

**VOLUME 2 OF 2**

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

**Submitted by S.J. HESS as a thesis for the degree of  
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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### **The ‘slum mentality’ of the evacuee – the myth challenged**

This Chapter firstly assesses Devon’s pre-war school medical service. Discussion then focuses on four crucial health issues which became problematic during evacuation, namely dirty habits, pediculosis (head lice), enuresis (bedwetting) and skin infections. The development of hostels for evacuees deemed unsuitable for billeting on arrival is also discussed. These health issues generated much adverse publicity, particularly during the first evacuation wave, and led to the persistent myth that evacuees were dirty, ill-trained and that they introduced pediculosis and skin infections into reception areas. Local documentary archive material is used to examine Devon’s experience and support the argument that generalised and exaggerated adverse publicity fostered a false stereotype. The largest number of evacuee children came to Devon in 1940 at a time when medical checks were improved, both in evacuation and reception areas. In addition the County already had an established degree of pediculosis and skin infections before evacuation. No evidence of a public or official outcry has been found locally to compare with reports emanating from some reception areas, particularly those areas receiving children from northern evacuation areas such as Merseyside.<sup>1</sup> This variance with the ‘received’ version of events highlights the importance of local research.

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<sup>1</sup> The percentage of Merseyside children suffering from pediculosis, who were evacuated to areas such as Herefordshire, Shropshire and Cheshire, was between 22-50% compared with children from London where the percentage ranged from 8-35%. R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.125. Shrewsbury reported that 31% of evacuated schoolchildren had unclean heads and West Suffolk gave the figure as 32.49% - B. Harris, *The Health of the Schoolchild* (Open University Press 1995) p.148

## Devon's School Medical Service

The School Medical Service was introduced by the Liberal Government in the 1907 Education Act,<sup>2</sup> and some of Devon's elementary school log books recorded medical visits at this time.<sup>3</sup> Local children also began to be weighed and measured<sup>4</sup> and assessed for 1d meals and free milk if found malnourished, although on a very small scale. Coldridge schoolchildren were evidently undergoing an immunisation programme for diphtheria by 1912 but the burden of paying for bacteriological throat swabs fell on the parents and there were strong protests.<sup>5</sup> There are entries during 1914-1915 for visits by the County Dentist<sup>6</sup> and School Oculist.<sup>7</sup> Butterleigh recorded one of the first visits by a school nurse to check for head lice in 1911 and a school doctor inspected children at Broadhembury in June 1912.<sup>8</sup> He requested that the girls tied their hair in two plaits and the school nurse remarked in September that this was one of the cleanest groups of children she had examined, only finding three families with dirty heads. Coldridge recorded regular difficulties with pediculosis and during 1923-5 between 15-20% of the school roll was frequently excluded whilst heads were cleaned.<sup>9</sup> DCEC *Circular 42* (January 1932) reminded teachers that hair must be tied back,<sup>10</sup> and it is evident that pediculosis was a minor and sometimes 'grave' problem<sup>11</sup> in Devon's schools well

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<sup>2</sup> The service was introduced on 1 January, 1908. The duty on local authorities was 'to provide for the medical inspection of children immediately before or at the time of or as soon as possible after the admission to a public elementary school, and on such other occasions as the Board of Education direct'. Harris, B. *The Health of the Schoolchild*, p.2

<sup>3</sup> *Butterleigh School Log Book 789C/EFL1* recorded a visit in 1908 and *Broadhembury Church of England School Log Book 3124C/EFL3* and *Budlake Broadclyst School Log Book 1806C/EAL1* recorded visits in 1909. A circular from Devon County Education Committee (*Crediton Hayward School File 1510C/EFA 25*) dated September 1909 gave instructions to headteachers regarding medical examinations at school. Medical inspection cards were issued for each pupil where heights, weights, clothing, cleanliness and vision were to be recorded. Parents were invited to inspections.

<sup>4</sup> A weighing machine was delivered to *Budlake Broadclyst School* in April 1910, *Log Book 1806C/EAL1*. *Brixham National School* was recording weighing and measuring by 1913, *Log Book 3651C/EFL2*.

<sup>5</sup> *Coldridge School Log Book 858AC/EFL2*

<sup>6</sup> *North Bovey 1411C/EFL4*, *Budlake Broadclyst 1806C/EAL1*, *Butterleigh 789C/EFL1* and *Clyst Hydon 2743C/EFL1* Log Books all record dental visits between February 1914 and February 1916.

<sup>7</sup> *Brixham National School Log Book 3651C/EFL2*

<sup>8</sup> *Butterleigh School Log Book 789C/EFL1*, *Broadhembury School Log Book 3124C/EFL3*

<sup>9</sup> *Coldridge School Log Book 858AC/EFL2*

<sup>10</sup> *Okehampton Senior School Correspondence 464C/EAM 215-221*

<sup>11</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1941, DCC150/4/5/1*, p.11

before the evacuees arrived, despite contemporary wartime comment that the country was ‘immune ...from this ever-present London risk’.<sup>12</sup>

The Fisher Act of 1918 converted the power invested in local authorities ‘to attend to the health and physical condition of children in elementary schools into a duty’.<sup>13</sup> However, under the 1921 Education Act there was no obligation on parents to submit a child for medical inspection and parents in Devon frequently objected in particular to dental treatment.<sup>14</sup> Payment to doctors for injuries sustained at school could be burdensome for parents ineligible for means testing.<sup>15</sup> Courses and lectures available for local teachers on subjects such as child psychology and methods for teaching dull, backward children were rare, usually held in London and funding and vacancies proved difficult to procure.<sup>16</sup> One improvement was the appointment by DCEC of an Organising Teacher of Retarded Children in October 1937. By 1939 the County was divided into 8 medical inspection areas with School Medical Officers expected to make at least two re-visits to urban schools and one to rural schools per year and school nurses averaging 6.3 visits per school. A County Psychologist was also in evidence at this time and during 1939 referred 6 children to both Plymouth and Exeter Child Guidance Clinics.<sup>17</sup> However, 1938 had ushered in plans for stringent economies and, having discovered that medical expenditure on schoolchildren was high compared

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<sup>12</sup> M. Cosens, ‘Evacuation – a social revolution’, *Social Work*, Vol. 2 Jan 1940, p.6.

<sup>13</sup> B. Harris, *The Health of the Schoolchild*, p.2. Harris also explained that the Fisher Act ‘gave local authorities the duty to make arrangements for the medical inspection of children in elementary and secondary schools and the power to attend to the health and physical condition of children in secondary schools’.

<sup>14</sup> *Coryton School Log Book 658C/EFL1-2* recorded that 13 out of 29 parents objected to school dental treatment in July 1938. *Zeal Monochorum Log Book 776C/EAL2* – May 1943 only about one-third willing to receive dental treatment.

<sup>15</sup> *Colebrooke School Log Book 542C/EAL2* recorded in 1938 that a mother was trying to claim damages from the school because her daughter’s fingers were badly injured whilst at school.

<sup>16</sup> *DCEC Circular No 77* dated 11 January 1938 advised teachers that in a few approved cases the Committee would make grants towards the cost of The Child Guidance Council’s vacation course in child psychology to be held in London. *DCEC Circular No 80* dated 12 May 1938 advertised lectures on Child Psychology in Torquay. *DCEC No 86* advised that only one vacancy had been applied for by DCEC for a course in London on problems and methods of teaching dull and backward children. *DCEC Circulars 2066C/EAM51* (DRO)

<sup>17</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1939, DCC150/4/5/1*

with other counties, cutbacks were planned.<sup>18</sup> Plymouth's ratio of medical staff per pupil was already well below that advised by the Board with 1 Medical Officer per 8,500 pupils (national average 1 per 6,450) and 1 general school nurse per 4,250 pupils (2,500-3,000 advised by Board).<sup>19</sup> Harris highlighted that nationally many of the problems during the first few months of war reflected 'the relatively little attention...given to maintenance of school medical services before war broke out'.<sup>20</sup>

### **Complaints about the health and hygiene habits of evacuee children**

A great listlessness among these people who were without any social traditions...these people had been "magicked" by the country ...The children, those funny little things out of the cities, with no manners, no knowledge of cleanliness, who stole anything and everything, had become grand.<sup>21</sup>

Particularly during the first evacuation wave, when medical checks were lax following a long summer holiday and the phoney war period appeared to stifle compassion in some quarters, vivid horror stories about the physical condition and behaviour of evacuees began to circulate. The 'long history of commentary'<sup>22</sup> on the ability of working-class mothers re-surfaced with a vengeance as negative publicity, generally emanating from members of the middle and upper classes,<sup>23</sup> reinforced

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<sup>18</sup> *Devon County Council Minutes DCC148/14, Appendix 1 to Report of Finance Committee*, 10 March 1938

<sup>19</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer for the City of Plymouth 1938*, pp. 179 and 181

<sup>20</sup> B. Harris, *The Health of the Schoolchild*, p.146

<sup>21</sup> *The Times Educational Supplement*, 8 May 1943 reporting on House of Lords debate on 5 May – quote taken from Lord Geddes's description of the beneficial effect of rural living on urban evacuees

<sup>22</sup> This stretched back to the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. See S. Rose, *Which People's War?* (Oxford University Press 2003) for further discussion. See also J. Welshman, *Underclass – A History of the Excluded 1880-2000* (Hambleton Continuum 2006) for discussion on the history of the concept of the 'underclass'.

<sup>23</sup> Oliver Lyttleton immortalized the 'dirty' evacuee in *The Memoirs of Lord Chandos* (The Bodley Head 1962) p.152. See also *Times Educational Supplement*, 8 May 1943, for comments by Lord Geddes, the Archbishop of York and Lord Snell, House of Lords debate on 5 May 1943.

views on the feckless urban poor. The following selection of random quotes aptly illustrates this pernicious attitude: ‘I saw these pathetic, dirty children myself...what is really shameful is that our system has allowed such creatures to grow up’,<sup>24</sup> (infection was being spread) ‘among our country children and their spotless home’,<sup>25</sup> ‘when my parents came to see me the people were surprised that they were so smart. They thought Londoners were not clean, they did not think we ate properly’.<sup>26</sup> Individuals and groups pressing for educational, moral and welfare reform during the 1930s eagerly seized on any hearsay evidence about ‘the submerged tenth’. The most influential lobbying came from the large numbers of voluntary middle-class workers in rural areas involved in the evacuation process who ‘perhaps more than any other section of the population, had very fixed ideas of social propriety’.<sup>27</sup> The 1940 NFWI Report<sup>28</sup> buttressed negative claims about evacuees by describing the ‘real shock’ of many of its members on finding ‘that many of the guests arrived in a condition and with modes of life or habits which were startlingly less civilised than those they had accepted for a life-time’.<sup>29</sup> Welcomed by those with eugenic and reform agendas, it reinforced an exaggerated perception that has remained for decades, both in the public memory and in historical texts, namely that ‘the evacuees...provided a close-up view of the conditions which many of the poor accepted as normal: children with head lice, impetigo and scabies, often unwashed and without any knowledge of elementary hygiene’.<sup>30</sup> The reinvigorated calls to educate girls in housewifery conflated with the fear of women’s new found wartime independence and subsequent drive to prepare women for a postwar return to domesticity.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Letter to *The Times*, dated 27 September 1939

<sup>25</sup> Letter to *The Times*, dated 29 September 1939 from a woman living in Henley-on-Thames

<sup>26</sup> P. Schweitzer, ed. *Goodnight Children Everywhere* (Age Exchange Theatre Trust 1990) p.47

<sup>27</sup> J. Macnicol, ‘The evacuation of schoolchildren’ in H. Smith ed. *War and Social Change: British society during the Second World War* (Manchester University Press 1986) p.27

<sup>28</sup> *Town Children Through Country Eyes* (NFWI 1940) pp. 4-5, 10,17

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* p.4

<sup>30</sup> J. Stevenson, *British Society 1914-1945* (Penguin 1984)p.141

<sup>31</sup> S. Rose, *Which People’s War?* pp.136,142,144 and 145

Months before evacuation took place concern was expressed amongst some members of the public about billeting 'dirty children'. Sir Percy Harris<sup>32</sup> insisted 'this is pure ignorance... London children from poorer districts ...delightful and charming...well brought up...well taught...clean and tidy'.<sup>33</sup> Despite this reassurance there were understandably problems with the state of some evacuees from the most deprived areas, particularly the North. This was acknowledged by the MH shortly following the first evacuation: 'in a limited number of districts the influx of persons in a dirty or verminous condition or suffering from skin trouble and similar ailments has presented a somewhat serious and distressing problem'.<sup>34</sup> A later government report compiled in June 1940 revealed that problems of pediculosis, enuresis and scabies appeared to be relatively minor in children from certain London and Manchester schools.<sup>35</sup> However, the *Summary Report* for the period 1 April 1939 - 31 March 1941 acknowledged that, allowing for exaggeration, there were nevertheless too many evacuated children suffering from pediculosis, skin diseases and uncleanly habits. Whilst recognising that living conditions in large towns were partially responsible, the report recommended instruction of young mothers in order to solve the problem permanently.<sup>36</sup> On balance this appeared to back educational remedies rather than addressing environmental factors,<sup>37</sup> thus echoing the view held by many from the middle and upper classes.

Nevertheless, the belief was shared by many during the war that the stories highlighting the shocking condition of evacuees were exaggerated. Titmuss later described the published statistics on head lice

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<sup>32</sup> Liberal M.P. for South West Bethnal Green

<sup>33</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 347, Col. 2330, 24 May 1939.

<sup>34</sup> *Ministry of Health Circular 1871*, 12 September 1939, found in *Okehampton 3248/16/2*. See also R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.125 and M. Parsons, *I'll Take That One* (Beckett Karlson Ltd. 1998) pp.195 and 197

<sup>35</sup> *PRO.ED 50/206* as cited in M. Parsons, *I'll Take That One*, p.264 - e.g. only 1 or 2 children with nits out of 670 pupils from Shepherd's Bush and only 8% from an East End school considered in need of special attention.

<sup>36</sup> *Summary Report by the Ministry of Health, Exeter City Council, Town Clerk's Papers, ARP Evac Group G, Box 1/8*

<sup>37</sup> These would include the problems of inadequate housing facilities, overcrowding, large families and the consequent ease of re-infestation

as ‘slovenly’,<sup>38</sup> whilst individual letters to *The Times* sought to redress the balance.<sup>39</sup> Members of Parliament highlighted the unfortunate exaggerations<sup>40</sup> as did various articles, surveys and reports into evacuation.<sup>41</sup> A contributor to the *London Schoolmasters’ Association Bulletin* wrote that the ‘exaggeration of the Press has made teachers physically sick’.<sup>42</sup> The LCC Education Department recorded that ‘unfortunately it was always the unusual incident of evacuation that attracted the attention of the press and the public’,<sup>43</sup> and the MH also believed that MOI reports stating that a large percentage of children were dirty and verminous was ‘a gross exaggeration, expressed in this general form’.<sup>44</sup> Locally, a lady wrote to her Vicar describing how she had worked for 30 years as a teacher in London. She spoke of the mothers’ distress as ‘they read the wholesale strictures on their (children’s) condition and conduct’. As the Vicar commented to the local press ‘they can’t write to *The Times*’ to defend their children’. He added that the local Evacuation Officer had told him that on average there were only about 25 ‘difficult’ cases in every 1,000 children and concluded ‘pray too for a heart of grace, that you too may look with compassion, and not with criticism, on these children who very possibly are the victims of circumstance’.<sup>45</sup> Endorsed by Hendrick,<sup>46</sup> Roberts’s

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<sup>38</sup> R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 125

<sup>39</sup> For example, *The Times*, 22 September 1939.

<sup>40</sup> For example, *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 352, Column 2233 (Sexton) and Column 2253 (Herbert Morrison), 2 November 1939, Volume 358, Column 340, 5 March 1940 (Chuter Ede).

<sup>41</sup> W. Boyd, ed. *Evacuation in Scotland* (University of London Press 1944) pp. 64, 115; R. Padley and M. Cole, *Evacuation Survey: A Report to the Fabian Society* (Routledge & Sons Ltd. 1940) pp. 214 and 253; J. E. Haine, ‘The Medical Side of Evacuation’, *The Medical Officer*, Volume 62, October 1939, pp. 147-8; G. Wagner, ‘Evacuation’, *Social Welfare*, IV, 6 (1940); ‘Our Social Evils’, *The Medical Officer*, Volume 69, April 1943, p. 106; S. Isaacs, ed. *The Cambridge Evacuation Survey* (Methuen & Co. Ltd. London 1941) pp. 3, 116-117; F. Le Gros Clark and R. W. Toms, *Evacuation – Failure or Reform Fabian Society Tract 1940* (Kraus Reprint 1969) p. 11; W. C. V. Brothwood, ‘Experience of Evacuation in a County Reception Area’, *Public Health*, 6, L111, 1940, pp. 126-127; F. Grundy and R. Titmuss, *Report on Luton*, p. 23 as cited in A. Oakley, *Man & Wife* (Flamingo 1997) p. 93; H. C. Dent, *Education in Transition* (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd. 1944) p. 13; *Times Educational Supplement*, 3 April 1943

<sup>42</sup> *L.S.A. Bulletin*, March 1940, 3 as cited in S. Rose, *Which People’s War?* p. 208

<sup>43</sup> R. Samways, ed. *We think you ought to go* (City of London, London Metropolitan Archives 1995) p. 14

<sup>44</sup> *MH 78/230* Notes on unsatisfactory aspects of evacuation compiled from reports of observers in Action Stations in England and Wales – letter sent from MOI to Ministry of Health dated 16 September 1939

<sup>45</sup> *Express and Echo*, 4 November 1939. Letter from the Vicar of Littleham-cum-Exmouth.

Also in *The Western Times*, 10 November 1939

<sup>46</sup> H. Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society 1880-1990* (Cambridge University Press 1997) p. 28. Hendrick acknowledged that ‘the traditional strict approach to child-rearing remained fairly widespread up to the 1940s, certainly among the working class’.



description of the strict discipline, including mealtime manners, imposed by working-class parents added perspective to alleged reports of bad behaviour by urban evacuees<sup>47</sup> and, from the late 1980s, other historians have highlighted the extent of exaggeration regarding the stereotypical somewhat repellent evacuee.<sup>48</sup>

Even without the additional problems of war, keeping clean was a daily struggle for a large proportion of families in an era of poor housing, inadequate and often deplorable sanitation, frequently ‘vermin ridden’ urban public baths and a booming second-hand clothing trade. Many children spent much of their lives in underground shelters before being evacuated and two sample evacuees have highlighted other factors. Margaret Funnell (8) from the Channel Islands was transported on a boat ‘still bloody’ from Dunkirk with no washing facilities and remembered the general comment on arrival in Devon about how dirty the children on the boat were. Iris Charos (10) explained ‘of course we were filthy from the train...we were all at the open window with grit and smoke coming in’. The largest number of evacuee children arrived in Devon during the summer and autumn of 1940 when medical checks were much improved. The London Metropolitan Evacuating Area had introduced medical examinations during the supplemental evacuation following the initial 1939 departure and by June 1940, 200 general practitioners reinforced teams of school doctors, checking LCC children on the day before departure.<sup>49</sup> However, local authorities had no power to insist on medical checks for the thousands of unofficial evacuees who came to the County and were a

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<sup>47</sup> E. Roberts, *A Woman's Place; an oral history of working-class women, 1890-1940* (Oxford Blackwell 1984) pp.11-15

<sup>48</sup> B. Wicks, *No Time to Wave Goodbye* (Bloomsbury 1988) p.86; M.Parsons, *I'll Take That One*, p.195; B.Holman, *The Evacuation: A Very British Revolution* (Lion Publishing 1995) pp. 78-9; J.Macnicol, ‘The evacuation of schoolchildren’ in H.Smith, ed. *War and Social Change: British society during the Second World War*, p.16. J. Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership, and the Second World War* (Oxford University Press 2002) pp.148, 150-151

<sup>49</sup> R. Samways, ed. *We think you ought to go*, p.11

potential health problem, although it was not difficult to arrange such checks in the case of unaccompanied children.<sup>50</sup>

### **Dirty Habits**

The term 'dirty habit' is somewhat ambiguous because sometimes it was used to describe problems such as enuresis, whilst reference to a 'dirty' evacuee could also mean that the child had head or body lice or was simply unwashed. Devon's MOH recorded in 1940 that those cases of children 'noted as being just dirty must be very few',<sup>51</sup> and the following year only 397 (1%) local and privately evacuated pupils and 325 (1.2%) officially evacuated pupils were recorded as being dirty.<sup>52</sup> Only three negative references have been found about the 'dirty habits' of evacuee children in extant local council archives. Paignton UDC hosted very large numbers of evacuees and kept well-documented records. During the third evacuation wave, 2,490 new evacuees came to Paignton. Weary and disgruntled householders, some of whom had billeted evacuees for over 4 years, complained of lack of assistance by the MH to enable them to get additional coupons to renew bed linen, mattresses and towels. Many had also relied on a pre-war income from seasonal holiday makers. It was thus hardly surprising that additional evacuees resulted in some complaints about such issues as 'stealing and unclean habits'. Some evacuee children were also found to have 'very dirty habits – not fit for general hostel'.<sup>53</sup> Ilfracombe UDC recorded in April 1941 that one evacuee aged 8 spent several months in the Sick Bay for dirty habits and enuresis. There were up to 1,229 unaccompanied evacuee children in the district at this time. In September 1944, a further 5 evacuee children between the ages of 6-9 spent several weeks in the Sick Bay due to dirty habits. There were between 300-400 unaccompanied children in the district at this time.<sup>54</sup> One Bristol

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<sup>50</sup> *Municipal Borough of Bideford, Minutes and Reports of Committees R2379A/(1/1)C25*, 8 November 1940

<sup>51</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1940, DCC 150/4/5/1*, p.9

<sup>52</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1941, DCC 150/4/5/1*, p.41.

<sup>53</sup> *Paignton Urban District Minutes R4582A/PC13*, 17 July 1944

<sup>54</sup> *Ilfracombe Urban District Council Sick Bay Admission and Discharge Book 1940-1945, R2458A/(2/3)C160*

evacuee child was withdrawn from its billet in Bideford RD 'owing to its dirty condition', although it is not clear whether the child was actually unwashed or suffering from head or body lice.<sup>55</sup> Both Bideford RDC and MB kept meticulous records on evacuation and hosted large numbers of evacuees yet this appears to be the only specific extant comment about dirty children. In addition to the local council records, one HMI mentioned bad habits and/or bad table manners amongst some of the poorer infant children from Acton (September 1939).<sup>56</sup> *The North Devon Journal* reported in November 1940 that the SMO for the Barnstaple area was very concerned about 'the uncleanly habits of some of the evacuee families'.<sup>57</sup> Several complaint letters were also found in *Exeter City Archive*. One householder complained that her evacuees 'had never received elementary training in sanitary decency'. A widow also complained that three siblings evacuated in 1941 had told her they were only used to sleeping on sawdust and were reportedly 'far from clean in their habits'.<sup>58</sup>

**Pediculosis** - the term 'unclean' was used to describe bodily dirtiness, head lice and body lice until March 1941 when the MH and Board issued revised circulars, superseding those issued in 1940, on measures to deal with head lice together with a request that the euphemism should be abandoned in favour of plain speaking, i.e. lousiness when describing head lice.<sup>59</sup> Confusion was therefore bound to have arisen in the figures before this ruling was introduced, a fact highlighted by Devon's MOH.<sup>60</sup> By 1941 Devon recorded all grades of infestation including 'nits only' under the collective heading of 'verminousness' and the standard of inspection was considered strict. However, many other authorities continued to exclude 'nits only' from their figures.<sup>61</sup> This practice may well have

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<sup>55</sup> *Bideford Rural District Council Minutes R2414A(1-5)C10*, p.299

<sup>56</sup> HMI Inspector, Mr Simmonds, reporting on Acton evacuees at Ugborough and Totnes – *ED134/270*

<sup>57</sup> *North Devon Journal*, 14 November 1940

<sup>58</sup> *Town Clerk's Papers, Exeter City A.R.P. Box 11, Group N*, April 1941

<sup>59</sup> *Times Educational Supplement*, 29 March 1941. *Newton Abbot Urban District Council Minutes R2361A/(5/4)C43*, 17 March 1941

<sup>60</sup> *DCC150/4/5/1 Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1940*, p. 9

<sup>61</sup> *DCC150/4/5/1 Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1941*, p. 11

been responsible for an underestimation of infestation amongst local children in many areas.

Meredith Davies (CMO) appears to have keenly espoused reform and was justly proud of the fact that separate records for local children, official and unofficial evacuees were kept between 1940-1942. He believed that Devon was the only reception area to conduct such systematic and comprehensive analysis'.<sup>62</sup>

In 1937, 7.9% of children nationally were found to be verminous,<sup>63</sup> although by 1941 Dr Kenneth Mellanby concluded from his inquiry, funded by the MH and Board, that the rate of verminous infestation was far higher than previously shown by the School Medical Reports. He also stated that rural areas had succeeded in dealing with the problem much better than urban areas.<sup>64</sup>

Complacency appeared to have set in prior to 1939 and evacuation led to a reassessment within the School Medical Service about tackling the problems of pediculosis and skin disease.<sup>65</sup> During the first evacuation wave, which caused the most furore, many SMOs in urban reception areas incorrectly claimed that pediculosis was 'virtually unknown' before the arrival of evacuees, also alleged in some rural areas.<sup>66</sup> However, Parsons and Starns (1999) found that 'medical records indicated there were already considerable problems associated with lice infestation in the countryside long before the arrival of evacuees'.<sup>67</sup> This is certainly the case in Devon where almost all the log books available for the pre-war years recorded regular checks<sup>68</sup> for pediculosis and

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<sup>62</sup> DCC150/4/5/1 *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1941*, p.5

<sup>63</sup> P.Thane, *The Foundations of the Welfare State* (Longman 1982) p.169. C.Loch Mowat, *Britain between the Wars 1918-1940* (Methuen & Co. Ltd. 1955) p.506

<sup>64</sup> Women's Group on Public Welfare, *Our Towns* (Oxford University Press 1943) pp.67, 69. R.Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp.126-7.

<sup>65</sup> See J.Welshman, 'Evacuation and Social Policy', *Twentieth Century British History*, Volume 9, Number 2, 1990, p.39

<sup>66</sup> J. Macnicol, 'The evacuation of schoolchildren' in H.Smith, ed. *War and Social Change: British society during the Second World War*, p.18. M.Cosens, 'Evacuation – a Social Revolution', *Social Work*, Volume 2, January 1940, p.6

<sup>67</sup> M.Parsons and P.Starns, *The Evacuation* (DSM 1999) p.70

<sup>68</sup> Carried out by school nurses and health visitors

included data on exclusions.<sup>69</sup> For example, one family whose children attended St Giles in the Wood were given a final warning in 1935 for persistent infestation,<sup>70</sup> and Milton Abbot School recorded several problem families and girls refusing to tie their hair back in 1937.<sup>71</sup> In Exeter, approximately 10% of schoolchildren had unclean heads for several years before the war,<sup>72</sup> and although no pre-war figures for Devon have been found, the problem was described as ‘grave’ in some areas before the arrival of evacuees.<sup>73</sup> In Plymouth, just over 11% of schoolchildren in 1938 were found ‘unclean’ with no improvement on this percentage for 5 years.<sup>74</sup> At Salisbury Road Senior Girls’ School, 10% of local girls had warnings when examined in October 1940, although the disruptive air raids undoubtedly exacerbated the problem.<sup>75</sup>

The problem was difficult to control because those under 5<sup>76</sup> and over 14 were often the cause of re-infestation amongst their school age siblings. Poor sanitation in local housing was undoubtedly also a major factor and Devon’s MOH was sympathetic to the problems:

houses unprovided with baths and good washing facilities,  
particularly when overcrowded, discourage the practice of

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<sup>69</sup> Examples include the following schools in the south and east - Aveton Giffard 2438C/EAL3, Axminster 2250C/EFL1, Budlake Broadclyst 1806C/EAL1, Broadhembury 3124C/EFL3, Buckerell 642C/EFL2, Cadeleigh 508C/EAL1, Cheriton Bishop 1933C/EAL2, Clyst Hydon 2743C/EFL1, Crediton Hayward Girls’ School 1510C/EFL2, Harberton 1277C/EFL1, Milton Abbot 2306C/EFL4, North Bovey 1411C/EFL4, Ogwell 396cEAL1, Revelstoke 790C/EFL1, Seaton 2270C/EFL3, Shaldon 2666C/EAL1, Throwleigh and Gidleigh 2066C/EAL2, Tiverton Chevithorne 752C/EFL5, Trusham 754C/EFL1, Ugborough 2437C/EAL4, Upton Pyne 758C/EFL1, Whitestone 768C/EFL1, Yeoford 3529C/EAL2. Schools in the North include Alverdiscott 622C/EFL3, Bradford 2323add/1, Broadwoodkelly Log Book 641C/EFL1, Bridgerule Log Book 2325C/EFL3 (10% excluded in October 1938), Challacombe 649C/EFL1 (Parents complained about great difficulty in keeping heads clean in November 1924), George Nympton 668C/EFL1, Great Torrington Blue Coat School 3074C/EFL3, Iddesleigh and Dowland 681C/EFL1, Little Torrington 393C/EFL3, Merton 1207C/EFL1, Pilton B6Z/3/4, St Giles in the Wood 1210C/EFL4, South Molton United B366/35

<sup>70</sup> *St Giles in the Wood School Log Book 1210C/EFL4*

<sup>71</sup> *Milton Abbot School Log Book 2306C/EFL4*

<sup>72</sup> *Exeter City Education Committee Minutes, ECA/19/95 Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1942*, p. 6

<sup>73</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1941, DCC150/4/5/1*, p. 11

<sup>74</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer for the City of Plymouth 1938*, p.184 ( held at Westcounty Studies Library)

<sup>75</sup> *Salisbury Road Senior Girls’ School Log Book 2329/2*

<sup>76</sup> Dr Mellanby’s 1941 survey revealed that infestation at ages 2,3 and 4 approached 50%, Women’s Group on Public Welfare, *Our Towns* (Oxford University Press 1943) p.72

personal hygiene... unless personal hygiene is a daily routine, 1 or 2 lice picked up from a school fellow will soon produce heavy infestation... however well the children are kept, if there is a constant source of re-infestation in the home... even daily attention will fail to prevent occasional slight infestation'.<sup>77</sup>

What is remarkable is the relative absence of recorded negative comment about pediculosis in Devon during the war despite the large number of evacuees. This is even more notable considering that overcrowded trains, classrooms and billets (often with crude sanitation and foster parents with little time to treat hair) coupled with the absence of school checks during the hot summer of 1939, either for local or evacuee children, undoubtedly encouraged a considerable increase in pediculosis. As previously highlighted, Devon's introduction to evacuation in September 1939 was much more gentle<sup>78</sup> compared with counties such as Essex, Kent, Hertfordshire, Sussex and Lancashire.<sup>79</sup> However, the number was still large enough to potentially create serious problems at a time when medical checks were haphazard. Added to this there were also approximately 4,411 unofficial unaccompanied children billeted in the County during September.

Prior to the second evacuation wave the MH issued overdue guidance on pediculosis for local authorities. Further Joint Circulars issued by the MH and Board,<sup>80</sup> together with a letter from the Government's Chief MOH (16 May 1940) addressed to SMOs in evacuation areas, outlined arrangements for medical examinations of registered children prior to Evacuation Plan IV and stressed the importance of keeping all children under frequent supervision particularly with regard

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<sup>77</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1942 DCC150/4/5/1*, p.9

<sup>78</sup> Returns for October–November 1939 showed a total of 9,623 official evacuees, of whom 6,947 were unaccompanied schoolchildren., *DCC Committee Minutes 148/15*, 14 March 1940

<sup>79</sup> R.Padley and M.Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, Table 2, p.50.

<sup>80</sup> *Circular 1942*, dated 29 January 1940 together with *Memo 230/Med. Memo Ev8, Joint Circular MH 1979, B of E 1504*, dated 12 March 1940, *Joint Circular MH 2027, B of E 1509*, dated 21 May 1940, *Education*, Volume LXXV, pp. 250, 432

to ‘conditions of uncleanliness and contagious skin diseases’. Another Joint Circular (17 July 1940) reminded LEAs in evacuating areas that even when schools were closed, medical inspection and continued supervision plus a medical examination on the day preceding departure was necessary for further stages of evacuation.<sup>81</sup> At the height of this second evacuation Devon’s MOH recorded that 2,151 (6.8%) local children and 4,388 officially evacuated schoolchildren (10%) were found to be verminous and/or dirty.<sup>82</sup> Rather than placing the blame on their unsanitary habits, he believed that a major contributory factor for the raised level amongst evacuees was that foster parents left them to comb their own hair.<sup>83</sup> One sample evacuee remembered the enjoyment he had with his foster mother searching out ‘nits’ in his hair and there were doubtless many other foster mothers who sensibly addressed the problem. Although medical checks were much improved by 1940, both in evacuation and reception areas, there were more problems with children evacuated during the latter part of the Blitz period due to time spent in shelters and interrupted school medical services. Amongst DCC records there is one reference to pediculosis in a memorandum referring briefly to a number of child evacuees who arrived in the County in a verminous condition at the end of 1940 resulting in expenditure on clinics and drugs which amounted to £96.4s.1d.<sup>84</sup>

Devon’s MOH described pediculosis as ‘most acute’ in 1941. Stricter standards of inspection were in place but more evacuees arrived from the bombed urban areas of Plymouth and Bristol where conditions were difficult.<sup>85</sup> The situation in Plymouth, with very few evacuees but dire wartime conditions, was serious. The number still on the school roll was approximately 1,966 and a staggering 1,686 (86%) were found to be verminous.<sup>86</sup> This indicates strongly that wartime conditions coupled with strains on the school medical service could very quickly result in an

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<sup>81</sup> *Joint Circular Ministry of Health 2098, Board of Education 1519, 3248A/16/4-9*

<sup>82</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1940 DCC150/4/5/1*, p. 36

<sup>83</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1941 DCC150/4/5/1*, p. 28

<sup>84</sup> *DCC Evacuation Box* .

