Unwelcome guests?
The host’s perspective of evacuation.

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Abstract

With the order to ‘Evacuate forthwith’ Operation Pied Piper began and, from the perspective of the planners, it was a complete success. However, although evacuation was voluntary, billeting those evacuees was not. This paper examines Evacuation from the host’s perspective during the first thirteen months of the Second World War. Using three case studies and original letters of appeal to the billeting Tribunal of Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire it considers the problems encountered by these hosts, the financial implications, the effects on their health, and the impact on their family life. It also considers whether the attitudes and perceptions of the hosts had a bearing on their experiences. It concludes that whereas the majority of the hosts tolerated and cared for their evacuees at personal and fiscal cost, for a minority they most certainly were unwelcome guests.
Chapter 1: Introduction.

On the 31st of August 1939 at 11.07am, the order ‘Evacuate forthwith’ was issued and Operation Pied Piper was set into motion (Summers, 2011). The contemporaneous account of the London County Council (Samways, n.d.) declared the operation a complete success. However, Starnes states ‘...the reality of the initial evacuation could be summed up in one word – chaos.’ (Parsons and Starns 1999:64).

Titmuss concurs: ‘Many reports testify to the confusion and unpreparedness which characterised the reception of mothers and children in September 1939.’ (1950:111).

Since less than half of the anticipated number of evacuees presented themselves at the London entraining stations they were ushered onto whichever train was waiting as they arrived – whatever the destination; many reception areas discovered that the evacuees they had planned for were not the evacuees who arrived (Gardiner, 2005).

Although it was anticipated that the evacuees would remain in the reception areas until the end of hostilities, the majority returned home when the aerial bombing campaign did not materialise [Table I]. During this period of the ‘Phoney War’, or ‘Bore War’, the rural sections of the country encountered health and social issues that they had never imagined existed. As Titmuss writes that ‘...the post bags of two ministers and many M.O.s [Medical Officers] were loaded with complaints of dirt, lousiness and immorality.’ (1950:114).
Table I: Evacuees remaining in reception areas January 1940. (Titmuss 1950:172)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From evacuation areas in England</th>
<th>Number remaining in reception areas</th>
<th>Percentage remaining</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Unaccompanied schoolchildren</td>
<td>420,000</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Mothers and accompanied children</td>
<td>56,000</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Expectant mothers</td>
<td>1,100</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Blind persons, cripples, and other special classes</td>
<td>2,280</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Teachers and helpers</td>
<td>43,400</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>522,780</td>
<td>40</td>
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</table>

Numerous authors have examined the evacuations of World War II: in anthologies, populist books and academic books and papers. There is an apparent wealth of information of the evacuation from the perspective of the evacuees who were moved from their homes to destinations unknown, including approximately 14,000 accounts on the BBC (2012) website *WW2 People’s War*. Some authors, such as, Richardson (1990), and Schweitzer (1990) have edited books of personal stories of the evacuees but these are written by those who were evacuated and do not tell the story from the host’s perspective. Schweitzer acknowledges that this aspect needs addressing.

Although Mackay admits that the experience of evacuation was ‘appalling’ for some children but for the majority ‘... by and large the adventure which began at the home railway station did not stop until the final return.’ (1999:165).
Parsons vehemently refutes this assertion, drawing attention to ‘...the sociological and psychological turmoil that many of the evacuees suffered and still suffer.’ (1998:14)

He also states ‘Few people are given access to material which explains why evacuation took place and, more significantly, the problems it caused.’ (1998:16)

Although evacuation was voluntary, billeting those evacuees was not. What was it like to be obliged to take a stranger’s child or children, or to share your house with adult strangers and their families? Were there financial impacts? What impact was there on family life? How were problems and disputes resolved? What was the outcome if there was no resolution? These questions will be considered in this paper.
Zeppelin bombing raids on London during the First World War killed 1500 people in the East End, highlighting the future danger of an aerial war rather than invasion from the sea (The Evacuees, 2010).

Air Staff calculated that for every ton of bombs dropped 50 people would casualties... about one-third would be killed. (Titmuss, 1950:4)

The plans for an exodus of the civilian population began in 1931 when the threat of military conflict became apparent, not only from Germany (Mackay, 1999; Mann, 2005), but also as a result of the civil war in Spain and the arrival of Spanish refugees. Wicks (2013) argues that when likely casualties of a Luftwaffe attack on Britain were calculated on these events, the Air Raid Precaution Committee failed to take into account the facts that Guernica was defenceless and it was market day. Nevertheless, evacuation plans were made, although Gärtner (2010) maintains that the real force behind the evacuation was the London County Council who made their own arrangements in the face of opposition from central government. These plans were adopted across the country, which was divided into danger zones, the ‘evacuation areas’; ‘reception areas’, areas supposedly away from the risk of bombing; and ‘neutral areas’ which would neither send nor receive evacuees. Operation Pied Piper was on standby, to commence on 1st September 1939.

The unique aspect in 1939 was the plan to move only those civilians who were most vulnerable, in an attempt to protect national moral and reduce the risk of hysteria and panic ensuing in the cities – largely amongst the poor and Jewish communities from whom ‘the authorities were not expecting much moral fibre’ (Mann, 2005:11). Disabled adults, pregnant women and mothers accompanying their children who below school age were also to be evacuated: and all would require billets when they arrived at their destinations.

However, the Military-style planning of the Anderson Committee failed to take any account of what would happen to the evacuees once they reached the reception areas. Gardiner states that this resulted in ‘serious mistakes’ (2004:18). Not least was the failure to anticipate
that children would require access to toilets on their journeys, but since the majority of the train carriages were 3rd class, non-corridor types the inevitable happened and children arrived wet with urine and faeces. A number had also vomited their emergency ration packs, consumed on the train but intended to relieve their host families during the initial 48-hour period (The Evacuees, 2010). It appears that this disastrous beginning was at least partially to blame for the resulting perception that these children were dirty verminous urchins (Summers, 2011).

Local authorities in the reception areas were responsible for making billeting arrangements and were given the power to compel householders to accept evacuees. Problems were expected to arise and billeting tribunals were set up before the evacuation began (Glasgow Herald, 1939).

Anderson, (2008), states that the war made adults more aware of the gulf between the social classes but also brought about a breaking down of class barriers. Soyinka, however, disagrees and highlights the fact that the difference in class between host and evacuee was responsible for many billeting problems. Parsons (1998) takes this further and maintains that barriers were actually reinforced by the patronising attitude of many in the reception areas, although it heightened awareness of the need for social reforms. Wicks states that the working class became aware that a class system that favoured the minority was in operation and that after the war there was a decrease in the automatic respect that most people gave to those in authority – since they were responsible for the enormous divide between rich and poor.

No money was available from central government to arrange additional medical services, hostels or school premises although there was a small billeting allowance for the hosts (Titmuss 1950). However this is where a gap in the research becomes apparent – there is very little written about the experiences of the hosts who were obliged to take whatever the billeting officers brought to their doors (Holman, 1995), without any additional infrastructure to support them. Alternatively, they could join what appeared to be an atmosphere of a slave market and choose their own: this is where the phrase that has defined the
evacuations was born: “I’ll take that one” Parsons (1998). However, the questions posed:

What was it like to be obliged to take a stranger’s child or children, or to share your house with adult strangers and their families?

Were there financial impacts?

What impact was there on family life?

How were problems and disputes resolved?

What was the outcome if there was no resolution?

cannot be answered in any meaningful way using published literature. This therefore is the focus of this research: what was experience of evacuation from the host’s perspective?

However, this is a small-scale study dealing with the initial evacuation and the first thirteen months of the war, in keeping with this dissertation. It may be argued that this was the most significant period since the experiences led to several changes in the policies and procedures of further evacuations.
Chapter 3: Research Approach and Techniques (Methods and Methodology).

Research for this dissertation includes three case studies that are representative of different social classes of host families. Patricia Crimmin [hereafter PC] a Senior Lecturer in History, was the 8-year-old daughter of a Welsh railway worker and wrote two letters recounting her experiences. Mary Houghton Brown [hereafter MHB] was 23 years old, newly married to a doctor in Somerset and the hostess of two young evacuees during the ‘Phoney War’, her oral testimony was given during a face-to-face interview. Lady Emma Barnard is the great granddaughter of the Hon. Mr and Mrs Clive Pearson, who were hosts to 30 evacuees and their siblings and lived in the large privately owned Parham House in Sussex; she recounted their story in a telephone interview. All of these transcripts are included as Appendix 2, and all the interviewees requested to be identified rather than to remain anonymous.

