



Evacuation



LEAVE THIS TO US SONNY—YOU OUGHT TO BE OUT OF LONDON

MINISTRY OF HEALTH EVACUATION SCHEME

This booklet is No.2 in the Mass-Observation Teaching Booklets series and is designed for use in secondary schools. It has been prepared by Peter Chrisp as part of a Community Programme funded by the Manpower Services Commission and includes edited extracts from the Mass-Observation Archive.

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Evacuation

e·vac·u·ate (ɪˈvækju,eɪt) *vb.* (*mainly tr.*) 1. (*also intr.*) to withdraw or cause to withdraw from (a place of danger) to a place of greater safety.

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"They call it Spring, Mummy, and they have one every year down here"

INTRODUCTION

In the 1930s it was widely feared that a new war would start with massive bombing of Britain's cities from the air. As the threat of war with Germany increased, the Government made plans to prevent a breakdown of civilian morale and panic flight from the cities. They decided to evacuate children and mothers with babies from the threatened areas to the countryside.

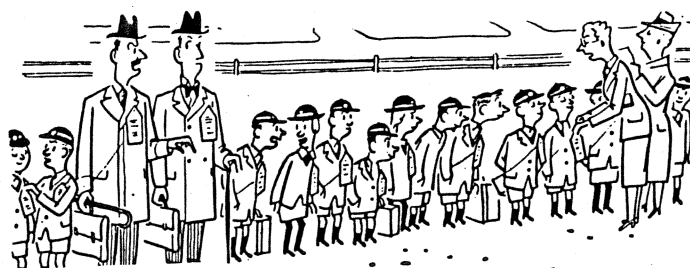
The Government had been preparing for this evacuation since 1931. Detailed plans were drawn up dividing the country into evacuation areas, reception areas, and neutral areas: parents living in the evacuation areas were to be encouraged to send their children to the reception areas. The scheme was to be voluntary so the number of evacuees varied from city to city depending on how effective the local organisation was; thus 75% of children in Manchester were evacuated but only 15% from Sheffield.

In the reception areas billeting officers were appointed whose task was to find host families for the evacuees. This was also voluntary though the officer did have compulsory powers if necessary. The hosts were to be paid an allowance of 10s-6d per week for each single child and child over sixteen, and 8s-6d per week for each extra child and mother (see the note on money at the end of the booklet).

On Friday, September 1st 1939 Hitler invaded Poland and the evacuation scheme went into effect. Children were assembled by their schoolteachers on station platforms in London, Clydeside, Merseyside, the industrial Midlands, Portsmouth and Southampton. They were taken by train to unknown destinations in the countryside where they were met by the billeting officers and the host parents.

In the first week of the Government scheme one and a half million people were evacuated. Another two million people had already made private arrangements to leave the cities in the months leading up to the war. This was the largest mass movement of people ever seen in Britain and it was completed without a single accident.

But despite this initial success problems with the scheme soon became apparent. The middle class hosts were appalled at the condition and behaviour of children from the worst slums in Britain, and the children had to cope with homesickness and the strangeness of life in the countryside. The Mass-Observation Archive has many accounts of children who had never had fresh food, who had never slept in a bed of their own or eaten at a table with a knife and fork. Most disturbingly many did not know how to use a toilet. It is not surprising that the stress the children felt led to widespread bedwetting. But the most immediate problem was cleanliness: partly because evacuation took place at the end of a long summer holiday when schools had not had their delousing parades for some months many children were infested with lice.



Businesses also
were evacuated from
the cities

"You should have laid more stress on the fact that we were
Business evacuees . . ."

If the expected bombing raids had taken place in 1939 the problems of the scheme might have seemed trivial in comparison with its benefits. However the period known as the 'phoney war' followed: the first bombers did not come till the summer of 1940. By the spring a million of the original evacuees had returned to the cities, often to find schools closed.

With the defeat of the allied armies and the fall of France, the south and east coasts of Britain became much more vulnerable to German bombing. A new evacuation scheme was needed. In May 1940 children on these coasts were moved to South Wales. Between June 13th and 18th 100,000 children were evacuated from London, to be followed by 213,000 more over the next three months in a 'trickle scheme'. Many of these children were being evacuated for a second time. There was also a 'seavac' scheme for sending wealthier children to America and Canada, though the sinking in September of the City of Benares with 73 children on board brought this to an end.

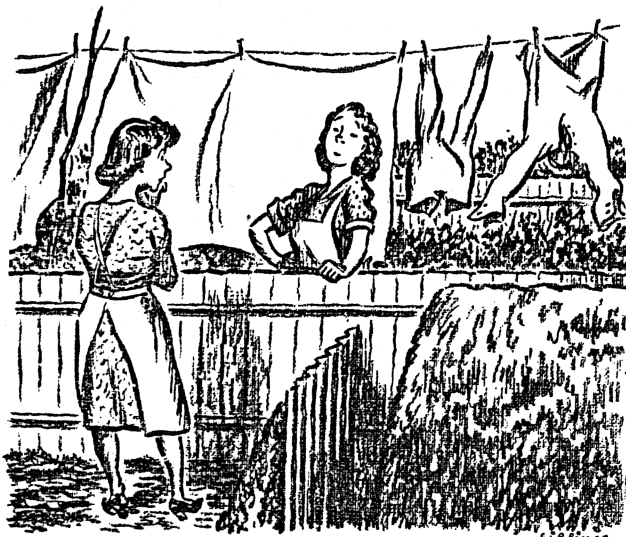
But because of the widespread failure of the first scheme it was much more difficult to persuade parents in 1940 to send their children to the countryside. Many stayed in the cities until they were forced to leave by the devastation caused by the bombs.

