

Berkshire Old and New

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Berkshire Local History Association

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The Association would like to express their thanks to all those who helped by assisting with the various stages of producing this issue of the journal.

Cover illustrations

Front. Reading Natural History Society members in Pamber Forest, 1901. Photo: Berkshire Record Office.

Back. Convent School of our Lady, Abingdon, home to wartime refugees from Belgium.

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The Reading Natural History Society and its records: the first fifty years, 1881-1931

David Cliffe

The formation of a natural history society in Reading was part of a movement across the whole country: most towns acquired a society like this in the later nineteenth century. By no means all have survived. There were field clubs, which had wider interests, including history, archaeology, and geology as well as natural history. The North Staffordshire Field Club, founded in 1864, claims to be the earliest of them. More locally, the Newbury District Field Club was founded in 1870. It published its *Transactions* right from the beginning, a regular cornucopia of information on the local area. On the other side of Reading, the Maidenhead and Taplow Field Club was founded in 1882. Their activities were similar to those of natural history societies, involving field excursions, and indoor lectures. In Reading, the Berkshire Archaeological Society was founded in 1871, and the Reading Literary and Scientific Society in 1880. Not surprisingly, these Reading societies had members in common, and the Natural History Society seems to have been formed from among the members of the Literary and Scientific Society in particular. More specialized societies, interested in geology, ornithology, butterflies and moths, etc., came along in the



Photograph taken in Pamber Forest, 1880

twentieth century.

Two classic photographs were taken at Pamber Forest in 1880, just before the Natural History Society was formed, and show many of the men who were to go on to found the Society on 6 April 1881. We know their surnames, because they have been written in a photograph album: some were well known professional men in the town, but in the case of others, the surname is all we can easily find out.¹ Even in the Society's minute books, only surnames are recorded.² It seems that in real life, they referred to one another by surname as 'Purnell, Wallace, Stevens,' and so on. The minute books in sometimes amusing ways suggest that the Society, and society in general, was much more formal than now. These minute books have provided the contemporary factual material for this article.

In the photograph reproduced on page 3, Mr Purnell, second from left, holds a sprig of cherry-laurel, probably for use in his killing-bottle.³ He must have been a collector of insects, and the leaves, when crushed, would have given off cyanide to render his specimens lifeless.

Third from left is Henry Marriage Wallis, who was to be the Natural History Society's first Honorary Secretary and Treasurer. It was at his house that it was decided to form the Society. Besides being an ornithologist of distinction, he was also a novelist, using the nom-de-plume Ashton Hilliers.⁴

To the right of Mr Wallis is Dr Joseph Stevens, an archaeologist, who became the Society's first President. He was also to become, in 1882, the first Honorary Curator of Reading Museum.⁵

To the right of Dr Stevens is Dr C. E. Hewitt, a member of the family which ran The Allied Arms public house in St. Mary's Butts, and ran the brewery behind it. He was elected to the first committee, and the Society held several meetings between 1881 and 1884 in the 'Brewery Room' in Chain Street.

The name of the man in the middle, with the curious leggings and the gun, is not given. His job was to shoot any interesting bird which had the misfortune to be in the vicinity, so that the gentlemen could examine it more closely. The idea that nature might need to be conserved came some years later, as we shall see.

Looking at the Society's early photographs, it is obvious that everyone is male. The founder-members numbered about twenty. New members had to be proposed and seconded in writing by existing members, and then elected by a majority of the committee at their next meeting. There was nothing in the rules forbidding females from joining, but it was 1891 before any ladies were elected as members, and 1922 before any ladies joined the committee.⁶

It is also apparent that membership was drawn from the middle and

upper-middle classes. The subscription was half-a-crown (12½p) for a year, but even if they could have afforded it and had wanted to join, most 'working' people would not have had the chance to attend the field trips and excursions. Most of them would be at work for five-and-a-half days a week, and it would be some time before the word 'leisure' meant very much to them.

Half of the excursions were on Tuesdays and Saturdays, starting in the morning. When the half-day closing of shops arrived in Reading, Wednesday was the chosen day.

For most of the members, in the early years, there was no such thing as leisure clothing. In the Edwardian era, for sportsmen there would have been clothing for hunting, riding, and for 'messaging about on the river'. When out on their excursions, the 'Nats' wore what they would have worn in the town



Photograph taken in Pamber Forest, 1901

three-piece suits, collars and ties, and, when ladies began to join, long skirts, and hats. By the 1920s, cloche hats were very much in vogue for the ladies. For most people, there are no knapsacks, haversacks, or rucksacks for carrying identification guides, jars for specimens, waterproofs or refreshments.

The exception, as far as the Society is concerned, seems to have been W. E. Butler, of the firm of Butler and Sons, importers and bottlers of beers,

wines and spirits. In the photograph of 1901, he wears his own version of what 'the toffs' wore when messing about on the river – a cap, a scarf tie, a spotted cummerbund, a light-coloured jacket, and lace-up boots.⁷ On other photographs he can be seen with his sporty bicycle. A meeting of the Society was held in the rooms above his premises in Chatham Street on 5 March 1886. This is now the public house called The Butler, but then called The Bakers' Arms. He was elected President of the Society in 1914.

Seated to the left in the photograph, with a butterfly net, is Mr H. A. King, a stationer on Cross Street. He moved to more prestigious premises in Queen Victoria Street when that street was opened shortly after the time this photograph was taken. He was also a photographer who produced his own picture postcards of the Reading area, and he obviously took many of the Society's photographs. Until about 1915 photographs appear in two versions, one without Mr King, when he was behind the camera, and one with Mr King, and without another member of the party. It was Mr King who on 12 February 1914 brought the 'oxy-hydrogen lantern', a forerunner of the slide projector and digital projector, to the Society's meetings; in that year he was also their librarian.

The man with the cigarette is 'Nat' Allen – alias Charles Nathaniel Allen, a taxidermist and picture-frame maker with a shop in King's Road. In the days when naturalists made private collections of preserved specimens, one can quite see why Mr Allen would want to be a member of the Society, and on 27 November 1913, he gave them a demonstration. He brought along a dead sparrowhawk, and proceeded to skin, stuff and mount it, 'all of which he accomplished within the hour.'

Looking at the names in the albums and on the slides, it is apparent that over the years, members of the staff of Reading Museum were well represented – like Dr Stevens – and many of them over the years have been expert naturalists. The Society held meetings at the Museum, and from 1916 onwards, members collected plants from the wild, which were brought to the Museum, kept moist, labelled, put on public view, and changed regularly. The Society's photographs (glass negatives and transparencies) are now in the Museum store, though the prints are at the Berkshire Record Office.

Inevitably, some of the members were on the academic staff of the Reading Extension College – later the University of Reading. So it is not surprising that the Society's minute-books and herbarium are in the Special Collections at the University Library.