<sup>85</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1941, DCC150/4/5/1*, p.11

<sup>86</sup> *Interim Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the City of Plymouth 1941, 1363/27*

escalation of infection. Thus it is unsurprising that the percentage of infection amongst evacuees rose even before leaving evacuation areas. In March, MH Circular 2306 and Board Circular 1544, issued following the disturbing findings in Mellanby's 1941 report (see above), urged LEAs to instigate more intensive cleanliness surveys. In response DCEC resolved that steps be taken to instruct the schools and urge the local sanitary authorities of Barnstaple, Bideford, Brixham, Dartmouth, Dawlish, Exmouth, Ilfracombe, Newton Abbot, Okehampton, Paignton and Tiverton to establish cleansing stations for the public to which evacuated schoolchildren and members of the public could be taken for disinfestations.<sup>87</sup>

During 1942 an Infestation Index<sup>88</sup> was recorded for the first time in Devon following criticisms made in *Our Towns* against LEAs in general, and Evacuation LEAs in particular, for not publishing such statistics.<sup>89</sup> Approximately 11.9% of schoolchildren were found to be verminous on at least one occasion and a new scheme was adopted employing 'nursing assistants' in the more urban areas of the County.<sup>90</sup> By the end of the year an experimental scheme was also introduced for the inspection and cleansing heads of verminous children by women without professional qualifications thus saving time of school nurses.<sup>91</sup> In Plymouth, where the school population had risen to approximately 14,500 as children returned from evacuation, pediculosis (varying in degree from 1 nit to many live vermin) was found in 116 children per 1,000.<sup>92</sup> The percentage of verminous children under DCEC was still 10.1 in 1943 although by December there were only 6,412 officially evacuated schoolchildren left in the County.<sup>93</sup> In Exeter, where there were only 151 evacuees left by the end of the year, 16.6% of schoolchildren were recorded as verminous. The SMO felt that

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<sup>87</sup> *Devon County Education Committee Minutes DCC150/4/1/39*, p. 37

<sup>88</sup> Obtained by dividing the number of individual children found infested by the estimated average attendance, multiplied by 100.

<sup>89</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1943 DCC150/4/5/1*, p.14

<sup>90</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1942 DCC150/4/5/1*, pp.2 and 9

<sup>91</sup> *Devon County Education Committee Minutes DCC150/4/1/40*, p.188

<sup>92</sup> *Interim Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the City of Plymouth 1942, 1363/28*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 5 and 14



much of the problem was due to a small number of difficult families, carelessness and mothers out at work.<sup>94</sup> Plymouth recorded an 11% infestation.<sup>95</sup>

Only two specific complaints concerning verminous evacuees were found amongst extant local council archives. Tiverton RDC complained about the dirty condition of many children evacuated to Thorveton from Bristol in 1941,<sup>96</sup> and Bideford RDC also recorded problems with Bristol evacuees in June 1942. The SMO stated that approximately 35% of 20 new arrivals from Bristol were unfit for billeting, with 6 suffering from head lice. The CBO wrote to the Chairman of Bristol Education Committee and the Medical Department 'expressing strong views as to the apparent lack of medical attention before evacuation'. Nothing much appeared to be done to rectify matters in Bristol because a further 27 evacuees arrived on 18 September and 10 out of the 26 intended for billets had to be taken to the hostel for temporary treatment for suspected dirty heads.<sup>97</sup> Positive comments about evacuees included the report of the MOH for Budleigh Salterton UDC who stated that the general appearance, clothing etc of the 102 schoolchildren who arrived in July 1940 was satisfactory and only 3 needed medical treatment. Another party of 98 who arrived the following November were also all medically satisfactory.<sup>98</sup> Ottery St Mary UDC recorded that the dentist and doctor examined the new evacuees in March 1942 and 'expressed their complete satisfaction of the condition and welfare of the children'.<sup>99</sup> Appendix 25 lists all known extant recorded entries in local council archives relating to pediculosis and its treatment.

Only one recorded complaint suggesting that pediculosis became problematic as a result of evacuation was found in the 262 elementary school log books deposited at DRO and NDRO. The

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<sup>94</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1943, ECA/19/95, p.6*

<sup>95</sup> *Interim Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the City of Plymouth 1943, 1363/29*

<sup>96</sup> *Tiverton Rural District Council Minutes R4/4addC1, 11 March 1941.*

<sup>97</sup> *Bideford Rural District Council R2414A(1-5)C11, 30 June and 22 September 1942, pp. 26 and 49*

<sup>98</sup> *Budleigh Salterton Urban District Council Minutes R7/3/C14*

<sup>99</sup> *Ottery St Mary Urban District Council Minutes R7/5/C12*

Headteacher of Totnes Infants' School wrote that 'the general cleanliness of the school has been adversely affected by the influx of evacuee children, therefore the school nurse would have to make more frequent visits.'<sup>100</sup> This entry was made in September 1941 following the extra intake of evacuees from Bristol and Plymouth. There were already large numbers of LCC evacuees who had arrived at the school in 1939 and 1940 when the SMO had stated that with a few exceptions 'they were generally very clean'.<sup>101</sup> By contrast, some headteachers specifically decided to record very positive comments about the cleanliness of evacuee children, sometimes contrasting them with local children. All the Acton children were found to be clean at Hennock in September 1939 whereas several local children were not.<sup>102</sup> At Witheridge National where there were 66 local children and 107 evacuees in June 1940, the LCC nurse found all evacuees to be clean after the summer holiday.<sup>103</sup> In November 1940, at the peak of the second evacuation wave, the SMO was recorded as being 'especially pleased with the evacuated children' at North Bovey,<sup>104</sup> and North Tawton Senior School recorded 100% cleanliness in the 139 local children and 108 evacuees.<sup>105</sup> In January 1941 the school nurse reported a high standard of cleanliness by both local and evacuee children at Washfield,<sup>106</sup> and in April the school nurse examined 36 local children and 23 official evacuees at Morebath and found 'perfect cleanliness of all scholars'.<sup>107</sup> In July 1944 the school nurse found all the evacuees perfectly clean at Stoke Fleming although some local children were not and at Shaldon every evacuated child was 'in a perfectly satisfactory condition' as regards cleanliness but one local

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<sup>100</sup> *Totnes Infants and Standard I Log Book 2440C/EAL8*

<sup>101</sup> *Totnes Rural District Council Minutes R9/8/37*

<sup>102</sup> *Hennock School Log Book 219C/EFL4*

<sup>103</sup> *Witheridge National School Log Book B40A/4/3*

<sup>104</sup> *North Bovey School Log Book 1411C/EFL4*

<sup>105</sup> *North Tawton Senior School Log Book 1212C/ESL1*

<sup>106</sup> *Washfield School Log Book 762C/EFL1-2*

<sup>107</sup> *Morebath School Log Book 703C/EFL1*

child was excluded and one warned.<sup>108</sup> Very few evacuees were recorded as being excluded with pediculosis although problems with regularly excluded local children were evident. In February 1943, DCEC produced Circular 30 specifically to warn headteachers that because some of them were informing children about impending checks for head lice ‘some habitual offenders are kept away from school by parents’.<sup>109</sup>

The argument could be made that headteachers were too busy dealing with the dramatic school roll increase to record pediculosis problems amongst evacuees. However, the pattern of recording daily minutiae in log books, which generally included all visits by local and LCC school nurses and health visitors, together with the requirement to record exclusions of children, renders it unlikely that if there had been a specific problem it would not have been recorded in some way. For example, St Nicholas School at Sidmouth, where there were 149 local children and unofficial evacuees and 109 official evacuees in March 1942, clearly recorded in June 1942 that an exclusion for head lice was the first case for over a year.<sup>110</sup> Tavistock Senior Church School excluded one girl out of 327 in July 1941 and one in November.<sup>111</sup> Barnstaple Holy Trinity Girls and Infants’ School, which became very overcrowded during 1940-1941 and made no mention of any pediculosis problems during this time, recorded 7 exclusions out of 158 after the holiday period in 1942.<sup>112</sup> Chittlehamholt School had 25 local children and 90 evacuees by February 1941. One exclusion for pediculosis was recorded in March 1942.<sup>113</sup> There are only 3 schools which recorded large numbers of exclusions: Brixham National pupil roll had doubled in size by July 1940 but no problems were recorded until March 1941 when there were additional evacuees from Plymouth, France and

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<sup>108</sup> *Stoke Fleming School Log Book 2439C/EAL4, Shaldon Log Book 2666C/EAL1*

<sup>109</sup> *DCEC Circular 30, 2066C/EAM51*

<sup>110</sup> *St Nicholas School Log Book 1525C/EFL7-8*

<sup>111</sup> *Tavistock Senior Church of England School Log Book 792C/EFL9-10*

<sup>112</sup> *Barnstaple Holy Trinity Girls and Infants’ School Log Book 2836C/EAL3, June 1942*

<sup>113</sup> *Chittlehamholt School Log Book 651Cadd/EFL1*

Belgium and 22 girls were excluded.<sup>114</sup> Stoke Fleming, where there were approximately 35 local children and 107 evacuees, excluded 32 children in May 1941.<sup>115</sup> Northam Appledore Junior excluded 11 children in March 1945 when most evacuees had returned. Throughout the entire war period there was no mention of any other problem regarding pediculosis.<sup>116</sup>

Pediculosis was clearly a nuisance in Devon before the arrival of evacuees and understandably became more troublesome during 1940 and 1941 when the number of schoolchildren doubled. It appears that evacuees from Bristol and Plymouth posed more problems on arrival than those from other areas. Devon's infestation rate settled back to 7% in 1945 'still high enough to be ashamed of',<sup>117</sup> although Exeter's had increased to 19.8%<sup>118</sup> and some areas of the County also appeared to be experiencing problems. In May 1945 a letter was written by Bideford Elementary School Managers to the Council complaining about the prevalence of pediculosis and asking if it had power to make a bye-law which would enable summary proceedings to be taken against parents who habitually allowed their children with unclean heads to associate with other children.<sup>119</sup> Bideford Infants' Church School experienced very little problem during the war but in 1945 the problem appeared to increase. In May 1946 there were 14 new admissions, half with head lice. In September there were 6 cases amongst the new intake.<sup>120</sup> Bishops Tawton Junior Mixed and Infants recorded no problems during the war period but did have 'a few bad cases' in January and October 1945.<sup>121</sup> DCEC recommended that where convenient the cleansing stations set up by the Sanitary Authorities should be used for the 'cleaning of verminous school children'.<sup>122</sup> By December 1945 there were

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<sup>114</sup> *Brixham National School Log Book (Girls) 3651C/EFL2*

<sup>115</sup> *Stoke Fleming School Log Book 2439C/EAL4*

<sup>116</sup> *Northam Appledore Junior School Log Book 2489Cadd.EAL5*

<sup>117</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1945 DCC150/4/5/1*, pp.17-18

<sup>118</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1945, ECA19/96*, pp. 5-6

<sup>119</sup> *Bideford Municipal Borough, Minutes and Reports of Committees, R2379A/(1/1)C29*, Health Committee May 1945

<sup>120</sup> *Bideford Church School Infants' Log Book 3238C/EFL3*

<sup>121</sup> *Bishops Tawton Junior Mixed and Infants' School Log Book 2310C/EFL2*

<sup>122</sup> *Devon County Council Minutes, Education Committee Report, June 1945*

approximately 17 nursing assistants employed by the County to check children's heads.<sup>123</sup> In response to the requirements of the Education Act, Plymouth recorded the allocation of a nurse to each school with responsibility for examining 'persons and clothing' of all pupils (about 2,000 children per nurse) once weekly if possible.<sup>124</sup>

### **Enuresis**

No other aspect of the social results of evacuation received so much publicity or lent itself so easily to exaggeration and misunderstanding. It was misunderstood because hitherto it had not been discussed, and it was exaggerated, partly because it had not been expected, and partly because it represented, along with all the other sacrifices involved in accepting strangers in the house, a burden on country people out of all proportion to the war effort then being made by the nation.<sup>125</sup>

Evacuation exposed the hitherto barely mentioned problem of enuresis and was followed by a similar exaggerated outcry as that over pediculosis. Inferior maternal training was frequently cited,<sup>126</sup> and Samuel Gill<sup>127</sup> 'blamed the problem on low social standards which he believed were inherited'.<sup>128</sup> *Our Towns* described the insanitary habits of evacuees as the greatest scandal and a revelation of the more squalid aspects of some town dwellers. The Report accurately stated that the complex issue of enuresis had not been adequately studied and also acknowledged that sanitary

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<sup>123</sup> *Devon County Council Minutes DCC148/16*, 13 December 1945

<sup>124</sup> *Interim Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the City of Plymouth 1945*, 1363/31

<sup>125</sup> R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp. 121-2

<sup>126</sup> *Town Children through Country Eyes* (NFWI 1940) p.5 concluded that 'though admittedly, the predominant reason was lack of home training, many other contributory causes are given – some correct, some incorrect.

<sup>127</sup> Secretary of the Guardianship Society in Brighton

<sup>128</sup> J. Welshman, 'Evacuation and Social Policy during the Second World War', *Twentieth Century British History*, Volume 9, No 1 1998, p.49

facilities were often disgraceful and needed much improvement in both homes and schools. However its emphasis on issues such as lack of training in infancy, wrong feeding, lack of concern by some parents and laziness both of children and parents, together with the recommendation that ‘training in sanitary habits should be regarded as an important part of health education’ strongly suggested that inferior maternal training was frequently to blame.<sup>129</sup> Titmuss admitted that the Government had not foreseen the seriousness of the problem which he felt was primarily a symptom of emotional disturbance for which foster parents were unprepared. He felt that there was a failure to heed the lessons from the 1934 LCC memorandum ‘Enuresis in Residential Schools’ and other evidence of pre-war enuresis amongst older children.<sup>130</sup> One example of government unpreparedness was the delay in delivering mackintosh overlays for young children ordered in May 1939. Only a small number were delivered to local authorities in time for the first evacuation wave.<sup>131</sup> Examples of local initiative include St Thomas RDC which ordered sheeting in September 1939 as a temporary measure<sup>132</sup> and Honiton RDC which discussed ordering sheeting if necessary in September 1939.<sup>133</sup> Newton Abbot UDC placed orders in July and August 1940.<sup>134</sup> Others may well have done the same but no record has been found.

Nevertheless, as with pediculosis there were plenty of contemporary articles and reports to counterbalance criticism of parental care and training. *The Cambridge Evacuation Survey* highlighted the ‘amazing ignorance’ of those in the community,<sup>135</sup> and Padley and Cole concluded that the principal causes for the outbreak of bed-wetting in the early days of evacuation were insecurity, anxiety over the safety of parents and friends, the emotional upset of leaving home, the

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<sup>129</sup> Women’s Group on Public Welfare, *Our Towns* (Oxford University Press 1943) pp. 83-91

<sup>130</sup> R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp.120-1

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.* *Problems of Social Policy*, p.121

<sup>132</sup> *St Thomas Rural District Council Minutes R7/10/C20*

<sup>133</sup> *Honiton Rural District Council Minutes, Emergency Committee R7/9/C/41*

<sup>134</sup> *Newton Abbot Urban District Council Minutes R2361A/(5/4)C43*

<sup>135</sup> S. Isaacs, ed. *The Cambridge Evacuation Survey* (Methuen & Co. Ltd. London 1941) p. 47

strangeness of new people, fears of doing the wrong thing and in a few cases a cool reception.<sup>136</sup> A leading educational psychologist, who had reliable pre-war figures for city children from the slums, explained the problem as a new manifestation in many if not most cases. Much of the problem was due to fear-neurosis but older children were sometimes manifesting anger-neurosis.<sup>137</sup> Boyd also found that there was some deliberate bed-wetting amongst children in Scotland who were homesick and wanted to be sent home.<sup>138</sup> Investigation by a 'skilled psychologist' into the evacuation of children from Bradford found that the enuretics did not come from homes where there had been no training, 'as popularly supposed'.<sup>139</sup> The Vice-Principal of the Cheltenham and County Child Guidance Clinic responded angrily to a report given by Northampton's SMO that stern warnings and explanations had been given to the culprits 'does he not know that enuresis occurs through anxiety, and, after the age of three, almost entirely through anxiety?'.<sup>140</sup> Reasons for anxiety were manifold and included town children's fear of ghosts and bogies in the countryside,<sup>141</sup> dark bedrooms, sleeping with strangers, fear of being reprimanded having been told to stay in bed, fear of asking where the toilet was on arrival, fear of using the outside toilet and lack of a suitable alternative. One evacuee from the Devon sample urinated in the fireplace because he woke up in the middle of the night and was too frightened to go down to the end of the garden. Shirley B (6) was very happy in her Devon billet for over 4 years but wet the bed most nights because she was scared of her elderly female school teacher. Elsie (10) became a bedwetter during her evacuation to Devon which lasted over two years. She was very unhappy and the problem ceased when she returned home. She had to suffer the indignity of being made to stand on a chair in assembly by her London headmaster, who told the whole school that she had wet the bed because she was too lazy to

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<sup>136</sup> R.Padley and M.Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, pp.187-8

<sup>137</sup> C.Burt, 'The Incidence of Neurotic Symptoms among evacuated schoolchildren', *The British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Volume X, February 1940, pp. 8-15

<sup>138</sup> W.Boyd, *Evacuation in Scotland*, p.107

<sup>139</sup> *Education*, Volume LXXIV, 22 December 1939 p.521

<sup>140</sup> *The Times Educational Supplement*, 16 November 1940.

<sup>141</sup> R.Padley and M.Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p. 225

get up. One letter found in the Exeter archives from a distressed mother pleading that her young son must not be caned again by his host for bedwetting illustrates the trauma that could be experienced by children if foster parents were unsympathetic.<sup>142</sup>

Lessons were learned from the first evacuation and, following government advice, arrangements were made locally by June 1940 for medical examinations to be conducted at detraining stations as the County braced itself for the second and largest evacuation wave.<sup>143</sup> Evacuating authorities were asked to classify children with problems such as enuresis before departure and the Government assured billeting officers that the problem would ‘tend to disappear as the children settle down’.<sup>144</sup> The LCC contacted local authorities in May 1940, outlining the medical symbols to be written in red pencil on each child’s identification label before leaving London.<sup>145</sup> These measures appeared successful and the MOH for the Holsworthy area reported that all the evacuees (approximately 140) who arrived in September-October 1940 had been examined not more than 4 days before arrival in Devon. They were ‘all pretty healthy’ and only 1 was temporarily placed in a hostel.<sup>146</sup> However, as mentioned above, it appears that Bristol evacuees were not always sufficiently well-checked before departure. Barnstaple MB was clearly irritated on finding 16 enuretic cases amongst a party of 160 children who arrived on 19 November 1941 because only 3 of these were recorded as enuresis cases on medical cards. A further 8 children were recorded as being enuretic

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<sup>142</sup> *Town Clerk’s Papers, Exeter City A.R.P. Box 11, Group N, April 1941*

<sup>143</sup> *Devon County Council Minutes DCC148/15*

<sup>144</sup> *Notes for Billeting Officer, Town Clerk’s Papers, A.R.P. Evacuation Box 12, Group N*

<sup>145</sup> A cross indicated the child had been medically examined, a circle indicated hostel requirements and a square indicated special consideration. On the back of the label, letters A-G indicated impetigo, scabies, vermin, nits, enuresis, infectious disease contact and other conditions - *Town Clerk’s Papers, City of Exeter A.R.P. Evacuation, Group N, Box 14*

<sup>146</sup> *Holsworthy Urban District Council Minutes 2588add/1, p.29*



but no requests or complaints were received from foster parents. The same party also included 2 siblings with ‘approaching Whooping Cough’.<sup>147</sup>

Titmuss described in detail the two clear-cut phases of hostel development for ‘difficult cases’ which included enuretics. The first phase was 1939 to mid-1941 when hostels were hurriedly put in place, often becoming ‘dumps’ for all kinds of children deemed unbilleteable. The second phase, where greater attention was paid to organisation, quality and treatment, was developed from mid-1941 when the Government took advantage of a respite in air raids to implement suggestions from the Shakespeare Report. It highlighted the need for special hostels for bedwetters, emotional children, delinquents and children suffering from infectious diseases. It also recommended that because children were often being evacuated from shelter life, where possible they should be rested and cleaned up in emergency hospitals or temporary hostels before billeting.<sup>148</sup> The focus was now much more on training and curative measures to prepare children for rebilleting and this phase continued throughout 1942-3.<sup>149</sup> The MH had originally suggested requisitioning property to use as hostels for difficult cases in Circular 1871 (12 September 1939) and Circular 1882 (2 October 1939). Some reception areas with large numbers of evacuees evidently took this advice and a Circular Letter (8 January 1940) from the Mental Health Emergency Committee in London commented on its considerable interest in work being done in reception areas regarding the provision of hostels.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> *Barnstaple Municipal Borough 2654add4/Box 13*

<sup>148</sup> *Report on Conditions in Reception Areas by a Committee under the Chairmanship of Mr Geoffrey Shakespeare, M.P* (HMSO 1941) p.10

<sup>149</sup> R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp. 164-5, 379-381. See also P.H.J. H. Gosden, *Education in the Second World War* (Methuen & Co. Ltd. 1976) pp.175-6

<sup>150</sup> *Town Clerk's Papers, City of Exeter A.R.P. Evacuation, Group N, Box 12/118*. See also *Ministry of Health 'Hostels for "Difficult" children'* published in 1944, a copy of which was found amongst a file belonging to *Ilfracombe UDC R2458A/(2/3)C260*

However, as new plans for a possible second evacuation wave were formulated, the Government was concerned that arrangements for medically examining and cleansing children before departure might break down if bombing raids occurred. Anxious not to offside householders in reception areas, the Treasury was persuaded to relax its restrictions on hostel accommodation. MH Circular 2032 (24 May 1940) introduced an important policy change by finally permitting local authorities, subject to approval by regional officers,<sup>151</sup> to incur necessary and reasonable expenditure in acquiring and equipping emergency hostels ‘in anticipation of evacuation’ to accommodate up to 5% of the quota of unaccompanied schoolchildren who were found to be unsuitable for billeting on arrival.<sup>152</sup> It was not until the summer of 1940 that requisitioned properties began to be set up as clearing hostels in Devon, accommodating children who could not be billeted on arrival for a variety of short term reasons, including enuresis, dirty condition, skin infections and lack of appropriate billets. Each local authority took its own decisions as to what hostels were needed but examples in Devon include Newton Abbot, where there were such serious billeting shortages in June 1940 that the local MH representative intervened to push through ‘immediately’ the council decision to requisition two properties.<sup>153</sup> Exeter also opened 3 hostels in June 1940<sup>154</sup> where 80 (3.4%) unaccompanied children were accommodated and the remaining 2,264 were billeted. By August the number of billeted children had risen to 3,439 although those in hostels had only risen by one.<sup>155</sup> In the same month there were 32,348 billeted unaccompanied children in Devon with only 558 (1.7%) housed in hostels.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Approval for hostels in Devon had to be granted by the Regional Office of the Ministry of Health (Bristol).

<sup>152</sup> *City of Plymouth Evacuation File 1645/1//12/20*. Also *Newton Abbot Rural District Council Minutes R2365A/(5/6)C31*

<sup>153</sup> *Newton Abbot Urban District Council Minutes R2361A/(5/4)C42*

<sup>154</sup> Sandford Hall, Loma-Loma and Southlands. *Exeter City Education Committee Minutes ECA/19/94-96*, p. 69, 28 June 1940

<sup>155</sup> *Town Clerk's Papers, Exeter City A.R.P. Box 14, Group N*

<sup>156</sup> *Devon County Council Minutes 148/15*

In response to the publication (January 1941) and recommendations of the Shakespeare Report, the MH Regional Officer asked the authorities in Devon to consider setting up separate accommodation for the following classes of unaccompanied children:

1. Combined clearing hostel and hostel for bedwetters
2. Hostels for difficult children
3. Sick bay for minor ailments including scabies and impetigo
4. Auxiliary isolation hospital if existing permanent and improvised  
emergency isolation hospitals were insufficient

Paignton UDC had over 4,909 evacuees by July 1941. The records indicate that arrangements for evacuees were extremely well-organised and the Council had already requisitioned 4 houses, each for separate problems, by November 1940.<sup>157</sup> The complacent comment that the Government's directive had been anticipated therefore appears to be well founded.<sup>158</sup> By March 1941, 3,802 unaccompanied schoolchildren were billeted in Exeter with 82 (2%) in hostels, which was only a few weeks after the arrival of over 500 children from Bristol.<sup>159</sup> Appendix 26 lists the hostels (excluding Exeter) in place by August 1941. In addition, the Isolation Hospital in Exeter serviced the County Borough as well as 16 other urban and rural districts.

In February 1942 the MH introduced an extra billeting allowance of 2s.6d for foster parents with enuretic evacuees. Macnicol and Welshman have both found indications that some foster parents invented bed-wetting cases to claim the additional laundry allowance.<sup>160</sup> One evacuee from the

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<sup>157</sup> 62 Dartmouth Road for difficult boys and a few bed-wetters accommodating up to 16; Clare Lodge for bed-wetters and dirty heads; Dunedin for mild infectious cases; Atherfield for skin complaints. *Paignton Urban District Council Minutes R4582A/PC9*, 4 November 1940

<sup>158</sup> *Paignton Urban District Council Minutes R4582A/PC9*, February 1941

<sup>159</sup> *Town Clerk's Papers, Exeter City A.R.P. Box 12, Group N*, 6 March 1941

<sup>160</sup> J.Macnicol, 'The Evacuation of Schoolchildren' in H.Smith, ed. *War and Social Change: British society during the Second World War*, p.16; J.Welshman, 'Evacuation and Social Policy during the Second World War', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 9, No 1, 1998, p.49

Devon sample<sup>161</sup> remembered spontaneously that her cousin's foster mother hung out sheets regularly claiming that her evacuee was a bedwetter. The principles of compensation and replacement of damaged articles, bedding and carpets had already been defined in Circular 1897 (24 October 1939). Compensation up to £5 was allowed without reference to the Senior Regional Officer although he had to be notified about all payments. Claims to local councils for damage caused by evacuees were usually for damaged bedding, although damage to furniture, crockery, walls and carpets were also included. The recorded claims listed in Devon's local council financial accounts for the war years (Appendix 27) are very few considering the large numbers of evacuees, were not always accepted as genuine and were usually for amounts under £3. Only one recorded official complaint has been found in extant records which expressed the concern of Newton Abbot RDC's Accounts Sub-Committee in February 1941 that in certain cases new bedding material supplied to evacuees in requisitioned houses 'had to be destroyed after being in use for a few weeks only due to lack of care and cleanliness'.<sup>162</sup> Unlike Devon, those reception areas which received large numbers of evacuees in September 1939, before hostels were set up and waterproof sheeting became readily available, would probably have had many more claims for damaged bedding.

Because hostels were set up locally in each district as and when needed there unfortunately appear to be no comprehensive County lists of the exact numbers, locations, dates and modus operandi of each hostel or detailed numbers and length of stay of temporarily accommodated enuretics. Other available local council sources are unreliable because they frequently fail to mention much detail about hostels. The ebb and flow of evacuation, the initial mixing of categories of children, either difficult to billet or for whom accommodation could not be found immediately, together with the pooling of hostels between districts when numbers of evacuees dwindled also complicates the

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<sup>161</sup> Coralie Setter

<sup>162</sup> *Newton Abbot Rural District Council Minutes R2365A/(5/6)C31*, 19 February 1941.

overall picture in the County.<sup>163</sup> For example, St Thomas RDC recorded that out of 1,250 evacuee children who arrived in June 1940, 100 were sent temporarily to hostels but did not specify which children were enuretic.<sup>164</sup> Bideford RDC established Parkham (Rectory) Hostel in July 1940 which housed approximately 20 children and appeared to be adequate despite the large numbers of evacuees (896 unaccompanied children by 4 August 1941).<sup>165</sup> Holsworthy UDC, which had previously sent bad cases of enuresis to Bude, opened a hostel in July 1942 which could accommodate up to 15 enuretic evacuees.<sup>166</sup> Devon's MOH did not mention enuresis until 1943 when he recorded that approximately 30 hostels, administered by the local sanitary authorities in the reception areas, remained open for evacuees with minor behaviour difficulties and enuresis.<sup>167</sup> By 1944 the number was down to 25. Records of the very large numbers of evacuees billeted on arrival indicate that only a very small percentage was sent to hostels due to enuresis and of these only very few remained in the hostels for any length of time.

### **Skin infections – scabies and impetigo**

There were genuine health concerns over the evacuation of large numbers of the population and viral epidemics were anticipated together with skin problems such as scabies (contagious skin infection caused by the mite) and impetigo (contagious bacterial skin disease) which thrived in war conditions, especially in underground shelters where people, unable to wash properly, were crowded together.<sup>168</sup> From 1940 onwards the potential for health problems in Devon increased dramatically as the County, already struggling with water shortages, became saturated with official and private evacuees, the military and war workers.<sup>169</sup> Titmuss claimed there was less viral disease

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<sup>163</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1944, DCC150/4/5/1*, p.16

<sup>164</sup> *St Thomas Rural District Council Minutes R7/10/C20*

<sup>165</sup> *Bideford Rural District Council Minutes R2414A(1-5)C10*

<sup>166</sup> *Holsworthy Urban District Council Minutes 2588add/1*, p.213

<sup>167</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1943, DCC150/4/5/1*, p.15

<sup>168</sup> Board of Education Circular 1469, dated 19 May 1939, emphasised the risk of contagious disease to local receiving authorities

<sup>169</sup> Example of concern voiced in *North Devon Journal*, 7 November 1940

than usual<sup>170</sup> although Starns recently argued that there was a ‘massive increase’ in deaths from infectious diseases during 1941.<sup>171</sup> The Government’s introduction of a programme of diphtheria inoculations for schoolchildren was a wartime bonus resulting from evacuation,<sup>172</sup> although Starns highlighted that the aim to immunise 75% of children before the end of 1941 fell far short of this with only 33% treated, due to enormous public resistance, an ‘aggressive advertising campaign’ by the Anti-Vaccination League and local authority resistance in some areas.<sup>173</sup> Locally there were already immunisation schemes in place at the outbreak of war in the districts of St Thomas and Exmouth. These were accelerated when a small group of diphtheria carriers was discovered amongst evacuees and there was no subsequent spread. By the end of 1940, almost all the local County Sanitary Authorities had made arrangements for diphtheria immunisation,<sup>174</sup> and the campaign was still ongoing in 1944.<sup>175</sup> Devon appeared to cope admirably with the overcrowding situation which was at its most difficult during 1940-1941. There were the obvious brief viral epidemics of childhood infections such as measles, mumps, whooping cough, chicken pox together with influenza which affected attendance records at some schools more adversely than others. However, the vast majority of recorded wartime medical reports for individual districts described the situation as very satisfactory despite the inevitable increase in skin diseases, particularly scabies and impetigo.

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<sup>170</sup> R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 534

<sup>171</sup> P. Starns, ‘Getting the Jab: Child health and immunization during World War Two Britain’, *Children in War*, November 2005, Vol.1, No.3, p. 29

<sup>172</sup> For example, Barnstaple SMO initiated a diphtheria programme for all elementary schoolchildren in November 1939 -*North Devon Journal*, 31 October 1940 – report of 1939 Annual Medical Report for Barnstaple

<sup>173</sup> P. Starns, ‘Getting the Jab: Child health and immunization during World War Two Britain’, *Children in War*, pp.29-35

<sup>174</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1939*, DCC 150/4/5/1, p. 24 and *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1940*, DCC 150/4/5/1, p.21

<sup>175</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1944*, p.33

Scabies had been on the increase for several years prior to the war in many areas and had more than doubled in London between 1935-1938.<sup>176</sup> However, Cambridge is an example of a reception area where there was no organisation for its treatment for many months after the initial evacuation wave as the problem was apparently relatively unknown in the area.<sup>177</sup> By contrast, Devon recorded 13 reported cases of scabies in 1937 and 6 in 1938,<sup>178</sup> although Paignton UD and South Molton MB later claimed scabies was either non-existent or practically non-existent prior to the reception of evacuees.<sup>179</sup> These figures appear very low compared with the naval City of Plymouth where 122 cases of scabies and 352 cases of impetigo were recorded in schoolchildren during 1938.<sup>180</sup> However, scabies was not a notifiable disease and there may well have been many more cases. Certainly the occasional log book recorded a pre-war case of scabies and frequent cases of impetigo and ringworm. For example, Newton St Petroc School (North Devon) had 6 scabies cases in November 1931 (school roll 39)<sup>181</sup> and Ilfracombe UDC recorded in 1937 that the Isolation Hospital was able to deal with cases which could not be satisfactorily dealt with at home, so there were clearly some cases in this area.<sup>182</sup>

During the first evacuation wave, lack of medical checks on departing schoolchildren resulted in problems. Another important factor was the Board's modified wartime procedure (Circular 1523)<sup>183</sup> for school medical inspections from September 1939 which undoubtedly exacerbated the

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<sup>176</sup> Women's Group on Public Welfare, *Our Towns*, pp.77-8. R.Padley and M.Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p.98. B. Harris, *The Health of the Schoolchild*, p.150

<sup>177</sup> S.Isaacs, ed. *The Cambridge Evacuation Survey*, p.46

<sup>178</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1939*, DCC150/4/5/1, p.7

<sup>179</sup> *Paignton Urban District Council Minutes R4582A/PC11*, 6 August 1942. *South Molton Municipal Borough- Town Clerk's General Correspondence 3058add1&2/Box15*, 11 December 1941

<sup>180</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer for the City of Plymouth 1938*, pp. 179, 181 and 185

<sup>181</sup> *Newton St Petroc School Log Book 707C/EAL2*

<sup>182</sup> *Ilfracombe UDC Medical Officer's Report 1937*, R2458A/(2/3)MO1

<sup>183</sup> Only one routine age group was to be examined fully, namely entrants into the elementary system and all children up to the age of 7 not already examined. The rest of the children had Rapid Health Surveys with special emphasis on their nutritional state. *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1940*, DCC 150/4/5/1, p.5

spread of contagious skin conditions. Devon's MOH found it to be unsatisfactory as the complete undressing of children could not always be undertaken and defects including contagious skin conditions were frequently missed and treatment delayed. The County returned to the normal procedure of fully examining the 3 routine age groups in 1941.<sup>184</sup> In 1939, 10 cases of scabies were recorded in Devon although figures taken after September are not highlighted.<sup>185</sup> Okehampton's MO reported that the London children, although largely immune to infectious diseases, appeared to be more susceptible to skin infection than local children,<sup>186</sup> a finding that was supported both by the 1940 figures of 3.1% infection per 1,000 local children and 15.0% per 1000 evacuee children,<sup>187</sup> and a report on the Devon school population in 1941.<sup>188</sup> A belated MH Circular (January 1940) offered general advice on scabies, prompting Teignmouth UDC to authorise plans to provide a sick bay if necessary<sup>189</sup> and Exmouth UDC to requisition Betworth as a skin disease hostel.<sup>190</sup> Nevertheless, a 1940 national survey on evacuation found that a number of reports of scabies and impetigo had been grossly exaggerated and that sometimes evacuees 'took the contagion from their hosts'.<sup>191</sup> Approximately 5% from the local sample believed they contracted scabies or impetigo sometime during their stay in Devon. Audrey Richardson (7) was not properly treated for scabies by her host family and on returning to London in 1942 had to be treated again. As Dartmouth's MO commented pragmatically in January 1943, the prevalence of scabies was to be expected in wartime, especially in winter and after a long spell of wet weather.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1940, DCC 150/4/5/1, p.5*

<sup>185</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1939, DCC150/4/5/1, p.9*

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.* p. 23

<sup>187</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1940, DCC150/4/5/1, p. 6*

<sup>188</sup> *The Times Educational Supplement*, 3 May 1941.

