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**TEACHER EDUCATION, EVACUATION AND COMMUNITY IN WAR-TIME  
BRITAIN: THE WOMEN OF AVERY HILL AT HUDDERSFIELD 1941-46**

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## **TEACHER EDUCATION, EVACUATION AND COMMUNITY IN WAR-TIME BRITAIN: THE WOMEN OF AVERY HILL AT HUDDERSFIELD 1941-46**

### **Abstract**

The evacuation of civilians during World War Two Britain included the relocation not only of school children and teachers, but of whole schools and, in some instances, of teacher training colleges. This paper examines the evacuation of Avery Hill College, a leading teacher training college, from London to Huddersfield between 1941 and 1946. Focusing on issues of gender and community, it provides an account of the circumstances of the move, institutional relations and resources, the social milieu of war-time Huddersfield, the challenges arising from evacuation, the responses of staff and trainees, and the broader institutional and teacher education policy transitions that ensued.

**Key words:** Teacher training; community; gender; war-time evacuation; colleges of education

# TEACHER EDUCATION, EVACUATION AND COMMUNITY IN WAR-TIME BRITAIN: THE WOMEN OF AVERY HILL AT HUDDERSFIELD 1941-46

## 1. EVACUATION

The evacuation of civilian populations during war can cause individual trauma as well as social tensions. Advances in military technologies, particularly in aerial bombing, meant that the Second World War witnessed evacuations on a previously unknown scale in Britain, Germany and elsewhere. Gärtner (2012), focusing on the evacuation of schoolchildren, provides an account of London County Council's (LCC) evacuation of over a million school children, and more than 200,000 teachers, beginning in early September 1939, and of the process of evacuation (*Kinderlandverschickung*) in Berlin, where, with connotations of defeatism, the process was more gradual. Cunningham and Gardner (1999) refer to a drift back to London by 1940 followed by a further wave after 'the Blitz' that summer<sup>1</sup>. The same study (Cunningham and Gardner, 1999, p. 331) identified four key issues in relation to the role of school teachers at that time. These were responsibility for the physical and mental health of children ('the national physique'); for 'citizenship education' (against totalitarianism); for 'transcending regional differences' (in a spirit of social cohesion); and, 'consolidation of the notion of teaching as...national service...'. This study, however, focusses specifically on the transfer of a whole community of trainee teachers and their tutors in the all-female Avery Hill College from Eltham, London to Huddersfield in the north of England between 1941 and 1946, and it seeks to highlight broad issues of social transition in relation to gender as well as some then embryonic changes in the community ethos of women's teacher education and of its institutions. Maguire and Weiner (1994, p. 123) in setting out the dynamics of the role of women as teacher educators refer to how,

...in the early 20th century, three factors led to the increased feminisation of teacher education. The increased secularisation of society, the psychologising of both teaching and women, and the impact of war, all contributed to teacher education's gradual construction as women's work. Thus the discourses of teacher education became suffused with notions of maternity, respectability and conformity.

Ben-Peretz and Fieman-Nemser (2018 p. ix) highlight the 'decisive power' of political transformations to shape education systems, and particularly teacher education. If the first world war had been pivotal in shaping the nature of women's residential teacher education, the second world war embedded the currents of change that would accelerate its demise in the post-war years.

In September 1939 public fears arising from the prospect of the aerial bombing of London led the Board of Education to decide that women's teacher training colleges in designated areas should be closed and transferred to safer areas for reasons of safety, whilst some colleges were moved owing to requisitioning of premises. Gosden (1976, p. 115) stated that by 1944 sixteen training colleges were being used 'for various war purposes.'. Whilst colleges were transferred 'whole', a few had students distributed across other institutions (Dent, 1977). Gardiner (2004) has pointed to the way in which evacuation vividly highlighted a range of social schisms around class, region, and gender. Moreover, the at times fervid milieu of wartime

Britain was a catalyst for changes in national identity and conceptions of citizenship, including gender roles (Rose, 2003). For trainee teachers, most already living away from home in the context of their residential institutions, evacuation would not be a precursor to the levels of emotional dislocation experienced by school children, or indeed, by many school teachers who were moved. Nevertheless, trainee teachers were immersed in a national crisis and, through their placements, often had direct experience of working with evacuated children. This was certainly the case with the women of Avery Hill.

Dr Frances Consitt, principal of Bingley Training College in Yorkshire since 1933 and sometime President of the Training Colleges Association, was already an influential figure on her appointment as Avery Hill principal in June 1938 (Edwards, 2001)<sup>2</sup>. When she began exploring the evacuation of Avery Hill the possibility of transfer to St John's Training College in York proved fruitless, as did negotiations with University College, Leicester. Eventually, Huddersfield was 'to be Avery Hill's salvation.' (Shorney, 1989, p. 142). On 22 November 1940, following correspondence with the London Education Authority, a Huddersfield Borough Council (HBC) Sub-Committee meeting resolved that 'as a war measure' Avery Hill would be accommodated by Huddersfield Technical College. The London Authority would pay the Huddersfield Borough Council £1, 13 shillings and 4 pence per term for each student. This arrangement would be subject to one term's written notice, though the Huddersfield Authority undertook not to exercise this power 'while hostilities continue' and Avery Hill would be required to vacate 'at the end of the first complete term after the cessation of hostilities...' (HBC, 1940 np). Shorney (1989, p. 143) records that '...notices were sent out to Avery Hill students instructing them to go to Huddersfield on 8 January 1941.'

