

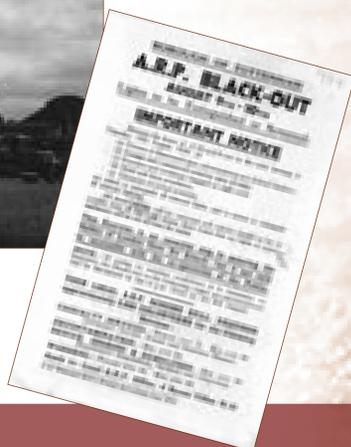
# Through the eyes of The Children

wartime memories

The Second World War ended in 1945. This exhibition commemorates the end of the war by recording memories of local people who lived through those years as children.

We look at their wartime experiences through their own eyes - from evacuation and school days, to life on the home front, their games and pastimes and how they celebrated victory on VE Day.

Their stories give us remarkable glimpses into their everyday lives as they recall what Haringey was like during the war.



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# Evacuation

With war fast approaching, the government wanted to protect people from the threat of air raids by evacuating children from towns and cities.

Before war began, one million children started to be evacuated on 1 September 1939. Most children travelled by train with their school to the safety of the countryside. This was seen as an adventure for some children - but an unhappy experience for others.

When the air raids did not happen, many evacuees began to go back home. But with Germany invading France and the beginning of the air attacks on Britain, there was a second evacuation of children.

**Here are some local people's recollections of that time:**

“The school I went to was in West Green Road, opposite the Catholic Church. That's where I was evacuated from, me and my sister. She was five and I was eight. I said goodbye to my dad that morning and never saw him any more because he got killed.

We went from Belmont Road Station. Parents weren't allowed to come on the platform with us so we just had to get on the train and go.



Some of us were crying... We got to Cambridge and we had to go to a centre and have our medical and our hair looked at in case we had nits. Then they gave us stuff to put in our sack, like crackers, to take with us. We all had our labels and our gas masks... They took us along, knocking at doors and said would you take a brother and sister in? We don't want to split two up.

**Barbara Leadbitter, born 1931**

“We went with my mother, brother and sister to Norfolk. The family we stayed with would sit round the table for the evening meal. Everybody sat there looking at the Londoners! The atmosphere wasn't good. My mother wanted to get back to London because nothing appeared to be happening. She wanted to get back to the doctor she knew and trusted because my brother was ill. She borrowed 30 shillings off the woman she was lodging with and got the train fare back.”

**Alan Barker, born 1936**

“I was billeted with a vicar. It was alien to me. I could not get on there. Couldn't stand it. I was moved on but I went from the frying pan into the fire because these people were very wealthy - I was an outcast. I had to eat on my own. I was not one of them... I overheard a conversation, she was explaining to her husband that I was 'like a scarecrow', badly dressed like a ragamuffin. It's made an impression on me ever since.”

**Ronald Powell, born 1930**



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# Bombing

German air attacks on Britain began in September 1940. Many were hurt and lost their homes during the bombings raids. By the end of the war, 7,736 children were killed and 7,622 were seriously wounded.

As part of Civil Defence, some children aged over 16 helped the Air Raid Precaution (ARP) services. They took up work that was highly dangerous. During air raids they could act as messengers, fire watchers, or working with the voluntary services.

In 1944 new weapons appeared as part of the enemy air raids - the V1 flying bomb and the V2 rocket. These caused more casualties and devastation. Locals recall the horrors and dangers of the air raids and how they tried to protect themselves:

“When the bombing started and things began to get very risky we trooped up to Manor House tube station along with lots of other families. We took flasks and necessities and the gas masks which were essential - we hadn't to forget those. I had a grown up one because I was eight years old but the young children, the infants, had what they called a 'Mickey Mouse' type with a flapping red nose - so I felt quite proud that I was given the adult's one.”

**Marian Cotton, born 1931**

“Our own house in Hartington Road in Tottenham was hit by incendiary bombs... I remember this particular night we came out [of our shelter] and the AFS, the air-raid wardens with their tin hats on... were putting out the flames on the roof of our house. But despite this, we soon gave up going into our shelter after a while - the Anderson shelter was cold and dark and had no lights - it was really very miserable.”

