

VOLUME 1 OF 2

**CIVILIAN EVACUATION TO DEVON IN
THE SECOND WORLD WAR**

**Submitted by S.J. HESS as a thesis for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in History, 2006**



**CIVILIAN EVACUATION TO
DEVON IN THE SECOND
WORLD WAR**

Submitted by Susan Jane Hess, to the University of Exeter as a
thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History,
July 2006.

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ABSTRACT

Extensive sources have been reviewed and analysed to piece together for the first time a detailed academic study of civilian evacuation to Devon¹ viewed against the national backdrop. The primary focus of this thesis is the large number of unaccompanied children who were officially evacuated to the County under the auspices of the Government Evacuation Scheme during the Second World War. However, Chapter Six discusses the evacuation of mothers and accompanying children, unofficial (private) evacuees and private school parties. The majority of evacuated children arriving in Devon originated from the London area and southeastern counties. In addition large numbers of children were also evacuated to the County from Bristol and within the County from Plymouth (Devon) during 1941 and briefly from Exeter in May 1942. Each of the three national evacuation waves is considered individually throughout the text as they are quite distinct in complexion, a fact frequently ignored in generalised accounts which tend to focus on reaction to the initial wave.

This thesis argues that:

1. lack of regional and local research has resulted in evacuation largely being viewed in generalised and stereotypical terms without due regard for the socioeconomic and geopolitical variance between those areas involved or the particular localised features of the evacuation process
2. the acclimatisation of evacuated children was particularly successful in Devon and drift back less than the national average
3. local evidence supports the argument that contemporary national reports of impoverished, dirty and ill mannered evacuees were frequently exaggerated
4. evacuation was central in accelerating postwar reform in areas of education, child care and welfare

¹ Maps of Devon can be found in *Appendix 1* (Philips' New Map of Devon 1938 kindly provided by Dr R. Watts) and *Appendix 2* (Map of Devon Parishes taken from M.R. Ravenhill and M.Rowe, ed. *Devon Maps and Map-Makers: Manuscript Maps before 1840*, Volume 1 (Devon and Cornwall Record Society 2002))

The civilian evacuation during World War Two was a remarkable event in the history of modern Britain. Interest in the subject has recently increased but there is enormous scope and need for further research both to broaden our understanding of the nature and impact of evacuation and to test entrenched views. The over-arching aim of this thesis is to contribute to this exploration.

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Front Cover - Evacuees arriving in Devon (*Google Images*)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

BDEA	Barnstaple Divisional Education Authority
BO	Billeting Officer
CBO	Chief Billeting Officer
CMO	County Medical Officer
DCC	Devon County Council
DCEC	Devon County Education Committee
DRO	Devon Record Office (Exeter)
ECA	Exeter City Archives
ERA	Evacuees Reunion Association
HMI	His Majesty's Inspector
LEA	Local Education Authority
LCC	London County Council
MB	Municipal Borough
MH	Ministry of Health
MOH	Medical Officer of Health
MOI	Ministry of Information
NFWI	National Federation of Women's Institutes
NDRO	North Devon Record Office (Barnstaple)
PRO	Public Record Office (now National Archives)
PWDRO	Plymouth and West Devon Record Office (Plymouth)
RDC	Rural District Council
SMO	School Medical Officer
TNA	The National Archives
UDC	Urban District Council
WCL	Westcountry Studies Library (Exeter)
WI	Women's Institute
WVS	Women's Voluntary Service

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I wish to thank the staff at Exeter University, Devon's three record offices in Exeter, Plymouth and Barnstaple, the Westcountry Studies Library, the Devon and Exeter Institution, the National Archives, the London Metropolitan Archives, Anne Stamper at the National Federation of Womens' Institutes and Liza Giffen at The Women's Library, London Metropolitan University. I am enormously indebted to all those who took time and patience to share with such enthusiasm their own unique evacuation story. Without their help this research would have been colourless. Finally, I would like to thank my husband David for his support and patience.

INTRODUCTION

Devonshire legitimately lays claim to being the most invaded county in the country's history. From 1939 to 1946, its borders were breached time and again by floods of people, who for widely varying reasons temporarily looked upon the county as home.¹

Nowhere throughout the forty counties to which London children had been sent had evacuation been such an outstanding success as in Devon.²

The motivation for this thesis developed from my discovery in 2002 that Devon was and is currently still omitted from the list of World War Two reception counties listed on the Battle of Britain website.³ Yet by mid 1940, following the second evacuation wave, the number of elementary schoolchildren in the County, totalling approximately 37,386⁴ prior to evacuation (excluding the County Boroughs of Plymouth and Exeter), was more than doubled by officially and

¹ Powell, B. *Devon's Glorious Past 1939-1945* (Two Hoots Publishing 1995), p.49

² *The Western Times*, 3 January 1941, printed this quote by Mr Robertson, Chairman of the LCC Education Committee

³ The map and figures of reception counties shown on www.battleofbritain.net/0001.html. Information given in *Document 5 The Evacuation of Women and Children* as of 12 Jan 2006 is taken from R. Tames's publication *Life in Wartime Britain*. For a much more comprehensive list of 'Wholly Reception Counties' refer to R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy* (H.M.S.O.1950) *Appendix 5*, p.553. Devon is not included on this list, presumably because Plymouth was classified as neutral. Devon is however included on a list of reception areas included in R. Padley and M. Cole's *Evacuation Survey: A Report to the Fabian Society* (Routledge & Sons Ltd 1940) p.50.

⁴ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1940, DCC 150/4/5/1*, p.1. An average figure of 39,144 is given in the *Elementary Education Financial Adjustment 1939-1940, DCC Evacuation Box*

unofficially unaccompanied evacuated schoolchildren⁵ and boasted the largest percentage of those sent from the London County Council (LCC) evacuation area.⁶ In addition, accommodation had to be found for both officially and unofficially evacuated mothers with children, teachers and helpers, large numbers of private evacuees, relocated war workers, various other categories of employees and the military.

The number of unofficial evacuees who came to Devon during the period 1939-1945 is difficult to assess accurately because no national or local uniform statistical record was kept. However, following the first evacuation wave in September 1939 code named 'Pied Piper', the civilian population of Devon rose between 60-72,000, the majority having made their own private arrangements.⁷ As war continued, evacuees from many areas, although largely from London and the Southeast, continued to arrive in Devon and by February 1941 the County (excluding Exeter and Plymouth) had already absorbed 78,569 official evacuees (adults and children).⁸ Space also had to be found for substantial numbers from Bristol, Plymouth and Exeter. During 1942-1943, schoolchildren from no less than 85 different LEAs⁹ were being taught and cared for in the County

⁵ The number of officially evacuated elementary schoolchildren given by the Elementary Education Sub-Committee in August 1940 was 40,000. *DCC150/4/1/38* p.148. The number given by County Medical Officer for December 1940 was 34,246 official and 3,120 unofficial elementary schoolchildren. *DCC150/4/5/1*, p.4

⁶ *The Times Educational Supplement* 18 January 1941. Also see *Education*, Volume LXXVII, 24 January 1941, p.68. The Chairman of the LCC Education Committee quoted a figure of over 50,000, which most probably included secondary pupils and may have included unofficial evacuee children.

⁷ Refer to *Appendix 7* for list of local councils in Devon indicating population increases by 29 September 1939. *The National Register- Statistics of Population United Kingdom and Isle of Man on 29 Sep 1939* (H.M.S.O.1944) *Appendix 1* records a total of 781,243 for the Administrative County of Devon (including associated County Boroughs of Exeter and Plymouth), a rise of 59,243 from numbers taken earlier in 1939 and recorded in *The General Register Office Census 1951, County Report DEVON* (H.M.S.O.1955) p.xii. Wasley recorded a total number of 82,000 evacuees in Devon by the end of September 1939 with private evacuees outnumbering official ones by 700%, G.Wasley, *Devon at War 1939-1945* (Devon Books 1994), p.28. Titmuss recorded that the additional population in Devon on 29th September 1939 was 64,556 (after making the appropriate adjustments). The number of official evacuees was 10,440 and if no private or official evacuees had left the county by 29th September 1939, private evacuation outnumbered the official movement by 5 to 1. If allowance was made for some return during September then roughly 71,800 private evacuees went to Devon. R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 547.

⁸ *Devon County Council Minutes DCC148/15, Emergency Committee Report*, 19 June 1941

⁹ See *Appendix 3* for list of LEAs

and the aggregate number (excluding Plymouth) rose to 101,000.¹⁰ In addition, Devon laid claim to being one of wartime Britain's most militarily active counties,¹¹ and by April 1944 the number of US troops rose to 85,191.¹² As with the 'civilian invasion', specific localised circumstances resulted in most US soldiers having 'particularly fond memories of Devon' and its hospitality, not always the case in other areas.¹³

Past diverse references to and accounts of this unique voluntary wartime exodus of British civilians from vulnerable crowded cities and towns to areas of lower population density have seldom given serious consideration to either the deep socioeconomic and geopolitical variation that existed in both reception and evacuation areas, or to the unique circumstances of each localised evacuation process. Evacuation exposed to national scrutiny the whole gamut of societal behaviour which, during peacetime, largely went unnoticed. Added to this were the pressures of war - dislocation and heartbreaking separation for adults and children alike and an invasion of strangers into sleepy parochial towns and villages. Scandals hit the headlines, unsubstantiated facts were promulgated and problems were frequently magnified out of all proportion to the reality of the situation, usually by the articulate middle and upper classes. In 1998, Parsons emphasised both the lack of serious research and the problem of finding a 'norm' with which to describe the evacuation scheme due to the proliferation of roles involved and the geographical variation.¹⁴ Titmuss himself cautioned that

¹⁰ ED134/39, G9E/941, Report by HMI Inspector Arnold Platts, dated 1 April 1944

¹¹ G.Wasley, *Devon at War*, pp.121-5, 145 and 167. This brought great advantage to local tradesmen – For examples see *South Molton Municipal Borough, Town Clerk's General Correspondence 3058add1&2/14*, letter from Town Clerk dated 13 December 1939 to the Rt. Hon. Earl Fortescue. Also mentioned in letter dated 13 March 1940 from Town Clerk to Major Hamilton, *3058add1&2/15*

¹² D. Reynolds, *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain, 1941-1945* (Phoenix Press 2000) pp. 110-111

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 113

¹⁴ M. Parsons, *I'll Take That One* (Beckett Karlson Ltd 1998) pp.244-249

‘the experience of districts varied greatly’¹⁵ and this variation and current lack of both regional and local research has also most recently been emphasised by Stewart and Welshman.¹⁶

Unlike more affluent reception areas such as Berkshire, where middle-class shock at the invasion of evacuees was apparently considerable,¹⁷ rural Devon was not wealthy. The majority of the working population was poorly paid and housing was frequently of a low standard with crude sanitation and inadequate water supplies, particularly in North Devon.¹⁸ The infrastructure was under-developed compared to more affluent counties and the multitude of small village schools lacked both facilities and opportunities. This rural impoverishment, particularly prevalent in large parts of Mid, West and North Devon, shocked many evacuees, even those from poor homes. Although the problems of urban and rural poverty differed, this deprivation, so familiar to the majority of Devon’s population, suggests that it was an important factor behind both the generally generous welcome given to evacuees and their successful assimilation. Idealisation of rural life as the embodiment of ‘authentic England’,¹⁹ a process started by the Victorians, clearly became a rallying cry for those commentators eager to highlight the wide gulf between urban and rural mentalities, but was not writ large in Devon’s evacuation literature. There was a belief that rural living benefited evacuees, a

¹⁵ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.125

¹⁶ J. Stewart and J. Welshman, ‘Culture, Behaviour and Poverty: The Evacuation of Children in Scotland, 1939-1945’, submitted to the *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*

¹⁷ In Berkshire, members of a congregational church opposed evacuation and asked whether there was ‘any necessity for the spoliation of decent homes and furniture (or) the corruption of speech and moral standards of our own children’, S.Fielding, ‘The Good War 1939-1945’ in N. Tiratsoo ed. *From Blitz to Blair – A New History of Britain since 1939* (Phoenix 1998) p.35.

¹⁸ Report by S.R. Raffety, Consulting Engineer from London, *Devon County Council Minutes, DCC 148/14 - 29 January 1938*. See also *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 350, Column 2234, 1 August 1939 – concern expressed about inadequate water supplies and sewerage in Devon

¹⁹ For an informative discussion see S.O. Rose, *Which People’s War?* (Oxford University Press 2003)

fact highlighted by evacuated teachers,²⁰ and even acknowledged by some parents,²¹ but no evidence of prevalent overt resentment or critical discourse which emphasised negative comparisons between rural and urban mores.

The status of this unique historical human experiment has moved on considerably from Gosden's rather dismissive appraisal that 'the evacuation of 1939 and the subsequent upheavals seemed much more important to contemporaries than they appear in retrospect'.²² Under the umbrella of the Evacuees Reunion Association (ERA)²³ ex-evacuees have finally found a united voice, encouraged by the recent upsurge of interest shown by the media, schools and museums, whilst historical debate continues to deliberate over the impact of war and evacuation. Since embarking on this thesis a new Research Centre for Evacuee and War Child Studies has been established at the University of Reading.

The aims of this thesis are fourfold:

1. To examine Devon's collective reaction to evacuation, focusing primarily on the reception of and provision for officially evacuated unaccompanied children. An in-depth local study of the impact of evacuation on a once remote and relatively backward and impoverished rural county offers new perspectives to the history of evacuation and begins to test received assumptions, originally generally propagated by a vocal minority of local social leaders. Generalised references such as 'the shock with which many middle-class homes had received over a million evacuee

²⁰ Examples include evacuated teachers billeted at Ashburton, Dartmouth, Pinhoe, South Brent and Totnes – ED134/270

²¹ For example, *The Western Times*, 8 August 1941

²² P.H.J.H. Gosden, *Education in the Second World War- a study in policy and administration* (Methuen & Co.Ltd 1976), pp.1-2

²³ The Evacuees Reunion Association was founded in February 1996 and is the largest organisation serving World War Two British evacuees.

schoolchildren, infants and mothers',²⁴ call for modification. Evidence clearly demonstrates that most billets in Devon were generously provided by the low paid working class. Whilst acknowledging that both urban and rural culture and poverty differed, the legendary billeting class clash between affluent country people and the urban poor thus begins to lose some of its credibility when viewed from the perspective of a less prosperous county.

2. To explore the reasons why the large majority of unaccompanied evacuee children acclimatised successfully in Devon and drift back was apparently below that of other counties.²⁵ Once again Devon's socioeconomic structure proved pivotal. Most billets were in working-class households and contemporary surveys found this to be a prime reason for children's successful adaptation. Devon's distance from evacuation areas and consequent lack of contact with family was also an important factor in the settling down process.

3. To support the argument that contemporary 'sensationalist' reports of dirty habits, enuresis, pediculosis and skin problems amongst evacuees were exaggerated, and to provide evidence that such health issues generally either resulted from wartime conditions and the trauma of evacuation or existed in Devon long before the arrival of evacuees. Imprecise accounts of 'unkempt, ill-clothed, undernourished and often incontinent children of bombed cities...messengers carrying the evidence of the deprivation of urban working-class life into rural homes'²⁶ will continue to distort the lens through which we view evacuation unless local research tests such suppositions.

²⁴ J. Stevenson, *The Penguin Social History of Britain, British Society 1914-1945* (Penguin Books 1984) p. 140

²⁵ *The Western Times* 28 March 1941; *Express & Echo*, 25 March 1941; R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p. 51

²⁶ D. Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State* (Macmillan Second Edition 1984) p.210

4. To argue that there is clear evidence that evacuation was a major factor in moving both political and public opinion out of its 1939 groove and accelerating postwar Labour reform in areas of education, child care and welfare which would not have happened so soon or in such a way without the experience of evacuation. Deprivation in areas of education and welfare was unmasked, not only amongst evacuees but also amongst the community at large, particularly in the poorer rural areas of counties such as Devon. For example, the wartime explosion of school meal provision in Devon benefited directly from government funding, and child guidance expertise developed as a result of experience gained from evacuee hostels and residential nurseries.

The remaining section of this Introduction reflects on the historiography ensuing from Titmuss's official wartime history *Problems of Social Policy* (1950) and discusses the sources, methodology and format employed in this thesis.

Historiography

Titmuss's pivotal text remains unique as the most comprehensive and authoritative commentary on evacuation. Apart from Boyd's *Evacuation in Scotland* (1944),²⁷ Ferguson and Fitzgerald's *Studies in the Social Services* (1954)²⁸ and Dent's *Education in Transition* (1944)²⁹ together with a number of wartime reports and surveys, there followed a dearth of well-researched texts dealing specifically or partially with the nature and impact of evacuation. Those written specifically about evacuation are few and range extensively in their depth of detail and analysis. For example, Inglis's *The Children's War* (1990) illustrates the problems inherent in short generalised accounts. Her loose descriptions of 'slipshod conditions of the reception centres' and the 'shocking condition of

²⁷ W. Boyd, ed. *Evacuation in Scotland* (University of London Press 1944)

²⁸ S.Ferguson and H.Fitzgerald, *Studies in the Social Services* (Her Majesty's Stationery Office 1954)

²⁹ H.C.Dent, *Education in Transition* (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co.Ltd.1944)

the majority of the city children' perpetuate inaccurate myths and add little to serious historical research. Her statement that 'head lice were almost unknown in rural areas' must not be accepted without further research as this was definitely not the case in Devon.³⁰ Jackson's account of evacuation claimed that 'host families were mainly middle class',³¹ again not true for Devon. By contrast, *The Evacuation: A Very British Revolution* (1995)³² by Holman, an evacuee himself, offers well-researched material to support the argument that evacuation accelerated reform, particularly in child care. Parsons's *I'll Take That One* (1998) called for serious research to reveal the accurate facts of evacuation thereby stemming the repetition of unsubstantiated facts and myths that continue to be presented both in modern school text books and in the media.

The majority of generalised accounts of evacuation and its possible impact on society and social policy usually appear as a brief but requisite section included within broader texts.³³ Due to the lack of both regional and local research, the repetition of received but untested assertions has continued to distort our understanding of evacuation. As recently as 1996 the eminent historian Peter Clarke, an acknowledged expert on twentieth century Britain, dismissed evacuation in one sentence - 'Evacuation of deprived inner-city children, sometimes displacing the comfortable classes from spacious homes, was a shock all round'.³⁴ However, from the 1980s revisionist historians began to question received notions of the impact of war and the ensuing historical debate has led to renewed interest in evacuation. Since Crosby's complaint in 1986 that secondary sources

³⁰ R. Inglis, *The Children's War: Evacuation 1939-1945* (Fontana 1990) pp. 13,17 and 19

³¹ C. Jackson, *Who will take our children?* (Methuen 1985) pp.187-8. Jackson wrote that it was the middle classes 'to which fell the brunt of the evacuation burden'.

³² B. Holman, *The Evacuation: A Very British Revolution* (Lion Publishing 1995)

³³ For example, P. Addison, *The Road to 1945* (Jonathan Cape 1975) pp. 72; A. Calder, *The People's War Britain 1939-1945* (Jonathan Cape 1969) pp. 34-50; A. Marwick, *War & Social Change in the Twentieth Century* (Macmillan 1974) pp. 156-7; A. Marwick, *Britain in the Century of Total War: War, Peace and Social Change 1900-1967* (The Bodley Head 1968) pp.265-6; H. Pelling, *Britain and the Second World War* (Collins 1970) pp. 321-2

³⁴ P. Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-1990* (Penguin 1996) p. 207

on evacuation tended to be impressionistic, anecdotal and lacking in analytical content³⁵ there have been some notable academic publications.³⁶

For the purposes of this short résumé I intend to outline briefly the main arguments found in both Titmuss's work and ensuing historical texts. Each historian contributes a different nuance but basically the debate about the effects of war and evacuation encompasses two main issues: firstly, whether total war and more specifically evacuation contributed to a degree of social levelling, a more unified nation and a realisation by the middle and upper classes of the plight of the poor. If so, was this superficial and did class division return postwar with a vengeance with the working-class mentality still blamed for its poverty, poor nutrition and unhealthy habits? Secondly, whether total war and evacuation contributed to a political and public consensus which called for reforms in social policy? If so, was the consensus a permanent legacy, what was the extent of the reforms and were they merely the continuation of pre-war developments? Latterly, several commentators have also highlighted the contemporary exaggerations about the habits, manners and unsanitary state of some evacuees whilst others have emphasised the urban/rural class clash.

Richard Titmuss, a man with a passion for both social justice and statistics, a self-taught demographer and social analyst, one of the 'founders' of Britain's Welfare State and 'arguably the dominant influence on social administration in the postwar period',³⁷ began work as official war historian on the social services in 1942. Privy to thousands of official and unofficial files before

³⁵ T. Crosby, *The Impact of Civilian Evacuation in the Second World War* (Croom Helm 1986) see Preface

³⁶ Examples include M. Parsons, *I'll Take That One*, B. Holman, *The Evacuation: A Very British Revolution*, J. Macnicol, 'The evacuation of schoolchildren' in H.L. Smith, ed. *War and Social Change: British society during the Second World War* (Manchester University Press 1986), J. Stewart and J. Welshman, 'Culture, Behaviour and Poverty: The Evacuation of Children in Scotland, 1939-1945, submitted to the *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, J. Welshman, 'Evacuation, Hygiene, and Social Policy: Our Towns Report of 1943', *The Historical Journal*, Volume 42, 3, pp.781-807, J. Welshman, 'Evacuation and Social Policy during the Second World War: Myth and Reality', *Twentieth Century British History*, Volume 9, Number 1, pp.28-53

³⁷ J. Welshman, 'The Unknown Titmuss', *Journal of Social Policy*, 33, 3 (2004) p.225-47

their declassification in the late 1970s, his monumental and definitive civil history *Problems of Social Policy* (1950) was accepted without criticism for many years. The Ministry of Health was apparently against its publication, finding it ‘too intimate, too revealing a book ... full of gossip, rife with unflattering facts’. However, Keith Hancock³⁸ threatened to resign and the book was duly published.³⁹ Welshman believes that his work remained surprisingly tenacious even once the ‘real or imagined consensus on the welfare state began to evaporate following the oil crisis of the early 1970s and under the impact of Thatcherism’.⁴⁰ Titmuss’s brief excluded in-depth detail of the effects of war on the ordinary, peace-time social services such as those for maternity and child welfare. A second volume was anticipated which would have dealt with such subjects but was never written. His text remains the most comprehensive study of the overall history of evacuation ever undertaken and still stands the test of time in this respect. He described all aspects of the three waves of evacuation, from the planning and reception to the return. He recorded the initial disorganisation, the development of welfare provision and the administrative financial nightmare facing local authorities. He traced the gradual relaxation of a parsimonious Treasury as the Government struggled both to retain the goodwill and compliance of foster parents and parents alike and grappled with the impossibility of continuing to sustain means testing with so many displaced persons. *Problems of Social Policy* was written in the heady early postwar years when belief in Britain’s New Jerusalem was at its zenith and the National Health Service, flagship of Labour’s postwar government, in its infancy. Little wonder that his writing reflected the wartime spirit of universalism which he so deeply espoused.⁴¹

However, Titmuss himself was the first to acknowledge the problems of writing about social history, particularly so close to the events and he anticipated that his broad generalisations would be

³⁸ Supervisor of the series of official civil war histories commissioned by the War Cabinet

³⁹ Oakley, A. *Man & Wife* (Flamingo 1997) p.293

⁴⁰ J. Welshman, ‘Evacuation, Hygiene, and Social Policy’, *The Historical Journal*, 42,3 (1999) p.783

⁴¹ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 506

subject to revision.⁴² Nevertheless he was not alone in believing that Dunkirk and the very real threat of invasion in the summer of 1940 ‘urged on’ the Government to expand its social policy for all, irrespective of ‘class, creed or military category’.⁴³ In addition, already forced to confront social problems resulting from the first evacuation wave, by the summer of 1940 the Government was faced with the increasing problems inherent in the second evacuation wave which this time included evacuees from previously designated safe areas on the south coast. Referring particularly to developments in the universal provision of school meals and milk, the National Milk Scheme⁴⁴ and special foods for certain groups in the community, Titmuss pointed to the ‘unanimity underlying policy and the speed at which decisions were acted on’.⁴⁵ He quoted the leader from *The Times* (1 July 1940), written soon after the last British troops left Dunkirk, to illustrate the ‘Dunkirk spirit’ and the change of mood in a country no longer enjoying the relative calm of the phoney war period but facing the unthinkable. It was time to put aside differences and unite against the Axis to save a democracy that in future would be required to embrace universalism as the price of total war.⁴⁶ He used the same quote in his 1955 ‘*War and Social Policy*’ lecture, describing it as ‘a call for social justice; for the abolition of privilege, for a more equitable distribution of income

⁴² R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp.ix and 508

⁴³ R. Titmuss, *Essays on the Welfare State* (George Allen & Unwin Ltd. Second Edition 1963) p.82. R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.508. Also see *The Times* leader for 1 July 1940.

⁴⁴ The National Milk Scheme for mothers and children under five was introduced in July 1940 and should not be confused with the Milk- in- Schools Scheme which was originally introduced in 1934 and given new impetus during the war. The decision to approve the supply of cheap or free milk to mothers and young children was taken on 7 June 1940, five days after the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force from Dunkirk. See Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 511

⁴⁵ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 514

⁴⁶ Ibid. pp.508 -9. The quote Titmuss used from *The Times* was ‘If we speak of democracy, we do not mean a democracy which maintains the right to vote but forgets the right to work and the right to live. If we speak of freedom, we do not mean a rugged individualism which excludes social organisation and economic planning. If we speak of equality, we do not mean a political equality nullified by social and economic privilege. If we speak of economic reconstruction, we think less of maximum production (though this too will be required) than of equitable distribution’.

and wealth, for drastic changes in the economic and social life of the country. The effect on social policy of these ideas about war strategy was profound'.⁴⁷

There has been a marked tendency when criticising Titmuss to ignore his later work and in a sense therefore to deny him his personal revisionism. A more disillusioned Titmuss can be seen in the late 1950s when delivering his lecture '*The Irresponsible Society*'. The ebullient author buoyed by the sense of reform so palpable in 1945 now appeared more disenchanted. He expressed alarm at the growing inequalities and failure of society to address the problems of 'dependent poverty, inequality and unfreedom'. He felt that all the impulse and ideals of the 1940s to recreate, rebuild and replan had collapsed and that 'many of us must also now admit that we put too much faith... in the concept of universality as applied to social security'.⁴⁸ This disenchantment accords with Calder's conclusion that it was the 'well-to-do' who benefited from the welfare state and that after Churchill's return in 1951 the trend was towards increasing social inequality.⁴⁹ However, shortly before his death in 1973, Titmuss added a passage to one of his lectures which appears as a postscript in *Social Policy* (1974).⁵⁰ Written after a period in hospital both as inpatient and outpatient, it clearly illustrates that during the last few months of his life he regained the belief that his work and that of others had not been 'entirely in vain' and that the 'British National Health Service, as he experienced it, was practising the moral principles in which he believed so passionately'.⁵¹

⁴⁷ R. Titmuss, *Essays on 'The Welfare State'*, p.82

⁴⁸ Ibid. pp. 217, 241, 229

⁴⁹ A. Calder, *The People's War – Britain 1939-45*, p. 585

⁵⁰ R. Titmuss, *Social Policy – An Introduction* (George Allen & Unwin Ltd. 1974) is an edited version of a course of introductory lectures given by Titmuss at the London School of Economics over a number of years which were revised yearly by him.

⁵¹ Ibid. Quote taken from the short Introduction (not paginated) written by B. Abel-Smith and K. Titmuss, dated December 1973.

Titmuss claimed that reports about the condition of mothers and children during the first evacuation wave aroused the nation's conscience and that this together with the Blitz 'stimulated inquiry and proposals for reform long before victory was even thought possible'. He also stated that the guiding principles during the war, although not always practicable nor always applied, were the pooling of national resources and the sharing of risk. He believed that acceptance of these principles 'moved forward the goals of welfare. New obligations were shouldered, higher standards were set...for five years of war the pressures for a higher standard of welfare and a deeper comprehension of social justice steadily gained in strength'.⁵² Calder (1969), imbued with a sense that postwar socialism had perhaps lost the momentum for more radical change, was first to question what he described as the postwar fashionable idea that there had been a revolution in British society, maintaining that the latter continued 'along the old grooves'.⁵³ He 'cast doubt on the veracity of this comfortable image of a nation united in the spirit of Dunkirk...drew attention to some discreditable features of the "people's war" that had previously been ignored or neglected'.⁵⁴ One year later Pelling claimed that British institutions emerged from war 'basically unaltered', whilst acknowledging that evacuation had both tended to break down parochialism and bring about some changes in social services.⁵⁵ However in 1974 Marwick revised his 1968 opinion that the importance of evacuation had been exaggerated.⁵⁶ He stressed that it was one of the most significant social phenomena of the war and, in Victorian overtones, endorsed Titmuss's belief that the condition of evacuated mothers and children led to 'the awakening conscience' of the middle and upper classes resulting in calls for social reform.⁵⁷ Addison (1975) favoured the concept of wartime national solidarity by describing the nation putting aside peacetime differences and closing

⁵² R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*. pp. 507-8

⁵³ A. Calder, *The People's War*, p. 17

⁵⁴ Mackay, R. *Half the battle* (Manchester University Press 2002) p.5

⁵⁵ H. Pelling, *Britain and the Second World War*, pp. 319-326

⁵⁶ A. Marwick, *Britain in the Century of Total War*, p. 266

⁵⁷ A. Marwick, *War and Social Change in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 156-7

ranks in 1940 with progressive Centre-opinion coming into its own and a new priority being attached to the morale and welfare of the working classes and the power of popular opinion.⁵⁸ Fraser (1984) writing on the evolution of the welfare state agreed that the ‘total’ nature of the war tended to reduce social distinctions and that evacuation had aroused the nation’s conscience and generated universalism in social policy.⁵⁹ Stevenson, writing in the same year, concluded that whilst ‘not quite as uniform as was sometimes portrayed at the time, the period after Dunkirk during the Battle of Britain and the Blitz did, for a time at least, forge a strong collectivist sentiment’.⁶⁰ One year later, Jackson (1985) stated that evacuation had an homogenising effect on British life.⁶¹ Recently Rose (2003) discussed the promulgation of ‘The People’s War’ by press, radio and film immediately after Dunkirk and at the beginning of the Blitz, which ‘took hold in public imagination’. Although highlighting ‘the fragility of a unitary national identity’, she believed the nation unified for the duration of the war, even if it could ‘not agree on how the nation was constituted’.⁶²

The most marked challenge to the concept of wartime class consensus from revisionist commentators became apparent during the 1980s and 1990s. Macnicol (1986) argued that Titmuss’s optimistic supposition was something of a myth and suggested that the gulf widened even further between the classes. Acknowledging that ‘the wildly exaggerated and inaccurate stories of the evacuees’ condition’, promulgated by more conservative-minded social commentators, fuelled the evacuation debate which in turn encouraged ‘an ideological climate favourable to welfare legislation’, it nevertheless ‘boosted a conservative, behaviouristic analysis of poverty that viewed the root cause of the children’s condition as family failure, poor parenting and general social

⁵⁸ P. Addison, *The Road to 1945*, p. 17

⁵⁹ D. Fraser, *The Evolution of the Welfare State*, pp. 209-10

⁶⁰ J. Stevenson, *British Society 1914-1945*, p.458

⁶¹ C. Jackson, *Who will take our children?* pp. xiv-xv

⁶² S. Rose, *Which People’s War?* pp. 2, 29, 208, 290-291

inadequacy'. This resulted in the renewed belief amongst the middle and upper classes that poverty was the result of working-class inadequacy, feckless parenting and educational failure to inculcate girls in the art of home making.⁶³ The pre-war eugenic-driven concept of the 'social problem group' thus evolved into the re-structured concept of 'the problem family'.⁶⁴ Macnicol also believed that evacuation revealed working-class solidarity.⁶⁵ In the same year Crosby echoed the latter statement by suggesting that evacuation revealed the realities of class and privilege to many of the urban poor and resulted in a concerted action to attain common goals which resulted in a strong leftward shift in political opinion.⁶⁶ In 1990 Lowe also argued that despite some sympathy amongst members of the middle and upper classes to the plight of the poorer evacuees, the idea of social solidarity appears to have been an 'artificially manufactured myth'.⁶⁷ Fielding et al (1995) believed that the impact of war on social harmony was 'widely misconstrued', claiming that many writers such as Titmuss, together with later historians who supported his thesis that Dunkirk and the Blitz had profoundly altered social and political attitudes, were Labour-inclined. Evacuation may have temporarily bridged social differences for a minority but it also reinforced traditional class antagonism and previous ideas about the positive impact of the Blitz on social cohesion were overstated.⁶⁸ Smith (1996) concluded that evidence of increased social solidarity during 1940

⁶³ See also J. Lewis, *The Politics of Motherhood: Child and Maternal Welfare in England 1900-1939* (Croom Helm 1980). Lewis stated that whether the problem was infant welfare prior to World War 1 or nutrition in the 1930s, the answer was believed to lie in the education of mothers. p.225

⁶⁴ The Eugenics Society was founded in 1907 and espoused a policy of sterilisation for those identified as members of the 'social problem group'. However in 1946, when 'wider political and demographic trends were unfavourable to its objectives', the Society's General Secretary up-dated 'the concept of the 'social problem group' by forming a Problem Families Committee. For further discussion on the Eugenics Society and the historical background to the concept of the 'problem family' see J. Welshman, 'The Social History of Social Work: The Issue of the 'Problem Family', 1940-1970, *The British Journal of Social Work*, Volume 29, No.3 (Oxford University Press June 1999) pp.457- 476. Also J. Welshman, *Underclass – A History of the Excluded 1880-2000* (Hambledon Continuum 2006)

⁶⁵ J. Macnicol, 'The evacuation of schoolchildren', in H.Smith ed.*War and Social Change: British society during the Second World War*, pp. 24-8 See also J. Macnicol, 'In Pursuit of The Underclass', *Journal of Social Policy*, Vol. 16, Part 3 (1987)

⁶⁶ T. Crosby, *The Impact of Civilian Evacuation in the Second World War*, pp. 146, 148

⁶⁷ R. Lowe, *The Second World War, Consensus and the Foundation of the Welfare State, Twentieth Century British History*, Vol 1, No 2, 1990, pp. 175-6

⁶⁸ S. Fielding, P. Thompson and N. Tiratsoo, *England Arise!* (Manchester University Press 1995) pp.14, 21, 26,38,212,213

‘should not be overstated’ because whilst Titmuss viewed society ‘from the top down’, studies of the working-class ‘do not support the concept of a people’s war’.⁶⁹ Hendrick (1997) endorsed the view that evacuation did not increase bonding between the classes but conceded that it led to a more detailed understanding of the extent and consequences of physical and mental poverty and the identification of ‘problem families’.⁷⁰ Parsons and Starns (1999) reiterated the view that ‘if anything, evacuation confirmed class prejudices and reaffirmed middle class desires to keep social class boundaries intact’.⁷¹ Recently, Mackay (2002) has attempted to redress the balance by counter-acting what he described as some of the negative interpretations offered by revisionists such as Calder, Macnicol, Smith, Ponting and Fielding. For Mackay, the attitude and behaviour of ‘the great mass of ordinary people’ was consistent with the spirit of Dunkirk.⁷²

Titmuss’s argument that political consensus backed up by public demand led to revolutionary universal social policy changes has also stimulated much debate. He discussed the spirit in which many welfare provisions were ordered and administered after 1941 which ‘was a sharp contrast with the mass treatment of individual distress during the years of heavy and prolonged unemployment’.⁷³ Calder (1969) concurred with Titmuss’s assessment of the Government’s change in social policy, maintaining that ‘the bombs had helped to produce what can only be called a change of heart in the authorities’.⁷⁴ Gilbert (1970) stressed that a private political consensus amongst Britain’s leaders to introduce an acceptable ‘national minimum’ was actually developed during the 1930s,⁷⁵ and Marwick (1974) argued that by late 1941 ‘a preoccupation with the

⁶⁹ H. Smith, ed. *Britain in the Second World War*, pp.3 and 41

⁷⁰ H. Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society 1880-1990* (Cambridge University Press 1997) p. 57

⁷¹ M. Parsons and P. Starns, *The Evacuation* (DSM 1999) p.190

⁷² R. Mackay, *Half the battle*, pp. 5-7, 250

⁷³ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp.515-6

⁷⁴ A. Calder, *The People’s War*, p. 224

⁷⁵ B.B. Gilbert, *British Social Policy 1914-1939* (B.T. Batsford Ltd 1970) p. vii

problems of social reform was apparent in all levels of society'.⁷⁶ McLaine (1979) believed political consensus 'gathered considerable momentum by 1941' and that as early as 1940 a discussion paper, although 'highly tentative...showed how far along the road towards agreement on basic social problems Labour and Conservative ministers could travel at this time'.⁷⁷ Recently, Webster (2002) has written of the 'spirit of euphoria that took hold of the intelligentsia during the darkest days of the war' and of the 'outburst of planning activity in the fields of health and welfare'.⁷⁸

Revisionists, particularly during the 1980s, chose instead to highlight 'the diversity of goals and conflict of principle that prevailed in government and party circles'.⁷⁹ Harris (1981) argued that Titmuss had not fully explored the nature of the wartime consensus and had perhaps exaggerated 'the extent to which the artificial circumstances of war could provide a permanent stable basis for the post-war welfare state'.⁸⁰ Thane (1982) felt that 'the impetus to a reluctant and divided wartime government to introduce social policy proposals and, more rarely, legislation, came less from the impact of Dunkirk than from the revival of political and industrial conflict in the latter part of the war'.⁸¹ Jefferys (1987) saw 'few signs of a novel enthusiasm for welfare reform in official circles' and believed the new Whitehall reform agenda was one of consolidation rather than innovation.⁸² Brooke (1992) argued that the consensus argument was 'deeply flawed' and that 'consensus in reconstruction planning after 1943 was fragile at best'.⁸³

⁷⁶ A. Marwick, *War and Social Change in the Twentieth Century*, p.157

⁷⁷ I. McLaine, *Ministry of Morale* (George Allen & Unwin 1979) pp.106 and 176

⁷⁸ C. Webster, *The National Health Service – a Political History* (Oxford University Press 2002) p.7

⁷⁹ J. Harris, 'War & Social History: Britain and the Home Front during the Second World War', *Contemporary European History Journal*, Volume 1, Part 1 (Cambridge Press 1992) p.19

⁸⁰ J. Harris, 'Some aspects of social policy in Britain during the Second World War', in W.J. Mommsen, ed., *The Emergence of the Welfare State in Britain and Germany 1850-1959* (Croom Helm London 1981) p.259

⁸¹ P. Thane, *Foundations of the Welfare State* (Longman 1982) p. 264

⁸² K. Jefferys, 'British Politics and Social Policy during the Second World War', *The Historical Journal*, Volume XXX,1 (Cambridge University Press 1987) pp.123, 142

⁸³ S. Brooke, *Labour's War* (Clarendon Press – Oxford 1992) pp.334, 340-342

Yet Lowe (1990) cautioned revisionists against underestimating the extent of political consensus ‘on both the need for reform and the broad objectives at which a nucleus of policies should be aimed’ during the period of February 1943 to autumn 1947. He considered that this consensus was supported by the Civil Service and public opinion but was prevented from advancing further due to ideological differences between the political parties.⁸⁴ Even Harris (1992), whose arguments have highlighted weaknesses in ‘the consensus approach’, cautioned those historians who minimised political consensus and national solidarity not to overlook ‘significant archival “silences” – silences that indicated certain areas of common agreement that were simply too profound and too self-evident to generate explicit comment or debate’.⁸⁵ Holman (1995) later concluded that many Conservatives had come to a consensus with Labour by the 1940s.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, in the same year Fielding et al. re-opened the argument with a rather more pessimistic approach and a lowered expectation about the ability of government to effect worthwhile change in society. They claimed that belief in an increased political radicalism had been exaggerated with few wishing to embrace Labour’s ethical postwar vision. They focused instead on the apathy, particularly amongst the working class, for affairs of state despite many who had ‘vague and nebulous desires’ for a better postwar Britain.⁸⁷ This echoed Thane’s 1982 text highlighting Mass-Observation records that suggested the effect of Dunkirk on the civilian was to increase concern about family safety and the need to win the war rather than focussing on issues of social justice or postwar reconstruction.⁸⁸ Mason (1998)⁸⁹ highlighted the adverse reaction towards the Beveridge Report⁹⁰ amongst

⁸⁴ R. Lowe, ‘The Second World War, Consensus and the Foundation of the Welfare State’, *Twentieth Century British History*, Volume 1, No 2, 1990. p.159

⁸⁵ J. Harris, ‘War and Social History: Britain and the Home Front during the Second World War’, *Contemporary European History Journal*, Volume 1, Part 1 (1992), p.34

⁸⁶ B. Holman, *The Evacuation: A Very British Revolution*, p.162

⁸⁷ S. Fielding, P. Thompson and N. Tiratsoo, *England Arise!*

⁸⁸ P. Thane, *The Foundations of the Welfare State*, p.224

⁸⁹ T. Mason, ‘Hunger...is a very good thing’, in N. Tiratsoo, ed. *From Blitz to Blair- A New History of Britain since 1939*, p.45

⁹⁰ The Beveridge Report on Social Insurance and Allied Services by Sir William Beveridge was published on 1 December 1942, one month after the victory at El Alamein. It became the blueprint for the postwar Welfare State.

prominent industrialists and leading Conservatives,⁹¹ an argument previously emphasised by Harris (1981) who stressed that most politicians and civil servants regarded it as an ‘inconvenient luxury that could not be seriously considered until after the return of peace’.⁹²

When considering the debate over the extent of reform in areas of welfare, education and child care resulting from war and in particular evacuation, it is important not to dismiss Titmuss’s fellow contemporary commentators such as Dent (1944) who clearly shared a belief in ‘a mighty ferment of ideas, a great surging impulse to reform, to plan a new and better order in education and society, an order rid for ever of the inequalities, injustices and inadequacies of the order of 1939’. He emphasised that the desire for reform, although not universal, was widespread and cut across class.⁹³ Wartime source material relating to evacuation clearly resonates with a striking sense of this spirit and belief in progression towards universalism, albeit largely recorded by sections of the articulate middle classes,⁹⁴ some of whom were equally responsible for fuelling exaggerated reports about the condition of evacuees. Later historians have endorsed this view of an increased public expectation for reform⁹⁵ and recently Rose (2003) highlighted that as early as 1939, ‘there was a

⁹¹ Churchill thought the report fostered a ‘dangerous optimism’ out of step with the ‘hard facts of life’. S. Fielding, ‘The Good War 1939-45’ in N. Tiratsoo, ed. *From Blitz to Blair- A New History of Britain since 1939*, p.45

⁹² J. Harris, *Some aspects of social policy in Britain during the Second World War*, in W.J.Mommsen, ed. *The Emergence of the Welfare State in Britain and Germany 1850-1959*, pp. 249, 254

⁹³ H.C. Dent, *Education in Transition*, pp. vii-iii

⁹⁴ For example, R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*; M.Cole, *Wartime Billeting* (Fabian Society May 1941); S. Isaacs, ed. *The Cambridge Evacuation Survey* (1941); F. Le Gros Clark and R.W. Toms, *Evacuation – Failure or Reform* (Fabian Society 1940); G.Shakespeare, *Report on Conditions in Reception Areas* (H.M.S.O. 1941); Federation of Women’s Institutes, *Town Children through Country Eyes* (NFWI 1940); Women’s Group on Public Welfare, *Our Towns* (Oxford University Press 1943), A. Calder and D. Sheridan, ed. *Speak for Yourself, A Mass-Observation Anthology* (Oxford University Press 1985) p.210. In addition, there are numerous articles and debates to be seen in *Education*, *The Times Education Supplement* (e.g. 14 September 1940, 14 and 28 November 1942), *Public Health*, *Social Work*, *Social Welfare*, *The British Journal of Educational Psychology*, *The Medical Officer*, *British Medical Journal*. Local newspapers in Devon such as *The Western Times* and the *Express and Echo* also provide ample evidence.

⁹⁵ Apart from those mentioned above other examples include K. Morgan, *Labour in Power 1945-1951* (Clarendon Press – Oxford 1984) p.503. Also see R. Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, pp. 97, 99-100, as cited in S. Brooke, *Reform and reconstruction* (Clarendon Press – Oxford 1992) pp. 146-7 and A. Peacock and J. Wiseman, *The Growth of Public Expenditure in the United Kingdom* (Princeton University Press 1961) pp.xxiv and 95

growing almost millenarian belief that a new Britain would rise up from the ruins of the war' and an 'exploding public discussion about reconstruction'.⁹⁶

Turning first to the potential impact of war and evacuation on welfare reform, Marwick (1974) agreed with Titmuss that the wartime Emergency Hospital Service 'provided a solid basis upon which a National Health Service could be built'.⁹⁷ Thane (1982) acknowledged that the war experience 'almost certainly speeded up the integration and improvement of health services',⁹⁸ and Jackson (1985) argued that there was an almost direct link between evacuation and the creation of the National Health Service.⁹⁹ Thorpe (1992), whilst cautioning against overstating the changes brought about by war and the mixing of the population, saw evacuation as a powerful impetus towards the universal provision of welfare services.¹⁰⁰ Holman (1995) stressed that although the Welfare State was slowly evolving throughout the early decades of the twentieth century and despite the force in revisionist arguments, the war and particularly evacuation opened public gaze to the variability and limitations of existing provisions and pushed local and central government into 'extending the scope and nature of its welfare services'. He also claimed that one side effect of evacuation was 'the growth, even the establishment of the occupation of social work'.¹⁰¹ Consequently, he believed that Titmuss was correct in stating that welfare principles came to the fore as never before.¹⁰² Hendrick (1997) stated that evacuation revealed the variability of local authority welfare provision and stimulated the expansion of statutory provision in a number of health and welfare services,¹⁰³ and Parsons (1998) claimed evacuation 'was the catalyst which

⁹⁶ S. Rose, *Which People's War?* p.62 and 87

⁹⁷ A. Marwick, *War and Social Change in the Twentieth Century*, p.161. R. Titmuss, *Essays on 'The Welfare State'*, p.83

⁹⁸ P. Thane, *The Foundations of the Welfare State*, p.238

⁹⁹ C. Jackson, *Who will take our children?* pp. xiv-xv, 187-8

¹⁰⁰ A. Thorpe, 'Britain' in J. Noakes, ed. *The Civilian in War* (Exeter University Press 1992) p. 24

¹⁰¹ B. Holman, *The Evacuation: A Very British Revolution*, p.173. Sheldon stated that 3,277 awards were made between 1945 and 1949 'the numbers climbed only gently upwards for the next 15 years'. B. Sheldon, *A Textbook of Social Work* (awaiting publication) p.33

¹⁰² B. Holman, *The Evacuation*, pp. 115, 119, 162-3, 185

¹⁰³ H. Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society 1880-1990*, p.54

helped bring the social service plans into reality'.¹⁰⁴ In the same year Welshman (1998) argued that Titmuss 'was undoubtedly correct in arguing that the evacuation profoundly altered attitudes to state welfare, and led to significant policy changes'.¹⁰⁵ The following year Lowe (1999) stated that evacuation resulted in the provision of standardised national social services as a postwar prerogative.¹⁰⁶

Turning to those historians who have supported the argument that educational reform resulted from war and evacuation, Gosden (1976) described signs of 'a change in the public attitude to education' within 4 weeks of the start of war¹⁰⁷ and Thane (1982), although arguing that pre-war continuity was the main impetus behind the Education Act, supported the idea that the experiences of war speeded up changes in certain areas of policy and acknowledged the 'popular demand for change which had grown so strong during the war'.¹⁰⁸ Parsons and Starns (1999) later suggested that evacuation played a large role in determining postwar education policy.¹⁰⁹ Reforms in child care resulting from evacuation have also been recognised by some historians. Inglis (1990) acknowledged that 'the evacuation scheme...became...the foundation stone of future child welfare policies',¹¹⁰ and Holman (1995) argued that the pre-war whisper for child care reform 'grew into a shout during the 1940s and the changes came so rapidly that it appeared like a revolution'. Commenting on the 1948 Children Act he believed 'its shape and stimulus came from the experiences of the war in general and evacuation in particular'.¹¹¹ Marwick (1996) believed the evacuation of children, separation of families and destruction of young lives in bombing raids

¹⁰⁴ M. Parsons, *I'll Take The One*, p.211

¹⁰⁵ J. Welshman, 'Evacuation and Social Policy during the Second World War: Myth and Reality', *Twentieth Century British History*, Volume 9, No. 1 (Oxford University Press 1998) p.53

¹⁰⁶ R. Lowe, *The Welfare State in Britain since 1945*, p. 275

¹⁰⁷ P.H.J.H. Gosden, *Education in the Second World War*, p.238

¹⁰⁸ P. Thane, *The Foundations of the Welfare State*, pp. 229,230,238 and 264

¹⁰⁹ M. Parsons and P. Starns, *The Evacuation*, pp.184-5

¹¹⁰ R. Inglis, *The Children's War*, p.166

¹¹¹ B. Holman, *The Evacuation*, pp.165 and 185

seemed to have raised the profile of child care,¹¹² and Welshman (1998) argued that evacuation ‘helped to accelerate progress in child guidance and encouraged interest in child psychology’.¹¹³ Recently, Hendrick (2003) has written that evacuation ‘more or less compelled an increasing number of LEAs to accept the principle of child guidance’.¹¹⁴

Health revisionists include Fox (1986) who argued that the National Health Act of 1946 ‘was the culmination of decades of increasing agreement about how medical care ought to be organised and distributed’ and that Britain’s health policies were similar to those adopted by other Western nations in the middle decades of the twentieth century. This argument, shared by most historians of the NHS, therefore dilutes the importance of the effect of war stressed by Titmuss, Marwick et al.¹¹⁵ With regard to educational reform, Thane (1982) saw the 1944 Education Act as ‘a continuation and completion of...considerable inter-war changes’,¹¹⁶ Thom (1986) felt it ‘created little that was new’,¹¹⁷ and Digby (1989) believed much of it ‘fell victim to expenditure cuts by the Treasury’.¹¹⁸ Simon (1991) argued that despite all the discussions and legislation, there was no fundamental restructuring of the old hierarchical system.¹¹⁹ In 1986, Macnicol took issue with Titmuss’s use of the Milk-in-Schools Scheme as ‘a clear example of policy change engendered by the social debate over evacuation followed by the impetus of Dunkirk’. As highlighted above, he argued that evacuation boosted the ‘conservative, behavioural interpretation of poverty’ which focused on the ‘problem family’. Officials in Whitehall reacted by concentrating on the ‘working-class mores’ of

¹¹² A. Marwick, *British Society since 1945* (Penguin 1996, 3rd Edition) p. 68

¹¹³ J. Welshman, Evacuation and Social Policy, *Twentieth Century British History*, Volume 9, No.1 (1998) p.52

¹¹⁴ H. Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society 1880-1990*, p.54 and H. Hendrick, *Child Welfare* (The Policy Press 2003) p.109. For example the LCC reviewed its child guidance provision in 1943, *The Times Educational Supplement*, 4 December 1943

¹¹⁵ D. Fox, ‘The National Health Service and the Second World War’ in H. Smith ed. *War and Social Change: British society during the Second World War* (Manchester University Press 1986) pp. 33-51

¹¹⁶ P. Thane, *The Foundations of the Welfare State*, p.229-30

¹¹⁷ D. Thom, ‘The 1944 Education Act’ in H. Smith, ed. *War and Social Change: British Society during the Second World War* (Manchester University Press 1986) p.101

¹¹⁸ A. Digby, *British Welfare Policy: Workhouse to Workfare* (Faber & Faber 1989) p.57

¹¹⁹ B. Simon, *Education and the Social Order 1940-1990* (Lawrence & Wishart 1991) p.74

evacuees rather than supporting 'increased state intervention to raise living standards'. He considered that the primary emphasis of *Our Towns: a close up*, the leading wartime report on evacuation, focused on reforming education to inculcate the slum mentality with middle-class values,¹²⁰ and whereas Holman (1995) described the Report as 'breathtakingly radical',¹²¹ Welshman (1999) highlighted its ambiguity which 'echoed interwar debates about behaviour and citizenship, but also reflected the ideas that would shape the welfare state in the post-war years'.¹²² Most recently, together with Stewart, he has once again stressed the Report's 'combined behavioural and structural interpretations of poverty and deprivation',¹²³ and in his latest book has described the Report as 'the key source for the concept of the problem family'.¹²⁴ Hinton (2002) believed the authors of the Report 'were well aware of the tensions they were negotiating between cultural and environmental explanations of poverty'.¹²⁵ Illustrating the need for further local research on evacuation, a recent paper by Stewart and Welshman has argued that Scotland's 'particularly harsh socio-economic conditions of the inter-war period' may have been partially responsible for a much more sympathetic approach to evacuation being apparent in Scottish evacuation literature. The concept of the 'problem family' was 'entirely absent from the debate' with emphasis on 'the structural rather than the behavioural causes of poverty and deprivation'.¹²⁶

Turning briefly in conclusion to the debate concerning the exaggerated stories about the poor condition of evacuees, an unfortunate and unjust stereotypical label that has clung to them

¹²⁰ J. Macnicol, 'The evacuation of schoolchildren' in H. Smith ed. *War and Social Change: British Society during the Second World War*, pp.22-25

¹²¹ B. Holman, *Evacuation*, p.146

¹²² J. Welshman, 'Evacuation, Hygiene, and Social Policy: The Our Towns Report of 1943', *Historical Journal*, 42, 3 (1999), p. 781.

¹²³ J. Stewart and J. Welshman, 'Culture, Behaviour and Poverty: The Evacuation of Children in Scotland, 1939-1945, p.6 - submitted to the *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*

¹²⁴ J. Welshman, *Underclass – A History of the Excluded 1880-2000* (Hambledon Continuum 2006) p.77

¹²⁵ J. Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership, and the Second World War* (Oxford University Press 2002) p.182

¹²⁶ J. Stewart and J. Welshman, 'Culture, Behaviour and Poverty: The Evacuation of Children in Scotland, 1939-1945, pp. 2, 6 & 34

unopposed until relatively recently, contemporary sources such the *Evacuation Survey* (1940)¹²⁷ and a letter sent to reception areas by the NFWI in December 1939¹²⁸ acknowledged this at the time. However when the NFWI published its very condensed report in May 1940 it nevertheless described the shock of members on finding that ‘many of the guests arrived in a condition and with modes of life or habits which were startlingly less civilized than those they had accepted for a life-time’.¹²⁹ A negative myth was born and was still being perpetuated without modification during the 1980s.¹³⁰ Macnicol (1986) challenged its veracity by concluding that the verdict of such groups as the NFWI propagated ‘wildly exaggerated and inaccurate stories of the evacuees’ condition’.¹³¹ Holman (1995)¹³² also drew attention to the exaggerated stories as did Parsons (1998) and Parsons and Starns (1999).¹³³ Recently, Hinton (2002) has suggested that the ‘omnipresence of these stories of barbarian invasion... should not be treated as accurate accounts... A process of stereotyping was clearly at work’.¹³⁴

¹²⁷ R. Padley and M.Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p. 3. This report was commissioned for the Fabian Society and prepared during the winter and spring of 1939-40.

¹²⁸ C. McCall, a member of staff on the NFWI during the war, wrote later in *Women’s Institutes* (Collins 1943) p.19 that a letter accompanying the questionnaire circulated to 5,700 Institutes throughout England and Wales stated ‘the earlier reports as to the condition and habits of a small section of evacuees were of a distressing kind, but it is now being said that such reports were greatly exaggerated’. Information kindly supplied by the NFWI Archive, The Women’s Library, London Metropolitan University and Anne Stamper (NFWI).

¹²⁹ *Town Children through Country Eyes – A Survey on Evacuation 1940*, p.4. The object of the survey was to provide the authorities with the comments of WI members on the condition and habits of the evacuees received into their homes. It was felt that this material would be of use ‘in the solution of the long term social problems which have been so strikingly laid bare by recent events’. Approximately 1,700 Institutes returned the questionnaire and although it was acknowledged that it was not a comprehensive sample it was finally condensed into a 23 page pamphlet. Sadly the original questionnaires are no longer extant. The first Women’s Institute was formed in 1915 specifically for the benefit of country women

¹³⁰ For example D. Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State*, p.209 and R. Inglis, *The Children’s War*, p.19

¹³¹ J. Macnicol, ‘The evacuation of schoolchildren’ in H. Smith, ed. *War and Social Change: British Society during the Second World War*, p. 27

¹³² B. Holman, *The Evacuation*, p. 78

¹³³ M. Parsons, *I’ll Take That One*, p. 244; M. Parsons and P. Starns, *The Evacuation*, p. 70

¹³⁴ J. Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership, and the Second World War*, pp.148, 150-151

Sources and Methodology

Research began by contacting as many people as possible who were evacuated to Devon or in some way involved in the reception process such as billeting officers or members of host families. Word of mouth, local newspapers, the ERA and Evacuee Registry Website¹³⁵ provided the necessary contacts. Two hundred and twenty one ex-evacuees responded¹³⁶ from as far afield as Australia, America and New Zealand. Each evacuee willingly answered a questionnaire¹³⁷ which was followed up by a phone call wherever possible. Only 6 participants requested anonymity. Twenty nine local people also offered information, including 2 ex-billeting officers (Totnes and Coldridge), both in their 90s. Harrison cautioned that ‘the only valid information for this sort of social history of war is that recorded at the time on the spot’.¹³⁸ Historians antipathetic towards oral evidence will highlight not only the comparatively small size and non-representational qualities of the sample but also the particular problems caused by the lengthy passage of time – ‘memory is often perceived as contaminated by an inherent unreliability’¹³⁹ and memories implanted at an impressionable age may lead to ‘distance lending enchantment’.¹⁴⁰ Nevertheless, although potentially quantitatively problematic, these personal testimonies breathe life into the history of evacuation in ways which no other source can equal. There is simply no substitute for the myriad of evacuation experiences and it would be short-sighted to dismiss them. Allowing for inevitable occasional inaccuracy of memory, useful data has been extracted from questionnaires on a variety of topics. Where particular individual examples have been quoted, the age given for the evacuee is that on arrival in Devon.

¹³⁵ <http://uk-pages.net/Guestbook/evacuees>

¹³⁶ List of sample evacuees *Appendix 4*

¹³⁷ *Appendix 5*

¹³⁸ T. Harrison, *Living Through the Blitz* (Collins 1976) p.330

¹³⁹ Gardner, P. and Cunningham, P.J. *The impact of wartime evacuation upon teacher attitude and practice* (University of Cambridge Research Project 2002) p.2 – can be viewed on ESRC Research Service – www.regard.ac.uk

¹⁴⁰ S. Brown, An Apple for the Teacher, *Children in War*, November 2004, Vol. 1, No. 2, p.68

With regard to written sources, Crosby highlighted that the major problem with official papers, newspapers and diaries is that they do not allow for easy quantification.¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, Government publications together with contemporary wartime local and national newspapers, journals, surveys, reports, committee minutes, correspondence and school log books have been invaluable sources, both for piecing together the history of evacuation and pinpointing the problems and diverse reactions locally and in governmental, educational, health and welfare circles. Despite the obvious methodological problems concerning degrees of subjectivity, together they have confirmed the development of an enormous energy and desire for reform, in large part driven by evacuation and its aftermath.

A number of reports, surveys and commentaries on evacuation written either during or in the first few years following the war by doctors, psychologists, educationalists, welfare workers, voluntary groups and others, have proved particularly informative such as the detailed *Evacuation Survey* by Padley and Cole (1940) and *Our Towns: a close up* (1943) compiled by the Women's Group on Public Welfare.¹⁴² Board of Education evacuation files relating specifically to Devon, held at the National Archives, yielded some interesting facts and figures but above all illustrated at local level the vast amount of daily paperwork relating to evacuation, the frustrations involved in recouping expenditure and the tenacity of Roger Armfelt,¹⁴³ Secretary of Devon County Education Committee (DCEC) until December 1941. Whilst preferring to use local initiative to address evacuation problems, he nevertheless challenged the Government on several areas of somewhat nebulous policy. MH File *MH101/14* was particularly informative, offering a chronological diary of national

¹⁴¹ T. Crosby, *The Impact of Civilian Evacuation in the Second World War*, quote taken from Preface

¹⁴² The Women's Group for Public Welfare was established in Autumn 1939 as a result of a meeting instigated by the WI and Townswomen's Guilds following the WI survey *Town Children Through Country Eyes*. The Report therefore deals largely with the first evacuation. The brief was to explore the 'domestic habits and customs of a minority of town-dwellers, disclosed by evacuation'. *Our Towns: a close up* (Oxford University Press 1943) p.iv. See also Bibliography for extensive list of contemporary wartime sources.

¹⁴³ See *Appendix 6* for list of key central and local government officials

evacuation, listing events, statistics and publications. LCC wartime record-keeping became very difficult and relatively few schools retained sufficient identity to keep records.¹⁴⁴ Therefore the London Metropolitan Archives' publication *We think you ought to go* (1995) described as 'a more or less exact transcription' of the original war history of the LCC Education Department compiled shortly after 1945 has also been a valuable source document.

Most anecdotal personal accounts of evacuation have never been published, merely written as testimonies for the family archive. Those that have been published provide an invaluable source for anyone wishing to learn more about the diversity of evacuee experiences, all of which are unique although frequently not dissimilar. For example Breed's *I know a rotten place* (1975) is marvellously descriptive and brings alive the issues of homesickness and the dilemma facing parents about whether to send their children away from danger zones. Clement's *No Time to Kiss Goodbye* (1995) consists of a collection of ten individual accounts of successful evacuation and one anonymous unhappy account, all in Clovelly, North Devon. Anecdotal collections of experiences in one village or town provide good case studies but this is the only such known local publication. Many village and town histories also include brief sections or photographs about evacuation.¹⁴⁵ Better known random anecdotal collections such as Wicks' *No Time to Wave Goodbye* (1988), which used over 8,000 respondents recalling good, bad or indifferent memories, and *Goodnight Children Everywhere* (1990), illustrate the uniqueness of evacuation experiences which are consequently difficult to quantify.

Wagner (1940) claimed that analysis of the scores of newspaper articles gave no help 'in understanding the evacuation situation either in its sociological relevance or in its practical consequences...Points were...magnified which were actually of very little significance

¹⁴⁴ Corporation of London, *Information Leaflet No 10*

¹⁴⁵ For example, N. Parry, *A Mid Devon Village* (Noel Parry 1999)

...emotionally biased representation of features in no relation to their real context'.¹⁴⁶ Despite the drawbacks of potentially subjective or sensational reporting, newspapers have nevertheless been informative contemporary sources. The use of positive images in Ministry of Information (MOI)¹⁴⁷ wartime films to drive home the message that evacuee children would be both well cared for, happy and above all safe under the Government Evacuation Scheme was also used in newspapers and poster campaigns.¹⁴⁸ By November 1939 extensive drift back was causing considerable concern and, following discussions regarding a publicity campaign, Regional MOI representatives endeavoured, after consultation with local health and education officials, to contact local editors in an effort to 'secure the insertion of suitable matter into the regional press'.¹⁴⁹ Positive 'representations of nationhood' which included successful evacuation were 'understood by the Government, the press, as well as many members of the public at large to be crucial to morale and to generating the massive public support that was needed for the war effort'.¹⁵⁰ Although MOI understandably sought to influence the way in which wartime events were reported and interpreted, Government policy continued to allow freedom of expression to a fiercely independent press, only employing when necessary its censorship powers under Defence Regulation 3 to prevent facts of military value reaching the enemy.¹⁵¹ Geoff Worrall, reporter with the *Express & Echo* (Exeter)

¹⁴⁶ G. Wagner, 'Evacuation', *Social Welfare*, IV,6, 1940, p.100

¹⁴⁷ The Ministry of Information was set up on 5 September 1939 to cover News and Press Censorship, Home Publicity, and Overseas Publicity in Allied and Neutral Countries – <http://catalogue.pro.gov.uk/Leaflets/ri2155.htm>. With regard to all aspects of evacuation, MOI was clearly directed by the Ministry of Health whose Press Officer was rather disparaging in April 1940 about frequent MOI feedback reports on evacuation and morale. The Ministry had its own sources of intelligence including the WVS, voluntary organisations, local authorities and MPs and regarded the Regional Offices of MOI as merely the tool for disseminating Government policy, *MH78/230*. MOI abandoned 'the deployment of morale propaganda' in July 1941, I. McLaine, *Ministry of Morale* (George Allen & Unwin 1979) p.240. See also p.217 for discussion on the doubt of some Ministry officials in 1940 about the value of the department to civilian morale and to the war effort generally.

¹⁴⁸ Erhardt found that when producing documentary films of evacuation such as *Westward Ho!*, 'in order to maintain the pretence that evacuation was an adventure for the children, many photographs which showed mothers and children visibly upset were either destroyed or hidden away in an archive'. E. Erhardt, III, 'The Ministry of Information's Films Division: Images and Projections of the Lives of Children in World War II Britain', *Children in War*, November 2004, Vol.1, No.2, p.78

¹⁴⁹ *MH 78/230*

¹⁵⁰ S. Rose, *Which People's War?* p.7

¹⁵¹ I. McLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, pp. 24, 36, 43, 91, 186 and 189

from 1949 to the present day and junior reporter during the war years in Bootle, verified that he was unaware of any pressure from central government to stifle negative comment. However, one case which clearly exemplifies the propaganda employed by national newspapers¹⁵² featured David Blackie (8).¹⁵³ He remembered that the home-made cake featured in the photograph taken of him and his siblings enjoying Devon hospitality was ‘whisked away’ uneaten. The photographers ‘spent some considerable time beforehand jollyng us up with chocolate and sweets...that of course accounts for our happy smiles and appearance which I can assure you was far from the true state of affairs’.

No detailed record of evacuation to Devon has been found in the available local archives. Therefore details have been pieced together from a systematic review of school log books, frequently scant council and parish records, medical reports, evacuation files, correspondence, local newspapers and the Astor Papers (held at PWDRO) together with relevant Government and LCC files. Although local records have been used previously to supplement national archive and contemporary wartime material on evacuation, most notably by Parsons (1998),¹⁵⁴ this study of Devon’s evacuation experience has reviewed and analysed, against the national backdrop, all known available extant local council and educational data pertinent to evacuation deposited at the 3 local record offices (Exeter, Barnstaple and Plymouth). The bibliography reflects the extent and diversity of these sources. Wherever possible, material from the pre (1930s) and postwar periods (up to 1948) has also been examined. At the outbreak of war there were approximately 467 elementary schools under Devon County Education Committee administration, 51 in Plymouth and 30 in Exeter. The available wartime school records deposited at the Devon Record Office for the east and south of the County (no separate western administrative area in 1939) represent 175

¹⁵² One of these photographs appeared in the *Daily Mirror* on 10 August 1940 and another in the *Illustrated London News* under the heading ‘Cockney children enjoying the delights of Devon’.

¹⁵³ Sample evacuee

¹⁵⁴ M. Parsons, *I’ll Take That One* used extensive local sampling, most particularly from Dorset.

elementary schools (Council and Voluntary). There are 87 deposits at North Devon Record Office and 23 at Plymouth and West Devon Record Office. These are mainly in the form of School Log Books but also include some Managers' Minutes and Evacuee Registers. Records are available for 4 secondary schools (22 under DCEC in 1939) for the east and south of the County, 1 in the north and 2 in Plymouth. The majority of school records are those of small village schools and, apart from those no longer extant, some log books still remain in primary schools. The decision was made not to access these as the above sample was considered adequate. DCEC guidelines issued to headteachers in March 1936 stated that a log book should contain a bare record of events which constitute the history of the school. Only statements of fact should be recorded and no expression of opinion.¹⁵⁵ Some log books were meticulously kept, others recorded very little detail.¹⁵⁶ They followed much the same familiar daily pattern throughout the war - headteachers coping quietly with frequently appalling facilities and staff shortages. Entries are interspersed with the occasional account of accidents at school or tragedies such as the death, either from illness or accident, of a teacher or family member, school nurse, local child or evacuee. Mention was often made of how well the evacuees blended into school life and of how evacuee teachers would be very much missed. Negative comments about evacuation are so few that all known ones encountered during research are recorded in this thesis. Managers' Minutes have been extremely useful for cross referencing and for accessing detail omitted from the log books. Combined with log books they have been an invaluable source on such issues as Devon's pre-war education and school medical service, the poor state of the County's schools, wartime staff shortages, the successful wartime development of school meals, postwar implementation of the 1944 Education Act and, last but not least, for shedding light on the vexed problem of pediculosis.

