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# Talking to the old inhabitants of Wheathampstead in 1956

by Daphne Grierson (1909 - 1994)

Transcribed by **John Wilson**, Lamer Lodge, between 1987 and 2002

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## POSTSCRIPT

Ulm, Wilhelmsburg, Germany. 17 January 1958

Dear **Mrs Meldrum**,

In answer to your letter with so many friendly wishes and kind thoughts expressed, I will just say "Thank you ever so heartily" - indeed, I feel extremely grateful to you and through you to your friends of the Club. All your parcels have arrived in due time and good order; thank you again! Christmas has been a time as delightful as can be expected under the circumstances; with health normally good and the weather very mild, we old people can get on with the memories of past good days and surroundings. And the present must be treated wisely and patiently, for we did learn many things in all these years.

Allow me to remark that some error of writing presented me to you as a woman, but I am **Mr Janis Wittenstein** (Janis is John in Latvian language). I am a widower, my wife died a few years ago; I have a daughter here, unmarried, her lungs are weak and she must constantly report for X-ray tests and needs suitable nourishment. **Wilhelmsburg** is an old fort, one of many all around Ulm; on a steep hill down which the city of **Ulm** can be reached in 20 minutes, a pleasant walk past villas and gardens.

Many **German refugees**, about **4,000**, **people from the Soviet zone** of occupation and from provinces turned over to Poland, live here until suitable homes and work is found for them. We old people, German or not, receive small pensions if we are homeless after the War. This sad page of our life-story is brightened up by kind and understanding friends, such as you in my case. Thanks again and again.

Here are conditions rather peculiar for this present time, **12 years** after the end of the War: the town is living a bright and prosperous life; many social institutions are doing their best to help, but here in **Wilhelmsburg** one sees a large quantity of children who have never lived in a

regular normal family home. Always in camps, in evacuation centres, military buildings and Army huts. Just fancy: never a proper nursery with toys and each child a nice cot! We old ones are missing the cosy nook by the fireside, but at least we can remember better times! Now I will finish this letter as I began, with sincere thanks and wishes of the best of luck through all this year!

Very sincerely yours

**J. Wittenstein.**