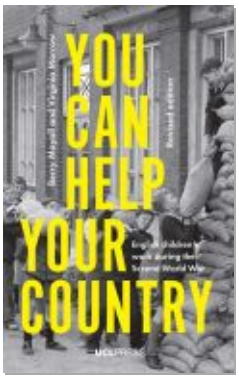
5. Younger children's work: Doing their bit



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5

Younger children's work: Doing their bit

In this chapter, we move on from our exploration in Chapter 4 of how children were encouraged to participate in the war effort to considering the extent to which they were aware of the war and what factors made them aware. Then we go on to consider children's activities towards the war effort. We draw mainly on school histories and on our interviews in order to describe these activities, both at school and outside school. Of course, the histories and interviews record mixed experiences during the war, with some children (whether evacuated or not) unhappy and overworked; others enjoyed themselves and felt valued.[1] Perhaps we should repeat that our emphasis is on what they did, on how they evaluated their contributions and on adult expectations that they would contribute.

School histories of all types tell us about war-work carried out by children aged 5–18, both what children did towards the war effort at school and what teachers organised. Our interviewees also drew somewhat on school efforts, but mainly on the work that they did in their own time, out of school hours. Some did not recall – or mention – any school-organised war efforts. In the section of this chapter detailing the kinds of work that children did, we draw mainly on elementary schools (5–14), as well as on interviews with people who were younger children during wartime. In Chapter 6 we deal with work in agriculture and other farm work, and in Chapter 7 we give separate attention to schools for older children, including boarding schools, because children there carried out work and had experiences that were specific to older children and to those attending private schools.

Children's awareness of the war

What did children know about the war and about their possible contributions to the war effort? They had a number of sources of information, and they varied in how far the war impinged on their consciousness and on their activities.

Firstly, some children, both working class and middle class, had direct contact with the war – both in cities and in rural areas. They sheltered from bombing, they saw enemy action, dogfights, bomb sites, fires, troop movements in the area and armed forces' camps. Many children had relatives fighting in the war. Asked whether adults shielded her from knowledge of the war, Susan Sawtell (aged 7 in 1939) said:

> No way could we be shielded. It was terrifying – we were in the cold damp shelter. And the whole ground shook. It was frightening . . . And people's brothers were being killed. The headmistress would send for them and tell them. No, I was very conscious of it, no way was I being protected.

Others had little knowledge of the war, or were preoccupied with other things. Roy Hattersley (aged 6 in 1939), for instance, writes mainly about family; school; football; cricket; and, later on, the Labour Party (Hattersley, 1983). Roger Sawtell (aged 12 in 1939) – who still has his wartime diaries – notes that, though he did fire watching at his boarding school and 'went to see a bomb crater':

> I have to say, looking at this diary, the war was not an important part of school life at all. Games were far more important. And unlike Susan [his wife] I don't recall being aware of what was happening.

Secondly, as we noted in Chapter 4, there was considerable encouragement from government departments. Schools were inundated with leaflets urging teachers and children to get involved – in salvage, savings, gardening. Many schools equipped themselves with radios, and some with a film projector and, for instance, showed a documentary or propaganda film each week. At Tedburn St Mary School (elementary) in Devon, the school history notes that anyone who was a child there during the war 'was almost made to feel that Tedburn School was the nerve-centre of Allied operations' because the headteacher involved everyone in implementing the urgent suggestions coming down from

government. Thus, among other national campaigns, four official 'weeks' were designated for specific fundraising drives: Wings for Victory Week, Salute the Soldier Week, War Weapons Week and Warship Week. In the 'Books for the Navy' scheme (organised by the Royal Naval War Libraries), people were urged to collect and donate unwanted books for distribution to the armed forces.

In May 1940, Lord Beaverbrook, the newspaper tycoon, was appointed by Churchill as Minister of Aircraft Production. As owner of the *Daily Express*, the *Sunday Express* and the London *Evening Standard* newspapers, he was able to campaign effectively for funds to build more planes – notably, Spitfires and Hurricanes (Gardiner, 2005: 304–12; Anderson, 2008: 80). Towns and villages, including their schools, worked together for 'Spitfire Funds' (publicity suggested that a Spitfire cost £5,000, although actually it cost considerably more) (Gardiner, 2005: 308–11). The Dig for Victory campaign was boosted by leaflets – at least 24 – issued by the Ministry of Agriculture, and these were listed in the BBC's schools-broadcasting programme notes on gardening.[2] As we noted (Chapter 4) the BBC schools-broadcasting service also ran a five-minute news bulletin every morning from September 1941 – Monday to Friday, including during the school holidays.

Thirdly, many charities asked for funds, including some charities linked to government efforts – for instance, the Women's Land Army Benevolent Fund, Mrs Churchill's Fund for Russia, the Red Cross, the Aid to China Fund, the Waifs and Strays Society, Earl Haig's Poppy Day (History of Badsey Schools, Evesham). Under the auspices of the British Ship Adoption Scheme, several schools 'adopted' a boat and sent goods (scarves, socks) to the men; in turn, men visited the schools and described their experiences. For example, at Barrow Grammar School, Barrow-in-Furness, Lancashire (now Cumbria):

> In 1943, Lower IVa adopted a motor launch and this example was taken by the whole school in 1944 when it adopted the submarine 'Upshot'. In July the crew and its commander, Lieutenant Wilkinson, an Old Boy, visited School to meet the boys in the classrooms and to present the White Ensign to the School. In return a Bible and School crest were presented to the captain on the School's behalf and a Jolly Roger by Unwin, the youngest pupil . . . A regular flow of comforts to the crew continued to link the boat to its adopted parents. (p. 114)[3]