**Ivy Pittam, born 1926**

“We had a big Morrison table shelter in the living room in Cambridge. When the siren went off they used to wake us up and come down and get under this big bed. We used it as a table in the day but as a bed when the sirens went off. We never had no lights upstairs, nothing like that. We used to have a torch - everything was dark when we went out at night.”

**Barbara Leadbitter, born 1931**



“A couple of my mates and I were walking up the High Road (in Sible Hedingham). All of a sudden a Messerschmitt German plane appeared with a Spitfire on its tail shooting at it. Of course a lot of them were missing the German aircraft and ploughing into the road. We hadn't got time to get out of the way - it was zum, zum, zum and it was all over. I was dumbfounded, saw the bullets afterwards, looking at the road. Yes - quite exciting times really!”

**Doug Pittam,  
born 1928**



Tottenham schoolboy, Robert Searle, kept a record of bombing raids in his school exercise book. He lists the days, times and length of the raid.

Day	Time	Length
Monday	10:00 pm - 6:00 am	8 hours
Tuesday	10:00 pm - 6:00 am	8 hours
Wednesday	10:00 pm - 6:00 am	8 hours
Thursday	10:00 pm - 6:00 am	8 hours
Friday	10:00 pm - 6:00 am	8 hours
Saturday	10:00 pm - 6:00 am	8 hours
Sunday	10:00 pm - 6:00 am	8 hours
Monday	10:00 pm - 6:00 am	8 hours
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Sunday	10:00 pm - 6:00 am	8 hours



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# School

Children's schooling was greatly disrupted by the war. The mass evacuation of 1939 took many schoolchildren away from their own schools to other parts of the country.

School buildings were sometimes taken over for war use or had been damaged by bombs. The school day was often interrupted by air raids, making it difficult to have lessons or even attend school. There was a shortage of teachers and supplies of books, paper and equipment.

“Because we was Londoners and evacuees you did get picked out, especially in schools. Because you was an evacuee you had to take that malt - it was horrible but we had to have it in the playground at play time. They used to come out with these great big tins of cod liver oil and malt and you used to have to queue up and take it.”

**Barbara Leadbitter, born 1931**

“The teachers used to take us out on geographical walks as they called it - just to get us out learning about the countryside. It wasn't very specialised, just something to do. The education went on, it was quite good. We hardly ever saw the headmaster. While we were at school we had morning assembly in the cinema - morning prayers, hymns sung, morning assembly in the traditional way of those times. In the afternoon we had the use of the school, I think the Cambridge schoolchildren did their schooling in the morning and were free in the afternoon. I never got to know any of those children - I never met them.”

**Jim Clark, born 1929**

“One of the major events of my life while I was at Tottenham Grammar School was the falling of a V2 rocket. It was launched from a site somewhere in Europe and landed somewhere in London. It landed about fifty yards or so away from the school, just across the road. Two boys were killed and a third lost his arm. It affected the school. I can recall no panic. We were taken back to our classrooms, the register was called and we were then released for the day. We found out about the fatalities and the injury the following day.”

**Peter Calvert, born 1932**



“We had very, very little schooling because there weren't the teachers. Some had been called up, some weren't properly qualified. Some were very kind and said just come in when you can because they knew it was going to be difficult to get to school, if at all. So it mainly consisted of fairy stories, nursery rhymes, learning basic reading and maybe very basic arithmetic. It was very, very poor the schooling, for us anyway. Maybe for other children it was different.”

**Marian Cotton, born 1931**



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# Child's play

Children still had fun, despite the war. Those living as evacuees in the country could enjoy open air and the green spaces. The cinema was popular for both teenagers and younger children. New playgrounds could be found on bombsites - as well as looking for shrapnel to take home as souvenirs.

Models of tanks, guns and aircraft were in at first in demand as toys. But war shortages meant that people often made their own toys, from scrap materials. Books and comics were widely read - especially during the time spent in air raid shelters.

When the American soldiers (GIs) arrived in 1942, children saw American culture at first hand. The GIs generously gave away their off-ration chocolate and chewing gum to kids.

“I had a set of little plaster golden coloured rabbits, very small. Mrs Tulley was the air raid shelter warden. I remember and she used to tease me about these rabbits. I used to carry them on me, they were like lead toys, these little rabbits.”

*Bill Rust, born 1937*

“My main occupation during the war was going to the library. That was lovely - getting books and books and more books.

