

# Far From Home

*Evacuees, Dr Barnardo's Boys and  
Prisoners of War in the  
Borderlands*



Sarah Harper



THE DEVIL'S  
PORRIDGE  
MUSEUM

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**THE DEVIL'S  
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**Armed Forces  
Covenant**



# Far from Home

## Evacuees in Annandale

In the late 1930s, rising tensions in Europe unnerved the Government and the British public as the potential for a German invasion grew. Even before the war was announced, the carefully planned Operation Pied Piper was put into action to evacuate vulnerable children and mothers from large cities.



On 1<sup>st</sup> September 1939, the Annandale Observer reported, *'The Ministry of Health and Secretary of State for Scotland announced that the evacuation of school children and other priority classes from certain important cities in the country would start today. This action was to be regarded purely as a precautionary measure taken in this time of international unsettlement.'* The Scottish cities to be evacuated were Edinburgh, Rosyth, Dundee, Glasgow and Clydebank. On this day, some 70,000 children from Glasgow were packed onto 102 special trains and dispatched to the countryside in fear of an imminent attack. As war loomed, the local paper concluded, *'The people of Annandale are not untowardly concerned in spite of the tense international situations'*.



## Who'll give a promise to keep this child safe?

This child's home is in the city. Up to the present his home has been safe. But let us face it: one of these days his home may be a ruin. There is no excuse for feeling falsely secure because nothing has happened yet. The danger of air-raids is as great now as it has ever been.

The Government is arranging to send this child, and some hundred thousands of others, to safety if raiders come. Each will need a home. Only one household in ten is caring for these children now. Volunteers are urgently needed. Plans must be made well ahead. There must be no hitch, no delay, in settling

the children in safety. Here is *your* chance to help.

You can if you wish make an immediate contribution to this safety scheme. Many households have been looking after evacuated children for six months now. They will be grateful for a rest. If you can take over one of these children, you will be doing a very neighbourly deed and helping greatly in the nation's defence.

To enrol as a host of a child now or in the future, or to ask any questions about the scheme, please get in touch with your local Authority.

The Secretary of State, who has been entrusted by the Government with the conduct of evacuation, asks you urgently to join the Roll of those who are willing to receive children. Please apply to your local Council.

**Advertisement from the Annandale Observer encouraging locals to take in an evacuee.**

In the Annandale area, Annan Town council officials and Councillors were preparing feverishly for the evacuation of children. Mr A Knox, the Depute Town Clerk, was appointed Chief Reception Officer. Councillor John Murray and Mr J Rodger were the Billeting Officers. The Provost of the ancient Royal Burgh assured evacuees that, *'Temporary guests would find a safe and healthy sanctuary in Annan,'* but Councillor Murray went on to caution, *'Both parties should remember that this is a time of war, and that, in so far as they possibly can, they should try and put up with matters.'*

Dr Elder oversaw the Market Hall in Annan being kitted out as a commodious first aid station with partitions, taps and sinks being installed. Wardens' posts were set up in Annan Town Hall, St Columba's School, Eastriggs Police Station and there were two in Gretna at Dormie House and Gretna Hall.

The logistics of moving thousands of children, many travelling unaccompanied, were extraordinarily complex. Local Billeting Officers were appointed to ensure new homes were found for everyone, but shortages of blankets and mattresses meant hundreds of new arrivals had to make do with palliasses—large bags which householders stuffed with straw. Local residents were made aware of their responsibilities, *'There will be no time for the Billeting Officer to argue on the doorstep'*, the Annandale Observer warned. The Defence Regulations stipulated that a billeting officer could require the occupier of any premises to accommodate evacuees and, if the resident refused, they could be fined up to £50 or be imprisoned for up to three months.

In Annan, 450 children and mothers arriving from the Shawlands area of Glasgow, were met by a large crowd of townspeople who lined up to help accommodate or transport the new residents. The evacuees were taken to Annan Academy where they would wait for billeting officers to assign them to host families. Similarly, in Eastriggs and Gretna, approximately 360 evacuees descended on the Gretna train station, mainly from Langside and Govanhill areas of Glasgow. Local nurses passed all the evacuees through a formal medical examination before being assigned new homes. The 240 children who arrived at Eastriggs train station from the Mount Florida area of Glasgow received the same reception.

