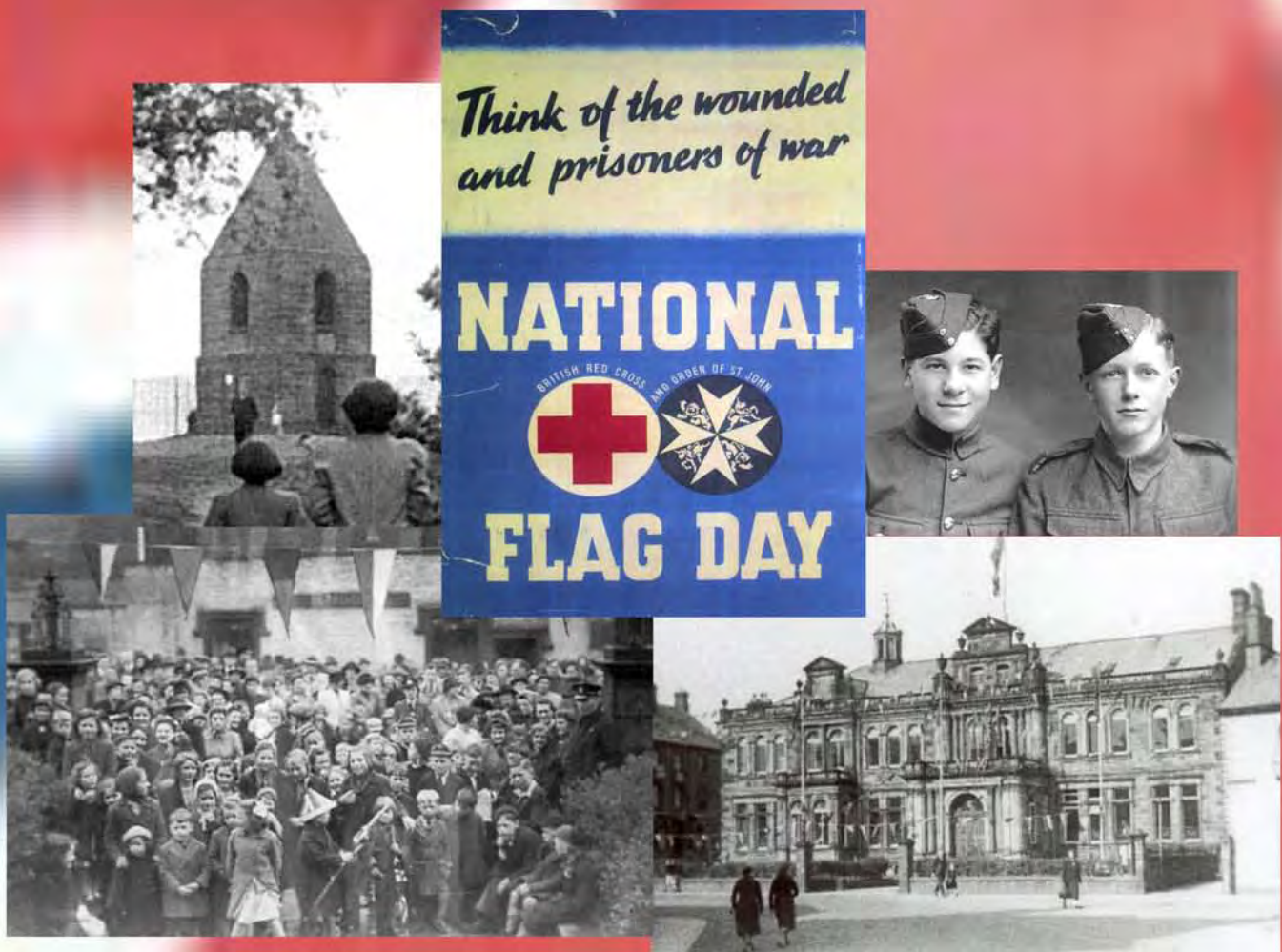


Penrith Museum

The Home Front in Penrith and Eden



A Resource Pack

A synopsis of key events supplemented by a Museum visit, handling session and associated art workshops



Eden Goes to War

On 3 September 1939, after Germany's attack on Poland, Europe was plunged into war for almost six years. Although our area was far away from the battlefield and less vulnerable to air attacks, the outbreak of war marked a new era for the people of Penrith and Eden:

- Many young men and women enlisted in the Forces while older people joined the Home Guard or became Air Raid Precaution (ARP) Wardens.
- Children from the North East were evacuated here to escape the threat of bombing raids on Tyneside.
- People were ordered to carry gas masks at all times.
- Instructions were given that warning of a threatened air attack would be given with sirens or hooters. Gas attacks would be signalled by hand rattles.
- A 'black-out' of all house windows was ordered.
- Pedestrians were forbidden to flash torches and motorists had to restrict car lights to an opening two inches (5 cm) in diameter.
- Petrol, coal and foodstuffs were rationed. The rationed products included butter, eggs, cheese, meats, tea and jam.
- Iron railings from parks and private gardens were collected for smelting and recycling into ships, tanks and weapons.
- Farmers were urged to produce more oats, barley, potatoes, meat and milk.
- Members of the Women's Land Army began to arrive on the farms.
- The 'Herald', along with other newspapers, was halved in size because of fears of paper shortages.

Penrith, though not in the firing line, was definitely on an important line of communication. Throughout the war years convoys of equipment, guns, tanks, jeeps and service personnel in battledress moved intermittently by night and by day, by road and by rail, on their journeys north, south, east and west.

The Home Guard - In a broadcast to the nation on 14 May 1940, Anthony Eden appealed 'to all men between 17 and 65 who had handled any weapon of offence or defence, and were willing to enrol in a citizen army to be called Local Defence Volunteers'. Within 24 hours more than a quarter of a million men had signed forms at their local police stations. Locally, these volunteers became the 8th Battalion (Cumberland) Home Guard, with its headquarters in Wilson Row.

The troops from Alston became famous both locally and nationally when they created a 'mounted' company to patrol the surrounding hill country on horseback.

Penrith A.R.P. (Air Raid Precaution) Services – From its early days, which began under a joint District Committee in May 1938, the A.R.P. Service gradually became absorbed in the County A.R.P. Committee, which controlled Wardens, Rescue, First Aid, Fire, Ambulance and Hospital Services. The Fire Service was eventually merged in the N.F.S. (National Fire Service).



Eden
District Council

Wartime in Eden

During World War Two four thousand acres of land around Warcop were used as a mock battlefield for men preparing for the D-Day Landings in Normandy and the invasion of Europe. (There is still a large army training centre at Warcop). There was also a small airfield at Whinfell, a few miles east of Penrith, where the planes were hidden by camouflage nets. It was supposed to be secret but information leaked out. William Joyce, better known as the infamous Lord Haw Haw because of his upper class accent on German propaganda radio broadcasts, mentioned the airfield to try to damage morale. He knew the area fairly well because his wife Margo Cairns White had been brought up in Carlisle before she went to live with her husband in Germany.

The skies above Eden were used for training by the RAF, but sometimes there were tragedies because of inexperience and bad weather. Deaths even occurred prior to the conflict. At Silverband Mine near Appleby a Spitfire crashed in poor visibility in 1939 shortly before the outbreak of war. Some of the locals managed to recover the pilot's body and brought him off the hillside on a farm trailer.

In October 1940 a Wellington bomber flown by 25 year-old Pilot Officer J.E.S Morton from New Zealand and his crew were returning from a bombing mission in Germany when bad weather forced them to bale out before the aircraft crash-landed in a field near Plumpton. All survived and presumably did not suffer much ill effect from their ordeal, as a few days later they were bombing the marshalling yards in Munich! Later, a German bomber returning from a raid, probably on Liverpool, dropped its last six bombs which landed on Stainmore and Musgrave.

On the night of 14 March 1941 a German plane dropped a bomb very close to Hugh's Crag Viaduct in Lowther Park. The pilot was probably aiming to destroy the main LMS railway line from London to Scotland. The following day a group of boys from the Newcastle Royal Grammar School visited the site and collected a piece of shrapnel from the bomb, which is now in the Penrith and Eden Museum collection.



Eden
District Council

The Lowther Secret

During the Second World War Eden became the nerve centre for one of the country's top military secrets. In 1941 the War Office drafted a small team of specialists to Lowther Castle to set up a special establishment called the Canal Light Defence (CDL) School. Here military experts devised a method of adapting the turrets of standard tanks to shine intense, flickering lights of up to thirteen million candlepower with the intension of blinding the enemy during night fighting.