Not surprisingly, some of the members were clergymen. Rev. J. M. Guilding, Vicar of St. Laurence's Church and editor of the four volumes of the Diary of the [Reading] Corporation, was a founder member, and Rev. P. H. Ditchfield, Rector of Barkham, author and antiquary, appears in several



Party at Kingwood Farmhouse, 1902

photographs. On at least one occasion he welcomed excursionists for tea at the rectory.⁸

Some were eminent medical men and women, like J. B. Hurry, who wrote the history of Reading Abbey and had a private botanical garden at his house, visited by the Society on 13 July 1921.⁹ On an excursion in about 1909, he was joined by Dr Hastings Gilford, of the Reading Dispensary, and Sir Jonathan Hutchinson of London: together they were working on a rare disease, Hutchinson-Gilford Progeria.¹⁰

In the photograph taken in 1902 of members of the Society at Kingwood Farmhouse, near Rotherfield Peppard, north of Reading, the lady seated to the right is Dr Esther Colebrook, a pioneer in the open-air treatment of tuberculosis.¹¹ The building was then a part of the Peppard Sanatorium, which she had founded. In 1904 she was to marry Henry Carling. She was the daughter of George Colebrook, the Reading butcher and grazier.¹² The gentleman standing on the right is Mr T. W. Marshall, whose nature notebooks of the 1930s are among the Society's material at the Berkshire Record Office.¹³

Reading's shopkeepers and traders were well represented in the membership – people like Philbrick's the tanners, Vincent's the coachbuilders, and Butler's the wine and spirit merchants.

The main activities of the Society, then as now, were the indoor evening meetings during the winter months, and the day excursions in the warmer part of the year.

Indoor meetings were held at a variety of venues, which seem to have changed according to who was on the committee – The Lodge Hotel, King's

Road; Willison's Hotel, Blagrave Street; St. Laurence's Parish Room; Mr Hewitt's Brewery Room in Chain Street; Folk House, otherwise known as The Friends' Institute, Church Street; the Abbey Gateway; the Geology Theatre at Reading University, and Reading Museum and Art Gallery. In the beginning, they were held at irregular intervals, and attracted around fifteen members an evening.

'Specimen meetings' were held about once a year, when specimens and microscopes were brought in, and members examined them. The enthusiasm for collecting is reflected in the minute-books. On 25 February 1887 Rev. H. C. Lang exhibited a case of butterflies, which included a Large Copper, extinct in Britain since 1851. About the time it became extinct, a specimen was worth 4s (20p), but by 1887 it was worth £4. On 23 November of the following year, H. M. Wallis gave a talk on eagles, bringing in the skins of the Golden Eagle, the Osprey, and 'both species of Spotted Eagle.'



Excursion party at the level crossing at Bramley Station, 25 May 1921

He also exhibited eight eggs, four of which he had 'taken' himself. On 7 January 1890, there was a 'conversazione' at which prizes were given for botanical specimens, collections of shells, lepidoptera, and stuffed birds and animals.

The need for restraint was sounded in 1918, when Dr F. W. Stansfield, in his presidential address on 17 January, said that he 'deprecated the making of large collections, often causing a local insect or plant to be exterminated.'

The excursions were to the same kinds of place as now, but using trains where transport was required. The major difference between then and now is that then there were no nature reserves. The photograph of 1921 shows a party at the level crossing at Bramley Station.¹⁴ They were to visit, or had just visited, Pamber Forest and Silchester, a walk of over four miles in each direction, before getting to the destination.

Trips therefore took a whole day. Today, people go by car, park near their destination, and the whole trip takes half a day. Sometimes, if the trip is to an area of particular interest, such as a nature reserve, there is very little



At The Round Oak public house, Padworth, 14 July 1915

walking involved.

Tea was often pre-arranged at a public house along the way. Miss A. M. Simmonds, known as ‘Nan’, remembering those days, said that the tea could sometimes be a nuisance, when the party had to be hurried away from a place of interest, so as not to be late for tea.¹⁵

Sometimes the tea was taken at a public house, as, for example, on 14 July 1915, when a photograph was taken at The Round Oak at Padworth.¹⁶ At other times, the tea was at the house of one of the members, at a vicarage, or at one of the big houses. The Society was obviously on friendly terms with Rev. P. H. Ditchfield at Barkham Rectory, with the Vicar at Lower Basildon, with Mr Keyser of Aldermaston Park, and with Mr Stanton at Park Place, Remenham. In most years between 1910 and 1927, the Society took tea with Mr J. H. Bowman at Crookham Common, after alighting from the train at Thatcham and exploring the Common.

In the early twentieth century, the membership stood at about a hundred, but inevitably this fell away during the First World War. Evening meetings were cancelled in the winter of 1914-15, but resumed for the next winter. Field excursions were combined with the outings of the Reading Literary and Scientific Society – reflected in the captions of some of the photographs.

After the war, the pattern of excursions soon reverted to what it had been before – regular visits to Crookham Common, and trips to Finchampstead, Wargrave, Remenham, Sulham, Pangbourne, Whitchurch, Goring Heath, Basildon, Silchester, and of course Pamber Forest, where the Society may be said to have started.

The Society's Records

Although Mr H. A. King was the Society's librarian, the Society had no premises of its own, and so its records, which are fairly complete, have become scattered among various repositories – all being kept safely, but with various arrangements for access. Below is a list of the main categories of material.

Local studies collection, Reading Central Library

The Library has the printed material – *The Reading Naturalist*, published annually since 1949, and its predecessor, *Quaestiones Naturales*. There is also the small book on wild plants, published in 1900, and there are a few photographs. It also contains a number of volumes published by members of the Society, mostly on natural history, but some medical texts, and (in the case of H. M. Wallis), some novels.

Berkshire Record Office

In the Record Office are a small number of loose photographs, and a photograph album containing 58 pictures, taken between 1881 and 1931. There is a card with the Society's original rules, with manuscript amendments dated 26 October 1889. There is a fascinating series of nature note-books which once belonged to T. W. Marshall, written between 1930 and 1935. Extracts from these would warrant a further journal article – though in a natural history journal, rather than here.

Reading Museum

In the Museum store is a large box with the name of the Society written on the outside, though not all the glass negatives and lantern slides contained in it have to do with the Society. It would seem that the slides had belonged to a member who also belonged to The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), probably H. M. Wallis. At one time the Quakers were providing adult evening education, from their East and West Reading Institutes, and from Folk House, next to their meeting-house in the middle of town. On 17 November 1925 the Natural History Society held one of its meetings at Folk House. These 'Quaker' slides are labelled in the same way, and probably by the same hand, as those which concern the Natural History Society.

Between them, the Record Office and the Museum have 128 images concerning the Society, but many of the slides have been copied from the photograph album. In all there are 77 different images, covering the years 1880-1931.

The University of Reading

The Society's minute books have ended up in the Special Collections at Reading University Library. They are now accessible from the reading room at the Museum of English Rural Life in Redlands Road. Unfortunately, the book covering the years 1891-1913 is missing, but otherwise everything is there, from the inaugural meeting almost to the present day. Also in the collection are various bits-and-pieces, including account books, membership lists, and lists of meetings and excursions, together with journal articles by members, some of them unpublished. The Society's herbarium is also kept here, a series of 25 albums of pressed plants, arranged in plant families, comprising some 400 specimens collected in the 1940s and 1950s, and still in good condition.

