

The misfortune of exile: refugees

The Frenchman cannot forgive the English, in the first place, for not speaking French, in the second, for not understanding him when he calls Charing Cross Sharon-Kro or Leicester Square Lessetair Square.

(Alexander Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts*)¹

On 1 June 1940, as the first Allied troops trickled back from Dunkirk, George Orwell toured the London railway stations of Waterloo and Victoria in search of news of a family friend, the eminent surgeon Laurence O'Shaughnessy, who was attached to the Royal Army Medical Corps in Flanders. On the platforms, he observed 'few' British and French soldiers, 'but great numbers of Belgian and French refugees'.² While the waiting crowd frequently 'cheered' the servicemen, the evacuated civilians only evoked 'silence', maybe because they constituted such a pitiful sight and conjured up images of what might befall the British should Hitler's armies ever cross the Channel. Up until now, the 'phoney war' had largely sheltered the public from the suffering that had blighted the peoples of Eastern Europe and, more recently, those of France and the Low Countries. Henceforth, refugees were in the public midst, and could no longer be hidden from view. This 'silence' might also have emanated from a fear of fifth columnists. As John Anderson, Viscount Waverley, the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security, confessed to his father on 2 March 1940, 'the newspapers are working up feeling about aliens. I shall have to do something about it, or we may be stampeded into an unnecessarily oppressive policy.'³ At around the same time, the Council of Austrians in Great Britain protested that such reporting, especially prominent in the *Daily Mail*, would 'only make matters worse'.⁴ Admittedly, the anxiety about a fifth column sprang from the notion that Belgian and Dutch refugees, rather than French, contained large numbers of Nazi sympathisers, and

would subside in July when the number of incomers dried up,⁵ yet in summer 1940 it is not difficult to believe that the British public suspected anyone with a foreign accent, despite the fact that on 11 September 1940 Count Ciano could confide to his diary, 'It seems incredible, but we do not have a single informant in Great Britain.'⁶

In all probability, the unfortunate citizens witnessed by Orwell would have been bussed to various reception centres dotted around London's suburbs, where they would have been processed, fed, and examined medically, before being distributed to a variety of lodgings in the capital, their homes for the remainder of the war, with their stories to be forgotten by history. To a degree, the retelling of their experiences involves an analysis of the administrative machinery that was put into place to assist their welfare, a chronicle culled from travel permits, ration books, food coupons and billeting allowances, documents that have survived because they relate to the spending of public monies, and have thus been retained for reasons of government accountability. Reconstructing the lives of the refugees further entails an examination of the emotions that ruled their lives – fear, boredom, alienation and uncomfortable personal choices – a history that is far more difficult to recreate, as such feelings rarely communicate themselves through the faded red and blue lines of ledger books. It is fortunate that those charged with looking after refugees – principally officials belonging to French Welfare, the Ministries of Health and Information, the volunteers of the Women's Voluntary Service (WVS) and Mass-Observation – frequently recorded interviews with those they met, and kept detailed records of refugee life. Such observations monitor the initial despondency felt by many arrivals in May–June 1940 and something of their expectations as the war drew to a close. There was a cruel irony in the events of summer 1944, when many of the French looked forward to going home only to find repatriation delayed by a fresh batch of refugees, principally children, rescued from the battlefields of Normandy.

Preparing to receive

In 1947, Mrs de l'Hôpital, one of the leading lights of the WVS, composed a report on 'The Story of the War Refugees in Great Britain, 1940–1947',⁷ a detailed study on government preparations for the arrival of citizens from France and the Low Countries, and a first-hand account of how her 'ladies in green' assisted Europe's 'unwanted'.⁸ For

the historian, this document is a treasure trove of information, one of those meticulously prepared dossiers that helpfully brings together a mass of confusing and tiresome administrative circulars and memoranda to make the whole picture that much clearer. It is, though, worth examining in detail those other documents, confusing as they may be, for they suggest de l'Hôpital's report is misleading in two vital regards. To begin with, she paints a picture of orderliness in Whitehall's arrangements for refugees. The whole business is described in the manner of a precise military campaign, with the relevant officials standing at the ready, like benign sergeant majors, dispensing discipline and good humour among those who passed through their hands. Although the handling of refugees did not get out of hand, and never matched the chaos that was to be witnessed in France, Belgium and Holland where officials simply fled their posts to join the retreating flood of humankind,⁹ the reception in Britain was hardly the smooth operation she depicts. Moreover, the impression she conveys is of a gentle and tolerant Britain, a land where the values of forbearance, assimilation and generosity prevailed, a view that was repeated in the first official histories of welfare during the Second World War: throughout the 1930s, it was maintained, brave Albion had constituted a safe haven for those fleeing Nazi oppression.¹⁰ In the same way that Vicki Caron has dispelled notions that France was a welcoming retreat for German Jews and others,¹¹ Bernard Wasserstein, Louise London and Colin Holmes have demonstrated that Britain likewise constituted a 'reluctant asylum'.¹² The work by Matthew Buck on the treatment of Belgian refugees in 1939–40 confirms these findings,¹³ as does an examination of the reception of the French. At best, British plans for the welcoming of refugees of all nationalities in 1940 were tardy, ill-conceived, lacking in goodwill and badly implemented.

These preparations had begun reluctantly in 1936 when mounting international tension concentrated government minds on the possibility of a general European war. Given the experiences of the First World War, it was widely appreciated that any handling of refugees could not be left solely in the hands of philanthropic bodies, yet beyond this there was little agreement on what to do.¹⁴ Although it was quickly decided that the Ministry of Health was the most appropriate department to handle the arrival and accommodation of large numbers of friendly aliens, this was not a task that Health officials particularly warmed to, complaining on several occasions that their time would be taken up dealing with the evacuation of British civilians, a recognition of how

aerial bombardment would seriously disrupt the rhythm of urban life.¹⁵ Foreign refugees, it was argued, would consume precious resources and disrupt home defence. It took the advent of the 'phony war' to speed up matters, various government departments coming together to pool information and resources. Recalling events in 1914–18, when 250,000 refugees had arrived in Britain from the Low Countries, an untitled Home Office document of 18 January 1940 anticipated that a staggering 500,000 civilians, mainly Dutch and Belgian, might make their way to British shores, an indication that London understood how Allied strategy, a rapid advance into Holland, would displace thousands of civilians and how these evacuees could not easily be returned home.¹⁶ Although the figure of 500,000 was later reduced to under 200,000, the possibility of Britain taking in French refugees never entered the equation; it was naturally assumed that these unfortunates would be looked after by their own government and, in any case, would retreat into metropolitan territory just as they had done in 1914. After all, it was thought that the Allied advance into Holland and Belgium, together with the protection afforded by the Maginot Line, would more or less make French territory inviolable.

It had been further hoped that France would accept the majority of French-speaking Belgians, yet Paris argued that it only possessed the resources to cater for its own evacuees, and was anxious that its strategic plans were not compromised by large numbers of refugees who would clutter up the roads and railways. In January 1940, General Gamelin, the commander-in-chief, without consultation with his allies, announced his army's intention of conveying all Belgian refugees to Channel ports for subsequent transfer to Britain. The French embassy at London was, subsequently, instructed to repeat this stance to the Foreign Office.¹⁷ Not surprisingly, this unilateral decision went down badly in Whitehall, where privately it was wondered whether Gallic concerns also hinged on the fact that Belgian refugees, or at least the Flemish-speaking ones, had not been warmly welcomed in France during the First World War. (Interestingly, nor had their experiences in Britain been especially happy.)¹⁸ Nonetheless, not wishing to upset Franco-British relations at such a delicate juncture, and recognising the logic of French strategic concerns, London exerted little pressure on Paris over the refugee question, and busily sought out other solutions. So began an unsuccessful dialogue with the Irish Republic in which it became plain that Dublin no more wanted foreign evacuees than did London or Paris. In conversation with the Duke of Devonshire, the

High Commissioner for Eire explained that his government had no wish to compromise its neutrality, and recalled that in 1914–18 many Belgians, albeit Catholics, ‘had proved to be of unsatisfactory character and undesirable influence in the religious houses in which they had been received’.¹⁹ Distinctly uncomfortable and clutching at straws, the Commissioner even suggested that Britain was ‘short of foreign currency’ and was thus exaggerating the possibility of a German invasion of Western Europe in order to ‘depress Dutch and Belgian securities’ which London would then buy ‘in large quantities’ and unload ‘at a substantial profit’, an allegation so outrageous that it left officials in Whitehall dumbfounded.

Resigned to accepting significant numbers of Dutch and Belgian civilians, and unwilling to argue any further with either the French or the Irish, in March 1940 the Ministry of Health issued Memorandum WR1, along with Circular 1983, to local government authorities in London and coastal areas, that is those regions most likely to receive refugees. Going into considerable detail about the arrangements for the reception and treatment of refugees, these confidential guidelines were augmented by Memorandum WR2 and Circular 1984.²⁰ As de l’Hôpital recalled in her report of 1947, ‘Landing places were to be organised at South and South East Coast resorts and at Mersey, Belfast Lough and the Clyde. Until the moment of the landing the refugees were to be the responsibility of the Admiralty. Thereafter, the Ministry of Health would take over.’²¹ It is interesting to note that, well aware of their duties come the arrival of refugees, WVS officials closely studied French plans for the evacuation of Paris and Alsace Lorraine, and were greatly impressed by what they saw.²² WVS observers were especially struck by the cooperation of private and public organisations, the revision of evacuation plans since the advent of the ‘phoney war’, and the strength of the French family unit, which was deemed stronger than its British equivalent and which would assist in the orderly withdrawal of civilians of all ages. No one had foreseen how the tactics of *Blitzkrieg* would pay little respect to elaborate government procedures and familial ties.

Arriving: ‘We of this country wish to offer you our great sympathy’

As the *exode* of civilians gathered momentum in France and the Low Countries, with possibly some eight million people on the roads, the first refugees started to arrive in Britain, not in droves as originally

feared, but in dribs and drabs, and not in orderly convoys to Northern Ireland and Scotland as anticipated, but at strategically important southern ports such as Southampton and Portsmouth.²³ From there, they made their way not to the provinces, as originally planned, but by train to London. As Buck relates, it had initially been the aim to keep refugees away from the capital, which was likely to suffer aerial bombardment, yet, on 10 May, the Ministry of Health instructed London County Council (LCC) to assist in the reception of refugees, a decision that surprised more perceptive members of the public.²⁴ As J. W. Dodgson, a lecturer in the Department of Chemistry at the University of Reading, observed in his wartime diary: 'What a desperate bit of foolery. If London is a dangerous area it is a doubtful kindness to stock it with refugees, if it is a safe area why remove Londoners? So while civil servants are having tennis parties, dances, concerts in the health resorts selected for their comfort, it is good enough for terrorised victims of Nazi bombing to go to the place from which these pampered civil servants have been sent. Either London is safe or it is not.'²⁵

To be fair, officials at County Hall, the headquarters of the LCC, remained put and set about the arrangements for the handling of the expected influx of refugees.²⁶ Within a short space of time, nine reception centres had been established in the capital. There refugees were 'fed, bathed and medically examined' before being transferred to the twenty 'cooperating' borough councils for billeting.²⁷ Once settled in their new homes, the Local Assistance Boards (LABs) then took charge of refugee needs. Some effort was also made to explain these complicated arrangements to the refugees themselves. Middlesex County Council (MCC) quickly drafted an address to be read out by interpreters at the key reception centres. Delivered in Dutch, Flemish and French, it began, 'First of all, we of this country wish to offer you our great sympathy in the bitter trials you have had to face, and to assure you that we will do all we can to help you until the time comes for you to return once again to your country.'²⁸ Depending on which version was being relayed, it ended, 'Long Live Queen Wilhelmina', 'Long Live King Leopold', and always 'God save King George'. There was no 'Vive, la France'; nor later was there 'Vive, le maréchal Pétain', or for that matter 'Vive, le général de Gaulle'.

Reading the minutes of the local government authorities in London, it seems that the reception of refugees went without a hitch. 'An intimation from the Ministry of Health that about 1,200 refugees will be

expected this weekend beginning on Friday', wrote in confident words the Director of Public Assistance of the MCC to his town clerks on 14 May.²⁹ Eye-witness accounts, however, suggest that refugees had exchanged one sort of administrative chaos in France for another in Britain. As the first trains, brimming with refugees, steamed into London, officials struggled to cope, especially in late May when immigration procedures were tightened up, following scares about fifth columnists. On the 23rd of that month, Mrs N—, a high-ranking figure in the WVS, filed a report on meeting a train of refugees at Waterloo. In this, she complained that, 'We were only told at 3 pm that a train was due at Waterloo station at that same hour.' A small party of WVS volunteers thus rushed to meet the coaches, which had arrived by the time they got there. On board were 150 refugees, half of whom were British. This was to create problems:

There was no differentiation of treatment for British or foreigners. They were all herded like cattle, many of the women, young and old, were in the last stages of exhaustion. They all waited one-and-a-half hours before the buses came into the station, and though the ambulances were in the station, they were not allowed to go before the buses arrived.³⁰

Bemoaning the lack of consideration shown by immigration officers towards British nationals, Mrs N— was also troubled by the behaviour of the refugees themselves, 'I was thoroughly ashamed to see such bad organisation, and even when the buses had come into the station, the extremely rough and pushing refugees were allowed to push their way in front of our nationals, and were allowed to get in before women, children and old folk.'

Although such behaviour was not typical of all refugees and betrayed something of the xenophobic attitudes of the time, it was understandable given the harrowing circumstances that the former had endured. The scenes in France were chaotic, and have since been vividly evoked both by novelists, among them Jean-Paul Sartre, and by film-makers, such as René Clément.³¹ Yet it is the eye-witness accounts that are often the most harrowing. The following is an extract from the unpublished diary of a Monsieur Vila, a man of Franco-British citizenship and a former employee at the French Railways Office in Piccadilly. Enlisted into the French army in 1939, he recounts the scene in Montreuil on 13 June 1940:

Once in Montreuil, we very soon realised the tragic panic situation and the full extent of the upheaval which the war had brought to France.

Normal life was completely upset and as we moved along the road leading out of the town we were shocked at the transformation which the deteriorating position had caused. Everywhere crowds of refugees were on the move in cars, lorries, on bicycles and most on foot taking with them only whatever they were able to transport in clothing and bedding. More people were watching from their houses uncertain whether they should join the exodus or remain and hope for the best when the Germans arrived. There was no further doubt that nothing could be done to stop the progress of the invaders since the Army was moving south with the civilians. It was a difficult decision to make for the people watching on their door steps, but those who remained at home were in the end more fortunate than the millions who took to the roads, abandoning their possessions to the bands of looters who followed the crowds.³²

For those civilians who were forced off the roads and on to one of the ships bound for England, the voyage across the Channel was no less frightening. Buried amid the Middlesex County Council archives is the following press report, which, through its very terseness and lack of hyperbole, manages to convey something of the discomfort and danger that journey entailed:

Most of the refugees have lost everything. Several had not slept for days. During the twenty-hour journey to an East Coast port, mother and babies slept on straw in the holds. One baby was born during the voyage.³³

Once disembarked on English soil, it was small wonder that most refugees were fatigued and confused. Those who arrived in the West Country were characterised by one observer as 'profoundly pessimistic', believing that the food offered them by the local authorities was merely a publicity stunt.³⁴ The following is a WVS interview, written up in the language of the time, with one new arrival:

The WVS spoke to a Belgian man with a dash of the tar brush, who got out of the train looking dazed.

'Can I help you?'

'Help!' he said turning on her almost savagely.

'Can we do anything for you; have you friends? Come and have some tea.' After he had tea, he mellowed very much, seemed grateful and went off to some address he knew.³⁵

The refugee was fortunate in that he at least had an address to go to. From the Empress Hall Refugee Centre was posted a pathetic letter by a French refugee, albeit a rather curious individual who was pursuing theophilosophical science and looking forward to the age of Aquarius,

who admitted to the Foreign Office that he had desperately looked through the phone book in order to write to anybody who shared his name in case they were a distant relation, but with no success.³⁶ The result, in his pidgin English, was that he had to endure ‘sleeping among people, ill-breeded enough, talking, smoking and spitting even at night.’

