

Operation Pied Piper: Britain's Forgotten War Children

By Marilyn Johnston

On the eve of the Second World War, more than a million British children were evacuated to the countryside for their protection. Hailed as a patriotic success, the 'Operation Pied Piper' was actually marred by accusations of abuse. Despite growing media coverage and public awareness, survivors still await reparation.

Introduction

In the first four days of September 1939 as the threat of war loomed, 1.5 million children, teachers, mothers and vulnerable adults were evacuated from British cities to the countryside.¹ This was a government-led evacuation scheme code named Operation Pied Piper. Children from densely-populated areas like London, where bombings by enemy forces were expected, were given the opportunity to be sent away to low-risk areas in the countryside. Many families made their own private evacuation arrangements with family or friends in the country. Including these figures and those of Scotland, an estimated 3.5–3.75 million people migrated from big cities in September 1939. In total, around 7 per cent of the British population became evacuees during the

¹ Julie Summers, *When the Children Came Home: Stories of Wartime Evacuees*, London, Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, 2011, p. xii.

Second World War and Operation Pied Piper remains the largest internal migration effort ever accomplished in British history.²

The mass migration programme portrayed in this paper is not equivalent to the perceived crisis as a result of asylum-seeking migration seen in political and social discourses today. Instead, due to the possibility of war in 1939 Britain, migration was devised as a *solution*. The inference of impending crisis—the temporary deviation from norm and threat of instability to an individual or group—was used by both the British government and the media to encourage mass migration.

The narrative of the evacuation was, at the time and on the whole, constructed positively by both the British media and authorities, and the effort was deemed a success. Yet it was only with the recent work of historians and journalists that a more nuanced, if not controversial, picture of Operation Pied Piper eventually came to light.³ Historians have compiled testimonies from former evacuees as well as detailing the organisation, duration and aftermath of the various evacuation operations of children within, and outside of, Britain. With a critical outlook upon governmental and media sources, and thanks to their reliance on previously unheard first-hand accounts, their research has confirmed that the evacuation affected an entire generation, and evacuees' experiences varied wildly. Many enjoyed their time with their foster families, thriving in the countryside; learning new skills and experiencing things they never would have in the city. Some evacuees stayed for good after the war, choosing to settle and work in their new location or were adopted by their loving foster families. Others remained in contact with their foster families for the rest of their lives. It was only years later, when former evacuees felt able to open up about their experiences, that the emotional trauma of separation from family, other psychological effects of the evacuation, and abuse experienced by some children at the hands of cruel host families, came to light and was documented and observed. Despite the uncovering of abuse, trauma and scandals, neither official apologies nor a reparation process are on the British government's agenda.

² Gillian Mawson, 'Operation Pied Piper – Six Amazing Facts About Britain's Wartime Evacuees', *Military History Now*, 31 March, 2017, Available at: <https://militaryhistorynow.com/2017/03/31/operation-pied-piper-six-amazing-facts-about-britains-wartime-evacuees/>; David Prest, 'Evacuees in World War Two – the True Story', *BBC History*, 17 February, 2011. Available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain_wwtwo/evacuees_01.shtml.

³ Mostly *When the Children Came Home* by Julie Summers (2011), and John Welshman's *Churchill's Children: The Evacuee Experience in Wartime Britain* (2010) as well as prominent World War Two experts and historians including (but not limited to) Steve Davies, Gillian Mawson and David Prest.

The topic of the evacuation has attracted much attention since the end of the twentieth century. This article focuses on the evacuation from the perspective of constrained migration studies which differs from war or childhood history studies. Since World War Two, much literature has been published on the subject of the evacuation. Unsurprisingly, the evacuation has also had a cultural impact, inspiring some of Britain's best-loved children's literature. Some examples of books with the evacuation as the backdrop of the story are: C.S Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950), *Carrie's War* by Nina Bawden (1973) and *Goodnight Mister Tom* by Michelle Magorian (1981). Over time, more evacuees' testimonies came to light as former evacuees began to open up about their experiences. There is more information and resources about the evacuation available now than ever before. Digital archives such as the BBC's *WW2 People's War* database⁴ (comprising of 500 pages of evacuee stories), and the Imperial War Museum's online collection⁵ ensure that vital resources (photos, films, sound recordings, documents etc.) are preserved for future generations.

