

The Great Escape – the Farnhill Connection

If you were to ask people in Farnhill what they knew about the Great Escape, they'd probably tell you about the film starring Richard Attenborough, Steve McQueen, etc., the one with the motorcycle rider trying to clear the fence protecting the Swiss border. If you're really unlucky, they might even try to hum or whistle the theme tune.

Fewer people would be able to tell you that the film was actually based on a true story, about a mass-breakout from a German concentration camp during World War II; and it would be very surprising if anyone mentioned that there was a strong connection with Farnhill.

But there was a connection, and this article aims to recount the story of the rather remarkable Zillessen family, who lived in Farnhill during World War II, and which produced not just a key character in the true story of the Great Escape, but an entire family of war heroes.

The article also includes information about the activities of the Kildwick and Farnhill Welcome Home Fund, set up at the end of the war, and which raised £1000 for the returning service men and women of the two villages.

The pre-war years

Erich Max Theodore Zillessen (known as Eric) was born in Wandsworth, London, on 23rd March 1888, into a family of mixed German/English parentage.

His father, Jacob a Wool Merchant, had been born near Dusseldorf in Germany and had married a Yorkshire woman. Their first child, a girl, was born in Germany but by the time Eric was born they had relocated to London.

In July 1893, when Eric was already 5 years old, Jacob became a naturalised UK citizen. His application was signed by H.H. Asquith, who would later become Prime Minister.

No. 7572

(A.)

NATURALIZATION ACTS, 1870.

Certificate of Naturalization to an Alien.

HOME OFFICE, LONDON.

WHEREAS *Jacob Theodor Zillessen*,

an Alien, now residing at *Normandale, Burstock Road, Putney, in the County of Surrey.*

has presented to me, the Right Honourable *Herbert Henry Asquith* one of Her Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State, Memorial, praying for a Certificate of Naturalization, and alleging that he is a

subject of Germany, having been born at *Wickrathberg, in Rhenish Prussia*; and is son of *Julius Marcellus and Johanne Alwine Zillessen*, both of Prussian Nationality = of the age of *Forty years* = a wool merchant = is married and has *Three children* under age residing with him. - viz -

<i>Johanne Margaret Zillessen</i>	aged	<i>9</i>	years
<i>Elisa Alwine</i>	"	<i>8</i>	"
<i>Eric Max Theodor</i>	"	<i>5</i>	"

and.

Figure 1: Jacob Zillessen's naturalisation (page 1)

and that in the period of eight years preceding his application he has resided for five years within the United Kingdom, and intends, when naturalized, to reside therein :

And whereas I have inquired into the circumstances of the case, and have received such evidence as I have deemed necessary for proving the truth of the allegations contained in such Memorial, so far as the same relate to the Memorialist :

Now, in pursuance of the authority given to me by the said Acts, I grant to the aforesaid

Jacob Theodor Zillessen

this Certificate, and declare that he is hereby naturalized as a British Subject, and that upon taking the Oath of Allegiance, he shall in the United Kingdom be entitled to all political and other rights, powers, and privileges, and be subject to all obligations, to which a natural-born British Subject is entitled or subject in the United Kingdom ; with this qualification, that he shall not, when within the limits of the Foreign State of which he was a Subject previously to his obtaining this Certificate of Naturalization, be deemed to be a British Subject, unless he has ceased to be a Subject of that State in pursuance of the laws thereof, or in pursuance of a Treaty to that effect.

In witness whereof I have hereto subscribed my Name this
8th day of *July* 18*93*.

H. H. Asquith

Oath of Allegiance.

I, *Jacob Theodor Zillessen of Normandale
Burstock Road, Putney, in the county of Surrey*

do swear that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Victoria, Her Heirs and Successors, according to law.

So help me GOD.

(Signed)

Jacob Theodor Zillessen

Sworn and subscribed this

17th day of *July* 18*93*.

before me.

(Signed)

S. Horace Candler

*A Commissioner to
administer oaths
in the Supreme Court
of Judicature -* Justice of the Peace
[or other official title].

Registered 20 July 1893

Figure 2: Jacob Zillessen's naturalisation (page 2)

In May 1916, aged 28, Eric married 18-year-old Rosetta Mary Towers from Sheffield.

1916. Marriage solemnized at <u>the Parish Church</u> in the Parish <u>Dunnington</u> of <u>Dunnington</u> in the County of <u>Wells</u>							
Column No.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.
42.	<u>Twenty-fourth May 1916</u>	<u>Eric Mase Theodore Zillesen</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>Bachelor</u>	<u>Sergeant 2/3 West Riding Field Ambulance</u>	<u>3^a Camp Larkhill Dunnington</u>	<u>Jacob Theodore Zillesen</u>
		<u>Rosetta Mary Towers</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>Spinster</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>65 Danville Street Sheffield</u>	<u>J. Towers (deceased)</u>
Married in the <u>Parish Church</u> according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the <u>Established Church</u> by <u>Licence</u> or after <u>—</u> by me.							
This Marriage was solemnized between us,		<u>Eric Mase Theodore Zillesen</u>	in the Presence of us,		<u>E. G. Gillesen</u>	<u>A. J. Ruddle</u>	
		<u>Rosetta Mary Towers</u>			<u>M. Elington</u>	<u>Chas. H. Harrington</u>	

Figure 3: Eric's marriage certificate

The marriage, by Licence, took place at Larkhill army camp on Salisbury Plain, suggesting that Eric had been conscripted to fight in WW1 and was undergoing training, with the West Riding Regiment, before being sent abroad.

Eric's WW1 service records have not survived – over 30% of all WW1 service records were destroyed in the blitz during WWII – but we can get some idea of his wartime activities from the records of the medals he received.

Name.	Corps.	Rank.	Regtl. No.
<u>ZILLESSEN</u>	<u>RAME</u>	<u>Sgt</u>	<u>1786</u>
<u>Eric</u>	<u>11th Lond. R. & Ind. Liut *</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>405292</u>
<u>Medal.</u>	<u>Roll.</u>	<u>Page.</u>	<u>Remarks.</u>
<u>VICTORY</u>	<u>handh. * off. 13</u>	<u>138.</u>	<u>on 11th Lond. R. 10/18/17</u> <u>Comm: 11/10/17</u> <u>11/12/29 12/6/25. NW/4/8456.</u>
<u>BRITISH</u>	<u>— do —</u>	<u>do</u>	
<u>STAR</u>			
<u>Theatre of War first served in</u>			
<u>Date of entry therein</u>			
<u>13/22</u>			<u>NW/4/8456</u>

Figure 4: Eric Zillesen's WW1 medal card

The medal card shows that by the time he began his service abroad he had transferred from the West Riding regiment to the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC), in which he served as a Sergeant.