Fourthly, some schools encouraged children's knowledge and enthusiasm, in a variety of ways. Schools, both state and private, fostered patriotism and awareness of world events through remembrances on Armistice Day, when children might process to the nearest war memorial with a wreath. The logbook of St Mary and St Giles Church of England Senior School at Stony Stratford, Buckinghamshire describes Empire Day in 1940:

> The Union Jack was flown and the first part of the Scripture period took the following form: Morning Prayers by Rev. E.A. Steer, singing of the Hymn 'O God our Help in Ages Past', reading of Viscount Bladuskie's message followed by a short address by Headmaster on the difference between Empire Day this year compared with Empire Day in 1939 when the King and Queen were visiting Canada, special prayers for the forces and the people were then offered by the Rev. E.J. Payne and the short service ended with the singing of the National Anthem. (p. 12)

As victory began to look probable, schools, especially those for older children, took a keen interest in the conduct of the war. Thus, at Terra Nova School, a private boys' boarding school in Cheshire, an 'old boy' recalled that every day

> from D-Day in 1944, the school gathered at 1.00 p.m. in Room 1 to listen to the BBC wireless news and the progress of the Allies across Normandy: Arromanches, Caen, Argentan, Falaise and then on. He recalls the celebratory school bonfire on VE-Day in 1945 and again on the fifth of November that year. (p. 98)

At Barrow Grammar School 'wall-magazines went up on the walls of some rooms with illustrations, articles and cuttings to keep the boys informed about the progress of the war' (p. 111). And at the School of St Clare, Penzance, in July 1943 'the noted authoress Phyllis Bottome spoke on the subject of persecution of minorities in Nazi-occupied countries' (p. 43).

Growing up in a Lancashire orphanage and attending Darwen Grammar School, Philip Oakes recounts the boys' reliance on an enthusiastic schoolteacher, Mr Buller, for news:

> His bulletins on the progress of the war, who was fighting whom and where, the numbers of casualties and the tally of tanks and planes destroyed were like chapters in a novel which became more

> fantastic day by day. In a sense it was Mr Buller's war. We saw no newspapers and only rarely were we allowed to listen to the radio [i.e. at the orphanage]. Mr Buller told us what was happening; more than that, he interpreted events and described personalities so enthusiastically that they seemed to be his own creation. (Oakes, 1983: 224)

Similarly, Susan Sawtell describes her teacher's initiatives at a private boarding school, near Derby:

> She put up maps and told us what was happening . . . She liked me because I was interested. She would talk to me about it. We would sit, we had meals at the table and we had to make proper conversation so we talked about it. And there were quite a lot of Jewish girls in the school and of course they were – and that was the other thing I was so aware of, you know – they had relatives and news was beginning to filter out [about the concentration camps].

Some parents encouraged children to follow the course of the war, using maps and conversation; other parents, according to our interviewees, didn't talk about the war – perhaps to protect their children from harsh news. However, messages were mixed and some children had means of finding out, as Teresa Letts (aged 9 in 1939) explained. She had moved with her family from Bermondsey, London, to stay with relatives in Kent:

> Interviewer: Did you know anything about the war?
> TL: Oh, I knew. I read the papers. Listened in. I had big ears. We listened to the radio and Lord Haw-Haw [the nickname of William Brooke Joyce, a US-born Nazi propaganda broadcaster to the UK].
> Interviewer: Did they [your parents] talk about what was happening?
> TL: No, never. My father used to turn the radio off. But we expected to be invaded. There were the butterfly bombs that came and rested on all the trees. And the army was billeted just round the corner . . . and we used to have the tanks rolling by the door. Father would explain to me and bring out a map. And uncles sent letters from abroad, from Alamein. We had several relatives in the war.

Fifthly, as we noted in Chapter 4, newsreels and propaganda documentaries were part of cinema programmes. And documentary films were

sent round to schools. For instance, at Stoke Poges village school, near Slough:

> [a] film projector was provided for the school and film shows regularly held, showing Ministry of Information documentaries, of which there were many during the war. These films were designed not only to give instruction to the populace but also to boost morale in the dark days of the War. (pp. 23–4)

At Tedburn Elementary School, Devon, the history notes that the enterprising headteacher

> saw to it that Tedburn was in at the beginning with a school wireless fitted and operating on 21st October 1939, quickly followed by a film projector in January 1940. The weekly film became a fixed feature of the timetable. [And] the whole world came into the village school and the horizons of the children were lifted far beyond the hills of Dartmoor. Every detail of the progress of the war through Europe, North Africa and the Far East was followed. (p. 10)

Finally we note that weekly magazines for children carried stories of patriotic daring, including the serialised stories of Biggles (the fictional air ace immortalised by ex-pilot and author W.E. Johns) and, from 1940, his female counterpart, Worrals (an initiative suggested by the Air Ministry as part of the WAAF [Women's Auxiliary Air Force] recruiting drive) (Cadogan and Craig, 1978: 230). These magazines (including *The Beano*, discussed in Chapter 4) also carried features urging children to do their bit, by, for instance, collecting salvage (ibid.: 230). Many wartime novels for children focused on two topics: evacuation (both positive and negative accounts) and German spies, with children active in catching them (ibid.: 223).

