



# Evacuation to Canada

## How much care was really taken?

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## Introduction

During World War II, children and those at risk were taken to places of safety to protect them from bombs and war damage. Often when we think of evacuation we think of people evacuated from London to the countryside. However, this doesn't tell the whole story. Some children were evacuated to other British Dominions (countries that were part of the British Empire) such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa.

In this exercise you will find out what happened to a number of children who were evacuated to Canada. Your task is to use primary source evidence to see how much care was taken over these children. Britain was at war, so were the children just put on a ship and sent to Canada, or were their cases carefully looked after? Once they were there, were they abandoned, or were they monitored? How much care was taken? Examine the official government documents and records to find out..

## Tasks

Look at Source 1

1. This is an excerpt from a radio address given by Dr.R.C.Wallace (chairman of the National Committee for Children from Overseas).
  - a) Examine the 'author' of the source. Why is this source useful to historians studying evacuation overseas in 1940?
  - b) What is C.O.R.B.?
  - c) Looking through the source carefully, arrange the events below in the correct order:
    - Provincial authorities took charge
    - Transported to provincial clearing centres
    - Children classified, transport arranged
    - Applications received
    - Received by Department of Immigration
    - CORB. set up
    - Children placed in carefully selected homes
    - Same agencies could sort out any problems

Look at Source 2

2. Excerpt from a radio address given by Dr.R.C.Wallace.
  - a) W Apart from the British government plan, how else were children evacuated from Britain?
  - b) Why does the speaker say, "What we can do for these young people is small indeed when weighted against what their parents are doing for us"?
  - c) Why do you think this radio address was broadcast to Canadians

Look at Source 3

3. This is part of George Parr's record.

- a) How old was George when this form was completed?
- b) Where had he lived before evacuation?
- c) What had George requested?
- d) Find four things from the report that show how George is distinctive from other boys at his school.

Look at Source 4

4. This is an official memo relating to the placement of the Parr children.

- a) What is the problem?
- b) Remembering what George Parr wanted (Source 3), suggest three reasons why the 'consideration' is sensible.
- c) What is the final result?

Look at Source 5

5. These are just two of many sources relating to George Parr and his two sisters. Further evidence includes a psychiatrist report, special health survey, visitor's report on their foster home, application form from their foster parents, together with many official letters. One letter from Mr Blois (Director the Department of the Public Health Nova Scotia) to Mr Reagh (George's foster father) includes a request

- a) What do you think the large number of documents shows about the standard of care for these evacuated children?
- b) What does the request from Mr Blois show?

Look at Source 6

6. Letter from the Office of High Commisioner for the UK, Ottawa, Canada to the Director General of C.O.R.B

- a) What does the author of the letter mean by the words 'top drawer'?
- b) Why do you think the author asked that the homes should not be especially selected from the 'top drawer'?

Look at Source 7

7. This is another section from the letter seen in Source 6

- a) Why could Celia, mentioned in this source, be described as somewhat big-headed?
- b) According to this source, how good was the choice of her foster-parents?
- c) Why was the careful choice of foster-parents so important? [Try to use words from the source in your explanation]
- d) Would this case be a good example to show parents in Britain worried about evacuating their child?

Look at Source 8

8. This is more of the letter seen in source 6 and 7

- a) Where had these children come from?
- b) Find three examples of evidence to suggest that they were enjoying their foster home.
- c) Is there any evidence to suggest that their foster father (Mr Kelly) was also enjoying looking after them? Explain your answer.
- d) Look back to your answer for Source 2c. Compare the broadcast with the report in Source 8 - why would this have been unsuitable to broadcast to Canadians?

Look at Source 9

9. Near the end of the letter, the author writes, "I found it difficult to credit that these...households were not 'show pieces'". Why do you think he wrote this?

10. Using all the source evidence you have examined, together with your previous answers, write a paragraph explaining your answer to: "How much care was really taken over Canadian evacuation?"

In your answer, make sure you:

- a) Explain your opinion backed up with evidence
- b) Identify whether real care was taken - or were official forms just completed?
- c) Suggest whether this shows the whole picture - is there any suggestion that there might be different examples of care? Do you have all the evidence you need?

## Background

Soon after Hitler came to power, Britain secretly made plans for evacuation - moving infants, schoolchildren and some adults to the countryside. In September 1939, several days before war was officially declared, the plan was put into action. Many evacuees returned home by early 1940 as the expected heavy air raids hadn't taken place. With the Blitz later that same year, evacuation was soon hurriedly begun again.