The pathetic nature of the refugees’ plight is further evoked by the lists of lost luggage filed with the British authorities. Typical of these was that lodged by a Mme L— who had arrived from Boulogne on 22 May, and who had since been billeted at Our Lady’s Priory in Haywards Heath. In a letter to the Commanding Officer of the Crystal Palace Reception Centre, where she had briefly been housed, she asked after ‘one travelling bag of dark grey material checked dark blue, no address attached owing to the extreme haste of our departure’.³⁷ Apart from an expensive fox fur, worth some 2,000 francs, which she had managed to hang on to, the remainder of her belongings testified to the desire to recover some dignity by reclaiming what few possessions were still hers. The bag comprised:

One lady’s mantle, grey mixture	200 frs
One pair lady’s shoes	200 frs
One pair snow boots	50 frs
One pair black stockings (new)	50 frs
Lady’s underclothing	300 frs

In a similar case, a Mlle Le— enquired after a ‘small chromium watch with a waistband of yellow leather’ that she had entrusted to a Mme Lefebvre en route to England from Le Havre.³⁸

While some refugees managed to hang on to some of their most treasured possessions (Orwell observed one with a parrot in cage),³⁹ their lack of material goods testified to the unexpected speed of the German advance and lack of prior thought civilians had given to the question of flight. This was a trend picked up by Mass-Observation in a series of interviews it conducted with sixty-two refugees (French, Dutch, Belgian, Polish and one Czech) at the Camberwell and Fulham Road Reception Centres.⁴⁰ Among this number, 60 per cent had no plans about their flight, 4 per cent had ‘plans to a point’, 16 per cent had unsuccessful plans, 4 per cent successful plans, 3 per cent were unsure how to judge the success of their plans, and 13 per cent gave ‘irrelevant answers’.

What the British had not been counting on was the large number of

bicycles that the refugees brought with them. Two-thirds of the refugees questioned by Mass-Observation at Camberwell and Fulham had possessed a bicycle on the Continent or had access to a car.⁴¹ One man (nationality not given) remarked, 'I had a bicycle which I used for about 1,200 km and my trousers were still whole. I didn't know where to go, I just rode on with the Germans on my heels.'⁴² It was not long before the reception centres in Britain were clogged up with such vehicles of all shapes and sizes. In a report of 25 May 1940, the WVS complained, 'Another trouble which is arising very energetically is the fact that practically everybody is bringing over a bicycle. For instance, on a train carrying 642 men, women and children, there were 175 bicycles. Our people view this with alarm. The number of bicycles coming into the country is, I am told, fantastic.'⁴³ The archives of individual reception centres bear out these stories and frequently contain lengthy handwritten ledgers detailing the descriptions, serial numbers and ownership of bicycles, testimony to the wishes of the refugees to cling on to one of their most valued possessions, a mode of transport that, more than likely, had helped them evade danger,⁴⁴ as it had in the case of some soldiers. Léon Wilson, one of the very first (if not *the* first) French soldier to enlist with the British army in the summer of 1940, recalls how he and a small band of colleagues retreated to Dunkirk. Some kilometres outside the town, they stumbled across a bicycle shop, by then deserted, where they appropriated the bikes to speed their journey.⁴⁵ Some sixty years later, when revisiting the area, Monsieur Wilson was astonished to discover that the same shop existed; even after that period of time, he still felt guilty about taking the bikes, even though the desperate circumstances had necessitated their acquisition.

While the reception of refugees might not have passed off smoothly – bogged down by the registering of property and thrown off course by the erratic arrivals of trains ferrying civilians from the ports – it is only fair to say that the British authorities were never overwhelmed and were frequently touched by the harrowing stories refugees brought with them. Despite the 'silence' that Orwell observed among the public, and despite a general wariness about foreigners and fifth columns, there was a general sympathy with their plight. At a café in Waltham Cross, Mass-Observation overheard a conversation between the sixty-year-old proprietress and two of her younger customers, in which all agreed it 'must be terrible' for the refugees.⁴⁶ There were also many spontaneous charitable gestures. The WVS recalls how, in May–June 1940, it was overwhelmed with offers of interpreters and assistance.⁴⁷

At the main London stations, the porters, in the politically incorrect words of one WVS official, ‘all worked like blacks, without any tips’.⁴⁸ The suspicion must remain, however, that things would have been very different if the 200,000 or so refugees that the government had originally been envisaging had actually arrived.

Late arrivals: The Royal Victoria Patriotic School

With hindsight, what is surprising is the laxity of immigration formalities pursued in May–June 1940, especially given the fear of a fifth column. While these were toughened up, in part on the recommendation of the Vansittart Committee,⁴⁹ they were not foolproof. After the official declaration of welcome, there might have followed much form-filling, undoubtedly extended in the course of May, and possibly some rudimentary interrogation at one of the reception centres, yet it was not difficult to wander away from these makeshift depots. In an interview with André Gillois, Henri Beausaire, an early recruit for the Free French, recalled his time at Camberwell, incidentally the same place that had processed Gilbert Renault-Roullies (later known by his *nom de guerre* Colonel Rémy), who was to become one of the most daring of resisters:

We were not questioned there. In principle we were locked up, but almost every evening I threaded my way through a hole in the wall in order to live it up in London. One morning the hole was blocked up. A baker happened to deliver some cakes by the main door. I took a plate into the van, and the sentries mistook me for a deliveryman.⁵⁰

Such laxity was not long-lived. With places in reception centres becoming scarce, and with the declaration of the Franco-German Armistice and the creation of the Vichy regime, from July 1940 new arrivals – whether refugees, volunteers for de Gaulle or even British citizens fleeing the Continent – were likely to discover themselves incarcerated in prisons until their bona fides could be vouched for. Such was the case of the writer Arthur Koestler who arrived in Britain from France at the close of the Blitz after a difficult journey via Marseille, Casablanca and Lisbon. ‘The last stage of this long trek to freedom was Pentonville Prison’, he writes, ‘where I spent six peaceful weeks in solitary confinement’. Conditions were not good:

Most of the time – on the average fifteen to sixteen hours a day – the cell was pitch dark, because the alert usually came with the fading of daylight,

and the lights in the cell were then switched off to prevent us presumptive fifth columnists from signalling to the raiders.⁵¹

Deprived of matches, Koestler learned how to ignite cigarettes via the cotton wool of the filters through which was inserted a slither of silver paper, the makeshift contraption then inserted into a light socket in the hope of causing a short circuit: 'Average duration until success is achieved: one hour.'⁵² Through a Frenchman, he also learned Marseille chess, a fiendish game in which a player made two moves instead of one, and was not allowed to check the king by his first move. Philippe Barrès and Jean Fayard, two ardent anti-Nazis who had quit France on board a Polish vessel, were less stoical in the face of Pentonville: one bath a week, one hour of exercise per day, and thrown in among common criminals.⁵³ Barrès soon left for the USA.⁵⁴ Equally outraged was Hélène Terré, a French Red Cross official, who was detained at the woman's prison of Holloway, which also housed a group of young students from a boarding school near Dunkirk.⁵⁵ Like Pentonville, this Victorian jail was close to the railway stations of King's Cross and Euston, prime bombing targets for the *Luftwaffe*. Before long, the inside of the prison came to resemble Bedlam as the inmates screamed throughout the air raids. Unwittingly, Terré had come to London accompanied by a Vichy agent, a Mlle Nicole, whom we shall meet in a later chapter.

Recognising the unsuitability of prisons, and aware of the withdrawal of the reception centres, which were increasingly required for the accommodation of Londoners who had been bombed out of their houses, in late 1940 the government sought out alternative venues for the processing of Continental arrivals. An early choice was the Oratory School, Brompton, today the school of Tony Blair's son, yet this also proved too cramped.⁵⁶ After further searching, the Royal Victoria Patriotic School (RVPS) in Wandsworth, a former school for the sons of military officers, was made available to the Security Services. Capable of holding some 300 residents, the RVPS fell under the aegis of BS Department in the Home Office, which had hitherto been concerned with civil internment camps. It was further decided that the new establishment should be exclusively concerned with men. Women were to be sent to a new reception centre at 101 Nightingale Lane, Balham.

As early as March 1941, the Home Office was singing the praises of the RVPS and the speed that new French entries into Britain were now being dealt with. It was acknowledged, however, that there had been a

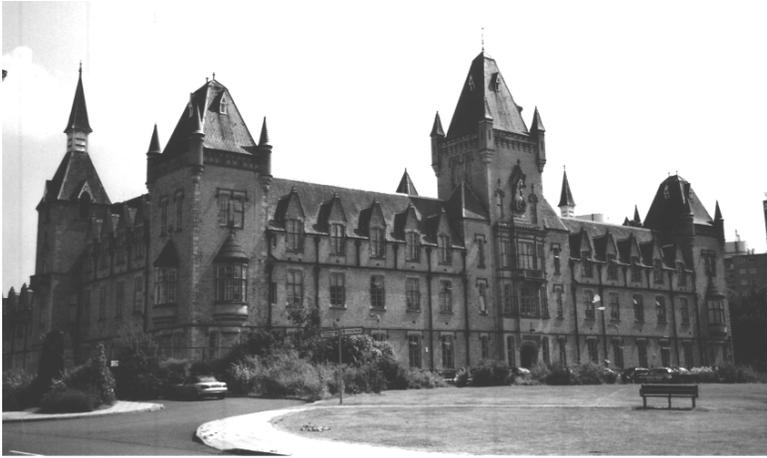


Figure 3 The Royal Victoria Patriotic Buildings, Wandsworth – today an arts, restaurant and office complex; in 1940 an interrogation centre for all refugees entering the UK

number of teething problems, especially in respect to the way in which French volunteers for de Gaulle had been handled, not so much at Wandsworth, but at Liverpool. In a trenchant letter to the Home Office, Spears complained that ‘the worst impression’ was being given ‘to enthusiasts who had forfeited everything to come to this country and continue the fight’.⁵⁷ On arrival at the port, there was no liaison officer to handle matters; the French were simply bundled into a Black Maria and taken off to a transit camp. There, officers had to share a dormitory with their men and refugees, and suffered the indignity of having to wash their cutlery and plates after each meal. It would not be difficult, concluded Spears, to rectify matters and to ensure that some word of encouragement was passed on to the volunteers.

To be fair, the Home Office was alarmed to hear of the procedures at Liverpool, which were allegedly being replicated at Glasgow. A series of promises were thus made to Spears. To begin with, it was made clear that the practice of driving volunteers to transit camps in prison vans had been abandoned; as we shall see, it is doubtful it ever existed in the first place.⁵⁸ Next, the Home Office promised to ease entry regulations. If warning of any new arrival was given beforehand, and if this person could be vouched for by de Gaulle, then the volunteer would be excused the ordeal of the RVPS. This exemption, it was pointed out, had recently been made in the case of Colonel Vallin, later to take

charge of the Free French Air Force. In a fictional setting, it is the intervention of Carlton Gardens that saves the young pianist and her opera-singing companion from a spell in Liverpool gaol, and then presumably Nightingale Lane, in the 1991 film *L'Accompagnatrice*.⁵⁹ Should a French national arrive by plane, or at any other place than a controlled port, and so long as they did not seek to conceal their identity, the Home Office promised that they would be subject to only a short spell at Wandsworth, although reading between the lines it appears that one Frenchman who had landed thus, a certain A— C—, had still been questioned at length by MI5.⁶⁰ Later, in May 1941, the Home Office agreed that British representatives could issue visas to 'vouched for' Free French volunteers in order that they did not have to attend the RVPS.⁶¹

In a further gesture to ease procedures, the Home Office accepted that the police should adopt a more conciliatory approach when handling arrivals and, on 5 June 1941, a circular was issued to chief constables in which local police forces were instructed to reassure de Gaulle's volunteers 'that they are being escorted to the Centre (ie the RVPS) not because they are personally suspect but in accordance with security measures'.⁶² Arrangements were also made for the distribution of leaflets carrying a personal message of welcome from de Gaulle. And, finally, the Home Office agreed to seek out further information on the manner in which French nationals were being dealt with at their point of arrival.

In some places, it appears the authorities went out of their way to offer support. The Immigration Officer in Poole replied that it was, on average, necessary to send one person a week up to Wandsworth.⁶³ Most arrived not by sea, but by plane, and were of 'the superior type', not refugees, but 'senior officers and men of means'. It had thus been deemed inappropriate to lock them up in the cells; rather, given their wealth, they had been able to put themselves up in a hotel where they had been supervised by an NCO before departing to London the next day. In the West of England, immigration officers recorded no complaints at Avonmouth, Whitchurch and Bristol. Instead of putting new arrivals into prison, they were kept on board their vessels overnight and then sent on to London the next day.⁶⁴ At Cardiff, the authorities also claimed that 'every consideration' was given to French nationals.⁶⁵ As Spears alleged, it appears that the trouble spots were indeed Glasgow and Liverpool, the places where, after summer 1940, most refugees and volunteers for de Gaulle landed. From Scotland, the

police claimed that every effort was being made to dispatch arrivals to Wandsworth on the overnight train to London.⁶⁶ Yet, depending on the time of disembarkation, this was not always possible, and so they had to be held overnight. This was the only way in which these people could be prevented from making contact with the French community in the city. In future, however, the immigration officers promised to follow the Bristol practice of keeping arrivals on their ships overnight until a train was ready to depart.

If the Immigration Office at Glasgow was irritated at the intervention of Whitehall, its counterpart at Liverpool was positively fuming.⁶⁷ Complaining that the city's constabulary was already overstretched, it was angry that police had to be used for the processing of French nationals. As to the question of housing, the only way to prevent 'wanderings around the city', and to maintain proper surveillance, was to use prison cells rather than boarding houses and hotels. Maybe in the light of what we know about the behaviour of the nearby French consulate this was a sensible precaution (see Chapter 4). Moreover, the immigration officer in overall charge could never remember an occasion when a Black Maria had been used, but conceded that buses might be employed in future; indeed, a separate enquiry by the Committee to the RVPS discovered that no prison vans had been deployed, merely 'charabancs or taxis'.⁶⁸ The officer also promised to look into the possibility of keeping arrivals on board ship overnight, and requested that the Ministry of Shipping be put in charge of these arrangements, and that a representative of the RVPS be sent up to meet vessels when docking. In a subsequent letter of April 1941, the Liverpool Immigration Office made known that future French arrivals were now held overnight on the Free French vessel *La Volontaire* until arrangements could be made to escort the men to London.⁶⁹ However, this meant that arrivals, sometimes in groups as large as twenty-five, could not be kept in a state of incommunicado. This troubled the Home Office, which urged the police in Liverpool to billet them in hotels or the Liverpool Scottish Drill Hall rather than *La Volontaire*,⁷⁰ a change that was indeed implemented.⁷¹ It remains unclear whether the overworked and irritable Liverpool police complied with other Home Office recommendations; the fact that the Spears Mission was still complaining about the modes of transport in September 1941 suggests not or, more likely, that the Free French remained very sensitive about the way in which potential recruits were handled.⁷²

Carlton Gardens was unquestionably the most strident critic of the

RVPS. There was intense dissatisfaction that arrivals to Britain were issued with a letter of welcome from de Gaulle, but were then not allowed to keep it.⁷³ The Français de Grande Bretagne (FGB), the self-appointed civil wing of the Free French, was also irritated that it could not distribute its own personal letter of welcome, a move scuppered by Downing Street, which thought an additional message unnecessary and likely to upset those who were not for de Gaulle.⁷⁴ Certainly, the official welcoming at Wandsworth was hardly cordial. After a very correct address, in which the School's Commandant offered his greetings, the internees were presented with a set of the rules, which must have gone down badly with men who had already broken a whole series of regulations to get to Britain in the first place:

- 1 This Reception Centre has been established with the purpose of offering temporary lodging to allied and neutral subjects who arrive in Great Britain.
- 2 It is duly the duty of the Centre's officers to assist you in proving your identity and, to this effect, of seeing all the documents to be found in your possession, and to ask you for all the information that they will judge necessary.

