

**The Educational Experiences of Children in England
during the Second World War**

[Introduction, Conclusion & Secondary Bibliography]

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Abstract

This study explores the education of children living on the home front in England, and to a lesser extent Wales, during the Second World War. It uses oral histories, written memories and contemporary material, such as classroom work and children's diaries, alongside archival documents. This multi-faceted approach allows us to ask what young people thought about school and in what ways their lives in the classroom adhered to or differed from the plans of political and educational authorities. In doing so, this thesis contributes to a growing literature which sets out to incorporate the child's perspective into histories of education.

Each chapter considers education from an increasingly broad perspective. It begins in the formal classroom familiar to children during the inter-war years but gradually expands to look at other sites of education – the outdoor environment of the countryside, the purpose-built camp schools, the wireless, and finally the streets and bomb-sites where children found themselves during long periods of school closures. Modes of learning beyond the traditional schoolroom reveal a more complete picture of children's educational lives.

Primarily, this research challenges the historiographical assumption that education was a 'casualty' of the Second World War. While acknowledging the disruptions facing the school system, it reveals the many ways in which individual institutions adapted to the circumstances of the conflict and took the opportunity to introduce a more child-centred curriculum suited to children dealing with difficulties elsewhere in their lives. This research also brings to light two models of citizenship underpinning state attitudes towards the education of children: the *informed citizen* and the *participatory citizen*. The authorities wanted to create a generation of active and educated young people and this took on a particular urgency during wartime. It is also possible to determine children's reactions to this rhetoric. Some took great interest in the events of the conflict and joined local war efforts, but others rejected adult demands by becoming truants or recording discontent in their diaries. Although in many ways confined by adult structures, we see that children were able to negotiate agency over their learning lives within the context of these constraints.

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Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my four late grandparents whose stories of the Second World War cemented my interest in history at an early age. Their childhoods in the East End of London and war-torn Poland and Russia required an unimaginable level of resilience and I was always stuck by their intelligence and enthusiasm for learning despite missing out on many crucial years of formal education. I thank them for showing me that classroom learning and passing exams is not the sole marker of success and it is from them that the inspiration for this thesis stems.

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List of Abbreviations

AASTA	Association of Architects, Surveyors and Technical Assistants
AFS	Auxiliary Fire Service
ARP	Air Raid Precautions
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BBC WAC	British Broadcasting Corporation Written Archives Centre
BFI	British Film Institute
BoE	Board of Education
CCSB	Central Council for School Broadcasting
CORB	Children's Overseas Reception Board
DSB	Director of School Broadcasting
<i>Education</i>	Education: the official organ of the Association of Education Committees
GBS	Governing Bodies of Public Schools
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspector
IoE	UCL Institute of Education Archives
IWM	Imperial War Museum
LCC	London County Council
LEA	Local Education Authority
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
MOA	Mass Observation Archive
NCC	National Camps Corporation
RAF	Royal Air Force
ResCEW	Research Centre for Evacuee and War Child Studies
SJA	School Journey Association
TNA	The National Archives
WVS	Women's Voluntary Service

Introduction

Between 1939 and 1945, British society was confronted by the upheavals of total war. Traditional family structures were dismantled as a result of conscription and the mass evacuation of vulnerable citizens from the cities. The introduction of a strict system of food rationing and regular air raid sirens disrupted the basic realities of everyday life. The aerial bombardment of both the Blitz and the V1 and V2 rockets killed over 62,000 people on the home front and destroyed 222,000 homes, leaving a large population of rootless civilians.¹ An omnipresent fear of invasion in the earlier years of war left many filled with anxiety for their own safety and that of their loved ones. In the midst of this physical, social, and emotional turbulence, the state was required to maintain Britain's educational structures. Historians have identified the problems plaguing the school system as it grappled with wartime changes; on the whole they suggest that it failed to function effectively, thus rendering education a 'casualty' of the conflict.² This thesis intends to re-evaluate this assumption by looking at adult ideas about education and how, or whether, these were received by children.

It is necessary here to define the central subjects of my research – the children. The geographical mobility of young people during the war was remarkable. Many children were evacuated in September 1939 but travelled home a few months later, only to be sent away again as a result of the Nazi occupation of France and the increased risk of invasion. As parents moved around for work or due to other changes in family circumstances, many evacuees did not return to the home they had left.³ Moreover, when evacuated for a second time, some children went back to the same reception area while others were sent somewhere entirely different. Put simply, one life story might involve a young person who was, at different points in the war,

¹ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy* (London, 1950), pp. 329, 335.

² For example G. Bernbaum, *Social Change and the Schools, 1918-1944* (London, 1967), pp. 98-103; N. Longmate, *How We Lived Then* (London, 1971), pp. 191-205; A.M. Preston, 'The Evacuation of Schoolchildren from Newcastle upon Tyne, 1939-1942: An Assessment of the Factors which Influenced the Nature of Educational Provision in Newcastle and its Reception Areas', *History of Education*, 18 (1989), pp. 231-241; E. Hopkins, 'Elementary Education in Birmingham during the Second World War', *History of Education*, 18 (1989), pp. 243-255; J. Gardiner, *Wartime Britain, 1939-1945* (London, 2005), pp. 32-33; P. Starns, *Blitz Families: The Children Who Stayed Behind* (Gloucestershire, 2012), pp. 47-60.

³ There were sixty million changes of address recorded by the Post Office during the Second World War. A. Marwick, *Britain in Our Century: Images and Controversies* (London, 1984), pp. 112-13.

both an evacuee and a city child, who lived in numerous households in multiple areas. Therefore, this thesis rejects the historiographical tendency to consider ‘city children’ and ‘evacuees’ as two entirely separate groups.⁴ These labels often pertained to the same individual whose childhood encompassed both spheres.

Age is another important consideration, since childhood is a socially constructed period of the life-cycle rather than one which is biologically determined.⁵ As Rosie Kennedy has recently argued in her study of children living during the First World War, childhood, or the sense of being a child, is related to experience rather than age.⁶ In the 1940s, a fourteen year old might have been in school under the control of adults or in full-time work exhibiting at least some semblance of independence. Naturally, in a study of education, the focus will be restricted to those young people who were still at school, or legally ought to have been. All children selected for discussion in this thesis were thus monitored by the Board of Education to some degree: either as pupils in their classrooms or camps, or school-less children who were the objects of great concern.⁷ The children explored are, on the whole, those between the ages of five and fourteen who attended elementary schools. Some were older, having gained a place at a secondary school where a small proportion of children moved at the age of eleven and remained until sixteen or eighteen.⁸ Of course, studying children’s education over a period of six years dictates that some of the subjects attended but also left school during the conflict. Although not studied in great depth, the experiences of school leavers do emerge in this research.

Following William Tuttle’s suggestion that children must be divided into generational cohorts, this investigation is sensitive to the variations between a school child beginning their education in 1939 and one coming to the end of it. Older children had specific concerns, for example regarding sexuality or impending

⁴ On evacuees: C. Jackson, *Who Will Take Our Children?: The British Evacuation Program of World War II* (London, 1985); T.L. Crosby, *The Impact of Civilian Evacuation in the Second World War* (London, 1986); R. Inglis, *The Children’s War: Evacuation 1939-1945* (Illinois, 1990); M. Parsons, *I’ll Take That One: Dispelling the Myths of Civilian Evacuation* (London, 1998); J. Welshman, *Churchill’s Children: The Evacuee Experience in Wartime Britain* (Oxford, 2010), p. 8. On city children: Starns, *Blitz Families*.

⁵ H. Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society, 1880-1990*, (Cambridge, 1997), p. 9.

⁶ R. Kennedy, *The Children’s War: Britain, 1914-1918* (London, 2014), p. 9.

⁷ The exception to this is children who attended privately run educational institutions.

⁸ See chapter 1 for further details on the educational structures in place in England and Wales.

military service, not faced by younger boys and girls.⁹ Entering the later stages of childhood brings with it greater potential for agency and control but simultaneously an assumption of increased responsibility which may prove burdensome.¹⁰ A nuanced understanding of the relationship between identity, age and experience is central to this thesis. Wherever possible, I will distinguish between the school lives of infants, juniors and seniors who encountered different obstacles and opportunities.

This thesis is concerned with the educational experiences of children in England, although it makes occasional reference to evacuees who moved to Wales. Scotland and Northern Ireland are outside of the scope of this project. This is because they organised their own evacuation schemes and were controlled by independent educational bodies, therefore they should be the topic of a separate study. Moreover, aside from reference to one of my interviewees, the thesis does not address children who were part of the government's overseas evacuation scheme, known as CORB, since this is being dealt with in current research by others.¹¹ I am interested in the variety of experiences of wartime children who remained in England and Wales during the conflict: both governmental and private evacuees, children at state-funded and fee-paying schools, those who were evacuated and those who were not.

