

TOWN CHILDREN
THROUGH
COUNTRY EYES

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A Survey on Evacuation 1940

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF WOMEN'S INSTITUTES
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OBJECT AND SCOPE OF THE SURVEY

The object of our survey was to provide the authorities with the comments of Women's Institute members on the condition and habits of the evacuees whom they received into their homes in September 1940. It was felt that no other organization could make this particular contribution—the reaction of the country woman to her town guests. The material, it was felt, would be mainly useful not as regards the wartime aspect of evacuation, but in the solution of the long term social problems which have been so strikingly laid bare by recent events. It was, therefore, in a constructive spirit and not with a sense of grievance that we set about the task.

Answers to our questionnaire were received from 1,700 Institutes more or less evenly distributed throughout those of the rural districts of England and Wales which form part of the reception areas. It must, however, be remembered that only a proportion of children were sent to rural areas so that the figures cannot be considered to be in any way comprehensive but only in the nature of a sample.

The material thus collected was sent first to Health and Education officials in the urban areas from which the children came. Their enlightened attitude bodes well for the future. Here are extracts from some of their letters, taken at random:—

“I read with profound interest the report . . . It would be difficult to overstate the value of this survey, so obviously unbiased and full of acute observations. I feel that, subject to any possible overriding national considerations, it should be given the widest publicity.”

“Allow me to thank you for your report, one which I have found intensely interesting and of great value to Public Health. Can you not make it more public, for these conditions should



be ventilated and corrected. In spite of all that the Public Health Authorities have done and are doing, the neglect of the parents is astonishing."

"This report I have read with very considerable interest and I feel it will go a long way in pointing to the future training of children and the education of their parents"

". . . this information is extremely interesting"

"I have been extremely interested in the report . . . it is most helpful because it shows the measure of the work to be undertaken."

THE SURVEY MAKERS

When the survey was made there were 5,700 Women's Institutes in the smaller villages of England and Wales with a total membership of 332,000. Practically every Institute member in the reception areas was personally involved in one way or another in caring for the evacuees. Many of the reports were signed by Institute members who were also billeting officers. When evacuation took place, our members did their very best to make their town visitors comfortable and happy, and made great sacrifices to this end. It was a real shock to them to find that many of the guests arrived in a condition and with modes of life or habits which were startlingly less civilized than those they had accepted for a life-time. It is therefore all the more satisfactory that very few indeed of the reports sent in by the Institutes were written in anything but a generous spirit. Most of them faced the situation very gallantly and with a keen sense of the humorous side (as the reports show). Now their main desire is that steps should be taken without delay to tackle the weaknesses in our social system of which they have had first-hand experience of such a distressing kind.

SCHOOLCHILDREN

HYGIENE

From the information given in the reports it was clear that in practically every batch of children there were some who suffered from head lice, skin diseases and bed-wetting. The proportion varied greatly and there were reasons why it was abnormally high in September 1939. But when all the extenuating circumstances are taken into account, the fact remains that a disturbingly large number of our children must habitually be afflicted with these complaints.

The following points are worth noting :

(a) *Head Lice*. Evacuation took place at the end of the summer holidays, so that the school authorities cannot be held responsible for the state of the children's heads. It should be noted that the condition of the children therefore gives a *much more accurate picture of the children's homes* than would have been obtained had evacuation taken place during term time. There are a number of reports of children going home for Christmas or the week-end and returning with dirty heads. One father of an evacuee said that "all children bred head lice and it couldn't be helped".

(b) *Skin Diseases*. Many children were infected in transit or by contact with others after arrival. The figures were therefore greater than would normally have been the case.

(c) *Bed-wetting*. It was widely recognized that the number of cases was unusually high, due to the sudden shock of leaving home and to the new circumstances and surroundings. Though admittedly the predominant reason was lack of home training, many other contributory causes are given—some correct, some incorrect. The comments show how anxious most of the foster mothers were to make every allowance for the condition and how great was their satisfaction at the way the children responded to treatment.

EXTRACTS FROM REPORTS

(The towns from which the children came are given in each case.)

Manchester. "Some had never slept in beds and had no training whatsoever."

Salford. "One boy very thin, had never had a bath before, his ribs looked as if black-leaded, suffered from head lice. All boys look much healthier and like being here."

