

# BOAT, BILLETS and LETTERS HOME

Memories of an evacuation  
from Dagenham  
to North Norfolk, 1939-40.



An evacuation group preparing to leave Norfolk for Staffordshire. Thelma Wolfe (nee Valentine) is on the left.

Waltham Forest Oral History Workshop - Occasional Paper. **£1.60.**

# **Boat, Billets and**

## **Letters Home**

Memories of an evacuation from Dagenham  
to North Norfolk, 1939-1940

Waltham Forest Oral History Workshop - Occasional Paper

First published 1990

Republished as web edition  
with minor amendments 2003

Compiled by and © Waltham Forest Oral History Workshop

Waltham Forest Oral History Workshop  
c/o Vestry House Museum  
Vestry Road  
London  
E17 9NH

[mail@wforalhistory.org.uk](mailto:mail@wforalhistory.org.uk)  
[www.wforalhistory.org.uk](http://www.wforalhistory.org.uk)

## INTRODUCTION

In 1985 one of our members, Mrs. Thelma Wolfe (nee Valentine) began to talk about her own memories of growing up in Leyton, and of starting work as a young teacher in Dagenham. She could recall with particular clarity the amazing course of events in 1939-40, when as an impressionable 21 year old, she was evacuated with a large party of Dagenham school children, to the very different setting of the North Norfolk coast.

This led to a trip to North Norfolk by members of the group to meet and interview some of the residents of East Runton who remembered some of the events. Subsequently the group was able to interview a few of the pupils who had been evacuated.

We hope the resulting booklet is of interest to residents both in Dagenham and North Norfolk, and that it sheds a little light on one of the few boat-borne evacuations of the war.

## THE GOVERNMENT'S EVACUATION SCHEME

---

H. M. Government has made a scheme for the removal of children and certain adults from congested areas should the country be threatened with war. The County of London and the neighbouring Boroughs of Acton, Barking, East Ham, Edmonton, Hornsey, Ilford, Leyton, Tottenham, Walthamstow, West Ham and Willesden are the areas to which this pamphlet applies.

The London County Council and the Councils of the Boroughs mentioned above are making the arrangements in London on behalf of H. M. Government, and the Government is taking responsibility for all matters of policy and for the arrangements in the Areas to which children and others will be sent.

*The plan depends for its success on the help which all citizens can give.*

**An extract from a booklet on the evacuation scheme, published in Spring 1939.**

## **BACKGROUND**

Britain declared war on Germany on 3rd September 1939, but for many people this was not the beginning. In 1935 Local Authorities were urged to prepare Civil Defence plans and two years later civil defence duties were imposed on them by the Air Raid Precautions Act.

Many people questioned the need for such preparations but as the political crisis in Europe worsened, recruits swelled the ranks of the A.R.P. By the summer of 1939 A.R.P. units had thousands of members in East London.

The Government had also taken other practical precautions. The manufacture of civilian gas masks was under way in 1937 and by the start of the war millions had been distributed. Air raid shelters were also commonplace. The Anderson shelter (named after the head of the A.R.P.) was developed in November 1938 and ten months later over two and a half million had been erected across the country. Plans for blackouts and food rationing were also swiftly developed as conflict began to look more likely. However it is the Government's plans for evacuation that many people remember most clearly about those last few months of 1939.

Bombing raids during World War One and those conducted during the Spanish Civil War, had convinced the Air Ministry that should an air attacks against Britain's major cities would lead to casualties on a terrifyingly high scale. Although air raid shelters and fire fighting services would prove invaluable in keeping the casualty figures down, evacuation would do most to avoid such massive bloodshed.

Accordingly, plans for the evacuation of all vulnerable sections of the public were drawn up in 1938 and households across the country were leafleted about the scheme. Parents who wanted their children to be evacuated had to register them at local schools. The country was divided up into safe, neutral and danger zones and the plan was to send children from the danger zones to safe areas. Most of East London was designated as a danger zone.

On 1st September 1939, as hostilities looked inevitable, children gathered at their schools and were taken in groups to their local departure points. This was done by volunteers, the Women's Voluntary Service (WVS) and teachers. Tens of thousands of children, expectant mothers and mothers with toddlers left the area for safer zones.

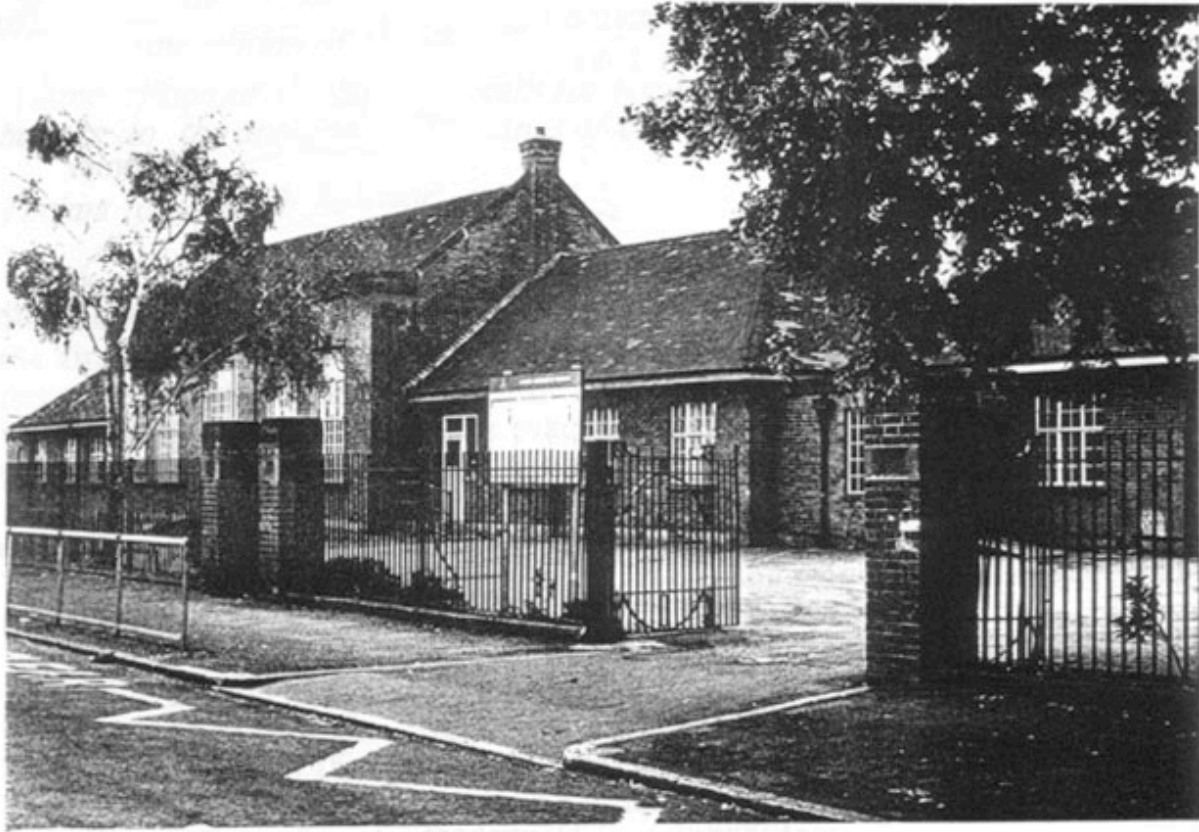
For many it was the first time away from home. They often found themselves sharing accommodation and schools with people who had little in common with them. Visits by parents were costly and infrequent and all too often heartbreakingly short.

The last months of 1939 are now known as the "Phoney War". To the evacuees apparently little was happening to threaten their family's safety in London.

By Christmas 1939 many evacuees, wracked with home sickness, had been collected by their parents. In some cases the parents found the contributions they had to make for their child's upkeep something of a burden.

The onset of the Blitz in 1940 caused a second wave of evacuation, but even with such immediate danger the turn out was poorer than in the previous September. Many families decided that facing the danger together was preferable to separation.

Although some children undoubtedly had a difficult time adjusting to their new foster homes, many Londoners have fond memories of their time away. It was often spent in the country, a real eye-opener for children from East London.



