

The Great Escape

by Megan Rix



An unforgettable wartime journey



The Great Escape



Introductory notes

by Megan Rix

Megan Rix has written several wonderful books in which cats and dogs are the central characters in the story. The identities and dilemmas of the animals are often more vivid than those of the humans. Rix's writing is never sentimental and tells of the powerful bond between people and animals in an informative, realistic and moving way.

Set at the time of war in Europe, the books represent a good way to study these periods. Rix provides excellent brief historical notes at the ends of the books answering many of the questions that the books provoke.

In this book we follow the fortunes of three pets that escape the clutches of a non-animal lover with whom they have been left. They set out to find their way from bomb threatened London to Devon where their family have been evacuated.

Activities are intended to encourage further reading of the books so the quoted texts have largely been chosen from the beginning of the books to avoid spoilers! The recommendation would always be to read the whole book but these resources are designed so that this is not essential. Alternatively they could be used alongside a couple of weeks of chapter reading to the class. There is an appendix of answer sheets to save precious teacher time!

The activities address **National Curriculum Literacy** guidelines as well as the following Key Stage 2 requirements and guidelines for other subjects.

History guidelines:

- Changes within living memory. Where appropriate, these should be used to reveal aspects of change in national life.
- An aspect or theme in British history that extends pupils' chronological knowledge beyond 1066.

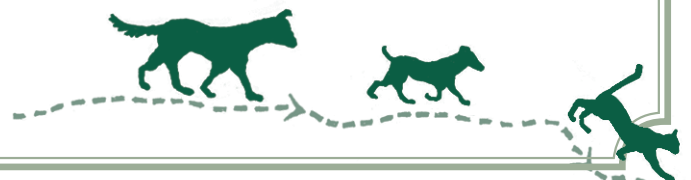
Art guidelines:

- To improve their mastery of art and design techniques, including drawing, painting and sculpture with a range of materials.

Below is a list of the different activities.

The passages are in order from the book but could generally be used out of order.

1. **Buster's treasure p.3 (comprehension)**
2. **Anderson shelter p.7 (design technology, craft)**
3. **Gas masks p.9 (rewriting)**
4. **Neville Chamberlain p.12 (handwriting, keyboard skills, learning from memory)**
5. **Mr Harris p.14 (inference)**
6. **Winston p.16 (punctuation)**
7. **Find out more p.17 (general knowledge)**
8. **Favourite parts of The Great Escape p. 18 (reflection)**
9. **Appendix p.19**



The Great Escape



1. Buster's treasure

by Megan Rix

Extract from Chapter 1

On a steamy hot Saturday morning in the summer of 1939, a Jack Russell with a patch of tan fur over his left eye and a black spot over his right was digging as though his life depended upon it.

His little white forepaws attacked the soft soil, sending chrysanthemums, stocks and freesias to their deaths. He'd soon dug so deep that the hole was bigger than he was, and all that could be seen were sprays of flying soil and his fiercely wagging tail.

'Look at Buster go,' twelve-year-old Robert Edwards said, leaning on his spade. 'He could win a medal for his digging.'

Robert's best friend, Michael, laughed. 'Bark when you reach Australia!' he told Buster's rear end. He tipped the soil from his shovel on to the fast-growing mound beside them.

Buster's tail wagged as he emerged from the hole triumphant, his muddy treasure gripped firmly in his mouth.

'Oh no, better get that off him!' Robert said, when he realized what Buster had. 'What is it?' Michael asked.

'One of Dad's old slippers – he's been looking for them everywhere.'

'But how did it get down there?' Buster cocked his head to one side, his right ear up and his left ear down.

'Someone must have buried it there. Buster – give!'

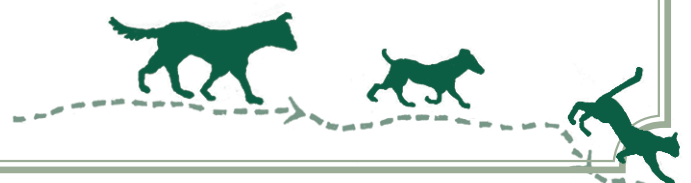
But Buster had no intention of giving up his treasure. As Robert moved closer to him Buster danced backwards.

'Buster – Buster – give it to me!'