Regardless of whether a child lived in the city, a town, or the countryside, their school life underwent some degree of change, as institutions uprooted to unfamiliar areas, while others set about accommodating the new arrivals. This thesis sets out to answer a number of questions about these changes to elucidate a topic that has been

⁹ W.M. Tuttle Jr., *'Daddy's Gone to War': The Second World War in the Lives of American Children* (Oxford and New York, 1993), p. 249.

¹⁰ L. Paris, 'Through the Looking Glass: Age, Stages, and Historical Analysis', *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 1 (2008), pp. 106-113.

¹¹ Claire Halstead has recently completed her PhD thesis on this subject, see *From Lion to Leaf: British Children Evacuated to Canada in the Second World War* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Western University, 2015). See also G. Bilson, *The Guest Children: The Story of the British Child Evacuees Sent to Canada during World War II* (Saskatoon, 1988); P.Y. Lin, 'National Identity and Social Mobility: Class, Empire and the British Government Overseas Evacuation of Children during the Second World War', *Twentieth Century British History*, 7 (1996), pp. 310-344; H. Brown, 'Negotiating Space, Time, and Identity: The Hutton-Pellett Letters and a British Child's Wartime Evacuation to Canada' in B.S. Elliott, D.A. Gerber, S.M. Sinke (eds), *Letters across Borders: The Epistolary Practices of International Migrants* (New York, 2006), pp. 223-247; P. Starns, *Oceans Apart: Stories of Overseas Evacuees in World War Two* (Gloucestershire, 2013); C. Halstead, "'Dangers Behind, Pleasures Ahead": British-Canadian Identity and the Evacuation of British Children to Canada during the Second World War', *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, 27 (2014), pp. 163-179.

neglected in the historiography of the Second World War: was education, as so many historians have contended, a ‘casualty’ of the conflict? In what ways did the form and function of education in children’s lives alter as a result of disruption? How successful were these structural changes and wartime innovations to the education system? How were broader societal concerns, such as those regarding good citizenship and the preservation of national ideals amongst the younger generation, affected by the war? In what ways did they consequently filter into the classroom? What lessons did the state hope children would take from their education and how, in turn, did children respond to these demands? Finally, did children in wartime England have agency over their education and what restrictions did they have to overcome in order to gain some control over their learning lives? While the existing literature on wartime education is dominated by adult voices, this thesis introduces material produced by children in order to understand their perspective of the period.

Historiography: History of Childhood

Childhood emerged as an area worthy of analysis in the 1960s, as historians looked to children to learn more about adult ideologies and motivations.¹² But it is since the 1990s that historians and social-scientists have moved from writing about *childhood* as a construction of a certain epoch to viewing *children* as subjects in their own right. Sociologist Leena Alanen was among the first to propose that we see childhood as a lived experience by asking how young people were able to ‘organize, coordinate and control events’.¹³ James and Prout similarly argued that children should no longer be seen as ‘the passive subjects of social structures and process’. Instead, they recommended that researchers locate instances in which young people

¹² Most notable is P. Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. by R. Baldick (New York, 1962). For criticisms and critiques of Aries, see A. Wilson, ‘The Infancy of the History of Childhood: An Appraisal of Philippe Ariès’, *History and Theory*, 19 (1980), pp. 132-153; C. Heywood, ‘Centuries of Childhood: An Anniversary – and an Epitaph?’, *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 3 (2010), pp. 341-365.

¹³ L. Alanen, ‘Rethinking Childhood’, *Acta Sociologica*, 31 (1988), pp. 53-67; L. Alanen, ‘Explorations in Generational Analysis’, in L. Alanen and B. Mayall (eds), *Conceptualizing Child-Adult Relations* (London, 2001), pp. 11-22.

display agency by challenging authority figures.¹⁴ More recent work in this field suggests that academics have failed to problematize notions of agency. In other words, although children can often make their own decisions, we must also acknowledge ‘their position of vulnerability in a context of extreme structural constraints’, particularly the limitations imposed by wartime.¹⁵ In researching this project, I was heavily influenced by the idea of children as ‘social actors’ and discovered that in many ways they were able to exert influence over their learning lives by entering into negotiations with teachers and other adults.¹⁶ But I have also remained conscious of the confines and adult-imposed regulations which restricted their sense of control in particular situations.

In light of these developments in childhood studies, historians have started writing about children’s worldviews during exceptional periods of history, including wartime. The literature on childhood in continental Europe and North America during the Second World War is expanding, with historians using oral history, children’s drawings and autobiography alongside more traditional archival sources to appreciate the experiences of young people according to class, geography, race and gender.¹⁷ This thesis draws upon such work by searching for the child’s perspective on their own lives and the world around them, and by identifying points of agency as well as instances in which children resented adult decision-making.

¹⁴ A. Prout and A. James, ‘A New Paradigm for the Sociology of Childhood? Provenance, Promise and Problems’ in A. James and A. Prout (eds), *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood* (London, 1997), p. 8.

¹⁵ E.K.M. Tisdall and S. Punch, ‘Not So “New”? Looking Critically at Childhood Studies’, *Children’s Geographies*, 10 (2012), pp. 255-256.

¹⁶ H. Hendrick, ‘The Child as a Social Actor in Historical Sources: Problems of Identification and Interpretation’, in P. Christensen and A. James (eds), *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices* (London, 1999), pp. 36-61. For more on the concept of studying children rather than childhood see D. Hogan, ‘Researching “the child” in Developmental Psychology’, in S. Greene and D. Hogan (eds), *Researching Children’s Experiences: Methods and Approaches* (London, 2005), pp. 22-41; A. James, ‘Agency’, in J. Qvortrup, W.A. Corsaro and M.S. Honig (eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies* (Basingstoke, 2009), pp. 34-45.

¹⁷ For example: D. Dwork, *Children with a Star: Jewish Youth in Nazi Europe* (New Haven, 1991); N. Stargardt, ‘Children’s Art of the Holocaust’, *Past & Present*, 161 (1998), pp. 191-235; N. Stargardt, *Witnesses of War: Children’s Lives Under the Nazis* (London, 2005); O. Kucherenko, *Little Soldiers: How Soviet Children Went to War, 1941-1945* (Oxford, 2011); L. Dodd, *Children Under the Allied Bombs, France 1940-1945* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Reading, 2011); S. Schwartz, ‘“The Grey Soldier on the Wall of the Besieged City”: Child Smugglers and Peddlers in Warsaw, 1940-43’. Paper presented at *War and Childhood in the Age of the World Wars: Local and Global Perspectives*, Washington DC, 2014.

In the British context, the early literature on World War Two (WWII) focused on the evacuation of children from a policy-making perspective, considering its impact on post-war legislation. Richard Titmuss set the agenda in his seminal work *Problems of Social Policy* (1950). Here he proposed that the exposure of the poor conditions of working-class evacuees, as well as the general experience of shared suffering throughout the Blitz, contributed to the growth of a national consensus that the state must intervene in providing more substantial welfare for those in need. Post-war progressive social policies thus emerged from this wartime sense of solidarity, as evidenced by the 1945 Labour victory.¹⁸ Titmuss' theory remained the orthodoxy for three decades until historians began to question the extent of dramatic change, pointing to the survival of conservative attitudes towards poverty.¹⁹ However, recently John Welshman has suggested that revisionists were too quick to dismiss the conclusions of Titmuss.²⁰ He argues that there was a 'fundamental sea-change in opinion that was consolidated in policy reforms' after the war in such areas as school meals, state provision of clothing, and a recognition of child psychology.²¹

By the 1980s, historians studying wartime evacuation began to acknowledge the impact of the scheme on the children involved, as opposed to official policy-making.²² The publication of personal memories, autobiographies and oral history collections became increasingly popular throughout the 1990s and 2000s.²³ This was likely to have been precipitated by the ageing of former evacuees and subsequent high-profile attempts to re-integrate their experiences into popular representations of the war, not least evidenced by the launch of a shared memory website by the BBC

¹⁸ Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*.

¹⁹ Most notably: R. Lowe, 'The Second World War: Consensus and the Foundation of the Welfare State', *Twentieth Century British History*, 1 (1990), pp. 152-182; S. Fielding, P. Thompson and N. Tiratsoo, *England Arise* (Manchester, 1995); J. Macnicol, 'The Effect of the Evacuation of Schoolchildren on Official Attitudes to State Intervention', in H.L. Smith (ed.), *War and Social Change: British Society in the Second World War*, (Manchester, 1998), pp. 3-28.

²⁰ J. Welshman, 'School Meals and Milk in England and Wales, 1906-45', *Medical History*, 41 (1997), pp. 6-29; J. Welshman, 'Evacuation and Social Policy during the Second World War: Myth and Reality', *Twentieth Century British History*, 9 (1998), pp. 28-52; J. Welshman, 'Evacuation, Hygiene, and Social Policy: The *Our Towns* Report of 1943', *Historical Journal*, 42 (1999), pp. 781-807.

