

## The Women's Voluntary Service

The WVS was begun in 1938, as part of the lead-up to war, in the hope that women could be integrated into ARP work from the outset.

It was dramatically successful and the WVS badge became as familiar as the ARP badge in the Home Front. The women ran rest centres, mobile canteens, bomb-site field kitchens, nurseries and even mobile laundries.



The WVS, founded in 1938 with 5 members, had attracted almost a million by 1941; its mobile canteens brought an oasis to many a bomb-gutted street.

## THE AUXILIARY TERRITORIAL SERVICE

The ATS was the women's branch of the British Army. It was formed on September 9<sup>th</sup> 1938, initially as a women's voluntary service, and existed until 1<sup>st</sup> February 1949.

The first recruits were employed as cooks, clerks and store-keepers. Later they took over many support tasks such as radar operators, anti-aircraft crew members, military police and lorry drivers.

By VE Day there were over 190,000 members of the WATS, including our Queen when Princess Elizabeth and Mary Churchill, youngest daughter of the Prime Minister.

The ATS was succeeded by the WRAC, formed on February 1<sup>st</sup> 1949



September 1938: the call goes out for women to join the newly formed ATS - and so free men for combat duties in the event of war

## EVACUATION

Evacuation started in June 1939, seen as the practical solution to protecting children from bombs. Parents suffered a form of bereavement when their children left, while the children found themselves propelled into the unknown. Some had wonderful times, but others experienced utter misery.

Evacuation was voluntary, but having evacuees billeted on one was compulsory.

Normally, evacuated children travelled with their school-teachers or women who responded to posters seeking volunteers to help shepherd the children into trains and see them to their new homes, often in remote places.

Many suffered the humiliation of standing in church halls clutching their belongings while local people selected children they liked the look of. The cruelty of this reached its climax when brothers and sisters were split up - some people preferring to choose demure little girls and reject their older brothers.

Once the children had been billeted, cards were filled in with their new address and sent to their parents.

In other cases, boarding schools were evacuated en masse which at least allowed some stability.

By January 1940, long before the Blitz began, many children had been returned to their homes, though some were sent away again.

In June 1940, overseas evacuation to British dominions was arranged, but tragically an evacuee ship was sunk by a U-boat torpedo and 70 children lost their lives. This episode caused the scheme to be abandoned.

Evacuation did not guarantee safety from the war. In May 1942, for example, an air raid destroyed houses in Exeter, to which children had been evacuated.

From 'The Home Front' by Guy de la Bedoyere



Evacuees and their teacher settle down to dormitory life in the country



CHILDREN EVACUATED - SOUTH LONDON - ARRIVING AT TRAINING CAMP AUGUST 1939