6. 'The Borough Council have done a great deal ... I hope they continue to do so in the future': children, community and the welfare state, 1941–55

Jonathan Taylor[1]

Histories of the welfare state have predominantly been written from the perspective of adult experts. This chapter takes a different approach by constructing a social history of the welfare state which is primarily informed by essays written by school pupils, aged between seven and sixteen years old. These writings allow us to develop a better understanding of the personal impact of welfare interventions. This is particularly necessary because, as Mathew Thomson has noted, while 'historians have provided us with a nuanced history of the motivations behind the welfare state … we know far less about its operations in practice and at an individual and cultural level'.[2] Thomson concedes that his own work is primarily concerned with 'patterns of ideas' and 'pays relatively little attention to the story of individual children'.[3] This chapter considers the narratives of children themselves in order to 'reconstruct the way the world was seen from the perspective of the individual children who lived through it'.[4] Caroline Steedman's autobiography of growing up in London in the 1950s has often been held up as a rare glimpse of 'the emotional experience and personal meaning' of growing up during this period.[5] Steedman's observation that 'I would be a very different person now if orange juice and milk and dinners at school hadn't told me, in a covert way, that I had a right to exist', has often

[1] I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Margaret Taylor for generously providing me with permission to include the photograph used in this chapter.

[2] M. Thomson, *Lost Freedom: the Landscape of the Child and the British Post-War Settlement* (Oxford, 2013), p. 80.

[3] Thomson, *Lost Freedom*, p. 9.

[4] Thomson, *Lost Freedom*, p. 9.

[5] Thomson, *Lost Freedom*, p. 80.

J. Taylor, '"The Borough Council have done a great deal ... I hope they continue to do so in the future": children, community and the welfare state, 1941–55', in *Children's experiences of welfare in modern Britain*, ed. S. Pooley and J. Taylor (London, 2021), pp. 147–73.

been cited as an example of how state welfare shaped working-class women's sense of self-worth.[6] The essays examined in this chapter allow us to assess prospectively the extent to which Steedman's experiences were shared by school pupils growing up in south London.

The introduction of the National Health Service (NHS) and reforms contained within the 1944 Education Act meant that children became some of the largest beneficiaries of wartime and post-war welfare reforms. It is much less clear, however, whether children growing up at the height of the Second World War either wanted or anticipated the reforms that were to come. To date, the most detailed examination of people's attitudes towards welfare reform relate to male members of the working class. Drawing upon a sample of responses to a wartime survey of attitudes towards welfare, Jose Harris has argued that working-class expectations were 'more modest and less ambitious than the reforms proposed later in 1942 in the Beveridge Plan'. Harris found 'little foreshadowing of Beveridge's demands … for the abolition of family poverty'.[7] Among those who did support increased state intervention, the expectation was that increased provision would come 'from Whitehall' rather than through an extension of 'existing local services'.[8] While Harris's work has revealed important ambiguities in working-class attitudes towards welfare, it is unclear whether these sentiments were shared by those who would benefit from age-specific services. Nor is it clear whether the modest expectations observed by Harris remained in place once the war was over. Taking serious note of the views of children growing up during and after the Second World War provides a far richer understanding of the changes discussed during the conflict and the reforms that were subsequently enacted. Three arguments are advanced over the course of this chapter. First, during the Second World War teenagers and older children were encouraged to share their opinions as part of wider efforts to strengthen their sense of civic responsibility. For this reason, historians need to acknowledge the views of teenagers and older children in order fully understand public interest in post-war reconstruction. Second, when understood from the perspective of children,

[6] C. Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman* (London, 1986), p. 123.

See, eg: A. Oram, *Women Teachers and Feminist Politics, 1900–39* (Manchester, 1996), p. 32.

[7] J. Harris, 'Did British workers want the welfare state? G. D. H. Cole's Survey of 1942', in *The Working Class in Modern British History: Essays in Honour of Henry Pelling*, ed. H. Pelling and J. M. Winter (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 200–14, at p. 214.

See also: P. Thane, 'The working class and state "welfare" in Britain, 1880–1914', *The Historical Journal*, xxvii (1984), 877–900.

[8] Harris, 'Did British workers want the welfare state?, p. 213.

the national state should be thought of as a much less influential provider of welfare than current histories of the period have implied. Finally, study of children's attitudes towards different welfare services reveals significant disparities in people's enthusiasm for reform, disparities that require us to rethink existing chronologies.

Essay collections

This chapter draws upon two collections of essays written by London schoolchildren twelve years apart.[9] The smaller of the two collections comprises twenty-eight essays that were written by teenagers, aged fourteen to sixteen, growing up in East London in the spring of 1942. This material has survived because of the actions of a woman called Miss Winifred Grant. Grant was born in 1895 and in the early twentieth century her family moved to West Ham where she lived for the next thirty years.[10]

In April 1942, Grant provided a representative of the social research organization Mass Observation (MO) with a series of compositions written by local pupils. Winifred Grant's MO diary indicates that her younger sister, Doris Grant, lived nearby and it is presumed that she worked as a teacher in West Ham. It has been inferred that the essays provided to MO were produced by Doris's pupils. Several weeks before submitting the essays, Winifred noted in her diary that 'D[oris was] very pleased with her boys this week. Says they are all trying hard. It has been up hill work as lots of them have had scant education for the last two years'.[11] The pupils' work was accompanied by a brief note in which Doris explained that 'the compositions were set in ordinary class-time without warning or preparation' and the writers were all aged between fourteen and sixteen.[12] Doris echoed the remarks recalled in her sister's diary: 'all these students have been handicapped by the terrible conditions of the 1940–1941 winters and/or by lengthy periods of evacuation; they are just beginning to pull up as far as the standards of work goes'.[13]

Unfortunately, the essays only provide the author's first initial and surname, making it difficult to determine their gender based on their names alone. Five of the essays have the word 'girl' inscribed on the top of the

[9] Caroline Steedman was born in 1947 and grew up in South London. C. Steedman, 'Prisonhouses', *Feminist Review*, xx (1985), 7–21, at p. 19.

When quoting from the children's essays, pseudonyms have been used throughout.

[10] The National Archives (TNA), RG101/1012F/002/40.

[11] Mass Observation Archive (MOA), MO Diary, W. Grant, 1 Feb. 1942.

[12] MOA, 59/6/E, letter from D. R. Grant, 14 April 1942.

[13] MOA, 59/6/E, letter from D. R. Grant, 14 April 1942.

page, in Doris's handwriting, and it is assumed that the remaining twenty-three essays were written by male pupils. While neither Winifred nor Doris make explicit reference to which school the children attended, it is assumed that the students attended one of West Ham's five secondary schools that educated pupils beyond the state school leaving age of fourteen. Admission to each of these schools was by scholarship examination only. The number of free secondary school places in West Ham increased threefold between 1923 and 1939. By the time war broke out, the local authority provided 250 scholarships, divided equally between boys and girls.[14] Many more students, however, benefitted from reduced fees so that over the course of the inter-war period, between a third and three-quarters of new students attending West Ham's secondary schools paid no or reduced fees.[15]

The West Ham pupils wrote an essay on one of three topics: 'What improvements should there be in the post-war world?' (answered by eighteen students), 'Relations between nations in the post-war world' (six students), and 'What part should religion play in the post-war world?' (four students). The questions asked of these pupils were consistent with a wider belief that young people's opinions should be valued and respected. Several months after writing their essays, Doris Grant's pupils held a '"Brains Trust" in class'. This activity is likely to have been inspired by a popular radio programme of the same name in which the speakers responded to questions sent in by listeners. At its peak, the programme received close to 4,000 listeners' questions a week.[16] Writing in November 1942, Winifred Grant observed that her sister was 'agreeably surprised at the questions asked and answered' by the pupils who took part in the classroom discussion.[17]

Doris Grant's pedagogical actions develop arguments made by Melanie Tebbutt as part of her study of BBC Youth Broadcasts during the 1930s and the Second World War. Tebbutt has suggested that the decision to commission radio programmes such as the *Under Twenty Club* and *Start You Talking* 'reflected a belief among the progressive political classes that enabling young people's participation in the new public space of the radio would contribute to citizenship and a stronger democratic culture'.

