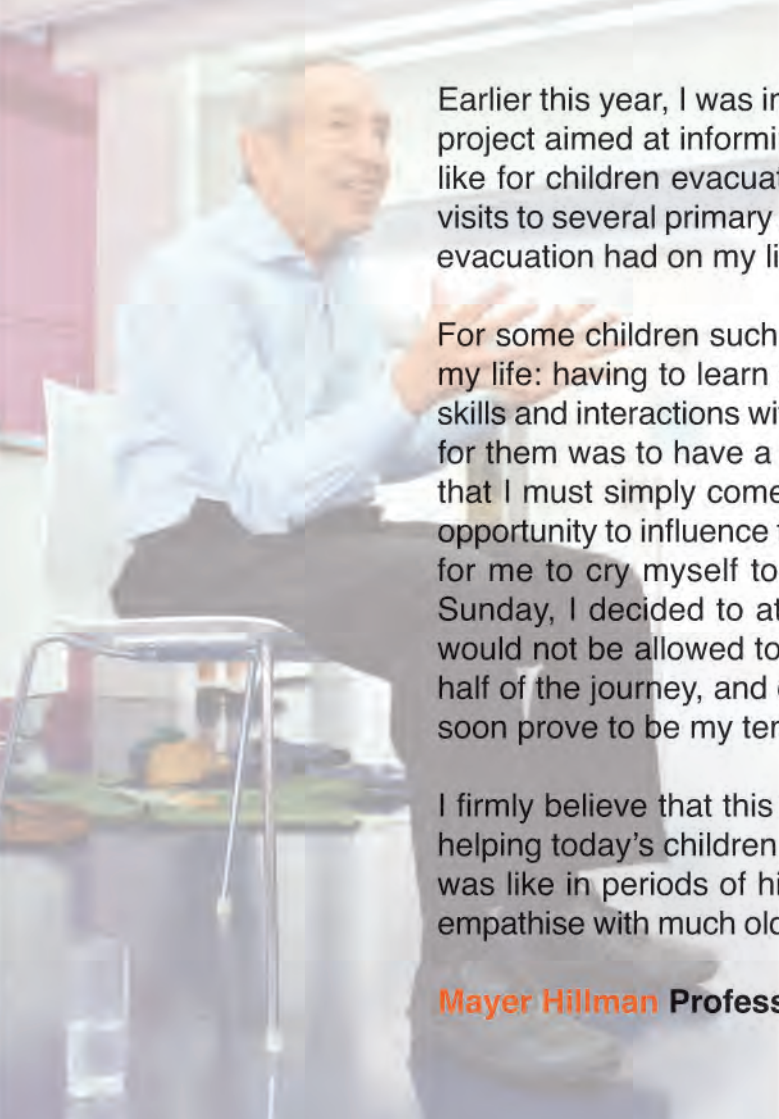




COBBLESTONES TO CORNFIELDS  
THE EVACUEE **PLAY** TROVE



Thank you to the Heritage Lottery Fund for enabling us to find and share World War II evacuee **play** memories with today's children

A man with grey hair, wearing a light blue button-down shirt and dark trousers, is seated at a table. He is smiling and gesturing with his hands as if in conversation. The background is a bright, slightly blurred indoor setting, possibly a cafe or meeting room. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Earlier this year, I was invited by London Play to contribute to its innovative project aimed at informing the present generation of children what life was like for children evacuated from London during the Second World War. In visits to several primary schools, I was able to describe the dramatic impact evacuation had on my life as an evacuee.

For some children such as myself, evacuation was the unhappiest time of my life: having to learn quickly how to deal with my inexperience in social skills and interactions with the adults on whom I was billeted. The alternative for them was to have a soldier! I sensed that they did not care for me and that I must simply come to terms with decisions made for me without any opportunity to influence them as I would have wished. It was not uncommon for me to cry myself to sleep owing to extreme unhappiness. Early one Sunday, I decided to attempt to walk back to London but realising that I would not be allowed to stay there, turned round having completed nearly half of the journey, and dejectedly returned to what I wistfully hoped would soon prove to be my temporary home.