The Annandale Observer reassured readers, *'It is confidently anticipated that after the first experience of having strangers in the home has been got over, everyone and everything will shake down into the workable arrangement which common sacrifice and common safety may require of all citizens in a time of emergency.'*



Many children were dispatched into the countryside with little idea of what was happening or where they were going. Each child had an identification label and were required to bring essential items as follows; their gas mask, change of underclothing, night clothes, house shoes or rubber shoes, stockings or socks, tooth brush, and towel, soap, face cloth, handkerchief warm coat or mackintosh, tin cup and parcel of food for one day. Many though had neither suitable shoes or a coat which was to cause concern when the winter months came. If more than one child in a family was being sent, the eldest child was instructed to stay together with their younger brother or sisters all day.

Parents were reassured that the addresses of children would be given to them as soon as they reached their new home. James Walker, who was evacuated from Dennistoun, recalled, *'My mother- she was going with us-wives with small children were advised to go as well. We got into this train- never had I been on a train in my life- and then, when we got in the carriage and closed the door, the mothers and fathers, that were not moving down, they broke down in tears and all that and all the kids started to cry because we didn't realise what was happening.'*

For some children it was an adventure; for others the trauma of separation and fear of the unknown would leave lasting scars. None had any idea what was going to happen to them or when they would return home.

Many evacuees, like Ellen Cartwright and her sister Renee, found themselves in families where they developed a strong emotional bond. Ellen recalls, *'My sister and I thought that we were going on an adventure and that it would be great fun. We had no idea we were going away and what would happen after.'*

The sisters, evacuated from Glasgow aged 7 and 10, ended up staying in Eastriggs with Mrs Cowan and her family. It was a happy time. The sisters returned to Glasgow but continued to spend their summers in Eastriggs with Mrs Cowan. Others like Betty Lennox, who was evacuated to Annan, ended up staying on after the war and making a permanent home in the area.



**Evacuee Ellen Cartwright, with local Hilda Cowan and Ellen's sister Renee.**

There was a strange coincidence at a house in Langholm. On the Friday before war was declared, a picture of Bonnie Prince Charlie and Flora MacDonald fell off the wall and on to the floor. The coincidence was that one of the girl evacuees who was to stay there was called Flora MacDonald!

The countryside offered the city evacuees many benefits. For those who had come from inner city slums, the health benefits brought by fresh air and the outdoors were significant. For children, brought up in the sums of inner Glasgow, being sent to Eastriggs and Gretna was a life-changing experience: their first encounter with fresh air and farm animals.

Local resident, John Burgess of Eastriggs, recalls, *'Very few of them knew where Hamilton was never mind where Annan was, or Eastriggs for that matter. I don't think they'd seen hills before or cows wandering about.'*



Equally, many evacuees were astonished by their experiences in the countryside. Some were horrified by the lack of modern facilities and by the scarcity of recreational opportunities so easily found in the city. One child did not think that he was getting real milk because it came from a cow and not from a tin as he was used to. Some children were traumatised when they were confronted at bedtime with clean white linen sheets. Their only experience of white sheets in the city was of shrouds, used to cover dead bodies.

Schools in the area operated a double shift system to accommodate the new arrivals. At Annan Academy, local children were taught in the mornings from 8.30am until 12.30pm, while the evacuees came to school in the afternoon for four hours, commencing at 1pm. For many children, evacuation meant a disrupted education. In some cases, teachers from the city schools came with their pupils to ensure some continuity of learning.

