

1939-45 - EVACUATION

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I have in my 'library' a book published by the Daily Express entitled 'These Tremendous Years – 1919-1938'. When I picked it up in a junk shop for a few pence I must admit for a brief moment I thought what a strange period to choose – surely 1939 would be a better ending point? But the book, of course, was written at the end of 1938 and was celebrating the fact that a Second World War had just been avoided - the final line reading 'and in Britain men and women settled down again to enjoy their peace.'

No doubt one of those settling down was Cyril Vincent Jenkins, the headmaster of West Byfleet Central School, who on the 27th September 1938 had recorded in the school log book that he had received 'orders to close the school at 4pm and to make preparations to receive children evacuated from London'. With Mr Chamberlain waving his little piece of paper a few days later promising 'peace in our time' the evacuation was cancelled and he was able to record that 'notice had been sent around the district by the Prefects that school will reopen this morning'.

Eleven months on, however, Mr Jenkins again had to record the preparations for the reception of children and mothers from London, noting on the 31st August 1939 'The first coach containing 25 boys and 4 masters and helpers from Southfields Secondary School, Wandsworth, arrived at school at 10am.'

He went on to record 'the method of reception in this and all following cases was as follows. The evacuees entered the school hall where they deposited their personal belongings. They passed then in order to a rest room, medical inspection room and a billeting room where billets were arranged by Mrs Romanes, Billeting Officer for West Byfleet. On allotment they recollected personal belongings, were handed rations for two days and then escorted to their billets by members of the WVS'. A second coach arrived half an hour later with children from Brandlehow Road School in Fulham.

One of the Southfield School children evacuated to this area later recalled the dashed hopes of him and his classmates as they travelled by train. 'There was no denying the disappointment which many of us felt in realizing that the Southern Railway had carried us so short a distance down the line. Perhaps the majority of us had hoped to take the air in Devonshire or Cornwall!'

Their disappointment was not eased by the apparent chaos and confusion caused by splitting the school up. 'We were divided into sections, without rhyme or reason, and invited to board buses which carried us to the homes of the four winds. One party of us was taken to Maidenhead, another to Byfleet, another to Old Woking, while a fourth was bid walk into the town of Woking itself!'

School children from south London were billeted all over the Woking area, as noted by the headmaster of the Central School at West Byfleet.

EVACUATION
OF
WOMEN AND CHILDREN
FROM LONDON, Etc.

FRIDAY, 1st SEPTEMBER.

Up and Down business trains as usual with few exceptions.

Main Line and Suburban services will be curtailed while evacuation is in progress during the day.

SATURDAY & SUNDAY,
SEPTEMBER 2nd & 3rd.

The train service will be exactly the same as on Friday.

Remember that there will be very few Down Mid-day business trains on Saturday.