I firmly believe that this 'Evacuee project' has served an invaluable role in helping today's children not only to gain a better understanding of what life was like in periods of history before they were born but also to help them empathise with much older people in their family and in their neighbourhood.

**Mayer Hillman** Professor Emeritus Policy Institute



# Introduction



## **Catherine Togut** **Evacuee Play Trove project worker**

In 1939 the tradition of street play was abruptly interrupted by the prospect of Nazi bombing raids. Half of London's children eligible for evacuation (around 400,000 youngsters) were transported to new lives in rural Britain. The children and their culture of play were transplanted to locations where the street games that they created or which had been passed down through generations were suddenly out of place.

Our Heritage Lottery-funded Evacuee Play Trove project set out to capture the play memories of over 30 former World War II evacuees. Their accounts told of city children deposited into the countryside, for some an alien environment where their urban street play was quickly replaced with the games their new rural friends played.

In partnership with the Half Moon theatre and the Museum of London who worked with us on a series of extraordinary workshops, the former evacuees brought their play memories to life at five primary schools across London and the Museum. Uniting the two generations through play was a mutually enriching experience for both the children and the evacuees.

Thank you to the Heritage Lottery for their support on this project. Without their help, this aspect of 20th century childhood would have been lost forever.

I would also like to thank all the former evacuee volunteers for their incredible work on this project and their inspirational energy, trekking across London to primary schools to share their memories at first hand, and their attention to detail to ensure I captured the games they played and learnt correctly. It has been a privilege to work with them and a humbling experience.

As Nancy, one of our evacuee volunteers said, 'the past shapes the present.' Through sharing the older generation's experience, London's children have learnt so much.

Read on to find out how we made the project happen, discover original World War II games played in London and the countryside, hear what the children and the evacuees learnt from each other and the play experiences from this unique time in our city's history.





# Diary of a 21st Century Landgirl

By Catherine Togut

When I started planning the Evacuee Play Trove project, I talked to former evacuees about how they managed to remember so clearly details from the past. For many, writing a diary during wartime was a cathartic ritual. Inspired by that, I decided to keep a diary of the project as it grew, capturing its impact on lives young and old.

## 10th February 2013

The Evacuee Play Trove project is launched. Tomorrow, I'm meeting with our partners, Museum of London and the Half Moon theatre. I'm very excited about the prospect of interviewing 30 former evacuees and bringing to life their experiences during the evacuation and discovering their war-time play experiences. I feel apprehensive about the possibility of bringing up painful memories during the interviews with the evacuees.

To give me support I'm working with Many Happy Returns, reminiscence experts, to gently guide the evacuees through the ups and downs of their memories.

## 21st March

We are half way through interviewing 30 former evacuees. I feel privileged and humbled to listen to their stories. Jean, aged 88, said about her experience of evacuation:

"I didn't take any reminders of home. My mother had made me a pair of gloves and I took a red leather manicure set my father had given me, I still have it. I can't remember whether I took any photos with me. I also took a pack of cards, everyone played cards. Four of us played together on the train to Taunton, Rummy I think it might have been."



**Renee**  
Evacuee project Volunteer



### 17th April

Today we interviewed former evacuees across London, from Bethnal Green to Hammersmith. Their stories are all fascinating. I'm realising the importance and urgency of capturing these memories now.

I'm noting lots of ideas and games from listening to evacuee memories for our workshops in May at the five schools and The Museum of London. I start wondering where I can find 1940s props for the workshops.

London Play and Half Moon theatre will be delivering our six week 1940s play workshops with our evacuee volunteers which will culminate in a final drama and song performance to the children's families and evacuee volunteers. I will be travelling to primary schools across London, dressed as a landgirl and carrying a suitcase full of World War II memorabilia and toys.

### 12th May

The workshops have been magical. The children have been transported back to wartime Britain through our evacuee volunteers' stories to the school children and answering questions about how they played.