Documentary research using the original files of Harold Crookes, Town Clerk for the Aylesbury Borough reception area, paints the picture of the local situation. These documents were contextually validated by the quality of the notepaper, that they were written in pencil or fountain pen, or using a typewriter, and that the syntax is contemporaneous. All research complied with the BERA guidelines and section 33 of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Oral testimony can only be a recount of events as the individual remembers them, it is well documented that the human memory is unreliable (Offer et al, 2000), and may become more so as the brain ages physiologically: this has been taken into account. Although Herodotus (484-425 BC) rated oral testimony as the most unreliable form of history, since the end of the Second World War it has been accepted as both valid and useful (Perks and Thomson, 1998) and is now a well-established method of collecting historical data, although not all historians recognise its merits (Tosh, 2010).

The use of face-to-face interviews using open and non-leading questions allows a deeper understanding of how events affected the
interviewees as individuals as it is possible also to take into account their body language and non-verbal cues (Robson, 2011) although Thomson (1998) argues the value of this interpretation depends on the skill of the interviewer. These factors were also taken into consideration.

However, the act of retelling may lead to modification of the memories, these modifications can become the established version, and thus the length of time between the event and the interview may have a significant impact. In addition memories are modified by nostalgia, information from other sources and the individuals attitudes and feelings about the events they are recounting (Tosh, 2010). This is demonstrated in a small way by the discrepancies in the accounts of friendship with the evacuee by PC [Appendix 2b] – two accounts separated by only three months.

Cross-referencing the memories with official accounts of the same events gives the oral testimony added validity and the historian must remain mindful of discrepancies. However, Thomson argues that the use of the oral history of the ‘under-classes’ (1998: 24) challenges the official version of events and may make a more true and valuable account. The letters and testimonies of host families give unique depth to the study of the period.

The official documents can themselves be problematical since as a resource they are not impartial, but reflect the political and ideological stance of the writers. Review of contemporaneous Parliamentary debates using Hansard can show insights about the prevailing political climates and their influence on those documents. These factors were taken into account when analysing the content of those documents.

People who had a grievance or problem with their roles as host families wrote the letters in the files of Harold Crookes. They tell the truth about the situations as the hosts saw them: there are few records giving the same situation from the evacuee’s point of view. This has been taken into account when analysing the contents of the letters.

The case studies for this dissertation are a small and specific sample and are not therefore of statistical significance. They are, however, of
historical interest as primary sources and they tell the story of evacuation from the perspective of the hosts.
Chapter 4: Did the problems associated with billeting make the evacuees unwelcome guests?

Aylesbury reception area was divided into two – the urban ‘Borough’, under the administration of Town Clerk Harold Crookes, and the ‘Rural District’, the surrounding villages, that is not part of this study. Most of the records of the Borough for this period survive untouched, although some have been lost in the intervening years.

Titmuss (1950) comments that the reception areas were ill prepared for the evacuees of 1939; however, this was not borne out in Aylesbury. Crookes appears to have been a careful planner. Indeed, at the end of the War when the Allies faced problems with civilian refugees in Europe, Aylesbury presented to the newly formed Control Commission for Germany, as an exemplar of housing displaced persons. His presentation notes indicate that Aylesbury had also been a receiving area for nursery school children evacuated during the Munich Crisis of 1938, and stresses ‘...the absolute necessity of commodious central premises through which all evacuees can pass’ (Crookes, 1939: MB/3/10/3/11a)

It seems that lessons learnt during this small-scale evacuation were applied to Operation Pied Piper.

This file also contains plans and paperwork for the evacuation: the plan of the Town Hall receiving area [Appendix 1], demonstrating that a great deal of thought was given to the arrival of the evacuees. 10,000 were expected in the district: 4,200 to arrive in the first three days, all passed through this centralised receiving area before dispersal around the billets of the Borough (1,600) and Rural areas (2,600). Emergency rations were issued to each evacuee, intended to alleviate the difficulties for the host on arrival.

Unfortunately there is no way to verify how many of the allocated evacuees actually arrived. The shortfall in London meant the transport was filled with whoever was next in line rather than leave partially full – irrespective of their intended destination. If 40% remained in January 1940 [Table I] it may well be that approximately 2000 evacuees were in the Borough.
Aylesbury appears to have planned thoroughly for the coming influx, but the evacuees needed housing when they arrived. A vast number of additional officials were needed, and these were the billeting officers.

A Ministry of Health circular ‘...emphasised that Billeting officers should be carefully selected as ”persons of tact, common sense and judgement” ’(Glasgow Herald, 1939:9).

Aylesbury Borough was divided into 14 areas, each being the responsibility of an area billeting officer who in turn was responsible for a team of street billeting officers. A chief billeting officer had ultimate responsibility, and held the only salaried post. This was a formidable administrative task undertaken on a voluntary basis. Indeed one of the evacuees to Aylesbury describes her billeting officer as ‘a formidable lady’ (Whitelock 2005).

Instructions to the billeting officers (Crookes, MB/3/10/5/11a) indicate the importance of ‘...establishing a friendly understanding between the householders and those billeted upon them’ but makes it clear that they should use compulsory powers of billeting if necessary. The intention was that billets be pre-arranged, but Aylesbury letters show that this was not always the case – as elsewhere in the country (Titmuss, 1950; Parsons, 1998; Wicks, 2013); some of the evacuees were taken in out of pity as this householder writes ‘...as I had seen others lying on the roadside after their tiring journey...I decided to try and manage...’

Titmuss (1950:111) refers to ‘direct selection....or haphazard allotment’ of evacuees to hosts. MHB (Houghton Brown, M: interview: 16.12.13. Appendix 2a) does not remember being consulted by a billeting officer, rather that she and her husband were simply given a time and place to collect their evacuees. Because they were late, ‘there were only these two little boys left’. PC’s parents took in a 7-year-old girl from Birmingham. She was the last of a large family, and they could not bear the thought of her left unwanted. (Crimmin, P: personal letters: 15.01.14 & 13.04.14. Appendix 2b)

The Hon. Mr and Mrs Pearson at Parham showed exemplary generosity when their 30 young Peckham billetees arrived – Mrs Alicia Pearson [hereafter AP] was so horrified that the authorities had separated
some boys from their siblings she demanded that they be sent as well. (Barnard, Lady E: telephone conversation 24.03.14. Appendix 2c)

The Ministry of Health anticipated that billeting problems would arise: the Glasgow Herald (1939:9) reported that local authority Tribunals would adjudicate where ‘householders were “aggrieved by billeting requirements’” and that they would be comprised of ‘three people, one of them a woman’, presumably for a ‘maternal’ opinion. Crooke’s file (MB/3/10/5/21) contain the ‘Rules made by the Minister of Health under Regulation 22 of the Defence Regulations 1939’ defining the scope and function of the Tribunal. Applicants would present their grievances in person and a further document suggests whereas the press might attend ‘the general public’ should not. Finally, it states:

…it should be made clear that the Tribunal is not set up to hear petty trivial complaints which [sic] could be adjusted within the household.

Nevertheless, it gives no indication of what a ‘petty and trivial’ complaint might be. Tribunals were to act independently but a question in the House (Hansard, 1943) suggests that this was not always believed to be the case.

The Aylesbury file - MB/3/10/5/125 - labelled ‘Late arrivals and trivial complaints (1939-1940)’ - contains 105 letters of grievances from hosts and it is unlikely that they considered their complaints trivial. There are no files indicating that ‘serious complaints’ were filed elsewhere so it may well be that ‘trivial’ was the universal appellation: it is ironic that it is exactly these issues that were not to be brought before the Tribunal according to Crooke’s own papers. It is not clear who comprised the Tribunal in Aylesbury, as the members are not identified in correspondence, but the letters of applicants illustrate that there were many issues that caused friction and ill feeling amongst the hosts of the Borough. Unfortunately, the majority of the outcomes of the hearings are unknown as few are filed. As can be seen in Table II, 40 of the 105 letters cited more than one reason for an appeal. The full analysis is included as Appendix 3.
Some went to great lengths to avoid the billeting order and two of these documents are reproduced [Appendix 4] because they need to be read to appreciate fully the emotions of the householders. The second householder [4a] thwarts the attempts of the billeting officer despite the presence of a special police constable, and in an era of respect for authority, this is a significant incident and indicative of the strength of feeling.

Between September 1939 and October 1940, the Tribunal was asked to rule on diverse concerns [Table II]. Unfortunately, although it was the duty of the Town Clerk to inform each applicant of the outcome not all have been filed so cannot be analysed. The administrative burden must have been enormous.