There was plenty of positivity to begin with. Just after the evacuation took place, the local newspaper enthused, 'Evacuees in the Eastriggs District consider themselves fortunate in being settled in a locality with so many advantages, not least from a health point of view. One little mite, on being asked how she liked her change of home, instantly replied, *'I could stay here for ever and ever.'*

There was also a strong effort locally to include evacuees in community life. The Annan choir met with 260 children in the Old Parish Church where they had a competition to see who had the stronger lungs. The report of the event highlighted a recitation of *'The Worm'*, a humorous poem by a Jean Brothy from Glasgow. It also mentions that young, Miss Violet Willis officiated at the piano. Miss Willis was an Annan girl and went on to teach at Annan Academy for a number of decades.

In 1939, at Halloween in Eastriggs, 40 evacuees joined their country cousins at Dornock School for 'mirth-provoking' amusement', which involved great rivalry between boys and girls. They played a 'Mystery Bowl' game where children left the room, while treats were put under them. In Annan, despite the grocers' windows looking bare, *'apple and nut business was of a brisk nature.'* Despite the blackout, there was a good number of guisers observed going about in Annan. It was just as well that there was a bright moon, because traditional lanterns were banned. Children were warned that they could not wear their gas masks, but to stick to the usual false faces.

At Christmas and New Year, the Government encouraged host areas to organise 'simple' parties for evacuees and they provided reduced day return rail tickets for parents to allow them to visit their children. Glasgow's Lord Provost arranged for toys to be sent to the evacuees, while Bertha Waddell's

Children's Theatre toured the reception areas. Many children returned for the holidays, however, and did not return.



The Brownie Party and the Sunday School Christmas Party were something to remember. The evacuees helped to organise the programme and they introduced a new game called '*Cheeky Rosie*'. The entertainment also included The Grand Old Duke of York, Farmer in the Den, Musical Arms, Spin the Plate, Forfeits and the Brave Warrior. The Annandale Observer report rejoiced that the children, '*still cheering and clutching an apple and orange wended their way home*'. Glasgow Corporation also paid for a sumptuous meal which included ice cream at the St John's Church Hall in Eastriggs. Teacher, Miss Anderson from Mount Florida School in Glasgow was the pianist for the occasion and accompanied the lively country dancing.

In Cummertrees, the evacuees also shone. The fun was fast and furious in the hall decorated by relief teachers, Miss Scott and Miss Shearer. The highlight was the performance of '*Christmas Luck*', a play written by 12-year-old Janet Rae from Glasgow. Each child received an orange and a sixpenny bit. All the entertainment helped everyone forget that a smoke bomb had been found around that time in Cummertrees.

The meeting of urban and rural populations brought together by evacuation was not always a happy experience. Officials in Dumfriesshire severely criticised Glasgow Corporation for evacuating children in a filthy condition. Some children stepped out of trains in the only clothes they possessed. Thousands were infected by head and body lice, while others carried infectious diseases. While some of the billeters asked for children to be removed, others rolled up their sleeves and got busy with soap, hot water and a nit-comb.

Ellen Cartwright recalled, *'When we came off the train and arrived at Eastriggs, nurses came and checked your hair, looked at your teeth and everything. My sister and I were sitting together, and we discovered later on that I had nits in my hair and that was one of the reasons we were one of the last to be picked.'*

The Dumfriesshire Education Committee learned that of 3,402 children evacuated to the area, 1,138 had either head lice or disease. Councillors learned that householders had to burn clothes and destroy bedding used by evacuees. Seven parishes had announced that they would refuse any further billeting.

In November 1939, the Glasgow Herald reported the havoc wreaked on rural areas by some of the city evacuees, deeming many of them *'quite out of control.'* Crimes included damage to houses, breaking windows, killing chickens and throwing stones at horses, cattle and passing motorists. They even placed stones on railway lines. Someone from Langholm wrote to the Scotsman newspaper to complain that the evacuees' habits were worse than animals. It concluded that, *'Carbolic soap will kill the louse but won't cure unpleasant habits.'*

The Earl of Mansfield also let go with both barrels in a number of tirades against the children, mothers and Glasgow Corporation. He deplored that children had been sent *'in a verminous state'*, many without a change of clothing. He said that there was *'rebellion in the countryside'* about the conduct of the evacuees. He complained that *'a surprisingly large proportion had never received the most elementary training in sanitary decency.'* Those that had thought up the evacuation scheme and sent 3162 city children to Dumfries, *'had neither brains nor conscience to consider what trials and tragedy the evacuees were being sent to.'*