The children always come up with unexpected and interesting questions for the guest evacuee. They have learnt many new games from the evacuees as well: five stones, whip and top, kick the can and skipping rhymes. Perhaps the biggest message the children take home is how to make toys and games out of very little, quite a revelation for this technologically-dependent generation.

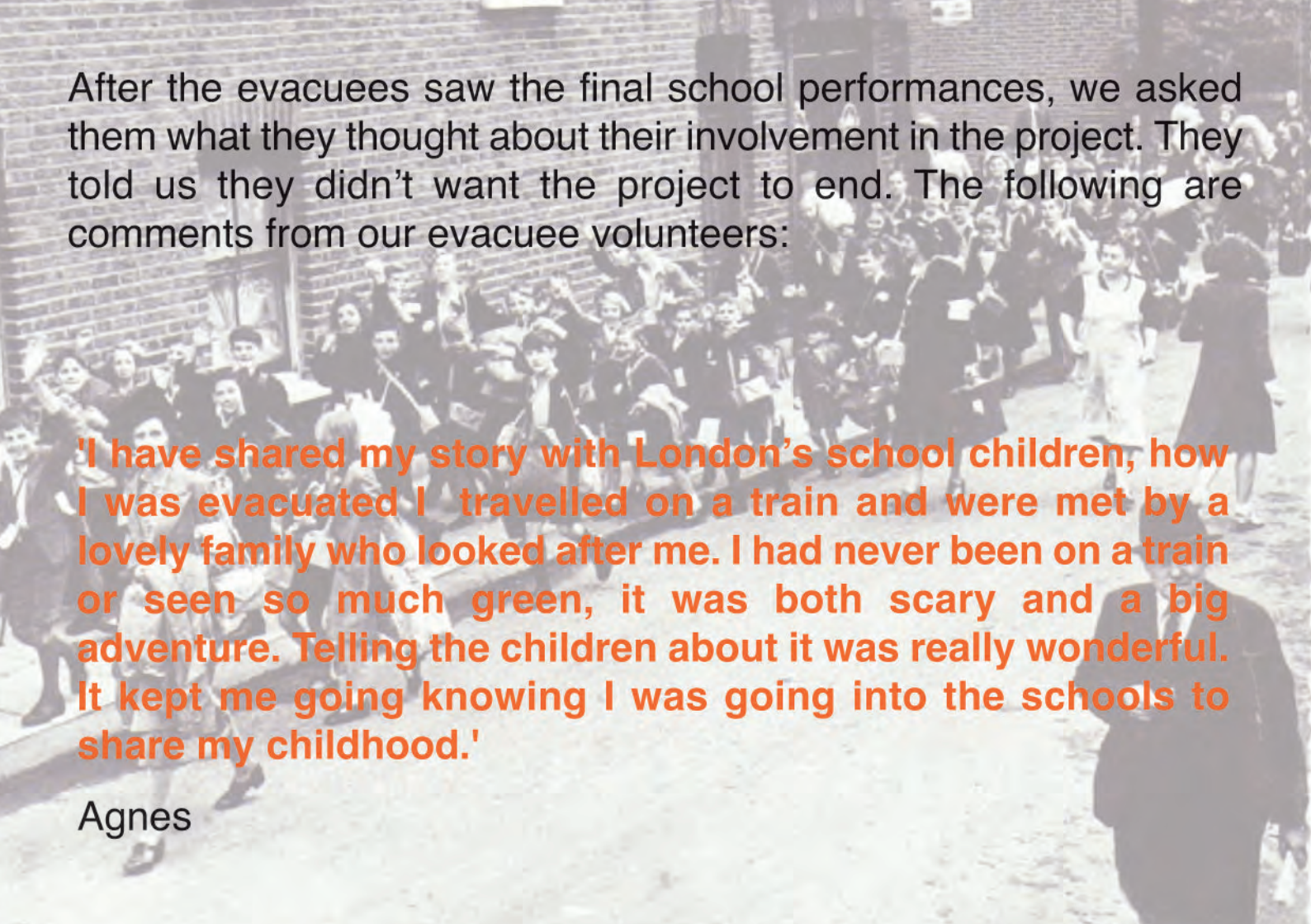
### 1st June

We are all really excited; the lyrics for the two songs have now been written by children and our wonder team Ben and Mark from Half Moon theatre. Hearing the children practise their songs sees me and Stella (my right hand evacuee volunteer) taking to the tissues.



