



The Home Front 1939–1945

Evacuation

The UK entered World War II on 3rd September, 1939. However, for many people in the UK, especially children, the war started before that date. These people were the evacuees¹.

Between 1938 and 1939 the British government started to prepare for war. The government decided to move children out of the cities and into the countryside². At 11.07 a.m. on 31st August, 1939, the government sent out an important message: 'Evacuate forthwith'³.

In the next four days, more than three million British children moved out of the cities and into the countryside. Their parents had jobs in the cities, so they stayed behind to work. Most children travelled with their teachers. About 100,000 teachers joined the evacuation. Everybody travelled by train. The government gave parents a list of things that children should take. The list included clothes, food and a gas mask⁴. Everything had to be put in one bag. Younger children had their name and address on labels⁵ on their clothes. For many children it was their first visit to the countryside. It was exciting, and terrifying...

The children stayed with 'host families'⁶. Some of these families didn't want to have city children in their homes, but they had no choice! Some children had a good time and they made friends with their new families. Other children found it a lot more difficult. They were a long way from home and they missed⁷ their families. Of course, not many people had phones at that time, so they could only write letters home. The evacuees went to local schools in the countryside. There were too many children in these schools, so often the local children went to school in the morning and the city children went in the afternoon.



Wartime Britain

German planes started to attack London in September 1940. In about nine months German planes dropped 31,000 bombs on London. The bombs hit a million houses and killed more than 20,000 people. Most attacks were at night, and the safest place to be was under the ground. Some people slept in bomb shelters⁸ in their gardens. Other people went to the nearest Underground tube station. Some nights more than 150,000 people slept in the Underground. Bombs fell on other cities, too. There were attacks on ports like Liverpool, and industrial cities like Birmingham and Coventry.

1 4.19 Read and listen to the text. Then answer the questions. ES

- 1 Who were the evacuees?
- 2 On what date did the British government start the evacuation?
- 3 How many children did the government evacuate?
- 4 Who travelled with the children?
- 5 How did they travel to the countryside?
- 6 What did the evacuees take with them?
- 7 Who did the children stay with?
- 8 How did they communicate with their families?
- 9 Where did they go to school?
- 10 Why did many children only go to school for half a day?

Glossary

- ¹ evacuee *sfollato*
- ² countryside *campagna*
- ³ forthwith *immediatamente*
- ⁴ gas mask *maschera antigas*
- ⁵ labels *etichette*
- ⁶ host families *famiglie ospitanti*
- ⁷ missed (a loved one) *sentivano la mancanza (di una persona cara)*
- ⁸ bomb shelters *rifugi a prova di bomba*



'I was born in 1933 in South London and I was evacuated to Denbury, in Devon, in 1939. I was only six, but I remember a railway station with hundreds of children. We all had labels on our coats. When we got to Denbury 20 of us got off the train. We all stood in the centre of the village. People came to the centre and chose the child they wanted. I don't think I was a very pretty child, because I was the last child to find a family. I went home with Mr and Mrs Baker. They were nice and they lived on a farm with lots of animals. I missed my parents, but I loved the animals on the farm!'

Jane Etherington



The Evacuees



'My brother and I went to Oswestry, in Shropshire. It was 1939, I was seven years old and my brother Evan was only five. I didn't want to be separated from my little brother, so I held his hand¹ all the way from Liverpool to Shropshire. When we arrived, they wanted Evan to live with a different family, but I wouldn't let go of his hand²! Finally we both went to live with Mr and Mrs Price. They had a very small house and we had to share a bed. It wasn't too bad, because I had my brother and my parents came to visit us three times.'

Patrick Morgan



Glossary

¹ held his hand *l'ho tenuto per mano*

² let go of his hand *lasciargli la mano*

2 4.20 Read and listen to the stories told by Jane Etherington and Patrick Morgan. Then complete the table below.

	Jane Etherington	Patrick Morgan
Before evacuation lived in	<u>South London</u>	6 _____
Age when they were evacuated	1 _____	7 _____
Evacuated to	2 _____	8 _____
Name of family that he/she stayed with	3 _____	9 _____
Bad thing(s) that he/she remembers	4 _____	10 _____
Good thing(s) that he/she remembers	5 _____	11 _____

Project

3 Pairwork With a partner imagine you are going to be evacuated and live with a host family. Make a list of ten things you would take with you and say why you would take them. Present your ideas to your class.

4 Now write a short text (70 – 100 words) about your experience. Use the questions below to help you. **ES**

- Where are you from?
- Where did you go?
- Who was your host family? (names, children, etc.?)
- Where did you live? (in a house, on a farm, etc.?)
- Where did you go to school?
- Who were your friends?
- What did you miss about home?