

**GOVERNMENT EVACUATION SCHEMES**  
**AND THEIR EFFECT**  
**ON SCHOOL CHILDREN IN SHEFFIELD**  
**DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR**

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# **GOVERNMENT EVACUATION SCHEMES AND THEIR EFFECT ON SCHOOL CHILDREN IN SHEFFIELD DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR**

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## **SUMMARY**

In the period between the First and Second World Wars evacuation came to be seen as a military necessity in the event of future hostilities. In anticipation of immediate and devastating bombardment of London and other British centres of economic and strategic importance, the organised removal of 'non-essential' groups of civilians from vulnerable areas was regarded as vital in order to save lives, preserve public morale and prevent universal panic. This thesis studies the effects of official evacuation schemes which were operated during the Second World War. Firstly, the background to planning is outlined, with particular attention to organisation for evacuation from Sheffield. Secondly, preparations for departure, the operation of the 'Pied Piper' programme, and resistance to evacuation, particularly with regard to Sheffield, are covered, together with reactions in reception areas and methods employed in the selection of billets. Thirdly, difficulties encountered in the reception areas, complaints about evacuees, the premature drift homeward of evacuees and problems of education, both nationally and locally, are discussed. Later evacuation plans, leading to the 'Trickle' scheme and its accompanying problems, as well as overseas evacuation, the effects of the Sheffield blitz, and further government planning are described. Finally Operation 'Rivulet' (the 'flying bomb' evacuation) and the implications of the change for the city of Sheffield from an evacuation zone to a reception area for victims of rocket attacks in 1944 is examined, concluding with the final stages of the evacuation scheme. Evacuation was an event of major social importance: massive upheaval followed, conflicting cultures of urban and rural life were exposed and the gaping chasm between classes was laid bare. The British public did not flee in unruly disorder: on the contrary, countless thousands resisted evacuation - none more so than the people of Sheffield. The reasons for this, and the broader significance of evacuation in the 'people's war', are also suggested.

In memory of my parents,

William and Anne Patterson,

who missed their children's growing years

through evacuation

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I am deeply appreciative of all those who greatly assisted me by giving interviews and am especially grateful to former evacuees, some of whom spoke for the first time of their experiences. They all gave their time generously and talked, often at length, with honesty, humour, and sometimes with pain. I wish I had been able to include more of their reminiscences within this work.

Finally, I should like to take this opportunity of expressing thanks to my family: to my daughters and sons, who encouraged me to return to study late in life and helped to raise my flagging spirits from time to time; and especially to my husband, whose unfailing and invaluable support throughout are more deeply appreciated than I can adequately express.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>ARP</b>	<b>Air Raid Precautions</b>
<b>BBC</b>	<b>British Broadcasting Corporation</b>
<b>CORB</b>	<b>Children's Overseas Reception Board</b>
<b>LCC</b>	<b>London County Council</b>
<b>PRO</b>	<b>Public Record Office</b>
<b>WVS</b>	<b>Women's Voluntary Service</b>



## INTRODUCTION

“The most part of them did convey their aged fathers and mothers, their wives and little children, into the city of Troezen, where the Troezenians received them very lovingly and gently. For they gave order that they should be entertained of the common charge, [...] and suffered the young children to gather fruit wheresoever they found it, and furthermore, did hire schoolmasters at the charge of the commonwealth, to bring them up at school.”

The above is Plutarch’s description of the official evacuation of the civilian population of Athens as a military necessity during the Persian invasion in 480 BC.<sup>1</sup> Nearly two and a half thousand years later, another official evacuation of a civilian population as a military necessity took place when invasion threatened western Europe.

During the first three days of September 1939, at the outbreak of the Second World War, nearly 1,500,000 British people left their homes under the government’s evacuation scheme.<sup>2</sup> Many thousands of town- and city-dwellers, who may never in their lives have ventured more than a few miles from home, found themselves transported at very short notice to places they had not even heard of before. At the same time, countless others made their own arrangements and removed themselves independently from areas of danger to places of safety. It was a huge exodus, hitherto unknown in Britain. Further movements of the civilian population took place under official schemes in ensuing years, notably in 1940 as the threat of invasion loomed and

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<sup>1</sup> *Vita Themistoclis*, 10, 5 (North’s translation), cited in R M Titmuss: *Essays on ‘The Welfare State’*, p.77

<sup>2</sup> R M Titmuss: *Problems of Social Policy, History of the Second World War*, p.33 [all further reference to this author will concern this publication]

with the onset of the *Blitzkrieg* on major industrial areas; throughout 1941 when bombing raids were intermittently increased, and again in 1944 when Germany unleashed its unmanned rocket attacks on London and the south of England.

Experiences of the Home Front in the First World War had brought home to the British government the fact that in any future hostilities the country would no longer be safe from invasion. Britain's island status, which had afforded protection over many centuries, had been breached by German zeppelin and aeroplane attacks. In the light of this, and in the expectation that technology would continue to make rapid advances and extend the range of aircraft, the government anticipated that in the event of war aerial bombardment greater than anything ever known before would put the civilian population in the front line and devastate industrial centres throughout the country.

Faced with this formidable prospect, Britain clearly had to be prepared to defend itself; but it was difficult to judge accurately the threat posed by this new method of warfare. In 1922 the possibility of a daily onslaught for an indefinite period upon London of seventy-five tons of high explosives was anticipated. Thereafter estimates were continually revised, reaching a peak in March 1939 when the Air Ministry warned of a possible seven hundred tons each day for the first two weeks, with an unknown quantity thenceforth.<sup>3</sup> Working on the basis of air-raid casualties suffered in 1917-18, the Ministry assumed in 1924 that there would be fifty casualties per ton of bombs dropped:

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<sup>3</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, pp.4-,6

by 1938 the Air Raid Precautions Department had increased the figure to seventy-two per ton.<sup>4</sup>

In hindsight it is clear that these estimates were vastly over-stated: the reality was that when war was finally declared, no bombs fell at all during the first months, and the total weight of those dropped by piloted aircraft in the whole of the war never reached the amount predicted in 1939 for the first fourteen days. Bell held that part of the difficulty in forecasting was that intelligence reports of Germany's strength were often wide of the mark.<sup>5</sup> However, it may be argued that the authorities faced an almost impossible task in attempting to assess a situation which was unprecedented in history.

It was in the light of popular reaction to German air attacks in the First World War that, in the inter-war years, the British government conceived its evacuation scheme. In 1917 Londoners were said to have panicked and caused rail and road chaos in their efforts to flee from danger.<sup>6</sup> Fearing a breakdown in law and order in the event of even greater and more devastating aerial bombardment, the government considered evacuation of certain groups of civilians from target areas in any future hostilities to be a military necessity. The chief priority for the authorities would necessarily be the prosecution of war, but an important consideration would also be the extent to which the civilian population might impede the war effort.

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<sup>4</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, pp.13,14

<sup>5</sup> P M H Bell: *The Origins of the Second World War in Europe*, p.180

<sup>6</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.18

The main objectives of the evacuation scheme were to preserve lives and to facilitate civil defence by removing non-essential members of the country's urban population from target areas, dispersing them into areas of safety. The priority groups were defined in 1938 as: (a) school children to be removed as school units in the charge of their teachers; (b) younger children accompanied by their mothers or some other responsible person; (c) expectant mothers; (d) adult blind persons and cripples whose removal was feasible.<sup>7</sup> In the interests of military necessity and public morale it was vital that any evacuation from the cities should be carried out in an efficient and orderly manner, under official direction.<sup>8</sup>

The government evacuation scheme was conceived to cover the whole of Britain, but there were regional variations in its operation. Wales was not to be involved in evacuating its population, but was much concerned in reception. In Scotland, children did not go out in school parties but were evacuated with their mothers.<sup>9</sup> In England, in addition to large numbers of mothers with their young children evacuating under the official scheme in the first days of September 1939, this first movement alone included nearly 827,000 school children travelling in school parties with their teachers and other voluntary helpers but without their parents.<sup>10</sup>

The mass of complicated arrangements required in planning the evacuation scheme called for a vast amount of administrative work. This involved dividing up the country

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<sup>7</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, pp.33,34

<sup>8</sup> PRO. ED.138/49

<sup>9</sup> Titmuss, *op. cit.*, p.551, n.1

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p.103

into evacuation, neutral and reception areas; liaising between countless numbers of local authorities; surveying receiving districts for billets; recruiting officials, escorts and foster parents. The co-ordination of transport to take the refugees by bus, coach, train and even by boat away from areas of perceived danger was a massive task. Financing the operation was necessarily a vitally important factor.

But despite all the forward planning, this thesis will argue, the architects of the scheme had little inkling of what it all meant to the people actually involved. Planners saw the exercise in terms of numbers rather than of people: in consequence, human feelings were neglected because there was little or no consultation with those who were to be most affected. Parents were expected to send their children away at very short notice to unknown destinations to live with strangers for an indefinite period of time, not knowing when they would see them again. Those responsible for drawing up the plans simply did not understand that this was an unbearable and incomprehensible concept for close-knit, mainly working-class families of the inner cities.

The first operation necessarily received the most attention for, because it was a movement of unprecedented scale, it is the most documented. But evacuation in Britain involved a constant migration of its inhabitants, with an estimated 4,000,000 people dealt with officially under the various government schemes which developed according to need throughout the war.<sup>11</sup> There is no way of accurately calculating the numbers of those who made their own private arrangements, for no records were kept of individuals who did not call upon official agencies for help.

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<sup>11</sup> H L Smith (ed): *War and Social Change*, p.7

Although the first government programme, code-named 'Operation Pied Piper', was initially seen as a blue-print for further official schemes, it quickly became apparent that it could not be adhered to slavishly. Even at the outset substantial changes were made to the programme. When it was seen that the number of travellers was so much smaller than expected the original four-day plan was suddenly compressed into three days, resulting in chaos in many evacuation and reception areas. In such a massive undertaking as this, it is perhaps extraordinary that there was not a single reported casualty or serious accident.<sup>12</sup> Yet it was surely inevitable that, at both local and national level, mistakes were made in carrying out the first official Evacuation Plan. How could it be otherwise? Aerial warfare on the scale expected had never previously been encountered: neither had any government or local authority been called upon before to implement such a huge movement of its people within such a short time. The first imperative was to get large groups of non-essential citizens away from danger: what happened in the reception areas was necessarily regarded as of secondary importance.

As German troops swept through Western Europe invasion became a very real threat to Britain. Southern and eastern coastal towns, earlier designated reception or neutral areas, were rapidly re-classified as danger zones, and some evacuees experienced their second move as they (and their hosts) were hastily transferred inland. When the long-dreaded bombing materialised, the 'Trickle' programme dealt with further movements of refugees from air-raids on industrial centres: some parents, hitherto apathetic or unwilling to evacuate their children, were frightened into action and sent them away.

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<sup>12</sup> Titmuss, *op. cit.*, p.101

Further evacuation took place throughout 1940 and 1941, largely dictated by the frequency and ferocity of enemy action on civilian targets. Attacks by unmanned aircraft in 1944 brought the last evacuations of the war, in Operation 'Rivulet'. Many of the early mistakes and grievances were rectified as time went on, but others continued to the end of the migrations.

Evacuation proved to be an exercise of major social importance. Massive upheaval ensued. Not only was a significant degree of dislocation of the urban population produced as thousands of families were broken up; in rural districts domestic privacy was invaded, and the education system became a shambles in both evacuation and reception areas. Conflicting cultures of urban and rural life were exposed: class divisions, though to some extent initially over-ridden in the interests of efficiency, revealed yawning chasms which led to problems in many reception areas. It may be an over-simplification to state that those in the upper and middle classes were the most likely to make their own private evacuation arrangements, independent of the government scheme. But, because it was mainly the inner areas of Britain's major industrial centres which were the most likely targets, the fact was that the great majority of 'official' evacuees were from the working class and many of them were poor.

There is no doubt that the country at large suffered a profound shock when Operation 'Pied Piper' exposed the social conditions of large towns and cities in Britain. On the one hand, ordinary people in villages and country towns struggled to cope with the physical problems encountered as they were compelled to share their homes with strangers who often arrived ill-clad and ill-equipped for life in a completely alien environment, who seemed to adhere to entirely different standards of behaviour. On the

the other, the middle and upper classes throughout the land were rocked by the revelations of poverty and deprivation endured by the masses who inhabited the inner cities - problems which had hitherto been overlooked or denied. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, an erstwhile 'progressive' Health Minister in Baldwin's government, wrote at this time to his sister:

"She [Dorothy] tells us of how one hostess said to her I never knew that such conditions existed, and I feel ashamed of having been so ignorant of my neighbours."<sup>13</sup>

This statement has been mistakenly attributed to Chamberlain himself.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the sentiments expressed may well have reflected the Premier's feelings and those of many of his class.

It has often been claimed that an important outcome of the evacuation which took place in the Second World War was the breaking down of class barriers: but the reality, it may be argued, was somewhat different. Certainly it had early been foreseen that in the event of wartime emergency it would not be possible to cater for individual needs, and official schemes for evacuation were therefore intended to be carried out irrespective of class, race or creed. What had not been anticipated was the shock received by middle-class householders as children from poor inner-city areas were delivered to their doorsteps. However, it may be argued that even if it had been possible to match evacuees with foster families of similar social status and religion, the strain on urban

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<sup>13</sup> Neville Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain (Dorothy was Chamberlain's daughter): Neville Chamberlain Papers, University of Birmingham Library, ref NC.18/1/1121 (courtesy of R Mee)

<sup>14</sup> The source of the error appears to be P Addison: *The Road to 1945*, p.72. Among those who have followed Addison are J Macnicol, "The effect of the evacuation of schoolchildren on official attitudes to State intervention" in H L Smith (ed): *War and Social Change: British Society in the Second World War*, p.8, and A Davies *Where Did the Forties Go?*, p.28



and rural peoples forced to live together for an indefinite period of time would have been too great in any case and the experience was always destined to end unhappily.

Some of the hostility shown by householders towards their 'guests' was inevitable and often understandable. Although the government strongly urged parents to send their children out of the cities, it stopped short at compulsion - sensing that such a course would be doomed to failure. But rural people felt aggrieved, for while evacuation itself was voluntary, the billeting of evacuees was not: the Civil Defence Act of 1939 empowered the government to compel local authorities to receive evacuees and obliged householders to take them in.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, complaints were soon heard that wealthy owners of 'big houses' in rural areas were allowed to shirk their responsibilities while advantage was taken of poorer villagers. When the newcomers arrived, hosts were outraged at the condition and behaviour of some: there was a furious outcry as the press took up and publicised critical accounts coming in from reception areas across Britain: in consequence, evacuees were universally condemned and stigmatised.

Despite the best intentions of officialdom, class differences could not be avoided. While evacuation was a human problem which transcended class, its operation was dictated by human factors. Upper- and middle-class parents in danger zones could avoid many of the problems of official programmes by evacuating themselves and their children privately. Some international companies set up their own schemes offering safe havens abroad for the families of their employees. In addition, there were groups of American intellectuals who offered sanctuary to the children of their British

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<sup>15</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.88

counterparts.<sup>16</sup> The gulf between the classes was surely typified by Harold Nicolson who, while poor and working-class parents in city tenements were struggling to send their children away with the bare minimum of a change of clothing, wrote to his wife, Vita Sackville-West:

“You will have to get the Buick in a fit state to start with a full petrol-tank. You should put inside it some food for 24 hours, and pack in the back your jewels and my diaries. You will want clothes and anything else very precious, but the rest will have to be left behind.”<sup>17</sup>

Millions of civilians were deeply affected by evacuation, especially at the outbreak of war but also in 1940 after the onset of air-raids, and again in the rocket attacks of 1944 and 1945. Moreover, it was not only evacuees whose lives were changed, sometimes for ever. Parents and grandparents, brothers and sisters, teachers who left their own families to move with the children were also affected, as well as the many volunteers who helped to organise the scheme or acted as escorts on long journeys - and that was only in the evacuation areas. In the reception areas evacuation also took its toll: it dominated the lives of foster parents and their families, billeting officers, voluntary workers, teachers and indigenous school children who had to share their facilities with the incomers. Even those living in neutral areas did not escape its impact, as some families from the other zones moved house rather than give up their children or open their homes to strangers. Considering this, it is perhaps curious that so little has been written about this migration: indeed, it seems to the writer that there has been a dearth

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<sup>16</sup> A Spokes Symonds (ed): *Havens Across the Sea*, p.1

<sup>17</sup> N Nicolson (ed): *Harold Nicolson: Diaries and Letters 1939-1945*, p.88

of research on evacuation in its entirety and little attempt to place it within the context of the history of the war.

In researching the subject it has largely been necessary to refer to relevant parts of more general works on the Second World War. By far the most outstanding work is the volume by R M Titmuss: *Problems of Social Policy*, which forms part of the series *The Official History of the Second World War* and includes within it perhaps the most comprehensive and detailed information on British evacuation available anywhere. Despite the passage of fifty years since the end of hostilities, Titmuss's factual information remains unchallenged, though his belief that class differences became less defined as a result of evacuation is more open to question. Because it is the only work of its kind, this volume has of necessity been extensively consulted for statistical details, not only in this thesis but also by all of the authors of books on evacuation since its publication in 1950.

There appear to have been few attempts to examine the subject as closely since then, although recent exceptions are Bob Holman: *The Evacuation: A Very British Revolution* and Richard Samways: *We Think You Ought to Go: An Account of the Evacuation of Children from London during the Second World War*, both published in 1995, and Martin Parsons: *"I'll Take That One": Dispelling the Myths of Civilian Evacuation 1939-45*, published in December 1998. In the 1980s the wealth of wartime documents made available by the Public Record Office attracted mainly American authors to publish detailed accounts, namely Carlton Jackson: *Who Will Take Our Children?* (chiefly concerned with overseas evacuation), Travis L Crosby: *The Impact of Civilian Evacuation in the Second World War*, and Ruth Inglis: *The Children's War: Evacuation*

1939-1945. There have also been some recent efforts to treat the subject historically, mainly for school pupils by, for instance, Derek Johnson: *Exodus of Children*, Fiona Reynoldson: *The Home Front: Evacuation* and Martin Parsons: *Evacuation*.

Various useful surveys were made on behalf of particular agencies during the actual course of the war, especially in the early years. Among these, perhaps the most notable researchers in 1940 were Richard Padley and Margaret Cole, who produced their *Evacuation Survey* for the Fabian Society, and Susan Isaacs, whose *Cambridge Evacuation Survey* was funded by the Mental Health Emergency Committee and carried out by a committee of social workers, sociologists, psychologists, teachers and psychotherapists, concentrating on the reception of a relatively small number of children. In the same year Women's Institutes in villages throughout the country reported members' experiences in *Town Children Through Country Eyes: A Survey of Evacuation*. The Hygiene Committee of the Women's Group on Public Welfare produced an important report, *Our Towns: A Close-Up*, in 1943. The problem is that, because these surveys were undertaken during the course of the war and not afterwards, their findings, however scholarly, were surely necessarily limited.

While professionals and voluntary bodies collected and published on evacuation mostly as seen from the reception areas, evacuees' views have been largely overlooked by historians and sociologists. True, there exist a few excellent anecdotal collections, notably by Bryan Johnson: *The Evacuees* and Ben Wicks: *No Time to Wave Goodbye*, and *The Day They Took the Children*, as well as some personal accounts of evacuees' own experiences, such as Bryan Breed: *I Know a Rotten Place: An Evacuee's Story Forty Years On* and head teacher Judith Grunfeld's account: *Shefford: The Story of a*

*Jewish School Community in Evacuation, 1939-1945.* One reason for this lack of research on evacuees may be that the majority came from the poor, urban working class who were less articulate and certainly carried less political clout than their hosts and hostesses.

In the light of the country's first devastating experiences of evacuation, which were revealed within days and so widely publicised, several articles were contributed by educational psychologists, teachers and educationists to publications such as *The British Journal of Educational Psychology* and *Education*, the official organ of the Association of Education Committees, in the early years of the war. However, after the first flush of enthusiasm and concern, interest in the subject appears to have dwindled until in 1944 and 1945 only one or two journal articles can be found. Some sociologists also responded to the problems thrown up in the first two or three years of the war by publishing articles in, for example, *Social Work*. Again, it appears that their interest waned as the war progressed. There seems to have been a mild revival in the local effect of evacuation in the past few years, as evidenced by a few articles in *History of Education* (1989) and *History of Education Society Bulletin* (1992).

Through evacuation the eyes of the country as a whole, and of the establishment in particular, were opened to facts of urban poverty and squalid living conditions which had previously been hidden or ignored. Some historians, notably Titmuss,<sup>18</sup> hold that these revelations were a major factor in the development of social reforms in the years

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<sup>18</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, pp.507-11

immediately following the war. In the 1980s Jackson agreed,<sup>19</sup> but Macnicol took issue with this theory, pointing to the fact that many measures had already been mooted before 1939.<sup>20</sup> More recently Holman asserts that evacuation was the catalyst which pushed the government into making the plans a reality,<sup>21</sup> and Parsons concurs with this view.<sup>22</sup> Crosby, on the other hand, holds that the main impact was political - that evacuation revealed to the urban poor the realities of class and privilege<sup>23</sup> and voting patterns were changed, leading to the Labour landslide victory of 1945. The view that class attitudes became more egalitarian was strongly defended by many, including Titmuss,<sup>24</sup> and just as energetically opposed by others such as Macnicol.<sup>25</sup> These arguments, however, will not form a part of this thesis, for its purpose is not to evaluate any perceived change in class attitudes or provision of social services which may or may not have been brought about by evacuation, but to trace its effect upon the people of Sheffield, and upon school children in particular.

It has been necessary to try to gain an insight into the problems encountered in both the evacuation and the reception areas. Questions are addressed about reasons for the reluctance of parents (and in particular the marked unwillingness of Sheffield people) to respond to official demands to send children away from areas of perceived danger, and for the early return of so many of those who did initially obey the government's call.

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<sup>19</sup> C Jackson: *Who Will Take Our Children?*, p.187

<sup>20</sup> Macnicol: *op. cit.*, p.22

<sup>21</sup> B Holman: *Evacuation: A Very British Experience*, p.129

<sup>22</sup> M L Parsons: "I'll Take That One", p.211

<sup>23</sup> T L Crosby: *The Impact of Civilian Evacuation in the Second World War*, p.146

<sup>24</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.508

<sup>25</sup> Macnicol: *op. cit.*, p.21

Why did some children remain in the reception areas, despite the fact that so many of their peers had gone home? What part did social class play, not only in the arrangements made by parents for their children, but in the operation of the scheme in the rural areas of Britain? How were the children received by foster parents, many of whom were forced to take them against their will in the first place? What happened about education? Did later schemes receive a better response - or was it a case of 'once bitten, twice shy' on both sides?

A detailed study has been undertaken of evacuation as it affected the citizens of Sheffield, and in particular its school children. This city was chosen because it is seen as particularly interesting. As a major industrial centre many of its inner-city districts were designated 'evacuation zones' and extensive plans were drawn up for a massive programme to move school children with their teachers, as well as mothers with young children and other priority groups, away from these perceived danger areas at the beginning of the war. Other districts in and surrounding the city were deemed to be neutral, and no mass movement of people was undertaken officially, although many people evacuated themselves privately from these areas. No areas of the city itself were designated reception areas at the outset, but in 1944 Sheffield did become a receiving area for upwards of 10,000 evacuees, both official and unofficial, fleeing from German V1 and V2 rocket attacks on London and southern England. The city can, therefore, claim to have witnessed all sides of the evacuation experience and may be said to be worthy of investigation for this reason alone.

But there is another, arguably more pressing, reason for inquiring into the effect of evacuation on Sheffield. Despite all the detailed planning, fewer than nine thousand

people left the city under the first programme.<sup>26</sup> The percentage of eligible children evacuated fell lamentably below that of every other county borough in England, with the sole exception of its close neighbour, Rotherham, which was not designated a danger zone until late in the day. The comparison between Sheffield's 15% and, for instance, Salford's 76% or Manchester's 69%<sup>27</sup> is patently worthy of study. Furthermore, by 5 December 1939 more than half of the few who had been evacuated from Sheffield had returned,<sup>28</sup> and by the following month less than one tenth of the city's eligible children remained in the reception areas - again, among the lowest in the land.<sup>29</sup> Even the serious blitz on the city in December 1940 did not persuade the majority of parents to send their children away.

What was the reason for this abysmal response? Little enlightenment has been forthcoming from local publications on the history of Sheffield: even those concerning the city during the Second World War either ignore the subject altogether or merely make passing reference to evacuation. A member of Sheffield Local Studies Library staff reflected the popular misconception of the city's role to the author of this thesis: "There is very little in the library on Sheffield evacuation in 1939 - they were all back within a month, weren't they?" Many people who were of school age or older and who lived in danger zones during the war years believe that no evacuation took place from the city at all. Local newspapers appear to support in some measure Ritchie Calder's contention, that Sheffield had prepared early for evacuating children to selected and

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<sup>26</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Survey April 1939 - March 1947*, p.4

<sup>27</sup> Titmuss: *op cit.*, p.550,1

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p.544

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p.173



familiar areas of Derbyshire,<sup>30</sup> and it was the government's intervention which caused a backlash from parents, resulting in the failure of the programme locally. But it will be asserted that many leading councillors, too, played a part in the city's poor showing.

In an effort to seek answers, a thorough investigation of available primary sources has been undertaken. An extensive search of Sheffield Archives has been made: it is clear that much weeding of records has taken place, but draft minutes of some committees dealing with civil defence were unearthed, which are listed in the Bibliography to this thesis and which gave a few invaluable insights into the planning and execution of evacuation programmes as they affected the city. The printed minutes of meetings of Sheffield City Council and of its Education Committee for the years 1937-1947 have been consulted but do not yield very much detail: enlightenment regarding bald statements of 'Reports received' has often been forthcoming only by consulting provincial newspapers of the period.

A list of all the schools scheduled for evacuation was obtained from Sheffield Education Department Library and it was hoped to make an extensive survey of the log-books of at least the majority of these in an effort to shed some light on communications between school officials and parents, as well as on preparations for and operation of the various evacuation programmes, not only in 1939 but after the blitz on the city in December 1940. It was anticipated that an interesting picture would emerge of experiences of staff and pupils in the reception areas and of how teachers coped with educating the children in their charge in new environments.

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<sup>30</sup> R Calder, "The School Child" in R Padley & M Cole (eds): *Evacuation Survey*, p.145

Unfortunately, of the seventy-five schools listed, log-books were available in the Sheffield Archives for only sixteen. Some schools had been bombed during the war, many had closed during the intervening fifty years, and a few head teachers have retained their log-books. Twenty-nine log-books covering the various departments of the sixteen schools had been deposited at the Archives and these, together with some other log books of schools in neutral areas, were scrutinised - with, however, a somewhat disappointing result. Many head teachers made scant mention of either planning or the event itself, recording only the barest details of this momentous event in their school's history, and some ignored it altogether. Of the few who made more than a passing reference to the subject only one or two gave detailed information regarding the exodus from Sheffield and arrival in the reception area. School admissions registers, which may have proved useful indicators of the extent of wartime migration, were not accessible in these Archives, being subject to closure for seventy-five years.

As in the case of Sheffield Archives, with the passage of time many files held in both the Leicestershire Record Office and in Nottinghamshire Archives have been subject to considerable weeding, and many records have no doubt been lost in this way. Leicestershire's Attendance Registers of Evacuated School Parties were useful in highlighting the ebb and flow of Sheffield's evacuee school children in that county, but unfortunately no similar records exist for Nottinghamshire. Nevertheless, extensive searches were made in both of these departments and some log-books and admissions registers were traced. These were inspected, with more favourable results: life in small country schools in the reception areas was significantly affected by the influx of numbers of town children and this may account for more detailed record-keeping.

The Local Studies Departments of Central Libraries in the cities of Leicester, Nottingham and Sheffield were visited, as well as several local libraries in the reception areas. Minutes of meetings of the relevant County Councils and Education Committees were combed, as well as Reports of School Medical Officers for the appropriate period. The former yielded only limited information, with greater detail being provided by local newspaper reports of the meetings; but the latter proved more productive. Some local libraries were found to hold published and unpublished works recording wartime reminiscences of local people, but with one exception (J Perry et al (eds): *Shepshed: Wartime Memories*) these contained little more than passing reference to evacuation.

While strenuous efforts were made to discover how Sheffield and its receiving areas coped with the problem of evacuation in the early years of hostilities, the question of migration into the city, when the tables were turned in 1944 and former evacuation and neutral zones became reception areas, has not been overlooked. Little written reference to this subject was found in school log-books or in Sheffield City Council and Education Committee Minutes although some details were discovered in draft Minutes of the city's Emergency Committee for Civil Defence. It was necessary, therefore, to consult newspaper reports which were prolific at first but few and far between after the arrival of several parties of evacuees, and to conduct oral interviews. The conclusion reached was that, although there was sympathy with the victims of rocket attacks, this evacuation was an event of comparatively little significance in the life of the city, at a time when the interest of ordinary people in the war was waning and it was generally accepted that victory would be achieved.

The voices of evacuees themselves have largely gone unheard and ignored by historians despite the fact that this vast migration created a huge impact both on a personal level, upon the individuals concerned, and on a wider level, upon British wartime society as a whole. It has been impossible, of course, to collect an account of the full effect of evacuation upon those who were involved; but some oral interviews have been undertaken with former evacuees who travelled under official government schemes and with others whose parents made arrangements privately, as well as with teachers who accompanied school parties and householders who opened their homes to refugees. Due to the passage of time and increasing age of the subjects, it was easier to find former evacuees than it was to locate representatives of other categories.

Interviews have provided fascinating, and often moving, reminiscences and have yielded much interesting information, not only in regard to the mechanics of evacuation as it affected those involved, but more importantly in gaining an insight into the children's feelings about leaving home and their experiences of reception, in particular of billets and foster parents. In this way it has been possible to obtain some (necessarily limited) overall view of the subject, particularly as it affected Sheffield people. Nevertheless, it must be accepted that memories may be somewhat unreliable after more than half a century has passed: they can be unconsciously selective and they may not always be accurate, however genuinely interviewees believe them to be. Interviews cannot, therefore, be considered as conclusive evidence: they can, however, be useful in illustrating points made by historians, and it is in this context that those conducted in the course of this research have been used.

With regard to other primary sources, Mass-Observation Archives provided a body of data expressing the views of ordinary people about life in Britain during the war and revealing illuminating insights into opinions of the 'man or woman in the street' (or village) on evacuees and evacuation. The Imperial War Museum contains many diaries and personal accounts, some of which were consulted; none, however, referred specifically to the situation regarding Sheffield. Likewise, although the Public Record Office merited thorough investigation and yielded much interesting information, little was discovered which expressly related to evacuation out of and, in the latter part of the war, into this particular area. Hansard was consulted for reports of Parliamentary debates on the subject.

Contemporary newspapers, which were the chief form of communication at the time and helped to form public opinion of both national and local issues, have been combed. *The Times* was largely relied upon for the national perspective, while Sheffield, Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire publications gave local information in both the evacuating and receiving areas under special scrutiny. In Sheffield, coverage after the first exodus was often meagre and relegated to inside pages, the front pages being given over to the progress of war. The 'Letters' columns and editorials have provided disappointingly little indication of local opinion of evacuation in either Sheffield or its many reception areas, both in reference to the planning stages of the programme and its operation. Whether this was due to apathy of readers and contributors, to an editorial policy opposed to 'rocking the boat', or in accordance with official government policy can only be surmised - but, seen from a present-day viewpoint, such reticence on the part of those most closely involved seems remarkable.

The officials who conceived the government scheme could have no comprehension of the enormous impact that their plans would make on the lives of vast numbers of the population of Britain. How, it may be asked, could these upper- and middle-class, mainly male and military architects of evacuation, who traditionally sent their own young children away from their comfortable homes at an early age to boarding schools apparently without a qualm, understand the enormity of their demands upon the close-knit families of the poor? The answer would seem to lie in the fact that they could not comprehend, because it was outside the realm of their experience.

This thesis begins by studying the background to the government evacuation scheme. Various plans devised by the British government in its efforts, firstly, to safeguard law and order and, secondly, to protect the civilian population are outlined, with particular attention to organisation for evacuation from Sheffield. Preparations for departure, including problems which arose at stations and on journeys are described, and responses to evacuation are discussed. Thirdly, the arrival of evacuees and muddles at detraining points, methods of selection and the shortfall in numbers arriving are covered. The fourth and fifth chapters are concerned with difficulties encountered in the reception areas, including complaints against evacuees, parental visits and billeting anomalies, problems of private evacuation, the drift homeward of evacuees and education. Chapter Six describes the 'Trickle' evacuation and its accompanying problems, as well as overseas evacuation, the effects of the Sheffield blitz, and further government planning. Before concluding, the last chapter examines the 'flying bomb' evacuation and its implications for the people of Sheffield and the final stages of the evacuation scheme.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### THE BACKGROUND TO PLANNING

The government evacuation scheme had its roots in the air raids of the First World War, when enemy bombing had demonstrated that Britain, hitherto protected for centuries by the sea, would henceforth be vulnerable to devastating attack from the air. It was clear that any future warfare could bring the danger of even more sophisticated and accurate aerial bombardment than had ever previously been experienced, and that measures must be taken to prevent the weakening of public morale. One important step, as has been seen, would be to move non-essential groups of the population away from areas of perceived danger. What was not so clear at this time, and indeed for many years, was the enormity of the impact of such a move, in terms of social dislocation, on the morale of the British people.

It has been argued that the government evacuation scheme was designed “simply and solely as a military expedient, a counter-move to the enemy’s objective of attacking and demoralising the civilian population.”<sup>1</sup> Only four years after the end of the First World War, Lord Balfour had warned of the possibility in any future conflict of “a torrent of high explosives” and “unremitting bombardment of a kind which no city [...] has ever had to endure”.<sup>2</sup> When the Committee of Imperial Defence was charged to review civil defence policy in 1924, a major anxiety of the authorities was not merely the protection

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<sup>1</sup> R M Titmuss: *Problems of Social Policy: History of the Second World War*, p.23

<sup>2</sup> PRO CAB.3/3 C.I.D.108-A, 29.5.22, cited in Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.5

of the civilian population in the event of war but, at least as important (and arguably even more so) the prevention of a possible breakdown of law and order. Fears were based on reports of public reaction to German air attacks in 1917 and 1918, when thousands of Londoners were said to have fled from the bombing in terror. Some had sought shelter in underground railway stations, while others were alleged to have caused rail and road congestion in their efforts to escape from the city, many deserting posts essential for the maintenance of public services.<sup>3</sup> This nervous reaction to the air raids was alleged to have been out of all proportion to their material effect, but in consequence a preoccupation with panic in the population formed a significant factor in government planning in ensuing years.

Three hundred tons of bombs had been dropped on the British Isles during the whole of the First World War. By 1924 the Air Raid Precautions Sub-Committee of the Imperial Defence Committee was forecasting that in any future hostilities London could be bombarded with one hundred tons of high explosives and incendiaries in a single day, which, it was said, would undoubtedly cause hysteria in the population.<sup>4</sup> Continual upward revision of bombing estimates throughout the following fifteen years did nothing to lessen official concern about public reaction: on the contrary, the question of civilian behaviour was a key topic of discussion at successive meetings of the Imperial Defence Committee in the run-up to war.

It was anxiety about public morale that led the Evacuation Sub-Committee of the Imperial Defence Committee, appointed in 1931, to consider as a priority, not so much

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<sup>3</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.18

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p.5



the problem of removing people from danger, but that of preventing panic and ‘a disorderly general flight’. An early solution suggested by this Sub-Committee was that the police force should be expanded so that a cordon could be thrown around the metropolis.<sup>5</sup> The authorities’ mistrust of the masses was further demonstrated by Winston Churchill’s statement in the House of Commons in November 1934:

“We must expect that under the pressure of continuous air attack upon London at least 3,000,000 or 4,000,000 people would be driven out into the open country around the Metropolis. This vast mass of human beings [...] would confront the government of the day with an administrative problem of the first magnitude.”<sup>6</sup>

It is evident that this was a general reflection of the attitude of the establishment to the urban public, for similar fears continued to be expressed throughout the ensuing years - for instance, the Home Secretary stated in November 1937: “We must have on the ground a system of air raid precautions that will ensure the country against panic.”<sup>7</sup> Discussions between the War Office, the Home Office and the Metropolitan Police from 1937 concluded that extra police, and perhaps even troops, would be needed to control London’s population in the event of a future war involving *Blitzkrieg* bombing.<sup>8</sup>

The Ministry of Health was charged to consider arrangements to deal with what it perceived to be an ‘inevitable’ increase in cases of neuroses: some estimates held that these would outnumber physical injuries by three to one.<sup>9</sup> In 1938 the Munich crisis appeared to bear out government concern about panic in the population, as 150,000

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<sup>5</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.18, n.1

<sup>6</sup> HoC Deb. 28.11.34, Vol. 295, Col. 859

<sup>7</sup> HoC Deb. 15.11.37, Vol. 329, Col. 41

<sup>8</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.19

<sup>9</sup> PRO CAB.HIST/S/4/4/18, cited in Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.20

people were reported to have quickly removed themselves from London to Wales and the West Country, temporarily overloading the railways system.<sup>10</sup> However, it could be argued that government action immediately following Munich did not help to calm fears or strengthen public confidence, as people were informed by wireless and newspapers that throughout the country the distribution of 38,000,000 gas masks (already manufactured and in store) was to begin immediately and over two hundred miles of trenches were to be dug in London and other industrial areas.<sup>11</sup> At this time inhabitants of Sheffield, for example, learned that a start had already been made in that city for 120,000 of its inhabitants had already been fitted with gas masks and work was in hand to dig several trenches in public parks to accommodate 15,000 people.<sup>12</sup> Despite the early start, however, some Sheffield people had still not received their gas masks by May the following year.<sup>13</sup>

Early attention had been given by the Evacuation Sub-Committee to the subject of evacuating "*les bouches inutiles*" - mainly women, children and invalids - from the metropolis and vulnerable provincial towns and cities in the event of war.<sup>14</sup> It was clear that wholesale evacuation of the civilian population was out of the question. The normal activities of the capital city had to carry on or risk severe damage to public morale. On the other hand, the expected aerial bombing of London would require the

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<sup>10</sup> T H O'Brien: *Civil Defence: History of the Second World War*, p.164

<sup>11</sup> G A N Lowndes: *The Social Revolution*, p.199

<sup>12</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 26.9.1938, p.4; 27.9.1938, p.3; also *The Sheffield Star*: 28.9.1938, p.7

<sup>13</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 22.5.1939, p.7

<sup>14</sup> O'Brien: *op. cit.*, p.23

large-scale movement of 'non-essential' people away from danger, and an orderly dispersal was necessary to avoid casualties and minimise panic.

The Sub-Committee's report, presented in June 1934, persuaded the government of the need for detailed plans for such an evacuation from London. These plans were subsequently drawn up, covering the co-ordination of railway timetables, estimates of the probable cost to the Government (approximately £920,000 per week at the outset) and of the extent of available accommodation within a fifty-mile radius of London. At this early stage it was expected that three-quarters of the capital's total population would need to be evacuated, on a voluntary basis, and the intention at this time was that complete families should move together wherever possible.<sup>15</sup>

Yet despite the fact that the subject of evacuation was receiving considerable attention in official quarters, the public at large were unaware of it, for the activities of the various committees received little publicity until the mid-1930s. It was not until July 1934 that the Prime Minister stated in a House of Commons debate on civil defence:

“Our plans have been carried as far as is possible without wider publicity than has hitherto been deemed to be in the public interest. [...] before long steps will be taken to communicate the necessary instructions to the public generally.”<sup>16</sup>

The government's reticence may be partly explained by the perceived political need to avoid naming Germany as a potential enemy and encouraging war. But one consequence was that much more attention was focused on public order than on other important factors: Macnicol has argued, for instance, that essential discussions between

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<sup>15</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.24

<sup>16</sup> HoC Deb. 30.7.1934, Vol. 292, Cols. 2335-6

local authorities and with central administration were inhibited, with neither knowing quite what the other was doing.<sup>17</sup> The matter which was to cause so many problems throughout the war - accommodation for displaced urban populations - appears to have received little consideration in comparison with the meticulous attention given to the problem of dispersal, in the early stages of the planning process at least.

Even when the ARP Department of the Home Office was formed, in April 1935, the local authorities were not taken into the Government's confidence and education of the public on civil defence did not include the possibility of evacuation. After six months of deliberations there was still no official mention of it: the Department's first circular sent to regional bodies concentrated on such measures as gas attacks and air raid precautions. Although the subject of mass movement of the population was raised in sub-committees of the Committee of Imperial Defence, it was not until November 1936 that the existence of evacuation plans was tacitly admitted, when a report from Sir William Beveridge to the Committee of Imperial Defence stated:

“The evacuation of London needs to be thought out in terms, not of transport only but of reception, housing (by compulsory billeting if necessary) and feeding. [...] No doubt those who are concerned with evacuation are making plans about food as well.”<sup>18</sup>

The potential danger of air attack was constantly scrutinised and regularly reviewed after Hitler's rise and consolidation of power in Nazi Germany. Then, in January 1937, the Air Ministry radically and suddenly increased its estimates of German military

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<sup>17</sup> J Macnicol, “The effect of the evacuation of schoolchildren on official attitudes to State intervention” in H.L. Smith (ed): *War and Social Change: British Society in the Second World War*, p.11

<sup>18</sup> PRO CAB.4/25 C.I.D.1276-B, 11.11.36, cited in Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.25

expansion and capacity. In the event of war it was now predicted that there would be an expected death toll of 600,000, with twice that number injured over a period of sixty days. There was a general expectation that the enemy would initially try to deliver a 'knock-out blow' with London as prime target, and ports and provincial industrial cities and towns as secondary goals.<sup>19</sup>

Clearly, air attacks would cause serious disorganisation and disruption of public services, and it was seen by the authorities as inevitable that huge numbers of people would seek to flee the cities to escape danger: evacuation now had to be tackled in a more comprehensive way in order to prevent widespread panic. By this time the Evacuation Sub-Committee's report of 1934, with its timetables and figures, was out of date. All its particulars had to be re-thought and broadened to encompass not just London but many other vulnerable areas beyond the capital.

Inexplicably, the Air Raid Precautions Bill in November 1937 contained no reference to evacuation when first presented to the house of Commons: indeed, the Home Secretary initially resisted demands for an amendment to include it. It was not until the committee stage of the Bill, a month later, and after continual pressure from Members of Parliament, that the omission was rectified by a clause requiring local authorities to draw up schemes and provide information to assist the government in evacuation plans.<sup>20</sup> Some politicians were not reassured, however. *The Times* reported the concern of Captain A Graham, Unionist Member for Wirral:

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<sup>19</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.13

<sup>20</sup> HoC Deb. 7.12.37, Vol. 330, Cols. 231,258

“In most of the principal countries of Europe plans for evacuation have been entirely worked out. We, as so often, are deplorably behind the times.”

Others expressed different concerns: for example, Sir Richard Glyn, Unionist Member for Abingdon, criticised the wholesale evacuation of people and exhorted Members not to encourage panic by making speeches which would encourage people to think there would be evacuation of large numbers because, he stated, he considered it simply was not possible.<sup>21</sup>

It has been seen that, up to the end of 1937, the general public had not been informed of the government’s intentions. Indeed, it may be argued that the government itself was not sure of its way forward, for the evacuation scheme was still in the early stages of development and subject to alteration throughout the early months of 1938. In January the Board of Education had issued Circular No. 1461 advising local authorities in vulnerable areas to consider evacuation since it was the Board’s intention to close all schools for the duration of any future war.<sup>22</sup> Then, in March, the same authorities were told not to take any action until the Home Office issued them with specific directions. The following month witnessed Sir Samuel Hoare, Home Secretary, assuring the House of Commons that the whole subject was being pursued thoroughly but the question of shelter provision needed to be settled before clear directives on evacuation could be given to local authorities.<sup>23</sup> In view of this prevarication, it seems hardly surprising that

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<sup>21</sup> *The Times*: 8.12.37, p.7

<sup>22</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.26, n.5

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p.27, n.1

many Members of Parliament and regional bodies throughout Britain were becoming fidgety.

Sheffield was a case in point. When the ARP Sub-Committee of the City Council met in February 1938, Circular 1461 was examined. Council members regarded it as “being too nebulous” and referred it back to the Board of Education with a request for guidance in the form of a model plan. On being informed that no such plan had been prepared, the Sub-Committee then requested the Board to “urge upon the Home Office the necessity for preparing a model plan immediately”, requiring at the same time that their views should be passed on to the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for the Home Department, the President of the Board of Education and all the local Members of Parliament.<sup>24</sup>

The reaction of local authorities demonstrated that independent regional schemes would cause confusion: it was clear that national organisation was needed both to define which areas were at risk and to assess facilities available in areas deemed to be relatively safe. The government’s own plans for evacuation were apparently getting nowhere, and might even be said to be hindering local initiatives. At the beginning of May 1938, London County Council approved the principle of evacuating school children, but the Home Office refused to instigate a survey of potential accommodation. When Duncan Sandys asked Sir Samuel Hoare if it would not expedite the whole preparation for air raid precautions to allow a survey, the reply was: “I am inclined to think that it would not.”<sup>25</sup> In fact, a national billeting survey was not undertaken until the following

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<sup>24</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Report 1938/39*, pp.38-9

<sup>25</sup> HoC Deb. 12.5.38, Vol. 335, Col. 1703

January. Part of the problem was financial: local authorities were reluctant to take on the costs involved, and the government did not provide them with adequate finance to cover the full extent of civil defence. Indeed, wrangling over finances was to dog successive evacuation programmes throughout the early years of the war.

A realistic national strategy was not begun until the end of May 1938, when the Anderson Committee on Evacuation was appointed with its stated remit:

“to review the various aspects of the problem of transferring persons from areas which would be likely, in time of war, to be exposed to aerial bombardment.”<sup>26</sup>

The question of evacuation occupied politicians at both national and local level in the ensuing months. By July the Sheffield branch of the Communist Party had prepared its own comprehensive plan for removing the population to safety. A pamphlet was published (Appendix 1), warning that the city would be one of the main targets of an enemy power and proclaiming “Sheffield must never be a second Barcelona!”. The plan was radical, proposing the compulsory evacuation of all the city’s school children up to the age of fifteen (the Party estimated a number of 55,000) accompanied by sufficient school teachers to look after them; together with all blind persons; all bed-ridden persons and wholly dependent invalids. The evacuees would be sent to the Derbyshire villages of Calver, Peak Forest, Edale and Flouch, where settlements would be established with paid staff in charge. Compensation would be paid to owners of such properties which were requisitioned, and parents or those responsible for evacuated dependants would be required to contribute towards their maintenance.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.27, n.5

<sup>27</sup> ARP: *A Complete Plan for the Safety of the People of Sheffield*, pp.3,4,6



The Communist project also proposed the temporary evacuation of all ‘non-essential’ civilians from inner-city areas from the time of receipt of any air raid warning until after the ‘all-clear’. These short-term evacuees should carry enough food for four meals and the city council would provide transport by corporation and private buses which would follow pre-arranged routes to shelters in various Derbyshire villages - Calver, Stoney Middleton, Tideswell, Langsett, Broomhead and Bradfield, Hathersage, Grindleford, Derwent, Bamford, Hope Valley and Castleton. Planners also envisaged air raid shelter protection for the whole of the city.<sup>28</sup> At the end of July the Communist Party plan was submitted to Geoffrey Lloyd, Minister responsible for Air Raid Precautions, by William Gallacher, Communist Member for West Fife, with a request that it would be put before the Committee “without political prejudice”.<sup>29</sup> No further reference to this project has been discovered during research.

The Anderson Committee worked quickly and presented its findings to Parliament on 26 July 1938, on the eve of the summer recess. The Report laid down certain principles which became the basis of the government’s evacuation scheme. It asserted its view:

“The whole issue in any future war may well turn on the manner in which the problem of evacuation from densely populated industrial areas is handled.”<sup>30</sup>

It was recommended that arrangements should be made for substantial numbers of non-essential persons to be removed from designated densely populated industrial towns and cities - possibly a third of the population of these areas. Schemes should be based on

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<sup>28</sup> *ARP: A Complete Plan for the Safety of the People of Sheffield*, pp.7,8

<sup>29</sup> HoC Deb. 28.7.38, Vol. 338, Col. 3283

<sup>30</sup> O’Brien: *op. cit.*, p.153

voluntary evacuation in all but exceptional circumstances; however, compulsory billeting powers should be taken to provide accommodation for refugees in private houses. Plans should be drawn up to evacuate school children in school groups, with their teachers, at government expense. The government should bear the initial cost of evacuation, with adult refugees or parents of child evacuees expected to contribute to their own maintenance wherever possible: no detailed proposals were made for payments to billetters at this stage. The committee stressed the need for urgent attention to be given to dispersal from vulnerable areas and for a survey to be made of accommodation available in the reception areas. Moreover, it was considered that a scheme covering the whole country could be organised within a few months. The importance of educating the public about the scheme was also emphasised, thus abandoning the secrecy which had earlier characterised evacuation planning.<sup>31</sup>

But although the Anderson Committee had acted swiftly to present the result of its considerations, its Report was not published immediately: in fact it was delayed for several months, until more than a month after the Munich crisis. Continuing official preoccupation with maintaining public morale was evident when Sir Percy Harris, MP, a member of the committee, explained the procrastination in a letter to *The Times*:

“The Home Secretary first withheld its publication because of the August Bank Holiday and then, I understand, because he thought that in view of the crisis some of its recommendations might alarm the public.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> O'Brien: *op. cit.*, p.153

<sup>32</sup> *The Times*: 1.11.38, p.15

Worse, the Home Office did not even start to implement the principles of the Report until the beginning of September. While civil servants then tried to set plans in motion, the first government official plan (Plan One) was still at an early state of development when the Munich crisis of September 1938 erupted.

Feverish activity ensued: on 22 September the LCC, which had already been working on its own contingency arrangements, was warned by the Home Office to prepare to evacuate children at short notice. Six days later some 4,300 children from special and nursery schools were removed to rural residential schools with parental consent. Although they were brought back within a matter of days when tension relaxed, the experience gained was invaluable in dealing with later movements of the population.<sup>33</sup> In the meantime, the need for speedy finalisation of a definite national design was clear, for confusion between regions reigned as some other local authorities, too, were hastily designing their own schemes. For example, at the same time as Essex authorities were planning to move their children away from the county border, the LCC were arranging to move East London children into that very area.<sup>34</sup>

As yet, ordinary people had still not received any official information or instructions on evacuation, apart from a cursory suggestion contained in *The Householder's Handbook* (issued to townspeople in connection with air raid precautions) to consider sending children and the elderly to places of safety.<sup>35</sup> During the acute phase of the Munich crisis national and provincial newspaper editors rushed to calm their anxious readers.

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<sup>33</sup> PRO.ED.138/49 [LCC Record of Education 1938-1945: unpublished notes for the *Education* volume of *The History of the Second World War*: Dr S Weitzman died before completing this work.]

<sup>34</sup> E M Jones: unpublished M.Phil Thesis (1974), p.1

<sup>35</sup> O'Brien: *op. cit.*, p.153

Over the course of a few days, a flurry of rather vague and confusing reports were published of arrangements for evacuation of civilians in the event of an emergency.

On 26 September 1938 *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent* revealed that secret plans were being made for several provincial centres, but as yet there were no concrete scheme for the evacuation of Sheffield people.<sup>36</sup> Only two days later, however, citizens learned that plans were indeed being made for their removal. Under the banner headline “Big Evacuation of Sheffield in Event of War”, they were informed that, in such an event, the government intended to evacuate from Sheffield and other congested areas as many persons as possible who wished to leave and could be spared, and to accommodate them in areas deemed to be safer from air attack:

“Evacuation will not be compulsory. Facilities will be afforded for those who wish to leave. [...] This advance intimation will enable the people of Sheffield to consider the matter and come to a decision as to whether they desire to be evacuated.”<sup>37</sup>

Next day the newspaper carried a warning to Sheffield people that evacuation arrangements would proceed very rapidly in any future emergency. Refugees travelling under this official government scheme would not be able to choose their own destinations or billets but every effort would be made to keep families together.<sup>38</sup>

Eventually, on 29 September, as war seemed inevitable, the government published two plans, drawn up by the Anderson Committee, for voluntary assisted evacuation: the civil servants had achieved some kind of initial success. But the confusion continued, not least in Sheffield. Both national and local press carried the Home Office announcement

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<sup>36</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 26.9.38, p.4

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, 28.9.38, p.5

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, 29.9.38, p.3

of the plans, the first being a general scheme for implementation in the event of emergency. The second scheme was limited to school children travelling in groups with their teachers. *The Times* stated that the arrangements would include some cities.<sup>39</sup> However, *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent* must have confused its readers, for although it trumpeted “Evacuation Plans for Large Towns” the report referred only to London, and no mention was made of any arrangements for the provinces.<sup>40</sup>

The general scheme incorporated some of Anderson’s basic principles. Anybody (adults and children alike) wishing to be evacuated would go to named railway stations wearing their warmest clothing and carrying only a small amount of hand luggage. At the stations they would be supplied with rations for the first forty-eight hours and a free railway ticket to an allocated destination within fifty miles of London, where they would be billeted. The government would pay billeting costs in the first instance, but those who could afford to would have to contribute later.

The scheme for school groups was more detailed. School children in congested areas of London whose parents consented to their removal would be transported from their schools in the care of their teachers. Parents were assured that the children would be domiciled in private homes where the householder taking them in would be expected to give them board and lodging and to look after them. They would become “members of the family”. The government would pay the householder ten shillings and sixpence a week for one child and eight shillings and sixpence per child if more than one child

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<sup>39</sup> *The Times*: 30.9.38, p.9

<sup>40</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 30.9.39, p.7

were taken. The scheme would be entirely voluntary and no parents need send their children away if they did not wish to do so. Although parents would not be told in advance where their children were going, they would quickly be informed by notices posted outside their schools.<sup>41</sup>

The move to publicise these rudimentary plans had clearly been intended to reassure the public and maintain morale at a critical period. However, while the government expressed its confidence in the proposed measures, the *ad hoc* nature of the general scheme in particular may have caused great embarrassment if huge numbers had put it to the test. As it turned out, Chamberlain returned from Germany proclaiming “peace for our time” at the eleventh hour and neither scheme was put into operation at that point. The LCC had gone ahead with its own arrangements and did operate the small-scale provision for certain children outlined earlier. But O’Brien asserts that, while some local authorities had begun to make their own preparations, arrangements for reception and billeting were only in an embryonic stage everywhere.<sup>42</sup>

Investigation of files in Sheffield Archives has disclosed that the Home Office instructed the City Council on 25 September 1938 to make arrangements for the evacuation of “those people (including children)” wishing to leave the city in a national emergency.<sup>43</sup> A report presented to the Emergency ARP Committee a month later showed that such a plan was drawn up, under which evacuees would travel by train from the two Sheffield main stations to railheads in South Yorkshire and Lincolnshire

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<sup>41</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 30.9.38, p.7

<sup>42</sup> O’Brien: *op. cit.*, p.164

<sup>43</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA 137/1

and the programme would be completed in two days. The general manager of the Transport Department had worked out a scheme of transport, but nothing further had been done as the emergency ended, and no further instructions were received from the Home Office. The committee was informed that there had been no proposal for the evacuation of school children by groups as in London, probably because there would have been too little time to carry out the scheme.<sup>44</sup>

In the crucial phase of the Munich crisis an exodus of considerable scale had taken place and many families fearfully left home and made their own way privately to country areas, as has been seen above. But the problem was not so much with those who could take care of themselves but with that large sector of city populations who would be unable to move without official help and who were clearly disturbed at the government's failure to make clear its intentions. These were the people with whom the authorities were concerned, and *The Times* echoed the continuing official anxiety about the morale of the masses when its editorial stressed the need for an orderly departure of those who would be "the poorer section of the people".<sup>45</sup>

In Parliament the government came under increasing attack for dragging its heels, for few believed the Munich Pact would secure more than a temporary respite. Until the crisis, the Home Office had been in control of central planning of the whole subject of civil defence, of which evacuation had been only one strand. However, it belatedly became clear that evacuation was not just a question of the orderly dispersal of city populations: education, housing, health and welfare were also key considerations.

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<sup>44</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA 157/1: meeting 26.10.38

<sup>45</sup> *The Times*: 30.9.38, p.13

Accordingly, in November 1938 power was transferred to a new Evacuation Division established at the Ministry of Health and constituted jointly from its own officials and those nominated from the Board of Education. The new Evacuation Division's first action was to set up an Advisory Committee composed of representatives of local authorities, several branches of the teaching profession, and local education departments. This body would have to deal with a multitude of human problems including transportation of evacuees, accommodation for pregnant mothers, provision of food, bedding and blankets, to name but a few (see Appendix 2).<sup>46</sup>

As the political situation eased temporarily, the Anderson principles were eventually translated into action and finally brought to the attention of the general public. Government officials may well have hoped that publication of the Report, eventually achieved on 27 October 1938, would have a settling effect on the people. And indeed, this may have been so in the case of city dwellers: at least, if they entertained any fears, few appear to have been voiced publicly. The "Letters" columns of Sheffield newspapers were largely silent on the subject: whether this was due to editorial policy or because there were simply no complaints from a largely urban readership is not clear.

On the other hand, criticism from country areas scheduled to receive evacuees poured in. No doubt the architects of the government scheme were disappointed to note the spate of letters from the public to the national and local press alike reflecting the depth of feeling in rural areas and expressing alarm at the prospect of compulsory billeting of evacuees on private householders. The Home Secretary divulged that he had received

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<sup>46</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.32



“quite a number” of letters from householders complaining that it would be “an outrage to have dirty little children from the London schools billeted upon our house.”<sup>47</sup> Various alternative suggestions for accommodation were put forward, several of which advocated building communal camps for families and school groups, thus avoiding the danger of the incoming townspeople, as one writer put it, “upsetting the lives of the rest of the community”.<sup>48</sup> But opposition was not all for selfish reasons: some writers put the view that both sanitary and cooking arrangements in country homes were insufficient to cope with additional numbers.<sup>49</sup> The executive council of the Rural District Councils Association also criticised arrangements for billeting and reception as “unworkable” and demanded that the proposals should be completely revised.<sup>50</sup>

*The Sheffield Telegraph* was mainly concerned with the lack of communication with the public during the autumn crisis and rebuked the Home Office on publication of the Anderson Report:

“Arrangements had to be made for the evacuation of thousands of Sheffield people to Lincolnshire villages and other districts comparatively ‘safe’. But the people concerned knew nothing of what was being proposed, nor did many of the wives whose homes they were going to invade. The whole question bristles with difficulty. If there is one thing likely to promote panic it is the idea among thousands of people, mostly strangers to each other, that they are being packed off together at a moment’s notice to an unknown destination to live for an indefinite period among other strangers who might not welcome them.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> HoC Deb. 3.11.38, Vol. 340, Col. 447

<sup>48</sup> *The Times*: 9.11.38, p.10

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, 11.11.38, p.10; *The Sheffield Star*: 18.11.38, p.4

<sup>50</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 13.10.38, p.8

<sup>51</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 28.10.38, p.6

This newspaper, which had kept its readership informed of air raid precautions plans throughout and beyond the crisis, discussed the recommendations on evacuation at length for two days and then, seemingly, forgot about the subject.

Apart from concerns over billeting and reception, it was clear that not everyone agreed with the mass movement of people from industrial areas. There were those who had opposed any official evacuation scheme on the grounds that large numbers of city people would in any case move to safety of their own accord (and were proved partially right). Others worried that a government-funded scheme of the size envisaged would divert finances away from munitions and aircraft production, and also satisfy the enemy's intention of causing dislocation and weakening public morale.<sup>52</sup> An extreme view was expressed by Austin Hopkinson, Member for Mossley, Lancashire, when he told the House of Commons:

“It is the business of the people living in the London area to be the bait drawing the enemy into the trap provided by our fighter squadrons, while balloon barrages and anti-aircraft guns drive him into the zone of battle.”<sup>53</sup>

Other public figures were quoted too: Professor J B S Haldane criticised the concept of evacuation and proposed the construction of a thousand miles of deep shelters sixty feet below London which, he averred, would protect the whole of the city's population.<sup>54</sup> Further, he asserted that some of the proposed reception areas were often more dangerous than evacuees' own homes, and declared that no children should be sent to east coast towns. Although these latter assertions were later justified, it could be argued

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<sup>52</sup> O'Brien: *op. cit.*, p.285

<sup>53</sup> R Padley & M Cole (eds): *Evacuation Survey*, p.15; G A N Lowndes: *The Silent Revolution*, p.197

<sup>54</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 2.9.38, p.5; O'Brien: *op. cit.*, p.190

that such dissenting voices added to public confusion and hardened attitudes against evacuation at the outbreak of war a year later.

Once the evacuation scheme, now designated Plan Two, did receive widespread publicity there was an urgency to update and complete preparations in case of a sudden deterioration in the international situation. A priority under Plan Two was to divide the country into 'evacuation', 'neutral' and 'reception' areas, according to the estimated degree of risk, comprising populations of approximately thirteen, fourteen and eighteen millions respectively. The task was begun in the autumn of 1938 and provisionally completed in the following January, although the second plan was later augmented by Plan Three as it took account of changes made in area designations in response to some local demands. Appendix 3 lists evacuation zones agreed by September 1939.

As Titmuss observed, while several local authorities asked for their status to be re-defined, with 200 demanding to be deemed neutral (thus being excluded from participation), not one authority zoned as an evacuation area disputed that decision; neither did one single authority request reception status.<sup>55</sup> This was echoed by a number of local associations of the National Union of Teachers who communicated to their Executive "that they regard their areas either as suitable for evacuation or unsuitable for reception".<sup>56</sup> This was arguably a significant early warning of billeting problems to come. Chester-le-Street, for example, flatly refused to accept its designation as a reception area, and when local officials were instructed that they must

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<sup>55</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.32

<sup>56</sup> *The Hallamshire Teacher*: No. 47, Nov 1938, p.5

accept the position, they did so with “extreme reluctance”.<sup>57</sup> The Ministry of Health, now in overall control of the government schemes, was forced to recognise and emphasise that children should go to homes where they would be welcome and sought to reassure parents on this score.<sup>58</sup>

Like most other industrial towns and cities, Sheffield was divided, with its inner city designated an evacuation area and its suburbs neutral. The nearby town of Rotherham and its surrounding rural districts were deemed to be wholly neutral.<sup>59</sup> Sheffield community leaders broadly accepted, in principle, the need to remove much of its population, though press reports indicated that ordinary people were divided over the issue. But no-one, it seemed, was happy about the government’s choice of reception areas for the city. At a meeting of the ARP Committee of Sheffield City Council on 19 October 1938 (before official publication of the Anderson Report) it had been recommended that representation should be made to the Home Office to ensure that the North Derbyshire area should be allocated for the reception of Sheffield evacuees.<sup>60</sup> The government’s negative response to this and a later request, and City Council members’ fury at what was seen as official intransigence, may have been significant contributory factors in the miserably low turn-out for evacuation when plans were eventually turned into reality.

North Derbyshire was seen as the natural destination for Sheffield’s evacuees: not only was the area familiar territory, but it was near enough for refugees to maintain contact

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<sup>57</sup> PRO. HLG.7/73

<sup>58</sup> *The Times*: 18.11.38, p.6

<sup>59</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 14.1.39, p.4

<sup>60</sup> Sheffield City Council: *Minutes 1937/1938*, p.495

with their homes in the city. Home Office proposals to remove them to Lincolnshire, therefore, were greeted with some alarm. Those who would be most affected by the move could hardly have been reassured to learn the comments of Councillor William Asbury, Chairman of the City Council's ARP Committee:

“It seems to me - and to other members of the ARP Committee - a very dangerous procedure to send civilians in large numbers to the east which would be in the direct line of sight of attacking aircraft. Boston and Spalding were among the areas proposed to accommodate refugees from Sheffield. They need only mentioning for anyone to appreciate how unsafe that would be.”<sup>61</sup>

For many months hopes were still high that Derbyshire would receive Sheffield evacuees, even as additional reception areas emerged: “parts of Lancashire”,<sup>62</sup> the North and East Ridings of Yorkshire,<sup>63</sup> and even the Lincolnshire coast<sup>64</sup> (the subject of Haldane's warning) were all named as possible locations at this time. Alderman E G Rowlinson, Chairman of Sheffield Education Committee, joined the debate when he revealed that a provisional scheme had been approved even before Munich to send Sheffield children to the Peak District of Derbyshire. He went on to express doubts about whether parents would approve the scheme to send their children a hundred miles nearer the line of enemy attack.<sup>65</sup>

Moreover, it could be held that the City Fathers were hardly inspiring their citizens to respond positively to government plans for civil defence in general and evacuation in

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<sup>61</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 29.10.38, p.12

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, 14.11.38, p.4

<sup>64</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 29.3.39, p.7

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*

particular. After months of debate their interest was apparently waning: one member of the city's ARP Committee was stung into complaining of apathy as he described one meeting: "Some read novels, some interested themselves in other ways, and some went out early."<sup>66</sup>

It was little wonder, it may be argued, that Sheffield parents did not rush to register their children for evacuation to these relatively distant and unfamiliar areas when they were called upon to do so only a short time afterwards. The local editor who had opined that parents would be willing to let their children go away under the government scheme in the knowledge that they would be safe and in good hands had clearly been over-optimistic, to say the least.<sup>67</sup>

Nationally, the situation facing the architects of the government's evacuation scheme was daunting. They decided to restrict the scheme to four groups: school children, moving with their school units; young children under school age accompanied by their mothers; pregnant women; and those adult blind or disabled people who could be moved without difficulty. The essential stipulation was the evacuation should be voluntary unless military reasons dictated otherwise. This non-compulsory element of the scheme severely complicated matters, for it meant that firm and complex arrangements had to be made on a basis of many unknown and variable conditions.<sup>68</sup>

Estimates of numbers likely to need evacuation were initially based on public reaction to the Munich crisis, as well as on figures gathered in surveys carried out in London at

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<sup>66</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 5.1.39, p.10

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, 25.11.38, p.11

<sup>68</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.34

that time, when the LCC reported a possible 83% of its school population had been ready to register. This had resulted in a projection that 4,000,000 people in the priority classes in vulnerable areas throughout the country would need transport and accommodation.<sup>69</sup> Although the public were made aware that those employed on essential work would be expected to remain in the cities and continue to contribute to the national effort, it was realised that there were other groups of 'non-essential' adults in the civilian population who would also want to leave the danger zones. However, the sheer size of the official scheme for priority classes forced the government to leave these less vulnerable groups to make their own private arrangements. It was an unavoidable decision which was, however, to exacerbate an already difficult situation regarding accommodation when war began.

If the voluntary factor of evacuation caused some problems in the 'danger' zones, it was as nothing compared with the trouble in store in the reception areas. The compulsory nature of billeting evacuees in private houses was always going to be a thorny problem, but the planners were convinced that this was the only way to overcome major problems of accommodation with reasonable standards of comfort.

In the nation-wide survey of reception areas called for by the government and carried out in January 1939 by local housing authorities conducting a house-to-house investigation, the standard adopted for estimating accommodation was for one person per habitable room in most of England and in Wales. Exceptions were made in the cases of already overcrowded parts of the north of England and Scotland, where the

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<sup>69</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.34

standard was one person over fourteen years of age or two children under fourteen to each habitable room. It was clear that not all the available billets would be suitable for all categories of evacuees - for example elderly people, invalids or single people at work all day would not be required to take unaccompanied school children.<sup>70</sup>

The January investigation revealed 4,800,000 'suitable' places available nationally, but by the following month this figure was reduced by one sixth as householders claimed reservations for friends and relatives.<sup>71</sup> Government planners had foreseen that, if an emergency arose, the results of the survey would be nullified by private 'early birds' who would seize at least some of the accommodation set aside for official evacuees, especially in attractive areas. The authorities were concerned about this development, but accepted that local authorities would have difficulty in evicting private refugees and nothing could be done to prevent this beyond appeals to the public on moral grounds.<sup>72</sup> In the localities, also, some cynicism was expressed about claims by householders of needy relatives, as evidenced by the comment of an ARP organiser for Bakewell and Ashbourne in Derbyshire - one of the areas sought by Sheffield authorities to receive its evacuees: "The genuineness of the reservations in favour of relations might be doubted in some cases."<sup>73</sup>

The concern was that, especially in the Home Counties and the south-west of England, accommodation was being reserved not just for family members but for others who

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<sup>70</sup> PRO.ED.138/48 Memos Ev.1,2

<sup>71</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.37

<sup>72</sup> PRO.HLG.7/89

<sup>73</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 7.3.39, p.10



could afford to pay for themselves.<sup>74</sup> Independent migration was not discouraged by the authorities, for it would save lives and reduce the proportions of the problem of civilians in vulnerable areas - and it would be less expensive for the government. However, private evacuation would later present a serious stumbling block to the government scheme, for householders would find paying guests preferable and more profitable than unknown and unwanted school children, young families or expectant mothers installed by officialdom.

As the accommodation survey progressed, attempts were made to reassure city dwellers that there would be enough places for them, and especially for their children, in the country. Sheffield people were optimistically informed that the machinery was prepared so that it would “simply be a case of pressing a button” and children would be removed to safety.<sup>75</sup> And with the machinery already in motion to close all schools in the evacuation areas for the duration of any hostilities, it was anticipated, by the authorities at least, that billeting in private homes would be a long-term project.

It was doubtless to be expected that such a thorough billeting survey would cause consternation in those areas scheduled to receive refugees. Its object had been two-fold: firstly, to ascertain the amount of surplus housing available, and secondly, to discover the number of householders who would offer hospitality to children and mothers willingly rather than under duress. Walter Elliot, Minister of Health, appealed to them:

“Small towns and villages can be of vital and human service. Moreover, [...] these towns will not lose out by giving

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<sup>74</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.38

<sup>75</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 7.1.39, p.8

hospitality, for there will be a good deal of extra trade brought by the refugees.”<sup>76</sup>

It was apparent from press reports, however, that he did not altogether succeed in his efforts to reassure country people.

In districts destined to receive Sheffield evacuees, opposition came not only from householders but also from some unexpected quarters. A Gainsborough councillor stipulated that evacuee children must be “decent”, and declared that no refugees from the slums were wanted in the town.<sup>77</sup> In an even more surprising assault the Archdeacon of Lindsey denounced the plan for evacuation: endorsing the call for underground shelters for townspeople as an alternative to the government scheme, he protested:

“It is outrageous and unfair that all these people should be thrust upon us without knowing anything about their morals or their cleanliness. [...] The authorities would have them dumped down here, no matter how much inconvenience or distress may [be] caused.”<sup>78</sup>

His attack brought a swift rejoinder from the Chairman of the ARP Committee of Sheffield City Council. Jumping to the defence of citizens of his city, Councillor Asbury declared:

“Very many townspeople [may] retort that they and their children may be distributed in homes about whose morals and cleanliness they know nothing. [...] I agree that it is absurd to think of the area as being suitable to evacuate Sheffield’s adults or children. We regard Lincolnshire as entirely unsuitable for the purpose.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 6.1.39, p.7

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*, 18.1.39, p.8

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*, 16.1.39, p.8

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*, 17.1.39, p.9

The later decision to re-allocate Sheffield evacuees to Kesteven<sup>80</sup> fortunately avoided further conflict with the Archdeacon. Eventually Lincolnshire was abandoned as an official reception area for Sheffield.

In contrast to the lack of local response in the period following the Munich crisis and before the publication of the Anderson Report, the Sheffield press carried several letters from members of the public when the billeting survey was in progress in January 1939. Those in areas expected to receive evacuees seemed to be divided in their views: some shared the concerns voiced above, while others dissociated themselves from the remarks and expressed willingness to accept “these poor little children”. Likewise, city parents appeared split on the issue, some objecting to the proposals for evacuating children to places unknown to them, and others supporting the scheme.<sup>81</sup> It is interesting to note that after this short flush of public response, correspondence on the subject apparently dried up altogether, with no letters to the two main Sheffield newspapers on the subject published for many months - in fact until after rehearsals began in late August. Whether this was simply because no letters were received about evacuation, or was a policy dictated by the government or by editorial staff is not clear.

At this stage, early in 1939, plans were in fact being laid for the evacuation of those in vulnerable parts of Sheffield. This was made clear in February by the Town Clerk when he reported to the City Council the government decision that the official scheme, so far as it related to the city, was now in course of preparation.<sup>82</sup> But the local press

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<sup>80</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 9.3.39, p.7

<sup>81</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*; *The Sheffield Star*: 19-24 January 1939

<sup>82</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.137/1, Meeting of ARP Committee 22.2.39; Sheffield City Council: *Minutes 1938/39*, p.474

further stirred the anxieties and frustrations of inner-city parents who were still kept in the dark about decisions affecting their offspring. Working on what turned out to be a vastly inflated estimate of the number of children who would need to be evacuated, one report was hardly reassuring:

“We cannot take 70,000 children out of Sheffield and dump them down anywhere in the country, leaving them to fend for themselves. We must know where they are going and that there is a space ready for each one of them.”<sup>83</sup>

School meetings provided a platform for parents to ask questions or to express for themselves their objections to the evacuation scheme. Some favoured the alternative of underground shelters which they considered would render the scheme unnecessary and avoid the separation of families.<sup>84</sup> The tunnel solution was resurrected from time to time throughout the pre-war period, the Lord Mayor of Sheffield joining proponents in suggesting such a system under the city could serve the dual purpose of easing traffic in peacetime and providing public shelters in the event of war.<sup>85</sup>

What seems to have been lacking was any positive encouragement by either press or community leaders to Sheffield parents to register their children for evacuation: indeed, it could be argued that those parents desiring to do so were being discouraged by press reporting. The reservations of the Chairman of the Education Committee were recorded more than once, and the city’s newspapers were quick to publish his comment that he doubted whether many parents would approve of their children being taken from them.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 3.2.39, p.5

<sup>84</sup> Log Books: Owlter Lane Intermediate School, entry 9.3.39; Sharrow Lane Mixed School, entry 13.5.39

<sup>85</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 23.3.39, p.6

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*, 28.2.39, p.8

Partly, this reluctance to push for evacuation may have been based on the City Council's continued opposition to the government's selection of Lincolnshire as the reception area for Sheffield, which one councillor had earlier described as "farcical".<sup>87</sup> Representations which had been made to the Home Office finally paid off in February 1939, as members of the city's ARP Committee were informed that a revised list of reception areas had been received, "which areas are more acceptable than those previously suggested."<sup>88</sup> But a month later it was clear that the matter was still unsettled, when Alderman Rowlinson appeared to reject the new areas (extending eastwards to the Lincolnshire coast and southwards to Market Harborough in Leicestershire), stating that the Education Committee was urging reconsideration of its Derbyshire scheme.<sup>89</sup> This lack of leadership was reflected in the fact that only one third of eligible parents had registered their willingness to send their children away with their schools by the end of March.<sup>90</sup>

In the meantime, the head teachers of some of the city's secondary schools, which were not included as school units in the Government Scheme, were making their own arrangements for evacuation: two secured accommodation for their children to the area of North Derbyshire officially denied to Sheffield. At a meeting of parents, teachers and governors of Notre Dame High School it was decided to explore the possibility of transferring the whole school to a country area. Within months the school had taken over Derwent Hall in Derbyshire, where many children remained until the summer of

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<sup>87</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 16.1.39, p.7

<sup>88</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA 157/1, Meeting 22.2.39

<sup>89</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 29.3.39, p.7

<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*

1941.<sup>91</sup> Sheffield High School made similar arrangements to move to Cliff College, Calver.<sup>92</sup> Although these were private arrangements which circumvented the official scheme to evacuate to other areas, the children were eligible for government billeting allowances. School fees continued to be the responsibility of parents except for pupils who held 'special places' who continued to be supported by the local authority.<sup>93</sup>

There were, however, other reasons for concern about dispersing large numbers of people into the countryside. Anxiety had already been expressed about water supplies, and indeed many rural areas were to experience problems in trying to cope with a sudden influx of town dwellers used to higher standards of sanitation. Questions asked in the House of Commons regarding a government grant towards "providing proper water supplies for the many Lincolnshire parishes which lack them" can hardly have reassured parents of prospective Sheffield evacuees, particularly when the Minister of Health was unsympathetic to the request.<sup>94</sup>

The government billeting survey was completed in early February 1939. But although the information gained confirmed sufficient places available for estimated needs, it was clear that many householders had shown themselves unwilling to act as hosts to evacuees and some had refused to co-operate in the enquiry at all. They were rebuked by the Minister of Health for their failure to embrace the children he described as "not scrofulous and verminous" but "the bud of the nation".<sup>95</sup> Praising volunteers who had

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<sup>91</sup> V Hallam: *Silent Valley at War: Life in the Derwent Valley 1939-1945*, pp.20,22

<sup>92</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 4.9.39, p.3

<sup>93</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Report 1939/40*, p.292

<sup>94</sup> HoC Deb. 2.3.39, Vol. 344, Col. 1522

<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*, Col. 1524

come forward to perform what he maintained was one of the most valuable forms of national service, Walter Elliot announced that such householders would be provided with a card bearing a "National Service" badge to display in the window of their homes, showing that they were actively supporting the evacuation scheme.<sup>96</sup> This was clearly offered as an incentive, but the move may have also been intended to exert neighbourly pressure on the reluctant. Whatever the motive, resistance continued throughout the period.

Yet despite the understandable reluctance of many country people to have their homes filled with strangers, volunteers did come forward and provisional places were secured for some 2,250,000 unaccompanied school children in England and Wales. That these offers were made in the knowledge of the less-than-generous billeting allowances demonstrated a widespread caring concern of many rural folk for their urban neighbours. The payments already announced (10s.6d. a week for one unaccompanied child, and 8s.6d. a week for each child where more than one was taken, irrespective of age) were confirmed.<sup>97</sup> But these sums would later be found inadequate and would add to the long list of problems to emerge the following September. Difficulties arising from billeting payments will be discussed in a later chapter.

The question of allocating reception districts to specific evacuating areas was one which greatly exercised officials, as has been seen. Apart from the priority classes, the organisers also had to take into consideration accommodation requirements of other sectors of the population whose needs might have to take precedence. Of particular

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<sup>96</sup> HoC Deb. 2.3.39, Vol. 344, Col. 2326; *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 3.3.39, p.1

<sup>97</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.39, n.1

importance were some government departments and civil servants: indeed, O'Brien contends that secret plans had been made to move the entire Government machine out of the capital in case of dire emergency.<sup>98</sup> The problem was further exacerbated by the fact that more than half of the available accommodation was in Wales and the sector of England south of a line drawn from the Wash to Bristol. This meant that many school children and mothers with young children, not only from London but other vulnerable cities further north, would have to be billeted a very long way from their homes, for example in Somerset or Devon.<sup>99</sup> The fear that this would make parental visits difficult and could also result in feelings of alienation due to differences in dialects and culture would later be borne out and add to the government's problems.