Parsloes School, 1990



## **DAGENHAM PREPARES FOR WAR**

*The Civil Defence Act of 1939 gave powers to local councils to move civilian populations from one area to another in the event of war. The entire country was divided into 'evacuation, reception and neutral' areas. Dagenham in East London was originally designated neutral: but after strong protest by the Mayor and councillors, was changed to an 'evacuation' area in June 1939. Dagenham, and 18 other districts added at a late stage to the original list, were left in some confusion about existing plans. As the Dagenham Post reported just 2 days before war was declared:*

In the event of war in the immediate future, the children of the adjoining districts of Barking and Ilford will be taken at once to a place of comparative safety. But the children of Dagenham will be left to face the horrors of aerial bombardment in this vast area. Their sole defence against highly organised modern warfare will be a civilian respirator and an Anderson steel shelter. In many cases that will be no protection whatever from high explosives, as garden shelters have not yet been issued to everyone.

However, whatever the Government intends to do, the local authority are hastily completing their plans for evacuation. Children have been recalled to their schools, given instructions in connection with evacuation and registered with their mothers. The local authority has its children prepared to be taken to a place of safety at a moment's notice.

*The same edition of the 'Post' calls for volunteers to act as escorts and helpers to the anticipated thousands of evacuees.*

*Thelma recalled:*

I was teaching in Dagenham and it hadn't been planned for Dagenham to be evacuated so we returned to school in the September of 1939 with all this in the air. There was a possibility of war, but it hadn't actually started. I remember we started in school on the Monday (28th August) and all this was in the air, that we might be evacuated, and school didn't really function properly. Towards the middle of the week we were still wondering whether we were going or not. And we were also making labels. I know we were doing something constructive towards it. So when the decision finally came on the Thursday afternoon we just broke school, went home and to re-assemble next morning.

I lived in Leyton and it was a long journey on the Underground from Plaistow. I had to get to Plaistow by bus, so it was a long journey every day. That was a problem that particular evening when we went home and we'd got to get back to school at 5 o'clock or 6 o'clock. A neighbour volunteered to drive me to Dagenham because there was no transport.

I thought it was a great adventure. Went off with a rucksack and didn't know where I was going, but my parents were very perturbed. People thought there would be bombing immediately, that was the great fear. That there would be bombing and gas attacks, that was why we had these gas masks. London was the prime target and Dagenham they thought was too far away, but then I suppose somebody realised that the planes would come in across the Thames estuary and come over Dagenham. And of course, we had the Ford works there, we had a lot of industry in Dagenham so I suppose they decided that it was necessary to evacuate the children.

I used to read or buy the Daily Telegraph at Plaistow station every morning to try to understand what it was all about.

*Were you aware of any evacuation plans?*

Well, we were only conscious of them during that summer, though of course the year before, September 1938, there was quite a kerfuffle when I'd only just started in the school. We had parents' meetings about the possibility of evacuation because it was thought that war would happen. Then, of course, it all faded out and all quietened down. Actually, that August (1939) I was in the Channel Islands when the idea came that war might start. We did have a problem getting back, we came back to Weymouth, instead of Southampton by boat, because we were some of the last people to get back. Some people even flew back because there was all this in the air. When we got back they were already painting lines on the edges of the pavement and some lines or something on the lamp-posts because of knowing there would a blackout.

*Thelma was asked what happened on the morning?*

The school was still being lit by gas and that holiday they had been ripping out all the gas fittings and they hadn't got round to fitting up the electricity because obviously, it was still summer and we wouldn't need any lighting for a couple of months. So the morning that we all assembled it was absolutely dark. I had two candles on my desk to mark off the register of the people who said that they were going.

The children were at their desks with their bags and you couldn't really distinguish who were just saying goodbye to their loved ones and who were coming with us. I can remember so vividly the darkness outside and all the faces peering in of poor souls who had had to make this decision to send their children. In that couple of days before we'd given them a list of clothing and toothbrushes and this sort of thing. In fact, it wasn't a couple of days it was only that day before because they had no possibility of buying anything and a lot of them hadn't got toothbrushes or facecloths or towels or anything, because they were family things and so they were finding great problems in getting their clothes together.

When they arrived on the Friday they'd got all sorts of bags and cases and anything that they could get hold of to put their stuff in. When we finally set off from school it was moonlight and we walked through the streets of Dagenham down to the Docks. It was all very calm. It was a great adventure you see. We didn't know where we were going and it was exciting because a lot of these children could never have had a holiday.

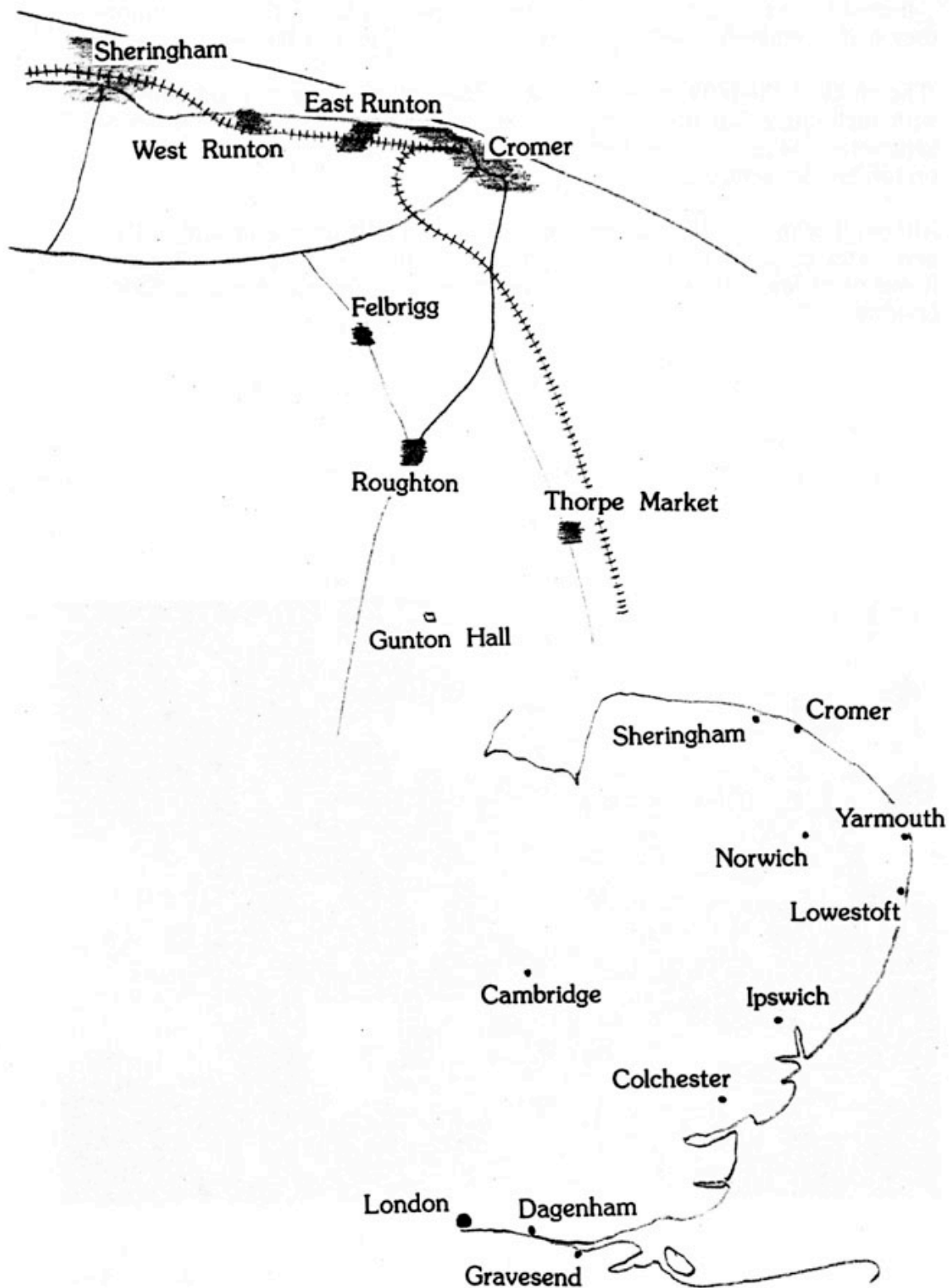
*Thelma was asked what the parents' feelings were like.*

There was a tremendous worry about it all, but not excitement, not panic.

