

Walthamstow WWII Evacuation

Part One – An Overview

In WWII, a few days before the declaration of war with Germany, the first of three waves of evacuation in the UK began. In this 1.5 million women and children were moved to the countryside by train and bus within three days. The second came in 1940 after the fall of France, when coastal towns were perceived as danger zones for invasion, and the third occurred in March 1944, when flying bombs threatened London and the Southeast.

Operation As well as the children, over 100,000 teachers and other selected classes of adults (mothers accompanying children below school age, expectant mothers and blind persons) were moved from identified 'evacuatable' areas or 'hazardous zones' to safer places called 'reception' areas, which were predominantly located in the country.

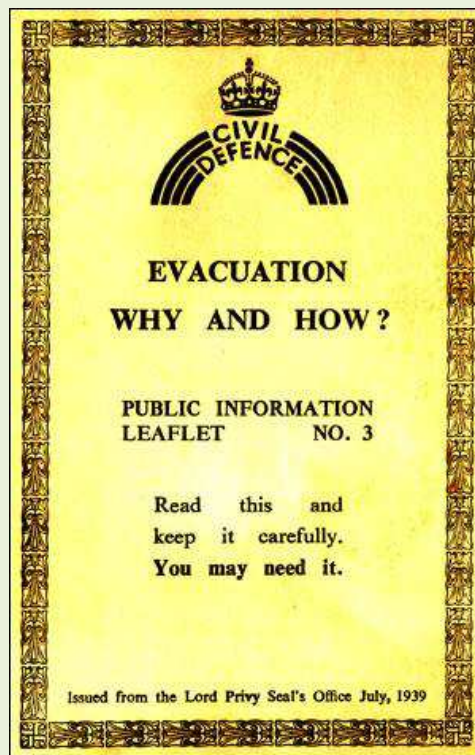


In Walthamstow this meant that 2000 mothers and 11,700 children of all ages left for the reception areas either with school groups or mothers-and-children groups. They were dispatched by train from Blackhorse Road and Walthamstow Stations (L.M.S.). In order to achieve this hundreds of helpers had to be recruited to handle the school parties at this end.

The helpers were needed to assemble them, feed them, record them, inspect them for clothing and health, and finally shepherd them to the dispatching points. Helpers were also required to accompany the parties and, if possible, remain with them in the Reception Areas, which were spread over the Counties of Rutland, Northampton, Bedford and Hertford. Day Special Schools for handicapped children and the Nursery School were sent to residential schools in Hertfordshire, Suffolk and rural Essex: some of these Groups were later moved to Dorset, Glamorgan and Middlesex, while the Nursery School went ultimately to Buckinghamshire. In addition to the children evacuated under the official scheme a large number were evacuated under private arrangements

Pied Piper

In Britain In 1939, most people knew that war with Germany was inevitable. In anticipation of this, Britain had made arrangements as to how it would deal with a situation where it was widely feared that a war would start with the massive bombing of Britain's cities from the air. Accordingly, the Government had drawn up plans that were designed to prevent civilian panic and decided to evacuate children and mothers with babies away from threatened areas into the countryside.



In order to achieve this, under the overall name of 'Pied Piper', detailed plans had been drawn up that divided the country into evacuation areas, reception areas and neutral areas. The scheme was voluntary so that the numbers involved varied from area to area.

I have to say that, although emotionally evocative, the choice of name for the operation seems singularly inappropriate as in the poem, the Pied Piper of Hamelin actually led the children away to a cave in a mountain and they were never seen again !

The Evacuation Areas

The identified evacuation areas under the Government scheme in London and its surrounding areas were: London, as well as the county boroughs of West Ham and East Ham; the boroughs of Walthamstow, Leyton, Ilford and Barking in Essex; the boroughs of Tottenham, Hornsey, Willesden, Acton and Edmonton in Middlesex

Reception Areas & Billeting Officers

In the reception areas, Billeting Officers were appointed whose job was to find host families for the evacuees. This was voluntary although the billeting officer did have power to compel people to accept evacuees. The hosts were to be paid 10/6 per week (52½p) for each single child and 8/6 (42½p) for each extra child and mother.

Walthamstow

In Walthamstow, Councillor Ross Wyld was in charge of Civil Defence for the Borough and in his book *'The War Over Walthamstow'* he tells us:

"Nine months before war broke out plans for Evacuation had to be made and Walthamstow was included in the official Ministry of Health Scheme for Greater London, the co-ordination of which was carried out by the Education Department of the London County Council. Mothers and children were registered in May 1939 and given preliminary



instructions and, when evacuation commenced in September 1939, 2,000 mothers and 11,700 children of all ages left for the reception areas either with school groups or mothers-and-children groups. They were despatched by train from Blackhorse Road and Walthamstow Stations (L.M.S.). Hundreds of helpers had to be recruited to handle the school parties at this end, to assemble them, feed them, record them, inspect them for clothing and health, and finally shepherd them to the despatching points. Helpers were also required to accompany the parties and, if possible, remain with them in the Reception Areas, which were spread over the Counties of Rutland, Northampton, Bedford and Hertford. Day Special Schools for handicapped

Above: Children leaving from Blackhorse Road station

children and the Nursery School were sent to residential schools in Hertfordshire, Suffolk and rural Essex: some of these Groups were later moved to Dorset, Glamorgan and Middlesex, while the Nursery School went ultimately to Buckinghamshire. In addition to the children evacuated under the official scheme a large number were evacuated under private arrangements

Education Problems

The education of the children caused many problems in the Reception Areas but these are matters rather for the record of those Areas than for ourselves. Suffice it here to say that we provided 500 teachers to assist with the

education of Walthamstow children in the Reception Areas. The evacuation of 9,000 school children out of a total school population of 15,000 created serious reorganisation problems in Walthamstow, although at first all schools were closed by Government order. Arrangements were made, however, for education to be continued in the homes, lessons being set for work at home and teachers visiting the homes once or twice per week to supervise the work done. By October 1939, the position had sufficiently stabilised for attempts to be made to return to a more normal form of organisation and, during that month, all children still remaining in Walthamstow and those who had already returned from Reception Areas, were required to register so that we might consider how best to re-open the Schools. Some 10,000 children registered and schools commenced to function again in January 1940: full-time compulsory attendance at school was resumed on the 1st April 1940.

Later Evacuation Schemes

The original evacuation scheme covered mothers with children, unaccompanied children, expectant mothers, cripples, blind persons and old people. Later, certain minor variations were made, including provision for evacuation of persons rendered home-less by destruction of their homes, but the chief variation was that which required would-be evacuees, (other than children or mothers with children), to provide satisfactory evidence that they had a billet ready for them at the other end. This, of course, reduced the number of evacuees considerably and also reduced the possibility of the abuses which had tended to arise under which children, (and mothers), were evacuated and returned several times. (One youngster was known to have been out and back no less than seven times!) By the early summer of 1940, so many of those evacuated in September 1939 had returned to London, that a second largescale evacuation was carried out in June and July. From Walthamstow 180 mothers and 2,563 children, in addition to others in the evacuatable classes, were sent out to the South-West Counties and South Wales. Again, the official exodus was supplemented by a "trickle" of assisted evacuees to private billets, and during the raids of 1940/41 the "trickle" developed into a steady "flow."



Yet a third organised evacuation had to be carried out when, after the period of reduced air activity over London during 1941/1944, the enemy launched the flying bombs in June 1944. The elementary school population of Walthamstow had crept up to over 12,000 or 80 per cent of the pre-war number. The "flying bomb" evacuation differed from its pre-decessors in that it had to be hastily planned and carried out actually "under fire," but there were no casualties throughout the operation. Over 940 adults in priority classes and 3,076 children were sent in organised parties to the Midlands and North of England and to South Wales and, in addition, a large number of private evacuations were assisted.

Above: Bomb damage in Farnham Road

In March 1945, plans were completed for the organised return of official evacuees for whom accommodation was, at that time, available in the war-damaged London area.

In the Reception Areas

Throughout the war-period, close relations were maintained between the Home Authority and the numerous reception Authorities in connection with the education, health and general welfare of the evacuees. A scheme for the supply of clothing for unaccompanied children was co-ordinated by the L.C.C. and assisted in the Evacuation and Reception Areas by the Women's Voluntary Services Organisation. Another important ancillary service enabled parents to visit evacuated children at reduced rail fares on production of a voucher from the Evacuating Authority.

Part Two – Walthamstow Evacuees

Children from Walthamstow schools were sent to a variety of places amongst which were St Just in Cornwall, Luton in Bedford, St Albans, Herts, Rutland, Leicestershire

Memories of St Just In Cornwall

Graham Dexter told us in 2009 in **Walthamstow Memories** ... "I was evacuated from the school near to St.Johns Rd (don't know the name of the school) to St.Just in Cornwall "... and On In 2015, Robert Ellis



told us in his post: "I also was evacuated from the school and remember all those buses lining up and getting on the train later. I ended up at St. Just with the Nankevis family. Their place was right in centre of village opposite the clock."

From Alec Smith in the BBC People's War Archive we read:

"I was evacuated with my older brother at the start of the war from Walthamstow (Blackhorse Road School) to St Just-in

Penwith which is almost at Lands End.

We were first put with the local butcher, the Stevens in Bank Square. then later moved to a relative of theirs at a farm just out of town, Boscean.

We were with the Eddy's Ethel and Matt. he was a typical farmer type. hard working and I believe hard drinking, though at the time I did not know of such things being only 6 years old.

'Auntie' Ethel' was a lovely lady, quite small and loved to cuddle me.

I can say with all honesty that the years we were there were the happiest of my life, I am now 70!

Bank Square, St Just 1950

We were taken back to London just before the Doodlebugs started, my brother was then working, so I was evacuated again but this time to what is now "Beckham" town Alderley Edge in Cheshire, I hated every minute of it.

The first man I was sent to was a farmer who loved to hit me any chance he had, My Mother came to visit and I was moved to a large house with about 6 other evacuees. it was better but I still hated it. Mum sent me a birthday present of a compass. except she sent me drawing compasses, but I did get the right thing later-- I needed it to show me which way was south to London. I was picked up twice by police on Crewe Station and returned to billet. I came home 2 weeks before war end. I went back to St Just for a holiday at the time that the Jap war finished ...”

A happy memory from Ken Johns recorded in the West Penwith Gallery:

“Had wonderful memories of being evacuated from London to the Trevathens(?) in St.Just..The father worked on a farm,Mother had a shop at bottom of garden and the son Eddie had a horse and cart vegetable round...What a life! and so different from Walthamstow,East London..Went back 50 years later ...hardly changed ..sadly the old water mill had gone”

Memories of Luton in Bedfordshire



Doreen Bindley and her sister Rita Ridley (from George Gascoigne School) are the girls walking near the front of the line

The following was first published Thursday 27 August 2009 in the *Waltham Forest Guardian* by reporter - *Mhairi Macfarlane*

"SISTERS spotted themselves in a photo being used in an exhibition to mark the 70th anniversary of the Great Evacuation.

Doreen Bindley and her sister Rita Ridley, of Douglas Road, Chingford, were aged nine and five respectively when they were sent to Luton from their home in Walthamstow in 1939.

The black and white photo, featured in the Guardian last month, shows the girls walking with other pupils George Gascoigne School arriving in Luton, and is one of several included in an exhibition at Vestry House Museum.

Mrs Bindley, who now lives in Loughton, said: "I was very shocked when I saw the photo in the paper because it was very familiar – we have the same photo ourselves.

"I recognised it straight away and got goosebumps."

