

**EVACUEES IN WOODHURST**

**1939-1945**



## EVACUEES

*In 1999 I completed an OU course called Oral History and for my subject I took the evacuees in Woodhurst in World War Two and their impact on the village. I interviewed five people to help me with this and their memories are quoted here.*

Woodhurst today is a small village, but in 1939 the population was about 240, almost half what it is today and the village was more isolated than today. To me a strange place to send evacuees to, as it was next to an active bomber base, with several more in the vicinity. Only two evacuees arrived in September 1939 although some Highbury High School girls who could not be accommodated in Huntingdon were sent to the village, but they stayed a very short time.

The peak times when the evacuees came were October/November 1941, September 1942 and July 1944, and many of them did not stay very long.. Unlike some places where children came from one school only with accompanying teachers, the children came from many different schools. 80 children came from London, coming from 23 different boroughs and 43 different schools. There is only one instance of four children from one school and that is because they were all in the same family.

Because the children were not in one cohesive unit and did not bring a teacher or helper with them it was probably more difficult for the children to settle in the village. Very few children brought a parent with them and a couple stayed with relatives. There were also children under five who do not appear on school records.

I have based the length of time they stayed on details in the school admission register.. The majority stayed for six months or less, some only a few days.. According to the school records just over half returned to London, the remainder changed their billet locally.

Woodhurst. School was for children from Woodhurst and Old Hurst and the school admission register shows where the evacuees stayed in the two villages. The number of evacuees fostered by individual families over the years differs from one to six. Also it was not guaranteed that children from a family would be billeted

together. If there were three or four children that was very unlikely. Just two children had a better chance of staying together. The chart at the end shows where the children stayed and for how long.

There was a difference of opinion amongst my interviewees as to how families and children were matched. Les Bass told me that two farmers of some standing in the village, Mr E Gurry and Mr C Cannon went round the village finding out which families would be able to take an evacuee. He remembered that his father on being asked if he could have one or two replied "*I bloody well ain't I've got enough to do now*". So they didn't have anyone. Another of my interviewees did not have any in his house as he lived in the village pub, but his aunt who lived opposite had two. He said she wasn't a children person so he didn't know how they got on..

Memories varied of how their parents had evacuees billeted on them. One said you didn't choose anyone, they made lists and doled them out accordingly. But Mrs. Stimson who had an evacuee billeted on her gave a different side to the events . She said "*I can remember them coming. They came in a bus here, then they put them all in the schoolroom poor little things and you picked one you could. I only could have one as I'd only got two bedrooms in my cottage. I had a little girl called Frances, she came from East Ham..*

However all the people I talked to agreed on one thing, that is that the children were very different from the Woodhurst children in many ways. Mrs Stimson who had little Frances staying with her said "*she hadn't got anything, she came from a poor, poor family*" Gerald Bozeat who was a boy of 10 when they arrived saw the boys in a different light. "*they were tough yeh, they'd been brought up street wise you see, we weren't, we'd only been wandering about this area, and they were really streetwise*". Les Bass who was younger than Gerald thought they all seemed more cocky than us. The headmistress of the school Nancy Chapman agreed that there was a great difference between the evacuees and the local children. She said "*they weren't very popular with the children because they knew all, or said they did*". She stated "*they were frightened of the countryside. One old boy said to me "Ain't there a lot of sky" Cos they had never been in open spaces, never knew what it was and I thought yes, you see, they were different.*"

She felt that in the playground they kept themselves together and did not mix with the local children. Les agreed with this he said “ *the evacuees tried to tell us how to go on and we didn't like that so we more or less said bugger off to London where you come from*” However Gerald had a much more sympathetic attitude. He remembered that “*We sort of mucked in at the end. We had been in a little village all our lives you know and they were quite street wise and they sort of showed us the way round for a little while. Until we got used to them*” He recalled that there was an exchange of activities. The evacuees showing things they used to do in London and the Woodhurst children showing them how to make bows and arrows and play with whips and tops an activity that couldn't be carried out in busy London streets.