Availability of billets was calculated at one evacuee per habitable room, but some hosts seem to have had to take more: this hostess appealed to the Tribunal to have two girls, 7 and 8, re-billeted, 14 months after their arrival, as she needed to go into hospital for surgery. The Tribunal decision was that they would be taken into a hostel for the period of her hospitalisation only. Her next letter illustrates how much some people were expected to bear:

I am unable to do the washing and look after [them all] and I have 10 people in the house [sic] my daughter nearly 15 years has to sleep in the same bedroom as my husband and myself...Mrs. ...next door has only five...and I have only 3 bedrooms and a living room...

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Table II: Reasons given to the Tribunal for removal of evacuees. File MB/3/10/5/125: September 1939- October 1940. Total number of letters = 105.
It seems inconceivable from a modern perspective that either billetings could be considered reasonable. In contrast, a request to have two 15-year-old boys removed after 11 weeks because his housekeeper was elderly and felt unable to cope was granted:

...you will I know realise that that she was engaged to look after me....she is an excellent housekeeper and I should have the greatest difficulty in replacing her.

It must be no wonder that some 16 letters complained that the allocations were unfair: one host states the intention to take this allegation to ‘the authorities in London’. However, an Aylesbury woman later commented:

There are many tales of evacuees being unhappy and uncared for, but having seen it with my own eyes, many more were welcomed into good homes to be sheltered from the air raids to come. All local families in this area squeezed up and made room...

(Drewdee, 2003)

It would seem from the quantity of complaint letters, in contrast to the number of evacuees, that most did their best to make their guests welcome: the elderly, pregnant women and mothers with young children as well as the unaccompanied evacuees, although the demands on the host families were significant. Letters describe how they had to re-arrange their whole houses to squeeze in the significant numbers of extra people, and their kitchens to cope with the extra housewives. There were financial implications as well.

The 1939 Billeting Allowance was 5/- per adult and 3/- for each accompanied child for board only. Unaccompanied children, who also had to be fed, brought in 10/6 for the first child and 8/6 for each additional child; received wisdom being that two children kept together would cost less than two billeted on separate households.

Some saw the evacuees as a potential source of income:

After a few weeks I was moved on - people had complained that the billeting officer shouldn’t be benefiting from the evacuees’ allowance which others might need more than her.
Moreover, a billeting officer writes:

...the householder appears to be actuated by motives of profit. ... continually saying that if she had private evacuees she would make more money, and indirectly asking for more from Mrs...and stating that she makes no profit. As the Government pay eleven shillings and Mrs...pays one pound apart from the baby's milk bill I think this is untrue particularly as the standard of living ...is that of a working class household, judging from the meals described by the evacuee ...

To a manual labourer with a 30/- weekly income the billeting allowance was significant; to the middle class with their higher standards of living it was not. Another potential source of income was the 3/6 weekly laundry allowance, paid to hosts of bed wetter’s, but the claims became so astronomical that investigations were held and a dramatic fall followed (Gardiner, 2004).

For some the additional cash may have made evacuees welcome. Nevertheless, in Aylesbury 14 of the 105 letters cite an unacceptable financial burden of unaccompanied children and these include ‘having to buy socks’, outfitting three children [Appendix 5] in one household and ‘sundry expense’ since the complainant states the children do not have suitable spare clothing. Initially there was no Government money available for supplementing the wardrobes of the evacuees, it being anticipated that charitable provision would suffice. At the end of August 1939, authorities were permitted to spend £1 per 200 children (Titmuss, 1950). MHB remembers that ‘some organisation, we think in London’ supplied new wellingtons for the younger of her evacuees, since he was heading for the country. In the photograph [plate 1], it is clear that these are so large they needed folding down to allow him to walk. The single brown carrier bag contained all their belongings; it was only half-full. The older boy is wearing several layers of clothes but clearly, they have not brought many spare. MHB cannot remember buying them supplementary items although she believes that the village collected second-hand clothes for all their evacuees.
At Parham, the Pearson’s bought all theirs dressing gowns (for Christmas 1941). Lady Emma was told that they wore them everywhere as they had never had such a thing. They brought them back to a reunion some 10 years ago such had been the impact of the generosity of their hosts (Parsons, ML: telephone conversation: 09.07.13).

The cost of the additional food was a major issue. Although evacuees had ration books from January 1940, the price of food rose steadily throughout the war (Gardiner, 2004). Several householders wrote of their inability to feed their evacuees on the given allowance:

...their appetites far exceed what the allowances cater for...working folks cannot afford to support other peoples [sic] children at the expense of their own...

The expectation to do so caused resentment: this is the third letter from this particular host:

...my wife and I find it impossible to feed two boys of 15 years on 17/- a week there[sic] respective parents have been notified of this difficulty and cannot at the moment help us although they both appear to hold more renumerative [sic] posts than I.

The Tribunal refused to remove the boys, the host then refused to feed them – giving them the billeting money to buy their own food. This
brought official castigation. One hostess resorts to writing weekly to her evacuee’s parents, the billeting officer reports:

...containing a full menu of the boy’s meals together with the cost for each item, and pointing out each time the loss she suffered...[she] consequently informs the boy of which food on the table he is to partake and those provided for the rest of the household is too expensive to be part of his menu.

Wicks (2013) found a similar story. However since only 14 letters were filed in the thirteen-month period it may be inferred that the majority of the hosts managed to cope. Nevertheless, according to regional Ministry of Health officials the rural reception areas were ‘not far removed from open revolt’ over the allowances (Titmuss, 1950:163). From the 31st May 1940 new rates were paid, [Table III] although with the 17% rise in costs since the evacuation began those caring for children under 10 were worse off in real terms (Gardiner, 2004).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unaccompanied schoolchildren, each child</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10–14 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>14–16 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Over 16</td>
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The three interviewees supplemented their diets with home-grown food. PC recalls:

My mother was a good manager and my father had 2 allotments and kept a pig, so we had plenty of food, supplemented I remember now and then, by mysterious supplies – fresh eggs, meat etc.

At Parham the evacuees only recognised vegetables from tins so they were given plots and had competitions to grow their own. Lady Emma states that the only problem was that the competition was fierce and they kept digging up their crops to see how they were doing!

The financial impact of caring for the evacuees was causing problems across the country, but the issue that really horrified the rural hosts was the physical condition of their increasingly unwelcome guests.

‘Dirty habits’ often referred to children who did not use lavatories and ‘dirty’ was the term applied to a variety of conditions during the initial evacuation – it might refer to bed wetting, lice, or a number of skin diseases. One Aylesbury Tribunal applicant used it because her evacuee got his trousers muddy, to her disgust, but for the other 23 it was far more serious. In March 1941, the Minister of Health issued a circular ‘in favour of plain speaking’ to avoid euphemism (Hess, 2006:11) but there had been a public outcry. In 1943 The Women’s Institute published *Our Towns: a Close Up*. The Spectator review stated:

...the complaints that so many evacuates mothers were dirty, verminous, idle and thriftless and that children had acquired dirty habits, and were in many cases foul-mouthed, liars and pilferers were unfortunately justified.

(Nicolson, 1943:255-6)

Lord Geddes concurred, but gave his opinion that by 1943 these unfortunate people had been ‘magicked’ [sic] into decency by the country life (Hansard, 1943:371). Appendix 5 is the full 7-page correspondence from one horrified Aylesbury hostess, although it is clear that she has done her best to deal with the situation and gone to some expense in addition. These cases did not have to go to Tribunal –
a Sick Bay was ready to cope with children deemed ‘unbillitable’ although this was not the situation across the country (Titmuss, 1950). The Aylesbury Gatehouse Hostel was later set up as a longer-term treatment facility. PC writes that the young girl who joined her family was:

v. dirty [sic], suffering from head lice and impetigo when she came home that night and was quickly sent to the local disinfecting centre in Aberdare until the lice and impetigo were dealt with.

In Aylesbury the host families were dealing with children who:

...are so Dirty in their Bedroom they wet the Bed every night and also the floor they have chambers in the Bedroom and they will never use them and they are quite old enough to no [sic] what they are for and all my bedding will have to be done away with as I couldn’t use that for anyone else...

Moreover, in her second letter the Appendix 5 correspondent writes:

Vermin in unbelievable quantities have today been found in the furniture the girls used – even in the wardrobe – [and] you can imagine what a distasteful task it was to remove them.