Evacuee project Volunteer **Stella**  
with children from St John's Primary School



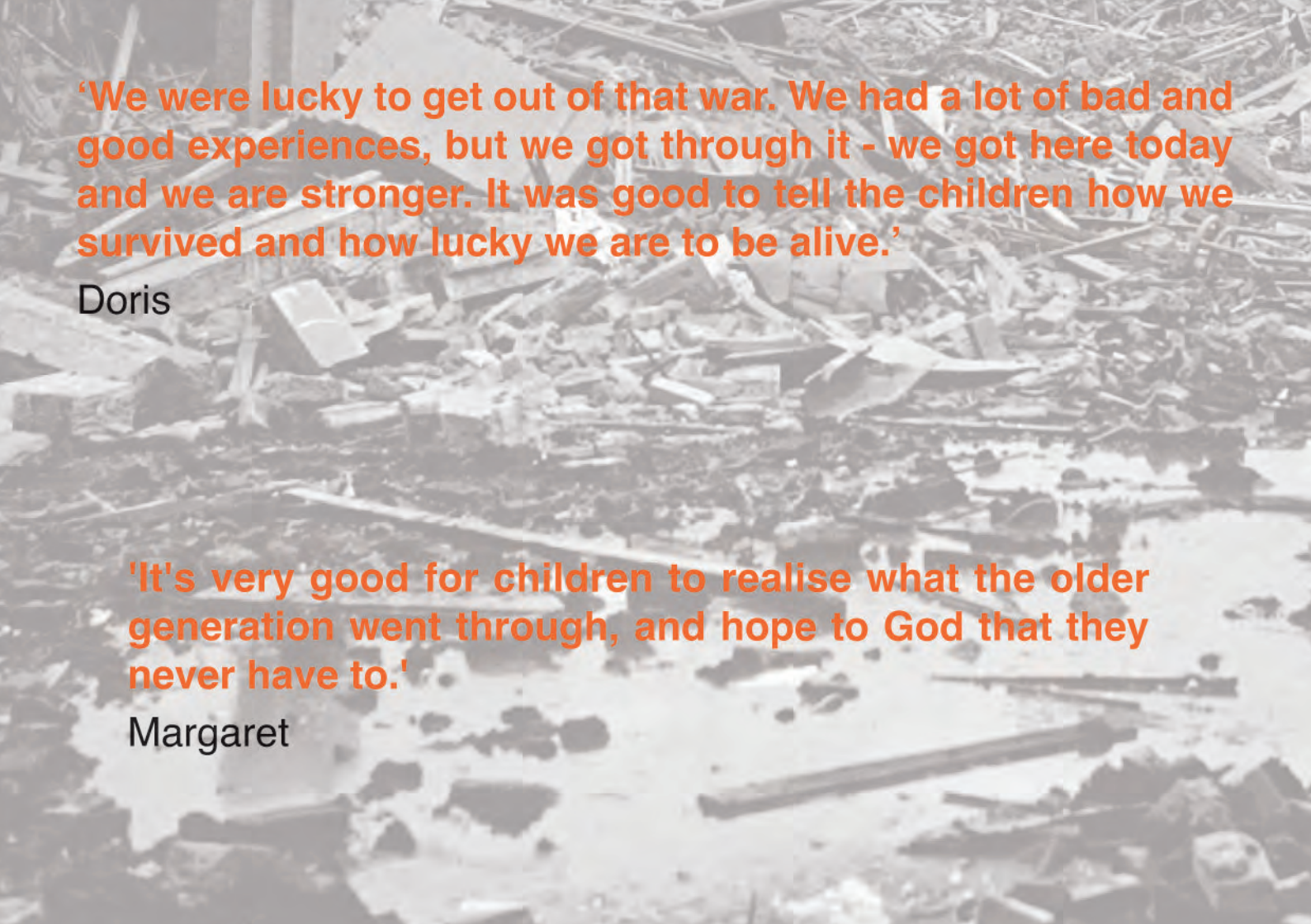


After the evacuees saw the final school performances, we asked them what they thought about their involvement in the project. They told us they didn't want the project to end. The following are comments from our evacuee volunteers:

**'I have shared my story with London's school children, how I was evacuated I travelled on a train and were met by a lovely family who looked after me. I had never been on a train or seen so much green, it was both scary and a big adventure. Telling the children about it was really wonderful. It kept me going knowing I was going into the schools to share my childhood.'**

Agnes





**'We were lucky to get out of that war. We had a lot of bad and good experiences, but we got through it - we got here today and we are stronger. It was good to tell the children how we survived and how lucky we are to be alive.'**

**Doris**

**'It's very good for children to realise what the older generation went through, and hope to God that they never have to.'**

**Margaret**

**'The school children asked lots and lots of questions about how we played and what sweets we ate.'**

**'It helps children understand how much life has changed. We told them to imagine their kitchen and remove all the electrical items: that's what we had. I've loved volunteering on the project and I got to meet new people. I've kept in touch with one of the other evacuees and I got a lovely thank you card and plant from London Play.'**

**It's taught the children something and I thoroughly enjoyed it, I've not been in a school for years.'**

**Stella**



### 10th June 2013

I have just come back from a full on day of filming with the evacuees. There are so many people to coordinate in the crew. I'm looking forward to filming at St John's Primary on Friday. Teresa the teacher said the children can't wait to see themselves with the evacuees on film.

### 17th July 2013

Plans are coming together for our end-of-project event which will be on 18th October at the Churchill War Rooms, a fitting venue. Churchill's wartime bunker is a fascinating maze of subterranean rooms that once buzzed with round-the-clock planning and plotting, strategies and secrets.

At the event children from St. John's Primary School, Tower Hamlets will be dressed as evacuees and performing two songs, the lyrics and music inspired by the play memories of our former evacuee volunteers.

The children were inspired by the stories from the volunteer evacuees and created lyrics that captured the emotions and experiences they heard of being taken from everything that was familiar to them to a new and uncertain life.

We will also be showing our film of the project that captures the moving interviews with the evacuees and the children's workshops. Some of the evacuee volunteers will be talking about their involvement in the project and what it meant to them to share their evacuee experience and play memories of that time with the children.

A group of children in school uniforms are performing on a stage. They are holding hands and have their arms raised in the air. The background is a plain wall, and the floor is light-colored. The children are wearing various colored dresses and shirts. The overall atmosphere is bright and cheerful.

## Dear Mum and Dad

Dear Mum and Dad,  
Life is different here,  
The air is not bad,  
The skies are clear,  
Dear Mum and Dad,  
I've learnt some new games,  
I run in the fields,  
With the friends that I've made,  
Even though  
I've had a good time,  
I pray every day,  
That you are both fine,  
Even though,  
I love the things I've been shown  
I love the adventure  
But it's not my home  
Even though,  
I love to play,  
I hope that we'll make it,  
And I'll see you again.

## Come Out to Play

Air raids coming any day,  
Shrapnel, rubble, bricks and dust,  
Leave right now before it's lost,  
Wash me with carbolic soap,  
Spam for breakfast, get your coat,  
No time for cup and ball today,  
Pack your case and go away,  
Time to go now,  
Evacuation,  
Wave my home good bye,  
Time to go now,  
Don't know where to,  
Will I see you again,  
Boys and girls a train away,  
From being in the country hay,  
Standing on a platform where,  
Wave goodbye, go safe from scare,  
Bye mother, bye father,  
I'll see you in a while,  
I'll write you a letter,  
To say that I'm okay



# THE EVACUEE PLAY TROVE

One of the aims of this project was to capture, document and revive for children today, the way former evacuees played - at home on the streets of London, in the fields in their temporary countryside homes, and back in the city once they returned. This section, the Evacuee Play Trove, details some of their games and comments about how the way their play changed as a result of this life changing event.

