

The Estate at War

Although few visitors are aware of it today, the Tatton estate played a vitally important role in Britain's wartime years between 1939 and 1945. Maurice Egerton, 4th and last Baron of Tatton, was keen to support the war effort and gave permission for his land at Ringway (now Manchester Airport) to be used from 1940 onwards.

It was here that the canopies of British parachute troops opened for the first time, heralding the birth of Britain's Airborne forces. Tatton Park became the training centre for No 1 Parachute School and over 383,000 parachute descents were made here by soldiers and civilians of many nationalities who came under cover of night to do their training jumps before leaping as Special Agents (by parachute) into Occupied Europe.

In addition, wartime brought a whole new set of activities and people to Tatton; evacuees, the Women's Land Army, the troops returning from Dunkirk, the Home Guard, Air Raid Precautions, the Auxiliary Fire Service, the Army, R.A.F. and eventually the U.S. Third Army.

Evacuees

The Tatton estate welcomed evacuees from Liverpool and Manchester. Some visited the park just for the day, and several actually stayed at the Hall and were entertained with canoeing expeditions on the estate ponds. The boys were city bred youngsters, knowing nothing of country life and ways and were often amazed by what they saw. One boy gathering chestnuts in the park in October 1939 remarked: "I buy these on Piccadilly for 7 a penny. I didn't know they grew on trees"

The National Evacuation Scheme proved to be unpopular and in keeping with the general tendency, Maurice's evacuees rarely stayed long. He kept a record of wartime visitors and evacuees are mentioned amongst them. The name of one little boy, Robert Park, turns up again in visitors lists for 1948, 1950 and 1953; perhaps there is some truth in a story told by old estate workers that Lord Egerton paid for the education of one ex-evacuee.

Land Army

The Women's Land Army filled the gaps in the workforce at Tatton caused by men joining up for active service. From the basic hostel accommodation in the Bothy in the gardens, or Rangemor (home of Lord Egerton's agent before it was requisitioned), the Land Army Girls would arrive to start work at 7.30 in the morning. Some would help clear the woods, others worked in the sawmill, the dairy, the kitchen gardens and in the fields at harvest time.

Not all the work carried out by Tatton's 15 or so Land Army Girls had obvious wartime significance. When Lord Egerton found that war prevented him from visiting his Kenyan estates, he used the Land Army to help him create the magnificent display of rhododendrons that visitors to the gardens still enjoy every year. He would sit on a shooting stick, directing the girls to plant here, or move a fully grown rhododendron a few yards over there (no small task!) if he thought its position could be improved.

Costume Information Sheet

World War II Evacuees on the Farm

Date: 1942 Tatton Home Farm at War

Where are you going?

Your Living History Day takes place at Tatton Dale Farm. The farm is just as it was when war broke out in 1939, so we hope you will get a good idea of what it was like to be an evacuee at this time.

What to wear

We find some sort of costume, however simple, will help you to enter into the spirit of the day. You could dress up as evacuees like the pictures below, or just as ordinary country children during the war. On a farm, both girls and boys often wore dungarees over a warm 'fair-isle' sweater. It is important that you are warm and dry on your visit to Tatton, as most of your time is spent outside. Make sure you bring a warm coat, a hat or hood and waterproof footwear.

Evacuees

Evacuees came from major cities like London and Manchester to live with families in the safety of the countryside and wore Identity Labels on arrival. Gas masks were carried at all times in brown cardboard boxes. Some children even had novelty models made to look like Mickey Mouse!

Boys

The boys hair was much shorter than today and often combed to one side. You could also wear a cap.

Boys wore blazers or short, warm jackets with a warm scarf and jumper underneath.

The boys wore short trousers all year round, (even in winter!) until the age of fourteen when they left school and started to work. Long socks were worn to keep them warm.



Girls

Girls hair was usually short and cut into a bob shape with a ribbon worn on one side. A kind of beret called a 'pixie' hat was worn outdoors.

Girls rarely wore trousers, but had thick woollen tights or long socks in the winter. Cardigans were very common, worn over a frock or with a blouse and pleated skirt or 'gym slip'.

Coats were $\frac{3}{4}$ length 'Mackintosh' style or wool in the winter, not short jackets like today.

In summer, both girls and boys wore sandals. In winter, stout lace-up shoes were normal. As you are going to the farm, however, it would be sensible to wear lace-up boots or wellies.

Resources

Wartime Tatton - Full Story guide available from the Tatton Gifts or the Old Hall reception.

'Ration Book Recipes-Some Food Facts 1939-1954' by Gill Curbishley available through English Heritage.