The major theme of the Mass-Observation reports was the enormous difference between the prosperous countryside and the chronically poor slum dwellers who were billeted on them. As the following accounts show, this was a difficult experience for both hosts and guests. But a positive result was that the middle-classes learned just how appalling the conditions of the city slums were. In the words of one informant, 'one half of Britain is at last learning how the other half lives.'



PUBLIC INFORMATION
LEAFLET NO. 3

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



*"My little Em'ly's down in Loamshire
for the duration of evacuation"*

EVACUATION

WHY AND HOW?

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 (see list at the back of this leaflet) 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 schoolteachers 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 well 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 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 menfolk. Possibly they are thinking that they might as well wait and see; that it may 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 "evacuable" 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 any 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 into 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 should 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 the 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 "evacuable" areas under the Government scheme are:—

(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.

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.



"London always is evacuated about this time of year"

ARRIVAL

Evacuation was announced over the radio on Thursday the 31st of August, and the huge operation began on Friday morning. In London, 72 stations organised special trains for the countryside. Travelling on one of them was Susan Waters, a 21 year old infant school teacher in charge of a group of young evacuees:

When we first set off from school, after having waited from 8.0 am until 11.30 am for orders to leave, we had no idea of our destination. There had been rumours about a place in Bedfordshire which proved to be incorrect. We trailed along to Walthamstow station and waited on the platform for about a quarter of an hour, after which time a train entered the station and we boarded it still not knowing our destination. The train proceeded at express speed until it arrived at Bedford Midland Station, where it stopped and we had orders to alight. We were then led - hundreds of us - about half a mile through the town to a kind of village green where there were several marquees and trestle tables and chairs. We were led into a large marquee, divided up into five sections and then sent, one section at a time in order to prevent overcrowding while eating, to the trestle tables where tea, lemonade and biscuits were served. After partaking of this refreshment we trooped through another marquee where the children were given a carrier bag filled with food for 24 hours - tin of beef, rolls, butter, chocolate etc. We were subsequently packed into buses (still unaware of our destination) and driven to ----(we didn't know its name until later) where we trooped into the village green cum playing field.

So far the organisation had been perfect. But the scene which ensued was more akin to a cattle or slave market than anything else. The prospective foster mothers who should not have been allowed onto the field at all just invaded us and walked about the field picking out what they considered to be the most presentable specimens and then harassed the poor billeting officers for the registration slips which were essential if they were to get the necessary cash for food and lodging from the government. Thus it was some hours before the children were all disposed of and those that felt they were going to get left behind were dissolved in tears and hadn't the slightest idea where the majority of them were.

A typical story from the reception areas comes from James McCallum, a 38 year old science teacher who was appointed billeting officer in the remote highland town of Kingussie:

The evacuees in this area were from a slum-clearance scheme in Edinburgh, and so some (at least 10%) were in a shocking condition of neglect, families with mothers as well as unaccompanied children - lousy, afflicted with impetigo and ringworm etc. This, on top of their arrival at 11.40pm (which allowed of nothing but to get them under cover for the night) led to a great deal of dissatisfaction on the part of the hosts, where these were well to do. Working class hosts either got down to it and cleaned their guests up, or being of the same temper felt quite at home with them. The more comfortable hosts, in spite of having more facilities, raised Cain in most instances until the children were removed. They were delightfully oblivious of the fact that other people had to take what they were refusing to deal with; the children did not cease to exist because they were undesirable.

James McCallum:

The most serious difficulty for the hosts has undoubtedly been the quite unexpected coming of the mothers. We had been instructed to arrange for the reception of unaccompanied children, and my district was to take about 160 of them. This was almost possible. I actually received 17 families, a total of 85 persons, ranging from babies of three weeks upwards.

Edward Heslop, a chemist from Colne in Lancashire, described the difficulty of one child in finding a billet:

We heard from our next-door neighbour of a woman a few streets away who was asked to take a girl into her home. The girl (twelve years old) presented such an unkempt appearance that the woman refused her. At the end of the day the child was presented again. Nobody would take her in. The woman had compassion on her and gave her shelter. The child was nervous, dirty and badly clad. She wet the bed the first night and was terrified of the consequences.

In Burford, Oxfordshire, 33 year old Renee Humphries, a writer and housewife, found confusion about the powers of the billeting officers:

No-one knows exactly the rights and powers of the billeting officers. And no-one challenges them because they seem to be exercised more rigorously on poor people than on rich, and as the poor people are often either tenants or employees of the billeting officer or his friends, they do not like to protest. Moreover they seem used to being 'run' and ordered about. But this does not prevent a great deal of bad blood and grumbling. I do not think all the ill feeling is the fault of the billeting officer entirely as they are faced with the job of getting a quart into a pint pot, and are so overworked that they have little time and chance to be tactful and find out rights and wrongs.

Betty Stevens, a 26 year old garage worker, Norfolk:

One evacuation official (she did not take any herself) said " When we took on this job we never thought such scruff was coming. We expected unaccompanied children. We never thought the mothers would come interfering. We are sick of their complaints. Don't you listen to their tales. They ought to be thankful anyone will take them."