<sup>189</sup> *Teignmouth Urban District Council Minutes R2360A/(5/5)33, 6 February 1940.*

<sup>190</sup> *Exmouth Urban District Council Minutes R7/4/C36, 7 May 1940*

<sup>191</sup> F.Le Gros Clark and R.W.Toms, *Evacuation – Failure or Reform, Fabian Tract 249* (1940) (Kraus Reprint 1969) p.11

<sup>192</sup> *Borough of Clifton Dartmouth Hardness Borough Council Minutes R9/1/C33, January 1943*



It is difficult to extricate the figures for evacuee children suffering with skin disease due to the large number of other non-residents, although separate figures were available for 1940 and 1941. In 1940, the incidence of skin disease was 3.1 per 1,000 local children (total on roll 37,386) and 15.0 per 1,000 evacuee children (total on roll 34,246 official evacuees). Fifteen local children and 47 evacuees required treatment for scabies.<sup>193</sup> During 1941, 4.5 per 1,000 local children and 10.9 per 1,000 evacuee children received treatment for scabies. Impetigo doubled with 1.5 per 1,000 local children and 4.8 per 1,000 evacuee children receiving treatment. Crowded billets, many with no bathrooms, harassed foster mothers with little time to supervise washing, failure to check for skin infections frequently ‘imported with evacuees’, problems of carrying out medical inspections in winter due to inadequate heating in schools and failure to carry out treatment all exacerbated the problem.<sup>194</sup> Scabies and impetigo were still troublesome in 1942 and more common amongst local children than during 1941. Part of the problem was that most rural areas were some distance from a clinic and many cases of persistent or recurrent scabies dragged on.<sup>195</sup> The Assistant CMO for Exmouth UD and St Thomas RD complained in 1944 that the same families returned with re-infestation, even after treatment. These families were classed ‘without exception...as dirty either in their personal habits or in their homes’, thus supporting the statement that ‘this is a disease of dirt’.<sup>196</sup> Since reports from St Thomas RD about the condition of evacuee families in 1944 were extremely positive, it is likely that most of these families were local.<sup>197</sup>

When assessing the school log books it is important to remember that the critical dates for Devon schools were September 1939, June and September-October 1940, February, April, May and

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<sup>193</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1940, DCC150/4/5/1*, pp.6, 34

<sup>194</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1941, DCC150/4/5/1*, pp. 6,7, 27 and 28

<sup>195</sup> 6.4 per 1,000 local children and 10.1 evacuees per 1,000 required treatment for scabies and 2.6 per 1,000 local children and 2.7 per 1,000 evacuees required treatment for impetigo. *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1942, DCC150/4/5/1*, pp.6,7 and 39

<sup>196</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1944*, p.35

<sup>197</sup> *Express & Echo*, 22 and 24 July 1944

November 1941 and July/August 1944. These are the dates when the largest number of school parties and/or mothers and children arrived in the County and when one might expect to see a steep rise in skin disease. Only 6 out of 179 elementary and secondary school log books deposited at the DRO mentioned any cases of scabies and impetigo (Appendix 28 lists specific examples from log books deposited at both DRO and NDRO). Generally these cases appeared to be caused by factors other than infected evacuees i.e. winter weather or summer holidays with no medical checks. In only one or possibly two cases was there evidence to suggest that evacuees had introduced infection. Water shortage problems were generally worse in North Devon than in the rest of the County and 30 out of 86 elementary log books deposited at NDRO recorded occasional cases of impetigo and/or scabies, usually involving just one or two pupils. There were only five schools<sup>198</sup> which recorded an impetigo epidemic and of these only Great Torrington suggests a possible link with the arrival of evacuees. Three of the epidemics took place during the winter months and two followed the summer holidays. Twenty two school log books recorded the occasional case of scabies.<sup>199</sup> Only four schools (Bishops Tawton Herner, Chittlehamholt, Lynton Barbrook, Petrockstowe) recorded 2-3 separate episodes of between 1-3 pupils infected and only 3 schools recorded 4 cases at one time (Frithelstock, George Nympton, Welcombe). Frequently there were either no evacuees, very few or well-established groups at the schools and only 3 of the 22 schools (Little Torrington, Twitchen, Petrockstowe) specifically recorded that the infected children were evacuees. It is noteworthy that Little Torrington had scabies at the school in 1938 and 1939 before

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<sup>198</sup> Ashreigney, Ashwater Hunscoth, Bideford Infants, Great Torrington and Roborough

<sup>199</sup> *Bishops Tawton Herner School Log Book 507C/EFL2* (barely any mention of evacuees in log book), *Barnstaple Holy Trinity Girls and Infants' School Log Book 2836C/EAL3*, *Bishops Tawton Junior Mixed and Infants' School Log Book 2310C/EFL2*, *Brendon School Log Book 637C/EFL1*, *Broadwoodwidger Thorn Cross School Log Book 751C/EAL1*, *Broadwoodkelly School Log Book 641C/EFL1*, *Bridgerule School Log Book 2325C/EFL3*, *Chittlehamholt School Log Book 651C/EFL1*, *Frithelstock School Log Book 392C/EFL1*, *George Nympton School Log Book 668C/EFL1*, *Great Torrington Blue Coat School Log Book 3074C/EFL4*, *Heanton Punchardon School Log Book 510C/EAL2*, *Iddesleigh and Dowland School Log Book 681C/EFL1*, *Little Torrington School Log Book 393C/EFL3*, *Lynton Barbrook Methodist School Log Book 1615C/EFL3*, *Northam Appledore Infants' School Log Book 708C/ESL2*, *Parracombe School Log Book 2842C/EAL2*, *Petrockstowe School Log Book 1209C/EFL2*, *Satterleigh and Warkleigh School Log Book 731C/EFL1*, *St Giles in the Wood School Log Book 1210C/EFL4*, *Twitchen School Log Book 755C/EFL3*, *Welcombe School Log Book 765C/EAL2*

the arrival of evacuees. The infected evacuees at Twitchen and Petrockstowe were from Bristol where extensive bombing and some apparent laxity in medical checks were important factors. Thus the school log books give no indication that any child from amongst the large numbers of evacuee children who came to Devon introduced more than the very occasional case of impetigo or scabies. There is however evidence to suggest that winter weather, overcrowding, cross infection, inadequate cleansing, failure to identify and isolate, susceptibility to skin disease, inadequate sanitary conditions, lack of adult supervision, possible dietary factors and bomb induced problems in Bristol and Plymouth were all contributory causes. For example, Plymouth reported a slight increase in scabies in 1940, probably due both to increased bombing and the number of armed forces.<sup>200</sup>

Exeter's MOH reported in May 1941 that the incidence of scabies was 6 times the pre-war rate. Some cases were caused by infected soldiers returning on leave, others connected with evacuated families from the bombed areas i.e. Plymouth and Bristol.<sup>201</sup> The number of cases rose and fell: 53 in 1939, 288 in 1940, 950 in 1941, 707 in 1942, 823 in 1943, 538 in 1944 and 375 in 1945.<sup>202</sup> Plymouth reported a continuing rise in scabies and a Treatment Clinic for both children and adults was opened in March 1942. There were approximately 108 cases per 1,000 during 1942.<sup>203</sup> The County's peak period for scabies infection reached in 1941 accorded with the national position, resulting in MH Circular 2517 (14 November 1941). The introduction of Order No 1724 (Defence Regulations) sought to get to the root of a problem that was 'so prevalent as to prejudice the efficient prosecution of war'.<sup>204</sup> Provision was granted for inspection of premises in which persons found to be verminous were or had been accommodated, examination and treatment of any other

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<sup>200</sup> *Interim Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the City of Plymouth 1940, 1363/26*

<sup>201</sup> *Exeter City Archive ECA/26/3 Public Health Committee Minutes, 8 May 1941.*

<sup>202</sup> *Exeter City Archive ECA/19/96 Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1945, p.6*

<sup>203</sup> *Interim Reports of the Medical Officer of Health for the City of Plymouth 1941 and 1942, 1363/27-28*

<sup>204</sup> S.Ferguson and H.Fitzgerald, *Studies in the Social Services* (HMSO 1954) p.16

persons in those premises who were possibly verminous, and for any necessary cleansing or destruction of articles on the premises. A DCC circular letter to local authorities (21 November 1941) stated that the action indicated by the MH was primarily of a sanitary nature and that the necessary steps should be taken by local sanitary inspectors. DCC officers would therefore not be involved.<sup>205</sup> For example, when South Molton RDC made strong representations to Devon County Public Health Committee at this time about provision it felt should be made for the accommodation of mothers and children requiring treatment, it was informed that the necessary steps should be taken by the Council's own Sanitary Inspector.<sup>206</sup>

Board Circular 1575 (23 December 1941) requested that all scabies cases needed to be reported to the MOH. However, Devon's MOH was clearly unhappy that scabies remained a non-notifiable disease and in January 1942 he sent a letter to all County MOsH inviting their opinion on the desirability of making scabies a notifiable disease with the intention of making representations to the MH.<sup>207</sup> However, the reply received from the Ministry stated that compulsory notification would not be an appropriate method of dealing with the problem.<sup>208</sup> A further MH Circular (14 May 1942) sought to clear up any doubts as to the respective function of county councils and district councils in giving effect to the Scabies Order 1941. It was clarified that county and district councils had concurrent powers under the Scabies Order and 'the proper distribution of functions should therefore be that which is most convenient and effective in each county'. Generally the onus for initial action rested with the district authority but duplication of provision should be avoided. For example, facilities already provided by the county council for the cleansing and treatment of

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<sup>205</sup> *Teignmouth Urban District Council Minutes R2360A/(5/5)C34*

<sup>206</sup> *South Molton Rural District Council Minutes R2407A/(2/6)C12*, 11 December 1941

<sup>207</sup> *Teignmouth Urban District Council Minutes R2360A/(5/5)C34*, Public Health Committee Meeting, 27 January 1942.

<sup>208</sup> *South Molton Municipal Borough Corporation Minute Book 3058add4/2/11*, 13 January 1942.

children under the school medical or child welfare service should be utilised to the full for dealing with those children discovered to be verminous.<sup>209</sup>

There is a brief mention of scabies and impetigo in some borough and district council records, namely Dawlish, Honiton, Paignton and Tiverton in the South and East and Barnstaple, Bideford, Holsworthy, Okehampton, Ilfracombe and South Molton in the North (further details in Appendix 29) but the percentage of sufferers was small and those evacuees found to be infectious were largely from Bristol and Plymouth. Exeter recorded in July 1944 that from a newly arrived party of 86 adult and 206 child evacuees, 1 child had scabies and 5 children from 2 families needed cleansing.<sup>210</sup> Plymouth, where scabies had been problematic during 1941-2, recorded that the 1941 Government Scabies Order ‘has proved very useful in control’.<sup>211</sup>

## **Conclusion**

There seems little doubt that whilst there were problems in many reception areas, further exacerbated by the Government’s delay in addressing the problems, the incidence of dirty habits, pediculosis, enuresis and skin infections was exaggerated, particularly by members of the middle and upper classes. The surveys of contemporary experts such as Boyd, Burt, Isaacs, Brothwood, Le Gros Clark, Toms, Titmuss and Grundy (referenced above) all found this to be the case. Those either seeking any excuse to criticise the evacuee strangers or wishing to boost the longstanding ‘feckless working-class parent’ and ‘social problem group’ agendas<sup>212</sup> magnified the minority of cases out of all proportion, seeking behavioural rather than environmental causes. Added to this

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<sup>209</sup> *Teignmouth Urban District Council Minutes R2360A/(5/5)C34*, Public Health Committee Meeting, 27 May 1942

<sup>210</sup> *Town Clerk’s Papers, Exeter City Council, A.R.P. Evacuation Group N, Box 13*

<sup>211</sup> *Interim Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the City of Plymouth 1944, 1363/30.*

<sup>212</sup> These conservative social attitudes were a continuation of well-established debates reaching back to the late nineteenth century and doubtless even further. For further discussion refer to J. Welshman, *Underclass – A History of the Excluded 1880-2000* (Hambledon Continuum 2006)

was a lack of understanding amongst some that trauma could cause temporary bedwetting, that pediculosis and skin diseases would spread quickly in wartime conditions, particularly in underground shelters, and that small children left to their own devices in strange homes would forget to keep themselves clean without supervision. The first evacuation wave was particularly problematic because children were sent off hurriedly following a long summer break with no medical checks. Once these were in place, both in evacuation and reception areas, the situation improved although an increase in cases was inevitable due to general wartime conditions, overcrowding in reception areas and the constant movement of large numbers of people.

Research into Devon's documentary wartime archives has revealed that the problem was not one of evacuees introducing hitherto unknown health complaints into the County but rather one of an understandable increase of existing problems due to the steep rise in population and wartime conditions. As already stated, the relatively small extent of negative comment about any of the above issues is particularly striking considering the large numbers of evacuees and the consequent extremely crowded conditions in schools and homes. Poor housing and sanitation hampered the struggle against problems such as scabies and pediculosis in Devon as it did in deprived urban areas, and comments found in the local archives generally acknowledge environmental rather than behavioural factors.<sup>213</sup> The findings of the Chief Assistant MOH for Lancashire County Council could equally apply to Devon and no doubt to many other reception areas. On the subject of enuresis he spoke of the surprise finding a few years before the war that in some infant schools now in reception areas, some 5% of children were bedwetting. The Medical Officers in Lancashire had no idea the condition was so prevalent 'because parents do not boast about it. Foster-parents do,

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<sup>213</sup> For example – *Dartington Archive, News of the Day*, 26 June 1942. Talk given by Miss R. Hunter, evacuated headmistress from Friars Street School, London; *Dartington Archive, My American Talk*, April 1941 – talk given by H.N. Brailsford written after an Easter visit to Dartington Hall; Comments made by Bishop of Exeter, *Express & Echo*, 6 November 1940; Letter from the Vicar of Littleham-cum-Exmouth, *Express & Echo*, 4 November 1939; *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1942 DCC150/4/5/1*, p.9

however, publicly lament the fact that an enuresis victim has been billeted upon them'. On the subject of 'these alleged dirty evacuees, there is no doubt that some of them were dirty. At the same time I do not think they were appreciably dirtier than a sample we ourselves could have provided from certain of the county districts'.<sup>214</sup> Evacuation encouraged reports and surveys on these health issues which highlighted explanations other than those of poor parenting and much was learned in the field of child care from the direct experience of reception areas.

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<sup>214</sup> W.C.V. Brothwood, 'Experience of Evacuation in a County Reception Area', *Public Health*, Volume 6, LIII, 1940, pp. 126-7

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### **Four aspects of evacuation evaluated: a local perspective**

This Chapter considers four separate issues which usually appear at some point in discussions on evacuation and as such deserve consideration: juvenile delinquency, religion, wartime work and clothing problems. The juvenile delinquent evacuee appears to be yet another stereotypical myth that calls for further research. Religious difficulties between evacuees and hosts caused headlines from time to time, yet in Devon there appears to have been very little discord. Perceived wartime exploitation of local and evacuee children, particularly in agriculture, also worried many adults. Devon's experience will be examined and evaluation made as to whether this concern was justified. Clothing was one of the most problematic aspects of evacuation for the Government, local authorities, teachers, foster-parents, parents and not least the evacuees themselves. Government policy on clothing and footwear, together with local initiatives and response to the problem will be considered in this section.

#### **Juvenile delinquency**

During World War One juvenile delinquency increased and thus it was only natural that those in authority were concerned about the impact of evacuating thousands of children into the countryside. There was also great anxiety about children who remained in the cities without compulsory schooling during the first few months of the initial evacuation wave. As one or both parents were mobilised, either into the Forces or the war industry, the situation in the evacuation urban areas deteriorated, especially when children began returning from reception areas during the phoney war period. Youth leaders in Peckham reported that the 1939-1940 period was the worst in the 10 years since their involvement in the area for organised gangs of children, and the Commission of the Churches graphically stated that 'a multitude of children lounged and roamed about the streets,



tasting the perilous delights of idleness and indiscipline'.<sup>1</sup> The problem of absent fathers in the Forces was not confined to large cities. The Headmistress of Stoke Fleming School (Devon) recorded on October 1942 that 8 local boys damaged a gentleman's property 'every one of these boys is at home with his mother or grandmother with fathers in the Forces'.<sup>2</sup>

Welshman has highlighted that the 'perceived' increase in juvenile delinquency and the possible effects of separation resulted in a profound impact on postwar theories about child care.<sup>3</sup> John Bowlby, Head of the Child Guidance Unit at the Tavistock Clinic, was influential in promoting the postwar argument that separation of small children from their mothers could lead to delinquency later in life.<sup>4</sup> The concern was therefore that not only separation enforced by wartime evacuation but also by that of the mother in the workplace could result in increasing numbers of delinquents. As with other aspects of evacuation, the wartime rise in juvenile delinquency was frequently blamed on the luckless evacuee. For example, a London woman explained that she brought her boys back from Exeter apparently because the local children taunted them at school saying that all London children were thieves.<sup>5</sup> Stories about indiscipline amongst those children who were either not evacuated in 1939 or who returned shortly thereafter when the schools were still closed doubtless coloured the popular conception of the type of child who was evacuated during 1940. Colin Jones (8) remembered that London criminals who had decamped to the countryside also gave Londoners a bad name. However, Titmuss highlighted the fact that high spirits and hooliganism were more noticeable in villages where the law of trespass was generally unknown to the evacuees and therefore reports from reception areas needed to be treated with caution.<sup>6</sup> Boyd found that the

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<sup>1</sup> B.Holman, *The Evacuation, A Very British Revolution* (Lion Publishing 1995) p.108

<sup>2</sup> *Stoke Fleming Log Book, 2439C/EAL4*

<sup>3</sup> J.Welshman, 'Evacuation and Social Policy During the Second World War: Myth and Reality', *Twentieth Century British History*, Volume 9, No.1 (1998) pp.49-50

<sup>4</sup> J.Bowlby, *Child Care and the Growth of Love* (London 1953) p.181 as cited in J. Welshman, 'Evacuation and Social Policy During the Second World War: Myth and Reality', pp.49-50

<sup>5</sup> Women's Group on Public Welfare, *Our Towns* (Oxford University Press 1943) p.46

<sup>6</sup> R.Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 148

problems in Scotland during the evacuation period were ‘more annoying than serious’,<sup>7</sup> Wagner stated that very few hostesses reported real difficulties about ‘lying, stealing, disobedience, etc.’<sup>8</sup> and Burt<sup>9</sup> wrote that there was ‘little demonstrable increase in definite delinquency’ as most of the problem was amongst the younger boys and attributable to ‘the novel appeals to primaeval instincts which the country-side so richly offers’.<sup>10</sup>

Local children doubtless took advantage of the ‘scapegoat evacuee’ to get into mischief and the influx of streetwise visitors mixing with the average high-spirited local youngster undoubtedly increased the incidence of petty offences. For example, smoking in hay ricks sometimes caused wilful or accidental damage which proved very costly to farmers.<sup>11</sup> Conversely, it could be argued that children, and in particular boys, who were evacuated to Devon and other rural reception areas were more likely to be kept busy and out of mischief. Many boys were billeted with farm labourers and even those who were not frequently worked on local farms. The schoolchildren were kept occupied collecting and salvaging for the war effort and older children worked in the holidays helping with the harvest. In addition, although schooling was often not ideal in Devon, things were usually much worse in evacuation areas where schools were either closed, requisitioned or bomb damaged.

National figures show that 1941 was the worst year for offences of all kinds committed by those under 17 with a rise of 36% (72,483) from 1939 (53,106). The numbers fell again by about 9-10% during 1942-1944 and then peaked at 73,620 in 1945.<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, Titmuss’s claim that the

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<sup>7</sup> W.Boyd, *Evacuation in Scotland* (University of London Press 1944) p.66

<sup>8</sup> G. Wagner, ‘Evacuation’, *Social Welfare*, Volume 1V, No. 6 (1940) p.107

<sup>9</sup> A leading educational psychologist

<sup>10</sup> C.Burt, *The British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Volume X, February 1940, pp.8-15

<sup>11</sup> *Dartington Archive, News of the Day*, 9 June 1942. The farmer lost 60% of his rick, equivalent to £110 feeding value and about 5,000 gallons value in milk.

<sup>12</sup> *Statistical Digest of the War* (HMSO 1951) p.51

proportion of women experiencing some spell of work in the services or in the war industry during 1942-1945 was considerably higher than 55%<sup>13</sup> somewhat challenges the argument that inadequate mothercraft was a main reason for delinquency, since the figures dropped during 1942-1944.<sup>14</sup> During 1941, concern was expressed in the House of Commons<sup>15</sup> and elsewhere about the rise in juvenile delinquency, particularly amongst the under 14s, and the consequences of the break-up of home life resulting from evacuation. In London the interruption of school life, loss of leisure facilities particularly for boys over 14, slackening discipline due to absent fathers and the excitement and unsettlement of war on adolescent boys were cited as causes for the rise in 1941-42.<sup>16</sup> Similarly it is possible that a rise of 66% during 1940 in breaking and entering in Plymouth was partially due to the disruption caused by bombing but certainly not to evacuees as there were very few in the City.<sup>17</sup> Devon's County Psychiatrist continued to believe, even during the worst year of 1941, that the newspapers were exaggerating the problem and that issues often solved at home were now being taken to the police courts.<sup>18</sup> *The Times Educational Supplement* echoed this in a 1941 report into the small increase in juvenile delinquency in Devon, claiming that offences were mainly childishly mischievous and there was no evidence to attribute the apparent increase of cases solely to the presence of evacuee children.<sup>19</sup>

There is very little mention either in local newspapers, council minutes or school log books concerning any form of evacuee delinquency and the problems documented were those of petty theft of such items as rabbit traps, empty beer bottles, cash from lavatory box, purses and bicycles,<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.412

<sup>14</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 373, Col. 1031, 24 July 1941.

<sup>15</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 370, Col. 29, 18 March 1941, Volume 373, Col. 1031, 24 July 1941, Volume 376, Col.629, 25 November 1941. See also *Education*, Volume LXXVII, 27 June 1941, p.533

<sup>16</sup> R. Samways, ed. *We think you ought to go* (City of London, London Metropolitan Archives 1995) p.44

<sup>17</sup> *The Western Times*, 20 March 1942

<sup>18</sup> *Dartington Archive, News of the Day* 4 July 1941 – extract of talk given on 27 June 1941.

<sup>19</sup> *The Times Educational Supplement*, 3 May 1941.

<sup>20</sup> See *The Western Times*, 11 October 1940, 15 November 1940, 29 November 1940, 6 December 1940, 3 January 1941, 10 January 1941, 22 August 1941, 7 November 1941, 13 March 1942. Also *Express & Echo*, 19 March 1941

together with the occasional act of vandalism, usually the result of boredom, mischievousness and sometimes hunger. For example, Richard Pooley, evacuated to Torquay from Charlton with 2 younger brothers, recorded that they were so hungry and cold because they were locked out of their billet until late at night that he began petty thieving to supplement their diet.<sup>21</sup> Sensational newspaper reports frequently concealed another side to the story. *The Ilfracombe Chronicle and North Devon News* reported on the case of a boy evacuee aged 15 who stole cakes and had been looking through pig bins to find food. The NSPCC suggested the boy had been made a drudge at his billet where he had a bed under the stairs and was locked in every night. The Superintendent of the Remand Home where he was sent stated that he found him well behaved, willing and most cheerful.<sup>22</sup> However, correspondence from the Town Clerk to the Senior Regional Officer claimed the boy had not been an evacuee for 15 months, had not been attending school and apparently the foster parents had ‘kept him out of pity’.<sup>23</sup> Another juvenile problem at Ilfracombe, not recorded in the District Council Minutes, took place in April 1941 several months after the reception of evacuees from Bristol. A group of evacuee children went before Ilfracombe Children’s Court but apparently each was dealt with leniently on account of good school reports and parents. The Sergeant told the court that there was an undeclared war between London and Bristol evacuee boys which at times became quite fierce.<sup>24</sup>

There are only five known extant references to problematic behaviour by evacuees recorded in the school log books and all are for fairly minor offences. Clayhidon School more than doubled in size during 1940 but there was only one report of an evacuee said to be suffering from nerves who broke a window, used foul language and terrorised children.<sup>25</sup> At Cruwys Morchard School one evacuee

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<sup>21</sup> R. Pooley, *The Evacuee* (Anglo American Publicity Services 1972)

<sup>22</sup> *The Ilfracombe Chronicle and North Devon News*, 22 December 1944

<sup>23</sup> *Ilfracombe Urban District Council R2458A/(2/3)C230 and C253*, letter dated 22 December 1944

<sup>24</sup> *Express & Echo*, 22 April 1941

<sup>25</sup> *Clayhidon Log Book 856C/EAL2*

girl stole 3s6d from her foster mother but had caused no previous trouble,<sup>26</sup> and at Silverton School one evacuee boy played truant, lied and stole from foster-parents.<sup>27</sup> Uffculme Ashill School received a visit from the Home Office in May 1942 to question three LCC evacuees who apparently put wood on the railway line at Uffculme<sup>28</sup> and at Ugborough School, where there were a large number of evacuees in 1941, a farmer complained that evacuees had been chasing sheep, ponies and colts and two had beaten a sheep.<sup>29</sup> Four district councils recorded problems. Four evacuees from London aged 10, 7 and younger damaged the pump house of the swimming pool at Exmouth.<sup>30</sup> Dawlish UDC wrote to the Senior Elementary School and to the Headmaster of Acton Boys' School drawing their attention to 'the amount of damage being done generally throughout the Town', which included damage to the windows of the bus shelter. This concerned local children as well as evacuees.<sup>31</sup> Paignton UDC meticulously recorded the evacuation process as it unfolded. In September 1940, a very small group of local and evacuee youths damaged trees and flowers in the park. In March 1941, 6 boys from Paignton Hostel for difficult children went before the Children's Court for stealing and the Court ruled that there should be more discipline at the hostel. Paignton Council clearly felt the burden needed to be shared by the LCC and DCEC but an appeal to the LCC for tangible support resulted in a negative reply with merely an assurance that the Council could 'count on the sympathetic interest of the teachers'. Four other evacuee boys were charged with theft or wilful damage. By mid-1941 there were 2,390 unaccompanied children in Paignton.<sup>32</sup> South Molton RDC Probation Committee recorded that in 1942 there were 2 evacuees from West Ham on probation and one evacuee from Plymouth in 1944.<sup>33</sup> Considering the very large numbers

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<sup>26</sup> *Cruwys Morchard Log Book 509C/EFL1*, 19 October 1942

<sup>27</sup> *Silverton Log Book 737C/EFL1*, December 1940

<sup>28</sup> *Uffculme Ashill Log Book, 756C/EAL6*

<sup>29</sup> *Ugborough School Log Book, 2437C/EAL4*, April 1941

<sup>30</sup> *Exmouth Urban District Council Minutes R7/4/C36*, 19 February 1940.

<sup>31</sup> *Dawlish Urban District Council Minutes R2369A/(5/3)C24*, 6 December 1939.

<sup>32</sup> *Paignton Urban District Council Minutes R4582A/PC9* 1 September 1940, *R4582A/PC9* 3 March 1941, *R4582A/PC10* 5 May 1941, 4 June 1941, 1 December 1941, 13 April 1942

<sup>33</sup> *South Molton Rural District Council Probation Committee Minutes 1941-1951, R2407A/(2/6for 2/2)BP9*

of evacuee children in Devon, the few recorded incidences in no way constitute a delinquency problem.

In October 1939 the Devon County Probation Committee declined an offer from the Home Office to provide a London Probation Officer free of charge to assist local officers. The Committee felt that the few problems with evacuated children were being dealt with satisfactorily.<sup>34</sup> The CMO noted that by the end of 1939 there was a ‘steadily increasing tendency to refer juvenile delinquency cases to the County Psychiatrist’ which he hoped would become accepted routine.<sup>35</sup> Figures for juvenile delinquency in Devon up to September 1940 were reported as well below average and the increase during the last few months of 1940 of some 400 cases above the previous year was attributed to juveniles and soldiers. Despite the doubling of the school population in 1940, only 70 evacuee children were dealt with by probation and in other ways by Juvenile Courts compared with 285 local children.<sup>36</sup> Provision was made for troublesome evacuee boys at Ashburton Hostel (The Old Grammar School),<sup>37</sup> and Lymptstone Hostel for the ‘most hardbitten’ was opened in December 1940.<sup>38</sup> Figures for the period 1 January 1941 to 11 March 1941 show that 67 local children went through the Juvenile Courts compared with 20 evacuees, yet the elementary school population was still approximately double the pre-war figure<sup>39</sup> and around 7,000 additional evacuees had arrived from Bristol in February 1941.<sup>40</sup> The Committee therefore felt that its decision to refuse Home Office help in 1939 had been justified.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Probation Committee Minutes DCC154/5/1/1* – meeting held 13 October 1939

<sup>35</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1939, DCC150/4/5/1*, p. 17

<sup>36</sup> *Probation Committee Minutes DCC154/5/1/1* – meeting held April 1941

<sup>37</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1940, DCC150/4/5/1*, p.21

<sup>38</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1941, DCC150/4/5/1*, p. 24

<sup>39</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1941, DCC150/4/5/1*, p. 1

<sup>40</sup> *Devon County Council Minutes DCC148/15, Emergency Committee Report March 1941.*

<sup>41</sup> *Probation Committee Minutes DCC154/5/1/1*

In August 1942, Ashburton Hostel for older boys was transferred to new premises at Crownwell, (Shaldon) as it was required for a new Remand Home for boys.<sup>42</sup> The Town Clerk of Barnstaple MB wrote to the DCC Clerk in November 1942 complaining that difficult children needing special attention in hostels (Ashburton, Crownwell and Lymestone) were invariably not dealt with for lengthy periods, in some cases up to 5 months. In addition, repeated applications to the CMO to find places in one of these hostels were frustrated because there were waiting lists. He suggested that immediate steps should be taken to provide additional accommodation. DCEC replied that it was considering providing a further hostel for difficult evacuated children, probably in the north of the County.<sup>43</sup> However, although a Child Guidance Centre was established at Barnstaple Welfare Centre in 1943 and served most of North Devon, it does not appear that a further hostel was provided in the North. Provision for treatment in South and West Devon was also deficient and an Educational Psychologist was appointed in September 1943 as well as a permanent County Psychiatric Social Worker.<sup>44</sup> The CMO mentioned in his 1944 Report that the wartime psychiatric hostel scheme for maladjusted children which was initiated in Devon and emulated in reception areas over the whole country had been a marked success. There were now 4 County Hostels – Crownwell (Shaldon) for girls and young boys, Alban Lodge (Paignton) opened in October 1944 for junior boys, Lymestone for older boys and Milton House (Newton Abbot) for retarded boys. He stressed that even before the war there had been a need for such facilities and hoped that at least 2 units would be continued after the war as a permanent part of the County Scheme for maladjusted children. By September 1945 an additional County Psychiatrist and a second Educational Psychologist were appointed<sup>45</sup> and by 1946 there were Child Guidance clinics

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<sup>42</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1942, DCC150/4/5/1, p. 23*

<sup>43</sup> *Barnstaple Municipal Borough 2654add4/Box13, letters dated 13 November and 17 November 1942*

<sup>44</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1943, DCC150/4/5/1, pp. 15-16*

<sup>45</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1944, p.17 Westcountry Studies Library.*

at Barnstaple, Torquay and Newton Abbot and hostels for maladjusted children at Shaldon, Totnes and Exmouth.<sup>46</sup>

### **Conclusion**

There is no documentary evidence to suggest that juvenile delinquency was particularly problematic in Devon, despite the doubling of the school population during 1940-1941. Offences were almost all petty and figures show that in 1940 the ratio of local offender to evacuee offender brought before the Juvenile Probation Committee was 4 to 1. Thus any suggestion that evacuees were causing the increase in juvenile delinquency is certainly an invalid claim in respect of Devon. Local child guidance provision improved in line with the national postwar trend and several wartime hostels for maladjusted children were retained. Much practical knowledge was gained from the hostels established under the Government Evacuation Scheme for 'difficult' children together with a genuine desire, both locally and nationally, to use this expertise in postwar care.<sup>47</sup>

### **Religion**

Titmuss recorded that problems in reception areas were often accentuated by religious differences, highlighting difficulties with Jewish evacuees in rural areas of East Anglia as an example.<sup>48</sup> Wicks's publication included several testimonials from Jewish and Catholic ex-evacuees describing some hostility but also cited a positive testimonial from a Jewish boy evacuated to Totnes (Devon) whose foster parents were very kind and later his family settled in the town.<sup>49</sup> Boyd noted that only 3 Scottish districts out of 76 made any attempt to match religious denomination but found there was very little complaint about anti-Catholic attitudes towards evacuees.<sup>50</sup> With regard to

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<sup>46</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1946*, pp.29-30 (Westcountry Studies Library)

<sup>47</sup> *Express & Echo*, 16 March 1945, article on Hostels for difficult children.

<sup>48</sup> R.Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 179

<sup>49</sup> B.Wicks, *No Time to Wave Goodbye* (Bloomsbury 1988) pp.95-96

<sup>50</sup> W.Boyd, ed. *Evacuation in Scotland*, pp. 60, 119-20



Devon, it does not appear that the religious denomination of either the evacuee or host was taken into account during the first evacuation wave. Only one Roman Catholic School and one Jewish School arrived in September 1939 and both were scattered. The Catholic units apparently ‘cried out persistently for “identity”,<sup>51</sup> and HMI Inspectors recommended that in future such schools should retain their identity<sup>52</sup> as there were some initial problems with billeting, largely due to location factors.<sup>53</sup> There was also an initial problem with one detachment of 17 Catholic children evacuated to Upottery which contained some ‘very difficult’ pupils resulting in a certain amount of local resentment.<sup>54</sup> Two reports compiled by the same HMI Inspector reveal that whilst a detachment of 17 pupils from the LCC Heygate Street Jewish School evacuated to Combe Raleigh under the charge of a ‘Jewess of a good type’ were ‘charming’ and ‘responsive’, the situation was not so positive in Talaton where the Headteacher together with his family and 23 pupils were evacuated. The Jewish children were apparently not popular with their hosts, largely because of the dietary problems and some evacuees reportedly made disparaging remarks to local children about their ‘dirty meat’. The HMI Inspector was unimpressed by both the school and the Headmaster, who was obviously not adjusting to local life.<sup>55</sup> Undoubtedly his sudden dislocation from London to rural Devon and the fact that he was 9 miles from some of his pupils did little to improve his humour.<sup>56</sup> Hermione Copelston, daughter of the Rector of Offwell and Widworthy, remembered a group of Jewish children billeted in the Rectory in September 1939, almost certainly a detachment from Heygate Street School. Their parents were apparently very anxious about their care but Ms Copelston remembered that the Chief Rabbi pragmatically relaxed the rules on food, allowing meat

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<sup>51</sup> ED134/39, G9E/941, Report by Arnold Platt, Senior HMI Inspector for Devon, dated 1 April 1944

<sup>52</sup> ED134/30, Inspectors’ Report, dated 24 November 1939

<sup>53</sup> ED134/270, Report by Clark, dated 20 December 1939. Schoolchildren from St Patrick’s RC School who were billeted in a number of small villages in East Devon were successfully transferred to Ashburton UDC and Buckfastleigh.