The CDL School trained men from the 35th Royal Tank Brigade, which in 1942 became part of the 79th Armoured Division. The tanks were tested in great secrecy, with all CDL personnel signing the Official Secrets Act once a month. The trainee units had their quarters at Lowther Park, in much the same location as the present caravan park, and also at Brougham Hall.

Altogether six thousand officers and men trained at the CDL School. £20 million was spent on the CDL tank project and almost two thousand tanks were converted. In May 1942 Earl Mountbatten visited Lowther to see the CDL tank in action, and in December of that year King George VI, Eisenhower and Winston Churchill came up to see a demonstration. Tests were very successful and some of the tanks were later taken over to Europe and used during the crossing of the Rhine. However, the over-cautiousness of commanding officers on the battlefield, especially Field-Marshal Montgomery, meant that the top-secret device was never properly used.

Some experts thought it was a great mistake not to employ what could have been a decisive weapon. Major General Fuller, the world's leading authority on tank strategy, said in 1949 'I regard the failure to use this tank as the greatest blunder of the whole war'. After the war the CDL was used in Africa and India and, in an improved form, it was adopted by the US Army and called 'The Xenon Searchlight'.



Eden
District Council

Wartime at Penrith Town Hall

From the summer of 1938 Council staff at the Town Hall and Mansion House were involved in the surveying of accommodation for future billeting of evacuees. On 31 August 1939, in preparation for the arrival of evacuees the following day, arrangements were made for the emergency food rations previously stored at the Railway Goods Station to be delivered to Brunswick Road School. These included 2544 tins beef, 4032 tins milk, 4000 bars of chocolate, 300 tins biscuits and 2000 carrier bags which were packed and distributed to the evacuees on arrival.

The Town Hall became the centre of civic activity. Not only were there regular gatherings of evacuees and refugees, but also Belgian, Norwegian, and French National Days. Entertainments for the relations of prisoners of war, children's parties, USA troops and foreign journalists were all held there. In addition there were regular meetings of Emergency Committees, Firewatchers, the War Savings Drives, Red Cross Appeals, as well as YMCA and Ministry of Information films. Civil Defence was closely associated with the Town Hall, its Report Centre functioning in the basement, while the whole building was given up to many exercises. On one occasion the stairway was completely occupied from 1.00am to 9.00am by Home Guard 'prisoners of war'.

On 8 May 1945, V E (Victory in Europe) Day, Winston Churchill's announcement of the end of the war was broadcast from the Town Hall steps to the assembled crowds outside. After his speech Mr C H Huntley, Clerk of the Council, and Councillor J E Irving, Chairman of the Council, addressed the crowd. Congregational Minister Reverend Tom Cross was there with his camera and his photographs are now in the Penrith and Eden Museum collection.



Eden
District Council

Rationing

Here are the average food rations that were allowed for one person per week:

4oz. Cheese	4oz. Bacon
4oz. Jam	4oz. Butter
2oz. Cooking fat	2oz. Margarine
8oz. Sugar	3oz. Sweets
2oz. Tea (adults)	12oz. Minced beef

(4oz. = 113 grams)

1 fresh egg per adult
3 fresh eggs per child
Dried egg powder to the value of 3 eggs
7 pints of milk for a child under 5
3.5 pints of milk for a school child
1 pint of dried milk

A child also had a bottle of milk at school.

Fish, bread, offal and fruit were not rationed but were often in short supply.

A further ration of sixteen points, later twenty points, was added for luxury-type foods such as:

- Biscuits
- Dried fruit
- Breakfast cereal
- Tinned food

Clothes were also rationed in 1940 because materials were in short supply. The allowance of 66 coupons a person was later reduced to 48. The following items will give you an idea of what a person could buy:

	Item	Coupons
Women	Coat	14
	Dress	11
	Blouse	5
	Shoes/boots	5
	Handkerchief	1
Men	Overcoat	16
	Jacket	13
	Trousers	8
	Shoes/boots	5
	Handkerchief	1



Eden
District Council

Evacuation to Eden

On 1 September 1939 about 800 schoolboys from the Newcastle Royal Grammar School arrived in Penrith by special train. Clutching their rucksacks, kit bags and gas masks, they had been evacuated here to escape the danger of Hitler's bombing raids on Tyneside. Their teachers and a small number of voluntary helpers accompanied them.