Your interest is therefore to reply in a frank and explicit manner to the questions that are put to you.

- 3 As soon as your identity and good faith have been established, you will be sent to the representatives of your country in Great Britain, and every help will be given to you in order that you can reach your destination. In waiting, you will understand that, for reasons of security, no communication will be permitted with the outside, either by message, letter, telephone or any other means.⁷⁵

To the annoyance of the Free French, 'residents' at Wandsworth were further required to sign a document to say that they understood all the rules and that they would observe them during their stay.

A further grumble concerned conditions within the RVPS. In a letter of September 1941, MI5 revealed that the Free French were especially disgruntled about the food, the quality not the quantity: 'We gathered that something a little more continental would be appreciated! I doubt whether the Mecca Cafés, or whoever they are, can rise to it, but perhaps you would like to consider the point.'⁷⁶ It later transpired the real problem was the prices in the canteen, which the inmates had to afford out of their pocket money.⁷⁷ Across in Nightingale Lane, French internees appear to have kicked up a fuss about sleeping arrangements, although this was contemptuously dismissed by the welfare officer, 'I

can appreciate that continental women, more especially the temperamental French who normally spend much of their time in well furnished bed-sitting rooms, may feel rebuffed and disheartened by an array of army blankets', but the other nationals were content.⁷⁸ The presence of armed guards was, however, thought disconcerting by both men and women, yet this was insisted upon by the War Office.⁷⁹ A further fuss blew up as to who among the French should be sent to Wandsworth, despite the earlier attempts of the Home Office to determine which groups needed to pass through the RVPS. It transpired that some French signed the *acte d'engagement* abroad, and were thus exempted from the RVPS; yet, on arrival in Britain, they proved either unsuitable for service with de Gaulle, or simply changed their minds and claimed to be mere refugees.⁸⁰

Just as French arrivals had not anticipated a stay in a Victorian boarding school, they had certainly not bargained on the nature of their questioning. Gillois cites the example of Joseph Kessel and his nephew, Maurice Druon, who, with the help of smugglers, had crossed the Pyrenees to make their way to London via Lisbon.⁸¹ At Wandsworth, Kessel was interviewed for some 48 hours in total, sometimes in 8- to 10-hour stretches. In the interrogation itself, his interviewers displayed an intimate knowledge of French geography, asking him about his mother and how she had travelled through Luchon on her way to the southern zone; had she gone by train or by bus. When he replied 'by train', his interviewer congratulated him, remarking that there was no bus through Luchon. When it was the turn of the aviator Henri Schutz, his inquisitors asked him where he was born and where he had spent his adolescence; on discovering he had studied at a particular *lycée* in Marseille, he was quizzed on teachers past and present. These questions he could answer; he was genuinely stumped when asked about the location of a nearby war memorial. This gap in his local knowledge ensured that his stay at Wandsworth lasted over a month. Even well-known figures were subject to prolonged holding. Claudius Petit, a member of the Conseil National de la Résistance (CNR) and a deputy of the Algerian Assembly, had the misfortune to land in England with a camera.⁸² In the ten days' wait for a plane to ferry him out of France, he had indulged his hobby for photography, snapping the local scenery. This raised the suspicions of his MI5 officers, who developed his film, although quite what they made of photographs of trees and hedges remains unknown; Petit only secured his release after his travelling companion, General de Lattre de

Tassigny, who himself had arrived disguised in beard and civilian clothes, vouched for him.

Maybe the greatest grumble of those held at Wandsworth was not so much the conditions or the intensive questioning, which interrupted community life, and on one occasion prematurely ended a football match as there were not enough players left on the pitch since one after another was called away for questioning.⁸³ Rather the greatest frustration was the delay in reaching freedom. As the Welfare Officer of the RVPS observed, 'The dominating idea is to get out; the guests after many vicissitudes are on the threshold of liberty, impatient to step across. They are like the passengers of a big liner which, after a rough passage, has docked in port, who are told they will not be allowed to land for a number of days.'⁸⁴ This was certainly the sentiment of Georges Le Poittevin who, in 1943, had escaped solitary confinement in a Pétainist jail in North Africa, and who is now president of the London-based Association des Combattants Volontaires. On reaching Gibraltar, he boarded a cargo vessel for Liverpool, which arrived only after being bombed by both the Luftwaffe and U-Boats, taking a direct hit from a 250 kilogram bomb, which thankfully did not explode. 'When I arrived in Liverpool, I took a breath and thought, freedom at last.'⁸⁵ In the event, he was handcuffed and sent immediately to Wandsworth where he soon learned he was under detention; although he had arrived in good faith, he was naturally troubled by stories doing the rounds among other detainees that some individuals had been shot as spies.

However unsatisfactory conditions were at Wandsworth, it should be stressed that the British were only taking prudent precautions. This was wartime, and after the initial influx of refugees had crossed the Channel in the summer of 1940, it was certain that later arrivals would be looked upon with suspicion, even if they had signalled their desire to join de Gaulle. Moreover, Wandsworth was not the Hôtel Terminus in Lyon where the SS man, Klaus Barbie, regularly tortured and murdered resisters, including Jean Moulin. MI5 officers might have deployed gruelling interviewing techniques, but they were not breaking people's arms or using terror tactics. As the former deputy for the Aisne Jean Pierre-Bloch, an arrival in London in 1942, acknowledged, some French recognised this.⁸⁶ For his part, Monsieur Le Poittevin recalls how he was questioned at length, with 'a very bright light shining in my eyes', yet the 'tone of the voice questioning me was always friendly, even when I was erring slightly in my explanations'.⁸⁷

On leaving, he was given a warm handshake by the colonel in charge and given 50 pounds sterling, the largest sum of money he had ever had in his possession, some of which was spent on a 'wonderful' steak-and-chips lunch in Soho and a gold wrist watch that never ever worked. It should be further stressed that it was principally the Free French that complained most about Wandsworth, ironical given the scandal that surrounded their own holding centres at Duke Street and Camberley where rough tactics, if not torture, were frequently used, and where the principle of habeas corpus was blatantly disregarded.⁸⁸ In truth, what really irritated Carlton Gardens about the RVPS was the fact that the British were getting hold of French arrivals before Gaullist officials. In this way, MI5 collated valuable intelligence on French matters. In his exhaustive history of British intelligence, F. H. Hinsley reveals how vital information in the preparation for D-Day was culled from Wandsworth⁸⁹ something vouched for by Monsieur Le Poittevin who was questioned extensively about his native Normandy, questions which at the time seemed utterly futile.⁹⁰ Information about conditions in occupied Europe was also passed on to the BBC for its broadcasts to France.⁹¹ The British could also recruit prospective agents for SOE, before the BCRA (Bureau Central de Renseignements d'Action) could get their hands on them. In his memoirs, de Gaulle betrays this particular grievance about the 'Patriotic School':

As soon as a Frenchman arrived in England, unless he was somebody well known, he was confined by Intelligence . . . and invited to join the British Secret Services. It was only after a whole series of remonstrances and requests that he was allowed to join us. If, however, he had yielded, he was kept away from us and we would never see him.⁹²

Such quarrels about the RVPS were, however, nothing compared to the squabbles that broke out over who should look after refugees once in the wider community.

Les pauvres types

How many refugees, especially French, did Britain receive? This is no easy question to answer. Refugees of all nationalities arrived at different times, at different places in the country; and were processed in different ways, some being quickly repatriated. In her report of 1947, de l'Hôpital records that on 17 May 1940 alone, WVS canteens fed some 8,500 French refugees at a cost of £100,⁹³ a figure repeated in older histories,⁹⁴ although

as we shall see detailed breakdowns, collated from a variety of sources, suggest for July–August a total French refugee population of about half this size, an indication that many civilians were immediately returned to their homeland, alongside the majority of French troops rescued at Dunkirk. Another problem in counting heads lies in the bureaucracy that was assembled to register their presence. Despite the eventual imposition of strict immigration and registration procedures, several refugees failed to complete the necessary forms, and openly defied restrictions on their freedom of movement. It is possible that some simply did not understand what information was being asked of them, especially as official interpreters were scarce and were frequently of a poor standard. Others may have left London to escape the Blitz, or perhaps to seek out jobs beyond the capital. Such was the case of one Frenchman investigated by the WVS, ‘P.R-D, French, formerly billeted in Islington. Local Authority stated that he had “left Islington”. Further enquiry showed that he had gone to work in Ripon. Ripon police stated they had no trace. Scotland Yard stated they had no trace; and there the matter rests since 3rd December.’⁹⁵ There was also the case of nine Frenchmen at the Norwood Centre who had subsequently vanished without any forwarding address.⁹⁶

WVS reports suggest that the French were among the worst of all nationalities at keeping the authorities informed of their whereabouts. It is possible that this was a characteristic defiance of authority, or possibly a churlish snub to the British. It is more likely to have been prudent behaviour. It was well known that the Vichy consulate, housed in London’s Bedford Square, was on the look-out for French nationals living in Britain, giving rise to fears that retaliatory action might then be initiated against their families on metropolitan soil. As early as September 1940, the Home Office was instructing police authorities not to disclose any information about French civilians.⁹⁷ In the case of the Dutch, Poles, Norwegians and Greeks, such warnings were nowhere near as strict. In May 1941, the Home Office repeated the advice and the ‘necessity of special care in enforcing the general rule in respect of enquiries which might be received about French citizens from officials of the Vichy Consulate’.⁹⁸ It might also be that French refugees wanted to keep their heads down in order to escape the attentions of Carlton Gardens, which, as we shall see in Chapter 5, was known to be pressing both the Home Office and Foreign Office for a full list of French nationals resident in Britain, purportedly for propaganda purposes yet, in truth, for a recruitment drive.

Despite the above difficulties, it is still possible to arrive at a reasonably

accurate figure for the number of French refugees. Statistics from four separate sources suggest a sum of 2,500–4,000, roughly a tenth of all refugees, that came to Britain during May–June 1940. All available evidence suggests that the French were the second largest group after the Belgians, who numbered approximately 20,000.⁹⁹ Interestingly, government figures are the least detailed, suggesting how willing Whitehall was to farm out refugees to local authorities and charitable bodies. In August 1940, the Committee on Foreign (Allied) Resistance (CFR) recorded 2,564 French refugees arrived since May 1940.¹⁰⁰ WVS totals for October 1940 are astonishingly similar, putting the estimate at 2,550.¹⁰¹ For its part, the LCC reported that, by the close of October 1940, 2,905 French refugees had passed through its reception centres.¹⁰² Maybe the most accurate breakdown comes from the Comité d'Entr'Aide aux Français (CEAF), a charitable organisation whose remit was the welfare of all French nationals in Britain.¹⁰³ It counted 2,046 refugees with addresses and 1,693 without addresses, an overall total of 3,739. It remains possible that both the WVS and the government had failed to take this latter body of non-addressees into their own calculations, or that these elusive refugees had been repatriated. It is known that over 500 refugees were sent home in the course of 1940–41 in circumstances of great secrecy, partly to protect them from patrolling U- and E-boats, which had already torpedoed a vessel carrying French sailors for repatriation, and partly not to upset the already fragile relations with de Gaulle's headquarters. Few files on refugee repatriation appear to have survived.

It is not hard to ascertain why so few French nationals arrived on these shores and, for that matter, why the large numbers of Belgian and Dutch failed to materialise.¹⁰⁴ To begin with, the suddenness of the German victory severed the escape routes on the northern coastline, forcing civilians to retreat inland, not that they had necessarily put plans in place for their flight. The questioning of Mass-Observation as to refugees' plans for flight will be recalled.¹⁰⁵ As the columns of civilians retreated into the heart of France, towns in the south swelled in size.¹⁰⁶ Rod Kedward cites the following examples: 'Cahors in the Lot grew from 13,000 to an estimated 60–70,000, Brive in the Corrèze from 30,000 to 100,000, and Pau in the Basses-Pyrénées, a major centre of exile from the north in 1914–18, from 38,000 to 150,000.'¹⁰⁷ Retracing the steps of those caught up in the *exode*, Kedward has further shown how many civilians, confused and without any real knowledge of where they were going, believed that they might be positively welcomed in those southern resort towns, which they had first encountered after the

introduction of paid holidays by the Popular Front, only to discover their sojourn was a far less pleasant than the one they had experienced during the *avant guerre*.¹⁰⁸ Interestingly, some Continental refugees, at least well-heeled ones, might well have travelled to British seaside resorts, such as Bournemouth, having spent holidays there in peacetime.¹⁰⁹ It was the British government's belief that French refugees were trying to reach North Africa.¹¹⁰ The initial impact of Pétainism may also have stemmed any attempted flight to Britain. As Kedward has again demonstrated, the appeal of the marshal effectively cast a trance over the demoralised peoples of France; here was the saviour who would rescue his people from the abyss.¹¹¹ Why, then, attempt the hazardous journey to Britain, a country responsible for the shelling at Mers-el-Kébir, and a country soon to constitute another piece in Hitler's European empire? Such events only fuelled a growing Anglophobia among the French public, which, throughout the 'phoney war', had questioned Britain's contribution to the war effort. It is not hard to believe that something of this Anglophobia travelled across the Channel with the refugees; certainly, many retained an admiration for Pétain, believing that he was doing his best in difficult circumstances.

While it is possible to account for the paltry numbers of French refugees, it is harder to ascertain their social complexion. As regards age and gender, WVS statistics highlight two key groups: children and women born before 1922.¹¹² There is little of surprise here. More interesting is the high proportion of young men. CEAF figures include 740 males between the ages of 17 and 35.¹¹³ Why so many young males should have figured is uncertain. How had they evaded conscription? It may be that they belonged to reserved occupations, especially since many stemmed from the industrial heartlands of northern France. Being young, healthy and without family ties, it might also be that they were best placed to flee. It is further possible that they were fearful of what fate might await them when the Germans arrived. In its interviews with refugees, Mass-Observation uncovered several reasons why civilians had taken to the roads, yet among young non-Jewish men the most frequent answer was their desire not to work for the Nazis.¹¹⁴ Whatever the case, in the eyes of the Home Office and MI5, these males were a real nuisance.¹¹⁵ Resisting calls to join either the Free French or the British armed services, they were deemed parasitical and a disturbing influence in that their morale was low. Maybe it would have been better if some effort had been made to find them employment in their existing fields of expertise; as we shall see, the government shied away from

such proposals, fearing that refugees would be accused of stealing British jobs.

Unsurprisingly, most refugees appear to have come from the districts of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais, that is those areas that felt the squeeze of Guderian's grip as German armour swung towards the coast to encircle the hapless BEF. Among the addresses of refugees processed by the LCC, it is the names of towns and villages of northern France that predominate: Berck-sur Mer; Dunkerque; Boulogne; Armentières; Calais; Chimay; Sainte Marie Kerque; Lille; Abbeville (the scene of de Gaulle's tank triumph); Port de Briques; Albert; Bruay; and Cauchy (the birthplace of Pétain himself).¹¹⁶

As to profession and social class, no real statistics appear to have survived, and might never have been obtainable in the first place. In August 1940, WVS complained that its office only possessed professional details of 950 of the 2,550 French refugees on its books.¹¹⁷ For its part, Mass-Observation did a statistical tally of refugees at Camberwell and Fulham, yet it was acknowledged that the samples were not truly representative as they included too many middle-class elements.¹¹⁸ Contemporary observations about the wealth of the refugees are also ambiguous. Having escaped France in 1940, the British journalist Neville Lytton watched newsreel of the *exode* in British cinemas:

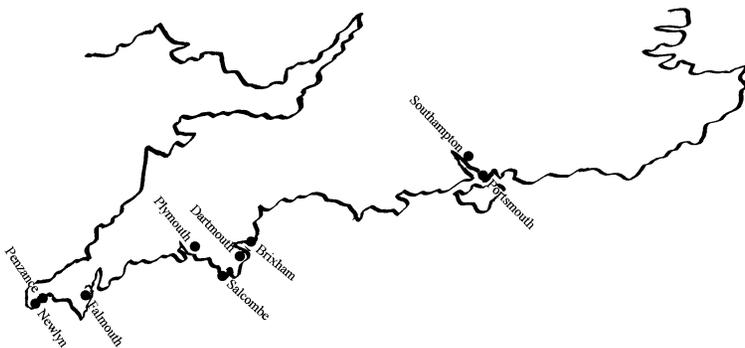
Since my arrival in England I have seen some films of these refugees and none of them get the atmosphere quite right. In these films the refugees seem to be drawn from the poorer classes only, whereas in fact all classes were on the road. You saw high powered Hispano-Suiza cars jammed in between farm wagons drawn by horses.¹¹⁹

It appears, however, that those with money and influence were best placed to evade the German advance by escaping into metropolitan France; the majority of those who came to Britain appear, in the words of Orwell, to have been 'middling people of the shopkeeper-clerk type ... in quite good trim',¹²⁰ an observation supported by Jean-Louis Crémieux-Brilhac, who describes such refugees as 'les humbles'.¹²¹ Yet whatever their position in France, most refugees arrived in England penniless and without means of support.

