

GREAT ASHFIELD HERE WE ARE AGAIN...

A collection of stories about our village at the time of the Second World War



HONOURS BOARD
C^T ASHFIELD SCHOOL
SCHOOL HALL FINE PLACE W80 SCHOOL

1926	1944
RUBY GOOCH	RUTH JAGGARD
WANDA GOOSTON	1947
1927	GRACE JAGGARD
GEORGE BUCKLE	VALERIE BECH
1930	1954
HARRY ARMSTRONG	JUNE CLOVER
1931	1961
PHYLLIS REDDIT	VERA MEEKINGS
JEAN WAKELIN	1963
1934	PETER GOODWIN
CYRIL SCASE	
1935	
LOIS ROSE	
1936	
JACK HIPKIN	
1941	
ROSEMARY JOHNSON	
1943	
DAVID JOHNSON	

In Memory of
Lance Corporal
Nelson John Brown
5826084, 1st Bn., Suffolk Regiment who died on 12 October 1944 Age 29
Son of John Robert and Edith Lydia Brown, of Great Ashfield, Suffolk.
Remembered with Honour
Overloon War Cemetery



Pearl Rose
and
Donia Stick
for
Great Ashfield Parish Council
??? 202?

THE STORIES

The Church

The Evacuees

The Eyewitnesses

The Farmers

The Fatality

The Headteacher

The Refugees

The School

The Soldier

The Teacher

The Village

The Wanderer

The Workers

THE EVACUEES

During the First World War towns like Bury St Edmunds were bombed from the air for the first time. Zeppelin attacks had killed 1,239 civilians nationally, over half of those killed were women and children. Across Europe in the 1920s the government began to think about the potential threat of air attacks and how to protect those on the "home front". A Committee on Air Raids Precautions was formed in 1924, headed by Sir John Anderson.

The Anderson Committee concentrated on practical ways of supporting the preservation of human life. Initially they focused on gas masks, which had been used already in the trenches during World War One, and underground shelters. In 1931 Sir Charles Hipwood of the Board of Trade was appointed to lead a sub-committee to investigate the possibilities of evacuation.

Initially the Hipwood Committee focused on London, considering when evacuation should take place and the difficulties of maintaining infrastructure if people had been evacuated. At that point they were determined that if evacuation was necessary it would need to be voluntary in order to avoid panic and chaos.

By the late 1930s the threat of war was a tangible possibility and in 1938 a report on evacuation was published by the Anderson committee. The report identified categories of people who were non-essential to war work and should be evacuated:

- school children in the charge of their teachers
- the infirm such as those with visual impairments
- pregnant women
- and mothers with babies or pre-school age children who would be kept together.

During 1938, in the expectation of mass bombing, the Government formulated plans for evacuating women and children from London and industrial areas elsewhere in the country.

The country was divided into zones:

- Evacuation areas, thought to be in greatest danger of bombing, such as Greater London, Birmingham and Glasgow.
- Neutral areas, not to be evacuated or used as reception areas. Often these were areas within reception area counties, for example Plymouth in Devon, Norwich and Great Yarmouth in Norfolk.
- Reception areas, typically rural communities, including West and East Suffolk.

In Suffolk as elsewhere:

The first step was a requirement for local authorities to undertake surveys [*of the Reception areas*] to ascertain the number of surplus rooms (on the basis to accommodate one person per habitable room) and the amount of these rooms available in households where the householder was willing to accommodate unaccompanied children. It was hoped the scheme would be voluntary and that it would not be necessary to use compulsory powers in this event. Teacher's organisations and the Women's Voluntary Service widely gave assistance in this survey. This survey was to be completed by Feb 28th 1939. From the results of this survey, an estimate of the allocation to individual districts was made along with a list of detrainng stations drawn up. Special groups (e.g. expectant mothers, special schools for handicapped [*sic*] children etc were to be accommodated in camps and

other suitable buildings, for example Alexandra's Children's Home was taken over in its entirety for the purpose of an emergency maternity home while many of Suffolk's Holiday Camps were used for nursery and other special needs schools).

