

# Evacuation in WW2

## Operation "Pied piper"

With the outbreak of the Second World War, the government were afraid the cities and larger towns would be targets for bombing raids by aircraft. 827,000 children and their teachers, 524,000 mothers with children under five years-old, 12,000 pregnant women and disabled people were evacuated. This massive operation was called "Pied piper."

At 11.07am on Thursday 31st August 1939 the order was given to evacuate forthwith. 1.5 million children, pregnant women, vulnerable people such as the disabled were evacuated. However, there was no big bombing raids on Britain in the first few months of the war and many children even returned home in early 1940. This part was called the "Phoney war".

## What 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 other things could you find in their suitcase?

- 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 - Apple





The children were evacuated by train and road to smaller towns and villages in the countryside.

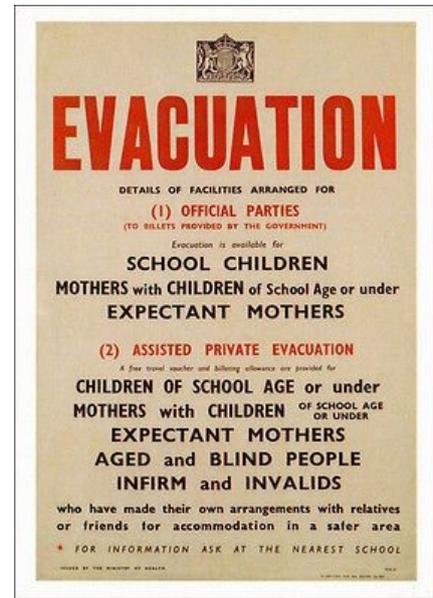
Some children were sent to stay with relatives in safer areas in the country. Others were sent to live with complete strangers. Billeting Officers were responsible for helping to find homes for the evacuees. Householders in the country who billeted (housed) city children were given money by the government.

### What was it like for the children?

Being an evacuee was probably very scary, but exciting at the same time. The children had to leave their families and often go to a strange place to live with strangers.

At the station, children would wear labels attached to them just like if they were a parcel! They stood at the railway stations not knowing where they would be going nor if they were going to be split from their brothers and sisters. The journeys were often long and tiring and the carriages were cramped with so many children travelling at the same time.

When they arrived in the countryside (often tired and very hungry) they would be taken to a village hall and that's where the Billeting Officer would be in charge of placing the children with a host. A 'pick your own evacuee' session often took place where the host families could even be seen haggling over the most presentable children whilst the sicklier and grubby-looking children were left until last.



### Billeting officers:

Billeting officers were responsible for helping to find homes for evacuee with households in the countryside. These householders were given money by the government. Billeting officers had to be well-organised ladies whom were good at communicating with others. Many were seen to be strict and upright, respectable members of the community who needed to use their influence to sometimes persuade members of their community to home the children. They were often problem-solvers and had a clear eye for detail.