Liverpool. "The state of the children was such that the school had to be fumigated after the reception."

"Except for a small number the children were filthy and in this district we have never seen so many verminous children lacking any knowledge of clean and hygienic habits. Furthermore, it appeared they were unbathed for months. One child was suffering from scabies and the majority had it in their hair and the others had dirty septic sores all over their bodies."

"Bed-wetting was very general among the children, a possible reason for the weakness was given by one of the teachers 'that the children spend most of the time, out of school, sitting on the cold door step.'"

London—

Battersea. "Some children were suffering from whooping-cough, chicken-pox, mumps, impetigo and scabies, and a hospital was opened immediately for these cases. We had great difficulty with a large number of dirty heads, as clean children became infected, but in a few weeks this was dealt with, and we have no further cases."

Bethnal Green. "It would be hard to exaggerate the state of the children's heads when they came; a lady opened a clinic in the village and had the children in every morning to be cleaned."

"The habits of the children were disgusting (detailed information can be given if required). The play meadow by the end of the first week was worse than any stock yard."

Chelsea and Fulham. "Quite a fair percentage of enuresis cases have been successfully treated and every effort has been made to help these children; quite a lot have developed the trouble since being evacuated; nervous strain and changed conditions have been responsible for it."

Finsbury. "The children billeted in this village were well-behaved and on the whole quite healthy and clean."

Fulham and Hammersmith. "The general condition of the children very good."

"Clean, well cared for and well behaved."

"The habits of most of the children were unspeakable and have caused great distress and expense to those who gave them billets."

"The rapid spread of verminous head infection was due to the London Authorities' most regrettable omission to send a Health Nurse with the children."

"The children relieve themselves any time and anywhere."

"Bed-wetting and similar insanitary habits were a tragedy in most cases of the younger children. For the most part they were entirely untrained and both by night and day gave infinite trouble."

"In nearly every house bedding had to be renewed."

Islington. "The chief difficulties . . . great prevalence of bed-wetting and other insanitary habits. Only one dirty head that I know of."

Kensington. "The President started a daily clinic to cleanse the heads during the second week; this had to continue for a considerable time."

"Bed-wetting very prevalent at first but no complaints now; I . . . think the change of life from town to country, the knowledge they were evacuated because of war, preyed on sensitive minds and the very trying time (getting up at 5 a.m., etc.) on the day of evacuation are all sufficient reasons for the bed-wetting, etc."

Lambeth. "An extremely nice collection of children, well-behaved and clean."

DIET AND FOOD HABITS

Wherever diet is mentioned, it is in identical terms. The children are used to being fed on "pieces" (bread and margarine), fish and chips, tinned food and sweets. This comment is not confined to the areas with very poor housing conditions. Vegetables (other than potatoes) and puddings were unknown to many children. It is frequently remarked that the children "looked at the country food at first with dark suspicion" but soon became accustomed to it. In many areas it is apparently the custom to give the child some pennies and for it to buy biscuits or fish and chips and eat it in the street. There are frequent reports of children being quite unaccustomed to having to sit down to meals and using knives and forks; when they are hungry they are given hunks of bread and margarine which they eat sitting on the doorsteps or elsewhere. Some children said they had never seen their mother cook anything and had no hot meals at home.

Numerous Institutes reported that after a few days the children developed boils and septic sores. Doctors ascribed these to the change of diet.

EXTRACTS FROM REPORTS

Walthamstow. "Bread and lard are a usual breakfast for a number of children when at home and fried fish and chips were asked for quite a lot at first for dinner and supper."

Clapton. "Majority . . . did not understand a plain cooked meal."

Leeds. "A number of the children difficult to feed . . . used to fish and chips and something in their hands for dinner, and were surprised that we had 'Sunday dinner' every day."

“Not used to a variety of vegetables and puddings in their diet; chief diet seems to have been stew and potatoes.”

Hull. “Were surprised to see food being cooked in their billets—being accustomed to . . . fish and chips and in some cases beer.”

Coventry. “In some cases, children were not used to country fare, tins and mince from the butcher, and . . . fried fish . . . more popular.”

Walsall. “The children’s food was chiefly from the fish and chips shops and bought cakes. After a few days there was a marked difference in their appearance.”

