



Transcriptions of Oral History Audio Clips

For use with lesson presentations



1. What was it like to be evacuated in WWII?

Dorothy Jarvis

...we were really excited and we were told to meet at the railway station with all the lists of the things that we'd got to take with us, and outdoor clothes as well and a snack if we wanted to, and that was it...We went to the school first and the school took us in a crocodile, you know how they used to do, to the station in Manchester where we piled on the trains. I was excited. It was a wonderful adventure...

Bettine Saffery

I can remember going to school and my mother was there with my smaller sister - she was two years old - and we went to the school and a coach came and we had to get on the coach and the parents weren't allowed to come to the railway station with us for some reason - they had to wave goodbye to us outside the school. ...I can remember that my mother, I can remember [her] saying to me "Hold on to his hand" because he was only four years old "and don't let go and when you get to where you're going don't let him go, you must stay together, tell the lady you must stay together, you must stay together." And of course my mother, I can remember standing, sitting on the coach my brother was in tears, mother was in tears with the baby sister who was crying because she didn't understand and I can remember I thought I mustn't cry because I've got to look after him.

Joyce Smith

We were all put on a bus and went up to the station and I couldn't understand why my mum was crying. She was at the gate ... the mothers weren't allowed on the platforms and we could see her through this gate with my sister and they were both crying and I'm being sent away to pick flowers for my mum for the day. That's what I was told. I mean I was six and ...I thought ... this was great and I was going with my sister and my brother and that's what I went off to do - pick these flowers for mum. And why was she crying? ...



2. Finding a new home in Staffordshire 1

Basil Turner

I was a scout in those days and we were asked to assist in the taking of the evacuees around to various addresses. They came from Manchester on the train, and then they were brought to a local school where they were given tea and biscuits, and sorted out where they could go. And we were given evacuees and an address to take them to. They were not always welcome. One incidence, one lady took one look at the children I'd got and said "I'm not having them!", and so I had to take them back. And another incidence, I took a lady and her son to a street that wasn't all that – two up and two down, no backs to them, and she took one look and said, didn't even knock on the door, she wasn't going to stay there in any case, you know? So I had to take them back.

Dorothy Jarvis

Well Alton, we had to trail up there and I was beginning to feel tired by that stage and most of us were trailing, lagging behind and we trailed in a long crocodile through the village and I was sort of part of, excited about the style of housing because they were made of great big stones. You know and I'd been used to red brick all my life. And we were taken to the school and again it was like going somewhere like fairyland because it's a beautiful school in Alton with the primary school, it's a beautiful setting where the school is with the castle on the edge of the precipice, and that was fairyland but we were rather tired but they gave us tea and biscuits and of course we went to the loo and that sort of thing. Then we had to turn round and go back to the village with this very sort of manager, perhaps he shouldn't be called that, this sergeant, you know, a good name for her, who had a long list of a whatsit board and yes and every so often we'd go down the high street and children were disappearing into houses and we had to wait until she'd settled them in with their billet ladies. And they went in twos and, usually ones and twos but sometimes there was just one, and maybe three and they tried to sort people, I think they had put preferences down, the host families, but they didn't always get what they wanted but they tried very hard to and then all the other children had gone and myself and my brother were the last ones and we went to this big house in Alton, and rat-tat-tat on the door and you know, oh holding each other's hand. And the door opened and a lady came out and "oh I can't take these children I can't have them my house is full" so the billet lady said "you've got to take them because we know you've got a big house". She said "well I've just got my sister here with their two children and they're staying with me" so she said "well you've still got to take these children" and it was the first inkling I had that perhaps it wasn't going to be so good because she obviously did not want us, and that's why she'd imported her family from Derby. Anyway, they were very kind and we went in and first of all they wanted to see what we'd brought with us and we opened our suitcases and had to show them all our clothes and I found that rather disturbing I didn't want people looking at my underwear at that stage, you know you didn't show your knickers to anybody you see! Anyway they fed us well and as I put down in the script here I started to cry when I went to bed but Tony had fallen asleep straight away because he was so tired. And we shared a big double bed, that was comforting really in a way, but next day was quite different.

John Doughty

We arrived at Lichfield, I didn't know it was Lichfield and we were put out in to some playground or some area of tarmac and the school nurse, or some nurse came along in uniform and put went through your hair with a knitting needle or something, and if you had nits, I assume that was what she was looking for, they put a cross on your forehead in some blue marker, I don't think it was violet, some blue marker and you were put aside, I was not put aside. We were taken to a coach then taken to Gentleshaw in to the reception area where we are that's near the Cannock Chase area, you probably know the area, then the really traumatic bit started. I can remember sitting on the floor cross-legged, I couldn't cross my legs now. Cross-legged surrounded by very large people and I do remember a bright light which was hanging above us. And there was a selection procedure and it was, people went round selecting folk who I think there must have been about 15 to 20 children in the middle of this selection bit and the people went round saying "Oh she's pretty we'll have her, she can come" and another one saying "Oh he'll help on the farm" and gradually they were whittled down until there was a grizzly fat little me sitting in the middle of the thing. Nobody wanted me and somebody said "well somebody's got to take him" and a chap called Mr McGill who I later became to recognise as a thoroughly nice fellar, and he said "Right OK we'll take him" and I was sort of taken away, very beaten down and very sort of defeated.