To these 24 hosts the evacuees certainly were unwelcome guests; and the other issues raised by Lord Geddes and the Women’s Institute - the disgraceful language and behaviour - were causing problems in Aylesbury as well. 18 of the letters to the Town Clerk were citing incidences of abuse.

This was both physical ‘... [the daughter] has had to receive medical treatment owing to receiving a blow from a brick that was thrown by [the evacuee],’ and:

Mrs ...has been staying with me just over a week...she has tried to scald me with a saucepan of boiling water...All my crockery has been broken up which she tried to hurt me...her language is abusive, such as prostitute, thief and other names [sic].

and verbal: ‘my wife is going in fear of ...’s temper she having threatened her’. In this case the hosts were housing a woman and
child and her husband was staying unofficially and therefore not paying billeting allowance either.

Some of the complaints of verbal abuse may stem from the generally profane language reportedly common to the evacuees from the slum areas of London, (Titmuss, 1950; Gardiner, 2004) which shocked the inhabitants of Aylesbury. However, in this case the police interviewed the hostess because she evicted her evacuee after eight days:

...after the second day he treated me with contempt and distain. He was insolent and sneering, he complained about his food and his room and he suggested I should give him pocket money...I have given him the best food I could and as I suffer from heart trouble I felt I could not go on with him in the house...

The police report ends ‘I have not seen the boy in question but [the billeting officer] has and her sympathies are with the [hosts].’

To these hosts the evacuees were very unwelcome guests but with compulsory billeting powers and a Tribunal to convince, they needed something that would tilt the balance in their favour. This, it appears, was the doctor’s certificate.

46 Tribunal appeals were on the grounds of caring for the evacuees causing a worsening of existing illness (n=19) such as heart disease or asthma (both serious conditions at the time) ‘My husband had to call the doctor to me and I have been under him since...my head...palpitations...’ or of causing new illnesses (n=27). ‘Nerves’ is the reason given in almost all cases where new illnesses are being reported. Today this would be referred to as ‘stress-related’:

...it is impossible for me to keep him any longer...my wife’s nerves are very bad and every day counts...I do not want my wife to have to go away...

The majority of the applicants support their cases with medical certificates or letters from their doctors and Gardiner (2004:45) states that ‘any doctor’s certificate seemed to count as decisive’ However, the chief billeting officer writes to the Town Clerk in October 1939:

We have done our best to accommodate householders holding Doctor’s certificates. Whether it will be possible to continue to
do this during the winter I do not know... [or] whether the certificates are on the suggestion of the doctor or the householders.

Eventually questions were raised in Parliament about the impartiality of those doctors. (Hansard, 1941: (a) and (b)). Aylesbury residents did not always find certificates successful:

I shall be glad if you will return, without delay, my medical certificate at present in your possession. At the same time perhaps you will inform me who flouted the opinion of my doctor without either consulting him or me? I am arranging to call my doctor before the tribunal; no doubt the person referred to above will be able to convince the tribunal out of her vast fund of medical knowledge that her ideas were right and that the doctor was wrong....

Although the number of letters was relatively small, they suggest that some of the hosts were finding their guests a severe trial. They were causing problems with their host’s health, their living space and their disposable income. They were found to be unhygienic, infested by lice and foul-mouthed. They could be abusive both verbally and physically and these hosts found them extremely unwelcome. However, some assumptions can be made from the letters about the hosts themselves. Was it possible that the host’s attitudes and perceptions were affecting the complaints that they made?
Chapter 5: Did the attitudes and perceptions of the host have a bearing on whether the evacuees were unwelcome guests?

Class does seem to have played a part in the official mind:

In 1938 the Anderson Committee called a lot of experts [including] Lady Reading, head of the WVS, and Lady Denham head of WI, as experts in child care. ...and ...if you look at the documents of the Anderson Committee, in pencil on the margin it actually says: ‘a child from a working class home will be quite happy to live in a garage or a shed as long as it is adjacent to a good middle class family’; and underneath this it says ‘I fully concur with this’ signed Denham. So there very much was a class issue regarding this which underlined the whole evacuation scheme.

(Parsons, in The Evacuees, Children of War, 2010)

Indeed it was the supposition that the working classes would panic in the event of aerial warfare, the ‘nervous civilians’ (Titmuss, 1950:20) that led to the plans to evacuate the cities.

There is some evidence that this underlying class attitude had an effect on the allocation of evacuees, and the ease with which some Aylesbury householders were able to have them moved on.

Crookes (MB/3/10/5/11a) states that there were ‘few large or very large’ houses within the Borough; the total number of dwellings given is 4835. It is not possible to establish his definition of size or establish the social class of the occupiers. Nevertheless, analysis of the quality and style of writing paper, the syntax and tone of the contents gives some indication of the attitudes and social status of the writers.

There are letters written on headed notepaper, on good quality letter paper and on paper torn from a note or exercise book; they are written with typewriters, fountain pens and pencils. There does appear to be some correlation between the quality of the paper and the tone of the writer – for example the letter imperiously demanding to know why his doctor’s certificate had not had the desired effect writes on flamboyantly headed note paper with his office and home addresses.
The correspondent whose evacuees were removed so quickly for his housekeepers benefit has written on thick cream paper, and by the tone he has no doubt that the Town Clerk will be able to comply with his request, as is in fact the case.

This contrasts to the letter from the hostess who needs surgery. Her paper is of a thin quality; her letter contains several spelling mistakes and no punctuation. It has been shown that the Tribunal agrees to place the girls in a hostel whilst she is in hospital only. Their response to her second letter previously mentioned is unfortunately not on file.

In addition, sixteen of the 105 letters to the Tribunal (Table II as ‘unfair’) suggest that the writers perceive a lack of fair play. One such complaint is that:

It seems to me that the people at the top end of Tring Road, Broughton Pastures, Limes Avenue and Regent Road, are being forced to have these boys while the rich with large houses who can afford the extra, which it costs to keep them, get away with it.

Crookes indignantly refutes this saying ‘I do not think the suggestion contained in the penultimate paragraph of your letter is warranted or even accurate…’ . Another writes:

I intend to submit my case to the authorities in London ... pointing out the uneven administration of the Evacuation Scheme, [sic] whereby householders without any children are occupying larger houses are seemingly exempt from housing evacuees whilst I am overcrowded. ...

Compulsory billeting powers caused friction in some sections of Aylesbury society:

...Lady Courtown....was good enough to write to me...from which I gathered I should only be asked to take evacuees in the event of extreme urgency...It is this type of behaviour which [sic] I consider to be grossly unfair towards people of my class.

It has been established that the higher echelons of society largely avoided playing fair part as hosts (Wicks, 2013; Parsons and Starns, 1999; Gardiner, 2004) – although not AP at Parham. Parsons (July
2013, telephone conversation) stated that ‘...whereas 50% of the middle and working classes were evacuated it was 85% of the working class that acted as hosts.’

In Aylesbury there was a police investigation when a householder (and her maid) refused to allow her billetee, a working class mother, the use of the kitchen, the indoor lavatory or water from the kitchen tap – she was to walk around the outside of the house to the outdoor washroom for all of these.

Although AP and her daughter Veronica Tritton at Parham House have been shown to be exceptional hostesses, Lady Reading was later to admit that ‘Evacuation had been a terrible fiasco...not nearly enough use was made of the big houses of England.’ (Gardiner, 2004:41)

It is evident, therefore, that the perception of an uneven burden in the billeting arrangements and the attitudes of the hosts had a bearing on whether the guests were unwelcome or not. The other perception and attitude that had a part to play was that of religious prejudice.

Gardiner states that there was a:

...strong current of anti-Semitism in Britain that went far beyond the fascist right....a survey in the 1930’s had estimated that as many as three-quarters of the British population harboured unfavourable attitudes towards the Jews.

(2004:31)

However there were exceptions to this, as the integration of the Jewish Free School, evacuated to Cornwall, demonstrates (Soyinka 2010). In the Aylesbury letters, only four make reference to the fact that the evacuees are Jewish and they vary from the Methodist Minister who says:

Then these two boys are Jews, I have no complaint about that but...when Sunday comes....we cannot leave these little fellows in the road, whilst we go in to worship...

The second is from the hostess who was:

....down for two children, billeting officer, [sic] asked me if I would take five as they were sisters...not realising trouble I
would have with them being Jewesis [sic], instead of Christian, over there [sic] food…I feel I have done my duty for these children, they have not done their duty in fairness to me.

The mother of these girls takes them home to London, stating that their care has been very poor and the attitude of the billeting officer is clear – she writes to Crookes:

...from recent experience I have come to the conclusion that parents such as Mrs... are prone to exaggerate a good deal and having once lodged their complaints rush their children back to London in a storm of indignation being too impatient to await investigation.