On 30th October 1917 he was commissioned as an officer, probably as a 2nd Lieutenant, in the 7th battalion of the London Regiment, before ending the war serving with the 11th battalion.

He received the Victory Medal and the British War medal for his service.



Figure 5: The medals that Eric Zillessen received for his WWI service. Allied Victory Medal (L) and British War Medal (R)

These were the two standard medals issued for overseas service during the period from the start of 1916 to the signing of the peace treaty in 1919.

Eric and Rosetta had four children, two born during the war and two after. They were all born in different locations:

- Marcel Eric Zillessen
Born: 14 January 1917, Northampton, Northamptonshire
- Walter Harold Zillessen
Born: Mar 1918, West Bromwich, Staffordshire
- Geraldine Mary Zillessen
Born: 16 August 1920, St Margaret's-at-Cliffe, Kent
- Theodore Zillessen
Born: 23 January 1926, London

Precisely why the family moved around so much is not known, but it is thought that Eric's sister may have lived in St. Margaret's at Cliffe and the family retained some connection with that place for a number of years.

Around 1930, Eric became Managing Director of the wool business Gerardson's Ltd., which had a factory in Sunbridge Road, Bradford.



Figure 6: Eric Zillessen's business card

The family moved first to Baildon and then, just before the start of WWII, to 62 Starkey Lane, one of a group of houses that was also known as Prospect View.

The Bradford wool industry had strong ties with Germany, stretching back into the 19th century when Germany led the world in the development of the technology associated with dyeing and wool treatments such as water-proofing.

It is perhaps not very surprising, given the family's connections with Germany, that Marcel was sent to Berlin in the late '30s to complete his education and he later became Gerardson's "Overseas Sales Representative".

Marcel learned to speak German with Berlin idioms and an upper-class accent. He also developed a full understanding of German life and culture and witnessed at first-hand the rise of the Nazi regime, including attending at least one Nazi party rally. He later admitted that, had he been younger and gone to school there, he would probably have succumbed to Nazism.

Meanwhile back home, a fifth child, Nicholas, was born in June 1939. Sadly, he died in 1944.

The Zillessen family during WWII

Eric and all four of the Zillessen children served during WWII.

Eric Zillessen in WWII

By the start of WWII Eric was well over the age when he would be expected to carry out active service. However there is good evidence that Eric joined the Cross Hills Home Guard.



Figure 7: Eric and Rosetta Zillessen with either Marcel or Walter

Note: This photograph was found amongst the papers of Herman Lofthouse. The identity of the two adults is beyond doubt – compare the signature above with that on Figure 22.

Although the dedication is to “Cross Hills Company Home Guard”, implying WWII, the photograph was almost certainly taken during WWI (by 1939 Eric was 51 and Rosetta was 42). It is undated but was taken in a studio in Edgbaston, Birmingham, suggesting a date between the birth of Marcel and the birth of Geraldine.

The identity of the child is impossible to determine with certainty, but is likely to be either Marcel or Walter.

Theodore Zillessen in WWII

Theodore Zillessen would have been called-up on his 18th birthday, January 23rd 1944. Although there is no doubt that he served (see later), it has not been possible to determine where or in what capacity. He would not have been sent abroad, as this was not permitted for recruits under the age of 21.

Geraldine Mary (Jill) Zillessen in WWII

It is difficult to assess degrees of bravery but when it come to consciously and deliberately putting yourself in harm's way in order to help others, then Geraldine Zillessen, known throughout her life as Jill, must surely rank amongst the bravest of the brave.

At some point in 1939, probably just after the outbreak of WWII, Jill Zillessen began her training as a nurse at Bradford Royal Infirmary. She qualified in November 1942.

ZAC-ZWI		REGISTER OF NURSES FOR 1943		
Reg. No.	Name.	Permanent Address.	Date and Place of Registration.	Qualifications.
116571	Zillessen, Geraldine Mary	Prospect View, Farnhill-Kildwick, Keighley	Nov. 27, 1942, London	The Royal Infy., Bradford, 1939-1942. By Examination.

Figure 8: Jill Zillessen's first entry in the UK Register of Nurses (1943)

Women were not required to serve in the armed forces during WWII. However, less than three months after qualifying as a nurse, on 8th February 1943, Jill was commissioned as a Sister in Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service (QAIMNS) – with a rank equivalent to that of a Lieutenant in the army (service number 260292). She was 22.



Figure 9: Jill Zillessen, in QAIMNS nurse's uniform

Queen Alexandra's was the nursing service of the army both in the UK and abroad. Jill served in both North Africa and Italy.

A posting abroad as a Queen Alexandra's nurse was a dangerous occupation. Although commissioned officers, QAIMNS nurses did not carry firearms. Also because these young women (and they all were young women) were not in military uniform, they were not covered by the Geneva Convention; however, because they were embedded within the army they were usually treated as if they were combatants.

By 1943, Jill must have been aware of stories of Queen Alexandra's nurses who had been captured and then raped, tortured and murdered – and yet she still volunteered to serve.

Walter Harold Zillessen in WWII

By the start of 1939, possibly even earlier, Walter was no longer living with his family.

The 1939 electoral roll records him living in Bedford and it was there, sometime in the last quarter of 1940, that he was married. By this time he must have been training with the RAF, as he was commissioned as a Probationary Pilot Officer with the RAF Volunteer Reserve on December 14th. (service number: 89302).

ROYAL AIR FORCE RESERVE.
Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve.

GENERAL DUTES BRANCH.

The undermentioned are granted commissions for the duration of hostilities:—

As Pilot Officers on probation.

14th Dec. 1940.
(Seniority 6th Dec. 1940.)

748479 Eric Walter PARTRIDGE (89300).
748474 Robert RICHARDS (89301).
741957 Walter Harold ZILLESSEN (89302).

Figure 10: Notice of Walter Zillessen's commission in the RAF reserve

On the same day he was commissioned he was transferred to the newly formed 86 Squadron, Coastal Command.



Figure 11: 86 Squadron insignia – the motto translates as “flying to liberty”

86 Squadron was formed at Gosport on December 6th 1940, in a coastal fighter role, equipped with Blenheim IVs.

Following training, the squadron moved to Wattisham, Suffolk, in March 1941 and began convoy escort patrols off the East Anglian coast, with a move to North Coates, Lincolnshire, in May. Beauforts replaced the Blenheims from June 1941 with the squadron being fully equipped with the new aircraft by July. These were used for mine-laying, reconnaissance and air-sea rescue patrols, with mine-laying beginning on 15th July 1941.