Migration as a wartime solution?

The idea of evacuation as a solution was devised in 1938 by the Anderson Committee, under the aegis of the Ministry of Health. The threat of war loomed, and it was presumed that infantry combat would be supplemented with air warfare. Bombings of innocent civilians in their masses was a likely outcome, therefore it was deemed necessary to move vulnerable people out of harm's way. The Committee categorised England and Wales into three groups: Evacuation, Neutral and Reception areas. Scotland devised its own similar evacuation scheme and Northern Ireland's evacuation was informal, with the eventual September 1939 evacuation being "something of a non-event"⁶ as families made their own arrangements.

Throughout 1938 and 1939, the Anderson Committee made preparations to move hundreds and thousands of people across England and Wales to the Reception areas. The initial idea was to build camps to accommodate large school groups that would eventually be used as educational campsites in peacetime; in fact, "a number of camps were built that could accommodate some 20,000 children in wartime",⁷ but the

⁴ BBC, *WW2 People's War: Childhood and Evacuation*. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/categories/c1162/>.

⁵ Imperial War Museum, *IWM Collections*. Available at: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections>.

⁶ Welshman, p. 198.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

idea was shelved due to its sheer cost. It was decided that billeting children into foster families was the most efficient way to operate, with the government shouldering the costs of their upkeep.

Though it was compulsory for households in Reception areas to take in evacuees if they had space, the evacuation of children remained voluntary and required parental consent. According to historian Niko Gärtner, “The government’s role was to provide the infrastructure, give incentives and educate parents”.⁸ Nevertheless, there was a great deal of pressure on parents to allow their children to be evacuated to the countryside. Appeals were made on the radio and leaflets were distributed encouraging parents to place their children in the scheme.⁹

Practice drills took place throughout August 1939. Children would meet at school and walk to pre-arranged departure points at bus stops and stations. On 31 August 1939, announcements were made via radio, newspapers and telegrams that Operation Pied Piper would begin the next day. Children arrived at their schools with packed suitcases, government-issued gas masks and labels pinned to their coats complete with name, school and address. Some schools pinned notices on the school gates to inform parents of the destination,¹⁰ and the groups walked to their designated meeting points as they had previously practised. As children filed to their meeting points, parents lined the streets and stations to say heart-wrenching goodbyes while trying to remain upbeat for their children, many of whom were bustling with excitement at the prospect of going on ‘holiday’. In many cases parents did not know how long their children would be away, nor where they had been sent to until confirmation arrived days later via postcards.

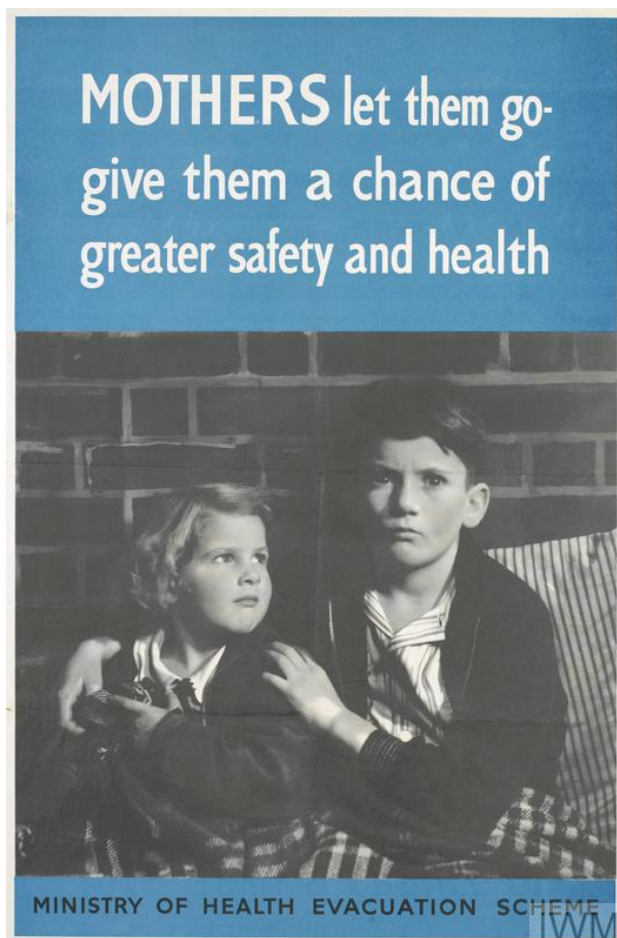
It is difficult to assess the extent to which the media had an impact on parents’ decisions to send their children away, as there is little information available from the period in question. In many testimonies, former evacuees who later had children questioned whether, if put in the same position as their parents, they would have been able to send their children to faraway places to be cared for by strangers. Undeniably, parents were subjected to a great deal of emotional and governmental pressure to send their children away and this was intensified by the press. Mothers were targeted via women’s magazines into cooperating with the government’s plans. The editor of