4. Finding a new home in Staffordshire 2

Ivy Wilson

I don't know what happened, I know she shaved my hair off, perhaps I'd got nits you see, I wouldn't know, we used to have those didn't we years ago. She shaved my hair right off I do remember that because it was so frightening and I was only with her as I say three to six weeks I can't remember exactly, then I was taken away to Hints and this other lady. That's all I can remember of that lady, the nasty one.

Maisie Hamilton

Oh I loved them both they were both very very good to me, they bought me clothes from head to foot as soon as I got there though I'd come with plenty of clothes they bought me another new wardrobe and everywhere they went I went with them...

Esther Carpenter

The woman with whom we were evacuated. She wasn't a Christian, she smoked and she drank and my sister and I weren't used to that at all, it was totally alien to us. Erm, to see a woman drinking stout, beer or whatever she drank. And she smoked. We couldn't say that the woman wasn't very kind, it's like when children are abused you don't tell anybody, it's a secret, and so we didn't tell anybody about that at all.

Joyce Smith

I say we were positively looked after in the best possible way, but the whole village it wasn't just my family it wasn't just Stafford, I mean we used to walk around and people used to say "Oh, you're the Sergeant's evacuees aren't you?" and on a hot day they'd say "oh do you want a drink come in." And they'd give us beautiful cold water to drink and they would be well just everybody was nice.

Douglas Wood

Everything was fine in the house, the only thing that was difficult, took a little while to get used to, was the local population, a few doors away there were couple of lads that lived there, and they'd really been told not to associate with these people from the slums of Birmingham. No question about it, they were told not to have anything to do with us, and that took a while to get over that. You know for the atmosphere to change, it did change though.

Shirley Webb

We spent more of our time with the servants of whom there were four or five than we did with the family, we sometimes were allowed, in inverted commas, to join the family for tea, but most of the meals we had with the servants, in the servants' hall...we were more looked after by them than we were by the family, the cook particularly and I wish I knew her name because she was a sweetie, she took us to her home, this was in Colton and she took us to her home in Rugeley for Sunday lunch.

Bernard O'Donnell

You must remember I was a townie, and in the town, as a child, you can't see very far before you see a building can you really? ... you can't even see the horizon, the proper horizon, because it's knocked off by buildings. And of course getting to Staffordshire, where we were, it was incredible because I could see a big, huge sky. I could see the hills round the back and to the right there was a pine forest ... And it was just amazing to be in the countryside and see cows and sheep ... I saw lambs being born once in the spring you know it was staggering.

Gordon Ellis

He went up the garden and came running back down the garden shouting and crying out "There's a monster" and it was a cow. He'd not seen a cow that close before. Living where they did in Stockport Road, Longsight, it wasn't a place where you'd got fields and cows so he'd wondered whether this monster was coming over the hedge at him.

George Emptage

She said "There's no lying in bed here, no lying in bed, everybody works," and the next morning she came in at 7 o'clock "right lads, up have a swill" and it was all no electricity in the place, nothing no heating only just this little fire in that room downstairs, and a good job it was warm at that particular time and we had a bit of a swill, well the water came from a pump outside and we had a swill in that and dried off with a herd sack, you know. And then we went on, out on the farm yard and the farmer showed us round, one thing and another, and he said "lads, you'll have to work here, nobody lies around, you'll have to work" and sure enough he give us some chores to do and that's what we had to do. We got up next morning at half past six, and we started doing the feeding cattle whatever what needed doing on the farm and the milk was finished, we came in and had breakfast round about quarter to eight, when all the men on the farm, the milkers and what have you, having their breakfast. And we came in and had our breakfast, had a bit of a wash, and what have you in cold water again, no hot water and then we had to set off for school.



6. What was it like for children in billet families?

Max Reynolds

...and they settled in alright, there was never a problem. We were all friends together, it was good...

Rob Weston

...They were welcomed into the house. They were very, very scared. Shall we say, they were obviously rather deprived children, I don't think they had much in the way of clothing or possessions that they brought with them. I know that mother gave them a bedroom with a double bed to share...I think my sister Dorothy and I were ready to welcome them and we showed them our toys and we played with them...

Dorothy Chadwick

...they seemed to take over and all the little bits and pieces that you'd got, you had to share them as well, and we didn't have much to start with so it wasn't, maybe it was me I don't know, but I didn't like sharing my things. Not when you hadn't got anything.

Well they talked funny, that was one thing, well I suppose Staffordshire, it is a dialect isn't it? But to us they talked really funny but you know we got on alright because we used to take them down to where we played and we were very happy together and it was the same at the school. You did get some bullying at school you know some of the lads like "Oh here's another foreigner"...

Beryl Alderson

...it was lovely for me I'd got a playmate. 'cause I've no brothers and sisters...

Frances Cook

We were left with the strag ends you could say, but eventually we got used to them, you know, so it didn't make a big lot of difference to us, apart from we had to share our toys and we had to share our mam and dad. They wanted loving like everybody else. You know, it wasn't their fault they were how they were. We were clean because my mam was clean, but they were probably cl, dirty because their mother was dirty. I mean she was when she came, she was, she was grubby, she wasn't like, her hands, her finger nails and things like that.

Michael Whitebrook

...'cause the evacuees, we'd three teachers in the village, you know were taking these 90 children, and they brought three more with them, so there was six teachers, our capacity just for the 90, they thought they might do half days the village children, half days the evacuees, but then they said oh well can't we split the classrooms up and all together, so desks them days were two seaters, two seaters, they put three on a desk. Right so they didn't bother splitting them? No they mixed us up you know...