*What instructions had been given to you by the school?*

I don't remember any instructions at all, we had our labels, we had our bags, we did have gas masks. We must have collected them in that week or two before this date because I can remember collecting mine in Leyton in the church near Sidmouth Road. We were going down to the Dock and going on to boats and I'd never seen Fords from that angle. I'd taken children round Fords but I hadn't been to the Dock before. It must have been a considerable walk.

Map indicating places mentioned in the text.





*Were there quite a number of children that you didn't know personally?*

Oh yes. I don't remember that I ever saw any of my own class again. It got very hot on the Sunday and the Monday, so it must have been quite fine weather. And I can remember passing Lowestoft and people waving to us you know. We'd no idea where we were going.

They didn't know what to do with us. There was no place really to take us. There were no plans of where we were going. So I suppose people in Yarmouth got this message that the boats were coming and they opened up a school. I can remember what it looked like, it was just a bungalow building and the usual iron railing round. They brought in trays of food, but it was all cold you know, sausage in red skins, apples and sausage rolls and white bread.

That was when we actually arrived on the Friday. We still had the same on Saturday and the same on Sunday. There was no hot food at all, it was pretty grim. The local people brought blankets for us.

*The local newspaper reported these events at the time:*

Evacuation from Dagenham of schoolchildren, others and children under 5 and pregnant women took place during Friday, 1st and Saturday, 2nd September, 1939. Pleasure steamers owned by the General Steam Navigation Company, were ordered to be available at dawn, at the jetties of the Ford Motor Company (at Dagenham Dock). Some 16,900 citizens of Dagenham (including 7,248 school children, 666 teachers and 266 helpers) were taken in 8 boats over these 2 days, from their homes in Dagenham to the ports of Yarmouth, Lowestoft and Felixstowe, for billeting in Suffolk and Norfolk.

*Thelma was asked about her feelings that first night:*

I'd been a Girl Guide captain and taken camping and I was very young and it was all adventure. I enjoyed organising things and being with the children. We made the most of it and tried to keep the children's spirits up, of course, because they were already beginning to sink.

It was just this cold food and I can remember that the children were taken in to long tables or something and fed and then the staff went in. One of the local Yarmouth helpers wanted to stop me from going in because she thought I was a schoolchild you see. I remember pulling myself up to a great height and saying, "I'm a teacher". On the Sunday morning two or three of us went for a walk because I suppose by this time we'd got a bit organised and had a bit of time off duty. We walked not far away from the school and we knew there was going to be an announcement at 11 o'clock and we heard somebody's radio and we asked if we could listen. We heard then that war was declared and we shot off back to the school. I mean, I don't know what we were going to do but we just felt, "Gosh, this is so ghastly!". Then that night, we were sleeping on the floor with the children to keep their spirits up, there was a siren went off. That was the most ghastly thing. Everybody shot up and sat up in bed and immediately tried to get their gas masks out because we'd been told that this was going to be necessary. We were sure there was going to be a raid at that moment.

*Had they been drilled on what the siren sounded like and what should they do if they heard it?*

I don't remember but I can still see us sitting up in the dark and the children trying to find their gas masks which they each had by them. And then the all-clear went and we all sort of collapsed

again and the panic was over. But the trouble was, even in that two and a half to three days it must have been, impetigo (a skin disease) started. Because we only had cold water and I don't know what towels we had for washing.

I suppose somebody had it who came with us and it spread, even in that couple of days. I can remember what these horrible little washrooms were like with their horrible little washbasins and cold water.

Monday morning. They fixed us up, each person and child with a bag with our iron rations, biscuits and corned beef. I don't remember what else but I know it was digestive biscuits and corned beef, maybe an apple or two. We were told that we were going to be moved away from the school. So we got all the children lined up in the playground and that's why I remember it was hot because it got very warm! And we stood there for ages and nothing happened and we sort of disbanded them again and then started again. Then actually some buses did arrive and we all piled into these. I had two friends who were infants teachers and we seemed to pile into the same coach. But some of my staff I never saw again because all the buses set off from Yarmouth along the coast of Norfolk and they had no idea of where we were going to stop.

As we went along they stopped in a village and asked if they would accept us. Now, there were officers ... Reception Officers of some sort, in the villages because that would be with the A.R.P. preparations. So as we went through the villages and stopped we asked if they would accept us and they couldn't. I think it was Mundesley that we got to about midday and we all got out because obviously the children had got to go to the toilet and have some food. And that playground had just been re-tarred, you know, they do all those sorts of things in the summer holiday. We stood in this tremendous heat on this tarry playground. I can remember that vividly, again, waiting to see what would happen next.

In the afternoon we set off again in this trek on the buses and we did manage as we went along to lose some of them. They were accepted in villages. We got as far as West Runton and stopped. In the middle of the village was a cafe that was called "Three Ways" and there were a few shops there.

Somebody got out and said was there any possibility of us being accepted there. And the owner of the "Three Ways" cafe came out and she said, "Have you had a cup of tea?", and we said, "No, we haven't", and she said, "Come on". And we all got out and went into this lovely garden behind this sort of 'olde worlde' cafe. And she gave us tea and cakes and of course we stayed in West Runton for the next nine months. I sat in that garden surrounded by children and kept them entertained while all the forces were at work trying to get them into families. Get them accepted for the night because it was getting dark. And I just sang camp fire songs with them you know, all sorts of silly action songs. Gradually the group got smaller and smaller, as they got taken away to families. But there were still quite a number that they had no room for. One of the people who was helping ran the local scout group and there was a church hall which she used for her scouts, she took them there for the night. It was the boys that were the last ones. I don't know if that had any significance. But it was the boys that then went with her to this church hall and slept there for the night. And then of course there were three of us, three teachers, and we had nowhere to go. I think the whole village was seething about this, you can imagine the excitement. A Miss Harcourt, who was the headmistress of the local public girls school, offered us accommodation that night so we were pretty comfortable.

I wasn't one of the leaders obviously. We had the Head and the Deputy of each of the schools, so I suppose there would have been three Heads there and so they would have been extremely busy and I would have been one of those who was just keeping the children happy and entertained.

*Thelma's letter dated Sept 5th gives some idea:*

We arrived here yesterday evening from Yarmouth and managed to get all the children billeted into houses. I am staying at the moment with two of the Infant's teachers at a gorgeous house. It is just like a house in the Ideal Homes' Exhibition - beautiful oak staircase, central heating, wonderful garden, etc. etc. Miss Harcourt is the headmistress of a boarding-school and told me this morning that she was too well brought up to know how to cook and as her maid has left we can have bed and breakfast here but will have to have other meals out.

Well we have a meeting at 11 o'clock this morning and perhaps we shall hear what is going to happen next. The whole time we have been quite in the dark as to what was going to happen next - but you never know.

*Mrs. Pugh was one of the children evacuated. She recalls:*

Well, it all started on September 1st 1939, and the memory still lingers strongly. We, meaning my sisters Elsie aged 11 years and Rosetta (Rosie for short) who was just 6 years old, gathered with other schoolchildren outside Spurling Road School. We all carried a variety of cases, holdalls, rucksacks containing a change of clothes, some sandwiches and, of course, our gas-masks. From the school we walked to Dagenham Dock, accompanied by my Mother, with Rosie crying incessantly as she complained of the long journey. Elsie could not have cared less, regarding it as high adventure. I was the eldest at 13 years and was deemed to be in charge and had to act the part.

On arrival at the Dock we boarded the Royal Sovereign - a Thames paddle steamer - and we were told we were being taken to Great Yarmouth in case of war. Well, as one can imagine, it was a long and tiring journey lasting nine hours, luckily the weather was mild. On disembarking we walked to a school somewhere in the town where we were issued with a palliasse and a blanket. We had a meal of cold saveloys and lemonade against a background of Rosie crying for her Mother.