Before our evacuee volunteers went to live in the countryside, they played mainly out on London streets. Many of the street games they played we still play today: marbles, leapfrog, jacks, skipping and tiddlywinks. Once they arrived in the countryside they were overwhelmed but excited by the vast open spaces of green and discovered a whole new playground – nature.

Their street play was now replaced by roaming through fields, climbing trees, pooh sticks, scrumping, blackberry picking, rabbiting, and building dens. They taught the country children games from London and learnt new games that they later brought back to London, such as new skipping rhymes.

For some, the experience of play in the countryside enriched their lives. Sadly, not all evacuees had good experiences and some of them would play imaginary games to counteract their sadness. To make themselves feel less sad they imagined being at home with their mum and dad.

The evacuee volunteers also shared memories with the children of how they loved playing on old bomb sites when back in London. This time in history saw an important shift in attitudes towards play culture. After World War II a new type of play space emerged: the adventure playground.

The new adventure playgrounds provided a more pleasurable and meaningful experience than the traditional playground. Children were building places themselves, tearing them down and rebuilding them again. In our workshops we used pictures and quotes from a 1946 *Picture Post* article in which Lady Allen of Hurtwood advocated using bomb sites as play spaces.

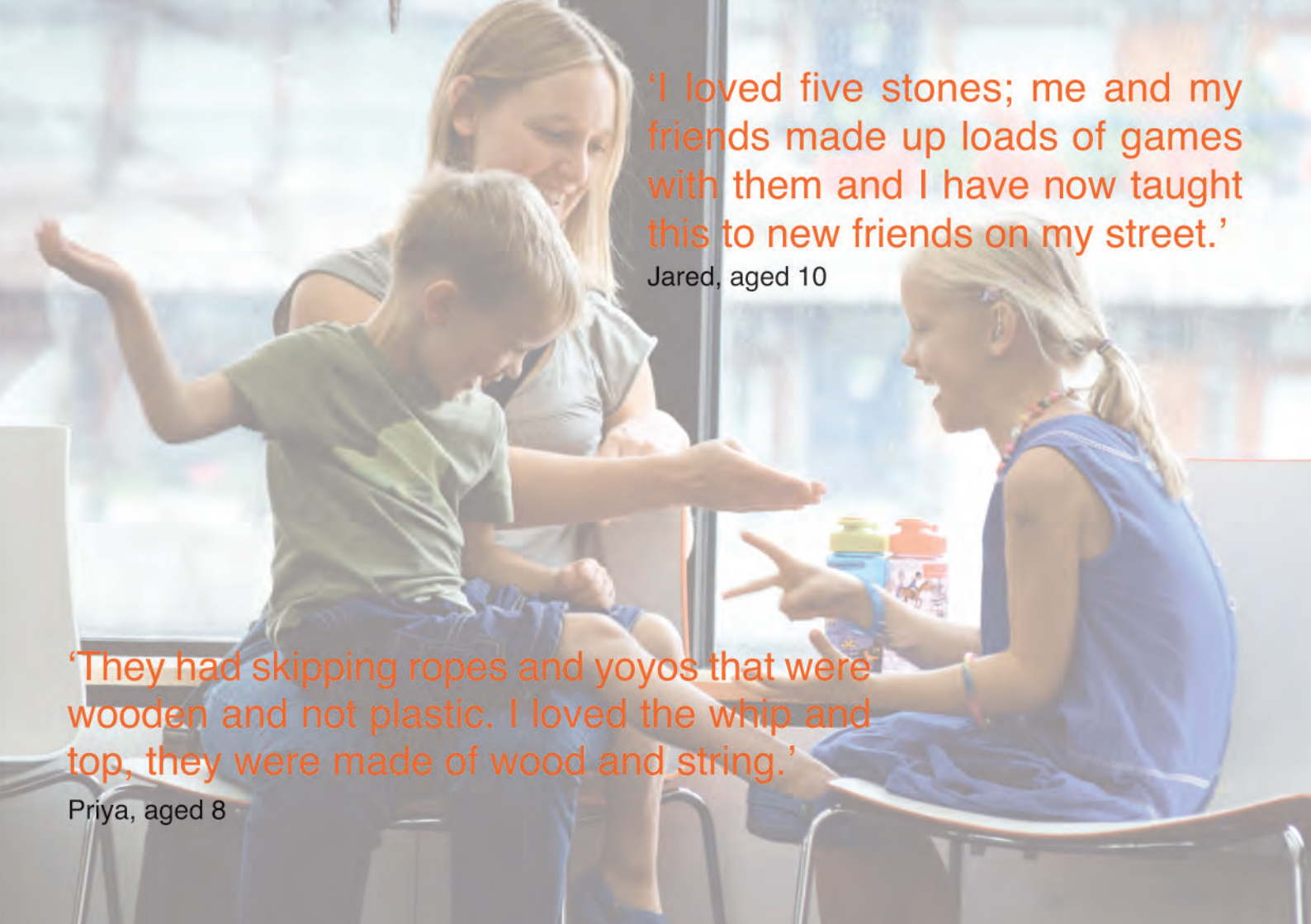
We recreated this experience for the children who went on to make 'bombed out' spaces with loose parts such as cardboard and wood, imagining themselves as playing on an old bomb site. At the end of the workshops the evacuees asked the children what they found the most interesting about playing during the war. This is what they said:

'That some boys played in the air raid shelters and collect scraps of metal from the houses that had been bombed, they would try and put them together like a puzzle to see if they could work out where the bomb came from. I also loved making World War II paper aeroplanes.'

Leo, aged 9







'I loved five stones; me and my friends made up loads of games with them and I have now taught this to new friends on my street.'

Jared, aged 10

'They had skipping ropes and yoyos that were wooden and not plastic. I loved the whip and top, they were made of wood and string.'

Priya, aged 8

Learn how to **play** some of the games taken from London streets to be shared with new friends in the countryside

## Five Stones

In our workshops, the evacuees told the children about 'Five Stones'. None of the children had ever played this simple game before and the evacuees had great fun demonstrating how to play it.

What you need for five stones:

5 stones of similar size

2 or more players

How to play: To start a turn, the player throws five stones into the air with one hand and tries to catch as many as possible on the back of the same hand.

The stones that were caught are then thrown up again from the back of the hand where they came to rest and as many as possible are caught in the palm of the same hand. If no stones end up being caught, the player's turn is over.

If, however, at least one stone was caught, the player prepares for the next throw by keeping one of the caught stones in the same hand and throwing all remaining stones on the ground.

The player then tosses the single stone into the air, attempts to pick up one of the stones that was missed and then catches the stone that was tossed, all with the same hand. The player repeats this until all the stones have been picked up.



‘The children were fascinated by this project, asking the evacuees questions, learning new games and responding creatively to their answers with poems, artwork and songs.’

Teresa McNally, Teacher  
St. John’s Primary School,  
Bethnal Green



## The Matzo Box Game

Matzo is an unleavened bread that Jewish people traditionally eat during the week-long Passover holiday.

Many of our evacuee volunteers are Jewish. They played the Matzo box game in London and taught it to the country children whilst they were evacuated. Matzo boxes were scarce in the countryside so they would use other cardboard boxes to interpret the game.

What you will need: one empty matza box, one pen and one marble.

How to play: Cut out six holes in the box and number them one to six with your marker pen. Everyone gets three goes at throwing the marble into the numbered holes. The person with the highest score wins.

## Skipping Songs

Here are skipping songs the evacuees taught the children.

What you need: A skipping rope or true to 1940's style a washing line taken from your garden (as revealed one of our evacuees). The skipping rhymes helped the children write their songs for their final performance.

Here is a funny rhyme that one evacuee volunteer, Nancy, taught the country children whilst she was evacuated. The country children loved hearing and learning this cheeky rhyme.