We are not, of course, saying that awareness simply caused children to work for the common good. As already indicated, for some children the war was a sideshow to their more interesting pursuits. But some kinds of work were already in place before the war. Thus, as well as domestic work at home and locally, children in the 1930s were involved in savings schemes for charities such as Barnardo's, Save the Children, Poppy Day, and Waifs and Strays. The British Ship Adoption Scheme was established by 1935, when St Clement Danes Grammar School, London adopted a tramp steamer (p. 97). However, it does seem that encouragement – and,

in some cases, pressure – came from many sides, and perhaps built up a momentum that provided a social and moral context for increased contributions by children, alongside adults.

Further, children's awareness was influenced by where they lived and by their experiences. It was also mediated by parental and teacher views on how childhood should be lived, and what they should know. Perhaps most interesting is that government, through a range of measures, encouraged children's participation (see also Chapter 4). One justification for this could be that since many children knew there was a war on, it was better that they should be encouraged to help rather than allowed simply to live in fear. Another reason must have been the potential of schools and of communities, including children, to contribute.

Children carried out varied work

In this section, we focus mainly on younger children, and especially on those who attended state elementary schools. This focus means that we are including working-class children, who in their daily lives would be accustomed to helping out at home and working outside of school hours. A common theme in interviewees' accounts of the war years was that work by children was a typical component of childhood, and that it provided an unquestioned basis for war-work. One interviewee, Audrey Balsdon, speaks for many: 'Work has always been part of childhood and anything we did in the War was just a continuation of what was expected of children.' Data from individual interviews, from written memories and from school histories indicates that children's work typically included more than one type of labour. However, it is important to note that children's contributions were (of course) slighter than those of adults. This point was made by several people who wrote in response to a radio programme on children's war-work presented by Richard Moore-Colyer in 2004.[4]

The history of Walkington Elementary School, Kent shows that a wide range of activities took place:

> As in the First World War, the school played a full part in the war effort. A jumble sale raised £40 to help pay for a Spitfire; a sale for Red Cross funds raised 50 guineas; a collection held on the last celebration of Empire Day (1940) raised £19.4s.5d for the Overseas League Tobacco Fund. Old books were collected for

> salvage, and nettles, horse chestnuts, and rose hips were gathered. A school garden – complete with bees and hives – was cultivated as part of the 'Dig for Victory' campaign, and showed a profit of five guineas on the first year's curriculum. Gardening was to become an important part of the wartime curriculum. A week's holiday was given in October to allow children to help the farmers to pick potatoes; this practice continued until 1954. The older boys were allowed to help on farms at other times during the year; in May 1942, for example, 'all the boys in the senior class are helping Mr Dove with potato planting'. (p. 35)

Gillian (aged 5 in 1939) made a list of war-related activities in advance of our interview:

> We picked rosehips and Mummy took them to the town hall for 1d a pint. My sister and I picked stones out of the vegetable garden and we got 1d a bucket for that. We collected silver paper – was it to build aeroplanes? – maybe not! We knitted squares to be sewn together to make blankets . . . Oh, yes and there was Dig for Victory – I remember the posters. We had parsnips, I connected parsnips with the Germans! Maybe someone took me into the garden and said this is one way to beat the Germans! And we grew broccoli, Brussels sprouts, kale – things that would stand through the winter.

The logbook of Boughton Monchelsea School (elementary), Kent demonstrates a range of activities over three years:

> 1939
> Dec. 23 During the week a carol party of native children and evacuated children collected £6.11.5d for a wool fund – girls to make knitted comforts for men serving in the forces.
>
> 1940
> May 24 Empire Day celebrated in the morning by a short service. 35/- was collected for the Overseas League Tobacco Fund.
>
> 1941
> Jan 15 From to-day the keeping of poultry will form part of the practical training of the older children. Miss Joan Clark has presented the school with six Light Sussex pullets. The house will be bought from garden fund.

Jan 30 Mr Voysey called to discuss pig keeping.
May 19 Mr Gaynor (Plant Protection Co.) gave a demonstration to the top class on the application of fertilizers and pest control.
Nov 22 Two chickens stolen during Friday night.

1942
Mar 20 Miss Smith, the vicar, Gen. R. Style and Capt. Crombie R.N. visited to see School display of warships made by the children.
Dec 23 at 11.45 a.m., the School assembled to present Mrs B.B. Jolly (Red Cross) with the money received for the collection of 14 cwt waste paper and 15/- from an afternoon concert. The money she had received she was sending to the Prisoner of War Fund.

And so on, through the war years. The 'knitted comforts' referred to above (see also Figure 5.1, next page) are helpfully described in the history of Stoke Poges village school, which quotes from the *Slough Observer* (March 1940):

> The boys and girls of Stoke Poges are doing their bit, knitting for the forces. They have completed three flying jerseys, two balaclava helmets, one scarf (made by a boy), mittens and gloves, four pairs of amulets, three pairs of sea stockings and socks. The whole school helps in the work. To start with, wool and knitting needles were bought out of school funds and every child contributes a half-penny per week to keep supplies going. (p. 24)

Similarly, another logbook lists a range of activities at Amberley Parochial School, Minchinhampton:

> Empire Day – collection from the children; children gave a concert to raise funds for local soldiers' comfort funds; children planted potatoes; War Weapons Week – children bought £82.10s savings certificates and stamps; blackberrying trips for the communal kitchen; Armistice Day – children to war memorial with wreath; hip picking [rose hips] – 5 stones of hips; 1 cwt of horse chestnuts collected and sent to Middlesex HQ; potato picking; children gave concert – £95.11.0 raised for Savings Campaign; collection of books for Salvage Books campaign. (pp. 111–14)

Some elementary-school histories note competition between war-work and schoolwork, though this is a topic of particular concern among