⁸ Niko Gärtner, ‘Administering ‘Operation Pied Piper’ – how the London County Council prepared for the evacuation of its schoolchildren 1938–1939’, *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, vol. 42, n° 1, 2010, pp. 17-32, p. 24.

⁹ Summers, p. 74.

¹⁰ Mawson, p. 2.

Woman's Own wrote in 1941: "Don't fight the recent evacuation plans. They are wholly for the benefit of your children".¹¹ Propaganda posters circulated by the Ministry of Health promoted the evacuation. The posters played on the "two most important emotions 'duty' and 'fear'".¹² One such poster begged: "Mothers let them go – give them a chance of greater safety and health".¹³ Interestingly, many evacuee children have since mentioned that it was their fathers, as the legal heads of households, that made the decision to send them away, with mothers having little say in the matter and children no input at all.¹⁴ Propaganda posters recruiting host families, and volunteers for the running of the evacuation scheme played upon citizens' sense of duty.¹⁵



Imperial War Museum, *Mothers let them go*. Available at: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/31811>.

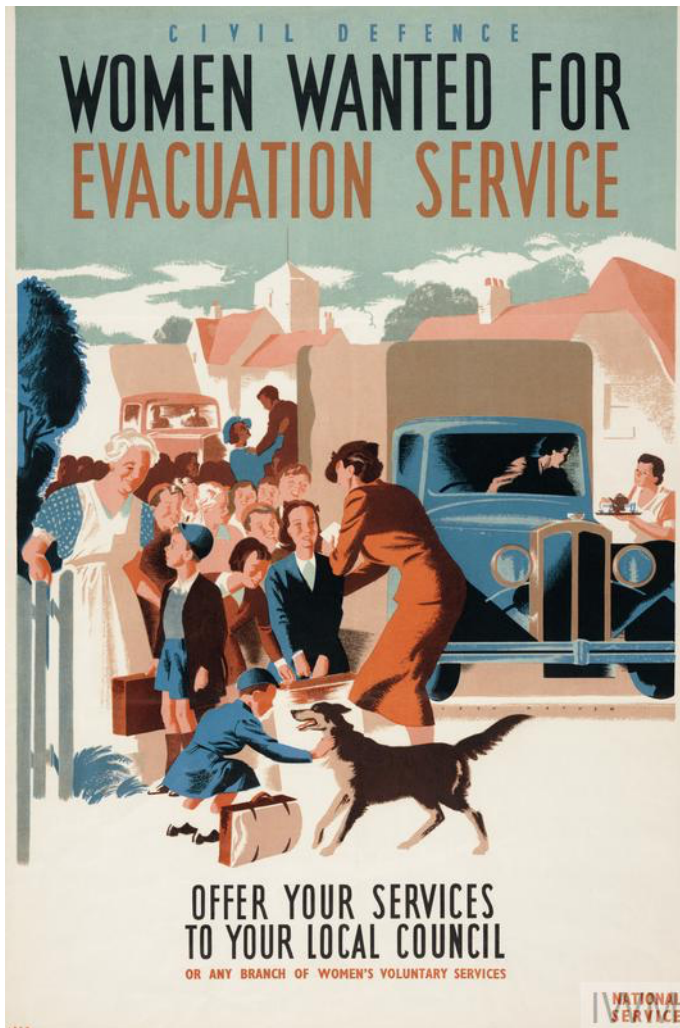
¹¹ Summers, p. 75.

¹² Urvashi Gautam, 'Information is safety: Posters promoting evacuation of children in Britain and Germany (1939-1945)', *Indian History Congress*, vol. 78, 2017, pp. 917-925, p. 923.