It was on one of these very early operations that Walter Zillessen was shot down over north Germany and killed, on 17th July 1941. He was 23.

He is buried in the Allied War Graves Commission Sage Cemetery, Oldenburg, and is commemorated on the War Memorial at St. Andrew’s Church, Kildwick, and also at St. Margaret’s-on-Cliffe, Kent.

Zillessen, Walter Harold



Cemetery: Sage War Cemetery

Country: Germany

Area:

Rank: Pilot Officer

Official Number: 86 Sqdn.

Unit: 89302

Force: Royal Air Force

Nationality: British

Details:

17/07/41 Age 23 7. E. 5. Son of Eric Max Theodor and Rosetta Mary Zillessen; husband of Nina Zillessen, of Chatham.

Figure 12: Walter Zillessen's grave, at Sage War Cemetery, Oldenburg, and recorded details



Figure 13: The WWII plaque on the St. Andrew's War Memorial

Marcel Zillessen in WWII

Within a month of the start of WWII Marcel had already enrolled in RAF. The UK 1939 Register, taken on 29th September of that year, lists Marcel as living in Baildon.

SURNAMEN AND OTHER NAMES.	O, V, S, P. or I.	M. or F.	BIRTH-		S, M, W, or D.	PERSONAL OCCUPATION.	See INSTRUCTIONS.
			Day.	Year.			
Zillessen Marcel	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
			14	Jan	1917	Sales Manager Wool Firm	Enrolled RAF

Figure 14: Marcel Zillessen on the UK 1939 Register

His occupation was given as “Sales Manager – Wool Firm” but an additional note records that he was “Enrolled in the RAF”.

When he first volunteered he was approached to work for the secret service - his fluent German and knowledge of Germany made him an ideal candidate for their type of work.

He declined, claiming that subterfuge seemed too devious and that he wanted to confront the enemy ‘face to face’.

Instead he continued in the RAF and, after training in Rhodesia, was assigned to 6 Squadron in North Africa (service number 119089).



Figure 15: 6 Squadron insignia – the motto translates as “eyes of the army”

Flying Hurricanes, the squadron took on the role of “tank busters” for Montgomery’s Eighth Army in its fight against Rommel’s Afrika Korps. For this purpose the aircraft were each fitted with two 40mm cannons under the wings. This gave the squadron its nick-name, “The Flying Can-openers”.

It was at the very end of this campaign, on April 6th 1943, that Marcel Zillessen was shot down and captured by Italian forces during the battle of Wadi Akarit in Tunisia. He was immediately flown to Germany.

The Axis forces in North Africa surrendered on May 13th 1943.



Figure 16: Marcel Zillesen

Eric was notified of his son's capture by telegram to Gerardson's after the information had been picked-up on German radio broadcast.

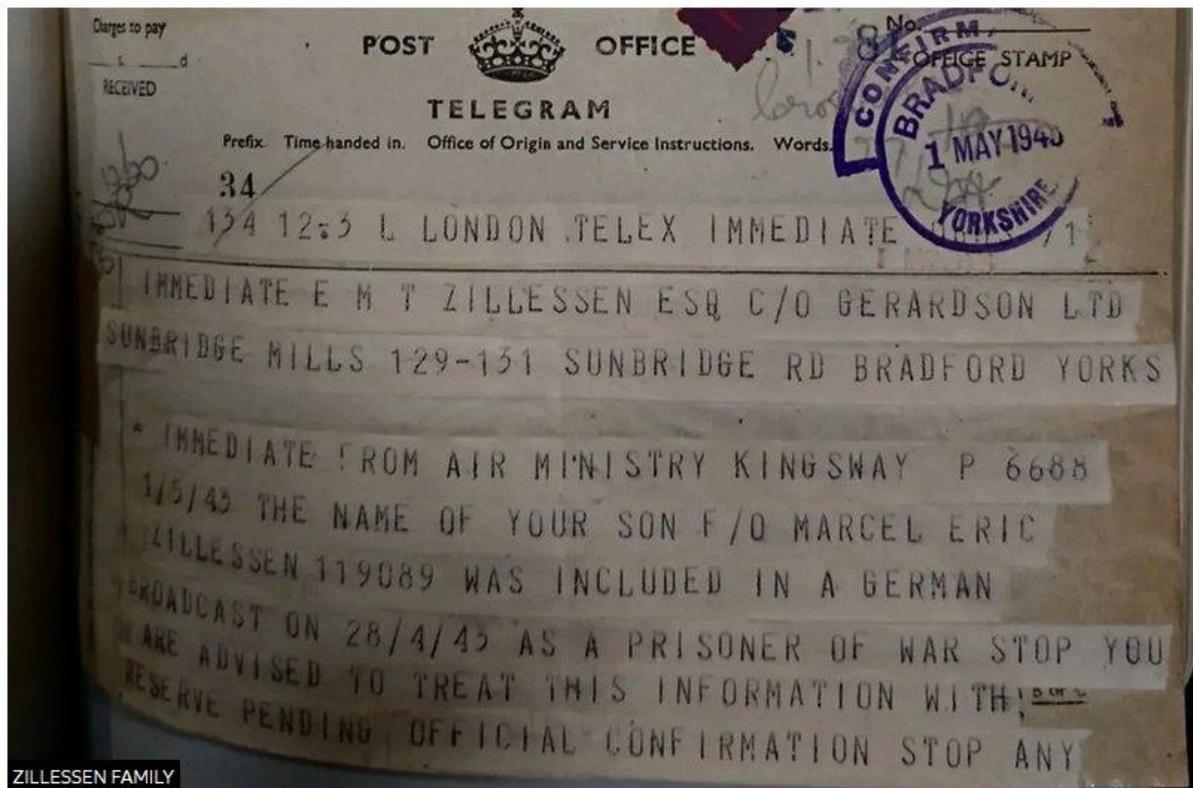


Figure 17: Telegram sent to Eric – Marcel is POW

Marcel (Axel) Zillessen as a PoW – the Great Escape

After his initial interrogation, Marcel was transferred to Stalag Luft III (as prisoner number L3 1094), located at Sagan, 120 miles east of Berlin (now in, Poland).