The boys were billeted with local families or in large houses like Sandath and Roundthorn, which became halls of residence for the duration of the war. Their bright blue blazers were soon a familiar sight around the town. The School used Penrith Methodist Church in Wordsworth Street as their base, and shared buildings and facilities with local children. In the afternoons the senior pupils used the classrooms at Penrith Queen Elizabeth Grammar School. Morning lessons were held in hired rooms in other parts of the town.

The Newcastle Royal Grammar School was not the only school evacuated to Eden. The rural towns and villages received almost 750 children, many from the South Benwell Council School and schools in South Shields. As the tempo of the enemy bombing increased from 1940 to 1942 there was also a swelling stream of private evacuees, particularly mothers and young children. The area was crowded with a larger population than had ever been known, giving an increase of 4000 extra people in the town and 2000 in the surrounding rural area.

Though the evacuation was intended as an emergency wartime exercise, it created many lasting bonds. Some evacuees eventually settled in Penrith, or married local girls, and many others maintained contact with their former host families. In July 1994 there was a special weekend of celebrations to mark the 50th anniversary of the Royal Grammar School's return home to Newcastle when former pupils re-visited the town to renew friendships and revive wartime memories.



Eden
District Council

Wartime Camps

Prisoner of War Camps:

Throughout the country fifteen hundred camps were built under a Government move to accommodate Italian and German prisoners of war. During the war years there were over four hundred thousand prisoners in Britain. Because Eden was so remote it was perfect to house prisoners of war and a number of camps were located in the area.

In the early 1940s there was an Italian prisoner of war camp, known as Camp 76, at Merrythought on the A6 just north of Plumpton. (The site is now owned by D.E.F.R.A. and is a Veterinary Investigation Centre). Shap Wells Camp: There was a camp for German Army officers at the Shap Wells Hotel (for more details see the section on the U-Boat Hotel).

Displaced Persons Camps:

At the end of the war the former Army camp of brick-built and Nissen-type huts in Lowther Park was converted to accommodate 600 refugees from Poland. They had their own school, church, community centre and football club. Many of the refugees later integrated into the local community. Greystoke Castle, which at the outbreak of the war had been taken over by the Army for tank driver training, was later used to house about 2000 Polish people.



Eden
District Council

U-Boat Hotel

The Earl of Lonsdale owned Shap Wells Hotel which was requisitioned and turned into Prisoner of War (PoW) Camp No 15 in February 1941. It housed up to 200 prisoners on the top two floors of the hotel, these often waiting to be sent to Glasgow and then off to Canada. It took German officers, with the camp leader at one point being a German Prince who was related to Queen Mary. Conditions for officers were much more comfortable than that for their British counterparts and it is recorded that the hotel linen and crockery were used for the prisoners, hence its nickname 'U-Boat Hotel'.

Security was important as the mainline railway was nearby and could be used as a means of escape. Each bedroom door had a spy hole fitted for extra security. The camp was protected with two rings of barbed wire and searchlights, and Guards lived in Nissen huts in the adjoining gardens to prevent escapes. However if officers gave their word of honour not to attempt to escape they were allowed to go out and walk on the fells. There were also crafts, painting, drama productions and building a swimming pool in the river to keep the prisoners busy.

This was not enough for two young Luftwaffe officers, Karl Wapper and Heinz Schnabel who were desperate to escape. They adapted uniforms so they looked like Dutch pilots and over time collected papers, maps and charts so that they could steal a plane and fly home. On Sunday 23 November 1941, they hid in a pile of firewood until night, escaped to Shap and at the railway cutting jumped onto a slow moving freight train on its way to Carlisle. Arriving there they went to see a film at the cinema and then went on to Kingstown airfield where they were let through in their disguise as Dutch flyers. They spent the night behind an aircraft hangar and in the morning told a mechanic that they needed to take up a monoplane on weather reconnaissance. Soon they were in the air and later in the day landed near Great Yarmouth in Norfolk, where they needed to be refuelled before they could head for Germany. Unfortunately for them the local RAF station couldn't refuel them that late in the day so they were invited to stay over at the RAF station nearby. There they were stormed while having hot baths, taken back to Shap Wells by Military police and sentenced to 28 days solitary confinement for their daring attempt at escape.