Robert and Michael raced around the garden after Buster, trying to get the muddy, chewed slipper from him. Buster thought this was a wonderful new game of chase, and almost lost the slipper by barking with excitement as he dodged this way and that

The game got even better when Robert's nine-year-old sister Lucy, and Rose the collie, came out of the house and started to chase him too.

'Buster, come back . . .'



The Great Escape



1. Buster's treasure (cont...)

by Megan Rix

Rose tried to circle him and cut him off. Until recently she'd been a sheepdog and she was much quicker than Buster, but he managed to evade her by jumping over the ginger-and-white cat, Tiger, who wasn't pleased to be used as a fence and hissed at Buster to tell him so.

Buster was having such a good time. First digging up the flower bed, now playing chase. It was the perfect day – until Lucy dived on top of him and he was trapped.

'Got you!'

Robert took Dad's old slipper from Buster. 'Sorry, but you can't play with that.'

Buster jumped up at the slipper, trying to get it back. It was his – he'd buried it and he'd dug it up. Robert held the slipper above his head so Buster couldn't get it, although for such a small dog, he could jump pretty high.

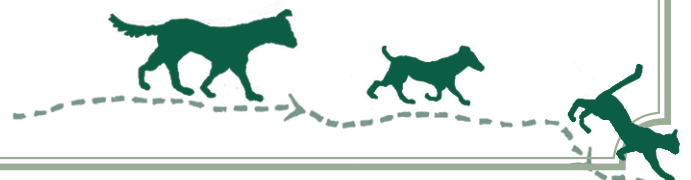
Buster went back to his hole and started digging to see if he could find something else interesting. Freshly dug soil was soon flying into the air once again.

'No slacking, you two!' Robert's father, Mr Edwards, told the boys as he came out of the back door. Robert quickly hid the slipper behind him; he didn't want Buster to get into trouble. Michael took it from him, unseen.

Lucy ran back into the kitchen, with Rose close behind her.

'You two should be following Buster's example,' Mr Edwards said to the boys.

At the sound of his name Buster stopped digging for a moment and emerged from his hole. His face was covered in earth and it was clear that he was in his element. Usually he'd have been in huge trouble for digging in the garden, but not today. When Mr Edwards wasn't looking, Michael dropped the slipper into the small ornamental fishpond near to where Tiger was lying. Tiger rubbed his head against Michael's hand, the bell on his collar tinkling softly, and Michael obligingly stroked him behind his ginger ears before getting back to work.



The Great Escape



1. Buster's treasure

by Megan Rix

Name _____

Date _____

Answer the questions with full sentences:

1. When does the story start?

2. Which adjectives tell us about the weather? Write two more adjectives that you could use to describe that type of weather.

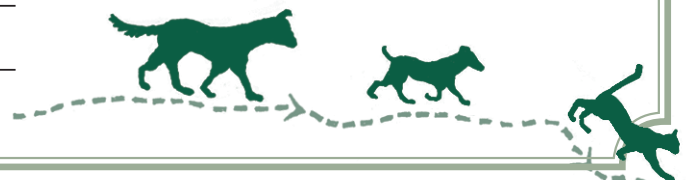
3. Write three sentences about Buster with information from the first five paragraphs.

4. What is 'Buster's Treasure'?

5. What did Buster do with the 'treasure' before the story starts and what happens to it now?

6. Write the names of the humans mentioned in the passage and what we find out about them.

7. Describe Rose and Tiger.



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1. Buster's treasure

by Megan Rix

Name _____

Date _____

8. Megan Rix does not make her animals talk but lets pretend that you are Buster and you are going write a diary entry for the day described. Use the passage to help you with the events of the day. Don't forget to use words such as **I** and **we** (not **he** and **they**).

A large spiral-bound notebook with lined pages, intended for writing a diary entry. The notebook is white with a silver spiral binding on the left side. The pages are ruled with horizontal lines.



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2. Anderson shelter

by Megan Rix

Extract from Chapter 1

Tiger had been out on an early-morning prowl of the neighbourhood when the government truck had arrived and the men from it had rung the doorbell of every house along the North London terraced street. Each homeowner had been given six curved sheets of metal, two steel plates and some bolts for fixing it all together.



Anderson Shelters

‘There you go.’

‘Shouldn’t take you more than a few hours.’