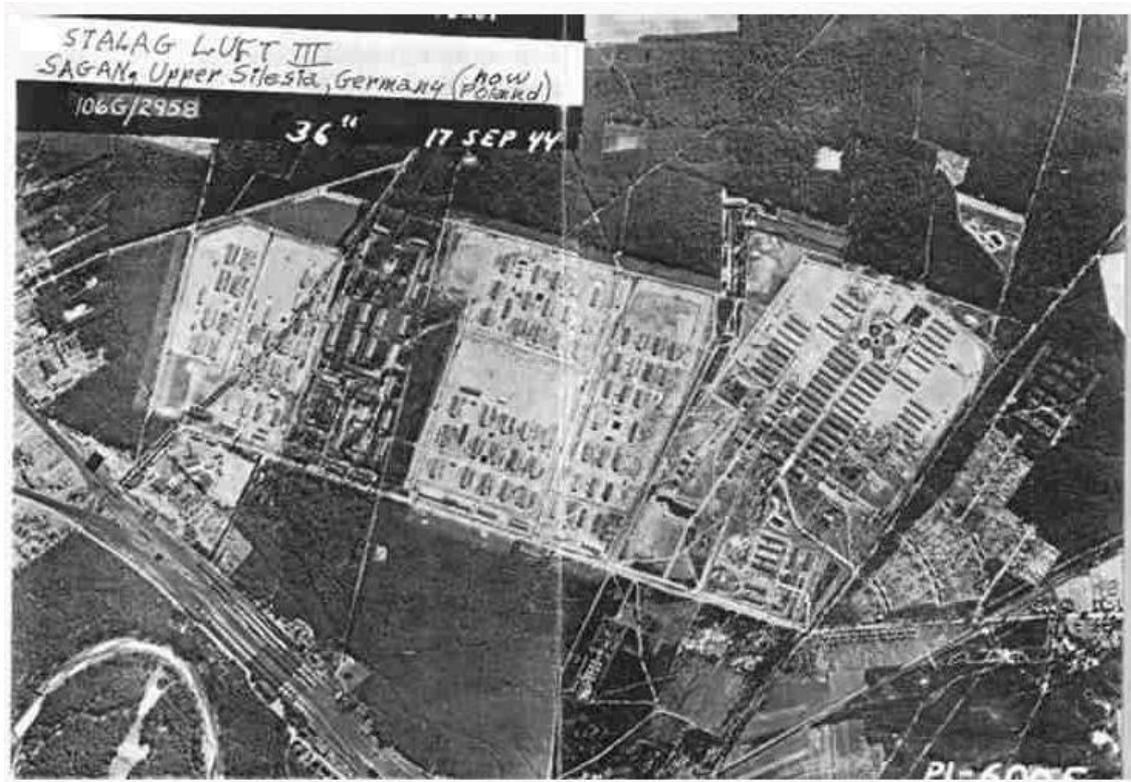


Figure 18: Aerial photograph of Stalag Luft III

Stalag Luft III had been opened in 1942 to house captured allied airmen.

It was designed to be the Luftwaffe version of Colditz; supposedly escape-proof and designed for “difficult” prisoners or those who had already tried to escape from other camps.

Marcel must have arrived in Stalag Luft III at just about the time, in April 1943, that three escape tunnels (called Tom, Dick and Harry) were being started. The escape committee, led by Squadron Leader Roger Bushell, very soon saw his potential to help with the escape plans. Very soon he had befriended some of guards, winning their confidence by helping to write love letters home to their wives and girlfriends, and simultaneously undermining their morale.

Once ingratiated with the guards, Marcel set about procuring pens, ink and stationary, which were then used to forge the documents and passports needed for a successful escape. He also bribed one of the guards, with chocolate and cigarettes obtained from prisoners’ Red Cross parcels, into drawing a map of the paths through the woods to Sagan railway station and providing an up-to-date railway timetable.

This is from Paul Brickhill's book of the Great Escape, which formed the basis for the later film.

Ace scrounger **Axel Zillessen** had a tamed ferret who helped him put together a detailed map of all the paths through the woods to the Sagan railway station. He also gave **Zillessen** an up-to-date timetable of all the trains leaving Sagan. Those tables were reproduced on a small printing press made by Johnny Travis and his carpentry shop.

Figure 19: From "The Great Escape" by Paul Brickhill

Throughout his time in the camp, Marcel preferred to be referred to by what he called his "cover" name, Axel, as he thought this would better enable him to travel as a Swede and get to neutral; Sweden, should he ever get the chance to escape.

The escape took place on the night of March 24th 1944, when Marcel and two hundred other men gathered in Hut 104, where the entrance to the tunnel called "Harry" was located underneath a stove.

Of the other two tunnels: Tom was discovered early by the Germans, and Dick was abandoned as digging proved problematical – it was subsequently used as a store and to dump material from the digging work done on Harry.

The escapees were formed into two groups. The first group, around 100 in all, included the escape committee and those which were "serial offenders" – men who had attempted to escape before. Also in this group were men like Marcel who spoke German and were likely to do well on the outside, and other men considered to have put in the most work on the tunnels.

The second group of 100, considered to have very little chance of success but would stretch the German resources, had been selected from the other camp inmates by means of drawing lots.

The escape did not go well. Between 9pm at night and 5am the following morning, only 76 of the two hundred had made their way along tunnel and out into the woods beyond. Then, due to a signalling error, the 77th man emerged from the tunnel just as a guard passed by.

Marcel might have stood a good chance of getting away but, although he was close to entering the tunnel, his opportunity was lost when the escape was discovered. This is his account of what happened next:

I cannot describe what it was like when it finally broke. The Germans were absolutely livid, there were dogs rushing around the camp and guards were pouring in from all over the place.

There was still around 150 PoWs left in the hut at the time we heard shots being fired. People came pouring down the tunnel telling everybody, 'it's all over'.

Once I realised that the escape had broken I just leapt out of the hut. I ran as fast as I could and jumped through the window into my own room.

The window must have been 5ft off the ground, but I shot straight through it.

The Great Escape was over.

Of the 76 that got out of the tunnel, all but three were recaptured. None of these three were able to return to their own country until after the end of the war (two Norwegians spent the rest of the war in neutral Sweden; and a Dutchman travelled across Germany and occupied France, reaching Spain where he sought refuge in the British Embassy in Madrid).

50 of the escapees were subsequently executed by the Gestapo.

Marcel remained at Stalag Luft III until very close to the end of the war: the German authorities unaware of his role in the escape.

As the end approached, with the Russians closing-in from the east, the prisoners were force-marched out of the camp. At the first stop, Marcel and four others escaped into the woods and returned to the camp which, by then, was full of refugees. The camp was subsequently liberated by the Welsh Guards.