Figure 5.1: *Knitting for the RAF*. Cover of a book of knitting instructions, depicting people of all ages contributing. Source: Mary Evans Picture Library

historians of schools for older children (see Chapter 7). But for any school, priorities could be sharpened when disaster struck. The history of Wisborough Green School (elementary), Sussex records the death by bombing of 29 boys and two teachers at a nearby school in 1942, and the next paragraph reads:

> As the war progressed, practical activities became more important than lessons and children were sent out to gather wool from fences and hedges or pick blackberries or work in the school vegetable garden. (p. 31)

The realities of the war affected schools' activities and children's consciousness. At Wittersham Church of England School (elementary), Kent, this point is graphically made:

> As in 1914–18 the school carried on its daily work as best it could; the pupils raised money for wartime causes – for National Savings and for Wings for Victory – they heard lecturers on such topics as the navy's defence of wartime convoys, they suffered the daily discomforts of blackout of the village, of rationing and shortages of fuel and food, they listened to neighbours' news of prisoners of war and casualties, and they learned to share their lives to some extent with the city children who had come to stay in their homes and school. (p. 18)

Kinds of work that children carried out

In this section, we focus on the five main topics described by our younger interviewees and in the elementary school histories. These are: (1) gardening and food production; (2) household and domestic work; (3) savings; (4) salvage; and (5) paid work. These are types of work that could be carried out by younger school-age children, as well as older ones.

Gardening and food production

As noted above (see also Chapter 4), government departments encouraged people – including children – to grow food. In September 1939, the first of the Board of Education's 'The Schools in Wartime' memoranda urged teachers to 'look round for a suitable piece of land and open up informal consultations at once with the owner or occupier'. This might be a garden or allotment owned by people whose war-work hampered their ability to grow food. It also included school grounds. Recipes were published in newspapers and booklets issued by the government. Thus, *Food Facts for the Kitchen Front* (Ministry of Food, 1941) is notable for its emphasis on the many ways in which vegetables could be prepared, using methods that minimised loss of nutritional value and using a minimum of (rationed) fat. BBC schools broadcasts covered gardening from January 1940. Later in the war, a White Paper, 'Statistics related to the War Effort of the UK' (1943–4), noted:

> An intensive drive has also been made to encourage production in private gardens and allotments in the Dig for Victory campaign. The number of allotments has increased from about 800,000 before the war to about 1.5 million in 1943 and there has been a large increase

> in the garden area devoted to vegetable production, with the result that private gardeners have themselves produced a substantial proportion of the vegetables essential for the maintenance of health and working efficiency.[5]

Work to increase the food supply got under way quickly. For instance, at Tackley School, Oxfordshire, school records show:

> In April 1940 six boys worked to prepare the new school garden and plant seeds. In May Mr Bevan, a horticultural instructor, called and gave advice on the new garden, brought some tools and promised cabbage plants. (p. 59)

Some adults remember the satisfaction they felt at what they had done as schoolchildren:

> Growing food was the one way they would let us help; they turned our school playing fields into allotments. Unfortunately, it had recently been laid down on a levelled corporation rubbish tip. Once the turf was lifted, we found ourselves trying to plant cabbages, carrots, and potatoes in soil composed of rusted tin cans, kipper bones and brown-edged copies of the Daily Express. I stole a lot of my dad's bone-meal – planted vegetables into solid pits of bone-meal. Everything grew amazingly well . . . the family enjoyed everything. Dad never found out where his bone-meal had gone. (Anon., quoted in Westall, 1985: 151)

At Beaudesert School (elementary), Leighton Buzzard:

> In 1943 the needs of a country supplied with much of its food from abroad were placed before the normal timetable of the school and many boys spent much of their time working on local farms and in the school gardens. Vegetables were supplied to the School Dinner Centre and in September an entry in the Logbook declared that 'the gardens must be the chief concern for this week and the next'. Altogether there were a total of 420 absences recorded in the first two months of the Autumn term as a result of agricultural employment. (p. 76)

Gardening at home featured in many interviewees' accounts, as we have noted. Some families had allotments in the cities. Frank Chappell (aged 4 in 1939) notes:

> We had an allotment in London (Peckham). My father was a great gardener, he kept chickens too. And I had a patch on the allotment to garden. And we did a bit of gardening at school.

And others, notably in the countryside, intensified the cultivation of the land. Joan Barraclough (aged 6 in 1939) remembers that her family moved to a house with an acre of land in a Berkshire village:

> My mother's aim was to make us as self-sufficient as possible. We were too small to be of much use in all this but we knew we had to help: planting vegetable seeds, weeding, picking fruit, feeding hens, coating the eggs with waterglass to preserve them and collecting sack-loads of dandelions, cow parsley and other tasty morsels from the hedgerows for the rabbits housed in hutches in the barn.