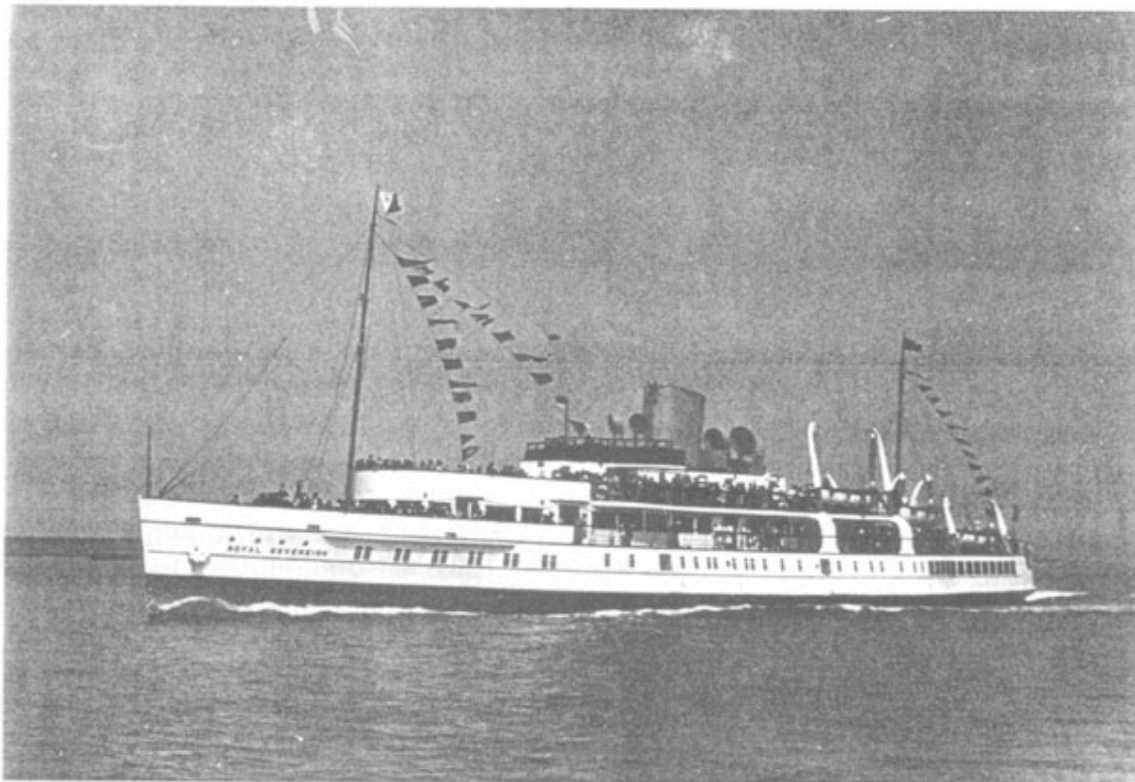
*Mrs. Pugh continues:*

On Saturday (2nd) we were taken to the beach to play and I remember two ladies buying us some rock. Lunch was the usual cold saveloys - no hot meals all the time we were there.

On Sunday 3rd we were told that war had been declared and soon after the announcement came the first air-raid warning, a fearful sound but happily a false alarm.

The next day we moved inland and were each issued with 'iron rations' - a tin of corned beef, a pound of biscuits and a half-pound bar of Cadbury's milk chocolate (and a warning that in no way were we to eat them). We then boarded buses for an unknown destination. Half way we stopped for sandwiches and a drink and here met my eldest brother's wife - Ivy and her two children Leonard and Sylvia. The girl was about 2 months old and the boy about 2 years.

We re-boarded the buses and eventually arrived at our final stopping place - a village called Thorpe Market.



The "Royal Sovereign," one of the vessels used in the evacuation.

## NORTH NORFOLK PREPARES FOR THE EVACUEES

*The people receiving the evacuees were as confused as the evacuees themselves. Mrs. Chestney's late husband was the Headmaster of the village school East Runton, Norfolk, and also the billeting officer for the area. She vividly remembers the arrival of the evacuees.*

We were told to expect 3 bus-loads of children. We were all prepared, we made a list of where the children could go, and who could have them and how many; and then they didn't come, having waited around for a long time.

Two buses arrived, full of mothers with young children. Well that quite a different matter from putting up schoolchildren! So we had to work hard to find out where these families could go. However, we got them all settled somehow or other, but before we did so, another busload arrived, with schoolchildren, on the same day. And that made things all the worse, because some of the accommodation had been changed.

*Mrs Barker remembers:*

That early September afternoon was very hot, we stood and waited for [the evacuees] on the school common. When they arrived all were sat down, and we appeared to choose the poor tired little children. All the children had labels on them, also gasmasks tied round their necks when they arrived. For years I kept those labels,

*Local people were expected to help out if they could Mrs Chestney recalls that:*

if necessary they [the authorities] could force children on you, if you had the room. There had been a census I think as to how many rooms there were vacant in the village.

*However, local people could and did exercise some selection. Mrs. Chestney and her husband:*

went round the village before they came, to find out who would have what, one boy or one girl, or 2 boys, or whatever, and I think the time came there was such a muddle because of the upset of who came and who didn't, that it was a case of those who said they'd like 2 girls went and said, "you come along with me", and it went like that.

*As a result of this 'help yourself' system, the Billeting Officer and his wife were left with a 'little terror' called Leslie whom nobody else would take.*

*Mrs Barker recalls her own feelings about seeing a family split up:*

I had agreed to have two girls, having one of my own, aged 10. The girls had were with a brother. They begged not to be separated as their mother had urged them to stay together. I then found that the girls were friends, just couldn't have the boy, so with tears the boy went to the village with [another couple]. I said to Victor you can come often to see your sister Doreen. He was only 7, and 6 his sister. It was a sad time for the children leaving their parents to come and live with strangers'

*Nor were the evacuees always happy with their hosts. Mrs Pugh recalled:*

We were put down on the village green and then the fun began. Fun being another word for 'Indignity'. We were to be housed in private homes - the owners being allowed to choose who

they wanted. How they decided I will never know, perhaps it was the best dressed, best scrubbed, the right sex and the number in the family. All I remember was the humiliation of the whole scene. We three were separated, Elsie being led off and Rosie and I taken to a cottage owned by a 90 year old spinster - it must have been a last-minute choice of billet.

*Others had a happier time, Mrs Willis was one of the children involved in her "Memories of Evacuation" she recalls:*

I was only eight when evacuated but certain things I can still remember. There were all of us children marching down the Heathway, Dagenham to catch the boat from Dagenham Dock to take us away from the bombing that our parents thought would take place.

When we docked (in Yarmouth) we were taken to a school which I think was called 'The Strand'. We slept on mattresses on the floor.

It must have been the next day the teachers took us into the village to find people who would look after us in their homes. I was with my sister but somehow came to be parted.

I was first put in a house with another boy called Les. The people who looked after us were very old I think. We must have been too noisy or naughty for them because we did not stay long. My next stay was in a very nice bungalow. The woman said she would only take one boy and I was the one that stayed. They were nice people. Mr & Mrs Melton were their names and they really looked after me.

The bungalow was right by the school. I remember jumping over the railings into the playground - always early for school. We went to church just down the road.

The village where all this happened was a place called East Runton at Cromer. It was near the sea and often we went and played on the sands. My sister stayed at West Runton. I used to walk to see her, she didn't like where she stayed. I don't think we stayed away long. I remember my mother coming down by coach to take us home and my dad waiting at Parsloes School for us to arrive home.

In 1987 I paid a visit to Cromer and I thought I would visit East Runton and the bungalow where I had stayed all those years ago and to my surprise the people who had looked after me were still there. After a while they remembered me and I was invited in and had a good chat about those faraway years.

*Thelma recalls her accommodation, sorting out the schooling, and life in the countryside:*

The Boulevard was the name of the road. It was quite a rough road and it led straight down to the coast. It was really delightful and there were very interesting houses there and some quite wealthy people. Not enormous houses but interesting houses and I found that very pleasant. One of them invited us to her home to listen to music you know, quite a big room. The maid came in for us with a cake and some coffee and this was quite different from anything I'd experienced before. And another one gave us free run of her games room and that made life very very interesting.

