Faces In The Crowd: How Similar Were The Experiences Of Kindertransport Refugees And Evacuees?

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation asserts that there is value to be gained from comparing the experiences of evacuees and Kindertransport refugees. The key debates associated with the two operations are considered and key threads are drawn between them. The use of a case study that uses semi-structured interviews involving five evacuees and six Kindertransport refugees helps to further develop an understanding of the individual experiences of the participants. The research findings suggest that the two schemes can be most appropriately compared when looking at wartime experiences of displaced children, but other factors can make it less suitable to compare pre- and post-war experiences. This dissertation suggests that such comparisons help to move towards a more nuanced understanding of civilian life during the Second World War in general and specifically the experiences of displaced children living in Britain. It further argues that this has contemporary relevance both within educational settings and for society at large.
INTRODUCTION

From 2005 to 2010 the Imperial War Museum in London held an exhibition entitled The Children’s War to coincide with the sixtieth anniversary of VE Day. It aimed to recreate the experiences of children living during the Second World War (IWM, 2010). This kind of exhibition is not uncommon; instead it supports Walvin’s (1984) suggestion that the British have an obsession with commemorating history. This is supported by Marr (2009, p.357), who states that the remembrance of the Second World War ‘still matters very much’.

The topic choice is not unusual either. Children’s experiences were entwined in the effects of the war, with the first major upheaval produced by it being the evacuation of schoolchildren and priority classes in 1939 (Donnelly, 1999). However, evacuees were not the only displaced children during the Second World War. For example, between 1938 and the outbreak of the war approximately ten thousand children, mainly Jewish, were brought to Britain from territories under Nazi occupation on the Kindertransport scheme.

This research will consider the experiences of evacuees and kindertransportees, drawing out similarities and differences between them. Those that came on the Kindertransport will be referred to as kinder or kindertransportees and the word evacuee will be restricted to British children evacuated within the British Isles.

Such research is important because the experiences of displaced children still hold resonance today. For example, a recent article in The Guardian newspaper discusses Britain’s ‘long and proud tradition’ of providing support to refugees (Packer, 2013, line 1). This is an intriguing, albeit simplistic, suggestion. It implies a British desire to help displaced people and shows a wish to commemorate this. The appropriateness of this suggestion could be considered in schools to help children develop a fuller understanding of the past. In primary schools, the programme of study for Key Stage 2 History provides an opportunity for children to study this claim in relation to the evacuees and Kindertransport refugees when studying Britain since 1930 (DFEE
and QCA, 1999). However, current learning materials aimed at primary aged children predominately focus on British evacuees, missing the chance to do this.

A key school resource used is a QCA scheme focusing on what the Second World War was like for children (QCA, 1998). Although, this is not statutory, Turner-Bisset (2005) argues that these schemes have been viewed as ready-made packages for teachers to follow. As such, it is important to see how far the scheme documents the different experiences of children during the war. Two questions in the scheme focused on the British evacuation and one relates to the experience of refugee children in general.

However, no link is drawn between refugee children and the United Kingdom, implying that the refugee experience took place elsewhere. As such, the next two questions in the scheme, focusing on the local area, imply an emphasis on children born in Britain. This is disappointing because it downplays the diversity of displaced children’s experiences in Britain during the Second World War.

Jackson (2008, p.26) provides an insight into why teaching materials may have overlooked refugees, stating that refugees ‘aggravated Britain’s problems when it had its own evacuation to do’. However, the inclusion of refugee experiences helps to move away from what Calder (1991) describes as a simplified perception of wartime experiences, focused on the country coming together as a unified whole, instead allowing for a diverse understanding to develop.

This research will consider how similar the experiences of the children were and how a comparison of the two provides a more nuanced understanding of displaced children’s experiences during the war. It sets out to see how the comparison between the two schemes supports or challenges common popular ideas surrounding them. Chapter two will consider the key debates associated with both schemes. Chapter three will outline how rich data from interviews of evacuees and kindertransportees will be triangulated with documentary evidence to develop an understanding of individual
experiences. Chapters four to six will consider the experiences within and between the operations. Finally, the conclusion will consider the research findings and indicate possible areas for further research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Different representations of the evacuee and Kindertransport experience have emphasised the schemes positive and negative aspects. However, what is perhaps of more significance is to ascertain how far a consideration of displaced children becomes more nuanced when the two operations are compared. This literature review will consider the debates associated with the evacuation and Kindertransport in turn before drawing out similarities and differences between them.

A number of historians have drawn attention to the negative aspects of the underlying organisation of the evacuation, focusing on the scheme’s lack of compulsion. Wicks (2009) states that this was designed to absolve the government of liability. Furthermore, Welshman (2010) argues that production in industrial towns had to continue, meaning that adults needed to stay to work in factories. This suggests that the priority of the government was not the welfare of the children, but freeing up their parents to work.

As such, it is not surprising that Nicholson (2000) argues the children’s experiences could be less than ideal. Negative aspects can be found throughout the operation including the organisation of the children’s journeys, their arrival in reception areas, relationships within billets and with the local community.

Brown (2009, p.27) states that the evacuees’ journeys were organised using ‘a very tight timetable’; however schools did not keep to the timings resulting in chaos when the first evacuation took place in 1939. The problems were exacerbated when the children arrived in reception areas due to a lack of planning (Smith, 2000). Jackson (2008) states that a common cause of trauma here was the fear of
being separated from siblings, as evacuees were usually selected by foster parents in an ad hoc manner in public meeting places.

After being allocated, Welshman (1998) states that the experiences of evacuees in their billets could be unsettling. Arguments erupted due to social and economic tensions. Jackson (2008) suggests that some hosts, regardless of their circumstances, felt that the government should pay all costs. This could lead to resentment towards the evacuees sent to them.

A contentious social issue raised by hosts focused on the evacuees suffering from nocturnal enuresis. This was most likely caused by the strange surroundings the children found themselves in; although Smith (2000) states that the contemporary explanation suggested it was a symptom of the evacuees’ poor upbringing. However, Jackson (2008) has suggested that social prejudices went the other way, with many evacuees arguing that their billets were dirty.

Within the wider community, Rose (2003) argues that the division between country and town living formed an important focus. Jackson (2008, p.41) states that some feared evacuees would damage ‘the social fabric of British life’. Wicks (2009) supports this suggesting that a surge of evacuees was unnerving for local children; although he states animosities soon dampened and friendships developed.

