

## Evacuation of Children and Women during World War 2



How do you think the children are feeling in the photo above?  
What do you think they have packed in their bags?

### What is evacuation?

Evacuation means leaving a place. During the Second World War, many children living in big cities and towns were moved temporarily from their homes to places considered safer, usually out in the countryside.

### When did evacuations take place in Britain?

The British evacuation began on Friday 1 September 1939. It was called 'Operation Pied Piper'.

Between 1939 - 1945 there were three major evacuations in preparation of the German Luftwaffe bombing Britain.

1. The first official evacuations began on **September 1 1939**, two days before the declaration of war. By **January 1940** almost 60% had returned to their homes.

A second evacuation effort was started after the Germans had taken over most of France. **From June 13 to June 18, 1940**, around 100,000 children were evacuated (in many cases re-evacuated). When the Blitz began on **7 September 1940**, children who had returned home or had not been evacuated were evacuated. By the end of 1941, city centres, especially London, became safer.

1. From **June 1944**, the Germans attacked again by firing V1 rockets on Britain, followed later by also V2 rockets. 1,000,000 women, children, elderly and disabled people were evacuate from London. This new way of attacking Britain carried on until the end of the war in Europe in **May 1945**.



**Sir John Anderson (a member of the House of Commons and placed in charged of Air Raid Precautions or ARP) divided the UK into three areas:**

1. **Evacuation** – areas where heavy bombing was expected.
2. **Neutral** – areas that would not need to send or receive evacuees.
3. **Reception** – rural areas where evacuees would be sent.

## **When did Evacuation end?**

World War Two ended in September 1945, however evacuation did not officially end until **March 1946** when it was felt that Britain was no longer under threat from invasion. Surprisingly, even 6 months after the war had ended, there were still 5,200 evacuees living in rural areas with their host families.

Many evacuees' had returned home long before March 1946.

In April 1945, the Government began to make travel arrangements to return the evacuees to their homes when the war was over.

## **What was it like for a child to be evacuated?**

Being an evacuee must have been scary and exciting at the same time. The children had to leave their families and homes behind and try to fit in with host families in the country.

### **At the station**

Children had labels attached to them, as though they were parcels. They stood at railway stations not knowing where they were going nor if they would be split from brothers and sisters who had gathered with them. They felt scared about being away from their families but also excited about going to a place they had never seen before and only read about in books.

### **On arrival**

The children arrived in the countryside, tired, hungry and uncertain whether they would ever see their families again.

They were taken to the village hall, where they would be met by the **billeting officer** (the person in charge of finding them homes). A 'pick-you-own evacuee' sessions would then take place, where **host families** (the people they were going to live with) haggled over the most presentable children while the sicklier and grubbier children were left until last.

### Why was evacuation introduced by the Government?

The British government was worried that a new war might begin when Hitler came to power in 1933. They were afraid that British cities and towns would be targets for bombing raids by aircraft.

### Why was it important for people to be evacuated?

Evacuation tried to ensure the safety of young children from the cities that were considered to be in danger of German bombing - London, Coventry, Birmingham, Portsmouth etc.

### Who was evacuated?

Schoolchildren (827,000) and their teachers

Mothers with children under five (524,000)

Pregnant women (12,000)

Some disabled people

### What clothes did children take with them?

The government recommended that in addition to their gas mask and identity card the evacuees had the following items:

Boys:

2 vests

2 pairs of pants

Pair of trousers

2 pairs of socks

6 handkerchiefs

Pullover or jersey

Girls:

Vest

Pair of knickers

Petticoat

2 pairs of stockings

6 handkerchiefs

Slip (like a very long vest with shoulder straps)

Blouse

Cardigan

### What else did they pack in their suitcases?

Overcoat or mackintosh

Comb

1 pair of Wellington boots

Towel

Soap

Facecloth

Toothbrush

Boots or shoes

Plimsolls

Sandwiches

Packet of nuts and raisins

Dry biscuits

Barley sugar (rather than sugar)

### How were they evacuated?

By train and road

### Where were they evacuated to?

To smaller towns and villages in the countryside. Some children were sent to stay with relatives outside in the countryside, but others were sent to live with complete strangers.

Billeting officers were responsible for helping to find homes for the evacuees. Householders in the country who billeted (housed) city children were given money by the government.

### When were they first evacuated?

At 11.07am on Thursday 31st August 1939 the order was given to evacuate forthwith.

1.5 Million children, pregnant women and other vulnerable people such as the disabled, evacuated to safer countryside locations in just two days.

But.....

There were no big bombing raids on Britain in the first months of the war (known as The Phoney War) as a result by early 1940 many children had returned home.

### When were they evacuated again?

They were evacuated again when heavy bombing raids started in the autumn of 1940 - The Blitz - and then again later, in 1944, when Germany attacked Britain with V1 Flying Bombs and V2 rockets.

### How many people were evacuated during the war?

By the end of the Second World War around 3.5 million people, mainly children had experienced evacuation. No one was forced to go but parents were encouraged by posters and told that their children would be safer from German bombs if they moved to the country.

