

# The Children of WW2

CHILDREN IN BEDFORDSHIRE  
1939—1945

BARS  
LSP #002

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*Adventures in Time*

Local Studies Topic Pack  
The Children of WW2

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## Teacher's Resource Pack



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## Introduction

This teacher's booklet is intended to give some brief detail into the history of the topic (based on material held at Bedfordshire Archives and Records Service) and explain the images used in the Topic Starter Pack.

Lesson plans or activities are not included as it is expected that teachers will want to incorporate the pack into their own lessons in ways that best meet the needs of their pupils.

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Further information, facsimile documents, digital copies and support with using the pack may be obtained by contacting the Archives Learning Officer.

## Operation Pied Piper—evacuees arrive in Bedfordshire

*The year was 1938. The people of Britain had been issued with gas masks and shed-like structures with curved roofs made from corrugated steel panels called Anderson shelters were being distributed to homes across the country. Plans were being made in case there was a war.*

*In January the previous year, the Chief Billeting Officer and Director of Education for Luton, carried out a survey. The survey of Luton covered 29,000 houses and concluded that there were 32,000 surplus occupied rooms. (This was later reduced to 22,000 rooms.) Luton would be one town that could expect to see a quota of evacuees but it was not be the only location in Bedfordshire to receive visitors.*

*The Government had split the country into three main zones; 'danger areas' where the enemy could be expected to target, 'neutral areas' where probable danger was not great and 'reception areas' would be locations where although not immune from attacks, were seen as improbable target locations. The Ministry of Health, responsible for evacuation felt that 'reception areas,' (like Luton) would be suitable for the reception and billeting of children and mothers from more dangerous areas. It was at this point that children from 'danger areas' were sent home with letters recommending that they be sent to a safer place.*

The threat of bombs two days before Britain declared war grew more likely as time passed. On 1st September 1939, the first of over 800,000 children were moved to the countryside where it was felt they would be safer if war was declared. 36,000 evacuees were billeted to Bedfordshire in 1939.

Most of the evacuees arrived by train though some made the journey by bus or car. Leighton Buzzard saw 7,000 mothers and children arrive from 1st to 3rd September. Officials state that billeting was carried out smoothly, the only problem was that extra blankets and bedding had to be supplied from local shops as the Government supplies did not arrive. 17,000 evacuees were allotted to the Borough of Bedford with the first train arriving on Friday 1st September at the station in Midland Road. Each train pulled carriages of between 700—800 evacuees, first the older children, carers and teachers followed the next day by mothers and younger children. Luton would expect to see 22,000 billeted in the

area and 12,285 over the first 3 days. In the village of Biddenham, 95 evacuees arrived to join a population of only 400.

For many of the evacuees, it was unclear why they had to leave home. This was often the way things were at a time when children did not question the authority of an adult. Older children arrived from London and the surrounding areas first. A lot of evacuees were sent to the country as a school unit with their teachers. Children were taken to a Main Reception and then, after a refreshment of milk, could be taken to Dispersal Centres across the main towns to nearby villages to meet their 'foster parents.'

### **EVIDENCE DOCUMENT**

#### **Government Evacuation Scheme**

Overcoat/ mackintosh

#### Girls:

1 vest, 1 pair of knickers, 1 petticoat, 2 pairs of stockings, 1 slip, 1 blouse, 1 cardigan, handkerchiefs

#### Boys:

1 vest, 1 pair of knickers, 1 pair of trousers, 2 pairs of socks, 1 pullover or jersey, handkerchiefs

#### Nightwear:

Comb, towel, soap, face-cloth, toothbrush, boots or shoes, plimsolls

#### Food:

Sandwiches, dry biscuits, packets of nuts and seedless raisins, barley sugar (not chocolate), apple, orange.

All should have gas masks.

H.E. Barker wrote in his diary in 1939:

On Friday and Saturday, 1st and 2nd September, Bedford witnessed many strange scenes when the bulk of the seventeen thousand evacuees allotted to the Borough arrived from London, as well as several thousand destined for county billets. Tents had been erected in the Cattle Market and the children were dispersed from these to meet their new "foster parents."

The schoolchildren came in on the Friday, and it was a pathetic sight to see

## Operation Pied Piper—evacuees arrive in Bedfordshire

these young pilgrims, with pack and gas mask, torn from their homes by the grim hand of war.

Evacuees arrived with only a few items that they were able to carry in a box or small suitcase. They could take only one toy with them. The children wore labels so they would not get lost. They carried their gas masks in boxes though some had satchels with a pocket designed for a gas mask. Red and blue gas masks were designed for the very young children and were called “Mickey Mouse” gas masks.

Unaccompanied children received a medical card on arrival and had access to medical attention if required.

Locals were told by Billeting Officers how many evacuees they would be taking on. This was not a choice. The ‘foster parents’ met the children at the Dispersal Centres (sometimes village halls) and often picked out the oldest children first as they would be more able to carry out work. Sometimes children had brothers and sisters and did not want to be split up. It was also not uncommon for more than one evacuee to be billeted in the same house. Some of the women were surprised to discover that the evacuees were poorly dressed and they donated clothes to the children.

It was a time of change not just for children in the ‘danger areas’ but for local children too. Some were quite surprised to see groups of new children arrive and take residence in their homes.

Mothers with small children and expectant mothers were evacuated within the first few days and found themselves arriving in towns like Luton and Bedford. However, many found the country too noisy and a few did not get along with the local women and so they returned to London.

On 3rd September, Britain gave Germany an ultimatum: Hitler must withdraw his troops from Poland or war would be declared. Hitler refused. Britain and then France declared war on Germany. Canada, Australia, New Zealand and India also declared war on Germany in the following days.

The first thing many evacuees did once they reached their new house was to write a postcard home as the parents did not know where they had been sent. Parents were discouraged from visiting for the first three months for fear of upsetting the children and making them homesick.