<sup>54</sup> ED134/270, Report by Whitworth, dated 7 November 1939

<sup>55</sup> ED134/270 – 9B(2)69, Report by Brown, dated 20 September 1939

<sup>56</sup> ED134/39, G9E/941, Report by Arnold Platt, Senior HMI Inspector for Devon, dated 1 April 1944

to be eaten but no pork.<sup>57</sup> In October 1940, DCEC Circular 3 notified schools that, in response to the request of the Emergency Committee for Religious Education of Jewish children from London, full facilities were to be granted to Jewish teachers and pupils from London for the observance of Jewish Holy Days.<sup>58</sup> By July 1941, Jewish children at Barnstaple Parish Church Junior Girls' School were taking religious education classes from 9-9.30 at the Thorne Memorial School.<sup>59</sup>

A letter from the LCC Education Officer (E.M.Rich) to Clerks of local authorities, dated 15 May 1940, stated that the Roman Catholic Authorities requested that children be kept together and billeted in areas where there were Catholic communities.<sup>60</sup> However, two months later a Catholic priest wrote to Ottery St Mary UDC expressing deep concern that Catholic children had been placed in billets located too far from the church. His initial request to move them was turned down by the Council, as it felt the children were happily settled. One month later, following Cardinal Hinsley's intervention, the MH advised Ottery Council of the central decision that religious groups should be kept together and billeted close to their denominational church. This had not been possible during the initial evacuation but 'efforts were now being made to adjust the position'. Ottery Council compromised by moving the motion that children should only be moved at parent's request and most evacuees chose to remain in their billets.<sup>61</sup> In a similar case, Kensal Newtown Catholic School, Liverpool, was relocated to Paignton from Devizes. The Catholic evacuees and Protestant householders appear to have been satisfied with the original billeting arrangements but the Catholic hierarchy requested that Catholic Schools should be re-grouped into more sympathetic reception

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<sup>57</sup> This relaxation of dietary rules is also mentioned in an HMI Inspector's Report *ED134/270, Report by Brown on Combe Raleigh*, dated 25 October 1939

<sup>58</sup> *Okehampton Senior School Circulars 464C/EAM215-221*

<sup>59</sup> *Barnstaple Parish Church Junior Girls' School Log Book 1918C/EFL4*, July 1941

<sup>60</sup> *Exeter City Council, Town Clerk's Papers, ARP Evac, Group N, Box 14*

<sup>61</sup> *The Western Times*, 12 July 1940, 9 August 1940 and *Ottery St Mary UDC R7/5/C/1*

areas.<sup>62</sup> The use of the phrase ‘more sympathetic reception areas’ illustrates Devon’s religious tolerance.

These are the only cases found in the extant records and there is little evidence to suggest whether the County heeded Government advice although it seems likely that it increasingly tried wherever possible to place Catholic school parties in urban areas where same denominational billets were more likely to be found.<sup>63</sup> Five sample evacuees were Catholic. Henry Teuma (10) was billeted in a Catholic home in Exeter in 1940 and attended St Nicholas Catholic School whilst Ellen Richards (7) and her siblings were placed with a Catholic family in Newton Abbot in 1940. Winifreda Williams’s siblings were also placed with a Catholic family in Newton Abbot in 1940 but Winifreda (10) was placed with Spiritualists where séances made her nervous when going to bed. Irene Anderson (8) and her sister were billeted in a Methodist household in Virginstowe but quite happily attended the Church of England and Methodist Chapel with their foster family. John Bosey (8) who came to Ilfracombe with a Catholic boarding school was uncertain about the denomination of his billet. The existence of several Jewish hostels is mentioned in local authority records. Dawlish UDC had 2,<sup>64</sup> and Exmouth UDC had 1 administered by a charitable organisation.<sup>65</sup> In 1944, one WVS member in Exeter helped the Jewish Refugee Association trace Jewish children billeted locally so that proper religious instruction was ensured.<sup>66</sup>

Non-conformity in the north and west of Devon was very strong and Ray Body (10), evacuated to Rackenford with hosts who were not themselves regular church goers, was told he must make a

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<sup>62</sup> T. Crosby, *The Impact of Civilian Evacuation in the Second World War* (Croom Helm 1986) p.40

<sup>63</sup> Catholic Schools in Devon – Axminster, Barnstaple, Buckfastleigh, Dartmouth, Newton Abbot, Paignton, Teignmouth, Torquay Abbey Road, Torquay St Marchchurch Priory – R. Bovett, *Historical Notes on Devon Schools* (Devon County Council 1989) p.384

<sup>64</sup> *Dawlish Urban District Council Minutes R2369A/(5/3)C29, Résumé of Government Evacuation Scheme at work in Dawlish*

<sup>65</sup> *Exmouth Urban District Council Minutes R7/4/C36*

<sup>66</sup> T. Gray, *Exeter in the 1940s* (The Mint Press 2004) p.97

choice between church and chapel. He chose the latter 'since tea between services was tempting'. Nevertheless, only 5 evacuees (2%) from the sample (including Winifreda Williams mentioned above) felt uncomfortable with the religious practices of their foster parents. In her third billet, Sheila Vodden (8) found her hosts were Jehovah Witnesses and she was made to embroider watch tower bags and knock on doors with pamphlets. John McGarry (6) and Jean English (12) were both put off religion as a result of being made to go to church and Hugh Gurney (8) was put off scripture for the rest of his life. However, many evacuees were used to attending Sunday Schools and those billeted with Methodist families found that three chapel visits on Sunday were welcome social occasions. Those who were not used to church/chapel attendance were generally quite happy to fit in. Some from the sample took the opportunity to earn a little pocket money by joining the choir, pumping the organ or bell ringing and evacuees were always included in the religious life of the villages.<sup>67</sup> Sending evacuees to church or chapel was also clearly a welcome relief for hosts, whether they themselves attended regularly or not. The Commission of Churches reported that an estimated two-thirds of churches in reception areas made some provision for evacuee children and/or mothers and attendance at Sunday Schools advanced extensively in some areas.<sup>68</sup> The opportunity for gathering new recruits was obvious and the Central Council of the Church for Religious Education published a circular entitled '*The Church and the Children in Time of War*'.<sup>69</sup> Locally, the Bishop of Exeter complained that evacuation 'has brought home...the fact that there were vast numbers of children in this country who were being brought up without any knowledge at all of the Christian faith', and Rev. Lawson described the warm welcome given to large numbers of evacuees, adding 'you will, I hope, bring them to Church with you and see to it that they go to Sunday School'.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Numerous examples of religious integration in village life can be seen in *The Western Times* e.g. 6 December 1940, 10 April 1941

<sup>68</sup> B.Holman, *The Evacuation: A Very British revolution*, pp.118-9

<sup>69</sup> *The Times*, 15 September 1939.

<sup>70</sup> *The Western Times*, 15 November 1940

## **Conclusion**

There is no documentary or testimonial evidence to suggest that religious issues during evacuation caused anything other than the odd minor problem, usually the result of an over-zealous, bigoted or inflexible individual. Those evacuees from the sample appear to have been happy to fit in with local religious practices and for several it was life changing. Martin Gouldthorpe (4) subsequently became a Minister after the 'seeds were sown by his Sunday School teacher' in Dunkeswell and Pauline Thompson (10) believed her compulsory church attendance 'was the bedrock of my very firm faith'.

## **Wartime work undertaken by local and evacuee schoolchildren**

Concern over possible exploitation of children during the war varied according to regional employment patterns. In 1943 Dent wrote that 'many worthy bodies and individuals...have protested, some of them violently, against this alleged exploitation of child labour'. However, he maintained that the situation was being wildly exaggerated because, although child labour on the land was open to abuse, the regulations for work were strict.<sup>71</sup> *The Times Educational Supplement* also reminded its readers that 'there is no parallel between the bad old days of child labour in factories'.<sup>72</sup> Against the national backdrop this section considers the available scant local evidence regarding the possible exploitation of Devon's local and evacuee schoolchildren in wartime agricultural work to the detriment of their education. The other important aspect of children's wartime work in Devon, namely the holiday campaigns, is also discussed.

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<sup>71</sup> H.C.Dent, *Education in Transition* (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd. 1944) p.157

<sup>72</sup> *The Times Educational Supplement*, 10 April 1943.

## **Agricultural work**

Devon had a larger acreage under crops and grass than any other County in England and Wales<sup>73</sup> and absenteeism from school during peak periods of the agricultural calendar was well-established long before the war, with local headteachers frequently lamenting the loss of schooling as far back as 1910.<sup>74</sup> During the war, rural counties such as Devon, where the potato and corn acreage under cultivation increased enormously, would have been unable to fulfil the government directive to vastly increase home grown food production without the invaluable assistance of schoolchildren and in particular the large numbers of evacuees who were so eager to help. For example, the corn acreage in 1941 was four times the pre-war amount and was only saved by the assistance of up to 500 children per day, several hundred soldiers and volunteers.<sup>75</sup> Gosden (1976) later expressed the view held by many that whilst there was educational loss especially severe in eastern counties, the exigencies of war justified children's employment in agriculture.<sup>76</sup>

During 1940, DCEC agreed to certain proposals submitted by the War Agricultural Committee for encouraging children to help on the land, including the extension of summer holidays in elementary schools and the use of senior and secondary schools for billeting boys over the age of 16 from secondary and public schools for part-time work.<sup>77</sup> By the end of the summer a total of 244,434 hours of harvesting and farm work was completed by local and evacuee children.<sup>78</sup> Children over 12 were already working during the holidays by 1941 and the rate of pay set by the Devon Agricultural Wages Committee was 4d per hour for 12-14, 5d for 14-16 and 6d for over 16.<sup>79</sup> Discretion was

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<sup>73</sup> *The Jubilee of County Councils 1889-1939: fifty years of local government* (London: Evans 1939) p.75

<sup>74</sup> For example, *Broadhembury School Log Book 3124C/EFL3* (September 1910), *Cadeleigh School Log Book 508C/EAL1* (July 1917)

<sup>75</sup> *Devon County Council Minutes, Report of Agricultural Committee, DCC148/15*, 11 December 1941. See also Murray, K. *Agriculture* (HMSO 1955) p. 258 with regard to the vital contribution of children assisting the potato harvest before 1944 when prisoner of war labour became relatively plentiful.

<sup>76</sup> P.H.J.H.Gosden, *Education in the Second World War – a study in policy and administration* (Methuen & Co. Ltd 1976) pp.81 and 84. See also K.Murray, *Agriculture*, p.258

<sup>77</sup> *Education*, Volume LXXVI, 19 July 1940, p.52

<sup>78</sup> *ED 134/31*

<sup>79</sup> *The Western Times* 4 April 1941.

permitted in local schools regarding dates and extensions of holiday time. For example, before fixing the dates of the 1943 summer holiday, Barnstaple MB Education Committee wrote to the War Agricultural Executive Committee to ascertain whether any children would be required to help with the harvest.<sup>80</sup> The Board, Home Office and the Ministry of Labour resisted any change in the law permitting the employment of children but by May 1942, faced with the shortage of labour, employment conditions were revised and children over 12 were granted exemption from school for up to 20 half-days annually for agricultural work. Theoretically no child was allowed to work more than 4 hours in any half day, 7 in a whole day or 36 in a week. Employment of children under 14 was to be discouraged if other sources of labour were available.<sup>81</sup> School harvest camps were also introduced and by the end of 1943 there were nearly 1,100 attended by approximately 70,000 older children.<sup>82</sup> By 1944, wages were not less than 9d per hour for both sexes (aged between 14-19) in organised school parties. *The Western Times* frequently mentioned the help given by evacuees<sup>83</sup> but not all Devon farmers were happy, complaining that gates were left open, that only about 1% of children were ‘worth anything’, and that cultivated land was overrun by soldiers and evacuees. A cabbage butterfly catching competition in Newton Abbot was abandoned because evacuees were blamed for causing damage to crops.<sup>84</sup> However, evacuation to rural areas also resulted in town-bred evacuee boys entering rural employment when they left school.<sup>85</sup> Devon benefited from this trend and by 1941 had made provision for training 2,400 town-bred boys per year.<sup>86</sup> One back-to-the-earth training scheme in Devon had more evacuee boys than local ones.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> *Barnstaple Municipal Borough Minutes 2654add2/C121*, 11 March 1943

<sup>81</sup> P.Gosden, *Education in the Second World War*, pp.82-3. See also *Education*, Volume LXXIX, 8 May 1942, p.369.

<sup>82</sup> *Times Educational Supplement*, 11 March 1944.

<sup>83</sup> e.g. *The Western Times* 15 September 1939, 3 and 30 August 1940,

<sup>84</sup> *The Western Times*, 18 April 1941, 25 July 1941 and 6 March 1942

<sup>85</sup> *Education*, Volume LXXVIII, 18 July 1941, p.49. Also *The Western Times*, 19 December 1941.

<sup>86</sup> *Dartington Archive*, extract from broadcast by H.N. Brailsford, M.P. April 1941.

<sup>87</sup> Ward, S. *War in the countryside* (Cameron Books 1988) p.104

The exploitation argument rumbled on throughout the war. Sir Percival Sharp<sup>88</sup> was particularly outspoken about what he considered as flagrant exploitation of children, especially evacuees.<sup>89</sup> In 1943 a number of evacuation authorities asked reception areas to ensure that the consent of parents and not foster parents was obtained before any children were employed in agricultural work.<sup>90</sup> The Executive Committee of the Workers' Education Association, the General Council of the Trades Union Congress, the National Union of Agricultural Workers and the National Association of Head Teachers were amongst those bodies voicing concern to the Board during the war.<sup>91</sup> Politicians also raised concerns from time to time about 'the wilful and flagrant breaking of the employment of children by-laws',<sup>92</sup> and some local teachers recorded concern about disruption to education. The Headteacher of Newton Poppleford recorded that pupils had put in a total of 7,016 hours of agricultural work between April and September, adding 'it is only right to say here that this causes much dislocation of school work'. Other examples include Ashburton, Broadhembury, Cadeleigh, Highampton, Monkokehampton and Newton Poppleford.<sup>93</sup> The CMO also believed that agricultural work was one likely cause for the increasing deterioration in posture amongst elder boys.<sup>94</sup>

Whilst there is no recorded evidence of any large scale infringement of the byelaws in Devon unlike some other areas,<sup>95</sup> nevertheless the following concerns were raised. Boys from Trusham School

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<sup>88</sup> Editor of *Education*

<sup>89</sup> Examples – *Education*, Volume LXXVI, 16 August 1940, p.112, Volume LXXIX, 15 May 1942, p.385

<sup>90</sup> *Circular 33, 2066C/EAM51*, 6 May 1943.

<sup>91</sup> Examples include *Times Educational Supplement*, 29 March 1941 and 5 April 1941, *Education*, Volume LXXIX, 22 May 1942, p. 412, *Education*, Volume LXXXI, 18 June 1943, p.565.

<sup>92</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 358, Column 339, 5 March 1940, Chuter Ede.

<sup>93</sup> *Broadhembury School Log Book 3124C/EFL3* (September 1910), *Cadeleigh School Log Book 508C/EAL1* (July 1917), *Highampton School Log Book 1664C/EFL2*, (October 1941), *Monkokehampton School Log Book 702C/EFL2* (October 1942 and August 1943), *Newton Poppleford School Log Book 2268Cadd.3/EFL1* (September 1944), *Ashburton Log Book 6020C/EFL4-5*, 11 January 1940.

<sup>94</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1942 DCC150/4/5/1*, p.39

<sup>95</sup> For examples of concern see *Times Educational Supplement* 3, August 1940, p.302 and *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 358, Column 551, 7 March 1940.



were employed on farm work without permission in June 1942,<sup>96</sup> and the Managers of Okehampton Senior School complained in December 1942 that many children were employed contrary to the byelaws and emergency regulations. They resolved both to inform DCEC that this was the prime cause of lowering efficiency in the school and to ‘strongly and insistently press for a searching investigation’.<sup>97</sup> In July 1943 the Chairman of DCEC protested that he had seen schoolboys, stripped to the waist, toiling on the land in the burning sun. Describing it as ‘downright slavery’ he called for a review because the work being done by the boys had gone beyond what the Committee had ever intended.<sup>98</sup> Several weeks previously *The Times Educational Supplement* had included a report from a local correspondent in the Devon County Youth Committee stating that there had been about 250 cases of boys and 290 cases of girls working excessive hours, the worst cases being in agriculture and domestic employment, particularly where parents were the employees.<sup>99</sup> During 1945, several cases of infringement of byelaws relating to employment of pupils from Tiverton Heathcoat Boys’ School were under investigation,<sup>100</sup> and Viscountess Astor complained that despite the regulations to protect children, the sanitary arrangements were appalling and the feeding very bad.<sup>101</sup>

### **Children’s salvage work**

Children of all ages took part in Herbert Morrison’s immensely successful Children’s 1940 Summer Holiday Campaign. The child work force in Devon was doubled by evacuation and the campaign was a masterstroke because it offered the dual benefits of assisting the war effort and allowing some respite for foster-parents. During the first fortnight of the school holiday, children from

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<sup>96</sup> *Trusham Log Book 754C/EFL1*

<sup>97</sup> *Okehampton Senior School Managers’ Minutes 464C/EAM234-240-280*, 4 December 1942.

<sup>98</sup> *The Western Times*, 9 July 1943.

<sup>99</sup> *The Times Educational Supplement*, 19 June 1943.

<sup>100</sup> *Tiverton Heathcoat Boys’ School Log Book 3029C/EAL3*, May 1945.

<sup>101</sup> *Education*, Volume LXXXV, 3 May 1945, p.693

approximately 335 schools in Devon worked 46,461 hours.<sup>102</sup> School log books confirm that they were engaged in collecting a vast array of badly needed supplies, and prizes were offered to schools as an incentive. Prodigious quantities of acorns, beech mast, chestnuts, dandelion roots, rose-hips, leaf mould, cones, wortleberries, sphagnum moss, bones, seaweed, firewood, foxglove leaves, roots, herbs, wool from fences, hedges and trees, and fruit for jam making were collected. Children dug, weeded, protected windows against blast, tidied the village street, darned socks for soldiers, looked after babies, carried meals to the harvest field, made signalling flags and camouflage nets, dug tank traps, cleaned Home Guard rifles, thatched hayricks, sheep-dipped, hoed, drove cattle, milked, harvested, cleared hedges, collected metal, rags, jars, bottles, tinfoil, paper, cardboard, fabrics, carpets, brass, copper, books, rat (1d) and mice (1/2d) tails, cabbage white butterflies and even the deadly poisonous colchicum. They also made hand towels, scarves, hot water bottle covers, bed jackets, dressing gowns, face flannels, backrests, leg supports and splints.<sup>103</sup> The 1940 summer holiday diaries of pupils at Parracombe School recorded that 39 local children and unofficial evacuees and 14 official evacuees accomplished 1,981 hours of farm work, 108 hours of housework and 27 hours of errands.<sup>104</sup> After 1940, individual schools were urged by the Board to redouble their efforts and organise their own holiday campaigns but these were never as successful as 1940,<sup>105</sup> although schoolchildren still worked in the fields during term time, collected and salvaged throughout the war and worked in the school vegetable plots. By the end of 1942, DCEC acknowledged that in many cases the arrangements for the summer and autumn holidays had been a waste of effort due to the very small attendances. For example, Thorveton School remained open

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<sup>102</sup> *The Times Educational Supplement*, 14 September 1940.

<sup>103</sup> *Devon County Education Committee EAM248-252, The Times Educational Supplement*, 14 September 1940, p.358. School Log Books frequently mention amounts collected by children e.g. Cheriton Bishop School with 26 local children and 11 evacuees picked 281 lbs of fruit and also won the cup for waste paper collection 4 times. *Log Book1933C/EAL2*. Harberton School children caught 1,619 cabbage whites in September 1943. *Log Book672C/EAL1*. Topsham Senior School collected 11,120 books in their salvage scheme in January 1944. *Log Book76/8/1/4*

<sup>104</sup> *Parracombe School Log Book 2842C/EAL2*, September 1940

<sup>105</sup> *Addendum to Circular 23*, 8 July 1942.

during the summer holiday but only 2 or 3 children attended for milk,<sup>106</sup> and the holiday scheme at Great Torrington Junior Mixed was labelled ‘a failure’ as no children turned up.<sup>107</sup> It was decided that the opening of schools during holiday periods could no longer be justified unless there was likely to be a better response,<sup>108</sup> although some schools were evidently open during the summer of 1944.<sup>109</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The pre-war use of children for seasonal agricultural work was well-established in Devon and undoubtedly some foster parents chose strong evacuee boys to work on farms. For example, Colin (9) and Alan (12) Sparks were briefly used as farm labourers and then rebilleted. Five others (0.2%) from the sample including four girls felt that they were overworked at both ends of the day to the point of misery and one returned home as a result. However, these cases were related to household chores. DCEC appeared to monitor schoolchildren’s wartime agricultural work and there is no evidence to suggest significant local exploitation of children or serious infringement of bye-laws, although some schooling was obviously lost. Children’s war work played a vital national contribution, particularly to the hard-pressed agricultural sector. It also integrated children socially, eased the burden on foster parents and importantly focused minds on any possible long-standing exploitation. This resulted in a decision by the newly established Ministry of Education to review the employment of schoolchildren in all areas, with the intention of ending the practice of seasonal agricultural work during school hours as soon as possible.<sup>110</sup> However, Butler’s speech at the Annual General Meeting of Essex Farmers’ Union in 1944 reflected the competing concerns of

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<sup>106</sup> *Thorveton School Log Book 2972C/EAL4*

<sup>107</sup> *Great Torrington Junior Mixed School Log Book 2485C/EAL8*

<sup>108</sup> *DCEC Circular 27, 2066C/EAM51*

<sup>109</sup> For example, *Ashburton School Log Book 6020C/EFL5*

<sup>110</sup> *Education*, Volume LXXXIV, 14 July 1944, p.43

Britain's agriculturalists, whom he described as being nervous of education, and educationalists.<sup>111</sup>

Locally it was not until 1947 that seasonal agricultural work for children below the age of 13 was discontinued.<sup>112</sup>

### **Clothing**

Problems with inadequate and worn-out clothing and footwear began as soon as the first evacuation wave was completed and, as with other aspects of evacuation, served to highlight pockets of dire poverty that existed, particularly in the North. The result was 'a stream of appeals, resolutions and complaints about clothing and footwear conditions from local authorities, voluntary agencies, civil servants and private individuals ranging from Lord Derby to the wives of agricultural labourers'.<sup>113</sup> Fortunately the mild weather in September helped to alleviate immediate distress to children and afforded extra time for Government deliberation, but as winter approached it was clear that the piecemeal efforts of voluntary agencies were insufficient in many areas. As with all aspects of evacuation the extent of the problem varied considerably from area to area. Locally the major problems were insufficiently strong footwear that could withstand the rain, mud and rough roads, and the replacement of clothing that was worn out, too small or unsuitable. However, documented evidence of problems is relatively uncommon and generally only in areas where there were large numbers of evacuees, particularly during 1940-1. It is fair comment that contemporary photographs of evacuee schoolchildren arriving in Devon do not bear witness to the 'ragged child' stereotype.

Prior to evacuation, MH Circular 1800/ Memo Ev.4 (1 May 1939) instructed parents to send their children with a change of underclothing, night clothes, house shoes or plimsolls, spare stockings or socks, a tooth-brush, comb, towel, handkerchiefs, and a warm coat or mackintosh. No-one really

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<sup>111</sup> *Education*, Volume LXXXIV, 5 December 1944, p.719

<sup>112</sup> *Devon Education Committee Circular No 20*, 5 May 1947

<sup>113</sup> R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp.115 and 374

knew how long the children would be away from home and clearly it would have been impossible for young children to carry much equipment or for the trains to accommodate it. Householders in reception areas were reassured that they were under no obligation to supply extra clothes or equipment even though some parents would be unable to supply their children with all the items listed. A rather vague assurance was given that ‘voluntary agencies may provide opportunities for improving the children’s personal equipment’.<sup>114</sup> This was clearly almost unworkable in practice and placed foster-parents in a very difficult position. It also placed an extra burden on both evacuated and local teachers who were responsible for reporting the clothing and footwear needs of children to the appropriate LEA if parents had failed to provide, resulting in another delay whilst the parents’ means were assessed.

In July 1939, the MH amended its clothing policy by acknowledging that unaccompanied children from families on public assistance and unemployment pay were eligible for extra help with clothing. However, pre-war annual reports of school clothing inspections encouraged a belief that the number of necessitous children was relatively small. Once again the true extent of poverty, exacerbated by interwar unemployment and only revealed by evacuation, appeared to have taken everyone including the Government<sup>115</sup> by surprise. There were no pre-war statutory powers in place for LEAs to provide boots and clothing for necessitous children in England and Wales, although these had existed in Scotland since 1908. It appears that the Treasury initially turned down a request from the MH for a clothing grant in Spring 1939 but finally agreed in August. A confidential letter was sent on 25 August 1939 to all evacuation authorities, ‘authorising the purchase locally of boots and clothing up to a limit of £1 for every 200 children’ with the stipulation that this was to be kept confidential.<sup>116</sup> Yet again the Government was indebted to the voluntary

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<sup>114</sup> *Ilfracombe UDC File of Circulars R2458A/(2/3)C260*. Also *Education*, Vol. LXXIII, 5 May 1939, p.560

<sup>115</sup> R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp. 115-9 and 375

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.* p. 118

agencies which rescued the situation from total chaos. During the war period approximately 11,000 WVS members were continually engaged in maintaining and distributing stocks of clothing stored in Regional, County, County Borough and smaller stores and dumps which had been donated from sources including the American and Canadian Red Cross, over 140 overseas organisations, the Lord Mayor of London's Air Raid Distress Fund, local people and also that purchased by local authorities.<sup>117</sup> By 1942 there were approximately 1,500 WVS issuing depots nationally.<sup>118</sup>

Several badly equipped children made far more impact than double the number adequately dressed and 'wild stories' were spread that feckless parents had failed their children although there was also a great deal of sympathy.<sup>119</sup> Various explanations have been offered as to why many of the children arrived ill-clad and it appears that a large number of parents would have preferred to send their children away better equipped.<sup>120</sup> A report in *Social Work* described 'the distress of London parents over the standard of clothing that the country people report to be "absolutely essential"'.<sup>121</sup> Most urban mothers, and indeed the evacuation planners themselves, were unaware that country conditions differed completely to those in towns.<sup>122</sup> For example, Dennis Pratt (8) described his mother's horror that 'her little boy' had to wear the heavy boots provided by his kind foster mother. Evacuation took place at the end of a long hot summer holiday and took most people by surprise. Only the bare essentials had been allowed for travelling and many parents believed the children would be returning sooner rather than later. Mothers had probably not sorted out the winter clothes and repairs of 'hand downs' was frequently a chore left to the winter months. However, the main reason for inadequate clothing was poverty. An estimated 4 million families were living 'from hand

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<sup>117</sup> *W.V.S Report of Ten Years' Work for the Nation 1938-1948*, R7/5/C/57 Box 7, 292 (DRO). See also C.Graves, *Women in Green* (William Heinemann Ltd. 1948) pp.189-190

<sup>118</sup> R.Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 375

<sup>119</sup> S.Isaacs, ed. *The Cambridge Evacuation Survey* (Methuen & Co. Ltd. London 1941) p.48

<sup>120</sup> R.Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.116 See also P.Ayers, *Women at War* (Liver Press 1988) p.3

<sup>121</sup> M.Cosens, 'Evacuation: A Social Revolution', *Social Work*, Vol. 2, January 1940, p.7

<sup>122</sup> For example, see W.Boyd, ed. *Evacuation in Scotland*, pp.57-8

to mouth' in 1939 following a prolonged period of unemployment and pawnbrokers, second-hand clothing dealers, jumble sales and clothing clubs selling garments of inferior quality were a lifeline. Following evacuation, *Our Towns* called both for the investigation of this 'vast instalment purchase organisation' and for reform of the supply of good and inexpensive clothing.<sup>123</sup>

An article written by an evacuated teacher highlighted the problems and expense of shoe repair, the need for which was now severely exacerbated both by walking long distances to schools in rural reception areas and by daily nature rambles.<sup>124</sup> An extract from a letter of thanks for a local collection of clothing, written by the headmistress of an Acton school evacuated to Totnes in September 1939, offers valuable insight into why so many of the children were insufficiently equipped and why parents were frequently not sending adequate supplies of clothing or money for such. She explained that a third of parents:

are sending everything needful; some are sending what they can by degrees; about a quarter cannot supply their children's needs. Reasons for poverty are many... Many of the fathers ...suffer from frequent unemployment... Many mothers work in local laundries... When war began many of the mothers were evacuated with their babies. Their earning powers gone... For those staying at home ...those who live on public assistance have their allowance curtailed because the children are away and their board and lodging is paid for them. However, clothes and boots and repairs for growing children cost money.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Women's Group on Public Welfare, *Our Towns*, p.55

<sup>124</sup> *The Times Educational Supplement*, 16 December 1939. Also HMI Inspector's Report *ED134/270 – 9B(2)/28*

<sup>125</sup> *Dartington Trust Archive – News of the Day*, 17 October 1939. See also R.Padley and M.Cole, *Evacuation Survey* (Routledge & Sons Ltd. 1940) p.222; Women's Group on Public Welfare, *Our Towns*, pp.54-61

Fathers of city children repaired their children's shoes and even a labourer in steady employment would have been hard pressed to provide 'leather footwear' for more than a couple of children.<sup>126</sup> Colin Crawley (2) described life in a large and very poor Bermondsey family. There was an old shoe cupboard and whenever one of the children got holes in their shoes they searched the cupboard for a shoe with no holes. If the shoe did not fit they cut a piece of cardboard to protect their feet which did not work very well and 'most children in the borough were in the same boat'. In rural reception areas where children had to walk long distances, often through mud, plimsolls and worn shoes were completely inadequate.

Clothing appeals on the radio and in the newspapers were hurriedly launched and the WVS, British Legion, WI and other institutions stepped in with various initiatives. Local examples during 1939 included Dawlish, where the Victoria Hall opened daily from October to provide clothing and repair for evacuees and, as elsewhere in the County, the public gave generously.<sup>127</sup> Exeter's Clothing Depot was set up by the Mayoress in September,<sup>128</sup> and Exeter British Legion developed a scheme for remodelling old clothes.<sup>129</sup> Exmouth volunteers fitted out 140 evacuees with complete sets of clothing,<sup>130</sup> and Moretonhampstead had spent about £34 on shoes and clothing by October.<sup>131</sup> South Molton RDC contributed £25 towards clothes and boots for urgent cases and the local WI collected and distributed clothing.<sup>132</sup> Teignmouth UDC's appeal for clothing and money immediately after the arrival of evacuees received a 'wonderful response'.<sup>133</sup> Mary Guscott wrote in her diary that her husband's employer gave her some clothes and shoes for her 2 evacuee girls,<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Women's Group on Public Welfare, *Our Towns*, p.61

<sup>127</sup> *Dawlish Urban District Council Minutes R2369A/(5/3)C24*, 4 October 1939

<sup>128</sup> *Express and Echo*, 13 September 1939

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.* 6 September 1939 and 2 September 1939

<sup>130</sup> *The Western Times*, 22 September 1939

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.* 6 October 1939

<sup>132</sup> *South Molton Rural District Council Minutes R2407A/(2/6)C12*, *South Molton Corporation Minute Book 3058add4/2/10-11*, p.145. *The Western Times*, 6 October 1939.