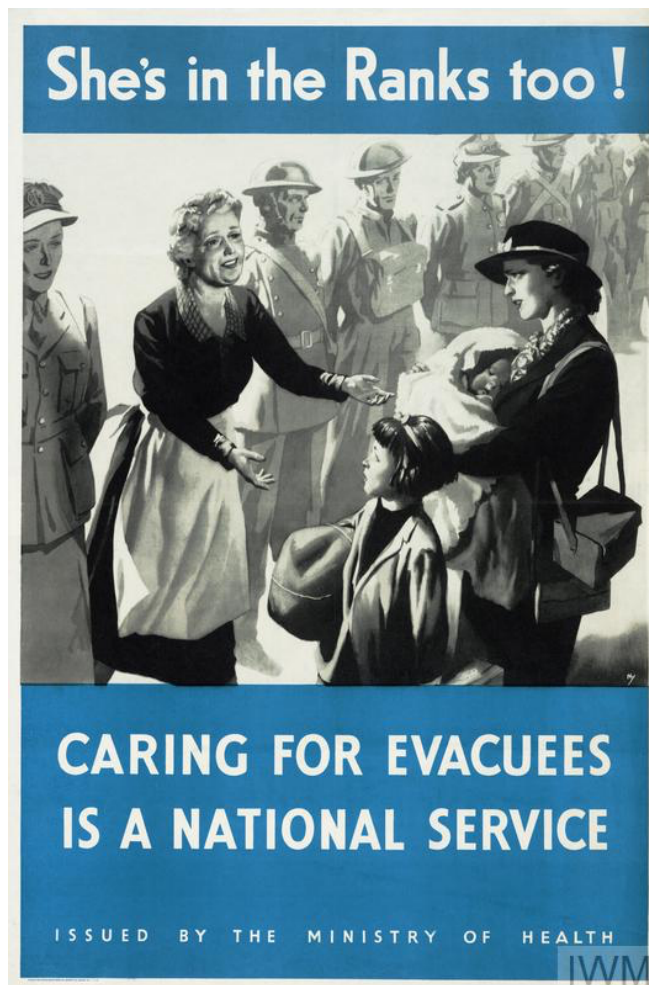
¹³ Imperial War Museum, *Mothers let them go*. Available at: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/31811>.

¹⁴ Summers, p. 72.

¹⁵ Gautam, p. 923.



Imperial War Museum, *Women wanted for evacuation service*. Available at: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/17601>



Imperial War Museum, *She's in the ranks too!*. Available at:
<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/19994>

Newspapers constructed a discourse to support the government, reminding parents that the scheme was a good idea and that children would be happy to leave for new adventures. It is therefore incredibly difficult to find a negative news story about the evacuation in the first few days of 1939. For instance, an article in *The Oswestry and Border Counties Advertiser*, a local Shropshire newspaper,¹⁶ describes the successful reception of city children in their county with nothing but positive language, applauding the “great scheme” and “magnificent work”. It is followed by a glowing report about the success of the scheme and “whole-hearted enthusiasm” of reception committees, transport workers and host families.

The migration scheme was portrayed to readers in the press as a resounding success. Yet, the words and feelings of the migrants, or in this case, the children, were absent. Upon arrival in their billets, children were indeed instructed to contribute to this false narrative of a successful evacuation by sending their pre-stamped postcards

¹⁶ The National Archives, ‘Evacuation to Shropshire’, Available at:
<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/evacuation-to-shropshire/source-1/>.

home carrying “only cheerful messages that would not upset their parents”.¹⁷ Mere days later, on 3 September 1939, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain announced to the nation that Britain was at war with Germany. The movement of millions of civilians out of harm’s way was completed just in time and the evacuation was deemed a success.

