

The Women's Voluntary Services (WVS) and Evacuees



The WVS was established in 1938 to encourage women to join the Air Raid Precaution Service (ARP). They were given national responsibility for evacuation and eventually moved some 1.5 million people (primarily children) out of cities in the early days of September 1939. Many evacuees subsequently returned to their homes, preferring the danger of bombs and the company of familiar neighbours to living in a strange area. However, a considerable number stayed on in their new homes and were integrated into the community - as the list on the next page shows.

By 1941, 1 million women belonged to the WVS. It was a voluntary organisation in which no one held a specific rank. It had a uniform but it was not free so many members simply wore the badge on their lapels.

The casualty rate was high: 241 members of the WVS were killed during the May 1941 Blitz alone and many more were wounded.

In due course this largely unsung, but increasingly vital, organisation took on many other varied roles. They collected clothing for evacuees, the bombed out and other needy people. They helped with the distribution of food and drink to troops and to victims of bombing; over 10,000 people were fed by them over the 57 nights of the Blitz and the people who survived the bombing of Coventry received some 14,000 meals. After the 'All Clear' was sounded Incident Inquiry Points were established and manned to help people find out about relatives and friends in areas that had been bombed. On a wider and more general basis they educated everyone in not wasting what they had and assisting the authorities with food rationing. There was a Salvage Officer and Food Leader in every WVS centre. To help with this they ran a series of campaigns such as 'Salute the Soldier', 'Wings for Victory', 'Spitfire Funds' and 'Warship Week.'

Two key people in the Deddington WVS responsible for evacuees were:

Helen LOVEDAY who lived at Castle End. It was her job to devise and manage the processing system for receiving and allocating billets to those arriving by train at Ayno Halt Station.

Freyda ROBERTS was the wife of Major Reginald Roberts and lived in Deddington House. She had been a Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) nurse in WWI and so was given responsibility for caring for evacuee children arriving with ailments. The children were first given a medical examination in Foresters Hall in the Tchure.

Those who were identified as having impetigo or scabies were initially sent to stay with Mrs Roberts at Deddington House. She soon had to start a hospital at the Old Vicarage because the number of children arriving with medical problems could not be accommodated in her own house. Healthy children were interviewed in a room on the top floor of the British Legion building¹ and allocated to foster parents. The weekly amount paid by the Government for an unaccompanied child was 10s 6d,² with an additional 8s 6d for a second child and a further five shillings if a parent had to be accommodated as well.

Some of the evacuees who came to Deddington

Doreen ASHTON née Stewart.

She was at Campbell School in Beacontree, Essex, with Pauline Savill and was evacuated to Deddington with her mother. Doreen stayed on after the war and married Ken Ashton and now lives in Kidlington.

Ada BLISS née Sorrell (D).

She was sister to Henry Sorrell (Royal Corps of Signals) who is named on the War Memorial (p.56). Ada married Sergeant Arthur Bliss.

Pauline FRANKLYN née Savill and her younger brother Terry.

She married Lance Corporal Peter Franklyn. Their story is on page 131.

Ronnie HALE.

He was cousin to Derrick Robbins.

Edward LLOYD.

He was the son of a London docker. Lived with the Harper family (Harry and Daisy and nephew Albert) in what is now Quinque House on New Street. Teddy's older sister Rosie was lodged across the road with Sybil French. Both children went to the Primary School.

Derrick ROBBINS (D)

He arrived by train from London on his own to stay with his relatives, the Ells, who lived at Tower View. His extensive recollections (p.168) give a fascinating insight into Deddington during the war years.

Jonny RYAN.

Dorothy (Dol) TARLING, née Sorrell.

She was Ada's younger sister. She married Frank Tarling (p.64). After the war Ada and Dol were joined in Deddington by their mother Eva.

¹ Now the 'Royal' British Legion and occupying the same building - see page 38.

² Ten shillings and six pence - there were 20 shillings to the pound and 12 pence to the shilling prior to decimalisation on 15 February 1971.