West Bromwich. “A hot meal was an unknown quantity with some. A ‘roe and a penn’orth’ seemed the favourite meal.”

Grimsby. “Their chief food at home was in most cases fish and chips, more often the latter without the fish. Milk puddings were unheard of and some did not even know what a pudding was! Now they are really healthy, happy and comfortable. You would scarcely know they were the same children.”

Manchester. “In many cases children had been fed most unsuitably having had food obtained most easily, chips, tinned food, biscuits, etc. Very few used to green vegetables. Much improved and active after a very different diet.”

“Few children would eat food that demanded the use of teeth—in almost every case could only eat with a teaspoon.”

“Practically all disliked fresh vegetables and pies and puddings of fresh fruit, plums, damsons, etc., were quite unknown to them. In many cases they refused to eat salad.”

Salford. “They refused milk and eggs; said they had fish and chips at home. With good wholesome food showed wonderful improvement.”

Liverpool. “One little girl of 5½ remarked one day that she would like to have beer and cheese for supper.”

“Most of the children seemed under-nourished when they arrived, yet some were troublesome to feed, not liking stewed fruit, vegetables and jam. Children had been used to receiving a penny at home to buy their own dinners. One used to buy broken biscuits, the other Oxo cubes.”

“Most of them seemed quite unaccustomed to ordinary everyday food and preferred a ‘piece’ or a bag of chips on the doorstep.”

Newcastle. “Those from the most neglected homes had no idea of eating at table, but were expert in making anything into a sandwich, fingers being preferred to forks.”

“Soup seemed to be unknown to some of the children. One mother admitted they never had soup, while two boys (10 and 12) attempted it with a knife and fork.”

Gosport. “Many children at first refused to eat home-cooked meat and fresh vegetables were unknown to them. Some had never used a knife and fork although they had come from good class homes.”

Southampton. “Children gained in height and weight and it is remarkable how many things such as soup, green vegetables, milk puddings the children now enjoy which they would not touch four months ago.”

London—

Battersea. “Many of the children were underweight and the house-mothers had some difficulty at meal-times. The home diet seems to have consisted of . . . chips and fish, tinned food, ice-cream, etc. These children rarely sat down to a meal and their table manners were non-existent.”

Bethnal Green. “Some of the children . . . ate with their fingers, they ate a large amount when first came; did not like vegetables except potatoes, which they wished to have as chips.”

Deptford. “The children’s home diet appears to have been fish and chips and tinned foods. Fresh vegetables and fruit . . . and many ordinary everyday items of diet . . . practically unknown to them.”

Finsbury. “The children did not understand sitting down to a meal, but seemed to like food in the hand. . . . Had apparently not been used to good nourishing meals of meat, vegetables and puddings, but preferred biscuits and tinned food.”

Fulham. “Most of the children had never sat down to a cooked meal and would not eat vegetables at first.”

Islington. “The mother of another girl said she was not getting enough fresh fruit, i.e. oranges and bananas, when there were quantities of apples and plums to be had for the picking up.”

Lambeth. “The children did not seem to have much idea of proper meals; they used to whine for a bit of bread. They did *not* at first like lots of things, but now they like everything.”

“Points noticed over diet were that very few of the children were used to any green or cooked vegetables and would not eat them at first. They liked highly spiced and seasoned food. A large number, even from apparently well-off homes, were quite unused to sitting down to table or to using knives and forks. They were used to having their food handed to them to take out, or eat anywhere.”

SLEEP

There are frequent reports of the children being unaccustomed to having sufficient sleep with a consequent restlessness and inability to concentrate. Many children had never slept in a bed.

EXTRACTS FROM REPORTS

Newcastle. “Surprising how much better they looked in a few weeks as the result of . . . being sent to bed at an early hour.”

Catford. “One great difficulty has been to get them to bed early but they are getting more amenable now.”

Rochester. “Householders had rather a tussle with the likes and dislikes of the children regarding food and also the hour of bed, but this has been overcome.”

Dagenham. “All gained in weight and look well through going to bed early.”

Gosport. “Billetees had difficulty in making them go to bed at reasonable hours.”

Southampton. “Did not undress to go to bed but put night clothes over day clothes.”