By the start of 1945 only London and Hull had not been declare safe enough for evacuees to return to. However, Jackson (2008) states that going home was sometimes as difficult as the initial departure had been. Brown (2009) agrees suggesting that although the system saved lives, it had long lasting social and educational ramifications.

However, there is an acceptance by many historians that, despite evidence of negative experiences, the evacuation had positive features. It has been argued that the operation was primarily conducted because it was likely that air raids on cities would be greater in this war than previous ones, so evacuating the children would reduce casualties and help maintain moral (Mackay, 1999;
Jackson, 2008). Despite some reservations about the organisation of the evacuation, Welshman (1998, p.32) states that on the whole the planning of the operation was a ‘logistical success’.

Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that many children enjoyed the experience. Indeed, Wicks (2009) argues that children were not always re-billeted due to disputes; instead some parents moved them because they felt they were getting too attached to their new lives. This viewpoint suggests an extreme of Mackay’s (1999) argument that the majority of evacuees made the best of their situation, maybe because they wanted to live up to propaganda stereotypes.

Gardiner (2010, p.366) supports this, stating that the war could not have been won if ‘unity and resolution of purpose’ had not been shown by the majority of the population. Furthermore, she has previously argued that the overall impact of the evacuation must be viewed as positive because the mixing of social classes ‘woke up the nation’ to poverty and put children’s needs at the top of government priorities (Gardiner, 2005, p.203). This viewpoint is supported by Welshman (2010, p.4) who states that the evacuation had a ‘significant impact’ on the development of the welfare state after the war.

It is now necessary to consider the debates associated with the Kindertransport, whilst considering how these compare to the evacuees’ experiences. There has traditionally been a positive interpretation of the operation, which came about as a result of Kristallnacht (Norton, 2010). This government organised pogrom resulted in widespread looting of Jewish property and the murder of approximately one hundred Jews (Dawidowicz, 1990). Panayi (2010) states that this event highlighted the need to support refugees fleeing from the Third Reich. However, this positive interpretation has been questioned (Sharples, 2004; Panayi, 2010). Due to the complex, interlinked nature of these debates it is necessary to consider the positive and negative features of different aspects in turn.

A controversial issue centres on the fact that the Kindertransport made special provision only for children (Kleinman and Moshenskha, 2004;
Dwork and Van Pelt, 2009). This is in contrast to the evacuation, which encouraged mothers to accompany children under the age of five (Jackson, 2008). It is important to consider why there was this contrast of policy.

Firstly, Stone (2003) states that across British society anti-Semitism existed to various degrees. Sharples (2012, p.22) agrees, arguing that although Kristallnacht compelled politicians to act, some believed that the Jews must have ‘done something to warrant the treatment’ received. Secondly, paradoxical as it may seem, it is important not to over-emphasise religion when discussing the Kindertransport. For example, Dippel (1996) states that German Jews were highly assimilated with one in four marrying gentiles. This caused concerns for potential host countries who were afraid of spies infiltrating their countries disguised as refugees (Wasserstein, 1999; Schaffer, 2005). Adding to this, there was a fear about adults taking British jobs (Holmes, 1990; Fast, 2011). Due to these reservations, Winder (2004) states that this was a period of severely restricted immigration.

London (2000, p.121) argues that this situation meant that the organisers of the Kindertransport were abandoning the parents with ‘little prospect of survival’. This is supported by Kushner (2006) who argues that the operation denied the children’s right to their natural parents. However, other historians have challenged this viewpoint, suggesting that it was not possible to know at the time how far the Nazi regime would go (Rubinstein, 1997; Andrews, 2013). Furthermore, Grenville (2012) suggests that parents were not excluded any more than other adult Jews and, although it was not easy to get a visa, many of the parents who survived managed to emigrate before the war.

Furthermore, it was not necessarily easy for children to be accepted onto the scheme because although the number of visas available for children was unlimited the scheme had to be privately funded. Gopfert (2004) states that this was because the government wanted to avoid the impression of an open door policy (Gopfert, 2004). This shows
another distinction between the two schemes; the evacuation was intended for all children but this was not possible for the Kindertransport.

Curio’s (2004) study of the Viennese Jewish community provides insights regarding requirements that the children had to meet. Guarantors were able to set individual requirements about the type of child they would sponsor to bring to this country. These requirements included particular ages and gender. Curio (2004) suggests that children with special educational needs had no hope of becoming a Kinder. However, Fast’s (2011) broader study challenges this; although it admits it was difficult for them to be accepted.

Unlike the evacuation, specialist trains were not used, with the number of Kinder on each transport varying greatly (Fast, 2011). One reason for this fluctuation was that the scheme could not keep up with demand due to monetary constraints (Wassterstein, 1999). The operation was cancelled at the start of the war. In total it probably saved about ten per cent of Jewish children living in Germany and Austria in 1939 (Grenville, 2012). However, Kushner’s (2004) previous argument should still be borne in mind; a focus on numbers saved does not do justice to the trauma of separation. As Grenville (2012, p.10) explains the children escaped to a country:

very different from that in which they had been growing up, and many of them never entirely overcame the shock.

The experience of separation was made worse by a general lack of social preparation to support the children before their departure. This may seem unacceptable today; however Hammel (2012, p.142) states child rearing has ‘changed dramatically’ in the last seventy-five years and it was quite common for children to be brought up outside of the immediate family.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the British evacuation had been preceded by the evacuees regularly practising what they would do when they were evacuated (Wicks, 2009). This difference is due to a
clear distinction between the schemes; one was organised by a government and one was organised to escape from one. As Kroger (2004) explains, the Kinder were escaping from a country with rapidly increasing anti-Semitism and therefore public scenes of preparation were best avoided.

At the time it was believed that the Kinder were ‘temporary immigrants’ who would subsequently emigrate (Grenville, 2012, p.4). As such, most of them were housed in reception camps upon arrival in Britain (Gopert, 2004). In these the Kinder experienced a system similar to evacuees, with foster-parents selecting children to billet (Fast, 2011). However, the RCM saw this as a humiliating process and took over allocation wherever possible, demonstrating a genuine concern for the children’s welfare (Gopfert, 2004).