The post-war years

Once the war ended, the surviving Zillessen children returned home to Farnhill.

In fact it's likely that for Jill the war ended a little earlier than for the others. On June 24th 1944, she married an American serviceman, John George Condon; and in 1945, gave birth to a son, Michael Eric.

Marcel's return, on VE Day itself, was reported in the Craven Herald. No mention was made of his role in the Great Escape, which he never spoke about publicly although it became widely known later.

Throughout the war the people of Farnhill had given their support to those who were in the services and regular gifts of money were distributed by, amongst others, the Methodist Chapel.

Just before the end of the war, the Parish Council launched a "Welcome Home Fund" – with Eric Zillessen as its secretary. They set themselves a fund-raising target of £1000, which represented £10 for each of the 100 men and women of the two villages who served during the war.

Following the privations of the war, the two villages seemed to enjoy themselves raising the money and there are reports in the local newspapers of many fund raising events. Even the children of the village got involved.

Six school-children: Colin Walmsley, Jack Parker, Geoffrey Allen, Max Parker, Norman Jennings, Leslie Allen and Jill Walmsley have been going round Farnhill with a comic horse and have this week raised £1 5s for the Kildwick and Farnhill Welcome Home Fund.

Perhaps the largest event was a Garden Party, held at Kildwick Hall on July 7th 1945. It seems likely that at least four members of the Zillessen family attended this event. It was reported in the Keighley News.

Welcome Home

Kildwick Hall Scene of Pretty Garden Party

A highly-successful effort by the Kildwick and Farnhill Welcome Home Committee took the form of a garden party and social gathering, held at Kildwick Hall on Saturday, by kind permission of Mrs. Sharpe ... the openers were Gunner Clarence Moore and Flight-Lieutenant Marcel Zillessen, both ex-prisoners of war, who expressed the delight it gave them to be free men once more ... Mr. E Zillessen, secretary of the fund, thanked Mrs. Sharpe for her kind hospitality.

A baby show attracted a large number of contestants from a wide area, and the awards ... were: Up to six months, 1. Maureen Watkinson; 2. Michael Condon. Six to 12 months, 1. Ian Armstrong; 2. Graham Hodgson. Twelve months to two years, 1. Neville Barrett; 2. Colin Waugh.

During the afternoon and evening selections were rendered on the lawn by the Skipton Prize Band, under the direction of Mr. Wilkinson, and costume dances were given by Miss Irene Ogden (Keighley) and her pupils. About 500 sat down to tea, served by ladies interested in the effort. There was a home and produce stall, and sideshows included a treasure hunt, throwing at the wicket, quoits,, and a "Mystic Lady". Donkey and pony rides, supervised by John Hargreaves, Dennis Wilcock, Frank Barrett, and Cedric Lister, were very popular ...

The day's proceedings ended with a dance in the Kildwick and Farnhill Institute which was very largely attended. The sum of £89 was raised by the day's proceedings for the Welcome Home fund effort, which now stands at over £200 towards the target of £1000.

On April 27th 1946, the fund held the first of two events at which a cheque for £10 was presented to each of those who had been "demobbed", and also to the families of those who had died on active service.

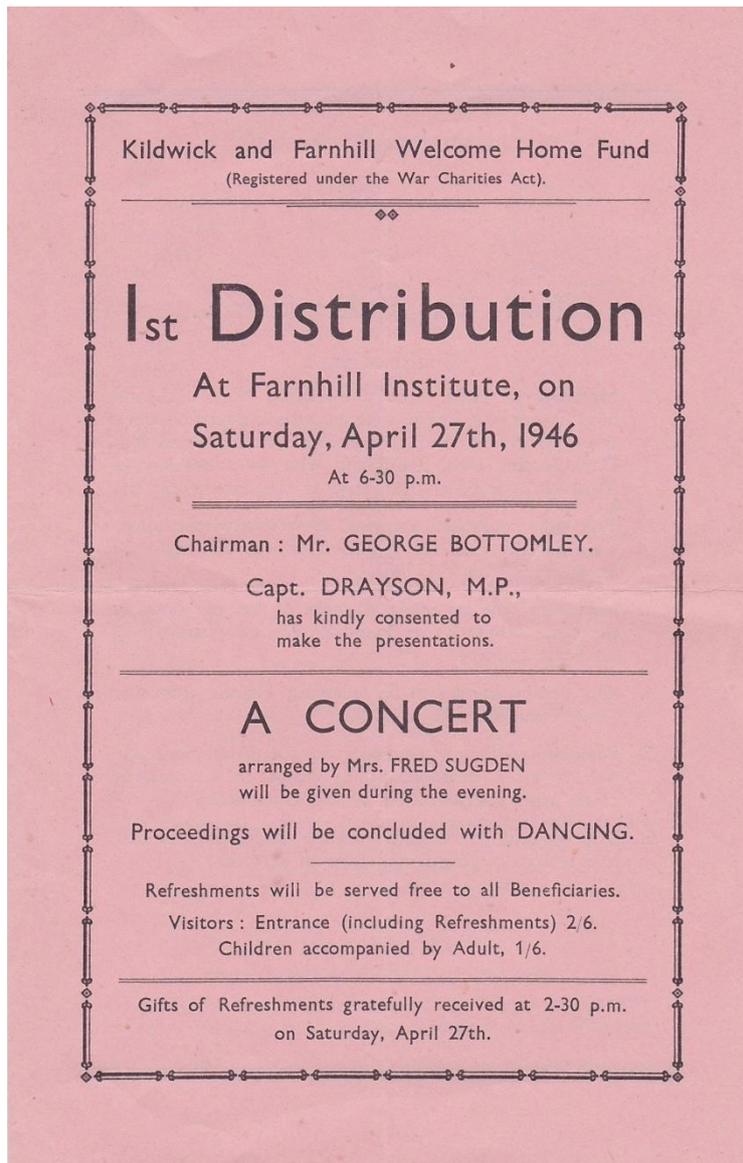


Figure 20: Programme for the first distribution from the Kildwick and Farnhill Welcome Home Fund

The list of beneficiaries, which probably forms a definitive list of all those who were called-up from Kildwick and Farnhill during WWII, includes the names of the four Zillessen children.