The original plans were just to evacuate people to places of safety in Britain, not overseas. As the Second World War progressed and an invasion of Britain became increasingly likely, offers from British dominions and other countries were taken seriously. Many felt it would be a sensible option, meaning children and others could be kept safe, far away from the war whilst also reducing the demand for limited food and resources in Britain.

Evacuation overseas began on a small scale and those featured in this snapshot are examples of children sent to Canada. The number of evacuees sent overseas was never to reach huge proportions though. Passenger ships that had been used to

transport evacuees were soon needed for more important duties, such as movement of troops and prisoners. Once this began, any remaining passenger ships that could be used for evacuation became an even more obvious target for German U-boats.

In August 1940 the SS Volendam, carrying British children, was torpedoed, but thankfully all passengers were rescued. In September 1940, the SS City of Benares travelling from Liverpool to Canada was sunk with the loss of 77 children and over 200 adults. The British government immediately stopped the overseas evacuation scheme. In total some 3,000 children were evacuated under the government scheme, with around 10,000 evacuated privately. This was a small proportion when compared with those evacuated within Britain. Nevertheless, as this snapshot illustrates, the part played by British dominions in offering a place of safety and security for those in danger during World War II should not be overlooked.

## Teachers Notes

This lesson asks pupils to develop their understanding of evacuation beyond the basic 'sent from London to the countryside'. Through primary source analysis it examines the fate of evacuees sent to Canada. Pupils investigate the organisation and bureaucracy behind evacuation, before looking at details of individual evacuees. From this, pupils may then develop their knowledge and understanding of evacuation in general - why did Britain take so much trouble and care when the war was on? This lesson helps pupils understand the differing experiences of evacuation as well as developing their ability to use source evidence to question and challenge existing beliefs.

It is worth making note that although the record for George Parr shows he was attending the school for the blind, this was only as a temporary placement when he reached Canada, and none of the Parr children had any problems with their sight.

This lesson can form part of studies for Key Stage 1&2 Scheme of Work Unit 9 and Key Stage 3 Scheme of Work Unit 18.

### Sources

Image : Photograph of Betty, George and Doris Parr at their "foster home" in Canada - DO 131/47

Source 1 & 2 : excerpt from a radio address given by Dr.R.C.Wallace (chairman of the National Committee for Children from Overseas) on November 3rd, 1940 - DO 131/45

Source 3 : History and record of George Parr from the Department of the Public Health Nova Scotia (Canada), August 9th, 1940 - DO 131/47

Source 4 : Official memo relating to the placement of the Parr children - DO 131/47

Source 5 : excerpt from a letter from Mr.Blois (Director of the Department of Public Health Nova Scotia) to Mr. Reagh (George's foster father - DO 131/47

Sources 6 - 9 : letter from the Office of High Commisioner for the UK, Ottawa, Canada to the Director General of C.O.R.B., London, Septenmber 23rd, 1940. - Do 131/45

## Schemes of Work

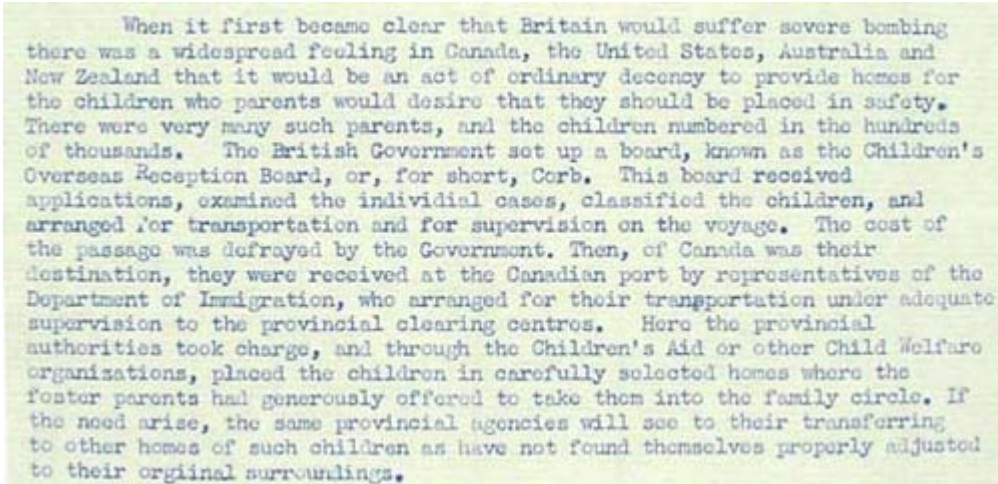
**Hot war, cold war why did the major twentieth-century conflicts affect so many people?**

Key Stage 3, Unit 18.

