

# 20th Century Sparks!

## World War Two

### Evacuees

**The implications of continuous air attacks on Britain's cities and towns led to the introduction of an evacuation programme. Children and babies were sent to the relative safety of the country to be spared the expected horrors of the bombings.**

**On this page you can explore some local memories of evacuees and host families.**

**There are further links in [Visitors to Brighton and Prisoners of War](#) about other visitors to the local area during the war.**



Re-enactment of World War II Evacuation, 1988. Downs Junior School carrying out an evacuation procedure to learn how it would have felt to be an evacuee in the Second World War.

*Copyright Evening Argus*

As the bombing became worse, the local authorities decided to evacuate thousands of children into the country to live with kind-hearted people for safety and comfort. They had their names and addresses on labels fastened to their jackets, their gas masks over their shoulders, and suitcases large and small packed with their clothes, etc. A good many children struggled along with this luggage to the various railway stations, from many large towns in the South and many more from the London area. It was a very pitiful sight to watch as they kissed their mums and dads goodbye.

*Albert Paul - [Hard work and no consideration](#)*

An official estimate in 1937 expected the war to start with sixty days of continuous air attack against the main cities, in which 600,000 people would be killed. (In reality 60,000 civilians were killed by enemy air attack in the whole six years of the war.) To meet this threat a massive evacuation was organised. The whole of Britain was divided into evacuation, neutral and reception areas. Plans were made to move 4 million people, mainly school children and mothers with their babies, from the first to the last areas; that is from the major cities to the countryside and smaller towns.

In fact, in 1939 one and a half million persons were officially evacuated and two million moved to safety making their own arrangements. Most of those officially evacuated in 1939 drifted back to their homes just in time for the 1940/41 Blitz, when another unofficial evacuation began. Finally in the summer of 1944 1.5 million people left London under threat from the V1 and V2 weapons.

*Michael Corum in [Brighton behind the Front](#)*



## World War Two

### Evacuees - continued

The police told us that this was another of Hitler's inventions called the V2, the world's first rocket missile and the second of Hitler's V-weapons, travelling at 3000 miles per hour. There could be no warning before the 2000 lb. warhead exploded. The first V2 fell at Chiswick on September 8th 1944 and another 1000 followed, killing 2,754 people before the last one fell at Kent on March 27th 1945. More V2s fell on Antwerp than on London, while on their way over.

*Albert Paul - Hard work and no consideration*

This was a massive exodus, a mixing of people which had a major effect on British society and individual lives. As never before 'one half found out how the other half lived', town met country and the classes were mixed up.

Brighton started the war as a reception area, receiving children from London. In 1940, as a front-line town, it became an evacuation area and sent some of its children away to the north.

*Michael Corum in Brighton behind the Front*

#### 16 March 1941

The children leave this morning, more tomorrow and others on Tuesday. It appears there are about 13,000 children in Brighton, 5,000 were expected to go, but I think only 3,500 are registered, which is considered quite good when compared with other towns. Mothers with young children may go if they have friends or relatives in reception areas.

*Olive Stammer in Brighton behind the Front*

When our teacher at St Mark's School in Arundel Road told us that we were going to be evacuated, none of us knew what she meant. I think we thought that it was a bit like a long annual Sunday School outing, and we were looking forward to going away. Why did we have to go to the clinic to be examined first? Why did we have to suffer the indignity of 'Nitty Nora' going through our hair with a steel knitting needle?

We all assembled at the school early one morning, with luggage labels pinned firmly to our coats, our few pitiful possessions in one case, and with our cardboard gas mask boxes on a string over our shoulders. We scrambled aboard the coaches that were to take us to the station and our new homes in Yorkshire, we thought it was exciting, so why was my mother crying?

After a while my father took me home. I still cringe when I hear stories of other evacuees as some of them were badly treated. It is one of the worst memories of my life time, I am sure my mother never realised how unhappy I was.

*Rita Packham in Brighton behind the Front*



## **World War Two**

### **Evacuees - continued**

We took an evacuee from London. I asked my father to get a child for us to care for, so he went to the office where they were dealing with homes for the evacuees, and he came back with a mother and baby boy of eighteen months, Barbara and Arthur. I was thrilled having a baby in the house, he was a lovely little chap, and we grew very fond of him. His mother was divorced and didn't appear to have any relatives, except for a brother who seemed to manage her affairs and visited her now and again. Barbara and Arthur stayed with us for a couple of years.