The tone of the third letter is much stronger:

These children are Jews a religion to which I have a great objection.... My wife volunteered to have two respectable girls about twelve years of age if possible, and who are not Jews...

And the final correspondent goes further:

I have written to [the sanitary inspector] making a complaint re nuisance and sanitary, [sic] ...the complaint is against our next door neighbours...They are Jews. The Jews eat different food to us English [which they throw into the dustbin]. It would not be fit for a pig to eat, and I think even that animal would walk away from it.

Religion did not have a bearing on the care given by the three host families from the case studies: PC does refer to her evacuee’s Catholicism; but only to say that her parents had no objection to this. This was not always the case in Non-Conformist Wales.

Although these are small-scale cases it is clear that the social class and religious convictions of the host had a definite bearing on the extent to which the evacuees were welcomed in Aylesbury. However the findings support the view that ‘...difficulties which occurred during billeting were more often along class lines rather than religious ones.’ (Soyinka, 2010:58).
This paper has looked at the experiences of host families in Aylesbury through the letters they wrote to the Town Clerk, Harold Crookes, and appeals to appear before the billeting Tribunal. It has also included primary evidence from the members of three host families and two online articles, one an Aylesbury resident (Drewdee, 2003), one an evacuee (Whitelock, 2005). The letters cover only the first thirteen months of billeting, although arguably this was the most significant period, as lessons learned led to official policy changes for later evacuations.

Assuming that approximately 40% of the evacuees remained in Aylesbury, the average across the country, the 105 letters sent to Harold Crookes represent a minority of the Boroughs hosts. Nevertheless, these letters demonstrate that there were many issues causing friction and ill feeling. The compulsory billeting exposed the rural countryside to unsuspected problems of urban living and affected the host’s health, their living space and their disposable income. Some of their guests were unhygienic, infested by lice and foul-mouthed and they could be both verbally and physically abusive. Hosts were obliged to house those with whom they had little in common and differences in class and religious belief caused further conflict.

The Tribunals were set up to adjudicate in all but ‘trivial’ cases, although the definition of ‘trivial’ is open to debate. However, in Aylesbury at least, there was a perception of an uneven burden of billeting and there is some doubt as to the impartiality of those in authority - demonstrated by the seeming lack of parity in dealing with requests and appeals. In some cases resolution of the host’s problem was not possible through official channels and they took unilateral action. These cases resulted in official castigation or the evacuees returning to the dangers of their hometowns.

Class played a part in the official mind on a national level and, in Aylesbury, the host’s social class may have influenced the complaints made. It certainly seems to have had a bearing on the tone of the letters written to the Town Clerk and the Tribunal. Apparently middle
class hosts tended to be less satisfied with the billeting allowance and the standard of their guest’s clothes and behaviour, whereas the apparently working class hosts tended to apply to the Tribunal on issues of overcrowding, such as the hostess persuaded to take five sisters.

Analysis of the early letters in Aylesbury suggests that the situation with billeting was similar to that found across the country: the majority of the hosts tolerated and cared for their evacuees at personal and fiscal cost, as did MHB, PC and AP. However, for a minority they most certainly were unwelcome guests.

Extending the Aylesbury research to the end of hostilities, and the return of the evacuees to their homes, would make the research more statistically valid since numbers would be larger. It would also determine whether billeting issues changed in any way as war progressed and living conditions became more difficult for the whole country. It would be possible to include analysis of damage compensation claims [Table II] made once the evacuees vacated their temporary homes – something beyond the remit of this paper.

Unfortunately, very few of those who were adult members of the host families survive, and those who were children are now beyond retirement age. Thus, further research will be increasingly archive based, as there are now comparatively few primary sources available. The story of the evacuations is poorer as a result.

In the 2014 curriculum (DfE, 2013), Evacuation and the Evacuees will fit into the category of ‘a significant turning point in British History’ not only because of the defeat of the Nazi regime but also because the lessons learned influenced social policy during the war and in the post war years (Welshman, 1998). Current academic and narrative resources look at evacuation mainly from the perspective of the evacuee: original Government propaganda films and photographs; contemporary newspaper reports; works of fiction such as ‘Goodnight Mister Tom’ (Magorian, 1981) and ‘Carrie’s War’ (Bawden, 1974). However Parsons draws attention to the ‘myth’ of the evacuation, perpetuated when children see only ‘written, film and photographic examples of smiling, happy children…going off to some unknown
destination to live with strangers... [without understanding] the problems it caused.’ (1996:7)

This research has opened a new area of study: the perspective of the kindly eponymous Mr Tom and the cold, distant Mr Evans – the hosts. It offers new documentary resources: the secondary and two primary accounts and the letters from hosts to the Tribunals, which will be used in an anonymous form to teach documentary analysis. The photographs: MHB’s evacuees [plate 1], the photographs taken of her in 1939 and 2013 and the ‘Hitler Snowman’ from Parham will be used to teach photo-analysis skills [Appendix 6].

To avoid perpetuating the myths of evacuation it is essential that the pupils learn a balanced story and to appreciate that to some, such as Mr Evans, the evacuees were unwelcome guests.
References:

• Parsons, M.L. Starns, P: (1999): *The Evacuation, the true story.* Peterborough: DSM.


**Filmography List:**

- *The Evacuees - The Children of War*: (2010): Pegasus Entertainment; Running time 60 minutes; Pegasus. Dolby PAL DVD format.
Transcript of conversation with Mary Houghton Brown: 16th December 2013 (my questions and responses in italics)

AF: So have you found several other people?

I have to say that there are not very many around:

AF: well no…. there wouldn’t be

No. This research should have been done years ago

AF: well yes, that’s what my mother said...didn’t you? You said that this research should have been done ages ago.

MHB: yes...well, you see...I’m 97and umm

AF: you must have been one of the very youngest people to ever take in evacuee children because you were only ...23

MHB: yes, yes I was quite young; really I’d only just been married

A she was only married the year before, so she was quite young, there won’t be many people who took in children of my mother’s age

Did you have any children of your own Mrs Houghton Brown?

At this time yes, Anthony had been...you had been born

AF: Yes

MHB: you had been born, you were...

A : just me, I was 3 months old, they came in September 1939 and my birthday is in June

MHB: yes, yes

AF: June, July August, September ...I’m not sure of the exact date....

MHB: hmm

AF: tell Fi, Mum, how you came to collect the boys...what happened

MHB: well, we were told that these boys would be coming down from London, the children

Yes, ....and we we, we were in one village and the next village was where the school was and
the school is where we would go to pick them up...and luckily it was a beautiful hot day as a matter of fact and everyone was outside. My husband was a doctor and he had his work to do and we only had one car and so um by the time we got there there were only these two little boys left, we were late and they were left really because they wouldn’t be parted and actually the little boy clung to his brother and certainly wasn’t going to be parted, before this we had had a false alarm, as it proved because the people of Bath..

AF: Mummy, Mummy I need to interrupt, you’ve go tin a bit of a muddle with that... Bath was two years later, was two years later.

MHB: Oh, was it? Oh I beg your pardon I was thinking it was before...

AF: no, Bath was 2 years later

MHB: Oh yes, right, right, yes....anyway it was, by the time we got to this next village there were only these 2 little boys left who wouldn’t be separated .....so we took both of them [laughs quietly] really had no option – in fact it was a shame for the big boy because he was very ready, very ready to mix with the village boys and they were very happy with him....but the little...the little boy clung to him...and ...well, really was rather a bother....[QL]....so ....we made some enquiries a dn found that actually his mother....with a baby I think....well certainly with, with someone younger anyway...was only 30 miles away so we made arrangements that the little boy should be transferred to his mother....

AF: [interrupts] Mummy, but that was after...3 months wasn’t it

MHB: yes, yes...

AF: ...that was about three months later wasn’t it?

MHB: Yes, when it was clear that he really wasn’t going to settle....because it really wasn’t fair to the big boy to have him, to have this little boy cling to him.. and that’s what happened.....we managed to get him moved...and that was really much, much better

*Do you remember how old they were?*

MHB; I can sort of see them...they were [AF:10], 12...

AF: 10 and 5

MHB: yes, 5
Appendix 2a

AF: we know that the oldest one must have been under 11, because he would have left the village school..

MHB: yes that’s right...

AF: he would have left the village school at 11.... And the younger one – well although he looks younger...we think he was probably 5 because they didn’t take children at younger than 5 then....although it is possible that the school said that they would take him even though he hadn’t had his 5th birthday because of the circumstances...

