

EVACUEES TO OXFORDSHIRE

Chris Hall, editor of *Oxfordshire Local History*, writes —

September this year will be the 70th anniversary of the evacuation of children from the cities to safe country areas. This county was a major reception area and *Oxfordshire Local History* is marking the occasion with a special issue. We would therefore like to hear from anyone who has memories of the evacuation in Oxfordshire, either in 1939 itself or during the later war years.

We are especially interested in exploring the social and economic interaction of the evacuees and the people of the villages and small towns which received them. There are still people alive today who will be able to recall cuckoos in the nest or strange new friends. We have already had an account of the pitched battle between village schoolchildren and evacuees on the first morning the latter went to school in one Oxfordshire village. Typical? Exaggerated? Unheard of? There is a variety of evacuee narratives which need to be sifted and analysed.

An aspect of the evacuation into Oxfordshire, which has not yet been explored, is the existence of five hostels run by Oxfordshire County Council in which evacuees considered unsuitable for housing with local families were placed.* The criteria for placing children in these hostels are not yet clear to us. We have already gleaned strong but not definitive suggestions that the hostels were unhappy places. We want to find out more. This is not easy because full records are not available to historians while inmates of the hostels may still be alive.

One such hostel was Wroxton House. One evacuee who lived there during the war recalls the matron, a Miss Hartree, who (in his words) 'ran a tight ship'. He says that he and his sister have never forgotten the place — 'Not always for the right reasons'. Do these phrases indicate a harsh regime? If so, was the county council responsible or did it merely carry out orders from central government without the ability to modify their outcome?

Will anyone who remembers Wroxton House in this role, whether from the inside or outside, or who recalls Miss Hartree, please contact me (address below). Indeed all recollections of the evacuation in Banburyshire are welcome.

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* The hostels are mentioned briefly in Malcolm Graham's book *Oxfordshire at War*, Stroud 1994.