‘Got hundreds more of these to deliver.’

Four of the workmen helped those who couldn’t manage to put up their own Anderson Shelters, but everyone else was expected to dig a large hole in their back garden, deep enough so that only two feet of the six-foot-high bomb shelter could be seen above the ground.



Garden Shelters



The Great Escape



2. Anderson shelter

by Megan Rix

You are going to make a model of an Anderson Shelter. First look at images of Anderson Shelters on the internet. They were delivered free to householders earning less than £5 a week, whilst those with a higher income were charged £7 for them.

You will need:

- largish piece of corrugated card
- some flat card
- plasticine
- paint
- kitchen towels
- cress seeds
- cling film
- a board to make it on (preferably waterproof)

Instructions:

1. Decide on the scale you are going to make your shelter, (you might make it the right size for playmobil characters to go inside).
2. Cut the card into a rectangle, (corrugations going over the top) and bend it onto something round so that it does not kink.
3. Anchor it onto the board using the plasticine.
4. From the flat card cut some doors to fit one end and a wall for the other end. Decide how to stick them onto the ends of the shelter (you might punch holes and use string hinges).
5. Now paint the ends of the shelter to camouflage them.
6. Cover the main piece of the shelter with cling film and then put kitchen roll on top, dampen it and sprinkle cress seed on it.
7. You will probably come up with other ways to embellish your shelter as people did during the war.
8. Watch your camouflage grow and enjoy your Anderson Shelter.



Shelters - London - 1940



The Great Escape



3. Gas masks

by Megan Rix

Extract from Chapter 2

Since the spring of 1939 every school in the country had been prepared for the possibility of war. Millions of gas masks had been given out to both adults and children, and everyone had to carry them at all times. Gas masks had even been made for dogs and horses. Buster and Rose didn't have gas masks yet, and goodness knows how they would react if they were forced to wear them.

None had been made for cats because no one was foolish enough to believe that a cat would wear a gas mask. Getting Tiger to wear one would have been just about impossible! You'd get scratched to pieces trying to put it on him – that's if you were able to catch him in the first place.

Lucy hated the gas mask she'd been given at school. The grown-ups called them Mickey Mouse masks to try and make the lurid pink monstrosities seem less sinister. But the masks didn't look anything like Mickey Mouse, or any other sort of mouse.

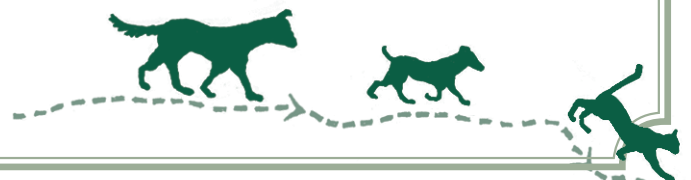
Lucy knew the mask could save her life if there was a gas attack, but she still loathed it. Just the thought of wearing it made her feel sick, and once she had it on she felt suffocated because there wasn't enough air coming through the filter to breathe easily and all she could smell was rubber.

Even worse, her class had to have a gas-mask drill twice a week. They'd all been given Ministry of Safety leaflets, which explained how to put the masks on:

1. Hold your breath.
2. Hold your mask in front of your face with your thumbs inside the straps.
3. Thrust your chin well forward into the mask and pull the straps over your head as far as they will go.
4. Run your fingers round the face part of the mask to make sure the head straps are not twisted.

Miss Morrison blew a whistle. 'Gas-mask practice,' she announced. 'Take your gas masks out of their boxes.'

Miss Morrison always wore a whistle round her neck now so that if there was a war and she got buried by rubble, people would be able to find her.



The Great Escape



by Megan Rix

3. Gas masks (cont...)

'I want you to put your gas masks on with your eyes closed today. A gas attack might come at any time – day or night.'

'Can't see out of the bloomin' thing anyway,' grumbled a boy behind Lucy, who'd already put his gas mask on.

And he was right. Lucy always found that just about as soon as she put her mask on, the Perspex misted up. Rubbing soap on the window, which they'd been told would help, made it worse and you got soap in your eyes too. There was only one thing the masks were really good for.

'On the count of three . . .' Miss Morrison said. And everyone picked up their masks, ready to put on the much-hated things.

'One . . . two . . . three!'

Lucy blew out through the rubber instead of in, to make a long, loud fart sound.

