

## Evacuation

**A**BOUT eighty boys of the school were entitled to be evacuated under the Government Scheme but, partly owing to the national emergency coming along during the holidays, only thirty-eight accepted the offer.

Masters were in attendance at the School from August 26th to answer parents' enquiries and make necessary preparations and I have to thank Mr. Stephens, Mr. Marsh, Mr. Lewis and Mr. Judge for curtailing their holidays and giving me very valuable help during that period. In accordance with information received the previous day, a circular was sent out to parents on the morning of Saturday, Sept. 2nd suggesting that we should probably have to wait two or three days more before being evacuated, but, following a further message received at midday, another notice stating that evacuation would take place the next morning had to be rushed out in the afternoon.

We assembled at 6 a.m. on the morning of Sunday, Sept. 3rd—forty odd boys, including one or two small brothers, myself and my wife and Mr. and Mrs. Reed to take charge of the party, and the masters already mentioned and Mr. Doig to see us off. A number of parents, who must have cursed Hitler for dragging them out of bed at such an hour on Sunday morning, were also present.

List were checked over and everyone was inspected to see that he was properly labelled and then we sat down to wait. After a while we were joined by a smaller party from the Girls' County School and at about 8.30, having been joined in the meantime by parties from the Lower Mitcham and Roman Catholic schools, we were packed into buses and started the first stage of our journey to an unknown destination. At about 9 o'clock we passed the end of my own road, which I had left at 5.30, and shortly afterwards we were deposited at Sutton Station. Here there was another wait but finally, at a little after 10 a.m., we did get into a train, still wondering where we were going, though in the meantime I had been told in confidence of three different destinations.

The route taken by the train soon showed that we were likely to reach somewhere between Chichester and Brighton. Some of the younger members of the party expressed intense disapprobation when the train pulled up at Littlehampton, but loudly expressed their delight when told that they were not to get out, but were going to Worthing. Shortly after 11 a.m. we reached that town and were just in time for the first air raid warning of the war, as a result of which we were immediately ushered into a sub-way, told to get out our gas masks and offered copious drinks of water. There seemed to be something wrong about this when we had taken so much trouble to get away from the "danger zone", but no-one "got the wind up" and the alarm did not last long.

We were next conducted to the Worthing Boys' High School, when people with official badges seized us in groups of half-a-dozen or so and took us off to be planted in billets. This was quickly accomplished, showing that those responsible, mainly the staff of the Worthing High School, had made very efficient arrangements for their part of the work. Early in the afternoon every one was sorted and the remainder of the day was spent in getting to know foster parents and finding out the whereabouts of other members of the party.

For the next ten days or so we had to amuse ourselves. Fortunately the weather was very warm and fine and there is safe bathing at Worthing. Also the Downs give excellent opportunities for rambling. Two collective rambles were organised during this period. The pre-Roman encampment at Cissbury was the objective of the first one and, though we were rather warm on reaching it, once we had eaten our lunches, everyone found some interesting occupation; either searching for neolithic remains or climbing trees or, more interesting still, eating blackberries. On the way back Gorman made the interesting find of a tortoise—probably self-evacuated—which he subsequently sold at a considerable profit.

On the second ramble we again went by Cissbury, where the weaker members were left behind, while the more stalwart continued on to Chanctonbury, from which viewpoint we looked across the Weald and wondered where Mitcham was. The return journey through No Man's Land valley was very picturesque, but the climb back on to the Cissbury ridge, after about 10 miles of walking, struck some of the party as being worse than an imposition.

This very pleasant second summer holiday, however, came to an end on Sept. 14th, when we assembled with the Battersea Grammar School in the High School buildings to commence work. Under the new conditions it took a little longer than usual to get into real school routine, but eventually boys were sorted

out into forms, a timetable was evolved, and we really began to know what we should be doing the next day.

Since then a good half-term's work has been accomplished. The school is in session each afternoon from Monday to Friday, and attendances are also made on some mornings for laboratory work, gym. classes and so on. Friendships were quickly made with both the boys and the Staff of the Battersea Grammar School, who have been most helpful to us, and have done all they can to make us feel, for the time being, we are a welcome part of their school.

At times slight difficulties have arisen through boys getting into forms which were too good or not good enough for them, or through slight divergencies between the curricula of the Mitcham and the Battersea schools, but these have quickly been rectified when brought to our notice, and the Headmaster of Battersea has been most kind and considerate in arranging, so far as our emergency organisation will allow, for our boys to get the maximum educative benefit from their association with his school. We hope that we have contributed something in return.

Much might be written about billets—a subject which is now always with us. It has been necessary to move a certain number of boys since we came, but in very few cases has the reason been really unsatisfactory behaviour on the part of boys, or really unsatisfactory arrangements for them in the billets. It is very pleasing to be able to state that, in the majority of cases, the foster parents have willingly tried to make the boys happy and comfortable and that in most cases they have been

very well satisfied with the behaviour of our boys in their houses. Of course on both sides there has to be a realisation that we are suffering some of the inconveniences of war, and that we must help one another to make the best of them.

It seems a pity that, when so much expense has been incurred and so much trouble taken to bring boys into an area where less danger is expected, some should let the little inconveniences worry them, until they worry their parents to take them back. So far about nine of our party have returned, one or two with good reasons, but most of them just because they were homesick. In some cases parents have not been so considerate as they might be. It is not very encouraging to us when after several hours searching for a new billet for a boy, we hear a day or two later that he is going home the next week-end; nor is it quite fair to the people who have had their own home life disturbed by making room for him in their house. Neither is it very courteous to a Headmaster who has been to considerable trouble to arrange for the education of a group of boys from another school, when they just fade away with little notice or acknowledgement of what has been done for them.

However, there are still about thirty boys of the school here, two or three who have been sent to this area independently having joined us, and most of us are making the best of things and realising that things are not at all bad if we face up to them. We have gained nearly half a term's work on those boys who were left behind. We have made new friends, seen new places and have had an interesting experience of the methods of another school.

Apart from a few colds, which we might have had in Mitcham, our health has been good and we are benefiting from the fresh air from the sea and from the Downs and most of us look considerably better for it. We all hope that our return may not be long delayed, but realise that in the meantime we can try to be a credit both to the Battersea Grammar School, to whom we are for the time being attached, and to the Mitcham County School, which has our more permanent loyalty.

W.L. WHITELEY.



**War Conditions**—The School has now adapted itself to war conditions. Some thirty of our members are still evacuated, though Mr. Reed and a number of boys have returned since our last issue. For the rest, all normal out-of-school activities have now been resumed and several new ones have sprung up, which is as it should be. After all, the refining and civilising influences of the less strictly "school" activities are needed now more than ever.