SOUTHERN RAILWAY



DON'T do it,
Mother—

**LEAVE THE CHILDREN
WHERE THEY ARE**

ISSUED BY THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH



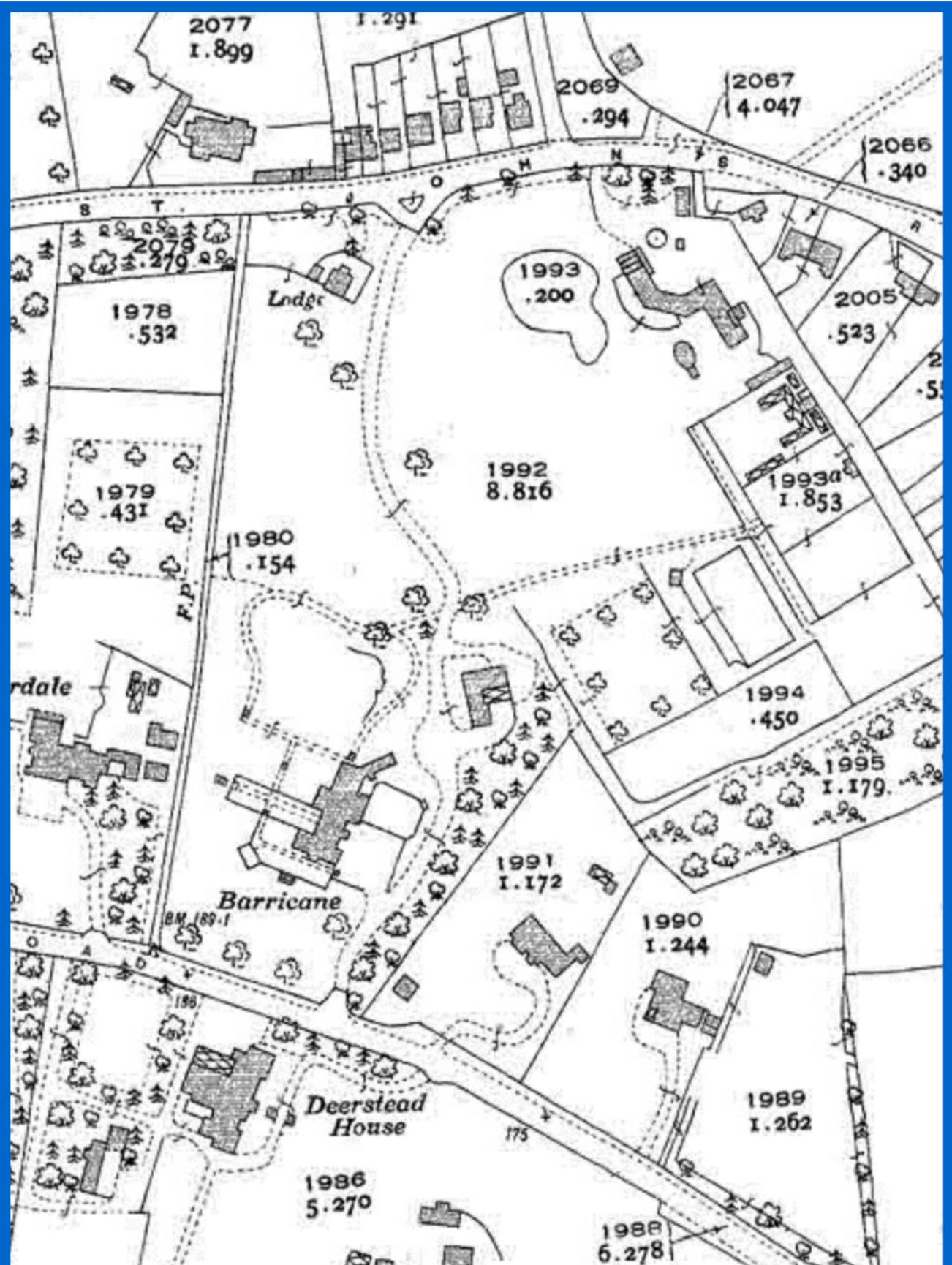
**LEAVE HITLER TO ME
SONNY— YOU OUGHT
TO BE OUT OF LONDON**

Wartime Posters urging children to be evacuated from London



**LEAVE THIS TO US
SONNY— YOU OUGHT
TO BE OUT OF LONDON**

MINISTRY OF HEALTH EVACUATION SCHEME



Barricane on St Johns Hill Road became the temporary home of the Putney County School for Girls (Mayfield).

I am not certain whether the recollection of 'Maidenhead' is entirely accurate, but he was not the only one to note the confusion at Woking Station. On the 1st September Her Majesty's Inspector, Miss George, arrived at West Byfleet School and was immediately made aware of the chaos that the authorities were causing at Woking. The headmaster noted 'I asked Miss George to go to the railhead to see if the evacuation officer would arrange for complete schools to be sent to one district. Later Miss George returned with the information that the Evacuation Officer or authority could not or would not alter the organisation which was being carried on'.

The teachers and children of Mayfield Girls School in Putney (who were to share the Woking Girls Grammar School premises in Park Road) also noted the chaos with one member recording in 'retrospect' in the school magazine 'our numbers being whirled off rapidly by bus, to unknown destinations and in wholly incalculable permutations and combinations'. They wondered whether they would ever meet again, but of course they did and eventually settled down with the Woking Girls using the Park Road site on Mondays, Wednesdays and

Fridays and the 'Mayfield' girls using the premises on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays – although classes were eventually taken at Barricane, a large house at St Johns Hill that the school took over in November 1940.

Life at Barricane appears to have been idyllic, if notes in the school magazine are anything to go by.

'The gardens command a lovely view of a wide sweep of wooded country fading into the blue mist of the hills on the horizon.'