Despite the above ambiguities, two groups of refugees do stand out. In its statistical profile, the CEAF counted some 50 priests and novices. Other accounts of refugees also point to the presence of both regular and secular clergy.¹²² One French woman, evacuated on 22 May 1940, found herself on a boat of 41 persons, of whom 4 were Sisters of

Charity.¹²³ While the evidence may be piecemeal, it tends to support W. D. Halls's observation that the Catholic Church was the one body, unlike local and national government organisations, that remained alongside the refugees in France, tending for their needs, only for its own members to be swept up in the general mêlée.¹²⁴ Interestingly, in all the reports compiled by British agencies handling French refugees, little mention is made of Jews although, in its interviews with refugees during June 1940, Mass-Observation did uncover small numbers.¹²⁵ Unsurprisingly, these men, women and children had left France and the Low Countries fully aware of the fate that awaited them when the Nazis arrived. Later in the war in 1942, shocked at Vichy's anti-Semitism, London gave some consideration to taking in some 1,000 Jewish orphans from unoccupied France, resettling them in either Britain or Palestine.¹²⁶ As Wasserstein has shown, the shortage of accommodation, the continued threat of invasion, early preparations for D-Day and the November 1942 Allied landings in North Africa effectively scuppered what was, in any case, a very limited humanitarian gesture.

The other readily identifiable body among French refugees was the large number of French fishermen and their families who made their home in the West Country. The presence of Breton fishermen has always been well known. In his memoirs, de Gaulle observes, 'In the last days of June a flotilla of fishing boats reached Cornwall, bringing over to General de Gaulle all the able-bodied men from the island of Sein.'¹²⁷ Crémieux-Brilhac suggests that, in September 1940, such Breton fishermen constituted the bulk of the Free French Navy.¹²⁸ It is



Map 1 Principal ports visited by French refugee fishermen and their families in 1940

true that many of these seamen enlisted with Carlton Gardens, but not all, some arriving as late as October 1940 without any real prior knowledge of de Gaulle.¹²⁹ In conversation with a Mr Matthews, the representative of the French consulate at Penzance, Henry Astor of French Welfare learned that French fishing boats, principally from Boulogne and the Breton Coast, had begun to arrive after 19 June, 'having left France at a moment's notice in a panic', making their way to the Cornish coast where many had fished before the war and, perhaps in the case of the Breton sailors, to a place where they recognised a cultural affinity.¹³⁰ In early July, the Foreign Office recorded seven fishing boats at Penzance alone, all carrying large numbers of human cargo: *Souvenir du Monde* (Boulogne), 67 people; *Ma Gondole* (Boulogne), 52; *Notre Dame de Montligeon* (Boulogne), 92; *Velleda* (Audierre), 45; *Espérance* (Boulogne), 52; *Corbeau* (Carmaret), 19; and *Maris Stella* (no port given), 23.¹³¹ The writer Ian Hay recalls that one Boulogne boat arrived at Brixham with 70 passengers on board, each one with the name 'Duval'.¹³²

While the families and friends of the fishermen were allowed on shore, the crews themselves, along with their vessels, were initially treated as 'captives', hardly surprising perhaps given that maritime relations between Britain and France, never that warm at the best of times and even cooler at the moment of Mers-el-Kébir, were far from cordial. Bobbing up and down in Newlyn and Penzance harbours, and likely to be sunk by the Royal Navy if they attempted to set sail into the Atlantic, the crews had faced starvation, and owed their survival to Matthews who, on his own initiative, spent some £400 to feed these men.¹³³ It remains unclear whether the money was Matthews' own or, more likely, that of the French consulate. According to Astor, the Ministry of Health's representative at Truro, a Mr Kirby, had been given permission by Whitehall to repay the amount, yet in late October 1940 Matthews was still waiting for his money.

Just how many French boats, their crews and families, crossed the Channel to relative safety in England remains unclear. British reports compiled for the Home Office and the CFR all suggest different figures. Some of the problems in ascertaining precise figures for this category of refugees were outlined in a report of E. Ashley Dodd of the Ministry of Information.¹³⁴ At the start of August 1940, he travelled down to Cornwall and Devon, visiting 'every likely port in the two counties', no mean feat given that he was unfamiliar with the localities and was short of petrol. He reported no French fishermen settled on the northern

coast but some fifty men and women at Penzance, another thirty at Salcombe, along with other groups of uncertain numbers at Falmouth and Plymouth. Clearly this was a shifting community. Some men, having offloaded their human cargo on the Cornish coast, had quickly headed back for France before the British authorities could impound their boats; others had journeyed up to London to be registered or to enlist with de Gaulle; a small band of men were reportedly travelling up and down the coast to discover a suitable port to make their home; and a small number had been interned. Their numbers, however, were inferior to those of the Belgians, as Hay suggests,¹³⁵ and as the following police statistics for Newlyn and Brixham in 1940 attest (see table).¹³⁶

	Male	Female	Children	Total
French	45	30	20	95
Belgian	224	169	135	528

In their work on Belgian refugees, utilising the CEGES archives in Brussels, Buck and Bernado y Garcia have suggested that the overall numbers of Belgians in the region might even have been higher, closer to 1,000, dwarfing the figures for the French, an impression borne out by contemporary observers.¹³⁷ It is also recalled that relations between the Dutch and Belgians were not that harmonious. This may be because the Belgians possessed more boats, and boats of a better quality, than the French.¹³⁸ As will be seen, the quality of these craft was later to become a source of real friction between the fishermen themselves and the Mission Economique Belge (MEB), part of the Belgian government-in-exile.

Catering for the refugees

As the *exode* gathered momentum, French refugees were caught up with other nationalities and were processed in much the same way, notably through the Central Committee for War Refugees from Holland, Belgium and France, the local War Refugee Committees, and the London reception centres, which were often aided by such charitable bodies such as the WVS, the Catholic Women's League and the British Red Cross. What is striking is that, as early as June 1940, a number of specifically French organisations were emerging to cater for their own nationals. In part, this reflected a strong sense of patriotic pride, and the impressive organisational skills of a long-established French colony in London. It also signalled that the refugees were about

to become part of the political infighting that bedevilled the 'forgotten French', and which partially necessitated the setting up of Bessborough's French Welfare.

Foremost among these organisations was the CEAF. As an undated Foreign Office memo recalled, it had been founded in the first week of August 1940 to deal with the welfare of refugees and was part of the many bodies that fell under the aegis of the Comité Central Permanent de la Colonie Française de Londres.¹³⁹ Its objectives, outlined in an open letter to members of the French colony in Britain, were to provide French refugees with financial and material assistance, shelter and lodging, meals at reduced prices, medical and hospital services, offers of employment, education, help with communications to France, and even advice on repatriation. Although French in origin, it soon had an English chairwoman, Lady Warwick, the sister of Antony Eden, and enjoyed good relations both with French Welfare and with the French consulate in Bedford Square, urging all French nationals to make contact with this Vichy outpost. As the war progressed, Lady Warwick's organisation took on broader responsibilities, looking after men demobilised from de Gaulle's forces, civilians of the *colonie française* and the employment rights of French nationals in this country. Following the D-Day landings, it held glorified bring-and-buy sales at the Grosvenor House to help the needy across the Channel.¹⁴⁰

Because of its links with both the Foreign Office and the Vichy consulate, the CEAF soon fell foul of the Français de Grande Bretagne (FGB), which was also doing battle with the Catholic Women's League and the French Red Cross, organisations that allegedly harboured Pétainist sympathies.¹⁴¹ As the self-appointed civil wing of the Free French, founded shortly before the famous broadcast of 18 June, the FGB was eager to recruit as much support as possible. It argued that the 98-year-old Société de Bienfaisance was the most appropriate body to handle French refugees, partially because this body exuded respectability and maybe because it was in such a state of disrepair that it seemed ripe for a Gaullist takeover.¹⁴² As the WVS noted, much of the Société's funding was frozen in the French War Loan compelling it to ask the Treasury for assistance. Interestingly, the CEAF was also subject to WVS criticism, although the nature of the complaints were very different to those of the FGB. 'General impression was very hole in the corner', remarked WVS visitors of the CEAF headquarters, 'Not calculated to give any one confidence; though very earnest they don't appear to have any initiative.'¹⁴³

The competition and sniping among the above agencies eventually forced the government to act. In a memorandum of early August 1940, the Foreign Office admitted there was ‘urgent necessity in coordinating all the many voluntary committees, both British and French, which have been set up in this country’ in order to expedite the administration of aid.¹⁴⁴ The political quarrels among the French organisations, alongside the personal rivalries that existed among the English involved in handling the refugees, were also thought damaging for propaganda. So it was that Duff Cooper, at the Ministry of Information, asked Bessborough to handle the new department of French Welfare.¹⁴⁵

In many ways, Vere Ponsonby, the ninth Earl of Bessborough, was the right man for the job.¹⁴⁶ He had already witnessed at close hand several fratricidal quarrels: in 1917, after action at Gallipoli, he had travelled to Russia as part of the Milner Mission; in 1920, he had been forced to quit the family seat in Kilkenny, Ireland, because of the civil war. Bessborough subsequently settled at Stanstead House on the Sussex/Hampshire border in 1924 and married Roberta de Neuflyge, the daughter of a French banker. During the interwar years, he sat as chairman of numerous companies, served as governor-general of Canada and took a keen interest in amateur dramatics. In 1940, he had displayed an early concern for the fate of the French, and put aside Stanstead for the billeting of troops from Dunkirk.¹⁴⁷ Here, then, seemed to be the man who possessed the necessary authority, diplomatic skills and knowledge of things French to sort out the Gallic quarrels that irritated both the Foreign Office and Ministry of Information.

The remit of Bessborough’s French Welfare was large. It was to oversee Gaullist propaganda and to be responsible for all social and welfare work associated with:

- General de Gaulle’s movement
- French civilians and refugees
- Those members of the French armed forces who are either undecided as to whether to remain to continue the struggle or return to France, including the wounded, and those who have definitively decided to be repatriated, and who, it seems, may have to be retained for some time in this country owing to shipping difficulties.¹⁴⁸

Situated in the Savoy Hotel, in rooms vacated by the Friends of the French Forces Fund, he soon discovered his work cut out. At the end of August, he complained that ‘chaos’ reigned among the many

committees handling refugees, which were 'launching out in every conceivable direction', partly because they were unaware that his new body had been set up to coordinate their actions.¹⁴⁹ It was thus agreed to announce the emergence of French Welfare in the press, and on the radio on at least two or three 'different occasions'.¹⁵⁰ If the annual report filed by Bessborough for French Welfare during 1941 is to be believed, some semblance of order was established during that year; as we shall see, various of the charitable bodies were designated different groups to look after.¹⁵¹ Nonetheless, the impression is that infighting continued apace. In early October, Sir Desmond Morton joked that Bessborough was 'nearly suffering from a nervous breakdown owing to the appalling time he is having with these Frenchmen, I don't wonder'.¹⁵² That his work was cut out is testified by the sheer range of agencies catering for French refugees and civilians.

So many agencies were there that, in late 1940, the Foreign Office even published a booklet, listing names, addresses and responsibilities of the different societies.¹⁵³

Comité d'Assistance aux Familles des Soldats Français	All Nations Voluntary Service League
CEAF	British Council
FGB	Catholic War Refugees Spiritual Welfare Committee
Hôpital Français	Central Committee for War Refugees from Holland, Belgium and France
Institut Français	Foster Parents' Plan for War Children
Société de Bienfaisance	YMCA
Société des Anciens Combattants Français de Grande Bretagne	Salvation Army
Union des Mutilés Français, Anciens Combattants, et Victimes de la Guerre	Seven Seas Club
British Committee for the French Red Cross and other French War Charities	International Commission for War Refugees in Great Britain
French War Charities Society	WVS
British Red Cross: Foreign Relations Department, French Section	British Empire Union
Army Welfare	British War Relief Society
Catholic Women's League	Merseyside Council for Hospitality ¹⁵⁴

Despite Bessborough's good efforts, bickering among the welfare agencies continued throughout the war. To begin with, this was a turf war – a struggle to win public and private monies and extend influence – rather than an ideological battle. In October 1940, Lady Warwick complained that the statutes of the Société de Bienfaisance were contrary to the War Charities Act and thus the organisation should desist from performing its current activities, a charge that proved wholly spurious.¹⁵⁵ In mid-November, Lady Warwick visited the Foreign Office itself where she vented her anger at the Société, telling one official that they 'were an entirely bad lot, that they were in debt and wanted to collar any refugee money which they could'.¹⁵⁶ When the hapless official looked into the matter, he was told by Lord Bessborough, 'that Lady Warwick worried him daily about questions, and he was not anxious to encourage her'.¹⁵⁷ Not to be outdone, the FGB also moaned regularly about the CEAF, particularly the contacts it maintained with the Vichy consulate. Eventually, in 1941 some sort of truce was established when Bessborough decided that, in future, the venerable Société de Bienfaisance would cater for all those French who came to Britain before 10 May 1940, that is before the German invasion of Western Europe. All those who arrived after this date – mainly refugees – would receive help principally from the CEAF.¹⁵⁸

This, of course, did not please the FGB, which considered it had been denied a valuable source of recruits. Nor did it please the Free French, which, in early 1942, attempted to muscle in on the care of refugees, turning the question of welfare into a more overtly political issue. On 27 January, Colonel Tissier criticised existing welfare arrangements on the grounds that they 'helped Vichy nationals too much' and did not 'do enough' for the Free French.¹⁵⁹ Interestingly, he also reproached the FGB. While Gaullist, it was 'a commercial opportunist movement', which had taken organisations under its wing that were part Vichy-funded, notably the Comité d'Assistance aux Familles des Soldats Français. To remedy the situation, the Free French had accordingly established the Assistance Sociale, under the direction of Pleven and Tissier himself. Linked to the Forces Féminines de la France Libre (FFFL), its role was to visit and report on the welfare of French nationals in the UK, although it was admitted that the training of its female recruits was meagre.

If Tissier had hoped that the women of the Assistance Sociale would monopolise the caring for all French refugees in Britain, and no doubt win some extra recruits in the process, he had not counted on the irre-

pressible spirits of Lady Warwick and Madame de l'Hôpital whose timeless sense of patrician and middle-class philanthropy was not going to be pushed aside by such blatant politicking. By March 1942, both the WVS and the CEAF were becoming agitated at the behaviour of the forty ladies belonging to the Assistance Sociale.¹⁶⁰ A furious row soon broke out over the care of the unfortunate Madame I—, an elderly lady, unable to speak English, suffering from paranoia, and with a ten-year-old grandson to look after, who had been in the care of the Camberwell Borough British War Refugee Committee.¹⁶¹ This body had arranged for the grandmother and child to be transferred to a convent at Baldock in Hertfordshire. In the meantime, two ladies of the Assistance Sociale had taken matters into their own hands, collecting the clothes of Madame I— while she was in hospital, but failing to give these to her, thus leaving the poor lady with nothing to wear when the time came for her move to the north of London. When the CEAF investigated the case, it was learned that the same two ladies had regularly called on the grandson every Thursday, taking him to a school in Victoria, despite the fact that the local War Refugee Committee had found him a place at a Roman Catholic school in Camberwell itself.