Mrs Stimson had many happy memories of Frances staying with her. She says “*we bought her all sorts of things, her clothes and that ....you know she hadn't got much at all, we treated her like our own really*” She used to take Frances to Peterborough when she visited her family, and take her fruit picking on the back of her bike. She admitted that it wasn't very nice when Frances had to go to the cleansing station in Huntingdon because she had head lice, but it was eventually cleared. Remembering these times she said “*I think they liked it the kids out here because they'd got the fields and everything they could go and play, they were all ever so happy the children*’

The head teacher looked at that time very differently. Her biggest problem was the sudden influx of children. For instance on September 14<sup>th</sup> 1942 the school re-opened after the Harvest Holidays with 27 children on roll. On September 28<sup>th</sup> eighteen evacuees were admitted. The same problem occurred in July 1944 when in one week 32 evacuees were admitted (this was probably due to the advent of the flying bombs) The school consisted of two rooms, one for the infants , the other for children up to the age of 14. The infant teacher was frequently away ill during this time. According to the head the two main problems were trying to find places for the children to sit and the number of forms she had to fill in. No lists were sent telling you where they came from or what they were like and she said that she got little help from the Local Education Authority. But she sympathised with the children and their problems recognizing that the younger children settled quicker than the older ones. About the over 10 year olds she said “*they were not*

*an easy age. They'd got to adjust to living in a village ... if you bring a child of that age who has been used to living in a town what do you expect"*

What was the effect on the village as a whole. It was a shock to the village when they arrived, particularly on the three occasions when a number arrived together. The head teacher thought to the village children who had never been out of the village the influx of these children was like a bomb being dropped on them as they were quite different. However Gerald thought " *They taught us things too, I think we learned a bit from them coming. They were certainly tough lads, you daren't say too much to them there'd soon be a fight going*" He did make friends with one lad and kept in contact with him until he was in his thirties. The evacuee used to come back and visit the village.

The evacuees did inevitably cause disruption to what had been a small village. Unfortunately most did not stay long enough to make friends, but the few who did stay for any length of time did settle and integrate. There are no reminders of their stay, however they must have widened the horizons of local children by bringing a little of their life in London into the local community.

This is a table of the people who took in evacuees that went to the school in Woodhurst. This does not account for those who were too young to go to school or those who stayed with relatives and are not shown in the admission register.

**L D LEFT DISTRICT**

**R H RETURNED HOME**

<b>Woodhurst host</b>	<b>Name of child</b>	<b>Length of time stayed</b>
MRS AYRES	Olive Dring	14/2/41-5/3/41 <b>LD</b>
	Bert Combeer	14/2/41-8/?/42 First stayed with Mrs Widdows <b>RH</b>
	Mary Wynn	7/3/41-5/6/42 <b>LD</b>
	Marion Purdon	28/9/42-13/10/44 <b>RH</b>
	Olive Barnes	24/7/44-4/8/44 <b>RH</b>
	Allen Barnes	24/7/44-4/8/44 <b>RH</b>
	Beryl Aris	24/7/44-4/8/44 <b>RH</b>
MRS BAILEY	Gladys Heard	24/10/44-4/5/45 <b>RH</b>
MRS BEETON	Gloria Erlicher	2/5/44-2/6/44 <b>RH</b>
	Sheila Aldridge	10/7/44-18/5/45 <b>RH</b>
Mrs BRAZIER	Kenneth Taylor	18/3/41-29/3/41 <b>LD</b>
	Clarence Young	10/7/44-4/5/45 <b>RH</b>
MRS BURROWS	Doris Latter	9/10/40-20/12/40 <b>RH</b>
	Rosina Wynn	10/3/41-5/6/42 <b>LD</b>
	Albert Wynn	14/7/41-5/6/42 <b>RH</b>
	Roy King	28/9/42-7/5/43 <b>RH</b>
	Alan King	28/9/42-7/5/43 <b>RH</b>
MRS CADE	Kenneth Rawlinson	28/9/42-27/11/42 <b>RH</b>
	George Emmett	11/7/44-19/9/44 <b>RH</b>