James Walker, evacuated from Glasgow, remembers the local people nicknaming them *'the Glasgow Keelies,'* the Scottish word for hooligans. But it was not just the children who were seen to be at fault. The paper went on to report: *'Many mothers are quite impossible. They make extravagant demands upon their hostesses and refuse to help with housework. Some will not get up until ten o'clock, sometimes even midday. Others depart early for the nearest centre of population, leaving householders to 'mind the wanes' until often late at night.*

*'There is no escape for some housewives who must spend day and night in the company of very undesirable women, seeing her well-kept house rapidly reduced to a slum house, cherished possessions fouled or destroyed and her children and endangered of physical and moral contamination.'*

There was a divergence of opinion, though, on the mothers who had arrived. A more balanced opinion expressed in the press was, *'There are those who have the idea that they have come for a holiday and expect food and attendance as well as accommodation, but the majority are decent, clean, working-class people who appreciate what is being done for them and are prepared to do their share of the work.'*

The feedback from the mothers who returned to the city was that their hosts were kind and helpful, but there were a number of drawbacks; the cost of living was higher in the country; their children's appetites were increased enormously because of the fresh air; there was a fear that their 'National Assistance' benefit would be affected and that their husbands could not manage on their own.

Some parents felt that evacuation abroad would be a safer option for their children. Among 86 children who arrived in Toronto in August 1940 were Donald and Olive Campbell Stewart from Dumfries. They were going to stay with their uncle for the duration of the war. Donald, aged 10, and Olive, age 9, travelled on their own. Donald proudly displayed his tartan kilt when he arrived. The ship was accompanied halfway across the Atlantic by a destroyer. On one occasion a U-Boat was sighted. Donald recalled, *'I think I heard depth charges going off, but I wasn't much interested in very much, as I was sea-sick at the time.'*

In 1939, Britain accepted 10,000 Jewish refugees from across Europe. Among these refugees was Kurt Gutmann, a German Jew from Krefeld who was evacuated to Annan when he was 12 years old. He remembered the fearsome Nazis in Germany and the posters, '*Jews are our misfortune*'. Jewish people in Germany were very vulnerable; Kurt was often beaten up at school for being 'dirty' and his uncle was instantly killed when he was thrown from a second-floor window.

Kurt was billeted with James and Florence Chalmers at the Back of the Hill, Annan and attended Annan Academy. Annan gave Kurt the freedom to be a child without prejudice or fear of harm; he played with local children, went to the cinema and swam at Waterfoot.

In 1944, aged 17 ½, Kurt joined the Black Watch to contribute to the war effort. By 1948, Kurt had returned to home to help rebuild a Nazi-free Germany. As he lived in East Germany, under the strict control of the USSR, Kurt was prohibited from sending letters back to friends in Annan until 1989 when the Berlin Wall fell. In the 1990s, Kurt and his wife, Inge, annually returned to Annan to visit old friends.

## **Solway Evacuee Tragedy**

Many of these city children took great pleasure in playing on the Solway Coast shoreline on sunny days. However, the notoriously strong currents and shifting sands of the Solway always lurked ominously in wait of the unsuspecting. Two evacuee children, a brother and sister, from the Parkhead district of Glasgow, who were billeted along with their mother and other members of the family in Gretna, were the victims of one of the most distressing drowning fatalities.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> September 1939, Betty Brennan, aged 9 and Eric Brennan, aged 7 were playing near the sewer pipe on the shore with their older sister Sarah and little brother Raymond, along with other playmates. They were playing near the Sarkfoot, totally unaware of the dangerous tides and treacherous currents, and, as the flood tide rushed up the Firth, the little brother and sister were swept away and drowned.

