

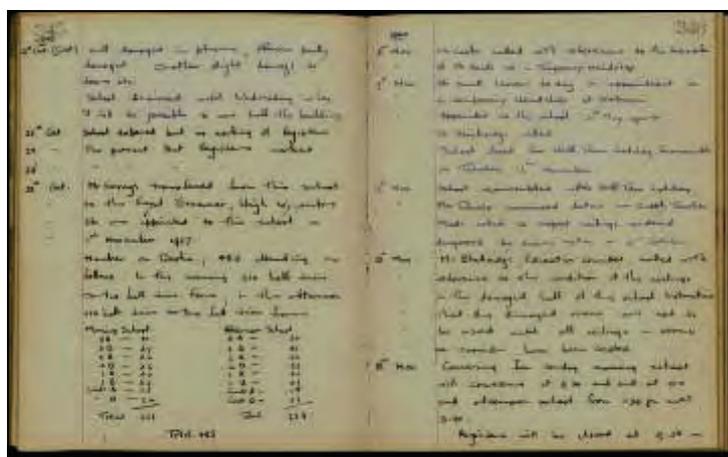
# Buckinghamshire in World War Two

## Schools



Schoolchildren from Queen's Park Infant School, Aylesbury, 1948 (ph Aylesbury2012)

The war had a huge impact on school life. In Buckinghamshire existing schools were greatly swelled in number by the arrival of evacuees. They had to face the influx of variously educated children together with the loss of their own teachers to the armed forces. Some schools evacuated en masse and took up empty buildings in the county. Every effort was made to ensure that school life continued as normal as possible and the government promoted positive propaganda about how everyone was coping and the broadening of city children's education by being in the countryside.



Head teachers at this time were required to keep a Log Book recording daily events at school. During the wartime period these give much detail about the running of schools and the problems with which they had to cope. The early part of the war brought waves of evacuees, frequent staff changes, air raid warnings and, on occasion, bomb damage.

Pages from Chesham Boys School Log book (transcription overleaf)

## Air Raids

**Germain St. School in Chesham** (now Thomas Harding school) received a direct hit by a bomb just days after a major influx of evacuees in the summer of 1940. The headmaster's brief notes reveal what must have been an extremely trying time for him. Note the school was only closed for two days and by the end of the week the school role had risen because of evacuees from 294 to 485! In common with other schools in the county the school day was split into two so that the huge numbers could be accommodated: only two out of fourteen classes worked the full day and the remainder worked half days. The log book entry for 3<sup>rd</sup> December complains that there is still debris from the bomb blast in the playground.

Below is a transcript of the entries in the School Log Book (ref E/LB/44/11)