“I’ll take that one”

Research and former evacuees’ testimonies have since revealed that the organisation of the evacuation was chaotic and did not run as smoothly as was reported in the press at the time. The evacuees departed cities via trains, buses and, in some cases, paddle steamers. Approximately 1.3 million evacuees left by train, with buses being used for young children and disabled groups in particular. Many former evacuees reported feelings of excitement that subsided as journeys stretched for many hours. Food was quickly eaten and in some cases there were inadequate toilet facilities on board and thus “many children either wet themselves or were forced to urinate from train windows”.¹⁸

Upon arrival in Reception areas, children were faced with further challenges. In many cases, school groups were sent to the wrong locations, or country towns found themselves overwhelmed with too many evacuees and not enough billets, so children were moved onto the next village. Many host families were reluctant to take in evacuees, and some who had previously had space to house evacuees no longer did. The result was that town halls across Reception areas were overflowing with tired, upset and homesick children. Billeting Officers in charge of finding homes for the children, were overwhelmed and found it impossible to perform their duties in an orderly manner. This meant that the distribution of children across the country degenerated into something resembling a “cattle auction”.¹⁹ Children were lined up and host families would assess them and state “I’ll take that one” – a phrase which clinical psychologist Steve Davies said was “the first of many moments that caused upset and humiliation for the evacuees”.²⁰ Girls were often picked first as they were considered better behaved and useful for helping out with household chores. Older

¹⁷ Mawson, p. 2.

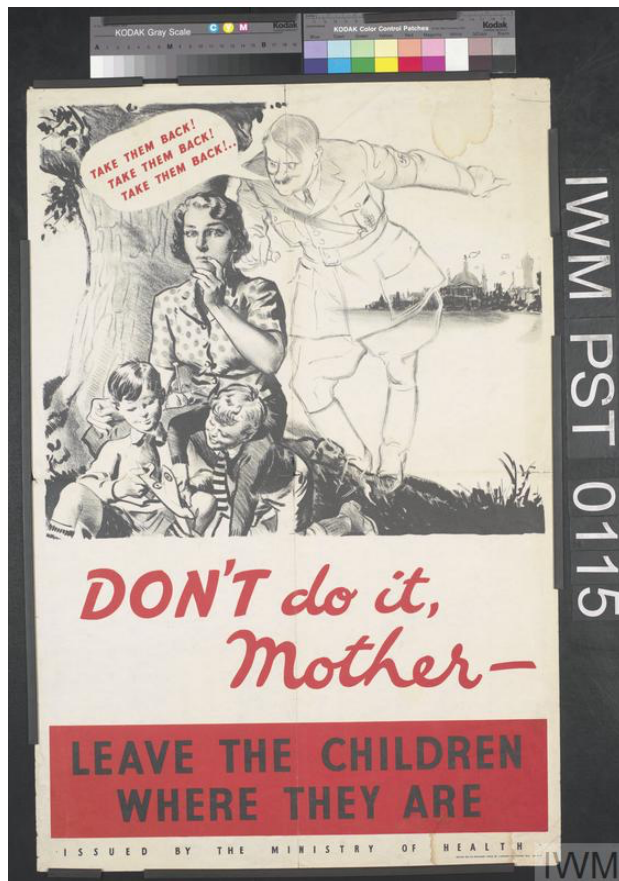
¹⁸ Chris McNab, *The Pitkin Guide to Evacuees of the Second World War*, Andover, Pitkin Publishing, 2012, p. 10-11.

¹⁹ Mawson, 2017.

²⁰ David Prest, 2011.

boys were also amongst the first to be chosen as they could be put to work on local farms. Siblings attempting to be billeted together (should they be lucky) were often picked last.

Consequently, the September 1939 evacuation, upon which the government worked fervently to implement with the help of the media to rally participation, was in some respects, ineffective. In the weeks and months that followed, despite the positive media portrayal of the evacuation, children began to trickle back into the cities. This is because throughout late 1939 and 1940—the period known as the Phoney War—no bombings occurred, provoking many parents to bring their much-missed children back home. In fact, less than 40 per cent of evacuees remained in Reception areas after four months of war.²¹ In an attempt to curb this mass return, the Ministry of Health created propaganda posters that exploited the parents' emotions.



Don't do it, mother – leave the children where they are. Available at: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/27712>

²¹ Eleanor H. Bernert & Fred C. Ikle, 'Evacuation and the Cohesion of Urban Groups', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 58, n° 2, 1952, pp. 133-138, p. 134.