References

- 1 BRO D/EX 1807/1.
- 2 University of Reading Library, Special Collections, available from the Reading Room at the Museum of English Rural Life, Redlands Road.
- 3 BRO D/EX 1807/1, p.1.
- 4 Edward H. Milligan, *British Quakers in Commerce and Industry, 1775-1920* (2007) p.456.
- 5 He had come from St. Mary Bourne, in Hampshire, and his main interests were archaeological. Reading Central Library has around 40 papers by him, many of them the texts of lectures, relating to Berkshire and Hampshire.
- 6 BRO D/EX 564/1/31.
- 7 BRO D/EX 1807/1, p.5.
- 8 BRO D/EX 1807/1, p.17; Reading Museum S0910058.
- 9 Reading Museum S0805049 (lantern slide); S0910058 (glass negative).
- 10 BRO D/EX 1807/1, p.19.
- 11 BRO D/EX 1807/1, p.23.
- 12 Henry Carling, and Esther Colebrook, 'Peppard Hospital: a short history.' Unpublished typescript at Reading Central Library.
- 13 BRO D/EX 1807/2/1.
- 14 Reading Museum S0805047 (lantern slide).
- 15 A. M. Simmonds, 'Reading and District Natural History Society – a brief history', *The Reading Naturalist*, No. 21, for 1967-68, published 1969.
- 16 BRO D/EX 1807/1, p.27.

The author is grateful to the staff at Reading Central Library, Reading Museum (Reading Borough Council), the Berkshire Record Office, and the Museum of English Rural Life at the University of Reading for granting access to their collections and for allowing copies of photographs to be made and reproduced.

The Belgian Refugee Appeal in Abingdon 1914

J. Dunleavy

Saturday, November 28,

Belgian Day

in Abingdon and District

when favours will be sold for button holes,
door knockers, office and shop fronts,
motors, horses, vans, etc.

Other towns have done splendidly

The local committee desire, in addition
to their present responsibilities, to
invite and maintain the present refugees
and hope the result of this day
will enable them to do so.

Saturday, November 28.

North Berks Herald, 21 November 1914

Few can be unaware of the significance of Belgium in the First World War. It was because Germany violated the international agreements guaranteeing the independence of the small kingdom that Britain entered the war on 4 August 1914. Less well known are the consequences, the vast outflow of Belgians to Holland, France and Britain. The movement of so many people over the space of a few weeks obliged host states to provide transport, accommodation, schools and other social amenities. The outbreak of war in 1914 provided journal editors with an abundance of news stories, feature

articles, and an avalanche of letters on all sorts of topics. By strange irony this was the time of year when editors frequently complained at the paucity of hard news, leading many readers to grumble at what came to be known as the 'silly season'. The Great War and the spate of stories inspired by the conflict would keep editors fully occupied with the task of chronicling a series of frightful events over the next four years.¹

The influx of the refugees to Britain began in the autumn of 1914. What had started as a mere trickle amounted to what *The Times* described as a cataract of Belgians by the end of the year. Estimates put the number of the first significant wave at about 100,000. Most accounts suggest the total number who ultimately sought refuge in this country was well over a quarter of a million: the largest immigrant movement ever in this country. An armada of ships conveyed the refugees to our channel ports in southern England. Folkestone in particular seems to have borne the brunt of this influx. As the numbers grew daily the coastal towns became anxious to encourage the Belgians to go inland, London proving to be the obvious place to make for until such times as the outcome of the conflict was decided. No one seemed sure as to how long the war might last: Lord Kitchener, the War Secretary, suggested a year at least, though he later he increased his estimate to three years. While Britain's politicians attracted severe criticism for their lack of preparation for war, at least there was already machinery in place to cope with an influx of refugees. The so-called Ulster Scheme had been framed in anticipation of civil war should the Liberal government persist in its determination to impose home rule on Ireland provoking civil war in that country.²

The system for dealing with refugees developed from a combination of a government department acting with a network of voluntary agencies that were numerous prior to 1914, but which proliferated to over two thousand during the war. The Home Secretary, Reginald McKenna, declared the Belgians ought to be welcomed as 'friendly aliens.' More significant was the obligation placed on the Local Government Board, directed by Herbert Samuel, to assume responsibility for the arrival and the dispersal of the refugees. This is where the efforts of the voluntary agencies were utilized.³

A War Refugees Committee (WRC) was formed early in the war. This was an expression of what might be termed the private philanthropic tradition which was so well organized that a party of its officers was despatched to Holland early in the war where they interviewed and decided who merited assistance coming to Britain. On arrival here the Belgians were referred to reception centres in London and elsewhere so that interviewers might ascertain their education and skills. Having acquired this information, the WRC had to try and match the needs and aspirations of the refugees with the

details submitted by local committees. London apparently was high on the wants list of the refugees, though it was obvious there were limits even to what London might provide. In view of this a policy of dispersal was adopted, and in retrospect this was a wise decision, since the voluntary agencies were able to utilize the seemingly universal pro-Belgian sentiment pervasive in the autumn of 1914.⁴

On their arrival in Britain the first consideration in dealing with the refugees was that of accommodation. Numerous offers of help had already been received by the local committees. Broadly speaking the refugees were provided with a choice: accept housing in a hostel, or else agree to wait until accommodation in private homes became available. Given that the Belgians appeared to be highly mobile it seems reasonable to suppose many of them had experience of both types of housing during their stay here. In between the extremes there were some able to afford hotel accommodation, though as the war progressed and the WRCs formulated a scale of allowances it seems likely the number of hotel residents would have declined; private smaller units became the norm.⁵

The information as to the availability of accommodation for the refugees in Abingdon was collated by the local refugee committee. They in turn made public just what was available in respect of rooms, houses, and institutions. The first group of Belgians arrived in the latter part of October. Among these was a lawyer and his family who were assigned to rooms in Oriel House, a commercial hotel in Ock Street managed by Mr Cullen. General Bailie welcomed others to the Wharf House. Mrs Kennedy, wife of the vicar, announced that a cottage in the vicarage grounds was available, though it was in need of furnishing. Mr Tatham announced others would be welcome at Northcourt House, and Mr Reynolds similarly at his home, The Gables. One journal stated the very first refugees to arrive were two women accompanied by a boy: they were directed to Our Lady's Convent. In all, the journal estimated the first batch of refugees amounted to about forty.⁶

Once here, the needs of the refugees became apparent. Most of them had left their homes and possessions at short notice, many of them having only the clothes which they were wearing. The Abingdon committee announced there was a need for monetary donations, or better still, regular payments for the refugees. When the Belgians arrived the committee were able to announce they had already received gifts of money, food, clothing, and coal. Not all the available accommodation was furnished, though happily an appeal for the loan of furniture was responded to. It is worth remembering there was a great air of uncertainty in the autumn of 1914. No one had any clear idea as to how long the conflict might last; still less the likely outcome of the war. Locally, the refugee committee which had displayed such energy

in the early stages of the war, continued to interest themselves in the welfare of the Belgians. Having displayed commendable haste in dealing with the first wave of refugees, the local committee cautioned townspeople against entering into commitments they might find difficult to satisfy. Prudence dictated it was time for a pause in their activities, the committee suggesting ominously the conflict might be 'for a prolonged period.'⁷