¹⁵⁵ *DCEC Circular No63 March 1936, 2066C/EAM51(DRO)*

¹⁵⁶ For example, the Managers were displeased with the Headmaster of Newton Poppleford School, who made no entries during a quarterly period in 1942. *Newton Poppleford Managers' Minutes 2268Cadd.2/ESM1*

Registers were found to be of less help in estimating numbers of evacuees and dates of drift back. Dates of return were often not filled in and from 1940 onwards numbers were usually kept in separate Registers, of which few remain locally.

From the extensive amount of local material that has been studied, one thing is particularly striking. The vast majority of local council committee minutes and reports have disappointingly little information about evacuation, often for lengthy periods of the war. Some records are incomplete for the war years, often stopping abruptly with no explanation. However, recorded detail about other council business such as highways and allotments suggests that any serious problems would have been recorded in committee reports. The Town Clerk of Okehampton MB preserved extensive evacuation data yet there are few letters of complaint or requests for compensation for damage incurred by evacuees amongst the files.¹⁵⁷ Unfortunately the lengthy discussions on evacuation which inevitably took place behind committee doors were, for evident reasons, never recorded,¹⁵⁸ and undoubtedly data has been lost or destroyed since 1945. However, there is a general impression of goodwill and co-operation. Very few Parish Council Minutes reveal anything about evacuation. For example, Topsham Parish Council Minutes were very comprehensive yet only had one brief mention of evacuation in October 1939, thanking organisers and helpers for the efficient way in which the evacuees were received.¹⁵⁹

No careful attempt was ever made nationally to collect a uniform statistical record of the progress of evacuation, and no two sets of figures ever agreed.¹⁶⁰ Devon's archives are no exception. Evacuee categories were frequently combined, particularly at the outset of war, and the numbers fluctuated

¹⁵⁷ 3248A/16/3, 3248A/16/14(a)

¹⁵⁸ For example, 'the lengthy consideration' given by South Molton MB to billeting, *South Molton MB Committee Minutes 3058add4/3/3/12*, p.12

¹⁵⁹ *Topsham Parish Council Minutes ECA*

¹⁶⁰ R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p.40

daily as evacuees came and went. In addition, over- stretched billeting officers who were finding it difficult to secure billets and felt aggrieved that other areas were perhaps not shouldering the burden equally, were occasionally generous in their approximations, and in one case challenged by the Clerk of Devon County Council, A.J. Withycombe.¹⁶¹ It was also not always clear whether secondary schoolchildren and Exeter schoolchildren were included. Where figures do not tally additional sources are referenced wherever possible. National figures given exclude Scotland.

The Annual Reports of the Medical Officers of Health for Devon, Plymouth and Exeter have been an invaluable source for extracting evacuee numbers and data on such issues as nutrition, welfare provision, skin diseases and pediculosis. Separate records for local children including unofficial evacuees and official evacuees commenced under DCEC in 1940 and Devon's MOH, Meredith Davies, claimed he was 'unaware of any similar comprehensive analysis having been systematically carried out in any other reception area'.¹⁶² Unfortunately, due to shortage of clerical staff, this practice was discontinued in 1943. Davies highlighted several problems inherent in accurate recording, explaining that the reduction of evacuees during 1942 had not been constant thus rendering it impossible to obtain an 'average' evacuee schoolchild population from which to calculate figures of general incidence of defects etc.¹⁶³ He also highlighted that not only did the experiences of Assistant MOsH differ sharply throughout the County,¹⁶⁴ but that there were very wide variations between the assessments made by individual MOsH even within similar districts of the County. A standardised scheme adopted in September 1940 was only partially successful.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ *Municipal Borough of South Molton, Town Clerk's General Correspondence 3058add1&2/14*, letters dated 11 December, 19 December and 20 December 1940

¹⁶² *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1941, DCC150/4/5/1*, p.5

¹⁶³ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1942, DCC150/4/5/1*, p.1

¹⁶⁴ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1940, DCC150/4/5/1*, p. 23

¹⁶⁵ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1941, DCC150/4/5/1*, p. 9 See page 29 for an example of this. See also *Annual Report for 1943*, p. 10

Structure of the study

Following the Introduction, Chapter One briefly reviews pre-war welfare provision, pre-war educational provision which includes residential and nursery care, pre-war educational provision in Devon and finally the geopolitical and socioeconomic structure of Devon ‘on the eve of war’. Chapter Two describes the origins and lengthy planning behind the Government Evacuation Scheme and reviews plans made by Devon’s local authorities. Chapter Three examines the County’s reception, billeting and welfare provision for officially evacuated unaccompanied children and discusses the problems of financial recovery. Chapter Four considers the traumatic effect of evacuation, the process of acclimatisation, the rate of and reasons for drift back and the eventual return of evacuees. Chapter Five reviews the educational provision for evacuees in Devon, the extent of co-operation between local and evacuated staff and the degree of educational disruption. Chapter Six discusses the evacuation of mothers with children, nursery provision, unofficial evacuees and private school parties. Chapter Seven considers four health and hygiene issues which caused much controversy, namely dirty habits, pediculosis (head lice), enuresis (bedwetting) and skin diseases. Using local documentary evidence, the view of the stereotypical ‘dirty’ evacuee is challenged as being exaggerated. Chapter Eight looks at four frequently debated aspects of evacuation from a local perspective, namely juvenile delinquency, religious problems, possible work exploitation and lack of clothing. Chapter Nine reviews pre-war provision of school meals and milk and examines the growth of wartime provision. The argument is made that the main catalyst for the spectacular wartime development of school meal provision in Devon was evacuation. Data for each chapter is analysed and compared against previous generalised assumptions which have failed to take account of local and regional variation. The Conclusion reviews the four aims of the thesis and discusses the conclusions drawn from local data. It also considers evidence of postwar reform, both local and national. Whilst acknowledging that the number of appendices is very extensive, the decision has been made to retain certain detailed local

information which cannot reasonably be incorporated into the main text. There is no extant comprehensive record of Devon's evacuation experience and the information pieced together from varied local and national sources during research for this thesis is considered a valuable source in its own right for possible future research.

CHAPTER ONE

The status quo on the eve of war

In order to contextualise evacuation and consider its possible impact on social policy reform, both during and following war, a brief assessment of the degree of welfare and educational provision already in place in England and Wales by September 1939 is requisite. Local educational pre-war provision is also evaluated and followed by a brief outline of the geopolitical and socioeconomic position of Devon in 1939.

Pre-war welfare provision

During the years 1913-1931, government and local authority expenditure on health and welfare provision increased from £74.6 millions to £376.8 millions.¹ Nevertheless, economic retrenchment exacerbated by the Depression ensured that private charity continued to be an indispensable feature during the 1930s,² and the Ministry of Health³ ‘worked hard to restrain rather than stimulate local expenditure’.⁴ However, the Government maintained that retardation in social services during the early 1930s was short-lived⁵ and, that by 1939, £50,000,000 more was being spent on social services than during the previous 7 or 8 years.⁶ Locally, Devon County Council expenditure on social services had risen gradually from £332,008 for 1930-1 to £368,890 for 1936-7 (11% over 6

¹ C. Loch Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars 1918-1940* (Methuen & Co. Ltd. 1955), p.496. This was the net expenditure by the government and local authorities on unemployment benefits and relief, old age pensions, widows’ and orphans’ pension, public assistance, national health insurance, education, housing, hospitals and child welfare and in 1938 amounted to about £9 per capita.

² *Ibid.* pp. 496-7 See also P. Addison, *Now that the War is over* (British Broadcasting Corporation and Jonathan Cape 1985) p.93

³ Ministry of Health established June 1919 after the dissolution of the Local Government Board

⁴ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 170

⁵ *The Health of the School Child, Report of the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Education for the Years 1939-45* (HMSO 1947) p.44

⁶ *The Times*, 14 July 1939. Statement by Sir John Simon, Chancellor of the Exchequer

years). However, the increased projected rise of £407,970 for 1938-9 (10.6%) was short-lived,⁷ and by March 1938 it was decided that drastic economies to limit future expenditure in all areas were to be effected. For example, Health Visitors were to be restricted to the 1938 number of 26.⁸

The Poor Law,⁹ although re-organised in 1929-30, continued to stigmatise and haunt many and there was ample evidence of ill health, poverty and inadequate social support particularly amongst working-class women. Upper and middle classes paid for the services of a doctor and whilst employed working classes benefited from National Insurance cover for health, unemployment and pensions, albeit limited in scope,¹⁰ unskilled workers, women and children were largely excluded, left without free health provision unless deemed 'necessitous'. In 1935 approximately 1,013 of the 3,029 national hospitals were voluntary and self-financing.¹¹ The more prestigious voluntary hospitals were independent of government and frequently relied on such money making ventures as flag days.¹² Hospitals run by local authorities or Public Assistance Committees, many of which had been transferred to local authority control under the 1930 Poor Law Act, were frequently very under-funded¹³ and collaboration between both local authorities and voluntary organisations to

⁷ *Devon County Council Minutes January 1938-December 1939, Special Finance Sub-Committee, February 1938, p.8* (held at Westcountry Studies Library)

⁸ *DCC Minutes, DCC148/14 – Appendix 1 to Report of Finance Committee, 10 March 1938, p.2*

⁹ Body of laws undertaking to provide relief for the poor, developed in sixteenth century England and maintained, with various changes, until after World War II. The social legislation of the 1930s and 40s replaced the Poor Laws with a comprehensive system of public welfare services. It was finally abolished in 1948 by the National Assistance Act. *Britannica CD 2000*

¹⁰ National Health Insurance Act was introduced by the Liberal reforming government in 1911. In 1938 it covered only 42% of the population. Friendly societies provided health insurance for only about one quarter of the population. T. Mason, 'Hunger... is a very good thing – Britain in the 1930s' in N. Tiratsoo, ed. *From Blitz to Blair – a new History of Britain since 1939* (Phoenix 1998) pp.5-6

¹¹ C. Loch Mowat, *Britain between the Wars 1918-1940*, pp.496-7

¹² B. Holman, *The Evacuation: A Very British Revolution* (Lion Publishing 1995) p.115

¹³ Of these, 116 were general public hospitals, 523 were Poor Law hospitals and the remainder were lying-in hospitals, fever hospitals and tuberculosis sanatoriums. C. Loch Mowat, *Britain between the War 1918-1940*, pp.496-7

provide hospital services was not well developed.¹⁴ Locally there were just over 50 hospitals ranging from eye infirmaries to isolation and cottage hospitals, 29 of which were voluntary.¹⁵

The 1918 Maternity and Child Welfare Act stimulated the development of antenatal and child clinics during the interwar period. These varied from village hall affairs to purpose-built centres in more prosperous urban towns and cities but Lewis described the available services as ‘very limited’,¹⁶ with one quarter of maternity and child welfare centres run by voluntary committees.¹⁷ In April 1937 the MH made an initial step towards encouraging authorities to increase the provision of milk for expectant and nursing mothers and children under school age¹⁸ (Circular 1519) and again in July 1939 (Circular 1840),¹⁹ although local authorities were not obliged to adopt such schemes.²⁰ In Devon, local pre-war maternity resources were described as ‘meagre’.²¹ By 1938 there were 39 maternity and child welfare centres²² and although the Public Assistance Institutions of Exeter and DCC contained some maternity beds, none of the Welfare Authorities owned or administered a maternity home.²³ DCC expenditure on Maternity and Child Welfare had risen from £9,553 for 1930-1 to £15,556 for 1936-7 and was projected to rise to £25,650 in 1938-9 although, as already mentioned above, strict economies were being imposed by 1938.²⁴

¹⁴ *Ministry of Health Hospital Survey 1945: The Hospital Services of the South-Western Area* (HMSO 1945) p. 6

¹⁵ *Kelly's Directory for Devon 1939*

¹⁶ J. Lewis, *The Politics of Motherhood* (Croom Helm 1980) p.13

¹⁷ C. Loch Mowat, *Britain between the Wars 1918-1940*, pp. 496-7

¹⁸ Even before the First World War a number of local authorities made provision of milk for nursing mothers and infants via the clinics. P. Atkins, ‘Fattening children or fattening farmers? School milk in Britain, 1921-1941’, *Economic History Review*, LVIII, 1 (2005), p.66

¹⁹ *Maternity and Child Welfare Committee Minutes, Exeter City Archive ECA/27/2*, pp. 398-9

²⁰ For example, *Devon County Council Minutes, Report of the Maternity and Child Welfare Committee, DCC 148/14*, 14 December 1939.

²¹ *Maternity and Child Welfare Committee Minutes, DCC157/5/1/4*, extract of 1944 Report.

²² *Devon County Council Minutes, DCC148/14, Reports of Maternity and Child Welfare Committee*, 23 June 1938

²³ *Ministry of Health Hospital Survey 1945: The Hospital Services of the South-Western Area*, p.85

²⁴ *Devon County Council Minutes January 1938-December 1939*, p.8 (held at Westcountry Studies Library)

Those eager to play down the impact of war on post 1945 reform, electing instead to highlight the continuity of pre-war provision, have frequently taken insufficient account of the regional disparity and ‘patchwork of health services’²⁵ which existed in Britain on the eve of war, resulting in an enormous gulf between affluent, progressive local authorities and those suffering from parochialism, bad management, stagnation and impoverishment. It was particularly in the depressed North and West where ‘obsolete services and backward-looking attitudes in health administration’ held back reform²⁶ and, as Thorpe highlighted, one major reason for discrepancies in standards of health was a continued high level of local authority control.²⁷ Dependent on local authority rates, health care services ‘were least provided where they were most needed’.²⁸ Webster cautioned against the impression advanced by some commentators that ‘the formidable array of services’ developed both by public authorities and voluntary agencies during the interwar years were such that a comprehensive health service was near completion in 1939. He described the provision in 1939 as a ‘haphazard assemblage’ displaying ‘pathetically limited... efforts at reform’ with only ‘marginal improvements in health services’ constrained amongst other things by interwar entrenchment.²⁹ Digby also argued that although appearances suggested that during the interwar years the British people experienced ‘some overall improvements in their welfare... class and regional disparities persisted and, in some cases, worsened’.³⁰ For example, some local authorities had a ratio of one health visitor per 100 children whilst for others it was one per 1,000.³¹ However,

²⁵ P. Addison, *Now that the War is over*, p.88

²⁶ C. Webster, *The National Health Service – A Political History* (Oxford University Press 2002) pp.12-13

²⁷ A. Thorpe, *Britain in the 1930s* (Blackwell Publishers 1992) p.115

²⁸ J. Welshman, *Municipal Medicine – Public Health in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Peter Lang 2000) p.29

²⁹ C. Webster, *The National Health Service*, pp.2-8. See also C. Webster, *The Health Service since the War*, Volume I (HMSO 1988) p.1. See also P. Addison, *Now that the War is over*, p.88

³⁰ A. Digby, *British Welfare Policy: Workhouse to Welfare* (Faber and Faber 1989) p.53

³¹ B. Holman, *The Evacuation: A Very British Revolution*, p. 115

Welshman has cautioned that underestimating the ‘impressive range of medical services’ in place by the late 1930s in cities such as Leicester distorts the impact of war on social policy.³²

Pre-war residential children’s homes, nursery, elementary and secondary provision

Holman described institutional child care as ‘bleak’ in 1939, with the majority of pauper children under the care of the Poor Law regimes or voluntary societies. Residential homes, in stagnation during the 1930s,³³ were often ‘depressing and over-disciplined’,³⁴ and staff had little or no training. The British Federation of Social Workers had only just been established (1936)³⁵ and welfare/social workers were scarce. Child guidance progressed slowly during the interwar years hampered both by staff and financial shortages.³⁶ Day nursery provision, supplied either by the MH, local welfare authorities or voluntary bodies, for children whose mothers were either ill or in full time employment, was meagre with only 104 in 1938 (4,291 places). The Board restricted its extension of nursery schools for ages 2-5 to overcrowded areas of greatest poverty and by 1938 there were only 118 (9,504 places), maintained or aided by local authorities. Classes provided for children aged 3-5 in elementary schools were few with only 157,000 children attending in 1938, of which 40,000 were in London.³⁷

The 1902 Education Act had ushered in a ‘dual system’ of elementary education whereby church schools were maintained by local authorities but kept their independence and denominational character. More than 50% of all elementary schools in England and Wales were Church or

³² J. Welshman, *Municipal Medicine – Public Health in Twentieth-Century Britain*, pp.289-290

³³ B. Holman, *The Evacuation: A Very British Revolution*, pp.123 and 167

³⁴ P. Thane, *The Foundations of the Welfare State* (Longman 1982) p.200. See also V.Norman, *Scattered Homes, Broken Hearts* (JDC Publications 2002) for information on the problems in children’s homes in Plymouth.

³⁵ J. Welshman, ‘The Social History of Social Work: The Issue of the “Problem Family”, 1940-70, *The British Journal of Social Work*, Volume 29, No. 3, p.468

³⁶ H. Hendrick, *Child Welfare* (The Policy Press 2003) p.109

³⁷ *Times Educational Supplement*, 7 November 1942 *Care of Children Under Five Survey* (in progress) by F. Hawtrey

‘voluntary’ schools although their percentage of pupils was only 30%.³⁸ State education was in a depressed condition during the interwar years and described by Lowe as ‘confused and confusing as the interwar health services’ with only gradual and ‘geographically uneven’ progress.³⁹ Simon argued the only interwar developments of significance within the elementary system (5-14) were the reorganisation of age groups⁴⁰ and the raising of the school age to 14.⁴¹ Mounting fiscal problems together with deep-rooted fear of social change limited advance, and at the outbreak of war over 50% of elementary pupils in England and Wales were still in the old all-age schools.⁴² Even the Labour Party’s interest in educational reform during the 1930s was low according to Barker and only revitalised after the 1938 Spens Report.⁴³ The state secondary system largely catered for the middle classes and was developed following the 1902 Education Act. By 1907, in order to qualify for a state grant, secondary schools were obliged to admit, free of charge, at least 25% of pupils from elementary schools.⁴⁴ By 1938, 54.2% of the 470,003 pupils were fee paying, 45.8% had won a ‘free place’, and the percentage of public elementary school pupils aged 10-11 gaining admittance through passing the local authority scholarship had risen from 9.5% in 1920 to 14.34%.⁴⁵ Reforms due to take place on the eve of war and consequently delayed were the raising of school leaving age to 15⁴⁶ and the development of tripartite secondary schooling recommended by the 1938 Spens Report 1938.

³⁸ This was because these schools were more prevalent in rural areas and tended to be smaller buildings.

³⁹ R. Lowe, *The Welfare State in Britain since 1945* (St Martin’s Press, Inc. 2nd Edition 1999) pp.1 and 204

⁴⁰ The 1926 Hadow Report proposed the re-organisation of age groups into Infant 5-7, Junior 7-11 and Senior 11-14. There were three Hadow Reports -1926, 1931 and 1933. The 1926 Report also recommended the division of secondary education into the grammar schools and secondary modern

⁴¹ Raised in 1922

⁴² B. Simon, *Education and the Social Order 1940-1990* (Lawrence and Wishart 1991) pp.16, 26 and 28.

Fisher’s Education Act of 1918, passed 3 months before the armistice was signed, raised the school age to 14.

⁴³ R. Barker, *Education and Politics 1900-1951* (Oxford 1972) p.71

⁴⁴ H. Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society 1880-1990* (Cambridge University Press 1997) p.67. Children had to pass an ‘attainment test’ at 11.

⁴⁵ B. Simon, *Education and the Social Order 1940-1990*, p. 28-29

⁴⁶ Recommended by the Hadow Report 1926 and finally implemented in 1947

Pre-war educational provision in Devon

The 1902 Education Act granted LEA status to counties and county boroughs, each with their own independent Education Committee.⁴⁷ By 1939 there were approximately 467 elementary schools (242 Council schools⁴⁸ and 225 religiously affiliated Voluntary schools⁴⁹) under the control of DCEC with 38,411 pupils aged 5-14,⁵⁰ 30 schools (7,000 pupils⁵¹) in Exeter and 51 schools (20,673 pupils⁵²) in Plymouth.⁵³ The average pupil rolls of the city schools in Exeter (233) and Plymouth (405) were considerably higher than those in much of Devon. Here the average pupil ratio per school was 82 but ranged extensively between the much larger urban schools such as Ashburton (337)⁵⁴ and the numerous rural village schools where pupil rolls could be as low as 10.⁵⁵ Increasingly during the 1940s and 1950s many of these small schools were closed on financial grounds. There was no local pre-war provision of Nursery Schools or Nursery Classes for the under fives although these existed in some parts of the country.⁵⁶ Frequent pupil absences due to sickness, bad weather, agricultural work, staff shortages and lack of heat or water in schools were a constant feature of pre-war school log books. These, together with Managers' Minutes and MOsH Annual

⁴⁷ LEAs in Devon – Exeter, Plymouth, Barnstaple, Tiverton and Torquay

⁴⁸ Maintained by local authorities

⁴⁹ Expense of maintaining fabric divided between Managers of school and local authority. Virtually all were Church of England Schools. Only 2 Wesleyan schools remained in the County by 1939. Landkey and Lynton were both situated in North Devon.

⁵⁰ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1939, DCC150/4/5/1*, p.1. The County Councils Association booklet *The Jubilee of County Councils 1889-1939: fifty years of local government* (Evans Brothers Ltd.1939) p.71 gives the number as 476 (thus switching the last 2 digits around) elementary schools including 24 senior schools with 39,065 pupils. Secretary of DCEC gave the number as 494 in November 1939. *ED 134/30, G671/572(1)* Letter from Armfelt to Board dated 10 November 1939. The number of elementary schools was recorded as 470 by 1940, *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1940, DCC150/4/5/1*, p.4

⁵¹ Approximate number given in *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer for the City of Exeter 1942 ECA/19/95*

⁵² This was the figure given in February 1941 before the City was evacuated. *Minutes of Plymouth City Education Committee 1644/139*, 27 February 1941

⁵³ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1939, DCC150/4/5/1* p.1. The information on Plymouth is listed in *Kelly's Directory of Devon and Cornwall 1939*.

⁵⁴ *Ashburton Log Book 6020C/EFL4*, June 1939

⁵⁵ For example *Ashprington Log Book 625C/EFL1*, pupil roll 10 on 9 January 1939, *Hittisleigh Log Book 675C/EAL3*, pupil roll 12 in January 1940, *Holne Log Book 678C/EFL1*, pupil roll 11 in January 1940

⁵⁶ *Maternity and Child Welfare Committee, DCC157/5/1/4*, letter from Secretary Armfelt of DCEC dated 17 June 1941.

Reports,⁵⁷ recorded the daily struggles to keep Devon's schools functional despite numerous problems including primitive sanitary provision, no running water or electricity, worn-out smoky stoves, crumbling walls and ceilings, leaks, burst pipes, lack of fuel and poor equipment.

Following evacuation there were apparently 'a number of outspoken criticisms' about conditions from evacuated teachers to HMI Inspectors.⁵⁸ Buckerell School with 29 pupils and one room divided by a curtain was typical of the many village schools inundated with evacuees, often outnumbering local children. The premises were described as having 'few facilities and little encouragement for really successful work to be conducted on modern lines'.⁵⁹ A 1934 HMI Report on St Andrew's Church School (Kenn) recorded that 56 pupils were split into two classes 'separated by a dilapidated curtain... housed in one room which provides no space for free movement or even for the necessary furniture which the school badly needs...badly heated and ventilated ... uncomfortably cold and draughty...entrance through an insanitary farmyard'.⁶⁰ In 1937 Ilfracombe Hele School was described as 'cramped and inconvenient premises...impossible to provide enough activity for any of the children...no room to move about, no room apparently for a black-board and easel for Class 1'.⁶¹ Tight pre-war financial budgets resulted in decisions regarding improvements to schools, many of which were described as hygienically unsatisfactory, being deferred.⁶² The war ushered in even more stringent budgeting,⁶³ a situation which continued in the immediate postwar

⁵⁷ See *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1942*, 150/4/5/1 p.4

⁵⁸ Report by HMI Arnold Platts, dated 1 April 1944, ED134/39, G9E/941

⁵⁹ *Buckerell Log Book 642C/EFL2*, HMI Report June 1939

⁶⁰ *St Andrew's Church of England School 2271C/EFL1-2*

⁶¹ *Ilfracombe Hele National Log Book 512C/EFL2*, May 1937. Another example was Bridgerule School where the Infants and Standard 1B classroom was found 'uncomfortably full, inadequately ventilated and not well lighted'. *Bridgerule Log Book 2325C/EFL3*, HMI Report 1937

⁶² *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1943*, DCC 150/4/5/1, p.4

⁶³ *Devon County Council Minutes, Report of Education Committee*, 14 March 1940, DCC 148/15. No expenditure was to be incurred on upkeep of school grounds and buildings except that which was absolutely necessary to ensure buildings were watertight. One example of the financial problems besetting the county's small schools - *Bickington Church School Managers' Minutes 549C/EFM1*, entry dated 18 June 1943 recorded a problem with boys' unsanitary urinal and lavatory. Reply received from Devon County Education Committee was read at 13 July 1943 meeting 'if the large holes in the base of the urinal wall were stopped up and an additional pail were provided it would meet the case'.

period, the problems compounded by labour and material shortages.⁶⁴

Despite an apparent formal pre-war bar on employing married women, which the Board requested to be suspended in June 1942 due to acute teacher shortage,⁶⁵ many pre-war local female teachers including headteachers were married. In fact DCEC actively sought a greater response from women teachers to fill headships, particularly in the larger schools.⁶⁶ Perhaps this is partially explained by the lack of certified teachers since as many as one-third of the 1,500⁶⁷ elementary teachers were uncertified (excluding 1,185 teachers in Plymouth).⁶⁸ Time-tables, approved by a body of Managers in each school, were left to the discretion of the Headteacher. Religious instruction was considered a vital part of school life and each elementary school was inspected by both Religious Instruction and HMI Officials. Despite strong nonconformity in north and west Devon, by 1939 only two of the 225 religiously affiliated elementary schools were Wesleyan (Landkey and Lynton). Many small schools only employed one teacher for all pupils aged 5-14 and it was not unusual to find HMI reports expressing concern about outdated methods.⁶⁹ One 1935 report, describing pupils from a typical small rural village school, reached a not uncommon verdict ‘the children come from very scattered homes, and do not see nor hear very much of what is going on in the world around them; they are for the most part naturally lethargic’.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Bombing of houses resulted in a shortage of building contractors and slowed up improvements ushered in by the 1944 Education Act.

⁶⁵ P.H.J.H. Gosden, *Education in the Second World War* (Methuen & Co 1976) p.97

⁶⁶ *DCEC Circular No 79*, 8 April 1938, 2066C/EAM51

⁶⁷ *The Jubilee of County Councils 1889-1939: fifty years of local government* (Evans Brothers Ltd.1939) p.71 gives the number as 1,628 elementary teachers

⁶⁸ *Western Times*, 11 May 1945. Devon’s Secretary for Education was referring to ‘one of the weaknesses of the past’.

⁶⁹ For example, *Chardstock Log Book 2214Cadd2/EFL3-4*, HMI Report of June 1938 ‘in many directions teaching needs to be brought more into line with modern practice’.

⁷⁰ *Thorn Cross School Log Book, Broadwoodwidger 751C/EAL1*, 5 March 1935

During the 1930s Devon apparently ‘made considerable progress’ in its reorganisation of schools⁷¹ into Mixed Infant and Junior Schools, with those over 11 transferring to Senior Schools in the towns. By 1939 there were approximately 32⁷² Senior Schools in towns attended by children aged 11–14, from both urban and rural areas. Some senior schools were newly constructed whilst others such as Topsham Senior School had ‘few of the facilities that one associates with a modern Senior School’⁷³ and were later criticised as inadequate for evacuees.⁷⁴ London’s re-organisation was considerably more advanced and many of the LCC evacuees came from modern or updated schools.⁷⁵ Their shock on arriving at small rural schools in Devon was profound. For example, one evacuee recalled that those children accustomed to large London schools could barely believe that the school building in Clovelly was really a school.⁷⁶ Despite the extensive disruptions of evacuation, re-organisation continued slowly in Devon throughout the war although, by 1944, 80% of rural schools nationally were still awaiting re-organisation.⁷⁷

As previously mentioned, the 1938 financial crisis seriously curbed educational expenditure, resulting in fewer new schools being built,⁷⁸ and recommended cuts were so drastic that DCEC warned that the re-organisation programme would not be completed until 1950 at the earliest and that Devon would be totally unprepared for the raising of the school age to 15. Concern was expressed that, whereas the most prosperous part of the County had been provided with senior and secondary school accommodation, the remainder of the County was ‘not likely to be quiescent on

⁷¹ R. Bovett, *Historical Notes on Devon Schools* (Devon County Council 1989) p.385. The 1926 Hadow Report had proposed the re-organisation of age groups into Infant 5-7, Junior 7-11 and Senior 11-14

⁷² *The Jubilee of County Councils 1889-1939: fifty years of local government*, p.71 gives the number as 24

⁷³ *H.M.I. Report*, 24 January 1938 -*Topsham Senior School Log Book 76/8/1/4*

⁷⁴ *ED 134/30*, Report on Evacuation in Devon dated 24 November 1939

⁷⁵ Central Schools, mainly in London, were established in 1911 and offered a vocational and scientific curriculum, set below the secondary school – H. Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society 1880-1990*, p.66

⁷⁶ H. Clement, *No Time to Kiss Goodbye* (Harry Clement 1995) p. 52

⁷⁷ K. Jefferys, ed. *Labour and the Wartime Coalition* (The Historians’ Press 1987) p.176

⁷⁸ For example, in 1938 the building programme was limited to two new senior schools – Broadclyst and Honiton. *Devon Education Committee Minutes*, March 1938 *DCC150/4/1/36* p. 2 and 43.

being told that development is stopped'.⁷⁹ One example of a purpose built school was Chagford Senior Mixed,⁸⁰ opened in 1936 with much positive publicity but also amidst some controversy that the fabric of rural life was being disturbed and would prejudice agriculture. Similar concerns continued to be voiced in other parts of Devon at the 'breaking up of the family life of the village school'.⁸¹ Despite considerable difficulties many small village schools offered able pupils the chance to sit scholarship exams for entrance into one of the 22⁸² Secondary Schools administered by DCEC (4,180 registered pupils in 1939).⁸³ There were also a few technical colleges⁸⁴ in the County.⁸⁵ However, by 1938 capital expenditure for new Secondary Schools was limited for at least 4 years.⁸⁶

⁷⁹ *Devon County Council Minutes DCC 148/14 Report of the Education Committee*, 10 March 1938.

⁸⁰ The status of Senior Schools was raised to Secondary Modern under the 1944 Education Act. Mixed Infant and Junior Schools became Primary Schools. e.g. *Chagford Senior School* recorded the date as 16 April 1945 in its *Log Book 1974C/ESL1* and *Coldridge Infant and Junior* recorded its changed status officially on 6 July 1944. *Log Book 858AC/3*

⁸¹ *Colebrooke Managers' Minutes 542C/EAMI*— In January 1949 the managers were faced with Devon County Education Committee's decision to close the school, the chief reason being that the cost of altering the inadequate sanitary conditions was not justified. Managers objected and claimed that 'children being taken from local schools as being as great disadvantage to agriculture'. *St Nicholas Church School, Combe Raleigh Managers' Minutes 567A/P152* included a newspaper cutting from June 1938 warning about 'the breaking up of the family life of the village school'. *Poltimore and Huxmore Managers' Minutes 2187C/EFM2* – Meeting held on 28 July 1941 to discuss transfer of children to Pinhoe. There was unanimous agreement against transfer. The village school 'with its practical knowledge of country life, its individual teaching and its religious training as a foundation stand for an ideal in the Nation's life...is well worth preservation'.

⁸² *The Jubilee of County Councils 1889-1939: fifty years of local government*, p.71 gives the number as 23 with 4,702 pupils and 296 teachers

⁸³ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1939, DCC150/4/5/1* p.29. *The Jubilee of County Councils 1889-1939* gives the number of secondary schools as 23 with 4,702 pupils

⁸⁴ Technical schools which offered training in skills required by local industries were established from 1913 onwards – H. Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society 1880-1990*, p.66

⁸⁵ Exeter, Plymouth, South Devon, Newton Abbot, Tiverton and Barnstaple.

⁸⁶ *Devon County Council Minutes, January 1938-December 1939, Report of the Finance Sub-Committee, Appendix 1*, p.4 (Westcountry Studies Library)

Devon on the eve of war

In the village life goes just like a tune over and over again, only a wedding, birth or funeral change the monotony. In the morning the children troop off to school. Women go to the tap in all weathers to fetch their water...Not a person is ever in a real hurry. On Sundays nearly everybody puts their best clothes on even if they aren't going to church or chapel. They all know each other...Going to town is a weekly event. Peace abounds everywhere and petty quarrels are soon smoothed out. So life goes on.⁸⁷

In today's overcrowded world much of Devon's appeal still lies in the vast tracts of farmland and moorland, speckled with isolated hamlets and farm buildings connected by small market towns such as Tiverton, Honiton, Torrington and Crediton. Modern mass communication makes it difficult to envisage the profound isolation of wartime rural Devon although even today's car driver still has to negotiate the network of winding lanes between village and town. In 1942, 23 of the 27 pupils at Welcome School (North Devon) were LCC evacuees under the headship of their teacher and an extract from the HMI Report illustrates this isolation:

it may be of interest to record that no newspapers reach it, and most of the homes where the children are billeted are without a Wireless Set. This lack of contact with the outside world impressed the Headmistress very forcibly and led her to organise social functions in aid of a variety of good causes. One of these good causes was the purchase of a Wireless Set for the school⁸⁸

⁸⁷ This extract from an essay written by a young evacuee billeted in Molland offers an interesting outside perspective on village life in Devon, *The Western Times*, 7 January 1944

⁸⁸ *Welcombe School Log Book 765C/EAL2*, July 1942

For thousands of children who came from the sprawling metropolis of London, and also those from the smaller cities of Bristol and Plymouth, where bustling streets doubled as playgrounds, the cultural shock was enormous. Many found Devon an unimaginable paradise but for a few it was an experience so traumatic that in some cases the memory is almost blank. The fact that two evacuated siblings from the sample could feel so differently about their stay in Wembworthy illustrates that even within the same billet the experience could be poles apart. Brian (10) immensely enjoyed his country lifestyle whilst Sheila (13) was so homesick that her only relief appears to have been school.

Until the reorganisation of counties in 1974, Devon ‘was second in area only to Yorkshire’,⁸⁹ and was the largest administrative county in England.⁹⁰ For purposes of administration it was divided into three areas: North, South and East. The local council system incorporated three tiers - the lowest tier consisted of 408 Parish Councils, the second tier consisted of 10 Municipal Boroughs (the largest being Torquay), 21 Urban and 17 Rural District Councils,⁹¹ and above these two tiers was the County Council, ‘entrusted with the management of the administrative and financial business’ of the County.⁹² The County Boroughs of Plymouth (pop. in 1938 – 202,269) and Exeter (pop. in 1938 – 69,160)⁹³ were independent. Stanyer described local government in Devon as responding slowly to the many social changes in the twentieth century and the County ‘as part of the system of government, appeared to be old-fashioned, in some way running behind other areas,

⁸⁹ D. Kay-Robinson, *Devon and Cornwall* (John Bartholomew & Son Ltd. 1977) p.3

⁹⁰ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1945*, extract included in *Maternity and Child Welfare Committee Minutes 1934-1948*, DCC 157/5/1/4

⁹¹ See *Appendix 7*

⁹² The County Councils Act of 1888 stated that ‘a Council shall be established in every administrative County as defined by this Act, and be entrusted with management of the administrative and financial business of that County, and shall consist of the chairman, aldermen, and councillors’. *The Jubilee of County Councils 1889-1939*, p.15

⁹³ These are the approximate figures given under the heading of Mid 1938 Registrar-General’s Estimate included in the *National Register United Kingdom and Isle of Man, Statistics of Population on 29 September, 1939* (HMSO 1944)

particularly the more urbanised counties and large towns and cities'.⁹⁴ Added to this was a nationwide fierce independence stretching back to feudal times where 'each separate city, borough and smaller authority was nearly autonomous' and 'every unit of local government, large or small, was proud of its separate identity, defiant of any threat to infringe its integrity'.⁹⁵ Indications of possible local government re-organisation in 1942 prompted the following censure:

local government, as its name implies, has been developed in this country on the basis of the closest possible contact between the government and those who govern, and as soon as that principle is lost then it is certain that the true foundation of our democratic system will have disappeared.⁹⁶

Politically the Southwest was a stronghold of a 'patriotic and imperialist Conservatism' with Labour trailing in third place well behind the Liberal Party until 1945. Even in the 1929 General Election 'the one genuinely three-party contest of the interwar period', Labour's share of the vote in Devon was only 18.7%. Plymouth Drake elected a Labour MP in this election but was one of only two Southwest constituencies to elect a Labour MP before 1945.⁹⁷ This electoral pattern was echoed in Devon's local government elections where the Labour Party 'scarcely figured...before 1945'.⁹⁸ Thorpe emphasised that if one accepts that working-class people benefited more from Labour-controlled local authorities during the interwar period, then Labour's electoral failure in

⁹⁴ J. Stanyer, *A History of Devon County Council 1889-1989* (Devon Books 1989) p.26. The Chairman of Devon County Council during the period 1938-46 was Sir John Daw.

⁹⁵ T. Harrison, *Living through the Blitz* (Collins 1976) pp.30 and.294

⁹⁶ Letter published in *The Times*, 31 October 1942, written by the President and Chairman of the Executive Council of Urban District Councils, found amongst Dawlish Urban District Papers R2369A/(5/3)C84

⁹⁷ A. Thorpe, 'One of the Most Backward Areas of the Country': The Labour Party's Grass Roots in South West England, 1918-45 in M. Worley, ed. *Labour's Grass Roots* (Ashgate 2005) pp.218 - 220

⁹⁸ J. Stanyer, *A History of Devon County Council 1889-1989*, pp.27, 104 as cited in A. Thorpe, 'One of the Most Backward Areas of the Country', p. 233

counties such as Devon ‘materially impoverished the lives of ordinary people’ compared with areas such as ‘Sheffield after 1926 or the London County Council areas from 1934 onwards’.⁹⁹

The total resident civilian population in 1939 prior to evacuation was somewhere between 722,000 and 741,660.¹⁰⁰ Devon’s position as a leading industrial county had collapsed in the late nineteenth century,¹⁰¹ and during most of its existence DCC had ‘faced the problems of a declining or stagnant economy’.¹⁰² Apart from Barnstaple, there were several market towns in North Devon but the bulk of the population inhabited the southern part of the County and in some respects life had remained unchanged for centuries. ‘It was a county of hamlets, villages and small towns, with only a few medium-sized urban areas’,¹⁰³ and many villages were part of large estates. One Surrey evacuee remembered the ‘curiosity on seeing two elderly ladies...wearing long black skirts and white aprons that reached the ground’ in North Tawton.¹⁰⁴ The lady living in a remote village near South Molton who did not possess a radio, never read newspapers and was unaware that there was a war was probably not unique in 1939.¹⁰⁵ It was unusual for children not to leave school at 14 and approximately two thirds of the working population were employed in the poorly paid service industries¹⁰⁶, distributive trades,¹⁰⁷ agriculture, forestry, fishing, construction, ship building, mining, quarrying, transport and communication. Only 5% were employed in professional and scientific

⁹⁹ A. Thorpe, ‘One of the Most Backward Areas of the Country’, p.235. See also J. Welshman, *Municipal Medicine – Public Health in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Lang 2000) pp.36-7

¹⁰⁰ *General Register Office Census 1951- County Report DEVON* (HMSO 1955) p. xii. This figure includes the County Boroughs of Plymouth and Exeter. The Mid 1938 Registrar-General’s Estimate was 741,660 – *National Register United Kingdom and Isle of Man Statistics of Population on 29 September 1939* (HMSO 1944)

¹⁰¹ J. Stanyer, *A History of Devon County Council*, p. 25. D. Kay-Robinson, *Devon & Cornwall*, pp. 12-13

¹⁰² J. Stanyer, *A History of Devon County Council*, p. 28

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* p. 86

¹⁰⁴ Devon Federation of Women’s Institutes, *Devon within Living Memory* (DFWI 1993) p. 210

¹⁰⁵ G. Wasley, *Devon at War* (Devon Books 1994) p. 30. See also Powell, B. *Devon’s Glorious Past 1939-1945* (Two Hoots Publishing 1995) p.49

¹⁰⁶ The 1931 Census recorded that the largest employment sector was ‘miscellaneous services’ which included domestic servants, hairdressers, chimney sweeps, waiters, laundry workers, publicans and cleaners. C.H.Lee, *British Regional Employment Statistics 1841-1971* (Cambridge University Press 1979).

¹⁰⁷ This category included shopkeepers, costermongers and shop workers

services and 11% in public administration and defence.¹⁰⁸ Housing was frequently of a poor standard with crude sanitation and inadequate water supplies, particularly in North Devon.¹⁰⁹ Most farms were small, many with no cultivating machinery. The number of holdings was 12,000 (1939), many of which were below 100 acres depending on poultry and pigs, with only 12 holdings above 500 acres.¹¹⁰ The industry had suffered badly during the interwar years especially with falling wheat prices and the average number of cattle per farm during the 1930s was 10.¹¹¹ Agricultural labourers were the lowest paid of all major groups of male workers with an average national wage in 1939 of 34s6d for a 50 hour week, a wage that probably was lower in Devon,¹¹² and below the minimum wage of 41s suggested by Rowntree in 1937 for rural workers with dependents.¹¹³

As many evacuees discovered ‘whilst farms in the Home Counties were relatively well supplied with piped water and electricity’ the inhabitants of ‘Wales and the South-West mostly lived and worked in conditions which were...unbelievably primitive’,¹¹⁴ and even the poorest Londoners were astonished.¹¹⁵ An LCC teacher evacuated to Beaworthy informed the MH that Devon is ‘the most unsanitary place I have ever visited’,¹¹⁶ and some Senior Acton pupils in Ermington had ‘qualms’ about the lavatory accommodation in billets.¹¹⁷ Eighteen months before the first official evacuees

¹⁰⁸ C.H.Lee, *British Regional Employment Statistics 1841-1971* (Cambridge University Press 1979)

¹⁰⁹ Report by S.R. Raffety, Consulting Engineer from London, *Devon County Council Minutes DCC 148/14 - 29 January 1938*. See also *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 350, Column 2234, 1 August 1939 – concern expressed about inadequate water supplies and sewerage in Devon

¹¹⁰ G. Wasley, *Devon at War 1939-1945*, pp. 2 and 38

¹¹¹ A brief survey of changes in Crediton 1930-38, found in *Crediton Hayward Boys School File 1510CEFA25 (Exeter Record Office)*

¹¹² K.A.H. Murray, *History of the Second World War – Agriculture* (HMSO 1955) p. 38 *British Labour Statistics Historical Abstract 1886-1968* (HMSO 1971) p.39

¹¹³ B. Seeböhm Rowntree, *The Human Needs of Nature* (Longmans 1937) p.12. Rowntree stated that ‘the standard of comfort of the agricultural workers has always been very low. It has been customary to expect them to “live rough”’. P.124

¹¹⁴ A. Calder, *The People’s War – Britain 1939-45* (Jonathan Cape 1969) pp. 419-20

¹¹⁵ The War and the People No.1, *Social Work*, Volume 2(1) 1941, p.8

¹¹⁶ ED 134/33, Letter to Ministry of Health dated 26 February 1941

¹¹⁷ ED134/270 – 9B(2)/28 – HMI Report dated 15 September 1939

arrived, a report on the North Devon Rural Water Supplies described some areas as the worst ever seen.¹¹⁸ However, the MH refused DCC the financial assistance needed for an improvement scheme.¹¹⁹ Concerns were also raised in Parliament prior to evacuation about the inadequacy of rural water supplies with regard to billeting large numbers of evacuees, not only in Devon but in many other rural areas.¹²⁰ In the event the shortage of adequate water supplies, exacerbated by evacuation, was ‘daily being forced upon the notice not only of local authorities....but upon Government departments’¹²¹ and undoubtedly accelerated the postwar improvements in Devon.

Barnstaple RDC Minutes vividly illustrate the constant pre-occupation with water shortage during wartime, and Berrynarbor PC Minutes demonstrate parish concern that the number of evacuees should be strictly limited because of inadequate water supply and sanitation.¹²² Evacuees arriving at Colebrooke School in September 1939 found there was no water in the school.¹²³ The following quote from a letter written by an evacuated LCC headmaster illustrates the shock felt by many evacuees who arrived in Devon - ‘So far, our existence has been very primitive. No bus, no post office and one delivery per day. Water drawn from a pump down the road and the sanitation does not bear thinking about’.¹²⁴ The lack of basic facilities in both homes and schools was commented on by almost every ex-evacuee from the sample. However, these conditions were certainly not unique to Devon.¹²⁵ Evacuation undoubtedly raised awareness of squalid rural conditions and even

¹¹⁸ *Devon County Council Minutes 148/14* Report by London Consulting Engineer dated 29 January 1938, further Report to Committee 15 December 1938 and Report of Public Health and Housing Committee 9 March 1939.

¹¹⁹ *Devon County Council Minutes 148/14*, p.8

¹²⁰ *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 348, Column 1498, 15 June 1939, Volume 350, Column 2234, 1 August 1939

¹²¹ *North Devon Journal*, 12 December, 1940

¹²² For example *Barnstaple Rural District Council Minutes, R3057Cadd.4(R2/5)C/19*, p.818; *Berrynarbor Parish Council Minutes B239add/3*, 11 March 1940

¹²³ *Colebrooke School Log Book 542C/EAL2*, 11 September 1939

¹²⁴ Letter written to Sir Percy Harris, M.P. *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 352, Col 2172, 2 November 1939.

¹²⁵ See R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 177 for a description of rural sanitary conditions.

Our Towns (1943) conceded that ‘Recently, health statistics from the poorest rural areas, taken in isolation, were worse in some respects than those of the worst and most congested town’.¹²⁶

To summarise, although there were some small improvements in welfare provision during the interwar years, Treasury restraint and regional disparity loomed large, particularly affecting working-class women and children. Apart from the ongoing gradual re-organisation of age groups and the raising of the school age to 14, educational provision saw little improvement either, particularly in poorer rural areas such as Devon where by 1938 the County Council imposed strict economies in both welfare and educational provision. Compared with more prosperous areas it appeared that Devon was ill-equipped to cope with the care of thousands of evacuees.

¹²⁶ *Our Towns* (Oxford University Press 1943) p.xv. Report compiled by the Women’s Group on Public Welfare

CHAPTER TWO

The origin and planning of the Government Evacuation Scheme from a central and local perspective

No one, in or out of the government, knew that another world war was inevitable. The record of the discussions, the plans, and the preparations...need to be read with this in mind.¹

On 9 September 1939, the Leader Column of *The Times Educational Supplement* delivered its verdict on the first evacuation wave ‘nor can one recall a greater piece of non-military planning than the transport and administrative arrangements which made the evacuation possible’.² The Government felt enormous relief that nationally a total of 1,473,500 official evacuees had been transported over several days, albeit with an understandable degree of chaos, away from heavily populated urban areas to less vulnerable reception areas. Yet one week later, when the bombs failed to materialise and people had time to reflect, criticism surfaced about ‘lack of forethought in high places’³ as local authorities, educational staff, voluntary agencies, householders and evacuees struggled to cope with the realities of evacuation in reception areas.

Back in February, Dame Georgiana Buller of Exeter had written to both *The Times* and Exeter’s Town Clerk about her concern that the MH had ‘flung this Scheme upon the community without giving adequate previous consideration to all its implications’. The Town Clerk agreed that the Government needed to ‘formulate their policy more clearly’.⁴ By 14 October it appeared that

¹ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.87

² *The Times Educational Supplement*, 9 September 1939

³ *Ibid.* 16 September 1939

⁴ *Town Clerk’s Papers, Exeter City Council, A.R.P. Evacuation Group N, Box 10*, 6 February 1939.

relations between evacuating and reception authorities had reached a critical stage: 'official circulars keep repeating that no extra burden is to fall on reception authorities as a result of evacuation, but so far the practical help they have received from evacuating authorities has been small'.⁵ One month later it was reported that 'local authorities in the reception areas have come face to face with many perplexities of which they had little experience'.⁶ Titmuss later acknowledged that time ran out for the planners and the dominant concern to get mothers and children out of the cities at all costs led to the problems of reception, billeting and welfare being obscured and neglected.⁷ This resulted in piecemeal Government responses to unforeseen problems as and when they arose, provoking occasional overt criticism by overworked local staff in Devon that the MH had 'either failed to realise the scope and magnitude of its task and responsibilities in the reception areas or failed to obtain the promise of adequate financial support'.⁸

Any criticism of the Government needs tempering by the following considerations. It was hitherto uncharted territory for a British government to plan the voluntary evacuation of between 3 and 4 million civilians, least of all in hypothetical circumstances. Plans were kept as secret as possible to avoid public alarm and prevent accusations of war mongering which obviously hampered open communication between central and local government. The nature and duration of the war, if it took place, were completely unpredictable as were the potential reactions of the population. Even at the end of August 1939 many, both inside and outside government, still refused to accept war as inevitable, including Sir Thomas Inskip, Dominions Secretary,⁹ and Devon's population enjoyed the bank holiday as usual.¹⁰ In addition, the initial evacuation scheme and subsequent waves remained voluntary throughout the course of the war and those in reception areas who billeted evacuees and

⁵ *The Times Educational Supplement*, 14 October 1939

⁶ *Ibid*, 25 November 1939

⁷ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 40

⁸ *Dartington Archive, News of the Day*, 10 and 20 June 1941. Remarks made by Billeting Officer

⁹ *The Western Times*, 4 August 1939. See also T. Harrison, *Living Through the Blitz* (Collins 1976)p.27

¹⁰ *The Western Times* reported on a variety of Bank Holiday activities

those who offered immeasurable assistance were also expected to do so voluntarily, with billeting coercion only reluctantly introduced when lack of accommodation became acute. Thus the main problems which beset government planning were Treasury parsimony, the complexity of local government and the unknown and variable factors inherent in a voluntary scheme which was itself dominated by concern to transport priority classes away from designated vulnerable evacuation areas with the utmost speed to minimise casualties and predicted mass civil panic. The physical evacuation was duly accomplished but the problems arising from the ensuing reception, billeting, education and welfare of the unpredictable numbers and categories together with the equally unpredictable behaviour of individuals had to be resolved when and where the problems arose.

Fear of devastating bombing aimed at heavily built-up areas and the possibility of ensuing panic in any future war had led to the formation of the Air-Raid Precaution Sub-Committee at the Home Office by May 1924. An Evacuation Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence was appointed on 16 February 1931 but by 1937, following Guernica, there was a drastic scaling-up in the Air Staff's estimate of German striking power¹¹ causing previous evacuation planning to appear outdated. The Air Raids Precaution Act became law on 22 December 1937 and the section on evacuation stated that non-essential urban dwellers should be evacuated and that it was incumbent on all local authorities to furnish the Secretary of State with any information relative to preparatory evacuation plans. Included in the Act was the first loose indication of possible Treasury reimbursement for expenses incurred 'the general superintendence and direction of measures taken under this Act...shall be defrayed out of moneys provided by Parliament'.¹² However, recovering the multitude of evacuation defrayments from the Treasury, the evacuating authorities or evacuees themselves was later to become a bureaucratic nightmare for reception areas.

¹¹ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.25

¹² *The Public General Acts 1937-38, Chapters 1-73*, p.21

On 26 May 1938, Sir Samuel Hoare¹³ announced that he had invited Sir John Anderson¹⁴ to chair an Evacuation Committee.¹⁵ Although described by Harrison as ‘far more remote from “the people” than is readily realized today’,¹⁶ Wheeler-Bennett’s biography depicted a man whose ‘gravity of mien, which some found forbidding, masked a nature of great kindness, great understanding and great justness’.¹⁷ The Anderson Committee’s Report, whilst focusing on London, was intended to be adapted for other areas and was submitted to Hoare on 26 July 1938,¹⁸ although not published until October following the Munich crisis. It stressed that whilst it was ‘impossible to envisage the horrors of intensive air attack... events in Spain and China have at least given some indication’.¹⁹ It concurred with government proposals and advice from local authorities that evacuation should be voluntary,²⁰ that billets would largely be provided in private houses if necessary under powers of compulsory billeting and that the initial cost of evacuation arrangements should be borne by the Government with a contribution from those who could afford it. It recommended a complete survey of accommodation by local authorities which was subsequently undertaken during January and February 1939. Padley and Cole described it as ‘a careful document’ but one which ‘left unsettled innumerable administrative details’ and avoided several real difficulties, such as whether the county or district authorities should control evacuation.²¹

¹³ Secretary of State for the Home Office

¹⁴ Permanent Under-Secretary of the Home Office 1922-1932, Governor of Bengal 1932-1937, Cabinet Minister: Civil Defence 1938-1940, Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security September 1939-October 1940, Cabinet Minister: War Cabinet 1940-1945. A Scottish Advisory Committee on Evacuation was appointed in December 1938.

¹⁵ Other committee members were Sir Percy Harris, Liberal M.P. for South West Bethnal Green, Mr George Doland, Conservative M.P. for Balham and Tooting and Dr Leslie Haden-Guest, Labour M.P. for North Islington. *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol 336, Col 1380

¹⁶ T. Harrison, *Living Through the Blitz*, pp. 29-30. Harrison was a co-founder of Mass- Observation (1937). He stated its brief was to supply accurate observations of everyday life and real (not published) public moods

¹⁷ J.W. Wheeler-Bennett, *John Anderson Viscount Waverley*, (Macmillan 1962) p.vii

¹⁸ Details of Report - *House of Commons Sessional Papers 1937-38, microfiche Cmd 5837x607* (Ex Uni Lib)

¹⁹ *Consolidated List of Government Publications, 1 January-31 December 1939, Evacuation Report*, p.515

²⁰ *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 368, Col 1493-4, 13 February 1941. In 1941 the Government introduced powers for compulsory medical examination and evacuation of children considered to be suffering or likely to suffer from effects of air-raids. This applied to the County of London and neighbouring evacuation areas.

²¹ Padley and Cole, *Evacuation Survey – A Report to the Fabian Society* (Routledge and Sons 1940) pp.19-20. Their Report was prepared during the winter and spring of 1939-1940 and therefore only concerned the results of the first evacuation wave

The Report also suggested there would be ‘great scope for voluntary service’ regarding welfare services for evacuees,²² thereby cutting Treasury expenditure on evacuation. Voluntary agencies were approached by the Home Office in September 1938 and asked to assist all local authorities scheduled to receive evacuees. Unquestionably, without their vital sustained contribution the initial evacuation scheme would have foundered.²³ Organisations such as the WI,²⁴ Townswomen’s Guild, British Legion, Salvation Army, Girl Guide and Boy Scout Movements were involved but the overwhelming and continuous assistance in every aspect of evacuation came from up to one million wartime members of the WVS, described as ‘the human mortar which was filled in between the bricks of officialdom’.²⁵ Initially established ‘to bring the influence of patriotic local social leaders to bear on local authorities reluctant to prepare for war’,²⁶ the members were regarded by Government as ‘agents’ in reception areas,²⁷ and their invaluable contribution was later acknowledged by the MH.²⁸ The powers invested in the WVS apparently caused ‘a state of siege’ in some Devon villages between the WI and the WVS. The former, an old established body led by the rural middle class, was ‘wildly jealous’ and refused to co-operate. In addition, some local women, thwarted in their aspiration to become WI presidents ‘seized the opportunity ... to set

²² Excerpt from the Report of the Anderson Evacuation Committee submitted on 26 July 1939

²³ See R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.376. Also J. Hinton, ‘Voluntarism and the Welfare/Warfare State, Women’s Voluntary Services in the 1940s’, *Twentieth Century British History*, Volume 9, No.2, 1998, p.274. Also comments by Devon County Psychologist –*Dartington Archive News of the Day*, 14 May 1941

²⁴ The National Federation of Women’s Institutes began in 1915 as a direct result of the wartime need for women in country districts to produce and preserve food. By 1940 the membership was approximately 338,000 women. D. Sheridan, ed. *Wartime Women: an anthology of women’s wartime writing for Mass-Observation, 1937-45* (London: Mandarin 1991) pp.74-5. It was exclusively a rural organisation with broad membership but middle class leadership. M. Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism* (Lawrence & Wishart 1997)

²⁵ C. Graves, *Women in Green* (William Heinemann Ltd. 1948) p.45. The WVS was formed in May 1938 in response to an appeal from the Home Secretary for more active support of women in A.R.P. work. See the following for details about the vital role of the WVS - S. Ward, *War in the Countryside 1939-45* (Cameron Books 1988) p.81; C. Graves, *Women in Green*; J.Hinton, ‘Voluntarism and the Welfare/Warfare State: Women’s Voluntary Services in the 1940s’, *Twentieth Century British History*, Volume 9, No.2, 1998; J.Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership, and the Second World War* (Oxford University Press 2002).

²⁶ J. Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership, and the Second World War*, p. 231

²⁷ *MH 78/230*, Letter from Press Officer of Ministry of Health to MOI, dated 8 April 1940. The Ministry received regular reports from the WVS, other voluntary organisations, local authorities and M.P.s

²⁸ *Summary Report by the Ministry of Health (England and Wales) 1 April 1939-31 March 1941*, p.9 *Town Clerk’s Papers, Exeter CityBox1/8 Group G, Ministry of Health Circulars and Memoranda*

up a rival organization'.²⁹ There was also some disapproval that middle and upper class women appeared to avoid genuine war work by affiliating themselves to voluntary organisations, in particular the WVS.³⁰

During the Munich crisis the LCC put its own evacuation plan into action, moving some 4,000 nursery and disabled children, in co-operation with Metropolitan Boroughs and adjacent local authorities, to residential schools and camps in the country. Although the children were brought back to London by 6 October 1938, this experience was to prove invaluable.³¹ The Munich crisis revealed the inadequacy of existing civil defence measures,³² and the MH and the much less influential Board of Education complained that the Home Office was not the appropriate department to handle evacuation planning. The MH assumed responsibility for planning on 14 November 1938 and an Advisory Committee on the Evacuation of Schoolchildren was appointed, composed of representatives of the associations of local authorities and LEAs.³³ Sir John Anderson continued to be responsible for policy direction. That the Board was not given equal importance in planning was a grave error and the cause of much educational disruption during the first evacuation wave as school parties found themselves scattered around remote villages, particularly in rural counties such as Devon. There is just one local recorded example of pre-war planning co-operation between authorities. Barnstaple Divisional Education Authority received news in May 1939 from Barnstaple MB that a Billeting Officer had been appointed and a distribution centre chosen. Its response was to assure co-operation in 'every possible way' with the proviso that it 'should be

²⁹ McIntyre, *Voluntary Service in Devon*, as cited in J. Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership, and the Second World War*, pp.145-6

³⁰ I. McClaine, *Ministry of Morale* (George Allen & Unwin 1979) p.177

³¹ *Corporation of London Archives, Evacuation Information Leaflet No 10*. Also R. Samways, ed. *We think you ought to go* (London Metropolitan Archives 1995) p. 8. A parents' meeting organised by the LCC during the emergency indicated that 80% of parents favoured a scheme for their children's separate evacuation, *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 341, Column 4-5, 8 November 1938

³² R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, pp.11-12

³³ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp.30-33

consulted before any definite plans are made concerning the children, the teachers, and the Schools'. There is no indication in the Committee Minutes of either authority that this co-operation was not forthcoming.³⁴

At the beginning of 1939 the MH divided the country into evacuation,³⁵ neutral and reception areas. Over 36 counties were designated as reception areas, chosen because their populations were less dense, not because they were necessarily safer.³⁶ Elliot later told critics 'we cannot...escape from the fact that in this small and industrialised country, under the possible conditions of air warfare, safety is only relative'.³⁷ Neutral areas were not to be evacuated but were considered unfit to serve as reception areas. Inevitable misjudgements resulted in port cities such as Plymouth and Bristol being classified as neutral and pressure to overturn this decision only succeeded when the cities suffered sustained bombing in 1941. On 6 January, Elliot broadcast to the nation, clarifying the evacuation scheme and forthcoming accommodation survey. Circulars, albeit very generalised, began arriving in local districts. Dawlish UDC was among the first 20 local councils nationally to return accommodation surveys,³⁸ and both Ilfracombe UDC and Tiverton RDC received a letter of

³⁴ *Barnstaple Divisional Education Authority Committee Minutes 1903C/EEM3-47*, 11 May 1939

³⁵ In September 1939 the evacuation areas included all or parts of

- a. London and adjoining districts of Middlesex, Surrey, Kent and Essex
- b. Midland – Birmingham, Coventry, Derby, Nottingham, Oldbury, Smethwick, Wallsall and West Bromwich
- c. North-West – Birkenhead, Bootle, Crosby, Liverpool, Manchester, Runcorn, Salford, Stretford, Wallasey, Widnes
- d. Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire – Bradford, Cleethorpes, Grimsby, Hull, Leeds, Middlesborough, Rotherham and Sheffield
- e. North-East – Gateshead, Hartlepool, Jarrow, Newcastle, South Shields, Sunderland, Wallsend, Tynemouth
- f. South – Chatham, Gillingham, Gosport, Portsmouth, Rochester, Southampton

Scotland – Clydebank, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Rosyth area.

The total number of evacuation areas was 81 with 1,100 reception areas, Harris, B. *The Health of the Schoolchild* (Open University Press 1995) p.144

³⁶ *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 353, Column 853, 16 November 1939.

³⁷ *City of Plymouth Evacuation Scheme 1644/375*, Walter Elliot speaking in the House of Commons, 18 May 1939

³⁸ *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 344, 2 March 1939

thanks from the Ministry for their prompt surveys.³⁹ Nationally approximately 100,000 volunteers visited 5,000,000 houses and, on the basis of one person per room, up to 6,050,000 places were found. This number was later reduced to 4,800,000 because of unsuitable premises and further decreased due to private reservations in the months leading up to war.⁴⁰ The MH paid high tribute to both the response and competence of local authorities,⁴¹ doubtless mindful that cajoling local authorities was crucial to keep them on side.

In March it was agreed that revised evacuation Plan II would supersede Plan I and that county and municipal boroughs together with urban and rural district councils would be in charge of reception and billeting.⁴² Many felt that the County Councils which normally administered education, the Poor Law, maternity and child welfare for the greater part of their administrative area should have been in charge. Critics highlighted that local councils were often poor, with overworked skeleton staffs and councillors who were only experienced in such issues as planning, highways and local minutiae and that County Councils were preferable because they were 'too large to be intimidated by local influence'.⁴³ Passing judgement on the initial problems and confusion in reception areas, Titmuss felt that 'the structure of English local government in 1939, with its multiplicity of units and their variation in size, ability and functions, was not of course the ideal administrative machine to be at the receiving end of the evacuation scheme'. He also described scenes of 'elderly, inefficient and obstructive aldermen, councillors and local officials' buried in 'slow committee rule, red tape' and 'jealously guarded localism'.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the LCC Education Department later stated it was unconvinced that 'the work could have been done better had it been made the

³⁹ *Ifracombe Urban District Council Minutes R2458A/(2/3)C32*, p.948. *Tiverton Rural District Council Minutes R4/4addC1*, 14 March 1939

⁴⁰ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.37

⁴¹ *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 344, Col. 1523, 2 March 1939

⁴² *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 345, Column 2058, 29 March 1939

⁴³ *Times Educational Supplement*, 4 January 1941, Letter from local government officer

⁴⁴ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 151, 317-8

responsibility of County Councils and Local Education Authorities'.⁴⁵ It can also be argued that intimate knowledge of their own district meant that local council officials were generally best placed to make ad hoc decisions as and when unforeseen local problems arose. For example, South Molton RDC Evacuation Officer told the Senior Regional Officer for the MH in no uncertain terms that if further evacuees were to be sent 'matters should be left to the official of the District who claimed to have intimate knowledge of local conditions'.⁴⁶

The LCC issued one general letter on 30 March but later found it necessary to issue a second in June due to 'the stream of inquiries which continue to reach County Hall on all aspects of the Government's plan'.⁴⁷ Reception authorities were informed of expected evacuee numbers and requested to proceed with planning. Authorities were again reminded in April about the need for a workable plan which could be operational at short notice and further MH circulars were sent regarding such issues as the reception of mothers and children and transport timetables.⁴⁸ Devon expected to receive up to 57,500 unaccompanied children, 12,500 adults, 63,000 others including expectant mothers and children of school age and an additional 52,000 unofficial evacuees who had reserved accommodation privately.⁴⁹ MH Circular 1800 together with Memo Ev.4 (1 May 1939) outlined the Evacuation Scheme for local authorities. Although assurance was given that the operation of the evacuation plan 'shall not result in any additional burden on the local rates', the opt-out clause was that 'it would certainly be difficult to disentangle at this point of time the direct and indirect effects of evacuation'. The clause on clothing is one example of government reassurance to householders which was clearly almost unworkable in practice (refer to Chapter 8). A list of essential clothing for evacuees was given but it was admitted that 'some parents would no

⁴⁵ R. Samways, ed. *We think you ought to go*, p.16

⁴⁶ *South Molton Rural District Council Miscellaneous Committee Minutes, R2407A/C28*, 29 July 1944

⁴⁷ *Town Clerk's Papers, Exeter City Council, Group N, A.R.P. Evacuation Box 14*

⁴⁸ *Crediton Urban District Council Minute Book R4/2/C/58*

⁴⁹ *DCC Maternity and Child Welfare Committee*, dated 15 May 1939, *DCC157/5/1/3*

doubt be unable to supply their children with all these articles, but you (the householder) would be under no obligation to supply extra clothes or equipment'.⁵⁰ Circular 1800 also announced that county councils were theoretically given the task of playing 'a useful part in co-ordinating the arrangements for the whole county in relation to the evacuating authorities and to the transport authorities',⁵¹ and local authorities were duly asked to submit their plans to their local CC. Padley and Cole criticised the decision to give county councils this minor role and claimed that 'with a few exceptions the counties played little or no part in making the reception plans'.⁵² They concluded that evacuation 'has emphasised...the weaknesses of our local government structure... and the need for regional organisation'.⁵³ Following the first evacuation wave it was clear that Devon County Council also believed the Government was mistaken to give county councils a minor role.⁵⁴ However, the Government decision to prioritise billeting over and above educational and welfare needs was the reason why local district councils were chosen to administer the scheme.

Further advisory circulars and letters followed including Board Circular 1469 (19 May 1939) which outlined measures to be taken by LEAs in reception areas to develop the School Medical Service in order to include evacuees. The LCC contacted the Town Clerk of Bideford MB and presumably all other local reception authorities in May and forwarded a copy of the letter sent to all London schools regarding evacuation arrangements together with a copy of the pamphlet sent to all London householders.⁵⁵ On 24 May, the Civil Defence Bill⁵⁶ was presented and the section on evacuation announced that children in school parties and mothers with under fives, both official and unofficial,

⁵⁰ *Ministry of Health Memorandum Ev.4*

⁵¹ *Ministry of Health Circular 1800*, 1 May 1939

⁵² R.Padley and M.Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, pp. 79-80. See also letter from a local government officer in *The Times Educational Supplement* dated 4 January 1941, summarising the difficulties inherent in the evacuation scheme so far as reception areas were concerned.

