

## **Operation Pied Piper - World War II Evacuation - Jean Slattery (an Evacuee)**

Friday 1st September 1939 was the first day of the mass evacuation known as Operation Pied Piper and I was among the first batch of evacuees to be taken away from my home in Chelsea, London. Over the 4 days of that weekend, in London alone, one and a half million evacuees were labelled bundled up and crammed into trains - to destinations unknown. Evacuation was to become a word which meant separation, unhappiness and an appalling homesickness. Always to feel a stranger in another person's home while continually trying to get along with people who had no connection with your back-ground. Nothing there belonged to you and we didn't belong there either. Treading water in the deep end of time. The insurmountable hurdle, when aged 6, to be told by your parents to be "always good and try not to cause a fuss". Like everyone in wartime we had to try and put on a 'brave face' and we did try so hard. Is it any wonder that so many of us wet the bed under the strain, or masked our misery with truculence?

I didn't return to my home for 5 years - just in time to dodge the Doodlebugs and V2 Rockets - for VE day was still 6 months off. I wasn't lucky enough to be sent to Brompton Regis.

Over 3,000,000 children were evacuated during that war and I suppose all of us have the black and white pictures of the newsreels in our minds, pictures of lines of children queuing to board the trains which would take them to safety - but away from home and family.

Mr E.L. Hughes had six brothers and two sisters and the story of his family makes fascinating reading. One brother died at Anzio, one was a Red Devil, imprisoned in Siberia, another was badly wounded at the Anzio bridgehead. All this happened in the space of two weeks. All his brothers were serving in the forces except for one - and he was bombed out twice.

Both Mr Hughes and Mrs Slattery belong to The Evacuees Reunion Association, and here is an extract of what was published in one of their monthly Newsletters, "The Evacuee".

This is in praise of and to thank those still living, and in Loving Memory of those who have passed on, for looking after us and giving us a life that we would not otherwise have known...

### **An Evacuees Experience at Brompton Regis**

After being back in London for a month or two we were again evacuated, this time to a village on the borders of Somerset and Devon - Brompton Regis near Dulverton - the land of Lorna Doane and John Ridd. This time we were all taken into the village hall and we were chosen by Bill and Mary Goss and taken to a cottage at the foot of the village. I say 'foot' because it was a short, but steep hill, something like 1 in 4. The cottage was one of three in a terrace placed end on to the stream.

While we were eating our tea there was a call at the kitchen door and a lady had two brothers with her for whom they were looking for accommodation and Mrs Goss agreed to take them for the time being. But they were always fighting and were soon moved. I was then given my own room from where I could lay in bed and watch the lambs jumping over one another at the top of the slope opposite. We were treated by Mr & Mrs Goss as if we were their own children and we had a wonderful time.

Mr Goss worked in the sawmill on the hill by the cottage and we would watch horse drawn carts being made from scratch, see them painted with all the fine art lining and see the wheels being made, watching whilst the blacksmith put on the red hot iron ring and hammered it in place as the wood went up in flames and another man throw a bucket of water over it to put it out and shrink the iron rim tight.

We would go to Hays farm behind us where they had docile cows that you could put your arms round the necks of. Or to Stenners farm down the road to be given a ride on his big Shire horse, perhaps three or four kids at a time (he seemed the size of a house).

In winter we would slide on the ice in the field where the stream had overflowed and frozen. Or slide down the hill on a sheet of bent corrugated iron. It was marvellous to go carol singing all through the village with a lantern on a pole come Christmas.

Thank-you to the people of that village who made us so welcome.