When they were allocated to families, Kleinman and Moshenska (2004) argue that social background played a major factor. Indeed, they suggest that this was the most important factor influencing the experiences of Kindertransportees, which mirrors the experiences of evacuees’.

This has been supported by Sharples (2004) who argues that British life offered a much higher standard of living to the children. However, Fast (2011) has challenged this, stating that many of the children came from upper middle-class families and class divides in England reminded them of Nazi persecution. Although, she stresses the difference between social stigmatisation in England and the dehumanization experienced in Germany meant many regarded their loss of status as a ‘small price to pay for their freedom’ (Fast, 2011, p.50).

In addition to class, fear of anti-Semitism was a when factor in placing children with families. It meant that a principle of dispersal was used to avoid a large group of refugees being placed together, as this could have resulted in the operation being stopped (Wasserstein, 1999; Curio, 2004). This is in direct contrast to the experience of evacuees, who were usually billeted with their schools. Brown (2009) states
larger groups of evacuees billeted together usually had the most positive experiences. Timms (2012) supports this and suggests that the evacuee experience is analogous to going to a boarding-school, whereas the Kinder’s experience was very isolating.

An additional factor influencing the Kinder was their age. There has been debate about how this affected their experiences. Kroger (2004) argues that young children, who had a limited understanding about what was happening, regarded their rescue as a form of punishment. Whereas, Fast (2011) has suggested that many of the older children were ready; although they still suffered anguish due to the responsibility they felt towards their younger siblings. Furthermore, after the war was declared, those Kinder that had reached the age of sixteen were interned as ‘enemy aliens’ (Gopfert, 2004, p.23). However, this policy was reversed within a year and Grenville (2012) has suggested that many were too young for it to affect them, so it had a limited effect on the operation as a whole. As such, Barnett’s (2004) earlier work, which suggested that the age of a child cannot be used to neatly categorise experiences, still holds true.

Fast (2011) has argued that the experiences of the Kinder varied greatly, depending on whether they had been guaranteed to live with a specific family or if they were billeted in reception camps. Despite the efforts of the RCM, numerous foster parents requested that the Kinder were billeted elsewhere; although Gopfert (2004) notes that it was rare for the children to request this themselves. It is important to consider why the Kinder were less likely than evacuees to request relocation.

Firstly, the war made it difficult for the RCM to contact the Kinder (Gopfert, 2004). Secondly, Barnett (2004, p.103) suggests that Kindetransportees needed to have contact with at least one member of their family and it is possible that they could have been frightened of having ‘further separation inflicted on them’ by losing this final contact. Finally, Sharples (2004, p.26) argues that concerns about relatives meant children ‘put a brave face on’, which meant they stayed put to
reassure their parents. This must have been difficult for the children as they faced a dilemma between assimilating into British society or maintaining their foreign identity.

The preceding analysis has considered the experiences of evacuees and Kindertransportees. It has discussed similarities and differences between the operations, why they were developed and how they affected the children’s experiences. Previous research by Timms (2012, p.137) has suggested that such a comparison can be difficult because the operations are ‘two fundamentally different paradigms’. However, this underplays the subtleties of individual experiences and misses an opportunity to consider why analogous features of the operations played out in different ways.

Learning from the past requires it to be encountered in ‘all its messiness’, instead of in a manner ‘that’s been shaped and shaded so that inspiring lessons will emerge’ (Novick, 1999, p.261). As such, Donnelly (1999) has argued that there must be an avoidance of generic trends, which skew away from the complexity of wartime experiences. Indeed Barnett (2012, p.169) suggests that ‘people suffer in very individual ways’. As such, this study suggests that artificially separating the two operations reduces the understanding that can be developed about displaced children’s experiences during the Second World War.

The following chapters will focus on the individual testimonies of evacuees and Kindertransportees. The reasons for this and the approach undertaken will be considered in the following chapter.

**METHODS AND METHODOLOGY**

This research project explored the experiences of five evacuees and six Kindertransportees in order to both consider their experiences and draw out diversity within them. This case study approach allows for the development of ‘fuzzy generalisations’, tentative conclusions regarding the experiences of the two groups (Bassey, 1999).
The main research approached used was semi-structured interviews. As such, it is necessary to consider the implications surrounding the use of oral data. Tosh (2010, p.314) points out that oral sources have an ‘inescapable element of hindsight about them’, meaning that the interviewees’ experiences have been modified and influenced by their subsequent lives.

However, Peniston-Bird (2009) suggests that hindsight can be a useful feature of oral evidence because opinions that may have been unacceptable in the past may become acceptable to express in the future. She argues that discarding oral evidence as subjective overlooks the fact that its value lies in the personal experiences it illuminates. Hence, why Tosh (2010, p.313) suggests that it can bring ‘the past vividly to life’; although he concedes that the interviewing process affects how the past is recalled.

To help deal with this and ensure a consistent approach, the researcher conducted all of the interviews. Three of the interviews were telephone based and seven were face-to-face. These were all recorded, transcribed and coded by the researcher to draw out key threads (Appendix V). The final participant’s data is drawn from a public speech they gave and notes the researcher made on this. There does not appear to have been any discernible difference between the interview methods used as all participants were keen to provide their positive and negative experiences.

Initially the researcher planned to focus on a particular locality. However, it was difficult to find participants who were billeted in the same area, especially Kinder, as this scheme actively discouraged this. As such, no set locality has been made the focus of this study. Furthermore, some of the participants were billeted with their parents, whereas others were not. However, as the focus of this research is on the experiences of the interviewees the exploration of different settings and setups will not detract from this, instead it will help to widen the diversity from which to draw ‘fuzzy generalisations’ instead of statistically significant conclusions.
The use of interviews requires the consideration of ethical issues. The BERA (2011) guidelines have been developed for educational research, but they can apply equally to research in other fields. Before taking part in the research, interviewees had to be able to provide voluntary informed consent, which means that they must understand the purpose of the research and use to this to decide if they wish to take part. Alongside this, participants have the right to withdraw at any time and they must be made aware of this right. This was explained to them and they were provided with a letter for their own reference (Appendix III).

Due to the nature of the research project, a key consideration from the BERA (2011, p.7) guidelines is the minimising of any ‘sense of intrusion’. To help to avoid this, the interviews were semi-structured, allowing for key areas to be compared whilst allowing the participants to develop the discussion in a matter they felt comfortable to proceed (Appendix IV).