**What was it like for children in the Second World War?**

Key Stage 1&2 Unit 9

## Source 1 : Excerpt from a radio address given by Dr.R.C.Wallace (chairman of the National Committee for Children from Overseas) on November 3rd, 1940 (DO 131/45)



When it first became clear that Britain would suffer severe bombing there was a widespread feeling in Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand that it would be an act of ordinary decency to provide homes for the children who parents would desire that they should be placed in safety. There were very many such parents, and the children numbered in the hundreds of thousands. The British Government set up a board, known as the Children's Overseas Reception Board, or, for short, Corb. This board received applications, examined the individual cases, classified the children, and arranged for transportation and for supervision on the voyage. The cost of the passage was defrayed by the Government. Then, if Canada was their destination, they were received at the Canadian port by representatives of the Department of Immigration, who arranged for their transportation under adequate supervision to the provincial clearing centres. Here the provincial authorities took charge, and through the Children's Aid or other Child Welfare organizations, placed the children in carefully selected homes where the foster parents had generously offered to take them into the family circle. If the need arise, the same provincial agencies will see to their transferring to other homes of such children as have not found themselves properly adjusted to their original surroundings.

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## Source 2 : Excerpt from a radio address given by Dr.R.C.Wallace (DO 131/47)

Before the Government supported plan was put into operation, children were being received in Canada under purely private auspices. Parents overseas sent them to their relatives or friends here. University families received children from university families in Great Britain. So, too, the medical fraternity, the engineers, the Rotarians, and other fraternities stretched the hand of friendship across the sea.

The fortitude and confidence of the people of Britain during these weeks of constant peril will live in history. The children who are with us are the sons and daughters of the men and women who are showing a spirit which fills our hearts with pride and gratitude. What we can do for these young people is small indeed when weighed against what their parents are doing for us. That service Canada is doing with a full heart.

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## Source 3 : History and record of George Parr from the Department of the Public Health Nova Scotia (Canada), August 9th, 1940 (DO 131/47)

<p><u>SOCIAL HISTORY</u></p> <p>FAMILY</p>	<p>George was born September 16, 1928 in Middlesbrough and belongs to the Methodist Church. George lived with his parents John and Minnie Parr at 28 West Lane, Middlesbrough all his life and attended Archibald School ( GA ) before leaving England. His father was a labourer in the chemical works and he has just been working for one year, before that he was unemployed for some time. Mrs. Parr does not work to support the family. Before Mr. Parr got his new job they were on the dole. Two sisters Betty and Doris came over with George, and he is very much attached to both of them, he requested that he be placed with them or near them.</p>
<p>CHILD</p>	<p>George is red headed, over size for his age is undoubtedly of superior intelligence. The supervisors of the school for the Blind spoke of George as being one of the best mannered and most trustworthy boy in the group.</p>

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#### CHILD

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## Source 4 : Official memo relating to the placement of the Parr children (DO 131/45)

MEMO

PROBLEM: . To place the three Parr children either in one home or as close together as possible. Conductress, Miss Gowen, reports children very attractive. Children impress staff at School for the Blind and department workers. They are Methodists.

CONSIDERATION: The homes of Mr. John A. Reagh and Mr. Harold Borden Reagh at Middleton, Annapolis County, seem to offer a solution. These families were Methodists before the formation of the United Church. The report of Mr. Wood, Agent of the Children's Aid Society for Annapolis, indicates that possibly these two homes might, between them, take the three children.

ACTION: Mr. Blois telephoned to Mr. John A. Reagh and explained the situation to him fully over the 'phone. Mr. Reagh asked for time to discuss it with his brother and their wives. Later Mr. Reagh telephoned to Mr. Blois that they had decided to take the three children, Doris and Betty to go to Mr. Harold Borden Reagh and George to Mr. John A. Reagh.

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Assistant Director.