And evacuees, billeted on farms, took part in farm work. This work has led to comments that children were exploited by farmers, and such exploitation has indeed been documented (e.g. Starns and Parsons, 2002). However, some memories are of positive experiences – such as this one from a boy billeted on farms and writing his memories in the Leedstown School, Cornwall (elementary) history:

> Again, I was well looked after and learned to help with the milking and ploughing, and various farm activities . . . I often travelled with Mr P on his horse and wagon to deliver his farm produce. The horses were named Bob and Girlie. (p. 62)

Household/domestic work

Helping at home was an established custom for the majority of children; and during the war years, as mothers and fathers were called up to war-related duties, children took on more of the tasks of running the home. This substitution work could be especially important when working-class families were running a business at home. One interviewee, Joyce Bateman, found herself, aged 10, in charge of the family smallholding in County Durham because both parents were called up to full-time work – her mother on shift work at an ordnance factory and her father in farm work. Her elder sister also had to work at a factory and her elder brother was in the Royal Air Force (RAF). At home, they had no electricity, no gas and no running water. So she had to collect water from a pump:

> I had to feed the hens and pigs and see to the greenhouse, dig up potatoes for dinner and then peel or scrape them, set the table and then rush off to school, often racing back at lunchtime to finish the chores I might have forgotten in the morning. Depending on what time Mam was working, the chores varied from week to week. From peeling pickling onions to shredding red cabbage or vegs for piccalilli . . . Saturday morning was black-lead the fire-range and clean the brass fender and all the other brass things from the hearth. Then there were 26 steps to swill down, scrub the big bench in the back yard – it had to be kept spotless as this was where we chopped up pork, skinned rabbits and hares and plucked pheasants etc.

This is only part of her account of jobs, and she goes on to say that she was both lonely and frightened:

> The worst part was night . . . Having to light the lamps after pushing the board up to stop light escaping – then I would sit in a corner on the settee and listen for someone to come. I hated it. No-one seemed to have time to spend with me but hey! Everyone was worried and busy and I didn't expect a fuss. Mind you I never got one.

An important task for girls at home was caring for younger siblings. However, many interviewees experienced this as an unquestioned task in families, so they often did not mention it unless we asked whether they undertook childcare. During the war years, girls were increasingly kept at home to care for children as well as to do household work, as is shown by records of school attendance (Titmuss, 1976: 415–18, Gosden, 1976: 68). When mothers as well as fathers were working out of the home, someone had to care for babies and for ill children; run errands; deal with the rent collector or insurance man; queue at the shops for food; and do the cooking, washing and cleaning.

Joy Ewer was aged 9 in 1939. The family moved around in accordance with her father's peripatetic work, building air-raid shelters. Her mother was often depressed:

> On and off during the war I looked after my brother, because she was depressed. And my father would pick up children from where we [had] lived, cousins, relatives and bring them to wherever we were living. So there would be several children. And we older cousins would look after the baby cousins and I remember on

> one occasion we had twin boys, my brother and another boy of similar age, and we used to push them around in a double pram, full of pee . . . It was the norm, I think and my mother would have expected it . . . Absolutely normal. You had no choice. Sometimes I'd get out on my own. Which I did as often as I could and I'd hide in a corner of a field and read.

Another interviewee, Elizabeth, was the eldest of nine children, living on a farm and aged 11 in 1939. She did domestic work, farm work and childcare. She said, of her young brother:

> He wouldn't go to school unless I took him. We were very close. [And before school, on the farm where she lived] very often I would clean the grates for lighting fires, clearing the ashes, and then tidying up before going. And if there was time I might have to milk a few cows before going.

An important kind of childcare was helping evacuees to settle in and make the best of local life. For instance, John (aged 8 in 1939) told of a succession of evacuees coming to live with the family in Cambridge:

> We got them into the Scouts as well. They joined the Scouts and joined in where they could. So we did help out there. We made them welcome. They went to school as well, got integrated into school.

At their elementary schools too, children engaged in domestic work. The rapid expansion of the school-meals service during the war was built up with the minimum of staff. So children helped with the preparation, serving and clearing of meals (Dent, 1944a: 160).

Savings

Schools worked at many ways of making money – putting on shows and making things to sell at fetes. Over 90 per cent of schools had savings schemes and it was reported that by March 1942, schools had contributed £23,500,000 in savings (Gosden, 1976: 85). During the 1943 Wings for Victory campaign, schools had been set a target of £3 million but actually raised over £10 million (Dent, 1944a: 160). Children's creativity was encouraged too during these campaigns – for instance, to design posters for their schools. An exhibition of these was held at the Royal Academy in

London in 1942, the first time that children's art had ever been exhibited there (ibid.: 160).[6]

Along with gardening, savings schemes are the commonest types of war effort mentioned in the elementary school histories. The headteacher of Trewirgie Infants School, Cornwall (pp. 55–7) describes the efforts made during the four big savings weeks. During each week 'a giant-size indicator' was erected outside a shop in each village, 'to catch the eye of young and old as they wended their way home from business, workshop, school'. She reports that the amounts collected doubled during the war years. Each village and each school organised its own events – so this was a community enterprise, involving children and adults. Weston-super-Mare Grammar School's history records that 'most town halls in the land sported some sort of huge barometer reflecting the town's progress towards reaching their savings target' (p. 31).

The history of Nash Mills School (elementary), Watford records the fact that these efforts were appreciated:

> Although routine matters like crowning the May Queen took place, the war dominated activities. The National Savings Group target for 'Salute the Soldier' was £50 and the school raised £301. Postcards arrived from soldiers thanking them for books collected by the children and for tobacco bought by the children's contributions to the Overseas League Tobacco Club. (p. 35)

And our interviewees filled in detail of savings schemes, and the pressure on everyone to contribute. Audrey Balsdon (aged 13 in 1939) recalls:

> I also was the Savings Monitor at school and every Monday had to go round the classroom asking for National Savings. Everybody saved 'for victory' . . . I am sure more children of whatever age were aware of the need to save not only money, but paper, elastic bands and all manner of everyday items. We weren't allowed to waste anything and I am sure that is still true of my generation, as we see the way food and other things are wasted now. In those days, nothing got thrown away.