CLOTHES

The lack of clothes and in a great many cases of failure of the parents to provide them is a widespread comment. Some of the children had been sewn into their clothes which were in such a state that they had to be burnt at once and fresh provided. There are some cases of the children being sent quantities of sweets and “comics” but no clothes, although the parents were quite well-to-do. Clothing was often sent dirty and in need of repair.

EXTRACTS FROM REPORTS

Leeds. “With very few exceptions they were pitifully badly clothed and a local Dorcas Society had to be set up to find warm garments for them.”

“Quite half the children came with very dirty and ragged clothes and a quarter of them had no boots or shoes fit to wear.”

“Condition of clothing dirty and unmended even in cases where parents can apparently afford more.”

Dagenham. “Parents send only ‘comics’ and sweets but not clothes.”

Nottingham. “Many had very poor clothing and no sleeping attire.”

Grimsby. “Members tried to persuade the parents to provide clothes. Some of the parents have been good about this, but only a few.”

“The Institute turned their Knitting Club into a working party and made and re-made clothing for most of the evacuees who were very poorly clad.”

Manchester. “Their clothing was in a deplorable condition, some of the children being literally sewn into their ragged little garments when they arrived.”

“Majority of children very poorly clad and without a change of underclothing and some of the parents up to the present have not supplied any clothing whatever.”

“The condition in which the children arrived was appalling; clothing was dirty and footgear inadequate, the majority wearing old plimsols or sandals.”

“With the exception of a few, the children came poorly clad; some shoes were worn out in a week.”

Liverpool. “In some cases, clothes were stitched on and had to be cut off.”

“The condition of the clothes in which they came was most pitiful. There were two or three dressed quite well, but some only just had the clothes they stood in. In some cases, buttons of any kind could not be found on any of their clothes, these were fastened on or simply held together by string and tape.”

“Condition of their boots and shoes—there was hardly a child with a whole pair and most of the children were walking on the ground—no soles, and just uppers hanging together.”

Dagenham. “We found that the school girls were very good at mending their clothes.”

Leytonstone. “On the whole parents had been good in sending clothes and taking them away and mending.”

Oldbury. “Very few of the children had sleeping clothes—knowing nothing about them.”

London—

Bethnal Green. “Clothing and shoes in several cases were totally inadequate and in one or two cases there was not even a change of underclothing. Many foster mothers have spent quite a bit of money on clothing, besides those clothes which have been begged or which they have been able to make themselves.”

“Relations . . . brought useless things for the children instead of useful clothing which in many cases the householders had had to provide.”

Deptford. “Few children had adequate clothing, their footwear being especially bad. It has proved very difficult to get clothing from some of the parents; in many cases old and torn garments have been sent unmended, the householder having to mend the garments and supply buttons and elastic, etc., before they could be used.”

Fulham and Hammersmith. “The children, most of them, were very inadequately clothed on arrival, and have all been fitted out with warm clothes, boots and all necessities by the generosity of local people.”

“. . . their very inadequate wardrobes are having to be supplemented by local effort.”

“They came from very different homes, mostly very poor; the parents have, however, been good in sending them necessary clothes.”

“About a third of the number had to be given clothes as many clothes sent by the parents were unsuitable or in holes. (Only a very few mothers seem to make their children's clothes, or mend.) Boots were bad, underclothing was scanty and ragged, many had no night clothes.”

Kensington. “Underclothes badly laundered and unmended. Footwear in very poor condition; parents send toys and sweets rather than required footwear and clothing.”

Lambeth. “Their clothing was deplorable . . .”

“The clothes very poor; a good number of them had never had night clothes before.”

“An extremely nice collection of children, clean and well-behaved, clothing of varied quality, shoes totally unsuitable; all had to get Wellingtons and mackintoshes.”

“In most cases, insufficient clothing and parents refused to send more. Children clothed by local generosity, as children and parents expected.”

UPBRINGING AND INTELLIGENCE

The attitude of the foster mothers is well illustrated by the words of a North country Institute: “The children, after a few weeks' kindness, showed us what lovely natures they had, had they been helped and treated properly.”

Many reports reveal how little home life some of the children had and how they responded to affection and discipline. Such children have to fend for themselves from an early age onwards as their parents go out to work all day and then go to the pictures in the evening.