²¹ Welshman, 'Evacuation and Social Policy', p. 53.

²² Jackson, *Who Will Take Our Children?*; Crosby, *Impact of Civilian Evacuation*.

²³ For example: D. Childs and J. Wharton (eds), *Children in War: Reminiscences of the Second World War* (Nottingham, 1989); J. Gardiner, *The Children's War: The Second World War through the Eyes of the Children of Britain* (London, 2005); L. Smith, *Young Voices: British Children Remember the Second World War* (London, 2007).

in 2003, and a commemoration service held in September 2009 at St Paul's Cathedral in London.²⁴ This literature debunked the idea of evacuation as an opportunity for impoverished Londoners to gain a cheery experience of idyllic rural Britain. Instead, it exposed tales of homesickness, snobbery and stories of poorly treated children, who were subjected to exploitation and even physical or psychological abuse.²⁵

Recent historiography has viewed evacuees through a wider lens, highlighting the diversity of experiences. Sue Wheatcroft has undertaken original and fascinating research on the treatment of disabled children during the Second World War, emphasizing the poor facilities, staff shortages and regular interruptions to lessons. Unfortunately, by Wheatcroft's own admission, personal testimony for this group is hard to come across and thus the child's perspective on their education is lacking.²⁶ Another development in the literature has related to geographic variation. Whereas the early work on evacuation centred on children from London and tended to assume that this represented a universal experience, smaller case studies have become popular.²⁷ Moreover, Penny Starns has recognised the young people neglected in studies of evacuation in her research on English cities during wartime, which focuses on those children 'who stayed behind'. In *Blitz Families* (2012) she presents chapters on Bristol, Plymouth, Birmingham, Coventry and London in order to understand the lives of young people facing the direct impact of aerial bombardment in England's

²⁴ The BBC's People's War website was open from 2003 to 2006 and collected 47,376 individual stories. S. Houseden and J. Zmroczek, 'Exploring Identity in Later Life through BBC People's War Interviews', *Oral History*, 35 (2007), p. 100. The archive can be found at bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar.

²⁵ P.E. Starns and M.L. Parsons, 'Against Their Will: The Use and Abuse of British Children during the Second World War', in J. Marten (ed.), *Children and War: A Historical Anthology* (London, 2002), p. 266-278; P. Starns, 'Boots for the Bairns', in M. Parsons (ed.), *Children: The Invisible Victims of War* (2008), pp. 13-22. These ideas disseminated into popular spheres for example: A. Chancellor, 'It's time to explode the myth that all children evacuated from the blitz were well treated', *The Guardian*, 3 September 2009.

²⁶ S. Wheatcroft, 'Children's Experiences of War: Handicapped Children in England during the Second World War', *Twentieth Century British History*, 19 (2008), pp. 480-501; S. Wheatcroft, 'Holiday Camps, Castles and Stately Homes: The Residential Option for the Evacuation of Disabled Children during World War II', in M. Clapson and P.J. Larkham (eds), *The Blitz and its Legacy: Wartime Destruction to Post-War Reconstruction* (Surrey, 2013), pp. 31-46; S. Wheatcroft, *Worth Saving: Disabled Children during the Second World War* (Manchester, 2013).

²⁷ Guernsey: G. Mawson, *Guernsey Evacuees: The Forgotten Evacuees of the Second World War* (Gloucestershire, 2012); Dorset: Parsons, *I'll Take That One*, pp. 216-242; Devon: S.J. Hess, *Civilian Evacuation to Devon in the Second World War* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Exeter, 2006); Nottingham: P.R. Holloway, *Evacuation and Education* (Unpublished MA thesis, University of Nottingham, 1982); B. Hammond, *The Experience of Evacuation in Wartime Nottinghamshire* (Nottingham, 2000).

urban centres. However, although Starns quotes extensively from parents, billeting officers and politicians to evidence her theory that educational standards markedly declined during the war, we do not hear from the pupils themselves about their experiences of school life.²⁸ By way of contrast, this thesis foregrounds the child's point of view as part of the history of wartime education.

Finally, Berry Mayall and Virginia Morrow's *You Can Help Your Country* (2011) has been a valuable addition to this field.²⁹ In studying children's contributions to war work during WWII, they present a version of wartime that moves beyond the traditional focus on evacuees and victimhood. Their research explores school histories and oral interviews to reveal that, although children did face difficulties, wartime also presented them with many opportunities to take responsibility by helping on the land, through fundraising, or by joining youth organizations. Using a sociological approach, they consider why children were asked to partake in such activities, arguing that an enduring perception of children as *earners* rather than *learners* can explain why the state so readily sacrificed academic standards to facilitate war work. However, Mayall and Morrow also note that children could behave as social agents in determining their own involvement in these activities. Of particular interest is their final point that work and education were interconnected spheres during the conflict; children could learn a great deal from undertaking work outside of the classroom and activities which served the war effort could happen at the school desk.³⁰ This blurring of boundaries also emerges in the present research, which considers children's learning experiences in informal or unconventional settings.

In summary, historians studying childhood on the British home front have covered a diverse and intricate range of experiences, considering wartime life from the perspective of young people and, where possible, using source material that has derived from the children in question. Yet these texts tend to focus on the organisation of evacuation, the relationships between children and their host families

²⁸ Starns, *Blitz Families*.

²⁹ B. Mayall and V. Morrow, *You Can Help Your Country: English Children's Work during the Second World War* (London, 2011).

³⁰ Mayall and Morrow, *You Can Help Your Country*, p. 239.

and to some degree the difficulties faced when returning home.³¹ Education is only ever tackled briefly and in relation to quantifiable factors such as staffing levels, the availability of equipment and examination results. However, not only did the majority of children spend most of their day at school, but also the school acquired a new cultural significance during the conflict. Teachers responded to children's changing situations by taking on a pastoral role and assuming responsibility for educating pupils on the world around them. Also, in any period of turmoil, the country's children are viewed with great significance as it is they who must rebuild a prosperous nation to prevent future conflicts, and it is through the education system that this might be achieved.³² As this thesis will demonstrate, schools were no longer content with offering a basic training in reading and writing but needed to instil in pupils important civic values that would equip them to become useful and responsible citizens. Children, in turn, responded to these demands in different ways, with some willingly taking on their role as 'future citizens' and others rejecting it entirely. Given these shifts in educational values and norms, it is surprising that the topic has not commanded more attention in the historiography of the Second World War. With this in mind, my research is dedicated to understanding the place of education in children's wartime lives.

Historiography: History of Education

Existing studies on education during the 1940s focus almost wholly on the evolution, implementation and long-term impact of the Education Act, which was passed in 1944.³³ Peter Gosden has argued that the specific disruptions faced by the wartime education system resulted in calls for improvements and thus to new policy.³⁴ Revisionist works have minimised the influence of war in precipitating change,

³¹ On returning home after spending many years as an evacuee: J. Summers, *When the Children Came Home: Stories of Wartime Evacuees* (London, 2011).

³² The fascinating 'Agents of Future Promise' project, based at the University of Leeds, intends to shed light on the concept of children as symbols of a better future and how this rhetoric was employed by politicians during the conflict. See their blog at: <http://childrenofthefuture.leeds.ac.uk/>

³³ For information on the key tenets of the Act, including the introduction of free secondary education for all and the raising of the school leaving age to fifteen, see R.G. Wallace, 'The Origins and Authorship of the 1944 Education Act', *History of Education*, 10 (1981), pp. 283-290; M. Barber, *The Making of the 1944 Education Act* (London, 1994).

³⁴ P.H.J.H. Gosden, *Education in the Second World War: a Study in Policy and Administration* (Cambridge, 1976), p. 238.

proposing instead that pre-war reforms played a large role in shaping the 1944 Act.³⁵ With regards to the transformative effect of the Act, Deborah Thom contends that it 'created little in the way of innovation or social levelling' while Brian Simon also argues that fundamental change was minimal.³⁶ Grammar schools generally attracted middle-class children while their working-class counterparts attended the new Secondary Moderns, therefore social barriers were not broken down in any fundamental way and educational opportunities for most children were still limited.³⁷

It is unsurprising that the historiography has primarily focused on the Act. As R.G. Wallace wrote in 1981: 'the view that the Act was a major piece of legislation needs no more corroboration than its survival 37 years later as the principal instrument by which the English and Welsh school system is governed.'³⁸ Older surveys of education tended to skim over wartime, only flagging up its 'disastrous effects' to explore the resultant changes to the existing system.³⁹ Many other texts, looking specifically at the subject of twentieth-century education, do not begin until 1944, viewing the Act as the start of the modern system.⁴⁰ This thesis does not attempt to intervene in the debates over the 1944 Education Act but instead the intention is to find out what happened in schools before the effects of this particular legislative change were felt. It looks at the policies regarding and experiences of children attending school *during* the war. For the young people, parents and teachers going about their lives while intense debates raged amongst politicians, the Act had little or no impact and it is these people that educational historians have tended to neglect. According to a Governmental Social Survey report, six months after the introduction

³⁵ Wallace, 'The Origins and Authorship of the 1944 Education Act', pp. 285-286; D. Thom, 'The 1944 Education Act: the "Art of the Possible"?' in H.L Smith (ed.), *War and Social Change: British Society in the Second World War* (Manchester, 1986), pp. 101-128.

