

What is an evacuee?

An evacuee is someone who has been sent away from a dangerous place to somewhere safe, especially during a war. This is usually a temporary measure to keep them safe. This happened a great deal in Europe during the Second World War.

At the start of the Second World War the government set up 'Operation Pied Piper'. This was the plan to evacuate people from the cities and other areas that were at high risk of being bombed or becoming a battlefield if Britain was invaded.

Vulnerable people, particularly children were also evacuated from Europe as the German army invaded and some came to Britain as it was considered a safer place to be at that time.

The Second World War Evacuees

During the Second World War 110,000 children came to Wales as evacuees.

As a result of the serious threats to British cities there was a drive to move the most vulnerable civilians to safer environments, namely the children, the mothers of children under five years of age, pregnant women and people with disabilities.

Whilst some were moved abroad to Canada, New Zealand or Australia, the majority were moved to rural parts within Britain.

Areas were split into three categories: 'dangerous' towns where there was a need to escape, 'neutral' areas where there was no need to escape but they could not receive any evacuees, and the 'accepting' areas that accommodated evacuees.

Many parts of Wales were considered to be 'accepting areas'.

Thousands of Welsh people supported the cause by demonstrating kindness and by welcoming evacuees into their homes voluntarily.



Evacuees in Gwynedd during the Second World War

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Isidore Wartski

Isidore Wartski was born in 1879.

His family had fled from Russia during the nineteenth century – a period when Jews were persecuted in the region.

His father, Morris Wartski, had made his home in Bangor and in 1865 established a jewellery and clothes shop on the High Street.

Isidore was also a successful businessman and expanded his father's clothes business, in addition to working on developing the Castle Hotel in the town.

Isidore was a popular figure in Bangor and a sponsor of local sports and charities.

After 15 years as a member of the Town Council, he was appointed Mayor between 1939 and 1941 – the first Jewish Mayor in Wales.

Evacuees from the Liverpool Institute

As the town's Mayor during the war, Isidore Wartski was responsible for assisting with arrangements for evacuees to be re-homed in Bangor.

In September 1939 young boys from the *Liverpool Institute* came to the town and this meant having to find a home to all of the students and teachers.

Every house in Bangor was inspected to see how many bedrooms were available and therefore how many children could be provided for.

A place was also allocated to educate the children and they were able to share facilities with another school in Berea Chapel on Caernarfon Road.

The pupils stayed in Bangor for nine months. Isidore Wartski received a tankard as a gift to thank him for his efforts during this period.



Isidore Wartski



Tankard given to Isidore Wartski

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Background to the Spanish Civil War

The Spanish Civil War that took place between 1936 and 1939 was a significant event; almost 500,000 lost their lives during that period.

It was a battle between the Republicans (the left wing democrats) and the Nationalists (the right wing Fascists) who were attempting to bring down the government and its liberal values.

The Nationalists were led by their leader Francisco Franco, and the majority of his supporters were landowners, members of the Roman Catholic Church and the Army.

The Republicans on the other hand were mainly workers, Trade Unionists and socialists.

The Nationalist were victorious and Spain was ruled under Franco's dictatorship until his death in 1975.

The response from Europe and Wales

The Civil War emphasized the fundamental differences in the vision of the European countries. Germany and Italy sent soldiers and ammunition to help the Nationalists, whilst the Soviet Union rushed to support the Republicans. The official stance in Britain was one of non-intervention.

2,000 Britons however decided to support the Republicans off their own backs.



Burning buildings in Guernica during the Spanish Civil War

In Wales many empathised specifically with the Basque Country in Northern Spain, as the independence and language of the region was under threat if the Nationalists came to power. 174 people from the South Wales collieries went to Spain.

It was a period when the trade unions were carrying out strikes against the colliery owners and the Socialist battle against the Nationalists rang true.

In North Wales the support given was more humanitarian than military in nature

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John Williams Hughes

John Hughes was born on 20 May 1906 and brought up in Marianglas on Anglesey.

His parents were Calvinists and he was from a background of Non-Conformism and Liberalism. He was a journalist and wrote for newspapers such as the *North Wales Observer*, *Y Goleuad*, *Tir Newydd*, *New Chronicle*, *Peace News* and the *Western Mail*.

Despite not having a medical background he became a volunteer with the Welsh Ambulance Unit and went to Spain to provide first aid to the civilians injured during the Civil War.

He was the joint secretary of the North Wales Spanish Medical Committee, and collected enough money to buy two vehicles and to fill both with first aid packages that were driven to Spain.

Evacuees from the Civil War

In December 1936, 40 school children were killed when a bomb was dropped on their school.

In 1937 Guernica was targeted by an air raid, and thousands of children had to flee as evacuees.

To raise awareness of the atrocity, John Hughes collected pictures drawn by the children of Guernica which were then used as propaganda against the fascist regime, as well as being used to spread the story of the bloodshed in newspaper articles and radio interviews.

4,000 had to escape from Spain in 1937 and over 200 children came to stay in Wales.

Due to the political nature of the difficulties, the government were wary of giving their support, and the Basque children had to rely on voluntary gifts from the public.

John Hughes took part in campaigning to secure homes for these refugees in North Wales and a number of them were given shelter in an old school for girls at Lôn Meiriadog, Old Colwyn. Further charitable efforts to support the evacuees included door to door collections and financial support from organisations and local schools.



Picture taken during the Spanish Civil War of a person receiving medical treatment



Pictures drawn by children of the attacks on Guernica

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