The visiting children were on the whole considered rougher and less disciplined than the village children though they quickly adapted themselves to their new lives. Certain cases are reported of where the art of stealing had apparently been taught the children by their parents as part of their outfit for life. “The children quite expected all apple trees were public property as hedges were.” “One boy returned to his billet with a live hen under his arm and informed his landlady that he could ‘get plenty more’ for her!”

Several correspondents comment on the utter lack of any religious knowledge.

On the teachers who accompanied the children not many Institutes commented. Of these some were critical, some appreciative. A few spoke in glowing terms of the teachers' unsparing work; of their excellent relationship with the children, both in and out of school and of the immense help this sharing of responsibility had been to the householders.

There were also divided opinions about the standard of intelligence. Some found the children quicker-witted and more alert than the country children, others less so.

EXTRACTS FROM REPORTS

Nottingham. “They all used bad language and had no idea of telling the truth and were quite undisciplined.”

Manchester. “On arrival almost equalled wild animals. Very noticeable difference after a few weeks.”

Newcastle. “Many of the children had no idea of telling the truth.”

“They have joined in the village life and have become part of the community, helping the housewife and doing jobs on the farm.”

Beckenham. "Children with few exceptions are well-behaved and biddable."

Barking. "General complaint made about the untidy condition of the roads and lanes, caused through the rubbish thrown about by the children."

Dagenham. "General behaviour much louder than the average country child."

"Villagers general impression seems to be 'what nice children they are.'"

"On the whole the children are a very nice lot, some very intelligent and sharp. The older ones are rather inclined to resent control of their foster mothers."

"Children mostly unruly and dirty in habits. Four stole from the householders (money and goods)."

Leeds. "These children were well dressed and perfectly clean but not accustomed to discipline."

"Very nice set of children on the whole, but they seem to have very little home life; in many cases both parents working and left children in charge of neighbour."

"General lack of manners and discipline in or out of school in comparison with local children."

Sheffield. "They appreciated everything that was done for them. Mix very well with village children and they have behaved well, no reports of damage or stealing."

London—

Bethnal Green. "Their quick wits and ready interest have done much for the country children."

Deptford. "We have found the evacuees singularly adaptable."

Fulham. "Quick to respond."

"The town children are well behind the village children in school work."

Kensington. "More dependent on adult help and less practical sense than country child. Little or no respect for other's property, majority no idea of using table implements at meals, no table manners at all."

"I am afraid many had no home training before they came as they were rude, uncouth and lacking in table manners, but they very quickly responded to treatment."

Lambeth. "At our Christmas party they seemed more alive, quicker to play games and help entertain, than our country children."

"The children in many cases . . . had nice manners but were untruthful and not altogether honest."

"On the whole children well-behaved and obedient."

Newcastle. "The teachers who came with them were a definite asset to the village life."

Kent. "Teachers have been helpful in every way."

Gosport. "Much of the success here due to excellent relations existing between head teacher and staff and parents, boys and billets."

Southampton. "The schoolmaster has been the greatest possible help."

"The school staff have gone out of their way to express to the villagers their gratitude for what is being done for the children."

Birmingham. "The schoolmasters and mistresses have been exceedingly helpful and have done more than their bare duty."

London—

Fulham. "An extremely nice school with delightful children and helpful teachers."

"The children have settled in well and behaved well; a state of affairs assisted by the splendid staff of teachers."

RESULTS OF COUNTRY LIFE

Real affection between the foster parents and the children is the general rule. Over and over again, the reports say how much the children will be missed when they leave. "Many foster parents are devoted to the children and dread their departure" is a typical remark although they are undoubtedly a great tie and curtail many housewives' normal activities.

Almost without exception, if any comment is made it includes a reference to the immense improvement in the health and manners of the children and to their gains in weight. The pride and pleasure of the country mother in this improvement is expressed again and again. There are hardly any reports of home sickness and many accounts of how the children cried bitterly when they were removed by their parents. There are reports of great interest in country life, particularly on the part of the boys.

EXTRACTS FROM REPORTS

Coventry. "Children's physique has greatly improved."

Walsall. "There was such a change in the children in a fortnight that their own teachers could scarcely recognize them."

"After being here a few days, there was a very marked difference in the appearance of the children and after two months one could hardly recognize them for the same children."