In those first months since war was declared not much appeared to change. People carried gas masks, worried that they may be a civilian attack. Wooden barricades were placed in front of plate glass shop windows in High Street in Bedford. A shelter of sandbags were piled high to guard against bomb splinters on St Peter's Green and in Harpur Street, windows of a Sunday School room were bricked in. The front of the Borough Police Station and walls of the Town Hall were screened with brick walls. So far though, the threat was not a reality.

Not all the evacuees found that they were able to settle into their new surroundings and many were homesick. The parents of many of those evacuated to the country would visit when they could and some decided to take them home again. During the 'Phoney War', as this time became known, three quarters of all evacuees returned home. Schools that had been turned into rest centres were returned to schools again.

By the spring of 1940, people in the towns and villages of Bedfordshire found that they had to make adaptations to everyday life. Many foods were rationed and there was also the addition of an evacuee to feed. One school dinner lady produced 80 hot dinners in a tiny kitchen in a church room. At weekends, family members could travel to Bedfordshire to visit the children. This worried many of the 'host' families as they would have to consider where the visitors would sleep and they would have to feed them. A foster parent could expect to receive 3/- for billeting a child but there were still food shortages in local shops.

Many city children discovered life in the country was quite different. For some, it was the first time that they had seen cattle and they had no idea that milk came from cows or that apples grew on trees. One unfortunate group of evacuees at Aspley Guise were taken to woodland by the local children where they convinced the visitors that lions ran freely among the trees!

The months since Operation Pied Piper passed. There had been no attacks as people had first suspected and parents of evacuees had decided that if they were going to die then they would do so together in their hometown.

## Operation Pied Piper—evacuees arrive in Bedfordshire

The 'Phoney War' came to an end in April 1940 and with it, the reality of war and all its horrors. It was clear to many that it would be safer for their children to remain in counties like Bedfordshire.

Some evacuees would spend most of the war in Bedfordshire. They now attended a different school and found new ways to entertain themselves. A number of evacuees had been billeted to Bromham from Willesden in north west London. Though the mothers appeared not to enjoy the rural lifestyle and found the village green to be cold, the children appeared happier with their time in Bromham. Some of the evacuees joined either the 'gangs', 'Thistley Green mob' or the 'Village boys'. For those that did make the journey to counties like Bedfordshire, it was impossible for their presence not to be felt. Although many locals would be happy enough to have extra children in their midst it was not always the case and the children were seen as a disruption to their rural lives.

The evacuees were allowed to visit families living in the dangerous zones and it was a reminder, for some, just how well protected they were in the country as they saw the damage the war inflicted on their home towns.

The evacuees would not always stay with the same family for the duration of their time in the country. Some 'foster parents' grew tired of the children and asked that they be billeted at another house and this sometimes meant that brothers and sisters who had been kept together might be separated.

For some who left for Bedfordshire in 1939, they would not return home again for 6 years.

When Japan surrendered on 14th August 1945, emotions were mixed. For the children evacuated to Bedfordshire it was the signal for much excitement and cheering that the war had been won. However, for those old enough to understand the significance of the atomic bomb drops on Hiroshima and Nagasaki would pause to consider the impact on human

life, for those who perished and those who survived.

Some evacuees kept in touch with their 'foster families' though this was not always possible or even encouraged. Some officials felt the evacuees should return to their city lives as quickly as possible so that their lives could return to normal. For many, it had been an extraordinary period in their lives and one that they would never forget.

## READ ALL ABOUT IT! - THE EVACUEES

Bedford Record 1939

### WHAT THE EVACUEES THINK

#### Interviews Selected at Random

Here are a few interviews with members of Bedford's new population, the thousands of people who were evacuated from London before the outbreak of war. These are the impressions of people who were selected at random by *Bedford Record* & *Circular* reporters and they reveal a variety of opinions; also the difficulties of men, women, and children suddenly transported into an almost new world and in exceptional circumstances.

#### A CONJURER'S COMPLAINT

Philip Livingstone, aged 14, a pupil at the Haberdashers' School, London, and resident in Cricklewood, told our reporter that Bedford was a bigger town than he had imagined. "I thought it was a small country town," he said. "I love the beautiful, wide river, although I was surprised to see it, since the streets just outside Midland Road station are dusty and look more like London streets than those at this end of the town (Talbot Road)."

"My only trouble is that I cannot find a shop which stocks all the objects and articles useful for conjuring, which is my hobby. I found one shop, but it was only 'part-time'. As a matter of fact, I want a thumb tip. I met a member of the Magic Circle in London and he told me to get one."

Philip thinks that the Bedford climate resembles that of Bournemouth—very relaxing.

His little sister, Patricia, likes Bedford, but she will like it better when her toys arrive.

#### RUSSELL PARK PRAISED

Miss M. H. Gilson, who teaches in the Starcross Senior Girls' School, St. Pancras, said: "We are having a great time in Bedford. This park (Russell Park) is ideal for our girls and a group of 300 who are attached to the Goldington Road School, play here regularly. The Borough Education Committee have been very kind to us in that they have lent us recreational equipment. Our children are mostly billeted in Pembroke Street. Everyone is very kind and a number of the children are learning good manners—it's the first time that some of them have known well-ordered homes."

"Personally, I visited Bedford twenty-five years ago as a child, so I know what a pleasant spot it is."

Miss Gilson said that she and the girls appreciated Bedford's good swimming-bath facilities. "But I am not worrying about the reopening of the cinemas," she said. "While the children are here they will have a chance to develop more self-reliance in their amusements."

#### "UNFRIENDLINESS"

Complaints of an unfriendly attitude towards evacuees were made to our reporter by a mother from West Hampstead, whom he found wheeling her two small sons along the Embankment in a perambulator.

