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We Were Young and at War

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Many young people kept diaries during the Second World War and some of these, discovered in some cases after their deaths, appear in this compilation. It makes for harrowing reading but could well change the emphasis of how the conflict is seen by young people in this country. Often it is seen as between the United Kingdom, Commonwealth, America and Germany whereas this book makes clear the awful consequences for most of Europe, especially the eastern states. In fact it is the rather banal letters between Brian Poole and his America penfriend Trudi, and the diary of David Hogan, another American, which show the contrast at its most stark. I think this is a pity as young people who were evacuated in the UK or interned in America also had harsh stories to relate, although not on the same scale as those from Stalingrad or Lodz.

However, the diary entries and letters home from both sides show all too clearly the hardship, the hunger and the sheer terror of this war. It is difficult to pick out one more than the others which touch the heart from Yura who was left to die in Leningrad because he was too weak to be taken to escape by his mother and sister, to Ina, killed as a partisan, to Dawid who died in Lodz of TB and hunger. These stories are counterbalanced somewhat by the words written by the young Germans, Herbert on the Eastern Front and Klaus who was drafted at 15 for the defence of Berlin, and Hachiro who became a suicide pilot right at the end of the War.

It seems to me that this will be a very useful resource book for students of history, and for teachers in particular. Young people who read it in its entirety, will find it a difficult, upsetting but ultimately rewarding read. There are photographs of the young people but no map which would have been very useful. There is no index, but a list of the published diaries, and a bibliography.

Running Order:

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