Eric was standing on a wooden support beside the sewer pipe, and, as the tidal water covered his feet, he began to cry and tried to climb on to the pipe. Betty took hold of his hand and Margaret Brogan, a playmate, who was on the pipe along with Betty took hold of her hand in turn. Eric then overbalanced and fell into the water, dragging his sister with him. Margaret tried in vain to keep her grasp of Betty, but the current proved too much for her strength and was forced to let go her grip, when on the point of being dragged into the water. In the meantime, Sarah had run to Sarkfoot Farm for assistance. Margaret continued to try to save the other children, grabbing and throwing a log of wood for Betty to grasp, but it was too late and within 2 minutes the children had disappeared. The bodies of the two victims were recovered from the River Sark the following evening by the police.

The Annandale Observer reported, *'Much sympathy is extended to the parents and family of the bereaved household that the two children who were evacuated to Gretna to be safe from a tragic death in a city, have met their death in the treacherous Solway Firth in the place where they came to for sanctuary.'*

## **Dr Barnardo's Boys**

Philanthropist Thomas Barnardo established a ragged school in the east end of London in 1867 to help educate vulnerable and orphaned children. Concerned for the welfare of children, Barnardo went on to open the first Barnardo's Home for destitute children in 1870. From this, Barnardo opened a further 96 homes before his death in 1905. The work of Barnardo's continued after his death, with homes spread out across Britain.

When war broke out in September 1939, much like the evacuation of thousands of other children, the children from Barnardo's homes were also relocated to less dangerous areas of Britain. The charity housed orphans as well as children who had fathers fighting in the Forces and no one to look after for them at home. Throughout the war, Barnardo's evacuated around 2500 boys and girls, from babies to teenagers, from their Homes in the city areas out to the country side.



The stately homes of Dumfriesshire provided sanctuary for hundreds of these evacuated children, including Springkell, Comlongon Castle, Castlemilk and Stapleton Tower.

Springkell, near Eaglesfield, was the first Scottish branch of Barnardo's to be opened for evacuee children, opening its doors on the 11th October 1940. Reports at the time record Barnardo's gratitude to host and hostess, Sir Edward and Lady Johnson Fergusson, for their kindness. It was a general evacuation centre and remained open until 23rd August 1945.

For a young child, estrangement from parents was extremely stressful but for the children of a Barnardo's Home this would have been even more traumatic. Many of these poor children had already lost their parents or had been maltreated in their short lives. Coping with evacuation, therefore, would have been even more psychologically damaging.

The Barnardo magazine told of one case at Springkell; a little boy aged four, arrived having been dug out from the ruins of his London home. At the mere sight of any plane, he would go into a fit of terror and cry out, *'It's a German*

*bomber. They killed my mummy!* After weeks of patient care, he learned to wave his hand at the British planes overhead and say, *'There's a British plane. They'll drive the Germans away, won't they nurse.'*



## Springkell

Another two-year-old girl at Springkell, was described more like a doll than a child, as she would not move at all, except her eyes, and always watched the door with terror. The condition was caused by persistent ill-treatment, but thankfully over time with Barnardo's, she regained her childhood.

Comlongon Castle opened its doors to pre-school children on the 15th January 1942. One of the first intake were Scottish twins aged 6 months, being cared for because their mother was in hospital and their father was in the forces. In 1947, it became a temporary home and a centre for nursery training. It closed on 29th February 1952. Similarly, Castlemilk, near Lockerbie, welcomed a group of Barnardo's boys aged 5 to 14 years, from February 1941 until March 1948.

Stapleton Tower, near Annan, was built around 1550 for the Edward Irving of the Bonshaw family of Irvings. The house was bought by the Critchley family in 1855 when Manchester businessman John Ashton Critchley married Annie Jane Wylie. The Critchley family owned the house until the end of the Second World War, in which time they welcomed a group of Barnardo's boys to stay between 1941 and 1948.



A branch of Barnardo's occupied Stapleton Tower on the 15<sup>th</sup> March 1941. It housed boys from age 5 to 14 years. Every morning, the boys would march with clogs on, the two miles to Eastriggs school with their sandwiches transported in a hamper, which was attached to a bamboo pole carried by two boys at the front.



