The Home Front 1939–1945

Evacuation

The UK entered World War II on 3rd September, 1939. However, for many people in the UK, especially children, the war started before that date. These people were the evacuees.

Between 1938 and 1939 the British government started to prepare for war. The government decided to move children out of the cities and into the countryside. At 11.07 a.m. on 31st August, 1939, the government sent out an important message: ‘Evacuate forthwith’.
In the next four days, more than three million British children moved out of the cities and into the countryside. Their parents had jobs in the cities, so they stayed behind to work. Most children travelled with their teachers. About 100,000 teachers joined the evacuation. Everybody travelled by train. The government gave parents a list of things that children should take. The list included clothes, food and a gas mask. Everything had to be put in one bag. Younger children had their name and address on labels on their clothes. For many children it was their first visit to the countryside. It was exciting, and terrifying…

The children stayed with ‘host families’. Some of these families didn’t want to have city children in their homes, but they had no choice! Some children had a good time and they made friends with their new families. Other children found it a lot more difficult. They were a long way from home and they missed their families. Of course, not many people had phones at that time, so they could only write letters home. The evacuees went to local schools in the countryside. There were too many children in these schools, so often the local children went to school in the morning and the city children went in the afternoon.
Wartime Britain

**German planes started to attack London in September 1940.** In about nine months German planes dropped 31,000 bombs on London. The bombs hit a million houses and killed more than 20,000 people. Most attacks were at night, and the safest place to be was under the ground. Some people slept in bomb shelters in their gardens. Other people went to the nearest Underground tube station. Some nights more than 150,000 people slept in the Underground.

**Bombs fell on other cities, too.** There were attacks on ports like Liverpool, and industrial cities like Birmingham and Coventry.