

# Manchester evacuees memorial



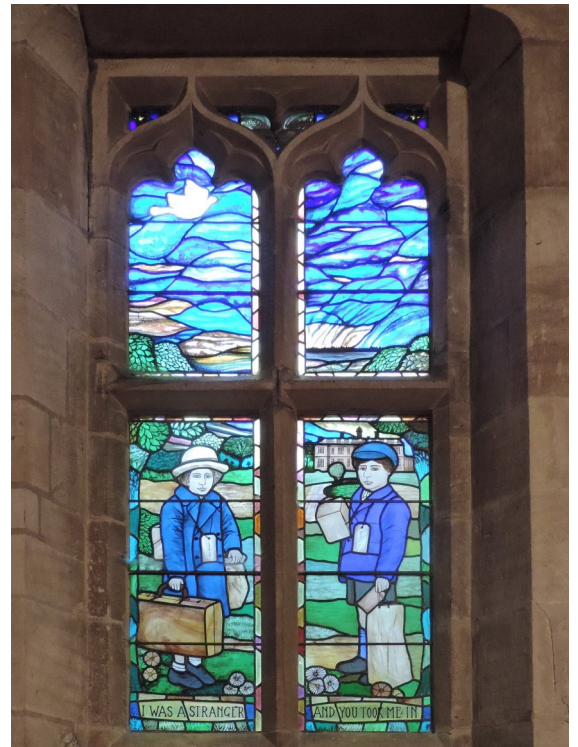
War Memorials Trust

## Introduction

This information sheet focuses on the background to evacuation in World War II and on the 'Manchester Evacuees' memorial stained glass window in All Saints' Church, Sudbury in Derbyshire. The sheet has been produced to accompany the lesson on evacuation in WMT's World War II topic plan for Key Stage 2. It can be used to provide background information on evacuation and this memorial for teachers or for use in lessons with older pupils.

## Evacuation

The evacuation of vulnerable groups from areas that were expected to suffer from air raids to safer locations was a key policy at the start of the war. It is thought that between the end of June 1939 and the first week of September, 3.5 million people left urban areas and moved somewhere safer. Some of these were businesses moving their premises away from cities and people who had the means moving themselves.



While some people did make their own arrangements for moving to safety, evacuation as we generally understand it is most often associated though with the encouragement to evacuate large numbers of young people, and in the first few days of September immediately before war was declared, 827,000 children of school age, 542,000 mothers with younger children, 103,000 teachers and 7000 disabled people were evacuated under the official government scheme. There was significant regional variation in numbers but in total 48% of school children in England and Wales, and 37% of Scottish children, were evacuated. The idea behind this policy was to keep children from cities such as London and Glasgow safe by billeting them with those who lived in areas that were unlikely to be targeted.

Some experiences of young evacuees have been fairly well documented, with many former evacuees recording their memories, and they varied widely. The actual process of being evacuated could often be stressful and bewildering, with long, difficult journeys and lack of organisation being fairly common. The methods of allocation also differed with some areas making efforts to keep families and school parties together, while others randomly assigned evacuees to billets or allowed hosts to choose their evacuee.

Having arrived at their billet the experiences of evacuees also varied. Many evacuees were from poorer families than those they ended up staying with and the often overcrowded and poverty-stricken urban homes they came from meant that they were unused to the better conditions their host families often lived in (and their host families were often shocked at the condition of the children placed with them). This was not the case for all, but for many children who had grown up in a town or city being placed in rural areas was unlike anything they had ever experienced.

These were just some of the factors that produced homesickness and a determination among many parents to bring their children home, especially when after a few months the anticipated air raids had not happened and people began to doubt the need for evacuation. Personal testimonies support this: one account from 1940 states, "The chief reason against the evacuation seems to be that there have been no air raids, so everybody is completely fed up." By the spring of 1940 1 million evacuees had returned home. Some, however, stayed with their host families until the end of the war or even beyond and had a positive experience.

### The memorial's design and history

The 'Manchester Evacuees' memorial is a stained glass window in All Saints Church, Sudbury. The image depicted in the four panels of the window consists of two children, recognisable as evacuees by their luggage, labels and gas masks, standing in front of a large house in a rural setting – an image consistent with the experiences many former evacuees and hosts have recounted. Above the scene, in a blue sky is a dove and running along the base of the image is the poignant inscription 'I was a stranger and you took me in.'

The window was donated to the church by a former evacuee from Manchester to Sudbury and is dedicated to evacuees from St Thomas' School in Ardwick, Manchester who stayed in Sudbury during the war. The window was dedicated by the Bishop of Derby in June 2001.



These photographs depict the Manchester evacuees memorial. Above is the inscription dedicating the memorial to the local people who cared for evacuees. To the left are close up images of the two children. Their evacuee labels, minimal luggage and gas masks can be clearly seen. On the first page of this sheet, is a picture of the whole memorial and the rural setting and a dove, symbolising peace, can be seen.

All images © Rick Nuth, 2015

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