

Home Front

Activities in this section look at what life was like for men, women and children on the Home Front.

Evacuees

Key Stage 3

History:

Chronological understanding

Change and continuity

Cause and consequences

Interpretation

Key Stage 3

English:

Competence

Creativity

Cultural understanding

Critical understanding

Overview of the activities

Using original sources of information to find out about the past.

Examining what life was like during the Second World War.

Comparing newspaper accounts with the adult memories of evacuees and letters written by evacuees at the time.

Evacuation

Evacuees' stories

Aim of the activities

To examine what life was like on the Home Front for evacuees and their families.

Preparation

PowerPoint: Evacuees (photographs, government documents and posters)

Newspaper article

Accounts of evacuees

Letters

Venues

The activities are suitable for use at venues with an interest in the Home Front: (RAF Cranwell, Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre, Metheringham Airfield Visitor Centre, Thorpe Camp Visitor Centre.)

The evacuees' stories were kindly supplied by Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre and newspaper article is from the Lincolnshire Echo.

Roles

Journalist or evacuee

Activity 1: Evacuation

The purpose of the activity is to help young people look at different sources of information and see what these tell us about the past.

Introduction

Explain that at the start of the War the decision was made to evacuate children and women with very young children out of cities to places of safety in the countryside. This meant moving large numbers of children away from their homes. Many travelled by train. Often they had no idea where they were going or where they were going to stay. Millions were evacuated. Often, when they arrived in country villages the evacuees met local people who had offered to take them in. Adults would look at the children and choose which ones they wanted. Imagine what it was like for the children waiting to be chosen. Some loved their new homes but many hated them.

Activity

Use the PowerPoint presentation to show the transcripts of the government documents to show how parents were informed about evacuation.

Children who remained in the cities lived with the threat of dropping bombs.

This activity explores the evacuation operation from different perspectives:

- newspaper account
- memories of adults who were evacuated
- documents from the time.

There is a transcript of an article taken from the Lincolnshire Echo on 1st September 1939. It describes the arrival of evacuees from Leeds at Lincoln Station. The article is quite long and the language is very different from language used in newspapers today. The article can be broken down into sections to study.

Next

When you have introduced the topic, divide the class into small groups and give them part of the article to consider. Ask young people read different sections of the article and summarise the article.

Comprehension

What do they think this piece of text is from?

What sort of writing is it? Is it fiction, non-fiction?

When do they think it was written? today, a few years ago, a long time ago?

What is it about?

What are the key events, places, people?

Activity

Ask young people to write about the evacuation of children from Leeds to Lincoln. Can they write a creative piece of writing from the perspective of a

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child from Leeds being away from home or from the point of view of a child in Lincoln having a child from Leeds billeted with them?

Extension

Ask young people to read the accounts of evacuees. Are the stories similar or different?

What do they think about the sources of information?

Ask young people to plan a documentary about children who were evacuated in the war.

How would they structure the programme?

Who would they interview?

What questions might they ask?

What might they need to take into account? Sensitivities etc (For example, many people who were involved in the War even now do not like to talk about it)

How do young people think people might react to being evacuated today?

What are the main issues?

Activity 2: Newspapers then and now

This is an alternative activity that focuses purely on the newspaper article.

Preparation

You will need the article from the Lincolnshire Echo and either a selection of modern newspapers or a selection of modern newspaper articles that focus on conflict. (Take care to ensure the material is appropriate for your group of young people).

Introduce the session.

Young people are going to look at articles from newspapers that relate to conflicts. Give them transcripts without the name of the newspaper.

Ask them to look at the articles carefully. Look for clues; how do we know when this article was written? Look at the headline, the who, what, when, where, how and why of this story. What is the event?

Can young people identify:

- facts
- opinions
- emotions

in the articles?

Plenary

Ask the young people to report back by giving a summary of the article and their view of when it was written and the type of newspaper it was written for. Show the title of the newspaper the article was from and the date.

Activity

Ask the young people to write a newspaper article about an event from the Second World War. The style must match the journalistic style of the newspaper.

Plenary

Ask young people to read their articles and ask the group to decide which newspaper they are writing for.

Extension activity

Take a paragraph from each of the newspapers and look at the length of sentences, the complexity of words (number of syllables) and the length of articles. Which has the least complex structure? Which has the most complex structure. Why? What does this signify if anything?