The women were certainly dirty, but they said they were hurried away without any change of clothes and there were no baths or washing facilities in the country.

HEALTH AND CLEANLINESS

In many cases the first things that hosts noticed about their new guests were dirt and disease. Lice, scabies and impetigo - a bacterial skin condition - were common complaints in the slums of 1939, but they were new to many houseproud country women, as was malnutrition. Jenny Hall, aged 31, from Kelmscott near Huddersfield, described the appearance of her evacuees:

With a few exceptions most of the children have showed signs of neglect and malnutrition. My own two were lifeless and showed obvious signs of oncoming rickets. Fresh air and good feeding is working wonders, especially with the boy who is younger. He now stands straighter and is bubbling over with energy and appears to have grown amazingly. The change-over has unsettled them nervously too. One of the teachers who has come here says that nearly all her class show some nervous twitch.

In West Kirby the billeting officer wrote:

Evacuees came from the toughest of a tough city and their notions of hygiene were distinctly primitive. They came from Liverpool. About 20% of the children and at least 45% of the women were lousy. This apparently had not been foreseen. While we are overcoming it in the children the women are much more difficult to deal with since they do not seem to care and resent any attempts at improvement.

This resentment of evacuee parents at attempts to improve them appears again in an account from Ilkley in Yorkshire:

The number of ruined beds is colossal. The parents do not seem to mind at all. A good many cases have been sent to a special 'house' for the purpose and cured. One furious father removed his four children because he was told they could be cured. 'It was in the family and always had been and he wasn't going to have them cured.'

In Chepstow many evacuees arrived suffering from impetigo. Local women were horrified and blamed the children's mothers, but the headmistress, 47 year old Mrs Mary Rowley, attempted to defend them:

I have spent my time trying to make the women understand that in congested industrial areas it is a constant struggle against dirt and vermin. They do not realise that many of the women go out to work and that the children are left to themselves. Nor do they realise that when you share a water supply with other families in a tenement house, cleanliness is not a goal to strive after as it is here. One half of Britain is at last learning how the other half lives. Many stories are going round. The hairdresser's wife was washing behind a little girl's ears. 'Don't bend my ears' she said, 'they'll never go back.'



DIET PROBLEMS

Some of the most surprising difficulties arose over food. Many of the evacuees had never eaten fresh vegetables or fresh meat. Middle class hosts were shocked to find these young children demanding beer and chips. Mary Rowley, the Chepstow headmistress, collected several stories:

Food problems are arising because these children are not accustomed to plain wholesome food. Many cannot eat butter, having only tasted bread and margarine and bread and lard. One foster mother has had to continue with bread and lard because the children will not eat anything else. Vegetables and greens seem to have been an unknown quantity to them. Their staple diet appears to have been boiled and a threepenny lot, which in Birmingham means two pennyworth of fish and a pennyworth of chips. They don't seem to be able to assimilate a quantity of food at a time. The amount in some cases shows a steady system of semi-starvation. This has improved. Many hours in the open air, unpolluted air, has worked wonders and most people report an improvement in the children's appetites.

'Have you bought us a bottle of beer?' said one of the boys to the man of the house last Saturday. 'Our Dad always brings us a bottle of beer on Saturdays. Sometimes we go to the pub with him.' 'You wouldn't be allowed in the pub' said the man. 'We do go in' said the boy 'and we get under the seat when the cop's around.'

The vicar of St. Francis Woollnock took in a ten year old boy who missed his fish and chips:

All happy. But boy said 'No fish and chips' and missed 'liquid'. When asked what liquid, said 'You know, liquid.'

'What kind of liquid?'

'Green liquid - when you have two pennorth of fish and chips they give you half a pint, when you have more they give you a pint.' Liquid from eels.

Some Gateshead teenagers upset their hosts by treating the home as a hotel:

'What'll you have for breakfast?'

'Bacon and eggs.'

'And what'll you have?'

'Bacon and eggs.'

'That's not what you get at home though, is it?'

'No, but me mother said we better say we'll have that 'cos you're gettin' bloody well paid fer feedin us.'

They also asked for beer for supper and got it.



Edward Heslop, the Lancashire chemist, wrote:

At the end of about two days the children became dissatisfied with their food and left quite a lot of it on their plates. We found a slice of bread down the lavatory basin. Nevertheless, when they did like the food they 'wolfed' it.

One observer sent in this report of six Irish slum women, evacuated from Liverpool to a Cheshire village:

Though the women cooked them a chicken tea for the arrival, this tea was not appreciated by the evacuee women who had never had chicken, did not enjoy it. They were told to get milk for the children from one of the farms, to which one of the women answered that she'd never given her children fresh milk. She wanted to give them tinned milk. Afterwards they tried to buy cooked meat and of course couldn't. Great indignation was aroused.

The Liverpool women had never seen fields before and did not know what to do. They looked, as one of the village women described, fish out of water. The village women were very indignant that their beautiful black and white village was spoiled by these women in shawls. They were catholics on top of it.

In Beccles, Suffolk, Elizabeth Bentley, who was a 25 year old actress, described evacuees settling in to their new diet:

The houses where children are unaccompanied are having no trouble - the children eat rather a lot and for the first few days ours used to drink pints of milk each, but now they are settling in, and except they have to be stopped from eating too many apples, which they will not bite properly, they feed well. In several houses where there are only one mother and child, they feed with the woman of the house and do not do their food separately.

