Evacuation in Ireland: The Experience of Evacuees in Éire and Northern Ireland During the Second World War

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EVACUATION IN IRELAND: THE EXPERIENCE OF EVACUEES IN ÉIRE AND NORTHERN IRELAND DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
History

by
Darby Kay Ward
May 2019

Accepted by:
Dr. Stephanie Barczewski, Committee Chair
Dr. James Burns
Dr. Michael Silvestri
ABSTRACT

This thesis examines civilian evacuations in Ireland during the Second World War. Factors, such as Éire’s policy of neutrality, Anglo-Irish political tensions, and the relationship between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, created a complex wartime environment in Ireland, which made the evacuations that took place there distinct from those in Britain. The primary focus of this thesis is government-sponsored evacuation from Great Britain to Ireland, and from the cities of Belfast and Londonderry to the countryside of Ireland. Its aim is to place these evacuations, which have been neglected by the historiographical record, in the context of government evacuation schemes within Britain and to show their exceptional nature.
DEDICATION

To my grandmother, Grammy, who passed away as I began to write.

She was my “soul sister” and greatest supporter. The last time we spoke was over the phone while I was researching for this project. I stood in a hotel room in Ireland, separated from her by the sea, possibly experiencing feelings very similar to those of the evacuees whose stories I seek to tell.

Joye Allen Wilson

(1942 – 2018)
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Stephanie Barczewski, who guided me to this topic and through the process of research and writing. Her constant encouragement and thorough editing was invaluable. Thanks must also be given to Dr. Michael Silvestri and Dr. James Burns, both of whom taught me as an undergraduate and still agreed to serve on my thesis committee. Dr. Silvestri’s classes gave me a foundational understanding of Irish history, which was of great importance to this topic. I appreciate his thoughtful notes and comments. Dr. Burns’s class on Britain and World War II influenced my decision to pursue graduate school, as well as my chosen field and topic. I am grateful for his encouragement and positivity during my time at Clemson. I would also like to thank Dr. Paul Anderson. I am so thankful for his wisdom and advice. Recognition should also be given to Dr. Vernon Burton and Dr. Pam Mack for the digital mapping component of my thesis, which was inspired by skills learned in their digital history course. In addition, credit is due to Lee Morrissey and the Humanities Hub, for providing the grant which gave me the financial means to travel to Ireland to collect primary source material.

Lastly, I must thank my family and friends, who have endured my constant ramblings about the evacuees. I am especially grateful to Cassee and Laura, for the long walks and phone calls. I appreciate their patience and willingness to listen. Most importantly, I am grateful to my parents for their constant love and support. I am especially thankful for my dad’s willingness to accompany me on adventures, including trips into the archives. To both my parents, I owe an insurmountable debt. Without their encouragement, none of this would have been possible.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

In February of 1941, ten-year-old Sheila Bynner, accompanied by her mother and sister, set off across the turbulent Irish Sea to begin their evacuation to Éire for the duration of the Second World War.¹ Prior to their crossing, Sheila and her family were residents of Garden Avenue, Mitcham, Surrey, but had lived the transient lives of evacuees since the beginning of the war in September of 1939. The Bynner family was on holiday in West Wittering when war was declared. Mr. Bynner left to join his Territorial Army Unit, while his wife and daughters spent the next seventeen months in various “unsuitable private evacuations” in the British countryside.² Finally, they decided to risk crossing to neutral Éire to stay with relatives for the duration. Over sixty years later at the age of 72, Sheila described her time as an evacuee in Éire for the BBC’s “People’s War” Digital Archive.³

¹ In this thesis, I have chosen to refer to the country now known as the Republic of Ireland as “Éire” because that was the name by which it was called during the Second World War according to the majority of sources I examined. When the name “Ireland” is used in this thesis, it will refer to the island of Ireland as a whole, meaning the entities of Éire and Northern Ireland taken together. Northern Ireland will refer to the six counties in the north of Ireland which remain part of the United Kingdom.

² “Private evacuations” means that the evacuees arranged and paid for their own evacuation. This stands in contrast with “government-sponsored” evacuations that are most commonly thought of in reference to wartime evacuation.

The Second World War holds a distinct place in British memory. As the title of the BBC’s Digital Archives denotes, it is often referred to as the “People’s War” because the home front’s experience of war stands out in collective memory as a time when Britain was united for the good of the nation and the world, fighting against the evil of the Nazis.\textsuperscript{4} Evacuation is often remembered as a defining aspect of the British home-front experience during the Second World War. Many former evacuees, like Shelia, have recorded their memories of evacuation, and these have often been used to support this popular “memory” of British unity during wartime. The collective memory of these evacuations has created a historical narrative in the minds of the general public. This narrative generally states that evacuation helped to erase class lines, break down barriers between rich and poor, eliminate regional differences within Britain, and create a single national identity for Britain, which for the duration of the war was a truly “United Kingdom.”

One reason evacuation stands out so clearly in the collective memory of World War Two is that it touched so many people. Since beginning my master’s degree, many family members and friends have asked me about my research. When I describe to them my chosen topic, people will often remark, “Oh, like in the Pevensie children in The Chronicles of Narnia.”\textsuperscript{5} There have also been several times that the other party has told

\footnote{4} “Collective memory” refers to shared memories by a group of people—in the case of these evacuees, the British people—about their own identity and history. These memories pass from one generation to the next and have a tendency to change with this passage.

\footnote{5} Set during the Second World War, C.S. Lewis’ first book in the series, The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe (1950), begins with the evacuation of the four Pevensie children, Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy, to the English countryside.
me that they know of someone—usually a friend of a friend or a distant family member—who was an evacuee during the Second World War. I have even received excited phone calls from my own family members to tell me that “so and so is from England and was an evacuee during the war.”

Almost every book on evacuation published since the 1980s begins with the author’s own story of evacuation, a personal story regarding an evacuee who the author knew, or some other personal connection the author has to evacuation. In the preface to *The Impact of Civilian Evacuation in the Second World War* (1986), for example, Travis Crosby discusses the people he encountered in British archives who told him stories of their wartime evacuation experiences. In *Who Will Take Our Children: The Story of the Evacuation in Britain 1939-1945* (1985), Carlton Jackson describes his time in Kirtlington, Oxfordshire, in 1951, when he made friends with many former evacuees. Ben Wicks’s *No Time to Wave Goodbye* (1988) begins with his personal experience as an evacuee. Jessica Mann describes how part of her motivation in writing and researching *Out of Harms Way: The Wartime Evacuation of Children from Britain* (2005) was to discover more about her own evacuation, which she barely remembered.

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6 This happened three times. Two were from my maternal grandmother and one from my father.

7 Travis Crosby, ‘Preface,’ *The Impact of Civilian Evacuation in the Second World War* (Dover, NH: Croom Helm, 1986), i-iii.


Wartime Britain (2010), discusses his memories of hearing his mother talk about her experiences of evacuation.\textsuperscript{11} Finally, Monica Morris’s collection of evacuee stories, Goodnight Children Everywhere: Voices of Evacuees (2011), contains three chapters devoted to her own story of evacuation, interspersed between the other evacuees’ memoirs.\textsuperscript{12}

Because of its impact on so many people, wartime evacuation in Britain has been thoroughly studied. This scholarly interest began while evacuation was still ongoing, as it created unique social situations that sparked the curiosity of policy-makers, sociologists, and psychologists. Child development, family separation, poverty, class hierarchies, education, and the rural/urban divide were exposed in unprecedented ways. Evacuation provided a unique environment in which these issues could be studied and led many universities, voluntary organizations, and government entities to conduct surveys regarding the evacuation experience.\textsuperscript{13}

Since the end of the war, scholars have frequently returned to the topic. The majority of historical writing concerning evacuation, however, discusses only evacuations within Britain. In academic histories, such as Richard Titmuss’s Problems of Social Policy (1950) and Crosby’s The Impact of Civilian Evacuation in the Second World War, and popular histories, like Morris’s Goodnight Children Everywhere and Wicks’s No Time to Wave Goodbye, the authors focus on child evacuees who were sent

\textsuperscript{11} John Welshman, Churchill’s Children: The Evacuee Experience in Wartime Britain (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1-4.
\textsuperscript{12} Monica B. Morris, Goodnight Children Everywhere: The Voices of Evacuees (Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2011).
from urban slums to the surrounding English countryside. Only occasionally do these studies of evacuation also describe evacuations to Scotland and Wales.

In recent years, histories of evacuation have begun to examine British children who were sent overseas to the United States and the British Empire. These studies include: Carlton Jackson’s *Who Will Take Our Children*, Janet Menzies’s *Children of the Doomed Voyage* (2005), and Jessica Mann’s *Out of Harms Way*. They discuss British children who were evacuated, either privately or by the British government’s Children Overseas Reception Board (CORB), to the United States, Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand.

In all of these studies of British evacuation during the Second World War, however, one destination for evacuees has been neglected: Ireland, the country to which Shelia Bynner and her family traveled in early 1941. A significant number of evacuations took place both to Ireland and within its borders during the Second World War. Evacuees traveled from Great Britain to Éire and Northern Ireland, from the cities of Belfast and Londonderry to the Northern Irish countryside, and from those same cities across the border to Éire. A few of the popular histories, such as Gillian Mawson’s *Evacuees*:

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16 In this thesis, I have chosen to refer to Northern Ireland’s second largest city as Londonderry, rather than Derry, because that is the name which is the most historically accurate for the time period which the thesis covers. This is not a political statement, but an attempt to use the title most commonly used in the historical sources with which I am dealing.
Children’s Lives on the WW2 Home Front (2014), include stories of evacuation to Northern Ireland, but they are memoir-like retellings of individual experiences. These stories tend to mirror those told about evacuations within Britain; they do not address the unique circumstances in Northern Ireland, such as religious tensions, that made evacuation there exceptional. Nor do they contain any mention of evacuations within Éire. Some historians who have written about the Second World War in Ireland more broadly, such as Robert Fisk and Clair Wills, mention the evacuations that took place there, but only briefly, rather than offering an extended analysis of the evacuations and their differences from those within Britain. Only Jennifer Redmond, in an article examining Irish children in Britain during the Second World War, provides a more detailed assessment. Redmond discusses the Irish children who were evacuated to Éire during the course of the war. The article contributes to a discussion of the national identity of evacuees who traveled to Éire, but it focuses solely on Irish children and does not discuss evacuations to Ireland more broadly. While it is probable that many, perhaps even the majority, of children who went to Éire were of Irish descent, not all were. Redmond’s article thus does not fill the gap regarding Irish evacuations in the historiography of British wartime evacuation.


Why does this gap remain? Because the Irish case does not fit the typical evacuation narrative. Éire’s wartime policy of neutrality, Anglo-Irish tensions brought about by that policy, and religious tensions within Northern Ireland created a unique environment in Ireland during wartime that was not present in other evacuation destinations. This unique environment made the evacuations that took place in Ireland exceptional, and it makes the study of them very complex. For these reasons, the majority of historians writing about British wartime evacuation have chosen to ignore Ireland. Sonya Rose, in discussing wartime evacuation within the context of British national identity and citizenship, states in a footnote that she “did not include a discussion of Northern Ireland because of its incredible complexity.” She goes on to say that the topic is “worthy of a book-length study on its own.”¹⁹ Rose acknowledges that a discussion of Ireland is needed, but cites the complex environment and tangled web of Irish identities as a reason not to tackle the topic. It is probable that this complexity Rose describes is the reason so many other historians have also chosen to exclude the study of Irish evacuation from their works.

The complexity of evacuations in Ireland, however, is precisely why they must be discussed and analyzed. Evacuations to and within Ireland during the Second World War are important because of their exceptionalism. The very existence of government-sponsored evacuations to Éire show the relationship with Great Britain to be more intimate than the policy of Irish neutrality implies. The difference between the systems of

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evacuation in Ireland and those elsewhere in the United Kingdom and Commonwealth gives insight into the unique environment that was present in Ireland during the war. Moreover, the existence of British citizens who fled to Ireland adds another layer to the discussion of British national identity during the war.

The evacuation of thousands of people to Ireland and within Northern Ireland during the Second World War, like the evacuation of women and children elsewhere in Britain, must be considered in the context of “wartime unity.” Irish neutrality, religious tensions, and Anglo-Irish cultural differences add new dimensions to the story of wartime evacuation. These aspects of evacuation make the study of these evacuees very complex, but it is this complexity that makes the topic all the more important. Evacuation in Ireland, in all its various forms, was unique. It was unlike evacuations anywhere within Great Britain or even the far-flung reaches of the Commonwealth.

In what follows, I will provide an analysis of evacuations that took place in Ireland during the Second World War. My hope is to describe their complexity and to show how they relate to other British wartime evacuations. Chapter 2 will provide context by examining the historiography surrounding evacuation in Ireland. The remaining chapters will deal specifically with two waves of evacuees grouped by their place of origin. Chapter 3 will explore evacuees who traveled from Belfast and Londonderry to Éire and the countryside of Northern Ireland. Chapter 4 will examine evacuees who crossed the Irish Sea from Britain to both Éire and Northern Ireland.
CHAPTER TWO

CONTEXT, HISTORIOGRAPHY, METHODS AND SOURCES

The study of evacuation in Northern Ireland has been a neglected topic in the historiography of the Second World War, however, much scholarship has been produced on evacuations within Britain, Irish neutrality, and the wartime atmosphere in Northern Ireland. In the following Chapter, I will provide context for evacuation in Ireland through a discussion of these three areas, including an outline of other British wartime evacuations and their historiography; an analysis of the policy of Irish neutrality and its effects on Anglo-Irish relations; and a description of Northern Ireland’s role during the Second World War. The conclusion of this chapter also contains a brief summary of my sources and methodology.

Context: The Evacuation within Britain and Overseas

Two days before the declaration of war on September 1, 1939, the British launched Operation Pied Piper, a scheme to remove schoolchildren from crowded cities that were at risk of aerial bombardment. School-age children were herded onto trains, buses, and boats bound for the countryside, where, the British authorities hoped, they would be welcomed into the loving arms of their fellow Britons. In reality, however, there was much more to evacuation than this idyllic picture. Evacuation occurred in several waves over the course of the war; evacuees were a diverse group from infants to the elderly; and the experiences of individual evacuees varied greatly.
There were many waves of evacuation over the course of the war, both government-sponsored and private. Operation Pied Piper is the most famous because it involved a great deal of government planning, because it was the largest single movement of people during the war, and because it was one of the earliest official actions of the war. It was by no means the only evacuation, however, and perhaps not even the most effective, since so many of those who were evacuated returned home during the Phoney War. Of the 1.5 million women and children who voluntarily evacuated in September 1939, an estimated 60 percent had returned home by January 1940.20

There were three additional significant waves of evacuation. The first of these occurred in June 1940, when a seaborne invasion of the southeast coast seemed imminent in the wake of the fall of France. The second, and perhaps most justifiable, transpired when the Blitz began in September of 1940. The final wave took place when the V-1 flying bomb attacks began in June 1944. In addition, there were many people who evacuated privately or through the government schemes outside of these specific time periods. During periods of aerial bombardment, many people left British cities in what is often referred to as “trickle evacuation.” Other evacuees, called “trekkers,” also evacuated nightly to the countryside surrounding London and other cities, returning in the morning to carry on with their jobs.

In addition to evacuations within the island of Great Britain, evacuees were also sent overseas. At the outbreak of the war, offers poured in from individuals and groups in the dominions and the United States volunteering to take in British evacuees, and some

wealthier families chose to evacuate themselves or their children to friends overseas. In the wake of Dunkirk and the invasion scare, the Children Overseas Reception Board (CORB) was formed to evacuate children overseas.\(^{21}\) Although their passage overseas was covered by the government, parents of those evacuated through CORB were expected to contribute money to their child’s upkeep, so the overseas evacuee children tended to be from a higher socio-economic class than those sent to the countryside through Operation Pied Piper or other government schemes within Britain.

Despite the enormous amount of planning that went into government-sponsored evacuation schemes, there were many problems with their execution, particularly with Operation Pied Piper. The Ministry of Health planned for the evacuation of 3.5 million women and children in the initial scheme, but due to its voluntary nature, only 1.5 million chose to participate. Many historians argue that the smaller number of evacuees led to logistical issues because it motivated officials to scramble the train schedules in an attempt to expedite the evacuation. Train timetables and destinations were mixed up, and many evacuees were sent to the wrong reception areas.\(^{22}\)

Since the majority of children did not arrive where they were supposed to, the billeting assignments were also chaotic. The journeys to the reception areas were long, and the children were tired, hungry, and dirty by the time they arrived. Upon their arrival, children were herded into schools or church halls where those who had volunteered to take in evacuees picked out the children they wanted to take home. Some former


\(^{22}\) Gardiner, *Wartime Britain*, 52.
evacuees described “feeling like puppies in a pet shop,” while others remembered the scene as being like a “slave market.” Allocating billets for young, unaccompanied children in this way often caused serious emotional trauma, especially for those who were not selected immediately.

Even after the children had been assigned to their billets, problems continued, often caused by social disparities between evacuees and their hosts. The evacuees were generally from working-class parts of London and were often looked down upon. There were many complaints from host families that the evacuees were verminous and unclean. Bedwetting, also a common issue among the evacuees, was also a chief cause of complaint by the host families. Although many studies done at the time showed that the bedwetting was most likely caused by their young age and homesickness, host parents tended to blame it on the children’s working-class upbringing.

Some child evacuees were treated very poorly. Many former evacuees described physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. Wicks’s No Time to Say Goodbye, for example, contains several stories of abuse: a young boy was beaten by his host mother “at least once a week with sticks, poker, wooden spoon” and a pre-teen girl was sexually abused by her host father and then poisoned. Scholars estimate that between 10 and 15 percent of children were abused by their hosts. In some cases, children brought these abuses to the attention of the evacuation authorities and they were moved to alternative billets, but

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23 Gardiner, Wartime Britain, 29.
24 Wicks, No Time to Say Goodbye, 134-5.
in many others, the evacuees were not taken seriously, or they chose to keep silent about the cruelty they experienced.

The overarching divide between rural and urban often disguised other differences that led to conflict between host and evacuee. One of the most common was religious difference. Since evacuees hailed from larger cities, they often came from religious backgrounds that were rare in the countryside. In particular, Jewish and Catholic evacuees sometimes faced prejudice from their host families. Monica Morris interviewed a number of evacuees who had very negative experiences. These include emotional and sexual abuse, but many evacuees were also mistreated due to religious prejudice. Morris provides several examples of anti-Semitic behavior from host families. Over half of the evacuees in her book were Jewish, and all of them experienced some degree of anti-Semitism, ranging from verbal abuse to being forced to break kosher to being obligated to attend the church services of the host family. One of the Jewish evacuees vividly describes being called a “heathen” by her host family.