The Abingdon response to the appeal for the Belgians was impressive. After all Abingdon was not a large town, and while local industry claimed to have fairly full order books, it was a low-wage area. Early in the war places such as Oxford and Reading had displayed their sympathies for the refugees by organizing flag days. The latter place raised £551, while the former managed an impressive £2,700. Such events gave townspeople the opportunity to make miniature flags, rosettes, neck bands, along with numerous other artefacts. Having procured a significant number of such items, a flag day would be announced usually having first secured the approbation of the local council and local commercial associations. Some of the items made at that time can still be seen in local museums or in private collections. Not all the artefacts could be considered works of art: what was important is that they all included the colours of the Belgian tricolour: black, yellow, and red.⁸

If larger towns could raise money in this way, Abingdonians were determined to prove they could do just as well. The Belgian Day in Abingdon was set for 28 November; the promoters stated that in emulating others it was hoped to obtain a substantial amount. In this way Abingdon might take part in extending hospitality to the refugees from 'plucky little Belgium'. Flag days involved a great deal of organization. With just a few days in hand the local committee had its work cut out. Late autumn is not the best season to undertake such events, but the organizers obviously decided that was a risk they would have to take. At a time when industry worked a five and half day week organizers were reduced to holding the flag day on a Saturday, this day being the time when workers received their weekly pay, so there was a need to approach them as they left their place of employment, before they could go off and do their shopping or attend sporting events.⁹

The arrangements for the flag day were delegated to a sub-committee of the WRC consisting exclusively of women. The honorary president was Lady Florence Bliss, while Miss May Cullen proved to be a seemingly tireless honorary secretary. For practical advice the committee of ladies relied heavily on advice tendered by Mrs Kingerslee, who had recently organized the very successful day in Oxford. Abingdonians had already raised some funds for the refugees by holding a number of social events, such as what was termed a Patriotic Concert, where the audience were able to give vent to

their musical propensities by singing popular songs of the day, notably 'It's a long way to Tipperary,' a song destined to become virtually our second national anthem.¹⁰

Neither flag days nor patriotic concerts were unique: being able to copy from other places, the organizers in Abingdon were determined the scope of the local celebration set for 28 November would be notable for its range of novel events. As principal officer Miss Cullen energized her collaborators by urging them to 'sell as many favours as possible!' In this way it was hoped the community would achieve a higher awareness of the plight of refugees, whether by donating objects for sale, or purchasing items. At Abingdon the infectious nature of what became known as 'Belgianitis' was demonstrated by the readiness of virtually every resident to support one or more of the events. The so-called snowball auctions appealed to many, while others enjoyed rides by donkey or motor car; guessing games also proved to be popular. The most intriguing and one of the most lucrative features on the day proved to be the sale of favours. Favours took the form of a button hole, a rosette, or a miniature Belgian flag. They were usually made of paper, so the cost of production was low. The quality of favours varied: what they had in common was that they all included Belgium's national colours. Just to emphasize it was an Abingdon effort a letter 'A' was usually superimposed on the black, yellow and red. The Abingdon volunteers were not satisfied with the conventional favour: it says much for the ingenuity of the local committee that support for the refugees was expressed in another way. This was the knitting of woollen favours that were adapted to fit on door knockers. The first group of sellers was to be observed at eight o'clock in the morning of flag day visiting all parts of the borough. Most volunteers reportedly had disposed of their wares within two hours. One virtue of this modus operandi was that each house demonstrated it had already been canvassed. According to a local journal during the morning despite unpromising weather virtually everyone in Abingdon seemed to be sporting the Belgian colours. There were no fixed prices for the favours, people were invited to make a suitable donation, and these ranged from one to six pence. Irrespective of the donation, the important thing was for every Abingdonian to display the colours.¹¹

The success of the day became apparent in the evening following the counting of the money. Starting at eight o'clock the counters took close on three hours to declare the amount raised by the volunteers. After deducting expenses of £4 4s 2d, the amount for the Belgian Relief Committee was £241 12s 10½d. Not all of this had been raised in Abingdon, a number of the outlying villages had had collections. Given that several of these had still to transmit amounts collected to Miss Cullen's committee it was anticipated

the final amount was likely to be around £250, a gratifying amount for a small market town and its neighbourhood.¹²

In commenting on the outcome, the *North Berks Herald* considered the amount raised reflected well on Abingdonians, their hearts were 'in the right place.' The successful arrangements for the appeal had been based on similar efforts in larger towns. Miss May Cullen stated the outcome was a reflection on the kindly feelings towards the less fortunate. In handing the proceeds to the local Belgian Relief Fund she explained this would enable the committee to continue to extend hospitality towards the refugees.¹³

The appeals on behalf of the Belgians up and down the country suggested the voluntary tradition was still a vital element in British society. But here we have been looking at the welcome extended to the first influx of Belgian refugees who came to this country in the first few months of the war; this was not to last. As the war progressed, and was extended over a wider area, so the number of war victims grew. Allied countries, such as Russia, France, and Serbia, also looked to Britain for help and these were responded to with varying degrees of success. The Belgian refugees in Britain, who numbered around 100,000 by the end of 1914, were not forgotten, though as the war continued they would receive fewer notices in the press. The policy of dispersal to other parts of the country was not universally welcomed by the refugees, while the provision of accommodation in hostels as opposed to private houses was an issue never really resolved. Attempts to place refugees in districts where work might be available were not always successful. Early in 1915, when it was obvious the war was far from over, the education system agreed to enrol Belgian children in schools. Localities with a significant Belgian population were permitted to set up schools taught by Belgian teachers; elsewhere, where the distribution of refugees was sparse, the children were obliged to attend English schools. Continuing appeals for charity were not always as successful as those in 1914. Complaints that the proceeds were not always benefitting those in need led the government to try and check abuses. The Charities Act regulating charities became law in 1916. Successful as the appeals such as the flag days of 1914 may have been, as the war continued with more and more looking to government for benefits, the amounts raised by the voluntary sector were eclipsed by an increasing dependence on Treasury funds. As Cahalan observed, the Good Samaritan was replaced by a bureaucrat. The London-based War Refugees Committee ceased operations on 31 December 1918, while local committees suspended their work shortly afterwards.¹⁴

References

- 1 B. Turner (ed.), *The Statesman's Yearbook 2014* (2013) p. 195. A. Livesey, *Great Battles of World War I* (1989) p. 12.
- 2 P. Gatrell and P. Nivet, 'Refugees and exiles', in J. Winter (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the First World War, vol. III, Civil Society*, pp. 189-91. A. J. P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (1965), ch. 1. Tony Kushner, 'Local heroes: Belgian refugees in Britain during World War I', *Immigrants and minorities*, v. 18 (1) (1999) pp. 1-28. The Ulster Scheme was an agency created by Irish Unionists who, in the event of the implementation of home rule, prepared to evacuate women and children to Britain. On the outbreak of the European war the machinery of the scheme and its personnel was put at the disposal of the Belgians Refugee Committee.
- 3 P. Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War* (1982) passim. This is the standard work on the subject. Reginald McKenna (1863-1943) proved to be a liberal-minded home secretary who resisted calls for the internment of aliens. Herbert Samuel (1870-1963) served as president of the Local Government Board during this period.
- 4 Cahalan, chapters 1 -5, passim.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 409. Ten shillings per week was the usual allowance for each refugee.
- 6 *North Berkshire Herald (NBH)*, 31 October 1914. In Abingdon the local committee appeared to be extremely class conscious, seemingly anxious to house the refugees according to their social status. Reading, by contrast, placed many of their Belgians in hostels. P. Roker, *Children of Mercy. The story of the schools of Our Lady's Convent Abingdon* (2000), p. 67.
- 7 *NBH*, 10, 17, 24 October 1914.
- 8 *NBH*, 21, 28 November 1914.
- 9 *NBH*, 28 November, 5 December 1914.
- 10 *NBH*, 5 December, 17 October 1914. Lady Florence Bliss was the wife of Sir Henry William Bliss, who had had a distinguished career in the Indian Civil Service. During his retirement he served on the London County Council and as a magistrate in Berkshire. The couple had made The Abbey at Abingdon their home in 1908.
- 11 *NBH*, 5 December 1914.
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 M. Bostridge, *The Fateful Year: England 1914* (2014) p. 235. The numbers of Belgians in this country at a given time are still the subject of debate. K. Myers, 'Hidden history of refugee schooling in Britain: Belgians 1914-18', *Higher Education. Journal of the History of Education Society*, v. 30 (2), 209.