Background information

On 1st September 1939 two days before Neville Chamberlain declared that Britain was at war with Germany, an evacuation programme was put in place. Children and women with very young children were moved out of cities to places of safety in the countryside. This meant large numbers of children were taken away from their homes. Many travelled by train. Often they had no idea where they were going or where they were going to stay. Millions were evacuated.

Often, when they arrived in country villages, the evacuees would go to village halls to meet the local people who had offered to take them in. Adults would look at the children and choose which ones they wanted. Imagine what it was like for the children waiting to be chosen. Some loved their new homes but many hated them.

Children still went to school during the War. As soon as they heard the air raid sirens they would go to public shelters or to classrooms that had been strengthened with sandbags.

Some children were evacuated for the whole six years of the war and didn't see their parents during that time. Others were luckier and their parents were able to visit regularly.

After the War, many children who were evacuated were told that they were the lucky ones and that they had been taken out of danger. Many adults who were evacuated suffered long term effects of the experience, even though they may have been placed with caring people, the sudden separation from their parents proved to be traumatic for many. Many felt they were not able to talk about the experience. Evacuation had many long-term consequences for the families involved. Young people may have grand parents or great grandparents who were evacuated in the War.

An LCC Government Evacuation Scheme poster, advising parents about the start of the evacuation process.

GOVERNMENT EVACUATION SCHEME

The Government have ordered evacuation of school children.

If your children are registered for evacuation send them to their assembly point at once.

If your children are registered and you wish them to be evacuated, the teachers or the school keeper will help you.

If you do not wish your children to be evacuated you must not send them to school until further notice.

Posters notifying the arrival or parties in the country will be displayed at the schools at which the children assembled for evacuation.

Government issued a leaflet War Emergency Information and Instructions:

If you live in one of these areas and have a child or children of school age who you wish to be evacuated you should send them to school on the day which will be notified to you. Each child should have a handbag or case containing the child's gas mask, a change of underclothing, night clothes, house shoes or plimsolls, spare stockings or socks, a toothbrush, a comb, a towel, soap and face cloth, handkerchiefs and, if possible, a warm coat or mackintosh.

Each child should bring a packet of food for the day. School children will be taken by their teachers to homes in safer districts where they will be housed by people who have already offered to receive them and look after them. Parents of school children living in these areas area strongly urged to let their children go. Parents will be told where the children are as soon as they reach their new homes. The cost of the journey will be paid by the Government. Posters will be exhibited at the schools showing the times when mothers with children below school age should assemble at the schools, unless they have been notified in some other way. Mothers and other persons in charge of children below school age should take hand luggage with the same equipment for themselves and their children as for school children. The names of the children should be written on a label or strong paper and sewn onto their clothes.

Children were allowed to take just one toy.

http://asafelaceto.org.uk/?location_id=215**Children at war**

Lincolnshire Echo, Friday September 1st 1939

LINCOLN RECEIVES FIRST CHILD EVACUEES

Scene of Calm Efficiency at Railway Station

SOME PASSED ON TO VILLAGES: OTHERS REMAIN IN CITY

Lincoln commenced its share in the great evacuation scheme shortly after 10 o'clock this morning.

From the first, the arrangements worked with perfect precision and an entire absence of confusion.

The first train-load of Leeds children arrived at the Lincoln L.N.E.R station. The numbers of children received were much smaller than those for which provision had been made. It was estimated that only about one-third of the maximum number which had been expected came on the first trains.

There was adequate staff to deal with the full numbers had they arrived and the whole work was efficiently handled in every particular.

The first train was due in at 10.28 a.m. It arrived to the minute. As it drew in to No. 5 platform a voice announced through the loudspeakers:

"When the train stops the children will get out and wait on the platform."

This and every subsequent instruction was immediately and implicitly obeyed.

The children all wearing identification labels, carrying their gas masks in cartons and bags containing clothing, quickly assembled with their teachers.

The next instruction came: St Anthony's School will move out of the station to the yard outside where they will assemble at the places marked for them."

In the station yard were cards placed on wooden stands bearing the names of the Leeds schools, and each party moved to its appointed place.

In less than five minutes the platform was cleared.

QUICK WORK

The loudspeaker again took up the direction to affairs and ordered the various schools to one or other of the double-decker buses drawn up in the station yard.

In less than half an hour from the train entering the station the last bus had moved off.