Before long, Lady Warwick had unearthed further cases of Assistance Sociale meddling, leaving several no doubt unwanted notes on Lord Bessborough's desk. From the West Country emerged the story of Mlle L— who had apparently visited refugees in Taunton, St Ives and Penzance making 'a nuisance of herself, stirring up ill-feeling and misinterpreting facts'.¹⁶² From the north-west, it was learned that the Assistance Sociale were setting up *foyers* for refugees in the Manchester district, which had turned into political forums, and a quarrel had broken out over who should be responsible for transferring a refugee from Warrington for a three-week holiday in Torquay.¹⁶³ On the south coast, the Assistance Sociale had apparently promised refugees much, but had then failed to deliver.¹⁶⁴ Indeed, this became the focal point of Lady Warwick's criticisms. In April 1942, she reported that the Gaullist ladies of the Assistance Sociale had caused tremendous disappointment among refugees, and was alarmed to hear that the organisation was now in the hands of Capitaine Terré who had been originally earmarked for a post in the colonies.¹⁶⁵ Colonial conditions, the CEAF chief continued, were not the same as those as in England. Terré had clearly inflamed the situation by suggesting that French women preferred to be visited by French women. This was not the case, thundered Lady Warwick. They disliked 'women in uniform, spying in an

authoritative manner', asking political questions, forcing people to join the FGB and selling the Croix de Lorraine. French refugees, she concluded, much preferred her own visitors, many of whom were, in any case French, belonging to the Sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul and the Little Sisters of the Poor.

At least in one area of welfare, such squabbling was largely avoided, maybe because the Free French were involved at an early stage: the case of some two hundred French schoolchildren. While nearly half of this number had arrived at the time of Dunkirk, the remainder had been attending the French *lycée* in South Kensington.¹⁶⁶ This latter group was initially destined to be rehoused at either Reading or Cambridge Universities, before a country house became available in Bedfordshire; ultimately they were transferred to Cumberland.¹⁶⁷ As to the remaining children, some thirty of these had been farmed out to families in London, but it soon transpired that another seventy-five had been studying at a preparatory school for the prestigious military academy of Saint Cyr, the equivalent of Sandhurst. Most of these boys, or rather young men, had expressed a desire to enlist with de Gaulle and they had been permitted to form a cadet corps. Their example had been seized upon by the Free French, and the British had cooperated in moving them to Rake Manor, near Godalming in Surrey where the headteacher of a neighbouring school allowed access to playing fields and classrooms. Additionally the British Council provided two teachers, one French and one English, soon to be joined by a British adjutant and two NCOs to act as drill instructors. Such skills appear to have been needed as the discipline of the school was reputedly of a low standard and there was a fear that the Department of Education might be called in. Matters were rectified by the appointment of a new commandant, and the financial upkeep of the boys was assured through the support of the International Commission for War Refugees in Great Britain. Because of the Quaker leanings of this organisation, there was a worry that it might withdraw its assistance when the military purpose of the school became apparent, but this raised no fuss until it actually had contact with representatives of the Free French after which its spokeswoman, a Mrs Crawshay, said 'she would have nothing to do with de Gaulle or the cadet school at Rake'.¹⁶⁸ As the CFR noted, there was no doubt that, 'Mrs Crawshay had been extremely badly treated by Free French Headquarters.' Carlton Gardens was unmoved. Betraying his Bonapartist conception of education, if not his Bonapartist politics, de Gaulle had plans for the 'technicians' to remain at Rake Manor and for

the 'intellectuals' to move elsewhere, possibly Lord Desborough's estate, Panshanger. It remains unclear whether this scheme was ever put into operation or whether the International Commission for War Refugees was coaxed back into assisting with the operation.

While much quarrelling went on over the responsibility for welfare, what evidence is there of political infighting among the refugees themselves? This was something that the British government was especially interested in. After all, to whom did they owe their loyalty? Whereas Belgians and Dutch refugees could pledge adherence to their governments-in-exile, governments still at war with Germany, the options for the French were nowhere near as straightforward. It was understood that it was hard for them to indicate a support for Britain. While Britain might have provided a safe haven, it had also failed to recognise their own government of Vichy as the legitimate French regime. Nor were MI5 and the Home Office oblivious to Pétain's appeal as a saviour, a man who was apparently doing his utmost to shelter his people from further suffering, although significantly refugees in Britain were never the direct subject of one of his many radio appeals.¹⁶⁹ By contrast, few refugees, apart from the West Country fishermen, appear to have rallied to de Gaulle. To many, he still appeared an unknown and rebellious quantity who did not even possess the wholehearted support of his British adherents. As a French Welfare report of early 1941 observed, 'A number of the more intellectual had adopted an attitude which, while violently anti-Vichy, approved of the FFL only as a military government, and did not associate themselves with it or with the Français de Grande Bretagne.'¹⁷⁰ Most, it was stressed, kept out of politics, although it was admitted that there were some two hundred who were deemed to be 'dangerous'. These observations are borne out in a wide-ranging report on French subversive activities, prepared by MI5 in January 1941. While the security services had taken an interest in one or two political circles that had formed within London, refugees were not singled out for special attention, and were clearly seen as less of a threat than other groups, including the Free French Navy, which was thought to harbour anti-British opinions.¹⁷¹

Because the relevant files have been either withheld or destroyed, it is difficult to say just how much of a threat politically active refugees posed. Three general observations, however, can be made. First, troublemakers among refugees were never regarded with the same degree of seriousness as those exiled soldiers and sailors whose Pétainist sympathies were thought damaging to the overall war effort. Second,

politically suspect French refugees largely disappear from the picture after 1941, if French Welfare reports are to be believed, suggesting that they may well have been among the 500 or so civilians that were quickly repatriated (see below). Third, it should be remembered that, in the feverish atmosphere of 1940, fifth columnists were to be spotted everywhere, and any eccentric or 'foreign' behaviour invited investigation. Not even government departments were free of exaggeration, the Vansittart Committee alleging that 500 fifth columnists had entered the country along with Dutch refugees in the spring of 1940.¹⁷² It was because of these exaggerated fears that a small number of French refugees with German-sounding names and mixed parentage were interned. For example, the Jewish artist H—de B—R—, who later painted a series of panels for the Air Ministry, spent the first two years of the war in a camp, thanks to the fact that he had been born in Germany to a Dutch father, although his mother was French.¹⁷³ A similar case was that of a wine merchant A— M—, who had traded extensively in Britain before the war, and who was held at a camp near to Liverpool because of his German-Jewish mother; his father appears to have been either Swiss or French.¹⁷⁴

It is in WRVS files, which the Home Office officials grew tired of weeding in the early 1970s, that a handful of other 'doubtful' French cases may be uncovered, testimony to the fact that the Service's tearooms constituted a mine of information for the Home Office and MI5, and proof that government really had little to fear. It is here that we read the sorry tale of one minor aristocrat, a refugee who had sought to supplement his income by going to sea, a move that foundered on the rocks of officialdom.¹⁷⁵ He had subsequently written a letter to the Ministry of War Transport asking that a supposed 'labour ban', forbidding him to take employment at sea, should be removed forthwith as this was his only suitable means of living. On enquiring into his background, the Ministry of War Transport discovered that he was 'an educated young man, of good birth and now penniless, born on 30 March 1912, in possession of a French passport', but clearly 'not the type to be found working as an ordinary seaman on a Merchant ship'. Nonetheless, for several months he had been attempting to sign on to Scandinavian vessels, and had made one trip of eight days, before his vessel was confined to port. In that brief voyage, he had created 'considerable trouble among the crew', although on investigation this mischief proved less serious than originally feared. He then left the ship without authorisation and turned up at the Norwegian consulate in a

state of ‘nervous tension’, ‘completely unnerved as a result of the recent bombing raid on Clydeside’. ‘In hysterics’, ‘weeping freely’, and speaking of the inevitability of being bombed, he had subsequently been entrusted to the WVS in Glasgow as he was clearly ‘unsuited for sea work’ and refused to join de Gaulle because news might reach the Germans who were holding his brother, the Duc de F—, as a POW.

Keen to pursue the matter, on 3 June 1941 Captain Alan Williams of French Welfare requested the WVS to provide further information about this man who was now resident in Inverness.¹⁷⁶ A confidential report, dated 26 June 1941, was subsequently obtained from Mrs B—, a canteen organiser.¹⁷⁷ Having invited him to tea on 25 June, she observed that he had work, but no money, and suggested ‘he could make some extra cash by teaching French’. ‘Being a French man, and by his own account a journalist,’ she continued, ‘he can talk at any length on any subject, especially politics, with shattering, if superficial logic.’ ‘If he had disturbed his fellow seamen’ this would not have been with ‘malicious intent’, and she suggested he held his tongue when in the presence of troops or members of the YMCA as, ‘not being journalists’, they could not be expected to have the same ‘detached view’. That he had come under suspicion might be attributed to ‘his somewhat misleading voice and bearing’, which was to be attributed to his Russian ancestry and ability to speak ‘Apache argot’ which ‘communicated itself to some extent to his manners’! Concluding her report, Mrs B— came to the diplomatic conclusion that here was a man in need of ‘a good doctor’, especially if he was doing heavy manual work.

If such cases were typical, Britain – or for that matter de Gaulle – had little to fear from Vichy agents. Instead, surviving documentation suggests that the concerns of French refugees were less to do with politics, and more to do with their everyday existence.

Travail, famille, patrie: the everyday life of refugees

As Churchill braced the British people for ‘blood, sweat and tears’, Marshal Pétain offered his own compatriots a national renovation based on the values of ‘travail, famille, patrie’. Such reactionary values were to be inculcated through a wholesale overhaul of French society and institutions: schools were to teach religious values; the Catholic Church was to be restored to a privileged position; peasants were encouraged to return to their farms; women were to give up work to take up their rightful positions as mothers and housewives; industry

and agriculture were to be reorganised along corporatist lines; and the administration of France would mirror that of the *ancien régime*. These projects quickly came to naught, undermined by ministerial instability at Vichy, ideological inconsistency, rival projects based on technocratic values, the German presence, and material shortages. People quickly saw through the sham of Vichy propaganda and focused on the harsh reality of their own lives. Nonetheless, in many regards, their lives were still ruled by *travail, famille, patrie*: the need to find work to keep body and soul together; the pressure to keep families as one, especially given the upheaval of the *exode*, the taking of POWs, the introduction of discriminatory legislation and the eventual deportations to Germany; and the decision whether to abandon *attentisme* for resistance. Strikingly, the everyday lives of French refugees in Britain also revolved around the same three core issues of work, family and country, for not dissimilar reasons.

Famille

A primary concern was the family, or more particularly, the reunification of families and friends after the *exode*. The French writer Henri Amouroux has shown how, in 1940–41, the French press and official noticeboards frequently carried such communiqués as the following:

Clermont Ferrand, 24 février 1941

Le préfet du Puy-de-Dôme à MM. les préfets des départements de zone occupée et libre.

J'ai d'honneur de vous communiquer sous ce pli des listes d'enfants perdus recherchant leurs parents ou recherchés par leurs parents.

AUBE

GRILLOT Françoise, 2 ans et demi (famille de 12 enfants), de Luyères, était avec sa soeur aînée dans un autocar avec des militaires du 173^e R.I. La grande soeur a été très gravement blessée entre les villages de Dôches et Laubressel (Aube), s'est évanouie et, depuis ce moment, aucune nouvelle de la petite Françoise qui a disparu.¹⁷⁸

Such notices bear an uncanny resemblance to those posted up, courtesy of the Ministry of Information, in refugee reception centres. The following enquiries were made at the King's Canadian School, Bushey Park, Hampton Hill, Middlesex:

Jacques Le Cavorzin, age 12, probably evacuated from Boulogne by British destroyers. No news since beginning of May.

Mlle Nicole Guillot, age 15, formerly of 145, rue de Saussure, Pirie. The

enquirer, a Mrs Borrias, is godmother to Mlle Guillot and is willing to take full charge of her if she can be found.

Mme Marie Battez and son Louis Battez, 14 yrs, formerly of 3 Impasse Clément, Le Portel. M. Louis Battez, on board P.95, *Notre Dame de France*, no news of them since May 16th.¹⁷⁹

It is known that some 90,000 children were separated from their parents at the time of the *exode*, never to be reunited; one wonders how many were separated by the Channel.¹⁸⁰ Government officials were also inundated with a flurry of letters asking after friends and relations. It is in the papers of Noel Baker, a politician deeply concerned for the welfare of internees and refugees, notably Spanish Republicans evacuated at Dunkirk and immediately interned,¹⁸¹ that may be uncovered several of these examples, notably a request from a South African, long resident in France, who was anxious to trace a Jewish companion who had landed at Falmouth in June 1940.¹⁸²

Alongside discovering relatives, refugees were keen to find new homes. Memorandum WR1 had originally envisaged the requisitioning of empty buildings, which would then be reconnected to power supplies, and the property owners recompensed by central government funds. Yet it soon became obvious this would be a costly business. While the policy was not altogether relinquished, Memorandum WR2 favoured placing refugees with private householders and boarding houses. Whitehall appreciated, however, that this was a risky policy, and that families could not be forced to accept the refugees. Not only had the economic dislocation created by the war made people protective of their jobs, it had also intensified a mistrust of all things foreign, a mistrust that was even deeper following the fall of France. Buck has demonstrated the way unhappy memories of Belgian refugees in the First World War also created apprehensions. He quotes one Cricklewood resident who complained to Mass-Observation: 'They're a dirty lot. I used to be in a hotel as a chambermaid and we had to take them. They ruined all the nice rooms in no time, doing their shoes on the curtains, and all sorts of filthy things.'¹⁸³

French refugees had cause to fear rebuff for other reasons. According to Mass-Observation, before 1939 British public opinion had been more sympathetic to Germans than it was to the French. 'The general stereotype of the French', it observed, 'particularly perpetuated in music halls and cartoons of the popular papers is of a voluble, excessively excitable, often slightly bearded, and somewhat lecherous personality.'¹⁸⁴ As war approached, sympathy for the French state

grew, but not necessarily for the French people. As Philip Bell and Ralph White have demonstrated, in 1939 British propaganda made much of the Maginot Line and the solidarity of the Franco-British alliance.¹⁸⁵ The rapid capitulation of the Allied armies, the signing of the Armistice, the bombing of Mers-el-Kébir and the creation of the Pétain government, had thus dumbfounded public opinion. In West London, Mass-Observation observed that people were so 'thunder-struck by the magnitude of the catastrophe that they are as yet unable to express any coherent attitude to it'.¹⁸⁶ It was an attitude also observed by the American diarist and writer Mollie Panter-Downes: 'The people seemed to respond to the staggering news [French capitulation] like people in a dream, who go through the most fantastic actions without a sound. There was little discussion of events, because they were too bad for that'; she added that, 'what the average simple Englishman believes about the average simple French man has only made recent events more difficult to understand'.¹⁸⁷ In this situation, it is not surprising that Mass-Observation occasionally overheard such comments as 'Bleeding French'.¹⁸⁸ The depth of such feelings was no doubt hardened by the fact that the Belgian, Czech and Polish exiles in Britain had quickly, and very visibly, thrown themselves back into the fight. There was thus a real anxiety among French nationals in Britain that they would become targets of hostility, a fear shared by Jean Monnet and his close associates who were initially scared to travel on the top deck of a London bus for fear of being recognised as French.¹⁸⁹

It was, then, an uphill struggle for the local War Refugee Committees, local boroughs and relief agencies to seek out willing landlords, and it is to the credit of these agencies that they succeeded in housing 80 per cent of all London-based refugees with private householders. It is also to the credit of householders that most said 'yes' when asked to take in refugees, testimony to the fact that the British public was genuinely moved by the plight of these unfortunate civilians, and was able to put aside its considerable doubts about unreliable foreigners. Nonetheless, every now and again strings were attached to offers of accommodation. One letter from a nurse in Birmingham to the LCC asked for a refugee who could look after her two small children: 'We would prefer a woman about 35 or so. Good with children, and must be very clean. A person with nice habits, as I want the children to be brought up nicely. Dutch preferably.'¹⁹⁰ Another lady from Crystal Palace, on the advice of her worried daughter, offered places to two refugees in order that they could keep her company during the

bombing.¹⁹¹ Others were much more blunt in their requests, and were clearly out to benefit from the fact that billeting allowances were to be paid direct to landlords, thus creating a guaranteed income. One enterprising proprietor from Harrow Weald wrote to the LCC: ‘Should you be requiring flats for refugees, I can offer you three ...’.¹⁹²

