



## Evacuees

One of the most noticeable effects of the war on Macclesfield was the influx of large numbers of strangers. The first appeared before the war had started when several thousand evacuees arrived on September 1<sup>st</sup> 1939. Many of these left after only a few months but they were replaced by others from newly threatened areas.

The arrival of these 'outsiders' had an impact on the population of Macclesfield and led to a number of changes, attitudes and lifestyles. Some changes were temporary, like the synagogue in Charles Roe's house on Chestergate where Jewish evacuees from London used to worship. Others were more permanent, such as the marriages between local girls and Dutch or Canadian soldiers.

The experience of the Spanish Civil War led to an expectation that future wars would involve heavy bombing of towns and populated areas. For this reason, government plans for the evacuation of children and the elderly from vulnerable areas were in hand long before September 1939.

Cheshire, like other counties, was divided into 3 types of area:-

- 1) A small number of crowded districts from which people would be evacuated. These included Birkenhead and parts of Wallasey.
- 2) Areas which would not be evacuated but would not receive evacuees either ('neutral areas'). Stockport, Crewe, Stalybridge, Ellesmere Port and Runcorn were included in this group.
- 3) Areas that would receive evacuees. Macclesfield fell into this third category.

By the end of August 1939, Macclesfield town and the surrounding rural areas were ready to receive 12,000 children from Manchester and Stretford. A similar picture could be seen all across the country with 1.5 million people evacuated between 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> September.

Often no attempt was made to match the social backgrounds between evacuee children and their host families. Children were selected by host families purely on the grounds of their physical fitness or personal appearance.

Macclesfield experienced its share of problems. Until the day of evacuation it wasn't known how many of the children would be of secondary school age so arranging schooling was difficult. The habits of some of the evacuees and the unclean condition of others led to many complaints by host families. In the first few weeks there were over 300 changes made to billets (where the evacuees were hosted) following complaints. Not all complaints were made by the host families, others came from parents of the evacuees or the evacuees themselves.

The local newspapers ran stories of happy evacuees at play in lovely gardens and enjoying themselves at Halloween parties. There were also reports of grumbings in the Town



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Council about the cost of the evacuation programme and also concerns about ill treatment of evacuees by host families.

By the end of October 1939 20% of Macclesfield's evacuees had already returned home and three months later only 1,500 remained (from 3,348 at the outbreak of war). The 'phoney' war conditions during this time meant that this happened all over the country with over half the evacuees going back home. Governments adverts urged parents not to be lulled into a state of false security and Macclesfield's newspapers regularly carried these appeals in the spring of 1940.

The start of the Blitz led to another wave of evacuation. Manchester suffered severely on 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1940 and the Mayor of Macclesfield went round the town's cinemas asking for help for children who had lost their parents and homes.

Reports suggest that most evacuees eventually settled happily in Macclesfield. Some children from poor inner city homes found themselves being driven by chauffeurs to large houses with servants. Others came from city streets and got their first experience of the countryside.

Another wave of evacuation took place in 1944 following further bombings. Macclesfield's first contingent of 'doodle bug' evacuees arrived in July, with others following in August.

It appears Macclesfield can, on the whole, be proud of its record and many evacuees remember the town and its people with affection.

It is worth noting that not all evacuation was one way. Although children – and the elderly too – from London, Liverpool and Manchester found Macclesfield a safe haven, some of the locals sought safety elsewhere. A good number spent most of the war years in America. These evacuees returned home, with American accents, during the second half of 1944.

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## 1. We are not snobs

Source – Macclesfield Courier

Date – 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1939

Headline – We are not snobs

So-called 'aristocratic towns' in various parts of England who are manifesting either shyness or opposition to the voluntary census which is being taken to ascertain how many children from danger zones could be billeted there in case of war, should take as an example the willingness with which the people of Macclesfield are accepting the scheme.

During the week a canvass has been made of the whole of No. 4 Ward and a portion of No. 2 Ward and the response has been about 98 percent.