The first contingent were booked for villages in the North Kesteven Rural District. Shortly after they had gone there arrived the first lot of evacuees for Lincoln city.

The same system worked again with exact smoothness and steadiness. The buses in this case took the children to two of the five distribution centres

which have been opened at the following schools: St Giles, Mount street, Bracebridge, Skellingthorpe road and Rosemary.

RATIONS ISSUED

At these schools the children received their rations for 48 hours. They were each handed a paper carrier in which were a tin of meat, a tin of sweetened milk, a tin of unsweetened milk, a pound of biscuits, a quarter pound block of chocolate.

The issue of rations was completed in a few minutes, a large staff of packers having done a lot of preliminary work.

Members of the Women's Voluntary Service assisted the teachers to issue the rations.

Children then went to classrooms for splitting up into small parties for drafting to their billets.

The behaviour of the children was excellent. There were no tear-stained faces.

A teacher from Leeds told an Echo reporter that it had been the same throughout the journey.

"Some of them look upon it as a glorified camp." he said. "One of the first questions I got was, 'Please sir, shall we be able to play Rugby?'
"Some of the children have been promised big parties when they return home."

One child, evidently thinking Lincolnshire meant somewhere near the seaside, had brought as seaside bucket, which formed an incongruous addition to gas mask and other luggage.

Mr C.W. Hooton, Chief Billeting Officer for Lincoln and Mr Robert Epton, for the Welton and North Kesteven Rural Districts, were at the station.

Both expressed themselves as well satisfied with the progress of the dispersal of the children.

Mr. L. E. Allbones chairman of North Kesteven Rural Council, stated that he had inspected arrangements made in the villages in his area and was assured that everything possible would be done for the evacuees.

CARS LOANED

All the Lincoln school teachers were on duty today assisting in the work at the station or the schools.

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A number of cars were available for taking children to the more distant billets in the city and the number will be increased to-night. These vehicles have been offered voluntarily.

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DEAN'S OFFER

In a message to the Echo, the Dean of Lincoln, Very Rev. R.A. Mitchell says: "It has occurred to me that some of those who have the care of evacuated children may be at a loss, especially during the first few days before the children know their way about, to find ways and means of occupying the spare time of the children.

"The Cathedral is an easy place to find and if any children are sent there we will do our best to look after them and if need be to direct them and to see them on their way to the houses where they are staying.

"They will also be very welcome to play, so far as space permits, in the Deanery garden, to which there is direct access from the Cathedral itself.



Newspaper activity sheet

Newspaper Story
Read the stories, you can team read them if you like.
What does the title of the article tell you?
Are you able to list the five Ws? Who is this newspaper story about? Does the story mention any other people? What has happened? Where did it happen? When did it happen? Why did it happen?
Is there anything unusual about this article?
How do you think the people felt? Can you pick out five adjectives?
When do you think this article was written? Why do you think this?
How is this different to a story you might see on the news or in a newspaper today?



Activity 3 Evacuees' stories

Introduction

There are three different examples of evacuees' stories. Ask the young people to scan the articles and then read them. There are examples of:

- adults reflecting on past experiences
- a child's letters from the time when he was evacuated plus his account of what happened.

Activity

Ask the children to read the stories and answer the questions in the writing frame.

Plenary

Feedback on what the young people have found out.

What do the young people think of the accounts as:

- A. evidence from the past
- B. inspiration for a piece of creative writing?

Ask young people to plan a piece of creative work based on one of the stories. It could be a poem, story, story board, children's book.

Name of the article.

What does the title tell you about the article you are going to read?

Who might it be written by?

What sort of story do you think it will tell?

If you are looking at the letters, how old do you think the person who wrote them was? How do these letters make you feel?

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Read the stories, you can team read them if you like, then answer the questions.

Who is this story about?

Who wrote the story?

What is the writer describing?

How do they feel about what happened to them?

Can you pick out any big events in the story?

Can you pick out five adjectives that might show how the writer felt at the time?

When do you think this article was written? Why do you think this?

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Evacuated to Wales - 1940

When mother and father said that my young sister and I had to go and live with our Aunt Amy in Wales for the time being, we were both dismayed and upset. My sister was only 9 yrs old and never liked being away from home, even for just one day, and I knew that our aunt did not really want us, particularly as her own three children were now grown.