*Some billets were changed a number of times as Thelma recalls:*



We'd only stayed at that house one night or two nights at the most and we moved into a little terraced house with a mother and daughter, quite small accommodation but very friendly we were welcome but she really hadn't got much room for us they suggested that we might apply for a house that was only used in the summer and we should write to the owners and see if we could have that while we were there.

*But this billet was not without tribulation:*

That bit of coast is facing north so the wind from the north, there was no land between that and the Arctic. It was really diabolical. We got a system going then of having a meal in East Runton in a pub at midday, we managed to organise that, just the three of us that were now living in this house together. The house was so cold because doors didn't fit properly as it was only intended for the summer and the cooker had something wrong with it. We made a cake once and left it in all night but it was like a biscuit in the morning, there was no way we could regulate it or cook properly on this stove.

We had problems immediately we moved into the house to put up blackout. We used black paper which was extremely difficult to use against the windows and shaded the light too, to stop light going towards the window. And the evening we were putting up all this the local policeman came along and we said, "What do you think of that?", and he said, "Yes, that's OK". So we were quite content with our efforts and then one evening. I was washing my hair up in the bathroom and there was a knock on the door and it was the policeman saying we were showing a light. Eventually we had to go to court about it. We thought it was absolutely ridiculous because no way could this light have been seen, the bathroom was on the side wall you see, and he said you could see it from up by the Links Hotel and we put on a practice of going up there and asking somebody to switch on a light and see if we could see it but we couldn't see it. It was really an amazing performance, but as I was the one who was in the bathroom at the time, I was the one who had to go to court you see.

I tried to keep this quiet from my parents because they worried about everything and they had come up for a holiday. It was peaceful and they'd come to stay with us in this very nice house and the day I had got to go to court I smuggled a hat out of the house pretending it was knitting or something. When I asked them whether they were going to Sheringham or Cromer, I was trying to persuade them to go in the opposite direction to Sheringham because I was going to Cromer Court. And when I got back in the evening I said, "Where have you been?" and they said, "We went for a walk round the back ways from East Runton into Cromer and showed Dad the new courthouse". Little did they realise I was in there. They went to visit the house where my mother helped with the children and the lady took great pleasure in showing them a newspaper cutting that said I'd been summoned for showing a light so they were quite staggered about that.

It was very amusing because being so young when I got there the policeman thought it was a great joke and said, "I hope you've brought your knitting because it's going to be a long session". And all these different cases were very funny. One was about cows being led through the lanes and should have had a light on the tail of the last cow or something ridiculous.

I was the last one to be cross-examined and they said, "Have you any questions to ask?" and I said, "Yes", which startled the policeman somewhat. I asked him if he remembered coming in and helping us and saying that our blackout was all right, you see. Well, he was a big nonplussed about this and so they said "Ten shilling fine and no costs" or something like that. It was just another chapter in the fun as far as I was concerned.

*Some children were moved from billet to billet, Mrs Pugh was evacuated with her sisters Elsie and Rosie. Their first billet was a guest house. Elsie was found a billet at Gunton Hall and Mrs. Pugh remained in the guesthouse until:*

As time passed, the authorities decided that our landlady was getting too old to look after us and I was offered a home on a farm. It was further from the school but it meant that we would be in a younger and better environment. Here there was a family of five - parents and three children.

On the farm I enjoyed loading the sugar beet into the cart and later the threshing. I also did some gleanings for another farm whilst I was with the "old lady". This farm was nearer the village green and owned by a couple who worked for the BBC. I well remember the lady had a disfigured face which she kept covered with a headscarf.

In our small way we enjoyed ourselves until the onset of winter. It was severe with snowdrifts as high as the single-decker bus. We had a two mile walk up the lane to the main road and if the bus was cancelled, another two mile walk to school. Often we were late. As I said, there were three children in the family at the farm. Keith was about five, then there was Marianne and the baby called Stuart. Keith was very spoiled and could do no wrong. I made a snowman one day on the chopping block and he kept knocking it off. I repeatedly told him not to do it and when he persisted I gave him a gentle push. At this he began bawling his eyes out and I was banned to the bedroom until further notice. The Evacuation Officer was duly informed and that was the end of my days on the farm.

From there I was put in a farm labourer's cottage. The place was lit by lamp light and made mending of my personal belongings very difficult. In spite of our humble beginnings, we had always enjoyed the luxury of electric light at home. I think this was the start of my eyes slowly deteriorating. I complained of headaches but was accused of being lazy. How I disliked this billet, plus the fact that I was not allowed out after school to go to the village. The reason for this being that I was accused of wanting to chase boys when in fact I only wanted to visit my friends on the farm. These were very narrow-minded people. I suppose they felt a sense of responsibility towards us at the time.

*Mrs. Chestney remembers the poverty of some of the London children on arrival:*

They came with only what they stood up in in some cases; and we worked hard all of us in the village, to fit them out. I remember going to Cromer with a crowd to fit them out with boots. Some of the ladies of the village made overcoats for them out of somebody else's overcoat. Some children were well dressed, but there were a lot of poor cases.

*The health and cleanliness of the Dagenham was also a source of concern to their Norfolk hosts. Many local people remember head lice and impetigo. Mrs. Pashley and Mrs. Goose both Runton schoolgirls in 1939; recall that not only did the London children speak differently they*

were covered in nits, horrible head lice. The poor children had impetigo badly and these awful sores in their hair.

*Mrs Chestney found herself under pressure:*

Personally I was busy trying to keep the peace, to quieten the parents down because some of the children were dirty, and of course that spread to the local children, which was very upsetting. Yes, head lice, well you can hardly expect otherwise. They were evacuated by boat, and the only

accommodation was on Yarmouth racecourse, which was not exactly the best place to be put, even for a night or two.

*Not surprisingly, too, there was bedwetting to cope with. Mrs Bell recalls:*

I could remember another thing which was peculiar to the evacuees and I know that nearly all of them, lots of them, they wet the bed. We used to have lots and lots of sheets, because they were so disturbed and some of them were so tiny and they had been dragged away from mother to a totally different environment, different habits. There was always an awful lot of trouble with wet knickers and wet beds all the time from the evacuees because of this emotional disturbance.

*Whilst Mrs. Pashley and Mrs Goose remember:*

That was another thing we couldn't understand I suppose when people used to say well they wet the bed and nobody else did. It was nerves, I should think Yes, I remember there was one who always wet and they were always teasing this poor lad.

*Mrs Barker recalls that 6 year old Doreen who stayed with her:*

was homesick, and often wet the bed. Pamela being younger thought this funny. In the morning she would sing "Doreen has wet the bed again and again." Poor Doreen cried, I knew it was nerves.

*Initial homesickness must have been sharpened by the differences between town and country ways of life. Mrs Chestney remembers:*

A lot of the [evacuated] parents who came with their young families were absolutely fed up to the teeth because there were no cinemas and there was only one pub, and no chips. And very soon the families, well all the parents, had gone back home.

*Food and diet were distinctly different for the young evacuees. Mrs Joyce Hawes, nee Cross, remembers an evacuated family; plus 2 brothers aged 10 and 6; staying with her family."*

They didn't know anything about any food. Almost everything my mother cooked, prepared and served, they just didn't know what it was. Fish and chips, of course, and pineapple, which, of course, used to be the very cheapest tinned fruit - they knew that, but they were very fastidious. They just didn't know the food when they first came.

*Mrs. Janet Hurn, nee Lansdell, also a Runton child, recalls impressions of the evacuated children:*

They had been through a lot, so they looked rough, and ways of living were completely different to us - I mean the young girl we had, she wouldn't eat any of the good solid foods. Every time Mother said to her, "Well, what would you like?" - it would be "fish and chips" - whereas we didn't know what fish and chips were. Of course, they brought in impetigo and we didn't know what it was until we were all painted purple.

*But Mrs Chestney was confident about the benefits of a rural diet in wartime:*

[The evacuees] were certainly well nourished when they went away! I think country people do feed their families better than they get in the town ... we had rationing yes, but the more you had in the house the more rations you got.

