

THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Portobello pupils sent north

By the summer of 1939 it was becoming obvious that Britain might soon be involved in war with Hitler's Germany. Since it was felt that Portobello might be a possible target for German bombers because of the presence of the power station, the railway and a military camp at Duddingston, it was decided to evacuate pupils whose parents desired it.

On Saturday 2nd September 1939, the day before war was declared, a group of 414 parents, teachers and pupils (complete with suitcases, gas masks and identity cards attached to their coats), assembled at 7 am. They proceeded to Portobello Railway Station where their train departed at 10.45 am.

Their destination was Banffshire, where most of them were billeted in houses at Buckie with smaller groups at Deskford and Cullen.

The Banffshire Advertiser reported that the evacuees arrived at Buckie station at 6.15 pm — after a journey of more than seven hours. They were taken to the Public School where they were served tea, sandwiches and biscuits and given a bag of rations to last them forty-eight hours. Each bag



This group is from Canonmills, but a similar scene would have occurred in Portobello. Many of the children appear to regard it as an adventure.
The Scotsman, 2nd September 1939

contained two tins of milk, a tin of corned beef, a bag of biscuits and two bars of chocolate.

By ten o'clock at night all the children had been billeted in houses in the area.

The headmaster and staff returned to Edinburgh on September 5th, to arrange the education of those who had not been evacuated.

The evacuees' education would continue after they were enrolled at Buckie High School.

Further evacuations followed. For example on 10th October the school log records two teachers taking groups of children to Buckie.

As the school still had no air-raid shelters, it was felt to be too dangerous to bring the remaining pupils into the building for instruction, and a plan was devised to give classes to small groups of children in the houses of parents who were willing to cooperate.

This did not work very well, however, and in January 1940, the pupils returned to school. Four shelters had now been constructed in the playground and the walls of the cloakrooms had been strengthened for use as further refuge.

Gas masks had to be carried by staff and pupils at all times and there were regular air-raid and respirator drills. A system of fire-watching was introduced and the fire-watchers kept vigil every night from dusk until 7 am. There was one incident when the school was flooded and it was claimed that a water pipe had been fractured by a fragment of a bomb.

In addition to being a place of instruction the school was used as an evacuation centre for people who might lose their houses through bombing and the gymnasium was stacked with blankets, clothing and canned food.



Evacuees from Edinburgh arriving at Buckie Railway Station, Banffshire, 1939
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Operation Pied Piper

Plans for what was codenamed *Operation Pied Piper* were largely ready by summer 1939.

Over 800,000 children were included in the more than 1.5 million people voluntarily evacuated from urban 'target' areas from 1st September.