenwald concentration camp they should visit the 'United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Website'. There are references in the following newspaper article to the conditions in the camp but I was personally quite shocked by the photographic evidence it contains.

Transcribed from the Burton Observer & Chronicle - Thursday 02 Feb 1967

A secret list made by a Coleorton Builder, 51 year old George Watmough, and smuggled out of the infamous Buchenwald concentration camp during the war more than 20 years ago, has become the basis on which about £1 million German compensation to horror camp victims from Britain has been paid out.

Mr. Watmough, of Pitt Lane, Coleorton, has received £184 from the compensation fund.



Another victim, Mr. John Clarke, aged 44, a National Coal Board wages office employee of Torrington Avenue, Whitwick, whose health was seriously impaired by his experience in the camp has been paid £1,100.

It is now thought that there may be a further grant from the German Government, as many of the payments are regarded as inadequate. Mr. Watmough, whose weight while he was in Buchenwald went down to about six stones, told me he has received a letter from one of his colleagues in the camp, saying that £184 for a three month slimming course was not very good compensation.

Mr. Clarke was very ill for many years after the starvation and horror of the concentration camp. Both he and his wife said that those who had received a smaller amount than his £1,100 had by no means been adequately compensated



MR. JOHN CLARKE

It is now nearly three years since Mr. Watmough looked out his faded little booklet of 150 names of the British and Allied concentration camp inmates, and sent details to the British Foreign office. At that time, Mr. Airey Neave, the conservative M.P. for Abingdon, was fighting for £2,000 compensation per head for all British victims, who he claims, were illegally detained in German concentration camps. Mr. Neave had blamed the Foreign office for allowing itself to be beaten and side tracked by the go slow tactics of the Germans. He claimed that Britain was the only country in the world which had at that time failed to get compensation for concentration camp victims.

A local student typed out the names in Mr. Watmough's book. The Coalville and Ashby area is probably the only district in the world from which two men were thrust together in a German concentration camp.

The story of Mr. Watmough's six months in Buchenwald began after he was shot down on an R.A.F. mission over France. The pilot and the rear gunner were killed, but he managed to bale out unharmed, and was found by members of the French Resistance.

The were planning to get him over the Spanish border and provided him with civilian clothes, but he was picked up by the Gestapo within a few days, and flung into a jail near Paris. There he claims, the Germans refused to accept that he was a military prisoner, and he was finally sent to one of the worst civilian concentration camps, 'Buchenwald'. There he saw stark horror all around him.

"I saw thousands of bodies in heaps outside a crematorium daily," he said, "Sometimes some of the 'bodies' were not yet dead. I remember seeing a young girl who had been shot through the neck and was still alive waiting for the crematorium."

It was while in the camp that he got together the names of the Americans, Channel Islanders and Britishers who were kept in a separate group. Later he was transferred to 'Stalag Ouste Three' and finally liberated at the end of the war.

"I shrank from thirteen stones to under six stones while I was at Buchenwald", Mr. Watmough said. "I have never got my old weight back, and I am now eleven and a half stones". I think that in common with other people who suffered similarly, I was entitled to be compensated."

Mr. Watmough's wife, Mrs. Betty Watmough, said : "My husband was shot down in the same week that our house in Lewisham was bombed, and my father was killed. At that time I was sent up to Griffydam, near Ashby as an evacuee. We were married before the war, and by October my husband had been presumed dead and I was drawing a widow's pension, but at Christmas 1944, I learned he was alive.

The other part of the story was taken up by Mr. Clarke, who was unmarried at the time. He was shot down as an air crew sergeant. He joined the resistance for six weeks before being 'sold by the French' and thrown into the same Paris Jail as Mr. Watmough. He met Mr. Watmough in the concentration camp at Buchenwald. Mr. Clarke said "The horror of the place has haunted me ever since."