The whole of the work is being done by local teachers under the direction of their Emergency Committee. Over 100 teachers have volunteered and using the Town Hall (former A R P room) as their headquarters they are now busily engaged in their colossal task of visiting about twelve thousand houses. The wards have been divided into sections over each of which is a group leader who, in

turn, organises his group into several sub-sections. Each house is canvassed and the householders asked if they are willing to take some of the young refugees.

### Few Negative Replies

At few houses are the canvassers receiving a negative reply. At some of the larger residences in No. 4 Ward they have been warmly received and the householders have expressed willingness to take as many as four or five refugees.

In many cases where there have been refusals it is not so much the reluctance of the householders but rather lack of accommodation....

So far as No. 4 Ward is concerned there are not a great many houses of larger description and consequently a proper response from these detached dwellings cannot be ascertained until other Wards have been canvassed.



## 2. Arrival plans

Source – Macclesfield Courier

Date – 1<sup>st</sup> September 1939

The Ministry of Health instruction for evacuation of children and mothers with children under school age has resulted in intensive efforts to complete the arrangements for the reception of 12,600 children and their parents in Macclesfield and district today (Friday) and tomorrow. They will come from Manchester and Stretford.

Today only school children will be received while on Saturday there will be mothers and young children.

Eight trains will arrive at Macclesfield Central Station during today, and barriers are being erected to assist in the marshalling..... For the rural areas a fleet of buses which have been commandeered locally will convey the children, who will be accompanied by teachers, to the parish schools, while in the town they will be taken to the schools.

At each school there will be stores of food, and workers from the WVS will be on duty to attend to the wants of the children at a canteen, while before the children leave the school with a billeting party they will be provided with sufficient food – biscuits, chocolates, tinned meat – for 48 hours....

The householders of the town and rural areas are asked to assist the task of billeting by waiting in their homes to receive those billeted upon them and not to 'pester' the billeting officers at the dispersal points....

After the children are billeted the house-holders are asked to write informing the parents where they are, as this will greatly ease the minds of the parents that they are safe and being cared for. In addition the teachers who travel with the children will keep contact and watch their general welfare.



### 3. Manchester Evacuee Memories

#### Source – Memories of evacuation from Manchester Evacuees

*'I have ever travelled on and had an interminable journey to Macclesfield. Eventually we arrived and were taken to a reception centre. This was a most pathetic start and will remain in my memory for ever. We were each issued with a carrier bag containing a tin of corned beef, a tin of evaporated milk, a tin of Nestles condensed milk, a packet of Marie biscuits and a large block of Cadbury's dairy milk chocolate. There were to be iron rations for your 'hostess'. Most children ate the chocolate immediately. I didn't touch mine – I was just longing to be at home with my mother. '*

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*'The older girls went first – probably it was thought they would prove less trouble. We younger ones sat there wondering where we would land. We watched the room gradually empty, but eventually we all were placed.'*

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*'We were assembled very early at the station all issued with identity discs, labels and coloured tapes (I do still have these) to denote our school and group. Each of these small groups was then placed in the care of a teacher – or a parent who had volunteered for this operation – it was extremely emotional – the children being more in a state of bewilderment – seeing our mothers so distressed at our leaving – and all of us children wondering if we would ever return.*

*On arrival at Macclesfield we were taken to a reception centre (some community hall I imagine) where we were given food – we already had been allocated to families – and they were there to collect us. Some children went in larger groups to bigger houses – others went in ones and twos – usually to small accommodation not just in Macclesfield – but to surrounding areas also – Prestbury etc.'*

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*'It was the first time in our lives we had ever left our parents, or even been on a train before, we arrived in Macclesfield and was then all taken to a local school where we then had to wait for someone to come along and choose you to share their home. We were given drinks and food and everyone was very kind, but although exciting it was also a little frightening.'*

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'Come the day of evacuation, Friday 1<sup>st</sup> September 1939, along with many other children, we were taken to Gorton station, and duly arrived at Macclesfield Station about lunchtime. We were then taken by bus to Sutton, where we were given refreshments in the Church Hall, while waiting for local families to choose who they would take home with them. I remember that no-one seemed to want two young boys, I was twelve and my brother ten. We waited in that little hall hoping that soon someone would come for us. By 4.30 approx., we were on our own in the playground, holding on to our possessions, and feeling just a little sad and lost. Then two ladies came through the gate, and hearts lightened, and I boldly went up to the younger lady who looked so Mumsie and said 'Please can we come home with you.' She replied 'I have only room for one'. Her name was Mrs ....., and her friend and neighbour was Mrs ....., who had only come for company to Mrs ..... The outcome was I went home with Mrs ..... and my brother with Mrs ..... On the way home we called at the only shop in the village and were bought sweets.