Addendum

Since this article was compiled a steady flow of publications bearing on the refugees in World War I has appeared. Readers will find two items worthy of attention: J. Arcus (ed.), *Berkshire in the First World War* (2015) and R. Frampton, *Abingdon in the Great War 1914-18* (2014).

Berkshire County Council and the Administration of Evacuation, 1938-1945

Natalie Burton

The political and bureaucratic climate in the lead up to World War Two was unprecedented in terms of planning. Civil defence was a new concept; lessons had been learnt since World War One, necessitated by advances in military technology and, later, observations of the destruction of property and massive loss of civilian life during the Spanish Civil War. The effects of the anticipated chemical bombardment of Britain's major industrial towns and cities and what steps should be taken to mitigate their effects, including evacuation, were being considered in secret at the very top levels of government as early as 1924.¹

In March 1931 the Committee for Imperial Defence set up an evacuation sub-committee to consider measures which 'would prevent the panic flight of civilians from possible target areas in the event of war.'² The need to evacuate London was the focus of their discussion and planning. It was also being considered by the Air Raid Precautions (Organisation) Committee as part of wider civil defence planning, presenting its London passive defence plan in 1933. In June 1934 the sub-committee for evacuation presented its report, including timetables for evacuation, and concluded that 3,500,000 people living in inner London (approximately 75 per cent of the population) would require evacuating. It proposed that wherever possible families should be moved together and accommodated in billets within a fifty mile radius of London. The committee's proposal that evacuation should be voluntary remained at the core of subsequent evacuation planning.³ However, there were no proposals for the organization of evacuees once they had arrived at their final destinations in the Home Counties; this was due in part to the intentional secrecy of this early phase of planning.

Although there had been vague admissions that civil defence planning was taking place, for example Stanley Baldwin's speech to the House of Commons in November 1932, a new phase of civil defence planning was signalled in May 1935 when it was decided to make a public announcement.⁴ It took a further two months for the newly established Air Raid Precautions (ARP) Department of the Home Office to publish Air Raid Precautions Memo No.1, inviting recipients (local authorities and private employers) to

establish an organization to coordinate efforts against air attacks, including recruitment of the public for ARP duties and their education in basic protective measures. The memo sent a clear signal from Government that the onus for planning lay squarely at the feet of local authorities. However, perhaps surprisingly given the preoccupation with evacuating London by the Committee for Imperial Defence in the early 1930s, there was no invitation for local authorities to begin planning for evacuation.

It took a further two years for the invitation made in ARP Memo No.1 to be formalized. The Air Raid Precaution Bill of November 1937 sought to clarify the financial support available to local authorities and required the submission of ARP schemes to the Home Office for approval. Yet it did not make any provision for evacuation; it was only after MPs pressured the Home Secretary that an amendment was inserted. The resulting Act compelled local authorities to provide information to Government for the purpose of assisting with the preparation of any evacuation scheme, with the responsibility for planning belonging to local authorities; an approach similar to ARP planning.⁵ The extent to which this development was a surprise to local authorities is debatable; Manchester City Council, sensing itself as a potential target area, was already well advanced in its ARP planning by the time the invitation of May 1935 became an imperative. In contrast, Berkshire County Council's (BCC) ARP committee had only met seven times, with two of these meetings spent discussing appointments to posts.⁶

The lack of detail and direction from Government meant that local authorities, in particular London County Council, continued to pressure the Home Office to take the initiative. By May 1938 the Home Office had conceded that several local schemes organizing evacuation would not be practicable and that the question of mass evacuation, particularly billeting (placing people in private homes or camps), needed to be considered in greater depth.⁷ Sir John Anderson, an ex-civil servant elected to parliament earlier that year, was appointed to lead an enquiry into the matter.

The Anderson Report of July 1938 laid down several broad principles to be applied to any evacuation planning. In keeping with the report of the evacuation sub-committee four years earlier, evacuation was to be entirely voluntary. However, the report stated that there should be a compulsory obligation on private householders to accommodate evacuees and that Government should meet the cost of evacuation of those who could not afford it, despite vociferous opposition; one MP allegedly said that compulsory billeting would be 'worse than death'. The report also reinforced the precept that local authorities should control evacuation but failed to give any concrete guidance, vaguely stating that 'All the services which are

delicately adjusted to meet the needs of the community on the present distribution of the population would have to be refashioned to deal with the new situation.' The only consideration the report gave to which sections of population should be evacuated, and therefore for whom local authorities could expect to receive and adjust these services, was that schoolchildren should be evacuated in organized school units if their parents could not make their own arrangements.

The Anderson Report was arguably naïve as to the scale and practicalities of mass evacuation. However, it should not be forgotten that this area of policy making was completely uncharted territory for the UK and was largely driven by fear. Contemporary commentators such as Padley and Cole in their 'Evacuation Survey' point out that the general feeling at Government levels was that in the event of such devastating bombing as had been seen in China, Spain and Poland any difficulties in planning would be overlooked and that those evacuated would feel relief.⁸ It was against this backdrop that local authorities were to formulate their evacuation planning.

The Munich Crisis of September 1938 led to a very real fear of war and local authorities were finally forced by circumstance to plan specifically to receive evacuees for the first time. Three BCC Clerk's files on evacuation scheme management survive from this period.⁹ A 'Strictly Private, Personal and Confidential' letter from Harold Neobard (Clerk to BCC) addressed to clerks of all urban and rural district councils in Berkshire sent on 16 September 1938 states 'The urgency of this matter was emphasized at a Conference held at the Home Office this morning ... make every possible effort to attend or send an authorised deputy.'¹⁰

Faced with the prospect that some form of evacuation would be taking place imminently, BCC instructed its districts to carry out a preliminary survey of housing in order to establish the quantity of rooms available for evacuees. Like much evacuation planning this survey was conducted in secret, with many clerks using rating information to gauge accommodation. Easthampstead Rural District Council (EDRC)'s return gives a district total of 4,453 houses, 24,237 rooms, and a population of 19,700. The number of potential evacuees allocated to ERDC as a result of this survey was 4,500 and 'up to one quarter of that figure will be taken up by the children [coming unaccompanied in school groups]'. It was anticipated that there would be 25,000 school children arriving into Berkshire. The standard form sent to districts with their allocation stated that the districts should ensure children 'should be billeted in private lodgings where the householder is willing to give them board and lodging' and 'the selection of suitable homes for school children will involve visiting the householders and discussing the proposals with them.'¹¹

The files at this early stage do not betray any sense of concern about projected numbers of evacuees and any problems which might ensue as a result. In the event, this was an evacuation on a much smaller scale than the picture painted by the projected numbers.