### **Stapleton Tower**

One Barnardo's boy recalled, *'In summer we were always barefoot and worked and played outside in our shorts and t-shirts. We did all the jobs about the place. Before you got breakfast, you had to do your chores. As well as gardening, you had to wash dishes and clothes, look after the chickens and donkeys- the list is endless.'*

Stapleton Tower was visited soon after its opening by a reporter from the Scottish Evening News. They reported, *'When I arrived three little boys met me in the avenue and proudly welcomed me to their home. Naively they told me that they, of course, did not belong there but had come from where the bombs were. As they escorted me to the matron's room, they were most anxious to describe a dog-fight and the whistling of falling bombs,'*

## Bob and Frank's Story

Frank Dickson and Robert 'Bob' Kerr were both trusted into the care of Dr Barnardo's Homes at the beginning of the war and, although the boys never met, their early lives followed almost identical paths.

By the age of two, Frank and Bob had both lost their mothers and with their fathers destined for the front line there was no one to care for them. This situation was not uncommon across Britain during the war and for many children Dr Barnardo's became their family.

Both boys spent their early years in Kent. Bob's childhood was quite unsettled with at least seven moves, but Frank was fostered by a retired school teacher known as 'Auntie Chris', who taught him to read and write.

As war hit, Dr Barnardo's began evacuating children to the countryside. Bob recalled setting off on a three-day train journey, destined for Balcary House in Hawick and not long after, in 1942, 6-year-old Frank was evacuated to Stapleton Tower near Eastriggs.

For Frank and Bob, heading to Scotland was a great adventure and both boys had happy memories of their time in the Borders and Dumfriesshire. Frank recalled, *'I had a happy time at Stapleton Towers...in summer, we spent most of the time playing in the grounds with just a swimsuit on. Some things stick in my mind such as eating haggis and quite a lot of rabbit stew. We used to have a competition to see who could find the most lead shot and would line them up around the edges of our plates.'*

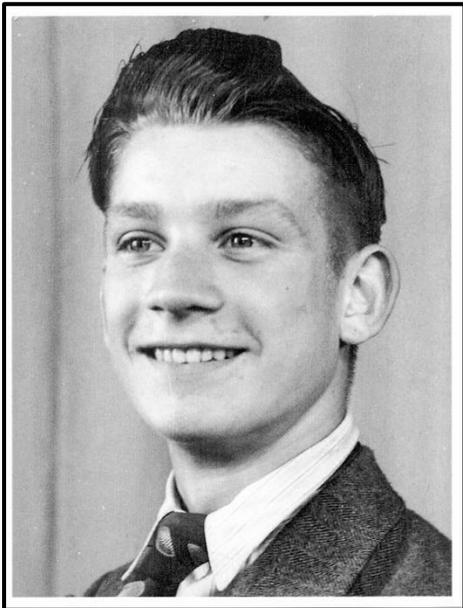
Frank also fondly remembered being taken to Ayr for a holiday, *'We stayed in a school near the seafront and spent all day on the beach with a laundry hamper full of sandwiches and jugs of orange juice. In the evening, we all trooped back for a hot meal. After our meal, we were all bathed and about 6 o'clock, we were all packed off to bed. Our beds were mattresses which had come with us, laid out in rows on the classroom floors. All the desks had been pushed back against the walls.'*

Bob felt great respect for his matron, Miss O'Brien, who made sure the Dr Barnardo's children became part of life in Hawick by regularly throwing Garden Fetes for the locals. Bob had a treasured memory of one of the fetes:

*'A rather posh lady visitor came into the kitchen in her fur coat offering to help prepare for the fete. The cook set her to stirring the soup. Then there was a scream and she fainted; she had seen the sheep's head which was used as stock in the pot.'*

The parents of Barnardo's children were permitted to visit if possible; Frank's father visited Stapleton Tower and took him out for the day, even though, at the time Frank had a bad case of chicken pox.

When the war ended, Frank was sent to a naval training school run by Barnardo's in Dorset. Bob continued to move around various Dr Barnardo's homes, eventually returning to Hawick and later moving to Dumfries.