*Olive Masterson - The Circle of Life*

All this happened in September 1939 and onwards, and a good many of these children, who are now young men and women, made great friends with the people who took them into their homes.

*Albert Paul - Hard work and no consideration*



## World War Two

### Visitors to Brighton

An important aspect of wartime Britain was the unwilling movement of people from well known home environments to some distant different place. Town children were evacuated to a countryside they had never seen before; men conscripted into the armed forces found themselves 'posted overseas', unwilling travellers for the first time in their lives. Women were directed from one end of the country to the other to work of national importance; families trekked each night out of blitzed towns to escape the bombs.

But people also came into communities from outside and not only from other parts of Britain. There were the allies; the Free French, Dutch, Poles and above all the Americans. Large numbers of Canadians moved into Brighton, it was from this part of the coast that the Canadians took part in the disastrous 1942 raid on Dieppe). Opinion about these incomers varied, some criticised the Yanks, the Canadians and other allies because they were 'overpaid, oversexed and over here'; but others profited from these contacts in a variety of ways and widened their horizons.

*Michael Corum in Brighton behind the Front*

The Canadians were very attractive to the girls, and attracted to the girls; this was because they generally had things which the local population did not have. They had cigarettes, sweets and confectionery of various kinds, they had chewing gum, which was considered a desirable commodity. As a boy, like many others of my age, I used to follow them round and say, 'Have you got any gum, chum', the standard phrase used. They would generally give you some, and also quite often bars of chocolate, which were quite unobtainable.

The Canadians, of course, had other ways of doing things, and other ways of talking, so a lot of the expressions were taken up by the girls especially, who liked aping the sort of comments that they made. They were extremely keen on ice hockey, almost their national sport, and this had a spin off on to the local team of Brighton Tigers, famous then, and for a long time after the war, at the SS Brighton, the sports stadium, at the bottom of West Street.

*Brian Dungate in Brighton behind the Front*

The dance halls were full of servicemen, some of them looked so young - even to me. All of them went to dance halls in the evening to have a good time. This was where they could try to forget what might be ahead of them. A lot of them did this by having too much to drink. They knew there would be women to hold when they danced and, if they could, they would go home with them for the night. The women felt the same way as you never knew if you were going to be alive the next day. This was due to the unpredictable bombing from German planes. Either on their way over to bomb London, or on their return journey when they wanted to off load their bombs. This would help to make the planes lighter and fly faster to evade the spitfires. This meant the SouthCoast was the dumping ground. Milly became attached to one young naval officer who told her he did not expect to return from the war and that he was sure he would be killed. She later heard that he had died.



## **World War Two**

### **Visitors to Brighton - continued**

We met Australians, South Africans, Americans and French Canadian servicemen. I did not like some of the Canadians, who were very strong, well built and often uncouth men. Some of them told me they were employed as lumber-jacks and lived in the backwoods of Canada. Since the war I have realised that some of these men were the first to land in France on D. Day and that many of them were killed on the beaches immediately on landing. Some of them may have been convicts, who were given the choice of staying in prison or enlisting. If they enlisted, they were specially trained for D. Day. In the dance halls I was aware that they spent most of their time drinking. They did not know how to dance or how to behave with women. When trouble arose in the dance hall, the Military Police appeared and took them away.

*Barbara Chapman - Boxing Day Baby*



## **World War Two**

### **Prisoners of War**

Towards the end of the war we had some German and Italian prisoners working on the numerous farms around us in Tattingstone and one day the bridle on the horse slipped off, with me with it, and straight into the arms of an Italian prisoner [*Mary would of been in her early teens*]. I was shocked but the crowd of Italians who were with him were very kind and gave me a cup of tea and sat me down on a fallen log. The mistress who was with me told me to come away from them and she did not half give me a thumping. The Italian who had broken my fall did not half tell her off. She then grabbed hold of me and put me back on the horse and got up behind me in a fine old stew!

The Germans were very clever as they made 'Jumping Jacks' out of wood of fallen trees and they were allowed to sell them. When I was out on my cycle rides I often saw the German Prisoners, and used to watch them making these Jumping Jacks. If I had been seen talking to them Hell would have been let loose on me, but fortunately no-one found out. They were so kind and gentle, and even so there were many of our own people about to see that no-one came to any harm. One of them even was kind enough to give me one of these Jumping Jacks without any payment, he was rather a fatherly type of man.

*Mary Adams - Those Lost Years*