Feedback to a Home Office questionnaire sent to district clerks after this evacuation reveals the extent to which evacuation was considered as a logistics exercise rather than something with a human face. Only one of the responses to the questionnaire filed in the clerk's files touches on practical arrangements for householders. D. H. M. Saunders, Clerk to ERDC wrote 'Householders required to know what was to be done with the children during the day time, how long were they likely to be staying, and what arrangements were made in case of illness.'¹² Maidenhead Borough's clerk added that 'The billeting of school children was favourably received but there was a general impression that the occupier had no choice in the matter.'¹³ Both Maidenhead and Wokingham Borough's clerks raised the need for one person to be responsible for all billeting rather than powers being replicated, and the issue of householders looking for friends and family to fill rooms rather than take refugees.

After the Munich Crisis, responsibility for evacuation planning moved from the Home Office to the Ministry of Health (MoH). A cross-departmental committee was established to identify geographical areas and social groups who would be most at risk should war break out and aerial bombing attacks take place. By early 1939, each district and borough council across the country had been categorised as an Evacuation, Reception or Neutral Authority according to the perceived threat of bombing.¹⁴ All districts under the administration of BCC were designated as authorities for the reception of evacuees, as was Reading County Borough. Each district council was to appoint a billeting officer with responsibility for placing evacuees. Often the billeting officer was also the district clerk or education officer. The county council would coordinate the district councils' efforts to place evacuees arriving in their area.

It was agreed by the cross-departmental committee that evacuation schemes should make use of private housing where possible rather than larger scale camps, as the Anderson report had recommended, although there continued to be debate about the extent to which this was feasible. The matter was not completely settled until early 1939, when it was conceded that some camps would be required for the vast numbers of children forecast to leave London and other large cities.

A government-directed door-to-door census in January 1939 surveyed over 5 million households nationwide in the space of a few weeks and included analysis of the potential impact on evacuees, householders and

demand for utilities.¹⁵ This census was purely statistical and revealed the extent to which private arrangements for billeting had already been made; in Berkshire, some 25 per cent of habitable rooms (on a single occupancy basis) had been reserved, a figure above the national average of 18 per cent.¹⁶ BCC was briefed as a result of the census to expect 46,722 evacuees, yet it was not until May 1939 that the 'priority classes' who would be given government help for evacuation were clarified. Expectant mothers, pre-school-age children with their mother or carer, school-age children removed in units led by their school teachers, the elderly and the disabled were to be evacuated from areas considered to be at risk from air attack.¹⁷ Planning accelerated; receiving authorities put their billeting processes in place and submitted their plans to BCC, and train companies drew up timetables including numbers to be 'detrained.'

In the event, during the first wave of evacuation from 1–4 September 1939 only 23,915 evacuees were received into the BCC administrative area, just over half of the people anticipated.¹⁸ The only area to receive more than its allotted number was Wallingford Borough, with 57 more arriving than a projected number of 500.¹⁹

Yet billeting officers in some areas were faced with a chronic shortage of housing stock and some evacuees ended up spending the night in temporary accommodation. For example, a group of 220 mothers and children who arrived in Bradfield on 4 September had to be housed in the village clubroom after accommodation in houses could not be found. This was in part due to some evacuees' refusal to be separated from friends and some villagers' refusal to take what they were not expecting. The billeting officer had received instructions from Bradfield Rural District Council three weeks earlier to prepare for 270 children and 30 adults, as well as several telegrams during the first two days of evacuation briefing the same.²⁰

Evidence suggests that rather than being down to a lack of planning on behalf of Berkshire's reception areas or hostility towards the evacuees themselves, refusal and reluctance to take in evacuees was due to a different demographic of evacuee arriving in the area than had been provisionally planned for. Billeting officers had been briefed to expect large parties of unaccompanied school children; in the event, mothers with children formed a significant number of arrivals. This led to some promises of accommodation being withdrawn. There was also a reluctance from billeting officers to use their powers of compulsory billeting.²¹ The immediate problem presented by these unexpected arrivals can be seen in the telegrams sent to Shire Hall by Harry Davies, Clerk to Maidenhead Borough:

'2,500 have been received in Maidenhead – distributed in Maidenhead,

Cookham and Marlow. No Mothers of Children. All working well. 1/9/39.'

'Total evacuees received 1,657. Unaccompanied children 560. Adults 60. Mothers & Children 1,037. Great difficulty in finding billets for mothers and children, had to use billeting powers. Otherwise all correct. General spirits fairly high. 2/9/39.'

'Total evacuees received 1446. Mothers and Children 1225. Adults and Children 223. Great difficulty in finding Voluntary billets. Evacuees children and condition good [sic]. 3/9/39.'²²

These difficulties were reflected on in the BCC Emergency Committee for Civil Defence's report to the full council (November 1939):

'According to the Government's Scheme, approximately 50 per cent. of the evacuees were to have been school children, 30 per cent. were to have been mothers with children under school age, and 20 per cent. to have been teachers, helpers, expectant mothers, blinds and cripples. District Councils worked out their billeting schemes accordingly, taking care that a proper proportion of each class should be distributed accordingly. Unfortunately these percentages were not always adhered to, even approximately. In East Berks, particularly, a considerably larger number of women and children arrived than anticipated, with the result that a great many householders who had volunteered for the reception and care of school children were called upon to provide lodging for a class of evacuee that they had declined to receive. This caused hardship to householders and added considerably to the difficulties of Reception Authorities and to those of the Billeting Officers. Nevertheless, all evacuees were able to be housed before nightfall of the day of arrival.'²³

The problem of finding accommodation at such short notice was further exacerbated by homeowners making private arrangements outside of the official scheme, an issue which had first been raised after the evacuation of September 1938. John Elliston Clifton, Clerk to Wokingham Borough wrote in his note to Neobard on 13 September 1939 'I may say that we now have a tremendous number of unofficial evacuees in the Borough.... And it is getting difficult to find any unoccupied billets.'²⁴ The problems of finding accommodation were further compounded by the need to house war personnel, including the military. Such groups were not part of the civilian Government Evacuation Scheme and so were not factored into calculations of the number of rooms available in an area.