The 79-year-old said she clearly remembers the Great Evacuation, when thousands of children were sent from London to the countryside.

The widower said: "The photo was taken on September 1, 1939. Before we went, they made us try our gas masks on, which we didn't like very much, but they would give us a penny for doing it."

The sisters were first sent to a "very nice couple" but then got moved to another family where, she said, they were unwanted.

She said: "We didn't go to school and were pushed out of the house every day. My mum came to see us and we were filthy and poorly looked after so she took us straight home. I was really glad to get home to Walthamstow."

Evacuees At Little Barford, Bedfordshire



From the community archives:

"Little Barford School

The school had a second lease of life. It was reopened between 1939 and 1945 for children who lived in the village and for evacuees. The first entry, on 16th October 1939, reads: "This Log Book arrived for Little Barford School which re-opened on Sept 13 1939, Village Children and Evacuees from Walthamstow"

In October 1939 there were 41 pupils; of which 35 were evacuees. A library was quickly set up for the children in the school. In January 1940 they had a half holiday and went to see the pantomime at the Royal Theatre in Bedford. This treat was paid for through the Greater London Christmas Treat Fund. In contrast to the fun, there were regular Air Raid Practices so that they children would know what to do in an emergency as on March 6th 1940 'Air Raid practice taken at 9:45 am. Children proceed to homes or nearest house. Time taken 4 mins.' There were also gas mask drills and safety checks. In August 1940 the policy of sending children home changed and the building was made safer so that children could stay in school during an air raid warning. By VE Day in 1945 only a few evacuees remained, most having returned home earlier in the war. The school was closed on 27th July 1945 and the village children returned to their schools in Sandy and Tempsford. The last entry reads: "The school closed today. It was re-

opened (on account of conditions arising from the outbreak of the European war on Sept. 1st 1939) to provide education for evacuees and children affected by de-reorganization, from Sandy and Tempsford Council Schools. Mrs. M. E. Johnson, Walthamstow, evacuated teacher, gave up her charge of the school this afternoon".

William Morris School Evacuees, Ridgmont, Bedfordshire

*From the Woburn Reporter
August 19th 1941*

"SCHOOLBOY GARDENERS WIN AWARD

The boys from William Morris School, Walthamstow were evacuated to Ridgmont during the war. Some of the older boys were allowed to help in the school allotments. Their efforts were rewarded when, in August 1941, they won an award of 5 shillings from the Bedfordshire Agricultural Society.



They were especially praised for transforming the site from 'an almost derelict site to one yielding a good crop of vegetables'. This led to the award becoming an annual event."

James Snowden's Evacuation To Ridgmont, Bedfordshire



Children walking to Blackhorse Road Station to be evacuated

"September 1st evacuation began. Younger brothers sisters were allowed to go with the pupils of William Morris School so Albert came with me to be for evacuated to the country. We all had our Gas Masks spare clothing and each child had a label pinned to their coat with their name and address on it.

From the school we were marched to Blackhorse Road railway station and put on a train for the journey to Ridgmont in Bedfordshire. When we arrived at the village school we were split into small groups and taken round the village to people who had agreed to take in the evacuees, and they chose the children they would

care for. Albert and I were picked by a Mrs. Taylor who had a grown up family of two boys Bill and Arthur and one daughter Queenie. Arthur had joined the army; Bill worked at the local brickwork's until he was called up for the army;

Queenie worked for the Duke of Bedford at Woburn House, Mr Taylor also worked for the Duke as a hedge cutter and layer. He had a large garden and

an allotment where he grew all the vegetables they needed, plus apples and plums. Mrs. Taylor looked after us fairly well, but we were concerned in the winter as she would suffer with a runny nose. In order to make the meat rations go further, she would make what was known as "Bedfordshire Clanger". This was pieces of meat, bacon or sausages wrapped in dough and boiled in a cloth. The end result was pleasant if one did not think of her runny nose, though we never saw it go into her cooking, we did think it was possible.

The Taylor's house had four bedrooms but none of the usual conveniences we were used to, like running water and a flush toilet. Drinking water was from a tap across the road, washing water was from a well in the back garden shared with the next door neighbours. It was enclosed by a square metal box with a hinged lid, a long pole with a hook at the end for a bucket was used to get the water, in the dry months the full length of the pole was used to get the water.



Parents waving goodbye to their children at Blackhorse Road Station

The toilet was a earth closet that had to be emptied regularly by Mr Taylor who buried it around his garden. He got some very good crops. As the closet was in an outhouse, there was no lingering in the winter.

Most of the village I believe was owned by the Duke of Bedford. There were three churches, (C of E, Baptist, and a Methodist), three farms and three Pubs, a Post Office with a Postmisstress and Post woman to deliver the mail. There

was also a butcher's shop, grocer's shop, a petrol station and a cobbler. The cobbler who had lost his left leg during the 1914-18 war one day he showed us his artificial leg with its springs and cords.

We were allowed to wander round the Duke's walled estate by walking a mile to the next village (Husborne Crawley) to enter through one of the lodge gates. There was a lodge gate at Ridgmont but that was not open. We saw there animals we had only seen in books or at the cinema, bison, deer, and many different kinds of birds, pheasants, partridges and others that were new to us townies. The nearest we got to seeing animals in town (apart from horses) were joints of meat hanging in the butcher's shops. Seeing these alive for the first time on the farms was very interesting to us.

The Taylors never went to church themselves but insisted that Albert and I went to Sunday school. First we tried the Baptist Church, that was not to our taste.

Then we tried the Church of England and after a few weeks we were persuaded to join the choir. It must have been to make up the numbers not for the quality of our voices.

The Vicar and his wife seemed rather aloof types to us but they always helped with the Sunday school and choir treats.

One of the choir treats was given in the vicarage. We had tea and cakes, and played games. One of the games we played was darts, with the Vicar keeping the scores by the dartboard. Towards the end of one game (I think it was the last) I had thrown two darts when the Vicar pointed out the number I wanted. Unfortunately for him I knew what was wanted and not knowing what he was going to do threw my last dart as he pointed. My dart was right on target and had his finger not been there I would have won, instead it caught his finger, and at that moment he looked more like the devil with his crimson face, than a man of the cloth.



We did not try the Methodist Church as the Taylors neighbours went there who appeared to find smiling a painful experience, their two children a boy and girl were not allowed to play with us townies. All the family were very thin.

The Butcher was very friendly and he let us watch him kill the animals with his Humane gun. It was very quick and caused no unnecessary suffering to the animal. We were also able to watch the skinning and butchering of the carcass.

The petrol pump was tended by an eccentric. He tried to sell children lucky dips. After one boy bought one the word went round and he never sold another. When the boy unwrapped his lucky dip he found a clock spring inside with "Spring has arrived" written on a piece of paper.

At the bottom of the village was a farm (the farmer's name is beyond recall) that besides having its own cattle and growing cereals also hired out threshing machinery with the driver of a steam traction engine to take it to the farm where it was needed. The machinery would be set up and run under the supervision of the driver. This farm also had a blacksmith for the shoeing horses and the repairing of farm machinery. This was another source of interest for us, watching the horses being shod, all questions being answered by the patient Blacksmith.

In the centre of the village was "Gurney's" a Dairy and cereal farm. We could watch the cows being milked and the milk being pasteurised. Although the farm produced gallons of milk the villagers were supplied by a man from the

next village of Millbrook. He would come in his pony and trap carrying two churns of milk and pour it into his customers containers from his measures.

Threshing time at this farm seemed to be a social event for the local cats and dogs when differences were forgotten. The reason became clear when about a third of the stack had gone into the thresher. Then rats and mice began jumping out most of which were caught and killed by the cats, dogs and anybody not engaged in the threshing. It was surprising how much vermin had nested in the stack.

The third farm was "Hedges" on the opposite side of the village to the first mentioned one. It produced beef cattle and cereal crops. It was at this farm that Albert and I began working on Saturday mornings and school holidays. If I remember correctly we were paid half a crown (12 ½ p) for Saturday morning and about fifteen shillings for a week (75p); more during hay making and harvesting. Mr. Hedges was a widower with one grown son Robert who appeared simple to us. One day when it was raining we were shredding mangel-wurzels in a barn when we saw him going back to the farmhouse carrying his rain coat over his arm. When asked why he was not wearing it he said "I don't want to get it wet as it's my new one".. One threshing time he was on top of the stack feeding the thresher when I was asked to go up and help him, I was half way up the ladder when it began sliding on the cobbled floor. I called out to tell him and he told me to wait a minute! fortunately for me the ladder stopped sliding.

We enjoyed helping with the hay making, harvesting and sheep shearing (we only caught the sheep for the shearers) but got fed up with hoeing rows and rows of Kale and mangel-wurzels especially in winter.

I liked best working with the horses during hay making, and harvesting or taking them to be shod. Peter and Paul were used for ploughing. They knew what was wanted and made Mr. Holland's job (who was the Ploughman) look very easy, all that was needed was a few soft spoken commands. When he tried out other horses with either Peter or Paul he shouted commands and used the reins to guide them.

The farm had five horses; Bess a black mare; Whitehead named because of the blaze on his head, who was young and skittish; Captain who was being trained for ploughing, and my favourites Peter and Paul lovely chestnut coloured horses with white fetlocks. These Shires were big gentle creatures.

In those days before combine harvesters, the corn was cut and bound in sheaves. These were gathered by hand and placed in groups of about twelve with the ears upwards. These stacks were known as "stooks". When the corn was dry, it was taken by carts to make ricks and then usually covered with a tarpaulin to wait the threshing machine.



Mr. Hedges never recognised the single or double British summer time and always used the Greenwich mean time, so if he asked you to do something at eight o/c. he meant six or seven according to which time was in use. This I found out when he asked me to take a horse to the blacksmith at 8am. and I agreed. Mr Goodman the stockman told me when Mr. Hedges had gone, that the time meant was 7am. As the Taylors were always up early it was not a problem.

The farm's garden was at the back of the house away to one side. The garden was entered by a gate through a spinney and a short walk brought you to another gate and a walled garden. We were taken by Mr Hedges the first time who told us how to hand weed his asparagus. It was one of his favourite vegetables. When he had gone we had a look around and saw that that it was mainly vegetables with fruit trees along the south wall in various beds.

When summer came we were warned by Mr. Goodman not to touch the fruit on the wall as Mr. Hedges would have



counted it. We realised why when the fruits began to ripen and saw the size of them big black Plums the size of apples, Peaches and Figs were left alone because there were so few of each, but we did eat the cherry plums as the tree was loaded and never seemed to be picked.

Left: A WWII schoolroom

Another job we were given was cutting down the thistles in the old orchard with a Bagging Hook (spelling?) which was similar to a sickle. On one occasion I was about to take a swipe at a clump of thistles when I noticed the centre was a different colour and realised it was a rabbit that was rooted to the ground in fear. I grabbed it quick and took it to Mr. Hedges who looked

surprised, killed it quickly with a [rabbit punch](#) and asked how I had got it. After I had told him he sent me back to catch some more, this was said as a joke as rabbits usually make a bolt for their burrow when people get near them.

Towards the end of the summer of 1941 Albert and I were getting fed up with country life (except for the farming).I did not feel the schooling was doing me much good. Whereas at William Morris School we had a teacher for every subject and the classes advanced each year at Ridgemont School the class was of mixed ages with the village children. I am not being disparaging about them but unlike us they were not streamed. We had two William Morris teachers who came with us a Mr. Mountford (nick named Polly, I am not sure why) who taught art at the home school) and a Mr. Finlay (nick named Shag because of the tobacco he smoked) who normally taught maths. They were expected to teach all subjects to all ages of eleven and above.