³⁶ Thom, 'The 1944 Education Act', pp. 101, 124; B. Simon, 'The 1944 Education Act: a Conservative Measure?', *History of Education*, 15 (1986), pp. 31-43.

³⁷ Lowe, 'Consensus and the Foundation of the Welfare State'; J. Harris, 'Some Aspects of Social Policy in Britain during the Second World War', in W.J. Mommsen (ed.), *The Emergence of the Welfare State in Britain and Germany* (London, 1981), pp. 247-62; C. Benn 'Comprehensive School Reform and the 1945 Labour Government', *History Workshop*, 10 (1980), pp. 197-204; C.H. Batterson, 'The 1944 Education Act Reconsidered', *Educational Review*, 51 (1999), pp. 5-15; B. Barker, 'Grammar Schools: Brief Flowering of Social Mobility?', *Forum*, 54 (2012), pp. 429-447.

³⁸ Wallace, 'The Origins and Authorship of the 1944 Education Act', p. 283.

³⁹ H.C. Barnard, *A History of English Education from 1760* (London, 1961), p. 291; J. Lawson and H. Silver, *A Social History of Education in England* (London, 1973), pp. 409-416.

⁴⁰ For example R. Lowe, *Education in the Post-War Years: A Social History* (London and New York, 1988); K. Jones, *Education in Britain: 1944 to the Present* (Cambridge, 2003); C. Chitty, *Education Policy in Britain* (Basingstoke, 2004).

of the Education Bill, only forty-five per cent of people had heard of it in some capacity, thirty per cent knew about plans to raise the school leaving age, and just thirteen per cent were aware of the initiative to provide free secondary education.⁴¹

One text which provides an exception to this gap in its efforts to tackle the subject of wartime education is Peter Gosden's *Education in the Second World War: A Study in Policy and Administration* (1976). As suggested by his title, Gosden conducted a tremendous level of archival research, trawling through the records of the Board of Education produced during the conflict as well as relevant Acts of Parliament, circulars and contemporary publications. Where this research is most valuable is in its meticulous detailing of the preparations made for wartime and the process of evacuation in the face of both the 'Phoney War' and mass aerial bombardment. His chapters 'The Long Haul, 1941-5', 'School Work in Wartime' and 'Staffing the Schools' have proved particularly useful as introductions to the issues discussed in this thesis and many of the figures used throughout are taken from Gosden's research.

What Gosden lacks, which this thesis will add, is the human element to the story. This omission is common in much educational history which inevitably focuses on the attitudes of policy-makers but not those of pupils. Yet we enhance our understanding of historical education systems by considering the 'pupil experience' alongside the views of officials. For example, political records can tell us that schools were invited to organise Spitfire Fund collections, and we can even gain a sense of the ways in which children went about getting the money and how much they managed to raise. But these sources do not reveal what children thought about this activity: was it enjoyable; did they feel a sense of pride for contributing to the war effort; or was it a burden, taking up time that they believed could be better spent elsewhere? Did they understand what the collection was for, and whom it would benefit? In providing a sense of the child's point of view on their learning experiences, this thesis will offer a complement to Gosden's early work.

⁴¹ Lowe, 'Consensus and the Foundation of the Welfare State', p. 175.

The process of adding voices ‘from below’ into the traditional historiography of education and the Second World War has been started by Philip Gardner and Peter Cunningham, who collected a large body of oral history interviews with former teachers to discover something of their wartime experiences. What they found was that, rather than being a time of ‘dislocation, disruption and breakdown’, wartime evacuation marked the start of a shift in teachers’ professional lives whereby they got to know their pupils on a personal level and were thus able to cater for them on an individual basis.⁴² This thesis is influenced by their approach and will for the first time investigate classroom interactions from the perspective of the *child*, giving voice to their experiences and interpretations. Like Gardner and Cunningham, this research challenges pre-conceived notions of what might constitute a ‘good’ education by investigating school life in both traditional and non-traditional classroom spaces. Doing so forces us to look at wartime education from a different perspective and to re-consider the notion that it offered little value to children.

Methods and Source Material: The Adult’s Perspective

Although children could potentially exert agency, it is important to recognise that they were also restricted by boundaries imposed by adults.⁴³ This thesis therefore pays attention to the structures in place which encouraged but also limited children’s potential to make decisions. In order to elucidate the bodies responsible for the welfare of children, this study has consulted records of the Board of Education and the London County Council (LCC), available at the National Archives and the London Metropolitan Archives respectively. Although there has been no attempt to undertake a case study of London or to assume its representativeness, the close relationship between the Board and the LCC Education Office has meant that much of the material held in the LCC Emergency War Measure files (LCC/EO/WAR)

⁴² P. Gardner and P. Cunningham, ‘Oral History and Teachers’ Professional Practice: a Wartime Turning Point?’, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 27 (2006), pp. 331-342; P. Cunningham and P. Gardner, “‘Saving the Nation’s Children’: Teachers, Wartime Evacuation in England and Wales and the Construction of National Identity”, 28, *History of Education* (1999), pp. 327-337. See also S. Hussey, ‘The School Air-Raid Shelter: Rethinking Wartime Pedagogies’, *History of Education Quarterly*, 43 (2003), pp. 517-539. For a challenge to the idea that wartime resulted in a permanent shift in teacher-pupil relationships, see S. Brown, “‘An Apple for the Teacher’: The Role of Teachers in the UK Evacuation”, *Children in War*, 1 (2004), pp. 65-69.

⁴³ Prout and James, ‘A New Paradigm’, p. 28.

pertains to national issues. This archive thus provides a useful starting point for exploring education on a broader geographical scale. Generally these records appear in administrative histories, but this thesis is original in that it uses this material to build up a picture of the social and educational context within which children's lives played out during the Second World War.⁴⁴

Contained within these archives is a wealth of material. Circulars and memoranda present an impression of official efforts to steer educational institutions in particular directions. Correspondence between politicians and civil servants reveals their concerns about children and sheds light on decision-making, such as the re-opening of schools in spite of aerial bombardment (chapter 1) or their options to deal with the rise in juvenile crime (chapter 5). Sources emanating directly from school management are not as widely available. This is because the Board of Education was reluctant to ask Local Education Authorities (LEAs) or headteachers to return information as regularly as they had done in peacetime, since they were already burdened with additional duties.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, letters between Board of Education staff and other government officials paint a vivid picture of the educational structures in place during this period. Also available at the National Archives are the files of education historian Sophia Weitzman, who was appointed by the Cabinet Office in 1945 to write a history of wartime education. This was not completed before her death in 1965 and the project was abandoned.⁴⁶ Her collection includes official reports, as well as more personal material such as lesson plans and school diaries compiled by teachers. Much of Weitzman's previously untouched material, which relates to the evacuation, methodically organised and catalogued, has been of great value to this thesis.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Niko Gärtner has used the wartime records of the LCC to write an administrative history of the London evacuation: N. Gärtner, 'Administering "Operation Pied Piper" – how the London County Council Prepared for the Evacuation of its Schoolchildren, 1938-1939', *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 42 (2010), pp. 17-32. See also his comparison with wartime Berlin: N. Gärtner, *Operation Pied Piper: The Wartime Evacuation of Schoolchildren from London and Berlin, 1938-1946* (Charlotte, North Carolina, 2012).

⁴⁵ Gosden, *Education in the Second World War*, p. 72.

⁴⁶ Gosden, *Education in the Second World War*, p.1.

⁴⁷ Some of Weitzman's policy-based findings were published posthumously in N. Middleton and S. Weitzman, *A Place for Everyone: A History of State Education from the Eighteenth Century to the 1970s* (London, 1976).

National newspapers and specialist educational journals offer an insight into official thinking and the topics dominating public discussions. Often letters to the editor expound popular opinions on aspects of the evacuation, although since contributors represented a limited cross-section of society their views must be employed cautiously. Magazines, such as *Picture Post*, encouraged a somewhat broader range of perspectives, including letters from children which appear in this thesis. Finally, individual chapters in the thesis make use of more specific material. Local archives, school log books and local newspapers have been consulted in order to formulate a picture of life in the government's residential camp schools (chapter three). The research on children's broadcasting at the BBC (chapter four) stems largely from material at the BBC Written Archives which includes reports on children's listening habits and conversations between producers on the subject of educational programming. The reasons behind this choice of material are further explained in the relevant chapters.