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'Unfortunately it was found that my friend was profusely infested with (what we then referred to as) 'crawlies' and at my mother's request she was speedily moved - via the 'nit clinic' - leaving me on my own - which I did not mind (not having a large family of my own anyway), and enjoying all the affection and consideration with which Mr and Mrs H always treated me.

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'I came from a working class home with eight kids so you can imagine. I ended up in a house with a parlour maid, a kitchen maid and cooks. And the outside staff included gardeners and there was a chauffeur as well. That was a very different life style. But I didn't find it hard to adapt. I liked the idea of being waited upon.'

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'All the billets were vetted by the staff of the high school and girls moved from unsuitable places. Those placed in the big houses where a staff of maids was still kept, fared the worst. Many were treated like servants - luckily not for long.'



#### 4. Evacuee parents

##### Source – Letters concerning Manchester evacuees written by their parents

'I am not returning to Bollington until Tuesday afternoon. The weather is too bad to think of going that distance by bus. We have had a very heavy fall of snow during the week-end. I expect it has been more in Bollington. Now as to going to billet at Mrs \_\_\_\_ - well I am afraid it would not suit me. I want something a little better. Then it is very high up and will be as cold as my present place. Anyhow, I have thought it well over and seeing that winter is not getting advanced I have decided to remain in Manchester at least for the present.'

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'Would you please try and arrange for my two boys age five and eleven to have a change of billet. The reason for this is that at their present billet there are only two bedrooms and they have to sleep in the same room as a married couple the other being occupied by two other children.'

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'I went to see my two daughters and they have been moved to another billet. Susan is O.K. and quite comfortable but I am not satisfied with Angela, it is only a two bedroom house and they have two boys of their own and I don't want Angela where there are only boys. I definitely think they ought to be together. I have had a talk with Mrs \_\_\_\_ and she tells me that they were two good girls and they agreed quite well together. I hope you will look into this matter as the moving has made me ill. I have got one of the little boys home for a few days and if Angela is still at the same Billet when it is time for him to come back I am afraid I will have to bring them all home as their Dad who is in the Army says she must not stay there.'



## 5. Evacuee Problems

Source – Macclesfield Courier

Date – 28<sup>th</sup> March 1940

Headline – Evacuation

A letter dealing with evacuation from the Board of Education was read by Mr. Mellor, who also reported on his attendance, along with the Town Clerk, at a meeting at Chester of local authorities to discuss evacuation. He stated there had been a tremendous lot of complaints with regard to the condition of evacuees. The Medical Officer of Liverpool had had to give reasons why there had been so many complaints about the children sent out from that city.

One of his reasons was that the evacuation day came immediately on top of a holiday. On the other hand,

evacuation authorities complained that when children were clean on evacuation, they were dirty within a fortnight afterwards. A lot of this was due to the fact that the receiving authorities had had to put the youngsters wherever they could.

The Board's letter stated it was being arranged for the evacuating authorities to give the children medical examinations before they were next evacuated. They would also be examined by the recognised authorities. Under the new scheme Macclesfield would receive eleven hundred unaccompanied school children.

Source – Macclesfield Advertiser

Date – 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1939

Headline – Late hours of evacuees

Complaints against the late hours being kept by evacuee children were made at the meeting of the Macclesfield Education Committee on Wednesday afternoon. It was

stated that members of the committee had seen them about in the 'black-out' after 10 o'clock, and concern was expressed at this.

Source – Macclesfield Courier

Date – 11<sup>th</sup> April 1940

Headline – Children who wanted supper beer

There had been cases of children evacuated to Bollington who would not go to bed without their supper beer, it was stated at the annual

conference of the Macclesfield and District Temperance and Band of Hope Union held in Hurdsfield Sunday School on Saturday.