Imperial War Museum, *Children are safer in the country ... leave them there*. Available at: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/29128>

Uncovering the truth

The government evacuation scheme was suspended on 7 September 1944, the day before the first V-2 bomb was launched on London.²² Though the evacuation scheme ceased, evacuees did not return home right away. Evacuees trickled home over the course of 1945 as they had done during the Phoney War months. On 2 May 1945, Londoners who had homes to return to were notified that they were allowed to leave Reception areas. They travelled back to the Capital on special trains or by using free travel vouchers. The evacuation scheme finally ended for good on the 31 March 1946, with an estimated 5,200 unaccompanied children still evacuated in England and

²² Summers, p. 36.

Wales. In fact, “the closing down of the evacuation scheme was a slow business, and was still going on in 1948”.²³ Some evacuees had no place to return to as homes had been destroyed during the bombings, others had been deserted by their parents or became orphans during the war.

Evacuation was not, in the case of every child, the exciting adventure which had been constructed by the press. Scholarly research and testimonies from the former evacuees exposed the shambolic execution of Operation Pied Piper and undermined the positive narrative of the evacuation constructed by the media at the time.

Sadly, even after evacuation, safety was not guaranteed and some children died in accidents or unexpected bombings of countryside areas. According to historian Gillian Mawson “the government in London hoped to suppress news of the deaths of evacuees” to reduce the likelihood of parents bringing their children back home.²⁴ Mawson’s claim that the media manipulated the truth in order to maintain the evacuation agenda is supported by the modern British government website gov.uk. It acknowledges that stories “were sometimes exaggerated by the popular press”.²⁵ Many positive testimonials of evacuees’ time in the countryside with their foster families exist, but the darker side of the evacuation was hidden.

Of course, experiences varied between evacuees; for some, it was an idyllic childhood which shaped their identities and futures. For others, it was a trauma which affected them for the rest of their lives. When historian Julie Summers interviewed former evacuees, she found that many who had positive evacuation experiences prefaced their stories with a caution such as: “I’m afraid my story will be of no interest to you”. Summers states that their stories are equally valid, and are “of great interest and they belong to the history every bit as much as those that have a less happy theme”.²⁶

It was only many years after the war that the darker side of the evacuation became more widely known. With the fiftieth and seventieth anniversaries of the evacuation, reunions were organised, and many former evacuees came together to reminisce, share, and in some cases, confront their experiences as evacuees for the first time. Others were encouraged to look back on their time as an evacuee only when

²³ Welshman, pp. 293-294.

²⁴ Mawson, 2017.

²⁵ [Grace Huxford](https://history.blog.gov.uk/2019/08/30/child-evacuees-in-the-second-world-war-operation-pied-piper-at-80/), ‘Child Evacuees in the Second World War: Operation Pied Piper at 80’, *History of Government*, 30 August, 2019. Available at: <https://history.blog.gov.uk/2019/08/30/child-evacuees-in-the-second-world-war-operation-pied-piper-at-80/>.

²⁶ Julie Summers, 2011, p. xv.

grandchildren began to question them about the war. Many evacuees carried life-long psychological trauma as a result of upheaval and separation from their parents as well as tensions within relationships with loved ones following their reunion. Summers states “What is striking about the stories told by evacuees is that in the immediate post-war era this topic was barely, if ever, discussed. It was simply taken for granted that children would adjust to life”.²⁷ For some children, adapting to life back home was easy, for others it was not. Estranged parents and children found themselves forced to be reacquainted (some after several years apart) under incredibly tense circumstances. People had changed over the course of a war, children had been forced to grow up quickly and civilians dealt with the ramifications of bombings, not to mention the experiences of those serving on the warfront.

Researchers and historians have since been able to comment and reflect upon the long-term psychological impacts of the evacuation. Testimonies from evacuated children, adults and foster families have helped shape the understanding of the successes and pitfalls of this large-scale migration undertaking. Few studies were made to assess the psychological impacts of the evacuation upon the children at the time. However, a 1941 edited volume titled *The Cambridge Evacuation Survey: A Wartime Study in Social Welfare and Education* authored by psychologists assessed the experiences of the children in their new billets by collecting information via surveys. It provided a rare insight into the children’s thoughts and feelings about the evacuation, leaving their families behind at the time and “Overall [...] demonstrated first and foremost [...] the strength of family ties”.²⁸

The psychological effects of the evacuation on former evacuees has been studied more widely since the war. Clinical psychologists observed “the experience of evacuation predicted a greater likelihood of insecure attachment, which was in turn associated with lower levels of psychological well-being”.²⁹ Insecure attachment is defined by the difficulty of establishing an emotional connection or meaningful relationship with others. Another psychologist found that adults recounting their evacuation experiences would describe them as something they had observed rather than experienced themselves. Indeed, “many of them had great blanks in their memories of events that had occurred at significant moments, such as the day they were evacuated. These mental blocks were subconscious defence mechanisms to shut

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

²⁸ Welshman, p. 276.