Methods and Source Material: The Child's Perspective

Studying the views of those making educational policy is only half of the story. This thesis is situated within a growing trend amongst historians of education to account for life in the classroom, alongside the views of politicians and educationists.⁴⁸ It explores what David Labaree has termed the *received curriculum*, or the knowledge that pupils themselves take from their classroom learning experiences.⁴⁹ As Ken Jones has observed, this may differ from the curriculum favoured by politicians:

The school isn't a place where the designs of the policy-makers are imprinted on the student population. On the contrary, it has been a site where those designs have been much contested, both consciously and unconsciously.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ K. Dams, M. Depaepe and F. Simon, 'Sneaking into School: Classroom History at Work', in I. Grovesnor, M. Lawn and K. Rousemaniere (eds), *Silences and Images: The Social History of the Classroom* (New York, 1999), pp. 13-46; D. Cannadine, J. Keating and N. Sheldon (eds), *The Right Kind of History: Teaching the Past in Twentieth-Century England* (London, 2011).

⁴⁹ D.F. Labaree, 'The Chronic Failure of Curriculum Reform', *Education Week*, 18 (1999), p. 42.

⁵⁰ Jones, *Education in Britain*, p. 5.

In other words, new policies or educational ideas did not always bring about a marked difference in the reality of wartime children's schooling. Often broad national narratives failed to trickle down into the classroom as LEAs, headteachers, and classroom teachers were able to intervene and reject suggestions made by the Board of Education. Children, therefore, were not always exposed to the specific curriculum prescribed by the Board. More than this, children themselves could also find ways of commenting on the aspects of their school experience which they did not enjoy. This may have been through such acts as truancy, disruptive behaviour, refusing to listen to the teacher, or failing to participate in class tests and discussions. Children in a learning environment have ways of displaying boredom or dissatisfaction, thereby forcing the teacher to reconsider their approach. This is encapsulated by Benita Blessing who states that: 'knowledge and the means to determine and impart it are negotiated in a constant process of give and take by both teachers and pupils'.⁵¹ Children's negotiations with adults are there for historians to discover, and this thesis draws upon both contemporary and retrospective source material in order to do so. The focus of this project is on restoring subjective voices into wider narratives of educational failure. When thinking about a period as complex as the Second World War, it is imperative to account for the lives of individuals, or we risk reducing our knowledge of the period to a 'canon of memorialised images, anecdotes and assumptions'.⁵²

Contemporary Material

Wartime is a useful starting point for the study of children's perspectives, for, as James Marten has written, 'wars create conditions that help historians access the lives of children and parents in ways that peacetime rarely offers'.⁵³ During a period of displacement and upheaval, children leave more traces: they write letters to their parents or are encouraged to keep diaries and records of their feelings during momentous events. Aware that they were living through a significant period in history, parents and teachers preserved, and then archived, documents related to

⁵¹ B. Blessing, 'Methodological Considerations: Using Student Essays as Historical Sources. The Example of Postwar Germany', *Paedagogica Historica*, 43 (2007), p. 766.

⁵² A.H. Bell, *London Was Ours: Diaries and Memoirs of the London Blitz* (London and New York, 2011), p. 3.

⁵³ J. Marten, 'Childhood Studies and History: Catching a Culture in High Relief', in A.M. Duane (ed.), *The Children's Table: Childhood Studies and the Humanities* (Georgia, 2013), p. 60.

children's wartime lives. This thesis includes examples of a huge array of such material which affords a rare insight into the feelings, thoughts and concerns of English children.

Many documents produced by or about children were sent into the Mass Observation Archive throughout the conflict. This social-anthropological organisation was established in 1937 to discover how 'ordinary' British people behaved on a day to day basis.⁵⁴ Many teachers served as contributors, sending in classroom work and reports on the evacuation of their school. Additionally, since the end of the war, former evacuees and their families have deposited material with the Imperial War Museum, including school scrapbooks, letters from evacuees to their parents, exercise books and sketch pads. Both of these archives contain source material donated voluntarily by individuals, and often this means that we gain a disproportionately middle-class, and in the case of Mass Observation, left-leaning view of wartime.⁵⁵ Yet these sources add flavour to the research; they show us what *some* children were thinking and how they responded to events. In particular, essays written by children give some indication of the sorts of discussions being held in the classroom and thus the role of the school in shaping pupils' ideas about the war. Blessing has persuasively argued that, although classroom work was traditionally thought to tell us simply what a teacher instructed their pupils, it can in fact reveal a significantly more detailed and personal view of children's lives.⁵⁶ Essays provide an impression of differences in gender and age cohorts when it comes to such aspects of life as the evacuation, air raids, rationing and schooling.

Inspector reports have also been used in this thesis where available. These documents present an adult's perception of the classroom according to their criteria of what makes a 'good' school and therefore tell us what the Board of Education expected of the institutions under their control. Yet reading these carefully also offers some insight into the child's world. Inspectors often asked children for their

⁵⁴ For more on Mass Observation, see P. Summerfield, 'Mass Observation: Social Research or Social Movement?', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 20 (1985), pp. 439-452.

⁵⁵ Crosby, *Impact of Civilian Evacuation*, p. 45; J. Hinton, *The Mass Observers: A History, 1937-1949* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 267-278.

⁵⁶ Blessing, 'Using Student Essays as Historical Sources', p. 757-777.

thoughts, and quoted responses in some depth. Put simply, a sense of the child's perspective can be garnered from material produced by adults.

Oral History and Written Memoirs

Oral histories and written reminiscences are also used to glimpse into the classroom 'with its characteristic daily routines, interactions and atmospheres' which, in much educational history, 'remains essentially silent to us'.⁵⁷ The next section of the introduction will offer a short overview of the oral history interviews and written accounts used in the thesis, before going on to outline the theoretical frameworks which underpin the treatment of interviews and narratives.⁵⁸ While written and oral testimony raise many of the same issues pertaining to memory and narrative-formation, this section includes some brief comments about the differences between the two forms of remembering. There is a burgeoning literature dealing with life history methodologies and the many problems they force historians to consider, just some of which is touched upon here.⁵⁹

This thesis makes use of sixteen oral history interviews that I conducted, and a further four from other sources.⁶⁰ I employed the 'snowballing' method, wherein I approached personal contacts to be interviewed and then sought participants through recommendations. Whilst practical, Jack Dougherty finds this to be restrictive: 'we often narrow our analyses by interviewing participants within the same social and political circles as the first contact, thus excluding alternative perspectives'.⁶¹ To counter this risk, I also posted advertisements on local history and alumni society websites in the hope of gathering stories which might be different from those I had

⁵⁷ P. Cunningham, P. Gardner, B. Wells and R. Willis, 'McNair's Lost Opportunity: the Student-Teacher Scheme and the Student-Teacher's Experience', *History of Education*, 24 (1995), p. 222.

⁵⁸ For more on my methodological approach to oral history, see E. Lautman, 'Educating Children on the British Home Front, 1939-1945: Oral History, Memory and Personal Narratives', *History of Education Researcher*, 95 (2015), pp. 13-16.

⁵⁹ For an excellent review of recent theory see R. Perks and A. Thomson (eds), *Oral History Reader*, 2nd Edition (London, 2006); A. Thomson, 'Four Paradigm Transformations in Oral History', *Oral History Review*, 34 (2007), pp. 49-70.

⁶⁰ See Appendix 1 for details on each interviewee, including their age at the start of the war and their location(s) throughout the period of conflict. All recordings are held by the author unless stated otherwise. Interviewees were given the option to remain anonymous and pseudonyms have been applied accordingly.

⁶¹ J. Dougherty, 'From Anecdote to Analysis: Oral Interviews and New Scholarship in Educational History', *Journal of American History*, 86 (1999), p. 719.

already accessed. This process comes with its own pitfalls, as any respondents will be 'self-selecting'; they believe their stories to be relevant and worthy of historical research. As a result, there is a possibility that alternative voices will not come forward.

Pre-existing oral interviews are also included in this thesis, from the Imperial War Museum and other locations. Using key word search functions in addition to contacting archivists directly, I was able to locate recordings with wartime children to fill certain gaps in my research, notably finding accounts of camp school evacuees. Undertaking a secondary analysis of interviews recorded by another historian raises pressing issues. For example, outside of their original context the intention of some of the interviewees' comments, as well as the questions posed by the interviewer, might be obscured to the modern researcher. Joanna Bornat has argued that challenges should not prohibit us from re-visiting this sort of secondary data. Rather, viewing interviews through the lens of new research questions, and with the benefit of different theoretical frameworks, historians are able to mine for undiscovered knowledge.⁶² The focus of my project on education has dictated that when analysing archived interviews, I paid closer attention to small details or throwaway comments about schools, teachers and classmates, which would not have interested a different researcher.