[14] K. L. O'Flynn, 'Post-primary education in West Ham, 1918–39' (unpublished Institute of Education PhD thesis, 1996), p. 127.

[15] O'Flynn, 'Post-primary education', pp. 220–2.

[16] P. Scannell, 'The Brains Trust: a historical study of the management of liveness on radio', in *Media Organization and Production*, ed. S. Cottle (London, 2003), pp. 97–112, at pp. 100–1.

[17] MOA, MO Diary, W. Grant, 23 Nov. 1942.

London's teachers actively promoted a culture that viewed 'young people as protagonists with valid voices'.[18] Indeed, Laura King has argued that 'the idea of children as future citizens … intensified in the conditions of wartime'.[19] Mary, one of the West Ham essayists, argued that it was 'absolutely essential that children should receive religious teaching' in order to ensure that 'the children that will be the rulers and voters of this country' are able to 'tell between goodness and badness'.[20] The teaching provided to Doris Grant's pupils and the content of children's essays indicates that teachers and pupils alike recognized that the correct instruction of children was key to the nation's future.

The second set of essays were produced by 332 children who lived in south London in the mid-1950s. These essays, which were written on the subject of 'All About My Neighbourhood', were created in response to an essay competition run by the Camberwell library service. The majority of essays appear to have been written in school and then submitted by teachers with the remainder written by children and submitted directly to the library. Pupils from twenty-eight different schools contributed to the project, including students attending Dulwich Village School whose class photograph is shown below.

The children who contributed to the essay competition were all aged between seven and sixteen and more than seventy per cent of all the submissions were provided by girls. The Camberwell essays contain much more information about the lives of the children who produced them. Nearly all of the essays include the name and age of the child, and the vast majority also include information about the school that the child attended and their home address. Camberwell's Chief Librarian later passed these essays on to Iona and Peter Opie, folklorists who pioneered the study of children's play. Compared to the West Ham essays, however, we know far less about the circumstances in which the essays were written and the amount of guidance, if any, the students received. Some of the essays follow a very similar structure which suggests that students in certain classes may have been directed to structure their writing in a particular way.[21]

The Camberwell essay topics were consistent with contemporary educators' belief that children should be presented with subjects that

[18] M. Tebbutt, 'Listening to youth? BBC youth broadcasts during the 1930s and the Second World War', *History Workshop Journal*, lxxxiv (2017), 214–33, at p. 228.

[19] L. King, 'Future citizens: cultural and political conceptions of children in Britain, 1930s–1950s', *Twentieth Century British History*, xxvii (2016), 389–411, at p. 393.

See also: P. Cunningham and P. Gardner, '"Saving the nation's children": teachers, wartime evacuation in England and Wales and the construction of national identity', *History of Education*, xxviii (1999), 327–37, at pp. 332–4.

[20] MOA, 59/6/E, Essay 21.

[21] Bodleian Library (BL), MS. Opie 36/2/75, 76, 78.

Figure 6.1. Mrs Taylor with her class of first-year junior pupils, Dulwich Village School, 1957.

Source: Private collection.

allowed them to 'draw on first-hand experiences' while still enabling the writer to release his or her 'inner creativeness'.[22] Steedman has argued that during this period 'a child's personal, creative, and autobiographical output was understood as the epitome of the process of growth through self-expression'.[23] In being asked to write about their neighbourhoods, participants in the essay competition were implicitly encouraged to reflect on their wider community and their place within this environment.

Neither set of essays is assumed to provide a mirror image of young people's attitudes towards the state or the way in which they believed welfare provision should develop after the war. They do, however, provide an invaluable starting point from which to explore the extent to which the modest expectations that Harris observed among her adult male working-class survey respondents were shared by girls and boys. The decision to centre this study on the writing of children builds upon the work of scholars such as

[22] C. Steedman, 'State-sponsored autobiography', in *Moments of Modernity? Reconstructing Britain, 1945–64*, ed. B. E. Conekin, F. Mort and C. Waters (London, 1999), pp. 41–54, at p. 44; 'What is good children's writing? –Part I', *The Use of English*, iv (1952), 66–75, at p. 71.

[23] Steedman, 'State-sponsored autobiography', p. 52.

Claire Langhamer and Hester Barron who have shown that 'a consideration of children's writing' can 'offer an alternative lens' on important historical issues.[24] Before examining the specific social problems that concerned the essayists, it is important to investigate the enthusiasm for reform among the West Ham pupils. Doing so allows us to examine whether Harris's findings extend to young people who were still in education.

Desire for reform

Many of the West Ham pupils, whose essays were written in spring 1942, expected life would change in Britain once the war had ended. Pupils' desire for reform was shaped by calls, within the popular press, for the government to commit itself to a programme of post-war reform. In 1940, Augustus Jenkinson, a Lecturer in Education based at the University of Manchester, published a book that examined the reading habits of twelve- to fifteen-year-olds. Jenkinson concluded that 'newspaper reading is a well-established practice' among boys and girls and noted that 'newspaper reading tastes of adults and adolescents are remarkably similar'.[25] More than ninety per cent of all participants reported reading a newspaper on a regular basis. Roughly half of girls and boys of all ages claimed to read two or three newspapers, and this figure was even higher among grammar school pupils.[26] These findings are important because of the frequency with which the press discussed issues relating to post-war reconstruction. In 1942, an editorial for the *Daily Mirror* observed that 'every day the public reads about plans for the future, post-war planning, planning for a better world'.[27] Post-war planning was also popularized in January 1941, when *Picture Post* published 'A Plan for Britain'. *Picture Post* was one of the most successful periodicals of the war, selling more than 1.7 million copies of its bimonthly edition in 1939. The magazine was established in 1938 and its owner, Edward Hulton, supported a mixed-economy welfare state.[28] 'A Plan for Britain' comprised a series of short articles which put forward proposals relating to a number of issues including employment,

[24] H. Barron and C. Langhamer, 'Children, class, and the search for security: writing the future in 1930s Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, xxviii (2017), 367–89, at p. 369.

[25] A. J. Jenkinson, *What Do Boys and Girls Read? An Investigation into Reading Habits with Some Suggestions about the Teaching of Literature in Secondary and Senior Schools* (London, 1940), pp. 89–90, 230–1.

[26] Jenkinson, *What Do Boys and Girls Read?*, pp. 89–90, 230–1.

[27] 'For our seamen', *The Daily Mirror*, 15 May 1942, p. 3.