"I am taking the children back home next Saturday," she said. "Bedford is a fine place for children, and they love it, but we cannot bear to be in a house where we feel that we are not wanted. People know that they will be fined if they turn us out, so they try to make things awkward for us so that we are glad to go to get away from it."

I know several mothers who are taking their children back to London, too, and it is all for the same reason. Our husbands cannot bear to think of us being where we are not wanted, and would rather that we were happy with them."

#### AN OPPOSITE VIEW

An exactly opposite opinion was expressed to our reporter a few minutes later by another mother with a little girl of 18 months.

"Everyone here has been so kind to us," she said. "We like it in Bedford very much indeed, and are having quite a holiday. People are so friendly and helpful to us, and no one could be kinder than the lady we are staying with."

#### "A BEAUTIFUL TOWN"

"It's fine to be in such a beautiful town as Bedford", said Betty Rosen, a dark-haired girl from the Starcross Street School in North London, "but I should like it better if my mother were here to enjoy it with me. She will be lonely without me and my little brother." She told a reporter her reactions to her changed situation in Russell Park just before her class assembled for games. She lives at 3 Lidlington Place, N.W.1, and is thirteen. Her temporary home is at 52 Pembroke Street, Bedford.

"We come to the park here every morning and afternoon where we meet our teachers and play rounders, netball, and all sorts of games. We have teams and we have coloured badges to indicate our team. We go bathing at the open-air baths, and for the first time, we have been fishing. We caught a few tiddlers with a net and put them in a jam-jar. Another girl, fishing with a line, caught quite a big fish. It's a great adventure, too, to have a rowing boat out, that is when the boys don't splash us!"

"We have a very nice house here, and I write almost every day to tell my mother what kind people we are with, and how comfortable we are. She sends us pocket money—we had half a crown each this week—and we had a grand time with it. We do not waste it. At the moment we are looking forward immensely to a day outing that we are having with the school. We are going out blackberrying, taking our food with us." She laughed when I asked her whether she would like going to school in Bedford. It seems that she does not like school, not even in a lovely place like Bedford. She is not alone!

Rosina Berry, her friend, who goes to the same school, and lives next door to her in Bedford, says she is delighted to get the chance to go to school in Bedford. The people with whom she is staying often give her pennies and apples, and are generally very kind, she says.

12th September issue.

## CHILDREN AND THEIR GAS MASKS

"Must be Taken to  
School"

### FRESH INSTRUCTION BY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

In future, despite a recent announcement by the B.B.C., all children in Bedfordshire will be required to take their gas masks to school with them. Ald. Goodman, Chairman of the Education Committee, brought the matter up as one of great importance at the Bedfordshire County Council meeting on Friday.

ALD. GOODMAN said that on 10th November an announcement was broadcast by the B.B.C. that the Board of Education stated that children in reception areas need not carry their gas masks while they were in those areas but that if they left their homes or billets for any length of time they must carry their gas masks. This was practically an open invitation to the children of Bedfordshire to attend school without their gas masks, said Ald. Goodman, and the Education Committee had had reports from the head teachers that children were taking advantage of it and leaving their gas masks at home. In January 1938 the Board of Education deprecated anything in the nature of respirator or air-raid drills, but in April 1939 they intimated that they were prepared to regard the matter as proper for discussion by local education authorities. The Elementary Education Sub-Committee arranged that the schoolchildren should receive instruction in the use and care of gas masks, and that the gas masks should periodically be examined by the A.R.P. wardens. Emergency measures were decided upon and the head teachers co-operated wholeheartedly with the Education Committee. Now, if the children left their gas masks at home, these measures and instruction would be lost and the masks would not be at hand in time of need.

#### RADIO ADVICE REFUSED

"This Council, through the Education Committee, is responsible for the safety and welfare of the children of the County," said Ald Goodman, "and if the Education Committee fail to take proper precautions, if any casualties happen a very difficult position may arise. The Board of Education state that the Education Committee is at liberty to use its discretion in the matter but it will not be easy to enforce any instruction that the children should bring their gas masks to school in view of the announcement over the wireless. I ask not only that the Council should support the Committee in its instructions that the children should take their gas-masks to school but that it should make representations to the proper quarters that either the B.B.C. announcement should be withdrawn or that the announcement be made that there is no danger from gas in Bedfordshire."

ALD. BRAYBROOKS said he hoped and believed that this Council would give Ald. Goodman the support for which he had appealed. The Government in their wisdom had spent many millions of pounds in providing gas-masks for every person in the British Isles. They did it for a specific purpose. Everyone expected that as soon as war was declared we should be raided very severely. Fortunately that had not happened, up to date. But it did not follow that it would not happen; indeed, the speaker was strongly of opinion that it would happen; and therefore it was all the more necessary during this time of respite, that the children whether going to school or anywhere else should carry their gas-masks.

MR. KEMPSTER pointed out that in the Borough of Bedford, the children in all the schools were expected to bring their gas-masks, and a roll call and examination of gas-masks was made twice daily. If the children had not got their masks they were sent home.

The CHAIRMAN (Sir Thomas Keens) said that the Emergency Committee decided at a meeting on Wednesday to instruct the Director of Education to see that notice should be given to all the schools in the County, that the children should carry their gas-masks.

MR. RICHARDSON: Can a roll call be made now to see which members of the Council have brought their gas masks? (Laughter.)

In answer to Ald. Goodman the Chairman said that the question of the modification or withdrawal of the B.B.C. announcement should be referred to the A.R.P. Controller (Mr. J. B. Graham) for necessary action.

28th November issue.