⁵³ R.Padley and M.Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p. 85

⁵⁴ Refer to Chapter 5 for discussion of Armfelt's memorandum to the Ministry of Health, dated 18 September 1939, *ED 134/30, G9E/3*

⁵⁵ *Bideford Municipal Borough, Minutes and Reports of Committees, R2379A/(1/1)C23*, 26 May 1939

⁵⁶ The Act was passed in July 1939. Refer to *Clause 47, Civil Defence Bill*, 24 May 1939 for details given by Walter Elliot

expectant mothers and blind adults would be categorised as ‘priority class’. Ample accommodation was available due to the generous response of householders and private evacuation could proceed provided it did not interfere with the official scheme. However, it would be impossible to inform London schools or parents about exact destinations.⁵⁷ *Public Information Leaflet No.3 - Evacuation Why and How?* (July 1939) briefly explained why evacuation was important, discussed the voluntary nature of the Scheme, assured parents that accommodation was available for children and that schooling would continue. It urged them to register their children and added that mothers with children under 5 and expectant mothers were also eligible. No mention was made about who would pay or whether welfare services would be available. Local authorities were also asked at this time to plan for extra isolation accommodation and to discuss the provision of communal meals with voluntary organisations.⁵⁸ The LCC independently co-ordinated schemes for the Metropolitan Area, together with 11 contiguous boroughs and district councils in adjacent counties. Letters were issued to all London schools detailing the proposed arrangements for school parties and an evacuation rehearsal was held in the Borough of Chelsea during June involving 5,000 children.⁵⁹

Preparations for evacuation were undoubtedly hampered by a Treasury ban on advance expenditure by local authorities until 25 August 1939, and Padley and Cole reported that ‘in few places did the districts make reception plans at all before evacuation actually took place’.⁶⁰ This was clearly not the case in Devon. Although some district sources for the period January-September 1939 are either no longer extant or recorded few details, most local councils appeared to have their evacuation planning well in-hand before the event and gave no indication that they felt unable to organise these details and subsequent welfare provision in their own areas, with guidance if

⁵⁷ *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol.347, Col. 2340-2341, 24 May 1939

⁵⁸ *The Times*, 31 July 1939

⁵⁹ *Corporation of London Archives, Evacuation Information Leaflet No 10*. R. Samways, ed. *We think you ought to go*, p. 9

⁶⁰ R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p. 79

necessary from DCC and the Regional Office of the MH at Bristol. In total, the County made provision for 116,200 evacuees plus 16,000 in Exeter and expected to receive approximately 14,471 (plus 3,150 to Exeter) during the first 4 days of evacuation.⁶¹ Excluding Plymouth, Tavistock Urban and Rural District Councils were the only districts not to be classified as reception areas during the first evacuation wave because accommodation was needed for ‘other purposes’, undoubtedly war workers or military.⁶² However, the councils were not informed of this decision until September 1939 and had already prepared evacuation plans. With the large numbers arriving in Devon during 1940, this decision was reversed.⁶³ Dartmouth MB and ‘certain other towns’ apparently made representations to the MH that their areas should not be classified as receiving areas but were unsuccessful.⁶⁴

Each local authority independently made decisions regarding the timing and extent of evacuation planning but all examples found in the archives demonstrate a willingness to co-operate with the Government’s broad guidance. However, local authorities also valued their independence. They occasionally recorded resentment towards both DCC and MH interference and were prepared to fight their case and occasionally refuse to implement suggestions.⁶⁵ Examples of pre-war evacuation planning offer a useful insight into the various initiatives taken and references have been found in the archives of six of the ten Municipal Boroughs, nine of the twenty one Urban District Councils and seven of the seventeen Rural District Councils, all detailed in Appendix 8. How comprehensive these various plans were in reality is frustratingly difficult to determine because

⁶¹ *Devon County Council Minutes DCC 148/15*, 14 March 1940

⁶² *Devon County Council Memorandum* dated 28 April 1939, 3248A/16/14(a)

⁶³ *Tavistock Rural District Council Minutes 1690/12*

⁶⁴ *Borough of Clifton Dartmouth Hardness Council Minutes R9/1/C30*, June 1939

⁶⁵ *Dawlish Urban District Council Minutes R2369A/(5/3)C83*, 4 November 1940. *Holsworthy Urban District Council Minutes 2588add/1*, p.112 – regarding Market Hall. *Ifracombe Urban District Council Committee Minutes R2458A(213)C72*, pp.488, 538, 582, 645 – regarding Burrow Lodge Hostel. *Bideford Rural District Council Minutes R2414A(1-5)C10*, 27 August 1940 – regarding Parkham Hostel. *South Molton Rural District Council Miscellaneous Committee Minutes R2407A/C28*, 29 July 1944, also *Town Clerk’s Correspondence 3058add1&2/14*, letter dated 7 November 1940 to DCC strongly objecting to proposal of Co-ordinating Billeting Officer for the Region

generally only the briefest details were recorded. Some local authorities such as Teignmouth, Exmouth and Budleigh Salterton UDC either mentioned nothing or scant detail about evacuation planning and reception until they recorded letters of thanks from evacuated headteachers and evacuating areas.⁶⁶ Other entries recorded congratulations to members of staff and volunteers for excellent reception and billeting arrangements but no further details.⁶⁷ References to evacuation in extant Parish records are few although a small number mention appointing volunteers to undertake the housing survey in January-February 1939.⁶⁸ However, from the available records of ten Parish Councils, it appears that they were generally contacted in the months leading to war by the appropriate District Council (Appendix 8).

As mentioned above, Padley and Cole claimed that most county councils played little or no part in making reception plans.⁶⁹ Titmuss considered that the pre-war conferences arranged by county councils were chiefly preoccupied with transport arrangements and ‘did not stimulate much discussion on welfare. The MH representatives who attended and addressed these conferences aroused little interest in the human side of the reception plans’.⁷⁰ Although undoubtedly wishing for higher stakes, DCC fulfilled its remit prior to the first evacuation wave even before the issue of MH Circular 1800 suggesting the co-ordinating role of county councils.⁷¹ A Conference was held

⁶⁶ *Teignmouth Urban District Council Minutes R2360A/(5/5)C33*, 5 September and 3 October 1939. *Budleigh Salterton Urban District Council Minutes R7/3/C14*, 1 September 1939. *Exmouth Urban District Council Committee Minutes R7/4/C35*, 5 September 1939. See also *Newton Abbot Urban District Council Minutes R2361A/(5/4)C42*, 18 September 1939, *Honiton Rural District Council Minutes R7/9/C12*, 23 September 1939, *Okehampton Town Council Minutes R3/1/15*, 29 September 1939. *Honiton Rural District Council Minutes R7/9/C12*, September 1939. *Tiverton Rural District Council Minutes R4/4addC1*, 24 October 1939.

⁶⁷ Examples include *Torbay Council Committee Minutes R4582A/TC68*, 5 September 1939, *St Thomas Rural District Council Minutes R7/10/C20*, 6 September 1939, *Exmouth Urban District Council Minutes R7/4/C35*, 5 September 1939

⁶⁸ *Rattery 5574A/PX3*, *South Brent 4299Aadd2/PX5*, *Tedburn St Mary 5237A/PX2*, *Alverdiscott B448/2*, *Instow 3964add4/1/2*, *Heanton Punchardon 2854A/PX1*, *Marwood B8A/1/3*, *Swimbridge B131/1/2*, *Lankey B532/2*, *Moretonhampstead 6014A/PX1*

⁶⁹ Padley and Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, pp. 79-80. See also letter from a local government officer in *The Times Educational Supplement* dated 4 January 1941, summarising the difficulties inherent in the evacuation scheme so far as reception areas were concerned.

⁷⁰ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.110

⁷¹ *Ministry of Health Circular 1800*, 1 May 1939

on 10 March in Exeter and representatives from local authorities were addressed by the Minister of Health on the evacuation of the civil population and Emergency Hospital arrangements.⁷² Following this, a circular letter dated 28 April was sent from DCC to all local councils enclosing a memorandum which summarised the arrangements made and proposals contemplated for evacuation to Devon. These plans were discussed at a further DCC Conference on 4 May following the completion of detailed national train time-tables. The list of those present at the meeting other than local authority representatives was comprehensive and included the General Inspector of the MH, the Regional Officer of the A.R.P. Department of the Home Office, the Managing Director of the London Transport Board, the Evacuation Officer for London, the Traffic Commissioner for the Western Area, the Divisional Superintendent of Great Western Railways, the Chief Constable of Devon, the Area Officer of the Unemployment Assistance Board, the Devon Education Secretary, the CMO, the Public Assistance Officer, the County A.R.P. Precautions Officer, representatives of Women's Organisations for National Service and representatives of the City Councils of Exeter and Plymouth. Details had been formulated to de-train school parties travelling on the Great Western line to Devon at Tiverton, South Molton, Barnstaple, Plymouth, Kingsbridge, Torquay, Paignton, Totnes, Newton Abbot and Teignmouth. Those travelling on the Southern Railway line were to be detrained at Sidmouth Junction, Seaton Junction, Crediton, Exeter, Bideford, Bude (for Holsworthy and Broadwoodwidge), Okehampton and Tavistock.⁷³ Buses, trains and cars would then take the parties to their destinations.

Following the Conference, Exeter's Town Clerk wrote a disgruntled letter to J.C. Wrigley, Secretary to the MH. He complained that it was quite evident the Railway Companies had not complied with paragraph 4 of the procedure agreed at the Provincial Evacuation Meeting on 25 April, whereby detraining stations were supposed to be agreed with representatives of the County

⁷² *Torrington Rural District Council Minutes, R2460A/(1/8)C9*, 4 February 1939

⁷³ *3248A/16/14(a) DCC Memorandum*, dated 28 April 1939, for consideration at Conference on 4 May.

Councils, pointing out that ‘ some of those chosen were the most inconvenient possible’.⁷⁴

However, without further detail it is difficult to appreciate the particular problem for Exeter since trains were scheduled to arrive in the City. It is therefore probable that the Town Clerk was referring to other parts of the County. In addition to DCC conferences, local area meetings also took place, for example Dartmouth BC sent representatives to a conference held in Kingsbridge on 16 May, Newton Abbot RDC and UDC met in June to discuss de-training and reception arrangements with the local WVS, and North Devon district councils attended a conference at Bideford on 29 June.⁷⁵

Chapter 5 discusses the difficulties faced by LEAs regarding the formulation of detailed educational plans because the provenance, precise numbers and destinations of pupils were unknown and local councils in charge of billeting were often disinclined to co-operate. Locally, only one School Log Book⁷⁶ recorded a visit by an official to discuss the evacuation scheme.⁷⁷ Clearly Brixham UDC, whose plans were complete, was unsure in June about whether its own Evacuation Committee was responsible for making arrangements for school accommodation or whether DCEC was making plans for the whole County.⁷⁸ During June, the MH advised local authorities that billeting books for unaccompanied children and warrant cards for billeting officers were to be forwarded shortly, a circular was drafted by the Government with helpful information for billetors, the MH Regional Office (Bristol) asked local councils for particulars of their formulated schemes, and instructed that billeting officers should by now definitely be appointed by name and informed of their duties.

⁷⁴ *Town Clerk's Papers, City of Exeter, A.R.P. Evacuation, Group N, Box II*

⁷⁵ *Borough of Clifton Dartmouth Hardness Borough Council Minutes and Committee Reports R9/1/C30, Newton Abbot Rural District Council Minutes, R2365A/(5/6)C30, Bideford Rural District Council Minutes, R2414A(1-5)C10, 4 July, 1939, p.65, Northam Urban District Council Minutes, 3978add3/2/1-15, 2/11*

⁷⁶ *Alverdiscott Log Book 622C/EFL3, 17 May 1939*

⁷⁷ Mrs Lampard-Vachell visited the school on 17 May. She was co-opted as a member of Torrington RDC Evacuation Sub-Committee in June 1939 and was described as ‘an important link between the WVS and the RDC’. *Torrington Rural District Council R2460A/(1/8)C9, 24 June 1939*. Her husband was a DCEC official.

⁷⁸ *Brixham Urban District Council Minutes R4582A/BC23, 12 June 1939*

DCEC sent a circular letter to local authorities with suggestions for carrying on the education of both native and incoming children. Details of road transport arrangements were communicated by the Traffic Commissioner (Western Area) in July and Circular Letters from the MH dated 22 and 25 August included a copy of local war instructions regarding evacuation and the long awaited authorisation to incur such reasonable expenditure as necessary for the reception of evacuees.⁷⁹ As a result of its rehearsal, the LCC decided that leaders of school parties should be ready to give information to officials in reception areas about children who were likely to prove 'difficult', e.g. bedwetters, problems with personal hygiene, nervous disposition.⁸⁰

On 25 August 1939, DCC forewarned the Town Clerk of Dawlish by telephone that the Government Evacuation Scheme would be activated on 1 September.⁸¹ Okehampton Town Council received a telegram dated 31 August from DCC - 'Most immediate Evacuation commences Friday 1 September. Take Action'.⁸² Germany invaded Poland on 1 September and the initial and largest wave of official evacuation commenced. The possibility that many who had registered for evacuation would change their mind was not realistically foreseen and caused much confusion in reception areas. As numbers were considerably fewer than expected, the carefully planned train timetables became irrelevant and well-ordered school parties arriving at main line stations were pushed onto the first available train. Parties and siblings became split in the ensuing confusion to get the trains out as quickly as possible. Although the main evacuation took place between 1-4 September, parties of schoolchildren were still arriving in Devon up to several weeks later. Approximately 827,000 unaccompanied children (393,700 from the London and Metropolitan

⁷⁹ *Crediton Urban District Council Minute Book, R4/2/C/58*

⁸⁰ *Town Clerk's Papers, Exeter City Council, Group N, A.R.P. Evacuation Box 10/100*, letter from LCC to reception authorities dated 23 August 1939.

⁸¹ *Dawlish Urban District Council Minutes R2369A/(5/3)C24*, 25 August 1939

⁸² *Okehampton File 3248A/16/1-2*

areas),⁸³ 525,500 mothers and children (257,000 from London and Metropolitan area) and 102,000 teachers and helpers were evacuated in the first wave from evacuation areas in England, Wales and Scotland to a multitude of British reception areas.⁸⁴ The total movement of private evacuees appeared to range between 1,500,000 and 2,000,000.⁸⁵

Conclusion

Dent (1944) claimed that ‘preparatory arrangements for evacuation (except those for transport) were naïve, unimaginative and muddled’.⁸⁶ With hindsight there are many criticisms that can be levelled against the first Government Evacuation Scheme. Lack of both Treasury underpinning and detailed planning for the reception and welfare of evacuees, bureaucracy which largely failed to appreciate the human factor, the expectation that district councils would cope with hundreds and sometimes several thousand evacuees without either dynamic central or local government leadership, the multitude of vague ‘permissive’ circulars and memoranda which conveniently left ‘as wide a margin of discretion as possible to Local Authorities within the framework of the scheme’,⁸⁷ reliance on the successful liaison between evacuating and reception authorities and total dependence on the goodwill and initiative of individual local authorities, educational staff, voluntary agencies and householders. The Borough Treasurer of Barnstaple MB disparagingly described MH Circular 2592 (Furniture for the Homeless) ‘as ambiguous as most of its predecessors’,⁸⁸ and Padley and

⁸³ Among evacuating authorities, there was one major exception to the general rule of giving control to the smallest territorial unit. The LCC rather than the metropolitan boroughs was made responsible for evacuating person from its area and by agreement between the councils eleven neighbouring boroughs (Acton, Barking, East Ham, Edmonton, Hornsey, Ilford, Leyton, Tottenham, Walthamstow, West Ham and Willesden) not normally in the LCC area were brought into this special scheme. The LCC was thus put in charge of evacuation for the whole of the London evacuation area. Padley and Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p. 22

⁸⁴ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy, Appendix 9*, p. 562.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p. 546

⁸⁶ H.C. Dent, *Education in Transition* (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd. 1944), p.17

⁸⁷ *Okehampton File 3248A/16/2, Ministry of Health Circular 1871*, dated 12 September 1939. See also *Ministry of Health Circular 1800 together with Memo Ev4*, dated 1 May 1939

⁸⁸ *Barnstaple Municipal Borough 2654add4/Box13*, letter dated 16 March 1942 from Borough Treasurer of Barnstaple MB to Town Clerk

Cole accused the Government of ‘using the decentralized local government system, not as a means of making allowances for local needs and resources, but rather as a method of shirking its own responsibility’.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, these criticisms must be weighed against the inherent problems of planning a unique, largely confidential voluntary evacuation for hypothetical conditions which relied on public co-operation and had meagre Treasury support. Locally, data generally suggests that councils co-operated with Government and DCC guidance and put reception plans in place, some of which were very comprehensive particularly in areas where larger numbers were expected. However, for most authorities in Devon, their proficiency and planning were only partially tested or not tested at all until mid 1940.

⁸⁹ R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p.36

CHAPTER THREE

From reception to return 1939-1945

Properly used – and in spite of difficulties – the opportunities now afforded for new human contacts – and for human understanding and appreciation can be a great instrument for good.¹

To avoid repetition and overlap, this Chapter will deal exclusively with officially evacuated unaccompanied schoolchildren. Despite the evident problem of length, the decision was made to review the process of reception, billeting, welfare provision and the financial recovery thereof from 1939 to 1945 altogether in one chapter. As always, the figures given are approximations since evacuee numbers were notoriously difficult to estimate and it is frequently unclear from the sources whether figures included secondary school and/or unofficially evacuated pupils.

By its very nature, even a pre-planned mass evacuation from real or perceived danger will engender a degree of confusion which inevitably provokes criticism in its aftermath. Evacuation Plan II² was implemented on 1 September 1939. Its prime concern was to remove priority class³ evacuees immediately from anticipated danger and its success as a vast logistical exercise was evident.⁴ If enemy bombing of cities had commenced immediately ‘most of the defects of the evacuation scheme would have seemed unimportant’,⁵ and the lives of many children would have been saved.⁶

¹ Manuscript written by Acton teacher ED134/270

² Plan II superseded Plan I in March 1939

³ Children in school parties, Mothers with children under 5, both official and unofficial, expectant mothers and blind adults

⁴ For example, in the London Metropolitan Area there were 1,589 assembly points which then dispersed to one of 168 entraining stations. R. Samways, ed. *We think you ought to go* (City of London, London Metropolitan Archives 1995) p.10. Also see R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp. 107-8.

⁵ A. Calder, *The People's War* (Jonathan Cape 1969) p.39.

⁶ M. Parsons, *I'll Take That One* (Beckett Karlson Ltd. 1998) Appendix 2, p.256 – viewpoint of two evacuated teachers who believed that despite the criticism, evacuation planning was ‘a job well done’.

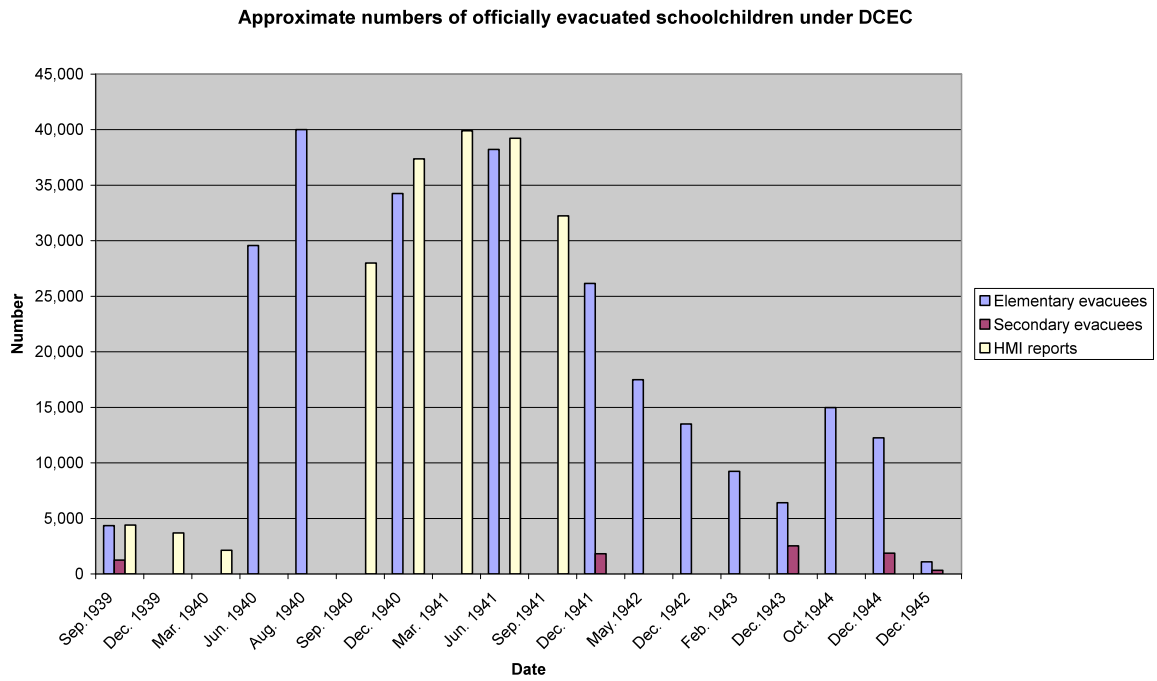
However, no bombs fell and as local authorities struggled with a plethora of problems the MH was heavily criticised for its lack of forethought and nebulous plans ‘for life in the reception areas’.⁷ By contrast, Devon’s first experience of reception was considered very successful. Numbers of official evacuees were much smaller than expected, resulting in a gradual introduction to evacuation in contrast to the fraught, steep learning curve experienced by many reception areas (see Padley and Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p.50). Consequently the initial evacuation wave was not perceived in the same negative terms. Nevertheless, in line with the national picture, DCC was clearly irritated at the lack of consideration given to educational needs in the process of billeting and actively sought solutions, suggesting to the Ministry that the County Council should become both the ‘controlling’ and ‘co-ordinating’ authority since the billeting authorities were unqualified to deal with educational considerations.⁸ However, the Ministry declined to backtrack (refer to Chapter 5).

During 1940-1941, officials in areas already billeting large numbers of evacuees had to work much harder to secure additional voluntary billets. Extensive local evidence indicates a marked tendency amongst well-to-do households to avoid billeting and compulsory billeting was reluctantly introduced in many areas, although actual prosecutions were relatively infrequent. The task of billeting officer was demanding, especially in the larger towns, and the calibre of officer varied. Voluntary assistance for all aspects of evacuation was crucial to the successful outcome of the scheme. Against a backdrop of apparent increasing shortage of billets, evacuee numbers fortuitously reduced during 1942-1943 but rose again briefly in mid 1944. Most evacuees had left the County by mid 1945. Despite acute billeting difficulties at peak periods of evacuation in overcrowded areas the generosity of householders far outweighed the selfishness of a minority. The reception and provision for evacuated children in Devon was successful and accomplished with little overt complaint.

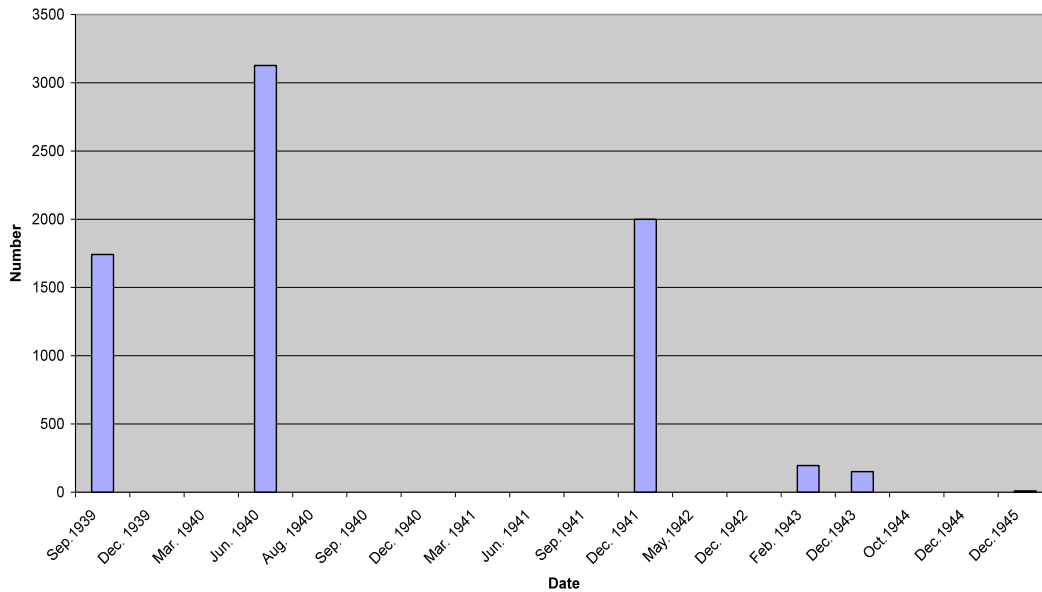
⁷ R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey* (Routledge & Sons Ltd. 1940) p.36

⁸ *ED 134/30, G9E/3*, Memorandum by Armfelt dated 18 December 1939

Data for the following graphs, illustrating numbers of officially evacuated schoolchildren under DCEC and Exeter City administration, has been taken from the text of this Chapter and the sources are therefore referenced in the footnotes. The white columns in the first graph represent figures found in HMI Report *ED 134/39- G9E/941*, which do not list elementary and secondary schoolchildren separately.



Approximate numbers of officially evacuated schoolchildren in Exeter City



Reception

Local councils, however small, were responsible for all aspects of billeting and throughout the war were obliged to digest large quantities of sometimes nebulous⁹ government circulars and memoranda which advised, instructed, updated, clarified and amended.¹⁰ Furthermore, quantities of material from Regional Offices, evacuation authorities and other bodies such as county councils and LEAs, had to be assimilated and in theory acted upon.¹¹ For local councils to be asked to shoulder a task of such enormity¹² was unprecedented in the history of local government and some commentators believed initially that the Government was shirking its own responsibility'.¹³ However, Devon's local councils rose to the challenge, asserted their independence, celebrated their successes, tested and developed latent skills and undoubtedly benefited enormously from the evacuation experience.

⁹ For example, see comment about unclear directions given by Government regarding financial recuperation in *Exmouth Urban District Council Minutes R7/4/C37*, 22 October 1941

¹⁰ During the first 9 months of war, approximately 137 Government circulars and memoranda were issued

¹¹ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 169

¹² See R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.153 for some of the tasks involved in the reception of evacuees

¹³ R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p.36

The majority of schoolchildren (830,000¹⁴) were evacuated in school parties between 1-4 September.¹⁵ Other children, whose parents changed their minds, followed during the next several months. Back in April, Devon had expected to receive up to 57,536 officially evacuated unaccompanied schoolchildren from London and the surrounding areas,¹⁶ of which 14,471 plus 3,150 for Exeter would arrive during the first four days of emergency.¹⁷ By July the MH stated that Devon would only be allocated 17,600 evacuees due to its remoteness¹⁸ but far fewer arrived. Largely concentrated in the east and south,¹⁹ the greatest numbers went to Exmouth UD (779) Torquay BC (between 668 and 796²⁰), St Thomas RD (618) and Honiton RD (502).²¹ In total there were somewhere between 4,350 and 5,500 elementary schoolchildren from the LCC and Acton area.²² Together with privately evacuated schoolchildren, the reception of these evacuees involved roughly one quarter of Devon's schools.²³ Exeter expected about 8,000 but only 1,742²⁴ had arrived

¹⁴ *MH101/14 Ministry of Health War Diary Part B*

¹⁵ Evacuatable areas in September 1939: London, West and East Ham; Essex Boroughs of Walthamstow, Leyton, Ilford, Barking; Middlesex Boroughs of Tottenham, Hornsey, Willesden, Acton, Edmonton; Medway towns of Chatham, Gillingham and Rochester; Portsmouth, Gosport, Southampton, Birmingham, Smethwick, Liverpool, Bootle, Birkenhead, Wallasey, Manchester, Salford, Sheffield, Leeds, Bradford, Hull, Newcastle, Gateshead, Edinburgh, Rosyth, Glasgow, Clydebank, Dundee.

¹⁶ The County was scheduled to receive evacuees from London, East and West Ham, Middlesex, Acton, Edmonton, Hornsey, Tottenham, Willesden, Barking, Ilford, Leyton and Walthamstow. The LCC co-ordinated schemes for the metropolitan area and for 11 contiguous boroughs and district councils in adjacent counties. The evacuatable parts of Great London were termed the Metropolitan Evacuatable Area. The LCC's 12 education divisional officers acted as dispersal officers. – Samways, R. ed. *We think you ought to go*, pp. 5 & 8

¹⁷ *DCC Minutes 148/15*, 14 March 1940. Also 3248A/16/14(a) *DCC Memorandum*, dated 28 April 1939

¹⁸ *Western Times*, 7 July 1939

¹⁹ List of Local Authorities affected by Government Evacuation Scheme in September 1939 – *Ref ED134/30*- Axminster UDC and RDC, Ashburton UDC, Budleigh Salterton UDC, Crediton UDC and RDC, Dawlish UDC, Dartmouth BC, Exmouth UDC, Honiton BC and RDC, Kingsbridge UDC, Okehampton BC and RDC, Ottery St Mary UDC, Newton Abbot RDC, Plympton St Mary RDC, Seaton UDC, St Thomas RDC, Sidmouth UDC, South Molton BC and RDC, Teignmouth UDC, Tiverton BC and RDC, Torrington BC and RDC, Torquay BC, Totnes BC and RDC

²⁰ *Torbay Municipal Borough Minute Book R4582A/TC69*, 16 January 1940, p. 415

²¹ *DCC Minutes 148/15*, 14 March 1940

²² 2,800 elementary LCC schoolchildren and 1,550 from Acton, *DCC Evacuation Box, Elementary Education Financial Adjustment 1939-1940*. Another estimate gave the figure as approximately 5,500 (3,564 LCC and 1,940 Acton) *DCC148/14, Report of DCEC*, 14 December 1939. HMI Inspector, Arnold Platts, recorded that 3,624 LCC and 1,563 Acton schoolchildren arrived during between 1- 4 September 1939. *ED134/39, G9E/941*

²³ *Express & Echo*, 22 September 1939

²⁴ *Exeter City Council Minutes, ECA1/60*. The figure of 804 was given in *Exeter City Council, Town Clerk's Papers, ARP Evac, Box 10/100, Group N*

by the end of September. Local reception plans were independently decided and therefore varied (Chapter 2) although LEA and Board officials were apparently present to meet every train except those which arrived unexpectedly.²⁵

The first evacuation wave to Devon was characterised by self-congratulation that things had gone so well,²⁶ tinged with disappointment in some areas that the expected evacuees had not materialised and that careful planning had only partially been tested.²⁷ During the war ‘jingoistic journalism’ was commonplace²⁸ and local newspapers were full of acclamatory reports about happy evacuees, affectionate foster parents and excellent local organisation,²⁹ an overall view backed up in official reports³⁰ and detailed in Appendix 9. Only one minor criticism was made about arrangements in Seaton UDC and Axminster RDC during the first day of reception when large numbers of unexpected mothers and children were amongst the 420 evacuees. The Inspector felt there was a certain amount of confusion, partly ‘because too many people were giving orders’ although the ‘greatest possible consideration’ was given and the organisation improved the following day.³¹ Since the Government agenda was to urge priority classes to remain in less dangerous reception areas the MOI, under the watchful eye of the MH, therefore encouraged the dissemination of positive propaganda about evacuation from both local authorities and press.³² Added to this, Devon’s local authorities were clearly keen to record their organisational skills and similarly local

²⁵ *Devon County Council Committee Minutes DCC148/14, Report of Education Committee*, 21 September 1939. Also see *ED 134/30*, Notes by local HMI inspectors for Ministry of Health

²⁶ Extant data from 5 local authorities record both their great satisfaction that the reception went so well and letters of appreciation. *Okehampton Town Council Minutes R3/1/15*, 29 September 1939, *St Thomas Rural District Council Minutes R7/10/C20*, 6 September 1939, *Newton Abbot Rural District Council Minutes R2365A/(5/6)C30*, *Paignton Urban District Council Minutes R4582A/PC9*, 15 April 1940 – letter from St Mary’s RC School, *Dawlish Urban District Council R2369A/(5/3)C24*, April 1940, Report of councillor’s visit to Acton

²⁷ *Western Times*, 8 September 1939 and *Express & Echo*, 22 November 1939. See also *Crediton Rural District Council Minutes R4/3addC57*, 25 September 1939

²⁸ Martin Parsons warned of the need to look beyond the jingoistic journalism in *I’ll Take That One*, p.16

²⁹ Examples include *Express & Echo*, 2 September 1939, *Western Times*, 8 September 1939 and *North Devon Journal*, 7 September 1939

³⁰ *ED 134/30*

³¹ HMI Inspector’s Report on arrival of evacuees to Seaton UD and Axminster RD, *ED134/270*

³² *MH 78/230*. Refer also to commentary on the wartime press in the Introduction pp.15-17

newspapers were happy to broadcast local pride in Devon's achievements. Florid plaudits from a number of other sources praising Devon's generosity of spirit, its warmth and efficiency of welcome, were also highlighted by the press. These included comments by the Regional Representative of the MOI (Southwest),³³ the LCC Inspector,³⁴ a member of the United Press Staff,³⁵ and a number of evacuated LCC and Acton teachers.³⁶

Following their arrival the children were usually taken to village or church halls, schools and sometimes market places whilst they were given refreshment and sorted. Iris Charos (10) said the use of cattle pens in Holsworthy for gathering the children 'didn't bother us one bit...it was so sensible to hold us together in safety'. However, James Roffey³⁷ felt a similar experience in Pulborough was 'humiliating',³⁸ illustrating how emotions varied in similar circumstances according to the age, sex, personality and background of the child. Ideally each child would have been carefully selected to match particular foster parents although this was an unrealistic and unworkable expectation in the circumstances. The evacuees, who frequently arrived late in the afternoon, were dispersed to their billets as quickly as possible but this took time and seemed an eternity to bewildered, exhausted and nervous children. Many felt that they had to wait a long time before being chosen or claimed, and for some ex-evacuees this memory of believing that they were almost the last unwanted child left, whether real or imagined, has remained.

There must have been a degree of irritation amongst officials at the last minute changes in numbers, times of arrival and unexpected configuration of some evacuee parties. Nationally less than 70% of

³³ *Letter from Regional Representative*, dated 6 December 1939, *Okehampton File 3248A/16/7*

³⁴ *Western Times*, 13 October 1939

³⁵ Article in the *Wintertown Times - Folder on Wartime*, Westcountry Studies Library

³⁶ *Express & Echo*, 9 and 27 September, 9 October and 6 November 1939. Also *ED134/270*

³⁷ Editor of *The Evacuee*

³⁸ *The Evacuee*, November 2002

LCC schoolchildren registered for evacuation³⁹ and more than half the mothers and children (unaccompanied and accompanied) for whom transport had been arranged failed to turn up.⁴⁰ Fewer numbers than anticipated led to last minute cancellation of trains and many reception officials were left with nothing to do, for example in Barnstaple where 1,200 children due to arrive on 4 September failed to materialise.⁴¹ However, only one example of recorded local authority irritation has been found. The Chairman of Crediton RDC, Sir J. Shelley, described the first evacuation wave as ‘a complete and absolute wash-out’, and complained about failure to notify officials of numbers and times of arrival.⁴² The area had been advised by the MH to expect 330 evacuees per day for 3 days but in the event only 157 arrived.⁴³ Two other complaints were found relating to public irritation. There was apparently some annoyance amongst a large crowd waiting outside the Jubilee Hall in Chagford until 11 p.m. on Saturday, 2 September when no evacuees arrived,⁴⁴ and villagers in Combe Martin complained they had lost hundreds of pounds by refusing paying guests and keeping their accommodation in reserve for evacuees (refer to Chapter 6 for discussion of rent charges for private evacuees).⁴⁵ By contrast, Torbay planned for approximately 3,800 children but only 796 children arrived. No recorded complaints were found despite the fact that reserve school supplies had been ordered.⁴⁶ The feeling of relief was doubtless stronger than the sense of irritation.

It is noteworthy that no horror stories featured in Devon’s newspapers. Life appeared to continue as usual and by the end of September 1939 the word ‘evacuee’ was barely mentioned by the local

³⁹ *Corporation of London Archives, Evacuation Information Leaflet No 10*

⁴⁰ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.107

⁴¹ *Barnstaple Municipal Borough 2654A/Box 12* – Letter of apology from Ministry of Health, dated 7 September 1939. Also *The Western Times*, 1 & 8 September 1939

⁴² *Western Times*, 20 October 1939

⁴³ *Crediton Urban District Council Minute Book R4/2/C/58, Circular letter from Ministry of Health*, dated 20 April 1939. Figures given on 25 September 1939

⁴⁴ *The Western Times*, 8 September 1939

⁴⁵ G. Wasley, *Devon at War 1939-1945* (Devon Books 1994) p.30

⁴⁶ *Torbay Municipal Borough Minutes R4582A/TC68*, 22 June, p.1686. *R4582A/TC69*, 16 January 1940, p. 415

press. The first evacuation wave to Devon was successful from the local councils' perspective and even nationally 'as things... turned out, it is more remarkable that this violent social experiment did succeed so well, that in so many cases the difficulties have been overcome'.⁴⁷ However, Devon's Secretary of Education was clearly upset that attempts by DCEC to encourage billeting co-operation from local councils appeared not to have been heeded and the distribution of children 'from an educational point of view was completely haphazard'.⁴⁸

Plan IV⁴⁹ was announced on 15 February 1940 (MH Memo Ev8). Restricted to unaccompanied schoolchildren, it was due to become operational when 'air raids develop on a scale involving serious and continuing perils to the civilian population'. However, the increased threat of invasion by June led to the evacuation process being started earlier. The Government hoped to move 670,000 children (267,000 from London),⁵⁰ and the Minister of Health broadcast an appeal to prospective householders in reception areas. Only the Great Western and Western divisions of the Southern railway line were available because other lines were needed for military operations⁵¹ and the Westcountry was therefore the obvious destination despite the feeling following the collapse of Belgium and France that Devon was no longer a 'safe' area.⁵² Described as 'not very bold or inspiring',⁵³ Percival Sharp,⁵⁴ Editor of *Education*, reviewed many letters of concern about the scheme. The main worries were lack of central co-ordination between the MH and the Board, the

⁴⁷ R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p.75

⁴⁸ ED 134/30, Memorandum by Armfelt dated 18 December 1939

⁴⁹ Plan III was not operated. Plan IV was to operate in three stages – IVa provided for children (230,000) whose parents evacuated them under Plan IV; Plans VIb and VIc provided respectively for a further 275,000 and 360,000 children who it was estimated might have to be evacuated if heavy air-raids began – *MH101/14 Ministry of Health War Diary Part B*

⁵⁰ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 174

⁵¹ *Ibid.* p.243

⁵² ED134/39, G9E/941, Report by HMI, Arnold Platts, dated 1 April 1944

⁵³ R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p.269

⁵⁴ Percival Sharp, Secretary of the Association of Education Committees 1935-44 was described by Gosden (*Education in the Second World War*, p. 441) as a very forceful personality who took an active part in the politics of education during the war and played an influential role in the setting up of the Burnham Committee

complete dependence on voluntary arrangements and the reliance on individual householders.⁵⁵ Devon expected to receive 37,700 children plus 3,000 for Exeter⁵⁶ and, although preliminary steps were taken in February to ensure that children would be sent to districts where sufficient school accommodation was available,⁵⁷ some billeting authorities and school managers protested against the number of children expected.⁵⁸ Armfelt clearly believed the MH's allocations made no educational sense and contacted the LCC Education Officer in an effort to resolve the problem (refer to Chapter 5).⁵⁹ In April, the LCC⁶⁰ warned local reception authorities that although only 9.5% of eligible schoolchildren had registered, in the event of Plan IV becoming operational, many more would assemble for evacuation.⁶¹ The response from provincial centres was even lower,⁶² and Padley and Cole partly blamed 'the irresponsible campaign conducted by certain newspapers against any and every form of evacuation'.⁶³ Other reasons included the development of a 'wait and see' mentality and previous unsatisfactory experiences in reception areas.⁶⁴

The results of a national 9 million leaflet Spring campaign to canvass potential householders were described as 'farcical'.⁶⁵ Only 1 householder in 50 appeared prepared to help and many of these already had evacuees.⁶⁶ The continuing Phoney War was undoubtedly a major factor for this apathy but exaggerated press reports and negative gossip about evacuees also fuelled a disinclination to

⁵⁵ *Education*, Volume LXXV, 1 March 1940, p.177

⁵⁶ *Devon County Council Minutes DCC148/15*, 14 March 1940

⁵⁷ *Devon County Education Committee Minutes DCC150/4/1/38*, p.2, 22 February 1940

⁵⁸ *Devon County Education Committee Minutes DCC150/4/1/38*, p.10, 29 February 1940

⁵⁹ *ED 134/30* –Letter from E.M. Rich, LCC Education Officer to Sir Maurice Holmes, Board of Education, dated 26 February 1940

⁶⁰ The Metropolitan Evacuating Area now included London CC, Acton, Barking, Barnes, Bexley, Brentford and Chiswick, Chatham, Chingford, Crayford, Croydon, Dagenham, Dartford, Ealing, East Ham, Edmonton, Enfield, Erith, Gillingham, Gravesend, Hornechurch, Hornsey, Ilford, Leyton, Merton and Morden, Mitcham, Northfleet, Rochester, Sheerness, Swanscombe, Thurrock, Tottenham, Waltham Holy Cross, Walthamstow, Wanstead and Woodford, West Ham, Willesden, Wimbledon and Wood Green.

⁶¹ *Barnstaple Municipal Borough Council 2654add4/Box13*, letter dated 24 April 1940

⁶² P.H.J.H. Gosden, *Education in the Second World War* (Methuen & Co. Ltd. 1976) p.36

⁶³ R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p.272

⁶⁴ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.176

⁶⁵ R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p. 272

⁶⁶ R. Titmuss, *Problems in Social Policy*, p. 175

become involved in the evacuation process. Devon, remote and even further removed from the reality of war, phoney or otherwise, also had a disappointing and apparent apathetic response to the campaign and several local authorities recorded their poor results: Bideford RDC experienced problems when it updated the list of those willing to billet,⁶⁷ Brixham UDC sent out 2,600 forms but by March only 116 replies had been received,⁶⁸ Budleigh Salterton UDC only received 50 replies from 1,100 forms, 37 of which were already billetors,⁶⁹ Exeter recorded that fewer than 1,000 from a possible 18,000 householders responded and about 50% of those who had replied had ‘satisfactory’ reasons why they could not billet,⁷⁰ South Molton RD recorded a ‘very poor’ response with only 350 offers when 2,000 billets were needed⁷¹ and Totnes RDC sent out 4,038 forms but only 191 were returned.⁷²

Lack of adequate medical checks in many areas during the first evacuation had helped to fuel national perceptions that all evacuees were either bedwetters, verminous or covered in skin diseases. The new plan requested medical checks in evacuation areas before departure and attendance of medical and/or nursing staff on arrival.⁷³ To recruit as many children as possible, the MOI produced two documentary propaganda films in 1940. One, entitled *Westward Ho!*, was targeted at parents in evacuation areas and used images of happy children arriving in Devon where they would be ‘both safe and happy in the hands of the government’s evacuation programme’. Erhardt believed the viewer was ‘left with the sense that the parents were not doing their personal and patriotic duty if they did not conform with the government’s request to send the children on

⁶⁷ *Bideford Rural District Council Minutes R2414A(1-5)C10*, April 1940

⁶⁸ *Brixham Urban District Council Minutes R4582A/BC24*, 12 March 1940

⁶⁹ *Budleigh Salterton Urban District Council Minutes R7/3/C14*, April 1940

⁷⁰ *The Western Morning News*, 11 April 1940

⁷¹ *South Molton Rural District Council Minutes R2407A/(2/6)C12*, April and May 1940

⁷² *Totnes Rural District Council R9/8/37*, 15 March 1940

⁷³ *Dawlish Urban District Council Committee Reports R2369A/(5/3)C82*, 21 February 1940

their extended “country holiday”.⁷⁴ This was obviously the desired effect but did not necessarily succeed in tight knit communities with other considerations to weigh up, even once the bombing commenced.

Rapidly unfolding events in Europe which threatened imminent invasion altered the indifferent public attitude engendered by the phoney war. Evacuation Plan IV became a reality and between 13-18 June 1940, 103,000 schoolchildren left London and Thames-side areas plus those within a 10 mile zone extending round the coasts of Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Kent and Sussex (approximately 25,000).⁷⁵ Altogether between 213,000 to 230,000 children were evacuated nationally from urban areas of danger between May and August.⁷⁶ From its gentle introduction in 1939 Devon now became the primary reception area for LCC schoolchildren.⁷⁷ On 13 June, 30 trains passed through Exeter⁷⁸ and by 18 June, 28,396 unaccompanied children were billeted with 1,178 in hostels.⁷⁹ Once again, local newspapers reported that it was ‘hard to find a downcast evacuee’,⁸⁰ and that several thousand children were billeted in Mid-Devon with ‘scarcely a hitch’. A survey carried out in St Thomas RD showed that evacuees were adapting themselves quickly. Mr Ritchie, accompanying a re-evacuated party from Gravesend declared ‘I would not have believed it possible to find a body of citizens so willing to do everything possible’.⁸¹ Exeter responded generously by billeting 2,540 evacuees without a single compulsory order, although the reaction in some districts

⁷⁴ E. F. Erhardt, III, ‘The Ministry of Information’s Films Division’, *Children in War*, November 2004, Volume 1, No. 2, p. 78

⁷⁵ R. Samways ed., *We think you ought to go*, p.11. This included 61,000 from the County of London, which represented 85% of those registered.

⁷⁶ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 243. The figure of 230,000 is given in *Ministry of Health War Diary Part B, MH101/14*

⁷⁷ *The Times Educational Supplement*, 22 June 1940, stated that 120,000 LCC schoolchildren were sent to 11 reception areas – Berks 7,000, Bucks 1,500, Cornwall 25,000, Devon 38,000, Dorset 1,000, Gloucestershire 1,000, Oxfordshire 7,000, Somerset 16,000, Wiltshire 5,500, Glamorgan 10,000, Monmouth 9,500

⁷⁸ *Western Morning News*, 14 June 1940. HMI, Arnold Platts, recorded that by 15 June, 55 trains had arrived at 21 detraining centres with 34,500 children, *ED134/38, G9E/941*

⁷⁹ *Devon County Council Minutes DCC148/15*, 26 September 1940

⁸⁰ *Express & Echo*, 14 and 17 June, 1940

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 19 June 1940

was apparently ‘profoundly disappointing’.⁸² The response of householders in Barnstaple MB was described as ‘magnificent’ with a last minute rush of volunteers and in some places ‘householders ...fighting for the children’.⁸³ There appeared to be no particular pattern associated with the varied responses from districts. The population of Barnstaple MB had risen from 14,530 in mid 1939 to 22,000,⁸⁴ therefore it cannot be argued that this district had few evacuees, thus improving the likelihood of local generosity, or that there was plenty of spare accommodation. By early July, DCC Emergency Committee considered reports from certain reception authorities which felt they were already saturated. Representations were made to the MH stressing that coastal districts in Devon were ‘now no more free from the visits of enemy aircraft than the areas from which evacuees have come and are still coming’,⁸⁵ and Sir Geoffrey Peto, Regional Commissioner, visited almost immediately to look at the possibility of reducing future numbers.⁸⁶ However, evacuees continued to arrive and by the beginning of August there were 32,348 officially evacuated unaccompanied children billeted in households throughout Devon (excluding Exeter) with 558 in hostels.⁸⁷ By the end of the month the number had grown to 40,000 (excluding Exeter).⁸⁸ This large number of billets, generally voluntarily offered, supports the argument that Devon householders were generous in their response.

Plan V (Trickle Scheme) developed to take further parties of schoolchildren away from the Blitz and began to operate on 6 July 1940.⁸⁹ Following bouts of heavy bombing, which began in September, the numbers increased dramatically with evacuation taking place 2-3 days after registration. An average week saw about 200 children leave but during the week ending 14

⁸² *Express & Echo*, 20 June 1940 – Remarks of Chairman of Exeter War Emergency Committee

⁸³ *North Devon Journal*, 13 and 30 June 1940

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 11 July 1940

⁸⁵ *Devon County Council Emergency Committee DCC149/5/3/2*, 9 July 1940

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Express & Echo*, 21 September 1940

⁸⁸ *Devon County Council Minutes DCC150/4/1/38*, 29 August 1940, p. 148

⁸⁹ R. Samways, ed. *We think you ought to go*, p.5

September, 1,530 left followed by 1,980 on the Sunday and Monday.⁹⁰ Children travelling from London on long distance trains were now provided with a hot meal.⁹¹ Newton Abbot, already hosting over 2,000 children, set up a House of Mercy in the Congregational Schoolroom as temporary billeting accommodation.⁹² Evacuees continued to arrive in the town throughout the summer months despite a serious bombing raid on the station on 20 August which killed 14 people. As more children left the cities the groups became ‘increasingly miscellaneous’ with approximately 60,000 LCC children evacuated over a 12 month period to various locations.⁹³ Devon’s elementary school population had risen from 38,411 (August 1939) to 74,752 (December 1940)⁹⁴ and Exeter’s from 7,764 (1939) to 10,891,⁹⁵ placing tremendous strain on school accommodation, teaching staff, equipment and the school medical service.⁹⁶ However, too many children still remained in the danger zones and there were calls for compulsory evacuation.⁹⁷ By November 1940, approximately 80% of the public apparently supported this⁹⁸ but, well aware of the ramifications of such a decision in a democracy, the Government continued a voluntary system.

During this intense period of activity local council records and newspaper reports were once again extremely positive, eager to demonstrate that Devon was playing an effective, cheerful and well-organised role in Britain’s total war and that evacuees were happily settled. As in 1939, a number of local councils proudly recorded their successful receptions, the charitable response from local householders, the satisfaction and happiness of evacuees and the letters of praise from evacuated

⁹⁰ P.H.J.H. Gosden, *Education in the Second World War*, p.41

⁹¹ R. Samways, ed. *We think you ought to go*, p.11

⁹² *The Western Times*, 27 September 1940

⁹³ *Corporation of London Archives, Evacuation Information Leaflet No 10*. Also R. Samways, ed. *We think you ought to go*, p.5

⁹⁴ *Annual Reports of School Medical Officer for Devon 1939 and 1940, DCC150/4/5/1*

⁹⁵ *Annual Report of School Medical Officer for City of Exeter 1942, ECA/19/95*

⁹⁶ *Town Clerk’s Papers, ECA Evac Box 12/128, Group N*, Letter dated 11 February 1941

⁹⁷ *Education*, Volume LXXV1, 13 September 1940, p.175, 20 September 1940, p.191, 22 November 1940, p. 361 and 6 December 1940, p.395

⁹⁸ G.H. Gallup, ed. *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls, Great Britain 1937-1975, Volume One 1937-1964* (Random House 1976) pp.30, 36 and 37

teachers describing local warmth and generosity.⁹⁹ Several examples are notable. The residents of Torbay appeared particularly generous throughout the course of the war and there are no known extant records of billeting problems. The Secretary of the Committee of London Head Teachers evacuated to Torquay expressed appreciation for ‘the courtesy and kindness shown by official and teaching staffs, and the loving kindness shown by the billetors’ (1,289 LCC children and 537 unofficially evacuated children by the end of June 1940).¹⁰⁰ Teachers responsible for 1,226 unaccompanied children billeted in Torrington RDC reported how well they had settled. Only one recorded billeting problem was found in the council archive. Perhaps this was partially due to the appointment of a liaison officer who kept in contact with the LCC.¹⁰¹ The LCC Chairman visited schools in South Devon and declared ‘it is impossible to speak too highly of the kindness of the foster parents’,¹⁰² and on a tour of the County several months later, the Chairman of the LCC Education Committee concurred.¹⁰³ Nationally the situation also appeared very positive. In January 1941, the Shakespeare Report published its findings on conditions in reception areas: ‘The great migration should have been doomed to failure. We were surprised to find that in the great majority of cases it is succeeding’.¹⁰⁴ The LCC now had children billeted in 699 areas,¹⁰⁵ and by February the national figure of 480,500 unaccompanied schoolchildren in billets was recorded.¹⁰⁶ Several months later the MH stated that 80% of the movement on the reception side had been a

⁹⁹ *Paignton Urban District Council R4582A/PC9*, 17 June 1940. *St Thomas Rural District Council Minutes R7/10/C20*, June 1940. Approximately 1,250 evacuees billeted in 29 parishes. *Dawlish Urban District Council Committee Reports R2369A/(5/3)C82*, 22 October 1940. *Barnstaple Municipal Borough Minutes 2654add2/C117*, March and June 1940. *The Western Times*, 29 November 1940 reporting on Okehampton RDC. *The Western Times*, 15 November 1940 reporting on South Molton RDC. *Barnstaple Rural District Council Minutes R3057add3C6*, p.784, 19 July 1940 and pp.805-6, 30 August 1940. *Express & Echo*, 5 December 1940. H. Clement, *No Time to Kiss Goodbye* (Harry Clement 1995) p. 15

¹⁰⁰ *Torbay Municipal Borough Council Minutes R4582A/TC69*, p.1418, 28 June 1940

¹⁰¹ *Torrington Rural District Council Minutes R2460A/(1/8)C10*, June and August 1940

¹⁰² *Education*, Volume LXXVI, 13 September 1940

¹⁰³ *The Times Educational Supplement*, 18 January 1941

¹⁰⁴ *The Times*, 25 January 1941 – Review of Shakespeare Report

¹⁰⁵ *Okehampton File 3248A/16/7*

¹⁰⁶ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy, Appendix 9*, p.562. Figures for England and Wales only

success.¹⁰⁷ Devon had also demonstrated that it could cope admirably with a doubling of the school population and successful billeting of large numbers.

Any hopes entertained by DCC of persuading the MH to reduce evacuee numbers allocated to Devon faded at the beginning of 1941 with the large scale destruction of Bristol and Plymouth. Originally classified as neutral areas, evacuation had been restricted to private initiative. Although the worst bombing raids in Bristol took place between November 1940 and April 1941, the City was not actually declared an evacuation area until May 1941. According to M-O observations, the public shelter system was felt by many to be inadequate and depression was widespread.¹⁰⁸ During the week commencing 17 February 1941, 7,000 evacuees arrived in Devon from Bristol¹⁰⁹ and approximately 20,085 Bristol children were eventually evacuated (6,671 privately) to Devon, Cornwall and Somerset.¹¹⁰ *The Western Times* announced there were apparently more offers of accommodation than children to fill them 'like those who have already been enfolded within the welcoming embrace of Devon, these latest visitors were as happy as the proverbial sandboys'.¹¹¹ South Molton RDC claimed 'we treat them so well they are sending more',¹¹² and a reporter from *The Sunday Pictorial* visiting Paignton in March, possibly in search of a sensational story on evacuation, apparently found little to write about because there was 'nothing to criticise'.¹¹³ Although Bristol schoolchildren were medically examined before departure and there were 'many tributes' to their clean condition,¹¹⁴ some must have slipped the net because there were complaints from Tiverton RDC, Bideford RDC and Barnstaple MB about the arrival state of children (see

¹⁰⁷ R. Samways, ed. *We think you ought to go*, p.18

¹⁰⁸ T. Harrison, *Living through the Blitz* (Collins 1976) pp. 208-9

¹⁰⁹ *Devon County Council Committee Minutes, DCC148/15, Emergency Committee Report*, March 1941. HMI Inspector, Dr Platts, gave the following figures for the period 18-21 February 1941: Devon 4,527, Exeter 510, Torquay 443, Tiverton 261, Barnstaple 178. *ED 134/33*

¹¹⁰ *Times Educational Supplement*, 5 September 1942. Also *Education*, Volume LXXXX, p.228

¹¹¹ *The Western Times*, 21 February 1941

¹¹² Another 500 children were due to arrive. *The Western Times*, 14 February 1941

¹¹³ *Paignton Urban District Council Minutes R4582A/PC9*, 16 March 1941

¹¹⁴ *Education*, Volume LXXXX, p. 228

Chapter 7). This latest evacuation irritated Exmouth UDC which complained the MH had not consulted with the authorities before sending evacuees.¹¹⁵

The first of 59 bombing raids began in Plymouth at the beginning of July 1940 and raids continued until 13 August 1943. However, the worst period was March-April 1941 when practically all the civic offices, the Guildhall, St Andrews, 40 churches, many schools, both ARP Centres and the shopping centres of Plymouth and Devonport were destroyed. A total of 1,300 civilians were killed and 3,000 injured.¹¹⁶ Despite constant pressure by the authorities, as in the case of Bristol the City was not declared an evacuation area until May 1941 when the worst raids were over. Before substantial numbers left Plymouth for safer parts of Devon, the County (excluding Exeter) had already absorbed 78,569 official evacuees (adults and children) by the end of February 1941 in addition to thousands of unofficial evacuees.¹¹⁷ Reports from Plymouth suggested the ‘early, easy blitz-lessons’ were not heeded or applied and the City was ill prepared.¹¹⁸ Rest Centres became over-crowded, thousands trekked from the City each night either sleeping outside on the moors and in fields or going to nearby overcrowded villages mainly in the Plympton, Tavistock and Kingsbridge area.¹¹⁹ Dartington was asked to send lorries to collect refugees as all the buses had been destroyed.¹²⁰ Contemporary comments highlighted both the lack of effective liaison and co-operation between Plymouth and nearby local authorities and the absence of Government guidance for post-raid services.¹²¹ Gordon Finn, evacuated on 10 May 1941, mentioned the flaws in the

¹¹⁵ *Exmouth Urban District Council Minutes R7/4/C36*, 4 March 1941

¹¹⁶ *Astor Family Papers 186/21/13*

¹¹⁷ *Devon County Council Minutes DCC148/15, Emergency Committee Report*, 19 June 1941. This number is possibly an aggregate figure.

¹¹⁸ T. Harrison, *Living Through the Blitz*, pp.218 and 223

¹¹⁹ *Devon County Council Minutes DCC148/15, Report of Public Assistance Committee*, 19 June 1941

¹²⁰ *Dartington Archive, News of the Day*, 24 April 1941

¹²¹ *Crediton Urban District Council Minutes, R4/2/C/96, Box 2*, Notes from Conference held 20 May 1941 at Exeter. R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp. 307 and 315. H.P. Twyford (War Correspondent for *Western Morning News*) *It came to our Door* (Underhill Plymouth 1946) pp.11, 77, 99 and 128. T. Harrison, *Living through the Blitz*, p.218

procedure which ‘by the time we were evacuated should have been ironed out’.¹²² Lord Astor, Mayor of Plymouth, wrote in desperation to the Regional Commission for the Southwest in May about the administrative barriers between local authorities ‘the peace-time system of slow committee rule, of red-tape, of endless letter writing between London, Regional Headquarters and the periphery has shown itself an absolute danger to human life’.¹²³ His exasperation was undoubtedly fuelled by his wife’s utter frustration at this time about the red tape hampering the establishment of residential nurseries (see Chapter 6).

War had moved uncomfortably close, encouraging a generous reaction from householders. Bideford MB recorded the good response from those willing to accommodate Plymouth evacuees at a time when there were already 929 billeted unaccompanied children. In June the CBO described their willingness ‘to face this difficult task in what is undoubtedly a splendid spirit’.¹²⁴ Okehampton RDC received an emergency call from Plymouth and within 48 hours the Evacuation Officer had received offers to billet 150 mothers with children and 100 unaccompanied children. However, the Mayor of Okehampton MB stated that, although householders ‘had extended a hearty welcome...lately a small percentage of householders had not been so willing as he would have liked to open their doors to the homeless and bombed civilians’.¹²⁵ However, several weeks later the CBO reported that officials were experiencing very little trouble billeting evacuees except from ‘the confirmed grouser’,¹²⁶ and in August, 980 householders out of 1009 returned their details for an accommodation survey ‘without reminder’.¹²⁷ Although the close proximity of war focused the minds of Devon householders as never before, the reality was that many towns were struggling to find even the most rudimentary accommodation and Devon’s infrastructure and generosity were

¹²² G. Finn, *Another kind of porridge* (Coulmore Press 2001) p.28

¹²³ T. Harrison, *Living through the Blitz*, p. 234

¹²⁴ *Bideford Municipal Borough Minutes R2379A/(1/1)C25*, May and June 1941

¹²⁵ *The Western Times*, 2 & 23 May 1941.

¹²⁶ *Okehampton 3248A/16/3*, Report of Chief Billeting Officer, July 1941

¹²⁷ *Okehampton 3248A/16/3*

stretched to the maximum. Ilfracombe reported severe difficulties both with accommodation and educational provision¹²⁸ and Exeter's Mayor suggested that representations should be made not to send any more evacuees because the City was already at saturation point.¹²⁹ The MH agreed that any further evacuees from Bristol or London would be sent to Cornwall because of overcrowding in Devon,¹³⁰ but despite this assurance further evacuees from Bristol arrived in November. By the end of 1941, Exeter had 2,000 unaccompanied schoolchildren,¹³¹ and DCC had 26,160 elementary and 1,813 secondary school evacuees excluding unofficial ones.¹³²

Exeter ceased to be a reception area after its extensive bombing on 4 May 1942 and most of the sample evacuees billeted there returned home. Evacuation to the rest of the County had slowed almost to a halt and very little information on evacuation was recorded apart from the steady decline in numbers and the very successful transference of Haberdashers' Aske's Girls' School to Barnstaple from Teignmouth as a safety precaution.¹³³ By the end of the year the number of officially evacuated schoolchildren in Devon had halved to 13,500,¹³⁴ and only 196 remained in Exeter.¹³⁵ In November the MH announced the suspension of organised evacuation for unaccompanied children from London as response had diminished.¹³⁶

On 4 November 1943, the Chairman of DCC was informed by the War Cabinet that an area of 25 square miles around Slapton Sands was to be evacuated by 20 December to facilitate US troop activities, later confirmed as preparations for D Day. This involved parts of 6 parishes and

¹²⁸ *The Western Times*, 14 February 1941

¹²⁹ Meeting of Exeter Education Committee reported in *The Western Times*, 20 June 1941

¹³⁰ *Devon County Council Emergency Committee DCC149/5/3/3*, 14 February 1941

¹³¹ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer for Exeter City 1942, ECA/19/95*

¹³² *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1941, DCC150/4/5/1*, pp.3 and 29

¹³³ *Barnstaple Town Council Minutes 2654add2/CI20*, p. 215, 23 October 1942. Letter from LCC Education Officer

¹³⁴ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1942, DCC150/4/5/1*, p.1

¹³⁵ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer for the City of Exeter 1942, ECA/19/95*, p. 9

¹³⁶ *Education*, Volume LXXX, 6 November 1942, p.425. Also *Times Educational Supplement*, 7 November 1942

approximately 3,000 people. Evacuees billeted in these parishes had to be relocated along with local people. Some travelled a considerable distance to find accommodation as much of it was already taken by evacuees.¹³⁷ June Parkings (3) and her mother had to leave East Allington and June believed they returned to London for a short time before returning to the village where they were found another billet. By the end of the year there were only 6,412 officially evacuated elementary and 2,534 secondary pupils remaining in Devon,¹³⁸ and 151 in Exeter.¹³⁹ Following the third evacuation wave in 1944 the number increased to 12,258 elementary schoolchildren by the end of the year.¹⁴⁰ V1 flying bombs began falling on London and the Southeast on 12/13 June for a period of 3 months and the official evacuation scheme (Rivulet) was re-opened on Saturday, 1 July.¹⁴¹ Between 10-12 July, 2,780 officially evacuated unaccompanied children from London, Kent and Surrey arrived in Devon,¹⁴² with some returning to their former billets.¹⁴³

Nationally ‘the one blot’ in 1944 was ‘the refusal of so many people to open their homes to evacuees’.¹⁴⁴ Devon also struggled to find enough voluntary billets. More females were now employed outside the home, the travel ban for visitors had been removed and there was undoubtedly war weariness. Proportionally far more children were sent to larger towns particularly in South Devon, comparatively few were sent to isolated rural areas¹⁴⁵ and none was sent to Plymouth.¹⁴⁶ Devon welcomed the new evacuees for the final time and DCEC recorded a letter from Surrey LEA expressing thanks to all concerned for the kindness received by their children.¹⁴⁷ Judging by the

¹³⁷ See G. Bradbeer, *The Land changed its face* (David & Charles: Newton Abbot 1973) for an account of the evacuation from the Slapton Sands area. Also G. Wasley, *Devon at War* (Devon Books 1994)

¹³⁸ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1943*, DCC150/4/5/1, pp. 5 and 45

¹³⁹ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer for the City of Exeter 1943*, ECA/19/95

¹⁴⁰ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1944*, pp. 3-4

¹⁴¹ Evacuable areas: LCC, Essex, Herts, Kent, Middlesex, Southampton, Surrey, East and West Sussex

¹⁴² *Devon County Education Committee Minutes*, DCC150/4/1/42, p.113, 13 July 1944

¹⁴³ For example, *Satterleigh & Warkleigh School Log Book 731C/EFL2, Throwleigh Evacuees Attendance Register 2066C/EAA17*

¹⁴⁴ *Times Educational Supplement*, 15 July 1944

¹⁴⁵ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1945*, p.27

¹⁴⁶ *Express & Echo*, 9 September 1944

¹⁴⁷ *Devon County Education Committee Minutes DCC150/4/1/42*, p. 231, 21 December 1944

record of thanks from both evacuating authorities and LCC staff sent to Teignmouth UDC, Ilfracombe UDC and Tiverton RDC, the organisation, billeting and care offered locally was very successful.¹⁴⁸ Nationally approximately 350,000 schoolchildren had been evacuated by 8 September when MH Circular 129/44 announced that no further organised parties would be evacuated.¹⁴⁹ By the end of 1945 there were still over 5,000 official evacuees left in the County, including 1,089 elementary and 327 secondary pupils under DCEC¹⁵⁰ and 9 in Exeter.¹⁵¹

Aspects of Billeting

The placing of evacuee children in private households by local authorities was both unprecedented and an enormous gamble by the Government but, both before and during the war, it insisted that this was the only solution because building large numbers of camps and furnishing hostels was prohibitively expensive¹⁵² and potentially dangerous. The Government also decided that the billeting system ‘required no expert monitoring and supervision from outside agencies, both before or during the evacuation process’.¹⁵³ With hindsight this decision could be described as unwise since independent monitoring would have been a beneficial addition to the difficult process of billeting. However, financial restraints, acute shortage of suitable manpower and local independence all militated against this idea and local initiatives usually came into play.

Voluntary billeting was always more difficult when things were quiet in London and the larger households were not seen to be contributing. However, Boyd found ‘the vast majority of households proved anxious to be hospitable and to do in a generous spirit what they conceived to be their

¹⁴⁸ *Teignmouth Urban District Council R236oA/(5/5)C36*, 24 July 1944, *Ilfracombe Urban District Council Minutes R2458A/(2/3)C33*, August 1944, *The Western Times*, 1 September 1944

¹⁴⁹ *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 403, Column 432, 28 September 1944

¹⁵⁰ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1945*, pp. 7 and 62

¹⁵¹ *Exeter City Education Committee Minutes ECA/19/96*, *Annual Report of School Medical Officer 1945*, p.7

¹⁵² R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.36

¹⁵³ M. Parsons and P. Starns, *The Evacuation* (DSM 1999) p.31

duty'.¹⁵⁴ The situation in Devon can be described in similar terms. There were undoubtedly many generous local people like the widowed foster mother of Joyce Owens (11). Joyce and her friend were billeted in a small house with no running water and stayed 3 years. They were later joined by Joyce's grandmother, a young cousin and the mother of Joyce's friend. One inherent but unavoidable weakness with the system of billeting was that checks could rarely be carried out in advance on the suitability of foster-parents, many of whom were elderly because they had spare rooms. However, according to the local sample the majority of these placements with elderly foster parents were successful. Another problem was that most parties arrived late in the afternoon or evening and were sent to billets as quickly as possible. Inevitably mistakes were made but despite the potential for problems there is very little local recorded detail about children not settling into their billets and available evacuee registers indicate that the majority of billets were not changed. This is remarkable in view of how badly wrong things could have gone although it is impossible to know how many of those who returned home were unhappy.