[28] C. Seymour-Ure, 'Hulton, Sir Edward George Warris', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2011).

town planning and education.[29] Hulton concluded the edition by arguing that: 'Youth is a force which can be the life spring of the state … in times of fundamental social change, such as the present, it is vital that our youth should be boldly brought to the fore'.[30]

Although none of the pupils referred to *Picture Post* directly, the publication's popularity, in combination with the similarities between its ideas and those found in the students' essays, means that it likely influenced some of the young writers.[31] Indeed, Paul Rennie has argued that technological changes in Britain's wartime print culture, of which *Picture Post* was a noted beneficiary, led to the expansion of photography and visual propaganda. Rennie credits these changes with 'play[ing] a crucial role in raising political consciousness'.[32] The publication's first editor, Stefan Lorent, sought to attract a diverse readership that encompassed 'the common man, the workers and the intelligentsia'. During the Second World War the role of editor was taken up by Tom Hopkinson who later commented that the magazine sought to 'influence events in a particular direction – that of a more just and equal society'.[33]

The principles of equality and justice are present in many of the West Ham essays. Robert began his essay by noting that 'after the war it is clear to most people that there will have to be a great many changes for the better in Britain'.[34] Robert's assumption closely aligned to *Picture Post*'s assertion that people were fighting for a 'new and better Britain'.[35] The end of the conflict was anticipated to provide an important opportunity to improve people's lives. George reflected that 'there is a great deal of talk nowadays of Post War Improvements and there will be much better living conditions'.[36] Some writers suggested that the war had heightened public awareness of the need for change.

[29] J. Stevenson, 'Planners' moon? The Second World War and the planning movement', in *War and Social Change: British Society in the Second World War*, ed. H. Smith (Manchester, 1986), pp. 58–77, at p. 58.

[30] H. Hulton, 'Give youth a real chance', *Picture Post*, x (4 Jan. 1941), pp. 41–2, at p. 42.

[31] A post-war survey of secondary school children's reading habits reported that *Picture Post* was identified as one of the most popular weekly magazines among boys and girls.

See: G. G. Harrap & Co and W. H. Smith & Son Ltd, *Survey of Boys' and Girls' Reading Habits* (London, 1957).

[32] P. Rennie, 'Socialvision: visual culture and social democracy in Britain during World War II', *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, i (2008), 243–59, at p. 243.

[33] C. Gorrara, 'What the liberator saw: British war photography, Picture Post and the Normandy campaign', *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, ix (2016), 303–18, at p. 312.

[34] MOA, 59/6/E, Essay 2.

[35] 'Foreword', *Picture Post*, x (4 Jan. 1941), p. 4.

[36] MOA, 59/6/E, Essay 15.

John argued that the conflict had caused people to 'realise the necessity for a complete reorganisation and reformation' of society. John closed his essay by noting that 'the planning of such improvements is a great joy and comfort in such difficult times'.[37] The process of imagining a better future served as a source of comfort during the war itself. Planning's popularity goes some way to explaining the positive response which greeted the Beveridge Report which was published in November 1942.[38] The publication's findings were produced at a time when people sought comfort in looking to the future. The following year, during a debate in the House of Lords on post-war reconstruction, Lord Soulbury confidently declared that 'we are all planners now'.[39]

The West Ham pupils' enthusiasm for planning coexisted with a recognition that the process of reform could take a number of years. This view was also held by the editors of *Picture Post* who argued that it could take up to 'ten years' before their vision of a 'new and better Britain' was realized.[40] Robert, who believed that most people expected 'a great many changes for the better', acknowledged that 'it may be a number of years after the war before the work of making Britain a better country can begin'.[41] Others were more circumspect. David hoped that the post-war period would see the construction of new hospitals and the end of unemployment. David closed his essay, however, by noting that 'whether these improvements will come to pass in the post-war world, it remains to be seen'.[42] The doubt expressed by David likely reflected a wider fear, evident in several essays, that the post-war period risked sharing many of the same disappointments that followed the First World War.[43] These concerns were noted by the Home Office who in December 1941 reported that:

> There is evidence of interest being taken both by men in the fighting forces, and by civilians, in the problems of reconstruction … particularly with the remnants of the generation that fought in the last war; they remember the chaos that faced them when they returned home. These men are determined that their sons shall not suffer as they did, and many young men seem to have taken to heart the lessons of that period.[44]

[37] MOA, 59/6/E, Essay 26.
[38] N. Whiteside, 'The Beveridge Report and its implementation: a revolutionary project?', *History and Politics*, iii (2014), 24–37.
[39] Hansard HL Debate, vol 103, col 224 (9 Dec. 1943).
[40] 'Foreword', p. 4.
[41] MOA, 59/6/E, Essay 2.
[42] MOA, 59/6/E, Essay 25.
[43] See eg: MOA, 59/6/E, Essays 4 and 18.
[44] MOI Digital, INF 1/292, 'Home intelligence weekly report', no. 61 (3 Dec. 1941), p. 4.

The West Ham essays, in conjunction with the Home Office's observation that 'many young men' had 'taken to heart' the lessons of the last war, supports David Cowan's argument that Britain's post-war social democracy was in part the result of a 'generational experience that was … frequently communicated to younger people'.[45] The post-war welfare state was the result of intergenerational calls for change, rooted in part in a shared desire to overcome many of the problems associated with the inter-war period.

Having established that many of the wartime writers expressed a strong desire for change once the war was over, the remainder of this chapter examines three themes: living conditions, education and healthcare. These issues feature in both essay collections, thereby allowing us to consider the extent to which young people's views changed over time. Pupils' views on these subjects also enable us to reconsider longstanding historiographical debates about the extent to which the Second World War marked an important watershed in people's lives. These topics present a strong case for differentiating between different strands of post-war welfare state. In fact, children's expectations and experiences of post-war welfare differed considerably depending on which service they were evaluating.

Living conditions

West Ham's proximity to the London docks meant that it was heavily bombed during the Second World War.[46] Nationally, politicians anticipated that housing would become an important issue once the war ended. In September 1944, Lord Woolton, the Minister of Reconstruction, reflected that 'of all the problems facing on the home front, housing is the most urgent and one of the most important from the point of view of future stability and public contentment'.[47] Study of the West Ham essays reveals that young people shared this sentiment and also believed that the war provided an opportunity to rectify inter-war housing problems. These findings challenge Nick Tiratsoo's argument that the British public's attitude towards town planning was characterized by a 'distinct lack of enthusiasm' and support David Cowan's claim that 'many people' took 'an interest in the

[45] D. Cowan, 'The politics of the past in Britain, c. 1939–1990' (unpublished University of Cambridge PhD thesis, 2019), p. 8.

[46] E. Stockton, 'World War Two: from Hollywood to the Newham Archives', *The Historian* (2019) <https://projects.history.qmul.ac.uk/thehistorian/2019/05/16/world-war-two-from-hollywood-to-the-newham-archives/> [accessed 18 May 2020].