As has been seen, it was of paramount importance to effect an orderly exodus from perceived danger areas in order to avoid panic. And in the early months of 1939 officials were mainly concerned with the dispersal from London, for that was where sudden air attacks were expected to begin. However, work was also proceeding on the mechanics of evacuation from industrial towns and cities in other parts of England and Scotland. To a large extent, the position of existing rail networks influenced the decision to allocate evacuating zones to particular receiving areas. The work involved was daunting, for not only were there complicated railway timetables to be worked out but also transport arrangements for parties to travel by road from assembly points to entraining stations and from detraining centres to outlying towns and villages in the reception areas to be organised. A comprehensive system of control was called for, and

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<sup>98</sup> O'Brien: *op. cit.*, p.285

<sup>99</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.39



divisional dispersal officers were put in charge of all transport arrangements for the evacuees countrywide, for it was clear that remarkable skill was needed in directing the work of 41,000 official and voluntary workers.<sup>100</sup>

In the reception areas the debate continued about accommodation. Disabled adults and children were, in the main, to be taken care of by institutions and boarding schools, and maternity homes were to cater for expectant mothers in the late stages of pregnancy. The demand was primarily for billets for other pregnant women, school children and their teachers, and mothers with young children under five years old. It was already accepted policy that children were to go to private homes. But, while empty houses may have seemed the best solution for the mothers with children, and these were reserved wherever possible, there were simply not enough available. Of those buildings that were suitable, many had already been reserved by business companies making provisional arrangements to evacuate their staffs.<sup>101</sup> It was clear that the vast majority of families and expectant mothers would also have to be billeted upon householders. This was where the sticky problem arose which was to haunt officials at national and local level throughout successive government evacuation schemes. For it was one thing, it seemed, to ask householders to take in a child or two: it was, however, quite another to expect them to share the intimacy of their homes (and especially their kitchens) with women and toddlers previously unknown to them.

Many in the reception areas continued to pursue the idea of camps and hostels which they saw as the best answer to the quest for billets for evacuees of all categories. Strong

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<sup>100</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, pp.40-43

<sup>101</sup> *ibid.*, p.38

pressure was exerted for a comprehensive programme to adapt existing holiday camps for families and also to provide new purpose-built camps for children. These would have the advantage of keeping family or school units together without encroaching too much into village life. There was much public discussion of the subject and some surprising views were put forward. One observer of the problem wrote:

“Why not use good barns? [...] They are warm and draught proof and with the addition of a staircase, sanitation and a kitchen, could accommodate anything up to fifty or sixty children.”<sup>102</sup>

When the Sheffield Soroptimists’ Society debated the issue of camps versus private homes for children, an eminent local head mistress volunteered her opinion that camps would present a more likely target for bombers. The majority at the meeting voted in support of camps, however - and this in an evacuating area.<sup>103</sup>

But the government resisted the pressure, and not only for financial reasons. Holiday camps had already been tested when they were used to house Jewish refugees from Germany and other European countries, but had proved unsuitable in winter conditions.<sup>104</sup> In any case, the Anderson Committee’s policy was clearly stated and followed: the vast majority of evacuees should be lodged with families. However, among a number of government circulars released at this time, two did give consideration to the provision of hostels for special categories of unaccompanied school children, notably ‘difficult’ children (those who were maladjusted or otherwise

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<sup>102</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 20.2.39, p.4

<sup>103</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 3.5.39, p.4

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.*, 27.3.39, p.6

unsuitable for ordinary billeting) and secondary school children whose education might be adversely affected at a critical stage.<sup>105</sup>

In February 1939 the government made another, albeit small, concession when it agreed to the construction of fifty camps, each to accommodate 300 refugees. However, funding was not forthcoming until the Camps Act was enacted in May, providing for schools to use such buildings for holidays in peace time and for accommodating children in the special categories in the event of war.<sup>106</sup> As it turned out, only thirty-one camps were eventually built by the summer of 1940, the majority of which were destined to be occupied by secondary or senior schools.<sup>107</sup>

But even then, empty houses, hostels and camps did not appreciably help the situation. Hotels and holiday guest-houses were reserved for reception purposes, but the brunt of billeting would still have to be borne by private householders and the government pinned their faith to their hospitality. Housewives' organisations and church bodies besieged local authorities and Members of Parliament with complaints.

The prospect of war was suddenly transformed from possibility to probability with the Czech crisis in the spring of 1939. The time factor dominated planning. In the haste to complete the programme, the problems of emptying the city of the priority classes at all speed obscured the equally important issues of reception and billeting, to say nothing of welfare and education.<sup>108</sup> The most important thing was that "*les bouches inutiles*" had

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<sup>105</sup> PRO.ED.138/48, Memos Ev.8,9

<sup>106</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.36

<sup>107</sup> PRO.ED.138/49

<sup>108</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.40

to be dispersed from London before the devastating air attack which was expected immediately following any declaration of hostilities, or risk public disruption.

Walter Elliot, speaking for the Evacuation Division of the Ministry of Health, assured the House of Commons that plans were well advanced for evacuation to be achieved within three days immediately prior to any announcement of war. Timetables were ready and each local authority had now been informed of the number of persons allotted to its area. However, while asserting "This is an orderly evacuation", the Minister went on to warn that once air raids did begin, the chaos would be terrific.<sup>109</sup>

At the same time, members of the public continued to receive confusing messages. On the one hand, government was urging parents in danger zones to register their children for evacuation and pressing householders in safe areas to offer hospitality. On the other, the provincial press reported that local officials, school teachers and other public figures were continuing to express their own concerns about the policy. At a national meeting of school attendance officers held in Sheffield only days after the Minister's announcement, there was a lively debate. One delegate, worried that his own child would not have the same care as at home, doubtless summed up the situation for many others throughout the country when he told the conference: "My wife said: 'Where you stay I stay, and where I stay the child stays' and that settled it for us."<sup>110</sup> And while some agreed with the suggestion that a child might become a stranger to its parents if

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<sup>109</sup> HoC Deb. 5.4.39 Vol. 345, Cols. 2870-5

<sup>110</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 10.4.39, p.5

separated for any length of time, others responded that the same child might be killed if it stayed at home.<sup>111</sup>

Although the scheme was directed centrally by the Evacuation Division, in the evacuation zones the town and district councils were responsible for drawing up detailed local plans and operating programmes for dispersal. With regard to London, in order to simplify a very complex task the LCC was made responsible for co-ordinating schemes for the whole of the Metropolitan area and for twenty boroughs and district councils in the Home Counties. In the rest of the country, where a zone extended into the territory of more than one authority, one officer was appointed to take charge of arrangements to prevent confusion. Sending and receiving authorities were put in touch with each other to settle details of housing - a mammoth task, for in England and Wales there were more than 1,100 reception districts and over eighty evacuation areas.<sup>112</sup>

The densely populated central, northern and eastern areas of Sheffield, with the exception of housing estates therein, were declared evacuation zones, while the rest of the city, together with all the housing estates, was classified as neutral and these areas would neither evacuate nor receive refugees. In the surrounding area the mining villages of South Yorkshire were also defined as neutral.<sup>113</sup> The City Council at first accepted this mixed designation of Sheffield. However, the Education Committee later asked that the whole city should be classed as a vulnerable area, but the request was turned down. This was conveyed to the committee:

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<sup>111</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 11.4.39, p.3

<sup>112</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.41

<sup>113</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 18.5.39, p.5

“[...] the Ministry of Health have only agreed to less than half of the city coming under such a category which contains about sixty thousand persons under the heading of ‘priority classes’, all of whom are being given the opportunity to state in writing whether or not they desire to be transferred to the Sheffield Reception Areas.”<sup>114</sup>

Other decisions seemed clearly inequitable too: nearby Rotherham Borough, initially declared neutral despite the town’s heavy industrial base, fought for evacuation status like its neighbouring city and eventually won.<sup>115</sup> Rotherham Rural Council, on the other hand, was not successful in changing the classification of the town’s outlying areas from partly ‘neutral’ and partly ‘reception’ to an entirely neutral area.<sup>116</sup>

It will be seen that at this stage of the proceedings the problem of reception was largely perceived as one of housing, with less regard to other considerations which were to play such an important part when evacuation came into force a few months later. But it was, perhaps, inevitable that such a gigantic and complicated scheme, drawn up to cover the national situation, could not cater for the multitude of problems which were later brought to light in the localities.

As speed became the imperative for evacuation planners after Czechoslovakia, a host of details needed to be finalised, but there was little firm information on numbers to be catered for. There were questions, for instance, of how many trains would be required, where they were destined, provision of food for the journeys, postcards for children to let parents know of their arrival. By May 1939 the government decided to publicise the

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<sup>114</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Report 1938/39*, p.4

<sup>115</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 14.7.39, p.3

<sup>116</sup> *ibid.*, 6.6.39, p.4

evacuation scheme more widely and in greater detail, and local authorities were asked to ascertain how many in the priority groups wished to take part in the official scheme. Voluntary registration of mothers and children was dealt with by appointed officers in the sending areas throughout the country. In many cities schools were used for this purpose, with teachers acting as voluntary registrars.<sup>117</sup> A recruitment programme went ahead to find extra helpers, mostly women, who would be willing to assist officials in supervising and travelling with the children if the scheme was put into action. The Dowager Marchioness of Reading, Chief Organiser for the Women's Voluntary Service, visited Sheffield on a tour to boost the flagging recruitment drive for civil defence and appealed particularly for women escorts. The press report, headlined "Wives Told Their Job is to Fight Panic", reiterated official concern over public morale and quoted Lady Reading:

"The care of the children if war should come would be the only assurance for the future of the life for which Englishmen have fought for centuries."<sup>118</sup>

The Chief Education Officer of Sheffield, H E Newton, was named as Evacuation Officer and he appointed a Liaison Committee to work with him to draw up an evacuation plan for the city using the directives issued by central government. Membership of this committee was drawn from many agencies - head teachers, administrative staff of the Education and Transport Departments in the city, as well as local representatives of the ARP Department, the Blind Welfare Department and the Sheffield Crippled Aid Association.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.43

<sup>118</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 11.3.39, p.9; *The Sheffield Star*: 10.3.39, p.1

<sup>119</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Survey April 1939-March 1947*, p.4

In March 1939 a Home Office circular informed local authorities in evacuation areas that immediate meetings were to be convened for head teachers and helpers in schools which would be using the same departure points, so that all the necessary arrangements could be made with local police and railway authorities for an orderly departure. Similar meetings should be arranged in reception areas to avoid confusion on arrival of evacuees.<sup>120</sup>

Available school log books give disappointingly little information about the momentous events affecting the city's children. One or two referred to the Munich crisis and civil defence in cryptic terms: for example the Headmaster of Carbrook Council Boys' School wrote: "After a week of suspense war has been averted. Much activity in gas mask fitting."<sup>121</sup> Beyond this, only two log books have been discovered which even mention that meetings were called in early March 1939 to inform parents of provisional evacuation plans and to distribute forms to be completed by those wishing their children to be registered for the proposed scheme.<sup>122</sup>

By early May, though, concerns about education were being aired publicly in educational journals and at council meetings. Questions about seniority and authority were raised. Teachers intending to evacuate with the children were worried about their position in the schools which they would be required to share, for the government would deem them to be under the administrative direction of the receiving area.<sup>123</sup> The

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<sup>120</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.41/29, Circular No. 59/1939

<sup>121</sup> Log Book: Carbrook Council Boys' School: entry 3.10.38

<sup>122</sup> Log Books: St Stephen's Mixed School: entry 3.10.38; St Barnabas (Cecil Road) Mixed School: entry 7.3.39

<sup>123</sup> *Education*: No. 1895, 5.5.39, p.3



matter was raised at a meeting of Sheffield Education Committee in May 1939, when a councillor asked if Sheffield children and their teachers could remain as identifiable entities in shared premises or would be under the jurisdiction of staff of the host school. The Chairman replied that it was expected that schools would operate in split shifts, with Sheffield children attending for half a day and the 'home' children the other half. The question of relative status of teachers, therefore, should not arise.<sup>124</sup> Although this method operated successfully in some areas when put to the test, it was to prove unworkable in others. In the event it became unnecessary, in the main, for the small number of children who moved from Sheffield.

Other problems surfaced, too: there was, for instance, the question of what to do about children in the same family who were attending different schools, for some who lived in evacuable areas were pupils at institutions in neutral areas and *vice versa*, while others could be split up from their siblings if their separate schools were not scheduled for the same reception area. These were perplexing questions which clearly needed to be addressed without delay.

The Evacuation Officer and his Liaison Committee co-operated in producing a booklet which was distributed to seventy-five schools in the evacuable parts of the city in May. Entitled *State of Emergency*, it presented a comprehensive survey of arrangements for the evacuation of those in the priority classes. Covering every detail, it seemed, from the relatively small matter of postages incurred by head teachers or the provision of

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<sup>124</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 23.5.39, p.3

armlets for marshals, to the huge matter of transport arrangements, it sought to stress the serious nature of the undertaking:

“The success of the Scheme outlined in this Booklet will depend upon the extent to which it is understood by those who have to take a part in the same if it is ever necessary to put the Scheme into operation.”<sup>125</sup>

The booklet also revealed that the knotty problem of the destination of evacuees from Sheffield had finally been settled: it was not Lincolnshire, Lancashire or even the hoped-for Derbyshire. Instead, the reception areas were named as Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire. Ten districts within these two counties were named: Barrow-upon-Soar, Castle Donington, Loughborough, Melton Mowbray, Melton and Belvoir, and Shepshed in Leicestershire; and Basford, Bingham, Newark and Southwell in Nottinghamshire. An estimated 60,300 billets were available, which was twice the number for whom the Evacuation Committee had catered and three times the number of places requested.<sup>126</sup> In the event, only one tenth of the billets were taken up at the outbreak of war.

The emergency instructions advised that every school party would be placed under the complete control of a named leader who would be responsible for all communications. Each leader should arrange to meet the entire teaching staff, caretakers and voluntary helpers under their jurisdiction to ensure that the scheme was fully understood. Teachers and other volunteers for evacuation duties must remain on call at week-ends and should leave their holiday addresses with the leader, who would also hold lists of

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<sup>125</sup> City of Sheffield: *State of Emergency*, 11.5.39, p.1

<sup>126</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Report 1939/40*, p.72

names and addresses of all the adults and children who had registered to travel under the scheme.

Head teachers were asked to inform parents of a list of clothing required in the event of evacuation, and to ask them to prepare and label the items with the child's name as soon as possible. Heads were also instructed to make further efforts to encourage more parents to register their children for the scheme.<sup>127</sup>

The document clarified the situation of many children when it was explained that evacuation would be extended beyond those attending the seventy-five named schools to cover children attending Special, Intermediate, Senior or Non-maintained schools as well as those at Higher Educational Institutions outside the evacuable areas if they lived in evacuable areas and their parents wished them to go. If children in the same family were attending different schools, they should all report to the establishment attended by the youngest child, from where they would be evacuated.<sup>128</sup>

In the event of evacuation plans becoming a reality, the government would make a public announcement over the wireless and give detailed instructions on the procedure to be followed. Were the situation to arise during a school holiday (as in fact it did), teachers should return to Sheffield immediately. If it happened during a normal school day, the school would be closed immediately and remain so until further notice. Children would be sent home to collect their luggage and report to their assembly points. Older pupils would act as messengers to relay information to those (pupils and

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<sup>127</sup> *State of Emergency, op. cit.*, p.1

<sup>128</sup> *ibid.*

teachers) intending to participate in the scheme but who were attending non-evacuable establishments.<sup>129</sup>

The children to be evacuated should assemble at the named schools wearing their thickest and warmest clothing and footwear, and be able to carry their luggage by themselves on their backs, preferably in a rucksack or similar container. One day's food should be taken, but drinks were only permitted if taken in a thermos flask. No child was to travel if suffering from, or in contact with, an infectious complaint, or with scabies or ringworm of the scalp or if the leader considered the child unfit to travel. A doctor or nurse would accompany each train and motor bus to the reception area.<sup>130</sup>

Leaders of parties should see that work was begun immediately on preparing identity cards for adults and labels for children showing the bearer's name, home address, the name and evacuation number of the Sheffield school to which the person was attached, and the reception area assigned (although the exact location within that area would not be known). The children should also be supplied with a distinctive coloured emblem which would easily identify them at the railway station. All those involved in helping would wear white armbands with the letters "S.E.C." in different colours to signify their separate duties as teachers, volunteer helpers or medical staff. The armbands would serve as passes and entitle the wearers to free travel on the day of evacuation. Staff of the Education Committee, also wearing identifying white armbands, would work with station officials to marshal the school parties on the platforms.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> *State of Emergency, op. cit.*, p.4

<sup>130</sup> *ibid.*, p.5

<sup>131</sup> *ibid.*, p.6

All the arrangements for travelling had been worked out with scrupulous attention to detail. Police protection would ensure that the school parties received priority. Travel vouchers were expected to be supplied to the schools in advance. Leaders would complete forms giving exact numbers and categories of parties for travel by train and by bus. Timetables had been meticulously worked out for everyone registered and particulars for each school listed entraining station, train number, departure time and detraining station. The majority of school parties would travel on foot or by bus or tram to the four Sheffield stations (Victoria, Midland, Darnall and Heeley) where they would complete their journeys by train. Those children and adults with physical handicaps would be taken all the way from assembly points to reception areas by motor bus. Although it was hoped to complete the programme in one day, similar provisional arrangements were made for a second day of evacuation, with extra leaders and escorts appointed.<sup>132</sup>

Instructions also covered arrival in the reception areas, where teachers and other escorts with the Sheffield parties would be under the direction of the government billeting staff: they were firmly advised that finding billets was not their responsibility. It was the leader's task, immediately accommodation for the party had been secured, to find a Post Office suitable to receive correspondence and to send telegrams to the Sheffield Chief Education Officer and to the caretaker of the evacuated school with that information, which would then be displayed on the school notice board for parents to see. Each child would be provided with a pre-paid postcard to send home at the first opportunity after this, telling their parents of their exact whereabouts so that they could then

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<sup>132</sup> *State of Emergency: op. cit.*, p.7

communicate with each other.<sup>133</sup> All other expenses incurred by head teachers in connection with evacuation business would be reimbursed by the Sheffield Education Committee.<sup>134</sup>

The billeting fees payable by the government to householders were unchanged from those indicated a year earlier: 10s.6d for a single unaccompanied school child's board and lodging, or 8s.6d. for each child if more than one child was taken in. Those householders offering lodging only to mothers with children under five years of age would receive 5s.0d. a week for the mother and 3s.0d. a week for each child who would be accompanying its mother. For other adults, such as teachers, blind or crippled adults and expectant mothers, the fee would similarly be 5s.0d. per person.<sup>135</sup> When these billeting fees were eventually put into effect they would be the subject of much discontent and difficulty throughout the war years, despite later adjustments.

With regard to schooling, the leaders of school parties were advised to report to the Chief Education Officer for the reception area concerned, for they would be under the jurisdiction of the host authority. The problem of status which had troubled the teachers was resolved by the instruction that, even in the likely event of having to share premises and educate the children on a shift system, the evacuated teachers and school children alike would be in the control of Sheffield head teachers, and payment of salaries would come from the home city.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> *State of Emergency, op. cit.*, p.8

<sup>134</sup> *ibid.*, p.9

<sup>135</sup> *ibid.*, p.8

<sup>136</sup> *ibid.*, p.9

It was clear that the teachers would be involved in a great deal more than teaching the evacuated children, however. On an optimistic note, the Chief Education Officer, in whose name the booklet was compiled, stated:

“I have been assured [...] that there would be a general desire to organise out of school activities for the children. Teachers will not be required to supervise children in billets; any help given in this direction, however, would doubtless be greatly welcomed.”<sup>137</sup>

This booklet dealt comprehensively with such diverse subjects as the method of payment of teachers' salaries during the period of evacuation and railway travel warrants for those escorts who would not be remaining in the reception areas for the duration of the emergency. In short, it was an invaluable and extremely informative handbook for teachers. It was, however, a pity that it was not made available for parents: they were left to gain their information at second hand from either school meetings or local newspapers, and may perhaps have responded more positively to the call for registration if they had been aware of the thoroughness of the preparations.

As it was, despite informative meetings held with parents in the affected areas, the resulting statistics were far from reassuring. Despite the fact that a second opportunity was given for reconsideration of their decisions, the Chief Education Officer was forced to report to his committee on 22 May 1939 that there were at that time only 18,392 definite requests for evacuation. However, as it was anticipated that the number may increase when (not 'if') evacuation became necessary, arrangements had been made with the billeting and transport authorities for a possible 30,000 evacuees to be moved

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<sup>137</sup> *State of Emergency, op. cit.*, p.9

on the first day of evacuation. Should some parents change their minds after the commencement of hostilities, arrangements would be made for their children to be moved and billeted in the same reception areas as their school mates who went on the first day of evacuation.<sup>138</sup> It was also intended that families should be billeted in the same area as far as possible, even if they did not travel on the same day.<sup>139</sup>

The disappointing response in Sheffield was mirrored in many towns and cities and signalled an apathy which had not been present at the time of the Munich crisis. With registrations alarmingly low across the country, the government arranged for explanatory leaflets to be delivered in July to householders in evacuation areas (see Appendix 4).<sup>140</sup> Local authorities in these zones also undertook a house-to-house canvas, which resulted in some increase in school children registered, but still a considerable shortfall in numbers. Nevertheless, it was decided to stay with the entraining movements already arranged, for it was expected that public reaction might well be different if war was declared, and demand might even exceed the figures on which the plans had been based.<sup>141</sup> Official concern about this possibility was expressed and Sheffield parents were warned:

“If plans are made for 20,000 and 40,000 present themselves, there is bound to be chaos for some days. It is not just a matter of transport, but of accommodation and food.”<sup>142</sup>

In the event, the authorities need not have worried.

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<sup>138</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Report 1939/40*, p.70

<sup>139</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 18.5.39, p.5

<sup>140</sup> Public Information Leaflet No. 3, July 1939: courtesy of interviewee, Dorothy Knowles

<sup>141</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.44

<sup>142</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 22.5.39, p.5



Financial arrangements, for long the subject of dispute between local and central administration and often the cause of delay, were supposed to be settled by the Civil Defence Bill of April 1939. Local authorities were obliged to obey instructions laid down by the Ministry of Health, but no additional burden of expense in connection with evacuation was to fall on local ratepayers, for provision was made for the Exchequer to repay approved financial outlay.<sup>143</sup>

The trouble was that the Treasury often disagreed with what local authorities and the Ministry deemed to be necessary expenditure: for instance, approval of the purchase of bedding and blankets for evacuees was delayed until 25 August 1939, (a week before evacuation) when a frenzy of commandeering and buying took place. Even then the problem was not solved, as is evidenced by wireless and press appeals from women's organisations for the public to donate blankets or knit woollen squares.<sup>144</sup> Yet as early as February officials in the reception areas had been required to send in returns of estimated quantities of bedding needed, and in May the government had foreseen problems in meeting the huge demands.<sup>145</sup>

There was, too, the matter of clothing for the poorest children. In the light of the Munich experience, Ben Smith, Member of Parliament, had warned the President of the Board of Education as long ago as 21 December 1938:

“It was found that large numbers of children were not provided with adequate clothing, boots and other necessities due to parental poverty. There are fears that evacuation in a future emergency will be hampered.”<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.42

<sup>144</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 28.8.39, p.5

<sup>145</sup> PRO.ED.138/49

<sup>146</sup> PRO.ED.50/204

Yet approval was not given until eight months later, only days before the children left their homes under the government evacuation scheme, for expenditure of up to £1 for every two hundred necessitous children, and even then it was only on condition that no publicity should be given to the meagre award.<sup>147</sup>

Given such a gigantic task to perform, it was perhaps inevitable that government officials treated the evacuation scheme largely as an exercise in logistics, with the emphasis being placed on questions of transport, billets and finance. But in doing so both national and local authorities failed to appreciate all the intensely human problems which would be encountered. As Susan Isaacs summed up the situation:

“If the Government, and the authorities co-operating with the Government, as well as the general public, had seen that evacuation, from its very nature, was necessarily far more than an emergency military measure [...] if human nature had been taken into equal account with geography and railway time tables, there would in all likelihood not have been so serious a drift back to the danger areas.”<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.92

<sup>148</sup> S Isaacs (ed): *The Cambridge Evacuation Survey*, p.4

## CHAPTER TWO

### DEPARTURE

The passing of the Civil Defence Act in July 1939 had signalled an escalation in preparations for war. This had been followed by a burst of government activity at the Ministry of Health as it established new regional offices or extended existing ones throughout the country. Similar activities were undertaken by local authorities as officials there prepared themselves to deal with any immediate problems thrown up by what was now perceived to be the real threat of war. Seeking to bolster public confidence and to 'talk up' the need for civil defence and evacuation, government agencies used the wireless and the press to assure the country at large that plans were ready.<sup>1</sup>

However, although official bodies were now demonstrating their preparedness, their efforts were not always appreciated or taken seriously by the man-in-the-street. Civil defence organisations were still short of trained manpower: despite sustained efforts over many months to recruit, results were patchy and volunteers were still reluctant to come forward in some regions.<sup>2</sup> Similar problems had been experienced immediately prior to the Munich crisis, when ARP wardens had been ridiculed for trying to enforce black-out rehearsals in London and some provincial cities, including Sheffield. Then, large sections of the public had refused to participate and several people had written

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<sup>1</sup> *The Times*: 30.8.39, p.11

<sup>2</sup> T H O'Brien: *Civil Defence: History of the Second World War*, p.208

complaining letters to their local newspapers.<sup>3</sup> *The Sheffield Star* hardly encouraged public participation as its London correspondent stated: “We can see no war in the offing. This war mentality seems to have gripped some people and it is a great pity.”<sup>4</sup>

A year later the situation had apparently not improved markedly in many areas: black-out rehearsals had taken place on 10 August 1939 in London and the South-East, but these had been greeted with apathy in the suburbs, while in the metropolis they were hindered by sight-seeing crowds more interested in the spectacle than in the gravity of the situation.<sup>5</sup> This indifference of the British people to air raid precautions also applied to their general attitude towards evacuation, as events were soon to prove. Arguably, though, this spirit may have been encouraged by both national and local press which, throughout the summer months, appeared to pay scant attention to the real possibility of evacuation: *The Times*, for instance, was largely silent on the matter. In the provinces Sheffield people learned nothing from local newspapers about the city’s plans for evacuation for several weeks until the end of August.

Hopes that Britain would avoid confrontation were severely dented by the signing of the non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union on 23 August 1939 and by Hitler’s increasing pressure on Poland.<sup>6</sup> The passage of the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act next day, followed by a series of emergency bills, signified the imminence of war. Rehearsals for the government’s evacuation scheme were put into immediate action. The experience gained from the selective evacuation of some 4,300

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<sup>3</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 11-20.8.38 Letters Columns

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, 15.8.38, p.4

<sup>5</sup> R M Titmuss: *Problems of Social Policy: History of the Second World War*, p.90

<sup>6</sup> C L Mowat: *Britain Between the Wars 1918-1940*, p.645

London children in priority groups under Plan One during the Munich crisis, and a full-scale practice by 5,000 Chelsea children from twenty schools in the borough, carried out as part of a civil defence exercise in July 1939, helped to inform the operation.<sup>7</sup>

In the light of the deteriorating situation in Europe through the summer of 1939 many local education authorities had kept up the momentum of preparations for a possible evacuation emergency. All teachers in Sheffield, whether in areas of perceived danger or not, had been called to a meeting at the end of July as schools had closed for the summer holidays, and had been informed of the duties expected of them. Those employed at schools in neutral areas of the city were delegated to help at evacuable schools. All were requested to leave their holiday addresses with the leaders of the appropriate evacuation parties.<sup>8</sup>

A BBC broadcast on Thursday 24 August abruptly ended the holidays of those tens of thousands of school teachers throughout the country who were affected by the government scheme. While parents whose children were away on holiday were exhorted to leave them where they were, school staffs were called back home and directed to report to their appointed schools on the morning of Saturday 26 August.<sup>9</sup> Many teachers would not have been altogether surprised, for the possibility of sudden recall had been mooted as the schools broke up. In addition, *Education*, the official

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<sup>7</sup> PRO.ED.138/49 [unpublished notes for the *Education* volume of *The History of the Second World War*: Dr S Weitzman died before completing this work.]

<sup>8</sup> Log Book: Crookes Endowed Boys' School, entry 25.7.39

<sup>9</sup> N Longmate: *How We Lived Then*, p.14

organ of the Association of Education Committees, had warned two weeks earlier of a proposal for evacuation drills to be held in schools.<sup>10</sup>

Whether foreseen or unexpected, when the order was given towards the end of the long summer vacation nearly all the teachers left their holidays, returned home and obeyed the instruction. Most remained on duty for the whole of the weekend: some even slept overnight in school buildings. A few were on holiday abroad or in remote areas and therefore unable to return immediately.<sup>11</sup> *The Hallamshire Teacher* reported that many newly-trained young staff, due to embark on their careers at the beginning of the term on the following Monday, turned up for work three days early and volunteered to help.<sup>12</sup> Perusal of *The Sheffield Star* has shown that their assistance was not entirely due to altruism, however, for this publication stated clearly:

“Newly appointed teachers and student teachers whose appointments date from Mon [*sic*] August 28th, must also report for duty at the Sheffield schools.”<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, Jackson asserts that teachers were the linch-pin of the whole evacuation operation<sup>14</sup> and it is difficult to dispute this claim, for without their assistance and organising skills no orderly evacuation would have been possible. Their willingness to participate in the government’s evacuation scheme had been ensured in the summer of 1938, even before Munich. Then, the Executive of the National Union of Teachers had met with representatives of the Anderson Committee, the Inspector General of Air Raid

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<sup>10</sup> *Education*, No.1910, 18.8.39, p.154

<sup>11</sup> O L Davis Jr: “The Invisible Evacuees: England’s Urban Teachers During the First Autumn of War, 1939” *History of Education Society Bulletin*, No.49 (1992) p.54

<sup>12</sup> *The Hallamshire Teacher*, Combined Nos.51/52, p.2

<sup>13</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 25.8.39, p.7

<sup>14</sup> C Jackson: *Who Will Take Our Children?*, p.12

precautions and Lady Reading of the Women's Voluntary Service. The Executive had passed the following resolution:

“That the National Union of Teachers, while not subscribing to any suggestion that war is inevitable, are prepared to co-operate with the Government and the Local Authorities in making plans for the safety of school children as effective as possible, and to recommend their members in the local areas to consider the desirability of co-operation on a voluntary basis.”<sup>15</sup>

This voluntary nature of teachers' assistance was reiterated after the crisis, on 24th November 1939 when a conference of representatives of the government, local authorities and teachers' unions was told that their co-operation was invited (not demanded or expected) in working out an orderly plan for evacuating school children.<sup>16</sup> Compulsion proved unnecessary, for as Weitzman observed, teachers' response countrywide was almost unanimously in favour of co-operation.<sup>17</sup>

In the last days of August evacuation rehearsals were held in London and all towns and cities in the designated danger zones, including Hull, Liverpool, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Manchester and Sheffield. Sheffield children were expected to report to school on Saturday 26 August to receive details of the rehearsal to take place on the following Monday, but many parents misunderstood the instructions carried in the local press and, while the teachers turned up in full force at the seventy-five evacuable schools, only an abysmally small percentage of children arrived. As one local reporter noted:

“Woodbourn Council School, [...] with 840 scholars, is one of the largest in the Eastern division [of the city]. Situated in the heart of one of Sheffield's vital industries, it is one of those schools which would close down entirely on the outbreak of hostilities. Parents of only 200 of the children have, however,

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<sup>15</sup> *The Hallamshire Teacher*, No.46, p.13

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, No.47, p.5

<sup>17</sup> PRO.ED.138/49

agreed to their evacuation, and [...] only 20 of those attended by noon today. Similar poor responses were reported from other schools.”<sup>18</sup>

Misunderstanding did not account for all the absent children, however. In Sheffield, as in other parts of the country, some parents who had previously registered their children for evacuation now called at their schools to say that they had changed their minds about sending them away.<sup>19</sup> In the event, the headmaster of Woodbourn Boys’ School (mentioned above) later recorded that less than half of those children who had been registered had actually been evacuated.<sup>20</sup>

On Monday 28 August, in the evacuable areas throughout England and Scotland those children whose parents did agree to their removal arrived at their schools for rehearsal. Secondary school children in the danger zones whose parents wished them to be evacuated had been registered at elementary schools close to their homes. These children, together with mothers with young children, also arrived for the rehearsals. They were joined by large numbers of adults - women, on the whole - who had volunteered to be helpers and escorts in time of emergency. These were mainly members of the Women’s Voluntary Service, Red Cross, St John’s Ambulance Brigade, and wives of teachers. All came with their luggage and a day’s food supply, prepared for a full-scale evacuation practice. Teachers checked kit, inspected gas-masks and handed out two identification labels to each child - one to be attached to the luggage and the other to be fastened to the child’s outdoor clothing.<sup>21</sup> Everyone marched in

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<sup>18</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 26.8.39, p.5

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Log book: Woodbourn Boys’ School, entry 2.9.39

<sup>21</sup> R Padley “The Exodus” in R Padley & M Cole (eds): *Evacuation Survey*, p.37



crocodile to local departure points; then, as transport had not been laid on for the rehearsal, they marched back to school and went home.<sup>22</sup>

There was no mistake about instructions this time, yet the situation in Sheffield on this Monday was hardly better than it had been two days earlier. School log books record the results: “Only a very small number turned up”,<sup>23</sup> “Response meagre”,<sup>24</sup> were typical entries. Out of nearly 1,000 scholars at Carbrook Council School, for instance, less than a third had been registered by their parents for evacuation and only approximately one hundred school children reported for the full-scale rehearsal.<sup>25</sup> It was clear that many of the parents who had responded favourably to registration calls earlier in the year had had a change of heart in the intervening period. It may be held that the attitude of this school’s headmaster, who was also the evacuation leader, had hardly encouraged a good response from his party, for he made plain his scathing view of the operation in the school log book: “The whole affair has shown that the majority of people are indifferent to scare-mongering.”<sup>26</sup> While in some parts of the country evacuation rehearsals continued for several days,<sup>27</sup> Sheffield children attended their schools after the Monday practice and resumed their normal work until the Thursday.<sup>28</sup> It had already become clear that there would be a considerable shortfall in the numbers to be evacuated from many areas, but the full extent of the deficit was not appreciated until later.

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<sup>22</sup> Davis Jr: *op. cit.*, p.54

<sup>23</sup> Log book: All Saints’ Girls School, entry 28.8.39

<sup>24</sup> Log book: Carbrook Council Boys’ School, entry 28.8.39

<sup>25</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 28.8.39, p.5

<sup>26</sup> Log book: Carbrook Council Boys’ School, entry 28.8.39

<sup>27</sup> B Wicks: *No Time to Wave Goodbye*, pp.34-5

<sup>28</sup> Log book: Carbrook Council Boys’ School, entry 29.8.39

The suspense was finally ended just before noon on the last day in August when the Cabinet ordered that evacuation was to begin the next day. The BBC and both national and local press promptly issued a number of pre-arranged announcements: one directed workers in essential industries to remain at their posts, while another requested people not to obstruct government measures. At least one communication was clearly intended to prevent panic and at the same time to attempt to promote more widespread participation in the scheme: the public were informed that all those in the designated priority classes could be evacuated irrespective of whether or not they had already registered.<sup>29</sup>

Some newspaper editors now made their contribution towards building morale, too. *The Times* confidently pointed to the “remarkable contrast” between the present organisation for evacuation compared with the improvisation which had taken place in September 1938.<sup>30</sup> And after months of seeming indifference *The Sheffield Star* carried an editorial exhorting those in the evacuation areas to take advantage of the government scheme. Readers were informed that 30,000 billets were waiting in the reception areas; as only two-thirds of these had been reserved through registration, there was still room for 10,000 extra evacuees. Parents of children participating in the official scheme were praised for taking the right line to safeguard their offspring.<sup>31</sup> However, this public attempt to drum up support was too little and too late for most local people, for their response was apathetic to say the least, as will be seen.

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<sup>29</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.97

<sup>30</sup> *The Times*, 30.8.39, p.6

<sup>31</sup> *The Sheffield Star*, 31.8.39, p.6

Head teachers of evacuable schools across the country were informed of the Cabinet decision by their local education authorities. Sheffield's Chief Education Officer did not waste words: his telegram to those schools read: "Evacuation Friday September First. [signed] Newton."<sup>32</sup> His instructions to non-evacuable schools were more explicit, however:

"Evacuation commences tomorrow. Your school will close at the end of this afternoon's session and the teachers attend at evacuable schools at times arranged by Group Leaders. On Saturday your teachers must also attend evacuable schools at same time to be prepared to accompany any remaining evacuees to reception areas. Please notify Head Teachers of other Departments. [signed] Newton."<sup>33</sup>

Children were sent home immediately and the city's schools, like those throughout Britain, closed for the emergency. Mass evacuation under the combined government Plans Two and Three, or Operation 'Pied Piper', would begin next morning.<sup>34</sup>

As seen in the preceding chapter and Appendix 2, the mechanics of organising for the departure of non-essential persons from vulnerable cities and towns across England and Scotland were vast and complex: transport schedules had necessarily mainly been prepared by using estimates gathered months earlier. In addition to secondary and primary school children, travel arrangements had to cover handicapped children in special schools and those in nursery schools and institutions, together with teachers, escorts and other helpers. Mothers with young children, blind and disabled adults, as well as expectant mothers also had to be catered for.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Log book: St Barnabas (Cecil Road) School, entry 31.8.39

<sup>33</sup> Log book: Ann's Road Senior Mixed School, entry 31.8.39

<sup>34</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.101

<sup>35</sup> PRO.ED.138/49

In London alone, officials from the railway companies, the London Passenger Transport Board and Scotland Yard had all co-operated in planning. Arrangements were in force for thousands of school children and other priority groups to assemble at 1,589 locations. Buses had to be provided to run through back-streets to take some of the school parties to entraining points, and each route had to be agreed with the Metropolitan Police. Other parties walked to nearby stations. There were also 172 Tube entraining points. Ninety-eight mainline stations were involved, from which trains ran on pre-arranged special routes to the reception areas.<sup>36</sup> In addition, preparations were made for thousands more, mostly children, to be taken by boat to coastal towns in East Anglia, while buses and coaches were laid on to transport many more people direct to the reception areas. In the London County Council's vast programme, planned to take effect over a period of four days, those scheduled to report on the first day of the operation were confined to unaccompanied school children and mothers with young children, together with teachers and volunteer escorts.<sup>37</sup> However, it had become clear during practices that the numbers reporting for evacuation were much lower than expected. Organisers resolved at the very last minute, therefore, to speed up the procedure by telescoping the planned four-day programme into three days - a decision which was to prove disastrous in many areas.

In comparison with London, Sheffield's operation was much smaller and considerably less complicated. Transport schedules had been meticulously planned months previously, as will be seen in Appendix 5, and timetables included in the *State of*

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<sup>36</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.107

<sup>37</sup> PRO.ED.138/49

*Emergency* booklet distributed to all schools in the evacuation area of the city in May.<sup>38</sup> Despite the fact that the numbers coming forward for evacuation had never exceeded a third of the total eligible, it had been necessary to cater for a possible large increase at the last moment. Accordingly, officials had planned to complete the task within two days, with arrangements for the movement of 17,000 of the priority classes on each day.<sup>39</sup>

In view of the low turn-out for the full-scale rehearsal in Sheffield, here too it was decided to accelerate the operation somewhat and to convey most of the priority classes to the reception areas on the first day, although transport arrangements would remain in place in case of a last-minute rush on the second day. All school children, mothers with young children, blind and crippled adults requiring evacuation were therefore instructed to attend at their appointed schools at the times stipulated by their evacuation leaders. Separate arrangements were made for expectant mothers and any pre-school children with them to assemble on the second day at the Child Welfare Clinic in the city, ready to travel to billets or a nursing home in Mansfield.<sup>40</sup>

Early on Friday 1 September (as early as 5.30 a.m. in at least one school)<sup>41</sup> the evacuees mustered at assembly points throughout England and Scotland. All the children reported with their gas-masks and with name-tags pinned to their coats or on string around their necks. Most carried sandwiches and a haversack containing one change of clothing as required by evacuation planners; some of the poorer ones brought their

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<sup>38</sup> City of Sheffield: *State of Emergency*, 11.5.39, p.2

<sup>39</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 30.1.39, p.5

<sup>40</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 30.8.39, p.7

<sup>41</sup> Myrtle Road School in London, cited in *The Nottingham Evening Post*: 1.9.39, p.1

belongings packed into a pillowcase; those poorer still had only the clothes they were wearing.<sup>42</sup> Parents gathered to wave goodbye, the vast majority not knowing where their children were going or when they would see them again.

In some Sheffield schools helpers almost out-numbered evacuees as volunteers and teachers from schools outside the evacuation zone came to help in the organisation. Burgoyne Road Council School, evacuating a total of 107 mothers and children (only a small fraction of those eligible), was swamped by nineteen extra teachers in addition to escorts and the combined staffs of its own Infants and Junior Mixed Departments. Similarly, Darnall Council Schools received help from fifteen staff in addition to their own establishment, to deal with a mixed party of seventy-one evacuees.<sup>43</sup>

The majority of Sheffield evacuees made their main journeys by rail, but the whole of the city's transport system was disrupted for the day as over one hundred public vehicles (mainly tramcars and buses) were laid on to take the evacuees from departure points to entraining stations. Those meeting at schools which had been allocated buses for that purpose were picked up and taken to the four most convenient Sheffield stations (Midland, Victoria, Heeley and Attercliffe), while those allocated to trams walked in crocodile to pre-arranged tram stops from where they were transferred to the rail heads.<sup>44</sup> Most of the parents said their farewells in the school playgrounds, but some followed their children to the stations, as an interviewee remembered:

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<sup>42</sup> Davis Jr: *op. cit.*, p.55

<sup>43</sup> Log books: Burgoyne Road Council Junior Mixed School; Darnall Boys' School; entries 1.9.39

<sup>44</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 31.8.39, p.7

“Children were marched up Station Approach, and mothers had raced the trams down to get a last look at their children but were not allowed near the station platforms.”<sup>45</sup>

At the entraining points the children followed their school banners, accompanied by teachers and volunteer escorts wearing distinctive armbands. On the platforms they were marshalled by railway staff. Sheffield Education Committee Report for 1938/39 stated that school medical officers attended at all local stations, where a room had been set aside as a First Aid Post and ambulances stood by to deal with any last-minute cases of sickness, while doctors or nurses also travelled with the evacuees on the trains to the reception areas.<sup>46</sup> Oral interviews have shown, though, that medical examinations did not take place for all Sheffield children prior to evacuation.

An interviewee, at the time twelve years old and travelling with his twin brother and younger sister in the care of Carfield Council School, recalled the excitement:

“I remember marching to Heeley Station. When we got there we joined hundreds of other children on the platform. We couldn’t see the end of the queue. We hadn’t brought any food with us, but on the platform all the children were given a brown paper bag with an orange, an apple and some nuts. The boys all seemed to be wildly excited and happy but some children, mainly girls I think, were crying and upset about leaving home. It was all a big adventure to me and my brother; we were very poor and it was like nothing we had ever known before.”<sup>47</sup>

These feelings may have been typical of many children at this time and were echoed by another former evacuee from Sheffield: “The sadness of parting for me was largely offset, for me at least, by the thrill of the adventure ahead.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Oral interview: Pamela Denniff, 16.9.94

<sup>46</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Report 1938/39*, p.40

<sup>47</sup> Oral interview: George Shelley, 12.8.96

<sup>48</sup> J Perry et al: *Shepshed: Wartime Memories*, p.55

From Sheffield's Victoria Station twenty trains were laid on to run to a variety of destinations including Newark, Bingham and Ruddington in Nottinghamshire and Barrow-upon-Soar, Loughborough and Melton Mowbray in Leicestershire. Many of these trains were less than a third full on this first day: the second one to arrive in Newark carried only 266 children and adults even though there was room for 840. The first contingent to leave the LMS Sheffield Midland Station comprised mothers and small children from Denby Street and Broomhall Nurseries, together with a party of school children with five teachers and some mothers and younger siblings, all bound for Melton Mowbray in Leicestershire.<sup>49</sup> A few parties, mainly made up of those with disabilities or from special schools, were transported all the way to the reception areas by bus, each party accompanied by a school nurse. The children of Maud Maxfield School for the Deaf travelled to Southwell, Nottinghamshire, in this way.<sup>50</sup> Departures on the second day amounted to very small numbers judging from statistics recorded in log books - the largest total from one school was discovered to be twenty-six from Owler Lane Council School.<sup>51</sup>

Despite the government's refusal to allocate Derbyshire as a reception area for the city's children, at least a few of them were found a refuge in that county under the official scheme, albeit late in the day. In the midst of rehearsal week, the Sheffield Health Committee reported to the City Council that the Public Works Department had been authorised to adapt Thornsett Lodge in the village of Bradfield for the reception of fifty small children from Herries Road Homes and Nursery and to erect a temporary wooden

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<sup>49</sup> P Hardy: *Sheffield at War*, p.12

<sup>50</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 1.9.39, p.1

<sup>51</sup> Log book: Owler Lane Council Intermediate School, entry 2.9.39



hut for staff. Babies from the orphanage at Fir Vale were evacuated to Fulwood Homes on the city boundary.<sup>52</sup>

Head teachers and governors of some independent schools had previously made their own arrangements for accommodation in Derbyshire. Sheffield High School for Girls moved more than half its pupils to become temporary boarders at Cliff Theological College, Calver. Ramblers holidaying at Derwent Hall Youth Hostel in Ashopton were quickly moved out in order to make room for one hundred and forty-five children evacuated from Notre Dame High School.<sup>53</sup> The Roman Catholic Church in Sheffield arranged for its orphanage children to be sent further afield, to St Vincent's Boarding School, near Preston in Lancashire.<sup>54</sup>

In 1938, in the haste to provide for evacuation at the time of the Munich Crisis, the issue of transport - that is to say, the process of getting the children away from danger - had been the governing factor in planning; billeting received secondary consideration, with education commanding very little attention indeed.<sup>55</sup> Had it proved necessary to operate full-scale evacuation at that time, it is clear that great problems would have been encountered under Plan One. A year later, some of the lessons learned had been taken on board in designing Plans Two and Three: administrative planning had largely revolved around the parallel issues of transportation and billeting. But even then it is apparent that not much attention had been paid to the schooling of evacuees once they reached the receiving districts, until the last minute. It was not until August that the

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<sup>52</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.157/4; Sheffield City Council *Minutes 1938/39*: p.1152

<sup>53</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 1.9.39, p.4; 4.9.39, p.3

<sup>54</sup> Oral interview: Alfred Knowles 20.10.92

<sup>55</sup> Padley & Cole: *op. cit.*, p.6

Board of Education issued Circular 1469 giving some guidance to evacuating teachers regarding their duties. Only two days before the exodus were details of education arrangements in reception areas more fully addressed in Circular 1474, when the Board's President, Earl de la Warr, perhaps inadvertently, seemed to confirm the lack of earlier planning as he stated in his foreword:

“[...] extensive preparations have been made for evacuation, and, now that these are well forward, it is time to consider what is to happen to children after evacuation.”<sup>56</sup>

The destination area for every school in the ninety-three evacuation areas throughout the country, with the exception of those scheduled late under Plan Three, had been known in Whitehall by April 1939.<sup>57</sup> On the basis of billeting surveys and initial registrations for evacuation, most of the reception areas had been informed of the categories and approximate numbers of refugees to expect if it became necessary to initiate the government scheme. In the evacuating areas some provincial authorities had been able to acquaint evacuation leaders in confidence of their parties' designated reception areas. Sheffield head teachers, for example, had received notice when they received the *State of Emergency* booklet prepared by the Education Department in May. But the destinations of others, particularly those in London, were kept secret even from leaders 'for security reasons' but also because the authorities refused to guarantee that parties would arrive intact in any given place.<sup>58</sup> In the event, the precaution proved to have been a sound one, but it created many difficulties for those charged with

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<sup>56</sup> *Education*: No.1912, 1.9.39, p.196

<sup>57</sup> G Hobby: unpublished M.Ed Thesis (1984), p.20

<sup>58</sup> M E Cosens: "Evacuation: A Social Revolution", *Social Work*, Vol. 1, No. 3, (1940), p.167

encouraging registration in the evacuation localities and arguably had acted as a powerful disincentive to parents' approval of the scheme.

This failure to disclose where their schools were going had for a long time concerned teachers, who were anxious about what facilities might (or might not) be available for their scholars in country districts. In the aftermath of Munich, for example, the headmaster of Barking Abbey School had complained about the secrecy of destinations in the hurried evacuation plans and requested that these should be made known well in advance of any future evacuation so that contacts could be made between evacuating and receiving schools and continuity of education maintained.<sup>59</sup> The plea had apparently fallen on deaf ears, however, for on 1 September 1939 in London and other cities many of the teachers ('the linch-pin of the whole operation') still did not know whither they were bound or what facilities awaited them in the reception areas. One teacher, whose pupils had assembled for evacuation at 6 a.m., wrote later in his school magazine:

"Finally, at a little after 10 a.m., we did get into a train, still wondering where we were going, though in the meantime I had been told in confidence of three different destinations."<sup>60</sup>

The children, and particularly those who were not accompanied by their mothers, were just as perplexed. One former evacuee's memory of the experience seemed to encapsulate the bewilderment felt by many:

"Nobody knew where we were going. And we all got in the train and went to where we went. [...] We didn't know where

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<sup>59</sup> E A Loftus: "The Evacuation of Schools in Danger Areas", *Journal of Education*, Vol. 70, p.685

<sup>60</sup> Mitcham County School for Boys: *The Mitchamian*, Vol. 3, No.4 (1939), p.3

we were going at all, and all those children didn't know where we were when we got there."<sup>61</sup>

A woman who was evacuated as a small child remembered:

"I seemed to be in a world of my own. [...] I cowered in a corner seat by the window and didn't utter a word on the entire journey. [...] It was as if I had to accept this fate with a stiff upper lip and not question the reason why."<sup>62</sup>

Security precautions were carried to extremes in a few cases, as when prefects travelling with an East End Convent School were instructed to keep the blinds down in the train carriages even in daylight because no clues were to be given as to their destination.<sup>63</sup>

Evidence gathered from interviews with Sheffield evacuees suggests that although the party leaders were aware of their receiving districts, in general the children's parents were not informed. Nearly all interviewees emphatically stated that no-one knew their destination in advance: the only exception was an ex-evacuee whose aunt was head teacher and leader of her school party and had told her parents where she was going.<sup>64</sup>

Across Britain the exodus was a triumph of organisation - on the surface at least: the rehearsals had served their purpose. In all, some 1,473,391 children and adults in the priority classes were evacuated from Britain's largest and most vulnerable cities under this first official programme, including those who joined the scheme in the first few weeks after the outbreak of war. Of these, 826,959 were unaccompanied school

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<sup>61</sup> A Ross: "Children Becoming Historians: An Oral History Project in a Primary School", *Oral History*, Vol. 12, No.2 (1984) p.23

<sup>62</sup> M Cooper (ed): *In Our Lifetime: Memories of the Second World War 1939-1945*, p.7

<sup>63</sup> D E Johnson: *Exodus of Children*, pp.21,2

<sup>64</sup> Oral interview: Pamela Denniff, 16.9.94

children travelling in the care of over 80,000 teachers and volunteers, many of the teachers remaining with pupils in the reception areas.<sup>65</sup> Herbert Morrison, Leader of the LCC, while confessing disappointment at the figures, was impressed with “the quiet, orderly character of the whole business”.<sup>66</sup> Earl de la Warr, having witnessed the movement of some of the London children, said: “If arrangements at the other end for receiving the children are as good as at this end, it bodes well for the scheme.”<sup>67</sup> His optimism was to be disappointed.

In an operation of such magnitude there were bound to be delays and mistakes. Pupils and staff of Dulwich College Preparatory School had to wait for ten hours before even leaving their premises for the station. They did not arrive at their destination in Kent, less than fifty miles away, until more than twelve hours had elapsed from the time of assembly and, even then, the older pupils faced a three-mile walk to their camp billet while the smaller boys travelled in a sheep wagon.<sup>68</sup> Confusion reigned, too, as the LCC moved some its schools to reception areas in Essex along the Thames estuary, while at the same time the Essex authorities were arranging to send their own children away from this region, fearing that the Thames would attract enemy bombing.<sup>69</sup> The chaos experienced in the reception areas as a result of speeding up the departure of school parties from entraining stations will be dealt with in the next chapter.

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<sup>65</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.103

<sup>66</sup> *The Times*: 2.9.39, p.12

<sup>67</sup> *The Nottingham Evening Post*: 1.9.39, p.1

<sup>68</sup> N Longmate: *The Home Front*, p.14

<sup>69</sup> Jackson: *op. cit.*, p.12

During rehearsals it had become clear to organisers at the ‘sharp end’ of the operation that even in the capital the numbers reporting for evacuation were much lower than expected. The full extent of the problem was not immediately grasped by some authorities or the public at large, however.<sup>70</sup> Initially, confusing messages were published. *The Times* reported a figure of 3,000,000 mothers and children evacuated in the first three days.<sup>71</sup> In fact, less than half of those who had been catered for actually turned up. The editor of *Education* did not appreciate the situation either: immediately following the exodus he stated that the response was generally very good. Commenting favourably upon Manchester’s numbers, but wrongly crediting that city with an evacuation rate of 80% (official statistics later gave 69%),<sup>72</sup> the editor nevertheless correctly drew attention to Sheffield’s poor performance: “The feature here throughout was the unusually low percentage of parents wishing to have their children evacuated.”<sup>73</sup>

Organisers in London, noting the shortfall there, made a last-minute decision to streamline the process of evacuation by condensing the planned four-day programme into three days. This telescoping, though, meant that plans which had been so meticulously made over previous months were sacrificed to speed. Train and bus schedules had to undergo extensive and complex changes at impossibly short notice. Complicating things further, the new railway timetables had to be tailored to fit in with other priority groups using the network, such as troops and hospital patients. In order to

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<sup>70</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.102

<sup>71</sup> *The Times*: 4.9.39, p.5

<sup>72</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.550

<sup>73</sup> *Education*: No.1912, 1.9.39, p.194

avoid congestion on station platforms, children were loaded into waiting trains, often in haphazard fashion.<sup>74</sup>

Although the majority of London teachers did not know their expected destination, a few education authorities had made previous arrangements to keep school units together and to match them with similar schools in reception areas. Even where this had not happened, many head teachers had gone to great lengths to preserve their school and class identities to try to avoid stress and to ensure continuity of education on arrival. Despite this, many groups were now broken up and separated at entraining points, ending up in different parts of the country. Organisers in one North London school had carefully sorted children into groups: friends and siblings were to be kept together and escorts carried detailed registers about every child. In the speeding up process at the station, railway marshals split the school party into several different crocodiles, breaking the groups down many times before sending them on their way. To make matters worse, when they arrived in the reception areas the scholars were distributed over fifty square miles, providing immense difficulties for teachers trying to track them all down.<sup>75</sup>

Nor was the trouble confined to insensitive handling at departure points. Some school parties, having managed to preserve their identities until arrival at detraining stations, were hastily split up into several groups and children put onto buses which deposited them in scattered villages, quite separated from friends and teachers.<sup>76</sup> Similar

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<sup>74</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.107

<sup>75</sup> R Padley "The Exodus" in Padley & Cole: *op. cit.*, pp.39,40

<sup>76</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, pp.107,109

problems were encountered in the provinces. Sheffield did not escape, as the head teacher of Carbrook Council School records. Having arrived intact at its destination, his party was broken down and families divided up in several different villages, causing problems and frustration for teachers.”<sup>77</sup>

Nor did all problems arise from muddles at railway stations: many children travelled with their schools directly to the reception areas by bus and coach. Some of these sped away from the London area and disgorged their passengers in an apparently indiscriminate manner. An interviewee who travelled without siblings with her school by coach demonstrated the random nature of some operations:

“All ‘only’ children were told to get off at one stop. I got off, but because I was near the end of the queue and there were too many children, I had to get back on and ended up at Outwood [only twenty miles from home] with family groups - probably better in the long run.”<sup>78</sup>

One wonders at the logic of separating singletons from families before even reaching a distribution centre. No such problems appear to have arisen in the case of Sheffield, where the numbers of people travelling all the way by bus and coach were confined to those with health problems, and for whom special arrangements had been made for their reception.

For many evacuees the train journeys themselves were often less than satisfactory, especially for the London children who often had to travel very long distances, for example to Somerset and Devon, and were confined within the carriages for many

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<sup>77</sup> Log book: Carbrook Council Boys’ School, entry 1.9.39

<sup>78</sup> Oral interview: Joan Patterson, 18.8.92



hours without a break. Some trains lacked corridors and toilet facilities, which resulted in many small, tired travellers arriving in a very soiled, unhappy and unattractive state. One train-load of London evacuees, bound for Somerset but forced by calls of nature to stop at Wantage station in Berkshire, never got back on the train but took up residence instead in that reception zone.<sup>79</sup>

Most parents had supplied children with sandwiches, but others went hungry and many had nothing at all to drink throughout their journeys. The children had been forbidden to take drinks with them unless these were carried in vacuum flasks<sup>80</sup> which few families were able to supply. Jackson suggests that although the official reason for banning drinks was to avoid the dangers of broken glass, it was mainly to avoid toilet problems.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, the situation was little better a year later, as will be shown in Chapter Six.

In comparison with many other evacuees, Sheffield children were fortunate. The distances between the city and their reception areas in Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire were not great, so many of the indignities suffered by evacuees from London and other cities were avoided. Local newspapers described the journeys as cheerful: one likened the operation to “a gigantic Sunday School treat”,<sup>82</sup> while another asserted that the children found it easy to keep smiling because they were smartly turned out in new clothes hurriedly bought by their mothers for the evacuation.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.108

<sup>80</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 1.9.39, p.4

<sup>81</sup> Jackson: *op. cit.*, p.17

<sup>82</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 2.9.39, p.5

<sup>83</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 1.9.39, p.1

The behaviour of the children in the mass movement was almost unanimously praised - officially at least - but the mothers came in for much censure, even at this early stage, though one reporter at least showed some insight:

“Where the children were steady, cheerful and responsive, the mothers were unstable, dejected and frequently antagonistic. [...] [It] may be that the worst cases caught the eyes of the critics.”<sup>84</sup>

It was not long, however, before the conduct of evacuees in general was put under greater scrutiny and became the subject of bitter complaint: this will be dealt with in Chapter Four.

Evacuees were scheduled to be dispersed over a wide area of England and Wales: under ‘Pied Piper’ the LCC alone sent school children to 476 billeting authorities and seventy-three education authorities spread across an area south of a line drawn roughly from Land’s End to the Wash<sup>85</sup> where the survey carried out in the previous February had identified a large surplus of accommodation; most Liverpool and Manchester children went to Wales. While getting the thousands of evacuees away from perceived danger had necessarily been the chief preoccupation of the programme, speeding up the entraining process at departure points had an unfortunate knock-on effect in some of these reception zones.

One outcome of the escalation was that billeting officers who were awaiting particular categories of refugees now found themselves having to deal with quite unexpected groups; for example, secondary school boys were deposited at centres awaiting mothers

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<sup>84</sup> *Education*: No. 1913, 8.9.39, p.213

<sup>85</sup> J Macnicol, “The effect of the evacuation of schoolchildren on official attitudes to State intervention” in H L Smith (ed): *War and Social Change: British Society in the Second World War*, p.6

with young children, and pregnant women arrived where unaccompanied children were expected.<sup>86</sup> Many country householders, already reluctant to open their homes to strangers, were confused, disappointed and even disgruntled when they did not get the evacuees they had expected. In short, accelerating the process in this way was a recipe for disaster.

Other problems for officials in receiving districts were caused by late changes in zoning. When evacuation zones were extended under Plan Three, some newly-included areas were thrown into confusion. O'Leary states that because Dagenham (a heavy industrial area, inexplicably omitted from earlier Plans) was added to the programme very late in the day, local officials did not receive any official circulars or proper instructions, with the result that very little preliminary work had been done when evacuation took place by boat a day early, on 31 August 1939. Reception authorities in East Anglia were quite unprepared for the large numbers arriving there, and due to a shortage of beds, some evacuees had to sleep for four nights on straw covered by sacking on schoolroom floors, being fed on a diet of milk, apples and cheese for this period.<sup>87</sup>

Similarly, some of Nottingham's inner-city areas had not been scheduled for evacuation until July, after strong representations had been made to the government. This city's teachers were not recalled from their holidays, and no rehearsals took place because officials were not notified of the reception areas allotted to them until days after the

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<sup>86</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, pp.107-09

<sup>87</sup> J O'Leary "Dagenham", in Padley & Cole: *op. cit.*, p.220

countrywide exodus had begun.<sup>88</sup> Eventually, the evacuation programme was hurriedly put into operation a week late and Nottingham city children were moved into many of the same areas as were allocated to Sheffield.<sup>89</sup> Fortunately, the problem of billeting was not so great here, because the late arrivals (only about half of those expected) were able to take up the many places left unfilled by those Sheffield children who had registered but did not report for evacuation.

It will be seen that although, in the main, the departure of children and priority classes could be counted a successful achievement, the arrival of the evacuees in the reception areas was another matter altogether. Due to telescoping of timetables, in a few cases all the efforts to prepare were wasted because no evacuees appeared, while in others the wrong groups arrived. In some areas there was chaotic pressure as numbers swamped the available resources.<sup>90</sup> These factors may have undermined the goodwill so necessary to the success of the scheme and even prejudiced some householders against those evacuees who were billeted upon them. Stemming from this, it might be argued that evacuees who sensed they were not welcome were more likely to be among the first to return home.

The apparent folly of speeding up the entraining process and telescoping plans painstakingly prepared for a four-day exodus into the space of three days must be seen in its contemporary context, however. Plans had necessarily been based on assumptions of numbers expected to travel. As far fewer people actually reported for evacuation the

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<sup>88</sup> *The Nottingham Evening Post*: 25.8.39, p.5

<sup>89</sup> Nottinghamshire Education Committee: *Minutes for Year Ended 31.7.40*, p.7

<sup>90</sup> F le Gros Clark & R W Toms: *Evacuation: Failure or Reform*, p.5

decision to drastically escalate timetables was based on the expectation of immediate and devastating aerial bombardment of the capital and other centres of industrial importance on the outbreak of war. It was perceived to be a race against time to get people away from danger to safer areas. In the event, of course, air raids did not materialise until several months later - a fact which could not be known at the time.

Despite all the difficulties encountered, however, not one casualty or serious accident was reported, and in the main the exodus proceeded smoothly.<sup>91</sup> This was a notable achievement in an operation of such magnitude, particularly considering the many unknown factors and *ad hoc* arrangements. It is true that evacuation authorities were dismayed to find that more than half of those in the priority classes remained behind in areas defined as dangerous:<sup>92</sup> nevertheless, had they been faced with the numbers originally expected, the outcome might not have been so successful.

When statistics were gathered in, it became clear that across England there were wide differences in numbers of school children who came forward for evacuation. Best results came from some of the northern counties, with the largest proportions being sent from Manchester and Salford, Newcastle and Gateshead, Liverpool and other Merseyside districts. Less successful were Birmingham and Nottingham. Almost the worst was Sheffield, with 15% (see Appendix 6): only Rotherham, which had been designated an evacuation area late, sent fewer of its eligible children away.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.101

<sup>92</sup> A D K Owen: "The Great Evacuation", *Political Quarterly* Vol. 11 (1940) p.34

<sup>93</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.550

As for London, at the height of the Munich Crisis the LCC had reported 83% of eligible children registered for evacuation.<sup>94</sup> Six months later, in March 1939, the figure had dropped to 69%<sup>95</sup> - a warning of the growing resistance of the public to evacuation. Six months after that, under Operation 'Pied Piper' in September 1939, the figure actually evacuated from London was only 49%.<sup>96</sup>

By May 1939 Sheffield authorities had received only 18,392 definite requests for evacuation out of an estimated total of 60,000 women, children and other priority classes.<sup>97</sup> On 22 August as tension was building nationally (but went unreported in Sheffield newspapers) the number of registrations had increased to 19,526, reaching a maximum of 20,182 by the end of the month as rehearsals were under way and a house-to-house census was undertaken in response to a request by the Ministry of Health to encourage more people to come forward.<sup>98</sup> At most, therefore, only one third of those in priority classes in the evacuable parts of Sheffield had signalled any desire to move out of the danger areas. As has been seen, the local authority decreed that arrangements would have to go ahead for the full number of possible evacuees to travel and to be billeted in the reception areas.<sup>99</sup> In the event just 8,757 people travelled on the first two days, of whom 5,093 were unaccompanied school children. A further 245 children were evacuated at the end of October - a total of a mere 5,338 out of an estimated 30,000 children in the evacuation zones of Sheffield.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.34

<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*, p.44

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*, p.55

<sup>97</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Report 1939/40*, p.70

<sup>98</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 29.8.39, p.4

<sup>99</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Annual Report of School Medical Officer 1939*, pp.39,40

<sup>100</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Survey April 1939 - March 1947*, p.4

Sheffield's poor turn-out was noticed and taken up by the national press. Five weeks after the exodus, when many of those who had left the city had already returned, *The Manchester Guardian* viewed the situation seriously:

“[...] the local education committee has 55,000 children on its hands, 25,000 of whom ought not to be in the city at all. It might be said in the crude Whitehall manner that these 25,000, having refused to heed the voice of authority, are contumacious - or rather, the outward and visible signs of parental contumacy, - and therefore not entitled to further consideration.”<sup>101</sup>

One Sheffield head teacher, noting the low turn-out, stated that, in his view, hitherto reluctant parents would soon let their children join those in the reception areas when they realised how well they were looked after. He also foresaw that in the event of air raids the parents would be “clamouring for their children to be taken out of the danger zone.”<sup>102</sup> This prediction was, however, over-optimistic, as will be evident in ensuing chapters of this thesis.

Why was the response so good in some places and yet so poor in others - in particular, Sheffield? Although many reasons may be given for the discrepancies between one evacuating area and another, it is difficult to place them in any particular order of importance. Geographical location appears to have been irrelevant to Sheffield's abysmal showing. Leeds, only forty miles to the north of the city, was more than twice as successful with 33% unaccompanied children leaving that city: Manchester, an equal distance to the west, evacuated 69%, while Salford, not much further away, recorded the highest figure in the country with 76%.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*: 4.9.39, p.4

<sup>102</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 28.8.39, p.6

<sup>103</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.550

Some of the differences may be attributed to attitudes of local authorities and the success or otherwise of publicity in localities. Some councils were both more persuasive and more efficient than others. Salford officials, for example, kept parents informed and carried out a very active campaign in the months leading up to evacuation. In addition, police cars toured the streets after the first main exodus in an attempt to persuade parents whose children remained in the area to register them for evacuation, with some success.<sup>104</sup> Again, in Newcastle, where 71% of eligible unaccompanied children were evacuated,<sup>105</sup> meticulous plans had been co-ordinated with the designated receiving areas and publicised from September 1938 right up to the eve of war. By this time Newcastle's receiving areas were informed of all schools expected, including the size and even the nature of the catchment areas.<sup>106</sup>

In other authorities, on the other hand, local officials, teachers and even newspaper editors were less encouraging - even negative - in communications with the public, or reluctant to accept government direction regarding reception areas. The previous chapter showed that Sheffield officials had made their own plans to send children into selected areas of Derbyshire with which parents were familiar. When, in 1939, government planners decreed instead that the city's children were to go to the Lindsey, and later the Kesteven areas of Lincolnshire. Ritchie Calder held that parents balked at these new areas - first, because they considered them farther from home than the villages of North Derbyshire and second, because their children would be nearer to the

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<sup>104</sup> R Padley "The Exodus" in Padley & Cole: *op. cit.*, pp.45-49

<sup>105</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.550

<sup>106</sup> A M Preston "The Evacuation of Schoolchildren from Newcastle upon Tyne, 1939-1942 . . .", *History of Education*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (1989), pp.231,241



enemy,<sup>107</sup> a view endorsed by at least one Sheffield councillor.<sup>108</sup> Be that as it may, the strong opposition expressed by Lincolnshire people and equally vigorous response of Sheffield people following the government's decision (shown in Chapter One) did nothing to boost confidence in the scheme. Reaction was clearly demonstrated by the low response to registration, which did not increase appreciably even when Sheffield people were later assigned to other reception areas in Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire.<sup>109</sup> Ritchie Calder contended that much of Sheffield's failure could be attributed to muddled administration,<sup>110</sup> and it is difficult to argue with this view.

Sheffield's community leaders had never shown much enthusiasm for the official scheme, yet in August, during rehearsals for the exodus, the Chairman of Sheffield Education Committee blamed the government for parents' unwillingness to let their children go away and asserted that if the Ministry of Health had asked education authorities to make arrangements on their own initiative the results would have been more satisfactory.<sup>111</sup> The City Fathers, having already publicly expressed their own reluctance with regard to evacuation, had hardly encouraged an enthusiastic response from citizens, as has been seen.

The press also played its part in determining public attitudes. While the two leading Sheffield newspapers referred to other civil defence matters in the two months preceding the outbreak of war, little mention was made of evacuation in general, and

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<sup>107</sup> R Calder, "The School Child" in Padley & Cole: *op. cit.*, p.145

<sup>108</sup> Councillor Asbury, quoted in *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 29.10.38, p.12

<sup>109</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 29.3.39, p.7

<sup>110</sup> R Calder, "The School Child" in Padley & Cole: *op. cit.*, p.145

<sup>111</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 29.8.39, p.4

none at all of the contingency plans for removal of the city's children in case of emergency. Not until 24 August, when national emergency legislation plans were being enacted, was minor attention given to the subject on an inside page of *The Sheffield Star*. Even then, despite the above-mentioned re-location of official reception areas which had taken place several months previously, after a long period of public wrangling, parents must have been confused to read:

“There is, of course, a scheme for the evacuation of Sheffield children from schools in the more densely populated areas, the reception areas for Sheffield including parts of Derbyshire and Lincolnshire.”<sup>112</sup>

The next day, twenty-four hours after the government order recalling teachers from holiday, the same publication again relegated the important information to the inside pages under the headline "City Teachers to Report Tomorrow", no doubt seeking to reassure the public by stating that the instruction was simply a precautionary measure in order to ensure that teachers were back at school and ready to carry out evacuation orders if necessary.<sup>113</sup> Even in its report on the first day of evacuation, *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent* relegated its coverage of this unprecedented and momentous event in the history of the city to the inside pages of the paper and seemed to have made a random guess of 2,000 children having evacuated.<sup>114</sup>

It may be argued, too, that teachers in Sheffield could have exerted more influence on public opinion through meetings with parents. Indeed, some such meetings were recorded in log books in the spring of 1939 and were well attended. In March the

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<sup>112</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 24.8.39, p.7

<sup>113</sup> *ibid.*, 25.8.39, p.7

<sup>114</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 2.9.39, p.5

parents of pupils at St Barnabas School had met to have the evacuation scheme explained to them. In the same month the three departments of Owler Lane Council School had mustered more than five hundred parents, who asked the head teacher to submit suggestions and questions to the Education Committee. (There is, unfortunately, no record of the Committee's response.)<sup>115</sup> But it appears that in some schools no meetings had taken place at all. While some parents responded to the call to evacuate their children and expressed confidence that their teachers would look after them, others complained that they had not been consulted.<sup>116</sup> No evidence of any really positive lead from Sheffield teachers has been found during the course of this research. On the contrary, one head teacher of an inner-city Sheffield school expressed his (rather disparaging) view:

“You can understand a mother's reluctance, besides which most of them are not highly imaginative and are unable to realise what an air raid would be.”<sup>117</sup>

Several of the school log books consulted carry very little reference to, or even no mention at all of the events of what must have been one of the most momentous weeks in educational history. One head teacher gave two or three lines to the matter, while at the same time devoting more than two whole pages to the annual report of the school examination in biblical knowledge.<sup>118</sup> Arguably this was an indication of some teachers' perception of the comparative importance of evacuation, which may have been conveyed to the parents and pupils of the school.

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<sup>115</sup> Log books: St Barnabas (Cecil Road) School, entry 7.3.39; Owler Lane Council Intermediate School, entry 9.3.39

<sup>116</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 26.8.39, p.5

<sup>117</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 28.9.39, p.6

<sup>118</sup> Log Book: Carbrook Council Boys' School, entry 29.8.39

Le Gros Clark suggested that two significant factors governing public response were (a) the amount of publicity given to the scheme, and (b) the popular estimate of vulnerability.<sup>119</sup> But also important was the view that a large portion of the British population simply did not believe there would be any air raids in the event of war, or even that war was imminent;<sup>120</sup> and they may have felt vindicated by such press statements as the following editorial, made on the day before evacuation and three days before the outbreak of war:

“This decision [to evacuate children] does not mean that there is any disposition to believe that war is any more inevitable now than it has been hitherto. Very many practicable steps have had to be taken in these troublous times and this should be looked upon simply as another one of them.”<sup>121</sup>

Nor could all of the indifference be put down to the example set by local community leaders, newspaper editors and teachers. It could be argued that the government itself played a part, albeit inadvertently. Only twenty-four hours before the exodus took place, a joint communiqué issued by the Minister of Health and the Secretary of State for Scotland stated: “Evacuation [...] is being undertaken as a precautionary measure in view of the prolongation of the period of tension.”<sup>122</sup> The intention may well have been to reassure the public and avoid panic, but it may be said that the full seriousness of the situation was not conveyed at a crucial time.

It could also be argued that the government had some responsibility for another factor which affected the turn-out. A large majority of official evacuees came from inner-city

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<sup>119</sup> Le Gros Clark & Toms: *op. cit.*, p.4

<sup>120</sup> Mass Observation File 942, p.4

<sup>121</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 31.8.39, p.6

<sup>122</sup> *ibid.*, 26.8.39, p.5

areas, where poverty was rife and the lack of any respectable clothing held some children back. Local authorities' attempts to alleviate the situation were severely hampered by the reluctance of the Treasury to approve an allowance to cover footwear and clothing for the most needy children. Permission was finally given for £1 to be spent for every two hundred necessitous children, with the proviso that no publicity should be given to the assistance. Arguably it was a case of 'too little, too late' for many children because the relevant circular did not arrive in many localities until 28 August - just four days before evacuation took place.<sup>123</sup> The lateness in approving the meagre allowance, and the secrecy surrounding it, were factors which surely inhibited the success of the scheme.

Even if their children did not qualify as necessitous, parents may well have been daunted by the list of clothing which they were expected to provide. Although officials had limited the requirements to what seemed, to them, only what was reasonable and necessary, the demands were quite beyond the pocket of many parents, especially those with large families. The list was formidable: a change of under-clothing, night clothing, house shoes or plimsolls, spare stockings or socks, tooth brush, comb, towel, handkerchiefs, soap and face flannel, knife, fork and spoon. The children were to wear a warm coat and/or mackintosh and their thickest and warmest footwear.<sup>124</sup> Many mothers simply could not afford to fulfil these demands, and although many of those who reported for evacuation did not have all of the items stipulated, some parents were too proud to allow their children to go away without the items.

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<sup>123</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.92

<sup>124</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 1.9.39, p.4

Newcastle authorities had understood the problem early on and had made some effort to alleviate it: from April onwards school children had been able to make garments in needlework lessons which the mothers were able to buy cheaply. The Director of Education for that city had written to the Ministry of Health in May stating his opinion that lack of appropriate clothing and footwear would adversely affect the evacuation scheme.<sup>125</sup> Despite the relatively high number of children reporting for evacuation in his area, in his report on the first day of evacuation the Director again drew attention to the number of children in need of boots and clothing:

“Friday was the worst possible day that could be chosen for evacuation as it is pay-day here. If the children had gone tomorrow, there would have been fewer badly equipped, and in some schools there would have been a higher turn-out.”<sup>126</sup>

It is difficult to know whether this situation also applied to Sheffield, for the only public comments on the children’s clothing seem to have been a few lines in local newspapers, and these were complimentary:

“A notable feature was the smartness with which the children were turned out. At a sacrifice in many cases, parents had fitted them up with new coats, suits and frocks.”<sup>127</sup>

Domestic economics may have played another part in the situation. For the very poor, the fear of losing the small amount of child allowance paid by the Unemployment Assistance Board could also have been a strong factor deterring parents from permitting their children to go, despite the fact that household expenses may have been somewhat reduced by the children’s absence. Often too, there was a reluctance to lose touch with

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<sup>125</sup> Preston: *op. cit.*, p.233

<sup>126</sup> PRO.HLG.7/73

<sup>127</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 2.9.39, p.5

family help or local charity funds.<sup>128</sup> Uncertainty about financial aspects of evacuation, such as parental contributions (which were not settled until October), also inhibited many people from sending their children away.

However, economic factors did not account entirely for the low turn-out. Parents blocked the evacuation scheme for their own reasons. It has been seen that in every danger zone throughout the country there were those who panicked at the last moment and took their children's names off the registration lists.<sup>129</sup> In some cases parents pleaded at a late stage in the proceedings that the child was ill or delicate; in others that the child was reluctant to leave its family. But a Liverpool University report suggested that some of these last-minute illnesses of children could have been manifestations of this unwillingness to be separated.<sup>130</sup>

Boyd asserted that parents with one or two children were more anxious about standards of care in foster homes and less willing to part with them than those with large families, and many 'only children' were kept at home.<sup>131</sup> However, this did not always apply, for in large and poor families many older children took an active part in child care and were needed at home. This was particularly so in cases where fathers were unemployed and the family depended upon the mother going out to work.

But arguably the chief cause for the shortfall was one which had been largely overlooked by the architects of the evacuation scheme: it was the matter of home ties.