List of Beneficiaries :

W. Allen	J. Heaton	K. Simpson
R. Armistead (A.T.S.)	E. Hicks	Percy Slater
C. D. H. Bartlett	M. Hill	A. Smith
R. Baxter	T. Hodgson	J. N. Smith
M. Beedom	Leslie Holmes	Richard Smith
K. Bell (W.A.A.F.)	A. Horner	Stanley Smith
W. E. Bennett	J. Hutchinson	R. Stephenson
J. Blakesley	J. Jones	H. Sugden
H. Blakesley	Clifford Kitson	D. Sugden
L. Blakesley	Chas. Kitson	E. L. Taylor
R. Blakesley	J. Kitson	A. Thompson
T. Blakesley	S. Kirk	J. Tillotson
H. Boothman	D. Lister	S. Tillotson
J. Bracken	A. Lofthouse	E. Tidswell
F. Butterfield	A. Lofthouse (A.T.S.)	R. Walkden
J. Carter	H. Longmoore	G. Walker
L. Clarkson	L. Lonsdale	A. Walmsley
G. M. Condon (G.A.I.N.S.)	R. Lonsdale	W. H. Wass
G. Croft	C. Loughenbury	H. Ward
H. Crossley	C. Moore	N. Ward
H. Critchley	L. Moore	D. Ward (A.T.S.)
F. Earnshaw	W. Moore	G. Waterhouse
G. W. Fletcher	W. Marklew	C. E. Whiteoak
D. Foster	B. Overend	J. Whitaker
A. Gill	B. Parker	R. Wilson
H. Greenwood	H. Pollard	F. Windle
C. Happs	W. Rishworth	J. Windle
D. Hargreaves	D. Robinson (A.T.S.)	H. Whittaker
A. O. Hartley	G. Sharpe	M. E. Zillessen
J. Hayton	K. H. Sharpe	T. Zillessen
K. Haworth	L. C. Sharpe	

Payments will be made to the next of kin of those who gave their lives for this country:—

G. Teal	W. Bracken	E. Holmes
J. Bancroft	W. H. Emmott	T. Gill
E. Bracken	W. H. Zillessen	

Figure 21: List of beneficiaries from the Kildwick and Farnhill Welcome Home Fund.

The event was reported in the Craven Herald ???REF #22???

“Welcome Home” Cheques of £10

Memorable Kildwick and Farnhill Ceremony

Fifty-three returned Servicemen and women of Farnhill, at a public gathering on Saturday evening, received at the hands of Mr. G. H. Drayson, Skipton’s M.P., who also served in the Royal Artillery throughout the war, an envelope containing a cheque for £10, and an illuminated card with the following inscription:

*“In recognition of the devoted service you rendered to your country during the war 1939-45.
May you live long to enjoy the fruits of victory.”*

The gifts were possible through the generosity of the people of Kildwick and Farnhill in building-up a Welcome Home Fund. Last year, on May 10, a meeting of representatives of various organisations of the two villages was arranged by the Farnhill Parish Council and the Kildwick Parish Meeting to discuss the inauguration of a “Welcome Home” Fund. Officials were appointed and, at a later date, a “target” figure of £1,000 was agreed upon. Towards this £850 has already been raised. ...

Mr. George Bottomley presided over the gathering and supporting him on the platform were: the Rev. J. Knight Calvert (Chairman of the Welcome Home Fund committee), Mr. E. Zillessen (Secretary), Mr. H. Kitson (Treasurer) and Mr. and Mrs. Drayson.

Mr. Bottomley described the gathering as a memorable one for the district, for not only was it the first public presentation of its kind in the Craven area, but it gave them the opportunity of meeting the Service men and women who had given so much in the country's interests. Some of the Servicemen they would never meet again, but they thought of them with pride and affection: they knew they had done their duty and that their work was finished. The two villages answered the call nobly, and out of a population of 680 over 100 joined the Services ...

An example of the presentation cards distributed at this event is shown below.



Figure 22: An example of the Welcome Home Fund's commemoration card – this one presented to the late Arthur Lofthouse. The signatures include that of Eric Zillessen, secretary of the fund

A list of the attendees included in the Craven Herald, but not reproduced here, shows that Marcel was the only one of the Zillessen children present at this event. However, Theo attended the second event that took place in March 1947, when Eric Zillessen made the presentations.

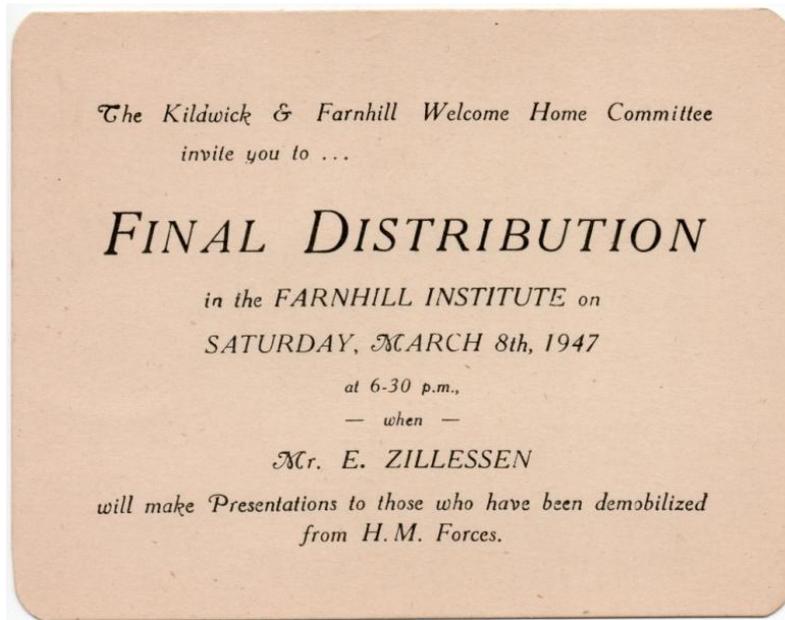


Figure 23: Invitation card for the Kildwick and Farnhill Welcome Home Fund “Final Distribution”

This event was also reported by the Craven Herald ???REF #28 ???:

FARNHILL

“Welcome Home” Gifts – The second distribution of gifts in connection with the Kildwick and Farnhill “Welcome Home” scheme was made at a gathering in Farnhill Methodist School on Saturday. The first distribution was made on April 27, 1946, when 55 ex-servicemen and women received their gifts. The fund commenced in the previous May and the “target” figure of £1000 was realised in less than 16 months. On Saturday each of 27 ex-service personnel received an envelope containing a cheque for £10 ...

The Rev. J. Knight Calvert, chairman of the “Welcome Home” committee presided and supporting him on the platform were Mr. E. Zillessen (secretary) and Mr. H. Kitson (treasurer) ...