The journey from Liverpool to North Wales, via tram, ferry and bus was a doleful one and parting from mother the next day meant my sister spent the time in tears. I was instructed by my aunt to take her out on to the hill behind the cottage and play some games to try and cheer her up. The following day we were taken down to the village school, met the three teachers and saw our classroom. To children used to a large city school this school was tiny, only two large rooms, one for the juniors and seniors and one for the infants. There were no 'Proper' desks as we knew them, just a bench which sat two or three with a higher bench in front and a shelf for our books underneath. As my sister was rather deaf she had more difficulties than me trying to adjust and began to be bullied.

The 'cottage' was quite large but it had no proper kitchen, no running water and no electricity. We washed in our bedroom in bowls, and water had to be carried up and down. The toilet was half way down the garden and was an earth closet which smelled so much my sister hated it and I had to stand in there with her because she was afraid of the big hole. Lighting was obtained with oil lamps which had to be constantly cleaned and it was quite hard to read as the lighting was so poor.

Aunt was not fond of housework so gradually our clothes were washed less and less and we began to smell the same as the other children. Each time I asked for clean clothes for us Aunt told me to "make do with what we had on" and of course we never had a bath so I began to feel dirty, which was distressing for us both and made life harder at school as the Welsh children commented that the 'bloody English' did not seem to wash. As they were not exactly clean themselves I argued with this and got thumped in the playground for my pains! We were always 'the bloody English' and everything we did or said was made fun of as they talked Welsh to each other. Very little English was spoken by the locals so I asked to be taught some Welsh and the older boys taught me all the swear words they could think of and were full of mirth when I said them! At least it gave me something to shout back at them when they bullied my sister.

When the headmaster found that the older boys were lying in wait for us when we left school, to bully and frighten us, he singled out the ones causing the trouble and thrashed them in front of the class - a thing my sister and I had never seen before as the schools in Liverpool were single sex. I was amazed at how hard he hit them but it did stop the worst of them and produced a protector in the shape of the boy who lived further up the hill from us. He took to going to and fro from school with us and as he had a large dog which went

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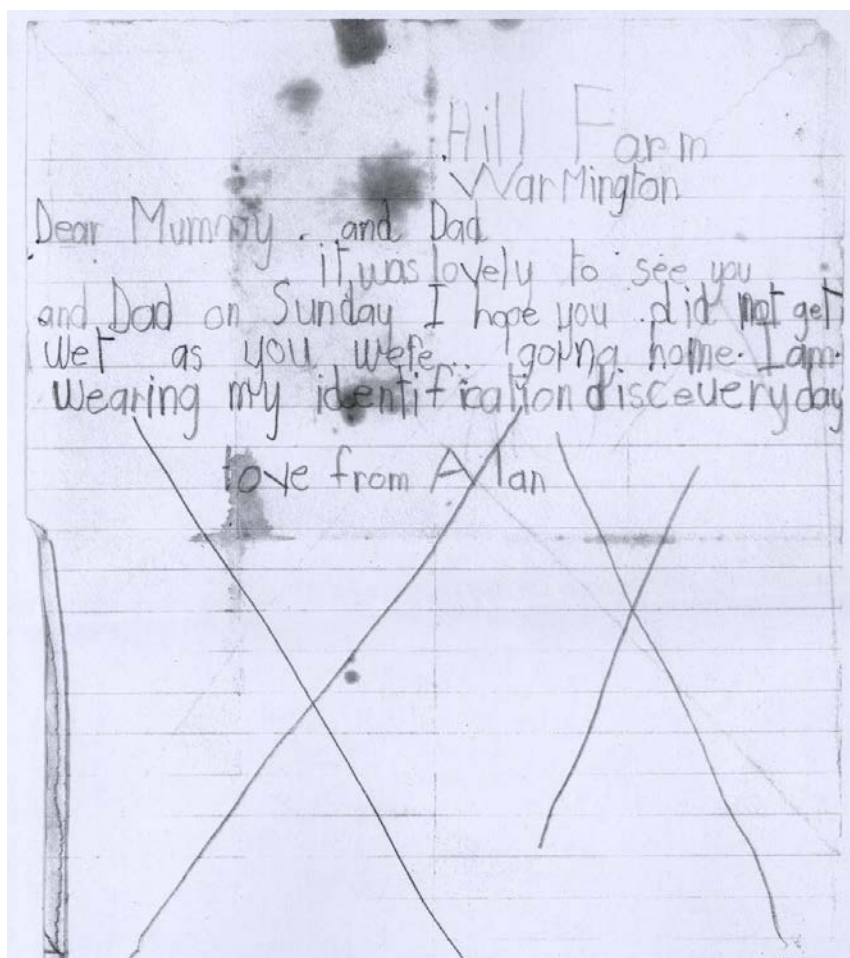
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everywhere with him and would tackle anyone Yoravith told him to, we were spared a lot more hassle.