Catholic children often experienced similar mistreatment, especially when placed with evangelical host families. One evacuee was bullied into believing she was “going to hell” by her Methodist foster parents, and a young boy was kicked out of his billet when his foster mother discovered he was Catholic. Not all Jewish or Catholic children

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26 Travis Crosby presents anti-Semitism specifically as one of three key social undercurrents that created hostility toward evacuees in reception areas. Crosby, *Impact of Civilian Evacuation*, 3-5.
experienced this cruelty, but it was certainly common, especially in the Welsh and Scottish countryside, where many host families held strict Baptist, Presbyterian, or Methodist views. Historians Angus Calder and John Welshman point out that many evacuees from Liverpool, with its large Catholic population, were sent to Northern Wales, where there were no Roman Catholic churches and the majority of the population were evangelical Nonconformists. This created inevitable problems.

To be sure, there were many positive experiences of evacuation in Wales, but it was a place where differences between host and evacuee were especially exaggerated. Even those evacuees who were not Jewish or Catholic experienced a different religion. In addition to religious difference, child evacuees in Wales also had to contend with a different language. Many of evacuees in Wales could not understand their host parents.

Evacuations in Wales are particularly important to a discussion of evacuations in Ireland for several reasons. Evacuation to Wales, in some ways, closely resembles evacuation in Ireland. There were many places in Ireland where evacuees encountered a different language or religion, especially if they were Protestant. As will be discussed later, however, the government’s approach to these problems was different. In addition, some of the problems experienced by Catholic evacuees to Wales contributed to a call for

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30 Gardiner, Wartime Britain, 31-33; Morris, Goodnight Children Everywhere, 10-11; and Welshman, Churchill’s Children, 96 and 111.
32 Morris’ book includes the story of an Anglican being mistreated by a Baptist host family. This was on the South Coast of England in Hampshire, however, not in Wales or Scotland. See Morris, Goodnight Children Everywhere, pages 85-8.
33 Wicks, No Time to Say Goodbye, 121-2.
government-sponsored evacuations to Éire. In contrast to Wales, Éire was almost entirely Catholic at the time of the Second World War, so it presented an obvious solution to the complaints the evacuation authorities were receiving from the Catholic Church. Irish neutrality and the complex political relationship between Éire and the United Kingdom, however, made this solution much more complicated.

Evacuation was thus a mixed experience. A variety of actors were involved, ranging from government officials and volunteer billeting officers to the evacuees themselves and their host families. Evacuees came from diverse backgrounds to different destinations at multiple points during the war. Some experienced hostility and abuse, while others encountered love and kindness. This heterogeneity of the evacuation experience has caused historians to approach the topic in a myriad of ways.

The earliest approach came from historians writing in the war’s immediate aftermath. They described the war as a time of national unity, and provided generally idyllic views of evacuation. They argued that evacuation brought Britons of different social classes closer together, broke down barriers between them, and was influential in creating postwar social reforms. These historians often referred to evacuation as one of the war’s greatest (and most successful) “social experiments.” Since these studies reflected the propaganda produced during the war, more recent historians have argued that their perspective was heavily influenced by that propaganda and by the historians’ personal experiences of the war.34 Despite their tendency to view evacuation through

34 Mark Connelly, We Can Take It: Britain and the Memory of the Second World War (Harlow: Pearson, 2004), 5-8.
rose-tinted glasses, these postwar historians were critical of some aspects. These criticisms generally focus on the government’s handling of evacuation, however, rather than on the tension between evacuees and their hosts. When postwar historians did discuss this tension, they presented it as a catalyst for ushering in postwar reforms meant to combat the plight of urban working-class children, rather than dwelling on the negative experiences of evacuation itself.

Richard Titmuss’s official history, first published in 1950 and entitled *Problems of Social Policy*, is one of the most comprehensive histories of evacuation. Commissioned by the British government, Titmuss accessed a variety of sources, including government records, surveys, books, journals, and newspapers. However, Titmuss’s history does not focus on the individual stories of evacuees; instead the book’s primary concern is with evacuation as a policy. Titmuss is critical of the government’s handling of evacuation, but he blames the policy rather than the individuals involved or the sociocultural undercurrents that may have influenced their actions. And despite his acknowledgement of negative evacuation experiences, Titmuss still argues that evacuation was a great equalizer for the British social classes.\(^{35}\)

A.J.P. Taylor’s presentation of wartime evacuation in his *English History 1914-1945* (1965) also encapsulates the postwar consensus view. Taylor refers to evacuation as “the greatest operation” of the preparations for war in Britain and claims that it was completely successful until the children arrived at the reception areas. He does discuss

some of the negative issues associated with evacuation, but he places blame for these problems on the “overburdened rural authorities” and the lack of money to properly outfit children for rural life. Like Titmuss, Taylor concludes that “English” people were not only brought closer together by evacuation, but that it created “a social revolution.”

Arthur Marwick, who produced three books dealing with Britain’s experience of the Second World War, also refers to evacuation as one of “the most significant social phenomena of the war” and argues that it was the key to bringing about social change. He does, to be sure, acknowledge that evacuees experienced cruelty at the hands of their hosts, but he still claims, like Titmuss and Taylor, that evacuation was a key element in the breaking down of class barriers.

Beginning in the late 1970s, the historiography of evacuation, and the British experience of Second World War in general, went through a period of revision in which historians claimed to overturn what they dubbed the “myths” of the postwar consensus. The postwar narrative of evacuation as a successful social experiment that erased class lines and ushered in postwar reforms began to crumble. The revisionists placed more emphasis on the negative experiences of evacuation and argued that it did not foster a social and ideological shift among the British people. Carlton Jackson’s *Who Will Take Our Children* (1985) asserts that evacuation “did not ‘revolutionize’ the science of child welfare” and places more emphasis on the personal experiences of evacuation. His was

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also one of the first historical works to devote significant space to a discussion of overseas evacuation.

The following year, Travis Crosby’s The Impact of Civilian Evacuation also provided an important revisionist argument. Crosby argues that, although there were numerous positive evacuation experiences, the “real significance of the evacuation lies among those evacuees who discovered hostility and dislike in reception areas.” He blamed three sociocultural undercurrents for creating negative evacuation experiences: racial prejudice, particularly antisemitism; social Darwinism; and class divisions. Crosby criticizes Marwick and other historians of the postwar era for assuming “too readily that the mere mixture of people from divergent backgrounds would be harmonious and beneficial.”

In “The Evacuation of School Children,” John Macnicol also directly challenges the postwar consensus. He blames negative evacuation experiences on “the trauma of family separation and cultural shock of coping with a new environment.” Macnicol argues that evacuation did not create a new demand for social reform, but that ideas existing prior to the war were simply reinforced. He concludes that wartime evacuation shows that the ideological consensus advocated by postwar historians was a “myth.”

Angus Calder makes a more balanced argument about evacuation. In both The People’s War: Britain 1939-1945 (1969) and The Myth of the Blitz (1995), Calder

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39 Crosby, The Impact of Civilian Evacuation, 3.
discusses aspects of the home front, such as looting and social tensions, that were airbrushed out of postwar histories. He uses negative stories of evacuation to contradict the rose-tinted picture of the postwar consensus. One of these features a Jewish girl who, when billeted with “a tight-lipped family, doing their Christian duty but without any warmth,” pretended to be Anglican and silently listened to the anti-Semitic language they spouted about their Jewish neighbors. More broadly Calder argues that evacuation was a mixed bag. He claims that it “helped to mix people in Britain together as never before and gave a basis for a new degree of mutual respect and understanding,” but also that the “heightened social awareness” it produced sharpened prejudices the middle classes.

Although often considered one of the earliest revisionist historians, Calder’s work on evacuation in some ways reflects recent waves of historiography on the subject, in which historians have attempted to find middle ground between the consensus and the revisionist viewpoints. Rather than focusing on the impacts of evacuation on social policy or the sociocultural undercurrents responsible for negative experiences of evacuation, histories of the Second World War published since the late 1990s put more emphasis on the individual and varied nature of evacuation. These scholars argue that it is impossible to generalize regarding evacuation experiences because they were numerous and both positive and negative. Instead of attempting to make sweeping arguments about the policy or experience of evacuation, these more recent histories focus on the individuals involved: hosts, parents, escorts, billeting officers, policymakers, and of course the

evacuees. These histories generally argue that evacuation was a multifaceted experience with both positive and negative qualities.

John Welshman’s *Churchill’s Children: The Evacuee Experience in Wartime Britain* (2010) is the best example of this recent trend in historiography. He tells the story of evacuation from the perspectives of all those involved: evacuees, parents, billeting officers, host families, teachers, policymakers, and others. Welshman is critical of the government’s handling of the evacuation scheme, but he also focuses on the stories of the policymakers behind it. By showing the debates and concerns of policymakers, his criticisms serve not to place blame on the government, but rather to emphasize the complex perspectives behind the creation of the evacuation scheme. Welshman includes both positive and negative stories of evacuation from a variety of sources to support his argument that evacuation was “a multilayered experience.”

Welshman is the only academic historians in recent years to devote a book solely to the topic of evacuation. Other historians, however, have dealt with the topic in the context of broader works on Britain and the Second World War. Mark Connelly discusses evacuation briefly in his book on Britain and the memory of the Second World War, but his argument is closer to the revisionist side of the scale than to Welshman because of his references to the deeply ingrained “myth” of evacuation. As previously mentioned, Sonya Rose also deals with evacuation in her study of wartime national identity, but she focuses less on the individual experience of evacuation and more on the influence the

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experience of evacuation had on British national identity. Like historians of the postwar consensus, Rose argues that evacuation placed a spotlight on the plight of the urban poor, which sparked calls for postwar reform. Like the revisionists, however, she argues that evacuation illuminated social divisions. In her words, “controversy over the impact of evacuation depicted a Britain riven in two rather than a unitary nation.”

Another set of secondary sources are the popular histories and collections of memoirs that have been published about evacuation. The majority of these works reinforce the postwar consensus view and only rarely describe hardship. For example, Gillian Mawson’s, *Evacuees: Children’s Lives on the WW2 Home Front* (2014) occasionally describes children who were unhappy during their evacuation, but this is generally due to homesickness or worry about family members suffering in the Blitz, rather than to discrimination or abuse. Some popular histories do, however, tell stories of hostility and abuses that evacuees suffered. Particularly critical are popular histories about overseas evacuation. Overseas evacuation has always been seen in a more critical light by historians, policy makers, and individuals because of the disasters associated with the transport of the evacuees and the wartime idea that overseas evacuees were abandoning Britain in its hour of crisis.

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47 See, for example, Monica B. Morris, *Goodbye Children Everywhere* and Ben Wicks, *No Time to Wave Goodbye*.
49 Several boats that were part of the CORB scheme were torpedoed on return from delivering the children to safety causing the deaths or imprisonments of young
Popular histories like these are often looked down on by the academic community, but they do have value. Their importance can be found in the way they reflect the general public’s view of an historical topic. In addition, popular histories sometimes contain information, such as personal stories, that is useful to the academic historian.\(^{50}\)

Whether popular or academic, all of these histories of evacuation lack analysis or even discussion of evacuations in Ireland. Some of them include the occasional sentence about evacuations in Northern Ireland, but none go into any detail or assess how they differed from those within Britain. The only secondary sources to mention the evacuations in Éire are broader works about Ireland during the war, but these generally contain only a page or two on the subject. They do not contain any extended analysis of individual experiences of evacuation in Ireland or how these evacuations differed from those within Britain.\(^{51}\)

**Context: Irish Neutrality and Anglo-Irish Relations**

To understand the exceptional nature of evacuations in Ireland during the Second World War, it is important to first discuss the complex relationship between Britain and Éire.

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adults and teachers who escorted them. Another boat was torpedoed with children on board, but all survived. There was also the sinking of the *City of Benares*, detailed in *Children of the Doomed Voyage*, which resulted in the deaths of seventy-seven of the ninety children on board. The CORB scheme was halted after that.\(^{50}\) Connelly, *We Can Take It*, 47-9.

\(^{51}\) Robert Fisk mentions that there were British evacuees in Ireland, but does not go into detail about them. More recently, Clair Wills’ cultural history of Ireland during the war mentions British evacuees in passing, but does not expand on their place in Irish society during the war. See Fisk, *In Time of War*, 104-5 and Wills, *That Neutral Island*, 49-52.
That relationship was defined by the Irish policy of neutrality. When Britain declared war in September 1939, the dominions and the rest of the British Empire soon followed. Éire was the only exception, instead declaring a policy of neutrality for the duration of the war. Many historians have argued that it was this policy of neutrality that represented Éire’s symbolic break with Britain, close to two decades after the Irish Free State came into existence. Éire’s neutrality was the primary cause of the tensions that defined Anglo-Irish relations throughout the war, both between the British and Irish governments and between the two peoples. Neutrality created the environment which made evacuation in Ireland, especially to Éire, so exceptional.

Éamon de Valera, leader of the Fianna Fáil party, worked throughout the interwar period to ensure Éire would be neutral in any European war. He laid the groundwork by dissolving the Oath of Allegiance to the Crown, limiting the power of the Governor-General, and, during the abdication crisis of 1936, removing all mention of the king from the Free State’s constitution. In 1937, a referendum championed by de Valera ushered in a new constitution that replaced the Irish Free State with Éire. This new constitution, as well as the name change, were important because they were another assertion of Éire’s sovereignty. Finally, in 1938, de Valera negotiated the return of the three Atlantic seaports over which Britain retained control in the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921. The return of these ports solidified Éire’s control over her own defenses. In February of 1939, de Valera announced that if war broke out, Éire would be neutral. When Britain declared war on September 3rd, he confirmed this neutrality in a radio broadcast to the Irish population.

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[^52]: Wills, *That Neutral Island*, 22.
people. This declaration of neutrality has been viewed by historians as an assertion of Éire’s sovereignty and a reinforcement of the country’s independence from Britain.

Most Irish historians credit the return of the treaty ports with giving Éire the independence from Britain necessary to declare neutrality. Many of these historians also make the point, however, that Britain returned the treaty ports as a symbol of goodwill in the hope that Éire would be an ally in the war that was looming. When de Valera declared neutrality, it created considerable tension between the two countries. Many politicians in Britain were suspicious that neutrality was a sham meant to hide Éire’s cooperation with the Nazis. Some even feared that the Nazis would invade Britain through Ireland. For this reason, the British government developed plans both to combat a German invasion from Ireland and to invade Éire herself. In the context of these tensions and suspicions between the two countries, it is somewhat surprising that a British government-sponsored evacuation scheme came to exist.

Irish neutrality also had many repercussions within Éire and Northern Ireland. Wills shows that many of those who traveled from Britain or Northern Ireland to Éire during the war described the journey as passing “from darkness into light.” The American journalist and Clemson alumnus Ben Robertson described travel to Dublin as being “like reaching heaven… there was light about you and a feeling of airiness, and

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53 Fisk, In Time of War, 2-10; Gardiner, Wartime Britain, 436-7; Wills, That Neutral Island, 21-2.
54 Fisk, In Time of War, 2.
55 Fisk, In Time of War, 236-244 and 348-9.
56 Wills, That Neutral Island, 6.
suddenly you were free... There is sugar in the bowl and butter on the plate.\

Neutrality allowed Éire to forego rationing and have only partial blackouts. The latter meant that Éire quite literally had more light than Britain and Northern Ireland. Some historians, however, have used this contrast to support a different argument regarding neutrality: that Éire was shrouded in cultural darkness because it was isolated from the rest of the world. F.S.L. Lyons uses the metaphor of Plato’s cave to argue that neutrality kept the Irish people in the dark, untouched by war, but also unable to take part in the technological, cultural, and economic advances that the experience of war brought. For her part, Wills concedes that Ireland was isolated from cultural advancement as a result of the policy of neutrality, but she also argues that Dublin was the cultural center of Europe during the war because Paris and London were occupied or bombed out.

Another debate regarding Irish neutrality concerns its reality: did Éire actually practice the neutrality it claimed during the war? And if they did not, to which side did the Irish government and the Irish people lean? During the war and to some extent the postwar era, many observers believed that Éire’s neutrality was a façade to hide the country’s support of Germany. This view, which generally came from non-Irish perspectives, pointed to the suspected involvement of the Irish Republican Army with German spies and submarines. The idea that Ireland favored Germany more broadly, however, has largely been invalidated by recent studies, especially of the Irish

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government’s internment of the IRA.⁶¹ Most historians now argue that if neutrality was compromised, it was due to pro-Allied sentiments. Some cite the successful cooperation of British and Irish spy networks in Éire.⁶² Others refer to the Irish government’s sending of aid to Northern Ireland after the Belfast Blitz.⁶³ Still others point to how Allied planes were permitted to refuel in Éire; how the RAF and USAF were allowed to install navigational markers along Éire’s coastline; and how Éire’s government imprisoned German airmen but returned their British counterparts when they crashed on Irish soil.⁶⁴

Arguments that support Éire’s success at remaining neutral rest on the government’s censorship of war news and promotion of pro-neutrality propaganda; the Irish people were able to maintain a neutral opinion of the war because they were largely unaware of it. This argument was first made by Robert Fisk, but was also taken up by Donal Ó Drisceoil in Censorship in Ireland 1939-1945: Neutrality, Politics and Society (1996).⁶⁵ In a later work, however, Ó Drisceoil asserts that neutrality was a “dual policy,”

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⁶¹ Wills, That Neutral Island, 93-5.
⁶³ Fisk, In Time of War, 481-503.
operating on two levels: on a public level Éire was impartial, but behind the scenes, government policies benefited the Allied war effort.66

The degree to which Éire supported or did not support the Allies is very relevant to a discussion of British evacuees in Éire. In a brief reference to evacuees in Éire, Fisk views them as a form of Irish humanitarian aid to the Allied cause.67 It could be argued that the mere presence of British citizens there confirmed Éire’s friendliness toward the Allies. The fact that the governments of the United Kingdom and Éire collaborated to create a government-run scheme of evacuation only makes this argument stronger.