[47] P. Malpass, 'The wobbly pillar? Housing and the British postwar welfare state', *Journal of Social Policy*, xxxii (2003), 589–606, at p. 594.

urban environment'.[48] Indeed, such was children's interest in reconstruction that pupils across the country took part in a competition to find the best ideas for post-war urban planning. The results of the competition were announced in December 1942 and the winners met with the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Works and Planning to share their ideas.[49] This competition stands alongside the BBC's wartime radio output as an example of efforts to strengthen young people's sense of citizenship and attachment to democratic culture.[50]

The chance to use the war as an opportunity to address problems that predated the conflict was noted by Jane who observed that:

> it is in one way, a blessing that some of the houses in the slums have been completely smashed up or partly damaged by the bombing because it will have done some of the builder's work for them. There should be slum clearances all over the country, because houses being so near to each other always results in bad sanitation, dirt and diseases.[51]

Jane's reference to sanitation and disease was one of several instances in which pupils noted the influence that housing had on people's well-being. The construction of new homes was thought to serve the twin roles of rehousing people displaced as a result of the conflict and improving people's health.

Many of the writers suggested that problems associated with unemployment and poor housing conditions could be meaningfully addressed together. Edward believed that after the war 'the government … [should] start remodelling the towns and cities, thus employing those people who would have been unemployed'.[52] Robert singled out the 'filthy slums' as a problem that needed to be addressed: 'in a modern healthy post-war Britain these will have to be pulled down' in order to be replaced by 'large modern healthy buildings'.[53] Robert's expectation that post-war infrastructure projects would last 'a long time after the war' implied that future unemployment, of the kind observed after the First World War, could

[48] N. Tiratsoo, 'The reconstruction of blitzed British cities, 1945–55: myths and reality', *Contemporary British History*, xiv (2000), 27–44, at p. 38; Cowan, 'The politics of the past in Britain', p. 31.

[49] 'Schoolboys' post-war plan for their town', *Manchester Evening News*, 19 Dec. 1942, p. 4; 'Prizes for young planners', *Western Daily Press*, 19 Dec. 1942, p. 5.

[50] Tebbutt, 'Listening to youth?', p. 228.

[51] MOA, 59/6/E, Essay 8.

[52] MOA, 59/6/E, Essay 13.

[53] MOA, 59/6/E, Essay 2.

be averted. The proposals made by Edward and Robert are strikingly similar to those of Ernest Bevin who, as Minister of Labour and National Service, predicted three months after the children had written their essays that 'if large-scale unemployment is to be prevented … the rebuilding of Britain may need to absorb … as much as a quarter of the insurable population'.[54]

The West Ham essays also provide us with a unique insight into people's attitudes towards the inter-war years. Several writers acknowledged that efforts to address housing problems had begun before war broke out. John, who expected that it would be many years before improvements could be made, noted that 'the abolition of slums was already making great headway in pre-war days' so that 'after the war, when many of these slums areas have been destroyed by bombs … steps should be taken to ensure that the buildings rising from these desolate areas are things of beauty'.[55] The inter-war period witnessed a dramatic expansion in house building. Local authorities provided more than 150,000 new dwellings in Greater London between 1919 and 1938, with a further 600,000 homes erected by private developers.[56] In 1933, West Ham council submitted a five-year programme of slum clearances to the Ministry of Health. This document recommended the demolition of nearly 500 houses and the construction of more than 700 new homes.[57]

A desire for continuity is also evident in several essays which discussed garden cities.[58] Welwyn Garden City was established in 1920 in an effort to address the country's housing shortage.[59] More than 20 years later, at the height of a second global conflict, several young people suggested that more New Towns should be built after the war. Richard believed that once the war had ended, 'towns should be reconstructed on the garden city principle'.[60]

[54] Malpass, 'The wobbly pillar?', p. 596.

[55] MOA, 59/6/E, Essay 26.

See also: MOA, 59/6/E, Essay 7.

[56] R. Dennis, 'Modern London', in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, ed. M. Daunton (3 vols, Cambridge, 2000), iii. 95–131, at p. 116.

See also: P. Scott, 'Marketing mass home ownership and the creation of the modern working-class consumer in inter-war Britain', *Business History*, l (2008), 4–25, at p. 6.

[57] 'Housing evils in West Ham', *The Times*, 31 Jan. 1935, p. 11.

[58] For a discussion of the history of garden cities see: Mass Observation, *People's Homes* (London, 1943), pp. 27–9.

[59] M. Clapson, 'From Garden City to New Town: social change, politics and town planners at Welwyn, 1920–48', in *Planting New Towns in Europe in the Interwar Years: Experiments and Dreams for Future Societies*, ed. H. Meller and H. Porfyriou (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2016), pp. 1–28, at p. 2.

[60] MOA, 59/6/E, Essay 27.

George concurred and argued that in order to provide housing for people affected by unemployment, 'old houses should be pulled down, and new ones built on the style of a garden city'.[61] David Cowan's study of wartime Glasgow and Bolton found that place often informed people's attitudes towards post-war housing.[62] The popularity of garden cities among the West Ham pupils supports this argument, with Welwyn Garden City fewer than 30 miles away. The end of the war was anticipated to provide a valuable opportunity to change people's lives for the better. Planning innovations introduced during the inter-war period were expected to have an important role to play.

Housing matters continued to attract popular attention once the war had ended. A survey conducted in July 1949 found that women in particular considered being 'too slow with housing' to be the Labour government's most outstanding failure.[63] An article published by the *Daily Mirror*, a year later, noted that 'the shortage of housing is the greatest domestic problem facing the nation'.[64] By 1955, however, only a handful of children who contributed to the Camberwell essay competition (three per cent) remarked upon the continuing problem of urban slums. On the other hand, nearly a quarter of all pupils referred to the expansion of their community, of which residential construction comprised an important component. Eleven-year-old Anna closed her essay by reflecting on the changes taking place in her community: 'every day more and more things are made, more houses and flats are being built in Camberwell and I'm sure my neighbourhood will be one of the best of its kind'.[65] Local branches of government were often credited with overseeing these changes. Fifteen-year-old Gloria contrasted the old terrace houses with 'no front gardens' and 'basement rooms' with 'the Council Houses which have been more recently put up and have all modern conveniences'.[66]

The most extensive discussion of housing problems related to the district of Bermondsey, an area known for its poor housing conditions.[67] In 1955, the Ministry of Housing and Local Government estimated that more than

[61] MOA, 59/6/E, Essay 3.
[62] Cowan, 'The politics of the past in Britain', p. 39.
[63] 'Neck and neck to the election', *Picture Post*, xl (6 Aug. 1949), p. 34.
[64] E. Wainwright, 'Just try getting Charlie out of the garden', *The Daily Mirror*, 4 Oct. 1950, p. 2.
[65] BL, MS. Opie 36/2/132.
[66] BL, MS. Opie 36/2/197.
[67] 'New homes for London's poor', *The Observer*, 21 Feb. 1937, p. 10.

1,200 houses in Bermondsey were unfit for human habitation.[68] Thirteen-year-old Jane began her essay by describing the area's reputation: 'My neighbourhood is Bermondsey, some people call it the slums of London'. Jane, however, questioned whether this reputation was fair: 'I think they are decent houses compared with some that I have seen in other places. At least we have a back garden to hang our washing in and do not have to hang it across the street.'[69] It is not clear what area of London Jane was comparing to Bermondsey. Other parts of the capital were certainly more overcrowded. The importance that Jane ascribes to her family's 'back garden', however, is consistent with MO's wartime observation that people valued domestic privacy very highly.[70] Jane's essay demonstrates that children were prepared to challenge the stereotypes used to describe certain neighbourhoods.