*Nellie Murphy's got no drawers\*  
Won't you kindly lend her yours.  
For she's going far away  
To sing 'Ta ra ra boom de ay.'*

\* Drawers are knickers!





# music room

Flute Club

Recorder Tuition

Globe Town Voices

Singing Assemblies

## Grandma's Footsteps

A group of children are in a brightly lit hallway. One child, a girl in a pink dress, is standing with her back to the camera, acting as 'Grandma'. Other children are sneaking up on her from behind. The scene is slightly blurred, suggesting movement.

How to play: One person is chosen to be Grandma. That person then has to face a wall at one side of the playing area, away from the other players. When the game starts, all the other players have to try and sneak up on Grandma without being seen or heard.

At random times throughout the game, Grandma has to turn around. Any player she sees moving she sends back to the start. She then turns back around and you can start moving towards her again.

The winner is the person who reaches Grandma first and taps her on the shoulder. This person (whether it's a boy or girl) is Grandma in the next round.



## I love coffee, I love tea

The evacuees skipped in the city and the countryside. They told us about the skipping game 'I love coffee, I love tea', a great way of making friends in the countryside as the game requires learning everyone's names.

How to play: Start off skipping on your own. As you skip, say the following rhyme, including your friend's name:

*'I like coffee, I like tea, I like Vera in with me!'*

Now your friend jumps in and skips with you and you say:

*'I don't like coffee, I don't like tea. I don't like Julie in with me!'*

Your friend must now jump out of your skipping rope as you skip. Keep going for as long as you can without stopping the rope. Then hand the skipping rope to your friend and see how long they can keep going.

## Big Ben

Our dynamic evacuee volunteer, Frieda, shared this skipping rhyme that she taught to her new friends in the countryside.

*Big Ben. Big Ben strikes one,  
Big Ben strikes two,  
Big Ben strikes three, (etc.)*



## Teddy Bear

This rhyme was precious to one of our evacuees, who got teary as she recounted her memories of singing this rhyme. She still has her teddy bear that she took with her as a comfort when she was evacuated.

How to play: The skipper jumps while singing the rhyme and acts out the actions as the words come up in the rhyme.

*Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear, turn around, Teddy Bear,  
Teddy Bear, touch the ground  
Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear, show your shoe, Teddy  
Bear, Teddy Bear, that will do!  
Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear, go upstairs, Teddy Bear,  
Teddy Bear, say your prayers  
Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear, turn out the lights, Teddy  
Bear, Teddy Bear, say good-night!*



## Sweet Rationing

In our workshops the children asked the evacuees a lot of questions about sweets. The evacuees told the children that as there was very little in the way of sweets, they really appreciated them.

Sweet rationing was introduced in 1942 and did not end until 1953, eight years after the war was over. The allowance was twelve ounces (340 g) to everyone over five years old. The 340 g ration was the equivalent of just one sweet a day. The daily ration of sweets allowed shocked the children involved in this project.

By 1943 sweets were so scarce even if you had sweet ration coupons it was no guarantee that you would be able to get your hands on your weekly sweet treats. Several of our evacuee volunteers have fond memories of their parents giving them their rations of sweets.

**Challenge yourself:** See how it feels to have just one sweet a day for a week.







Children from St John's Primary School  
Workshop, June 2013





Filming **play** memories at  
Stepney Jewish Community  
Centre, July 2013













# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Heritage Lottery for their funding. Thank you to all the evacuee volunteers, Museum of London, Half Moon, Many Happy Returns, the school children, their parents and grandparents who all brought the past to life.

Karen Parker, Lauriston Primary School  
Pauline Elwell, Mowlem Primary School  
Juliette Dancy, Peter Hills Primary School  
Liz Jinks, St John's Catholic Primary School  
Teresa McNally, St John's Primary School

Thank you to Poppy Reed for her wonderful photography in this book.

Thanks always to Melian Mansfield, London Play's chair of trustees and source of endless encouragement.

Finally, thank you to the London Play staff team and trustees for their support.





**LOTTERY FUNDED**



**CONNECTING THE  
GENERATIONS**