Eden
District Council

Life at Hutton-in-the-Forest

The Hutton estate had an interesting history during the Second World War. William Vane, who later became the first Lord Inglewood, inherited the Estate in 1931 and served in France and the Middle East during the Second World War. While he was away his younger sister Margaret Vane ran the Estate. She wrote weekly letters to her brother and so there is a good record of events on the Estate.

At the beginning of the war two mothers and children from Newcastle were evacuated to the house, but the housekeeper found the idea of more evacuees too difficult to cope with, and as she was not well, they were moved to farms near Skelton. The house was also used for storage for people who had homes bombed in London.

The mansion was considered for a number of uses such as to house Czech refugees to work on the Forestry Commission land, or as an Admiralty training school, or for a girls' school. The BBC were also interested in it, but while everyone was negotiating HM Forces decided that they needed the house and they requisitioned it. The Vane family still had a flat there, which they continued to use.

The RAF arrived, but only stayed a short time as it was felt to be too far from Carlisle. The men slept in huts in the grounds and the officers slept in the house. The hall and the pele tower were used as offices. The RAF wanted electricity in the house and the Estate agreed to pay a proportion of the cost. They bought a second hand generator which on the RAF's departure was left in a loose box for the army who followed. A Tank Company, stationed at Lowther, used Hutton for additional accommodation. 300 men were expected to use the house but in reality this was probably about 150. The gardens were used to grow vegetables for the troops.

In November 1940 the Air Ministry requisitioned the land on the estate for hiding and storing aeroplanes. The woods made it an ideal spot and an airstrip was built using thousands of tons of limestone from Flusco and Blencowe quarries to fill in the hollows to make a flat landing strip. At one point there were 100 men working on the ground. There was a standing in the woods for about 100 planes and some of the first Hurricane fighters were stored there. The cattle and sheep grazed the landing area, which was good camouflage, and the local farmer was given 30 minutes notice of planes landing or taking off to move the stock. Guards and dogs manned the area. The pilots were all stationed at Silloth and the airstrip was used for maintenance with offices and a canteen in the woods. As the war progressed the runway had to be enlarged, but with as few trees as possible cut down because they were needed for camouflage. The Estate's head forester applied for help from the Italian and German prisoners from the Merrythought Camp at Calthwaite as the other Estate workers had been called up to fight.

The BBC took over two farms on the Estate to build the Skelton transmission station in 1942, and it was said that the BBC station was probably the most up to date and largest short wave station in the world at the time with entirely British equipment. 65% of the transmissions went to Europe and 35% were World transmissions.

When the war came to an end the house was returned to its owners but the Navy required the woods for storing ammunition until 1946.



Eden
District Council

Eden Timeline

1939

- Food reserves built up
- Billeting Officers started organising accommodation for the expected evacuees
- Spitfire crash near Silverband Mine, Appleby.
- Penrith Town Hall planned for civil defence, plan in Penrith and Eden Museum
- 1 September, The boys of the Royal Grammar School arrive in Penrith as evacuees.
- 3 September, Britain declares war on Germany and men and women all over Eden sign up.

1940

- As bombing increases elsewhere, more evacuees arrive in Eden.
- October. Wellington Bomber crashes near Plumpton.
- Six bombs dropped on Stainmore and Musgrave by a German bomber returning from a raid on Liverpool.
- Air Ministry requisitioned Hutton Estate for hiding and storing planes.
- 25 October permission given by Penrith Urban District Council to erect an air raid shelter in Castle Park, Penrith.

1941

- As bombing increases elsewhere, more evacuees arrive in Eden.
- Canal Light Defence School opens at Lowther Castle.
- Shap Well Hotel opens as an officers Prisoner of War camp for German officers, nicknamed 'U-boat Hotel'.
- 14 March. Bomb dropped near Hugh's Crag Viaduct in Lowther Park. Piece of shrapnel in Penrith and Eden Museum.

1942

- In May Earl Mountbatten visited Lowther to see the CDL in action and in December Lowther was visited by King George VI, Eisenhower and Winston Churchill.
- BBC built Skelton Transmission Station

1943

- There were about 718,000 cars on the British roads – this was a fall from around 1,000,000 at the end of the 1930s. Cars that were in use had to be adapted to meet blackout regulations and immobilised to prevent the enemy using them in case of invasion. Difficulties in getting hold of petrol severely limited vehicular use.