At Barsham they've had trouble with women who couldn't cook at all. They had no idea what to order from the grocer. I suppose they live entirely from tins and fish and chipshops at home. We have had one child who would not eat at all but her mother thought that was the change, not the food.



"What I 'ates about this evacuation is the country makes the kids' voices sound so 'ollow."

The Lighter Side of Evacuation

Scores of Amazing and Amusing Incidents

THEY are here. They have settled down. Northamptonshire's population has increased by 39,000 with the arrival of evacuees from the vulnerable districts of London, writes an "Independent" representative.

Young children showed a brave exterior and declined to succumb to the emotional pangs of homesickness.

Northampton people with prodigious sympathy have recognised and appreciated the inner feelings of these little children and others being ruthlessly torn from their homes through the unknown contingencies of war; torn from their cherished belongings, their parents and relatives.

Accordingly they received a truly admirable welcome. Northamptonians generally are doing their utmost, as indeed it is their duty, to ensure the complete comfort of our visitors.

Thought Potatoes Grew on Trees!

A story is told of an evacuee child from the slums who, seeing for the first time a lark "carolling at the gates of Heaven" above Abington Park, shouted: "Oo! look at that bird a-ollerin' because it can't get back to its cage."

Some of the poorer children brought to Northampton have revealed an almost equally pitiful ignorance. A kitchen garden came as a revelation to some Hoxton children who had never seen vegetables growing before.

Thus it was quite a novel adventure for them to help in picking kidney beans and gathering potatoes, which they thought grew on trees like apples.

He Saw a "Cah"

A small urchin was brought to the doorstep of his new "mother's" house in Roade. The front door was opened and without formality a small shrill voice piped: "Ullo, lidy—I just seen a cah."

The "lidy" was surprised, but not unduly impressed. "Haven't you seen a car before? There's plenty of them about."

"Yus, lidy, so I seen—ole 'erds of 'em. Funny looking animiles, ain't them?"

The subject of cows was dismissed by the sudden appearance of the urchin's arm from behind his back. Something was thrust under the "lidy's" nose. "Wot's thet, lidy?"

She recoiled a step and informed the child that "thet" was a frog.

"A frawg, is it? Sort o' pretty, ain't it?" He gazed wistfully upon the thing in his hand. "Lidy? Do yer fink I kin tike it ter bed wiv me?"



AT LEAST one Northampton dog is "doing his bit," for this patient Thornton Road Dalmatian daily allows himself to be hitched up to a small tricycle and gives rides in turn to young evacuees, much to their obvious delight, reflected in this picture.

Wish They Could Adopt Them

In homes that have hitherto been childless, married couples are finding a new joy in caring for little ones entrusted to their care, united with many a wish that they could adopt them permanently.

It has become a common but charmingly familiar scene in and around Northampton to see elderly people tenderly shepherding or trying to amuse children in their charge.

The toddlers confidently cling to the coat tails or hands of their guardians, prattling of their homes, toys, schools and other childish interests. Many of them have had the crowning joy of being taken out into the country blackberrying.

Sun Tans Evacuees

The sunshine that has smiled on our young guests this week, enabling them to get out into the open air, has already touched up the pale faces of many of them with tan.

One of the visiting teachers remarked to an "Independent" representative: "The fine fresh air and wonderful open spaces of Northampton are doing my lads a world of good. Many of them have never been in such healthy surroundings before."

Extracts from the Northampton Independent 8.9.39.



EH MISTER, WHAT A LOT OF BLUE SKY YOU HAVE HERE!

Looking for the 'lighter side of evacuation' the newspapers told many stories of the amazement of children confronted with nature - amazement always expressed in broad cockney accents. Mass-Observation also collected examples of city children's ignorance of the countryside. Bolton children evacuated to Wales were terrified of the sea, which they had never seen before. In Hemel Hempstead Bill Turner, a 17 year old art student, wrote:

Nature proved incomprehensible for one boy. For him every berry is a cherry, every bird a chicken. He is utterly devoid of any feeling for nature, it is beyond him.



Evacuee. "Wot's pushing it?"

But many children adapted quickly, particularly those from the middle class. Boys from a London school evacuated to Burwash in Sussex enjoyed helping the local farmers with their work. A third year boy wrote in the school magazine in the spring of 1940:

I have learned to set mole traps and to skin the moles and cure their fur. I set the traps across the tunnel which the mole has made and when he next comes that way the trap springs shut. I skin them, which is not a very nice business to many people but I have got used to it. I put the pelts in a mixture and I have made a purse for my mother with one.

A second year boy wrote:

I have been billeted on a farm for over six months and I have enjoyed every minute of it. The first week we were haying and I learned that the hay cutter, or mower, went round the field and worked towards the centre. The hay lies on the ground for a day and then is turned. If it gets rain the hay loses its sweetness.



15 BOYS—BANG GO THE CHAIRS

Herald
28/4/39
P. 7

MRS. MAY WELCH, of Beaconsfield Villas, Brighton, has so many children she doesn't know what to do.

But, unlike those of the Old Lady Who Lived in a Shoe, they are not her own. They are evacuees.

She has fifteen—all boys.

"And I can't cope with them," she told the magistrate yesterday when she was summoned for showing a light in the black-out.