**Barnardo's Boys - Bob Kerr aged 14 and Frank Dickson**

## Prisoners of War (POWs)

The role of Britain in the Second World War was to defeat Fascism spreading across Europe and return land back to their Allies. As well as gaining land in victories, Britain also captured Prisoners of War (POWs); these were soldiers of the enemy or in some cases displaced civilians.

The British had gathered POWs from all theatres of war, including Germans, Italians, Ukrainians and Polish. These POWs would be transferred to special camps either in the captor's country or in a captured land. Large numbers of prisoners were held in Britain throughout the war and after; there were around 400,000 POWs in Britain in 1946, which reduced as they were increasingly repatriated.

There were several types of Prisoner of War camps which played different roles; internment camps were built to hold civilian aliens who were captured within Britain or abroad; command cages which were early versions of camps which used existing buildings, tents and huts as camps; or interrogation centres where German prisoners would be classified according to their political views. German prisoners with strong Nazi views were graded black; other Germans were graded either grey or white because they held less strong views, white graded prisoners were trusted to work outside the camp without guards.

The treatment of captives was generally humane, the principles of the Geneva Convention dictating that POWs should be provided with the same living conditions as the captor's troops. The British Government endeavoured to keep to this rule, but, with wartime shortages of food, clothing and fuel, POWs were often given less or lower quality supplies. Medical and dental care was provided to POWs by British medical professionals or fellow German prisoners who had the equivalent qualifications.

The British authorities also made efforts to re-educate prisoners by highlighting the faults in Fascism and the Nazi regime and promote the benefits of democracy. After the war, German POWs were required to watch footage of the Allies liberating the concentration camps to convince them further fascism was evil. One stunned German POW said, *'I fought for them and risked my life and lost my home... I was ashamed to be German.'*

## POWs on the Solway Coast

There were six Prisoner of War camps around the Solway Coast area including Hallmuir Farm Camp and Dryfeholme Camp near Lockerbie, Barony Base Camp, Barony Working Camp and Carronbridge Camp near Dumfries and No.4 Camp near Longtown. A large number of POWs from local camps were billeted out on farms as the labour was desperately required to work the land. Usually groups of thirty men were escorted by armed guards to the fields where they would work under close supervision at all times.

Some POWs would be taken in by the farmer to stay and work on the farm; POWs and farming families often grew very attached to each other and formed life-long friendships. Jean Murchie grew up on a local farm and recalled, *'I do remember the lorry that used to drop them off at different farms and they would all shout out the back. They were cheerful, you know, nice guys. And then we had the Ukrainians. My mother quite liked to cook. She was a good cook and she liked to feed them well because she always said they were some mothers' sons.'*

Hallmuir Farm Camp, near Lockerbie, was built in 1942 to house almost 450 German and Italian prisoners. Most were employed on local farms and forestry projects. The camp boasted electric lighting, stove heating, regular visits from medical professionals, Protestant and Catholic religious services and even a male voice choir made up of POWs. By May 1945, Hallmuir POW camp held 1968 prisoners; 1821 were German, 124 were Ukrainians who had been fighting with the German army and in the Waffen SS, as well as some French, Austrian, Czech, Romanian and Hungarian prisoners. By 1947, the camp was empty as all POWs had been repatriated or had moved on. At Hallmuir, meanwhile, the Ukrainians converted the chapel established by the Italians into a Ukrainian Orthodox Church which still remains today.

The Barony at Parkgate near Dumfries was established as a POW camp in 1939 on the Galbraith family's estate. The estate had been taken over by the British army and a Jewish Pioneer Corps who built huts, initially for training, then later for prisoners from Germany, Austria and other 'alien' nations.

In 1941, the Norwegian Army moved to the Carronbridge camp, established in Islahead wood by the River Nith, near Thornhill. This camp was made up of

around 58 buildings and distinctive Nissen huts made of corrugated iron. Carronbridge camp was later used to train Allied troops, including the British, Polish and French Canadians, then it later became POW Camp 293 in 1945. The German Prisoners were encouraged to create camp newspapers; "*Unsere Welt*" (Our World) was produced by prisoners during their internment at Carronbridge camp.