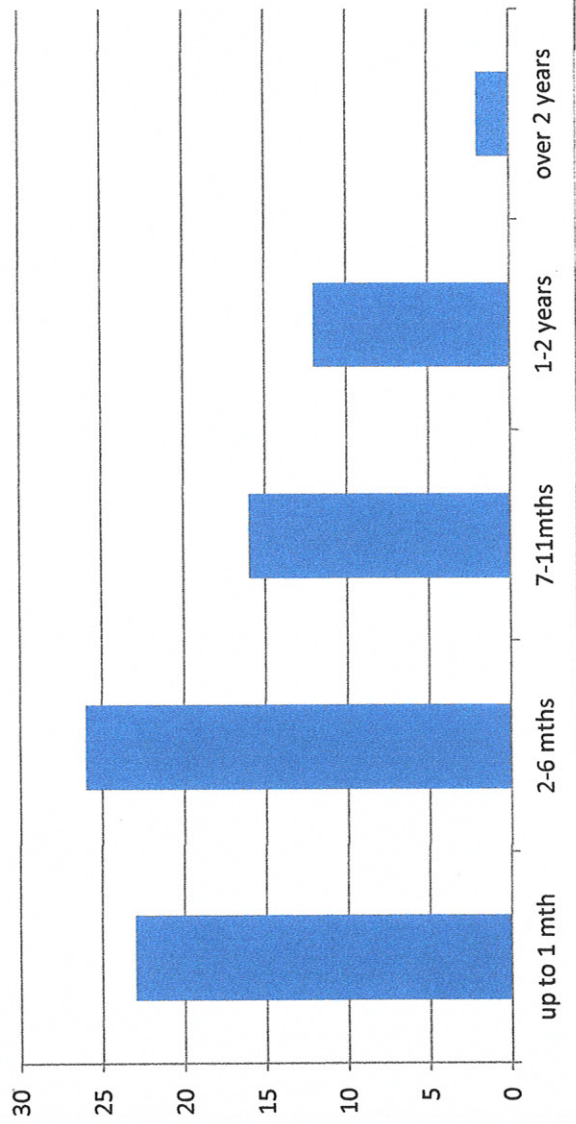
MRS CANNON Jun	David Banks	21/10/40-22/1/41	<b>LD</b>
MRS CHANDLER	James Scott	10/7/44-14/7/44	<b>Changed Billet</b>
MRS CHAPMAN	Olive Barnes	4/11/40-24/1/41	<b>LD</b>
MRS COOPER	Daisy Gladden	11/11/40-1/8/41	<b>RH</b>
	Margaret Gladden	11/11/40-1/8/41	<b>RH</b>
	Anthony Johnston	28/9/42-18/12/42	<b>RH</b>
	Derek Potter	11/1/42-19/3/43	<b>Changed Billet</b>
	Brian Potter	19/1/43/-23/4/43	<b>RH</b>
MRS COOTE	Irene Leishmnan	31/10/40-21/11/40	<b>RH</b>
	Arthur Webb	28/9/42-3/8/45	<b>awarded special place</b>
MRS CROSS	Arthur Batt	12/11/40-24/1/41	<b>RH</b>
MRS FINN	Hamish Galloway	12/3/45-20/12/45	<b>LD</b>
MRS L GURRY	Sheila Garratt	27/1/41-8/8/41	<b>RH</b>
MRS B GURRY	Cecil Foulsham	25/11/40-11/12/41	<b>RH</b>
MRS R GURRY	Patricia Rules?	11/11/40-5/12/41	<b>removed to Warboys</b>
	June Allen	10/7/44-4/6/45	<b>RH</b>
MRS GURRY	June Smith	22/9/42-28/1/44	<b>Warboys for 3 weeks</b>
		21/2/44-20/6/45	<b>RH</b>
	Shirley Cathcart	23/5/45-5/6/45	<b>RH</b>
MRS HART	Robert Johnston	28/9/42-18/12/42	<b>RH</b>
MRS HOBBS	William Rogers	30/6/41-8/8/41	<b>RH</b>
	Patricia Wynn	27/10/41-5/6/42	<b>LD</b>
	Gerald Taylor	28/9/42-23/7/43	<b>RH</b>
MRS JONES	Linda Young	10/7/44-17/11/44	<b>changed billet</b>
MRS KIMPTON	Sylvia Fineman	11/11/40-8/8/41	<b>RH</b>