<http://civildefence-suffolk.webeden.co.uk/evacuation-1939/4552150696>

When War was declared on 3rd September 1939 evacuation had already begun two days before, on 1st September. Railway staff, the police and school teachers had been involved in planning the mass movement of children.

The government concentrated on evacuating those who lived in the areas most likely to be bombed and were unlikely to be able to organise evacuation for themselves. They concentrated on the groups they felt were most likely to panic, foreigners, Jewish and the poorest. Some evacuees were in all of those groups.

Their Darkest Hour: The hidden history of the Home Front 1939 – 1945, Stuart Hylton Gloucestershire 2001.

More than one and a half million people were evacuated including 800,000 children.

In *When the Children Came Home: Stories of Wartime Evacuees* Julie Summers comments:

[The evacuation] was codenamed Operation Pied Piper. Who on earth came up with that name? Not a mother, that is certain. After all, the piper leads the children of Hamelin away from the town, never to return...

...What must it have been like to be sent away from home at 5, 10 or even 14, as some of the older ones were, and then come home months, – or, more often, years – later and have to pick up where you left off? Is it even possible when your life has changed in all other respects? And who were the winners and losers in the whole evacuation project?

Three days before the outbreak of War, on the morning of 31st August, Operation Pied Piper began as the order was given for evacuation on the following day. On the morning of 1st September children assembled at their schools carrying only a handbag or case containing the items listed in a leaflet from the Ministry of Health:

- a gas mask
- a spare set of underclothes
- night clothes
- indoor shoes or plimsolls
- spare stockings or socks
- a toothbrush, comb, towel, soap, face cloth, and handkerchiefs
- a packet of food for the day.

In addition, if they had one, they were to bring a warm coat or mackintosh. A label was pinned to each child. On this was written their name, the name of their school and the authority from which they were being evacuated. 32,000 of those children were from Stepney in East London. The authority was the London County Council (LCC).

The underground station from which their journey commenced determined which of the four main-line stations they were taken to... from... Stepney Green... which accessed the District Line it naturally followed that the school parties were taken to

Ealing, Richmond or Wimbledon... Some parties who were taken over to Ealing ended up in Norfolk, Suffolk, Ely, Cambridge, Essex and Hertfordshire.

...For Stepney's schools, those evacuated from the same underground station appear to have ended up in similar areas, so that neighbouring schools would still be neighbouring in reception areas. However, members of a single school could be scattered over quite a large area.

Evacuation was to introduce the people of Stepney to a very different way of living, whether it be with a rural, working family or a more privileged experience with middle or upper class families.

Children found themselves without parental support at an early age. Many from Stepney were reported in the newspapers as "dirty, lice ridden, foul mouthed, bed-wetters and undomesticated". Their Cockney accent was perceived to be a result of laziness. Many were Jewish and were met with unfriendliness, prejudice and anti-Semitism because of that.

Reception families were struck by the food preferences of the evacuees, assuming that they preferred take-away food such as fish and chips. Many of the mothers who accompanied their very young children were unable to cook and this was seen as preference rather than the outcome of little or no access to a kitchen or running water.

Stepney: Profile of a London Borough from the Outbreak of the First World War to the Festival of Britain, 1914-1951 [Samantha L. Bird](#) Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Dr Juliet Gardiner writing in 2005 in *The Children's War: The Second World War through the eyes of the children of Britain* says:

I think part of the problem of this was that it tended to be exaggerated, obviously there were some instances of very anti-social children and very disturbed and very disruptive children, very poor children, but a lot of children, okay, they were poor, okay, they didn't have any underwear,... they came with very inadequate clothing for the countryside, they often came with nits, or they might have a skin disease, but a lot of these were the signs of poverty; that society and the government had basically let down a large percent of the population. But some people would translate that and say this was fecklessness, and the old idea that urban society is kind of feckless and not responsible in the way that the countryside is. But this was basically a myth and I think we mustn't forget that there was a great deal of rural poverty. So those working class children - sewn into their clothes, brown paper for the Winter - no underwear, nits, no table manners and were brought up on a diet of chips and cups of tea, all this would feature in the press. There was very little news during the war, everyone was expecting war news but there was very little, so this got very, very high visibility and high profile. You can imagine the Daily Mail story every day.