"It was one of those boys," she explained. "He took a candle into an empty room."

Sold Her Furniture

To add to her troubles, she gave birth to twins three weeks ago. They were born dead.

After the magistrates had dismissed the summons against her, Mrs. Welch told the "Daily Herald" about her fifteen boys.

"Mind you," she said, "I am not grumbling about *all* my evacuees. Some of them are fine kids, but how on earth am I to keep them on 8s. 6d. each a week?

"To give them plenty of good food and comfortable beds I've practically sold my home up. Last week I sold £20 worth of furniture to buy bed linen.

Exit Another

"Then they dance on the beds, and break them. They've broken my chairs, too."

As to food Mrs. Welch mentioned that she has to get three 11lb. tins of biscuits a week.

Just before the "Daily Herald" man left the house there was a crash in the room where the boys were at tea.

"Another chair gone," murmured Mrs. Welch. And it was.

Evacuees Hike 30 Miles

LIL CORNEY, 13-year-old London evacuee, and her brother, Jimmy, aged 8, felt home sick.



Lily

They wanted to see the new flat in Talbot-grove House, Notting Hill, W., into which their parents had moved.

So, with Eileen Spakels, aged 11, they decided to walk the 30 miles home from Burchetts Green, the Berkshire village where they were billeted.

"You could have knocked me down with a feather when Jimmy poked his nose round the door, grinning all over his face," Mr. Corney told the "Daily Herald" yesterday.

"Lily said she made Jimmy go on walking by saying he would get his name in the papers if he stuck it out.



Jimmy

"He did. He walked the whole way to Acton and then they got a bus, paying the fare from pennies someone had given them.

"Yesterday their mother took them back, and found them new billets. I don't think it will happen again because really they seemed quite happy in the country."

Odyssey

ELEVEN-YEAR-OLD Edward Culling, whose home is at Bestwood-road, Deptford, was evacuated to Eastbourne, but decided that home was best.

Early on Sunday the police at Tunbridge Wells found him trudging along wet through and tired out. He had tramped the 35 miles from Eastbourne.

He was sent back to Eastbourne by train. On Monday he was again missing. Now he has arrived home.

GIRL EVACUEE TRIES TO WALK 100 MILES

Catherine Brundenell, 12, of Ealing, started to walk the 100 miles home from her billet in the country, but was detected at Chippenham, Wilts, after having covered seven miles. On Sunday evening a Chippenham woman met the child, who asked the way to the railway station, so that she could walk along the line to Ealing. The woman took the girl to her brother, a billeting officer was communicated with, and Catherine was returned to her foster-parent.

PROBLEMS WITH BEHAVIOUR

Some of the most shocking stories concern differences in behaviour between hosts and evacuees. Mrs Rowley, the Chepstow schoolmistress, related the strange behaviour of the children to the conditions of the slums:

The difficulty seems to be that many of the children have never learnt the ordinary decencies of life. What can be done with a child who picks a newspaper and goes into a corner of the drawing room instead of going to the lavatory?

Tales of the manner in which the children take their food are rife. Some of them will not sit at the table, but want to sit on the floor and have the food handed to them. This must be where there has been overcrowding and there has been no room at the table. Some do not know how to use a knife and fork, they only use a knife. Others have never been used to sanitation, and foul the paths and gardens.

One boy said he never went to sleep lying down, he perched himself by the bedpost and went to bed clinging with his head resting on it. There had never been room in the bed at home for him to lie down. A little girl said she always went to bed in her frock and did not know what a night gown was.

Mrs Rowley's attitude to the evacuees was more sympathetic than most observers in the country. A more typical reaction was that of James Clewlow, an insurance salesman who collected the complaints of hosts living near Birmingham:

Lady X's large mansion has been almost wrecked by these wretched children. Colonel Y turned his out into the garden, but they completely wrecked this also. Mrs Z has had three beds broken already. Someone else had to burn sixteen blankets because of infection of some disease.



"Please, Miss, have you got any more china that we could have?"

Observers were encouraged to record overheard conversations. Here are three examples from around the country.



Host, Hertfordshire:

'I just won't have that child any longer. He wets his bed every night. He was alright at first. Now he is awful. And do you know what he says to me? He says that he will go on piddling in his bed until he is allowed to go home to his mother again.'

Two Blackpool landladies:

'If you say two words to them they turn round and swear at you. I've seen a lot of dogs with better manners.'
'Carved their initials on the sideboard. Wrote all over the wall. Eat their food on the floor. Broke half the china.'

Working class woman of 45 in Bolton pub:

'Like them poor people in Blackpool who've had dirty lads put in their nice clean houses. I know a woman who had five come. She said 'You must have a bath' and they said they wouldn't. She said 'You must have a bath or you don't get into my clean beds'. So they went up and had a bath together, all five of them. You never saw such a mess as they made. It was newly decorated too.'