	Vera Garratt	27/1/41-8/8/41	<b>R H</b>
	Terence Smith	28/9/42-14/4/43	<b>changed billet</b>
MRS LEONARD	David Bashford	11/11/40-12/12/40	<b>gone to Godmanchester</b>
	Stanley Marlow	25/11/40-1/8/41	<b>L D</b>
	Brian Hawthorn	25/11/40-19/6/42	<b>R H</b>
MRS MURDEN	John Prendy	11/11/40-16/1/42	<b>gone to Devon</b>
	Leonard Prendy	11/11/40-16/1/42	<b>gone to Devon</b>
MRS PALMER	Daniel Hellens	5/11/40-21/11/40	<b>R H</b>
	Joan Daws	10/7/44-4/8/44	<b>L D</b>
	Margaret Daws	10/7/44-4/8/44	<b>L D</b>
	Michael Reynolds	10/7/44-21/7/44	<b>L D</b>
MRS RAVENHILL	Norman Magrie	10/7/44-4/8/44	<b>R H</b>
MISS REYNOLDS	Arthur Oliver	28/9/42-4/12/42	<b>L D</b>
	Kenneth Oliver	28/9/42-4/12/42	<b>L D</b>
	Maureen Young	10/7/44-22/12/44	<b>R H</b>
MRS ROBINSON	Alfred Capes	7/12/42-9/12/42	<b>L D</b>
	Roy Masters	10/7/44-9/11/44	<b>R H</b>
MRS ROWELL	Joan Brighten	26/11/40-4/4/41	<b>R H</b>
	Ivy Wynn	7/3/41-5/6/42	<b>L D</b>
MRS SADDINGTON	James Hellens	5/11/40-21/11/40	<b>R H</b>
	Ilene Hellens	5/11/40-21/11/40	<b>R H</b>
	Irene Fineman	13/1/41-10/4/41	<b>R H</b>
	Eileen Garratt	27/1/41-8/8/41	<b>R H</b>
	Phyllis Russel	28/9/42-24/11/42	<b>L D</b>



MRS SADDINGTON cont	Gerald Seekings	16/11/42-27/11/42 <b>L D</b>
MRS STIMPSON	Frances Parker	28/9/42-15/10/43 <b>Went to Somersham</b>
MISS STOKES	Lydia King	28/9/42-7/5/43 <b>R H</b>
	Doris King	28/9/42-7/5/43 <b>R H</b>
MRS WALING	Albert Westoby	11/11/40-6/5/41 <b>gone into hospital</b>
	Derek Watts	11/11/40-6/1/42 <b>R H</b>
MRS WALING cont	Freda Smale	11/7/44-19/9/44 <b>R H</b>
MRS WATSON	James Murphy	10/7/44-14/7/44 <b>changed billet</b>
	Henry Murphy	10/7/44-14/7/44 <b>changed billet</b>
	Anthony Papper	24/10/44- <b>L D</b>
MRS WIDDOWS	Jean Darg	4/11/40-24/1/41 <b>L D</b>
	Bert Combeer	5/11/40-6/12/40 <b>R H</b> <b>See Mrs Ayres</b>
	Louise Anderson`	22/4/41-9/5/41 <b>R H</b>
MRS YOUNG	Derek Purdon	28/9/42-15/3/43 <b>R H</b>

### Length of time evacuees stayed in Woodhurst



APPENDIX 3

PLACES OF ORIGIN AND SCHOOLS ATTENDED BY  
EVACUEES IN WOODHURST SCHOOL REGISTER

<u>DISTRICT OF LONDON</u>	<u>SCHOOLS</u>	<u>NUMBER OF CHILDREN</u>
BATTERSEA	Surrey Lane	1
BERMONDSEY	Gallywell Road	3
BETHNAL GREEN E 1	Our Lady of Assumption	3
	Wilmot Street	3
	The Lawrence	1
	St Patricks	3
	David Street	2
	Wood Close	1
BRIXTON	St Judes	1
CAMBERWELL S E 5	The Avenue	4
GOLDERS GREEN	Wessex Garden Juniors	2
JAMAICA ROAD S E 16	Dockhead R.C.	4
KIDBROOKE S E 3	Kidbrook Pavillion	4
LEIGHTON S E 10	Calvert Road	2
	Tapestry Street	2
	Leebridge School	1
	Farmer Road	1
	Newport Road	1
LEIGHTONSTONE E 11	Trumpington Road	3
MITCHAM	Lonesome Juniors	1
	Lonesome Infants	1
PECKHAM	?	1
ROTHERHITHE	Riverside Juniors	2
	Keeton Road Boys	1
SYDENHAM S E 26	Adamstill Road	1
TOOTING	Fircroft School	2
TOTTENHAM N 15	Seven Sisters	1
WALWORTH	?	1
WANDSWORTH S W 18	Swaffield Road	2
	St Faiths Ebner Street	1
WAPPING	St Patricks	2



### APPENDIX 3

WEST HAM S E 15	Water Lane	1
	St James Road	2
	Napier Road	1
	Upton Cross	2
	?	1
WIMBLEDON	Ridgeway School	2
WOOLWICH S E 18	Islington Road	1
	Burnidge Grove	3
	St Mary's School	2
	?	1
WOOD GREEN	Lordship Lane	1
	Tapestry Street	2



