

THE DAY WE WENT TO ROTHESAY O!

*A brief account of the wartime evacuation
of Glasgow children to Bute*

Alan R. Harrow

Fifty years ago, on 1 September 1939, thousands of children began moving out of cities and towns all over Britain. By train and bus and boat they fled from the threat of Hitler's bombs. By 3 September, when war was officially declared, nearly 1½ million people had been evacuated to safe areas in the country. This evacuation was the biggest movement of people Britain has ever witnessed.

Bute, for so long a popular resort with Glasgow holidaymakers, was now designated a reception area for Glasgow evacuees. The first women and children evacuated from the city under the Government scheme arrived in Rothesay on Friday, 1 September. For many of the children it was their first trip out of Glasgow. They came on the "Jeanie Deans" and were accompanied by teachers and other helpers. A large crowd gathered at the pier to welcome this first contingent. The children, wearing their identity labels and clutching their gas masks, were met by local evacuation officials. They marched the evacuees to the Regal Cinema, where a meal was served, and emergency rations handed out. A fleet of buses and cars then transported the evacuees to their new billets. In the afternoon the same steamer returned with a second batch of evacuees.

According to the "Buteman and West Coast Chronicle", some difficulty was experienced in finding sufficient accommodation for the evacuees who were sent to Port Bannatyne. There the work of the billeting officials was considerably hampered by the fact that many of the houses were still occupied by summer visitors. As a result many of the evacuees put to the Northend district were not found billets until nearly midnight.

On the whole the reception of the evacuees at Kilchattan Bay went very successfully. Mr Malcolm Kelso, billeting officer, and a band of volunteers worked hard to arrange accommodation for all their evacuees. The main difficulty experienced was in the case of large families who refused to be separated.

On Sunday, 3 September, another group of evacuees landed in Rothesay. The children came from Hillington School and St Constantine's School in Glasgow. They arrived amid torrential rain. After a meal, they were hurriedly taken to their billets. A number were sent to the summer camps on Canada Hill. Unfortunately these "puir wee mites" were the victims of flooding through the night.

According to a return sent to the Department of Health on 18 September, there were 731 unaccompanied children billeted and 1,653 other persons — that is, women with children of and under school age, teachers and helpers, making a total of 2,384. In addition to those evacuated under the Government scheme, a very large number of people had come to Bute under private arrangement and were staying with friends and relatives.

Most householders gave the evacuees a warm, friendly welcome into their homes. They felt pity and sympathy for the little children. Others were apprehensive and wondered how their family life would be upset by the intrusion of these strangers.

For one poor Rothesay man of seventy-nine it was all too much. He appealed to the billeting tribunal against having a mother and five children billeted on him. He stated that his rooms were full of works of art by his late wife, and he could not put children in them. He also submitted a doctor's certificate saying he was an invalid and that billeting evacuees on him would be prejudicial to his health. But with the prospect of more evacuees coming to Rothesay at any moment and the shortage of suitable accommodation, his appeal was dismissed.

Almost immediately the householders had numerous problems to deal with. Many children were very homesick. They missed their families and found it difficult to settle. Some were so nervous and upset that they wet their beds.

Most of the evacuees came from overcrowded, slum homes. Their hosts were often shocked at the condition of these children. Many were found to have head lice and skin diseases such as scabies or impetigo. The householders also complained about the condition of the children's clothes. Some evacuees arrived wearing clothing that was so dirty and verminous it had to be burnt.

The evacuees' manners and habits were very often the cause of friction. Some stole from their hosts or damaged their property. Householders were often surprised to find the children were not used to sitting at a table or eating with a knife and fork.

When mothers moved into billets with their children there was almost always tension. Some women regarded evacuation as a holiday and expected to be waited on. The lack of privacy and the extra work in providing for evacuees frequently caused animosity between city mothers and their hosts. As a result the billeting tribunals were kept extremely busy.

So numerous were the complaints from Bute householders that the Lord Provost despatched a very strong letter of protest to the Chief

Evacuation Officer in Glasgow. He complained that "Many of the mothers and children, especially those from Townhead School, were in a filthy condition". He concluded by saying, "If you are sending mothers and children to Rothesay, if even for the credit of the city of Glasgow, please see that they are very thoroughly cleansed".