The main complaints voiced by billetors concerned the level of billeting allowance and the belief that the wealthier sections of communities were evading their public duty. The initial billeting allowance was set at 10s6d for one child and 8s6d per child for more than one child. The average wage for a working-class person in 1939 was between £2-3 per week and the initial billeting allowance equated to 52.5p and 42.5p per week for unaccompanied children.¹⁵⁵ When wear and tear of bedding and furniture was taken into account the allowances were seen by many as extremely mean,¹⁵⁶ although interestingly the boarding-out allowance for non evacuees paid by Devon Public Assistance Committee was in fact lower and only raised from 7s6d to 8s6d at the end of 1940.¹⁵⁷ At first the Government refused to accept the growing criticism, particularly vocal from

¹⁵⁴ W. Boyd, *Evacuation in Scotland* (University of London Press 1944) p.51

¹⁵⁵ A. Kempe and R. Holroyd, *Evacuees* (Hodder & Stoughton 1993) p.26

¹⁵⁶ For example, see protest letter printed in M. Parsons, *I'll Take that One*, Appendix 1

¹⁵⁷ *The Western Times*, 20 December 1940

householders of higher social levels, that the allowances were inadequate, especially for adolescents.¹⁵⁸ For example, problems were reported in Budleigh Salterton UDC, not about behaviour or health issues, but about feeding 98 boys evacuated with Beaufroy Technical College. It seems that householders were not keen to provide meals for adolescent boys and as a result billets were hard to find.¹⁵⁹ Titmuss believed the criticism partially reflected the deterioration of goodwill in reception areas caused by the arrival condition of many evacuees, the absence of air attacks on London and the belief that some parents were saving money at the expense of householders in reception areas. He also highlighted the fact that what was considered inadequate by those of higher social levels was often acceptable to the working class.¹⁶⁰ More criticism was generated, this time from parents, when the Government controversially announced on 4 October that a reasonable proportion of the cost of billeting schoolchildren would be recovered from parents.¹⁶¹ The contribution asked for was 6s, reduced according to financial circumstances and operative from 28 October 1939. The Government Evacuation Scheme Pamphlet had previously warned that a contribution towards the cost of lodging 'may later on be required from the responsible person...if he can afford to pay',¹⁶² and Gallup Polls for October 1940 indicated that 76% of the public felt that the Government's decision to compel parents to pay something for the upkeep of evacuated children was fair.¹⁶³

Finally responding to pressure, the allowance was raised from 14 October 1939 to 10s6d for children aged 16 and over. As the cost of living rose, pressure continued for billeting allowances to be increased whilst the Government resisted. However, in order to retain householders' co-

¹⁵⁸ *The Times*, 12 & 16 September 1939

¹⁵⁹ *Budleigh Salterton Urban District Council Minutes R7/3/C14*, 19 September 1939

¹⁶⁰ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.161

¹⁶¹ *Parliamentary Debates*- Volume 351, Columns 1963-4; Volume 352, Column 2175; Volume 353, Column 811

¹⁶² *Government Evacuation Scheme Pamphlet, Milton Damerel 1136Z/Z1*

¹⁶³ G. H. Gallup, ed. *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls, Great Britain 1937-1975, Volume One 1937-1964*, p.23

operation for a possible second evacuation wave, the allowance was raised on 2 March 1940 to 10s6d for 14 year olds. As the war situation worsened the allowance was again adjusted in May to 10s6d for those aged 10-14, 12s6d for 14-16 and 15s for over 16. The cost of living continued to rise and from the middle of 1941 until 1944 the MH received ‘a steady stream of protests’ from many sources.¹⁶⁴ Locally Tiverton BC and Crediton RDC recorded their support for Camarthen’s Town Clerk who wrote to the Government in 1943 complaining about the ‘meagre and totally inadequate billeting allowance’ which was one of the root causes for the difficulty in billeting unaccompanied children.¹⁶⁵ The anomaly still existed that the allowance for lodging a civil servant and providing 2 meals per day was one guinea per week whereas full board and lodging for a schoolboy of 16 or 17 was only 15s.¹⁶⁶ Allowances increased again in May 1942, particularly to help those householders who had been caring for evacuees for a considerable period, and in July 1944 for the third wave,¹⁶⁷ although Barnstaple RDC resolved to inform the MH that the allowances were still ‘totally inadequate’.¹⁶⁸

Writing in 1943, Dent believed the working classes ‘on the whole reacted commendably...but...the shock was too severe for the middle classes. Their reaction was in many instances deplorable...most shameful of all were the instant and inflexible decisions ...to rid themselves at once of such undesirable quests, and the ruthless methods to which they resorted to achieve this end’.¹⁶⁹ Various surveys and reports suggest that many well-to-do citizens, who did not need the

¹⁶⁴ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.398. See also M. Parsons, *I’ll Take That One*, pp.104-5

¹⁶⁵ *Tiverton Town Council Minutes R4/IaddC6*, 6 December 1943. *Crediton Rural District Council Minutes R4/3addC57*, 11 December 1943

¹⁶⁶ M. Cole, *Fabian Report 55* (Fabian Society May 1941) p.185. See also letters in *The Times*, 12 & 16 September 1939

¹⁶⁷ 1942 Increase: 10s6d for 5-under 10, 11s0d for 10-under 12, 12s0d for 12-under 14, 13s0d for 14-under 16, 15s6d for 16-under 17, 16s6d for 17 and over. See *Education*, Volume LXXIX, p.267 – Report of announcement in the House. July 1944 – increase for children over 5 by 1s per week throughout the scale.

¹⁶⁸ *Barnstaple Rural District Council Minutes R3057add3C6*, p.1454, 11 August 1944

¹⁶⁹ H. C. Dent, *Education in Transition*, p.12

meagre financial inducement, skilfully avoided their obligations,¹⁷⁰ and there were reportedly ‘very many cases’ where the billeting officer was intimidated by local gentry resulting in children being billeted in poor homes.¹⁷¹ However, *The Times Educational Supplement* not unsurprisingly refuted the ‘sweeping generalizations’ of Padley and Cole’s survey,¹⁷² and the Shakespeare Report felt that allegations were not always well founded but admitted that unfortunate instances occurred.¹⁷³

There is ample evidence to suggest that Devon’s working class bore the brunt of the evacuation and that a proportion of the well-to-do were reluctant to the point of manifest selfishness. The following examples illustrate that this attitude was not restricted to one area. A billeting official from Teignmouth UDC claimed that ‘if it were not for the working class mothers in the main I don’t know what would have happened at Teignmouth. Many of them have shown hearts of gold’.¹⁷⁴ Lily Ramsden (sample), BO in Totnes, remembered the response for billets was more generous from working-class families who understood the children better and were more prepared for the disruption than the middle-class homes. Totnes Welfare Officer wrote that most teachers ‘agreed that the villages had been exceptionally kind and good to the children – most of the neglect came from the large houses. This is of course a generalization but the same tale repeats itself from village

¹⁷⁰ For discussion examples see – *Evacuation, Home Intelligence Report*, dated 18-25 June 1941, as cited in H. L. Smith, ed. *Britain in the Second World War* (Manchester University Press 1996) pp.43-4; A. Marwick, *War and Social Change in the Twentieth Century* (Macmillan 1974) pp.156-7; *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 352, Column 2234, 2 November 1939; R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 393; S. Isaacs, ed. *The Cambridge Evacuation Survey* (Methuen & Co. Ltd. London 1941) p.58; B. Beaven and J. Griffiths, ‘The blitz, civilian moral and the city: mass-observation and working-class culture in Britain, 1940-1’, *Urban History*, 1999, pp.85-6; I. McLaine, *Ministry of Morale* (George Allen & Unwin 1979) p.176; R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey* (Routledge & Sons 1940) pp 28, 149-150, 171 and 254; *Parliamentary Debates* Volume 374, Column 1485, 16 October 1941; M. Cole, *Fabian Tract 55* (Fabian Society May 1941) pp.180 and 190; M. Parsons and P. Starns, *The Evacuation* (DSM 1999) p.182; M. Parsons, *I’ll Take That One* (Beckett Karlson Ltd. 1998) pp.105 and 252 and Appendix 1; A. Calder, *The People’s War – Britain 1939-45* (Jonathan Cape 1969) pp.408-9, F.Le Gros Clark & R. W. Toms, *Fabian Tract 249 (1940) Failure or Reform* (Kraus Reprint 1969) p.6 ; S. Ward, *War in the countryside* (Cameron Books 1988) p.94; S. Fielding, P. Thompson and N. Tiratsoo, *England Arise* ((Manchester University Press 1995) pp.8-9; J. Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership, and the Second World War* (Oxford University Press 2002) p.153; I McLaine, *Ministry of Morale* (George Allen & Unwin 1979) p.176

¹⁷¹ R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p. 28

¹⁷² *The Times Educational Supplement*, 27 July 1940 – report on Padley and Cole’s survey

¹⁷³ Report on Conditions in Reception Areas by a Committee under the Chairmanship of Mr Geoffrey Shakespeare, M.P. (His Majesty’s Stationery Office 1941) p.6

¹⁷⁴ *Express & Echo*, 8 January 1941

to village'.¹⁷⁵ In October 1940, the Chairman of Ilfracombe UDC informed the local Methodist Minister that the response to appeals for billets was good but mainly from the poorer classes in the town and that 'a great number of well-to-do people seem only too anxious to avoid their responsibilities'.¹⁷⁶ In February 1941 he again described the response from the working class as 'wonderful'...although the response from people with big houses 'was very poor'.¹⁷⁷ A Torrington Town Councillor said he was 'ashamed of his town...the working class had responded magnificently, but...big houses in the town...would not'.¹⁷⁸ Seaton UDC received a letter from one resident complaining that his rooms were fully booked for holidays but 'there are plenty of large houses in Seaton that are occupied by only 2-3 persons'.¹⁷⁹ In a letter to the local BO the Headmaster of Dartington Private School said it was his understanding that 'there are still large private houses in this neighbourhood with empty rooms...deliberately kept empty'.¹⁸⁰ It was also alleged that in certain parishes of North Devon, billeting officers were pressing those with evacuees to take more while large houses were left untouched.¹⁸¹ A Plymouth local government official sought alternative accommodation through the Tavistock BO for his wife and young son because their billet in Lamerton was unsuitable. Nothing materialised and, on making his own enquiries, the husband found 'a most amazing state of affairs'. Large houses with very small households either had no evacuees or just one or two and the largest house in the district was not even on the Register of Tavistock RDC. Apparently the BO was not even particularly interested with these findings.¹⁸² In Exeter, there was apparently an 'evasion of duty of some of the householders of the larger houses by freezing out so that evacuees will not stay put'.¹⁸³ Possibly evacuees were not being allowed in the billet during the daytime or they were plainly made unwelcome. *The Western Times* reported

¹⁷⁵ *Dartington Trust Archive*, letter from Welfare Officer to Dorothy Elmhirst, January 1942

¹⁷⁶ *Ilfracombe Urban District Council Letterbook R2458A/(2/3)*, 25 October 1940

¹⁷⁷ *Express & Echo*, 21 February 1941

¹⁷⁸ *The Western Morning News*, 18 October 1940

¹⁷⁹ *Seaton Urban District Council Correspondence File R7/6/C107*

¹⁸⁰ *Dartington Archive*, Letter from William Curry to Roger Morel (Billeting Officer) dated 21 January 1941

¹⁸¹ *Western Times*, 18 October 1940

¹⁸² *Astor Family Papers 186/21/3*, Letter dated 1 October 1941 to Chief Billeting Officer, Plymouth

¹⁸³ T. Gray, *Exeter in the 1940s* (The Mint Press 2004) p.51

that whilst many small and crowded houses took evacuees, larger houses often with small families and servants were ‘allowed to go free...this sort of thing is still going on in Okehampton’.¹⁸⁴

As previously highlighted, Devon’s population was largely working class. Whatever their motive, financial, altruistic or both, it was these people who opened their homes to evacuees. Clearly there was an apparent reluctance amongst well-to-do households to offer accommodation and further local studies are needed to discover whether this was the case in most or just some of the reception areas.¹⁸⁵ If both the vast majority of billetors and billetees were working class it could then be argued that the much-publicised momentous class clash resulting from billeting was, as with many other aspects of evacuation, an over-exaggerated and untypical commentary elaborated by a minority of social community leaders. Appendix 10, compiled from sample questionnaires, lists the varied occupations of host families in Devon. Thirty percent from the sample were billeted on farms or with farm labourers. As previously discussed, most farms in Devon were worked by small owner/tenant farmers far removed from ‘the gentleman farmer’ stereotype. The list reflects the fact that approximately two thirds of the working population were employed in the poorly paid service industries¹⁸⁶, distributive trades,¹⁸⁷ and a variety of manual or semi-skilled jobs. Five percent were billeted in ‘professional’ households and five percent with unspecified retired or employed middle class. Fifteen (0.6%) sample evacuees stayed in large houses but were usually only allowed in part of the house and had their meals in the kitchen, often with the housekeeper. Some of Devon’s gentry were generous towards the evacuees, in particular Dorothy Elmhirst of Dartington Hall and the Hon. Betty Asquith at Clovelly, who involved themselves wholeheartedly in their welfare.

¹⁸⁴ *Western Times*, 11 July 1941

¹⁸⁵ Penny Starns has recently highlighted the ‘extra burden on the working class, particularly those who were living in rural areas, since more working class evacuees were taken in by working-class hosts’. P. Starns, ‘Getting the Job: Child health and immunisation during World War Two Britain’, *Children in War*, November 2005, Vol. 1, No.3, p.29

¹⁸⁶ The 1931 Census recorded that the largest employment sector was ‘miscellaneous services’ which included domestic servants, hairdressers, chimney sweeps, waiters, laundry workers, publicans and cleaners. C.H.Lee, *British Regional Employment Statistics 1841-1971*(Cambridge University Press 1979)

¹⁸⁷ This category included shopkeepers, costermongers and shop workers

Some offered property, not necessarily their sole one, to private schools or residential nurseries but had nothing to do with the actual care of evacuees whilst others agreed to accommodate evacuees in part of their house. Examples include Sir John Kennaway at Fairmile (Ottery St Mary), Sir Richard Acland (Liberal M.P.)¹⁸⁸ at Killerton (Broadclyst) and Sir Derrick Heathcote Amory at Bolham House (Tiverton).¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ Richard Acland was elected for Barnstaple in 1935. In 1942 he formed the socialist Common Wealth Party with J. B. Priestley. Acland and his party advocated the public ownership of land and during the Second World War gave away his Devon family estate of 19,000 acres (8,097 hectares) to the National Trust. The Common Wealth Party was dissolved and Acland joined the Labour Party and was elected to represent Gravesend in 1947. Ten years later he resigned in protest against the party's support for Great Britain's nuclear defence – source www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/Jacland.htm - 48k

¹⁸⁹ Elected Conservative MP in 1945 for Tiverton. Also served as Chairman of Devon County Education Committee for several years before the war but in 1940 he went on active service and was badly injured at Arnhem in 1944.

Billeting Officer

Evacuation...had not only kept Barbara, as billeting officer, constantly busy, but had transformed her, in four months, from one of the most popular women in the countryside into a figure of terror. When her car was seen approaching people fled through covered lines of retreat...anywhere to avoid her persuasive “But surely you could manage one more”¹⁹⁰

The tasks they had to perform were loaded with situations in which passions could be aroused in the village shop or pub, council chamber or school¹⁹¹

The first quote is somewhat whimsical but this description of a fictional billeting officer is not without basis. The power to appoint billeting officers was delegated by the MH to the mayors of county and municipal boroughs and to the chairmen of urban and rural district councils.¹⁹² In urban areas the Town Clerk or Sanitary Inspector usually assumed the role of Chief Billeting Officer in addition to their normal workload, and officers frequently found that they were unable to fulfil their work obligations satisfactorily, particularly following the second evacuation wave. For example, the Town Clerk of Totnes, who desired no payment for his billeting duties and paid his assistant out of his own pocket, finally felt by February 1941 that he needed a full-time assistant.¹⁹³ The CBO for Exmouth UDC resigned in October 1940 as the result of a breakdown in health.¹⁹⁴ Tavistock’s Town Clerk had been appointed CBO when evacuation plans were originally drawn up in 1939 but both rural and district councils were classified as exempt from receiving evacuees during the first evacuation wave because of the large number of military personnel in the area. This position

¹⁹⁰ E. Waugh, *Put out more flags* (Chapman & Hall 1967 3rd Edition) p.84

¹⁹¹ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 392

¹⁹² Regulation 22 of the Defence (General) Regulation 1939

¹⁹³ *Totnes Municipal Borough, Town Council Minutes R9/2/C34*

¹⁹⁴ *Exmouth Urban District Council R7/4/C36*

changed in 1940 and the Town Clerk wanted to resign. He clearly did not wish to be responsible for any financial matters arising from evacuation ‘as in the light of past experiences if he endeavoured to meddle in such matters it would inevitably lead to friction’. The Council, unwisely as it transpired,¹⁹⁵ persuaded him to stay by agreeing to free him from any financial responsibility which would come within the purview of the Government Audit Department, and from making enquiries and reports.¹⁹⁶ Dawlish UDC Town Clerk asked for extra staff in July 1941 because his ordinary work was falling ‘considerably into arrear’. He also pointed out that no part of the salaries of permanent officials assisting with evacuation could or had been charged to the Evacuation Scheme Account.¹⁹⁷ In November 1940, a deputation of billeting officers in Newton Abbot complained about the difficulties of billeting. By January 1941 they had all resigned.¹⁹⁸

Rural billeting officers were volunteers and generally leaders in their community, for example part-time officials, local vicars, teachers, civil servants, solicitors, farmers etc. It was a demanding job especially during the peak periods of evacuation and particularly stressful in the areas where large numbers arrived. Many of the billeting officers in the rural area around Totnes were farmers who were so busy ‘that with the best will in the world they cannot do much more than cope with the bare formalities of their business of billeting’.¹⁹⁹ No training was given although courses were very occasionally held, for example in Weston-Super-Mare on 12 April 1943,²⁰⁰ and as Calder highlighted ‘such people naturally varied enormously in status, competence, integrity and compassion. It fell upon them to organise a social experiment of unprecedented size and difficulty’.²⁰¹ In October 1940, it was reported that the Clerk of Tavistock RDC had ‘found the

¹⁹⁵ Refer to Pages 107, 111-2, 116 and 131 for examples of problems associated with this CBO

¹⁹⁶ *Tavistock Rural District Minutes 1690/12*, September 1940

¹⁹⁷ *Dawlish Urban District Council Committee Reports R2369A/(5/3)C83*, 17 July 1941

¹⁹⁸ *Newton Abbot Urban District Council Minutes R2361A/(5/4)C43*

¹⁹⁹ *Dartington Archive*, Letter from Grace Drake (Welfare Officer) of Totnes to Dorothy Elmhirst, January 1942.

²⁰⁰ *Newton Abbot Urban District Council Minutes R2361A/(5/4)C44*

²⁰¹ A. Calder, *The People's War*, p.39

position terrifying' when evacuee children arrived much later than expected. He had wanted to settle the children in their billets before dark.²⁰²

Although there are very few recorded comments concerning the strain placed on local government officials acting as billeting officers in Devon, their invidious position and the local friction that was sometimes generated, particularly in smaller communities, can be illustrated by several examples. In April 1940, before the course of war forced the Treasury to relax its stringent financial policy, the part-time Town Clerk of South Molton MB, W.A. Cokayne Frith, wrote to his counterpart in Dulverton RDC. He had noticed a press report of a recent meeting held by Dulverton RDC where the Town Clerk took 'a very strong attitude with regard to the imposition placed upon Clerks by the evacuation scheme'. Mr Frith had obviously voiced similar concerns but 'found that I appeared to be running my head against a brick wall'. All the work for the first evacuation wave had been done by his own staff to the detriment of his private practice. He had urged South Molton RDC to employ a paid clerical assistant to take charge of the revised evacuation plans but they would not authorise this without MH agreement. When he wrote to the Ministry explaining the position he received 'a curt note to the effect that the Ministry would consider the appointment of paid clerical assistance if and when the need arises'. The Town Clerk of Dulverton RDC replied that although work as Evacuation Officer was part of his duty as Clerk to the RDC, billeting officer was not. The strain on his staff 'was becoming unbearable and to alleviate it I decided to definitely refuse to carry on as billeting officer. It was not a question of pay, but of accommodation and want of staff'.²⁰³

Evidently Mr Frith decided to continue but encountered problems again in 1944 when he was 'placed in an invidious position by having to undertake the task of settling billetees on householders, often his own clients'.²⁰⁴ This sometimes involved 'unpleasantness and abuse from

²⁰² *The Western Times*, 11 October 1940

²⁰³ *South Molton Municipal Borough, Town Clerk's General Correspondence 3058add1&2/14*, letters dated 23, 24 and 25 April 1940. A local well-known lady volunteered to take over as Billeting Officer in Dulverton

²⁰⁴ *South Molton Corporation Minute Book 3058add4/2/11*, p.154, 12 September 1944

people because they have to do a bit for their King and Country'.²⁰⁵ In October 1940, the Clerk of Honiton RDC stated that a story was circulating that billeting officers were being paid 'a ridiculous sum for the work they were doing' whereas in reality they were rendering voluntary service and often spending their own money. This story was having a bad effect in the villages and depriving billeting officers of their authority.²⁰⁶ In February 1941, Ilfracombe's CBO resigned following a complaint by the WVS area official to the MH (Bristol) about billeting arrangements for some child evacuees. The Officer felt his name 'would be dragged down in the same way as the previous Billeting Officer',²⁰⁷ who upset members of the local WVS in late 1940 by apparently ignoring them when a large party of evacuated children arrived and was relieved of his duties in December 1940, ostensibly to devote more time to his job as sanitary inspector.²⁰⁸ This illustrates the friction and clashes of personality sometimes generated between various agencies or individuals involved in evacuation.

As war progressed, the need for continued co-operation from local reception authorities was recognised as essential by central government and requests for extra assistance or honorariums were usually granted if appropriate.²⁰⁹ In October 1940, the Chairman of DCC wrote to all local councils explaining that discussions with the Regional Commissioner on the subject of the difficult and urgent problems of billeting and accommodation in the region had resulted in the suggestion to appoint a Billeting Co-ordinating Officer to liaise between the Regional Officer of the MH (Bristol) and the large number of authorities in Devon.²¹⁰ Some councils recorded their disinclination and/or

²⁰⁵ *South Molton Municipal Borough General Correspondence 3058add1&2/15*, 7 October 1940

²⁰⁶ *The Western Times*, 25 October 1940

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 14 February 1941

²⁰⁸ *Ilfracombe Urban District Council Minutes R2458A/C(2/3)C33*, pp.158-9 and *Ilfracombe Urban District Council Committee Minutes R2458A(213)C72*, p.178

²⁰⁹ For example, Newton Abbot UDC appointed a paid CBO in April 1940. His request for an increase of 10/- in July was granted *Newton Abbot Urban District Council Minutes R2361A/(5/4)C42-C43*. See also *Ilfracombe Urban District Council Letterbook R2458A/(2/3)*, September 1940..The Sanitary Inspector asked for an honorarium of £50 and was granted £25

²¹⁰ Further discussion of this decision can be found in Chapter 5 under the section on billeting problems. Somerset, Dorset and Gloucestershire also appointed a Billeting Co-ordination Officer at this time

disapproval especially if it involved any expense or interference.²¹¹ One Councillor from Teignmouth UDC resented the interference especially as ‘he had yet to hear of a town where billeting had not been amicably done’, although the BO thought it was a sensible idea.²¹² After a meeting with local officials it was decided that, although the County Council had hitherto not been actively associated with billeting, A.J. Witherby, Clerk to DCC, would assume the duties on a voluntary basis. A meeting was held at the beginning of November to discuss billeting problems, in particular to assist with the most equitable distribution of evacuees in the County,²¹³ bearing in mind such issues as adequacy of educational and public health services, the need to co-ordinate the surveys of available accommodation made from time to time, the maintenance of liaison between the billeting authorities and MH Regional officers and the need to harmonise the requirements of the military authorities with the billeting authorities.²¹⁴

Initial MOI reports in 1939 found ‘considerable evidence of ignorance, high-handed action and apparent indifference’ amongst billeting officers nationally.²¹⁵ This was inevitable as overworked officers attempted to billet on householders as many children as quickly as possible. Cole’s 1941 survey recommended that there should be a new status for billeting officers because of the inherent problems with the status quo. He or she should be a paid servant of an outside authority, which was prepared to issue directions and introduce standards for his/her guidance. Full time local government officials were finding it hard to fulfil their normal duties and part-time officials such as town clerks in small towns were financially heavily dependent on the goodwill of the middle and

²¹¹ For example, *South Molton Municipal Borough 3058add1&2/14*, letter dated 7 November 1940 to Clerk of DCC.

²¹² *The Western Times*, 8 November 1940

²¹³ See Chapter 5 for discussion of DCEC’s concern at this time about billeting children where there was suitable educational provision

²¹⁴ *The Western Times*, 13 December 1940. Also *Dawlish Urban District Council Committee Reports R2369A/(5/3)C82*, October 1940 and *Crediton Urban District Council Minutes R4/2/Cadd2C115*

²¹⁵ *MH 78/230*

upper classes. A purely voluntary worker was often treated as a nuisance.²¹⁶ The recommendations were ignored, presumably because it was easier to continue with the status quo and avoid the expense, administrative difficulties and potential problems with independently minded local councils. Several months later an article in the *Times Educational Supplement* concluded that the equity of billeting varied ‘according to the courage of the chief billeting officer...even the most conscientious of these officers must be sorely tempted to “let sleeping dogs lie” when the sleeping dog may be an influential member or a friend of an influential member of the council responsible for his or her appointment’.²¹⁷ Many officers apparently ‘hesitated to use compulsory powers for fear of incurring the wrath of locally powerful people’.²¹⁸ It is interesting to note that after the resignation of its CBO, apparently on health grounds, Exmouth UDC took the decision to set up a Billeting Sub-Committee and toughen up regarding compulsory billeting. No discrimination whatsoever was to be permitted in favour of members, officers or servants of the Council.²¹⁹

Locally only three recorded complaints were found in council records about unsympathetic or incompetent billeting officers and again reflect the tension that could occasionally ensue between local and evacuated ‘leaders’ or between different agencies. The first case involved a few LCC Party Leaders who complained that undesirable billets in Dawlish were not being dealt with and that adult evacuees visiting for advice and guidance were not receiving ‘the sympathetic consideration due to them’. The Council investigated but claimed that without exception all billeting officials had discharged their duties satisfactorily. However, it invited the party leaders to discuss the situation. In March, the Chairman of the Evacuation Committee, upset by the

²¹⁶ M. Cole, ‘Wartime Billeting’, *Fabian Society Tract 55* (Fabian Society May 1941) p.183

²¹⁷ *Times Educational Supplement*, 5 July 1941. See also *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 352, Column 2274, 2 November 1939

²¹⁸ *H.I. Weekly Report*, INF 1/292 as cited in I. McClaine, *Ministry of Morale* (George Allen & Unwin 1979) p.176 and also reproduced in H. L. Smith, ed., *Britain in the Second World War: a social history* (Manchester University Press 1996) pp.43-4

²¹⁹ *Exmouth Urban District Council Minutes R7/4/C36*, 5 November 1940

allegations, temporarily resigned after 34 years service. It was decided that all future complaints about billeting should be put in writing.²²⁰ The second case involved M. Francis, Representative of Duppas-Waddon Evacuation Party from Croydon, who wrote to Exeter's Secretary for Education in March 1941. He complained that practically all the children who had returned home had done so because their billets had been unsatisfactory. The billeting officers had apparently either refused to re-billet them or were too 'tardy'. The Town Clerk was furious 'the statements made... absolutely confound me and are a rank injustice to this office'. He pointed out that Mr Francis had changed his billet seven times in 9 months and highlighted a recent case of foster parents who were 'broken hearted' because their evacuee was removed at a teacher's suggestion. Writing later to the Headteacher at Montgomery School, the Town Clerk agreed that any assistance given by teachers in arranging necessary transfers was welcome. However, he added that in his personal experience 'many quite unnecessary transfers have been suggested by teachers, which, if they had been acted upon by the Billeting Officer, would have caused unsettlement in both children and householders'.²²¹ The third case involved Tavistock's CBO. In August 1943, DCEC's Welfare Officer wrote to the Finance Department suggesting that a part-time paid billeting officer was needed because the Town Clerk was unsatisfactory. The Council defended him but a part-time officer was duly appointed the following month and in May 1944 a full-time billeting and welfare officer was appointed.²²² Previous remarks discussed above concerning this officer, who was a reluctant CBO, suggest that perhaps he was not suitable billeting officer material.²²³ One further complaint was recorded by the Headteacher of Inwardleigh School where an evacuee received a black eye apparently inflicted by his foster mother. The Headteacher 'several times asked the Billeting Officer to change his billet because of persistent ill-treatment, in vain, and it is no use

²²⁰ *Dawlish Urban District Council Committee Reports R2369A/(5/3)C84*, January 1942. Also *R2369A/(5/3)C27*

²²¹ *Town Clerk's Papers, Exeter City Archive, A.R.P. Evac, Box 12, Group N*. Letters dated 28 March 1941 and 20 November 1941

²²² *Tavistock Rural District Council Minutes 1690/12*

²²³ *Astor Family Papers 186/21/3* – Letter to Chief Billeting Officer of Plymouth dated 1 October 1941. Refer to Reference 195 for page numbers in this Chapter describing previous negative remarks.

appealing him'. The boy and his brother were removed shortly thereafter due to persistence of the Enquiry Officer but returned home very soon.²²⁴

Despite the difficulties there appeared to be no shortage of applicants for the post of billeting officer,²²⁵ and some found a sense of fulfillment. Mr Copelston, BO for Lapford, felt it was the most exciting job he had ever had.²²⁶ The retiring BO for Ilfracombe, who had taken over during a crisis in July 1944, stated that he 'found billeting work most interesting, and although at times hard and trying, I felt that I was doing useful service'.²²⁷

Billeting difficulties

It was realised that the invasion of family life on such a scale was unprecedented, and that such a policy would have to fight in every village and town of the country a centuries-old dislike of billeting in private homes.²²⁸

During the uncertain weeks leading up to war differences of opinion regarding potential billeting problems were undoubtedly aired behind closed doors at local authority committee meetings. The only recorded example found was at Okehampton RDC where a scheme for the communal billeting of children in Chagford as a counter proposal to billeting in private homes was submitted by the Air Raids Precaution Officer and supported by the Sanitary Inspector and apparently many

²²⁴ *Inwardleigh Log Book 688Cadd./EAL1*, October 1941

²²⁵ 28 applicants in October 1940 for billeting officer post offering £2 per week, *Okehampton 3248A/16/3*; 21 for assistant billeting officer in Tiverton in December 1940, *Tiverton Town Council Minutes R4/1addC1*; 27 applicants for billeting officer in Ilfracombe in January 1941, *Ilfracombe Urban District Council Minutes R2458A/(2/3)C33*, p.178

²²⁶ Information supplied by Mr Copelston's son

²²⁷ *Ilfracombe Urban District Council Letter Book R2458A/(2/3)C231*, 15 December 1945

²²⁸ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 36

householders. The MOH however felt happier for the children to be privately billeted rather than ‘lumped’ together in barracks and felt some householders were not prepared ‘to pull their weight’. In the event the motion was turned down.²²⁹ The Civil Defence Act of July 1939 authorised local authorities to serve notice on the occupier of any premises, requiring particulars about the premises and the number of residents for billeting purposes. Failure to comply could result in a summary conviction not exceeding £5. In August the MH requested that all local authorities should send letters to householders who had not volunteered, intimating that in the event of an emergency they ‘would be obliged to accept evacuees’.²³⁰ Initially there appeared to be some confusion about the ‘quasi-voluntary, quasi-compulsory character of the whole scheme’, and little evidence to suggest that compulsion was used openly by authorities during the first few months of evacuation.²³¹ Due to the number of official evacuees being less than expected in Devon, no particular difficulties were recorded during the first evacuation wave and no compulsory measures were needed. There were minor changes of billets in practically all areas but the number of difficult evacuees was few in number.²³² However, the number of private evacuees occupying accommodation in the County was to prove problematic during the second evacuation wave. Some householders, hoping to avoid billeting official evacuees, claimed they no longer had accommodation either because they were expecting relatives or friends, or because they hoped to attract private lodgers. However, in an unprecedented move, the MH withdrew the freedom of householders to give priority to relatives or friends if they were not from evacuation areas.²³³

The phoney war period, together with sensational stories in the press, had encouraged apathy amongst potential householders whose recruitment was vital for the success of Evacuation Plan IV.

²²⁹ *Western Times*, 14 July 1939

²³⁰ *Brixham Urban District Council Minutes R4582A/BC23*

²³¹ For example, *The Times*, 17 August and 27 September 1939. See also R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p.71

²³² *ED 134/30*

²³³ *Town Clerk's Papers, Exeter City Council A.R.P. Evac Box 10/100, Group N*

Even when the bombing began it was difficult for those in unaffected rural and parochial reception areas such as Devon, where lack of access to newspapers and radios was not uncommon, to imagine the devastation inflicted on those so often already the victims of severe urban poverty. The billeting registration returns, vital for the second evacuation wave, were very low and the decision was taken by many local authorities during 1940 to introduce compulsory billeting together with independent Billeting Appeals Tribunals. Locally, some authorities reluctantly initiated these mechanisms at various times from 1940 onwards, either to counteract apathy and discourage non-cooperation from those householders inclined towards selfishness, to eliminate suspicions that well-to-do householders were evading their billeting duty,²³⁴ or during peak periods when large numbers were already billeted.²³⁵ However, Honiton MB Evacuation Committee recorded its resistance to compulsory billeting for young unaccompanied children on unwilling householders because it would cause ‘most unhappy domestic conditions for children’.²³⁶

Hard pressed billeting officers were often more enthusiastic about compulsory measures than the councils themselves. Brixham UDC, Budleigh Salterton UDC, Bideford MB, Crediton RDC and Totnes BC were amongst those councils which felt compelled to introduce compulsory measures.²³⁷ Totnes had been forced to sanction compulsory billeting in August 1940 as two billeting officers had resigned, complaining that responses to newspaper and their own personal appeals were ‘entirely insufficient’.²³⁸ However, Lily Ramsden (Totnes BO - sample) only remembered having to take someone to court on one occasion. By September, Ilfracombe UDC was finding difficulty accommodating the large number of unaccompanied children but the Council was reluctant to use

²³⁴ *Report on Conditions in Reception Areas by a Committee under the Chairmanship of Mr Geoffrey Shakespeare, M.P.* (HMSO 1941) p.6

²³⁵ For example, Bideford already had 1,051 children billeted before it introduced compulsory billeting. *Bideford Municipal Borough Minutes R2379A/(1/1)C25*, November 1940

²³⁶ *Honiton Municipal Borough Council Minutes R7/1/C12*, p.151, July 1944

²³⁷ *Brixham Urban District Council Minutes R4582A/BC23-24*, June 1940; *Budleigh Salterton Urban District Council Minutes R7/3/C14*, April 1940; *Bideford Municipal Borough Minutes R2379A/(1/1)C25*, November 1940; (Crediton) *The Western Times*, 16 August 1940

²³⁸ *Totnes Town Council Minutes R9/2/C34*, 28 August 1940

compulsory billeting. However in November, with already 1,155 in billets, compulsion was used for the first time although only 2 people refused to comply, one of whom was elderly and unwell.²³⁹ Local prosecutions were relatively few considering the large number of evacuees needing accommodation. For example, at the end of 1940 there were 9 summonses in Exmouth, which was near saturation point, for failing to comply with billeting orders.²⁴⁰ One of these cases concerned the Vicar of West Raleigh who refused to billet 3 boys and appealed. The rectory was a nine roomed house but the Vicar stated his wife was not in 'strong health'. Similar excuses at peak periods tested local authority patience, especially when houses had plenty of spare accommodation. The couple were pressed to take a mother and children because they would not need the same attention.²⁴¹ No evidence of any explicit backlash in Devon against compulsory billeting has been found.

Other billeting problems during 1940 were recorded in the following areas:

In Barnstaple RD the CBO at Braunton stated that there were no more voluntary billets but the Committee was reluctant to resort to compulsory billeting unless it was assured that the water supply would be adequate to meet the extra demands. By December there were approximately 7,500 evacuees in Barnstaple RD which strained the water systems to the limits.²⁴² Bideford RDC encountered problems in some parishes during July when 750 unaccompanied children arrived. Villagers in the Parish of Parkham complained about the nuisance being caused by the second batch of evacuees who apparently misbehaved. This is notable for being the only known complaint by locals of group evacuee misbehaviour recorded in extant local council records.²⁴³ Also in July

²³⁹ *Ifracombe Urban District Council Letter Book, R2458A/(2/3)C116*, Letter to Ministry of Health dated 19 September 1940 and letter to Lord Mayor's Secretary dated 27 November 1940. Also *Ifracombe UDC Committee Minutes R2458A(2/3)C72*, 13 November 1940, p.425

²⁴⁰ *The Western Times*, 15 November 1940 and 10 January 1941

²⁴¹ *Ibid.* 17 January 1941

²⁴² *Barnstaple Rural District Council R3057add3C6*, p.863, 6 December 1940. Also *Express & Echo*, 7 December 1940

²⁴³ *Bideford Rural District Council Minutes R2414A(1-5)C10*, April and July 1940

opinions differed amongst Dawlish UDC officials as to whether the town could accommodate more evacuees. The Town Clerk (CBO), clearly feeling the pressure, said it was ‘beyond the bound of human possibility...he might be forced to resign’. Other councillors claimed there was still plenty of room and that people were making excuses.²⁴⁴ A furious ‘volunteer’ from Seaton complained to the Government about the manifest lack of co-operation between the Ministry and the Board and the apparent disregard in London for local surveys of accommodation.²⁴⁵ Individual irritation in overcrowded areas, either amongst officials or the public, vented against a Government which appeared to ignore local feedback, was undoubtedly common but seldom recorded.

Despite poor registration returns, householders frequently developed a spontaneous group generosity at the last moment and responded much better to gentle persuasion than to brute tactics by understandably overwrought billeting officers. Evidence suggests that there was only a small minority who were genuinely unwilling to help. Several press reports about potentially difficult billeting situations in the Newton Abbot area illustrate how apparent reluctance of householders could change quickly and how officious billeting officers could alienate potential billetors. About 500 children arrived in Newton Abbot in June but, according to the CBO, out of 20% of those canvassed who gave excuses only about 5% were genuine and some people were rude and aggressive. However, canvassers reported on the readiness of the majority of householders to play their part, some of whom were clamouring for children although it seemed that in a few cases compulsory billeting was ‘ruthlessly applied’ at very short notice. Two days later the same newspaper reported on the marvellous response from Newton Abbot RDC householders towards over 1,600 children and on the reception of nearly 4,000 children in Mid-Devon that went scarcely without a hitch.²⁴⁶ The successful response in Newton Abbot RDC was doubtless largely due to the fact that householders were approached individually after only 350 replies out of 7,000 registration

²⁴⁴ *Express & Echo*, 4 July 1940

²⁴⁵ *ED 134/31*, Letter from Seaton resident – last page missing, dated 5 August 1940

²⁴⁶ *Express & Echo*, 17 and 19 June 1940

forms were returned. Billeting officers in each parish were requested to consult with Parish Councillors and in future to submit lists of proposed billets for children to ensure that as far as possible the houses were suitable 'in all respects'.²⁴⁷ However, the situation later worsened in Newton Abbot UD when a deputation of billeting officers requested an immediate decision by the Council in November regarding compulsory billeting. There is no record of the response but they all resigned in January.²⁴⁸

In Exeter the Chairman of the Education Committee was worried that the reception of more children over and above the 4,500 already accommodated might cause a breakdown in part of the elementary education system. However the Town Clerk (CBO) was determined that householders should not avoid their patriotic duty and replied the City could accommodate 16,000.²⁴⁹ Some residents wrote to the Town Clerk explaining they could no longer take evacuees because relatives and friends were coming to stay but were notified that unless these guests came from evacuation areas they did not have priority over official evacuees.²⁵⁰ Whilst it appeared there was a lack of billets there were nevertheless plenty of householders desperate for evacuee children. An Exeter teacher highlighted the fact that many residents had previously offered to take evacuee children but on hearing nothing further presumed their offer was turned down. They therefore did not think further appeals for billets applied to them. The teacher stated that when evacuees arrived it was not a case of 'where shall I get rid of this child' but 'where can I get extra children to satisfy the demands of the district. I have not met one person who is not anxious to help'.²⁵¹ A householder from Heavitree asked why there was talk of compulsory billeting. He/she was not alone in having

²⁴⁷ *Newton Abbot Rural District Council R2365A/(5/6)C31*, 5 June 1940, July 1940

²⁴⁸ *Newton Abbot Urban District Council Minutes R2361A/(5/4)C43*

²⁴⁹ *Express & Echo*, 24 July 1940

²⁵⁰ *Town Clerk's Papers, Exeter City Council A.R.P. Evac Box 10/100, Group N*

²⁵¹ *Town Clerk's Papers, Exeter City Archive, A.R.P. Evac, Box 12, Group N*, Letter dated 3 August 1940

filled out a form, phoned the billeting officer and visited in person, yet was still without an evacuated child.²⁵²

Finding spare billets became increasingly difficult as war continued. The number of official evacuees recorded in Devon by February 1941 was 78,569, even before those from Plymouth arrived.²⁵³ However, a 1941 report found that rural areas nationally were apparently taking more interest in outside affairs and felt the scheme for unaccompanied children was ‘a very definite success’. In most cases the foster parents looked after the children very well and became very fond of them.²⁵⁴ Persuasion and threat of compulsory billeting were constantly required in overcrowded districts despite the MH’s advertising campaign in May 1941 to attract householders by describing the status of billeting as equal to a position in the Forces. The following examples were recorded locally during 1941: Barnstaple MB reported some difficulties billeting unaccompanied children under 5, a difficult age group to billet because there was no relief from child care.²⁵⁵ By September 1941, accommodation was so scarce in Brixham UD that the Council replied negatively to Bristol’s request to accommodate more children.²⁵⁶ It was evidently easier to refuse Bristol than London. Ilfracombe UDC used compulsory billeting when evacuee children arrived from Bristol on 18 and 20 February 1941. Sixteen cases of refusal were reported²⁵⁷ and a woman was fined £15.²⁵⁸ Press reports reached Bristol but the Lord Mayor reassured the Council that parents of evacuees believed them to be exaggerated and were quite satisfied their children had been very well

²⁵² *Express & Echo*, 25 July 1940

²⁵³ *Devon County Council Minutes, Emergency Committee Report, DCC148/15*, 19 June 1941.

²⁵⁴ ‘The War and the people’, *Social Work*, Volume 2, 1, 1941, p.7

²⁵⁵ *Barnstaple Municipal Borough Minutes 2654add2/C120*, 28 November 1941

²⁵⁶ *Brixham Urban District Council Minutes R4582A/BC25*, 5 September 1941

²⁵⁷ *Ilfracombe Urban District Council Committee Minutes R2458A(2/3)C72*, p.471. In April, 3 cases were due to be examined, *Ilfracombe Urban District Council Committee Minutes R2458A(2/3)C33*, p.211

²⁵⁸ *The Western Times*, 25 April 1941. Also *Ilfracombe Urban District Council Committee Minutes R2458A(2/3)C33*, p.211

received.²⁵⁹ Lucy Faithfull, a regional welfare officer, spent 3 months in Ilfracombe during 1941 because of billeting problems. By visiting and persuasion she got householders to change their minds and apparently the outcome was successful.²⁶⁰ Teignmouth UDC warned in January 1941 that drastic steps would have to be taken unless voluntary offers were more 'freely forthcoming',²⁶¹ and Tiverton BC was forced to use compulsory billeting in a few cases in June when 466 children arrived from Plymouth.²⁶²

Had serious bombing renewed again in London during 1942-3, the billeting situation in Devon might well have deteriorated badly. Many householders already had long term evacuees billeted with them and spare accommodation amongst a war weary public was scarce. In November 1942, the CBO of Crediton UDC recorded that the position as elsewhere was increasingly difficult and gave three reasons why billeting in private houses in Crediton had become much more problematic. Many young married women had joined the Services or were engaged in other war work. Many former billets were now occupied by members of the Land Army and the many elderly residents of Crediton were too old.²⁶³ Fortuitously the number of evacuee children fell during 1942 and continued to fall but, despite the improved situation, Okehampton's CBO claimed he made 48 calls before placing two children from a London School which had been 'bombed with such dire results'. He attributed this reluctance to the fact that reports on bombing were not published in the press as in the early days of war.²⁶⁴

There continued to be a serious shortage of billets in many areas of Devon during 1944 for a variety of reasons, detailed in Chapter 6. The Rivulet evacuation wave during the summer months again

²⁵⁹ *Ilfracombe Urban District Council Minutes R2458A/(2/3)C33*, March 1941, p.194

²⁶⁰ B. Holman, *The Evacuation*, p.51

²⁶¹ *Teignmouth Urban District Council R2360A/(5/5)C34*, 7 January 1941

²⁶² *Tiverton Borough Council Committee Minutes R4/1addC5*, 10 June 1941

²⁶³ *Crediton Urban District Council Local Defence Committee War Book R4/2/C/67*, 11 November 1942

²⁶⁴ *Report of the Chief Billeting Officer, Municipal Borough of Okehampton, for the year ending 30 June 1943. Okehampton 3248A/16/3*

tested both the generosity of Devon householders and the competence of billeting officers. Between 10-14 July, 6,110 evacuees were accommodated in Devon and, despite the destruction, 1,000 were billeted in Exeter. Reports expressed ‘considerable success’ in billeting unaccompanied schoolchildren.²⁶⁵ However, MH Circular 110/44 (19 August 1944) admitted that many local authorities were requesting sheets and towels which were unavailable due to a shortage of cotton and therefore parents were expected to supply them. Exmouth UDC considered this an unsatisfactory state of affairs which could jeopardise further billeting. Nevertheless, 880 evacuees were very successfully billeted there in July, the majority voluntarily, and by September there were 1,356 evacuee children in private homes.²⁶⁶ The following local problems were recorded:

In Ashburton billeting difficulties resulted in 92 children out of 120 evacuees sleeping at the school on the first night, 30 on the second.²⁶⁷ Dawlish UDC was forced to introduce compulsory billeting in July when only 62 voluntary billets were initially offered for 200 children from Kent. More billets were found but police aid was used to enforce compulsory billeting and there were some prosecutions.²⁶⁸ Records of appeals against billeting both children and mothers with children between 2 August 1944 and 21 April 1945 indicate that 48 were allowed, 19 disallowed and 9 adjourned.²⁶⁹ Ilfracombe UDC also experienced great difficulties during July due to service billeting, an increase of residents and large numbers of visitors.²⁷⁰ Ottery St Mary UDC and Newton Abbot UDC both reported problems²⁷¹ and South Molton RDC received an apology from the Senior MH Regional Officer that evacuees had been sent at short notice. He acknowledged the Southwest Region had taken more than any part of the country but more might have to be sent.²⁷²

²⁶⁵ *ED 134/39 G9E/963*

²⁶⁶ *Exmouth Urban District Council R7/4/C39*, 19 July 1944

²⁶⁷ *Ashburton School Log Book*, 6020C/EFL5, 13 and 14 July 1944

²⁶⁸ *Dawlish Urban District Council Minutes R2369A/(5/3)C29*, July 1944

²⁶⁹ *Dawlish Urban District Council Evacuation Folder 2369AddC4A*

²⁷⁰ *Ilfracombe Urban District Council R2458A/(2/3) C73*, July 1944

²⁷¹ *Ottery St Mary Urban District Council Committee Minutes R7/5/C/5*, p.46, 5 October 1944. *Newton Abbot Urban District Council Minutes R2361A/(5/4)C46*, 20 July 1944

²⁷² *South Molton Rural District Council Minutes R2407A/(2/6)C12*, 29 July 1944

Positive billeting experiences other than those of Exeter and Exmouth UDC (see above) included Torbay MB where 1,490 children were billeted by September²⁷³ with no mention of any recorded billeting problems, St Thomas RDC where 300 children were very satisfactorily billeted in July,²⁷⁴ and Bideford RDC where billets were found for 250 children who arrived at short notice and were temporarily housed in Rest Centres for 2 days. All went smoothly and only one refusal was noted at Clovelly.²⁷⁵

Alternative solutions to billeting in private households

In accordance with Government policy, all children arriving in Devon who were suitable for billeting were accommodated privately, even at peak periods. In May 1940 the Treasury approved expenditure for local authorities to accommodate up to 5% of children found unsuitable for billeting on arrival (MH Circular 2032), and Devon's hostel development for short term problems ranging from enuresis and skin infections to longer term psychological disturbances is discussed in Chapters 6 and 7. Finding suitable premises, staff and equipment was problematic and expensive, and although the County sometimes used spare spaces in hostels to house children temporarily until suitable billets were found, it was always Government intention that children wherever possible would be billeted in private homes. Even in August 1940 when there were 32,348 evacuee children in Devon, only 3% were in hostels.²⁷⁶

However, one unique residential hostel for evacuee children was set up at Dartington Hall, owned by Dorothy²⁷⁷ and Leonard Elmhurst. Dorothy's deep and committed philanthropic interest in the welfare of evacuee children was similar to that of her friend and compatriot, Nancy Astor. When approximately 400 children arrived from London earlier than expected in Dartington on 14 June

²⁷³ *Torbay Municipal Borough R4582A/TC73*

²⁷⁴ *St Thomas Rural District Council Minutes R7/10/C25*

²⁷⁵ *Bideford Rural District Council Minutes R2414A(1-5)C12, July 1944*

²⁷⁶ *Devon County Council Minutes DCC148/15, DCC Meeting dated 26 September 1940*

²⁷⁷ Dorothy was the daughter of an American millionaire

1940, those who could not be billeted in the village were taken to Dartington Hall where the Dance School was offered as an Evacuation Hostel. The children later moved into the Junior School premises at the Hall. More evacuees later arrived from London, Bristol, Plymouth, Exeter and other areas,²⁷⁸ and several from the sample spent time there. However, the division of financial and administrative control between DCEC and Dartington Council became particularly problematic in May 1941 following the Plymouth and Bristol evacuations. Problems including lack of equipment, trained staff, initiative and efficiency, together with dependence on voluntary help and the financial problems of running a hostel for between 200-220 evacuees, finally led to DCEC assuming sole responsibility in 1942.²⁷⁹

Another suggested alternative to private billeting was the establishment of camps. However, the Camps Act (25 May 1939)²⁸⁰ was never more than ‘a tiny contribution to the problems of evacuation’,²⁸¹ and camps generally proved an unpopular and costly alternative to private billeting. After Munich a large number of Members of Parliament urged Sir John Anderson and the Minister of Health to initiate a camp building programme for evacuees, but support was mixed. Arguments against such a programme included expense, finding suitable sites, the increasing shortage of building materials and labour, bombing risks, health and psychological issues, the shortage of teaching staff, and the difficulties of continuous day and night contact with pupils.²⁸² Following the first evacuation wave many teachers suggested that camps might help with billeting problems but apparently once experienced they proved ‘less than universally popular with both teachers and

²⁷⁸ P. Connolly, *Evacuees at Dartington 1940-1945* (Northfleet Press 1990)

²⁷⁹ *ED 134/33*, Memo dated May 1941 written by Mrs C. Ashworth, friend of Kenneth Lindsay, M.P and letter from HMI dated 8 May 1941. *ED 134/38, G9E/930*

²⁸⁰ The Act allowed for the promotion and facilitation of construction, maintenance and management of camps of a permanent character for use as school holiday camps to be overseen by the National Camps Corporation

²⁸¹ See R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, pp.27,170, 189, 243 and 279-80. See also *Education* Volume LXXIII, p.388. Letter from Education Officer to Editor of *Education*, dated 31 March 1939

²⁸² Psychological opinion did not favour camps, particularly for those under 11. R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p.189

pupils'.²⁸³ Nevertheless by December 1939, 31 camps were either completed or under construction²⁸⁴ and by 1940 these were all completed. One was occupied by an evacuated orphanage and the others with one exception were occupied by evacuated schoolchildren.²⁸⁵

However, MH Circular 1987 (26 March 1940) again emphasised the cost of camps and the problem of staffing. The 31 new camps only accommodated 11,000 children and there were already over 400,000 in reception areas and plans to evacuate a further 500,000 if necessary.²⁸⁶ The only mention of a possible camp in Devon was made during April 1940 before the huge influx of evacuees arrived. Local councils in Devon seaside resorts received a letter from Weston-Super-Mare Corporation suggesting that representations be made to the MH that all children billeted in seaside resorts be re-housed in properly built camps. Sidmouth UDC recorded that no action was to be taken and no other records have been found.²⁸⁷ Presumably the lack of interest was due to cost, the uncertainty about the evacuation situation and possibly because, due to Devon's remoteness, any such camps would be too distant for later use in peacetime. By February 1941, 6,500 children nationally were billeted in camps, falling to between 5,700 and 5,400 during 1942-1944.²⁸⁸ In 1945 the powers and duties of the MH under the Camps Act of 1939 were transferred to the Ministry of Education as the benefit of camps for educational purposes were recognised.

²⁸³ P.H.J.H. Gosden, *Education in the Second World War* (Methuen & Co. Ltd. 1976) p.77

²⁸⁴ *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 355, Columns 459-460, 5 December 1939

²⁸⁵ *Education*, Volume LXXXIII, p.226

²⁸⁶ *Ministry of Health Circular 1987 – Notes for Billeting Officers - Okehampton File 324A/16/2*

²⁸⁷ *Sidmouth Urban District Council R7/7/C21*, 30 April 1940

²⁸⁸ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.381

Supervision of billets

MH Circular 1857 (27 August 1939) merely ‘suggested’ that one of the duties of a billeting officer was to visit children in their billets.²⁸⁹ It was hard for children to know who to talk to if they were unhappy, especially in an era when children rarely complained. Apart from unsuitable foster parents, jealousy or difficult behaviour manifested by children of host parents occasionally caused problems.²⁹⁰ June Kitchen (8) found it difficult to complain about her unhappiness but finally turned to her London teacher who shared the same billet. He wrote to her father but unfortunately the host found out. However, June was duly moved to another billet and was very happy.

Appendix 11 details the number and reasons for billet changes amongst the local sample, with remarkably only 5.4% resulting from unhappiness.

A long overdue MH Circular (January 1941), presumably in response to the Shakespeare Report, requested local councils to report within 14 days to the Senior Regional Officer as to whether visiting arrangements for unaccompanied children were adequate and suitable.²⁹¹ Tavistock UDC immediately requested an LCC nurse who was seconded without delay.²⁹² Additional circulars in March, and also in 1942 and 1945, urged local authorities that billets should be visited at least once a month.²⁹³ Billeting officers, teachers, school helpers, social/welfare workers²⁹⁴ and voluntary helpers were used as friendly ‘visitors’ but it was impossible to ascertain if arrangements were

²⁸⁹ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.390

²⁹⁰ For example, a local child at Atherington described by the Headteacher as having a ‘serious behaviour problem’ badly injured a female evacuee in the head. The evacuees were moved and the local child was seen by the Educational Psychologist -*Atherington School Log Book 631Cadd/EFL1*, Sep – Oct 1942. Also see W. Harbert, *Child of the War* (Third Age Press 1995) p.32

²⁹¹ *Totnes Rural District Council Minutes R9/8/37*, 17 January 1941

²⁹² *Tavistock Urban District Council Minutes 2587/13*, January/February 1941

²⁹³ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp. 390-391. M. Parsons, *I’ll Take That One*, p.15

²⁹⁴ The profession of Social Work was ‘in its infancy’ and Social (Welfare) workers were in very short supply. The British Federation of Social Workers was only established in 1936 and the first course began at the London School of Economics in 1954. J. Welshman, ‘The Social History of Social Work: The Issue of the “Problem Family”, 1940-70, *The British Journal of Social Work* (Oxford University Press June 1999) Volume 29, No. 3, p.468

satisfactory because no comprehensive investigations were conducted by the MH during the war.²⁹⁵ This is one area where ideally, if finance and adequate staff had been available, much more should have been done independently to monitor the visiting process. There must have been many cases where local 'visitors' avoided causing problems with fellow locals. Skill was also needed to judge whether an evacuee child was exaggerating problems in order to return home. For example, a child billeted in Exeter claimed she was not being well fed. The older sister, billeted in the same home, claimed how well they were looked after and the Chief Inquiry Officer found it an 'exceptionally good home'.²⁹⁶

Apart from an HMI report in October 1939 stating that there was ample evidence of regular visits to billets, frequently by teachers and helpers,²⁹⁷ there are no further details recorded locally about systematic visits to billets until 1942, with little information thereafter. Systematic visits in Totnes were not adopted until February 1942,²⁹⁸ and at the same time Dawlish UDC altered its 1939 resolution that foster parents would probably resent the procedure and set up a Sub-Welfare Committee to undertake visits.²⁹⁹ The MH Regional Office began to tighten up and queried why there had apparently been no regular system of visiting billets in Okehampton MB as late as June 1942. Assurances were given that visits would be organised.³⁰⁰ Barnstaple MB recorded in December that all children in billets were visited an average of once a week and difficult cases more frequently (698 unaccompanied children in December). How long this procedure had been in place is unknown.³⁰¹ The only local council which recorded any detailed billeting statistics was Exmouth UDC where 2,401 evacuees (unaccompanied children and mothers with accompanying children) were billeted during 1942. Between February and March, 101 children were moved for a variety of

²⁹⁵ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 391

²⁹⁶ *Town Clerk's Papers, Exeter City Council, A.R.P. Evac, Box 10/100*

²⁹⁷ *ED 134/30*

²⁹⁸ *Totnes Town Council Minutes R9/2/C34, 28 February 1942*

²⁹⁹ *Dawlish Urban District Council Committee Reports R2369A/(5/3)C84, 29 January 1942*

³⁰⁰ *Okehampton 3248A/16/3*

³⁰¹ *Barnstaple Municipal Borough 2654add4/Box13, December 1942*

reasons including sickness and periods of rest for householders. Eleven billets were found unsuitable and there were 73 voluntary placements, 22 ‘persuasive’ and 6 ‘compulsory’. During March-April, 137 billets were changed. None were found unsuitable and there were 17 persuasive or compulsory placements. By December 1943 it was reported that there were only a handful of unsuitable billets per month (500 unaccompanied children billeted).³⁰² Bearing in mind the potential problems, the number of unsuitable billets appears minimal.

On 6 January 1943, DCEC contacted local authorities to explain that the Regional MH Welfare Officer had again raised the question of arrangements made for visiting billets. There was difficulty in some areas finding suitable official helpers and councils were asked to supply numbers. For example, South Molton RDC, where one billeting case involving the NSPCC had been recorded in 1940, replied there was only 1 helper.³⁰³ It appears that many short staffed local authorities were probably still relying both on the goodwill of teachers to check on children’s billets and on luck. By August, DCEC’s Welfare Officer complained that Tavistock’s CBO was failing to arrange frequent visits to billets. Despite the Council’s affirmation of the Town Clerk’s ‘diligent work’, the following month a part-time paid billeting officer was appointed to assist. In May 1944 a full-time billeting and welfare officer was appointed³⁰⁴ and monthly reports on visits to billets featured in the Council Minutes for the first time. Almost 2,000 evacuees were billeted during the third evacuation wave and, with the exception of a few complaints all appeared happy and well cared for.³⁰⁵

³⁰² *Exmouth Urban District Council Minutes R7/4/C37*, pp. 338, 363 and *R7/4/C38*, p.410

³⁰³ *South Molton Rural District Council Minutes R2407A/(2/6)C12*, December 1940. *South Molton Municipal Borough General Correspondence 3058add1&2/16*, January 1943

³⁰⁴ *Tavistock Rural District Council Minutes 1690/12*

³⁰⁵ *Tavistock Rural District Council Minutes 1690/12*, August - September 1943 and July – August 1944

Accidents amongst evacuees in Devon

During the war, accidents amongst children increased as a result of unlit houses and roads, lack of supervision, improvised sleeping arrangements, unexploded bombs and other potential hazards such as emergency water tanks. The number of excess deaths from accidents during 1940-1942 amongst the under fives was 1,060 and 966 for those aged 5-15.³⁰⁶ Roads became more dangerous due to the blackout and military traffic and one survey reported that, between September and December 1940, 1 in 7 children killed in road accidents were evacuees.³⁰⁷ However, another survey by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents found that, whilst there was an alarming increase in deaths between September 1940 and July 1941, fatal accidents to children in reception areas were rare.³⁰⁸

It was therefore inevitable that there were some tragic accidents amongst evacuees in Devon, especially with the large military presence. Apart from loss of life or injury resulting from enemy action, which included bombs, mines, cannon fire and machine guns,³⁰⁹ some evacuees lost their lives or were injured in tragic accidents that occurred whilst working on farms, or through mishaps in unfamiliar surroundings, particularly by rivers and the sea.³¹⁰ Although heavily fortified, beaches were dangerous places for adventurous children because of unexploded ammunition left by troops. Fire claimed the lives of two London evacuees at Sydney House Hostel (Torrington)³¹¹ on 19 February 1942. Another fire in January 1945 at Shobrooke Park killed 3 evacuee pupils from St

³⁰⁶ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp.333-334

³⁰⁷ *Education*, Volume LXXV111, p.301, 10 October 1941

³⁰⁸ *Times Educational Supplement*, 6 September 1941

³⁰⁹ For example, on 16 October 1942, enemy planes machine gunned pupils in Cornworthy School playground. Four children received bullet wounds including one evacuee. *Cornworthy School Log Book 1276C/(including add & add2)EFL1-2*; On 26 January 1943, the village of Aveton Giffard was bombed and machine gunned by 6 German planes. One evacuee was killed. *Aveton Giffard School Log Book 2438C/EAL3*. However, up to the end of 1942, only 27 evacuated LCC children were killed in air-raids nationally. The Government estimated that during the same period about 4,500 children's lives were saved in the Metropolitan Evacuating Area. R. Samways, ed. *We think you ought to go*, p.18

³¹⁰ For example, *The Western Times*, 13 September and 29 November 1940 and 10 April 1942

³¹¹ The hostel housed delicate children recuperating from illness and also some evacuees waiting to be re-billeted. A memorial service was held on the site on 18 May 2002 and amongst evacuees who returned were two sisters whose brother had died in the fire.

Peter's Court Prep School.³¹² Examples of the most poignant reports of other accidents to evacuees in Devon are those of the 4 year old Bristol boy who drowned on his birthday,³¹³ the 2 year old boy from Deptford who drowned in a lily pond,³¹⁴ the young boy tragically killed in June 1943 after being crushed against a gate by a cattle truck in Tiverton market,³¹⁵ the two 7 year old boys, one killed by a lorry in Honiton on his way to post a letter³¹⁶ and the other who walked backwards into a lorry at Hartland,³¹⁷ the 6 year old boy killed by a lorry outside his billet in St Giles in the Wood,³¹⁸ the 11 year old sister of two evacuees from the sample who cut her knee when fetching water from the pump and died from septicaemia, and the death of a boy in Stoke Fleming who, after spending '10 happy months' with foster parents, fell over a cliff and drowned during Victory Week.³¹⁹ Nevertheless, evacuation spared large numbers of children from death or injury, and accidents and injuries suffered by evacuees in Devon must be considered in that context.

³¹² *Western Times*, 26 January 1945

³¹³ *Ibid.* 2 May 1941

³¹⁴ *Devon and Somerset News*, 13 March 1941

³¹⁵ *Culm Valley Gazette*, 15 October 2002

³¹⁶ *The Western Times*, 13 September 1940

³¹⁷ *Ibid.* 6 September 1940

³¹⁸ *St Giles in the Wood School Log Book 1210C/EFL4*, August 1941

³¹⁹ *Stoke Fleming 1342Aadd10/PZ3*

Welfare provision

The expected war on civilian society had not come.

The Government, in preparing to meet an immediate air onslaught, had put into operation its civil defence schemes and had, by so doing, upset the working of the peace-time social services³²⁰

Welfare provision for evacuated children in Devon was multi-faceted and ranged from small scale initiatives organised by individual householders or local village groups to those established by councils and voluntary organisations. At first, Government directives were minimal but gradually evolved from late 1940 onwards. Lessons were not heeded from the previous war³²¹ and initially there was a lamentable failure both to anticipate the extent to which medical staff would be diverted to military and civil defence duties and to acknowledge that reception areas frequently had underdeveloped medical services.³²² Due to the relatively small number of evacuees who arrived in September 1939, the difficulties were less severe in Devon than those experienced by some other reception areas. Details of much of Devon's wartime welfare provision for evacuee children, such as short term hostels, nurseries and clothing, are discussed in subsequent chapters. This section examines the development of additional local welfare provision which resulted from increasing Treasury flexibility and from lessons learned during the first evacuation.

³²⁰ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 138

³²¹ During the first year of World War One, 12% of school medical staff was called up. H. Hendrick, *Child Welfare* (The Policy Press 2003) p.92

³²² From 1938-1945 the number of full-time SMOs was reduced by more than 50%, part-time by 20% and full-time school nurses by 12%. The dental service lost 25% full-time dental officers and 30% part-time. H. Hendrick, *Child Welfare*, p.124

Pre-war local conferences on evacuation held in reception areas largely dealt with travel arrangements and little was discussed concerning the potential problems of welfare provision for evacuees.³²³ In Devon, plans covered brief checks by medical staff, feeding and transportation to billets but mentioned little about facilities needed for welfare provision, although in May there were tentative discussions about the problem of raising a large staff of extra nurses, voluntary or otherwise.³²⁴ The Treasury refused to sanction advance expenditure until 25 August 1939 which undoubtedly hampered the preparation of premises for evacuation needs, for example residential nursery schools and buildings to deal with infectious cases.³²⁵ From the outbreak of war the MH loosely 'urged local authorities to form committees of interested and knowledgeable people who would concern themselves with the welfare of evacuees'. However, little was achieved until the end of 1940³²⁶ and the Ministry was criticised for its lack of 'devices to compel local authorities to adopt these schemes'.³²⁷ Apart from the School Medical Service, medical provision for unaccompanied schoolchildren included free domiciliary care by the billeting authority's doctor who was remunerated from a central fund operated by the Local Emergency Committee for the medical profession. In addition, free sick-bay treatment for minor ailments and hospital treatment under the emergency hospital scheme was available.³²⁸ The Government made a charge of 2d per week for medical care which was taken out of the money collected from parents for their child's billeting allowance.³²⁹ However, a survey carried out in December 1939 found that out of 54 county and county borough authorities, rather less than a third provided adequate facilities, a third could make more provision, and the rest seemed to have made little or no provision.³³⁰

³²³ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 110

³²⁴ *Devon County Council Maternity and Child Welfare Committee Minutes DCC157/5/1/3*, Meeting held on 15 May 1939

³²⁵ For example, Okehampton MB's plans had no provision in the remote part of the Borough to deal with infectious cases. *3248A/16/1*

³²⁶ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 391

³²⁷ R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p.56 – Report on the first evacuation wave

³²⁸ *Town Clerk's Papers, Exeter City Council A.R.P. Evac, Box 14, Group N*

³²⁹ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 225

³³⁰ Survey carried out by the Joint Committee of the four Secondary School Associations. R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p. 103

Devon's health visitors assisted in the reception of evacuees in September 1939 and school clinics (normally 21) were set up in 8 additional places.³³¹ In Exeter all ordinary clinics closed but continuous sessions were available at the School Medical Clinic.³³² MH Circular 1879 (29 September 1939) reiterated its earlier suggestion that local welfare committees should be set up but, due to lower than expected numbers, there are no records of any such local committees during the first evacuation wave. Circular 1882 (2 October 1939) emphasised the need for collaboration and co-operation between evacuation and reception authorities, anticipating that evacuation authorities would release staff required by reception authorities wherever practicable.³³³ LCC nurses were apparently willing to help in Devon but it was difficult to find school nurses who could adapt themselves to rural conditions and lack of any definite arrangement for the provision of cars proved a 'serious obstacle'.³³⁴ However, Devon's school medical system was not stretched excessively at this point in contrast to many other reception areas, although routine inspections of schoolchildren were briefly interrupted due to evacuation.³³⁵

Before the Blitz forced a change in Treasury policy, expenditure on extra welfare provision for evacuees was low priority, reliance on voluntary effort was substantial and local authority spending restricted 'within the narrowest possible limits'. This is illustrated by the Government's refusal to sanction a proposed loan of £4,000 for additional beds at Exeter Isolation Hospital. Although arrangements had been made under the Evacuation Scheme by which existing isolation accommodation could be supplemented 'economically and expeditiously', Exeter City Council

³³¹ *Devon County Council Maternity and Child Welfare Committee Minutes DCC157/5/1/3*, 4 September 1939. *The Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1939, DCC150/4/5/1*, pp.6-7 recorded that there were 9 clinics primarily for evacuees although local children were also treated –Axminster, Colyton, Holbeton, Ottery St Mary, Sandford, Seaton, Sidmouth, Sticklepath and Topsham

³³² *Exeter City Council Minutes, Maternity and Child Welfare Committee, ECA/27/2*, p.400

³³³ *Ministry of Health Circular 1882 – Okehampton File 3248A/16/2*

³³⁴ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1939, DCC150/4/5/1*, p.25. Evacuated medical staff had little experience of particular difficulties associated with work in rural areas. *PRO ED138/58* as cited in B. Harris, *The Health of the Schoolchild* (Open University Press 1995) p.145

³³⁵ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1939, DCC150/4/5/1*, p. 4

described the attitude of the Ministry as ‘incomprehensible’.³³⁶ Improved medical checks for children, both on departure from evacuation areas and on arrival in reception areas, were an important feature of planning for a successful second evacuation wave. In response to Joint MH Circular 1979 and Board Circular 1504, DCEC approved plans for up to 17 local doctors to assist the School Medical Staff and local Medical Officers of Health, all chargeable to the MH.³³⁷ Evacuation areas were responsible for medically examining those who were registered, keeping them under supervision and examining them before departure. In April the LCC agreed to accept financial responsibility for one additional School Medical Inspector and one additional Dental Surgeon for Devon.³³⁸ Following the second evacuation, MH Circular 2046 (14 June 1940) introduced an extra 5s allowance per week for householders who voluntarily nursed their unaccompanied child evacuee if suffering from a minor ailment that could suitably be treated at home, thus relieving overcrowding in hostels and hospitals.³³⁹ In September, 10 school nurses were sent from London but no School Medical Inspector or Dental Surgeon as agreed. DCEC therefore approved the temporary appointment of 3 School Medical Inspectors, 7 School Dental Surgeons and 7 School Dental Attendants, all charged to the Evacuation Account.³⁴⁰ Exeter also appointed an additional temporary SMO.³⁴¹

Following Government recommendations towards the end of 1940, welfare committees began to appear in areas with large numbers of evacuated schoolchildren. These often either included local and LCC teaching staff or liaison with them. Examples include Exmouth UDC³⁴² and Sidmouth

³³⁶ *Crediton Urban District Council Minute Book R4/2/C/58*, 29 January 1940. Letter from Ministry of Health dated 8 January 1940

³³⁷ *Devon County Education Committee Minutes DCC150/4/1/38*, 28 March 1940, p. 43

³³⁸ *Ibid.* 18 April 1940, p.64

³³⁹ *City of Plymouth Evacuation File 1645/11/12/20*

³⁴⁰ *Devon County Council Minutes, Report of the Education Committee DCC148/15*, 26 September 1940

³⁴¹ *Exeter City Council Education Minutes ECA/19/94-96*, p.78, September 1940

³⁴² *Exmouth Urban District Council R7/4/C36*, 2 July 1940

UDC.³⁴³ Paignton UDC also allocated LCC helpers to various welfare duties,³⁴⁴ and Dawlish UDC responded to a request by LCC teachers and sent three LCC helpers to each school.³⁴⁵ As bombing increased the Government continued to remove many of its financial restrictions on welfare. A wide range of emergency services was encouraged and the evacuation scheme now began to operate 'as a receiver of social casualties'. As welfare workers became increasingly vital, local authorities were encouraged to add them to their staff although there was a universal shortage of trained workers.³⁴⁶ By the end of the year DCC had 32 school clinics (21 pre-war) for minor ailments and a number of temporary clinics set up at schools, which functioned for a few weeks at a time. There were also an extra 2 temporary Ophthalmic Surgeons and an additional part-time School Medical Inspector.³⁴⁷ In December the MH announced that Regional Inspectors were in place throughout the country to ensure that local authorities were implementing Government policy. Seventeen specially trained and experienced female Welfare Officers were sent to Regional Offices and Bristol (Southwest Region 7) was allocated three. The services of the Insurance Inspectorate were also used from time to time in connection with welfare problems in reception areas.³⁴⁸

Considerable numbers of trained medical staff had either joined the Armed Forces or been drafted into the Home Front casualty services and this led to a chronic shortage of staff throughout the war which hampered welfare expansion.³⁴⁹ Dorothy Elmhist dramatically described the problems at Dartington to an American audience, determined to impress upon them the dire situation in Britain. Although Dartington Hall was experiencing particular difficulties at this time (pages 126-7), judging by the CMO's comments below, problems caused by a general shortage of medical staff in

³⁴³ *Sidmouth Urban District Council Minutes R7/7/C21*, November 1940

³⁴⁴ *Paignton Urban District Council Minutes R4582A/PC9*, 15 August, October and November 1940

³⁴⁵ *Dawlish Urban District Council Committee Reports R2369A/(5/3)C82*, 15 December 1940

³⁴⁶ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp. 370-1, 385 and 404.