At length I began to despair of our situation, my sister's severe homesickness, our difficulties in a school where the main language was Welsh, the lack of the cleanliness we were used to etc, and I sent a postcard to my dear old great-aunt asking for us to please be returned home, and setting out our problems. Two days later our mother arrived unexpectedly and was horrified at our dirty and smelly clothes, my sister's thinness and our general air of unhappiness. She and my great-aunt packed all our things and took us on the long journey home again.

Grimy old Liverpool looked wonderful to our eyes, although had we been able to appreciate it, the Welsh countryside was much more beautiful. My father got an earful of his sister's failings and my mother declared that we would all stay together and face what Hitler had in store for us - which turned out to be the really fearful bombing of Liverpool the following year or so.

Maxine Norman

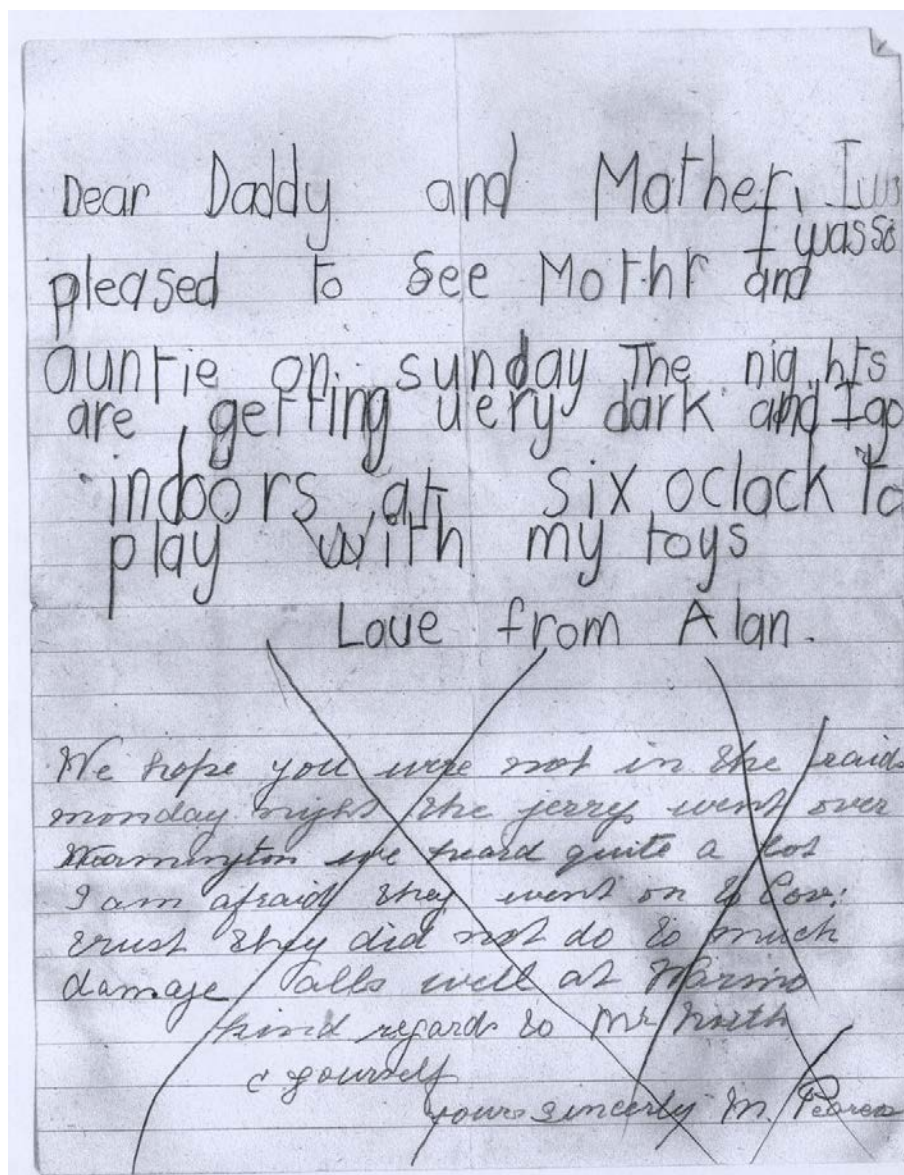


Alan North's Recollections of being an evacuee

Alan North was evacuated from Blackberry Lane Stoke Heath Coventry in 1940. We went to Warmington, nr Banbury, Oxon about 30 miles away from Coventry. I was taken to the village hall with my sister who was 2 years older than me. She was taken in by the vicarage and I went with a Mrs Pearsons to a farm at the bottom of Warmington Hill on the main Banbury/Warwick Rd.

I used to sit on a window ledge in the room facing the main road watching the traffic go by and in the Winter lorries used to get stuck in the snow trying to get up the hill. I went to the village school, my father used to cycle over from Coventry quite often to see us. He was an air raid warden when he wasn't at work and he always brought us a small gift each time.

Mother came on the train sometimes. We never went back to Coventry my parents got work in one of the villages near Bambury and we had a small rented cottage for a while. When I was fourteen I had a job on a stud farm looking after the horses. We were eventually allocated a council house in Bodicote nr Bambury and from there I enlisted in the Army R.A.S.C and was sent to Africa for 3 years fighting the Mau Mau.



SHIRLEY REDING'S WARTIME MEMORIES OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-1945

I was four years old when the war started and living in London, the worst place to be, for six long war ridden years. I was playing outside when my mother came to tell me a war had started and to take me inside. Everyone thought bombs would start dropping-immediately! They didn't of course but things did change and our tranquil life was never the same again.