*Mrs Hurn's mother had one evacuated child but was not too worried feeding an extra mouth as milk was always available, despite rationing, and the family had their own chickens and rabbits.*



Runton church hall, used for overflow classes, 1986.

## SETTLING INTO NORTH NORFOLK

*Once the party of Dagenham children had been settled with families, and their teachers either billeted or renting their own accommodation, the routines of school and leisure time had to be re-established.*

*Thelma remembers:*

It was a very beautiful place and that September was lovely too. So of course the next morning was a very relaxed feeling compared to what we'd been through before. And we had a meeting in the cafe with the local teachers and the headteacher. We discovered that there was a group from Grays there already who had been evacuated there. So we were quite a lot of children and teachers without a school and the local headmaster had a school in East Runton which must have been a couple of miles away southwards towards Cromer and quite a tiny school. So he didn't know how he was going to accommodate this great influx of children.

*By the 1930s there were about 75 children attending the school, divided into 3 classes The arrival of the Dagenham children in September caused the school population to double overnight The problems this caused were numerous.*

*Thelma recalls that:*

They used a hall in East Runton, part of the time and in the local school but I was only in the school. But as I say we were so overstaffed that we spent quite a lot of time in the headmaster's house having cups of tea and coffee and waiting. I suppose we taught on a rota really because there were just too many teachers. We discovered that there were other Dagenham teachers in the area and we met up with some who lived in the East Runton Hotel. We had quite sociable times and they came to our house and we went to dances. It was all quite fun before they were gradually recalled and we got down to very few. But I suppose up to Christmas there were masses of us there.

I remember writing on the beach. And obviously I was very interested in geography and so it was really delightful for me to be teaching in that way. I was very happy about it. It didn't worry me at all.

Quite a big group of the children went to a house where there was a big family and because they had plenty of space. I think they used it as a boarding house and not a guest house because it wasn't smart enough for that.

But they needed help there so I got in touch with my mother and asked her if she'd like to come and help and she did. She came up and stayed for a short time, I don't know how long it was now, but of course in the end she got worried about my father being left at home and she went home as well. But for this short time she was up there, as well at this sort of menagerie of masses of children. I used to sort of go and visit her in the evenings. I didn't worry about the darkness or being in the countryside at all. I was quite happy being there. It was an eye-opener to me and of course they made a fuss of us.

In the first few weeks we no sooner got a system going than a lot of children went back because nothing happened as far as London was involved. Nothing was happening at all. They weren't being bombed, so of course children wanted to go home and parents wanted their children. We were too far away for the parents to visit which was very sad.

*Thelma wrote to her parents on 1st October:*

I had only 20 Dagenham children in school today. A lot more of them have gone home. I expect next Monday I shall only have ten. There are still no signs of us returning.

Next week all the children, Norfolk and Dagenham, are going to be in school together and we are going to teach with 3 teachers in one room. What a hope!!

Most of them returned it seemed to me. I can't remember many of the Dagenham children. It's the locals that I got involved with, but there must have been Dagenham children otherwise we wouldn't have stayed there. It was interesting at first when we settled down and we had regular teaching when we were teaching half the day Dagenham children, half the day local children. I can remember using quite a normal classroom and the difference between the attitudes was very marked. Dagenham children were very used to formal ways of being treated in the classroom and they would be very well behaved and would only answer once they'd put their hands up or they would sit straight and wait for things to be given out and all that sort of performance. It surprised me because my own school was so experimental but these children were rather different from the ones I'd been used to. And the local children were absolute individuals. They'd been in a very small school and treated as individuals. They came from farms and they walked miles on their own and they were much more difficult to control in a big group than the Dagenham children. And of course they were amazed at the whole situation. All these different children and all these teachers. They only had three staff in that little school and suddenly they'd got masses of people everywhere.

*Mrs Rowney nee Heather Bell, wasn't so enthusiastic:*

The little evacuees.. the ones in my class, I remember they weren't so bright they certainly were not up to us and I can't remember whether we were taught together, but they were lagging behind, for some unknown reasons probably because where they came from, they had had much larger classes, whereas in a small village school you only had a small number. So the teacher could concentrate on us!

*Some of the Dagenham children were squeezed into the Runton school classrooms. Whilst others had lessons at the East Runton Reading Room. Many people remember the system of morning and afternoon shifts, with half the children in school while the other half went to Mrs. Chestney's house to knit for the troops, weave or do needlework, or went for country rambles. Not that the Dagenham children really minded*

*Mrs Hawes recalls:*

We liked [the fact] that we didn't have such strict lesson times and it was disorganised and we were scattered all over the village into different buildings - it was exciting.

*Mrs Pugh remembers there was, to begin with, some friction with the local children:*

As the snow lay thick we were unable to go home for lunch so we ate sandwiches (no school meals in those days). After eating we were locked out of the school in the cold and at the mercy of the bullying bigger boys.

They succeeded one day to chase us miles across country. After being chased for some time we looked for a safe refuge and decided that the 'Girls' Toilet' would be the best bet. However, not



to be put off, they followed us in there. Not the most desirable of places. The toilets consisted of a seat across a trench which the caretaker had to clean out daily. The one luxury was the fact that they were individual and could be secured with a key. The boys persisted and stood guard until the bell went. The Headmaster was not at all pleased when he heard about it and naturally blamed us for encouraging the boys. All we were interested in was someone to play games with like "Knocking down ginger" and "Tippy-cat". However, we were unable to convince him of our innocence and we had to rely on the support of our own teachers from Dagenham to prevent him from banning us from the school indefinitely. The real ringleader was unmasked when a big boy of about 14 years or more threw a snowball through the school window and was immediately expelled.

*For the teachers in charge of the Dagenham children there was little time off duty. These children could not be left to their own devices after school and at weekends, and there were no cinemas, chip shops, transport or other urban amenities to occupy them. Consequently a variety of home-grown activities, such as music, dancing, handicrafts and cubs, scouts and guides were run by the Dagenham teachers, in co-operation with their Runton counterparts.*

*Thelma's letters dated October 1st and 9th reflect the increasing involvement of the newcomers:*

The concert Wednesday night was quite good. It was only the boarding school, their staff and the evacuated teachers. A small orchestra played, a choir and trio. They want us to join in and next Wednesday we are going to take some of the children up there and are going to sing songs. They also want us to join the orchestra. So if it is possible, perhaps Auntie Vera could get my violin and you could bring it up when you come. I may also be able to do something with my singing. We are also going to form a dramatic club with Miss Harcourt's teachers. I went to see the Guide captain of East Runton on Thursday and had tea with her. I am going to start Guides here on a Saturday afternoon and take her Guides as well. The Scouts met yesterday and I'm probably going to take the Cubs.

By the way, if there are any Guide books in my blue case will you please send them in the trunk.

The music teacher here has already lent me a violin and Miss Gunton has offered to lend me one.

My Guides have already been knitting 6" squares and are still doing so. Sixteen arrived Saturday for the meeting. It looks as though I shall have a pretty good company. The Scouts also seem as though they are going to flourish well. I went to orchestra yesterday afternoon. It was good. I played firsts and we played some music that we had played in the orchestra at college, and some by Peter Warlock. It only meets every fortnight, so it will be meeting the first Sunday you are here.

Doreen takes the senior boys for P.T. and last week she had them outside for the lesson. She told them to run and see if they could race each other. They all ran, but didn't stop as she told them to and she lost them in the hedges and fields - sounds like Will Hay.

*Joyce Hawes recalls being taught violin by Mr. Chestney who accompanied the dancing classes. Mrs Hawes later paid 6d (25p) a week to buy a violin from the school and played with the school orchestra at Cromer Town Hall.*

*Geoffrey Abbs, who was a Runton boy in 1939, also remembers violin lessons, and bamboo pipes accompanying the country dancing. Mrs. Hurn recalls that these pipes were made by the children.*

*Mrs Hawes was a member of the 1st Runton Guides, and remembers its leader, Miss Hensman, being joined by Miss Valentine. There was also a thriving Cub pack, which met in a local garage Geoffrey Abbs remembers Saturday morning meetings and after a particularly exhausting Saturday morning hike, Miss Valentine had carried him, he promised "when I'm a man I'll carry you!"*

*Thelma recalls these activities:*

We got quickly involved with our hobbies and I was quickly snapped up to take over the Guides. Then I started a Cub pack in West Runton. We used somebody's garage once a week and that was very good because I sort of taught from that angle, of doing your good deed and lighting fires and cooking food and it meant that that made discipline very simple. They were aiming for something in their ordinary day's work at school; the same as they would do at Cubs or Guides. My interest in music came in handy, the headmaster was very keen on music and played the violin and I did and I suppose my parents must have brought my violin up. And I also joined the Rural Music Association and went to play with a little orchestra.