<sup>133</sup> *Express and Echo*, 6 September 1939

<sup>134</sup> Extract taken from Mary Guscott's unpublished diary, kindly supplied by her son. Mrs Guscott lived at Uppincott, Shobrooke near Crediton



and there were undoubtedly countless other individual gestures of generosity throughout the County. Local shops were also quick to exploit the potential market. For example, Wordens of Okehampton advertised heavy walking shoes at low prices for evacuees.<sup>135</sup>

However, with winter approaching the MH was forced to take further action. Circular 1907 (7 November 1939) continued to emphasise that responsibility for clothing children lay with the parents, the unemployment assistance board or voluntary agencies and not with foster parents. The Ministry was restrained by a parsimonious Treasury and counted on the fact that if teachers, helpers and householders kept in regular touch with parents ‘there should be comparatively little difficulty in obtaining the necessary supplies of clothing, or money for their purchase, from those parents who are willing and able to carry out their obligations towards their children’.<sup>136</sup> However, local authorities were instructed that if all else failed the matter was to be reported by the headteacher in the reception area to the director of education in the evacuating area. Nothing was to be said in public but approximately £15,000 had been distributed to the directors to deal with necessitous cases.<sup>137</sup> Although ‘it certainly would have offended against all the canons of welfare work, hitherto practised’<sup>138</sup> not to have investigated the parents’ financial circumstances before spending tax payers’ money on clothes, nevertheless this could be a very tortuous procedure which adversely affected the child.<sup>139</sup>

Titmuss believed this was ‘in effect, the beginning of a new social service’, because previously the LEAs had no statutory powers to provide for necessitous children. Nevertheless, he described the Government Clothing Scheme as a ‘characteristic British mixture of Exchequer money and

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<sup>135</sup> *The Western Times*, 8 September 1939

<sup>136</sup> *Education*, Vol. LXXIV, p.465

<sup>137</sup> R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.120

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.* p. 165

<sup>139</sup> R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 214

charitable gifts, administered by local authorities and run by voluntary workers'. It was cumbersome with too many delays before children got clothes, and for the first year of war it failed to help the poor clothe their children.<sup>140</sup> As Welshman highlighted, 'the Ministry still believed that the state should only step in after the resources of parents and voluntary organizations had been exhausted'.<sup>141</sup> Pressure on the Government began to increase. Many LEAs supported the resolution passed by Grimsby LEA at the beginning of 1940 urging the Government to empower reception authorities to supply clothing and footwear aided by a 100% grant and if necessary to increase contributions payable by parents in respect of billeting charges to meet the additional cost.<sup>142</sup> The General Purposes Committee of the Association of Municipal Corporations, whilst not supporting Grimsby's resolution, nevertheless made representations to the MH that local authorities in reception areas should be authorised in cases of urgency to supply the child immediately and then to recover the cost from the parent or appropriate assistance authority. Failing recovery, expenditure should be charged to the Evacuation Account.<sup>143</sup> However, the MH and Board continued to refuse 'to burden themselves with what they regarded as a parental responsibility',<sup>144</sup> provoking criticism of inadequate measures and reliance on voluntary bodies - 'the sooner the state shoulders its due responsibilities the better for its schemes of evacuation'.<sup>145</sup>

The second evacuation scheme introduced more problems, especially to Devon. The Bristol Regional Officer of the WVS claimed that about 40% of parents were unable to clothe their children adequately.<sup>146</sup> Many local initiatives were introduced which included clothing funds and make-and-

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<sup>140</sup> R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp. 115, 120, 166 and 374

<sup>141</sup> J. Welshman, 'Evacuation and Social Policy during the Second World War', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 9, No 2, pp. 40-44

<sup>142</sup> *Education*, Vol. LXXV, 2 February 1940, p.92

<sup>143</sup> *Education*, Vol. LXXVI, 19 July 1940, p.46

<sup>144</sup> P.H.J.H.Gosden, *Education in the Second World War*, p.205

<sup>145</sup> F. Le Gros Clark and R.W.Toms, *Evacuation – Failure or Reform*, *Fabian Tract 249* (1940) (Klaus Reprint 1969)p.7

<sup>146</sup> *North Devon Journal*, 18 July 1940

mend groups.<sup>147</sup> Local grumbles were few but the following comments about the clothing problem were found, all from overcrowded areas. The Mayor of Barnstaple claimed some evacuees had been given new clothes and during the week the parents arrived, changed the children's clothing and took it back to London presumably to sell.<sup>148</sup> An unusually tetchy statement from the Chairman of Braunton PC, already vexed by severe water shortages, claimed that 'if it were not for the goodwill and generosity of the people of Braunton, a lot of these youngsters would be walking about in rags and tatters'.<sup>149</sup> The CBO for Dawlish UDC was sympathetic to the plight of approximately 1,800 evacuee children 'many of them through no fault of their own were found to be sorely in need of clothing and footwear. It therefore became necessary to open a Clothing Centre'.<sup>150</sup> The Chairman of the Local Evacuation Committee later recorded that in the early days of the evacuation scheme when Dawlish received over 1,000 evacuees (normal population approximately 6,000) the problem of clothing was 'oft-times...a veritable nightmare'.<sup>151</sup> The Town Clerk of Ilfracombe UDC wrote to the Lord Mayor of London's Secretary on 27 November 1940 hoping to secure a similar donation as that given to Barnstaple MB and RDC (£500 each) to help with 1,800 LCC schoolchildren. He stated that 'a great number of these persons are sorely in need of assistance and the WVS and other associations are doing great work to provide them with clothing'.<sup>152</sup> By January 1941, over 300 families in the Newton Abbot area had been supplied with clothing which had 'become available in an almost unceasing flow'. At least 5,000 separate articles

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<sup>147</sup> Examples include Barnstaple Rural District Clothing Fund, *North Devon Journal*, 15 August 1940; the Wayside Club, Barnstaple where evacuees could bring mending and have lunch for 1s weekly, *North Devon Journal*, 17 October 1940; Bradnich clothing appeal for winter garments, *The Western Times*, 8 November 1940; locals at Clovelly donated or made clothes for the orphan evacuees from Plymouth, V. Norman, *Scattered Homes*, p.223. Salcombe Regis Mother's Union set up a sewing party in November for making clothes for evacuees, *3232A/PG1*. Bideford WVS organised a collection of unwanted clothing for over 1,000 evacuees from Croydon. Boots and shoes were the biggest problem but the WVS also sewed, knitted and repaired garments and evacuated mothers assisted. *Annual Report of the Honorary Secretary 1940, Bideford Womens' Emergency Services (affiliated to WVS) Minute Book 1939-1945, R2379A/(1-1)Z28*

<sup>148</sup> *North Devon Journal*, 14 November 1940

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.* 12 December 1940

<sup>150</sup> *Dawlish UDC Evacuation Folder*, Letter dated 23 July 1945 from CBO, *R2369AddC4A*

<sup>151</sup> *Dawlish Urban District Council Minutes R2369A/(5/3)C24*, 4 October 1939 and *C29*, March 1944 *Résumé of Evacuation*

<sup>152</sup> *Ilfracombe RDC, Town Clerk's Letter Book R2458A/(2/2)*

were undergoing repair and over 1,000 garments given to evacuee children. The local WVS was in charge of much of this organisation.<sup>153</sup> Paignton UDC reported there were problems washing, mending and providing clothes for approximately 2,266 schoolchildren who had arrived in June 1940. Enquiries revealed that in many cases the parents could not afford to provide clothing and some clothing sent by parents was not approved by foster parents.<sup>154</sup> South Molton RDC requested sanction from the Regional Controller for permission to buy boots for needy evacuees and charge this to the Evacuation Account.<sup>155</sup>

One initiative was the formation of boot repairing classes, and schools which were able to introduce classes apparently received financial assistance from DCC.<sup>156</sup> Dawlish School reported such success that 6 or 7 teachers in the County were sent by the Department of Education Authority to study the working of the class.<sup>157</sup> The LCC Chairman visited Devon and found the evacuees well-equipped with Wellingtons and strong boots 'the latter largely as a result of the boot-repair shops started by senior schools in the various towns and villages'.<sup>158</sup> As with other repercussions of evacuation, clothing deprivation amongst a minority of local children was also highlighted and there are some documented examples of ragged clothing and totally inadequate footwear,<sup>159</sup> sometimes preventing children from walking to school through muddy fields. In one case during the severe weather in

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<sup>153</sup> *The Western Times*, 8 January 1941

<sup>154</sup> *Paignton UDC Minutes, R4582A/PC9*, 1 July 1940, 15 August 1940, 2 September 1940

<sup>155</sup> *South Molton Rural District Council Minutes R2407A/(2/6)C12*, 10 October 1940

<sup>156</sup> *Bradley Rowe School 76/6/1 – letter in Lillie Road Log Book* (evacuated LCC school). The following records on boot repairing classes were found in the archives: *Bradley Rowe School 76/6/2 – Beaufort House Evacuation Party*, October 1940; *Tavistock Senior School Log Book 792C/EFL9-10*, 1942; *Tiverton Heathcoat Boys' School Log Book 3029C/EAL3*, May 1941; *The Western Times – report on LCC evacuee boys in Totnes*, 21 March 1941; *Parliamentary Debates* Vol. 370, Col. 311-2, 20 March 1941. Minister of Education spoke of 29 evacuated schoolboys at Dartington Hall – the initial cost of leather scrap was met by an LCC grant.

<sup>157</sup> *The Western Times*, 18 July 1941

<sup>158</sup> *The Times Educational Supplement*, 11 January 1941.

<sup>159</sup> Examples include *Colebrooke School Log Book, 542C/EAL2* (1943); *Bickington School Log Book, 549C/EFL1* (24 March 1943)

January 1940, village children in Bulkworthy came to school with old socks as overshoes which became frozen to the ground.<sup>160</sup>

As the Blitz raged, forcing mothers and children out of the London area, MH Circular 2168 (2 October 1940) marked an official change of emphasis. The need to clothe children now took priority over recovering costs although voluntary effort was still heavily relied upon.<sup>161</sup> More liberal grants were allotted to local authorities in evacuation areas for their own clothing schemes. In November, the London Clothing Scheme, initiated by the MH, LCC and WVS, was started and extended to include children in reception areas of all evacuating authorities in the South, Southeast and Southwest of England. In January 1941, a letter from DCEC to local authorities explained that Circular 2168 was ‘an attempt to deal in a more comprehensive and businesslike way with the problem of supplying evacuee children with boots and clothing’ and was intended to take the load off the shoulders of foster parents. Three County Clothing Depots were set up by the WVS in Devon at this time.<sup>162</sup> The Shakespeare Report recommended weekly inspection of clothing by teachers<sup>163</sup> and an acceleration of the arrangements for authorising the issue of clothing by evacuation authorities.<sup>164</sup> Pressure for improvement also came from such bodies as the Association of Education Committees, which urged the Government to introduce legislation to enable local authorities to incur expenditure on the provision of footwear for necessitous schoolchildren.<sup>165</sup> Teachers were reminded by DCEC both of the importance of welfare in the success or failure of evacuation and of the great debt owed to teaching staffs. It hoped both local and evacuated staff

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<sup>160</sup> *Bulkworthy School Log Book 646C/EFL3*

<sup>161</sup> R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp. 374-5

<sup>162</sup> *Seaton UDC R7/6/C!07*

<sup>163</sup> One example of a local school implementing this policy was Coldridge – *Coldridge School Log Book, 858AC/EFL2-3*, May 1941

<sup>164</sup> *Report on Conditions in Reception Areas by a Committee under the Chairmanship of Mr Geoffrey Shakespeare, M.P.* (HMSO 1941) p.17

<sup>165</sup> *Education*, Volume LXXVIII, 1 August 1941. Another deputation met the President of the Board of Education on 9 January 1942, *Education*, Volume LXXIX, p.228 – 20 March 1942

would be included on welfare committees. Assistance with the boots and clothing schemes was now included as an educational responsibility.<sup>166</sup>

Anxious not to appear as if there had been a total ‘climb down’ from the previous policy of parental responsibility, the subsequent MH Circular 2488 (24 September 1941) clearly stated that the methods recommended in Circular 2168 had been wholly successful in ensuring that parents were reminded if necessary of their responsibility to clothe their children but that children were being provided without delay if the parent was unable to fulfill their obligation. All evacuation authorities were asked to re-examine their clothing arrangements for evacuated unaccompanied children immediately.<sup>167</sup> Locally, aside from the WVS and other voluntary help such as Toc H, Rotary, the Salvation Army, churches and chapels, much of the detailed work involved in the Clothing Scheme fell on teachers. Administratively this became even more complicated after 9 June 1941 following the sudden and unexpected announcement of clothes rationing. Despite this extra work, no complaints in Devon’s school log books were found. In fact virtually nothing was recorded about clothing problems but one entry in the Cruwys Morchard Log Book illustrates the extra work for teachers. In March 1942, the Headteacher had to close the school early to catch the bus to Tiverton in order to visit the WVS depot in search of a pair of boots for an evacuee who had been waiting for replacement boots or shoes since Christmas. One week later he received boots from home and by May the Headteacher reported that the boots of evacuees were in much better condition and most had 2 pairs.<sup>168</sup> One other comment was found in a letter written to Dorothy Elmhirst from the Welfare Officer for the Totnes area: ‘clothing which was such an awful problem and deluged me when I first began is not so bad now, though footwear is a constant problem. City parents cannot

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<sup>166</sup> *Okehampton Senior School 464C/EAM387-392*

<sup>167</sup> *3248A/16/2*

<sup>168</sup> *Cruwys Morchard School Log Book 509c/EFL1*

understand or believe the strain on shoe leather which long country walks can exact from boots bought for city wear'.<sup>169</sup>

There were however some problems with correct form filling by local teachers. In March 1941, DCEC Circular 8 drew attention to a complaint by the LCC Education Officer. The Boots and Clothing Scheme was only intended for the minority of children whose parents could not meet their needs and Form U.C.1 (request for clothing and/or footwear) was 'being used too liberally and often with insufficient reason "inclement weather", "boots worn out" "no reply from parents" and so on ... as reasons for urgency. If it is known that the parents will have difficulty in supplying the clothes, Form C1 (letter to parents) should be dispensed with and C2 sent to the (evacuating) authority at once'.<sup>170</sup> This in turn caused problems because a number of teachers then dispensed with Form C1 and sent C2 directly to the District Care Organiser. In a number of cases parents protested they were not consulted by the teachers<sup>171</sup> although Okehampton's CBO claimed that letters to children's parents asking for clothing or settlement of accounts paid for by Okehampton foster parents went unanswered and cash payments for items such as footwear repairs were never mentioned even in weekly letters from the parents. The CBO felt that some parents were taking advantage of the generosity of foster parents.<sup>172</sup> Another reminder from the LCC in February 1942 highlighted that the scope and purpose of the London Clothing Scheme appeared in danger of being misunderstood. The official scheme only operated for children whose parents could not afford to buy their clothing and wherever possible parents were expected to pay at least part of the cost since 'the LCC is not a substitute for retail stores'.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> *Dartington Hall Archive*, Letter dated January 1942

<sup>170</sup> *DCEC Circular 8, 2066C/EAM51*, dated 8 March 1941

<sup>171</sup> *DCEC Circular 9, 2066C/EAM51*, dated 9 May 1941

<sup>172</sup> *3248A/16/2* Letter to Town Clerk dated July 1941

<sup>173</sup> *DCEC Circular 18, 2066C/EAM51*, dated 9 February 1942

When Plymouth children were evacuated during 1941, they were still only advised to take the bare minimum of clothing, just as the original evacuees in 1939 had done. For a girl this included, besides the clothes being worn: 1 vest, 1 pair of knickers, 1 bodice, 1 petticoat, 2 pairs of stockings, handkerchiefs, 1 slip and blouse, 1 cardigan, night attire and if possible Wellingtons, boots or shoes and plimsolls.<sup>174</sup> A letter from the MH to Plymouth's Town Clerk, dated 5 May 1941, agreed to supplement 'if need arises' efforts made by the Authority and volunteers by up to £100. No public reference was to be made as 'it might lessen the sense of parental responsibility or discourage voluntary effort'. By 31 January 1942, up to £250 was allowed but by June the Town Clerk was warned that in future local purchase of materials and articles of clothing was not allowed. Supplies were to be obtained centrally through the Senior Regional Office at Bristol.<sup>175</sup> There were several references in the Astor Family Papers to children from Plymouth arriving ill-clad. Lady Vivian, WVS Organiser for Cornwall, wrote to Lady Astor about children arriving in St Ives 'in the most disgraceful condition, not even a change of clothes with them. In fact, they are almost in rags'. The Plymouth Secretary for Education wrote a very apologetic letter to Lady Astor explaining that local arrangements were designed to ensure that all children left the City properly clad. Another letter addressed to Lady Astor from the leader of a group of 22 children evacuated to Willand (Devon) spoke of a number of children without sufficient or suitable clothes. She was advised to visit the WVS in Cullompton.<sup>176</sup>

The boot and clothing scheme became even more necessary as clothing shortages increased throughout the war. Clothing centres continued to be set up by the WVS in Devon for locals as well as evacuees but sometimes ran short of stock. For example, following the Plymouth bombing raids, urgent appeals for donations went out as the WVS depot in Torbay was practically depleted.<sup>177</sup> By

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<sup>174</sup> *City of Plymouth Evacuation Scheme 1644/376*

<sup>175</sup> *City of Plymouth Evacuation 1645/11/12/30*

<sup>176</sup> *Astor Family Papers 186/21/3*, Letters dated May and October 1941

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.* 5 September 1941



March 1943, the WVS stated that the supply of Wellington Boots for Devon children was almost exhausted and by April 1944 they were restricted in rural areas to those who had long or muddy journeys to school. By December 1944 following the third evacuation wave there were very few available for distribution through the WVS.<sup>178</sup> For example, at Branscombe School only children who lived 2 miles or more from school or who could produce a Medical Certificate were eligible for Wellingtons.<sup>179</sup> By August 1944, the Board of Trade endeavoured to put supplies at the disposal of local authorities in evacuation areas so that every official evacuee could arrive in the reception areas with a reasonable supply of clothing and footwear.<sup>180</sup>

There is no doubt that many foster parents in Devon were extremely generous to their evacuees<sup>181</sup> and countless women volunteered their time throughout the war, sorting and repairing second-hand clothing. Local newspapers continued to report on charitable clothing initiatives such as village dances to raise money and sewing groups. One Exeter woman died from staphylococcal septicaemia after pricking her finger mending black stockings for evacuee children.<sup>182</sup> Bideford Women's Emergency Services, affiliated to the WVS, even made garments from the salvaged pieces of burnt clothing sent from Bristol.<sup>183</sup> Many from the sample remember receiving clothing or money for clothing from home and three cases where evacuees said their clothing was either sold for profit<sup>184</sup> or taken away.<sup>185</sup> Colin Jones (8) became obsessed about the wear and tear on his clothes. His foster mother sewed up his pockets to prevent tearing and he subsequently got chilblains. Another boy was accused of purposely making holes in his clothes to make work for the

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<sup>178</sup> DCEC Circulars 31, 44 and 50, 2066C/EAM51

<sup>179</sup> Branscombe School Log Book 5022C/EFL3, December 1944

<sup>180</sup> Parliamentary Debates, Volume 402, Column 1134

<sup>181</sup> See letter from WVS organiser, *The Western Times*, 24 October 1941

<sup>182</sup> *The Western Times*, 27 December 1940

<sup>183</sup> Bideford Women's Emergency Services Minute Book R2379A/(1-1)Z28

<sup>184</sup> Peggy Martin aged 9

<sup>185</sup> Jean Wiltshire aged 6 and June Redvers aged 10

foster mother.<sup>186</sup> However, 7 evacuees remembered that their foster mothers enjoyed sewing and knitting for them and others were either bought or given clothing and footwear. One lucky evacuee in Devon received some clothing from the WVS. When he ripped the stitches in the trouser pocket he found 2s and a letter from Buenos Aires asking him to write if there was anything he needed.<sup>187</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The problematic wartime issue of clothing and footwear for evacuees once again highlights the lack of Government foresight in its evacuation planning and its determination to insist on parental responsibility despite the obvious hardships of many families, severely exacerbated by war. It also illustrates both the Government's dependence on voluntary agencies and public generosity which prevented the problem from becoming overwhelming and the gradual realisation that the laborious practice of means testing was impracticable during war conditions. Welshman has described the period of September 1939 to May 1941, when evacuation forced the Government to face the problems of clothing and footwear, as 'an interesting study in policy formation',<sup>188</sup> and Gosden emphasised the gradual change in the Board's attitude with the progression of war and continuous lobbying. LEAs were finally empowered to provide footwear and clothing by the 1944 Education Act.<sup>189</sup> Although costly, Titmuss believed the clothing scheme, which had grown steadily throughout the war, was one of the most successful new welfare services introduced as a result of evacuation. It also began to replace many of the second-hand dealers and clothing clubs which had been a feature of pre-war urban cities.<sup>190</sup> Another positive outcome of the evacuee clothing problem were the contemporary reports which 'offered revealing insights into the issue of footwear and clothing which had rarely been mentioned by interwar social surveys'. There was also additional

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<sup>186</sup> Information supplied by Pamela Thompson aged 10

<sup>187</sup> *The Western Times*, 21 November 1941

<sup>188</sup> J. Welshman, 'Evacuation and Social Policy', *Twentieth Century British History*, Volume 9, No. 1, 1998, p.41

<sup>189</sup> P.H.J.H. Gosden, *Education in the Second World War*, p.206

<sup>190</sup> R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.376

criticism of school medical inspections which resulted in some further examination of the wider links between poverty, health and welfare. For example, Dr E.H. Wilkins, SMO, conducted a survey in 1941 on schoolchildren's feet. He concluded bad feet would only be solved by a rise in living standards and an attack on poverty.<sup>191</sup> As with other aspects of evacuation, Devon's officials and populace coped generously, sympathetically and sensibly with the clothing and footwear problems and documentary sources once again offer very little evidence to suggest that there was much formal complaint.

Reiterating the conclusions drawn on the other issues discussed above, any local increase in juvenile delinquency during the war cannot be blamed on evacuees despite their large numbers. However, the County benefited both from the postwar retention of several wartime hostels for maladjusted children and from the practical knowledge gained. Problems arising from religious issues were very few, illustrating local religious tolerance. The contribution of both local evacuee children to the war effort, particularly in agriculture and during the 1940 Holiday Campaign, was crucial and little evidence of serious exploitation was found although education was somewhat disrupted during peak periods. The wartime focus on children's work led to some postwar reform of previous practice.

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<sup>191</sup> E. H. Wilkins, 'Feet: With Particular Reference to School Children', *Medical Officer*, 66 (1941) pp. 6,30,38 as cited in J.Welshman, 'Evacuation and Social Policy during the Second World War: Myth and Reality', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 9, No.2, pp.40-44

## CHAPTER NINE

### Wartime expansion of school meals and milk

This Chapter considers, against the national backdrop, both the pre-war provision of school meals and milk in Devon and its wartime expansion. The argument is made that the principal catalyst for the very successful local expansion of provision was evacuation, particularly marked in the case of school canteens. As ever, locally recorded figures and percentages differ and can only ever be rough approximations due to the fluid nature of the wartime school population, the fluctuating meal and milk consumption according to the season, the varying school attendance levels and the fact that it is not always clear whether secondary pupils were included in the figures. Local percentages appear to have been calculated from the number of pupils attending school on a particular day rather than taking the yearly average.<sup>1</sup> This therefore could result in considerable percentage variance depending on the season and how many children were absent from school on any given day.

#### Pre-war provision

Provision of school meals from 1906 until the early 1940s must be viewed against a backdrop of ‘vigorous debate... between those who favoured state intervention, and others who maintained that malnutrition was a problem of poor parental care and who opposed school meals funded out of the rates’.<sup>2</sup> The 1906 Education (Provision of Meals) Act empowered LEAs to ‘take such steps as they think fit for the provision of meals or milk for children in attendance at any public elementary school in their area’. However, this was not compulsory and although children began to be assessed

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<sup>1</sup> For example, figures given for 1943 by the CMO recorded that 38,321 pupils were present ‘on the day’ at school (total school roll 43,723) and 27,712 (72.3%) took milk, *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1943*, DCC 150/4/5/1, p.12

<sup>2</sup> J. Welshman, ‘School Meals and Milk in England and Wales 1906-45’, *Medical History*, Volume 41, No.1 (January 1997) pp.6-29

for malnourishment by SMOs after 1908, provision for the needy, generally in the form of milk, was small scale and strictly means tested.<sup>3</sup> Although consolidated by further legislation in 1914, 1921 and 1934, the Board ‘interpreted legislation narrowly, refused to accept any wider responsibility for child poverty, and rarely put pressure on LEAs which provided inadequate meals services’.<sup>4</sup>

During the 1920s, school meals were provided nationally by some LEAs free of charge or subsidised, either on grounds of poverty or malnourishment. However, provision was haphazard and financial retrenchment resulted in cutbacks to ‘all aspects’ of the school meals service. Rural deprivation in Devon was stark with pupils described in a 1920 SMO’s report as ‘pale, undersized, underfed, sad-faced, suffering from a combination of bad housing, large families and inadequate food. Often such children had to walk one, two or even three miles to school in all weathers, sometimes arriving cold, soaked and tired’.<sup>5</sup> Another very similar report on Devon in 1923 recorded ‘many of the children in country schools are pale-faced, anaemic-looking, with eyes lacking lustre, undersized, under-fed and sad-faced’.<sup>6</sup> In 1927, Devon’s headteachers were encouraged to provide suitable surroundings and provision for heating meals brought by children who lived a distance from school. Equipment for heating meals (a boiler, jug for cocoa and a saucepan for boiling eggs) was available from DCEC on request although parents were expected to provide crockery and cutlery.<sup>7</sup> Following the financial crisis of 1931, the Board changed the

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<sup>3</sup> In 1925 only about 20,000 children in England and Wales received school milk, P. Atkins, ‘Fattening children or fattening farmers? School milk in Britain, 1921-1941’, *Economic History Review*, LVIII, 1 (2005), pp. 57-78

<sup>4</sup> J. Welshman, ‘School Meals and Milk in England and Wales 1906-45’, *Medical History*, p.28

<sup>5</sup> H. Hendrick, *Child Welfare* (The Policy Press 2003) pp.87-88. Second quote taken from a report by Devon’s SMO in 1920

<sup>6</sup> Liberal Land Committee, *The Land and the Nation: Rural Report of the Liberal Land Committee, 1923-5* (London: Hodder and Stoughton 1925) as cited in P. Pagnamenta and R. Overy, *All Our Working Lives* (British Broadcasting Corporation 1984) p.198

<sup>7</sup> *Okehampton School Correspondence 464C/EAM 215-221, DCEC Circular No. 26, August 1927*

practice of selection so that poverty as well as malnourishment had to be proved.<sup>8</sup> By 1935 Devon had introduced a system of nutrition grading<sup>9</sup> but parents' income was still carefully scrutinised by the County Medical Department.<sup>10</sup> By 1938 DCEC was actively discussing the provision of canteen facilities for Junior and Infant Schools where numbers were over 50, and provision was agreed for 2 large elementary schools (Hemyock and Shaugh Prior).<sup>11</sup> However, by September the Committee had concerns about over-expenditure on 1d meals and free milk and new awards were suspended.<sup>12</sup> By May 1939 only 855 (2.2%) schoolchildren were receiving subsidised 1d meals (if canteen facilities existed)<sup>13</sup> and it was announced that in future only children in categories C (slightly undernourished) and D (badly nourished) would be supplied with free milk and 1d meals.<sup>14</sup>

There are very few log book entries recording school meal provision in Devon prior to war.<sup>15</sup>

Several schools recorded that meals such as pasties brought by children were warmed,<sup>16</sup> and at the small rural school of Halwell and Moreleigh the dedicated headmistress cooked a midday meal for children unable to return home.<sup>17</sup> Although the health benefits were acknowledged,<sup>18</sup> drastic cuts in the County's 5 Year Programme of estimated capital expenditure from 1938-1943 meant that the

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<sup>8</sup> H. Hendrick, *Child Welfare*, p.89. According to Atkins, between 1934 to 1939, the Board of Education 'continued to claim that child malnutrition had been exaggerated'. It also did not believe that its duty extended to income support for poor families, P. Atkins, 'Fattening children or fattening farmers? School milk in Britain, 1921-1941', *Economic History Review*, LVIII, 1 (2005), p. 69

<sup>9</sup> *Annual Report of School Medical Officer 1939*, DCC150/4/5/1, p. 4

<sup>10</sup> *Buckerell Log Book 642C/EFL2*, July 1935

<sup>11</sup> *Devon Education Committee Minutes*, DCC150/4/1/36 pp.18 and.99. Report of Elementary Education Sub-Committee, 12 May 1938

<sup>12</sup> 464C/EAM 215-221, DCEC Circular No.83, September 1938

<sup>13</sup> DCC150/4/1/37 p.132

<sup>14</sup> 464C/EAM 215-221, DCEC Circular No.89, 12 May 1939

<sup>15</sup> One rare example of a small rural school was Dunkeswell School where children who stayed to lunch were offered hot meals twice weekly from 1936, *Dunkeswell School Log Book*, 663C/EFL1

<sup>16</sup> *Highhampton School Log Book 1664C/EFL2*, *Hittisleigh School Managers' Minutes 675C/EAM2*

<sup>17</sup> *Halwell and Moreleigh Log Book 1274C/EAL3*

<sup>18</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1939*, DCC 150/4/5/1, p.12

provision of canteens in rural village schools was a very distant prospect.<sup>19</sup> However, the newly built Chagford Senior Mixed (opened in 1936) was one of 23 senior schools providing canteens by 1938.<sup>20</sup> Providing a two course meal for 3d, the canteen attracted much attention in the Press and was visited by many people including those from other schools. Featured frequently in the school log book, it was obviously deemed an enormous success.<sup>21</sup> From April 1939, Dawlish Infants' School offered children who lived more than 10 minutes walk away the opportunity to be bussed to Dawlish Senior School canteen for 3d meals. In 1939, DCEC introduced the Nutrition Survey<sup>22</sup> and it is a sobering thought that the first survey carried out at Uffculme Ashill School found 57% of the children (approximately 20-27 on roll) undernourished. Only two or three children at the school were evacuees.<sup>23</sup> This compares badly with the 1937 national malnutrition figures of 15% Category A (excellent), 73.8% Category B (Normal), 10.6% Category C (slightly under-nourished) and 0.7% Category D (badly under-nourished).<sup>24</sup> Many children at Great Torrington Junior Mixed were also described as under-nourished in 1939.<sup>25</sup>

Nationally, the continuing attitude amongst many right-wing politicians was that State provision encouraged 'bad or careless parents' to provide less at home,<sup>26</sup> and Welshman emphasised that civil servants at the Board also shared these 'conservative interpretations of poverty and family

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<sup>19</sup> *Devon County Council Minutes Appendix 11, Report of Finance Committee 15 December 1938, DCC148/14.* Capital expenditure for education in 1937-8 was £319,891. The projected targets were £174,853 (1938-39), £222,020 (1939-1940), £162,707 (1940-1941), £145,000 (1941-2) and £144,000 (1942-1943)

<sup>20</sup> *DCC150/4/1/36* p.137

<sup>21</sup> *Chagford Senior Mixed School Log Book 1974C/ESL1*

<sup>22</sup> *Annual Report of School Medical Officer 1939, DCC150/4/5/1*, p. 4

<sup>23</sup> *Uffculme Ashill Log Book 756C/EAL6*

<sup>24</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer for the City of Plymouth 1938*, pp. 183-4 (held at Westcountry Studies Library)

<sup>25</sup> *Great Torrington Junior Mixed School Log Book 2485C/EAL8*, December 1939. This was before the arrival of evacuees

<sup>26</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 317, Col 157, 4 November 1939

life'.<sup>27</sup> Pre-war provision of free or subsidised meals in schools was small scale<sup>28</sup> and the Board's CMO later acknowledged that the standard of meals was very low.<sup>29</sup> By 1938, approximately 3.9% (160,000) of elementary schoolchildren in England and Wales took meals, with 110,000 of these generally receiving free meals at feeding centres, and the remaining 50,000 paying for meals in school canteens.<sup>30</sup>

Pre-war milk supply for Devon's schoolchildren depended on availability, and powdered milk was sometimes used. Milk was felt to be the most suitable and cheapest form of nourishment<sup>31</sup> and, by 1925, DCEC encouraged headteachers to promote consumption, stating that most parents could afford this.<sup>32</sup> *DCEC Circular 37* (July 1930) expressed concern that many schools had arranged to supply malted milk instead of plain milk using equipment lent by the supplier, usually Horlicks or Cow and Gate. Teachers were warned that no such scheme should be adopted without consultation with the Committee, who also discouraged dried milk manufacturers from canvassing headteachers in elementary schools.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, this practice remained quite common during the 1930s, usually because children and parents either preferred malted milk or suitable milk supplies were unobtainable.<sup>34</sup> In January 1932, DCEC informed headteachers that arrangements were in place for a number of schools to be supplied with milk under the National Milk Publicity Scheme with one

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<sup>27</sup> J. Welshman, 'School Meals and Milk in England and Wales 1906-45', *Medical History*, p.8

<sup>28</sup> P.H.J.H. Gosden, *Education in the Second World War* (Methuen & Co. Ltd. 1976) pp. 183-4

<sup>29</sup> *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. 24

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* p.23

<sup>31</sup> Petty suggested that school milk was expanded in the 1930s at the expense of solid school meals, E.C.Petty, 'The impact of the newer knowledge on nutrition: nutrition science and nutrition policy, 1900-1939' (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Univ. of London 1987) as cited in P.J. Atkins, 'Fattening children or fattening farmers? School milk in Britain, 1921-1941, *Economic History Review*, LVIII, 1 (2005) p. 75

<sup>32</sup> *Devon County Education Circulars 464C/EAM215-221, Circular No 10*, September 1925

<sup>33</sup> *Devon County Education Circulars 464C/EAM215-221, Circular No. 37. Poughill School* sought permission from DCEC in 1938 to give Ambrosia dried milk to those receiving free milk because fresh milk was unobtainable. *Log Book 76/19/1/1*

<sup>34</sup> Examples include *North Bovey Log Book 1411C/EFL4*, 1 October 1937; *Colebrooke Log Book 542C/EAL2*, March 1937; *Drewsteington (Whiddon Down Board School) Log Book 1908C/EFL2*, December 1935; *Dunchideock Log Book 662C/EFL2*, January 1938; *Great Torrington Junior Mixed Log Book 2485C/EAL8*, December 1930; *Hartland Elmscott Log Book 673C/EAL2*, September 1936; *Iddesleigh and Dowland Log*



third pint costing 1d and by 1933 Milk Clubs, already popular in some counties, were actively encouraged.<sup>35</sup>

Fears that the market would de-stabilise due to an excess supply of milk<sup>36</sup> resulted in the 1934 Milk-in-Schools' Scheme,<sup>37</sup> 'aimed more to solve the problems of the dairy industry than to improve the health of schoolchildren'.<sup>38</sup> Provision was regionally patchy as illustrated by Devon's scheme which was beset with problems between 1934-1938. The local schools that did introduce the scheme frequently mentioned problems of erratic supply despite the importance of dairy farming in the region. Reasons given varied from sick cows, lack of bottles, refusal of producers to adhere to the Grade 'A'<sup>39</sup> quality requirements of the County and disinclination to provide milk for just a few children. Milk schemes were abandoned or never started in some schools due to either lack of supply or lack of enthusiasm for daily milk, both amongst the children themselves and parents who had to pay.<sup>40</sup> There are however some examples of schools, both urban and rural, where milk

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*Book 681C/EFL1*, November 1922 that hot cocoa; *Ilfracombe Infants Log Book 2314C/EFL5*, November 1936. *Pancrasweek Log Book 714C/EFLC*, December 1937.

<sup>35</sup> *Devon County Education Circulars 464C/EAM215-221*, Circular No. 42 (January 1932) and Circular No. 49 (May 1933). Also see P. Atkins, 'Fattening children or fattening farmers? School milk in Britain, 1921-1941', *Economic History Review*, LVIII, 1 (2005), p. 58 for discussion on national voluntary milk clubs during the 1920s. Atkins highlighted that by 1933 over 1 million children in England and Wales were involved in these clubs

<sup>36</sup> The downturn in agriculture during the 1920s and 1930s resulted in farmers turning to increased milk production. The 1932 Imperial Economic Conference also kept British markets open to imports of dairy products from Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, depressing the market for surplus milk in Britain. See P. Atkins, 'Fattening children or fattening farmers? School milk in Britain, 1921-1941', *Economic History Review*, pp. 67 and 71.