I suggest that using a combination of the snowballing and advertising methods, alongside existing interviews, has allowed me to cover a wide spread in terms of geography, age and class.⁶³ The interviewees were between the ages of three and fifteen at the start of the war. They came from London, Birmingham, Coventry, Nottingham, Manchester, Newcastle, Essex and Sussex, although inevitably moved around to varying degrees including to locations in Wales. Some left school at fourteen and entered the labour force, whereas others went on to university and in two instances, entered the world of academia. This variation has allowed me to

⁶² J. Bornat, 'Crossing Boundaries with Secondary Analysis: Implications for Archived Oral History Data'. Paper presented at the *ESRC National Council for Research Methods Network for Methodological Innovation*, University of Essex, 2008. Accessed: http://www.restore.ac.uk/archiving_qualitative_data/projects/archive_series/documents/ArchivedEthicsandArchivesEssex19-0-.08JBornat_000.pdf [10 March 2015].

⁶³ Class is determined, in this thesis, by parental occupation.

ascertain how far the war, as opposed to familial circumstances, made a difference to personal experiences of education.

The written personal narratives stored at the Research Centre for Evacuee and War Child Studies at the University of Reading have also provided a fascinating source for this thesis. Established by Martin Parsons in 1998, it has collected a vast selection of material related to WWII, including approximately 1000 memoirs, notes and letters written by former British evacuees. Autobiography has traditionally been associated with particular social groups – the literate, the middle-classes, the politically astute – as opposed to oral history which has focused on marginalised groups such as children, women and the working-classes.⁶⁴ The Research Centre, however, has bucked this trend in collecting the written memoirs of a wide cross-section of people. When reading the material, it became clear that some contributors were confident writers, while others were less assured but had been prompted by a family member to record their past. Many of the recollections were sent in after hearing Dr. Parsons speaking on a local radio station and therefore the Research Centre is not restricted to former evacuees who are well-known or with exceptional stories. On the whole, then, the archive has ‘rescued’ the memories of those who traditionally would not have spoken in a public forum, just as oral history has been doing for many years.

Memoirs contained at the Research Centre are varied; some consist of short hand-written notes providing general details about the war while other contributors have compiled lengthy documents, sometimes in conjunction with archival work and complete with photographs. For this thesis, forty-five memoirs were read and analysed although due to matters of space it has not been possible to make reference to all of them.⁶⁵ Historians and sociologists have long grappled with issues of sample size. Generally, researchers have agreed that twenty to thirty life stories is a sufficient number to gain a significant level of insight into a particular group.⁶⁶ I

⁶⁴ P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, 3rd Edition (Oxford, 2000); L. Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (Oxon and New York), p. 27.

⁶⁵ See Appendix 2 for a list of memoirs used in this thesis.

⁶⁶ D. Bertaux, ‘From the Life-History Approach to the Transformation of Sociological Practice’, in D. Bertaux (ed.), *Biography and Society: the Life History Approach in the Social Sciences* (London, 1981), pp. 37-38; Blessing, ‘Methodological Considerations’, p. 764; L. Bosi and H. Reiter,

certainly discovered that, when conducting interviews or spending time in the archive reading through personal memories, patterns began to emerge which enabled me to reach conclusions about the educational experiences of wartime children. Hence, twenty oral history interviews and twenty-one written accounts are included in order to identify general patterns, while doing justice to the level of specific detail on offer. It is worth making a final comment here about representativeness. As other scholars have discovered, we are more likely to recruit interviewees who have positive memories of their past and who continue to identify themselves as part of a group.⁶⁷ Most of my interviewees had gone on to have happy lives, good jobs and secure families and therefore may reflect on their childhood with this in mind. When writing this thesis I have remained conscious of the former evacuees or city children who do not want to speak about their experiences, and whose stories, as a result, we may not get to hear.

Oral History, Autobiography and Popular Memory

The early reaction to oral history methodologies was one of mistrust: how could people accurately recall events after a long period of time, particularly memories from childhood when their sense of self had not yet fully developed? Certainly, memory can prove unreliable, as people tend to mis-remember, reconceptualise and even entirely forget aspects of their past. Early oral historians set about proving that oral history could be a valuable source by highlighting the fallibility of archival records. They argued that police reports, newspaper interviews, or minutes taken from a meeting were all based originally on someone's memory.⁶⁸ Essentially, they agreed that oral interviews should be used with great scrutiny and care, but not more so than any other types of material employed by historians. As the methodology developed, researchers began to suggest that the potential unreliability of memory was not a weakness but should be treated as a further means by which to explore the past. When the narrator appears to be exaggerating or embellishing we must ask *why*.

'Historical Methodologies: Archival Research and Oral History in Social Movement Research', in D. Della Porta (ed.), *Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research* (Oxford, 2014), p. 132.

⁶⁷ When conducting 140 interviews with adults who spent their childhood living in orphanages in the American Midwest, Birgette Søland discovered their stories were overwhelmingly positive, "'Never a Better Home": Growing Up in American Orphanages, 1920-1970', *History of Childhood and Youth*, 8 (2015), pp. 34-54.

⁶⁸ A. Portelli, 'The Peculiarities of Oral History', *History Workshop Journal*, 12 (1981), p. 101.

If a significant event is omitted, an historian should not assume this renders the testimony useless but consider what this gap might mean about the experience itself and subsequent efforts to interpret it.⁶⁹ As Alessandro Portelli famously declared, oral history narratives ‘tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, what they now think they did’.⁷⁰

When conducting interviews it was therefore important to be aware of the participants’ existing ideas about evacuation and wartime childhood, where these came from, and how they might have influenced their narratives. How was the memory shaped by public and personal representations of an event?⁷¹ Imaginings of the Second World War are ubiquitous in Modern British society and have proved popular amongst those writing and producing television programmes, films and fiction. Throughout the process of researching and writing this thesis, I have been struck by the frequency with which the Blitz and the evacuation process are evoked in British culture.⁷² Taken together, it is fair therefore to make the assumption that my interviewees would have some knowledge of the period outside of their own experiences. As well as external cultural objects, such as novels and films, narrators often draw on the memories of other evacuees. Alastair Thomson discovered in his research on WWI that national narratives created by veterans’ groups, historians and other forms of memorialisation, can directly impact on the memories of individuals who find a sense of equanimity when their story ‘fits in’ with available cultural codes.⁷³ It is easier to construct, or ‘compose’, a version of the past which allows us to become part of a group narrative. The Second World War has been widely known as a ‘People’s War’ during which citizens pulled together, defeated the common enemy against all odds and withstood the horrors of the Blitz all the while exhibiting

⁶⁹ L. Passerini, ‘Women’s Personal Narratives: Myths, Experiences, and Emotions’, in The Personal Narratives Group (ed.), *Interpreting Women’s Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives* (Indiana, 1989), pp. 196-7.

⁷⁰ Portelli, ‘Peculiarities of Oral History’, pp. 99-100.

⁷¹ Popular Memory Group, ‘Popular Memory: Theory, Politics, Method’, in R. Perks and A. Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader*, 1st Edition (London, 1998), p. 78; L. Noakes and J. Pattinson, “‘Keep calm and carry on’: The Cultural Memory of the Second World War in Britain”, in L. Noakes and J. Pattinson (eds), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War* (London, 2013), pp. 1-24.

⁷² Since I began writing, the Blitz played a large part in Kate Atkinson’s novel *Life After Life* (2013) while the 2014 cinematic adaptation of the Paddington Bear story explicitly conjured the traditional view of kind British strangers taking in children during the war when the character of Paddington is told not to worry about life in England.

⁷³ A. Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (Oxford, 1994).

a display of stoicism and getting on with daily life.⁷⁴ Contradicting this pervasive vision can prove impossible, resulting in what Penny Summerfield has described as ‘dis/composure’, and therefore narrators are unlikely to challenge these ideas of the period.⁷⁵

There is one very clear illustration of this theory of ‘composure’ at work. Many former evacuees vividly remember waiting for foster parents to select them and specifically recall being ‘picked last’ during the allocation process. While this may have been based on their actual experience, it is also possible that the narrators are drawing upon the Michelle Magorian novel *Goodnight Mister Tom* (1981) in which an evacuee is billeted with the eponymous host after no one else would take him in.⁷⁶ In her recollections, one evacuee wrote about the difficulties of finding a family since her mother had specifically requested that she was not separated from her older sister:

So we were left ‘til last, we were then taken in a coach around the village and people were asked to take in two children, after many rejects I was feeling very tired. At this point a lady said she would have us.⁷⁷

Another evacuee recalls a markedly similar experience:

Mum had told us not to be separated from one another so our insistence on staying together made it difficult to find a home and we were the last to leave the hall [...] A teacher from our school together with a billeting officer took us to what was thought to be a suitable part of the town and the process of knocking-on-doors began. At first

⁷⁴ This vision was most famously challenged in A. Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (London, 1991).