The children in Great Ashfield were from Cephas Street School in Stepney. At Christmas the children could not return home, but were not forgotten or ignored by the Mayors of the London Boroughs from which they had come.

BURY FREE PRESS

Saturday December 16, 1939

The Evacuees at Christmas

137,000 IN EAST ANGLIAN REGION.

Bury's Plans for Entertaining Little Guests

A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE FROM LONDON MAYORS

The following message to evacuees, school teachers and householders was sent by the Mayors of Bethnal Green, Shoreditch, and Stepney, the boroughs from which evacuees have been sent to this district:

"Every boy and girl loves to spend Christmas at home with mother and father. This year many thousands of you will be living in East Anglia – away from your homes – for the first time in your lives. We at home feel sad that this has to be just as much as you will do. But it is one of those things we have to bear during this war. London is not yet safe enough for you to return, for a crowded city is no place for boys and girls in time of war. You are helping those responsible for your safety by staying away from London. Will you all try and be patient until the day – and it may not be very far distant – when the world is at peace again? May you all enjoy a very happy Christmas!

"And now a word to school teachers and to those thousands of householders who are looking after our children. Many of you have made very great sacrifices so that our children shall have a happy Christmas. Some of you will be helping with parties and entertainments in social centres for those under your care. For this, and for all that you have already done, we in the London area express our very deep thanks. On behalf of grateful mothers and fathers we send the warmest Christmas greetings to you all.

"A Merry Christmas! And may the New Year be blessed with the happiness of peace."

The letter is signed by J. C. Edwards (Bethnal Green). Thomas J. Silltoe (Shoreditch), F. R. Lewey (Stepney).

And a fortnight later the Bury St Edmunds Chamber of Commerce and others held Christmas parties for the children:

FREE PRESS & POST

SATURDAY DECEMBER 30, 1939

Big Christmas Party

YESTERDAY'S TREAT FOR BURY CHILDREN

Many Evacuees Included.

A ten-days-old baby born in the Alexandra Home, the maternity institution for evacuee mothers in West Suffolk, was the youngest guest at a Christmas Party given to a big family numbering 350 by the Bury St. Edmund's Chamber of Commerce yesterday. A generous response to an appeal for 500 shillings enabled the party to be given to 300 poor children of the town, and they were joined by evacuee mothers and children, under school age, for whom no provision was made by the L.C.C. Fund. This being confined to the evacuated school children...

OTHER PARTIES

Evacuee school children from the Morpeth Street Central School who attended Bury Silver Jubilee School, had their Christmas party in the Town Hall on Monday afternoon... A similar celebration for St. Anne's and St. Patrick's Roman Catholic School

was held yesterday in St. Edmund's Hall. At each of the L.C.C. parties local children from the houses where the evacuees are billeted were invited as guests.

Their teachers subscribed for a Christmas party for the evacuee children of the John Scurr School who attend Bury Feoffment Junior Mixed School. This took place yesterday, being arranged by Miss Dedman, headmistress...

The Great Ashfield children were not left out...