Miss Morrison was furious.

'Who did that? Who was it? Who did it?'

She stared at a sea of children in gas masks. It was impossible to tell who'd made the sound.

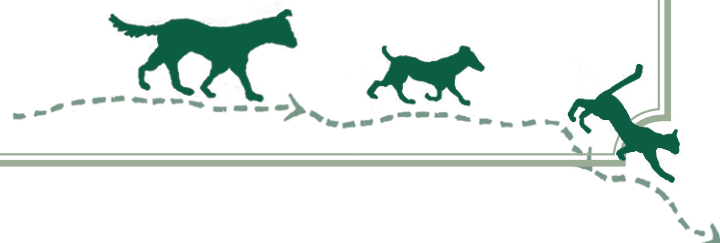
Other children blew out too and Miss Morrison looked as though she was going to explode.

Behind her mask Lucy grinned, until Miss Morrison announced that she was keeping the whole class in at breaktime as punishment for their 'disgraceful behaviour'.

You are Miss Morrison and you are going to write a report to the head teacher about the behaviour of your class today using the information from this passage. Don't forget to write it in the first person. You might start your report with...

PUPIL BEHAVIOUR REPORT FORM

This morning, I...



The Great Escape



4. Neville Chamberlain

by Megan Rix

Name _____

Date _____

Extract from Chapter 3

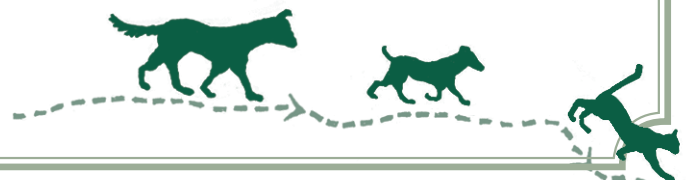
At precisely 11.15 Mr Chamberlain started to speak. His voice was sombre.

'I am speaking to you from the Cabinet Room at 10 Downing Street. This morning the British ambassador in Berlin handed the German government a final note stating that unless we heard from them by 11.00 a.m. that they were prepared at once to withdraw their troops from Poland, a state of war would exist between us.

'I have to tell you that no such undertaking has been received, and that consequently this country is at war with Germany.'

This is a famous speech that marked the beginning of the Second World War.

Copy out the speech (the part in **bold**) in your very best handwriting.



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4. Neville Chamberlain

by Megan Rix

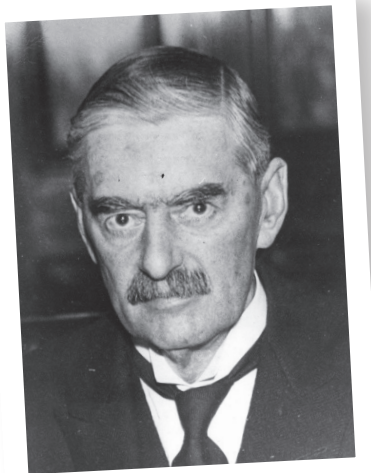
Now type the speech out on a computer using the correct fingering. Your fingers should use these keys as homes to return to:

Just use your thumbs on the space bar.



Home Keys

Now you will be half way to learning this speech by heart. Test yourself with a partner and help each other to learn it fully.



Neville Chamberlain

Extension activity: Find a recording of the speech on the web and see if you can copy Neville Chamberlain's voice to perform it for your class or the school.



The Great Escape



5. Mr Harris

by Megan Rix

Extract from Chapter 6

The Wood Green Animal Shelter had been set up to rescue animals after the Great War. The short journey from the Harrises' North London house to the shelter had not been easy, due to Mr Harris reckoning he could sell Tiger's cat basket and so deciding to carry Tiger instead.

Tiger turned out to be a wriggler and the two dogs hadn't made it any easier. Rose went too slowly and kept stopping while Buster spent his time trying to choke himself on his lead by racing ahead.

Worse, when he got there, Mr Harris found he wasn't the only one. There must have been more than a hundred people with pets in the queue in front of him. Maybe even two hundred.

'It'll break my little girl's heart when she finds out what I've done,' said a woman with a yellow Labrador puppy that kept trying to play with Buster. 'Stop it, Toby – leave him alone.'

The puppy whined.