These two colleges, brought together in the wake of cataclysmic international events, like the locales in which they had been nurtured, had very different cultures.

## **2. AVERY HILL AND 'THE CULTURE OF FEMININITY'**

Avery Hill College, founded without religious affiliation as a women's teacher training college by the LCC in 1906, was located east of Eltham, in South East London. It enjoyed a large parkland campus utilising a former grand mansion. It was considered well-resourced and quickly established a strong reputation. David Shorney's (1989) history of Avery Hill College skilfully evades the pitfalls of eulogy and sentimentality that have afflicted many other institutional studies (Crook, 2012) and incorporates an excellent account of its evacuation experiences, to which I am much indebted. In July 1948 *The Avery Hill Reporter*, a College publication, reappeared following a ten-year hiatus and featured short reflections on the 'Huddersfield years' which informed both Shorney's work and this study<sup>3</sup>.

Elizabeth Edwards' (2001) *Women in Teacher Training Colleges, 1900-1960: a culture of femininity*, focussed on three leading colleges, including Avery Hill and discussed Frances Consitt as principal between 1938 and 1960. Edwards provides an insight into the world of women's residential teacher training in the first half of the twentieth century, evoking a genteel social sphere where, often, lower middle-class women were enculturated into the practices of the 'middle class proper' (p. 2). The residential (generally including staff) and 'family ethos' of the college community was

central to this, and especially so at a 'superior' college such as Avery Hill. There was within these colleges an emphasis on social activities around religious services and prayer, shared formal meals, on music and 'theatricals', on sporting activities and on college 'rituals'. For Edwards, these experiences '...played the crucial role in transmitting to students the cultural, aesthetic, intellectual and spiritual values of the liberal humanist traditions of the middle class.' (Edwards, 2001, p. 168). Taylor (1969, p. 12), had earlier argued that:

...the dominant value orientations of teacher education during the first six decades of the present century have been those of social and literary romanticism...a partial rejection of the pluralism of values associated with conditions of advanced industrialization; a suspicion of the intellect and the intellectual; a lack of interest in political and structural change; a stress upon the intuitive and the intangible; upon spontaneity and creativity; an attempt to find personal autonomy through the arts; a hunger for the satisfactions of inter-personal life within the community and a small group, and a flight from rationality.

Avery Hill arguably reflected some but, importantly, not all of the above characteristics. Whilst the circumstances of war-time Huddersfield presented a challenge to the kind of relatively enclosed female and matriarchically managed communities described by Edwards and so caustically characterised by Taylor, there is evidence that the women of Avery Hill were far from disinterested in matters of the intellect, and that they were in no way wary of change or disinclined to engage with the wider communities that the students were being trained to serve as teachers. This paper is concerned with both the internal community life that constituted 'the College', one so essential to such residential institutions, but also with the way in which enforced war-time relocation facilitated an outward facing engagement with external communities. Francis Consitt's predecessor at Avery Hill, Freda Hawtrey, had used her sixteen years in office (1922-38) to improve academic standards (matriculation became the standard entry requirement) as well as to establish an ethos of commitment to child welfare as central to the curriculum. This would be a strong feature of the work of the College in Huddersfield (see Section 6 below). Hawtrey, however, had been something of an autocrat who had rigorously enforced middle class codes of decorum and behaviour (Edwards, 2001). A useful counterpoint to Avery Hill can be found by consideration of Gipsy Hill Training College, another South London residential women's college, which had been established in 1917. There Lillian de Lissa, principal from its foundation to 1947, implemented a modernist progressive vision which, according to Whitehead (2012 p. 620), '...treated students as adults and, in contrast with other residential colleges, they were not supervised closely. The family metaphor as described by Edwards did not dominate at GHTC.' Gipsy Hill was evacuated first to Brighton in 1939, then to Bankfield House near Bingley, close to Consitt's former college and some four miles from the city of Bradford, where it was based from December 1940 until its return to London in 1946 (Whitehead 2016).

In relation to the selection of trainees Edwards (2001, p. 75) quotes Consitt, who interviewed all Avery Hill applicants personally, as follows 'We look for soundness, vigour, vitality, sensitiveness. We attach quite as much importance to fitness in character and temperament as to academic attainment.' Also, important to Consitt

were ‘...appearance, dress and speech’. One successful applicant was Margaret Joan Tedrake (nee Marks) (1922-2016), daughter of a Salisbury schoolteacher, she was with Avery Hill at Huddersfield between 1941 and 1943 and was interviewed, some forty years later, in 1982<sup>4</sup>. Margaret Tedrake’s school, the South Wilts Grammar School for Girls in Salisbury had, briefly, taken in Spanish Civil War evacuee children whilst she was a pupil and her family provided a home to two girl evacuees from Southsea throughout the war years. In utilising the memories of Margaret Tedrake as a ‘lone informant’ in terms of oral testimony I am mindful of Gardner and Cunningham’s (1997, p. 334) work on teachers’ oral histories of evacuation, both in terms of methodological considerations (issues of recollection, context, and mediation) and their contention that ‘the process of evacuation was one of the greatest experiences of social change seen in the course of the twentieth century.’ With regard to memories, Ben-Peretz (1995) has pointed to the innate subjectivity of teachers’ ‘stories’, invoking Eisner’s (1991) claims for the virtue of this in providing access to a source of ‘unique modes of thinking’ which serve to provide insights into the experiences they relate.

