

Evacuees

On September 2nd, 1939 Germany under Hitler's direction invaded Poland. As a result, Britain declared war on Germany on September 3rd, Hitler refusing to back down. The Prime Minister - Neville Chamberlain - made a speech on the radio to the nation telling them of the devastating news. They listened in stunned silence, but in essence this was no surprise to the British people as they had been preparing for the war for over a year for an attack by bombs or poison gas.

People started to build Anderson shelters (supplied by the Government) in their back gardens and 38 000 000 gas masks were distributed around the country. For many this would have been their second experience of a world war - only twenty years later.

It was thought that ports and large towns and cities would be the first places to be bombed and many children were moved from these places to small villages in the country. In many places this happened immediately and the children were evacuated without delay. Ninety percent of parents agreed that evacuation was the only way to ensure that their children were safe - even though they suffered heartbreak at having to let them go.

The minute war was declared, children were sent to school and their teachers took them to train stations and onto the countryside. Each child had to take a gas mask, a label with their name on; they also were given a packed lunch and some sweets for the journey. By nightfall, they were living in a strange house with a new family.

Many children from the big cities were poor and this surprised their new families; some children were rude and this upset the kind people who had offered to take them in. The majority, however, settled well into their new regime and found some solace in helping out in the garden, growing vegetables and enjoying the fresh air of the countryside.

Some children returned to their parents but most stayed for the duration of the war. Their new foster families adopted some unfortunate children as their parents were killed in the air raids.