Regardless of whether it was truly neutral, the policy of neutrality created conditions that made evacuation in Éire exceptional. Neutral propaganda and censorship made it hard for British evacuees to get news of the war. The tensions between Britain and Éire meant that some evacuees experienced prejudice from Irish people because they came from Britain. The lack of rationing, aerial bombardment, and blackouts in Éire made the experience of the war very different from that in Britain. These things made the homecoming of evacuees to a postwar Britain, ravaged by the German bombs and still under rationing, a dramatic shock.68

67 Fisk, In Time of War, 175.
68 This will be discussed further through the memoirs of Sheila Bynner, Neil Murphy, and others evacuees in Chapter 4.
**Context: Northern Ireland**

Northern Ireland’s experience of the Second World War was different from that of Éire, but it also diverged from that of Britain. Geographic separation from but political unity with Britain; an open border policy with neutral Éire; and religious tensions between Protestants and Catholics created a very different atmosphere in Northern Ireland during the war. This unique environment had a significant influence on the civilian evacuations that took place there.⁶⁹

The separation between Northern Ireland and Éire was first established in 1920 by the Government of Ireland Act. The partition designated two separate parliaments for Ireland; one for six counties in Ulster, where there was a Protestant majority, the other for the twenty-six remaining counties. After the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, the southern twenty-six counties became the Irish Free State, while the six Ulster counties became Northern Ireland and remained part of the United Kingdom. This political unity to Britain—despite its geographic separation—and geographic proximity to Éire—despite its political separation—put Northern Ireland in a complex position in terms of loyalty and identity, especially during the Second World War.⁷⁰

Political unity with Britain made Northern Ireland a belligerent nation, but the country’s physical separation from Britain made its part in the war ambiguous. For example, conscription was not mandatory in Northern Ireland, but the country did play host to vast numbers of Allied military personnel. In addition, the people of Northern Ireland

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Ireland were expected to follow blackout regulations and rationing. The physical separation from Britain, however, meant that many of them did not take these blackout regulations seriously. Air raid precautions, including evacuation, were not enforced to the same degree that they were in Britain because many believed that Belfast and Londonderry, although both home to vital war industries, were far enough removed to be out of reach of the German bombers. In the spring of 1941 this theory was proven false, as the cities of Northern Ireland experienced aerial bombardment. Londonderry was bombed only once, but Belfast was bombed four times. The first attack on Belfast on April 7 was fairly small, but the second eight days later was devastating. Only London and Liverpool suffered greater losses in one night than Belfast on April 15. Also on April 15, Londonderry was bombed for the first and only time. A single German plane flew over the city and dropped two bombs, killing fifteen people. The third and fourth raids on Belfast took place on the consecutive nights of May 4 and 5. These last two raids caused fewer deaths and more damage to houses.

Prior to the air raids in spring of 1940, there were two government attempts to evacuate schoolchildren from Belfast, which met with a limited response. After the air raids there was another push to get women and children out of the city, and a number of families who evacuated privately. Also in the wake of these air raids a scheme for

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continuous or “trickle” evacuation was set up and “trekking” – in which people left the
city at night to sleep in the surrounding hills and returned for work in the morning—
occurred. Some of these evacuees stayed with friends or family in the countryside of
Northern Ireland; many were billeted, or paid to stay, with strangers; and still others
crossed the border into neutral Éire, becoming war “refugees.”

Northern Ireland’s relationship with neutral Éire was another factor that created a
unique wartime environment. The geographic proximity of the two countries and the
open border existing between them made it easy for “refugees” from Belfast and
Londonderry to cross into neutral Éire. The open border also allowed smuggling—in
which several former evacuees describe participating—to become a common practice,
which undermined the government’s wartime rationing scheme. The British
government was highly aware of the adjacency of Northern Ireland to Éire. That a
German invasion might be attempted through Éire’s open border with Northern Ireland
was a concern for the British government, as was the loyalty of the Northern Irish people.

The latter was not an entirely unfounded concern. Although the Unionist majority
of Northern Irish people expressed political loyalty to Britain, there were some who
disagreed with this stance. The varying attitudes in Northern Ireland towards the

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74 The term “refugee” was used primarily to describe evacuees from Northern
Ireland in government documents and newspapers, although it was also used to describe
evacuees from Britain prior to the government-sponsored scheme. In general, the word
“refugee” was only used to describe multi-aged groups of evacuees. Groups of
unaccompanied children were very rarely referred to as “refugees.”

75 One former evacuee even describes having participated in smuggling during the
war. See Sophia Finlay, “Shankill Road Evacuee at Strabane 1941-43,” WW2 People’s
War, contributed 06 April, 2005,
country’s relationship with Britain were made manifest in the tensions between Protestants and Catholics. In Northern Ireland, religious status usually determined political attitudes. Protestants generally favored political unity with Britain, while Catholics were often Nationalists who opposed the Union and desired the reunification of Ireland. These divisions, so steeped in religious identity, created a divide in Northern Ireland that was unique within the British Isles. Although these tensions would not come to their apex until later in the 20th century with “the Troubles,” the government of Northern Ireland was aware of them due to violence during the Irish War of Independence, and the policy of government-sponsored evacuation was modified accordingly.

**Methods and Sources:**

The biggest challenge to the study of evacuation in Ireland during the Second World War is the available source material. Because the majority of evacuees within Britain were government-sponsored, those evacuations were well-documented. As previously discussed, there were many surveys, records, and other government documents created about the evacuation’s implementation and execution. Evacuation within Britain has also been a popular topic for oral historians and memoir-writers because its impact was so widespread. Due to the large amount of primary source material and public interest in the topic, the secondary sources about evacuation within Britain are also numerous.

The evacuations that took place in Ireland have much of the same documentation, but in lesser quantities. This is partially due to the large number of private evacuees to
Éire and Northern Ireland, of whom no records were kept.  

For the government-sponsored evacuees, there are archival documents which provide a limited overview of evacuation in Ireland. Additionally, although less numerous, there are several memoirs that have been written by former evacuees in Ireland that provide information on the individual experience. I have examined archival documents from the United Kingdom National Archives, the National Archives of Ireland, the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, and the London Metropolitan Archives. I have also analyzed several memoirs of former evacuees in Ireland; two of these are in the form of published books, while the rest come from the BCC’s WW2 “People’s War” Digital Archive. I will combine the use of these documents and memoirs to create a comprehensive picture of evacuation within Ireland.

Like any account of an historical event, these sources all have biases, but some are more problematic than others. In particular, the memoirs must be considered with some degree of skepticism for two reasons. First, they are recollections written down sixty or more years after the events they describe. All of the usual problems of memory must be considered in their analysis: inaccuracies, exaggerations, seeing the past through a rose colored lens, and the like. Second, they are self-selected, meaning their authors volunteered to tell their story. The self-selection issue is even more important since it was

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Lack of records is particularly relevant for the “war rush” evacuations which occurred at the beginning of the war. Newspaper reports and government papers mention a large migration of people from Britain to Éire and Northern Ireland in the weeks surrounding the declaration of war, but statistics or finite records of those evacuees were not kept due to the open border that existed between the United Kingdom and Éire at the time. See Fisk, *In Time of War*, 104-105; and Wills, *That Neutral Island*, 49-52.
the BBC that collected the memoirs. The BBC played an important part in keeping Britain united during the Second World War, and some historians have argued that it was at the forefront of the production of the “myth of the People’s War.” It is thus likely that any memoir submitted to an archive run by the BCC would describe a more positive evacuation experience.

The two published memoirs, those of Edward Hickey and Neil Murphy, are problematic for the same reasons -- memory and self-selection-- but also for others. Both individuals were very young during their evacuation: Neil was six and “Teddy” was less than a year old. The gap between the ages at the time of their evacuations and the ages at which they recorded these memoirs is greater than many of those who wrote for the People’s War Digital Archive, so the corresponding problems associated with their memories are also larger.

In addition to the young age of the author at the time of the events it describes, another problem with Teddy’s memoir is that it is specifically written from the perspective of a young child. The book is filled with imaginative names for people and places that the author encountered during his evacuation, which makes it hard to decipher the factual details of the author’s story. There are still very important details that can be gleaned from the memoir, however, despite its imaginative nature. The child-like

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narration provides a very specific picture of Éire and is important to understanding the popular memory of evacuees there.

Neil’s memoir is also problematic. Some of his stories are far-fetched, and the methods he used for recalling them are controversial. Neil states that he was involved with the IRA at the age of seven. He claims responsibility for the bombing of a department store, and asserts that he met the captain of a German submarine, provided intelligence that led to the sinking of the SS Irish Oak, and then stowed away on a Lancaster Bomber during a raid over Berlin. In the preface Neil explains that he repressed the memories of these events because they were traumatic, and only through hypnotherapy, which he performed on himself, was he able to recall them.

The far-fetched nature of these memories and the methods of recalling them call into question the truth of Neil’s story. I have still chosen to use the memoir as evidence about evacuations to Éire, however, as I think it is probable that many of the details in Neil’s memoir concerning his life during the war are correct. The details Neil conveys about Éire and how he was treated by the locals correspond with those found in other memoirs. I also think that it is likely some of the more dramatic aspects were sensationalized, either in his own mind or as an attempt to sell copies of the memoir. Despite its possible fabrications, Neil’s memoir gives an important perspective on evacuation to Éire. Even if the account is entirely fictional, it still describes how one individual, who grew up during the Second World War, viewed and interpreted

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79 Neil Murphy, Neil’s War: One Boy’s Story of his Evacuation to Ireland at the Outbreak of WWII, (Molash, Kent, UK: RoseTintedSpecs, 2011).
80 Murphy, Neil’s War, 8-9.
evacuations to Éire. Furthermore, the existence of the memoir means that the general public have some collective memory of the evacuation to Éire.

The archival documentation of evacuation from the cities of Northern Ireland range from government correspondence concerning the evacuation scheme and correspondence between voluntary evacuation organizations to lists of potential billets and evacuee children labeled with their religious status. From the BBC’s WW2 People’s War Digital Archive, I have also consulted seventeen memoirs written by former evacuees from Belfast and one written by an evacuee from Londonderry. Taken together, these sources will be used in Chapter 3 to depict evacuation from those two Northern Irish cities.

The archival documents I have examined concerning evacuation from Great Britain to Ireland range from government correspondence concerning evacuation and circulars outlining its rules and regulations to lists of the government-sponsored evacuees. In addition to the memoir of Shelia Bynner that was recounted at the very beginning of this chapter, I have obtained four other memoirs from the BCC’s WW2 People’s War Digital Archive that were written by former evacuees from Great Britain to Éire. These are the memoirs of Patricia Riley, Christine Franks, Peter Tiernan, and Mary Fellows. These combined with the memoirs of Neil Murphy and Edward “Teddy” Forde Hickey make up my body of evidence for Chapter 4, which will deal with the evacuations from Great Britain to Éire.
Conclusion:

Wartime conditions in Éire and Northern Ireland were distinct, from each other and from the circumstances that existed in Britain. Civilian evacuation in both Éire and Northern Ireland was influenced by their unique environments, and was therefore rather different than evacuation in Britain. The exceptional nature of the wartime experience in Ireland has caused it to be neglected in the historiography of evacuation. Evacuees such as Sheila Bynner had a unique experience of the war, one that has been left out of previous histories on wartime evacuation. In the following chapters, I intend to tell this exceptional story of civilian evacuation in Ireland, into the gap left in the historical narrative.
CHAPTER THREE
EVACUATION FROM BELFAST AND LONDONDERRY

In April 1941, Sophia Finlay, the child of a “strong Orangeman,” was evacuated after an air raid damaged her home on the Shankill Road in the Protestant area of Belfast. She was sent to stay with relatives in Dergalt near Strabane, where the divide between Protestant and Catholic families was not as confrontational as that in Belfast. During her evacuation she became close to a Catholic family, the Dunnes. In a memoir of her time as an evacuee, Sophia recalls that she “frequently participated in nightly prayers with the Dunne family,” reciting the Hail Mary, and learned songs of an “overtly nationalist flavor” as well. Age fourteen at the time of her evacuation, Sophia was aware of the significance of these things and did not repeat them to her father or neighbors on the Shankill Road.81

Sophia’s story is not typical of former evacuees from Belfast or Londonderry. Her memoir is one of few evacuee memoirs posted on the BBC’s WW2 People’s War Digital Archive that makes any reference to religion, and it is the only one that directly refers to the conflict between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland. Her story is also unique because it describes the intermingling of Protestants and Catholics that evacuation could cause. This mixing of Protestants and Catholics during evacuation is contrary to the plan laid out in Northern Irish government documents about the official evacuation

scheme. The government plans for evacuation were defined by an attempt to keep
Protestants and Catholics separate. This religious segregation is one of the several aspects
that made evacuation from Belfast and Londonderry different from other evacuations of
British civilians during the Second World War.

**Northern Ireland at War**

Wartime evacuations of the cities of Belfast and Londonderry, especially under the
government-sponsored scheme, formed an exception to other civilian evacuations
because the wartime experience of Northern Ireland was exceptional. According to the
1937 census, Belfast, the largest city in Northern Ireland, had a population of 438,086
persons two years prior to the war’s outbreak, the majority of whom were Protestant. Roughly 24 percent of participants in the 1937 census identified themselves as Roman Catholic, 64 percent as Presbyterian or Church of Ireland, and 12 percent as “other” or did not state their denomination. The residential areas of the city were divided along sectarian lines: Catholics lived in certain areas of the city, such as on the Falls Road, and Protestants lived in others, such as on the Shankill Road.

According to the 1937 census, Londonderry, Northern Ireland’s second largest city, had a much smaller population size of about 47,813 persons. Just as in Belfast, the

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city was divided by religious affiliation. Londonderry, however, had a higher percentage of Catholics because of its proximity to the border with Éire. Roughly 61 percent of those surveyed for the 1937 census identified themselves as Roman Catholic, only 36 percent as Presbyterian or Church of Ireland, and 3 percent as other or did not state their denomination. Religion and religious tensions permeated evacuation in Northern Ireland on many levels, especially in the government evacuation schemes for Londonderry. The planning for government-sponsored evacuation was more intricate because of the unique divisions between Protestants and Catholics.84

Although the segregation of and attempt to accommodate evacuees based on their religious affiliation was one of the most unique aspects of evacuation in Northern Ireland, it was not the only aspect which caused these evacuations to differ from those elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland’s geographic and political position—separate from Britain, yet still part of a belligerent nation—had an impact as well. Because of their distance from mainland, the cities of Belfast and Londonderry were not bombed until April 1941. This meant that the government of Northern Ireland had additional time to revise their plans for evacuation in light of the problems with the evacuations within Britain. Some adjustments that came out of the extra planning included detailed surveys of reception areas to find suitable billets, medical inspections of evacuees, separation of evacuees by religious affiliation, encouragement of mothers to join their children in the countryside, and an emphasis on finding billets that allowed large families to remain

84 The smaller numbers of potential evacuees, compared to that in Britain, made this plan more realistic.
together. The additional time between the outbreak of war and the evacuations also, however, made potential evacuees and their families feel a lesser sense of urgency, causing the number of participants to be lower than in Britain. The additional planning did not necessarily make the evacuations in Northern Ireland more or less successful than those in Britain, but it made the process and experience of evacuation different.

Northern Ireland experienced its first air raid on the night of April 7-8, 1941. This attack was fairly small compared to those in Britain, but was followed by three that were much more devastating. The second raid, on the night of April 15-16, was the worst in terms of loss of life, but the third and fourth raids, on the consecutive nights of May 4-5 and May 5-6, caused significant damage to homes and civic infrastructure. Taking together, these night-time raids are referred to as the “Belfast Blitz.”

Additionally, Northern Ireland’s border with Éire allowed evacuees the option of fleeing from Belfast and Londonderry by land to a neutral country. In the wake of the Belfast Blitz, Éire received many “refugees” fleeing the air raids. These “refugees” were generally multigenerational and not government-sponsored. In addition to Blitz “refugees,” the governments of Northern Ireland and Éire also cooperated to send government-sponsored evacuees from Londonderry to pre-selected billets in Éire. Northern Ireland was the only place in the United Kingdom where it was possible to

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85 On the night of April 15-16, Londonderry was also bombed. A single plane dropped only two bombs on the city, however, the damage from the bombs did take the lives of fifteen people.

86 I use the term “refugee” here because it was the term used to refer to these evacuees by the government of Éire in official documents. They are included in the story of evacuation from Belfast and Londonderry because they were private evacuees, even if the government of Éire referred to them as “refugees.”
evacuate to a neutral country without traveling by boat, which was expensive and carried the threat of being torpedoed by German submarines. The ability to cross into a neutral country in such a way had ramifications for the political relationship between Northern Ireland and Éire, and was another factor that made evacuation from Belfast and Londonderry unique.

Evacuation from Belfast and Londonderry can be split into several categories. There were government-sponsored schemes of evacuation, as well as private evacuations. Within the government schemes, there were provisions for both large-scale evacuations, like Operation Pied Piper, and “trickle” evacuations. In both of these forms of government-sponsored evacuation, evacuees could be classified as “unaccompanied” or “accompanied.” Another type of private evacuation, “trekking” or “ditching,” was also common in the months immediately following the Belfast Blitz.

Evacuees encompassed a variety of ages, especially after the air raids on Belfast. Most government-sponsored evacuees were school-age children, but many of these children, to a greater extent than in Britain, were accompanied by their mothers. In some

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87 “Private” evacuations were those in which the evacuees traveled to the countryside, selected and paid for their accommodation under their own steam without government assistance or interference.
88 “Trickle” evacuation refers to the constant gathering and sending of women and children to pre-selected billets in the countryside in small groups. “Evacuation,” September 1941, Evacuation General Policy, MPS2/2/4, PRONI.
89 Accompanied children were joined by their families during their evacuation. In most cases, this meant their mother and siblings, but in other cases it was another adult female relative, such as an aunt.
90 “Trekking” or “Ditching” refers to the phenomenon where civilians, often in large groups, left the city at night to shelter in the surrounding countryside, but returned to the city in the morning to continue their daily routine.
cases, when a family’s home was destroyed by an air raid, the government even sponsored the evacuation of entire families, though they encouraged employed males to stay in the cities. The government also planned to evacuate elderly, blind, or infirm persons, but there is little evidence regarding how many people took advantage of this scheme. Private evacuees encompassed a greater age range, often including parents, grandparents, and older siblings. This was especially true of those who fled across the border to Éire.

It is difficult to make general comments about private evacuees because there is less evidence available about them. It is, however, probable that some of the memoir writers, particularly those who describe their parents driving them to the countryside, were private evacuees. To a certain degree, these can be used as sources on private evacuation, but they must be examined cautiously because it is hard to know their accuracy. There is some source material on “ditchers” and “refugees” because, although not technically included in the government scheme of evacuation, they were discussed in government documents regarding evacuation. Of these various types of evacuation, however, the most evidence can be found on government-sponsored schemes. Both the large-scale and trickle evacuations were heavily documented. For this reason, and because the government scheme best exhibits the exceptional nature of evacuation in Northern Ireland, the main focus of this chapter will be the government-sponsored evacuation schemes.
Government Policy: Planning for Evacuation

Early discussions of government-sponsored evacuation in Northern Ireland began in 1939, with the British evacuation scheme as a model. After problems with the British scheme developed, however, government officials in Northern Ireland suggested revising certain aspects of their plans in an attempt to improve the scheme. Some of these revisions and amendments to the scheme, such as requiring medical examinations and pre-arrangement and pre-selection of billets, came to fruition, while others, like the exclusion of adult females from the scheme, were not realized in the final plans for evacuation. In addition to trying to combat the problems faced by evacuees within Britain, the planners of government-sponsored evacuation in Northern Ireland acknowledged the complex circumstances within the country that would make the nature of evacuation different from Britain. Government officials in Northern Ireland began the planning for civilian evacuation with these things in mind. A note from early discussions about government-sponsored evacuations in September 1939 included the statements that there was a “keenness to evolve a perfect scheme.”