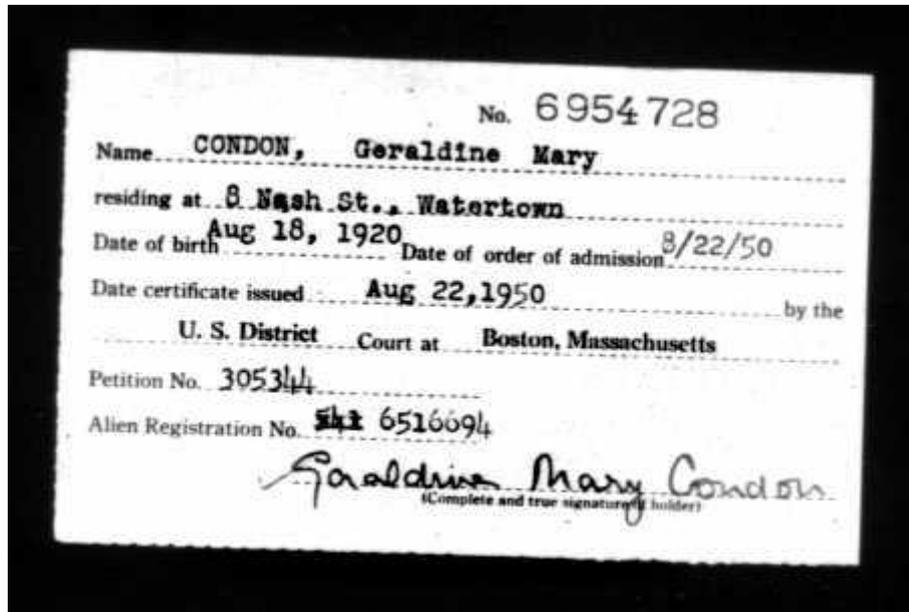
Mr. E. Zillessen then presented the cheques, shaking hands with and speaking to each recipient. He said that he was very gratified at being asked to make the presentations. It had been a labour of love in raising the money for the fund and he was indebted to the officials and members of the committee for their splendid efforts ...

No further public presentation of gifts will be made. Demobilised service men and women who have not yet had their gifts and those still serving with the Forces will receive them privately.

Jill did not attend either of the Distribution events. At the end of March 1946 she and her young son, Michael, had set sail for the USA aboard the Queen Mary, arriving in New York on April 4th. (Presumably her husband John was already in the States.)

Her mother Rosetta and brother Theo travelled out to the States, for a visit, early in 1948: they are both recorded as arriving in New York on January 17th 1948 and returning to Liverpool on April 10th 1948. In addition, Marcel is recorded as arriving in Liverpool from New York on December 3rd 1948; although when he travelled out is not known.

Geraldine Mary Condon became a US citizen in August 1950.



No. 6954728

Name CONDON, Geraldine Mary

residing at 8 Nash St., Watertown

Date of birth Aug 18, 1920 Date of order of admission 8/22/50

Date certificate issued Aug 22, 1950 by the
U. S. District Court at Boston, Massachusetts

Petition No. 305344

Alien Registration No. 542 6516094

Geraldine Mary Condon
(Complete and true signature of holder)

Figure 24: Geraldine Condon's naturalization document

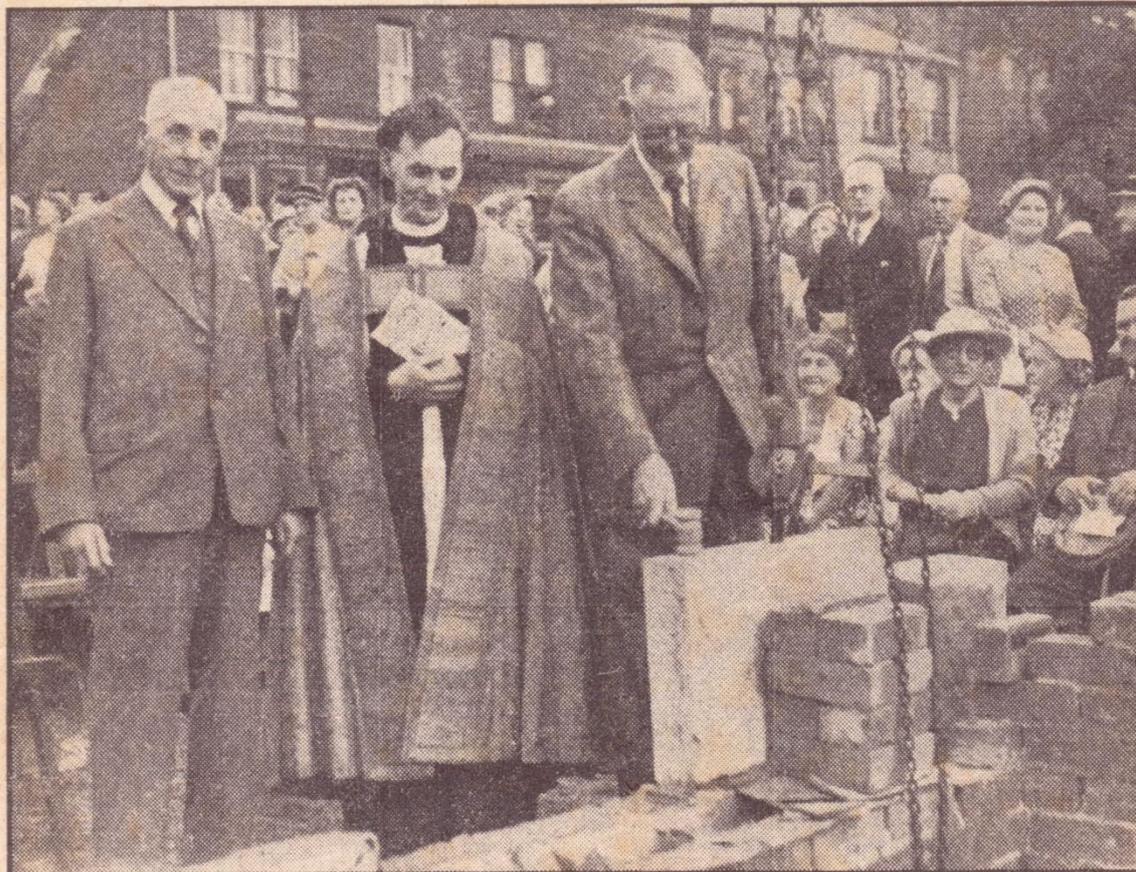
Very early in the 1950s Theodore left the family home – this may have coincided with his marriage in 1951. This was registered in Bradford and the electoral rolls suggest that the couple lived in Baildon.

