

Wartime West Sussex 1939 – 1945

EVACUEES

Evacuees arrive in Worthing

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Worthing's First Evacuees Arrived To-day

The first trainload of evacuees from the danger areas arrived at Worthing Station at a quarter to eleven this morning.

The influx is to continue for three days. Each day, eleven trains will bring more than 8,000 evacuees.

Worthing is to take 19,000, about half of whom are children. The remaining 5,000 who will come through Worthing Station are allocated to the Rural District.

These numbers do not include blind persons, of whom about 800 are expected, nor the evacuees from certain convalescent homes which are needed for use as hospitals.

The last evacuation train is due at 5.25pm. Trains will run to the same schedule to-morrow and on Sunday.

Almost immediately after yesterday's radio announcement that evacuation was to take place, the Town Hall was inundated with callers, who crowded into the Town Clerk's department throughout the afternoon. The majority had billeting queries, but some came to offer their ears or services.

As each train arrived, the evacuees were distributed by Southdown buses and on foot to the clearing centres in parties of 100 to 250.

Twelve schools were used as clearing centres, each staffed by a billeting officer in charge, billeting officers, assistants, messengers and women helpers.

At the distributing centres, the officers in charge distributed evacuees in groups to the billeting officers, who were responsible for taking them to the houses where the billets were known to be available as a result of a census.

Children were taken to all householders who had indicated that they were willing to receive them. In other cases, it was simply a question of billeting where accommodation was available.

Transport had been arranged for children who were billeted at long distances from the clearing centres. Buses were used for distribution within a fifteen miles radius of the town.

Special Coaches

The Southdown Company had arranged for special coaches to be brought into service so that the regular town and district services would not be disorganised.

According to yesterday's Ministry of Health announcement, day schools in both evacuation and reception areas were to be closed for instructional purposes from to-day until further notice. The schools were to be kept open for the assembly of children and other purposes in connection with evacuation.

It was announced at the Town Hall to-day that Worthing elementary

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schools, which were to have reopened on Monday, would remain closed until further notice.

In a circular issued last month by the County Education Committee, it was suggested that both local children and evacuated children should attend the schools by a shift system. It was also suggested that evacuated children should be “under some form of educational discipline for the whole of the day.”

Although the Worthing education authority has issued no similar statement, it is reasonable to assume that a similar arrangement might be adopted here.

First Train In On Time

The first train arrived at Worthing at 10.45am with 700 Streatham children. This morning's other trains were at 11.35 and 12.36 each with 850 from South Bermondsey; at 12.39 with 600 from West Norwood; at 1.47 with 850 from South Bermondsey, and at 2.4 with 989

from Gipsy Hill. The last train was due at 5.25.

Marshals had been on duty at the station since 9.30: most of them were members of the Rotary Club.

Mr C. E. Marr was in charge.

Members of the Air Defence Cadet Corps had been at the station as early as 7am packing rations.

As each train arrived the evacuees were taken in groups through the subway to the north side of the station where 48 hours' rations and buses to take them to the clearing centres were waiting.

Packages of all kinds made up the children's luggage – attaché cases, bags, rucksacks and bundles. All carried cardboard gasmask boxes.

Most of the children looked bewildered-only a few were smiling. But all were completely self-possessed and they gave helpers no trouble.

Things went so smoothly that the first bus-load was away a quarter of an hour after the first train arrived.

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