One of the early suggestions for the improvement of the evacuation scheme included the addition of medical inspections. This suggestion was the result of problems with the British evacuation. It was noted in an early discussion on evacuation that “trouble had been experienced in England in respect of verminous and T.B. children”; it was then “suggested that children should be medically examined in the morning of

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91 “Evacuation of school children,” September 27, 1939, Evacuation General Policy, MPS2/2/4, PRONI.
evacuation." At the time, this suggestion was ignored due to the shortage of time and medical personnel. By December 1939, however, the revised plan for evacuation did include a provision requiring parents to allow their children to undergo a medical inspection as part of the registration process.

To a certain extent, medical inspections served their purpose. There were still complaints of verminous or sick children, but they were not as numerous as those in Britain and they did not occur until much later in the war, when the majority of evacuees had already been in the countryside for some time. The majority of these complaints were not from host families, but from local billeting officers who noticed evacuees had become sick or verminous during their stay in the countryside. The evacuation authorities attempted to combat this problem by removing these children from their billets to group homes or hostels. Prior to moving these children, evacuation authorities also sent them to evacuee camps for additional medical inspection and to be disinfected.

Another attempt to improve on the British scheme for evacuation was the implementation of detailed billeting surveys. In preparation for evacuations from both Belfast and Londonderry, Northern Ireland’s Ministry of Home Affairs conducted

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92 “Evacuation of school children,” September 27, 1939, Evacuation General Policy, MPS2/2/4, PRONI.
93 “Evacuation: Revision of Arrangements: To every parent and guardian of children under school-age in Belfast,” December, 1939, Evacuation General Policy, MPS2/2/4, PRONI.
94 Draft of Circular AEO: EV.C.229: to each Area Executive Officer and the Area Administrative Officer, Ballymena from Assistant Secretary, September, 1943, MPS2/7/9, PRONI; Letter to “Area Executive Officer, Antrim,” April 1944, MPS2/7/9, PRONI. Hostels and camps as accommodation for evacuees will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter.
surveys of Reception Zones to determine which homes would make suitable billets for evacuees. The Ministry began to conduct these surveys well before the evacuations took place, and Zone Reception Officers, who resided in the Reception Zones, continued to update lists of potential billets for the duration of the war. Billets were categorized by several different factors, including the cleanliness of the home and socio-economic status of the host family, but the primary concern was the number and type of evacuees the host family was willing to take in: how many and of what religion? A billeting survey for Magherafelt in County Londonderry in January 1942 shows this approach to billeting:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>1 Mother &amp; 1 Child</th>
<th>1 Mother &amp; 2 Children</th>
<th>1 Mother &amp; 3 Children</th>
<th>1 Mother &amp; 4 Children</th>
<th>1 Mother &amp; 5 Children</th>
<th>1 Mother &amp; 6 Children or more</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. Catholic</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2.1 Return of Suitable Accommodation Available for Accompanied Families*  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>1 Child</th>
<th>2 Children</th>
<th>3 Children</th>
<th>4 Children</th>
<th>5 Children</th>
<th>6 Children or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. Catholic</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2.2 Return of Suitable Accommodation Available for Unaccompanied Children*  

Such detailed billeting surveys were unique to Northern Ireland, especially in their categorization of potential hosts by religious affiliation. These surveys were particularly important to the evacuation of Londonderry, where “the religious question

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95 “Billeting Survey for Lagherafelt,” January 10, 1942, *Londonderry Evacuees*, MPS2/2/6, PRONI.
96 “Billeting Survey for Lagherafelt,” January 10, 1942, *Londonderry Evacuees*, MPS2/2/6, PRONI.
was one of the most important factors to be taken into consideration.” After registration, evacuees were also put into categories based on their “addresses, ages, religions and ‘types’ of families” that would be used to determine which evacuees were suited for which billets. The number of hosts willing to take in Protestant evacuees was frequently larger than the number willing to house Catholic evacuees, but in some places, especially in Londonderry, the number of potential Catholic evacuees far outstripped the number of Protestants. Statistics on available accommodation for Londonderry evacuees in August 1941 concluded that there were 1,380 billets available for Protestant evacuees and only 700 for Catholics. A summary of registration for the same evacuation concludes that there were 4,639 registered Protestant evacuees and 11,238 registered Catholic evacuees. This is explained by the larger population of Catholics in Londonderry in general. The high numbers of Catholics in Londonderry possibly explains why so many evacuees in Londonderry wished to evacuate to Éire. The number of people in Éire willing to take in Catholic evacuees was likely much greater since the number of Catholics in Éire was higher.

In addition to categorizing evacuees and hosts by their religion, evacuation officials separated them into four “types” based on their social class and cleanliness.

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97 “Notes of Conference Held in the Guildhall, Londonderry at 10.30 a.m. on Friday, the 29th August, 1941,” Londonderry Evacuees, MPS2/2/6, PRONI.
98 “Notes of Conference Held in the Guildhall, Londonderry at 10.30 a.m. on Friday, the 29th August, 1941,” Londonderry Evacuees, MPS2/2/6, PRONI.
99 It should also be noted that only a small percentage of registered evacuees turned up to participate in the actual evacuation. Estimates for the evacuation of Londonderry are generally around 35%. “Londonderry Evacuation – Summary of Registration,” August 1941,” Londonderry Evacuees, MPS2/2/6, PRONI.
These four “types” included: (A) middle class with a clean and adequately furnished house; (B) working class with a clean house; (C) working class with an untidy house; and (D) any class with a dirty house. It is possible this separation of evacuees into specific “types” based on class was a reaction to the negative experiences of evacuation in Britain, where it had been rumored that class tensions between hosts and evacuees had resulted in evacuees returning to cities. This method of typing would also be open to interpretation and sectarian prejudices by billeting officers, but since they were generally from the areas which they administered, it was likely they were of the same faith as the evacuees for which they were responsible.

The attention given to matching evacuees with host families of similar religious and socio-economic backgrounds prior to their evacuation is unique to Northern Ireland. In Britain, evacuation was defined by the intermingling of social classes. The mixing of social classes in British evacuations, to be sure, led to complaints, but it also has been a key piece of evidence for historians arguing that evacuation brought about post-war social reforms. More negatively, the mixing of religions in British evacuations often resulted in the mistreatment or even abuse of evacuees. The conscious decision in Northern Ireland to separate evacuees and hosts based on religion and social class was likely a response to the negative experiences of more random billeting methods in Britain. In addition to this, religious identity in Northern Ireland had political connotations that had led to violence in the past. It is likely that government officials

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100 “Notes of Conference Held in the Guildhall, Londonderry at 10.30 a.m. on Friday, the 29th August, 1941,” Londonderry Evacuees, MPS2/2/6, PRONI.
were worried that the random assignment of billets might result in the intermingling of Protestants and Catholics, which would have been dangerous. Another possibility is that the government created these policies because, being aware of the mistrust between Catholics and Protestants, they anticipated unwillingness to billet evacuees of different religious affiliation and wanted to prevent complaints from host families.

It is difficult to say whether the separation of Protestant and Catholic evacuees was necessary. Although it is certainly possible that children who encountered religious prejudice never came forward to tell their stories, the fact that the archival evidence contains no complaints by evacuees in Northern Ireland of mistreatment on the basis of religion speaks to the relative success of the policy. The experience of Sophia Finlay that was recounted at the beginning of this chapter, however, reveals that government efforts to keep Catholics and Protestants separate were not always necessary. Sophia’s friendship with the Catholic Dunne family shows that it was possible for evacuees to live with host families of a different faith. To be sure, this is only one case out of thousands, but nonetheless her story calls into questions the justification for the government policy of religious segregation.

In addition to pre-arranging evacuees to be sent to billets based on their religious and socio-economic background, the government of Northern Ireland also placed special emphasis on having evacuees select billets with friends or relatives in the countryside prior to their evacuation. R. Dawson Bates, Minister of Home Affairs, submitted a

\[\text{\textsuperscript{101}}\] It could also be argued, however, that the decision of Sophia not to recount her friendship with the Catholic Dunne family to her Protestant family in Belfast also represented the Sectarian tensions with evacuation tried to avoid.
revised plan for evacuation in December 1939 that contained the following statements concerning Pre-Selection of Billets:

The general evacuation scheme requires amendment in light of the British experience … a parent may have relatives in the country who would be willing to take his children … the children cannot go there, but must go with their school. I propose to amend the scheme so as to enable any parent who can, to choose the billet in advance and to have his children sent with the school or party going to that district.¹⁰²

The idea of pre-selected billets being part of the government scheme is clearly intended here as an improvement on the British experience of evacuation. Allowing children to stay with friends or relatives was made easier by the pre-arrangement of all billets. Pre-selection of billets was added to the plan for government-sponsored evacuation and, as will be discussed later in this chapter, it proved useful, but perhaps not to the extent Bates had hoped.

In the same document, Bates made another suggestion to improve the evacuation plan that was never implemented: to exclude adult females from participating in the government scheme. In the same plan for revision of the evacuation scheme from December 1939, Bates stated that:

It is also desirable to amend the scheme so as to reduce … the number of mothers and adult female relatives accompanying the children. The dissatisfaction in Great Britain, which brought such numbers of children back to the towns, originated with the adults who were quickly bored by the country life and absence of amenities.\(^\text{103}\)

Like the amendment regarding pre-selected billets, this suggestion resulted from information about problems with British evacuations. This amendment, however, was never realized. Especially in the wake of the Belfast Blitz, the number of mothers who evacuated with their children in Northern Ireland was very high. Bates was, however, right that it would, as in Britain, cause problems. The number of households in the countryside willing to billet accompanied families was much lower than those willing to take in unaccompanied children. In addition to this, the dissatisfaction of mothers with life in the countryside was also a prominent issue in Northern Ireland. Former evacuee Jim Cleland explained that his evacuation only lasted a year because his mother Ena quickly tired of life in the countryside.\(^\text{104}\) Another evacuee, John Donaldson, remembered that life in the countryside “must have been hell” for his mother, “having lost a modern house with a garden and indoor toilet and bathroom.” Mrs. Donaldson’s

\(^{103}\) R. Dawson Bates – Minster of Home Affairs, Revisions to Evacuation Plan, December 1939, *Evacuation General Policy*, MPS2/2/4, PRONI.

dissatisfaction with her evacuation eventually led to the family’s move to England, despite the increased danger there.  

**Government Policy: Implementation of Plans**

Although planning for the evacuation of schoolchildren from Belfast began prior to the outbreak of war, the implementation of these plans stalled many times because the government of Northern Ireland thought air attacks on Belfast were unlikely due to its geographic distance from Germany. Many within the Northern Irish government believed that evacuation should only take place when “signs of imminent danger” were present. These signs included the “evacuation of Liverpool or Glasgow,” the two closest British cities to Belfast; “enemy reconnaissance flights over Belfast”; and “actual or attempted attack on Belfast.” With the fall of France in 1940 and the resulting German acquisition of airbases along the French coast, however, the danger to Belfast was increased, and government officials within Northern Ireland began to debate instituting the evacuation scheme.

One week prior to the first evacuation of Belfast, not all government officials were in agreement about the necessity of the scheme, and some tried to postpone it. On July 1, 1940, Sir Thomas Gardiner, an official in the Northern Irish government, stated

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105 There were some other factors that likely influenced the Donaldson family’s move to England, including Mr. Donaldson’s being there working in the war industries. John Donaldson, “The Evacuees,” WW2 People’s War, contributed 26 February, 2004, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/16/a2349416.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/16/a2349416.shtml).


107 Statement by the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland from Stormont Castle, July 1940, *Evacuation General Policy*, MPS2/2/4, PRONI.
that he “felt that it was quite premature to consider such a step.” His reasoning for this was that Glasgow and Liverpool had not yet been evacuated, and it would cause “embarrassment for London” if Belfast was evacuated before those cities. Gardiner further asserted that “if Belfast were a city situated in Great Britain the United Kingdom Government would definitely not decide on evacuation in present circumstances.”

Despite Garinder’s objections, the first large-scale evacuation of Belfast went forward on July 7, 1940. The decision to evacuate was “purely precautionary” and entirely voluntary. The evacuation plan only had the capacity to evacuate 20,000 children from Belfast, and that was assuming that half of those children would stay with family and friends, not in billets assigned by the government. Prior to its implementation, some government officials believed the plan should be amended to include provisions for evacuating additional children immediately after the initial 20,000 were removed, but these plans proved unnecessary, as they assumed all the parents of Belfast would be eager to send their children away. Of the 18,000 children who registered for evacuation, however, only 7,000 appeared on the day.

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108 “Record of telephone conversation with Ministry of Home Security – 1st July 1940,” Evacuation General Policy, MPS2/2/4, PRONI.
109 “Notes for Minister’s Interview with Press,” July 1940, Evacuation General Policy, MPS2/2/4, PRONI.
110 Letter to Lieut.-General H. J. Huddleston from “MacD.,” (Possibly John MacDermott – Minister of Public Security), June 27, 1940, Evacuation General Policy, MPS2/2/4, PRONI.
111 “Evacuation Plans made by the Ministry of Home Affairs,” June 26 1940, Evacuation General Policy, MPS2/2/4, PRONI; Brian Barton, The Blitz: Belfast in the War Years (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press Limited, 1990), 60.
The evacuation scheme was attacked in newspapers for being a “flop” or “fiasco,” but the success of the scheme was in reality relatively similar to that of Operation Pied Piper.\footnote{See Brian Barton, \textit{The Blitz: Belfast in the War Years}, 60.} Newspapers condemned the government scheme for evacuating only 10 percent of the school-age children from Belfast.\footnote{\textit{Belfast News-Letter}, 7 July 1940.} While the statistic is technically true, as only 7,000 of the estimated 70,000 total number of children in Belfast were evacuated, the maximum number the government was prepared to evacuate was only 20,000, and 18,000 had registered prior to the date of evacuation.\footnote{“Evacuation Plans made by the Ministry of Home Affairs,” June 26 1940, \textit{Evacuation General Policy}, MPS2/2/4, PRONI.} It might therefore be more accurate to state that 7,000 out of 18,000 children were evacuated. If these numbers are considered, the first evacuation of Belfast had a 39 percent rate of success, which only trailed Operation Pied Piper by 3-5 percent.\footnote{Of the 3.5 million expected to evacuate Britain, only 1.5 million were evacuated, or 43\%.} Seen in that light, the first large-scale evacuation of Belfast was comparable to the first evacuation in Britain.

Measured in terms of numbers of women and children sent away from the city, however, evacuation in Northern Ireland was less successful. There were several additional attempts at mass evacuation from Belfast. In these subsequent evacuations, the numbers of government-sponsored evacuees were much lower. The most unsuccessful attempt was an evacuation in early 1941, which resulted in only 20 of the 5,000 registered evacuees participating.\footnote{The actual date of this evacuation was not referenced in government documents, but based on newspaper articles from 1941, I think it probable it was in} Further attempts at large-scale evacuation were made
in April and July 1941, after the Belfast Blitz, but these evacuations also suffered poor response rates.\textsuperscript{117} In August 1941, large-scale evacuation was abandoned in favor of “trickle” evacuation, “whereby batches of women and children up to 30” were sent to reception areas every few days.\textsuperscript{118} The “trickle” evacuation was more successful. Government estimates claim that approximately 60,000 women and children had been billeted in Reception Areas by September 1941.\textsuperscript{119}

Government-sponsored evacuation from Londonderry was one of the last evacuation schemes to be planned and carried out. The city’s first mass evacuation attempt did not take place until late June 1941, after the city’s only bombing raid. If measured by its usefulness, the government evacuation of Londonderry was extremely unsuccessful because no further enemy raids occurred after it was evacuated. The government of Northern Ireland, however, could not have known at the time that the city would not be bombed again, and the citizens of Londonderry were “eager” for the evacuations to take place.\textsuperscript{120} But despite their purported “eagerness,” the citizens of Londonderry did not take full advantage of the evacuation scheme. The city also suffered

\textsuperscript{117} “Evacuation of Children,” Public Notices section of the \textit{Belfast Newsletter}, April 12, 1941, \textit{Evacuation General Policy}, MPS2/2/4, PRONI.
\textsuperscript{118} “Evacuation,” November 10, 1941, \textit{Evacuation General Policy}, MPS2/2/4, PRONI.
\textsuperscript{119} “Evacuation,” September, 1941, \textit{Evacuation General Policy}, MPS2/2/4, PRONI.
\textsuperscript{120} “Notes of Conference held in Guildhall, Londonderry on Monday, the 16\textsuperscript{th} June, 1941 at noon,” \textit{Evacuation from Londonderry}, MPS2/2/6, PRONI.
from poor response rates and, like Belfast, moved to a policy of trickle evacuation in August 1941.121

Despite its unnecessary nature in hindsight, the evacuation of Londonderry was important because it was one of the last government-sponsored evacuation schemes to be planned and put into action. Londonderry was not even considered as a potential Evacuation Area until after the air raid of April 1941. This delay in planning evacuation caused it to benefit from the lessons learned from the mistakes of the previous schemes. Planners of the Londonderry evacuation were able to learn from previous efforts, both in Britain and from Northern Ireland. Some examples of minor adjustments have already been mentioned, such as the more extreme attention paid to religious tensions, but the biggest difference was the inclusion of a provision to send several thousand women and children to pre-selected billets in Éire. Planning for this cross-border evacuation was undertaken, with the input of government officials from Éire’s Department of Justice, in September 1941.122

**Evacuee Experiences: Journey and Arrival in the Countryside**

On the day of evacuation, much as was the case within Britain, evacuees were required to gather at assembly points, generally schools, and were then transported to the countryside

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121 “Notes on a Conference Held in the Guildhall, Londonderry at 10.30 a.m. on Friday, the 29th August, 1941,” *Londonderry Evacuees*, MPS2/2/6, PRONI.
122 “Pre-Selected Evacuees going to Éire: Note of a Conference held in Dublin at Department of Justice on Friday, 18th September, 1941,” *Londonderry Evacuees*, MPS2/2/6, PRONI.
by bus or train. Kathleen Hamilton describes her experience on the day of her evacuation from Belfast:

On the Saturday we were evacuated we went to our school, St Matthew's, with all the other children … My mum had packed our clothes into a case and we also had to carry our gas masks with us and each of us had labels with our names on them. We were all loaded on to a bus and most of the children were crying and upset. We were brought to Great Victoria Street train station and put on board a train. We were given a packed lunch for our journey. We were on the train for about two and a half hours and it was a very quiet journey because we were all so miserable and afraid of what lay ahead for us.\(^{123}\)

Although Hamilton does not disclose the exact date of her evacuation, other details in her account make it likely that she took part in one of the early evacuations, possibly the first mass evacuation in July 1940. She mentions later that “some time during the second year,” they walked to the top of a mountain at night where they “saw all these flashing lights and could hear the noise … Mr Mohan told us then that it was Derry city being bombed.”\(^{124}\) For Kathleen to have witnessed the bombing of Londonderry is a bit far-fetched. The city was bombed only once, and the small number of bombs dropped on it


\(^{124}\) Kathleen Hamilton, “Evacuated to Berney near Strabane.”
make it unlikely that the event would have lasted long enough for the evacuees to witness it from a mountainside near Strabane. Most likely, Kathleen convinced herself she saw this happen because she remembers Londonderry being bombed during her evacuation. Since Londonderry was bombed in April 1941, it is probable that Kathleen was evacuated in the summer of 1940. This being the case, Kathleen’s description of her evacuation gives some idea of what the journey from Belfast to the countryside was like under the early government-sponsored evacuation scheme. Hamilton does not mention, however, that the evacuations from Northern Ireland differed from those within Britain in that provisions were made to keep Protestant and Catholic evacuees segregated, even during their assembly and journey to the countryside. The most striking example of this occurred during the Londonderry evacuation in June 1941. In a government document summarizing this evacuation it is stated that “Protestant children were requested to assemble at 9 a.m. for departure at 9.30 a.m. and Roman Catholic children at 2 p.m. for departure at 2.30 p.m.” Evacuations from Belfast also contained similar provisions for separating Protestants and Catholics.