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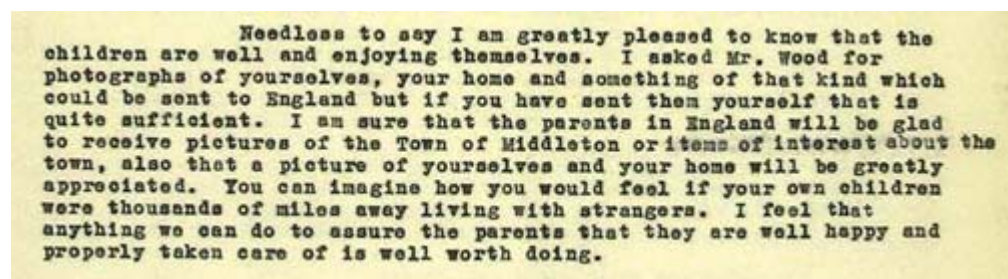
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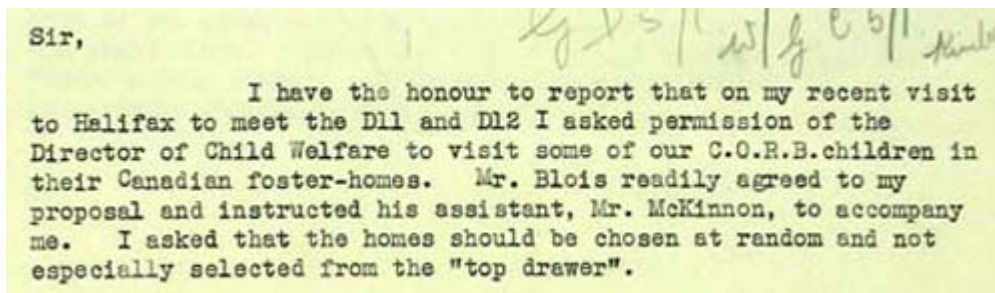


Needless to say I am greatly pleased to know that the children are well and enjoying themselves. I asked Mr. Wood for photographs of yourselves, your home and something of that kind which could be sent to England but if you have sent them yourself that is quite sufficient. I am sure that the parents in England will be glad to receive pictures of the Town of Middleton or items of interest about the town, also that a picture of yourselves and your home will be greatly appreciated. You can imagine how you would feel if your own children were thousands of miles away living with strangers. I feel that anything we can do to assure the parents that they are well happy and properly taken care of is well worth doing.

## Source 5 : Transcript of Excerpt from a letter from Mr. Blois (Director of the Department of Public Health Nova Scotia) to Mr. Reagh (George's foster father) (DO 131/47)

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## Source 6 : Letter from the Office of High Commissioner for the UK, Ottawa, Canada to the Director General of C.O.R.B., London, September 23rd, 1940 (DO 131/45)



Sir,

I have the honour to report that on my recent visit to Halifax to meet the D11 and D12 I asked permission of the Director of Child Welfare to visit some of our C.O.R.B. children in their Canadian foster-homes. Mr. Blois readily agreed to my proposal and instructed his assistant, Mr. McKinnon, to accompany me. I asked that the homes should be chosen at random and not especially selected from the "top drawer".

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## Source 7 : A later extract from the same letter seen in Source 6 (DO 131/45)

clearly indicated, throughout the interview, that in her opinion the Dominion was exceedingly fortunate to have been given the privilege of entertaining her. Notwithstanding her aggressive and somewhat challenging manner and her overweening conceit it was obvious that, handled with tact and understanding, she might have a brilliant future ahead of her. It was equally apparent that in the wrong atmosphere she would prove fractious and be a source of constant trouble and anxiety. After considerable cogitation, Mr. Blois placed Celia with a wealthy printer, Mr. Ross, a rugged, large-hearted man, with a bluff and commanding manner. The experiment has been entirely successful and it was obvious, from my conversation with the child, that she is happy and contented and on affectionate terms with her foster-parents. Mr. Ross has sent her to a private school where she is making good progress. Celia wants to be a trained nurse and I understand that Mr. Ross will provide the necessary training should she remain in the Dominion long enough.

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## Source 8 : Further examples of C.O.R.B. children from the same letter seen in Sources 6 & 7 (DO 131/45)

They had apparently come from a somewhat poor home in Middlesborough and had been placed with the Editor of the "Halifax Herald", one of the two leading newspapers of the town.