'The house itself, wisteria and creeper covered, is modern, in excellent condition which it is our pride to preserve. Most noticeable is the abundance of woodwork – panelled library (now a class room), hall and dining room, fine parquet floors, the solid wooden doors and broad staircase. To turn a private house into a school for two hundred and forty girls and twenty staff, is not an easy matter and has taxed the ingenuity of staff and school. Corridors, alcoves in class rooms and wardrobe cupboards have been turned into cloakrooms, forms have had to be carefully chosen for classrooms according to the number of desks each would hold, and a junior and senior morning assembly are held separately, as the

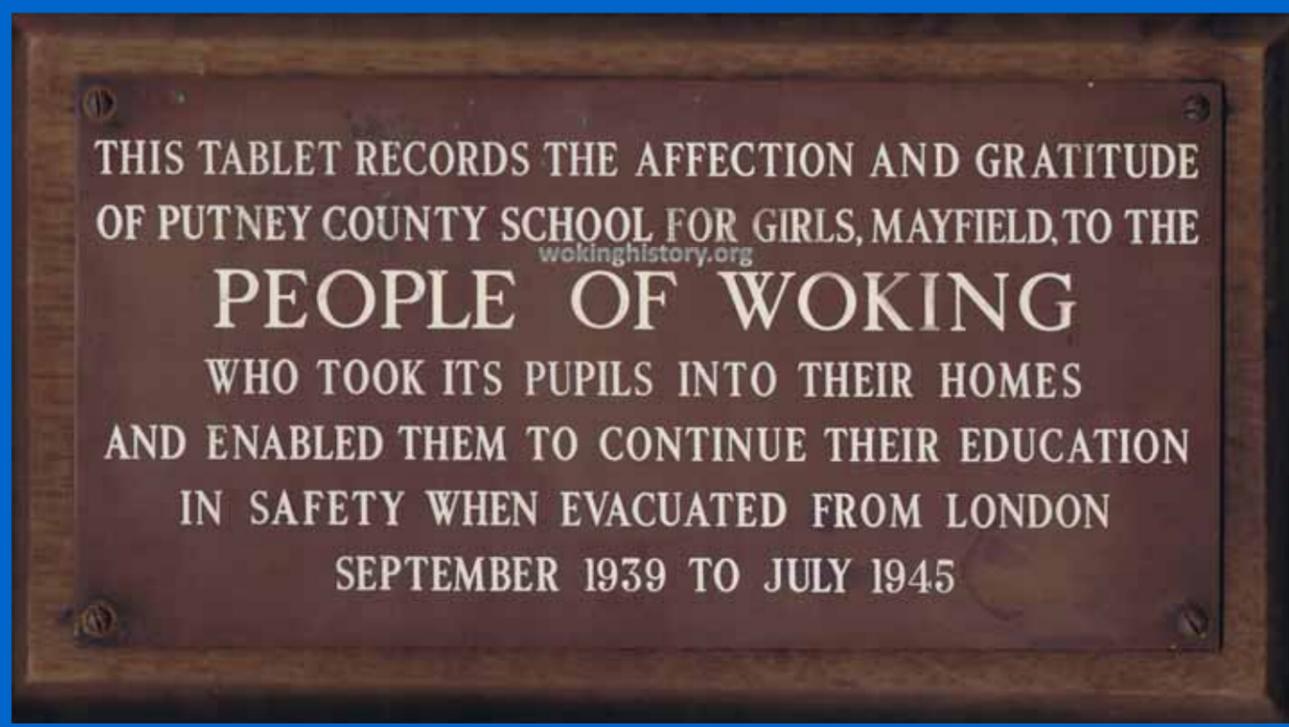


hall will not hold more than a hundred and twenty. Nearly every classroom has hot and cold running water (very useful for the improvised laboratory and art room); we boast five baths and of extensive kitchen quarters. Miss Hobbs and her three helpers, Mrs Mine, Mrs Smith and Mrs MacDonald provide about one hundred and fifty lunches daily (6d each); the dining room, like a revelation suit case, expands to its utmost limits for the two sittings. The forms taking Domestic Science now have plenty of scope for helping in the preparing and cooking of meals'.

'The accommodation at Barricane is limited for our numbers, and we have all had to learn to live at closer quarters with one another than in the spaciousness of Mayfield, and there are difficult times – that bottle-neck outside the staff room; break on a wet day with buns in the hall, milk in the dining room and girls everywhere; the last morning of term when all the end of term proceedings have to be duplicated.'