1940																																									
17th Sept.	Notification of further L.C.C. evacuation tomorrow. Members of the Staff billeting in the town.																																								
18th Sept.	School used for evacuation purposes.																																								
19th Sept.	School used for evacuation purposes.																																								
20th Sept.	A small number of children in attendance but Registers not marked.																																								
27th Sept.	School closed until 7th Oct as a second instalment of the Summer Holiday.																																								
7th Oct.	School reopened. Working two sessions. Eight Forms working in the morning and eight in the afternoon. The following members have been added to the staff. Messrs. Ross, Woodrow, Godward & Jones.																																								
21st Oct.	The School badly damaged by enemy action at 11.15 last night. A high explosive bomb fell on the clinic breaking the majority of windows and frames on the playground side of the school. Ceilings are down, large numbers of tiles removed, the wall damaged in places, offices badly damaged, and other slight damage to doors etc. School dismissed until Wednesday when it will be possible to use half the building.																																								
23rd Oct.	School reopened but no marking of Registers.																																								
24th Oct.	Few present but Registers marked.																																								
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28th Oct.	Mr. Scraggs transferred from this school to the Royal Grammar, High Wycombe. He was appointed to this school on 1st November 1927. Number on Books; 485 attending as follows. In the morning six half time and two full time Forms, in the afternoon six half time and two full time forms.																																								
	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="2" style="text-align: left;">Morning School</th> <th colspan="2" style="text-align: left;">Afternoon School</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>3A</td> <td style="text-align: right;">41</td> <td>3A</td> <td style="text-align: right;">26</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3B</td> <td style="text-align: right;">37</td> <td>3B</td> <td style="text-align: right;">41</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2A</td> <td style="text-align: right;">34</td> <td>2A</td> <td style="text-align: right;">26</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2B</td> <td style="text-align: right;">32</td> <td>2B</td> <td style="text-align: right;">32</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1A</td> <td style="text-align: right;">36</td> <td>1A</td> <td style="text-align: right;">31</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1B</td> <td style="text-align: right;">32</td> <td>1B</td> <td style="text-align: right;">31</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Contr.A</td> <td style="text-align: right;">25</td> <td>Contr.A</td> <td style="text-align: right;">15</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Contr.B</td> <td style="text-align: right;"><u>24</u></td> <td>Contr.B</td> <td style="text-align: right;"><u>22</u></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td style="text-align: right;">261</td> <td>Total</td> <td style="text-align: right;">224</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Morning School		Afternoon School		3A	41	3A	26	3B	37	3B	41	2A	34	2A	26	2B	32	2B	32	1A	36	1A	31	1B	32	1B	31	Contr.A	25	Contr.A	15	Contr.B	<u>24</u>	Contr.B	<u>22</u>	Total	261	Total	224
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Air raids did not just happen at night; what to do with school children during a day time air raid was quite a problem and is raised in several log books and Governors Minute books:

**Wolverton Council School (E/MB/239/8)**

19<sup>th</sup> October 1939

*Air Raid Warning: The reports given by the Head Teacher Revealed that about 70% of the parents desired the children to be sent home when an Air Raid Warning is given. As this conflicts with the County Instructions on this matter as outlined in Circular no. 836 dated 8<sup>th</sup> September 1939, it was agreed to submit the matter to Aylesbury and await their comment. In the circumstances it was not thought wise to communicate the Circular to the local press.*

16<sup>th</sup> November 1939

*Air Raid Warning Procedure: A letter was read from Mr. Cooke pointing out that the Committee could only agree to a departure from Circular 836 if the alternative action suggested was unanimously agreed by the managers and by the local ARP Authorities... The Managers carefully considered the position in relation to the very short notice which now appeared to be given in the case of Air Raids.. The Managers considered the children would be safer in school than in the streets in the case of Short Notice of a Raid.*

**Stoke Poges School (E/LB/198/9)**

September 5<sup>th</sup> 1940

*An Air Raid Warning lasted from 10am until 10.55am. Gunfire being heard the children sheltered under tables and desks arranged to give best cover... Owing to a complaint from a parent, Mr. Nash, who has come to live in this district from London, & who asserted that nothing was done in the school during an air-raid warning, I consider it advisable to make a note of warnings, when heard. He has decided to keep his children at home until proper shelters are provided.*

**Bradwell Council Boys School (E/LB/22/5)**

*3<sup>rd</sup> September 1940 Air Raid Alarm was sounded at 10.55am. The boys who were at play were immediately brought to their classrooms and normal lessons continued. One boy, Geoffrey Atkinson, ran home for shelter and two others were taken out of school by their mothers. The "all clear" sounded at 11.25am.*



The old School at Bradwell

### **Old Bradwell Council Infants (E/LB/22/10)**

This small village school had one teacher, Miss Willett, and the size of the school rose from less than ten pupils to around 40 by September 1940. She was eventually allocated another teacher to share the teaching.