*Thus both local and London children were occupied and educated and gradually learnt to live together. Mrs Chestney considered this integration went quite well.*

I think mainly the [evacuated] children themselves were quite happy to be with the other children; I don't remember any real squabbles.

*By Christmas 1939, the Dagenham group had been in Runton for nearly four month. Many of the evacuated mothers with young children had drifted back to London by this time. But the schoolchildren remained Special efforts were made by the Norfolk people to lay on Christmas treats.*

*Mrs Chestney recalls:*

We arranged that all the children should have a present, and we had a party, of course, and much to the amazement of the children, Father Christmas came walking down the railway line! And the Runton people gave the evacuees a party. And the visiting staff gave all children a party, and there was Punch & Judy; great excitement!

*Thelma recalled:*

Christmas of course was quite good in school. They went to a lot of trouble to make it enjoyable for the children and the Head came round to the different rooms and said to us, "If the children want to do something which you are surprised about, just let them". Well, that didn't mean anything to me, I didn't know what he was talking about. But school was beside the embankment of the railway line and we suddenly saw Father Christmas walking along the track with a sack over his back and of course as soon as the children spotted him they just went mad and all raced outside the school and that's of course, what he meant that if they wanted to go, let them, don't try and stop them. This was the local people giving presents and all sort of things for Father Christmas to distribute to the children.

*The planning for the evacuees had begun in November when Dagenham Council voted £900 towards the cost of Christmas parties for evacuees in the reception areas, and cheap travel vouchers for parents to visit their children.*

*For Mrs. Pugh's mother this led to a decision for Elsie to join the "returnees."*

Christmas came and my parents were invited to come and see us. This they did and Rosie cried so much my mother decided to take her home. At that time all was quiet as the bombing had not yet started.

*Thelma recalled that gradually their friends amongst the staff returned to Dagenham:*

Particularly some of the men went and we then joined with some of the people from Grays. Some of our children were being taught in a gardener's cottage in West Runton. Mr Lewis, who was from Grays, was standing in the doorway of two rooms and teaching both groups. Of course, the groups were so small that although the class wasn't very big, he was having to stand in the doorway of two rooms to teach them, I remember that.

*Children also continued to leave, Mrs. Pugh left in the spring of 1940 after six months of evacuation and summer coming in a holiday area:*

By now it was coming up to Easter and the people Elsie was staying with wrote to my mother and asked if they would take her home as they were expecting visitors for the summer and needed her room. My mother was furious saying "They are not staying where they are not welcome" and duly arrived to take Elsie away. Her bag was packed and left in the porch. The woman not having the decency to face my mother. I accompanied them and we arrived back at Dagenham once more.

*By the spring of 1940 the pleasures of living in the countryside meant different activities recalled in letters from Thelma dated April 30th and May 4th.*

I walked back from Sheringham and on the way heard the cuckoo. The trees are out now in leaf and the world doesn't seem such a dreadful place after all.

Thursday evening after taking Cubs I was taken by car to a concert at Holt given by the Rural Music School. Last night we cooked our tea up on a hill in East Runton and Miss Hensman, the Guide Captain came and brought some marshmallows with her which we toast on sticks.

*One of the more difficult things for the adults in Runton was the contact - or lack of it - with the Dagenham parents. Janet Hurn remembers her evacuated sister being visited by her parents from London:*

I remember [Margaret's] Mum and Dad coming to see her. I can see them now, her Dad was in a long black overcoat and a black bowler hat and the mother in a long fur coat. At the time I didn't know how to talk to them, we were flabbergasted ... Margaret with nothing and they arrived on the scene [so smart]. They came just the once.

*The mother of Mrs Chestney 'little terror' visited him one day.*

and she was so hurt that Leslie was calling me 'Mum', because my two were calling me Mum. I think she was very hurt and she decided it was time he went home. So she took him and I presume she went back to Dagenham.

*However, Mrs Barker seems to have gone out of her way to welcome her evacuees' parents for regular stays:*

Their father worked in Dagenham at Ford's and the parents were friends and often came up for weekends, as I could put them up a they gave me 5/-,

In this way friendships were made, which in a few cases continued after the evacuees left Norfolk. However the real difficulties of travel in wartime, the distances involved and the limitations of the visiting arrangements made for the parents by the Dagenham authorities, all meant that some evacuated children had little contact with their families.

Many Runton people say that both they and the Dagenham children understood the need for evacuation. Doreen Howells, who came from Gravesend but travelled to Norfolk with children from Dagenham, recalls that, aged 10, she knew exactly why she and her two younger sisters had separated from their parents and did not question the situation. Not that Runton was without reminders of war - ration and identity cards, shortages and queues, searchlights, blackouts and restricted zones were all facts of everyday life by 1942 Mrs Hurn remembers having to practise putting desks together at Runton school and getting underneath when the siren went Mrs Goose and Mrs Pashley recall being told to run home when they heard the siren go.

## PRACTISE PUTTING ON YOUR RESPIRATOR



1. Hold your breath. (To inhale gas may be fatal.)
2. Hold mask in front of face, thumbs inside straps.
3. Thrust chin well forward into mask. Pull straps as far over head as they will go.
4. Run finger round face-piece taking care head-straps are not twisted.

### MAKE SURE IT FITS

See that the rubber fits snugly at sides of jaw and under chin. The head-straps should be adjusted so that they hold the mask firmly on the face. To test for fit, hold a piece of soft, flat rubber or of soft tissue paper to end of mask and breathe in. The rubber or paper should stick.



## THE VIEW FROM DAGENHAM

*Perhaps unknown to the Dagenham evacuees, there was continuing official activity back in London. The Dagenham Post for 15th September 1939 ran as its main headline:*

Dagenham War Emergency Committee considering appointment of Liaison Officer in reception areas to deal with complaints of evacuees; now known that some mothers have returned to Dagenham, others have collected their children.

*Two weeks later, the paper reported more alarmingly.*

Dagenham Council Committee's Evacuation report family life broken; women and children 'strangers in a strange land'; mothers sleep on straw in empty houses; chaos in reception areas.

*To handle this difficult situation, and to prevent the further return of civilians to Dagenham, a small committee of Evacuation Liaison Officers was formed. They attempted initially to clarify who was where, who had left the reception areas already, and to deal with numerous complaints and problems. Their reports to the Council indicate that they were reliant on contacts with individuals such as billeting officers and WRVS organisers in the reception areas, and where they had no such contacts, they could often get little information about the wellbeing of the evacuees.*

*The first Evacuation Liaison Officers' report refers to the problems of returning mothers and in getting petrol to visit the reception areas.'*

Our difficulties have been many, First Petrol. In an attempt to conserve our ration, we have been forced to walk. The transport services in the towns and villages being non existent. It is a fact that in just over two days, Mrs Thomas has completely worn through soles of one pair of shoes.

*In addition:*

very many complaints have been made of the state of cleanliness of schoolchildren, especially with regard to heads. Unfortunately most of these are justified. This must have been caused by evacuation taking place after the school summer holidays before the usual system of medical examination could be commenced.