³⁴⁷ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1940, DCC150/4/5/1*, pp.1 and 17

³⁴⁸ *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 367, Columns 1330 and 1369, 19 December 1940. The staff consisted of just over 600 including 264 women

³⁴⁹ For example, *The Western Times*, 29 August 1941. See also R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.150

Devon were causing concern. Dorothy explained that it was almost impossible to get help from a trained nurse during the winter 1940/41 and on one occasion it took 48 hours to reach a doctor. The few local doctors left in the area were out late at night doing their rounds but many patients went unattended. There was only one trained nurse and a helper for the 200 evacuees billeted at the Hall and volunteers had to be drafted in for emergencies.³⁵⁰ In June 1941, Dartington's BO blamed the MH for the situation. There was only one Welfare Officer for South Devon, apparently without a car, and the school doctor and dentist were finding it difficult to visit pupils regularly.³⁵¹ The shortage of nurses was reported in both Newton Abbot RD and Barnstaple.³⁵² Devon apparently also had more difficulty than any other county in staffing its hospitals.³⁵³

Locally, apart from Plymouth, the provision and organisation of welfare began to improve rapidly during 1941, stimulated by improved Government funding which gave the wherewithal to implement the recommendations of the Shakespeare Report, published in January.³⁵⁴ Each local authority was now well aware of the provision expected having all received a copy of the Report together with MH Circular 2307. The need for more welfare officers was highlighted and Devon appointed an Assistant Welfare Officer and additional requested staff.³⁵⁵ A Conference for Welfare Officers in the Southwest Region was held in Taunton on 14 February. Local authorities were also encouraged to provide leisure occupations for evacuated schoolchildren as part of general welfare work.³⁵⁶ Devon's MOH voiced his concern at the beginning of the year about the health of

³⁵⁰ P. Connolly, *Evacuees at Dartington 1940-1945* (Northfleet Press 1990) – Excerpt from talk given by Dorothy Elmhirst during her visit to the USA in 1941

³⁵¹ *Dartington Archive, News of the Day*, 10 and 20 June 1941

³⁵² *The Western Times*, 22 August and 22 November 1941

³⁵³ *Express & Echo*, 30 April 1941

³⁵⁴ The Introduction to the Report stated that a Committee under the Chairmanship of Geoffrey Shakespeare M.P. was appointed by the Ministry of Health on 15 November 1940, 'for the purpose of inquiring into the welfare of evacuated and homeless persons in the reception areas and examining the provision made for their comfort and contentment and for easing the burden on the householders receiving them'. The Committee spent 17 days in certain reception areas in four separate Regions. Other committee members included Miss A.C. Johnston, WVS and Mr H. Darlow, Town Clerk of Bedford.

³⁵⁵ *Devon County Education Committee Minutes DCC150/4/1/38*, p.223

³⁵⁶ *Okehampton Senior School Circulars from DCEC 464C/EAM215-221*

schoolchildren and a conference of Assistant Medical Officers concluded that the County's medical staff needed to be doubled to cope with the extra workload, i.e. 4 additional Medical Officers and 10 Health Visitors.³⁵⁷ This echoed the conclusion of the Shakespeare Committee that nationally the District Medical Service was not being extended sufficiently rapidly.³⁵⁸ As a result, 5 further temporary Assistant CMOs (3 full-time, 2 part-time) were appointed plus a Senior Dental Surgeon (appointed in April) and 19 Health Visitors/School Nurses (the majority from LCC, Bristol and Croydon).³⁵⁹ By April, Devon Public Assistance Committee was envisaging temporary salary increases of between £25-50 for district and institutional medical officers. Almost without exception all local medical officers had demanded a salary increase because of the enormously increased work load and extra expenses. In many cases salaries for medical officers were apparently the same as '30 years' ago.³⁶⁰

By August, Civilian Welfare Committees had been set up throughout Cornwall, Devon, Somerset and Wiltshire and 'closer co-operation than ever before between all the local authorities, voluntary bodies, Region and its Ministries, the Service etc' was being reported.³⁶¹ At the end of the year an additional temporary Welfare Officer and Assistant Medical Officer were appointed plus 1 full-time³⁶² and 3 part-time Psychiatric Social Workers for the North and Southwest areas of the County – all chargeable to the MH.³⁶³ The CMO reported that 'the outstanding feature of the year 1941 has been, like its predecessor 1940, the examination and treatment of evacuees'.³⁶⁴ However, the situation in Plymouth was more difficult. Following the City's partial evacuation the Lord Mayor

³⁵⁷ *The Western Times*, 10 January 1941

³⁵⁸ *Report on Conditions in Reception Areas by a Committee under the Chairmanship of Mr Geoffrey Shakespeare M.P.* (HMSO 1941) p. 11

³⁵⁹ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1941, DCC150/4/5/1*, pp. 3-4

³⁶⁰ *The Western Times*, 24 January and 25 April 1941

³⁶¹ *Crediton Urban District Council Local Defence Committee War Book R4/2/C/67, Civil Defence Office of the Regional Commissioner, Information Bulletin No 4*, 31 August 1941

³⁶² Resigned in June 1942

³⁶³ *Devon County Education Committee Minutes DCC150/4/1/39*, pp.195 and 206. *Devon County Council Minutes DCC148/15*, 11 December 1941

³⁶⁴ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1941, DCC150/4/5/1*, pp. 21-2

had presented a mobile dental clinic for the joint benefit of Devon children and Plymouth evacuees,³⁶⁵ and a medical officer and school nurse were also seconded.³⁶⁶ The City struggled during 1941 with reductions in medical and dental staff due to secondments, although school nurses still visited each school an average of 10.5 times throughout the year and a considerable amount of time was spent by MOsH examining children before evacuation. These somewhat restricted services continued during 1942.³⁶⁷

Many local authorities which had not already appointed welfare committees during 1940 organised them during 1941 and competent councils endeavoured to co-operate with the various agencies involved in the welfare of evacuee children. The following records were found: Bideford RDC established a central welfare committee in almost every parish by January.³⁶⁸ Budleigh Salterton also established a welfare committee in January,³⁶⁹ however Armfelt felt irritated enough by November to write to the Board describing it as ‘one of the few places in the County where there is little effective co-operation between local council, voluntary organisations and teachers’.³⁷⁰ There are no clues to what might have gone wrong and evacuation is barely mentioned in the council records from May 1941 until June 1943 when another welfare committee was appointed following a request from the Regional MH Welfare Officer.³⁷¹ Perhaps a clash of personalities or particularly independently minded officers prevented effective co-operation. During October, Honiton RDC requested the re-forming, if not already accomplished, of small welfare committees in each parish.³⁷² Northam UDC, having at first refused because of numerous effective local efforts,³⁷³ appointed a welfare committee in April which included 4 councillors, headteachers from each

³⁶⁵ *Devon County Education Committee Minutes DCC150/4/1/39*, p. 91, June 1941

³⁶⁶ *Devon County Council Minutes, Report of Education Committee DCC148/15*, 25 September 1941

³⁶⁷ *Interim Reports of the Medical Officer of Health for the City of Plymouth 1941 and 1942*, 1363/27-28

³⁶⁸ *Bideford Rural District Council Minutes R2414A(1-5)C10*, January 1941

³⁶⁹ *Budleigh Salterton Urban District Council Minutes R7/3/C14*

³⁷⁰ *ED 134/34*, Letter from Armfelt to Secretary of the Board of Education, dated 15 November 1941

³⁷¹ *Budleigh Salterton Urban District Council Minutes R7/3/C14*

³⁷² *Honiton Rural District Council R7/9/C12*, October 1941

³⁷³ *Northam Urban District Council Committee Minutes 3978add3/2/11*, 6 March 1941

elementary school and 6 members of the WVS.³⁷⁴ Seaton UDC decided ‘the expense would not be justified’³⁷⁵ and Tiverton RDC maintained a welfare committee was unnecessary.³⁷⁶ Tiverton BC appointed 2 evacuated LCC teachers onto its Welfare Committee in January and representative teachers from Bristol and Plymouth were included several months later.³⁷⁷ The Evacuation Committee also appointed 7 welfare visitors in April.³⁷⁸

Welfare progress continued during 1942 although numbers of evacuees fell.³⁷⁹ Recommendations were made by DCEC in January to organise welfare training courses (cost met by MH) for women aged between 18-20 and over 30³⁸⁰ to help address the severe shortage of trained staff.³⁸¹ By October there were 12 full-time Assistant County Medical Officers (6 pre-war) although only 2 of these additional doctors were employed in connection with the inspection of evacuees, exclusive of clinic work.³⁸² The number of school clinics and clinic sessions varied according to the ebb and flow of the population but averaged about 50 (32 in 1940). Signs that some of the extra welfare provision introduced for evacuees would perhaps remain postwar were hinted at by the CMO who stated that ‘additional or improved services provided for the supplemented population, once used and appreciated, often require to be continued for the use of the residual, or even the original Devon population. This applies particularly to the many additional school clinics, welfare centres and nurseries established since the War began’.³⁸³ Exeter now had 5 School Medical Officers

³⁷⁴ *Northam Urban District Council Minutes 3978add3/2/12*, April 1941

³⁷⁵ *Express & Echo*, 24 April 1941

³⁷⁶ *Tiverton Rural District Council Minutes 1690/12*, October 1941

³⁷⁷ *Tiverton Borough Council Committee Minutes R4/1addC5, Public Health Committee*, 7 January and 8 July 1941

³⁷⁸ *Tiverton Borough Council Committee Minutes R4/1addC5*, 8 April 1941

³⁷⁹ For example, a conference of Sidmouth headteachers was held in March to discuss welfare issues for evacuees, *Sidmouth St Nicholas School Log Book 3651C/EFL2*

³⁸⁰ *Devon County Education Committee Minutes DCC150/4/1/40*, p.220, 1 January 1942

³⁸¹ *Town Clerk's Papers, Exeter City Archive, A.R.P. Evac, Box 12/131, Group N*

³⁸² *Devon County Education Committee Minutes DCC150/4/1/40*, October 1942, p.147

³⁸³ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1942, DCC150/4/5/1*, pp.1 & 19

(1 temporary), 1 Dental Surgeon, 2 Assistant School Dental Surgeons (temporary) and 7 School Nurses plus 2 temporary ones.³⁸⁴

In August 1943, the County Accountant sent a report to the County Medical Staff pointing out that the cost of additional staff appeared to exceed the amount received from evacuating authorities (£1 per head for each official evacuee in the County) which was also intended to cover the cost of books, stationery, needlework and other materials, fuel, light, cleaning and upkeep of buildings and grounds. A recommendation was made to reduce the staff by one Dental Surgeon and one Dental Attendant 'but that no further reduction be made in view of the improved medical service to the Devon children which the additional staff had made possible'.³⁸⁵ As a result of the recommendations of the Joint Medical Staff Committee³⁸⁶ appointed in the Spring, DCC approved sufficient increases in December to enable all the most important additional clinics and other services to be continued for the benefit of local children. Medical, dental and health visiting staff were transferred from temporary 'evacuation' status to the 'Devon' staff roll. The number of Assistant Chief Medical Officers was increased by 6 ½ to 11, Dental Surgeons from 9 to 15, Dental Attendants from 9 to 15 and Health Visitors/School Nurses from 26 to 34. Thrice yearly personal hygiene surveys were carried out on all elementary schoolchildren. These local improvements directly resulted from evacuation.³⁸⁷

Evacuation had raised the profile of child welfare and the momentum appeared set to continue. Evacuated teaching staff had contributed to this impetus and in March 1944, *DCEC Circular 43* highlighted its concern that following the departure of many of them, some local teachers were resistant to seeking advice on welfare issues. Staff were reminded that the Secretary of Education

³⁸⁴ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer for Exeter City 1942, ECA/19/95*

³⁸⁵ *Devon County Education Committee, DCC150/4/1/41, 26 August 1943*

³⁸⁶ Comprised of the Education, Maternity and Child Welfare, Public Health and Mental Deficiency Committees

³⁸⁷ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1943, DCC150/4/5/1, pp. 2-3*

was still the Co-ordinating Officer for Welfare and that there were still 3 County Welfare Officers.³⁸⁸ The future of child care was also under consideration in Exeter. In May, the Maternity and Child Welfare Committee resolved to appoint a sub-committee consisting of the Chairman, Deputy Chairman and Secretaries of the 4 Child Welfare Centres in order to consider the future planning of Child Welfare Services in the City.³⁸⁹ Exeter's MOH later thanked Dr Craig 'for his initiative and perseverance in providing Exeter with a child guidance centre (Pilton House) at a time when this work was little understood or appreciated'.³⁹⁰ The third evacuation wave posed little problem for Devon as many of the welfare arrangements, hostels, sick-bays and practically all the additional clinics set up for the first and especially the second evacuation wave and retained for local children, were still operating.³⁹¹ Undoubtedly, evacuation to Devon advanced permanent improvements in welfare provision for children which was not planned pre-war.

Children's entertainment

Entertainment was an important additional welfare provision for evacuee children, particularly prominent during the Christmas period. *The Cambridge Evacuation Survey* concluded that before the war the Cambridge people showed little interest in the recreation of children but the evacuation 'brought to the fore the whole question of the use of leisure, and the response was immediate'.³⁹² In Devon local people voluntarily contributed much time, energy and enthusiasm to raising money for various entertainments to assist the children's integration. In one example of many the new Welfare Officer for Totnes described the 'wonderfully generous efforts' of the local villagers who raised money in 1941 to supplement the meagre 9 ¾ pennies per child donated by London, Bristol and Plymouth. Apparently some evacuees had run away and made for the nearest town with a cinema. A friend of the Welfare Officer offered to organise a free show for the children, Totnes Senior

³⁸⁸ 2066C/EAM51

³⁸⁹ *Exeter Maternity and Child Welfare Committee Minutes ECA/27/2*, 8 May 1944.

³⁹⁰ *Exeter Education Committee Minutes, ECA/19/96, Annual Report of School Medical Officer 1945*

³⁹¹ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1944*, p. 4 (held at Westcountry Studies Library)

³⁹² S. Isaacs, ed. *The Cambridge Evacuation Survey* (Methuen & Co. Ltd. London 1941) pp.156-7

School Hall was proposed as a venue and petrol was applied for from the Regional Transport Commissioner in Bristol. Over 600 children from 10 villages attended the show.³⁹³ Local newspapers continuously reported throughout the war on fundraising events, village and town tea parties, Sunday school outings and sports days which strengthened the bonds between the local and evacuee children. Many villages organised weekly entertainment, for example East Anstey held weekly tea parties and games for the children. During 1940 the evacuee children were kept busy with the Summer Holiday War Campaign (Chapter 8) and for those in rural billets there was always plenty to do. Several other examples of entertainment initiatives included summer holiday camps established in 1941 at Bolham, Chevithorne and Cove Schools which proved very successful,³⁹⁴ and the establishment of St Nicholas Club for evacuees aged up to 16 by Exmouth UDC.³⁹⁵

In January 1944, an appreciative evacuee billeted in Okehampton wrote to *The Western Times* 'If after the war I have to leave this town, I shall remember with joy and gratitude this party given for our benefit'.³⁹⁶ The Government Christmas campaign of pantomimes, parties and musical festivals was originally launched during the winter of 1939-1940 to discourage drift back. One such party was hosted by London evacuees for the local children of Newton St Cyres where 'they had been overwhelmed with kindness'.³⁹⁷ Leisure time spent together socially benefited both local and evacuated children. Reports found that Lambeth evacuees 'seemed more alive, quicker to play games and help entertain, than our country children' and those from Bethnal Green had 'quick wits and ready interest' which benefited country children.³⁹⁸ Only one example was found of a less charitable 'Christmas spirit' - a householder wanted compensation from an evacuee's mother for entertaining him over the Christmas period. Exeter's Town Clerk re-billeted the boy and wrote to

³⁹³ *Dartington Archive*, Letter from Grace Drake of Totnes to Dorothy Elmhirst, January 1942

³⁹⁴ *Tiverton Borough Council Committee Minutes R4/1addC5*, 8 July 1941

³⁹⁵ *Exmouth Urban District Council Minutes R7/4/C37*, 22 October 1941

³⁹⁶ *The Western Times*, 14 January 1944

³⁹⁷ Comments by London teacher in *The Western Times*, 22 December 1939

³⁹⁸ *Town Children through Country Eyes* (NFWI 1940) pp.14-15

his mother ‘I am glad to say (this) is the only case I have heard in Exeter where there is any question of the children not being welcome at Christmas.’³⁹⁹

The following Christmas, the Minister of Health urged local authorities to make special efforts once again to entertain the children. Whilst relying heavily on voluntary fund raising ‘reasonable expenditure from public funds would be sanctioned where necessary’,⁴⁰⁰ normally not exceeding 1s per head. All evacuation authorities in the Greater London Area adopted a common policy in December 1940 to assist reception authorities to provide entertainment for the evacuees⁴⁰¹ and Crediton, for example, received £6 towards any local scheme of entertainment.⁴⁰² Money from the Lord Mayor’s London Air Raid Distress Fund was also donated in 1940 and both Barnstaple (£500) and Tiverton (£100) received funds.⁴⁰³ Plymouth’s Lord Mayor began a welfare fund for evacuees which, amongst other things, considered applications for games and craft materials.⁴⁰⁴ Included below is a small selection of the numerous examples of local Christmas entertainment in 1940: Bridford School was entertained by evacuees and local children and the Headmaster emphasised the ‘excellent spirit’ that existed between the children.⁴⁰⁵ Exeter entertained nearly 500 evacuees at the Civic Hall, helped by members of the Salvation Army, Railway Guard and St Thomas’ Church parishioners.⁴⁰⁶ Exmouth entertained 3,500 evacuee children at parties,⁴⁰⁷ and local and evacuee children from Kenn gave a Christmas concert. The Headmaster described the ‘happy relations...great social benefits each had gained from the other’.⁴⁰⁸ Entertainment at Christmas

³⁹⁹ *Town Clerk’s Papers, Exeter City Council, A.R.P. Evac, Box 10/100*, Letters from householder to mother of evacuee and from mother to Town Clerk – December 1939

⁴⁰⁰ *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 367, Column 347, 28 November 1940

⁴⁰¹ *Ilfracombe Urban District Council Letterbook R2458A/(2/3)C254*

⁴⁰² *The Western Times*, 27 December 1940

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.* 6 December 1940

⁴⁰⁴ *City of Plymouth Evacuation File 1644/376*

⁴⁰⁵ *The Western Times*, 20 December 1940

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 27 December 1940

⁴⁰⁷ *The Western Times*, 13 December 1940

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 20 December 1940

continued to be organised each year and in November 1942 the Ministry of Food authorised the issue of margarine and preserves for children's Christmas parties.⁴⁰⁹

Financial Recovery for officially evacuated schoolchildren

The matter of expenditure always loomed large...and paralysed initiative...most of what was done to help the evacuees to settle down was accomplished by the enterprise of private citizens⁴¹⁰

Fears about reimbursement acted as a considerable constraint on reception policies⁴¹¹

The financial recovery of evacuation expenses from both the Government and large numbers of evacuating authorities was extremely complex and time-consuming for Devon's local officials and administrative staff. It was particularly stressful for the County Accounting Officer, R.D. Imrie, and his staff as they struggled with vast amounts of paperwork and red tape, enormously complicated by unofficially evacuated schoolchildren,⁴¹² in an effort to claw back evacuation expenses for every provision from heating, lighting and stationery to examination fees, medical treatment and additional personnel. For example, decisions had to be made about when and whether the need for teachers had arisen due to an increase in local scholars or an influx of evacuees. It became clear immediately following the first evacuation wave that the complex balancing of finances between reception and evacuation authorities, particularly regarding

⁴⁰⁹ Between 13 December 1942-10 January 1943. *Education*, Volume LXXX, p.369 and 449 – Ministry of Health Circular 2705, 10 October 1942

⁴¹⁰ W. Boyd, *Evacuation in Scotland* (University of London Press 1944) p.52

⁴¹¹ R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p.84 – commenting on first evacuation wave

⁴¹² Discussed in Chapter 6

unofficially evacuated schoolchildren, had not been foreseen by the Government. The Director of Education for Anglesey (reception area) was surely not alone in believing that Board Circular 1469 (19 May 1939), which stated that the responsibility for meeting the educational costs of evacuated children would fall on the evacuating LEAs, should have been followed by appropriate legislation.⁴¹³

Local schools were notified by DCEC at the end of August 1939 that all extra educational expenditure incurred as a result of evacuation would be met by the evacuating authorities. Consequently, overworked teaching staff were burdened with additional administration as separate accounts had to be kept and all expenditure required approval from an HMI or representative of the MH depending on the goods, i.e. school materials (Board), drugs and dressings (MH).⁴¹⁴ During the first evacuation wave Devon only received officially evacuated schoolchildren from the LCC and Acton. Expenditure, other than that met by the Government, was settled directly with these authorities and a conference was held in early September between LCC Officials, Imrie and Armfelt to discuss arrangements.⁴¹⁵ MH Circular 1879 (29 September 1939) unrealistically reassured local reception authorities that direct expenditure on salaries, arrangements for expectant mothers and other services in connection with evacuation would probably not be large and that no difficulty should be encountered arranging temporary finance. If in financial difficulty, the Ministry would make payments on account once a statement of expenditure details was received.⁴¹⁶

A plethora of problems immediately arose and the Davidson Committee, representing the LEAs of England and Wales, was appointed in November 1939 to consider the problems of adjusting evacuation expenditure between authorities. The Board published the Committee Report on 31

⁴¹³ *Education*, Volume LXXIX, p.324, 24 April 1942

⁴¹⁴ *Okehampton Senior School 464C/EAM375-381*. Also *DCC Evacuation Box*

⁴¹⁵ *Devon County Education Committee Minutes DCC150/4/1/37*, 14 September 1939

⁴¹⁶ *Ministry of Health Circular 1879, Okehampton File 3248A/16/2*

January 1940 and its recommendations included adjustments over a wide field of elementary and secondary education.⁴¹⁷ Due to the financial expenditure resulting from large numbers of unofficially evacuated schoolchildren from neutral areas, DCEC asked schools in March not to incur expenditure on the upkeep of school grounds or buildings except for absolute necessities such as keeping buildings watertight.⁴¹⁸ By September the school population had doubled, the number of evacuation authorities had risen dramatically and the Chairman of Devon's Finance Committee had no other option but to insist that 'country must come before county'. The Council's priority was to fund the evacuation, particularly with regard to elementary education and evacuation institutions.⁴¹⁹ The bureaucratic nightmare of locating the correct evacuation authority from which to claim financial recovery is illustrated by two local cases. Firstly, it became apparent when Devon claimed expenses from Liverpool that approximately one quarter of children resided outside the evacuable area of the City and further investigations were necessary to discover the appropriate authorities. Secondly, a letter from the Secretary of Middlesex Education Committee to Imrie in December 1940 pointed out that, although it was the authority for higher education throughout the County, there were 12 autonomous elementary education authorities. Therefore 'any children included in your account...formerly resident in any of the autonomous areas...are not in any circumstances the responsibility of this Authority'.⁴²⁰

The ongoing complexities of financial adjustments caused misunderstandings even amongst County staff. During early 1941 Imrie understandably became increasingly frustrated with the problems of

⁴¹⁷ For example, 'all expenditure by the receiving authorities due to evacuation, air-raid precautions, supplementary school accommodation, conveyance of evacuated schoolchildren, etc., should be met by a direct charge on the Exchequer. The expense of children from evacuation areas where their parents still had homes, should be met by the evacuation authority and children coming from neutral zones should be the responsibility of the receiving authority; apportionment to be based on the school roll at the end of each week. Additional expenditure for extra teachers, books and stationery, medical inspection, upkeep of building and ground, etc; should be met by mutual arrangements between evacuation and receiving authorities'.
<http://www.bopcris.ac.uk/bopall/ref9596.html>

⁴¹⁸ *Devon County Council Committee Minutes, Report of Education Committee DCC148/15*, 14 March 1940

⁴¹⁹ *The Western Times*, 27 September 1940

⁴²⁰ *DCC Evacuation Box*

financial recovery. He returned some accounts for evacuation expenditure to the CMO because they needed to be specifically allocated either to the MH (generally non-consumable articles) or to the appropriate evacuating authority (generally consumable articles). He clarified that the Davidson Report recommended that consumable materials were to be apportioned between evacuating and receiving authorities in proportion to the respective number of their children. The CMO, an astute and experienced officer, replied that it was impossible to allocate accounts to evacuation authorities as no records had been kept up until then. Further correspondence highlighted the CMO's concern at the 'interminable delay' if every small account for non-consumable goods which might concern both the MH and Board needed sanction from their appropriate local representatives. Imrie believed he was exaggerating these difficulties but the CMO insisted that there was no local MH representative to sanction goods such as drugs and dressings. The matter was evidently resolved and nothing further mentioned but it illustrates the grey areas that existed even within the same county council.⁴²¹

Nationally, reception counties were reporting increasing difficulties following the second evacuation wave and the Davidson Committee was obliged to revise its original Report. From 1 April 1941 all children became eligible for a Government billeting allowance and, whereas previously many authorities with children in reception areas had not been listed as evacuation authorities, financial adjustment with all authorities was now permitted.⁴²² A Report by Exmouth UDC on the Evacuation Conference, held in Exeter in late 1941, undoubtedly echoed the frustrations of most local authorities when it criticised the MH's unclear directives on the recovery of billeting costs.⁴²³ Ambiguous guidelines over such issues as travel expenses for secondary school evacuees were still confusing authorities in late 1943.⁴²⁴

⁴²¹ *DCC Evacuation Box*, Letters dated between 6 February and 25 May 1941

⁴²² *Ibid.*

⁴²³ *Exmouth Urban District Council Minutes R7/4/C37*, 22 October 1941

⁴²⁴ *ED134/38, G9E/864*, Letter from DCEC to HMI dated 16 September 1943

Although the revised Davidson Report allowed for increased reimbursement, the process of recovery became even more protracted. In April 1942 Imrie sent an irritated letter to the newly appointed Acting Secretary of DCEC, W.E. Philip, complaining of the long drawn out negotiations with regard to financial adjustments - 'I...have to point out that we are now 2 years in arrears with the collection of evacuation income'. Philip's reply assured him that everything was being done 'to finish the aggravating series of detailed investigations which evacuating authorities find it necessary to impose upon us...there is a constant return and cross verification of children whose homes are not in one evacuation area but in another...The larger evacuating authorities have taken a very long time to check the list of names sent to them e.g. Croydon and Bristol'. Imrie then suggested that authorities which were holding things up should be reported to the Board.⁴²⁵ It was not until February 1943 that the DCC Superintendent wrote to Imrie regarding the above mentioned financial adjustments for 1941-2. He explained it had been impossible to forward the list of evacuating authorities any earlier because the work involved in preparing the evacuation claims had been 'very much greater than in previous years'. The Second Davidson Report had made it necessary to approach many more authorities. In addition, parents who had relocated from the original home area 'created numerous difficulties and endless enquiries',⁴²⁶ and there were particular problems of financial adjustment for evacuated secondary pupils.⁴²⁷ Unsurprisingly DCC staffs were 'very much overworked and under-staffed',⁴²⁸ and local council officials were sometimes muddled by the Government's financial policy. For example, there appeared to be confusion in Axminster about

⁴²⁵ *DCC Evacuation Box*, Letters dated 13 April, 9 May and 15 June 1942

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.* Letter dated 10 February 1943

⁴²⁷ *ED 134/38, G9E/864*

⁴²⁸ *ED 134/38 G9E/864*

the cost of treating local people for scabies, causing the bewildered local MO to complain ‘I don’t know where I am’.⁴²⁹

From early 1942 onwards there was a fairly acrimonious exchange of correspondence between the County Councils’ Association and the MH about the financial burdens on reception authorities, chiefly with regard to the Law of Settlement and the Government’s undertaking that no additional burden would be placed on local rates resulting from evacuation (MH Circular 1800). The Ministry wanted to delay adjustment until after the war but the Association continued to harry. In October 1944 the Association sent the Ministry a report from Devon’s Settlement Officer which illustrated the type of problem facing County Councils. A Kent teacher was evacuated to Dawlish in September 1939, taken ill in February 1943, returned home and was subsequently admitted to hospital. Under the Law of Settlement and Removal, Devon was adjudged legally liable for the cost of her maintenance because she had resided for a period of 3 consecutive and uninterrupted years in the County. This problem appeared to remain unresolved until a simpler system was devised under the National Health Service.⁴³⁰

A note scribbled on a form for the first half of the Financial Year 1945/6 illustrates the financial strain imposed on the County by evacuation ‘Let’s get some money in – we are hard up!’⁴³¹ The Government Evacuation Scheme officially closed down (MH Circular 85/48) on 31 March 1946.

⁴²⁹ *The Western Times*, 1 January 1943. A letter from the Regional MH stated it had been agreed that the Council must use the cleansing facilities available for evacuees and need not charge their own population provided the Council’s pre-war provisions, if any, were taken full advantage of before they used facilities provided at Exchequer cost for evacuees. If the number of local cases substantially outnumbered the evacuee cases, a contribution would be expected from the Council. However, the local MO said he had been told by the CMO that the cost could be reclaimed from the parents if in a position to pay, failing which the local authority would foot the bill.

⁴³⁰ Correspondence between the County Councils’ Association and the Ministry of Health, *MH57/390*

⁴³¹ *DCC Evacuation Box*

An interim scheme⁴³² was introduced and remained until 5 July 1948 (National Health Service Act) when evacuees ceased to be the subject of special financial arrangements. There were however still some outstanding accounts for wartime claims against several authorities including Plymouth.⁴³³ There may well have been additional correspondence on the problems of financial recovery that are no longer extant. Many of the records referred to in this section (*DCC Evacuation Box*) only recently came to light when DRO was preparing to move to new premises.

Conclusion

Devon's reception and care of large numbers of unaccompanied children from many evacuation areas can be described as very successful. Although the first official evacuation wave only partially tested the County's planning ability, infrastructure and generosity, this relatively smooth introduction to such a unique experiment offered lessons for future evacuation waves. As with any large scale organisation the competence and personalities of local officials varied immensely, sometimes causing unnecessary problems with the public and other agencies. Particularly during 1940-1942 the County's hospitality, administrative competence and infrastructure were tested to the limit. If there is criticism to be made it would highlight the lack of billeting co-operation during the first evacuation wave between local councils and DCEC, the fairly haphazard initial system of supervising billets and the reluctance of many well-to-do householders to offer billets. It was the predominantly working-class householders who generously opened their homes and cared for evacuees. If this proves to be the case in many other reception areas it calls into question the extent of the billeting class clash thesis. Although compulsory billeting was reluctantly introduced in many areas of Devon from 1940 onwards there were relatively few prosecutions or complaints. This should be viewed against a background of the need to distribute the billeting more equally

⁴³² An interim scheme to assist the transition between the emergency welfare apparatus of 1939-45 and the postwar legislation for child care, social assistance and health services was introduced on 1 April 1946 and remained until 5 July 1948 when the Children Act required local authorities to assume responsibility for the maintenance and well-being of the remaining evacuee children (approximately 1,500 nationally).

⁴³³ *DCC Evacuation Box*

together with severe overcrowding exacerbated by unofficial evacuees, a large military presence and latterly, holidaymakers. Apart from numerous and continued local voluntary initiatives, extra welfare provision improved substantially from late 1940 as Treasury funding relaxed. Evacuation to Devon was indisputably the direct catalyst for both considerable improvements in the school medical service and positive development in the child guidance service. These services became considered as indispensable for local postwar needs and were not the result of pre-war planning.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Emotional Experience

In their physical appearance, the use of local dialect, their ready participation in the varied activities of school, home and farm life the evacuated children are not readily distinguished from local children.¹

This Chapter discusses the issue of trauma experienced in varying degrees by unaccompanied evacuee schoolchildren and evaluates the local welcome and speed of acclimatisation in Devon. Reasons for drift back are reviewed as well as the sometimes problematic process of re-integration into the family home. The argument is made that the majority of evacuee children acclimatised well and for longer periods in Devon than the national average. Most were from working-class homes and wartime research suggested that billeting in similar type households was much more successful. The children also adapted better when further from home as frequent visits from parents could be de-stabilising. Devon fulfilled both these criteria. Generally, local people appear to have generously welcomed the evacuees and got on with the job of caring for them, both at home and in school, without much apparent complaint, pious moralising or feelings of revulsion for their urban guests, often evident in other more affluent counties and widely publicised.² This is not to deny that there were both inhospitable local residents and miserable evacuees in Devon. However, evacuees appear to have blended into village and small town life, for the most part ranging from tolerably to very happy. The lasting bond with Devon and its countryside which so many of the sample still feel after over sixty years is testimony to the generosity of spirit demonstrated by the vast majority of

¹ *Holworthy Senior School Log Book 2329C/EFL4*, HMI Report 20 August 1943

² For example, see M. Smith, *Britain & 1940* (Routledge 2000) p.72

householders. Gerald Smith, a Bristol evacuee, summed up his experience and that of many other evacuee children, describing how ‘some returned to their home soon after their arrival, others even ran away from this strange new life, but most stayed, and through their acquaintance with the “Country Folk” became part of their life’.³ This Chapter in no way seeks to diminish the deep and lasting trauma suffered by a percentage of evacuees, the study of which is fraught with difficulties and impossible to quantify in other than fairly generalised terms.

Trauma

The whole of the child’s life, its hopes and fears, its dependence for affection and social development on the checks and balances of home life, and all the deep emotional ties that bound it to its parents, were suddenly disrupted.⁴

Although generally best left to evacuees themselves, either individually or collectively, to express their own unique memories of the depth of trauma experienced, nevertheless any study of evacuation would be incomplete without mention of this most individual and psychologically pivotal aspect of the process. Unthinkable in today’s Britain, an estimated 1,289,064 unaccompanied young children over five and 11,400 under five were evacuated between September 1939 and September 1941.⁵ This does not include those evacuated at a later date, the large number of children who were privately evacuated to relatives, friends or strangers or those children accompanied by a parent. The plans for evacuation were prepared by civil servants, many of whom had been sent away to boarding school at an early age. Their overriding focus was to preserve life

³ An account of evacuation by Gerald Smith, *Hartland 2431Z/1-5*

⁴ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 109. See also a similar quote written by James Roffey, Editor of *The Evacuee*, May 1998, p.7 describing the trauma of separation from everything familiar, the disruption and often permanent change in lives and the lasting effects.

⁵ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, Appendix 10, p. 563

and prevent mass panic in urban areas rather than to consider the psychological and sociological implications for parochial Britons. These implications were not addressed until the evacuation was *a fait accompli*.

The bravery of these unaccompanied children is remarkable and indeed Armfelt commented that their pluck, humour and courage was ‘quite amazing’.⁶ For most this was their first experience of leaving parents, siblings, home and familiar street, their first experience of boarding a bus, underground or overland train with ‘no goodbyes, no knowledge of the journey ahead. This was to be our first journey on a train, we had never had a holiday or been parted from our parents’.⁷ For many, particularly the older children, the very long journey to Devon began as a huge adventure ‘we were all keyed up with excitement at the thought of a grand train journey into the unknown, which we thought could not last more than a week away’.⁸ For smaller children the length of the journey to Devon was often traumatic as they travelled on trains, generally without corridors and toilets, frequently for between 10-12 hours as they stopped in sidings for troop trains to pass and deposited children at various stations. A teacher accompanying children to Devon in 1940 reported that children were afraid because the journey was so long they thought their parents would not be able to find them.⁹

On arrival late in the afternoon or evening, children who were ‘dirty, tired, hungry and many with coal dust in their eyes’¹⁰ or who had soiled themselves or been travel sick, were ushered onto buses or escorted on foot to dispersal points. The agony of believing they were left until last in the village or school hall, where prospective hosts frequently chose their evacuees and where many children

⁶ ED134/270 – E9B(2)/10

⁷ D. Wadson aged 7 – evacuee sample

⁸ N. Sidnell aged 12 – evacuee sample

⁹ B. Johnson, ed. *The Evacuees* (Victor Gollancz Ltd. 1968) p.53

¹⁰ Betty Coulbeck (10) was a member of St John’s Ambulance Brigade in Plymouth and contributed this information.

were unaware that they were already allocated but not yet picked up,¹¹ is still vivid to many. As late as 1944 this cause of trauma was still apparent in Torrington RDC where the MOH complained of an unnecessary time lag in some cases between feeding and billeting children due to the fact that sufficient billets were not found before arrival. 'This tends to make the children feel they are not wanted, especially when some are picked out by their foster parents and others are left'.¹² Some genuinely believed that their parents no longer wanted them and had given them away: 'I remembered angry times when my older brother... had been naughty and my mother had threatened to send him away... surely I had not been that naughty, not enough to be punished like this'.¹³ Older children charged with responsibility for younger siblings found they were sometimes split despite protestations. However this only occurred in 22 of the 102 sample cases where unaccompanied children travelled to Devon with siblings and the few extant Evacuee Registers that recorded host addresses indicate that siblings were kept together as much as possible.¹⁴ Where siblings were split in the sample, perhaps either due to different sex, overcrowding or attendance at different schools, the impact of separation appears to have been minimal with only 4 unhappy evacuees out of the 22 who were split. However, research has found that the eldest evacuee in a family group sometimes became 'precociously active' as a result of being forced to undertake the role of parent.¹⁵

A survey of schoolchildren from London, Birmingham and Liverpool evacuated in the first wave estimated that about 94% were very happy.¹⁶ Another survey of children aged 11-14 examined

¹¹ P. Schweitzer, ed. *Goodnight Children Everywhere* (Age Exchange Theatre Trust 1990) p.10

¹² *Torrington Rural District Council Minutes R2460A/(1/8)C14*, 15 July 1944 Report by Medical Officer

¹³ *The Evacuee*. May 1998, p.5 See also R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey* (Routledge & Sons Ltd. 1940) p.187

¹⁴ *Axmouth Register 627C/EFA1, Beer Register 2269C/EFA2, Crediton Hayward Boys' Evacuee Register for Flint LCC School 1510C EFA15*.

¹⁵ S. Sandelin Benko, H. Spranger, M. Parsons, 'The Past must inform the future – War Children...The Trauma', *Children in War*, Volume 1, No.1, 2004, p.67.

¹⁶ C. Burt, *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Volume X, Part 1, February 1940, pp.8-15. See also M. Vernon, *The British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Volume X, Part 2, June 1940, p.134. M.A. Davidson and I.M. Slade, *The British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Volume X, Part 3, November 1940, pp. 179-195

100 children and found that only 17 failed to settle down happily.¹⁷ Systematic inquiries carried out over a period of 18 months revealed that evacuated children were adapting themselves ‘far more readily to new persons and to new environments than had generally been predicted’. However, a leading educational psychologist¹⁸ called for further reports, acknowledging that the complexities of evacuation were manifold with ‘great possibilities of different judgements as to what are “successful adjustments” to evacuation’.¹⁹ Locally, only 7 references to unhappy evacuees were found in the 265 log books sampled. At Atherington siblings were moved from their billet because one of them received a serious head injury inflicted by the ‘difficult’ daughter of the foster parents.²⁰ Seven evacuees attempted to get back to London from Culmstock about 3 weeks after their arrival.²¹ One evacuee boy at Inwardleigh received a black eye apparently inflicted by his foster mother and returned home.²² One evacuee at Landkey Wesleyan School changed billets due to unhappiness,²³ and an LCC evacuee boy tried to return to London from Littleham but was found by the police. He returned home one month later.²⁴ One evacuee boy ran away from Ottery St Mary and the Headteacher informed his mother that the main cause of his unhappiness appeared to be her failure to keep in contact.²⁵ One evacuee at Shobrooke changed billets due to unhappiness.²⁶

Mindful of the problems inherent in attempting to quantify the state of happiness, only 10% of the Devon sample described their evacuation experience as unhappy, generally either because of homesickness or problems with foster parents. Age does not appear to have been a factor since those above 10 were equally susceptible to unhappiness as those in younger age groups. Fifteen percent of the sample felt fairly happy, 75% ranged from happy to very happy and the majority

¹⁷ *The British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Volume X, Part 3, November 1940, pp. 179-195

¹⁸ C. Burt who was also Editor of *The British Journal of Educational Psychology*

¹⁹ C. Burt, *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Volume XI, Part 2, June 1941, pp. 85-97 and 127

²⁰ *Atherington Log Book 631Cadd/EFL1*, September 1942

²¹ *Culmstock Log Book 2679C/EAL1-2*, 8 July 1940. The evacuees were found by a policeman at Hemyock.

²² *Inwardleigh Log Book 688Cadd./EAL1*, October 1941

²³ *Landkey Wesleyan School Log Book 1903C/EEL44*

²⁴ *Littleham & Landcross Log Book 513C/EAL1*, 11 September 1941

²⁵ *Ottery St Mary Junior Boys’ School Log Book 2253C/EFL4-5*, January 1940

²⁶ *Shobrooke Log Book 1410C/EFL2-3*, 1943

believed that evacuation had been a very beneficial experience.²⁷ This is all the more remarkable bearing in mind that these children, generally aged between 4-13, went with strangers into strange homes with strange food and customs, attended strange schools and in most cases had no communication with parents other than the occasional letter or rare visit during several years. One 12 year old Kent evacuee wrote that life on the Devon farm ‘makes me forget the terrors of the world’.²⁸ Several amongst the 10% unhappy and homesick sample evacuees found themselves haunted by the trauma. Although Reg Dunkling (11) felt the 20 months in South Devon ‘opened up a new world’, his young brother Leslie (4) believed ‘the panic disorder which has haunted me for years stems from the wartime experience’. Even evacuees who were fairly happy sometimes still experience trauma ‘I visit Torquay as often as I can but the visits are marred by my feeling that I am lost or orphaned and have nowhere to go’.²⁹

Children worried that their parents would be killed and for many this became a reality either as a result of enemy attack in Britain or abroad, or sometimes as a result of illness. The Headteacher of Ugborough School had the unenviable task of telling 3 evacuated siblings that their parents, eldest brother, grandmother and aunt had all been killed in a bombing raid.³⁰ Eight evacuees from the sample lost one or both parents and there appears to have been a lack of sensitivity and support by hosts when breaking the news. Children’s emotional well-being was not considered to the same extent as nowadays and perhaps householders felt emotionally unable to deal with a situation they had never faced before. Sheila Vodden (8) was expected to go to school straight after hearing about both parents dying in a bombing raid and was not allowed to mention it again. Sam Watson and his twin sister (6) were not told for 6 months about their father’s death. John Bosey (8) was called in from the street by the housekeeper and told his father had been shot down and was dead ‘now go

²⁷ See also S. Isaacs, ed. *The Cambridge Evacuation Survey* (Methuen & Co. Ltd. London 1941) p.177 for description of positive changes noted in the evacuees.

²⁸ *North Devon Journal*, 20 March, 1941

²⁹ Valerie Hedges aged 6, Devon sample

³⁰ *Ugborough School Log Book 2437C/EAL4*, November 1944

out and play'. Doll Ponsford's mother (Uffculme host) was asked by the father of her evacuees to tell them that their mother had committed suicide. An anonymous contributor to the sample, D. H. (6), was told to shut up when he cried on hearing that his father had died. His sister in another billet was given no sympathy and told to go to school.

'How could our mothers who were supposed to love us, want us and protect us, just casually wave us away. One part of us, as grown-ups, understood – the other part could not forgive'.³¹ Leslie Dunkling (4) believed his mother was among those who were not especially maternal and who welcomed the freedom. Yet in peacetime 80% of London mothers were apparently against having their children looked after by neighbours,³² and the reasons why parents finally and reluctantly took the heart-rending decision to send their children to an unknown destination in the care of complete strangers were varied, illustrated vividly in Breed's *I know a rotten place*'. Even after the fall of France and the onset of the Blitz when the civilian death rate soared in August and September 1940 and evacuation propaganda was remorseless, mothers were often forced to take the decision by their husbands and cried for weeks afterwards. There was a strong feeling that it would be better to face the danger together, that reception areas were also dangerous, that previous evacuation in September 1939 had been unsatisfactory and that the economic strain of the dismembered family was too great for the average working-class income. However, as neighbouring homes and schools took direct hits and mothers struggled alone to cope with large families, illness and childbirth or were needed for the war industry, as children spent increasing time in underground shelters deprived of sleep and schooling and some wanted to join their friends on the great adventure, many parents decided they would have to part with their children. Nevertheless, many parents chose not

³¹ M. Holgate aged 6, Devon sample

³² D.Sheridan, ed. *An Anthology of Women's Wartime Writing for Mass-Observation 1937-45* (London: Mandarin 1991) pp.159-60

to send their children away. Even during the worst raids there were still 80,500 (17.8%) children of school age who remained in London during December 1940, rising to 105,500 by June 1941.³³

Acclimatisation of evacuee children in Devon

The kindness of the Clovelly villagers and the peace of the village worked their magic on the evacuees.³⁴

We just seemed to fit into the family and village from the word go and most of the evacuees felt the same.³⁵

Most of the children settled down happily and learned to respect the country way of life.³⁶

The most wonderful thing to me was the kindly way the villagers have assisted their little guests.³⁷

The WI Report on the first evacuation wave concluded that 'real affection between the foster parents and the children is the general rule. Over and over again, the reports say how much the children will be missed when they leave...there are hardly any reports of home sickness and many accounts of how the children cried bitterly when they were removed by their parents'.³⁸ It could be argued that the WI Report was perhaps biased, inferring that country homes were more beneficial

³³ R. Samways, *We think you ought to go* (City of London, London Metropolitan Archives 1995) p.50. This was probably the smallest number in London at any time during the war.

³⁴ *Western Morning News*, 4 May 1998, Report of Evacuee Reunion at Clovelly

³⁵ Iris Charos aged 10 (sample) evacuated to Chilsworthy

³⁶ *Western Morning News*, 9 June 1990, Report on Evacuee Reunion at Dartington

³⁷ *Ibid.* 14 June 1940, Report by United Press Staff on evacuation to Chudleigh

³⁸ *Town Children through Country Eyes* (National Federation of Women's Institutes 1940) p.15

for the evacuees than their own homes. However, other reports confirm this early attachment.³⁹ Locally, Exeter's MOH described the 'real affection...between evacuees and their foster parents',⁴⁰ and Dr Mackenzie Wintle, Hon. SMI, claimed that 'almost without exception' the evacuee children had settled extremely well and were far less distressed by the separation than the parents.⁴¹ HMI Reports also stressed that evacuees had settled down very well in Devon with the locals,⁴² and one Inspector highlighted the perkiness, minimal drift back, lack of illness and excellent attendance of evacuees despite distances from school, compared with local children.⁴³ According to Armfelt, householders found their earlier apprehensions 'groundless', discovered their patriotic duty was in fact pleasurable, and bought the children boots and clothing and took them out for treats and excursions. A deep reluctance to see their evacuee children re-billeted for educational reasons and the ensuing publicity caused problems for DCEC.⁴⁴ For example, reports from Moretonhampstead claimed 'there won't half be a rumpus if the Devon Education Committee tried to shift our evacuees',⁴⁵ and foster mothers in Heathfield near Newton Abbot and Chudleigh Knighton were 'once more happy' when they learned that proposals to move their evacuees had been abandoned.⁴⁶ This early attachment continued to manifest itself during ensuing evacuation waves. In August 1940, the suggested removal of some evacuee children from their billets in Dawlish Warren to Dawlish in order to be nearer school led to 'great distress' for both evacuees and householders.⁴⁷ All the foster parents in Bulkworthy assembled to say goodbye to their evacuees in July 1940 when they were transferred to Bideford after only 3 weeks,⁴⁸ and two girls relocated with Haberdasher's

³⁹ For example *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 352, Column 219, November 1939

⁴⁰ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1939*, DCC 150/4/5/1, p. 24

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p. 24

⁴² *ED 134/30*

⁴³ *ED 134/30*, Report of Inspectors' Clerks dated March 1940

⁴⁴ *ED 134/30*

⁴⁵ *The Western Times*, 22 December 1939

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 29 December 1939

⁴⁷ *Express & Echo*, 8 August 1940

⁴⁸ *Bulkworthy School Log Book 646C/EFL3*

Askes' School from Teignmouth to Barnstaple were seen 'on the arms of their new foster parents' on the first day.⁴⁹

Local evidence strongly suggests that the majority of foster parents appear to have done their best to welcome evacuee children into their homes, but were local children as keen to embrace these strangers? *The Cambridge Evacuation Survey* found that reports from various sources indicated that generally local and evacuee children did not mix, even in the playground,⁵⁰ and further research at local level is necessary to determine whether this was typical. By contrast, the evidence in Devon, where the interruption of parochial life must have been particularly exciting for local schoolchildren, indicates a very different picture. There are numerous log book entries about how well and quickly evacuee children integrated from a variety of individuals including Diocesan Inspectors, HMI Inspectors from both Devon and evacuating counties, Foundation Managers, visiting dignitaries and local and evacuated headteachers.⁵¹ It could be argued that positive

⁴⁹ *Barnstaple Town Council Minutes 2654add2/C120*, p. 215, 23 October 1942. Letter sent by LCC Inspector

⁵⁰ S. Isaacs, ed. *The Cambridge Evacuation Survey*, p.172

⁵¹ Examples include *Ashreigney School Log Book 2221C/EFL2*, 1942, *Alwington School Log Book 390C/EFL1*, June 1940, *Barnstaple Parish Church Junior Girls' School Log Book 1918C/EFL4*, July 1943, *Beaufort House School Evacuation Party Log Book (Exeter) 76/6/2*, November 1941, *Bideford Grammar School Headmaster's Report 1943 276add4/1/6-11*, *Branscombe School Log Books 5022C/EFL2-3*, September, October and December 1939, July 1944, *Braunton School Log Book 355C/EAL3*, March 1941, *Broadclyst Budlake School Log Book 1806C/EAL1-2*, November 1939, *Broadclyst Westwood School Log Book 456C/EFL2*, February 1940, *Broadhembury School Log Book 3124C/EFL3*, 5 May 1941, *Buckland Brewer School Log Book 3166C/ESL2*, June 1942, *Chittlehamholt School Log Book 651Cadd/EFL1*, November 1940, *Colebrooke School Log Book 542C/EAL2*, July 1940, *Crediton Hayward Girls' School Log Books 1510C/EFL2-3*, July 1940, *Cruwys Morchard School Log Book 509C/EFL1*, April 1941, *Drewsteington Whiddon Down Board School School Log Book 1908C/EFL2*, March 1941, *Dunsford School Log Book 3275C/EAL2-3*, May 1941, *Great Torrington Blue Coat School Log Book 3074C/EFL3*, October 1940, *Halberton School Log Book 672C/EAL1*, November 1940, *Hennock School Log Book 219C/EFL4*, December 1940, *Hittisleigh School Log Book 675C/EAL3*, October 1940, *Holsworthy Senior School Log Book 2329C/EFL4*, August 1943, *Ilfracombe Holy Trinity Junior Mixed School Log Book 2314C/EFL3*, June 1941, *Kingswear School Log Book 3683Cadd/EFL6-7*, May 1941, *Kingkerswell St Mary's School Log Book 3426C/EFL6*, December 1940, *Marland St Peter's School Log Book 697C/EFL1*, November 1940, *Merton School Log Book 1207C/EFL1*, November 1940, *Ogwell School Log Book 396C/EAL1*, October 1939, *Roborough School Log Book 721Cadd/EFL1*, October 1940, *Salcombe Regis School Log Book 726C/EFL2*, November 1939 and 1940, *Shobrooke School Log Books 1410C/EFL2-3*, December 1940, *Silverton School Log Book 737C/EFL1*, September 1940, *Stoke Canon Managers' Minutes 76/43/1/4*, November 1940, *St Giles in the Wood School Log Book 1210C/EFL4*, June 1940, *South Molton United School Log Book B366/35*, April 1941, *Topsham Senior School Log Book 76/8/1/4*, 24 February 1941, *Torquay St Saviours Log*

comments about evacuation were politically expedient and that school visitors had little time to assess things. However, inspectors never shied away from criticism if necessary and headteachers usually always logged problems. A touching gesture came from Southwark Central Girls' School, evacuated to Topsham for 6 months before relocating to Newton Abbot, when scholars and teachers presented Topsham School with a picture entitled 'Happy Days'.⁵² The MOH for Brixham and Paignton, Dr A. Dick, reported in 1946 that the influence on Devon children of wartime conditions and mixing closely with large numbers of children from densely populated towns was surprisingly 'very good'.⁵³ Only one log book entry was found concerning the negative influence of evacuee children on local ones. The Headteacher of Tavistock Senior Church School appeared to have some problems for several weeks at the end of 1940 due to older LCC boys misbehaving and refusing to work when taken by lady teachers. He felt their influence was beginning to have a bad effect on the local children during the crowded morning assembly. Things evidently settled down because nothing further was mentioned.⁵⁴

It is rare for a child not to experience some form of unfriendliness or rivalry at school and only natural that there was initial suspicion as local and evacuee groups teased and sized each other up. Only one log book entry was found concerning the bullying of evacuees. Four boys at Axmouth School were caned for bullying and hitting 2 evacuees who had arrived the previous day.⁵⁵ Evacuees from the sample were billeted throughout Devon and overwhelmingly felt that local children welcomed them. Table 4.1 lists the varied responses (those who attended school and were not in 'separate identity' school parties) when asked whether local children were welcoming.

Book 3675C/EFL9, October 1939, *Witheridge National School Log Book B40A/4/3*, November 1940, *Yarcombe School Log Book 1453C/EFL2*, June 1941

⁵² *Topsham Senior School Log Book 76/8/14*, April 1940

⁵³ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1946*, p.50, held at Westcountry Studies Library

⁵⁴ *Tavistock Senior Church School Log Book 792C/EFL9*, 12 November and 5 December 1940

⁵⁵ *Axmouth School Log Book 627C/EFL1*

TABLE 4.1

Were Local Children Welcoming?	Reply	
	No	%
Yes	123	65.0
Took time to settle down	17	9.0
Unfriendly	17	9.0
Could not remember	16	8.5
Some local friendly, others not	12	6.5
Mixed feelings	1	0.5
Improvement after arrival of official evacuees	1	0.5
Fights with local boys	1	0.5
Dialect prevented assimilation	<u>1</u>	<u>0.5</u>
Total	189	100.0

The last reason given above by one sample evacuee leads aptly onto the problem of dialect. Several sample evacuees remembered being quite nervous at first because they could not understand their foster parents. Gladys Symess (8) was one but she soon became acclimatised and interpreted when her mother visited. On arrival, David Blackie (8) felt terrified because he could not understand the dialect of the farmer who took them home or that of the people in the village hall. ‘I really can understand how slaves must have felt when being auctioned off’. Several other evacuees remembered that their accents caused problems at first. One said that the local headmaster hated evacuees and constantly made fun of their Bristol accent,⁵⁶ and Iris Hext (12) remembered that some Totnes teachers made fun of the cockney accent. Assimilating the Devonshire dialect was one way evacuee children could become acceptable to their peers. In addition, many of them embraced

⁵⁶ *The Evacuee*, April 1998 – an ex-evacuee from Devon but not part of the sample

the country way of life in its totality which included adopting the local dialect. The press seized on such positive propaganda, for example describing a concerned father from Kennington who found that his son had developed both a broad Devonshire dialect and a love affair with farming. The father made it clear that he had ‘other plans for him’.⁵⁷ Wally Harbert found that by the time he had lived in Cheriton Fitzpaine for six months ‘I regarded myself as a native’.⁵⁸ Gordon Brooks (7) also said that ‘within a month or two, we were true Devonians’. The downside of adopting the native dialect was that it sometimes made re-integration more difficult in the short term as non-evacuated siblings and schoolchildren ridiculed the accent (see pages 182-3).

Although part of the Government’s publicity campaign to encourage parents to evacuate their children, film propaganda such as ‘*These Children are Safe*’⁵⁹ which portrayed happy, healthy town children set free in the countryside was not simply a myth but a reality for many evacuees in Devon and was eloquently described by an Acton teacher evacuated to Newton Abbot.⁶⁰ Flynn has recently discussed the 1940 MOI film *Spring Offensive*.⁶¹ Its sub-plot explored the fascination of an evacuee for his farm billet and Flynn considered the ‘certain persistent discourses that constitute the image of child evacuees in the many stories, both fictional and non-fictional, that have become embedded in our culture’. Whilst not wishing to suggest that many evacuees ‘could not have experienced something similar’, he used the example of narratives that ‘present the joy of town children set free in the countryside for the first time’.⁶² Whilst cognizant of ‘distance lending enchantment’,⁶³ it is nevertheless of interest to discover that out of 193 sample evacuees billeted in

⁵⁷ *The Western Times*, 26 January 1940

⁵⁸ W. Harbert, *Child of the War* (Third Age Press 1995) p.109

⁵⁹ Originally produced at the end of 1939 for overseas display, the film was tried out in January 1940 at a cinema in a tough part of Bethnal Green and received a good reception *MH78/230* – Letter from K. McGregor to Kerwood

⁶⁰ *ED134/270* ‘The countryside has an inexhaustible supply of treasures...Joy is the keynote of their life at present...Joy in their beautiful surroundings’. See also article on successful acclimatisation of evacuated children in *The Western Times*, 25 July 1941

⁶¹ Primarily made for agricultural purposes

⁶² S.R.D. Flynn, ‘Those Billets’, *Children in War*, Vol.1, No 2, November 2004, p. 21

⁶³ S. Brown, An Apple for the Teacher, *Children in War*, November 2004, Vol. 1, No. 2, p.68

the rural areas of Devon, 2.5% did not like it, 0.5% quite liked it, 4% gradually came to appreciate it but an overwhelming 93% loved it, many with a lifelong passion. Comments from the sample include ‘I loved the countryside...I always look upon going to Devon as going home’,⁶⁴ ‘I’d never seen such beauty before...it was like seeing colour for the first time’,⁶⁵ ‘I could never get over the beauty of Clovelly’.⁶⁶ Many also remembered with pleasure the traditional customs they were introduced to, some of which are still practised⁶⁷ whilst others associated with traditional farming methods have all but disappeared.⁶⁸ The LCC reported in 1945 that many evacuees who reached school-leaving age during evacuation took jobs in the country where they intended to spend their lives.⁶⁹ Most of the evacuee school leavers in Okehampton apparently wanted to take up farming⁷⁰ and a handful from the sample also chose to remain as farmworkers.

Evacuation clearly worked best where the class gulf was narrowest,⁷¹ a vital factor in the overall success of Devon’s billeting programme and subsequent acclimatisation of evacuee children. Boyd found billets in working-class homes were the most successful,⁷² and Burt discovered that one of the most common causes of maladjustment was the wide difference in the economic, social and cultural status between billets and the children’s own homes.⁷³ Other wartime investigations such as the one conducted by the Barnett House Study Group also found that evacuees were almost always happiest with families of similar social background.⁷⁴ Jackson believed that ‘generally, the

⁶⁴ Joyce Howard aged 11 (sample) evacuated to Lustleigh

⁶⁵ R. Pooley, *The Evacuee* (Anglo American Publicity Services 1972) p.3. Richard was evacuated to Torquay

⁶⁶ H. Clement, *No Time to Kiss Goodbye* (Harry Clement 1995) p.39

⁶⁷ Oak Apple Day, the Floral Dance, Beating the Bounds and Raising the Glove at Honiton

⁶⁸ Examples include food hampers and homemade cider brought to the harvest fields, the ritual village picnic when a large tree was felled to make horse drawn carts, the local blacksmith making cart wheels and the rabbit chase at harvest time.

⁶⁹ *The Times Educational Supplement*, 4 August 1945. See also article in *The Western Times*, 25 July 1941, which stated that children had become so settled in the country that many wished to remain.

⁷⁰ *The Western Times*, 19 December 1941

⁷¹ J. Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership, and the Second World War* (Oxford University Press 2002) p.147

⁷² W. Boyd, ed. *Evacuation in Scotland* (University of London Press 1944) p.115.

⁷³ C Burt, ‘The Billeting of Evacuated Children’, *The British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol XI, Part 2, June 1941, pp. 85-97

⁷⁴ S. Fielding et al., *England Arise* (Manchester University Press 1995) p. 22

farther the villagers were from London the more tolerant they were of the evacuees'.⁷⁵ Vicky Norman experienced evacuation in both Devon and Buckingham and 'whereas the evacuated children had been accepted and integrated with the North Devon villagers, in Buckingham the rigid class barriers were still in force'.⁷⁶ The amount of home-sickness in poorer children was also found to be much smaller than anticipated.⁷⁷

Wartime reports support the argument that the geographical distance between reception and evacuation areas appears to have been an important factor in the process of successful acclimatisation as frequent visits could be unsettling.⁷⁸ The only counties where below 20% of LCC children returned home were Cornwall, Devon and Somerset.⁷⁹ The husband of an evacuated teacher in charge of a school party stated that before the children arrived in Devon they had been evacuated to Eastbourne. London was too near, parents visited at weekends and the children wanted to go home.⁸⁰ Burt's 1940 survey of schoolchildren from London, Liverpool and Birmingham found:

there is considerable evidence to show that the separation has caused far more grief, anxiety and nervous strain to the mothers than to their children; and a good deal of nervous instability among the children themselves has been directly

⁷⁵ C. Jackson, *Who will take our children?* (Methuen 1985) p. 9

⁷⁶ V. Norman, *Scattered Homes Broken Hearts* (JDC Publications 2002) p.290

⁷⁷ C. Burt, 'The Incidence of Neurotic Symptoms among evacuated school children', *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Volume X, February 1940, pp.8-15

⁷⁸ See for discussion R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp. 173-4; W. Boyd, *Evacuation in Scotland*, p. 117; Milton Damerel 1136Z/Z1 – Account written by husband of evacuated teacher to Devon; M.A. Davidson and I.M. Slade, 'Results of a survey of senior school evacuees', *The British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Volume X, Part 3, November 1940, pp. 179-195; C. Burt, 'The Billeting of Evacuated Children', *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Volume XI, Part 2, June 1941, pp. 85-97; R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p.51; *Ministry of Health Memo Ev6*, dated November 1939, found in *Exeter City Archive, ARP Evac Box 11, Group N*

⁷⁹ R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p.51

⁸⁰ *Milton Damerel 1136Z/Z1*

precipitated by unwise but no doubt well-meaning actions
of their unhappy parents e.g. by the receipt of emotional
letters or by visits ending in fresh tearful partings.⁸¹

For children evacuated to Devon, parental visits for the vast majority were so infrequent that some young children failed to recognise their parents on return. Lack of visits were due to a number of reasons: in-affordability,⁸² length of journey, punishing work schedules, younger children at home, wartime transport restrictions. There is one local record of problems caused by parental visits to Totnes RDC and it is exceptional for its somewhat uncharitable tone. Totnes was one area that received evacuees in the first small evacuation wave to Devon and perhaps the phoney war situation was partly to blame for the grumbles. Statements were made that Acton children evacuated to Totnes were perfectly happy when left alone but were being disturbed by weekend visits from parents. Some parents wanted to be accommodated for the weekend and others were coming too frequently, which caused some resentment because poor people were struggling to keep evacuees on the small billeting allowance whilst parents were saving money on their children's keep.⁸³ Incidentally, complaints from reception areas that parents asked for food whilst visiting appear to have been exaggerated. Wagner claimed in 1940 that further investigations revealed that the hostess, brought up to offer food to visitors and uncomfortable about the conflict of either spending time and money on preparing food or not doing it all 'felt guilty and blamed it on parents'.⁸⁴

The Government discouraged visits both by train and bus, particularly for long distance travel, to deter drift back and to avoid alienating billetors. In December 1939, about 800 parents came on

⁸¹ C. Burt, 'The Incidence of Neurotic Symptoms among evacuated school children', *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Volume X, February 1940, pp.8-15; C. Burt, 'The Billeting of Evacuated Children', *British Journal of Educational Psychology* Volume XI, Part 2, June 1941, pp.85-97

⁸² The distress caused to many parents of children evacuated to Devon was raised in the House of Commons on 2 November 1939. *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 352, Column 2091.