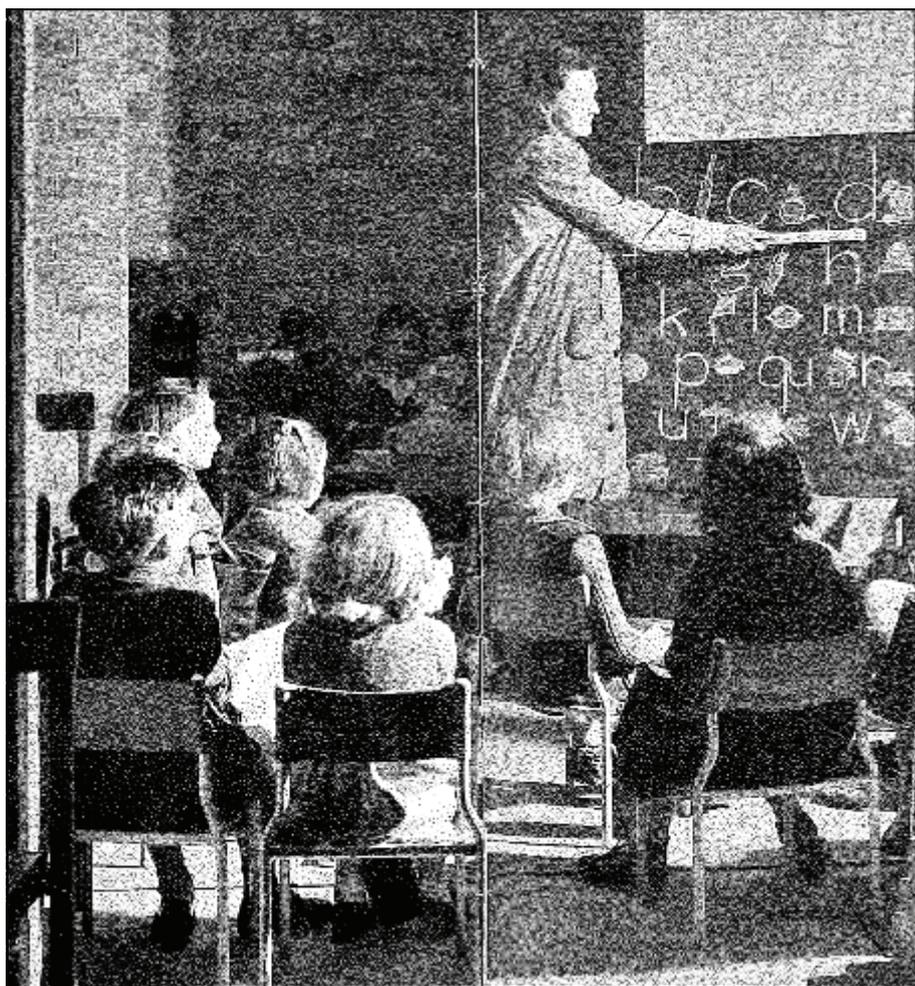
September 6<sup>th</sup> 1940 *On Tuesday we had an air raid warning. Four parents came to school to fetch children home. I looked after the rest of the children scattering them in groups around the room keeping them as safe as possible because **NOTHING HAS YET BEEN DONE** to the windows.*

September 13<sup>th</sup> *On Thursday we had another Raid Warning during the morning. As **NOTHING** has yet been done to the glass we cannot carry on with our work. We "scatter" as best we can from the windows under desks and behind cupboards and sing.*

September 27<sup>th</sup> 1940 *A police Sergeant called this afternoon to warn all children not to go up the lane toward Linford (as there was an unexploded mine on Wood Farm) Nothing has yet been done to the windows and there is added danger.*

October 11<sup>th</sup> *During the week 11 bombs have fallen in the village though fortunately on grassland. Something should be done to the windows.*

October 14<sup>th</sup> *The Newport Infants Headmistress cycled over to my house on Friday evening with some curtain net that HMI Mr Blocksidge had left for my windows. I cycled over to Mr. Bird and he has covered the windows with it during the weekend. There have been 4 air raid periods today.*