Furthermore, all participants in the research project are anonymous. However, some of the interviewees have written and contributed to seminal collections of testimonies making it difficult to disguise their identities. The interviewees who were affected understood and appreciated this situation. To ensure partial anonymity, the interviewees have not been named; although they may be possible to identify through reference to their publications. This approach has been used for two main reasons. Firstly, even though many of the interviewees were happy to be cited in text, preserving their anonymity allows the focus to be on what they have said. Secondly, as Summerfield (1998, p.26) explains, this approach protects them from any embarrassment the ‘mediation between their words and “the public” might cause’.

Indeed, care needs to be taken to avoid imposing our own cultural and social attitudes on to someone’s past experiences. By accounting for the participants’ own perception of themselves a greater appreciation of their experiences can be developed. Woods and Raikes (2008)
explain that selection is itself an act of production, which can alter the original meaning of something. As such, historians need to be careful in what they accredit and disaccredit in order to develop their arguments.

To avoid doing this the interview data will be triangulated with documentary sources to develop a broader understanding of different experiences. Peniston-Bird (2009) suggests that such an approach is effective because it allows ideas to be cross-referenced in order to produce a more rounded understanding. Autobiographies were used to gain a further insight into the Kinder’s experiences. For the evacuees a school log book and Education Committee minutes from Shropshire County Council (SCC) were analysed. Shropshire was chosen because it was seen as a particularly suitable area to evacuate children to so it can be somewhat considered as a model location to compare different experiences to (Jackson, 2008).

The use of documents was somewhat limited for several reasons. Firstly, data protection reduces the files that researchers have access to and in terms of the Kindertransport those that are available are scant (Hammel, 2012). Secondly, due to the rich data collected from the interviews it was decided that they would be the primary focus of this project. An examination of this research will be the focus of the following chapters.
“AUSWANDERUNG” – A JOURNEY INTO A BETTER LIFE?

This chapter will consider the early experiences of the participants of the two schemes. It will focus on their lives before leaving, their journey to their new homes and their initial reactions.

Before leaving home the evacuees in this sample lived in London. However, their impressions of their life before leaving varied. RW and DW were five when they were evacuated, making them the youngest evacuees in the sample. Their memories focused on activity related to the war, probably because both were evacuated after the Blitz had started. DW recalls doodlebugs landing close to her home. These started being dropped in 1944. Given her age at evacuation, it is surprising that DW did not leave earlier because she would have been in evacuation category B, where mothers were encouraged to go with their children (Jackson, 2008). However, DW’s recollection that her father had to persuade her mother to evacuate suggests her mother was hesitant for them to go.

The oldest evacuee in the sample, aged thirteen, lived in Barnet. Her recount again focuses on the effects of the war before being evacuated stating that ‘the air raids… got worse and worse’. However, yet again, it seems that IB’s parents were hesitant to leave. This may have been because they lived in relative comfort in a ‘modern semi-detached house’. IB found the bombing a terrifying experience and recalls they finally left when a ‘bomb landed very near’ and damaged their roof.

The other two evacuees, RL aged eight and EL aged seven, have few memories of the war before leaving. Instead both focused on their living conditions, RL describing his as ‘almost Dickensian’. The lack of experience of bombing may be because their accounts suggest they were evacuated early in the war. EL said that she knew she was going but ‘we didn’t know if we were going to go that day or not’. This links in with the national situation at the time, as Brown (2009) states the government had been urged to start evacuating, but held off to avoid the impression it was preparing for war.
The Kinder’s earlier experiences are similar to many of the evacuees, in that they show a gradual worsening of the situation. However, instead of feeling comforted by being at home there was a feeling of growing isolation from the rest of the community due to anti-Semitism. For example, RB, aged four, spent a lot of time with her Christian grandmother and HR, aged eight, spent six weeks in the summer of 1938 in Landek. This helped to shelter them from the violence; however they could still sense the separation between their families and the rest of the population.

The older Kinder had vivid memories of the worsening conditions, especially after *Kristallnacht*, which BG described as ‘a turning point’. RD, aged ten at the time of departure, recalls ‘shivering with cold and panic’ in the back of a car whilst her house was attacked and father taken away (David, 2003, p.42).

The journey to their new homes is another area of marked difference for the two schemes. The three evacuees who were billeted with their parents each had limited memories of the journey, with RW’s suggestion that it was ‘not a problem’ repeated by each of them. The journey was also positive for the evacuees who went without their parents, for example RL remembers having his ‘head out of the train most of the time’ to take in his new surroundings.

In contrast to the evacuees, the journey was not pleasant for the Kinder, a fact recalled by all of them. Each journey was filled with worry, understood in greater depths by the older children, but HR describes how it ‘penetrated to the younger ones’. However, there is also a reoccurring memory of the relief when crossing the border into Holland. Both RD and IW describe happily receiving food from Dutch people.

When arriving in the reception areas the evacuees had a range of different experiences. Those that were with their parents went straight to their billets, suggesting it had been pre-arranged. Indeed, IB recalls that her ‘mother had written to her second cousin’ to make private arrangements. For the children evacuated alone the experience was
different. Like many evacuees nationally, RL remembers being selected by his foster parents (Wicks, 2009). He recalled:

I was the last one to be picked they had already chosen my brother... and they came back and got me.

Although these children were not billeted with their parents they still had contact with their former lives. For example, RL was evacuated with the rest of his school to Lincolnshire, billeted with his brother, with his sister billeted within the same village. Similarly, EL was billeted with her brother the first time she was evacuated and then a friend the second time.

Unlike the evacuees, only one Kinder in the sample went with any members of their family. RB was accompanied by her mother and brother; although the former had to return to Germany. HR had initially stayed with his aunt and uncle, but was evacuated at the start of the war, and did not really get to know them. In total, four of the Kinder were guaranteed to stay with a family, whereas BG and RD were to stay in hostels. Overall, the Kinder in the sample experienced more billets that the evacuees.