## 6. Evacuees settling in

### Source – Memories of Manchester evacuees

'There first names were Jim and Mary. She stayed with them a few years. She grew to love them and they loved her. She has a wonderful home with them. They asked my mother could they adopt her. She refused. But she visited them for many years till sadly \_\_\_ died. She then lost touch with Mary. Also she clearly remembers four boys she played with and wonders often where they are now.

She was treated very kindly. Myself (Monica) went also to a family in Macclesfield, sadly it wasn't a nice experience, I don't remember there name, possibly because I was unhappy there. They had two children, who I wasn't allowed to mix with. I was never allowed to play out with my sisters. I was made to eat my meals alone in the kitchen, and had to do lots of polishing, scrubbing floors. I was there about six weeks. My mother found out and requested I be taken away. I next went to a family called \_\_\_\_. I don't remember the address, but they had lots of sons and one daughter. But by this time I was unsettled and my mother brought me back to Manchester. My two sisters remained there some years they both have happy memories.'

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'All in all - like most children I adapted - and as was quite usual then - accepted the situation as it was and remember it with no feeling of unhappiness or regret. I know my mother must have felt more distress being without both her children - had she still been alive she would have been able to give me more specific dates and the duration of my stay - she declared it 'a nightmare' she would never forget.'

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'I remember my long walk down Chestergate and Byron's tea room at the bottom. My mother used to take me there when she visited. You could still get lovely cakes even then!

I used to go to the market on Saturday to get fresh vegetables for Mrs \_\_\_\_\_. I hated Macclesfield - not that there was anything really wrong with the town. I think I would have hated anywhere at that time. All I wanted was to be at home with my family.'

Source – Macclesfield Courier

Date – 14<sup>th</sup> September 1939

Headline – Editorial



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The novelty having worn off, we find many problems in connection with the evacuees which may, and we hope will, be solved when the children get settled down to their part-time school duties. Certainly much more discipline is needed than can be exerted by hosts and hostesses, for we hear of conduct in many directions, and by no means confined to elementary scholars, which, to say the least, does not add prestige to our educational methods.

Last week's experiences have proved how much better it would have been to have assembled all these children somewhere for instruction in how to conduct themselves in their new surroundings. Some teachers did this, but from what we have heard over the week-end, they were not completely successful.

As with every other problem, there are two points of view, and it may be that there have been so many square pegs in round holes that if a revision could be undertaken we should have fewer complaints... For instance, how can we expect boys and girls from, say, Ancoats and Gorton, to be completely happy in a mansion where the domestic organisation is entirely foreign to them? Likewise children from High Schools, who have found themselves billeted in a small working-class home.

It is fairly certain that now we are finding out these misfits, steps will be taken to straighten out the difficulties, and as far as possible, transfer evacuees to homes which are more in harmony with those which they have left, and to which many have returned.

Source – Macclesfield Courier

Date – 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1939

Headline – Dear Children All

Dear children all,

My little evacuee is named Doris. She is just eleven years old, and I wish that you could have seen her great delight on seeing a robin for the first time in her life.

Early in the morning Doris sits up in bed, rubs her eyes and enquires what is the strange noise she hears. In a very sleepy voice I answer 'It must be the curlews. They are up and doing, and it's high time we were too.' 'Oh,'

she cries, 'I thought it was a cat.' The cows in the field at the back of my home are a great attraction to Doris. And she loves to go to the farm for a bottle of real cow's milk.

I do really think, girls and boys, that our little city visitors give us a lot of pleasure. We're so interested in them, and have so much to do for them that somehow we forget just why they are compelled to take up their abode with us. The days are



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very dark and cloudy, but somewhere the sun is always shining. Let's seek it out. If the outlook is bad let's try the uplook. Haven't you heard it said, 'Even in the black-out we see the stars.' It's our simple duty to be

as bright and cheerful as possible. Let's refuse to be discouraged. Don't throw things up the sponge. Keep a cheerful courage and things will see us through.