'We have also accommodation elsewhere. We

After the war Mayfield School presented the plaque, below, to Woking and paid for some beds in the Woking Victoria Hospital



have the use of the large playing field of a prep school ten minutes walk from our building, and we still use the laboratory and hall of the Woking County Girls School each afternoon for science and gymnastic lessons. We have also been fortunate since Easter in securing the top floor of a house just across the road from our own, for the use of the Sixth Forms, especially the commercial Sixth, and for our library. More of the library at Mayfield and the greater part of the fiction library are being brought down for our use. The latest arrival from Putney is the grand piano, which bears the marks on its frame of the strange vicissitudes through which it has passed since it was last used by the school in August 1939.'

Practically every local school was involved one way or another with the evacuation. At Kingfield, Miss Wilson (of The Grange, Old Woking), as Deputy Billeting Officer was apparently busy at the Central School where she had everything well organised and under control with troops from the local boy scouts giving directions to those who were lost.

Sadly, however, there were not enough places in people's homes for all the evacuees and in Woking the council agreed to provide two

Many large houses in the Woking area were commandeered by the council as hostels – Surrey County Council taking over Lismore on the corner of Heathside Road and White Rose Lane.

hostels (one for boys, one for girls), possibly after a run-in with the Ministry of Health when a party of school children were apparently sent back to London 'because no billets could be found for them'.

According to one account 'The Ministry of Health were not impressed and told the council that if they did not use compulsory billeting powers, the ministry would assume control. The council called for volunteers again, but with little effect, some residents interviewed noting that there wasn't so much fuss in the last war when zeppelins bombed London, and others complaining that it was impossible to 'go out to tea' if they had children staying with them.'

Sad to say some complained that telephone boxes and meters 'had been rifled' whilst other thought the town 'far too convenient for sponging parents to visit their children'.

Woking's Billeting Office was in Bath Road (more or less where Middle Walk is today), next to the Woking Civic Restaurant, with an evacuation hostel in Goldsworth Road (on the corner of Poole Road).

Other hostels were set up in large commandeered houses such as Dunblane House in Constitution Hill, Rockhurst and Highlands at Danes Hill and Lismore in Heathside Road. The Old Vicarage, The Gables, The Cedars, Berton Hatch, The Pines, John of Gaunt (Byfleet Corner), Marigolds and Foxton in the Old Woking Road and Marmion in Station Road at West Byfleet were also recorded as billeting hostels at that time.

Back in September 1939 Mr Jenkins at West Byfleet recorded that 'during the three days of evacuation 257 children from 17 different schools with 29 teachers or helpers including 7 head teachers, mothers and children under school age were received and billeted in the district. The Woking area had begun to do its bit towards the war!

THE MARIST SCHOOL

Another school that was evacuated to this area was the Marist Convent School from Fulham. They appear to have had a happier time than most, the eighteen children and three sisters all being billeted in West Byfleet where they eventually took over a house in Madeira Road called 'The Knowle',

Later they acquired a larger home called 'The Gables' on the corner of Sheerwater Road and Old Woking Road. Here they stayed throughout the war - and afterwards - the old house eventually being pulled down to make way for the new Marist School on the same site.

MEMORIES OF AN EVACUEE TO WOKING

For some the evacuation to Woking was a traumatic experience. One person who was evacuated to Woking recalled being sent here with his brother and how they were then split up. 'Bert and I arrived at Woking and were taken to a church hall. We sat on the floor while people walked about, picking children out like cattle. Some stopped in front of Bert and me: 'I'll take him, not that one...' An official s replied, 'You can't separate them, they're brothers.' But they

did. Bert was chosen by a nice family. They had a lovely home and later wanted to adopt him. I was left on my own, feeling totally rejected. Out of a church hall full of young kids, I had endured the pain of watching each of the others being chosen by a host family, wondering when my turn would come. When they took my brother away, my heart sank. How could they leave me? Why not take me? What was wrong with me? I was heartbroken.'

The boy in question was Freddie Foreman, who in the 1950's and 60's would become an associate of the infamous Kray Twins and a notorious East End killer! Did the wise women of Woking see something in this lad that would be a foretaste of what was to come, or heaven forbid did the experience of rejection in that Woking church hall set him on his course of hatred of humankind?