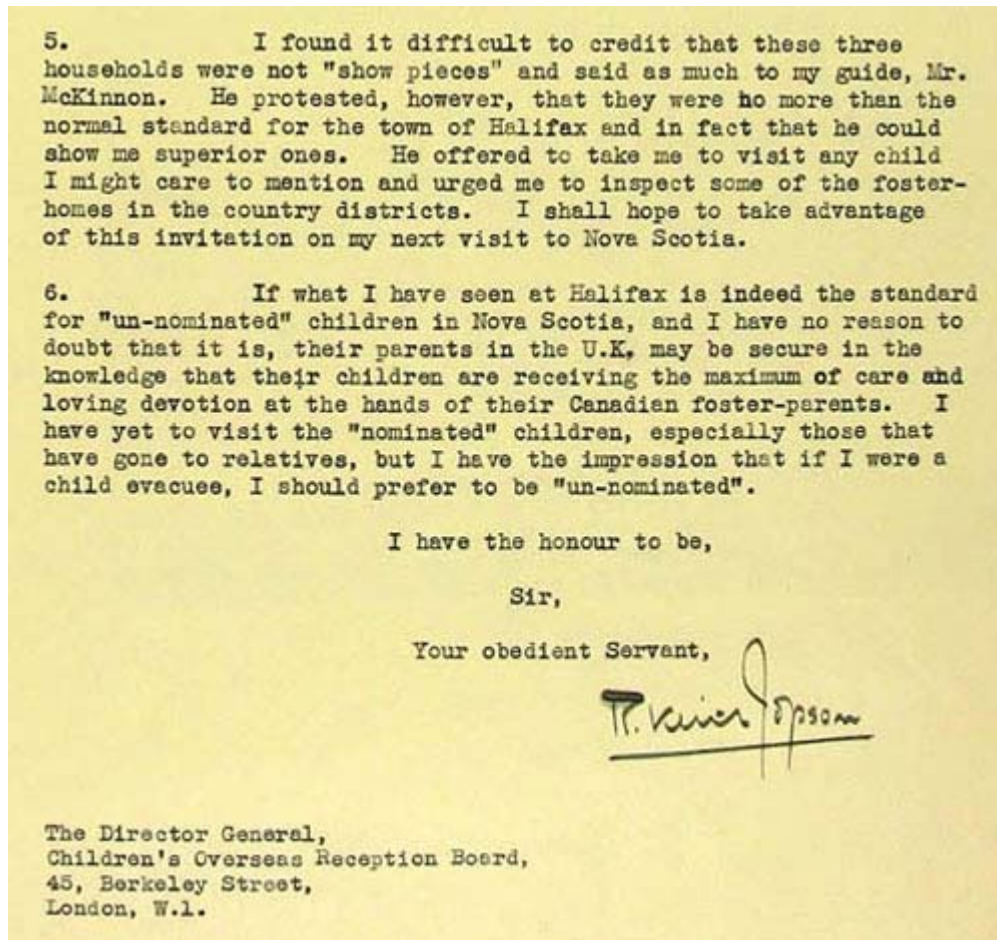
They had each put on more than ten pounds in weight, were charmingly dressed, and had so absorbed the Canadian atmosphere as to be indistinguishable from Canadian children. Their Canadian accent was so marked that I would not have believed them to be English. I had the strong impression that these children would never want to return to the United Kingdom: they were frank in their admission that their Middlesborough home had been very different. They were intelligent children and Mr. Kelly showed me, with parental pride, the youngest child's exercise books which showed that she had been consistently awarded full marks at the local "public" school. Both the Ross and Kelly households were in the suburbs of Halifax, ideally situated on the North Arm of the harbour with lawns running down to the water and an attractive prospect of woods, waterways and yacht clubs. These homes might be described in England as "upper middle class". They were extremely comfortable and expensively furnished, though with a lack of taste that appears to be universal in this Dominion.

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## Source 9 : Excerpt from letter seen in Sources 6-8 (DO 131/45)



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5. I found it difficult to credit that these three households were not "show pieces" and said as much to my guide, Mr. McKinnon. He protested, however, that they were no more than the normal standard for the town of Halifax and in fact that he could show me superior ones. He offered to take me to visit any child I might care to mention and urged me to inspect some of the foster-homes in the country districts. I shall hope to take advantage of this invitation on my next visit to Nova Scotia.

6. If what I have seen at Halifax is indeed the standard for "un-nominated" children in Nova Scotia, and I have no reason to doubt that it is, their parents in the U.K. may be secure in the knowledge that their children are receiving the maximum of care and loving devotion at the hands of their Canadian foster-parents. I have yet to visit the "nominated" children, especially those that have gone to relatives, but I have the impression that if I were a child evacuee, I should prefer to be "un-nominated".

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

R.Keith Jopson

The Director General,

Children's Overseas Reception Board,

45 Berkley Street,

London, W1