The initial impression of both the evacuees and Kinder was generally positive. For evacuees, such as RL, it was ‘such a change’ to be in the countryside. However, DW was not impressed recalling that the ‘house was dirty and not what I was used to’. For the Kinder the situation had not sunk in, for example RB and HR saw it as a temporary measure, almost an adventure. The presence of her brother made RB feel safe because if he ‘didn’t get upset...then that was okay’. HW and IW both recall meeting their guardians and the kindness they experienced. For those in hostels the reaction was more negative. BG stated that he ‘learnt a lesson’ the first night when his hot-water bottle froze in the cold. Furthermore, RD’s first hostel ‘depressed’ her because it provided her with her first proper glimpse of the sea, which seemed like a wall blocking her way home.
Overall, did the early experiences of the Kinder and evacuees suggest a journey into a better life? For both groups there had been a worsening of experiences before leaving home. However, the evacuees remained part of their local communities and it can be seen that their parents were hesitant for them to leave.

Conversely, the Kinder had experienced a gradual isolation from the rest of the community that was getting worse. This difference between a sense of togetherness experienced by the evacuees and isolation experienced by the Kinder can be seen further in how the different children travelled to their billets; all of the evacuees went with a family member but the Kinder usually went alone. This meant the evacuees had access to a support system that most of the Kinder transportees did not have. However, both groups generally had positive initial impressions; although the Kinder’s reactions were more hesitant, especially from those who had experienced direct anti-Semitism. At this stage it was unclear for both groups if their life away from home would be better. As such, the next chapter will consider how experiences changed during the war.
EXPERIENCING A NEW LIFE – FILLED WITH OPPORTUNITIES OR TRAUMA?

The purpose of this chapter is to consider the experiences of the evacuees and Kinder once they had time to settle in to their new homes. It focuses on school life, good memories, bad memories, relationships within the local community and links with home.

DW recalls that her mother did not allow her to attend school; although she was not sure why this was. The SCC (n.d) minutes provide an insight into why this may have been the case, stating that ‘children under five… were to be excluded from school’ when air raids started. A similar situation may have applied to DW.

The rest of the evacuees did attend school. EL states that schooling was ‘more or less normal’; however the war affected these experiences. For example, several evacuees recalled spending half of the day on nature walks due to their schools being overcrowded. This was an experience recalled in the Highley School Log Book as a way to allow all children to continue to receive schooling (Highley School, n.d). Furthermore, RL recalls that the curriculum was influenced by the war, for example he wrote ‘essays… on the war’.

Like the evacuees, school was an important part of the Kinder’s experience and it was generally a positive affair. However, their memories focused on the pastoral side of school, whereas the evacuees had focused on school routine. This difference could be because of Grenville’s (2012) suggestion that the Kinder were in a strange country and primarily needed emotional support. RB describes going to a Quaker boarding school as analogous to ‘coming out of hell into paradise’ due to the traumatic treatment she had suffered in her first billet. This positive viewpoint was shared by other Kinder, for example HR states his school was sensitive in anticipating the needs of a refugee. When schooling was negative for the Kinder again the experiences related back to pastoral needs. For example, BG attended an agricultural training school and described it as similar to going to ‘borstal’.
Schooling was a way that many of the evacuees came into contact with the local community. RL states there was some initial tension, but this settled down. This supports earlier research by Wicks (2009, p.86) which suggested that nationally there was a short-lived fear by local children that evacuees were an ‘invading army’. For IB, her experiences with the local community focused on interacting with other evacuees as the village she was billeted in contained few local children. The mix of evacuees caused some problems as she ‘couldn’t understand what they were saying’; although she recalls that the children adapted and got on well. As such, EL’s explanations that ‘everyone... mixed in together’ eventually applied to all of the evacuees who went to school.

Similarly, schooling provided a means of connecting with the local community for the Kinder. Language issues were also present, but instead of becoming accustomed with a different accent the Kinder had to learn a new language. Their success in doing so seems to have affected their experiences in the local community. Three of the four Kinder that attended school learnt English quickly and had positive memories of interacting with local children. RD, on the other hand, was billeted in a hostel where the children only spoke German, which made it harder to integrate into the local community and made her feel isolated.

On balance, the evacuees’ memories were positive, with the exception of DW. EL summed up the general mood suggesting that it was ‘more or less a normal life but placed somewhere else’. Many of the good memories related to playing games in the countryside and enjoying food. For example, IB recalled enjoying playing on the ‘spoil tips’ from the local coal mine.

Like the evacuees, most of the Kinder’s positive experiences related to their local environment. The participants focused on everyday life experiences and their integration into the local community. For example, HW attended a refugee club in Glasgow which provided ‘some sort of connection’ with his past before he integrated into the
local community. A similar experience was found by HR. One of the people he was billeted with took him to the Variety Theatre, which introduced him to British culture.

Some of the evacuees had negative experiences in their billets. Interestingly, these experiences were more common with those who were billeted with their parents. DW states there were tensions between her family and the foster family, which she thinks was due to ‘the man [being]... interested in my mum’. The experience did not last long and they soon went home. RW also experienced some tension within his billet, having a fight with one of the family’s children because he had fallen out with RW’s brother.

For some of the Kinder, the location ensured that their ‘physical well-being was assured’, but not their emotional needs (David, 2003, p.58). Like positive memories, bad ones were particularly attached to certain places. RB found her first billet distressing due to constantly being punished by her foster-mother, which seemed to confirm her belief that she was sent away from home for being naughty.

Moving to a different location could create distress. HR had settled into his new life in Blackpool, when he was forced to move back to his aunt and uncle’s and he found it ‘extremely difficult’ to settle into a ‘different kind of environment’. For RD it was not moving to a hostel in a different location that caused problems, but the continued running of it by the same matrons who she felt had ‘got a bit sick of us’.

The evacuees have recollections of making links with people back home. Many of them remembered sending letters home, or in the case of RW receiving a telephone call from his father. Alongside these occasions, RL remembers going home for the summer holidays. These experiences were generally happy occasions; although the importance placed on them is reduced by those who went with parents, probably because they had their main contact from home with them. However, contacting home could be distressing. EL recalled that her parents’ visit was traumatic and caused her to return and stay at home.
As with the evacuees, a concern for the Kinder was contact with their parents and, again, the experiences varied. For some this was a cause for concern. Both RD and BG found it difficult waiting for letters from home. The presence of war added to these difficulties as they could not contact their parents directly (David, 2011).