For private evacuees, the journey to the countryside was different, especially in the wake of the Belfast Blitz. Private evacuees had to arrange their own transport to the countryside. Some of them, like the government-sponsored evacuees, took public transportation. June Martin, for example, recalls that she was “brought to the bus stop at the top of the Knock Road to be put on the evening bus” with her aunt, who “was given

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125 “Londonderry Evacuation,” 1942, Londonderry Evacuees, MPS2/2/6, PRONI.
no warning and no option” not to accompany the child. Many private evacuees left Belfast accompanied by their entire families. John Donaldson, for example, described traveling to Newry with his mother and four siblings. Another former evacuee, who did not provide her name, vividly described her journey out of Belfast with half of her family crammed into her grandfather’s car:

That afternoon my mother, Jack and I, my Aunt Norah and my cousins Mullan and Shelia, together with as many as possible of our belongings and emergency rations for the next few days all squashed into grandpa’s car and set off for an undetermined period of evacuation. On the way out of town, the footpaths were thick with people making their way out of the city; they carried cases and boxes; some carried babies while the families’ possessions were pushed along in the pram; there were laden handcarts, wheelbarrows and children’s go-carts, all piled high with rescued belongings … I wanted to stop and help … My grandfather drove on inexorably and my mother tried to tell me that there was nothing we could do.  

This description provides not only an idea of her own journey to the countryside, but also a glimpse into the journey of other private evacuees whom she passed on her way out of

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the city. The emphasis on carrying a multitude of material possessions, in both her own story and her description of the other evacuees, is interesting. It is one way in which descriptions of government-sponsored and private evacuees differ. Kathleen Hamilton, for example, describes carrying only a suitcase, packed by her mother, and a gas mask. Documents pertaining to the government evacuation scheme provide a packing list for evacuees emphasizing that, “only the smallest amount of luggage can be carried” and that “the most satisfactory luggage carrier is a rucksack or haversack.”¹²⁸ The difference in the number of possessions carried by evacuees, however, is more a product of the variations between private and government-sponsored evacuation, rather than something unique to Northern Ireland.

Despite differences in evacuation policy, such as the segregation of Protestant and Catholic evacuees, the memoirs by Hamilton and the private evacuees shows that evacuees’ journeys to the countryside of Northern Ireland were similar to those experienced by evacuees in Britain. Upon reaching the countryside, however, the experiences of these evacuees began to diverge. One key difference between evacuation in Britain and Northern Ireland was the way in which billets were assigned. This is illustrated in the memoir of Andree, who was evacuated to Gortin in County Tyrone. Andree described that upon her arrival in Omagh:

We were taken to a school or hall and various adults came in and shouted out the names of children. The children then went off with the adult.

¹²⁸ “Evacuation of Registered Evacuees. Assembly Instructions. (Accompanied Families),” July 27, 1941, MPS2/2/6, PRONI.
Eventually a doctor appeared and called out: “Two girls for Mrs McFarland” – that was me and another girl. He took us by car to Gortin.\textsuperscript{129}

There are some similarities between Andree’s story and the narrative that is commonly told of evacuees in Britain. In both Britain and Northern Ireland, evacuees were gathered in school or church halls where they awaited their billeting assignments. The story of Andree, however, veers away from the British narrative after this point. In Britain, former evacuees often describe the scene of billeting assignment as chaotic, with potential host parents swarming around the children, picking the ones they wanted out of the crowd, often based on their looks alone. The description of the billeting assignment provided by Andree is much calmer. From her description, the children were kept in a separate room until their host families, or someone designated by their host family, came to retrieve them.

Andree’s memoir illustrates the impact that Northern Ireland’s policy of pre-arranged billeting had on the individual evacuee’s experience. Like Kathleen, Andree likely participated in one of the early government evacuations of Belfast.\textsuperscript{130} It is hard to say how the conscious separation of Protestants and Catholics impacted Kathleen or Andree, as neither discuss religion in their memoirs. If anything, the absence of religion

\textsuperscript{129} Andree, “Evacuee in Gortin, Co Tyrone,” WW2 People’s War, contributed 17 February, 2005, \url{http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/00/a3678500.shtml}.

\textsuperscript{130} She describes later in her memoir that she returned to Belfast for Christmas, a few months before the air raids of April 1941. Andree, “Evacuee in Gortin, Co Tyrone.”
in either memoir supports the idea that separation by religious affiliation made the conflict a nonissue during evacuation, which speaks to the success of the policy.

Many former evacuees speak fondly of the people who hosted them in the countryside, but the majority of these positive experiences were recounted by evacuees who stayed with family or friends. There were some evacuees billeted with strangers, however, who also experienced positive receptions from their host families. Margaret Wilson, for example, remembers that she was “treated with great kindness.” In her account, she states that her foster family “influenced her life forever.” Margaret’s connections with her host family ran so deep that her “mother is buried on land gifted by them to the local church.” She even writes that she still keeps “in touch with descendants of that wonderful family” and goes to visit them in County Fermanagh several times a year. 131

In a similar fashion, Jim Ferguson describes the positive experience he and his siblings had staying with Mr. and Mrs. Patterson, whom they called “Aunt Lizzie and Uncle Willie”:

Aunt Lizzie and Uncle Willie were so good to us, they were just like a mother and father to us. We wanted for nothing, there was always plenty of good food on the table. We stayed there until the end of the war, although my sister stayed on, and my brother George went back to the

farm there when he was old enough. We always kept in touch after the war.\(^{132}\)

In addition to Jim and Margaret, there are many other stories of evacuees who were welcomed to the countryside by friends or relatives.

Stories of reception in the countryside, however, were not always positive. Of the eighteen accounts of evacuation in Northern Ireland on the BBC’s “People’s War” Digital Archive, two of them describe negative interactions between host and evacuee. Pat McDonald recalled that her host family “used to shout at us all the time” and that they “had children and they always got a wee bit more than us.”\(^{133}\) Eileen Wells, who was evacuated with her mother and siblings, remembered that their first billet was with a local minister whose “wife did not seem happy to have us.” Eileen and her family were soon moved to a cottage on a local farm.\(^{134}\)

In addition to these accounts, several newspaper articles describe negative responses to the billeting of evacuees in Newcastle, County Down, on the east coast of Northern Ireland. One newspaper quoted a young woman as saying, “I hope to goodness we do not get any evacuees. I would hate to hear them crying and shouting and see them


climbing all over the furniture.”135 The same article goes on to state that the people of Newcastle “would rather see the children undergo the horrors of an air raid which might shatter their nerves for their lifetime than that their supersensitive ears should be the recipients of childish laughter, shouts, or tears.”136 To be sure, this story was followed by several letters to the editor criticizing the article for only including at one side of the story.137 There was, however, also an anonymous handwritten note, in the same file as the newspaper clippings, commenting on the July 1941 evacuation from Belfast to Newcastle that ended with the statement: “People of Newcastle put up a disgusting performance. They didn’t want them (the evacuees), and they made it plain.”138 This evidence suggests that evacuees were not welcomed everywhere or by all people.

In addition, several letters were sent to evacuation officials by people in the countryside containing complaints or questions about evacuation. Dated February 1940, a letter from the minister of a Presbyterian congregation in Downpatrick, County Down, contains a list of concerns from his congregation about billeting evacuees. Some of these

135 “No Evacuees Need Apply: Astonishing Story from Seaside Town,” The Northern Whig and Belfast Post, July 1941, Evacuees: Newcastle/WVS/Newspaper Articles, PM2/13/207, PRONI.
136 “No Evacuees Need Apply: Astonishing Story from Seaside Town,” The Northern Whig and Belfast Post, July 1941, Evacuees: Newcastle/WVS/Newspaper Articles, PM2/13/207, PRONI.
137 “Letters to the Editor: Evacuee-Shy Seaside Town Defends Itself,” and “Letters to the Editor: Varied Views on Evacuees Reception in Ulster Town,” The Northern Whig and Belfast Post, July 1941, Evacuees: Newcastle/WVS/Newspaper Articles, PM2/13/207, PRONI.
138 This note was likely written by a billeting officer or government official, but is not signed or dated. It was in a file next to other documents pertaining to the June 1941 evacuation. Handwritten Note, Evacuees: Newcastle/WVS/Newspaper Articles, PM2/13/207, PRONI.
issues included the “prevalence of infections or contagious diseases” in Belfast; worries that a “householder will have to accept a mentally defective evacuee”; and fears that the government would not “relax compulsory billeting in cases where the householders are aged, infirm, ill, or otherwise unable to comply with the demands of their charges.”

On August 22, 1941, the Ministry of Home Affairs held a joint conference on evacuation with representatives from the Christian churches, both Protestant and Catholic, the object of which was to solicit a joint statement from the churches encouraging citizens from all denominations to cooperate with the evacuation scheme. It is significant, given the context of religious tensions and the provisions that had been made to separate evacuees of different religious affiliations, that the intended outcome was a “joint-statement.” Three representatives from the Ministry were present, as well as a representative each from the Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, and Methodist Churches. An invitation to attend the conference was sent to representatives from the Church of Ireland, but they were unable to attend owing to the date being during “holiday time.”

The outcome of the conference was a letter—approved by all Christian denominations (Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Methodist, and Church of Ireland)—which was released in the fall of 1941. The letter was very general. It did not address

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139 J. M. Moore (minister), Letter to M.J. Hayes, Esq., 22 February 1940, Evacuation General Policy, MPS2/2/4, PRONI. Perhaps the real concern of the Presbyterian congregation was not the pervasiveness of “contagious disease” in Belfast and chances of housing “a mentally defective evacuee,” but the prevalence of Catholicism and the chances of housing a Catholic evacuee.

140 “Notes of a Conference on Evacuation held on Friday 22nd August, 1941, between representatives of the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Churches,” Evacuation General Policy, MPS2/2/4, PRONI
differences in religion or discuss the success (or lack thereof) of government plans to separate evacuees based on religion. Instead, the letter discussed the “unnatural process” of mass evacuation, “justified only by the need for dispersing the civil population in wartime” and begged for “the full co-operation of householders in country areas.”¹⁴¹ It is difficult to say whether the joint-statement and the cooperation of the churches had an impact on the reception of evacuees. There are few letters of complaint addressed to the Ministry after fall 1941, but this could also be due to the decreasing number of evacuees being sent to the countryside.

The disparity between positive and negative responses to evacuees may not be entirely random. First, it is possible that some Reception Zones were more welcoming to evacuees than others. Many stories of positive reception come from evacuees to the three western counties of Northern Ireland: Fermanagh, Tyrone, and Londonderry, while the negative reactions to evacuation described by the press and the letter from the Presbyterian minister are both from County Down in the eastern half of the country. That the positive and negative experiences are grouped in certain geographic areas raises the question of whether some Reception Zones in Northern Ireland were more welcoming to evacuees than others, but there are problems with this theory. For example, one of the few accounts that describes a negative experience was written by Eileen Wells, who was evacuated to Ballinamallard in County Fermanagh. In addition, several evacuee accounts, such as that of Michael O’Shea, who was evacuated to Ardglass, County Down, and June

¹⁴¹ “Letter from the Heads of Churches,” Fall 1941, Evacuation General Policy, MPS2/2/4, PRONI.
Martin, who was evacuated to Ballywalter, also in County Down, that describe a positive reception in places on the east coast.\(^{142}\)

More important than the geographic distinction is the variation between the type of sources regarding positive and negative reactions to evacuation. The majority of negative responses to evacuation were printed in newspapers during the war and were written by adults residing in the countryside, while positive experiences described in the memoirs were written down many years later by those who participated in the evacuation as children. On one hand, the newspapers are more reliable because they were printed at the time these events occurred, but they also have certain biases associated with the press. The memoirs, on the other hand, might not be completely accurate because they were written down so many years after the events took place, but they are first-hand accounts of evacuation by evacuees. The letter from the Presbyterian minister could be considered more reliable, but it is problematic in that it only expresses the views of one congregation in County Down and may not even express the views of everyone within that congregation. In addition to this, it should also be mentioned that this letter does not describe an actual experience with an evacuee, but is rather a preemptive list of complaints.

It would be impossible to say definitively that one source is a more accurate description than the other. The sources are all biased in some way, but they all also hold some degree of truth. These sources must be taken as equally valid. One is not more

truthful than the other. The disparity between them simply exhibits the varied and complex nature of evacuation in Northern Ireland: there were a variety of experiences of evacuation, both positive and negative.

**Evacuee Experiences: Unique Accommodations**

The accommodation for evacuees that has been discussed up to this point has been generally of unaccompanied, government-sponsored evacuees staying in individual households during their evacuation. This form of accommodation was the most commonly described in evacuee memoirs and government documents, but it was not the only type. Lodging for evacuees came in several forms. In addition to being housed with strangers, evacuees were billeted with relatives or friends, in private cottages on farms, or sent to group homes, often requisitioned buildings, that were termed “hostels” or “camps.”

More so than in Britain, the government of Northern Ireland relied heavily on the idea that many evacuees would be housed with relatives or friends. As was discussed earlier, the government of Northern Ireland expected half of the evacuees from the initial evacuation of Belfast to stay with friends or relatives in the countryside. The emphasis on community connections between rural and urban households is unique to Northern Ireland. Nowhere in Britain did the government plan for government-sponsored evacuees to have friends or relatives in the countryside with whom they would stay.

Not only was government expectation of these connections unique, but also the degree to which it was fulfilled. Exact statistics of the number of evacuees who stayed with friends or family in the countryside would be difficult to determine with the sources
available, but the memoirs of former evacuees give some idea. Out of the eighteen accounts by evacuees from Belfast, six of them specifically mention staying with relatives or in cottages provided by relatives. If these evacuees are taken as a sample group of the larger whole, 35 percent of evacuees used familial connections to procure their billets. While this 35 percent not quite the 50 percent estimated by the government, it is still a significant percentage of children who had a connection to someone in the countryside.

There are a few issues with this statistic, however. First, eighteen is a very small sample group when compared to the total number of evacuees. Second, there is no way to determine for certain that these evacuees were part of the government scheme for evacuation. In fact, it is probable that many of the evacuees who submitted accounts were private evacuees. That so many evacuated to relatives, however, regardless of their status as government-sponsored or private, still demonstrates that there were unique networks of familial connections in Northern Ireland that made evacuation experiences exceptional.

Accounts by former evacuees who stayed with relatives and friends, described a more comforting reception in the countryside, which is understandable since many of these evacuees were familiar with their hosts. Michael O’Shea, for example, remembered staying with his grandparents in the fishing village of Ardglass, County Down, a place that he loved “more than anything else.” 143 Although he stayed with his grandparents, other details suggest that Michael was a government-sponsored evacuee from other

details in his memoir. He recalls that “big numbers of children, their parents and teachers were evacuated to the countryside,” and that his father was “one of the teachers.”

In similar fashion to O’Shea, an anonymous female evacuee who described exiting the city in her grandfather’s car recalled that she was evacuated to her grandparents’ cottage in the Antrim hills where she used to spend holidays. She remembered that they would stay there from “after Easter each year and come back to the city at Hallowe’en. It was a precious place.” It is very likely that the anonymous female evacuee was a private evacuee based on the evidence that her grandfather drove her to the countryside.

On the other hand, some evacuees, including Sophia Finlay and Elsie Spotswood, stayed with distant relatives in areas they did not know very well. Sophia recalled that she “had no previous introductions to relatives around Strabane.” This did not necessarily make the experience worse, however. Sophia remembered her time in Strabane fondly and quickly adjusted to the company of her unfamiliar relations. Elsie, in contrast did not describe her distant relatives with the same warmth as Sophia. She recalled:

In April 1941, I was evacuated to Waringstown together with Jim and Margaret, cousins Dot, Sam and Lily McClintock and Roy Purdy. Aunt

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146 Sophia Finlay, “Shankill Road Evacuee at Strabane 1941-43.”
Sarah went with us. The people who boarded us were relatives of Uncle David Walker.\textsuperscript{147}

Elsie’s qualification that her hosts were relatives of her uncle, rather than herself, imply that she was probably not a blood-relation to her host family. Elsie does not say she had been to Waringstown before and the distance from her relations, makes it likely that she was not familiar with the area.

Elsie and Sophia both recall being evacuated in April 1941 after the first air attacks on Belfast. Although both remember staying with family, details regarding their transportation to the countryside make it probable that they were both government-sponsored evacuees. Sophia describes how she and her sister were “put on the train for our journey to safety” and that they “were met at Strabane station” by their relatives.\textsuperscript{148} Sophia and her sister were not accompanied by an adult family member, which makes it unlikely they were private evacuees. While Elsie does not describe her method of travel to the countryside, she does recall that she was accompanied by several other children and an aunt. Private evacuations generally involved the entire family, including multiple adults. The solitary Aunt Sarah being in charge of six children makes it more likely Elise was an accompanied, government-sponsored evacuee.

Evacuees who stayed in hostels, camps, or cottages were generally government-sponsored mothers and children. As in Britain, there was considerable opposition to

\textsuperscript{147} Elsie Spotswood, “Wartime Memories of Belfast,” WW2 People’s War, contributed 10 July, 2005, \url{http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/52/a4418552.shtml}.

\textsuperscript{148} Sophia Finlay, “Shankill Road Evacuee at Strabane 1941-43.”
evacuation from residents of the countryside who did not want to provide housing for
mothers of evacuee children. The number of people willing to house unaccompanied
children was nearly four times that of the number willing to house accompanied families.
In the 1942 billeting survey for the Magherafelt district discussed previously, there were
502 households willing to take in unaccompanied children, while only 129 were willing
to take mothers with children. The government of Northern Ireland attempted to
combat this problem through the establishment of hostels and camps for evacuees, as well
as by housing accompanied families in private cottages.