The Lord Provost's letter was followed by an even stronger one from the Town Clerk on 6 September. He wrote that the Bute authorities were having "a good deal of trouble . . . with some of the evacuees on account of their being dirty in person and in habits and also on account of the children being quite unruly and doing a considerable amount of damage to the houses". He added that these children and their parents would be housed at the Healthieries camp where "the proprietor is well up in managing this class of person".

Yet, despite all the problems, many evacuees settled down well in their new homes. Indeed the children and their foster families often became very close and formed lasting friendships.

The sudden influx of so many children caused considerable disruption to local schools. In many schools the overcrowding was so bad that the double-shift system was put into operation. This meant that the local children attended in the morning and the evacuated pupils were taught in the afternoon. Even working the double-shift system, some of the schools were unable to accommodate all the pupils. For example, tutorial classes for evacuee children in the Public School were at one time held in the cloakroom as no suitable room was available.

The arrival of large numbers of private and Government evacuees pushed the roll of the Academy over the 1,000 mark for the first time in its history. When the school re-opened on 11 September, Rector Munro recorded in the log book:

Primary school filled up to maximum by voluntary evacuees working 9–12.30.

Hillington School, Glasgow occupying Primary Rooms from 1–4.30 pm.

The Academy, being the only secondary school on the island, bore the full brunt of the influx of evacuees requiring secondary education. An Inspector's Report for Session 1941–42 reveals the position of the Academy's roll in the three sessions following the initial evacuation in September 1939.

	Sept. 39	Jun. 40	Sept. 40	Jun. 41	Sept. 41	Jun. 42
Local	572	525	571	478	574	496
Evacuee	624	196	255	448	444	280
Total	1196	721	826	926	1018	776

The Inspector went on to observe that "The fluctuations which have been violent and quite unpredictable necessitated repeated adjustment of

time-table and staff requirements . . . The general spirit of the school has been greatly affected by the ebb and flow of evacuees and problems of attendance and conduct have had to be faced”.

Indeed so concerned were the authorities by the level of truancy among evacuee pupils that a full-time Compulsory Officer was employed to deal with them.

The island's Primary schools were similarly affected. At Kingarth the arrival of the evacuees caused considerable problems. The school had to operate the double-shift system of working to accommodate all the pupils. In the school's log book the Headteacher recorded that “Difficulty has been experienced in arranging classes” and “The want of material and class books has hindered progress”. Gradually, however, these difficulties were overcome.

At Kerrycroy the double-shift system was also adopted. The Infant Divisions of Kerrycroy and St David's from Glasgow were taught in the morning from 9–12. The Junior and Senior divisions were in session from 1–4.30. Homework was given to the children to occupy them when they were not in attendance.

The Headmistress of Kildavanan, Miss Blaikie, wrote to the School Management Committee stating that in view of the considerable increase in the number of children at her school another Elsan W.C. would be advisable. It was agreed to provide this and the cost was charged to the Glasgow Education Authority. The lack of toilet facilities seems to have been of concern to other headteachers because they decided to give pupils a longer period at leave times to get around this problem.

In January 1940 Rector Munro informed the School Management Committee that there had been a considerable decline in the number of evacuees attending the Academy. The same was true of other schools on the island. All through the autumn there was a steady trickle of evacuees returning home. The main reason for their return was simple: no bombs had fallen. As the weeks went by, the heavy bombing the Government had forecast did not happen. Parents thought there was no point in leaving their children in the country and began to take them home.

Homesickness was another major cause of the drift back. Almost all of the evacuees missed their homes. Many women could not settle in their new, unfamiliar surroundings. It was so different from what they were used to and they pined for home.

Following the heavy bombing raids of Clydeside in 1941, the Government announced there would be a second wave of evacuation. But this second evacuation proved no more successful than the first. Soon the evacuees were returning home in ever-increasing numbers.

On 7 September 1944, five years and six days after it had begun, the Government announced the ending of further evacuation. The great evacuation of the cities then passed into British folklore.

One thing however is sure. No matter how long their stay on the beautiful island of Bute — whether it was only for a few weeks or for the duration of the war — the evacuees would never forget the day they went to Rothesay O!

References

1. Burgh of Rothesay Evacuation Records. (These records are held in the District Archives at Lochgilphead. They await the attention of the professional historian.)
2. School Management Committee for Bute Minute Books No. 4 and No. 5.
3. The Rothesay Express.
4. The Buteman and West Coast Chronicle.
5. Rothesay Academy log book.
Kerrycroy Public School log book.
Kingarth Public School log book.