A works secretary from Eccles sent in this report:

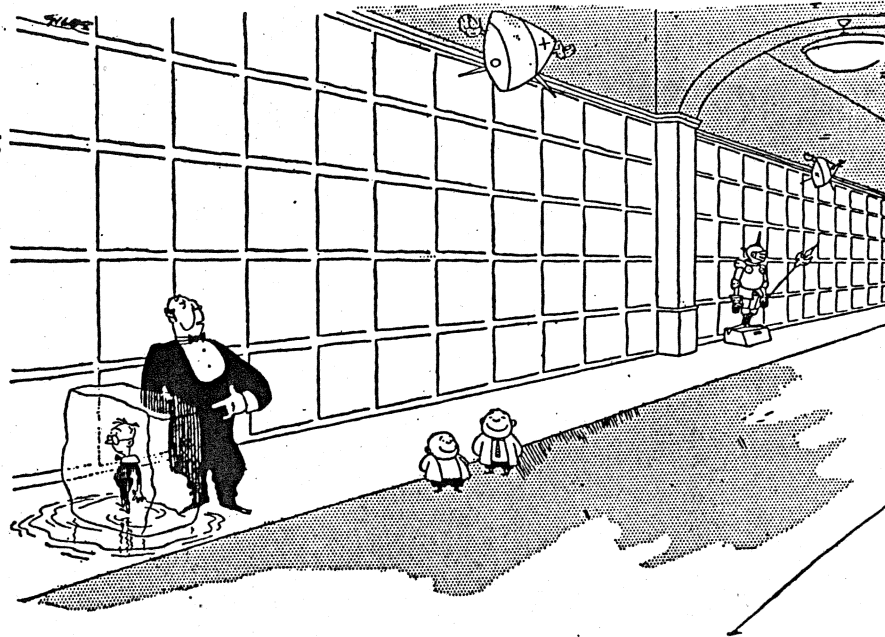
Some are foul mouthed and filthy. One woman complained that her evacuee, a boy, blew his nose on the tablecloth (and worse than that said Mrs O). One boy (13) refused to eat cereal and milk for his supper saying 'I want some bloody beer and chips.' I said did Mr O know that schools would be opened with a view to parents registering for further evacuation. 'What, more?' said Mr O, 'Oh my God!'

Again the complaints were not all one-sided. Several evacuees told observers that they did not feel welcome in their new homes. Here are some comments collected from Manchester evacuees in Blackpool:

Boy aged nine: 'Missus always looks at us sideways as if we was muck.'
Woman aged twenty-five: 'That bitch (the hostess) couldn't smile to save her bloody life. Puts us food in the back kitchen as if we was dogs.'
Woman, thirties: 'Think it was bloody Buckingham Palace the way she goes on.'
Boy aged ten: 'Every time we go in she's getting at us. Worse than school.'



"Won't it be WONDERFUL when peace is restored once more?"



"Perhaps our evacuee friends can enlighten us as to who placed Master Michael in the refrigerator last night?"

There were also many complaints of abuses in the scheme. Apart from hosts who used the evacuees as unpaid servants, there were many reports of billeting officers letting upper middle class hosts off lightly. One town claiming that it could take no more evacuees was investigated and it was found that, while the working class districts were full, 23 town councillors had between them 76 rooms to spare. At the same time in working class areas evacuees were sleeping in double shifts. Helen Rowe, a 17 year old schoolgirl from Edgware, wrote:

I was an evacuee for six weeks. The main problem between evacuees and hosts seems to be the difficulty of adapting the one to the other. A few of the hosts treated their evacuees as guests or as they would their own children, but the majority treated the girls as unpaid maids. A good deal of publicity has been given to hosts burdened with dirty verminous evacuees, but none, or very little, to cases where well brought up middle class girls and boys have been billeted in poor, dirty homes where they have little to eat and none of the facilities they are used to. At least half of the 250 girls evacuated with the school are billeted in tiny, dirty houses where they have to do any housework that is done. Being billeted in such houses has a very bad effect on the younger girls of an impressionable age and they grow slack in their care of their personal cleanliness and manners. There are a good many clean, middle class homes in L---, but the owners of these homes have seen to it that they do not have to take evacuees.

Comment from a mother whose son was evacuated to Brighton:

*my boy is sharing a bed (single)
with an improperly washed coalman*

MOTHERS

In many cases children found it easier to adapt to country life than the mothers who came with them. One reason for this was described by Renee Humphries, the Oxfordshire housewife:

Different conventions: eg about pubs. To country people the pub is a male reserve and it is improper and not 'done' for women to gate crash into the public bar at any rate. As if a woman were to go and powder her nose in the Athenaeum [an exclusive London men's club]. For the townspeople it is very much more of a social centre for everyone. The townswoman, feeling lonely, goes to the pub and is received with horrified surprise, while the hostesses are deeply shocked.

If the countrymen were shocked at strange women invading their pub, for their part the women found the countryside much too quiet. As one 35 year old woman from Blackpool said to an observer:

Pubs is all too bloody posh. I like a bit of a sing song.

Elizabeth Bentley, the Suffolk actress, told how neighbouring villages were 'terrorised' by the women from the city:

Many of the mothers are quite unable to cook. Most of them are dirty, and at Bungay and Reedham they have trouble with women getting drunk and fighting. At Reedham the bad language is said to be continuous and appalling. Most of the mothers who find cooking impossible (like the one who cooked an egg for half an hour and then told the woman of the house that it hadn't gone soft yet) stayed three days and then packed up and went home.

Local gossip consists of reports of women fighting in the streets of Bungay - Mr L says they have some real bad ones there - and being put in jail for being drunk. I gather they only fight each other, not the women they are billeted on. Apparently the women in Reedham use bad language all day, but at night they put their children away and go out and get drunk, and then their language is even worse, and they terrorise the village, wandering about the streets shouting and singing and swearing and keeping everyone awake.