Eventually Albert and I persuaded Mum to fetch us home. The bombing had eased off otherwise I don't think she would have agreed...."

Evacuated to Biggleswade, Bedfordshire

From Biggleswade Today in 2009

"Sidney Banks now lives in Australia, but has written down his memories of being evacuated to Cople.

Sid's father was in the Navy and he was "uprooted from his home by war" and evacuated from Walthamstow in 1940 at the age of nine.

He recalls with clarity the tension that the London schoolchildren must have felt at the time War broke out.

"From that day there was no further schoolwork done.

"We all went into school each day and sat in the hall with the teachers around us and waited and waited.

"On the first day of waiting some people came in and gave us all a gas mask in a strong cardboard box that had string through it so that you could carry it around your neck.

"We were told that we were never to go anywhere without carrying it."

One day, there was a flurry of activity which Sid describes, and one can only imagine the distress of the mothers who were losing both husbands and children at the same time, with no idea what the future would hold.

"Mums were there, all crying, and teachers and others were putting children into groups and giving us lunch packs and putting labels around our necks.

"My eldest sister Margaret was sitting with me in the hall and we were put into the same group.



"We were being evacuated into the country to save us from the air raids that were to come."

A Cockney by birth, Sid recalls the "long and frightening" train journey with his sister into the unknown without their parents.

After being moved twice, once from a miserable time with a couple who would lock Margaret in a cupboard, Sid was eventually billeted with Arthur and Florence Jeeves in Grange Lane, Cople.

Arthur was the village postman and shoe mender for many years.

To the children's delight and surprise, when they arrived they were greeted by their mother and younger sister Barbara who had also been evacuated to the village, and were staying in a tiny but damp cottage nearby - too small for Sid and Margaret to join them.

However, their joy was short-lived.

Sid's mother fell ill and went back to London which by then was being heavily bombed.

He did not hear from her again.

Sid and Margaret were well looked after.

"Mr and Mrs Jeeves were a lovely couple.

"I think they were about sixty.



"They lived in a small but lovely two-storey cottage at the far end of the village in number 1 Church Row.

"At the other end of Church Row was the lovely old village church."

Sid describes Mr Jeeves as being a tall, gentle man who had nevertheless fought in the Great War.

After Mr Jeeves had delivered his letters in the morning, Sid would watch with wonder as he made shoes to measure for the people of the village.

Above: All Saints Church, Cople

"I used to love the smell of the beeswax with which he sealed the cord he used to stitch the sole to the uppers" says Sid.

Not surprisingly then, Mr Jeeves was also the village beekeeper supplying honey, and Sid learned to love eating honeycomb while he was there.

"Mrs Jeeves was a nice lady: very homely with small glasses which she wore all the time" says Sid.

He would call her 'Aunty' and describes her as being "round and comfortable".

She would cook the children simple but tasty meals using rations.

Being in the country, Sid and his sister also got used to seeing birds and rabbits shot with a catapult to make supplementary 'pudding rolls'.

Thrift was a way of life.

In the evenings, the family would walk along the hedgerows in the fields to gather twigs and fallen branches for the next day's fire - known as gleaning.

These would be carried in slings made of sacking.

Sid and his sister were able to learn a lot about the countryside from these rambles, forming a love of nature which never left him.

Mr Jeeves was in charge of the Land Defence Volunteers or 'Dad's Army'.

Sid recalls it being "great fun" to watch them on parade pretending to shoot guns.

Some nights they would hear incendiary bombs being dropped on the hanger roofs of Cardington aerodrome, and one one occasion, Mr Jeeves had to call out his troops to find a parachutist who had come down in the fields nearby (which they did).

The children slept together in a huge bed up a very steep flight of stairs.

"It was a very happy and safe-feeling house" remembers Sid.

The small cottage had no hallway and the front room or 'parlour' was seldom used, the family usually congregating in the kitchen.

Right: Local Defence Volunteers (Home Guard – Dad's Army) drilling



There was a wash house outside with cold running water and porridge each day for breakfast.

Baths were once a week when Mrs Jeeves would heat water on the black lead stove in buckets and Mr Jeeves would fetch the tin bath.

One bath of water served all four of the household in turn.

While he was there, Sid integrated into village life, joining the church choir where he sang every Sunday at services.

He and Peter Burr were also friends with Freddy Tatman who lived at the neighbouring farm.

"We would sit in the stalls there planning our war, playing soldiers and eating ears of grain by the handful."

Sid helped out with the rest of the village at harvest time - a favourite time for him.

"When the potatoes were gathered, the whole village used to meet at the stream on the farm and the stream was dammed at a narrow party.

"The potatoes were all tipped in the stream and almost the whole village would wade into it and clean the potatoes while having great fun.

"These potatoes were bagged and others which were not to be cleaned were stored in the earth barrow as it was called to be dug out later in the year as the village required them."

Sid describes the potato picking as "back breaking work, even for us youngsters" but it was rewarded with morning tea and lunch which was "all part of the fun and ritual of the day".

"Everyone would sit around chatting and eating cheese made in the village and bread from the village bakery and drinking black tea. We were all very close.

"The farm was a truly wonderful place to a city boy. It had a large orchard with all types of fruit and nut trees.

"During picking time we made ourselves sick from eating plums and greengages!"

Many evacuees had to come to terms with the death of a parent while they were away, and Sid was no exception.

He recalls being teased one day by some of the children at school who told him they knew his mother had died.

"I still remember the horrible feeling I had all morning at school" says Sid.

A few days later, Sid's Uncle Jack turned up unexpectedly.

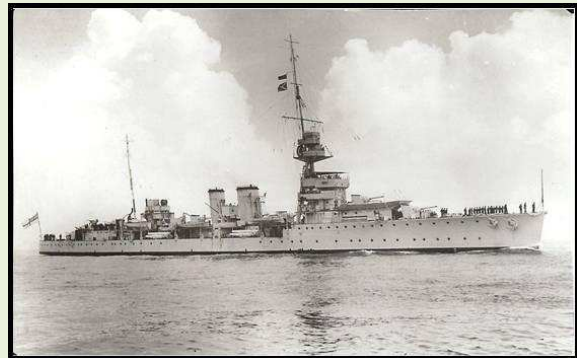
Jack Esquilant was a London steeplejack whose job was to mend the roofs of the capital's bombed churches.

He had cycled all the way from London to give Sid the news that his mother had indeed died.

His younger sister Barbara had been sent away but to compound the tragedy, his father was missing in action following the sinking of his ship HMS Dauntless.

It was a very sad time for Sid and Margaret.

However, a few months later, the children's grief was lifted in a scene reminiscent of the film The Railway Children.



Above: HMS Dauntless

"It was morning and I heard a strange voice downstairs.

"I knew immediately it was dad.

"I rushed downstairs!"

It turned out that Sid's father had been transferred to another ship just before HMS Dauntless's fatal voyage.

Sid and Margaret stayed with the Jeeves until his father was discharged from the Navy and remarried.

The children then returned to their old home in Walthamstow.

Memories of St Albans

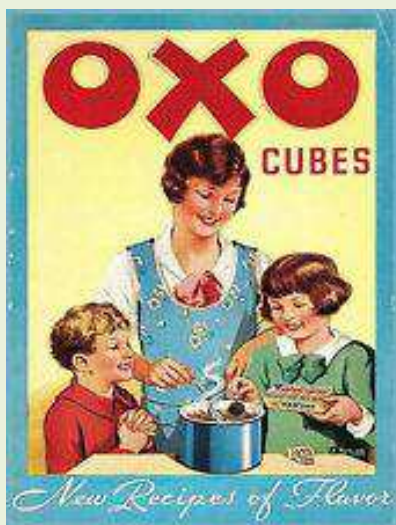
And again from *Mhairi Macfarlane* in the *Walthamstow Guardian*:

"A DIET of dry bread and Oxo cubes was one of the less favourable memories of 74-year-old Thomas Horton's years as a child evacuee in St Albans during the Second World War.

Aged just four, he was the youngest boy at Coppermill Secondary School in Walthamstow to leave without his parents. But one of thousands of children to be put on a train out of London on September 1, 1939 – two days before the declaration of war.

Wearing a name tag and clutching a gas mask and a tin of spam, the boy was examined by prospective families and recalls it feeling like a "cattle market" for he and his sisters.

The grandfather said: "The first home we stayed at was horrible. I was fed on bread and Oxo. We told mum and she came and took me straight home. But every time we went home the bombs came with us. My sister and I would sit up in my room and hear, 'boom, boom, boom', getting closer and closer."



Mr Horton was sent back to St Albans during the Blitz, but his second experience was better because of the kind Mrs Turner who, he said, was "out of this world".

"I don't think it did me any harm," he said. "And I really enjoyed the schools in St Albans. The teachers did everything to make you feel at home and like you belonged.

"I never got home sick because all I had ever known was living away."

But not all evacuees' experiences were pleasant. Many were homesick and were not welcomed by their families".

Olive Heales, 79, was also at Coppermill Secondary School when she was evacuated to St Albans, aged nine.

Mr Heales said: "My sister thought she was going to the farm for the day and couldn't understand why her mother was crying.

"The first place she went to was a large house with butlers and they thought it looked very nice. But then they were sent down to the cellar and told to live down there. They were given bread and a scraping of margarine.

"Another man told me that when his family were having eggs for breakfast they wouldn't wake him up. They would eat first, then give him bread and butter."

He added: "A lot of people had really bad times. People tend to think they were enjoying themselves living on farms, but it wasn't good for all."

Daisy Clarke's Evacuation To St Alban, Herts

"I was nine years old when my family gathered round the wireless to hear Neville Chamberlain tell us that we were at war with Germany. Neville Chamberlain was the Prime Minister and had come back from Germany with no peace treaty.

I lived at 5 Ringwood Road, Walthamstow, which was in the East End of London. I attended Copperhill Lane School, not far from the River Lee. We soon had an Anderson air raid shelter in the garden, also a Morrison one that was like a cage with a top we used as a table. No bombs had fallen at this time but within weeks plans were being made for the first evacuations. My mother and father said it would be best for me to go to the countryside out of London.



We met at Copperhill Lane School, with our gas masks in a cardboard box. A label was tied on us with haversacks on our backs. Tearfully I said good bye to my mother and father and also to my baby brother Charlie. I had never been away on my own ever before and we did not know where we were going.

The Women's Voluntary Service and Spurgeons helped with the children at the time of the evacuation. The kindness shown to us was great, my sandwiches were of egg and the drink was cold tea in a Camp Coffee bottle. We went by train that September; the weather was lovely with the sun shining through the windows of the carriages as we made our way to the country. There were fields full of golden corn which I had never seen before. We ended up at St Albans, temporarily at a big house along the Verulamium Road. The next day Mr and Mrs Foreman, who had a little boy named Henry, took me into their home at Kingsbury Ave.



Every week I had to write home on a postcard, the postage was two pence in old money. I wrote that I had some new glasses with steel frames and that Auntie had a birthday party for me and given me a new frock. I also asked if they could send me some money, as I had torn my frock when I fell over, but my sandals were still good. I wrote that the weather was good. The reason the postcards kept so well and we can still read them today is because they were written in pencil.

I became part of their lives and by now the bombing of London had started. The Blitz began in September 1941 and continued for some time when London was bombed day and night. Fighter planes called Spitfires and Hurricanes helped defend London and surrounding areas, and there were many losses on both sides. Barrage balloons were a common sight over many cities; these helped keep the Luftwaffe high in the skies making it harder for them to sight their bombs."