### **3. HUDDERSFIELD TECHNICAL COLLEGE AND AVERY HILL’S TEACHING ACCOMMODATION AT HUDDERSFIELD**

The Huddersfield Technical College, as it was known in 1941 when it accommodated Avery Hill, was an institution with its roots in the mechanics’ institute movement, having been founded as the Huddersfield Young Men’s Mental Improvement Society in 1841 (Walker, 2017). At the outbreak of the Second World War it was a college of substance, and whilst war depleted its student numbers, almost 5,000 were enrolled in 1944-45 (O’Connell, 2016). As a mechanics’ institute, Huddersfield had made provision for the training of local ‘pupil teachers’ and harboured ambitions not only for the establishment of a ‘day teacher training college’ in the town, but also to be designated as a ‘university college’. In pursuit of the latter objective it developed stronger provision in the humanities than was typical for similar institutions. 1904 saw renowned educationalist Michael Sadler’s *Report on Secondary and Technical Education in Huddersfield* (Sadler, 1904) which recommended against the case made by Huddersfield Principal Dr S. G. Rawson. By the 1920s the demise of the pupil teacher system curtailed teacher training in Huddersfield excepting subject updating classes. In 1919, the College made an application (to the Board of Education) for designation as a teacher training centre for ex-service men, but again the ambitions of Huddersfield were thwarted (Cook, Fisher and Walker 2008). The arrival of Avery Hill at Huddersfield may well have struck an ironic note in the minds of those longer serving members of the host institution who had cherished ambitions to develop their own teacher training college in the town.

Despite its commitment to the humanities at the outbreak of the Second World War the Huddersfield institution was, as its name signified, predominantly technical in nature. Most students were male and were, in the main, drawn from local industries on a part-time basis. Throughout the late 1930s, however, the College had planned much needed new accommodation and the foundation stone for a ‘Chemistry Building’ was laid in 1937. It was this new building which, some three months after opening, would serve Avery Hill students by day and Huddersfield students during the evenings. The Huddersfield College was unable to provide residential facilities.

The Huddersfield Principal Dr J. W. Whittaker used his Annual Report for 1940-41 to explain that (HTC, 1941, p. 1),

In January, 1941 some 300 hundred students and 31 members of staff under the direction of Dr Frances Consitt came to us from Eltham, and found a temporary home in the Technical College lecture rooms and laboratories. The housing of a large separate College of this kind did not prove very difficult. All their work is in the day-time, whereas the heavy load of the Technical College is in the evening. Contacts between the students and staffs of the two Colleges have proved of advantage to both, and grateful acknowledgement is made of the co-operation and goodwill of the visitors and guests in such activities as debates, students' social functions, and fire-watching, and in the general life and work of the College.

Positive statements continued to appear in annual reports, and Frances Consitt remained gracious in her appreciation of the facilities, writing in 1944 that Dr Whitaker '...has always shown us the utmost consideration and has been a most kindly host.' (Consitt, 1944a, p. 1). Some initial tensions, however, had been evident. Avery Hill trainee Margaret Tedrake, in a 1982 Interview, recalled that,

...we took over the, um, what was a new technical college I think and, ah, there was friction there [short laugh], because this London college coming up, taking over their new building, and I don't think we were very popular to begin with. But afterwards we, you know, were accepted in the town.

Gipsy Hill, a significantly smaller institution than Avery Hill, experienced no such issues at Bankfield where the gothic mansion's rooms and out-buildings provided classrooms and library space, though some of the 75 students were billeted out. Whitehead (2016 p. 201) quotes de Lissa thanking the owner Henry Ayrton as follows,

Apart from having a place to work in safety, valuable as this is, Bankfield gives us much more. The beauty of this house and its surroundings will help students to keep their minds filled with things of permanent value so essential in training. Because of this they will be better prepared for their work and for the influence they must exercise on the young children...who are tomorrow's citizens. Thus it is not only I, but all England that thanks you.

Like the rest of society, the feminised world of women's teacher education was being disrupted in various ways. Regulations published by the Board of Education in 1910 had required that women's teacher training colleges should be led by women principals (Heward, 1993), but now these female leaders would increasingly find themselves beholden to men not only in the form of 'landlords' but also as drivers of policy (as the McNair Committee would soon demonstrate).

The generally constructive relationship between Huddersfield and Avery Hill is evident in a trail of bureaucratic details. On 18 February 1941, minutes of the Huddersfield Borough Council's Finance Sub-Committee (HBC, 1941a np) recorded an estimate of £30 for adapting a room for use with hand-weaving classes for Avery Hill trainees (reflecting the craft dimension of the College's curriculum) resolving that

'work be proceeded with' subject to the LCC bearing half the cost. Small kindnesses were subject to meticulous process, on 20 October 1941 for example the Council's FE Sub-Committee (HBC 1941b np) recorded thanks to 'Miss Phillips' for her gift to the Technical College of 'Linguaphone records in Italian' (Ada Phillips was Avery Hill's Vice Principal).