Reflecting the general national trend, many evacuees had returned home

by the end of 1939, due in part to the absence of anticipated bombing raids over Britain's major cities (a period known as the 'Phoney War' or 'Twilight War'). The Ministry of Health, concerned about potential acceleration in numbers of evacuees returning home in the run-up to Christmas, issued guidance through its regional officers stating that '[we] still strongly deprecate this practice and consider that all possible steps should be taken to discourage it', although, in keeping with the voluntary nature of evacuation, a total ban was not enforced.²⁵

However, dissatisfaction with the billeting process had become entrenched. Of 7,000 surveys sent out to householders in Maidenhead in March 1940 (by request of the Minister of Health in preparation for another wave of evacuation) only 243 responses were received. Of these, 129 already had evacuees, 72 would offer accommodation and 42 stated they would refuse.²⁶

During the summer and autumn of 1940 aerial bombing became a reality. BCC's reception authorities were once again called upon to organize billets for evacuees arriving from London and, reflecting the scope of the bombing, from Canterbury and coastal areas of Kent.²⁷ Lessons had been learnt from the previous evacuation. Possibly in response to media attention on the perceived 'dirty' health and habits which some evacuees had brought with them into the countryside, and the friction that this had caused, Government Evacuation Scheme Plan IV required receiving authorities to provide hostels for sick and unbilleteable children.²⁸

Other measures to be implemented at this time were aimed at making sure that the role of women in production (filling the gaps left by men called up for military service) was supported by sufficient childcare arrangements.²⁹ Wartime Nurseries were to be established by local authorities to provide childcare for local and evacuated women employed in war work. Berkshire's Wartime Nurseries and residential units came under the management of BCC's Public Health and Housing Committee.³⁰ In keeping with the national picture, many large and stately homes across Berkshire were requisitioned at this time to help with the war effort. It was the military that occupied the largest proportion of these. However, several owners were keen to avoid the damage inflicted upon such homes during World War One and chose instead to offer their homes for use for evacuation. Amongst the large houses offered were Ladye Place in Hurley, used for a residential nursery³¹ and Boyne Hill House in Maidenhead, used to accommodate an evacuated school.³²

As 1940 wore on, a steady stream of evacuees sought accommodation in Berkshire. Although there were nowhere near the numbers who had arrived in early September 1939, there was increasing concern by October 1940 that

Berkshire was full. A. L. Fullalove, Clerk to Wantage Urban District Council wrote in a letter to Neobard:

“The population of Wantage at the last census was 4463, the number of actual visitors, evacuees and refugees on the 19th instant was 1169; add for subsequent arrivals 40, making the total of 5672. In addition to which a large number of soldiers are billeted in the Town. It will be observed that if the influx of trekkers continues at the same rate for another four or five days the accommodation in the Town will be exhausted, more particularly seeing that all the available large halls and certain empty houses have been requisitioned by the military authorities.”³³

Maidenhead Borough (keenly feeling their proximity to London) stated that they had grave concerns on grounds of public health. With such an influx of official and unofficial refugees, who were not counted towards the borough’s population, there was concern that the town’s sewerage system would not be able to cope.

In his subsequent report to the MoH’s senior regional officer, Neobard surmised that ‘the Authorities are of the opinion that saturation point has now been reached and there is, for practical purposes, no more accommodation.’³⁴ Writing to his clerks a few days later, Neobard bluntly stated ‘it now seems clear that the county is practically full and there is little room left for evacuees of any kind.’ Weekly returns of population were to be made, using food cards as a way of counting, ‘so that the different Authorities concerned may be in a position to decide upon their future course of action,’ perhaps as a response to their exacerbation as much as to build a body of evidence to submit to the regional office of the MoH should the need arise.³⁵

As the Blitz continued many people acting outside of official schemes were also arriving into Berkshire. This placed further pressure on infrastructure and resources. Referred to as ‘Trekkers’ in official correspondence and minutes at the time, this group presented the authorities with the greatest problem; they were not planned for and therefore billets were not easy to come by. Many ended up staying in temporary accommodation set up in church and community halls before being transferred elsewhere. The situation in Maidenhead was particularly pressing, with families living in the Wesleyan church hall and Crauford House (a large private home which had been requisitioned) for months on end.³⁶

The situation in Maidenhead came to a head in November 1940, when an

unfavourable report into conditions in the town was printed in the *Daily Herald*. 'Evacuees Here Would Prefer Bombing – Town Of Misery' screamed the headline. The report, written by Clifford Webb, details how evacuees could not be found billets: 'Mrs Gadd has had a fortnight of Maidenhead ... spent in the local church hall. ... Mrs Gadd had wanted a billet for herself, her children and a woman relative who had offered to look after the children when Mrs Gadd went into hospital. Apparently, there wasn't a billet.' The article points to the problem that unofficial evacuees were not being accounted for in any scheme, yet the people had been given free railway vouchers supplied by their authorities in London. It describes how evacuees were wandering the streets during the day, having been pushed out of doors in the morning because the local evacuee centre had closed down (there was never any obligation placed on households receiving evacuees to provide daytime activities, or even meals). 'There is as much misery and discontent in Maidenhead as in any town I have yet visited. ... Maidenhead is probably as crowded as most of the towns around London. ... But mothers and children who arrive from bombed out areas must be somebody's responsibility,' Webb wrote.³⁷

This was followed by a demonstration by evacuees at Crauford House and a mass leafleting campaign to evacuees by the Maidenhead Refugee and Evacuee Committee, led by one Mrs Marmoy, whose leaflet 'Do not let your rights be kept secret!!' laid out the situation along class lines:

'Why are not billets found quickly [sic]. The Billeting Officer [one Col. Johns.] refuses to billet people in houses belonging to rich people who have plenty of room but are unwilling to help you. He refuses to requisition empty houses for evacuees. Therefore all the working class houses are dangerously overcrowded and billets are not found quickly.'³⁸

Neobard, accompanied by Mr Kerwood from the MoH made a visit to Maidenhead apparently on 22 October 1940, perhaps having anticipated negative publicity on the situation (although this comes after the *Daily Herald* report in the file). Several officers were interviewed and the Wesleyan Hall and Crauford House were visited. The report's author accusingly states 'It was not clear to me, however, that large houses had been used for billets as fully as small houses. My information from various sources, sometimes confidential, is that billeting is not being carried out as it should be.'³⁹ Due to the deliberate central government policy that all responsibility for billeting lay with local billeting officers, there was little that the county could do to intervene when such accusations of class bias were made.

From January 1941 some reception areas were closed to evacuees under Lodging Restriction Orders, so that authorities could concentrate on providing billets for war workers. Initially, the Berkshire councils were not

amongst them.⁴⁰ In March 1941, BCC was allocated 2,400 evacuees to be accommodated in the county. Despite the problems of the previous autumn, Maidenhead accepted their allocation of 300 evacuees. Wokingham Borough (with BCC also acting on their behalf) petitioned to have their allocation of 400 evacuees reduced to no more than 90. Theoretically there was a surplus of 1896 habitable rooms in the borough. The clerk of the council stated that the committee felt it would be 'dangerous to health to place more people in the Town' citing that there had been a large number of complaints upheld at billeting tribunals due to ill health and old age.⁴¹ They were unsuccessful.

As in Maidenhead a few months before, Neobard detected an underlying reason for the problems in Wokingham:

'It is clear from all the correspondence that an unwillingness to use compulsory powers is prevalent, and while the authorities excuse themselves on the ground that people compelled to take evacuees usually make conditions so uncomfortable for the evacuees that they are only too pleased to leave the houses, there can be little doubt that the true underlying reason is the unwillingness to impair good relations amongst neighbours in the town who will still have to live together when the war is over.'⁴²

There was clearly some exasperation as well as a measure of sympathy at county level with the reluctance of billeting officers to use their powers.