_Had he been evacuated officially?_

AF: yes

_Children under school age were usually evacuated with their mothers_

AF: Oh, right, right, I didn’t know that ...he wouldn’t have been separated from his mother....well she was evacuated with another...a baby my mother thinks

MHB: yes, we eventually found out that the, umm, the mother and the younger, the much younger child were at a farm in....Devonshire I think, we,we managed to get him sent there

_But the older boy – was he, you said he was quite happy to be with the village children?_

MHB: well he was happy to be with the other children I think

_Do you know where they came from?_

MHB: well, we know they came from...

AF: they came from London, we know they came from London....and one of the first places to evacuate...although we have no idea whether they came from there..was Dagenham, si it is possible that they came from Dagenham, although we have no proof of that, no proof at all, and they came to the school by bus didn’t they?

MHB: yes

AF: but whether the bus had come from the station, or whether the bus had come from Dagenham

MHB: yes, yes...

AF: you don’t remember....
Appendix 2a

MHB: well I don’t really know, as I said, we were late getting there and I didn’t get as much information as we might have done...

Did you get any information from a Billeting Officer...did anyone come and visit you to ask if you would take children?

MHB: oh no, no,

AF: Mummy, how did you know how to go to the school...somebody must have talked to you or otherwise how would you have known to go to the school?

MHB: oh yes, we were certainly notified, I don’t remember anybody asking us....because we had no option

AF: well, maybe you had a letter? Because very few people I think had telephones, Daddy did

MHB: well we did because he was a doctor.. well maybe we had a letter then...yes, I know we were told to go and we were late getting there, but how we were told I don’t really remember....

AF: we’ve got a photo of them on the day that they arrived [picks up photo album]...we’ve got a photo, haven’t we...and you can see, all they are carrying is a brown carrier bag that is only half full, you can tell from the photo, .....and in the photo we can see that they little boy...and maybe the older one...are wearing brand new wellington boots..

MHB: that’s right! [laughs] that’s right

AF: That are much too big and you can see where they have been folded over – so some organisation – we think in London – had said ‘these children are going to the country, some of them will be going to farms’, and someone had equipped them with wellington boots....and they were wearing their gas masks...weren’t they

MHB: oh, yes, they couldn’t be parted from their gas masks...

Were you living here, in this village?

MHB: we were living in Leigh on Mendip – well I say we were living at Leigh on Mendip, there was a village, there was our house and the manor House in the valley, at the bottom of the hill, and we had to walk up the hill to get to the village, the real village was almost above us

AF: you were almost in Coleford, weren’t you...
Appendix 2a

MHB: well Coleford was 6 or 7 miles away

AF: no, no no

MHB: well, I thought it was. It was quite a drive away

AF: and you knew a farmer’s wife who took two boys as well, didn’t you? Tell Fi about that...

MHB: oh yes, I was fairly friendly with this rather wealthy farmer’s wife....and she said to me
[in incredulous parody]..’I hear you have two boys, and they eat with you in the Dining Room!’
I said, yes....don’t you? ‘Oh no’ she said ‘they have their meals in the kitchen with the cook!’
[laughs]We didn’t have a cook, and our kitchen was too small... it wouldn’t have occurred to me anyway!

*How did you feel about having them?*

MHB: Well, it was all very interesting....I felt very sorry for them...we felt very sorry for the
younger boy, and we had to make several enquiries to find out where his mother was...but the
elder boy, I really think he rather enjoyed himself!

AF: it must have been quite challenging for you because you had only been married for a
year....and you were 23 and you already had a baby, so to suddenly have a 10 year old and a 5
year old, and a baby – and a very busy doctor’s wife...

MHB: [laughs quietly] yes, yes well it was....

AF: because you ran, what...a clinic for babies, didn’t you?

MHB: oh yes, yes,

AF: as a nurse, and you had that to cope with that as well......

MHB: oh yes, I can’t remember what her name was, the Lady of the Manor...well she had a
meeting in the village to see what we could do for the troops –

AF: at that meeting did you discuss the children?

MHB: no – we only discussed about the troops, I can’t remember whether this was before or
after....I think before...

AF: probably after because the boys arrived before war was declared

MHB: yes...
Appendix 2a

AF: I asked you if you can remember buying any clothes for the boys,

MHB: no I don’t remember buying any clothes for them

AF: well, we saw that they came with only the brown carrier bag...they can’t even have had a complete change of clothes each from the look of the bag

MHB: hmm, well I don’t remember buying anything for them

AF: Did someone else in the village give you clothes? Someone with older children?

MHB: well, we collected clothes, people gave whatever they had

AF: ah, did people take them to the school or the village hall and then you could go and see what they had

MHB: it must have been the school I think, because the school was very good

AF: you must have needed more clothes than they came with, you must have needed more....

*How much of your time was spent looking after them each day?*

MHB: well I don’t remember being bothered by them [pauses]

AF: well, did they have their lunch at school? Did you have to give them a packed lunch or did the school give them lunch?

M...well, I suppose I gave them a packed lunch, I don’t think, no, I don’t think the school gave them lunch...I suppose I must have given it to them

AF: well I don’t know what happened in those days, now the village school cooks lunches, but I don’t know what happened then...

MHB: no....

*Did they bring ration books with them?*

MHB: I don’t remember...no

AF: you had a garden, didn’t you? You had a big garden, and you had a gardener,

MHB: yes, we had a big garden, and I don’t think we ever bought vegetables... we also had to have an air-raid shelter...and one night the alarm went, we had several false alarms..[tells me a story of being in the air raid shelter with a woman from the village]
Appendix 2a

AF: did you go down to the air raid shelter with the little boys, with the evacuee boys?

MHB: well, we must have done...but I don’t remember....no, I don’t remember them being there, I don’t think we can have done...I remember the woman from the village and her boys, but not the evacuees. We tried to keep in touch with them, with the evacuee boys; I remember that the older one had gone on to a farm in Devonshire

AF: what, they were moved on from you, somewhere else you mean?

MHB: yes, well I think he must have been

AF: did he go back to London and was evacuated again?

MHB: hmm....well I don’t know, I don’t know

AF: we rather think that because London hadn’t been bombed after 6 months they went back home to London and then were evacuated again when the bombing started

*That does seem to have happened in a lot of cases – children drifted home again and then were re-evacuated once the bombing started*

AF: yes, but by that time you had two children and were in no position to take children because it was a little house

MHB: no, no....

AF: and shortly after that, my father, who was a doctor, was called up and sent to North Africa to a tented hospital and a locum had to move into their house with his wife and child and that’s when my mother, with two small children moved in with my grandparents....

AF: another interesting story my mother told us was that whist the boys were there my mother was pregnant with my brother Jeremy....I am the eldest....so my mother became pregnant with her second baby...and you wanted to... to call the baby ‘Anthony’

MHB: yes, yes we did

AF: but you already had the [evacuee] boy called Tony, so you though it would be too confusing...but in fact Tony left, we are pretty sure that he left after Jeremy was born because you changed the name of your second child – you had to wait until Anthony was born a few years later
So having the evacuees really did have an impact on your family life... it affected the choice of name for your son... that really is beyond the call of duty!

MHB: [laughs] yes it did, didn't it!

AF: my father wrote a diary, but he doesn’t say anything about it at all really... I don’t know why... [recounts diary entry of them picking up two families of women and children on the road out of Bath after the city was bombed. These families stayed for 2 or 3 nights until they were sure there was no further bombing and they returned to their homes]

AF: but you were always very self-sufficient Mum, weren’t you?

MHB: yes, well we didn’t feel the effects of rationing much... because we grew our own vegetables

AF: you made all your own clothes... my Grandmother made all our clothes

MHB: [laughs] yes, yes – I was brought up to sew

AF: maybe you made some clothes for those boys

MHB: I don’t remember...

AF: I do remember now you saying that the people in the village collected clothes. Maybe you went to see what you could get

MHB: yes, people were very helpful... and willing to do what they could

So you had help from the village – did you have any help from the Officials? From the Billeting people at all?

MHB: only a woman from the village... nothing to do with the boys

Do you remember receiving any payments from the Government to help look after the boys?

MHB: no, no I don’t remember any money being exchanged

Did they have any financial impact on your family?

AF: they must have had an effect on your housekeeping... if you had these two extra mouths to feed?

MHB: yes... but I don’t remember what, it’s a long time ago! [laughs]
How long did the older boy stay with you?

MHB: I……I....