**Nissen hut at Carronbridge**

Dryfeholme Camp or Halleaths Camp, as it was also known, near Lockerbie was established in 1941, originally to train Canadians. The camp made up of around 150 Nissen huts around Halleaths House and an abandoned railway, eventually became a POW Camp 617 to house German prisoners.

On the English side, No.4 camp at Hallburn, Longtown was home to German, Ukrainian and Polish Prisoners of War. The camp was slightly isolated on the outskirts of Longtown, so POWs would use bicycles to pedal into the town. Most POWs worked on local farms or the local saw mill. One German POW, paratrooper Fred Sichert, was captured during the battle for Normandy and taken to England. Fred worked on farms around Longtown or anywhere labour was required; it was while delivering milk to the Crown Hotel in Wetheral that Fred met his future wife, Isabella. As a result of marrying Isabella with a special licence, Fred remained in Cumbria for the rest of his life.



**Fred Sichert working on a local farm**

Similarly, Nina Piszczykiewicz, the daughter of Polish Mikolaj and Maria Piszczykiewicz, grew up in Longtown, as her parents were displaced after the war had ended. Nina recalled the camp at Hallburn:

*'There were hundreds of Poles in the camp, which was like a little village...It was quite a pleasant life. We were fed and we had gardens and chickens but we were very poor. We had nothing, just what we stood up in. Many Poles thought they would gradually go back home, but as time went on they stayed and got on with their lives. They got jobs either on farms, on the roads or in factories in Carlisle'.*

It was whilst bathing in August 1946, that tragedy would strike when a German POW drowned in the River Esk. Prisoner, Hinz Siegfried, aged 20 accidentally drowned while out with a bathing party of other German prisoners. A search and rescue attempt was made, but it was in vain, with his body being found later. The evidence showed that Siegfried had been seen sitting on some rocks on the side of the river, when he disappeared into the water; the Coroner determined there was no reason for Siegfried to have committed suicide, as he was supporting his family at home in Germany.

## Local people and the POWs

Many local people remembered the Prisoners of War fondly and recalled them working on the land and their presence in the community. Robert Johnstone, who lived on a farm near Creca as a child, remembered, *'There were some Italian Prisoners, and they would lift me up and say, 'Aww Bambino!' They were hoeing turnips in the field in front of our house, when the war finished, and I remember the boss going down to tell them and the hoes went up in the air and they were dancing and hugging each other.'*

Ruby Hardisty also remembered the local Italians who would cycle from Kirkpatrick Fleming, where they were camped, into Gretna to go to the cinema. Ruby recalled, *'Our boys were devils: they would put things on the road to give them punctures on their bikes. Just daft, just daft boys' stuff, you know. They were always at the pictures, that's where most of them learnt English, the pictures mostly.'*

Some locals still felt some animosity towards Prisoners of War, particularly the Germans. Jean Mackay remembered, *'They [Germans] used to march up Vancouver Road every Sunday because the Catholic chapel was at the top of our road. My poor Dad, because my Dad was at Dunkirk and everything, he used to tingle when he saw those Germans.'*

## Conclusion

The hospitality of local people in the Solway Coast area and their dedication to protecting the vulnerable was vital to keeping Briton's children safe and ensured that they would have a bright future. The evacuation of thousands of children to this quiet area of Scotland had a lasting impact on the locality and those children who had been relocated. The same can be said for the Prisoners of War who faced an equally unfamiliar new country and the unknown prospects of what they would return home to in Europe. Many of those who were originally 'far from home' chose to make the Solway Coast their new homes for the rest of their lives.

# Far From Home

## *Evacuees, Dr Barnardo's Boys and Prisoners of War in the Borderlands*



In the late 1930s, rising tensions in Europe and potential invasion unnerved the British Government who were responsible for protecting citizens. As a result *Operation Pied Piper* evacuated thousands of children and orphaned Dr Barnardo's children from British cities to the countryside. The countryside also hosted Prisoners of War who were similarly far from home.



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