A quiet Norfolk village inhabited largely by retired people also found it hard to accept the 'fast' behaviour of city women. Betty Stevens, the garage worker, sent in this report:

They all had a distinct Cockney accent and swore regardless, which set most people against them from the start. They were reputed to be strong drinkers. The local inhabitants stood outside the pubs to see them come out at closing time.

Out of five here one day we noticed only one wore a wedding ring. Two horrified their host by saying that the visiting gentlemen were only boy friends. She ordered the whole party out of her house at once!

CLOTHES AND MONEY

In contrast to the drunken mothers reported in Suffolk and Norfolk, a Cullercoats schoolteacher described the great effort made by poor women in Newcastle to equip their children:

A teacher told me that one of the mothers would be paying for her children's new clothes till Christmas.

One mother stood by while I examined the luggage of her son and daughter. She was shabby, thin and very anxious. She said, 'It's a dreadful thing having to send the children away like this, but I want to do the best I can for them. I've told them it's a holiday, because I didn't want to frighten them.' Then as I began to take the articles out of the neatly packed new rucksacks she said, 'I don't want them to be a bother to the people they're going to, Miss, so I've given them an extra pair of stockings so there won't be too much darning. I've given them extra soap and toothpaste too.' She had also provided them with two pairs of substantial new pyjamas, and two new pairs of warm underwear, and two large thick new towels. She glowed with pride when I congratulated her on the way she'd equipped her children.

Mrs Rowley, the Chepstow schoolmistress, described the difficulty of middle class hosts in managing the Government allowance (see note on money at the end of the booklet) :

The parents seem to have the idea that they can expect their children to be clothed as well as fed for the Government allowance. When one parent who visited a child was asked 'What about clothes?' she answered, 'Well, the Government pay you well', and in this case the child had said that her father earned £4 a week and her mother went to work too.

While the 8s-6d per child allowance seems a princely sum to the local people who've kept a decent standard of living on unemployment benefit with an allowance of 3s per child, others who have always had higher incomes say that it is not adequate. This is because the first week's allowance has gone in many cases on buying adequate clothing and in supplementing their ordinary household supplies with the type of food the children will only eat, sometimes tinned food. Some who can just manage now say that the allowance will not be enough with rising prices, and with an increase in the children's appetites.

The point that it was the better off hosts who found the Government allowance inadequate was made many times. One headmistress evacuated to Brighton sent in these reports:

A stranger in a Lyons cafe with a little boy of four: 'You can't feed a child on 8s-6d. It's ridiculous. It can't be done.'

Myself: 'How do you think people on the dole manage with 3s for a child's food?'

Brighton hostess: 'I simply can't feed Elsie on 8s-6d. I can't give her different food from my children. They have bacon and egg and butter and marmalade for breakfast. And plenty of milk puddings. We are losing on it.'

A young bank clerk in Wootton Bassett told this story of a host trying to make a profit out of the government allowance:

I heard of a woman who has four children of her own and took in three evacuees. She did this by getting her own children to tell the evacuee children to ask to be shifted. When one of them left she went on drawing the money. It is her boast that she has been able to buy herself a new set of false teeth with the proceeds (from a neighbour, at second hand). Now she has to pay off her debt to the council by keeping a child free. Presumably the kid will starve.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

We have seen that a major cause for complaint was the tension caused by the cultural difference between the urban working class and the rural middle class. The plan was also criticised for ignoring more extreme cultural differences - those of race and religion. Sidney Wilson, a 24 year old teacher, described what happened when a group of orthodox Jewish children were evacuated to a small village near Peterborough:

The fact that about 85% of the evacuees are Jews and that previously Jews were unknown here led to a great many difficulties at first. For instance, one boy refused to be billeted with 'gentiles', and even refused any refreshment on arrival unless prepared by a Jew. He and two other boys, who refused to sleep in a gentile's house, had to be sent home.

In other instances both parties settled down quickly. On the first morning one foster mother asked her Jewish charges if they had bacon for breakfast at home. They said they did not, but on being asked if they would have some they agreed, and 'thoroughly enjoyed it'.

The Government also blundered in sending large numbers of Roman Catholics from Liverpool and Glasgow to Protestant areas. Jimmy Coulter, a 21 year old chemistry student, was living in Prestwick, a Protestant seaside town which received evacuees from Glasgow:

At least one case existed where a Protestant minister had two Roman Catholic children billeted on him. When they said they would have to get up early for mass he refused to allow them, saying that if his house was good enough for them they would have to attend his church. I have heard of a dozen cases at least where Protestant hosts refused to allow young children to get up early and go out without breakfast to mass.

RETURN TO THE CITIES



In November 1939 one Yorkshire housewife wrote:

The chief reason against the evacuation seems to be that there have been no air raids, so everybody is completely fed up.