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<sup>128</sup> Owen: *op. cit.*, p.36

<sup>129</sup> Davis Jr: *op. cit.*, p.54

<sup>130</sup> Owen: *op. cit.*, p.36

<sup>131</sup> W Boyd: *Evacuation in Scotland: A Record of Events and Experiments*, p.84

When it came to the point of parting with their children, thousands of parents across the country shrank from the prospect. The Liverpool University investigation (mentioned above) found that 38% of parents who refused to send their children away gave as their reason that they could not bear the separation.<sup>132</sup> In addition, there was the often-stated view that it was better for the family to stay together and die than to be split up. To quote a Sheffield interviewee who was ten years old at the outbreak of war:

“My mother nearly let me go, but my father couldn’t bear to have the family parted. He said we should all stick together and stay at home. If a bomb got us we’d all go together.”<sup>133</sup>

In some reception areas the shortfall in numbers considerably eased problems of billeting, for private evacuees flooding into these regions had already taken up places allocated for the government scheme.<sup>134</sup> There were particularly high rates of private evacuation to south-west England and to Wales: the problem was not so great in the midlands and the north. By the end of September the reception areas of Devonshire alone, excluding neutral zones of that county, had taken in approximately 71,800 private evacuees, while official evacuees accounted for only 10,440. In the same period Wales received 120,000 private evacuees and 56,000 official refugees.<sup>135</sup>

Titmuss contended that there was no panic rush to get out of the capital when the government evacuation scheme began, but a steady stream of Londoners and other urban dwellers did make their own arrangements and left the cities quickly, either by

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<sup>132</sup> Owen: *op. cit.*, p.36

<sup>133</sup> Oral interview: Jean Norton, 21.2.96

<sup>134</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.106

<sup>135</sup> *ibid.*, p.547



rail or road.<sup>136</sup> No doubt many of these unofficial evacuees went to relatives and others had already made arrangements and booked lodgings in private houses, boarding houses and hotels in country areas and seaside towns. *The Times* reported that 5,000 people had left Southampton by ship for America in the last two days of August.<sup>137</sup> In addition, business firms, nursing homes, families and some schools and other institutions had previously made their own plans to evacuate their staffs, patients and students from vulnerable areas. Some had been moving out through the summer months and others were galvanised into action by the implementation of the government scheme.<sup>138</sup> Vera Brittain, in her diary for 26 August 1939, noted:

“[...] the stream of traffic along the road - buses full of troops, long distance ‘Relief’ buses carrying civilians, small cars filled with luggage, cots and prams, large furniture removal vans.”<sup>139</sup>

The extent of this private movement could not be known at the time: because there was no need for people to inform the authorities of their movements, no accurate record could be kept.<sup>140</sup> indeed, it was not until 1944 that a historical analysis was made.<sup>141</sup> Working on figures obtained from the reception areas, Titmuss suggested that, at a conservative estimate, 1,808,300 people evacuated themselves privately from areas of perceived danger into reception areas at the outbreak of war. This figure may well have reached 2,000,000, and does not include those who moved into areas which were classified as neutral.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.90

<sup>137</sup> *The Times*: 1.9.39, p.11

<sup>138</sup> O’Brien: *op. cit.*, p.285

<sup>139</sup> A Bishop & Y A Bennett (eds): *Wartime Chronicle: Vera Brittain's Diary 1939-1945*, p.25

<sup>140</sup> T Harrison: *Living Through the Blitz*, p.32

<sup>141</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.102

<sup>142</sup> *ibid.*, p.546

Immediately after the first exodus parents in many cities requested a second chance to evacuate their children. Once war had been declared, they may have been persuaded of the need to get them out of the cities. But they may also have been influenced by the fact that, with the schools expected to be closed in the danger areas for the duration of the war, their children were without proper schooling. Although Sheffield's Assistant Education Officer had been quick off the mark and instituted a Home Education Service within days of the exodus, in its early stages the best that could be arranged was home teaching on a limited scale. In London and many other cities there was no prospect of any education at all.<sup>143</sup>

In response to parents' requests, the Ministry of Health authorised planning for another estimated 35,000 children to be evacuated and to link up with their school units already in the receiving districts, as and when individual evacuating and receiving areas could co-ordinate their arrangements.<sup>144</sup> Accordingly, the Board of Education issued instructions for schools to take further registrations of prospective evacuees on 11 and 12 September for a possible second movement to take place at the end of October. The offer applied only to school children and not to mothers with children under school age or expectant mothers.<sup>145</sup>

The response in Sheffield was once again disappointing, however: by mid-morning on 11 September not one child had arrived at Bow Council School or Cathedral School,<sup>146</sup> while at Carbrook Council School, where 1,000 children were on the roll at the

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<sup>143</sup> *Education*: No. 1915, 22.9.39, p.260

<sup>144</sup> *ibid.*, No. 1917, 6.10.39, p.295

<sup>145</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 11.9.39, p.5

<sup>146</sup> Hardy: *op. cit.*, p.13

beginning of term and less than a fifth had evacuated already, only eleven arrived for registration and two of those subsequently dropped out.<sup>147</sup> A total of six hundred and eighty names had been taken from all the city's evacuable schools in the period between the first exodus and the new registration dates. However, after forms were sent to parents, inviting them to give a definite undertaking that these children would be evacuated if arrangements were made, only four hundred of them agreed to this.<sup>148</sup> As it turned out, a mere 245 were evacuated on 26 October 1939.<sup>149</sup> To make matters worse, 55% of those who had been evacuated at the beginning of September had already returned home.<sup>150</sup>

In the movement of 1,500,000 people under the government evacuation scheme, (dubbed by at least one reporter as "The Bible Exodus Completely Dwarfed",<sup>151</sup>) the absence of any casualties indicated that planning and rehearsals had paid off - despite the problems brought about by the shortfall in numbers and consequent last-minute re-organisation of arrangements. Those who did report for evacuation followed their instructions and were accompanied by 40,000 teachers and escorts, many of whom stayed on in the reception areas. 127,000 members of the Women's Voluntary Service, together with volunteers from the Red Cross, St John's Ambulance and other organisations helped in the transfer of the evacuees from their homes in the cities to billets in the country.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Log book: Carbrook Council Infants' School, entry 26.10.39

<sup>148</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 3.10.39, p.1

<sup>149</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Annual Report of School Medical Officer 1939*, p.41

<sup>150</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 24.10.39, p.10

<sup>151</sup> *The Nottingham Evening Post*: 1.9.39 p.1

<sup>152</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.106

At least the Minister of Health demonstrated his appreciation of the fact that there was more to the operation of the evacuation scheme than just the moving. While Herbert Morrison, referring to the London area, had described the operation as “simply magnificent”, Walter Elliot warned:

“The first bit of the task is over. The move has been made. That was the work of the organisation. Now we have to tackle the second half - that is, the adjustment and settling in. That is infinitely important and can be done by no organisation. It has to be done by the people themselves; and only the goodwill and imagination of the newcomers can really make it succeed.”<sup>153</sup>

But he under-estimated the contribution required of the householders, as will be seen in ensuing chapters of this work.

In the administrative sense and in terms of transportation there appears to be no doubt that this vast operation was a triumph. But in terms of persuading people to leave areas of perceived danger and, what is more, to stay in the safety of reception areas, it will be seen that the government evacuation scheme was a demonstrable failure. As Isaacs declared, the neglect of human feeling, family ties and personal issues was to put in jeopardy a scheme which was voluntary, and therefore largely relied for its success upon gaining the confidence of the people.<sup>154</sup> This, unfortunately, the authorities had signally failed to do.

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<sup>153</sup> *Education*: No. 1913, 8.9.39, p.213

<sup>154</sup> S Isaacs (ed): *The Cambridge Evacuation Survey*, p.10

## CHAPTER THREE

### ARRIVAL

After the first day's evacuation *The Times* quoted Herbert Morrison, Leader of London County Council:

“The reception in various districts of the evacuated school children was carried out with the same efficiency that characterised the departures. [...] There was no confusion.”<sup>1</sup>

Two days later, however, the newspaper acknowledged that not quite everything had gone according to plan. Although claiming that over 3,000,000 people had been safely evacuated under the government scheme (an over-estimate), the article admitted: “One or two trains arrived at the wrong destinations”<sup>2</sup> - a somewhat misleading underestimate of the chaos which had really occurred in the reception areas.

It has already been seen that the main preoccupation of those who planned Operation ‘Pied Piper’ in 1939 was to get people away quickly and unharmed from vulnerable areas. That objective had certainly been achieved. But what had not been foreseen by officials who packed the evacuees into trains at departure points was the widespread confusion which would reign in the reception areas as a result of their last-minute telescoping of railway timetables. In their efforts to speed up the operation, they had unwittingly contributed to countless subsequent problems in receiving districts, and it was several days before matters were sorted out.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 2.9.39, p.12

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, 4.9.39, p.5

There were wide differences in the experiences of the various reception areas but, initial arrangements in many provincial districts were unquestionably chaotic in the first days of September. Due to the shortfall in numbers reporting for evacuation, very few centres received their predicted quotas: sometimes no-one arrived at reception points or, what was worse, far greater numbers than anticipated swamped some areas.<sup>3</sup> Under the official scheme Cornwall, for example, received only 3% of its allotment (though vast numbers of private evacuees), but in the counties of Berkshire, Cumberland, Huntingdonshire, Sussex and Westmorland around 50% of those expected arrived. There appeared to be no geographical pattern in this distribution - for instance, it is interesting to note that while Suffolk East received a record 59% of those expected, the neighbouring zone of Suffolk West received only 38% (see Appendix 7).<sup>4</sup>

In addition, the composition of groups who disembarked at the numerous country stations was often entirely different from those expected, as has been seen in Chapter Two. These changes of categories for particular areas caused considerable trouble for receiving authorities and rendered obsolete many carefully prepared plans that had been made for billeting the refugees. It was especially difficult where large numbers of women with small children arrived unexpectedly, for these were the hardest of all to accommodate: householders did not want to share their homes with adults, and there were not nearly enough vacant houses to cater for all the families.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> R M Titmuss: *Problems of Social Policy: History of the Second World War*, p.106

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p.553; Appendix 7

<sup>5</sup> F Le Gros Clark & R W Toms: *Evacuation: Failure or Reform*, p.5

Because the first requirement was for accommodation, the object was to transfer incoming refugees to a central point for refreshment and then despatch them quickly, supplied with basic rations for one day, to billets. The system often worked well in those cases where the predicted numbers and categories had already been known and were actually received. In some instances, considerable care had been taken to allocate children to homes prior to arrival, and where this happened the evacuees went off in an orderly manner with their hostesses. But this was not the position universally, and a much more haphazard allocation of children to householders was likely to take place, as will be seen.

Responsibility for the safe conduct of the evacuees to their billets rested with the Billeting Sub-Committees in each separate area.<sup>6</sup> It was of paramount importance to get all the refugees housed before nightfall on the day of arrival and the procedures used to attain that goal varied from area to area. In some, billeting officers were well organised and had carried out detailed preparations; the machinery was in place so that they could cope even where the incoming parties were different from those expected. But in other areas arrangements had not been completed by the time evacuation began.

The inaction of some authorities may have been encouraged by the unwillingness of Whitehall to guarantee (however justified by events) that particular parties would arrive at specific destinations: they could argue that plans could not be made with incomplete information. Cole made the point, already stated in the Introduction to this thesis, that the architects of the scheme were, in the main, “military, male and middle-class”.

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<sup>6</sup> *The Nottingham Evening Post*, 1.9.39, p.7

Numbers of evacuees, it seemed, were more important to them than the individuals who made up the parties.<sup>7</sup> In Titmuss's view, the fact that there were only four female inspectors in the Ministry of Health at the time of the first evacuation may have significantly contributed to the failure to appreciate the conditions in which the women and children would arrive and to provide adequate facilities for them,<sup>8</sup> and it is hard to argue with this.

It may also be significant that most organisers and all billeting officers in the first years of evacuation were willing but unpaid amateurs. Some, it is true, possessed valuable experience and applied this successfully to the tasks in hand; but others, albeit well-intentioned, were woefully lacking in the organisational skills so necessary for an undertaking of such magnitude and complexity. As the months passed and the task of billeting became more complex, the posts of chief billeting officers eventually became salaried, but their assistants remained volunteers.<sup>9</sup>

Arguably an even more important reason for the unpreparedness of some provincial districts, however, was the ban on advance expenditure which had been imposed by the Treasury on receiving authorities until a very late stage in the programme. Even though local authorities had made many requests to be allowed to spend money on preparing hostels and maternity homes, and to purchase vital equipment such as bedding and waterproof sheets, permission had not been granted until six days prior to the declaration of war.<sup>10</sup> The Ministry of Health had not even ordered mackintosh overlays

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<sup>7</sup> R Padley & M Cole (eds): *Evacuation Survey*, p.4

<sup>8</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.110

<sup>9</sup> T L Crosby: *The Impact of Civilian Evacuation in the Second World War*, p.31

<sup>10</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.110



(those most necessary of items, as events were to show) until May 1939 and very few had been delivered by the outbreak of war.<sup>11</sup> Already acute problems of shortages of clothing, blankets and mattresses were exacerbated by the muddles, especially in those areas where overcrowding took place.

On the eve of war local officials in Nottinghamshire, getting ready to receive Sheffield children, were still waiting for supplies of bedding at the twenty distribution points which had been established. In the case of Southwell, for example, as late as 30 August the Clerk to the Rural District Council reported:

“[...] the Government are not yet in a position to supply us with the extra mattresses and blankets that are required. [...] there has been a tremendous call for such things.”<sup>12</sup>

Here, public appeals for donations were being made even as the refugees were arriving in reception areas.<sup>13</sup>

Leicestershire local authorities, also preparing for Sheffield refugees, carried in the local press similar requests for gifts of bedding.<sup>14</sup> At this late stage, members of women's and youth organisations came forward to offer their services in knitting blanket squares and making clothing collections as well as in washing and mending for unaccompanied children.<sup>15</sup>

Pleas were made in the evacuating areas too: the local organiser of the Women's Voluntary Service appealed to the Sheffield public to give any spare blankets or to knit

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<sup>11</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.121

<sup>12</sup> *The Newark Advertiser*: 30.8.39 p.6

<sup>13</sup> *The Eastwood & Kimberley Advertiser*: 1.9.39, p.3

<sup>14</sup> *The Loughborough & Shepshed Echo*: 1.9.39, p.7

<sup>15</sup> *The Eastwood & Kimberley Advertiser*: 1.9.39, p.3

woollen squares. Strangely, perhaps, she added: "Membership of the WVS is not essential for those who help us in this way."<sup>16</sup> Local women, whether members or not, responded to the call and by the end of September 1,000 blankets had been sent to the reception areas for the city's evacuees.<sup>17</sup> A study of contemporary local newspapers has shown that the crisis continued for several weeks into the autumn.

When many of the meticulous plans for the transportation of the children were undone by telescoping timetables, it was not those responsible for the speeding-up process who picked up the pieces at the reception end, but teachers and volunteers such as the WVS, who had to cope with finding billets for those left at the end of the day. Weitzman's assertion that teachers' help in the evacuation programme was crucial to its success<sup>18</sup> is undoubtedly correct. On the other hand, her assumption that they unanimously co-operated throughout the operation is not wholly supported by Graves, reporting their role in the reception centres:

"Some of the teachers of the evacuated schools helped gallantly. [...] Others considered that their own social status would be irretrievably impaired if they gave any practical help in an emergency, and acted accordingly."<sup>19</sup>

The task facing officials in the receiving areas was enormous as parties of evacuees arrived at the distribution centres. Officials had been supplied with Warrants of Appointment and detailed instructions on procedure, together with lists of accommodation and books of billeting forms to be completed for each evacuee. All the

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<sup>16</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 26.8.39, p.4

<sup>17</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 30.9.39, p.5

<sup>18</sup> PRO.ED.138/49

<sup>19</sup> C Graves: *Women in Green*: p.34

reception authorities should have been in possession of details of billeting allowances payable for each category of evacuees - but as this had not been despatched until the last day of August,<sup>20</sup> it is likely that not all Chief Billeting Officers had received this information in time, which may have deterred some prospective hosts from coming forward.

Emergency rations, which had been delivered to the reception areas several weeks previously and kept in storage, were taken out and packed into carrier bags. Each bag contained a tin of corned beef and two of condensed milk, together with a packet of biscuits and a bar of chocolate, ready to be issued to every evacuee as they left the distribution centres for their billets.<sup>21</sup> As the newcomers arrived at the centres refreshments had to be provided and particulars of each evacuee noted down. Once accommodation had been arranged, billeting forms had to be made out, rations issued and the evacuees despatched, the vast majority to private homes.

Many organisations, including the WVS, the Red Cross and the St John Ambulance Brigade, had provided escorts to assist in the transfer of the evacuees from their homes in industrial towns and cities. Upon arrival in the country much of the work of initial reception, billeting and after-care fell upon these same volunteers. Together with members of Women's Institutes and others acting either independently or under the aegis of many different voluntary bodies, the women helped at railheads in the country and were particularly needed at the distribution centres where they provided

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<sup>20</sup> *The Loughborough & Shepshed Echo*: 1.9.39 p.7

<sup>21</sup> *The Mansfield Reporter*, 8.9.39, p.2

refreshments and assisted in allocating and escorting the evacuees to billets.<sup>22</sup> As Graves recorded in his account of the contribution of the WVS:

“It was not easy to disentangle hundreds of tired, sick, nervous children and their numerous parcels from the general mêlée and deliver them at their billets in a state of body and mind which promised well for future relations with the foster parents; yet more of the success of the billeting depended upon the personality of the helpers at the dispersal points than perhaps any of them realised at the time.”<sup>23</sup>

The government had stated all along that although evacuation was to be voluntary, reception and billeting of refugees would be compulsory. However true in theory, this did not always turn out to be the case in practice. Enforcement was difficult within the confines of small villages, where the billeting officer was often the social inferior of the local gentry and reluctant to fall foul of them. Chapter One drew attention to the animosity felt in some quarters even while plans were being drawn up, and resentment against evacuees did not abate when the scheme was put into operation, as will be seen.

Longmate asserted that at first, despite the many problems encountered, there was in general a remarkable public spirit of welcome for the evacuees in the reception areas. As an example, he cited the arrival in Luton of four hundred mothers and children from the East End of London. As they walked through the streets of that town, Luton housewives “poured out of their front doors” to carry luggage and give the children drinks of milk.<sup>24</sup> However, there were many instances where it was made plain that the refugees were unwanted. Milburn was one of several observers who noted that, even

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<sup>22</sup> N Longmate: *How We Lived Then*, p.369

<sup>23</sup> Graves: *op. cit.*, pp.32-3

<sup>24</sup> N Longmate: *How We Lived Then*, p.48

when householders had agreed in advance to take in refugees, many now found that for one cause or another they could no longer do so.<sup>25</sup> It was often difficult for local officials delivering evacuees, even to householders who had agreed to offer hospitality, for their reception on the doorstep varied considerably. Graves asserted that mostly there was a warm welcome - initially, at any rate - but sometimes prospective hosts changed their minds or did not like the look of the newcomers and slammed the door in their faces. Then the work of billeting had to begin again.<sup>26</sup>

This is not to say, however, that the newcomers were everywhere unwelcome. Administrators in some reception areas had prepared well for their evacuees. Crosby cites Reading, Berkshire, as an example of good practice. Here, the education officer acted as reception and chief billeting officer and thus combined responsibility for both the education and accommodation of the evacuees - an unusual occurrence, but one which largely avoided many of the pitfalls experienced in other areas. In a speedy and efficient operation the children were met at the station, escorted to schools where they were fed, then issued with their temporary rations before being taken individually by teachers and volunteers to their new homes.<sup>27</sup> But although Crosby asserts that organisation in reception areas was smooth,<sup>28</sup> ample evidence has been cited to the contrary: Reading was, by his own admission, an exceptionally good example.

It was evident, even before they left home, that Sheffield evacuees were not going to be universally welcome in their allotted reception areas. Reporting on Leicestershire's

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<sup>25</sup> P Donnelly (ed): *Mrs Milburn's Diaries: An Englishwoman's Reflections 1939-1945*, p.15

<sup>26</sup> Graves: *op. cit.*, p.36

<sup>27</sup> Crosby: *op. cit.*, p.30

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p.28

preparations as evacuation rehearsals were well under way, a local newspaper recounted how the county's householders had had to be reminded that the local authority had power to require them to billet.<sup>29</sup> At the same time the Mayor of Loughborough warned householders, in a circular letter setting out billeting allowances, that they were bound to fulfil obligations to billet evacuees, even if they were unwilling.<sup>30</sup>

Not all Nottinghamshire householders seemed eager to take in refugees either: Newark's Chief Constable of Police warned that there was no getting out of the obligation to billet.<sup>31</sup> Praising the vast majority who were showing "the utmost willingness and public spirit", the Chairman of the County Council acknowledged that some people displayed an inadequate sense of their responsibilities.<sup>32</sup> One description of Sheffield evacuees' arrival arguably suggests that problems with Nottinghamshire householders may have been envisaged:

"Each group was accompanied by a billeting officer and a special constable [...] and armed with full legal powers to enforce billeting where necessary."<sup>33</sup>

The chaos experienced in East Anglia has already been cited in Chapter Two, where unexpectedly large numbers arrived and some evacuees spent four nights sleeping on schoolroom floors.<sup>34</sup> In Weston-super-Mare it was not only the numbers, but also the lateness of the hour, which caused similar problems. Organisers knocked at householders' doors until long after midnight, but many mothers and children were left

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<sup>29</sup> *The Newark Advertiser*: 30.8.39, p.5

<sup>30</sup> *The Loughborough & Shepshed Echo*: 1.9.39, p.7

<sup>31</sup> *The Newark Advertiser*: 30.8.39, p.5

<sup>32</sup> *The Nottingham Evening Post*: 30.8.39, p.8

<sup>33</sup> *The Newark Advertiser*: 6.9.39, p.3

<sup>34</sup> J G O'Leary, "Dagenham," in Padley & Cole: *op. cit.*, p.220

without billets. They were forced to spend the first night in school halls where, no beds being available, they slept on wood block floors or on chairs placed against the walls, with only a blanket issued to keep them warm, and small babies were put to bed in desks.<sup>35</sup>

In hindsight it was inevitable, in such a massive and unprecedented undertaking, presided over by such a huge number and wide variety of individuals, that some mistakes would be made. Some of these were more easily put right than others, especially where 'special categories' were concerned. A report on evacuation conditions in reception areas, now in the Public Record Office, stated that although Scarborough was organised to receive school children from Hull, the town's billeting officers found themselves dealing instead with a different group:

“[...] a few demented people, large numbers of mental defectives, children suffering from infectious diseases and very many women and children in a very filthy bodily condition.”<sup>36</sup>

The small numbers arriving in most places meant that much of the transport laid on in the reception areas was redundant. In Nottinghamshire a fleet of buses provided by five East Midlands bus companies stood ready at detraining stations to take evacuees to reception centres either in the receiving towns or in outlying villages. In the event, many of the vehicles were surplus to requirements.<sup>37</sup>

Very many trains, too, were under-subscribed. Newark officials, anticipating 1,400 Sheffield evacuees on the first day of evacuation, were shocked when so few finally

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<sup>35</sup> *Weston Mercury & Somersetshire Herald*: 4.9.39, p.4

<sup>36</sup> PRO.ED.138/50

<sup>37</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 1.9.39, p.4

arrived - a total of 540. The first train, destined for rural areas, contained 274 evacuees, less than half the number expected. Of the 840 scheduled for the second train only 266 detrained. On the second day it was much worse: only 26 people arrived in each of the two trains from Sheffield, leaving most carriages empty and rendering nearly all the waiting buses redundant.<sup>38</sup>

Newark's first arrivals were chiefly from Pye Bank School: the evacuees marched to nearby Lovers' Lane School, from where they were taken by buses to country reception centres. The children's behaviour was praised and they were reported to be happy and cheerful: furthermore, they were described as "a bunch of well-clothed and well-fed children."<sup>39</sup> The second contingent were mainly from Owler Lane School: the newcomers walked to the Technical College, where they were provided with a meal by volunteers of the WVS before being allocated to billets in the town.<sup>40</sup> Newspapers in the reception areas were filled with upbeat details of the refugees' arrival but, as one observer noted:

"Although there were smiles and jokes, it seemed a sad procession. Youngsters marched along with their pillowcase kitbags over their shoulders, haversacks on their backs and their luggage in their hands."<sup>41</sup>

Southwell Rural District Council had made preparations for 4,000 people, but in the event less than a quarter of that number arrived.<sup>42</sup> The first train from Sheffield contained only 186 evacuees instead of the 800 expected - school children, teachers,

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<sup>38</sup> *The Newark Advertiser*: 6.9.39, p.3

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Log book: Owler Lane Intermediate School: entry 1.9.39

<sup>41</sup> *The Newark Advertiser*: 6.9.39, p.2

<sup>42</sup> *The Newark Herald*: 2.9.39, p.1



mothers and small children - in four coaches, with the remaining eight empty. Only four of the twelve waiting buses were needed to take the evacuees along streets lined with watching people to the Ideal Cinema, from where they were despatched to billets. It was reported here:

“The whole scheme was efficiently carried through and with whole-hearted co-operation from everyone concerned, there was a minimum of fuss.”<sup>43</sup>

But the party’s “strangely silent attitude” was noted. Four more trains arrived at Southwell during the day, and again the total number of refugees was far smaller than had been catered for. On the following day the first train was cancelled and only forty-seven evacuees arrived on the second.<sup>44</sup>

It was even worse at Kimberley, where arrangements had been made for 700 evacuees from Sheffield. No figures were given for the first day’s arrivals, but on the second day a total of less than sixty passengers, mostly mothers with children arrived in two twelve-coach trains at Kimberley Station. The fifteen buses waiting to convey the evacuees to outlying districts were superfluous.<sup>45</sup> What was more, the second train of the day brought only four passengers from the city - a doctor, a teacher and a woman with a baby.<sup>46</sup> Children arriving at Basford and Ruddington were despatched by specially chartered buses to the designated reception centres.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *The Newark Advertiser*: 6.9.39, p.3

<sup>44</sup> *The Nottingham Evening Post*: 2.9.39, p.7

<sup>45</sup> *The Eastwood & Kimberley Advertiser*: 8.9.39, p.3

<sup>46</sup> *The Newark Advertiser*: 6.9.39, p.2

<sup>47</sup> *The Nottingham Evening Post*: 1.9.39, p.7

Papplewick, expecting 120 Sheffield evacuees, received only a sixth of that number. The small village of Linby, anticipating fifty, fared somewhat better and received thirty-one school children from the Pitsmoor area: here, after refreshments and prayers in the local school hall, the local vicar gave a speech and assured the newcomers that they were among kind people and “all he asked of them was that they should be kind in return.” Describing the scene, *The Hucknall Dispatch*, showed a certain foresight:

“[...] few realised to the full what it meant to them, but being of an impressionable age, the circumstances will be seared into their minds, so that if they are privileged to live they will recount the memory with a shudder.”<sup>48</sup>

It was much the same story of depleted numbers in Leicestershire. The market town of Loughborough was originally scheduled to receive a total of 9,000 Sheffield evacuees (school children, expectant mothers, blind and crippled adults) in the first two days of evacuation.<sup>49</sup> However, numbers were scaled down in the light of poor registration results, and in the event only 720 arrived.<sup>50</sup> Reporting on the event, *The Loughborough & Shepshed Echo* stated that the first train brought a party from Abbeydale School comprising 300 school children and some mothers and younger children. Twenty buses, far in excess of requirements, were waiting to take the evacuees to Shelthorpe Schools where they were divided into small parties and placed in charge of billeting officers who took them to the streets “where they were to be distributed.” The report went on to say that the children were “mostly welcomed warmly when taken to their billets”<sup>51</sup> - perhaps an implicit acceptance that not *all* children were happily received.

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<sup>48</sup> *The Hucknall Dispatch*: 31.8.39, p.3; 7.9.39, pp.5,8

<sup>49</sup> *The Loughborough & Shepshed Echo*: 1.9.39, p.7

<sup>50</sup> Loughborough Education Committee: *Report 1939*, p.6

<sup>51</sup> *The Loughborough & Shepshed Echo*: 8.9.39, p.5

Shepshed had expected 1,600 Sheffield evacuees over the two days, but only 236 in total arrived.<sup>52</sup> This small town had been well prepared for larger numbers and boasted a billeting staff of one hundred.<sup>53</sup> At Melton Mowbray no statistics were given, but it can be assumed that here, too, numbers fell short of expectation. The party who arrived from Burgoyne Road Council School at 11.30 am on the first day were shepherded to the Corn Exchange where milk and biscuits were handed round before women billeting officers took the evacuees to their new homes.<sup>54</sup>

Various local dignitaries appear to have been in control at the different detraining stations in Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire reception areas. At Basford, the Clerk to the Rural District Council was in charge, assisted by members of the WVS, while in some areas - for example, Ruddington - it was the local vicar who directed operations.<sup>55</sup> The Mayor of Newark met all the trains arriving in the town,<sup>56</sup> while at Loughborough the Chairman of the County Council turned out to oversee the proceedings.<sup>57</sup>

Evacuation was presented as an exciting adventure. Cinema newsreels and photographs in national and local newspapers showed children with happy faces peering from railway carriage windows as they left their home stations, and smiling hosts in the country welcoming small groups with the billeting officer looking on. In the first few days, cheery messages were conveyed in press reports and pictures published of evacuees engaged in country pursuits. Nevertheless, despite the early optimistic reports

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<sup>52</sup> *The Nottingham Evening Post*, 27.9.39, p.8

<sup>53</sup> *The Loughborough & Shepshed Echo*: 1.9.39, p.7

<sup>54</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 2.9.39, p.5

<sup>55</sup> *The Nottingham Evening Post*: 1.9.39, p.7

<sup>56</sup> *The Newark Herald*: 2.9.39, p.1

<sup>57</sup> *The Loughborough & Shepshed Echo*: 8.9.39, p.5

that everything had gone well in reception, it was soon clear that dissatisfaction was not far below the surface.

In this first evacuation the subject of medical inspections seems to have been a rather ‘hit-or-miss’ affair. Nationally, the government had not made general provision for children to be examined before they went away, because the first priority was to remove non-essential persons from perceived danger.<sup>58</sup> Coming at the end of the long summer holidays, when school clinics were closed, children had been without medical supervision for several weeks. The consequences of this situation were far-reaching, as will be seen in the next chapter of this thesis.

At local level, most Sheffield evacuees received at best a cursory medical check before leaving the city,<sup>59</sup> although one log book recorded that some children had already been examined at school.<sup>60</sup> Children suffering, or having had contact with, infectious complaints were officially deemed unacceptable for evacuation but in the event, as the School Medical Officer afterwards reported, in fact not one city evacuee was turned away after examination at the departure stations.<sup>61</sup>

What happened in the Nottinghamshire reception areas has been difficult to ascertain, for there appears to have been no specific policy on the matter and little evidence that examinations were carried out as a routine practice. No mention was made of medical inspections in the town of Newark as the children detrained, but at Basford and

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<sup>58</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.126

<sup>59</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Report 1939*, p.40

<sup>60</sup> Log book: Philadelphia Infants School, entry 31.8.39

<sup>61</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Report 1939*, p.40

Ruddington the children were medically checked on arrival at the stations.<sup>62</sup> Nothing has been discovered about the procedure at the remaining detraining stations for Sheffield evacuees in the county. Of Leicestershire's policy on the matter there is very little additional information. At Loughborough any children suspected of suffering from infectious or other illnesses were inspected at the station by a nurse, but it was reported that "very few cases arose which gave rise to difficulties in immediate billeting." In Melton Mowbray evacuees were medically examined before leaving for their billets, but only a few cases of tonsillitis were found: these were sent direct to hospital.<sup>63</sup>

On this showing, the health of Sheffield evacuees on arrival in the reception areas would seem to have been generally good, but across the country, revelations of pediculosis, skin infections and other ailments, discovered almost immediately after the children had arrived in their billets at the outbreak of war, caused a public outcry. Medical staffs in reception areas faced a gargantuan task in dealing with arriving children who had already been without medical care for weeks and many of whom, from the poorest and most overcrowded inner-city areas, were in need of urgent attention for these ailments.<sup>64</sup> The furore was such that the success of future evacuation schemes was severely in doubt. It was considered essential to avoid such problems in the future: consequently, on 5 October the Minister of Health instructed evacuating local authorities to carry out medical inspections and necessary treatments of infected children before dispatching further parties to the reception areas.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *The Nottingham Evening Post*: 1.9.39, p.7

<sup>63</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 2.9.39, p.5

<sup>64</sup> *The Health of the School Child: Report of Chief Medical Officer Ministry of Education 1939-45*: p.31

<sup>65</sup> HoC. Deb. 5.10.39, Vol. 351, col. 2106

Sheffield Education Committee made a determined effort to head off potential trouble in the receiving districts in further movements of pupils. The few Sheffield children who had registered were medically examined during the weekend before the follow-up evacuation of 26 October 1939 in order to give the reception areas warning of any cases needing special supervision and so that officials there could make suitable billeting arrangements. Children rejected at the first examination were checked again on the following Wednesday, when 255 out of the original 264 were passed as fit to travel. The report of the School Medical Officer gave the following statistics:<sup>66</sup>

<u>Number of children inspected at first examination</u>	<u>264</u>
Number passed as fit at first examination, including:	227
2 Nervous and highly strung	
5 Nocturnal enuresis (occasional)	
Number referred for re-examination	36
Definitely unfit (rheumatic endocarditis)	1
<u>Conditions referred for re-examination:</u>	
Pediculosis scalp	1
Nits	28
Swabs (throat)	6
Impetigo (face)	1
<u>Condition of children when referred for re-examination:</u>	
Number re-examined	<u>28</u>
Number cleared of any defect	18
Number with few nits still present	9
Impetigo healing satisfactorily	1
<u>Number of children passed as fit for evacuation</u>	<u>255</u>

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<sup>66</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Annual Report of School Medical Officer 1939*, p.41

It is interesting to note that nine children with unclean heads and five with occasional enuresis were apparently not rejected. In the event 245 actually transferred to the reception areas and all were once more examined at the stations before boarding trains to the reception areas.<sup>67</sup>

Arrangements in the reception areas were invariably reported as a triumph of organisation and efficiency in the local press, and no doubt this was true in many cases. It is interesting to note, however, that of those former evacuees interviewed who remembered their feelings on arrival in the reception areas, few were left with that impression. Only one former interviewee from Sheffield, who travelled with All Saints School, confirmed the official view:

“It was very orderly at the Station - no panic, just like a holiday. We got the bus to Victoria Station and the train to Kimberley. We went straight from Kimberley Station to the buses which were waiting. Someone must have organised that brothers and sisters stayed together. It seemed a very long way, but I don't remember any children crying.”

Arriving at Linby School she added, however, that selection was less methodical. As the children were supplied with bread and jam sandwiches and Horlicks, the local residents entered the hall in haphazard fashion and picked out the children they wanted.<sup>68</sup>

This random selection of children was widespread. A Sheffield ex-evacuee remembered a similar procedure on her arrival at Awworth, Nottinghamshire, where the Parish Room was used as a reception centre:

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<sup>67</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Annual Report of School Medical Officer 1939*, p.41

<sup>68</sup> Oral interview: Dorothy Knowles, 21.3.95

“We had to wait around until we were picked. There were a lot of people there, who came around us. Someone said: ‘Would you like to go with this lady?’ and she came and took my brother and me.”

Although this interviewee went home after a short time, she returned to the same billet after the Sheffield blitz in December 1940 and rejoined her brother who had remained with the foster family, which suggests that the arrangement was successful in this case at least.<sup>69</sup>

One evacuee from a very poor Sheffield home stayed in her first Nottinghamshire billet only a few hours: she recalled:

“My sister and I were taken somewhere by mistake at first. We were sat there in this posh house, frightened to move because they were very upper-class. When it all came to, we’d been taken to the wrong people. They came and brought us to Mr and Mrs Smith and it was much nicer. [...] They lived in a terraced house in a block.”

It is possible that these girls were not, in fact, sent to the wrong house: their first hosts may have been unwilling to take them. In the event, the second placement turned out to be very successful and the interviewee remained in that billet for four years.<sup>70</sup>

At Whatton, Nottinghamshire, another interviewee’s experience of selection for billeting was typical of many. Travelling with Pitsmoor Church of England School, he remembered:

“We were taken to the village school. [...] So far as I remember, no-one had decided who was to go with whom, so we all stood around the school and local people came along and took whoever they wanted.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Oral interview: Margaret Bennett, 16.3.95

<sup>70</sup> Oral interview: Brenda Cox, 8.3.95

<sup>71</sup> Oral interview: Douglas Pearson, 2.9.95



In Leicestershire, the evacuees destined for Loughborough largely avoided this embarrassment, it appears. One, who was evacuated along with his twin brother in the Carfield Council School party, recalled that the WVS were in charge at the church reception centre where his party was taken:

“When we arrived we all had a number attached to us and they called the numbers out [...]. When our number came up we were taken into another room and introduced to the people who were going to look after us, then we walked to their home with them. We didn’t know where we were going and they didn’t talk to us or tell us much. It wasn’t far away: it was at the back of a pawn shop in the centre of Loughborough.”

Although they had set out from home early in the morning and travelled only approximately fifty miles from home, it was evening when they reached their billet.<sup>72</sup>

But not all Leicestershire reception arrangements were well organised. A former pupil of Firshill School, remembered a chaotic scene at Mountsorrel, where she was taken before she eventually found a temporary home with an elderly woman:

“It was like a slave- or cattle-market [...]. We queued up for mugs of cocoa from long tables and the residents came in to choose, walking around the outside of the room. Children kept disappearing with people. The door opened a few inches to let them out, then it banged shut and the rest of us were left.”<sup>73</sup>

Across Britain this haphazard process of allocation of children was widespread. Tired children were lined up in school halls while local people viewed them and selected their ‘guests’ for themselves. It was a discomfiting and humiliating experience at the end of a long and traumatic day, and the despair and degradation felt by many poorer or less attractive children as they were scrutinised and passed over may be imagined. Brothers

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<sup>72</sup> Oral interview: George Shelley, 12.8.96

<sup>73</sup> Oral interview: Pamela Denniff, 16.9.94

and sisters who insisted on staying together were often left until last. Wicks aptly described the humiliation of waiting to be chosen as “seared into the mind with a branding iron”<sup>74</sup> - never forgotten by those who experienced it.

In these circumstances it was sometimes observed that, while housewives were inclined to pick clean and respectable-looking children, farmers often chose strong boys.<sup>75</sup> This was corroborated by another Sheffield evacuee to Mountsorrel, who remembered that her foster father had not wanted any evacuees at all, but reluctantly agreed to take in a boy to help in the garden. He was shocked when his wife returned with a mother and two small girls instead.<sup>76</sup>

Calder’s assertion that the best-dressed children were often assigned to any local gentry who had expressed willingness to take evacuees<sup>77</sup> was borne out by another Sheffield interviewee:

“One lady came and picked my sister and me and took us into the billeting room, but the billeting officer (Miss Gray) said ‘You can’t have those two little girls - they’re mine!’ That was because we had all lovely hand-knitted garments on - jumpers, skirts and cardigans to match.”

The girls were quickly taken to the manor house where the billeting officer lived with her father, the local colliery owner, and a staff of five servants.<sup>78</sup>

Not all householders were happy with the evacuees assigned to them, and some seemed to regard the children as commodities. One Loughborough woman was reported as

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<sup>74</sup> B Wicks: *No Time to Wave Goodbye*, p.53

<sup>75</sup> J Macnicol, “The effect of the evacuation of schoolchildren on official attitudes to State intervention” in H L Smith: *War and Social Change*, p.6

<sup>76</sup> Oral interview: Pamela Grayson, 12.3.96

<sup>77</sup> A Calder: *The People’s War*, p.40

<sup>78</sup> Oral interview: Dorothy Knowles, 21.3.95

saying “I ordered a boy, and you’ve sent me a girl.” Another complained: “I asked for two little girls aged five and six, and you’ve sent me two aged six and seven.”<sup>79</sup> Some were even more specific: one Shropshire woman, whose husband was on the local billeting committee, recorded:

“He had asked if I would like girls or boys, dark or fair, blue eyes or brown. I (smilingly) replied, ‘Two girls - fair hair and blue eyes, please.’”

In this case the householder was a satisfied customer: she was granted her wish.<sup>80</sup>

Pupils of special schools were not generally caught up in this kind of confusion. They travelled with their teachers and adult helpers to the reception areas as school units and were, for the most part, accommodated in camps, large houses and hotels which had been arranged in advance.<sup>81</sup> There they remained as separate entities and did not normally integrate into the community or attend local council schools, though some were combined with schools dealing with similar categories of children in reception areas. The eighteen children evacuated with Sheffield’s Maud Maxfield School for the Deaf, for instance, joined forces with Normanton Hall School in Southwell, Nottinghamshire.<sup>82</sup> However, most special schools in Sheffield, such as the School for Blind Children, were situated in neutral areas of the city and went on with their work without interruption.<sup>83</sup> A few cases were discovered where one or two individual children from open-air schools in Sheffield were received into ordinary schools in reception areas, as seen in the register for St Peter’s School Loughborough where three

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<sup>79</sup> *The Loughborough & Shepshed Echo*: 8.9.39, p.5

<sup>80</sup> C & E Townsend: *War Wives: A Second World War Anthology*, p.16

<sup>81</sup> P H J H Gosden: *Education in the Second World War*, p.177

<sup>82</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1939*, p.40

<sup>83</sup> *The Health of the School Child: op. cit.*, p.82

pupils from Whiteley Wood Open Air School were admitted.<sup>84</sup> This, however, seemed to be the exception rather than the rule. The log book of the only other special unit in the evacuable area of Sheffield which has been discovered in research, Pomona Street Special Centre for the Mentally Deficient, makes no mention of evacuation but gives details of the Home Tuition Scheme, indicating that these pupils did not go away.<sup>85</sup>

Arrangements for adults in the special categories did not always run smoothly. Chester's chief billeting officer apparently omitted to make arrangements to accommodate a large party of blind people from Liverpool, despite having had prior warning of the arrival. These people spent the first night in the Poor Law Institution and the next at a teachers' training college, after which eighty of their number 'mutinied' and went home.<sup>86</sup>

Nottinghamshire officials had apparently not expected all of the blind or otherwise disabled adults who arrived from Sheffield, either. Arrangements had been made for one contingent of twenty-nine adults who detrained at Newark, for they were quickly taken to the town's Isolation Hospital, where accommodation had been adapted for their use.<sup>87</sup> But another party went to the village of Papplewick, where residents were surprised to find a number of elderly blind people included in the first batch of arrivals there. The problem was quickly tackled, and in one weekend members of the WVS in

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<sup>84</sup> St Peter's School Admissions Register 1939-1943, Leicester Record Office, ref DE1360/131

<sup>85</sup> Log book: Pomona Street Special Centre (previously Highfield Special Mentally Deficient School)

<sup>86</sup> J Croall: "Chester during the Second World War", Sheffield University, BA Dissertation (1992)

<sup>87</sup> *The Newark Advertiser*: 6.9.39, p.3

two neighbouring villages had found and equipped a bungalow for the use of these evacuees which became known as 'The WVS Home for Blind Evacuees' in Linby.<sup>88</sup>

Expectant mothers largely avoided these difficulties at reception centres. Mansfield, at first designated a neutral area, was selected to receive three hundred pregnant Sheffield women. There, the Berry Hill Miners' Welfare Convalescent Home had been adapted for their use and was ready. However, billets for the women's accommodation before and after confinement were not so easily obtained. Even three days before evacuation, there was such a shortage that volunteers had been hurriedly called out to canvass hundreds of houses to find room for them.<sup>89</sup>

At home in Sheffield, the women knew nothing of this, for the following day *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent* reported encouragingly that a list of private householders willing to take in the women had been drawn up.<sup>90</sup> In the event, only eighty-one expectant mothers, together with their fifty-three small children, elected to leave the city on the day before the outbreak of war. They travelled direct to Mansfield in three buses, accompanied by three municipal midwives<sup>91</sup> who were temporarily seconded to Nottinghamshire County Council to help in caring for them.<sup>92</sup>

Pupils of independent preparatory or secondary schools also mostly escaped the confusion: not being included in the official scheme, their staffs had generally made their own arrangements for evacuation. Derwent Hall, lately a youth hostel, had been

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<sup>88</sup> Hucknall Public Library: File L.90.2: "Hucknall in the Second World War"

<sup>89</sup> *The Nottingham Evening Post*: 29.8.39, p.3

<sup>90</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 30.8.39, p.4

<sup>91</sup> *The Mansfield Reporter*: 8.9.39, p.2

<sup>92</sup> Sheffield City Council: *Report of Chief Medical Officer of Health 1939*, p.25

made ready for pupils of Notre Dame School, Sheffield. Eleven nuns and eight maids had travelled to Ashopton earlier to clean and prepare the neglected building, and school equipment was transported from the city school by willing parents.<sup>93</sup> The girls of Sheffield High School, moving into Cliff College at Calver, found the classroom and boarding facilities, which served the theological students who were normally resident, needed little adaptation: they even had a private chapel.<sup>94</sup> Other groups made their own arrangements, too: for instance, an offer by the Vicar of Ashbourne to take in the choirboys from his former church (St Cuthbert's) in Sheffield was gladly accepted.<sup>95</sup>

National and local newspapers carried cheerful reports of the evacuees' arrival. On the day after the exodus *The Sheffield Telegraph and Independent* informed its readers that the evacuees were greeted with warm welcomes in their new quarters and had quickly begun to settle down. In its next issue it reported "complete satisfaction with all the arrangements".<sup>96</sup> The priest of St Charles' Church in Sheffield, who had escorted children to Barrow upon Soar from Attercliffe, publicly reassured mothers that their children were happy in their new homes.<sup>97</sup>

Despite these assurances, however, it is clear that not all Sheffield evacuees were content. The headmaster of Carbrook Council Boys' School complained that, having arrived intact at the Leicestershire station of Quorn & Woodhouse, his party was broken

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<sup>93</sup> V Hallam: *Silent Valley at War: Life in the Derwent Valley 1939-1945*, pp.20,22

<sup>94</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 4.9.39, p.3

<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*, 2.9.39, p.5

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*; also 4.9.39, p.3

<sup>97</sup> *ibid.*, 2.9.39, p.5

down and families divided up in several different villages, causing problems and frustration for teachers. He reported:

“Everything went well until we reached the rail head at Quorn - where by some excellent muddling by too many in authority, all our careful work of arranging parties was undone in a few minutes and families broken up, causing great dissatisfaction.”<sup>98</sup>

The headmistress of Carbrook Infants' School recorded in the school log book that children and teachers were distributed between the villages of Anstey, Newtown Linford, Thurcaston and Cropston, while mothers with young children were sent to Rothley. When more mothers arrived on the second day they were housed in yet another village, Reresford.<sup>99</sup> By December the situation had apparently not improved, for a meeting of Leicestershire Education Committee was told that the children from Sheffield were so widely scattered that a teacher was continuing to act as organiser for the area.<sup>100</sup> Appendix 8, compiled from details of Leicestershire Education Committee Attendance Record of Evacuated School Parties and showing the eventual destinations of pupils from Sheffield schools who arrived in that county, bears witness to this fragmentation. Although no such information has been discovered for those evacuated to Nottinghamshire, it is likely that a similar situation existed there: indeed, *The Newark Herald* reported that at least one Sheffield party, from Pye Bank Council School, was similarly split up and sent to five neighbouring Nottinghamshire villages - Balderton, Coddington, North and South Collingham, and Farndon.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Log book: Carbrook Council Boys' School, entry 1.9.39; Leicestershire Record Office ref DE2144/331

<sup>99</sup> Log book: Carbrook Council Infants' School, entry 2.9.39

<sup>100</sup> Leicestershire Education Committee: *Minutes 1939*, p7723; *ibid.*, File CC4/16/1/25

<sup>101</sup> *The Newark Herald*: 2.9.39, p.1

Receiving authorities were reluctant to shoulder all the responsibility for difficulties which arose and Sheffield Education Committee was blamed for some of the problems in the reception areas. In prior negotiations with reception areas, the authority had insisted upon the city's children being billeted only in villages where a Sheffield teacher was present. But in Nottinghamshire, Basford councillors protested that the policy had caused unnecessary trouble to householders and had been the cause of parents removing their children. At a meeting of the Rural District Council, the Sheffield authority was criticised for its failure to supply information on numbers and categories of evacuees which, it was stated, could have been sent both in advance of planning and by telephone after the trains had left for the reception areas on the actual days of evacuation.<sup>102</sup>

It was not just a local problem, but a national one. Fragmentation of school parties was not uncommon, and in an extreme example London teachers found that their pupils were scattered in villages spread out over four hundred square miles; in another case children from one school were accommodated in twenty-three different villages.<sup>103</sup> One head teacher, criticising the splitting up of school parties, felt strongly:

“There was no co-ordination between the different bodies. The transport people transported; the reception people received; the billeting officers billeted. [...] If evacuation is ever arranged again, let it be ‘*x* children will be billeted at *y* and will attend *z* school’. No school - no billeting.”<sup>104</sup>

It was claimed that much of the separation of school groups was later shown to have been unnecessary, because villages often received several disconnected groups from

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<sup>102</sup> *The Nottingham Evening Post*: 10.10.39, p.6

<sup>103</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.112

<sup>104</sup> M E Cosens: “Evacuation: A Social Revolution”, *Social Work*, (January 1940), p.174



different schools and would have been able to take complete units. Furthermore, the scattering of school parties also meant that some teachers, who had promised parents that they would stay with the children, were quite unable to do so.<sup>105</sup> It may be argued, however, that the Ministry of Transport, in its refusal to guarantee the destination of any party, had foreseen that these difficulties might occur and had tried to avoid such problems.

Provincial press reports of the arrival of Sheffield children did not criticise the methods of allocating evacuees to homes, highlighting instead the warm greetings of hosts and the satisfaction of evacuees.<sup>106</sup> The headmaster of Sharrow Lane School was so impressed with the welcome extended to his party that he wrote to the local newspaper expressing the appreciation of Sheffield teachers for the help and kindness offered by Loughborough teachers and citizens. However, praising the reception of the evacuees which had been very carefully thought out and carried out rapidly and efficiently, he acknowledged that there had been some misfits in the initial billeting.<sup>107</sup> It was not until later that criticisms surfaced about the methods employed in this essential task.

In hindsight it is clear that there was bound to be some mis-matching of hosts and guests. Like *was* matched with like in many cases, but inevitably some children were billeted in poorer homes than they were used to, while others found themselves in much better circumstances than they could ever have imagined and were equally unhappy.

An anonymous letter writer to *The Nottingham Evening Post* asserted:

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<sup>105</sup> Cosens: *op. cit.*, p. 167

<sup>106</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 1.9.39, p.1; *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 1.9.39 & 2.9.39, p.5

<sup>107</sup> *The Loughborough & Shepshed Echo*, 13.9.39, p.4

“Some children have been extremely fortunate in the ‘lucky dip’ method of distribution and billeting employed, while others find themselves in surroundings certainly lower than their previous home life. A simple system of reference as to conditions from which each child has been taken [...] would have avoided many of the admitted misfits now coming to light.”

The signature “All Away” suggested the writer was a dissatisfied parent of evacuees.<sup>108</sup>

Calder’s view that at the outbreak of war 1,000,000 people were “stuffed under a government scheme from cities into ‘reception areas’”<sup>109</sup> may appear now to over-state the case. However, at the time it may well have seemed to some of those who arrived in strange towns and villages tired and hungry, after long and difficult journeys, and found themselves faced with chaotic conditions and unwilling hosts, that they were indeed being ‘stuffed’ into any available place. General confusion was widespread and it was several days before many matters were sorted out. The often random assignment of children to billets may have secured for them a bed for the night: but for too many, it provided little more.<sup>110</sup>

It is true that some householders did not honour earlier promises of accommodation, which added to difficulties and frustration for organisers and evacuees alike. Perhaps surprisingly, many teachers found it difficult to get accommodation.<sup>111</sup> Here, the wide discrepancy between their billeting allowances of five shillings and the twenty-one shillings for civil servants may well have been an important factor. A more surprising reason was given by Chuter Ede in the House of Commons who related that one teacher

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<sup>108</sup> *The Nottingham Evening Post*: 7.11.39, p.8

<sup>109</sup> A Calder: *The Myth of the Blitz*, p.60

<sup>110</sup> O L Davis Jr: “The Invisible Evacuees...” *History of Education Society Bulletin*, No.49 (1992) p.56

<sup>111</sup> N Longmate: *How We Lived Then*, p.56

was told by her billeter: "I am so disappointed to have you because I expected to have one of those mothers who would have been useful in the kitchen."<sup>112</sup>

Dispersal of the evacuees in the reception areas was further complicated by the condition of some of the children as they arrived, which did not endear them to prospective hosts. Many had had to endure long, hot journeys in non-corridor trains without lavatories and this contributed to the dirty and dishevelled state of some upon arrival: this should have been expected. But others had actually set out from home with their clothing and belongings in a deplorable state, as some hostesses were soon horrified to discover.<sup>113</sup> What had also not been anticipated was that some evacuees were found to be suffering from lice and/or skin diseases.<sup>114</sup> These issues will be discussed in the following chapter.

It was not only the children who arrived in disarray: long journeys for mothers travelling with small children were often exhausting. One such evacuee woman, arriving at a distribution centre set up in a non-conformist chapel in Westmorland, not only desired but needed a bath. There was no privacy in the chapel, but a solution was found by allowing her to enjoy a tub of hot water which was carried into the large pulpit.<sup>115</sup>

Local newspapers reported the public disgust at the state of some of the evacuees, and related some accounts about evacuees from Leeds and other cities, but published no

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<sup>112</sup> HoC Deb. 7.9.39, Vol.351, col. 805

<sup>113</sup> Mass-Observation File 11

<sup>114</sup> Gosden: *op. cit.*, p.165

<sup>115</sup> Graves: *op. cit.*, p.34

such criticisms of Sheffield children, who were praised for being well turned out and in good health:

“[...] they were wearing smart new clothes and suits which their mothers had hurriedly bought for them for the evacuation. Brightly polished shoes, clean socks and [girls’] newly curled hair added to a spruce appearance.”<sup>116</sup>

Teachers’ representatives also commended the Sheffield children: “The quality of the kit brought was generally good.”<sup>117</sup>

In the reception areas, however, it was sometimes a different story. A Nottinghamshire foster mother who was interviewed, indicating that her Sheffield evacuees were not well equipped when they arrived, stated:

“We took them to Ilkeston and rigged them up. I think it was done on purpose, you know. [...] But the parents helped with clothes after that.”<sup>118</sup>

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Who, or what, was to blame for the shortcomings which came to light upon the arrival of the children in the reception areas under the official government schemes; and what, if anything, was done to remedy the situation?

Officials in the reception areas were often held responsible for failures of organisation. But it may be unfair to blame billeting authorities in every case. Their officers could, after all, only act upon information received and it has been seen that much confusion arose because inadequate details were given to the reception areas of the numbers and

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<sup>116</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 1.9.39, p.1

<sup>117</sup> *Education*: No. 1910, 18.8.39, p.194

<sup>118</sup> Oral interview: Gladys Smith, 12.5.95

categories of evacuees who would arrive. Even after the mistakes of 1939, billeting officers were sometimes given insufficient notice of the arrival of evacuees in their areas: sometimes they were informed by telegram when the children were already on their way, and sometimes not at all.<sup>119</sup>

In drawing up plans for evacuation, government planners had seen the task of billeting officers as of temporary duration and not meriting the employment and special training of skilled personnel. Consequently, at the outset of evacuation at least, most billeting officers were volunteers, few of whom held any appropriate qualifications for what was to become a particularly onerous and taxing job.<sup>120</sup> Some mis-matching of evacuees to billets might have been avoided if more trained skill had been available for the work from the beginning, for prompt attention could have avoided serious friction in many cases. Moreover, it had not been foreseen that not one, but several evacuations would take place throughout the war and would be spread out over five years.

And it should not be overlooked that, whereas numerous rehearsals had been held in evacuation areas to highlight potential problems and ensure smooth operation of the departure, it had simply not been possible to carry out similar procedures at arrival points. Officials in reception areas were, therefore, dealing with some problems which even the most far-sighted of them could not have envisaged.

Padley asserted that the Ministry of Health's unwillingness to guarantee that any particular party would arrive at a specific destination may have had serious

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<sup>119</sup> N Longmate: *How We Lived Then*, p.62

<sup>120</sup> Crosby: *op. cit.*, p.31

consequences with regard to the numbers of children registering for the first evacuation.<sup>121</sup> Dent, too, considered this a “big error”.<sup>122</sup> However, the wisdom of the Ministry was borne out by events, as has been seen.

Again, much has been made of the failure of parents in 1940 to respond to a new publicity campaign enjoining them to register their children for evacuation as fear of invasion spread. But public condemnation of urban evacuees in 1939, and first- or second-hand unhappy experiences in the reception areas may well have deterred many from registering their children. In addition, the desire of families to stay together in adversity was a deterring factor.

The condition and behaviour of many of the children was the subject of much complaint, especially in the first movement. It had, however, proved impossible for the schools medical staffs to carry out all the necessary inspecting and cleansing of the children before they were sent away from the danger areas at such short notice and at the end of the long summer holidays. Nevertheless, in his report on the health of school children during the war years, the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Education pointed out:

“The unbilleteable minority gained much more notoriety than the great majority of well brought up and well behaved children who settled down with foster parents in happy relationships.”<sup>123</sup>

This seems to confirm the later view that the condition of the unfortunate few was attributed, by rumour and reportage, to the many who presented no such problems. Still,

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<sup>121</sup> R Padley “Until the Outbreak of War” in Padley & Cole: *op. cit.*, p.32

<sup>122</sup> H C Dent: *Education in Transition*, p.17

<sup>123</sup> *The Health of the School Child: op. cit.*, p.31

it is clear that there were serious problems awaiting medical staffs when these large numbers of children arrived in the countryside.

In subsequent evacuations many of the lessons had been learned, and there were fewer and less urgent problems. This was largely because, under the 'Trickle' programme, there was not the frenetic rush to get the children away in such large numbers. With smaller numbers of children leaving over a period of time, it was possible to examine the children before departure and pinpoint potential problems. In addition, the hostels and clinics so hastily set up in the 1939 emergency were still available for children who were difficult to billet in private homes.<sup>124</sup>

Much has been made of the 'cattle-market' method of allocating children to host families, and from the point of view of the evacuees the policy is hard to defend. Boyd expressed the opinion that the method of selection by prospective hosts left a feeling of resentment among both hosts and evacuees who got second pick.<sup>125</sup> Yet that was not the fault of householders who came to choose the children, for most of them were responding with good intentions. However, Longmate's view, that this "slave-market" method of allocation to billets at least provided a temporary bed and avoided the trudge from door to door in search of a home,<sup>126</sup> seems to dodge the issue - that neither should have been necessary had there been more communication between evacuating and receiving authorities and less last-minute reorganisation. As Burt observed, much more detailed advance planning of reception should have been made, entailing evacuees

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<sup>124</sup> *The Health of the School Child: op. cit.*, p.31

<sup>125</sup> W Boyd: *Evacuation in Scotland*, p.60

<sup>126</sup> N Longmate: *How We Lived Then*, p.51

being greeted individually and refreshments provided before being introduced to their hosts and departing to billets.<sup>127</sup>

The government evacuation scheme had been based on the theory that almost all evacuees would be billeted in private households, as has been seen in Chapter One. But until the evacuees arrived in the reception areas in September 1939 it was not fully realised just how vast a gulf existed between the standards of life and cultural outlook of the average country householders and the inhabitants of poor inner-city districts.

In 1939 it had certainly not been appreciated by the mainly male and middle-class organisers of evacuation just how difficult it would be to billet the mothers and yet, arguably, if more females had been involved in planning this possibility would have been plain. Billeting was (perhaps not unreasonably) seen by many householders as no more than an unpleasant necessity. It was to be expected, then, that if pressed they would prefer unaccompanied school children, who would be out of the house for the best part of the day during the week at least and would more easily conform to hosts' customs and expectations. Much less welcome would be mothers and small children who would be continually under foot, sharing kitchens and bathrooms, making noise and less able or willing to try to adjust. Noting their hostile reception and quick return home, the government's offer of assisted evacuation from 1940 meant that the problem of billeting large numbers of mothers and young children on private householders was much less likely to arise in later evacuations.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> C Burt: "The Billeting of Evacuated Children", *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. XI (1941), p.92

<sup>128</sup> S Ferguson & H Fitzgerald: *Studies in the Social Services*, p.148



Complaints came from both sides - from reluctant hosts, discouraged by unhappy experiences or rumours, and from truculent guests disaffected with country life and unwelcoming billetters. On the other hand, the difficulties and uncertainties which faced individual host families in connection with the arrival of evacuees have often been overlooked. Lord Tonyandy, at the time a teacher in a Welsh evacuation area, recalled that a sympathetic crowd gathered to watch the arrival of the evacuees. He noted, as he called out their names, that it was not only the newcomers who were nervous and fearful:

“The people [of the village] were fearful. They did not know what the children would be like. All they knew was that here were children in need. [...] It took some readjusting on both sides.”<sup>129</sup>

Dent asserted that there had been no preparation of householders for their daunting task of receiving the evacuees, or guidance given to evacuees as to their behaviour in the billets. In his opinion it was an exceptionally hazardous experiment which had been planned and initiated by people who had no inkling of its far-reaching implications<sup>130</sup> and it is difficult to disagree with this.

Just how willing were people to take in evacuees? In 1939, many householders in the reception areas were initially motivated by a genuine desire to help those whom they perceived to be in real danger. Patriotic feelings were also an important factor. But Cole suggested something else: that to some extent the obligation was enforced by local mass opinion<sup>131</sup> - no-one wanted to be accused by their neighbours of not doing their

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<sup>129</sup> Lord Tonyandy: BBC interview “Songs of Praise”, 8.10.95

<sup>130</sup> Dent: *op. cit.*, p.3

<sup>131</sup> M Cole, “General Effects: Billeting” in Padley & Cole: *op. cit.*, p.72

bit. When the expected aerial bombardment of industrial centres did not materialise, however, the initial fervour abated.

When the second evacuation programme was introduced in 1940, only one householder in fifty volunteered to take evacuees, despite the improvements which had been implemented in regard to medical inspections and hostels for children with special needs.<sup>132</sup> But when the bombs started dropping, prospective hosts were torn between sympathy for the victims of the blitz and memories of the vast problems which had arisen the previous year. Harrison found, too, that the evacuees themselves were more ready to make the best of things.<sup>133</sup>

The success of the 1944 evacuation was partly helped by the fact that many evacuees fleeing the rocket attacks on the south of England were sent to cities in the north of England and the midlands, where their hosts often had personal experience of both evacuation and bombing raids. And while many of the refugees this time had made their own arrangements and could be expected to have found congenial conditions for themselves, a Mass-Observation survey found that even the official scheme worked well on the whole, and householders received “a better type of evacuee than they expected.”<sup>134</sup>

Where there were problems, it was not always the householders who were at fault; the evacuees were sometimes difficult to please. One account tells of an extreme case:

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<sup>132</sup> N Longmate: *How We Lived Then*, p.60

<sup>133</sup> Mass-Observation File 483, p.9

<sup>134</sup> Mass-Observation File 2189, p.1

“There were five ladies each prepared to take two children. The party when it arrived consisted of a Mother and nine children, from none of whom she was prepared to be separated.”

The problem was solved by a Rest Centre for the first night, after which a warden found a house for the family.<sup>135</sup>

The government rightly claimed success for the mass movement of so many people on this unprecedented scale. But the first objective of the evacuation, to clear areas vulnerable to attack of the priority classes, had largely failed for, as Calder remarked, “the cities were still loud with children”.<sup>136</sup> And within a fortnight of this vast operation, it was evident that a drift homeward was already taking place among many of those who had been evacuated.

As Boyd assessed the situation:

“The evacuees were dumped on private householders. That done, the Government and most local authorities seemed to think that their main task was over.”<sup>137</sup>

It was assumed that once safely billeted, the evacuees would stay put: in fact a great deal of moving and re-allocating was about to begin.

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<sup>135</sup> Mass-Observation File 2189, p.8

<sup>136</sup> A Calder: *The People's War*, p.39

<sup>137</sup> W Boyd: *op. cit.*, p.52

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PROBLEMS IN THE RECEPTION AREAS

In hindsight, it ought to have been apparent from the beginning that it was always going to be unrealistic to expect large numbers of townspeople to move into the countryside and then settle into other people's rural homes without trouble. Similarly, it should not have been surprising that country folk would refuse to accept willingly what amounted to an invasion of their homes by urban strangers with different habits and mores. It was simply asking too much of both sides.

What could not have been anticipated, however, was the speed at which criticisms of the new arrivals began to emerge. Even as they reached their billets, mothers with small children and unaccompanied school children alike found themselves castigated by householders, for the reprehensible state of their bodies and clothing. Officials and journalists joined the condemnation as the poverty of large industrial towns and cities, so long hidden, unseen, unremarked, or ignored, was suddenly laid bare for all to see in market towns and small villages throughout the country.

Initial sympathy for the refugees quickly degenerated into vilification: goodwill evaporated and was replaced by hostility and suspicion. Having first carried encouraging reports of the successful movement of many thousands of women and children from the towns and cities, and the warm welcome awaiting them in rural districts, national newspapers and those in receiving districts were within days filled with articles highly critical of the condition of evacuees. Within weeks they were

relating complaints about their unsocial manners and bad behaviour. This chapter will concentrate on some of the problems encountered.

At the planning stages of the evacuation programme local authorities had been advised to set up small committees to deal with any difficulties which might occur. Problems were expected to concern unaccompanied school children more than any other group but, in fact, it was the mothers with young children who came in for most opprobrium.<sup>1</sup> The billeting of mothers and their small children with private householders was arguably doomed to failure from the beginning. As St Loe Strachey commented, the remarkable plan by which the government expected strangers to do their own catering and cooking in other women's houses had never sounded promising to housewives.<sup>2</sup>

Undoubtedly there were problems on both sides, for it cannot have been easy for either evacuee or host when it came to sharing household facilities. On the one hand, country people were required to allow into their homes, for an indefinite period of time, unknown mothers with small children - women who sometimes did not respect their values, possessions, or way of life and whose cigarette-smoking, manner of speech and dress were quite foreign. On the other, evacuated women were expected to adapt to the homes and ways of strangers with entirely different life experiences, cultures and standards. Moreover, they were inevitably subordinate to the householder and often subject to close observation and severe disapproval of their hosts.

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<sup>1</sup> H C Dent: *Education in Transition*, p.6

<sup>2</sup> A St Loe Strachey: *Borrowed Children*, p.49

In addition, domestic and sanitary arrangements in country cottages were sometimes primitive by the standards of even the poorest townspeople. Some homes were without electricity and offered only oil lamps for light and coal ranges for cooking. Even worse was the lack of flush toilets: instead there were often earth closets situated at the end of gardens. It was perhaps inevitable that in the face of so many unforeseen difficulties many evacuee women returned to their homes within weeks, and sometimes within days, of leaving the cities.

No doubt some reports were exaggerated or coloured by class prejudice, for some evacuees had been ill-matched to their billets in the rush to get a roof over their heads. It is also arguable that, had the predicted bombing of danger areas materialised, the short-comings of both the government scheme and the newcomers might have been largely overlooked in the interests of patriotism. Yet the facts could not be ignored - the condition and clothing of many evacuees was very poor - and in the absence of expected stories of courage and solidarity under enemy air attack following the announcement of war, it was these who made the news headlines instead. Only a week after the first evacuees had arrived in the reception areas, *The Spectator* declared:

“Many of the mothers were the lowest grade of slum women - slatternly malodorous tatterdemalions trailing children to match.”<sup>3</sup>

If this judgement was unnecessarily harsh and too general, it may nevertheless have helped to reinforce prejudices already held by some country people against city dwellers as a whole. In one Oxfordshire reception area, for example, it was reported that

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<sup>3</sup> T L Crosby: *The Impact of Civilian Evacuation in the Second World War*, p.34

although most people did their best for the evacuees, hostile comments were heard from others that only the “hysterical type of woman” had been evacuated and that “a decent woman would never leave her husband”.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps it was no wonder that no mothers with children were left in the district by Christmas 1939.<sup>5</sup>

In the evacuation areas, it seemed, the press was keen to reassure the public at large, and parents in particular, that all was well in the reception districts. Initial coverage of Sheffield refugees’ reception had been enthusiastic. The local press informed readers that many reassuring letters from happy Sheffield evacuees and from their new foster parents had been received and the children were regarding their absence from home as a ‘grand holiday’. *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent* reported great goodwill in the receiving areas towards the city’s children and mothers.<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately, this happy situation appears not to have lasted long. In Nottinghamshire, just ten days after their arrival, the Chairman of Basford Rural District Council announced that a tribunal had already been set up to deal with complaints about evacuees.<sup>7</sup> At the next meeting councillors were told that local officials were shocked when so many mothers with large families had arrived on the first train from Sheffield and there had been many problems in finding homes for them.<sup>8</sup>

It was a similar story in Leicestershire, where it is evident that reception authorities had to resort to coercion to get some evacuees billeted. *The Illustrated Leicester Chronicle*,

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<sup>4</sup> M Graham: *Oxfordshire at War*, p.47

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p.38

<sup>6</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 4.9.39, p.3; 7.9.39, p.7

<sup>7</sup> *The Nottingham Evening Post*: 12.9.39, p.5

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, 10.10.39, p.6

in a post-war résumé of the period immediately following the announcement of war, reported:

“The task with evacuee mothers was not far from being embarrassing. [...] The officials had powers of enforcement and requisition: sometimes these powers had to be used.”<sup>9</sup>

A billeting officer in the county blamed Sheffield women for discord in the reception areas: many women had come with four or five young children, and getting them to agree with another family in the same house was a very difficult matter, he said. Here, too, tribunals had been set up within days to analyse complaints, and empty properties had been inspected with a view to furnishing them for evacuated families.<sup>10</sup> Less than a fortnight after the first evacuation, the Clerk to Leicester City Council protested to the Ministry of Health that 75% of evacuated mothers with pre-school children were objectionable on grounds of health, habits or character: however, further investigation revealed the figure to be nearer 15%.<sup>11</sup>

When the National Federation of Women’s Institutes conducted a survey of 1,700 branches of the organisation throughout the country it concluded that although many women were conscientious and capable, “a distressing proportion” were described by householders as feckless and ignorant, often apparently unable to sew or cook and unwilling to help in the home or even to keep their children or their own quarters clean. The survey found that country hosts were further outraged that many of their ‘guests’

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<sup>9</sup> *The Illustrated Leicester Chronicle*: 2.11.46, p.6

<sup>10</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 28.9.39, p.5

<sup>11</sup> PRO.HLG.7/76, cited in Crosby: *op. cit.*, p.39



bemoaned the lack of fish and chips and cinemas, and went unescorted into public houses.<sup>12</sup>

It was not just receiving officials and rural householders who reproached the women, either, for a Nottinghamshire newspaper quoted the view of an evacuated teacher from Sheffield on the subject:

“It is the mothers and not the children who are complaining about the conditions and causing trouble. They are not prepared to put up with any of the little inconveniences which one is bound to get in rural districts and they won’t adapt themselves to country life.”<sup>13</sup>

However, not all the faults were on the evacuees’ side, for some of the billets offered to them were neither clean nor suitable.<sup>14</sup> Some evacuee women complained that, after a wonderful initial reception at the rail heads, they were taken to billets which left much to be desired in the way of cleanliness, particularly in those reception areas where large unoccupied houses had been set aside for families to share. A member of Mass-Observation noted a typical comment from families in one such overcrowded building: “They gave us that great welcome at the Town Hall, and then they put us into this dirty place and forgot all about us.”<sup>15</sup> In Shepshed, a receiving district for Sheffield, there were so many evacuee families with poor facilities in their billets that washbasins and baths were installed for their use in an empty shop in the town.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> National Federation of Women’s Institutes: *Town Children Through Country Eyes*, pp.1,15

<sup>13</sup> *The Nottingham Evening Post*: 18.9.39, p.1

<sup>14</sup> C Graves: *Women in Green*, p.37

<sup>15</sup> Mass-Observation File 2189, p.20

<sup>16</sup> J Perry et al: *Shepshed: Wartime Memories*, p.52

Sometimes, even when facilities were adequate, other factors influenced the speedy return home of some families, as one interviewee demonstrated. Arriving with his mother and seven of his ten siblings in Stowmarket from Ilford, the very large family was allocated to an unoccupied house which was hastily renovated and furnished by local volunteers. Beds were in short supply and the children were obliged to sleep on straw mattresses, but otherwise the house was well equipped. Two days after moving in, however, a burglary took place. The former evacuee said:

“That was enough for my mother. Next morning she got us all packed and ready and went down to the village to see about bus times. She said we couldn’t stay there and we all went home that day.”

Some of the children from this family were later successfully evacuated without their mother.<sup>17</sup>

Occasionally a voice was raised publicly in support of the women. Only a fortnight after the exodus, a writer to the ‘Letters’ column of *Education* told of the humiliation of mothers with babies having to return to the distribution centre of an unnamed reception area many times before being admitted into any billets:

“It was rather the [local] mothers who were ‘fretful and complaining’. One I heard of went so far as to say she would commit suicide if a mother and young babe were billeted on her!”<sup>18</sup>

Some hosts reacted more sympathetically than others. Mass-Observation investigators reported that, although goodwill was often shown by working-class hosts, it was badly lacking among the middle classes, whose reaction to the evacuees was often

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<sup>17</sup> Oral interview: George Green, 17.12.93

<sup>18</sup> *Education*, No. 1914, 15.9.39, p.248

‘deplorable’.<sup>19</sup> Dent, too, held that repulsion ousted pity and any sense of Christian duty went by the board as many middle-class householders set about the task of getting rid of their unwanted and undesirable guests.<sup>20</sup>

Within days the ‘grand holiday’ was drawing to an end for some, and signs of discontent in reception areas were already filtering back to the cities as mothers began to take their children home. It was not only that the women felt unwelcome in the billets but, used to the bustle of inner-city life, many were frankly bored with the limitations and the quietness of the countryside. In an apparent reference to unofficially evacuated families in Derbyshire, a local journalist reported:

“I met many Sheffield people, and the biggest grumbler was a woman: ‘Derbyshire is so dead’ she wailed. ‘It’s so dull here after dark. There’s simply nothing doing.’”<sup>21</sup>

The women were castigated for their behaviour in their billets, and condemned when they left them to go back to the cities. In October *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent* continued the censure of mothers:

“With supreme self-assurance they did not worry about the possibility of danger to their children. All they wanted was to get back to their crowded tenements where they could do as they liked.”<sup>22</sup>

However, given the public outcry about evacuation, it was perhaps small wonder that even within a fortnight the return of many mothers and children to danger areas was causing grave concern to national and local government authorities. As early as 12

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<sup>19</sup> Mass-Observation File 482, p.6

<sup>20</sup> Dent: *op. cit.*, p.12

<sup>21</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 11.9.39, p.5

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, 17.10.39, p.4

September, the Ministry of Health warned that tact, tolerance and understanding, as well as administrative enterprise and ingenuity would be required to keep them in the reception areas.<sup>23</sup> The drift back, which was to cause concern throughout the war years, will be covered in the next chapter.

So much for evacuated mothers. Many unaccompanied children found their welcome short-lived too, as the distressing condition of some was quickly revealed. The dirty and unkempt appearance of some who tumbled off trains, buses and ferries into reception centres after long journeys might have been anticipated. What had not been expected was that, as the children arrived in their billets, a significant number were found to be suffering from head lice, nits and/or skin diseases. In addition, the clothing of some was ragged and inadequate, or even infested with vermin: for instance, a large number of householders in Welsh villages who took child evacuees from Liverpool reported their clothing so dirty and vermin-infested that it had to be burned. Worse was to come: when the children awoke next morning, many wet beds were discovered. Soon, there were further complaints - of dirty habits, dishonesty and bad behaviour.<sup>24</sup>

The possibility of contagious health problems had been anticipated by at least a few agencies involved in planning evacuation, however. In May 1939 some local medical authorities had warned that in a massive movement of population the mixing of different strains of infection posed a potential threat to general health: town children might take with them into the reception areas diseases to which country children had

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<sup>23</sup> *The Nottingham Evening Post*: 13.9.39, p.1

<sup>24</sup> R M Titmuss: *Problems of Social Policy: History of the Second World War*, pp.115, 117, 122

not built up immunity. One medical journal intimated that evacuees should initially be kept separate from local children, but the suggestion was ignored.<sup>25</sup>

The Board of Education had also foreseen the possibility of such issues arising. Importantly, it had predicted that pediculosis, impetigo and scabies would be the chief problems in the first instance, and advocated that medical staffs should be increased and cleansing facilities provided to pre-empt any such difficulties. Again, the proposals had fallen on deaf ears, mainly because civil defence measures were perceived to be of greater importance.<sup>26</sup> Had adequate medical inspection and supervision been made available before the evacuated children left their home towns and cities, it is arguable that much of the furore which followed their arrival in the reception areas could have been avoided.

As it was, it quickly became clear that among almost every batch of evacuees arriving in reception areas throughout the country there were some (and often many) children who needed rigorous cleansing and treatment. Billeting officers, school doctors, nurses and health visitors were swamped with cries for help for evacuees and also for the householders. Local authorities responded by calling upon their school medical officers to visit all schools in reception districts and to carry out a speedy medical review of all the recently-arrived children.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *The Medical Officer*: Vol LXI, 6.5.39, p.174, cited in Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.15, n.1

<sup>26</sup> Board of Education Circular No.1469, 19.5.39, cited in P H J H Gosden: *Education in the Second World War*, p.164

<sup>27</sup> *The Health of the School Child: Report of Chief Medical Officer Ministry of Education 1939-45*, p.31

In some areas officials took drastic action as evacuees stepped off the trains. At Wigtown, where large numbers of mothers with children were received, the medical officer assembled a team of helpers armed with hair-clippers, who proceeded (without permission) to shave the heads of all the evacuees.<sup>28</sup> It was not unknown for individual householders to take extreme measures to deal with the problem: an interviewee told of a foster parent in Ald borough who, becoming infested with lice from her Hull evacuees, treated the whole family with sheep-dip to cleanse them.<sup>29</sup> This was apparently not an isolated instance, for Mass-Observation quoted another householder in Colne who bought a cake of sheep dip to wash her evacuee's head and then passed it on to neighbours for their evacuees.<sup>30</sup>

Public response to the revelations of infestation was immediate and furious. Press reports were damning: the response of one West Country journalist was not untypical:

“The condition of some of the children was almost incredible - and an eye-opener to those who believed that London's sordid slumdom had died with the Victorian novelists.”<sup>31</sup>

The implication was that 'dirty diseases' of lice, impetigo and scabies were connected with character faults or with shortcomings in the behaviour and habits of the urban lower classes.