⁷⁵ P. Summerfield, ‘Dis/Composing the Subject: Intersubjectivities in Oral History’, in C. Lury, T. Cosslett and P. Summerfield (eds), *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods* (London, 2000), pp. 91-106.

⁷⁶ *Goodnight Mister Tom* remains part of British popular culture, having been adapted into a film in 1998 and a touring theatre production in 2011.

⁷⁷ Research Centre for Evacuee and War Child Studies (hereafter ResCEW), D EVAC A/1/150, January 2005, p. 2.

nobody seemed willing or able to take on three young boys.
Eventually, however, we were installed in a fine detached house.⁷⁸

These are examples from the many which I could have selected from my sample. A far greater number of narrators purport to have been selected last than is realistically possible.⁷⁹ This is not to say that these adults are lying about their childhood but rather they may have adapted their own stories to adhere to more widely known versions of the evacuation. They use these cultural shorthands which, while they may not have happened as described, accurately and concisely evoke the sense of unknowingness, fear and vulnerability which encapsulated the billeting process. We need to look beyond the issue of truth or authenticity to consider what inaccuracies and discrepancies can reveal about the child's experience.

The way in which education is typically discussed in popular culture plays an interesting part in the construction of retrospective memories. Katie Wright and Julie McLeod's article 'Public Memories and Private Meanings' has been helpful in this respect. Their Australian interviewees, educated between 1930 and 1950, overwhelmingly presented their schooldays as the best of their life, which surprised the authors in view of their knowledge of the social context of the time – the widespread poverty of the interwar years, the Second World War and the forced removal of indigenous students from the 1930s onwards.⁸⁰ What they found pervading the narratives was the sense that interviewees contrasted their own youth to that of their children and grandchildren, thus we learn not just about their own memories but also their views on contemporary society, particularly on the issue of discipline.⁸¹ In addition to serving as a social commentary on modern childhoods, Wright and McLeod propose that this overwhelmingly cheery depiction of school life in the past emerges 'in relation to powerful cultural narratives' that school days are a time of carefree enjoyment.⁸² As William Tuttle also found: 'there is nothing

⁷⁸ ResCEW, D EVAC A/1/126, No date, pp. 1-2. These memoirs were deposited during the 1990s or 2000s, after the publication of *Goodnight Mister Tom*.

⁷⁹ Welshman, *Churchill's Children*, p. 8.

⁸⁰ K. Wright and J. McLeod, 'Public Memories and Private Meaning: Representing the "Happy Childhood" Narrative in Oral Histories of Adolescence and Schooling in Australia, 1930s-1950s', *Oral History Forum*, 32 (2012), pp. 1-19.

⁸¹ Wright and McLeod, 'Public Memories and Private Meaning', p. 13.

⁸² Wright and McLeod, 'Public Memories and Private Meaning', p. 15.

unique in an older generation boasting of its past, sometimes while bemoaning the collective shortcomings of succeeding generations'.⁸³ When analysing my transcripts, I have been aware of the cultural codes shaping the memories of former wartime children both in relation to the conflict itself and education more generally.

Written Memoirs vs Oral Memories

Oral history presents opportunities, but also difficulties, for the researcher not present in written accounts. Firstly, oral history permits the historian to make a direct contribution to the making of the source; they can select appropriate interviewees and raise issues that are traditionally left unspoken.⁸⁴ Schools and education rarely feature in narratives of the evacuation. The reason may be that, with so many extraordinary changes to children's lives, the everyday, commonplace activity of 'going to school' has not been considered worthy of study. Conducting my own oral history interviews allowed me to intervene directly in the creation of source material and to encourage discussion of a topic previously neglected.⁸⁵

Second, and on a related note, the researcher conducting the interview will invariably have some impact on the final narrative. It is impossible for the interviewer to maintain a position of complete objectivity.⁸⁶ They might inadvertently show disapproval or disagreement through 'body language and subtleties in the phrasing of the questions' and equally interviewees may emphasise particular topics they feel will interest the historian rather than focusing on those most important to them.⁸⁷ There are ways of mitigating the inevitable contribution of the researcher to the final

⁸³ Tuttle, *The Second World War in the Lives of American Children*, p. 245.

⁸⁴ Thompson, *Voice of the Past*, pp. 1-24.

⁸⁵ This is cited as one of the major advantages of oral history in Gardner and Cunningham, 'Oral History and Teachers' Professional Practice', p. 340.

⁸⁶ A. Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (New York, 1991), pp. 29-45. For more on the relationship between historian and participant in an interview context, see: D.W. Jones, 'Distressing Histories and Unhappy Interviewing', *Oral History*, 26 (1998), pp. 49-56; C. Hamilton, 'On Being A "Good" Interviewer: Empathy, Ethics and the Politics of Oral History', *Oral History*, 36 (2008), pp. 35-43. The unequal power dynamics involved in the process of analysing interview transcripts have been discussed in: D. Patai, 'Ethical Problems of Personal Narratives, or, Who Should Eat the Last Piece of Cake?', *International Journal of Oral History*, 8 (1987), pp. 5-27; K. Borland, '"That's Not What I Said": Interpretive Conflict in Oral Narrative Research', in S.B. Gluck and D. Patai (eds), *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (New York, 1991), pp. 63-76.

⁸⁷ V. Yow, '"Do I Like Them Too Much?": Effects of the Oral History Interview on the Interviewer and Vice-Versa', *Oral History Review*, 24 (1997), pp. 72-78.

narrative. Going into the interviews, I did not want to dictate what the interviewee shared and therefore force them to alter their narrative according to my own agenda. Even when encouraging discussion on the topic of education, I did not adhere to a rigid questionnaire but took with me a list of broad themes which I referred to only as a prompt, keeping my questions as open-ended as possible. This adheres to Portelli's suggestion that we avoid 'closed' questions, since resulting answers tend merely to 'confirm the historian's previous frame of reference'.⁸⁸

Third, oral narratives offer historians a further level of story-telling to observe. We are not restricted to the written word, but can include tone, volume, speed, hesitations, laughter and pauses as part of the analysis. These non-verbal signifiers can 'sometimes say as much as the words themselves', offering indications of a life history not revealed merely by looking at printed interview transcripts or published memoirs.⁸⁹ This introduction has outlined the merits of reminiscences in filling the gaps of the past and enabling access to the subjective meanings of children's educational experiences. We have come a long way from A.J.P Taylor's oft-repeated dismissal of the methodology: 'memoirs of years ago are useless except for atmosphere...old men drooling about their youth – No.'⁹⁰

Chapter Outline

This thesis comprises of five thematic chapters which consider the varied educational spaces occupied by wartime children. Each chapter moves further away from the classroom environment familiar to children before the war to look at the more unconventional sites of learning that emerged during the conflict, namely residential camp schools and the BBC. It ends with a study of school closures and truancy, when the traditional classroom was completely absent.

⁸⁸ Portelli, 'The Peculiarities of Oral History', p. 104.

⁸⁹ Gardner and Cunningham, 'Oral History and Teachers' Professional Practice', p. 339; K. Anderson and D.C. Jack, 'Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses', in R. Perks and A. Thomson (eds), *Oral History Reader*, 1st Edition (London, 1998), pp. 157-171.

⁹⁰ A.J.P. Taylor, quoted in A. Thomson, 'Unreliable Memories? The Use and Abuse of Oral History', in W. Lamont (ed.), *Historical Controversies and Historians* (London, 1998), p. 26.

Chapter one provides the contextual details necessary for understanding the impact of war on the education of children. It begins by indicating the educational structures in place in England before the outbreak of war. It then situates the three main evacuations in their logistical and ideological context, using official records to describe plans made by various authorities regarding the travel, billeting and general welfare of evacuees. Finally, the chapter explains how the government organised schooling in safe and evacuated areas when forced to deal with the unexpected number of children who remained in or rapidly returned to Britain's cities. It addresses the impact of these major upheavals on both pupils and the staff members tasked with looking after them.

Starting in the schoolroom, chapter two looks at the suggestions made by the Board of Education during wartime and examines to what extent the experiences of children mirrored these official expectations. It considers whether the war precipitated educational innovation in terms of the curriculum and teaching styles by analysing classroom work and personal memories of learning. Chapter three turns attention to the classroom in a different form through a case study of four residential camp schools built to accommodate evacuees. It asks if, as elites had hoped, these government-funded camps provided an experiment in social levelling, wherein working- and middle-class children were exposed to public school values. Using material from local archives the chapter poses the question of whether the camps marked a revolution in education or were simply short-term solutions to the practical problems raised by wartime.