Daisy Clarke's 2nd Evacuation To Rushden, Northamts

"Father said that my mother and brother were to be evacuated from London.

This was the second stage of the evacuation; they arrived at Rushden South End School (now the Full Gospel Church). Mrs Muxlow, a local councillor and W.V.S were on hand to place them with families. Mr and Mrs Fred and Alice Sharp took them in, they had a small house in South Terrace (no longer there).



Left: Class of evacuees with teacher Mr Williams (rear right) Daisy is on the left-hand end of the middle row

The house that we all shared in London had been hit by an incendiary bomb by the German Luftwaffe, the house was so damaged by fire my father had to move out, and went to a house in Markhouse Ave, East

End of London. The East End of London suffered colossal damage at the hands of the German Luftwaffe during this time of the war, which is known as The Blitz. Whole blocks of houses came down during the bombing raids on London and surrounding areas. Where father lived at Markhouse Ave there was a massive search light on the corner, on the other side of the road was a big ack-ack gun. My father then said he wanted me to be with my mother and brother at Rushden, but Alice and Fred had not got the room. Then my mother's friend Madge Bettles who lived at Harborough Road said that the Reverend and Mrs Green of the Rectory (now the Cloisters) wanted daily help in The Rectory. They accepted us into the rectory and we moved in.

I then went to school at Little Street, it was the Baptist Chapel. We only attended in the mornings as the Rushden children attended in the afternoons. We had school dinners which cost 4d old money and walked to a metal building in Portland road. Then we, the London children, went to The Boot and Shoe College along Rectory Road. Mr Williams was my teacher, Mrs Constable was the headmistress, Miss Kelsey was the drama teacher."

Donald Rust's evacuation to Northamptonshire



Left: Evacuees playing in Wollaston, Northamptonshire during the Second World War. Pictured in the photograph is a young Donald Rust, who was evacuated to Wollaston from Walthamstow in London. © Wollaston Museum

"It was a great day in the family Rust household when I was born. That was in 1933 christened Donsald and began my life in Walthamstow. The years went by and that dreaded year 1939 Cme upon us. War was declared. My parents were, like thousands of

couples all over London , thinking of the safety of their children. Before the advent of the bombing of London, my parents decided to send me to the country, thus I became a refugee.

I have a vague memory of a train station with hundreds of children with big labels on their coats. A lot of people were crying as they said goodbye to their offspring. As I was only seven I cannot remember very much. My next recollection is standing on the grass near Hinwick Road and people coming out of their houses and taking children from the group I was in. I must have been the 'ugly duckling' as I did not get picked until the last few. For a child of my age this was a terrifying experience and one I will never forget.

Well, at last, I was picked by Mrs Yeomans of Hinwick Road. I cannot remember anything of my time with her as Mrs Yeomans became ill and I had to leave. My next home was with Mr and Mrs Laughton. Now that I was a little older I have a few more memories. I remember a long back garden with ducks, then a field with a old caravan on the right and on the other side of the field were allotments. Each time I crossed the field, I was chased by a dozen geese!. Mr Laughton kept pigs and one day I fell in the pigsty. They were so shocked that they didn't know what to say, must have been my London upbringing.

One of my lasting memories are going to Bozeat to get conkers from the trees on the right up the hill, reciting Incy Wincey Spider in the village hall and playing on the rec (Short for Recreation Park I should imagine) that was on the left down London Road (Now a by-pass) Also the strange village people who ate their Yorkshire Pudding before their dinner!....."

Memories of Rutland In Leicestershire

From the Langham Village History Group

"Another chapter has been added to a story which began in the summer of 1939 when pupils from Maynard Road School Walthamstow were evacuated to rural Rutland. Many found homes in the village of Langham and in April 2011 four of those evacuees Ken Bloomfield, John Carter, Leslie Dvorkin and Gary Godfrey returned, to unveil a plaque commemorating their stay. They were accompanied by Alun North, head teacher of Henry Maynard Junior School and three pupils. Prior to the unveiling ceremony, they all joined in Langham Primary School's end of term assembly in the parish church and were then shown around Langham School by head teacher, Janet Lord. The commemorative plaque has been placed in the Village Hall which was where the weary children were taken to be chosen by their temporary families. It reads: This commemorative plaque is dedicated to the people of Langham, who in September 1939 opened their homes and hearts to the children of Maynard Road School, Walthamstow, London. The love, hope and protection received must never be forgotten and will remain an act of true compassion for all time. The Evacuees Joined for the unveiling by people from the village, and two classes of children from the school who had recently been studying World War II, each of the former evacuees recollected the kindness and welcome they had received and spoke of Terry Weeden and Bernard Payne who were not well enough to attend. "



Right: Ken Broomfield, John Carter, Leslie Dvorkin and Gary Godfrey unveiled the plaque in Langham village hall.

John Carter Evacuated To Rutland

"John Carter had no idea what was happening to him when he left Walthamstow, Northeast London, in 1939. He ended up with the Smiths, who owned a farm in Rutland, and he could not help but compare his hosts with his parents. His father drank beer and swore; Mr Smith did not. His mother was illiterate and worked in a shirt factory; Mrs Smith was educated and cultured. His father was a staunch Communist sympathiser; the Smiths were patriots. 'Nearly three years with the Smiths left me with a permanent feeling of shame for my parents and perhaps a sense of guilt for such shame,' he says. 'Physically, mentally and socially, evacuation was all gain for me, but psychologically it left scars.'

Walthamstow Children Evacuated To Rockland, Norfolk

Extracts from School Log Books of the Rockland St Mary School

September 1939, 12 evacuated children from Walthamstow admitted.

Walthamstow Children Evacuated To Cumbria

Extracts from School Log Books of the Lindal & Marton School In Cumbria



- “1944, Jul 17 33 out of 34 officially evacuated children from Walthamstow E17 and billeted in Lindal and Marton arrived this morning and were admitted to school. This scheme was rendered necessary by the pilotless plane or flying bomb raids on London and South England. Their ages ranged from 6 to 15; no Teacher accompanied them, and there is no equipment nor material suitable here for children over 11.
- 1944, Jul 20 12 of the Walthamstow evacuees of 12+ yrs, were today transferred for the afternoon session to Dowdales.
- 1944, Jul 18 I gave a general task for ages 10-11 to the Walthamstow evacuees. The results were deplorably low. These boys and one girl can neither read nor write; their conversation and composition indicate their attendance at the cinema has been more regular than that at school. As an offset to this, it should be recorded that education or rather attendance at school in London since the outbreak of war in 1939 has not been compulsory, also their behaviour both in billets and school is exemplary.
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Part Three – Addenda

Government Public Information Leaflet

Evacuation

Why and How?

Public Information Leaflet No. 3

Read this and keep it carefully. You may need it.

Issued from the Lord Privy Seal's Office July 1939

Why evacuation?

There are still a number of people who ask “What is the need for all this business about evacuation? Surely if war comes it would be better for families to stick together and not go breaking up their homes?”

It is quite easy to understand this feeling, because it is difficult for us in this country to realise what war in these days might mean. If we were involved in war, our big cities might be subjected to determined attacks from the air – at any rate in the early stages – and although our defences are strong and are rapidly growing stronger, some bombers would undoubtedly get through.

We must see to it then that the enemy does not secure his chief objects – the creation of anything like panic, or the crippling dislocation of our civil life.

One of the first measures we can take to prevent this is the removal of the children from the more dangerous areas.

The Government Evacuation Scheme

The government have accordingly made plans for the removal from what are called “evacuable” areas to safer places called “reception” areas, of school children, children below school age if accompanied by their mothers or other responsible persons, and expectant mothers and blind persons.

The scheme is entirely a voluntary one, but clearly the children will be much safer and happier away from the big cities where the dangers will be greatest.

There is room in the safer areas for these children; householders have volunteered to provide it. They have offered homes where the children will be made welcome. The children will have their school teachers and other helpers with them and their schooling will be continued.

What you have to do

Schoolchildren:

Schoolchildren would assemble at their schools when told to do so and would travel together with their teachers by train. The transport of some 3,000,000 in all is an enormous undertaking. It would not be possible to let all parents know in advance the place to which each child is to be sent but they would be notified as soon as the movement is over.

If you have children of school age, you have probably already heard from the school or the local education authority the necessary details of what you would have to do to get your child or children taken away. Do not hesitate to register your children under this scheme, particularly if you are living in a crowded area. Of course it means heartache to be separated from your children, but you can be quite sure that they will be looked after. That will relieve you of one anxiety at any rate. You cannot wish, if it is possible to evacuate them, to let your children experience the dangers and fears of an air attack in crowded cities.

Children under five:

Children below school age must be accompanied by their mothers or some other responsible person. Mothers who wish to go away with such children should register with the local authority. Do not delay in making enquiries about this.

A number of mothers in certain areas have shown reluctance to register. Naturally, they are anxious to stay by their men folk. Possibly they are thinking that they might wait as well wait and see; that it might not be so bad after all. Think this over carefully and think of your child or children in good time. Once air attacks have begun it might be very difficult to arrange to get away.

Expectant mothers:

Expectant mothers can register at any maternity or child welfare centre. For any further information inquire at your town hall.

The Blind:

In the case of the blind, registration to come under the scheme can be secured through the home visitors, or enquiry may be made at the town hall.

Private Arrangements:

If you have made private arrangements for getting away your children to relatives or friends in the country, or intend to make them, you should remember that while the government evacuation scheme is in progress ordinary railway and road services will necessarily be drastically reduced and subject to alteration at short notice. Do not, therefore, in an emergency leave your private plans to be carried out at the last moment. It may then be too late.

If you happen to be away on holiday in the country or at the seaside and an emergency arises, do not attempt to take your children back home if you live in an "evacuatable" area.

Work must go on:

The purpose of evacuation is to remove from the crowded and vulnerable centres, if an emergency should arise, those, more particularly the children, whose presence cannot be of assistance.

Everyone will realise that there can be no question of wholesale clearance. We are not going to win a war by running away. Most of us will have work to do, and work that matters, because we must maintain the nation's life and the production of munitions and other material essential to our war effort. For most of us therefore, who do not go off to the Fighting Forces our duty will be to stand by our jobs or those new jobs which we may undertake in war.

Some people have asked what they ought to do if they have no such definite work or duty.

You should be very sure before deciding that there is really nothing you can do. There is opportunity for a vast variety of services in civil defence. You must judge whether in fact you can or cannot help by remaining. If you are sure you cannot, then there is every reason why you should go away if you can arrange to do so, but you take care to avoid interfering with the official evacuation plans. If you are proposing to use the public transport services, make your move either **before** the evacuation of children begins or **after** it has been completed. You will not be allowed to use transport required for the official evacuation scheme and other essential purposes, and you must not try to take accommodation which is required for the children and mothers under the government scheme.

For the rest, we must remember that it would be essential that the work of the country should go on. Men and women alike will have to stand firm, to maintain our effort for victory. Such measures of protection as are possible are being pushed forward for the large numbers who have to remain at their posts. That they will be ready to do so, no one doubts.

The "evacuatable" areas under the government scheme are: London including West Ham, East Ham, Walthamstow, Leyton, Ilford and Barking in Essex; Tottenham, Hornsey, Willesden, Acton and Edmonton in Middlesex; the Medway towns of Chatham, Gillingham and Rochester; Portsmouth, Gosport and Southampton; Birmingham, Smethwick; Liverpool, Bootle, Birkenhead and Wallasey; Manchester and Salford; Sheffield, Leeds, Bradford and Hull; Newcastle and Gateshead; Edinburgh, Rosyth, Glasgow, Clydebank and Dundee.