The story of billeting provided by former evacuee Eileen Wells is an excellent
example both of the reluctance of individuals to house accompanied families and of
government attempts to combat this problem. Wells and her family were evacuated from
Belfast after an air raid in which an unexploded bomb damaged their house. Wells’s
father was posted overseas in Burma, so she, her siblings, and mother were evacuated
through the government scheme to County Fermanagh. The first night, they were billeted
with a local minister, but the minister’s wife did not like having them in her house, so
they “were moved to a large store called Croziers” where they stayed for several nights.
Although Wells does not specify, it is probable that Croziers was a requisitioned as a
group home or temporary camp for evacuees. Eventually, they were moved again “to a

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149 “Billeting Survey for Magherafelt,” January 10, 1942, Londonderry Evacuees,
MPS2/2/6, PRONI.
local farm owned by people called Dickson.” This also did not last and finally they were billeted in a private cottage nearby for the rest of the duration.\textsuperscript{150}

The tumultuous story of billeting accompanied families was not unique to government evacuation. Private evacuee John Donaldson was also moved around several times. Like Eileen, John’s house was hit by a bomb during an air-raid. During the raid, John and his family had fled to the hills surrounding Belfast and they came back to find their house in ruins:

Our maternal grandmother … arranged for us to go to a farm near Newry in County Armagh, owned by a Mr. Toy. He gave us a barn to sleep … We could only take this for a few days, granny moved us to a different farm. I slept on a truckle bed, sharing a room with two brothers in their thirties … We then moved to a cottage with an earth floor in Garvaghy Lane in Portadown, County Down … We thought it was paradise, surrounded by fields on the edge of the town … Our father was working in England … Mother had refused to go because of the intense bombing in England in the early war years … After ten months of living in this primitive cottage, she decided that “if we were going to be bombed out in Ireland, we might as well be with your father in England.” In retrospect, our paradise must have been hell for her, having lost a modern house with

\textsuperscript{150} Eileen Wells, “From York Road to Ballinamallard,” WW2 People’s War, contributed 06 January, 2005, \url{http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/76/a3484776.shtml}. 
garden and indoor toilet … in February 1942 we set off on the great adventure of emigration to England.\textsuperscript{151}

The conclusion of Donaldson’s story of evacuation, involving his family’s move to England, is unique, but the difficulty of finding suitable accommodation for the entire family, despite their status as private evacuees, illustrates the larger issue of large families finding accommodation.

Another story of accompanied government evacuation can be found in the account of the Londonderry evacuee Bertie Lynch. Lynch recalled:

We were evacuated to Ballylong up near Artigarvan. Their [sic] were two families and it was like a barn. We gathered spuds. … It was decided the accommodation wasn’t suitable in Ballylong and we were sent to Strabane. It was in a Catholic school. And when we came back our Drew was able to recite the rosary right off.\textsuperscript{152}

Bertie’s memoir is harder to interpret than Eileen’s. The wording she uses makes it seem like her first accommodation was some type of group home, because she says that two families were there, but she may have just been talking about the family who owned the farm and her own. It is also possible that Bertie was not actually an accompanied

\textsuperscript{151} John Donaldson, “The Evacuees,” WW2 People’s War, contributed 26 February, 2004, \url{http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/16/a2349416.shtml}.  
\textsuperscript{152} Bertie Lynch, “Reminiscences from Derry,” WW2 People’s War, contributed 06 November, 2003, \url{http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/37/a1981037.shtml}. 
evacuee. She uses the word “we” and mentions “two families,” but perhaps she was simply referring to her and herself and her sibling as a “family.” It is also hard to know what she means by the statement: “it was a Catholic school.” Is she saying she was billeted in a Catholic school? Or did she and her sibling simply attend the school while in Strabane? If Bertie was accompanied by her mother and they were billeted in a Catholic school during their evacuation, the memoir provides another description of accompanied evacuees who were unsuccessfully billeted with strangers and then moved to a group home. Even if this is true, however, the account is still lacking in information about the group home for evacuees.

The majority of former evacuees who submitted memoirs to the BCC’s People’s War Digital Archive stayed in the single households with strangers or relatives. Of the eighteen former evacuees, ten were billeted in houses with strangers, five stayed with relatives, two ended up in rented or government-assigned private cottages, and only one may have experienced evacuation in a group home. None of the evacuees who submitted their memoirs to the Digital Archive included detailed descriptions of staying in government camps or hostels, so it is difficult to get the evacuees’ perspective on these types of billets. Government documents, however, do provide some clarity in regard to group homes for evacuees.

A summary of evacuation from September 1941 mentions that the “Slieve Donard Hotel” was being used as an evacuee hostel, accommodating “about 100 people.” The report states that “no complaints have, so far, been received from the evacuees
accommodated in this Hostel.” A summary of evacuation from November 1941 also briefly describes an unnamed hostel in Newcastle which housed ninety-four families including ninety mothers, four guardians, and 270 children, or 364 people total. The hostel was also reported to have a Nursery Centre and sick bay with qualified nursing staff to care for children under the age of five. It is probable that the unnamed hostel was the same Slieve Donard Hotel discussed in the September 1941 summary.

There are three other “hostels” referenced in government documents. Not much information is given about two of them: “the hostels at Moneyglass and Stranocum” were only mentioned in the context of medical inspections for verminous children in documents from 1942-3. The documents referring to these two hostels imply that they were for accompanied families of evacuees, but also for unaccompanied children who were transferred there when billets in the countryside were deemed unsuitable.

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155 “Slieve Donard” is the name of a historic hotel in Newcastle. I believe this to be the same hotel discussed in these documents, but cannot find evidence to confirm. The hotel’s website has a section dedicated to its history, but fails to mention whether evacuees were accommodated there during the war. I think this can be explained in one of two ways. Either that the owners of the hotel, which changed hands in the 1970s, do not know evacuees were accommodated there, or that they did not find accommodation of evacuees a worthy topic of inclusion in the brochure. It is also possible, however, that this is not the same hotel and there was a different hotel in Northern Ireland by the same name that has been destroyed since the evacuees were housed there.  
156 Letter to “Area Executive Officer, Antrim,” April 1944, MPS2/7/9, PRONI.
The summaries of evacuation that discuss the hostel at Slieve Donard also refer to a place called the “Stuart Hall Evacuee Hostel.” As of November 1941, the hostel was described as providing residence for over 300 women and children, with a Nursery Centre and a sickbay. The accommodation at Stuart Hall was in the process of being expanded so that it would have room for approximately a thousand additional evacuees.\textsuperscript{157} The earlier summary from September 1941 stated that “all the women and children housed in this Hostel are content and happy and none of them has the least desire to return to Belfast.”\textsuperscript{158}

These positive descriptions from the 1941 summaries of evacuation, however, are contradicted by two letters from Lord Charlemont, former chairman of the Stuart Hall Board, to the private secretary of the Duke and Duchess of Abercorn. Charlemont’s purpose in writing these letters was to prevent the Duke and Duchess from visiting Stuart Hall, and he is very critical of the management of the evacuee hostel. On April 1, Charlemont explained that he was the former chairman, but “resigned from this position a couple of months or so ago as we had no powers to do anything and I didn’t care to be in such a position.”\textsuperscript{159} According to Charlemont, the evacuee hostel was “financed by the Government but actually run by Mr. Goorwitch (of Castle Junction, Belfast.)” He complains that the conditions at Stuart Hall had deteriorated since his resignation and makes some anti-Semitic remarks about Mr. Goorwitch:

\textsuperscript{157} “Evacuation,” November 10, 1941, \textit{Evacuation General Policy}, MPS2/2/4, PRONI.
\textsuperscript{158} “Evacuation,” September 1941, \textit{Evacuation General Policy}, MPS2/2/4, PRONI.
\textsuperscript{159} Lord Charlemont, Letter to Henderson, April 1, 1942, GOV/3/3/85, PRONI.
I do not think conditions there are altogether satisfactory; all the re-organisation has given great offence locally for various reasons … I think it’s strange that the Government should have given such extraordinary powers to a – well, to a non-Aryan; in view of feeling about such persons themselves and also the natural idea that Ulster people are best fitted for Ulster positions, any such person would need to watch his step very carefully if he was to avoid any ill-feeling. But Mr. G. has taken no such care!¹⁶⁰

These comments raise important questions about Jewish evacuees in Northern Ireland. In Britain, Jewish evacuees were often treated very poorly due to presence of anti-Semitism in the countryside. How did this anti-Semitism impact Jewish evacuees? There are no Jewish evacuees who have written memoirs about being evacuated within Northern Ireland, and government plans to separate children based on religion do not mention the status of those with non-Christian religious affiliation, so it is very hard to determine how they were treated in Northern Ireland.

Perhaps the government of Northern Ireland specifically left Jewish evacuees out of the scheme, or perhaps the number of potential Jewish evacuees was too small to mention. The government initiative to match evacuees with suitable billets makes it likely that, if Jewish evacuees participated, there was an attempt to match them with Jewish homes in the countryside. The number of Jewish households in the Northern Irish

¹⁶⁰ Lord Charlemont, Letter to Henderson, April 1, 1942, GOV/3/3/85, PRONI.
countryside as compared to the number of Jewish evacuees is unknown, but it is probable the ratio was unbalanced. It is known, however, that there was a hostel for evacuees run by a Jewish businessman from Belfast. Was Stuart Hall created with Jewish evacuees in mind? There is no evidence to support this theory outright—no documents concerning the hall mention Jewish evacuees—but it is possible. Regardless of whether Stuart Hall was home to Jewish evacuees from Belfast, some Jewish evacuees were housed in group homes in the Northern Irish countryside. The best example of this is Ballyrolly House, in Millisle, County Down, which was the site of a Refugee Resettlement Farm for European Jews during the war.\(^{161}\) Despite the lack of concrete evidence, it is possible that other evacuee camps and hostels were created with Jewish evacuees in mind.

Lord Charlemont’s complaints about Stuart Hall, however, were not limited to Goorwitch’s status as a “non-Aryan.” Charlemont’s second letter, written two days later on April 3, was much more concerned with the finances of Stuart Hall. Charlemont discussed his dislike of government using taxpayer money to make improvements to the hostel:

> Home Affairs have put the resources of the taxpayer at the disposal of Mr. Goorwitch and he can, and does, order anything he pleases. Building

\(^{161}\) Ballyrolly was the wartime home of European Jewish children who came to the United Kingdom in the late 1930s as part of the Kindertransports. The Jewish community in Belfast was responsible for setting up the camp. This thesis will not address the Kindertransports or Ballyrolly in detail because it is primarily concerned with the Irish experience of evacuation and these evacuees were by definition European. Their story is an important one, but it is one that deserves to be told with them as the focal point. [https://wartimeni.com/location/ballyrolly-house-millisle-co-down/](https://wartimeni.com/location/ballyrolly-house-millisle-co-down/).
operations have been in progress there since last June and are not finished yet; the cost to the taxpayer must be in the tens of thousands of pounds … why should we save our money to support S.H. … they’ve never had more than 250 evacuees up to date.\textsuperscript{162}

The statement about the “250 evacuees” is interesting because it contradicts statements by government documents in previous months that there were over 300 evacuees. No records show the exact numbers of evacuees in residence at Stuart Hall, so it is difficult to say which source was accurate. It should be considered, however, that Charlemont had many negative things to say about Stuart Hall, so his bias would be to underreport the number of evacuees in residence.

In the remainder of his letter, Charlemont continued to complain about Goorwitch and gives some additional information to the story of his “retirement” from the Stuart Hall Board:

… all power has been put into the hands of Goorwitch … I and Rowley Elliot did’nt [sic] like the way in which one Lady Superintendent was dismissed at a moment’s notice and we forced G. to submit any proposal of this nature to the Board for confirmation. But from that moment we were doomed to be got rid of at the first opportunity. Since the “reoganisation” (with the disappearance of the Board) another Lady Superintendent was sacked in a similar way – I think she was treated most

\textsuperscript{162} Lord Charlemont, Letter to Henderson, April 3, 1942, GOV/3/3/85, PRONI.
shamefully in every way, and she was very good at her job. Goorwitch went round and abused her to the evacuees … much of what he said was libelous.\textsuperscript{163}

The words “we were doomed to be got rid of” are particularly intriguing. In the first letter, Charlemont implies that he retired from the board of his own volition because he was frustrated by his lack of power. The second letter, however, suggests Goorwitch had a direct influence on Charlemont’s “retirement” and perhaps even had him removed from the board. This distinction is important because it adds to Charlemont’s bias in his descriptions of Stuart Hall. In addition to his apparent anti-Semitism, Charlemont also seems to want revenge on Goorwitch for taking away his power over the running of Stuart Hall, which may explain why his descriptions are negative. His motive is also to prevent Lord and Lady Abercorn from visiting the evacuee hostel, so it is no surprise that his statements would be negative.

The government documents, of course, also have bias. They had a motive to report positive things because they were responsible for evacuation. On the other hand, it should be considered that the same document that reported positive things about Stuart Hall also mentioned the failed mass evacuation that only evacuated 20 of the 5,000 registered evacuees, so, although they are biased, they are probably more reliable than the letters. Lord Charlemont’s letters, however, are important because they show complex story behind the running of the evacuee hostels. They are also important because

\textsuperscript{163} Lord Charlemont, Letter to Henderson, April 3, 1942, GOV/3/3/85, PRONI.
Charlemont’s goal in writing the letters—preventing the visit of Lord and Lady Abercorn—was unsuccessful. In June 1942, Lady Abercorn received a letter from Mrs. Elizabeth Douglas asking, on behalf of “the Mothers of Stuart Hall,” if she “would condescend to visit our Hostel.”164 After some debate, it was decided that Lady Abercorn would visit Stuart Hall, which she did on August 25, 1942.165

There is one additional online source that provides information on Stuart Hall as a home for evacuees: the Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Community Archive. The archive published a gallery of photographs of evacuees who were housed at Stuart Hall. Alongside the photographs, is the information that Stuart Hall was “gifted to the Ministry of Home Affairs” in Spring 1941 and that “Belfast businessman Nathan Goorwitch was given the task of establishing and managing the Stuart Hall Evacuee Hostel, with the assistance of a local voluntary committee chaired by Lord Charlemont.”166 These words make the relationship of Goorwitch and Charlemont seem uncomplicated, which from the letters Charlemont wrote, we know to be false.

While the information from the Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Community Archive does not give insight into the tension between Charlemont and Goorwitch, the photographs do, however, allow a glimpse into the lives of evacuees at Stuart Hall. From these photographs, it can be ascertained that there were Nissan huts

164 Elizabeth Douglas – Chairman Mothers Committee, Letter to Her Grace the Duchess of Abercorn, June 4, 1942, GOV/3/3/85, PRONI.
165 Mrs. Haslett, Letter to Lady Turner, August 6, 1942, GOV/3/3/85, PRONI
constructed on the property, one of which served as a school room for evacuee children. Whether evacuees also slept in these huts or were actually accommodated inside Stuart Hall is unclear. These photographs even include one of the Duchess of Abercorn touring the grounds with Goorwitch.

Evacuee Camps were distinct from hostels in that they served a different purpose. Their primary purpose was to provide temporary accommodation for those awaiting billeting assignments. They were generally closer to the city, so they could serve as “rest and Dispersal Centre accommodation in the event of severe air raids.” The November 1941 summary of evacuation reports that there were several evacuee camps consisting of “huts” under construction near both Londonderry and Belfast. Documents discussing medical examinations from 1942-3 also refers to “Drummuck Camp near Broughshane.” where children were to be sent for medical examinations prior to admission to the hostels at Moneyglass and Stranocum. No real descriptions are given of these camps, but it can be ascertained that there were facilities for medical examination and treatment, as well as

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169 “Evacuation,” November 10, 1941, Evacuation General Policy, MPS2/2/4, PRONI.

170 By “huts” the report is probably referring to structures like the Nissan Huts constructed on the grounds of Stuart Hall. “Evacuation,” November 10, 1941, Evacuation General Policy, MPS2/2/4, PRONI.

171 Letter to “Area Executive Officer, Antrim,” April 1944, MPS2/7/9, PRONI.
huts that provided accommodation for evacuees in the case that it was “found necessary
to detain them in the Camp for an extended period.”¹⁷²

The two evacuation summaries of Fall 1941 also describe accommodation being provided by the government for “ditchers.” “Ditchers” were civilians who left their homes at night to escape the Blitz, but returned to the city the next morning to continue their daily lives. By the fall of 1941, “approximately 110 huts” had been constructed to accommodate “ditchers.”¹⁷³ The Ministry of Home Affairs, however, tried to discourage families from “ditching.” It was noted in a summary of evacuation that “every endeavor is being made to persuade the families who are using the ‘ditchers’ huts to be evacuated.”¹⁷⁴

John Donaldson, although a private evacuee, does briefly describe his family as having been “ditchers” prior to their evacuation. John recalled that he and his family “fled to the Divis Mountains, the hills surrounding Belfast, and spent the night in the heather watching and listening to the harbor burn.”¹⁷⁵ After the all clear, the family returned to the city. The Donaldson family’s experience of “ditching” was during one of the first air-raids, and they were evacuated to the countryside soon afterwards. John’s experience of “ditching” was very brief and he likely did not experience government

¹⁷² Letter to “Area Executive Officer, Antrim,” April 1944, MPS2/7/9, PRONI.
¹⁷³ “Evacuation,” November 10, 1941, Evacuation General Policy, MPS2/2/4, PRONI.
¹⁷⁴ “Evacuation,” November 10, 1941, Evacuation General Policy, MPS2/2/4, PRONI.
intervention. By November 1941, government surveys note that “ditching” had decreased due to the opening of the “war on the Russian front” and “lack of air-raids.” The government, however, did not know whether the Germans might resume their bombing campaign on Belfast, so they continued to proceed “with all possible speed to get the full complement of ‘ditchers’ huts erected and equipped at the earliest possible moment.”

**Conclusion:**

Despite attempts by the government of Northern Ireland to improve their evacuation plans using knowledge of problems that had occurred with the British scheme, the general experiences of evacuees in Northern Ireland and Britain were similar. What made evacuation in Northern Ireland different from that in Britain, however, was the consciousness of religion. The divide between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland was seen as so entrenched that government policies were designed specifically to prevent the two faiths from mixing. These policies permeated the experience of evacuation, causing many aspects, such as the experience of billeting, to be distinct from their British counterparts.

The religious issue made evacuations in Northern Ireland unique, but, with the exception of those who crossed the border to Éire, it was still an internal evacuation. The government of Northern Ireland paid billeting allowances to its citizens for the maintenance of evacuees. The camps and hostels that housed groups of evacuees from Belfast and Londonderry were still the same country in which they had lived previously.