<sup>37</sup> The Milk Marketing Board took over the Milk in Schools Scheme in 1934, P. Atkins, 'Fattening children or fattening farmers? School milk in Britain, 1921-1941', *Economic History Review*, p. 59

<sup>38</sup> J. Welshman, 'School Meals and Milk in England and Wales 1906-45', *Medical History*, p.28. The Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Health also acknowledged that the Scheme had originated as a means of disposing of surplus milk, *The Health of the School Child, Report of the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Education for the Years 1939-45*, p. 26

<sup>39</sup> In 1936, 'one-fifth of school milk in England and Wales was neither heat-treated nor Grade A (Tuberculin Tested) - P. Atkins, 'Fattening children or fattening farmers? School milk in Britain, 1921-1941', *Economic History Review*, p. 70

<sup>40</sup> Examples include *Inwardleigh Managers' Minutes 683C/EAM6*, 1935; *Coldridge Log Book 858AC/EFL2-3*, 1939. *Bratton Clovelly Log Book 848aC/EAL1*, July 1939; *St Nicholas Church School, Combe Raleigh Log Book 657C/EFL2*. *Buckerell Log Book 642C/EFL2*, July 1935. *Branscombe Managers' Minutes 5022Cadd/EFMI*, March 1935; *Dunkeswell Log Book 663C/EFL1*, 1935; *Culmstock Managers' Minutes 2679C/EAM1*, October 1934; *Halberton Log Book 672C/EAL1*, April 1936; *Milton Abbot, Chillaton Log*

provision appeared to be making headway<sup>41</sup> although, as mentioned above, difficulty of supply was frequently the reason why the scheme broke down and log books are not reliable sources of when and if the scheme broke down and for how long.

Many teachers recognised the benefits of milk consumption yet it is noteworthy that Pilton School in North Devon (252 on roll), which began the Milk Scheme in February 1935, tested the weight of children taking milk. Records revealed surprisingly that those who did not take milk increased their weight more than those taking milk,<sup>42</sup> although the number of pupils taking milk who were deemed 'necessitous' and therefore not receiving an adequate diet at home was not recorded. Barnstaple Divisional Education Authority (BDEA) encountered some difficulties in October/November 1934 when starting the Scheme but by 1935 most local schools were supplied and free milk for necessitous children was introduced in July 1936. However, in December 1939, BDEA recorded that 'there is...room for improvement in the cleanliness and quality of milk being supplied',<sup>43</sup> and the problem of a regular supply of clean milk continued to be the major obstacle for all local schools in the County in implementing the Scheme. Nevertheless, fresh efforts were made by DCEC to encourage milk consumption in 1937 and the position by 31 March 1939 was that 312

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*Book 550C/EAL2*, June 1936; *Kingswear Junior School Log Book 3683Cadd/EFL6*, September 1936; *Tiverton Heathcoat Girls and Infants' Log Book 2745C/EFL4*, November 1934; *Iddesleigh and Dowland Log Book*, October 1934.

<sup>41</sup> *North Bovey Log Book 1411C/EFL4*, *1411Cadd/EFL5*, 31 January 1939; *Brixham Furzesham Boys' Log Book 3652C/EFL3*, - October 1934; *Crediton Hayward Boys' Log Book 1510Cadd.3/LI*, 4 February 1935; *Crediton Hookway Log Book 659C/EAL2*, November 1936; *Exminster Log Book 3206C EAL2*, December 1934; *Milton Abbot Log Book 2306C/EFL4*, May 1935; *Seaton Log Book 2270C/EFL3*, 1932; *Shaldon Log Book 2666C/EAL1*, February 1935; *Stoke Canon Log Book 76/43/6*, December 34; *Silverton Girls' Log Book 737C/EFL1*, November 1934; *Throwleigh and Gidleigh Log Book 2066C/EAL2*, July 1935; *Topsham Senior School Log Book 76/8/1/4*, October 1934; *Totnes Infants and Std.I Log Book 2440C/EAL8*, January 1935; *Whitestone Log Book 768C/EFL1*, January 1935; *Yeoford Log Book 3529C /EAL2*, January 1935; *Bideford Infants Church School Log Book 3238C/EFL2*, September 1938; *Bishops Tawton Junior Mixed and Infants Log Book 2310C/EFL2*, 1935; *Bishops Tawton – Herner Log Book 507C/&addEFL2*, April 1935 and October 1938; *Landkey Log Book 1903C/EEL44*, January 1935; *Great Torrington Junior Mixed Log Book 2485C/EAL8*, October 1934 and October 1938; *Fremington Log Book 2487C/EAL2*, January 1936; *Braunton Log Book 355C/EAL3*, 1934; *Bridgerule Log Book 2325C/EFL3*, October 1934; *Northam Appledore Mixed School Log Book 2236C/EFL6*, March 1938; *Marland St Peters Log Book 697C/EFL1*, 1936; *Lynmouth Log Book 1903C/EEL48*, November 1934.

<sup>42</sup> *Pilton School Log Book B6Z/3/4*, February 1935

<sup>43</sup> *Barnstaple Divisional Education Authority Committee Minutes 1903C/EEM3-47*, December 1936

(66.8%) of the 467 elementary schools administered by DCEC were included in the Scheme with 39% (15,066 pupils) taking daily milk (38,411 on roll). All but one of the 22 secondary schools administered by DCEC were included in the scheme with 36% (1,518) pupils taking milk (4,180 on roll). This was certainly lower than the national average of 56%.<sup>44</sup> Just over 4,000 (9%)<sup>45</sup> local children received free milk but only if classified as slightly (Category C) or badly undernourished (Category D) and financially needy.<sup>46</sup>

### **Wartime expansion of school meals and milk, with particular focus on Devon**

Devon's archives offer an excellent case study on the way in which one rural county responded to government wartime directives for the expansion of school meals and milk, a national policy which Titmuss described as remarkable for its underlying unanimity and speed of decision making.<sup>47</sup> Whilst believing that Titmuss 'almost certainly exaggerated the role played by humanitarian "generosity"', Harris (1995) acknowledged 'the significance of the changes which took place' as a combined result of evacuation, military strategy and the war industry's need for working mothers.<sup>48</sup> A paper entitled 'War History of School Meals and Milk', prepared by E.D.Marris in September 1944 for use in the official wartime history of education, claimed 'the real impetus came from the Battle of Britain, bombing, threat of invasion and renewed evacuation'<sup>49</sup> which was also the explanation given by the CMO of the Ministry of Education.<sup>50</sup> Titmuss also cited evidence of unsatisfactory health indices during the first 2 years of war including a rise in tuberculosis and

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<sup>44</sup> Nationally, about two and a half million (56%) elementary children received milk during 1938-9 with approximately 440,000 receiving free milk. A further 206,000 pupils in secondary and technical schools were also included in the scheme. P. Gosden, *Education in the Second World War*, p.184. The CMO for the Ministry of Education recorded 55%, *The Health of the School Child, Report of the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Education*, p.29

<sup>45</sup> In 1939 there were approximately 38,411 elementary and 4,180 secondary pupils on the school roll for DCEC. This excludes Exeter and Plymouth. *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer DCC150/4/5/1*, pp.1 and 29

<sup>46</sup> *DCC150/4/1/37* pp.107 and 132

<sup>47</sup> R.Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 514

<sup>48</sup> B. Harris, *The Health of the Schoolchild* (Open University Press 1995) p.156

<sup>49</sup> E.D. Marris, *War History of School Meals and Milk* as cited in P.H.J.H.Gosden, *Education in the Second World War*, pp.189-190.

<sup>50</sup> *Report of the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Education 1939-1945*, p.24

higher infant death rates as reasons that combined to move the Government into action.<sup>51</sup> Gosden (1976) added that the final phase of expansion began in March 1943 when the food supply situation became critical as a result of the Battle of the Atlantic. Pressure from Professor Drummond, Scientific Adviser of the Ministry of Food, the Beveridge Report and the Education Bill were also important additional factors in the Government's decision to expand and establish meals and milk provision for all children as standard practice.<sup>52</sup> Welshman (1998) described the transformation of attitudes towards school meals and milk during the war and the establishment of a consensus which was to last until the 1960s. He considered that evacuation was the catalyst for this 'dramatic change of policy' but also cited expansion of the school milk policy in the late 1930s and the wider wartime food policy as important factors.<sup>53</sup>

Local authorities responded to increased government pressure for expansion in a variety of ways and pace according to their local circumstances. Commentary on the expansion of school meals and milk both nationally and in Devon is divided into two sections, namely meals and milk.<sup>54</sup> Appendix 30 lists approximate dates of canteen provision in Devon's elementary schools and Appendix 31 lists the approximate percentage of pupils taking milk from 1939-1946. Graphs of these wartime increases are included in the text. Appendix 32 lists the types of milk supplied to Devon schools during 1942-1944 and Appendix 33 records the national school meals and milk expansion in both elementary and secondary schools for the period 1938-1945.

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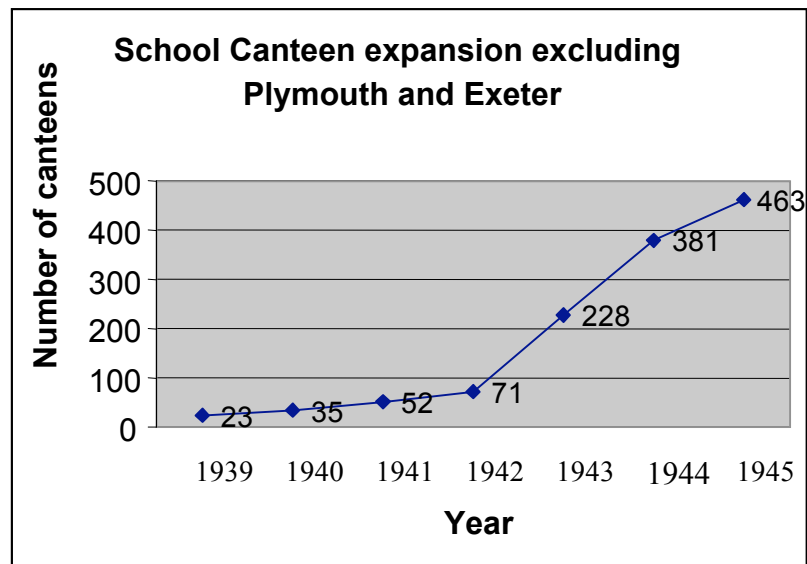
<sup>51</sup> R.Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.509

<sup>52</sup> P.H.J.H.Gosden, *Education in the Second World War*, p. 192

<sup>53</sup> J.Welshman, 'Evacuation and Social Policy during the Second World War', *Twentieth Century British History*, Volume 9, Number 2 (Oxford University Press 1998) pp.45-48

<sup>54</sup> DCEC administered the whole of Devon apart from the cities of Exeter and Plymouth. Barnstaple Divisional Education Authority came under the umbrella of DCEC.

**Wartime expansion of school meals under DCEC administration  
1939-1945**



**School meals provision**

Records indicate beyond doubt that as a direct result of evacuation Devon was able to take full advantage of government financial incentives from late 1940 onwards to expand school meals provision.<sup>55</sup> This welfare measure developed more impressively than any other introduced in the County during the war and was well above the national average after 1942. The initial urgency of providing midday meals for thousands of unaccompanied evacuee children, both in order to relieve foster-parents and solve the problem of long distance travel between rural billets and village schools, propelled the Government to finance a school meals programme. Increasingly generous Treasury grants further necessitated by other wartime factors transformed national provision by 1945.

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<sup>55</sup> *Devon County Council Minutes DCC148/15*, Report of Education Committee 12 December 1940

Nationally by 1938, approximately 160,000 (3.9%) elementary schoolchildren took meals, 69% of whom were deemed necessitous, yet by February 1945, 1,650,000 school meals were being served to 36.3% of elementary and secondary pupils with approximately 14% receiving free meals and the rest paying 4d to 5d per meal.<sup>56</sup> Pre-war, only about 10,000 LCC elementary schoolchildren, usually those who were undernourished and necessitous, were provided with meals. By 1944 this number had risen to over 70,000.<sup>57</sup> In Devon the position changed beyond all recognition. There were approximately 23 senior school canteens just prior to the outbreak of war<sup>58</sup> and records indicate that in May only 855 children were eligible for subsidised 1d meals and then only if canteen facilities existed at the school.<sup>59</sup> Yet a sample of 10,742 local elementary schoolchildren had revealed that approximately 16.1% were classified as slightly malnourished (Category C) and 0.9% classified as malnourished (Category D).<sup>60</sup> However, by 1946 nearly two-thirds of all primary and secondary schoolchildren received a midday meal 5 times per week in one of the County's 487 school canteens and dining centres. Meals to even the most isolated village schools were either supplied from central kitchens, larger nearby schools or prepared on site with the emphasis increasingly in favour of smaller kitchens serving single schools or small groups.<sup>61</sup> Exeter City Education Committee appointed a Supervisor of School Meals on 7 October 1940 and increased the percentage of schoolchildren taking meals from 7.2% in 1942 to 43.1% by 1947. In 1939 there had been one central kitchen in Exeter but by July 1946 there were 4 area kitchens and 2 sub-kitchens.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *Report of the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Education 1939-1945*, pp.23 and 29. Also R.Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.510

<sup>57</sup> R. Samways, ed. *We think you ought to go* (City of London, London Metropolitan Archives 1995) p. 40

<sup>58</sup> DCC150/4/1/36 p. 137

<sup>59</sup> DCC150/4/1/37 p.132 Also *Devon County Education Committee Circular 89*, dated 12 May 1939 (*Throwleigh and Gidleigh 2066C/EAM51*)

<sup>60</sup> DCC150/4/5/1 *Annual Report of School Medical Officer 1939*, p. 5

<sup>61</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1946*, p.2

<sup>62</sup> *Exeter City Archive ECA/19/96, Education Committee Report, October 1940. Also Annual Report of School Medical Officer 1946-7, City and County of City of Exeter Education Committee Minutes*, p.17 (Westcountry Studies Library)

Most canteens were developed by converting school buildings in some way or by providing huts and in some cases taking over redundant wartime British Restaurants. Delays between plans for a school canteen and its implementation usually resulted from planning delays, labour and equipment shortages and lack of water supply but sometimes from the reluctance of school managers, who deemed meal provision unnecessary, and from occasional disinterest of parents (detailed in Appendix 30). There was occasional recorded irritation at the length of time between equipment arriving and the canteen opening. For example, the Managers of Cheriton Bishop School resolved to remind DCEC that although equipment had been at the school for 12 months, no action had been taken. This appears to have been an oversight since meals began very shortly thereafter.<sup>63</sup>

School Log Books and Medical Reports illustrate the enthusiasm and recognition of the benefits of the wartime expansion of school meals. For example, Exminster's Headteacher recorded that '404 meals have been supplied this week ... the children are looking better already...The provision of dinners certainly makes for better attendance... the best for years'.<sup>64</sup> Upton's Headteacher also hoped the canteen dinners 'may have some effect on the attendance'<sup>65</sup> and Crediton Hookway's Headteacher described the 'continued appreciation of canteen meals – 100% attendance'.<sup>66</sup>

Devon's MOH reported the 'great extension of the benefits of school feeding with a reflected improvement, reported on all sides, to the apparent mental and physical well-being of the children',<sup>67</sup> and an HMI Report commented that the milk and meal periods had been successfully used as opportunities for social training at Broadhembury.<sup>68</sup>

Prior to evacuation the MH and Board highlighted the advantages of communal midday meals for evacuated children in MH Circular 1800/Memo Ev4 and Board Circular 1469 (May 1939). A

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<sup>63</sup> *Cheriton Bishop School Managers' Minutes, 1933Cadd/EAM7*, 9 November 1943

<sup>64</sup> *Exminster School Log Book 3206C EAL3*, March 1944

<sup>65</sup> *Upton School Log Book, 757aC/EFL3*, May 1943

<sup>66</sup> *Crediton Hookway School Log Book 659C/EAL3*, October 1946

<sup>67</sup> *Annual Report of School Medical Officer 1944*, p.1

<sup>68</sup> *Broadhembury School Log Book 3124C/EFL3*, March 1953

further MH Circular 1841/Memo Ev5 (28 July 1939) again impressed on local authorities that communal meals were ‘desirable to relieve householders as soon as practicable’ and ‘may ...relax the tension caused by the existence of 2 families in 1 house’.<sup>69</sup> Communal feeding had first been proposed in the 1938 Anderson Report as one way of relieving foster parents from providing midday meals and supervision and also for keeping the nation fit and healthy for the war effort. However, implementation was as always left to local initiative and relied on voluntary help. Meals costing 2s per week would have to be paid out of the billeting allowance, which many already considered overly meagre. The first change in government policy resulting from evacuation occurred at the end of November 1939 when evacuees, particularly mothers and children, were returning home from reception areas against advice. MH Circular 1916 and Board Circular 1484 now placed responsibility for the organisation of communal meals for evacuees (which also included necessitous local children) with the LEAs rather than primarily with the billeting authorities. They were urged to collaborate with local reception authorities to establish these arrangements and reassurance was given that no expenditure on the provision of meals for evacuated children would fall on reception areas. Hiring and equipping premises would be covered by the Board. The Government stressed that the provision of communal feeding was especially desirable in the rural parts of reception areas where children were billeted far from school and in those areas where double shifts at school as a result of evacuation affected the provision of meals in the home. Local authorities were asked to submit their plans for the communal feeding of evacuees.<sup>70</sup> A further Board Circular 1490 (December 1939) expressed concern that nutrition surveys, suspended in some areas as a result of war, must be maintained in order to check for necessitous and under-nourished children.

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<sup>69</sup> *Exeter City Council, Town Clerk's Papers, ARP Evac, Group G, Box 1/8*

<sup>70</sup> *Report of the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Education 1939-1945*, p.23. Also see P.H.J.H.Gosden, *Education in the Second World War*, p.187 and *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 355, Col 1295, 14 December 1939



However, nationally the response to government guidance was slow with many local authorities proving apathetic.<sup>71</sup> By March 1940, 95 of the LEAs which were wholly or partly reception areas had replied that there was no need to take any steps, 10 were considering, 12 had not supplied any information and only 52 authorities had made provision of some kind.<sup>72</sup> Le Gros Clark, member of the Children's Nutrition Council, reported that by the summer of 1940, 60% of those evacuated children receiving meals were concentrated in the Home Counties, 15% in Devon, Dorset, Cheshire and West Riding and the remaining 25% 'thinly dispersed' in other reception areas. Increasing numbers of evacuees during the late summer and autumn did not appear to stimulate reception areas into any marked effort.<sup>73</sup> Titmuss stressed that before the 'decisive change' in government policy in July 1940 'the provision of meals at school had been interpreted by most educational authorities... as a relief measure for malnourished children'.<sup>74</sup> Herwald Ramsbotham, who assumed the Presidency of the Board in April 1940, believed that the establishment of meals 'would be an important educational advance',<sup>75</sup> but highlighted the problem that many householders preferred to feed the evacuees themselves rather than surrender part of their billeting allowance.<sup>76</sup> A further obstacle to progress was the dearth of empty properties, usually already rented to evacuated government departments, businesses, private citizens and the military. Structural alteration was often also required before a building could become operational as a canteen. Despite the apparent lackadaisical national response, DCEC was one authority which took initiatives to comply with Board Circular 1484 (November 1939) and by 25 January 1940 the following steps had been taken: the numbers of children (local and evacuated) willing to have a communal meal, if provided, were ascertained; where numbers exceeded 50, enquiries were made about suitable

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<sup>71</sup> R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.164. *The Times Educational Supplement* also reported on the slow response, 30 March 1940

<sup>72</sup> P.H.J.H.Gosden, *Education in the Second World War*, p.187. See also Study of school meal development by Le Gros Clark, *The Times Educational Supplement*, 2 January 1943

<sup>73</sup> *The Times Educational Supplement*, 2 January 1943

<sup>74</sup> R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 509

<sup>75</sup> J. Welshman, 'Evacuation and Social Policy during the Second World War', *Twentieth Century British History*, pp. 45-48

<sup>76</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 362, Col 19, 18 June 1940. See also M. Parsons, *I'll Take That One* (Beckett Karlson Ltd. 1998) pp.104-5

premises for a canteen; where canteens already existed, additional equipment and helpers were provided to allow evacuated children to have the meal.<sup>77</sup>

It was clear that the first year of war was having ‘a most adverse effect on school meals and milk services’.<sup>78</sup> The national figure for school meals had dropped from approximately 160,000 in 1939 to 130,000 by July 1940.<sup>79</sup> As the threat of invasion increased following the fall of France and retreat from Dunkirk, the second evacuation wave commenced. Board Circular 1520 (22 July 1940) urged a review of arrangements for the supply of milk and meals to necessitous children and for immediate expansion of canteen facilities for schoolchildren. A minimum grant of 50% for local authorities providing school meals was announced. Authorities already receiving grants in excess of 30% would be increased by a further 20%.<sup>80</sup> The progressive partnership of Clement Attlee (Lord Privy Seal) together with Lord Woolton (Minister of Food) was behind this significant initiative<sup>81</sup> which soon carried the expectation that expansion ‘would be permanent’.<sup>82</sup> By October, DCEC had reviewed its January 1940 initiative in response to the Board’s increased pressure for canteen expansion and introduced the following amendments: where under 20 stayed at school for dinner, provision for warming meals only was to be considered; where between 20-50, the possibility of establishing a canteen should be considered (the number had previously been 50 and over); where over 50 remained to dinner a canteen should be provided.<sup>83</sup> The price of meals increased to 1s6d weekly for one child, 1s3d for 3 or more siblings or 4d for one meal.<sup>84</sup> Plymouth Education Committee also responded promptly to Board Circular 1520 by approving an

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<sup>77</sup> DCC150/4/1/37, Report of Domestic Subjects Special Sub-Committee 25 January 1940, p. 387

<sup>78</sup> *Report of the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Education 1939-1945*, p.24

<sup>79</sup> R.Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 510

<sup>80</sup> B. Harris, *The Health of the Schoolchild*, p.159

<sup>81</sup> P.H.J.H.Gosden, *Education in the Second World War*, p.187 See also *Report of the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Education 1939-1945*, p. 24

<sup>82</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 369, Column 277, February 1941, Herwald Ramsbotham.

<sup>83</sup> *Devon Education Committee Minutes*, DCC150/4/1/38, Report of Domestic Subjects Special Sub-Committee, 2 October 1940, pp.165-166

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.* Report of Executive Sub-Committee, 11 July 1940, p.123

experimental meal service for about 200 children who lived too far from school to return home.<sup>85</sup>

Barnstaple Divisional Education Authority recommended the provision of a central canteen offering 1d meals to necessitous children and meals on payment to local children and evacuees. By 10 October 1940 it was decided to offer free meals to necessitous children, although this was not policy in the rest of the County under DCEC administration<sup>86</sup> until October 1943 (DCEC Circular No 38) and then only if canteen facilities were available.<sup>87</sup>

The power invested in local authorities to 'fix its own test of necessity' was criticised by *The Times Education Supplement* as one which gave no equality of opportunity for poor children to receive free meals,<sup>88</sup> and wide discrepancies existed between authorities as illustrated in Devon's case.

Board Memorandum 267 (27 December 1940) reminded local authorities that Circulars 1484, 1520 and 1528 had urged expansion. The Board also introduced 'an important symbolic change in the arrangements for the provision of free meals to necessitous children' by abolishing the traditional distinction between feeding centres<sup>89</sup> and school canteens. In future, all were to be called school canteens.<sup>90</sup> Pressure for expansion of meal provision to include evacuated mothers and pre-school children was increasingly put on reception areas because of rising numbers of evacuees. The Government hoped that friction caused between hosts and evacuated mothers sharing kitchens could thus be alleviated somewhat and thereby diminish the reluctance to billet mothers with children. The capital cost of equipment and other approved expenditure on meals for mothers and children was reimbursed by the Exchequer.<sup>91</sup> Barnstaple responded by opening a new Communal Feeding Centre in February 1941 (Adults 6 meals for 4s, Children 6 meals for 2s). There are no figures for

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<sup>85</sup> *Minutes of Plymouth City Education Committee, 1644/139, 19 September 1940*

<sup>86</sup> *Barnstaple Divisional Education Authority Committee Minutes 1903C/EEM3-30, 12 September and 10 October 1940*

<sup>87</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1943, DCC150/4/5/1, p.11* See also DCEC Circulars 2066C/EAM51

<sup>88</sup> *The Times Educational Supplement, 11 April 1942*

<sup>89</sup> During the interwar period, free meals were usually provided in feeding centres and 'paying' meals in school canteens. B. Harris, *The Health of the Schoolchild*, p.173

<sup>90</sup> B. Harris, *The Health of the Schoolchild*, p.159

<sup>91</sup> *Parliamentary Debates, Volume 367, Col 1334, 19 December 1940*

February but in April there were approximately 562 officially evacuated mothers and 941 pre-school children in Barnstaple. However, by March the Education Committee was already expressing disappointment at the comparatively small numbers using the Centre.<sup>92</sup>

According to a local press report in October 1940, communal feeding centres had increased nationally by 3 per day since the scheme began.<sup>93</sup> Exeter opened a communal feeding centre at the Civic Hall on 25 November 1940. With over 3,000 unaccompanied schoolchildren in the City, preliminary steps towards the provision of meals from a Central Kitchen were taken and a female Supervisor of School Meals was appointed.<sup>94</sup> Nationally, a new Standing Committee on Medical and Nutritional Subjects was set up early in 1941. One of its principal duties was to monitor, by means of surveys, the nutritional state of the population and especially that of the priority classes. Responsibility for communal feeding centres for the general population was transferred to the Ministry of Food on 1 March 1941 and these were renamed British Restaurants by Lord Woolton in April. Bideford opened its British Restaurant the same month. However, an article in *Education* claimed that less than 0.25% of the population were being served in May 1941 and condemned the Government's policy as 'far from adequate'.<sup>95</sup> Padley and Cole criticised the fact that the provision of communal kitchens had been left to voluntary effort. Backed by government finance 'they would have been an admirable legacy of evacuation for the countryside'.<sup>96</sup> However, their recommendation might well have compromised the development of meals in schools. According to Gosden, the growth and popularity of the British Restaurants became a threat to the Board's plan to establish school meals as an educational service. Some LEAs also used British Restaurants as a convenient escape from increasing school provision. To prevent this, the Ministry of Food and

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<sup>92</sup> *North Devon Journal*, 27 February 1941

<sup>93</sup> *The Express and Echo*, 1 October 1940.

<sup>94</sup> *Express and Echo*, 11 November and 20 November 1940. Resolution passed by the Executive Subcommittee of Exeter Education Committee

<sup>95</sup> *Education*, Volume LXXVIII, 12 September 1941, p.215

<sup>96</sup> R.Padley and M.Cole, *Evacuation Survey* (Routledge & Sons Ltd.1940) p.150

Board finally agreed that schoolchildren were only to use the British Restaurants as ‘a temporary expedient’ until a school canteen was opened.<sup>97</sup> Locally, by the end of 1941 DCEC certainly regarded the provision of a school canteen as non-essential in cases where meals were obtainable from British Restaurant.<sup>98</sup> However, figures given below indicate that very few children in Devon were actually taking meals in British Restaurants.

Expansion of school canteens continued in Devon and by the end of 1940 there were 35 under DCEC control. The financial estimate for 1941-1942 was raised from £2,600 to £8,225 in response to Board Circular 1520 (July 1940) but DCEC acknowledged that it would be impossible to implement many of the new proposals and expenditure was realistically more likely to be £3,600.<sup>99</sup> By June 1941, DCEC Minutes began to include lists of newly established canteens together with the percentage of government grant (up to 70%). Although reports suggested that Devon and Somerset were making considerable headway with expansion and projections were highly optimistic,<sup>100</sup> progress was hampered as canteen equipment and manpower became increasingly difficult to obtain and there were many tenders competing for limited funding. Only 18 canteens were established in 1941 increasing the number to 52. By the end of 1941 approximately 13.8% of the total elementary school population (4,450 local children and 4,000 out of 26,779 official unaccompanied evacuees) were taking meals in canteens. There were 7 British Restaurants in the County but only 440 children took meals there.<sup>101</sup> Plymouth Education Authority also began to institute mid-day meals during 1941 although results were surprisingly disappointing at first.<sup>102</sup> For example, Mount Street

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<sup>97</sup> P.H.J.H.Gosden, *Education in the Second World War*, pp.200-201

<sup>98</sup> *Times Education Supplement*, 29 November 1941. Report on meeting of DCEC on 30 October 1941.

<sup>99</sup> *Devon County Council Minutes, Report of Education Committee, DCC148/15*, March 1941

<sup>100</sup> *Times Educational Supplement*, 25 January 1941 and 3 May 1941. Also *Dartington Archive* – broadcast by Noel Brailsford M.P. in April 1941.

<sup>101</sup> *DCEC Minutes DCC150/4/1/39*, p. 220. See also *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1941, DCC 150/4/5/1*, p.18

<sup>102</sup> *Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the City of Plymouth 1941, 1363/27*

Mixed introduced meals on 15 June 1941 but only 5 children took advantage.<sup>103</sup> Nationally, the Board's progressive new President, R.A. Butler,<sup>104</sup> announced that approximately 300,000 (6%) elementary and secondary pupils in England and Wales were receiving meals by July 1941, a figure he was keen to improve.<sup>105</sup>

In a fine example of wartime consensus, Butler who was impatient at the slow progress presented a joint paper, together with the Minister of Food<sup>106</sup> and the Secretary of State for Scotland,<sup>107</sup> to the War Cabinet in September 1941 recommending an increased grant. Board Circular 1565 (25 September 1941) now urged provision of meals on a much larger scale and told LEAs and schools that they were responsible for persuading every child to participate.<sup>108</sup> The Treasury was cajoled into increasing its grant by 10% up to a maximum of 95%, making the average rate 80%.<sup>109</sup> DCEC now decided that school canteens should be provided wherever there were not less than 30 children wishing to take a midday meal.<sup>110</sup> Barnstaple Divisional Executive Authority also resolved to begin feeding children in schools as soon as possible.<sup>111</sup> One 'reform of outstanding importance' was introduced in Devon following the Government's directive in Board Circular 1567 (21 October 1941). Financial necessity was now the sole qualification adopted by the Committee for receipt of free milk and cheap meals. Official evacuees were to be considered 'necessitous' if parents contributed less than the full 6s per week towards the cost of billeting. The 10 year old double

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<sup>103</sup> *Mount Street Mixed School Log Book 2544/5*

<sup>104</sup> Conservative M.P. for Saffron Walden

<sup>105</sup> *Education*, Volume LXXVIII, p.333, 17 October 1941

<sup>106</sup> Frederick Marquis was one of a number of ministerial appointments from outside politics. He was ex-managing director of Lewis's store chain and had previous experience as warden of a settlement in the Liverpool dockland. He was appointed Minister of Food in April 1940 and in 1946 became Chairman of the Conservative Party.

<sup>107</sup> Thomas Johnston (Labour) was a prominent Scottish socialist and politician who served as Secretary of State for Scotland from February 1941 to May 1945

<sup>108</sup> R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.510

<sup>109</sup> *Education*, Volume LXXVIII, p.349

<sup>110</sup> *DCC150/4/1/39-40*

<sup>111</sup> *1903C/EEM3-37*, 8 January 1942

criterion of financial need plus clinical evidence of lack of food ‘with all its haphazardness and wide variation of standard and grading’ was abolished.<sup>112</sup>

In January 1942, the Welfare Officer for the Totnes Area acknowledged the clear benefits of the increased provision of school canteens, particularly for children with long school journeys ‘one blessing at least due to war!!!’<sup>113</sup> DCC Finance Committee Report for March 1942 illustrates the extent of Treasury assistance for school meal provision. Included in the figures is a list of 15 schools (March 1941) due for canteen conversion together with the percentage proportion charged to the Evacuation Account. Two schools were eligible for 100% grant, 2 for 90%, 1 for 85%, 1 for 80%, 1 for 75%, 1 for 70%, 3 for 60% and 4 for 50%. The annual estimates for expenditure on elementary education for 1942-1943 were £61,142 more than the period 1941-1942 and expenditure on meals totalled £21,375, the bulk of which was met by Government grants.<sup>114</sup> By February 1942 Devon was providing 17.7% (13.8% in December 1941) of elementary schoolchildren with meals compared with the national figure of 11.5%. At this time the number of official unaccompanied evacuees had dropped to 16,515 (36,402 local children).<sup>115</sup> Exeter was below the national figure in February 1942, providing 7.1% with meals.<sup>116</sup>

Local children were now benefiting from provision made when the number of evacuees was higher and the CMO recorded that the DCEC school meals programme had ‘developed on a considerable scale’. By the end of 1942 there were 21 independent new school canteens with an additional number of schools receiving meals from Cooking Depots which, although run by the Ministry of Food for feeding the civilian population in an emergency, were normally available for feeding schools in the neighbourhood. For example, Heathfield supplied 35 schools and Yealmpton

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<sup>112</sup> *Annual Report of School Medical Officer 1941, DCC150/4/5/1*

<sup>113</sup> *Dartington Archive*, Letter addressed to Dorothy Elmhirst dated January 1942

<sup>114</sup> *Devon County Council Minutes DCC148/15*, 13 March 1942

<sup>115</sup> *Devon County Education Committee Minutes DCC150/4/1/40*, June 1942, pp. 81 and 91

<sup>116</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer for Exeter City 1942*, p. 9

supplied 17. A number of school canteens also sent meals to schools in their vicinity. British Restaurants were scaled down – only 332 local children and 201 evacuees were taking meals there. Figures given for 1942 show that 23% of elementary pupils were now taking meals in 71 canteens (52 in 1941) and 49 Dining Centres (3 in 1941). Cooking Depots were planned for Whipton, Barnstaple and Tavistock and Central Kitchens were being built in Crediton, South Molton, Holsworthy, Kingsbridge, Hatherleigh, Dartmouth and Culmstock.<sup>117</sup> According to *The Times Educational Supplement*, Plymouth Education Committee provided 8 centres for feeding city schoolchildren<sup>118</sup> in May 1942 and a further 8 in June.<sup>119</sup> By the end of the year there were 30 centres in school halls and class rooms although the SMO was clearly disappointed that only approximately 17.9% (2,717) were taking meals and remarked that ‘one would...expect much greater use to be made’ of the Government Scheme. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that the maintenance of the general physical condition of the children was partly due to the provision of milk and meals at school.<sup>120</sup>

Critics such as the Chairman of the Children’s Nutrition Council (Wales) found it ‘deplorable that our goal is still only one million out of five and a half millions by the end of 1942.’<sup>121</sup> In an effort to encourage mothers to take up war work and to ‘strengthen the evacuation policy’, the Board had encouraged LEAs to keep schools open during the holidays for meals and milk (Board Circular 1596, 30 June 1942). This policy, according to Gosden, was not very successful.<sup>122</sup> Locally, it is difficult to assess the success of the holiday scheme. Several log books mention this holiday

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<sup>117</sup> *Devon County Education Committee Minutes DCC150/4/1/40*, 7 October 1942, p.184. *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1942, DCC150/4/5/1*, pp.13-14

<sup>118</sup> Over half of the city’s school children (6,202) were still in reception areas over a year after the heaviest bombing raids.