Paranoia surrounding the war resulted in HW being accused of trying to correspond with the enemy when trying to contact home. As such, he was detained as a category A enemy alien. However, HW states that this became a ‘high powered experience’ due to the opportunity to interact with intellectual internees. This instance supports Donnelly’s (1999) suggestion that people tried to make the best of unfortunate situations and live up to propaganda stereotypes.

For other Kinder, connections with home formed less of a priority. HR assumed that life back in Vienna ‘would be pretty well the same as in Britain’, so he did not worry about hearing from them. However, his foster-family in Blackpool did keep links with Austria alive, for example his German speaking foster-parent played Germanic Christmas songs on a piano. Likewise, RB was not overly concerned with links back home because to her the farm she was staying on was her home and she assumed her mother was dead.

Overall, it is clear that neither the evacuees nor Kinder had purely positive or negative experiences during the war; instead they all experienced a mixture of feelings. The Kinder’s experiences focused more on integration than the evacuees. The evacuees interacted with the local community, but maintained separate identities, as can be seen by RL’s discussion of nicknames shared between the evacuees and local children. However, for the Kinder there was a stronger desire to integrate into the local community, probably due to their past trauma. The next chapter will consider how the end of the war affected the experiences of the two groups.
REFLECTING ON THE EXPERIENCE – MORE PAIN THAN GAIN?

This chapter will consider the impact of the Kindertransport and evacuation on its participants after the war. It will focus on events immediately after the end of the war and any lasting effects the participants felt their experiences had on them. This latter point will help to develop an understanding of their experiences in a broader context.

All of the evacuees had returned home by the end of the war or within a few weeks of it finishing. A sense of relief permeates their recollections. For example, IB described the ending of the war as a ‘feeling of lightening’, even though it took a ‘long time... to get back to normal’ as it meant that the immediate threat of danger was over. This sense of relief was compounded by a sense of gratitude. RL reflects that he ‘did all sorts of things’ that he would not have done, for example learning the names of different types of cows. Even those who had found the experience unpleasant reflected with appreciation, with DW stating ‘I was glad I was living where I lived’ and not in the house she was billeted in.

Unlike the evacuees, the Kinder’s experience at the end of the war was often tinged with sadness. RD states that she was ‘absolutely thrilled that the war was over’; however she was one of three participants who discovered that their parents had died in the Holocaust. A recent survey on the Kindertransport suggests that sixty per cent of all Kindertransportees lost both parents (Hammel, 2012, p.150). BG summed up the natural reaction to finding this out, stating that the ‘wounds will never heal’.

All except one of the Kinder stayed in Britain after the end of the war. RB’s parents had survived and came to collect her, but she states that it was impossible to ‘pick up a relationship’ that had been severed for the previous ten years (Barnett, 2010, p.12). Being repatriated to Germany against her will was her ‘worse memory’ and was as if she was undertaking the Kindertransport in reverse.
For other Kinder the end of the war was not as traumatic. HW was relieved to be reunited with his mother and spent the years after the war enjoying life and developing a catering business.

In terms of the longer term impact of the experience over their lifetimes the evacuees were positive. EL stated that ‘those were the days’. This may be seen as being rose-tinted; however it came from the belief that it helped her deal with adversity rather than suggesting that the entire experience was positive. A similar view was held by RL, who suggested that ‘possibly a legacy of being evacuated [is]… taking what comes’. IB stated a similar sentiment, but applied it to the wider effects of the war instead of solely crediting the evacuation for developing this outlook.

However, even for those Kinder who had been ‘very happy to be here’, the impact of the experience could still cause problems in later years. IW states that she has been ‘very apprehensive’ about visiting Germany since the war; although the experience whilst being there has been positive. HR also found the experience of going to Germany important in coming to terms with his experiences on the Kindertransport. Whilst there on military duty after the war he experienced a ‘turning point’ when he saw the reaction to a colliery disaster making him feel that people there ‘weren’t that different’. These visits to Germany have been part of a consideration of identity. BG sums up what many of the Kinder feel, stating:

I do not look upon Germany as my home country, only as the country of my birth (Grunberg, 2003, p.149).

This was supplemented by a desire to not be seen as a foreigner within Britain, a view shared by IW who recalled lambasting someone for calling her German, replying ‘I’m Scottish by adoption’.

Overall, the experiences of the participants after the war suggests an agreement with Timms’ (2012) suggestion that it took longer for the Kindertransportees to come to terms with their experiences than the evacuees. This can even be seen with some of the Kinder who had
generally positive wartime experiences as they tried to link pre-war, wartime and post-war experiences together. This kind of self-reflection was also carried out by the evacuees, but the conclusions regarding their experiences generally seem to have been reached earlier and are more positive. The final chapter will expand on these issues to consider how similar the experiences of the two groups were over the three periods.
CONCLUSION

This research set out to explore how similar the experiences of evacuees and Kindertransport refugees were and how comparing them affects our understanding of displaced children’s experiences during the Second World War. This conclusion will consider three questions: What does the data suggest about the diversity of experiences within and between the groups? What implications does this have for future research? What implications does this have for teachers?

It is important to appreciate that the data used to draw conclusions focuses on a small case study, primarily drawing on eleven interviews as data. The research approach clearly meant that the participants are not fully representative of all of the children who came on the Kindertransport or who were evacuated. Indeed, the willingness of the participants to be part of the project may skew the research towards a particular perspective. However, the range of different backgrounds and experiences allows for some very cautious ‘fuzzy generalisations’ to be developed. These will now be considered in terms of pre-arrival, evacuation and post-war experiences.

The pre-arrival experiences of the evacuees were predominately focused on the economic conditions they had grown up in and memories of air raids. For the Kinder each testimony focuses on anti-Semitic tension, with it dominating the accounts of the older children. This supports Fast (2011) who suggested the older children were aware of the growing anti-Semitism and ready to leave.

During the evacuation period there is a mentioning of negative aspects by both groups; however these were usually discussed in a positive way by the participants. As such, both groups seem to be trying to live up to the ‘propaganda stereotype’ of wartime spirit (Mackay, 1999, p.146). However, there is also support for Hammel’s (2012, p.146) suggestion that on a daily basis they were ‘pursuing relatively ordinary lives’, which can equally be applied to both groups.
In the testimonies there is a general aim to integrate into the local community, especially the Kinder ones. The presence of relatives and ability to return home allowed the evacuees to maintain more of their pre-evacuation identity. This may suggest the reason why the evacuees’ post-war experiences focus on memories that relate to the time as a whole, as the boundaries between the evacuation process and their home lives were often blurred.