AF: we think it was six months

MHB: I have six months in my mind....maybe about seven months in all....yes, he was quite
happy in his school and mixing with the village boys..............

And how did you feel about having them with you?

MHB: I was quite happy about it......oh yes....

AF: and my father would certainly have been happy – he had a heart of gold, didn’t he,
Daddy?

MHB: oh, yes

AF: my father would have done anything to help anybody, so he would have been very keen to
hang on to them

MHB: well the fact that I had been a nurse....that I was a trained nurse, and I was happy
dealing with all sorts of people....I think that makes a difference...and I loved working in the
children’s ward...I was very happy....so I was used to working with children.

Did the boys have any health problems?

AF: did they come with head lice?

MHB: no, no. they were fine, quite healthy.....that might be why the people [the farmer and
his wife] didn’t want them in the dining room!

Mrs HB, how did you feel when they left?

MHB: I should think a feeling of slight relief....I hadn’t grown that fond of them, you know...I
was interested in following their progress, you know when they left, but, um....it was rather a
relief.......

AF: you were also heavily pregnant

MHB: yes, I was
Appendix 2a

AF: you had a toddler, and you were also expecting another baby so you must have been getting a bit exhausted...

MHB: yes, yes that’s right....

AF: Fi, that’s the photo....aren’t they gorgeous?

[shows me the copy of the photograph of the two boys taken by Dr Houghton Brown the day they arrived, smartly dressed although the older boy obviously has several layers of clothes and trousers that look too large. The younger has wellington boots that are so large someone has turned the tops down, although one has sprung back up and is thigh length, the elder boy has a firm grip on his brother’s sleeve and there is a brown paper carrier on the drive in front of them. Both are wearing their gas mask box and are smiling faintly]

_The little one is so tiny! They are good looking boys_

AF: aren’t they just? We just wish we could track them down....

_I see what you mean about his wellingtons!_

AF: do you see the carrier bag, there’s not a lot in it

_Do you remember if they had any food with them when they came?_

AF: did they have any food on the train?

MHB: I don’t know, I really don’t remember but it was all organised so someone must have fed them...maybe at the school. We were so late.....

[general chat about the photos and the family]

_I meant to ask you...when I write this up, would you like a copy?_

AF: oh yes

MHB: that would be lovely...

_And would you like to remain anonymous or would you like me to mention you by name?_

AF: by name

MHB: oh definitely by name I think

_Thank you so much, both of you for talking to me...I really appreciate it._
Appendix 2a

[further discussion of whether the boys were with the Houghton Brown’s for Christmas.......Mrs HB does not remember either the boys being with them for Christmas, or going home and then coming back after the holiday, Anne believes that her grandfather may well have made presents for them if they were there, Mrs HB does not remember buying presents]

AF: I think that because you were a nurse you coped better than other people...you were a very capable young lady

MHB: yes, that’s true, I didn’t get bothered by things, I didn’t fuss or worry, no, no.

AF: I asked you how the boys got to school and you said the boys walked, even though it was quite a long walk

MHB: I expect they did, I can’t think that I....well we only had one car anyway, so I expect they walked. Children were used to walking! It was about 3 or 4 miles, we were in the valley at the bottom of the hill, the village was at the top...

Quite a trek to school then, uphill...quicker on the way home!

[here there is a conversation between AF and her mother about how the younger boy had got to Devonshire to his mother....MHB cannot remember the details, she knows that she did not take him, and that she never met the mother so she believes that someone must have come to collect him. A suggests a Social Corker or someone similar, MHB cannot remember]

AF: when the little boy left was the older boy very sad? Sad to see his brother go?

I was just about to ask that  [laughter from MHB and A]

MHB: oh no, he was rather overjoyed I think! [laughs], he was quite happy with the village boys and didn’t want his brother tagging on. I don’t think he was sad!

Is there anything that you can remember about the boys or the evacuation, anything I haven’t asked you about?

MHB: no, no I don’t think so...I get a bit mixed up about the boys and the other....we had a very active Sunday School...

AF: Did the boys go? I bet they did. Did you go to church on Sundays? Did you take the boys with you?
Appendix 2a

MHB: well....I think we must have.....

AF: well if you went, I don’t think you would have left them at home..

MHB: Oh no, we wouldn’t have left them.

AF: I think that you have been to church practically every Sunday of your life!

MHB: I remember that the church was half way up the hill...but I don’t remember the boys being with me somehow.

[here the conversation moves to discussion of family photos and non-related topics]

End
Appendix 2b

Letter from Pat Crimmin sent 15.01.14, unsolicited but because she knew about my dissertation.

We had evacuees when I was a child in Aberdare Glamorgan, from London first (v.rough from the docks area) and then from Birmingham when that area was being badly bombed. My parents took a girl, a year younger than me — so about 7 I think — one of a large family living v. near Birmingham Small Arms Factory, who had been regularly bombed. They were Roman Catholics & altho [sic] room was found for most of them Madelaine was left partly because Aberdare was still recovering from years of depression and most people could only take 1 child in addition to their own families and then because in this strongly Protestant chapel-going area, she was an RC and most RCs in Aberdare were Irish or of Irish decent and looked at rather askance on those two counts (most of the doctors were also Irish – tho’ [sic] their Catholicism wasn’t so great an objection for some reason). My parents were willing to take this little girl as they had no prejudice against RCs and the thought of her left alone was repugnant to them and it was known they would not attempt any interference with her religion. She was v. dirty, suffering from head lice and impetigo when she came home that night and was quickly sent to the local disinfecting centre in Aberdare until the lice and impetigo were dealt with. She was a nice little girl and with us for, I think, 3 years, possibly 2. She couldn’t read or write when she came, much to my amazement, but I rather resented her I’m afraid. She went everywhere with us, visits to my grandparents, to the seaside at Barry (she’d never seen the sea and was overwhelmed by the first site of it) and she was a good friend. I wish I knew what happened to her but she went back home and we lost touch with her.

Further letter 13th April 2014:

I didn’t miss Madelaine when she left. I can’t say she was a good friend, tho’ [sic] she was a loyal little girl. We once did something wrong – well, I started it, I think in playing we upset a vase of flowers and the water got into the cupboard where the dry rations were kept. There was a row. Neither of us confessed tho’ it was I who was to blame but Madelaine kept silent too so my mother punished both of us: some hard slaps on the legs and to bed in disgrace! I’m ashamed of this now, but it shows, I think, what a loyal and more socially aware child she was – one of a large family, 6 I think, a sister with another (RC) family two doors from us, 2 brothers 2 streets away and I think another sister and brother. I quite liked her but she couldn’t read or write when she arrived and I had been able to do both for 2 years at least and we had little in common. Poor little girl, she must have been very lonely at times tho’ I don’t remember her complaining. But children can be quite indifferent to each other and only children don’t learn social skills very easily and I was rather a loner as a child…..

…..But despite rationing we had no shortage of food. My mother was a good manager and my father had 2 allotments and kept a pig, so we had plenty of food, supplemented I remember now and then, by mysterious supplies – fresh eggs, meat etc. I suspect thro’ [sic] a black market with local farmers – the less said about this the better. Also my father as a railway man was in what was classed as ‘heavy occupation’ and carried extra meat and protein rations and we knew someone who worked in the local slaughterhouse, so the odd (probably illicit) supplies of suet/fat appeared now and then.
Appendix 2c

**Conversation with Lady Emma Barnard of Parham**  
Monday 24th March 2014

Mrs Veronica Tritton, Lady Barnard’s Great Aunt, passed the stories of the War years and the evacuees to her, she also wrote a record which has been kept by the family.

Lady Barnard’s Great Grandparents, the Hon. Mr and Mrs Clive Pearson had 30 boys billeted with them from 39/40 to 42. Official evacuation from Peckham, South East London. Arrived with 2 teachers (not their own teachers she believes). Arrived at Pullborough station and then bussed up to Parham (a large but privately owned house)

They were indented 30 boys but Mrs Pearson absolutely horrified that they had been separated from their families, their siblings especially so she went to the authorities and demanded that they also be sent... the sisters. The youngest child under their care was 5 years old.

Domestic arrangements made by Mrs Wooley [housekeeper] – children slept in the accommodation that is now the Estate Office – many bedrooms off a long corridor, the children came into the main house to eat all their meals. Eventually they also had a couple of teachers too – not, she believes the same ones who delivered to boys to their billet.