In some of these places only certain areas will be evacuated. Evacuation may be effected from a few other places in addition to the above, of which notice will be given.



**EVACUATION WILL TAKE PLACE ON
FRIDAY & SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 1st and 2nd**

THE SCHEME COVERS ONLY-

Schoolchildren (private, elementary and secondary)

Teachers and registered helpers

Children under 5 if they are accompanied by the mother,
or some other adult in place of the mother. Expectant mothers.

Blind persons and cripples (not chair cases)

All those who are in these classes and wish to be evacuated,
whether they have given their name or not, **MUST** report at one
of the assembly points given below, at the time and on the day stated.

Notes

- 1.-In the case of a family which has schoolchildren the assembly point should be, if possible, one of the schools at which the children attend, otherwise it should be the nearest school.
- 2.-A schoolchild who comes to school on the day of evacuation from that school will be evacuated. If you do not want the child to go, keep him or her away from school.
- 3.-Be in time
- 4.-Bring gas-mask, food for the journey and a change of clothes
One bag only for clothes.

**GOVERNMENT EVACUATION SCHEME
TO PARENTS OF SCHOOL CHILDREN**

The Government have decided that parents of schoolchildren in this area are to have the opportunity of sending their children away to a safer district while present enemy activity continues. If you wish your children to go with the organised scheme, please fill in the form attached to this notice and get your child to bring it to school.

Arrangements to be made.

1. Clothing Your child should take the following in addition to what he or she is wearing, and all articles must be darned and mended. If any of these articles cannot be provided please notify the teacher at once.

BOY.

2 vests.
2 under pants.
2 shirts.
2 pyjamas and night shirts.
2 pair socks.
2 pairs boots or shoes.
1 Wellingtons (if possible).
1 warm coat and/or mackintosh.
(if not being worn).
1 pair knickers or trousers.
1 pullover.
6 handkerchief.
1 toothbrush.
1 face flannel.
1 comb.
2 towels.

GIRL.

2 vests.
2 liberty bodices (if worn).
2 knickers.
2 nightdresses or pyjamas.
2 pairs of socks or stockings.
2 pair shoes
1 Wellingtons (if possible).
1 warm coat and/or mackintosh
(if not being worn).
1 warm dress or tunic and
jersey.
1 cardigan.
2 cotton frocks.
6 handkerchiefs.
1 toothbrush.
1 face flannel.
1 comb.
2 towels.

Gas mask

Identity card

Ration book

Clothing and personal coupons

2. You will wish to do everything possible to ensure that your child goes away with clean clothes, clean hair and a clean body.

3. Luggage. The child should wear this warmest and thickest footwear. The inventory above is to taken as minimum requirements, but do remember that your child should not be taken more than he can carry comfortably.

4. Food. Each child should take sufficient food for one day. Be sure your child has his ration book and if pages of coupons out of his book have been deposited with retailers, ask for their return and pin the loose pages in the ration book. Your child's ration book, identity card and personal coupons should be placed inside the gas mask case. PLEASE keep this notice for reference and return the form to your child's school immediately if you want him or her to take part in the evacuation scheme.

Implementation Of Operation Pied Piper

<http://www.maltonmercury.co.uk/what-s-on/out-about/pied-piper-and-the-thousands-of-arrivals-1-6771744>

Operation Pied Piper was implemented on September 1, 1939, and in the first four days over one and a half million children were evacuated out of London by train and bus.

As well as the children, over 100,000 teachers and other selected classes of adults (mothers accompanying children below school age, expectant mothers and blind persons) were moved from identified 'evacuable' areas or 'hazardous zones' to safer places called 'reception' areas, which were predominantly located in the country. The identified evacuable areas under the Government scheme were: (a) London, as well as the county boroughs of West Ham and East Ham; the boroughs of Walthamstow, Leyton, Ilford and Barking in Essex; the boroughs of Tottenham, Hornsey, Willesden, Acton and Edmonton in Middlesex; (b) the Medway towns of Chatham, Gillingham and Rochester; (c) Portsmouth, Gosport and Southampton; (d) Birmingham and Smethwick; (e) Liverpool, Bootle, Birkenhead and Wallasey; (f) Manchester and Salford; (g) Sheffield, Leeds, Bradford and Hull; (h) Newcastle and Gateshead; (i) Edinburgh, Rosyth, Glasgow, Clydebank and Dundee.

All was arranged with the help of local authorities and the Women's Volunteer Service (WVS).

Billeting officers were given the task of finding host families for the evacuees, but the sheer number of children being moved caused problems from the outset. The fact that a significant number of families who had been identified as having the capacity to take evacuees had already filled their allocation before the scheme officially started by taking the children of family and friends who lived in cities and industrial areas which were likely to be bombed also added to the problem.

This led to the unfortunate but common scenario whereby the newly arrived evacuees were lined up along a wall and adults, the hosts, were allowed to 'pick their own', often issuing the comment "I'll have that one."

Each child took with them a small suitcase or bag containing clothes, their gas mask and a small food hamper consisting of two cans of meat, three cans of milk, one loaf of bread or one packet of biscuits and quarter of a pound of chocolate which amounted to the child's rations for 48 hours. The hosts were paid 10 shillings and 6 pence per week for each single child, and 8 shillings and 6 pence for each extra child. Children under school age were accompanied by their mothers or other responsible person and the host was only responsible for providing board not lodgings and received payment of 5 shillings a week for each adult and 3 shillings a week for each under age child.

Problems soon arose. Middle class country hosts were often shocked at the condition and behaviour of some of the inner city children, who themselves had to cope with their strange and new surroundings and homesickness. There were accounts of children who had never eaten fresh food, who had never slept in a bed of their own, or used a knife and fork to eat. Some children could not settle in their new homes and made repeated efforts to get back home to their parents. During the period of the 'Phoney War', from September to the end of the year in 1939 when the expected air raids did not come, two thirds of evacuees had returned home by Christmas.

This can be seen in the Helmsley School register which lists the arrival on September 13, 1939, of 58 girls, aged between 5 and 14, from Southend Girls and Infants, Middlesbrough. On the same day, six other official evacuees arrived from Hull. The register also lists the names of the evacuees hosts and the dates that many of them returned home during the period of the Phoney War.

During the first half of 1940, a smaller number of children, most probably relatives or family friends from a variety of locations – Hull, Grimsby, Birmingham, Cleethorpes – were registered.

The next big influx occurred on July 10, 1940, when 59 new evacuees arrived in the village, 54 of them from Ayresome Junior School, Middlesbrough.

The influx of evacuees into Helmsley continued through until mid-1943.

It is then interesting to note the arrival of other nationalities into the village from May 1946. Whilst the grounds of Duncombe Park had been used as a military camp and training establishment during the war, its use was changed to that as a Polish Resettlement Corps camp from early 1946. (The Polish Resettlement Corps was an organisation formed by the British Government in 1946 as a holding unit for members of the Polish Armed Forces who had been serving with the British Armed Forces and did not wish to return to a Communist Poland after the end of the Second World War.) Five children from Poland and one from Germany were registered between May 1946 and January 1947, and, even more intriguing, one child from Lebanon, one child from Palestine, two children from Bombay and three children from Germany had been registered at the school by the end of 1948.

Undoubtedly, Operation Pied Piper helped to save the lives of thousands of children who would have otherwise been killed, seriously injured or traumatised as their towns and cities were bombed. By the time the official scheme came to an end, approximately three million had been evacuated. However, the experience of being evacuated would have both positive and negative

effects on many of those that went through it, and of the hosts and children of the villages and communities that took them in.

A Contemporary Evaluation Of Pied Piper's Implementation

http://www.iohndclare.net/wwii4_evacuees_longmate.htm

Register for Evacuation Now!

An extract from Norman Longmate: *How we Lived Then - A history of everyday life during the Second World War* (1971): published by Pimlico ISBN 0 09 908080 x
(used by permission of [The Random House Group Limited](#))

‘Some children may try your patience by wetting their beds, but do not scold or punish; as this will only make matters worse.’

W.V.S. leaflet, *Information for Householders Taking Evacuees*. July 1944

The arrival of the evacuees at Luton was typical. The first arrivals, from Walthamstow, that Friday found the Mayor, the Town Clerk and the Chief Constable waiting at the L.M.S. station to welcome them, while as the first party of four hundred mothers and children from the East End walked down the streets the Luton housewives poured out of their front doors to carry the mothers' luggage and to press cups of milk upon the children.

For hundreds of thousands of families the war began, not with the blackout at sunset on Friday 1st September, but before sunrise. The start of evacuation had been announced on the radio the day before and in the residential streets of the great cities soon after dawn mothers were packing into small cases the garments lovingly cleaned and pressed over the last few days. A Jewish mother in Clapton, East London, remembers the ‘terrible task’ of waking her two small daughters at 5.30 in the morning and the tears of the eight-year-old; her sister, a year older, took it well. An hour or two later, as the children marched off with their school their parents watched, stunned, wondering if they would ever see them again. That Friday morning, in an equal number of other homes in quieter parts of the country, other women, almost as deeply moved, were beginning their very different preparations, dusting out the spare room or looking out their own children's discarded toys.

The government had decided that evacuation should be voluntary but that billeting should, if necessary, be compulsory.

*Enthusiasm to
host an evacuee*

Although few people wanted to accommodate adults, there was, in 1939, little difficulty in finding foster-homes for children. The woman M.P. who told of women in moorland villages in Durham ‘who went home weeping because they had not had a child allocated to them’, the male M.P. who described seeing ‘a regular fight’ on the platform of a North Wales station as two would-be hosts competed for the privilege of taking in two small boys from Liverpool, were not exaggerating. The arrival of the evacuees at Luton was typical. The first arrivals, from Walthamstow, that Friday found the Mayor, the Town Clerk and the Chief Constable waiting at the L.M.S. station to welcome them, while as the first party of four hundred mothers and children from the East End walked down the streets the Luton *housewives poured out of their front doors to carry the mothers’* luggage and to press cups of milk upon the children.

Many schools had been assembling the children every morning for the past week to keep them together, and one helper at a North London infant and junior school believes she will never get out of her ears the chorus of Ten Green Bottles, sung by hundreds of five-to twelve-year-olds as they sat on the floor of the school hall during these days of waiting. The departure when it actually came was, by universal agreement, a model of efficiency. Usually the children were mustered in the playground, parents being asked to stay outside, then each school set off for the station led by a ‘marked man’, often the caretaker, carrying a placard giving its name and reference number. The effort involved was prodigious. Seventy-two London transport stations were involved, and in four days the main-line railway companies carried more than 1,300,000 official evacuees, in nearly 4,000 special trains. The famous red London buses were also busy, transporting nearly 230,000 passengers to London stations or to their wartime homes. Some bus-drivers went for thirty-six hours without sleep, while a teacher visiting an L.C.C. education office in North London was shocked to find the usually immaculate staff ‘absolutely exhausted, working round the clock in shirt sleeves and unshaved’.

Setting off

The hardest burden of all that day fell on the parents and many comforted themselves with small details, like the fact that their daughter looked proud of her new gas mask case, or their son seemed thrilled to have secured his favourite front seat upstairs on the bus. A teacher who escorted an Islington school to Northampton remembers one six-year-old girl innocently asking, ‘Why are some mummies crying?’, and being satisfied with the explanation, ‘Because they can’t come on holiday with us too.’ The escorting teachers were more apprehensive, for none, apart from schools which had made their own arrangements in advance,

*Sadness and
apprehension*

knew where they were going until they arrived... In villages round Charing, Kent, the authorities were nonplussed when six hundred girls and staff of the Mary Datchelor School descended upon them, they had expected seven elementary schools. The headmistress saw her pupils disperse 'in drizzling rain and gathering gloom to their unknown villages'; it was not for a fortnight that they were reunited in Ashford, and not for some time after that that the last four girls were finally located.