WALSHAM-LE-WILLOWS

CHRISTMAS FESTIVITIES. – On Wednesday afternoon and evening the Temperance Hall presented a festive appearance, when the children of the Mixed Voluntary and Infants Schools, together with the evacuated children of **Cephas Street L.C.C. School**, Mile End, who are billeted in the parish, were entertained to an enjoyable Christmas tea and treat. This event was made possible by the proceeds from two concerts given by the combined scholars, and the generosity of many parishioners who subscribed in cash and kind. The arrangements were carried out by the Headmasters, Mr. A. Kershaw, J.P. (London) and Mr. V.E.J. Dove, with the assistance of the school staffs... After tea crackers were pulled, carnival hats donned, and popular songs and choruses sung under the leadership of Mr. Kershaw with Miss G.A. Watson at the piano. Mr. JOSEPH with some of the senior boys, billeted at Great Ashfield, contributed songs. The Vicar expressed thanks to all who had helped to make the event such a success. On leaving each child was the recipient of an orange, apple, bag of sweets and a present. On Saturday some fifty of the London children were conveyed by coach to Bury St. Edmunds where they were entertained at the Odeon cinema. Miss Bath and Miss Gillett (teachers) were in charge of the party.

Simon JOSEPH's story, written by himself, appears elsewhere in this publication.

Into the New Year the Mayors continued to visit...

FREE PRESS & POST

SATURDAY APRIL 13, 1940

The Mayor of Stepney

OFFICIAL VISIT TO BURY AND NEIGHBOURHOOD.

Gratitude to Evacuees' Foster Parents

The benefits which the evacuee children are deriving from their stay in the country were remarked upon by members of an official party from Stepney who visited the district yesterday (Thursday)...

The morning's visits were to places in the town. At the Feoffment Junior Mixed School, which includes scholars from John Scurr School, Mile End, the evacuee children were invited to put up their hands if any of them wished to return home, but none did so.

"I see you don't want to come back," said the Mayor of Stepney. "I am very pleased to see you looking

SO VERY WELL AND HAPPY.

You are lucky to come to such a lovely spot as Bury St Edmund's." He added that in Stepney they felt very grateful to all concerned in promoting the well-being and

happiness of the evacuees, and he especially thanked the foster parents and the teachers. In behalf of Stepney Council, he hoped the children would keep up the traditions of Stepney by being as little trouble as possible.

Mrs Frankel [Lily Frankel, a Stepney Councillor, wife of Mr Dan Frankel, M.P., [L.C.C.] said that the evacuees looked very well, and asked them to tell their foster mothers how much the London party wished to thank them.

Miss Whateley [Monica Whateley, L.C.C., deputising for the Chair of the L.C.C. Public Health Committee] said the L.C.C. were very proud of the London children evacuated to the country. They hoped that the friends the children had made would remain the friends of a lifetime.

Miss Dedman, headmistress of the John Scurr School, thanked the visitors, who then went on to visit the St. Anne's School, Whitechapel, which is evacuated to St. Mary's Infants' School. At both schools, the Mayor of Stepney distributed sweets which he had brought with him.

The final visit of the morning was to the communal house for mothers and children at 82, Guildhall Street, where the party was welcomed by Mrs. Davey, W.V.S.

The visitors were entertained to lunch at the Angel Hotel by the Mayor of Bury and afterwards left for visits to evacuated children at Hinderclay, Walsham-le-Willows, Rickinghall and Great Ashfield (*Cephas Street School*), Badwell Ash (St. Peter's) and the L.C.C. Nursery School at Stowlangtoft Hall, where they were entertained to tea.

The teachers who had accompanied the children were aware of the need to provide entertainment. Two of the teachers who had joined the local Women's Institute were able, with the support of the WI, to organise a film show in the Badwell Ash Church Room.

One of those was Lilian WILSON, one of the Cephas Street teachers.

FREE PRESS & POST

Saturday July 26, 1941

Women's Institute Activities.

GREAT ASHFIELD AND BADWELL ASH

A large number of members and friends were entertained recently at Shackerland Hall by Mrs. Eric SYMONDS, this gathering taking the place of the July meeting at the White Horse. The attraction was a whist drive on the lawn, when prizes were won by Miss WILSON (evacuee teacher), Miss FRENCH and Miss JAGGARD. There were also prizes for parcels games. Refreshments served by Mrs. Eric Symonds (assisted by Mrs. CHAPMAN), included strawberries. The president, Miss HEIGHAM, gratefully thanked Mrs. Symonds for her continued kindness as hostess in such difficult times.