It should not be assumed, however, that all - or even most - evacuees had been living in squalor in the cities; nor that all billets were clean and wholesome. There were indeed many cases where verminous children from inner-city slums were sent to fastidious

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<sup>28</sup> PRO.CAB/HIST/S/4/8/6, cited in Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.84

<sup>29</sup> Oral interview: Margaret Laing, 4.3.97

<sup>30</sup> Mass-Observation File 11

<sup>31</sup> *The Weston Mercury*: 4.9.39, p.1

foster parents; but there were also instances where delicately nurtured town children were dispatched to unclean and uncaring country householders. Moreover, it was not unknown for evacuees to catch infectious skin diseases or head lice in their billets: at least one interviewee from a clean home became infected with head- and body-lice within weeks of arrival,<sup>32</sup> and another evacuee was infected with scabies on three separate occasions while in her billet.<sup>33</sup> Loughborough's Medical Officer of Health stopped short of suggesting that unaccompanied children were deliberately neglected, but implicitly criticised some foster parents:

“[...] there is naturally a certain lack of interest and attention devoted to them compared to that given to the householder's own children. [...] The result is that many slight infestations, with lice for instance, are not treated which would be immediately dealt with in the case of the householder's own children.”<sup>34</sup>

Reasons may be advanced for many of the problems exposed by evacuation, not least the incidence of infestation. As seen in Chapter Three, the exodus happened at the end of the summer holidays, when school medical services had been largely unavailable for several weeks. Government planners had regarded the need for speed in getting people away as paramount, and no official provision had been made for the children to be medically examined before they left the danger areas. Few reception areas had arranged for inspections on arrival, and some had even been misled about the need for such preparation: officials in Liverpool, for instance, had told Welsh receiving

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<sup>32</sup> Oral interview: Pamela Denniff, 16.9.94

<sup>33</sup> Personal experience of writer

<sup>34</sup> Report of Loughborough Medical Officer of Health on the Medical Aspects of Evacuation, p.1, Loughborough Library Local Studies Collection

authorities that their children would arrive clean and free from infectious disease.<sup>35</sup> Some children may have been infected by close contact with others during long journeys on crowded trains, for in hot weather pediculosis and skin diseases spread rapidly. But in many cases the condition undoubtedly already existed in their homes: as the Women's Group on Public Welfare found, cramped and poor living conditions, shared beds, no baths and sometimes no tap water all provided a breeding-ground for vermin and infestation.<sup>36</sup>

Whatever the reasons, the discovery that large numbers of children were suffering in this way rocked authorities and householders alike. The revelations, and the resulting outcry across the whole country, prompted the Board of Education and the Ministry of Health to expedite an investigation by Dr Kenneth Mellanby into the incidence of head lice which he had already begun before the war. His results were to prove disturbing: in industrial cities lousiness was found in approximately 50% of all girls under fourteen years and in boys to a smaller extent - declining from 45% at two years to 20% at school leaving age. A much lower percentage of such infections was discovered in rural areas<sup>37</sup> and this may account for the shock experienced in the reception areas. On the other hand, perusal of pre-war newspapers had indicated that there was already concern about head lice in children in at least one district which received Sheffield children in 1939, with *The Hucknall Dispatch* reporting that 25% of girls of school age there had "unsatisfactory hair conditions".<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.127

<sup>36</sup> Women's Group on Public Welfare: *op. cit.*, p.93

<sup>37</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p. 127

<sup>38</sup> *The Hucknall Dispatch*: 22.6.39, p.3



It has been possible to ascertain from the Report of Sheffield's School Medical Officer for 1938 that 15.15% girls and 1.82% boys were unclean at that time.<sup>39</sup> No medical statistics are available for the first evacuees from Sheffield in 1939 for, as has been seen in the previous chapter, the majority received at best only a cursory inspection before leaving. However, when a second chance was offered for evacuation in October, all those who registered were examined by the school medical services, when the School Medical Officer reported that thirty of these children, or 11.36%, were found to have infectious conditions of the head or skin.<sup>40</sup> It seems reasonable to believe that the percentage for September would have been at least similar, if not higher in view of the absence of medical services due to summer holidays. Indeed, when registrations were invited again seven months later, in May 1940, the proportion had risen to 13.9%.<sup>41</sup>

It is clear, therefore, that some Sheffield children did take infectious conditions with them into the reception areas. The Nottinghamshire School Medical Officer reported that 30% of the evacuees arriving in the county from the combined evacuation zones of Sheffield, Leeds and Nottingham in 1939 were found to have been suffering from vermin and/or skin diseases. Although the foregoing research suggests that this percentage may have been overstated, at least in regard to Sheffield, it is not possible to refute it categorically.

In Nottinghamshire, the county's School Medical Officer's Report showed that school nurses were deployed in making regular visits to both billets and schools and close

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<sup>39</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1939*, p.39

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, p.41

<sup>41</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1940*, p.32

liaison was maintained between the school medical service and the relevant reception and billeting authorities. Some hosts appear to have refused, or been unable, to deal with the problem, for the Report stated:

“[...] it is to be regretted that evacuee children were all too frequently returned to the evacuation areas by reception authorities when billet difficulties arose.”<sup>42</sup>

In Leicestershire it was apparently a similar situation, for Loughborough's Medical Officer of Health stated that it was a common occurrence for householders to request that verminous children be removed.<sup>43</sup> When the town's Education Committee met just two weeks after the evacuees' arrival, the Clerk reported that the billeting tribunal had already sat twice, the most common cause of complaint being the condition of the children. Several nurses had come from Sheffield to look after a number of 'special' children and see they were put in a condition which would eliminate any grumbles, and more nurses had been asked for from the city.<sup>44</sup> The Committee's Report for 1939 shows that schools in the town, temporarily closed due to the emergency, were commandeered for the purpose of making a thorough medical inspection of every evacuated child.<sup>45</sup> In Shepshed, examination of a school log book showed that weekly visits were made by a school nurse from Sheffield to check on evacuees from the city.<sup>46</sup>

Initial reports conveyed by *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent* on the city's evacuees had been cheerful, indicating very few problem cases.<sup>47</sup> Predictably, perhaps,

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<sup>42</sup> Nottinghamshire Education Committee: *School Medical Officer's Report 1939-1940*, p.4

<sup>43</sup> Report of Loughborough Medical Officer of Health on the Medical Aspects of Evacuation, p.1, Loughborough Library Local Studies Collection

<sup>44</sup> *The Loughborough & Shepshed Echo*: 22.9.39, p.4

<sup>45</sup> Loughborough Education Committee: *Report 1939*, p.6

<sup>46</sup> Log book: Shepshed Council School, several entries

<sup>47</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 2.9.39, p.5

even though complaints were fully aired by local newspapers in the reception areas, very few references have been found in the Sheffield press. Sheffield's School Medical Officer, in his Report for 1939, took issue with many of the complaints from receiving officials as he observed: "Experience showed when the committee's nurses went into the reception areas that the reports [...] were undoubtedly exaggerated."<sup>48</sup>

Evacuees were also sometimes blamed for bringing other infectious diseases into the reception areas, too. When thirty-eight cases of diphtheria were reported in Loughborough, the Medical Officer of Health for Leicestershire stated that, in his opinion, the disease was probably brought by a carrier from an evacuated area. Referring to Sheffield children in particular, he said that since the evacuees had been in Leicestershire there had been an increase in infectious diseases.<sup>49</sup> At a meeting on 19 October 1939, members of Loughborough Town Council agreed to call upon the Sheffield authorities for more medical help in addition to that already sent.<sup>50</sup>

In rural areas where the school population had suddenly ballooned by huge proportions, sometimes increasing by 100% within a few days, child welfare services were strained to the limit. In evacuation areas the normal work of school clinics was temporarily suspended and doctors, dentists and nurses were deployed in reception districts to assist local authority staffs dealing with affected children. Nurses continued to make frequent visits to schools throughout the period of the war wherever there were appreciable numbers of evacuees in schools. Hostels for the 'unbilleteable minority' (those with

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<sup>48</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1939*, p.41

<sup>49</sup> *The Loughborough & Shepshed Echo*: 13.10.39, p.5

<sup>50</sup> Borough of Loughborough Town Council: *Minutes 1939/40*, Item 9

contagious skin diseases, lice, enuresis and severe behavioural problems) had to be hastily improvised by local authorities. Voluntary organisations, particularly the Red Cross, St John Ambulance Association and Women's Voluntary Service, helped to bring the situation under control so that the school medical services in reception areas were able to resume more normal working conditions.<sup>51</sup>

The Ministry of Health did not respond officially until January 1940, when two memoranda - "Scabies" and "The Louse and How to Deal with It" - were produced and distributed to medical officers in reception areas.<sup>52</sup> In March the Board of Education radically amended its policy on medical examinations to ensure that evacuees would be inspected before evacuation took place, and again upon arrival in the reception areas. A new system of coding the children's identity labels was established in May, so that receiving authorities could be warned of any potential problems as evacuees arrived. This innovation helped to avoid the recurrence of the 1939 fiasco. The symbols were as follows:<sup>53</sup>

+ = medically inspected	C = vermin
0 = hostel recommended	D = nits
□ = special consideration	E = enuresis
A = impetigo	F = infectious disease contact
B = scabies	G = other conditions

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<sup>51</sup> *The Health of the School Child: op. cit.*, p.31

<sup>52</sup> R Padley "Six Months' Practice" in R Padley & M Cole (eds): *Evacuation Survey*, p.62

<sup>53</sup> Gosden: *op. cit.*, p.168 n.20; p.169

Infestation and skin problems may have been foreseen by at least some medical authorities: but no-one, it appears, had expected that nocturnal enuresis would quickly become a problem. In fact bed-wetting was not a new phenomenon but it had been a hidden one. Lack of reportage and ignorance had caused its incidence to be grossly under-estimated, and it was not until thousands of children were suddenly uprooted from their homes and deposited in strangers' houses that the problem was exposed.

The very first morning after the young refugees' arrival in their billets brought shock and horror to hosts for it seemed, as Isaacs put it, that "evacuation produced a Niagara all over English and Scottish country beds". Householders were outraged at the discovery of so many wet beds and they protested loudly. Sweeping allegations about the filthy behaviour of evacuee children of all ages were carried in the national press and local newspapers in reception areas and made it seem that all inhabitants of evacuation areas were 'tarred with the same brush'.<sup>54</sup>

Local authorities had certainly not anticipated the full extent of the problem, and the ban on advance expenditure for such items as mackintosh overlays for evacuees which had been imposed by the Treasury until late in evacuation preparations had not helped either. When approval was finally given in May 1939 supplies of waterproof sheets were ordered for children under five years, but few consignments had been received by the time that evacuation began. Crucially, no provision at all had been made for older children for this had not been deemed necessary.<sup>55</sup> As a result, many householders had

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<sup>54</sup> Isaacs: *op. cit.*, p.47

<sup>55</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.121

their mattresses and bedding spoiled, and were faced with a great deal of extra washing, all of which caused natural resentment in the reception areas.

Bed-wetting was one of the most publicised features of complaints against evacuees, at least in the first few weeks. Although its extent was often exaggerated, it was difficult to quantify: Boyd quoted figures ranging up to 33% of school children, but many reports to the Ministry of Health cited numbers of between 10% and 20%.<sup>56</sup> Evacuees were universally stigmatised and parents often blamed for failing to train their children, when the truth was more likely to be that the cause was insecurity, and the nervous strain of separation from home was responsible for initial nocturnal accidents. Another contributory factor was that many country homes had only outside earthen closets: urban children, used to well-lit cities and unfamiliar with total darkness, were sometimes afraid to go down long garden paths to 'privvies' at night. With patience and understanding much of the trouble was soon put right, but with foresight it could probably have been largely avoided.

An enquiry by Bradford Education Committee in November 1939 (instigated in response to complaints about its evacuees) refuted allegations that most enuretic children came from homes where no training had been given, while accepting this was so in a few exceptional cases. The report also found the condition may have affected some children to a minor degree already but become exacerbated on evacuation; and often it was a new phenomenon caused by unhappiness in billets.<sup>57</sup> Burt's study of a group of children in areas of London, Birmingham and Liverpool, published in 1940,

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<sup>56</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.121. n.4

<sup>57</sup> *Education*, No. 1928, 22.12.39, p.521

noted a significant increase in nocturnal enuresis after evacuation and maintained that it was not a habit but largely a new manifestation, often caused by temporary emotional disturbance due to leaving home.<sup>58</sup> He went on to assert that ignorance about sanitary arrangements in the billet, or even shyness, could exacerbate the situation:

“A girl of 13 years remained four days in her new home without learning where the lavatory was, explaining later that she ‘didn’t know what to say’.”<sup>59</sup>

No complaints relating specifically to Sheffield children have been found in local archives, newspapers, documents or other sources in reception areas regarding bed-wetting, and only one reference to the subject has been discovered in the evacuation area itself. The Annual Report of the School Medical Officer for 1939 showed no statistics for September. Of the 264 city children who registered for evacuation in October that year, only five (less than 2%) were recorded with “occasional nocturnal enuresis” and all were passed fit to go to the reception areas: however, this sample is too small to be representative of Sheffield evacuees as a whole.<sup>60</sup> The subject was not referred to in later reports on evacuation concerning Sheffield and no interviewees mentioned the problem in regard to themselves.

Often, bed-wetting was rectified with time and patience, but for several months the burden fell on foster parents. It was June 1940 before an extra laundry allowance of 3s.6d. weekly was made for householders dealing with persistent cases of enuresis.<sup>61</sup> In

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<sup>58</sup> C Burt: “The Incidence of Neurotic Symptoms Among Evacuated School Children”, *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. X (1940), p.10

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, p.14

<sup>60</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Report of the School Medical Officer 1939*, p.41

<sup>61</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.125

most cases foster parents were reasonable, but there were some cases where householders sent the child home, or wrote to parents telling them to remove the child without consulting the billeting officer.<sup>62</sup> Most problems were comparatively short-lived as the remaining children settled down in their new surroundings. Health improved, cleanliness was established and enuresis often proved to be a temporary inconvenience. Nevertheless, for a few children the only answer was hostel accommodation.

Titmuss found that a small minority of children deliberately fouled their billets, either because they had been untrained or sometimes as a demonstration of despair and unhappiness or rebellion against new regimes.<sup>63</sup> The National Federation of Women's Institutes' report on evacuees from the East End of London stated:

“Some were simply crawling with lice, etc, and actually never used a lavatory; the children simply sat down in the house anywhere to relieve themselves and actually one woman always sat the baby in the bed for this purpose.”

The survey blamed some mothers for failing to train their children but considered that bad habits reflected the conditions of home life.<sup>64</sup> In crowded inner-city tenements many families may have had to share one communal lavatory: these conditions may have accounted for some of the perceived 'dirty habits'.

The problem of enuresis did recur in further evacuation programmes during the war, but it was not accompanied by the rancour that it had aroused in 1939. There were several reasons for this. Firstly, later movements did not involve the huge numbers or the speed

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<sup>62</sup> *Education*, No. 1928, 22.12.39, p.521

<sup>63</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, pp.121-25

<sup>64</sup> National Federation of Women's Institutes: *op. cit.*, pp.15,16



of removal which had been experienced in 1939 and which had rendered authorities unable to inspect children before they left. Improved medical supervision and examinations of children registered for future programmes enabled staff to identify the condition, and the new system of labelling drew the attention of reception authorities to potential problems as the children arrived. In addition, hostels were set up in 1940 so that severely enuretic children were not sent to unsuspecting householders.<sup>65</sup>

Poor sleeping habits were also a cause for complaint, with many reports of children refusing to go to bed at reasonable hours, or to sleep in beds provided by hosts. Leicestershire Director of Education quoted a case where an evacuee's mother complained that the child's new bedtime was far too early, for at home he never went to bed before 10.30 p.m: she took him back to the evacuation area.<sup>66</sup> It was said of Manchester evacuees: "Some had never slept in beds."<sup>67</sup> But it was not always appreciated by country people that children of large families living in overcrowded city tenements were often used to retiring very late and sharing beds with several siblings or their parents.

Evacuation authorities and householders were in for a further shock when the pitiful state of clothing of many evacuees was revealed. As children arrived in the reception centres it was seen that large numbers of them were inadequately clad or shod: even worse, some were in verminous and ragged garments. The outcry at the poor and filthy state of some children's attire was reported countrywide in local and national

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<sup>65</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.125

<sup>66</sup> *The Loughborough & Shepshed Echo*: 13.10.39, p.5

<sup>67</sup> National Federation of Women's Institutes: *op. cit.*, p.3

newspapers, many of which carried appeals for clothing and boots for needy evacuees. Some parents were accused of expecting hosts to clothe their children.<sup>68</sup> Ministry of Health policy was that parents were responsible for providing footwear and clothing for evacuated children, with voluntary help or poor law assistance only in needy cases.<sup>69</sup>

The failure of many parents to provide sufficient or suitable garments was a frequent and continuing complaint of hosts throughout the war. It was one of the problems investigated by the National Federation of Women's Institutes, whose results showed that large numbers of children arrived in the reception areas ill-shod and very poorly clad, and clothing was often sent dirty and in need of repair. In extreme cases evacuees were sewn into their clothes which then had to be burned and replaced by foster parents. A frequent observation was that many children's footwear was entirely unsuitable for country life; while some were entirely without underwear or nightwear. One householder said that her evacuees were so unused to night clothes that they simply put them on over their everyday clothes.<sup>70</sup>

London and Liverpool evacuees came in for most criticism, but there were similar problems with children from other areas. From Lindsey, in Lincolnshire (a reception area for Leeds), it was reported that many evacuees arrived in rags and some were completely re-clothed by their hosts.<sup>71</sup> Accounts sometimes differed on children from the same district, however. One Women's Institute branch reported on Leeds evacuees:

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<sup>68</sup> Mass-Observation File 11

<sup>69</sup> R Samways (ed): *We Think You Ought to Go*, p.15

<sup>70</sup> National Federation of Women's Institutes: *op. cit.*, pp.7,8

<sup>71</sup> Women's Group on Public Welfare: *op. cit.*, p.54

“With very few exceptions, they were pitifully badly clothed. Quite half the children came with very dirty and ragged clothes and a quarter of them had no boots or shoes fit to wear.”<sup>72</sup>

But another, relating to the same city, stated: “These children were well dressed and perfectly clean but not accustomed to discipline.”<sup>73</sup> Lindsey householders who had earlier been so outspoken about their unwillingness to take in children from Sheffield [see Chapter Two] may have regretted their comments as they came to realise that other towns and cities also had their share of social problems.

Sheffield evacuees did not escape censure, though. In Nottinghamshire the first report of the Chief Billeting Officer for the area south of the Trent criticised the poor and dirty condition of some of the city’s children.<sup>74</sup> An Awsworth householder who was interviewed remarked on the poor state of her evacuees’ clothing on arrival. Although their father later co-operated with her to provide for them, when one of his daughters was chosen to be the local May Queen, it was the hosts who provided her outfit.<sup>75</sup>

In Leicestershire there were also indications of problems over evacuees’ attire. *The Loughborough & Shepshed Echo* reported that many of the clothes of Sheffield children had been unsatisfactory. Supplies of boots and clothing were requested from the city and a scheme had been set up to send more garments from the evacuating area, while a Children’s Evacuation Fund had been established in Loughborough.<sup>76</sup> The log book of Shepshed Council Senior School recorded a conference arranged by the Leicestershire

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<sup>72</sup> National Federation of Women’s Institutes: *op. cit.*, p.7

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, p.11

<sup>74</sup> *The Nottingham Evening Post*: 10.10.39, p.6

<sup>75</sup> Oral interview: Gladys Smith, 12.5.95

<sup>76</sup> *The Loughborough & Shepshed Echo*: 22.9.39, p.4

Director of Education with head teachers in the county to discuss problems of clothing for the evacuee children who included some from Sheffield.<sup>77</sup>

*The Sheffield Star*, which had praised Sheffield evacuees for their spruce appearance as they left home on 1 September,<sup>78</sup> had within a month changed its tune, reporting that many city children had arrived in their billets very poorly clad, and people in the reception areas had rallied round to clothe them properly.<sup>79</sup> Meanwhile, Sheffield authorities had acted promptly to address the problem. The subject was discussed by the city's Emergency Committee, when the Public Assistance Officer reported that he had taken up with the Minister of Health the question of provision of boots and clothing for evacuated children whose parents were in receipt of relief.<sup>80</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent* reported that leaders of all the city's evacuated schools were asked to conduct a survey of the needs of individual needy children in the reception areas and welfare officers visited parents to encourage them to equip their children properly. Most responded positively, but in other cases the Sheffield Clothing Guild sent garments and footwear to foster parents. The Chief Education Officer was at pains to point out that parents' financial circumstances were investigated before their children received free donations of this kind, however.<sup>81</sup> Documents examined at Brookside School (formerly East Leake Primary School) show that this Guild was still helping needy Sheffield evacuees in 1943 and 1944.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Log book: Shepshed Council Senior School, entry 18.3.40

<sup>78</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 1.9.39, p.1

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*, 28.9.39, p.5

<sup>80</sup> Sheffield Archives Files CA 157/2(a) & (b); CA 157/4, Minute 250

<sup>81</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 29.9.39, p.5

<sup>82</sup> Nottinghamshire County Council letters to Head Teachers, 25.8.43, 26.8.44, East Leake School papers

The clothes of some children were, indeed, in a deplorable condition and presented serious problems for many householders. Some dug into their own pockets to dress the children, while others bought clothing and then asked for reimbursement from parents. But not all householders were willing to do this and children could be left feeling guilty at their parents' neglect or inability to provide.<sup>83</sup> However, as Titmuss pointed out, country householders who took in the children were often ignorant of the poverty which produced this state of affairs. Many mothers in poor, inner-city areas had long been forced to use clothing clubs to equip their families and did not realise that cheap and shoddy clothes which had been adequate for town wear would be entirely unsuitable for the country, particularly in the oncoming winter.<sup>84</sup> Le Gros Clark and Toms held that most families had tried their best to follow instructions and patched and washed their children's 'best' which was often their 'only'.<sup>85</sup>

Some evacuating authorities had evidently been unaware of the full extent of deprivation until rehearsals for the exodus were under way. Then, Newcastle-upon-Tyne officials estimated 21% of its children registering for evacuation had insufficient clothing and 13% had inadequate footwear, while Manchester reported about 20% of evacuees arriving in plimsolls.<sup>86</sup> But, whereas local education authorities in Scotland already had power to provide boots and clothing for the poorest children during the inter-war years, in England and Wales no such authority existed until a few days before evacuation began.<sup>87</sup> This factor, no doubt, accounted for many complaints levelled at

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<sup>83</sup> J S Clarke: "Family Life" in Padley & Cole: *op. cit.*, p. 160

<sup>84</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p. 116

<sup>85</sup> F Le Gros Clark & R W Toms: *Evacuation: Failure or Reform*, p. 4

<sup>86</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, pp. 115, 117

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*, p. 118

evacuees by those in the reception areas, for the covert allocation of £1 for every two hundred necessitous children awarded by the Treasury at the eleventh hour<sup>88</sup> had come too late for some of the most needy. In any case, the paltry amount eventually granted was woefully inadequate: Liverpool, for instance, spent more than five times its £502 allowance and even then its children were among the most severely criticised for their abysmal standard of dress.<sup>89</sup>

In November the Ministry of Health was forced to respond to public demand by providing some financial relief, either to issue essential clothing to needy children or to the parents so that they might supply their children with the necessary items.<sup>90</sup> A sum of £15,000 was distributed to Directors of Education to enable them to deal with ‘necessitous cases’ but, as with the August allowance of £1 per two hundred children, the award was not to be made public.<sup>91</sup> In April 1940 Sheffield Education Committee passed a resolution urging the government to make provision within the official evacuation scheme empowering local education authorities to supply clothing to necessitous children and to pass on the charge to the Exchequer<sup>92</sup> and by the time the ‘Trickle’ evacuation was under way the government had increased the clothing allocation to £1 per year per thirty evacuated children,<sup>93</sup> as will be seen in Chapter Six.

Another widespread complaint about evacuee children concerned their eating habits.

The Women’s Institutes Survey found that, whereas opinions sometimes differed with

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<sup>88</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.92

<sup>89</sup> *Education* No. 1916, 29.9.39, p.283; also Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.119, n.1

<sup>90</sup> MoH Circular 1907 7.11.39 in *Education*: No. 1925, 1.12.39, p.465

<sup>91</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.120

<sup>92</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Report 1939/40*, p.544

<sup>93</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.375, n.2

regard to other matters, on the matter of food there was universal agreement among householders:

“Wherever diet is mentioned it is in identical terms. The children are used to being fed on bread and margarine, fish and chips, tinned food and sweets. This comment is not confined to areas with very poor housing conditions.”<sup>94</sup>

Mass-Observation diarists, also, noted frequent complaints from hosts that evacuees were quite unaccustomed to using cutlery and sitting down at a table to hot meals, preferring instead to have a packet of chips or hunk of bread in their hand on the doorstep. Some foster mothers reported that their evacuees would only eat bread and lard, and refused more wholesome food.<sup>95</sup> Several stories exist (some no doubt apocryphal) of children requesting beer and chips for their supper.<sup>96</sup>

A much more vexed question was the conduct of evacuees. When the government evacuation scheme was being drawn up, it was based on the theory that almost all evacuees would be housed with families in private homes. True, officials had anticipated some minor behavioural problems at the beginning, but confidently expected householders to have little trouble in controlling the vast majority of children and preserving reasonable discipline in the home.<sup>97</sup> A limited number of hostels were set up to deal with an expected “small proportion of children” whose care and supervision might place an undue burden on ordinary householders.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> National Federation of Women’s Institutes: *op. cit.*, p.4

<sup>95</sup> Mass-Observation File 11

<sup>96</sup> eg. A Marwick: *The Home Front*, p.27; National Federation of Women’s Institutes: *op. cit.*, p.5

<sup>97</sup> Dent: *op. cit.*, p.5

<sup>98</sup> *The Health of the School Child*, *op. cit.*, p.64

Most children did settle down without serious problems. However, behavioural difficulties with evacuees proved to be much greater than expected and many more hostel places were needed than were available. The problem was that it was not until the children were deposited in billets that householders found they could not cope with some of them. The Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Education held that the great majority of children who were found to be troublesome after arrival had given no indication previously that they were difficult.<sup>99</sup> This was disputed by both the Bradford enquiry<sup>100</sup> and by Leslie, who (unsympathetically) opined that those children who were difficult in reception areas were most likely to be difficult at home and were likely to be “neglected brats”.<sup>101</sup>

It cannot be denied that many householders had genuine cause for complaint, but some accounts were embellished and sensationalised, especially where an excuse was wanted to avoid taking in evacuees or to have them removed. The adverse publicity caused the behaviour and condition of all evacuees to be under constant scrutiny, with small transgressions often magnified out of all proportion to their seriousness.<sup>102</sup> Bradford’s enquiry into complaints about its children embraced all the agencies involved in evacuation - billeting officers, receiving householders, schools, parents and the children themselves. The Chief Education Officer explained:

“This five-fold approach was found to be necessary because of the unreliability of accounts of evacuees’ behaviour. This unreliability was in some cases found to consist not only of gross exaggeration but also of complete falsity of facts.”<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> *The Health of the School Child, op. cit.*, p.65

<sup>100</sup> *Education*, No. 1928, 22.12.39, p.521

<sup>101</sup> I M Leslie: “Some Problems of a Hostel in a Reception Area”, *Social Work*, (July 1940), p.307

<sup>102</sup> Dent: *op. cit.*, p.13

<sup>103</sup> *Education*, No. 1928, 22.12.39, p.521



The Report of Sheffield's School Medical Officer confirmed this view and implicitly criticised some householders:

“It must be pointed out that the psychological disturbance caused in some of the children transferred to the country, under such emotional conditions, seem to have affected also a certain number of the recipients of the evacuees.”<sup>104</sup>

Nevertheless, reception authorities reported a sharp increase in juvenile crime, particularly in theft from shops and stores, which was publicly connected with evacuees. Burt challenged the theory that evacuation itself was to blame: he held that in most cases petty crime was committed by children already known to steal before they were evacuated. He attributed much of the problem to the fact that country shopkeepers were unused to “predatory tricks of city youngsters” and to new opportunities for mischief afforded by the move to a new environment.<sup>105</sup> The Bradford investigators considered that much of the pilfering and bad behaviour was caused by unhappiness, but also found a considerable amount of robbing from orchards and other trees occurred in the early weeks of evacuation by children unused to country living.<sup>106</sup> A Sheffield evacuee explained:

“We had never seen anything growing on trees before, other than leaves, but the Rector had conker trees in the Rectory garden and we went in to get them.”<sup>107</sup>

Another said many children used to go ‘scrumping’ apples when the fruit was ripe.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Report of the School Medical Officer* 1939, p.41

<sup>105</sup> C Burt: “The Incidence of Neurotic Symptoms Among Evacuated School Children”, *op. cit.*, pp.13,11

<sup>106</sup> *Education*, No. 1928, 22.12.39, p.521

<sup>107</sup> Oral interview: Elaine Piotrowicz, 21.3.95

<sup>108</sup> Oral interview: Jean Perry, 4.9.96

At first Sheffield newspapers carried only upbeat, if ambiguous, reports on evacuees “somewhere in Leicestershire”:

“The village policeman said he had much more work in the past fortnight. He said, however, that the children from Sheffield were better behaved than those living in the village.”<sup>109</sup>

But, although Sheffield reporters were apparently loath to admit that the city’s children may have given trouble in the reception areas, it is clear that some did. Examination of the punishment book at East Leake Junior School, for instance, (where the school population swelled overnight by 35% when fifty-one Sheffield children joined the school)<sup>110</sup> showed that three of the city’s evacuees were mentioned several times. Two were punished for stealing apples within the first days of arrival at the school and one was caned for bad behaviour no less than eight times in his first year in the reception area.. All these boys appear to have settled down eventually: at any rate, their names did not appear in the book after October 1940, although they all remained in the area until at least 1942.<sup>111</sup>

‘Scrumpling’ fruit was one thing. Maladjustment and crime were more serious, and it was soon clear that a number of children were unsuitable for billeting in private homes and would need specialised care in institutions. It has been seen in Chapter One that the government had been reluctant to approve the provision of hostels, for private homes were a much cheaper option; and although funding for fifty institutions was eventually granted in May 1939 very few had been completed by the outbreak of war.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 18.9.39, p.5

<sup>110</sup> Miscellaneous papers: Brookside Primary School (formerly East Leake Council School)

<sup>111</sup> East Leake Council School Punishment Book

<sup>112</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.36

It was not until a further wave of evacuation was envisaged, amid fears of failure in view of the first experience, that funding for the project on any significant scale was approved in May 1940.<sup>113</sup> The appointment of regional welfare officers was sanctioned the following month, when an expansion in the number of hostels followed.<sup>114</sup>

The problem was that in the rush to provide more hostels, and in the absence of sufficient qualified staff to run them initially, children deemed unbilleteable for a number of varying reasons tended to be lumped together.<sup>115</sup> It was not until January 1941 that the Shakespeare Report on Conditions in the Reception Areas was published, identifying the need to separate children who were unclean or suffering from short-term illnesses from those with more severe difficulties, including maladjustment, mental and physical handicaps,<sup>116</sup> as will be seen in Chapter Six.

Even where behavioural problems were not severe, reports about the children were often critical. The initial goodwill and altruistic intentions of many hosts at the outset gave way, as the 'phoney war' dragged on into months, to irritation and intolerance as the evacuees stayed longer than expected while no danger appeared imminent. Some host families began to feel that advantage was being taken of their hospitality, and a frequent complaint was of the lack of gratitude or appreciation shown by evacuees whose arrival had greatly disrupted country life. But the headmaster of an evacuated school took a more balanced view, reporting that evacuation had had considerable success despite examples of ingratitude on the part of some evacuees on the one hand,

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<sup>113</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.380

<sup>114</sup> G A N Lowndes: *The Silent Revolution*, p.216

<sup>115</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.380

<sup>116</sup> PRO.HLG.7/85 Shakespeare Report, p7

and obstruction, incompetence and delay on the part of some officials and householders in the reception area on the other.<sup>117</sup>

Varying reports on Sheffield evacuees were received. Some householders complained that evacuated children lacked all social graces and one foster mother protested that although her three evacuees from the city were clean and friendly, they were yet completely lacking any co-operation, responsibility and pleasant manners although they were not “from the poorest and most depressing slums” but their parents were “decent and well paid working people”.<sup>118</sup> But Sheffield children were defended by the Rector of Linby-cum-Papplewick in Nottinghamshire, who nevertheless recognised there had been problems in other areas:

“The children sent to Linby and Papplewick are a very nice collection - I should say the best of that city. We have not much to complain of as in other places.”<sup>119</sup>

A Women’s Institute report upon Sheffield evacuees was also complimentary:

“They appreciated everything that was done for them. Mix very well with village children and have behaved well, no reports of damage or theft.”<sup>120</sup>

It is clear from press reports in reception areas that dissatisfaction there was not far below the surface almost from the beginning. Only ten days after the first exodus, members of Basford Rural District Council (where many Sheffield evacuees were received) discussed the suggestion that rural areas had been exploited. A councillor advocated that if more evacuees were sent, they should be allocated to the suburbs of

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<sup>117</sup> Mitcham County School for Boys: Minutes of Governors’ Meetings 1939-1942

<sup>118</sup> *The Hallamshire Teacher*, Vol. 51/52, p.18

<sup>119</sup> *The Hucknall Dispatch*: 5.10.39, p.5

<sup>120</sup> National Federation of Women’s Institutes: *op. cit.*, p.11

urban areas where there were younger people who could look after the evacuees better than old people in the country.<sup>121</sup>

In the evacuation areas, however, local newspapers continued for several weeks to print upbeat reports about the success of billeting. In November *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent* praised householders in the city's reception areas, the majority of whom, it was said, accepted the situation as their patriotic duty, and were forging friendships which would never be broken.<sup>122</sup> Yet the next day the same newspaper implicitly accepted all was not well with some foster parents when it carried a suggestion that householders could pair up to share the care of evacuees month by month.<sup>123</sup> It is not known if this proposal was taken up, but one might venture to suggest that it was a proposal hardly suitable for already insecure children.

In a movement of such huge proportions as Operation 'Pied Piper' it was inevitable that some mistakes would be made in placements: for instance, *The Nottingham Evening Post* reported that an ageing bachelor, living with his equally elderly sister and a cook, was allocated eight unaccompanied children.<sup>124</sup> Angus Calder asserted that billeting officers were 'bombarded' throughout the early part of the first evacuation scheme by householders demanding that their evacuees should be removed and quoted the case of Maidenhead, where re-billeting averaged 750 transfers in the first three months.<sup>125</sup> Undoubtedly some billeting breakdowns could have been avoided if more officials

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<sup>121</sup> *The Nottingham Evening Post*: 12.9.39, p.5

<sup>122</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 17.11.39, p.4

<sup>123</sup> *ibid.*, 18.11.39, p.5

<sup>124</sup> *The Nottingham Evening Post*: 14.9.39, p.4

<sup>125</sup> A Calder: *The Myth of the Blitz*, p.60

trained in social work had been available for the work of billeting from the outset, for prompt attention could have avoided serious friction in many cases.

Inevitably, some Sheffield children suffered from errors in billeting, too. The headmaster of Sharrow Lane School, while praising officials in the Loughborough reception area for their carefully-made plans which had been rapidly and efficiently carried out, acknowledged that there had been some misfits in initial arrangements:

“Some of the evacuees were not quite happy in their billets and some of the Loughborough citizens found themselves unable to retain the evacuees who had been billeted with them.”<sup>126</sup>

Harrison considered the hostility of householders was directed against all evacuees in 1939 regardless of religion or race,<sup>127</sup> but it is evident that these were factors in some mismatches in billeting. Jackson averred that there was no reference to either subject on evacuation registration forms, because architects of the scheme believed there would be no time to consider individual requirements in an emergency.<sup>128</sup> However, the fact that Non-conformist Welsh hosts tended to be unfamiliar with the needs of the many Roman Catholics destined for the area, while Jewish customs were often entirely unknown to Gentiles in rural reception areas, should have flagged up the possibility of problems.

When country districts of Protestant Wales were swamped by Liverpool Catholic children with nowhere to worship and often no teachers nearby, foster parents did not always appreciate that spiritual health was more important than physical safety in the

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<sup>126</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 13.9.39, p.4

<sup>127</sup> Mass-Observation File 483, p.9

<sup>128</sup> C Jackson: *Who Will Take Our Children?*, p.23

eyes of the church. One Catholic priest, calling upon parents to bring their children home from a reception area, warned that any physical danger they might incur thereby was trifling when compared with the spiritual dangers they ran by remaining.<sup>129</sup>

It was difficult for rural villagers to avoid noticing an influx of Jewish evacuees, as in the case of Chatteris, Cambridgeshire, whose population of five thousand was swelled in a day by seven hundred evacuees, 85% of whom were Jewish East End children.<sup>130</sup>

Grunfeld described the attitude towards Jews in some reception areas:

“There was a strong element of fear and prejudice, nourished by ignorance and superstition and mixed with the usual portion of the traditional dislike of the unlike.”<sup>131</sup>

For some children, the exodus of September 1939 was not their first evacuation, but the second. Jewish children, who had come to England as refugees from Nazi oppression after the Czech crisis only a year before, were moved again.<sup>132</sup> Ironically, in the atmosphere of suspicion created by war conditions, some of these children were shunned or detested for their foreignness or for speaking German, their mother tongue.<sup>133</sup> However, one evacuee asserted: “It was not that we were Germans and it was not that we were Jewish. It was that we came from London.”<sup>134</sup> In other words, the animosity was simply due to the fact that they were evacuees. Mass-Observation also noted that in some areas the term “Jew” was used synonymously with “evacuee”.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> S Herbert “Rural Wales” in Padley & Cole: *op. cit.*, p.237

<sup>130</sup> T Kushner: *The Persistence of Prejudice*, pp.67-70

<sup>131</sup> J Grunfeld: *Shefford: The Story of a Jewish School Community in Evacuation, 1939-1945*, p.3

<sup>132</sup> C L Mowat: *Britain Between the Wars 1918-1940*, p.615

<sup>133</sup> J Baumel: “Twice a Refugee: The Jewish Refugee Children in Great Britain during Evacuation, 1939-1943”, *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 45 (1983), p.176

<sup>134</sup> T Kushner “British Anti-Semitism in the Second World War”, unpublished Ph.D Thesis, p.267

<sup>135</sup> Mass Observation File 11

Ignorance on the part of hosts led to considerable problems for some children, isolated from their religious leaders and friends, especially Jewish evacuees. Food was a particular problem, and sometimes the only way for them to become acceptable to their foster families was to abandon their religious rituals and adopt the local customs,<sup>136</sup> but some problems were solved by the drift back to the cities. Some Gentile foster parents actively encouraged the children's different religious beliefs. Chaim Bennett, a Latvian Jewish refugee, settled happily with two Gentile Englishwomen who took care of his dietary requirements and were sensitive to his religion. However, when he told his parents of his foster family's preparations for their own Christmas, he was quickly removed by his angry father.<sup>137</sup>

Baumel found no evidence of any kind of preparation for those householders who took in evacuees of different faiths, although some printed information sheets were distributed to Jewish teachers and leaders regarding essential dietary requirements after they were evacuated. The subject received little press attention, but a radio broadcast by the Chief Rabbi on 3 September 1939 implied that problems had arisen early, for Jews were advised: "[...] in a national emergency such as the present, all that is required is to refrain from eating forbidden meats and shell fish."<sup>138</sup>

No specific problems concerning religion or race came to light during research on Sheffield evacuees: in fact, a local newspaper optimistically suggested that evacuation was breaking down denominational barriers when it reported that some Church of

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<sup>136</sup> T Kushner: *The Persistence of Prejudice*, p.70

<sup>137</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*: 14.12.96, p.10

<sup>138</sup> Baumel: *op. cit.*, p.177



England children were attending a Baptist Sunday School in a Leicestershire reception area.<sup>139</sup> One Methodist interviewee, evacuated from Sheffield to an Anglican billet in Nottinghamshire, related how she successfully negotiated the religious diversity:

“In the mornings I went with the housekeeper to Chapel in Hucknall. Then I used to go to Church in Linby with Miss Gray in the evenings.”<sup>140</sup>

Some Roman Catholic school parties from the city were matched with schools of the same denomination in reception areas, but not all: examination of Leicestershire attendance records of evacuated school parties showed that St Catherine’s and St Charles’ Catholic schools were split up between three different schools in Leicestershire, none of them Roman Catholic.<sup>141</sup> No reference to Jewish evacuees from the city has been found.

Many problems which arose in billets were less attributable to misunderstandings about religion and race than to differences in social class. It has been seen in Chapter One that householders of all classes were unwilling from the very beginning to open their homes to potential evacuees from industrial towns and cities, and the previous chapter showed how members of the ‘gentry’ who did accept their obligations were often assigned the best-dressed children. It was often (and conveniently) contended that working-class evacuees were more likely to settle with hosts of their own class, and a teacher confirmed that this view was held in her reception area:

“The upper half of the village wish to take the best evacuees, for apparently cottage folk ‘do not mind’. On the other hand, most

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<sup>139</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 20.11.39, p.6

<sup>140</sup> Oral interview: Dorothy Knowles, 21.3.95

<sup>141</sup> Leicestershire Record Office: File DE 2144/269

children from ‘ordinary homes’ seem happier with the humble people of the village - they describe it as more like home.”<sup>142</sup>

Opinions voiced by community leaders in Lincolnshire expecting Sheffield’s refugees had demonstrated their pre-conceived fears of the urban lower classes, as mentioned in the first chapter. Few other references have been found to problems of class specifically concerning the city, but a Leicestershire teacher who received Sheffield evacuees intimated that there had been some difficulties in this regard:

“The people who arranged where they were to go did not study the types of people and that caused problems. Ordinary people were put in with upper middle-class homes and it was a problem for both sides. Neither side felt comfortable with the other.”<sup>143</sup>

Throughout evacuation there were complaints in reception areas that working-class householders had to bear the brunt of billeting while the middle classes and wealthier country people were allowed to dodge their responsibilities. The last chapter has shown some of the difficulties of billeting officers who were often reluctant to offend neighbours and local dignitaries, and took the easier path of depositing evacuees with poorer villagers with already cramped accommodation. Harold Nicolson tacitly acknowledged this when he wrote in his diary only two weeks after evacuation that the condition of many of the children “horrifies the cottagers upon whom they have been billeted” but made no mention of any shock felt by the middle classes.<sup>144</sup>

Billeting officers undoubtedly had a difficult job to do, and were not helped by the fact that at the beginning of evacuation they were mostly untrained volunteers. They were

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<sup>142</sup> St Loe Strachey: *op. cit.*, p.47

<sup>143</sup> Oral interview: Violet Hutchinson, 6.9.96

<sup>144</sup> N Nicolson (ed): *Harold Nicolson: Diaries and Letters 1939-1945*, p.33

often unpopular, and in cases where there was no-one from the evacuation areas to keep an eye on recalcitrant children, they were the ones who mediated between evacuees and foster parents and who fielded complaints about anything from bed-wetting or bad behaviour to parental visits or their failure to provide clothing or, later in the war, coupons for their children.<sup>145</sup>

The Ministry of Health stipulated that billeting officers should visit all evacuees in their billets to satisfy themselves that all was well, but no guidance was given on the regularity of supervision and it was not until in March 1941 that local authorities were advised that visits should be made monthly.<sup>146</sup> However, it is evident that not all billeting officers were conscientious in overseeing their evacuees: one ex-evacuee hardly ever saw hers,<sup>147</sup> and another, who was billeted with a shopkeeper, remembered:

“The regular visit of the billeting officer was a bit of a farce. She would pull up outside the shop, then one of my foster-parents would invariably go out to the door and the billeting officer would call out ‘Is he being a good boy?’ When they replied that I was, she wound up the window and drove away. No-one asked me how I felt.”<sup>148</sup>

It was also the remit of the billeting officer to find alternative homes for evacuees whose hosts either could not or would not continue to look after them. One apparently found an innovative way of dealing with some unaccompanied child evacuees, as Liberal Member of Parliament Sir Percy Harris told the Commons:

“One billeting officer in a village asked the children to go home. They did not go, so he put three or four on a coach and sent them off to Kings Cross in charge of the conductor.”

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<sup>145</sup> “T E L”: “The Second Evacuation”, *Social Work*, Vol. 3, No. 5, p.122

<sup>146</sup> Ministry of Health Circulars No 1857, 27.8.39; No 2307, 14.3.41, in Titmuss: *op. cit.*, pp.390,391

<sup>147</sup> Personal experience of writer

<sup>148</sup> Oral interview: James Roffey, 30.3.97

Their headmaster was not aware that they had left until days later, and it was a week before he was informed that they had arrived home safely.<sup>149</sup> Refusal to accept evacuees was an offence punishable by law, but in practice few prosecutions were brought, and fines were nominal. Some offenders were local dignitaries: in Blackpool, for example, a local magistrate was fined £5 for refusing to take in evacuees.<sup>150</sup>

There were undoubtedly cases where children and foster parents were incompatible, and conversations with ex-evacuees suggested that older children seemed more difficult to settle in private homes than younger children. One Sheffield interviewee, evacuated with his twin brother to Loughborough, was moved on after a month while his brother remained in the billet. He thought the foster parents had taken on too much with two twelve-year-old boys:

“I got naughty and they reported me. The billeting officer came and told me frankly that they didn’t want me. I was sorry to leave my brother, but if they hadn’t reported me I would have wanted to go home because I wasn’t happy there.”<sup>151</sup>

In the event, his next placement was very successful and he stayed there until he left school two years later. Another ex-evacuee, aged fifteen when he left home, had several changes of billet which he thought were caused by misdemeanours, such as smoking.<sup>152</sup> But Isaacs quoted a boy who was asked why he had left his billets and replied: “They said I ate too much.”<sup>153</sup> Moreover, acceptance of children seemed, in some cases at least, to be conditional upon good behaviour, as one host’s letter to a new

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<sup>149</sup> HoC. Deb. 2.11.39, Vol. 352, cols. 2172-74; *Education*, No. 1923, 17.11.39, p.421

<sup>150</sup> PRO.ED.10/251

<sup>151</sup> Oral interview: George Shelley, 12.8.96

<sup>152</sup> Oral interview: John Patterson, 18.8.92

<sup>153</sup> Isaacs: *op. cit.*, p.89

evacuee's parents illustrated: "I feel sure he is a good boy, and if he is, I can assure you we will do all in our power to make him comfortable."<sup>154</sup>

Many children were parted from siblings when billeted and several interviewees regretted this. Although efforts were generally made to keep families within the same village or town, they were sometimes separated by considerable distances. Understanding foster parents sometimes made arrangements for brothers and sisters to meet regularly, however. One interviewee and her sister remained closely in touch despite being billeted several streets away,<sup>155</sup> but another, evacuated with two brothers from a Sheffield orphanage to a Lancashire residential school, hardly saw the older boy because fraternising was not encouraged.<sup>156</sup> Some children were able to meet with other family members at school, but where differing age groups were involved and children attended different schools it was often difficult to keep in touch. Others found that members of their families were billeted in different social environments. When one twin was separated from his brother, he was fostered by the prosperous owners of a sweet factory, while his sibling remained with a small pawnbroker and they were only able to meet occasionally in a park after school.<sup>157</sup>

There was some resentment in reception areas that parents were not required to pay anything towards the upkeep of their children for several weeks after their children had left their homes in the evacuation districts. When parental contributions were introduced on 28 October 1939, the amount demanded did not cover the full billeting

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<sup>154</sup> Ernest Joy to C Goring (undated letter): Imperial War Museum, Evacuees' Exhibition October 1996

<sup>155</sup> Oral interview: Iris Howard, 4.9.96

<sup>156</sup> Oral interview: Alfred Knowles, 20.10.92

<sup>157</sup> Oral interview: George Shelley, 12.8.96

allowance paid by the government to householders, for officials took into consideration the fact that children's absence from home did not markedly affect the overhead costs of housekeeping when rent, electricity and other bills still had to be paid. The rate was means-tested and ranged up to six shillings per child per week. Parents who were unemployed, receiving public assistance or on very low wages were not required to pay anything. Those considerably better-off were invited to pay more than the statutory rate, up to nine shillings per child, although it was estimated that only 2% actually contributed this amount.<sup>158</sup>

Some parents unofficially subsidised the billeting allowance directly to foster parents, but it is evident that others tried to avoid paying anything at all. In July 1940 twenty-nine Sheffield parents were summoned for being in arrears with billeting contributions for their evacuated children.<sup>159</sup> The problem clearly persisted throughout the war, for a meeting of the Emergency Committee for Civil Defence on 20 October 1944 heard that there were still fifty-eight cases concerning evacuees from the city where all reasonable steps had failed to recover arrears of billeting allowances and an amount of £412.15s.9d was written off.<sup>160</sup> It is evident that the refusal of parents to accept their financial responsibilities riled some householders in the reception areas. The impact upon the success of the evacuation scheme of the government's demand for parental contributions will be examined in the next chapter.

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<sup>158</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, pp.156, 160

<sup>159</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 28.7.40, p.5

<sup>160</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA 157/7

The Government billeting allowances to foster parents were a continual source of contention throughout the war. The original allowance took no account of the age of the evacuees, even though big boys were clearly more expensive to feed than small girls. In addition, the cost of living rose sharply in the early months of the war, yet it was not until June 1940 that the amount payable for older children was finally increased in an effort to improve the poor response of householders to requests for billets for the proposed 'Trickle' evacuation.<sup>161</sup> In March 1942 the rate rose marginally for older children once more, but that for younger children remained static for almost five years. It was not until July 1944 that an extra shilling was finally wrung from the Treasury which covered all age groups. The table below, constructed from figures supplied by Titmuss, illustrates the changes in rates throughout the war.<sup>162</sup>

**Billeting Allowances for Unaccompanied Children 1939-1945**

<u>Age</u>	<u>1.9.39</u>	<u>1.6.40</u>	<u>23.3.42</u>	<u>25.5.44</u>
5-10 years	10s.6d.*	10s.6d*	10s.6d.	11s.6d.
10-11 years	10s.6d.*	10s.6d.	10s.6d.	11s.6d.
11-12 years	10s.6d.*	10s.6d.	11s.0d.	12s.0d.
12-14 years	10s.6d.*	10s.6d.	12s.0d.	13s.0d.
14-16 years	10s.6d.*	12s.6d.	13s.0d.	14s.0d.
16-17 years	10s.6d.*	15s.0d.	15s.6d.	16s.6d.
Over 17 years	10s.6d.*	15s.0d.	16s.6d.	17s.6d.

\*10s.6d. where one child was taken; 8s.6d. for each child where more than one child was taken.

<sup>161</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.164

<sup>162</sup> Figures taken from Titmuss: *op. cit.*, pp.161,163, 397( nn.2,3)

Mass-Observation found that, while middle-class hosts found it hard to keep up their normal standard of living on the billeting allowance, particularly in the first months of evacuation, poorer hosts were often more satisfied with the amount.<sup>163</sup> Surprising as it may seem, only two weeks after the first evacuation began, some newspaper headlines were even expressing concern about householders profiteering from evacuees.<sup>164</sup> There was also speculation in some quarters that hosts were taking evacuees for the money and then neglecting them, and a former evacuee from Sheffield confirmed her experience of this:

“My foster mother had a cousin [who] took in three families of children and let them live in the back part of the house. The front part of the house where he lived with his wife was beautifully furnished [...] but where the children lived it was really bare. [...] The children did all the household jobs except the cooking.”<sup>165</sup>

Complaints about evacuees soon extended to their parents remaining in the evacuation areas. Although members of the WVS and Women’s Institutes often arranged to use village halls as meeting places for families,<sup>166</sup> national and local newspapers reported parents descending upon their children’s country billets, often regarding the visit as a day out for themselves and expecting to be fed and entertained at the host’s expense, or spending their time drinking in public houses.

The accusations mainly referred to parents whose children had been evacuated within a reasonably short distance from home and who could afford to visit them. In mid-

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<sup>163</sup> Mass-Observation File 11

<sup>164</sup> *Weston-super-Mare Gazette*, 16.9.39, p.1

<sup>165</sup> D Lacy: *Recollections of Evacuation*, taped conversation, courtesy of J Jones, Sheffield Hallam University

<sup>166</sup> N Longmate: *How We Lived Then*, p.53



November 1939 cheap fares were sanctioned for parents to make monthly Sunday rail journeys of less than 160 miles except at Christmas and holiday periods, but it was not until 1941 that railway tickets at reduced rates were made available for longer journeys. Many children who were billeted in distant reception areas therefore received few visits or none at all for almost two years.<sup>167</sup>

It is clear that some Sheffield parents were guilty of abusing country householders' hospitality, for criticisms began in Leicestershire soon after the children's arrival. By the end of September 1939 the Chief Billeting Officer for the county reported that parents were causing much embarrassment.

“In many cases, parents had visited Shepshed, had two meals with the foster parents and caused a lot of inconvenience and very seldom paid for what they ate!”<sup>168</sup>

A week later another host complained that when five people arrived just before lunch to visit his evacuee he told them it was not fair to expect a meal, but they replied that there were no cafes open and he felt obliged to do what he could.<sup>169</sup> It was a similar story in Nottinghamshire reception areas for city evacuees, where Southwell's evacuation officer advised local householders that they should charge for meals served to evacuees' visitors.<sup>170</sup>

Some householders did not seem to mind the imposition, however, and were even indulgent about parents' visits. A Nottinghamshire foster parent who was interviewed

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<sup>167</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.178, n.1

<sup>168</sup> *The Loughborough & Shepshed Echo*, 29.9.39, p.8

<sup>169</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 2.10.39, p.5

<sup>170</sup> *The Newark Advertiser*: 4.10.39, p.6

had willingly provided her evacuee's father with hot meals on his regular visits to his daughter. She did not seem to mind his behaviour at all when she said:

“Her dad came to visit her more than her mother. [...] He'd have his dinner here, go for a drink, have a rest and then his tea and catch the train home to Sheffield.”<sup>171</sup>

Not all Sheffield parents were inconsiderate, of course, and one mother who wrote to the editor of *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*, signing herself “Humiliated”, was clearly aggrieved at the plethora of adverse reports in the press. While it was natural for parents to want to see their children, she commented:

“But it would be a nice change if someone would say a kind word in favour of the considerate parent [...]. All the sympathy seems to be for the hostess and none for the parent.”<sup>172</sup>

A few parents were guilty of more than thoughtlessness. Less than three weeks after evacuation, a Sheffield man was fined £10 (a considerable sum of money) for assault while on a visit to his family who were billeted with the Chairman of Loughborough's Magistrates. Having been invited to stay overnight at Prestwold Hall, he then became drunk and disorderly and assaulted police who had been called to evict him. He was also ordered to leave the town forthwith. It was stated in his defence that he had become depressed through not eating proper meals in his wife's absence.<sup>173</sup>

Some parents did not visit their children at all, for varying reasons: for instance, some felt intimidated by their children's new environment, and this could lead to a sense of alienation in both parent and child. One Sheffield interviewee was billeted in

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<sup>171</sup> Oral interview: Gladys Smith, 12.5.95

<sup>172</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 4.10.39, p.4

<sup>173</sup> *The Loughborough & Shepshed Echo*: 22.9.39, p.3

Farnsfield, Nottinghamshire, with a childless, middle-aged couple who were more affluent than her parents and led a different life-style. She recalled:

“My parents didn’t visit at all: they were too poor. I wrote home every week and I remember chewing my pencil and saying ‘What can I say now?’ ”<sup>174</sup>

Foster parents were not above reproach, either, and occasional incidences of violence towards evacuees were published in the press throughout the war. Sheffield newspapers carried some reports of cruelty in areas which had received city evacuees, though none was specifically linked to Sheffield children. Sometimes these cases seemed to be dealt with comparatively leniently. In Nottinghamshire a blacksmith was found guilty of severely assaulting a seven-year-old evacuee, causing him two black eyes, punching and banging his head on the ground: the magistrate said he had had considerable provocation and fined him £2 with £1.1s. costs.<sup>175</sup> When a three-year-old evacuee was beaten with a brush, severely bruised and rendered unable to walk, the foster parents were found guilty but not fined: instead they were ordered to pay £2.17s court costs.<sup>176</sup>

Less violent, but nonetheless cruel incidents, occurred too. An interviewee who was evacuated from Sheffield to Shepshed with three siblings, reported:

“My brother used to be shoved into the coal hole with the door slammed shut. I remember other things too: there were a lot of things that happened to me.”<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Oral interview: Patricia Gamble, 12.3.96

<sup>175</sup> *The Nottingham Evening Post*: 12.10.39, p.6

<sup>176</sup> *ibid.*, 29.12.39, p.8

<sup>177</sup> Oral interview: Amy Saddington, 4.9.96

But she did not elaborate on this information. Another evacuee was frequently beaten for such minor offences as a hole in her sock throughout the four and a half years she spent in one billet.<sup>178</sup>

Some evacuees endured a harsh existence in institutions. An interviewee who was evacuated at eight years old from a Sheffield orphanage to a Roman Catholic boarding school for boys in Preston for four years, said of his experience:

“I can’t remember any good times. Life was very hard and we didn’t get much food. A yard-man kept discipline. [...] He hit the children with the chair leg, and I got twelve on each hand often.”<sup>179</sup>

Some billets were unsuitable in other ways, as one Sheffield interviewee illustrated. Evacuated to Loughborough with Firs Hill School where her aunt was headmistress, she was separated from her brother and initially billeted with an eccentric old woman.

“There was only the elderly lady and myself and we slept in the same bed together with the monkey. Everywhere we went the monkey went too, on a chain, and I was allowed to sit and nurse it if I was good. There was no bathroom and no hot water.”<sup>180</sup>

After a short time her aunt, hitherto occupied with the problems of more than a hundred evacuees, heard that her niece, previously kept spotlessly clean and well cared for, was filthy, verminous and running wild and the child was re-billeted with a young couple in a modern house. No-one believed her when she said she had slept with the monkey.

Many evacuees did not suffer overt cruelty, unkindness, or thoughtlessness but were nevertheless not easily accepted into the local community. One Sheffield evacuee

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<sup>178</sup> Personal experience of writer

<sup>179</sup> Oral interview: Alfred Knowles, 20.10.92

<sup>180</sup> Oral interview: Pamela Denniff, 16.9.94

wrote of her Leicestershire reception area: “The people are very kind but blame the wrong doings on to Sheffield children.”<sup>181</sup> Another commented: “The local children didn’t like us: we were labelled as evacuees always.”<sup>182</sup> Several other interviewees confirmed this view and it was also borne out by a local resident in a Nottinghamshire village which received Sheffield children, who admitted: “Yes, we did gang up on the evacuees - well they were incomers, weren’t they?”<sup>183</sup>

Cultural differences between town and country were difficult to overcome, and integration of evacuees into some rural communities was often a very long process, occasionally never achieved. Even private evacuees suffered discrimination, as one interviewee from Sheffield showed: “They didn’t like us: any excuse they would take to slight you. You were labelled really.” Still living in the same Leicestershire area fifty years later, she went on: “I’ve been here all these years and yet we’re always pointed out as evacuees and not Shepshed people.”<sup>184</sup> On the other hand, residents often saw things differently, as a teacher from that area demonstrated in interview: “The Sheffield children got on all right with the local children - well, children do really, don’t they?”<sup>185</sup>

There were difficulties for local people too, however, as the same resident teacher explained: “It was only a small village at the time, and the large number of evacuees made a huge impact. It was a bit of a shock.”<sup>186</sup> Only 236 of the expected number of 1,600 arrived here, which prompts the question of how local inhabitants could have been

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<sup>181</sup> *The Loughborough & Shepshed Echo*: 10.11.39, p.6

<sup>182</sup> Oral interview: Amy Saddington, 4.9.96

<sup>183</sup> Oral interview: Ellen Baldry, 16.7.97

<sup>184</sup> Oral interview: Mary Mabe, 4.9.96

<sup>185</sup> Oral interview: Violet Hutchinson, 6.9.96

<sup>186</sup> *ibid.*

expected to have coped with a full quota. The mere presence of large numbers of evacuees in small villages could cause problems of all kinds to residents, and one of the greatest - the effects on education - will be dealt with in the next chapter.

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It has been demonstrated that the first evacuation programme, although hailed as an outstanding success in terms of its speedy and safe execution, nevertheless brought with it many unforeseen difficulties once the refugees arrived in the reception areas. Some of those problems have been covered in this chapter, and others - concerning the unofficial movement from urban to rural areas, the effects of evacuation on education, and the drift back to the danger areas, all of which further threatened the success of the government scheme - will be dealt with in the next chapter.

Many householders had viewed their task of billeting as an unpleasant necessity, somewhat more bearable in the case of unaccompanied school children than mothers with small children. At least school children were out of the house for several hours a day; but the invasion of privacy caused by mothers with small children underfoot and sharing kitchens and bathrooms could prove a strain for householders. Yet some hosts who had initially been unwilling to take in evacuees became very fond of them in a short time, and long-lasting friendships were formed.

Most hosts, like most evacuees, were working-class people who buckled down and got on with the job of coping. A Nottinghamshire host reflected the popular view of evacuees:

“Everybody found fault with this, that and the other, you know. They were bed-wetters and that sort of thing. A rough lot, but I think that people weren’t very charitable. [...] but they were

usurpers in our lives, weren't they? They did integrate into the life after a time, those that did stay on. I don't think there was any compulsion [to take in evacuees] [...] no, I think it was that no-one would have dared to say no, so we took them."<sup>187</sup>

Householders were not the only grumblers, for some parents complained that foster parents failed to love their charges, while others felt threatened if householders were too loving, or worried that their children would develop a taste for living at a standard above their own. But most complaints did come from hosts, for disenchanted evacuees were apt to vote with their feet: and it was, of course, chiefly those who were dissatisfied who were heard, and not the countless numbers of billetters and billeted who settled happily together.

The National Association of Women's Institutes, striving to present a fair report and to give reasons for many of the problems in reception areas, nevertheless concluded that many of the children were dirty and ill-kempt - they did have lice and nits, and other skin diseases and were badly clothed. Much of their behaviour - at least in the first weeks of evacuation - was said to be unacceptable, and a degree of maladjustment greater than expected was revealed by evacuation. Criticism was heaped upon parents, who were indiscriminately blamed for failing to bring up their children properly; for visiting too much or too little; for being selfish in sending their children away, or conversely, for bringing them home again. But their most damning evidence built up against the mothers who were evacuated with small children, as has been seen.

In 1939 it had not been fully appreciated that provision of adequate welfare services would be crucial to the success of evacuation. While official action was relatively

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<sup>187</sup> Nottinghamshire Local Studies Library: taped conversation Ref A89 a/b/1

prompt in dealing with infestation and infectious skin diseases, it took several months before the problems of bed-wetting and maladjustment were properly addressed and hostels established to deal with severe cases. Voluntary organisations, such as the Women's Voluntary Service, moved quickly to set up clothing schemes for needy children and to open day centres where evacuated mothers with pre-school children could meet. But national government was slow to respond to the need for extra finance throughout the period of evacuation, whether for clothing or hostels for children, provision for laundry costs or improved billeting allowances for householders. Arguably, if the evacuation scheme had been adequately funded from the outset, many of these difficulties could have been avoided.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE DRIFT BACK

The previous chapter has shown some of the difficulties encountered by hosts and evacuees who participated in the government evacuation scheme in 1939. The intention of this section is to study three more problems: the unofficial movement of individuals in this first programme; the drift homeward of evacuees; and the effect upon education of the evacuation of children.

Titmuss, whose investigation of the subject was published in 1950 and is still the most extensive and reliable study of the subject, estimated that 1,473,391 people in the priority groups moved under the first official scheme in the first few weeks of war. In addition, large numbers of other people made their own arrangements and moved to safer areas without government help.<sup>1</sup> Just as official evacuation ebbed and flowed according to the progress of the war, with continual transference of individuals between danger areas and reception districts, so unofficial refugees also moved back and forth between 'safe' areas and their homes.<sup>2</sup>

It is impossible to assess accurately the number who evacuated themselves unofficially throughout the Second World War, for no records were kept of individuals who did not call upon official agencies for help. However, by studying the loss of population of the evacuation areas, Titmuss calculated that approximately 2,000,000 people made their

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<sup>1</sup> Titmuss: *Problems of Social Policy, History of the Second World War*, p.101-103

<sup>2</sup> N Longmate: *How We Lived Then*, p.73

own plans for private evacuation from areas of perceived danger to safer areas in England and Wales during the period from the end of June to the end of September 1939 alone.<sup>3</sup>

In Sheffield, where the initial number of official evacuees was only 8,757,<sup>4</sup> the actual count of people who moved out of the city in this period was estimated to be 13,200:<sup>5</sup> this would seem to give a figure for private evacuees of 4,443, or 34% of the total. By December 1941 it was reported by the local press that the number of private evacuees from Sheffield had equalled those officially evacuated.<sup>6</sup> Few official references to private evacuation have been found in relation to Sheffield and because this thesis is concerned primarily with official government schemes, few interviews have been conducted with unofficial refugees.

Who were these unofficial evacuees? Harrison maintained that it was largely the middle classes who evacuated themselves privately.<sup>7</sup> Boyd concurred, adding that small families with only one or two children or those who were better off financially were more likely to make their own arrangements, while the poorer (or larger) the family, the more ready parents were to send their children away under the official scheme.<sup>8</sup> This seems a reasonable assumption, for large families would have found it more difficult to stay together, even with relatives, and poor or working-class parents would have been dependent upon government provision.

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<sup>3</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.102

<sup>4</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Annual Report of School Medical Officer 1939*, pp.39, 40

<sup>5</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.543

<sup>6</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 10.12.41, p.3

<sup>7</sup> Mass-Observation File 942

<sup>8</sup> W Boyd: *Evacuation in Scotland*, p.84

Little is known of the journeys of unofficial evacuees to their various receiving areas. Some were already on holiday and simply remained where they were: others travelled privately, often in family groups, to friends or relatives in the country areas. With an estimated half of the 2,000,000 private evacuees having already earmarked their accommodation several months earlier,<sup>9</sup> it seems fair to assume that most travel plans would also have been made in advance. It is likely, therefore, that their journeys would have been much less fraught with difficulties than those arranged by government agencies, which had ended up in chaos for so many official evacuees.

It is difficult to know whether there were as many complaints against those who removed themselves privately as against official evacuees, for little specific reference to them has been found. It is probable, however, that because they were able to make their own arrangements, they chose familiar places or at least an environment similar to their own in cultural and economic terms, where they felt they could comfortably settle: they were therefore less likely to encounter many of the problems or the ensuing hostility that assailed those who moved under official schemes. Whether they were more inclined to stay put, once they had arrived in safer areas, is debatable.

In September 1939 the drift back of official evacuees had begun almost as soon as they arrived in the reception areas. Boyd saw this more as a succession of waves of home-going than a steady filter back, with the initial peak showing as early as the end of the first week, and the second after the first month. Another followed when billeting charges were levied on parents in October, and a fourth in December when many

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<sup>9</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.102

children were brought home for Christmas and did not return to their billets afterwards. The movement homeward slowed down between January and Easter, but as schools in evacuation areas were allowed to reopen in March 1940, more children returned to their home cities.<sup>10</sup> Contrary to expectations, the bombing which finally began in the summer of 1940 did not create a great demand for mass migration; nor did it discourage the early return home of those who did opt to leave the cities, and the pattern of ebb and flow continued throughout ensuing years. Even in 1944, when large numbers evacuated London and southern England to escape the terrors of rocket attacks, the drift back began even while flying bombs were still arriving.<sup>11</sup>

The previous chapter has drawn attention to problems of evacuee mothers with young children in the reception areas and, perhaps predictably, these were among the first to return to the cities. Barely had some been found homes before they left them: there were even a few who did not wait to be billeted before catching the next train home.<sup>12</sup> Within a week of the first evacuation, national and local government authorities were expressing anxiety about the early return of both mothers and children and newspapers were denouncing the women for their failure to give evacuation a chance to succeed.

As has been seen in the previous chapter, many women found it very difficult to settle in the reception areas. Several who had come with large families were separated from their older children, who were sometimes billeted a considerable distance away. They missed their husbands and homes as well as town facilities with their familiar shops and

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<sup>10</sup> Boyd: *op. cit.*, p.95

<sup>11</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, pp.370,429

<sup>12</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.112

cinema entertainment. In addition, they were often expected to stay out of their billets during the day: many found their accommodation dull, cold and comfortless in the long dark evenings of approaching winter. Although the Women's Voluntary Service and other organisations opened clubs and social centres where they could meet, it was not enough to keep the women in the countryside.

One remedy, a scheme to set up nursery centres to be supported by volunteers, was quickly advanced to help cope with these difficulties and avert the threat to the evacuation scheme of mothers returning home. As with other aspects of evacuation, however, the Treasury proved yet again to be a stumbling block, dithering about giving financial approval so that by the time the scheme was agreed, on 9 January 1940, much of the damage had been done:<sup>13</sup> the national situation showed an average of 88% of evacuated mothers had already returned to the danger areas. In Sheffield the figure was even worse, with 95% of mothers having returned by 5 December 1939.<sup>14</sup>

There were other reasons for the premature return of the women, too: Isaacs' view, that family financial difficulties were an important factor in the drift back,<sup>15</sup> seems to be upheld by a report in *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*. A city mother who had returned home with her three children within ten days admitted being lonely in the country but said her main reason for return was monetary: the billeting allowance (five shillings for herself and three shillings for each child) was inadequate for she had to pay the householder extra for food and had expenses at home:

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<sup>13</sup> S Ferguson & H Fitzgerald: *Studies in the Social Services*, pp.179, 180

<sup>14</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.544

<sup>15</sup> S Isaacs (ed): *The Cambridge Evacuation Survey*, p.129

“There was still the rent [at home] to pay, and my husband had to pay for his board out. Then there were small items such as insurance. I could not afford it.”<sup>16</sup>

Many women also worried about husbands left alone in the cities, and could hardly have been reassured to read the views of some religious and municipal officials which were reported in the press: for instance, barely two months after evacuation began, the Bishop of Winchester stated in a House of Lords debate on the subject:

“A man’s home is most unhappy and uncomfortable without his wife. The wife is not only wife and mother but she is housekeeper, she is cook, she is parlourmaid, she is laundrywoman and everything else rolled into one. I think it is quite natural that women should desire to return to their husbands.”

He went on to say, however, that the children should be encouraged to stay; but many women would not or could not leave their young children.<sup>17</sup> Even while registrations were being invited for an imminent second evacuation in October, *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent* reported on a heated meeting of the Education Committee and quoted one city councillor’s comment: “To divide women from their husbands is opening the door, in my opinion, to immorality.”<sup>18</sup> Government attempts to dissuade evacuees from returning home were surely undermined by statements such as these.

All the above factors contributed to the early return of mothers with small children. But, even if the drift back home of women was deplored by those in authority, the fact was that it was sometimes welcomed by those who had received them. One hard-pressed billeting officer, apparently reflecting the views of foster parents, stated:

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<sup>16</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 12.9.39, p.3

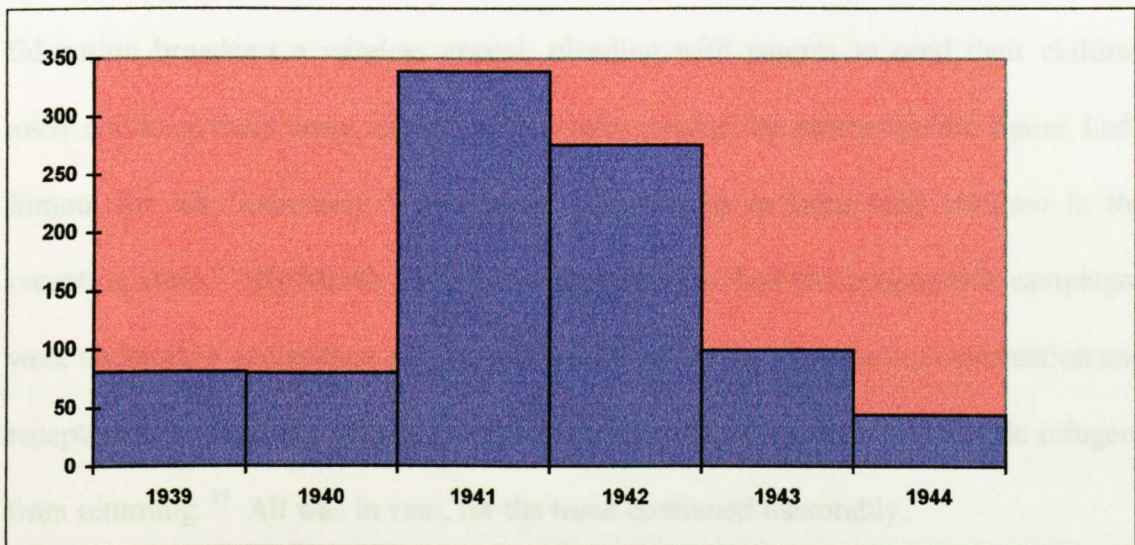
<sup>17</sup> HoL Deb 1.11.39, Vol 114, Col 1601; *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 2.11.39, p.7

<sup>18</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 24.10.39, p.10

“The only satisfactory feature of the whole unfortunate business, from the rural householder’s point of view, is that a good many of these mothers are skedadling back home to their vulnerable cities.”<sup>19</sup>

Nor was it only mothers with children who took the road home: it was the same with pregnant women. At the outbreak of war eighty-one expectant mothers left Sheffield for Mansfield, but thirty-five returned within eight weeks, before their confinements.<sup>20</sup> Only three were left by Christmas.<sup>21</sup> Annual Reports of the Chief Medical Officer for Sheffield for the war years show, however, that a total of 919 expectant mothers elected to be evacuated from the city to Nottinghamshire nursing homes for their confinements, the last case in July 1944.<sup>22</sup> The chart below has been constructed to illustrate the position: the largest number moved after air raids on the city. No indication of how many returned home before their confinements after 1939 has been found.

**Movement of Expectant Mothers from Sheffield to Nursing Homes in Nottinghamshire, 1939-1944**



<sup>19</sup> *Education*, No. 1914, 15.9.39, p.248

<sup>20</sup> Sheffield City Council: *Report of the Chief Medical Officer 1939*, p.4

<sup>21</sup> *The Mansfield Reporter*: 29.12.39, p.3

<sup>22</sup> Statistics were as follows: 1939, 81; 1940, 80; 1941, 339; 1942, 276; 1943, 99; 1944, 44: cited in Sheffield City Council: *Annual Reports of the Chief Medical Officer 1939-1944*

Some women with young children did settle amicably in their billets, and some remained in the reception areas even after the war had ended. A Sheffield woman praised the welcome extended by members of the Women's Institute in Kegworth, even though she and her four young children were initially left without a billet and eventually split up. The family made friends and never returned to the city.<sup>23</sup> Ex-evacuees interviewed in Shepshed also mentioned that several Sheffield families had remained in the area after the end of hostilities.<sup>24</sup>

So much for the women. It was the return home of school children which caused the most anxiety and this was publicly expressed by officials at both national and local level. Within days of the exodus the Minister of Health voiced his concern about the returning tide, warning that tact, tolerance and understanding, as well as administrative enterprise and ingenuity would be required by everyone in both reception and evacuation areas if the flow was to be halted.<sup>25</sup> The President of the Board of Education broadcast a wireless appeal, pleading with parents to send their children away and keep them away, though he was later rebuked by another public figure, Lady Simon, for his "extremely feeble appeal" to parents to keep their children in the reception areas.<sup>26</sup> By March 1940 the situation was so bad that propaganda campaigns were undertaken and posters and leaflets were distributed widely in both evacuation and reception areas, and the help of the BBC was enlisted in attempts to dissuade refugees from returning.<sup>27</sup> All was in vain, for the trend continued inexorably.

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<sup>23</sup> A Porter, "I was an Evacuee", *Cogwords*, No. 16 (1985), p.3, Kegworth Public Library

<sup>24</sup> Oral interviews: Jean Perry and Mary Mabe, 4.9.96

<sup>25</sup> *The Nottingham Evening Post*: 13.9.39, p.1

<sup>26</sup> *Education*: No. 1920, 27.10.39, p.360; No. 1923, 17.11.39, p.420

<sup>27</sup> PRO.HLG.108/21



Many different reasons have been advanced for the premature return home of unaccompanied school children. In Isaacs' view, there were three important factors governing the return home of many child evacuees. Firstly there were family ties - either the children became homesick, or parents missed them, or both. Secondly, there was the knotty problem of the relationship with foster parents: sometimes parents were dissatisfied with their child's billet, either because it was not good enough, or else because it was too good and represented a threat to their family security. A third important cause was financial strain - either due to the introduction of parental contributions to billeting, the cost of clothes or fares to visit the children, or the need to have a child of wage-earning age at home.<sup>28</sup>

Homesickness was undoubtedly an important factor. The National Federation of Women's Institutes' reassurance that there were "hardly any reports of home-sickness" among evacuees<sup>29</sup> contrasts with other findings that it rated highly among reasons for return. Isaacs, for example, quoted many cases of children missing their parents and homes, even if they were happy in their billets: her view, that young evacuees were most likely to be homesick if they were separated from older siblings or there were no other children in the billet, was also supported by John.<sup>30</sup>

Emotional letters and visits from parents to the children were also blamed for causing anxiety which often translated itself into homesickness, resulting in home-going, for children often felt guilty if they realised their parents were unhappy without them. The

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<sup>28</sup> Isaacs: *op. cit.*, p.129

<sup>29</sup> National Federation of Women's Institutes: *Town Children Through Country Eyes*, p.12

<sup>30</sup> Isaacs: *op. cit.*, pp.55-61; E M John, "A Study of the Effects of Evacuation and Air Raids on Children of Pre-School Age", *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. XI (1941) p.179

Bradford enquiry, carried out in the early months of evacuation, concluded that a high proportion of children who had found it hard to settle in reception areas were ‘only’ children or from small families, where parents were anxious about them. But the enquiry also found that some “slum” children missed their crowded homes and were often difficult to billet.<sup>31</sup>

Nonetheless, some middle-class officials were unsympathetic about homesickness and found it difficult to appreciate the feelings of close-knit, poor and working-class families. In Loughborough, a reception area for many Sheffield children, the town’s Medical Officer of Health criticised the “deplorable attitude” of parents who took their children home simply because they could not bear to be parted from them. He asked:

“Where would the people who had had boarding school educations [*sic*] be today if their parents had not been able to stand being parted from them?”<sup>32</sup>

He was evidently not alone in his views, for the Vicar of St George’s Church in Sheffield, himself father of five evacuated sons, described the desire of parents to bring their children home as “pure selfishness”.<sup>33</sup> Evacuation leaders, too, were often exasperated with parents. One head master asserted that parents naïvely believed the first tale of bad conditions, ignoring children’s tendency to make up any story to cover the real reason for wanting to come home. In his report to the governors of the school he castigated parents for ignoring the children’s best interests and for disregarding agreements they had made with the school to keep the children in the reception areas.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *Education*: No.1928, 22.12.39, p.520

<sup>32</sup> *The Loughborough & Shepshed Echo*: 13.10.39, p.5

<sup>33</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 12.12.39, p.6

<sup>34</sup> Mitcham County School for Boys: Minutes of Governors’ Meetings 1939-1942

The demand for the return of children was not always at the parents' behest, however. An interviewee in Ratcliffe-on-Trent recalled two young brothers, evacuated from Sheffield, who made several unsuccessful attempts to run away to their homes and were always brought back by the police.<sup>35</sup> Another city evacuee, sent to Newark with his sister, intimated that his was not an isolated case when he recalled:

“The house was so dirty that we both decided we weren't stopping. Next morning we packed our bags and we went. [...] We didn't know where we were going but a policeman picked us up and took us back to the community centre where the teachers were looking after other children who were in trouble.”

