

Levens school in the Second World War 1939 - 1945

The Headmaster was Mr Tomlinson.

At the beginning of the war there were 148 children on the registers. This consisted of 88 Levens children, 43 Newcastle evacuees and 17 South Shields evacuees.

The Newcastle and South Shields children began classes in the Women's Institute and the Parish Room. Later in September all the children were amalgamated in the school building and the Parish Room, making very large classes. Three evacuated teachers joined the staff. A considerable number of nature rambles took place to ease the congestion.

To make matters worse, in January 1940 the weather was so cold that the toilets froze solid and the school was closed for a week due to unsanitary accommodation. Gas mask tests were carried out regularly to ensure that all the children could use them properly. The whole school carried out 'Air Raid Practice' in order to be able to evacuate the school in one minute (quite a feat considering the number of children involved).

Also in 1940 Miss Coward left and Mr John Common was moved away to take charge of evacuees at Burneside school. On the same day the Supply Teacher was re-called for other duties. During the Whitsuntide holiday in that year the following entry appears in the school log book: 'Owing to the present very critical position we opened school today.' It must have been thought that the children were safest in the school when an imminent invasion was expected. In December 1940 most of the Newcastle evacuees returned home.

Throughout the period of the war there was an extra nurse who came from Newcastle. There seems to have been some considerable misunderstanding as to the duties of the two nurses, refereed by the Headteacher.

In May 1941, 53 children from Barrow were evacuated to Levens. Two teachers came with them. In July 1941 two of the Barrow children were accidentally drowned at Ninezergh. At this time the school had 3 Levens teachers, 1 Newcastle teacher, and 2 Barrow teachers, all working in the school building and the Parish Room. Miss Dand got married in early 1942, but agreed to stay at the school for the duration of the war.

By August 1943 most of the evacuees had gone home, leaving 7 from Barrow, 1 from Newcastle and several private evacuees. Another 6 London children arrived in October 1944, probably due to the V2 rockets which followed the V1 flying bombs, killing, in total, about 9000 people in London and the South East.

In the course of the evacuation 12 different temporary teachers from the North East and Barrow arrived and left - an organisational nightmare for the Headmaster. During this time there was more emphasis on the children's health with doctors' examinations as well as nurses. Diphtheria vaccinations were carried out, and various skin complaints treated, including scabies. There were problems with caretakers leaving and not being replaced, and the heating system gave trouble. The regular examinations were kept going with difficulty, and trips to the swimming baths took place with voluntary help.

In 1944 the school was re-decorated and the school canteen opened, and in 1945 a new boiler was installed. Things were returning to normal.