Eric and Rosetta Zillessen continued to live in Farnhill for a number of years after Theodore had left.

When the Kildwick estate was broken up and sold at auction on November 9th 1949, the details for Lot 6, which included property and land at the junction of Grange Road and Starkey Lane, show that Eric Zillessen was renting just over 300 square metres of land at a cost of 2s per annum.

Eric seems to have been involved in the project to build St. Andrew's Church Hall on Station Road, Crosshills; and in 1955 he laid the foundation stone. (The building is now the warehouse of Viamed Ltd.)

CROSS HILLS STONE LAYING



Laying the foundation stone of the new church hall of Kildwick St. Andrew's Church which is being erected at Cross Hills. The stone was laid by Mr. E. Zillessen, of Bingley, one of the founder-members of the Friends of Kildwick Church. Also in the picture are the Rev. S. A. Selby, Vicar of Kildwick, and Mr. G. Green, who presided.

Figure 25: Eric Zillessen laying the Parish Hall foundation stone

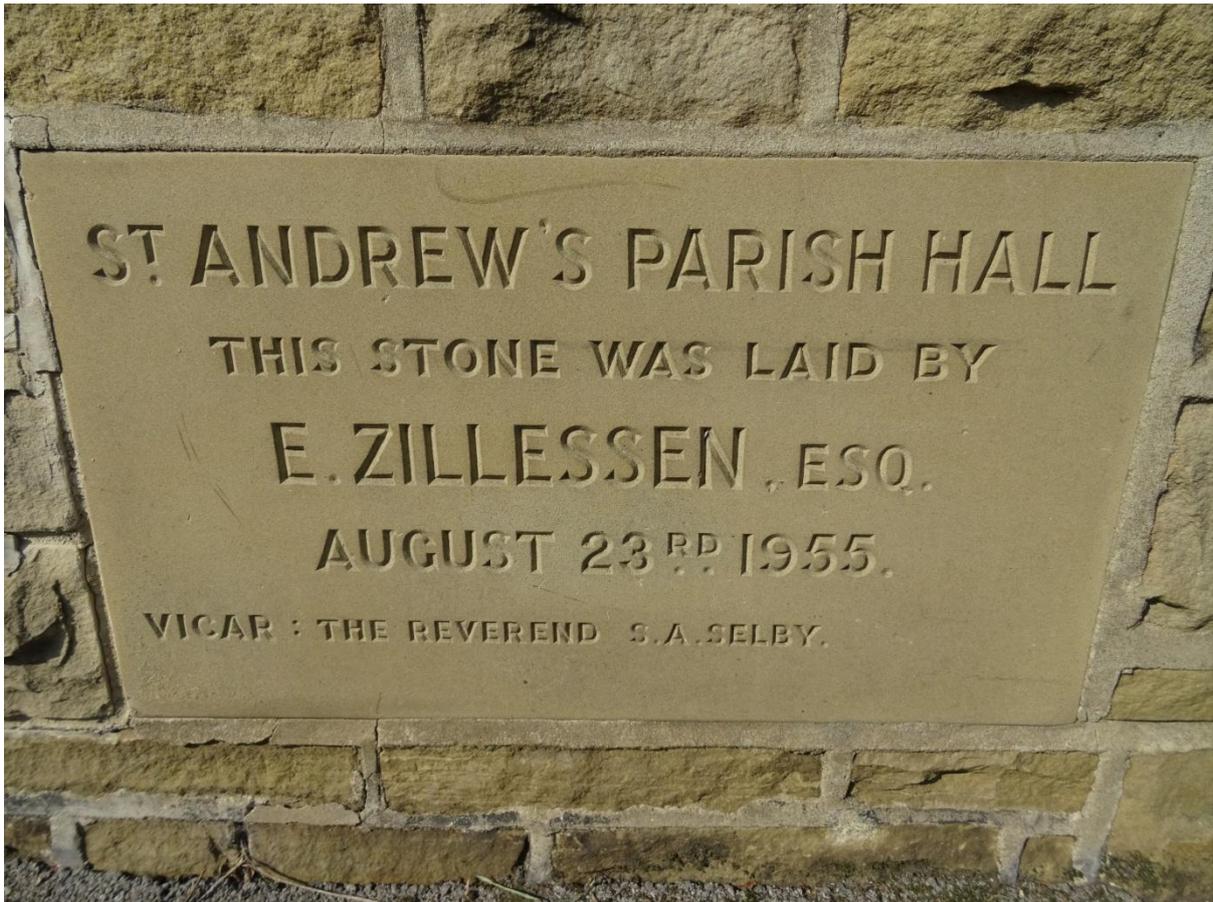


Figure 26: The Parish Hall foundation stone. With thanks to the staff of Viamed Ltd.

At some point around this time Eric and Rosetta left Farnhill and moved to Bingley.

There is no evidence that Marcel returned to live in the family home after the war. He married in 1951, in Bradford

He did, however, resume working for his father's company. He later moved to a wool company in Darlington when Gerrardson's was taken over by Coats-Patons.

By the 1970s he had left the wool trade and opened a chain of fast-food restaurants throughout the North-East. He subsequently retired to Robin Hood's Bay, where he ran a bed and breakfast establishment with his wife.

Rosetta Zillessen died in 1970, and Eric in 1975.

Theodore died in 1990.

Marcel Eric Zillessen, died at Robin Hood's Bay on January 8th 1999.

Jill died in Florida in 2010, just a few days short of her 90th birthday – she was the last member of a remarkable family.

Acknowledgements

The Farnhill Local History Group would like to thank Marcel and Keith Bunnett for suggesting this article and supplying information on the Zillessen family in Farnhill. Keith was a close friend of Theo Zillessen, and named his son Marcel after Marcel Zillessen.

The documents shown in Figures 20, 21 and 22 were loaned by John Lofthouse, from his late father's papers: the business card (Figure 6) and the photograph of Eric (Figure 7) were found amongst papers belonging his grandfather, Herman Lofthouse, who was a member of Kildwick Home Guard.

Additional information and the invitation card (Figure 23) was provided by Helen Moran, who also did some of the archive research.

Considerable assistance was provided by the staff of:

- Skipton Public Library
- Keighley Public Library
- Darlington Public Library
- Eden Camp, North Yorkshire
- and the staff of Viamed Ltd, Station Road, Crosshills