Unlike the West Ham essays, none of the Camberwell writers connected the area's housing problems to the pre-war period. Given that the oldest contributors would have been younger than two years old when war broke out, we could not reasonably expect any of the writers to have personal memories of the inter-war period. The absence of *any* mention of inter-war housing problems, however – particularly when we consider that other aspects of the region's history were discussed – suggests that their parents and teachers omitted to discuss this aspect of the area's recent history with them. Overcrowding was a contentious issue in inter-war south London.[71] In 1933, protestors, carrying posters that read 'slums breed disease', threw stink bombs during a meeting of the Camberwell Council. The action was provoked by the council's perceived failure to clear the borough's slums.[72] A survey conducted by *The Observer*, in 1937, found that poverty and overcrowding were a notable feature of the north of the borough: 'here the streets are narrow, ugly, merely drab lines dividing drabber streets … a typical product of Victorian industrialism'.[73]

The small proportion of the essays that discussed housing problems reflected the considerable reconstruction efforts in south London during this time. In March 1949, the London County Council (LCC) announced a preliminary programme for the clearance of approximately 1,500 slum houses,

[68] Ministry of Housing and Local Government, *Slum Clearance*, Cmd 9593 (London, 1955), p. 26.

See also: L. Wilkinson, 'Where is Mr Brady, mystery man of slums?', *Daily Mail*, 25 Nov. 1952, p. 1; R. Percival, 'Police probe mystery landlords', *Daily Mirror*, 25 Nov. 1952, p. 13.

[69] BL, MS. Opie 36/2/424.

[70] Mass Observation, *People's Homes*, p. 171.

[71] 'New homes for London's poor', p. 10.

[72] 'Council uproar over slums', *The Manchester Guardian*, 21 Sept. 1933, p. 11.

[73] 'New homes for London's poor', p. 10.

with Camberwell identified as one of the priority areas.[74] Responsibility for housing was shared between Camberwell Borough Council and the LCC, a fact acknowledged in some of the essays.[75] Part way through her essay, fourteen-year-old Joan distinguished between the prefabs 'belonging to the Borough' and those belonging to 'the [London County] Council'.[76] Several pupils were clearly aware that their own house was council owned. Nine-year-old Linda began her essay by explaining that 'I live in a council flat in Dulwich.'[77] The matter-of-fact way in which Linda described this, and the lack of any follow-up comment, suggests that living in a council-owned flat was not viewed as particularly remarkable by Linda or her peers.[78]

By the mid-1950s, London children were alert to the construction of new homes and considered them to be a positive development. Close examination of the pupils' work also suggests that by the 1950s, children, who were growing up in communities subject to wartime bombing, attributed the need to rebuild the nation's homes to wartime damage rather than problems which predated the conflict. This shift in focus is an important example of how the Second World War displaced memories of problems previously associated with the inter-war years.

Education

Many of the most far-reaching suggestions found within the West Ham essays relate to education. The issue was raised in ten out of the eighteen essays which discussed the improvements that the pupils wished to see introduced after the war. To date, historians have drawn upon the findings of a social survey conducted after the 1944 Education Act to argue that 'raising the school leaving age and [providing] equality of access' commanded widespread support. Study of the essays submitted to MO reveals that enthusiasm for changes to the educational system predated the government's plans for educational reform in 1944.[79]

Most of the essays that discussed education emphasized the need for greater educational equality. James was concerned that 'some … children

[74] 'Slum clearance in London', *The Times*, 27 July 1951, p. 3.
[75] *Report of the Medical Officer of Health for Camberwell*, 1955, p. 28.
[76] BL, MS. Opie 36/1/38.
[77] BL, MS. Opie 36/2/394.
[78] There is evidence, however, to suggest that children did not want to live in a prefab. See: BL, MS. Opie 37/1/383.
[79] S. Fielding, P. Thompson and N. Tiratsoo, *England Arise: the Labour Party and Popular Politics in 1940s Britain* (Manchester, 1995), p. 35.

who are in elementary school are very brainy but their parents have not the money to give them secondary school education' and as a result 'promising pupils' were denied the opportunity to develop their abilities further.[80] During the inter-war period, a significant proportion of working-class students who qualified for grammar schools refused to take up their place for economic reasons.[81] While James did not suggest a solution to the educational inequalities that he had observed, the 1944 Education Act went some way towards addressing these concerns, by acting upon the recommendations of the inter-war Spens Committee, and introduced free secondary education for all.[82]

The 1944 Act was more conservative when it came to the issue of independent schools.[83] No doubt this conservatism would have frustrated Richard who believed that 'public schools such as Eton and Harrow should be abolished, as they give rise to snobbishness, and allow the sons of peers etc, to have a so called superior education'. Richard firmly believed that 'admission to secondary schools should be on the basis of general intelligence not general wealth'.[84] Likewise, Arnold argued that 'a new system of education' should be introduced so that 'even the poorest people may receive the same education as the rich. Public schools should be abolished + schools set up under government control'.[85] These aspirations were predicated on a considerable expansion in the role of the state after the conflict had ended. The importance of educational equality was also observed among adult research participants. In October 1943, MO published a report – which used information collected in January 1941 and September 1942 – about people's post-war aspirations. Researchers found that education was the topic about which the most panel members hoped to see changes after the war, more so than housing or improvements in standards of living. MO noted that 'there was a general feeling that … greater equality of education was needed'. The report cited a 'middle-class man' who called for changes to ensure that 'nobody misses a decent education because his parents can't afford to lose his support'.[86] While MO did not observe widespread support

[80] MOA, 59/6/E, Essay 14.

[81] B. Jackson and D. Marsden, *Education and the Working Class* (London, 1962), p. 230.

[82] B. Harris, *The Origins of the British Welfare State: Society, State and Social Welfare in England and Wales, 1800–1945* (London, 2004), pp. 292–3.

[83] B. Simon, 'The 1944 Education Act: a Conservative measure?', *History of Education*, xv (1986), 31–43, at p. 43.

[84] MOA, 59/6/E, Essay 27.

[85] MOA, 59/6/E, Essay 8.

[86] MOA, 'Post-war hopes', *Mass Observation Bulletin*, Oct. 1943, p. 1.

for the abolition of independent schools, the report reveals important areas of overlap between the attitudes of older pupils and the 'considered and thoughtful' views of the panel members.[87] Historians seeking to understand public attitudes towards reform need to consider the views of school-aged pupils whose opinions often aligned with those of adults surveyed as part of better-known research projects. Indeed, as Tebbutt has argued, amid the totality of the Second World War progressive policymakers were eager to listen to the views of teenagers. It is important that historians do likewise.