Grimsby. "All improved very much in health and some of them have put on over a stone in weight."

"All children have put on weight owing to proper and regular meals and bed-times. You would scarcely know they were the same children."

Manchester. "Children have improved out of all recognition both mentally and physically during the four months, in health, manners, cleanliness and intelligence. Have all put on weight."

"Vast improvement in health, also gain in weight by children who have taken school dinners. Also improvement in table manners."

"No doubt children left in the village have benefited as regards their health in both weight and appearance."

"All the children were happy and all put on weight before returning home."

"Most of the children wept bitterly when taken home. Those who stayed have improved wonderfully in appearance and also in their manners."

Liverpool. "Those remaining are improving immensely in physique. Their own teachers testify to the new vigour in the children. One mother was so delighted to see the great improvement in her child that she nearly wept for joy."

"One foster mother says that her little boy came supplied with five shirts. She has been obliged to let in pieces into the sides to get them on him now!"

Newcastle. "Good food and country air have given most of them lovely colours and they do enjoy the freedom of the country lanes and fields."

Walthamstow. "The children are learning a multitude of things about the country, and one child, amazed to see horses and fowls in a meadow together asked anxiously 'Won't the horses eat the fowls?' and was happy to be reassured."

Hull. "Some knew little of country life, were amazed at the sight of fruit growing on trees and did not know hens laid eggs

or that cows gave milk. At first they climbed trees, took fruit, but as they were well looked after by their teachers soon calmed down."

Birmingham. "From the children's point of view evacuation in this area has been an adventure full of new experiences."

London—

Battersea. "The general physique of the children has improved enormously under the better home conditions and good food and air; almost every child has put on weight."

Deptford. "The children who are still here show a marked improvement in health."

Fulham. "The children show a marked improvement in health and physique."

"The physical condition of such children as remain has improved considerably since their arrival in September."

"The children have all settled down well and are loving village life; they have all improved in physique and in manners and their content is gratifying. The older boys are determined to get jobs on farms in spite of parental persuasion that they would earn more money in London."

"They took to country food very well and the 13 which remain have all improved in physique and gained weight."

"The children have all improved enormously in health and appearance. They came from very different homes, mostly very poor."

Holborn. "The children's appreciation of the country, which has been very apparent ever since their arrival has developed into a general desire to live there permanently, getting their parents to leave London to join them."

Lambeth. "Many friendships have been formed and much knowledge gained of what country life really means, and it is felt that all this will leave a lasting impression, when the children return to London."

MOTHERS AND YOUNG CHILDREN UNDER FIVE

One of the most distressing features of the reports is the evidence of the complete inability of some of the mothers to manage a home. None of the experiences of the evacuation scheme shocked our members more deeply than this.

Warm tribute is paid by the Institute hostesses to those who showed themselves competent mothers, but they found it hard

to be sympathetic to women who could neither cook, sew nor conform to the ordinary standards of human decency and whose one idea of enjoyment was to visit the public-house or cinema. They were frankly horrified and disgusted at the state of filth in which some of the mothers left their billets and many reports reflect the conviction that this state of affairs is a serious slur on our educational system.

The experience was all the more distressing because it was so widespread. The evidence shows that to a lesser or greater extent this type of mother exists in every one of our big towns. There were of course many mothers outside this category. Of these there is little to say except that they were clearly unhappy in the country. They were unaccustomed to the life, the food and the surroundings. Moreover, they were justifiably anxious about their homes and their husbands. Unlike the children they could not quickly adapt themselves and it was a surprise to nobody that within a week or two of the evacuation a large proportion of them had left the villages.

Quotations from a number of reports are given under the following headings:—Health and Hygiene, Training of Children, Home Management.

HEALTH AND HYGIENE

Many of the mothers are described as capable and conscientious. But a distressing proportion were feckless and ignorant. The W.I. members realized that the bad habits in many cases reflected the conditions of home life, e.g. bad housing, lack of sanitary arrangements, overcrowding. The trouble was widespread and a great deal of bedding and other household equipment was ruined.

EXTRACTS FROM REPORTS

Islington. “Three of the women were very troublesome, being dirty and causing great distress to the people on whom they were billeted. The other five were quite clean and kept their children in good condition.”