Wartime Teaching (from Government publication ) (D113/59)

## Evacuation

The Logbooks reveal the impact of evacuation on the local community. In most cases pupils from one or more schools were billeted in or around a town together with their teachers who would then be added to the local school's staff. The disruption to the school timetable and smooth running is clear to see. The following entries are taken from Bradwell Council Boys School. (E/LB/22/5)

15<sup>th</sup> September 1940 *The school opened today, Sunday, for the receipt of official evacuees from West Ham and LCC schools. Altogether 110 children were billeted in Bradwell.*

16<sup>th</sup> September *School was closed today to allow staff to complete billeting arrangements.*

17<sup>th</sup> September *School re-opened this morning. 42 official evacuees were admitted. Two members of the West Ham staff, Messrs D. Miller and Mr Sherman, were incorporated with the staff.*

23<sup>rd</sup> September *Mr Sherman who returned to London for the weekend has not attended school today. The Headmaster had to teach two classes throughout the day.*

24<sup>th</sup> September *Mr. Sherman still absent. Mr Pimbley absent to attend his medical examination for service with the Forces.*

25<sup>th</sup> September *School closed today for further evacuations into Bradwell.*

26<sup>th</sup> September *School re-opened this morning. 33 more London children and 2 London teachers, Messrs A.H.James and L. Wexler were admitted.*

27<sup>th</sup> September *School closed today for a week's holiday*

30<sup>th</sup> Sept – 4<sup>th</sup> Oct *The school building was opened each day for the use of evacuee children under the supervision of their teachers. The Headmaster attended daily to deal with enquiries and difficulties regarding billeting.*

October 7<sup>th</sup> *School re-opened this morning – 20 private evacuees were admitted making number on books = 323*

17<sup>th</sup> October *Mr Finn, of West Ham, arrived today to replace Mr. Sherman who last attended on 20th Sept.*

16<sup>th</sup> October *Mr. James absent today to bring his furniture from London.*

17<sup>th</sup> October *Mr. Wexler absent today to examine his London home which had been damaged by enemy action.*

21<sup>st</sup> October *School could not open this morning owing to the building being badly damaged by enemy action on Sunday Oct 20<sup>th</sup> at 8pm. [it remained closed until 4<sup>th</sup> November]*



Photograph of the "Stay at home" holiday in Rectory Field, Farnham Royal, August 1944. Also evacuated children from The Grange Hostel in Farnham Royal (D113/59)

## **Refugees**

Reference to refugees from abroad can also be found in the Log Books. In April 1939, even before the outbreak of war, the Rothschilds in Waddesdon used one of their houses, "The Cedars", to house twenty-eight Jewish boys fleeing Nazi persecution. There were two schools in Waddesdon, the Council school and the Church of England school. Despite the fact that the boys had little or no English the schools took ten each. The log book of the Council school reads simply:

*18.4.39 School re-opened today. No. on roll 47. 12 new pupils, 10 of whom are German Refugees.[they were joined by an eleventh later]*

An inspection report made in June goes on:

*During the present term the routine working of the school has been rendered more difficult owing to the presence of eleven refugee boys from Germany, only two of whom possessed any real knowledge of English. It is, therefore, to the credit of the headmistress and to the older children that these German children have settled down so happily in their new environment... They enter with zest into the spirit of their new school life..*

(E/LB/215/30)

## **Other events**

Sometimes the Log Books record pleasurable wartime events:

### **Chilton School (E/LB/48/5)**

*May 8<sup>th</sup> 1945 School closed today and tomorrow; both days having been set apart as National Holidays following the unconditional surrender of Germany.*