<sup>119</sup> *Times Educational Supplement*, 20 June 1942.

<sup>120</sup> *Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the City of Plymouth 1942, 1363/28*

<sup>121</sup> *Education*, Volume LXXX, p.46, 17 July 1942

<sup>122</sup> P.H.J.H.Gosden, *Education in the Second World War*, p.203



Period: Ashburton School decided to close on 14 August due to insufficient numbers,<sup>123</sup> although Dunsford reported that about half the children were taking meals during August, Axminster recorded that 78 pupils took milk and 24 took meals and Kingsteignton supplied meals and milk throughout the holiday period.<sup>124</sup>

In January 1943, an article in *The Times Educational Supplement* described the wartime expansion of school meals as almost on a level with the implementation of the School Medical Service in 1907 ‘universally acknowledged to have been one of the most enlightened and beneficent educational advances of the present century’. The social and nutritional benefits of the midday school meal were remarkable.<sup>125</sup> As the food supply became critical, Board Circular 1629 (15 May 1943) urged LEAs to accelerate their school meal programmes in order to meet the desired minimum national target of 75% provision. Incentives included free school canteen equipment ordered from the Ministry of Works on or after 1 May 1943, the offer to supply, erect and equip complete kitchens and to carry out free adaptations to school premises. In addition, the Ministry also offered approved capital expenditure where authorities wished to continue to plan and execute their own canteen schemes and those to which the authorities became committed on or after 1 May 1943 would be reimbursed in full.<sup>126</sup> Publicly, Circular 1629 stated that schoolchildren needed to be safeguarded fully from nutritional dangers arising from the war although the decision was apparently influenced by an unfavourable outlook in the Atlantic Battle and in some measure by the Parliamentary Debate on the Beveridge Report in February 1943.<sup>127</sup> Photographs and articles on school canteens now featured regularly in issues of *Education* as did advertisements for the latest cookers.

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<sup>123</sup> *Ashburton School Log Book*

<sup>124</sup> *Dunsford School Log Book 3275C/EAL2-3, Axminster School Log Book 788C/EFL1, Kingsteignton School Log Book 688Cadd2/EAL3*

<sup>125</sup> *The Times Educational Supplement*, 2 January 1943

<sup>126</sup> *Devon County Education Committee Minutes DCC150/4/1/41, Report of the Executive Sub-Committee*, 10 June 1943, p.85

<sup>127</sup> *Report of the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Education 1939-1945*, p.28

However, Devon was finding it increasingly difficult to obtain labour in order to continue expansion,<sup>128</sup> particularly after the bombing of Plymouth and Exeter, and requested that canteen work be classified as ‘A’ priority.<sup>129</sup> Local figures for 1943 show that by February, 28.9% of DCEC’s elementary schoolchildren were receiving meals (20.7% nationally<sup>130</sup>). By the end of 1943 the figure had risen to 36.6% (nationally between 26.5% and 30.1%<sup>131</sup>) and school canteens were now reorganised as Central Kitchens at Culmstock, Crediton, Cullompton, Hatherleigh, Holsworthy, Honiton and South Molton. The number of school canteens and dining centres had risen dramatically to 228 (120<sup>132</sup> by end of 1942).<sup>133</sup> Exeter figures show that 11.2% were receiving meals in February 1943,<sup>134</sup> but undoubtedly the bombing had hampered provision. Also the City was no longer a reception area after May 1942 so the need to provide for evacuees had diminished. By February 1944, the number of schoolchildren taking meals under DCEC administration had almost doubled since the end of 1942 (23%) to 43.1%, which included just over one third of the evacuees (2,367) still in the County.<sup>135</sup> Estimated expenditure on school meals for 1944-1945 projected an increase of £26,950 and it was anticipated that 12.5% of total expenditure on meals would be chargeable to the MH in respect of evacuated children still in the County. As the purchase of equipment and cost of all building and adaptations ranked for 100% government grant and all remaining expenditure was eligible for 80% grant, only about £15,000 of the total expenditure of £97,600 would be chargeable to the rates. The Committee was hopeful that provision

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<sup>128</sup> For example, Cruwys Morchard School canteen was set to open in September 1942 but the work was delayed because of the Exeter blitz, *Cruwys Morchard School Log Book 509C/EFL1*

<sup>129</sup> *Devon County Education Committee Minutes DCC150/4/1/41, Report of the Executive Sub-Committee, 10 June 1943, p.85*

<sup>130</sup> The Board’s CMO recorded 23.5%, including secondary pupils, for February 1943. *Report of the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Education 1939-1945, p.29*

<sup>131</sup> *Education, Volume LXXXIII, p.163.* Chuter Ede announced the figure of 26.5% on 18 January 1944 in the House. Le Gros Clark gave the figure as 30.1% for February 1944 – *Education, Volume LXXXIII, pp.741-2.* The Board’s CMO gave the figure as 32.8%, including secondary pupils, for February 1944, *Report of the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Education 1939-1945, p.29*

<sup>132</sup> Seventy one school canteens and 49 dining centres, *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1942, DCC150/4/5/1, pp.13-14*

<sup>133</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1943 DCC150/4/5/1, pp.11-12. Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1944, p.12*

<sup>134</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer for Exeter City 1942, ECA/19/95, p.9*

<sup>135</sup> *Devon County Education Committee Minutes DCC150//4/1/42, 23 February 1944, p.26*

would be made during the next 12-18 months for supply of meals to every school in the County although progress was still hindered by delays in planning permission.<sup>136</sup> Exeter now had 19 school canteens and 15.8% (6,813 elementary school children) were taking meals. Feeding centres were to be replaced by canteens during 1944.<sup>137</sup> The City at this time only had several hundred official evacuees remaining.

Board statistics were included in the DCEC figures for May 1944. Nationally, 30.1% of elementary pupils were taking meals compared with 44.5% in Devon. Secondary school figures for both provided and direct grant were also given for Devon (51.2% provided and 24.0% direct grant) averaging 53.8%. Although clearly very successful with its school meals expansion, Butler asked DCEC to reconsider the income scale for the provision of free milk and meals. Revised in 1943 it was still considered ‘one of the most severe in the country’ and its further relaxation was an additional wartime bonus.<sup>138</sup> By the end of 1944, 48.1% (14,976 local elementary schoolchildren and 6,873 official evacuees) and 52.62% secondary schoolchildren were taking meals in one of DCEC’s 381 school canteens or dining centres.<sup>139</sup> In Plymouth, 18% elementary and 21.6% secondary children were taking meals, almost all of which were supplied by the Emergency Catering Department of Plymouth Corporation, cooked at Central Kitchens and delivered to schools in containers. An Organiser of School Meals was appointed in September 1944 and the MOH felt that much of the improvement in the children’s general health was due to the Government’s nutritional policy.<sup>140</sup> During the third evacuation wave, the Government continued the policy that meals for unaccompanied official evacuee children must be paid out of the billeting allowance. Accompanied evacuees were treated as local children with free meals for those in financial need

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<sup>136</sup> *Devon County Committee Minutes DCC148/16*, 9 March 1944

<sup>137</sup> *Exeter City Archive ECA/19/95*, p. 7 *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1943*

<sup>138</sup> *Devon County Education Committee Minutes, DCC150/4/1/42*, p.213

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.* pp.94, 213 and 220

<sup>140</sup> *Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the City of Plymouth 1944, 1363/30. Minutes of Plymouth City Education Committee, 1644/139*, 21 September 1944

and Ministry of Education Circular 2 (18 August 1944) instructed LEAs to meet this cost in full from the Evacuation Account.<sup>141</sup>

The 1944 Education Act (Section 49) required the Ministry to impose on LEAs the duty of providing school meals, milk and other refreshments for pupils attending maintained schools. The charge for meals could not exceed the cost of the food and free meals were available in cases of financial hardship.<sup>142</sup> Expansion continued throughout 1945 in Devon, although in Plymouth the devastation from bombing impeded implementation of the desired programme of school kitchens.<sup>143</sup> There were 463 (381 in 1944) canteens and dining centres administered by DCEC by the end of the year feeding 49.9% elementary and 63.2% secondary schoolchildren, rising to 487 canteens and dining centres feeding 59.3% elementary and 70.3% secondary children by the end of 1946.<sup>144</sup> This was indeed a remarkable achievement and owed much to the goodwill of teachers. Nationally, by October 1945, 39.7% pupils in primary and grant-aided secondary schools were taking meals.<sup>145</sup> Ministry of Education Circular 21 (4 January 1945) estimated that the school meals service needed to be more than doubled and that on average schools would need canteen provision for some 75% of the number in daily attendance. Priority was to be given to the school meals service once the repair of war damaged houses was addressed. Authorities were now urged to prepare and submit their proposals 'without delay'.<sup>146</sup> Draft regulations issued by Butler also required every LEA to establish a school meals service and employ a school meals organiser from 1 April 1945.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> P.H.J.H. Gosden, *Education in the Second World War*, p.195

<sup>142</sup> *Report of the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Education 1939-1945*, p.29. Regulations S.R. & O No 698 came into force on 1 April 1945.

<sup>143</sup> *Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the City of Plymouth 1945*, 1363/31

<sup>144</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1946* (Westcountry Studies Library)

<sup>145</sup> *Report of the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Education 1939-1945*, p.29. Also see J. Welshman, 'School Meals and Milk in England and Wales 1906-45', *Medical History*, p.27

<sup>146</sup> *The Times Educational Supplement*, 13 January 1945

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.* 31 March 1945

The goodwill of teachers in supervising increased expansion of school meals had and would continue to be pivotal. There had been rumblings of discontent as wartime provision expanded. Nationally, large numbers had assumed many extra wartime duties, particularly those evacuated with their pupils. Gosden described how the NUT pushed for certain conditions in the Education Bill when it became clear in 1943 that the Government was intending to supply meals and milk to all children who wanted them. The majority of teachers decided to support the general expansion and reached an agreement with the Government that the dining and social training supervised by the teacher was classified as a professional task.<sup>148</sup> However, the Ministry acknowledged that ‘the burden of work at present falling on teachers is often excessive and must be reduced either by a transfer of responsibilities to the school meals staff, strengthened by up-grading, or by the provision of assistance to the head teacher’.<sup>149</sup> In November 1945, two further articles on the subject were published. The first discussed a memorandum based on reports made by local associations of the NUT in Surrey. The reports were almost unanimous that non-teaching services, particularly meals and milk ‘encroach more and more on the main service of education and take up teachers’ time and energy to an extent that is jeopardizing the efficiency of the individual teacher and the work done in the school’. The second reported on a resolution taken by the London Schoolmasters’ Association on 9 November calling on the LCC to express its opinion to the Ministry of Education that the contemplated expansion of the provision of school dinners ‘makes it imperative to recruit and train immediately an ancillary staff (other than the teaching staff) for all duties, including supervision, connected with the provision of school meals’.<sup>150</sup> Occasional concerns can be found in local school log books. The Headteacher of Chardstock noted that ‘there is a shortening of full teaching duties of approximately 2 hours per week due to supervision duties, time taken up in preparing room for

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<sup>148</sup> P.H.J.H.Gosden, *Education in the Second World War*, p.204

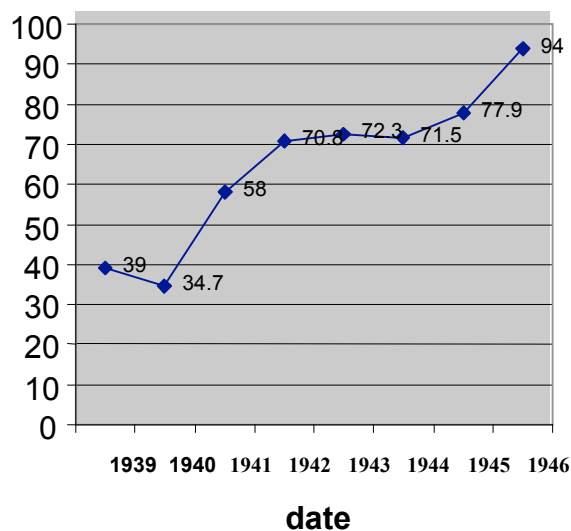
<sup>149</sup> *The Times Educational Supplement* 13 January 1945

<sup>150</sup> *The Times Educational Supplement*, 17 November 1945. Article discussing Ministry of Health Circular 21 (4 January 1945)

dinners and then to school work again'.<sup>151</sup> Exminster's headteacher was pleased that the children were looking better even after one week of school meals. However 'additional work is a strain on the teachers... This coupled with the numerous forms from Dentist, Doctor etc means less and less time for teaching'.<sup>152</sup> At Tavistock Senior Church School a staff meeting was held on 2 June 1943 where a unanimous decision was taken 'that the duty of serving meals should not be considered as part of the undertaking of the teacher on duty'.<sup>153</sup> Clearly this was a sensitive issue and one which the Ministry of Education needed to address in order to retain the future goodwill of teachers.

### School milk provision

**Graph illustrating the approximate percentage of elementary pupils under DCEC administration (excluding Plymouth and Exeter) taking milk 1939-1946 as recorded by the County Medical Officer**



By 1938 an estimated 55% (2,500,000) of elementary schoolchildren were taking milk nationally with 560,000 receiving it free of charge. By September 1946 one-third pint of milk was free to all children.<sup>154</sup> Locally the Scheme had improved considerably by March 1939 but provision still fell

<sup>151</sup> *Chardstock St Andrews School Log Book 2214Cadd2/EFL4*, 17 November 1944

<sup>152</sup> *Exminster School Log Book 3206CEAL3*, March 1944

<sup>153</sup> *Tavistock Senior Church School Log Book 792C/EFL9-10*

<sup>154</sup> *The Health of the School Child, Report of the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Education 1939-1945*, pp. 22-23, 29

well below the national average with 39% (15,066) of elementary pupils and 36% (1,518) of secondary pupils taking milk with just over 10.4% (4,000) of pupils receiving free milk.<sup>155</sup> By 1946, 97.1% (462) of primary schools and 100% (60) of secondary schools administered by DCEC were included in the Scheme with 94% of primary schoolchildren and 76.6% secondary schoolchildren receiving one-third pint of free milk daily.<sup>156</sup> Exeter recorded that 91.4% (84.7% in 1942) received one third pint free milk, increasing to two thirds as soon as supply permitted.<sup>157</sup>

Macnicol challenged what he saw as Titmuss's use of the Milk-in-Schools Scheme to illustrate 'a clear example of policy change engendered originally by the social debate on evacuation, and then given sudden new urgency by the "decisive" influence of Dunkirk in July 1940'.<sup>158</sup> Titmuss clearly put on record that reports of the condition of some evacuees 'aroused the conscience of the nation' and that the subsequent further evacuation and bombing 'stimulated inquiry and proposals for reform'. He also fervently believed that the period following the military disaster of Dunkirk when invasion fears reached their peak was 'the most fruitful for social policy and action', highlighting the Government's decision in July 1940 to expand the school meals and milk service. He also specifically mentioned that the decision to introduce the National Milk Scheme for mothers and pre-school children<sup>159</sup> was taken five days after the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force from Dunkirk.<sup>160</sup> Here it is important not to confuse the **National Milk Scheme** with the **Milk-in-Schools Scheme** introduced in 1934. The National Milk Scheme was introduced by the new Ministry of Food as a wartime food policy, although MH Circular 1840 (July 1939) had taken steps

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<sup>155</sup> *DCC150/4/1/37* p.107 and p. 132

<sup>156</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1946*, p.17 (Westcountry Studies Library)

<sup>157</sup> *Annual Report of School Medical Officer for Exeter 1946-7, Exeter Education Committee Minutes*, p. 15, held at Westcountry Studies

<sup>158</sup> J.Macnicol, 'The Evacuation of Schoolchildren', H. Smith, ed. *War and Social Change* (Manchester University Press 1986) p.22.

<sup>159</sup> The National Milk Scheme provided every child under 5 and all expectant and nursing mothers with 1 pint of daily milk for 2d instead of 4 1/2 p. Smith used it as an example of wartime concern with increasing Britain's population growth, H.L. Smith, ed. *Britain in the Second World War: a social history* (Manchester University Press 1996) p.5

<sup>160</sup> R.Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp. 507-11

to increase milk consumption amongst expectant and nursing mothers and pre-school children with the introduction of the Milk Marketing Board Scheme.<sup>161</sup> Macnicol highlighted a report written by the Board's CMO which he believed suggested a very different interpretation for the expansion of the Milk-in-Schools Scheme, unconnected with Dunkirk. He summarised the report and concluded that the following three reasons were behind Board Circular 1567 (21 October 1941) which announced the Government's aim of increasing milk consumption among schoolchildren to as near 100% as possible: expansion was planned prior to the outbreak of war; milk in schools became part of the wider wartime rationing and food policy and expansion was further spurred on to compensate for the reduction in the meat allowance; the disruptions of wartime made it virtually impossible to implement the pre-war means test criteria.<sup>162</sup> However, the Report reveals that the CMO also stated that after the Government initiative taken in July 1940 (Circular 1520) which was largely the inspiration of Attlee together with Lord Woolton,<sup>163</sup> 'a further impetus' to the expansion of meals and milk came from 'the Battle of Britain and subsequent bombing with renewed evacuation and threat of invasion',<sup>164</sup> which is exactly what E.D. Marris claimed.<sup>165</sup> Titmuss himself highlighted the fact that as part of the national food policy 'evidence of unsatisfactory health indices during the first two years of war - for instance, higher infant death rates and rising tuberculosis rates' also influenced the proposals to expand the provision of school meals and milk in July 1940.<sup>166</sup> The disaster at Dunkirk was a crucial turning point because the fear of invasion became heightened. It then became imperative to expand the provision of meals and milk in schools and to increase, under the National Milk Scheme, the supply of cheap milk to expectant and nursing mothers and children under 5 as the second wave of evacuees began to arrive in reception areas. Morale needed boosting,

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<sup>161</sup> The scheme involved a reduction in the price of liquid milk for local authorities for the purpose of their Maternity and Child Welfare arrangements and came into operation on 31 July 1939.

<sup>162</sup> J.Macnicol, 'The Evacuation of Schoolchildren', H. Smith, ed. *War and Social Change*, pp.22-24

<sup>163</sup> Clement Attlee was Lord Privy Seal at this time and Lord Woolton was Minister of Food. Refer to P.H.J.H.Gosden, *Education in the Second World War*, p.187 See also *Report of the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Education 1939-1945*, p. 24

<sup>164</sup> *Report of the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Education 1939-1945*, p.24

<sup>165</sup> E.D. Marris, *War History of School Meals and Milk* as cited in P.H.J.H.Gosden, *Education in the Second World War*, pp.189-190.

<sup>166</sup> R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.509



the evacuation scheme needed to succeed and the population's health became of paramount importance to withstand the struggle ahead.

Nationally by October 1939, following the first evacuation wave, the number of children in England and Wales receiving milk had fallen by about 1 million and the total drunk was down about 40%.<sup>167</sup> It appears that many parents were not aware that they could send a postal order to the teacher or billeting householder to ensure their child received one-third pint of milk for 1/2d under the Milk-in-Schools Scheme.<sup>168</sup> The situation improved during the next 12 months following Board Circular 1520 (22 July 1940) with approximately 50% of elementary and secondary schoolchildren receiving milk.<sup>169</sup> However, locally the Board drew DCEC's attention to the fact that the percentage of children in Devon taking milk under the recognised scheme was considerably lower than the national percentage.<sup>170</sup> Approximate average figures given were 38% (14,316) local elementary pupils and 34% (11,661) evacuees. Totalling figures for local, unofficial and official evacuees, this gave an overall percentage of 34.7 taking milk.<sup>171</sup> Following this, DCEC sent a letter in November 1940 to all schools requesting that Managers and Headteachers collaborate to do their best to increase milk consumption under the Scheme, especially in view of the fact that it had 'for a number of reasons never received as much support in Devon as in other counties'.<sup>172</sup> Concern was expressed by DCEC at the seriousness of an agricultural county consuming less milk than other areas of the country but one reason given was that children drank more at home in Devon.<sup>173</sup> By December, DCEC had revised its methods of assessing malnutrition and authorised the supply of

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<sup>167</sup> R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.149

<sup>168</sup> *Education*, Volume LXXV, 19 January 1940, p.47

<sup>169</sup> R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 509

<sup>170</sup> *DCEC Committee Minutes*, DCC150/4/1/38, 2 October 1940, p.165

<sup>171</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1940*, DCC150/4/5/1, p.14

<sup>172</sup> *Okehampton Senior School Correspondence*, 464C/EAM361-421, Letter dated 11 November 1940

<sup>173</sup> *Express and Echo*, 31 October 1940

two-thirds instead of one-third pint of milk to malnourished children.<sup>174</sup> Approximately 60% of schoolchildren in Plymouth were taking milk by the end of 1940.<sup>175</sup>

Supplies of sufficient drinkable milk and reluctance to provide small schools had dogged Devon's implementation of the Scheme since its pre-war inception. War had exacerbated the problems and great difficulty was experienced throughout many parts of the County in 'obtaining milk of quality up to the very lenient standard required by the Committee and indeed of obtaining any kind of milk'.<sup>176</sup> The shortage of milk continued during 1941 as farmers and dairymen remained reluctant to supply schools, especially small ones. Equipment and labour shortages also meant that many small schools received no supplies.<sup>177</sup> The Mayor of Barnstaple complained in April 1941 that the Scheme, so successful in improving children's health, had been stopped. The dairyman could not supply the town's schools because shortage of cattle feed had decreased production by about 40%.<sup>178</sup> The problem of supply was not unique to Devon during the winter of 1940-1941. Shortage of milk, bottles and aluminium caps, transport difficulties, lack of manpower, the black-out, shortage of feed and rising costs all combined to exacerbate the main problem which was the reluctance of dairymen to supply milk to schools because of the lack of financial incentive.<sup>179</sup> Even back in November 1939, the main topic of conversation amongst farmers at Exeter Market was the inadequate prices fetched for milk in view of rising costs of production.<sup>180</sup> In cases where farmers agreed to deliver milk in bulk to schools an extra burden was placed on teachers, well-documented in Devon's school log books. Beakers had to be supplied and in some larger schools extra help was

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<sup>174</sup> *Report of Education Committee, DCC148/15*, 12 December 1940

<sup>175</sup> *City of Plymouth Interim Report of the Medical Officer of Health 1940*, 1363/26, p.6

<sup>176</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1940, DCC 150/4/5/1*, p.16

<sup>177</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1941, DCC 150/4/5/1*, pp.1 and 17

<sup>178</sup> *Express & Echo*, 4 April 1941

<sup>179</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1941, DCC 150/4/5/1*, Introduction.

<sup>180</sup> *Express and Echo*, 24 November 1939

required to deal with the distribution of milk and the washing of beakers.<sup>181</sup> The Board finally persuaded the Treasury to increase the dairymen's margin from 8d to 10d. In addition, milk rationing was introduced on 12 April 1941, although the National and School Milk Schemes were guaranteed to receive the same quantity of milk as they had taken during the week beginning 2 March.<sup>182</sup> Nevertheless despite all the problems, *The Times Educational Supplement* ran an upbeat article on Devon's milk and meals provision in May 1941.<sup>183</sup>

At this point it is important to highlight the problems of untreated milk,<sup>184</sup> particularly problematic in rural areas. Starns has recently highlighted that in some rural areas between 1939 and 1942 'the cases of non-pulmonary tuberculosis increased dramatically because children were being supplied with untreated milk'.<sup>185</sup> The figures for Devon rose from 22 local children and 5 evacuees in 1940 (22 and 4 respectively in 1941) to 59 in 1942 falling to 43 in 1943 and 40 in 1944.<sup>186</sup> Although no comment was made by the CMO to suggest that the increase in cases during 1942 was connected with untreated milk, it was of concern to him that the percentage of 'tuberculin tested' and 'pasteurised' milk supplied to schools was not higher (20.6% in 1942) compared with 'accredited' and 'ordinary' (presumably raw) milk which accounted for 74.2% of supplies (further details given in Appendix 32).<sup>187</sup> Again in 1943 and 1944 he stated that only a minority of schools had first class liquid milk.<sup>188</sup> There was however comment that the change from pasteurised urban milk to raw

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<sup>181</sup> For example, Axminster School hired a milk canteen worker on 5 January 1942, *Axminster School Log Book 2250C/EFLI*

<sup>182</sup> *Express & Echo*, 16 April 1941

<sup>183</sup> *Times Educational Supplement*, 3 May 1941

<sup>184</sup> A 1936 survey by the People's League of Health showed that one-fifth of school milk in England and Wales was neither heat-treated nor Grade A (Tuberculin Tested). P. Atkins, 'Fattening children or fattening farmers? School milk in Britain, 1921-1941', *Economic History Review*, LVIII, 1 (2005), p.70

<sup>185</sup> 'Between 1939 and 1942 there were at least 13,000 new cases of non-pulmonary tuberculosis and it was conservatively estimated that at least 40% of these were of a bovine origin'. P. Starns, 'Getting the Jab: Child health and immunization during World War Two Britain', *Children in War*, November 2005, Vol. 1, No.3, p.32.

<sup>186</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1940-1944*, DCC 150/4/5/1

<sup>187</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1942*, DCC 150/4/5/1, p.15

<sup>188</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1943*, DCC 150/4/5/1, p.13. *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1944*, p.13

rural milk may have caused a doubling of cervical adenitis (enlarged lymph glands in the neck) amongst evacuees compared with local children during 1940. However, the CMO was sceptical because this ratio reversed during 1941 and continued to fall.<sup>189</sup>

Following the joint paper<sup>190</sup> presented to the Cabinet in September 1941, the Government's school meals and milk policy 'took another big step forward'.<sup>191</sup> Board Circular 1567 (21 October 1941) introduced an important reform by granting free milk to necessitous children on the ground of financial necessity alone and not clinical proof of malnourishment. Official evacuees were to be considered 'necessitous' if parents contributed less than the full 6s per week towards the cost of billeting. Schoolchildren and certain other groups were given specific priority with a basic home milk allowance of one-half pint for those aged 5-18 and a further allowance under the Milk-in-Schools Scheme of one-third or two-thirds for children who paid, with no limit for those receiving free milk.<sup>192</sup> Despite the Treasury's grant rate on all expenditure in connection with the supply of milk being increased to 100% (1 October 1941), many smaller schools in Devon were still without milk and dried milk, the usual standby, had been withdrawn from the public market by the Ministry of Food.<sup>193</sup> DCEC wrote to all schools in December explaining that following recent Government Circulars 'an obligation rests on every grant aided school to enable its pupils to participate in the Milk-in-Schools Scheme'. Improvement was urgently needed to improve Devon's figure of 51%,<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1941*, DCC 150/4/5/1, p.9. Those needing treatment per 1,000: 1.9 in 1940, 1.1 in 1941, 1.0 in 1942 and 0.6 in 1943. Those requiring observation per 1,000: 45.3 in 1940, 42.9 in 1941, 23.1 in 1942 and 37.3 in 1943. *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1943*, p.8

<sup>190</sup> Presented by Butler (President of the Board of Education), Lord Woolton (the Minister of Food) and the Secretary of State for Scotland.

<sup>191</sup> R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.509

<sup>192</sup> *Report of the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Education 1939-1945*, p.26

<sup>193</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1941*, DCC150/4/5/1, p.17

<sup>194</sup> Confusingly, DCEC Minutes for 10 December 1941 recorded that 58% of children were taking milk, DCC150/4/1/39, p.248. The CMO also recorded 58%, *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1941*, DCC150/4/5/1, p.17. These figures possibly included secondary pupils.

which compared badly with the national average of 60%.<sup>195</sup> In Plymouth, 95% of schoolchildren resident in the City (approximately 1,966) were taking milk by the end of the year.<sup>196</sup>

By May 1942, the national situation had improved further with the provision of some milk to approximately 80% of pupils.<sup>197</sup> Board statistics still showed that in contrast to Devon's above-average performance in meal provision, only 68.4% of elementary schoolchildren were receiving milk in February 1942 compared with the national average of 79.8%.<sup>198</sup> Exeter fared better with 84.7% taking milk,<sup>199</sup> and Plymouth had 89% taking milk although this had dropped from 95% for the previous year.<sup>200</sup> The urban setting and size of Exeter and Plymouth's schools was probably the most likely reason for increased milk consumption. By December, the Agriculture Committee was reporting another milk shortage in the County,<sup>201</sup> although dried milk was now available, and the percentage taking milk was somewhere between 63-65%. By May 1943, Devon's figure of 73.2% was still lower than the national average of 78.9%. It appears there was still a problem locally with supplying milk in bottles due to shortage of labour and material.<sup>202</sup>

An important milestone was taken by the Board in November 1943 (Administrative Memo 489) concerning official evacuees in public elementary schools. Concerned to find that in general the percentage of those children receiving school milk, on payment or fee, was considerably lower than the percentage of other children, the Board finally acknowledged that it was due to the complexity of the task of arranging for the collection of payments or for the investigation of the means of the

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<sup>195</sup> *Okehampton Senior School Correspondence, 464C/EAM253-258*. Letter dated 9 December 1941.

<sup>196</sup> *Interim Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the City of Plymouth 1941, 1363/27*

<sup>197</sup> P.H.J.H.Gosden, *Education in the Second World War*, pp. 192, 201-2. Note that the Chief Medical Officer for the Ministry of Education recorded 77.9% for February 1942, *The Health of the School Child, Report of the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Education for the Years 1939-1945*, p.29

<sup>198</sup> *DCEC Minutes, DCC150/4/1/40*, June 1942, p.81. DCEC figures for February 1942 recorded 69% taking milk, *DCEC Minutes, DCC150/4/1/40*, p.37. The national percentage for February 1942 was recorded as 77.9% by the Chief Medical Officer for the Ministry of Education, *The Health of the School Child, Report of the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Education for the Years 1939-1945*, p.29

<sup>199</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer for Exeter City 1942, ECA/19/95*, p.9

<sup>200</sup> *Interim Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the City of Plymouth 1942, 1363/28*

<sup>201</sup> *Devon County Council Minutes, DCC148/15*, 10 December 1942

<sup>202</sup> *DCEC Minutes 150/4/1/41, Report of Executive Sub-Committee*, 20 May 1943, p.67. *DCEC Circular 34*, dated 10 June 1943, *Throwleigh and Gidleigh School File of DCEC Circulars 2066C/EAM51*

parents. Henceforth all unaccompanied evacuated children attending public elementary schools were to receive school milk without payment to the reception authority. Reception authorities were instructed to include the cost with their expenditure on free milk for local children. Accompanied evacuated children were to be treated in the same way as local children. The downside for local authorities was the Board's warning that it hoped they would 'settle such questions locally by the exercise of reasonable discretion without undue labour or the reference of case to the Board'.<sup>203</sup>

By mid 1944 there was a marginal consumption drop locally of 0.8% for elementary pupils (0.6% drop nationally). DCEC recorded that a total of 72.44% elementary and 60.2% of secondary pupils (57.0% provided and aided and 73.0% direct grant) were taking milk.<sup>204</sup> Approximately 90.2% of pupils in Exeter were also taking milk although it is unclear whether this percentage included secondary pupils.<sup>205</sup> Plymouth recorded that 82.6% elementary and 73.8% secondary schoolchildren were taking milk.<sup>206</sup> By the end of 1945, 77.9% of elementary pupils and 53.6% of secondary pupils under DCEC were receiving milk. Only 38 elementary schools and 1 secondary school had no provision, therefore indifferent percentages could be interpreted as a desire not to drink available milk since many schoolchildren either disliked plain milk or milk in any form.<sup>207</sup> For example, only 6 pupils at Trusham School wanted milk in July 1942 so the idea was abandoned.<sup>208</sup> Exeter had dropped back to 87.2%.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> *Education*, Volume LXXXII, 26 November 1943, p.664

<sup>204</sup> *DCEC Minutes, DCC150/4/1/42*, pp. 94 and 117. The CMO also recorded secondary school consumption – 62.58%, *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1944*, p.13 (Westcountry Studies Library)

<sup>205</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer City of Exeter 1943, ECA/19/95*

<sup>206</sup> *Interim Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the City of Plymouth 1944, 1363/30*

<sup>207</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1945*, pp.15-16

<sup>208</sup> *Trusham School Log Book 754C/EFL1*

<sup>209</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer City of Exeter 1945, ECA/19/96*, p.7

## Conclusion

Welshman believed that ‘the war had seen a transformation of attitudes towards school meals and milk, and a new acceptance by the Board of Education of the inadequacies of welfare services’.<sup>210</sup> The expansion of school meals from a position in 1938 when approximately 150,000 (4.0%) schoolchildren took meals to one in February 1945 when the number had increased to 1,650,000 (36.3%)<sup>211</sup> was indeed a major leap in social policy and resulted in both improved health and school attendance. The LCC Education Department recorded the complete change that took place in the country’s attitude towards school meals. Before the war ‘the key to a school meal...lay in the words “undernourished” and “necessitous”; now the door is open to all children’.<sup>212</sup> In Devon, financial retrenchment in 1938 held little prospect of improvement for the foreseeable future. The Government’s desire for a successful Evacuation Scheme was without doubt the initial catalyst in the expansion of school meals and continued to be the principal motivation in Devon where large numbers of evacuees needed to be fed at midday and Government funding assured spectacular canteen development. Throughout the war other factors played their part in consolidating the Government’s change of policy, namely the threat of invasion, the dislocating effect of bombing, the communal feeding policy, the critical food supply in 1943, the need to bolster the nation’s morale and health, the Beveridge Report, the Education Bill, the visionaries who continued to press for permanent reform and the combined key efforts of Lord Woolton and Butler. With regard to the expansion of milk provision, although by 1938, 55% of schoolchildren nationally were taking milk, the pre-war Milk-in-Schools Scheme was evidently not universally successful as can be seen from Devon’s example where only 39% of pupils were taking milk in March 1939. Atkins has recently argued that ‘the rise of school milk in the 1930s was not the sunlit upland of welfare socialism’, that ‘MISS was designed not so much to fatten children as to fatten the farmers’, that interwar

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<sup>210</sup> J. Welshman, ‘School Meals and Milk in England and Wales 1906-45’, *Medical History*, p.27-28

<sup>211</sup> Figure for 1938-9 does not include secondary schoolchildren. Figure for 1945 refers to primary and grant-aided secondary schoolchildren, *The Health of the School Child, Report of the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Education for the Years 1939-45*, p.29

<sup>212</sup> R. Samways, ed. *We think you ought to go*, p.39. See also R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.509

progressive dairy legislation was curbed by ‘the web of vested interests’ and that the change of policy in 1940 introduced by the new Churchill administration, with its substantial increase in both school and welfare milk, would not have been possible without the special wartime conditions’.<sup>213</sup> By September 1946, all schoolchildren were eligible for free milk and the spectre of proving ‘necessitousness’ had disappeared forever. Evacuation was once again a major factor in this expansion particularly in 1943 when unaccompanied official evacuee schoolchildren became eligible for free milk as the complexity of means testing and collection of payment finally became too burdensome. The additional wartime factors mentioned above also played their part.