## 7. City scholars evacuated

Source – Macclesfield Courier

Date – 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1941

Headline – City Scholars Evacuated – About 1,000 for this area

Some one thousand school children from the Manchester area are being evacuated to Macclesfield and district this week under a new Government scheme. This is the second time this area will have been called upon to accommodate these youngsters, though this time the circumstances are different.

Because of the recent attacks on Manchester the Government ordered the operation of the new scheme in order that the children can be protected as far as possible from any further wanton raids by the Germans. The scholars were registered last Saturday, but the general response by the parents was considered disappointing by the authorities. All the children to be sent out of the city were medically examined yesterday, and only those passed as fit were scheduled for inclusion in the evacuation scheme.

The last time this area received evacuees from Manchester and district was on the two days before declaration of war. At that time it was a question of anticipation, but not it is different. The bombs have fallen on Manchester and its immediate vicinity, and some of these children who have come to-day (Thursday), and who are coming tomorrow to Macclesfield and the

rural area around have lost fathers, mothers and even brothers and sisters, and in some cases their homes have been completely destroyed.

The first train load of about 400 children from Manchester and Stretford reached the Central Station this afternoon, and the next batch, expected to be of a similar number, will arrive tomorrow afternoon. This number will be for Macclesfield alone. An additional number of children will go to the surrounding rural district, and a further 200 or so are to be billeted at Bollington.

The local billeting authorities appeal for the sympathetic co-operation of the general public. These youngsters have to be accommodated and it will help the billeting officers if billets are all ready for them when they take the children to the various houses.

Fortunately, although many houses where room was originally available are now filled with people from the South – London in particular – there are still a sufficient number left to accommodate these youngsters. Housewives need no reminding of the terrible nights the children have experienced recently, and without a doubt they will afford them the same



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hospitality that they extended in the early days of the war.

The children will not be accompanied by parents this time, though no doubt if the blitz on the North West returns with the same ferocity the Government will be considering the question of the evacuation of children under school age and their mothers.

### Mayor's Appeal

'Real Good Samaritans' was the description applied to local householders by the Mayor (Councillor F. Baron) in an appeal he made last night at the Majestic, Picturedrome, Premier and Cinema picture houses for billets for the new batch of evacuated children expected from Manchester and Stretford.

After thanking the cinema managers for allowing him the facilities for making the appeal, Councillor Baron reminded his audiences that local people had fortunately not experienced the terrible devastation and suffering which had occurred through enemy action at Manchester and other large centres.

He pointed out that the locality was now being called upon to house nearly 900 children. He appealed for the help of all householders in that great work, and for all who possibly could, to accommodate the children.

*'Will you please make the sacrifice?' he pleaded, 'not only from a national standpoint, but for humanity's sake, and do what you can to ease the trouble which has befallen these children. Bear in mind that some of their parents have either been killed or injured, and that many of their homes have been laid desolate.'*

'I know many householders have already done their best and been real good Samaritans, and their services have been greatly appreciated but I do hope that those who have not helped, and can do so, will open their doors to these children when they arrive.'

In conclusion, the Mayor pointed out that if the Macclesfield public responded generously to the appeal – as he felt sure they would – then the authorities would feel when victory arrived, as it most certainly would, that Macclesfield had not failed in its duty.



## 8. Country Pleasures

### Source – Manchester evacuee memories of the countryside

*'It was a beautiful summer, and only going to school part time was fine for us lads. You can imagine the adventures we had, lads who had hardly seen a blade of grass, with all this glorious countryside which I came to love. I was not a very healthy child, but with all the love bestowed on me, and the healthy country air, I soon became a care free and happy child. We were accepted by all the local people, and I'm afraid we didn't really accept, or realise what a traumatic experience, being at war was to the adult population. The innocence of childhood.*

*The winter came which was pretty grim, I remember the snow drifted right up to the bedroom windows but it was paradise to us, and we joined in all the usual winter frolics.'*

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*'We spent hours in the autumn sunshine gathering huge baskets of blackberries in the country lanes around Broken Cross, which our foster mother made into blackberry and apple jam in huge quantities.'*

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*'One year the snow covered up to the red blob on the 30 mile an hour sign. I'd never seen snow like that before – so white and deep. In Manchester we only knew slush. And I loved sitting in the garden and listening to the bees.'*