## The blackout and bombing

*During the summer of 1939, a lot of Britain was in no doubt that there would be air raids if war was declared. Many still remembered there had been some air raids and bomb drops during World War 1. Aviation technology had advanced so far that, by the end of the 1930s, the threat to civilian life from the air was more than a mere possibility.*

On 8th and 9th July 1939, the Borough of Luton council agreed to hold a blackout from midnight to 4am. It proved to be a wise strategy as Luton suffered the most from enemy attacks over Bedfordshire. This was probably due to Vauxhall and other major industries located in the town that would be seen as probable factories where munitions would be produced. 107 people were killed and almost 500 were injured in Luton.

The blackout began on 1st September 1939. People would make sure that their house was ready for blackout just after sunset. There were reminders about blackout times in the local newspapers. Children could take part in making sure that their house was ready for the blackout. Thick, black material was used to replace curtains and materials like cardboard, brown paper and black paint was used to make sure that no light would be able to escape from a house and so make it easier for the enemy to drop their bombs.

There were a lot of accidents when the blackout first came into effect. There were no street lights, shop window lights or lights from moving traffic. White stripes were painted on curbs but a lot of people still tripped up. The government decided to alter the rules so that people could carry small torches dimmed with paper and these had to be pointed down. The blackout was not a time for children to be outside playing, it was too dangerous.

The blackout lasted until September 1944 and then became the 'dimout.'

Air raid sirens were used to warn of an attack. The sirens became known as 'Moaning Minnie.' Families living in 'danger areas' often slept in their Anderson shelters. There was no room for a toilet in the shelter so this meant running back to the house in the dark with a torch. It was

not uncommon for the Bedfordshire villages to not have a proper toilet and residents might have to make do with running to a barn where there would be a bucket and a bench with a hole balanced on top of it.

The first raid on Luton occurred in daylight and without warning on Friday 30th August, 1940. Multiple bombs fell, killing 59 and injuring 140 people. Many lost their homes, some damaged beyond repair and other properties were destroyed completely.

Around noon on 15th October 1940, witnesses described a single plane circling over Old Bedford Road in Luton. It dropped a bomb, causing damage to a hat factory and sending sewing and blocking machines across the site. A total of 13 people were killed and 35 were injured, including a 14 year old boy. The children at Old Bedford Road school were already familiar with the drill and were safe in the air raid shelter beneath the playground.

There were to be many further raids in Luton. Vauxhall Motors, the Skefko works and Commer Cars were all able to recover from attacks. On one afternoon, 194 bombs dropped on the town. There were no fewer than 900 warnings over Luton during WW2.

As with Luton, air raid sirens were to become a common sound for the residents of Bedford. On 30th July 1942, 10 people were killed in a raid. This was to be the worst attack on the town.

Raids could happen at any time and it was not uncommon for children to be woken during the night with the sounds of aircraft flying above their houses. Children and adults lay awake, counting the allied aircraft leaving for battle and then counting them back. Later, another noise kept people awake. V1 (doodlebugs) and V2 bombs could be heard passing overhead. The V1 and V2 rockets continued to drop over Britain in the first half of 1945 and it was said that if you looked, you could see fire coming out of the tails.

## Rationing—Food, clothing and furniture

Prior to the start of WW2, only one third of the food eaten in Britain had been grown there. This changed when many of the boats that imported food were sunk by enemy submarines. Poor people worried that they would not be able to buy food if prices increased.

Land was dug for crops to provide food for people and fodder for animals. The government introduced a system where food and clothing became rationed and the prices were fixed so that everyone paid the same amount.

Food ration books were issued at the end of September 1939. Shoppers had to register with their chosen retailers by November.

By December 1941, a 'points' system had been introduced on unrationed food like biscuits and spam. Everyone had 16 points a month and different foods were 'priced' depending on how easy or difficult it was to obtain them. This worked better for larger families as they were able to add their points together.

### EVIDENCE DOCUMENT

#### Clothing Rations

- 1 man's shirt = 5 coupons
- 1 jacket = 13 coupons
- 1 suit = 26 coupons
- 1 handkerchief = 1 coupon
- 1 women's coat = 18 coupons
- 1 woollen dress = 11 coupons
- 1 pair of knickers = 2 coupons

### EVIDENCE DOCUMENT

#### Weekly rations for 1 person

- 2 pints milk
- 4oz (100g) bacon
- 1s.2d of beef, pork, veal or mutton—approx. 1lb (550g)
- 2oz (50g) butter
- 2 oz (50g) cheese
- 4oz (100g) margarine
- 2 oz (50g) lard
- 8oz (225g) sugar
- 8oz (225g) jam
- 2oz (50g) tea
- 1 egg

The government thought that the points coupon ration books worked very well. It was reported in The Bedfordshire Times and Standard newspaper that 25,000 books had been issued in the first two days.

In July 1942, sweets were added to the list of foods on ration. This meant no chocolate eggs at Easter. There was some opportunity for savoring sugary treats other than using sweet ration coupons when the American servicemen, many stationed in Bedfordshire, passed through villages such as Bromham and would sometimes throw sweets to the children.

A lot of foods were unavailable during the war as it would be difficult to ship to Britain. A Bedford resident, Leah Aynsley, who kept a diary through the years of WW2 recalls local children who, until that point, had never seen a banana. Initials are used in place of names written by the author. Ms. Aynsley explained;

*Tuesday, 4th May 1943,*

*...some of them do not know what a banana is like. T's uncle sent him 3 from Gibraltar. He was allowed to eat one, one was sent to the school to show the children and one was raffled for a charity!!..*

*Wednesday, 5th May 1943,*

*After saying what I did about bananas, it is a funny thing that last night I saw in an ironmonger's window 2 bright green bananas, labelled "Genuine Article. Not for sale. Sent by a member of our staff.."*

Potatoes, fruit and fish were not rationed. Articles appeared in newspapers offering recipe ideas and there was even a book titled; '100 ways to cook a potato'.

## Rationing—Food, clothing and furniture

Children from London and the surrounding areas would have noticed the changes in food on offer in the country. There was more land available to turn into allotments and local children would be able to pick berries from nearby bushes.