²⁹ D. Foster et al., ‘The evacuation of British children during World War II: a preliminary investigation into the long-term psychological effects’, *Aging & Mental Health*, vol. 7, n° 5, 2003, p. 398-408, p. 405.

out the most painful experiences".³⁰ Some former evacuees were able to put their experiences behind them after the war, but many carried the negative effects with them for the rest of their lives.

Difficulties faced evacuees at every step. First they dealt with the trauma of separation from their parents. Then they found themselves in completely unfamiliar landscapes, living with strangers. Tensions often arose between evacuees and host families, prompted by country versus city contrasts. In some cases, children from comfortable backgrounds found themselves in billets with no electricity or running water. In others, children from incredibly poor city areas arrived dirty and malnourished. Host families, ignorant to the extent of poverty or lack of hygiene in the inner cities, were shocked. There are many reports of enuresis (bedwetting) among the evacuees which stemmed from the stress of the upheaval. Some host families severely punished the child which ultimately exacerbated the problem. In extreme cases, children identified as frequent bedwetters were sent to hostels for children who could not go to ordinary billets. They would often find themselves housed in potentially more dangerous situations with children who had aggressive or delinquent behaviour.³¹

Evacuees were sometimes subjected to bullying either from within their billets; from foster parents, jealous sons and daughters or local children. The term 'vaccies' was used as a derogatory slur which "came to represent the excremental underside of British civilization". Although some city children did arrive in the countryside "filthy, ragged, ill-fed, foul-mouthed, delinquent, louse-ridden"³² many more were labelled with this stereotype, exacerbating already difficult circumstances. Some young women—mothers with babies, or expectant mothers—who were also evacuated under the government scheme, found themselves clashing with the women of the household who bristled at the prospect of another woman invading their space, while others were used as unpaid slaves to do housework

As children were evacuated in school groups, there was at least some semblance of familiarity in their new lives. Children were able to maintain friendships from home as friends were billeted with families nearby. School teachers who accompanied the children did their best to continue schooling in the Reception areas, using empty

³⁰ Summers, p. 246-247.

³¹ Welshman, p. 176.

³² Maud Ellman, "Vaccies Go Home!": Evacuation, Psychoanalysis and Fiction in World War II Britain', *Oxford Literary Review*, vol. 38, n° 2, 2016, p. 240-261, p. 243.

facilities such as village halls, barns or even open fields for classrooms. In other cases local schools would share their classrooms, and timetables were adapted so local children were educated in the morning and evacuees in the afternoon or vice versa. Education suffered during the war as well, with thousands of teachers taken away by military service or war work. To make up the shortfall, some teachers came out of retirement or local civilians with little experience became tutors. By spring 1940, an estimated 5 per cent of secondary school children and 10 per cent of primary school children in England and Wales received no education at all. Only 30 per cent of primary school children received full-time education.³³

Some evacuees were subjected to psychological, physical or sexual abuse at the hands of the adults that were supposed to care for them. The extent of the abuse experienced by evacuees and subsequent trauma will never be fully known, with Julie Summers stating “while it undeniably occurred, there are no accurate records of the number of children who were abused nor detailed accounts of what form it took. All too often unsubstantiated percentages are bandied about and the figures vary wildly”.³⁴ In a study, historian David Prest interviewed 450 former evacuees, with 12 per cent reporting some form of what would be classed as child abuse today.³⁵ Meanwhile, social historian Juliet Gardiner stated “10 to 15 per cent of evacuees were abused physically, sexually or emotionally, and the NSPCC did bring a number of prosecutions for cruelty”.³⁶ Many of these harrowing stories emerged only many years later, when the former evacuees were able to reflect upon and speak out about their experiences with the distance passing time provided.