Later, this evacuee was billeted unofficially with the wealthy Batchelor family (of canned food fame) in Edale where he and nine other evacuees were well treated.<sup>36</sup>

Another, evacuated from Sheffield to Leicestershire in September 1939, although happy in his billet, resisted his parents' instructions to stay in the reception area. He said:

“I spent many happy hours in activities unknown to city kids. I took the scholarship exam at Shepshed and passed. But by the summer was secretly longing for my mother [...] so, against all advice, back to Sheffield I went.”<sup>37</sup>

Another interviewee missed her mother and went home, while her brother remained with their foster parents. After the heavy bombing of the city in December 1940, however, she returned with her mother to the same billet in Nottinghamshire, where the family stayed together for several months before again joining the drift home.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Oral interview: Ellen Baldry, 16.7.97

<sup>36</sup> J Lacy: *Recollections of Evacuation*, taped conversation, courtesy of J Jones, Sheffield Hallam University

<sup>37</sup> J Perry *et al*: *Shepshed: Wartime Memories*, p.55

<sup>38</sup> Oral interview: Margaret Bennett, 16.3.95

Even when parents were reluctant to bring back homesick children, they often found it very hard to refuse, and were sometimes encouraged by foster parents to accede to the child's request. A Sheffield woman illustrated the dilemma in a letter to the local press signed: "A Worried Mother". Although well satisfied with her four children's billets and education she was distressed that three of them had not settled and wanted to come home. Visiting for only the second time in the seven weeks that they had been away, she observed that one child had developed a nervous twitch and was said to be so unfriendly and unmanageable that his foster parents advised that he should go home.<sup>39</sup>

Another justified her decision to bring her unaccompanied children home within days:

"My daughter wrote me letters every day that nearly broke my heart. [Both children] had good billets and were well looked after. But they wouldn't settle down."<sup>40</sup>

It was, of course, a difficult situation for many parents when unhappy children pleaded to be taken home, yet some did turn a deaf ear to their appeals. An interviewee told how he was homesick and secretly wrote home several letters begging his parents to take him home, but these were ignored. He remembered:

"When my mother came to visit, all she seemed to want to know was whether I was being a good boy and helping out. She didn't want to know how I felt and refused to discuss going home."<sup>41</sup>

It was often the case that when one child became homesick or was missed by a parent, brothers and sisters were brought home at the same time, and examination of school

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<sup>39</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 28.10.39, p.4

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, 12.9.39, p.3

<sup>41</sup> Oral interview: James Roffey, 30.3.97

registers has borne out this point.<sup>42</sup> But it was not always so: when siblings had settled happily in their billets they sometimes returned at different times: one interviewee's young sister was taken home early because her mother missed her, yet he and his brother remained much longer, themselves returning at separate times later in the war.<sup>43</sup>

In Sheffield some officials expressed dismay at the flood of returning children at a meeting of the Education Committee early in October. Seeking to reassure anxious parents, Canon Dunford, a member of the committee, had visited the billet of every evacuee from the city's Roman Catholic schools and declared himself very satisfied with them.<sup>44</sup> Others were less positive, however: when the committee met again two weeks later the Chairman commented: "We have to recognise that for one reason or another there is no confidence in the scheme as a whole." Alderman Bancroft, another councillor was more explicit about his feelings, which were hardly encouraging, to say the least. Never a supporter of the scheme, he proclaimed :

"Why we should endorse a big blunder that has been made I don't know. The whole thing has been a fiasco and I don't want to associate myself with endorsing something I don't believe in."<sup>45</sup>

The rate at which Sheffield evacuees flooded back home is demonstrated in the table below. This has been constructed from statistics presented to a meeting of the city's Education Committee and carried in a report of *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent* on 24 October 1939, and shows both the numbers of evacuees in all the priority classes

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<sup>42</sup> For example, Admissions Registers: St Peter's School, Brookside County Primary School (formerly East Leake Council School)

<sup>43</sup> Oral interview: George Shelley, 12.8.96

<sup>44</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 12.10.39, p.4

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, 24.10.39, p.10

who left the city under the first government programme at the beginning of September and of those who had returned within a mere eight weeks. Although the newspaper reported an average of 55% of all classes returning, the actual figure is even higher, at almost 57%.<sup>46</sup>

**Position of Official Evacuation from Sheffield at 24 October 1939**

<b><u>Category</u></b>	<b><u>Evacuated on 1 &amp; 2.9.39</u></b>	<b><u>Returned by 24.10.39</u></b>	<b><u>Percentage Returned</u></b>
Mothers & young children	2775	2303	83.0%
Unaccompanied children	5093	2066	40.6%
Expectant mothers	86	35	40.1%
Blind adults	29	15	51.7%
Cripples	16	8	50.0%
Teachers & helpers	758	*547	72.2%

\*Many teachers, although willing to stay in the reception areas, were recalled when there were insufficient Sheffield evacuees to teach.

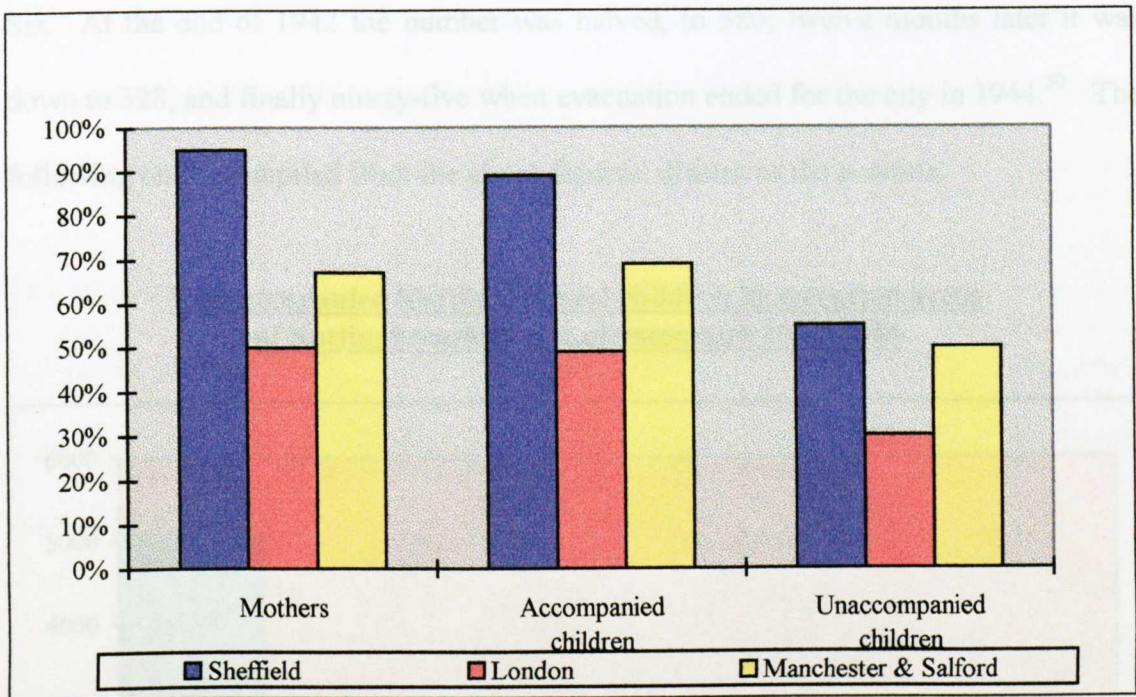
To have achieved a truly accurate assessment of the numbers of official evacuees of all priority groups in all the reception areas at any given time would have been an almost impossible task. Dent considered that the only way in which this could have been achieved would have been by a simultaneous house-to-house survey<sup>47</sup> - clearly an impractical undertaking in time of war. However, an estimate of the homeward movement of official evacuees using figures given by evacuating authorities in the six largest English cities at 5 December 1939, just three months after the first exodus, was

<sup>46</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 24.10.39, p.4

<sup>47</sup> H C Dent: *Education in Transition*, p.28

made by Titmuss.<sup>48</sup> The chart below, compiled from these statistics, shows that Sheffield recorded the highest percentage of returnees in each category when compared with Greater London and Manchester and Salford (the latter chosen because of its relative geographical proximity to Sheffield).

**Sending authorities' estimate of returns of evacuees at 5 December 1939**

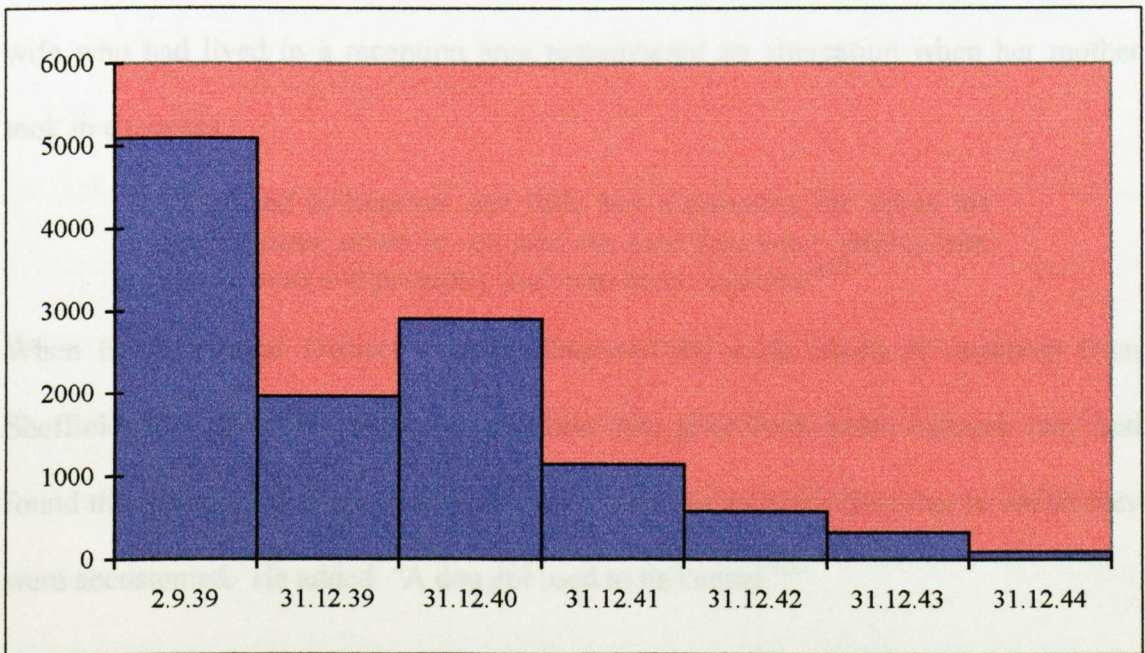


Sheffield parents had already shown themselves to be among the most reluctant in the country to send their children away, and it seemed that they were also some of the most eager to bring them back. Chapter Two showed the number of 5,093 unaccompanied school children evacuated from the city at the beginning of September 1939 was increased by 245 on 26 October. However, at the end of that year there were only 1,962 still away. Investigation of Annual Reports of the School Medical Officer for Sheffield

<sup>48</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.544

from 1939 to 1945 has shown how few children in this category remained in the reception areas during the war years. By the end of December 1940, two weeks after heavy bombing of the city, the figure had increased to 2,900. But by the following year there was a sharp reduction to 1,150, despite the fact that a “private assisted scheme” was by then in force, under which all unaccompanied child evacuees were entitled to billeting allowances and free travel to the reception area,<sup>49</sup> as will be seen in Chapter Six. At the end of 1942 the number was halved, to 580; twelve months later it was down to 328, and finally ninety-five when evacuation ended for the city in 1944.<sup>50</sup> The following chart, compiled from the above figures, illustrates the position.

**Unaccompanied Sheffield school children in reception areas  
of Nottinghamshire & Leicestershire 1939-1944**



<sup>49</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.361

<sup>50</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Annual Reports of the School Medical Officer, 1939-1945*



The relationship between parents and foster parents was another vital factor in determining whether evacuee children stayed in their billets or returned home. Children's unhappiness may well have been a common reason for homecoming but, conversely, Burt asserted that problems arose with parents who were concerned that their offspring were too happy with their new foster parents and feared they might grow apart from them.<sup>51</sup> Other parents were dissatisfied if the standards of the host family differed from their own: for instance, Loughborough Education Committee was informed of a mother who took her child home because he was not allowed to stay up until his normal bedtime of 11 o'clock at night.<sup>52</sup>

The Bradford enquiry found that sometimes a difference in social status, with the child feeling the host unfriendly, was an important factor in difficulties.<sup>53</sup> One interviewee's wife who had lived in a reception area remembered an altercation when her mother took in evacuees:

“She tried to improve one little boy's manners, but when his mother came down to see him she said they were making him far too posh and promptly took him home with her.”<sup>54</sup>

When Basford Rural District Council discussed the early return of evacuees from Sheffield, the Chairman said some evacuees had gone back home because they had found the treatment they had received in rural areas to be better than that to which they were accustomed. He added: “A dog got used to its kennel.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> C Burt: “The Billeting of Evacuated Children”, *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, p.94

<sup>52</sup> *The Loughborough & Shepshed Echo*: 13.10.39, p.5

<sup>53</sup> *Education*: No. 1928, 22.12.39, p.520

<sup>54</sup> Oral interview: Stanley Smith, 20.12.92

<sup>55</sup> *The Nottingham Evening Post*: 12.9.39, p.5

Tension between parents and hosts could be caused by financial issues. The previous chapter has referred to the resentment of some householders concerning parental contributions towards the upkeep of evacuees, but parents were also hostile to this measure, and its implementation was blamed by many for the early return home of unaccompanied children. On the one hand, many hosts felt that parents were not paying enough: on the other, parents objected to the 'means test' method of assessment and some had not expected to have to pay anything at all.<sup>56</sup> Maintenance payments were not demanded of parents until 28 October 1939, several weeks after the first exodus. Yet it had always been the government's intention to exact some payment from parents. At a meeting of the War Cabinet on 4 October, when it was agreed to impose the charges, Sir John Anderson admitted that one effect of introducing parental contributions "would probably be to encourage some parents to bring their children back" but considered it was a risk which could not be avoided.<sup>57</sup>

Several evacuating authorities expressed concern that the proposal to introduce parental contributions would encourage the return of evacuees. In a report to the Ministry of Health, Gateshead's Director of Education declared it had "knocked the bottom out of the evacuation scheme".<sup>58</sup> Salford Education Committee canvassed other local education committees in evacuation areas with a view to asking the government to postpone the implementation of the plan, in a bid to stem the drift back. The matter was debated by Sheffield Education Committee at the end of October, when it was said that it would cost more to collect the contributions than the government would gain:

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<sup>56</sup> R Padley & M Cole (eds): *Evacuation Survey*, p.60

<sup>57</sup> PRO.CAB.65/1 WM 36(39): 4.10.39, War Cabinet Conclusions, reference courtesy of R Mee

<sup>58</sup> PRO.HLG.7/73, Report 27.10.39

representations were made to the government, but without success.<sup>59</sup> At the meeting some members asserted that the trek home of evacuees had only developed since parental contributions, but others disputed the claim. Canon Dunford maintained that “the wholesale return of children had taken place long before the question of payment was ever mentioned: from the first week the children had begun to pour back.”<sup>60</sup> Evidence from contemporary newspapers and secondary sources supports this view.

In the reception areas, too, the introduction of maintenance payments was blamed for the early return of evacuees. The small town of Shepshed had only received 236 of the 2000 evacuees expected from Sheffield, yet more than a third had already returned to their homes by the end of September.<sup>61</sup> Six months later there were only forty-five Sheffield evacuees left - less than 20% of the original, already low, number. The Chief Billeting Officer reported that, in his opinion, the main reason for the drift back of children was the government’s enforcement of billeting charges.<sup>62</sup>

Chapter Four has dealt with the effect upon hosts of parents’ visits to their children. Many national and local authorities also blamed them for encouraging the early return home of children. Only three weeks after the start of the scheme a Ministry of Health official reported:

“Visits by parents to children have, on the whole, proved to be a nuisance [...] and offered too easy an opportunity for them to bring their children home.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> City of Sheffield Education Committee: *Report 1939/40*, p.304

<sup>60</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 24.10.39, p.10

<sup>61</sup> *The Nottingham Evening Post*: 27.9.39, p.8

<sup>62</sup> Perry: *op. cit.*, p.45

<sup>63</sup> PRO.HLG.7/73

The impact of parental visits upon the drift back was debated by several contemporary researchers. Davidson and Slade held that visits to evacuees had little effect, and did not appear to prevent the children from settling in their billets,<sup>64</sup> and Isaacs concurred with this view.<sup>65</sup> Burt, on the other hand, considered the visits were an important factor in the premature return of children and called for visits to be more formally arranged, thus avoiding disruption of foster parents' routines.<sup>66</sup> Had this initiative been implemented, it might well have gained early support in the reception areas and avoided some friction.

The concern of evacuating authorities was clear. On more than one occasion Sheffield's Chief Education Officer appealed to parents not to visit their children frequently for fear of unsettling them, adding that the response to evacuation has been a considerable disappointment, but the tendency to bring the children back was even more so.<sup>67</sup> In the city's reception areas, too, officials upheld this view: for instance, the Clerk to Loughborough Education Committee commented: "Visits by parents certainly do upset the children."<sup>68</sup> Press reports were also critical: readers of *The Loughborough & Shepshed Echo* were told that appeals had been made to parents to refrain from paying frequent and lengthy visits to their children because the hardship of parting increased the children's demands to be taken home.

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<sup>64</sup> M A Davidson & I M Slade: "Results of a Survey of Senior School Evacuees", *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. X (1940), p.193

<sup>65</sup> Isaacs: *op. cit.*, p.60

<sup>66</sup> Burt: "The Billeting of Evacuated Children", *op. cit.*, pp. 93,94

<sup>67</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 29.9.39, p.5; 3.10.39, p.4

<sup>68</sup> *The Loughborough & Shepshed Echo*: 27.10.39, p.5

Not all children found their parents' visits unsettling, however. An interviewee, the youngest of nine siblings, was very happy in her Nottinghamshire billet and remained there for five years, although her sister returned home almost immediately. She said:

“I remember my father and mother often coming to visit, with my sisters and brothers at various times, and I never wanted to go back with them.”<sup>69</sup>

There were, of course, other reasons for the drift back. In addition to parents' visits to evacuees in their billets, those children whose reception areas were within reasonable distance of their homes were able to travel home to see their families, and this could be an unsettling experience. Titmuss contended that the distance between the evacuated child and its home was an important factor in the drift back, particularly before concessionary fares for parents were introduced: only 19% of the London children evacuated to Somerset had gone home by January 1940, whereas 35% of those evacuated to Hertfordshire had returned.<sup>70</sup> The distance factor may well have had a bearing on the flood back of Sheffield children to their homes, for their reception areas were easily and cheaply accessible to parents, being at most only an hour's journey by rail: 65.6% were back at home by this time, as will be seen in the table on page 234 below.

Boyd found that children were more likely to settle and stay in their billets if parents visited at long intervals rather than frequently, and applied this finding to privately evacuated children as well.<sup>71</sup> Burt concluded that children who went home for a visit in the early weeks were less likely to return to the reception area than those who went at a

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<sup>69</sup> Oral interview: Brenda Cox, 8.3.95

<sup>70</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.178 n1, p.174

<sup>71</sup> Boyd: *op. cit.*, p.95

later stage in the war.<sup>72</sup> Another reason cited elsewhere by the same psychologist was the fact that, as winter approached, the novelty and excitement of life in the country wore off and boredom set in, and disenchanting evacuees went home.<sup>73</sup>

Parents' concern over their children's health was another important factor in their early return home. Much was made by teachers, psychologists and doctors in the reception areas of the rapid and noticeable improvement in health of the majority of evacuees, and Macnicol suggests that Board of Education officials were keen to find confirmation of this in their efforts to convince parents to leave the children in the country. However, despite extensive surveys, no conclusive proof could be produced of any significant difference in the growth of evacuated children.<sup>74</sup> Burt and Simmins even considered that in a minority of cases health actually deteriorated, and maintained that this induced some parents to turn their backs on the evacuation scheme in the early weeks of the programme.<sup>75</sup>

Vernon's theory was that the return of some children to the cities often had a knock-on effect, with others following soon after, for evacuees often felt a strong pull from friends at home.<sup>76</sup> This view was borne out by an interview with a Sheffield evacuee who had been billeted in "palatial surroundings" with a wealthy industrialist, along with

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<sup>72</sup> C Burt: "The Billeting of Evacuated Children", *op. cit.*, pp.93,94

<sup>73</sup> C Burt: "The Incidence of Neurotic Symptoms Among Evacuated School Children", *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. X (1940), p.11

<sup>74</sup> J Macnicol, "The effect of the evacuation of schoolchildren on official attitudes to State intervention" in H L Smith (ed): *War and Social Change*, p.19

<sup>75</sup> C Burt & C A Simmins: Review of S Isaacs (ed): *The Cambridge Evacuation Survey*, p.74

<sup>76</sup> M D Vernon: "A Study of Some Effects of Evacuation on Adolescent Girls", *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. X (1940), p.133

another schoolmate and a family of three brothers. Although very happy in their new household, all five went home for Christmas and never returned to the reception area:

“One boy was leaving school, so he wasn’t going back anyway. Two of the three brothers didn’t want to leave home again, so their parents wouldn’t let the other one go back without them. I was quite willing to go back there but because I would have been the only one, I didn’t go either.”<sup>77</sup>

The early drift back to the cities and its relationship to family ties had been foreseen by some psychologists. Winnicott, for example, had warned in a BBC broadcast at the time of the first exodus that, although mothers had been pressed to give up their children, any initial compliance with the scheme could not be expected to last.<sup>78</sup> In Sheffield, a city councillor declared that it was mainly British love of home that was bringing children back: at first, evacuation was seen as a joy ride, but when the Prime Minister warned of a three-year war or even longer, parents were not content to be separated for so long.<sup>79</sup> In one of Sheffield’s reception areas *The Newark Advertiser* took up the theme, asserting that it was not because evacuees were dissatisfied with conditions in the area but that they missed their homes.<sup>80</sup> The headmaster of Carbrook Council Boys’ School simply commented: “Home ties are too strong”.<sup>81</sup>

Another important reason for the drift back to the cities was simply that no bombs fell. Many of those who had rushed to the reception areas, expecting immediate and devastating air attack on the outbreak of war, became restive as months passed with no

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<sup>77</sup> Oral interview: Douglas Pearson, 2.7.95

<sup>78</sup> C Winnicott *et al*: *D Winnicott: Deprivation and Delinquency*, p.3

<sup>79</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 24.10.39, p.10

<sup>80</sup> *The Newark Advertiser*: 15.11.39, p.2

<sup>81</sup> Log book: Carbrook Council Boys’ School, entry 7.9.39

sign of bombing or other danger in the cities. This was one of the reasons cited by teachers of Broomhall and Denby Street Nursery Schools. Two hundred mothers and small children left in September 1939 but, persuaded home by the absence of air-raids, there were only enough children to form one class when term started in January 1940, and by April only two of the original evacuees remained in the reception area.<sup>82</sup>

Harrison confirmed the lack of bombing as a reason for the drift back, asserting that this psychological factor had been overlooked by the authorities. In his view, parents brought their children home because they thought it safe to do so: when no bombs had fallen in the first winter of war, many parents felt there would be no raids. When raids did come, some sent their children away again, but when there was comparative calm once more, the process was repeated.<sup>83</sup> Isaacs put it more succinctly:

“In a country in which it is generally agreed that the family is the greatest source of security and incentive, it seems odd to ask why children go home when there is no obvious reason for their staying away. The more sensible question [might be] why did they stay?”<sup>84</sup>

Whatever the causes, the early return of the children from the reception areas was not only deprecated by officials: it was also resented by some hosts. A Nottinghamshire reporter, reminding readers that many Sheffield children had arrived in poor condition and townspeople had rallied to their aid, observed: “For those people to feed and clothe them well and then see them drift back to Sheffield is very unfair to them and to the children.”<sup>85</sup> In Leicestershire, too, the Chief Billeting Officer in Shepshed expressed the

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<sup>82</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA 522(44); *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 3.5.40, p.1

<sup>83</sup> Mass-Observation File 916

<sup>84</sup> Isaacs: *op. cit.*, p.123

<sup>85</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 28.9.39, p.5



vexation of local people. The Rural District Council was one of many authorities to experience a lot of trouble with evacuees, he said; and the council should advise Sheffield Education Authority that no school children should be taken back to the city.<sup>86</sup>

Several authorities at both national and local level called for strong measures to be taken, both to compel parents to evacuate children in danger areas and to prevent them from bringing their children home. The War Cabinet discussed the proposal that parents should be asked to give a voluntary undertaking to keep their children in the reception areas, but dropped the suggestion for fear that such a requirement might encourage even more parents to bring their children home immediately.<sup>87</sup> The decision was attacked by teaching authorities, who criticised the government for leaving responsibility with the parents.<sup>88</sup>

Local newspapers deployed varying methods in attempts to persuade parents to leave their children in the reception areas. *The Sheffield Star* adopted a threatening approach, stressing the possibility of air raids and warning that if children were evacuated again it would not be easy to re-billet them.<sup>89</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent* tried to reassure parents: in an effort to persuade parents not to bring their children home, the paper carried stories for several weeks of city evacuees who were happy in their billets in the country.<sup>90</sup> Statistics have proved that neither method had much success.

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<sup>86</sup> *The Nottingham Evening Post*: 27.9.39 p.8

<sup>87</sup> PRO.CAB 65/2. W.M.121(39)

<sup>88</sup> *Education*: No. 1923, 17.11.39, p.420; *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 11.8.41, p.2

<sup>89</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 28.9.39 p.9

<sup>90</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 25.9.39 ff.

When the War Cabinet discussed the worrying drift back of evacuees in December 1939, a comparison was made between statistics for London and those for other cities. It was reported that figures for London, where the need for evacuation was greatest, showed the best results. By contrast, those for Yorkshire and other northern counties showed that, in that part of the country, the evacuation scheme was “practically a dead letter”.<sup>91</sup> In the House of Lords the Archbishop of Canterbury gave his view:

“In Yorkshire, the home of a very independent and sometimes obstinate race, there was very little response to the plea for evacuation.”<sup>92</sup>

It has already been seen that the percentage of mothers and children returning early to Sheffield was alarmingly high. The table below, constructed from statistics presented by the Minister of Health to Parliament in February 1940, shows the city also had the worst result in respect of unaccompanied school children.<sup>93</sup>

**Unaccompanied school children from major English cities remaining in reception areas at 31 December 1939**

<b><u>Evacuation Area</u></b>	<b><u>Number Evacuated</u></b>	<b><u>Number Returned</u></b>	<b><u>Percentage Remaining</u></b>
Sheffield	5,338	3,500	34.4%
Manchester	66,300	41,000	38.2%
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	28,300	14,000	50.5%
Leeds	18,935	8,500	55.1%
Birmingham	25,241	11,000	56.4%
Liverpool	60,795	23,000	62.2%
London	241,500	79,500	67.1%

<sup>91</sup> PRO.CAB.73/1, CDC 14(39)

<sup>92</sup> HoL Deb. 7.2.40, Vol. 115, Col. 468

<sup>93</sup> Data compiled from HoC Deb. 1.2.40, Vol. 356, Col. 1285; also cited in C Binfield *et al*: *The History of the City of Sheffield*, p.107

By the following 16 March the figures were even worse: there were only 1,550 (or 29%) Sheffield elementary school children still in the reception areas,<sup>94</sup> and by 4 June the President of the Board of Education reported that only 2.5% remained, compared with 32.8% from London and 8.8% from Leeds.<sup>95</sup>

Early in 1940 the government, aware that urgent steps had to be taken to encourage movement in the likelihood of later evacuations and to stem the return flow, introduced a more liberal financial policy. Throughout that year more money was made available to improve and extend welfare services in reception areas and to provide staff for hostels, group homes, social clubs, welfare centres as well as feeding centres and canteens for mothers and children.<sup>96</sup> In 1941 the Shakespeare Report identified the need for full-time welfare officers and further growth of hostel and residential nursery accommodation for children:<sup>97</sup> the introduction of these improvements and the development of a clothing scheme illustrated the fact that increasing attention was now being paid to individual needs. Although the fundamental purpose of these improvements was to help maintain the evacuation scheme and prevent mothers and children from returning to cities, it is difficult to assess their success, for the ending of heavy bombing raids around mid-1941 led to many evacuees returning home.<sup>98</sup>

The government's exhortations to evacuees to remain in the reception areas may be said to have been continually undermined by views expressed by some municipal leaders,

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<sup>94</sup> HoC Deb. 2.4.40, Vol. 359, Col. 31

<sup>95</sup> HoC Deb. 4.6.40, Vol. 361, Cols. 781-2

<sup>96</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, pp.372, 374

<sup>97</sup> PRO.HLG.7/85 Shakespeare Report, p7

<sup>98</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.386

however. In February 1940, responding to a newspaper reporter's criticism of Sheffield as "the worst city in England with the most stubborn people", the Chairman of Sheffield Education Committee (at best a lukewarm supporter of evacuation) was defensive:

"Stubbornness is not exactly a vice. [...] It is true that comparatively few Sheffield children now remain in the reception areas, but we put the pros and cons to the parents and left them to decide for themselves."<sup>99</sup>

The following month, at a heated meeting of Sheffield Education Committee regarding possible future evacuation, a city councillor expressed his view that parents of children who were still evacuated were either both out working or else did not want to care for their offspring. Other members of the committee disagreed, one denouncing the comment as "a foul lie".<sup>100</sup> It might be argued that the public airing of such views did not encourage Sheffield parents to send their children away: indeed, a parent was quick to respond: "It is no wonder that people bring their children back in the face of such criticism."<sup>101</sup> Registrations for the next programme were again disappointingly low in the city.

The anxiety of the authorities at both national and local level about the drift back was not only related to the children's safety but also to their education. Schooling was to prove one of the most important issues: in February 1940 Lord Addison (a former Minister of Health) went so far as to opine that the national system of education had been the first major casualty of the war.<sup>102</sup> Because the chief concern of the authorities

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<sup>99</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 16.2.40, pp.4, 6

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.*, 30.3.40, p.8

<sup>101</sup> *ibid.*, 3.4.40, p.3

<sup>102</sup> A St Loe Strachey: *Borrowed Children*, p.107

had been to put a roof over the heads of the evacuees, billeting had taken first priority and education requirements were largely neglected initially.

Schooling could not begin until children, often scattered over many miles, had been traced and sometimes re-billeted nearer to school units. It has been seen in Chapter Three that many Sheffield evacuees were despatched to billets in several different villages in the reception areas and separated from their school units, as were children from other danger zones. It often took many days for teachers to round up all their pupils, and sometimes they were not wholly successful, for distances were too great and some evacuees had to be absorbed into local schools. Nor was the problem of schools' separation always resolved quickly: in December 1939 Leicestershire Education Committee members heard from the county's ARP (Education) Sub-Committee that Sheffield children were so widely spread throughout the county's reception areas that an official from the Council staff was still required to assist with organisation.<sup>103</sup>

The Board of Education, in its circular No. 1474 issued so late in August 1939, had stipulated that local schools and visiting schools would each retain their own individuality. In some areas a double-shift system of education would be necessary, enabling two schools to share the same building and ensuring each could retain its own identity. In this way teachers would remain in charge of their evacuated pupils and would be responsible for organising social activities or nature walks during the half-days that they were not in school.<sup>104</sup> It was soon clear, however, that this part of the

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<sup>103</sup> Leicestershire Education Committee: *Minutes 1939/40*, p.7723

<sup>104</sup> Board of Education Circular No. 1474, *Education*, No.1912, 1.9.39, p.196

evacuation scheme was fraught with difficulties: in some cases the plan never came to fruition at all, while in others the arrangements were often short-lived.

One big problem for schools struggling to maintain solidarity was that in many cases only half the pupils, and sometimes (as in the case of Sheffield) far fewer, had been evacuated in the first place: the rest of them stayed at home or were privately evacuated to other areas. Another difficulty was that the plan had already been severely damaged by the fragmentation and separation of school parties either on departure or arrival (or both). Appendix 5, the details of which have been collated from Leicestershire Education Committee records, shows how many Sheffield units evacuated to that county were split up and distributed among several schools in different villages.<sup>105</sup> (No such information has been discovered relating to reception areas in Nottinghamshire.) Lowndes' view was that only large-scale redistribution of billets would have ensured that all schools could have operated as separate entities<sup>106</sup> but that would have caused even more disruption to children already traumatised by evacuation and all that it had entailed.

In addition, the early shift homeward of large numbers of evacuees gradually, or sometimes quickly, rendered it uneconomic to employ two sets of teachers in the countryside. Consequently, as school logs books show, large numbers of teachers who had volunteered to stay with their charges in reception areas were soon called home to help in setting up tuition schemes in the cities, causing even greater loss of unity in the reception areas. Government ministers expressed concern about problems in schooling

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<sup>105</sup> Leicestershire Education Committee Attendance Register of Evacuated School Parties 1939-40

<sup>106</sup> Lowndes: *op. cit.*, p.211

caused by the drift back of evacuees to the cities, not least that of planning school accommodation for unknown numbers of children in both evacuation and reception areas. But, despite strong pressure, they stopped short of introducing an element of compulsion into the evacuation scheme for fear that such a requirement might encourage even more parents to bring their children home immediately.<sup>107</sup>

By early November 1939 the original plan to retain the separate identities of all schools had been re-examined and watered down. Forced to accept that the education of older children, in particular, had been adversely affected by billeting difficulties, the Board of Education now permitted some reorganisation of placements to enable schools to retain their identity. At the same time, it acknowledged that it was not possible, or indeed desirable, for all schools to try to function independently and some would have to merge with local establishments. The main concern by this stage was to ensure that all officially evacuated children should have access to a teacher from their own schools.<sup>108</sup>

From the beginning of evacuation the constantly changing school population, resulting from the drift back, caused considerable problems for education authorities in both evacuating and receiving areas and contributed to an often chaotic state of education, particularly in many of the danger zones. An editorial in *Education* seemed to sum up the dilemma, criticising the 'come and go as you please arrangement' of evacuation:

“If all the children had gone, we should know what to do. If none had gone we should have arranged something. But with some here and some there, and constant movement backwards and forwards, the confusion becomes more and more difficult to

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<sup>107</sup> PRO.CAB 65/2. W.M.121(39)

<sup>108</sup> Board of Education Circular 1480, *Education*: No. 1922, 10.11.39, p.400

straighten out. We are disappointed with the government scheme.”<sup>109</sup>

The intention to retain schools as separate entities had been seen by many as good in theory, but attempts to stick to it rigidly were almost bound to create problems. Although the evacuating staffs may have been keen to retain their independence, it is clear that not all receiving authorities agreed. While the Director of Education for Bedford, for example, supported the principle, he attacked it as impracticable and unnecessary, pointing out that school identities had already been destroyed by the large proportion of children whose parents had refused to evacuate them in the first place, and by the rapid return home of many others.<sup>110</sup>

Nottinghamshire’s Director of Education had reservations about the matter from the very beginning, as documents held at Brookside County Primary School (formerly East Leake Council School) show. In a letter dated 4 September, he asked head teachers of receiving schools to treat evacuated teachers “as friends, so that a complete harmonious interchange of ideas and responsibility” would be achieved, but instructed:

“You should deal with them as one community, in fact as if they were all Nottinghamshire children. [...] It is at present considered highly inadvisable to make any arrangement that provides for the Nottinghamshire children being educated in one shift and the visiting children in the other shift.”<sup>111</sup>

It was not long, however, before some evacuated teachers were being criticised for intransigence. In October, members of Basford Rural District Council complained that

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<sup>109</sup> *Education*: No. 1918, 13.10.39, p.322

<sup>110</sup> *ibid.*, No. 1922, 10.11.39, p.402

<sup>111</sup> Letters 4.9.39, 6.9.39 Brookside County Primary School (formerly East Leake Council School)



Sheffield teachers had expected to be sent to a suburban area and were intent upon keeping not only their schools, but also their classes, together as units. But Basford was a rural area covering many scattered villages and it was not possible to accede to the wishes of the evacuating authority.<sup>112</sup> The minutes of Nottinghamshire Education Committee also record criticism of some Sheffield teachers for their insistence on maintaining school entities in small villages.<sup>113</sup>

Some Sheffield teachers clearly did disapprove of their school units being split up. Carbrook Council Boys' School log book contains a testy reference to the fact that its pupils had been dispersed over a wide area:

“By this scattering, the Leicester [*sic*] Authority are able to claim 7 of our teachers to remain to look after less than 100 children.”

Despite dwindling numbers as the drift back escalated, several evacuated staff of this school remained in the area for several months. The last teacher to leave that reception area in 1944 seemed to concur with the head teacher's opinion as she later commented on her long stay: “It was a bit of a luxury considering wartime economies.”<sup>114</sup> As it is apparent from records held in Leicestershire archives that there were only eight of the original 158 Carbrook pupils still in the evacuation area by March 1943,<sup>115</sup> this seems a reasonable observation.

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<sup>112</sup> *The Nottingham Evening Post*: 10.10.39, p.6

<sup>113</sup> Nottinghamshire Education Committee: *Minutes 1939/40*, p.7

<sup>114</sup> Log Book: Carbrook Council Boys' School, several entries; also C Parsons: *Schools in an Urban Community*, p.135

<sup>115</sup> Leicestershire Education Committee Attendance Registers of Evacuated School Parties 1939-44

However, not all Sheffield teachers insisted upon teaching their children separately, and no doubt the comparatively small numbers arriving in the reception areas sometimes helped the situation. In Newark, Nottinghamshire, (where less than a third of the expected evacuees from the city had arrived) members of the Education Committee heard that several schools in reception areas were operating satisfactorily less than three weeks after evacuation and no double shifts were necessary, indicating that merging had taken place from the beginning.<sup>116</sup>

Likewise, in Leicestershire, where 642 evacuees from twelve Sheffield schools had been received in Melton Mowbray and distributed over thirty-seven neighbouring villages, integration was evident, as the Girls' Secondary School log book indicated:

“[On 4 September] the Head teachers of these groups met at this school to formulate schemes of procedure for the education of their children. Most of the Sheffield Heads were in favour of assimilating the evacuees into the various village schools.”<sup>117</sup>

Elsewhere in the county, however, the shift system did operate. In an extreme case, severe overcrowding caused attendance times to be staggered from 10.00 am until 7.00 pm, to be operated initially at Kegworth School, as seventy Sheffield children arrived, mostly from Hillsborough Council School.<sup>118</sup> The head teacher of Firs Hill School managed to keep most of her pupils together by acquiring accommodation in two church halls.<sup>119</sup> Even so, staff and pupils experienced a short period of confusion:

“Initially, the teaching accommodation was very cramped, with no space to move about without disturbing other classes. Once

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<sup>116</sup> *The Newark Advertiser*: 20.9.39, p.10

<sup>117</sup> Log Book: Melton Mowbray Modern Girls' School, 12.9.39

<sup>118</sup> *Cogwords* No.1 (1972), p.12; also Leicestershire Education Committee Attendance Register of Evacuated School Parties 1939-40

<sup>119</sup> Leicestershire Education Committee Attendance Register of Evacuated School Parties 1939-40

more suitable premises had been found, and tables and desks had been borrowed and furniture had been transferred from Sheffield, things improved a good deal.”<sup>120</sup>

The immediate impact on receiving schools was often great and, while Sheffield newspapers were reassuring parents at home that there was “a pleasant feeling between the evacuees and the village people”,<sup>121</sup> it is plain that the picture was not always so rosy and local teachers in the reception areas had their own misgivings about the situation. The minutes of a meeting of Nottinghamshire National Union of Women Teachers revealed concern: “Rural education cannot stand up to it: they have not the equipment, staffs or buildings.”<sup>122</sup> In Sutton Bonington, a resident Nottinghamshire teacher commented on the influx of evacuees and teachers from Sheffield which caused teaching problems through overcrowding and over-staffing. Her relief as the situation resolved itself by the drift back is apparent:

“The curriculum was severely affected for a time but after the first year or so of the war most of the evacuees and teachers had returned home and normality reigned.”<sup>123</sup>

Another teacher who was interviewed described the impact of the sudden influx of evacuees from Sheffield upon her small school in Leicestershire and, perhaps unwittingly, revealed her feelings of dismay at the disruption:

“Yes, an entire class came. The children and teacher were dumped on us really. We only had three classrooms in the school and it was very awkward. She had to move with the children from one room to another. Then they integrated with our school really.”<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> *Firs Hill Schools 1893-1993*: pp.28, 29

<sup>121</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 11.10.39, p.4

<sup>122</sup> National Union of Women Teachers Minute Book 1940-41, Nottingham Archives Ref DD/TU/14/1

<sup>123</sup> I Judson: *Remembering Sutton Bonington*, p.55

<sup>124</sup> Oral interview: Violet Hutchinson 6.9.96

An ex-evacuee, sent to Nottinghamshire, remembered the difficulties at the small village school at Farnsworth:

“It was so crowded at first that we had to sit three to a desk. I think we were educated with the village children in the mornings and went for walks many afternoons in the countryside. But after six months there were only six of us evacuees left in the village.”<sup>125</sup>

Yet despite the many difficulties, education in the reception areas did generally get under way quickly. Some evacuated schools were operational within a week of arrival, and nearly all pupils had been found school accommodation by the middle of September.<sup>126</sup> That is not to say that schools were functioning normally, however: indeed, it would have been naïve to expect this, for overcrowding and shortages of equipment were problems suffered by both evacuees and local pupils, to say nothing of their teachers.

Pupils of evacuated special schools tended, on the whole, to suffer less upset. In general, children at these schools were not billeted with householders, but were usually sent in parties with their teachers and other helpers to communal accommodation in camps, large houses or hotels, where they operated as separate entities within the community, often being educated independently of local children.<sup>127</sup> In Sheffield, as has been seen in Chapter Three, the children of Maud Maxfield School for the Deaf were briefly evacuated to Normanton Hall School in Southwell, but other Sheffield

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<sup>125</sup> Oral interview: Patricia Gamble, 12.3.96

<sup>126</sup> Leicestershire Education Committee: *Minutes 1939/40*, p.7717

<sup>127</sup> *The Health of the School Child: Report of Chief Medical Officer Ministry of Education 1939-45*, p.82

special schools were either situated in neutral areas of the city or do not appear to have been evacuated.

Where schools could operate autonomously the interruption to education was obviously less than where pupils were dispersed over large areas and separated from their units, or where schools had to share premises with local establishments and operate on a shift system. However, it is clear that many evacuees did not receive their customary hours or quality of education, although it may be argued that opportunities afforded by the countryside for nature study compensated for the lack of formal teaching. Moreover, the absence of specialist staff for secondary school pupils often meant that older children were deprived of learning those subjects at a critical stage for examinations. In addition, younger children suffered disruption when their familiar teachers were recalled to the cities.<sup>128</sup>

It has been disappointing to find that the thirty-five relevant log-books available in Sheffield Archives (accounting for only half the number of schools officially evacuated) contain very few references to the school curriculum as experienced in the reception areas. Exceptionally, the head master of Owler Lane Intermediate School reported that in Newark the children met in the afternoons for organised games, rambles, and visits to places of historical interest.<sup>129</sup> Other information, such as the fact that pupils from Firs Hill Council School integrated well into local community life, has been gleaned from booklets produced by local history societies<sup>130</sup> and from personal interviews.

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<sup>128</sup> A Calder: *The People's War*, p.48

<sup>129</sup> Log book: Owler Lane School, entry 12.9.39

<sup>130</sup> *Firs Hill Schools 1893-1993*, p.28

Although evacuation imposed many strains on education in reception areas, there were benefits too. Urban children experienced a new way of life in the countryside, which broadened their horizons; and country children also learned from the newcomers a new outlook and new ambitions.<sup>131</sup> As one former evacuee from Sheffield attested:

“Nature study lessons started off for me, and probably for many of the other children, a life-long interest in flowers, birds and insects. The lessons took the form of long rambles with frequent stops to examine objects of interest.”<sup>132</sup>

In Leicestershire, some of the Sheffield evacuees who remained in Shepshed joined local school children in playing their part in the war effort. Senior boys dug gardens, grew vegetables and fruit while the girls picked blackberries and made jam. In 1942 senior children were allowed to work in the fields for three days a week at harvest time and were paid for their efforts.<sup>133</sup>

If educational arrangements in reception areas were less than satisfactory, they were far worse, and frequently non-existent at first, for those remaining behind in the danger areas. At the outbreak of war all schools in evacuation areas had been closed, as well as medical and dental services and milk and meals schemes, for it had been expected that large-scale evacuation from the danger areas would render them unnecessary.<sup>134</sup> Many school buildings had been commandeered by civil defence authorities and equipment, books and furniture had often been removed. The log book of Philadelphia Infants' School, for instance, recorded that a company of Royal Engineers moved in and stacked desks in the playground even as the evacuation party of school children were waiting to

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<sup>131</sup> Lowndes: *op. cit.*, p.213

<sup>132</sup> D Lacy: *Recollections of Evacuation*, taped conversation, *op. cit.*

<sup>133</sup> Log book: Shepshed Council Senior School; also oral interview: Jean Perry, 4.9.96

<sup>134</sup> Lowndes: *op. cit.*, p.211

leave for the reception areas.<sup>135</sup> In the first months of the war there was initially little or no opportunity of formal schooling for those children who had either returned home early or who had not gone away in the first place. Titmuss estimated that by the end of December over 1,000,000 children had been without education for more than four months in the danger zones.<sup>136</sup>

The problem of school children, their numbers ever swelling as more and more evacuees returned home, running wild in large towns and cities was widely aired in public. In October *The Manchester Guardian*, for example, took up the urgent cry for schools to be reopened in the danger areas, stating that across the country evacuated children were returning to their homes each day in hundreds to towns and cities where no education awaited them.<sup>137</sup> But the government faced a dilemma: to reopen schools may be taken as an admission of the failure of evacuation and could threaten the government's scheme. Also, civil defence arrangements would be disrupted if schools that had been taken over had to be returned to the education authorities. As a compromise measure, in the face of popular pressure to reopen empty schools and reclaim occupied premises, the Board of Education recommended on 29 September that local authorities should organise home tuition in small groups for children in danger areas but made clear that no authority was given for the opening of schools for ordinary instruction.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Log book: Philadelphia Infants' School, entry 2.9.39

<sup>136</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.146

<sup>137</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*: 27.10.39, p.7

<sup>138</sup> Board of Education Circular 1479, 29.9.39, *Education*, No. 1917, 6.10.39, p.298

In Sheffield, where the need was great because of the disappointingly small number of children evacuated, the Deputy Chief Education Officer, Dr W P Alexander, had already put such a plan into action. By 18 September, less than three weeks after Operation "Pied Piper", the first stage of the Sheffield Home Tuition Scheme was up and running, enabling small groups of children to receive some education in their own or neighbours' homes from peripatetic staff. In order to operate the scheme 341 evacuated teachers - nearly two-thirds of those who had gone away less than three weeks earlier<sup>139</sup> - were called home, no longer needed in the reception areas in view of dwindling numbers there. Many others soon followed, as examination of available log books shows.<sup>140</sup> The amount of teaching was necessarily limited but fulfilled a useful purpose, as one of the teachers involved in teaching the children in their homes later observed: "The children didn't learn much but at least the schools kept in touch with them, and that was all that could be hoped for."<sup>141</sup>

The Sheffield initiative was widely praised in Parliament and by education authorities across the country as well as by national and local newspapers,<sup>142</sup> but calls continued in both press and Parliament for school buildings in evacuation areas to be reopened. However, it was not until 1 November 1939 that the government announced that those schools with adequate shelter provision and which were not needed for civil defence purposes could reopen. Others which were not required by other agencies could reopen

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<sup>139</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 19.10.39, p.5

<sup>140</sup> Log books, e.g.: Philadelphia, St Barnabas, Wybourn Schools

<sup>141</sup> C Parsons: *Schools in an Urban Community*, p.135

<sup>142</sup> HoC Deb. 6.11.39, Vol. 353, Cols. 884-5; also, eg, *Education*: No. 1916, 29.9.39, p.277; No. 1920, 27.10.39, p.358; *The Manchester Guardian*: 7.10.39, p.7



when shelters were built and they complied with government safety conditions.<sup>143</sup> In theory this went some way to address the problem; but in practice it was many months before adequate safety arrangements could be completed for some schools and formal education for all children could recommence.

However, simply reopening schools did not provide a complete answer to the problem because, while children in reception areas were legally bound to attend school, there was no such obligation on those in the evacuation areas, even where facilities for education were available. With concerns about escalating numbers of children still out of school, and increasing hooliganism in some areas, there were continued calls for children in the danger zones to be compelled to attend school. In February 1940, after apparently dragging its feet for several weeks, the government eventually instructed local authorities to re-introduce compulsory education throughout the country from the beginning of April.<sup>144</sup> The outcome was encouraging: Parliament heard that by 2 May an average of half the children of elementary school age in evacuation areas across the country were receiving full-time education by May and only 10% (about 115,000) were getting no education at all: 87% of secondary school children were receiving full-time schooling and only 5% none.<sup>145</sup>

Sheffield's results were slightly better: at that time all the city's children of school age were catered for in some measure, with 65% receiving full-time education, 25% being taught part-time and 10% still receiving home tuition.<sup>146</sup> Formal schooling in Sheffield

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<sup>143</sup> HoC Deb. 2.11.39, Vol 352, Cols. 2187-8; *Education*, No. 1922, 10.11.39, p.400

<sup>144</sup> Sheffield City Council: *Minutes 1939/40*, p.271

<sup>145</sup> HoC Deb. 2.5.40, Vol 360, Cols. 884-6; also Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.147

<sup>146</sup> Percentages calculated from figures given in *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 23.5.40, p.1

then continued throughout the war, despite intermittent raids on the city, apart from a short break in December 1940 after heavy bombing, when all schools were closed and teachers deployed in evacuation work until those schools which were undamaged could reopen in mid-January 1941.<sup>147</sup>

Education was not the only casualty of the war: welfare services for children, in particular for those who had not been evacuated, also suffered greatly. It has already been seen that school medical services, essentially in abeyance for a month before the first exodus because schools were on holiday, were largely suspended in evacuation areas on the outbreak of war even though large numbers of children remained in these regions.<sup>148</sup> While some school doctors, dentists and nurses were sent to reception areas to assist existing staffs there with problems concerned with suddenly increased school populations, medical personnel not evacuated were often redeployed in civil defence services, thus leaving many children who remained at home without normal medical services.<sup>149</sup> In Sheffield, despite the fact that some members of the school health service were initially seconded to the reception areas, medical facilities were maintained throughout the war. School clinics, too, continued to be staffed even though some were shared with Civil Defence services. Nevertheless, depletion of staff meant that routine medical examinations of school children were considerably scaled down.<sup>150</sup>

The situation was unsatisfactory in regard to provision of free milk and school meals for poor children. This time it was not only those remaining in the danger areas who were

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<sup>147</sup> Dent: *op. cit.*, p.76; Log books, e.g. Woodbourn Boys' School; Carbrook Boys' School

<sup>148</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.145

<sup>149</sup> *The Health of the School Child: op. cit.*, p.31

<sup>150</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Survey April 1939-March 1947*, p.25

left without these services when schools closed: many evacuees were also without them for many weeks. As early as May 1939 Board of Education Circular 1469 had expressed the intention that children entitled to these facilities would continue to receive them in the reception areas; but administration of such schemes was at the discretion of the local authorities concerned.<sup>151</sup> Titmuss asserted that the failure of the government to specify fully how these services should be funded in the reception areas led to prevarication and delay for evacuees. It was not until mid-1941 that provision was fully restored in both reception and evacuation areas.<sup>152</sup>

The issue of free milk for needy evacuees was somewhat clarified when the Board of Education specified that the cost of provision was to be recovered from the evacuating authority. But the further suggestion, that other evacuees could also benefit from the school milk service with parents contributing the halfpenny charge per bottle, led to wrangling between receiving and evacuating authorities about how to recover payment.<sup>153</sup> Research at Brookside School in the former reception area of East Leake has shown that Sheffield Education Committee furnished lists of evacuees entitled to free milk to the receiving authorities and reimbursed the costs. Not all evacuating authorities were as forthcoming, however, as a circular from the Director of Nottinghamshire Education Committee to the county's head teachers indicated:

“Leeds authority have stated that it would appear necessary to supply milk to those cases only where the Nottinghamshire school Medical Officer reports under-nourishment.”<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> P H J H Gosden: *Education in the Second World War*, p.185

<sup>152</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.222

<sup>153</sup> Board of Education Circular 1475, 31.8.39 in Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.222(n.3); Gosden: *op. cit.*, p.185

<sup>154</sup> Letter Sept 1940: Nottinghamshire Education Committee, at Brookside County Primary School

The subject of school meals was a thorny one, too. As early as 1938, the Anderson Report had foreseen the need to help foster parents by providing communal meals for evacuees. In August 1939, on the eve of evacuation, the Board of Education made it clear that free provision would not be necessary because the billeting allowance would cover the cost.<sup>155</sup> But many foster parents were, understandably, unwilling to pay the two shillings asked of them from their billeting allowances, and parents had already been assessed for their contributions.<sup>156</sup> In addition, delay in hiring and equipping premises for communal feeding centres caused by confusion over financial responsibility was not resolved until November, when the government agreed to defray the cost.<sup>157</sup> Even then, the scheme was slow to get off the ground because of apathy on the part of receiving authorities: by March 1940 only 3% of evacuees were receiving communal meals, two-thirds of these authorities having reported there was no demand for the service.<sup>158</sup> It was not until late in 1941 that the situation regarding both milk and meals improved, when the government raised the grants for these facilities and rest centres were used for providing school meals. In 1944 free milk was made available to all unaccompanied evacuees billeted officially.<sup>159</sup>

Problems of funding various aspects of the government evacuation scheme have been discussed in earlier chapters. Financial arrangements regarding education were the subject of constant deliberation between the various local authorities, as records lodged

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<sup>155</sup> Board of Education Circular 1475, 31.8.39; *Education*: No. 1913, 8.9.39, p.217

<sup>156</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.164

<sup>157</sup> Board of Education Circular 1484, 21.11.39; F Le Gros Clark & R W Toms: *Evacuation: Failure or Reform?*, p.14

<sup>158</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.164

<sup>159</sup> *ibid.*, p.222; R Samways: *We Think You Ought to Go*, pp.40, 41

at Leicestershire Record Office demonstrate. The county's Director of Education wrote regularly to Sheffield Education Committee setting out the costs incurred for educating evacuees in the county's secondary schools. At Loughborough Grammar School £10 per head per year was claimed for Sheffield boys where no city teacher was present, but at the town's High School for Girls the evacuees were accompanied by a Sheffield teacher and only £1.16s.9d per head per year was requested until Easter 1941, when it was increased to £10 per head, presumably because the teacher had returned to the city. A charge of £2.12s.6d for each evacuee who sat for the School Certificate examination was levied on the sending authority. Other, more obscure, expenses were incurred too: at Rawlins Grammar School in Quorn, for example, an amount of one shilling per evacuee per annum was claimed towards the upkeep of the school grounds.<sup>160</sup>

In December 1939 the Board of Education, realising the need for reading matter to occupy evacuees in the long winter evenings, made representations to the government for funding. The Exchequer finally agreed to meet the costs incurred in sending additional books to reception areas on a scale of £1 per annum for every 800 children in reception areas under the government's evacuation scheme. There was also a Treasury allowance of £1.10s per 1,000 books to help libraries in evacuation areas willing to send books to reception areas for evacuees.<sup>161</sup> At the same time Sheffield Libraries Department sent 2,480 library books to the reception areas for the use of evacuated Sheffield school children.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Various letters, Leicestershire Education Committee: Education General File

<sup>161</sup> Board of Education Circular 1493, 15.12.39; *Education*, No. 1928, 22.12.39, p.523

<sup>162</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Report 1939-40*, p.393

In 1939 the continued drift back worried local education officials in Sheffield, as in other cities. Members of the Education Committee, dismayed by the likelihood that the constant homeward stream of evacuee school children would jeopardise the home tuition scheme, visited local teachers in the reception areas and praised arrangements there. But they warned parents:

“Our chief concern at the moment is that the children there are enjoying possibilities of education which may not be forthcoming for a long time in Sheffield and may perhaps in some districts never be forthcoming at all until the war is over.”<sup>163</sup>

Nevertheless, the stream of evacuees returning to the city continued relentlessly. It may not be surprising to note that figures were high where pupils were separated from their peers: Wybourn Council School, dispersed among seven village schools, showed half the original number of 137 had returned six weeks later, while Walkley Council School, similarly scattered, recorded an even higher figure with two-thirds of the original sixty-six having left in the same period and only twelve remaining in the reception area by Easter 1940.<sup>164</sup>

Where evacuated schools operated as independent units and friends remained together the homeward flow appeared less rapid, however: Firs Hill school, accommodated in two church halls, showed a loss of only a third of the original number in the first six weeks. However, by the beginning of the January term numbers were so small that only two teachers of the original four were needed, both of whom had returned by mid-1940

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<sup>163</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 12.10.39, p.4

<sup>164</sup> Leicestershire Education Committee Attendance Register of Evacuated School Parties 1939-40

when only fourteen children remained.<sup>165</sup> Even where very small numbers had been evacuated the rate of returning was high, as the log book for Philadelphia Infants' School demonstrates. Twelve children from this school were evacuated to Nottinghamshire on 1 September, but by 9 October only four remained there, two of whom were from the same family.<sup>166</sup> Hillsborough Council School appears to be the only one which maintained its numbers fairly well, with thirty-nine of the original fifty-six junior children still present at Kegworth School when the summer holidays commenced the following July - perhaps influenced by the presence of the head teacher, who travelled to the reception area and remained there for several months.<sup>167</sup>

It was little different for older pupils. Comprehensive lists have not been available for evacuees to Nottinghamshire, but Leicestershire Education Committee records show that a total of 612 senior school children from Sheffield were received into schools in the county at the beginning of September, of whom only 349 were left by the end of November.<sup>168</sup> In Loughborough, where St Peter's Church Hall was acquired for senior-age school evacuees, 145 pupils from a variety of Sheffield schools were admitted on 18 September. Examination of the school registers shows that this number had been halved by the end of October, and only twenty-eight of the original entrants, or 19.3%, were still there six months later: a mere eight were left when the school merged with local schools in September 1942. The chart below, compiled from the registers, illustrates the position.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Leicestershire Register of Evacuated School Parties 1939-40; *Firs Hill Schools 1893-1993*, pp.28,29

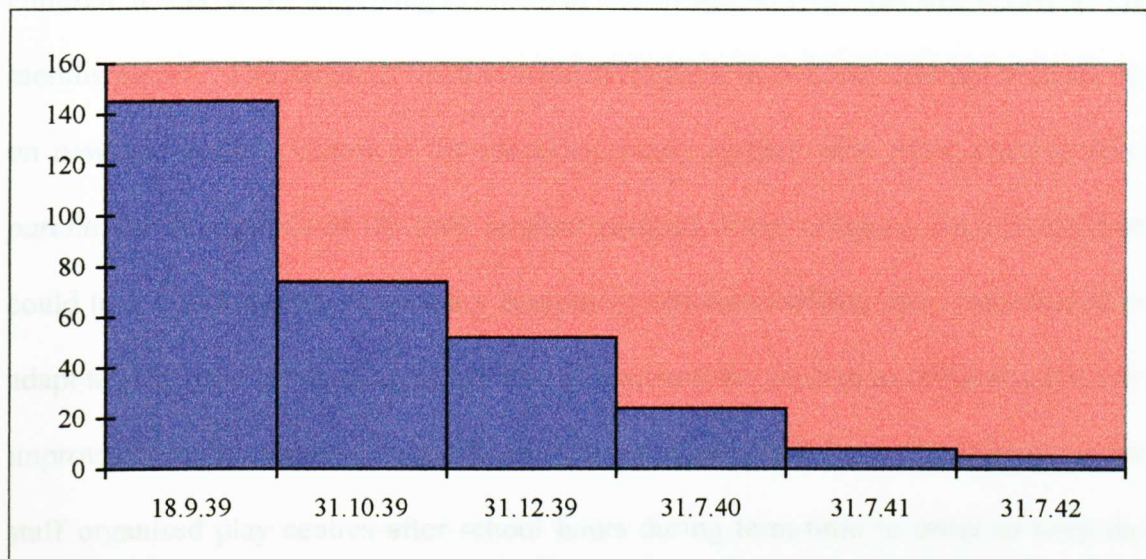
<sup>166</sup> Log book: Philadelphia Infants' School, entries 1.9.39, 9.10.39

<sup>167</sup> *Cogwords* No.1 (1972), p.16; Leicestershire Registers of Evacuated School Parties 1939-44

<sup>168</sup> Leicestershire Education Committee: *Minutes 1939/40*, p.7753

<sup>169</sup> St Peter's School Admissions Registers 1939-1943, Leicestershire Record Office, Ref. DE1360/131

**Sheffield Senior School Evacuees on the Register of St Peter's School,  
Loughborough, from 18 September 1939 to 31 July 1942**



Schools which had made their own arrangements also had their problems with the drift homeward. Reference has already been made in Chapter Two to Notre Dame School, whose staff and pupils had moved to Derwent Hall in Ashopton at the beginning of the war. Although the evacuation was deemed a success, some children had inevitably remained behind in the city and others gradually returned to Sheffield, leaving staff obliged to reopen the city premises in 1940. Managing both sites proved uneconomic and the country premises were closed in May 1941 when they were condemned as unfit by a Board of Education Inspector.<sup>170</sup> In answer to severe criticism by the local press, the governors set out their dilemma:

“The government has now changed its view and sanctioned the opening of all schools in Sheffield. Under these circumstances the authorities of Notre Dame were compelled to reopen their school in Cavendish Street or lose the majority of their pupils.”<sup>171</sup>

<sup>170</sup> V Hallam: *Silent Valley at War*, pp.23-25

<sup>171</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 12.7.41, p.2



Nor was the wish to return home confined to evacuated mothers and unaccompanied children: it was hardly surprising to note that school teachers, too, became restive as the months passed. The demands upon evacuated teachers were great: charged with taking on new and arduous duties in the reception areas, teachers also often acted *in loco parentis* to their pupils as the only familiar adult to whom unhappy evacuee children could turn. Lacking their customary equipment and surroundings, they were forced to adapt to new ways of teaching, either fitting in around the timetables of local schools or improvising independent units in church halls or similar buildings. In addition, some staff organised play centres after school hours during term-time in order to keep the evacuees out of trouble and relieve householders.<sup>172</sup> They were often also burdened with the task of reviewing the state of evacuees' clothing, maintaining contact with parents and householders, and recovering money (and coupons later in the war) from parents for boot and shoe repairs.<sup>173</sup>

Governmental parsimony, discussed earlier in regard to evacuees, also affected teachers. Having left their homes and families for an unknown length of time, many had to find their own accommodation in the receiving areas and often found it particularly difficult to find billets. Faced with a choice between the higher lodging allowances available from civil servants who had been granted twenty-one shillings per week for full board, or the five shillings payable from teachers (for room only), many householders naturally preferred the former.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> *Education*: No. 1923, 17.11.39, p.424

<sup>173</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.375

<sup>174</sup> *Education*: No. 1914, 15.9.39, p.237

Although evacuation service was voluntary, many teachers had willingly accompanied their pupils to the reception areas initially: but the shortfall in numbers of children leaving Sheffield, and the early homecoming of many more, had necessitated the early return of the vast majority of staff to the city. Not only was it uneconomic to keep them in areas where there were insufficient pupils to teach, but they were needed in the city as the home tuition scheme got under way. Examination of log books in both Sheffield and the reception areas has shown that, throughout the early part of the war at least, there was a constant coming-and-going of teachers between the receiving authorities and the city. As numbers dwindled and evacuees were absorbed into village schools, some of those who remained took on the role of peripatetic staff, moving around between evacuated units as the need arose.<sup>175</sup>

But it was apparent by the end of the year that some of those who had stayed on in the reception areas initially were also ready to come home. An article in *The Hallamshire Teacher*, the journal of the Association of Sheffield Teachers, stated that there had been “some difficulties” for evacuated staff and went on:

“Quite a number of Sheffield teachers who have been in Leicestershire or Nottinghamshire since September 1st feel that it is time that somebody relieved them for a period.”

The ensuing request for those with few personal ties in the city to come forward may imply a reluctance of some teachers to volunteer for evacuation service as the war progressed.<sup>176</sup> On the other hand, some teachers apparently enjoyed working in the reception areas. Three Sheffield teachers from Newhall Council School were still in

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<sup>175</sup> Log books: Awsworth, Linby, Shephed Schools in Notts & Leics; Ellesmere Road, Owler Lane Schools in Sheffield

<sup>176</sup> *The Hallamshire Teacher*: Combined Nos. 51/52, p.4

the Kegworth area three years later. Another, evacuated to Loughborough for two years, wrote to the above journal: “Yes, evacuation is pleasant, its duties resting lightly in these calm surroundings.”<sup>177</sup>

By November 1939 the Board of Education was considering what to do with evacuee children remaining in the reception areas during the Christmas holidays. Evacuated teachers were asked to take their holidays on a rota system, leaving some available to organise out-of-school activities during the period while schools were closed.<sup>178</sup> Local authorities were requested to contribute towards the cost of organising play centres for evacuated children, and records show that Sheffield Education Committee made a grant available to Nottinghamshire County Council of a sum “not exceeding £75” for this purpose.<sup>179</sup> Although no mention has been found of a similar grant to Leicestershire County Council it may be assumed that similar action was taken.

Despite these arrangements, growing fears were expressed that large numbers of children would return to their homes for Christmas and that, once reunited, families would not wish to be separated again. *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent* made a rather half-hearted attempt to dissuade parents from bringing their children home:

“We do not suppose the evacuated children will really suffer much. There will be Christmas joys of some sort for them in the reception areas. [...] The children will be better off and safer where they are.”<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> *The Hallamshire Teacher*: No.8, p.1

<sup>178</sup> *Education*, No. 1923, 17.11.39, p.424

<sup>179</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Report 1939/40*, p.393

<sup>180</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 4.11.39, p.4

But six weeks later stronger pressure was perceptible. An article announced the intention of reception authorities to provide parties and entertainment for the evacuees and declared:

“Those who remain [in their billets] will have a much better time than those who come back. [...] It is expected that this will be the dullest Christmas on record for children in Sheffield, as school parties will be out of the question.”<sup>181</sup>

The Minister of Health appealed through both national and local newspapers to people in reception areas to make the evacuees' first Christmas away from home a happy one. Avoiding any government financial liability for festive arrangements, he suggested that local authorities in evacuation areas should help with the costs involved. Optimistically, he continued:

“Simple entertainments are all we suggest. A tea party in a local hall, with a Christmas tree, a bag of sweets, a conjuring turn perhaps, will be enough to make a child enjoy and remember his Christmas as an evacuee.”<sup>182</sup>

The Finance Committee of Sheffield City Council responded with a special grant towards the cost of Christmas festivities for evacuated children at the rate of two shillings per head, to provide Christmas entertainment for officially evacuated city children in the reception areas. Reflecting the number of children remaining away from home, this amount was successively reduced year by year. Whereas in 1939 the grant was for £200, by the following year it was £100. In 1941 a sum “not exceeding £60” was allowed; but by 1942 it was down to £15 and remained the same in the following

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<sup>181</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 14.12.39, p.8

<sup>182</sup> *The Newark Herald*: 2.12.39, p.2

year.<sup>183</sup> By Christmas 1944 Sheffield children had officially returned home, and no grant was made.

In many reception areas there was evidence that efforts were made to entertain evacuees during the festive season for several years. Both local and evacuated teachers combined to hold parties in school halls at Newark and at Hathern, while in East Leake it was the WVS who were responsible for organising a party for evacuees and their parents.<sup>184</sup> Many local groups and individuals also provided Christmas parties and presents for Sheffield evacuees. In Nottinghamshire, for instance, the Order of Oddfellows distributed gifts for evacuees to its members who were acting as foster parents.<sup>185</sup> In Leicestershire, Toc H organised toy distributions for necessitous children, while local people entertained evacuees at Kegworth and Shepshed. Numbers of evacuees remaining in reception areas influenced arrangements in following years: in some areas there were so few evacuees that they were integrated with local children. In Shepshed, dwindling numbers enabled organisers to take evacuees to the local cinema in 1940, and were apparently small enough in 1943 for a party to be held in a local café.<sup>186</sup>

The increased drift back at Christmas continued to be a problem in ensuing years, as did official efforts to discourage parents from bringing their children home. The suspension of special low railway fares for parents over the holiday period throughout

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<sup>183</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Reports: 1939/40*, p.185; *1940/41*, p.39; *1941/42*, p.346; *1942/43*, p.318; *1943/44*, p.339

<sup>184</sup> *The Nottingham Evening Post*: 21.12.39, p.8; *The Loughborough & Shepshed Echo*: 29.12.39, p.5; Brookside County Primary School (formerly East Leake Council School) papers.

<sup>185</sup> *The Eastwood & Kimberley Advertiser*: 15.12.39, p.3

<sup>186</sup> *The Loughborough & Shepshed Echo*: 24.11.39, p.4; 22.12.39, p.5; 29.12.39, p.8; 12.1.40, p.10; 26.1.40, p.8; 3.1.40, p.6; *The Loughborough Monitor*: 6.1.44, p.5

the war was no doubt also aimed at dissuading parents from visiting over the Christmas period. In 1941, by which time there were only six hundred official unaccompanied evacuees and a similar number of privately billeted children, local newspapers drew attention to the fact that many parents were now employed in war work and unlikely to get more than one day's break, urging parents not to visit their children or to allow them to come for a holiday.<sup>187</sup>

Not all children returned home early, however, for evacuation could prove a happy experience for them and for their householders. One of the few evacuees interviewed who stayed with her foster parents for the full duration of evacuation said that her experience in Awsworth, Nottinghamshire, was very positive, although her sister was unhappy and joined the drift back at an early stage. She stated:

“I was happy from the start. [...] I used to go all over with them - everywhere they went, I went. They were very kind. They looked on me as a daughter really. When I came home they were very upset.”<sup>188</sup>

This evacuee's foster mother confirmed the success of the placement and said of her charge: “We made a princess of her. We wanted to adopt her.”<sup>189</sup>

It was not unknown for evacuees to settle so well with their foster parents that they never returned to their own homes. One interviewee was evacuated with four siblings to Shepshed, where the children were split up in several different billets. When she returned home early after her first unsuccessful placement, neighbours of the foster mother wrote to Sheffield and pleaded to take her into their home. This second billet

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<sup>187</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 10.12.41, p.3

<sup>188</sup> Oral interview: Brenda Cox, 8.3.95

<sup>189</sup> Oral interview: Gladys Smith, 12.5.95

proved successful beyond anyone's expectations, for she remained with this couple when her natural parents died in 1944:

“I lived with them until I married, and then lived in the house next door to them. I cared for them in their last years, so hopefully I repaid them for their kindness to me.”

Her sister, billeted separately nearby, also stayed with her foster parents until she married.<sup>190</sup>

Very few private evacuees were interviewed. One, however, told how, having returned home soon after the first official programme, she was sent to Shepshed after the Sheffield blitz to join her sister who was already successfully billeted there. She recounted her experience as the evacuation scheme officially ended for city children:

“When the government said the evacuees could go back, I went back too. But my mother persuaded me that the other people could give me a better chance in life than she could.”<sup>191</sup>

This woman settled in Shepshed after the war and was still living there when interviewed over fifty years later.

Some interviewees commented that they thought their parents were pleased to have their children away: it was noted that these tended to be members of large families. One observed that his mother was relieved when some of her ten children were evacuated.<sup>192</sup> Another, one of four brothers evacuated to Surrey, said:

“I think it was quite a help for my parents having two of us boys away, and they only brought us back to prevent my mother being called up for munitions work.”<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Oral interview: Iris Howard, 4.9.96

<sup>191</sup> Oral interview: Shirley Hull, 4.9.96

<sup>192</sup> Oral interview: George Green, 17.12.93

<sup>193</sup> Oral interview: James Roffey, 30.3.97

Likewise, another Sheffield interviewee, evacuated with his twin brother and a sister but who had seven more siblings, said: "I think it was a good thing for my parents. It had been hard for them to make ends meet at home."<sup>194</sup>

Chapters Six and Seven will show that, while many of the problems outlined in this and the previous chapter were successfully tackled in ensuing movements, some were not resolved as the war progressed.

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<sup>194</sup> Oral interview: George Shelley, 12.8.96



## CHAPTER SIX

### THE 'TRICKLE' EVACUATION

As the 'phoney war' progressed and the expected heavy bombardment of Britain failed to materialise, the problem of cities crowded with vulnerable citizens continued to exercise the minds of government officials. In February 1940 a new scheme, known as Plan Four or the 'Trickle' programme, was announced for evacuation. Drawn up in close consultation between the Ministry of Health and the Board of Education, together with representatives of local authorities and the teaching professions in England and Scotland, the objective was to retain in the reception areas as many as possible of those evacuees already there and to provide for further large-scale movement of civilians if serious air raids developed.<sup>1</sup>

The new programme was initially intended to apply only to school children, who would travel to safety in their school groups over a period of time as and when the need arose. Evacuation would be voluntary but, in an attempt to prevent the premature drift homeward which had caused such havoc with the previous scheme, parents were to be asked to sign an undertaking to leave the children in the reception areas until the school units returned. Billets in private houses would remain the main source of accommodation for the majority of evacuees, but hostels would be provided for difficult children and those unsuitable for billeting with foster parents. Revealing the new

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<sup>1</sup> R M Titmuss: *Problems of Social Policy, History of the Second World War*, p.174

scheme, Walter Elliot, Minister of Health, optimistically declared that the longer period available for planning would enable arrangements to be more satisfactory than the last time. At the same time, he announced that billeting allowances for children over fourteen years of age would be increased by two shillings to 10s.6d. from 2 March irrespective of the new scheme, and billeting allowances would be extended to cover unaccompanied children evacuated under private arrangements, even if they were billeted with relatives.<sup>2</sup>

As German forces swept through Belgium and Holland in May, Plan Four had to be hastily re-drawn as reception zones along the coasts of south and east England were exposed to attack. It was considered essential to move as many civilians from these areas as possible, including large numbers of people who had already been evacuated there from London. From 19 May the task began of removing London evacuees and local children from a ten-mile radius of the coasts of Sussex, Kent, Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk, and later from the Medway towns, inland to the Midlands and South Wales. With the fall of France, children were also moved from Portsmouth, Southampton and Gosport and the following month from several towns on the east and north-east coasts. At the same time, the 'Trickle' scheme (now known as Plan Five) was put into operation to remove parties of school children from London at regular intervals.<sup>3</sup>

At the end of June it became necessary to encompass other vulnerable groups. Partly to stimulate the voluntary migration of mothers and young children from the coasts, and also to meet a growing demand for facilities to be offered to mothers in other areas, at

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<sup>2</sup> HoC Deb. 15.2.40, Vol. 357, Cols. 993-6; also *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 16.2.40, pp.5,6

<sup>3</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, pp.242,3

the end of June the Ministry of Health announced an additional programme. This new 'assisted private evacuation scheme' applied only to women with children under the age of five years, although older school children were allowed to accompany their mothers as well, and the onus of finding accommodation in reception areas rested with these evacuees. The government agreed to provide free travel vouchers and to pay to householders a billeting allowance of five shillings a week for the mother and three shillings per child.<sup>4</sup>

By the end of October the onset of the *Blitzkrieg* induced the government to adopt an even more liberal policy towards private evacuees in an effort to encourage non-essential persons to move away from the affected areas. Free travel and billeting allowances were offered to several other categories of individuals who normally resided in the Greater London evacuation area and could make their own arrangements: mothers with children of any age, expectant mothers and elderly, disabled or homeless people were now included in the arrangements. At the end of the year the allowances were extended to private evacuees of all the official categories from any of the danger areas, provided that they specified a definite destination in reception areas. At the same time some districts which had previously been classified as neutral were brought into use as reception areas. In addition, agreements were made with the governments of Eire and Northern Ireland for billeting allowances to be paid for mothers and children who could make private arrangements there.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> T H O'Brien: *Civil Defence: History of the Second World War*, p.361; also Titmuss: *op. cit.*, pp.242,43

<sup>5</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.361,367; also HoC Deb. 17.10.40, Vol. 365, Col. 814

But the welter of amendments brought in by the Ministry of Health regarding categories eligible for evacuation sometimes led to confusion among evacuating individuals as well as receiving authorities. Mass-Observation reported as typical the reaction of the Deputy Clerk of one local authority:

“The arrangements are too involved for average folks to understand, and too many forms to fill in and sign. [...] This for people whose whole world has come about their ears in the previous 24 hours.”<sup>6</sup>

In designing the ‘Trickle’ scheme, mindful of earlier unhappy experiences, planners had been loath to include mothers in any future organised movement of evacuees. But the onset of heavy air-raids on the capital in September, which left women with no official facilities except for the ‘private assisted’ scheme, forced the government to introduce a limited programme on 22 September for the officially-organised evacuation of homeless mothers with their children from a few East London boroughs. This, however, met with little response, with only 2,600 evacuees leaving under the scheme by the end of that month. The government evacuation programme was then quickly extended to all mothers and children in the whole of the Metropolitan area of London, becoming Plan Seven, (a complicated Plan Six having been abandoned)<sup>7</sup> with the result that approximately 89,000 mothers and children were evacuated in October: however, numbers once again fell off to 11,200 in November and only 1,300 in December.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout the years of planning for evacuation, and following the disappointing response of so many in the priority groups in September 1939, the subject of making

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<sup>6</sup> Mass-Observation File 483, p.9

<sup>7</sup> R Samways: *We Think You Ought to Go*, p.11

<sup>8</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, pp.285,6

evacuation compulsory had been frequently discussed and discarded. With the enemy advance through Europe, the government once more came under increasing pressure to make obligatory the evacuation of school children. But, in the light of experience gained in Operation 'Pied Piper', officials feared that parents would refuse to comply with any official order to evacuate their children, which would leave the government in the tricky situation of either having to ignore their refusal or else of taking punitive measures against them. Pressed on the subject in Parliament, Malcolm MacDonald, now Minister of Health, announced on 30 May 1940:

“My information from all parts of the country is that a considerable proportion of parents would not co-operate in any scheme for their compulsory separation from their children. ... We have come to the conclusion ... that we should continue this as a voluntary scheme.”<sup>9</sup>

Six months later he repeated that it was impractical to bring in compulsory powers to prevent the return of children from reception areas.<sup>10</sup> The President of the Board of Education echoed the message on 13 December, the day after the first blitz on Sheffield, when he told a local reporter: “Compulsory evacuation is socially and politically impossible.”<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, compulsory evacuation *was* applied in a limited way. In the face of continued heavy bombing and in response to concern about the effect of shelter life on children remaining in danger areas of Greater London, the government assumed new powers under Defence Regulation 31C. Local authorities in Greater London were thus

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<sup>9</sup> HoC Deb. 30.5.40, Vol. 361 Cols. 637-8

<sup>10</sup> HoC Deb. 19.12.40, Vol. 367 Col. 1330

<sup>11</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 13.12.40, p.5

permitted to order the medical examination of any child under fourteen years old believed to be suffering in mind or body as a result of war conditions and to require a distressed child to be sent away from the area under the evacuation scheme.<sup>12</sup> Little immediate use appears to have been made of these powers, however, for in mid-February 1941 the Minister of Health reported to Parliament that only two children had been compulsorily evacuated in this way.<sup>13</sup> The LCC Record of Education examined at the Public Record Office showed, however, that “about 470” children under the age of five years were evacuated.<sup>14</sup> no further mention of the subject has been traced in the course of this research.