⁸³ *Express and Echo*, 18 November, 1939. Report of Totnes RDC Committee Meeting

⁸⁴ G. Wagner, 'Evacuation', *Social Welfare*, 1940, Volume 1V, No.6, p.107

special excursions to Exeter. A reception was organised by Exeter Education Committee in co-operation with evacuated LCC teachers. *The Express and Echo* (Exeter) enthusiastically reported happy, healthy children and parents completely satisfied with their care.⁸⁵ Another visit of several hundred parents was reported in May 1940 when apparently only 2 or 3 children cried and that was because their parents suggested they return to London. Only one child was taken back due to health reasons.⁸⁶ Travel to Devon was problematic and afforded little time for parents and their children. In January 1940, a special train was run from Waterloo, departing at 8.30 a.m. and due to reach Exeter Central Station at 12.43 p.m. Those travelling to Exmouth were due to arrive at 1.11 p.m. and leave again at 5.45 p.m, which only gave them 4 1/2 hours visiting time. Arrangements were made in Exeter to meet parents and provide buses but in the event 2 trains arrived early, no-one was there to receive over 100 parents and ‘complete chaos was caused as all arrangements had been based on the timing given as 12.43 p.m.’⁸⁷ By the end of 1940 cheap travel facilities for 3 day periods were introduced although, for most evacuees in Devon, visits were still a rarity.⁸⁸

Drift Back

This section firstly examines national and local reasons for drift back and then considers evidence which supports the argument that ‘a greater percentage of the original evacuees stayed in Devon than in any other English or Scottish county’.⁸⁹ The public tended to associate reports of drift back with unhappy evacuees. However, various wartime surveys illustrated that there were other reasons, frequently more significant. In particular these included: the phoney war, the financial burden on households (particularly when mothers were evacuated) parents (particularly mothers)

⁸⁵ *Express & Echo*, 4 December 1939

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 20 May 1940

⁸⁷ *Town Clerk's Papers, Exeter City Council, A.R.P. Evacuation Group N, Box 14*

⁸⁸ *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 367, Col. 897. Announced by the Minister of Transport on 11 December 1940. Concern was expressed in the House of Commons that people lost travel time due to air-raids and train delays

⁸⁹ *Express & Echo*, 25 March 1941. Statement by the Minister of Health, Ernest Brown. See also *ED 134/30*, Report of Inspectors' Clerks dated March 1940

missing their children and concerned that they would prefer their foster parents, older children needed to help at home (particularly with fathers away and mothers working), unsettling parental visits, ‘psychological infection’ when news of one unfortunate incident of bad billeting spread through the neighbourhood, parental concern that children were not properly cared for and educational change, e.g. reaching 14 or taking up scholarships.⁹⁰

Several weeks following the first evacuation wave and in an effort to stem drift back, MH Circular 1879 (29 September 1939) advised local authorities not to offer any facilities for enabling individuals to return home.⁹¹ However, the phoney war and the re-opening of schools encouraged many to return.⁹² London was deemed safe enough for the King’s daughters to return for Christmas and the general public apparently felt this too.⁹³ Once at home and with little evident danger it was inevitable that children remained. Although in Scotland 75% of children had returned home by Christmas,⁹⁴ it is remarkable that return was not higher in England and Wales. By January 1940, 42.8% (315,192) had returned leaving approximately 57.2% (419,691) in reception areas.⁹⁵ By March 1940, the number left in reception areas dropped to 347,000,⁹⁶ with London and Liverpool the two main areas where drift back was less.⁹⁷ Approximately 35% of London schoolchildren had

⁹⁰ The above reasons are all given in the following: *MOI Summary of General Situation in November 1939*, MH 78/230; S. Isaacs, ed. *The Cambridge Evacuation Survey*, pp.129, 135,140, 142 and 184; *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 352, Column 2175, 2 November 1939; W. Boyd, *Evacuation in Scotland*, pp.67 and 114; C. Burt, ‘The Incidence of Neurotic Symptoms among evacuated school children’, *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Volume X, February 1940, pp. 8-15; M. Vernon, ‘A study of some effects of evacuation on adolescent girls’, *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Volume X, Part 2, June 1940, pp. 114-134 ; *The Times Educational Supplement*, 27 July 1940, letter from evacuated Head Teacher; M. Parsons, *I’ll Take that One* (Beckett Karlson Ltd. 1998) p. 111; S. Ferguson and H. Fitzgerald, *Studies in the Social Services* (HMSO 1954) p.7; D. Sheridan, ed. *Wartime Women: an anthology of women’s wartime writing for Mass-Observation, 1937-45* (London: Mandarin 1991) p.66

⁹¹ *Ministry of Health Circular 1879 – Okehampton File 324A/16/2*

⁹² C. Burt, ‘The Billeting of Evacuated Children’, *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Volume XI, Part 2, June 1941, pp. 85-97. See also Government concern and discussions for publicity campaign to stem drift back MH78/230

⁹³ R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p.156

⁹⁴ W. Boyd, ed. *Evacuation in Scotland*, pp.116 and 118

⁹⁵ R. Samways, ed. *We think you ought to go* (City of London, London Metropolitan Archives 1995)p.14

⁹⁶ *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 360, Column 44, April 1940

⁹⁷ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp.172-173

returned by January 1940, many from the East End. Schools had begun to re-open in November 1939, with health and welfare services re-appearing despite many schools having been commandeered for other services.⁹⁸ During the 1930s, 40% of London children went to the cinema once weekly,⁹⁹ and boredom became a problem for some evacuees in rural areas, particularly adolescents, as winter approached.¹⁰⁰ Despite this, drift back was less amongst secondary children,¹⁰¹ a fact reflected in Devon's figures.¹⁰² Approximately 85% of the 70% evacuated London secondary pupils (60% in school parties, 10% unofficially evacuated) were still in reception areas in March 1940,¹⁰³ and by mid 1943, for every 2 secondary schoolchildren in London, 1 London pupil was still evacuated.¹⁰⁴

Locally the pace of drift back was considerably slower compared with the national figures. By December 1939 only 9% of both LCC and Acton elementary schoolchildren (approximately 5,500 arrived) had returned and by March the figure had only risen to 16%. A proportion of these had left as school leavers.¹⁰⁵ Only a small number of unaccompanied children who came to Exeter had returned.¹⁰⁶ The above percentages varied from area to area, possibly lower where circumstances allowed for school parties to remain in more cohesive units, although there is insufficient data for analysis. Of the several examples that were recorded, 39% of the original 796 children had returned

⁹⁸ R. Samways, ed. *We think you ought to go*, pp. 5 & 14. Also *Education*, Volume LXXV, 9 and 23 February 1940 and *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 356, Column 756.

⁹⁹ D. Reynolds, *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain, 1941-1945* (Phoenix Press 2000) p.38

¹⁰⁰ M. Vernon, 'A study of some effects of evacuation on adolescent girls', *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Volume X, Part 2, June 1940, pp. 133-134. C. Burt, 'The Incidence of Neurotic Symptoms among evacuated school children', *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Volume X, February 1940, pp.8-15

¹⁰¹ R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p.168; W. Boyd, ed. *Evacuation in Scotland*, p.109

¹⁰² *Annual Reports of the School Medical Officer 1939-1940*, DCC150/4/5/1

¹⁰³ R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p.168

¹⁰⁴ R. Samways, ed. *We think you ought to go*, p.5

¹⁰⁵ *Devon County Council Minutes DCC148/14, Report of Education Committee*, 14 December 1939 and DCC148/15, 14 March 1940

¹⁰⁶ *Express & Echo*, 30 September 1940. Statement made by Mr Tue, Secretary for Education in Exeter. Also 13 October 1939.

from Torbay MB by December 1939,¹⁰⁷ 11% of pupils from St Patrick's RC School (170 pupils) returned in 1939 when the scattered school was moved as a unit to Ashburton and Buckfastleigh,¹⁰⁸ and some pupils returned to London from Awliscombe. Apparently an LCC helper from the village was asked to return due to her unsuitability and promptly circulated 'untrue rumours' amongst parents about conditions in Devon. Although the evacuees were described as particularly happy some parents removed their children.¹⁰⁹ By June 1940, 68% of the original 50 evacuees from Walworth were still at Shobrooke,¹¹⁰ and 76% of the original 25 evacuees from Archbishop Tenison LCC Lambeth School were still at Branscombe.¹¹¹ The majority apparently remained throughout the war and their headteacher eventually married and settled in Sidmouth.¹¹²

The Headmistress of Barnstaple Girls' Grammar School described the adaptability of the evacuee children which had 'been a revelation to most people'. She stated that in cases where children had returned, it was invariably at the mother's request.¹¹³ In September 1939, Berrymeade School (Acton) evacuated 428 children to Totnes and the surrounding villages of Ugborough, Bittaford and Wrangaton. Twenty six percent returned from Ugborough (115 Acton evacuees) and 27% returned from South Brent (112 Juniors from Acton) between 2 October 1939 and 1 August 1940.¹¹⁴ The log book¹¹⁵ revealed the main reasons for this drift back (Table 4.2). After this date there was no further mention of returning children.

¹⁰⁷ *Torbay Municipal Borough Committee Minutes R4582A/TC69*

¹⁰⁸ Memorandum by R. Armfelt dated 18 December 1939, *ED134/30 – G9E/3*

¹⁰⁹ HMI Report on Awliscombe School -*ED134/270*

¹¹⁰ *Shobrooke School Log Book 1410C/EFL2-3*

¹¹¹ *Branscombe School Log Book 5022C/EFL2-3*

¹¹² <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/1491/c20.html>

¹¹³ *North Devon Journal*, 20 March 1941

¹¹⁴ HMI Report on Ugborough and South Brent -*ED134/270*

¹¹⁵ Details of log book kindly supplied by P. Connolly

Table 4.2

Reason for return	No	%
Parents' wishes	9	21.0
Danger from air raids (July 1940)	9	21.0
Mother lonely, fretting	6	14.0
Family moving	4	9.3
Father's wish	3	7.0
Parents not agreeing to change of billet	3	7.0
Child wanting to return	2	4.6
Injury	2	4.6
Mother returning	2	4.6
Other reasons including sleepwalking and tiredness	2	4.6
Friction in billet	<u>1</u>	<u>2.3</u>
Total	43	100.0

Following the second evacuation wave lack of bombing was no longer a reason for return. From available data it appears that the prime reason for drift back was parental wish, very often that of the mother.¹¹⁶ An evacuated LCC Headteacher rather disparagingly listed 7 reasons for return by her pupils:

1. A little girl, enjoying the happiest 10 months of her life was taken home to look after the new baby
2. Older girls needed when mothers tired of housework
3. Mothers became piqued, if not downright jealous at the better conditions in billets

¹¹⁶ Wagner found that parents were 'guilty to a much higher degree' for the return of children than foster parents, G. Wagner, 'Evacuation', *Social Welfare*, Volume 1V, No, 6 (1940) p.102

4. Many parents said they could not bear to be without their children
5. Many took them back on impulse for no reason
6. Many removed them recently because of rumours of invasion, air attacks etc in reception areas
7. In a few cases foster parents who no longer wanted the children advised parents that the reception area was more dangerous than London¹¹⁷

Only 2 evacuees from the Devon sample stayed less than 6 months and approximately 30% stayed for between 2 – 5 years, some even longer. Reasons for return included a desire to face danger with one's family, mothers wanting children to return and educational moves. Joe Twitchen (12) was happily evacuated in Bampton but in 1944 he heard that 16 neighbours had been killed at home so he decided to return to his family 'let's all go together'. Dorothy Cox (7) and her 3 siblings returned home from North Bovey after a few months because their mother missed them. They returned to a prime target area (Woolwich) and Dorothy became a very nervous child due to constant air raids. David Maxwell (7) and his brother were brought back from Hartland to Tolworth, just in time for the 1944 bombings, because their mother thought they were growing too far apart from their home and family. Iris Charos (10) was very happy in Chilsworthy but her mother became jealous of the bond between her children and their foster parents. Iris's 'mother's lightening visit overnight to take us home without warning was so devastating to me in particular...it altered my relationship with her for so many years'. Some evacuees returned to take up scholarships or work. Those children who were brought home and then faced bombing were frequently traumatised and sadly some lost their lives. Local examples include three children taken from Ashburton in September 1940 who lost their lives the following day.¹¹⁸ Pamela Thompson's (10) friend was killed in the Blitz shortly after returning home, and John Cripps (10) knew two fellow evacuees

¹¹⁷ *Times Educational Supplement*, 27 July 1940

¹¹⁸ *The Western Times*, 13 September 1940

killed by a flying bomb on their return. Jill Perry's friend was killed in an air-raid and Jill, home on a 2 week holiday, crossed off the days in her diary, longing to get back to the safety of Ilfracombe.¹¹⁹

The ebb and flow of schoolchildren from Devon after the second evacuation wave is not recorded in any detail but the graphs included in Chapter 3 clearly illustrate the pattern. In addition, data set out in Appendix 12 has been extracted from council minutes and log books to demonstrate the very gradual nature of drift back, thus supporting Ernest Brown's statement that a 'greater percentage of the original evacuees stayed in Devon than in any other English or Scottish county'.¹²⁰ An additional reason for drift back in the areas of Brixham, Paignton, Teignmouth, Exeter, Exmouth and Kingsbridge was enemy bombing.¹²¹ From Spring 1941 onwards drift back began to accelerate but not enough to justify any reduction in temporary staff during the year because of the additional influx from Bristol in February and November, plus those from Plymouth in April/May. The Government was still anxious to deter drift back and parents were repeatedly asked not to bring their children back to vulnerable areas. A personal letter was sent from the Government to every mother of evacuated children urging her to keep them in the country, and teachers, via local LEAs, were asked to stress this imperative.¹²² It appears that many Bristol evacuees were returning in June 1941 'because parents think danger is over'.¹²³ Nationally, by the end of August 1941 approximately 450,000 evacuated unaccompanied children were still in reception areas (490,000 in February 1941).¹²⁴ By December 1941 the number of evacuated elementary pupils remaining in Devon had dropped from the previous December to 26,160 (34,246 in December 1940) and 1,813

¹¹⁹ B. Wicks, *No time to wave goodbye* (Bloomsbury 1988) p.168

¹²⁰ *Express & Echo*, 25 March 1941. Statement by the Minister of Health, Ernest Brown. See also *ED 134/30*, Report of Inspectors' Clerks dated March 1940

¹²¹ *ED134/39, G9E/941*

¹²² *Throwleigh & Gidleigh, DCEC Circulars 2066C/EAM51- DCEC Circular No 10* dated June 1941

¹²³ *Tiverton Heathcoat Girls' School Log Book 2745C/EFL4-5*

¹²⁴ *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 374, Column 43, 9 September 1941

secondary evacuated pupils,¹²⁵ although it is not possible to calculate the percentage of drift back because additional evacuees arrived in Devon during 1941.

By January 1942, over 2,000 evacuees per month were apparently returning to London from Devon, usually by train.¹²⁶ The LCC Chairman wrote to all local authorities in reception areas, anxious to check the drift back which was steadily increasing due to home ties and the continuing lull in bombing since September 1941. He sought to encourage reception areas to inspire householders with a renewed sense of the value of their services.¹²⁷ Nationally by March there were 376,784 elementary schoolchildren remaining in the reception areas¹²⁸ falling to 220,000 by December.¹²⁹ The concerned BO for Bideford RDC described the drift back which ‘started as a trickle...now fast approaching a torrent’,¹³⁰ although Yeoford School reported numbers were steadily dwindling, chiefly because evacuees had reached school leaving age.¹³¹ Approximately 10,280 Bristol evacuees had returned from Cornwall, Devon and Somerset during the lull in bombing leaving 9,805 in the reception areas by March 1942 (some children were evacuated more than once).¹³² The Headteacher of Tiverton Heathcoat Boys’ School noted that many evacuees were returning to Bristol in April.¹³³ By May, the number of officially evacuated schoolchildren under DCEC care was 17,490,¹³⁴ a fall of approximately 10,483 (37%) since the previous December.¹³⁵ In Exeter, the bombing led to many evacuee children returning home. By June, approximately 5,062 of 11,264¹³⁶ Plymouth schoolchildren had returned, leaving 6,202 still in reception areas.¹³⁷

¹²⁵ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1941, DCC150/4/5/1*

¹²⁶ *The Western Times*, 16 January 1942. Report from DCEC

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* 20 March 1942

¹²⁸ *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 380, Column 800, 4 June 1942

¹²⁹ P.H.J.H. Gosden, *Education in the Second World War* (Methuen & Co. Ltd. 1976) p.48

¹³⁰ *Bideford Gazette*, 17 March 1942

¹³¹ *Yeoford School Log Book 3529C/EAL2-3*, March 1942

¹³² *Education*, Volume LXXX, p.228

¹³³ *Tiverton Heathcoat Boys’ School Log Book 3029C/EAL3*, April 1942

¹³⁴ *Devon County Education Committee Minutes DCC150/4/1/40*, p. 91

¹³⁵ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1941, DCC150/4/5/1*

¹³⁶ Wasley gave the figure as 12,997 - G. Wasley, *Devon at War 1939-1945* (Devon Books 1994) p.144

¹³⁷ *Times Educational Supplement*, 20 June 1942

By the end of 1942 the number of evacuated schoolchildren under DCEC was reduced to 13,500 elementary (26,160 in December 1941) and 778 official¹³⁸ secondary (1,813 in December 1941).¹³⁹ The numbers were also falling at Highgate School, evacuated to Westward Ho! It was decided to return in 1943 and the boys later had a lucky escape when a V1 damaged the cricket pavilion and swimming bath. A few minutes before the cricket field had been in full use.¹⁴⁰ By the end of 1943 there were approximately 6,412 officially evacuated elementary schoolchildren and 2,534 secondary pupils under DCEC,¹⁴¹ and 151 remaining in Exeter.¹⁴² Return to Plymouth and Bristol had slowed because many evacuees had no homes to return to,¹⁴³ and by May 1944 the number of Plymouth schoolchildren remaining in reception areas had only fallen to 3,475 (4,604 in January 1943).¹⁴⁴ The third evacuation wave lasted from July-September 1944 and most stayed in reception areas until it was considered safe to return. Nationally between 85-90% were still in reception areas in September,¹⁴⁵ and by October there were 14,978 evacuated schoolchildren under DCEC (6,478 in June), slowly reducing to 12,258 by December.¹⁴⁶

¹³⁸ Unofficial secondary pupils were not included in this figure. There is a strange anomaly between this record of 778 secondary pupils in 6 evacuated schools for 1942 given in *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1942, DCC150/4/5/1*, p.35 and the steep rise in 1943 to 2,534 pupils in 17 evacuated secondary schools given in the 1943 Report, p.45

¹³⁹ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1942, DCC150/4/5/1*

¹⁴⁰ R. Kessel, *Highgate at Hartland* (Kingsbridge Stationers)

¹⁴¹ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1943, DCC150/4/5/1*, pp. 5 and 45. From the CMO's Report, there appears to have been a rise of 1,756 secondary pupils during 1943. There is no obvious explanation for the rise in pupils and evacuated secondary schools at a time when numbers were falling except that unofficial evacuees might be included.

¹⁴² *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer for the City of Exeter 1943*

¹⁴³ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1945*, p.27

¹⁴⁴ *Minutes of Plymouth City Education Committee 1644/139*

¹⁴⁵ *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 403, Column 432, 28 September 1944

¹⁴⁶ *Devon County Education Committee Minutes DCC150/4/1/41*

Return Home

The failures and misfits of evacuation have never lacked publicity; what has received much less than due notice is the fact that ever since the first mass migration in September, 1939, there has been a solid core of children, some scores of thousands strong, who from the start settled down happily in their foster-homes, and between whom and their foster-parents there matured as the years passed enduring bonds of affection as strong as any that could exist between children and parents by blood.¹⁴⁷

At first some of us did not want them, but they have, by their charming ways, so wound themselves into our lives that we view with apprehension the time of parting.¹⁴⁸

The above quotes testify to the deep bond that developed between so many evacuees and their surrogate parents. Many householders felt bereft when their evacuees left, especially childless couples and some expressed a wish to adopt their evacuees. One respondent from the sample was later told by her foster-mother that her foster-father died from a broken heart. Detailed planning for the return of official evacuees began in Spring 1944 but schemes drawn up for London and the Southeast had to be revised as a result of the flying bomb and rocket attacks. In September 1944 the Government decided to effect an 'evacuation in reverse', with London last in the queue. On 18 October 1944, the Midland cities and all other areas north and west of a line joining Southampton and Hull were declared 'go

¹⁴⁷ *The Times Educational Supplement*, 4 August 1945

¹⁴⁸ *Dartington Archive, News of the Day*, 17 June 1941

home areas' and procedures were set out for organised return in numerous circulars. Surprisingly, Plymouth was included in the Government's list of areas (MH Circular 146) instructed in October 1944 to make arrangements for the return of unaccompanied children. The City's Director of Education, Dr Andrew Scotland, found this incomprehensible because so much school accommodation had been destroyed or damaged.¹⁴⁹

On 10 March 1945 the Government issued the general outline of procedures for the return of London evacuees with homes. From then onwards various instructions were issued regarding trains, escorts, food etc. During April 1945 a government sponsored weekly letter appeared in *The Western Times*. The format used two fictitious characters, one called Lucille who wrote to Monica answering various queries and suggesting helpful wartime tips such as what to do with one's Anderson shelter once war was over. On 27 April the letter discussed the return of evacuees. Lucille told Monica that the return scheme for Greater London would not become operative until the Government decided it was safe. Meantime 'it will be better that you should not encourage the evacuees in your village to make a move'. Mothers and children would be first to leave followed by unaccompanied children. Where there were sufficient numbers special trains or reserved coaches would be provided. Failing this, free travel vouchers would be issued. The final plans for the return of organised parties were announced on 29 June.¹⁵⁰

A large proportion of LCC schoolchildren did not leave Devon until June/July 1945 and the LCC worked out its own scheme to bring back children from approximately 1,000 reception areas.¹⁵¹ The local newspapers recorded some of the departures e.g. parties of children left Exeter on 23 June 'to all

¹⁴⁹ *Education*, Volume LXXXIV, p. 354, 29 September 1944, p.424, 13 October 1944 and p. 492, 27 October 1944

¹⁵⁰ For detail see *Ministry of Health War Diary Part B, MH101/14*

¹⁵¹ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp. 431-2

the parting was hard; to many severe',¹⁵² and the same scene was enacted in different parts of the country.¹⁵³ Not all returned home for a variety of reasons. By October, 1,089 elementary and 327 secondary pupils still remained in Devon and even in December there were still over 5,000 official evacuees of all categories left in the County.¹⁵⁴ Twenty four sample evacuees (11%) never left Devon, 11 because their parent/parents moved down and 13 because they decided to work in Devon, could not settle back at home or their families were broken apart as a result of death or divorce.

MH Circular 95/45 (28 May 1945) advised local authorities in evacuation areas to arrange follow-up visits to the homes of returning evacuee children to assist parents' and children's adjustment to conditions made unfamiliar by separation and many years of war. It was suggested that social workers, health visitors, school nurses, child care organisers and others should be used to give advice and help in homes where difficulties or misunderstanding had arisen.¹⁵⁵ Family dynamics had changed forever – children leaving beloved foster-parents, one or both parents killed, older siblings killed or no longer at home, family homes destroyed, change of area, new siblings born during the war who were strangers, parents and siblings like strangers, divorce rates increasing dramatically. Some felt they could not trust anybody and could not confide in their parents again.¹⁵⁶ Many evacuees had adopted different speech and manners 'I went home such a different child. I didn't seem to fit in so well. My sister hated my country accent.'¹⁵⁷ Approximately 5% of the sample reported difficulties integrating because of their changed accent. Margaret Coulter (5) was in Devon for 3 years and on returning to her school in Middlesex the class was asked to write an essay about two people talking. Margaret decided to write about two men in the village talking in Devonian accents. 'I suppose it looked like gibberish. The insensitive teacher had me up in front of the class for the terrible spelling.

¹⁵² *Express & Echo*, 23 June 1945

¹⁵³ *Education*, Volume LXXXIV, p. 733, 15 December 1944

¹⁵⁴ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1945*

¹⁵⁵ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.438

¹⁵⁶ P. Schweitzer, ed. *Goodnight Children Everywhere* (Age Exchange Theatre Trust 1990) p.49

¹⁵⁷ M. Parsons, *Waiting to go Home* (DSM 1999) p.106

I didn't try to explain and from then on shut out my past life'. Others, like Maureen Batts (8), found it very hard to adjust to urban living after Devon 'I hated being back in London. It was dirty, cold and all bomb-damaged...the war had opened up a whole new world, where I was safe, well looked after and loved'. Shirley Curtis (5) was evacuated to Devon in August 1944. When she returned home in 1945 the trauma of not knowing where she wanted to live caused her hair to fall out. She finally settled with her foster mother in Devon. Twenty percent of the sample found great difficulty reintegrating and most have retained a lifelong attachment to the County with many finally returning 'home' for their retirement.

In January 1946 the MH reassured local authorities that the Government would still bear the cost of board and lodging for children unable to return home but councils must continue to take the appropriate recovery from the parents or guardians. By 31 March the Evacuation Scheme came to an end. There were 5,200 unaccompanied children left in reception areas in England and Wales (no figures for Devon). About 3,000 remained with foster-parents, 1,000 in residential nurseries and special schools and the rest were in hostels of various kinds. For many there was no suitable housing to return to, others were orphaned or casualties of family schism due to death or divorce. A small number were deserted by parents, including several from the local sample. An interim scheme to assist the transition between the emergency welfare apparatus of 1939-45 and the post-war legislation for child care, social assistance and health services was introduced on 1 April 1946 and remained until 5 July 1948 when the Children Act required local authorities to assume responsibility for the maintenance and well-being of the remaining evacuee children (approximately 1,500 nationally).¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp. 437-8

Conclusion

Several important conclusions can be drawn from the material presented in this Chapter. Evacuee children settled well in Devon where the vast majority of billets were in rural working-class homes and the distance from London prevented both potentially unsettling visits from parents and visits home. They generally adapted happily to rural life and integrated quickly with local children. Drift back was very gradual and lower than the national average. The prime reason for return was parental wish, and return due to unhappiness was low on the list of reasons. The Chairman of the LCC Education Committee believed that ‘nowhere throughout the forty counties to which London children had been sent had evacuation been such an outstanding success as in Devon. He thought this must be largely due to the warm-heartedness of the foster parents’.¹⁵⁹ This begs the question – were the people of Devon more warm-hearted in their response than those in other reception areas? Although there has been minimal research on individual counties, reference to several quotes given above¹⁶⁰ indicates that nationally the evacuation of schoolchildren was successful and resulted in strong bonds developing between many foster-parents and evacuee children. Perhaps the slower pace of parochial life, the lack of material wealth and sense of community spirit sustained the majority of local people in Devon during their wartime ‘invasion’ and encouraged a more relaxed attitude. However, apart from the obvious benefits of working-class billets and distance from evacuation areas, the fact that the County provided for the largest number of LCC children makes Devon’s evacuation success even more notable.

¹⁵⁹ *Western Times*, 3 January 1941

¹⁶⁰ Footnotes 38 and 147. Also see ‘The War and the People – No. 1’, *Social Work*, Volume 2, No.1 (1941) p.9 ‘In most cases the foster parents become genuinely fond of the children and look after them exceedingly well’.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Educational Experience

Any attempt to draw up a balance sheet of educational gains and losses was bound to be complicated and indeterminable. The main difficulties were overcome and there was the broadening of human interest.¹

Education was a crucial factor in the success of the Government Evacuation Scheme and laid a heavy burden on LEAs, educational staff and all those concerned with the well-being of both local and evacuated schoolchildren. Devon's problems of billeting schoolchildren close to suitable schools, the complex issue of retaining the separate identity of evacuated schools, the temporary need for double shifts, shortage of educational equipment, the introduction of an informal curriculum, the role of teachers and wartime educational disruption are all examined in this Chapter. There is also a separate section on the educational problems in Plymouth. Both the School Medical Service and School Meals and Milk Schemes are discussed in Chapters 3, 7 and 9 and are therefore not included. The relative brevity of this Chapter is due to lack of data in local council records. There is also little to draw on from log books which often referred briefly to crowded conditions, additional accommodation, teacher absences and re-organisation of classes, but very rarely recorded complaints concerning evacuation. The evacuee children were absorbed quickly and school life continued. Regrettably there is no extant comprehensive record of the school parties which came to Devon, generally from London and the Southeast, but Appendix 13 lists those LCC schools which arrived in 1939. Appendix 14 lists evacuated school parties, their provenance and destination, as provided by the evacuee sample.

¹ P.H.J.H. Gosden, *Education in the Second World War* (Methuen & Co. Ltd. 1976) p.75

Billeting problems

MH Memo Ev 5 (28 July 1939) stated it was 'clearly desirable' that schoolchildren should if possible be in billets within reach of school.² Following the first evacuation wave to Devon, Armfelt voiced concern that there were cases of senior pupils being sent to villages where there was no senior school accommodation and younger children billeted at considerable distances from local schools.³ Attempts to forestall problems of this nature and invite 'close co-operation' had been made by DCEC in June 1939 and Armfelt was clearly angry that no local authority had responded constructively. This resulted in the distribution of children which 'from an educational point of view was completely haphazard'.⁴ Consequent re-billeting for educational and religious reasons was causing great controversy amongst Devon's householders who were both reluctant to change their evacuees and often unaware of the educational facts. It also generated a good deal of unwelcome press publicity.

By December, Armfelt had prepared a memorandum on behalf of DCC which requested that the Board took action to remedy the situation. It warned that haphazard billeting would increase drift back and that the only way forward was for the County Council to become both the 'controlling' and 'co-ordinating' authority. The MH could not 'handle a local situation without local help' and the billeting authorities were unqualified to deal with educational considerations.⁵ Minutes in the Board's file indicate a Government acknowledgement that MH Circular 1871 (12 September 1939) only contained 'a mild suggestion' that reception authorities should co-operate with LEAs and that neither this nor the Board's Circular 1480 (6 November 1939) had explained to local authorities the importance of the educational question and the need for it being explained to householders. It was

² *Exeter City Archive, Box1/8, Group G*

³ *The Western Times*, 8 September 1939

⁴ *ED 134/30, G9E/3*, Memorandum by Armfelt dated 18 December 1939

⁵ *Ibid.*

suggested that a short circular or memo should be addressed to local authorities pointing out that the Government attached great importance to educational considerations and that the authorities should ‘treat kindly’ suggestions made by the LEAs. However, the Ministry was clearly maintaining its original position that each local authority remained ‘master in its own district’.⁶ DCC was informed that if explanations given to householders regarding re-billeting failed to convince them ‘it is difficult to see in what way the County Council...could intervene to any useful purpose’. Handing over the administration of the Evacuation Scheme to the County Council was certainly not considered a possibility.⁷

Nationally, the extent of problems encountered in reception areas varied from authority to authority depending on how successful the co-operation was between local billeting and educational authorities. It was reported that many districts apparently even refused to involve education officers at detraining centres in 1939,⁸ although this was apparently not the case in Devon.⁹ Critics, including DCEC, continued to believe that the county councils should have been in charge of billeting because, once billeted, all the services on which the evacuee child relied were those provided by the education authorities and not the billeting authorities.¹⁰ To exacerbate the problems, liaison prior to evacuation between evacuating and reception authorities was rare except in the case of secondary schools because destinations were usually impossible to predict, especially in the case of LCC children. However, as soon as evacuated teachers (approximately 418 teachers

⁶ *ED 134/30*, Inspectors’ Report of Devon’s position (excluding the West and Southwest area) 24 November 1939, Memorandum by Armfelt dated 18 December 1939, Ministry of Health Minute Sheet dated 15 January 1940

⁷ *ED 134/30, G9E/3*, Letter from Ministry of Health and Board of Education to DCEC dated 24 January 1940

⁸ R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey* (Routledge & Sons Ltd. 1940) p. 82

⁹ LEA and Board officials were apparently present to meet every train except those which arrived unexpectedly - *Devon County Council Committee Minutes, DCC148/14, Report of Education Committee*, 21 September 1939. *ED 134/30*, Notes by local HMI inspectors for Ministry of Health

¹⁰ *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 352, Column 2168, 2 November 1939 – James Chuter Ede M.P. who became Parliamentary Secretary for the Board of Education in 1940. Also comments by Director of Education of Anglesey, *Education*, Volume LXXIX, p.324, 24 April 1942 and R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p.80

in 1939) arrived in Devon,¹¹ they were ‘brought into immediate touch with Devon teachers and plans formulated for the re-opening of the schools’.¹² There is one recorded local example of authorities apparently working together in their pre-planning. Barnstaple Divisional Education Authority agreed in May 1939 to co-operate in ‘every possible way’ with Barnstaple MB and its billeting officers, with the *sine qua non* that they ‘should be consulted before any definite plans are made concerning the children, the teachers, and the Schools’.¹³

A critical open letter sent to Herbert Morrison,¹⁴ Leader of the LCC, by the London Teachers’ Association, was published in January 1940. It stressed that only the organisation of children to the entraining stations was successful. ‘The distribution from the railhead had scattered schools into bits and billeting was done without considering children as anything but pawns. Evacuation had failed from an educational point of view and was therefore failing as a dispersal effort’.¹⁵ Shortly thereafter Armfelt notified E.M. Rich, LCC Education Officer, that the Ministry’s new schedule for Devon allocated, in many cases, large numbers of evacuees to areas where school accommodation was overstretched and small numbers to areas with plenty of accommodation. Rich wrote to Sir Maurice Holmes¹⁶ at the Board suggesting these allocations had been made by the MH without consultation with the Board and that it was probably the same in other reception areas. Holmes promised to look into the matter as did Armfelt. A local conference was called to discuss re-distribution. Armfelt then wrote to William Cleary¹⁷ warning him that the Chairman of DCEC was very disturbed about the ‘apparent disregard for educational facilities’ and proposed to write to the MH. He stressed his personal aim was to settle the matter locally and persuaded the Chairman to

¹¹ *The Western Times*, 8 September 1939

¹² *DCC Committee Minutes DCC148/14, Report of Education Committee*, 21 September 1939

¹³ *Barnstaple Divisional Education Authority Committee Minutes 1903C/EEM3-47*, 11 May 1939

¹⁴ Labour M.P. for South Hackney and Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security from October 1940-May 1945

¹⁵ *Education*, Volume LXXV, p.27, 12 January 1940

¹⁶ Permanent Secretary at the Board of Education from 1937-1945

¹⁷ Principal Assistant Secretary at the Board responsible for Elementary Education

invite the Regional Evacuation Officer to visit Devon.¹⁸ Nothing further was found on this matter but following the second evacuation HMI Platts wrote that although contacts with BOs was improved ‘billeting was, and still is, first and education comes second’.¹⁹

On 7 November 1940, following advice from the MH Regional Office, A.J. Withycombe, Clerk to DCC, assumed the voluntary position of Billeting Co-ordinating Officer. His brief was to liaise between the Regional Office and the large number of local authorities in Devon, although clearly not all of these were keen at first to yield to such DCC interference.²⁰ Similar action was also taken in Somerset, Dorset and Gloucestershire. It appears that pressure on the MH from county council officials such as Armfelt and possibly from members of the public involved in evacuation who complained about ‘the manifest lack of co-operation between the Ministry and the Board and the apparent disregard in London for local surveys of accommodation’,²¹ finally resulted in the decision to include county councils for the first time, although not in a position of control, in the vexed problem of billeting. A conference was held in Exeter to discuss billeting problems, in particular to assist with the most equitable distribution of evacuees in the County, bearing in mind such issues as adequacy of educational services.²²

¹⁸ *ED 134/30*, Letter from E.M. Rich to Sir Maurice Holmes, dated 26 February 1940. Reply from Holmes dated 29 February 1940. Letter from Armfelt to Cleary dated 4 March 1940.

¹⁹ *ED134/39, G9E/941*, Report dated 1 April 1944

²⁰ *Dawlish Urban District Council Committee Reports R2369A/(5/3)C82*, November 1940

²¹ *ED 134/31*, Letter from Seaton resident – last page missing, dated 5 August 1940

²² *The Western Times*, 13 December 1940. Also *Dawlish Urban District Council Committee Reports R2369A/(5/3)C82*, October –November 1940 and *Crediton Urban District Council Minutes R4/2/Cadd2C115*

Separate identity of evacuated schools

Board Circular 1474 (29 August 1939) had optimistically stated the ‘the local school and the visiting school will each retain its own personality’, working double shifts if necessary.²³ However, there were reports of initial confusion in reception areas when school parties arrived in September 1939, many of which had already been split in the rush to leave the evacuation areas. In rural areas school parties were often divided between different villages or sent to villages where accommodation was inadequate or unsuitable.²⁴ For example, one London school was split between 23 villages in Norfolk,²⁵ and headteachers elsewhere sometimes found themselves visiting up to 6 or 7 villages to check their children.²⁶ Examples in Devon include Berrymeade School (Acton) which arrived with 428 children in September 1939. The Infants together with their siblings remained in Totnes, girls were sent to South Brent and boys went to Ugborough, Bittaford and Wrangaton. Victory Place School was scattered from Sidmouth to Dunkeswell, and Southwark Central Boys’ was scattered over 5 villages on both banks of the River Exe. In addition, the policy of billeting siblings together caused educational difficulties, for example in the case of senior evacuee boys having to be transported daily to Dawlish from Teignmouth. In relatively few local cases was the unit of the school, generally further divided on arrival, ‘so billeted as to facilitate suitable educational organisation’.²⁷

By November 1939, the Board was forced to reconsider its position on evacuee schools retaining their own identity (Circular 1480, 6 November), acknowledging that mergers were the better option in some cases.²⁸ Apart from the logistical problems, large numbers of the schools’ pupils had

²³ R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p.115

²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 82

²⁵ R. Samways, ed. *We think you ought to go* (City of London, London Metropolitan Archives 1995) p.20. Also P.H.J.H. Gosden, *Education in the Second World War*, p.15

²⁶ *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 352, Column 2172 – Sir Percy Harris, M.P.

²⁷ *ED 134/30*

²⁸ P.H.J.H. Gosden, *Education in the Second World War*, p.11

remained at home, further weakening the unit identity. Anticipating that the second evacuation wave would take place under sustained bombing, the LCC notified reception areas in March 1940 that it would no longer be possible to organise the evacuation on the basis of schools as they existed in August 1939. Parties of children would be made up and assembled at suitable schools under the supervision of teachers in London and it would not be possible to attempt to link up children with their former schools in the reception areas.²⁹ Although during June 1940 the majority of children who arrived in Devon were attached to school parties, as the bombing intensified from September onwards, it was frequently impossible to arrange for evacuation to take place in the form of school parties. Large numbers of children had also moved with their parents independently.³⁰

Exeter's Secretary for Education claimed that in June 1940 the policy of evacuee schools retaining their separate identity 'was forced on us (and most other reception areas)'.³¹ His comment may refer to the original aim of the LCC to preserve the identity of its schools but which had to be abandoned in many reception areas. He later warned the Chief Education Officer of Bristol that 'even with the best will in the world' Bristol schoolchildren would have to be merged into local schools. Every school in Exeter had nearly doubled its peace-time roll and all available accommodation for classes except churches was in use.³² Early attempts to run evacuated schools as separate units generally broke down in Devon as elsewhere but in Autumn 1941 there were still apparently 73 school units consisting entirely of evacuees, including 5 LCC selective central schools.³³ As children returned home gradually and teachers were recalled, it became prudent to merge even those school parties that had maintained their independence. Secondary schools were the most successful in maintaining their identity,³⁴ and Appendix 15 lists those secondary schools

²⁹ *Exeter Town Clerk's Papers, Box 14, Group N*

³⁰ *DCC Evacuation Box, Second Davidson Report 1941*

³¹ *Town Clerk's Papers, ECA Evac Box 12/128, Group N, Letter dated 11 February 1941*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ P.H.J.H. Gosden, *Education in the Second World War*, p.75

³⁴ R. Samways, ed. *We think you ought to go*, pp.21-22

evacuated to Devon as complete units during 1940-1942. The LCC Education Department documented that:

Relatively few schools retained sufficient identity to keep records as in peace-time... Many schools had lost their identity and their former pupils to such an extent that the local authorities could not pick out a particular reception area as the temporary home of their schoolchildren.³⁵

Double Shifts

Nationally, insufficient accommodation and delays both in finding extra accommodation³⁶ for school parties and in receiving financial approval from either the evacuation areas or the Treasury forced many reception schools to introduce double shifts as a necessary temporary measure. Apart from loss of schooling, the afternoon shifts were problematic for children already tired from walking to school and playing during the morning, and became much more difficult during the winter months. LCC records indicate that the double shift system was usually 'speedily converted to practically full time education',³⁷ and certainly DCEC's policy was to avoid double shifts wherever possible and persuade evacuated headteachers to merge.³⁸ This position was made easier in 1939 by the relatively small number of official evacuees (approximately 5,500 elementary) although there were also 4,411 unofficially evacuated elementary and secondary pupils to accommodate. One local school had 95 unofficial evacuees, 5 had over 50 and 26 had over 30.³⁹

³⁵ *Corporation of London Information Leaflet No 10*

³⁶ Following second evacuation wave, over 400 extra premises had been hired in Devon, *ED134/39, G9E/941*

³⁷ R. Samways, ed. *We think you ought to go*, p.20

³⁸ *ED134/30*, Report on prevalence of double shifts in Exmouth UDC

³⁹ *ED 134/30*, Letter from DCEC to Board dated 10 November 1939

Nevertheless, during 1939, 101 Devon schools out of the 140 affected were able to avoid the double shift system and by December only 6 schools were still operating this system.⁴⁰

Shortage of educational equipment

Board Circular 1469 (19 May 1939) suggested that local reception authorities might ‘find it convenient’ to increase normal stocks of educational material. DCEC resolved not to take action,⁴¹ and although not recorded in the Committee Minutes, a newspaper report stated the emergency proposal was described as ‘ridiculous’ by one councillor, who added ‘if the children are to be sent here they ought to be sent with materials’.⁴² Of course, at this time the projected number of expected evacuees was high and cost was uppermost in the minds of Committee members. However, Barnstaple MB⁴³ and Torbay MB both decided to order reserve stocks.⁴⁴ For the first few months after each evacuation wave, schools struggled to cope with a desperate shortage of equipment, particularly in the typical small, ill-equipped village schools. For example, Branscombe reported ‘standing room only’ in December 1940.⁴⁵ Harbertonford welcomed 73 evacuees in June 1940 and some children were accommodated in the spare room, with others in the meadow. Merging took place when furniture arrived from the LCC in October.⁴⁶ There were no desks or equipment for Bristol evacuees who arrived at the already over-crowded Coldridge School in 1941 and the children had to wait one month for the delivery of furniture from Bristol.⁴⁷ At Totnes Infants and Standard 1, the overcrowding was so bad in May 1941 that the staffroom was used as a classroom with 38-41 children packed in with only space for 11 dual desks.⁴⁸ School furniture

⁴⁰ *DCC Minutes 148/14, Report of the Education Committee*, 14 December 1939. Also *Education*, Volume LXXV, 12 January 1940, p.32. Crediton RDC arranged merging from the outset *ED134/30*

⁴¹ *DCEC Minutes DCC150/4/1/37*, 27 July 1939.

⁴² *The Western Times*, 28 July 1939

⁴³ *Barnstaple Municipal Borough 2654A/Box 12, 2654add2/C115 Council Minutes*, p.256, *Barnstaple Divisional Education Authority Committee Minutes 1903C/EEM3-47*, 6 July 1939

⁴⁴ *Torbay Municipal Borough Minutes R4582A/TC68*, 22 June 1939

⁴⁵ *Branscombe School Managers’ Minutes 5022Cadd/EFM1*, December 1940

⁴⁶ *Harbertonford School Log Book 1278C/EFL2-3*, 16 June and October 1940.

⁴⁷ *Coldridge School Log Book 858AC/EFL3*, February 1941

⁴⁸ *Totnes Infants and Standard 1 School Log Book 2440C/EAL8*

including such sundry items as netball posts, canteen heating cupboards and even a piano, was supplied by LCC, Bristol and Plymouth LEAs although delivery was frequently delayed and furniture old⁴⁹ and sometimes broken, prompting the comment from the Headmaster of Tavistock Senior Church School that the dual desks supplied by the LCC were ‘antique but usable’.⁵⁰ The LCC sent about one-third of its school equipment to reception areas between September 1939 and the end of 1941. A decline in the child population during the interwar years had led to surplus furniture stocks and explains the age of some equipment.⁵¹

Wartime curriculum

Board Circular 1469 also suggested ideas for the educational curriculum of evacuee schoolchildren, including ideas on informal educational activities such as massed singing and dramatic work when no school building was available. However, evacuated teachers were not warned how few rural schools had assembly halls and how difficult it would be to sing and dance when only a curtain divided the classes,⁵² prompting comments such as ‘we London teachers have...discovered that rural schools have not got the facilities for modern education which we value and enjoy so much at home.’⁵³ Board Circular 1474 (29 August 1939) updated Circular 1469. For those evacuees transferred to the country, nature study,⁵⁴ rambles, local surveys, gardening, care of small livestock, life on the farm and studying remains of the past were suggested. Those in towns could visit places of interest whilst those at the seaside could study the coast and shoreline.⁵⁵ Many evacuee children were introduced to these informal outdoor lessons which enhanced their education, particularly

⁴⁹ See comments in *Kingswear School Log Book 3683C/EFL6-7*, August 1940, *Kingkerswell St Mary’s School Log Book 3426C/EFL6*, June 1941, *Holloway Street Junior Girls’ (Exeter) School Log Book 68/3/1/15*, January 1941

⁵⁰ *Tavistock Senior Church School Log Book 792C/EFL9-10*, September 1941

⁵¹ R. Samways, ed. *We think you ought to go*, p.51

⁵² H.C. Dent, *Education in Transition* (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd. 1944) p.6

⁵³ D. Sheridan, ed. *Wartime Women* (London: Mandarin 1991) p.68. See also *ED134/39, G9E/941*

⁵⁴ These pursuits were already well known to Devon children long before evacuation and frequently featured in log books as far back as 1902. For example *Clyst Hydon School Log Book 2743C/EFL1*

⁵⁵ *Barnstaple Municipal Borough Education Correspondence 2654A/6/2*

when teachers used their initiative, for example by introducing arithmetic when pupils sold their garden produce.⁵⁶ One LCC teacher evacuated to Honiton wrote to the Board after questions relating to double shifts were asked in Parliament which ‘will give the impression we are having a jolly fine holiday at the country’s expense’. To refute this suggestion he listed in detail the variety of activities conducted outside formal school hours.⁵⁷ There were also reports from Devon of local and evacuee teachers fostering inter-school activities and a ‘lavish’ local response from the LEA, local sports clubs and farmers in providing space.⁵⁸ During Summer 1940, the LCC Chairman, A. Emil Davies, visited some 20 London schools evacuated to South Devon. ‘In almost every case the children were in the open air, cultivating vegetables, plants, etc. Many schools are keeping chickens, rabbits, guinea pigs, etc. In one school...a large hall was filled with tables on which girls were sorting out...herbs and roots which were being gathered and sold to a London firm of druggists’.⁵⁹ *The Times Educational Supplement* reported that ‘the value of open air and of the world of Nature as class-rooms have been realized as never before’.⁶⁰ During June 1941, Chuter Ede⁶¹ toured Devon’s rural senior schools, recording for reference ‘several striking cases in which the use of the child’s environment...had given a general stimulus to the child’s mental activities’.⁶² Many from the local sample felt that outdoor pursuits and increased practical work benefited them throughout their lives.

⁵⁶ G. Finn, *Another Kind of Porridge* (Coulmore Press 2001) p.104

⁵⁷ *ED 134/30- G671/671*, Letter from W. Hillyer to Board, dated 13 October 1939.

⁵⁸ *ED 134/30- G9E/1*

⁵⁹ *Education*, Volume LXXVI, 13 September 1940

⁶⁰ *The Times Educational Supplement*, 14 September 1940

⁶¹ James Chuter Ede, Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Education May 1940-May 1945

⁶² *The Western Times*, 13 June 1941

The role of teachers

The nature of total war requires singular dedication from many. Teachers bore a huge burden of responsibility on behalf of the Government, and for those evacuated teachers who suddenly found themselves *in loco parentis*, closer teacher-pupil relations were often forged.⁶³ An Acton teacher recorded that for the first time teachers 'are able really to know each individual pupil'.⁶⁴ A 1940 HMI Report commented on the general delightful spontaneity of the London evacuees in Devon, not only due to their perkiness but also due to the effect of spending so much time with their teachers,⁶⁵ and in Yarcombe (Devon) evacuee teachers were described as 'bosom friends'.⁶⁶ Additional wartime voluntary duties included visiting billets, the supervision of holiday clubs, school activities, salvage collection and the varied administrative duties associated with school meals, milk and clothing needs. Due to the shortage of staff, particularly men, with so many in the Forces, elderly retired teachers and married women were often called on to fill the gaps. In October 1940, the Chairman of DCEC expressed his concern about the shortage of male staff. One local school of 450 children only had 1 male teacher apart from the headmaster and an evacuated teacher.⁶⁷ In November 1941, DCEC acknowledged that headmasters deserved a bonus because they were probably 'more hard-worked than any other section of the community'.⁶⁸ Whether this included equally hard-working headmistresses is unknown. Devon's log books reveal the personal stress that both local and evacuated teachers sustained. Many evacuated teachers had their houses bombed and both local and evacuated teachers lost close family members although sanctioned leave

⁶³ P.J. Cunningham and P. Gardner, 'Saving the nation's children', *History of Education*, 1999, Volume 28, No. 3, p 331

⁶⁴ *ED 134/270*

⁶⁵ *ED 134/30*

⁶⁶ *ED 134/30*, Report by Inspectors' Clerks dated March 1940

⁶⁷ *The Western Times*, 4 October 1940

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 7 November 1941

was generally only a few days. Brixham Furzeham School Log Book clearly illustrates the disruption caused by LCC teachers coming and going, being transferred, being absent for several days at a time to visit bombed out homes, husbands on leave etc. At St Nicholas School (Sidmouth) an evacuated teacher from Kent returned to London on 20 November 1944 because her husband, a London teacher, suffered a heart attack. He died but she nevertheless courageously returned to duty by 27 November.⁶⁹

The shortage of teachers in reception areas for the second wave became acute as many had returned home. Approximately 1,454 teachers and 461 helpers were billeted in Devon between 13-18 June 1940.⁷⁰ Almost every school in Devon was affected by evacuation⁷¹ and by the beginning of 1941, educational facilities were stretched to their maximum as further evacuees arrived from Bristol and then Plymouth. There were only 2 responses for the position of Assistant Master at Alphington Primary School in May. Poignantly, one of their male teachers, called up in December 1940, had just been killed.⁷² The number of pupils in some schools had more than doubled. For example, the small village school of Coldridge had 100 on the roll in June 1941 (34 local children) and water had to be brought to the school.⁷³ Culmstock had 196 evacuees in March 1941 (72 local children) including children from London, Bristol, Czechoslovakia and Austria.⁷⁴ Topsham Infants had 340 on the roll in April 1941 (167 local children),⁷⁵ and Ugborough had 239 on the roll (75 local children) including evacuees from Acton, LCC, Bristol, Folkestone, Canterbury and Brentford. Another 49 arrived from Plymouth just after this entry.⁷⁶

⁶⁹ *St Nicholas School, Sidmouth Log Book 1525C/EFL8*

⁷⁰ *DCC Minutes DCC148/15*, 26 September 1940

⁷¹ *ED134/39, G9E/941*

⁷² *Alphington Primary School Minute Book 4374C/EFM1*

⁷³ *Coldridge School Log Book 858AC/EFL2-3*

⁷⁴ *Culmstock School Log Book 2679C/EAL1-2*, 6 March 1941

⁷⁵ *Topsham Infants School Log Book 5761C/EFL5*

⁷⁶ *Ugborough School Log Book 2437C/EAL4*

As numbers fell in Devon during 1942, DCEC were required to transfer evacuated teachers back to their home authorities ‘at a very rapid rate’, causing some local schools to re-organise their classes as many as 4-5 times a year.⁷⁷ The national shortage of teachers pushed the Board into issuing Circular 1591 (June 1942), requesting a suspension of the bar on employing married women by all LEAs.⁷⁸ In Devon married women teachers were already in evidence in local schools before the outbreak of war and DCEC had resolved back in September 1939 to recommend that, subject to Managers’ approval, women be allowed to continue after marriage.⁷⁹ DCEC issued another letter in March 1943 about the serious and increasing shortage of teaching staff throughout the country.⁸⁰ In 1945, a certain number of evacuated teachers in Devon had no homes to return to and were granted leave of absence without pay. DCEC decided to offer them temporary employment to help alleviate the immediate post-war staffing shortages.⁸¹ Despite the greatly increased strain on local teachers, recorded complaints and negative comments about evacuees were very rare. The only examples found were at Roborough where the Headteacher slapped two 8 year old boys on the hand for having ‘no idea of working when I have to leave them’,⁸² at Witheridge where a 14 year old evacuee ‘grossly insulted’ the teacher and received 6 strokes,⁸³ and at Tavistock Senior Church School where, for several weeks, some older LCC boys refused to work when taken by lady teachers.⁸⁴ This latter case illustrates the problems caused by lack of male staff.

Dent believed that the ‘air of lofty superiority’ of many urban teachers bred ‘an antagonism, a suspicion and distrust between town and countryside’ and to a lesser extent rural teachers were

⁷⁷ *Bovey Tracey 2160A/PE19*, Letter from DCEC dated 21 November 1942

⁷⁸ P.H.J.H. Gosden, *Education in the Second World War*, p.97

⁷⁹ *Devon Education Committee Minutes DCC150/4/1/37*, p.253, 14 September 1939

⁸⁰ *DCEC464C/EAM401-411*

⁸¹ *Totnes Infants and Standard 1 School Log Book 2440C/EAL8*, letter from DCEC

⁸² *Roborough School Log Book 721Cadd./EFL1*, February 1942

⁸³ *Witheridge National School Log Book B40A/4/3*, December 1941

⁸⁴ *Tavistock Senior Church School Log Book 792C/EFL9*, 12 November and 5 December 1940

‘unwilling to enter into partnership with the newcomers’.⁸⁵ Rose highlighted a similar concern voiced by a contributor to the *London Schoolmasters’ Association Bulletin* who wrote that ‘teachers have learnt a great deal – of the snobbery and hypocrisy of the countryside they have read in novels’.⁸⁶ There is little to suggest that such problems existed in Devon although naturally there were variations in teaching methods. For example, evacuated teachers remarked on how local teachers came early to school and went home late and LCC headteachers, unlike their counterparts in Devon, never taught.⁸⁷ Numerous examples recorded by HMI Inspectors and those found in log books and newspapers illustrate the excellent relations and co-operation existing between evacuated teachers and local teaching staff and residents of Devon.⁸⁸ In 1939, an HMI Inspector recorded that from his experience there was only one LCC school where the staff were not settling well, chiefly on religious grounds. This was almost certainly a reference to Heygate Street Jewish School.⁸⁹ By contrast, there are very few negative comments. Devon’s HMI mentioned that with ‘jealousies and local pride of certain local and evacuated teachers, the grade and status with pay of teachers crept

⁸⁵ H.C. Dent, *Evacuation in Transition*, pp.22-4

⁸⁶ *L.S.A. Bulletin*, March 1940, 3. MS38A/6/ME/1/14 as cited in S. Rose, *Which People’s War?* (Oxford University Press 2003) p.208

⁸⁷ Report by HMI, Arnold Platts, dated 1 April 1944, *ED134/39, G9E/941*

⁸⁸ For example, *ED 134/30*, Notes by HMI Inspectors for Ministry of Health, intended to give a picture of education of official and unofficial evacuees in Devon. *ED 134/34*, Letter from Herwald Ramsbotham to David Heathcoat Amory, dated 12 May 1941. *ED 134/30*, Letter dated 13 October 1939 from W. Hillyer, evacuated teacher from Gloucester LCC School, Peckham to Honiton. *The Western Times*, 27 December 1940, 13 March 1942, 12 February 1943. *Crediton Hayward Girls’ School Log Book 1510C/EFL2-3*, September 1943. *Crediton Hayward Boys’ School – Headmaster’s Report 1510C/EFA26*. *Cruwys Morchard School Log Book 509C/EFL1*, November 1941. *North Bovey School Log Book 1411C/EFL4*, 29 July 1942. *Broadclyst Westwood School Log Book 456C/EFL2*, February 1940. *Chagford Senior School Log Book 1974C/ESL1*, January 1942. *Branscombe School Log Book 5022C/EFL2-3*, 21 December 1939. *Yarcombe School Log Book 1453C/EFL2*, 25 June 1941. *Tedburn St Mary School Log Book 3382C/EFL3*, June 1940. *Kingsbridge Primary, Junior and Senior School Managers’ Minutes 1874C/EAMI-3*, July 1942. *Harbertonford School Log Book 1278C/EFL2-3*, December 1942. *Exmouth Infants’ School Managers’ Minutes 2352C/EFM1*, 27 July 1945. *Barnstaple Gaydon Street Log Books 2318C/EFL3*, December 1941, *Barnstaple Parish Church Junior Girls’ School Log Book 1918C/EFL4*, July 1943, *Welcombe School Log Book 765C/EAL2*, July 1945. *Marland St Peters School Log Book 697C/EFL1*, December 1942. *Great Torrington Blue Coat School Log Book 3074C/EFL4*, October 1944. *Great Torrington Junior Mixed School Log Book, 2485C/EAL8*, October 1942. *Buckland Brewer School Log Book 3166C/ESL2*, April 1941. *Shobrooke School Log Book 1410C/EFL2-3*, December 1940

⁸⁹ *ED134/270 – 9B(2)18* Inspector’s Report dated 12 September 1939. Further information on the difficulties at Heygate are discussed in Chapter 8

in'.⁹⁰ There are only 3 specific references in log books about any discord. Culmstock's Headteacher was informed that LCC teachers were in the habit of knitting when taking class.⁹¹ At Stoke Fleming there was a problem between the Headmistress and the LCC teacher concerning the transfer of 2 children into the Headmistress's class. The LCC teacher lodged a complaint but there was no further mention in the log book.⁹² Ashprington's Headteacher 'regretfully' reported a conflict between herself and the LCC mistress. Having disciplined children in both her own class and the LCC class, the LCC teacher objected and accused Ms Gibson of interfering. The matter was resolved by a County Inspector.⁹³ Considering the potential for problems, particularly with regard to leadership and methods of teaching and discipline, all exacerbated by extremely difficult wartime conditions, it is remarkable how well staff co-operated with each other and in many cases forged close bonds.

Educational disruption

Evacuation of urban children from relatively well-equipped schools to rural schools with far fewer resources was a revelation for both evacuated teachers and pupils.⁹⁴ However, whilst there was initial disruption for both local and evacuee schoolchildren as teachers struggled to cope with crowded and frequently primitive conditions in reception areas, shortage of materials, equipment, and facilities for practical work, 37% of the sample definitely felt their education benefited from the stability of regular schooling and new experiences. Twenty three percent felt their education was disrupted and 40% were unsure either way. As always with education, luck was the vital ingredient, particularly regarding the calibre of teachers. Upheavals of re-evacuation was the main cause of disruption cited by the sample but also one teacher classes, shortage of teachers, curriculum

⁹⁰ *ED 134/39, G9E/941*

⁹¹ *Culmstock School Log Book 2679C/EAL1-2, November 1940*

⁹² *Stoke Fleming School Log Book, 2439C/EAL4, May 1942*

⁹³ *Ashprington School Log Book 625C/EFL1, 7 November 1940*

⁹⁴ For example, *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 353, Column 973, 16 November 1939

changes, overcrowding, lack of cookery and housewifery facilities, poor teaching and too much time spent on helping the war effort. The log books testify to the severe overcrowding, frequent re-organisation of classes, shortage of equipment and lessons taking place in village and church halls and any other available accommodation. By September 1940, 233 village, church and club halls in Devon had been hired as emergency accommodation,⁹⁵ later rising to 400.⁹⁶ Despite these difficulties, the striking attitude was one of continuing as normally as possible. Nationally, contemporary reports confirmed that standards were ‘astonishingly high’ and Gosden highlighted the advantage of the increased school roll in many small village schools in Devon because it limited the age range of each of the classes,⁹⁷ although with shortage of staff and accommodation this was not necessarily of benefit. LCC secondary schools showed no evidence of falling standards.⁹⁸

Brixham’s experience deserves special mention. Fishing ties with France and Belgium were strong and evacuees from both countries settled in Brixham during the war. The French children were fewer in number and were taught at local schools. However, by September 1940 there were about 80 Belgian children, many of whom could not speak or understand English. Armfelt’s correspondence with the Board reflects his concern about suitable educational provision since integration into local schools was problematic because of the language barrier. He clearly believed a separate school should be set up although this was not DCEC’s responsibility. However, the Board’s opinion, based on experience gained during World War One, was that the children would progress better if integrated. Between 60-70 children were admitted to local schools but a local survey indicated that large numbers were not attending any school. Sometime during late 1940 and early 1941, a separate unit was set up in the Baptist Hall by the Belgian Government, staffed by

⁹⁵ ED 134/31

⁹⁶ ED 134/39, G9E/941

⁹⁷ P.H.J.H. Gosden, *Education in the Second World War*, pp.75 and 81

⁹⁸ R. Samways, ed. *We think you ought to go*, p.22

Belgian teachers. This resulted in the transfer of some Belgian children already in local schools. Although exercising 'certain supervision', DCEC was unsure whose responsibility the school was. By October 1941 there were between 150-200 children at the Baptist Hall, with only about 27 attending local schools.⁹⁹ A Resident Officer from the British Council, together with his wife, taught English at the Hall to help prevent the children becoming isolated. By March 1942, local schools were notified by DCEC that an agreement had been reached whereby Belgian children would work half of each day in local schools to assist integration and half of each day in halls with their own teachers and the 2 teachers from the British Council.¹⁰⁰ This case demonstrates the care and concern taken by Armfelt and DCEC to ensure that the Belgian children received the best possible education which included a policy of local integration.

For those children left in evacuation areas the picture was much bleaker. Schools had been closed to give the evacuation every chance of success and discourage return, thereby also closing down the school medical service. By October 1939, reports from all parts of the country described children in evacuation areas running wild without schooling and care.¹⁰¹ The Government was forced to re-open schools wherever possible in evacuation areas from 1 November as drift back increased, providing there was reasonable protection against air-raids. Unfortunately, one fifth of schools in evacuation and neutral areas had been taken over for other purposes (two-thirds of LCC schools).¹⁰² At this stage schooling was not compulsory and absenteeism was rife with causes ranging from household chores, queuing for food, looking after younger siblings, staying at home when fathers were home on leave, transport difficulties, alleged loss of clothing coupons and shortage of leather to repair shoes. By the end of 1939, over 1,000,000 children in evacuation areas had been without

⁹⁹ An independent Fishing School for 20-30 boys aged 12-14 had also been set up by the Belgian Minister of Marine.

¹⁰⁰ *ED 134/17A*

¹⁰¹ *The Times Educational Supplement*, 21 October 1939

¹⁰² P.H.J.H. Gosden, *Education in the Second World War*, p.22. R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.146. A. Calder, *The People's War* (Jonathan Cape 1969) p.49

education, health services and school meals and milk for over 4 months.¹⁰³ By February 1940, LEAs were instructed to prepare for the re-introduction of compulsory attendance in those schools with adequate air-raid facilities.¹⁰⁴ However, by March there were still no LCC elementary schoolchildren in full-time education - 29.8% were part-time, 37.2% received home tuition of some kind and 33.0% had no instruction.¹⁰⁵ Emergency schools had been introduced with preference given to children over 11 until June 1940 and then reduced to 8 years and above. In addition, approximately 2,660 parents allowed groups to meet in their houses.¹⁰⁶ Prior to bombing this position began to improve with 26,000 out of 152,000 listed in full-time education at one of 605 emergency schools.¹⁰⁷ By contrast, Manchester's situation had 'radically' improved with compulsory education re-introduced and approximately 75% in full-time education.¹⁰⁸

All state schools closed again when the second evacuation wave began, most remaining so for 3-4 months.¹⁰⁹ Even when they did re-open the Board became increasingly concerned as schools were bombed, more than one-third of school time was spent in shelters and about 100,000 children nationally 'were running loose'.¹¹⁰ As children drifted back from the reception areas and many of the non-evacuated children were educationally and physically in poor shape, the LCC attempted to enforce compulsory education in early 1941.¹¹¹ By March 1942, 579 LCC emergency schools were open with 84.1% attendance. The school roll was now 175,974, of which 1,645 were half-time but the ebb and flow of children and teachers required constant re-organisation.¹¹² A Gravesend

¹⁰³ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.146. See also R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p.154

¹⁰⁴ R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, pp.124-5

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* p.125.

¹⁰⁶ R. Samways, ed. *We think you ought to go*, pp.32-33

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* p.33

¹⁰⁸ R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p.210

¹⁰⁹ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.243

¹¹⁰ P.H.J.H. Gosden, *Education in the Second World War*, p.42

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* p.45

¹¹² R. Samways, ed. *We think you ought to go*, pp.34-36

teacher, evacuated to Dartington (Devon) for 19 months, returned to Kent in May 1942. She found large classes and children badly affected by continued absences, many of whom had become undisciplined due to fathers away and mothers working.¹¹³ Children lacked concentration and had become noisier and more restless. In March 1943, the LCC tested a number of elementary schoolchildren and predictably the results, compared with 1924, were ‘disappointing, especially in the case of girls’.¹¹⁴ During 1944, enemy action once again resulted in a very serious decline in the school attendance of London children.¹¹⁵

Several of the evacuee sample recalled the disruption caused by bombing raids and school closure before evacuation. Ron Fry (11) was not evacuated from Bristol until November 1941 and remembered the double shifts and time spent in shelters. Brian Thornton (10) only received a few hours tuition per week in London. Harry Gilbert’s (8) school in Bexleyheath (Kent) was closed in 1939 and he had to go to a lady’s house to collect work. Donald Porter (9) from Erith (Kent) had lessons in a private house before evacuation in 1940. Unsurprisingly, tests carried out in Southend comparing 1939-1940 with 1941 found the average attainment of non-evacuees in reading and arithmetic was many months below that of the evacuees. Contributing factors included fewer distractions out of school hours in reception areas, lack of facilities which gave reading and arithmetic a larger share of the timetable and teachers whose knowledge of the children’s background out of school was greater due to evacuation.¹¹⁶ Although rare, local recorded comments about backward evacuee children described a worrying trend. Devon’s County Psychiatrist spoke in June 1941 of many evacuated children of 8 and 9 ‘unable to read as a result of discontinuous teaching’.¹¹⁷ Branscombe’s Headteacher found that many evacuees in 1944 were behind in the 3Rs

¹¹³ *Dartington Archive, News of the Day*, 7 July 1942

¹¹⁴ R. Samways, ed. *We think you ought to go*, p.37 See also B. Holman, *A Very British Revolution* (Lion Publishing 1995) p.109. Also *Times Education Supplement*, 23 October 1943

¹¹⁵ *Education*, Volume LXXXIV, 15 September 1944, p.311

¹¹⁶ *The Times Educational Supplement*, 21 November 1942

¹¹⁷ *Dartington Archive, News of the Day*, 4 July 1941

and some boys of 10 and 11 could not read,¹¹⁸ and Black Torrington's Headteacher found the London children who arrived in late 1940 'very backward'.¹¹⁹

Although the LCC scholarship system was severely tested,¹²⁰ many evacuees to Devon were given the chance to take scholarships set by their particular evacuation area, even in the smallest village schools. However, this often depended on the co-operation of the headteacher in schools where children usually did not take scholarships. For example, Jean English (12) and 2 other boys were coached by the Headmistress of Uplowman School and all passed. Sadly, nearly 50% of the homes of approximately 3,000 London children who had won scholarships in 1941 were either destroyed or damaged. Many families had moved to districts not classified as evacuation areas and the children forfeited the right to be classed as evacuees and attend evacuated schools with government assistance unless parents footed the bill.¹²¹ Having passed her scholarship in South Brent and attended Kingsbridge School, Jean Saulsbury (10) returned to Central School in Acton when it was deemed safe. The teachers kept changing, the curriculum was not completed and none of her class took their school certificate. June Jenkins (15) was evacuated to Hertfordshire in 1939 and had no schooling for 6 months because the Grammar School was for boys and the headmaster would not admit her. She spent her time helping younger children at the village school. She then came to Barnstaple and attended the Grammar School with 6-7 other girls from her evacuated school. Here her education benefited considerably from regular lessons and no bombing raids.