#### 4. LIVING ACCOMMODATION AND 'COLLEGE LIFE'

Avery Hill secured the use of two substantial houses on the fringes of Huddersfield. 'Sandymount', an impressive 'villa' at Crossland Moor two miles from the town centre was rented at £100 per annum. 'Bourneville', in the Fartown area of Huddersfield also approximately two miles from the town centre but in the opposite direction to Sandymount, was rented at £70 per annum. It accommodated the Principal, eight students, a warden, a matron, and a maid. Sandymount benefited from a two-acre garden which was home to the College goat, Mary Ann, a frequent escapee who 'In some ways...' became '...best known of the residents and had a circle of admirers.'. Whilst Jack, Frances Consitt's Airedale Terrier, '...greeted all accepted as college folk.' (Batstone, 1948a p. 24). Such post-war reminiscences suggest the power of relatively 'trivial' bonding signifiers for the spirit of community in testing times. Meanwhile, the less salubrious Bourneville provided accommodation for two staff, eight students (occupying two large rooms), and incorporated two designated 'sick rooms' (Wilson, 1948). These somewhat distant properties served as social centres for the students, the great majority of whom were billeted out. This caused considerable pressure, especially as numbers expanded (156 new students were admitted in September 1943). In 1944 Frances Consitt (1944a, p. 1) lamented 'These war-time students have not had the advantage of a period of residential community life. This I consider a great loss.'. Lecturers acted as 'wardens' visiting 'the hostesses' (landladies) to check student welfare. Bed and breakfast and evening meal payments were initially set at £1 and five shillings per week. Day-time meals were generally taken in the local 'British Restaurant' (establishments set up nationally by the Ministry of Food in 1940) or at cafes in town. Consitt (1944a, p. 1) reported how, in an effort to maintain the community spirit enjoyed in Eltham she established '...geographical, social groups of about 40 students and three or four lecturers. These groups have met two or three times a term for parties, picnics and so on, in addition to the social gatherings of the whole college.'. Consitt appreciated the burden which visiting the hostesses and '...keeping alive the college societies in the face of endless complications and frustrations...' placed on her teacher staff whilst also acknowledging the efforts of '...the Matron, Miss Hill, and not least of the secretaries, whose work has been considerably increased by the necessity of dealing with the billets...' (Consitt, 1944a, p. 2). Despite the undoubted challenges during the Huddersfield years changes in staffing were relatively few – up to 1944 there had been just two resignations (Consitt 1944a, p. 3).

Whatever the efforts made to sustain a sense of an internal academic and social community the dispersion of staff and students inevitably took its toll on aspects of College life. Given the exigencies of war and the logistics of travel it is not surprising that English lecturer Dr Jennie Aberdein's enterprising correspondence (Aberdein 1926-1957) with leading literary and artistic figures (including John Masefield, Dorothy Sayers, Vita Sackville-West, and Louis MacNeice), often issuing invitations

to speak to Avery Hill students, fell completely silent during the Huddersfield years. The loss of the residential college life which Avery Hill had so valued was however, in large measure, compensated by interactions with the local community (as outlined in Section 6 below). At the personal level, an obituary (Anon., 2014) for former Avery Hill trainee Euphemia Shotton (1925-2014) reflected often warm relationships recalling that at Huddersfield ‘...she lodged with a window cleaner and his wife, who she kept in touch with for many years.’ Margaret Tedrake (MT) spoke of her experience with affection, ‘...we had rooms out...with families there, and they, you know, did the cooking for us and our washing, and we had a nice period, a happy time there for two years.’,

MT I lived in, um, just an ordinary terraced house with two people. He was a, made brushes I remember, and they had two children who were both away in the forces so they, you know, were pleased to sort of adopt us. There were two of us there, yes.

Q. You were taken into the home as one of the family, were you?

MT Yes, yes. We had our own bedroom but we had to study actually down, you know, in their, um, living room, with being, you know, trainee teachers we had an awful lot of preparation to do - so it must’ve been inconvenient for them.

Q. You would all be sitting together would you, in that one room?

MT Yes...apart from if we wanted to play the piano we were allowed to go into the best room [short laugh], the parlour as they called it. She made all her own bread too...we’d come home to this lovely smell of baking...

## 5. HUDDERSFIELD AT WAR, AND ITS MORAL CLIMATE

Evacuation begins with a journey, generally to an unfamiliar destination not chosen by the evacuee, and travel is often a significant part of the experience. Margaret Tedrake recalled arriving Huddersfield for the first time on a blackout darkened January evening in 1941,

...ah, but the travelling...We had to take our huge trunks with us on the train and my mother just sort of put me on it in Salisbury and I had to get off at Waterloo and get a car, or a taxi it must’ve been, across to Euston and then go up with our luggage [short laugh] and no one to meet us there...

And then another time we went up and there must’ve been a raid somewhere up that way because I went via...Bristol and we had to change at Crewe and we were at Crewe all night...there was a whole pantomime cast on the station as well [short laugh]. We had great fun waiting until about six in the morning for the milk train to take us through to Huddersfield...

Areas of Britain had been designated as either ‘evacuation’, ‘reception’ or ‘neutral’ – and whilst Huddersfield was the latter it would serve as a destination for many evacuated children. The local economy was based on textiles with significant chemical and engineering which was largely dedicated to the war effort (including the manufacture of submarines and gears for military vehicles). Relative to many areas, the Huddersfield district was spared bombing with only few raids, beginning on 25 August 1940 when 10 bombs fell, with the final raid occurring on 24 December 1944. As elsewhere blackout restrictions were enforced and many buildings, including the

new Chemistry Building serving the Avery Hill students, were protected by sandbags. War impacted on daily routines (Wheeler, 2009) and on the political and social life of the town. A leading local fascist, Leslie Grundy, was amongst those detained without trial under Defence Regulation 18b (Mackling, 2007). By the end of 1941 the local Trades Council (Rose, 2003), together with the town's Communist Party branch, was calling for Anglo-Soviet co-operation and the opening of a second front.