Despite a Government campaign advising mothers to leave their children in the countryside, a million evacuees had returned to the cities by the spring of 1940. The bitterness that many felt about their experience comes across in this letter from a mother evacuated to Dunstable:

I am writing to let you know I have left Dunstable & am at my sisters I couldn't stick it any longer we ~~were~~ were treated as bits of dirt by the locals as though it wasn't bad enough going through what we did to get there we started out at 11 o'clock & did not get to ~~Dunstable~~ until 5 after five changes by train & bus and standing on the curb in ~~London~~ for an hour & twenty minutes we arrived at a skating rink & then were picked out so you can guess what some poor devils were like who had four or five children they were still there on the Sunday afternoon & then eight families were put in an empty house & different people gave them bits of furniture I admit some of them were a bit too much with their hair in curlers & overalls but we were not all the same




***DON'T** do it,
Mother.—*

**LEAVE THE CHILDREN
WHERE THEY ARE**

ISSUED BY THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH

Another woman: I'm going back 'ome, I can't trust my 'usband to be left alone.

Another woman. Her husband wrote & said it was  very quiet up in London, but my husband say you stop away it's awful here there is air raid alarms going all day, so I am going back to see what he is up to.

Jack Stevens, Betty's 18 year old brother

NOTE ON MONEY

References to money have been left in the pre-decimal coinage. There were twenty shillings to the pound and twelve pennies to the shilling. In 1941 a manual worker earned an average wage of £3-15s-5d. Prices and wages varied considerably during the war, but some indication of the value of money comes from these statistics, collected for an International Labour Office Report in December 1941:

Bread	4d for a 2lb loaf
Milk	4½d per pint
Butter	1s-7d per lb
Cheese	1s-1d per lb
Bacon	1s-8½d per lb
Sugar	4d per lb
Potatoes	8d per 7lb bag

The problem of feeding evacuated children on the Government allowance of 8s. 6d. a week is harassing many housewives in the country, more especially with the prospect of rationing in the near future. The children need balanced meals with a good proportion of milk, fresh vegetables, and fruit. In the space of a short article it is difficult to give exact costing and menus, but perhaps the experience of two women who have been fairly successful will be of use.

One, a Scottish woman, who has five boys in her house (they range from 6 to 12) and who has to do everything herself, says they have gained in weight and are always contented with their food. To begin with, they didn't like this and they didn't like the other, but now they have settled down and eat heartily. Being a Scot, their hostess naturally believes in porridge. This they have three times a week for breakfast, alternating with scrambled eggs. She allows 4-5 eggs for five boys, using milk and margarine. For their bread and butter she mixes 1lb. of butter with 1lb. of margarine.

Vegetables and apples come from the garden. The boys have three meals a day, breakfast, dinner, and a high tea. They have an apple at 11 o'clock and one before they go to bed. Tea is given once a day at breakfast; with supper hot milk is drunk.

Here is the budget for one week's food:—

	s.	d.	
Bread and cakes	6	0	(2 loaves a day; the rest in puddings)
Eggs ..	..	2 6	
Sausages	..	1 4	2lb. beef sausages, some for breakfast on Sunday.
Meat	..	10 0	Canterbury lamb, joint; 3lb. boiling meat; 2lb. beef, flank; 2lb. minced steak.
Jam ..	..	3 0	
Butter ..	..	3 0	
Sugar ..	..	1 6	
Tea ..	..	8	
Porridge	..	1 0	A handful goes into fried onions or mince to make up a supper dish.
Flour ..	..	4	
Tins of fruit ..	1	2	They are allowed this as a treat.
Laundry ..	2	0	
Peas, barley, rice, lentils, &c.	2	0	
Soap ..	..	6	
Milk, 4 pints a day, also skim milk ..	8	2	
Boot polish ..	1	0	A very large item in the budget.
	<u>£2</u>	<u>4 2</u>	

This does not include fruit, vegetables, accommodation, service, or coal.



Mass-Observation was an organisation which was set up in the late 1930s in order to record the thoughts and behaviour of ordinary people. Its founders, Tom Harrisson and Charles Madge, explained their idea in a 1937 pamphlet:

Mass-Observation intends to work with a new method. It intends to make use not only of the trained scientific observer, but of the untrained observer, the man in the street. Ideally, it is the observation by everyone of everyone, including themselves.

Different methods were used to record 'the voice of the people'. Unlike the opinion pollsters, M-O made great use of informally collected contributions. A team of paid observers recorded people's behaviour in public places, they noted overheard conversations on buses and in pubs, and they casually struck up conversations with strangers without revealing their identity as observers.

At the same time a 'panel' of volunteer observers was recruited. These volunteers were asked to keep diaries and to reply to monthly questionnaires - over 3,000 people took part at some time or other. These monthly 'directives' dealt with a wide assortment of subjects. For example, volunteers were asked 'What does HOME mean to you?', 'What do you believe about the news you are getting nowadays?', and 'Do you think Hitler is sane?'.

The peak of M-O's activities occurred during the Second World War and the material collected provides a unique record of how people coped with the impact of war.

In the late 1940s M-O turned to commercial market research and became a limited company, but the records of the original organisation are now held at the Mass-Observation Archive at Sussex University. Here the raw material has been sorted into over 50 topic collections (with titles such as **Anti-Semitism, Shopping, and Dogs in Wartime**). Together with the diaries and directive replies these formed the basis of over 3,000 typed reports and 25 books, which are also held in the Archive. Apart from manuscripts the collection includes photographs, newspaper cuttings, leaflets, posters and other ephemera.

If you are interested in finding out more about Mass-Observation, Oxford Paperbacks have published an excellent anthology called Speak for Yourself, edited by Angus Calder and Dorothy Sheridan. You are also welcome to write to Dorothy Sheridan, the archivist, at the Mass-Observation Archive, Sussex University, Brighton BN1 9QL.