

# CIVILIAN EVACUATION TO DEVON IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Submitted by Susan Jane Hess, to the University of Exeter as a  
thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History,  
July 2006.

This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it  
is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be  
published without proper acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work  
has been identified and that no material has previously been  
submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any  
other University.

.....

# ABSTRACT

Extensive sources have been reviewed and analysed to piece together for the first time a detailed academic study of civilian evacuation to Devon<sup>1</sup> viewed against the national backdrop. The primary focus of this thesis is the large number of unaccompanied children who were officially evacuated to the County under the auspices of the Government Evacuation Scheme during the Second World War. However, Chapter Six discusses the evacuation of mothers and accompanying children, unofficial (private) evacuees and private school parties. The majority of evacuated children arriving in Devon originated from the London area and southeastern counties. In addition large numbers of children were also evacuated to the County from Bristol and within the County from Plymouth (Devon) during 1941 and briefly from Exeter in May 1942. Each of the three national evacuation waves is considered individually throughout the text as they are quite distinct in complexion, a fact frequently ignored in generalised accounts which tend to focus on reaction to the initial wave.

This thesis argues that:

1. lack of regional and local research has resulted in evacuation largely being viewed in generalised and stereotypical terms without due regard for the socioeconomic and geopolitical variance between those areas involved or the particular localised features of the evacuation process
2. the acclimatisation of evacuated children was particularly successful in Devon and drift back less than the national average
3. local evidence supports the argument that contemporary national reports of impoverished, dirty and ill mannered evacuees were frequently exaggerated
4. evacuation was central in accelerating postwar reform in areas of education, child care and welfare

---

<sup>1</sup> Maps of Devon can be found in *Appendix 1* (Philips' New Map of Devon 1938 kindly provided by Dr R. Watts) and *Appendix 2* (Map of Devon Parishes taken from M.R. Ravenhill and M.Rowe, ed. *Devon Maps and Map-Makers: Manuscript Maps before 1840*, Volume 1 (Devon and Cornwall Record Society 2002))

The civilian evacuation during World War Two was a remarkable event in the history of modern Britain. Interest in the subject has recently increased but there is enormous scope and need for further research both to broaden our understanding of the nature and impact of evacuation and to test entrenched views. The over-arching aim of this thesis is to contribute to this exploration.

# CONTENTS

## VOLUME 1

<b>Title Page</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>List of Contents</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>List of Tables and Illustrations</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Abbreviations</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>12</b>
General introduction and aims of thesis	12
Historiography	18
Sources and Methodology	36
Structure of the study	44
<b>Chapter One: The status quo on the eve of war</b>	<b>46</b>
Pre-war welfare provision	46
Pre-war residential children's homes, nursery, elementary and secondary provision	50
Pre-war educational provision in Devon's schools	52
Devon on the eve of war	57
<b>Chapter Two: The origin and planning of the Government Evacuation Scheme from a central and local perspective</b>	<b>64</b>
Conclusion	80
<b>Chapter Three: From reception to return 1939-1945</b>	<b>82</b>
Reception	85
Aspects of billeting	102
Billeting Officer	110
Billeting difficulties	117
Alternative solutions to billeting in private households	126
Supervision of billets	129
Accidents amongst evacuees in Devon	132
Welfare provision	134
Financial recovery for officially evacuated schoolchildren	147
Conclusion	153

<b>Chapter Four: The emotional experience</b>	<b>155</b>
Trauma	156
Acclimatisation of evacuated schoolchildren in Devon	162
Drift Back	171
Return Home	180
Conclusion	184
<b>Chapter Five: The educational experience</b>	<b>185</b>
Billeting problems	186
Separate identity of evacuated schools	190
Double shifts	192
Shortage of educational equipment	193
Wartime curriculum	194
The role of teachers	196
Educational disruption	200
Plymouth's schoolchildren	206
Conclusion	211
<b>Chapter Six: Provision for additional evacuees</b>	<b>213</b>
Officially evacuated mothers and accompanying children	213
Nursery provision for the under fives	244
Unofficial (private) evacuees	262
Private School Parties	273
Conclusion	275
<b>VOLUME 2</b>	
<b>Chapter Seven: The 'slum mentality' of the evacuee – the myth challenged</b>	<b>276</b>
Devon's pre-war school medical service	277
Complaints about the health and hygiene of evacuee children	279
Dirty Habits	284
Pediculosis	285
Enuresis	295
Skin infections: scabies and impetigo	303
Conclusion	311
<b>Chapter Eight: Four aspects of evacuation evaluated: a local perspective</b>	<b>314</b>
Juvenile Delinquency	314
Religion	322
Wartime work undertaken by local and evacuee schoolchildren	327
Clothing	334
Conclusion	347