I remember one day going to the library with a young friend and we went for a walk along West Green Road and a German plane came over very, very low so we could almost see his face. He machine gunned the people in the road and we had to hide in a doorway.”

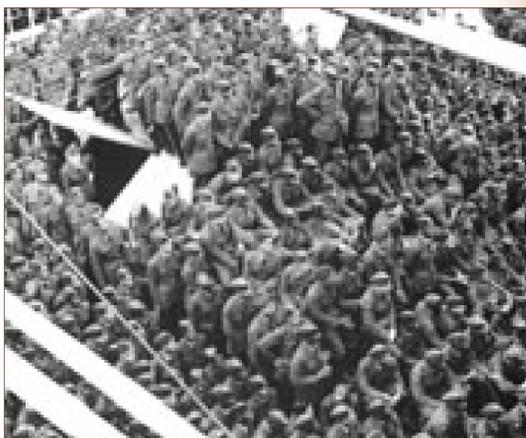
*Ivy Pittam, born 1926*

“I used to go to Alexandra Palace roller skating when I was kid. We used our skates to go to school as well. We'd used to play marbles a lot in the gutter.”

*Doug Pittam, born 1928*

“There was an American air base near to our evacuation home in Cambridge... Some American soldiers were coming through this park and we used to say to them: 'Have you got any gum chum?' If they didn't have gum on them they used to give us candy - very friendly.”

*Barbara Leadbitter, born 1931*



# Life on the home front

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Children, along with everyone else, coped with shortages of food and clothing. Rationing was introduced in January 1940, when food from abroad could no longer reach Britain.

The ration included restrictions on buying meat, sugar, butter, cheese, and eggs. The weekly sweet ration was 2oz (57g), the equivalent of one small bar of chocolate or packet of sweets.

Growing and eating your own vegetables was greatly encouraged. New recipes were also tried, 'making do' with what you had. Clothing was also rationed from June 1941. This was a problem for growing children who had to wear outfits from older brothers or sisters. From 1942 they were given extra coupons to help provide the clothes and shoes they needed.



“We used to have to eat tripe - horrible! Kidney, liver, egg powder - no eggs, it was all powdered. Most of it was vegetables - like carrots. You used to have toffee carrots, like toffee apple, but you put toffee on carrots - we used to eat them during the war. We had porridge. The only thing, because we was rationed, if we had two slices of toast, one spoonful of jam was put on the plate. If you used it all on one slice, it was tough - you didn't get another one.”

**Barbara Leadbitter, born 1931**

“There were things in particular - sweets, chocolate, all on ration. Food was very limited. We used to save up our coupons to buy something substantial rather than tiny bars of chocolate. We would spend it in one go, perhaps once a month. We were reduced at certain times to eating things from the herbalist (shop), I remember liquorice root and anything that resembled sweetmeats. Carrots, of course. We were encouraged to eat more vegetables.”

**Marian Cotton, born 1931**

“Old things of your mother's, anything you could beg or borrow had to be cut up and remade. Knitting wool was in very short supply, so old jumpers had to be unpicked and wound into 'skeins' between your thumb and your wrist and then carefully washed and dried and then wound up into balls and re-knitted into something else.”

**Ivy Pittam, born 1926**

“My mother made wonderful stews out of nothing really. I feel I was well fed. We didn't have much in the way of sweets but aunts and uncles saved their coupons and gave them to me. We didn't have oranges, we didn't have bananas. People would sit and say, 'Oh I'd like a nice plate of ham and eggs', and you'd say, 'What's that?' You just couldn't get it - it was a luxury you dreamt of. I didn't know what it was because we didn't have it.”

**Jean Calvert, born 1936**



“I don't remember us being short of anything. My grandfather had allotments. They took over parts of playing fields and things like that. I suppose we must have got a certain amount of vegetables from him. I know he used to sell his produce because I've got his notebooks showing the things that he sold, certainly from the post war period.”

We had a double garden because it was two flats. The people in the upstairs flats didn't use the garden and we planted that with potatoes. We had quite a lot of new potatoes from that. The people next to us kept chickens and my grandfather kept chickens and rabbits.”

**Bill Rust, born 1937**



# Working for the war effort

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Teenagers often left school at the age of 14 years old. During the war, nearly 80% of boys and 70% of girls between the ages 14 and 17 were at work. They had jobs in agriculture, offices, shops and factories.