From 1943 Huddersfield was a recreational attraction for the US Army 192nd Ordinance Aviation Company, a segregated black regiment comprising 178 enlisted men and six white officers based near Penistone, twelve miles from the town (Harris 1948). Smith (1987, p. 105) in a study of Black GIs in Britain referred to the Penistone camp, stating that "...vast improvements would have been needed to divert the men there from their main goal – the 'wine, women and song' of Huddersfield." An article 'Huddersfield Girls and Coloured Soldiers' branding the 'girls' "'Gold Diggers' who prey upon American Troops" appeared in the local newspaper on 20 September 1943, provoking correspondence concerning sexual morality. According to the reporter, 'The problem is one of white girls and coloured men meeting clandestinely and making love to one another in shop doorways, quiet side streets, and open spaces and in some instances in vehicles drawn up at the side of the pavement.' (Huddersfield Daily Examiner, 1943a p. 3). The 'blame' for this behaviour was placed firmly on local young women aged 15 to 18.

Moral panics occurred elsewhere. Rose (2003, p. 79) refers to Bath, Leicester and Liverpool, in addition to Huddersfield, claiming 'This was a nation that could not incorporate within it pleasure seeking, fun-loving and sexually expressive women and girls' and arguing that these women were constructed as 'anti-citizens' (see also Rose 1998). One of the Americans stationed at Penistone (Harris 1948, p. 154) stated that 'In Huddersfield most of our men frequented the pubs on Queens [sic] Street – the worst section of the town...Of course, the soldier associated with all types of women, but most of them belonged to the middle class.'. Queen Street was not the worst part of Huddersfield, indeed, at its south end was the new technical college building where Avery Hill students were taught. Webster (2013) has pointed out that the diverse nationalities and ethnicities of second world war Britain gave unprecedented opportunities for relationships which, particularly in relation to race, could be seen as transgressive if not a possible threat to morale and to civil order. Huddersfield was not immune to such phobias. It was, however, more likely a concern for student welfare and a tradition of college etiquette and moral rectitude that caused Frances Consitt to require that 'hostesses' accommodating Avery Hill students should maintain a log book to record times of return each evening (Shorney, 1989 p. 144). Edwards (2001) highlighted the importance in the ethos of women's teacher training colleges of 'respectability', as signified by appearance, expression, relationships and sexuality. Margaret Tedrake recalled that,

I had a boyfriend [short laugh] who...went into the Fleet Air Arm, and I used to go down to his parents because we, my family knew them. They lived in Nottingham. So, I used to have to get special written permission from my mother, John's [boyfriend?] mother, to the principal of the college to go down for weekends [laughs] and had to report back when I got back in the evening. So, it ah [pause] was most odd.

In nearby Bingley, Gipsy Hill's College Council, chaired by principal Lillian de Lissa, decreed that on one night each week students could go out without permission though they were subject to a daily 2130 curfew, 2215 on Saturdays (Whitehead, 2010; 2016). The proclaimed democratic adult ethos of Gipsy Hill had its limits. A National Union of Students (NUS) conference held at Leeds in January 1941 witnessed a unanimous call for the relaxation of teacher training college restrictions on students, especially evening curfews, which led to a front page report in the *Times Educational Supplement* (Browne, 1979).

Civic moral conservatism was abroad in Huddersfield, as elsewhere, as illustrated by circumstances arising from the distance of playing fields from the town centre college buildings which required that Avery Hill students accessed their physical education sessions via public transport. Shorney (1989, p. 145) relates that the local Watch Committee wrote to the Avery Hill Principal complaining that students travelling on buses in 'their scanty and indecent dress was an offence to the good people of the town!'. Margaret Tedrake told her interviewer that,

I remember, you know, a very funny thing. They had letters in the paper at the time because the students coming from London wore knee-length socks [short laugh] and they'd just not [been] seen there before and [there was] a terrific kerfuffle about that...

The Avery Hill community in Huddersfield actively contributed to the 'Home Front' by cultivating the gardens at Sandymount, as well as by knitting on behalf of the Women's Voluntary Services (WVS). It is, perhaps, unsurprising that the published evidence provides no indication of any individual pacifism or equivocation in relation to the war. There was from as early as 1944 a clear will on the part of Francis Consitt for the College to return to London, a resilient stance which Air Commodore E. G. Dixon, Chair of the Avery Hill Governing body, was at that time disinclined to support (Dixon 1944). It is, however, the direct engagement of both staff and students with the townsfolk that best illustrates the positive morale and disposition of both staff and students.