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In the following chapter, I will examine a form of evacuation that was not only distinct from British evacuations, but also from evacuation within Northern Ireland: evacuation from Great Britain to Ëire and Northern Ireland.
Evacuees who traveled from Great Britain to Ireland have the most exceptional story of evacuation, especially those who took up residence in Éire. They crossed the Irish Sea from an active war zone to a country that was not only neutral, but was also considered by many to be aiding the opposing side. Even in Northern Ireland, the wartime environment was very different from Britain. As discussed previously, the precarious position of Northern Ireland—part of a belligerent nation, but geographically separated from the war—caused a relaxed and almost apathetic attitude to wartime policies, such as blackout regulations and rationing.

The evacuees themselves were also exceptional. There were two basic types of evacuees sent from Great Britain to Ireland: private evacuees and government-sponsored evacuees. The majority of private evacuees traveled across the Irish Sea in the week leading up to and shortly after the declaration of war. In September 1939, these private evacuees, or “refugees” as they were called in Éire, crowded onto ferries from Holyhead, Liverpool, and Fishguard bound for Belfast, Dun Laoghaire, and Cork. Due to Éire’s open-border policy with the United Kingdom and the sheer number of people who participated in this wave of evacuation, it is difficult to obtain accurate statistics.

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regarding private evacuees. Secondary sources describing this evacuation, however, place the number of evacuees in the thousands and claim that “more than 80 per cent of the original arrivals were Irish citizens returning home.”

Government-sponsored evacuation did not begin until late 1940, during the height of the Blitz. There were two schemes of government evacuation: one to Northern Ireland, the other to Éire. In many ways, these schemes more closely resembled private evacuation than other government-sponsored evacuations. The main difference between private and government-sponsored evacuations to Ireland was who footed the bill: for government-sponsored evacuees, it was the British government, whereas private evacuees paid their own way.

The other difference between private and government-sponsored evacuation is the amount of source material. The governments of Great Britain, Northern Ireland, and Éire kept detailed records of policy decisions and correspondence concerning government-sponsored evacuation, as well records of the evacuees who participated. In contrast, very little evidence survives about private evacuees beyond the accounts written by the evacuees themselves, and even with these, it is often unclear whether they were private or government-sponsored. For this reason, this chapter will deal primarily with the policy

178 Memorandum relating to Control of Aliens and Control of Influx of People from Great Britain, 7 October 1939, TSCH/3/S11470, National Archives of Ireland.
181 Of the seven memoirs I have found from former evacuees to Éire and Northern Ireland, only one can be confirmed as a government-sponsored evacuee: Sheila Bynner,
of government-sponsored evacuation, but will use former evacuees’ accounts to provide evidence for the experience of evacuation in Ireland more generally.

Government-sponsored evacuees can be further separated into two categories based on their destination: those who went to Northern Ireland beginning in November 1940 and those who went to Éire starting in December 1940. Evacuations to Northern Ireland and Éire differed from one another in terms of the individual experiences of evacuee: evacuees in Northern Ireland experienced a wartime atmosphere that was not present in Éire, even if it was less intense than that in Britain. In other respects, however, the policies of evacuation to Northern Ireland and Éire, however, very closely resembled one another because they were planned at the same time. For these reasons, evacuation schemes to Northern Ireland and Éire will be discussed together in this chapter.

The emphasis, however, will be placed on evacuations to Éire because it was the most exceptional of the government schemes, and the majority of the source material leads in that direction. Éire’s declaration of neutrality during the war represented a clear break with Britain and the Empire. The existence of a scheme in which the governments of Éire and Great Britain cooperated during this time thus raises many questions: Why did the British government allow citizens to evacuate to Éire? Why did Éire allow them to enter the country? Who were these evacuees? Why did they choose to evacuate to Éire rather than to the British countryside or the Commonwealth? In this chapter, I hope to

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whose memoir was discussed at the beginning of Chapter 1. Sheila’s mother’s name and address appear on a list of government evacuees from February 1940.
provide answers to some of these questions as well as provide context to them via a discussion of evacuations in Northern Ireland.

**The Call for Government-Sponsored Evacuation to Ireland**

About year after the private evacuee “war rush” in September 1940, Thomas Ward evacuated his wife Rose and their daughters Mary Patricia Irene (age four) and Bernadette Bridget (age five), from London to County Monaghan in Éire.\(^{182}\) At the time, Rose, Mary, and Bernadette were considered private evacuees because they were evacuated to Éire without government assistance. Due to Thomas’s persistent letter-writing efforts, however, the family was brought under the government evacuation scheme. Their experience of evacuation straddles the line between the two groups of evacuees: they started their time in Éire as private evacuees, but ended it under government sponsorship. The Wards’ case was an exception in terms of government evacuation to Éire, but the information provided by Thomas’s letters does give some idea of the motivations behind the establishment of the scheme.

Thomas first wrote to the Secretary of the London County Council on October 14, 1940, to inquire about travel vouchers and billeting allowances for his family. He politely explained that he could not afford to keep his family in Éire for the duration of the war. His wife quit her job in London to travel with the children to Éire, and his own income would not cover all of their expenses while evacuated.\(^{183}\) The reply came a week

\(^{182}\) Thomas Ward to the Secretary of the London County Council, 14 October 1940, EO/WAR/2/61, LMA.

\(^{183}\) Thomas Ward to the Secretary of the London County Council, 14 October 1940, EO/WAR/2/61, LMA.
later from an “Education Officer.” It stated politely that there was “no provision in the Government Scheme for the evacuation … from London to Éire,” and the government was “not able, therefore, to assist … towards the payment of board and lodging.”184

Desperate to keep his family safe, Thomas wrote again on October 23. This time, he included a newspaper clipping from the Evening News that implied the government did have a scheme of evacuation to Éire. He also referred to “notices which are posted … all over the city … relating to Evacuation of children to ‘Neutral’ areas,” which he argued should include “Neutral” Éire. Thomas even offered to borrow money to bring his family back to London to have them re-evacuated under the government scheme. In the final lines of his letter, Thomas reminded the Education Officer that his family “would not have to go there were it not for Enemy Action” and insisted that he only sent them to Éire because they were turned out of their house due to the enemy air raids.185

The Education Officer replied five days later, defensively insisting that the clippings and notices regarding Éire as being included as a government evacuation area were “a little premature.” He went on to explain to Thomas that the governments of Éire and Northern Ireland had offered to receive evacuees, but that there were “various small practical difficulties to be overcome.” He then encouraged Thomas to try to keep his family in Éire for “a little longer until an official announcement could be made.”186 The government scheme was officially set into motion in December of 1940, and two months

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184 Education Officer to Thomas Ward, 21 October 1940, EO/WAR/2/61, LMA.
185 Thomas Ward to Education Officer, 23 October 1940, EO/WAR/2/61, LMA.
186 Education Officer to Thomas Ward, 28 October 1940, EO/WAR/2/61, LMA.
later, in February of 1941, Thomas was awarded billeting allowances and travel vouchers for his wife and daughters.\textsuperscript{187}

The Ward family’s case is important for a number of reasons. First, it demonstrates a possible motive for the creation of a government evacuation scheme to Éire: desire from the British public for such a scheme. It implies that public outcry from British citizens, like Thomas, may have been a motivating factor for the creation of a government-sponsored evacuation scheme to Éire. The letter of October 23 also suggested that the press was advertising Éire as an evacuation destination. The presence of such an article, regardless of whether it was in line with government policy, implies that there was desire from not just Thomas, but others in Britain to evacuate to Éire.

The letters written by Thomas also give some insight into the identity of the evacuees who went to Éire. Thomas’s letters provide a home address and the names of his children, which hint that the Wards may have been Catholic and were probably from a higher socio-economic class than those who evacuated through government-sponsored schemes within Britain. The Ward family’s address, 38/40 Eccleston Square, Victoria, S.W.1., was in west London near Westminster and the residences of Churchill and other government officials.\textsuperscript{188} Although Thomas claims his wife as a necessary wage earner for the family, their home address was not in a typical working-class area of London. It is thus probable that Thomas and his family were different from typical working-class evacuees who participated in evacuation schemes within Britain.

\textsuperscript{187} Education Officer to Thomas Ward, 8 February 1941, EO/WAR/2/61, LMA.
\textsuperscript{188} Thomas Ward to Education Officer, 10 February 1941, EO/WAR/2/61, LMA.
In Thomas’s letter, we also learn the names of his children. Although Thomas and Rose Ward were common English names, Mary Patricia Irene and Bernadette Bridget had Catholic and possibly Irish connotations. The name Mary is attributed to a number of different saints, but most importantly in the Catholic Church to the Virgin Mary.\textsuperscript{189} Bernadette and Patricia are both feminine versions of male saints’ names. Bernadette comes from St. Bernard, while Patricia comes from St. Patrick.\textsuperscript{190} The name Bridget, however, has the most significance as the anglicized version of St. Brigid, one of the patron saints of Ireland.\textsuperscript{191} Bridget and other forms of the name “Brigid” were very popular during this time for those of Irish origins. These are only loose connections and do not establish Thomas or his family as being Irish or Catholic, but they do hint at the possibility that many of the evacuees were of Irish descent and their motivation in choosing Éire as an evacuation destination may have been based on this. Although the outcome of Ward family’s case is exceptional in that they were brought under the government scheme after having already evacuated to Éire, it is possible that their socio-economic status and religious identity were similar to others who participated in the scheme.

Finally, Thomas’ correspondence with the Education Officer gives insight into the way many evacuees may have felt about the war and why they chose Éire over the British countryside. Thomas’ letters take a tone of annoyance with the war and its disruption of

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\textsuperscript{189} “Mary,” Behind the Name, \url{https://www.behindthename.com/name/mary}.
\textsuperscript{190} “Bernadette,” Behind the Name, \url{https://www.behindthename.com/name/bernadette}; and “Patricia,” Behind the Name, \url{https://www.behindthename.com/name/patricia}.
\textsuperscript{191} “Bridget”, Behind the Name, \url{https://www.behindthename.com/name/bridget}.
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daily life. This can be seen especially in the way that he underlines the sentences explaining that his family would not left if it weren’t for the war. It is possible that he sent his family to Éire because he was disenchanted with the war. Despite this, he also displays a vague sense of the “business as usual” attitude that gave way to the myth of the Blitz, when he insists that his family only went to Éire because they were turned out of their house and that he had to remain in England to work and maintain their life there. It implies that if the bombing raid had not caused them to leave their house, they would have remained in London and carried on with their lives. It also shows that, even if Thomas was disenchanted with the war to the point of sending his children to a neutral country, he still remained in London, most likely supporting the war effort by working in a war industry job.

The government response to Thomas’ letter writing also provides some insight into the British government’s plans for evacuation to Éire. The Education Officer’s response to Thomas advising him to keep his family in Éire establishes that the British government was already working to set up the scheme of evacuation to Éire in October 1940. Letters between government officials regarding the Ward family also establish that their being brought under the government scheme after having already evacuated to Éire was an exception and not to be repeated. The specific statement that other similar cases were not to be brought under the government scheme, however, means that other families had already evacuated privately to Éire from Great Britain.

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192 D.H. Ledbetter to P.M. Middlemiss, 5 February 1941, EO/WAR/2/61, LMA.
Evacuation Policy: Circulars 2194 and 2239

Just a few months after Thomas’s letter-writing campaign began, the government-sponsored evacuation scheme to Éire and Northern Ireland was officially set into motion. On November 5, 1940, the British Ministry of Health sent a document, Circular 2194, to “all Evacuation Authorities” titled “Government Evacuation Scheme. Facilities in Northern Ireland,” outlining the rules and regulations for government-sponsored evacuation to Northern Ireland. In parentheses under the title of the document, it was stated that the circular did not apply to Éire, for which another circular would be issued “in due course.” On December 16, the Ministry of Health issued the second circular: number 2239, which outlined rules and regulations for the evacuation to Éire. The two circulars were similar in scope, as both limited the types of people who could apply to take part in the schemes. Some of the regulations were the same for Northern Ireland and Éire, while others extended only to those traveling to Éire. All of these requirements, however, were different from those imposed upon evacuees within Britain or Northern Ireland. By assessing whom the scheme excluded, we can glean information about the identity of those who did participate.

Some of the regulations that were common to both schemes included the requirement that mothers accompany their children for the duration of their evacuation and that they not travel “to and fro” between their destination and Britain.¹⁹³ The

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provision requiring mothers to accompany their children was unique to evacuation to Ireland. Since evacuees were not sent to Northern Ireland or Éire in convoys, the provision makes sense. Many of the complaints that arose from evacuations within Britain, however, were about evacuee mothers, rather than their children, so it is interesting that this provision existed. The requirement that mothers not travel back and forth between Britain and Ireland was likely put in place to prevent the Ministry of Health from getting requests for travel vouchers for multiple trips across the Irish Sea. It is also possible, however, that this was a reaction to the complications caused by mothers traveling back and forth between cities and countryside in evacuation schemes within Britain.

Both schemes also required evacuees to make their own travel and billeting arrangements, as well as to pay for their own upkeep. These were also exceptional provisions that applied only to the scheme of evacuation from Great Britain to Northern Ireland and Éire. The British government only financed evacuees in Ireland by way of billeting allowances—which were about half as much as those in Britain—and travel vouchers. In Britain, billeting allowances were much greater because they were meant to include the cost of both room and board for the evacuee. In addition to these requirements, both schemes also excluded “persons possessing German, Austrian or Italian nationality.”194

The requirement that mothers accompany their children was a major limiting factor, especially in households where the mother was also a wage earner. In order for the mother to accompany her children, evacuees had to come from a family where the mother was a necessary wage earner and could afford to travel with her children. Additionally, the family had to have enough money to maintain themselves while they were evacuated. The only assistance the government scheme promised was a billeting allowance and travel voucher. This meant the evacuees had to be able to pay for their food and other needs during their stay. Even though the government-sponsored scheme provided financial assistance, it still would have cost too much for many working-class families. These requirements make it probable that the majority of evacuees who traveled to Éire and Northern Ireland were of a higher socio-economic class than those who took part in evacuations within Britain. The case of the Ward family illustrates this: Rose Ward went with her children to Éire, but the family could not afford to stay there because she was unable to find work. For the Wards, this was an issue because they were private evacuees, also paying for their own travel costs and billeting. Once they were accepted under the government scheme, however, the Wards were able to pay for their food and clothing in Éire.

The provisions in the scheme requiring evacuees to make their own travel and billeting arrangements were the most unique and the most limiting, especially for those going to Éire. Circular 2239, the document outlining regulations for the evacuation scheme to Éire, specified that evacuees had to make arrangements to be billeted with
“relatives or friends.”\textsuperscript{195} The inclusion of the words “relatives or friends” are an important distinction. In order to qualify for the government scheme, the evacuees were literally required to have some prior connection to Éire. If evacuees stayed with family during their time in Éire, it is also probable that many of the evacuees were of Irish descent. In addition to this, the circular also forbid mothers from going to Dublin, Cork, Limerick, or Waterford, unless they could prove they were “of Irish extraction” or had “Irish husbands.”\textsuperscript{196} These two provisions, which were specific to the scheme of evacuation to Éire, made it likely the majority of those taking part in the government-sponsored evacuation were Irish or of Irish descent.

Additional documents back up this claim. A letter from L.C. Duke of the British government to Mr. Dulanty of the Office of High Commissioner states the following:

The whole evacuation scheme for Éire is in itself limited from the start to those who can make their own arrangements to be received by friends or relatives. It is further limited by the reservation that only persons of Irish extraction will be allowed to stay with friends or relatives in your four largest cities. In effect, therefore, all those who will go to Éire under the proposed arrangement will either be Irish or ill have Irish friends or relatives.\textsuperscript{197}

\textsuperscript{195} P. Bartu, Circular 2239, “Government Evacuation Scheme Facilities in Éire,” 16 December 1940, EO/WAR/2/61, LMA.
\textsuperscript{196} P. Bartu, Circular 2239, “Government Evacuation Scheme Facilities in Éire,” 16 December 1940, EO/WAR/2/61, LMA.
\textsuperscript{197} L.C. Duke, Letter to Mr. Dulanty of the Office of High Commissioner for Éire, \textit{Official Evacuees to Éire}, AST 11/27, the United Kingdom National Archives. The
Requiring evacuees to make their own travel and billeting arrangements gave those mothers evacuating to Éire and Northern Ireland added responsibility, but also, a greater deal of freedom. In allowing mothers to choose their own billets and arrange their own travel, evacuees had more control over their own experience. This relinquishing of control illustrates one of the largest divergences from evacuations in Britain: a transfer of government control and accountability. In government-sponsored evacuations in Britain, the Ministry of Health made travel arrangements and assigned billets to evacuees, but the schemes for evacuation to Ireland took this responsibility away from the British government and gave it to the mothers of evacuees, who would also become evacuees themselves. These women, possibly with the help of a husband, organized their own travel and were required to make their own billeting arrangements with friends or relatives.

The transfer of decision-making power from government officials to evacuees, particularly in the case of billeting arrangements, was both a privilege and a burden. It allowed families to have more control over their experience of evacuation, which potentially led to a more positive evacuation experience. If evacuees were able to pick their hosts, they were less likely to be housed with someone of a different religion or social class. Evacuees were supposed to have a prior relationship with their host, which

context of these statements is a discussion of which government would take responsibility over the small number of evacuees who “might lose their means of support after arriving in Éire.” Duke is trying to convince Éire’s government “to take this minority in her stride and provide for them.” Eventually the governments agree that in the case of mothers who are unable to support themselves, the government of Éire will “be refunded by the British Government by means of a periodical global payment.”
would create an easier transition. As discussed previously, however, it also limited the number and type of people who could apply for evacuation to Éire and Northern Ireland.

The policy of evacuees making their own billeting arrangements was likely born out of necessity, especially regarding the scheme of evacuation to Éire. Government arrangement of billets in Éire would have required the British and Irish governments to work together to compile lists of available billets and then assign them to evacuees. This type of cooperation with an Allied power during the war would have violated Éire’s neutrality, especially if it involved the government of Éire requiring Irish citizens to billet British evacuees.

It is also possible, however, that this change in policy was due to the British government’s other evacuation experiences. Perhaps government officials had learned a lesson from the previous internal evacuations. British evacuations that involved “assigned billets” were heavily criticized due to the incompatibility between host and evacuee, often due to differences in religion or class. The haphazard manner in which billeting officers and hosts decided upon housing for the children in their care often resulted in bad placements. Not only would giving up control of billeting arrangements have taken away the bureaucratic headaches of having to match evacuees with willing host families, but it also would have reduced the British government's culpability if things went wrong.

**Evacuee Identities: Lists and Maps of Evacuees in Éire**

Circular 2239 is not the only document that provides evidence regarding the identity of evacuees who traveled under the government scheme to Éire. There are also several files containing lists of mothers who applied to take part in the scheme. These lists include the
names, addresses, and number of children for over 2,000 mothers/applicants. Of those mothers, 1,524 were approved for evacuation. These mothers with their children total 5,330 known government-sponsored evacuees.\textsuperscript{198} Although these lists do not contain the names of all British evacuees in Éire during the war, the data provided by them helps to create a vignette of the larger picture of the scheme and even gives evidence regarding the evacuees’ identities. In particular, the addresses given make it possible to detect patterns in the origins of those who evacuated to Éire through the government scheme and provide further evidence that many of them were Irish.

