

Wartime West Sussex 1939 – 1945

EVACUEES

Evacuation to and from Worthing

Extracts from *Despatches from the Home Front, The War Diaries of Joan Strange 1939-1945* (Monarch Publications, 1989)

1939

February 2nd A voluntary national service worker came round to see about the billeting of children in case of war - we are liable to have five!

September 6th The first week of the war.....Worthing, being a safe zone, has had over 10,000 evacuees from London billeted on the inhabitants. On Saturday afternoon Schofield and I helped billet some Bermondsey blind people.....They were a really pathetic lot of people - mostly old (I took several over eighty) all dirty and several ill. Ken's been billeting school children and found it a strenuous job.

1940

June 18th The new immediate horror is invasion and air raids of great intensity. I went to Windlesham School in the afternoon. It is being evacuated to Glastonbury next Friday.

July 22nd The town seems *very* empty now the evacuated children have left us - 3,000 of them.

September 23rd Horrified at the eight o'clock news to hear that a child evacuee ship had been torpedoed in mid-Atlantic in darkness and in a gale. Only eight out of ninety-three children saved. How glad Mollie must feel that she and the boys did not take the risk of evacuating to Canada.

October 22nd Copper, a former colleague of mine when she worked at the Sussex County Hospital, phoned me to ask if I could possibly find rooms for five poor elderly 'bombed-out' people from London. I have to say yes after having had a letter previously from her telling me how simply pathetic and awful the devastation in London is.

October 23rd The five arrived today! All to tea here. Poor Mother - they arrived two hours earlier than was expected and Mother had to entertain them all. Two were stone deaf which wasn't to be wondered at as they were eighty-nine and eighty-five! The two others were very jolly seventy-nine and seventy-six and the other fifty-odd. After tea we dispersed them - four to Schofield's landlady and one to Dorothy MacPherson - with hopes that all would be well. The two very elderlies had not been out of their house for two years till they were bombed and the elderly gent looked like death. They are *very* old and helpless.

1941

March 9th A great blow today. Following on the proposed ban on Worthing, it is now official that there is to be a 'voluntary' evacuation of school children. Ken and family will be going to a 'north midland' locality. What to do about his allotment!

March 12th The evacuation of the schools is causing a great stir naturally in the town. Ken came to tea and seems fairly reconciled to it all. Some parents are very up in arms.....

1944

July 22nd ...Trains full of children passed through Worthing today. I hear they are from Hastings and Bexhill. The flying bombs are very numerous over those towns.