¹¹⁸ *Branscombe School Log Book 5022C/EFL2-3*, 24 July 1944

¹¹⁹ *Black Torrington School Log Book 634C&add/EFL*, 6 January 1941

¹²⁰ R. Samways, ed. *We think you ought to go*, p.56

¹²¹ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp.395-6

Plymouth's schoolchildren

The severe educational disruption for Plymouth children is significant. Enemy action destroyed approximately between 33-45.4%¹²² of the total number of school places (approximately 17.4% destroyed in Exeter)¹²³ although throughout the bombing schools tenaciously continued as normally as possible despite the appalling disruption. Remarkably, exams and medical inspections continued wherever possible and school meals were introduced during May-June 1942. Unlike the rest of Devon, Plymouth was classified as a neutral area and received very few evacuee schoolchildren. By February 1940 there were only 67 unofficially evacuated secondary and 385 elementary pupils.¹²⁴ However, from the outbreak of war some schools were amalgamated with others due to takeover by military or war departments, although in some cases this only lasted for a few months.¹²⁵ The 54 nursery classes were closed¹²⁶ and their teachers allocated to fill vacancies caused by call up, resignations, illness etc.¹²⁷ Educational disruption intensified from mid-1940 as night-time air-raids increased and schoolchildren became exhausted. The log books testify to the low attendance and tiredness of the children from July 1940 onwards during the months leading up to the heaviest attacks in April/May 1941. Work was affected and pupils from damaged and destroyed schools amalgamated with other schools. The mains gas supply was damaged in January

¹²² Prior to evacuation the school population of Plymouth was given as 20,673 elementary and 2,500 secondary pupils in *Minutes of Plymouth City Education Committee 1644/139*, 27 February, 1941. However Twyford gave the total figure as 16,808 with 7,645 school places destroyed – H.P. Twyford, *It came to our Door* (Underhill Plymouth 1946) p.128

¹²³ 1,220 school places were destroyed, P.H.J.H. Gosden, *Education in the Second World War*, p.57. The normal number was approximately 7,000 - Approximate number given in *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer for the City of Exeter 1942 ECA/19/95*

¹²⁴ *Minutes of Plymouth City Education Committee, 1644/139*, 29 February 1940

¹²⁵ For example, Camels Head Boys' School was shared with Damar Central working double shifts, 863/1. Cattedown Road Senior Girls' School worked double shifts at Prince Rock Senior Boys' School until 1 December 1939, 2350/1. King Street Senior Boys' School amalgamated with Stoke School on double shifts, 2312/2. Paradise Road Junior Mixed School was taken over by the war department and moved to Stuart Road Junior Mixed on double shifts, 2070/1. Plymouth Junior Technical School moved to Plymouth Public Central Boys' and worked double shifts, 1716/8

¹²⁶ These remained closed until 1942 when, despite so much destruction, accommodation and equipment was put in place by March

¹²⁷ *Minutes of Plymouth City Education Committee, 1644/139*, 23 November 1939

1941 and schools with no heat were advised to open for just one hour in the morning and one hour in the afternoon for physical education.¹²⁸ In an effort to counteract disruption, the teachers at Plymouth Public Central Boys' School ran voluntary classes for pupils who were working double shifts with Plymouth Junior Technical School (taken over by the military).¹²⁹ Teachers at Camels Head Boys' School had been running similar voluntary classes at least once weekly outside official hours since January 1940,¹³⁰ and pupils at Charles Senior Mixed School on half-time were also encouraged to attend extra tuition in their 'off' sessions during March 1941. The Headteacher recorded 'their spirit and that of my staff fills me with pride'.¹³¹

The log books reveal the disturbing fact that many schools were without adequate air-raid shelters during the 1940 raids, and also during 1941 when many Emergency Schools were formed.¹³² Children's lives were seriously at risk and it was due to luck rather than planning that more were not killed. For example, there was no provision against air raids or any fire fighting apparatus in September 1939 at Ford Senior Girls' School and the shed was used whilst trenches were developed during April 1940. The school was damaged in December 1940 and badly hit in April 1941.¹³³ Pupils at Tracy Street School were forced to shelter in the lower main hall under desks until October 1940 when their shelter was completed,¹³⁴ and children at Crownhill School were forced to

¹²⁸ For example *Mount Street Mixed School Log Book 2544/5*, *Grey Coat School Log Book 423/1/2*, *Charles Girls' School 1526/3*, *Crownhill School Log Book 1842/3*, *Palace Court Senior Girls' School Log Book 1736/1*, *Laira Green Infant School Log Book 1513/4*, *Johnston Terrace Infants and Junior Mixed School Log Book 1533/1*, *Hyde Park Girls' School Log Book 2065/2*, *Ford Senior Girls' School Log Book, 2318/4*, *Salisbury Road Senior Girls' School Log Book 2329/2*, *St Andrew's Junior Boys' School Log Book 792/1*, *Tracy Street School Log Book 1502/3*

¹²⁹ *Plymouth Public Central Boys' School Log Book 1715/8*

¹³⁰ *Camels Head Boys' School Log Book 863/1*

¹³¹ *City of Plymouth, Emergency Re-organization of Schools 1644/103*, Letter to Mr Clegg from Headteacher dated 27 March 1941

¹³² Examples include Stuart Road Junior Mixed School where the shelters were insufficient in 1939 for the number of pupils which included those from Paradise Road School *Log Book 2070/1*, and Salisbury Road Senior Girls' School and Plymouth Public Central Boys' School where the trench shelters were still not adequate during 1940 - *Salisbury Road Log Book 2329/2*, *Plymouth Public Central Boys' Log Book 1715/8*

¹³³ *Ford Senior Girls' School Log Book 2318/4*

¹³⁴ *Tracy Street School Log Book 1502/3*

shelter in the hedge outside. The shelter under construction was still unfit in February 1941.¹³⁵ The trench shelters at Cattedown Road Senior Girls' School were only completed by 4 July 1940 as raids were ongoing.¹³⁶ At Prince Rock Junior Mixed and Infant School, re-inforcement work on the shelter made conditions chaotic and during one raid in January 1942 neither the children nor the residents of Cattedown had sufficient shelter and one child was injured. This was reported immediately to the authorities but there was no response. The Headteacher therefore decided to shelter the Juniors under the playground shed and the Infants together with the Cattedown children in the ground floor school corridors.¹³⁷ At Hyde Park Road Senior Mixed Emergency School, housed at Hope Baptist Schoolroom and comprising seniors from Hyde Park Schools plus boys from Montpelier, the nearest shelter was 5 minutes walk. Air raids were ongoing in July 1941 and children were forced to remain in the building. The headmaster wrote to the City Surveyor's Department at this time voicing his grave concern and asking for instructions. Eventually the school was visited by an official in February 1942 who claimed he was unaware that shelters had not been provided. The situation was still not resolved one year later when air raids and intense gunfire were heard near the school. This could so easily have led to severe loss of life as the building was damaged during a heavy raid on 16 November 1943.¹³⁸ Clearly the overwhelmed City Surveyor's Department was unable to respond in many cases.

In January 1941, a list of extra accommodation was compiled that could be made available for damaged or destroyed schools.¹³⁹ As the pupil roll decreased the Board instructed Plymouth LEA to amalgamate certain schools into 'emergency schools' as an experiment. The Managers of St Joseph's Junior Mixed School, Devonport protested that 'We are isolated by a large area of

¹³⁵ *Crownhill School Log Book 1842/3*

¹³⁶ *Cattedown Road Senior Girls' School Log Book 2350/1*

¹³⁷ *Prince Rock Junior School Log Book 1524/3*

¹³⁸ *Hyde Park Road School Log Book 2065/3*

¹³⁹ *City of Plymouth, Emergency Re-organization of Schools 1644/103*, Report dated 20 January 1941

devastation...If St Joseph's is closed, the young children will have to go a long distance through all this dangerous area, even if they do not go to a Roman Catholic School'.¹⁴⁰ Concerns that pupils who remained in the City might perhaps not attend school led to a request from the Education Secretary for teachers to assist in home visits.¹⁴¹ Other teachers were needed in the rest of Devon and one headmaster was placed in the unenviable position of nominating a teacher because none of the staff were prepared to volunteer for evacuation.¹⁴² A 1945 HMI Report summed up the wartime experience of many Plymouth children who lived 'in the centre of areas of desolation; their experience in the past few years have been sad, often sordid, and with few, if any, cultural contacts'.¹⁴³

Once the City achieved evacuation status in May 1941 many parties of pupils were evacuated. For those evacuated privately the MH granted the same billeting allowances and free travel. The Headmaster of Johnston Terrace, once the largest school in Plymouth with 700 pupils, wrote a poignant last entry in the log book on 27 June 1941, illustrating the sadness felt by many teachers at this time:

Thirteen years ago this child of mine was born. It grew and flourished...Our old school building is destroyed, and children and teachers are scattered far and wide. Only a tiny number with one Class Mistress left to carry on the school tradition.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ *City of Plymouth, Emergency Re-organization of Schools 1644/103*, Letter dated 30 May 1941

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Letter dated 17 May 1941

¹⁴² *City of Plymouth, Emergency Re-organization of Schools 1644/103*, Letter dated 1 December 1941 from the Headmaster of Grey Coat Junior Mixed and Infants School to Mr Clegg, Secretary for Education

¹⁴³ *Morice Town School Log Book 1460/1*

¹⁴⁴ *Johnston Terrace Infants and Junior Mixed School Log Book, 1533/1*

Prior to evacuation the school population of Plymouth was 20,673 elementary and 2,500 secondary pupils.¹⁴⁵ By November 1941, 7,540 elementary and 1,390 secondary pupils were still evacuated in Devon and Cornwall, 5,780 elementary and 220 secondary were scattered in other reception areas and 11,080 elementary and 850 secondary had remained or returned to Plymouth. The evacuees were described as generally 'very contented and happy'.¹⁴⁶ Very few schools went as complete units. Devonport Girls' High School was evacuated to Stoodleigh (Tiverton), Mount House School went to Tavistock, St Boniface College (very badly damaged) went to Buckfast Abbey, Notre Dame High School went to Teignmouth and the rest went to Cornwall. Temporary disruption to lessons was inevitable and one headmistress wrote to Mr Clegg, Plymouth City Secretary for Education, advising him that, although kindly received and comfortably billeted, the school accommodation was 'nil at the moment'. The local Grammar School was not prepared to work double shifts and although various Sunday School rooms etc. were suggested there was no furniture other than chairs.¹⁴⁷ Devonport High School for Girls 'found everyone...most kind and helpful' in Stoodleigh,¹⁴⁸ although the teaching accommodation was described as 'possible' but not 'good'. For both the local and evacuated schools to have full-time programmes the local school used make-shift rooms every afternoon. The temporary accommodation was not properly equipped and a request for this was made but 'until it arrives not much serious work can be done'.¹⁴⁹ The girls were accommodated in village homes and nearby farm houses and the Village Hall was used for gym and indoor games. Some work was done in the school buildings at Stoodleigh and science and domestic

¹⁴⁵ *Minutes of Plymouth City Education Committee 1644/139*, 27 February 1940

¹⁴⁶ *Minutes of Plymouth City Education Committee 1644/139*, 27 November 1941

¹⁴⁷ *City of Plymouth, Town Clerk's Papers 1738/33*, Letter dated 15 May 1941 from Miss Turner to Mr Clegg, Secretary for Education. This correspondence concerned Plymouth High School for Girls, evacuated to Cornwall in May 1941.

¹⁴⁸ *Town Clerk's Papers, City of Plymouth, 1738/33*, Letter from Headmistress to Mr Clegg, dated 18 May 1941

¹⁴⁹ *City of Plymouth Town Clerk's Papers 1738/33*, Letter from C.B. Joyner to Mr Clegg, dated 17 May 1941

science classes were accommodated at Tiverton Middle School although transport was necessary. The School Certificate Class worked in Tiverton for the remaining term and those girls were billeted in the town.¹⁵⁰

Conclusion

The overall wartime educational picture in Devon appears to have been one of achievement amidst difficult circumstances. DCC clearly believed that the MH was mistaken in its decision to place local authorities in sole charge of billeting schoolchildren. Armfelt continued to put pressure on the MH and Board, highlighting the needs of education and the shortcomings of the *status quo*. A partial victory was won in late 1940 when the Clerk to DCC assumed the voluntary position of Billeting Co-ordinating Officer. Although the majority of school parties lost their unit identity and rapidly became merged with local schools, this fostered integration and both evacuee and local schoolchildren benefited from sharing diverse knowledge and educational practice. There is no data to suggest that local and evacuee teachers did not co-operate fully and respect each other with surprisingly little friction but much shared appreciation. Formal education was obviously disrupted, much more for some children than others but many benefited from the introduction of informal educational activities and closer teacher/pupil relations. Those in reception areas such as Devon largely fared better than their counterparts in evacuation areas. HMIs clearly played a vital role in the integration of evacuees, and the multitude of conferences, visits and meetings which brought together large numbers of workers in the educational field as never before was undoubtedly beneficially advantageous for future reform.¹⁵¹ However, there was a feeling that reform at the Board was long overdue, illustrated by the HMI Evacuation Report for Devon which stressed that the Board's officials were overworked and not provided with any help.¹⁵² A quote from the 1941

¹⁵⁰ *City of Plymouth Town Clerk's Papers 1738/33*,. Letter from Ms Moore to Mr Clegg, dated 18 May 1941

¹⁵¹ Report by HMI, Arnold Platts, dated 1 April 1944, *ED134/39, G9E/941*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

County Inspectors' Interim Report on Beaufort House, Lillie Road and Redriff School Parties is an apt and optimistic conclusion to this Chapter. The school parties consisted of 275 schoolchildren, evacuated to the already overcrowded Bradley Rowe School, Exeter in June 1940 and later merged together as Beaufort House Elementary School at Bradley Rowe School. 'Few schools in this area have had the trials of this LCC unit. Yet, to spend a day in it, is to see not only an excellent standard of work, but the happiest band of children and teachers...despite all the drawbacks of accommodation, the Head Master and his staff have somehow managed to maintain a good standard of formal work'.¹⁵³

¹⁵³ *Beaufort House Evacuation Party Log Book 76/6/2*, Interim Report 26/27 November 1941

CHAPTER SIX

Provision for additional evacuees

This chapter presents a brief overview of three additional categories of evacuee who came to Devon: officially evacuated mothers with children, unofficial evacuees (also variously referred to as refugees, voluntary or private evacuees) and private school parties. Due to limited word space and available extant documentary sources, the decision was taken from the outset to concentrate primarily on officially evacuated unaccompanied schoolchildren. Nevertheless the County also had to make provision for large numbers of the above categories and, using the relatively scant archive material available, it is important both to summarise this provision and to discuss any difficulties encountered. The expansion of nursery school provision will also be reviewed in this Chapter as it links directly to the evacuation of mothers with children and the success of that particular scheme.

Officially evacuated mothers and accompanying children

Only 5 days after the outbreak of war the Government decided that mothers would be excluded from any further evacuation scheme. Reports on the condition and behaviour of women moved from Liverpool were mainly responsible for this ‘drastic change in policy’.¹ The NFWI Report *Town Children through Country Eyes* was also characteristically equally damning about a ‘distressing proportion’ of mothers including those from London, although many mothers were also described as ‘capable and conscientious.’² Petitions against billeting adult evacuees in private homes had been lodged even before September 1939 by those with ‘nightmare visions of barbarian invasion’.³ Recently, Rose has re-emphasised the apparent tension generated by evacuation

¹ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.142

² *Town Children through Country Eyes* (NFWI 1940) pp.17-23

³ J. Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership, and the Second World War* (Oxford University Press 2002) p.149

'between what were imagined to be two opposing ways of life – urban and rural'. Examples are given of shocked rural inhabitants, from Glasgow to Lincolnshire, recoiling in horror at the state and moral behaviour of evacuee urban mothers and their children.⁴ This was not a new phenomenon as working-class women had been accused by 'members of the middle classes of doing a disservice to society by being bad mothers'⁵ since the mid-nineteenth century, and for those with a parallel agenda in 1939 the opportunity to incite criticism was irresistible. Andrews (1997) stressed that although very few in the WI Movement were related to farmers, their belief that they were the 'essence of English womanhood' was ingrained. She likened the stories and myths about town mothers to the 'similarly unpleasant, racist myths that operate within post-war Britain'.⁶

Once again, this highlights the need for and importance of local research. Reception areas not only differed in their socioeconomic composition but the numbers and provenance of their evacuees also varied extensively. Crucially, whereas many reception areas were deluged in September 1939, the majority of officially evacuated mothers with children who came to Devon, mainly from London and the Southeast, arrived during 1940-1941 when the phoney war period was over and the gossip and sensational press headlines fuelling mistrust had abated somewhat. Apart from an overt sense that evacuation to Devon benefited the health and well-being of evacuee children and an acceptance that many evacuated mothers found the country overwhelmingly boring, there is no written evidence suggesting a widespread hostile reaction from self-conceived 'morally upright' householders in Devon against the slovenly ways of the urban poor. Behind closed doors there was undoubtedly suspicion and criticism which naturally occurs when strangers arrive in small parochial communities. However, the majority of Devon's householders were rural working-class, living in poor housing. Their ways may have differed considerably from the urban ways of the evacuees but

⁴ S. Rose, *Which People's War?* (Oxford University Press 2003) pp. 58,59, 207-209

⁵ *Ibid.* p.119

⁶ M. Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism* (Lawrence & Wishart 1997) pp.113-114

hardship was no stranger. Making exception both for a hitherto unprecedented situation where people were forced to live together and for variations of cultural norms, personality and behaviour from both locals and evacuees alike, the majority of local people appeared to accept and settle down with their urban visitors and the available written commentary on evacuation, largely from middle and upper class contributors, strongly suggests a more compassionate rather than hostile reaction.

The approximate number (England and Wales) of evacuated mothers with children in September 1939 was 426,500.⁷ Of these an estimated 257,000 were from the London and Metropolitan area (35% of those eligible).⁸ Transport was arranged for double the number but their failure to turn up led to extensive changes in train schedules and destinations, resulting in some confusion in reception areas.⁹ Large numbers of those who did go only stayed a few days or weeks and *The Times* reported on 11 September that mothers were returning home everyday. By October about 50% had returned¹⁰ and despite government-led advice issued by local reception authorities to discourage drift back, by January 1940 it was estimated that between 86-88% had returned home, leaving 57,500 mothers with children in reception areas.¹¹ There are no comprehensive figures for the number of officially evacuated mothers with children who arrived in Devon during the first evacuation wave. However, the following available scant local data indicates that the number was low and it is clear that reception counties less distant from evacuation areas appear to have borne

⁷ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.562 Appendix 9

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 103

⁹ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp. 106-7

¹⁰ *Express and Echo*, 25 October 1939

¹¹ S. Isaacs, ed. *The Cambridge Evacuation Survey* (Methuen & Co. Ltd. London 1941) pp.1-2. Also see Summary Report by the Ministry of Health, 1 April 1939-31 March 1941, p. 30 - copy held in Exeter City Council, Town Clerk's Papers, *ECA, ARP Evac, Group G, Box 1/8*. Ministry of Health figures estimated that 223,381 (85.8%) of the 260,276 accompanied children and 145,681 (87.6%) of the 166,206 mothers had returned.

the brunt.¹² Exeter recorded that 356 mothers with 528 children were billeted by 16 September. In addition, there were 55 mothers with 52 children in the City who were either unofficial evacuees or on holiday and 51 mothers and 80 children had already returned home. By the end of 1939, 89% of mothers with children had returned which accords with the national average.¹³ Some arrivals to Devon were unexpected, which prompted an irritated comment from the Chairman of Crediton RDC about confusion in reception areas.¹⁴ A miscellaneous group of 75 evacuees had arrived in Crediton including mothers with children and expectant mothers although, by 25 September, 12 mothers with children and 3 expectant mothers had returned home.¹⁵ In Sidmouth two houses were hastily requisitioned as hostels for mothers and children and a Ministry of Labour Branch opened on Saturday 2 September to render financial assistance.¹⁶ Seaton anticipated 260 children but, although fewer children arrived, 12 mothers and guardians with children and 12 expectant mothers arrived unexpectedly.¹⁷ It is unclear whether Torquay, where arrangements for over 300 mothers with children were described as ‘most satisfactory’,¹⁸ and Honiton, where 110 mothers with children were all successfully billeted,¹⁹ were forewarned about numbers and category.

The Government attempted to stem drift back by issuing MH Circular 1871 (12 September 1939). It requested local authorities to discourage mothers from returning and suggested easing the tension between evacuees and householders by providing communal meals, help with clothing, blankets and bedding and requisitioning empty houses. Circular 1882 (2 October 1939) emphasised the principle

¹² For example, R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey* (Routledge & Sons Ltd. 1940) pp.240, 244-5. See also the N.F.W.I. Report *Town Children through Country Eyes* for reports on London mothers, pp. 17-23.

¹³ *Exeter City Town Council, Town Clerk's Papers, ARP Evac, Group N, Box 10*. The arrival figures of 301 mothers with 476 children were given in *Exeter City Council, Town Clerk's Papers, ARP Evacuation, Group G, Box 2/8, Annual Report of Medical Officer of Health for Exeter, 1939*

¹⁴ *The Western Times*, 20 October 1939. Sir John Shelley was Chairman

¹⁵ *Crediton Urban District Council Minute Book R4/2/C/58*, 25 September 1939

¹⁶ *Sidmouth Urban District Council Minutes R7/7/C21*, 31 August and 4 September 1939

¹⁷ *Seaton Urban District Council Minutes R7/6/C/8*, 3 September 1939

¹⁸ *Torbay Municipal Borough Minute Book of Council and Committees, R4582A/TC68*, 5 September 1939, p.2145

¹⁹ *Honiton Borough Council Minutes R7/1/C/9*, 13 September 1939

of welfare equality with local mothers and children.²⁰ Clearly this was a steep learning curve for all involved. Local details of welfare provision are not well documented but the following examples were recorded. The number of DCC Welfare Centres rose from 41 in December 1939 to 44 by March 1940 (excluding Torquay) although a decision was taken in December not to respond to MH pressure to supply milk at reduced rates to expectant and nursing mothers and children under 5.²¹ Resthaven Convalescent Home at Exmouth was used for expectant evacuated mothers and assurances were sought from the Government that the cost was recoverable.²² At first the MH maintained that it was only financially liable for women who had registered for evacuation as expectant mothers. Other cases were to be charged to the evacuating authority in the area of 'normal residence', assuming such services had been available pre-war. However, as the need to evacuate became more pressing during the summer of 1940, the Government agreed that reception authorities could charge expenses to the Evacuation Account (melting pot for the ultimate financial adjustment) from August onwards for those London women who either became pregnant after evacuation or who had made their own arrangements.²³ In Exeter, the City Council took over Mowbray House (private nursing home) as a temporary maternity home from 2 September with less than 24 hours notice, and although all buildings used by Welfare Centres became ARP First-Aid Posts, welfare 'needs were met'.²⁴ The Cathedral Rest Rooms were set up in October as a community centre for mothers with children, where they could eat cheaply, discuss problems, receive advice and enjoy a short period of relief from child care.²⁵ However, by February 1940 the

²⁰ R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, pp.133-4

²¹ *Maternity and Child Welfare Committee, Devon County Council Minutes, DCC 148/14-15*

²² *Devon County Council Emergency Committee Minutes, DCC149/5/3/1*, 11 September 1939

²³ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp.221-2

²⁴ *Exeter City Council Maternity and Child Welfare Committee Minutes, ECA/27/2*, p.398. Also *Exeter City Council, Town Clerk's Papers, ARP Evac, Group G, Box 2/8, Annual Report of Medical Officer of Health for Exeter 1939*, pp.29-30

²⁵ *ECA, ARP Evacuation, Group N, Box 10*, Memo dated 27 September 1939

centre was barely used as only 29 mothers with 36 children were left in the City.²⁶ Apart from the support given by the WVS, the WI also initiated local support. For example, High Bickington WI discussed how best to help evacuated mothers with children under school age and agreed to invite them to social meetings without requiring the usual 4d.²⁷

Nationally the official evacuation of mothers with children in 1939 was labelled a failure lacking in 'imaginative thinking',²⁸ and it appears that the Government had given very little thought to the logistics of such a scheme. Local authorities were not permitted to spend any money on services until late August 1939 when they were finally authorised 'to incur such reasonable expenditure as is necessary for the reception of evacuated persons'.²⁹ Those mothers who chose to avail themselves of the official scheme found they had no choice over their destination or billet and no guarantee if they travelled with a school party including their older children that they would reach the same destination. Accommodation was provided at the Government's expense (5s to householder for mother and 3s for child) with the proviso that a contribution towards the cost of lodgings 'may later on be required ...if they can afford it'. However, during the first year of war no attempt was made to recover any part of the billeting allowance from the mother.³⁰ Only sufficient food and some small hand luggage could be taken on the train and no prams were allowed.³¹ The MH only had 4 women inspectors in the months leading to war and this possibly contributed to the failure of visualising inevitable problems on arrival.³² Billeting in private homes was unavoidably problematic as it meant two women sharing cooking facilities and the evacuee mother trying to occupy her child or children without imposing on the householder. By November 1939, Sir Percy

²⁶ *ECA , ARP Evacuation, Group N, Box 14*, February 1940

²⁷ *High Bickington WI Minutes B327/2/1*, 6 September 1939

²⁸ S. Isaacs, ed. *The Cambridge Evacuation Survey*, p.39

²⁹ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp. 91-2

³⁰ *Ibid.* p.167

³¹ *Government Evacuation Scheme Pamphlet and Handbook for Registrars, 1136Z/Z1*

³² R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 110

Harris,³³ original member of the Government Evacuation Committee, agreed with critics that ‘if it is insisted upon on too large a scale it is a way to cause civil discontent and to create an atmosphere hostile to the war’.³⁴ Lady Astor³⁵ suggested that mothers with children in most cases would be better in hostels,³⁶ and the MOH for Exeter, G.B. Page, criticised the scheme as ‘hurriedly and badly conceived’. Reception staff had to be on duty for several days but there was no definite information available as to the days and trains on which the mothers would arrive. ‘Wagging tongues contributed their share of wholly apocryphal stories and no doubt had the satisfaction of doing some mischief’.³⁷

The majority of mothers had left home quickly in the panic of war, with some regarding evacuation as a ‘summer trip to the seaside’.³⁸ Lack of bombing combined with restrictions of living with strangers, shortage of money, no employment, parochial and often fairly primitive country conditions, boredom, worry about family members left at home and severance from the multitude of familiar supporting social, economic and institutional agencies of the urban environment all led to unhappiness. Social workers in reception areas reported that the main reason for return was financial. Many now had the burden of running two households and the cost of living in smaller towns and country districts was usually higher than in London.³⁹ The second most important reason given was that older children left at home were suffering from lack of control and the third reason

³³ Liberal MP for Bethnal Green South West

³⁴ *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 352, Column 2172, 2 November 1939

³⁵ Mayoress of Plymouth and M.P. for Sutton Division, Plymouth

³⁶ *The Times*, 19 September 1939. See also *The Times*, 30 September 1939 – letter from Social Centre Organiser

³⁷ *Exeter City Council, Town Clerk's Papers, ARP Evacuation, Group G, Box 2/8, Annual Report of Medical Officer of Health for Exeter, 1939.*

³⁸ F. Le Gros Clark and R.W. Toms, *Evacuation – Failure or Reform: Fabian Society Tract 249* (1940 – reprinted by Kraus 1969) pp.3- 4

³⁹ *The Times*, 25 January 1941 – Review of The Shakespeare Report

was boredom, often apparently given as the main reason to hide the other ones.⁴⁰ Locally it is impossible to catalogue the prime reasons for drift back as there are very few recorded comments. However, Exeter's Chief Sanitary Inspector wrote to the Town Clerk in September on the subject and listed various reasons: home-sickness, complaints of insufficient financial help, dissatisfaction with billets and unhappiness in new environment. Significantly he added that 'such discontent... is not general for there have been many instances where both occupier and billettee have settled down comfortably together'.⁴¹ There were several reports in the local newspapers of some evacuees returning home because 'they could not tolerate the quietude after the noise and bustle to which they had become accustomed'.⁴² MOI also informed the MH that an unsubstantiated rumour, started in North Devon but which had spread elsewhere, suggested that mothers were returning to the East End because they believed soldiers were being billeted in their homes.⁴³

The following 1939 report on the difficulties faced by mothers evacuated to Exeter was typical, and even more so for those in remote rural reception areas:

She has been put into a completely new environment away from the freedom and responsibilities of her own home... She has no husband to care for... Living in a billet is almost equivalent to being cooped up in part of a house... The householder expects them to stay in their own quarters... Free use of the garden is very often resented... In order to escape from the billet she goes out as much as possible but has

⁴⁰ *Express and Echo*, 25 October 1939. See also *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 352, Column 1020, 19 October 1939. A Scottish survey of 86 respondents found 25 complained of financial difficulties, 19 of incompatibility, 14 of class difference, 11 of religious difficulties (chiefly Roman Catholic evacuees in fairly strong Protestant districts) and 4 of lack of danger - W. Boyd, *Evacuation in Scotland* (University of London Press 1944) p.67

⁴¹ *Exeter City Council, Town Clerk's Papers, ARP Evac, Group N, Box 10*, letter dated 18 September 1939

⁴² *The Western Times*, 15 September and 29 September 1939 and *Express and Echo*, 13 September 1939

⁴³ *MH78/230*, Letter from Intelligence Division of MOI to Ministry of Health, dated 14 October 1939

nowhere to go ...I have seldom, if ever, since the war, been
in the busy, crowded Exeter High Street without seeing these
mothers and children wandering about looking miserable.⁴⁴

One letter from a worried 'working class' father to Exeter Town Clerk described the predicament of his mother-in-law and his two young children billeted in a well-to-do household in Exeter. 'The Lady...is making it very uncomfortable for them, making them walk about all day until bed time'.⁴⁵ However, these examples occurred before the Cathedral Rest Rooms in Exeter became available as a community centre in October. Dorothy Elmhirst⁴⁶ also illustrated the evacuated mothers' predicament in rural Devon:

Cut adrift from their streets, their shops, their favourite
haunts ...For the first few months – in fact for the greater
part of the first year they were miserable – they were lost...
they simply couldn't stand the sense of isolation in the
country ...better be bombed than buried alive in the country
and back they all went – almost all of them.⁴⁷

Margaret Bond (2) came to Devon with her mother to be near evacuated grandparents. Her unhappy mother spent much time at Barnstaple Station watching the trains and left after 6 months because she could not adjust to country life. The separation also affected those left at home. A London newsagent rapidly went insane when separated from his wife and children and cut his throat.⁴⁸ Less sympathetic was an article in *The Times* stating 'it is quite common for townspeople,

⁴⁴ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 168

⁴⁵ *Exeter City Archive, ARP Evac Box 10/100, Group N*, letter dated 8 September 1939

⁴⁶ American Heiress and owner of Dartington Hall (Devon) together with her husband Leonard

⁴⁷ Talk given by Dorothy Elmhirst whilst in America during 1941, *Dartington Archive*.

⁴⁸ *The Express and Echo*, 12 September 1939

with little capacity of self-occupation and not knowing the solace of literature which the Poet Laureate has commended to his fellow-citizens for dark days, to be utterly lost in the country'.⁴⁹

As plans for the second evacuation wave were formulated, a new scheme for mothers with children was introduced in MH Circular 2071 and E.V.10 (27 June 1940). 'Assisted private evacuation' permitted mothers with children under 5 to make their own accommodation arrangements but excluded mothers whose children were all aged over 5. The Government met the cost of billeting, whether the billetor was a stranger, friend or relative. In addition, free travel vouchers were supplied once proof of a secured billet was produced. Finding accommodation from a distance was problematic and frequently done by word of mouth, placing advertisements or writing to the local reception authority. The pressure on local authorities to find billets was often relentless, forcing DCC to pass a resolution in late 1940 that the MH be 'urged' to circulate up-to-date statistics from reception areas to the evacuation areas, highlighting those reception areas which had reached saturation point. Before granting free travel vouchers the appropriate BO should be contacted to ascertain whether there was still accommodation available at the billet named by the applicant.⁵⁰ No response from the MH to these proposals was recorded. Nevertheless, despite the problems, nationally approximately 430,000 mothers and children took advantage of the 'assisted' scheme.⁵¹

Fears of invasion and imminent bombing induced more mothers to leave the cities and by August 1940 the approximate number of billeted mothers with children nationally totalled 57,000 (607 mothers and young children under DCC administration,⁵² and 53 mothers and young children in Exeter⁵³). Serious loss of life and homes, combined with pressure from the public, then forced the

⁴⁹ *The Times*, 15 September 1939

⁵⁰ *Dawlish Urban District Council Committee Reports R2369A/(5/3)C82*

⁵¹ *Summary Report by the Ministry of Health 1 April 1939-31 March 1941*, p. 33, *Exeter City Council, Town Clerk's Papers, Group G, Box 1/8*

⁵² *Devon County Council Minutes DCC148/15*, 26 September 1940

⁵³ *Exeter City Council, Town Clerk's Papers, ARP Evacuation Box 14, Group N*

Government to introduce Evacuation Plan VII on 22 September 1940 for the organised evacuation of homeless mothers and children. At first only a few east London boroughs were included for fear of swamping the reception areas and the response was poor. The scheme was then extended to all mothers and children in all boroughs of the County of London together with a number of surrounding areas.⁵⁴ By 31 March 1941, 40,000 mothers with 73,000 children had been evacuated under this organised scheme,⁵⁵ and altogether 571,000⁵⁶ were now billeted nationally in reception areas (2,944 mothers with 4,761 children in Exeter⁵⁷). However, the response was still described as disappointing despite government propaganda and at this point the Government was forced to adopt a 'more liberal financial policy' to improve welfare provision in reception areas as an inducement.⁵⁸ Propaganda was successful in some cases and one mother described the relentless daily persuasion of Dr Hill on the wireless who 'kept on about the selfish mothers who would not consider the offer of safety for their children...in the end I put my name down to go with Pam'.⁵⁹ Sadly these evacuees were not always safer in Devon. For example, one billeted mother and her 4 children were killed in a bombing raid on Exmouth,⁶⁰ and another mother was injured and lost 2 of her children in another raid, both in January 1941.⁶¹ The organised evacuation of mothers and children was discontinued in March 1942 due to lack of demand. However, the popular 'assisted private evacuation scheme' continued.⁶²

Back in October 1940, the MH (Bristol) had warned local authorities in Devon that the Government considered it essential to transfer as many mothers and children as possible from the bombed areas

⁵⁴ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp. 285-6. See also *Express and Echo*, 7 October 1940

⁵⁵ *Summary Report by the Ministry of Health, 1 April 1939-31 March 1941*, p. 33, *Exeter City Council, Town Clerk's Papers, Group G, Box 1/8*. Titmuss gave the figure of 181,000 mothers with children officially evacuated between 15 September 1940 and 30 June 1941, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 300

⁵⁶ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.562, Appendix 9.

⁵⁷ *Exeter City Council, Town Clerk's Papers, ARP Evacuation Box 12, Group N*

⁵⁸ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp. 369-371

⁵⁹ P. Schweitzer, ed. *Goodnight Children Everywhere* (Age Exchange Theatre Trust 1990) p.39

⁶⁰ *Exmouth Urban District Council Minutes R7/4/C36*

⁶¹ *Express and Echo*, 18 January 1941

⁶² R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 425

of London and the Provinces. At least 30,000 were to be expected in the Region.⁶³ The Ministry also advised local authorities that advance accommodation arrangements in nursing homes needed to be made for those expectant mothers who could not be confined in their billets.⁶⁴ Even from September the County had begun to experience the daily arrival of larger numbers of mothers and children who could no longer be described as taking a holiday at the expense of the householder.⁶⁵ Many had fled the bombing with nothing and problems arose from lack of appropriate certification verifying that they were from an evacuation area.⁶⁶ Devon Public Assistance Committee voiced concern at the numbers arriving in Devon 'in a destitute condition at all hours of the night'. For example, two women arrived in Totnes with 11-12 children in the middle of the night. The Public Assistance Officer affirmed that suitable halls and other places throughout the County were being set up for the homeless and they would be looked after until the proper authorities could take over.⁶⁷ Measures were taken in Barnstaple MB where the Council allowed evacuees who arrived at the station very late at night to sleep in carriages,⁶⁸ and refugees arriving at any hour in Newton Abbot were directed to the Rest and Shelter Station in the Congregational Schoolroom.⁶⁹

Exeter City Council Archive provides a good case study of a local reception area struggling to find householders willing to take mothers and children fleeing the Blitz. Appeals were urgently launched, as in other districts, for accommodation, bedding etc. and the Mayor felt relieved that finally he could describe evacuees as 'families who have lost everything in the front line of the battle of London'.⁷⁰ Large parties of several hundred mothers with children were arriving regularly

⁶³ *Exeter City Council Town Clerk's Papers, ARP Evacuation Box14, Group N*. Letter dated 11 October 1940. Also *Devon County Council Emergency Committee Minutes, DCC149/5/3/3*

⁶⁴ *Seaton Urban District Council, Circulars R7/6/C107*, letter from Ministry of Health dated 8 October 1940 addressed to Honiton, Seaton and Axminster authorities.

⁶⁵ F. Le Gros Clark and R.W. Toms, *Evacuation – Failure or Reform*, pp. 3-4

⁶⁶ *Express and Echo*, 16 September 1940

⁶⁷ *The Western Times*, 27 September 1940

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *The Western Times*, 3 January 1941

⁷⁰ *Express and Echo*, 23 September 1940

in the City although the WVS Catering Bill for refreshments in the Civic Hall illustrates that expected parties were often smaller than provided for.⁷¹ By October 1940 the situation in Exeter was acute due to reluctance to billet this category of evacuee, more usually amongst those with most accommodation. The Council decided to divide the administrative area into 3 districts (St Thomas, Eastern and Central) and compulsory billeting notices were served on all householders who had the necessary accommodation but had not yet volunteered.⁷² Amongst a list of 26 compulsory billets for the week of 21 October, the Lord Bishop of Crediton and 6 doctors were included.⁷³ Exeter's Town Clerk, C.J.Newman, prominent but apparently 'not universally liked',⁷⁴ revealed that he now felt little sympathy for those 'fortunate enough to live in the relative safety of the Reception Areas'. It was now not about finding accommodation for mothers and children who were avoiding danger but who were homeless. Desperate measures were required and 'minor illness, age, or infirmity' no longer exempted a householder from billeting duty.⁷⁵ After consultation it was agreed with the Exeter Committee of the Local Division of the BMA that no further medical certificates were to be accepted by the billeting authorities as many of the medical reasons given were 'inadequate'. If a family doctor felt there were strong medical grounds for exemption he must be prepared to attend the Appeal Tribunal to testify.⁷⁶

Inevitably in the panic to find billets some mothers with children were billeted with unsuitable and often elderly householders which caused some distress. Occasional cases of this kind were exceptional enough to find their way into the newspaper. For example, one mother and 2 children

⁷¹ For example on 23 September 1940, 317 were catered for but 192 arrived and on 28 September 404 were catered for but 198 arrived. *Exeter City Council, Town Clerk's Papers, ARP Evac, Group N, Box 12.*

⁷² *Express and Echo*, 23 October 1940. See also *Exeter City Council, Papers of Town Clerk, ARP Evacuation, Box 11, Group N* – letter from Senior Regional Officer of Ministry of Health, dated 25 September 1941

⁷³ *Exeter City Council, Town Clerk's Papers, ARP Evacuation, Box 14, Group N*

⁷⁴ T. Gray, *Exeter in the 1940s* (The Mint Press 2004) p.11

⁷⁵ Ministry of Health ruling

⁷⁶ *Exeter City Council, Town Clerk's Papers, ARP Evacuation, Box 12, Group N*, Letter dated 16 November 1940

were billeted with a 70 year old journeyman tailor who suffered from neurasthenia. His house was very small and the evacuated family had a room 10 feet by 8.⁷⁷ A curt letter from the CBO (Town Clerk) to another elderly householder stated ‘I am afraid it has been necessary to billet in households where the occupants are well over 80 years of age and in poor health. You are not required to give them any attention. You can appeal to Tribunal’.⁷⁸ An elderly Exeter lady aged 81 with a weak heart, presumably with a large house, was apparently forced to take 2 women and 3 babies under threat of an alternative of 10 soldiers. She agreed to take them for 1 night only.⁷⁹ Publicised appeals to the Exeter Billeting Appeals Tribunal included a retired schoolteacher with nervous strain who had billeted a ‘good mother’ and 4 children for just over 4 months. Her appeal for respite was refused because she and her husband alone shared 3 living rooms.⁸⁰ Some houses in the City were requisitioned as extra accommodation. Despite the difficulties a letter from the Town Clerk to the Divisional Dispersals Officer ‘most emphatically’ disagreed that mothers and children were returning because of unsatisfactory billets.⁸¹ Nevertheless, this degree of local government intervention in the lives of its residents in the face of total war was unparalleled.

Apart from Exeter, Devon’s seaside and market towns received the majority of mothers with children and town clerks were flooded with requests for accommodation. The fall of France had placed Devon within the range of German bombers but this appeared not to discourage evacuees. Local councils were not slow to protest about lack of available accommodation but were usually ignored and somehow had to cope. Honiton RDC wrote to the MH in June 1940 stating that, as the District was now apparently a Military Zone, no further evacuees should be sent. The objection was

⁷⁷ *Express and Echo*, 24 October 1940

⁷⁸ *Exeter City Council, Town Clerk’s Papers, ARP Evacuation, Box 12, Group N*, Letter dated 13 November 1940

⁷⁹ *Exeter City Council, Town Clerk’s Papers, ARP Evacuation, Box 10/100*, Letter from Town Clerk to Chief Sanitary Inspector dated 3 September 1940

⁸⁰ *Express & Echo*, 27 February 1941

⁸¹ *Exeter City Council, Town Clerk’s Papers, ARP Evacuation, Box 10/100*. Letter dated 7 November 1940

evidently disregarded because 80 mothers with children arrived in October.⁸² By September, Crediton UDC appeared to have only 6 available billets for 1 mother and 2 children and 1 billet available for 1 mother and 1 child.⁸³ Brixham UDC was finding it almost impossible to billet mothers with children particularly as refugees from France and Belgium were also arriving. In October the Regional Office wanted to send a further 300 but the Town Clerk replied that only 100 could be accommodated. There is no record of how many actually arrived.⁸⁴

A number of local councils recorded specific difficulties billeting mothers with accompanying children at this time: Bideford MB found that evacuees were arriving daily, far in excess of the numbers expected and provided for. By September 1940 the position regarding available accommodation was 'causing considerable concern'. Representations to the MH were apparently ignored and a further 150 mothers and children were allocated to the town in October.⁸⁵ By November over 1,300 evacuees had been billeted (pop. 9,294)⁸⁶ and compulsory billeting was introduced.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, accommodation was found somehow and by June 1941 there were approximately 475 homes billeting mothers with children with 'very few complaints'.⁸⁸ Exmouth UDC experienced an acute billeting situation as evacuees arrived with little or no forewarning. By 13 November 1940 there were approximately 1,050 officially evacuated and 1,373 unofficially evacuated mothers with children amongst the 4,000 evacuees (pop.15,170). One party had to sleep and eat for more than one week at the Pavilion (temporary Social Welfare Centre for evacuees) and the Billeting Sub-Committee decided it would have to introduce compulsory billeting. There was clearly discontent amongst both householders and evacuees that arrangements made for the

⁸² *Honiton Rural District Council Minutes R7/9/C12*, pp. 80 and 93

⁸³ *Crediton Urban District Council Minutes R4/2/Cadd2C115*, 30 September 1940

⁸⁴ *Brixham Urban District Council Minutes R4582A/BC24*

⁸⁵ *Municipal Borough of Bideford, Minutes and Reports of Committees R2379A/(1/1)C24*, 25 October 1940

⁸⁶ Peacetime population – refer to *Appendix 7*

⁸⁷ *Municipal Borough of Bideford, Minutes and Reports of Committees R2379A/(1/1)C24-C25*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* C25

reception of mothers with children had not been well prepared.⁸⁹ Ilfracombe's population rose from the peacetime total of almost 9,000 to 20,000 by October 1940, a large number of whom were troops requiring billets. Amongst the evacuees there were 363 mothers with 535 children and the main problem reported was that evacuee mothers were complaining about the lack of bathing facilities in the town because there were no public baths.⁹⁰ Torrington RDC recorded that by November 1941 the Evacuation Officer felt compelled to write to the MH highlighting the difficulties of billeting women with children and requesting priority for unaccompanied children.⁹¹

Houses and sometimes vacant hotels requisitioned under Regulation 51 of the Defence (General) Regulations 1939 and MH Circular 2140 (16 September 1940) provided extra accommodation for mothers with children as private billets became harder to find, and these appeared to offer a successful solution to billeting this problematic category. Expenses were paid by the Treasury. For example Dawlish UDC requisitioned 22 houses between 1939-1943.⁹² There were occasional recorded problems about bad behaviour or damage to properties and Dawlish Council found that some husbands joined their wives in billets.⁹³ Two complaints from members of the public were found in the files for the periods November 1940 and August 1942. The first concerned 2 families of mothers with children whom it was alleged were guilty of receiving 'visits by troops and disorderly conduct',⁹⁴ and the second letter referred to the 'disgraceful and unbearable state of affairs' brought about by occupants of requisitioned houses on an estate.⁹⁵ In July 1943 a 'handful'

⁸⁹ *Exmouth Urban District Council Minutes R7/4/C36*

⁹⁰ *Ilfracombe Urban District Council Minutes R2458A/(2/3)C116*, letter to Evacuation Officer, Ministry of Health, dated 26 October 1940. Also *R2458A/(2/3)*, letter to Ministry of Health dated 12 August 1940 from Ilfracombe Town Clerk

⁹¹ *Torrington Rural District Council Minutes R2460A/(1/8)C11*

⁹² *Dawlish Urban District Council Minutes R2369A/(5/3)C29, Resume of Government Evacuation Scheme at work in Dawlish*

⁹³ Under the Government Scheme, male members of the family ordinarily in employment were not eligible for billeting and were advised to return to employment if possible.

⁹⁴ *Dawlish Urban District Council Committee Reports R2369A/(5/3)C82*, 11 November 1940

⁹⁵ *Dawlish Urban District Council Minutes R2369A/(5/3)C27*, letter dated 29 August 1942

of difficult families were reported at Blenheim Hotel and at least one requisitioned house.⁹⁶ It is impossible to know whether these complaints were genuine or excessively exaggerated, particularly as emphasis on ‘good citizenship’ was stressed during war and women and girls were frequently censured for perceived sexual immorality.⁹⁷ *The Express and Echo* also reported in March 1941 that some Dawlish homes had been used ‘in a disgusting manner’.⁹⁸ Undoubtedly a few cases of bad behaviour by mothers would have fuelled disinclination to billet and the same press article reported that 50% of the 326 householders served with billeting notices had protested for medical or other reasons. Only 25% of the excuses were considered justified by officials and prompted the comment ‘their attitude is a crying shame’.⁹⁹ Other examples of properties requisitioned by local authorities are given in Appendix 16. Despite the difficulties recorded between 1939-1945 there is no evidence to suggest that more than a small minority accommodated in requisitioned houses mistreated the premises and equipment.

As overworked local authorities struggled to accommodate increasing numbers it was inevitable that many requisitioned properties were less than ideal. There was concern in South Molton that some should be vacated ‘being so unfit for human habitation as being liable to lead to an epidemic’.¹⁰⁰ Barnstaple MB was found to have no system of inspection or supervision and most of the houses were reported to be in a bad state of repair with a deficiency of equipment.¹⁰¹ Several months later a report made by a Plymouth official claimed that in one area of Bideford RD ‘the water and cooking arrangements and the sanitation are not fit for women and children’ and one

⁹⁶ *Dawlish Urban District Council Committee Reports R2369A/(5/3)C85*, Report from Representatives from Regional Office of MH and the MH County Welfare Officer – 23 July 1943

⁹⁷ S. Rose, *Which People's War?* pp.108-9

⁹⁸ *Express & Echo*, 6 March 1941

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *South Molton Municipal Borough, General Correspondence 3058add1&2/15*, letter to Senior Regional Officer from Town Clerk dated 16 January 1941

¹⁰¹ *Barnstaple Municipal Borough 2654add4/Box 14*, letter from Ministry of Health (Bristol) to Town Clerk, dated 18 June 1941

mother was given a rusty fruit tin to boil water by a disgruntled householder. It was also reported that one requisitioned empty house at Clovelly had walls streaming with water and was full of dead flies. The report inevitably found its way into the local newspapers. Bideford RDC strongly refuted the claims and took Florence Horsburgh¹⁰² to visit the house which apparently turned out to have ‘electric light, Triplex grate, bathroom, airing cupboard and other conveniences’. The evacuees ‘expressed themselves perfectly happy with the condition’ of the house.¹⁰³ Such reports were rare and difficult to verify. The original reports from two of the women evacuated to Bideford were found amongst the papers of Plymouth’s Town Clerk. One of the women who ended up in the Clovelly house (mentioned above) described how tired and dirty the party of mothers and children were on arrival in Bideford, the delay before taking them to billets and the awful condition of her first billet. The householder’s wife had left him 3 days previously and there was only one bed between 4 and no covers. After being re-billeted in Clovelly she returned home unable ‘to stand the dirty and bad conditions any longer’. The second report, sent by the woman who was given the rusty fruit tin, was generous about the local billeting officers ‘who were most kind to me, giving me refreshments, shelter during the day, also lending me a pram’.¹⁰⁴ It is notable however that amongst the minutes of Tavistock RDC another complaint was lodged by Plymouth, and mentioned by Lady Astor at a meeting of Devon and Plymouth Welfare Committee. This concerned a hostel at Horrabridge for 5 elderly Plymouth evacuees. Five visits were conducted by Tavistock’s Assistant BO, the MOH and the local Health Visitor but they failed to find any cause for concern. The Council was angry and decided to send the report to the Senior Regional Officer informing him that the complaint should not have been made and that it did not appreciate interference by Plymouth.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Health

¹⁰³ *Bideford Rural District Council Newspaper Cuttings R2414A(1-5)C62*

¹⁰⁴ Reports in *City of Plymouth, Town Clerk’s Correspondence 1645/11/12/30-31*

¹⁰⁵ *Tavistock Rural District Council Minutes 1690/12, Report by Ministry of Health, November 1941*

In November 1940 it was announced that the Bishop of London's personal emissary, Rev. K.F. Ashcroft, was to tour the West Country. His brief was to suggest how churches and social bodies could help to remove the conflict of interests and friction between urban and rural people. For example, he had come across a tiny pub where villagers had to go to bed early but Londoners wanted to stay up until midnight.¹⁰⁶ It is impossible to know how much of the national debate about feckless slum parents, particularly prevalent after the first evacuation wave, had filtered down to Devon's working-class householders who were unlikely to have the required capacity, time or financial resources required to digest national 'highbrow' newspapers or necessarily own radios. However, the Bishop of Exeter felt moved to counter gossip about London mothers, not necessarily those in Devon as he was possibly responding to national press reports:

I hear they are very extravagant and buy nothing but tinned foods. But, if you never had a larder in which to keep your food, nor nothing but a gas ring upon which to cook it, you, too, would buy tinned food. People say they horde about in the High-street. So would you if you never knew the meaning of privacy...If I were to sum up my experiences in East London, the general summary would be of general admiration, of wonder that the mothers and families who live in such houses have been able to maintain so high a standard of cleanliness and decency when everything else was against them.¹⁰⁷

Little local specific information about welfare provision and initiatives for mothers with accompanying children was recorded. However, by December 1940, 4 extra Health Visitors were employed in the County, chargeable to the Evacuation Account. Welfare Centre attendance figures

¹⁰⁶ *The Western Times*, 22 November 1940

¹⁰⁷ *Express and Echo*, 6 November 1940

for 1940 recorded that 5,335 officially evacuated mothers (1,945 unofficial), 3,571 infants (1,420 unofficial) and 3,409 accompanied children aged 1-5 (706 unofficial) were seen.¹⁰⁸ From the outbreak of war the MH had loosely urged but not compelled¹⁰⁹ local authorities to form welfare committees but little was achieved until the end of 1940.¹¹⁰ With so many mothers and accompanying children now in reception areas, MH Circular 2178 (18 October 1940) offered general advice to ensure that communal activities and other facilities away from billets were provided. Everything possible needed to be done to help women settle down, to minimise the inconvenience to householders and to prevent drift back. Social provision such as clubs, classes and communal meals were recommended,¹¹¹ and most local authorities formed welfare committees during the next few months. *Parish Council Leaflet No 13* entitled *Village Life in War-Time* emphasised that evacuees must be made to feel at home and initiatives such as community laundries, make and mend classes, women's clubs and play centres were suggested.¹¹² Examples of local welfare provision during 1940 have been found in various sources and included sewing groups, crèches, rest rooms, social centres and clubs (further details given in Appendix 17). Surprisingly, Ilfracombe failed to establish a recreational club until October 1942, despite the desperate need due to large numbers of evacuated women and children.¹¹³

The Shakespeare Report,¹¹⁴ presented to Government in January 1941, highlighted the need for more welfare officers familiar with the psychology of London mothers to stimulate and co-ordinate

¹⁰⁸ *Devon County Council Minutes, DCC 148/15*

¹⁰⁹ R. Padley and M. Cole's *Evacuation Survey*, p.56 criticised this failure of Government after the first evacuation wave

¹¹⁰ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 391

¹¹¹ *Education*, Volume LXXVI, p.398

¹¹² *1238A/PX91-95*

¹¹³ *The Western Times*, 9 October 1942

¹¹⁴ The Introduction to the Report stated that a Committee under the Chairmanship of Geoffrey Shakespeare M.P. was appointed by the Ministry of Health on 15 November 1940, 'for the purpose of inquiring into the welfare of evacuated and homeless persons in the reception areas and examining the provision made for their comfort and contentment and for easing the burden on the householders receiving them'. The Committee spent 17 days in certain reception areas (including Tavistock, Devon) in four separate Regions. Other committee members included Miss A.C. Johnston, WVS and Mr H. Darlow, Town Clerk of Bedford.

all forms of welfare activities in reception areas. The Committee also found that many accounts of unjustifiable behaviour by London women generally related to the September 1939 evacuation when less adequate arrangements had been made for their reception and welfare, and by 1940 ‘a spirit of give and take was discernible’. All local authorities and county councils received a copy of the report together with MH Circular 2307. The Ministry suggested that occupational and recreational clubs be established together with information centres and posters were prepared to advertise these facilities. It was also suggested that there should be supervision of billets, which proved sound advice if acted upon.¹¹⁵ The National Council of Social Service issued a pamphlet on Women’s Clubs which was sent to reception and neutral areas by the MH in February 1941.¹¹⁶ By March 1941 several new Welfare Centres and extension of existing ones had been approved by DCC. This expansion became more pressing after the Plymouth Blitz,¹¹⁷ and both Devon and Exeter and North Devon Civilian Welfare Committees were established at this time to deal with all matters arising from evacuation, particularly emergency arrangements.¹¹⁸ Evacuee mothers were responsible for calling a doctor as they would normally do at home should they or their accompanying child/children become ill. If unable to pay they had to apply to the Relieving Officer who in turn would issue an Order for the District MO to give treatment. Emergencies could be treated without an Order.¹¹⁹ Tavistock UDC introduced a novel idea in August 1941. The MOH was so busy that a Medical Club was set up and evacuees were invited to contribute 3d per head weekly.¹²⁰

The Government spotlight was finally firmly focused on the need for increased welfare initiatives. During 1941 local newspapers ran MH advertisements stating that ‘caring for evacuees is a national

¹¹⁵ 3248A/16/4-5 and Ilfracombe Urban District Council Committee Minutes R2458A/(2/3)C72

¹¹⁶ City of Plymouth Evacuation File 1645/11/12/20

¹¹⁷ Devon County Council Minutes, DCC 148/15

¹¹⁸ Devon County Council Minutes DCC 149/5/4/1

¹¹⁹ City and County of the City of Exeter Civil Defence Handbook of Emergency Information 1942

¹²⁰ Tavistock Urban District Council Minutes 2587/13

service' and 'think what it means to men who are serving...to know that their wives and children have been removed from the danger zones'. Calls were also made for volunteers to house women and children or to help organise local clubs, communal feeding centres and social gatherings.¹²¹ One example appeared in *The Western Times* and pictured a mother and baby. In the background was an excerpt from a letter written by the wife to her husband 'I know you'll be glad to hear that I'm very happy, everything is being done to make us feel at home and now they are trying to organise a club'.¹²² MOI documentary film *Living with Strangers* was released, directed specifically at both potential evacuee mothers with children and hosts. It discussed the inherent problems of evacuation from both perspectives but illustrated the enormous benefit of community welfare initiatives and the need for day nursery schools.¹²³ Parsons has highlighted the film's distorted image of evacuees, for example the impression that host families were better educated and more socially adjusted. He also underlined the rather patronising way in which women were treated at the time.¹²⁴ The Board also urged LEAs to expand canteens to include evacuated mothers with children. Nationally as well as locally the response to all these suggestions was positive and the Government later expressed satisfaction that 'continuous progress has been made by County, Borough and District Councils'.¹²⁵ By January 1942 the number of social centres, mothers' clubs and information bureaux had greatly increased.¹²⁶ Local examples include the remarkably well-equipped Dartington Social Centre, open every evening, which offered whist drives, table tennis, French and Esperanto classes, dressmaking, folk and ballroom classes, M.O.I. films, lectures and the distribution of cod liver oil and fruit juice for babies.¹²⁷ An unusual initiative in Tiverton was an

¹²¹ *The Western Times*, 25 April, 9 May 1941

¹²² *Ibid.* 18 April 1941

¹²³ E. F. Erhardt, III, 'The Ministry of Information's Films Division', *Children in War*, November 2004, Volume 1, No. 2, pp. 79-80

¹²⁴ M. Parsons, *I'll Take That One* (Beckett Karlson Ltd. 1998) p.138

¹²⁵ 3248A/16/3

¹²⁶ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 373

¹²⁷ *Dartington Archive, Dartington Hall Estate Diary for 1942*, filled in by Roger Morel, Chief Billeting Officer, on 30 September 1942

exhibition of articles made by evacuee mothers which proved to be ‘a great success’, and undoubtedly helped to foster some pride amongst these women and assist their temporary re-settlement.¹²⁸

Many mothers with children came to Devon during 1941 from Bristol and Plymouth and, by October, Exmouth reported there were 1,462 adults with children accommodated in the town.¹²⁹ Between March and September 1941, 1,775 children under 5 left Plymouth with their mothers for various reception areas throughout the country.¹³⁰ As war dragged on and overcrowding became acute it became even harder to find accommodation in private homes. Stories of apparent ‘really callous apathy’ towards homeless mothers with children were not necessarily always accurate as there was apparently ‘a great deal of goodwill when it is tapped but... not the initiative’.¹³¹ However, a report and several case examples found amongst Plymouth’s Town Clerk’s Correspondence illustrate that there were some unfortunate episodes, both in Devon and Cornwall. The Town Clerk recorded that at first the complaints from returning evacuated Plymouth families, many of whom visited him in person, appeared to be exaggerated ‘possibly through the harassed state of mind of the evacuee’. Nevertheless, the number of complaints prompted him to investigate some of them and he became uneasy that other areas were both somehow unaware that war was in progress and that the people of Plymouth had undergone a terrifying experience. Citing several unfortunate examples he likened the mood of Plymouth people to ‘a powder barrel’ and concluded by recording that the greater proportion of families had returned.¹³²

¹²⁸ *Tiverton Borough Council, Town Council Committee Minute Book R4/1addC5*

¹²⁹ *Exmouth Urban District Council R7/4/C39*

¹³⁰ *Interim Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the City of Plymouth 1941, 1363/27*

¹³¹ *Astor Family Papers 186/21/3, Correspondence from Mrs Priestley of Herefordshire to Nancy Astor*

¹³² *City of Plymouth, Town Clerk’s Correspondence 1645/11/12/30-31*

Unhappy billeting was frequently not due to householders' lack of compassion, but to badly overcrowded conditions and lack of accommodation and equipment leading to unsuitable placements. For example, one Plymouth lady and her children were taken to a room in Bideford at 7 p.m where there were no facilities for cooking or washing and no beds or bedding. The billeting officer did his best but despite assistance from neighbouring households she returned to Plymouth as no other suitable billet was found.¹³³ Although Honiton BC raised the question of Plymouth evacuees who had received 'harsh treatment from householders' and decided to prosecute householders who refused to billet next time,¹³⁴ lack of suitable accommodation was also to blame. One case concerned a woman and 3 children, aged 5, 2 and 3 weeks, who were evacuated to Honiton on 23 September 1941. She was placed in a house alone with a widower who was very understanding and helpful about the awkward situation. She went to the Police Station and was finally re-billeted at 11 p.m. with another Plymouth evacuee. There was only one bed between them and for the next 2 days they searched for more suitable premises. The woman was taken ill in the street and they were eventually taken to another very overcrowded billet although the householder was 'kind, and did her best for them'.¹³⁵

Inevitably there were grumbles from both evacuees and locals alike during this very difficult time. In May 1941, Cullompton BO stated that there were people who appeared to be trying to evade their responsibilities to their fellow Plymouth citizens. However, Okehampton RDC expressed strong resentment at alleged press reports that the country districts were not ready to receive homeless families from Plymouth. The response of householders 'had been wonderful' but much of the problem was because people who had registered did not turn up.¹³⁶ The problem of difficult

¹³³ *City of Plymouth, Town Clerk's Correspondence 1645/11/12/30-31*

¹³⁴ *Honiton Municipal Borough Council Minutes R7/1/C/10*, p.17, September 1941

¹³⁵ *City of Plymouth, Town Clerk's Correspondence 1645/11/12/30-31*, Letter dated 2 October 1941 from E. Solomon

¹³⁶ *Express & Echo*, 5 and 12 May 1941

evacuees, mainly women, was evidently raised at an Exeter Conference convened by the MH in late 1941. The Chief Sanitary Inspector of Paignton reported ‘it would appear that Paignton was by no means alone in this problem. They did not, however, get much assistance in this particular section, so had, presumably, to work out their own salvation’.¹³⁷ Exeter’s Town Clerk received a letter from the MH Regional Office in September 1941 commenting on the proportionally large number of claims for damage compared with other reception areas ‘although I appreciate that this may be largely attributed to the class of evacuee with which you have been afflicted’.¹³⁸ It is difficult to know whether this comment referred specifically to Plymouth, Bristol or London evacuees.

As already mentioned, exact numbers of evacuated mothers with children are very hard to ascertain as they were frequently unrecorded or not listed separately. However, it does seem that drift back during the second evacuation wave was not immediate and many settled for some time in the area. Exeter’s Mayor implored mothers not to return to London when he addressed them at the Christmas party in December 1940,¹³⁹ and indeed many had no choice having lost their homes or relinquished them whilst husbands were away on war duties. However, by August 1941 many were reportedly returning home from Devon as the bombing receded.¹⁴⁰ Data found amongst Barnstaple and Bideford Municipal Borough records gives some indication of the rate of return, which increased during 1942 (Appendix 18). During 1942-1944 the number of evacuated mothers with children continued to decrease as those able and willing to return home left Devon although nationally, through the privately assisted scheme, approximately 1,464 mothers, 1,448 children under 5 and 1,056 over 5 were evacuated from London County during 1943.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ *Paignton Urban District Council Minutes R4582A/PC10, Public Health Committee*, 3 November 1941

¹³⁸ *Exeter City Archive, Town Clerk’s Papers, ARP Evac, Box 13, Group N*

¹³⁹ *The Western Times*, 27 December 1940

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 22 August 1941

¹⁴¹ R. Samways, *We think you ought to go*, p.17

Detailed government planning for the organised return of evacuees began in Spring 1944 but the unexpected and heavy loss of life inflicted by the V1 flying bombs resulted in a re-opening of the official Government Evacuation Scheme referred to as ‘Rivulet’. The third evacuation wave began on 5 July 1944 and continued until 7 September as demand fell off sharply in August. The evacuees were largely from London and the Southeast where bombing was most heavily concentrated. Just when it seemed that victory was within reach all those involved with the evacuation process had to galvanise themselves once more. MH Circular 93/44 (1 August, 1944) highlighted new problems regarding billeting. Householders had to contend with rationing and other domestic difficulties and many women were now employed.¹⁴² The vital importance of adequate welfare arrangements was once again impressed on all reception authorities.¹⁴³ One additional complication in Devon, adding to the shortage of billets, was the removal of the ban against visitors to the Western protected military areas (MH Circular 84/44).¹⁴⁴ Nevertheless, a press report stressed that although there were instances of householders refusing to accommodate mothers with children in Exeter because holiday makers were more profitable, ‘in nearly every case local housewives are standing loyally by those less fortunate people’.¹⁴⁵ It is impossible to verify whether this report had an intentionally patriotic ‘spin’ or was based on realistic figures. Paignton’s CBO claimed that his work had been made even more difficult because many mothers were told before leaving London that there would be billets waiting for them.¹⁴⁶ Yet another problem was that householders in some areas such as Barnstaple and the south coast towns had been warned in 1943 that American troops might need billeting.¹⁴⁷ The 4th Division duly arrived in Devon in January 1944 and by April there were 85,191 American troops in Devon, many of whom required billets.¹⁴⁸ Accommodation was so scarce in

¹⁴² In April 1943 the government began to direct women into part-time work who had previously been exempt from conscription because their domestic responsibilities prevented them from working full-time

¹⁴³ *Ilfracombe Urban District Council Minutes R2458A/(2/3)253*

¹⁴⁴ *Paignton Urban District Council Minutes R4582A/PC13*, 17 July 1944

¹⁴⁵ *Express & Echo*, 7 August 1944

¹⁴⁶ *Paignton News*, 22 July 1944

¹⁴⁷ *Barnstaple Municipal Borough 2654add4/Box 13*, letter from Town Clerk to Lady Astor, 5 October 1943

¹⁴⁸ D. Reynolds, *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain, 1941-1945* (Phoenix Press 2000) p.11

Torquay that 2 police officers apparently commandeered a small hotel run by a widow and her daughter. The women were advised to live on the ground floor and later discovered that the hard-pressed authorities should not have forced them to take in troops without a man in the house.¹⁴⁹

By August 1944, approximately 307,600 mothers with children had been evacuated in organised parties from London and the Southeast and approximately 552,000 mothers and children, old people and homeless made their own arrangements under the private 'assisted scheme'.¹⁵⁰ Although there are no separate figures for mothers with children, an LCC Report stated that by 22 July nearly 34,000 children under five and approximately 30,000 mothers and expectant mothers had been officially evacuated from the London area.¹⁵¹ Local records show that this was a very testing time for the billeting authorities which were undoubtedly taken by surprise. As always the response from householders for this potentially problematic category of evacuee was uneven and reflected a certain war weariness. It also appears on occasion that those offering accommodation were not matched up with those needing it, even though they had gone to considerable lengths to notify the authorities of their willingness, and this caused irritation towards billeting officials.¹⁵² The seaside resorts of Paignton, Torquay and Ilfracombe were understandably reported as having particular difficulties.¹⁵³ These towns had hosted large numbers of mothers with children during 1940-1942 and Torquay residents appeared reluctant to offer billets to the 550 mothers and children who arrived,¹⁵⁴ no doubt hoping to attract holiday trade instead or even troops. Pam Daymond (12) remembered her parents receiving a telegraph in 1944 from her ex-foster parents in Moretonhampstead stating 'mothers and babies being billeted in the village, prefer to have you back'. Unsurprisingly, billeting difficulties were recorded in generally over-crowded areas like

¹⁴⁹ D. Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, p.278

¹⁵⁰ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 427

¹⁵¹ *Education*, Volume LXXXIV, p.154

¹⁵² *Express & Echo*, 20 July 1944

¹⁵³ *ED 134/39, G9E/963*

¹⁵⁴ T. Crosby, *The Impact of Civilian Evacuation* (Croom Helm 1986) pp. 57-8

Barnstaple MB, Bideford MB, Dawlish UDC, Ilfracombe UDC, Okehampton MB, South Molton RDC and Totnes MB (further details given in Appendix 19).

Nevertheless, these negative reports must be balanced against other extremely positive reports cited below. The fact remains that accommodation was found for evacuees, even those who arrived unexpectedly, although numerous requests made by post or other sources were generally refused.¹⁵⁵ Rest Centres, usually in schools or village halls generally established after the Plymouth Blitz, provided useful holding centres for mothers with children until billets or requisitioned houses could be found. For example, Chagford Senior School was closed on 12 July because 11 mothers and 37 children had spent the night there,¹⁵⁶ and 357 mothers with children were accommodated at rest centres in North Molton, Bishopsnympton, Chittlehampton and Chulmleigh prior to billeting.¹⁵⁷ Exeter used 8 of its 29 Rest Centres and cared for 1,215 mothers and small children before billeting.¹⁵⁸ Budleigh Salterton found accommodation for over 200 mothers with children and reported that most householders had been very kind although there were inevitably some grouches.¹⁵⁹ Crediton BO stated that 'the majority have responded nobly to the demands made upon them...they have opened their hearts and homes to strangers in a way that can only be termed remarkable'.¹⁶⁰ Okehampton RDC found that all went extremely well even though the expected 500 unaccompanied children turned out to be 400 mothers with children. A local vicar declared he had never come across a more grateful group of people.¹⁶¹ South Tawton reported that mothers not only

¹⁵⁵ *Bideford Municipal Borough Evacuation Sub-Committee Minutes R2379A(1/1)C53*

¹⁵⁶ *Chagford Senior School Log Book 1974C/ESL1*, 12 July 1944

¹⁵⁷ *South Molton Rural District Council Minutes, R2407A/(2/6)C12*, 20 July 1944

¹⁵⁸ *Express & Echo*, 28 August 1944

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 19 July 1944

¹⁶⁰ *Express & Echo*, 1 September 1944

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.* 22 and 24 July 1944

made a collection to express their thanks but cleaned up the reception hall,¹⁶² and St Thomas RDC also reported the mothers were an extraordinarily pleasant set of people.¹⁶³

A number of mothers with children remained in the County after the organised return of official evacuees which took place in stages between September 1944 and July 1945, according to the safety of the evacuated areas.¹⁶⁴ This was usually because they either had no home to return to or they had decided to remain in Devon. For example, 18 families (53 people) remained in Dawlish,¹⁶⁵ 25 mothers and 73 children were still in Paignton in September 1945,¹⁶⁶ and Exmouth, which had 2,000 mothers and children by December 1944, reduced to 929 by April 1945, still had 161 official and 80 unofficial mothers and children in September 1945.¹⁶⁷ MH Circular 60/45 (11 April 1945) instructed local authorities on what assistance was to be given to help re-house these evacuees.¹⁶⁸

To summarise, despite the prognosis of the Chief Assistant MOH for Lancashire County Council, shared by many, that it was unlikely ‘the billeting of mothers and young children will ever be successful’,¹⁶⁹ there is no evidence to suggest that the billeting of mothers with children was not largely successful in Devon despite the enormous social complexity of such an undertaking. Devon’s HMI wrote in his diary that the 1939 evacuation of mothers with children was a failure.¹⁷⁰ In so far as the Government was unsuccessful in persuading mothers with children to remain in the less dangerous reception areas when no bombs were falling, 1939 was an understandable failure. However, from Devon’s perspective it was neither a failure in terms of organisation nor of

¹⁶² *Express & Echo*, 22 and 24 July 1944

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ London was declared safe after 2 May 1945. Many mothers applied for free travel vouchers after this date and returned on their own rather than in organised parties.