In order to analyze patterns in the origins of the evacuees, I plotted the addresses of these evacuees on a map using ArcGIS digital mapping software.\textsuperscript{199} On this map, each dot is representative of a mother and her children. The historical data from the lists did not transfer perfectly to the present-day ArcGIS base map. Many of the street names listed were changed in the postwar era, houses were destroyed during the Blitz, and residential areas were turned into commercial areas. Due to these changes, it is not possible to locate every single address given on the lists of approved evacuees. But although the maps are not complete, but they are still useful as a tool for identifying clusters of evacuees from certain areas of Britain.

The data shows that, as was the case for the internal government evacuation scheme, the majority of evacuees who traveled to Éire were from larger British cities,

\textsuperscript{198} Lists of Evacuees Approved for Evacuation reviewed for Department of Justice, December 1940 – October 1941, DFA/4/202/1647, National Archives of Ireland.
\textsuperscript{199} Darby K. Ward, \textit{Evacuees from Great Britain to Éire}, Last Updated: November 27, 2018, “ArcGIS – Clemson,” \url{http://arcg.is/0O4z4a}. 
especially London, Glasgow, Liverpool, Manchester, and Birmingham. When the map is zoomed into the individual cities, however, the patterns begin to differ from internal evacuation schemes. In all of these cities, evacuees who traveled to Éire were clustered in certain areas or neighborhoods. In Birmingham, the evacuees were primarily from the south of the city, with clusters around Sparkbrook. Evacuees from Manchester were clustered around neighborhoods in Chorlton-on-Medlock, Hulme, and Salford. Liverpool, historically an area of settlement for Irish immigrants after the Great Famine, had evacuees spread throughout the center of the city, as well as clusters around Bootle, Seaforth, and Kirkdale.

The two largest groups of evacuees participating in the government evacuation scheme to Éire were from London and Glasgow: London sent 1,196 total evacuees, while Glasgow sent 1,071. It is unsurprising that London sent the most evacuees because it was the most repeatedly bombed area in Great Britain and produced the most evacuees in total. It is slightly surprising, however, that the number of evacuees sent to Éire from London only surpassed that sent from Glasgow by 125 people. Glasgow, like Liverpool, was an area where many Irish Catholic immigrants had settled in the late nineteenth century and continued to be an area of Irish migration well into the twentieth century.\footnote{Ward, \textit{Evacuees from Great Britain to Éire- Birmingham view}, Last Updated: November 27, 2018, “ArcGIS – Clemson,” \url{http://arcgis.19SGee}.} \footnote{Ward, \textit{Evacuees from Great Britain to Éire- Manchester view}, Last Updated: November 27, 2018, “ArcGIS – Clemson,” \url{http://arcgis.1CzOTj}.} \footnote{Donald M. MacRaild, \textit{The Irish Diaspora in Britain, 1750-1939} (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 44-47; Ward, \textit{Evacuees from Great Britain to Éire- Liverpool view}, Last Updated: November 27, 2018, “ArcGIS – Clemson,” \url{http://arcgis/1Xim1S}.} \footnote{MacRaild, \textit{The Irish Diaspora in Britain}, 45.}
If the majority of evacuees traveling to Éire were Irish immigrants or their descendants—which based on the evidence in the government correspondence and circulars is probably true—that would explain the close margin existing between the number of evacuees from Glasgow and London.

When plotted on a map, the clusters of evacuees from London and Glasgow show a correlation with historically Irish neighborhoods. In London, the children who took part in the government-sponsored evacuation to Éire primarily came from the western areas of the city, especially the northwest, and were much further away from the Thames. These areas of the city, such as Kilburn and Willesden, contained high populations of Irish immigrants. This is exhibited on the map below:

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204 Ward, *Evacuees from Great Britain to Éire- London view*, Last Updated: November 27, 2018, “ArcGIS – Clemson,” [http://arcg.is/1r0bev](http://arcg.is/1r0bev).

205 MacRaild, *The Irish Diaspora in Britain*, 41, 47.
A similar pattern occurred with the evacuees from Glasgow, where neighborhoods were divided along sectarian lines between Catholic and Protestant Irish. The evacuees originating in Glasgow were primarily from areas south of the River Clyde, especially from a neighborhood known as the Gorbals. This area was known for having a large population of Irish Catholic immigrants. Although the lists of approved evacuees do not denote the evacuees’ religious preference, their addresses show a correlation with Catholic neighborhoods. This is not enough evidence to prove that those who evacuated to Éire were primarily Catholic, but it certainly does make that a strong possibility.

Map 3.2 Evacuees from Great Britain to Éire – Glasgow view

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Evacuee Experiences in Éire

First-hand accounts are also an important source for discovering the identity of evacuees to Éire. In addition to Shelia Bynner, the BBC’s People’s War archive contains four other accounts by former evacuees to Éire: Patricia Riley, Peter Tiernan, Mary Fellows, and Christine Franks. These along with two formally published accounts—*Neil’s War* by Neil Murphy and *The Early Morning Light* by Edward Forde Hickey—provide additional information that enhances the information on evacuees’ identities provided by archival documents.

As stated previously, it is hard to determine whether these evacuees participated in the government evacuation scheme or were privately evacuated because the government scheme was so similar to private evacuation. Based on the dates given of their evacuations, however, Christine Franks, Patricia Riley, Neil Murphy, and Edward Forde Hickey were all private evacuees because they were evacuated prior to the establishment of the government scheme. It is impossible to say whether Peter Tiernan or Mary Fellows were private or government-sponsored evacuees because their accounts do not provide sufficient detail. Based on the evidence in her account, however, Shelia Bynner almost certainly participated in the government evacuation scheme. Shelia’s last name “Bynner” is fairly unique and can be matched with the name of a woman on the lists of approved evacuees. On the list 18 from February of 1941, there is a mother named Annie Eleanor Bynner, accompanied by two children, who resided at 73 Garden Avenue, Mitcham, Surrey. As Sheila recalls in her account that she was evacuated in February 1941, that she lived on Garden Avenue in Mitcham, and that she was accompanied by her
mother and one sister, is all but certain that Annie Eleanor Bynner was her mother and that Sheila and her sister are the two children listed.\(^{207}\)

Regardless of their status as government-sponsored or non-government-sponsored, the details from these accounts can still provide a great deal of information about the identities of evacuees who traveled to Éire. Although the government documents do not specify the religious orientation of the evacuees, the accounts do provide some clues. Shelia and Christine’s accounts both describe attending Protestant schools during their time in Éire. Shelia writes that she attended “a Protestant ‘dame’ school,” while Christine writes that she “went to the village Church of England School.”\(^{208}\) The two memoirs by Neil Murphy and Edward Forde Hickey, meanwhile, suggest they were Catholics. Neil recounts attending a Catholic school at his home in Sheffield and while on evacuation in Éire, as well as Sunday Mass at Saint Vincent’s in Cork.\(^{209}\) Edward Forde Hickey devotes an entire chapter of his book to his first mass at the Catholic church in Tipperary.\(^{210}\)

The remaining three evacuees do not specify their religious affiliation in their accounts, but the religion of Mary Fellows can be identified by details in her memoir.

\(^{207}\) “List No. 18,” Lists of Evacuees Approved for Evacuation reviewed for Department of Justice, December 1940 – October 1941, DFA/4/202/1647, National Archives of Ireland.


\(^{209}\) Neil Murphy, *Neil’s War: One boy’s story of his evacuation to Ireland at the outbreak of WWII*, (Kent, UK: RoseTintedSpecs Imprint: 2011), 29, 49, 60-64.

Fellows’ account of evacuation was recorded by a student at Saint Benedict’s Catholic High School. It also mentions that she had her “First Holy Communion,” while in Éire. Although first communion is a rite also performed in the Anglican church, it is more common in the Catholic church. The combination of these factors make it likely that Fellows was Catholic. Peter Tiernan and Patricia Riley give less information about their religious affiliations. Both, however, describe having stayed with blood relatives in Éire. Since the majority of Ireland was Catholic during this time, it is probable that they were Catholic.

If Fellows, Tiernan, and Riley were all considered to be Catholic, the ratio of religious affiliations in the evacuation from Great Britain to Éire would be five Catholic evacuees for every two Protestants. These statistics would prove that a significant majority of evacuees were Catholic and would possibly provide a motivation for their wish to evacuate to Éire. As discussed in Chapter 2, hostility experienced by Catholic evacuees was a fairly common problem with evacuations in Britain. If the majority of evacuees who wished to go to Éire were Catholic, this would give the British government good reason to create such a scheme, as it would eliminate complaints from Catholic evacuees within Britain.

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212 Tiernan specifically says that his host was his father’s brother, while Riley recalls staying with her grandmother. The two confirmed Protestant evacuees, Sheila Byrner and Christine Franks, remembered staying with family members who cannot be confirmed as blood relatives. In the case of Christine Franks, it is especially likely her hosts were not blood relatives as she describes them as her “uncle’s parents.”
Although they do not always delineate a religious preference, the accounts continue to support the argument that the majority of evacuees had familial connections to Éire. All the accounts describe evacuees who stayed with relatives. Shelia Bynner she stayed with her “Uncle Frank and Aunt Lucy in Athlone.” Patricia Riley went to stay with her “dad’s mother” in Éire because “being neutral Éire was taking in many children.” Peter Tiernan and Mary Fellows also recall having stayed with family. Tiernan claims to have stayed with his father’s brother, while Fellows said she stayed with her “Auntie.” Christine Franks’ familial connections are more distant. She recalls that she stayed “at her uncle’s parents home,” so it is possible that she was not related by blood to the people with whom she resided.

The two published memoirs also specifically confirm that one or more of the authors’ parents were recent Irish immigrants to Great Britain. In the first chapters of his memoir, Edward tells the story of his parents, who immigrated to Britain to find work in war industries. He goes on to explain that they sent him back to Éire as a newborn to stay with his maternal grandmother, who he fondly referred to as “the Dowager,” and uncle, nicknamed “Blue-eyed Jack.” Neil’s father was also an Irish immigrant to Britain, but not as recently as Edward’s parents. In his memoir, Neil recounts the story of his father’s

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213 Bynner, “An Evacuee’s Tale: Athlone, Ireland.”
flight from Ireland in 1920 when he was training as a doctor in Cork. According to Neil’s memoir, his father was forced to flee Ireland after being “arrested by Black and Tans for breaking the curfew.”218 Again the details of Neil’s story are so extreme that they call into question its truth, but even if these details are exaggerated, it is still likely his father was born in Ireland. After he was evacuated to Ireland, Neil and two of his siblings stayed in Cork with his father’s sister, “Auntie Mary.”219

Of these seven memoirs of former evacuees, six confirm a blood relative as their host during their time in Éire, and Edward Forde Hickey reveals that both of his parents were recent Irish immigrants. If we take these memoirs to be proportionally representative of British evacuees in Eire as a whole, at least six out of seven evacuees had Irish relatives. The information contained in these memoirs taken together with the requirements of Circular 2239 and the patterns identifiable in the addresses of government-sponsored evacuees strongly suggest that the majority of those who evacuated to Éire may have been Irish themselves.

The identities of evacuees to Éire were complex, however. Their accounts reveal that complexity in a way that archival documents cannot. Even if the evacuees had Irish parents or grandparents, this did not necessarily mean that they would have identified themselves as Irish. When Shelia Bynner discusses having gone to a Protestant school during her time in Éire, she also mentions having to learn Irish, which she says “as a

\[\text{218 Murphy, Neil’s War, 58-59.} \]
\[\text{219 Murphy, Neil’s War, 41.} \]
patriotic Brit” she “promptly forgot.” The attitude displayed in that statement is not that of someone who would identify themselves as Irish.

**Evacuation Ends: Termination of the Scheme and Return to Britain**

On May 7, 1941, the Ministry of Health sent out another circular, number 2194D and marked “Confidential,” which suspended “all further evacuation from Great Britain to Northern Ireland.” The circular was very brief and did not give a reason for the termination of the scheme, but, the date—the day after the fourth air-raid on Belfast—makes it likely that German bombing was the cause. It is unclear and somewhat puzzling that the government waited this long to suspend the evacuation scheme, especially considering the number of deaths caused by the air-raid of April 15-16. In addition, it is somewhat ironic that they chose to suspend evacuation after the May 5-6 air raid because that particular attack would be the last aerial bombardment of Belfast during the war.

Evacuation of British civilians to Éire was terminated in a similar fashion, but not until nearly three years later. On March 12, 1944, circular No.33/40 announced: “that further evacuation from Great Britain to Éire should be suspended.” It was also noted that husbands wishing to visit their families in Éire needed to contact the Passport and Permit Office because a travel voucher would be issued. Like the circular terminating evacuation.

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220 Bynner, “An Evacuee’s Tale: Athlone, Ireland.”
221 Of course, it should also be considered that this account was written over 60 years after the events occurred and it is possible other events in Shelia’s life may have caused her to express this sentiment.
to Northern Ireland, this circular was also marked “Confidential.”²²³ Although no reasons are given in the circular for the suspension of the evacuation scheme, a general ban on travel between Great Britain and Éire was issued on March 15, 1944, and the termination of the evacuation scheme was almost certainly an action related to the travel ban.²²⁴

Was the termination of the evacuation scheme truly necessary? The lists of government evacuees approved for evacuation to Éire end after October 1941, and there are no real clues as to why. The abrupt end of the lists of evacuees could mean that there are two and half years’ worth of lists that are missing or destroyed, but it is also possible that the number of people wishing to evacuate to Éire simply dropped off, as the London Blitz had ended in May.

The archival documents give very little clues as to how and when evacuees returned home. Evacuee accounts, however, do give some descriptions of homecomings to Britain. Mary Fellows, Christine Franks, and Neil Murphy all returned home before the war’s end. Fellows returned in 1942 because her father was sick; Franks returned in 1940, prior to the Blitz because her grandparents were unable to care for her; and Murphy returned in 1943, allegedly due to his dealings with the IRA. The other four evacuees—Patricia Riley, Peter Tiernan, Edward Forde Hickey, and Sheila Murphy—all remained in Éire for the duration of the war. Most of the evacuees who stayed until the war’s end describe a rocky adjustment to life in post-war Britain.

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²²⁴ A number of different reasons are cited for this travel ban, but the most prominent is that the ban stemmed from fears of security leaks by Irish factory workers in the lead up to D-Day. See: Wills, “That Neutral Island,” 384.
Tiernan and Hickey were both very young at the time of their evacuation, so their memories of their previous life in Britain and their parents were almost nonexistent. Both evacuees describe having to adjust to a mother they did not remember. Hickey describes his mother’s face as “achingly unwelcomed” because the “only love he’d ever known” had been from his grandmother and uncle.\textsuperscript{225} Tiernan, who returned home in 1945, also recalled that he “did not take kindly to living with a mother I could not remember, but then learnt to love all over again.” He also remembers that the other children could not understand him when he started school.\textsuperscript{226} It is probable this was due to an accent he obtained during his evacuation, but it could also be that he had learned some of the Irish language. Although his initial return to life in Britain was rough, Tiernan describes adjusting to life in Britain fairly quickly.

Sheila Bynner’s return, however, was another story. Sheila does not give a date for her return to Britain, except to say that it was after VE Day, but she does describe her adjustment to life in Britain in bittersweet terms:

Postwar Britain was an awful shock after Athlone. We could not return to our house in Mitcham because our tenant was in a wheel-chair and when the war ended the Government decided tenants should have security of tenure. Property prices had rocketed as so many houses were uninhabitable from the bomb damage, so greedy landlords were making a quick profit by putting up rents. Dad had an ailing wife and three teenage

\textsuperscript{225} Hickey, \textit{The Early Morning Light}, 363.
\textsuperscript{226} Tiernan, “Evacuated to Ireland.”
daughters but our tenant did not budge so Dad sold her our home as a sitting tenant. I never forgave her. For six years I had looked forward to going back to Mitcham where I was born. I felt uprooted.²²⁷

In the remainder of her memoir, Sheila recalls that her father took a job in Leeds and the family “settled in a rented house in an industrial suburb” where everything was in need of repair and food was in short supply. In particular, the winter of 1947 was hard for the Bynner family, as they ran out of coal. Sheila remembered her father “sneaked along the railway line at the back of the house picking up lumps which had fallen off the coal-tenders on their way to Middleton Colliery.” Five years after the war, Sheila’s mother passed away from a stroke at the age of fifty-four, but her father “lived to a good old age and never lost his edge.”²²⁸ Although the description of her return to Britain takes a negative tone, Sheila ends her account by describing it as “my tribute to my parents and to my aunt and uncle who cared for my sister and me in desperate times.”

“Irish” Evacuees in Éire:

First-hand accounts and archival documents provide information about the identities and motivations of those who evacuated to Éire during the Second World War. The lists of approved evacuees reveal that a significant percentage of those who evacuated to Éire came from Scotland, specifically Glasgow. The maps created from these lists show that the majority of evacuees were from neighborhoods with a large proportion of Irish

²²⁷ Bynner, “An Evacuee’s Tale: Athlone, Ireland.”
²²⁸ Bynner, “An Evacuee’s Tale: Athlone, Ireland.”
residents and that many of them were probably Catholic. The correspondence between evacuees and the British government convey that public outcry may have helped to bring the government-sponsored evacuation scheme to fruition. Both the letters and lists suggest that evacuees who traveled to Éire were of a higher socio-economic class than evacuees within Britain.

Éire was unique. The policy of neutrality made it seem to many evacuees like a haven from war-torn Britain. Neutrality protected it from rationing, conscription, and, for the most part, the Blitz. As Clair Wills points out, many narratives call traveling from Britain to Éire during this time as a “journey from darkness into light.” Still, the policy of neutrality represented a clear political break with Britain and its empire. Some scholars have even argued that this was the real reason why Éire declared its neutrality: to solidify independence from Great Britain and the Empire. To choose to evacuate to Éire came with circumstances that did not exist for evacuees to the British countryside or elsewhere in the Commonwealth. Understanding the identities of those who evacuated from Britain to Éire is the key to understanding their motivations in doing so. The collective memory of the Second World War is of a conflict of good versus evil. As a neutral country, Ireland’s place in that memory is precarious, and therefore the status of British citizens who fled to her shores is complex. The existence of evacuees in Éire thus points to a more varied picture of the “People’s War.

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229 Wills, That Neutral Island, 5.
230 Eunan O’Halpin, Spying on Ireland: British Intelligence and Irish Neutrality during the Second World War (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 139-142; Fisk, In Time of War, ix-xiii; and Wills, That Neutral Island, 16-18 and 54-49.
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