This is not to say that people did not go without. Bedfordians became used to egg powder in place of real eggs. Meat was quickly rationed and a new, processed meat called SPAM found its way onto shop shelves. Inevitably, there was a rush to the shops when news of a scarce food back on the shelves came through. Housewives, with children in tow, would stand in queues for long periods. Sometimes they were not even sure what they might be queueing for!

Some evacuees found themselves eating a dinner at school for the first time. Medicals took place at the schools and if some appeared underweight they were to stay at school during the lunch period and eat a school dinner.

### Timeline of some foods rationed during WW2:

Jan 1940	Mar 1940	Jul 1940	Mar 1941	Jun 1941	Nov 1941	Jan 1942	Jul 1942
Sugar,	meat	tea*, lard,	jam, syrup	eggs	milk**	dried	sweets
Bacon,		margarine,	treacle,			fruit,	
butter		cheese	marmalade			rice	

\*Children were not allowed to be given this item

\*\*Extra was given to children

On 1st June 1941, the rationing of clothing was introduced. It was not to end until 15th March 1949. Everyone was issued with a clothes ration book. The system for rationing worked by allowing each person 66 points in the form of coupons. Each item of clothing was worth a certain number of points. For example, a man's shirt equated to 5 coupons and a woman's coat used 18 coupons. Coupons could be spent however you wanted to, as long as you could pay for the items. Children's shoes were 3 coupons. In 1942, the rationing of clothes was reduced to 48 coupons. The only exception was for those in manual work who were allowed extra coupons.

Cloth was becoming expensive. The government needed to make sure that clothes were available to people at prices they could afford. Utility clothing used specific cloth and was cut in such a way to save money. There were no elaborate designs or excessive amounts of buttons on Utility clothes. Men's trousers would not have turn-ups on them. Socks were limited to a length of 9 1/2 inches (237mm). Everyone wanted to keep their clothes for as long as possible and recycle where they could. The government advice was to 'make do and mend' and children became used to 'hand me downs'.

It was not just clothes that became hard to come by. Furniture and home appliances were difficult to replace and it was not possible to buy new items as the materials were now needed for the war effort. Even repairing items was hard, owing to the lack of replacement parts. Utility furniture was designed in a way that minimum materials would be used. Designs were kept simple and some people thought they lacked style. Furniture-buying permits were introduced that allowed only the newly married, those starting families and people who had been bombed out to buy furniture up to a given number of 'units' in addition to money.

## READ ALL ABOUT IT! - RATIONING

### Bedfordshire Times and Standard 1943



**SOAP RATIONING**  
*and the children!*

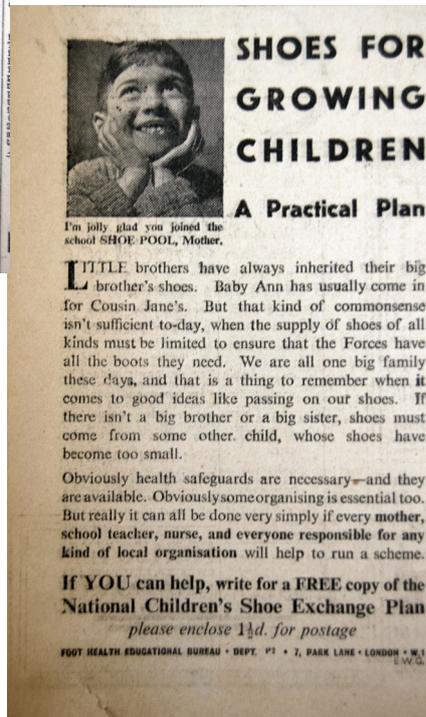
Bodyguard makes  
**HEALTH PROTECTION**  
sure

THINK OF THE children's health when you use your soap coupons — and be sure you get some Bodyguard. The rich, antiseptic lather guards health day by day. Remember, every time you do the house cleaning with Bodyguard you wash away dirt and germs. So use it regularly — but use it carefully, too! Keep your Bodyguard tablet in a dry place when not in use and it will last much, much longer.

**BODYGUARD**  
THE SOAP TO BEAT THOSE GERMS  
1½d Tablet — 1 Coupon

15th January issue.

15th January issue.



**SHOES FOR GROWING CHILDREN**  
**A Practical Plan**

I'm jolly glad you joined the school SHOE POOL, Mother.

**L**ITTLE brothers have always inherited their big brother's shoes. Baby Ann has usually come in for Cousin Jane's. But that kind of commonsense isn't sufficient to-day, when the supply of shoes of all kinds must be limited to ensure that the Forces have all the boots they need. We are all one big family these days, and that is a thing to remember when it comes to good ideas like passing on our shoes. If there isn't a big brother or a big sister, shoes must come from some other child, whose shoes have become too small.

Obviously health safeguards are necessary—and they are available. Obviously some organising is essential too. But really it can all be done very simply if every mother, school teacher, nurse, and everyone responsible for any kind of local organisation will help to run a scheme.

**If YOU can help, write for a FREE copy of the National Children's Shoe Exchange Plan**  
*please enclose 1½d. for postage*

FOOT HEALTH EDUCATIONAL BUREAU • DEPT. P7 • 7, PARK LANE • LONDON • W.1  
E.W.G.

*"His first favourite  
with the children"*



**AND ONLY 2 POINTS  
THE GIANT PACKET**

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17th September issue.

17th December issue.

**TIZER**  
**THE APPETIZER**



**Will  
Come  
Back  
With  
Victory**

## At school during the war

There was an extended summer holiday for some children in 1939 as preparations were taking place to re-inforce the schools with sandbags, dug-outs and the rearrangement of classes to absorb the influx of evacuees that were expected to arrive from London and the south coast. In Houghton Regis, school children were given an extra 3 weeks holiday so that the changes could be made.