¹⁶⁵ *Dawlish Urban District Council Committee Reports R2369A/(5/3)C87*

¹⁶⁶ *Paignton Urban District Council Minutes R4582A/PC14*

¹⁶⁷ *Exmouth Urban District Council Minutes R7/4/C39*

¹⁶⁸ 4907Z/Z22-30

¹⁶⁹ W.C.V. Brothwood, ‘Experience of Evacuation in a County Reception Area’, *Public Health*, Volume 6, LIII, 1940, p.127

¹⁷⁰ *ED 134/39,G9E/941*, Report by Arnold Platts dated 1 April 1944

householders' cooperation and there was no adverse publicity about a 'barbarian invasion', described by Hinton as 'a process of stereotyping...clearly at work'.¹⁷¹ All known extant local council references pertinent to billeting difficulties for the period 1939-1945 have been included and are by no means extensive considering the large numbers of evacuees and the unprecedented nature of billeting urban strangers on rural households, which sometimes became compulsory. It is impossible to estimate how many complaint letters are no longer extant or how many of the complaints reflected the overcrowded, makeshift and ill-equipped billets rather than mean spirited householders. Householders were understandably reluctant to offer billets to this category of evacuee, preferring unaccompanied children or more lucrative private lodgers, and those living in popular destinations receiving large numbers of all classes of evacuees were bound to feel disgruntled at times, especially owners of hotels and guest houses.

Further large numbers of evacuees from Bristol and Plymouth in 1941 following closely after the arrival of extensive numbers from the London area during 1940 undoubtedly increased tensions and tested generosity. Nevertheless, billets in private homes were found for thousands, numerous welfare initiatives were established and many mothers and children settled down, frequently staying many months and even several years. One ex-evacuee to Devon remembered that her mother joined her and her sister in their Clovelly billet. She settled in well, helped around the house and even sometimes shared a scarce cigarette with the foster father.¹⁷² Maureen Heath's (3) mother and aunt who found accommodation in Alverdiscott were frequently visited by the wives of farm labourers for 'all kinds of advice', and Catherine Cantle (sample), a young mother evacuated to Totnes and Salcombe, wrote 'my overriding memories of the time are of the general friendliness of the people of Devon'. Those leaving Paignton were 'loud in their praises of the treatment they had received'

¹⁷¹ J. Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership, and the Second World War*, pp. 148, 150-151

¹⁷² H. Clement, *No Time to Kiss Goodbye* (Harry Clement 1995) p.98

and there were tearful scenes as mothers and children said goodbye to their Exmouth hosts.¹⁷³

Although local newspapers frequently reflected the ‘rural idyll’ of life in Devon, there is little hard evidence to support either a pronounced, well-publicised or uncharitable belief in an urban/rural divide so apparently prominent in some areas of the Country, which appeared to echo a middle and upper class cultural perspective.

Apart from many friendships, an important legacy from the evacuation of mothers with children was the increased provision of welfare centres in the County. By June 1944 there were 57 Welfare Centres under DCC control (41 in December 1939). Only two of these were closed in December 1945 when the need for them ceased,¹⁷⁴ increasing to 69 by 1948.¹⁷⁵ Inadequate maternity provision had also been highlighted.¹⁷⁶ The war ‘impressed upon the nation the need for active measures to maintain the health of babies and young children, and had shown up serious gaps that had existed in the pre-war services’.¹⁷⁷ The LCC was in no doubt that ‘it was the pioneer activities’ of its various welfare organisers sent to reception areas ‘which opened the eyes of many local authorities, as well as the Ministry, to the value of welfare work’. It also believed that evacuation had revealed ‘Want, Ignorance and Squalor’ in both town and country alike and consequently the well-being of the young was being hindered and needed to be addressed.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷³ *Express & Echo*, 5 & 7 June 1945

¹⁷⁴ *Devon County Council Minutes, DCC 148/15*

¹⁷⁵ *Annual Reports of Devon County Council Medical Officer 1948-1951*, p. 37

¹⁷⁶ For example *Newton Abbot Urban District Council Minutes R2361A/(5/4)C45*, 17 January 1944

¹⁷⁷ S. Ferguson and H. Fitzgerald, *Studies in the Social Services* (HMSO 1954) p.175

¹⁷⁸ R. Samways, ed. *We think you ought to go*, pp.14 & 18

Nursery Provision

The decision to discuss wartime nursery provision in this Chapter was taken because of the direct link with the Government's belated agenda to encourage mothers with children to evacuate and remain in reception areas for as long as deemed necessary. Devon's wartime nursery provision was largely stimulated by evacuation and both day and residential nurseries will be discussed in turn.

As discussed in Chapter 1, national provision of pre-war day nurseries, nursery schools and nursery classes within elementary schools was extremely limited and patchy. In Devon there were no daytime nurseries or nursery classes and only a few nursery schools.¹⁷⁹ The national provision of residential homes was also very poor. Although the London Metropolitan Evacuating Area had independently secured accommodation for 300 parties (maximum number 17,000) of pre-school and handicapped children by June 1939,¹⁸⁰ initially the Government Evacuation Scheme made no arrangements for the under fives unless accompanied by their mothers or attending one of the nursery schools or day nurseries evacuated as units. Only approximately 36 residential nurseries (1,500 children – usually orphans/abandoned), 55 day nurseries (2,400 children) and 56 nursery schools were evacuated as residential units in September 1939.¹⁸¹ A small number of places were also found in residential country nurseries and specially supervised billets by such organisations as the Waifs and Strays Society, Dr Barnardo's Homes, the Children's Country Holiday Fund and the WVS.¹⁸²

The Government was justifiably criticised by advocates of nursery schools for its woeful lack of provision for pre-school children in its evacuation planning. As with so many aspects of the

¹⁷⁹ Refer to Chapter 1

¹⁸⁰ R. Samways, *We think you ought to go*, pp. 9 & 10

¹⁸¹ Figures given on 8 February 1940 – *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 357, Column 399. R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, gave the figure of 3,458 children evacuated with existing nursery schools and day nurseries.

¹⁸² C. Graves, *Women in Green* (William Heinemann Ltd. 1948) p.43- 44

scheme, the usual grey area existed between the MH and the Board, coupled with Treasury parsimony, and there was much debate but little action about how to tackle the problem. Lady Astor¹⁸³ publicly voiced her concerns in September 1939, suggesting that whilst it was impractical to take over large houses because of staffing shortages and problems with structural adaptation, an appeal should be made to householders to take small groups of children with helpers, thus establishing small emergency nursery schools for daytime care.¹⁸⁴ Le Gros Clark and Toms proposed either day nurseries with trained supervisors in small urban or village areas where there were a number of small children billeted with foster parents and transport available or provision of very small residential nurseries for 20 or so children. Complexity and cost were the principal drawbacks.¹⁸⁵ Harold Dent, Editor of *The Times Educational Supplement* (1940-1951), was an influential supporter of educational reform and shortly after the first evacuation wave he commented on how evacuation had highlighted the inadequacy of many mothers with the result that ‘many people who before were lukewarm about nursery schools are now their ardent advocates’.¹⁸⁶ However, others including medical officers of health and child welfare officers argued against provision, fearing it might damage the child’s character.¹⁸⁷

Government wartime nursery provision was ill-planned and developed hesitantly at first, initially spawned both from the need to relieve householders in reception areas in cases where young children under 5 were billeted and to discourage drift back by mothers. MH Circular 1871 (12 September 1939) had ‘vaguely’ mentioned the development of day nurseries and crèches where there were considerable numbers of children¹⁸⁸ but as always the initiative was left to the local

¹⁸³ Mayoress of Plymouth and M.P. for Sutton Division of Plymouth

¹⁸⁴ *The Times*, 19 September 1939

¹⁸⁵ F. Le Gros Clark and R.W. Toms, *Evacuation – Failure or Reform* ((Kraus Reprint 1969) p.9

¹⁸⁶ *The Times Educational Supplement*, 2 December 1939

¹⁸⁷ R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p.189. Also S. Ferguson and H. Fitzgerald, *Studies in the Social Services*, p.193

¹⁸⁸ R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p.133

authorities and voluntary support. Expenses were either to be charged to the Evacuation Account or the evacuating authorities and lack of staff both for arranging the nursery provision and for coping with the administration hampered development. As an afterthought, Appendix to MH Circular 1882 (2 October 1939) added that day nurseries for billeted children would only be practical in more populated districts because of the transport difficulties in rural areas.¹⁸⁹ Summerfield believed that the 'weight of Ministry of Health prejudice against alternatives to maternal care acted as a major constraint on wartime child care policy'.¹⁹⁰ DCEC's position at this time regarding evacuated under fives was that where recognised evacuated units or nursery classes had been attached to schools, these evacuee children should be allowed to continue as a class. No change was to be made to the age of admission (usually 5) of local children at these schools. Individual evacuees under 5 were not to be admitted to a school unless it was one of the few local schools already admitting under fives and no inconvenience or additional expense was to be incurred.¹⁹¹ There is one record in October of an HMI visit to Seaton School to ascertain the number of official evacuees, aged between 3-5, with a view to establishing a nursery school but no further mention of this.¹⁹² Dawlish UDC set up a day nursery school for evacuees in January 1940.¹⁹³

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Board, Kenneth Lindsay, acknowledged that the presence of approximately 150,000 children under five in the reception areas (40,000 unaccompanied) was 'a novel problem' but principally one which concerned the MH. Nursery schools were out of the question but neither would crèches or day nurseries solve the problem.¹⁹⁴ It was clear that nursery provision, as with many other complex evacuation issues, had not been clearly thought through but circumstance soon compelled the Government into action. Partly as a result of pressure from certain

¹⁸⁹ 3248A/16/2

¹⁹⁰ P. Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War* (Croom Helm 1984) p.95

¹⁹¹ *Devon County Education Committee, DCC150/4/1/37*, p.259, 5 October 1939

¹⁹² *Seaton School Log Book 2270C/EFL3*

¹⁹³ *Dawlish Urban District Council Minutes R2369A/(5/3)C24*, 3 January 1940

¹⁹⁴ *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 353, Columns 895-7, 16 November 1939

voluntary organisations¹⁹⁵ together with alarm at drift back and the need to retain the support of householders in reception areas, a Joint Committee of the MH and Board drafted a plan in October 1939 to provide Nursery Centres for children aged 2-5 to be staffed largely by voluntary workers and supervised by trained nursery school teachers.¹⁹⁶ The shortage of trained staff meant an unavoidable relaxation of pre-war regulations, regarded as 'strictly temporary'.¹⁹⁷ Somewhere between a day nursery and a nursery school, these centres were a cheaper option and of a simpler standard than ordinary nurseries.¹⁹⁸ MH Circular 1936 and Board Circular 1495 (6 January 1940) suggested that the centres should be administered by small local welfare committees and set up mainly in districts with 50 or more infants. Provision for those under 2 could be met with day nurseries or crèches. However, the Treasury was concerned that supporters of the pre-war nursery movement would capitalise on this expansion and delayed financial approval. By the time the Joint Committee convinced it otherwise most of the mothers with pre-school children had returned. Ferguson and Fitzgerald described the Nursery Centres Scheme as 'a hurriedly devised stop-gap designed to cope with entirely unforeseen conditions in the reception areas' during the first evacuation wave. Padley and Cole found it 'attractive' but were disappointed it was not formulated earlier. They also highlighted the poor response from local authorities and doubted whether it would work.¹⁹⁹

The new evacuation scheme (Plan IV) was confined to unaccompanied children over the age of 5. Children under this age in evacuation areas without parental care would be evacuated to reception areas if room could be found either in existing residential nurseries or near to day nursery centres

¹⁹⁵ For example, the Nursery School Association, the Women's Group on Public Welfare and the Child Welfare Group of the WVS

¹⁹⁶ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 169

¹⁹⁷ P. Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War*, p.94

¹⁹⁸ R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p.135

¹⁹⁹ S. Ferguson and H. Fitzgerald, *Studies in the Social Service*, pp.178-188. See also R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, pp. 135-6

when they would be billeted with foster parents.²⁰⁰ This decision was described as a ‘deep disappointment’ to all those interested in the welfare of this group.²⁰¹ By March 1940 an estimated 2,715 of the 3,458 children previously evacuated with nursery schools and day nurseries were still in the reception areas²⁰² although, by July, the number of original evacuees under 5 and those sent in the second evacuation wave was being described as ‘comparatively small’ by the President of the Board.²⁰³ However, the London Blitz concentrated minds and emphasised the desperate need for Nursery Centres in reception areas.²⁰⁴

The Shakespeare Report added weight to the argument by recommending that evacuated mothers would settle better if they could be relieved of child care and find local employment. Nurseries and play centres for evacuated children were proposed.²⁰⁵ The Nursery School Association welcomed the official provision of nursery centres for evacuated children because it extended an albeit modified nursery education at a time when opening more nursery schools was impossible. Well aware officials in reception areas were already over-burdened, the NSA offered the services of skilled organisers financed with the help of the British War Relief Fund of America. The main obstacle to expansion was finding suitable premises,²⁰⁶ and progress was very slow. By April 1941 only 86 nursery centres accommodating 2,700 children had been approved nationally.²⁰⁷ In March, Lady Allen of Hurtwood²⁰⁸ had highlighted the lack of co-ordination in provision for the under fives and urged improvement. Residential nurseries for evacuated children up to 5 were administered by

²⁰⁰ *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 357, Column 1365, 21 February 1940

²⁰¹ R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p. 140.

²⁰² *Ibid.* p. 127

²⁰³ *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 362, Column 1020, 4 July 1940

²⁰⁴ For example, *The Times Educational Supplement*, dated 26 October 1940, called for their establishment

²⁰⁵ G. Shakespeare et al, *Report on Conditions in Reception Areas* (HMSO 1941) pp. 6 and 181

²⁰⁶ *Education* Volume LXXVIII, p.199, 5 September 1941

²⁰⁷ *The Times Educational Supplement*, 19 April 1941

²⁰⁸ Lady Marjorie Allen of Hurtwood (1897-1976) became the Founder President of the World Organisation for Early Childhood Education

the MH, day nurseries (whole-time and part-time) for mothers working in factories came under the Ministry of Labour and Emergency Nursery Centres for evacuated children aged 2-5 in reception areas were under the Board. There was no provision for the mother with children who was struggling to cope with evacuees.²⁰⁹ By May the conflict of views between the Board, which wanted provision for under fives in nursery schools run by teachers, and the MH which wanted nurseries run by nurses was resolved in favour of the latter,²¹⁰ a change in policy direction recently described as ‘astounding’.²¹¹ Ferguson and Fitzgerald believed that ‘woman power’ now replaced the need for a successful evacuation scheme and became the essential element in changing government policy on wartime day nurseries as the need for women workers in the war economy became pressing in Spring 1941.²¹² Much personal pressure was also brought to bear by the Minister of Labour, who had been pushing hard for nursery provision to facilitate the recruitment of married women. However, Devon still regarded evacuation as the main impetus for the development of wartime nurseries,²¹³ and by June 1941 there were between 20-30 such centres.²¹⁴ Appendix 20 lists examples of nursery centres recorded in local archives which were established during 1940-1941 in towns with large numbers of evacuees.

The numbers of evacuated children under 5 also led to visits and plans for nursery schools/classes in some places such as Totnes and Honiton where there were large numbers. For example, Honiton Nursery Class re-formed in April 1941.²¹⁵ A letter to Exeter’s Town Clerk from the local Ministry of Labour Employment Exchange, dated 27 February 1941, stressed that many local and evacuated

²⁰⁹ *The Times Educational Supplement*, 29 March 1941

²¹⁰ P.H.J.H. Gosden, *Education in the Second World War* (Methuen & Co. Ltd. 1976) p. 433. See also comments in *The Times Educational Supplement*, 7 June 1941

²¹¹ E. F. Erhardt, III, Children’s time to “Carry On”, *Children in War*, Vol.1, No.1, May 2004, p. 74

²¹² S. Ferguson and H. Fitzgerald, *Studies in the Social Services*, p. 181. Also see P. Ayers, *Women at War* (Liver Press 1988)p.25

²¹³ *DCC148/15 Report of Maternity and Child Welfare Committee*, dated 25 September 1941

²¹⁴ *Devon County Council Maternity and Child Welfare Committee, DCC157/5/1/4*, 17 June 1941

²¹⁵ *Totnes Infants and Std I School Log Book 2440C/EAL8*, visit from HMI in March 41 regarding need for nursery school in Totnes. *Honiton School Log Book 4072CEFL3-4*, visit Feb 1941 regarding formation of Nursery Class.

mothers with children were unable to take up war work because of the difficulty of arranging care for their children. The Town Clerk was asked if there was any possibility of setting up another crèche in the City as the one in Queen Street was inadequate. The curt reply was that the Government would have to make its own arrangements if it wanted the services of women as local authorities were already overstretched and understaffed.²¹⁶ However, whether organised by Government or local authority officials, by April the first nursery centre for children of evacuee parents in Exeter was expected to 'be hailed with pleasure by all those welfare workers and others who realise the enormous benefit of these centres'.²¹⁷ Exeter Maternity and Child Welfare Committee also requested a list of houses suitable for setting up other nurseries.²¹⁸ The County Psychologist, Marjorie Davis, was hopeful that the increasing number of centres would develop into permanent nursery schools after the war.²¹⁹

In June 1941, DCEC clarified the Government's latest position on nursery provision (MH Circular 2338 and Board Circular 1553 - 31 May 1941). Nursery Schools (very few in Devon) and Nursery Classes in elementary schools which existed in some places as normal peace-time provision (none in Devon) were the responsibility of the appropriate LEA. However, Nursery Centres which were restricted to evacuees (20-30 in Devon) and Day Nurseries (babies up to 5) for children of women workers (none in Devon) were in future to be amalgamated into Wartime Nurseries, overseen by the Maternity and Child Welfare Authority from 1 April 1941. These wartime nurseries would provide full daytime care for children up to 5 and were also available for children of women who went out to any kind of work for the whole day. They could be set up in evacuation, neutral and reception areas and approved net expenditure would be repaid fully by the MH. Mothers would be expected to pay 1s per day at full-time nurseries (12-15 hours care with all meals) and 3d per day at part-time

²¹⁶ *ECA, ARP Evacuation, Group N, Box 12*, February 1941

²¹⁷ *Express & Echo*, 4 April and 1 May, 1941

²¹⁸ *ECA/27/2*, p. 427, 25 June 1941

²¹⁹ *Dartington Trust Archive, Report in News of the Day*, 14 May 1941

nurseries (school hours and no meals). No payment would be requested from unemployed evacuated mothers unable to contribute.²²⁰ Perhaps mindful of Lady Allen's criticism in March, the Government now stressed the importance of co-operation between local Maternity and Welfare authorities, the LEAs and the billeting authorities. However, Lady Astor, already embroiled in a desperate struggle to find and equip residential nurseries for Plymouth's young evacuee victims, launched a scathing attack on both the MH and Board on 11 June. According to a close member of her staff her attitude against Whitehall officials 'who in their short-sightedness had not declared Plymouth an area for the evacuation of children' had hardened and resulted in her unpopularity with the Churchill administration.²²¹ She criticised their inadequate planning for the under fives and referred to a comprehensive plan which had been given to them before the war and which they had turned down. 'They have done nothing until pushed and pressed...one of the real tragedies is that there have been too many men' in both departments. There were still 42,000 children under five in London, and she urged the Government to get out those willing to leave.²²²

Devon was quick to respond and appointed a special Joint Sub-Committee (Maternity and Child Welfare and DCEC).²²³ Small Visiting Committees, nominated by Welfare Committees which included representatives of the WVS, were to report on visits to authorities with established nurseries and make recommendations to the Joint Sub-Committee.²²⁴ By September a number of wartime nurseries (no exact figure given) had been set up in the County where evacuated children together with children (aged 2-5) of local or evacuee working parents could attend. Evacuation

²²⁰ *Devon County Council Maternity and Child Welfare Committee, DCC157/5/1/4, 17 June 1941*

²²¹ R. Harrison, *My Life in Service* (The Viking Press 1975) p.189. There were many male Members of Parliament who were still resistant to women's participation in politics

²²² *Parliamentary Debates, Volume 372, Columns 258-60, 11 June 1941*

²²³ *DCC150/4/1/38, p.83, 20 June 1941*

²²⁴ *Sidmouth Urban District Council Minutes R7/7/C22*

remained the main impetus in Devon as it was felt that wartime nurseries would help ease the strain in crowded billets.²²⁵ Okehampton's CBO reported the success of the newly established day nursery in July 'I have already received from a number of our householders appreciative remarks to the effect that things are much sweeter now the smaller kiddies can be out of their houses during the day'.²²⁶

On 5 December 1941, MH Circular 2535 and Board Circular 1573 introduced another temporary wartime measure. Where staffing and accommodation would allow, nursery classes in public elementary schools were to be permitted for children aged 2 upwards.²²⁷ During 1942 some teachers from Devon attended nursery school courses²²⁸ although no data has been found on any new provision of nursery classes at this time. In June a temporary Co-ordinating Officer for Devon's Wartime Nurseries was approved by the Ministry to form a liaison between the Joint Sub-Committee and the Nurseries.²²⁹ Local children were now permitted to attend wartime nursery centres but had to relinquish their place if needed by an evacuee or child of a working mother.²³⁰ Nationally by September there were 826 wartime nurseries providing 34,000 places.²³¹ *The Times Educational Supplement* reported that the provision of day and residential nurseries for young children of evacuated and working mothers was now 'going ahead with some speed, but for a long time it was very halting'.²³² By November there were over 1,000 wartime day nurseries accommodating over 50,000 children and more than 400 residential nurseries with places for over 12,000 children.²³³ By August 1942 there were 22 wartime nurseries in Devon: Barnstaple,

²²⁵ DCC148/15 *Report of Maternity and Child Welfare Committee*, dated 25 September 1941

²²⁶ 3248A/16/3, *Report of Chief Billeting Officer*

²²⁷ S. Ferguson and H. Fitzgerald, *Studies in the Social Services*, p. 189

²²⁸ For example, *North Bovey School Log Book 1411C/EFL4*, Teacher attended 2 week course in Bristol, 15 January 1942. *Axminster School Log Book 2250C/EFL1*, Headteacher attended course from 3-17 October 1942

²²⁹ DCC148/15

²³⁰ *Sidmouth Urban District Council Minutes R7/7/C23*

²³¹ *Education*, Volume LXXX, p.241

²³² *The Times Educational Supplement*, 7 November 1942

²³³ *Ibid.*

Bideford, Brixham (2), Dartington, Dartmouth, Exmouth (3), Holsworthy, Newton Abbot, Okehampton, Paignton, Salcombe, Sidmouth (3 accommodating approximately 66 children), Stoke Fleming, Tavistock (opened by Florence Horsburgh),²³⁴ Tiverton, Silverton and Torrington.²³⁵ Four of these were full-time and 18 were part-time.²³⁶ Exeter had 2 full-time and one part-time nursery²³⁷ and Plymouth opened its first wartime nursery in July 1942 for 40 children.²³⁸

An acute shortage of trained nursery staff led to the introduction of training schemes by the MH in 1943,²³⁹ and by August 1944 published figures illustrated ‘the impressive growth of training facilities’.²⁴⁰ A Wartime Nursery Conference held in May 1943 manifested ‘a clear conviction that nursery education must be regarded as a permanent feature of ...national life’,²⁴¹ and many hoped that the ‘new departure in child care... the care of the child apart from its mother’, which had not hitherto been regarded as an essential service, would bring opportunity for postwar social reforms.²⁴² It was clear however that any national provision would be patchy. In Devon, the postwar future of wartime nurseries continuing as day nurseries looked doubtful as the number of evacuee children decreased. In January 1943, DCC’s Wartime Nursery Sub-Committee decided to close a number of these,²⁴³ although Paignton opened another centre on 10 May,²⁴⁴ and a second centre was opened in Plymouth (Devonport) in November.²⁴⁵ By July 1944, although there were still 4 full-time nurseries in Devon and the creation of the post of Nursery Organiser,²⁴⁶ the part-

²³⁴ *DCEC Minutes 150/4/1/39*, p.137, 11 September 1941

²³⁵ *Wartime Nurseries Committee Minutes, DCC150/4/8/1*, August 1942

²³⁶ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1942, DCC150/4/5/1*, p. 4

²³⁷ *Exeter Maternity and Child Welfare Committee, ECA/27/2*, 27 April 1944

²³⁸ *Interim Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the City of Plymouth 1942, 1363/28*

²³⁹ *The Times Educational Supplement*, 23 January 1943 – training schemes for wartime nursery staff. See also 1 May 1943 for details of 2 month nursery nurse training announced by Ministry of Health

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 12 August 1944

²⁴¹ *The Times Educational Supplement*, 22 May 1943

²⁴² *Ibid.* ‘Care of Children Under Five’, 7 November 1942

²⁴³ *Tiverton Borough Council Minutes R4/1addC5*

²⁴⁴ *Paignton Urban District Council Minutes R4582A/PC12*

²⁴⁵ *Interim Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the City of Plymouth 1943, 1363/29*

²⁴⁶ Advertisement in *The Times Educational Supplement*, 1 January 1944

time nurseries had been reduced to 12 from 18.²⁴⁷ These closures were undoubtedly unpopular. For example, Dartington Wartime Nursery closed in April 1944 despite protests from many local people and organisations.²⁴⁸ There were still 3 wartime nurseries in Exeter, 2 full-time (Buddle Lane and Burnt House Lane) and 1 part-time (Paul Street), which had been running for 2 years.²⁴⁹ Plymouth's MOH recorded that housing shortages had increased the urgent need for more nurseries in addition to the 2 centres.²⁵⁰ Although no more centres were opened the 2 existing ones remained busy throughout 1945 and were still successful in 1947.²⁵¹

There is some locally recorded wartime evidence of official recognition of the benefits of nursery education. Mr Lampard Vachell (Vice Chairman of DCEC) stated optimistically in 1943 that 'it was generally realized that nursery schools which had sprung out of the war were of great benefit and would remain',²⁵² and Sidmouth UDC resolved to recommend that DCC urge the LEA to include the provision of nursery schools in the postwar programme.²⁵³ In Exeter, a 1944 memorandum by the MOH and SMO on nursery schools and nursery classes highlighted the increasing body of opinion during the past 10 years which favoured the establishment of nursery schools and classes. The memo concluded with the caveat that although there was much to be said for good nurseries, bad ones 'cannot be too strongly condemned'.²⁵⁴ Several months later, Mrs Malcolm Capener, Nursery Infant School Organiser for Devon, gave a talk to Exeter Townswomen's Guilds in September 1944. They unanimously passed a resolution 'that nursery infant schools should become part of the educational system in every area and for all children'.²⁵⁵ Nationally, a review of

²⁴⁷ *DCC150/4/8/3*, July 1944

²⁴⁸ *Dartington Trust Archive*

²⁴⁹ *Exeter City Maternity and Child Welfare Committee Minutes ECA 27/2*, 27 April 1944, pp.504-5

²⁵⁰ *Interim Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the City of Plymouth 1944*, 1363/30

²⁵¹ *Interim Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the City of Plymouth 1945 and 1947*, 1363/31 and 33

²⁵² *The Western Times*, 10 September 1943

²⁵³ *Sidmouth Urban District Council R7/7/C24*, 27 February 1944

²⁵⁴ *Exeter City Maternity and Child Welfare Committee Minutes ECA 27/2*, 27 April 1944, pp.504-5

²⁵⁵ *Express & Echo*, 20 September 1944

Nurseries and Nursery Schools concluded that by 1944 the nursery school had an assured future and was ‘recognized now as an integral part of the educational system’.²⁵⁶ Day nurseries still courted controversy but it was recognised that some were needed for domestic emergencies.²⁵⁷ However, despite the optimism, the new Education Act only stipulated that local authorities should ‘have regard’ to the need for securing that provision is made for pupils who have not attained the age of five years by the provision of nursery schools or, where the authority consider the provision of such schools to be inexpedient, by the provision of nursery classes in other schools.

Anxiety was expressed at the beginning of 1945 at the apparent determination of the MH to close down the day wartime nurseries²⁵⁸ as soon as they were no longer necessary to the war effort. However, Butler hoped that some would be transferred to LEAs as nursery schools or even nursery classes,²⁵⁹ although he explained that they were never intended to meet a postwar need and he had no authority to provide such nurseries for other than war purposes.²⁶⁰ Parliament debated the general social value of nurseries and Florence Horsburgh reiterated that those fully attended would not be closed but was unable to promise that vacancies could be filled by children whose mothers were not technically working.²⁶¹ Locally, DCC announced that children of mothers not in employment could no longer be admitted to nurseries after 28 February.²⁶² By June, as the evacuees were in the process of leaving the County, DCC considered the closure of more nurseries and the transference of children to schools. The MH Regional Officer suggested to Devon’s HMI that DCEC should take over all the part-time nurseries and those at Bideford, Paignton and Ilfracombe

²⁵⁶ *The Times Educational Supplement*, 10 February 1945

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.* V. Creech-Jones, *Review of Nurseries and Nursery Schools*, 10 February 1945

²⁵⁸ By the end of 1944 there were 783 wartime nursery classes attached to infant schools providing accommodation for 38,850 children aged 2-5, *Education*, Volume LXXXIV, 1 December 1944

²⁵⁹ *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 408, Column 386, 15 February 1945. Also *The Times Educational Supplement*, 24 February and 17 March 1945

²⁶⁰ *Education*, Volume LXXXV, p.306, 2 March 1945

²⁶¹ *Times Educational Supplement*, 17 March 1945

²⁶² *DCC Wartime Nurseries 150/4/8/3*

with immediate effect. Those that the Education Committee did not want to accept responsibility for (2 at Sidmouth and 1 at Torrington) where there were very few full-time workers would probably have to close.²⁶³ No decision on this proposal was recorded. It should be mentioned here that the WVS was a vital component of the return home for nursery children and acted as escorts for those who were unaccompanied. Parties of children were taken on arrival in London to the WVS Receiving Nursery at Hanover Lodge before being collected by parents. The WVS also ran a Godmother Scheme for those children in nurseries who could not return home for various reasons.²⁶⁴

In August 1945 the Ministries of Health and Education announced the establishment of a National Nursery Certificate. In November a deputation organised by the London Women's Parliament met representatives of both Ministries in order to keep the spotlight on nursery provision,²⁶⁵ and by December Joint Circular 75 (MH and MEd) requested local authorities to submit their proposed development schemes for nursery services to include 'a combination, appropriate to local needs and circumstances, of nursery schools, nursery classes, day nurseries, and organizations of daily guardians administered by the welfare authority and supervised by their health visitors, using existing services as a foundation'.²⁶⁶ Locally, by October 1945 the number of full-time nurseries in Devon was still 4 but the part-time nurseries had been reduced from 12 (1944) to 9 (Bideford, Dartmouth, Exmouth, Ilfracombe, Newton Abbot, Paignton (2), Sidmouth, Torrington).²⁶⁷ In January 1946, Ministry of Education Circular 75 was circulated to DCC Joint Nursery Committee explaining that the wartime arrangement of 100% grant for wartime nurseries from the MH to local authorities would continue until 31 March. Local authorities were then asked to review these

²⁶³ *DCC Minutes 148/16*, 21 June 1945. *DCC Wartime Nurseries DCC150/4/8/3*

²⁶⁴ C. Graves, *Women in Green* (William Heinemann Ltd. 1948) pp.247-8

²⁶⁵ *Times Educational Supplement*, 4 August and 17 November 1945

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 22 December 1945

²⁶⁷ *DCC Wartime Nurseries 150/4/8/3*

nurseries 'with due regard to the extent to which women are likely to continue to be required in essential industries in the area'. The average attendance in Devon at this time was only 299 children. Nurseries or classes taken over by the LEA would receive a grant from the Ministry of Education under Education Grant Regulation 1945.²⁶⁸ Exeter reviewed its situation at this time. Whilst prepared to continue running the 3 wartime nurseries subject to annual review, the Council was not in favour of 'daily minders' or 'sitters in' and took the view that the correct place for children under 2 was at home with their mothers and not in nurseries.²⁶⁹ By February 1946, DCC had decided to continue the 4 full-time nurseries in the County but kept Tiverton under review. Six of the remaining 7 part-time nurseries were also kept under review. The Finance Committee projected the annual cost of maintenance at £15,000, 53% of which would be paid by the MH.²⁷⁰ During the early part of 1947, letters from the Minister of Health and Minister of Labour recommended the continuance of existing nurseries²⁷¹ and by 1948 there were still 4 full-time day nurseries at Barnstaple, Bideford, Tiverton and Totnes and 6 part-time ones at Bideford, Dartmouth, Exmouth, Ilfracombe, Newton Abbot and Paignton accommodating 49 children aged 0-2 and 327 aged 2-5. Two residential nurseries, mainly for short stay, were also planned for Braunton (North Devon) and Kingsbridge (South Devon).²⁷² The last remaining Wartime Nursery Centre (Oakleigh Road, Barnstaple), which became a Welfare Nursery after the war, finally closed in 1953.²⁷³

Turning to residential nurseries, apart from those pre-war residential nurseries discussed above which were evacuated, wartime residential nurseries were developed as a direct result of evacuation and during September-October 1940 there were 2,614 applications for places in reception areas as

²⁶⁸ *DCC Wartime Nurseries Committee 150/4/8/3, Memo from Secretary of DCEC to members of Joint Nursery Committee*, dated 17 January 1946

²⁶⁹ *ECA/27/2*, p. 568

²⁷⁰ *DCC Wartime Nurseries 150/4/8/3 and DCC Minutes, Finance Committee Report*, 14 March 1946

²⁷¹ *DCC Minutes*, March 1947

²⁷² *DCC Medical Officer's Annual Reports 1948-1951*, held at Westcountry Studies Library

²⁷³ *DCC Wartime Nurseries 150/4/8/3*

young children became permanently or temporarily motherless as a result of bombing. Examples included John aged 18 months whose mother had been killed and whose father was ‘too unhinged’ to work, Terry aged 2, whose parents had both burnt to death and Michael aged 2 ¼, whose mother had been killed and whose father was away in the Forces.²⁷⁴ Lady Reading, Chairman of the WVS, appealed urgently to the MH in December 1940 to provide a large number of houses for these children. In addition, under the umbrella of MH Circular 2462 and Circular EMS 211 (29 August 1941) – Bombed and Sick Babies Scheme, the LCC acted as a central clearing house and was notified of all forthcoming discharges from hospitals. Parents were encouraged to send their children away from London to private billets in the country, either with or without the mother. Approximately 470 children ‘certified to be suffering or likely to suffer in mind and body as a result of enemy raids’, were compulsorily evacuated from the London Metropolitan Area at this time.²⁷⁵ Figures show that the number of unaccompanied children in residential nurseries rose from 6,500 in February 1941 to a peak of 13,900 by September 1944, falling to 4,800 by September 1945. By the end of 1946 only 28 nurseries with 521 children remained and country houses were returned to their owners.²⁷⁶

Many of these residential nurseries were initially financed by private donations and gifts from both Britain and overseas, particularly from the US and Dominions. By December 1941 there were 335 (over 10,000 places) with approximately one-third established as a result of this overseas aid.²⁷⁷ Barton Place in Exeter was established in 1941, run by Save the Children and largely funded by Save the Children Federation of the United States. It appears to have been very successful and Colin Crawley (2) was so happy there that he was dismayed to return home. Coralie Setter (1) was

²⁷⁴ S. Ferguson and H. Fitzgerald, *Studies in the Social Services*, pp. 221-2

²⁷⁵ R. Samways, ed. *We think you ought to go*, p. 13

²⁷⁶ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.381. S. Ferguson and H. Fitzgerald, *Studies in the Social Services*, pp.212-250

²⁷⁷ *ECA Evac, Box 1/8, Summary Report by the Ministry of Health*, p. 35

also very happy for 4 years at Escot (Ottery St Mary) and did not want to leave when her mother came to collect her. By March 1942, Exeter had 31 evacuated children staying either in Barton Place or Honeylands (established for delicate children during the early 1920s).²⁷⁸ Once America joined the war and funding became more difficult, much of the expenditure for residential nurseries was charged to the Evacuation Account. In November 1941 Dartmouth Billeting Committee received a letter from DCC asking for names and addresses of any householders who were willing and had accommodation to set up a small nursery unit. By December a nursery home and school were established at Rookville.²⁷⁹ Altogether there were 19 residential nurseries in Devon (excluding Plymouth) by July 1941 and 2 in Exeter,²⁸⁰ administered either by charities, evacuation areas or DCC (funded by MH).²⁸¹

Once Plymouth was declared an evacuation area Lady Astor spearheaded the initiative to find and equip suitable premises as residential nurseries for unaccompanied children under five. Through her connections several houses were offered to her personally e.g. Tapley, North Devon. She set up a Voluntary Committee comprised of her own committee of voluntary bodies and that of the Public Health Committee, believing that the normal ‘inevitable delays of public bodies’ would thus be avoided. Kate Spurrell, a teacher seconded by Plymouth Education Committee at Lady Astor’s request, worked as organiser for this Voluntary Committee. Lady Evelyn Gunston, Director of the Anglo-American Relief Fund, backed by the MH and already experienced in evacuating London children under 5, offered assistance. Between 5 and 6 June 1941, 90 children were sent to 2 residential nurseries financed by the Anglo-American Relief Fund – Doverhay (Porlock, Somerset) and Tapley Park (Instow, North Devon). Lady Gunston also assisted the MH to open Instow House

²⁷⁸ *Town Clerk’s Papers, Exeter City Council, A.R.P. Evac. Box 11, Group N*

²⁷⁹ *Borough Council of Clifton Dartmouth Hardness, Minutes and Committee Reports R9/1/C32*

²⁸⁰ *Wartime Nurseries Committee, DCC150/4/8/1, June 1941*

²⁸¹ 5 (Waifs and Strays), 1 (Anglo American Relief Fund), 1 (LCC), 1 (Bristol), 4 (Plymouth), 1 (Norland Institute), 1 (?), 5 (DCC) – *Wartime Nurseries Committee, DCC 150/4/8/1, June 1941.*

(Instow) in September 1941 which was funded by the Ministry and run by Lady Gunston in her personal capacity. Apparently the Ministry was unhappy about the billets and care of 22 Plymouth children evacuated to Putsborough and Branton (Devon). By the end of 1941 there were 12 residential nurseries in several counties accommodating 452 Plymouth children.²⁸² There was still however a waiting list of 88 children, on average 2 applications per day, and over 150 names were removed because parents were dissatisfied with the delays. Although generally very good, there were concerns from time to time about staff shortages, frequent changes of staff and over-strict and institutionalised matrons.²⁸³ McMillan trained Nursery School Teachers employed by Save the Children Fund were considered to be much better for the development of the children.²⁸⁴ A letter to Nancy Astor from the Lindleys of Wortley House, Gloucester, highlighted the problems of staff shortages. Mrs Lindley wrote that she was so glad to offer her 'beautiful home' to the children. Her husband added that they were struggling because of lack of staff 'it might be worth while for Mr Ernest Brown to see the sort of thing that is being achieved by voluntary effort, and this might result in including the care of bombed children among the works of national importance to which women might well be set'.²⁸⁵

There was undoubtedly friction between Mr Baxter, Chairman of Plymouth Corporation Public Health Committee and Lady Astor, which eventually found its way into the press in September 1942. Mr Baxter accused Lady Astor of using her position as Lady Mayoress 'to interfere in the administrative affairs of the City, a resentment which, I believe, is shared by a very large number of

²⁸² *Interim Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the City of Plymouth 1941, 1363/27.* Also *Astor Family Papers 186/21/3*

²⁸³ Six changes of matrons at Doverhay and 4 at Tapley caused concern as did the initial lack of equipment and staff at Puttscombe Nursery, Georgeham, Barnstaple. Also initial problems at Doverhay when children arrived - equipment supplied by Ministry of Health was delayed and there were staff shortages. Mothers were apparently not happy with Querns Nursery (Cirencester) which was seen as too institutional although the children were healthy.

²⁸⁴ *Astor Family Papers 186/21/3 & 5*

²⁸⁵ *Astor Family Papers 186/21/3*, Letter dated 21 September 1941

my colleagues in the City Council'. In October 1941 Lady Astor had toured the nurseries and found those run by the Public Health Committee of DCC (including Putsborough and Braunton mentioned above) so unsatisfactory that she, together with the Emergency Committee and MH decided to have the under 2s and 2-5s in separate nurseries. The Ministry became responsible for the under 2s and Lady Astor's Voluntary Committee for the 2-5s. By March 1942 the Public Health Committee was unhappy because it did not have control of the three Save The Children funded nurseries. There was also lack of confidence in Kate Spurrell's work, and a belief that she had been imposed upon the Committee by Lady Astor. By July 1942 Plymouth Education Committee decided that the PHC should regain control of the nurseries.²⁸⁶

By December 1942, 696 Plymouth children had been evacuated to residential nurseries (See Appendix 21 for August 1942 list of nurseries). Reasons for return were listed: 73 children (12%) due to age, 96 children (14%) for sensible reasons (family moving from Plymouth, re-marriage of mother, children of staff who have left with mother, cases where mother has reconstructed her home, cases of illness where mothers have been advised to have children at home, 98 children (14%) for other reasons and 3 children (0.4%) due to death.²⁸⁷ At the end of 1943 there were 415 Plymouth children accommodated in residential nurseries,²⁸⁸ and by the beginning of November 1944, when the MH instructed that the Plymouth evacuation scheme should be wound up, there were still 272 children in residential nurseries dropping to 124 by the end of December.²⁸⁹ The nurseries were closed down by September 1945 and those children who could not return home were admitted to Warleigh House Nursery, City Hospital, Plymouth.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁶ *Astor Family Papers 186/21/3 & 5*

²⁸⁷ *Astor Family Papers 186/21/5*

²⁸⁸ *Interim Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the City of Plymouth 1943, 1363/29*

²⁸⁹ *Interim Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the City of Plymouth 1944, 1363/30*

²⁹⁰ *Interim Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the City of Plymouth 1945, 1363/31*

In summary, the wartime provision of daytime nursery care in Devon largely resulted from evacuation although in other reception areas the need for women's wartime labour doubtless became the main impetus from 1941 onwards. The postwar retention of 4 full-time and 7 part-time day nurseries provided during the war may not appear impressive but, from a pre-war position of no daytime nursery provision apart from a few nursery schools, the position had certainly progressed. The temporary national expansion of wartime residential nurseries was directly due to the need to evacuate vulnerable children. Both war and more specifically evacuation were the catalysts needed to highlight the gap between pre-war advocates of reform and government entrenchment. The need for and benefit of gradual postwar expansion of daytime and residential nursery provision was largely accepted, and experience gained during the war undoubtedly benefited future child care. Although progress would be gradual and uneven, the direction was now established.

Unofficial (Private) Evacuees

Apart from the 'privately assisted' priority category of evacuee (mothers and children) discussed above, there was another category of evacuee referred to variously as 'unofficial' 'private', 'voluntary' or 'refugee' in local documentary sources. This category included both priority (children, mothers, elderly and infirm) and non priority classes of evacuee. They usually made their own arrangements and there is very little local data on numbers. Neither were there any national official statistics for this category²⁹¹ but Titmuss put the number somewhere between 1,500,000 and 2,000,000 during the first evacuation wave,²⁹² although the number increased steadily during the War. The LCC acknowledged that it was impossible to calculate the number of privately evacuated children from its area but estimates appeared to show on average about 50,000 children at any one time.²⁹³ Devon was a favoured destination and the population rose by approximately 60,000 at the

²⁹¹ Padley and Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p.40

²⁹² R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.546

²⁹³ R. Samways, ed. *We think you ought to go*, p. 22

end of September 1939,²⁹⁴ with at least 52,000 people having reserved private accommodation the previous May.²⁹⁵ An article in *The Times* claimed that hotels which had not been requisitioned were full of well-to-do refugees who too frequently had fled from nothing ‘they sit and read and knit and eat and drink, and get no nearer to war than the news they read in newspapers’.²⁹⁶ By October 1940 there was apparently a striking trend of ill-feeling generated against the ‘upper classes’ for being first to leave bombed districts and to find the best places in evacuation areas.²⁹⁷ Titmuss criticised ‘the principle that those who could afford to do so should make their own arrangements “emphasized rather than diminished” differences in social circumstances’.²⁹⁸

However, many unofficial evacuees were not financially well off and struggled to make ends meet. The only extant locally recorded emergency financial provision for such people during the first evacuation wave was a Public Assistance Sub-Committee set up by Seaton UDC in September 1939 to deal with unofficial evacuees who had no means of self-support.²⁹⁹ Thousands increasingly left the cities in panic during bombing raids, were not part of official parties or the assisted private scheme, and arrived in reception areas at all hours, frequently in shock, with no belongings and nowhere to go.³⁰⁰ For example, in September 1940 panic refugees, mainly from London, arriving daily in Bideford MB caused a serious shortage of accommodation and consequent concern. By November, 1,350 had been billeted and compulsory billeting had to be introduced to accommodate

²⁹⁴ *Appendix 1, The National Register- Statistics of Population United Kingdom and Isle of Man Statistics of Population on 29 September 1939* (HMSO 1944) gives a total of 781,243 in Devon Administrative County, a rise of 59,243 from numbers taken earlier in 1939 for *The General Register Office: National Registration of England and Wales 1939 Population Statistics* (General Register Office) p.xii. See also G. Wasley, *Devon at War* (Devon Books 1994) p.28. R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 547. Titmuss gave the figure of 64,556 population rise. Also refer to *Appendix 7* of this thesis for list of local councils in Devon indicating population increases by 29 September 1939.

²⁹⁵ *Maternity and Child Welfare Committee DCC157/5/1/3*, meeting held 15 May 1939

²⁹⁶ *The Times*, 10 January 1940

²⁹⁷ *Home Intelligence Weekly Report*, 14-21 October 1940, *INF 1/292* as cited in I. McLaine, *Ministry of Morale* (George Allen & Unwin 1979) p.176

²⁹⁸ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.249

²⁹⁹ *Seaton Urban District Council Minutes R7/6/C/8*

³⁰⁰ See M. Cole, *Wartime Billeting* (Fabian Society May 1941) pp.175-6

official evacuees.³⁰¹ Evacuees unable to provide for themselves were recorded arriving in Crediton RD without the appropriate certification to prove they had come from an evacuation area.³⁰² Many ‘panic refugees’ did not realise that ‘without having the blanket of “officialness” thrown over them’ the Government accepted no financial responsibility for them.³⁰³ Although MH Circular 2154 conceded that recovery of payment towards their billets need not be sought for the first 2 weeks after arrival, no arrangements had been made for health and welfare services. If unofficial evacuees could not afford the services of a private doctor they had to turn to the district (poor law) medical service.

The MH Bristol Regional Office reported that many of the 200,000 unofficial evacuees who had arrived in the South West during September and October 1940 were unable to pay for medical attention, that the Poor Law medical service provided by public assistance authorities was insufficient and that the burden of accountancy and correspondence with evacuation authorities and poor law authorities, complicated by means testing, was a veritable nightmare. Despite evidence of hardship to both evacuees and charitably disposed doctors, the Government made no policy change until the end of 1940 when social distress became politically important and it was realised that ‘the doctrine of recovery was preventing the extension of certain health services and prohibiting mothers and children getting access to some of the help they needed’.³⁰⁴ Mounting complaints finally led to MH Circular 2204 (16 November 1940) which directed local authorities in reception and neutral areas to extend their normal health and welfare services to all ‘evacuated and homeless persons’ whether billeted or privately accommodated. Newcomers were to be acquainted with the available

³⁰¹ *Bideford Municipal Borough Minutes and Reports of Committees, R2379A/(1-1C24-C25, 27 September and 8 November 1940*

³⁰² *The Western Times*, 20 September 1940

³⁰³ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp. 223-4

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.* pp.224-8

services and all expenses charged to the Treasury backdated to 1 September 1940.³⁰⁵

Coincidentally, just before the Circular was issued a local newspaper report headlined an article ‘TO WAKE MINISTERS UP Devon demands ruling on refugee finance’. The DCC General Purposes and Finance Sub-Committee had resolved to ask the MH for a ‘definite ruling’ regarding payment for refugees and evacuees because with regard to public assistance ‘no financial provision whatever had been made’.³⁰⁶

There is one unique example in Devon of a large scale communal billeting scheme provided by Kingsbridge RDC for privately evacuated mothers and children, presumably relatively well-to-do. The Council requisitioned 160 country houses, bungalows, country cottages and villas. Activities for mothers were organised almost every night, such as adult education, sewing classes, film shows, dancing and whist drives. Mothers paid 14s6d per week, children over 5 paid 6s6d and those under 5 paid 4s6d. There was a Health Insurance Scheme for a 3d contribution per week and week-end cottages for visiting husbands. Mothers were paid to work in the kitchens or gardens if they wanted. A reporter from *The Field* described these evacuees as ‘amongst the happiest in the country’.³⁰⁷ Usually however, depending on their circumstances, private evacuees either stayed with relatives and friends or found accommodation in hotels, private homes or rented accommodation. Many were prepared to pay higher rents and continued to come to Devon throughout the war which resulted in far less accommodation being available for official evacuees. This caused additional problems for hard-pressed local billeting officers and was inevitably sometimes a cause of resentment amongst those householders billeting official evacuees. MH Circular 2164 (30 September 1940) requested that local authorities take appropriate action in cases of profiteering

³⁰⁵ *City of Plymouth Evacuation File 1645/11/12/20*. MH Circular 2283 (4 February 1941) then extended the provisions made in Circular 2204 to people ‘who have temporarily left homes in evacuated areas and have made private arrangements in reception or neutral areas’.

³⁰⁶ Devon Public Assistance Committee unanimously adopted this recommendation. *The Western Times*, 22 November 1940

³⁰⁷ S. Ward, *War in the Countryside 1939-1945* (Cameron Books 1988) pp.94-7

from accommodation suitable for self-evacuated refugees.³⁰⁸ The following month it was reported that private evacuees in the Parish of Stoke Rivers (Barnstaple RDC) were paying up to £2 per week for board and lodging which apparently resulted in some householders trying to ‘shift child evacuees in order to take in paying guests’.³⁰⁹ An angry parent claimed that when Torquay became ultra-fashionable again because of its immunity from intensive bombing ‘the landladies grasped their opportunities for money-making by manufacturing all sorts of reasons to rid themselves of the poor evacuated kids’.³¹⁰ In January 1941 the Minister of Health was asked if he was aware that small houses in North Devon which were let pre-war at 7s to 10s per week were now being offered at 30s per week. The Minister agreed to investigate.³¹¹ Later that year there were allegations of people in Newton Abbot RD sub-letting furnished rooms at exorbitant prices to unofficial evacuees.³¹² Honiton RDC also expressed concern about the refusal of ‘certain occupiers of farmhouses’ to have evacuees. Some had let accommodation to unofficial evacuees and whilst some farmers only received 8s6d government billeting allowance, other farmers let part of their farmhouse for £1 per week and did ‘nothing for it’.³¹³ These examples were reported in the press and it is therefore impossible to ascertain the extent of inflated rents. There was one complaint of excessive rent recorded in Dawlish UDC Minutes.³¹⁴ Efforts to prevent such exploitation included registers of lodgers that had to be kept by anyone who offered furnished or unfurnished lodging or sleeping accommodation,³¹⁵ and any reported cases were investigated. One other case was highlighted in Plymouth where 4 adults and 3 children were billeted in a 4 roomed cottage in the

³⁰⁸ *Torbay Municipal Borough Council Minutes R4582A/TC69*

³⁰⁹ *The Western Times*, 18 October 1940. See also M. Cole, *Wartime Billeting: Fabian Research Series No 55* (Fabian Society May 1941) p.185

³¹⁰ *ED 134/32*, Letter from T. Gully to Herbert Morrison, dated 16 December 1940

³¹¹ *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 368, Columns 1077-8. Question asked by R.C. Morrison, Labour MP for Tottenham North.

³¹² *The Western Times*, 25 July 1941

³¹³ *Ibid.* 26 September 1941

³¹⁴ *Dawlish Urban District Council Committee Reports R2369A/(5/3)C83*, 19 May 1941

³¹⁵ *The Western Times*, 22 August 1941

grounds of a large house. The female owner charged 29/- per week, yet barely any equipment and only 2 blankets were provided.³¹⁶

There are a number of instances recorded in the local council archives during 1940 where shortage of billets due to private occupation caused major difficulties in finding enough accommodation for priority class official evacuees (detailed in Appendix 22). There were further problems in April/May 1941 after the heavy bombing raids on Plymouth. Thousands of people fled the City and whilst many slept outside and returned by day, others filled the rest centres set up by Plymouth and Devon Civilian Welfare Committee. Totnes recorded that numbers sometimes exceeded 25,000 and there were problems with evacuees who wanted to stay in the centres.³¹⁷ The Civil Defence Officer of the Regional Commission described the human problem which developed as a result of the April raids: ‘difficulties of care, welfare, feeding, transport, billeting, etc, on a scale such as we had had no previous experience of’.³¹⁸ For example, in May Exeter sought an additional 500 camp beds and 2,000 blankets to cope with the influx of private evacuees from Plymouth.³¹⁹ Two recorded official comments have been found that appear to reflect some concern that evacuees might remain indefinitely. The Chairman of DCC Town and Country Planning, stated ‘there is evidence that the majority ...intend to stay...we shall have to very much be on our guard as they will want to build as soon as they can get labour and material.’³²⁰ More in jest and with some pride, Exeter City Secretary for Education, G.A. Tue, was quoted as saying that content evacuees in Exeter ‘seem likely to stay here until they qualify for old-age pensions’.³²¹

³¹⁶ *City of Plymouth, Town Clerk's Correspondence 1645/11/12/30-31*

³¹⁷ *Totnes Town Council Minutes R9/2/C34*, May 1941

³¹⁸ *Crediton Urban District Council Local Defence Committee War Book, R4/2/C/67, Civil Defence Office of the Regional Commissioner, Information Bulletin No 4*, dated 31 August 1941

³¹⁹ *Exeter City Council, Town Clerk's Papers, Group N, Box 10*

³²⁰ Mr Hayter-Hames was speaking at the Devon Branch of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England in mid-1941. *The Western Times*, 4 July 1941

³²¹ *The Western Morning News*, 11 April 1940

Fortuitously the number of unofficial evacuees fell during late 1941 and 1942.³²² However in July 1944, the number of private evacuees fleeing the V1 flying bombs and V2 rockets caused severe accommodation shortages once again. Barnstaple MB recorded that between 12 June and 12 August, in addition to hundreds of official evacuees 1,124 private evacuees arrived with billeting notices, 246 without and 1,670 made their own arrangements.³²³ Tiverton MB received 870 unofficial evacuees in one week³²⁴ and Paignton UDC recorded 2,615 refugees ‘under purely private arrangements’. Visitors flocked to holiday resorts after wartime restrictions were lifted and Paignton found it was fully booked almost immediately.³²⁵ Crediton RDC recorded 1,300 private evacuees³²⁶ and Ilfracombe UDC reported great difficulty finding billets due to large numbers of visitors making their own arrangements. Billets thought to be empty had been occupied by private evacuees leading to a shortage of accommodation for mothers and children. ‘Many admit they came as visitors and desire to remain indefinitely’.³²⁷

During the war thousands of unaccompanied children were also privately evacuated to relatives, friends or recommended/unknown hosts in Devon. For example, an advertisement in *The Western Times* (30 August 1940) from a Salisbury address requested a good class home for brother and sister ages 5 and 3. The parents of David Craton (6) and his sister had answered a small classified advertisement in *The Daily Telegraph* and the children were billeted in Monkleigh with complete strangers. Evacuated teachers also sometimes recommended billets for children as in the case of Brian (10) and Sheila Thornton (13) who came to Wembworthy. Although these children were ‘priority’ class evacuees the Government only paid a billeting allowance if parents could not afford

³²² ED 134/37

³²³ Barnstaple Municipal Borough 2654add4/Box 13

³²⁴ Tiverton MB Town Council Minutes R4/1addC6, 4 July 1944

³²⁵ Paignton UDC Minutes R4582A/PC13, July 1944

³²⁶ *Express & Echo*, 14 August 1944

³²⁷ Ilfracombe UDC Minutes R2458A/(2/3)C73, 8 July 44. *Ilfracombe UDC Committee Minutes R2458A(213)C73*, pp.379-80

6s per week. The initial reaction of the Devon School Medical Service in 1939 was that unofficially evacuated schoolchildren were well nourished and clothed ‘presumably...from homes with economic circumstances above the average’.³²⁸ Means testing was removed in May 1941 after protests from the LCC and unaccompanied privately evacuated children were then entitled to the same billeting allowance and free transport as children sent with officially organised parties.³²⁹

Devon’s schools opened on 4 September 1939 to receive the expected large numbers of official evacuees and whilst the majority of official evacuees did not arrive until June 1940, large numbers of rural and urban schools admitted unofficial evacuees, both unaccompanied or accompanied by mothers. The numbers arriving at the schools in 1939 were usually between 2-7 children but some schools received larger numbers. For example, Barnstaple Blue Coat School registered 21, Ilfracombe Infants registered 13, Appledore Northam registered 15, Pilton registered 26 and Bishops Tawton registered 13.³³⁰ DCC recorded that the total number of unofficial evacuees on the school registers for the week ending 23 September was 4,411 from over 150 different education authorities, detailed in Appendix 23. These were largely evacuation areas but over 300 children came from neutral and reception areas. By 8 December this number had reduced by 24% to 3,336³³¹ and by 1 January 1940 by 43% to 2,494.³³² Exeter recorded that by March 1940 a total of 933 unofficial evacuee schoolchildren had arrived from 71 different education authorities and 595 (39%) had returned.³³³ Following the second evacuation wave the number given by DCEC at the

³²⁸ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1939, DCC150/4/5/1*

³²⁹ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.361

³³⁰ *Barnstaple Blue Coat School Log Book 1805C/EFL1-2, Ilfracombe Infants School Log Book 2314C/EFL5, Appledore Northam C.P. School Log Book 2489Cadd.EAL5, Pilton Infant and Junior School Log Book B6Z/3/4, Bishops Tawton Junior Mixed and Infants School Log Book 2310C/EFL2*

³³¹ Another set of figures recorded by DCEC for December 1939 gave the number as 1,000 secondary schoolchildren and 3,573 elementary schoolchildren, *DCC Evacuation Boxes*. Also *DCC Minutes 148/14, 14 December 1939*

³³² *DCC Evacuation Boxes*

³³³ *ECA Town Clerk’s Papers ARP Evac, Group N, Box 12*

end of 1940 was approximately 3,120,³³⁴ dropping by 16% to 2,623 by June 1941 (another set of figures states over 3,000)³³⁵ and by 46% to 1,676 by May 1942.³³⁶

Financially these unofficial evacuee pupils drained local educational resources. Armfelt wrote to the Board in October 1939 expressing both his concern over the additional expenditure and the lack of guidance from the Board, and his correspondence reveals a rather confused state of affairs. He estimated an overspend of possibly £25,900 as the number of unofficial evacuee pupils was increasing and sought clarification that expenses would be recoverable from the evacuation authorities. In addition, 948 secondary schoolchildren from 61 LEAs had necessitated approximately 20 additional teachers, increasing expenditure by about £6,000. Armfelt claimed that MH Circular 1475 led Devon to believe that expenses could be charged to the home authorities but having communicated with a number of them the replies indicated ‘a great variety of views’. The Board replied that the obligation to provide elementary education for ‘private’ evacuees rested with the LEA in the reception area. Expenditure for secondary schools was to be settled by the authorities concerned case by case, collecting fees from parents wherever possible but in cases where secondary pupils had left neutral or reception areas no continuing responsibility rested on the authority of the area from which the child left.³³⁷

By November, DCEC Executive Sub-Committee revealed an £8,300 overspend for unofficial elementary pupils and £6,350 for unofficial secondary pupils.³³⁸ Armfelt wrote again to the Board in desperation claiming that Devon’s experience of evacuation was very different to that expected.

³³⁴ *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1940, DCC150/4/5/1, p.4*

³³⁵ *The Times Educational Supplement*, 3 May 1941 – article on evacuation in Devon, figures given by R.N.Armfelt, Secretary for Education in Devon

³³⁶ *DCEC Minutes DCC150/4/1/40, p.93*

³³⁷ *ED 134/30, G671/572, Letters dated 12 and 28 October 1939*

³³⁸ *Report of Executive Sub-Committee, Devon Education Committee Minutes, DCC150/4/1/37, pp.296-7, 9 November 1939*

The number of official evacuee schoolchildren was far lower than expected, whilst the number of unofficial evacuee schoolchildren was much higher. He asked the Board to take the initiative to secure a settlement on national lines.³³⁹ Demonstrating the strain on local finances, an unsigned note scribbled at the bottom of a handwritten draft evacuation expenses claim for 1939-1940 for submission to the MH asked 'is there any hope of getting any grant in respect of unofficial evacuees?' for such expenses as travel, teachers' salaries, books and stationery, medical inspections, treatment and exam fees.³⁴⁰ Representations were then made to the County Councils' Association, the Board and the Association of Education Committees on behalf of Dorset, Cornwall and Devon pointing out that there were approximately 3,500 unofficial evacuee schoolchildren in Devon representing about one third of the total number of evacuees. The letters highlighted that the Government had repeatedly stated that no additional expenditure would fall on receiving authorities as a result of evacuation and that this undertaking should apply to unofficial as well as official evacuees. DCEC meanwhile sought to offset some of its overspend by making savings in such areas as the Organisation of Physical Training, Special Schools, Supplementary Physical Training, Orthopaedic Treatment, Administration and Inspection, Loan Charges and Rents.³⁴¹

In view of the strong representations made to the Government by different authorities and the tenacity of such individuals as Armfelt concerning the problem of educational expenditure on unofficial evacuee children, a Joint Committee (Davidson Committee) was set up with representatives of the Association of Education Committees and the LCC together with the Association of Directors and Secretaries for Education, under the chairmanship of an official from the Board. The Committee reported to the Board in January 1940 and, subject to the

³³⁹ *ED 134/30 – G671/572(1) and G671/572(2)* Letters dated 10 and 13 November 1939.

³⁴⁰ *DCC Evacuation Box*

³⁴¹ *Report of Executive Sub-Committee, Devon Education Committee Minutes, DCC150/4/1/37*, pp.296-7, 9 November 1939. Also *DCC Minutes, Report of Education Committee*, 14 December 1939 (Westcountry Studies Library)

recommendations being passed, DCEC anticipated the receipt of ‘substantial compensation for the expenditure on unofficial evacuees’.³⁴² The reported overspend on unofficial evacuee schoolchildren at this time was £7,300.³⁴³ Despite economies and presumably some compensation the continuing overspend reported in March 1941 was largely attributable to the 1,460 ‘voluntary’ secondary school evacuees.³⁴⁴ During the same month a reconstituted Davidson Committee revised its 1940 Report. Forced to make allowances for the large numbers of children fleeing bombardment independently and not under arrangements made by evacuation authorities, reception areas were able, from 1 April 1941, to claim financial adjustment from all authorities, not just those classed as evacuation areas. Thus certain evacuee children previously classified as ‘unofficial’ now became ‘official’.³⁴⁵ More privately evacuated children came from Bristol during 1941 and although there are no separate figures, approximately 6,671 came to destinations in Somerset, Devon and Cornwall.³⁴⁶ Less straightforward financial settlements between education authorities were often still unresolved months and even several years after evacuees had returned home. The numbers of unofficial evacuee children in Devon fell from late 1941. During 1943 there were approximately 1,425, slowly falling to 1,365 by April 1944.³⁴⁷ No figures are available for the third evacuation wave.

³⁴² *Devon County Council Minutes, Education Committee Report DCC148/15*, 14 March 1940 and *Devon County Council Minutes, Report of Education Committee, DCC148/15*, March 1941

³⁴³ *Devon County Council Minutes, Report of Education Committee*, March 1940 (WSL)

³⁴⁴ *Devon County Council Minutes, Education Committee Report DCC148/14*, 13 March 1941

³⁴⁵ *Devon County Council Minutes, Report of Education Committee*, March 1941 (Westcountry Studies Library). Also R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.209. *DCC Evacuation Box- Davidson Report*

³⁴⁶ *The Times Educational Supplement*, Report of evacuation of Bristol children, 5 September 1942

³⁴⁷ *ED 134/39 – G9E/941 Report by Arnold Platts, HMI for Devon*, dated 1 April 1944

Private Schools

By 17 August 1939, a scheme had been introduced for the evacuation of private schools, both boarding and day, should the decision be taken to evacuate. Schools were required to send details of their proposed method of evacuation to the MH with full particulars of numbers, reception district and method of transport.³⁴⁸ All railway transport was needed for the Government Evacuation Scheme so buses or cars had to be arranged. The Government also offered parents of children in private schools the option to register them for inclusion in parties from elementary and secondary schools.³⁴⁹ Private schools generally rented large mansions and hotels although some pupils were billeted with local householders. Some schools evacuated those pupils who wished to go but kept the school open for day pupils.³⁵⁰ Others were forced to relocate because their buildings were requisitioned and schools in rural locations such as Blundell's and Shebbear College, both in Devon, saw their pupil roll increase as parents sent children away from high risk areas.³⁵¹ Other schools in areas considered at risk by parents struggled to remain viable.³⁵² Unfortunately there is no comprehensive list of the private schools evacuated to Devon and very little information has been found but a list of some of these schools and their destinations detailed in Appendix 24 has been compiled from various archival sources, personal testimonies, newspapers and the recent publication *Schools at War*.

Memories of Highgate School's wartime evacuation written by A.J.F. Doulton (Headmaster 1955-1974), together with the written reminiscences of one pupil,³⁵³ offer a glimpse of the planning and evacuation experience of one evacuated private school. Highgate had briefly evacuated its boarders

³⁴⁸ R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p.32

³⁴⁹ *The Times*, 31 July 1939

³⁵⁰ For example, Elmhurst School, Croydon. D. Stranack, *Schools at War* (Phillimore 2005) p.25

³⁵¹ D. Stranack, *Schools at War*, pp.5 and 66

³⁵² For example, Wychwood School, Oxford - D. Stranack, *Schools at War*, p.75

³⁵³ Ross Kessel, *Highgate at Hartland* (Kingsbridge Stationers 1994). Mr Kessel also took part in the local sample and kindly lent his copy of Doulton, A.J.F. *Highgate School 1938-1944: The Story of Wartime Evacuation* (Lindel Organisation Ltd 1975)

during the Munich crisis in 1938, an experience which revealed both the complexities of evacuation and the need to prepare in advance for future war. Stately mansions in the Home Counties and Gloucestershire were deemed unsuitable for a large school party, not least because of the inadequacy of the plumbing. Seaside resorts in the West Country were then reconnoitred by the Headmaster and his assistant during Christmas 1938/9. The decision was made to send the Senior School to Westward Ho! where several hotels were secured, and the Junior School to nearby Hartland Abbey, owned by the Stucley Family. Despite shorter hours, distances between temporary classrooms, inadequate toilet facilities at Hartland, lack of adequate heating which forced boys to wear balaclavas, mittens and overcoats, and the loss of younger members of staff to the Forces, the examinations held in 1940 were successful. The boys benefited from plenty of fresh air, exercise and their wonderful surroundings. In 1941 the Junior School joined the Seniors at Westward Ho! and remained there until 1943. Apparently the cost of the evacuation was comparatively light compared with many other private schools, partly because the National Provincial Bank and the Admiralty rented the school buildings in North London during the war.

Conclusion

Sir – with the wonderful news of victory it seems the appropriate time for someone to express the gratitude felt by many Londoners towards the people of Exeter...I know that I speak for others as well as myself when I say those who received us on that Friday nearly six years ago are now numbered among our greatest friends.³⁵⁴

Reviewing this Chapter, it is remarkable that the County appeared to cope so well with the varied extent of provision required for its ‘unofficial’ evacuees and the above quote illustrates the gratitude felt by many adult evacuees towards the people of Devon. The County’s popularity throughout the war with privately funded evacuees placed it in the invidious position of being one of the foremost reception areas. Coupled with its prominence as a destination for both unofficial and official evacuees during 1940-1941 and its military importance, the challenge for Devon’s local authorities, educational and welfare services and for all those involved with evacuation, officials and householders alike, was exceptional. Unsurprisingly there were billeting difficulties, particularly with mothers and children. However, the overall picture was one of success and acceptance with very little overt complaint and much generosity. For example, one resident from Clyst Hydon received the British Empire Medal for housing nearly 40 mothers and children during a period of almost 5 years.³⁵⁵ Local daytime nursery provision established largely for evacuees, although not extensive, appeared to focus minds on its possible benefits. Much of this provision was retained postwar and plans in response to the Education Act promised more improvement. Wartime residential nurseries had also offered the unique opportunity to study and improve child care.

³⁵⁴ *Express & Echo*, 17 August 1945. Letter written by a ‘cockney’

³⁵⁵ *The Western Times*, 29 March 1945