However, for the Kinder there was a clear distinction between the different stages. It is the transition points, the build-up and aftermath of the war, which mark the clearest divergence between the schemes. For example, the evacuees were part of the wider public who celebrated the end of the Second World War, whereas for the Kinder it would mark the end of the Holocaust as well (Gopfert, 2004).

It was when the horrors of the Holocaust became evident that the Kindertransport started to become inextricably linked to it; although this created problems for the Kinder as many became racked by survivors’ guilt (Gopfert, 2004). Neville’s (1999, p.2) suggestion that people not affected by ‘the sheer horror of the Holocaust’ cannot imagine the suffering holds true. However, such sentiment should not be retrospectively applied to events that happened before its horror came to light. The point, therefore, is that the experience of the Kinder during wartime should not be evaluated with the hindsight of the Holocaust.

A ‘fuzzy generalisation’ from this research suggests that comparisons during the wartime years are pertinent as there are many areas of joint comparison, for example experiences in the local community and at school. However, during the transition points into and out of the war other factors, such as knowledge of the Holocaust, become more prominent and make comparisons less pertinent. As such, this research challenges Timms’ (2012) suggestion that the schemes should be seen point-blank as ‘fundamentally different paradigms’. This is because this does not take account of the diversity of experiences and how they changed over time.
Instead, this research suggests that there is a variety of experiences within and between the schemes and comparing these allows for a richer understanding of children’s experiences during the Second World War. As such, it supports Barnett’s (2012) suggestion that experiences depend on individuals, not overarching schemes.

Both this case study and Timms (2012) focused on relatively small samples and, as such, a larger research project would be useful to ascertain how far it is suitable to compare wartime experiences and how this affects our understanding of displaced children’s wartime experiences.

This project, and future research, can have direct implications for teaching. Embedded in the Teachers’ Standards (DfE, 2012, p.7) is a requirement for teachers to ‘address misunderstandings’. This research can be used to help children develop a better insight into displaced children’s experiences in Britain during the Second World War. This will support their understanding of the Key Stage Two strand that focuses on Britain since the 1930s (DFEE and QCA, 1999).

However, these experiences do not just provide an opportunity to understand the past, but the present and future as well. Ofsted (2011) discusses the central value of history in enhancing pupils’ social responsibility. The consideration and comparison of different groups within a community is an excellent way to do this not only to highlight the differences, but also the sometimes surprising similarities that can reveal our shared humanity.
APPENDICES

Appendix I: Dissertation Supervision Log
Appendix II: Ethics form completed for the interviews undertaken in this research.
Appendix III: Letter sent to interviewees outlining key ethical considerations.
Appendix IV: Interview schedule used with all interviewees as a starting point for discussion.
Appendix V: Example of an Interview Schedule: interview prompts for evacuees and Kindertransport refugees.
Appendix III: Letter sent to interviewees outlining key ethical considerations.

Dear [Name],

Thank you for taking part in my undergraduate dissertation research, undertaken as part of my BA (Hons) Primary Education degree at the University of Northampton.

My dissertation research aims to compare the experiences of Kindertransport refugees with British evacuees during the Second World War. As part of this research I am interviewing a sample of Kindertransport refugees and British evacuees. Thank you for your interest in being a part of this sample.

As part of the interviewing process I will be using a voice recorder to record the interview. This recording will remain confidential and will only be used as part of this dissertation and any publications which subsequently arise from it.

Throughout the entire process your identity will remain totally anonymous, unless you explicitly state that you want your name used in the project. You have the right to withdraw from the process at any time. After the research has been completed I will send you a summary of the research findings, if you wish.

If you have any questions or queries please do not hesitate to contact me by email [redacted] or telephone [redacted].

Once again I thank you for your time and participation in this research.

Yours sincerely,

Chad McDonald
Appendix IV: Interview schedule used with all interviewees as a starting point for discussion.

Interview questions and prompts

1. What was life like before you left home?

2. How old were you when you were evacuated / sent on the Kindertransport?

3. Tell me about your journey: What are your memories?

4. What was your initial reaction like when you arrived at your new home?
   - Place(s)
   - People
   - Environment

5. What are your memories of your life whilst being evacuated?
   - Your new home(s)
   - Your school(s)
   - Other children/people in the community
   - Good/bad memories
   - Concerns/links with home

6. What were your strongest memories after the war?
7. How far has it influenced you since the war?

8. How old were you when the war ended?

9. Have you got anything else you would like to add?
APPENDIX V: Example of an Interview Schedule: interview prompts for evacuees and Kindertransport refugees.

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT (DW)

Key

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CM</td>
<td>Interviewer speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DW</td>
<td>Interviewee speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(.)</td>
<td>Micro-pause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(x)</td>
<td>Timed Pause (x represents number of seconds)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x.</td>
<td>Full stop represents an unfinished word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[x]</td>
<td>Paralinguistic feature with x denoting the particular feature</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CM: What was life like before you left home?**

**DW:** Before we left home (.) well my dad was in the forces in the royal artillery (.) on the search lights and err we weren’t allowed to know where he went at all (.) and errm (.) we were in the bombing we had (.) to share first of all we had to share an air raid shelter with next door (.) but my mum wasn’t happy with that she wanted her own one (.) so they said well we we (.) you know we haven’t got one so you’ll have to go around the houses and look (.) to see if there are anyone’s (1) and people aren’t there their their in their gardens and we’ll go and get it which she did (.) and they put it in for us and (1) we were in there and then my dad came home on leave and the bombing was very bad (.) and one night we didn’t manage to get to the shelter and err I was in bed so my mum threw herself on me [laughs] and he threw his-self on my (.) on my mum and errrm and he said no I’m not going (.) back (1) and leaving you here so you will have (2) to be evacuated I can’t leave you like this (.) and err we were that was arranged and we went to a place called Harlow erm but obviously (.) I went with my mum and err we didn’t know where my dad was because he wasn’t allowed to say where he were was so I went with my mum
we went to this [laughs] funny place it was like (.) a it wasn’t really a farm it was like a farmer’s cottage really and they had no running water or anything but err (2) I didn’t go to school there but the children had to go (.) but the children had to go I don’t know but I think the woman was working on the land and my mum was left in charge to take they were very unruly children erm and she had to take them off to school it was really weird place [laughs]

CM: Where were you evacuated from?