The effect of the war was evident by the records in the school log books. In Bromham in 1934, the average attendance was 55 pupils. In September 1939 the number had grown to 80 with the addition of small groups of evacuees and a larger Willesden group and their teachers.

1940 began with changes that everyone felt. Bacon, ham, sugar and butter were difficult to buy, restricted under the new rationing system. Families were being split as young men were called up. Bedfordians still went to work, shopped, looked forward to leisure time and children still went to school.

A local schoolmaster had already noticed differences between the children and was not impressed with the newcomers in his classes. He felt that the work of the evacuees was lacking compared to the local children. In an edition of the local Bedfordshire Times newspaper he explains that; "all they seem to care about is dancing, singing and playing games," adding that "spelling evidently does not matter".

Many evacuees returned home during the 'Phony War' so it was easier to absorb the evacuees in some areas. For other schools, a system of sharing the classrooms in the mornings and afternoon between local children and evacuees sometimes took place. On warmer days, lessons could be timetabled outside or children could embark on nature lessons. Some villages also made use of the Parish Hall to conduct lessons. In Luton, an 'alternate days' scheme saw children in the classroom on one day and on excursions and taking part in games in the park on the other day. Lessons could be taught in shelters if necessary although some classes were read stories or sang when they needed to take cover.

There were not just new children to consider. Many of the male teachers had been 'called up' and retired teachers were asked to return to the classroom. The evacuees' teachers also taught in the village schools. It was a difficult time for everyone, the teachers had also left their homes and families to look after the evacuees.

Teaching and learning was difficult at times. There were disruptions from air raid drills and warnings at any time. Class numbers fluctuated as evacuees arrived and left. Evacuees could also be granted the day off school if they had visitors.

A lot of children educated in the time of WW2 reflected that teachers were often quite strict. This was an era when the cane was used on children who disobeyed the rules. One rule that everyone had to abide by was to carry a gas mask and anyone who left their gas mask at home would be sent back for it. However, children were at least allowed to decorate their gas mask boxes.

More children stayed at their schools during the lunch period during the war. It was considered safer for children to take sandwiches to school or eat school dinners rather than to go home when there may be danger of bombing.

Lessons continued to be taught, as far as possible, as they had been before the war. Additional lessons had also been added to the curriculum. Fraying lessons saw children making pillows for wounded soldiers and knitting classes to make warm clothing for those in need. There was also a competition in Bedfordshire asking classes to create a poster to ask people to purchase War Bonds to finance the making of munitions. Winners around the county received 10 shillings of Savings Certificates.

Not even the war would halt all school activities. Some children sat an examination known as the Eleven plus. Good results would mean entry to a Grammar school. (This would be expensive though and not everyone could afford the cost of the uniform and equipment needed for lessons.) Children could also not escape a visit from the school dentist where the shrill sound of the drill could sometimes be heard from the classrooms.

## Entertainment and toys

In 1939, all cinemas closed for a short time. Authorities were worried that there would be a lot of people in one space if there was an attack. The ban only lasted for one week and everyone could again watch films at theatres across Bedfordshire. The new Disney film called 'Fantasia' became a popular choice for children in 1940.

For the evacuees new to the county, exploring their new surroundings was an obvious choice and an adventure for those who had never stepped a foot outside the capital before the start of the war. The days would appear lighter for longer as the country entered into double summer time with clocks going forward an extra hour.

There were organized groups for children to join including the Girl Guides, Boys' Brigade, Sea Cadet Corps, Air Training Corps and Boy Scouts. The Luton Girls' Choir became so accomplished that they even acquired national fame.

Some sporting events had been suspended during the war but not all, fixtures still took place and crowds watched Service teams play football, a boost for morale for all in attendance.

Children were expected to 'do their bit' during the war and this meant helping with fund raising events, collecting salvage and 'digging for victory'.

The factories that had produced toys before the war could now expect to be making munitions and the materials were needed for the production of weapons. Paper toys were still on sale and homemade toys made from wood, tin cars and trains from old bean cans soon became an alternative to shop bought items.

By Christmas of 1942 a few more toys appeared on the shelves. Shop Christmas lights were modified at windows and had to be turned off during an air raid warning. Children were also invited to local parties at Christmas and for some, toys were sent from London and America. Later in the war, some of the parties were organized by the American airforcemen who were stationed in locations like Little Staughton and Bedford. Pantomimes were also performed during the Christmas period. In 1944, children in Bedford were encouraged to recycle their old

Christmas cards and turn them into scrapbooks for the children's ward at the local hospital.

There were many military parades in the streets of towns like Bedford to watch. Troops would march by and bands played. There were also demonstrations to observe. In Luton, children were able to see a tank close up. Some children took extra interest in this as their parents helped make the Churchill tank at the Vauxhall factory.

Families sat together in the evenings and listened to the wireless set. Programmes included a 'Children's Hour' with plays and stories to listen to. Children would often read books and comics when they were not at school. Comics were available during the year as it was hoped that it would keep spirits up.

Another popular form of entertainment for many was watching aeroplanes. Books appeared to help young aviation enthusiasts identify the aircraft. At the American airfield in Thurleigh, spotters would wait for a green flare to signal that all crew had returned safely. They hoped not to see an orange flare, indicating there were injured personnel or a red flare to notify fatalities in the sortie.

People were encouraged to 'holiday at home' during the war but that is not to say that people did not take holidays. Some coastal locations were not considered safe so visiting family members who lived inland was often a better choice. Those staying at home could be lucky and enjoy a day at Whipsnade Zoo or spend days at a local swimming pool like the new California in Dunstable which had opened in 1937.



Article published in the Bedfordshire Times and Standard on 12th December, 1941.