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<sup>213</sup> P. Atkins, ‘Fattening children or fattening farmers? School milk in Britain, 1921-1941’, *Economic History Review*, LVIII, 1 (2005), pp.60, 70 and 76



## CONCLUSION

The whole process was so intensely interesting and so human and vital in all its aspects that I count myself fortunate to have had this experience.<sup>1</sup>

This thesis developed from the central premise that lack of 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. It has evolved into the only known comprehensive record of Devon's overall evacuation experience, pieced together using extensive extant local sources together with additional primary and secondary material. The principal arguments of the thesis are reviewed below in turn. Discussion about the role of evacuation in postwar social reform necessarily forms a substantial part of this conclusion because new material is introduced as evidence that evacuation was central in accelerating postwar reform in areas of education, child care and welfare, all of which particularly benefited the County.

In common with all reception areas Devon's regional distinctions, together with the variety of circumstances that came into play between 1939 and 1945, resulted in a unique evacuation experience. Important local factors included the very high percentage of working-class households, extensive rural deprivation, the relatively small number of official evacuees in September 1939, the County's popularity with thousands of unofficial (private) evacuees and its significance as a military area. Conclusions drawn from the research have revealed that, despite the relatively poor facilities and vast geographical area, Devon's evacuation experience was for the most part competently and co-operatively handled with much generosity of spirit and little indication of ill-

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<sup>1</sup> The Headmaster of Bideford Grammar School talking about evacuation in his 1943 Report *276add4/1/6-11*

feeling. Plans were largely in place before evacuation commenced, local authorities asserted their independence but also generally accepted guidance from DCC, the MH and the Board. Urban authorities faced a much greater challenge in terms of numbers of evacuees and consequent strain on both resources and local people. It is therefore remarkable that the County appeared to cope so well with the varied extent of provision required for such large numbers of diverse temporary residents, and a heavy reliance on the generosity and compliance of largely working-class householders together with prodigious voluntary effort was pivotal. Evacuation proved to be a successful, fruitful and positive experience for the majority of evacuees and their foster parents.

Most evacuated children appeared to acclimatise happily and integrate quickly with local children. Drift back was very gradual and lower than the national average and the prime cause for return appears to have been parental wish, with return due to unhappiness low on the list of reasons. Described as the County with the most successful evacuation provision for LCC children,<sup>2</sup> the obvious benefits of working-class billets and distance from evacuation areas doubtless combined with the slower pace of parochial life and sense of community spirit thereby sustaining the majority of local people during their wartime 'invasion'. It is also argued that rural poverty fostered a more compassionate approach towards the evacuated urban poor, less evident in affluent areas.

Despite the school population more than doubling during 1940-41, the overall wartime educational picture appears to have been one of achievement despite the many privations and disruptions. Although the majority of evacuated school parties lost their unit identity, integration benefited both evacuee and local schoolchildren and local and evacuated staff appeared to co-operate and respect each other with surprisingly little friction but much shared appreciation. There is no documentary evidence to suggest that wartime juvenile delinquency was particularly problematic in Devon and any suggestion that evacuees caused a significant increase in local offences would certainly be invalid. Neither is there any evidence to suggest that religious issues posed more than the odd

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<sup>2</sup> *Western Times*, 3 January 1941

minor problem. On the contrary, regular church and chapel attendance was usually regarded by evacuee children as a welcome social event. With regard to children's war work, there is no data to suggest significant local exploitation or serious infringement of bye-laws, although some schooling was obviously lost. Children's war work played a vital national contribution, particularly in an agricultural county such as Devon. It also integrated children socially, eased the burden on foster parents and importantly focused official attention on any possible long-standing exploitation.

Unlike some reception areas 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 and the added complication that much of the available accommodation was secured by unofficial 'private' evacuees. The shortage of accommodation became particularly acute during 1940-41 and again in 1944, causing some tension as officials struggling to find billets were frequently obliged to introduce compulsory measures. However, billets in private homes were found for thousands and many evacuees settled down, very often remaining many months and even several years. The overall picture was one of success and acceptance with very little overt complaint. Since most households were working-class there is little evidence of any class clash between billetors and billetees. Large numbers of privately evacuated unaccompanied children were also successfully integrated but undoubtedly caused a financial burden on the County's educational finances, particularly initially. The provenance of Devon's evacuees was varied but the majority came from the London area and the County's experience does not accord with the stereotypical dirty, verminous, ill-trained and ill-mannered evacuee from the slums. Research has revealed that the problem was not one of evacuees introducing hitherto unknown health complaints into Devon but rather one of an understandable increase of existing problems due to the steep rise in population and wartime conditions. Complaints were relatively few and comments found in the local archives generally acknowledged environmental rather than behavioural factors.

Jefferys cautioned ‘war...made possible the creation of a brave new world; it did not make it certain’.<sup>3</sup> Debate over the success, failure or shortcomings of postwar reforms discussed below is beyond the remit of this thesis. As discussed in the Introduction, opinions have ranged widely as to the extent to which war and evacuation may have acted as catalysts for educational, child care and welfare reforms introduced both during and after the war. That lobbyists of various persuasions called for some of these reforms during the 1930s cannot be disputed nor that some reform was gradually taking place or was at least under consideration. However, the critical factor remains that interwar progress was slow, geographically uneven and hampered by financial restraints. With the large movement of population, war and evacuation in particular highlighted as never before the manifest inequalities of provision. Emergency measures established for evacuees, many of whom were used to more extensive services, were then enjoyed by those in reception areas who were often accustomed to far less provision. The emerging *Zeitgeist* encompassing the desire amongst both young and old for an improved and more equitable postwar future as the public’s reward for the sacrifices of total war meant there could be no return to the status quo of 1939, despite the reluctance of Churchill and others with a conservative outlook. As Dent encapsulated - ‘war has compelled us to do what in peace we were content to neglect’,<sup>4</sup> and Welshman has highlighted the probable influence of evacuation reports such as *Our Towns* on ‘civil servants in the key central departments’.<sup>5</sup> The varied circumstances of war and evacuation forced the Treasury to formulate a more liberal financial policy and the extent of wartime State control paved the way for comprehensive welfare measures. It is also worth remembering that the postwar Labour Government was led by a man whose early experience of social work in the East End fuelled his desire for social improvement through politics.

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<sup>3</sup> K. Jefferys, *The Churchill coalition and wartime politics, 1940-1945*, p.7

<sup>4</sup> H.C. Dent, *Education in Transition* (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd. 1944) pp. viii, 79-80

<sup>5</sup> J. Welshman, ‘Evacuation, Hygiene, and Social Policy: The *Our Towns* Report of 1943’, *The Historical Journal*, 42,3 (1999) p. 804

Those few historians who have examined the process of evacuation in more depth have claimed that it was indeed a catalyst for reform. Local agencies, officials and the public also recognised that evacuation offered unparalleled opportunities for change. For example, Devon's MOH acknowledged that the evacuation scheme 'acted as a powerful accelerator to normal progress, to the comfort of the people of Devon'.<sup>6</sup> One unexpected result of evacuation in Devon was the attention it focused on the inadequate water supply. An unlikely outcome prior to war, evacuation forced the Government to address the problem, finally agreeing in 1944 to provide most of the necessary finance for the North Devon Water Scheme.<sup>7</sup> The Chairman of Devon's Public Health Committee expressed his delight 'women...are not going to spend the rest of their lives walking down the village street with a bucket to draw water from a well'.<sup>8</sup> This aptly illustrates one of the beneficial local effects of evacuation on the relatively backward County of Devon.

Turning first to educational reform, despite concerns that local authorities differed in their willingness and competence to translate the 1944 Education Act 'into a practical reality' and that it 'would never be implemented in full', at the time it was welcomed as 'far-reaching' and 'the greatest and grandest educational advance since 1907'.<sup>9</sup> The delays in implementing the recommendations of the 1938 Spens Report had increased calls for reform especially during September 1939. However, it was war and evacuation in particular that proved to be the catalysts for change, convulsing the status quo and causing Dent (1944) to comment that the old educational order died on the day evacuation began.<sup>10</sup> The Board was forced 'for the first time... to plan and control rather than just advise. Weaknesses in the existing system became more visible. Pressure for change from the press, interested organisations and individuals increased, whilst the reputation

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<sup>6</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1945*, p.62 (Westcountry Studies Library)

<sup>7</sup> *Tavistock Rural District Council Minutes 1690/12*, May 1944

<sup>8</sup> *Western Times*, 13 April 1945

<sup>9</sup> *The Times Educational Supplement*, 24 and 31 July 1943, 25 November, 30 December 1944, 3 March and 7 April 1945

<sup>10</sup> H.C. Dent, *Education in Transition*, pp. viii, 79-80

of the Board declined'.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, disappointment with the Board caused Devon's Chief HMI to ask 'does the Board care two hoots about education?'.<sup>12</sup> Dent claimed that Butler, however personally enthusiastic, 'could not have got through what he has had not the general atmosphere been favourable... although not one of major educational developments were wholly new, they had evolved as a direct consequence of war'.<sup>13</sup> Even the catch phrase for the Milk of Magnesia advertisement in *Education* was subtitled 'Most of us are thinking about the sort of world we are going to have after the war. We have made up our minds that it has got to be a better world'.<sup>14</sup> Devon's wartime archives also illustrate this will and energy for educational reform. For example, Derrick Heathcoat Amory anticipated that the evacuation experience would prove very useful in the postwar period 'to push ahead with the solution of some of our educational problems'.<sup>15</sup> The President of North Devon Teachers' Association declared that the present educational scheme was outmoded and required overhauling 'to be in step with the birth of a new world',<sup>16</sup> and Devon's Chief HMI reported that the multitude of local conferences, visits and meetings about evacuation, which brought together large numbers of workers in the educational field as never before, was clearly beneficially advantageous.<sup>17</sup>

By Spring 1944, DCEC 'almost' unanimously agreed to proceed with educational reconstruction as a result of the new Education Bill. Developments under consideration were raising the school-leaving age, reorganising secondary, primary, nursery and nursery-infant schools, special provision

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<sup>11</sup> A. Land, R. Lowe and N. Whiteside, *Development of the Welfare State 1939-1951: a guide to the documents in the Public Record Office* (HMSO 1992) pp.138-9

<sup>12</sup> Evacuation Report by HMI, Arnold Platts, dated 1 April 1944, *ED134/39, G9E/941*

<sup>13</sup> H.C. Dent, *Education in Transition*, pp.79, 234-5

The educational developments were listed as :war-time nurseries, school meals, camp boarding schools, the service of youth, pre-service training, school harvest camps, the registration of young persons, technical education, university education, adult education and curricular trends

<sup>14</sup> *Education*, Volume LXXXIV, July 1944, p.111

<sup>15</sup> *ED 134/31*, Letter from Derrick Heathcoat Amory to Herwald Ramsbotham dated 22 October 1940.

Derrick Heathcoat Amory was Chairman of Devon County Education Committee up to the outbreak of war. In 1940 he went on active service until he was wounded badly in 1944. In 1945 he became Conservative MP for Tiverton, later becoming Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1958.

<sup>16</sup> *Western Times*, 15 January 1943

<sup>17</sup> Report by HMI, Arnold Platts, dated 1 April 1944, *ED134/39, G9E/941*

for dull and backward children and other handicapped children and improving and erecting new buildings.<sup>18</sup> Despite Churchill's reluctance, opposition by some M.P.s,<sup>19</sup> tension in the coalition and the difficult negotiations with the Catholic Church and Church of England, the 1944 Education Act was pushed through in the wake of the Beveridge Report by the skill of Butler, assisted by Chuter Ede, although a national shortage of teaching staff and the priority claim of housing on the building industry meant that its implementation was unavoidably delayed. Locally, stringent wartime budgeting had resulted in the deferral of decisions regarding improvements to school buildings,<sup>20</sup> and immediate postwar financial problems were compounded by labour and material shortages. By March 1945, there was some alarm within DCC about the constant growth of expenditure 'forced on local authorities by Acts of Parliament',<sup>21</sup> and by the following year DCC's educational expenditure estimate represented an increase of £248,525 over the gross estimate for 1945/6 (£2,121,260).<sup>22</sup> Many of Devon's small rural schools waited either to be closed down due to lack of numbers or buildings beyond repair or opted for controlled status because they could no longer survive as 'aided' schools in the face of reorganisation and obligations to fulfil the building requirements stipulated in the Education Act.<sup>23</sup> Pressure by DCEC was put on schools that lagged

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<sup>18</sup> *Western Times*, 2 June 1944. Also *Devon County Council Minutes DCC148/16*, 24 June 1943 and 15 June 1944

<sup>19</sup> Herbert Morrison (Home Secretary) apparently suggested to Bevin (Minister of Labour) that 'the Education Bill should not go forward because a Tory Minister would be in charge of it'. K. Jefferys, ed. *Labour and the Wartime Coalition* (The Historians' Press 1987) p.169

<sup>20</sup> *Devon County Council Minutes, Report of Education Committee*, 14 March 1940. (Westcountry Studies Library) DCEC had asked the Committee that no expenditure be incurred on upkeep on 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'.

<sup>21</sup> *Devon County Council Minutes DCC148/16*, 8 March 1945

<sup>22</sup> *Devon County Council Minutes DCC148/17*, 14 March 1946, p.20.

<sup>23</sup> *Branscombe Managers' Minutes 5022Cadd/EFM1* illustrate the struggle that went in many small voluntary schools to remain 'aided'. Aided schools had to finance 50% of alterations to improve buildings required by the 1944 Education Act, whereas 'controlled' schools would receive 100% funding from the local education authority. Although control of the school passed to the local authority, there was a safeguard to protect the denominational character of the school. The managers of Branscombe reluctantly agreed to become 'controlled' in 1950. See also *Combe Raleigh St Nicholas Church School Managers' Minutes 567A/P152* and *Cotleigh Managers' Minutes 2574C/EFM1*.

behind in implementing the requirements of the Education Act,<sup>24</sup> but progress was slow. One headteacher reluctantly resigned in 1947 due to there still being ‘no water, sanitation, cloakroom or playground’.<sup>25</sup> Branscombe School finally had electricity installed in January 1956 although there were still bucket type closets, no staff WC, no washbasins and just an outside pump until 1958. Yet back in July 1938 the SMO had referred to the sanitary arrangements at the school as ‘a great danger to the health of the children’.<sup>26</sup>

Opinion is divided as to whether innovations introduced during evacuation stimulated postwar curriculum changes. It was apparently a common complaint before war that school curricula ‘were in many respects remote from reality’. Dent (1944) was clearly excited about wartime developments and believed that the broadening of outlook amongst evacuees, both children and teachers, had important repercussions on the curriculum with school life and work becoming more relevant to the life and work of society.<sup>27</sup> Burt (1940) also believed that evacuation offered extensive opportunities ‘for making fresh experiments in curricula and school teaching’.<sup>28</sup> In 1945, *The Times Educational Supplement* published a letter from Professor E. Photiades thanking British teachers for sending him particulars of methods and materials they improvised when evacuated or when their schools were damaged or destroyed. He found the 3,000 word pamphlet ‘exciting’ and hoped that it would be circulated overseas.<sup>29</sup> However, Parsons cautioned about overestimating the claims made by some educationalists<sup>30</sup> such as Weber (1971)<sup>31</sup> and Simon (1991) who believed that ‘many of the more

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<sup>24</sup> For example, DCEC put pressure on the Managers of Colaton Raleigh Aided School in 1947. *Colaton Raleigh Managers’ Minutes, 2973addA/PE1*

<sup>25</sup> *Butterleigh School Log Book 789C/EFL1*, 30 September 1947.

<sup>26</sup> *Branscombe Log Books 5022C/EFL2-3 and Managers’ Minutes 5022Cadd/EFM1*

<sup>27</sup> H.C. Dent, *Education in Transition*, pp.41 and 155

<sup>28</sup> C. Burt, ‘The Incidence of Neurotic Symptoms among evacuated school children’, *The British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Volume X, Part 1, February 1940, pp.8-15

<sup>29</sup> *Times Educational Supplement*, 1 December 1945. Conference of Allied Ministers of Education

<sup>30</sup> M. Parsons and P. Starns, *The Evacuation* (DSM 1999) pp.184-5. Also M. Parsons, *I’ll Take That One* (Beckett Karlson Ltd. 1998) p.81

<sup>31</sup> L. Weber, *The English Infant School and Informal Education*, p.166 as cited in B. Simon, *Education and the Social Order 1940-1990* (Lawrence & Wishart 1991) p.362



advanced techniques in our primary schools were worked out' during evacuation.<sup>32</sup> Thom (1986) claimed most innovation 'was for the duration only',<sup>33</sup> but more recently Cunningham and Gardner (1999) found that a number of respondents to earlier interviews explained how evacuation 'transformed their attitude to teaching in particular and to working with children in general'.<sup>34</sup> Their latest study (2002) concluded that evacuation

- i) was a significant stimulus for a major reconceptualization of the normative role of the teacher
- ii) resulted in a greater variety of teacher experience than had been anticipated
- iii) made a significant though not apparently a decisive contribution to post-war moves towards the implementation of progressivism and child-centredness in education<sup>35</sup>

With regard to reforms in the School Medical Service, evacuation 'exposed many of the inherent weaknesses of the Service as it had developed since the Edwardian period'.<sup>36</sup> Devon's MOH believed that 'the impact of the war on the Devon schools has, in some directions, acted as a stimulus rather than as a damper to the School Health Service'.<sup>37</sup> One important result of evacuation was the decision taken by DCC in 1943 to retain the increased medical staff originally temporarily employed for evacuation purposes. This decision was taken 'for the benefit of the Devon child

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<sup>32</sup> B. Simon, *Education and the Social Order 1940-1990* (Lawrence & Wishart 1991) p.35

<sup>33</sup> 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.112. See also S. Brown, 'An Apple for the Teacher: The Role of Teachers in the UK Evacuation', *Children in War*, Volume 1, No. 2, November 2004, p.68 for a discussion of study on Tottenham County School, Cambridgeshire

<sup>34</sup> P. Cunningham and P. Gardner, 'Saving the nation's children', *History of Education*, 1999, Volume 28, No. 3, p.328

<sup>35</sup> P. Gardner and P. Cunningham, 'The Impact of wartime upon teacher attitude and practice' (University of Cambridge Research Project 2002) can be viewed on ESRC Research Service – [www.regard.ac.uk](http://www.regard.ac.uk)

<sup>36</sup> H. Hendrick, *Child Welfare* (The Policy Press 2003) p.124

<sup>37</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1946*, p.2 (Westcountry Studies Library)

population'.<sup>38</sup> The Education Act 'immensely' strengthened the hand of the School Medical Service as LEAs were obliged to provide, without charge, arrangements for the medical inspection and treatment of children attending both primary and secondary schools.<sup>39</sup> By September 1944, academic centres for the teaching of child health were being established in several universities.<sup>40</sup> Locally, DCEC began to implement Section 48(3) of the Education Act in 1945, which legislated for 'the provision of an almost comprehensive medical treatment service for all children attending maintained schools, free of direct cost to the parents'.<sup>41</sup> Reform was costly and by 1946 DCC's expenditure had increased by almost £38,000.<sup>42</sup> The following year steps were taken towards provision of Special Educational Treatment for Handicapped Pupils.<sup>43</sup> With regard to Plymouth, the return of evacuated children, shortage of qualified staff and the new requirements of the Education Act led to the School Medical Service being 'somewhat hampered' even during 1946.<sup>44</sup> Following the 1946 National Health Act, the SMS was renamed the School Health Service and, with the advent of free universal access to GPs, was now able to 'concentrate on preventive work'.<sup>45</sup>

The Children and Young Person Act (1933) was 'a stimulus' to authorities to provide more adequate provision for maladjusted children<sup>46</sup> but progress before the war was slow. The Education Act (1944) made it obligatory for LEAs to provide centres for the ascertainment and treatment of maladjusted children, 'thereby formally incorporating it into the School Medical Service'.<sup>47</sup> In December 1944, the MH produced a survey which reviewed the experience gained from hostels for

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<sup>38</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1943*, DCC 150/4/5/1, p.2. Assistant CMOs increased by 6 1/2 to 9, Dental Surgeons increased by 9 to 15, Dental Attendants increased by 9 to 15 and Health Visitors increased by 26 to 34.

<sup>39</sup> *Times Education Supplement*, 16 September 1944. Also B. Harris, *The Health of the Schoolchild* (Open University Press 1995) p.2.

<sup>40</sup> *Times Education Supplement*, 16 September 1944

<sup>41</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1945*, p.2 (Westcountry Studies Library)

<sup>42</sup> *Devon County Council Minutes*, DCC 148/17, *Education Committee Report*, 14 March 1946

<sup>43</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1946*, p.2 (Westcountry Studies Library)

<sup>44</sup> *Interim Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the City of Plymouth 1945 and 1946*, 1363/31-32

<sup>45</sup> H. Hendrick, *Child Welfare*, p.131

<sup>46</sup> *Exeter Education Committee Minutes ECA/19/96*, p.8

<sup>47</sup> H. Hendrick, *Child Welfare*, pp.109-110

‘difficult’ children set up as a result of evacuation.<sup>48</sup> Those child guidance services developed in some reception areas to deal with problem evacuees ‘once established...remained and grew’,<sup>49</sup> and by 1945 the value of child guidance was generally recognised throughout the country and clinics of varying types were established.<sup>50</sup> Local provision improved in line with the national postwar trend and there was genuine desire to use the expertise gained during evacuation in postwar care.<sup>51</sup> The CMO recorded that the wartime psychiatric hostel scheme for maladjusted children, initiated in Devon and emulated in reception areas over the whole country, had been a marked success. By September 1945 an additional County Psychiatrist and a second Educational Psychologist were appointed<sup>52</sup> and by 1946 there were Child Guidance clinics at Barnstaple, Torquay and Newton Abbot and hostels for maladjusted children at Shaldon, Totnes and Exmouth.<sup>53</sup> Exeter had established a centre by 1945<sup>54</sup> and by 1947 a clinic and boarding house were due open in Plymouth once the problem of recruiting either a Psychiatric Social Worker or a Psychologist had been resolved.<sup>55</sup>

The wartime expansion of temporary residential nurseries and hostels for evacuated children heightened awareness of the plight of children in residential homes and provided ample material for studies into child care and the effects of separation from parents.<sup>56</sup> The needs of children were highlighted as never before, fostering was ‘popularised’ and the importance of full-time trained

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<sup>48</sup> *Times Educational Supplement*, 16 December 1944

<sup>49</sup> P.H.J.H. Gosden, *Education in the Second World War – a study in policy and administration* (Methuen & Co. Ltd 1976) p.176

<sup>50</sup> *Exeter Education Committee Minutes ECA/19/96*, p.8.

<sup>51</sup> *Express & Echo*, 16 March 1945, article on Hostels for difficult children.

<sup>52</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1944*, p.17 (Westcountry Studies Library)

<sup>53</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1946*, pp.29-30 (Westcountry Studies Library)

<sup>54</sup> Pilton House

<sup>55</sup> *Interim Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the City of Plymouth 1947*, 1363/33

<sup>56</sup> For example, during 1945 two reports were commissioned by the Provisional National Council of Mental Health and National Council of Social Service respectively, *Times Educational Supplement*, 14 October 1944 and 22 September 1945. Lady Allen also wrote a report on children’s residential care aimed at stimulating the Government, authorities and the general public ‘into action’, *The Times Education Supplement*, 10 February 1945. Review of Lady Allen’s publication *Whose Children?*

welfare staff for separated children was acknowledged.<sup>57</sup> Ferguson and Fitzgerald (1954) believed the MH became more ‘practical, wise and humane’ during the 6 years of war and recognised that family crises and the need for full-time care for young children were not exclusively wartime phenomena.<sup>58</sup> The LCC also believed there was an opportunity to retain the houses, camps and mansions opened for both evacuated handicapped and under fives ‘the great social experiment which started under the stress and fear of war may be carried on in peace for the lasting benefit of these children’.<sup>59</sup> In 1948, the Children Act placed a statutory duty on local authorities to take into care, up to the age of 17, orphans and children whose parents were unfit or unable to care for them and to register and supervise adoption societies.

With regard to daytime nursery provision, war and evacuation in particular highlighted the need for and benefit of gradual postwar expansion and encouraged those committed to reform: ‘We cannot go back to haphazard ways; we are learning too much about the difficulties of child management...The very nurseries of war bring the opportunity for social reforms’.<sup>60</sup> However, despite much optimism postwar nursery provision fell short of expectations and progress was gradual and uneven. Summerfield (1984) believed those authorities that took over redundant wartime nurseries ‘returned to the pre-war policy of providing day nurseries for special cases of poverty or hardship’ and did not advance the service for working women.<sup>61</sup> By 1947 only 879 day nurseries remained compared to 1,450 in 1943,<sup>62</sup> although the numbers of nursery schools remained stable but unable to keep pace with the rising birth rate.<sup>63</sup> Locally, DCEC Circular 15 (9 October 1946) reviewed the County’s plan for the provision of nursery schools or classes but warned

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<sup>57</sup> B. Holman, *The Evacuation: A Very British Revolution* (Lion Publishing 1995) p.185

<sup>58</sup> S. Ferguson and H. Fitzgerald, *Studies in the Social Services* (HMSO 1954) pp.249-250

<sup>59</sup> R. Samways, *We think you ought to go* (City of London, London Metropolitan Archives 1995) p.31

<sup>60</sup> *Times Educational Supplement*, Care of Children Under Five Survey, 7 November 1942

<sup>61</sup> P. Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War* (Croom Helm 1984) p.66

<sup>62</sup> H. Smith, ed. *War and Social Change: British society during the Second World War* (Manchester University Press 1986) p.222

<sup>63</sup> P. Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War*, p.187

although such schools and classes were being provided this was a long-term policy and new and adapted buildings might not be ready for ‘some years’.<sup>64</sup> Exeter also planned to establish nursery schools in addition to nursery classes (number not recorded) in 1946.<sup>65</sup> An entirely new venture was also launched in the same year when 17 students from the City’s Day Nurseries and Nursery Monitress Staff in the Infants’ Schools embarked on a 2 year course to gain a National Nursery Examination Board Certificate.<sup>66</sup>

The most dramatic effect of evacuation on educational welfare reform was the expansion of school meals and milk provision consolidated by the Education Act which obliged LEAs to provide milk and meals from 1 April 1945 and to employ a qualified and experienced school meals organiser. The spectacular national development of school meals during the war from a position in 1938 when approximately 160,000 schoolchildren took meals to one in October 1945 when the number had increased to 1,840,000 (39.7%)<sup>67</sup> was a major leap in social policy. Locally, school canteens and dining centres had risen from 23 in 1939 to 487, feeding 64.8% (59.3% elementary and 70.3% secondary) of children by the end of 1946, well above the national figure.<sup>68</sup> By 1946 DCC’s projected expenditure on milk and meals had risen by £56,000, mostly for prefabricated canteens which were largely chargeable to the Treasury.<sup>69</sup> Exeter was supplying meals to 34.3% from a pre-war position of no provision,<sup>70</sup> although Plymouth’s slow recovery from the heavy bombing hampered meals expansion, with only 22.2% receiving meals by October 1946.<sup>71</sup> The Government’s desire for a successful Evacuation Scheme was without doubt the catalyst for this expansion and

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<sup>64</sup> *Throwleigh and Gidleigh School Circulars File 2066C/EAM51*

<sup>65</sup> *Exeter Maternity and Child Welfare Committee Minutes, ECA/27/2*, 25 January 1946, p.568. The remaining wartime nurseries were Buddle Lane, Burnt House Lane and Paul Street. Also *Exeter Education Committee Minutes ECA/19/96*, p.27

<sup>66</sup> *Annual Report of School Medical Officer for Exeter 1946-7, Exeter Education Committee Minutes, ECA/19/96*, p.27

<sup>67</sup> *The Health of the School Child, Report of the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Education for the Years 1939-1945* (HMSO 1947) p.29

<sup>68</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1946* (Westcountry Studies Library)

<sup>69</sup> *Devon County Council Minutes, DCC 148/17*, 14 March 1946, p.20

<sup>70</sup> *Exeter City Education Minutes ECA/19/96*, p.16

<sup>71</sup> *Interim Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the City of Plymouth 1363/33*

continued to be the pivotal factor in Devon where large numbers of evacuees needed to be fed at midday and costs were offset against the Evacuation Account and Treasury grants. Other issues played their part, namely the threat of invasion, the dislocating effect of bombing, the communal feeding policy, the critical food supply, the need to bolster the nation's morale and health, the Beveridge Report, the Education Bill and the progressives in those Government departments involved in the process who sustained pressure for permanent reform on the Treasury. With regard to the expansion of milk provision, the 1934 Milk-in-Schools Scheme was already reaching approximately 55% of schoolchildren in 1938 and by October 1945 this had risen to 71.7%.<sup>72</sup> Viewed nationally, expansion therefore appeared less spectacular overall and the pre-war continuity argument appears to have some validity. However, provision in 1939 was very uneven whereas by August 1946 school milk became free to all. At variance with the national average, Devon's school milk consumption had risen steeply from 37%<sup>73</sup> in 1939 to an overall average of 85.3% (94% elementary and 76.6 secondary)<sup>74</sup> and 95% in Plymouth<sup>75</sup> by the end of 1946. This begs the question – how many other rural areas struggled to supply schoolchildren with milk during the few years prior to war?

Turning to welfare reform, evacuation once again played a pivotal role and the LCC claimed 'the pioneer activities' of its various welfare organisers sent to reception areas 'opened the eyes of many local authorities, as well as the Ministry, to the value of welfare work'.<sup>76</sup> In particular, the evacuation of mothers with children forced local authorities in over-crowded reception areas to increase the provision of welfare centres. The war 'impressed upon the nation the need for active

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<sup>72</sup> *The Health of the School Child, Report of the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Education for the Years 1939-1945* (HMSO 1947) p.29

<sup>73</sup> Figures for elementary and secondary schoolchildren combined

<sup>74</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1946*, p.17 (Westcountry Studies Library). DCC recorded that in February 1946, 65.3% (78.14% primary and 52.6% secondary) took milk, *Devon County Council Minutes, DCC 148/17*, p.53

<sup>75</sup> *Interim Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the City of Plymouth 1363/33*

<sup>76</sup> R. Samways, ed. *We think you ought to go*, pp.14,18

measures to maintain the health of babies and young children, and had shown up serious gaps that had existed in the pre-war services'.<sup>77</sup> In Devon, DCC approved sufficient funds at the end of 1943 to retain the most important additional clinics originally set up for evacuees. The CMO recorded that 'in most of the places where new clinics had been established during the war there had been a pre-war need for them, and the coming of the evacuees only precipitated necessary development'.<sup>78</sup> By June 1944 there were 57 Welfare Centres under DCC control (41 in December 1939),<sup>79</sup> and by 1948 the number had increased to 69.<sup>80</sup> Evacuation also highlighted the 'meagre pre-war resources'<sup>81</sup> of maternity provision in Devon,<sup>82</sup> and the emergency maternity scheme, described as one of the Government's 'most successful ventures during the war', became a catalyst for progress in areas of the country which had previously ignored the needs of expectant mothers.<sup>83</sup> Locally, plans were drawn up for a 20 bed maternity hospital in the Tavistock area,<sup>84</sup> and the MH also advised DCC that units at Barnstaple, Exeter and Torbay needed to be established.<sup>85</sup> During 1945, a wider and more varied nursing course was introduced in Plymouth to address the problem of shortage of nurses but, although several hospital improvement schemes were submitted for approval to the MH during 1946, not much was achieved due to the continuing demands of the housing programme.<sup>86</sup> Evacuation also highlighted the need for 'a drastic revision of the methods of Public Social Service administration' and lessons learned throughout the war were invaluable.<sup>87</sup> It also 'played a critical role' in remodelling the 'social problem group' concept, popular during the 1930s,

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<sup>77</sup> S. Ferguson and H. Fitzgerald, *Studies in the Social Services*, p.175

<sup>78</sup> *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1943*, DCC 150/4/5/1, p.2

<sup>79</sup> *Devon County Council Minutes*, DCC 148/15

<sup>80</sup> *Annual Reports of Devon County Council Medical Officer 1948-1951*, p.37 (Westcountry Studies Library)

<sup>81</sup> *Devon County Council War-time Nurseries Committee Minutes, 1944 Report by Chief Medical Officer*, DCC157/5/1/4

<sup>82</sup> For example *Newton Abbot Urban District Council Minutes R2361A/(5/4)C45*, 17 January 1944

<sup>83</sup> S. Ferguson and H. Fitzgerald, *Studies in the Social Services*, pp.68-9

<sup>84</sup> *Tavistock Rural District Council Minutes 1690/12*, March 1945

<sup>85</sup> *Exeter Maternity and Child Welfare Committee Minutes, ECA/27/2*, 11 February 1946

<sup>86</sup> *Interim Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the City of Plymouth 1945 and 1946*, 1363/31-32

<sup>87</sup> J.Q. Henriques, 'Evacuation and Welfare', *Social Work*, Volume 1, No.4 (London Charity Organisation Society 1940) pp.235-241. Also comments made by Florence Horsburgh at a meeting of civic representatives of welfare workers at Bideford, *Western Times*, 17 October 1941

into that of the 'problem family'.<sup>88</sup> One further effect of war and evacuation was the end of the marriage ban on women teachers announced by Butler in March 1944. He paid tribute to the many women who had returned to teaching and said that 'their fine example had caused the government to change their policy'.<sup>89</sup> As a result of their various wartime roles, women's confidence rose and they 'increasingly expected to have a say in both local and national administration'.<sup>90</sup>

The effects of evacuation were manifold and largely positive. The horizons of all those involved in the process were broadened and many lives were enriched, deprivations were highlighted, energy for reform was re-vitalised and areas of education, child care and welfare benefited enormously. Whilst in some areas the division between the classes undoubtedly deepened, this does not appear to have been the case in Devon where barriers appear to have been softened rather than strengthened. The extent of reform doubtless disappointed many but even now local disparity continues to exist in health, welfare and educational provision. It is hoped that further research on individual counties will extend our understanding of this unique wartime experiment and continue to test previously received assumptions.

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<sup>88</sup> For further discussion see J. Welshman, *Underclass – A History of the Excluded 1880-2000* (Hambledon Continuum 2006)

<sup>89</sup> *Times Educational Supplement*, 18 March 1944

<sup>90</sup> S. Ward, *War in the countryside* (Cameron Books 1988) p.164. See also J. Hinton, 'Voluntarism and the Welfare/Warfare State: Women's Voluntary Services in the 1940s, *Twentieth Century British History*, Volume 9, No. 2 (Oxford University Press 1998) p.279