

Wartime West Sussex 1939 – 1945

EVACUEES

Evacuees arrive in Mid-Sussex- problems

Mid-Sussex Times, September 12th 1939

Making the evacuees in Mid-Sussex feel at home

Arrangements for Welfare and Education of Children

A train which should have taken mothers and children to Brighton somehow or other was stopped at Haywards Heath, and the evacuees were "planted out" in the district.

Fourteen mothers and about forty children from the East End of London were accommodated in two classrooms at the Haywards Heath Senior Councils School for several days.

Two women and their children who arrived in Haywards Heath would not be parted, and after much trouble the billeting authorities found the two families an empty house. The first night, the women had a fight, as one wanted to turn the other out of the house. Police had to be called in to restore peace.

The excuse of a woman billeted in Haywards Heath for her return to London was that she could not get the fish and chips to which she had been used.

Several of a party of women who were billeted at Twineham found the village too dull, and returned to London. One woman's husband who arrived in Twineham with a bed and some delicacies had a shock when told his wife had gone !

A temporary "mother" who bought pyjama suits for two small boys aged six and five was fiercely told that she wasn't going to make them into "sissies". (And she didn't, for the first night they took off the pyjamas and went to bed *in coats, day trousers and boots* !)

...Another caller at the (Hassocks) Report Centre on Monday was a seven-year-old evacuee, who told an amazing story of having run away from his billet on the Brighton side of the Downs because he was given only stale bread to eat and water to drink....His tearful plea to be sent back to London had to be refused, and the authorities had no option but to return him to his billet pending inquiry into his story.

"Many London women evacuated to the country", says a minister (the Rev. H Blight), "are finding loneliness their greatest problem, and want to return; but public money will be wasted if all these people are allowed to go back. They will become refugees in the event of air raids, with terrible consequences to themselves."

In the opinion of Mr Blight, social committees should be formed in the villages and country towns to provide local interest for the mothers and children.

In a broadcast, Mr Walter Elliot, Minister of Health, warned people moved to the safety of the country not to return to towns in the danger areas. "Do not think it is all right because nothing has happened yet," he said.....

Inevitably, Mr Elliot stated, there were rough passages for evacuees as well as smooth. It was not possible to remove and billet 1,500,000 people without misfits.....

The local organisations, the Minister continued, would now be actively at work investigating grievances, adjusting misfits, and organising communal arrangements.