## 6. ENGAGEMENT WITH THE TOWN

Evacuation was a process that highlighted differences between the rural and the urban, and between the north and the south. By 1945 38% of Avery Hill students were from the North, 14% from the Midlands, and 22% from Greater London (Shorney, 1989). It seems likely, however, that the sojourn in Huddersfield would have influenced these statistics. Certainly, in the early years, 'the overwhelming majority' of students had been Londoners (Shorney, 1989 p. 58). For some, evacuation intensified perceptions of economic and social well-being. Avery Hill lecturer Frances Batstone recalled that 'Dr Bartlett and I were distressed by the condition of some of the children living behind the Technical College'. From Autumn 1941 Avery Hill ran a children's club close to the College, meeting one evening a week for those under 8 years, and another for those aged 8 to 14. In 1948 she wrote,

A number of the children who came were on probation, and, as one visitor who had worked in the East End of London remarked one night after a

horrified tour of the play-centre 'they all looked like criminals': at that time Dr Bartlett and I used to stand at the door as the boys came in to receive their knives (sometimes carving knives!) to keep them safely until they went home. (Batstone, 1948b p. 25)

Despite sometimes escaping to the nearby rural beauty, many Avery Hill students became actively involved in the life of the town. Margaret Tedrake described how,

...we used to go up on the moors on the weekends for walks, and we used to be encouraged to go out, you know, for walks because Huddersfield's a very industrial town...I sang in the Huddersfield Choral Society for almost the two years. We, you know, we were encouraged to join the public library and join choral societies and help with the Guides and the Brownies...

There was Avery Hill youth work at Milnsbridge Youth Club, with the YWCA and elsewhere, '...students gave constant help in Youth work all over town, particularly in physical education and drama; this continued throughout our stay.' (Batstone, 1948b p. 25). Avery Hill carol services, held in St Paul's Church close to the Technical College were open to locals, as were drama productions. A performance of *Androcles and the Lion* in 1945 was staged specifically for 'invited hostesses' (Anon., 1948 p. 27).

The community activities of Principal Consitt were reported in the local press. On Friday 23 January, 1942, she addressed the Milnsbridge New Street School Parent Teacher Association on 'The Youth Movement of Today' where she argued that '...the movement should be a service of other people to youth, because it was the birthright of all boys and girls to have extended facilities until they reached maturity. Dividends would be returned later in the services youth would give to the community' (Huddersfield Daily Examiner, 1942 p. 3). On Thursday 18 February, 1943 members of Huddersfield Inner Wheel (a women's Rotary Club off-shoot) gathered at the Whiteley's Café to hear Dr Consitt speak on 'Schools of the future'. There she made the case for more nurseries in post-war Britain, arguing that children should not be taught reading or writing before the age of six and a half. Junior schools, she contended, should be rebuilt on an 'open-air' plan with learning based 'on activity and experience and not only by books.' At secondary level, she proposed that the 'more intellectual children and the less intellectual children could be taught in different schools in the same grounds, so that they could meet for recreation, choral etc. but they should be taught separately.' (Huddersfield Daily Examiner, 1943b p. 2). Gardner and Cunningham (1997, pp. 335-336) argued that it was the experiences of teachers in wartime, and specifically, through caring for evacuated children, that '...began to breakdown...professional conservatism and open the way for transformed and more generous interpersonal expectations for educational practice.'. Frances Consitt's thinking, framed within its time, was emblematic of this and she was more than prepared to share it with the townfolk of Huddersfield. She (Consitt 1944a Section 6 np) was firmly of the view that,

...the situation of the Technical College in the heart of the town of Huddersfield...has made it easy for us to establish contact with local officials and to develop the sociological side of our training. We seem to have become

very much a part of the life of the town, more a part of Huddersfield than we were of our home borough of Woolwich.

As early as 1940 Avery Hill College was no longer an institution focussed on the genteel domesticity that would be subsequently described by Edwards (2001), and was even less an example of the intellectually threadbare type of college scorned by Taylor (1969).

## 7. ADVANCES IN PROVISION

Shorney's study (1989) indicates the high academic calibre of Avery Hill staff in the late 1930s, many were graduates of prestigious universities. The reputation of the College was underlined when, in November 1942, two members of the McNair Committee visited Frances Consitt at Huddersfield. Edwards (2001) states that the Avery Hill syllabus had been devised by the LCC's Education Committee prior to the establishment of the College in 1906, and that it prioritised the academic development of the students. The first year of the two-year course was devoted to academic studies, whilst the second focussed more on professional practice. According to Edwards (2001, p. 9) 'After the Second World War the curriculum remained essentially unchanged.', a judgement which was generally true of teacher education in the immediate post-war period, though the war years had seen significant developments in the 'curriculum offer' of Avery Hill. Consitt would report with some pride that the College offered all the provision it had made available prior to the war whilst adding Divinity and re-establishing social studies and health education '...to give the students some training on sociological lines.' (Consitt 1944a, p. 3). Fabian Brackenbury's pioneering work on health education was particularly influential, '...she is almost embarrassingly sought after at present by Local Education authorities and other colleges to visit them and explain her views and ways.' (Consitt 1944a, p. 3). From September, 1942, the College introduced an 'experimental junior school course' placing emphasis on '...an aesthetic rather than on a predominantly intellectual approach.' (Consitt 1944a p. 3). An accredited nursery school course was introduced, and students were trained in the use of mechanical aids (epidiascope and lantern) as well as educational films. On top of this correspondence courses, developed by Dr Jennie Aberdein on behalf of the *Association of Teachers in Colleges and Departments of Education* (ATCDE), were introduced for members of the armed forces (Shorney 1989).