From 1941 everyone aged between 16 and 18 registered to help with the war effort as part of their national service. By the time they were 18, boys received their call-up papers to join the armed forces. Girls at 18 also took on essential war work or joined the women's auxiliary services.



Young children had to do their bit too. They could help by salvaging scrap metal or waste food for recycling. Children also assisted with raising money for munitions and supplies for the troops, as well as 'digging for Victory' in gardens and allotments.

“In 1939, when war started, senior members of staff at E C Ambridge's (the ironmongers) were called up. So when I was about 15½ - no more than 16 - I was actually the senior assistant. I learnt quickly and the governor taught me everything about the trade. It was absolutely amazing really. We were in a trade greatly affected by the war. Everybody was clambering into the shop to buy things - black-out material and black-out blinds. We supplied coverings for air-bricks - to stop the poison gas coming in.”

Stanley Woods, born 1924

“I left school at 15 and I got a job at Cosser Thermometers in Vale Road. I was there for 6 months. My sister was already working at the National Union of Teachers and a position came up there in their insurance company. So I applied and was there for 10 years.”

Queenie Rawle, born 1924

“While I was at Ruggles Garage in Lordship Lane, I got called up - at the age of 16. You had the option of going into the Territorials or into the AFS, the Auxiliary Fire Service. I opted to go into the AFS and got stationed up in Highgate, at the top of Highgate Hill. I used to go there nights on a kind of shift pattern. I used to work during the day though at Ruggles.”

Doug Pittam, born 1928

“The ARP warden came and asked me and my brother (who was 2 years older than me) to join the street fire patrol. You had to be 16 to join. We went to Tottenham Grammar School and they gave us lessons down there, one evening a week, on how to deal with incendiary bombs. We had to lie on our stomach. One of us had a stirrup pump and the other had the spray. You had to crawl on your stomach and try and treat the incendiary bomb. We were issued with a police whistle, a steel helmet and a stirrup pump each. We had to patrol two nights a week.”

Stanley Woods, born 1924

“We used to have National Savings. Most children would take sixpence a week, save the stamps and you'd get a National Savings certificate. There was a 'Wings for Britain Week' and we were asked to design posters to get the children to save their money. I started this poster - it was meant to be the post office in Lordship Lane, a little girl with her back to the counter and her mother. The slogan was Save Your Saturday Sixpence. I got second prize for the whole of Tottenham for that age range.”

Jean Calvert, born 1936

“And I spent one or two days working on a farm. This was June 1940. We worked on a farm a few of us and got paid one shilling. I think it was one day, one shilling we got paid. Which we thought was good because schoolboys don't have much money, if any.”

Jim Clark, born 1929



# Victory

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The war ended in 1945. Victory in Europe (VE Day) was celebrated on 8 May. Later, victory over Japan (VJ Day) was held on 15 August.

On VE Day, street parties, fancy dress parades and bonfires were held. Food was still rationed but everyone brought something - especially to give treats for children. Despite the celebrations, life was still disrupted for a long time after. Children who had stayed away as evacuees now returned to their families after years of separation.



Dads coming back from the forces or held in prisoner-of-war camps were like strangers to their children. Families had lost parents or loved ones. Others had become homeless or displaced by the war. Life would not be the same again.

“When peace time came everybody was hanging out flags. My parents were ordinary people, quite restrained and respectable, but even my father did get one and put it out on a broom pole out of the downstairs window. My memory of that day is going to Walthamstow, with my aunts dancing all around the streets and Churchill speaking. There was big bomb site in Wood Street and there was an effigy of Hitler and everybody cheering. We were all so happy dancing. Most of my uncles weren't back of course. It was just different. It was a different feel.”

Jean Calvert, born 1936

“My mum came for us, said she was coming to get us. That day we come home, Churchill declared the war was over in the evening. That was when we heard the radio at mum's house. Grace and Frank, who we were billeted with throughout the war, couldn't come to the station with us. They'd had us for six years and they were very upset because we was coming home.”

Barbara Leadbitter, born 1931

“We went to London on VE night. I remember it being very crowded, I think we went on a 33 tram, part of the way at least. We were on the end of the Embankment by the Houses of Parliament where the 33 stopped. I just remember lots of people. There was supposed to be a big fireworks display but there were just so many people that we finished up by coming home again.”

Bill Rust, born 1937