<b>Chapter Nine: Wartime expansion of school meals and milk</b>	<b>350</b>
Pre-war provision	350
Wartime expansion of school meals and milk, with particular focus on Devon	357
School meals provision	359
School milk provision	376
Conclusion	385
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>387</b>
<b>Appendix 1a: Philips New Map of Devon (1938)</b>	<b>403</b>
<b>Appendix 1b: Enlargement of North Devon</b>	<b>404</b>
<b>Appendix 1b: Enlargement of South Devon</b>	<b>405</b>
<b>Appendix 1c: Enlargement of East Devon</b>	<b>406</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Map of Devon Parishes</b>	<b>407</b>
<b>Appendix 3: List of local education authorities with children evacuated to Devon 1942-1943</b>	<b>409</b>
<b>Appendix 4: List of ex-evacuee sample</b>	<b>411</b>
<b>Appendix 5: Questionnaire sent to ex-evacuee sample</b>	<b>414</b>
<b>Appendix 6: List of key central and local government officials</b>	<b>416</b>
<b>Appendix 7: Administrative Area of Devon County Council, including civilian population figures for 1931,1938 and 1939</b>	<b>420</b>
<b>Appendix 8: Locally recorded examples of evacuation planning</b>	<b>422</b>
<b>Appendix 9: HMI Evacuation Reports for Devon in September 1939</b>	<b>428</b>
<b>Appendix 10: List of billetors' occupations taken from ex-evacuee sample</b>	<b>430</b>
<b>Appendix 11: Table of billet changes amongst sample</b>	<b>431</b>
<b>Appendix 12: Examples of drift back from Devon</b>	<b>433</b>

<b>Appendix 13: List of London County Council Schools sent to Devon in 1939</b>	<b>435</b>
<b>Appendix 14: List of evacuated school parties and destination in Devon, provided by evacuee sample</b>	<b>438</b>
<b>Appendix 15: List of evacuated secondary schools in Devon 1940-1942</b>	<b>444</b>
<b>Appendix 16: List of properties requisitioned by local authorities in Devon</b>	<b>445</b>
<b>Appendix 17: Examples of welfare initiatives introduced by Devon's local authorities during late 1940</b>	<b>447</b>
<b>Appendix 18: Dates and approximate numbers of evacuees remaining in Barnstaple and Bideford Municipal Boroughs 1941-1944</b>	<b>449</b>
<b>Appendix 19: Details of local billeting difficulties during 1944</b>	<b>450</b>
<b>Appendix 20: Examples of Nursery Centres established in Devon during 1940-1941</b>	<b>453</b>
<b>Appendix 21: List of Residential Nurseries accommodating children under 5 from Plymouth as of August 1942</b>	<b>454</b>
<b>Appendix 22: Examples of shortage of billets for official evacuees due to influx of unofficial evacuees during 1940</b>	<b>455</b>
<b>Appendix 23: List of unofficial evacuees on Devon School Registers w/e 23.9.39</b>	<b>456</b>
<b>Appendix 24: List of private schools evacuated to Devon</b>	<b>458</b>
<b>Appendix 25: Local council records relating to pediculosis and its treatment</b>	<b>460</b>
<b>Appendix 26: List of sick bays and hostels in Devon (excluding Exeter) established by August 1941</b>	<b>461</b>
<b>Appendix 27: Examples of damage claims found in local council archives</b>	<b>464</b>
<b>Appendix 28: Data on skin infections found in local school log books</b>	<b>467</b>
<b>Appendix 29: List of recorded local council entries regarding impetigo and scabies</b>	<b>470</b>

<b>Appendix 30: List of approximate dates of canteen provision for schools under DCEC administration and Exeter City Council</b>	<b>473</b>
<b>Appendix 31: Approximate available percentages of elementary and secondary pupils under DCEC administration taking milk 1939-1946</b>	<b>480</b>
<b>Appendix 32: Types of milk supplied to Devon schools 1942-44</b>	<b>481</b>
<b>Appendix 33: National expansion of school meals and milk in both elementary and secondary schools, 1938-1945</b>	<b>482</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>483</b>



## **LIST OF TABLES AND ILLUSTRATIONS**

### **TABLES:**

**4.1 page 166 Were local children welcoming?**

**4.2 page 175 Reasons for drift back of pupils from  
Berrymeade School (Acton) between 2 October 1939 and 1  
August 1940**

### **ILLUSTRATIONS:**

**Front Cover - Evacuees arriving in Devon (*Google Images*)**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>BDEA</b>	<b>Barnstaple Divisional Education Authority</b>
<b>BO</b>	<b>Billeting Officer</b>
<b>CBO</b>	<b>Chief Billeting Officer</b>
<b>CMO</b>	<b>County Medical Officer</b>
<b>DCC</b>	<b>Devon County Council</b>
<b>DCEC</b>	<b>Devon County Education Committee</b>
<b>DRO</b>	<b>Devon Record Office (Exeter)</b>
<b>ECA</b>	<b>Exeter City Archives</b>
<b>ERA</b>	<b>Evacuees Reunion Association</b>
<b>HMI</b>	<b>His Majesty's Inspector</b>
<b>LEA</b>	<b>Local Education Authority</b>
<b>LCC</b>	<b>London County Council</b>
<b>MB</b>	<b>Municipal Borough</b>
<b>MH</b>	<b>Ministry of Health</b>
<b>MOH</b>	<b>Medical Officer of Health</b>
<b>MOI</b>	<b>Ministry of Information</b>
<b>NFWI</b>	<b>National Federation of Women's Institutes</b>
<b>NDRO</b>	<b>North Devon Record Office (Barnstaple)</b>
<b>PRO</b>	<b>Public Record Office (now National Archives)</b>
<b>PWDRO</b>	<b>Plymouth and West Devon Record Office (Plymouth)</b>
<b>RDC</b>	<b>Rural District Council</b>
<b>SMO</b>	<b>School Medical Officer</b>
<b>TNA</b>	<b>The National Archives</b>
<b>UDC</b>	<b>Urban District Council</b>
<b>WCL</b>	<b>Westcountry Studies Library (Exeter)</b>
<b>WI</b>	<b>Women's Institute</b>
<b>WVS</b>	<b>Women's Voluntary Service</b>