The railways were during these days crowded with military traffic and most journeys, as well as being mysterious, were extremely slow. A Liverpool teacher, travelling with ninety children who had assembled at 10 a.m., found that they did not reach their destination, Cleobury Mortimer in Shropshire, until 7.30 p.m. A London woman felt hours after joining a train at Vauxhall that they must be at least in Devon, and was highly disappointed to realise that they were being unloaded in Reading, only forty miles away. But the slow journey did provide an opportunity for many teachers, travelling with strange schools, to get to know their new pupils. One woman escorting an Islington Roman Catholic school was astounded at their poverty; most lacked suitcases and had brought their scanty spare clothing with them in pillow slips and cushion covers. A master travelling with a Liverpool school was equally shocked by his boys' ignorance of the countryside. They enlivened the journey by arguing whether the animals to be seen from the train were pigs or sheep.

The journey

Many unfortunate children and escorts travelled in non-corridor coaches and arrived damp, soiled or, at best, uncomfortable. In at least one case the lack of a lavatory decided the destination of the train. Part of a West Ham school, travelling to Somerset, rebelled halfway and were instead unloaded at Wantage.

The protracted journey had another unforeseen result; some of the children, more from boredom than unhappiness, passed the time writing pathetic messages on the printed, franked postcards issued to them to notify their new address. 'Dear Mam, I want to come home. Pleas come and tack us home', reads one surviving card, duly delivered next morning to a Liverpool mother. Only the postmark enlightened Mam as to her children's whereabouts. The writer had forgotten to include his address. 'Dear Mum, I hope you are well', ran another card. 'I don't like the man's face. I don't like the lady's face much. Perhaps it will look better in daylight. I like the dog's face best.'

Bus journeys, though shorter, presented a different problem. An eleven-year-old Gravesend girl travelling to Sudbury in Suffolk remembers that the whole bus load were sick...

Few people who witnessed it have forgotten the arrival of the

Arrival

evacuees. I can vividly remember the crocodile of small children, laden with cases and gas masks, filing out of Newbury station and walking two by two up the road to the reception centre at the nearby council school. Some carried buckets and spades, for, to ease the pain of parting, their mothers had assured them that they were going to the seaside.

Many people still have bitter memories of the 'slave market', at which they were allocated to foster-parents – in one Lincolnshire town the cattle market was actually used as a distribution centre. A couple who took eighty children from Wembley to a village near Chard in Somerset noticed how the largest were immediately chosen by farmers needing unpaid help, the smallest being left to last. A thirteen-year-old Girl Guide in the village of High Broome, near Tunbridge Wells, noticed that smartly dressed little girls were soon 'spoken for', but 'a small tousled-haired boy, trousers too big, socks round his ankles, threadbare shirt and jacket and a small paper parcel of his belongings tied to his gas mask case', remained unclaimed for a long time.

The 'slave market'

The 'slave market' method at least avoided the sad trudge from door to door in search of a welcoming home. An Islington teacher was moved by the sight of a five-year-old girl, who had kept cheerful all day, finally sinking down on the kerb of a Northampton street in tears, and not even being consoled by the bar of chocolate in her bag. Before long, however, 'that lost feeling was cuddled away by the warm-hearted "aunt"'. Visiting her charges later that evening, the same teacher found them all happily tucked up in bed.

This was the general experience. The nation's mothers revealed on the 1st September 1939, and the days immediately following it, a warmth and good nature towards other people's children that many of their guests still recall with affection nearly thirty years later. The inevitable childish accidents were accepted with exemplary patience. The daughter-in-law of a Yorkshire country vicar, then aged sixteen, recalls the arrival of two small girls, aged eleven and seven, from Sunderland. They were very clean and well-behaved – 'especially selected for the Vicarage', she suspects – but the excitement, or the contrast between the vicarage food and their usual diet of pie and chips and bread and jam, proved too much for the younger one, who was immediately sick on the dining-room carpet. Both soon improved enormously in health and became much-loved members of the family, keeping in touch until they married.

*Generally
successful*

Placings with unmarried women were often surprisingly successful. At Combe Raleigh, Devon, one billeting officer placed, with some misgivings, a three-year-old toddler with three

elderly maiden ladies. On arrival he stood solemnly gazing round at his new home with tears pouring down his cheeks and announced: 'My name is Robert; I am a big boy and I don't cry – well, not often.' Within a few months he was idolised by the whole household and when his mother eventually came to see him she was horrified when at bedtime he knelt down and prayed: 'O God, don't let this woman take me away; she says she's my mother, but I want to stay here with my aunties.'

Since the poorest families were least able to make private arrangements for their families, the evacuees included an exceptionally large number of ragged and neglected children. A Dorset woman, then aged seventeen, remembers going with her mother to collect two evacuees from the railway waiting room at Sherborne at ten o'clock on a wet, cold, dark night. The two little sisters, aged five and seven, whom they took home were cold, frightened and crying and, once in the light, proved also to be filthy and in rags. When they took the children to the bathroom, they were greeted with hysterics, the girls imagining that they were about to be drowned. Next morning, their hostess, by no means well-off, bought them both a completely new outfit and the children became contented members of the family, particularly delighting in frequent baths. When, a year later, they were finally removed after the government had begun to press the parents for a contribution to their support, 'I do not know who cried most, us or the children', their hostess recalls.

Poor families

There were many such successes, but, understandably, it was the failures which made the headlines. The commonest complaint was of bed-wetting. A leading article in *The Lancet* remarked that, 'Somewhat unexpectedly enuresis has proved to be one of the major menaces to the comfortable disposition of evacuated urban children. . . . Every morning every window is filled with bedding, hung out to air in the sunshine.' Official estimates of the number of children afflicted varied from 4 to 33 per cent and the constant washing of bedding soon represented a serious burden on many a housewife. Ministers drawn from a world where laundry was left to the servants were slow to act. It was not for months that hostels were opened for incurable bed-wetters and not until June 1940 that a modest allowance, of around three-and-sixpence a week, was approved for householders with enuretic evacuees.

*Failures –
enuresis*

Even more widespread than wet beds were vermin-infested heads. In parts of Wales, half the evacuees from Merseyside had heads crawling with lice, and rural Scotland, suffering an invasion from Glasgow, had a similar experience. In part of Wigtown, in Scotland, the medical officer, aided by three detachments of V.A.D.s, resourcefully bought up all the hair clippers in sight and

*Verminous
children*

cut the hair of every mother and child in a particularly verminous detachment of Glaswegians. One aristocratic hostess was said to have driven her evacuees through the sheep dip...

Many evacuees, too, came from homes where no sentence was complete without a swear word. One teacher remembers a two-year-old boy scandalising a Cambridgeshire village by leaning from a front window shouting words never heard there from such tender lips before. 'He said F', an outraged woman reported to her. A W.V.S. Billeting Officer in Cornwall had to cope with an angel-faced five-year-old from an Irish docker's family in the East End of London who electrified a respectable farmer's family by casually remarking when she dropped a fork, 'Blast the f-ing b-!' When reproved she retorted, 'I'll tell my dad about you and he'll come and knock your bleeding block off.'

Swearing

Another common complaint was of the inadequate and unsuitable clothes in which many children had been sent away. Some had been sewn into their clothes for the winter or encased in a layer of brown paper near the skin as a substitute for warm underclothes. A nurse living in the Rhondda was surprised on preparing to give her five-year-old evacuee a bath to be told by his mother, 'Bill don't want a bath, as I've plastered him up for the winter.'...

Clothing

To some unlucky foster-parents it began to seem in those first, disillusioning weeks that life in the back streets of London and other large towns could hardly have changed since Dickensian times. It was, perhaps, the beginning of that great movement of opinion towards social reform that was to gather momentum throughout the war. At the time, however, the predominant emotion was horror. Soon everyone in the reception areas had an evacuee story, just as later everyone in the blitzed cities had a bomb story... In Blaenavon in Monmouthshire two small girl evacuees caused great amusement by asking their hosts as they prepared to go out for a walk on the first evening if, like mum and dad, they were going out to get drunk. The sober Welsh couple caring for them there were less amused on their return home; the girls had stripped the wallpaper from the wall, explaining that their mother always did this in a new house to see if there were bugs behind it. A small boy in Oxford astonished the two respectable elderly ladies who had taken him in by helpfully remarking after supper that he would put himself to bed, 'so you two old geezers can get off to the boozier'.

More serious was the dishonesty in which some parents had deliberately trained their children. A Mansfield hostess was shattered, when taking her ten-year-old evacuee shopping for embroidery silks in Woolworths, to have a handful dropped into her basket, with the explanation, 'That's the way you do

Dishonesty

shopping, buy one or two, drop them when the assistant gets your change, then grab a handful.' Another evacuee, sent shopping in Eastbourne, returned proudly with both goods and money; he had stolen everything on his list. A third fried his hosts' tropical goldfish, worth £25, to eat.

The restricted diet of many children from the cities was also a revelation to their hosts. In Eastbourne many children firmly refused chicken, demanding their usual fish and chips instead. A Dorchester woman's chief memory of evacuees is of their sitting on the well-scrubbed door-steps of this respectable town eating fish and chips from newspaper... A Liverpool teacher accommodated two brothers who, never having seen an egg before, attempted to eat one shell and all...

Diet

The coming of the evacuees widened horizons in other ways also. A sixteen-year-old Hereford girl remembers admiring the newcomers, because they were independent of their parents and had come from the sophisticated big city. The children in a Northamptonshire village were, one then aged ten remembers, very impressed by a senior girl's school from Clapton. 'They knew about film-stars, shops and clothes . . . They taught us rhymes . . . and to yodel in a peculiar way that the adults called cat-calling and annoyed them intensely.'...

Widening horizons

Only occasionally did jealousy blossom between hosts and guests. One six-year-old girl in Sussex caused great embarrassment to her parents by remarking of their twelve-year-old evacuees: 'You like that one better, but I prefer this one!' She consolidated her unpopularity with the two girls by 'splitting' on them to her mother, a strict sabbatarian, for playing tennis in the garden one Sunday evening... In one Lancashire house-hold there were bitter quarrels between the ten-year-old daughter of the house and a girl evacuee of the same age. When the evacuee spilled her tea her hostesses daughter sneered, 'You ought to live with pigs', to which the evacuee smartly riposted, 'Oh, but I do now'.

Jealousy

Although many evacuated children took jobs locally on leaving school the majority never adjusted very enthusiastically to rural life. The then headmistress of the Mary Datchelor Girl's Grammar School, evacuated from Camberwell to Kent and then, in 1940, to South Wales, was amused that as the coach loads of girls drove through the streets of the industrial town of Llanelly they greeted with cheers such signs of civilisation as cinemas and Woolworths. A woman living in the Dorset village of Piddletrenthide noted that the 'vacs' from a Southampton school asked immediately where these essential amenities were, and on finding them missing, went home again in six weeks. Even those who had spent nights on end in shelters, neglected by working

mothers, pleaded to return, preferring raid-smitten Southampton to the quiet of village life.