## The End of WW2

In 1945, on 8th May, Britain celebrated Victory in Europe. Adolf Hitler had committed suicide on 30th April and Germany surrendered on 7th May. Parties were held across Bedfordshire. The day gave people the opportunity to dress up and enjoy themselves. Banners and Union flags were hung outside and a fanfare of fireworks were set off in celebration. Bonfires were built with guys dressed to look like Hitler. Finally, after years of the blackout, lights were turned on at night and searchlights switched back on so that the cities were as bright as possible.

Towards the end of the war, only 200 official evacuees remained in Luton. The last evacuee filled train left on 23rd June, 1945. This was not a happy time for all children. Some evacuees were 'unclaimed' and were transferred to the Government welfare scheme. Other children were orphans and their time in Bedfordshire was the only chance they had to experience family life. It was not expected that orphans stayed on with their 'foster parents' and there were cases when they were not even allowed to stay in touch. Some evacuees did write and visit and remained friends with their Bedfordshire families long after the war ended.

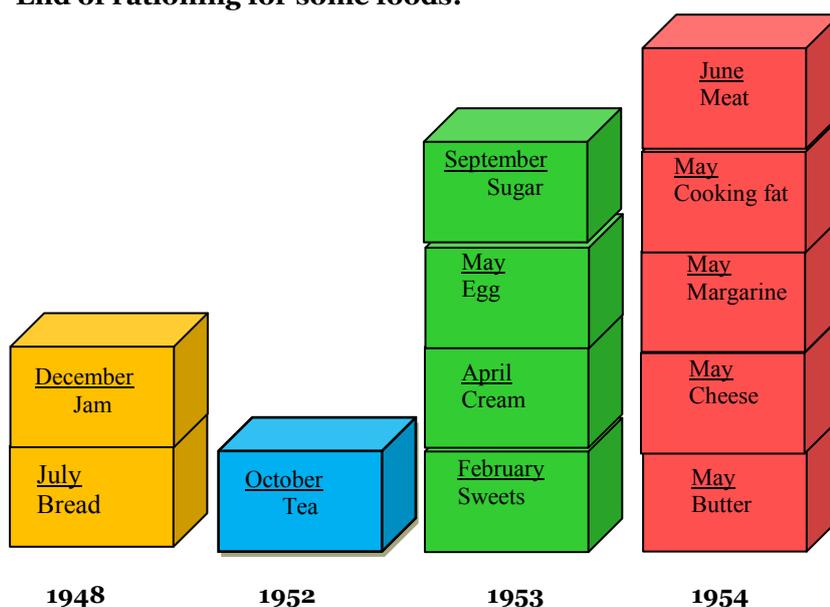
Newspapers reported the shocking news that an atomic bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima, Japan on 6th August and then on 9th August on Nagasaki. VJ Day was announced on Wednesday 15th August.

For the evacuees, a lot had changed in the time they had been billeted. Some children had been living in Bedfordshire for up to 6 years. In this time they had grown up. It was not always easy to settle back into city life. Some children were nervous to see their fathers once the war ended, they couldn't remember what their father looked like as they were so young when they were sent away to Bedfordshire. Others had been born after their fathers had left to serve. Family members might have been taken as prisoners of war and it was difficult for some children to recognize them as they had lost so much weight during their time as a prisoner.

After the war ended Ampthill put on a fancy dress parade. The weather was quite bad with rain but this did not stop the children marching through the streets to the park.

It took some time for life to return to normal. Towns and villages still held visual reminders of the war. Rationing did not end straight away as there was still a shortage of some consumables. Sweets were not removed from the rationing list until February 1953. In July 1946, bread was placed on ration so that emergency supplies could be sent to people who were starving in Germany.

#### End of rationing for some foods:



## Explanation of Images

The images and copies of posters referenced on the following pages form part of a free 'Schools Pack' and have been selected for their relevance to the area of **Bedfordshire in World War 2**.

A range of images and posters have been selected to highlight the social history of the area for the duration of WW2 and are intended to stimulate enquiry based study. The majority of the documents used can be found in the archives. The images are intentionally labelled only with an archives reference, so that students are encouraged to search for clues regarding the nature, age and relevance of each image.

A PowerPoint presentation of all of the images can be obtained by contacting the Archives Learning Officer.

**It should be noted that images provided by BARS belong to them and are copyright. Copies can be made by the school for use in lessons, but should not be used in any other publications. Digital copies may not be made or used on websites or intranet.**

Similar 'Local Studies Packs' are available free of charge to any Bedfordshire school. Please contact the Learning Officer for further details on further 'Topic Packs', 'Local Studies Packs' or 'maps packs' that may be of interest to you.

## The Children of WW2

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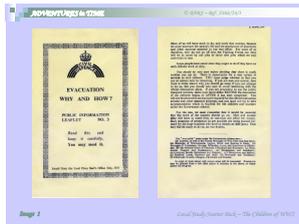


Image 1

Front and back pages of Civil Defence Public information leaflet— Evacuation. Why and How? Issued to every household shortly before the outbreak of war.

Ref: X464/24/3

Date: July, 1939

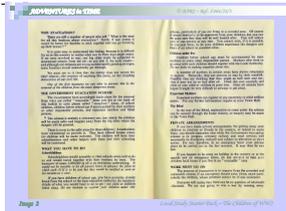


Image 2

Middle pages of Civil Defence Public information leaflet— Evacuation. Why and How? It was discovered that no more than 1/3 of citizens read the leaflets. (-source Imperial War Museum , Study Documents)

Ref: X464/24/3

Date: July, 1939



Image 3

'Dig for Victory' leaflet, part of a campaign issued by the Ministry of Agriculture

Ref: Z145/87

Date: 1939 –1945



Image 4

Evacuees arrive at Bedford, view of group taking refreshments. Taken for the Bedford Record.

Ref: BTNeg710/3

Date: 5th September, 1939



Image 5

Evacuees arrive at Bedford, view of group taking refreshments. Taken for the Bedford Record.