It will be recalled that it had originally been the intention to house refugees outside London, but, in the event, most were dispatched to and housed in the capital, as the following WVS/Home Office statistics for August 1940 reveal. Of 23,431 War Refugee cards, the distribution was as follows:

In 16 London boroughs	8,256
In 4 Local Authorities in Essex	733
In 5 Local Authorities in Kent	1,014
In 15 Local Authorities in Middlesex	3,653
In 15 Local Authorities in Surrey	2,206
In 1 Local Authority in Herts	2
Total	15,864

(The remainder were housed in: two London and Middlesex boroughs, which had not sent in returns; five local authorities in Lancashire; three in South Wales; and two in Yorkshire.)¹⁹³

Living in the capital, however, brought with it exactly the problems that had been foretold, especially when the Blitz started in earnest. After the initial bustle of the reception centres, refugees had been impressed by the calm summer skies that hung over London. As Mass-Observation discovered, within France refugees had been deeply disconcerted not so much by the fires that accompanied the *exode* as the Stukas passed ahead, but by the noise and sight of people panicking.¹⁹⁴ The tranquillity of London also struck other prominent exiles, including de Gaulle, and is frequently commented upon in the memoirs of the period. In the words of Robert Mengin, walking through London’s parks on 19 June, ‘The sky was of a purest blue. The lawns were still green. That silence, that purity, that freshness overwhelmed you with a sense of transience and fragility.’¹⁹⁵

With the fall of autumn leaves came the fall of enemy bombs. The anxieties of refugees were eloquently put by Bastin, the representative of the Belgium government-in-exile, to Ministry of Health officials, in a meeting that November: ‘A great many refugees had the terrible experience of German bombing in their country and it is not surprising therefore to hear most of them say that “they have left a hole to fall into

another.”¹⁹⁶ The question was next raised at the dreary sounding Fourth Meeting of the Welfare Sub-Committee for War Refugees held on 25 November 1940.¹⁹⁷ Here Bastin, in the stodgy language of the minute-taker, ‘pointed out how difficult it is for War Refugees restricted as to their movements and not possessing the language, to find for themselves suitable rooms in safer areas. Those desirous of leaving bombed areas are being encouraged to make their own arrangements and for this reason, he raised with the Sub-Committee the question of setting up suitable machinery which would enable the refugees to be transferred in groups to selected areas.’ The issue was handed over to the Central Committee for War Refugees, meeting on 20 November, which recommended to the Ministry of Health that certain classes of war refugee, ‘women with children and generally family groups, including the men, when the latter had no employment in the London area’, could indeed be moved to districts where there were no security objections and in which billets were likely to be found. Rather disingenuously C. F. Roundell, of the Ministry of Health, replied on 2 December 1940 stating that careful consideration had been given for the initial reception of refugees in the London region.¹⁹⁸ Billets elsewhere were so scarce, and general demands on accommodation ‘so acute’, that the minister ‘has found it necessary to make a rule that foreign war refugees as such may only be billeted in those areas specifically set aside for their reception’. He feebly concluded that refugees could take advantage of evacuation schemes available for residents; alternatively, subject to police permission, they could move to any part of the country save those prohibited under the Defence Regulations. He carefully sidestepped Bastin’s argument that refugees lacked both the language and the freedom of movement to seek out other homes, although those hurdles clearly did not deter those independent-minded French who were eager to shake off the unwanted attentions of the Vichy consulate.

The Blitz aside, life within refugee homes appears to have been bleak with many chores falling to the women, at least if WVS reports are to be believed. The following is an account of a large house in St John’s Wood, just behind Regent’s Park in London, which provided shelter to 11 families (7 Belgian, 3 French, 1 Portuguese) 42 people in all (26 adults, 16 children): ‘Each family has one bedroom, children curtained off, plus one large sitting room.’¹⁹⁹ There was also a large sitting room shared by all:

The women are divided in groups to do the house work, the cooking and the general tidying up in the house. The cooking is done by 3 women for

3 days running at the end of which they leave that department spotless for the next group to take on. The three women, who have had their turn at cooking, do their own small laundry and the turning out of their rooms. Once a week, all the women and bigger children knit and mend clothes sent from the Clothing Centre. We hope to get material soon for the people to make their own winter clothes. On Saturday morning, the hot water installation is turned on and everyone takes baths and does the heavier laundry. The catering is possible on a cheap basis because of numbers and allows us to be well in the grant.

As the report implies, refugees were desperately poor. Not only were they destitute when they arrived, they received little financial assistance from their British hosts who devised a fiendishly complex system of welfare support, worthy of the Victorian values of thrift and self-reliance. Whereas those in requisitioned properties (the minority) drew financial aid through the pre-war Prevention and Relief from Distress (PRD) apparatus, administered through central government's Unemployment Assistance Board (UAB), those in billets (the majority) were supported by the Public Assistance Committees (PAC) which fell under the control of the Ministry of Health. As already mentioned, PAC aid was paid direct to the householder who would then decide how to use this money. This had several consequences. First, it denied refugees any real independence of their landlord. Second, it kept them in a state of impoverishment. This was, in part, deliberate. The government had no wish that public monies should favour foreigners over the destitute of this country,²⁰⁰ and there was clearly some public resentment that, at a time of national crisis, taxpayers' money was being spent on 'outsiders'. Nonetheless, as early as June 1940, Whitehall recognised that refugees needed some measure of financial independence, if only to pay for a cup of tea, and it was thus decided to issue 'pocket money'; it was exactly that.

Given that government paid so little, and given that the complicated welfare machinery it had set in place often failed to function smoothly, it is small wonder that refugees abused the system. On 6 May 1941, the St Marylebone War Refugee Committee, based at 128/134 Baker Street, reported to WVS that there were 107 refugees in the borough.²⁰¹ On investigating some 35 cases, 14 were guilty of 'systematic misrepresentation with the purpose of drawing full billeting allowances, Public Assistance, or evading a proportionate rental'. The cases investigated appear mainly to have been Polish, Belgian and Czech. There is no mention of the French maybe because, unlike their Continental counterparts, they could not defraud the system by drawing on benefits

from their own government, subsidies that they then did not declare to the British authorities.²⁰² On several occasions, Colonel Tissier reminded French Welfare that the Free/Fighting French possessed insufficient funds to assist their destitute compatriots living in the British Isles although, as we have seen, this did not stop the Assistance Sociale from attempting to monopolise refugee relief, a project that was doomed from the start.

Ultimately, Vichy stepped in to assist impoverished French nationals, whether refugees or otherwise. In October 1941, the Consulate-General in Bedford Square suggested that the Reciprocal Advances Account, which had been set up to deal with the liquidation of the French government's assets and obligations in Britain, could be used to assist the needy, a gesture that was warmly welcomed by the Foreign Office as Vichy was doing something similar for British nationals in unoccupied France.²⁰³ While wary that this money might be used to promote pro-Pétainist sentiments, reassurance was drawn from the fact that, in the case of refugees, it would be distributed through the auspices of the CEAF, a move which must surely have angered the FGB and Free French. Whatever the case, there was no denying the enthusiasm of the CEAF which, on the death of its Lady Warwick in 1943, chose to bring its good works to the attention of the Foreign Office.²⁰⁴ By that stage, it was spending approximately £125 a month on refugees and the destitute of the French colony, the following list outlining certain of its costs:

Distributed cash	£22 7s 10d
Oculists bills	£5 5s 0d
Dentists	£5 4s 6d
Milk bills (children)	£6 9s 9d
Patent food	£6 15 s 0d
Clothes distributed (approx value)	£135 7s 2d
Visitors dealt with	75
Employment found for	11
Billeting troubles	7
General info (lodgings)	22
Red Cross messages sent	4
POW parcels sent	6 ²⁰⁵

Such voluntary work was no mean achievement, given that the CEAF no longer relied principally on subscriptions, but on private sources; it remains unclear whether it still benefited from the Reciprocal

Advances Account. In 1943, it boasted that it already possessed the cash to carry on for at least another 18 months,²⁰⁶ something that could not have pleased the Assistance Sociale.

Travail

Despite the efforts of the CEAF, it was manifest that the only way in which French refugees could escape the poverty trap was to find employment. For its part, the government was also eager to draft as many able-bodied people as possible into the war effort. In February 1941, French Welfare reported on twenty men and women who were employed at the Burtonwood Aircraft Repair Depot in Lancashire and a similar number, over military age, who were attached to demolition squads.²⁰⁷ Yet the government was far less keen on French refugees taking up their pre-war professions lest this created resentment on the part of British workers fearful for their own livelihoods. So it was that, in July 1941, the case of four Trouville boat workers arrived on Bessborough's desk; it was suggested that they had been sacked from a British shipyard because of trade-union pressure. On investigation, it transpired that they had been dismissed simply because their work had been 'poor'.²⁰⁸

This concern about the protection of British jobs might explain why the government made the employment bureaucracy for refugees so daunting, although we should never overlook the Victorian values of thrift and self-help that underscored the whole welfare apparatus. On arriving in Britain, refugees had been issued with a notice in their native language that explained the processing, housing and food arrangements.²⁰⁹ Within 48 hours of arriving at their billets, all foreigners were to register at a police station where they would be issued with Registration Certificates. If refugees were able to work, it was their responsibility to report next at the local Employment or Labour Exchange. Explaining that there was a 'present need for skilled and unskilled agricultural workers, forestry workers and workers in saw mills', hardly the type of job to be found in London where most refugees were located, a warning ensued that refugees could not take on a job without a permit from the Labour Exchange and notification to the Ministry of Labour. All of this, even if explained in French, must have been terribly confusing to a refugee already disorientated by the experiences of the *exode* and arrival in a strange country.

Confusion naturally ensued. The WVS was especially concerned, and cited the case of a certain De P—, whom its volunteers discovered

at CEAF headquarters: 'De P— said that he had first to apply to the police – then to the Labour Exchange – who referred the matter to the Home Office – who held it up indefinitely.'²¹⁰ Although De P— was unflatteringly referred to as 'just the sort of person for whom no one would bother to do anything', the WVS concluded, 'There is a great deal of dissatisfaction among the refugees due mostly to their not having anything to do except to make complaints. The effect is to demoralise them and the people among whom they are living.' On occasion, when jobs were found, they were not to the refugees' liking. In October 1940, Lady Warwick complained to the Foreign Office about the behaviour of one Mr O'C— from Denmark Hill, presumably an official at the local Labour Exchange, who had been pressurising French women to take jobs in a munitions factory.²¹¹ He had been 'very rude and rigorous in his methods', continued Lady Warwick, explaining that these women were reluctant to accept such employment as they feared they might end up assembling bombs that would be dropped on France. The jobsworth at Denmark Hill was not alone in his uncaring attitude. In suburban Teddington, one French male, too ill to fight and suited only to a 'light sheltered job', had been told that he had to take up demolition work or forfeit his money. According to Margaret Green, an expert on African matters who had been lecturing the Free French on colonial administration, he had been so dispirited that he had sought repatriation, believing this was the only option left to him.²¹²

Perhaps the most contented of the refugees were those fishermen and their families who had landed in the West Country. Some of these had been immediately shipped off to London for registration. There, they had been billeted at empty houses in Pembury Road in Tottenham, only a stone's throw from White Hart Lane, the home of Tottenham Hotspur, whose towering and ramshackle East Stand was being used as a mortuary.²¹³ Most had registered through the proper channels, several aligning with de Gaulle. In addition, the families were given a fortnightly 75s allowance, yet their great desire was to be allowed to return to Penzance to fish, and to join up with crews they had left behind; only, in 1941, after much pressure from French Welfare, was their request granted. When they eventually resettled in Penzance, they found homes waiting for them, but no furniture. In Newlyn, French fisherwomen reputedly announced that they could not sleep on straw mattresses: 'nous sommes pour de Gaulle, et de Gaulle ne couche pas sur la paille'.²¹⁴

In the meantime, their compatriots in Devon and Cornwall had already begun to adapt to life in exile, although this process had not been without teething problems. Having spoken with the many London-based agencies concerned with the French fishermen, in October 1940 Henry Astor of French Welfare set off on a tour of the West Country to see what was happening with his own eyes.²¹⁵ Arriving first at Plymouth, he discovered no French fishermen as such, but only 'Frenchmen serving with the Royal Navy'. According to a Miss Waveney Lloyd, of the Ministry of Information, these men felt they were 'merely tolerated' and were not appreciated as an 'asset'. There was disquiet that English lessons, initially provided by the local authorities, had now stopped, and that the French were kept apart from British ratings, although one Frenchman had complained that he was being forced to work on a vessel manned by his own countrymen! In conversation with Captain Lush of the Admiralty, Astor learned that there were five French fishing boats still lying in the mud at Plymouth; these were, however, in a poor state, and needed considerable amounts of 'time and money' spent on them. In far better shape was a French sand dredger, the *Ingénieur de Jolie*, said to be in 'perfect condition', together with a complete crew, which Lush was keen to have transferred to Liverpool, lest the men set sail for France. For his part, Lush had faith only in those fishermen whose families were based in England, thus deterring them from flight. This point was echoed by Miss Lloyd who was keen to do everything in her powers to reunite the fishermen with their wives. As Lush grumbled, there had already been two cases of boats 'escaping and returning to France'.

Travelling next to Falmouth, Astor discovered a healthier situation with no 'idle boats' and fishermen 'perfectly contented living ashore with their families', occasionally deploying their boats for secret work on behalf of the Royal Navy. Brixham also presented an encouraging picture, with twelve men and four trawlers, earning a good living, happy that their families were ashore. At Newlyn, Astor was unable to meet any of the authorities dealing with the refugees, but was fortunate to speak to the fishermen themselves who belonged to some five boats. Once again, the fact that families had been reunited was a key factor in the contentment of the men, yet given the disadvantage that their boats were only suitable for long-line fishing, there was concern as to what would happen over the winter. Here, no arrangements had been made to support the men, via PAC, should bad weather prevent them fishing, as was the case in Brixham. Over in Salcombe, where many boats had

first landed, only four fishermen remained, together with two vessels, the *Pourquoi Pas*, in need of repair, and the unfortunate *Sainte Isabelle*, which had recently sunk. Not surprisingly, the concern of the four remaining Frenchmen was with their material welfare. Unable to fish, they had turned their hands to salvage work, earning paltry wages for the Southern Salvage Company; with the arrival of winter all salvaging had ceased. Lonely and dispirited, with their families in France, these men did not hide their desire to return to their homeland.

Nearby, in Dartmouth, no fishermen remained, two abandoned boats the only sign of their visit. In better shape were the nine boats that Astor discovered in Southampton. These boasted semi-diesel engines and had been refitted shortly before the war by the French government on the condition that the vessels would be put to government disposal at a time of crisis; four had been fitted with mine-sweeping gear, which the Admiralty was now contemplating removing. Probably because of the importance of the port at Southampton and its place in the front line, considerable thought had been given to relocating these particular fishermen, and it was proposed that the boats and their crews be transferred to the west coast of Scotland for the purposes of herring fishing, although it should not be forgotten that the Admiralty also used such boats for spying purposes.²¹⁶

All in all, the French fishermen appear to have been more contented than their Belgian counterparts where quarrels between French and Flemish speakers were rife. As Buck relates, these arguments did not merely reflect national differences but the fact that the Belgians owned numerous well-equipped vessels.²¹⁷ Such a catch proved too tempting for the Belgian government-in-exile, yet its ham-fisted attempts to assert authority over the fleet only succeeded in precipitating an almighty quarrel with the fishermen themselves, who were supported by Bryan Stevenson, a local fish wholesaler who doubled up as the Belgian consul. The Belgian government's insistence that the fishermen paid insurance premiums direct to itself only created further discontent.