'Needs must. There's a war coming. No time for sentimentality,' said someone else with two spaniels that Rose and Buster were sniffing at, all four of their tails wagging happily in greeting.

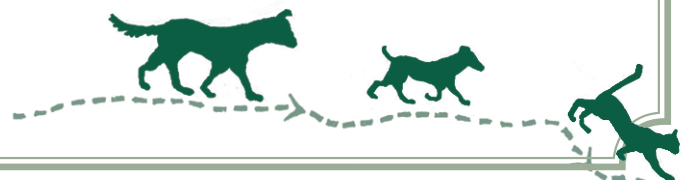
'A dog would eat you as soon as kill you when they're hungry,' said a fat man with a miniature poodle.

'We've got to think of the baby. Can't trust the dog with it,' a lank-haired woman said, while her whippet looked up at her adoringly.

'And they spread diseases,' said a fox-fur-coated woman with a Siamese cat. The cat hissed at Tiger and Tiger arched his back and hissed in reply, almost escaping from Mr Harris's arms as he did so.

'No you don't!' Mr Harris clamped the pesky cat to his chest. Tiger gave him a look of utter disgust, but there wasn't anything he could do. He was effectively trapped. Mr Harris had his right arm firmly round Tiger and was holding both of the dogs' leads with his left.

As he listened to the people around him, Mr Harris started to think that bringing the animals to the shelter to be put down was more effort than it was worth. He could be stuck in this queue for over an hour, maybe even two.



The Great Escape



5. Mr Harris

by Megan Rix

Name _____

Date _____

Here are some statements. Say whether they are **true** or **false** and justify your answer with information from the extract.

1. The Wood Green Animal Shelter was set up a month before the story starts.

2. Mr Harris carried Tiger in his arms.

3. There were lots of people at the Shelter.

4. Toby was a black cat.

5. There was a lady in the queue who had a baby.

6. Tiger and Mr Harris were very fond of each other and Mr Harris wanted to keep the animals.



The Great Escape



6. Winston

by Megan Rix

Name _____ Date _____

The man's pudgy fingers reached out and stroked Tiger and Tiger could feel all the worry of the last few days dissolving. He rubbed his chin against the man's hand and purred with pleasure.

Oh Winston, not another cat, a voice said.

Tiger froze but Winston's hand didn't stop stroking him, not even for one second.

Yes, and isn't he a beauty? Winston said. Bring over some of that salmon. I suspect he's hungry.

A moment later a small plate of still-warm salmon was put on the windowsill next to Tiger.

Go on, then, Winston told him.

Tiger didn't need to be asked twice. The salmon was gone in no time at all, and Tiger put his head to one side, looked at Winston, and miaowed hopefully for more.

Winston laughed. More salmon, and make it quick, he said.

Tiger was in heaven. Salmon and someone's fingers that stroked him in just the right way.

Shut the window. I don't like flies in my kitchen, the other voice said.

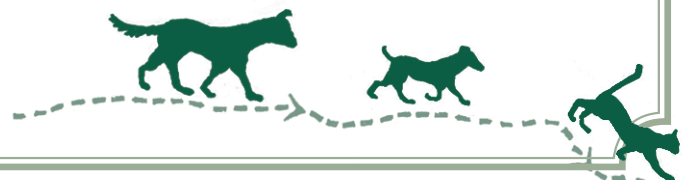
Winston lifted Tiger into the kitchen and pulled down the window behind him.

Oh dear, we seem to have left out the punctuation from this extract! Help!

Can you find:

- 6 pairs of speech marks
- 9 apostrophes
- 10 commas
- 17 full stops
- 1 exclamation mark

Who do you think the character Winston might be?



The Great Escape

by Megan Rix



7. Find out more

Name _____

Date _____

Use reference material to help you answer the questions (the back of **The Great Escape** has a handy afterword).

1. Were more animals or more humans killed during World War Two?
Find out the numbers.

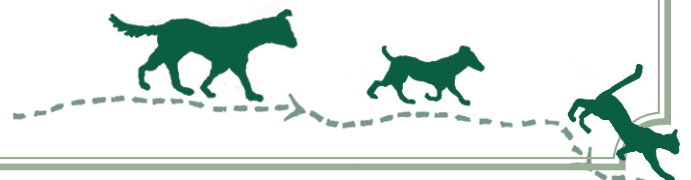
2. What is the Dickin Medal and who is it named after?