I do remember how miserable it was to have blackout curtains up at the windows, not a chink of light was to be seen from the outside in case of an air raid. Worse, was having to sleep in an air raid shelter in the garden. There was just myself and my mother, my father had to go to war and was gone for most of those six years. I remember reading my comics by candle light on many a night. One night we were caught out on a sudden raid and whilst racing to our shelter my mother's head was missed by inches by a falling piece of shrapnel. There was also a very big shelter in the school grounds and sometimes we had to have our lessons in there. At night Air Raid Wardens would patrol and shine their torch into our shelter to see if we were O.K. I can also remember if a plane flew over when I was on my way to school I would automatically lay flat on the pavement because that is what I had been told to do. Another thing I can remember is being issued with a gas mask in case of a gas attack. I was so disappointed because I did not get a Mickey Mouse one as some children did! We had to carry these masks around with us all the time.

Before my father was called up he was an Air Raid Warden and had to go into a bombed block of flats to see if there was anyone trapped in there. There was a lady sat in a chair - dead. A girder fell down and my father was trapped in there for two days. My mother said he was never the same man again!

My mother, along with other mums worked in a factory making parts that were needed in planes. We had to stay at school until late afternoon and were given tea and home made rock cakes. I can remember how we used to fight over who would have the end bits, they were lovely and crunchy. At lunchtime my mother used to leave a pre-cooked dinner for me and arranged for a neighbour's 14 year old daughter to look after me. She did not do it very well as she used to eat all the good bits and leave me with the greens! It was only when my mother noticed different things disappearing from the larder that she realized what was going on.

The sound of the air raid siren was so frightening and to hear it today still takes me back to how I felt then. Having to sleep in the air raid shelter and awake to goodness knows what was a nightmare. You could come out of your shelter and a whole street could be bombed down.



Eventually things got so bad it was decided that children would be evacuated to a place of safety. My mother had said that we could both go to live with my Grandmother just outside of Newcastle for a while. So, I was one of the lucky one's, so many little children were sent away from London on their own! Whilst we were at my Grandmother's a telegram came to say our house had been bombed to the ground. I was so upset my mother asked a friend if they could perhaps retrieve some of our belongings from the rubble, but when she got there our house was still standing! We never did find out who sent the telegram! Another telegram bore the bad news that my mum's brother had been killed in the front line.

The picture was taken at a party given for children at the A.R.P. Depot one Christmas. A friend of my dad's had made me a wooden desk for a present. It was accidentally given to another child so he was furious. We had very few toys in those days so I really missed out there. The party was lovely and I can still remember it now. There was jelly, jelly and more jelly and a few sandwiches but everyone did there best to make it great for us children.