CLOTHING WANTED

For Evacuated Children

**WOULD ANYONE HAVING
SURPLUS CLOTHING SUIT-
ABLE FOR USE OF CHILDREN
(ALL SIZES) EVACUATED TO
BUTE, PLEASE SEND TO ME,
EITHER TO 1 EAST PRINCES
STREET, OR TO MILFORD,
CRAIGMORE.**

**THESE GIFTS WILL BE
GRATEFULLY ACKNOW-
LEDGED.**

Mrs J. S. M'MILLAN.

Source: Rothesay Express 5/9/39

S.D.C.		No. _____	
Charges to pay s. d.	POST OFFICE TELEGRAMS Telegrams for INLAND addresses may be handed to the messenger who delivers this form. The Post Office accepts telegrams by telephone. This form, and if possible the envelope, should accompany any enquiry respecting this Telegram.		No. _____ Date _____
TIME OF RECEIPT	Prefix: _____ Time handed in: _____ Office of Origin and Service Instructions: _____ Words: _____		To: _____
12/11/18 12/11/18 12/11/18	65 1.30 OHNS EDINBURGH 18		To: _____

THE INFORMATION OVERLEAF WILL INTEREST YOU.

POST IMMEDIATE WHITE TOWN CLERK ROTHESAY

EVACUATION FRIDAY 1 ST SEPT LOW IN TAKE

ACTION PARAGRAPH TEN ACKNOWLEDGE HEALTH EDINBURGH

POST OFFICE		Charge		Counter number	
INLAND		Chargeable words			
TELEGRAM		Actual words		Yes _____ No _____	
FOR POSTAGE STAMPS		For conditions of acceptance, see over SERVICE INSTRUCTIONS			
If you wish to pay for a reply insert R.P. here		ADDRESS Lord Provost Dollan, City Chambers, Glasgow.			
Happy Rothesay Evacuees send you the Seasons Greetings and heartiest thanks. Provost Buchanan					

Please write on the back of this form, the telephone number, or name and address of the sender, if not telegraphed

Evacuee rations at Pavilion
 No. of tins
 Nestles Milk - 2,803 tins
 Carnation milk - 2,820 tins
 Corned Beef - 4,346 tins
 Chocolate - 4,743 Bars
 Biscuits - 5 tins unpacked
 393 tins repacked
 27 Empty biscuit tins

J. S. Shaw

THE BUTTERFLIES OF THE ISLAND OF BUTE

J.A. Gibson

Introduction

The British butterflies are among the best known creatures of our countryside. Virtually all naturalists are familiar with at least the common species, which makes it all the more remarkable that no information on the butterflies of Bute has ever been published in any previous volume of the Society's *Transactions*.

A search through the recently published reference bibliography of the local lists of British lepidoptera (Chalmers-Hunt, 1989) also reveals no known detailed account of Bute butterflies. Many papers are listed for the neighbouring island of Arran, but there is virtually nothing at all for Bute. This is even more surprising, so the need for a separate account of the butterflies found on the Island of Bute is clearly long overdue.

To a very large extent the study of our Scottish butterflies has been completely revolutionised during the past decade, by the publication of Dr George Thomson's magnificent book on *The Butterflies of Scotland* (1980). Dr Thomson covers the distribution of all butterflies throughout Scotland, with both written text and 10 km-square distribution maps, in a truly masterly fashion, a contribution to our permanent knowledge of the subject which has placed all other naturalists forever in his debt. Nevertheless, it is still the responsibility of the local naturalist to collect together whatever information he can on local distribution. Only thus can our knowledge be kept up to date, and any changes in distribution or population recorded.

Although not primarily an entomologist, I have been interested in butterflies all my life, so that these collected notes, which are based entirely on my own observations on the island since the mid-1930s, now span a period of well over fifty years on Bute.

To the best of my knowledge, the butterfly population of the Island of Bute is not significantly different from that found in other parts of the Clyde area, but it is always worth while preparing separate lists of the fauna and flora found on any island, since just occasionally these show surprising differences from the neighbouring mainland or other islands. With this in mind, therefore, these notes are here offered as an attempt to fill a gap in our knowledge of Bute natural history.

Systematic List

In the following Systematic List the arrangement and nomenclature follow Thomson (1980). For the commoner butterflies I list the dates of