3. Write down who received the Dickin Medal during World War Two.

4. Where is there a memorial to the animals who were involved in the war?

5. Who was Winston Churchill and did he like cats?

6. What other animals were important during the war?



The Great Escape

by Megan Rix



8. Favourite parts of The Great Escape

Name _____ Date _____

Score these on a scale 1 to 5 (1 being poor and 5 being fantastic!)

	1	2	3	4	5
Finding out about World War Two.					
Making the Anderson Shelter.					
Reading the story.					
Looking forward to reading the rest of the book?					

Draw a picture below of the part of the project that you enjoyed most and say why you liked it.



The Great Escape

by Megan Rix



9. Appendix

Answers to **6. Winston** (punctuation exercise).

The man's pudgy fingers reached out and stroked Tiger, and Tiger could feel all the worry of the last few days dissolving. He rubbed his chin against the man's hand and purred with pleasure.

'Oh, Winston, not another cat!' a voice said.

Tiger froze but Winston's hand didn't stop stroking him, not even for one second. 'Yes, and isn't he a beauty,' Winston said. 'Bring over some of that salmon. I suspect he's hungry.'

A moment later a small plate of still-warm salmon was put on the windowsill next to Tiger.

'Go on, then,' Winston told him.

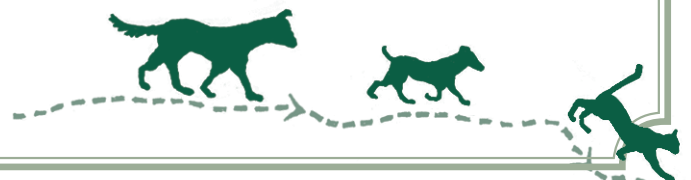
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Winston laughed. 'More salmon and make it quick,' he said.

Tiger was in heaven. Salmon and someone's fingers that stroked him in just the right way.

'Shut the window. I don't like flies in my kitchen,' the other voice said.

Winston lifted Tiger into the kitchen and pulled down the window behind him.



The Great Escape

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Answers to **7. Find out more** (from the **Afterword** in the book).

1. Were more animals or more humans killed? Find out the numbers.

A little-known historical fact sets the scene for this book: in September 1939, after the announcement that Great Britain was at war, more than 400,000 cats and dogs were put down at their owners' request in just four days. Between 1939 and 1940, another 350,000 pets were killed.

The total number of pets that were put down – 750,000 – is more than twelve-and-a-half times the number of civilian deaths throughout the country during the whole of the Second World War.

2. What is the Dickin Medal and who is it named after?

The Dickin Medal is awarded to animals for 'acts of conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty in wartime'. The medal was instituted in 1943 and named after Mrs Maria Dickin CBE, the founder of the PDSA (People's Dispensary for Sick Animals).

3. Write down who received the Dickin Medal during WW2.

During the Second World War, a total of 54 Dickin Medals were awarded, of which 32 went to pigeons, 18 to dogs, three to horses and one to a cat.

4. Where is there a memorial to the animals who were involved in the war?

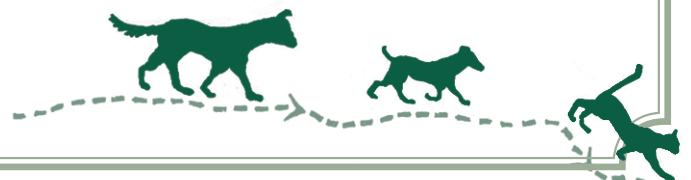
In 2004 a memorial to commemorate all the animals and birds that were killed during wartime was erected in Hyde Park.

5. Who was Winston Churchill and did he like cats?

Winston Churchill's fondness for cats is well documented. For his 88th birthday he was given a ginger cat that he named Jock. After Churchill's death his family asked that a marmalade cat always be resident at Chartwell. In November 2010 Jock number 5, a kitten who'd been rescued by Cats Protection, moved in. He has an unlikely love of water.

6. What other animals were important during the war?

Around 250,000 homing pigeons were used during the Second World War.



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Picture credits

by Megan Rix

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Anderson Shelters

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Garden Shelters

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Shelters - London - 1940

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Home Keys

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Neville Chamberlain

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