### **Little Marlow School (E/LB/141/3)**

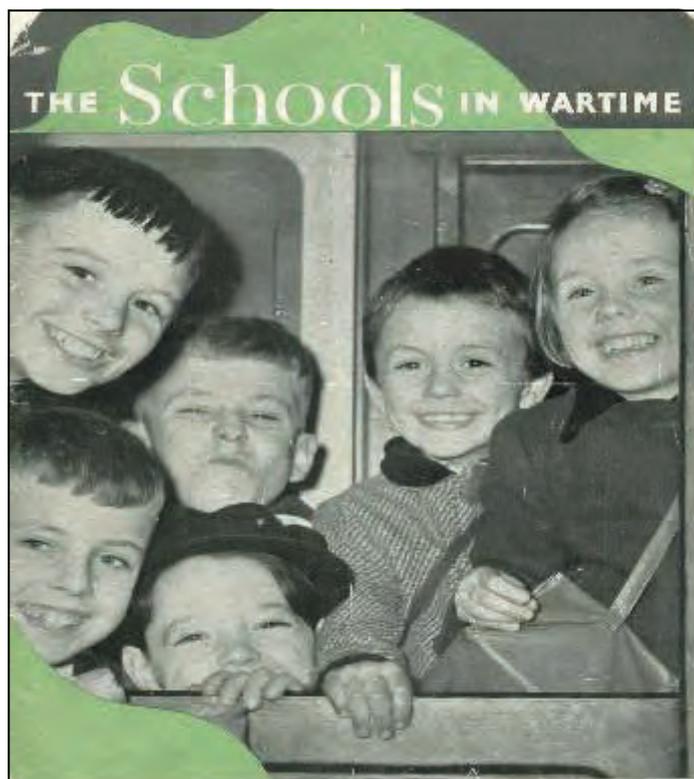
*24.2.44 The children went into the school garden at 3.40 this afternoon to see General Eisenhower of the Eighth American Army and C in C of the English and American "Invasion Army" for Europe, General Montgomery of the Eighth English Army, and Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Todder... walk through the Village to inspect troops of the Eighth army stationed here.*

### **High Wycombe**

*22.12.42 Members of the forces of U.S.A. provided the Christmas party for the children this year. It took place during the afternoon.*

The state of emergency led to the alteration of school term dates. In 1939 and 1940 the Summer half term holiday (Whitsun) happened not at the end of May but the beginning of July; the summer holidays in 1940 lasted for only two weeks although the influx of evacuees resulted in erratic school openings for weeks. Even during holiday periods the school buildings remained open for use by the evacuees (and their teachers) as they were unable to "go home".

The government was keen to promote a positive view of education during the war: teachers coping despite the difficulties; city children experiencing the delight of the countryside; children involved in working the land. A wartime information brochure about schools (D113/59) glosses over the problems clearly expressed in the log books above but illustrates well the morale building efforts of government propaganda.



Even school children were expected to participate in the War Effort. In a letter to EB Basden dated April 1946 the headmaster of Hollybush C of E school describes his pupils work in collecting Salvage. (D113/59)

*The Salvage Dump for old iron was made in 1940, and all material for it collected by the children of Hollybush...A collection of waste paper began in 1940, and on a smaller, but regular scale, still goes on. At the peak period every child in the school collected a sufficient amount to win a "Cog in the Wheel" Badge, and we received a special letter of appreciation...I have no idea of the quantity collected, but the Salvage men said on several occasions that the children have saved hours of time for the collectors. This has also been done by children in their spare time.*

Nor was their collecting limited to salvage:

*Herbs were collected for Messrs Broome and Sehemmer during the summers 1940-44. Two boys of 11yrs. made frames of wire netting and the herbs were dried in my garage. We collected mint, yarrow, tansy, plantain leaves, usually in 7lb lots, though when there was less wastage in drying we were able to send larger quantities. This was arduous work as a sack of fresh leaves would dwindle to a few handfuls when dried. Occasionally a Nature Lesson was used for collecting, and much of the Summer holiday of 1942, otherwise keen children did the picking in the evenings and sometimes helped with the drying.*