Consitt (1944a, p. 2) considered that despite poor library facilities and inappropriate study conditions in the billets '...the academic standards of the college have been creditably maintained, chiefly because of the devoted determination of the lecturers.'. She bemoaned that conditions meant that the war-time trainees read less extensively than their predecessors and that in consequence the 1943 results in specialist subjects had seen an increase in those unable to reach 'advanced standard', though professional results had been 'exceptionally good'. Avery Hill staff were highly committed to meeting the particular pastoral needs of their 'billeted out' trainees, a time-consuming aspect of their work which was appreciated by former student Margaret Tedrake.

Consitt pointed to access to both rural and urban schools in which to undertake 'school practice' as a positive aspect of evacuation. Gaining access to placements,

however, presented difficulties, with many trainees placed at distance from Huddersfield, including Halifax, Spenborough and Wakefield (Consitt 1944a, p. 2). The extent to which placements presented a challenge was underlined when 'Miss Cossey', headteacher of Kirkheaton St John's Church of England Infants School, close to Huddersfield (which taught evacuee children from Shoreham in Sussex) agreed to the placement of 15 Avery Hill students over seven Thursday mornings. This was a large number of trainees for a small school, however, Miss Cossey considered that the children had been '...very good and responded to the students.' (Brooke, 1983 p. 50). Complications could arise: on 24 July 1942, the Huddersfield Borough Council's Education Management Sub-Committee granted a request from Avery Hill College that a student be allowed access to the town's Spring Grove Council School in a 'supernumerary and honorary capacity' during an intercalated year prior to resumption of her training course. This was granted (HBC, 1942 np).

The logistical side of managing the College was taxing. On 15 November 1943 Consitt (1943) wrote to E. G. Dixon, Chair of the College governors, regarding the possible resumption of governors' meetings, which had not been convened since the move, to be held in London,

...myself and the secretary will have to spend three days on the matter. The morning train from Huddersfield is more often late than not; to make sure we were there on time, we should have to travel the evening before. If the meeting could be held in the morning, we could perhaps catch the 2.50 back. This would mean we need be only two days on the matter...

Her frustration at this prospect was almost palpable and, in due course, the LCC agreed to supply a secretary (Hughes, 1943). After much prognostication, it was 7 February 1944 before the meetings would resume.

## **8. MOVING BACK AND MOVING ON**

On 7 January 1944 John Everett Butt, of Bedford College, University of London and an Avery Hill governor wrote to Consitt (Butt, 1944 np), probably reflecting her own anxieties:

I myself am particularly concerned at the thought of one-year courses which I suppose we shall have to adopt to meet the immediate post-war needs. No other choice seems possible, but I regard the proposal as a desperate solution of the problem of providing sufficient teachers, and I am wondering what we can do to mitigate it.

Of more immediate concern to Consitt was continuing to press for Avery Hill to be allowed to return to London. Germany surrendered on 8 May 1945, Japan on 15 August, but in September 1945 Avery Hill students again began their studies in Huddersfield. The Avery Hill campus had suffered serious bomb damage and it was the third term of 1945-46 before the return to London finally happened, and the Huddersfield Technical College could at last enjoy unfettered use of its 'new' building.

The personal happenstance occasioned by war was written out in numerous and mostly lost social and professional details in the lives of the evacuated Avery Hill students and staff, and those they encountered. Between 1941 and 1946 close to nine hundred Avery College trainee teachers studied in Huddersfield, bringing their energies and ambitions to the town and its schools, to the surrounding areas, and to the lives of its people. Heather Howells, for example, an Avery Hill student from Barry in South Wales met her husband to be, Mike Morton, at a dance in Huddersfield in 1943 (Morton, 2006). Illustrative of the social dis-junctures that evacuation might occasion, Williams (2010), reports that 'MD', also a Welsh student and a Welsh speaker, who had planned to leave Llanelli for Avery Hill to broaden her horizons in London (where she had an aunt), complained that travel from Huddersfield made it difficult to visit her parents. MD was also unhappy at limited contact with other Welsh people whilst at Huddersfield. On leaving Huddersfield Margaret Tedrake took up her first teaching appointment at Dulwich Hamlet School, London in September 1943 only to be subsequently evacuated, in her role as a teacher, to Lytham St Annes, Lancashire. Her boyfriend was killed in a flying accident in June 1944.

Avery Hill lecturer Frances Batstone<sup>5</sup> (Batstone, 1948b p. 26) related how during the final session of the Children's club she and Dr Bartlett had set up in Huddersfield '...two fourteen year old veterans...' had been disbelieving that it '...really was the last night...' of their organised activities and their club leaders would be returning to London. Pointing to his friend, one of the boys told her 'I'm and me'll carry on, Miss.'. The social dimension of Avery Hill's work in Huddersfield, partly motivated by cultural dislocation associated with regional difference, and in large measure by the needs of a society at war, was an important element of the evacuation experience. It also underlined the growing sense of 'teachers as national servants' and prefigured a more collaborative post-war way of the profession working with welfare agencies (Cunningham and Gardner 1999 p. 336). The challenges of post-war reconstruction and the shortage of teachers led to their value being more widely recognised despite the status diminishing implications of the one-year training courses that would be subsequently implemented through the 'emergency colleges' (Gardner and Cunningham 1998).