Ref: BTNeg710/4  
Date: 5th September, 1939



Image 6

Catalogue and price list of Board of Trade Utility furniture sold by G Waters, furnishers, 2 Hitchin Street, Biggleswade

Ref: X758/10/18  
Date: 1940—1949



Image 7

Laying sand bags on St Peter's Green, Bedford. Caption reads '1939 - War with Germany was imminent and orders were issued for air-raid shelters to be built immediately, and on St. Peter's Green helpers were recruited to lend a hand.'

Ref: BP54/4/1  
Date: 1939



Image 8

Bomb damage in Ashburnham Road, Bedford. Caption reads '1940 - German raiders made Bedford their target and bombers scattered their lethal loads over the town on several occasions. Buildings destroyed included this hotel in Ashburnham Road.'

Ref: BP54/4/3  
Date: 1940

## The Children of WW2

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Image 9

Photograph of women and children queing to weight paper for salvage. Caption reads '1942 - We were at war and every commodity was vital for the war effort, waste paper became valuable and the WVS organized many salvage drives and local appeals met instant response.

Ref: BP54/4/6

Date: 1942

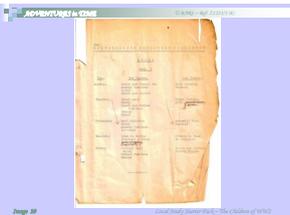


Image 10

Bedfordshire Education Committee papers relating to menu's for school canteens:  
Rationed commodities required for 10 meals per day for week 1 menu.

Ref: Z1223/1 (4)

Date:



Image 11

Photograph of people dancing in the street. Caption reads '1945 - Rejoicing reached its climax with the declaration of peace after the stern years of war. This picture epitomises the spirit of the day as they danced in the streets in joyous abandon.

Ref: BP54/4/8

Date: 1945



Image 12

Reference  
BTNeg1029/1  
Title  
Building air raid surface shelters in Bedford. For Bedford Record

Ref: BTNeg1029/1

Date: 18th February 1941

Date free text

18 February 1941



Image 13

Photograph of men searching and clearing wreckage of bomb damage. Caption reads '1941 - the Civil Defence Organization was ready for emergencies and rescue teams carried out really magnificent work when required - a part of the complex system that safeguarded the inhabitants.'

Ref: BP54/4/4  
Date: 1941



Image 14

Title: High Street. View looking south taken from first floor of building opposite Rose & Son at the Silver Street/Mill Street junction. /20 published in 'Memories of Bedford', 1999 p8-9

Ref: BTNeg2041/20  
Date: 4th April 1945



Image 15

Home Guard Parade, High St. (From Beds. Times - tve. box 1302)

Ref: Z50/9/747  
Date: March 1942



Image 16

Clothing ration-book with coupons

Ref: AD3736/5 (1), (2)  
Date: 1947

## The Children of WW2

Page 31



Image 17  
Papers and correspondence relating to the Harpur Trust schools, 1939  
Reception of school children—to be signed by the Billeting officer

Ref: HT15/1/37 (12)

Date:



Image 18  
Scene outside the Swan Hotel, V.E day (Box 2154)

Ref: Z50-9-750

Date: 8th May 1945



Image 19  
'The Pioneer', issue number 4, the magazine of London children in Bedford

Ref: Z164/3

Date: April 1940



Image 20  
Box 2104. Evacuees at Midland Station, Bedford.  
23 June 1945

Ref: BTNeg2104

Date: June 1945

### Did you know...

- Everyone was issued an Identity card that they had to keep with them in case of an inspection. Each card had a series of letters and numbers. For example, ABRD/110/3. the number 3 meant the individual was third in the family.
- As the war progressed and some meat became hard to come by, some butchers sold horse and whale meat.
- Children were given 1 pint of milk a day as extra rations
- In 1942, with coal at a shortage as many miners had joined the forces, the government asked people to save fuel by only filling baths to 5 inches. People used black paint to mark the depth inside the bath. This was a task that children could help out with.
- In February 1942, soap was rationed to 16 oz a month.
- Food rationing lasted for 14 years in Britain.
- Neville Chamberlain broadcast to the British people on 3rd September at 11:15 am to announce that they were at war with Germany.

## Did you know...

- Pets were not allowed in public shelters. People let their pets stay with them in private shelters and put cotton wool in their ears so the noises would not be as loud.
- 'Ration chocolate' was available during the war, though it was not considered to be particularly nice.
- After Neville Chamberlain had announced Britain was at war in his radio speech, the air raid sirens sounded and people rushed to their shelters
- Some farmers painted white stripes on their cattle so that that could be seen during a blackout.

This pack has been produced with references from the following sources. All sources listed are held at BARS:

- Luton At War—Home Counties Newspapers Ltd. Ref . 130
- Bedfordshire At War by Nigel Lutt Ref. 140
- Bedfordshire Within Living Memory—Bedfordshire Federation of Women's Institutes Ref. 120
- Bromham in Bedfordshire—A History by Roger. W Rideout. Ref. 130
- Daily Life in a wartime house by Laura Wilson
- Them Damn 'Vacs—A personal story of wartime evacuation by Margaret Ann Bray Ref. 140
- A Bedford Diary of four war years by H.E. Barker Ref. 130
- The diaries of Leah Aynsley, resident of Bedford Ref. Z1606
- Bedfordshire Times and Standard 1941
- The Story of Luton by James Dyer and John Dony Ref. 130 Lut.
- Dunstable and District at War compiled by Jean Yates and Sue King Ref. 130

Additional sources can be found at the following websites:

<http://www.bedfordshire.gov.uk/CommunityAndLiving/ArchivesAndRecordOffice/ArchivesAndRecordOffice.aspx>

**Notes:**



Contact us for further information on local history, access to primary sources, visits to the archives and other resources for schools:

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