*However, a later report comments that:*

for the first time since commencing our duties we had an official admission that impetigo and scabies were known in the country villages before the entry of evacuees,

*Shortages of clothing and footwear took up a considerable amount of Liaison Officers' time, and they commend enthusiastically the new an second-hand clothing scheme run by the WVS in Cromer, In fact, arrangements for the evacuees in North Norfolk seem generally to have compared favourably with those elsewhere. The WVS in Cromer also took upon itself to visit evacuated schools and teachers, and advise foster parents not to frighten evacuees with tales of 'bogey men' and ghosts.*

*The Liaison Officers consistently tried to persuade parents to leave their children in the reception areas. A small panic spread during autumn of 1939, when it was rumoured that parents would have to start paying towards the cost of their absent children's keep. The office urged the Council to ask the local MP to protest against this Government plan.*

*Clearly the evacuees remained in the minds of the councillors and officials of Dagenham, and arrangements for their welfare were felt to be a matter of civic concern. Nonetheless, the distance between Dagenham and the reception areas made real involvement difficult from the start, and the recollections of teachers like Thelma Wolfe and of the people of Runt on, convey a spirit of "getting on with it" for both the evacuation parties, and their hosts.*



## MOVING ON

*By the early summer of 1940, as German troops pushed west towards the Channel the east coast of England became increasingly concerned with the threat of invasion, As the war progressed Joyce Hawes remembers barricades in the streets, gun sites and mines on the beaches and bombing convoys overhead Mrs Pashley and Mrs. Goose recall the barrage balloons which were sent up to protect the skies over Norfolk and the incendiary bombs which managed to get through. Later in the war, Cromer suffered several air raids with some loss of life.*

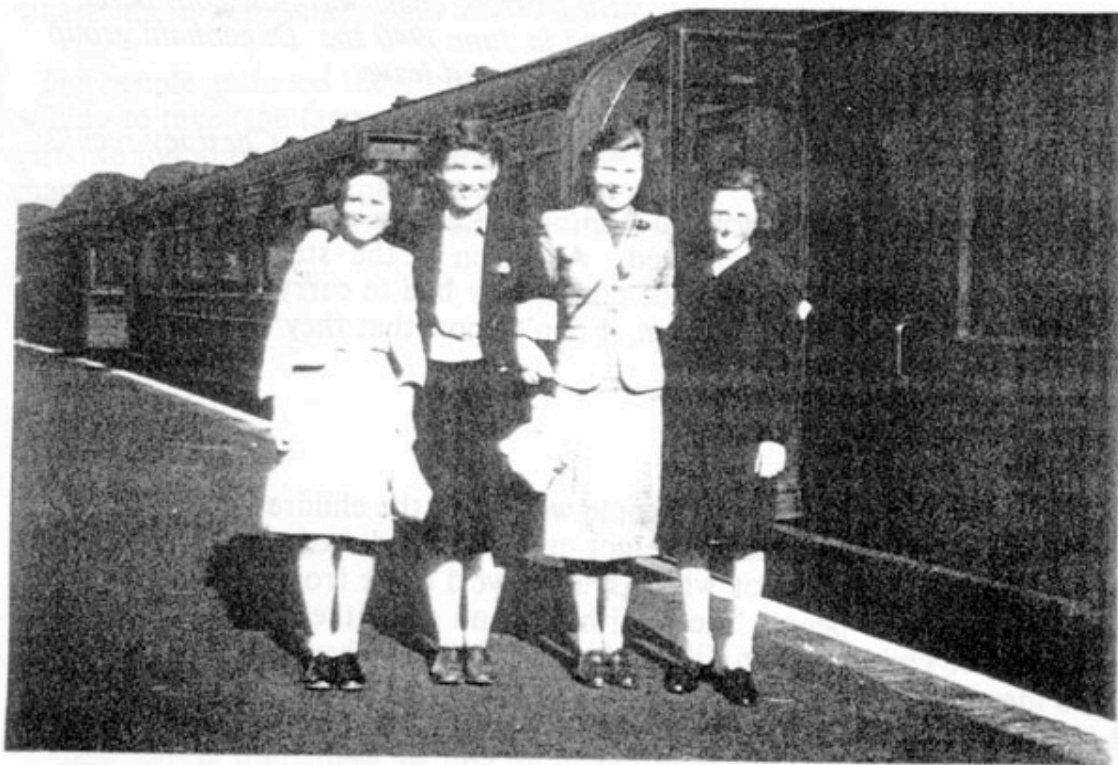
*North Norfolk, on the North Sea Coast, enemy planes, Thelma recalls, was in the flight path of some enemy planes. Thelma recalls:*

Being on the coast. In the October or November a German plane had to come down on the beach at Sheringham and we all walked along to have a look at it. I suppose the army was there and we had to start showing our identity cards when we went into Cromer. They stopped us on the road because they were worried about an invasion. Of course it was crazy having children evacuated there so we just got the message that we'd all got to move from there and we had to assemble at Cromer station. We didn't know where we were going again, we just had to pack up.

*Not surprisingly, the formerly peaceful Norfolk coast was now considered to be unsafe for evacuated children, and in June 1940 the Dagenham group and their teachers were instructed to pack up and leave.*

*Many Norfolk people remember the day of departure. Mrs. Chestney recalls:*

We were stopped on the way from Runton to Cromer, everybody had to stop and have their identity cards checked. And then on the station there were all the children with their little bags of goods, they had to carry what they could, and what was left had to be sent on, I don't know that they'd acquired much except a few good clothes.



Leaving Norfolk for Staffordshire.

*Thelma again:*

We were a bit sad and the local people were sad, the children especially were sad we were going because we got quite attached to them. Again we sort of clung to staff regardless of which schools we'd come from or which area. We said to the Grays people "Keep with us", and so on the train we got quite a mixed bag of children from different areas. So that when the train set off we'd no idea at all where it was going. And I couldn't imagine that we were just going west because all railway lines go to, as far as I was concerned, the network is from London. But they joined up and we went right across westwards.

*The Dagenham party ended up in Staffordshire for a further period of evacuation before returning to London.*

*Neither was the experience of evacuation over for those children who had already returned to Dagenham. In July 1940, with the blitz affecting East London, children were on the move again, Mrs. Pugh recalls:*

So it all began again but this time much more organised. Our clothing had to be three of everything and we had to submit to a medical and head inspection before being passed as ready for departure. This time we were told the exact date we would be leaving. The day dawned and we boarded a double-decker bus which took us to Heathway underground station (a stones throw away from the school). We were on our way to the West country.

My father had arranged to see us off at the main line station, which in this case was Paddington. We worried at his absence due to circumstances which were unknown to us at the time. We all assembled at the school where we were labelled (seen many times on TV) with our name and destination. There we were all lovely and clean and tidy waiting for the 'off'. Our train to Paddington from Heathway was a special. There were no stops and we were put ten to a carriage. At last we were on our way on the last leg of the journey to, of all places, "St. Germans". This caused us great amusement since we were supposed to be running away from 'them'.

Eventually we arrived at St.Germans where we boarded a coach and were driven to a place called Botus Fleming. We were transferred to a church hall where there were sandwiches and cakes and cold drinks.

The people gathered there had already decided the type of child they were willing to take (the farmers preferred boys naturally) and as we were three girls we found ourselves left until last. Just as we were beginning to despair a man in a clerical collar offered to take us saying that we should not be separated. Once more we were on our way to an unknown destination.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The Waltham Forest Oral History Workshop would like to thank Mrs Pashley, Mrs Hum, Mrs Goose, Mrs Hawes, Mrs Hinds, Mrs Rowney, Mrs. Yoxley, Mrs Barker, Mr. Abbs, Mrs Chestney, Mrs Howells, Mr. Mackie, and above all Thelma Wolfe, for so generously sharing their memories with us.

The Workshop acknowledges the cooperation and help given by Mrs Bolt and her staff of the Cliftonville Hotel, Cromer.

Mr. Norman Hicks of Eastern Counties' Newspapers helped publicise our visit to Cromer, joined our discussions there and subsequently sent press cuttings from 1939-40.

We also appreciate the assistance received from BBC Radio Norfolk for their help with our appeal for interviewees during our visit to Norfolk.

Staff at Valence House Museum and Valence Library in Dagenham helped with advice and photographs from the 'Evacuation Reports of the Liaison Borough of Dagenham, 1939-40', and the Dagenham Post' of August to October 1939.

Thanks are also due to the Director of the National Maritime Museum for permission to reproduce the photograph of M.V. Royal Sovereign.

Finally, Vestry House Museum in Walthamstow continues to support the Workshop, and house the material as a continuing resource, for members of the group and public alike.