The peak period of evacuee management for BCC was 1939-1941. From 1942, the number of evacuees billeted in private accommodation through government schemes was in decline, nationally and locally. There was a small, brief spike in evacuee numbers nationwide during the V1 and V2 rocket attacks of summer 1944 to spring 1945. Despite the devastation these bombing raids caused, the numbers of people who temporarily settled in Berkshire was nothing like the earlier years of the war. However, official government scheme evacuees were not the only migrant group who had needs to be met; people evacuated privately, trekkers, and military and other personnel had also swollen Berkshire's population. The numbers of evacuees who in one way or another remained under the care of local authority education and welfare services continued to present challenges and stretch resources although by this stage, services across the county were better equipped to meet their needs. Evacuees were officially allowed to return home in June 1945, although in reality many had already returned.

Many of the problems with evacuation seem to stem from the fact that this was a concept which had the immediate physical safety of urban

populations at heart, rather than their longer term social welfare; it was chiefly a numbers game, based on a genuine fear that recent history could well repeat itself, on British soil. Whilst some lessons had been learned by central government for the second major wave of wartime evacuation, it was too late to change firmly entrenched problems; not in the least the compulsory nature of billeting, which had been a divisive principle from the very beginnings of evacuation planning. However for all its difficulties and failings, the sheer scale of the task which evacuation presented to local government cannot be overestimated. The administration of the educational, public health and financial aspects of evacuation was a massive undertaking with a constant stream of government memos and circulars to be implemented. Yet on the most basic level of need, that of finding housing for the evacuees, county councils were impotent. In effect, their role was limited to that of an intermediary between their rural, urban and borough authorities, who were determined to keep evacuee numbers to a minimum, and central government, who were determined to see evacuation through.

References

1 The Committee of Imperial Defence had created an ARP committee in 1924 to forecast the effects of aerial bombings on civilians in response to the progress of aviation technology and armaments since the First World War. It had been decided from the outset to keep the work of this department secret so as not to alarm the public. For more on the development of civil defence planning see Natalie Burton, 'The Establishment and Organisation of Civil Defence Operations in Berkshire 1936–1945', *Berkshire Old and New*, v. 29 (2012).

2 Uncredited quotation in M. L. Parsons and P. Starns, *The Evacuation: the true story*.

3 R. M. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, Chapter 3, 'Preparations for War.'

4 He said 'I will not pretend that we are not taking our precautions in this country. We have done it. We have made our investigations, much more quietly and hitherto without any publicity, but considering the years that are required to make your preparations, any Government of this country in the present circumstances of the world would have been guilty of criminal negligence had they neglected to make their preparations.'

5 N. Burton, 'The Establishment and Organisation of Civil Defence Operations in Berkshire 1936–1945'.

6 Minutes of the Air Raid Precautions Committee 1936–1939 (BRO, C/CL/C3/15/1).

7 The socialist commentator J. B. S. Haldane had warned as early as 1933 that 'There will not be anything like accommodation for 3 million refugees from London' and 'The Cambridge Scientists group have worked out a scheme for evacuating many of the population of Cambridge into the surrounding areas. And no doubt the women and children of Reading, Wokingham and Windsor could be scattered over Berkshire and so on. The whole affair will have to be organised nationally, and it seems likely

that Londoners will be quite unduly favoured unless some control is exercised by Parliament.' (J. B. S. Haldane, *ARP*, p. 195).

8 Padley and Cole, *Evacuation Survey*, p.31.

9 General Management of Government Evacuation Schemes for Easthampstead Rural District, Maidenhead Borough and Wokingham Borough Councils (BRO, C/CD/B1/1-3).

10 Evacuation Scheme: Easthampstead Rural District (BRO, C/CD/B1/1).

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Evacuation Scheme: Maidenhead Borough (BRO, C/CD/B1/2).

14 The initial evacuation areas were London, Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester and Sunderland.

15 Ministry of Health Circular 1759/EV1.

16 Titmuss, Chapter 3, Preparations for Evacuation. Certainly, the issue of homeowners taking the initiative themselves to fill rooms with family and friends had been raised by Wokingham Borough's clerk after the Munich Crisis (BRO, C/CD/B1/3).

17 Ministry of Health Memo Ev4 was presented as the full detail of the Government Evacuation Scheme (managing the movement of people from target towns and cities) and gave local authorities instructions to make schemes for their part of the process, accommodating and providing services for those displaced into their care.

18 Government Evacuation Scheme No 2 or 'Operation Pied Piper'.

19 Report to Full Council by the Emergency Committee for Civil Defence, November 1939 (BRO, C/CL/C1/1/42). This is a figure of some significance when considering the September 1939 evacuation. Many references in published histories of the county and of evacuation incorrectly quote the higher, projected number rather than the actual number of official evacuees (calculated using returns to the MoH), significantly inflating the county's role as a receiving authority. Generally, counties to the south and east of the London evacuation area received far more evacuees through official evacuation than receiving areas to the west, such as Berkshire and Reading. A summary map can be found in Padley & Cole, pp.50-51.

20 D. Greenaway and D. Ward (ed.), *In the Valley of the Pang*, chapter 7 'Evacuation – a Reception Area in Berkshire.' These are the recollections of Miriam Ward, found in a notebook after her death.

21 Granted under Civil Defence Act 1939: 'Any local authority may, for the purpose of enabling them to comply with any such request or directions as aforesaid, serve on the occupier of any premises a notice requiring him to send to the authority, within such time as may be specified in the notice, such particulars with respect to the premises and to the number of persons resident therein as may be so specified, and any person who fails to comply with the notice shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding five pounds.'

22 Evacuation Scheme: Maidenhead Borough (BRO, C/CD/B1/2).

23 Report to Full Council by the Emergency Committee for Civil Defence, November 1939 (BRO, C/CL/C1/1/42).

24 Evacuation Scheme: Wokingham Borough (BRO, C/CD/B1/3).

25 Ibid. Copy letter from MoH Regional Evacuation Officer, G. M. Husbands, to Neobard, 1/12/39.

26 Evacuation Scheme: Maidenhead Borough (BRO, C/CD/B1/2).

27 For example, Folly Farm in Sulhampstead was used to accommodate a maternity home from Dover (BRO, C/CD/B3/2/2).

28 These local authority hostels came to be managed collectively by the Berkshire Child Guidance Clinic in August 1941, reflecting a national trend towards medicalizing the problems of childhood and the psychological and psychiatric treatment of 'maladjusted' children. Growing concern about the link between being 'maladjusted' and the negative effects of separation from their parents in some evacuees led to the MoH requesting BCC to make 'certain hostels' near Berkshire Child Guidance Clinics exclusively for the use of evacuee children under their care in spring 1942.

29 MoH circular 2388 (May 1941).

30 For more on this, see Committee Minutes (BRO, C/CL/C3/5/7, 8), Evacuee Welfare Sub-Committee Minutes (C/CL/C3/5e/1) and Property Management, Residential and Daytime Nurseries (C/CD/B3/3, 4).

31 Property Management: Ladye Place, Hurley (BRO, C/CD/B3/3/3-8).

32 Evacuation Schools: Boyne Hill House, Maidenhead (BRO, C/CD/B3/1/2).

33 Evacuation Scheme: General Administrative File (BRO, C/CD/B1/8). Letter, 23 September 1940.

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