The reforms put forward by Arnold and Richard had a great deal in common with the proposals advanced by A. D. Lindsay, the Master of Balliol College, Oxford, in his submission to *Picture Post*'s 'Plan for Britain'. Lindsay's article, which was published in early 1941, complained that there existed 'one system of education for the poor and another for the rich' and that all too often 'the decision as to which boys should go to which schools … depends not on ability or fitness, but on wealth and class'.[88] While it can be tempting to attribute the suggestions contained within the West Ham essays to the optimism of youth, the pupils' ideals are better understood as the product of a wartime culture in which educational inequality was perceived to be an 'evil' that required a 'radical … cure'.[89]

Education was often understood to benefit society as a whole, in part by ensuring greater equality of opportunity once people left school. David, who began his essay by arguing that the post-war world should see 'more equalisation of wealth', believed that 'all schools should be founded upon the same principles + students who fail to pass examinations should not be allowed to attain high positions through favouritism'.[90] Educational assessment was thought to provide an important defence against nepotistic employment practices. Leonard Schwarz has argued that by 1939 most professions largely accepted the need for professional examinations.[91] The West Ham pupils wished to address the barriers which prevented poorer students from being able to sit professional exams in the first place. Henry recommended that the state should 'provide an education for every boy and girl up to the age of sixteen'. Doing so, Henry argued, would provide 'every child the chance to get on in the world'. Henry was keen to ensure that it was not only the young who should benefit from access to great

[87] MOA, 'Post-war hopes', *Mass Observation Bulletin*, Oct. 1943, p. 1.
[88] A. D. Lindsay, 'Plan for education', *A Plan for Britain*, x (4 Jan. 1941), 27–31, at p. 27.
[89] Lindsay, 'Plan for education', pp. 27–31.
[90] MOA, 59/6/E, Essay 25.
[91] L. Schwarz, 'Professions, elites, and universities in England, 1870–1970', *The Historical Journal*, xlvii (2004), 941–62, at p. 957.

opportunities. Once the war was over, 'working men should be allowed to enter the Government if they are fit for the position'. Henry was concerned that many of the existing Members of Parliament 'have not enough sense to keep goats'.[92] The inclusion of 'working men' in national politics was thought to provide a solution to this problem. It was anticipated that if these changes were introduced, 'this country would be in a much better condition'.[93] Improving educational provision was also considered to be vital to addressing specific problems. Arthur believed that in order to address slum housing, 'colleges should now be set up to train the future planners and architects of the post-war world'.[94] Educational reforms were viewed as a means of achieving greater social equality and addressing the nation's housing needs.

Much like in West Ham, education formed an important component of many of the Camberwell essays. Peter Mandler has noted education represented 'one of the principal sites of socialisation – *the* most important site outside the family'.[95] Given that children spent so much of their time in schools that were close to their homes, it is not surprising that educational spaces were mentioned in more than half of all the essays. Compared to the West Ham material, however, the Camberwell essays displayed a much less politicized understanding of education. This reflected three important differences between the essay collections. First, the questions asked of the Camberwell and West Ham pupils encouraged very different responses. The latter group of pupils were explicitly asked to think about the future and what improvements they would like to see. By framing the question in this way, pupils were encouraged to justify the changes that they wanted. In contrast, the Camberwell essayists were asked to write about their present-day neighbourhoods. This exercise did not explicitly encourage respondents to consider what changes should be introduced and why this might be preferable to the current system. The overwhelming majority of Camberwell essays only mentioned schooling in passing and so conformed to the descriptive style of writing encouraged by the question.[96] Second, at a time when the franchise was limited to those over the age of twenty-one, it is significant that many of the Camberwell writers were much younger than the West Ham pupils. The average age among the Camberwell

[92] MOA, 59/6/E, Essay 16.
[93] MOA, 59/6/E, Essay 16.
[94] MOA, 59/6/E, Essay 12.
[95] P. Mandler, 'Educating the nation I: schools', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, xxiv (2014), 5–28, at p. 6.
[96] See, eg: BL, MS. Opie 36/2/228.

respondents was eleven years old and fewer than twenty per cent of pupils were over the age of fourteen. In contrast, all of the West Ham pupils were at least fourteen years old. Finally, the context in which the pupils were writing differed considerably. The West Ham essays were produced during a period of heightened public interest in social reform and at a time when encouraging teenagers to voice their opinions was thought to strengthen social democracy. The Camberwell essays were the product of a period of far greater political consensus, one in which the consequences of wartime changes to education policy were still being enacted.

The 1944 Education Act required local authorities to provide free secondary education for all. It did not, however, stipulate what form this education should take, only that it should be suited to different 'ages, abilities and aptitudes'. In practice, nearly all local authorities, including the LCC, adopted a bipartite system which comprised grammar schools and secondary modern schools. The views and experiences described in a small subsection of the Camberwell essays shed important light on how the first generation of students educated under the Butler Act viewed the opportunities available to them as well as revealing important changes in the value that children placed on educational equality.

Social surveys conducted between the early 1950s and the mid-1960s consistently found that parents of all social classes aspired for their children to attend a grammar school.[97] Many of the Camberwell pupils shared this aspiration. Eleven-year-old Beryl explained that just north of her local park was 'Honor Oak Grammar School' and that this was 'where I would like to go to if I get a grammar school place'.[98] Beryl understood that attendance at the local grammar school was not guaranteed. Several students commented in more general terms on people's respect for grammar schools. Fourteen-year-old Doris, for example, observed that 'a few yards away from the hospital is Wilsons Grammar School for Boys it … is a very good school so I have heard some people say'.[99] While particular grammar schools were singled out for praise, none of the pupils' essays expressed a preference for attending a secondary modern school. The Camberwell pupils shared their parents' enthusiasm for a grammar school education.

South London was home to a number of well-established independent schools. Earlier it was shown that several of the West Ham writers advocated for the abolition of public schools. In Camberwell, on the other hand, none of the contributors criticized the existence of independent

[97] Mandler, 'Educating the nation', p. 13.
[98] BL, MS. Opie 36/2/244.
[99] BL, MS. Opie 36/2/349.

schools. Further research is needed to establish to what extent the absence of any criticism, particularly in light of the reforms advocated by the West Ham pupils, was a reflection of changing attitudes towards independent schools in the years after the Second World War. The independent schools referred to most frequently in the Camberwell essays – James Allen's Girls' School (JAGS) (referred to by nine pupils) and Dulwich College (by thirty-four) – both owed their existence to the Elizabethan actor Edward Alleyn. Despite their common origins, prior to the 1944 Education Act, the schools had very different statuses. JAGS had been a direct grant school while Dulwich College was part of the Headmasters' Conference (HMC), an organization that brought together the country's leading public schools.[100]

Much like pupils' discussions of state-funded schools, most of the essays which referred to the local independent schools only mentioned them very briefly. The small number of pupils who discussed the schools in more depth, however, were overwhelmingly positive. Eight-year-old Richard devoted a large proportion of his writing to discussing the local schools. Part way through his essay, Richard explained that 'James Allayen's [sic] … takes children from 5 to 18, lots of children want to go there'.[101] The appeal of going to an independent school was also remarked upon by ten-year-old Clive, who explained that 'there is a great school called Dulwich College which I hope to go to'. As with Richard's essay, Clive made no reference to the fact that the majority of students who attended Dulwich College paid fees.[102] Neither writer explained why people aspired to attend these schools in particular. Information provided by a third student suggests that part of the appeal lay in the belief that attendance would improve pupils' future employment prospects. Thirteen-year-old Victor, who attended a local secondary modern school, closed his essay by describing some of the famous landmarks in his community: 'the other famous place is the college … If you go to the college, you have a chance of a better job than you would have if you went to an ordinary school'.[103] Victor's distinction between Dulwich College and 'an ordinary school' is best understood as evidence of the difference that pupils perceived between secondary modern

[100] *The Public Schools and the General Educational System: Report of the Committee on Public Schools* (London, 1944), pp. 126, 128; T. Halstead, 'The First World War and public school ethos: the case of Uppingham School', *War & Society*, xxxiv (2015), 209–29, at p. 210.