With some obvious exceptions, children were in general welcome, at least in 1939, but few hosts wanted adults to share their homes. A Suffolk head teacher remembers that it was a great deal easier to find homes for the fifty children who flooded into her village school in 1939 than for their four teachers. Much of this reluctance to accept teachers as lodgers was unjustified but, as with children, a few unreasonable teachers could give a whole school a bad name. A woman at Saxmundham, Suffolk, did her best to be welcoming to the guardian of one contingent of ten evacuees from Birmingham, aged from four to fourteen, ‘a short, aggressive elderly Yorkshire female, who was so outspoken and demanding that we reckoned anyone so unpleasant must be dead honest and conceal a heart of gold. We were’, she acknowledges, ‘no judge of human nature, as she started by eating all the evacuees’ bacon ration to keep up her strength, and ended by stealing blankets from our Austrian refugees.’

Adults

Expectant mothers were even less welcome than teachers... Even less welcome than expectant mothers were women with small children. About 524,000 mothers with infants under five were evacuated in 1939, but so decisively did the scheme fail – by January 1940 only 65,000 remained away – that it was never attempted on any large scale again. As with the children of school age, a few slovenly or dishonest mothers were enough to give them all a bad name and, since many such parties arrived at places which were not expecting them, relations were often strained from the start... While many wartime children still have happy memories of their foster parents, very few evacuated mothers recall their hosts with anything except distaste... This evacuees’ eye-view differs little from the recollections of hosts...

Few stayed long. Some women, after one horrified look at the empty fields around them, simply crossed over on to the departure platform. A Billeting Officer in a Somerset village remembers one such mother being appalled to learn that the single train that day had already gone. But the prize for the shortest stay on record must surely go to a Southampton mother who, on reaching the Dorset village of Netherbury, refused even to get out of the bus and returned with it...

Long before Christmas 1939 the great drift homewards was well under way. The death blow to the largest and most successful scheme, that for unaccompanied children, was inflicted by the government itself, which, as it had all along intended, began from the end of October to demand a contribution from parents to help support their evacuated children. The amounts involved were less than the official billeting allowance of 10s.6d.

Going home

for one child, 8s.6d. each for more than one, for six shillings a child would, it was announced, be accepted in full settlement, but the scheme proved literally more trouble than it was worth, burdening hard-pressed officials with an enormous amount of extra work and yielding only a trivial financial return. In innumerable cases it tipped the scale in deciding parents to bring their children home... By the 8th January 1940, 900,000 of the nearly one-and-a-half million adults and children evacuated in September 1939 had gone home. In London and Liverpool only a third of all children were still away, in Glasgow and Birmingham only a tenth, in Sheffield, Derby and Coventry even fewer. By May 1940, when the whole war situation changed, an evacuee in many country towns and villages had again become a rare sight. In the danger areas, despite a new publicity campaign, only one family in five registered their children for evacuation if heavy raids began. In the reception areas, only one householder in fifty now volunteered to take in evacuees, despite such improvements as medical inspection of children before they left and a far more generous provision of all the items suggested by experience, from hostels for difficult children to mackintosh sheets.

Such arrangements help to explain why later evacuations, though affecting overall far more people than the first great flight of 1939? caused much less disturbance and are less remembered. From May 1940, with the growing threat of invasion, the government began to clear school-children from a belt ten miles inland from Norfolk to Sussex, and in the next few months there was a similar movement of children from supposedly dangerous towns, from Hull to Portsmouth, and from London and the Thames-side towns. Although owing to pressure on the railways schools were sometimes split up, there was less confusion than in 1939, though altogether some 213,000 children were moved. After the previous failure no attempt was made compulsorily to billet mothers with young children, the government relying largely on 'assisted private evacuation', described in the next chapter. By autumn 1940 about 56,000 mothers and children from the coastal areas had been officially billeted in reception areas, while another 328,000 people, of both sexes and all ages, had moved under their own arrangements.

After the start of the London blitz in September 1940, the government operated a 'trickle' scheme under which small parties, mainly of mothers and small children, and homeless people, left London each week. By now the early goodwill had evaporated and evacuees were unfashionable, so that few jobs needed a tougher skin than that of Billeting Officer. A woman who took on this 'most hated job' in Chertsey still regards the

Later evacuations

district with real bitterness. 'There was a terrible lot of "old pals association", where voluntary billeting had first been accomplished,' she remembers, 'so that small slum houses were overcrowded but big wealthy houses left untouched. The average "life" of a Billeting Officer was six months . . . One had no support from the locals and very little from the Ministry. Laws were ambiguous and impossible to enforce. I could have papered my walls with the doctors' certificates I received immediately I sent out a compulsory billeting notice.'...

By 1944 most people in the reception areas were war-weary and unwillingness to accept evacuees had become even more pronounced, when in June there occurred the fourth and last great wave of evacuation as the flying bombs clattered over southern England and on to London. In the next few weeks nearly a million adults and children left the capital, 552,000 of them under officially-assisted private arrangements, the rest in organised parties. This included many small children whose mothers could not go with them, but even these poor, frightened infants could not rekindle the old enthusiasms of 1939' A woman shop-owner remembers that though the first children to arrive in Morecambe from the V.I raids were 'complete nervous wrecks with pale faces and blinking eyes', the local Billeting Officers had considerable difficulty in finding them homes.

- The government rather rashly announced the end of official evacuation on 7th September 1944, the day before the first V.2 rocket fell on London, but even these new attacks failed to halt the steady return to the cities, which reached its peak during the autumn of 1944' One after another from September onwards the former danger districts were proclaimed 'go home' areas, until by the end of the year only Hull and London were not yet considered safe. Their turn finally came on 2nd May 1945, six days before the European war ended, but it was to be nearly another year before the evacuation scheme was officially wound up. Few, it must be acknowledged, mourned its end.

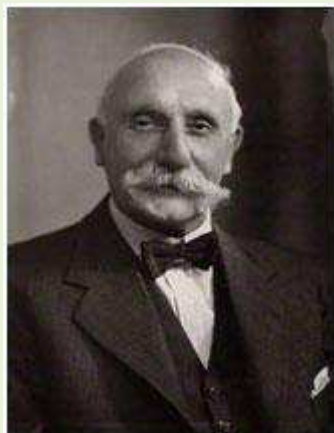
- *The end of evacuation*

Local MP's Visit Evacuees

Hansard Commons Evacuation Debate 14 September 1939 vol 351 cc802-86

Walthamstow MP Valentine McEntee

[§ Mr. McEntee](#)



I was sent by the local authority of which I am a member into the areas to which children from our area were sent. I was accompanied by my wife, who happens to be the deputy mayor, and was deputising for the mayor, and by the director of education. We travelled into areas as far away as Rutland, and came back through Kettering, Rushden and many of the villages round there in Bedfordshire. The thing that struck me particularly was that the children are almost entirely happy. Almost every one of the school children I met was happy, and the other children were too, but the mothers are unhappy, very unhappy indeed—not in all cases, but in many cases. I do not know how many have returned, and I should not like even to guess, but when it is said that 50 per cent. have

probably returned I think that is a high estimate, very much exaggerated. I do not think that anything like that number is returning and I certainly hope that nothing like it will return.

What are the problems that we discussed with the mothers and the difficulties in which the mothers found themselves? We met mothers—some of them stopped us in the street because they knew us—and they told us of their difficulties and why they were being forced to go back, although they did not desire to do so. One mother said to me: My case is typical of several that I know. I came down here with my husband in work, and he would have been able to send me money week by week. I was here only a couple of days when I received a letter from him that he had been thrown out of work and that hundreds of others like himself were in the same position. He is now quite unable to send me any money at all, because he must pay the rent, because of the labour exchange. He feels that he must pay the rent or otherwise he would be put out there. I am told that I have to go to the labour exchange, but there is no labour exchange here within miles of me and I can't get to it at all, but I have heard of people who have gone there, and this is their experience. The officer said to them: 'If your husband is out of work and signing, he is getting an allowance for you, and therefore, he must send to you that allowance that he is getting in Waltham-stow or any other area, and send it to you here so that you can live.' Said this mother to me: But suppose he does that. It is not possible to pay the rent at home and for me to live down here on the allowance that is given by the labour exchange. It is quite impossible for us to live in those circumstances. I am very happy in the home in which I am here, but I am compelled to go back to my husband because neither of us can afford to live and keep out of debt, and feed ourselves reasonably well. That is one of the problems, and it will have to be dealt with. It will right itself ultimately when all these men have secured, as I believe they will, other employment, but the position is in the meantime driving very many mothers back into the areas from which they came.

I went into Rutland, and I want to pay the highest possible tribute to everybody in the areas to which children from my area went. I found in every case the very greatest kindness to both

mothers and children. There were unsatisfactory cases, but they were very small in number in comparison with the number which had been evacuated. Here is the position in Rutland. We interviewed the chairman of the county council and the medical officer. I did not see the medical officer myself, but he was interviewed. I saw the director of education also. They said: We should like to provide for your mothers all the services that you provide for them in Walthamstow, but we cannot possibly do it. We have not such services here and we never have had. We have no equipment with which to give them the facilities that they have had in Walthamstow. We said: These mothers have been in the habit of getting free milk and of being able to get cheap milk. They cannot get it down here, and they want to know the reason why. We have a contract which has run for many years for dried milk and other foods that have to be supplied to young children, and we supply to those children, and to the mothers for the children, dried milk, fresh milk and foods that they generally require, at primary or cost price. When they do as they did in Walthamstow, go into a shop and ask for some of these foods, they find it is impossible to pay for them. There was an experience in which a child of 12 years of age wanted repairs to his boots. The mother said: I sent the boots to be repaired and I was charged 3s. 6d. I cannot possibly live and pay the high cost of repairs and all the other expenses in an area like this. That is one of the greatest difficulties that we have and I hope that the House and the Minister will consider it. If it is not considered and improved I am certain that you will not only have the 50 per cent. that has been referred to, but a very much higher percentage of our people, coming back into the towns again. There is the question of the family where there are school children and a mother with a young baby, or perhaps an expectant mother, billeted in the same house. Take the case where there is a child under school age and, in the same house, two other children of school age. The occupier of the house is getting 5s. for the mother, 3s. for the child under school age, and 3s. also for the other children. That mother knows of other places close by where people could get 10s. 6d. and 8s. for those two children. I know that in the one case the children have to be fed and in the other case they have not, but there is no relation between the two scales. Unless some better system is created you will have mothers going back by thousands to the places whence they came.

We went to see why they were coming back and to prevent them from doing so if we could, and we succeeded very well. We may have broken the regulations of the Minister; if so, I hope the Minister will forget what I am going to say. We have in Walthamstow a very good nursing service system. We sent the nurses to Rutland, as a present to the Rutland authority in return for the kind service they are providing for our children. We also sent down a midwife, because they have no such services in Rutland as we have. We are also sending this week a dental clinic, almost completely equipped, and the equipment for those nurses and the midwife to use. In Oakham a penny rate brings in £60, and over the whole county it brings in £2,000. We get far more than that in Walthamstow; and, of course, the authorities in Rutland are unable to provide the services that we should like to see given to our children. I think the Minister might advise larger local authorities to transfer their services where they can be effectively used for the children. And please pay some attention to the question of children who are over school age and children who are under school age in regard to billeting arrangements.

I believe I was the first Member in this House to suggest billeting of children when the question of evacuation arose. There has been a good deal of talk about camps, hostels and that kind of thing. I saw one house in the area where I went in which the owner had not lived for a long time, and

he wrote to say that we could have the servants' quarters and use them for the children. There are scores of houses empty. If you look at the "Times," the "Telegraph," "Country Life" and papers of that sort you will see advertisements of beautiful houses for sale. Why not buy them? They have been up for sale in some cases for quite a long time.