The reluctance of large numbers of people in danger areas to comply with government plans for evacuation had been noted in 1939. It was no surprise, therefore, that resistance was again evident when the ‘Trickle’ scheme was introduced. In March 1940, when a publicity campaign began a month after the announcement of the new plan, over nine million circulars were sent to householders in evacuation and reception areas throughout the country, explaining the programme. More than three and a half million of these were sent out in danger zones, (one hundred thousand forms in Sheffield alone), asking parents to decide whether they wished to register their children for evacuation to safe areas if air raids developed.<sup>15</sup> Once more, national and local response was apathetic. In an effort to drum up more support in the city, *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent* reported an extension of the closing date for registration: but

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<sup>12</sup> HoC Deb. 19.12.40, Vol. 367, Cols. 1330-1; *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 13.12.40, p.5

<sup>13</sup> HoC Deb. 13.2.41, Vol.. 368, Cols.1493-4

<sup>14</sup> PRO.ED.138/49

<sup>15</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 1.3.40, p.7

it was to no avail, for only a few hundred parents bothered to return their forms and many of those stated they wished to keep their children at home.<sup>16</sup>

With the threat of invasion looming, the Board of Education stepped up its preparations to institute the new programme of evacuation. Schools throughout the country were ordered to open specially for medical inspections to take place on Whit Monday 1940.<sup>17</sup> Although details were broadcast on radio and publicised in the national and local press, with reassurances that billets were waiting for evacuees under the new scheme,<sup>18</sup> Sheffield parents once more demonstrated their determination not to be separated from their children. Very few of the city's children arrived to be medically examined, the largest number (sixty-six) discovered by this research having been at Wybourn Senior Mixed School, where there is no record of how many actually registered for evacuation. Although twelve children turned up for examination at Owlter Lane Intermediate School on the appointed day, none was registered for evacuation two weeks later.<sup>19</sup> Despite the early reticence, 22,420 city children were eventually inspected at their schools and kept under supervision with special regard to contagious skin diseases and uncleanness. However, after all the efforts, the School Medical Officer for Sheffield Education Committee reported that only 1,656 children (a tiny fraction of those eligible) had finally been registered under the new scheme.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 30.3.40, p.8

<sup>17</sup> Sheffield City Council: *Medical Officer's Report 1940*, p.32

<sup>18</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 13.5.40, p.1

<sup>19</sup> Log books: Owlter Lane Intermediate School, 13.5.40; Wybourn Senior Mixed School, 1.6.40

<sup>20</sup> Sheffield City Council: *Medical Officer's Report 1940*, p.33

Confusion about destinations, so rife in the run-up to the first scheme, still appeared to reign in 1940 and it may be argued that this aggravated the situation and did not inspire confidence in parents. It is apparent from research that new reception areas had been identified for Sheffield children, although no authorised information on this matter has been discovered during examination of local archives and libraries. Two school log books reveal that the Derbyshire villages of Clowne and Dronfield were scheduled to receive city children in 1940, but there is no evidence that parents were informed officially or that Sheffield children arrived there.<sup>21</sup> In April, readers of *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent* may have been perplexed to learn that the previously neutral areas of Worksop and the surrounding villages of Blyth, Carlton, Harworth, Bircotes and Langold had already been chosen as new reception areas for potential evacuees from Sheffield but then rejected. So that children could be sent where there was sufficient school accommodation, the villages of Oldcotes, Carburton, Norton, Cuckney and Nether Langwith were then selected, along with the town of Worksop.<sup>22</sup> Within weeks the list was yet again amended, to Oldcotes, Carburton, Nether Langwith, Carlton, Bircotes and Langold.<sup>23</sup>

But it was not only parents in evacuating areas who showed themselves unwilling to comply with government requirements. There were difficulties, too, in persuading reluctant householders in some of the receiving districts to offer billets. Despite many improvements which had been implemented in regard to medical inspections and hostels for children with special needs since the first evacuation programme began, only

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<sup>21</sup> Log books: Carbrook Council Boys' School, entry 11.3.40; Dronfield Junior School, entry 18.12.40

<sup>22</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 12.4.40, p.6

<sup>23</sup> *The Worksop Guardian*: 17.5.40, p.2



one householder in fifty volunteered to take evacuees when the 'Trickle' programme was introduced<sup>24</sup> - a situation which would hardly have encouraged parents of potential evacuees to consider participation in the scheme. Throughout March and April the government mounted a widespread publicity campaign in an effort to recruit more foster parents. The Minister of Health sent a circular for publication in newspapers in reception areas, appealing to householders to "Join the Roll" of those willing to take in evacuee children if future need arose, and weekly advertisements also appeared in the press with similar messages.<sup>25</sup>

Worksop householders did not rush to volunteer homes for Sheffield evacuees when, in March, 3,260 circulars were delivered in the area requesting offers of accommodation. Only 204 favourable replies were received for an estimated intake of eight hundred children. *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*, informing readers of the position on 12 April 1940, suggested that one difficulty was that as soon as a scheme was prepared, the government requisitioned billets reserved for children to use for their own staff or members of the armed forces, and people could not be expected to billet children and others at the same time. It was feared that compulsory billeting would have to be introduced.<sup>26</sup> The situation was hardly likely to change the minds of parents who were already worried about separation from their children.

Interestingly, Worksop people themselves were not told of their poor performance until a full week after the announcement in the Sheffield press. It was not until 19 April that

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<sup>24</sup> N Longmate: *How We Lived Then*, p.60; Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.175

<sup>25</sup> PRO.HLG.108/21; also *The Loughborough Echo*: 22.3.40, p.5, and March-April 1940, *passim*

<sup>26</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 12.4.40, p.6

the weekly local newspaper carried an account of the Worksop Rural Council meeting which had been held nine days earlier. It was clear that preliminary discussions had already taken place between officials from both evacuation and reception areas, for detailed travel plans had already been worked out and reception centres had been identified for Sheffield evacuees in the event of further evacuation. Perhaps seeking to excuse poor local response, the Clerk stated: "Although householders in the area have had no experience of billeting, they have heard such bad reports from elsewhere that they fought shy."<sup>27</sup>

It was not until a month later that sufficient billets were found, after volunteers from the WVS had been brought in to canvass householders in an effort to persuade them to take the children.<sup>28</sup> Even then, it is apparent that local fears about refugees had not been altogether allayed, for at the next Rural Council Meeting members were assured that the number of evacuees would not exceed the allocation of eight hundred and would all come from Sheffield. As the majority would come from the east side of the city and would be billeted in the industrial part of the reception area, it was felt that the available billets would be "entirely suitable". Medical examinations would take place upon arrival in Worksop, before the children were taken by bus to surrounding villages. Billets would be found for accompanying teachers and it was hoped that school parties would not be separated.<sup>29</sup> In the event, as will be seen, although Worksop householders were eventually called upon to billet evacuees, very few came from Sheffield.

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<sup>27</sup> *The Worksop Guardian*: 19.4.40, p.2

<sup>28</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 13.5.40, p.1

<sup>29</sup> *The Worksop Guardian*: 17.5.40, p.2

It took the intensified bombing attacks on London, in early September 1940, to persuade people to leave the danger areas. Parents who had initially been reluctant to register their children for evacuation did begin to send them out of the metropolis with their school parties when heavy bombing of the capital began. But by the following month, after the scheme was extended to include mothers with their children, it was noted that the numbers of unaccompanied children reporting for evacuation slumped.<sup>30</sup> In the opinion of one London social worker at the end of October, it had “practically killed the scheme for parties of [unaccompanied] school children”. It was asserted that whereas between twenty and thirty official school parties of children had been leaving for the country daily, the number of family parties arriving in the reception areas under the voucher scheme had on several occasions run into hundreds.<sup>31</sup> Titmuss confirmed the trend, citing the fact that, whereas 20,500 unaccompanied children were evacuated in September, and 15,000 in October, by November the number was down to 4,000 and December showed a figure of only 760.<sup>32</sup>

Paradoxically, while Sheffield parents were being urged to send children away to safer areas in October 1940, the city’s Emergency Defence Committee was arranging for the city to receive seven hundred evacuees from London. These refugees were mothers and children who were homeless or had suffered injuries in the *Blitzkrieg* on the capital and were in transit to reception areas in the north of England.<sup>33</sup> In the event, five hundred arrived and were taken to four reception centres set up in hospitals around the city: the

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<sup>30</sup> O’Brien: *op. cit.*, p.397

<sup>31</sup> Mass-Observation File 483, p.6

<sup>32</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.285

<sup>33</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.157/5, Minute 1240

City General, Wharncliffe and Nether Edge Hospitals and Firvale House for one night. Members of the WVS together with ARP volunteers helped with reception. After being offered baths, hot meals and overnight accommodation, the evacuees were transferred out of the city to billets in various parts of the West Riding of Yorkshire.<sup>34</sup>

As in 1939, Sheffield people once again showed themselves unwilling to heed official exhortations to leave their homes. It was not until the city was hit by severe air raids in December that some victims of the bombing began to take advantage of the scheme, and even then it was indeed a mere trickle who evacuated beyond the city boundaries to the reception areas, under the official scheme at least. Worksop was alerted to receive Sheffield evacuees, but it is clear from newspaper reports that very few indeed arrived, and none under the government evacuation scheme.<sup>35</sup> It is evident that it was a similar story in Dronfield, where the local school became a reception centre for Sheffield children, for the school log book records: "No evacuees arrive, therefore school re-opened but three unofficial evacuees enrolled."<sup>36</sup> Indeed, when an attempt was made at this time to persuade five thousand homeless Sheffield people to transfer to rest centres offered by neighbouring authorities, less than one fifth agreed to go, and the vast majority had returned within twenty-four hours.<sup>37</sup>

As for householders in the reception areas, Harrison, reporting for Mass-Observation, asserted that when the bombs actually started dropping prospective hosts were torn between memories of the vast problems which had arisen the previous year and

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<sup>34</sup> *Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 25.10.40, p.4

<sup>35</sup> *The Worksop Guardian*: 10.1.41, p.1; 24.1.41, p.7

<sup>36</sup> Log book: Dronfield Junior School, entry 20.12.40

<sup>37</sup> M Walton & J P Lamb: *Raiders Over Sheffield*, p.97

sympathy for the victims of the blitz.<sup>38</sup> In some receiving districts local people remained obstinate in their refusal to open their homes even after the *Blitzkrieg* had begun, and on 21 October 1940 the Ministry of Health asked the relevant local authorities to implement compulsory billeting powers without hesitation where necessary.<sup>39</sup> After the heavy bombing of Sheffield in December householders in the Worksop area came forward with one thousand offers of accommodation for city evacuees even though they had already been called upon to billet children from Yarmouth and the Midlands: a surprising turn of events in view of their unwillingness in the previous April's census.<sup>40</sup>

Even by December the position had not changed in some areas, however, and in some places attitudes appear to have hardened. In Loughborough, where Sheffield evacuees had generally received a welcome the previous year, local people were reproached by the editor of *The Loughborough & Shepshed Echo*:

“Some of you have refused to take evacuees; some of you have made them uncomfortable. [...] Are you selfish and greedy about your home - its privacy and its comforts?”<sup>41</sup>

It was clear that widespread reports of difficulties with evacuees in 1939 were seen as a contributing factor in the continuing resistance there, for two days later the same newspaper carried a large advertisement headed “A Vital Message” appealing for more householders to come forward with billets:

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<sup>38</sup> Mass-Observation File 483, p.9

<sup>39</sup> Mass-Observation File 467, p.4

<sup>40</sup> *The Worksop Guardian*: 7.6.40, p.1; 6.12.40, p.8; 20.12.40, p.4; 10.1.41, p.1; 24.1.41, p.7

<sup>41</sup> *The Loughborough & Shepshed Echo*: 27.12.40, p.3

“Be a rumour stopper. Do not pass on stories you hear about the misfits among evacuees. These are mostly exaggerated and an injustice to the vast majority who are successfully billeted.”<sup>42</sup>

It might be expected that by 1940, when the ‘Trickle’ plan commenced, the difficulties experienced in the first evacuation programme would have been ironed out, and indeed many had been rectified. Overcrowding and muddles at railway stations were largely avoided because smaller numbers of evacuees were travelling at any given time. Strong efforts were also made to avoid the fragmentation of school parties which had occurred the previous year. However, at least some of the old problems remained, as an official complaint received from an escort on an evacuation journey in 1940 indicated:

“Drinking water was not available on the train in accordance with general policy. It was supplied at the only stop, four hours after the journey began, when only three porters were available to give cups of water to three hundred children in eleven minutes.”<sup>43</sup>

Organisation in the reception centres had been improved to some extent by the appointment of trained and paid billeting officers. But, reporting for Mass-Observation, Harrison found that much use was still made of volunteers. Complaining that little had been learned from the previous evacuation in this regard, he considered the success of reception was largely dependent upon “a few really energetic and intelligent individuals usually from the WVS.”<sup>44</sup> With more information available on categories of expected evacuees, organisers in most reception areas tried to match incoming school children to foster homes before arrival. Nevertheless, in some districts experiences were

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<sup>42</sup> *The Loughborough & Shepshed Echo*: 29.12.40, p.3

<sup>43</sup> PRO.ED/50/206

<sup>44</sup> Mass-Observation File 483, p.9

remarkably similar to those of a year earlier and some children still found themselves being paraded before prospective hosts in conditions resembling a cattle-market.<sup>45</sup>

Overcrowding, too, was still a problem in some reception areas after the onset of bombing, with small towns suddenly receiving an unexpectedly large influx of people.

A Mass-Observation report quoted one evacuee's account of arrival in Oxford:

“I slept the night in the cinema. [...] The majority sleep in the gangways and between the seats. There are perhaps 800 in all in the cinema. [...] Nearly every mother has a small child and as soon as one cries, three or four others start too. It was quite impossible to get more than ten minutes uninterrupted sleep.”<sup>46</sup>

The cultural gulf between the classes was surely epitomised by Lady Patricia Ward who saw the same scene in a different light:

“The East End loved it. They settled themselves down, each night, on rugs and cushions and blankets along the corridors; [...] and wasn't it a lovely, bright place, almost like a palace? So they told each other.”<sup>47</sup>

By 1940, too, school children were competing for accommodation with war workers and business evacuees, who offered householders better remuneration. Private evacuees, in particular those prompted by the blitzes between September 1940 and May 1941, also produced many problems for administrators, for they took many billets reserved for evacuees under the official scheme.<sup>48</sup> As an example, a survey of evacuees undertaken in Weston-super-Mare in December 1941 showed that, while there were 3,172 people in priority classes officially evacuated under government schemes present

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<sup>45</sup> Personal experience of writer in Weston-super-Mare

<sup>46</sup> Mass-Observation File 482, p.8

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Mass-Observation File 916

in the town at that time, the number of unofficial evacuees (including war workers) was approximately 9,000.<sup>49</sup>

Problems of keeping siblings together in billets also remained. Like many older children, an interviewee who was fourteen years old at the time, had been given strict instructions before he left home:

“My mother told me to keep the family together, so I tried to stop a woman taking my two little sisters away. Then the woman’s neighbour offered to take me, so I thought it would be all right. That was the start of the enforced split with my sisters. I didn’t realise my billet would only be temporary, and we were soon separated for good. It was never the same again.”<sup>50</sup>

Once in their billets, some of the complaints about earlier evacuees resurfaced, but others were avoided by measures which had been taken in the intervening period. It appeared that many of the lessons had been learned and there were fewer and less urgent problems.

In the aftermath of the first evacuation programme temporary hostels had been hurriedly opened to cater for children who were unclean or suffering from short-term illnesses, and some of these, together with the clinics so hastily set up, were still available for children who were difficult to billet in private homes. Eager to avoid a repetition of the protests received in 1939 from householders, the Treasury had given permission for more hostels to be set up, but the problem was that when this work was started in the winter of 1940 children suffering from a variety of conditions were often lumped together.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> PRO.HLG/7/80

<sup>50</sup> Oral interview: John Patterson, 18.8.92

<sup>51</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.379



In January 1941 the Shakespeare Report on Conditions in the Reception Areas identified the need to set up a separate category of institutions for children with behavioural or emotional problems, staffed with trained social and psychiatric workers.<sup>52</sup> By the end of 1941 re-organisation had begun, and in August 1943 there were 233 hostels catering for these children. By the time the 'Trickle' evacuation was under way it had also been accepted that hostels or camps were also better than private billets for older children attending secondary, technical and central schools, so that facilities for after-school study could be provided. The number of hostels for this group of children increased from five in July 1940 to ninety-four in August 1943, when there were also 254 other hostels catering for short-stay cases, convalescents, nursery children and other miscellaneous categories. Whereas in early 1941 only 3% of unaccompanied children were accommodated in camps and hostels, by March 1944 this proportion had risen to 12%.<sup>53</sup>

The 'Trickle' programme did not involve the huge numbers of people nor the speed of removal which had been experienced in 1939 and which had rendered authorities unable to inspect children before they left. Improved medical supervision and regular examination in schools of children registered for future programmes enabled staff to identify medical problems, which clearly still persisted. When 22,420 Sheffield children were medically inspected in May 1940, 2,632 were found to have nits and 52 were suffering from impetigo: it seems reasonable to assume that a similar situation existed in other industrial areas. However, without the frenetic rush to get children

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<sup>52</sup> PRO.HLG.7/85 Shakespeare Report, p7; *The Health of the School Child*, *op. cit.*, p.65

<sup>53</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, pp.382,3

away and with smaller numbers leaving over a period of time, it was possible to check the children before departure, and the new system of labelling alerted reception authorities to potential problems as the children arrived: consequently fewer unclean or severely enuretic children were sent to unsuspecting householders.<sup>54</sup>

The problem of enuresis did recur in further evacuation programmes during the war, but measures taken in June 1940 ensured that the condition was not accompanied by the rancour that it had aroused in 1939. The Ministry of Health organised better distribution of mackintosh underlays, and an extra laundry allowance of 3s.6d. weekly was made for householders dealing with persistent cases of enuresis.<sup>55</sup> When evacuation began again these actions helped to ease the situation for many householders. Some abused the allowance, however, and there was evidence that a few even invented bed-wetting problems. Although a doctor's certificate was required as evidence before the money could be claimed, it was discovered that in one Welsh village alone, the considerable sum of £350 was paid out for laundry allowances in 1941-42. This was a meteoric rise from the £43 claimed for the previous year. Following an official investigation there was a sharp fall in reported cases of enuresis in the village.<sup>56</sup>

The state of clothing of inner-city children evacuated to the country had been the subject of many complaints in September 1939, and it has been seen in Chapter Four that the £1 allowance per two hundred necessitous children, awarded so belatedly by the

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<sup>54</sup> *The Health of the School Child: op. cit.*, p.31; Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.125

<sup>55</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.125

<sup>56</sup> PRO.HLG.7/162, Memoranda: cited in J Macnicol, "The effect of the evacuation of schoolchildren on official attitudes to State intervention" in H L Smith (ed): *War and Social Change*, p.16

Treasury, was pitifully inadequate to deal with the widespread poverty revealed by Operation 'Pied Piper'. By the time the 'Trickle' programme was under way these problems had been largely dealt with, mainly thanks to voluntary action in both evacuating and receiving areas where members of Women's Institutes and the WVS set up clothing depots and sewing groups to make or mend children's garments.<sup>57</sup>

In Sheffield, in the light of earlier problems encountered by evacuation officials, the Education Committee had passed a resolution in April 1940, urging the government to make provision within the official scheme to empower local education authorities to supply clothing to necessitous children and to pass on the charge to the Exchequer.<sup>58</sup>

In October the government increased the clothing allocation to £1 per year per thirty evacuated children.<sup>59</sup> After heavy raids on Sheffield in December 1940, and in anticipation of numbers leaving the city for the reception areas, officials made efforts to head off complaints from prospective hosts by authorising Worksop Borough Council to purchase nine hundred pairs of boots for evacuees: it is not known, however, whether this instruction was carried out. An appeal for second-hand clothing was made in the city, and the proceeds were sent to Worksop in readiness for the influx - which, in the event, did not materialise.<sup>60</sup>

The manners of evacuees, mothers and children alike, had attracted much criticism in 1939 and it is evident that things were little different in 1940, when the conduct of some continued to cause offence in the country. The good intentions of householders were

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<sup>57</sup> National Federation of Women's Institutes *Survey*, pp.7,8

<sup>58</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Report 1939/40*, p.544

<sup>59</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.375, n.2

<sup>60</sup> *The Worksop Guardian*: 10.1.41, p.1; 24.1.41, p.7

tested as the evacuees stayed longer than expected and fatigue set in. Some hosts began to feel that advantage was being taken of their hospitality, and a frequent complaint was of the lack of gratitude or appreciation shown by evacuees whose arrival had greatly disrupted country life. Visiting Oxford in September, Vera Brittain observed:

“Amongst the rugs and perambulators on the short dry grass lie pieces of chewed apple core, fragments of orange peel, and the inevitable sheets of torn dirty newspaper which indicate, like a paper trail, the presence of an evacuee population the moment that it moves from its normal environment.”<sup>61</sup>

On the other hand, as a Mass-Observation reporter noted, there were still some shocking rest centres in the reception areas, and many unsympathetic touches. In one crowded town the billeting officer had a huge notice on the door:<sup>62</sup>

<p>KNOCK ONCE AND WAIT OUTSIDE. NO BEDDING, BLANKETS, ETC.</p>
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Moreover, billeting difficulties were still impeding educational arrangements in 1940 as they had a year earlier, with some schools experiencing the same problems of fragmentation that were evident after the first evacuation. In October, with the ‘Trickle’ programme well under way, the head teacher of a Surrey secondary school evacuated to Somerset informed his school governors that pupils’ education was gravely jeopardised by the fact that they were divided among several schools in the neighbourhood and unable to function as a unit. He reported: “For one reason or another they seem to be pushed where there is least opposition to their coming.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> V Brittain: *England's Hour*, pp.165-66, cited in M Graham: *Oxfordshire at War*, p.40

<sup>62</sup> Mass-Observation File 483, p.7

<sup>63</sup> Mitcham County School for Boys: Minutes of Governors' Meetings 1939-1942

Attention has been drawn in Chapter Four to problems relating to religion and race in the first evacuation programme. As Harrison saw the situation, in 1939 the hostility of some householders had been directed against all evacuees, regardless of race or religion: amid the distress caused by the blitz in 1940, however, resentment was not at first focused on the evacuees except for Jews who, he asserted, were scapegoated because they were conspicuous.<sup>64</sup> By February 1941, however, four Mass-Observation investigators found that anti-semitism appeared to be much reduced, although it continued to manifest itself in some areas.<sup>65</sup> But even if racial tension had decreased, indiscriminate resentment of evacuees *was* evident in some cases, as in 1939. Published anecdotal accounts of evacuation contain many instances of this,<sup>66</sup> and ex-evacuees also recalled acts of unkindness by hostile foster parents and bullying by local children.<sup>67</sup> As a teacher in a Cheshire reception area commented:

“Evacuation is bitterly unpopular. [...] What chance of happiness has a child in a household in which he is an unwanted intruder? A reluctant ‘hostess’ can make a child’s life miserable without any definite act of cruelty.”<sup>68</sup>

Many problems were related to social class. Harrison’s investigators considered class conflict still existed in the second programme, as it had in the first, but asserted that the problem decreased “appreciably” after October 1940.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, throughout the years of evacuation there were constant complaints about the unfair social distribution

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<sup>64</sup> Mass-Observation File 483, p.9

<sup>65</sup> Mass-Observation File 577

<sup>66</sup> For example, B Wicks: *No Time to Wave Goodbye*; B S Johnson (ed): *The Evacuees* ; P Schweitzer *et al* (eds): *Goodnight Children Everywhere*

<sup>67</sup> Oral interview: Jean Perry, 4.9.96; also personal experience of writer

<sup>68</sup> *The Times Educational Supplement*: No. 1375, 6.9.41, p.423

<sup>69</sup> Mass-Observation File 577

of accommodation, with working-class householders called upon to bear the brunt of billeting while wealthier country families were often untroubled by evacuees.

A letter to *The Times Educational Supplement* in September 1941 showed that some householders in reception areas were still reluctant to take in evacuees of any kind, but particularly those from the lower classes. A teacher from the independent Sheffield High School for Girls, which had evacuated as a unit in September 1939 to a theological college in nearby Derbyshire and housed its pupils in boarding accommodation and local billets, complained that if for some reason a billet had to be changed, difficulties were always encountered, especially as people in larger houses who were well-known to have plenty of room consistently refused to help:

“They are not prepared to open their houses to us except when there are rumours of a ‘worse type of evacuee’ from a neighbouring industrial city. When this ‘menace’ does not materialise the evasive offers of hospitality are withdrawn.”<sup>70</sup>

The pupils of this school were likely to have been, on the whole, children of middle-class parents: if a party of children from Sheffield’s inner-city areas had been sent to the district, it is likely that they would have been even more unwelcome.

Billeting officers were sometimes accused of going back to the same people time and time again. According to one critic: “The distribution of billet notices is as indiscriminate as German bombing. There are many eligible billets which have been missed, whilst others have been well and truly strafed.”<sup>71</sup> One reason for this was that billeting officers were usually local people, inclined to act within the constraints of their

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<sup>70</sup> *The Times Educational Supplement*, No. 1377, 20.9.41, p.447

<sup>71</sup> Mass-Observation File 483, p.9

position in the community and often loath to upset influential neighbours. Criticism was voiced in Parliament, with Eleanor Rathbone complaining of the snobbery and weakness of local billeting officers who had not the courage to stand up to local grandees who refused to take in children.<sup>72</sup>

Some billeting officers were themselves members of the local gentry: for example, Lady Beryl Mayhew, President of Norwich Division of Red Cross, was involved in finding homes for evacuees in October 1940. A letter to her stepson seems to show her class-consciousness: “Mrs L looked the grubby type that might settle down in Mrs P’s rather hugger mugger establishment.” She settled “a very smart woman indeed in a fur coat” on her own family’s estate farm but made no mention of taking any evacuees herself.<sup>73</sup>

In 1941 there was at least one attempt to match evacuees with hosts of similar social class. Barrow-in-Furness teachers forwarded details of evacuees, including comments on their health, ability, character, interests and homes to billeting officers in the reception area of South Westmorland. The types of home were indicated as follows:

A	first-class, including bath and w.c.
B	good class home with sound parents of artisan types
C	overcrowded home, lack of parental interest or poverty resulting in children likely to be verminous or ill-clothed.

The plan was hailed as “the try-out of Britain’s newest evacuation idea”, but it was clearly controversial: it was stated that many billeting officers had ignored the scheme which was undemocratic and discriminatory. However, it was defended on the

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<sup>72</sup> HoC Deb. 10.10.40, Vol. 365, Cols. 504-5

<sup>73</sup> P Mayhew (ed): *One Family’s War*, p.116

(distinctly class-conscious) grounds that a remark such as “A really good girl” might place a child from a “C” home into a “B” or even an “A” class billet where she would greatly benefit. When the matter was discussed at a meeting of the South Westmorland Rural District Council, the press were asked not to publish the disclosure and it did not appear in the Chief Billeting Officer’s official report. Although it was said to have been working successfully, no further mention of the project has been discovered.<sup>74</sup>

One of the biggest problems encountered by officials operating the first evacuation scheme - that of persuading those in danger areas to leave their homes - had brought about sweeping changes and a more liberal policy by 1940. But an equally vexing one - how to keep evacuees in the reception areas - was to dog the authorities throughout the war. In September 1939 the drift back had begun almost as soon as those who did opt to leave the cities arrived in reception areas, and a similar pattern was apparent in October 1940, at the height of the London blitz, when a social worker reporting for Mass-Observation on the problems encountered in reception areas stated:

“We have had one or two instances this week, however, of parents going to visit their children, not liking the billets, bringing them home to London and immediately coming to the office to register them for re-evacuation!”

In this case, evacuees’ parents defended their actions by stating that billeting officers were either unable or unwilling to find other billets for the children in the original reception areas.<sup>75</sup> An article in *The Times Educational Supplement*, deploring the return of children to danger areas and rebuking parents, drew a spate of letters from

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<sup>74</sup> *The Times Educational Supplement*: No. 1376, 13.9.41, p.436

<sup>75</sup> Mass-Observation File 483, p.6



teachers who criticised householders for their often unwelcoming attitudes. A further article two weeks later reported that the large amount of correspondence received was almost unanimous in defence of parents and critical of householders.<sup>76</sup>

It is clear that opinions in reception areas and in danger areas differed on reasons for the premature return home of evacuees. In November 1940, when London mothers and children escaping the bombing were evacuated to villages on the outskirts of Sheffield which had previously been designated neutral, the drift back was again soon evident. Here, a local newspaper reported that even though their welcome had been warm, a quarter of the families sent to Stannington had returned home within days and, while it was understood that separation from husbands and fathers proved too much of a wrench, the women were blamed:

“Some allowed themselves no time to settle in their new surroundings and went back home within a few days and some women followed each other back to London.”<sup>77</sup>

Within weeks the familiar pattern of early return was to be repeated by Sheffield refugees when the city was hit by heavy air raids and again by Londoners in the 1944 ‘flying bomb’ evacuation, as will be seen.

By 1941 there were more complaints from the reception areas that some evacuees were making a holiday of evacuation, becoming “habitual nomads” and using the government scheme to travel around the country, returning home at the first hurdle only to re-register and move to a different destination.<sup>78</sup> When Gainsborough Rural Council, for

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<sup>76</sup> *The Times Educational Supplement*: Nos. 1374-1376, 30.8.41-13.9.41

<sup>77</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 14.11.40, p.5

<sup>78</sup> PRO.ED.138/50; Mass-Observation File 11; *Social Work*: Vol.2, No.1, p.8

instance, considered the problem in August that year, the Clerk reported that some families had been evacuated five or six times under the official scheme. Representations were made to the Ministry of Health.<sup>79</sup> In an effort to check this activity 'selective evacuation' was introduced in late 1941, requiring returned evacuees to show just cause before being re-evacuated.<sup>80</sup>

In October 1942, when Leicestershire Education Committee again discussed the decline, members were informed that the number of Sheffield children attending elementary schools in the county had fallen by nearly two-thirds in the previous eighteen months, leaving only 132 of the city's children in Leicestershire reception areas. While the chief reason for this was acknowledged to be the prolonged freedom from heavy air attack, the meeting was informed that the figures should be seen in the light of two other important factors. Firstly, many children had been joined in the county by their parents and were no longer considered evacuees because billeting allowances were not payable. Secondly, as there had been no considerable evacuation for two years, many children had reached school leaving age.<sup>81</sup> No further reference to evacuation was found in the Minutes of Leicestershire Education Committee after this.

In March 1941 the Shakespeare Report on conditions in reception areas found that, despite enormous difficulties associated with such a vast disruption of normal life, the scheme was succeeding in the great majority of cases. The Ministry of Health followed this on 29 May with its own report, asserting that 80% of the movement on the

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<sup>79</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 6.8.41, p.3

<sup>80</sup> T L Crosby: *The Impact of Civilian Evacuation in the Second World War*, p.55

<sup>81</sup> Leicestershire Education Committee: *Minutes 1941/42*, p.8016

reception side had been a success. However, the proportion of children who remained in the reception areas for long periods was relatively small, and many of these had several changes of billet during their stay.<sup>82</sup>

While plans were laid for the 'Trickle' evacuation, and civilians were being moved further inland from southern and eastern coasts of England, another government-sponsored scheme was inaugurated - one which involved sending children much further afield. During the summer of 1940 many spontaneous offers of hospitality were received from private homes through the governments of the Dominions and the United States of America. In June, in response to calls from members of the public and of Parliament and in view of the worsening situation in Europe and the fear of invasion of Britain, the Children's Overseas Reception Board (CORB) was established under the chairmanship of Geoffrey Shakespeare, Under-Secretary of State for the Dominions. Under the scheme the return voyage would be free for children attending grant-aided schools, and parental contributions on the same basis as for children evacuated within Britain were payable direct to the CORB central fund. Registration of potential evacuees began on 18 June.<sup>83</sup>

Curiously, in view of their unwillingness to register their children for domestic evacuation, parents showed no such reluctance to send them overseas. There was an immediate rush of applications, and on 4 July the public was informed that no further requests could be accepted. By this time 211,000 requests had been received across the country for the evacuation of children aged between 5 and 16 years - this despite the

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<sup>82</sup> PRO.ED/138/49

<sup>83</sup> C Jackson: *Who Will Take Our Children? The Story of the Evacuation of Britain 1939-1945*, p.134

fact that no attempt at persuasion was made, no guarantee of safety was offered, nor was any promise made by the government to bring the children back at any specified time. In addition, 32,000 applications were received by the Board for evacuation to the United States of America.<sup>84</sup>

In the short life-span of the CORB scheme (delayed at the start by the lack of escort ships and tragically ended in September by the sinking of the *City of Benares* with the loss of seventy-three children and six escorts) 2,664 children had been evacuated from Britain under the official scheme: 1532 to Canada, 577 to Australia, 353 to South Africa, 202 to New Zealand).<sup>85</sup> At the same time the United States of America received 4,200 children accompanied by 1,100 adults who were allowed to make private arrangements. An additional 838 children, who had sponsors and whose parents could pay their passage, were sent with the co-operation of CORB under the auspices of the American Committee for the Evacuation of European Children. CORB reported that some 11,000 children were evacuated overseas privately, (exit permits still having been granted to those who wished to make their own arrangements after the closure of the official scheme) though Titmuss calculated this figure as being nearer to 13,603.<sup>86</sup>

Sheffield appears to have followed the national trend. It is interesting to note that, although reluctant to register their children for inland evacuation within easy reach of their homes, city parents responded far more enthusiastically to the notion of sending their offspring overseas. Whereas only 1,656 school children had finally been

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<sup>84</sup> Titmuss, *op. cit.*, p.246

<sup>85</sup> HoC Deb. 25.2.42, Vol. 369, Col. 374

<sup>86</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, pp.246,7

registered for the 'Trickle' scheme (see above), the report of the city's Medical Officer of Health showed that 2,429 children were medically examined in the city by medical officers for the Children's Overseas Reception Board, with 2,241 being passed as suitable to travel to the Dominions.<sup>87</sup> It was reported that some mothers wanted to register babies, while others asked in vain to accompany their children to supervise them.<sup>88</sup> In the event, it is clear that only seventeen Sheffield children eventually travelled under this scheme (nine to Australia, six to South Africa and two to Canada).<sup>89</sup> no statistics have been found regarding private overseas evacuation.

While the authorities strove to dampen public enthusiasm, with the Chairman of CORB warning that the scheme would be limited by the number of ships available and billets offered in prospective host countries, the Prime Minister let it be known that he opposed the mass emigration of British children, seeing it as likely to encourage a defeatist spirit.<sup>90</sup> The Bishop of Sheffield, on the other hand, appeared to be persuading city parents to let their children go overseas as he stated:

"Parents are faced with the choice of two evils - either expose their children to the risks and strain of intensive bombing, or send them away to less congested parts of the country, or better still, overseas. The lesser evil seems clearly to send children as far away as possible."<sup>91</sup>

There followed several articles in the local press, exhorting parents to send their children away, and especially to the Dominions.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Medical Officer's Report 1939/40*, p.33

<sup>88</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 27.6.40, p.5

<sup>89</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Survey*, p.4; *Sheffield Civic Record*, Nos.25-26, p.3

<sup>90</sup> M Gilbert: *The Churchill War Papers Vol. II*, pp.451, ,541; Jackson: *op. cit.*, p.81

<sup>91</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 21.6.40, p.5

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.*, 21.6.40, p.1; 22.6.40, p.4; 29.6.40, p.4

However, Vera Brittain, who sent her own children to the United States (but had not evacuated them within Britain) voiced the dilemma faced by many parents: “There seemed to be no right decision to be made [...] whichever course I took would involve bitter regrets.”<sup>93</sup> The debate continued for several weeks in Parliament, where Churchill’s view was not supported by some Members. Colonel Wedgwood, for instance, who had often expressed the need to reduce the number of ‘useless mouths’ in Britain, announced:

“The fewer mouths we have to feed, the more ammunition we can afford. [...] I put forward the plea that America should be asked to take our useless mouths.”<sup>94</sup>

Others pointed out that although government had urged British people to have confidence in their country, some ministers’ actions in sending their own families overseas was showing that they had no confidence themselves.<sup>95</sup>

Class divisions were evident in overseas evacuation as in the British schemes. The CORB programme was attacked as being class-conscious in Parliament by the Member for Llanelli, who warned that there would be considerable feeling in the country if well-to-do children were allowed to leave the country.<sup>96</sup> But government officials anxious to avoid allegations of class bias, were at pains to make the official scheme available to all school children, and the Under-Secretary for the Dominions reported on 20 August that 99% of those children selected by CORB for evacuation attended grant-aided schools.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> A Bishop & Y A Bennett (eds): *Vera Brittain's Diary 1939-45*, editors’ note, p.50

<sup>94</sup> HoC Deb. 2.7.40, Vol. 362, Cols. 743-4

<sup>95</sup> HoC Deb. 16.7.40, Vol. 363, Cols. 19-23

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> HoC Deb. 20.8.40, Vol. 364, Col. 1113

In addition to the government-organised scheme, various American business organisations, such as Warner Brothers, Kodak Company and Hoover Vacuum Cleaner Company, made their own arrangements for children of their British employees to be evacuated privately and billeted with American families.<sup>98</sup> No accusation of class distinction has been discovered against these companies, but it is evident that class did play a part in other schemes for overseas evacuation, some of which were highly selective. *The Boston Daily Transcript* advertised and sponsored a scheme to bring out children of ‘professional and clerical’ families.<sup>99</sup> The headmaster of the Cambridge Tutoring School in New York offered to take one hundred British school boys at a special offer of £100 each, but stipulated: “Boys from a cultural background only can be accepted. Sons of Army and Navy officers and professionals would be welcome.” Similarly, American, Canadian and Australian doctors contacted the British Medical Association offering to take children of British doctors, while Douglas Fairbanks Junior planned to set up a large colony in Hollywood to cater entirely for British actors’ children.<sup>100</sup> At the same time, Yale University put forward a scheme for the reception of children of intellectuals from Cambridge and Oxford universities. Cambridge demurred, partly on the grounds that such a scheme would be seen as privileged; Oxford, on the other hand, sent a contingent of twenty-five wives and one hundred and twenty-five children of academics who were taken into affluent and welcoming homes.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 27.12.40, p.5; Crosby: *op. cit.*, p.113

<sup>99</sup> Crosby: *op. cit.*, p.117

<sup>100</sup> Jackson: *op. cit.*, pp.68,71

<sup>101</sup> A Spokes Symonds: *Havens Across the Sea 1940-1990*, p.2; Crosby: *op. cit.*, pp.115,6

Despite the efforts of government to make the CORB scheme open to all, it is clear that more middle-class parents were able to send their children abroad than were the working class. For one thing, poor parents would have found it almost impossible to comply with the clothing requirements for overseas evacuation, which were more stringent than for inland evacuees. An interviewee who travelled under the scheme from Sheffield to Australia, remembered that his parents had to provide a khaki uniform suitable for Scout activities on board ship, and also a panama hat - items which were hardly likely to be owned by many inner-city children.<sup>102</sup> Replying to concerns of Labour politicians, Viscountess Astor implicitly accepted the part played by privilege when she told the House of Commons: "It was not the government's fault that people who had the money sent their children out of the country."<sup>103</sup>

Once overseas, CORB evacuees, like those within Britain, were not immune to changes of billet, for various reasons. Sometimes foster parents' circumstances changed, or the children simply could not settle with their hosts: in other cases hosts asked for financial contributions which could not be met due to government restrictions.<sup>104</sup> A Sheffield evacuee moved three times around his extended family in Australia due to the illness of his hosts and, fourthly, to a family who had applied in 1940 for a British evacuee and were still on the waiting list in 1942.<sup>105</sup> As with British householders, some hosts who had rushed to take children initially had not anticipated that they would stay so long and disillusionment and fatigue set in. Jackson noted that once the United States entered

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<sup>102</sup> Oral interview: Geoffrey Stevens, 12.3.97

<sup>103</sup> HoC Deb. 16.7.40, Vol. 363, Col. 352

<sup>104</sup> J Statler: *Special Relations*, pp.98, 132, 139

<sup>105</sup> Oral interview: Geoffrey Stevens, 12.3.97



war in December 1941, British evacuees seemed less welcome than earlier: American lifestyles, hitherto affluent, were suddenly cramped, affected by rationing of gasoline and some foodstuffs, and evacuees were in danger of overstaying their welcome.<sup>106</sup>

To the chagrin of CORB officials, the drift homeward so apparent in domestic programmes also affected overseas evacuees. While most evacuees remained to the end of the war in keeping with the agreement signed by their parents, some began returning early by privately-arranged means, often by ship via Lisbon. Some hosts and guests had quarrelled, while some parents worried that their children may become too fond, not only of their foster parents, but also of their host country (with its greater freedom and less rationing) and forget their own parents and homes.<sup>107</sup> Vera Brittain's children, evacuated to America in June 1940, were among those who left prematurely. By January 1942 she had sensed growing disillusionment on the part of their foster parents and soon noted veiled criticisms of her son.<sup>108</sup> Brittain recorded in her diary: "He has obviously been wrongly handled and made recalcitrant."<sup>109</sup> Six months later, "faced with the grim dilemma of again risking John's life or losing him for the duration and virtually altogether", she began active efforts to get her children brought home, though it was more than a year before both children were back in England.<sup>110</sup>

It is clear, from examination of files lodged with the Sheffield Archives, that evacuation was under constant discussion at local, as well as national, level throughout the war.

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<sup>106</sup> Jackson: *op. cit.*, p.139

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.*, p.168

<sup>108</sup> Bishop & Bennett: *op. cit.*, pp.118, 153

<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*, p.199

<sup>110</sup> *ibid.*, pp.189, 155, 233, 236

Several schemes of civil defence were planned and adapted as circumstances dictated, as has already been seen. Documents show that early in December 1940, after the devastating bombing attack on Coventry and only days before heavy raids on Sheffield, the city's Emergency Committee for Civil Defence met to discuss arrangements for air raid precautions in the event of heavy air assault on the city. Contingency plans were drawn up for the possible evacuation of city hospitals and arrangements made for approximately five hundred beds to be set up and equipped in Carterknowle and Greystones schools and in the Teacher Training College. These establishments, together with "certain golf club houses", would be used as emergency hospitals in case of necessity.<sup>111</sup>

At the same time, *The Sheffield Star* reported details of a new and comprehensive plan to deal with homelessness in the event of heavy air attack. Known as the "Sheffield Come Right In" scheme, it was devised by the city's Public Assistance Officer and a member of the ARP Committee and described as "the first of its kind in the country." Unveiling the scheme, the Chairman of the Emergency Committee stated that it was already clear that compulsory billeting of evacuees upon unwilling householders caused problems and damaged morale. Therefore, Sheffield women were being asked to make immediate arrangements for their families to stay with friends or relatives in the event of bomb-damage to their homes by future air raids. Councillor Asbury announced:

"We appeal to all householders in Sheffield to pair off with each other, and make arrangements now to go to, or receive, another household at a place not less than half a mile away."<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.157/5, Minute 1354

<sup>112</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 2.12.40, p.6

On 6 December, only a week before the Sheffield blitz, the Public Assistance Officer revealed more details of the scheme. Four thousand volunteers would carry out a city-wide canvass of homes in order to compile records of each family's proposed alternative accommodation. Public Assistance authorities would be responsible for information as to the whereabouts of people after any air raid. Throughout the city fifty-four feeding centres, which had already been set up, would henceforth be manned continually. Stores of food and clothing and field kitchen equipment were held at the centres and also at various points on the outskirts of the city. Arrangements were in hand for people who may need to sleep at the centres, which would be provided with shelters, though it was hoped that the "Come Right In" scheme would avoid this necessity in most cases.<sup>113</sup> No further mention of this scheme has been discovered in the course of research: it is assumed that the heavy raids on Sheffield, which began within days of its inception, rendered it unworkable.

On 12 December 1940 (only hours before the onset of bombing of the city) members of Sheffield Emergency Committee held a timely meeting with Chief Officers of the Corporation to plan for action after a potential air raid. The Public Assistance Officer was requested to contact religious authorities and to ensure that cinemas and schools could be made available for sheltering homeless people. It was also agreed that the WVS would supply cooks and assistants for feeding centres and that education welfare officers and city rent collectors would act as billeting officers in such an emergency.<sup>114</sup> The Chief Education Officer reported that a scheme was currently in existence which

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<sup>113</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 6.12.40, p.6

<sup>114</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.39(71)

would cover the immediate evacuation of 1,800 children but did not provide for mothers. After recent consultations with the Minister of Health it had been decided to retain this skeleton scheme and to modify it to meet such circumstances as may arise.<sup>115</sup>

No-one attending that meeting could have envisaged how soon the scheme would have to be revived and modified.

After the heavy raids of 12 and 15 December, the 'Trickle' scheme was immediately re-publicised through the Information Committee's news service and evacuation officers were ready for parents to register their children for evacuation at the information bureau situated at the Central Library. However, as in the previous year, the people of Sheffield again proved implacably resistant to evacuation. Walton and Lamb, employees at the Central Library, recorded that officials from the city's Public Assistance Department attempted to evacuate five thousand homeless people in overcrowded halls to rest centres made available by neighbouring authorities. After two days of concerted effort to persuade the refugees to move only nine hundred had agreed to go, and within twenty-four hours seven hundred of these had returned.<sup>116</sup>

Even when, on 18 December, the Emergency Committee for Civil Defence decreed that all mothers with children of school age, as well as expectant mothers, the blind and the aged, should be brought within the official evacuation scheme,<sup>117</sup> public reaction was extremely poor. It seemed that Sheffield people who had been bombed out of their homes preferred to find billets in the suburbs.<sup>118</sup> Records show that only two hundred

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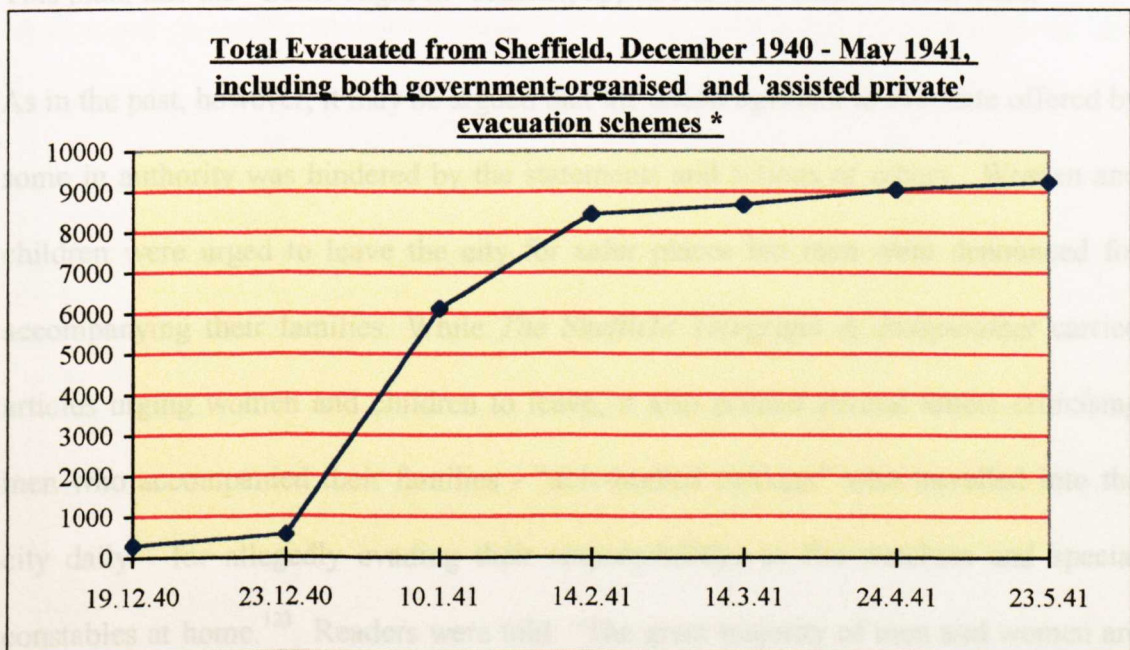
<sup>115</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.157/3

<sup>116</sup> Walton & Lamb: *op. cit.*, p.97

<sup>117</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.39/71, Minute 1413

<sup>118</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 20.12.40, p.5

evacuees responded immediately and were transferred to rest centres outside the city, and travel vouchers and billeting certificates were issued to an additional ninety adults with children to go to private billets in other areas. The exodus continued very slowly until Christmas,<sup>119</sup> after which the government decision to extend travel and billeting allowances to private evacuees in priority categories from any of the danger areas<sup>120</sup> [see above] may have influenced the sudden increase to 3,776 by 31 December and to 6,121 over the following ten days. After steadily climbing to 8,631 two months later demand then fell off, until by 23 May a total of 9,246 (comprising 2056 mothers, 4692 children, 2498 others) was shown to have left and statistics were apparently abandoned.<sup>121</sup> The graph below demonstrates this pattern of movement but there are, unfortunately, no details available of numbers who returned home during this period.



\*Statistics taken from Sheffield Archives, File CA.157/5: Emergency Civil Defence Committee, 5 April 1940 - 25 July 1941

<sup>119</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.39/71, Minute 1413

<sup>120</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 6.1.41, p.4

<sup>121</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.39/71, Minutes 1413, 1724, 1781, 1944

Local newspapers aired concern at the abysmal response of Sheffield people to the call for evacuation and published a Sheffield doctor's solution to the problem. Flying in the face of government policy, Dr Bessie Goodson advocated compulsory evacuation, but maintained that this need not mean the forcible separation of children from their parents. Certain cities and centres could be put out of bounds for children, and mothers could be encouraged to accompany them to safe areas so that they would be evacuated in family groups. The group principle could be extended so that neighbouring families went together armed with their own familiar helpers. She asserted:

“One of the causes of failure of evacuation was the fact that the minds which had conceived evacuation had been for the greater part male, military and upper-middle class, whereas those who had tried to carry it out had been largely female, civilian and working class.”<sup>122</sup>

This plan, like the “Come Right In” scheme, appears to have sunk without trace.

As in the past, however, it may be argued that the encouragement to evacuate offered by some in authority was hindered by the statements and actions of others. Women and children were urged to leave the city for safer places but men were denounced for accompanying their families. While *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent* carried articles urging women and children to leave, it also printed several letters criticising men who accompanied their families - “able-bodied trekkers” who travelled into the city daily - for allegedly evading their responsibilities as fire-watchers and special constables at home.<sup>123</sup> Readers were told: “The great majority of men and women are facing up to it with grim determination, refusing to seek safety in flight.”<sup>124</sup> The

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<sup>122</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 16.12.40, p.4; *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 17.12.40, p.5

<sup>123</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 16.1.41 - 7.3.41

<sup>124</sup> *ibid.*, 5.2.41, p.4

Chairman of the city's Emergency Committee remarked that evacuation should be limited to the priority groups who could make no really useful contribution in the community or to the war effort, in particular mothers and children.<sup>125</sup> However, it is clear that mothers did not escape criticism, for a woman who had evacuated with her three small children wrote that her relatives were accusing her of lack of courage and hinting that her duty was in Sheffield.<sup>126</sup> The intimation, in March, by the Ministry of Health that travel vouchers and certificates for billeting allowances should be restricted to those in the priority classes normally resident in evacuable districts was seen as unhelpful by the Emergency Committee. Sheffield officials were still working to encourage citizens to leave the city, and the Director of Education was instructed to inform the Regional Officer that such a course was impracticable at that time.<sup>127</sup>

Many child psychologists voiced concern about the psychological effects of war and evacuation upon children.<sup>128</sup> The Director of Sheffield Child Guidance Clinic echoed the fear that they could suffer mentally as well as physically from the separation from parents (or even the fear of this) and also from the fear of bombing.<sup>129</sup> National and local newspapers published articles on the matter, but at times it seemed that the efforts of some journalists to encourage evacuation were sabotaged by their editors. Having carried many articles exhorting parents to send their children out of the city for more

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<sup>125</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 23.1.41, p.5

<sup>126</sup> *ibid.*, 7.3.41, p.4

<sup>127</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.157/5, Minute 1781

<sup>128</sup> W Boyd, "The Effects of Evacuation on the Children", *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. XI (1941), pp.120-127; C Burt, "The Incidence of Neurotic Symptoms Among Evacuated School Children", *op. cit.*, pp.8-15; M D Vernon, "A Study of Some Effects of Evacuation on Adolescent Girls", *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. X (1940), pp.114-134

<sup>129</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 14.10.39, p.6

than a year, *The Sheffield Star* perversely carried the headline “Some Children Better Off After a Blitz” in August 1941. The report summed up: “Some children, far from having their nervousness increased by the bombing, are actually happier and better.”<sup>130</sup> But the paper continued to carry almost weekly reports of city evacuees who were happy in their billets.

As has been seen, although Worksop was ready to receive evacuees from Sheffield after the December blitz on the city, few arrived there. Some of those who did leave under the organised scheme were accommodated in Doncaster, where four rest centres were quickly opened for the refugees. Some large families were difficult to billet because they refused to be separated; and here, as in other parts of the country, it is apparent that social distribution of accommodation was uneven. In an uncomfortable echo of past experiences, *The Sheffield Star* reported: “People responded well to an appeal for billets, especially in working-class areas.”<sup>131</sup>

As in earlier programmes, the behaviour of some evacuees drew complaints. In Bakewell, for instance, some recent arrivals from the city were unpopular in the town. It was said of them: “They are condescending in their attitude and made it plain that they regard Bakewell people as country bumpkins.”<sup>132</sup> But generally the welcome was warm. *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent* reported:

“Country folk in the area around Sheffield differentiate between genuine evacuees and those seeking to avoid responsibility. Genuine cases have been received with sympathy.”<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 5.8.41, p.5

<sup>131</sup> *ibid.*, 6.1.41, p.4

<sup>132</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 25.1.41, p.5

<sup>133</sup> *ibid.*, 23.1.41, p.5



It should be remembered, too, that an influx of evacuees in small villages or even in country towns could cause considerable inconvenience to local inhabitants and inflame a natural antipathy towards ‘foreigners’. As the war progressed everyday products, for example envelopes or toilet paper, became more difficult to come by. As rationing ensued some shopkeepers imposed their own restrictions and put up signs stating that goods in short supply were reserved for ‘registered customers only’.<sup>134</sup> But some evacuated Sheffield women complained that, even though they had registered with shopkeepers in reception areas and received their rations, they were denied supplies which were kept for local people because they were not considered regular customers.<sup>135</sup>

The numbers who had left the city under the first official scheme in 1939 had been pathetically low, as has been seen. The drift homeward had continued relentlessly until there were only seven hundred city children still away in the reception areas of Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire by December 1940.<sup>136</sup> Once again, those who did opt to leave Sheffield followed the national trend in returning to the city soon afterwards. At the end of January 1941 it was reported that “close on 3,000” had been evacuated under official arrangements,<sup>137</sup> but Dent’s assertion that 59,695 pupils were in attendance at schools in Sheffield by 7 February<sup>138</sup> (a mere eight weeks after the blitz), indicates that evacuated children were again a tiny minority.

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<sup>134</sup> Jackson: *op. cit.*, p.9

<sup>135</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 21.8.41, p.2

<sup>136</sup> Walton & Lamb: *op. cit.*, p.97

<sup>137</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 28.1.41, p.5

<sup>138</sup> H C Dent: *Education in Transition*, p.77

In March 1941 an official in a nearby country town compared the situation with that of a year earlier: "We had 1,000 children from Sheffield living here, settling down nicely. Now there are only about a dozen - they all went back."<sup>139</sup> A local editor illustrated the dilemma faced by mothers: "The women are torn between their duty to their children, their own nervous fears, and the claims of their husbands."<sup>140</sup> When, in May 1941, the Emergency Committee requested the Director of Education to obtain details of the number of persons evacuated under the government scheme who had subsequently returned to the city he reported that the task was impossible and the instruction was withdrawn.<sup>141</sup> It may be argued that, as in 1939, the concerned statements of some of those in authority were undermined by ineffectual responses of others: for instance, King George VI, visiting Hull soon after devastating air raids and hearing that a number of children had already come back to the city, merely remarked: "It is very naughty of them."<sup>142</sup>

The subject of evacuation failure was again taken up by Sheffield Education Committee in August 1941. Its newly-elected Chairman reported that, almost two years after the war had begun and eight months after heavy bombing of the city, there were only 1,500 unaccompanied school children from Sheffield still evacuated (in Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire): these included the small residue of those who left under the official programme in September 1939 but the numbers had been boosted by others who went away privately and who had become included in the government billeting scheme by the

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<sup>139</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 27.3.41, p.2

<sup>140</sup> *ibid.*, 5.2.41, p4

<sup>141</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.157/5, Minutes 1944, 1983

<sup>142</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 6.8.41, p.1

amendments of the previous year. The new Chairman's attitude was less ambivalent than his predecessor's and he appeared disappointed:

“We have tried every method we could think of to persuade parents to send their children away. [...] but the figures speak for themselves. Even after last December they would not do anything about it.”<sup>143</sup>

It was not all gloom and doom, however, and there were many instances where hosts and evacuees settled amicably together. In 1941, after widespread bombing of many towns and cities, an unattributed article in *Social Work* reported that householders in an unnamed midland town had found a peaceful coexistence with evacuee families from Birmingham and Sheffield. Some local women who wished to go out to work had come to arrangements whereby evacuee mothers would run the host household and mind all the children in the house in exchange for their keep. The report went on: “This district is one of the few in reception areas in which the local residents do not complain about the evacuees.”<sup>144</sup>

Although it was impossible to control the homeward drift of those who had evacuated themselves privately or under the assisted scheme, a hard line was apparently taken with those who had taken advantage of the government-organised scheme. When one family, bombed out of their Sheffield home and evacuated to Doncaster, requested permission to return and be rehoused in the city, instructions were given to the Housing Manager to refuse, on the grounds that in accordance with government policy evacuees should remain outside the target areas.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 8.8.41, p.4

<sup>144</sup> *Social Work*: July 1941, Vol. 2, No.1, p.10

<sup>145</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.157/6, Minute 2337

Throughout 1941, as indeed throughout the war, evacuation planning continued at national and local level. A file labelled "Local War Instructions: Secret Documents," held by Sheffield Archives, revealed that in September the Sheffield Emergency Committee met, apparently secretly, to design a new "Homeless" evacuation scheme. New reception areas were identified and train timetables prepared to transport homeless evacuees out of the city over a period of three days from seven local Sheffield railway stations (Brightside, Tinsley, Darnall, Wincobank, Wadsley Bridge, Victoria and Midland) to Southwell, Halifax, Tibshelf, Huddersfield, Worksop, Clowne, Mansfield and Denby Dale. (Doncaster, Barnsley, Tickhill and Bentley were initially included in the list but by January 1941 had been removed.)<sup>146</sup>

In October the evacuable area of the city was extended to include additional districts which had suffered heavy bomb damage in the preceding months. The Emergency Committee agreed to limit the issue of travel vouchers and evacuation certificates to those residing in these areas, with the proviso that restrictions would be relaxed for a limited period immediately following severe air raids. It was also agreed that contingency plans should be prepared for the speedy evacuation of up to 10,000 unaccompanied school children in the event of heavy bombing.<sup>147</sup>

It was envisaged that the Sheffield "Homeless" evacuation scheme would not become operative until the third or fourth day of continuous attack, by which time it was expected that many homeless people would have been billeted in other areas of the city. Evacuation out of Sheffield would be confined to homeless persons who were unable to

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<sup>146</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.41/29

<sup>147</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.157/6 Minutes 2278, 2150

obtain billets within the city limits. The Director of Education (responsible for evacuation) specified the categories eligible to take advantage of the scheme:

“The only persons eligible are those who are homeless and who are not men and women who are in employment nor persons requiring special attention, eg bedridden, cripples, mental defectives, etc.”<sup>148</sup>

Within the city an amended list was drawn up of rest centres - which, although it could not have been foreseen at the time, was to be resurrected and brought into operation in 1944 when Sheffield became a reception area for evacuees from the flying bombs [see Appendix 9, Chapter Seven].<sup>149</sup> Correspondence between the city’s Director of Education and the Director of Social Welfare disclosed officials’ concern that the number of rest centres had been cut to a minimum and voiced the need to recruit voluntary help to register homeless people for evacuation in any emergency. A request for some preliminary training for those who were to staff the rest centres if the need arose was refused on the grounds of secrecy: the Deputy Senior Regional Officer explained: “The existence of the scheme is not to be made known until it is actually decided to bring it into operation.”<sup>150</sup>

The threat of invasion was clearly taken seriously in Sheffield: in July 1942 an instruction leaflet was compiled by members of Sheffield Invasion Committee with the object of avoiding public disorder in any future invasion. Local newspapers offered to carry inserts in their publications urging the public to stand firm in the case of invasion

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<sup>148</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.41/29, memos 28.11.41, 23.1.42

<sup>149</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.41/29

<sup>150</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.41/29, memos 28.11.41, 1.1.42

but the suggestion was refused.<sup>151</sup> Instead, house-to-house visits were made by officially appointed Visitors (mostly ARP wardens and members of the police) in order to prepare the public in advance to meet invasion conditions. The Visitors were instructed to learn the contents of the instruction leaflet and not to deviate from it in any way when talking to householders, to avoid upsetting people and causing panic. It appears that not all efforts were successful in this regard, for one councillor reported local talk of Fifth Column activity after Visitors had called upon constituents in his area. When the Chief Constable was called in to investigate, he dispelled the rumours and complained in turn that the councillor had been derogatory about the way volunteers dealt with a difficult job.<sup>152</sup>

In October 1942 a new Draft (Revised) Civil Defence Plan was considered and adopted by the Sheffield Invasion Committee. Importantly, under this detailed plan there was to be no organised evacuation of civilians to reception areas outside the city. Billeting within the city boundaries was to be extended to cover all Sheffield people rendered homeless, either by enemy air raid or other damage to their homes (presumably by invasion) and those who might be rendered homeless by evacuation. In addition, all refugees from outside Sheffield, including people made homeless by evacuation and sent to Sheffield on the order of the military authority, were included. Under this plan Sheffield was divided into six sections in each of which a number of rest centres and intermediate hostels had been earmarked. A total of 63,000 potential billets had already been identified in house-to-house visits by ARP volunteers, and it was estimated that

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<sup>151</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.157/6, meeting 21.8.42

<sup>152</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.43/13(a)

20,000 people could be dealt with per day, subject to special transport being available. Official evacuation in organised parties does not appear to have been envisaged, however. Billeting officers had been appointed (to be assisted by teachers if necessary) to deal with people made homeless in the event of heavy bombing and to billet them in private homes in undamaged areas within the city borders. Compulsory billeting was not ruled out if the number of voluntary billets were to prove insufficient in the case of heavy damage to particular districts of the city. Pre-empting any possible reluctance on the part of hosts, the ARP Controller stated:

“The only rule to be applied will be - is there room in the house for such persons? - if the billeting officer is of the opinion there is, the householder will be expected to receive one or more persons for a short time and to do his or her best for them.”<sup>153</sup>

Evacuation out of the city was back on the agenda in June 1943, when the Emergency Committee for Civil Defence met to review schemes for the organisation of school rest centres, emergency feeding, billeting and evacuation in the event of any future crisis. The Director of Education issued particulars to committee members and other council officials which showed that facilities would be available for the movement out of the city of all the priority classes of civilians able to make arrangements for accommodation with relatives or friends in reception or neutral areas and travel vouchers and billeting certificates would be provided. Official evacuation in organised parties does not appear to have been envisaged, however.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.43/13(a)

<sup>154</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.681(14)(27)

Although evacuation had largely fallen off nationally by 1943, organised plans were made for it to be resumed in case of emergency. On 9 July Duncan Sandys reported plans made by the Home Office, not for any wholesale movement out of London, but for the removal when the time came of 100,000 persons in priority classes, such as school children and pregnant mothers, at the rate of 10,000 a day.<sup>155</sup>

The continual updating of evacuation plans throughout the years was shown to have been necessary when, the following year, London and the south of England were attacked by flying bombs. This last phase of evacuation will be covered in the next chapter.

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<sup>155</sup> W S Churchill: *The Second World War: Vol.. V, Closing the Ring*, p.205



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE LAST PHASE

By the spring of 1942, when air attacks on the cities had decreased and the need for evacuation appeared to have diminished, opinion in the reception areas was in favour of winding up the scheme. Even those householders who had willingly accepted the 'guests' thrust upon them at the outset of war were wearying of their task, for few of them could have envisaged how long they would be expected to put up with strangers in their homes, and some saw no justification for being required to continue to care for other people's children while their mothers were going out to work in the cities. Moreover, the risk of danger appeared, to the public at least, largely to have abated.<sup>1</sup>

But when the War Cabinet reviewed the matter in April of that year it was decided to retain the evacuation scheme.<sup>2</sup> For one thing, dismantling such a huge and intricate structure was considered premature at a time when plans were already afoot for Britain to invade Europe and civilian populations of ports might have to be moved in consequence. For another, the demand for very young children to be evacuated to residential nurseries and for expectant mothers to move to country maternity homes had not abated - indeed, numbers were even to increase throughout the following year. In addition, there was a continued need for billets for resident nursery children as they reached the age of five years and left to go to primary schools in reception areas.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> R M Titmuss: *Problems of Social Policy: History of the Second World War*, p.424

<sup>2</sup> PRO.CAB/73/10 C.D.C.(E)(42) 11th mtg. 30.4.42; cited in Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.425

<sup>3</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.425

Some restrictions on evacuation were, however, introduced in 1942. In March the organised scheme (Plan Seven) for mothers and children - demand for which had, in any case, largely fallen off - was halted. Evacuation of unaccompanied school children in organised parties under the 'Trickle' scheme (Plan Five) remained in place until the end of the year, when it was suspended except in such vulnerable areas as London, Hull, Portsmouth, Southampton, and Plymouth. But schemes for assisted private evacuation were maintained, with travel vouchers and billeting certificates provided for those in the priority classes who were able to make their own arrangements to move to safer areas.<sup>4</sup>

The government's decision to keep the official evacuation scheme in force throughout the country, albeit in a restricted form, turned out to be a wise one. In the summer of 1944, when V1 rockets (popularly known as 'flying-bombs' or 'doodlebugs') attacked London and the south-eastern counties of England and demand for the movement of mothers and children away from this wide area quickly followed, the scheme was resurrected and put into effect.<sup>5</sup>

In fact, although the devastating assaults by these pilotless aircraft came as a profound shock to the public at large, the new bombardment was not unexpected by War Office officials. O'Brien maintained that planning against rocket attacks had begun in early 1944, when the Government prepared Evacuation Programme VIII (code-name 'Rivulet') for the voluntary evacuation of school children, mothers and young children and expectant mothers from London, Southampton, Portsmouth and Gosport.<sup>6</sup> But the

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<sup>4</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.425,6; R Samways: *We Think You Ought to Go.*, pp.11, 12

<sup>5</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.426

<sup>6</sup> T H O'Brien: *Civil Defence: History of the Second World War*, p.650

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health asserted that complete arrangements had been in place even before that - since the previous September, when timetables had been drawn up for 10,000 to be evacuated per day from the capital to designated reception areas. In July 1944 Florence Horsbrugh told the House of Commons: "We merely had to say 'Go ahead'. The order was given and the machine worked. The plan was ready."<sup>7</sup>

Whatever the case, the new onslaught upon a wide swathe of southern England forced the government to make drastic changes to the map of evacuation, reception and neutral areas which had existed since 1939. Many of the original designations were now rendered obsolete. Former reception authorities, particularly those in the path of the V1 rockets, became responsible for evacuating persons in the priority classes to areas earlier defined as danger zones. At the same time some provincial towns and cities, which had previously evacuated 'inessential' civilians with varying degrees of success, were quickly compelled to adapt to their new status as reception authorities.

As may be imagined, considerable difficulties were encountered by authorities previously geared to evacuation and now in what were deemed reception areas. Administrative machinery had to be quickly adapted to cope with the imminent arrival of large numbers of women and children requiring accommodation in the homes of householders with no previous experience of receiving evacuees. As one woman observed: "Yes, one day we were a 'prohibited area' and the next we were receiving evacuees!"<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> HoC Deb. 21.7.44, Vol. 402, Cols. 503-4; *The Sheffield Star*: 21.7.44, p.4

<sup>8</sup> Mass-Observation File 2189, p.5

Sheffield was one of the industrial cities which changed its position from a (largely unsuccessful) evacuation zone to a successful reception area, as will be seen. Many local women who had evacuated their own children out of the city in September 1939 now became foster parents themselves. Two interviewees who had left Sheffield with their schools in 1939 recalled this change of status. The mother of one, having been herself evacuated with her children after the bombing of Sheffield, accepted a London mother and daughter in 1944.<sup>9</sup> The other ex-evacuee had barely returned from her billet in Linby, Nottinghamshire, when she found herself sharing her home with two unaccompanied school children from the south of England.<sup>10</sup>

Flying bomb attacks began on 12 June 1944 but, despite Florence Horsbrugh's assurance that the plan was ready, evacuation did not start until three weeks later. O'Brien claimed that evacuation of the priority classes was seen as less urgent than the repair of bomb-damaged houses. There was criticism from an uninformed public about the apparent absence of an official scheme and a great deal of private evacuation had already taken place before the start of the officially organised movement.<sup>11</sup>

On 1 July the government requested the London County Council to take responsibility for the resumption of the official programme and registration of school children began immediately.<sup>12</sup> Six days later the Prime Minister announced to the House of Commons that unaccompanied children whose parents wished them to be moved out of the danger areas were already being evacuated. Registers were being opened "for people of small

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<sup>9</sup> Oral interview: Margaret Bennett, 16.3.95

<sup>10</sup> Oral interview: Elaine Piotrowicz, 21.3.95

<sup>11</sup> O'Brien: *op. cit.*, p.655

<sup>12</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.427

means and not engaged on war work". Lessons had apparently been learned from the earlier reluctance of parents to part with their children, for Churchill continued: "We do not propose to separate the mother from the child except by her wish." Registration of pregnant women and mothers with small children would begin next day. It also seemed that private evacuation was now being actively promoted, as Churchill went on:

"We are not discouraging people who have no essential work to do from leaving London at their own expense [...] in fact, they assist our affairs by taking such action at their own expense."<sup>13</sup>

Titmuss estimated that, in the period between 5 July and 7 September 1944, 307,600 women and children were evacuated under the official programme 'Rivulet' (popularly known as 'the flying-bomb evacuation') along with children and staff in more than ninety residential schools and nurseries situated in 'bomb alley'. In the same period a far greater number (a total of 552,000 mothers, children, aged and homeless people) took advantage of the assisted scheme and made their own arrangements to evacuate themselves, aided by billeting certificates and travel vouchers provided by the government.<sup>14</sup> Some evacuees returned to billets they had occupied in earlier programmes.<sup>15</sup> An evacuation census taken on 30 September 1944 showed that 1,012,800 people of all the priority classes were moved from their homes into reception areas in England and Wales in 1944, including 284,000 unaccompanied children.<sup>16</sup>

The first organised parties left London for reception areas in the midlands and north of England three weeks after the new attacks began. For nine weeks trainloads of refugees

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<sup>13</sup> HoC Deb. 6.7.44, Vol. 401, Col. 1329; *The Sheffield Star*: 6.7.44, p.1

<sup>14</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, pp.427,428

<sup>15</sup> R Inglis: *The Children's War: Evacuation 1939-1945*, p.139

<sup>16</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.430; p.562, Appendix 9

departed from London stations at regular intervals - at first in large numbers but, as time went on, demand decreased until the official scheme was largely suspended on 7 September.<sup>17</sup> Expectant mothers, nursery children and the old and infirm remained eligible for organised evacuation, as well as children joining evacuated secondary schools, while homeless mothers with children remained covered by the assisted scheme.<sup>18</sup> While this emergency evacuation was in progress, plans were being laid for the possible large-scale official movement from London of hospital patients, key government departments and important production units to meet the consequences of any escalation of flying bombs and long-range rocket attacks over a prolonged period. But simultaneously, and perhaps paradoxically, discussions were also taking place regarding scaling down all the various schemes covering evacuation, as will be seen.<sup>19</sup>

Once again, private evacuation impeded efforts of administrators as it had in 1939, as large numbers of unofficial evacuees complicated official billeting arrangements. In Sheffield, the first organised party of mothers and children arrived on 11 July, but they were preceded by many people who had made their own arrangements: *The Sheffield Star* reported that three hundred had arrived in the first few days of July and had either taken up private lodgings or were helped to find accommodation by city billeting officers.<sup>20</sup> At a meeting five weeks later, on 18 August, members of Sheffield Emergency Committee for Civil Defence were informed that the number of private evacuees had risen to an estimated 3,500 and the flood showed no signs of decreasing.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.427

<sup>18</sup> Ministry of Health circular 129/44, 23.9.44; cited in Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.427 n.4

<sup>19</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.428

<sup>20</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 10.7.44, p.8; 11.7.44, p.2

<sup>21</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.157/7, Report 18.8.44

The total number who made their own arrangements to come to the city during the period of rocket attacks is unknown.

The news of Sheffield's change of status was hardly trumpeted to its citizens: *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent* made no mention of the subject until after the arrival of the first party of evacuees. *The Sheffield Star* carried front-page headlines on 6 July 1944 announcing the restoration of evacuation and outlining details of the new programme, but it was only when they turned to the back page that observant readers would have noticed a small item informing them that their city was in the front line for receiving refugees. No doubt seeking to reassure readers, the article declared that no special difficulties were anticipated.<sup>22</sup> The task began immediately of encouraging local people to respond positively to the challenge of its reversal of role. Next day *The Sheffield Star* exhorted its readers to give sanctuary to the evacuees: they could demonstrate their honour and admiration for Londoners by "taking the evacuees to their hearts in true Yorkshire style".<sup>23</sup>

Chapter Six demonstrated that many of the lessons learned from problems which arose in the first ('Pied Piper') programme were heeded when the 'Trickle' scheme was operated. Similarly, the LCC officials who were responsible for evacuation made strong efforts to avoid pitfalls encountered in the second programme when 'Rivulet' was executed. On the whole, journeys appear to have been better organised in 1944 than in earlier programmes. Advance notice of transport arrangements was given to the Women's Voluntary Service, which provided four welfare workers on each train and

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<sup>22</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 6.7.44, pp.1, 8

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, 7.7.44, p.2

supplied urns of tea and baby bottles for mothers and infants, while the LCC provided paper cups and churns of milk. Some of the travellers had lost all possessions in bombing attacks and steps were taken to try to ensure that needy children and adults were provided with sufficient clothing before travelling, so avoiding some of the earlier criticisms levelled against evacuees. In the receiving areas rest centres were generally used as clearing houses where the evacuees stayed, usually for the first night, giving billeting officers more time to allocate the evacuees to suitable billets. Graves observed that although, as before, unaccompanied children proved easiest to billet, while mothers with large families who refused to be separated were the most difficult, local authorities recognised the need to requisition large houses as hostels or communal billets more quickly this time.<sup>24</sup>

For all the efforts of organisers, however, some procedures had not improved in the intervening period. The secrecy which had attended journeys in earlier programmes was again evident in some areas. Prior knowledge of destinations was not always made available to those travelling; neither were all reception officials informed of numbers and categories of evacuees allocated to their districts. *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent* showed that confusion apparently accompanied at least the first trainload to arrive in the city, for it was reported that the refugees had been unaware that they were bound for Sheffield until the train drew into the station, and city officials receiving them had not known how many to expect.<sup>25</sup> An interviewee who travelled with this party recalled that the mothers passed the journey by community singing, returning

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<sup>24</sup> C Graves: *Women in Green*: pp.231-2

<sup>25</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 12.7.44, p.3



again and again to the refrain “We don’t know where we’re going till we’re there”. She felt this indicated that the party did not know their destination. Her older brother, however, asserted that he knew where the family was going but was not allowed to divulge the secret. Waiting to depart, he was about to inform a friendly minister of religion where he was going, when he was whisked away by his mother and other women and soundly rebuked. According to his sister, he remembered:

“I was told I must not tell a soul - not even someone who appeared to be a vicar. Apparently the feeling was that one had to be careful of enemy spies, and one dog collar did not a vicar make.”<sup>26</sup>

In reception areas across the country, despite all efforts, some of the confusion of 1939 and 1940 was experienced yet again in 1944. *Education* reported that householders in one village, standing by to receive forty mothers with young children, were confronted with thirty unaccompanied school children whose escorts had no details and knew nothing about them: billeting staff had to copy names and addresses from the children’s coat labels. Within a fortnight the same village was swamped by more than one hundred additional official and private evacuees who arrived without any warning.<sup>27</sup>

There were other, similar, muddles. Holman cites the case of the official evacuation from Ilford, when a party of women and children got out at the wrong station and ended up in Accrington, where unaccompanied school children had been expected: the school children went to Oldham, where the mothers were awaited.<sup>28</sup> An interviewee who was evacuated with another Ilford school group was more fortunate, however. He spent the

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<sup>26</sup> Oral interview: Frances Pullen, Part 2, 19.2.98

<sup>27</sup> “T E L”: “The Second Evacuation”, *Social Work*, Vol. 3, No. 5, January 1945, p.121

<sup>28</sup> B Holman: *The Evacuation: A Very British Revolution*, p.66

first night in a Barnoldswick rest centre cared for by the WVS. Next morning, it was clear that allocation of billets had already been made, for the children were called out by name and taken by coach to neighbouring villages where their hosts stepped forward to greet them.<sup>29</sup>

But random selection of children continued elsewhere. A Nottinghamshire woman remembered the *ad hoc* arrangements made by her mother and other neighbours when a bus full of young children appeared without warning on their street in 1944:

“My mother found out that they were evacuees. I was upset to see the children so unhappy. [...] Suddenly one little girl got hold of my mum’s arm and said ‘Lady, lady, take me home with you.’ [...] She stayed with us until 1947.”