The British Evacuees Association (formerly the Evacuees Reunion Association) was created in 1996 “to ensure that the true story of the great evacuation would become better known and preserved for further generations”.³⁷ The BEA continues to help connect former evacuees and families with long lost contacts and organise reunions. It campaigned for many years to obtain the National Memorial to the Evacuation located at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire. It was inaugurated in 2017 and pays tribute to the evacuated children and their families for the sacrifices they made during the war. The stories of the evacuation are still very present in Britain today with grandparents passing their stories onto their families

³³ McNab, 2012, p. 24.

³⁴ Summers, 2011, p. 256.

³⁵ McNab, 2012, p. 19.

³⁶ Juliet Gardiner, *Wartime: Britain 1939–1945*, London, Headline Book Publishing, 2004, pp. 48-49.

³⁷ The British Evacuees Association. Available at: <http://www.evacuees.org.uk/>.

and, although World War Two and the evacuation is no longer on the National Curriculum, many primary schools still opt to teach it.

Conclusion

After the end of the war, the country was dealing with recovery. Entire communities had to be rebuilt after the Blitz, and numerous families had to cope with the loss of loved ones. This meant little attention was given to the evacuees' wellbeing as they returned home, and they were expected to reintegrate seamlessly into family life. For some, this meant coming home after six years away, returning to new homes, destroyed communities, new siblings or even new step-parents. Parents too, had to deal with the return of their children, some of whom they had not seen in years. The children had grown up, many had developed different accents or came home speaking local dialects or another language. In many cases, the evacuees held their foster families and lives in the country with high regard that they resented coming home to dirty, crowded cities and their parents. Others resented their parents for sending them away to foster families that were nasty and abusive. Aside from dealing with the physical and emotional effects of war itself, an entire generation of children and their parents had to deal with the outcome of prolonged separation and rebuilding relationships which for many, were never quite the same again.

The war in general, and the shocking state of cities' children and mothers who were evacuated during the 1939 Operation Pied Piper, prompted the government to make changes in order to better the health and well-being of the population.³⁸ This included the 1944 Education Act, which came into effect after the war, making secondary education free for all children. Social services and state welfare were also created, with the National Health Service introduced in 1948 providing free healthcare for all. Despite rationing of food and goods continuing until 1954, "the new welfare state and growing economic opportunities meant there was hope for a brighter and more prosperous future for children in post-war Britain".³⁹

The external crisis of impending war drove the government to create evacuation as a solution. Yet, this ultimately generated another type of individual trauma which,

³⁸ Summers, 2011, p. 301.

³⁹ Imperial War Museum, Growing up in the Second World War. Available at: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/growing-up-in-the-second-world-war>

if not wholly unforeseen, was not regarded as a pressing issue. The evacuation was by no means the perfect solution to the threats brought on by war. In 1987, separation anxiety expert John Bowlby told the *Sunday Times* "Evacuation was a bad mistake".⁴⁰ The scheme did however, remove children out of harm's way, who might otherwise have been seriously injured during the blitzkrieg in 1940 or V-1 and V-2 rocket launch attacks in 1944. It is important to highlight that many former evacuees have spoken highly of their evacuation experiences which provided them with wonderful memories, friendships and opportunities.

The public discourse surrounding the evacuation scheme was designed by the government and press to be consistently positive. This is evident through propaganda, emotional and heart-warming articles, suppression of negative news stories and the lack of individual public testimonies from evacuees themselves at the time. There exists a discrepancy between the public portrayal of the success of the evacuation scheme and the internal crises experienced by individuals who suffered long-term as a result of evacuation. At the end of the war, families were reunited, the economy improved and the British government invested in the health and well-being of its civilians. This success is somewhat undermined by the emergence of information regarding the individual internalised trauma of those who suffered because of evacuation. What the evacuation and its consequences demonstrate is the need to interrogate an established understanding of the past. It is necessary to challenge and complicate set discourses surrounding historical events. It is crucial to seek out and listen to individual testimonies of those who experienced these circumstances first-hand in order to ensure that our knowledge of the past is based on more than one constructed narrative.

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⁴⁰ Ruth Inglis, *The Children's War: Evacuation 1939-1945*, Glasgow, William Collins & Sons, 1989, p. 154, cited in Julie Summers, 2011, p. 302.