For once, the French were models of good citizens.²¹⁸ The West Country fishermen rarely figure in the CFR minutes and, in 1942, French Welfare reported that the welfare of the remaining *pêcheurs* had passed from the CEAF to the Free French, although problems clearly remained.²¹⁹ While the Free French provided free medical attention, children under school age were catered for by the Child Welfare

Department; those of school age came under the aegis of the Ministry of Education. Perhaps typical of a male-dominated profession, it was the women's welfare that was being neglected, leaving the CEAF anxious to establish some kind of health insurance benefit.

One of the reasons why the Free French were happy to take on board the welfare of the fishermen was that most had rallied to de Gaulle and, in 1940, had readily manned his fledgling navy. Nor did it go unnoticed that the coastlines of Devon and Cornwall were ideal landing grounds for those French men and women escaping metropolitan soil. Whereas in 1940–41 there had been a constant worry that the fishermen would abscond, in 1942 it was more likely that they would be welcoming and assisting boats escaping France. In September 1942 two such vessels, the *Marie Henriette* and *Muse des Mers*, carrying thirteen men, arrived in Newlyn where they were welcomed by representatives of the Admiralty, French Welfare and the Fighting French.²²⁰ In 1940, these boats would have been confined to harbour, this time the welcome was far better coordinated, the police being 'very kind' and the immigration officers 'restrained'. A half-tin of tobacco was drawn from Customs for each man; the local WVS and PACs provided parcels of food and gifts; and French Welfare laid its hands on sizeable quantities of cider and beer. Entertainment was arranged on the quayside and, on 20 September, a party lasted from 6.00 to 9.00 p.m., to which local French fishermen and Free French soldiers were invited. Even the Gaullists could not grumble about the arrangements and, on 26 September, the newly arrived refugees were transferred to London for registration and security purposes, presumably for a stay at the Patriotic School, before being allowed to return to Cornwall.

Patrie

There were those who wished to travel in the other direction, and be repatriated to France. Such a sentiment was, in many senses, perfectly understandable. It will also be recalled that this was an extremely delicate subject, especially with the Free French. When Chartier of the Consulate-General asked that information about repatriation be broadcast on the BBC, his request was flatly turned down; the news was instead to be relayed through French charitable agencies, no doubt pinned on an obscure part of their noticeboards.²²¹ Moreover, repatriation involved making complicated shipping arrangements, always a hazardous business since the Germans refused to grant a safe passage even to boats flying a neutral ensign. Nonetheless, this prospect of

being torpedoed by a U-boat did not prevent some 500 refugees from returning to their homeland in the immediate six months after the Battle of France. Quite who volunteered for repatriation is unclear. While it is likely that this number included troublemakers identified by the British, it also comprised those who simply could not adapt to a new way of life. As we have seen, Britain was a strange land with strange customs, the welcome of officialdom had not exactly been overflowing with charity, few refugees appear to have known the English language, the Blitz was a stark reminder that the war was not over, and there remained the prospect of a German invasion. Yet maybe the greatest attraction of repatriation was the prospect of being reunited with families. Such was the case of a handful of male refugees from Brest and Dunkirk, in the words of Chartier 'travailleurs sérieux', who had taken work in British factories and who were contemptuous of their fellow refugees who preferred to live 'dans l'oisiveté aux frais de la charité publique'.²²² More than anything, he continued, these men were worried about their families.

As the full extent of German oppression and of Vichy impotence became transparent, the prospect of repatriation must have become less than appealing, yet at least the rallying of large parts of the French empire to the Allied cause offered one possibility of returning to lands that were 'forever French'. Until the conquest of North Africa in late 1942, when a large segment of the Free French established itself in Algiers, this process appears to have happened in dribs and drabs and involved military, rather than civilian, personnel. However, in January 1943, French Welfare arranged for two parties of such people to travel to Madagascar via Fleetwood.²²³ The local WVS, unaware of the nature of the parties, was accordingly instructed to meet these groups as they arrived from London in the North West, and to arrange for temporary billeting, food and necessary clothing.²²⁴ As handwritten telephone messages in the archives attest, arrangements did not go as planned. Although WVS representatives were instructed not to meet the train, and thereby bring attention to themselves, news of the arrival appears to have been leaked, compromising the safety of the mission, although ultimately the party did manage to set sail without mishap.²²⁵

By this date, thought was already turning to the Liberation of Europe and the eventual repatriation of all French refugees.²²⁶ De l'Hôpital records how:

in the tense weeks before D Day 1944, top secret plans were put in hand for the reception of persons who it was expected might escape from the coasts of Normandy and Brittany to seek refuge in England soon after the invasion. A large camp was set up in Sussex at Shoreham to be a Reception Centre, staffed by the military assisted by Ministry of Health officials, with WVS responsible for welfare and clothing. This camp was to be the first stop and after a stay of twenty-four hours each batch of refugees would be moved to London where a large centre had been opened comprising several houses in Onslow Square, in which WVS would again be responsible for welfare and clothing.²²⁷

While WVS officials set out for Sussex, these arrangements never went to plan; and, in the event, the process of receiving refugees bore an uncanny resemblance to circumstances in May–June 1940. To begin with, refugees did not arrive at designated ports.²²⁸ Second, the numbers were fewer than predicted. In a letter to Lady Reading of 20 June 1944, Grace Peel of the Amis des Volontaires Français (AVF) remarked, ‘I have heard from the French Consul General that so far the numbers of French refugees are very small and that at the request of the British authorities the work in connection with them is to be undertaken with as little publicity as possible.’²²⁹ Third, there was squabbling among French agencies as to who should cater for the refugees. French Welfare soon found that it was having to act yet again as an arbiter between the AVF, CEAF, FGB and WVS. Fourth, given the launch of the dreaded V1 and V2 rockets, there were considerable doubts about London as a suitable depot. Lady Peel wondered whether it would be better to send refugees down to the West Country where the fishermen were settled: ‘Little French colonies exist in Devon and Cornwall, our French Friends would therefore not feel so *depaysés*. The Free French Committee with the help of the British Council have established 4 or 5 little French schools where, after attending English schools, French children continue their French lessons and can qualify for their *Certificat d’Etudes*.’²³⁰ As Peel continued, there were several offers of accommodation:

I also heard when lecturing at Ilfracombe last week that schools were being circularised asking them to take two or more refugees. Miss Warrell Bowring of the Adelaide Girls’ College was willing to take two girls if they were French . . . Mr and Mrs Johnstone who have over a period of years collected a large family of about 25 French orphans and brought them over here in 1940 are willing to take 12 more. Mrs Johnstone would like some quite young babies amongst them. I can assure you the children would be wonderfully looked after. There are 12 children of all ages at

Silverton so the newcomers would feel at home. The Johnstones make only two conditions: the children should be French and above all they don't want to take any Mothers.'

In a final echo of the situation of 1940, public charity and goodwill contrasted markedly with the parsimony and obduracy of government. When, in August 1944, Lady Reading suggested to the Ministry of Health the possibility of flying over two or three hundred 'delicate French children', she received a lukewarm response.²³¹ Having sought the opinions of the Ministry of Education, Board of Trade and Foreign Office, a Health representative replied:

Although, as a general proposition, the value of a successful international gesture of this sort can be very great, our feeling is that unless it could be extraordinarily well done, it might be as likely to result in complaint or misunderstanding as gratitude. Not only would the risks of bringing delicate or rickety children from the warmer climate of France to the rigours of an English winter be serious, but we have lost a great deal of the permanent accommodation which existed before the war in this country for such children and would have to find special ad hoc premises and staff. An even greater difficulty perhaps is that if we made such a gesture to France we could hardly resist pressure to do so successively for Belgium, Holland, Norway and, perhaps, even Poland, Czechoslovakia, Greece and Yugoslavia.²³²

In the event, some French children did arrive, but numbers were small. Often they had been orphaned, and were being sent to these shores principally for a break, rather than long-term settlement.²³³ Many of their parents appear to have died in concentration camps or had been killed fighting in the Resistance.²³⁴ Having rested in the Lucy Cohen Convalescent Home in Hove, they spent two months among English families before returning to France.

Brighton was, with Shoreham, one of the dispatch points from where long-term French refugees were returned home. This was a task overseen by the usual bodies – French Welfare, CEAF and WVS – alongside the newly established delegations of the French government. On 4 April 1946, the WVS regional officer for Brighton and Hove recalled the scenes in late 1944/early 1945: 'They came through in 50–100 at a time. I believe the WVS there did a grand job, and on occasions had to house them for twenty-four hours if the boat failed to sail.'²³⁵ Indeed, the activities of the Sussex WVS drew warm thanks from Henri Frenay, the famous resister, recently appointed *Ministre des prisonniers de*

guerre, déportés et réfugiés.²³⁶ So it was that the French refugees, unexpected and unwanted in 1940, slipped out of England, unnoticed and unlamented, in 1944.

Conclusions

It remains unknown how many refugees chose to stay in these isles at the end of the war. Surmise suggests it could only have been a few: possibly women who had married British men, and maybe some of those fisherfolk and their families who put down roots in the West Country. Of all the groups making up the French community in exile, the lot of the refugees was the most uncomfortable. In the first place, their arrival had not been foreseen. In the strategic planning for the war, both France and Britain looked on refugees of any nationality as an irritant that might upset carefully laid military plans. During the ensuing discussions, Paris largely triumphed. Keen not to upset its chief ally, and recognising the logic of the French position, Britain reluctantly agreed to accept the majority numbers of Belgian and Dutch civilians, and drew up contingency plans accordingly. Reading these documents some sixty years after the event, they possess a convincing, albeit cynical, logic. Whether they were ever practical remains dubious. Goodness knows how Britain would have coped with the 500,000 Dutch and Belgian refugees it had initially anticipated receiving. If such numbers had ever entered, it is tempting to believe that Britain would have experienced the same confusion witnessed in the *exode*, leaving the country vulnerable to a German invasion. In the event, the small numbers – Dutch, Belgian, French – that eventually arrived could be managed without too much bother. They never posed a security threat and cost little to the taxpayer, however much Ministry of Health officials might have grumbled. The refugees did, however, constitute a political target for Gaullist agencies, yet a majority of them were deeply reluctant to abandon their *attentiste* position. This reluctance was never truly appreciated by the FGB and Free French, which indulged in a constant struggle with the CEAF, a conflict that often degenerated into parish-pump politics. Disorientated, distressed and desolate, the principal concerns of the refugees were, above all, practical ones: housing; clothes; food; and employment. Accordingly, they kept themselves to themselves and made little attempt to mix with the British public. Undoubtedly, their ‘foreignness’ and their impoverishment set them apart, yet the overriding impression is that, after the

fifth-column scare of May–June 1940, they elicited sympathy and support at least among the public, unlike their compatriots in the French army and navy who decided on early repatriation rather than serve with de Gaulle.

Notes

- 1 I am indebted to R. Ashton, *Little Germany. German Refugees in Victorian Britain* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989) p. 25 for this observation about French refugees.
- 2 G. Orwell, *The Collected Essays. Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, vol. 2, *My Country. Right or Left, 1940–1943* (London, Secker & Warburg, 1968), pp. 342–3.
- 3 J. W. Wheeler-Bennett, *John Anderson, Viscount Waverley* (London, Macmillan, 1962), p. 239. See too R. Tree, *When the Moon was High. Memories of War and Peace, 1897–1942* (London, Macmillan, 1975), p. 119.
- 4 CCC SPRS 1/182, letter from the Council of Austrians in Great Britain to Spears, 8 April 1940.
- 5 M. Kochan, *Britain's Internees in the Second World War* (London, Macmillan, 1983), p. 41.
- 6 G. Ciano, *Ciano's Diaries, 1939–1943* (London, William Heinemann, 1947) pp. 289–90.
- 7 Women's Royal Voluntary Service (hereafter WVRS) Box 198, Mme de l'Hôpital, 'The Story of the War Refugees in Great Britain, 1940–1947'.
- 8 On the WVS, see C. Graves, *Women in Green. The Story of the WVS* (London, Heinemann, 1948).
- 9 On the administrative confusion that accompanied the *exode* in France, see especially J. Vidalenc, *L'Exode de mai–juin 1940* (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1957) and N. Dombrowski, 'Beyond the Battlefield. The French Civilian Exodus of May–June 1940', unpublished New York University Ph.D. thesis, 1995.
- 10 R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy* (London, HMSO, 1950) and F. M. Wilson, *They Came as Strangers. The Story of Refugees to Great Britain* (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1959).
- 11 V. Caron, *Uneasy Asylum. France and the Jewish Refugee Crisis, 1933–1942* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1999).
- 12 B. Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe, 1939–1945* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1979), L. London, *Whitehall and the Jews, 1933–1948. British Immigration Policy and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000) and C. Holmes, *A Tolerant Country. Immigrants, Refugees and Minorities in Britain* (London, Faber & Faber, 1991).

- 13 M. Buck, 'Feeding a Pauper Army. War Refugees and Welfare in Britain, 1939–1942', in *Twentieth Century British History*, 10 (3) 1999, 310–44.
- 14 P. Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War* (New York/London, Garland, 1982), pp. 501–2.
- 15 PRO HO 213 464 203/2/1, letter of Sir Russell Scott, Home Office, to George Chrystal, Ministry of Health, 17 March 1937.
- 16 PRO HO 213 464 203/2/8, untitled report of 18 January 1940.
- 17 PRO HO 213 1739 203/2/5, letter of Castellane, French Embassy, London, to I. A. Kirkpatrick, Foreign Office, 15 January 1940.
- 18 Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief*, *passim*.
- 19 PRO HO 213 1739 203/2/7, letter of J. S. Stephenson, Dominions Office, to A. Maxwell, Home Office, 30 January 1940, containing a note on a conversation between the Duke of Devonshire and the High Commissioner for Eire.
- 20 WRVS Box 31, RFG 25/1, Part 1, Ministry of Health Memorandum WR1, and Circular 1983, both undated, plus Memorandum WR2, and Circular 1984, again both undated.
- 21 WRVS Box 198, Mme de l'Hôpital, 'The Story of the War Refugees in Great Britain, 1940–1947'.
- 22 WRVS Box 12, FC42, 'Report on the French Evacuation Schemes, 1939–1940', by Agnes Crosthwaite, Delegate of the British Federation of Social Workers to the Journées d'Etudes de Service Social, held at 6 rue de Berri, Paris, February 1940.
- 23 On such arrivals on the south coast, see T. Kushner and K. Knox, *Refugees in the Age of Genocide. Global, National and Local Perspectives during the Twentieth Century* (London, Frank Cass, 1999), p. 178, and E. G. Bennett, *In Search of Freedom. The Story of Some Refugees and Exiles who found a Haven in Bournemouth and District* (Bournemouth, Bournemouth Local Studies Publications, 1988).
- 24 Buck, 'Feeding a Pauper Army'.
- 25 Reading University Library (hereafter RUL) Box 605, 'The War and Us', the unpublished diary of J. W. Dodgson, vol. 4, 13 May 1940, p. 290.
- 26 London County Council (hereafter LCC), 'Report of the Civil Defence and General Purposes Committee, 10 June 1940', London County Council, *Minutes of Proceedings, 1940–1942*.
- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 London Metropolitan Archives (hereafter LMA) MCC/WE/PA/2/41, address to refugees, undated.
- 29 LMA MCC/WE/PA/2/40, letter of E. Ridley, Director of Public Assistance, MCC, to town clerks, 14 May 1940.
- 30 WRVS Box 31, RFG 25/1, Part 1, 'Report on Meeting of War Refugee Train, from Mrs N—, 23rd May 1940'.
- 31 See J.-P. Sartre, *Iron in the Soul* (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1950), and René Clément's 1954 film, *Jeux Interdits*.