[101] BL, MS. Opie 36/2/312.

[102] BL, MS. Opie 36/2/75.

[103] BL, MS. Opie 36/2/330.

and non-secondary modern schools, as opposed to state and independent schools.[104] Much like some of the West Ham writers, young people believed that the type of school a person attended could inform their life opportunities. Unlike their wartime counterparts, however, none of the children growing up in Camberwell expressed opposition to independent schooling on the grounds that it unfairly discriminated between children on the basis of their parents' wealth.

The views and experiences described in a small subsection of these essays shed important light on how the first generation of students educated under the Butler Act viewed the opportunities available to them. Peter Mandler's study of social surveys completed by adults led him to conclude that 'support for grammar schools did not imply support for meritocracy'.[105] The 1944 Education Act led parents to view education as 'a universal public service … [so that] parents of all classes came to seek the best teachers and schools for their children'.[106] The Camberwell essays develop this argument further. Children shared their parents' aspiration to attend what were perceived to be the best schools. This aspiration arose in part because it was believed that the type of education a person received could have an important influence on the opportunities available to them in the years that followed. The Camberwell pupils were among the first generation of children to benefit from reforms advocated for by their West Ham predecessors. The egalitarian zeal displayed by pupils writing at the height of the Second World War, however, was strikingly absent among secondary school students writing twelve years later.

Healthcare

Public opinion has long been credited with playing a vital role in shaping healthcare policy in the late 1940s. Charles Webster has argued that Labour's introduction of the NHS represented a response 'to public demand'.[107] Likewise, Lawrence Jacobs has suggested that during the Second World War the general public supported 'enlarging the state's role in social welfare and healthcare' and this position directly influenced the

[104] Michael Young and Peter Willmott observed that residents of Bethnal Green used the phrase 'ordinary school' to refer the secondary modern schools, rather than state-funded schools more generally. M. Young and P. Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* [1957] (London, 2011), pp. 29–30.

[105] Mandler, 'Educating the nation', p. 5.

[106] Mandler, 'Educating the nation', p. 13.

[107] C. Webster, *The National Health Service: a Political History* (Oxford, 2002), p. 256.

actions of senior policymakers.[108] Most recently, however, Nick Hayes has asserted that 'generally people and patients did not see root-and-branch reform as necessary', in large part because of the success of contributory payment schemes.[109] Indeed, even wartime proponents of a state medical service acknowledged that the existing health system catered to the needs of poorer patients. In his contribution to *Picture Post*'s 'Plan for Britain', Dr Maurice Newfield conceded that 'in our great hospitals the poor can get for a trifling payment or even for nothing the skill and attention for which the rich have to pay dearly'.[110] Newfield was concerned, however, that in order to access hospital treatment 'the poor must be ill'. As a result, people were discouraged from seeking 'early diagnosis and treatment' and instead waited until they were 'really ill before calling in the doctor'.[111] Newfield's desire to see greater emphasis placed on preventative healthcare was consistent with the arguments advanced by the inter-war founders of the Peckham Health Centre who believed that doctors were wrong to ignore 'the uncomplaining or so-called "healthy" ' members of the population.[112]

Hayes has argued that of the many areas discussed in relation to reconstruction, 'employment and housing consistently dominated as the key issues, with health reform hardly mentioned'.[113] Indeed, MO's study into hoped-for changes in the post-war world made no mention of reform to health services.[114] Nor did health feature heavily in the West Ham essays, a fact that suggests that children's perspectives on this aspect of welfare were very similar to those of their parents. Employment and housing were the issues that children most often referred to in their essays. Healthcare provision, on the other hand, was referred to just once when David, who had called for a greater distribution of the nation's wealth, argued that

[108] L. Jacobs, *The Health of Nations: Public Opinion and the Making of American and British Health Policy* (London, 1993), pp. 112, 120.

[109] N. Hayes, 'Did we really want a National Health Service? Hospitals, patients and public opinions before 1948', *The English Historical Review*, cxxvii (2012), 625–61, at p. 626.

[110] M. Newfield, 'A real medical service', *Picture Post*, x (4 Jan. 1941), pp. 36–8, at p. 36.

[111] Newfield, 'A real medical service', p. 36.

[112] I. H. Pearse, 'The Peckham Experiment', *Eugenics Review*, xxxvii (1945), 48–55, at p. 48. For more information about the Peckham Health Centre, see: P. Conford, ' "Smashed by the national health?" A closer look at the demise of the Pioneer Health Centre, Peckham', *Medical History*, lx (2016), 250–69; L. A. Hall, 'The archives of the Pioneer Health Centre, Peckham, in the Wellcome Library', *Social History of Medicine*, xiv (2001), 525–38.

[113] Hayes, 'Did we really want a National Health Service?', p. 641.

[114] MOA, 'Post-war hopes', *Mass Observation Bulletin*, Oct. 1943, p. 1.

after the war 'state hospitals and nursing homes ought to be built'.[115] While David suggested that 'everything should be worked in an economical way', he stopped short of advocating for nationalization of the health service. The West Ham essays indicate that healthcare reform, of the kind that emerged as a result of the National Health Service Act 1946, was not a priority for young people growing up in wartime who were more concerned about post-war housing and employment. Hayes' assertions that there was 'no great popular demand from the average man or woman' for radical change in the way healthcare was provided extended to the average girl and boy.[116]

Turning to the post-war period, Martin Gorsky has noted that histories of the NHS have tended to comprise 'top-down histor[ies] of the politics of the service' with a particular focus on the actions of 'politicians, officials, doctors, intellectuals and pressure groups driving the policy process'.[117] Harry Hendrick's study of hospital visiting practices provides a refreshingly different perspective. Hendrick has charted the process by which the distress of pre-school patients, at being separated from their parents, came to be regarded as a legitimate emotion. This work, however, stops short of investigating the attitudes of young people towards the NHS.[118] More recently, a team of historians at the University of Warwick has begun to collect evidence in an effort to develop a 'People's History of the NHS'. The retrospective accounts collected through the project, however, require historians to 'grapple with how memory is shaped over the passage of time, particularly around discussion of moments which are now regarded as "historic" '.[119] The writings of the Camberwell pupils provide a valuable means by which we can prospectively examine young people's mid-twentieth-century attitudes towards the NHS. The pupils' essays provide an alternative perspective from which to respond to Andrew Seaton's call for a more holistic understanding of the service.[120]

[115] MOA, 59/6/E, Essay 25.

[116] Hayes, 'Did we really want a National Health Service?', p. 661.

[117] M. Gorsky, 'The British National Health Service 1948–2008: a review of the historiography', *Social History of Medicine*, xxi (2008), 437–60, at p. 438.

[118] H. Hendrick, 'Children's emotional well-being and mental health in early post-Second World War Britain: the case of unrestricted hospital visiting', in *Cultures of Child Health in Britain and the Netherlands in the Twentieth Century*, ed. M. Gijswijt-Hofstra and H. Marland (Amsterdam, 2003), pp. 213–42, at p. 213.

[119] J. Crane, 'Saving the NHS: activism over time', *People's History of the NHS* (blog) <https://peopleshistorynhs.org/encyclopaedia/saving-the-nhs-activism-over-time/> [accessed 18 May 2020].