And Tony Rees (aged 7 in 1939) explained in his written account:

> On a given day each week in my infant school, children were told to bring in what they could save to be exchanged for savings

> stamps that were stuck in a book. When you had fifteen shillings' worth you sent them off to be exchanged for a savings certificate which was guaranteed to be worth £1.0s.6d in ten years' time. My mother's two sisters each gave me a shilling each week to save and by the time we went to live in the country in October 1940 I had four certificates worth £3, which means that the scheme must have got going just about immediately when schools re-opened in October 1939 after the outbreak of war. The pressure to save was pretty strong. One incentive was to set targets. £5,000, we were told, would buy a Spitfire plane, £10 million would buy a large warship. The former was a feasible target for a school over a year or two, the latter for a city the size of Birmingham during its annual savings week.

While, we gather, most charities seemed to people to be deserving causes, Rose (aged 6 in 1939), brought up in a Communist family, remembered standing on the street in London towards the end of the war with a collecting box for Mrs Churchill's Fund for Russia, and she said she was shocked at the number of people who refused to give. She had been brought up to believe that Russia was a great society.

Financing the war also included making things to sell, as Teresa Letts told us:

> And then you had fairs in the summer, a village fete on the village green. We would have to raise money. 'Say Thanks with Tanks!' And we used to make things to sell, or raffle them – pipe-cleaner dolls, rag dolls; my father made a doll's house and we made curtains and knockers and furniture out of balsa sticks. And bigger dolls' toys – we made cots from shoe boxes and dolls to go in them. And fairy dolls, we used to make for the Christmas tree . . . We made rag rugs on hessian, scarecrows for the gardens, we soaked beech leaves in glycerine for the winter; made brooches out of beech husks. I learned crocheting and made crocheted collars. Paper doilies we made out of paper, folded and cut. We grew lavender and in the drawers you had wallpaper with lavender stuck down, with a piece of muslin over it.

Salvage

Of the many schemes to get children involved in the war effort, one remembered by many was organised by the Women's Voluntary Service

(WVS): the 'Cogs' scheme (that is, children were encouraged to regard themselves as cogs in the war-work machine). Hundreds of thousands of children joined Cogs corps, as part of the salvage-collecting enterprise. *The Times* noted in 1941 that the scheme was based on 'the knowledge that all children like responsible worthwhile work to do. Schools were asked to co-operate and most did' (see also Figure 5.2 opposite). A Cog song started: 'There'll always be a dustbin' (Anderson, 2008: 790). The Gamston Elementary School (Nottinghamshire) history recorded a Cogs scheme:

> Nottinghamshire introduced a scheme to encourage children to collect paper. If you collected 25 books you became a Lance Corporal, 50 books a Corporal, etc. A boy who had collected 250 Punch magazines all at once, was made a Field Marshall – the first in Nottinghamshire. (p. 142)

Tony Rees recounts how he enthusiastically collected waste paper and filled the garage with it – until his mother, in desperation, urged him to write asking the council to collect it:

> A few days later I had my answer . . . appointing me to be a Senior Salvage Steward, and enclosing a yellow lapel badge of office. The letter explained that there would soon be a delivery of three bins, one for paper, one for metal and one for bones . . . Apart from the yellow badge and consequent envy of the other children, the only perquisite of my appointment was that I, in turn, could choose Junior Salvage Stewards, who would be sent their badge on my nomination.

Figure 5.2 is captioned as follows:

> Even [sic] the children are helping in the paper-salvage campaign, one of the most vital of civilian tasks of the moment: school children in Chelsea recently staged a "strong-man act"! They carried a two-ton load from their school in Glebe Place to the King's Road. The load was split amongst 300 boys and girls, each of whom carried approximately 11.5 lb. of precious paper for the war effort, beside rags, bottles, scrap metal and old dry batteries. The need for every scrap of waste paper is urgent. PLAY YOUR PART NOW! (*Sphere*, 1941a).