Vernon Square, King's Cross. “Many of the mothers and children were bed-wetters and were not in the habit of doing anything else. Much more constant use of bedroom utensils, both by day and night than among the country women.”

Hampstead and Camden Town. “Approximately one-third did not wash the children or their clothes or teach them to be clean.”

King's Cross. “The majority of these mothers were distressing cases; their habits were deplorable in most cases. The conduct and habits of these mothers have not been exaggerated.”

Hornsey. “Six mothers and children were very dirty, rough and in every way undesirable. It will be almost impossible to billet any more in this district should the occasion arise.”

Tower Bridge. “About 90 per cent came with extremely dirty, insanitary habits.”

Camberwell, Clapham Junction. “One family of a mother and four children under six were very dirty and had to be sent to a large house where they could be under the supervision of an L.C.C. worker. The children are now looking splendidly well and happy and seem to have quite settled down to country life. This family lived in two rooms in London, the father, mother and four children sleeping in one room.”

Bethnal Green. “Some were simply crawling with lice, etc., and actually never used a lavatory; the children simply sat down in the house anywhere to relieve themselves and actually one woman who was given the guest room . . . always sat the baby in the bed for this purpose.”

TRAINING OF CHILDREN

The mothers fell into two types (a) the frankly dirty and shiftless mother, (b) the mother who though passably clean or even smart herself yet seemed too indolent, bored or incompetent to train her children or look after her home.

Several reports express distress that the mothers though attending the Welfare Centres are not learning how to train their children themselves.

EXTRACTS FROM REPORTS

Vernon Square, King's Cross. “The children were only accustomed to obey when cuffed or shouted at—this was true of at least 50 per cent. In quite a few cases the mothers had no control over their children at all and went home for that reason.

One does not wish to be hard on these women, who of course were being seen at a disadvantage, but it is a fact that the poorest cottagers were shocked at their ignorance (of managing, cooking,

etc.), at their lack of ordinary cleanliness and good habits. This applies to 40 per cent of the women who came here."

Caledonian Road, Islington. "The young mothers were the worst. . . . Their children were not trained to be clean. They did not seem able to cope with them. Most of them were dirty."

Fulham, Woodford Green and Waltham Cross. "Except for one, who came from a better class home, I should say they all lacked knowledge of how to train, clothe and feed their children, but they do their best, and the children are quite pleasant, and though grubby not really dirty."

Willesden. "A great many lacked the will or knowledge to train their children in good habits."

Holloway. "They were generally pleasant to meet and to live with. About twelve were said to be very lazy and shiftless. Others seemed to be thrifty and industrious."

Copenhagen Street and York Way, Caledonian Road. "Parents are without hygienic training and do not make any attempt to enforce personal cleanliness and good habits upon their children."

Croydon. "I know of four cases . . . where the mothers seemed to have no idea of how to train a baby in good habits. Something will have to be done to give girls, before leaving school, practical knowledge of how to keep a baby dry, and that it is far less trouble in the end than washing napkins and blankets as well as essential for the child—not just telling them, but doing it themselves in a crèche. I don't want to underrate what has already been done in this matter, but the problem of child training has been brought home to us by this evacuation, and we have seen the need for ourselves, and it is up to us to see that the next generation are given a better start."

Bethnal Green. "The children with very few exceptions were beyond their mothers' control and did as they liked."

Surrey Docks, Rotherhithe. "All mothers very clean, respectable young women and very careful over children's training. One extra mother transferred, had a small boy and baby who were not well trained."

Rotherhithe. "None very good, but one bad case of a mother with 7 children under 10 who seemed to think she had done her part in bringing them into the world and that there her

responsibility ended. The children were nice little things, but utterly out of control—but they were kept superficially clean."

Peckham. "The billeting officer, a qualified physician, said that in some cases the mothers' habits and inability to train and keep their houses clean was very distressing. On the other hand, there were some very nice clean women and children. Our experience generally was not as unfortunate as some of the villages round us."

West Ham. "The W.I. President who has housed two Westminster slum families (mother and one child, aged 3½ and one infant, mother and one child of 5 and one infant) comments that notwithstanding some years attendance at the City of Westminster Health Clinic, and being housed for some years in a Peabody Trust Estate, the sanitary habits of these women leave everything to be desired. Moreover, one of them is still incapable of scalding an infant's bottle, knowing when an infant requires changing, or of following the simplest routine. This would seem to indicate that education is primarily at fault in some cases, it is not lack of opportunity."