DW: Err North London yes

CM: How old were you when you were evacuated?

DW: Oh I suppose I was well (.) 1935 about five yeah yeah

CM: Tell me about your journey: What are your memories?

DW: I don’t really know I mean obviously I was with my mum so it was quite comfortable so you know I d. don’t really have any memories no

CM: What was your initial reaction like when you arrived at your new home?

DW: Oh my god [laughs] this is really horrible [laughs] erm no not very happy at all that house was dirty and (.) not what I was used to

CM: What was your initial reaction like to the people?

Yes I can remember (.) actually I I think the man (.) he was actually there erm (2) he was very (.) a rough very rough man (.) and really burly man (.) and his wife erm (2) she was very unkempt [laughs]

CM: What was your initial reaction like to the environment?

Around the area (1) well I know it was (.) it was very very sort of (.) I remember it being very muddy and erm we didn’t have any running water at all they to. had to well I made a terrible mistake so I turned the tap on as I would at home and I got screamed and shouted at don’t turn the tap on you’ll waste the water we have to pump it up
CM: What are your memories of your life whilst being evacuated?

Yes it was (.) yes the only place we weren’t we didn’t go anywhere else and err I err we didn’t like it my mum didn’t like it and (.) she didn’t think it was right for us to sort of be there so we did end up going back home (1) I suppose we must have been there just a few months I suppose about three months that was it (.) and then we couldn’t stand it any longer and off we went (2) and stayed back at home

CM: Do you have any memories of school?

I didn’t go the school my mum didn’t let me go to the school so (.) I didn’t go

CM: Do you have any memories of other children?

No only the children in the house that (.) they were very rough [laughs]

CM: Do you have any memories of people in the community?

No (.) No I don’t think we sort of really went out (1) at all and my mum did all the cooking and everything so I suppose (.) the lady who did the shopping whatever was there (1) my mum cooked and washed and cleaned and (1) and just looked after the children (1) I don’t know the homeowners they just went out to work I think he worked on the land erm (.) I don’t know why he wasn’t (.) in the forces I don’t know maybe (.) because they needed the people on the land erm I think she must have worked on the land as well (1) I know they were always very very dirty so those are the things that have stuck in my mind [laughs]

CM: Do you have any good memories?

Not really no I (1) I we just didn’t like it erm (2) I think that the I think the man was interested in my mum (.) and err there were lots of rows
because obviously his wife you know wasn’t happy with that (.) so I know there were lots of rows (1) that was it

**CM: Why did you end up at that house?**

I don’t know why I I just assumed that err when we said we were going to be evacuat. Wanted to be evacuated they just found somewhere 9.) for you to go (1) erm that’s the only thing I know about it

**CM: Did you have any concerns about home whilst you were away?**

No I didn’t I mean I was too young (.) to think about things like that obviously I was concerned about my dad where my dad was and what was happening (.) but we sort of weren’t told anything we didn’t know about my dad (1) only if (.) he contacted us erm we didn’t know where he was I know very well that we used to because we were at Harlow we wondered oh was my dad near (.) err we used to go for lon. (.) walks you know looking around and that I remember leaning over this gate looking into this field and thinking (.) where’s (.) my (.) dad [laughs] but know that (2) that’s all I remember really

**CM: What were your strongest memories after the war?**

After the war ended (.) of the war (3) I think it was quite exciting for us as children because when the err (.) bombs used to drop and the planes came over the next morning we would all run out into the street and find (.) see if we could find the biggest bit of shrapnel and things like that and (.) err that that was one of the things I remember and that was just like an exciting thing (.) but the other things were quite scary when (.) the doodlebugs came over and stopped that that was really really scary because yo. (.) if they stopped and it was quite within (1) very near to you you wondered (2) where was it going to drop (.) that was really (.) that was scary (.) very scary
CM: Did you experience any doodlebugs?

Err yes (. .) not very far from us one did land (. .) and that was (. .) horrible when we were home yes that was probably before we actually went (1) hmm to be evacuated I know I used to because of course I was the only child I didn’t have any brothers or sisters I used to play under the table (. .) most of the time (. .) with all my toys (. .) just in case (. .) a big wooden table erm yeah I remember going down to the shelter and we had the dog and the cat down there and I’m just thinking to myself (. .) when we were (1) when we were evacuated what happened to my cat and dog I wonder perhaps now neighbours fed them I don’t know laughs but I liked the shelter really my mum made it really nice down there I can smell it now I can smell that (. .) smell when I think about it (. .) it’s very strong (1) hmm

CM: How far has it influenced you since the war?

(2) Erm (1) I don’t (1) really know (. .) how it influenced me (. .) it was just it influenced me that I was glad I was living (. .) where I lived (. .) and not there even (1) though he were experiencing everything (. .) I didn’t like being away from my home at all (2) it was just lucky really that I went (. .) with my mum and didn’t have to go on my own (. .) that must have been really dreadful for children (1) and for the parents

CM: How old were you when the war ended?

Now when did the war end (. .) yeah I suppose I must have been ermm (2) about was I (. .) about (. .) eight something like that I still remember going to school (1) to the infants school (. .) and we had to go into a shelter there (1) I can still remember that (2) no (. .) no (. .) not a very good memory [laughs] I’m better with now [laughs] which is a bit of luck

CM: Have you got anything else you would like to add?

No (1) no (. .) not really no (. .) just lucky none of my family were killed (1) I just (. .) my dad’s friend had his face blown away and I remember him coming to our home (. .) and that was really sad (2) very horrible
(1) but otherwise yeah (.) and I never asked my dad as that dreadful yeah you don’t ask (.) as children (.) you you know you have to ask because you don’t know otherwise he probably didn’t want talk about it really (1) seen some horrible things (1) but he did never go abroad so that was something (.) hmmm (.) he stayed during the war didn’t go anywhere but he didn’t know [laughs] that he didn’t know where he was [laughs] could have been Timbuktu for all we knew [laughs] hmm haven’t got a lot to add really [laughs]
REFERENCES