When the McNair Report (Board of Education, 1944) on the supply, recruitment and training of teachers and youth leaders was published there were 83 training colleges, 60 were for women and 7 were co-educational. 64 had fewer than 150 students, 28 fewer than 100. The McNair Committee featured only three women and, though the training colleges were widely consulted, these institutions had no representation on the Committee. The colleges generally offered two-year courses. McNair, seeking to raise the status of teaching, recommended that teacher training should be regulated by universities and that Area Training Organisations (ATOs) should be formed to build links between universities and teacher training colleges with three-year courses and a stronger academic base. A letter dated 10 July 1944 to Air Commodore Dixon states Consitt's (1944b) support for this. 'Institutes of Education' were subsequently set up at various universities. The post-war shortage of teachers, nonetheless, led to the establishment of 'Emergency Training Colleges' which, until 1951, ran the one-year training courses (Gosden, 1976) about which Avery Hill had been so concerned. The Huddersfield Technical College Principal's Report for 1946-47, in contrast, stated '...we welcome the Emergency Training Colleges and take this

opportunity of wishing every success to the Huddersfield Technical Training College housed in our premises, which commenced operations in June 1947.' (HTC, 1947 p. 1-2). This new college was one of three (the others were in Bolton and London) established at that time which specialised in the training of technical teachers (see Bailey 2007 for a detailed account of this development). It would be another sixteen years, in 1963, before Huddersfield would welcome its own (to be short-lived) school teacher training college, in the form of the Oastler College<sup>6</sup>. In 1959 Avery Hill admitted its first male students, 1981 would see the appointment of the College's first male principal. In 1985 the Avery Hill College merged with Thames Polytechnic.

McNair (Board of Education 1944) would suggest that residence should not be a condition of employment in colleges, and that where residence could not be avoided rotas should be established. Bell (1981, p. 6) argued that teacher training colleges of the 1950s continued to offer '...a discrete moral community...' operating through '...rituals which brought the full complement of staff and students frequently together in ways that articulated their bonds to each other.'. In this fragile continuity with pre-war experience there was an undercurrent of what would become a powerful tide of change. Gardner and Cunningham (1998, p. 253), writing at the end of the century, referred to teacher educators having '...memories of deep structural inequities and insecurities, defined and redefined by diversification, amalgamation and the binary divide, as teacher training moved towards a more settled and accepted place within higher education.'. They argued that, at the demise of teacher training colleges, a stronger identity had been emerging, one that rested on a '...sense of professional service to the educational interests of the nation in the years of postwar reconstruction.' and they identified the existence of a sadly misplaced '...expectation of national recognition in return for sacrifice, endeavour and commitment to expansion and improvement.'.

The Avery Hill College evacuation years contained elements of continuity in relation to the established school teacher training curriculum, as well as innovation in youth work and the introduction of both an experimental junior school course and a new nursery school course. The experience in Huddersfield constituted far more than an extraordinary episode of inconvenience and disruption, though in some respects it was that, and the prolonged period of community engagement it provided gave positive impetus to the work of the College which emerged ostensibly undiminished and, in terms of its spirit, strengthened. At the same time, the post-war social fabric of Britain was changed in ways that would see the demise of women's teacher training colleges, and of teacher training colleges more broadly (see Simmons, 2017 for an account of the associated policy context. McCulloch, 2018 outlines the ideological roots of these and more recent reforms in teacher education). As Rose (2003) has argued, the Second World War in Britain was a period that signalled the imminent end of empire, a contestation over women's rights both at work and domestically (and teaching as a profession had been regarded as combining elements of both spheres), as well as anxieties around the unifying national trope of the 'family'. Powerful post-war economic and political changes impacted on social class, on gender and on race irrevocably transforming British society and its institutions.

## **10. DISCLOSURE STATEMENT**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## 11. NOTES

[My software only allows bottom of page footnotes, or endnotes]

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<sup>1</sup> There were more than 600,000 London evacuees between 1 and 3 September 1939. Unofficial 'drift back' and 'new waves' mean that overall numbers have to be estimated. During the course of the war evacuation was by no means limited to London.

<sup>2</sup> Frances Consitt, the daughter of a police officer, was educated at Harrogate Grammar School and Bolling Girls High School, Bradford before Reading University College and Somerville College, Oxford. Her doctorate, on the use of film in the

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teaching of History in schools, was awarded by the University of Leeds (Shorney 1989).

<sup>3</sup> I have also utilised Avery Hill College reports and correspondence which are housed in the University of Greenwich archives. Additionally, I have accessed minutes, reports and prospectuses of the then Huddersfield Technical College collected in the University of Huddersfield's archives, as well as editions of the *Huddersfield Daily Examiner* newspaper held on microfiche at the Huddersfield Public Library. The majority of these sources were either official or public documents created/published at a time of national emergency, and this has implications for both their tone and content.

<sup>4</sup> This interview is catalogued under number 6354 in the oral history collection held at the Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>5</sup> In 1947 Frances Batstone succeeded Lillian de Lissa as Principal of Gipsy Hill Training College. As with Avery Hill, when the College came to its end it would be with a man at the helm. Batstone's successor, and the final principal at Gipsy Hill, was Ken Barker. In 1975 Gipsy Hill merged with Kingston Polytechnic (Gibson, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> In 1970 Oastler merged with the Huddersfield College of Technology (as the former Huddersfield Technical College was then titled) to form the Huddersfield Polytechnic, which in 1992 was designated the University of Huddersfield (Cook, Fisher and Walker, 2008).