Portsmouth. "The mothers . . . had not the most elementary ideas of decency and home-training."

Birmingham. "The appalling apathy of the mothers was terrible to see. 'Pictures' and cheap novelettes were their one desire. Had no wish to knit, sew or cook."

"Babies and young children quite untrained in clean habits, behaved like untrained puppies. Nearly all the women attend Welfare Centres in Birmingham. General feeling was one of shame that such people are being bred in our big cities."

HOME MANAGEMENT

It came as an acute personal shock to our members to realize how badly qualified and how unwilling so many of the young mothers were to bring up their children and be home-makers. Several Institutes made the comment that this reflected seriously on our educational system.

EXTRACTS FROM REPORTS

Islington. "The mothers had little idea of cleanliness or cooking, and being used to constant shopping found it difficult to cater in absolutely different surroundings. One apparently was unable to read the official documents."

Shoreditch. "As these mothers with one exception returned to London at the end of a week, perhaps the less we say about them the better. They were put into empty houses which were furnished for them, and the state in which they were left speaks for itself."

Liverpool. "Family of five, girl 13, boy 11, girl 9, boy 6, girl 1½, all sleep together in one room with father and mother at home."

Bermondsey. "One thing which made us sad was the realization that these mothers were only able to cook with a tin opener. It seems awful that these young mothers cannot even cook a rice pudding, though this is literally true. I saw a baby given a raw sausage to eat, because the mother was too idle and dirty to cook it, though offered all facilities. There was no proper time set aside for meals. They varied daily, and sometimes breakfast and dinner would be eaten together at 3.30 p.m. For meals the children in several instances just grabbed what they fancied, and ran about eating it. To my own knowledge, evacuees who went back from our small number left 60 packets of biscuits behind. They were in a general way very wasteful of food.

This is not an attempt to be critical, but to set down facts. The best evacuee of all was an elderly woman who had not had the benefit of a modern and expensive L.C.C. education. After this experience I think England ought to be proud of her country women for their cleanliness, good housewifery and decent standards."

Rotherhithe, Bermondsey and Brixton. "A large proportion of the mothers and babies were dirty and slovenly in their habits—their rooms not cleaned, bedding and blankets filthy. When soiled beyond possible use under-blankets were just flung into cupboards instead of being washed. The smell in these rooms was awful. Many of the younger children had not been house-trained and floors and bedding were in a deplorable condition.

In several instances, although separate comfortable rooms were provided for the families, they preferred to herd together. In one house, 3 mothers and 5 children slept in one room about 12 foot square, leaving other bedrooms unoccupied. It was particularly noticeable that the rougher element was the least able to put up with discomfort on the day of evacuation, and they were the first to return home. The mother and children now remaining are all clean, tidy, frugal and grateful."

St. John and Adys Road, East Dulwich. "Two bad cases. One is the mother of three schoolchildren whose heads are dirty, and although put into clean and comfortable rooms with some of her children she just muddles along and the rooms are very dirty and untidy. Many of the W.I. members had mothers and small children billeted on them and they were disgusted at the way some of the children behaved at the table and also the way they were allowed to destroy things, especially bedclothes, and their mothers made no attempt to stop them. Many of them have gone back to London to their homes and pictures, etc., they could not settle, but many of their children have been found billets in nursery schools and other places. One thing, they all improved in health during their stay.

Only two out of the twelve mothers ever did any darning or needlework."

Camberwell and Brixton. "The children in all cases were clean and well cared for. Wrong feeding with the youngest children was the most noticeable defect. One mother with a boy of 18 months gave him tinned herrings and new bread at 7 o'clock in the evening. Then when the child was in pain with indigestion, the mother got hysterical and wanted the doctor to be sent for. Another, a little girl, was taken ill through eating tinned salmon."

Portsmouth. "Children had never seen their mother cook anything and had no hot meals at home."

"Three children were ill nourished and said their mother could not cook. When they had a cooked meal (a rare occasion) father cooked it."

May 1st, 1940.

HEADLEY BROTHERS
109 Kingsway, London, W.C.2
and Ashford, Kent