The Pearson’s daughter, Veronica Tritton, also lived at the house. Lady Barnard says that her husband had been killed during the first 8 months of the war and she had been devastated by the loss – “the great love of her life” - the arrival of the children was a joy to her. She was something of a tomboy and took the children under her wing, teaching city boys to climb trees and run wild thorough the enormous estate (today some 875 acres). The Pearson’s were also very involved and ‘hands on’ even though Mr Pearson the younger son of Viscount Cowdray was a ‘very, very busy man’. He had a treehouse built for the children and thatched with heather. The children were not restricted as to where they could roam, but in order to communicate with them Mrs Tritton taught them to return to the house when they heard a dog whistle: 1 blast meant “come back”; 2 “come back now”; 3 “come now or there will be trouble”! Mrs Tritton said “they flew like birds”

The children apparently refused to eat vegetables, since to them vegetables came in tins! To encourage them they were given an area of the kitchen garden and there was a competition to see who could grow the best ones. The only problem being, she said, that initially they kept digging them up to see how they were doing.

On the house website there is a report of the war years, and a photograph that she told me about: when they built a snowman of Hitler.

At Christmas the children were given presents, the first year they had hairbrushes, the second they were all given dressing-gowns. Lady Barnard reports that they had not had such a thing before and they wore them everywhere, refusing to take them off. Dr Martin Parsons [in a telephone conversation with me in July 2013] says that Parham had a reunion of the surviving evacuees about 10 years ago, and they had all brought their dressing gowns with them, having kept them all that time. He also states that Parham was very unusual in that it is a rare
example of the Upper Class taking in evacuees, there is much evidence to show that the higher echelons of society at the time avoided this duty whenever possible, it was usually the working class, those least able to afford it, who offered shelter.

Lady Barnard is still in contact with many of the evacuees: they still come back to the house and email. They hold her family in great affection, one saying that “we were the luckiest evacuees in England.” also that “there hasn’t been a day in my life when I haven’t thought of Mr and Lady Pearson. They changed my life.” She says that they all called her great-grandmother “Lady Pearson” although she was actually ‘Mrs’ – which she feels is a great statement of the respect and affection that they held for her.

![The ‘Hitler Snowman’ reproduced with permission.](image)

Once a month the mother’s would come to visit, which Lady Barnard describes as ‘very traumatic’ and the children had an ‘unspoken code’ that when the mothers left they would all run to their own hiding places around the property – ‘it was accepted practice, and they must have cried their eyes out’ – and reconvene for supper. There was no teasing, and they never referred to the tears.

In addition to the Christmas presents all the children received a weekly sum of pocket money – duly recorded in the estate ledgers – and they must have used some of this money to purchase the Christmas presents that they gave to the Pearson’s. Lady Barnard says that these were a covering for a footstool and a green rug with a black cat on it: both of which are still at the house. The children had made them themselves.

In 1942 the house was requisitioned for The Canadian Infantry, part of the Southern Defence region. The evacuees were moved to other billets. Lady Barnard reports that her great aunt was “I think devastated when they left, although she never said so, it might just be something I read into it as a mother myself, but I think she must have been”. She always spoke of them in a positive light, (‘she never had a negative spin on anything’) although she did tell lady Barnard that they ‘were cheeky’, her reported ‘favourite’ a boy nicknamed ‘Puddn’ who was both ‘cheeky and naughty’.
Appendix 2c

A legacy of this time was to plant a grove of trees on the estate – named ‘Peckham Grove’ – each child planting one tree. Today it is flourishing.
I then introduced her there I had introduction to another the
who you like often persuade me.

From her lips.* When I was asked, "I can bring this country, why not have
in your country?" This is the house in and if you turn them as I myself put
around and to ask to put the apple into the house. I repeated "Under
answered the little house."

I introduced her there I was glad.

I then turned to her

I said that she would not accept it but on the other hand, she would
and brought up this little house under my order. She replied "I will not accept
nor would accept any encouragement."

I asked her if she were to return to the house of the still
answered the little house.

I introduced her here.

If she were here.

I asked if her name was A. and she said, "Yes, I am."

He were shown into the dining-room over and over.

Here is a map of the town and a quick manner the door and I asked to see
Borough of Aylesbury.

Report on

On the 9th January, 1941, at 4.40 p.m. I called at Aylesbury, to serve a Bilingting Notice on the occupier, requiring her to provide accommodation for an evacuee boy, named...

...and her son were the only persons living in the house. Mrs. refused to accept the Bilingting Notice, and said she would not have the boy in the house. She stated that her husband was in the Army, and challenged me as to why I was not in uniform.

I placed the Bilingting Notice on a chair in the hall. Mrs. threw the form out in the porch and slammed the door.

After a struggle, owing to Mrs. holding the letter-box, I managed to get the notice into the letter-box. As I was leaving she threw the Bilingting Notice out into the front garden, where I left it. Miss witnessed the letter act.

was billeted on Mrs. at 2.0 p.m. on Friday, January 10th.

A. J. Gates,
Bilingting Officer of the Borough of Aylesbury.
Appendix 5

Aylesbury,

Bucks.

30.9.37.

The Evacuation Authorities,

Walton Grange,

Walton Road,

Aylesbury.

Dear Sirs,

This is just to advise you that I shall be returning to you on Monday, after I have taken them to the welfare clinic to have their heads cleaned. This action is not unpremeditated, as I have had them for a month, & I hope the experience I have suffered during this period will never be repeated.

I took these children in when the billeting officer discovered that the home for which they were intended had been closed, & the poor souls were standing in the rain; it was miserable, dirty, & foreboding. More than I could bear to see. When I undressed them I had shock no. 1. I found them indescribably ragged & dirty. Their
Appendix 5

The change of clothes was most unexpected. So much so that they had to be washed immediately. I had to boil them out with starch. The majority purchased new clothes. The shoes were brown. I have had them repaired and bought new ones.

They had no idea how to use a lavatory. The smallest girl (aged six) continually has "accidents" in her knickers. This habit has been so often repeated that I have made her wash them out herself this past week — the "accidents" (cold water) are now on the increase.

The boy, aged seven, found it easier to leave pools on the floor than use the lavatory. Fear of this habit I have cured him.

They didn't know what a bath meant. I found two stools on giving the smallest girl her first bath, but felt confident that I could overcome this. By means of their perseverance, I have got them to wet me have clothes to wash each week.
them twice a week.

And after a month of pleading,

... annoying, a finally threatened to

give to her teacher to move for

the other girl (age 12) to change

her less a smoker. She seems

to resist every effort to help her.

I can't get "near" her. She

doesn't talk to me. She takes

anything we buy her as a

matter of course; we are still

convinced of success.

The day that war was

declared I visited Queen's Park

where a made the request that

they should be removed. My

husband - I were sleeping in

a single bed so that the children
could have our room. I have

my parents (over 70) a soldier

deflected on me; but when I

saw how rushed I knew the

officiers were, I thinking to do

my bit to help, I thought

in the matter a advised to

by the Billeting Officer accordingly.
I can honestly say that I have done everything possible to make these children happy. I have prepared good wholesome meals for them, I have washed and nursed them, I have done everything possible to improve their lot. I hoped we could help them through to their parents eventually for happy little people.

Now a snippery now continually runs. Now I have found blood on his pillow, sheets, a blanket. I think he should be medically examined.

He has a most unpleasant rash, which will not yield to home measures.

I have milk or nips in bed as everything possible to clean up this cold. I can see nothing further.

NOW in spirit of washing over head & feet all alive with livestock as is the last straw. I cannot run them. I have killed all three heads in paraffin.
Photograph 366:

The Town Clerk had a reply on 2.10.39 to inform him that the two girls were seen by the Medical Officer of Health and issued with a certificate to say 'that they are suitable cases for treatment in the Public Assistance Institution, owing to body and head vermin. The child [boy's name] is not in need of such treatment'
I wish to register my most sincere thanks for your prompt action, which resulted in the removal of the girls from my care.

I fear my entry into your office was a most unexpected and alarming one, but I felt so utterly desperate and broken-hearted, than something just had to be done, to draw official attention to my plea.

The items in unbelievable quantities have today been...
found in the furniture the girl used - even in the wardrobe - substantial cash is now to remove them. Therefore the room has now been purged in.

I pray successfully - completely cleaned.

As I will attend the clinic daily about his nasal swabbing.

I now go war to the day when the box is removed in accordance with your wishes, as he is a hourly reminder of a filthy and horrid experience.

Because then close my home for a short while in order to take a short holiday - on my return I hope to be of nationwide service in a less unpleasant and surprising form. Again, grateful thanks to you.

Sincerely,

Personal.

Town 8.

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