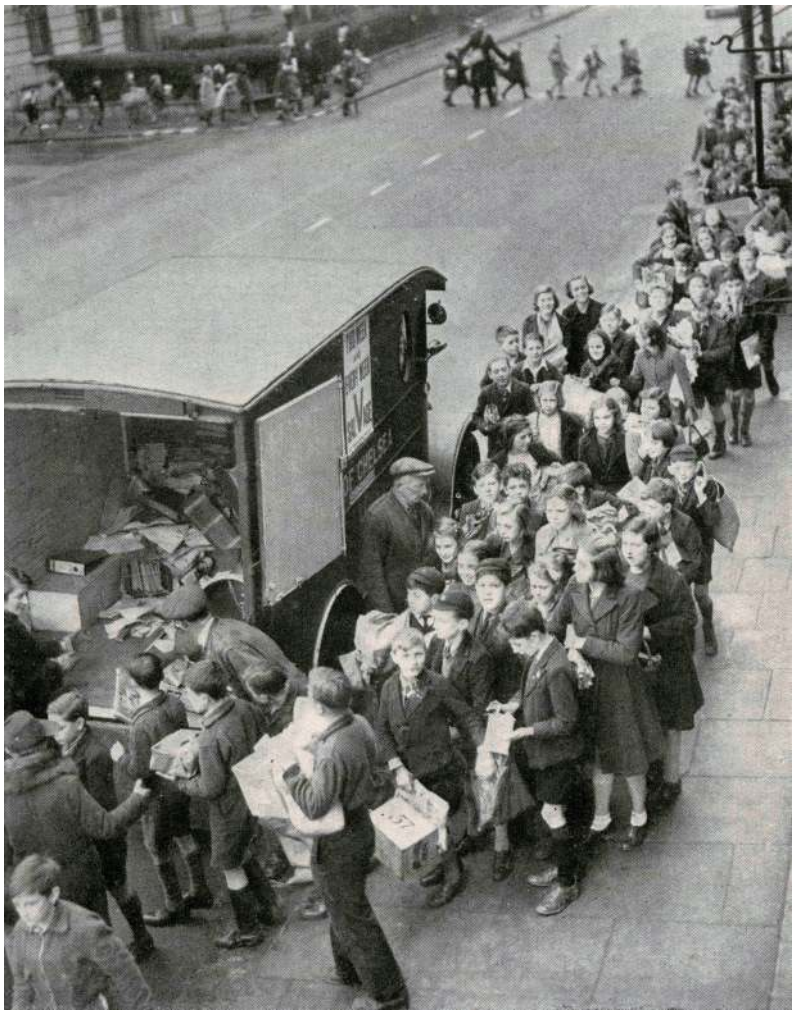

Figure 5.2: Paper-salvage campaign. Source: Mary Evans Picture Library

Many people recall the pig bin stationed at the end of their street so that people could put their waste food there, to be used by those keeping pigs. And one of the jobs done by children was to take vegetable waste to the bin each day. The history of Powell Corderoy School (elementary), Dorking records:

> The younger children formed a branch of the Children's Feather Brigade, which collected feathers to make into pillows for the hospitals, and children of all ages joined in picking blackberries,

> which were then delivered to the local Fruit Preservation Centre to be made into jam . . . During the annual Egg Week, one year, to collect eggs for the Dorking Hospital . . . the school contributed a record number of 540 eggs, and when a nationwide Book Salvage Fortnight was organised the school contributed over 10,000 books and magazines. (p. 66)

Foraging or 'scrounging' for blackberries, mushrooms, acorns (for pigs), rose hips and nettles was a topic in many memories. This kind of work, already necessary in poorer families (Humphries, 1981: ch. 6), was more widely useful in wartime to supplement rations. Frank Chappell and his siblings would be sent out 'scrumping' in London:

> Our mother used to give us a shopping basket to fill – apples, plums, nuts – we climbed into the garden of a big house. It had been locked up for the war and the owners gone away. But we saw the back of the house had been blown out, so we climbed in: there were elephants' feet waste bins, chandeliers, lots of books, Victorian children's books – I took a few!

And Teresa Letts described herself as 'a scrounger':

> The war was lovely, it was freedom, I lived where I wanted, how I wanted. My mother used to call me a gipsy because I was never in. I used to bring home all sorts of things. Mushrooms, fruit, wild berries, flowers.

Paid work

Some children did paid work – and there is some evidence that rates of work varied, with more evacuated children doing paid work than those who stayed put. As the Appendix shows, of the sample children evacuated from London to Oxford, 30 per cent were earning money whereas fewer of the local children (14 per cent) and of children living in London (8 per cent) did so. One reason may be that pocket money, even if normal in pre-war households, might not be readily available to many children living away from their parents. Some of the money earned could also have been given to the foster parents, to eke out the government subsidy for evacuated children. Paid work may not have been a direct contribution to the war effort (though some was) but it did perhaps mean that children were able to feel useful and to keep

themselves cheerful, using the money for sweets (rationed) and for trips to the cinema. Frank Chappell, evacuated to Wales, did a paper round. Another of our interviewees, June McMahon, evacuated to a rural area aged 9, told us:

> JM: We got this little job at the manor house – we got paid 6d a week (each) and we used to wash up every night. [Then she was sacked, because she stole a peach.] So then we got another job with Mr and Mrs N and that was on a farm. We used to chop firewood, and collect the eggs, we used to feed the chickens and we used to do all sorts of things.
> Interviewer: Did you like that?
> JM: Well, it wasn't a problem. It didn't seem like a chore . . . And we were paid about the same, for a lot more work. He had a lot of apple trees and he didn't mind if we – Help yourself! And of course we used to go, I think they call it 'gleaning'. Because Mrs F [foster mother] had chickens too and at one stage a pig. So we did the gleaning for them. There was a pigsty in her garden.

As we describe in the next chapter, children's agricultural work was paid during the Second (but not the First) World War. Of course, most of the children who feature in this chapter left school at 14 and worked in factories, offices or on the land – or for household enterprises. The 1930s youth-unemployment problem was alleviated by the war because of labour shortages, so young people could find work that was directly useful (unlike many peacetime pre-war jobs), or they were directly recruited into war-related work. For instance, Eddie's career is followed in the history of Piggott School, in Berkshire: at 14, he 'went straight to a course at Woodley Aerodrome, and by the age of 17 had qualified as a skilled fitter' (p. 10). As we shall describe in Chapter 7, training in technical work for the war effort was also an important development during the war.

Discussion

It is clear that government ministries and charities were keen to enlist children in the war effort. Firstly, war conditions reduced the availability of imported food, and the Dig for Victory campaign was almost certainly recognised by everyone as a contribution to the nation's larder. Secondly, waging war most certainly did require huge funds and any means of

encouraging the population to contribute, including children's efforts, had to be worthwhile. A third important problem was the shortage of labour; so children's contributions were substituting for the work of adults. This aspect of war-work is not very well documented, except in the examples that our interviewees gave us and in the discussion by Titmuss of what the school-attendance records show (as noted above), but children – especially girls – were a reserve force who kept the home fires burning; in doing so, most of them were continuing with the kinds of domestic work that they had done before the war, though now some had more to do.