Lilian WILSON was born in Bethnal Green on 8th July 1894, the daughter of a railway worker. She was a teacher with the London County Council at Cephas Street School, Stepney Green. In 1939 she was evacuated with the Cephas Street children and was living at Ashfield House with the HOLLOND girls, all of approximately the same age as herself, and their mother.

FREE PRESS & POST

SATURDAY MARCH 8, 1941

Women's Institute Activities.

Great Ashfield & Badwell Ash

The February meeting was the best in numbers for some time, and in consequence the meeting regained some of its noted vitality and briskness...

... The open film show arranged through the Institute by the Ministry of Information was highly successful. Through the kindness of the President (Miss HEIGHAM) the older children from both Evacuee and Village Schools were present. The Hall in which the film was shown, and which is used as the Evacuee School, was prepared by the teachers in charge, Miss BATH and Miss WILSON. The vote of thanks to the two operators of the films, proposed by the President, was received with applause by the large audience.

Mabel Fraser HEIGHAM was the only unmarried daughter and youngest child of Clement Henry John Heigham of Hunston Hall, Chief Constable of Suffolk, and his wife Grace Charlotte FRASER. In 1939 Mabel was living at The Cottage, next door to Parkers Farm on The Street in Badwell Ash.

Ethel L BATH was born in Brixton in 1888, the only child of George Henry Bath, the Superintendent of the St George's Public Baths, Betts Street, and his wife Mary who was the matron at the baths. In 1911 she was enumerated aged 23 as a student teacher, living at the Baths with her parents. In 1939 she was evacuated with the children and was boarding in the High Street, Walsham le Willows.

The local newspaper was involved in providing support and entertainment for local children, including the evacuees.

FREE PRESS & POST

SATURDAY FEBRUARY 21, 1942

Uncle Geoff's Children's Chat.

LEAGUE OF HONOUR MOTTO:

Honourable in Everything and Towards Everyone.

Hullo children, here we are again for our very own chat. First. Let me give a very warm welcome to our 24 new members – my, aren't they rolling in! Fancy, getting on for 7,000... what a family! I should have a rare old job if I had to take your mothers' place and look after the rations for you all in these times, shouldn't I?... But there, talking of rations, we don't do badly, really, do we, when we remember what this terrible war means for us all. I bet the German children, and those in countries under Nazi rule, would like to exchange places when meal times come round.

OUR LETTER BOX

Now for our letters...

AN EVACUEE'S GOOD RECORD

Another well-written and interesting letter is from Rose BAKER, of Great Ashfield, who has been evacuated from London. "I enjoy myself very much down here. I have to go to school at Badwell, a mile away, and I go to Sunday School every Sunday morning. I have been to Sunday School every Sunday since I have been down here. I came top at a Scripture exam at my school and I won a lovely Bible. Last year at Sunday School I won a Prayer Book."

Congratulations to you, Rose, and I hope you will keep it up.

NEW MEMBERS (*extract*)

6605 JAGGARD, Ruth C., Daisy Green, Great Ashfield

6606 JAGGARD, Grace C., Daisy Green, Great Ashfield

6610 BAKER, Rose, Jubilee Cottage, Great Ashfield.

In the 1939 Register Rose BAKER is shown as living at 1, Council Houses, Main Road, Great Ashfield, with Percy HAWES, a horseman on a farm, and his wife Eva. Rose was born in Stepney on 29th January 1929. In 1939 her parents, Charles, a stable hand, and Jessie, née WIDOWSON, were living at 8 June Buildings, Grantley Street, Mile End. Her siblings George, Ernest and Peter were living at home with their parents. Her mother passed away on 6th December 1944. Rose married Thomas HOLT in Bethnal Green on 12th October 1948.