Chapter four looks at the pedagogic function of the BBC's School Broadcasting, which offered an education to children listening at school and at home. In this way, it reached young people in both traditional and less conventional educational spaces. The chapter considers the tone, style and content of broadcasts in order to tease out the BBC's ideas about young people and their place in society. It also touches upon the children's responses to this type of education, identifying the dialogic relationship between the BBC and their young listeners. Finally, chapter five centres on the absence of formal education, looking at the anxieties of officials over school closures and the resultant increase in juvenile delinquency. It explores the panic amongst authorities regarding working-class motherhood and the deleterious effects

of urban life, which contributed to an impression of children ‘running wild’. The chapter then investigates four crimes and misdemeanours frequently committed by children: truancy, theft, playing on bomb sites, and sexual deviance. It argues that children used delinquency to negotiate their lives, and that the institution of the school acquired cultural capital as it was posited as a solution to these problems.

It is worth stressing that the aim of this thesis is not to make a judgement as to whether the wartime education system was good or bad, effective or disrupted. Rather it investigates schooling during the conflict by taking into account the ideas of officials and their vision for education, while also asking whether this translated into practice through including the pupils’ perspectives on their learning lives. Throughout, it will be argued that authority figures, from politicians to BBC producers, set out to mould children into *informed citizens*, with knowledge of the world around them, and *participatory citizens*, ready to serve their country in whatever way possible. More than this, the thesis looks at the many ways children reacted to their schooling: did they buy into these models of citizenship? What aspects of the education system appealed to young people and how did they deal with those elements of the curriculum they did not like? By bringing the child’s perspective to the foreground this research offers a nuanced approach missing from existing narratives of wartime education which emphasize upheaval and chaos. Finally, this thesis demonstrates that through the study of young people we can learn much about the nation as a whole, the role children are expected to play and the ways they negotiate or contest this through their everyday interactions with the state.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored English children's experiences of education during the Second World War, a topic that has been long neglected in existing research on the period. It argues that the historiographical emphasis on the relationship between host families and their evacuees has resulted in the marginalisation of the school day as a subject worthy of study. This is surprising because education was a central component of the wartime experience of children, whether for those attending an unfamiliar type of school or those who missed out on traditional schooling completely. In the limited cases where schooling during the war years is mentioned, historians tend to emphasize the shortcomings of the Board of Education in dealing with the vast structural changes precipitated by the conflict. This research reconsiders what has become a historiographical orthodoxy, contending that by disregarding the wartime system of education as chaotic – or, a 'casualty' of war – we fail to do justice to the complexities of children's learning lives.

This is not to suggest that all children were enthralled by their wartime school days. Countless young people missed weeks, months, and even years of formal education. They have frequently expressed resentment that they spent the rest of their lives catching up on basic skills they should have learnt at school, poor handwriting being a common example of this. When they were able to open, schools did encounter severe difficulties due to the interruptions of air raid warnings, staff shortages, lacking resources, and inappropriate classroom space, and as a result, teachers often focused on the three Rs at the expense of more creative subjects. However, this research has revealed that neither governmental inspectors nor pupils were satisfied with this narrow scope. Schools were required to get back to normal as soon as possible and more than this, to capitalise on their new situations by developing innovative pedagogies and learning techniques. Many teachers recognised the need to cater for the personal interests of their pupils. When they had relatives serving abroad, schools addressed these fighting fronts and enabled young people to appreciate the lives of their loved ones. The children discussed in chapter two relied on school staff to answer their questions about the conflict, or to distract them from

the difficulties of the wartime home front when this was more appropriate. Once the upheaval created by the evacuation and the severe bombing of 1940 had subsided, the system offered a curriculum which focused on the needs of children as individuals and encouraged them to flourish as independent learners.

Moreover, this thesis has challenged the conventional image of wartime schools by exploring both the classroom and educational sites beyond the classroom: the countryside, the Home Service scheme, the camp schools, the wireless, and the adventure playgrounds. These features of Britain's educational landscape have been largely overlooked in existing discussions on wartime schooling, and including them in this study has questioned the perception of education as a 'casualty'. We have seen that the BBC developed specific educational broadcasts designed to teach evacuees about their environments and to facilitate friendships between newcomers and locals, helping both groups to settle into their new lives. Similarly, the residential nature of camp schools meant that children were engaged in education during both classroom and leisure time, through evening debate clubs and a wireless room to which they had unlimited access. Furthermore, the communities formed in residential camps comforted the young pupils and the presence of friends and teachers somewhat alleviated the homesickness experienced by evacuees billeted in private households. In other words, these new educational structures served as a source of intellectual stimulation and emotional or personal support. Educational authorities recognised their responsibility towards young people, who had the right to information and reassurance from the adults around them.

While the state had a duty towards children in offering educational opportunities, they also held specific expectations of how young people ought to behave in return. Wartime heightened the state's desire to mould children into good citizens, who would become the next generation of loyal and hard-working adults. Various educational bodies were employed to serve this end. The rural settings of reception areas and camp schools could, it was believed, provide the ideal environment for character-building, rectifying the perceived inadequacies of an urban working-class upbringing. This thesis has uncovered two models of citizenship within which children were conceptualised: the *informed* and the *participatory* citizen.

The *informed citizen* had to know about the world around them on a local, national, and international scale. They were expected to pay attention to current affairs and were taught how to learn independently of teachers. The school work presented in chapters two and three reveals that pupils were encouraged to think intelligently about the conflict and the circumstances facing other allied nations. They were granted space to record their own opinions on war news, which they formed by reading newspapers, listening to the radio, following allied progress on maps, and through discussions with other children. The launch of the BBC's News Commentaries in 1940 (chapter four), the first news programme aimed specifically at children, represented a shift to viewing young people as educated citizens. The BBC realised that children wanted to learn about the dramatic, and often uncomfortable, events of wartime and endeavoured to present information in an honest fashion.

Wartime children were also moulded into *participatory citizens* who were healthy, fit and motivated to assist in public life. This thesis has demonstrated the central part played by teachers and other educators in inspiring young people to join the war effort. Children at camp schools, discussed in chapter three, were expected to support community projects, through fundraising and bringing in the harvest at nearby farms. Camp planners hoped that such activities would turn the apathetic young arrivals into well-rounded and fit citizens with a firm sense of social responsibility, community-spirit, and positive leadership skills. Similarly, the BBC urged young listeners to find ways to help, whether by keeping themselves healthy, or researching cooking methods to preserve food supplies. This in itself was often deemed to be an educational endeavour, contributing to the child's comprehension of national requirements. The official fixation on the war effort had far-reaching effects on elite attitudes towards children. As shown by chapter five, notions of the useful and productive citizen exacerbated a sense of delinquency amongst those children who declined opportunities to participate.

Crucially, this thesis has integrated the viewpoint of the child into these official visions of citizenship, asking whether their perspective mirrored adult assumptions about the education system. It has demonstrated that young people responded to

adult demands according to their own desires and were able to shape their individual experiences of learning. Looking at oral history interviews, retrospective memoirs and contemporary documents such as children's classroom work, essays and drawings, an insight has been gained into the perspective of young people. Archival material produced by adults, such as inspector reports, has also been used to mine for the children's outlook on their education since very often these sources include quotations from school pupils or descriptions of their behaviour. It is clear that, although constrained by adult-imposed rules and the social structures of the school and the home, children living through the Second World War had the potential to retain some control over their own lives.

Children sometimes exerted agency in negative ways: we have seen examples of young people who recorded their objections towards the strenuous nature of war work in school magazines and wrote to their parents about the deficiencies of members of the teaching faculty. Chapter five found that delinquency and truancy served as tools to negotiate adult authority from the marginalised position of childhood by actively rejecting official rules and regulations. However, this research has also located agency within a positive paradigm, since children can be found showing off about their knowledge of current affairs to peers and family members or keenly seeking opportunities to get involved in the war effort. The BBC in particular opened many forums for children to comment on programming, thereby entering into a dialogue with their young listeners. In this way, children had the chance to subtly influence what they learnt and how it was presented to them. Examples of when they chose to participate in the curriculum, as well as when they pointedly refused to, build up a sense of children's efforts to negotiate their learning lives. This research, then, contributes to a growing historiographical trend of removing wartime children from a model of victimhood and looking at the extent to which they could operate as social actors.

The findings presented in this thesis have implications for the literature on childhood and education during the Second World War, proposing that we conceptualise education more broadly and incorporate the voices of politicians, educationists, and inspectors, as well as those who received their demands – the schoolchildren.

Overall, widening the source base to include oral history, retrospective memoirs, and classroom work alongside archival and political material has enabled access to new perspectives. Similarly, expanding the definition of the school to encompass spheres within and outside of the traditional classroom demands that assumptions about education are challenged as well as the impact of dramatic change, such as war, on children's experiences of learning. This thesis therefore makes empirical and also methodological contributions to the field.

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