Eden
District Council

1944

- In Britain 1576 million cinema tickets are sold. This compares to 903,000 ten years previously and 343 million in the 1960s, when television was available. In Penrith the Alhambra and the Regent were popular for a night out and to see the wartime newsreels.
- Penrith Local Savings Committee awarded a plaque for success in 'Salute the Soldier Week 1944', the plaque is in Penrith and Eden Museum.
- 6 June D-Day
- End of July The Royal Grammar School left Penrith and returned to Newcastle
- 17 October. Halifax aircraft crashed between Penruddock and Motherby on a navigational exercise from Yorkshire.

1945 War ends. Labour party wins British election and sets up 'Welfare State'.

- 8 May VE Day
- 15 August VJ Day



Eden
District Council



I WISH TO MARK, BY THIS PERSONAL MESSAGE,
my appreciation of the service you have rendered to your
Country in 1939.

In the early days of the War you opened your door to strangers
who were in need of shelter, & offered to share your home with
them.

I know that to this unselfish task you have sacrificed much
of your own comfort, & that it could not have been achieved
without the loyal co-operation of all in your household.
By your sympathy you have earned the gratitude of those to
whom you have shown hospitality, & by your readiness to
serve you have helped the State in a work of great value.

Elizabeth R



Eden
District Council



URGENT

PUT YOUR CAR OUT OF ACTION

In order to prevent the enemy seizing vehicles and using them all motor vehicles in this area, except essential vehicles, must be put completely out of action immediately. This Order applies to private cars, goods vehicles, motor cycles and all other motor vehicles. It does not apply to agricultural tractors used solely in the internal operations of a farm.

Special labels marked with the letters "E.L." have been issued for essential vehicles. If your vehicle is in this area and has not been classified as essential by the issue of an E.L. label you must immobilise it permanently in the following way :—

- (1) If it has an internal combustion engine,
 - (a) You must remove the distributor head and leads (or in the case of a motor cycle with no distributor head, the sparking plug and lead) ; and
 - (b) You must also remove the carburettor or empty the petrol tank.
- (2) If it has a compression ignition (e.g. diesel) engine, you must remove the fuel injection pump and connections.

If you have your car with you now and your home is in this area, you should drive it home **IMMEDIATELY** and immobilise it there. If you are merely passing through, you should ask the police whether you may proceed. If they agree, you should go **IMMEDIATELY** and immobilise your car as soon as you reach your destination.

All the parts removed and any similar spare parts must be hidden so that the enemy cannot find them.

YOU MUST ACT AT ONCE. Failure to carry out this instruction forthwith is a criminal offence.

*Issued by Authority of the Regional Commissioner
acting under Defence Regulation 16A.*



Eden
District Council



8th June, 1946

TO-DAY, AS WE CELEBRATE VICTORY, I send this personal message to you and all other boys and girls at school. For you have shared in the hardships and dangers of a total war and you have shared no less in the triumph of the Allied Nations.

I know you will always feel proud to belong to a country which was capable of such supreme effort; proud, too, of parents and elder brothers and sisters who by their courage, endurance and enterprise brought victory. May these qualities be yours as you grow up and join in the common effort to establish among the nations of the world unity and peace.

George R.I.



Eden
District Council

Glossary

ARP Air Raid Precautions

Billets The houses and hostels where evacuees stayed.

CDL School Canal Light Defence School

Civilians People who are not in the armed forces.

Evacuation The movement of people from areas of danger to areas where they will be safe.

Hosts Families who looked after evacuees.

Land Army Organization that recruited women to work on farms during the Second World War.

PoW Prisoner of War

VE Day Victory in Europe Day - 8 May 1945

VJ Day Victory in Japan Day - 15 August 1945



Eden
District Council

Books To Read

Britain at War: Evacuation by Martin Parsons (Wayland, 1999)

When I was Young, World War II by Neil Thompson (Franklin Watts, 1993)

Life on the Home Front by Tim Healy (Reader's Digest 1993)

'Under the Shadow of the Beacon': A Few Penrith and District Memories of the Years 1939-1945 by I G Sim (Reprinted from the Penrith Observer, 1945)

'Evacuation': A personal account of the Newcastle Royal Grammar School in Penrith, Cumberland, during the years 1939-1944 by George Pallister (1979).

Royal Grammar School, Newcastle Upon Tyne: A History of the School in its Community, edited by Brian Mains and Anthony Tuck (1986)

Penrith: A Historical Record in Photographs published by Penrith Museum (2000)



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