So the second point we reiterate here is that it was expected for the vast majority of children to help out – as our interviewees told us. Children were not at this time conceptualised as scholars, solely or at all; childhood could, and in practice did, include work. Thus, while some interviewees thought that they were helping the war effort – others did not conceptualise their work in these terms. It was just what you did. Childhood included contributing to the division of labour, in households and in society more generally.

Perhaps schools were an obvious target for ministries and charities, since children and teachers together could devote some of their school hours – and out-of-hours time – to war-work. While morale boosting may have been one motive for encouraging young children to do their bit, it does seem from our evidence that children and their teachers did make contributions to the war effort. However, it is interesting in another respect that government departments targeted schools. Schools, it seems, were not regarded solely as places of learning and preparation, set apart from social and political enterprises; they were constituent agencies in the national enterprise, and the children who attended them could be asked to drop their schoolwork in favour of collaborating with their teachers for the good of the nation. Such a call to help had occurred in the First World War too. In this sense, children as learners were second in priority to children as workers. We have here indications not only that war made for unusual demands on the people but also that schoolchildren could readily be classified as part of 'the people'.

Explicit rhetoric about service as a concept underpinning the school ethos does not feature much in the elementary-school histories, as it does in histories of grammar and private schools, but duty to respond to government requests does. Loyalty to God, King and Country was embedded in elementary-school events. Since about half the elementary

schools were church schools (mainly Church of England and Roman Catholic; see Barber, 1994: 24 for discussion), this ensured that those children were taught to revere both God and Country. In non-church schools too, a daily assembly with hymns and prayers, celebrations of Armistice Day, visits to the church for harvest festivals and visits by local clergymen would site Christianity and patriotism firmly in school life. Furthermore, many of the elementary-school histories are of village schools – and their war-work was often part of a village enterprise, as we have exemplified. It is also tempting to suggest that the war offered opportunities welcomed by some teachers to widen the children's experiences. Keeping chickens and growing vegetables provided an active form of education, as well as release from school desks. Though the downward pressure of the 'scholarship exam' may have worried some teachers and some children, it might have been taken seriously for only a minority of the most promising children (since the chances of success were slight, and costs daunting). So it may be that, compared with grammar and private schools, academic success was less of a preoccupation at many of these schools.

We also note that many children probably experienced childhoods in some of the conventional ways that people ascribe to childhood nowadays – that is, that children should have freedom to explore, to play, to be independent. Many of those who recalled their childhood chose to mention that they found enjoyment where they could – some of those evacuated enjoyed country life and some of the local children enjoyed roaming around the countryside with them. Some noted that children benefited from freedom – parents not having the time to control them: Benny Green (1994) recounts teenage exploits out and about in London. Some children enjoyed seeing the aerial dogfights, playing war games, collecting shrapnel and becoming experts in aeroplane recognition.[7] Others, we hear, were purposely protected by their parents – again in the name of one component in ideas about childhood: that it should be carefree. Thus, Teresa Letts' father – who, we learned earlier, had ambivalent views on whether she should be allowed to know about the war – also insisted that she should have an enjoyable childhood, free from household chores, even though her mother was heavily overworked:

> No, my father said, leave her alone. She's got enough to put up with. Enjoy things while you can. He didn't want me helping with the washing up. She [mother] would say, but she won't know how

> to wash up and he would say, she'll have plenty of washing up later on. Let her enjoy this world as much as she can.

But he also insisted on absolute obedience to parental diktat:

> Oh, yes, I had to do what they said. There was no argument about that. If they said be in by eight, you had to be.

For some children, undoubtedly, the war years were very hard (Joyce Bateman, in charge of the family's smallholding, is a prime example). But here we are up against the assumption that in childhood life should not be hard; this may well be a more modern assumption, and it would therefore be with hindsight that we would view the hard work of some children as not natural to childhood. It is also difficult, looking back, to know how important, in shaping people's ideas, were the tough choices and difficult lives of adults at the time; to what extent parents and others responsible for children thought it justifiable, especially because of the war conditions, to ask of children that they work even harder than they had in pre-war times.

The notion of childhood as a time of protected innocence – especially about adult problems (marital tensions, sex, poverty) is evident in some of the accounts; it persists alongside the view of some (but not all) parents and other adults that children should know about the war (through maps, radio, cinema, relatives' activities in the armed forces). So some children were kept informed about the war, others were not. However, schoolteachers seemed to have assumed that children should be taught patriotism, and this provided one basis for harnessing children's work in the service of their country.

Notes

1 For instance, the history of Trinity Grammar School, evacuated to the countryside, gives detailed memories, good and bad, of children's wartime experiences.
2 Topics covered in the 'Dig for Victory' leaflets included: onions, leeks, shallots, garlic (Leaflet No. 2); manure from garden rubbish (No. 7); jam and jelly making (No. 10); storing potatoes for food and seed (No. 13); garden pests and how to deal with them (No. 16); and making the most of a small plot (No. 23).
3 As explained in Chapter 1, we refer in the text to page numbers of the school history. The 'Schools histories' section of the Appendix lists all the schools to which we refer, along with the author, title and publisher of the history.
4 This material is held at the Museum of English Rural Life (University of Reading) in a folder relating to Moore-Colyer's work.
5 'Statistics related to the War Effort of the UK, 1943–44', Cmd 6564, viii, 597, p. 17.

6 The development of 'progressive' interest in children as artists during the twentieth century is told by R.R. Tomlinson, whose 1947 book, *Children as Artists*, includes paintings by children during the Second World War.

7 Tony Giles (2002) became so expert that he was awarded an Efficiency Certificate by the RAF in recognition of his 94 per cent accuracy in recognising aircraft (the certificate is reproduced as the frontispiece to his memoirs).