

Wartime West Sussex 1939 – 1945

EVACUEES

Evacuees guilty of stealing

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Evacuees' "Wholesale" Thefts From Stores

Twenty Three London boy evacuees billeted in Worthing lined up before Worthing Juvenile Panel on Friday heard the chairman, Mr Frank Hollands, tell them that by their "Wholesale" thefts from local stores they had let down large numbers of children who had been sent to Worthing from danger areas.

While most of them appeared shame-faced, others looked unimpressed and preserved a bold front.

The oldest, who is 16, leaned against the press table as the accusation against him was read out by the Magistrates' Clerk, Mr F. G. Stevens, and he had to be told to stand up straight. The youngest was 10. The majority was from a Poor Law Institution and others were from an orphanage.

Proof that the children are being cared for was given when two householders stepped into the witness box to tell the panel that the boys billeted on them were "good boys at home."

Mr G. H. Williams, on behalf of the London "County Council" expressed regret that the boys they had sent down to Worthing had got into this trouble, in spite of the town's hospitality. A large number, he said, was from a Poor Law Institution and their headmaster had been detained on important business. He was very sorry the children had given trouble to the authorities and to the police.

No Complaints Lately

He added that he had found out from Woolworth's that the firm had no complaint to make during last week.

The superintendent of the orphanage told the Panel that he thought it was the lack of control which had unbalanced the boys.

The 23 boys admitted 15 cases of stealing articles from stores and shops. Of these cases 13 referred to Woolworth's Stores, and articles to the

total value of £5.00 were stolen. Some of the children asked that other thefts should be taken into consideration by the Panel, including thefts from Marks and Spencer's W. H. Smith & Sons, Walker Brothers, Wade's Garage and Lacey's.

The articles stolen included playing cards, fountain pens, watches, a torch, scissors, pencils and pocket knives.

Most of the children had nothing to say. One accused of putting a French 25 centime piece in a cigarette machine, said that he did not expect to get any cigarettes.

Schoolmasters and parents spoke for many of the children.

One mother said: "If I had my way I would take my boy back to London."

A father thought that his son being shifted from one billet to another had caused "the trouble".

A householder with whom two of the boys were billeted told the Panel: "They have both been very good boys. I can't understand what made them do this."

A man who had one of the boys billeted with him said that the boy came into the kitchen and said "I am very sorry, sir, for all this stealing, but I can't help it."

"He gave his heart to the Lord Jesus Christ and since then his behaviour had been better," said the man. "I should like to say he is determined to go straight by the power of God."

After the Panel had retired, the chairman said that they felt that the boys knew that they were doing wrong. The Panel knew they were away from supervision and realised that the bright things set out on the counter were a temptation.

Some of the boys were placed on probation for six months and some for a year. The chairman added that they could not make the boys pay costs.

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