This woman maintained that many other children found homes in nearby houses in the same way.<sup>30</sup>

With regard to Sheffield, as stated in Chapter Six, examination of files lodged with the City Archives has shown that the subject of evacuation had been under constant discussion by various local committees throughout the war. Several schemes of civil defence were planned and adapted as circumstances dictated. In January 1941, in the aftermath of the city blitz, the responsibility for billeting people made homeless by bombing was transferred to the Education Welfare Department.<sup>31</sup>

A list of rest and distribution centres in the city which was drawn up in 1942 as part of contingency plans for any further heavy bombing of the city<sup>32</sup> was resurrected for use in

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<sup>29</sup> Oral interview: George Green, 17.12.93

<sup>30</sup> Nottingham Local Studies Library: File L94: News Cuttings 1939-1943

<sup>31</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.43/15; *Sheffield Civic Record*: No 25-26, Aug/Sept 1949, p.3

<sup>32</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.41/29

the 'flying bomb' evacuation and brought into operation for the reception of incoming refugees [see Appendix 9]. Detailed arrangements for reception had also been worked out in advance and the procedure was broadly followed for each party arriving. The refugees were met at the station by the Director of Education, together with welfare officers, members of the Education Office staff and several teachers who were present to offer assistance to the evacuees. Doctors and nurses were also on hand to deal with any cases of illness. On the platform they were organised into parties and transported to distribution points while their luggage was sorted, loaded into waiting vans and sent on after them. *The Hallamshire Teacher* proudly pronounced: "Marshals accompanying the parties have expressed their opinion that the Sheffield arrangements are the best that they have encountered."<sup>33</sup>

On arrival at the rest centres the evacuees were provided with hot meals prepared by a British Restaurant depot. Members of the WVS took charge of sleeping arrangements and provided breakfast for all the refugees next morning.<sup>34</sup> The newcomers were welcomed at the centres by the Lord Mayor, who visited each contingent of official evacuees as they arrived throughout the ensuing weeks.<sup>35</sup> Officials from the Food Office and Labour Exchange also visited the distribution points to deal with ration book transfers and requests for financial assistance.<sup>36</sup> Local women teachers helped with filling in billeting notices while their male colleagues set about the urgent task of finding homes for the refugees: others used their cars to convey the evacuees to billets.

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<sup>33</sup> *Hallamshire Teacher*: No 20, July 1944, pp.2,3; No 21, Sept 1944, p.3; *The Sheffield Star*: 11.7.44, p.4

<sup>34</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 11.7.44, p.4

<sup>35</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 20.7.44, p.3; 7.8.44, p.3; 8.11.44, p.3

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, 19.7.44, p.3

Having assisted with marshalling and billeting throughout the period of evacuation, many teachers went on to volunteer to stand by to help in the school summer holiday.<sup>37</sup>

Although reception procedures seem to have followed a pre-set pattern, billeting procedures were a different matter. Varying accounts have been found of methods of selecting homes for evacuees to Sheffield. To begin with, lists of billets appeared to have been pre-arranged. An interviewee who was one of the first to arrive in the city recalled:

“We spent a night at the reception place before being billeted next day. We sat on benches and listened for our names to be called, to be assigned a billet. Many children had come without their mothers, and even those with mothers found themselves separated at this point and sent to different homes.”

Her family was divided, the two elder children taken by an elderly widow and her mother and young brother billeted a few houses away.<sup>38</sup> A press report showed that all the first arrivals found billets, except for one family of eight who refused to be separated and were finally settled into a hostel. A large family of six children was taken in by the Vicar of Owlerton, but some other families were split up in amicable arrangements.<sup>39</sup>

Not everything went so smoothly for later arrivals, however. In an uncomfortable echo of past procedures, a London widow who was interviewed described her experience when she was evacuated to Sheffield with her four children in August:

“We were taken to a church hall and selected like slaves in the cattle markets. ‘I’ll take that one, etc. etc.’ Knowing the difficulty in arranging for five, I allowed the two older children

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<sup>37</sup> *Hallamshire Teacher*: No 21, Sept 1944, p.3; *The Sheffield Star*: 31.7.44, p.3

<sup>38</sup> Oral interview: Frances Pullen, 11.7.97

<sup>39</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 13.7.44, p.4

to go with a man and wife and I went with the two youngest children.”<sup>40</sup>

This ex-evacuee’s daughter (also interviewed) remembered that her mother and small siblings did not find a billet immediately, but were taken in temporarily by a local doctor until they were accommodated with a family in another area of the city.<sup>41</sup>

Another evacuee to the Sheffield area remembered a kind welcome at the reception centre which, however, ended in misery:

“There was food and drink, just like a party for children, but for many of us the party did not end on a happy note. [...] It seemed that the adults were there to pick a child who appeared to be ‘suitable’ either by size, looks or gender, and eventually that resulted in my brother and I being separated. We were devastated.”<sup>42</sup>

The numbers who arrived in Sheffield fell short of those expected - another reminder of past experiences in other reception areas. Although the first train had brought a total of 681 evacuees (including 222 mothers)<sup>43</sup> all those following were less full, and many ran half-empty. The second party, arriving three days later, comprised 584, only three-quarters of the anticipated quota,<sup>44</sup> but this may have been affected by an unfortunate incident. On 14 July twenty people queuing for clothing at a WVS centre prior to evacuation were killed by a flying bomb: fifteen of the dead had been destined for Sheffield.<sup>45</sup> The shortfall continued throughout the following weeks, however, as will be seen in the table below. In a scene reminiscent of Sheffield evacuees’ own reception

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<sup>40</sup> Oral interview: Gwen McDermott, 24.10.97

<sup>41</sup> Oral interview: Hazel Robbins, 29.9.97

<sup>42</sup> Oral interview: Patricia Jones, 3.11.97

<sup>43</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 12.7.44, p.3

<sup>44</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.157/7: Meeting 21.7.44

<sup>45</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 15.7.44, p.3

areas of Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire in 1939, the third contingent brought only half of the 1,600 expected, the first train carrying only 280 evacuees.<sup>46</sup> The table below, constructed from figures taken from several successive editions of *The Sheffield Star* and the Lord Mayor's Secretary's files lodged in the city's Archives, illustrates the position.<sup>47</sup>

**Evacuees received into Sheffield under Government Evacuation Programme 'Rivulet', Autumn 1944**

<b>Date of Arrival</b>	<b>Numbers Expected</b>	<b>Numbers Arrived</b>
11 July 1944	800	630
14 July 1944	800	584
19 July 1944	1,600	859
3 August 1944	1,000	740
6 August 1944	800	692
8 August 1944	1,600	654
10 August 1944	900	873
13 August 1944	800	640
22 August 1944	800	667
25 August 1944	800	500
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,900</b>	<b>6,839</b>

Local newspapers reported that when the newcomers were taken to rest centres, many would-be foster families were disappointed that there were not enough evacuees to go round.<sup>48</sup> An examination of archive files has revealed that, throughout the period of this evacuation programme, reception plans were frequently revised as it became clear at the last minute that fewer evacuees would arrive in the city than originally expected.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.157/7; *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 20.7.44, p.3

<sup>47</sup> Figures taken from Sheffield Archives File CA.509/5; also *The Sheffield Star*: 11.7.44, p.4; 14.7.44, p.4; 19.7.44, p.4; 31.7.44, p.3; 5.8.44, p.2; 8.8.44, p.1; 10.8.44, p.3; 12.8.44, p.3; 21.8.44, p.3; 25.8.44, p.4

<sup>48</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 20.7.44, p.3; *The Sheffield Star*: 19.7.44, p.4

<sup>49</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA 509/5/1-12

A meeting of the Emergency Committee for Civil Defence on 21 July was informed that 2,073 official evacuees had arrived in the city by that date. An estimated 800 unofficial evacuees had also come, who had made their own arrangements under the assisted scheme. All had been found accommodation, with the exception of a few large families who were temporarily being housed in intermediate hostels until more suitable accommodation could be found for them.<sup>50</sup>

The local press was keen to publicise the fact that arrangements for the evacuees were widely acclaimed by officials of the local authorities from whence they had come. At first there was little difficulty in accommodating all the evacuees - indeed, it was stated that at two rest centres so many offers of billets had been received that evacuees did not need overnight accommodation but went straight to the homes of their host families.

*The Sheffield Star* reported:

“The generosity of housewives has been amazing. [...] Voluntary billeting means happiness for all parties and we would not have our visitors return with anything but pleasant memories of their stay.”<sup>51</sup>

For several days the euphoria continued. Under the headline “Sheffield Clamours for Child Evacuees”, the same publication stated that Sheffield was one of the few places in the country where there were more billets than evacuees, and billeting officials had been besieged with offers for children. But a cautionary note intimated that mothers were less welcome: “While we have had literally thousands of offers [...] we want more offers for accompanied children.” Various suggestions were put forward to ease any

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<sup>50</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.157/7 Report of the Director of Education 21.7.44

<sup>51</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 15.7.44, p.2

future problems of accommodation, including one proposing the use of hostels built for Bevin boys which were well equipped with sick bays and shower baths: no further mention has been found of this, however.<sup>52</sup>

Within a fortnight a hint of the familiar aversion to mothers appeared in a newspaper article under a more sobering headline: "City May Have a Billet Problem". Although there was still no problem in finding homes for unaccompanied school children, Sheffield's Director of Education warned: "If great numbers of mothers arrive we will need more volunteers to billet them."<sup>53</sup> The arrival of 740 more evacuees (including 157 mothers) on 3 August showed that there were still plenty of Sheffield hosts eager to offer accommodation, however. It was reported that when the evacuees arrived at two rest centres there were "queues waiting to take them - indignant at having to wait until the new arrivals were fed and had gone through the routine medical examinations".<sup>54</sup>

Suddenly, on 5 August, the quota of evacuees scheduled for the city was quadrupled: originally set at 3,000, it was now fixed at 12,000. Perhaps in an effort to sweeten the bitter pill, the news was published alongside a letter from the War Cabinet thanking Sheffield people for their "fine work". With another trainload of refugees expected, officials were concerned that compulsory billeting powers might become necessary, but the Chief Billeting Officer announced optimistically that many people had previously turned up at rest centres without prior notice and asked for evacuees, which had helped

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<sup>52</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 18.7.44, p.5; 17.7.44, p.5

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*, 31.7.44, p.3

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, 4.8.44, p.5



greatly.<sup>55</sup> Citizens may have been encouraged by the implied invitation, for homes were found for all except a few large families in the party which arrived next day.<sup>56</sup>

Until the change of quota, officials had relied on offers of accommodation from volunteers and had mostly been able to prepare lists of potential billets in advance of the arrival of parties.<sup>57</sup> But, with the news of such a significant escalation, rumours of compulsory billeting began and rumbled on for several days. *The Sheffield Star* announced that, although accommodation had easily been found for around 4,000 evacuees so far, people were pouring in almost daily and the vast increase in numbers threatened to make compulsion inevitable.<sup>58</sup> (In fact, it is clear that the number had been under-estimated, for archive files show that over 5,000 official evacuees had arrived by this time.)<sup>59</sup> In contrast to the earlier, happy situation, there were now some families languishing in rest centres for more than four days because of a lack of suitable billets.<sup>60</sup> The newspaper advised that tolerance and tact would be needed on both sides if billeting were to be successful: householders might be resentful, but most would be sympathetic, and evacuees should be reminded that they bore some responsibility too.<sup>61</sup>

It was, of course, essential to find billets for each party as quickly as possible, for the rest centres had to be cleared ready to receive the next group. The Director of Education warned that if not enough volunteers came forward, billeting officers would

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<sup>55</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 5.8.44, p.4

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, 7.8.44, p.8; *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 7.8.44, p.3

<sup>57</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 9.8.44, p.3

<sup>58</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 11.8.44, p.4

<sup>59</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.157/7: Meetings 21.7.44, 18.8.44:

<sup>60</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 11.8.44, p.3

<sup>61</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 11.8.44, p.2

tour the district around the rest centres: but householders were assured that they need not fear unnecessary hardship, for the officers would use discretion. The Town Clerk would oversee machinery for any appeals against compulsory billeting, and tribunals would be set up consisting of members of the City Council.<sup>62</sup>

Sheffield officials were clearly embarrassed by the notion of introducing compulsory billeting and made clear that it was not due to wholesale refusals.<sup>63</sup> In the event, half of the next party of 640 who arrived on 13 August were found homes. There appeared to be little trouble in billeting unaccompanied children, but families continued to pose a problem.<sup>64</sup> Billeting authorities announced the intention to requisition some large houses which had formerly been in military occupation to serve as hostels for families with several children.<sup>65</sup> In this way, four suburban mansions in one small road were re-designated and became home to nine families, and other premises were also adapted. Once again, officials visited the newcomers with details of organisations such as the Child Welfare Centre, the Food Office and the Fuel Office.<sup>66</sup>

Although the hostels were furnished and equipped with essential items, the Housing Department was unable to provide the many domestic articles needed by refugee families who had been forced to carry with them only the bare necessities of clothing. As a former evacuation zone, Sheffield had not been issued with the stocks of furnishings supplied to authorities which had operated as reception areas from the

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<sup>62</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 11.8.44, p.4

<sup>63</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 14.8.44, p.3

<sup>64</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 14.8.44, p.5

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*, 12.8.44, p.3

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*, 14.8.44, p.; 16.8.44, p.3

outset. An appeal was carried in city newspapers for local people to donate such items, including flat irons and 'bedroom utensils'.<sup>67</sup> The children's column of *The Sheffield Star* also carried appeals over several weeks for toys and games to be donated for the use of evacuees in hostels.<sup>68</sup>

At a meeting on 18 August the Emergency Committee for Civil Defence was informed that compulsory billeting had been necessary in only a very limited number of cases. Roughly 90% of each trainload had been billeted without difficulty, but members were told:

"The remaining 10% form a residue and are, for various reasons, unbilleteable. These are taken from the rest centres to intermediate hostels. Once in these hostels it is a most difficult matter to persuade them to leave and go into the billets provided."

At that time there were 168 families in hostels throughout the city, and others were to be transferred to the Queensbury Hostel in the West Riding.<sup>69</sup> By 11 September the number had been reduced, with only eighteen official and three unofficial evacuees remaining in hostels. By mid-December all the hostels had been closed.<sup>70</sup>

In addition to mothers with small children and unaccompanied school children, evacuees to Sheffield included elderly people: one couple celebrated their golden wedding anniversary at Intake rest centre.<sup>71</sup> There were also several expectant mothers, who were invited to attend the Maternity and Child Welfare Centre, where

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<sup>67</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 17.8.44, p.5

<sup>68</sup> For example, *The Sheffield Star*: 29.7.44, p.5; 14.8.44, p.4

<sup>69</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.157/7: Meeting 18.8.44

<sup>70</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.157/7

<sup>71</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 26.8.44, p.5

arrangements were made for their confinements.<sup>72</sup> Some families who came to Sheffield in 1944 had already been evacuated several times after various bombing raids.<sup>73</sup> A few even seemed to treat the situation lightly - in a depressing reminder of complaints in earlier programmes, one family was reported to have already been to Eastbourne and Wales and were looking forward to the 'holiday' because it was not expected to be for long.<sup>74</sup>

Brinton-Lee, of Mass-Observation, considered that this last evacuation was more successful - from the point of view of organising officials, hosts and evacuees - than earlier migrations, for various reasons. Firstly, the programme was on a smaller scale and was mainly a movement of people from the south northwards. Secondly, whereas earlier evacuations had mainly concerned the inhabitants of inner-city areas, this time a broader cross-section of the population was involved because flying bombs fell over a much wider area, including the outer suburbs of London as well as south and south-east England. In addition, since many urban districts had now become reception areas it was often (but not always) possible to match like with like - town-dwellers with urban hosts and country people in rural billets.

On the other hand, new difficulties had arisen. Everywhere, food and household goods were in shorter supply than earlier. In some of the new reception areas, where heavy bombing had taken place earlier in the war, the housing shortage was acute. In addition, many cities were already filled with war-workers and troops; middle-class

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<sup>72</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1944*, p.37

<sup>73</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 10.8.44, p.3; *The Sheffield Star*: 12 July - 25 Aug 44

<sup>74</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 25.8.44, p.4

hosts had fewer domestic staff; and some, who had earlier encountered difficult house-guests, were wary of going through the experience again. A Cambridgeshire householder summed up the feeling: "I won't pretend about this, the more experience we have, the less we like it."<sup>75</sup>

Titmuss asserted that very few mishaps and no substantial complaints were reported in the reception areas.<sup>76</sup> However, investigation has shown that, as in earlier evacuation movements, billeting once more proved a thorny issue and many instances of reluctance to accept evacuees were discovered by contemporary researchers. *The Economist* reported that the welcome extended to refugees was generally good and the evacuation was largely successful but observed:

"The centuries-old dislike of British people for billeting in private houses [...] has not grown weaker with the passage of time and is now much stronger in the case of civilians (especially families) than of troops."

It was said that this was mostly due to the general disinclination of local people to share their homes with 'foreigners' from another part of the country, which had been noted in 1939 and still much in evidence five years later.<sup>77</sup>

*The Spectator* referred to a 'hate campaign' directed at evacuees, allegedly being worked up by some popular London newspapers which complained that evacuees were offered free transport and free accommodation and were free to return home whenever they liked. A letter to the editor stated:

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<sup>75</sup> Mass-Observation File 2189, pp.1-4

<sup>76</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.428

<sup>77</sup> *The Economist*: 29.7.44, p.142, unsigned article

“As long as evacuation is voluntary - and therefore irresponsible - and reception compulsory, the seeds of the hate campaign will yield a bumper crop.”<sup>78</sup>

Criticisms of billeting officers surfaced once again: some were accused of being generous in their offers of other people’s hospitality in villages which had been ‘once bitten’ in 1939 and were ‘twice shy’ in 1944.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, the passage of time did not appear to have affected class consciousness in reception areas: complaints about discrimination in favour of upper- and middle-class householders in the reception areas were still in evidence. As one Mass-Observation reporter observed:

“Small householders have been put to inconvenience and threatened with compulsory billeting while members of the town council and people living in large houses in the better residential areas have not taken any billetees at all.”

But the same investigator put some of the blame upon “the tyranny of servants” in the big houses over elderly employers and their reluctance to put up with evacuees. The situation had been aggravated by the fact that, as the war dragged on, gradually more and more of the domestics had been called up into the forces, leaving large residences severely under-staffed.<sup>80</sup>

It was often remarked that prominent citizens were not as responsive as could have been hoped. A contributor to the journal *Social Work* maintained that a high standard of living was not always associated with a high standard of charity, and the best foster parents often already had large families, though some childless couples were glad to

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<sup>78</sup> *The Spectator*: 21.7.44, p.50; 4.8.44, p.105

<sup>79</sup> “T E L”: “The Second Evacuation”, *op. cit.*, p.120

<sup>80</sup> Mass-Observation File 2189, p.16

take evacuee children.<sup>81</sup> This was borne out by two interviewees who were evacuated to Sheffield in 1944. Although separated from their mothers on arrival, both found their hosts generous in hospitality despite their cramped living conditions and spoke highly of their foster parents. One ex-evacuee was billeted in a small terraced house and slept in a camp-bed in her hostess's bedroom, while her brother shared a room with the adult son of the house.<sup>82</sup> The second was happily accommodated in the tiny, inner-city home of a childless couple employed in the local steel-works and said repeatedly: "They were such kind people."<sup>83</sup> On the other hand, her mother and younger siblings were less happy with much more affluent householders.<sup>84</sup> Similarly, another interviewee, who felt miserable and neglected in the home of well-to-do hosts, reported: "My brother and I did not receive good care, and for both of us it was a year of great unhappiness."<sup>85</sup>

Some landladies were condemned for preferring unofficial evacuees to those sent under the government scheme: but in their defence it was pointed out that many who had been able to charge private lodgers thirty shillings a week were now required to take in children on full board for little more than a third of that sum, or else rent a room to a mother and child for eight shillings per week.<sup>86</sup> Sheffield did not escape condemnation on this score: at the end of August *The Sheffield Star* reported that local landladies were turning out their Sheffield tenants from rented rooms to make room for unofficial evacuees who were able to pay more for their accommodation.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> "T E L": "The Second Evacuation", *op. cit.*, p.121

<sup>82</sup> Oral interview: Frances Pullen, 11.7.97

<sup>83</sup> Oral interview: Hazel Robbins, 29.9.97

<sup>84</sup> Oral interview: Gwen McDermott, 24.10.97

<sup>85</sup> Oral interview: Patricia Jones, 3.11.97

<sup>86</sup> "T E L": "The Second Evacuation", *op. cit.*, p.121

<sup>87</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 30.8.44, p.3

Other householders were apparently unwilling to comply with billeting orders, too. In Blackpool, for example, where local dignitaries had refused to take in evacuees in 1939 (see Chapter Four), summonses were issued against six people for the same offence within a week of the beginning of the operation 'Rivulet'.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, the Town Clerk reported on three cases under investigation to a meeting of the Emergency Committee for Civil Defence in September. The relevant file shows that no action was taken on two of these: a report was submitted on the third but no conclusion was recorded.<sup>89</sup> It is interesting to note that no mention of any of these cases has been found in local newspapers.

Attempts were made to reassure reluctant householders that they would not face the problems which had been encountered in 1939, but not all were convinced. Like Worksop people in 1940, Chester citizens (who had received evacuees from Liverpool in 1939) were unwilling to respond to the call to offer billets, despite officials' assertions that they would find people coming from the south would be of a completely different calibre from those they had before.<sup>90</sup>

It was true that the official evacuation programme of 1944 encompassed a broader cross-section of the population than had "Operation Pied Piper" with its high proportion of inner-city residents. Mass-Observation reported that the proportion of slum-dwellers seemed to have been lower in relation to the whole, and many hosts said they received a better type of evacuee than expected. In Birmingham, formerly an evacuation zone but

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<sup>88</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 15.7.44, p.1

<sup>89</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.157/7

<sup>90</sup> *The Chester Chronicle*: 15.7.44, cited in J Croall: unpublished BA Dissertation, p.34



by this time a receiving area, a rest centre helper was quoted: "I was amazed, *amazed*, to see rows and rows of bright clean intelligent children."<sup>91</sup>

Sheffield newspapers were keen to convey a public image of a city welcoming the newcomers with open arms, but quoted cases of inhospitality on the part of people in other reception areas. One report on Knutsford in Cheshire stated: "Half the people are willing to help and the others are finding all kinds of excuses to refuse." Another, on Hoole in the same county, described how two hundred evacuees had been left without billets and quoted conflicting views of members of the Urban District Council. The Clerk clearly held householders responsible as he observed: "It is amazing the amount of illness which has developed in the district since the evacuees arrived." But a couple of days later, the Council Chairman put the blame on evacuees:

"One [evacuated] mother had refused four billets - the first three were either 'too posh', 'not posh enough' or 'too quiet'; she had refused to look at the fourth, but had gone home instead."<sup>92</sup>

In 1944, as in 1939 and 1940, the familiar aversion of householders to adult evacuees was evident. Mass-Observation reporters still found a reluctance among some private householders to take in any evacuees, especially mothers and children. A billeting officer in Nottingham (formerly an evacuation area), where 500 evacuees were expected, reported that offers for only about 150 were received, and 98% of the volunteer householders did not want mothers with children. In the event, only sixty evacuees arrived.<sup>93</sup> In Bradford an investigator remarked:

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<sup>91</sup> Mass-Observation File 2189, pp.1, 2

<sup>92</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 11.7.44, p.2; 15.7.44, p.1; 17.7.44, p.1

<sup>93</sup> Mass-Observation File 2189, p.12

“I haven’t met a single person who wouldn’t have taken in an unaccompanied child, or children, but the minute ‘mother and child’ was mentioned most people said ‘No women!’”<sup>94</sup>

In Sheffield an elderly woman wrote to her local newspaper to express her dismay at being required to take an evacuee mother with two children, and stated her firm intention to lock up her house and go away.<sup>95</sup>

It was not all gloom, however: Graves held that, because inhabitants of many northern and midland towns and cities had personal experience of bombing and evacuation problems, they responded sympathetically to the new evacuees.<sup>96</sup> And although Mass-Observation reports described several areas of failure in the ‘flying bomb evacuation’, observers also pointed to examples of success. Despite the Cheshire householders’ reluctance cited above, other officials in the same county declared their satisfaction with the efficiency and smoothness of organisation in dealing with nearly three thousand evacuees.<sup>97</sup> An interviewee, who was a veteran of previous programmes, noted a much more welcoming attitude in hosts in 1944 than in earlier years, when he had witnessed a marked reluctance to take in evacuees: this time he remembered that several local people had come forward and were disappointed that so few had arrived.<sup>98</sup>

In 1944, as in 1939, it was evacuee women who again attracted the majority of complaints: in the course of this investigation few criticisms of unaccompanied children have been discovered. In Monmouth, where householders cited earlier unhappy

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<sup>94</sup>Mass-Observation File 2189, p.21

<sup>95</sup>*The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 14.8.44, p.3

<sup>96</sup>Graves: *op. cit.*, p.232

<sup>97</sup>Mass-Observation File 2189, p.6

<sup>98</sup>Oral interview: George Green, 17.12.93

experiences as reasons for their unwillingness to take in mothers and children, there were mixed reports. Many empty houses were requisitioned for use as hostels to accommodate mothers with large families, but officials soon received complaints that some of the occupants were dirty and neglectful. Other families, however, were praised for 'getting on with the job of settling in'. For their part, some of the evacuees were dissatisfied with the accommodation provided, while others were full of praise for the welcome received.<sup>99</sup>

At first, very few criticisms of Sheffield's hosts or 'guests' were published in the local press, but some surfaced in the 'Letters' columns in mid-August. One writer was worried about rumours "so prevalent in London of the complete indifference and apathy of Sheffielders to the evacuees". Another contributor demanded "Sheffield authorities want the rumours scotched." Some complaints from householders mirrored those of earlier programmes in other reception areas, particularly with regard to evacuees' ingratitude or unspecified "peculiar habits".<sup>100</sup> In contrast, several letters of thanks and praise were published from grateful evacuees, one of whom signed herself "79 years old and still going strong".<sup>101</sup> Only one complaint from an evacuee was found: a London woman protested that evacuees in Sheffield were getting a raw deal.<sup>102</sup>

Evidence gleaned from newspapers, archive files and interviews uncovered little overt criticism of evacuees by Sheffield householders. Despite optimistic press reports of the evacuees' warm reception it is clear, however, that not all Sheffield residents welcomed

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<sup>99</sup> Mass-Observation File 2151, pp.2-6

<sup>100</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 14.8.44, p.3; 23.8.44, p.3

<sup>101</sup> *ibid.*, 21.7.44, p.2; 29.7.44, p.3; *The Sheffield Star*: 10.8.44, p.2; 28.8.44, p.2

<sup>102</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 18.8.44, p.3

them, and some were openly hostile. One interviewee remembered her family's attitude of distaste towards them:

“We definitely looked down on them. I suppose we felt superior to them really. And we knew they were low class and dirty from the reports at the beginning of the war.”<sup>103</sup>

On the other hand, the family of another Sheffield interviewee reacted more positively: her mother took in some children even though she had several children of her own. She reported: “We accepted them: we felt sorry for them and so we did our best for them and found them very satisfactory.”<sup>104</sup> Another, who was an ex-evacuee herself, also had no problems in accepting a mother and child: perhaps because of her own experiences, the two families settled down well together.<sup>105</sup>

The Director of Education for Sheffield gave clear instructions that all evacuee children should be encouraged to mix freely and receive the same treatment as local children, ensuring that no special provision would be necessary for the newcomers.<sup>106</sup> Response was apparently positive, and no overt animosity such as that experienced by evacuees in 1939 and 1940 was reported in newspapers or interviews, although inevitably some did feel discrimination at times. One ex-evacuee said:

“In the playground I longed to play, but that privilege belonged to the local regulars, it seemed. I just stood a few yards away and wistfully watched them.”<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Oral interview: Barbara Smith, 16.12.94

<sup>104</sup> Oral interview: Dorothy Donnelly, 16.12.94

<sup>105</sup> Oral interview: Margaret Bennett, 16.3.95

<sup>106</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.157/7; *The Sheffield Star*: 14.7.44, p.4

<sup>107</sup> Oral interview: Frances Pullen, 11.7.97

Some women and young adults settled in easily, while others reported that they felt unwelcome. Within days of their arrival, it was reported that a number of evacuee mothers had obtained work in Sheffield and had arranged for their householders to look after their children.<sup>108</sup> Likewise, fifty adolescent evacuees were soon found work locally by the Ministry of Labour.<sup>109</sup> Most mothers, however, did not stay long enough to look for jobs, and many experienced the problem that had dogged evacuee women sharing homes with local families. Feeling in the way in their billets, they spent their days in local parks and cafés or touring the local area by public transport. An evacuee mother recalled: “I collected the children each day and we went for circular bus rides around the town and sometimes right out into the countryside.”<sup>110</sup> Another interviewee said: “All of us went to Graves Park together after school and at weekends. The park was a favourite meeting place for displaced London mothers.”<sup>111</sup>

While many problems cited in earlier evacuation programmes were again encountered in 1944, some were different. Grumbles about visitors, for instance, this time mainly related to husbands of evacuated women and not to parents of unaccompanied children.<sup>112</sup> One reason for this may have been that the journeys involved were often longer and more expensive, even with government-subsidised fares. The distance between Sheffield and London, for example, may have deterred parental visits to unaccompanied children billeted in the city.

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<sup>108</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 17.7.44, p.5

<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*, 18.8.44, p.3

<sup>110</sup> Oral interview: Gwen McDermott, 24.10.97

<sup>111</sup> Oral interview: Frances Pullen, 11.7.97

<sup>112</sup> Mass-Observation File 2189, p.14

Shortages of bed linen or other household articles which had become scarce as the war stretched into its fifth year also caused stress. It was not long before private householders were asking for help, for many of those who may have earlier been bombed out of their own homes were now coping with evacuees and were in need of crockery, cutlery, bedding and towels.<sup>113</sup> But, as *The Sheffield Star* reported:

“Although wear and tear of linen by evacuees is a sore point for householders, no general provisions are being made to issue extra coupons.”<sup>114</sup>

The city’s Chief Billeting Officer offered bunk beds, palliases and blankets where required, but admitted that neither bed linen nor pillows could be supplied.<sup>115</sup>

Despite newspaper descriptions of Sheffield as a welcoming city, it was not long before there were rumblings of discontent about unequal distribution of evacuees to reception centres in the suburbs. In mid-August the warden of an inner-city rest centre asked:

“Can you tell us why five or six lots of evacuees have been sent to the same district of Sheffield but none has yet been sent to Fulwood or Ecclesall where the houses have a lot more spare rooms?”<sup>116</sup>

It has been difficult to substantiate this claim but it can be observed from Appendix 1 that there were far more rest centres in working-class areas - Heeley, Hillsborough, Shiregreen and Crookes, for instance - than in the more affluent areas of, say, Endcliffe, Dore or Totley. It may be held that there were comparatively few middle-class suburbs in a city largely supported by its heavy industries: nevertheless, it can be seen that such residential areas as Crosspool and Fulwood were not even listed.

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<sup>113</sup> *The Spectator*, No. 6056, 21.7.44, p.50; *The Sheffield Star*: 18.8.44, p.2

<sup>114</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 17.7.44, p.5

<sup>115</sup> *ibid.*, 18.7.44, p.5

<sup>116</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 16.8.44, p.5

When the city's quota of evacuees was quadrupled in August there were murmurs that Sheffield was being asked to bear an unfairly heavy burden of reception: one correspondent to *The Sheffield Star* pointed out that Manchester had received less than half the number of evacuees sent to Sheffield, and inferred that advantage was taken of the city's willingness to co-operate in reception. The newspaper's editor replied that the decision had been taken on hard facts: there were simply more billets to spare in Sheffield than in Manchester, where accommodation was needed for servicemen and other floating wartime communities.<sup>117</sup>

In 1939, as has been seen in Chapter Four, some evacuees were accused of causing damage in the reception areas. No complaints from householders about damage by evacuees to Sheffield in 1944 have been discovered during a trawl through local newspapers or in interviews. However, a search of the city's Archives revealed that two amounts were written off in respect of loss of household equipment issued to evacuees who had returned to London. Given the large number of evacuees who had come to Sheffield, the amounts were fairly small: £3.1s.10d on 17 November 1944 and £29.2s.0d on the following 16 February.<sup>118</sup> This appears to suggest that, on the whole, evacuees did not cause a great deal of damage in the city.

It is apparent that there was far less dissatisfaction about the condition of evacuees in 1944 than in 1939. This was partly due to the help given to refugees by clothing depots which had been set up by such organisations as the WVS. But the chief reason for improvement was undoubtedly the development of welfare services throughout the war

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<sup>117</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 22.8.44, p.1

<sup>118</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.157/7

- not least the importance of regular medical inspection of all school children.<sup>119</sup> The widespread problems of uncleanliness encountered in 1939 were thus largely avoided.

The matter of medical inspection before evacuation in this last programme is unclear. Mass-Observation reporters were uncertain if these were always carried out, and much seemed to depend upon the resources of local organising bodies at departure points. In most cases it was found that procedures had improved: a nurse travelled with each train and gave a cursory last-minute inspection on the train. The evacuees were inspected again on arrival either at the station or rest centres, and any special cases sent to the sick bay. In another part of Yorkshire, a Northallerton nurse demonstrated the improvement by comparing the situation with that of 1940, when she had to examine four hundred children in a country station waiting room. In 1944 she found that all the evacuees had been examined before leaving home stations, with special conditions being listed on cards.<sup>120</sup>

With regard to Sheffield, the Report of the School Medical Officer for 1944 recorded that evacuees arriving in the city had been medically inspected before leaving their home stations and information relating to defects noted and forwarded to the reception areas. Nevertheless, they were examined again at rest centres “in a spirit of warm sympathy and helpfulness”. The report continued:

“It is a pleasure to record a different picture [...] of the excellent care of these children who were inspected after many weeks of exceedingly trying conditions in the home area. It is

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<sup>119</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.379

<sup>120</sup> Mass-Observation File 2189, p.10



fair proof of the high morale of the people living under continuous strain.<sup>121</sup>

The health of the evacuees gave little cause for criticism. At a meeting of the Emergency Committee for Civil Defence on 21 July 1944 it was stated that, of the 2,073 official evacuees who had arrived in the city in the first nine days, only eighty-two were suffering from infectious conditions - or 3.9% of the total. The situation was hardly different by mid-August, by which time 6,085 official evacuees - 1,839 mothers with 3,412 children and another 834 unaccompanied school children - had been received. Of these, a total of 245 (or 4%) suffered infectious conditions, including one family found to harbour body lice as well as head lice. The table below, taken from the report of the Director of Education lodged in Sheffield Archives,<sup>122</sup> shows the position:

**Results of Medical Inspection of Evacuees to Sheffield during  
Government Evacuation Programme 'Rivulet' 1944**

Minor casualties dealt with at railway station	2
Nits and lice - heads cleansed	115
Scabies - dealt with by Ministry of Health Department	23
Enuresis	37
Minor ailments dressed	51
Asthma	3
Chickenpox	1
Whooping cough	1
Others (1 eye trouble, 2 gastric illness)	3
To Medical Rest Centres	4
Tuberculosis	3
Pneumonia	1
Paralysis	1

<sup>121</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1944*, p.37

<sup>122</sup> Figures taken from Sheffield Archives File CA.157/7: Report 18.8.44

Cleansing of all the affected evacuees was undertaken at the rest centres, where 148 minor, non-infectious ailments were also treated.<sup>123</sup> The scabies cases were sent to the City General Hospital along with two further unspecified cases, while those with whooping cough and chickenpox were admitted to Lodge Moor Hospital. Three evacuees were transferred to the medical rest centre at Broomhill in the suburbs<sup>124</sup> and one adult with paralysis to Fir Vale House. At the railway stations treatment for “minor cases of malaise” was undertaken. In some cases, special selection of billets was required, for example to accommodate one child who was allergic to animals.<sup>125</sup>

Under the ‘flying bomb’ evacuation programme it was planned that, as in earlier programmes, teachers from the evacuation areas would accompany organised parties of school children. But recruitment proved a stumbling block and by the end of July only 250 (or 3%) of the 8,000 teachers employed by the LCC had volunteered for work in reception areas. With 1,500 teachers needed to assist with evacuees throughout England and Wales, the National Union of Teachers warned that compulsory powers would have to be used if volunteers were not forthcoming.<sup>126</sup>

Teachers gave various reasons for their reluctance to move with their pupils. Some, who had been evacuated previously, declared that their treatment and experiences in reception areas earlier in the war had deterred them. Many complained that the housing allowance was too small and the government refused to increase it. Others claimed that

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<sup>123</sup> *The Health of the School Child: Report of Chief Medical Officer Ministry of Education 1939-45*, pp.32,33

<sup>124</sup> Taptonville Hostel, cited in *The Sheffield Star*: 11.7.44, p.4

<sup>125</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1944*, p.38

<sup>126</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 25.7.44, p.3

if they did go to the reception areas, there was no guarantee that they would be re-employed by the LCC.<sup>127</sup> Teachers were also said to fear that their homes might be requisitioned in their absence, and by October, the shortage of London teachers in reception areas was still so bad that the Minister of Education, R A Butler, threatened to direct them to these areas under Defence Regulation 58A.<sup>128</sup>

No teachers were among the first parties of evacuees who arrived in Sheffield, although officials had clearly expected some to accompany the refugees and announced they would be warmly received and billeted in hostels run by the Education Department. Few, if any, had apparently arrived two weeks later, for the Director of Education applied to the LCC for teachers to come and assist with the evacuees.<sup>129</sup> The situation had improved somewhat by the autumn, when the Sheffield Education Committee Report showed that, after renewed requests, fifty-nine took up duty.<sup>130</sup> Even then, research in school log books has revealed that, of the small number of evacuated teachers traced, all arrived at least one week after the start of the autumn term, and all except one had returned to the south by Christmas.<sup>131</sup>

It appears that those teachers who did evacuate were not immune from the muddles which occurred in the reception of other groups of refugees. An article in *The Hallamshire Teacher* showed that when a party of thirty teachers arrived in the city in

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<sup>127</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 25.7.44, p.3

<sup>128</sup> HoC Deb. 26.10.44 & 27.10.44, Vol. 404, Cols. 334, 487-8

<sup>129</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 11.7.44, p.4; 14.7.44, p.4; 26.7.44, p.2.2

<sup>130</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Report 1944-1945*, p.133

<sup>131</sup> Log books: Crookes Endowed; Anns Road; Hillsborough; Owler Lane, Huntsmans Gardens; Burgoyne Road Schools

September, accommodation had to be arranged at only two hours' notice and an orphanage for the daughters of teachers was quickly adapted as a temporary hostel.<sup>132</sup>

When Sheffield was declared a reception area, one of the first concerns was that large numbers of incoming children would present problems for education in a city where there was already a shortage of teachers and overcrowded classrooms.<sup>133</sup> The Director of Education, anxious to avoid the problems of shared schools and split shifts experienced in some areas in 1939, instructed head teachers to take as many evacuees into their schools as possible.<sup>134</sup> In the event, only three trainloads had been received by the end of the summer term and all the children were absorbed without much difficulty into schools and local activities and organisations.<sup>135</sup>

Throughout the vacation a further seven organised parties of refugees arrived in the city, bringing the total of official evacuees to around 7,000. Fears were again expressed that problems would arise as large numbers of children were expected to apply for school places at the start of the new term. The position was further complicated because it was not known how many children had arrived under private arrangements - some reports referred to "thousands of unofficial evacuees", but this was later amended to "many hundreds".<sup>136</sup> The Director of Education repeated his intention to make no special arrangements for the evacuees but to absorb them into existing schools, and continued his negotiations with various southern authorities for teachers to come to the city.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> *Hallamshire Teacher*: No 21, Sept 1944, p.3

<sup>133</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 6.7.44, p.8

<sup>134</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.157/7: Report 21.7.44; *The Sheffield Star*: 14.7.44, p.4

<sup>135</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 26.7.44, p.2

<sup>136</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 23.8.44, p.2; *The Sheffield Star*: 22.8.44, p.4; 25.8.44, p.4

<sup>137</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 22.8.44, p.4

The last official party of evacuees arrived in the city on 25 August and more than 2,000 new evacuees had registered at local schools when term began four days later. Parents were assured that no problems were envisaged.<sup>138</sup> Nevertheless, some schools did suffer from overcrowding: the very small Crookes Endowed School added thirty-six London evacuees to a number already admitted the previous term.<sup>139</sup> Woodseats Infants' School was also very full: an interviewee recalled:

“The school was terribly overcrowded, with the sudden influx of evacuees, and three or four children were squeezed into each desk made for two.”<sup>140</sup>

The Report of the Director of Education for 1944 showed that over 3,000 children evacuated from the south of England had been received into Sheffield elementary schools in the period from July to September.<sup>141</sup> This number exacerbated the problem of overcrowding which had grown throughout the war years as some schools had closed due to bomb damage and many others had lost members of staff to war service. With all but a handful of its own evacuees returned, and the increase in pupil numbers due to inward evacuation the position was serious. Titmuss stated that, whereas there had been only two classes of more than fifty children in Sheffield in 1939, by autumn 1944 there were 406, and sixty of these contained more than sixty children each.<sup>142</sup>

Once again, however, the drift homeward of evacuees, which had caused so much concern to planners of earlier migrations, was soon evident. Many were found to be

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<sup>138</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 30.8.44, p.5

<sup>139</sup> Log book: Crookes Endowed Junior School

<sup>140</sup> Oral interview: Frances Pullen, 11.7.97

<sup>141</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Report 1944/45*, p.133

<sup>142</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.406

returning home within a short time, and sometimes even within days of their arrival.<sup>143</sup> By the beginning of August, even while England continued to suffer devastating rocket attacks and refugees were still fleeing northward out of the capital, large numbers were making their way south again. The Prime Minister told the House of Commons that the morale of Londoners could be judged by the fact that many evacuation trains had returned as full as when they had left for the reception areas. But, he went on, the government wished to discourage this needless risk and strongly advised leaving the capital “in a timely, orderly, gradual manner”.<sup>144</sup> The first part of the statement might have been seen as condoning the conduct of the returnees, but it was interpreted by the Sheffield local press as a further appeal to those in the danger zones to take advantage of the government’s evacuation scheme.<sup>145</sup> However, the drift homeward continued as other efforts were made to stem the flow. The Chairman of LCC toured the reception areas in early September and warned: “Conditions are so uncertain that it would be unwise for people to come home yet.” He hoped they would stay until the government was satisfied it was safe.<sup>146</sup>

It might be argued that returning evacuees were emboldened by a statement made by Churchill’s son-in-law: on 7 September 1944 Duncan Sandys, Chairman of the ‘Crossbow’ Committee charged with reporting on rocket attacks,<sup>147</sup> told a press conference that the Battle of Britain was over “except possibly for a few last shots”. The announcement proved somewhat premature, for the very next day brought the first

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<sup>143</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.429; O’Brien: *op. cit.*, p.655

<sup>144</sup> HoC Deb. 2.8.44, Vol. 402, Cols. 1476-78; O’Brien: *op. cit.*, p.662

<sup>145</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 3.8.44, p.8

<sup>146</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 5.9.44, p.4

<sup>147</sup> W S Churchill: *The Second World War, Volume VI: Triumph and Tragedy*, p.38

of the V2 missiles: in addition, V1 flying bombs continued to plague Britain for seven more months.<sup>148</sup>

Despite the terror wrought by the new and more powerful weapons, by 10 September the drift homeward appeared to have become a flood, with 37,000 pouring back from the provinces into London stations in one day, causing chaos as they mixed with holidaymakers leaving or arriving at the same time.<sup>149</sup> The position became so serious that railway officials ordered a temporary halt to the conveyance of luggage sent in advance by returning evacuees at two of London's main stations, Paddington and King's Cross. In vain the Minister of Health warned: "We strongly deprecate the continued flow back to London."<sup>150</sup>

Sheffield officials were slow to acknowledge the exodus from the city. On 22 August *The Sheffield Star* stated: "Sheffield has not had the experience of other reception authorities, of large numbers of evacuees returning to the south."<sup>151</sup> Three days later it was admitted that some mothers were leaving the city with their children, but the matter was played down, being described by a spokesman as "a dribble such as occurs in every town". The Chief Billeting Officer was defensive:

"Those going back were the type who could not settle. I know of one case of a woman who went back because she did not want to be in 'a smoky hole like Sheffield' but at the seaside. People going back would be hard to satisfy anywhere."<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> B Holman: *op. cit.*, p.60; A Calder: *The People's War*, p.562

<sup>149</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 11.9.44, p.1

<sup>150</sup> *ibid.*, 16.9.44, p.4; 13.9.44, p.4

<sup>151</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 22.8.44, p.4

<sup>152</sup> *ibid.*, 25.8.44, p.4

On 8 September, the day that the government announced the suspension of general evacuation arrangements, it was finally admitted that evacuees *were* leaving Sheffield in large numbers. It seemed that the local press were keen to absolve city hosts from any responsibility for the return, for *The Sheffield Star* said of the southerners: "They are sorry to go because they have been made so happy and comfortable." Neither were the evacuees criticised: on the contrary, various reasons were given for their leaving. It was argued that Londoners considered the capital safe because the government had lifted blackout regulations and suspended the evacuation scheme. And in any case, not all were going home - "some were more cautious and were staying on to be safe rather than sorry," but there was no place like home, even though they all spoke of the wonderful hospitality. The evacuees were even praised: it was said that Sheffield people admired them. The Director of Education, in charge of the city's evacuation programme, suggested that it was not official evacuees who had gone home, but those who had made their own private arrangements to come to the city.<sup>153</sup>

On 14 September the Director of Education reported to the Emergency Committee that the total of official evacuees in the city had reached 8,046 of which 1,569 were unaccompanied children<sup>154</sup> but it is clear that, as in previous evacuation programmes, there had been a continual movement of evacuees into and out of Sheffield throughout the period in which operation 'Rivulet' functioned. Once again the ebb mainly concerned mothers with their children, with the population of unaccompanied school children remaining much more stable. An examination of the Billeting Register in mid-

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<sup>153</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 8.9.44, p.4; 9.9.44, p.2; 11.9.44, p.8

<sup>154</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.157/7: Report of Director of Education 13.9.44:



September showed that, whereas more than 1,000 adults with children had returned home in the previous fortnight, the number of unaccompanied children had reduced by only twenty-five.<sup>155</sup>

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Preliminary discussions had begun at the end of 1943 for the return of most evacuees to their homes, and by spring 1944 detailed plans were in hand. Rocket attacks necessarily delayed plans for London and south-east England but by the following September everything was ready for a gradual reversal of the original evacuation scheme for the rest of the country, with the exception of Hull and some other east coast towns.<sup>156</sup> On 8 September 1944, the same day that the first V2 missile fell on London, the government announced the suspension of organised evacuation.<sup>157</sup> Although air attacks continued until the following March and heavy damage was inflicted by the new weapon, renewed demand for evacuation did not occur and the official scheme was not revived. However, the assisted scheme remained in place, with travel vouchers and billeting certificates issued for those in danger zones who wished to make their own arrangements to move to safer areas.<sup>158</sup>

The transfer of parties of school children, mothers, nursery children as well as the aged, infirm and blind from the reception areas called for minutely detailed preparation and co-operation between the various authorities involved, as had their removal from danger

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<sup>155</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.157/7

<sup>156</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.431

<sup>157</sup> *ibid.*, p.429

<sup>158</sup> *ibid.*

areas in 1939. Across the country many of the original school parties had disintegrated: some pupils had reached leaving age and returned home independently; countless others had joined the drift back months, or even years, earlier. Few teachers remained evacuated, for the majority had been recalled - either to join the armed forces or, as numbers in the reception areas dwindled, to return to their original schools to cope with the increased numbers of pupils at home.<sup>159</sup>

In preparation for the first stage of the planned return, in September the Ministry of Health ordered evacuating authorities to send lists of all evacuated children to the reception areas to check that children were still present there. Notices were sent to adult evacuees and to foster parents and guardians of unaccompanied school children, detailing the procedure for the organised return home. Evacuees would be allowed to remain in the reception areas under certain circumstances, including cases where homes were bomb-damaged, or family circumstances were unsuitable. In addition, children about to sit examinations or in employment in the reception area would be allowed to stay with the consent of parents. Householders were warned that billeting allowances would cease if parents had made private arrangements for children to stay with them. Free travel vouchers would be issued to those evacuees able to return home within four weeks of the date to be stipulated by the authorities.<sup>160</sup>

As has been seen in earlier chapters, only a small proportion of those eligible to be evacuated had actually left Sheffield under the 'Pied Piper' and 'Trickle' schemes, and very few indeed remained in the reception areas of Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire

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<sup>159</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.431

<sup>160</sup> Ministry of Health circulars: 129/44 and 146/44, cited in G Wallis: MA Dissertation, pp.253-4

in September 1944: the Director of Education gave the total number of unaccompanied children still away as 200. Glossing over irrefutable evidence of the earlier refusal of most citizens to leave the city, and the rapid return of the vast majority of those who had agreed to evacuation, he stated that the main reason for the reduction in the original number was that children had returned to the city as they reached school leaving age. News of official arrangements for their return hardly made headlines in the local press but was contained in a small column on the fourth page of *The Sheffield Star*.<sup>161</sup> its sister paper, *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*, carried no information at all.

Preliminary procedures for the return were outlined. Evacuees would receive a notice from the local authority telling them about their return home and mothers with children who wished to make their own arrangements would be eligible for free railway vouchers: the government would bear the cost of transporting heavy luggage and equipment. Those who wished their return to be organised for them would travel in escorted parties with unaccompanied school children. Parents or other authorised adults wishing to bring their children home privately would not receive travel vouchers. Evacuees who failed to return home without good reason would have billeting and other accommodation arrangements cancelled. The Minister of Health repeated the advice to evacuees from London and southern England not to come back and instructed local authorities not to assist evacuees to return to those areas which were not considered safe.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 26.9.44, p.4

<sup>162</sup> *ibid.*

In December 1944 ninety-five unaccompanied children were brought home to Sheffield from the reception areas. In his annual report to Sheffield Education Committee, the School Medical Officer stated: "A few children, owing to special circumstances, still remain in the reception areas."<sup>163</sup> No details of organisation for the return has been discovered: archive research proved fruitless and all interviewees who stayed in the reception areas until the end of the evacuation scheme came home under private arrangement. The event did not, apparently, merit any publicity, for no mention has been found in local newspapers. The return of only three of the seventeen official overseas evacuees from Sheffield has been traced: two came home in February 1945 and the third in December. Two of these events were covered by the press.<sup>164</sup>

As discussed above, archive records show that in 1944 Sheffield billeting officials had faced the task of receiving nearly 7,000 official evacuees of all classes from the south of England.<sup>165</sup> In addition, an unknown number of unofficial refugees had arrived in the city - officials finally estimated the total number as more than ten thousand people.<sup>166</sup> On 15 December the Emergency Committee approved the closure of information centres and hostels in the city and reduced the number of rest centres. The Billeting Department was also closed. In February it was deemed unnecessary to continue to man the remaining rest centres, but the Emergency Committee for Civil Defence agreed they should be kept ready "in case of alert".<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1944*, p.37

<sup>164</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 5.2.45, p.3; *The Sheffield Star*: 26.2.45, p.5; Oral interview: Geoffrey Stevens, 12.3.97

<sup>165</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.157/7

<sup>166</sup> *Sheffield Civic Record* No 25-26, Aug/Sept 1949, p.3

<sup>167</sup> Sheffield Archives File CA.157/7

Planning for the return to London was particularly complicated, for special trains had to be arranged to transport London mothers and children who had been scattered over a thousand billeting areas.<sup>168</sup> The programme was the responsibility of the LCC, but Graves asserted that it was the WVS who carried it through. Volunteers of that organisation visited parents to see if they were able to accept their children back: when details were ready, they visited again to warn when to expect them. The women also acted as escorts on trains carrying the evacuees and delivered unaccompanied children to points within walking distance of their homes.<sup>169</sup>

Titmuss estimated that there were 1,040,200 evacuees of all classes in reception areas across the country in September 1944 and it was expected that arrangements would have to be made to transport 500,000 people in organised parties to complete the return home. Once more, however, government planning was confounded, for large numbers of people did not avail themselves of official facilities but went ahead independently and made their own arrangements. When a census was taken in March 1945, two months before the official end of evacuation, it was found that nearly 600,000 evacuees, or 60% of the September figure, had already gone home in the intervening period, leaving a total of 438,000 official evacuees (mostly Londoners) in various parts of England and Wales: only 132,000 of these were unaccompanied school children [see Table below].<sup>170</sup> Government plans had to be scaled down accordingly and fresh timetables drawn up.

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<sup>168</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.431

<sup>169</sup> Graves: *op. cit.*, p.242

<sup>170</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, pp.433-5, 562

**Total number of evacuees billeted in all reception areas of  
England and Wales 1939-1945**<sup>171</sup>

Date	Unaccompanied children	Mothers and children	Other classes	Total
Sept 1939	765,000	426,500	107,000	1,298,500
Jan 1940	420,000	56,000	46,780	522,780
Aug 1940	421,000	57,000	41,000	519,000
Feb 1941	480,500	571,000	*287,200	1,338,700
Sept 1941	435,700	450,000	178,000	1,063,700
Mar 1942	332,000	279,000	127,000	738,000
Sept 1942	236,000	196,000	98,000	530,000
Mar 1943	181,000	148,000	77,000	406,000
Sept 1943	137,000	124,000	61,400	322,400
Mar 1944	124,000	132,000	63,400	319,400
Sept 1944	284,000	601,000	127,800	1,012,800
Mar 1945	132,000	243,000	63,000	438,000
Sept 1945	13,250	†n/a	†n/a	13,250

\*Mainly homeless people , including 66,200 such people billeted in evacuation areas.

†By September 1945 all in these categories had left the reception areas or ceased to be evacuees.

Finally, on 2 May 1945, all the remaining evacuees were informed that they could leave their reception areas. Due to the complexity of the planning, special evacuee trains did not start running until June 1945, but the operation was completed by 12 July 1945, by which time 54,317 evacuees had taken advantage of the organised scheme. 115 trains had run from reception areas to London and the south of England but, as in 1939, ordinary people refused to conform to the government's expectations. Most people decided to act on their own initiative and take advantage of travel vouchers, while the intricate plans of officials went unheeded and many of the trains were half-empty - this time on the journey home.<sup>172</sup>

<sup>171</sup> Figures taken from Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.562, Appendix 9

<sup>172</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, pp.433-4

On 3 May 1945 *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent* announced that transport would be arranged for evacuees to leave the city the following month in organised and escorted parties. A census would first be taken to determine numbers of those who could return at once and also those unable to go back because they had no home or for other reasons. There would be a special check on the home addresses of unaccompanied children to ensure that there was no obstacle to their return.<sup>173</sup>

Mothers with children comprised the majority of the first party, when over three hundred evacuees left Sheffield for London and the south of England on 6 June. The event was covered by both local newspapers. It was stated that some mothers were returning with babies who had been born while they were evacuated and others had been baptised in city churches and chapels: all the evacuees spoke with gratitude of the welcome they had received. They were seen off at the station by many host families who lined the platform. Once again members of the WVS were in evidence, both in distributing sweets and toys to the children and parcels to the mothers, and also acting as escorts on the train.<sup>174</sup>

Unaccompanied school children were the last to be repatriated. Sheffield witnessed the final phase of evacuation on 28 June 1945, when almost two hundred left the city in a train which also carried children from neighbouring towns, including Rotherham. *The Sheffield Star* reported the view of the WVS organiser, Mrs R C Maples: "This is certainly far happier than their arrival - exhausted, frightened and lonely - last year."

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<sup>173</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 3.5.45, p.3

<sup>174</sup> *ibid.*, 6.6.45, p.2; *The Sheffield Star*: 6.6.45, p.5

The scene described in Chapter Three, when evacuees to coastal towns were re-located inland in June 1940, was re-enacted as the School Medical Officer remarked:

“Affectionate leave-takings on the station were evidence of the happy relationships which existed between the foster mothers and the children.”<sup>175</sup>

*The Sheffield Star* reported: “nearly all the foster mothers had tears in their eyes.” Many children had settled in their billets and made friends at their schools, while some of the youngest had little recollection of their homes.<sup>176</sup> Once again, refreshments on the special train were provided for the journey by members of the Sheffield WVS but this time the party was accompanied by forty-four London teachers who had travelled to Sheffield specially to act as escorts.<sup>177</sup> By this time the crucial general election of 1945 was only a week away and was receiving widespread press coverage. Little public attention was paid to this final stage of the government evacuation scheme as it affected Sheffield, one of the major local newspapers failing even to give the subject a mention

In his annual report for the year, the School Medical Officer indicated that 319 children were examined prior to their departure from the city and, in accordance with previous practice, information relating to any defects found was forwarded to appropriate authorities. The perennial problem of infestation arose even in these last days, for the report went on: “The few children who were found to have infested heads were cleansed before departure.”<sup>178</sup> It may be assumed that these children, who had been in foster homes for some months, had become infected while in their billets.

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<sup>175</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1945*, p.41

<sup>176</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 28.6.45, p.4

<sup>177</sup> *ibid.*, p.1

<sup>178</sup> Sheffield Education Committee: *Annual Report of the School Medical Officer 1945*, p.41



For families which had been divided for long periods - sometimes many years - there may have been many difficulties to overcome when they were finally reunited. Not only did parents and children have to learn to settle down with each other again, but often husbands who had been away on war service had to re-establish their relationship with wives who had grown used to new independence, perhaps having gone out to work in their families' absence. Children who had left home little more than babies were approaching teenage years at the end of the war: some had become used to living an ordered existence in middle-class comfort and had to adjust to poorer circumstances in crowded and noisy households.

There were also some problems, inevitably perhaps, for children who returned home after years abroad. Despite having kept in close touch with her two children evacuated under the Children's Overseas Reception Board (CORB), Vera Brittain remarked of her son, who had been away for three years: "it will take time to get to know him again".<sup>179</sup>

A former CORB evacuee returning to Sheffield from Australia, also found adjustment difficult. He said in interview:

"It was like entering a different world when I came back. At one point I was homesick for Australia and did think of going back. But my mother was upset, so I stayed on in England."<sup>180</sup>

Some children appear to have coped with the change without difficulty, however: for instance, an interviewee who had been billeted in a mansion with five servants

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<sup>179</sup> A Bishop & Y A Bennett: *Wartime Chronicle: Vera Brittain's Diary 1939-1945*, p.233

<sup>180</sup> Oral interview: Geoffrey Stevens, 12.3.97

apparently found no problems when she returned to her 'two-up, two-down' terrace home after five years away:

"I just settled in and carried on the same as before, even though I had been used to a very different way of living. Mum and Dad had progressed as well because they had visited me and seen how things were done. They had more money and were generally better off."<sup>181</sup>

Another interviewee had also become used to a better life-style. She said of her return:

"I got on all right with my mother but I missed the luxury sort of things."<sup>182</sup> Although one ex-evacuee left his twin brother in the reception area when he returned home on reaching school-leaving age, he settled down quickly:

"It was all so different and exciting, what with going to work and all that. I missed the billet very much but going to work and earning money was a big thing."<sup>183</sup>

However, others encountered problems: at least one former Sheffield evacuee, after no such trouble in her billet, began to wet her bed when she returned home.<sup>184</sup> Another,

evacuated to a residential school for five years, felt the experience had affected his entire life, for he stated that institutional care had inhibited his trust in people.<sup>185</sup>

Despite having always felt "an outsider" in his reception area, an ex-evacuee who was billeted in Hatfield for the entire period of the war did go back to his foster home.

"When we went home it was like being with strangers. We didn't know our parents at

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<sup>181</sup> Oral interview: Dorothy Knowles, 21.3.95

<sup>182</sup> Oral interview: Patricia Gamble, 12.3.96

<sup>183</sup> Oral interview: George Shelley, 12.8.96

<sup>184</sup> Oral interview: Pamela Denniff, 16.9.94

<sup>185</sup> Oral Interview: Alfred Knowles, 20.10.92

all.” This interviewee later ran away from home and returned to Hatfield until he was called up for National Service.<sup>186</sup>

Some foster parents found the parting very painful, too. As the evacuation scheme ended and children had to return home, the foster parents of one city child were desolate. Several times during the interview this householder repeated:

“My husband says ‘Take her while I’m at work’. He was very touchy: he didn’t want to see her go. He thought the world of her, and I did.”

When the foster mother escorted the child back to Sheffield, she was not welcomed by everyone, however, for a relative clearly felt that home was not the best place for this particular evacuee: “He did shout about us bringing her back. [...] He didn’t want [the child] to get into bad ways - you know.”<sup>187</sup>

Just over half the evacuees from Sheffield interviewed had kept in touch with their host families for at least a short time after their return home, some having invited their foster parents to their weddings many years later.<sup>188</sup> Likewise, some evacuees into the city kept in touch with their Sheffield hosts long afterwards.<sup>189</sup> But a former Sheffield evacuee to Nottinghamshire, although happy in his billet, did not remain in touch with his wealthy host afterwards, for he said: “It would have seemed like begging.”<sup>190</sup>

Evacuated children often found that their education was doubly disrupted - firstly when they arrived in the reception areas, and again when they returned home. And this did

<sup>186</sup> Oral interview: Terence Lenihan, 29.6.97

<sup>187</sup> Oral interview: Gladys Smith, 12.5.95

<sup>188</sup> Oral interviews: Geoffrey Stevens, 12.3.97; Pamela Grayson, 12.3.96; Joan Patterson, 18.8.92

<sup>189</sup> Oral interviews: Frances Pullen, 11.7.97; Hazel Robbins, 29.9.97

<sup>190</sup> Oral interview: Douglas Pearson, 2.7.95

not just apply to inland evacuees but to those who went overseas. A former CORB evacuee from Sheffield felt his chances of going to university were severely prejudiced by his evacuation to Australia. Having attended a city grammar school before evacuation, he was placed with pupils two years younger than himself when he reached Perth in order to fit in with the national system of his host country.

“Then I had four years in a grammar school there and was 16 when I got home, ready to take School Certificate. But in England I was told I would have to go back at least a year because the Australian system was behind ours here. I didn’t want to repeat all that and decided to give up my education and go to work.”<sup>191</sup>

After the official return of evacuees from the reception areas a Ministry of Health inquiry at the end of July 1945 found 67,000 people still in billets who could not return to their homes. The majority of these were mothers with children, while an estimated 10,000 were unaccompanied school children.<sup>192</sup> By March 1946, when the evacuation scheme was finally wound up, the figure had fallen by almost a half to 38,000. Family groups accounted for 29,000 and 4,000 were old or infirm evacuees. Most of these remained because their own homes had either been bombed, given up in their absence, or requisitioned during the war: they became the responsibility of the receiving local authorities.<sup>193</sup> There were only 5,200 unaccompanied children left in reception areas covering the whole of England and Wales.<sup>194</sup> Of these, 3,000 were living in private billets and 1,000 in residential nurseries and special schools: the rest were in hostels. Some had remained because their families were homeless or suffering other domestic

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<sup>191</sup> Oral interview: Geoffrey Stevens, 12.3.97

<sup>192</sup> PRO.HLG/102/78 file 99043/16/166/38/1, cited in Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.437 n.1

<sup>193</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, pp.434, 435, 437

<sup>194</sup> PRO.HLG/102/78 file 99043/16/166/38/1, cited in Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.437

difficulties. Others had lost one or both parents, either through death or divorce. Many of the evacuees remaining in private billets became permanent members of their foster families. By 5 July 1948 there were still approximately 1,500 evacuated children for whom no permanent arrangements had been made: under the Children Act of that year they became the responsibility of their various local authorities.<sup>195</sup>

Family life had undoubtedly undergone stresses and strains while fathers were away for long periods, houses were bombed, or mothers were working outside the home; so it would not have been surprising to find many evacuated children unclaimed after the war had ended. Yet, despite continual accusations throughout the war that parents were taking advantage of evacuation to shirk their responsibilities and abandon their children, an investigation by local authorities concerned about unaccompanied children in July 1945 had found only twenty-nine children had actually been deserted.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.438

<sup>196</sup> *ibid.*, p.437 n.3

## CONCLUSION

In the foregoing chapters attention has been drawn to the multitude of problems encountered by those affected by various programmes of the government evacuation scheme: those who were charged with the task of initial planning, the many officials involved with the operation of the various programmes, and the individuals who took part and were most intimately concerned - that is, the evacuees themselves and those who took them in. The experience of the people of Sheffield, and in particular the city's children, has been put in context with the national situation. An attempt has been made to show reasons why difficulties arose and how they were addressed.

The government claimed success for Operation 'Pied Piper' in September 1939. The movement of nearly 1,500,000 people in less than four days, to reception areas spread across the length and breadth of Britain, had been achieved without a single reported casualty. Nothing of such magnitude had been attempted in this country before. In terms of logistics, the government and all the thousands of officials across the country who had been employed in this monumental venture could rightly deem it a success. But, though there may have been no physical casualties, it is clear that many other problems were encountered.

It has been seen that evacuation was planned as a military necessity, to be carried out in anticipation of immediate and devastating air attack on London and other cities and towns of industrial importance in the event of war. The organised movement of priority groups of civilians from danger areas was regarded as essential in order to save lives, preserve public morale and prevent universal panic - for it was feared that inhabitants of

those areas would flee in terror in the face of aerial bombardment. The matter of transporting evacuees to reception areas was studied and organised in intricate detail, but was hampered by the perceived need to keep the subject out of the public domain.

The government faced a dilemma: on the one hand, it was essential to be prepared for hostilities, especially when Germany began to build its military strength throughout the 1930s. On the other, it was politically important to avoid naming a potential enemy and thus appear to be encouraging war, at a time when the British people were still coming to terms with the great losses incurred by the First World War and were eager to preserve peace. But the secrecy which surrounded the planning process impeded efficiency: as Macnicol asserts, one consequence was that many fundamental issues were not discussed, either between participating local authorities or with central administration,<sup>1</sup> and this had far-reaching effects.

The failure to disclose proposed reception areas to those most directly concerned - the people living in the danger areas - surely had a serious effect upon parents' willingness to register their children for evacuation. It may also have accounted for the reluctance of those who did register them to let their offspring actually go away when the time came. The confusion surrounding the choice of receiving districts for Sheffield - when first the Peak District, then Lancashire, Yorkshire and Lincolnshire were rumoured to have been earmarked for the city before Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire were finally chosen - was one example of prevarication, which has been documented in the first chapter. When receiving districts were finally made known to local officials, the

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<sup>1</sup> J Macnicol, "The effect of the evacuation of schoolchildren on official attitudes to State intervention" in H L Smith (ed): *War and Social Change: British Society in the Second World War*, p.11

refusal of the Ministry of Health to guarantee that any particular party would arrive at a specific destination caused considerable anxiety to evacuation leaders and teachers, and may have deterred potential evacuees, although events showed the wisdom of that decision when chaos resulted from speeding up the dispersal process, as has been seen.

There is no doubt that Treasury procrastination put the scheme in jeopardy in more ways than one. Delay in granting permission for local authorities in reception areas to purchase bedding, blankets and, above all, waterproof sheets for children under five years old until the end of May 1939 meant that supplies of these essential items had not been received in many areas when the children arrived. Repercussions have been well documented. Moreover, the failure to provide any mackintosh underlays at all for children of school age turned out to be a crucial omission. The ban on spending, which was not lifted until 25 August, gravely impeded the ability of evacuating and receiving authorities to prepare adequately by adapting premises and providing both householders and needy children with basic requirements. The covert allowance of £1 per two hundred necessitous cases (less than 1¼d. per child) for clothing and boots, authorised only days before the first exodus, was inadequate. The fact that the sum was not increased for more than a year<sup>2</sup> threw an extra burden on householders which added to stress and ill-feeling, and was only alleviated by voluntary assistance, mainly from women's organisations.

Billeting allowances were another sticking point. The same amount was payable for five-year-olds as for adolescents of seventeen and it was nine months before the

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<sup>2</sup> R M Titmuss: *Problems of Social Policy, History of the Second World War*, pp.118,375( n.2)



differential for children over fourteen was introduced. Despite a marked rise in the cost of living there was no further change until March 1942, when some selective increases were made, but it was May 1944 before allowances for all age groups rose by one shilling a week.<sup>3</sup> Such penny-pinching led to friction between hosts and parents. Likewise, controversy over payments for school milk and the decision to charge householders for evacuees' school meals made for increased tension in the reception areas. It took two years for the situation to improve substantially, when the Exchequer raised the grants for facilities for meals for all school children, yet it was 1944 before free milk was available to all official unaccompanied evacuees.<sup>4</sup>

The failure of the planners to foresee the importance of nurseries in reception areas for evacuated pre-school children proved to be an error which had far-reaching consequences, and it was compounded by the refusal of the Treasury to sanction expenditure on such provision. Early appeals from the Ministry of Health and the Board of Education went unheeded, and action was not taken until January 1940 to allow the provision of day centres for young children to be set up, by which time 88% of the evacuated mothers and accompanied children had returned home.<sup>5</sup> It was only in later programmes that the importance of welfare services to the success of evacuation was recognised.

The government decision to make the Ministry of Health responsible for the organisation of evacuation was considered a mistake by many. Lowndes, for example,

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<sup>3</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, pp.161, 163, 397

<sup>4</sup> R Samways: *We Think You Ought to Go*, pp.40, 41

<sup>5</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, pp.169, 170

contended that if the Board of Education had been in charge, its officials would have been less likely to have accepted the Treasury embargo on spending or the telescoping of timetables which caused such scattering of school parties and resulting chaos in the reception areas. Moreover, the Board might have anticipated the need for nursery provision earlier and certainly would have entrusted billeting to local education authorities instead of housing departments which were inadequately staffed to deal with children.<sup>6</sup>

A major shortcoming of the government evacuation scheme was that, in comparison with the meticulous attention given to dispersal from the danger areas, not enough thought was given to what was to happen to the evacuees in the reception areas, in the first programme at least. There had been problems enough in earmarking billets before the operation began; but it seemed that few had foreseen the difficulties which were to arise between hosts and their 'guests' when the evacuees arrived in their new homes. For although it was a mass movement, after the transport stage was past the matter of billeting was, as Margaret Cole maintained:

“a highly individual business [...] it consisted in the placing, by individuals, of individuals in individual families and groups, over widely separated and widely differing localities.”<sup>7</sup>

The billeting of mothers with their children upon private householders was, perhaps, doomed to failure from the beginning. On the one hand, evacuated women had to take their small children into the homes of strangers with entirely different life experiences, cultures and standards, and to adapt to conditions which were sometimes completely

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<sup>6</sup> G A N Lowndes: *The Silent Social Revolution*, pp.205- 6

<sup>7</sup> R Padley & M Cole (eds): *Evacuation Survey*, p.3

alien to them. On the other, hostesses were expected to accommodate and extend a welcome to mothers and infants, some of whom did not respect their values, possessions or way of life, who did not help in the home and who were miserable in their new surroundings. It was no light undertaking, either, for foster parents to open their homes to unaccompanied children, some of whom were badly-behaved and ill-clothed for country life, with unfamiliar accents and mores, and to feed and care for them for an unknown period of time. No preparation or help was given to either evacuees or householders to help them to adjust to their new circumstances and it was, perhaps, inevitable that many placements broke down within weeks, and sometimes within days.

In 1939 the public conscience received a massive shock as revelations of the condition of some evacuees gained much unwelcome publicity. Had adequate medical supervision and inspection been made available before the children left their home towns and cities, it is clear that much of the furore which followed their reception could have been avoided. Evacuation exposed a gap in the school medical services, for the absence of these facilities during the long summer holidays prior to the first operation led to perhaps the greatest animosity against evacuees. Steps were taken in successive programmes to head off problems of health and cleanliness by examining evacuees before leaving the danger areas. However, there still remained some cases where refugees arrived in need of cleansing - for example the 3.9% of evacuees from the south who arrived in Sheffield in 1944, as mentioned in Chapter Seven.

No-one, it seemed, had anticipated that the problem of bed-wetting would be so widespread and cause such consternation and condemnation from householders who

were ill-equipped to deal with the problem due to the shortage of waterproof underlays. In hindsight, this was a grave error, for it should have been evident that the trauma of leaving home would have some repercussions. While for most affected children enuresis proved to be a problem of short duration, caused by temporary insecurity, the immediate reaction of many officials and householders was to blame parents for lack of training and children for dirty habits. It was several months before the problem was addressed and hostels set up to deal with severe cases, but future evacuation programmes were comparatively free from criticism on this point. It is clear that, in the absence of air raids and lack of war news, the attention of both the press and the public was drawn towards horror stories about evacuees and, in Samways' words:

“Thus the widespread hospitality and welcome that flowed from countless country homes gave place in the public mind to startling tales of dirty Londoners and grudging country folk.”<sup>8</sup>

Although it has not been the purpose of this thesis to assess the extent to which differences in social class affected evacuation and evacuees, it would be unwise to ignore the issue and the part which it played throughout various programmes. It is evident that the often-held view that evacuation made a significant impact in breaking down class divisions during the war must be challenged. Problems of class pervaded almost every aspect of evacuation from the very beginning. For one thing, the architects of the government scheme were mainly “military, male and middle-class”<sup>9</sup> yet were charged with making plans on behalf of a civilian working class with whom they were completely out of touch. Many of those who drew up the scheme sent their own

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<sup>8</sup> Samways: *op. cit.*, p.14

<sup>9</sup> Padley & Cole: *op. cit.*, p.4

offspring to boarding-schools at an early age: it did not occur to them that they were asking too much of the populace to send their children away to unspecified destinations, in the care of strangers, for an unknown period of time. They simply did not comprehend the strength of family feeling among the urban working class.

In the reception areas problems of class conflict were apparent from the start, and nowhere more so than in the matter of billeting. Particularly in Operation 'Pied Piper' and the 'Trickle' programme, it has been demonstrated that many upper- and middle-class owners of large houses managed to evade their responsibilities. They were tacitly supported by billeting officers whose duty it was to ensure fairness but who often lived locally and were loath to upset their neighbours. Reports on all programmes of evacuation have shown that working-class householders in smaller houses and cottages, often with large families themselves, were more likely to be left to bear the brunt of billeting and take in the evacuees than their wealthier countrymen and women.

That is not to say, however, that all owners of large houses refused evacuees, or that all working-class householders welcomed them into their homes. Class was not a deciding factor in the success of all placements: some children were miserable in affluent surroundings while others were happy, and the same applied to evacuees in poorer homes. Twin brothers from Sheffield, for instance, were equally content in very diverse circumstances, one settling immediately with working-class hosts and remaining with them even after leaving school, and the other finding affection in affluent, middle-class surroundings.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, there were not just problems of class: religion and race

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<sup>10</sup> Oral interview: George Shelley, 12.8.96

were always thorny issues - and it seemed that no-one was prepared, either, for the social impact that the clash of cultures would expose, for the differences between urban and rural working classes became an unexpectedly contentious issue.

Class hostility was somewhat less apparent by the time the 'Rivulet' programme was operated. An important reason for this may be that, because rocket attacks were more random than earlier air raids, evacuees were drawn from a wider cross-section of the population, - from suburban areas as well as inner-city London and also from rural areas of south and south-east England. Also, since reception areas had been re-defined, it was easier to match hosts with evacuees from similar environments. In addition, some urban householders had themselves earlier been victims of bombing and were therefore, perhaps, more likely to receive their 'guests' more sympathetically. Nevertheless, as Chapter Seven has demonstrated, complaints were received in Sheffield that most billets were being sought in working-class areas, leaving the suburbs relatively untouched.

It has been shown in earlier chapters that, in the planning of the government scheme, the question of education was given scant attention until evacuation was imminent. Clearly, dispersal and billeting had to take precedence in a war situation; but, as a contributor to the journal *Education* maintained: "It would have been better if transport minds and billeting minds had fitted with the minds of education officers."<sup>11</sup> As it was, the education of large numbers of children was badly disrupted when the first programme was operated, with far-reaching effects.

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<sup>11</sup> *Education*: No. 1920, 27.10.39, p.358

It was in the evacuation areas that education was confused and disorganised for the longest period. It had been assumed that the majority of children would leave the danger areas and the schools were expected to close for the duration of hostilities. The fact that compulsory education was not re-introduced until April 1940 undoubtedly adversely affected the education of many thousands of children. In some danger zones home tuition was established: Sheffield was at the forefront of a scheme in which non-evacuated children were taught in groups in their own homes by peripatetic teachers. Nevertheless, most children in evacuation areas had only part-time schooling, or none at all, for several months because schools had been requisitioned or did not possess adequate shelter protection.

In reception areas few arrangements could be made in advance because the arrival of particular groups, or even of numbers and categories was not guaranteed. When the children did arrive, the fragmentation of so many evacuated schools affected not only the incomers and their teachers, but also interrupted schooling for resident children and their staffs. In addition, overcrowding in small schools meant that shift arrangements had to be made, curtailing the amount of education that both local and incoming children received. Although the problem was greatest in the first programme, the constantly moving population throughout the war complicated matters for teachers, who had to cope with ever-changing numbers in both reception and evacuation areas.