Prices ought to be tumbling down by now, and it would be advisable to consider the possibility of buying some of these houses in these areas where mothers could be accommodated under some kind of social arrangement, so that they could keep their own privacy and have some system of communal living that would enable them to dine together.

There is another instance of a serious mistake being made. The children went away in charge of teachers, and there was a responsible person available in every case, but the mothers were handed over by one area to another and nobody was in charge of them. I met many London County Council mothers seeking somebody to whom to put their grievances and to obtain a remedy. I met women from Walthamstow in exactly the same position. They wanted some one to whom to tell their grievances so that they might get them remedied. They went to teachers, who said that while they were willing to do what they could, they had no authority, as they were sent to look after the school children. I went, with the authority of my local authority, to the reception area, and in company with the Director of Education, instructed a teacher, in places where there were mothers about, to look after the mothers and to forget the school children for the time being. These teachers were told that their job was to look after the mothers and to report to the authority from which they came. They were told that, where grievances could be remedied locally, they should be referred to the local officers and others concerned. If it could be arranged for somebody to look after mothers in the same way as the children are looked after, and to act as a sort of liaison officer between the sending and the receiving authority, somebody who would be kindly and considerate towards the mothers, I believe that it would do an immense amount of good.

I express the hope that has already been expressed by many people, that those who have gone away and are in reasonably good circumstances will stay away. I believe that by&and£by they will be very glad to do so, but we must make the conditions somewhat better than they are at present. We should remedy the mistakes which have been made. I do not believe that there have been many mistakes considering the magnitude of the problem. I am sure that if a little time is given, and there is kindness, consideration and toleration among all the people concerned, this thing will right itself. I would ask the Minister and the Government to be generous in their treatment of mothers, if they desire them to remain away. They should encourage them to do so by making their conditions tolerable and assuring them that while they are in the country their husbands at home are getting on reasonably well.

There were some local authorities who professed not to know that they had compulsory powers, and there were a few who, knowing they had them, declined to use the powers against certain persons. I am sure that everyone in this House will say that as far as billeting is concerned, where a district has to accept persons to be billeted, whether they are children, mothers, soldiers or civil servants, the law has to be enforced without regard to distinctions of class or anything else. The common obligation that has been placed on the district must be fairly administered by the billeting authority. There is an appeal committee to which any aggrieved person may go, and the

members of that committee should be regarded as the proper persons to settle all questions of dispute.

I hope that if my words can reach any parents outside this House, I may be allowed to beg of them to leave their children where they are in the reception areas. As one who has had some experience in the past of being responsible for children away from their homes, I urge that as far as possible parents should do nothing to create a feeling of home sickness. I hope the parents will realise that in the great majority of cases the persons who have received the children are honestly trying to do their best for them. There is a story in today's "Schoolmaster" of some boys who were billeted in a village. The good man of the house and his wife produced halma, ludo, snakes and ladders and the other games which their children had used. After playing with these games for three quarters of an hour one of the boys said, "These are Cissies' games. Haven't you got a pack of cards." The man produced a pack of cards and after a couple of hours he had to borrow his train fare for the next day. Having had experience of cockney boys, I can well believe that that is true.

The people have done their very best in most cases to make the children feel at home, and needlessly to upset them is neither in the national interest nor in the interest of the children. I do, how-ever, want to put in a plea for one particular case. I hope that where a doctor says that it would be an advantage to a child in circumstances of illness or otherwise that the parent should see the child, and where the parent cannot afford it—I hope the means test, if any, will not be too severe—free railway vouchers should be given so that the parents can in those circumstances see the child. I am sure that that would do a great deal towards easing the minds of many parents in this matter.

There have been cases reported to me, as I anticipated there would be, where difficulties with regard to sanitation and water supply are giving concern to the local authorities. I feel sure that the Minister of Health will endeavour to keep in touch with such local authorities and give them all the assistance and advice that is possible. There are various problems relating to finance, especially in regard to some women and children who have gone out. These cases are very urgent, and I hope they will receive the sympathetic consideration of those in whose hands they lie.

There is one final point which more concerns the Board of Education than the Ministry of Health, although both are concerned in it. Owing to the fact that the receiving authorities were in the main not education authorities very little regard has been paid in some areas to keeping schools together when they were evacuated. I have had a case brought to my notice of a secondary school that is spread over seven or eight villages, and I have also the case of quite a small school in Surrey, from which fewer than 100 children were taken, which has been spread between three parishes in Berks and Buckinghamshire—I do not think I am giving information to the enemy and I hope the Minister of Information will not be too hard upon me—the village of Sunninghill, in Berkshire, Burnham in Buckinghamshire and Dorney in Buckinghamshire, three most delightful villages any one of which could have accommodated all the children. There will have to be some reshuffling of the children to put that matter right. It is desirable that as far as possible school units should be restored. I know the difficulties which confronted the billeting authorities when they had these children placed upon their hands and had to find places for them.

It was essential that they should be placed in billets as soon as possible, and I hope that any adjustments which have to be made will be made at as early a date as is possible.

I want to say on behalf of my hon. Friends that we desire to express our thanks to all those who have had anything to do with this great movement of the population. We know that it has imposed discomforts on some people in the receiving areas. We thank them for the spirit with which these discomforts have been borne. May I repeat something which was said by the Minister of Health, that in the weeks that lie ahead of us none of us knows whether he may not be evacuated from some place which at the moment appears to be quite safe. We have to meet perils which are common perils in the spirit of national unity which has been so largely exemplified, and I sincerely hope that no people who have been evacuated will unnecessarily come back. I hope that where discomforts exist which can be removed, the earliest opportunity will be taken of removing them, because I am sure that there is a desire on the part of the receiving as well as the evacuation areas that this measure shall be one which will enable people to enjoy in as much safety as they can the life which lies ahead during the next few months. It may be that within the next few weeks detailed criticisms may have to be made. This evening I have tried not to elaborate criticisms which appear to me to be merely petty. I believe that the discomforts, I will not call them inefficiencies, which are being experienced at the moment, have been reduced to the minimum by the co-operation of all concerned, and I sincerely hope that that co-operation will continue and that the Minister will live up to the spirit of Circular 1871, which I welcome, so that we may be able to congratulate ourselves when the whole business is over upon having carried through this gigantic movement with the minimum of friction and the maximum of advantage.

Leyton MP Reg Sorenson

[§ Mr. Sorensen](#)

The Noble Lady knows more about butlers than I do. Perhaps she also is frightened of her own butler, although I do not suppose she is frightened of anybody. However, that may appear a trivial matter, but really it is not so trivial. After all, one has to realise that although these working-class women may have been living in small and poor homes, they have been used to controlling those homes. They have had their own domestic and social happiness; they have arranged their own affairs in their own way; they have known the local institutions, desirable or otherwise; they have got into the habit of living in their own world. After all, a home is much more important to a woman than it is to a man. Then they are taken from their home and pushed into another little home, or it may be a large house, and naturally they feel like fishes out of water; and, try as they may, within 24 hours a strange homesickness comes over them. They have not always the necessary background which some alleged more cultural people possess. They find that habits to which they have been accustomed cannot be pursued and even that work which they want to do cannot be done. I dare say that many women in large houses, for instance, would be much happier if only they could have some work to do, and that also obtains in smaller houses.

That being so, we should appreciate that whether women have gone into big homes or three-roomed cottages, there are psychological problems, and it is useless to try to place the blame here or there. They are human problems which we have to try to solve. One thing that is essential is that you should recognise that we are dealing not merely with a mass but with human beings each of whom has her own idiosyncrasies and characteristics. In all our plans and schemes for a new society we tend, perhaps, to overlook that fact, and it is essential that we should recognise it in this instance or, whatever our sincere desires, they will not reach fulfilment. We want to remove from the mothers who have gone into these reception areas any idea that we have shoved them out in the countryside and left them there like some dump. Some have that impression. Last week I met several women sitting in the fields and I talked with them. They said that in that weather it was very nice, but one said, "What am I to do? My hostess told me immediately I had had my breakfast that she could not have me in her house as it was too small and I must clear out. I have been sitting in the cemetery and sitting here, but I am wondering when I am going to bath my baby."

Stories have been told which each one of us could multiply indefinitely. We should appreciate that in some of these cases the best women in the world, whether the owners of little cottages or wealthier owners of large houses, or evacuated mothers, are finding a real difficulty in trying to adjust themselves to a new environment. I hope to go round the villages again and keep in constant touch with them. I believe all Members should try to keep in touch with their constituents, not merely politically but because we have a duty as human beings to other human beings. I hope I shall get my petrol ration increased in consequence. Perhaps the Minister of Health will take that into consideration. I will use it only for that purpose, if he will drop a hint in the right direction. One could spend a great deal of time detailing a host of problems that one has come across in the course of one's human investigations. I dare say we shall have an opportunity of taking these problems, and perhaps suggesting solutions, to the Minister of Health and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Education.

Whether the war is going to last three years or much less, as we all fervently hope, it will be monstrous to suggest that either the children or the mothers are to be pushed out into the countryside, sometimes miles away, and then be told they will not see their children and their husbands for months and months to come. That in itself has aroused a large number of real human difficulties. Think of the menfolk who may be serving and may come back on leave and perhaps find their wives miles away and their children scattered. What is going to happen in those circumstances? I strongly support the plea that special transport facilities shall be organised to enable fathers to visit their children and husbands their wives, and perhaps on occasion wives to visit their children in some other part of the country. I suggest that provision should be made for communal centres wherever practicable. I saw at Dunmow a disused post office taken over and roughly adapted for the use of the women in the locality. I do not know who was responsible for initiating it, but I compliment him sincerely. At the same time, this rather derelict building, festooned with cobwebs and smelling musty and fusty, with 20 or 30 wailing children, was hardly the place for women to get out of the pouring rain. I suggest that there should be a drive towards the establishment of communal centres, attractively fitted out, in which mothers could rest with their children, and so relieve the burden on the hostesses and also have opportunities to meet their kindred and friends from their own districts.

Much remains to be done in the provision of social services. Many of these women have been used to relatively adequate social services in their own areas and miss them in the rural areas. That gap ought to be filled. My hon. Friend the Member for West Walthamstow (Mr. McEntee) suggested that some large houses should be rented. I go further and say they should be commandeered, at least for the period of the war. In the national interest we are commandeering human lives. Surely if there are large houses vacant in the country, or boarding-houses and hotels vacant along the sea-coast, they should be taken over by the nation for the nation's mothers and children and fitted up properly for the use of those who are bearing very heavy burdens at the present time. I, as the representative of West Leyton and my colleagues in that district, do not want it to appear that we have lost contact with the people who have gone away. Technically our responsibility is ended, but morally our responsibility remains. As a county councillor I recognise that in many of the reception areas co-ordination and co-operation are needed and I would urge the consideration and co-operation are needed and I would urge the consideration of a scheme by which the evacuating authorities and the authorities in the reception areas and the county council should collaborate, so that financial and other responsibilities could be shared and the highest results achieved.

In that way a great deal more could be done and unnecessary friction avoided. We do not want to set the country folk against the town folk. They are the same people, they belong to the same country and they share the same burdens. We want, if we can, to gain something of real value for our country out of this terrible tribulation. There are difficulties and sorrows almost indescribable at the present time and perhaps more are to follow, but, at least, let us resolve that something will be gained from it all for the coming generation. I believe that on the lines I have just indicated we can approach a solution of this problem.

Part 4 – My Primary Sources For The Article

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Bill Bayliss

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