[120] A. Seaton, 'Against the "sacred cow": NHS opposition and the Fellowship for Freedom in Medicine, 1948–72', *Twentieth Century British History*, xxvi (2015), 424–49, at p. 427.

Children largely shared their parents' conservative view of the NHS.[121] This is particularly significant because children were disproportionately likely to come into contact with the NHS.[122] As Gareth Millward has noted, children were central to post-war immunization campaigns as vaccination programmes became an established part of the British welfare state.[123] Maria Marven's chapter in this volume shows that by the early 1950s the NHS was one of the largest providers of children's convalescent homes in London.[124] Yet, health services were referred to by fewer than ten per cent of the Camberwell children. Not a single essay made direct reference to the NHS. In fact, libraries were mentioned three times more often than hospitals. Within the twenty-seven essays which did refer to healthcare services, several commented on repairs taking place at St Giles' Hospital. Inspection reports produced by the Nursing Council for England and Wales reveal that the hospital sustained damage during the Second World War. The operating theatre and administrative unit were eventually reopened in 1954.[125] These repairs did not go unnoticed. Ten-year-old Ann, for example, explained that 'Saint Giles Hospital is very near our home. It has recently been repaired from damage in the war'.[126] None of the essays which mentioned the repair of St Giles' Hospital, however, connected this to the advent of the NHS. The hospital stood alongside a host of other local amenities, including blocks of flats, a local church and an art gallery, which pupils observed had needed to be repaired as a result of damage sustained during the Second World War.[127]

The small number of essays which discuss people's use of health services suggest that, despite Maurice Newfield's aspirations, young people growing up in Camberwell did not view the NHS as a preventative service.[128] The pupils' essays indicate that people predominately used the health service once they had become unwell. Seven-year-old Marilyn explained that 'there is a hospital in my road which is very useful if you have hurt yourself or

[121] For evidence of the conservativism of the adult public see: Hayes, 'Did we really want a National Health Service?', p. 657.

[122] J. Crane, 'Why the history of public consultation matters for contemporary health policy', *Endeavour*, xlii (2018), 9–16, at p. 11.

[123] G. Millward, *Vaccinating Britain: Mass Vaccination and the Public since the Second World War* (Manchester, 2019), pp. 2, 47.

[124] See Figure 5.1.

[125] TNA, DT 33/960, Report on third visit to hospital, 7 Nov. 1956, pp. 3–4.

[126] BL, MS. Opie 36/2/361.

[127] See, eg: BL, MS. Opie 36/2/124, 131, 312.

[128] Newfield, 'A real medical service', p. 36.

are very ill'.[129] Likewise, thirteen-year-old Janet explained that 'doctors are very helpful and there is [sic] three or four doctors and two hospitals near us in case of accident and they are very helpful'.[130] Janet's repetition of the use of the adjective 'helpful' is one of just two instances in which the young writers judged the support that people could expect to receive from medical experts. The second occurrence is found in eleven-year-old Sandra's essay: 'Saint Giles Hospital … is a very nice Hospital and they would do anything for you'.[131] Given that the NHS replaced a system in which women and children, in particular, did not have easy access to healthcare, Sandra's comments suggest that by the mid-1950s at least some children were appreciative of what they perceived to be the generosity of local hospitals, even if they stopped short of connecting this to the nationalization of healthcare.[132] The absence of any reference to the NHS supports Mathew Thomson's assessment that the service missed the opportunity to establish a 'strong, distinctive, new identity' in its early years.[133] Despite the frequency with which the NHS has been presented as the jewel in the crown of the post-war welfare state, the writings of both wartime and post-war pupils suggest that healthcare reforms were not viewed as a significant break from the past. This is consistent with Jennifer Crane's finding that prior to the 1980s health-based activism was focused on local issues rather than a sense of the NHS as a national service.[134]

Conclusion

In order to develop a more nuanced understanding of the welfare state, historians need to be attentive to the views and experiences of children. The chapter began by acknowledging the significance of Carolyn Steedman's school orange juice to histories of post-war welfare. One of the central claims of this chapter is that shortly before Steedman was born, children were presented with multiple opportunities to express their opinions as part of initiatives designed to strengthen their sense of citizenship as future

[129] BL, MS. Opie 36/2/69.

[130] BL, MS. Opie 36/1/36–37.

[131] BL, MS. Opie 36/2/379.

[132] Crane, 'Why the history of public consultation matters for contemporary health policy', p. 11.

[133] M. Thomson, 'The NHS and the public: a historical perspective' <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/blog/2017/10/nhs-and-public-historical-perspective> [accessed 18 May 2020].

[134] J. Crane, '"Save our NHS": activism, information-based expertise and the "new times" of the 1980s', *Contemporary British History*, xxxiii (2019), 52–74, at p. 58.

members of Britain's democratic culture. The essays produced by the West Ham pupils are a testament to this principle. Their contents reflected a combination of personal and familial experience of inter-war hardship with public and political arguments for state-led reform. The enthusiasm for reform among West Ham's pupils stands in stark contrast to the modest expectations Harris observed among men in working-class employment. The fact that attendees of West Ham's grammar schools included children whose parents were in working-class occupations suggests that initiatives that sought to encourage children to view themselves as part of the national community succeeded in encouraging working-class students to perceive the future differently from those already in employment. The Second World War was an important moment in which children were viewed as future citizens and encouraged to contribute to national conversations about the kind of future that people wished to see.

Turning to the Camberwell essays, this chapter has shown that children were aware of the important role that different branches of local government played in delivering welfare services. On the other hand, central government was noticeable by its absence from the pupils' work. This is all the more significant when we consider that during the Second World War working-class men expected increased provision would come 'from Whitehall' rather than though an extension of 'local services'.[135] Historians have long acknowledged that the provision of post-war welfare services was characterized by regional disparities. In order to develop our understanding further, scholars need to explore the ways in which children responded to these differences, particularly as this was a time when many families were relocating to suburban areas. How, for example, did children react to discovering that facilities enjoyed in one location were not available elsewhere in the country?

Finally, by considering pupils' attitudes towards distinct components of welfare, this chapter has shown that the history of the welfare state is better understood as comprising a series of separate, but related, strands of support. The West Ham pupils' desire for better housing was echoed in the Camberwell children's approval of the many new homes that were under construction. The pupils differed, however, in their understanding of the origins of the need for new homes. Wartime memories of inter-war slums disappeared by the 1950s as London's children came to believe that post-war reconstruction represented a response to damage sustained during the conflict. The intergenerational relations which proved so formative in shaping the wartime pupils' expectations of the state appeared to have receded in

[135] Harris, 'Did British workers want the welfare state?', p. 213.

importance by the 1950s. The essays were most similar in their discussion of healthcare, a service that arguably underwent the most significant changes after the war. Pupils' relative indifference towards the formation of the NHS is best understood as further evidence of a lack of enthusiasm for health reform. More research is needed in order to understand the point at which the NHS became the secular religion it is more commonly known as today. Children's attitudes towards educational reform, on the other hand, reveal important changes. The egalitarian principles contained within many of the West Ham essays were noticeably absent among the Camberwell pupils. The first generation of pupils educated under the Butler Act benefitted from reforms which expanded their educational opportunities. These same pupils, however, appeared content to accept a system which retained significant educational inequalities.