The architects of the government evacuation scheme had expected that the majority of "non-essential persons" would leave the vulnerable areas at the beginning of the war and would stay away until peace returned. But their plans were confounded by the British public, who either refused to evacuate their children in the first place, or brought

them home early. The mass exodus of September 1939 was followed by the return of large numbers of evacuees to the cities, but when bombing materialised further evacuation programmes were initiated. The populations of evacuating and receiving areas were in constant flux, with evacuees leaving their homes in times of perceived danger, and returning within months, or even weeks. The ebb and flow of evacuation may be demonstrated by the experience of one small reception area: Weston-super-Mare, a small seaside resort, received a total of 10,336 official evacuees, coming and going according to the fortunes of war, but only 130 spent four years or more in the town.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, neutral areas were also affected, not only by re-zoning or war damage, but also by the unpredictable movement of private evacuees into and out of those areas according to the perceived threat of air raids.

During the course of nearly six years of war 4,000,000 people were evacuated under various official programmes, but this figure overstates the total number of individuals because it includes some who evacuated several times. To the approximate number of 1,450,000 who moved under Operation 'Pied Piper' must be added the 300,000 who were dispersed in the early summer of 1940 from Medway towns and coastal areas. A further 1,250,000 were evacuated under the 'Trickle' scheme during periods of intensive air attacks, and 1,000,000 under Operation 'Rivulet' in 1944. In addition 2,600 children travelled overseas with the Children's Overseas Reception Board.<sup>13</sup> The chart below, statistics for which were taken from Titmuss and based on local counts of

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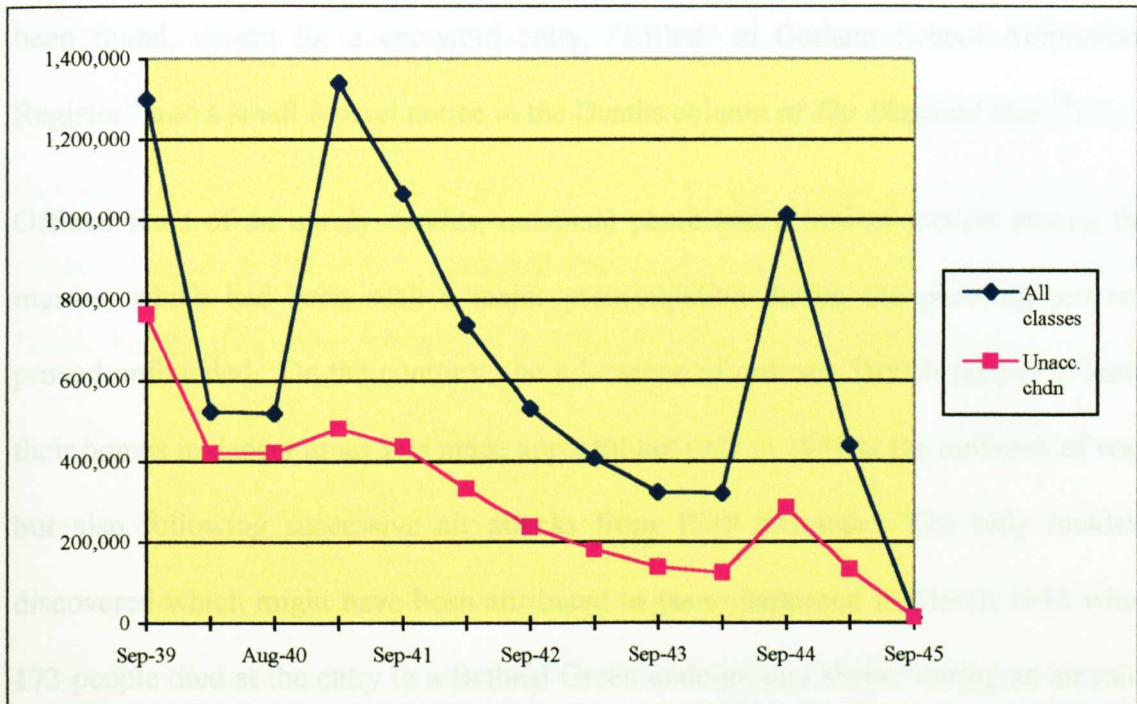
<sup>12</sup> B Brown & J Loosley: *Yesterday's Town: Weston-super-Mare*, p.98

<sup>13</sup> Lowndes: *op. cit.*, p.207



evacuees at six-monthly intervals, demonstrates the fluctuations in movements of people to billets in reception areas throughout the war years.<sup>14</sup>

**Movements of evacuees under official government schemes  
during the Second World War**



The government evacuation scheme clearly succeeded in its objective of saving lives.

Lowndes showed that the total number of non-evacuated children under the age of fourteen killed in air attacks on British cities during the war was 7,778.<sup>15</sup> It has not proved possible to compare the position of evacuated children over the whole of that time but, according to Samways, up to the end of 1942 only twenty-seven London evacuees were killed in air-raids in reception areas and a government estimate suggested that during the same period 4,500 children's lives were saved for the entire

<sup>14</sup> Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.356

<sup>15</sup> Lowndes: *op. cit.*, p.208

metropolitan evacuating area.<sup>16</sup> In Sheffield, examination of the Civilian War Dead Roll of Honour has disclosed that seventy-nine children under the age of fourteen were killed in city air raids during the war.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, the death of only one evacuated Sheffield child has been discovered. (Interestingly, no trace of any report of this has been found, except for a one-word entry: "Killed" in Gotham School Admissions Register<sup>18</sup> and a small funeral notice in the Deaths column of *The Sheffield Star*.<sup>19</sup>)

Official fears of an unruly exodus, universal panic and a loss of morale among the masses, which had been such a major preoccupation during the planning process, proved unfounded. On the contrary, the reluctance of ordinary British people to leave their homes in danger areas was made apparent not only in 1939 at the outbreak of war, but also following successive air attacks from 1940 onwards. The only incident discovered which might have been attributed to panic happened in March 1943 when 173 people died at the entry to a Bethnal Green underground shelter during an air raid. Crosby asserts, though, that this was not due to a stampede, but resulted from a woman tripping on a badly-lit, steep staircase, which caused the following crowd to collapse on top of each other.<sup>20</sup>

'Trekking' who left danger zones each night, returning in the morning, were sometimes accused of running away in fear. However, McLaine held that trekking was not a panicky mass flight but rather an orderly procedure, although the Home Intelligence

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<sup>16</sup> Samways: *op. cit.*, p.18

<sup>17</sup> *The Civilian War Dead Roll of Honour: Sheffield*, several entries

<sup>18</sup> John Malcolm Marsh: Gotham Council School Admissions Register, Nottingham Archives ref. SA.74/1/4

<sup>19</sup> *The Sheffield Star*: 22.7.40, p.6

<sup>20</sup> T L Crosby: *The Impact of Civilian Evacuation in the Second World War*, p.128

Department saw it as an alarming symptom of low morale.<sup>21</sup> It is evident that some Sheffield people also regarded the phenomenon as a sign of weakness: after the blitz in December 1940 local newspapers carried several letters criticising trekkers for seeking safety in flight and urging them to stay in the city and 'do their bit' in civil defence.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, Churchill's comment, at the height of the rocket attacks in 1944, that public morale could be judged by the immediate return of many evacuees from reception areas<sup>23</sup> gives support to the claim that ordinary people kept their heads and remained steady in the face of prolonged attack, and were not frightened into disorderly flight. Further, this was evidenced by their resistance to evacuation throughout the war.

It has been seen that evacuation was dogged by several problems, but perhaps the greatest difficulty for administrators was the failure of the British public to react in the way expected by the architects of the government scheme. To begin with, there was their reluctance to register school children and mothers with young children for evacuation. Of those who did sign up, far fewer than expected actually went away under the official programme when the time came. Huge numbers of those who left had returned within weeks to the cities, especially mothers and young children. When further schemes were introduced as invasion threatened, or when bombing began, the population of the cities and towns still showed little enthusiasm for evacuation.

It may be said that it was always going to be an impossible task to try to impose a scheme of such a revolutionary nature - to persuade people to leave their homes and

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<sup>21</sup> McLaine: *op. cit.*, p.120

<sup>22</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 16.1.41 - 7.3.41

<sup>23</sup> HoC Deb. 2.8.44, Vol. 402, Cols. 1476-78

travel to unknown destinations for an indefinite period of time - upon a nation who were not convinced of its necessity. Sheffield people, for instance, failed to heed the warning of a local Member of Parliament that the city would be of considerable and special attention at the hands of an enemy because of its important armaments industry.<sup>24</sup> An interviewee recounted a view popular at the time: "They'll never find Sheffield among all these hills: we'll be safe here."<sup>25</sup>

It is clear that the architects of evacuation vastly over-estimated the number of eligible individuals who would actually opt to leave their homes and take advantage of the government scheme. In 1939, across the country 1,500,000 of the expected number of evacuees elected to stay at home, or else made their own private arrangements and moved to safer areas independently. Some local authorities in danger areas were much less successful than others in persuading vulnerable people to leave: Sheffield's 15% and Rotherham's 8% of eligible school children evacuated hardly bears comparison with Salford's 76%. But the latter authority had carried out a dynamic campaign to keep parents informed in a positive way and expected (and achieved) a good result.<sup>26</sup> Had the Salford policy been carried out in Sheffield, the city's poor showing might have been improved, though this cannot be stated with certainty.

However, it is argued that there were other factors which helped to account for Sheffield's failure. Whereas Rotherham's low numbers may be blamed on the fact that the town was classified a neutral area until July 1939,<sup>27</sup> Sheffield's inner-city areas

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<sup>24</sup> HoC Deb 20.12.38, Vol. 342, Col. 2809: G Lathan, MP for Park, Sheffield

<sup>25</sup> Oral interview: Sheila Clay, 15.3.98

<sup>26</sup> Padley & Cole: *op. cit.*, pp.42,48

<sup>27</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph & Independent*: 14.7.39, p.3

were always classified a danger zone and its officials had plenty of time to prepare for evacuation. Failure could be partly attributed to muddled administration at both national and local level. The government impeded plans made on behalf of Sheffield people by allocating officials' preferred reception area (the Peak District) to evacuees from other industrial districts. Community leaders in some localities chosen to receive city children made public their opposition to the project. Such prevarication was hardly guaranteed to instil confidence in Sheffield parents.

Another important reason for the low turn-out of evacuees from Sheffield, it is contended, was the apathy of many municipal leaders which persisted throughout the first programme and has been documented in several chapters of the thesis. Not only was there a lack of positive encouragement by city officials: at times local councillors publicly voiced opinions which were quite negative and critical of parents who had allowed their children to remain in the reception areas. This was hardly conducive to success, and may well have led to the premature return home of some and, in addition, may have inhibited parents from registering their children for future evacuation.

The local press, too, appeared ambivalent in the period before war began, and although a policy of rather more encouragement was pursued in newspapers once bombing started, it could be argued that it was too little and too late for the Sheffield public who were reluctant to go away even after heavy bombardment. Locally, after the first exodus from Sheffield, evacuation seemed almost forgotten until the city became a reception area in 1944. Newspaper reports had dwindled after the first few months, to the point where the return of the few remaining evacuees when the government scheme finished scarcely merited a mention. Although press interest was briefly resurrected

when evacuees poured into the city in July and August 1944, there was only cursory coverage of their return at the end of the war.

Several reasons may be advanced for the premature drift back to the cities of evacuees after the exodus of 1939, among them financial worries, the introduction of parental contributions, dissatisfaction with billets, class hostility, religious and racial prejudice, and the failure of the expected air-raids to materialise before the summer of 1940. All these factors played some part in persuading evacuees to return home early and threatened the first scheme with failure. They were also partly responsible for the reluctance of many parents to take part in future schemes - even when the *Blitzkrieg* began, for not only were rural householders 'once bitten, twice shy' about offering homes for evacuees: urban dwellers were also loath to risk a repetition of earlier unhappy experiences. Further, it is arguable that the public outcry at the condition and conduct of evacuees, fuelled by newspaper reports, local rumour and hearsay, had an adverse effect upon the success of any future evacuations.

Much was made of the failure of parents to respond to the new campaign launched in the spring of 1940. The simple desire of families to stay together in adversity was an important contributory factor. When the 'Trickle' programme was begun the problem of resistance in reception areas was somewhat avoided by sending smaller parties over a longer period of time. In 1944 Operation 'Rivulet' saw many evacuees being sent to reception areas formerly designated danger zones, where householders may have been less resistant to billeting because they had experienced air raids themselves. It has been seen, however, that even then evacuees were not universally welcomed.

There were, inevitably, omissions and mistakes in the operation of the government scheme in the reception areas. It is clear that there was a lack of consultation with those who were to be most affected, and not enough thought was given before the war began to problems likely to arise in these districts: the government's prime concern, after all, was for national security. At the beginning of the war it had not been appreciated that provision of adequate medical and welfare services would be crucial to the success of evacuation and there were hardly any social workers available where they were most needed - in the reception areas.<sup>28</sup> In 1939 at least, apart from teachers, the vast majority of those involved at ground level in carrying out the plans which bureaucrats had conceived were willing, but inexperienced, volunteers - from the escorts in the evacuation zones to the billeting officers in receiving areas - and were often not qualified to deal with many of the problems which arose, particularly those concerned with the condition and behaviour of evacuees or facilities for pre-school children.

Some lessons were learned from mistakes made in the first evacuation: in subsequent programmes, for instance, transport plans were better adhered to, largely avoiding muddles at reception points; this in turn led to less confusion on the education front. Welfare services, hitherto overlooked, were put in place as the need was realised, or as quickly as funding allowed. But other errors were repeated, as the continuance of 'cattle market' methods of selection for billeting in some places indicated. Complaints

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<sup>28</sup> C Burt, "The Billeting of Evacuated Children", *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. XI (1941), p.87

regarding financial shortages rumbled on throughout the war, with the Treasury providing minimum assistance only when pressed, and often very late in the day.

The greatest impediment to the scheme's success, and one that had been grossly underestimated by authorities, however, was the inexorable pull of home ties. Moreover, the failure of the scheme to appeal to those most at risk suggests that family unity was at its strongest in the poorest sections of the population, although this would be hard to prove. Before the war, neither parents nor children in the working classes had ever envisaged a long period of separation from each other. If the anticipated air raids had begun when war was declared, or if evacuation had taken place six months later, it is arguable that public opinion would have been less concerned with the shortcomings of the evacuation scheme and the condition of evacuees, and the drift back might have been less marked: but this must remain a matter of conjecture.

It has not been the remit of this study to join the debate on the importance of evacuation to the introduction of changes in social policy. Nevertheless, it is clear that evacuation drew attention to the economic and social deprivation which existed in many inner-city areas and which could no longer be ignored. Middle-class complacency was rocked by the revelations, as Britain's social services were exposed as hopelessly inadequate. With more trained social workers it is conceivable that there might have been less trouble in the billets and less heart-ache on both sides. If nursery provision had been in place in the reception areas, the drift back might have been lessened. It is true, as Macnicol asserts, that some changes in social policy had already been put forward



before the war.<sup>29</sup> But it seems to this writer that evacuation highlighted the shortcomings of existing welfare provision and demonstrated, for example, that reliance upon untrained staff and voluntary organisations was insufficient. It served as a focus for change and speeded up the provision of such facilities as hostels and psychological support for disturbed children, trained social workers, welfare clinics and school meals for all.

In all the planning and execution of the government evacuation scheme little attention was paid to the psychological effect on unaccompanied children of being uprooted from home and family and deposited among strangers for weeks, months, sometimes for years. What was a skilful strategic exercise produced confusion and distress in human and educational terms. Evacuation left in its wake many emotional problems: anecdotal evidence and personal interviews with evacuees attest to this. Evacuation meant that children were not only without their home background, parents and siblings, but they also lost the familiar environment of their school, home town, amusements and often their friends as well.

The successes went largely unrecorded, as did the feelings of the evacuees. The voices of dissatisfied householders, on the other hand, were heard everywhere almost immediately. As the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Education reported, it was “the unbilleteable minority” of children who caused serious problems in the reception areas and who gained much more notoriety than “the great majority of well brought up and well behaved children who settled down with their foster parents”.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Macnicol: *op. cit.*, p.22

<sup>30</sup> *The Health of the School Child: Report of Chief Medical Officer Ministry of Education 1939-45*, p.31

Some children adapted happily to country life and were loved and cosseted in their billets. There were even some who were better cared for in their billets than in their own homes, as one interviewee declared:

“We were showered with love and didn’t want to go home at the end of the war. Our foster mother was a better mother to us than our own mother was.”<sup>31</sup>

Other children, equally well looked after, were miserable and homesick. But what is often overlooked is that, just as the evacuees had their rogue elements, so not all foster parents were loving and caring: some children were brutally treated and abused and others were treated with coldness, neglected and unloved.

The subject of evacuation has often been overlooked in accounts of the history of Britain in the Second World War. But this study has attempted to show that it was an event of profound significance in the lives of countless ordinary British people. Evacuation preoccupied officials who made the plans as well as administrators, teachers and volunteers who carried through the various programmes, and it affected country householders who took in refugees. Above all, it concerned all the evacuees themselves - particularly those who, leaving their parents at home, went unaccompanied into other people’s homes and were dependent upon the goodwill of strangers for weeks, months, and sometimes for years of their childhood.

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<sup>31</sup> Oral interview: George Green, 17.12.93

## APPENDIX 1

Civil Defence Pamphlet produced by Sheffield Communist Party, July 1938

[original kindly lent by N E Moore, Sheffield]

**A.A.R.P.**  
1938

A COMPLETE  
**PLAN**

FOR  
THE SAFETY OF  
THE PEOPLE OF

**SHEFFIELD**

**2d.**

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APPENDIX I  
Civil Defence Pamphlet produced by Sheffield Communist Party, July 1938  
(original kindly lent by N E Moore, Sheffield)

**FOREWORD.**

We submit here for the consideration of the people of Sheffield an abridged version of the memorandum that has been submitted to the Sheffield Municipal authorities by the Sheffield Communist Party.

A word or two of explanation is necessary. In the first place we want to assure our readers that the Communist Party does not believe that a major war is inevitable. On the contrary we are absolutely convinced that peace can be restored to the world, if we, the common people, take the necessary action promptly.

The greatest danger of War arises from the policy of the present Government, which makes concessions to the aggressor nations, Germany, Italy and Japan, renders the League of Nations ineffective and refuses to enter a peace alliance with the Democratic powers. If war is to be averted this policy must be reversed. This means that this country must take its stand with Republican Spain, Czechoslovakia, France and the Soviet Union in a peace bloc within the framework of the League of Nations.

By collective-action these powers can and will force Japan and the Fascist States to abandon their aggressive aims and thus restore peace in the Far East and Central Europe. It will be readily agreed by our readers that the application of this policy so far as Britain is concerned seems to involve the defeat of the Government. We have little reason to believe that the present Government is likely to reverse its policy to the extent required.

We shall continue, therefore, to do all in our power as a Party to avert war. But at the same time we must realise that our efforts may not be successful. Recognition of this fact makes it necessary for us to consider seriously the safety of the people in the light of modern warfare. There can be very little doubt that an examination of the Air-Raid precaution scheme of the Government will show that they are hopelessly inadequate from the standpoint of protecting the population.

Sheffield is one of the Key cities, and would for certain be one of the main targets of an enemy power. This is not denied by any one, yet there is no evidence that the safety of Sheffield is receiving the consideration it demands. In this pamphlet you will read for yourselves the comprehensive general plan for safety proposed by the Communist Party. We do not claim it to be the last word, but we do assert that it is based on the correct basic principle, viz.:

**THE SAFETY OF THE PEOPLE COMES FIRST.**

Nor do we claim that our proposals will make all the people safe, experience drawn from China, Spain and

Abyssinia show that this is quite impossible. The blame for this lies at the door of the present Government. It is they who have added to our present problems of unemployment, high prices, and bad housing, the danger of being bombed from the air and gassed in our homes.

Therefore, while we strive as never before to wrest the reigns of Government out of the hands of Chamberlain and Co., the friends of Hitler and Mussolini, at the same time  
**WE DEMAND HERE AND NOW THAT THE LIVES OF  
 MEN AND WOMEN AND CHILDREN MUST BE  
 SAFEGUARDED AT ALL COSTS.**

**B. BARKER.  
 G. ALLISON.  
 G. FLETCHER.**

### **SHEFFIELD AIR RAID PRECAUTIONS.** **The Objectives in Modern Aerial Warfare.**

The experiences during the World War and purely military consideration have given rise to a widespread opinion that the chief aim of aerial attack will be the destruction of military objectives, such as aerodromes, armament works, power stations and railway centres.

While it is true that the destruction of such points will be of tremendous value, the experience gained during the war in Spain, which is of particular importance because the German and Italian Air Fleets are having a full dress rehearsal at the expense of that unhappy country, shows that **the chief aim of modern aerial warfare is the terrorisation of the civilian population.**

Any system of air raid protection must regard as its primary responsibility the safeguarding of the population whose demoralisation would be of maximum importance to the enemy.

Due to the relatively poor accuracy of bombing from the air the easiest method of disrupting the life of a city is by indiscriminate destruction. It would not be necessary to make a direct hit on an armament factory to put it out of commission, the same purpose is achieved by making a city uninhabitable.

We repeat, therefore, that the chief aim of air raid precautions must be the protection of life, because this is of infinitely greater importance than the protection of property, and because the destruction of the civil population will be the object of enemy attack.

The impression has been created that the principal risk is from poison gas, but the chief danger is actually the high explosive bomb on account of the terrible toll of life which may be caused by direct hits and the ease with which essential services can be interrupted. Quite apart from the danger to life, the dislocation of the water supply, sewage system, electricity or gas supplies, would impose tremendous hardship on a city.

The second danger is from incendiary bombs, but these will not be used on a scale comparable with high explosive bombs, on account of the impossibility of achieving absolute accuracy and of the lesser damage attainable.

The least danger is from gas, but the fact that it has not been employed in Spain or China should not be overestimated. In Spain, Germany and Italy have to be careful not to outrage world opinion too far. This consideration will be removed if they succeed in plunging the whole world into war. Successful gas bombardment depends on a number of variable factors. Atmospheric conditions must be favourable, the resistance of the anti-aircraft defence must have been overcome to allow raiders to descend in order to attain any precision of aim. It is extremely improbable that there will be any gas attacks unless they are preceded by an intensive use of high explosive and incendiary bombs.

Air Raid Precautions must be based on the protection of the population and services of a city from the effects of **high explosive bombs**, and only then can adequate measures be taken to combat the fire and gas peril.

### **SHEFFIELD.**

There is no doubt that Sheffield will be one of the first targets for enemy raids. As the "Sheffield Telegraph" has stated, it will be second only to London and Birmingham. The destruction of the most important armament centre in the country, together with the terrorisation of half a million people will obviously be a task for the enemy at the earliest possible opportunity.

Sheffield is, for example, within easy reach of Kiel and Heligoland, and the smoke pall which hangs over the City will actually assist identification by aircraft flying at a great height; the course of the River Don, the cleft in the hills, make Sheffield a dangerously easy target for raiding planes.

The path of enemy aircraft will depend largely on the extent to which defences have crumbled. In the event of a successful break through, the programme would probably consist of an attack on Liverpool, taking in Manchester, Sheffield, Doncaster, Scunthorpe and Hull on the way home. On a less successful visit the raiders would probably turn on reaching Sheffield and concentrate their attack on the City.

In view of the terrible possibilities here envisaged, any system of precautions must be absolutely thorough-going.

Failure to undertake genuine protection is criminal neglect of the safety of half a million lives.

### THE CIVIL POPULATION.

Willing and enlightened co-operation by every man and woman in the City is absolutely essential for the success of any system of defence for Sheffield. The Sheffield Defence Scheme must be of such a nature that the people of the City recognise it as a genuine attempt to provide them with the maximum amount of protection, and the scheme must have a genuinely democratic basis.

It does not require the wisdom of Solomon to ascertain the causes of the present apathy regarding the Official Air Raid Precautions. The average man and woman is interested, but he or she knows only too well that the present schemes, organised by the Government and imposed on the Local Authorities, would not save one of the thousands who have been massacred by air attacks in Spain and China. The people know that war stricken Spain, starved of resources as it is, has saved thousands of lives that would be lost here owing to inadequate protection. The "Popular Front" Government in France is spending more on Paris than the "National" Government intend to spend on the whole of Britain. In these circumstances it is no wonder that the people remain indifferent to appeals to take part in ferry-mandering schemes which make futile attempts to grapple with the problem. Genuine schemes of protection will secure the instantaneous and wholehearted support of the entire population.

The British people are a free and democratic people to whom authoritarianism is utterly foreign. There is a world of difference between regimentation imposed from above and self-imposed democratic discipline. The British people in general, and Sheffielders in particular, will never consent to play the part of tin soldiers to an autocratic bureaucracy, and there is a very widespread suspicion with justification, that this is precisely the part they are being called upon to play at present.

This pamphlet is much more than a condemnation of the existing Air Raid Precaution Schemes; detailed proposals follow for the protection of your life and those of your dear ones.

### SHEFFIELD MUST NEVER BE A SECOND BARCELONA!

#### THE PROPOSED MEASURES OF DEFENCE.

Under this heading we propose to put forward a detailed scheme for the protection of Sheffield. The entire responsibility rests with the central government and not the local authorities. The Sheffield Corporation should use the utmost pressure on the Government to ensure that this scheme is adopted.

#### Aircraft Protection.

The major objection to the Air Programme of the present Government apart from the gross inefficiency which there is good reason to suspect exists in administration, is that far too high a proportion of the total expenditure is the construction of bombing aircraft, and far too little on the provision of defensive units, i.e., interceptor and chaser planes. This policy is in accordance with that enunciated by Mr. Baldwin when Premier, but it will be no consolation to our people to know that men, women and children in the enemy countries are being subjected to the same agony as ourselves. There must be a reversal of this policy.

#### Anti-Aircraft Batteries.

Sheffield has excellent sites on the surrounding hills for the location of anti-aircraft batteries. The Corporation should demand, in view of the national importance of Sheffield and its consequent liability to frequent attack, that the provision of anti-aircraft batteries—a purely defensive weapon—should receive early attention.

#### Warning System.

It is absolutely essential that all likely objectives of enemy attack should receive the earliest possible warning. The details of the system should be made available to responsible local bodies, and the Corporation should not be content with vague assurances.

#### Counter-Espionage.

The activities in this country of certain subjects of the aggressor states have become a scandal of the gravest dimensions, and investigation should be conducted into the activities of the consulates of these States.

It is, likewise, of national importance that full investigations should be conducted into the affairs of Fascist and Semi-Fascist organisations in this country. The Corporation should demand of the Home Office that the activities of the Special Branch of the C.I.D. should be concentrated on these national responsibilities.

#### THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS.

The Sheffield Corporation has the duty of providing adequate protection against air attack for the people of the city, with a total population of approximately 520,000. To regard the job as "done" when not very good gas masks have been stored at Leeds, people told how to make their windows "splinter-proof" and their houses "gas-proof" is nothing short of criminal negligence. Even the latest stretching of the Government in its recommendations to provide trenches in public parks and private gardens cannot be regarded as proof of any genuine intention to face the problems involved. The work which must be carried out falls into three categories.

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- (1) Defence of human life during a raid.
- (2) Rescue and salvage work made necessary by a raid.
- (3) Protection of vital services and supplies.

The first category is beyond all doubt the most important, yet it is here that least is being done. With regard to the second category, while we do not wish to minimise its importance, we do assert that it is more necessary to **prevent death and disablement** than it is to devise schemes, however good in themselves, for salvaging the dead and wounded.

It is amply proven by the terrible experiences of Spanish and Chinese cities, that the only protection for the inhabitants during a raid is **the dispersal of the population or adequate air raid shelters.**

**We are of the opinion that both forms of protection should be used.**

#### Evacuation.

We propose that the following sections of the population should be permanently evacuated immediately upon the outbreak of war and should be maintained in evacuation settlements.

**Compulsory.** All school children up to the age of fifteen, together with sufficient school teachers to look after them.

All blind persons.

All bed-ridden persons and wholly dependent invalids.

**Voluntary.** All old-age pensioners and their wives.

All nursing and expectant mothers.

All children below the school age.

We estimate that this would involve the permanent evacuation of 55,000 school children, 16,000 adult females, 8,000 adult males and 10,000 children under the school age—a total of 24,000 adults and 65,000 children.

Accommodation would be provided by the requisitioning of suitable places within the area shown on map No. 1, reasonable compensation to be paid to the owners of the property. Permanent staffs would have to be established in such settlements and adequate measures taken to ensure proper sanitation and provisioning. The parents of school children and those responsible in other cases would be required to contribute a small amount for the maintenance of their dependents who were so evacuated.

We also propose that there should be temporary evacuation of certain sections of the population immediately warning of an enemy raid is received, those evacuated to return to the city when "all clear" reports have been received. Such evacuation to take place into the districts shown on the map No. 1. We have divided the greater part of Sheffield into five areas, from which it would be desirable to evacuate the

entire population. We do not consider that this would be practicable, due to the impossibility of securing the necessary transport.

The basis of temporary evacuation is calculated as follows. All remaining children, all married women, except those who wish to remain, all other women and girls except those taking part in the services, and about 40% of the men and boys resident in these areas.

The five areas are shown on Map No. II., and are numbered in accordance with their degree of danger in a raid. Areas 1 and 2 are outlined in detail below, together with the number of people concerned.

Area 1. The whole of the Attercliffe, Darnall, Tinsley and Burngreave wards, the whole of the Firth Park and Brightside wards south of Barnsley Road, and of a line drawn from Owlter Lane to the city boundary at Meadowhall and Wincobank L.M.S. station and that part of the Neepsend ward lying east of Rutland Road.

Area 2. The whole of St. Philips and Owlerton wards, all Walkley ward north and South Road, all Crookes-moor ward north of the Walkley tram route, all Hillsborough ward between Malin Bridge and the Penistone Road end of Leppings Lane and the Parkwood Springs part of Neepsend ward.

Area.	Women and girls.	Children.	Men and boys.	Total.
1	36,000	7,500	17,000	60,500
2	36,000	7,500	17,000	60,500

We propose that temporary evacuation should be complete so far as Area No. 1 is concerned. In Area No. 2 it should be possible to evacuate the whole of the area south of Hillsborough Park, excluding Wisewood and the parts above Walkley Lane. The temporary removal of those people end and the crowded areas close to the river Don.

Evacuation would be carried out by Corporation and private buses, of which there are about 400 available, by lorries and by private cars conscripted for the purpose. In our opinion it would be extremely dangerous to attempt any part of the evacuation schemes with the Corporation tram cars.

The routes from Sheffield should be as follows:—

Area 1. (a) Prince of Wales Road and Ridgeway Road.  
(b) Herries Road and then both Halifax Road and Middlewood Road.

(c) Wicker, West Bar, West Street, Clarkehouse Road, Ecclesall Road.

Area 2. (a) Langsett Road, Holme Lane, Rivelin Valley

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**Road.**  
(b) St. Philips Road and Crookesmoor Road to Manchester Road.

Destinations should be as shown on Map No. 1.

- Area 1. (a) Calver, Stoney Middleton, Tideswell.  
 (b) Langsett, Broomhead and Bradfield district.  
 (c) Hathersage, Grindleford.
- Area 2. (a) Derwent, Bamford.  
 (b) Hlope Valley, Castleton.

The practical details of evacuation would have to be worked out very carefully to ensure smooth working of the scheme, consideration being given to the distribution of the population at different times of the day, and arrangements made to ensure that the vehicles and drivers required for evacuation purposes can respond promptly to the warning signals. **Trial evacuation must also be carried out.**

Each temporary evacuation centre should be organised to provide for about 500 persons. Wooden army type huts should be erected as shelters and canteens for the supply of hot drinks, milk and chocolate. About 200 of these centres will be required and the sites should be selected now and adequate provision made for sanitary arrangements. All persons in the evacuation area should keep on hand sufficient tinned food for four meals and a loaf of bread spare. In the case of unemployed families the tinned food should be provided through the Labour Exchange.)

**Air Raid Shelters.**

The Government holds that a large number of air raid shelters are neither practicable, nor necessarily desirable. We say that the provision of bomb and gas-proof shelters is not only a practicable proposition, but an urgent necessity.

- There are three types of shelters:—  
**Heavy Bombproof**, 40 feet or more underground, with very heavy reinforced concrete protection.  
**Light Bombproof** Shelters placed 10 to 20 feet underground, with a three to six foot concrete protection, safe against anything but a direct hit from a heavy bomb.

**Splinter Proof.** Covered in trenches, or concrete buildings standing either free or in the floor of other buildings.

All these shelters are fireproof and the first two types can be made gas proof fairly easily. The cost of such shelters is approximately £30, £10, and £5 per person protected respectively.

In Sheffield the provision of shelters is required as follows:—  
Heavy bomb proof shelters should be provided at all works and factories, in the centre of the town, on the main

line railways in the centre of the town and at the service areas. Light bomb proof shelters should be erected in areas 2, 3, 4, and 5 sufficient to take the entire population of these areas who are not scheduled for evacuation; works and factories in these areas to provide such shelters to house their workpeople during a raid. Splinter proof shelters should be provided for the entire population of the remainder of the City.

The adoption of the foregoing proposals would ensure that every man, woman and child in Sheffield could count on adequate protection from aerial attack. In addition, civilian Duty No. 1, gas masks should also be issued to every adult.

**A.R.P. Service Centres.**

For this purpose the City should be divided into ten service districts as indicated on Map No. 3, with service centres located as follows:—

- |                           |                        |
|---------------------------|------------------------|
| No. 1. Eastern ...        | Greenhand Road         |
| No. 2. North Eastern ...  | Upwell Street          |
| No. 3. North Central ...  | Rutland Road           |
| No. 4. North Western ...  | Langsett Road Barracks |
| No. 5. West Central ...   | Broad Lane             |
| No. 6. Central ...        | Pond Street            |
| No. 7. Northern ...       | Barrasley Road         |
| No. 8. South Eastern ...  | Elm Tree               |
| No. 9. Western ...        | Fulwood Road           |
| No. 10. South Western ... | Abbey Lane             |

These centres should consist of heavy bomb and gas proof shelters constructed to hold the administrative office for the district, to house all service workers and the necessary equipment, first-aid and dressing stations, and should be equipped with self-contained electric generators for emergency use.

Immediately a warning of enemy approach is given, all workers scheduled for service duty in the area should report to their appropriate centre for the following duties:—

- (a) Ambulance and medical work.
- (b) Rescue and salvage work.
- (c) Organisation of fire suppression work.
- (d) Organisation of decontamination work.
- (e) Patrol work for the information of the centre.

**Maintenance of Services and Supplies.**

One of the most dangerous possibilities involved in a successful air raid is the dislocation of food and milk supplies, or water, gas, electricity, telephone, and sanitary services. To guard against and to minimise this, we make the following proposals:—

- (a) The direction of all food, milk and fuel supplies should be taken over by a special Corporation Department in conjunction with the Co-operative Societies, the



Sheffield and District Distributive Trades Association, and the relative Trade Unions.

- (b) Special measures should be taken to protect the Corporation Abattoir, while arrangements should be made to de-centralise the existing markets.
- (c) Arrangements should be made with the Railway Companies to duplicate the conveyance of supplies by road when necessary.
- (d) The staffs of the Electricity Department, the Water Undertaking, the Highways and Sewage Department, the City Engineer and Surveyor's Department, the Cleansing Department, the Sheffield Gas Company and the Post Office Telephone Service should be organised to safeguard these services from possible dislocation caused by a raid.
- (e) The Hospital and medical services should be safeguarded against possible interruption, and this should be arranged by the Sheffield Municipal and Voluntary Hospitals Joint Advisory Committee.

#### Control and General Organisation.

Complete control of the whole protection system must be in the hands of the democratically elected representatives of the people of Sheffield, i.e., it must be in the hands of the City Council acting through a Committee under the chairmanship of the Lord Mayor, and consisting of the following members:—

The chairman of the Health, Highways and Sewage, Water, Estates, Finance, Transport, Water, Education, Electricity, Markets, and the Hospitals Joint Advisory Committees, two representatives of the Derbyshire County Council, together with eight members nominated by the opposition.

For technical advice, the committee should be enlarged by representatives of the following organisations:—

The Trades Council, the Chamber of Commerce, the Cutlers' Company, the Sheffield Gas Company, the Post Office Telephone Service, the Transport and General Workers' Union, the National Union of General and Municipal Workers, the National Union of Railwaymen, the Amalgamated Engineering Union, the Electrical Trades Union, the P.O. Engineering Union, the Distributive Trade Workers, the Building Trades Workers, the National Union of Teachers, the Co-operative Societies, the Road Haulage Contractors Associations, the Building Trades Employers Association and the St. John's Ambulance Brigade.

For actual administration purposes selected members of the staffs already employed in the various organisations concerned should be assisted by the technical advisers provided by the Government.

#### Staffing of the Necessary Services.

The staff for the services envisaged in the scheme should be recruited from those whose work is already connected with the various services, plus a smaller number of personnel will be required for extraordinary duties.

In the first category can be placed those required for transport duties, salvage work, the maintenance of services and supplies and the staff required for canteen work. The general organisation should be in the hands of the appropriate Trade Unions co-ordinated by the Central Committee. All such workers should be trained in first-aid and in the use of gas masks.

In the second category are ambulance and medical workers, organised through the appropriate bodies, and the fire-fighting service, which should be based on the fire brigades, which is, however, totally inadequate in its present strength (three officers and fifty-seven men). Decontamination squads should be recruited from specially selected men in the Highways, Sewage and Cleansing Department and Road and Public Works Contractors, who are used to heavy work and able to stand the great strain of working in protective clothing.

The Warden system is undoubtedly the most important aspect of the entire administrative problem, for Wardens will be the link between the mass of the people and the Central Authority. The method of recruitment is, therefore, of vital importance. There is only one way to ensure smooth and efficient working of the whole system—**direct election by the people themselves.**

The ten service districts should each be divided into about twenty-five sections, and each section into units comprising 50 to 100 people, and each unit should elect a Warden. The Wardens will elect a Section Warden responsible for the Section, while the Section Wardens will elect a Chief Warden for the service district. The ten district Wardens thus elected will be responsible to the Central Authority for the entire system. Police officers, of whom there are about 700 in the city, should be allocated to assist the Wardens in the execution of their duties.

Wardens will be responsible for the local organisation of the civil population during an emergency, including patrol duties during a raid, direction being in the hands of the section and district Wardens. All Wardens should receive an intensive training in every branch of the work required.

#### FINANCIAL ASPECTS.

In the existing Government plans it is provided that no local authority shall be obliged to spend more than the proceeds of a 1d. rate. In Sheffield this amounts to about £12,500, a totally inadequate sum, considering that the

Government's share of the total cost is not to be more than 75%. A total expenditure of £50,000 would thus appear to be the extent of the present plans. This is no more than 2/- per head of the population.

To get a proper perspective in the matter we must remember that the total rearmament plans of the Government involve the expenditure of at least £1,500,000,000, about £32 per head. The talk of genuine schemes of protection for the people of Britain "costing too much" is exposed as a deception as soon as this comparison is made. The cost of putting our proposals into effect would be approximately £5,000,000. Assuming a Government contribution of 75%, this would leave Sheffield with the job of finding £1,250,000.

Is it too much to pay this sum, to ensure adequate protection for ourselves, our wives and our children from the horrors to which an unprotected city would be exposed?

We place the matter in this light because we wish to expose those who seek to frighten us out of the demand for **adequate protection** with talk of the tremendous cost. **The cost IS HIGH, but the value of human life IS HIGHER.**

This financial burden must not be placed on the workers of Sheffield. We urge that the Corporation should continue with renewed vigour the campaign to force the Government to bear the entire cost of providing **adequate protection** for the British people—it is a National responsibility.

Higher taxation of the **profits** which are being made by the **armament manufacturers** is the solution that we advocate. In the last completed financial year, ten firms in Sheffield mainly engaged in armament production made a total profit of over £1,600,000. In nearly every instance they are making seven to eight times as much profit per year out of each workman employed as it would cost to give him complete protection.

An alternative scheme is that the Corporation should demand from the Government authority to levy a Municipal Income Tax to raise its proportion of the total cost. This Income Tax should be levied on income solely or mainly arising from work carried out, or conducted from premises in the city of Sheffield, and incomes under £350 per annum would be exempt.

The following considerations should also be taken into account:—

- (1) The provision of shelters at works, factories and on the Railways should be undertaken by the firms concerned and regarded as capital expenditure.
- (2) No supplier or contractor in connection with any work on the Air Raid Protection Schemes should be allowed to draw profit from such work. In the case of large firms the prohibition would be absolute. In

the case of small firms, a profit allowance might be made where genuine hardship would otherwise be caused, and in the case of small private contractors, management allowances should be made on a reasonable basis equal to a salary to the individual contractor.

(3) The saving effected by the removal of unemployed men from the hve register should be taken into account and an allowance made to the Corporation of the resulting reduction in national expenditure.

(4) The Government should allow to the Corporation, as part of its contribution to the total costs, the entire cost to the Corporation of the diversion of employees from their normal work to work in connection with the scheme.

In the light of the above considerations, we declare that there is not the slightest foundation for claiming that the cost of genuine protection is prohibitive. The money to finance the scheme is available. **It will be found by any Government which desires to protect the people of our country.**

**WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?**

This pamphlet contains only the essential features of the plan: the complete scheme is too long for publication as a pamphlet.

A copy of our complete proposals for the safety of the people of Sheffield has been sent to every member of the City Council and to every Sheffield Member of Parliament. **The adoption of this scheme may save YOUR life.**

**HOW CAN YOU SECURE ITS APPLICATION?**

- Read this pamphlet carefully.
- Pass it to your friends.
- Urge your acquaintances to buy a copy.
- Write to the local Press.
- Write to your Councillor and M.P.
- Talk about it.
- Raise the question at your work, in your Trade Union, Co-op, Guild and Labour Party.

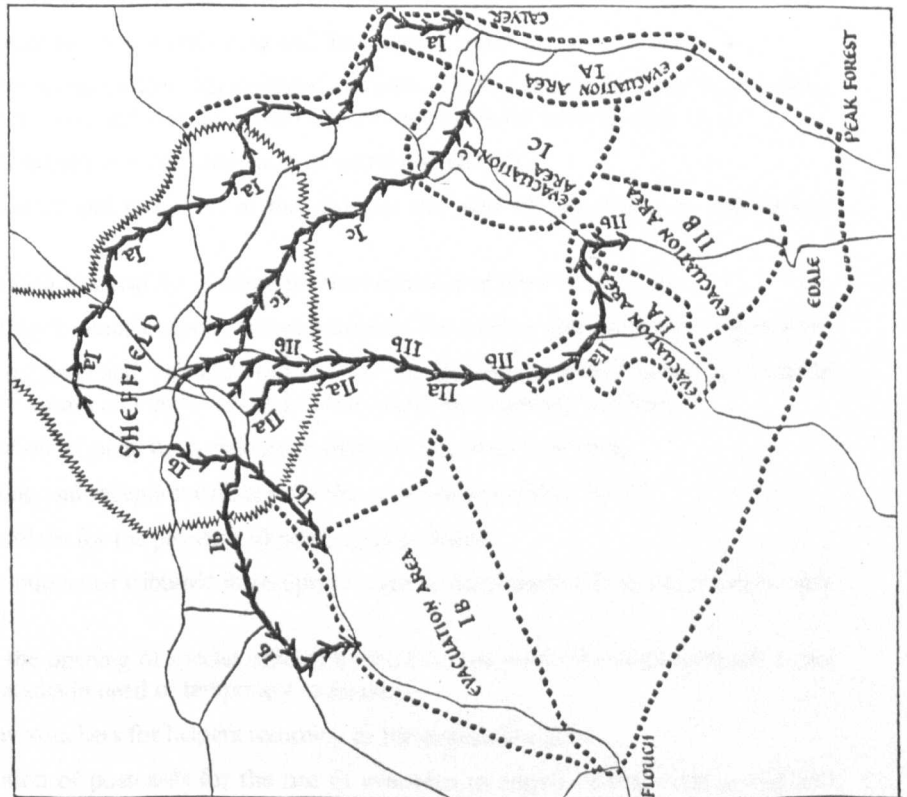
**ACT NOW**

**TO-MORROW MAY BE TOO LATE**

**MAP ONE**

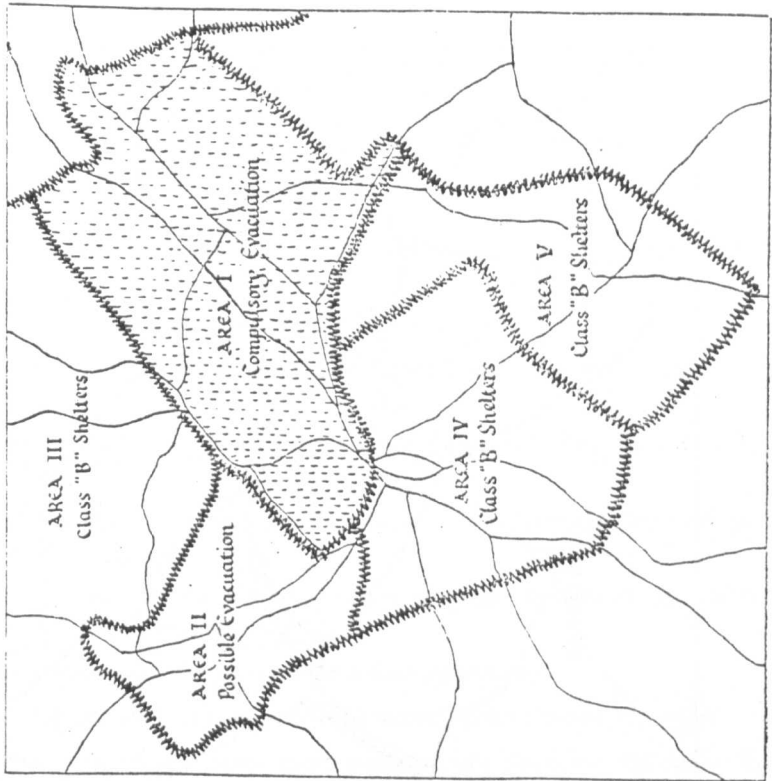
showing

Permanent Evacuation Zone. (Calver, Peak Forest, Edale, Flouch)  
and Temporary Evacuation Zones and Routes of Evacuation.

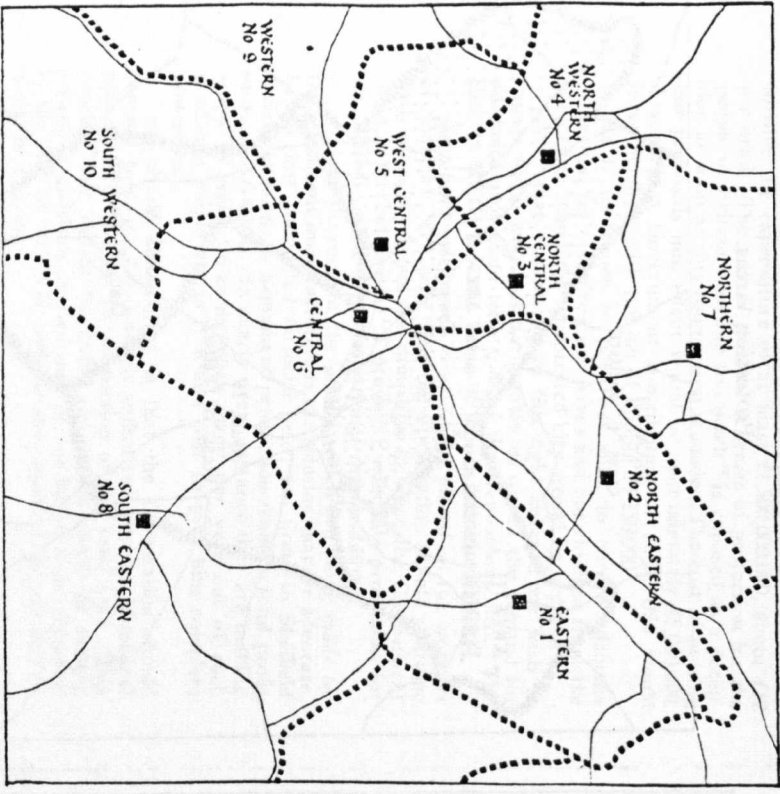


**MAP TWO**

Protection Areas.



**MAP THREE**  
Service Districts and Centres.



To cover cost of production we are compelled to charge 2d. (Twopence) for the first Edition of this Pamphlet. A good sale at Twopence will enable us to produce subsequent editions at a cheaper rate.

## APPENDIX 2

### Items in the Planning of Evacuation\*

1. Arrangements for road transport for expectant mothers, blind persons and physically handicapped children.
2. The registration of expectant mothers at maternity and child welfare centres, the issue of permits for different types of transport, and the maintenance of a 'live' register of mothers within one month of confinement.
3. The enrolment and organisation of an adequate number of teachers and helpers to travel with the school children.
4. Advising all parents of the luggage and clothing to be taken by children.
5. Arrangements for assembly points, entraining and detraining stations, including the organisation of reception staff (with armlets).
6. The provision at railway stations and for the journey of water supplies and first aid and sanitary facilities.
7. The production and distribution by the London County Council of a complete terminology of evacuation issued to prevent misunderstanding.
8. The distribution by the London County Council of an evacuation pamphlet for mothers and children, including a number printed in Greek for Cypriots in Soho.
9. Arrangements for a special registration day in London for the Jewish community.
10. Rehearsals by London schools in methods of crossing roads (demonstrations of 'wave' crossing).
11. Provision and distribution of emergency food rations (meat, milk, biscuits, chocolate and carrier bag) for forty-eight hours through the Food (Defence) Plans Department, and the subsequent increase of food supplies in reception districts.
12. Arrangements with the police to control entraining and detraining at main stations.
13. Preparation of billeting forms and notices, appointment warrants, identity labels, final warning notices, telegrams, posters, wireless, press and cinema notices and arrangements for loud-speaker vans.
14. The organisation of petrol supplies for road transport at detraining stations.
15. Arrangements for the transfer and reception of the children and staff of day nurseries and nursery schools.
16. Arrangements with the British Medical Association for the medical treatment of children.
17. Provision of accommodation for handicapped children including the staffing and equipping of premises.
18. Provision of adequate nursing and medical services in the reception areas, including hospital accommodation, maternity homes and midwives and obstetricians for expectant mothers.
19. The purchase and distribution of camp beds, palliasses, blankets and rubber sheeting.
20. The appointment of billeting and reception officers and the organisation of their work.
21. Arrangements with post offices for the payment of billeting allowances.
22. Preparations for the appointment of tribunals in reception areas to hear appeals from occupiers to vary or cancel billeting notices.
23. Arrangements (including the opening of special offices) by the Unemployment Assistance Board to pay allowances to evacuated adults in need of temporary assistance.
24. The preparation of railway vouchers for helpers returning to the evacuation areas.
25. The printing and distribution of postcards for the use of evacuees to announce their safe arrival and address.

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\* R M Titmuss: *Problems of Social Policy: History of the Second World War*, pp.541,2

### APPENDIX 3

#### Designated Evacuation Areas in Britain

September 1939\*

1	London and outer metropolitan areas
2	Medway Group (Chatham, Gillingham and Rochester)
3	Southern Ports (Portsmouth, Southampton and Gosport)
4	Midlands (Birmingham, Smethwick, Coventry, Derby, Nottingham, Walsall, West Bromwich and Oldbury)
5	Merseyside (Liverpool, Bootle, Wallasey, Birkenhead, Manchester, Salford, Crosby, Stretford, Widnes, Litherland, Runcorn, etc.)
6	Yorkshire and Lincolnshire (Bradford, Leeds, Sheffield, Kingston-on-Hull, Grimsby, Cleethorpes, Middlesbrough and Rotherham)
7	North-East Group (Newcastle, Gateshead, South Shields, Sunderland, Tynemouth, West Hartlepool, Jarrow, Wallsend, Felling, Hebburn and Whickham)
8	Scotland (Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, Clydebank and the Rosyth area of Dunfermline)

N.B. In England, only in a few cases outside London was the whole area scheduled as evacuation. Most boroughs and urban districts included both evacuation and neutral zones, and only those parts considered most vulnerable were zoned for evacuation.

In Sheffield, only the densely populated central, northern and eastern areas, with the exception of housing estates therein, were designated evacuation zones.

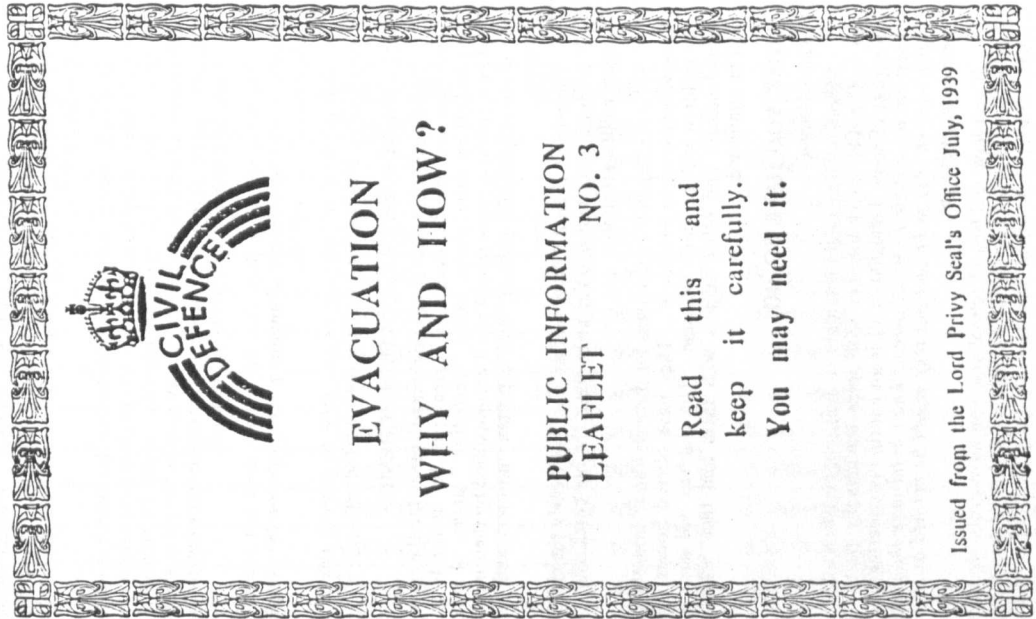
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\* Titmuss: *op. cit.*, p.33, n.2

## APPENDIX 4

Government Leaflet delivered to householders in evacuation areas, July 1939

[original kindly lent by interviewee Mrs D Knowles]



Most of us will have work to do, and work that matters, because we must maintain the nation's life and the production of munitions and other material essential to our war effort. For most of us therefore, who do not go off into the Fighting Forces our duty will be to stand by our jobs or those new jobs which we may undertake in war.

Some people have asked what they ought to do if they have no such definite work or duty.

*You should be very sure before deciding that there is really nothing you can do.* There is opportunity for a vast variety of services in civil defence. YOU must judge whether in fact you can or cannot help by remaining. If you are sure you cannot, then there is every reason why you should go away if you can arrange to do so, but you should take care to avoid interfering with the official evacuation plans. If you are proposing to use the public transport services, make your move either BEFORE the evacuation of the children begins or AFTER it has been completed. You will not be allowed to use transport required for the official evacuation scheme and other essential purposes, and you must not try to take accommodation which is required for the children and mothers under the Government scheme.

For the rest, we must remember that it would be essential that the work of the country should go on. Men and women alike will have to stand firm, to maintain our effort for victory. Such measures of protection as are possible are being pushed forward for the large numbers who have to remain at their posts. That they will be ready to do so, no one doubts.

The "evacuable" areas under the Government scheme are:—  
 (a) London, as well as the County Boroughs of West Ham and East Ham; the Boroughs of Walthamstow, Leyton, Ilford and Barking in Essex; the Boroughs of Tottenham, Hornsey, Willesden, Acton, and Edmonton in Middlesex; (b) the Midway towns of Chatham, Gillingham and Rochester; (c) Portsmouth, Gosport and Southampton; (d) Birmingham and Smethwick; (e) Liverpool, Bootle, Birkenhead and Wallasey; (f) Manchester and Salford; (g) Sheffield, Leeds, Bradford and Hull; (h) Newcastle and Gateshead; (i) Edinburgh, Rosyth, Glasgow, Clydebank and Dundee.

In some of these places only certain areas will be evacuated. Evacuation may be effected from a few other places in addition to the above, of which notice will be given.

Government leaflet delivered to householders in evacuation areas, July 1939  
[original kindly lent by interviewee Mrs D Knowles]

**WHY EVACUATION?**

There are still a number of people who ask "What is the need for all this business about evacuation? Surely if war comes it would be better for families to stick together and not go breaking up their homes?"

It is quite easy to understand this feeling, because it is difficult for us in this country to realise what war in these days might mean. If we were involved in war, our big cities might be subjected to determined attacks from the air—at any rate in the early stages—and although our defences are strong and are rapidly growing stronger, some bombers would undoubtedly get through.

We must see to it then that the enemy does not secure his chief objects—the creation of anything like panic, or the crippling dislocation of our civil life.

*One of the first measures we can take to prevent this is the removal of the children from the more dangerous areas.*

**THE GOVERNMENT EVACUATION SCHEME**

The Government have accordingly made plans for the removal from what are called "evacuable" areas (see list at the back of this leaflet) to safer places called "reception" areas, of school children, children below school age if accompanied by their mothers or other responsible persons, and expectant mothers and blind persons.

The scheme is entirely a voluntary one, but clearly the children will be much safer and happier away from the big cities where the dangers will be greatest.

There is room in the safer areas for these children; householders have volunteered to provide it. They have offered homes where the children will be made welcome. The children will have their schoolteachers and other helpers with them and their schooling will be continued.

**WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO**

**Schoolchildren**

Schoolchildren would assemble at their schools when told to do so and would travel together with their teachers by train. The transport of some 3,000,000 in all is an enormous undertaking. *It would not be possible to let all parents know in advance the place to which each child is to be sent but they would be notified as soon as the movement is over.*

If you have children of school age, you have probably already heard from the school or the local education authority the necessary details of what you would have to do to get your child or children taken away. *Do not hesitate to register your children under this*

*scheme, particularly if you are living in a crowded area. Of course it means heartache to be separated from your children, but you can be quite sure that they will be well looked after. That will relieve you of one anxiety at any rate. You cannot wish, if it is possible to evacuate them, to let your children experience the dangers and fears of air attack in crowded cities.*

**Children under five**

Children below school age must be accompanied by their mothers or some other responsible person. Mothers who wish to go away with such children should register with the Local Authority. *Do not delay in making enquiries about this.*

A number of mothers in certain areas have shown reluctance to register. Naturally, they are anxious to stay by their menfolk. Possibly they are thinking that they might as well wait and see; that it may not be so bad after all. *Think this over carefully and think of your child or children in good time. Once air attacks have begun it might be very difficult to arrange to get away.*

**Expectant Mothers**

Expectant mothers can register at any maternity or child welfare centre. For any further information inquire at your Town Hall.

**The Blind**

In the case of the blind, registration to come under the scheme can be secured through the home visitors, or enquiry may be made at the Town Hall.

**PRIVATE ARRANGEMENTS**

If you have made private arrangements for getting away your children to relatives or friends in the country, or intend to make them, you should remember that while the Government evacuation scheme is in progress ordinary railway and road services will necessarily be drastically reduced and subject to alteration at short notice. Do not, therefore, in an emergency leave your private plans to be carried out at the last moment. It may then be too late.

If you happen to be away on holiday in the country or at the seaside and an emergency arises, do not attempt to take your children back home if you live in an "evacuatable" area.

**WORK MUST GO ON**

The purpose of evacuation is to remove from the crowded and vulnerable centres, if an emergency should arise, those, more particularly the children, whose presence cannot be of any assistance.

Everyone will realise that there can be no question of wholesale clearance. *We are not going to win a war by running away.*



## APPENDIX 5

Timetable for Evacuation of Sheffield Schools 1 September 1939[Details extracted from City of Sheffield: *State of Emergency*, 11.5.39, p.2]TO NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

<u>Sheffield School</u>	<u>Entraining Station</u>	<u>Departure time</u>	<u>Detraining Station</u>
Hucklow Road	Victoria	9.30 am	Bingham
Pitsmoor CE	Victoria	9.30 am	Bingham
Newhall	Victoria	12.50 pm	Bingham
Langsett Road	Victoria	4.15 pm	Bingham
Maltby Street	Victoria	4.15 pm	Bingham
Hammerton	Darnall	8.45 am	Kimberley
Woodbourn	Darnall	10.50 am	Kimberley
Darnall Road	Darnall	1.30 pm	Kimberley
Whitby Road	Darnall	1.30 pm	Kimberley
All Saints'	Victoria	9.15 am	Kimberley
Neepsend CE	Victoria	10.0 am	Kimberley
Wincobank	Victoria	10.0 am	Kimberley
Attercliffe CE	Victoria	12 noon	Kimberley
Carbrook CE	Victoria	12 noon	Kimberley
Cathedral	Victoria	12 noon	Kimberley
Pye Bank	Victoria	8.30 am	Newark
Owler Lane	Victoria	10.40 am	Newark
Coleridge Road	Darnall	1.0 pm	Ruddington
Huntsman's Gardens	Darnall	1.0 pm	Ruddington
Darnall CE	Darnall	3.30 pm	Ruddington
Phillimore Road	Darnall	3.30 pm	Ruddington
Crofts	Victoria	4.0 pm	Ruddington
Tinsley	Victoria	4.0 pm	Ruddington
Wadsley Bridge	Victoria	4.0 pm	Ruddington
Tinsley CE	Victoria	4.0 pm	Ruddington
Maud Maxfield Deaf	All by bus	n/a	Southwell
Morley Street	Midland	2.35 pm	Southwell
Springfield	Midland	9.35 am	Southwell
Upperthorpe	Midland	11.15 am	Southwell
St Jude's (Eldon Street)	Midland	11.15 am	Southwell
Philadelphia	Midland	12.55 pm	Southwell
Pomona Street	Midland	12.55 pm	Southwell
Park	Midland	4.15 pm	Southwell
Salmon Pastures	Midland	4.15 pm	Southwell

**TO LEICESTERSHIRE**

<b><u>Sheffield School</u></b>	<b><u>Entraining Station</u></b>	<b><u>Departure time</u></b>	<b><u>Detraining Station</u></b>
Hillsborough	Midland	10.10 am	Kegworth
Bow	Midland	1.30 pm	Kegworth
Hillfoot	Midland	1.30 pm	Kegworth
Abbeydale	Heeley	8.30 am	Loughborough (LMS)
Sharrow Lane	Heeley	11.0 am	Loughborough (LMS)
Carfield	Heeley	12.40 pm	Loughborough (LMS)
Lowfield	Heeley	2.20 pm	Loughborough (LMS)
St Barnabas CE (Alderson Road)	Heeley	2.20 pm	Loughborough (LMS)
St Barnabas CE (Cecil Road)	Heeley	2.20 pm	Loughborough (LMS)
St Stephen's	Midland	9.20 am	Loughborough (LMS)
St Wilfrid's RC	Midland	9.20 am	Loughborough (LMS)
St Silas' CE	Midland	11.50 am	Loughborough (LMS)
St Vincent's RC	Midland	11.50 am	Loughborough (LMS)
Sale Memorial	Midland	11.50 am	Loughborough (LMS)
Netherthorpe	Midland	3.10 pm	Loughborough (LMS)
St Joseph's RC	Midland	3.10 pm	Loughborough (LMS)
St Mary's (Hermitage Street)	Midland	3.10 pm	Loughborough (LMS)
St Mary's (Walkley)	Midland	3.10 pm	Loughborough (LMS)
St Matthias' CE	Midland	3.10 pm	Loughborough (LMS)
St Simon's CE	Midland	3.10 pm	Loughborough (LMS)
Brightside	Victoria	2.15 pm	Loughborough (LNE)
Burngreave	Victoria	2.15 pm	Loughborough (LNE)
Attercliffe	Victoria	3.45 pm	Loughborough (LNE)
St Charles' RC	Victoria	3.45 pm	Loughborough (LNE)
Broomhall Nursery	Midland	8.45 am	Melton Mowbray
Burgoyne Road	Midland	8.45 am	Melton Mowbray
Denby Street Nursery	Midland	8.45 am	Melton Mowbray
Duchess Road	Midland	10.25 am	Melton Mowbray
Woodside	Midland	10.25 am	Melton Mowbray
Wybourn	Midland	12.05 pm	Melton Mowbray
St Marie's RC	Midland	1.45 pm	Melton Mowbray
Walkley	Midland	1.45 pm	Melton Mowbray
Hillsborough RC	Midland	3.25 pm	Melton Mowbray
St George's CE	Midland	3.25 pm	Melton Mowbray
St John's (School Street)	Midland	3.25 pm	Melton Mowbray
St John's (Cricket Road)	Midland	3.25 pm	Melton Mowbray
Carbrook	Victoria	9.0 am	Quorn & Woodhouse
Ellesmere Road	Victoria	11.40 am	Quorn & Woodhouse
Firs Hill	Victoria	12.30 pm	Quorn & Woodhouse
St Catherine's RC	Victoria	12.30 pm	Quorn & Woodhouse
Grimesthorpe	Victoria	2.45 pm	Quorn & Woodhouse

## APPENDIX 6

### Number and proportion of unaccompanied school children evacuated from certain areas on the outbreak of war

[Details extracted from R M Titmuss: *Problems of Social Policy: History of the Second World War*, pp.550,1]

<u>County Borough</u>	<u>No. of children</u>	<u>No. evacuated</u>	<u>% evacuated</u>
Newcastle	39,800	28,300	71
Gateshead	14,900	10,598	71
South Shields	12,300	3,826	31
Tynemouth	4,600	1,481	32
Sunderland	25,100	8,289	33
West Hartlepool	8,000	2,881	36
Middlesborough	16,700	5,171	31
Leeds	57,400	18,935	33
Bradford	29,900	7,484	25
Bootle	10,500	7,123	68
Liverpool	99,500	60,795	61
Wallasey	3,500	2,662	76
Birkenhead	15,100	9,350	62
Manchester	96,000	66,300	69
Salford	23,800	18,043	76
Rotherham	4,100	332	8
Sheffield	35,600	5,338	15
Derby	12,700	3,438	27
Nottingham	21,600	4,763	22
Walsall	2,000	360	18
West Bromwich	6,900	1,786	26
Smethwick	9,300	2,219	24
Birmingham	101,000	25,241	25
Coventry	15,400	3,082	20
Portsmouth	39,900	11,970	30
Southampton	30,200	11,175	37
London Administrative County	490,000	241,000	49

\*Only in a few instances outside London was the whole area under the local education authority evacuated. Most county boroughs included both neutral and evacuation zones. The figures given refer to the latter.

## APPENDIX 7

**Evacuees received in wholly reception counties of England and Wales**  
**September 1939**

[Statistics extracted from R M Titmuss: *Problems of Social Policy: History of the Second World War*, p.553]

<u>County</u>	<u>Evacuees received</u>	<u>% received to numbers expected</u>
Bedfordshire	37,163	45
Berkshire	36,832	50
Buckinghamshire	31,345	47
Cambridgeshire	14,480	34
Cornwall	2,576	3
Cumberland	22,499	51
Dorsetshire	19,807	44
Isle of Ely	8,425	40
Herefordshire	6,697	38
Huntingdonshire	8,658	52
Lincolnshire (Holland)	8,682	33
Lincolnshire (Kesteven)	1,655	7
Northamptonshire	42,529	44
Oxfordshire	21,502	43
Soke of Peterborough	2,424	15
Rutland	2,712	49
Shropshire	20,604	45
Somerset	46,532	42
Suffolk East	38,842	59
Suffolk West	8,842	38
Sussex East	72,527	53
Sussex West	41,656	51
Westmorland	9,775	55
Isle of Wight	5,201	23
Wiltshire	25,659	45
Wales ex Glamorgan & Monmouthshire	56,987	32

## APPENDIX 8

### Destinations of Sheffield Schools evacuated to Leicestershire, 1 & 2 September 1939, demonstrating how schools were scattered

[Details extracted from Leicestershire Education Committee Attendance Record of Evacuated School Parties 1939-1940, Leicester Record Office File DE.2144/269]

<u>Sending School</u>	<u>Receiving School</u>
Attercliffe Council	Rothley C of E Senior
Attercliffe Council	Rothley C of E Infants
Attercliffe Council	Swithland C of E
Attercliffe C of E	South Charnwood
Bow Council	Breedon C of E
Bow Council	Old Dalby C of E
Brightside Council	Barrow on Soar C of E
Brightside Council	Barrow on Soar Council
Brightside Council	Burton on the Wolds Council
Broomhall Nursery	Melton Mowbray C of E Infants
Burgoyne Rd	Melton Mowbray Primary.Boys
Burgoyne Rd	Melton Mowbray Primary.Girls
Burngreave	South Charnwood
Carbrook Council	Anstey Latimer St
Carbrook Council	Anstey Main St
Carbrook Council	Newtown Linford Council
Carbrook Council	Rearsby C of E
Carbrook Council	Thurcaston C of E
Carbrook Council	Thurmaston Roundhill
Denby Street Nursery	Melton Mowbray C of E Infants
Duchess Road Council	ABB Kettleby Council
Duchess Road Council	Scalford C of E
Duchess Road Council	Freeby C of E
Duchess Road Council	Stapleford & Saxby C of E
Duchess Road Council	Frisby on the Wolds C of E
Ellesmere Road	Barkby Council
Ellesmere Road	Queniborough C of E
Ellesmere Road	Syston Parochial Junior
Ellesmere Road	Syston Parochial Infants
Firs Hill Council	Mountsorrel St Peter's
Firs Hill Council	Mountsorrel Baptist School Room
Grimesthorpe Council	Baptist School Room Quorn
Grimesthorpe Council	Quorn C of E Infants
Grimesthorpe Council	Ratcliffe on the Wreake
Hillfoot Council	Castle Donington C of E
Hillfoot Council	Castle Donington Modern
Hillsborough Council	Castle Donington Modern
Hillsborough Council	Kegworth
Hillsborough RC	Melton Mowbray RC
Netherthorpe Council	Shepshed Council Senior
Netherthorpe Council	Shepshed Council Infants

Senior boys from Melton Mowbray rural area	Melton Mowbray Modern Boys
Senior girls from Melton Mowbray rural area	Melton Mowbray Modern Girls
St Catherine's RC	Sileby C of E
St Catherine's RC	Cossington
St Catherine's RC	Sileby Council
St Charles's RC	Sileby C of E
St George's C of E	Branston C of E
St George's C of E	Goadby Marwood
St George's C of E	Waltham C of E
St George's C of E	Croxton Kerrial Council
St John's Cricket Rd	Croxton Kerrial Council
St John's Cricket Rd	Eastwell C of E
St John's Cricket Rd	Eaton Council
St John's Cricket Rd	Barsby Council
St John's School St	Rotherby
St Joseph's RC	Shepshed RC Senior
St Joseph's RC	Shepshed RC Infants
St Marie's	Melton Mowbray RC
St Mary's	Shepshed Council Senior
St Mary's	Shepshed Council Infants
St Matthias	Shepshed Council Senior
St Matthias	Shepshed Council Infants
St Simon's C of E	Shepshed Council Senior
St Simon's C of E	Shepshed Council Infants
Walkley Council	Great Dalby Council
Walkley Council	Knossington C of E
Walkley Council	Somerby Council
Walkley Council	Twyford C ouncil
Walkley Council	Burrough C of E
Walkley Council	Sproxtton
Walkley Council	Saltby C of E
Woodside	Melton Mowbray Primary.Boys
Woodside	Melton Mowbray Primary.Girls
Wybourn Council	Bottesford C of E
Wybourn Council	Harby Council
Wybourn Council	Hose C of E
Wybourn Council	Long Clawson C of E
Wybourn Council	Barkestone C of E
Wybourn Council	Stathern Council
Wybourn Council	Knipton C of E
Unknown	Melton Mowbray C of E Infants
Unknown	Wymondham C of E
Unknown	Hoby C of E/Asfordby Council
Unknown	Redmile C of E

**Schools evacuated to Leicestershire but unaccounted for: Abbeydale, Carfield, Lowfield, Sharrow Lane, St Barnabas C of E, St Silas C of E, St Stephen's C of E, St Vincent's RC, St Wilfrid's RC, Sale Memorial.**

## APPENDIX 9

**Sheffield Rest Centres for Reception of Evacuees from the South of England 1944\***

<b>Eastern District</b>	Darnall Public Hall
<b>South East District</b>	Hollinsend Methodist Church
	Intake Methodist Church
	Prince of Wales Methodist Church
	Ridgeway Road Social Welfare Centre
	Woodhouse Wesley Methodist Church
<b>North East District</b>	Beck Rod Methodist Church
	Ellesmere Road Methodist Church
	Shiregreen Congregational Church
	Sicey Avenue Social Welfare Centre
<b>Western District</b>	Broompark Congregational Church
	Broomspring Congregational Church
	Crookes Wesley Hall
	Hanover Methodist Church
	St Timothy's Church, Slinn Street
<b>South West District</b>	Ann's Road Methodist Church
	Banner Cross Methodist Church
	Bents Green Methodist Church
	Carterknowle Road Methodist Church
	Dore & Totley Union Church
	Endcliffe Congregational Church
	Endcliffe Park Methodist Church
	Greystones Methodist Church
	Holmhirst Road Methodist Church
	Meersbrook Park Congregational Church
	Meersbrook Park Methodist Church
	Millhouses Methodist Church
	Norton Lees Parish Hall
	Oak Street Methodist Church
	Plantation Road Methodist Church
	Psalter Lane Methodist Church
	St Chad's Parish Hall, Abbey Lane
	St Peter's Mission Hall, Fitzroy Road
	Totley Rise Methodist Church
<b>North West District</b>	Birley Carr Methodist Church
	Hillsborough Trinity Methodist Church
	Hillsborough Wesley Methodist Church
	St Mark's Methodist Church
	Wadsley Bridge Methodist Church

\* Information taken from Sheffield Archive File CA 509/5: Lord Mayor's Secretary's files 1938-46

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Name	Year of Birth	Evacuated from	Evacuated to	Date of Interview
Mrs Ellen Baldry	1931	Sheffield	Radcliffe, Notts	16.7.97
Mrs Margaret Bennett	1933	Sheffield	Awsworth, Notts	16.3.95
Ms Sheila Clay	1932	Sheffield	Calver, Derbys	15.3.98
Ms Brenda Cox	1933	Sheffield	Awsworth, Notts	8.3.95
Ms Pamela Denniff	1935	Sheffield	Mountsorrel, Leics	16.9.94
Mrs Patricia Gamble	1930	Sheffield	Southwell, Notts	12.3.96
Mr Victor Gilbert	1926	Kent	Beccles, Suffolk	17.12.92
Mrs Pamela Grayson	1936	Sheffield	Mountsorrel, Leics	12.3.96
Mr George Green	1929	Ilford, Essex	Clitheroe, Lancs	17.12.93
Mr Alan Hall	1926	Sheffield	Newark, Notts	22.5.96
Mrs Iris Howard	1932	Sheffield	Shepshed, Leics	4.9.96
Mrs Shirley Hull	1935	Sheffield	Shepshed, Leics	4.9.96
Mrs Patricia Jones	1932	Wanstead, London	Sheffield	3.11.97
Mr Alfred Knowles	1930	Sheffield	Preston, Lancs	20.10.92
Mrs Dorothy Knowles	1930	Sheffield	Linby, Notts	21.3.95
Mr Terence Lenihan	1933	London	Hatfield, Herts	29.6.97
Mrs Mary Mabe	1928	Sheffield	Shepshed, Leics	4.9.96
Ms Gwen McDermott	1912	Romford, Essex	Sheffield	24.10.97
Mr T C Norman	1933	Sheffield	Brinsley, Notts	20.5.98
Mr John Patterson	1924	London	Weston, Somerset	18.8.92
Mrs Joan Patterson	1929	Mitcham, Surrey	Outwood, Sussex	18.8.92
Mr Douglas Pearson	1926	Sheffield	Whatton, Notts	2.7.95
Mrs Jean Perry	1930	Grimsby, Lincs	Shepshed, Leics	4.9.96
Ms Elaine Piotrowicz	1929	Sheffield	Linby, Notts	21.3.95
Mrs Frances Pullen	1937	Mitcham, Surrey	Sheffield	11.7.97
Mrs Hazel Robbins	1937	Romford, Essex	Sheffield	29.9.97
Mr James Roffey	1928	London	Horsham, Sussex	30.3.97
Mr William Rusling	1928	Sheffield	Woodborough, Notts	13.5.98
Mrs Amy Saddington	1928	Sheffield	Shepshed, Leics	4.9.96



Name	Year of Birth	Evacuated from	Evacuated to	Date of Interview
Mr George Shelley	1927	Sheffield	Loughborough, Leics	12.8.96
Mr Stanley Smith	1931	Dagenham, Essex	Newquay, Cornwall	20.12.92
Mr Geoffrey Stevens	1931	Sheffield	Perth, Australia	12.3.97
Mrs Mary Stevenson	1936	London	Sheffield	12.3.98

### **OTHER ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS**

Name	Year of Birth	Domicile 1939-45	Reason for Interview	Date of Interview
Ms Dorothy Donnelly	1934	Sheffield	Accepted evacuees	16.12.94
Mrs V L Hutchinson	1908	Shepshed	Teacher, reception area	6.9.96
Mrs Margaret Lang	1931	Scarborough	Accepted evacuees	4.3.97
Mr N E Moore	1911	Sheffield	Non-evacuee experience	15.5.98
Ms Jean Norton	1929	Sheffield	Non-evacuee experience	21.2.96
Ms Brenda Smith	1933	Sheffield	Non-evacuee experience	16.12.95
Mrs Gladys Smith	1907	Awsworth	Accepted evacuees	12.5.95
Mrs Sheila Smith	1933	Somerset	Accepted evacuees	20.12.92
Mrs Eileen Start	1931	Shepshed	Accepted evacuees	4.9.96
Mrs Betty Wiggett	1929	Sheffield	Accepted evacuees	1.9.97

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 Darnall CE Infants' School  
 Dronfield Cross Lane Junior School  
 Ellesmere Road Infants' School  
 Ellesmere Road Junior Mixed School  
 Hillsborough Boys' School  
 Hillsborough Girls' School  
 Huntsman's Gardens Infants' School  
 Huntsman's Gardens Junior Mixed School  
 Owler Lane Intermediate School  
 Owler Lane Junior Mixed School  
 Owler Lane Manual Centre  
 Philadelphia Girls' School  
 Philadelphia Infants' School  
 Pomona Street Special Centre  
 St Barnabas (Alderson Street) School  
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