- 32 IWM 97/7/1, Diary of Monsieur Vila, 14 June 1940. Vila was eventually demobilised in the southern zone, joined the Resistance and ultimately made the dangerous passage across the border to Spain to join de Gaulle in London in 1942.
- 33 LMA MCC/WE/PA/2/40, anonymous press report, undated, probably May 1940.
- 34 I. Hay, *Peaceful Invasion* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1946), p. 25.
- 35 WRVS Box 198, 'Refugees interviewed in one morning, May 17th before regulations re Clearing Houses became strict', 22 May 1940.
- 36 PRO FO 371 24355 C7860/7559/17, letters of G— R—, 14 July and 4 August 1940.
- 37 LMA LCC We/M (1) Box 12, letter of A. L—, to Commanding Officer, Crystal Palace, 9 June 1940.
- 38 LMA LCC We/M (1) Box 10, letter of Mlle Le—, Crystal Palace, to Officer in Charge, King's Canadian Residential Open Air School, Hampton Hill, 9 July 1940.
- 39 Orwell, *My Country*, p. 343
- 40 MO 262, 'Third and Main Report on the Refugees', 11 July 1940. See too the earlier reports in MO 238 and MO 245.
- 41 *Ibid.*
- 42 *Ibid.*
- 43 WRVS Box 31, RFG 25/1, Part 1, letter of the Chair, WVS, to Brigadier-General H. L. Ismay, Committee of Imperial Defence, 25 May 1940.
- 44 LMA LCC We/M (1) Box 10, notes from the King's Canadian Open Air School, Hampton, Middlesex, no date (summer 1940?).
- 45 Interview with the author, London, 22 March 2002.
- 46 M-O TC25 Box 1 25/1/G, Report of 19 June 1940.
- 47 WRVS Box 198, 'On the Squads', 29 May 1940.
- 48 WRVS Box 198, 'Refugees interviewed in one morning, May 17th before regulations re Clearing Houses became strict', 22 May 1940.
- 49 CCC SPRS 1/136, Vansittart Committee, second meeting, 21 June 1940.
- 50 A. Gillois, *Histoire secrète des français à Londres de 1940 à 1943* (Paris, Hachette, 1972), p. 110.
- 51 A. Koestler, *Scum of the Earth* (London, Eland, 1991 edn), p. 10.
- 52 *Ibid.*
- 53 Gillois, *Histoire secrète*, p. 115.
- 54 J.-L. Crémieux-Brilhac, *La France Libre de l'appel du 18 juin à la libération* (Paris, Flammarion, 1995), p. 83.
- 55 Gillois, *Histoire secrète*, pp. 115–16.
- 56 PRO HO 213 1978 203/2/107, draft of a letter of Lord Swinton to the War Office, 12 December 1940. Life at the Oratory School is recounted in Kochan, *Britain's Internees*, pp. 7–8.
- 57 PRO HO 213 1756 212/1/39, letter of Spears to Newsam, Home Office, 9 March 1941.

- 58 PRO HO 213 1756 212/1/39, letter of Newsam to Spears, 13 March 1941.
 59 *L'Accompagnatrice*, directed by Claude Miller, 1991.
- 60 PRO HO 213 1756 212/1/39, letter of Newsam to Spears, 13 March 1941.
 61 PRO HO 213 451 201/18/10, various correspondence of May–June 1941.
 62 PRO HO 213 1981 203/2/141, circular of 5 June 1941.
- 63 PRO HO 213 1756 212/1/39, letter of Immigration Officer to Home Office, 7 April 1941.
 64 *Ibid.*
- 65 PRO HO 213 1756 212/1/39, letter of Immigration Officer of 29 March 1941.
 66 PRO HO 213 1756 212/1/39, letter of 26 March 1941.
 67 PRO HO 213 1756 212/1/39, letter of 19 March 1941.
- 68 PRO HO 213 1981 203 1981 293/2/141, document of summer 1941, Committee on the RVPS.
- 69 PRO HO 213 1756/212/1/39, letter of Liverpool Immigration Office to Home Office, 29 April 1941.
 70 PRO HO 213 1756/212/1/39, draft letter of May 1941.
 71 PRO HO 213 1756/212/1/39, undated minutes of the RVPS.
- 72 PRO HO 213 1980 203/2/137, Agenda for the Committee on the RVPS, 9 September 1941.
 73 PRO FO 1055 9, letter of Bessborough to Morton, 7 July 1941.
 74 PRO FO 1055 9, letter of Morton to Bessborough, 19 June 1941, to which is attached a letter from de Malglaive to Bessborough, 16 June 1941, plus a copy of the projected FGB letter, dated 16 June 1941.
- 75 Gillois, *Histoire secrète*, pp. 111–12.
- 76 PRO HO 213 1980 203/2/137, letter of MI5 to Miss Davis, Home Office, 9 September 1941.
 77 PRO HO 215 505, Security Executive Committee on RVPS, 20 November 1941.
 78 PRO HO 215 486, letter to Home Office, 22 January 1942, signature illegible.
- 79 PRO HO 213 1980 203/2/137, Committee on the RVPS, Minutes of Meeting, 12 September 1941.
- 80 PRO HO 213 1934 35/35/20, Note of meeting at the Home Office on 15 January 1942 to consider various questions regarding volunteers for Free French Forces. It should also be noted that there was a particular concern over the number of Gaullist volunteers from South America, principally Spaniards, who were motivated not by a desire to fight the Germans, but by a wish to escape poverty.
- 81 Gillois, *Histoire secrète*, pp. 112–14.
 82 *Ibid.*
- 83 PRO HO 215 487, Report of Welfare Officer, RVPS, 25 August 1943.
 84 *Ibid.*

- 85 Letter to the author, 2 March 2002.
- 86 J. Pierre-Bloch, *De Gaulle ou le temps des méprises* (Paris, La Table Ronde, 1969), p. 97. See too F.-L. Closon, *Le Temps des passions* (Paris, Presses de la Cité, 1974), p. 22.
- 87 Letter to the author, 2 March 2002.
- 88 See Crémieux-Brilhac, *La France Libre*, pp. 730–3 who recounts the infamous Dufour case, albeit in sympathetic terms. It is worth looking at the many cases of alleged Free French injustice in PRO FO 371 41908.
- 89 F. H. Hinsley, *British Intelligence in the Second World War* (London, HMSO, 1981, vol. 2, pp. 32–3, 192.
- 90 Letter to the author, 2 March 2002.
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- 92 C. de Gaulle, *The Call to Honour, 1940–1942* (London, Collins, 1955), p. 157.
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- 120 Orwell, *My Country*, p. 342.
- 121 Crémieux-Brilhac, *La France Libre*, pp. 85–6.
- 122 PRO FO 1055 7, Comité d'Entr'Aide, no date, 1941.
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- 153 To be found in PRO FO 371 24360.
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- 160 PRO FO 371 31990 Z2045/231/17, letter of Captain Williams, March 1942.
- 161 PRO FO 371 31990 Z2045/231/17, undated CEAF note on Mme I—.
- 162 PRO FO 371 31990 Z2045/231/17, note of Lady Warwick, January 1942.
- 163 PRO FO 371 31990 Z2045/231/17, note of 7 January 1942.
- 164 PRO FO 371 31990 Z2045/231/17, note of 6 December 1941.
- 165 PRO FO 371 31990 Z3172/231/13, Memorandum by Lady Warwick, April 1942.
- 166 The fate of the schoolchildren may be followed in CFR minutes in PRO FO 371 24360.
- 167 The life of the *lycée* in exile is recalled in Hay, *Peaceful Invasion*, pp. 158–64.
- 168 PRO FO 371 24360 Z13565/7736/17, CFR minutes, 5 December 1940.
- 169 See J.-C. Barbas, *Philippe Pétain. Discours aux français, 17 juin 1940–20 août 1944* (Paris, Albin Michel, 1989).
- 170 PRO FO 371 28365 Z629/123/17, 'Report on the Work of French Welfare' for the Committee on Foreign (Allied) Resistance, 29 January 1941.
- 171 PRO FO 371 28460 Z 792/792/17, Memorandum discussed by the CFR, 29 January 1941.
- 172 CCC SPRS 1/136, Vansittart Committee, second meeting, 21 June 1940.
- 173 CCC SPRS 1/182, letter to Spears, 16 May 1945.
- 174 CCC SPRS 1/182, letter of Spears to Newsam, 22 August 1940.
- 175 WRVS Box 12, FC42, 'Note' on A— de M—, Prince de L— and Duc de L—, initialled 12 May 1941.
- 176 WRVS Box 12, FC42, letter of Capt. Williams, French Welfare, to Lady Reading, 3 June 1941.
- 177 WRVS Box 12, FC42, Chief Regional Administrator, WVS to Captain Alan Williams, French Welfare, 12 August 1941, to which the handwritten report of Mrs B— is attached.
- 178 H. Amouroux, *La Grande Histoire des français sous l'occupation*, Vol. 1, *Le peuple du désastre, 1939–1940* (Paris, Robert Laffont, 1976), p. 400.
- 179 LMA LCC We/M (1) Box 10, letter of Dame Rachel Crowdy, Ministry of Information, to Superintendent, King's Canadian School, 16 July 1940.
- 180 W. D. Halls, *The Youth of Vichy France* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1981), p. 3.
- 181 CCC NBKR 4/590, contains the relevant correspondence.
- 182 CCC NBKR 4/579, letter to Noel Baker, 26 June 1940.
- 183 Buck, 'Feeding a Pauper Army'.
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- 188 M-O TC25 Box 1 25/1/G, 'Aliens and the East End', 1 August 1940.
- 189 J. Monnet, *Mémoires* (Paris, Fayard, 1976), p. 169.
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- 191 LMA LCC We/M (1) Box 12, letter, no date (summer 1940?).
- 192 LMA LCC We/M (1) Box 12, letter of 26 May 1940.
- 193 WRVS Box 31, RFG 25/1 Part 1, Women's Voluntary Service, Memorandum on Refugees. Appendix VIII, Statistics, Enquiries and Nationalities, August 1940.
- 194 M-O FR 245, 'Refugees: questions about leaving the country', 'Second report on refugees, 4 July 1940'. Questions were put to 152 people: 103 men and 49 women. Asked what they found most alarming, the replies were as follows: Fire: 20 per cent men and 0 per cent women; noise, 25 per cent men, 92 per cent women; and people panicking 74 per cent men, 8 per cent women.
- 195 R. Mengin, *No Laurels for de Gaulle* (London, Michael Joseph, 1967), p. 69.
- 196 WRVS Box 31, RFG 25/1, Part 1, letter of C. F. Roundell, Min. of Health to G. C. Kullmann, Central Com. for War Refugees, no date (late November 1940?). Fortunate were those twenty French orphans, initially rescued by an English couple, found trembling in a cellar in Chelsea and transferred to the countryside. See Wilson, *They Came as Stangers*, p. 231.
- 197 WRVS Box 31, RFG 25/1, Part 1, 'Evacuation of War Refugees from Bombed Areas, 3 December 1940', signed Mme de l'Hôpital.
- 198 WRVS Box 31, RFG 25/1, Part 1, letter of C. F. Roundell, Ministry of Health to Chairman, Central Committee for War Refugees, 2 December 1940.
- 199 WRVS Box 31, RFG 25/1, Part 1, 29 St John's Wood Park House, no date (late July/Aug. 1940?). See, too, F. Raes, 'Female Belgian Refugees in Britain during the Second World War. An Oral History', in M. Conway and J. Gotovitch, *Europe in Exile. European Exile Communities in Britain, 1940-1945* (New York/Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2001), pp. 67-80. The smaller number of French refugees to Belgian makes it impossible to pose the same kind of questions as in this article.
- 200 WRVS Box 31, RFG 25/1, Part 1, Ministry of Health Memorandum WR1, and Circular 1983, both undated, plus Memorandum WR2, and Circular 1984, again both undated, give the details of all these arrangements.
- 201 WRVS Box 31, RFG 25/1, Part 2, letter of St Marylebone War Refugee Committee to Lady Gowers, WVS, 6 May 1941.
- 202 WRVS Box 31, RFG 25/1, Part 2, letter of Mme de l'Hôpital, WVS, to Dr Kullmann, Central Committee for War Refugees, 13 May 1941.

- 203 PRO FO 371 28368 Z9147/123/17, Minute of 27 October 1941.
- 204 PRO FO 1055 7, 'Monthly statement for May', dated 24 June 1943.
- 205 *Ibid.*
- 206 PRO FO 1055 7, letter from Georges Clerk to Bessborough, 16 March 1943, and 'Points for the Foreign Office', no date (1944?).
- 207 PRO FO 371 28365, Report of French Welfare to the CFR on 'The French Community in the UK', 5 February 1941.
- 208 PRO FO 371 22367 Z6310/123/17, letter of Mack to Bessborough, 20 July 1941, and Bessborough's reply, 22 July 1941.
- 209 WRVS Box 31, RFG 25/1, Part 1, 'Notice to Refugees'.
- 210 WRVS Box 12, FC42, 'Comité d'Entr'Aide aux Français en Grande Bretagne. Report on visit by Mrs Pryce Jones and Miss Rae, 19 August 1940'.
- 211 PRO FO 371 28368 Z9132/123/17, Minute of 11 October 1940.
- 212 CCC NBKR 4/261, letter of Margaret Green to Noel Baker, 24 January 1941, in which she cites another case where the man in question had been better treated only when he produced his *carnet militaire* to show he had been demobilised from the Free French.
- 213 PRO FO 1055 4, letter from Lady Warwick, CEAF, to Captain Williams, French Welfare, 11 October 1940.
- 214 Wilson, *They Came as Strangers*, pp. 230–1.
- 215 PRO FO 1055 4, 'Report on Visit of Mr H. Astor to West Country, Re Breton Seamen, October 18th–26th, 1940, Inclusive'.
- 216 See S. Brooks Richards, *Secret Flotillas. Clandestine Sea Lines to France and French North Africa, 1940–1944* (London, HMSO, 1996).
- 217 M. Buck, unpublished paper.
- 218 See Wilson, *They Came as Strangers*, pp. 230–1.
- 219 PRO FO 1055 8, notes for 'Report on French Welfare for the Year 1942'.
- 220 PRO FO 1055 12, Report by Captain C. Peebles-Chaplin, September 1942.
- 221 PRO FO 371 24358 C13210/7559/17, letter of Brennan to Chartier, 30 November 1940.
- 222 PRO FO 371 24358 C13966/7559/17, note of 26 December 1940.
- 223 WRVS Box 12, FC42, letter of Capt. Williams, French Welfare, to Mme de l'Hôpital, WVS for Civil Defence, 14 January 1943.
- 224 WRVS Box 12, FC42, letter of Assistant Regional Administrator, Region 10, to Miss Foster Jeffrey, 12 January 1943, 'Reference the impending job at F. Centre, with corresponding arrangements to be made at the L. Centre'.
- 225 WRVS Box 12, FC42, letter of Regional Administrator to Mrs Goldney, WVS, 19 January 1943.
- 226 PRO MH 76 519, contains details of this initiative.
- 227 WRVS Box 198, Mme de l'Hôpital, 'The Story of the War Refugees in Great Britain, 1940–1947'.

- 228 WRVS Box 31, RFG 25/1, Part 2, letter of Deputy Vice-Chairman, WVS, to Miss Florence Horsbrugh, Ministry of Health, 28 July 1944.
- 229 WRVS Box 31, RFG 25/1, Part 2, letter of Lady Peel, AVF, to Lady Reading, WVS, 20 June 1944.
- 230 *Ibid.*
- 231 WRVS Box 31, RFG 25/1, Part 2, letter of Ministry of Health official, signature illegible, to Lady Reading, 29 August 1944.
- 232 WRVS Box 31, RFG 25/1, Part 2, letter of Ministry of Health official, signature illegible, to Lady Reading, 13 September 1940.
- 233 WRVS Box 12, FC42, letter of F. R. Hoyer Millar, Foreign Office, to Lady Hillingdon, WVS, 19 January 1946.
- 234 WRVS Box 12, FC42, letter of Commandant Boury, representative of the Comité d'Entr'Aide aux Français to Lady Reading, 1 March 1946.
- 235 WRVS Box 12, FC42, note from Miss Hornby, Region 12, 4 April 1946.
- 236 WRVS Box 12, FC42, letter of Frenay to Mr J. Poyser, General Inspector, Minister of Health, 20 November 1944.