



The Enigma Plot

Evacuees

A plan for safety

During the run-up to World War 2, the British government knew that war was coming, and they believed that many British cities would be bombed. They put in place a plan to try to make sure that children living in cities would be safe.

Operation Pied Piper

When war was declared, at the end of August 1939, the government's plan swung into action. It was called Operation Pied Piper, and it involved many thousands of children leaving their families and heading off on trains for distant parts of the country. The children wore name labels on their clothes, rather as if they were parcels. Neither the children nor their parents had any idea where they were going or where they would end up.



A strange sort of holiday

Both children and parents were encouraged to treat evacuation as 'an adventure' or 'a holiday', but in fact it must have been a terrifying time for many of them. When the children reached the end of their train journey, they were usually taken to a village hall. They had to line up and wait for a stranger to choose them - and then they found themselves heading off for a new home.

Some children had a very happy time as evacuees - they enjoyed living in the country and their hosts were kind to them. Other children had a terrible time - especially if they ended up living with someone who was cruel or who really just wanted an unpaid servant.

A false alarm?

In the meantime, the expected bombing of British cities didn't really happen - not in the first few



months of the war, at any rate. So many city families decided to take the risk and bring their evacuee children home again.

Fact Evacuees go back home

By Christmas 1939, just a few months after Operation Pied Piper, almost half of the evacuees were back with their families.

Second wave of evacuation

However, when Germany invaded France in June 1940, people were afraid that Britain would be invaded next. German aircraft and rockets began to bomb London almost every night. So once again, many children were sent away from the cities to try to avoid the bombs. Many of them remained as evacuees until the end of the war, in 1945. A few even stayed on with their adopted families and found a new life altogether.



Family stories

There may be someone in your family who was an evacuee or remembers talking to someone who experienced it. For example, as a very young boy, the author Rod Hunt had two evacuees – a mother and baby – staying with his family.

Why not ask about, and see if you can gather some stories from your family or friends? After all, that's what history is. Stories.

Some more websites to explore

- A BBC website with detailed information about children's lives in Britain during World War 2: http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/world_war2/
- A website run by the Second World War Experience Centre, about evacuees during World War 2, and including personal accounts of life as an evacuee: <http://www.war-experience.org/education/evacuation/evacuation-intro.asp>
- The stories of some of the people who worked at Bletchley Park during the Second World War, from the Bletchley Park website: <http://www.bletchleypark.org.uk/content/hist/history/Veterans.rhtm>
- Historical articles and videos from the Bletchley Park website: <http://www.bletchleypark.org.uk/content/hist/history.rhtm>
- Information about codes and ciphers, from the Bletchley Park website, with examples to try out, including a virtual Enigma machine: <http://www.bletchleypark.org.uk/edu/yc/codes.rhtm>

